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## 01 - THE TEACHINGS OF DON JUAN: A YAQUI WAY OF KNOWLEDGE

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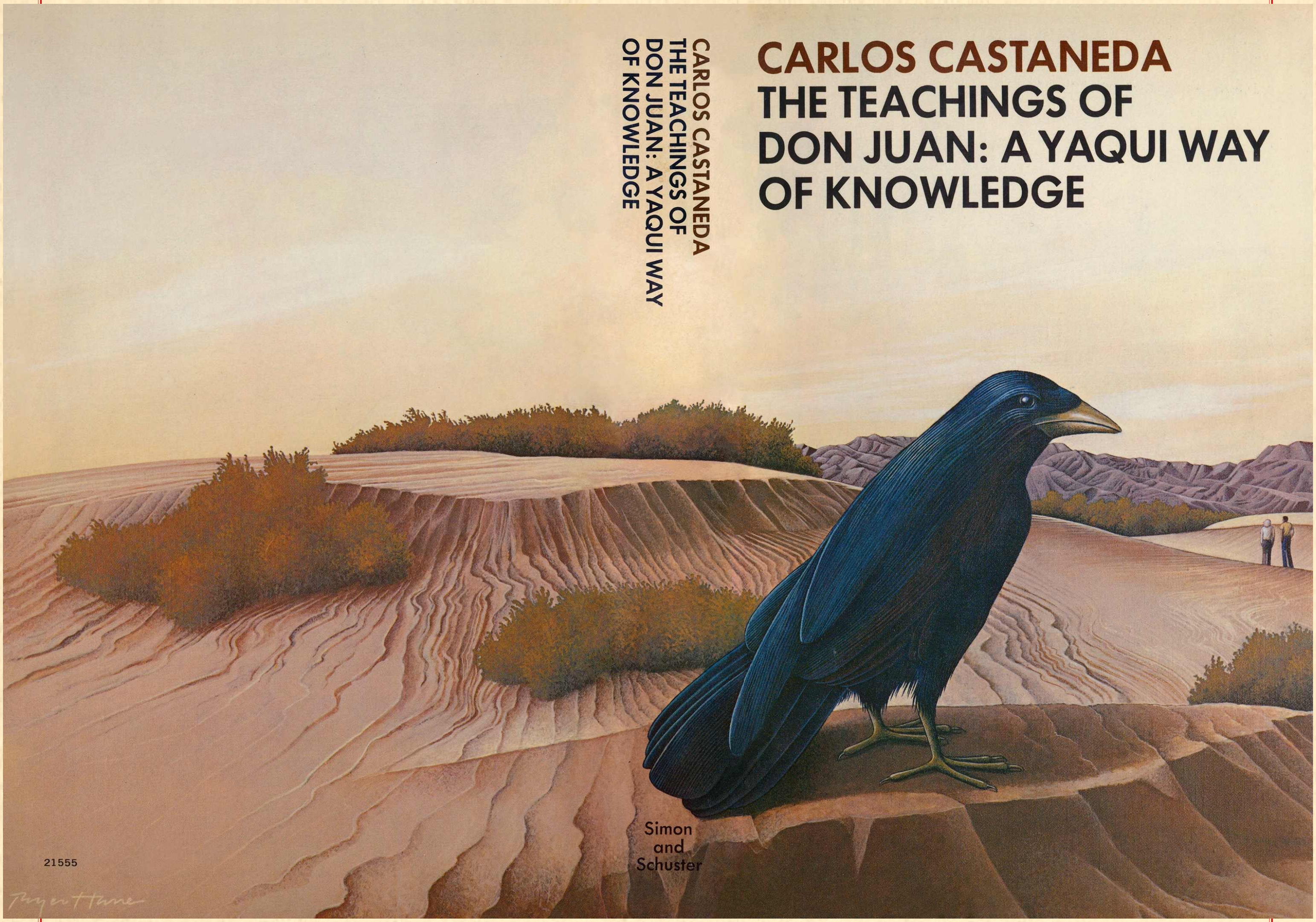
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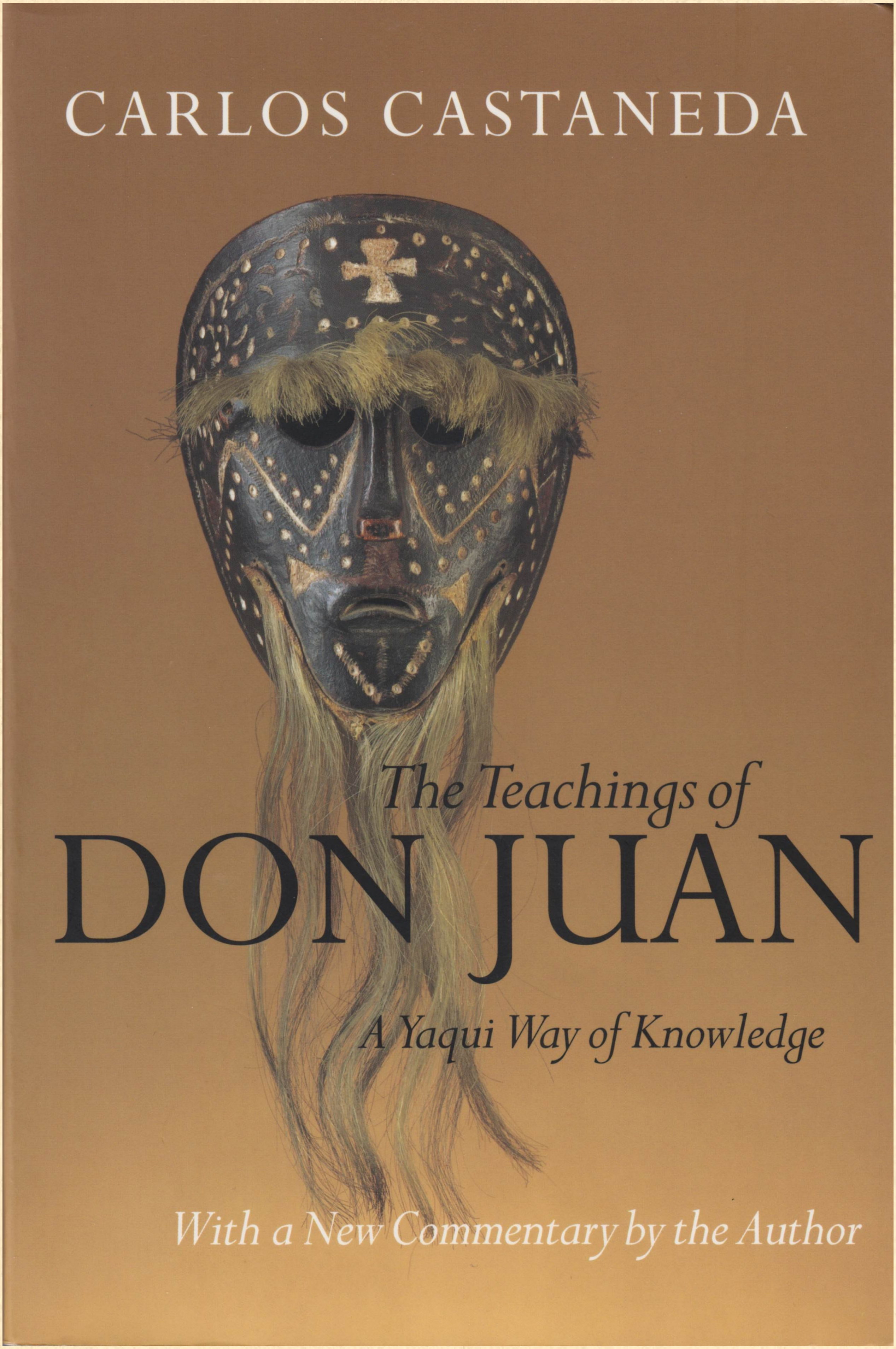

CARLOS CASTANEDA

# *The Teachings of*
# DON JUAN

## *A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*

*With a New Commentary by the Author*

# Book 1 - THE TEACHINGS OF DON JUAN

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* * *

For
DON JUAN
and for the two persons
who shared his sense of magical time
with me

* * *

## Acknowledgments

I wish to express profound gratitude to Professor Clement Meighan, who started and set the course of my anthropological fieldwork; to Professor Harold Garfinkel, who gave me the model and the spirit of exhaustive inquiry; to Professor Robert Edgerton, who criticized my work from it's beginning; to Professors William Bright and Pedro Carrasco for their criticisms and encouragement; and to Professor Lawrence Watson for his invaluable help in the clarification of my analysis. Finally, I am grateful to Mrs Grace Stimson and Mr F. A. Guilford for their assistance in preparing the manuscript.

* * *

## 30th Anniversary Commentary

Author's Commentaries on the Occasion of the Thirtieth Year of Publication (1998)

*The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* was first published in 1968. On the occasion of it's thirtieth year of publication, I would like to make a few clarifications about the work itself, and to state some general conclusions about the subject of the book at which I have arrived, after years of serious and consistent effort. The book came as a result of anthropological field work which I did in the state of Arizona and in the state of Sonora, Mexico. While doing graduate work in the Anthropology Department at the University of California at Los Angeles, I happened to meet an old shaman, a Yaqui Indian from the state of

Sonora, Mexico. His name was Juan Matus.

I consulted with various professors of the Anthropology Department about the possibility of doing anthropological field work, using the old shaman as a key informant. Every one of those professors tried to dissuade me, on the basis of their conviction that before thinking about doing field work, I had to give priority to the required load of academic subjects, in general, and to the formalities of graduate work, such as written and oral examinations. The professors were absolutely right. It didn't take any persuasion on their part for me to see the logic of their advice.

There was, however, one professor, Dr. Clement Meighan, who openly spurred my interest in doing field work. He is the person to whom I must give full credit for inspiring me to carry out anthropological research. He was the only one who urged me to immerse myself as deeply as I could into the possibility that had opened up for me. His urging was based on his personal field experiences as an archaeologist. He told me that he had found out, through his work, that time was of the essence, and that there was very little of it left before enormous and complex areas of knowledge attained by cultures in decline would be lost forever under the impact of modern technology and philosophical drives. He put to me as an example the work of some established anthropologists of the turn of the century, and the early part of the twentieth century, who collected ethnographic data as hurriedly but as methodically as possible on the cultures of the American Indians of the plains, or of California. Their haste was justified, because in a matter of one generation, the sources of information about most of those native cultures were obliterated, especially among the Indian cultures of California.

At the same time all this was happening, I had the good fortune of attending classes with Professor Harold Garfinkel of the Sociology Department at UCLA. He supplied me with the most extraordinary ethnomethodological paradigm, in which the practical actions of everyday life were a bona fide subject for philosophical discourse; and any phenomenon being researched had to be examined in it's own light and according to it's own regulations and consistencies. If there were any laws or rules to be exacted, those laws and rules would have to be proper to the phenomenon itself. Therefore, the practical actions of shamans, viewed as a coherent system with it's own regulations and configurations, were a solid subject for serious inquiry. Such an inquiry didn't have to be subject to theories built a priori, or to comparisons with material obtained under the auspices of a different philosophical rationale.

Under the influence of these two professors, I became deeply involved in my field work. My two driving forces, drawn from my contact with those two men, were: that there was very little time left for the thought processes of the Native American cultures to remain standing before everything was going to be obliterated into the mishmash of modern technology; and that the phenomenon under observation, whatever it may have been, was a bona fide subject for inquiry, and deserved my utmost care and seriousness.

I dove into my field work so deeply that I am sure that in the end, I disappointed the very people who were sponsoring me. I ended up in a field that was no man's land. It was not the subject of anthropology or sociology, or philosophy, or religion, for that matter. I had followed the phenomena's own regulations and configurations, but I didn't have the ability to emerge at a safe place. Therefore, I compromised my total effort by falling off the adequate academic scales for measuring it's worth or it's lack of it.

The irreducible description of what I did in the field would be to say that the Yaqui Indian sorcerer, don Juan Matus, introduced me into the *cognition* of the shamans of ancient Mexico. By *cognition*, it is meant the processes responsible for the awareness of everyday life, processes which include memory, experience, perception, and the expert use of any given syntax. The idea of *cognition* was, at that time, my most powerful stumbling block. It was inconceivable for me, as an educated Western man, that *cognition*, as it is defined in the philosophical discourse of our day, could be anything besides a homogeneous, all-engulfing affair for the totality of mankind. Western man is willing to consider cultural differences that would account for quaint ways of describing phenomena, but cultural differences could not possibly account for processes of memory, experience, perception, and the expert use of language to be anything other than the processes known to us. In other words, for Western man, there is only *cognition* as a group of general processes.

For the sorcerers of don Juan's lineage, however, there is the *cognition* of modern man, and there is the cognition of the shamans of ancient Mexico. Don Juan considered these two to be entire worlds of everyday life which were intrinsically different from one another. At a given moment, unbeknownst to me, my task mysteriously shifted from the mere gathering of anthropological data to the internalization of the new cognitive processes of the shamans' world.

A genuine internalization of such rationales entails a transformation, a different response to the world of everyday life. Shamans found out that the initial thrust of this transformation always occurs as an intellectual allegiance to something that appears to be merely a concept, but which has unsuspectedly powerful undercurrents. This was best described by don Juan when he said, "The world of everyday life cannot ever be taken as something personal that has power over us, something that could make us, or destroy us, because man's battlefield is not in his strife with the world around him. His battlefield is over the horizon, in an area which is unthinkable for an average man, the area where *man ceases to be a man*."

He explained those statements, saying that it was energetically imperative for human beings to realize that the only thing that matters is their encounter with *infinity*. Don Juan could not reduce the term *infinity* to a more manageable description. He said that it was energetically irreducible. It was something that could not be personified or even alluded to, except in such vague terms as infinity, '*lo infinito*.'

Little did I know at that time that don Juan was not giving me just an appealing intellectual description; he was describing something he called an *energetic fact*. *Energetic facts*, for him, were the conclusions that he and the other shamans of his lineage arrived at when they engaged in a function which they called seeing: the act of perceiving energy directly as it flows in the universe. The capacity to perceive energy in this manner is one of the culminating points of shamanism.

According to don Juan Matus, the task of ushering me into the *cognition* of the shamans of ancient Mexico was carried out in a traditional way, meaning that whatever he did to me was what was done to every shaman initiate throughout the ages. The internalization of the processes of a different *cognitive system* always began by drawing the shaman initiates' total attention to the realization that we are beings on our way to dying. Don Juan and the other shamans of his lineage believed that the full realization of this *energetic fact*, this irreducible truth, would lead to the acceptance of the new *cognition*.

The end result which shamans like don Juan Matus sought for their disciples was a realization which, by it's simplicity, is so difficult to attain: that we are indeed beings that are going to die. Therefore, the real struggle of man is not the strife with his fellowmen, but with *infinity*, and this is not even a struggle; it is, in essence, an acquiescence. We must voluntarily acquiesce to *infinity*. In the description of sorcerers, our lives originate in *infinity*, and they end up wherever they originated: *infinity*.

Most of the processes which I have described in my published work had to do with the natural give and take of my persona as a socialized being under the impact of new rationales. In my field situation, what was taking place was something more urgent than a mere invitation to internalize the processes of that new *shamanistic cognition*; it was a demand. After years of struggle to maintain the boundaries of my persona intact, those boundaries gave in. Struggling to keep them was a meaningless act if it is seen in the light of what don Juan and the shamans of his lineage wanted to do. It was, however, a very important act in light of my need, which was the need of every civilized person: to maintain the boundaries of the known world.

Don Juan said that the *energetic fact* which was the cornerstone of the cognition of the shamans of ancient Mexico was that every nuance of the cosmos is an expression of energy.

From their plateau of *seeing* energy directly, those shamans arrived at the *energetic fact* that the entire cosmos is composed of twin forces which are opposite and complementary to each other at the same time. They called those two forces *animate energy* and *inanimate energy*.

They *saw* that *inanimate energy* has no awareness. Awareness, for shamans, is a vibratory condition of *animate energy*. Don Juan said that the shamans of ancient Mexico were the first ones to *see* that all the organisms on Earth are the possessors of vibratory energy. They called them *organic beings*, and *saw* that it is the organism itself which sets up the cohesiveness and the limits of such energy. They also saw that there are conglomerates of vibratory, *animate energy* which have a cohesion of their own, free from the bindings of an organism. They called them *inorganic beings*, and described them as clumps of cohesive energy that are invisible to the human eye, energy that is aware of itself, and possesses a unity determined by an agglutinating force other than the agglutinating force of an organism.

The shamans of don Juan's lineage *saw* that the essential condition of animate energy, organic or inorganic, is to turn energy in the universe at large into sensory data. In the case of *organic beings*, this sensory data is then turned into a system of interpretation in which energy at large is classified and a given response is allotted to each classification, whatever the classification may be. The assertion of sorcerers is that in the realm of *inorganic beings*, the sensory data into which energy at large is transformed by the *inorganic beings*, must be, by definition, interpreted by them in whatever incomprehensible form they may do it.

According to the shamans' logic, in the case of human beings, the system of interpreting sensorial data is their *cognition*. They maintain that human *cognition* can be temporarily interrupted, since it is merely a taxonomical system, in which responses have been classified along with the interpretation of sensory data. When this interruption occurs, sorcerers claim that energy can be perceived directly as it flows in the universe. Sorcerers describe perceiving energy directly as having the effect of seeing it with the eyes, although the eyes are only minimally involved.

To perceive energy directly allowed the sorcerers of don Juan's lineage to see human beings as conglomerates of energy fields that have the appearance of luminous balls. Observing human beings in such a fashion allowed those shamans to draw extraordinary energetic conclusions. They noticed that each of those luminous balls is individually connected to an energetic mass of inconceivable proportions that exists in the universe; a mass which they called *the dark sea of awareness*. They observed that each individual ball is attached to the *dark sea of awareness* at a point that is even more brilliant than the luminous ball itself. Those shamans called that point of juncture the *assemblage point*, because they observed that it is at that spot that perception takes place. The flux of energy at large is turned, on that point, into sensorial data, and those data are then interpreted as the world that surrounds us.

When I asked don Juan to explain to me how this process of turning the flux of energy into sensory data occurred, he replied that the only thing shamans know about this is that the immense mass of energy called *the dark sea of awareness* supplies human beings with whatever is necessary to elicit this transformation of energy into sensory data, and that such a process could not possibly ever be deciphered because of the vastness of that original source.

What the shamans of ancient Mexico found out when they focused their *seeing* on the *dark sea of awareness* was the revelation that the entire cosmos is made of luminous filaments that extend themselves infinitely. Shamans describe them as luminous filaments that go every which way without ever touching one another. They *saw* that they are individual filaments, and yet, they are grouped in inconceivably enormous masses.

Another of such masses of filaments, besides the *dark sea of awareness* which the shamans observed and liked because of it's vibration, was something they called *intent*, and the act of individual shamans focusing their attention on such a mass, they called *intending*. They *saw* that the entire universe was a universe of *intent*, and *intent*, for them, was the equivalent of intelligence. The universe, therefore, was, for them, a universe of supreme intelligence. Their conclusion, which became part of their *cognitive world*, was that vibratory energy, aware of itself, was intelligent in the extreme. They saw that the mass of *intent* in the cosmos was responsible for all the possible mutations, all the possible variations which happened in the universe, not because of arbitrary, blind circumstances, but because of the *intending* done by the vibratory energy, at the level of the flux of energy itself.

Don Juan pointed out that in the world of everyday life, human beings make use of *intent* and *intending* in the manner in which they interpret the world. Don Juan, for instance, alerted me to the fact that my daily world was not ruled by my perception, but by the interpretation of my perception. He gave as an example the concept of *university*, which at that time was a concept of supreme importance to me. He said that *university* was not something I could perceive with my senses, because neither my sight nor my hearing, nor my sense of taste, nor my tactile or olfactory senses, gave me any clue about *university*. *University* happened only in my *intending*, and in order to construct it there, I had to make use of everything I knew as a civilized person, in a conscious or subliminal way.

The *energetic fact* of the universe being composed of luminous filaments gave rise to the shamans' conclusion that each of those filaments that extend themselves infinitely is a field of energy. They observed that luminous filaments, or rather fields of energy of such a nature converge on and go through the *assemblage point*. Since the size of the *assemblage point* was determined to be equivalent to that of a modern tennis ball, only a finite number of energy fields, numbering, nevertheless, in the zillions, converge on and go through that spot.

When the sorcerers of ancient Mexico *saw* the *assemblage point*, they discovered the *energetic fact* that the impact of the energy fields going through the *assemblage point* was transformed into sensory data; data which were then interpreted into the *cognition* of the world of everyday life. Those shamans accounted for the homogeneity of *cognition* among human beings by the fact that the *assemblage point* for the entire human race is located at the same place on the energetic luminous spheres that we are: at the height of the shoulder blades, an arm's length behind them, against the boundary of the luminous ball.

Their *seeing*-observations of the *assemblage point* led the sorcerers of ancient Mexico to discover that the *assemblage point* shifted position under conditions of normal sleep, or extreme fatigue, or disease, or the ingestion of psychotropic plants. Those sorcerers *saw* that when the *assemblage point* was at a new position, a different bundle of energy fields went through it, forcing the *assemblage point* to turn those energy fields into sensory data, and interpret them, giving as a result a veritable new world to perceive. Those shamans maintained that each new world that comes about in such a fashion is an all-inclusive world, different from the world of everyday life, but utterly similar to it in the fact that one could live and die in it.

For shamans like don Juan Matus, the most important exercise of *intending* entails the volitional movement of the *assemblage point* to reach predetermined spots in the total conglomerate of fields of energy that make up a human being, meaning that through thousands of years of probing, the sorcerers of don Juan's lineage found out that there are key positions within the total luminous ball that a human being is where the *assemblage point* can be located and where the resulting bombardment of energy fields on it can produce a totally veritable new world. Don Juan assured me that it was an *energetic fact* that the possibility of journeying to any of those worlds, or to all of them, is the heritage of every human being. He said that those worlds were there for the asking, as questions are sometimes begging to be asked, and that all that a sorcerer or a human being needed to reach them was to *intend* the movement of the *assemblage point*.

Another issue related to *intent*, but transposed to the level of universal *intending*, was, for the shamans of ancient Mexico the *energetic fact* that we are continually pushed and pulled and tested by the universe itself. It was for them an *energetic fact* that the universe in general is predatorial to the maximum, but not predatorial in the sense in which we understand the term: the act of plundering or stealing, or injuring or exploiting others for one's own gain. For the shamans of ancient Mexico, the predatory condition of the universe meant that the *intending* of the universe is to be continually testing awareness. They saw that the universe creates zillions of *organic beings* and zillions of *inorganic beings*. By exerting pressure on all of them, the universe forces them to enhance their awareness, and in this fashion, the universe attempts to become aware of itself. In the *cognitive world* of shamans, therefore, awareness is the final issue.

Don Juan Matus and the shamans of his lineage regarded *awareness* as the act of being deliberately conscious of all the perceptual possibilities of man, not merely the perceptual possibilities dictated by any given culture whose role seems to be that of restricting the perceptual capacity of it's members. Don Juan maintained that to release, or set free, the total perceiving capacity of human beings would not in any way interfere with their functional behavior. In fact, functional behavior would become an extraordinary issue, for it would acquire a new value. Function in these circumstances becomes a most demanding necessity. Free from idealities and pseudo-goals, man has only function as his guiding force. Shamans call this *impeccability*. For them, to be impeccable means to do one's utmost best, and a bit more. They derived function from *seeing* energy directly as it flows in the universe. If energy flows in a certain way, to follow the flow of energy is, for them, being functional. Function is, therefore, the common denominator by means of which shamans face the *energetic facts* of their *cognitive world*.

The exercise of all the units of the *sorcerers' cognition* allowed don Juan and all the shamans of his lineage to arrive at odd energetic conclusions which at first sight appear to be pertinent only to them and their personal circumstances, but which, if they are examined with care, may be applicable to any one of us. According to don Juan, the culmination of the shamans' quest is something he considered to be the ultimate *energetic fact*, not only for sorcerers, but for every human being on Earth. He called it the *definitive journey*.

The *definitive journey* is the possibility that individual awareness, enhanced to the limit by the individual's adherence to the *shamans' cognition*, could be maintained beyond the point at which the organism is capable of functioning as a cohesive unit, that is to say, beyond death. This transcendental awareness was understood by the shamans of ancient Mexico as the possibility for the awareness of human beings to go beyond everything that is known, and arrive, in this manner, at the level of energy that flows in the universe. Shamans like don Juan Matus defined their quest as the quest of becoming, in the end, an *inorganic being*, meaning energy aware of itself, acting as a cohesive unit, but without an organism. They called this aspect of their cognition *total freedom*, a state in which awareness exists, free from the impositions of socialization and syntax.

These are the general conclusions that have been drawn from my immersion in the *cognition* of the shamans of ancient Mexico. Years after the publication of T*he Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, I realized that what don Juan Matus had offered me was a total cognitive revolution. I have tried, in my subsequent works, to give an idea of the procedures to effectuate this cognitive revolution. In view of the fact that don Juan was acquainting me with a live world, the processes of change in such a live world a live world never cease. Conclusions, therefore, are only mnemonic devices, or operational structures, which serve the function of springboards into new horizons of *cognition*.

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Para mi solo recorrer los caminos que tienen
corazon, cualquier camino que tenga corazon.
Por ahi yo recorro, y la unica prueba que
vale es atravesar todo su largo. Y por ahi
yo recorro mirando, mirando, sin aliento.

* * *

(For me there is only the traveling on paths
that have heart, on any path that may have
heart. There I travel, and the only worth-while
challenge is to traverse it's full length.
And there I travel looking, looking, breathlessly.)

— *Don Juan Matus*

...nothing more can be attempted than to
establish the beginning and the direction of
an infinitely long road. The pretension of
any systematic and definitive completeness
would be, at least, a self-illusion. Perfection
can here be obtained by the individual
student only in the subjective sense that he
communicates everything he has been able to see.

— *Georg Simmel*
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## Foreword — by Walter Goldschmidt

This book is both ethnography and allegory.

Carlos Castaneda, under the tutelage of don Juan, takes us through that moment of twilight, through that crack in the universe between daylight and dark into a world not merely other than our own, but of an entirely different order of reality. To reach it he had the aid of *mescalito, yerba del diablo*, and *humito*- peyote, datura, and mushrooms. But this is no mere recounting of hallucinatory experiences, for don Juan's subtle manipulations have guided the traveler while his interpretations give meaning to the events that we, through the sorcerer's apprentice, have the opportunity to experience.

Anthropology has taught us that the world is differently defined in different places. It is not only that people have different customs. It is not only that people believe in different gods and expect different postmortem fates. It is, rather, that the worlds of different peoples have different shapes. The very metaphysical presuppositions differ: Space does not conform to Euclidean geometry: Time does not form a continuous unidirectional flow: Causation does not conform to Aristotelian logic: Man is not differentiated from non-man, nor life from death as in our world. We know something of the shape of these other worlds from the logic of native languages and from myths and ceremonies as recorded by anthropologists. Don Juan has shown us glimpses of the world of a Yaqui sorcerer, and because we see it under the influence of hallucinogenic substances, we apprehend it with a reality that is utterly different from those other sources. This is the special virtue of this work.

Castaneda rightly asserts that this world, for all it's differences of perception, has it's own inner logic. He has tried to explain it from inside, as it were- from within his own rich and intensely personal experiences while under don Juan's tutelage- rather than to examine it in terms of our logic. That he cannot entirely succeed in this is a limitation that our culture and our own language place on perception; rather than his personal limitation. Yet, in his efforts he bridges for us the world of a Yaqui sorcerer with our own; the world of nonordinary reality with the world of ordinary reality.

The central importance of entering into worlds other than our own- and hence of anthropology itself- lies in the fact that the experience leads us to understand that our own world is also a cultural construct. By experiencing other worlds, then, we see our own for what it is, and are thereby enabled also to see fleetingly what the real world- the one between our own cultural construct and those other worlds- must in fact be like. Hence the allegory as well as the ethnography. The wisdom and poetry of don Juan, and the skill and poetry of his scribe, give us a vision both of ourselves and of reality. As in all proper allegory, what one sees lies with the beholder, and needs no exegesis [* *exegesis- an explanation or critical interpretation*] here.

Carlos Castaneda's interviews with don Juan were initiated while he was a student of anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles. We are indebted to him for his patience, his courage, and his perspicacity [* *perspicacity- the capacity to assess situations or circumstances shrewdly and to draw sound conclusions*] in seeking out and facing the challenge of his dual apprenticeship, and in reporting to us the details of his experiences. In this work he demonstrates the essential skill of good ethnography [* *ethnography- the branch of anthropology that provides scientific description of individual human societies*]- the capacity to enter into an alien world. I believe he has found a path with heart.

- *Walter Goldschmidt*

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## Introduction

In the summer of 1960, while I was an anthropology student at the University of California, Los Angeles, I made several trips to the Southwest to collect information on the medicinal plants used by the Indians of the area. The events I describe here began during one of my trips. I was waiting in a border town for a Greyhound bus; talking with a friend who had been my guide and helper in the survey. Suddenly he leaned towards me and whispered that the man, a white-haired old Indian who was sitting in front of the window, was very learned about plants, especially peyote. I asked my friend to introduce me to this man.

My friend greeted him, and then went over and shook his hand. After they had talked for a while, my friend signaled me to join them, but immediately left me alone with the old man; not even bothering to introduce us. The old Indian was not in the least embarrassed. I told him my name, and he said that he was called Juan Matus, and that he was at my service. He used the Spanish polite form of address. We shook hands at my initiative and then remained silent for some time. It was not a strained silence, but a quietness: natural and relaxed on both sides. Though his dark face and neck were wrinkled, showing his age, it struck me that his body was agile and muscular.
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I then told him that I was interested in obtaining information about medicinal plants. Although in truth I was almost totally ignorant about peyote, I found myself pretending that I knew a great deal, and I even suggested that it might be to his advantage to talk with me. As I rattled on, he nodded slowly and looked at me, but said nothing. I avoided his eyes and we finished by standing, the two of us, in dead silence. Finally, after what seemed a very long time, don Juan got up and looked out of the window. His bus had come. He said good-bye and left the station.

I was annoyed at having talked nonsense to him, and at being seen through by those remarkable eyes. When my friend returned he tried to console me for my failure to learn anything from don Juan. He explained that the old man was often silent or noncommittal; but the disturbing effect of this first encounter was not so easily dispelled.

I made a point of finding out where don Juan lived, and later visited him several times. On each visit I tried to lead him to discuss peyote, but without success. We became, nonetheless, very good friends, and my scientific investigation was forgotten- or was at least redirected into channels that were worlds apart from my original intention.

The friend who had introduced me to don Juan explained later that the old man was not a native of Arizona- where we met- but was a Yaqui Indian from Sonora, Mexico.

At first I saw don Juan simply as a rather peculiar man who knew a great deal about peyote, and who spoke Spanish remarkably well; but the people with whom he lived believed that he had some sort of 'secret knowledge'; that he was a 'brujo'. The Spanish word brujo means, in English, medicine man, curer, witch, or sorcerer. It connotes, essentially, a person who has extraordinary and usually evil powers.

I had known don Juan for a whole year before he took me into his confidence. One day he explained that he possessed a certain knowledge that he had learned from a teacher- a 'benefactor' as he called him- who had directed him in a kind of apprenticeship. Don Juan had, in turn, chosen me to serve as his apprentice, but he warned me that I would have to make a very deep commitment and that the training was long and arduous. [* *arduous- characterized by toilsome effort to the point of exhaustion; especially physical effort*]

In describing his teacher, don Juan used the word 'diablero'. Later I learned that diablero is a term used only by the Sonoran Indians. It refers to an evil person who practices black sorcery and is capable of transforming himself into an animal: a bird, a dog, a coyote, or any other creature. On one of my visits to Sonora, I had a peculiar experience that illustrated the Indians' feeling about diableros. I was driving at night in the company of two Indian friends when I saw an animal that seemed to be a dog crossing the highway. One of my companions said it was not a dog, but a huge coyote. I slowed down and pulled to the side of the road to get a good look at the animal. It stayed within range of the headlights a few seconds longer and then ran into the chaparral. It was unmistakably a coyote, but it was twice the ordinary size. Talking excitedly, my friends agreed that it was a very unusual animal, and one of them suggested that it might be a diablero. I decided to use an account of the experience to question the Indians of that area about their beliefs in the existence of diableros. I talked with many people, telling them the story and asking them questions. The three conversations that follow indicate what they felt.

"Do you think it was a coyote, Choy?" I asked a young man after he had heard the story.

"Who knows? A dog, no doubt. Too large for a coyote."

"Do you think it may have been a diablero?"

"That's a lot of bull. There are no such things."

"Why do you say that, Choy?"

"People imagine things. I bet if you had caught that animal you would have seen that it was a dog. Once I had some business in another town, and got up before daybreak, and saddled up a horse. As I was leaving, I came upon a dark shadow on the road which looked like a huge animal. My horse reared, throwing me off the saddle. I was pretty scared too, but it turned out that the shadow was a woman who was walking to town."

"Do you mean, Choy, that you don't believe there are diableros?"

"Diableros! What's a diablero? Tell me what a diablero is!"

"I don't know, Choy. Manuel, who was riding with me that night, said the coyote could have been a diablero. Maybe you could tell me what a diablero is?"

"A diablero, they say, is a brujo who changes into any form he wants to adopt. But everybody knows that is pure bull. The old people here are full of stories about diableros. You won't find that among us younger people."

"What kind of animal do you think it was, dona Luz?" I asked a middle-aged woman.

"Only God knows that for sure, but I think it was not a coyote. There are things that appear to be coyotes, but are not. Was the coyote running, or was it eating?"

"It was standing most of the time, but when I first saw it, I think it was eating something."

"Are you sure it was not carrying something in it's mouth?"

"Perhaps it was. But tell me, would that make any difference?"

"Yes, it would. If it was carrying something in it's mouth it was not a coyote."

"What was it then?"

"It was a man or a woman."

"What do you call such people, dona Luz?"

She did not answer. I questioned her for a while longer, but without success. Finally she said she did not know. I asked her if such people were called diableros, and she answered that 'diablero' was one of the names given to them.

"Do you know any diableros" I asked.

"I knew one woman," she replied. "She was killed. It happened when I was a little girl. The woman, they said, used to turn into a female dog. And one night a dog went into the house of a white man to steal cheese. The white man killed the dog with a shotgun; and at the very moment the dog died in the house of the white man, the woman died in her own hut. Her kin got together and went to the white man, and demanded payment. The white man paid good money for having killed her."

"How could they demand payment if it was only a dog he killed?"

"They said that the white man knew it was not a dog because other people were with him, and they all saw that the dog stood up on it's legs like a man and reached for the cheese which was on a tray hanging from the roof. The men were waiting for the thief because the white man's cheese was being stolen every night. So the man killed the thief knowing it was not a dog."

"Are there any diableros nowadays, dona Luz?"

"Such things are very secret. They say there are no more diableros, but I doubt it because one member of a diablero's family has to learn what the diablero knows. Diableros have their own laws, and one of them is that a diablero has to teach his secrets to one of his kin."

"What do you think the animal was, Genaro?" I asked a very old man.

"A dog from one of the ranches of that area. What else?"

"It could have been a diablero...?"

"A diablero? You are crazy! There are no diableros."

"Do you mean that there are none today, or that there never were any?"

"At one time there were, yes. It is common knowledge. Everybody knows that. But the people were very afraid of them and had them all killed."

"Who killed them, Genaro?"

"All the people of the tribe. The last diablero I knew about was S———. He killed dozens, maybe even hundreds of people with his sorcery. We couldn't put up with that and the people got together and took him by surprise one night and burned him alive."

"How long ago was that, Genaro?"

"In nineteen forty-two."

"Did you see it yourself?"

"No, but people still talk about it. They say that there were no ashes left even though the stake was made of fresh wood. All that was left at the end was a huge pool of grease."

Although don Juan categorized his benefactor as a diablero, he never mentioned the place where he had acquired his knowledge; nor did he identify his teacher. In fact, don Juan disclosed very little about his personal life. All he said was that he had been born in the

Southwest in 1891; that he had spent nearly all his life in Mexico; that in 1900 his family was exiled by the Mexican government to central Mexico along with thousands of other Sonoran Indians; and that he had lived in central and southern Mexico until 1940. Thus, as don Juan had traveled a great deal, his knowledge may have been the product of many influences. And although he regarded himself as a Yaqui Indian from Sonora, I was not sure whether to place the context of his knowledge totally in the culture of the Sonoran Indians. However, it is not my intention here to determine his precise cultural milieu. [* milieu- the environmental condition]

I began to serve my apprenticeship to don Juan in June 1961. Prior to that time I had seen him on various occasions, but always in the capacity of an anthropological observer. During these early conversations I took notes in a covert manner. Later, relying on my memory, I reconstructed the entire conversation. When I began to participate as an apprentice, however, that method of taking notes became very difficult because our conversations touched on many different topics. Then don Juan allowed me- under strong protest, however- to record openly anything that was said. I would also have liked to take photographs and make tape recordings, but he would not permit me to do so.

I carried out the apprenticeship first in Arizona; and then in Sonora because don Juan moved to Mexico during the course of my training. The procedure I employed was to see him for a few days every so often. My visits became more frequent and lasted longer during the summer months of 1961, 1962, 1963, and 1964. In retrospect, I believe this method of conducting the apprenticeship prevented the training from being successful because it retarded [* *retarded- slowed the growth of, or development of]* the advent of the full commitment I needed to become a sorcerer. Yet the method was beneficial from my personal standpoint in that it allowed me a modicum [* *modicum- a small or moderate or token amount*] of detachment; and that in turn fostered a sense of critical examination which would have been impossible to attain had I participated continuously without interruption. In September 1965, I voluntarily discontinued the apprenticeship.

Several months after my withdrawal, I considered for the first time the idea of arranging my field notes in a systematic way. As the data I had collected were quite voluminous, and included much miscellaneous information, I began by trying to establish a classification system. I divided the data into areas of related concepts and procedures and arranged the areas hierarchically according to subjective importance- that is, in terms of the impact that each of them had had on me. In that way I arrived at the following classification: uses of hallucinogenic plants; procedures and formulas used in sorcery; acquisition and manipulation of power objects; uses of medicinal plants; songs and legends.

Reflecting upon the phenomena I had experienced, I realized that my attempt at classification had produced nothing more than an inventory of categories; any attempt to refine my scheme would therefore yield only a more complex inventory. That was not what I wanted. During the months following my withdrawal from the apprenticeship, I needed to understand what I had experienced; and what I had experienced was the teaching of a coherent system of beliefs by means of a pragmatic [* *pragmatic- concerned with practical matters*] and experimental method. It had been evident to me from the very first session in which I had participated that don Juan's teachings possessed an internal cohesion. Once he had definitely decided to communicate his knowledge to me, he proceeded to present his explanations in orderly steps. To discover that order and to understand it proved to be a most difficult task for me.

My inability to arrive at an understanding seems to have been traceable to the fact that after four years of apprenticeship I was still a beginner. It was clear that don Juan's knowledge and his method of conveying it were those of his benefactor. Thus my difficulties in understanding his teachings must have been analogous to those he himself had encountered. Don Juan alluded to our similarity as beginners through incidental comments about his incapacity to understand his teacher during his own apprenticeship. Such remarks led me to believe that to any beginner, Indian or non-Indian, the knowledge of sorcery was rendered incomprehensible by the outlandish characteristics of the phenomena he experienced. Personally, as a Western man, I found these characteristics so bizarre that it was virtually impossible to explain them in terms of my own everyday life, and I was forced to the conclusion that any attempt to classify my field data in my own terms would be futile.

Thus it became obvious to me that don Juan's knowledge had to be examined in terms of how he himself understood it. Only in such terms could it be made evident and convincing. In trying to reconcile my own views with don Juan's, however, I realized that whenever he tried to explain his knowledge to me, he used concepts that would render it 'intelligible' to him. As those concepts were alien to me, trying to understand his knowledge in the way he understood it placed me in another untenable position. Therefore, my first task was to determine his order of conceptualization. While working in that direction, I saw that don Juan himself had placed particular emphasis on a certain area of his teachings- specifically, the uses of hallucinogenic plants. On the basis of this realization, I revised my own scheme of categories.

Don Juan used, separately and on different occasions, three hallucinogenic plants: peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*), Jimson weed (*Datura inoxia* syn. *D. meteloides*), and a mushroom (possibly *Psilocybe mexicana*). Long before their contact with Europeans, American Indians have known the hallucinogenic properties of these three plants. Because of their properties, the plants have been widely employed for pleasure, for curing, for witchcraft, and for attaining a state of ecstasy. In the specific context of his teachings, don Juan related the use of *Datura inoxia* and *Psilocybe mexicana* to the acquisition of power: a power he called an 'ally'. He related the use of *Lophophora williamsii* to the acquisition of wisdom, or the knowledge of the right way to live.

The importance of the plants was, for don Juan, their capacity to produce stages of peculiar perception in a human being. Thus he guided me into experiencing a sequence of these stages for the purpose of unfolding and validating his knowledge. I have called them 'states of nonordinary reality', meaning unusual reality as opposed to the ordinary reality of everyday life. The distinction is based on the inherent meaning of the states of nonordinary reality. In the context of don Juan's knowledge, they were considered as real; although their reality was differentiated from ordinary reality.

Don Juan believed the states of nonordinary reality to be the only form of pragmatic learning and the only means of acquiring power. He conveyed the impression that other parts of his teachings were incidental to the acquisition of power. This point of view permeated don Juan's attitude toward everything not directly connected with the states of nonordinary reality. Throughout my field notes there are scattered references to the way don Juan felt. For example, in one conversation he suggested that some objects have a certain amount of power in themselves. Although he himself had no respect for power objects, he said they were frequently used as aids by lesser brujos. I often asked him about such objects, but he seemed totally uninterested in discussing them. When the topic was raised again on another occasion, however, he reluctantly consented to talk about them.

"There are certain objects that are permeated with power," he said. "There are scores of such objects which are fostered by powerful men with the aid of friendly spirits. These objects are tools- not ordinary tools, but tools of death. Yet they are only instruments; they have no power to teach. Properly speaking, they are in the realm of war objects designed for strife. They are made to kill; to be hurled."

"What kind of objects are they, don Juan?"

"They are not really objects. Rather, they are types of power."

"How can one get those types of power, don Juan?"

"That depends on the kind of object you want."

"How many kinds are there?"

"As I have already said, there are scores of them. Anything can be a power object."

"Well, which are the most powerful, then?"

"The power of an object depends on it's owner; on the kind of man he is. A power object fostered by a lesser brujo is almost a joke. On the other hand, a strong, powerful brujo gives his strength to his tools."

"Which power objects are the most common, then? Which ones do most brujos prefer?"

"There are no preferences. They are all power objects; all just the same."

"Do you have any yourself, don Juan?"

He did not answer. He just looked at me and laughed. He remained quiet for a long time, and I thought my questions were annoying him.

"There are limitations on those types of powers," he went on, "but such a point is, I am sure, incomprehensible to you. It has taken me nearly a lifetime to understand that by itself an ally can reveal all the secrets of these lesser powers; rendering them rather childish. I had tools like that at one time when I was very young."

"What power objects did you have?"

"*Maiz-pinto*, crystals, and feathers."

"What is maiz-pinto, don Juan?"

"It is a small kernel of corn which has a streak of red color in it's middle."

"Is it a single kernel?"

"No. A brujo owns forty-eight kernels."

"What do the kernels do, don Juan?"

"Each one of them can kill a man by entering into his body."

"How does a kernel enter into a human body?"

"It is a power object and it's power consists, among other things, in entering into the body."

"What does it do when it enters into the body?"

"It immerses itself in the body. It settles on the chest, or on the intestines. The man becomes ill, and unless the brujo who is tending him is stronger than the bewitcher, he will die within three months from the moment the kernel entered into his body."

"Is there any way of curing him?"

"The only way is to suck the kernel out, but very few brujos would dare to do that. A brujo may succeed in sucking the kernel out, but unless he is powerful enough to repel it, it will get inside him, and will kill him instead."

"But how does a kernel manage to enter into someone's body?"

"To explain that I must tell you about corn witchcraft, which is one of the most powerful witchcrafts I know. The witchcraft is done by two kernels. One of them is put inside a fresh bud of a yellow flower. The flower is then set on a spot where it will come into contact with the victim; the road on which he walks every day; or any place where he is habitually present. As soon as the victim steps on the kernel, or touches it in any way, the witchcraft is done. The kernel immerses itself in the body."

"What happens to the kernel after the man has touched it?"

"All it's power goes inside the man, and the kernel is free. It becomes just another kernel. It may be left at the site of the witchcraft, or it may be swept away; it does not matter. It is better to sweep it away into the underbrush where a bird will eat it."

"Can a bird eat it before the man touches it?"

"No. No bird is that stupid, I assure you. The birds stay away from it."

Don Juan then described a very complex procedure by which such power kernels can be obtained.

"You must bear in mind that maiz-pinto is merely an instrument, not an ally," he said. "Once you make that distinction, you will have no problem. But if you consider such tools to be supreme, you will be a fool."

"Are the power objects as powerful as an ally?" I asked.

Don Juan laughed scornfully before answering. It seemed that he was trying hard to be patient with me.

"Maiz-pinto, crystals, and feathers are mere toys in comparison with an ally," he said. "These power objects are necessary only when a man does not have an ally. It is a waste of time to pursue them, especially for you. You should be trying to get an ally. When you succeed, you will understand what I am telling you now. Power objects are like a game for children."

"Don't get me wrong, don Juan," I protested. "I want to have an ally, but I also want to know everything I can. You yourself have said that knowledge is power."

"No!" he said emphatically. "Power rests on the kind of knowledge one holds. What is the sense of knowing things that are useless?"

In don Juan's system of beliefs, the acquisition of an ally meant exclusively the exploitation of the states of nonordinary reality he produced in me through the use of hallucinogenic plants. He believed that by focusing on these states and omitting other aspects of the knowledge he taught, I would arrive at a coherent view of the phenomena I had experienced.

I have therefore divided this book into two parts. In the first part, I present selections from my field notes dealing with the states of nonordinary reality I underwent during my apprenticeship. As I have arranged my notes to fit the continuity of the narrative, they are not always in proper chronological sequence. I never wrote my description of a state of nonordinary reality until several days after I had experienced it; waiting until I was able to treat it calmly and objectively. My conversations with don Juan, however, were taken down as they occurred immediately after each state of nonordinary reality. My reports of these conversations, therefore, sometimes antedate [* *antedate- be earlier in time*] the full description of an experience.

My field notes disclose the subjective version of what I perceived while undergoing the experience. That version is presented here just as I narrated it to don Juan; who demanded a complete and faithful recollection of every detail and a full recounting of each experience. At the time of recording these experiences, I added incidental details in an attempt to recapture the total setting of each state of nonordinary reality. I wanted to describe the emotional impact I had experienced as completely as possible.

My field notes also reveal the content of don Juan's system of beliefs. I have condensed long pages of questions and answers between don Juan and myself in order to avoid reproducing the repetitiveness of conversation. But, as I also want to reflect accurately the overall mood of our exchanges, I have deleted only dialogue that contributed nothing to my understanding of his way of knowledge. The information don Juan gave me about his way of knowledge was always sporadic, and for every spurt on his part there were hours of probing on mine. Nevertheless, there were innumerable occasions on which he freely expounded his knowledge.

In the second part of this book, I present a structural analysis drawn exclusively from the data reported in the first part. Through my analysis I seek to support the following contentions: (1) don Juan presented his teachings as a system of logical thought; (2) the system made sense only if examined in the light of it's structural units; and (3) the system was devised to guide an apprentice to a level of conceptualization which explained the underlying order of the phenomena he had experienced.

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## The Teachings

### Chapter 1

My notes on my first session with don Juan are dated June 23, 1961. That was the occasion when the teachings began. I had seen him several times previously in the capacity of an observer only. At every opportunity I had asked him to teach me about peyote. He ignored my request every time, but he never completely dismissed the subject, and I interpreted his hesitancy as a possibility that he might be inclined to talk about his knowledge with more coaxing.

In this particular session he made it obvious to me that he might consider my request provided I possessed clarity of mind and purpose in reference to what I had asked him. It was
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impossible for me to fulfill such a condition because I had asked him to teach me about peyote only as a means of establishing a link of communication with him. I thought his familiarity with the subject might predispose him to be more open and willing to talk; thus allowing me an entrance into his knowledge on the properties of plants. He had interpreted my request literally, however, and was concerned about my purpose in wishing to learn about peyote.

*Friday, June 23, 1961*

"Would you teach me about peyote, don Juan?"

"Why would you like to undertake such learning?"

"I really would like to know about it. Is not just to want to know a good reason?"

"No! You must search in your heart and find out why a young man like you wants to undertake such a task of learning."

"Why did you learn about it yourself, don Juan?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Maybe we both have the same reasons."

"I doubt that. I am an Indian. We don't have the same paths."

"The only reason I have is that I *want* to learn about it; just to know. But I assure you, don Juan, my intentions are not bad."

"I believe you. I've smoked you."

"I beg your pardon!"

"It doesn't matter now. I know your intentions."

"Do you mean you saw through me?"

"You could put it that way."

"Will you teach me, then?"

"No!"

"Is it because I'm not an Indian?"

"No. It is because you don't know your heart. What is important is that you know exactly why you want to involve yourself. Learning about 'Mescalito' is a most serious act. If you were an Indian, your desire alone would be sufficient. Very few Indians have such a desire."

*Sunday, June 25, 1961*

I stayed with don Juan all afternoon on Friday. I was going to leave about 7 p.m. We were sitting on the porch in front of his house, and I decided to ask him once more about the teaching. It was almost a routine question, and I expected him to refuse again. I asked him if there was a way in which he could accept just my desire to learn; as if I were an Indian. He took a long time to answer. I was compelled to stay because he seemed to be trying to decide something.

Finally, he told me that there was a way, and proceeded to delineate a problem. He pointed out that I was very tired sitting on the floor, and that the proper thing to do was to find a 'spot' (*sitio*) on the floor where I could sit without fatigue. I had been sitting with my knees up against my chest, and my arms locked around my calves. When he said I was tired, I realized that my back ached, and that I was quite exhausted.

I waited for him to explain what he meant by a spot, but he made no overt attempt to elucidate the point. I thought that perhaps he meant that I should change positions, so I got up and sat closer to him. He protested at my movement, and clearly emphasized that a spot meant a place where a man could feel naturally happy and strong. He patted the place where he sat, and said it was his own spot; adding that he had posed a riddle I had to solve by myself without any further deliberation.

What he had posed as a problem to be solved was certainly a riddle. I had no idea how to begin, or even what he had in mind. Several times I asked for a clue, or at least a hint as to how to proceed in locating a point where I felt happy and strong. I insisted and argued that I had no idea what he really meant because I couldn't conceive the problem. He suggested I walk around the porch until I found the spot.

I got up and began to pace the floor. I felt silly, and sat down in front of him.

He became very annoyed with me, and accused me of not listening; saying that perhaps I did not want to learn. After a while he calmed down, and explained to me that not every place was good to sit or be on; and that within the confines of the porch there was one spot that was unique; a spot where I could be at my very best. It was my task to distinguish it from all the other places. The general pattern was that I had to 'feel' all the possible spots that were accessible until I could determine without a doubt which was the right one.

I argued that although the porch was not too large (twelve by eight feet), the number of possible spots was overwhelming, and it would take me a very long time to check all of them; and that since he had not specified the size of the spot, the possibilities might be infinite. My arguments were futile. He got up and very sternly warned me that it might take me days to figure it out, but that if I did not solve the problem, I might as well leave because he would have nothing to say to me. He emphasized that he knew where my spot was, and that therefore I could not lie to him. He said this was the only way he could accept my desire to learn about Mescalito as a valid reason. He added that nothing in his world was a gift; that whatever there was to learn had to be learned the hard way.

He went around the house to the chaparral to urinate. He returned directly into his house through the back.

I thought the assignment to find the alleged spot of happiness was his own way of dismissing me, but I got up, and started to pace back and forth. The sky was clear. I could see everything on and near the porch. I must have paced for an hour or more, but nothing happened to reveal the location of the spot. I got tired of walking, and sat down. After a few minutes, I sat somewhere else, and then at another place until I had covered the whole floor in a semi-systematic fashion. I deliberately tried to “feel” differences between places, but I lacked the criteria for differentiation. I felt I was wasting my time, but I stayed. My rationalization was that I had come a long way just to see don Juan, and I really had nothing else to do.

I lay down on my back, and put my hands under my head like a pillow. Then I rolled over, and lay on my stomach for a while. I repeated this rolling process over the entire floor. For the first time, I thought I had stumbled upon a vague criterion. I felt warmer when I lay on my back.

I rolled again, this time in the opposite direction, and again covered the length of the floor; lying face down on all the places where I had lain face up during my first rolling tour. I experienced the same warm and cold sensations depending on my position, but there was no difference between spots.

Then an idea occurred to me which I thought to be brilliant- don Juan's spot! I sat there, and then lay; face down at first, and later on my back; but the place was just like all the others.

I stood up. I had had enough. I wanted to say good-bye to don Juan, but I was embarrassed to wake him up. I looked at my watch. It was two o'clock in the morning! I had been rolling for six hours.

At that moment don Juan came out and went around the house to the chaparral. He came back, and stood at the door. I felt utterly dejected, and I wanted to say something nasty to him and leave. But I realized that it was not his fault; that it was my own choice to go through all that nonsense. I told him I had failed. I had been rolling on his floor like an idiot all night, and still couldn't make any sense of his riddle.

He laughed and said that it did not surprise him because I had not proceeded correctly. I had not been using my eyes. That was true, yet I was very sure he had said to feel the difference. I brought that point up, but he argued that one can feel with the eyes when the eyes are not looking right into things. He said that as far as I was concerned, I had no other means to solve this problem but to use all I had— my eyes.

He went inside. I was certain that he had been watching me. I thought there was no other way for him to know that I had not been using my eyes.

I began to roll again because that was the most comfortable procedure. This time, however, I rested my chin on my hands, and looked at every detail.

After an interval the darkness around me changed. When I focused on the point directly in front of me, the whole peripheral area of my field of vision became brilliantly colored with a homogeneous greenish yellow. The effect was startling. I kept my eyes fixed on the point in front of me, and began to crawl sideways on my stomach, one foot at a time.

Suddenly, at a point near the middle of the floor, I became aware of another change in hue. At a place to my right, still in the periphery of my field of vision, the greenish yellow became intensely purple. I concentrated my attention on it. The purple faded into a pale, but still brilliant, color which remained steady for the time I kept my attention on it.

I marked the place with my jacket, and called don Juan. He came out to the porch. I was truly excited. I had actually seen the change in hues. He seemed unimpressed, but told me to sit on the spot and report to him what kind of feeling I had.

I sat down, and then lay on my back. He stood by me, and asked me repeatedly how I felt; but I did not feel anything different. For about fifteen minutes I tried to feel or to see a difference while don Juan stood by me patiently. I felt disgusted. I had a metallic taste in my mouth. Suddenly I had developed a headache. I was about to get sick. The thought of my nonsensical endeavors irritated me to a point of fury. I got up.

Don Juan must have noticed my profound frustration. He did not laugh, but very seriously stated that I had to be inflexible with myself if I wanted to learn. Only two choices were open to me, he said: either to quit and go home, in which case I would never learn; or to solve the riddle.

He went inside again. I wanted to leave immediately, but I was too tired to drive. Besides, perceiving the hues had been so startling that I was sure it was a criterion of some sort, and perhaps there were other changes to be detected. Anyway, it was too late to leave. So I sat down, stretched my legs back, and began all over again.

During this round, I moved rapidly through each place; passing don Juan's spot to the end of the floor, and then turned around to cover the outer edge. When I reached the center, I realized that another change in coloration was taking place, again on the edge of my field of vision. The uniform chartreuse [* *chartreuse- a shade of green tinged with yellow*] I was seeing all over the area, turned at one spot to my right into a sharp verdigris. [* *verdigris- a green patina that forms on copper or brass or bronze that has been exposed to the air or water for long periods of time*] It remained for a moment, and then abruptly metamorphosed into another steady hue different from the other one I had detected earlier. I took off one of my shoes and marked the point, and kept on rolling until I had covered the floor in all possible directions. No other change of coloration took place.

I came back to the point marked with my shoe, and examined it. It was located five to six feet away from the spot marked by my jacket, in a southeasterly direction. There was a large rock next to it. I lay down there for quite some time trying to find clues, looking at every detail, but I did not feel anything different.

I decided to try the other spot. I quickly pivoted on my knees and was about to lie down on my jacket when I felt an unusual apprehension. It was more like a physical sensation of something actually pushing on my stomach. I jumped up and retreated in one movement. The hair on my neck pricked up. My legs had arched slightly, my trunk was bent forward, and my arms stuck out in front of me rigidly with my fingers contracted like a claw. I took notice of my strange posture, and my fright increased.

I walked back involuntarily and sat down on the rock next to my shoe. From the rock, I slumped to the floor. I tried to figure out what had happened to cause me such a fright. I thought it must have been the fatigue I was experiencing. It was nearly daytime. I felt silly and embarrassed. Yet I had no way to explain what had frightened me, nor had I figured out what don Juan wanted.

I decided to give it one last try. I got up and slowly approached the place marked by my jacket, and again I felt the same apprehension. This time I made a strong effort to control myself. I sat down, and then knelt in order to lie face down; but I could not lie in spite of my will. I put my hands on the floor in front of me. My breathing accelerated. My stomach was upset. I had a clear sensation of panic, and fought not to run away. I thought don Juan was perhaps watching me. Slowly I crawled back to the other spot, and propped my back against the rock. I wanted to rest for a while to organize my thoughts, but I fell asleep.

I heard don Juan talking and laughing above my head. I woke up.

"You have found the spot," he said.

I did not understand him at first, but he assured me again that the place where I had fallen asleep was the spot in question. He again asked me how I felt lying there. I told him I really did not notice any difference.

He asked me to compare my feelings at that moment with what I had felt while lying on the other spot. For the first time, it occurred to me that I could not possibly explain my apprehension of the preceding night. He urged me in a kind of challenging way to sit on the other spot. For some inexplicable reason, I was actually afraid of the other place, and did not sit on it. He asserted that only a fool could fail to see the difference.

I asked him if each of the two spots had a special name. He said that the good one was called the *sitio*, and the bad one the enemy. He said these two places were the key to a man's wellbeing, especially for a man who was pursuing knowledge. The sheer act of sitting on one's spot created superior strength. On the other hand, the enemy weakened a man and could even cause his death. He said I had replenished my energy, which I had spent lavishly the night before, by taking a nap on my spot.

He also said that the colors I had seen in association with each specific spot had the same overall effect either of giving strength or of curtailing it.

I asked him if there were other spots for me like the two I had found, and how I should go about finding them. He said that many places in the world would be comparable to those two, and that the best way to find them was by detecting their respective colors.

It was not clear to me whether or not I had solved the problem, and in fact I was not even convinced that there had been a problem. I could not avoid feeling that the whole experience was forced and arbitrary. I was certain that don Juan had watched me all night, and then proceeded to humor me by saying that wherever I had fallen asleep was the place I was looking for. Yet I failed to see a logical reason for such an act, and when he challenged me to sit on the other spot I could not do it. There was a strange cleavage between my pragmatic experience of fearing the 'other spot', and my rational deliberations about the total event.

Don Juan, on the other hand, was very sure I had succeeded, and acting in accordance with my success, he let me know he was going to teach me about peyote.

"You asked me to teach you about Mescalito," he said. "I wanted to find out if you had enough backbone to meet him face to face. Mescalito is not something to make fun of. You must have command over your resources. Now I know I can take your desire alone as a good reason to learn."

"You really are going to teach me about peyote?"

"I prefer to call him Mescalito. Do the same."

"When are you going to start?"

"It is not so simple as that. You must be ready first."

"I think I am ready."

"This is not a joke. You must wait until there is no doubt, and then you will meet him."

"Do I have to prepare myself?"

"No. You simply have to wait. You may give up the whole idea after a while. You get tired easily. Last night you were ready to quit as soon as it got difficult. Mescalito requires a very serious intent."

# Chapter 2

*Monday, August 7, 1961*

I arrived at don Juan's house in Arizona about seven o'clock on Friday night. Five other Indians were sitting with him on the porch of his house. I greeted don Juan and sat waiting for the others to say something. After a formal silence, one of the men got up, walked over to me, and said, "Buenas noches." I stood up and answered, "Buenas noches." Then all the other men got up and came to me. We all mumbled 'Buenas noches', and shook hands either by barely touching one another's finger-tips, or by holding the hand for an instant and then dropping it quite abruptly.

We all sat down again. They seemed to be rather shy and at a loss for words; although they all spoke Spanish.

It must have been about half past seven when suddenly they all got up and walked towards the back of the house. Nobody had said a word for a long time. Don Juan signaled me to follow, and we all got inside an old pickup truck parked there. I sat in the back with don Juan and two younger men. There were no cushions or benches, and the metal floor was painfully hard; especially when we left the highway and got onto a dirt road. Don Juan whispered that we were going to the house of one of his friends who had seven mescalitos for me.

I asked him, "Don't you have any of them yourself, don Juan?"

"I do, but I couldn't offer them to you. You see, someone else has to do this."

"Can you tell me why?"

"Perhaps you are not agreeable to 'him' and he won't like you. Then you will never be able to know him with affection as one should, and our friendship will be broken."

"Why wouldn't he like me? I have never done anything to him."

"You don't have to *do* anything to be liked or disliked. He either takes you, or throws you away."

"But, if he doesn't take me, isn't there anything I can do to make him like me?"

The other two men seemed to have overheard my question and laughed.

"No! I can't think of anything one can do," don Juan said.

He turned half away from me, and I could not talk to him any more.

We must have driven for at least an hour before we stopped in front of a small house. It was quite dark, and after the driver had turned off the headlights, I could make out only the vague contour of the building.

A young woman, a Mexican judging by her speech inflection, was yelling at a dog to make him stop barking. We got out of the truck, and walked into the house. The men mumbled "Buenas noches" as they went by her. She answered back, and went on yelling at the dog.

The room was large, and was stacked up with a multitude of objects. A dim light from a very small electric bulb rendered the scene quite gloomy. There were quite a few chairs with broken legs and sagging seats leaning against the walls. Three of the men sat down on a couch which was the largest single piece of furniture in the room. It was very old and had sagged down all the way to the floor. In the dim light, it seemed to be red and dirty. The rest of us sat in chairs. We sat in silence for a long time.

One of the men suddenly got up and went into another room. He was perhaps in his fifties; tall, and husky. He came back a moment later with a coffee jar. He opened the lid and handed the jar to me. Inside there were seven odd-looking items. They varied in size and consistency. Some of them were almost round, others were elongated. They felt to the touch like the pulp of walnuts, or the surface of cork. Their brownish color made them look like hard, dry nutshells. I handled them; rubbing their surfaces for quite some time.

"This is to be chewed [*esto se masca*]," Don Juan said in a whisper.

I had not realized that he had sat next to me until he spoke. I looked at the other men, but no one was looking at me. They were talking among themselves in very low voices. This was a moment of acute indecision and fear. I felt almost unable to control myself.

"I have to go to the bathroom," I said to don Juan. "I'll go outside and take a walk."

He handed me the coffee jar and I put the peyote buttons in it. I was leaving the room when the man who had given me the jar stood up, came to me, and said he had a toilet bowl in the other room.

The toilet was almost against the door. Next to it nearly touching the toilet was a large bed which occupied more than half of the room. The woman was sleeping there. I stood motionless at the door for a while. Then I came back to the room where the other men were.

The man who owned the house spoke to me in English: "Don Juan says you're from South America. Is there any mescal there?" I told him that I had never even heard of it.

They seemed to be interested in South America, and we talked about the Indians for a while. Then one of the men asked me why I wanted to eat peyote. I told him that I wanted to know what it was like. They all laughed shyly.

Don Juan urged me softly, "Chew it, chew it [*Masca, masca]*."

My hands were wet, and my stomach contracted. The jar with the peyote buttons was on the floor by the chair. I bent over, took one at random, and put it in my mouth. It had a stale taste. I bit it in two and started to chew one of the pieces. I felt a strong, pungent bitterness. In a moment, my whole mouth was numb. The bitterness increased as I kept on chewing, forcing an incredible flow of saliva. My gums and the inside of my mouth felt as if I had eaten salty, dry meat or fish which seems to force one to chew more. After a while I chewed the other piece and my mouth was so numb I couldn't feel the bitterness any more. The peyote button was a bunch of shreds like the fibrous part of an orange, or like sugarcane, I didn't know whether to swallow it or spit it out. At that moment, the owner of the house got up and invited everybody to go out to the porch.

We went out and sat in the darkness. It was quite comfortable outside, and the host brought out a bottle of tequila.

The men were seated in a row with their backs to the wall. I was at the extreme right of the line. Don Juan, who was next to me, placed the jar with the peyote buttons between my legs. Then he handed me the bottle which had been passed down the line, and told me to take some of the tequila to wash away the bitterness.

I spat out the shreds of the first button and took a sip. He told me not to swallow it, but to just rinse out my mouth with it to stop the saliva. It did not help much with the saliva, but it certainly helped to wash away some of the bitterness.

Don Juan gave me a piece of dried apricot, or perhaps it was a dried fig- I couldn't see it in the dark, nor could I taste it- and told me to chew it thoroughly and slowly without rushing. I had difficulty swallowing it. It felt as if it would not go down.

After a short pause the bottle went around again. Don Juan handed me a piece of crispy dried meat. I told him I did not feel like eating.

"This is not eating," he said firmly.

The pattern was repeated six times. I remember having chewed six peyote buttons when the conversation became very lively. Although I could not distinguish what language was spoken, the topic of the conversation in which everybody participated was very interesting. I attempted to listen carefully so that I could take part, but when I tried to speak, I realized I couldn't. The words shifted aimlessly about in my mind.

I sat with my back propped against the wall, and listened to what the men were saying. They were talking in Italian, and repeated over and over one phrase about the stupidity of sharks. I thought it was a logical, coherent topic. I had told don Juan earlier that the Colorado River in Arizona was called by the early Spaniards "el rio de los tizones [the river of charred wood]"; and someone misspelled or misread "tizones", and the river was called “el rio de los tiburones [the river of the sharks].” I was sure they were discussing that story, yet it never occurred to me to think that none of them could speak Italian.

I had a very strong desire to throw up, but I don't recall the actual act. I asked if somebody would get me some water. I was experiencing an unbearable thirst.

Don Juan brought me a large saucepan. He placed it on the ground next to the wall. He also brought a little cup or can. He dipped it into the pan, and handed it to me. He said I should not drink, but should just freshen my mouth with it.

The water looked strangely shiny; glossy, like a thick varnish. I wanted to ask don Juan about it, and laboriously I tried to voice my thoughts in English. Then I realized he did not speak English. I experienced a very confusing moment, and became aware of the fact that although there was a clear thought in my mind, I could not speak. I wanted to comment on the strange quality of the water, but what followed next was not speech. It was the feeling of my unvoiced thoughts coming out of my mouth in a sort of liquid form. It was an effortless sensation of vomiting without the contractions of the diaphragm. It was a pleasant flow of liquid words.

I drank, and the feeling that I was vomiting disappeared. By that time, all noises had vanished and I found I had difficulty focusing my eyes. I looked for don Juan, and as I turned my head I noticed that my field of vision had diminished to a circular area in front of my eyes. This feeling was neither frightening nor discomforting, but quite to the contrary, it was a novelty. I could literally sweep the ground by focusing on one spot and then moving my head slowly in any direction. When I had first come out to the porch, I had noticed it was all dark except for the distant glare of the city lights. Yet within the circular area of my vision, everything was clear. I forgot about my concern with don Juan and the other men, and gave myself entirely to exploring the ground with my pinpoint vision.

I saw the juncture of the porch floor and the wall. I turned my head slowly to the right, following the wall, and saw don Juan sitting against it. I shifted my head to the left in order to focus on the water. I found the bottom of the pan. I raised my head slightly and saw a medium-size black dog approaching. I saw him coming towards the water. The dog began to drink. I raised my hand to push him away from my water. I focused my pinpoint vision on the dog to carry on the movement, and suddenly I saw him become transparent. The water was a shiny, viscous liquid. I saw it going down the dog's throat into his body. I saw it flowing evenly through his entire length and then shooting out through each one of the hairs. I saw the iridescent [* *iridescent- varying in color when seen in different lights or from different angles*] fluid traveling along the length of each individual hair and then projecting out of the hairs to form a long, white, silky mane.

At that moment I had the sensation of intense convulsions, and in a matter of instants a tunnel formed around me; very low and narrow; hard and strangely cold. It felt to the touch like a wall of solid tinfoil. I found I was sitting on the tunnel floor. I tried to stand up, but hit my head on the metal roof, and the tunnel compressed itself until it was suffocating me. I remember having to crawl toward a sort of round point where the tunnel ended. When I finally arrived- if I did- I had forgotten all about the dog, don Juan, and myself. I was exhausted. My clothes were soaked in a cold, sticky liquid. I rolled back and forth trying to find a position in which to rest; a position where my heart would not pound so hard. In one of those shifts, I saw the dog again.

Every memory came back to me at once, and suddenly all was clear in my mind. I turned around to look for don Juan, but I could not distinguish anything or anyone. All I was capable of seeing was the dog becoming iridescent. An intense light radiated from his body. I saw again the water flowing through him, kindling him like a bonfire. I got to the water, sank my face in the pan, and drank with him. My hands were in front of me on the ground and, as I drank, I saw the fluid running through my veins setting up hues of red and yellow and green. I drank more and more. I drank until I was all afire: I was all aglow. I drank until the fluid went out of my body through each pore and projected out like fibers of silk, and I too acquired a long, lustrous, iridescent mane. I looked at the dog and his mane was like mine. A supreme happiness filled my whole body, and we ran together toward a sort of yellow warmth that came from some indefinite place. And there we played. We played and wrestled until I knew his wishes and he knew mine. We took turns manipulating each other in the fashion of a puppet show. I could make him move his legs by twisting my toes, and every time he nodded his head I felt an irresistible impulse to jump. But his most impish [* *impish- naughtily or annoyingly playful*] act was to make me scratch my head with my foot while I sat. He did it by flapping his ears from side to side. This action was to me utterly, unbearably funny. Such a touch of grace and irony; such mastery, I thought. The euphoria that possessed me was indescribable. I laughed until it was almost impossible to breathe.

I had the clear sensation of not being able to open my eyes: I was looking through a tank of water. It was a long and very painful state filled with the anxiety of not being able to wake up and yet being awake. Then slowly the world became clear and in focus. My field of vision became again very round and ample, and with it came an ordinary conscious act; which was to turn around and look for that marvelous being. At this point I encountered the most difficult transition. The passage from my normal state had taken place almost without my realizing it: I was aware; my thoughts and feelings were a corollary of that awareness; and the passing was smooth and clear. But this second change- the awakening to serious, sober consciousness- was genuinely shocking. I had forgotten I was a man! The sadness of such an irreconcilable situation was so intense that I wept.

*Saturday, August 5, 1961*

Later that morning after breakfast, the owner of the house, don Juan, and I drove back to don Juan's place. I was very tired, but I couldn't go to sleep in the truck. Only after the man had left did I fall asleep on the porch of don Juan's house.

When I woke up it was dark. Don Juan had covered me up with a blanket. I looked for him, but he was not in the house. He came later with a pot of fried beans and a stack of tortillas. I was extremely hungry.

After we had finished eating and were resting he asked me to tell him all that had happened to me the night before. I related my experience in great detail and as accurately as possible.

When I had finished, he nodded his head and said, "I think you are fine. It is difficult for me to explain now how and why. But I think it went all right for you. You see, sometimes he is playful, like a child: At other times he is terrible, fearsome. "He either frolics, or he is dead serious. It is impossible to know beforehand what he will be like with another person. Yet, when one knows him well- sometimes. You played with him tonight. You are the only person I know who has had such an encounter."

"In what way does my experience differ from that of others?"

"You're not an Indian, therefore it is hard for me to figure out what is what. Yet he either takes people or rejects them- regardless of whether they are Indians or not. That I know. I have seen numbers of them. I also know that he frolics, he makes some people laugh, but never have I seen him play with anyone."

"Can you tell me now, don Juan, how does peyote protect...?"

He did not let me finish. Vigorously he touched me on the shoulder.

"Don't you ever name him that way. You haven't seen enough of him yet to know him."

"How does Mescalito protect people?"

"He advises. He answers whatever questions you ask."

"Then Mescalito is real? I mean he is something you can see?"

He seemed to be baffled by my question. He looked at me with a sort of blank expression.

"What I meant to say, is that Mescalito..."

"I heard what you said. Didn't you see him last night?"

I wanted to say that I saw only a dog, but I noticed his bewildered look.

"Then you think what I saw last night was him?"

He looked at me with contempt. He chuckled, shook his head as though he couldn't believe it, and in a very belligerent tone he added, "A poco crees que era tu— mama [Don't tell me you believe it was your- mama]?" He paused before saying "mama" because what he meant to say was "tu chingada madre"; an idiom used as a disrespectful allusion to the other party's mother. The word "mama" was so incongruous that we both laughed for a long time.

Then I realized he had fallen asleep, and had not answered my question.

*Sunday, August 6, 1961*

I drove don Juan to the house where I had taken peyote. On the way he told me that the name of the man who had 'offered me to Mescalito' was John. When we got to the house, we found John sitting on his porch with two young men. All of them were extremely jovial. They laughed and talked with great ease. The three of them spoke English perfectly. I told John that I had come to thank him for having helped me.

I wanted to get their views on my behavior during the hallucinogenic experience, and told them I had been trying to think of what I had done that night and that I couldn't remember. They laughed and were reluctant to talk about it. They seemed to be holding back on account of don Juan. They all glanced at him as though waiting for an affirmative cue to go on. Don Juan must have cued them, although I did not notice anything, because suddenly John began to tell me what I had done that night.

He said he knew I had been 'taken' when he heard me puking. He estimated that I must have puked thirty times. Don Juan corrected him and said it was only ten times.

John continued: "Then we all moved next to you. You were stiff, and were having convulsions. For a very long time while lying on your back, you moved your mouth as though talking. Then you began to bump your head on the floor, and don Juan put an old hat on your head and you stopped it. You shivered and whined for hours, lying on the floor. "I think everybody fell asleep then; but I heard you puffing and groaning in my sleep. Then I heard you scream and I woke up. I saw you leaping up in the air, screaming. You made a dash for the water, knocked the pan over, and began to swim in the puddle.

"Don Juan brought you more water. You sat quietly in front of the pan. Then you jumped up and took off all your clothes. You were kneeling in front of the water; drinking in big gulps. Then you just sat there and stared into space. We thought you were going to be there forever. Nearly everybody was asleep, including don Juan, when suddenly you jumped up again, howling, and took after the dog. The dog got scared and howled too, and ran to the back of the house. Then everybody woke up.

"We all got up. You came back from the other side still chasing the dog. The dog was running ahead of you barking and howling. I think you must have gone twenty times around the house, running in circles, barking like a dog. I was afraid people were going to be curious. There are no neighbors close, but your howling was so loud it could have been heard for miles."

One of the young men added, "You caught up with the dog, and brought it to the porch in your arms."

John continued: "Then you began to play with the dog. You wrestled with him, and the dog and you bit each other and played. That I thought was funny. My dog does not play usually. But this time you and the dog were rolling on each other."

"Then you ran to the water and the dog drank with you," the young man said. "You ran five or six times to the water with the dog."

"How long did this go on?" I asked.

"Hours," John said. "At one time we lost sight of you two. I think you must have run to the back. We just heard you barking and groaning. You sounded so much like a dog that we couldn't tell you two apart."

"Maybe it was just the dog alone," I said.

They laughed, and John said, "You were barking there, boy!"

"What happened next?"

The three men looked at one another and seemed to have a hard time deciding what happened next. Finally the young man who had not yet said anything spoke up.

"He choked," he said, looking at John.

"Yes, you certainly choked. You began to cry very strangely, and then you fell to the floor. We thought you were biting your tongue. Don Juan opened your jaws and poured water on your face. Then you started shivering and having convulsions all over again. Then you stayed motionless for a long time. Don Juan said it was all over. By then it was morning, so we covered you with a blanket and left you to sleep on the porch."

He stopped there and looked at the other men who were obviously trying not to laugh. He turned to don Juan and asked him something. Don Juan smiled and answered the question. John turned to me and said, "We left you here on the porch because we were afraid you were going to piss all over the rooms."

They all laughed very loudly.

"What was the matter with me?" I asked. "Did I...?"

"Did you?" John sort of mimicked me. "We were not going to mention it, but don Juan says it is all right. You pissed all over my dog!'

"What did I do?"

"You don't think the dog was running because he was afraid of you, do you? The dog was running because you were pissing on him."

There was general laughter at this point. I tried to question one of the young men, but they were all laughing and he didn't hear me.

John went on: "My dog got even though: He pissed on you too!"

This statement was apparently utterly funny because they all roared with laughter, including don Juan. When they had quieted down, I asked in all earnestness, "Is it really true? This really happened?"

Still laughing, John replied: "I swear my dog really pissed on you."

Driving back to don Juan's place I asked him: "Did all that really happen, don Juan?"

"Yes," he said, "but they don't know what you saw. They don't realize you were playing with 'him'. That is why I did not disturb you."

"But is this business of the dog and me pissing on each other true?"

"It was not a dog! How many times do I have to tell you that? This is the only way to understand it. It's the only way! It was 'he' who played with you."

"Did you know all this was happening before I told you about it?"

He vacillated for an instant before answering.

"No, I remembered, after you told me about it, the strange way you looked. I just suspected you were doing fine because you didn't seem scared."

"Did the dog really play with me as they say?"

"Goddammit! It was not a dog!"

*Thursday, August 17, 1961*

I told don Juan how I felt about my experience. From the point of view of my intended work it had been a disastrous event. I said I did not care for another similar 'encounter' with Mescalito. I agreed that everything that had happened to me had been more than interesting, but added that nothing in it could really move me towards seeking it again. I seriously believed that I was not constructed for that type of endeavor. Peyote had produced in me, as a post-reaction, a strange kind of physical discomfort. It was an indefinite fear or unhappiness; a melancholy of some sort which I could not define exactly; and I did not find that state noble in any way.

Don Juan laughed and said, "You are beginning to learn."

"This type of learning is not for me. I am not made for it, don Juan."

"You always exaggerate."

"This is not exaggeration."

"It is. The only trouble is that you exaggerate the bad points only."

"There are no good points so far as I am concerned. All I know is that it makes me afraid."

"There is nothing wrong with being afraid. When you fear, you see things in a different way."

"But I don't care about seeing things in a different way, don Juan. I think I am going to leave the learning about Mescalito alone. I can't handle it, don Juan. This is really a bad situation for me."

"Of course it is bad— even for me. You are not the only one who is baffled."

"Why should you be baffled, don Juan?"

"I have been thinking about what I saw the other night. Mescalito actually played with you. That baffled me, because it was an indication [omen]."

"What kind of indication, don Juan?"

"Mescalito was pointing you out to me."

"What for?"

"It wasn't clear to me then, but now it is. He meant you were the 'chosen man' [*escogido*]. Mescalito pointed you out to me; and by doing that, he told me you were the chosen man."

"Do you mean I was chosen among others for some task, or something of the sort?"

"No. What I mean is, Mescalito told me you could be the man I am looking for."

"When did he tell you that, don Juan?"

"By playing with you, he told me that. This makes you the chosen man for me."

"What does it mean to be the chosen man?"

"There are some secrets I know [*Tengo secretos*]. I have secrets I won't be able to reveal to anyone unless I find my chosen man. The other night when I saw you playing with Mescalito, it was clear to me you were that man. But you are not an Indian. How baffling!"

"But what does it mean to me, don Juan? What do I have to do?"

"I've made up my mind and I am going to teach you the secrets that make up the lot of a man of knowledge."

"Do you mean the secrets about Mescalito?"

"Yes, but those are not all the secrets I know. There are other secrets of a different kind which I would like to give to someone. I had a teacher myself, my benefactor, and I also became his chosen man upon performing a certain feat. He taught me all I know."

I asked him again what this new role would require of me. He said learning was the only thing involved; learning in the sense of what I had experienced in the two sessions with him.

The way in which the situation had evolved was quite strange. I had made up my mind to tell him I was going to give up the idea of learning about peyote, and then before I could really make my point, he offered to teach me his 'knowledge'. I did not know what he meant by that, but I felt that this sudden turn was very serious. I argued I had no qualifications for such a task: It required a rare kind of courage which I did not have. I told him that my bent of character was to talk about acts others performed. I wanted to hear his views and opinions about everything. I told him I could be happy if I could sit there and listen to him talk for days. To me, *that* would be learning.

He listened without interrupting me. I talked for a long time. Then he said:

"All this is very easy to understand. Fear is the first natural enemy a man must overcome on his path to knowledge. Besides, you are curious. That evens up the score. And you will learn in spite of yourself. That's the rule."

I protested for a while longer, trying to dissuade him, but he seemed to be convinced there was nothing else I could do but learn.

"You are not thinking in the proper order," he said. "Mescalito actually played with you. That's the point to think about. Why don't you dwell on that instead of on your fear?"

"Was it so unusual?"

"You are the only person I have ever seen playing with him. You are not used to this kind of life, therefore the indications [omens] bypass you. Yet you are a serious person, but your seriousness is attached to what you do; not to what goes on outside you. You dwell upon yourself too much. That's the trouble; and that produces a terrible fatigue."

"But what else can anyone do, don Juan?"

"Seek and see the marvels all around you. You will get tired of looking at yourself alone, and that fatigue will make you deaf and blind to everything else."

"You have a point, don Juan, but how can I change?"

"Think about the wonder of Mescalito playing with you. Think about nothing else. The rest will come to you of itself."

*Sunday, August 20, 1961*

Last night don Juan proceeded to usher me into the realm of his knowledge. We sat in front of his house in the dark. Suddenly, after a long silence, he began to talk. He said he was going to advise me with the same words his own benefactor had used the first day he took him as his apprentice. Don Juan had apparently memorized the words, for he repeated them several times, to make sure I did not miss any.

"A man goes to knowledge as he goes to war; wide-awake, with fear, with respect, and with absolute assurance. Going to knowledge or going to war in any other manner is a mistake, and whoever makes it will live to regret his steps."

I asked him why was it so, and he said that when a man has fulfilled those four requisites, there are no mistakes for which he will have to account. Under such conditions, his acts lose the blundering quality of a fool's acts. If such a man fails, or suffers a defeat, he will have lost only a battle; and there will be no pitiful regrets over that.

Then he said he intended to teach me about an 'ally' in the very same way his own benefactor had taught him. He put strong emphasis on the words 'very same way', repeating the phrase several times.

An ally, he said, is a power a man can bring into his life to help him, advise him, and give him the strength necessary to perform acts, whether big or small, right or wrong. This ally is necessary to enhance a man's life, guide his acts, and further his knowledge. In fact, an ally is the indispensable aid to knowing. Don Juan said this with great conviction and force. He seemed to choose his words carefully. He repeated the following sentence four times:

"An ally will make you see and understand things about which no human being could possibly enlighten you."

I asked, "Is an ally something like a guardian spirit?"

"It is neither a guardian nor a spirit. It is an aid."

"Is Mescalito your ally?"

"No! Mescalito is another kind of power. A unique power! A protector, a teacher."

"What makes Mescalito different from an ally?"

"He can't be tamed and used as an ally is tamed and used. Mescalito is outside oneself. He chooses to show himself in many forms to whoever stands in front of him, regardless of whether that person is a brujo or a farm boy."

Don Juan spoke with deep fervor about Mescalito's being the teacher of the proper way to live. I asked him how Mescalito taught the 'proper way of life', and don Juan replied that Mescalito showed how to live.

"How does he show it?" I asked.

"He has many ways of showing it. Sometimes he shows it on his hand, or on the rocks, or the trees, or just in front of you."

"Is it like a picture in front of you?"

"No. It is a teaching in front of you."

"Does Mescalito talk to the person?"

"Yes. But not in words."

"How does he talk, then?"

"He talks differently to every man."

I felt my questions were annoying him. I did not ask any more. He went on explaining that there were no exact steps to knowing Mescalito; therefore no one could teach about him except Mescalito himself. This quality made him a unique power. He was not the same for every man.

On the other hand, the acquiring of an ally required, don Juan said, the most precise teaching and the following of stages or steps without a single deviation. There are many such ally powers in the world, he said, but he was familiar with only two of them; and he was going to lead me to them and their secrets; but it was up to me to choose one of them because I could have only one. His benefactor's ally was in *la yerba del diablo* (devil's weed), he said, but he personally did not like it even though his benefactor had taught him it's secrets. His own ally was in the *humito* (the little smoke), he said, but he did not elaborate on the nature of the smoke.

I asked him about it. He remained quiet. After a long pause I asked him:

"What kind of a power is an ally?"

"It is an aid. I have already told you."

"How does it aid?"

"An ally is a power capable of carrying a man beyond the boundaries of himself. This is how an ally can reveal matters no human being could."

"But Mescalito also takes you out of the boundaries of yourself. Doesn't that make him an ally?"

"No. Mescalito takes you out of yourself to teach you. An ally takes you out to give you power."

I asked him to explain this point to me in more detail, or to describe the difference in effect between the two. He looked at me for a long time and laughed. He said that learning through conversation was not only a waste, but stupidity because learning was the most difficult task a man could undertake. He asked me to remember the time I had tried to find my spot, and how I wanted to find it without doing any work because I had expected him to hand out all the information. If he had done so, he said, I would never have learned. But, knowing how difficult it was to find my spot, and above all, knowing that it existed, would give me a unique sense of confidence. He said that while I remained rooted to my 'good spot' nothing could cause me bodily harm because I had the assurance that at that particular spot I was at my very best. I had the power to shove off anything that might be harmful to me. If, however, he had told me where it was, I would never have had the confidence needed to claim it as true knowledge. Thus, knowledge was indeed power.

Don Juan said then that every time a man sets himself to learn, he has to labor as hard as I did to find that spot; and the limits of his learning are determined by his own nature. Thus he saw no point in talking about knowledge. He said that certain kinds of knowledge were too powerful for the strength I had, and to talk about them would only bring harm to me. He apparently felt there was nothing else he wanted to say. He got up and walked towards his house. I told him the situation overwhelmed me. It was not what I had conceived or wanted it to be. He said that fears are natural; that all of us experience them and there is nothing we can do about it. But on the other hand, no matter how frightening learning is, it is more terrible to think of a man without an ally, or without knowledge.

## Chapter 3

In the more than two years that elapsed between the time don Juan decided to teach me about the ally powers and the time he thought I was ready to learn about them in the pragmatic, participatory form he considered as learning, he gradually described the general features of the two allies in question. He prepared me for the indispensable corollary of all the verbalizations, and the consolidation of all the teachings- the states of nonordinary reality.

At first he talked about the ally powers in a very casual manner. The first references I have in my notes are interjected between other topics of conversation.

*Wednesday, August 23, 1961*

"The devil's weed [Jimson weed] was my benefactor's ally. It could have been mine also, but I didn't like her."

"Why didn't you like the devil's weed, don Juan?"

"She has a serious drawback."

"Is she inferior to other ally powers?"

"No. Don't get me wrong. She is as powerful as the best of allies, but there is something about her which I personally don't like."

"Can you tell me what it is?"

"She distorts men. She gives them a taste of power too soon without fortifying their hearts, and makes them domineering and unpredictable. She makes them weak in the middle of their great power."

"Isn't there any way to avoid that?"

"There is a way to overcome it, but not to avoid it. Whoever becomes the weed's ally must pay that price."

"How can one overcome that effect, don Juan?"

"The devil's weed has four heads: the root, the stem and leaves, the flowers, and the seeds. Each one of them is different, and whoever becomes her ally must learn about them in that order. "The most important head is in the roots. The power of the devil's weed is conquered through the roots. "The stem and leaves are the head that cures maladies; properly used, this head is a gift to mankind. "The third head is in the flowers, and it is used to turn people crazy, or to make them obedient, or to kill them. "The man whose ally is the weed never intakes the flowers, nor does he intake the stem and leaves, for that matter, except in cases of his own illness; but the roots and the seeds are always intaken; especially the seeds; they are the fourth head of the devil's weed and the most powerful of the four.

My benefactor used to say the seeds are the 'sober head'; the only part that could fortify the heart of man. "The devil's weed is hard with her protégés, he used to say, because she aims to kill them fast; a thing she ordinarily accomplishes before they can arrive at the secrets of the 'sober head'. There are, however, tales about men who have unraveled the secrets of the sober head. What a challenge for a man of knowledge!"

"Did your benefactor unravel such secrets?"

"No, he didn't."

"Have you met anyone who has done it?"

"No. But they lived at a time when that knowledge was important."

"Do you know anyone who has met such men ?"

"No, I don't."

"Did your benefactor know anyone?"

"He did."

"Why didn't he arrive at the secrets of the sober head?"

"To tame the devil's weed into an ally is one of the most difficult tasks I know. She never became one with me, for example, perhaps because I was never fond of her."

"Can you still use her as an ally in spite of not being fond of her?"

"I can; Nevertheless, I prefer not to. Maybe it will be different for you."

"Why is it called the devil's weed?"

Don Juan made a gesture of indifference, shrugged his shoulders, and remained quiet for some time. Finally he said that 'devil's weed' was her temporary name [*su nombre de leche*]. He also said there were other names for the devil's weed, but they were not to be used because the calling of a name was a serious matter, especially if one was learning to tame an ally power. I asked him why the calling of a name was so serious a matter. He said names were reserved to be used only when one was calling for help- in moments of great stress and need- and he assured me that such moments happen sooner or later in the life of whoever seeks knowledge.

*Sunday, September 3, 1961*

Today, during the afternoon, don Juan collected two *Datura* plants from the field.

Quite unexpectedly he had brought the subject of the devil's weed into our conversation, and then asked me to go with him to the hills and look for one.

We drove to the nearby mountains. I got a shovel out of the trunk and we walked into one of the canyons. We walked for quite a while, wading through the chaparral [* *chaparral- dense vegetation consisting of stunted trees or bushes*] which grew thick in the soft, sandy dirt. He stopped next to a small plant with dark-green leaves, and big, whitish, bell-shaped flowers.

"This one," he said.

Immediately he started to shovel. I tried to help him but he refused with a strong shake of the head, and went on to dig a circular hole around the plant; a hole shaped like a cone, deep toward the outer edge and sloping into a mound in the center of the circle. When he stopped digging he knelt close to the stem and with his fingers cleared the soft dirt around it, uncovering about four inches of a big, tuberous, forked root whose width contrasted markedly with the width of the stem, which was frail in comparison.

Don Juan looked at me and said the plant was a "male" because the root forked out from the exact point where it joined the stem. Then he stood up and started to walk away, looking for something.

"What are you looking for, don Juan?"

"I want to find a stick."

I began to look around, but he stopped me.

"Not you! You sit over there." He pointed to some rocks twenty feet away. "I will find it."

He came back after a while with a long, dry branch. Using it as a digging stick, he loosened the dirt carefully along the two diverging branches of the root. He cleaned around them to a depth of approximately two feet. As he dug deeper the dirt became so hard-packed that it was practically impossible to penetrate it with the stick.

He came to a halt and sat down to catch his breath. I sat next to him. We did not talk for a long time.

"Why don't you dig it out with the shovel?" I asked.

"It could cut and injure the plant. I had to get a stick that belonged to this area so that, if I had struck the root, the injury wouldn't have been as bad as one caused by a shovel or a foreign object."

"What kind of a stick did you get?"

"Any dry branch of the paloverde tree would do. If there are no dry branches you have to cut a fresh one."

"Can you use the branches of any other tree?"

"I told you, only paloverde and not any other."

"Why is that so, don Juan?"

"Because the devil's weed has very few friends, and paloverde is the only tree in this area which agrees with her- the only thing that grabs or hooks onto it [*lo unico que prende*]. If you damage the root with a shovel she will not grow for you when you replant her, but if you injure her with such a stick, chances are the plant will not even feel it."

"What are you going to do with the root now?"

"I'm going to cut it. You must leave me. Go find another plant and wait until I call you."

"Don't you want me to help you?"

"You may help me only if I ask you!"

I walked away and started to look for another plant in order to fight the strong desire to sneak around and watch him. After some time he joined me.

"Let us look for the female now," he said.

"How do you tell them apart?"

"The female is taller and grows above the ground: So it really looks like a small tree. The male is large and spreads out near the ground and looks more like a thick bush. Once we dig the female out you will see it has a single root going for quite a way before it becomes a fork. The male, on the other hand, has a forked root joined to the stem."

We looked together through the field of *Daturas*. Then, pointing to a plant, he said, "That's a female." He proceeded to dig it out as he had done the other. As soon as he had cleared the root I was able to see that the root conformed to his prediction. I left him again when he was about to cut it.

When we got to his house he opened the bundle in which he had put the *Datura* plants. He took the larger one first, the male, and washed it in a big metal tray. Very carefully he scrubbed all the dirt from the root, stem, and leaves. After that meticulous cleaning, he severed the stem from the root by making a superficial incision around the width of their juncture with a short, serrated knife and by cracking them apart. He took the stem and separated every part of it by making individual heaps with leaves, flowers, and the prickly seedpods. He threw away everything that was dry or had been spoiled by worms, and kept only those parts that were complete. He tied together the two branches of the root with two pieces of string, cracked them in half after making a superficial cut at the joint, and got two pieces of root of equal size.

He then took a piece of rough burlap cloth and placed in it first the two pieces of root tied together. On top of them, he put the leaves in a neat bunch, then the flowers, the seedpods, and the stem. He folded the burlap and made a knot with the corners.

He repeated exactly the same steps with the other plant, the female, except that when he got to the root, instead of cutting it, he left the fork intact, like an upside-down letter Y. Then he placed all the parts in another cloth bundle. When he finished, it was already dark.

*Wednesday, September 6, 1961*

Today, late in the afternoon, we returned to the topic of the devil's weed.

"I think we should start with that weed again," don Juan said suddenly.

After a polite silence I asked him, "What are you going to do with the plants?"

"The plants I dug out and cut are mine," he said. "It is as though they were myself. With them, I'm going to teach you the way to tame the devil's weed."

"How will you do that?"

"The devil's weed is divided into portions [*partes*]. Each one of these portions is different: Each has it's unique purpose and service."

He opened his left hand and measured on the floor from the tip of his thumb to the tip of his fourth finger.

"This is my portion. You will measure yours with your own hand. Now, to establish dominion over the devil's weed, you must begin by taking the first portion of the root. But since I have brought you to her, you must take the first portion of the root of my plant. I have measured it for you, so it is really my portion that you must take at the beginning."

He went inside the house and brought out one of the burlap bundles. He sat down and opened it. I noticed it was the male plant. I also noticed there was only one piece of root. He took the piece that was left from the original set of two and held it in front of my face.

"This is your first portion," he said. "I give it to you. I have cut it myself for you. I have measured it as my own. Now I give it to you."

For an instant, the thought that I would have to chew it like a carrot crossed my mind, but he placed it inside a small, white, cotton bag.

He walked to the back of the house. He sat there on the floor with his legs crossed, and with a round *mano* began to mash the root inside the bag. He worked it over a flat slab which served as a mortar. From time to time he washed the two stones, and kept the water in a small, flat, wooden dugout basin.

As he pounded he sang an unintelligible chant, very softly and monotonously. When he had mashed the root into a soft pulp inside the bag, he placed it in the wooden basin. He again placed the slab mortar and the pestle into the basin, filled it with water, and then carried it to a rectangular pig's trough set against the back fence.

He said the root had to soak all night, and had to be left outside the house so it would catch the night air [*el sereno*]. "If tomorrow is a sunny, hot day, it will be an excellent omen," he said.

*Sunday, September 10, 1961*

Thursday, September 7 was a very clear and hot day. Don Juan seemed very pleased with the good omen and repeated several times that the devil's weed had probably liked me. The root had soaked all night, and about 10:00 a.m. we walked to the back of the house. He took the basin out of the trough, placed it on the ground, and sat next to it. He took the bag and rubbed it on the bottom of the basin. He held it a few inches above the water and squeezed it's contents, then dropped the bag into the water. He repeated the same sequence three more times, then discarded the bag, tossing it into the trough, and left the basin in the hot sun.

We came back to it two hours later. He brought with him a medium-size kettle with boiling, yellowish water. He tipped the basin very carefully and emptied the top water, preserving the thick silt that had accumulated on the bottom. He poured the boiling water on the silt and left the basin in the sun again.

This sequence was repeated three times at intervals of more than an hour. Finally he poured out most of the water from the basin, tipped it to an angle to catch the late afternoon sun, and left it.

When we returned hours later, it was dark. On the bottom of the basin there was a layer of gummy substance. It resembled a batch of half-cooked starch; whitish or light gray. There was perhaps a full teaspoon of it. He took the basin inside the house, and while he put some water on to boil I picked out pieces of dirt the wind had blown into the silt. He laughed at me.

"That little dirt won't hurt anybody."

When the water was boiling he poured about a cup of it into the basin. It was the same yellowish water he had used before. It dissolved the silt, making a sort of milky substance.

"What kind of water is that, don Juan?"

"Water of fruits and flowers from the canyon."

He emptied the contents of the basin into an old clay mug that looked like a flowerpot. It was still very hot, so he blew on to it to cool it. He took a sip and handed me the mug.

"Drink now!" he said.

I took it automatically, and without deliberation drank all the water. It tasted somewhat bitter, although the bitterness was hardly noticeable. What was very outstanding was the pungent odor of the water. It smelled like cockroaches.

Almost immediately I began to sweat. I got very warm, and blood rushed to my ears. I saw a red spot in front of my eyes, and the muscles of my stomach began to contract in painful cramps. After a while, even though I felt no more pain, I began to get cold and perspiration literally soaked me.

Don Juan asked me if I saw blackness or black spots in front of my eyes. I told him I was seeing everything in red.

My teeth were chattering because of an uncontrollable nervousness that came to me in waves, as if radiating out from the middle of my chest.

Then he asked me if I was afraid. His questions seemed meaningless to me. I told him that I was obviously afraid, but he asked me again if I was afraid of her. I did not understand what he meant and I said yes. He laughed and said that I was not really afraid. He asked if I still saw red. All I was seeing was a huge red spot in front of my eyes.

I felt better after a while. Gradually the nervous spasms disappeared, leaving only an aching, pleasant tiredness and an intense desire to sleep. I couldn't keep my eyes open, although I could still hear don Juan's voice. I fell asleep. But the sensation of my being submerged in a deep red persisted all night. I even had dreams in red.

I woke up on Saturday about 3:00 p.m. I had slept almost two days. I had a mild headache and an upset stomach, and very sharp, intermittent pains in my intestines. Except for that, everything else was like an ordinary waking. I found don Juan sitting in front of his house dozing. He smiled at me.

"Everything went fine the other night," he said. "You saw red and that's all that is important."

"What would have happened if I had not seen red?"

"You would have seen black, and that is a bad sign."

"Why is it bad?"

"When a man sees black it means he is not made for the devil's weed, and he vomits his entrails out, all green and black."

"Would he die?"

"I don't think anyone would die, but he would be sick for a long time."

"What happens to those who see red?"

"They do not vomit, and the root gives them an effect of pleasure which means they are strong and of violent nature; something that the weed likes. That is the way she entices. The only bad point is that men end up as slaves to the devil's weed in return for the power she gives them. But those are matters over which we have no control. Man lives only to learn. And if he learns, it is because that is the nature of his lot; for good or bad."

"What shall I do next, don Juan?"

"Next you must plant a shoot [*brote*] that I have cut from the other half of the first portion of root. You took half of it the other night, and now the other half must be put into the ground. It has to grow and seed before you can undertake the real task of taming the plant."

"How will I tame her?"

"The devil's weed is tamed through the *root*. Step by step, you must learn the secrets of each portion of the root. You must intake them in order to learn the secrets and conquer the power."

"Are the different portions prepared in the same way you did the first one?"

"No, each portion is different"

"What are the specific effects of each portion?"

"I already said, each teaches a different form of power. What you took the other night is nothing yet. Anyone can do that. But only the brujo can take the deeper portions. I can't tell you what they do because I don't know yet whether she will take you. We must wait."

"When will you tell me, then?"

"Whenever your plant has grown and seeded."

"If the first portion can be taken by anyone, what is it used for?"

"In a diluted form it is good for all the matters of manhood: old people who have lost their vigor; or young men who are seeking adventures; or even women who want passion."

"You said the root is used for power only, but I see it's used for other matters besides power. Am I correct?"

He looked at me for a very long time, with a steadfast gaze that embarrassed me. I felt my question had made him angry, but I couldn't understand why.

"The weed is used only for power," he finally said in a dry, stern tone. "The man who wants his vigor back; the young people who seek to endure fatigue and hunger; the man who wants to kill another man; a woman who wants to be in heat- they all desire power. And the weed will give it to them! "Do you feel you like her?" he asked after a pause.

"I feel a strange vigor," I said, and it was true. I had noticed it on awakening and I felt it then. It was a very peculiar sensation of discomfort, or frustration. My whole body moved and stretched with unusual lightness and strength. My arms and legs itched. My shoulders seemed to swell. The muscles of my back and neck made me feel like pushing, or rubbing, against trees. I felt I could demolish a wall by ramming it.

We did not speak any more. We sat on the porch for a while. I noticed that don Juan was falling asleep. He nodded a couple of times, then he simply stretched his legs, lay on the floor with his hands behind his head, and went to sleep. I got up and went to the back of the house where I burned up my extra physical energy by clearing away the debris. I remembered his mentioning that he would like me to help him clean up at the back of his house.

Later, when he woke up and came to the back, I was more relaxed.

We sat down to eat, and in the course of the meal he asked me three times how I felt. Since this was a rarity, I finally asked, "Why do you worry about how I feel, don Juan? Do you expect me to have a bad reaction from drinking the juice?"

He laughed. I thought he was acting like a mischievous boy who has set up a prank and checks from time to time for the results. Still laughing, he said:

"You don't look sick. A while ago you even talked rough to me."

"I did not, don Juan," I protested. "I don't ever recall talking to you like that." I was very serious on that point because I did not remember that I had ever felt annoyed with him.

"You came out in her defense," he said.

"In whose defense?"

"You were defending the devil's weed. You sounded like a lover already."

I was going to protest even more vigorously about it, but I stopped myself.

"I really did not realize I was defending her."

"Of course you did not. You don't even remember what you said, do you?"

"No, I don't. I must admit it."

"You see. The devil's weed is like that. She sneaks up on you like a woman. You are not even aware of it. All you care about is that she makes you feel good and powerful: the muscles swelling with vigor, the fists itching, the soles of the feet burning to run somebody down. When a man knows her, he really becomes full of cravings. My benefactor used to say that the devil's weed keeps men who want power, and gets rid of those who can't handle it. But power was more common then. It was sought more avidly. My benefactor was a powerful man, and according to what he told me, his benefactor in turn was even more given to the pursuit of power. But in those days there was good reason to be powerful."

"Do you think there is no reason for power nowadays?"

"Power is all right for you now. You are young. You are not an Indian. Perhaps the devil's weed would be in good hands. You seem to have liked it. It made you feel strong. I felt all that myself. And yet I didn't like it."

"Can you tell me why, don Juan?"

"I don't like it's power! There is no use for it any more. In other times, like those my benefactor told me about, there was reason to seek power. Men performed phenomenal deeds, were admired for their strength and feared and respected for their knowledge. My benefactor told me stories of truly phenomenal deeds that were performed long, long ago. But now we, the Indians, do not seek that power any more. Nowadays, the Indians use the weed to rub themselves. They use the leaves and flowers for other matters. They even say it cures their boils. But they do not seek it's power; a power that acts like a magnet, more potent and more dangerous to handle as the root goes deeper into the ground. When one arrives to a depth of four yards— and they say some people have— one finds the seat of permanent power; power without end. Very few humans have done this in the past, and nobody has done it today. "I'm telling you, the power of the devil's weed is no longer needed by us, the Indians. Little by little, I think we have lost interest, and now power does not matter any more. I myself do not seek it, and yet at one time when I was your age, I too felt it's swelling inside me. I felt the way you did today, only five hundred times more strongly. I killed a man with a single blow of my arm. I could toss boulders, huge boulders not even twenty men could budge. Once I jumped so high I chopped the top leaves off the highest trees. But it was all for nothing! All I did was frighten the Indians— only the Indians. The rest who knew nothing about it did not believe it. They saw either a crazy Indian, or something moving at the top of the trees."

We were silent for a long time. I needed to say something.

"It was different when there were people in the world," he proceeded, "people who knew a man could become a mountain lion, or a bird, or that a man could simply fly. So I don't use the devil's weed any more. For what? To frighten the Indians? [*¿Para que? ¿Para asustar a los indios?*]"

And I saw him sad, and a deep empathy filled me. I wanted to say something to him, even if it was a platitude.

"Perhaps, don Juan, that is the fate of all men who want to know.

"Perhaps," he said quietly.

*Thursday, November 23, 1961*

I didn't see don Juan sitting on his porch as I drove in. I thought it was strange. I called to him out loud and his daughter-in-law came out of the house.

"He's inside," she said.

I found he had dislocated his ankle several weeks before. He had made his own cast by soaking strips of cloth in a mush made with cactus and powdered bone. The strips, wrapped tightly around his ankle, had dried into a light, streamlined cast. It had the hardness of plaster, but not it's bulkiness.

"How did it happen?" I asked.

His daughter-in-law, a Mexican woman from Yucatan who was tending him, answered me.

"It was an accident! He fell and nearly broke his foot!"

Don Juan laughed and waited until the woman had left the house before answering.

"Accident, my eye! I have an enemy nearby. A woman. "La Catalina!" She pushed me during a moment of weakness and I fell."

"Why did she do that?"

"She wanted to kill me, that's why."

"Was she here with you?"

"Yes!"

"Why did you let her in?"

"I didn't. She flew in."

"I beg your pardon!"

"She is a blackbird [*chanate*]. And so effective at that. I was caught by surprise. She has been trying to finish me off for a long while. This time she got real close."

"Did you say she is a blackbird? I mean, is she a *bird*?"

"There you go again with your questions. She is a blackbird! The same way I'm a crow. Am I a man or a bird? I'm a man who knows how to become a bird. But going back to "la Catalina", she is a fiendish witch! Her intent to kill me is so strong that I can hardly fight her off. The blackbird came all the way into my house and I couldn't stop it."

"Can you become a bird, don Juan?"

"Yes! But that's something we'll take up later."

"Why does she want to kill you?"

"Oh, there's an old problem between us. It got out of hand and now it looks as if I will have to finish her off before she finishes me."

"Are you going to use witchcraft?" I asked with great expectations.

"Don't be silly. No witchcraft would ever work on her. I have other plans! I'll tell you about them some day."

"Can your ally protect you from her?"

"No! The little smoke only tells me what to do. Then I must protect myself."

"How about Mescalito? Can he protect you from her?"

"No! Mescalito is a teacher, not a power to be used for personal reasons."

"How about the devil's weed?"

"I've already said that I must protect myself, following the directions of my ally the smoke. And as far as I know, the smoke can do anything. If you want to know about any point in question, the smoke will tell you. And it will give you not only knowledge, but also the means to proceed. It's the most marvelous ally a man could have."

"Is the smoke the best possible ally for everybody?"

"It's not the same for everybody. Many fear it and won't touch it, or even get close to it. The smoke is like everything else: It wasn't made for all of us."

"What kind of smoke is it, don Juan?"

"The smoke of diviners!"

There was a noticeable reverence in his voice— a mood I had never detected before.

"I will begin by telling you exactly what my benefactor said to me when he began to teach me about it; although at that time, like yourself now, I couldn't possibly have understood. The devil's weed is for those who bid for power. The smoke is for those who want to watch and see. And in my opinion, the smoke is peerless. Once a man enters into it's field, every other power is at his command. It's magnificent! Of course, it takes a lifetime. It takes years alone to become acquainted with it's two vital parts: the pipe and the smoke mixture. The pipe was given to me by my benefactor, and after so many years of fondling it, it has become mine. It has grown into my hands. To turn it over to your hands, for instance, will be a real task for me, and a great accomplishment for you- if we succeed! The pipe will feel the strain of being handled by someone else; and if one of us makes a mistake, there won't be any way to prevent the pipe from bursting open by it's own force, or escaping from our hands to shatter, even if it falls on a pile of straw. If that ever happens, it would mean the end of us both- particularly of me. The smoke would turn against me in unbelievable ways."

"How could it turn against you if it's your ally?"

My question seemed to have altered his flow of thoughts. He didn't speak for a long time.

"The difficulty of the ingredients," he proceeded suddenly, "makes the smoke mixture one of the most dangerous substances I know. No one can prepare it without being coached. It is deadly poisonous to anyone except the smoke's protégé! [* *protégé- a person who receives support and protection from an influential patron who furthers the protégé's career*] Pipe and mixture ought to be treated with intimate care. And the man attempting to learn must prepare himself by leading a hard, quiet life. It's effects are so dreadful that only a very strong man can stand the smallest puff. Everything is terrifying and confusing at the outset, but every new puff makes things more precise. And suddenly the world opens up anew! Unimaginable! When this happens the smoke has become one's ally, and will resolve any question by allowing one to enter into inconceivable worlds.”

"This is the smoke's greatest property, it’s greatest gift. And it performs it's function without hurting in the least. I call the smoke a true ally!"

As usual, we were sitting in front of his house, where the dirt floor is always clean and packed hard. He suddenly got up and went inside the house. After a few moments he returned with a narrow bundle and sat down again.

"This is my pipe," he said.

He leaned over towards me and showed me a pipe he drew out of a sheath made of green canvas. It was perhaps nine or ten inches long. The stem was made of reddish wood. It was plain; without ornamentation. The bowl also seemed to be made of wood, but it was rather bulky in comparison with the thin stem. It had a sleek finish, and was dark gray; almost charcoal.

He held the pipe in front of my face. I thought he was handing it over to me. I stretched out my hand to take it, but he quickly drew it back.

"This pipe was given to me by my benefactor," he said. "In turn I will pass it on to you, but first you must get to know it. Every time you come here I will give it to you. Begin by touching it. Hold it very briefly at first until you and the pipe get used to each other. Then put it in your pocket, or perhaps inside your shirt. And finally put it to your mouth. All this should be done little by little in a slow, careful way. When the bond has been established [*la amistad esta hecha*], you will smoke from it. If you follow my advice and don't rush, the smoke may become your preferred ally too."

He handed me the pipe, but without letting go of it. I stretched my right arm towards it.

"With both hands," he said.

I touched the pipe with both hands for a very brief moment. He did not extend it to me all the way so that I could grasp it, but only far enough for me to touch it. Then he pulled it back.

"The first step is to like the pipe. That takes time!"

"Can the pipe dislike me?"

"No. The pipe cannot dislike you, but you must learn to like it so that when the time of smoking comes for you, the pipe will help you to be unafraid."

"What do you smoke, don Juan?"

"This!"

He opened his collar, and exposed to view a small bag he kept under his shirt which hung from his neck like a medallion. He brought it out, untied it, and very carefully poured some of it's contents into the palm of his hand.

As far as I could tell, the mixture looked like finely shredded tea leaves varying in color from dark brown to light green; with a few specks of bright yellow.

He returned the mixture to the bag, closed the bag, tied it with a leather string, and put it under his shirt again.

"What kind of mixture is it?"

"There are lots of things in it. To get all the ingredients is a very difficult undertaking. One must travel afar. The little mushrooms [*los honguitos*] needed to prepare the mixture grow only at certain times of the year, and only in certain places."

"Do you have a different mixture for each type of aid you need?"

"No! There is only one smoke, and there is no other like it."

He pointed to the bag hanging against his chest, and lifted the pipe which was resting between his legs.

"These two are one! One cannot go without the other. This pipe and the secret of this mixture belonged to my benefactor. They were handed down to him in the same way my benefactor gave them to me. The mixture, although difficult to prepare, is replenishable. It's secret lies in it's ingredients, and in the way they are treated and mixed. "The pipe, on the other hand, is a lifetime affair. It must be looked after with infinite care. It is hardy and strong, but it should never be struck or knocked about. It should be handled with dry hands, never when the hands are sweaty, and should be used only when one is alone. And no one- absolutely no one- should ever see it unless you mean to give it to somebody. That is what my benefactor taught me, and that is the way I have dealt with the pipe all my life."

"What would happen if you should lose or break the pipe?"

He shook his head very slowly, and looked at me.

"I would die!"

"Are all the sorcerers' pipes like yours?"

"Not all of them have pipes like mine. But I know some men who do."

"Can you yourself make a pipe like this one, don Juan?" I insisted. "Suppose you did not have it: How could you give me one if you wanted to do so?"

"If I didn't have the pipe, I could not- nor would I want to- give one. I would give you something else instead."

He seemed to be somehow cross at me. He placed his pipe very carefully inside the sheath which must have been lined with a soft material because the pipe, which fitted tightly, slid in very smoothly. He went inside the house to put his pipe away.

"Are you angry at me, don Juan?" I asked when he returned. He seemed surprised at my question.

"No! I'm never angry at anybody! No human being can do anything important enough for that. You get angry at people when you feel that their acts are important. I don't feel that way any longer."

*Tuesday, December 26, 1961*

The specific time to replant the 'shoot', as don Juan called the root, was not set, although it was supposed to be the next step in taming the plant-power.

I arrived at don Juan's house on Saturday, December 23, early in the afternoon. We sat in silence for some time, as usual. The day was warm and cloudy. It had been months since he had given me the first portion.

"It is time to return the weed to the earth," he said suddenly. "But first I am going to fix a protection for you. You will keep it and guard it, and it is for you alone to see. "Since I am going to fix it, I will also see it. That is not good because, as I told you, I am not fond of the devil's weed. We are not one. But my memory will not live long: I am too old. You must keep it from the eyes of others, however, because as long as their memory of having seen it lasts, the power of the protection is harmed."

He went into his room and pulled three burlap bundles out from under an old straw mat. He came back to the porch and sat down.

After a long silence he opened one bundle. It was the female *Datura* he had collected with me. All the leaves, flowers, and seedpods that he had stacked up before were dry. He took the long piece of root shaped like the letter Y and tied the bundle again.

The root had dried and shriveled and the bars of the fork had become more widely separated and more contorted. He put the root on his lap, opened his leather pouch, and pulled out his knife. He held the dry root in front of me.

"This part is for the head," he said, and made the first incision on the tail of the Y; which in an upside-down position resembled the shape of a man with his legs spread out.

"This is for the heart," he said, and cut close to the joint of the Y. Next he chopped the tips of the root; leaving about three inches of wood on each bar of the Y. Then, slowly and patiently he carved the shape of a man.

The root was dry and fibrous. In order to carve it, don Juan made two incisions and peeled the fibers between them to the depth of the cuts. Nevertheless, when he came to details, he chiseled the wood, as when he shaped the arms and the hands. The final product was a wiry figurine of a man, arms folded over the chest and hands in a clasping position.

Don Juan got up and walked to a blue agave growing in front of the house next to the porch. He took the hard thorn of one of the center, pulpy leaves, bent it, and rotated it three or four times. The circular motion almost detached it from the leaf; it hung loose. He bit on it, or rather, he held it between his teeth, and yanked it out. The thorn came out from the pulp, bringing with it a white tail, two feet long. Still holding the thorn between his teeth, don Juan twisted the fibers together between the palms of his hands and made a string, which he wrapped around the figurine's legs to bring them together. He encircled the lower part of the body until the string was all used up; then very skillfully he worked the thorn like an awl inside the front part of the body under the folded arms, until the sharp tip emerged as though popping out of the figurine's hands. He used his teeth again and, by pulling gently, brought the thorn nearly all the way out. It looked like a long spear protruding from the figure's chest. Without looking at the figure any more, don Juan placed it inside his leather pouch. He seemed exhausted from the effort. He lay down on the floor and fell asleep.

It was already dark when he woke up. We ate the groceries I had brought him and sat on the porch for a while longer. Then don Juan walked to the back of the house, carrying the three burlap bundles. He cut twigs and dry branches and started a fire. We sat in front of it comfortably, and he opened all three bundles. Besides the one containing the dry pieces of the female plant, there was another with all that was left of the male plant, and a third, bulky one containing green, freshly cut pieces of *Datura*.

Don Juan went to the pig's trough and came back with a stone mortar, a very deep one that looked more like a pot whose bottom ended in a soft curve. He made a shallow hole in the dirt, and set the mortar firmly on the ground. He put more dry twigs on the fire. Then he took the two bundles with the dry pieces of male and female plants and emptied them into the mortar all at once. He shook the burlap to make sure that all the debris had fallen into the mortar. From the third bundle he extracted two fresh pieces of *Datura* root.

"I am going to prepare them just for you," he said.

"What kind of a preparation is it, don Juan?"

"One of these pieces comes from a male plant, the other from a female plant. This is the only time the two plants should be put together. The pieces come from a depth of one yard."

He mashed them inside the mortar with even strokes of the pestle. [* *pestle- a club-shaped hand tool for grinding and mixing substances in a mortar*] As he did so, he chanted in a low voice, which sounded like a rhythmless, monotonous hum. The words were unintelligible to me. He was absorbed in his task.

When the roots were completely mashed he took some *Datura* leaves from the bundle. They were clean and freshly cut, and all were intact and free of wormholes and cuts. He dropped them into the mortar one at a time. He took a handful of *Datura* flowers and dropped them also into the mortar in the same deliberate manner. I counted fourteen of each. Then he got a bunch of fresh, green seedpods which had all their spikes and were not open. I could not count them because he dropped them into the mortar all at once, but I assumed that there were also fourteen of them. He added three stems of *Datura* without any leaves. They were dark red and clean and seemed to have belonged to large plants, judging by their multiple ramifications.

After all these items had been put into the mortar, he mashed them to a pulp with the same even strokes. At a certain moment he tipped the mortar over, and with his hand scooped the mixture into an old pot. He stretched out his hand to me, and I thought he wanted me to dry it. Instead, he took my left hand and with a very fast motion separated the middle and fourth fingers as far as he could. Then, with the point of his knife, he stabbed me right in between the two fingers and ripped downwards on the skin of the fourth finger. He acted with so much skill and speed that when I jerked my hand away it was deeply cut, and the blood was flowing abundantly. He grabbed my hand again, placed it over the pot, and squeezed it to force more blood out.

My arm got numb. I was in a state of shock— strangely cold and rigid, with an oppressive sensation in my chest and ears. I felt I was sliding down on my seat. I was fainting! He let go my hand and stirred the contents of the pot. When I recovered from the shock, I was really angry with him. It took me quite some time to regain my composure.

He set up three stones around the fire and placed the pot on top of them. To all the ingredients he added something that I took to be a big chunk of carpenter's glue; and a pot of water, and let all that boil. *Datura* plants have by themselves a very peculiar odor. Combined with the carpenter's glue which gave off a strong odor when the mixture began to boil, they created so pungent a vapor that I had to fight not to vomit.

The mix boiled for a long time as we sat there motionless in front of it. At times, when the wind blew the vapor in my direction, the stench enveloped me, and I held my breath in an effort to avoid it.

Don Juan opened his leather pouch and took the figurine out. He handed it to me carefully and told me to place it inside the pot without burning my hands. I let it slip gently into the boiling mush. He got out his knife, and for a second I thought he was going to slash me again. Instead, he pushed the figurine with the tip of the knife and sank it.

He watched the mush boil for a while longer, and then began to clean the mortar. I helped him. When we had finished he set the mortar and pestle against the fence. We went inside the house, and the pot was left on the stones all night.

The next morning at dawn don Juan instructed me to pull the figurine out of the glue and hang it from the roof facing the east; to dry in the sun. At noon it was stiff as a wire. The heat had sealed the glue, and the green color of the leaves had mixed with it. The figurine had a glossy, eerie finish.

Don Juan asked me to get the figurine down. Then he handed me a leather pouch he had made out of an old suede jacket I had brought for him some time before. The pouch looked like the one he owned himself. The only difference was that his was made of soft, brown leather.

"Put your 'image' inside the pouch and close it," he said.

He did not look at me, and deliberately kept his head turned away. Once I had the figurine inside the pouch, he gave me a carrying net, and told me to put the clay pot inside the net.

We walked to my car. He took the net from my hands, and fastened it onto the open lid of the glove compartment.

"Come with me," he said.

I followed him. He walked around the house, making a complete clockwise circle. He stopped at the porch and circled the house again, this time going counterclockwise, and again returning to the porch. He stood motionless for some time, and then sat down.

I was conditioned to believe that everything he did had some meaning. I was wondering about the significance of circling the house when he said, "Hey! I have forgotten where I put it."

I asked him what he was looking for. He said he had forgotten where he had placed the shoot I was to replant. We walked around the house once more before he remembered where it was.

He showed me a small glass jar on a piece of board nailed to the wall below the roof. The jar contained the other half of the first portion of the *Datura* root. The shoot had an incipient growth of leaves at it's top end. The jar contained a small amount of water, but no soil.

"Why doesn't it have any soil?" I asked.

"All soils are not the same, and the devil's weed must know only the soil on which she will live and grow. And now it is time to return her to the ground before the worms damage her."

"Can we plant her here near the house?" I asked.

"No! No! Not around here. She must be returned to a place of your liking."

"But where can I find a place of my liking?"

"I don't know that. You can replant her wherever you want, but she must be cared for and looked after because she must live so that you will have the power you need. If she dies, it means that she does not want you and you must not disturb her further. It means you won't have power over her. Therefore, you must care for her, and look after her so that she will grow. You must not pamper her, though."

"Why not?"

"Because if it is not her will to grow, it is of no use to entice her. But, on the other hand, you must prove that you care. Keep the worms away and give her water when you visit her. This must be done regularly until she seeds. After the first seeds bud out, we will be sure that she wants you."

"But, don Juan, it is not possible for me to look after the root the way you wish."

"If you want her power, you must do it! There is no other way!"

"Can you take care of her for me when I am not here, don Juan?"

"No! Not I! I can't do that! Each one must nourish his own shoot. I had my own. Now you must have yours. And not until she has seeded, as I told you, can you consider yourself ready for learning."

"Where do you think I should replant her?"

"That is for you alone to decide! And nobody must know the place, not even I! That is the way the replanting must be done. Nobody, but nobody, can know where your plant is. If a stranger follows you, or sees you, take the shoot and run away to another place. He could cause you unimaginable harm through manipulating the shoot. He could cripple or kill you. That's why not even I must know where your plant is."

He handed me the little jar with the shoot.

"Take it now."

I took it. Then he almost dragged me to my car.

"Now you must leave. Go and pick the spot where you will replant the shoot. Dig a deep hole, in soft dirt, next to a watery place. Remember, she must be near water in order to grow. Dig the hole with your hands only, even if they bleed. Place the shoot in the center of the hole and make a mound [*pilón*] around it. Then soak it with water. When the water sinks, fill the hole with soft dirt. Next, pick a spot two paces away from the shoot, in that direction [pointing to the southeast]. Dig another deep hole there, also with your hands, and dump into it what is in the pot. Then smash the pot and bury it deep in another place, far from the spot where your shoot is. When you have buried the pot go back to your shoot and water it once more. Then take out your image, hold it between the fingers where the flesh wound is, and, standing on the spot where you have buried the glue, touch the shoot lightly with the sharp needle. Circle the shoot four times, stopping each time in the same spot to touch it."

"Do I have to follow a specific direction when I go around the root?"

"Any direction will do. But you must *always remember* in what direction you buried the glue, and what direction you took when you circled the shoot. Touch the shoot lightly with the point every time except the last, when you must thrust it deep. But do it carefully. Kneel for a more steady hand because you must not break the point inside the shoot. If you break it, you are finished. The root will be of no use to you."

"Do I have to say any words while I go around the shoot?"

"No, I will do that for you."

### *Saturday, January 27, 1962*

As soon as I got to his house this morning, don Juan told me he was going to show me how to prepare the smoke mixture. We walked to the hills and went quite a way into one of the canyons. He stopped next to a tall, slender bush whose color contrasted markedly with that of the surrounding vegetation. The chaparral around the bush was yellowish, but the bush was bright green.

"From this little tree you must take the leaves and the flowers," he said. "The right time to pick them is All Souls' Day [*el día de las ánimus*]."

He took out his knife and chopped off the end of a thin branch. He chose another similar branch and also chopped off it's tip. He repeated this operation until he had a handful of branch tips. Then he sat down on the ground.

"Look here," he said. "I have cut all the branches above the fork made by two or more leaves and the stem. Do you see? They are all the same. I have used only the tip of each branch, where the leaves are fresh and tender. Now we must look for a shaded place."

We walked until he seemed to have found what he was looking for. He took a long string from his pocket and tied it to the trunk and the lower branches of two bushes, making a kind of clothesline on which he hung the branch tips upside down. He arranged them along the string in a neat fashion. They were hooked by the fork between the leaves and the stem, and resembled a long row of green horsemen.

"One must see that the leaves dry in the shade," he said. "The place must be secluded and difficult to get to. That way the leaves are protected. They must be left to dry in a place where it would be almost impossible to find them. After they have dried, they must be put in a bundle and sealed."

He picked up the leaves from the string and threw them into the nearby shrubs. Apparently he had intended only to show me the procedure.

We continued walking and he picked three different flowers, saying they were part of the ingredients and were supposed to be gathered at the same time, but the flowers had to be put in separate clay pots and dried in darkness. A lid had to be placed on each pot so the flowers would turn moldy inside the container. He said the function of the leaves and the flowers was to sweeten the smoke mixture.

We came out of the canyon and walked towards the riverbed. After a long detour we returned to his house. Late in the evening we sat in his own room, a thing he rarely allowed me to do, and he told me about the final ingredient of the mixture, the mushrooms.

"The real secret of the mixture lies in the mushrooms," he said. "They are the most difficult ingredient to collect. The trip to the place where they grow is long and dangerous, and to select the right variety is even more perilous. There are other kinds of mushrooms growing alongside which are of no use. They would spoil the good ones if they were dried together. It takes time to know the mushrooms well in order not to make a mistake. Serious harm will result from using the wrong kind- harm to the man and to the pipe. I know of men who have dropped dead from using the foul smoke."

"As soon as the mushrooms are picked, they are put inside a gourd; so there is no way to recheck them. You see, they have to be torn to shreds in order to make them go through the narrow neck of the gourd."

“How can one prevent a mistake?”
“By being careful and knowing how to choose. I told you it is difficult. Not everybody can tame the smoke; most people do not even make the attempt.”

"How long do you keep the mushrooms inside the gourd?"

"For a year. All the other ingredients are also sealed for a year. Then equal parts of them are measured and ground separately into a very fine powder. The little mushrooms don't have to be ground because they become a very fine dust by themselves. All one needs to do is to mash the chunks. Four parts of mushrooms are added to one part of all the other ingredients together. Then they are all mixed and put into a bag like mine." He pointed to the little sack hanging under his shirt.

"Then all the ingredients are gathered again, and after they have been put to dry you are ready to smoke the mixture you have just prepared. In your own case, you will smoke next year. And the year after that, the mixture will be all yours because you will have gathered it by yourself. The first time you smoke I will light the pipe for you. You will smoke all the mixture in the bowl and wait. The smoke will come. You will feel it. It will set you free to see anything you want to see. Properly speaking, it is a matchless ally. But whoever seeks it must have an intent and a will beyond reproach. He needs them because he has to intend and will his return, or the smoke will not let him come back. Second, he must intend and will to remember whatever the smoke allowed him to see, otherwise it will be nothing more than a piece of fog in his mind."

*Saturday, April 8, 1962*

In our conversations, don Juan consistently used or referred to the phrase 'man of knowledge', but never explained what he meant by it. I asked him about it.

"A man of knowledge is one who has followed truthfully the hardships of learning," he said. "A man who has, without rushing or without faltering, gone as far as he can in unraveling the secrets of power and knowledge."

"Can anyone be a man of knowledge?"

"No, not anyone."

"Then what must a man do to become a man of knowledge?"

"He must challenge and defeat his four natural enemies."

"Will he be a man of knowledge after defeating these four enemies?"

"Yes. A man can call himself a man of knowledge only if he is capable of defeating all four of them."

"Then, can *anybody* who defeats these enemies be a man of knowledge?"

"Anybody who defeats them becomes a man of knowledge"

"But are there any special requirements a man must fulfill before fighting with these enemies?"

"No. Anyone can try to become a man of knowledge. Very few men actually succeed, but that is only natural. The enemies a man encounters on the path of learning to become a man of knowledge are truly formidable. Most men succumb [* *succumb- (1.) consent reluctantly: (2.) be fatally overwhelmed*] to them."

"What kind of enemies are they, don Juan?"

He refused to talk about the enemies. He said it would be a long time before the subject would make any sense to me. I tried to keep the topic alive and asked him if he thought I could become a man of knowledge. He said no man could possibly tell that for sure, but I insisted on knowing if there were any clues he could use to determine whether or not I had a chance of becoming a man of knowledge. He said it would depend on my battle against the four enemies — whether I could defeat them, or would be defeated by them— but it was impossible to foretell the outcome of that fight.

I asked him if he could use witchcraft or divination to see the outcome of the battle. He flatly stated that the result of the struggle could not be foreseen by any means, because becoming a man of knowledge was a temporary thing. When I asked him to explain this point, he replied:

"To be a man of knowledge has no permanence. One is never a man of knowledge, not really. Rather, one becomes a man of knowledge for a very brief instant after defeating the four natural enemies."

"You must tell me, don Juan, what kind of enemies they are."

He did not answer. I insisted again, but he dropped the subject and started to talk about something else.

*Sunday, April 15, 1962*

As I was getting ready to leave, I decided to ask him once more about the enemies of a man of knowledge. I argued that I could not return for some time, and it would be a good idea to write down what he had to say, and then think about it while I was away.

He hesitated for a while, but then began to talk.

"When a man starts to learn, he is never clear about his objectives. His purpose is faulty. His intent is vague. He hopes for rewards that will never materialize, for he knows nothing of the hardships of learning.

"He slowly begins to learn— bit by bit at first, then in big chunks. And his thoughts soon clash. What he learns is never what he pictured, or imagined, and so he begins to be afraid. Learning is never what one expects. Every step of learning is a new task, and the fear the man is experiencing begins to mount mercilessly, unyieldingly. His purpose becomes a battlefield.

"And thus he has tumbled upon the first of his natural enemies: Fear! A terrible enemy— treacherous, and difficult to overcome. It remains concealed at every turn of the way, prowling, waiting. And if the man, terrified in it's presence, runs away, his enemy will have put an end to his quest."

"What will happen to the man if he runs away in fear?"

"Nothing happens to him except that he will never learn. He will never become a man of knowledge. He will perhaps be a bully or a harmless, scared man. At any rate, he will be a defeated man. His first enemy will have put an end to his cravings."

"And what can he do to overcome fear?"

"The answer is very simple. He must not run away. He must defy his fear, and in spite of it, he must take the next step in learning, and the next, and the next. He must be fully afraid, and yet he must not stop. That is the rule! And a moment will come when his first enemy retreats. The man begins to feel sure of himself. His intent becomes stronger. Learning is no longer a terrifying task.

"When this joyful moment comes, the man can say without hesitation that he has defeated his first natural enemy."

"Does it happen at once, don Juan, or little by little?"

"It happens little by little, and yet the fear is vanquished suddenly and fast."

"But won't the man be afraid again if something new happens to him?"

"No. Once a man has vanquished fear, he is free from it for the rest of his life because, instead of fear, he has acquired clarity- a clarity of mind which erases fear. By then a man knows his desires. He knows how to satisfy those desires. He can anticipate the new steps of learning, and a sharp clarity surrounds everything. The man feels that nothing is concealed.

"And thus he has encountered his second enemy: Clarity! That clarity of mind which is so hard to obtain, dispels fear but also blinds.

"It forces the man never to doubt himself. It gives him the assurance he can do anything he pleases, for he sees clearly into everything; and he is courageous because he is clear; and he stops at nothing because he is clear. But all that is a mistake. It is like something incomplete. If the man yields to this make-believe power, he has succumbed to his second enemy and will fumble with learning. He will rush when he should be patient, or he will be patient when he should rush; and he will fumble with learning until he winds up incapable of learning anything more."

"What becomes of a man who is defeated in that way, don Juan? Does he die as a result?"

"No, he doesn't die. His second enemy has just stopped him cold from trying to become a man of knowledge. Instead, the man may turn into a buoyant warrior, or a clown. Yet the clarity for which he has paid so dearly will never change to darkness and fear again. He will be clear as long as he lives, but he will no longer learn, or yearn for anything."

"But what does he have to do to avoid being defeated?"

"He must do what he did with fear. He must defy his clarity and use it only to see, and wait patiently and measure carefully before taking new steps. He must think, above all, that his clarity is almost a mistake; and a moment will come when he will understand that his clarity was only a point before his eyes. And thus he will have overcome his second enemy, and will arrive at a position where nothing can harm him any more. This will not be a mistake. It will not be only a point before his eyes. It will be true power.

"He will know at this point that the power he has been pursuing for so long is finally his. He can do with it whatever he pleases. His ally is at his command. His wish is the rule. He sees all that is around him. But he has also come across his third enemy: Power!

"Power is the strongest of all enemies. And naturally, the easiest thing to do is to give in. After all, the man is truly invincible. He commands: He begins by taking calculated risks, and ends in making rules because he is a master.

"A man at this stage hardly notices his third enemy closing in on him; and suddenly, without knowing, he will certainly have lost the battle. His enemy will have turned him into a cruel, capricious man."

"Will he lose his power?"

"No, he will never lose his clarity or his power."

"What then will distinguish him from a man of knowledge?"

"A man who is defeated by power dies without really knowing how to handle it. Power is only a burden upon his fate. Such a man has no command over himself, and cannot tell when or how to use his power."

"Is the defeat by any of these enemies a final defeat?"

"Of course it is final. Once one of these enemies overpowers a man there is nothing he can do."

"Is it possible, for instance, that the man who is defeated by power may see his error and mend his ways?"

"No. Once a man gives in he is through."

"But what if he is temporarily blinded by power, and then refuses it?"

"That means his battle is still on. That means he is still trying to become a man of knowledge. A man is defeated only when he no longer tries, and abandons himself."

"But then, don Juan, it is possible that a man may abandon himself to fear for years, but finally conquer it."

"No, that is not true. If he gives in to fear, he will never conquer it because he will shy away from learning and never try again. But if he tries to learn for years in the midst of his fear, he will eventually conquer it because he will never have really abandoned himself to it."

"How can he defeat his third enemy, don Juan?"

"He has to defy it, deliberately. He has to come to realize the power he has seemingly conquered is in reality never his. He must keep himself in line at all times, handling carefully and faithfully all that he has learned. If he can see that clarity and power without his control over himself are worse than mistakes, he will reach a point where everything is held in check. He will know then when and how to use his power; and thus he will have defeated his third enemy.

"The man will be, by then, at the end of his journey of learning, and almost without warning he will come upon the last of his enemies: Old age! This enemy is the cruelest of all; the one he won't be able to defeat completely, but only fight away.

"This is the time when a man has no more fears, no more impatient clarity of mind- a time when all his power is in check, but also the time when he has an unyielding desire to rest. If he gives in totally to his desire to lie down and forget; if he soothes himself in tiredness, he will have lost his last round and his enemy will cut him down into a feeble old creature. His desire to retreat will overrule all his clarity, his power, and his knowledge.

"But if the man sloughs off his tiredness, and lives his fate through, he can then be called a man of knowledge; if only for the brief moment when he succeeds in fighting off his last, invincible enemy. That moment of clarity, power, and knowledge is enough."

## Chapter 4

Don Juan seldom spoke openly about Mescalito. Every time I questioned him on the subject he refused to talk; but he always said enough to create an impression of Mescalito- an impression that was always anthropomorphic. [*anthropomorphic- suggesting human characteristics for animals or inanimate things*] Mescalito was a male, not only because of the mandatory grammatical rule that gives the word a masculine gender, but also because of his constant qualities of being a protector and a teacher. Don Juan reaffirmed these characteristics in various forms every time we talked.

*Sunday, December 24, 1961*

"The devil's weed has never protected anyone. She serves only to give power. Mescalito, on the other hand, is gentle, like a baby."

"But you said Mescalito is terrifying at times."

"Of course he is terrifying, but once you get to know him, he is gentle and kind."

"How does he show his kindness?"

"He is a protector and a teacher."

"How does he protect?"

"You can keep him with you at all times and he will see that nothing bad happens to you."

"How can you keep him with you at all times?"

"In a little bag, fastened under your arm or around your neck with a string."

"Do you have him with you?"

"No, because I have an ally. But other people do."

"What does he teach?"

"He teaches you to live properly."

"How does he teach?"

"He shows things and tells what is what [*enzeña las cosas y te dice lo que son*]."

"How?"

"You will have to see for yourself."

*Tuesday, January 30, 1962*

"What do you see when Mescalito takes you with him, don Juan?"

"Such things are not for ordinary conversation. I can't tell you that."

"Would something bad happen to you if you told?"

"Mescalito is a protector; a kind, gentle protector; but that does not mean you can make fun of him. Because he is a kind protector, he can also be horror itself with those he does not like."

"I do not intend to make fun of him. I just want to know what he makes other people do or see. I described to you all that Mescalito made me see, don Juan."

"With you it is different, perhaps because you don't know his ways. You have to be taught his ways as a child is taught how to walk."

"How long do I still have to be taught?"

"Until he himself begins to make sense to you."

"And then?"

"Then you will understand by yourself. You won't have to tell me anything any more."

"Can you just tell me where Mescalito takes you?"

"I can't talk about it."

"All I want to know is if there is another world to which he takes people."

"There is."

"Is it heaven?" (The Spanish word for heaven is cielo, but that also means "sky".)

"He takes you through the sky [*cielo*]."

"I mean, is it heaven [*cielo*] where God is?"

"You are being stupid now. I don't know where God is."

"Is Mescalito God—the only God? Or is he one of the gods?"

"He is just a protector and a teacher. He is a power."

"Is he a power within ourselves?"

"No. Mescalito has nothing to do with ourselves. He is outside us."

"Then everyone who takes Mescalito must see him in the same form."

"No, not at all. He is not the same for everybody"

*Thursday, April 12, 1962*

"Why don't you tell me more about Mescalito, don Juan?"

"There is nothing to tell."

"There must be thousands of things I should know before I encounter him again."

"No. Perhaps for you there is nothing you have to know. As I have already told you, he is not the same for everyone."

"I know, but still I'd like to know how others feel about him."

"The opinion of those who care to talk about him is not worth much. You will see. You will probably talk about him up to a certain point, and from then on you will never discuss him."

"Can you tell me about your own first experiences?"

"What for?"

"Then I'll know how to behave with Mescalito"

"You already know more than I do. You actually played with him. Someday you will see how kind the protector was with you. That first time I am sure he told you many, many things, but you were deaf and blind."

*Saturday, April 14, 1962*

"Does Mescalito take *any* form when he shows himself?"

"Yes, any form."

"Then, which are the most common forms you know?"

"There are no common forms."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that he appears in any form, even to men who know him well?"

"No. He appears in any form to those who know him only a little, but to those who know him well, he is always constant."

"How is he constant?"

"He appears to them sometimes as a man, like us, or as a light."

"Does Mescalito ever change his permanent form with those who know him well?"

"Not to my knowledge."

*Friday, July 6, 1962*

Don Juan and I started on a trip late in the afternoon of Saturday June 23. He said we were going to look for *honguitos* (mushrooms) in the state of Chihuahua. He said it was going to be a long, hard trip. He was right. We arrived in a little mining town in northern Chihuahua at

10:00 p.m. on Wednesday June 27. We walked from the place I had parked the car at the outskirts of town, to the house of his friends; a Tarahumara Indian and his wife. We slept there.

The next morning the man woke us up around five. He brought us gruel and beans. He sat and talked to don Juan while we ate, but he said nothing concerning our trip.

After breakfast the man put water into my canteen, and two sweet-rolls into my knapsack. Don Juan handed me the canteen, fixed the knapsack with a cord over his shoulders, thanked the man for his courtesies, and turning to me said, "It is time to go."

We walked on the dirt road for about a mile. From there we cut through the fields and in two hours we were at the foot of the hills south of town. We climbed the gentle slopes in a southwesterly direction. When we reached the steeper inclines, don Juan changed directions and we followed a high valley to the east. Despite his advanced age, don Juan kept up a pace so incredibly fast that by midday I was completely exhausted. We sat down and he opened the bread sack.

"You can eat all of it, if you want," he said.

"How about you?"

"I am not hungry, and we won't need this food later on."

I was very tired and hungry and took him up on his offer. I felt this was a good time to talk about the purpose of our trip, and quite casually I asked, "Do you think we are going to stay here for a long time?"

"We are here to gather some Mescalito. We will stay until tomorrow."

"Where is Mescalito?"

"All around us."

Cacti of many species were growing in profusion all through the area, but I could not distinguish peyote among them.

We started to hike again and by three o'clock we came to a long, narrow valley with steep side hills. I felt strangely excited at the idea of finding peyote which I had never seen in it's natural environment. We entered the valley and must have walked about four hundred feet when suddenly I spotted three unmistakable peyote plants. They were in a cluster a few inches above the ground in front of me to the left of the path. They looked like round, pulpy, green roses. I ran towards them, pointing them out to don Juan.

He ignored me, and deliberately kept his back turned as he walked away. I knew I had done the wrong thing, and for the rest of the afternoon we walked in silence, moving slowly on the flat valley floor which was covered with small, sharp-edged rocks. We moved among the cacti, disturbing crowds of lizards and at times a solitary bird; and I passed scores of peyote plants without saying a word.

At six o'clock we were at the bottom of the mountains that marked the end of the valley. We climbed to a ledge. Don Juan dropped his sack and sat down.

I was hungry again, but we had no food left. I suggested that we pick up the Mescalito, and head back for town. He looked annoyed, and made a smacking sound with his lips. He said we were going to spend the night there.

We sat quietly. There was a rock wall to the left, and to the right was the valley we had just crossed. It extended for quite a distance and seemed to be wider than, and not so flat as I had thought. Viewed from the spot where I sat, it was full of small hills and protuberances.

"Tomorrow we will start walking back," don Juan said without looking at me, and pointing to the valley. "We will work our way back and pick him as we cross the field. That is, we will pick him only when he is in our way. He will find us and not the other way around. *He* will find us— if he wants to."

Don Juan rested his back against the rock wall and, with his head turned to his side, continued talking as though another person were there besides myself. "One more thing. Only *I* can pick him. You will perhaps carry the bag, or walk ahead of me— I don't know yet. But tomorrow you will not point at him as you did today!"

"I am sorry, don Juan."

"It is all right. You didn't know."

"Did your benefactor teach you all this about Mescalito?"

"No! Nobody has taught me about him. It was the protector himself who was my teacher."

"Then Mescalito is like a person to whom you can talk?"

"No, he isn't."

"How does he teach, then?"

He remained silent for a while.

"Remember the time when you played with him? You understood what he meant, didn't you?"

"I did!"

"That is the way he teaches. You did not know it then, but if you had paid attention to him, he would have talked to you."

"When?"

"When you saw him for the first time."

He seemed to be very annoyed by my questioning. I told him I had to ask all these questions because I wanted to find out all I could.

"Don't ask *me*!" He smiled maliciously. "Ask *him*. The next time you see him, ask him everything you want to know."

"Then Mescalito *is* like a person you can talk..."

He did not let me finish. He turned away, picked up the canteen, stepped down from the ledge, and disappeared around the rock. I did not want to be alone there, and even though he had not asked me to go along, I followed him. We walked for about five hundred feet to a small creek. He washed his hands and face, and filled up the canteen. He swished water around in his mouth, but did not drink it. I scooped up some water in my hands and drank, but he stopped me and said it was unnecessary to drink.

He handed me the canteen and started to walk back to the ledge. When we got there, we sat again facing the valley with our backs to the rock wall. I asked if we could build afire. He reacted as if it was inconceivable to ask such a thing. He said that for that night we were Mescalito's guests and he was going to keep us warm.

It was already dusk. Don Juan pulled two thin, cotton blankets from his sack, threw one into my lap, and sat cross-legged with the other one over his shoulders. Below us the valley was dark; with it's edges already diffused in the evening mist.

Don Juan sat motionless facing the peyote field. A steady wind blew on my face.

"The twilight is the crack between the worlds," he said softly, without turning to me.

I didn't ask what he meant. My eyes became tired. Suddenly I felt elated. I had a strange, overpowering desire to weep!

I lay on my stomach. The rock floor was hard and uncomfortable, and I had to change my position every few minutes. Finally I sat up and crossed my legs, putting the blanket over my shoulders. To my amazement this position was supremely comfortable, and I fell asleep.

When I woke up, I heard don Juan talking to me. It was very dark. I could not see him well. I did not understand what he had said, but I followed him when he started to go down from the ledge. We moved carefully— or at least I did because of the darkness. We stopped at the bottom of the rock wall. Don Juan sat down and signaled me to sit at his left. He opened up his shirt and took out a leather sack, which he opened and placed on the ground in front of him. It contained a number of dried peyote buttons.

After a long pause he picked up one of the buttons. He held it in his right hand, rubbing it several times between the thumb and the first finger as he chanted softly. Suddenly he let out a tremendous cry.

"Ahiiii!"

It was weird, unexpected. It terrified me. Vaguely I saw him place the peyote button in his mouth and begin to chew it. After a moment he picked up the whole sack, leaned towards me, and told me in a whisper to take the sack, pick out one mescalito, put the sack in front of us again, and then do exactly as he did.

I picked a peyote button and rubbed it as he had done. Meanwhile he chanted, swaying back and forth. I tried to put the button into my mouth several times, but I felt embarrassed to cry out. Then, as in a dream, an unbelievable shriek came out of me: Ahuji! For a moment I thought it was someone else. Again I felt the effects of a nervous shock in my stomach. I was falling backwards. I was fainting. I put the peyote button into my mouth and chewed it. After a while don Juan picked up another from the sack. I was relieved to see that he put it into his mouth after a short chant. He passed the sack to me, and I placed it in front of us again after taking one button. This cycle went on five times before I noticed any thirst. I picked up the canteen to drink, but don Juan told me just to wash my mouth, and not to drink or I would vomit.

I swished the water around in my mouth repeatedly. At a certain moment drinking was a formidable temptation, and I swallowed a bit of water. Immediately my stomach began to convulse. I expected to have a painless and effortless flowing of liquid from my mouth as had happened during my first experience with peyote, but to my surprise I had only the ordinary sensation of vomiting. It did not last long, however.

Don Juan picked up another button and handed me the sack, and the cycle was renewed and repeated until I had chewed fourteen buttons. By this time all my early sensations of thirst, cold, and discomfort had disappeared. In their place I felt an unfamiliar sense of warmth and excitation. I took the canteen to freshen my mouth, but it was empty.

"Can we go to the creek, don Juan?"

The sound of my voice did not project out, but hit the roof of my palate, bounced back into my throat, and echoed to and fro between them. The echo was soft and musical, and seemed to have wings that flapped inside my throat. It's touch soothed me. I followed it's back and forth movements until it had vanished.

I repeated the question. My voice sounded as though I was talking inside a vault.

Don Juan did not answer. I got up and turned in the direction of the creek. I looked at him to see if he was coming, but he seemed to be listening attentively to something.

He made an imperative sign with his hand to be quiet.

"Abuhtol[?] is already here!" he said.

I had never heard that word before, and I was wondering whether to ask him about it when I detected a noise that seemed to be a buzzing inside my ears. The sound became louder by degrees until it was like the vibration caused by an enormous bullroarer. It lasted for a brief moment and subsided gradually until everything was quiet again. The violence and the intensity of the noise terrified me. I was shaking so much that I could hardly remain standing, yet I was perfectly rational. If I had been drowsy a few minutes before, this feeling had totally vanished; giving way to a state of extreme lucidity. The noise reminded me of a science fiction movie in which a gigantic bee buzzed it's wings coming out of an atomic radiation area. I laughed at the thought. I saw don Juan slumping back into his relaxed position. And suddenly the image of a gigantic bee accosted me again. It was more real than ordinary thoughts. It stood alone surrounded by an extraordinary clarity. Everything else was driven from my mind. This state of mental clearness, which had no precedents [* *precedents- examples that are used to justify similar occurrences at a later time*] in my life, produced another moment of terror.

I began to perspire. I leaned toward don Juan to tell him I was afraid. His face was a few inches from mine. He was looking at me, but his eyes were the eyes of a bee. They looked like round glasses that had a light of their own in the darkness. His lips were pushed out, and from them came a pattering noise: "Pehtuh-peh-tuh-pet-tuh." I jumped backward, nearly crashing into the rock wall. For a seemingly endless time I experienced an unbearable fear. I was panting and whining. The perspiration had frozen on my skin, giving me an awkward rigidity. Then I heard don Juan's voice saying, "Get up! Move around! Get up!"

The image vanished and again I could see his familiar face.

"I'll get some water," I said after another endless moment. My voice cracked. I could hardly articulate the words. Don Juan nodded yes. As I walked away I realized that my fear had gone as fast and as mysteriously as it had come.

Upon approaching the creek I noticed that I could see every object in the way. I remembered I had just seen don Juan clearly, whereas earlier I could hardly distinguish the outlines of his figure. I stopped and looked into the distance, and I could even see across the valley. Some boulders on the other side became perfectly visible. I thought it must be early morning, but it occurred to me that I might have lost track of time. I looked at my watch. It was ten to twelve! I checked the watch to see if it was working. It couldn't be midday: It had to be midnight! I intended to make a dash for the water and come back to the rocks, but I saw don Juan coming down and I waited for him. I told him I could see in the dark.

He stared at me for a long time without saying a word. If he did speak, perhaps I did not hear him, for I was concentrating on my new, unique ability to see in the dark. I could distinguish the very minute pebbles in the sand. At moments everything was so clear it seemed to be early morning, or dusk. Then it would get dark: Then it would clear again. Soon I realized that the brightness corresponded to my heart's diastole, and the darkness to it's systole. The world changed from bright to dark to bright again with every beat of my heart.

I was absorbed in this discovery when the same strange sound that I had heard before became audible again. My muscles stiffened.

"Anuhctal [as I heard the word this time] is here," don Juan said. I fancied the roar so thunderous, so overwhelming, that nothing else mattered. When it had subsided, I perceived a sudden increase in the volume of water. The creek, which a minute before had been less than a foot wide, expanded until it was an enormous lake. Light that seemed to come from above it touched the surface as though shining through thick foliage. From time to time the water would glitter for a second— gold and black. Then it would remain dark, lightless, almost out of sight, and yet strangely present.

I don't recall how long I stayed there just watching, squatting on the shore of the black lake. The roar must have subsided in the meantime, because what jolted me back (to reality?) was again a terrifying buzzing. I turned around to look for don Juan. I saw him climbing up and disappearing behind the rock ledge. Yet the feeling of being alone did not bother me at all. I squatted there in a state of absolute confidence and abandonment. The roar again became audible. It was very intense, like the noise made by a high wind. Listening to it as carefully as I could, I was able to detect a definite melody. It was a composite of high pitched sounds, like human voices, accompanied by a deep bass drum. I focused all my attention on the melody, and again noticed that the systole and diastole of my heart coincided with the sound of the bass drum, and with the pattern of the music.

I stood up and the melody stopped. I tried to listen to my heartbeat, but it was not detectable. I squatted again, thinking that perhaps the position of my body had caused or induced the sounds! But nothing happened! Not a sound! Not even my heart! I thought I had had enough, but as I stood up to leave, I felt a tremor of the earth. The ground under my feet was shaking. I was losing my balance. I fell backwards and remained on my back while the earth shook violently. I tried to grab a rock or a plant, but something was sliding under me. I jumped up, stood for a moment, and fell down again. The ground on which I sat was moving, sliding into the water like a raft. I remained motionless, stunned by a terror that was, like everything else, unique, uninterrupted, and absolute.

I moved through the water of the black lake perched on a piece of soil that looked like an earthen log. I had the feeling I was going in a southerly direction, transported by the current. I could see the water moving and swirling around. It felt cold, and oddly heavy, to the touch. I fancied it alive.

There were no distinguishable shores or landmarks, and I can't recall the thoughts or the feelings that must have come to me during this trip. After what seemed like hours of drifting, my raft made a right-angle turn to the left, the east. It continued to slide on the water for a very short distance, and unexpectedly rammed against something. The impact threw me forward. I closed my eyes and felt a sharp pain as my knees and my outstretched arms hit the ground. After a moment I looked up. I was lying on the dirt. It was as though my earthen log had merged with the land. I sat up and turned around. The water was receding! It moved backward, like a wave in reverse, until it disappeared.

I sat there for a long time, trying to collect my thoughts and resolve all that had happened into a coherent unit. My entire body ached. My throat felt like an open sore; I had bitten my lips when I 'landed'. I stood up. The wind made me realize I was cold. My clothes were wet. My hands and jaws and knees shook so violently that I had to lie down again. Drops of perspiration slid into my eyes and burned them until I yelled with pain.

After a while I regained a measure of stability and stood up. In the dark twilight, the scene was very clear. I took a couple of steps. A distinct sound of many human voices came to me. They seemed to be talking loudly. I followed the sound. I walked for about fifty yards and came to a sudden stop. I had reached a dead end. The place where I stood was a corral formed by enormous boulders. I could distinguish another row, and then another, and another, until they merged into the sheer mountain. From among them came the most exquisite music. It was a fluid, uninterrupted, eerie flow of sounds.

At the foot of one boulder, I saw a man sitting on the ground, his face turned almost in profile. I approached him until I was perhaps ten feet away. Then he turned his head and looked at me. I stopped- his eyes were the water I had just seen! They had the same enormous volume, the sparkling of gold and black. His head was pointed like a strawberry. His skin was green; dotted with innumerable warts. Except for the pointed shape, his head was exactly like the surface of the peyote plant. I stood in front of him, staring. I couldn't take my eyes away from him. I felt he was deliberately pressing on my chest with the weight of his eyes. I was choking. I lost my balance and fell to the ground. His eyes turned away. I heard him talking to me. At first his voice was like the soft rustle of a light breeze. Then I heard it as music— as a melody of voices— and I 'knew' it was saying, "What do you want?"

I knelt before him and talked about my life; then wept. He looked at me again. I felt his eyes pulling me away, and I thought that moment would be the moment of my death. He signaled me to come closer. I vacillated for an instant before I took a step forward. As I came closer he turned his eyes away from me and showed me the back of his hand. The melody said, "Look!" There was a round hole in the middle of his hand. "Look!" said the melody again. I looked into the hole and I saw myself. I was very old and feeble and was running stooped over, with bright sparks flying all around me. Then three of the sparks hit me, two in the head and one in the left shoulder. My figure, in the hole, stood up for a moment until it was fully vertical, and then disappeared together with the hole.

Mescalito turned his eyes to me again. They were so close to me that I 'heard' them rumble softly with that peculiar sound I had heard many times that night. They became peaceful by degrees until they were like a quiet pond rippled by gold and black flashes.

He turned his eyes away once more and hopped like a cricket for perhaps fifty yards. He hopped again and again, and was gone.

The next thing I remember is that I began to walk. Very rationally I tried to recognize landmarks, such as mountains in the distance, in order to orient myself. I had been obsessed by cardinal points throughout the whole experience, and I believed that north had to be to my left. I walked in that direction for quite a while before I realized that it was daytime, and that I was no longer using my 'night vision'. I remembered I had a watch and looked at the time. It was eight o'clock.

It was about ten o'clock when I got to the ledge where I had been the night before. Don Juan was lying on the ground asleep.

"Where have you been?" he asked.

I sat down to catch my breath.

After a long silence he asked, "Did you see him?"

I began to narrate to him the sequence of my experiences from the beginning, but he interrupted me saying that all that mattered was whether I had seen him or not. He asked how close to me Mescalito was. I told him I had nearly touched him.

That part of my story interested him. He listened attentively to every detail without comment, interrupting only to ask questions about the form of the entity I had seen, it's disposition, and other details about it. It was about noon when don Juan seemed to have had enough of my story. He stood up and strapped a canvas bag to my chest. He told me to walk behind him, and said he was going to cut Mescalito loose; and I had to receive him in my hands and place him inside the bag gently.

We drank some water and started to walk. When we reached the edge of the valley, he seemed to hesitate for a moment before deciding which direction to take. Once he had made his choice we walked in a straight line.

Every time we came to a peyote plant, he squatted in front of it and very gently cut off the top with his short, serrated knife. He made an incision level with the ground, and, sprinkled the 'wound', as he called it, with pure sulphur powder which he carried in a leather sack. He held the fresh button in his left hand and spread the powder with his right hand. Then he stood up and handed me the button, which I received with both hands, as he had prescribed, and placed inside the bag. "Stand erect and don't let the bag touch the ground or the bushes or anything else," he said repeatedly, as though he thought I would forget.

We collected sixty-five buttons. When the bag was completely filled, he put it on my back and strapped a new one to my chest. By the time we had crossed the plateau we had two full sacks, containing one hundred and ten peyote buttons. The bags were so heavy and bulky that I could hardly walk under their weight and volume.

Don Juan whispered to me that the bags were heavy because Mescalito wanted to return to the ground. He said it was the sadness of leaving his abode which made Mescalito heavy. My real chore was not to let the bags touch the ground, because if I did Mescalito would never allow me to take him again.

At one particular moment the pressure of the straps on my shoulders became unbearable. Something was exerting tremendous force in order to pull me down. I felt very apprehensive. I noticed that I had started to walk faster, almost at a run. I was, in a way, trotting behind don Juan.

Suddenly the weight on my back and chest diminished. The load became spongy and light. I ran freely to catch up with don Juan, who was ahead of me. I told him I did not feel the weight any longer. He explained that we had already left Mescalito's abode.

*Tuesday, July 3, 1962*

"I think Mescalito has almost accepted you," don Juan said.

"Why do you say he has *almost* accepted me, don Juan?"

"He did not kill you, or even harm you. He gave you a good fright, but not a really bad one. If he had not accepted you at all, he would have appeared to you as monstrous and full of wrath. Some people have learned the meaning of horror upon encountering him, and not being accepted by him."

"If he is so terrible, why didn't you tell me about it before you took me to the field?"

"You do not have the courage to seek him deliberately. I thought it would be better if you did not know."

"But I might have died, don Juan!"

"Yes, you might have. But I was certain it was going to be all right for you. He played with you once. He did not harm you. I thought he would also have compassion for you this time."

I asked him if he really thought Mescalito had had compassion for me. The experience had been terrifying. I felt that I had nearly died of fright.

He said Mescalito had been most kind to me: He had shown me a scene that was an answer to a question. Don Juan said Mescalito had given me a lesson. I asked him what the lesson was and what it meant. He said it would be impossible to answer that question because I had been too afraid to know *exactly* what I asked Mescalito.

Don Juan probed my memory as to what I had said to Mescalito before he showed me the scene on his hand. But I could not remember. All I remembered was my falling on my knees and 'confessing my sins' to him.

Don Juan seemed uninterested in talking about it any more. I asked him, "Can you teach me the words to the songs you chanted?"

"No, I can't. Those words are my own, the words the protector himself taught me. The songs are *my* songs. I can't tell you what they are."

"Why can't you tell me, don Juan?"

"Because these songs are a link between the protector and myself. I am sure some day he will teach you your own songs. Wait until then; and never, absolutely never, copy or ask about the songs that belong to another man."

"What was the name you called out? Can you tell me that, don Juan?"

"No. His name can never be voiced, except to call him."

"What if I want to call him myself?"

"If some day he accepts you, he will tell you his name. That name will be for you alone to use, either to call him loudly or to say quietly to yourself. Perhaps he will tell you his name is José. Who knows?"

"Why is it wrong to use his name when talking about him?"

"You have seen his eyes, haven't you? You can't fool around with the protector. That is why I can't get over the fact that he chose to play with you!"

"How can he be a protector when he hurts some people?"

"The answer is very simple. Mescalito is a protector because he is available to anyone who seeks him."

"But isn't it true that everything in the world is available to anyone who seeks it?"

"No, that is not true. The ally powers are available only to the brujos, but anyone can partake of Mescalito."

"But why then does he hurt some people?"

"Not everybody likes Mescalito, yet they seek him with the idea of profiting without doing any work. Naturally their encounter with him is always horrifying."

"What happens when he accepts a man completely?"

"He appears to him as a man, or as a light. When a man has won this kind of acceptance, Mescalito is constant. He never changes after that. Perhaps when you meet him again he will be a light, and someday he may even take you flying, and reveal all his secrets to you."

"What do I have to do to arrive at that point, don Juan?"

"You have to be a strong man, and your life has to be truthful."

"What is a truthful life?"

"A life lived with deliberateness; a good, strong life."

## Chapter 5

Don Juan inquired periodically, in a casual way, about the state of my Datura plant. In the year that had elapsed from the time I replanted the root, the plant had grown into a large bush. It had seeded and the seedpods had dried. And don Juan judged it was time for me to learn more about the devil's weed.

*Sunday, January 27, 1963*

Today don Juan gave me the preliminary information on the 'second portion' of the *Datura* root; the second step in learning the tradition. He said the second portion of the root was the real beginning of learning. In comparison with it, the first portion was like child's play. The second portion had to be mastered: It had to be in taken at least twenty times, he said, before one could go on to the third step.

I asked, "What does the second portion do?"

"The second portion of the devil's weed is used for seeing. With it, a man can soar through the air to see what is going on at any place he chooses."

"Can a man actually fly through the air, don Juan?"

"Why not? As I have already told you, the devil's weed is for those who seek power. The man who masters the second portion can use the devil's weed to do unimaginable things to gain more power."

"What kind of things, don Juan?"

"I can't tell you that. Every man is different."

*Monday, January 28, 1963*

Don Juan said, "If you complete the second step successfully, I can show you only one more step. In the course of learning about the devil's weed, I realized she was not for me, and I did not pursue her path any further."

"What made you decide against it, don Juan?"

"The devil's weed nearly killed me every time I tried to use her. Once it was so bad I thought I was finished. And yet, I could have avoided all that pain."

"How? Is there a special way to avoid pain?"

"Yes, there is a way."

"Is it a formula, a procedure, or what?"

"It is a way of grabbing onto things. For instance, when I was learning about the devil's weed I was too eager. I grabbed onto things the way kids grab onto candy. The devil's weed is only one of a million paths. Anything is one of a million paths [*un camino entre cantidades de caminos*]. Therefore you must always keep in mind that a path is only a path. If you feel you should not follow it, you must not stay with it under any conditions. To have such clarity, you must lead a disciplined life. Only then will you know that any path is only a path, and there is no affront to oneself or to others in dropping it if that is what your heart tells you to do. But your decision to keep on the path or to leave it must be free of fear or ambition. I warn you. Look at every path closely and deliberately. Try it as many times as you think necessary. Then ask yourself, and yourself alone, one question. This question is one that only a very old man asks. My benefactor told me about it once when I was young, and my blood was too vigorous for me to understand it. Now I do understand it. I will tell you what it is: Does this path have a heart? All paths are the same: They lead nowhere. They are paths going through the bush, or into the bush. In my own life, I could say I have traversed long, long paths, but I am not anywhere. My benefactor's question has meaning now. 'Does this path have a heart?' If it does, the path is good. If it doesn't, it is of no use. Both paths lead nowhere; but one has a heart, the other doesn't. One makes for a joyful journey. As long as you follow it, you are one with it. The other will make you curse your life. One makes you strong: The other weakens you."

*Sunday, April 21, 1963*

On Tuesday afternoon, April 16, don Juan and I went to the hills where his *Datura* plants are. He asked me to leave him alone there, and wait for him in the car. He returned nearly three hours later carrying a package wrapped in a red cloth. As we started to drive back to his house, he pointed to the bundle and said it was his last gift for me.

I asked if he meant he was not going to teach me any more. He explained that he was referring to the fact that I had a plant fully mature, and would no longer need his plants.

Late in the afternoon we sat in his room. He brought out a smoothly finished mortar and pestle. The bowl of the mortar was about six inches in diameter. He untied a large package full of small bundles, selected two of them, and placed them on a straw mat by my side. Then he added four more bundles of the same size from the pack he had carried home. He said they were seeds, and I had to grind them into a fine powder. He opened the first bundle and poured some of it's contents into the mortar. The seeds were dried, round and caramel yellow in color.

I began working with the pestle. After a while, he corrected me. He told me to push the pestle against one side of the mortar first, and then slide it across the bottom and up against the other side. I asked what he was going to do with the powder. He did not want to talk about it.

The first batch of seeds was extremely hard to grind. It took me four hours to finish the job. My back ached because of the position in which I had been sitting. I lay down and wanted to go to sleep right there, but don Juan opened the next bag and poured some of the contents into the mortar. The seeds this time were slightly darker than the first ones, and were lumped together. The rest of the bag's contents was a sort of powder, made of very small, round, dark granules.

I wanted something to eat, but don Juan said that if I wished to learn, I had to follow the rule; and the rule was that I could only drink a little water while learning the secrets of the second portion.

The third bag contained a handful of live, black, grain weevils. And in the last bag were some fresh white seeds, almost mushy soft, but fibrous and difficult to grind into a fine paste, as he expected me to do. After I had finished grinding the contents of the four bags, don Juan measured two cups of a greenish water, poured it into a clay pot, and put the pot on the fire. When the water was boiling he added the first batch of powdered seeds. He stirred it with a long, pointed piece of wood or bone which he carried in his leather pouch. As soon as the water boiled again he added the other substances one by one, following the same procedure. Then he added one more cup of the same water, and let the mixture simmer over a low fire.

Then he told me it was time to mash the root. He carefully extracted a long piece of *Datura* root from the bundle he had carried home. The root was about sixteen inches long. It was thick, perhaps an inch and a half in diameter. He said it was the second portion, and again he had measured the second portion himself, because it was still *his* root. He said the next time I tried the devil's weed I would have to measure my own root.

He pushed the big mortar towards me, and I proceeded to pound the root in exactly the same way he had mashed the first portion. He directed me through the same steps, and again we left the mashed root soaking in water, exposed to the night air. By that time the boiling mixture had solidified in the clay pot. Don Juan took the pot from the fire, placed it inside a hanging net, and hooked it to a beam in the middle of the room.

About eight o'clock in the morning of April 17, don Juan and I began to leach the root extract with water. It was a clear, sunny day, and don Juan interpreted the fine weather as an omen that the devil's weed liked me. He said that with me around, he could remember only how bad she had been with him.

The procedure we followed in leaching the root extract was the same I had observed for the first portion. By late afternoon, after pouring out the top water for the eighth time, there was a spoonful of a yellowish substance in the bottom of the bowl.

We returned to his room where there were still two little sacks he had not touched. He opened one, slid his hand inside, and wrinkled the open end around his wrist with the other hand. He seemed to be holding something, judging by the way his hand moved inside the bag. Suddenly, with a swift movement, he peeled the bag off his hand like a glove, turning it inside out, and shoved his hand close to my face. He was holding a lizard. It's head was a few inches from my eyes. There was something strange about the lizard's mouth. I gazed at it for a moment, and then recoiled involuntarily. The lizard's mouth was sewed up with rude stitches. Don Juan ordered me to hold the lizard in my left hand. I clutched it. It wriggled against my palm. I felt nauseated. My hands began to perspire.

He took the last bag, and, repeating the same motions, he extracted another lizard. He also held it close to my face. I saw that it's eyelids were sewed together. He ordered me to hold this lizard in my right hand.

By the time I had both lizards in my hands I was almost sick. I had an overpowering desire to drop them, and get out of there.

"Don't squeeze them!" he said, and his voice brought me a sense of relief and direction. He asked what was wrong with me. He tried to be serious, but couldn't keep a straight face and laughed. I tried to easy my grip, but my hands were sweating so profusely that the lizards began to wriggle out of them. Their sharp little claws scratched my hands, producing an incredible feeling of disgust and nausea. I closed my eyes and clenched my teeth. One of the lizards was already sliding onto my wrist. All it needed was to yank it's head from between my fingers to be free. I had a peculiar sensation of physical despair, of supreme discomfort. I growled at don Juan, between my teeth, to take the damn things off me. My head shook involuntarily. He looked at me curiously. I growled like a bear, shaking my body. He dropped the lizards into their bags and began to laugh. I wanted to laugh also, but my stomach was upset. I lay down.

I explained to him that what had affected me was the sensation of their claws on my palms. He said there were lots of things that could drive a man mad, especially if he did not have the resolution- the purpose, required for learning; but when a man had a clear, unbending intent, feelings were in no way a hindrance, for he was capable of controlling them.

Don Juan waited awhile and then, going through the same motions, handed me the lizards again. He told me to hold their heads up and rub them softly against my temples, as I asked them anything I wanted to know.

I did not understand at first what he wanted me to do. He told me again to ask the lizards about anything I could not find out for myself. He gave me a whole series of examples: I could find out about persons I did not see ordinarily, or about objects that were lost, or about places I had not seen. Then I realized he was talking about *divination*. I got very excited. My heart began to pound. I felt that I was losing my breath.

He warned me not to ask about personal matters this first time. He said I should think rather of something that had nothing to do with me. I had to think fast and clearly because there would be no way of reversing my thoughts.

I tried frantically to think of something I wanted to know. Don Juan urged me on imperiously, and I was astonished to realize I could think of nothing I wanted to 'ask' the lizards.

After a painfully long wait I thought of something. Some time earlier a large number of books had been stolen from a reading room. It was not a personal matter, and yet I was interested in it. I had no preconceived ideas about the identity of the person, or persons who had taken the books. I rubbed the lizards against my temples, asking them who the thief was.

After a while don Juan put the lizards inside their bags, and said that there were no deep secrets about the root and the paste. The paste was made to give direction; the root made things clear. But the real mystery was the lizards. They were the secret of the whole sorcery of the second portion, he said. I asked whether they were a special kind of lizard. He said they were. They had to come from the area of one's own plant: They had to be one's friends. And to have lizards as friends, he said, required a long period of grooming. One had to develop a strong friendship with them by giving them food and speaking kind words to them.

I asked why their friendship was so important. He said the lizards would allow themselves to be caught only if they knew the man, and whoever took the devil's weed seriously had to treat the lizards seriously. He said that, as a rule, the lizards should be caught after the paste and the root had been prepared. They should be caught in the late afternoon. If one was not on intimate terms with the lizards, he said, days could be spent trying to catch them without success; and the paste lasts only one day. He then gave me a long series of instructions concerning the procedure to follow after the lizards had been caught.

"Once you have caught the lizards, put them in separate bags. Then take the first one and talk to her. Apologize for hurting her, and beg her to help you. And with a wooden needle sew up her mouth. Use the fibers of agave and one of the thorns of a choya to do the sewing. Draw the stitches tight. Then tell the other lizard the same things and sew her eyelids together. By the time night begins to fall you will be ready. Take the lizard with the sewed-up mouth and explain to her the matter you want to know about. Ask her to go and see for you. Tell her you had to sew up her mouth so she would hurry back to you and not talk to anyone else. Let her scramble in the paste after you have rubbed it on her head. Then put her on the ground. If she goes in the direction of your good fortune, the sorcery will be successful and easy. If she goes in the opposite direction, it will be unsuccessful. If the lizard moves towards you (south), you can expect more than ordinary good luck; but if she moves away from you (north), the sorcery will be terribly difficult. You may even die! So if she moves away from you, that is a good time to quit. At this point you can make the decision to quit. If you do, you will lose your capacity to command the lizards, but that is better than losing your life. On the other hand, you may decide to go ahead with the sorcery in spite of my warning. If you do, the next step is to take the other lizard and tell her to listen to her sister's story, and then describe it to you."

"But how can the lizard with the sewed-up mouth tell me what she sees? Wasn't her mouth closed to prevent her from talking?"

"Sewing up her mouth prevents her from telling her story to strangers. People say lizards are talkative: They will stop anywhere to talk. Anyway, the next step is to smear the paste on the back of her head, and then rub her head against your right temple, keeping the paste away from the center of your forehead. At the beginning of your learning it is a good idea to tie the lizard by it's middle to your right shoulder with a string. Then you won't lose her or injure her. But as you progress and become more familiar with the power of the devil's weed, the lizards learn to obey your commands and will stay perched on your shoulder. After you have smeared the paste on your right temple with the lizard, dip the fingers of both hands into the gruel; first rub it on both temples and then spread it all over both sides of your head. The paste dries very fast, and can be applied as many times as necessary. Begin every time by using the lizard's head first and then your fingers. Sooner or later the lizard that went to see comes back and tells her sister all about her journey, and the blind lizard describes it to you as though you were her kind. When the sorcery is finished, put the lizard down and let her go, but don't watch where she goes. Dig a deep hole with your bare hands and bury everything you used in it."

About 6:00 p.m. don Juan scooped the root extract out of the bowl onto a flat piece of shale. There was less than a teaspoon of a yellowish starch. He put half of it into a cup and added some yellowish water. He rotated the cup in his hand to dissolve the substance. He handed me the cup and told me to drink the mixture. It was tasteless, but it left a slightly bitter flavour in my mouth. The water was too hot and that annoyed me. My heart began pounding fast, but soon I was relaxed again.

Don Juan got the other bowl with the paste. The paste looked solid, and had a glossy surface. I tried to poke the crust with my finger, but don Juan jumped toward me and pushed my hand away from the bowl. He became very annoyed. He said it was very thoughtless of me to try that, and if I really wanted to learn there was no need to be careless. This is power, he said, pointing to the paste, and nobody can tell what kind of power it really is. It was bad enough that we had to tamper with it for our own purposes— a thing we cannot help doing because we are men," he said— but we should at least treat it with the proper respect. The mixture looked like oatmeal. Apparently it had enough starch to give it that consistency. He asked me to get the bags with the lizards. He took the lizard with the sewed-up mouth and carefully handed it over to me. He made me take it with my left hand and told me to get some of the paste with my finger and rub it on the lizard's head, and then put the lizard into the pot and hold it there until the paste covered it's entire body.

Then he told me to remove the lizard from the pot. He picked up the pot and led me to a rocky area not too far from his house. He pointed to a large rock and told me to sit in front of it as if it were my *Datura* plant, and holding the lizard in front of my face to explain to her again what I wanted to know, and beg her to go and find the answer for me. He advised me to tell the lizard I was sorry I had to cause her discomfort, and to promise her I would be kind to all lizards in return. And then he told me to hold her between the third and fourth fingers of my left hand, where he had once made a cut, and to dance around the rock doing exactly what I had done when I replanted the root of the devil's weed. He asked me if I remembered all I had done at that time. I said I did. He emphasized that everything had to be just the same, and if I did not remember I had to wait until everything was clear in my mind. He warned me with great urgency that if I acted too quickly, without deliberation, I was going to get hurt. His last instruction was that I was to place the lizard with the sewed-up mouth on the ground and watch where she went so that I could determine the outcome of the experience. He said I was not to take my eyes away from the lizard, even for an instant, because it was a common trick of lizards to distract one and then dash away.

It was not quite dark yet. Don Juan looked at the sky. "I will leave you alone," he said, and walked away.

I followed all his instructions and then placed the lizard on the ground. The lizard stood motionless where I had put it. Then it looked at me, and ran to the rocks towards the east and disappeared among them.

I sat on the ground in front of the rock as though I were facing my plant. A profound sadness overtook me. I wondered about the lizard with it's sewed-up mouth. I thought of it's strange journey and of how it looked at me before it ran away. It was a weird thought; an annoying projection. In my own way I too was a lizard undergoing another strange journey. My fate was, perhaps, only to see. At that moment I felt that I would never be able to tell what I had seen. It was very dark by then. I could hardly see the rocks in front of me. I thought of don Juan's words: "The twilight— there's the crack between the worlds!"

After long hesitation I began to follow the steps prescribed. The paste, though it looked like oatmeal, did not feel like oatmeal. It was very smooth and cold. It had a peculiar, pungent smell. It produced a sensation of coolness on the skin and dried quickly. I rubbed my temples eleven times, without noticing any effect. I tried very carefully to take account of any change in perception or mood, for I did not even know what to anticipate. As a matter of fact, I could not conceive the nature of the experience, and kept on searching for clues.

The paste had dried up and scaled off my temples. I was about to rub some more of it on when I realized I was sitting on my heels in Japanese fashion. I had been sitting cross-legged and did not recall changing positions. It took some time to realize fully that I was sitting on the floor in a sort of cloister with high arches. I thought they were brick arches, but upon examining them I saw they were stone.

This transition was very difficult. It came so suddenly that I was not ready to follow. My perception of the elements of the vision was diffused, as if I were dreaming. Yet the components did not change. They remained steady, and I could stop alongside any one of them and actually examine it. The vision was not so clear or so real as one induced by peyote. It had a misty character; an intensely pleasing pastel quality.

I wondered whether I could get up or not, and the next thing I noticed was that I had moved. I was at the top of a stairway and H., a friend of mine, was standing at the bottom. Her eyes were feverish. There was a mad glare in them. She laughed aloud with such intensity that she was terrifying. She began coming up the stairs. I wanted to run away or take cover, because 'she'd been off her rocker once'. That was the thought that came to my mind. I hid behind a column and she went by without looking. "She's going on a long trip now," was another thought that occurred to me then; and finally the last thought I remembered was, "She laughs every time she's ready to crack up."

Suddenly the scene became very clear. It was no longer like a dream. It was like an ordinary scene, but I seemed to be looking at it through window glass. I tried to touch a column but all I sensed was that I couldn't move; yet I knew I could stay as long as I wanted, viewing the scene. I was in it and yet I was not part of it.

I experienced a barrage of rational thoughts and arguments. I was, so far as I could judge, in an ordinary state of sober consciousness. Every element belonged in the realm of my normal processes. And yet I knew it was not an ordinary state.

The scene changed abruptly. It was night-time. I was in the hall of a building. The darkness inside the building made me aware that in the earlier scene the sunlight had been beautifully clear; yet it had been so commonplace that I did not notice it at the time.

As I looked further into the new vision I saw a young man coming out of a room carrying a large knapsack on his shoulders. I didn't know who he was, although I had seen him once or twice. He walked by me and went down the stairs. By then I had forgotten my apprehension, my rational dilemmas. "Who's that guy?" I thought. "Why did I see him?"

The scene changed again and I was watching the young man deface books; he glued some of the pages together, erased markings, and so on. Then I saw him arranging the books neatly in a wooden crate. There was a pile of crates. They were not in his room, but in a storage place. Other images came to my mind, but they were not clear. The scene became foggy. I had a sensation of spinning.

Don Juan shook me by the shoulders and I woke up. He helped me to stand and we walked back to his house. It had been three and a half hours from the moment I began rubbing the paste on my temples to the time I woke up, but the visionary state could not have lasted more than ten minutes. I had no ill effects whatsoever. I was just hungry and sleepy.

*Thursday, April 18, 1963*

Don Juan asked me last night to describe my recent experience, but I was too sleepy to talk about it. I could not concentrate. Today, as soon as I woke up, he asked me again.

"Who told you this girl H. had been off her rocker?" he asked when I finished my story.

"Nobody. It was just one of the thoughts I had."

"Do you think they were your thoughts?"

I told him they were my thoughts, although I had no reason to think that H. had been sick. They were strange thoughts. They seemed to pop up in my mind from nowhere. He looked at me inquisitively. I asked him if he did not believe me. He laughed and said that it was my routine to be careless with my acts.

"What did I do wrong, don Juan?"

"You should have listened to the lizards."

"How should I have listened?"

"The little lizard on your shoulder was describing to you everything her sister was seeing. She was talking to you. She was telling you everything, and you paid no attention. Instead, you believed the lizard's words were your own thoughts."

"But they *were* my own thoughts, don Juan."

"They were not. That is the nature of this sorcery. Actually, the vision is to be listened to, rather than looked at. The same thing happened to me. I was about to warn you when I remembered my benefactor had not warned me."

"Was your experience like mine, don Juan?"

"No. Mine was a hellish journey. I nearly died."

"Why was it hellish?"

"Maybe because the devil's weed did not like me, or because I was not clear about what I wanted to ask- like you yesterday. You must have had that girl in mind when you asked the question about the books."

"I can't remember it."

"The lizards are never wrong. They take every thought as a question. The lizard came back and told you things about H. no one will ever be able to understand because not even you know what your thoughts were."

"How about the other vision I had?"

"Your thoughts must have been steady when you asked that question. And that is the way this sorcery should be conducted; with clarity."

"Do you mean the vision of the girl is not to be taken seriously?"

"How can it be taken seriously if you don't know what questions the little lizards were answering?"

"Would it be more clear to the lizard if one asked only one question?"

"Yes, that would be clearer; if you could hold one thought steadily."

"But what would happen, don Juan, if the one question was not a simple one?"

"As long as your thought is steady, and does not go into other things, it is clear to the little lizards, and then their answer is clear to you."

"Can one ask more questions of the lizards as one goes along in the vision?"

"No. The vision is to look at whatever the lizards are telling you. That is why I said it is a vision to hear more than a vision to see. That is why I asked you to deal with impersonal matters. Usually, when the question is about people, your longing to touch them or talk to them is too strong, and the lizard will stop talking and the sorcery will be dispelled. You should know much more than you do now before trying to see things that concern you personally. Next time you must listen carefully. I am sure the lizards told you many, many things, but you were not listening."

*Friday, April 19, 1963*

"What were all the things I ground for the paste, don Juan?"

"Seeds of devil's weed and the weevils that live off the seeds. The measure is one handful of each." He cupped his right hand to show me how much.

I asked him what would happen if one element was used by itself, without the others. He said that such a procedure would only antagonize the devil's weed and the lizards. "You must not antagonize the lizards," he said, "because the next day during the late afternoon you must return to the site of your plant. Speak to all lizards and ask the two that helped you in the sorcery to come out again. Search all over until it is quite dark. If you can't find them, you must try it once more the next day. If you are strong you will find both of them, and then you have to eat them, right there. And you will be endowed forever with the capacity to see the unknown. You will never need to catch lizards again to practice this sorcery. They will live inside you from then on."

"What do I do if I find only one of them?"

"If you find only one of them you must let her go at the end of your search. If you find her the first day, don't keep her, hoping you will catch the other one the next day. That will only spoil your friendship with them."

"What happens if I can't find them at all?"

"I think that would be the best thing for you. It implies that you must catch two lizards every time you want their help, but it also implies that you are free."

"What do you mean, free?"

"Free from being the slave of the devil's weed. If the lizards are to live inside you, the devil's weed will never let you go."

"Is that bad?"

"Of course it is bad. She will cut you off from everything else. You will have to spend your life grooming her as an ally. She is possessive. Once she dominates you, there is only one way to go — her way."

"What if I find that the lizards are dead?"

"If you find one or both of them dead, you must not attempt to do this sorcery for some time. Lay off for a while.

"I think this is all I need to tell you; what I have told you is the rule. Whenever you practice this sorcery by yourself, you must follow all the steps I have described while you sit in front of your plant. One more thing. You must not eat or drink until the sorcery is finished."

## Chapter 6

The next step in don Juan's teachings was a new aspect of mastering the second portion of the *Datura* root. In the time that elapsed between the two stages of learning don Juan inquired only about the development of my plant.

*Thursday, June 27, 1963*

"It is a good practice to test the devil's weed before embarking fully on her path," don Juan said.

"How do you test her, don Juan?"

"You must try another sorcery with the lizards. You have all the elements that are needed to ask one more question of the lizards; this time without my help."

"Is it very necessary that I do this sorcery, don Juan?"

"It is the best way to test the feelings of the devil's weed towards you. She tests you all the time, so it is only fair that you test her too, and if you feel anywhere along her path that for some reason you should not go on, then you must simply stop."

*Saturday, June 29, 1963*

I brought up the subject of the devil's weed. I wanted don Juan to tell me more about it, and yet I did not want to be committed to participate.

"The second portion is used only to divine, isn't that so, don Juan?" I asked to start the conversation.

"Not only to divine. One learns the sorcery of the lizards with the aid of the second portion, and at the same time one tests the devil's weed; but in reality the second portion is used for other purposes. The sorcery of the lizards is only the beginning."

"Then what is it used for, don Juan?"

He did not answer. He abruptly changed the subject, and asked me how big were the *Datura* plants growing around my own plant. I made a gesture of size.

Don Juan said, "I have taught you how to tell a male from a female. Now, go to your plants and bring me both. Go first to your old plant and watch carefully the watercourse made by the rain. By now the rain must have carried the seeds far away. Watch the crevices [*zanjitas*] made by the run-off, and from them determine the direction of the flow. Then find the plant that is growing at the farthest point from your plant. All the devil's weed plants that are growing in between are yours. Later, as they seed, you can extend the size of your territory by following the watercourse from each plant along the way."

He gave me meticulous instructions on how to procure a cutting tool. The cutting of the root, he said, had to be done in the following way. First, I had to select the plant I was to cut and clear away the dirt around the place where the root joined the stem. Second, I had to repeat exactly the same dance I had performed when I replanted the root. Third, I had to cut the stem off, and leave the root in the ground. The final step was to dig out sixteen inches of root. He admonished me not to talk or to betray any feeling during this act.

"You should carry two pieces of cloth," he said. "Spread them on the ground and place the plants on them. Then cut the plants into parts and stack them up. The order is up to you; but you must always remember what order you used because that is the way you must always do it. Bring the plants to me as soon as you have them."

*Saturday, July 6, 1963*

On Monday July 1, I cut the *Datura* plants don Juan had asked for. I waited until it was fairly dark to do the dancing around the plants because I did not want anybody to see me. I felt quite apprehensive. I was sure someone was going to witness my strange acts. I had previously chosen the plants I thought were a male and a female. I had to cut off sixteen inches of the root of each one, and digging to that depth with a wooden stick was not an easy task. It took me hours. I had to finish the job in complete darkness, and when I was ready to cut them I had to use a flashlight. My original apprehension that somebody would watch me was minimal compared with the fear that someone would spot the light in the bushes.

I took the plants to don Juan's house on Tuesday July 2. He opened the bundles and examined the pieces. He said he still had to give me the seeds of his plants. He pushed a mortar in front of me. He took a glass jar and emptied it's contents— dried seeds lumped together— into the mortar.

I asked him what they were, and he said they were seeds eaten by weevils. There were quite a few bugs among the seeds- little black grain weevils. He said they were special bugs, and that we had to take them out and put them into a separate jar. He handed me another jar, one-third full of the same kind of weevils. A piece of paper was stuffed into the jar to keep the weevils from escaping.

"Next time you will have to use the bugs from your own plants," don Juan said. "What you do is to cut the seedpods that have tiny holes: They are full of bugs. Open the pod and scrape everything into a jar. Collect one handful of bugs and put them into another container. Treat them rough. Don't be considerate or delicate with them. Measure one handful of the lumped seeds that the bugs have eaten and one handful of the bugs' powder, and bury the rest any place in that direction [here he pointed southeast] from your plant. Then gather good, dry seeds and store them separately. You can gather all you want. You can always use them. It is a good idea to get the seeds out of the pods there so that you can bury everything at once."

Next don Juan told me to grind the lumped seeds first, then the weevil eggs, then the bugs, and last the good, dry seeds.

When all of them were mashed into a fine powder don Juan took the pieces of *Datura* I had cut and stacked up. He separated the male root and wrapped it gently in a piece of cloth. He handed me the rest, and told me to cut everything into little pieces, mash them well, and then put every bit of the juice into a pot. He said I had to mash them in the same order in which I had stacked them up.

After I had finished he told me to measure one cup of boiling water and stir it with everything in the pot, and then to add two more cups. He handed me a smoothly finished bone stick. I stirred the mush with it and put the pot on the fire. Then he said we had to prepare the root, and for that we had to use the larger mortar because the male root could not be cut at all. We went to the back of the house. He had the mortar ready, and I proceeded to pound the root as I had done before. We left the root soaking in water, exposed to the night air, and went inside the house.

He told me to watch the mixture in the pot. I was to let it boil until it had some body—until it was hard to stir. Then he lay down on his mat and went to sleep. The mush had boiled for at least an hour when I noticed that it was getting harder to stir. I judged it must be ready, and pilled it off the fire. I put it in the net under the eaves, and went to sleep.

I woke up when don Juan got up. The sun was shining in a clear sky. It was a hot, dry day. Don Juan commented again that he was sure the devil's weed liked me.

We proceeded to treat the root, and at the end of the day we had quite a bit of yellowish substance in the bottom of the bowl. Don Juan poured off the top water. I thought that was the end of the procedure, but he filled the bowl with boiling water again.

He brought down the pot with the mush from under the roof. The mush seemed to be almost dry. He took the pot inside the house, placed it carefully on the floor, and sat down. Then he began to talk.

"My benefactor told me it was permissible to mix the plant with lard; and that is what you are going to do. My benefactor mixed it with lard for me, but as I have already said, I never was very fond of the plant, and never really tried to become one with her. My benefactor told me that for best results, for those who really want to master the power, the proper thing is to mix the plant with the lard of a wild boar. The fat of the intestines is the best. But it is for you to choose. Perhaps the turn of the wheel will decide that you take the devil's weed as an ally, in which case I will advise you, as my benefactor advised me, to hunt a wild boar and get the fat from the intestines [*sebo de tripa*]. In other times, when the devil's weed was tops, brujos used to go on special hunting trips to get fat from wild boars. They sought the biggest and strongest males. Those brujos had a special magic for wild boars. They took from them a special power; so special that it was hard to believe even in those days. But that power is lost. I don't know anything about it. And I don't know any man who knows about it. Perhaps the weed herself will teach you all that."

Don Juan measured a handful of lard, dumped it into the bowl containing the dry gruel, and scraped the lard left on his hand onto the edge of the pot. He told me to stir the contents until they were smooth and thoroughly mixed.

I whipped the mixture for nearly three hours. Don Juan looked at it from time to time and thought it was not done yet. Finally he seemed satisfied. The air whipped into the paste had given it a light gray color and the consistency of jelly. He hung the bowl from the roof next to the other bowl. He said he was going to leave it there until the next day because it would take two days to prepare this second portion. He told me not to eat anything in the meantime. I could have water, but no food at all.

The next day, Thursday July 4, don Juan directed me to leach the root four times. By the last time I poured the water out of the bowl, the day had already become dark. We sat on the porch. He put both bowls in front of him. The root extract measured a teaspoon of a whitish starch. He put it into a cup and added water. He rotated the cup in his hand to dissolve the substance and then handed the cup to me. He told me to drink all that was in the cup. I drank it fast and then put the cup on the floor and slumped back. My heart began pounding. I felt I could not breathe. Don Juan ordered me, matter-of-factly, to take off all my clothes. I asked him why, and he said I had to rub myself with the paste. I hesitated. I did not know whether to undress. Don Juan urged me to hurry up. He said there was very little time to fool around. I removed all my clothes.

He took his bone stick and cut two horizontal lines on the surface of the paste, thus dividing the contents of the bowl into three equal parts. Then, starting at the center of the top line, he cut a vertical line perpendicular to the other two, dividing the paste into five parts. He pointed to the bottom right area, and said that was for my left foot. The area above it was for my left leg. The top and largest part was for my genitals. The next one below, on the left side, was for my right leg, and the area at the bottom left was for my right foot. He told me to apply the part of the paste designated for my left foot to the sole of my foot and rub it thoroughly. Then he guided me in applying the paste on the inside part of my whole left leg, on my genitals, down the inside of my whole right leg, and finally on the sole of my right foot.

I followed his directions. The paste was cold and had a particularly strong odor. When I had finished applying it I straightened up. The smell from the mixture entered my nostrils. It was suffocating me. The pungent odor was actually choking me. It was like a gas of some sort. I tried to breathe through my mouth and tried to talk to don Juan, but I couldn't.

Don Juan kept staring at me. I took a step towards him. My legs were rubbery and long, extremely long. I took another step. My knee joints felt springy, like a vault pole. They shook and vibrated and contracted elastically. I moved forward. The motion of my body was slow and shaky; it was more like a tremor forward and up. I looked down and saw don Juan sitting below me, way below me. The momentum carried me forward one more step, which was even more elastic and longer than the preceding one. And from there I soared. I remember coming down once. Then I pushed up with both feet, sprang backwards, and glided on my back. I saw the dark sky above me, and the clouds going by me. I jerked my body so I could look down. I saw the dark mass of the mountains. My speed was extraordinary. My arms were fixed, folded against my sides. My head was the directional unit. If I kept it bent backwards I made vertical circles. I changed directions by turning my head to the side. I enjoyed such freedom and swiftness as I had never known before. The marvelous darkness gave me a feeling of sadness, of longing, perhaps. It was as if I had found a place where I belonged— the darkness of the night. I tried to look around, but all I sensed was that the night was serene, and yet it held so much power.

Suddenly I knew it was time to come down. It was as if I had been given an order I had to obey. And I began descending like a feather with lateral motions. That type of movement made me very ill. It was slow and jerky, as though I were being lowered by pulleys. I got sick. My head was bursting with the most excruciating pain. A kind of blackness enveloped me. I was very aware of the feeling of being suspended in it.

The next thing I remember is the feeling of waking up. I was in my bed in my own room. I sat up, and the image of my room dissolved. I stood up. I was naked! The motion of standing made me sick again.

I recognized some of the landmarks. I was about half a mile from don Juan's house, near the place of his *Datura* plants. Suddenly everything fitted into place, and I realized that I would have to walk all the way back to his house, naked. To be deprived of clothes was a profound psychological disadvantage, but there was nothing I could do to solve the problem. I thought of making myself a skirt with branches, but the thought seemed ludicrous, and besides, it was soon going to be dawn. The morning twilight was already clear. I forgot about my discomfort and my nausea and started to walk towards the house. I was obsessed with the fear of being discovered. I watched for people and dogs. I tried to run, but I hurt my feet on the small, sharp stones. I walked slowly. It was already very clear. Then I saw somebody coming up the road, and I quickly jumped behind the bushes. My situation seemed so incongruous to me. A moment before I had been enjoying the unbelievable pleasure of flying: The next minute I found myself hiding, embarrassed by my own nakedness. I thought of jumping out on the road again and running with all my might past the person who was coming. I thought he would be so startled that by the time he realized it was a naked man I would have left him far behind. I thought all that, but I did not dare to move.

The person coming up the road was just upon me and stopped walking. I heard him calling my name. It was don Juan, and he had my clothes. As I put them on he looked at me and laughed. He laughed so hard that I wound up laughing too.

The same day, Friday July 5, late in the afternoon, don Juan asked me to narrate the details of my experience. As carefully as I could, I related the whole episode.

"The second portion of the devil's weed is used to fly," he said when I had finished. "The unguent by itself is not enough. My benefactor said that it is the root that gives direction and wisdom, and it is the cause of flying. As you learn more, and take it often in order to fly, you will begin to see everything with great clarity. You can soar through the air for hundreds of miles to see what is happening at any place you want, or to deliver a fatal blow to your enemies far away. As you become familiar with the devil's weed, she will teach you how to do such things. For instance, she has taught you already how to change directions. In the same manner, she will teach you unimaginable things."

"Like what, don Juan?"

"That I can't tell you. Every man is different. My benefactor never told me what he had learned. He told me how to proceed, but never what he saw. That is only for oneself."

"But I tell you all I see, don Juan."

"Now you do. Later you will not. The next time you take the devil's weed you will do it by yourself around your own plants because that is where you will land; around your plants. Remember that. That is why I came down here to my plants to look for you."

He said nothing more, and I fell asleep. When I woke up in the evening, I felt invigorated. For some reason I exuded a sort of physical contentment. I was happy; satisfied.

Don Juan asked me, "Did you like the night? Or was it frightful?"

I told him that the night was truly magnificent.

"How about your headache? Was it very bad?" he asked.

"The headache was as strong as all the other feelings. It was the worst pain I have ever had," I said.

"Would that keep you from wanting to taste the power of the devil's weed again?"

"I don't know. I don't want it now, but later I might. I really don't know, don Juan."

There was a question I wanted to ask him. I knew he was going to evade it, so I waited for him to mention the subject. I waited all day. Finally, before I left that evening, I had to ask him, "Did I really fly, don Juan?"

"That is what you told me. Didn't you?"

"I know, don Juan. I mean, did my body fly? Did I take off like a bird?"

"You always ask me questions I cannot answer. You flew. That is what the second portion of the devil's weed is for. As you take more of it, you will learn how to fly perfectly. It is not a simple matter. A man *flies* with the help of the second portion of the devil's weed. That is all I can tell you. What you want to know makes no sense. Birds fly like birds and a man who has taken the devil's weed flies as such [*el enyerbado vuela así]*."

"As birds do? [*¿Asi como los pájaros?*]."

"No, he flies as a man who has taken the weed [*No, así como los enyerbados]*."

"Then I didn't really fly, don Juan. I flew in my imagination, in my mind alone. Where was my body?"

"In the bushes," he replied cuttingly, but immediately broke into laughter again. "The trouble with you is that you understand things in only one way. You don't think a man flies; and yet a brujo can move a thousand miles in one second to see what is going on. He can deliver a blow to his enemies long distances away. So, does he or doesn't he fly?"

"You see, don Juan, you and I are differently oriented. Suppose, for the sake of argument, one of my fellow students had been here with me when I took the devil's weed. Would he have been able to see me flying?"

"There you go again with your questions about what would happen if . . . It is useless to talk that way. If your friend, or anybody else, takes the second portion of the weed all he can do is fly. Now, if he had simply watched you, he might have seen you flying, or he might not. That depends on the man."

"But what I mean, don Juan, is that if you and I look at a bird and see it fly, we agree that it is flying. But if two of my friends had seen me flying as I did last night, would they have agreed that I was flying?"

"Well, they might have. You agree that birds fly because you have seen them flying. Flying is a common thing with birds. But you will not agree on other things birds do, because you have never seen birds doing them. If your friends knew about men flying with the devil's weed, then they would agree."

"Let's put it another way, don Juan. What I meant to say is that: If I had tied myself to a rock with a heavy chain, I would have flown just the same- because my body had nothing to do with my flying."

Don Juan looked at me incredulously. "If you tie yourself to a rock," he said, "I'm afraid you will have to fly holding the rock with it's heavy chain."

## Chapter 7

Collecting the ingredients and preparing them for the smoke mixture formed a yearly cycle. The first year don Juan taught me the procedure. In December of 1962, the second year, when the cycle was renewed, don Juan merely directed me. I collected the ingredients myself, prepared them, and put them away until the next year.

In December 1963, a new cycle started for the third time. Don Juan then showed me how to combine the dried ingredients I had collected and prepared the year before. He put the smoking mixture into a small leather bag, and we set out once again to collect the different components for the following year.

Don Juan seldom mentioned the "little smoke" during the year that elapsed between the two gatherings. Every time I went to see him, however, he gave me his pipe to hold, and the procedure of 'getting familiar' with the pipe developed in the way he had described. He put the pipe in my hands very gradually. He demanded absolute and careful concentration on that action, and gave me very explicit directions. Any fumbling with the pipe would inevitably result in his or my death, he said.

As soon as we had finished the third collecting and preparing cycle, don Juan began to talk about the smoke as an ally for the first time in more than a year.

*Monday, December 23, 1963*

We were driving back to his house after collecting some yellow flowers for the mixture. They were one of the necessary ingredients. I made the remark that this year we did not follow the same order in collecting the ingredients as we had the year before. He laughed and said the smoke was not moody or petty, as the devil's weed was. For the smoke, the order of collecting was unimportant. All that was required was that the man using the mixture had to be accurate and exact.

I asked don Juan what we were going to do with the mixture he had prepared and given me to keep. He replied that it was mine, and added that I had to use it as soon as possible. I asked how much of it was needed each time. The small bag he had given me contained approximately three times the amount a small tobacco bag would hold. He told me I would have to use all the contents of my bag in one year, and how much I needed each time I smoked was a personal matter.

I wanted to know what would happen if I never finished the bag. Don Juan said that nothing would happen: The smoke did not require anything. He himself did not need to smoke any more, and yet he made a new mixture each year. He then corrected himself and said that he *rarely* had to smoke. I asked what he did with the unused mixture, but he did not answer. He said the mixture was no longer good if not used in one year.

At this point we got into a long argument. I did not phrase my questions correctly and his answers seemed confusing. I wanted to know if the mixture would lose it's hallucinogenic properties, or power, after a year, thus making the yearly cycle necessary; but he insisted that the mixture would not lose it's power at any time. The only thing that happened, he said, was that a man did not need it any more because he had made a new supply. He had to dispose of the remaining old mixture in a specific way which don Juan did not want to reveal to me at that point.

*Tuesday, December 24, 1963*

"You said, don Juan, you don't have to smoke any more."

"Yes, because the smoke is my ally, I don't need to smoke any more. I can call him any time, any place."

"Do you mean he comes to you even if you do not smoke?"

"I mean I go to him freely."

"Will I be able to do that, too?"

"If you succeed in getting him as your ally, you will."

*Tuesday, December 31, 1963*

On Thursday December 26 I had my first experience with don Juan's ally, the smoke. All day I drove him around and did chores for him. We returned to his house in the late afternoon. I mentioned that we had had nothing to eat all day. He was completely unconcerned over that. Instead, he began to tell me it was imperative for me to become familiar with the smoke. He said I had to experience it myself to realize how important it was as an ally.

Without giving me an opportunity to say anything, don Juan told me he was going to light his pipe for me; right then. I tried to dissuade him, arguing that I did not believe I was ready. I told him I felt I had not handled the pipe for a long enough time. But he said there was not much time left for me to learn, and I had to use the pipe very soon. He brought the pipe out of it's sack and fondled it. I sat on the floor next to him and frantically tried to get sick and pass out- to do anything to put off this unavoidable step.

The room was almost dark. Don Juan had lighted the kerosene lamp and placed it in a comer. Usually the lamp kept the room in a relaxing semi-darkness; it's yellowish light always soothing. This time, however, the light seemed dim and unusually red; it was unnerving. He untied his small bag of mixture without removing it from the cord fastened around his neck. He brought the pipe close to him, put it inside his shirt, and poured some of the mixture into the bowl. He made me watch the procedure, pointing out that if some of the mixture spilled it would fall inside his shirt.

Don Juan filled three-fourths of the bowl, then tied the bag with one hand while holding the pipe in the other. He picked up a small clay dish, handed it to me, and asked me to get some small charcoals from the fire outside. I went to the back of the house and scooped a bunch of charcoals from the adobe stove. I hurried back to his room. I felt deep anxiety. It was like a premonition.

I sat next to don Juan and gave him the dish. He looked at it and calmly said the charcoals were too big. He wanted smaller ones that would fit inside the pipe bowl. I went back to the stove and got some. He took the new dish of charcoals and put it before him. He was sitting with his legs crossed and tucked under him. He glanced at me out of the corner of his eye and leaned forward until his chin nearly touched the charcoals. He held the pipe in his left hand, and with an extremely swift movement of his right hand picked up a burning piece of charcoal and put it into the bowl of the pipe. Then he sat up straight, and holding the pipe with both hands, put it to his mouth and puffed three times. He stretched his arms to me and told me in a forceful whisper to take the pipe with both hands and smoke.

The thought of refusing the pipe and running away crossed my mind for an instant; but don Juan demanded again— still in a whisper— that I take the pipe and smoke. I looked at him. His eyes were fixed on me. But his stare was friendly, concerned. It was clear that I had made the choice a long time before. There was no alternative but to do what he said.

I took the pipe and nearly dropped it. It was hot! I put it to my mouth with extreme care because I imagined it's heat would be intolerable on my lips. But I felt no heat at all.

Don Juan told me to inhale. The smoke flowed into my mouth, and seemed to circulate there. It was heavy! I felt as though I had a mouthful of dough. The simile occurred to me although I had never had a mouthful of dough. The smoke was also like menthol, and the inside of my mouth suddenly became cold. It was a refreshing sensation. "Again! Again!" I heard don Juan whispering. I felt the smoke seep inside my body freely, almost without my control. I needed no more urging from don Juan. Mechanically I kept inhaling.

Suddenly don Juan leaned over and took the pipe from my hands. He tapped the ashes gently on the dish with the charcoals, then he wet his finger with saliva and rotated it inside the bowl to clean it's sides. He blew through the stem repeatedly. I saw him put the pipe back into it's sheath. His actions held my interest.

When he had finished cleaning the pipe and putting it away, he stared at me, and I realized for the first time that my whole body was numb; mentholated. My face felt heavy and my jaws hurt. I could not keep my mouth closed, but there was no saliva flow. My mouth was burning dry, and yet I was not thirsty. I began to sense an unusual heat all over my head. A cold heat! My breath seemed to cut my nostrils and upper lip every time I exhaled. But it didn't burn; it hurt like a piece of ice.

Don Juan sat next to me, to my right, and without moving held the pipe sheath against the floor as though keeping it down by force. My hands were heavy. My arms sagged, pulling my shoulders down. My nose was running. I wiped it with the back of my hand, and my upper lip was rubbed off! I wiped my face, and all the flesh was wiped off! I was melting! I felt as if my flesh was actually melting. I jumped to my feet and tried to grab hold of something- anything- with which to support myself. I was experiencing a terror I had never felt before. I held onto a pole that don Juan keeps stuck on the floor in the center of his room. I stood there for a moment, then I turned to look at him. He was still sitting motionless, holding his pipe, staring at me.

My breath was painfully hot (or cold?). It was choking me. I bent my head forward to rest it on the pole, but apparently I missed it, and my head kept on moving downward beyond the point where the pole was. I stopped when I was nearly down to the floor. I pulled myself up. The pole was there in front of my eyes! I tried again to rest my head on it. I tried to control myself and to be aware, and kept my eyes open as I leaned forward to touch the pole with my forehead. It was a few inches from my eyes, but as I put my head against it, I had the queerest feeling that I was going right through it.

In a desperate search for a rational explanation I concluded that my eyes were distorting depth, and that the pole must have been ten feet away, even though I saw it directly in front of my face. I then conceived a logical, rational way to check the position of the pole. I began moving sideways around it, one little step at a time. My argument was that in walking around the pole in that way I couldn't possibly make a circle more than five feet in diameter. If the pole was really ten feet away from me, or beyond my reach, a moment would come when I would have my back to it. I trusted that at that moment the pole would vanish, because in reality it would be behind me.

I then proceeded to circle the pole, but it remained in front of my eyes as I went around it. In a fit of frustration I grabbed it with both hands, but my hands went through it. I was grabbing the air. I carefully calculated the distance between the pole and myself. I figured it must be three feet- that is, my eyes perceived it as three feet. I played for a moment with the perception of depth by moving my head from one side to the other, focusing each eye in turn on the pole, and then on the background. According to my way of judging depth, the pole was unmistakably before me, possibly three feet away. Stretching out my arms to protect my head, I charged with all my strength. The sensation was the same— I went through the pole. This time I went all the way to the floor. I stood up again; and standing up was perhaps the most unusual of all the acts I performed that night. I thought myself up! In order to get up I did not use my muscles and skeletal frame in the way I am accustomed to doing, because I no longer had control over them. I knew it the instant I hit the ground. But my curiosity about the pole was so strong I 'thought myself up' in a kind of reflex action. And before I fully realized I could not move, I was up.

I called to don Juan for help. At one moment I yelled frantically at the top of my voice, but don

Juan did not move. He kept on looking at me, sideways, as though he didn't want to turn his head to face me fully. I took a step toward him, but instead of moving forward I staggered backward and fell against the wall. I knew I had rammed against it with my back, yet it did not feel hard. I was completely suspended in a soft, spongy substance— it was the wall. My arms were stretched out laterally, and slowly my whole body seemed to sink into the wall. I could only look forward into the room. Don Juan was still watching me, but he made no move to help me. I made a supreme effort to jerk my body out of the wall, but it only sank deeper and deeper. In the midst of indescribable terror, I felt that the spongy wall was closing in on my face. I tried to shut my eyes but they were fixed open.

I don't remember what else happened. Suddenly don Juan was in front of me, a short distance away. We were in the other room. I saw his table and the dirt stove with the fire burning, and with the corner of my eye I distinguished the fence outside the house. I could see everything very clearly. Don Juan had brought the kerosene lantern and hung it from the beam in the middle of the room. I tried to look in a different direction, but my eyes were set to see only straight forward. I couldn't distinguish, or feel, any part of my body. My breathing was undetectable. But my thoughts were extremely lucid. I was clearly aware of whatever was taking place in front of me. Don Juan walked towards me, and my clarity of mind ended. Something seemed to stop inside me. There were no more thoughts. I saw don Juan coming and I hated him. I wanted to tear him apart. I could have killed him then, but I could not move. At first I vaguely sensed a pressure on my head, but it also disappeared. There was only one thing left— an overwhelming anger at don Juan. I saw him only a few inches from me. I wanted to claw him apart. I felt I was groaning. Something in me began to convulse. I heard don Juan talking to me. His voice was soft and soothing, and was, I felt, infinitely pleasing. He came even closer and started to recite a Spanish lullaby.

"Lady Saint Ana, why does the baby cry? For an apple he has lost. I will give you one. I will give you two. One for the boy and one for you [*¿Señora Santa Ana, porque llora el niño? Por una manzana que se le ha perdido. Yo le daré una. Yo le daré dos. Una para el niño y otra para vos*]." A warmth pervaded me. It was a warmth of heart and feelings. Don Juan's words were a distant echo. They recalled the forgotten memories of childhood.

The violence I had felt before disappeared. The resentment changed into a longing— a joyous affection for don Juan. He said I must struggle not to fall asleep; that I no longer had a body and was free to turn into anything I wanted. He stepped back. My eyes were at a normal level as though I were standing in front of him. He extended both his arms towards me and told me to come inside them.

Either I moved forward, or he came closer to me. His hands were almost on my face— on my eyes, although I did not feel them. "Get inside my chest," I heard him say. I felt I was engulfing him. It was the same sensation of the sponginess of the wall.

Then I could hear only his voice commanding me to look and see. I could not distinguish him any more. My eyes were apparently open for I saw flashes of light on a red field. It was as though I was looking at a light through my closed eyelids.

Then my thoughts were turned on again. They came back in a fast barrage of images— faces, scenery. Scenes without any coherence popped up and disappeared. It was like a fast dream in which images overlap and change. Then the thoughts began to diminish in number and intensity, and soon they were gone again. There was only an awareness of affection, of being happy. I couldn't distinguish any shapes or light. All of a sudden I was pulled up. I distinctly felt I was being lifted. And I was free, moving with tremendous lightness and speed in water or air. I swam like an eel. I contorted and twisted, and soared up and down at will. I felt a cold wind blowing all around me, and I began to float like a feather back and forth, down, and down, and down.

*Saturday, December 28, 1963*

I woke up yesterday late in the afternoon. Don Juan told me I had slept peacefully for nearly two days. I had a splitting headache. I drank some water and got sick. I felt tired, extremely tired, and after eating I went back to sleep.

Today I felt perfectly relaxed again. Don Juan and I talked about my experience with the little smoke. Thinking that he wanted me to tell the whole story the way I always did, I began to describe my impressions, but he stopped me and said it was not necessary. He told me I had really not done anything, and that I had fallen asleep right away, so there was nothing to talk about.

"How about the way I felt? Isn't that important at all?" I insisted.

"No, not with the smoke. Later on, when you learn how to travel, we will talk; when you learn how to get into things."

"Does one really get into things?"

"Don't you remember? You went *into* and *through* that wall."

"I think I really went out of my mind."

"No, you didn't."

"Did you behave the same way I did when you smoked for the first time, don Juan?"

"No, it wasn't the same. We have different characters."

"How did you behave?"

Don Juan did not answer. I rephrased the question and asked it again. But he said he did not remember his experiences, and that my question was comparable to asking a fisherman how he felt the first time he fished.

He said the smoke as an ally was unique, and I reminded him that he had also said Mescalito was unique. He argued that each was unique, but that they differed in quality.

"Mescalito is a protector because he talks to you and can guide your acts," he said. "Mescalito teaches the right way to live; and you can see him because he is outside you. The smoke, on the other hand, is an ally. It transforms you and gives you power without ever showing it's presence. You can't talk to it, but you know it exists because it takes your body away and makes you as light as air. Yet you never see it; but it is there giving you power to accomplish unimaginable things, such as when it takes your body away."

"I really felt I had lost my body, don Juan."

"You did."

"You mean, I really didn't have a body?"

"What do *you* think yourself?"

"Well, I don't know. All I can tell you is what I felt."

"That is all there is in reality— what you felt."

"But how did you see me, don Juan? How did I appear to you?"

"How I saw you does not matter. It is like the time when you grabbed the pole. You felt it was not there and you went around it to make sure it was there. But when you jumped at it you felt again that it was not really there."

"But you saw me as I am now, didn't you?"

"No! You were NOT as you are now!"

"True! I admit that. But I had my body, didn't I, although *I* couldn't feel it?"

"No! Goddammit! You did not have a body like the body you have today!"

"What happened to my body then?"

"I thought you understood. The little smoke took your body."

"But where did it go?"

"How in hell do you expect me to know that?"

It was useless to persist in trying to get a 'rational' explanation. I told him I did not want to argue or to ask stupid questions, but if I accepted the idea that it was possible to lose my body, I would lose all my rationality.

He said that I was exaggerating, as usual, and that I did not, nor was I going to, lose anything because of the little smoke.

*Tuesday, January 28, 1964*

I asked don Juan what he thought of the idea of giving the smoke to anyone who wanted the experience.

He indignantly replied that to give the smoke to anyone would be just the same as killing him, for he would have no one to guide him. I asked don Juan to explain what he meant. He said I was *there*, alive and talking to him, because he had brought me back. He had restored my body. Without him I would never have awakened.

"How did you restore my body, don Juan?"

"You will learn that later, but you will have to learn to do it all by yourself. That is the reason I want you to learn as much as you can while I am still around. You have wasted enough time asking stupid questions about nonsense. But perhaps it is not in your destiny to learn all about the little smoke."

"Well, what shall I do, then?"

"Let the smoke teach you as much as you can learn."

"Does the smoke also teach?"

"Of course it teaches."

"Does it teach as Mescalito does?"

"No, it is not a teacher as Mescalito is. It does not show the same things."

"But what does the smoke teach, then?"

"It shows you how to handle it's power, and to learn that you must take it as many times as you can."

"Your ally is very frightening, don Juan. It was unlike anything I ever experienced before. I thought I had lost my mind."

For some reason this was the most poignant image that came to my mind. I viewed the total event from the peculiar stand of having had other hallucinogenic experiences from which to draw a comparison, and the only thing that occurred to me, over and over again, was that with the smoke one loses one's mind.

Don Juan discarded my simile, saying that what I felt was it's unimaginable power. And to handle that power, he said, one has to live a strong life. The idea of the strong life not only pertains to the preparation period, but also entails the attitude of the man after the experience. He said the smoke is so strong one can match it only with strength; otherwise, one's life would be shattered to bits.

I asked him if the smoke had the same effect on everyone. He said it produced a transformation, but not in everyone.

"Then, what is the special reason the smoke produced the transformation in me?" I asked.

"That, I think, is a very silly question. You have followed obediently every step required. It is no mystery that the smoke transformed you."

I asked him again to tell me about my appearance. I wanted to know how I looked, for the image of a bodiless being he had planted in my mind was understandably unbearable.

He said that, to tell the truth, he was afraid to look at me. He felt the same way his benefactor must have felt when he saw don Juan smoking for the first time.

"Why were you afraid? Was I that frightening?" I asked.

"I had never seen anyone smoking before."

"Didn't you see your benefactor smoke?"

"No."

"You have never seen even yourself?"

"How could I?"

"You could smoke in front of a mirror."

He did not answer, but stared at me and shook his head. I asked him again if it was possible to look into a mirror. He said it would be possible, although it would be useless because one would probably die of fright, if of nothing else.

I said, "Then one must look frightful."

"I have wondered all my life about the same thing," he said. "Yet I did not ask, nor did I look into a mirror. I did not even think of that."

"How can I find out then?"

"You will have to wait, the same way I did, until you give the smoke to someone else— if you ever master it, of course. Then you will see how a man looks. That is the rule."

"What would happen if I smoked in front of a camera and took a picture of myself?"

"I don't know. The smoke would probably turn against you. But I suppose you find it so harmless you feel you can play with it."

I told him I did not mean to play, but that he had told me before that the smoke did not require steps, and I thought there would be no harm in wanting to know how one looked. He corrected me, saying that he had meant there was no necessity to follow a specific order, as there is with the devil's weed; all that was needed with the smoke was the proper attitude, he said. From that point of view one had to be exact in following the rule. He gave me an example, explaining that it did not matter what ingredient for the mixture was picked first, so long as the amount was correct.

I asked if there would be any harm in my telling others about my experience. He replied that the only secrets never to be revealed were how to make the mixture, how to move around, and how to return. Other matters concerning the subject were of no importance.

## Chapter 8

My last encounter with Mescalito was a cluster of four sessions which took place within four consecutive days. Don Juan called this long session a *mitote*. It was a peyote ceremony for *peyoteros* and apprentices. There were two older men, about don Juan's age, one of whom was the leader, and five younger men including myself.

The ceremony took place in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, near the Texas border. It consisted of singing and of ingesting peyote during the night. In the daytime women attendants, who stayed outside the confines of the ceremony site, supplied each man with water, and only a token of ritual food was consumed each day.

*Saturday, September 12, 1964*

During the first night of the ceremony, Thursday September 3, I took eight peyote buttons. They had no effect on me, or if they did, it was a very slight one. I kept my eyes closed most of the night. I felt much better that way. I did not fall asleep, nor was I tired. At the very end of the session the singing became extraordinary. For a brief moment I felt uplifted and wanted to weep, but as the song ended the feeling vanished.

We all got up and went outside. The women gave us water. Some of the men gargled it: Others drank it. The men did not talk at all, but the women chatted and giggled all day long. The ritual food was served at midday. It was cooked corn.

At sundown on Friday September 4, the second session began. The leader sang his peyote song, and the cycle of songs and intake of peyote buttons began once again. It ended in the morning with each man singing his own song, in unison with the others.

When I went out I did not see as many women as had been there the day before. Someone gave me water, but I was no longer concerned with my surroundings. I had ingested eight buttons again, but the effect had been different.

It must have been towards the end of the session that the singing was greatly accelerated, with everybody singing at once. I perceived that something or somebody outside the house wanted to come in. I couldn't tell whether the singing was done to prevent 'it' from bursting in, or to lure it inside.

I was the only one who did not have a song. They all seemed to look at me questioningly, especially the young men. I grew embarrassed and closed my eyes.

Then I realized I could perceive what was going on much better if I kept my eyes closed. This idea held my undivided attention. I closed my eyes, and saw the men in front of me. I opened my eyes, and the image was unchanged. The surroundings were exactly the same for me whether my eyes were open or closed.

Suddenly everything vanished, or crumbled, and there emerged in it's place the manlike figure of Mescalito I had seen two years before. He was sitting some distance away with his profile towards me. I stared fixedly at him, but he did not look at me: Not once did he turn.

I believed I was doing something wrong, something that kept him away. I got up and walked towards him to ask him about it. But the act of moving dispelled the image. It began to fade, and the figures of the men I was with were superimposed upon it. Again I heard the loud, frantic singing.

I went into the nearby bushes and walked for a while. Everything stood out very clearly. I noticed I was seeing in the darkness, but it mattered very little this time. The important point was, why did Mescalito avoid me?

I returned to join the group, and as I was about to enter the house, I heard a heavy rumbling and felt a tremor. The ground shook. It was the same noise I had heard in the peyote valley two years before.

I ran into the bushes again. I knew that Mescalito was there, and that I was going to find him. But he was not there. I waited until morning and joined the others just before the session ended.

The usual procedure was repeated on the third day. I was not tired but I slept during the afternoon.

In the evening of Saturday September 5, the old man sang his peyote song to start the cycle once more. During this session I chewed only one button and did not listen to any of the songs, nor did I pay attention to anything that went on. From the first moment my whole being was uniquely concentrated on one point. I knew something terribly important for my well-being was missing.

While the men sang I asked Mescalito, in a loud voice, to teach me a song. My pleading mingled with the men's loud singing. Immediately I heard a song in my ears. I turned around, and sat with my back to the group and listened. I heard the words and the tune over and over, and I repeated them until I had learned the whole song. It was a long song in Spanish. Then I sang it to the group several times. And soon afterwards a new song came to my ears. By morning I had sung both songs countless times. I felt I had been renewed, fortified.

After the water was given to us, don Juan gave me a bag, and we all went into the hills. It was a long, strenuous walk to a low mesa. There I saw several peyote plants. But for some reason I did not want to look at them. After we had crossed the mesa, the group broke up. Don Juan and I walked back, collecting peyote buttons just as we had done the first time I helped him.

We returned in the late afternoon of Sunday September 6. In the evening the leader opened the cycle again. Nobody had said a word but I knew perfectly well it was the last gathering. This time the old man sang a new song. A sack with fresh peyote buttons was passed around. This was the first time I had tasted a fresh button. It was pulpy but hard to chew. It resembled a hard, green fruit, and was sharper and more bitter than the dried buttons. Personally, I found the fresh peyote infinitely more alive.

I chewed fourteen buttons. I counted them carefully. I did not finish the last one, for I heard the familiar rumble that marked the presence of Mescalito. Everybody sang frantically and I knew that don Juan and everybody else had actually heard the noise. I refused to think that their reaction was a response to a cue given by one of them merely to deceive me.

At that moment I felt a great surge of wisdom engulfing me. A conjecture I had played with for three years turned then into a certainty. It had taken me three years to realize, or rather to find out, that whatever is contained in the cactus *Lophophora williamsii* had nothing to do with me in order to exist as an entity. It existed by itself out there; at large. I knew it then.

I sang feverishly until I could no longer voice the words. I felt as if my songs were inside my body, shaking me uncontrollably. I needed to go out, and find Mescalito, or I would explode. I walked towards the peyote field. I kept on singing my songs. I knew they were individually mine— the unquestionable proof of my singleness. I sensed each one of my steps. They resounded on the ground: Their echo produced the indescribable euphoria of being a man.

Each one of the peyote plants on the field shone with a bluish, scintillating light. One plant had a very bright light. I sat in front of it and sang my songs to it. As I sang Mescalito came out of the plant— the same manlike figure I had seen before. He looked at me. With great audacity for a person of my temperament, I sang to him. There was a sound of flutes, or of wind; a familiar musical vibration. He seemed to have said, as he had two years before, "What do you want?"

I spoke very loudly. I said that I knew there was something amiss in my life and in my actions, but I could not find out what it was. I begged him to tell me what was wrong with me, and also to tell me his name so that I could call him when I needed him. He looked at me, elongated his mouth like a trumpet until it reached my ear, and then told me his name.

Suddenly I saw my own father standing in the middle of the peyote field; but the field had vanished and the scene was my old home, the home of my childhood. My father and I were standing by a fig tree. I embraced my father and hurriedly began to tell him things I had never before been able to say. Every one of my thoughts was concise and to the point. It was as if we had no time, really, and I had to say everything at once. I said staggering things about my feelings towards him, things I would never have been able to voice under ordinary circumstances.

My father did not speak. He just listened, and then was pulled or sucked away. I was alone again. I wept with remorse and sadness.

I walked through the peyote field calling the name Mescalito had taught me. Something emerged from a strange, starlike light on a peyote plant. It was a long shiny object— a stick of light the size of a man. For a moment it illuminated the whole field with an intense yellowish or amber light. Then it lit up the whole sky above, creating a portentous, marvelous sight. I thought I would go blind if I kept on looking. I covered my eyes and buried my head in my arms.

I had a clear notion that Mescalito told me to eat one more peyote button. I thought, "I can't do that because I have no knife to cut it."

"Eat one from the ground," he said to me in the same strange way.

I lay on my stomach and chewed the top of a plant. It kindled me. It filled every corner of my body with warmth and directness. Everything was alive. Everything had exquisite and intricate detail, and yet everything was so simple. I was everywhere: I could see up and down and around; all at the same time.

This particular feeling lasted long enough for me to become aware of it. Then it changed into an oppressive terror; a terror that did not come upon me abruptly, but somehow swiftly. At first my marvelous world of silence was jolted by sharp noises, but I was not concerned. Then the noises became louder and were uninterrupted, as if they were closing in on me. And gradually I lost the feeling of floating in a world undifferentiated, indifferent, and beautiful. The noises became gigantic steps. Something enormous was breathing and moving around me. I believed it was hunting for me.

I ran and hid under a boulder, and tried to determine from there what was following me. At one moment I crept out of my hiding place to look, and whoever was my pursuer came upon me. It was like sea kelp. It threw itself on me. I thought it's weight was going to crush me, but I found myself inside a pipe or a cavity. I clearly saw that the kelp had not covered all the ground surface around me. There remained a bit of free ground underneath the boulder. I began to crawl underneath it. I saw huge drops of liquid falling from the kelp. I 'knew' it was secreting digestive acid in order to dissolve me. A drop fell on my arm. I tried to rub off the acid with dirt, and applied saliva to it as I kept on digging. At one point I was almost vaporous. I was being pushed up towards a light. I thought the kelp had dissolved me. I vaguely detected a light which grew brighter. It was pushing from under the ground until finally it erupted into what I recognized as the sun coming out from behind the mountains.

Slowly I began to regain my usual sensorial processes. I lay on my stomach with my chin on my folded arm. The peyote plant in front of me began to light up again, and before I could move my eyes the long light emerged again. It hovered over me. I sat up. The light touched my whole body with quiet strength, and then rolled away out of sight.

I ran all the way to the place where the other men were. We all returned to town. Don Juan and I stayed one more day with don Roberto, the peyote leader. I slept all the time we were there. When we were about to leave, the young men who had taken part in the peyote sessions came up to me. They embraced me one by one, and laughed shyly. Each one of them introduced himself. I talked with them for hours about everything except the peyote meetings.

Don Juan said it was time to leave. The young men embraced me again. "Come back," one of them said. "We are already waiting for you," another one added. I drove away slowly trying to see the older men, but none of them was there.

*Thursday, September 10, 1964*

To tell don Juan about an experience always forced me to recall it step by step, to the best of my ability. This seemed to be the only way to remember everything.

Today I told him the details of my last encounter with Mescalito. He listened to my story attentively up to the point when Mescalito told me his name. Don Juan interrupted me there.

"You are on your own now," he said. "The protector has accepted you. I will be of very little help to you from now on. You don't have to tell me anything more about your relationship with him. You know his name now; and neither his name, nor his dealings with you, should ever be mentioned to a living being."

I insisted that I wanted to tell him all the details of the experience, because it made no sense to me. I told him I needed his assistance to interpret what I had seen. He said I could do that by myself; that it was better for me to start thinking on my own. I argued that I was interested in hearing his opinions because it would take me too long to arrive at my own, and I did not know how to proceed.

I said, "Take the songs for instance. What do they mean?"

"Only you can decide that," he said. "How could I know what they mean? The protector alone can tell you that, just as he alone can teach you his songs. If I were to tell you what they mean, it would be the same as if you learned someone else's songs."

"What do you mean by that, don Juan?"

"You can tell who are the phonies by listening to people singing the protector's songs. Only the songs with soul are his and were taught by him. The others are copies of other men's songs. People are sometimes as deceitful as that. They sing someone else's songs without even knowing what the songs say."

I said that I had meant to ask for what purpose the songs were used. He answered that the songs I had learned were for calling the protector, and that I should always use them in conjunction with his name to call him. Later Mescalito would probably teach me other songs for other purposes, don Juan said.

I asked him then if he thought the protector had accepted me fully. He laughed as if my question were foolish. He said the protector had accepted me, and had made sure I knew that he had accepted me by showing himself to me as a light, twice. Don Juan seemed to be very impressed by the fact that I had seen the light twice. He emphasized that aspect of my encounter with Mescalito.

I told him I could not understand how it was possible to be accepted by the protector, yet terrified by him at the same time.

He did not answer for a very long time. He seemed bewildered. Finally he said, "It is so clear. What he wanted is so clear that I don't see how you can misunderstand."

"Everything is still incomprehensible to me, don Juan."

"It takes time really to see and understand what Mescalito means. You should think about his lessons until they become clear."

*Friday, September 11, 1964*

Again I insisted upon having don Juan interpret my visionary experiences. He stalled for a while. Then he spoke as if we had already been carrying on a conversation about Mescalito.

"Do you see how stupid it is to ask if he is like a person you can talk to?" don Juan said. "He is like nothing you have ever seen. He is like a man, but at the same time he is not at all like one. It is difficult to explain that to people who know nothing about him and want to know everything about him all at once. And then, his lessons are as mysterious as he is himself. No man, to my knowledge, can predict his acts. You ask him a question and he shows you the way, but he does not tell you about it in the same manner you and I talk to each other. Do you understand now what he does?"

"I don't think I have trouble understanding that. What I can't figure out is his meaning."

"You asked him to tell you what's wrong with you, and he gave you the full picture. There can be no mistake! You can't claim you did not understand. It was not conversation— and yet it was. Then you asked him another question, and he answered you in exactly the same manner. As to what he meant, I am not sure I understand it, because you chose not to tell me what your question was."

I repeated very carefully the questions I remembered having asked. I put them in the order in which I had voiced them: "Am I doing the right thing? Am I on the right path? What should I do with my life?" Don Juan said the questions I had asked were only words. It was better not to voice the questions, but to ask them from within. He told me the protector meant to give me a lesson; and to prove that he meant to give me a lesson and not to scare me away, he showed himself as a light twice.

I said I still could not understand why Mescalito terrorized me if he had accepted me. I reminded don Juan that, according to his statements, to be accepted by Mescalito implied that his form was constant and did not shift from bliss to nightmare. Don Juan laughed at me again, and said that if I would think about the question I had had in my 'heart' when I talked to Mescalito, then I myself would understand the lesson.

To think about the question I had had in my heart was a difficult problem. I told don Juan I had had many things in mind. When I asked if I was on the right path, I meant: "Do I have one foot in each of two worlds?"; "Which world is the right one?"; "What course should my life take?"

Don Juan listened to my explanations and concluded that I did not have a clear view of the world, and that the protector had given me a beautifully clear lesson.

He said, "You think there are two worlds for you— two paths. But there is only one. The protector showed you this with unbelievable clarity. The only world available to you is the world of men, and that world you cannot choose to leave. You are a man! The protector showed you the world of happiness where there is no difference between things because there is no one there to ask about the difference. But that is not the world of men. The protector shook you out of it and showed you how a man thinks and fights. *That* is the world of man! And to be a man is to be condemned to that world. You have the vanity to believe you live in two worlds, but that is only your vanity. There is but one single world for us. We are men, and must follow the world of men contentedly.

“I believe that was the lesson."

## Chapter 9

Don Juan seemed to want me to work with the devil's weed as much as possible. This stand was incongruous with his alleged dislike of the power. He explained himself by saying that the time when I had to smoke again was near, and by then I ought to have developed a better knowledge of the power of the devil's weed.

He suggested repeatedly that I should at least test the devil's weed with one more sorcery with the lizards. I played with the idea for a long time. Don Juan's urgency increased dramatically until I felt obliged to heed his demand; and one day I made up my mind to divine about some stolen objects.

*Monday, December 28, 1964*

On Saturday December 19, I cut the *Datura* root. I waited until it was fairly dark to do my dancing around the plant. I prepared the root extract during the night and on Sunday, about 6:00 a.m., I went to the site of my Datura. I sat in front of the plant. I had taken careful notes on don Juan's teachings about the procedure. I read my notes again, and realized I did not have to grind the seeds there. Somehow just being in front of the plant gave me a rare kind of emotional stability; a clarity of thought, or a power to concentrate on my actions which I ordinarily lacked.

I followed all the instructions meticulously, calculating my time so that the paste and the root were ready by late afternoon. About five o'clock I was busy trying to catch a pair of lizards. For an hour and a half I tried every method I could think of, but I failed in every attempt.

I was sitting in front of the *Datura* plant trying to figure out an expedient way of accomplishing my purpose when I suddenly remembered that don Juan had said the lizards had to be talked to. At first I felt ludicrous talking to the lizards. It was like being embarrassed by talking in front of an audience. The feeling soon vanished and I went on talking. It was almost dark. I lifted a rock. A lizard was under it. It had the appearance of being numb. I picked it up. And then I saw that there was another stiff lizard under another rock. They did not even wriggle.

The sewing of the mouth and eyes was the most difficult task. I noticed that don Juan had imparted a sense of irrevocability [* *irrevocable- incapable of being retracted*] to my acts. His stand was that when a man begins an act there is no way to stop. If I had wanted to stop, however, there was nothing to prevent me. Perhaps I did not want to stop.

I set one lizard free and it went in a northeasterly direction— the omen of a good, but difficult, experience. I tied the other lizard to my shoulder and smeared my temples as prescribed. The lizard was stiff; for a moment I thought it had died, and don Juan had never told me what to do if that happened. But the lizard was only numb.

I drank the potion and waited awhile. I felt nothing out of the ordinary. I began rubbing the paste on my temples. I applied it twenty-five times. Then quite mechanically, as if I were absentminded, I spread it repeatedly all over my forehead. I realized my mistake and hurriedly wiped the paste off. My forehead was sweaty. I became feverish. Intense anxiety gripped me, for don Juan had strongly advised me not to rub the paste on my forehead. The fear changed into a feeling of absolute loneliness; a feeling of being doomed. I was there by myself. If something harmful was going to happen to me, there was no one there to help me. I wanted to run away. I had an alarming sensation of indecision, of not knowing what to do. A flood of thoughts rushed into my mind, flashing with extraordinary speed. I noticed that they were rather strange thoughts; that is, they were strange in the sense that they seemed to come in a different way from ordinary thoughts. I am familiar with the way I think. My thoughts have a definite order that is my own, and any deviation is noticeable.

One of the alien thoughts was about a statement made by an author. It was, I vaguely remember, more like a voice, or something said somewhere in the background. It happened so fast that it startled me. I paused to consider it, but it changed into an ordinary thought. I was certain I had read the statement, but I could not think of the author's name. I suddenly remembered that it was Alfred Kroeber. Then another alien thought popped up and 'said' that it was not Kroeber, but Georg Simmel who had made the statement. I insisted that it was Kroeber, and the next thing I knew I was in the midst of an argument with myself. And had forgotten about my feeling of being doomed.

My eyelids were heavy, as though I had taking sleeping pills. Although I had never taken any, it was the image that came to my mind. I was falling asleep. I wanted to go to my car and crawl in, but I couldn't move.

Then, quite suddenly, I woke up, or rather, clearly felt that I had. My first thought was about the time of day. I looked around. I was not in front of the Datura plant. Nonchalantly I accepted the fact that I was undergoing another divinatory experience. It was 12:35 by a clock above my head. I knew it was afternoon.

I saw a young man carrying a stack of papers. I was nearly touching him. I saw the veins of his neck pulsating and heard the fast beating of his heart. I had become absorbed in what I was seeing and had not been aware, so far, of the quality of my thoughts. Then I heard a 'voice' in my ear describing the scene, and I realized that the voice was the alien thought in my mind.

I became so engrossed in listening that the scene lost it's visual interest for me. I heard the voice at my right ear above my shoulder. It actually created the scene by describing it. But it obeyed my will, because I could stop it at any time and examine the details of what it said at my leisure. I 'heard-saw' the entire sequence of the young man's actions. The voice went on explaining them in minute detail, but somehow the action was not important. The little voice was the extraordinary issue. Three times during the course of the experience I tried to turn around to see who was talking. I tried to turn my head all the way to the right, or just whirl around unexpectedly to see if somebody was there. But every time I did it, my vision became blurry. I thought: "The reason I cannot turn around is because the scene is not in the realm of ordinary reality." And that thought was my own.

From then on I concentrated my attention on the voice alone. It seemed to come from my shoulder. It was perfectly clear, although it was a small voice. It was, however, not a child's voice or a falsetto voice, but a miniature man's voice. It wasn't my voice either. I presumed it was English that I heard. Whenever I tried deliberately to trap the voice, it subsided altogether or became vague and the scene faded. I thought of a simile. The voice was like the image created by dust particles in the eyelashes, or the blood vessels in the cornea of the eye; a wormlike shape that can be seen as long as one is not looking at it directly; but the moment one tries to look at it, it shifts out of sight with the movement of the eyeball.

I became totally disinterested in the action. As I listened the voice became more complex. What I thought to be a voice was more like something whispering thoughts into my ear. But that was not accurate. Something was *thinking* for me. The thoughts were outside myself. I knew that was so, because I could hold my own thoughts and the thoughts of the 'other' at the same time.

At one point the voice created scenes acted out by the young man, which had nothing to do with my original question about the lost objects. The young man performed very complex acts. The action had become important again and I paid no more attention to the voice. I began to lose patience. I wanted to stop. "How can I end this?" I thought. The voice in my ear said I should go back to the canyon. I asked how, and the voice answered that I should think of my plant.

I thought of my plant. Usually I sat in front of it. I had done it so many times that it was quite easy for me to visualize it. I believed that seeing it, as I did at that moment, was another hallucination, but the voice said I was 'back'! I strained to listen. There was only silence. The Datura plant in front of me seemed as real as everything else I had seen, but I could touch it, I could move around.

I stood up and walked towards my car. The effort exhausted me, and I sat down and closed my eyes. I felt dizzy and wanted to vomit. There was a buzzing in my ears.

Something slid on my chest. It was the lizard. I remembered don Juan's admonition about setting it free. I went back to the plant and untied the lizard. I did not want to see whether it was dead or alive. I broke the clay pot with the paste and kicked some dirt over it. I got into my car and fell asleep.

*Thursday, December 24, 1964*

Today I narrated the whole experience to don Juan. As usual, he listened without interrupting me. At the end we had the following dialogue.

"You did something very wrong."

"I know it. It was a very stupid error; an accident."

"There are no accidents when you deal with the devil's weed. I told you she would test you all the way. As I see it, either you are very strong or the weed really likes you. The center of the forehead is only for the great brujos who know how to handle her power."

What usually happens when a man rubs his forehead with the paste, don Juan?"

"If the man is not a great brujo he will never come back from the journey."

"Have you ever rubbed the paste on your forehead, don Juan?"

"Never! My benefactor told me very few people return from such a journey. A man could be gone for months, and would have to be tended by others. My benefactor said the lizards could take a man to the end of the world and show him the most marvelous secrets upon request."

"Do you know anybody who has ever taken that journey?"

"Yes, my benefactor. But he never taught me how to return."

"Is it so very difficult to return, don Juan?"

"Yes. That is why your act is truly astonishing to me. You had no steps to follow, and we must follow certain steps because it is in the steps where man finds strength. Without them we are nothing."

We remained silent for hours. He seemed to be immersed in very deep deliberation.

*Saturday, December 26, 1964*

Don Juan asked me if I had looked for the lizards. I told him I had, but that I couldn't find them. I asked him what would have happened if one of the lizards had died while I was holding it. He said the death of a lizard would be an unfortunate event. If the lizard with the sewed-up mouth had died at any time there would have been no sense in pursuing the sorcery, he said. It would also have meant that the lizards had withdrawn their friendship, and I would have had to give up learning about the devil's weed for a long time.

"How long, don Juan?" I asked.

"Two years or more."

"What would have happened if the other lizard had died?"

"If the second lizard had died, you would have been in real danger. You would have been alone without a guide. If she died before you started the sorcery, you could have stopped it; but if you had stopped it, you would also have to give up the devil's weed for good. If the lizard had died while she was on your shoulder after you had begun the sorcery, you would have had to go ahead with it, and that would truly have been madness."

"Why would it have been madness?"

"Because under such conditions nothing makes sense. You are alone without a guide, seeing terrifying, nonsensical things."

"What do you mean by nonsensical things?"

"Things we see by ourselves. Things we see when we have no direction. It means the devil's weed is trying to get rid of you; finally pushing you away."

"Do you know anyone who ever experienced that?"

"Yes. *I* did. Without the wisdom of the lizards I went mad."

"What did you see, don Juan?"

"A bunch of nonsense. What else could I have seen without direction?"

*Monday, December 28, 1964*

"You told me, don Juan, that the devil's weed tests men. What did you mean by that?"

"The devil's weed is like a woman, and like a woman she flatters men. She sets traps for them at every turn. She did it to you when she forced you to rub the paste on your forehead. She will try it again, and you will probably fall for it. I warn you against it. Don't take her with passion. The devil's weed is only one path to the secrets of a man of knowledge. There are other paths, but her trap is to make you believe that hers is the only way. I say it is useless to waste your life on one path, especially if that path has no heart."

"But how do you know when a path has no heart, don Juan?"

"Before you embark on it you ask the question, 'Does this path have a heart?' If the answer is 'no', you will know it, and then you must choose another path."

"But how will I know for sure whether a path has a heart or not?"

"Anybody would know that. The trouble is nobody asks the question; and when a man finally realizes that he has taken a path without a heart, the path is ready to kill him. At that point very few men can stop to deliberate, and leave the path."

"How should I proceed to ask the question properly, don Juan?"

"Just ask it."

"I mean, is there a proper method, so I would not lie to myself and believe the answer is yes when it really is no?"

"Why would you lie?"

"Perhaps because at the moment the path is pleasant and enjoyable."

"That is nonsense. A path without a heart is never enjoyable. You have to work hard even to take it. On the other hand, a path with heart is easy; it does not make you work at liking it."

Don Juan suddenly changed the direction of the conversation and bluntly confronted me with the idea that I liked the devil's weed. I had to admit that I had at least a preference for it. He asked me how I felt about his ally, the smoke, and I had to tell him that just the idea of it frightened me out of my senses.

"I have told you that to choose a path you must be free from fear and ambition. But the smoke blinds you with fear, and the devil's weed blinds you with ambition."

I argued that one needs ambition even to embark on any path, and that his statement that one had to be free from ambition did not make sense. A person has to have ambition in order to learn.

"The desire to learn is not ambition," he said. "It is our lot as men to want to know, but to seek the devil's weed is to bid for power, and that is ambition because you are not bidding to know. Don't let the devil's weed blind you. She has hooked you already. She entices men and gives them a sense of power. She makes them feel they can do things that no ordinary man can. But that is her trap. And, the next thing, the path without a heart will turn against men and destroy them. It does not take much to die, and to seek death is to seek nothing."

## Chapter 10

In the month of December 1964, don Juan and I went to collect the different plants needed to make the smoking mixture. It was the fourth cycle. Don Juan merely supervised my actions. He urged me to take time, to watch, and to deliberate before I picked any of the plants. As soon as the ingredients had been gathered and stored, he prompted me to meet with his ally again.

*Thursday, December 31, 1964*

"Now that you know a bit more about the devil's weed and the smoke, you can tell more clearly which of the two you like better," don Juan said.

"The smoke really terrifies me, don Juan. I don't know exactly why, but I don't have a good feeling about it."

"You like flattery, and the devil's weed flatters you. Like a woman, she makes you feel good. The smoke, on the other hand, is the most noble power. He has the purest heart. He does not entice men or make them prisoners, nor does he love or hate. All he requires is strength. The devil's weed also requires strength, but of a different kind. It is closer to being virile with women. On the other hand, the strength required by the smoke is strength of the heart. You don't have that! But very few men have it. That is why I recommend that you learn more about the smoke. He reinforces the heart. He is not like the devil's weed, full of passions, jealousies, and violence. The smoke is constant. You don't have to worry about forgetting something along the line."

*Wednesday, January 27, 1965*

On Tuesday January 19, I smoked again the hallucinogenic mixture. I had told don Juan I felt very apprehensive about the smoke, and that it frightened me. He said I had to try it again to evaluate it with justice.

We walked into his room. It was almost two o'clock in the afternoon. He brought out the pipe. I got the charcoals. Then we sat facing each other. He said he was going to warm up the pipe and awaken her, and if I watched carefully I would see how she glowed. He put the pipe to his lips three or four times, and sucked through it. He rubbed it tenderly. Suddenly he nodded, almost imperceptibly, to signal me to look at the pipe's awakening. I looked, but I couldn't see it.

He handed the pipe to me. I filled the bowl with my own mixture; and then picked up a burning charcoal with a pair of tweezers I had made from a wooden clothespin I had been saving for this occasion. Don Juan looked at my tweezers, and began to laugh. I vacillated [* *vacillate- be undecided about something*] for a moment, and the charcoal stuck to the tweezers. I was afraid to tap them against the pipe bowl, and I had to spit on the charcoal to put it out.

Don Juan turned his head away and covered his face with his arm. His body shook. For a moment I thought he was crying, but he was laughing silently.

The action was interrupted for a long time. Then he swiftly picked up a charcoal himself, put it in the bowl, and ordered me to smoke. It required quite an effort to suck through the mixture. It seemed to be very compact. After the first try, I felt I had sucked the fine powder into my mouth. It numbed my mouth immediately. I saw the glow in the bowl, but I never felt the smoke as the smoke of a cigarette is felt. Yet I had the sensation of inhaling something; something that filled my lungs first and then pushed itself down to fill the rest of my body.

I counted twenty inhalations, and then the count did not matter any longer. I began to sweat. Don Juan looked at me fixedly and told me not to be afraid and to do exactly as he said. I tried to say "all right", but instead I made a weird, howling sound. It went on resounding after I had closed my mouth. The sound startled don Juan, who had another attack of laughter. I wanted to say "yes" with my head, but I couldn't move.

Don Juan opened my hands gently and took the pipe away. He ordered me to lie down on the floor, but not to fall asleep. I wondered if he was going to help me lie down but he did not. He just stared at me uninterruptedly. All of a sudden I saw the room tumbling, and I was looking at don Juan from a position on my side. From that point on the images became strangely blurry, as in a dream. I can vaguely recall hearing don Juan talk to me a great deal during the time I was immobilized.

I did not experience fear, or unpleasantness during the state itself, nor was I sick upon awakening the next day. The only thing out of the ordinary was that I could not think clearly for some time after waking up. Then gradually, in a period of four or five hours, I became myself again.

*Wednesday, January 20, 1965*

Don Juan did not talk about my experience, nor did he ask me to relate it to him. His sole comment was that I had fallen asleep too soon.

"The only way to stay awake is to become a bird, or a cricket, or something of the sort," he said.

"How do you do that, don Juan?"

"That is what I am teaching you. Do you remember what I said to you yesterday while you were without your body?"

"I can't recall clearly."

"'I am a crow. I am teaching you how to become a crow.' When you learn that, you will stay awake, and you will move freely. Otherwise you will always be glued to the ground, wherever you fall."

*Sunday, February 7, 1965*

My second attempt with the smoke took place about midday on Sunday January 31. I woke up the following day in the early evening. I had the sensation of possessing an unusual power to recollect whatever don Juan had said to me during the experience. His words were imprinted on my mind. I kept on hearing them with extraordinary clarity and persistence. During this attempt another fact became obvious to me: My entire body had become numb soon after I began to swallow the fine powder which got into my mouth every time I sucked the pipe. Thus I not only inhaled the smoke, but also ingested the mixture.

I tried to narrate my experience to don Juan. He said I had done nothing important. I mentioned that I could remember everything that had happened, but he did not want to hear about it. Every memory was precise and unmistakable. The smoking procedure had been the same as in the previous attempt. It was almost as if the two experiences were perfectly juxtaposable, and I could start my recollection from the time the first experience ended. I clearly remembered that from the time I fell to the ground on my side I was completely devoid of feeling or thought. Yet my clarity was not impaired in any way. I remember thinking my last thought at about the time the room became a vertical plane: "I must have clunked my head on the floor, yet I don't feel any pain."

From that point on I could only see and hear. I could repeat every word don Juan had said. I followed each one of his directions. They seemed clear, logical, and easy. He said that my body was disappearing and only my head was going to remain, and in such a condition the only way to stay awake and move around was by becoming a crow. He commanded me to make an effort to wink, adding that whenever I was capable of winking I would be ready to proceed. Then he told me that my body had vanished completely and all I had was my head. He said the head never disappears because the head is what turns into a crow.

He ordered me to wink. He must have repeated this command, and all his other commands countless times, because I could remember all of them with extraordinary clarity. I must have winked, because he said I was ready and ordered me to straighten up my head and put it on my chin. He said that in the chin were the crow's legs. He commanded me to feel the legs and observe that they were coming out slowly. He then said that I was not solid yet, that I had to grow a tail, and that the tail would come out of my neck. He ordered me to extend the tail like a fan, and to feel how it swept the floor.

Then he talked about the crow's wings, and said they would come out of my cheekbones. He said it was hard and painful. He commanded me to unfold them. He said they had to be extremely long, as long as I could stretch them, otherwise I would not be able to fly. He told me the wings were coming out and were long and beautiful, and that I had to flap them until they were real wings.

He talked about the top of my head next and said it was still very large and heavy, and it's bulk would prevent my flying. He told me that the way to reduce it's size was by winking; with every wink my head would become smaller. He ordered me to wink until the top weight was gone and I could jump freely. Then he told me I had reduced my head to the size of a crow, and that I had to walk around and hop until I had lost my stiffness.

There was one last thing I had to change, he said, before I could fly. It was the most difficult change, and to accomplish it I had to be docile and do exactly as he told me. I had to learn to see like a crow. He said that my mouth and nose were going to grow between my eyes until I had a strong beak. He said that crows see straight to the side, and commanded me to turn my head and look at him with one eye. He said that if I wanted to change and look with the other eye I had to shake my beak down, and that that movement would make me look through the other eye. He ordered me to shift from one eye to the other. And then he said I was ready to fly, and that the only way to fly was to have him toss me into the air.

I had no difficulty whatsoever eliciting the corresponding sensation to each one of his commands. I had the perception of growing bird's legs, which were weak and wobbly at first. I felt a tail coming out of the back of my neck and wings out of my cheekbones. The wings were folded deeply. I felt them coming out by degrees. The process was hard but not painful. Then I winked my head down to the size of a crow. But the most astonishing effect was accomplished with my eyes. My bird's sight!

When don Juan directed me to grow a beak, I had an annoying sensation of lack of air. Then something bulged out and created a block in front of me. But it was not until don Juan directed me to see laterally that my eyes actually were capable of having a full view to the side. I could wink one eye at a time and shift the focusing from one eye to the other. But the sight of the room and all the things in it was not like an ordinary sight. Yet it was impossible to tell in what way it was different. Perhaps it was lopsided, or perhaps things were out of focus. Don Juan became very big and glowy. Something about him was comforting and safe. Then the images blurred; they lost their outlines, and became sharp abstract patterns that flickered for a while.

*Sunday, March 28, 1965*

On Thursday, March 18, I smoked again the hallucinogenic mixture. The initial procedure was different in small details. I had to refill the pipe bowl once. After I had finished the first batch, don Juan directed me to clean the bowl, but he poured the mixture into the bowl himself because I lacked muscular coordination. It took a great deal of effort to move my arms. There was enough mixture in my bag for one refill. Don Juan looked at the bag and said this was my last attempt with the smoke until the next year because I had used up all my provisions.

He turned the little bag inside out and shook the dust into the dish that held the charcoals. It burned with an orange glow, as if he had placed a sheet of transparent material over the charcoals. The sheet burst into flame, and then it cracked into an intricate pattern of lines. Something zigzagged inside the lines at high speed. Don Juan told me to look at the movement in the lines. I saw something that looked like a small marble rolling back and forth in the glowing area. He leaned over, put his hand into the glow, picked out the marble, and placed it in the pipe bowl. He ordered me to take a puff. I had a clear impression that he had put the small ball into the pipe so that I would inhale it. In a moment the room lost it's horizontal position. I felt a profound numbness, a sensation of heaviness.

When I awakened, I was lying on my back at the bottom of a shallow irrigation ditch, immersed in water up to my chin. Someone was holding my head up. It was don Juan. The first thought I had was that the water in the channel had an unusual quality; it was cold and heavy. It slapped lightly against me, and my thoughts cleared with every movement it made. At first the water had a bright green halo, or fluorescence, which soon dissolved, leaving only a stream of ordinary water.

I asked don Juan about the time of day. He said it was early morning. After a while I was completely awake, and got out of the water.

"You must tell me all you saw," don Juan said when we got to his house. He also said he had been trying to 'bring me back' for three days, and had had a very difficult time doing it. I made numerous attempts to describe what I had seen, but I could not concentrate. Later on, during the early evening, I felt I was ready to talk with don Juan, and I began to tell him what I remembered from the time I had fallen on my side, but he did not want to hear about it. He said the only interesting part was what I saw and did after he 'tossed me into the air and I flew away.'

All I could remember was a series of dreamlike images or scenes. They had no sequential order. I had the impression that each one of them was like an isolated bubble, floating into focus and then moving away. They were not, however, merely scenes to look at. I was inside them. I took part in them. When I tried to recollect them at first, I had the sensation that they were vague, diffused flashes, but as I thought about them I realized that each one of them was extremely clear although totally unrelated to ordinary seeing— hence, the sensation of vagueness. The images were few and simple.

As soon as don Juan mentioned that he had 'tossed me into the air', I had a faint recollection of an absolutely clear scene in which I was looking straight at him from some distance away. I was looking at his face only. It was monumental in size. It was flat and had an intense glow. His hair was yellowish, and it moved. Each part of his face moved by itself, projecting a sort of amber light.

The next image was one in which don Juan had actually tossed me up, or hurled me, in a straight onward direction. I remember I 'extended my wings and flew'. I felt alone, cutting through the air, painfully moving straight ahead. It was more like walking than like flying. It tired my body. There was no feeling of flowing free, no exuberance.

Then I remembered an instant in which I was motionless, looking at a mass of sharp, dark edges set in an area that had a dull, painful light. Next I saw a field with an infinite variety of lights. The lights moved and flickered and changed their luminosity. They were almost like colors. Their intensity dazzled me.

At another moment, an object was almost against my eye. It was a thick, pointed object. It had a definite pinkish glow. I felt a sudden tremor somewhere in my body and saw a multitude of similar pink forms coming towards me. They all moved on me. I jumped away.

The last scene I remembered was three silvery birds. They radiated a shiny, metallic light, almost like stainless steel, but intense and moving and alive. I liked them. We flew together.

Don Juan did not make any comments on my recounting.

*Tuesday, March 23, 1965*

The following conversation took place the next day after the recounting of my experience.

Don Juan said: "It does not take much to become a crow. You did it and now you will always be one."

"What happened after I became a crow, don Juan? Did I fly for three days?"

"No, you came back at nightfall as I had told you to."

"But how did I come back?"

"You were very tired and went to sleep. That is all."

"I mean did I fly back?"

"I have already told you. You obeyed me and came back to the house. But don't concern yourself with that matter. It is of no importance."

"What is important, then?"

"In your whole trip there was only one thing of great value— the silvery birds!"

"What was so special about them? They were just birds."

"Not just birds— they were crows."

"Were they white crows, don Juan?"

"The black feathers of a crow are really silvery. The crows shine so intensely that they are not bothered by other birds."

"Why did their feathers look silvery?"

"Because you were seeing as a crow sees. A bird that looks dark to us looks white to a crow. The white pigeons, for instance, are pink or bluish to a crow; seagulls are yellow. Now, try to remember how you joined them."

I thought about it, but the birds were a dim, disassociated image which had no continuity. I told him I could remember only that I felt I had flown with them. He asked me whether I had joined them in the air or on the ground, but I could not possibly answer that. He became almost angry with me. He demanded that I think about it. He said, "All this will not mean a darn. It will be only a mad dream unless you remember correctly." I strained myself to recollect, but I could not.

*Saturday, April 3, 1965*

Today I thought of another image in my 'dream' about the silvery birds. I remembered seeing a dark mass with myriads of pinholes. In fact, the mass was a dark cluster of little holes. I don't know why I thought it was soft. As I was looking at it, three birds flew straight at me. One of them made a noise: Then all three of them were next to me on the ground.

I described the image to don Juan. He asked me from what direction the birds had come. I said I couldn't possibly determine that. He became quite impatient and accused me of being inflexible in my thinking. He said I could very well remember if I tried to, and that I was afraid to let myself become less rigid. He said that I was thinking in terms of men and crows, and that I was neither a man nor a crow at the time that I wanted to recollect.

He asked me to remember what the crow had said to me. I tried to think about it, but my mind played on scores of other things instead. I couldn't concentrate.

*Sunday, April 4, 1965*

I took a long hike today. It got quite dark before I reached don Juan's house. I was thinking about the crows when suddenly a very strange 'thought' crossed my mind. It was more like an impression or a feeling than a thought. The bird that had made the noise said they were coming from the north and were going south, and when we met again they would be coming the same way.

I told don Juan what I had thought up, or maybe remembered. He said, "Don't think about whether you remembered it or made it up. Such thoughts fit men only. They do not fit crows, especially those you saw, for they are the 'emissaries' of your fate. You are already a crow. You will never change that. From now on the crows will tell you with their flight about every turn of your fate. In which direction did you fly with them?"

"I couldn't know that, don Juan!"

"If you think properly you will remember. Sit on the floor and tell me the position in which you were when the birds flew to you. Close your eyes and make a line on the floor."

I followed his suggestion and determined the point.

"Don't open your eyes yet!" He proceeded, "In which direction did you all fly in relation to that point?"

I made another mark on the ground.

Taking these points of orientation as a reference, don Juan interpreted the different patterns of flight the crows would observe to foretell my personal future or fate. He set up the four points of the compass as the axis of the crows' flight.

I asked him whether the crows always followed the cardinal points to tell a man's fate. He said that the orientation was mine alone: Whatever the crows did in my first meeting with them was of crucial importance. He insisted on my recalling every detail, for the message and the pattern of the ‘emissaries’ were an individual, personalized matter.

There was one more thing he insisted I should remember and that was the time of day when the emissaries left me. He asked me to think of the difference in the light around me between the time when I 'began to fly' and the time when the silvery birds 'flew with me'. When I first had the sensation of painful flight, it was dark. But when I saw the birds, everything was reddish— light red, or perhaps orange.

He said, "That means it was late in the day. The sun was not down yet. When it is completely dark a crow is blind with whiteness and not with darkness, the way we are at night. This indication of the time places your last emissaries at the end of the day. They will call you, and as they fly above your head, they will become silvery white. You will see them shining against the sky, and it will mean your time is up. It will mean you are going to die and become a crow yourself."

"What if I see them during the morning?"

"You won't see them in the morning!"

"But crows fly all day."

"Not your emissaries, you fool!"

"How about *your* emissaries, don Juan?"

"Mine will come in the morning. There will also be three of them. My benefactor told me that one could shout them back to black if one does not want to die. But now I know it can't be done. My benefactor was given to shouting, and to all the clatter and violence of the devil's weed. I know the smoke is different because he has no passion. He is fair. When your silvery emissaries come for you, there is no need to shout at them. Just fly with them as you have already done. After they have collected you they will reverse directions, and there will be four of them flying away."

*Saturday, April 10, 1965*

I had been experiencing brief flashes of disassociation, or shallow states of nonordinary reality.

One element from the hallucinogenic experience with the mushrooms kept recurring in my thoughts: the soft, dark mass of pinholes. I continued to visualize it as a grease or an oil bubble which began to draw me to it's center. It was almost as if the center would open up and swallow me, and for very brief moments I experienced something resembling a state of nonordinary reality. As a result I suffered moments of profound agitation, anxiety, and discomfort; and I willfully strove to end the experiences as soon as they began.

Today I discussed this condition with don Juan. I asked for advice. He seemed to be unconcerned and told me to disregard the experiences because they were meaningless, or rather valueless. He said the only experiences worth my effort and concern would be those in which I saw a crow: Any other kind of vision would be merely the product of my fears. He reminded me again that in order to partake of the smoke it was necessary to lead a strong, quiet life. Personally I seemed to have reached a dangerous threshold. I told him I felt I could not go on. There was something truly frightening about the mushrooms.

In going over the images I recalled from my hallucinogenic experience, I had come to the unavoidable conclusion that I had seen the world in a way that was structurally different from ordinary vision. In other states of nonordinary reality I had undergone, the forms and the patterns I had visualized were always within the confines of my visual conception of the world. But the sensation of seeing under the influence of the hallucinogenic smoke mixture was not the same. Everything I saw was in front of me in a direct line of vision. Nothing was above or below that line of vision.

Every image had an irritating flatness, and yet, disconcertingly, a profound depth. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the images were a conglomerate of unbelievably sharp details set inside fields of different light. The light in the fields moved creating an effect of rotation.

After probing and exerting myself to remember, I was forced to make a series of analogies or similes in order to understand what I had seen. Don Juan's face, for instance, looked as if he had been submerged in water. The water seemed to move in a continuous flow over his face and hair. It so magnified them that I could see every pore in his skin or every hair on his head whenever I focused my vision. On the other hand, I saw masses of matter that were flat and full of edges, but did not move because there was no fluctuation in the light that came from them.

I asked don Juan what were the things that I had seen. He said that because this was the first time I was seeing as a crow the images were not clear or important, and that later on with practice I would be able to recognize everything.

I brought up the issue of the difference I had detected in the movement of light. "Things that are alive", he said, "move inside, and a crow can easily see when something is dead, or about to die, because the movement has stopped or is slowing down to a stop. A crow can also tell when something is moving too fast, and by the same token a crow can tell when something is moving just right."

"What does it mean when something is moving too fast, or just right?"

"It means a crow can actually tell what to avoid and what to seek. When something is moving too fast inside, it means it is about to explode violently, or to leap forward; and a crow will avoid it. When it moves inside just right, it is a pleasing sight and a crow will seek it."

"Do rocks move inside?"

"No, not rocks or dead animals or dead trees. But they are beautiful to look at. That is why crows hang around dead bodies. They like to look at them. No light moves inside them."

"But when the flesh rots, doesn't it change or move?"

"Yes, but that is a different movement. What a crow sees then is millions of things moving inside the flesh with a light of their own, and that is what a crow likes to see. It is truly an unforgettable sight."

"Have you seen it yourself, don Juan?"

"Anybody who learns to become a crow can see it. You will see it yourself."

At this point I asked don Juan the unavoidable question.

"Did I really become a crow? I mean would anyone seeing me have thought I was an ordinary crow?"

"No. You can't think that way when dealing with the power of the allies. Such questions make no sense, and yet to become a crow is the simplest of all matters. It is almost like frolicking; [* *frolicking- playing in a carefree manner*] it has little usefulness. As I have already told you, the smoke is not for those who seek power. It is only for those who crave to see. I learned to become a crow because these birds are the most effective of all. No other birds bother them, except perhaps larger, hungry eagles, but crows fly in groups and can defend themselves. Men don't bother crows either, and that is an important point. Any man can distinguish a large eagle, especially an unusual eagle, or any other large, unusual bird, but who cares about a crow? A crow is safe. It is ideal in size and nature. It can go safely into any place without attracting attention. On the other hand, it is possible to become a lion or a bear, but that is rather dangerous. Such a creature is too large; it takes too much energy to become one. One can also become a cricket, or a lizard, or even an ant, but that is even more dangerous, because large animals prey on small creatures."

I argued that what he was saying meant that one really changed into a crow, or a cricket, or anything else. But he insisted I was misunderstanding.

"It takes a very long time to learn to be a proper crow," he said. "But you did not change, nor did you stop being a man. There is something else."

"Can you tell me what the something else is, don Juan?"

"Perhaps by now you know it yourself. Maybe if you were not so afraid of becoming mad, or of losing your body, you would understand this marvelous secret. But perhaps you must wait until you lose your fear to understand what I mean."

## Chapter 11

The last event I recorded in my field notes took place in September, 1965. It was the last of don Juan's teachings. I called it 'a special state of nonordinary reality' because it was not the product of any of the plants I had used before. It seemed that don Juan elicited it by means of a careful manipulation of cues about himself. That is to say, he behaved in front of me in so skillful a manner that he created the clear and sustained impression that he was not really himself, but rather someone impersonating him. As a result I experienced a profound sense of conflict. I wanted to believe it was don Juan, and yet I could not be sure of it. The concomitant [* *concomitant- an event or situation that happens at the same time as another*] of the conflict was a conscious terror so acute that it impaired my health for several weeks. Afterwards I thought it would be wise to end my apprenticeship then. I have never been a participant since that time, yet don Juan has not ceased to consider me an apprentice. He has regarded my withdrawal only as a necessary period of recapitulation, another step of learning, which may last indefinitely. Since that time, however, he has never expounded on his knowledge.

I wrote the detailed account of my last experience almost a month after it happened, although I had already written copious notes on it's salient points on the following day during the hours of great emotional agitation which preceded the highest point of my terror.

*Friday, October 29, 1965*

On Thursday September 30, 1965, I went to see don Juan. The brief, shallow states of nonordinary reality had been persisting in spite of my deliberate attempts to end them, or slough them off as don Juan had suggested. I felt that my condition was getting worse because the duration of such states was increasing. I became sharply aware of the noise of airplanes. The sound of their motors going overhead would unavoidably catch my attention, and fix it to the point where I felt I was following the plane as if I were inside it, or flying with it. This sensation was very annoying. My inability to shake it off produced a deep anxiety in me.

Don Juan, after listening attentively to all the details, concluded that I was suffering from a loss of soul. I told him I had been having these hallucinations ever since the time I had smoked the mushrooms, but he insisted that they were a new development. He said that earlier I had been afraid, and had just “dreamed nonsensical things,” but that now I was truly bewitched. The proof was that the noise of the flying airplanes could carry me away. Ordinarily, he said, the noise of a brook or a river can trap a bewitched man who has lost his soul and carry him away to his death. He then asked me to describe all my activities during the time prior to experiencing the hallucinations. I listed all the activities I could remember, and from my account he deduced the place where I had lost my soul.

Don Juan seemed to be overly preoccupied, a state that was quite unusual for him. This naturally increased my apprehension. He said he had no definite idea as to who had trapped my soul, but whoever it was intended without doubt to kill me or make me very ill. Then he gave me precise instructions about a 'fighting form,' a specific bodily position to be maintained while I remained on my beneficial spot. I *had* to maintain this posture he called a form [*una forma para pelear*].

I asked him what all that was for, and whom I was going to fight. He replied that he was going away to see who had taken my soul, and to find out if it was possible to get it back. In the meantime, I was supposed to stay on my spot until his return. The fighting form was actually a precaution, he said, in case something happened during his absence, and it had to be used if I was attacked. It consisted of clapping the calf and thigh of my right leg and stomping my left foot in a kind of dance I had to do while facing the attacker.

He warned me that the form had to be adopted only in moments of extreme crisis, but so long as there was no danger in sight I should simply sit cross-legged on my spot. Under circumstances of extreme danger, however, he said I could resort to one last means of defense-hurling an object at the enemy. He told me that ordinarily one hurls a power object, but since I did not possess any I was forced to use any small rock that would fit into the palm of my right hand; a rock I could hold by pressing it against my palm with my thumb. He said that such a technique should be used only if one was indisputably in danger of losing one's life. The hurling of the object had to be accompanied by a war cry, a yell that had the property of directing the object to it's mark. He emphatically recommended that I be careful and deliberate about the outcry and not use it at random, but only under “severe conditions of seriousness.”

I asked what he meant by “severe conditions of seriousness.” He said that the outcry or war cry was something that remained with a man for the duration of his life; thus it had to be good from the very beginning. And the only way to start it correctly was by holding back one's natural fear and haste until one was absolutely filled with power, and then the yell would burst out with direction and power. He said these were the conditions of seriousness needed to launch the yell.

I asked him to explain about the power that was supposed to fill one before the outcry. He said that it was something that ran through the body coming from the ground where one stood. It was a kind of power that emanated from the beneficial spot, to be exact. It was a force that pushed the yell out. If such a force was properly managed, the battle cry would be perfect.

I asked him again if he thought something was going to happen to me. He said he knew nothing about it and admonished me dramatically to stay glued to my spot for as long as it was necessary, because that was the only protection I had against anything that might happen.

I began to feel frightened; I begged him to be more specific. He said all he knew was that I should not move under any circumstances. I was not to go into the house or into the bush. Above all, he said, I should not utter a single word; not even to him. He said I could sing my Mescalito songs if I became too frightened, and then he added that I knew already too much about these matters to have to be warned like a child about the importance of doing everything correctly.

His admonitions produced a state of profound anguish in me. I was sure he was expecting something to happen. I asked him why he recommended that I sing the Mescalito songs, and what he believed was going to frighten me. He laughed and said I might become afraid of being alone. He walked into the house and closed the door behind him. I looked at my watch. It was 7:00 p.m. I sat quietly for a long time. There were no sounds corning from don Juan's room. Everything was quiet. It was windy. I thought of making a dash for my car to get my windbreaker, but I did not dare to go against don Juan's advice. I was not sleepy, but tired. The cold wind made it impossible for me to rest.

Four hours later I heard don Juan walking around the house. I thought he might have left through the back to urinate in the bushes. Then he called me loudly.

"Hey boy! Hey boy! I need you here," he said.

I nearly got up to go to him. It was his voice, but not his tone, or his usual words. Don Juan had never called me "Hey boy!" So I stayed where I was. A chill went up my back. He began to yell again using the same, or a similar, phrase.

I heard him walking around the back of his house. He stumbled on a woodpile as if he did not know it was there. Then he came to the porch and sat next to the door with his back against the wall. He seemed heavier than usual. His movements were not slow or clumsy, just heavier. He plunked down on the floor, instead of sliding nimbly as he usually did. Besides, that was not his spot and don Juan would never under any circumstances sit anywhere else.

Then he talked to me again. He asked me why I refused to come when he needed me. He talked loudly. I did not want to look at him, and yet I had a compulsive urge to watch him. He began to swing slightly from side to side. I changed my position, adopted the fighting form he had taught me, and turned to face him. My muscles were stiff and strangely tense. I do not know what prompted me to adopt the fighting form, but perhaps it was because I believed don Juan was deliberately trying to scare me by creating the impression that the person I saw was not really himself. I felt he was very careful about doing the unaccustomed in order to establish doubt in my mind. I was afraid, but still I felt I was above it all, because I was actually taking stock of and analyzing the entire sequence.

At that point don Juan got up. His motions were utterly unfamiliar. He brought his arms in front of his body, and pushed himself up, lifting his backside first. Then he grabbed the door and straightened out the top part of his body. I was amazed about how deeply familiar I was with his movements, and what an awesome feeling he had created by letting me see a don Juan who did not move like don Juan.

He took a couple of steps towards me. He held the lower part of his back with both hands as if he were trying to straighten up, or as if he were in pain. He whined and puffed. His nose seemed to be stuffed up. He said he was going to take me with him, and ordered me to get up and follow him. He walked towards the west side of the house. I shifted my position to face him. He turned to me. I did not move from my spot. I was glued to it.

He bellowed, "Hey boy! I told you to come with me. If you don't come I'll drag you!"

He walked towards me. I began beating my calf and thigh, and dancing fast. He got to the edge of the porch in front of me and nearly touched me. Frantically I prepared my body to adopt the hurling position, but he changed directions and moved away from me, towards the bushes to my left. At one moment, as he was walking away, he turned suddenly, but I was facing him.

He went out of sight. I retained the fighting posture for a while longer, but as I did not see him any more I sat cross-legged again with my back to the rock. By then I was really frightened. I wanted to run away, yet that thought terrified me even more. I felt I would have been completely at his mercy if he had caught me on the way to my car. I began to sing the peyote songs I knew. But somehow I felt they were impotent there. They served only as a pacifier, yet they soothed me. I sang them over and over.

About 2:45 a.m. I heard a noise inside the house. I immediately changed my position. The door was flung open and don Juan stumbled out. He was gasping and holding his throat. He knelt in front of me and moaned. He asked me in a high, whining voice to come and help him. Then he bellowed again and ordered me to come. He made gargling sounds. He pleaded with me to come and help him because something was choking him. He crawled on his hands and knees until he was perhaps four feet away. He extended his hands to me. He said, "Come here!" Then he got up. His arms were extended towards me. He seemed ready to grab me. I stomped my foot on the ground and clapped my calf and thigh. I was beside myself with fear.

He stopped and walked to the side of the house and into the bushes. I shifted my position to face him. Then I sat down again. I did not want to sing any more. My energy seemed to be waning. My entire body ached. All my muscles were stiff and painfully contracted. I did not know what to think. I could not make up my mind whether to be angry at don Juan or not. I thought of jumping him, but somehow I knew he would have cut me down, like a bug. I really wanted to cry. I experienced a profound despair. The thought that don Juan was going all the way out to frighten me made me feel like weeping. I was incapable of finding a reason for his tremendous display of histrionics. His movements were so artful that I became confused. It was not as if he was trying to move like a woman: It was as if a woman was trying to move like don Juan. I had the impression that she was really trying to walk and move with don Juan's deliberation, but was too heavy and did not have the nimbleness of don Juan. Whoever it was in front of me created the impression of being a younger, heavy woman trying to imitate the slow movements of an agile old man.

These thoughts threw me into a state of panic. A cricket began to call loudly, very close to me. I noticed the richness of it's tone. I fancied it to have a baritone voice. The call started to fade away. Suddenly my whole body jerked. I assumed the fighting position again and faced the direction from which the cricket's call had come. The sound was taking me away. It had begun to trap me before I realized it was only cricket-like. The sound got closer again. It became terribly loud. I started to sing my peyote songs louder and louder. Suddenly the cricket stopped. I immediately sat down, but kept on singing. A moment later I saw the shape of a man running towards me from the direction opposite to that of the cricket's call. I clapped my hands on my thigh and calf and stomped vigorously, frantically. The shape went by very fast, almost touching me. It looked like a dog. I experienced so dreadful a fear that I was numb. I cannot recollect anything else I felt or thought.

The morning dew was refreshing. I felt better. Whatever the phenomenon was, it seemed to have withdrawn. It was 5:48 a.m. when don Juan opened the door quietly and came out. He stretched his arms, yawning, and glanced at me. He took two steps towards me, prolonging his yawning. I saw his eyes looking through half-closed eyelids. I jumped up. I knew then that whoever, or whatever, was in front of me was not don Juan.

I took a small, sharp-edged rock from the ground. It was next to my right hand. I did not look at it. I just held it by pressing it with my thumb against my extended fingers. I adopted the form don Juan had taught me. I felt a strange vigor filling me, in a matter of seconds. Then I yelled and hurled the rock at him. I thought it was a magnificent outcry. At that moment I did not care whether I lived or died. I felt the cry was awesome in it's potency. It was piercing and prolonged, and it actually directed my aim. The figure in front wobbled and shrieked and staggered to the side of the house and into the bushes again.

It took me hours to calm down. I could not sit any more. I kept on trotting on the same place. I had to breathe through my mouth to take in enough air.

At 11:00 a.m. don Juan came out again. I was going to jump up, but the movements were *his*. He went directly to his spot and sat down in his usual familiar way. He looked at me and smiled. He was don Juan! I went to him, and instead of being angry, I kissed his hand. I really believed then that he had not acted to create a dramatic effect, but that someone had impersonated him to cause me harm or to kill me.

The conversation began with speculations about the identity of a *female* person who had allegedly taken my soul. Then don Juan asked me to tell him about every detail of my experience. I narrated the whole sequence of events in a very deliberate manner. He laughed all the way, as if it were a joke. When I had finished he said, "You did fine. You won the battle for your soul. But this matter is more serious than I thought. Your life wasn't worth two hoots last night. It is fortunate you learned something in the past. Had you not had a little training you would be dead by now, because whoever you saw last night meant to finish you off."

"How is it possible, don Juan, that she could take your form?"

"Very simple. She is a *diablera* and has a good helper on the other side. But she was not too good in assuming my likeness, and you caught on to her trick."

"Is a helper on the other side the same as an ally?"

"No, a helper is the aid of a diablero. A helper is a spirit that lives on the other side of the world and helps a diablero to cause sickness and pain. It helps him to kill."

"Can a diablero also have an ally, don Juan?"

"It is the diableros who have the allies, but before a diablero can tame an ally, he usually has a helper to aid him in his tasks."

"How about the woman who took your form, don Juan? Does she have only a helper and not an ally?"

"I don't know whether she has an ally or not. Some people do not like the power of an ally and prefer a helper. To tame an ally is hard work. It is easier to get a helper on the other side."

"Do you think *I* could get a helper?"

"To know that, you have to learn much more. We are again at the beginning, almost as on the first day you came over and asked me to tell you about Mescalito, and I could not because you would not have understood. That other side is the world of diableros. I think it would be best to tell you my own feelings in the same way my benefactor told me his. He was a diablero and a warrior. His life was inclined towards the force and the violence of the world. But I am neither of them. That is my nature. You have seen my world from the start. As to showing you the world of my benefactor, I can only put you at the door, and you will have to decide for yourself. You will have to learn about it by your effort alone. I must admit now that I made a mistake. It is much better, I see now, to start the way I did, myself. Then it is easier to realize how simple and yet how profound the difference is. A diablero is a diablero, and a warrior is a warrior; or a man can be both. There are enough people who are both. But a man who only traverses the paths of life is everything. Today I am neither a warrior nor a diablero. For me there is only the travelling on the paths that have a heart; on any path that may have a heart. There I travel, and the only worthwhile challenge for me is to traverse it's full length. And there I travel— looking, looking, breathlessly."

He paused. His face revealed a peculiar mood. He seemed to be unusually serious. I did not know what to ask or to say. He proceeded:

"The particular thing to learn is how to get to the crack between the worlds and how to enter the other world. There is a crack between the two worlds; the world of the diableros and the world of living men. There is a place where the two worlds overlap. The crack is there. It opens and closes like a door in the wind. To get there a man must exercise his will. He must, I should say, develop an indomitable desire for it, a single-minded dedication. But he must do it without the help of any power or any man. The man by himself must ponder and wish up to a moment in which his body is ready to undergo the journey. That moment is announced by prolonged shaking of the limbs and violent vomiting. The man usually cannot sleep or eat, and wanes away. When the convulsions do not stop, the man is ready to go, and the crack between the worlds appears right in front of his eyes; like a monumental door; a crack that goes up and down. When the crack opens the man has to slide through it."

"It is hard to see on the other side of the boundary. It is windy, like a sandstorm. The wind whirls around. The man then must walk in any direction. It will be a short or a long journey, depending on his willpower. A strong-willed man journeys shortly. An undecided, weak man journeys long and precariously."

"After this journey the man arrives at a sort of plateau. It is possible to distinguish some of it's features clearly. It is a plane above the ground. It is possible to recognize it by the wind, which there becomes even more violent, whipping, roaring all around. On top of that plateau is the entrance to that other world. And there stands a skin that separates the two worlds. Dead men go through it without a noise, but we have to break it with an outcry. The wind gathers strength; the same unruly wind that blows on the plateau. When the wind has gathered enough force, the man has to yell and the wind will push him through. Here his will has to be inflexible, too, so that he can fight the wind. All he needs is a gentle shove. He does not need to be blown to the ends of the other world. Once on the other side, the man will have to wander around. His good fortune would be to find a helper nearby— not too far from the entrance. The man has to ask him for help. In his own words he has to ask the helper to teach him and make him a diablero.

"When the helper agrees, he kills the man on the spot, and while he is dead he teaches him. When you make the trip yourself, depending on your luck, you may find a great diablero in the helper who will kill you and teach you. Most of the time, though, one encounters lesser brujos who have very little to teach. But neither you nor they have the power to refuse. The best instance is to find a male helper lest one become the prey of a diablera, who will make one suffer in an unbelievable manner. Women are always like that. But that depends on luck alone, unless one's benefactor is a great diablero himself, in which event he will have many helpers in the other world, and can direct one to see a particular helper. My benefactor was such a man. He directed me to encounter his spirit helper."

"After your return, you will not be the same man. You are committed to come back to see your helper often; and you are committed to wander farther and farther from the entrance until finally one day you will go too far and will not be able to return.

"Sometimes a diablero may catch a soul and push it through the entrance and leave it in the custody of his helper until he robs the person of all his willpower. In other cases, like yours for instance, the soul belongs to a strong-willed person, and the diablero may keep it inside his pouch, because it is too hard to carry otherwise. In such instances, as in yours, a fight may resolve the problem— a fight in which the diablero either wins all, or loses all. This time she lost the combat and had to release your soul. Had she won she would have taken it to her helper, for keeps."

"But how did I win?"

"You did not move from your spot. Had you moved one inch away you would have been demolished. She chose the moment I was away as the best time to strike, and she did it well. She failed because she did not count on your own nature, which is violent, and also because you did not budge from the spot on which you are invincible."

"How would she have killed me if I had moved?"

"She would have hit you like a thunderbolt. But above all she would have kept your soul and you would have wasted away."

"What is going to happen now, don Juan?"

"Nothing. You won your soul back. It was a good battle. You learned many things last night."

Afterwards we began to look for the stone I had hurled. He said if we could find it we could be absolutely sure the affair had ended. We looked for nearly three hours. I had the feeling I would recognize it, but I could not.

That same day in the early evening don Juan took me into the hills around his house. There he gave me long and detailed instructions on specific fighting procedures. At one moment in the course of repeating certain prescribed steps I found myself alone. I had run up a slope and was out of breath. I was perspiring freely, and yet I was cold. I called don Juan several times, but he did not answer, and I began to experience a strange apprehension. I heard a rustling in the underbrush as if someone was coming towards me. I listened attentively, but the noise stopped. Then it came again, louder and closer. At that moment it occurred to me that the events of the preceding night were going to be repeated. In a matter of a few seconds my fear grew out of all proportion. The rustle in the underbrush got closer, and my strength waned. I wanted to scream or weep, run away or faint. My knees sagged; I fell to the ground, whining. I could not even close my eyes. After that, I remember only that don Juan made a fire and rubbed the contracted muscles of my arms and legs.

I remained in a state of profound distress for several hours. Afterwards don Juan explained my disproportionate reaction as a common occurrence. I said I could not figure out logically what had caused my panic, and he replied that it was not the fear of dying, but rather the fear of losing my soul, a fear common among men who do not have unbending intent.

That experience was the last of don Juan's teachings. Ever since that time I have refrained from seeking his lessons. And, although don Juan has not changed his benefactor's attitude towards me, I do believe that I have succumbed to the first enemy of a man of knowledge.

~ THE END of The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge~

## A Structural Analysis

The following structural scheme, abstracted from the data on the states of nonordinary reality presented in the foregoing part of this work, is conceived as an attempt to disclose the internal cohesion and the cogency of don Juan's teachings. The structure, as I assess it, is composed of four concepts which are the main units: (1) man of knowledge; (2) a man of knowledge had an ally; (3) an ally had a rule; and (4) the rule was corroborated by special consensus. These four units are in turn composed of a number of subsidiary ideas; thus the total structure comprises all the meaningful concepts that were presented until the time I discontinued the apprenticeship. In a sense, these units represent successive levels of analysis, each level modifying the preceding one.*

Because this conceptual structure is completely dependent on the meaning of all it's units, the following clarification seems to be pertinent at this point: Throughout this entire work, meaning has been rendered as I understood it. The component concepts of don Juan's knowledge as I have presented them here could not be the exact duplicate of what he said himself. In spite of all the effort I have put forth to render these concepts as faithfully as possible, their meaning has been deflected by my own attempts to classify them. The arrangement of the four main units of this structural scheme is, however, a logical sequence which appears to be free from the influence of extraneous classificatory devices of my own. But, insofar as the component ideas of each main unit are concerned, it has been impossible to discard my personal influence. At certain points extraneous classificatory items are necessary in order to render the phenomena understandable. And, if such a task was to be accomplished here, it had to be done by zigzagging back and forth from the alleged meanings and classificatory scheme of the teacher to the meanings and classificatory devices of the apprentice.

*For outline of the units of my structural analysis, see Appendix B.

## The Operative Order: The First Unit

### *Man of Knowledge*

At a very early stage of my apprenticeship, don Juan made the statement that the goal of his teachings was "to show how to become a man of knowledge". I use that statement as a point of departure. It is obvious that to become a man of knowledge was an operational goal. And it is also obvious that every part of don Juan's orderly teachings was geared to fulfill that goal in one way or another. My line of reasoning here is that under the circumstances 'man of knowledge', being an operational goal, must have been indispensable to explaining some "operative order". Then, it is justifiable to conclude that, in order to understand that operative order, one has to understand it's objective: man of knowledge.

After having established "man of knowledge" as the first structural unit, it was possible for me to arrange with assurance the following seven concepts as it's proper components: (1) to become a man of knowledge was a matter of learning; (2) a man of knowledge had unbending intent; (3) a man of knowledge had clarity of mind; (4) to become a man of knowledge was a matter of strenuous labor; (5) a man of knowledge was a warrior; (6) to become a man of knowledge was an unceasing process; and (7) a man of knowledge had an ally.

These seven concepts were themes. They ran through the teachings, determining the character of don Juan's entire knowledge. Inasmuch as the operational goal of his teachings was to produce a man of knowledge, everything he taught was imbued with the specific characteristics of each of the seven themes. Together they construed the concept "man of know ledge" as a way of conducting oneself, a way of behaving that was the end result of a long and hazardous training. "Man of knowledge", however, was not a guide to behavior, but a set of principles encompassing all the unordinary circumstances pertinent to the knowledge being taught.

Each one of the seven themes was composed, in turn, of various other concepts, which covered their different facets.

From don Juan's statements it was possible to assume that a man of knowledge could be a *diablero,* that is, a black sorcerer. He stated that his teacher was a *diablero* and so was he in the past, although he had ceased to be concerned with certain aspects of the practice of sorcery. Since the goal of his teaching was to show how to become a man of knowledge, and since his knowledge consisted of being a *diablero,* there may have been an inherent connection between man of knowledge and *diablero*. Although don Juan never used the two terms interchangeably, the likelihood that they were connected raised the possibility that "man of knowledge" with it's seven themes and their component concepts covered, theoretically, all the circumstances that might have arisen in the course of becoming a diablero.

### *To Become a Man of Knowledge Was a Matter of Learning.*

The first theme made it implicit that learning was the only possible way of becoming a man of knowledge, and that in turn implied the act of making a resolute effort to achieve an end. To become a man of knowledge was the end result of a process, as opposed to an immediate acquisition through an act of grace or through bestowal by supernatural powers. The plausibility of learning how to become a man of knowledge warranted the existence of a system for teaching one how to accomplish it.

The first theme had three components: (1) there were no overt requirements for becoming a man of knowledge; (2) there were some covert requirements; (3) the decision as to who could learn to become a man of knowledge was made by an impersonal power.

Apparently there were no overt prerequisites that would have determined who was, or who was not, qualified to learn how to become a man of knowledge. Ideally, the task was open to anybody who wished to pursue it. Yet, in practice, such a stand was inconsistent with the fact that don Juan as a teacher selected his apprentices.

In fact, any teacher under the circumstances would have selected his apprentices by means of matching them against some covert prerequisites. The specific nature of these prerequisites was never formalized; don Juan only insinuated that there were certain clues one had to bear in mind when viewing a prospective apprentice. The clues he alluded to were supposed to reveal whether or not the candidate had a certain disposition of character, which don Juan called "unbending intent".

Nevertheless, the final decision in matters of who could learn to become a man of knowledge was left to an impersonal power that was known to don Juan, but was outside his sphere of volition. The impersonal power was credited with pointing out the right person by allowing him to perform a deed of extraordinary nature, or by creating a set of peculiar circumstances around that person. Hence, there was never a conflict between the absence of overt prerequisites and the existence of undisclosed, covert prerequisites.

The man who was singled out in that manner became the apprentice. Don Juan called him the *escogido,* the "one who was chosen." But to be an escogido meant more than to be a mere apprentice. An escogido, by the sheer act of being selected by a power, was considered already to be different from ordinary men. He was considered already to be the recipient of a minimum amount of power which was supposed to be augmented by learning.

But learning was a process of unending quest, and the power that made the original decision, or a similar power, was expected to make similar decisions on the issue of whether an *escogido* could continue learning or whether he had been defeated. Those decisions were manifested through omens that occurred at any point of the teachings. In that respect, any peculiar circumstances surrounding an apprentice were considered to be such omens.

### *A Man of Knowledge Had Unbending Intent.*

The idea that a man of knowledge needed unbending intent referred to the exercise of volition. Having unbending intent meant having the will to execute a necessary procedure by maintaining oneself at all times rigidly within the boundaries of the knowledge being taught. A man of knowledge needed a rigid will in order to endure the obligatory quality that every act possessed when it was performed in the context of his knowledge.

The obligatory quality of all the acts performed in such a context, and their being inflexible and predetermined, were no doubt unpleasant to any man, for which reason a modicum of unbending intent was sought as the only covert requirement needed by a prospective apprentice.

Unbending intent was composed of (1) frugality, (2) soundness of judgment, and (3) lack of freedom to innovate.

A man of knowledge needed frugality because the majority of the obligatory acts dealt with instances or with elements that were either outside the boundaries of ordinary everyday life, or were not customary in ordinary activity, and the man who had to act in accordance with them needed an extraordinary effort every time he took action. It was implicit that one could have been capable of such an extraordinary effort only by being frugal with any other activity that did not deal directly with such predetermined actions.

Since all acts were predetermined and obligatory, a man of knowledge needed soundness of judgement. This concept did not imply common sense, but did imply the capacity to assess the circumstances surrounding any need to act. A guide for such an assessment was provided by bringing together, as rationales, all the parts of the teachings which were at one's command at the given moment in which any action had to be carried out. Thus, the guide was always changing as more parts were learned; yet it always implied the conviction that any obligatory act one may have had to perform was, in fact, the most appropriate under the circumstances.

Because all acts were pre-established and compulsory, having to carry them out meant lack of freedom to innovate. Don Juan's system of imparting knowledge was so well established that there was no possibility of altering it in any way.

### *A Man of Knowledge Had Clarity of Mind.*

Clarity of mind was the theme that provided a sense of direction. The fact that all acts were predetermined meant that one's orientation within the knowledge being taught was equally predetermined; as a consequence, clarity of mind supplied only a sense of direction. It reaffirmed continuously the validity of the course being taken through the component ideas of (1) freedom to seek a path, (2) knowledge of the specific purpose, and (3) being fluid.

It was believed that one had freedom to seek a path. Having the freedom to choose was not incongruous with the lack of freedom to innovate; these two ideas were not in opposition nor did they interfere with each other. Freedom to seek a path referred to the liberty to choose among different possibilities of action which were equally effective and usable. The criterion for choosing was the advantage of one possibility over others, based on one's preference. As a matter of fact, the freedom to choose a path imparted a sense of direction through the expression of personal inclinations.

Another way to create a sense of direction was through the idea that there was a specific purpose for every action performed in the context of the knowledge being taught. Therefore, a man of knowledge needed clarity of mind in order to match his own specific reasons for acting with the specific purpose of every action. The knowledge of the specific purpose of every action was the guide he used to judge the circumstances surrounding any need to act.

Another facet of clarity of mind was the idea that a man of knowledge, in order to reinforce the performance of his obligatory actions, needed to assemble all the resources that the teachings had placed at his command. This was the idea of being fluid. It created a sense of direction by giving one the feeling of being malleable and resourceful. The compulsory quality of all acts would have imbued one with a sense of stiffness or sterility had it not been for the idea that a man of knowledge needed to be fluid.

*To Become a Man of Knowledge Was a Matter of Strenuous Labor.*

A man of knowledge had to possess or had to develop in the course of his training an all-around capacity for exertion. Don Juan stated that to become a man of knowledge was a matter of strenuous labor. Strenuous labor denoted a capacity (1) to put forth dramatic exertion; (2) to achieve efficacy; and (3) to meet challenge.

In the path of a man of knowledge drama was undoubtedly the outstanding single issue, and a special type of exertion was needed for responding to circumstances that required dramatic exploitation; that is to say, a man of knowledge needed dramatic exertion. Taking don Juan's behavior as an example, at first glance it may have seemed that his dramatic exertion was only his own idiosyncratic preference for histrionics. Yet his dramatic exertion was always much more than acting; it was rather a profound state of belief. He imparted through dramatic exertion the peculiar quality of finality to all the acts he performed. As a consequence, then, his acts were set on a stage in which death was one of the main protagonists. It was implicit that death was a real possibility in the course of learning because of the inherently dangerous nature of the items with which a man of knowledge dealt; then, it was logical that the dramatic exertion created by the conviction that death was a ubiquitous player was more than histrionics.

Exertion entailed not only drama, but also the need of efficacy. Exertion had to be effective; it had to possess the quality of being properly channeled, of being suitable. The idea of impending death created not only the drama needed for overall emphasis, but also the conviction that every action involved a struggle for survival, the conviction that annihilation would result if one's exertion did not meet the requirement of being efficacious.

Exertion also entailed the idea of challenge, that is, the act of testing whether, and proving that, one was capable of performing a proper act within the rigorous boundaries of the knowledge being taught.

*A Man of Knowledge Was a Warrior.*

The existence of a man of knowledge was an unceasing struggle, and the idea that he was a warrior, leading a warrior's life, provided one with the means for achieving emotional stability. The idea of a man at war encompassed four concepts: (1) a man of knowledge had to have respect; (2) he had to have fear; (3) he had to be wide-awake; (4) he had to be self-confident. Hence, to be a warrior was a form of self-discipline which emphasized individual accomplishment; yet it was a stand in which personal interests were reduced to a minimum, as in most instances personal interest was incompatible with the rigor needed to perform any predetermined, obligatory act.

A man of knowledge in his role of warrior was obligated to have an attitude of deferential regard for the items with which he dealt; he had to imbue everything related to his knowledge with profound respect in order to place everything in a meaningful perspective. Having respect was equivalent to having assessed one's insignificant resources when facing the Unknown.

If one remained in that frame of thought, the idea of respect was logically extended to include oneself, for one was as unknown as the Unknown itself. The exercise of so sobering a feeling of respect transformed the apprenticeship of this specific knowledge, which may otherwise have appeared to be absurd, into a very rational alternative.

Another necessity of a warrior's life was the need to experience and carefully to evaluate the sensation of fear. The ideal was that, in spite of fear, one had to proceed with the course of one's acts. Fear was supposed to be conquered and there was an alleged time in the life of a man of knowledge when it was vanquished, but first one had to be conscious of being afraid and duly to evaluate that sensation. Don Juan asserted that one was capable of conquering fear only by facing it.

As a warrior, a man of knowledge also needed to be wide-awake. A man at war had to be on the alert in order to be cognizant of most of the factors pertinent to the two mandatory aspects of awareness: (1) awareness of intent and (2) awareness of the expected flux.

Awareness of intent was the act of being cognizant of the factors involved in the relationship between the specific purpose of any obligatory act and one's own specific purpose for acting. Since all the obligatory acts had a definite purpose, a man of knowledge had to be wide-awake; that is, he needed to be capable at all times of matching the definite purpose of every obligatory act with the definite reason that he had in mind for desiring to act.

A man of knowledge, by being aware of that relationship, was also capable of being cognizant of what was believed to be the expected flux. What I have called here the "awareness of the expected flux" referred to the certainty that one was capable of detecting at all times the important variables involved in the relationship between the specific purpose of every act and one's specific reason for acting. By being aware of the expected flux one was supposed to detect the most subtle changes. That deliberate awareness of changes accounted for the recognition and interpretation of omens and of other unordinary events.

The last aspect of the idea of a warrior's behavior was the need for self-confidence, that is, the assurance that the specific purpose of an act one may have chosen to perform was the only plausible alternative for one's own specific reasons for acting. Without self-confidence, one would have been incapable of fulfilling one of the most important aspects of the teachings: the capacity to claim knowledge as power.

### *To Become a Man of Knowledge Was an Unceasing Process.*

Being a man of knowledge was not a condition entailing permanency. There was never the certainty that, by carrying out the predetermined steps of the knowledge being taught, one would become a man of knowledge. It was implicit that the function of the steps was only to show how to become a man of knowledge. Thus, becoming a man of knowledge was a task that could not be fully achieved; rather, it was an unceasing process comprising (1) the idea that one had to renew the quest of becoming a man of knowledge; (2) the idea of one's impermanency; and (3) the idea that one had to follow the path with heart.

The constant renewal of the quest of becoming a man of knowledge was expressed in the theme of the four symbolic enemies encountered on the path of learning: fear, clarity, power, and old age. Renewing the quest implied the gaining and the maintenance of control over oneself. A true man of knowledge was expected to battle each of the four enemies, in succession, until the last moment of his life, in order to keep himself actively engaged in becoming a man of knowledge. Yet, despite the truthful renewal of the quest, the odds were inevitably against man; he would succumb to his last symbolic enemy. This was the idea of impermanency.

Off-setting the negative value of one's impermanency was the notion that one had to follow the "path with heart". The path with heart was a metaphorical way of asserting that in spite of being impermanent one still had to proceed and had to be capable of finding satisfaction and personal fulfillment in the act of choosing the most amenable alternative and identifying oneself completely with it.

Don Juan synthesized the rationale of his whole knowledge in the metaphor that the important thing for him was to find a path with heart and then travel it's length, meaning that the identification with the amenable alternative was enough for him. The journey by itself was sufficient; any hope of arriving at a permanent position was outside the boundaries of his knowledge.

## The Second Unit

### *A Man of Knowledge Had an Ally*

The idea that a man of knowledge had an ally was the most important of the seven component themes, for it was the only one that was indispensable to explaining what a man of knowledge was. In don Juan's classificatory scheme a man of knowledge had an ally, whereas the average man did not, and having an ally was what made him different from ordinary men.

Don Juan described an ally as being ”a power capable of transporting a man beyond the boundaries of himself”; that is, an ally was a power that allowed one to transcend the realm of ordinary reality. Consequently, to have an ally implied having power; and the fact that a man of knowledge had an ally was by itself proof that the operational goal of the teachings had been fulfilled. Since that goal was to show how to become a man of knowledge, and since a man of knowledge was one who had an ally, another way of describing the operational goal of don Juan's teachings was to say that they also showed how to obtain an ally. The concept "man of knowledge", as a sorcerer's philosophical frame, had meaning for anyone who wanted to live within that frame only insofar as he had an ally.

I have classified this last component theme of man of knowledge as the second main structural unit because of it's indispensability for explaining what a man of knowledge was.

In don Juan's teachings, there were two allies. The first was contained in the *Datura* plants commonly known as Jimson weed. Don Juan called that ally by one of the Spanish names of the plant, *yerba del diablo* (devil's weed). According to him any species of *Datura* was the container of the ally. Yet every sorcerer had to grow a patch of one species which he called his own, not only in the sense that the plants were his private property, but in the sense that they were personally identified with him.

Don Juan's own plants belonged to the species *inoxia;* there seemed to be no correlation, however, between that fact and differences that may have existed between the two species of

*Datura* accessible to him.

The second ally was contained in a mushroom I identified as belonging to the genus *Psilocybe;* it was possibly *Psilocybe mexicana,* but the classification was only tentative because I was incapable of procuring a specimen for laboratory analysis.

Don Juan called this ally *humito* (little smoke), suggesting that the ally was analogous to smoke or to the smoking mixture he made with the mushroom. The smoke was referred to as if it were the real container, yet he made it clear that the power was associated with only one species of *Psilocybe;* thus special care was needed at the time of collecting in order not to confuse it with any of a dozen other species of the same genus which grew in the same area.

An ally as a meaningful concept included the following ideas and their ramifications: (1) an ally was formless; (2) an ally was perceived as a quality; (3) an ally was tamable; (4) an ally had a rule.

### *An Ally Was Formless*

An ally was believed to be an entity existing outside and independent of oneself, yet in spite of being a separate entity an ally was believed to be formless. I have established "formlessness" as a condition that is the opposite of "having definite form", a distinction made in view of the fact that there were other powers similar to an ally which had a definitely perceivable form. An ally's condition of formlessness meant that it did not possess a distinct, or a vaguely defined, or even a recognizable, form; and such a condition implied that an ally was not visible at any time.

### *An Ally Was Perceived As a Quality*

A sequel to an ally's formlessness was another condition expressed in the idea that an ally was perceived only as a quality of the senses; that is to say, since an ally was formless it's presence was noticed only by it's effects on the sorcerer. Don Juan classified some of those effects as having anthropomorphic qualities. He depicted an ally as having the character of a human being, thus implying that an individual sorcerer was in the position of choosing the most suitable ally by matching his own character with an ally's alleged anthropomorphic characteristics.

The two allies involved in the teachings were presented by don Juan as having a set of antithetical qualities.

Don Juan categorized the ally contained in *Datura inoxia* as having two qualities: it was woman-like, and it was a giver of superfluous power. He thought these two qualities were thoroughly undesirable. His statements on the subject were definite, but he indicated at the same time that his value judgment on the matter was merely a personalistic choice.

The most important characteristic was undoubtedly what don Juan called it's woman-like nature. The fact that it was depicted as being woman-like did not mean, however, that the ally was a female power. It seemed that the analogy of a woman may have been only a metaphorical way don Juan used to describe what he thought to be the unpleasant effects of the ally. Besides, the Spanish name of the plant, *yerba,* because of it's feminine gender, may have also helped to create the female analogy. At any rate, the personification of this ally as a woman-like power ascribed to it the following anthropomorphic qualities: (1) it was possessive; (2) it was violent; (3) it was unpredictable; and (4) it had deleterious effects.

Don Juan believed that the ally had the capacity to enslave the men who became it's followers; he explained this capacity as the quality of being possessive, which he correlated with a woman's character. The ally possessed it's followers by bestowing power on them, by creating a feeling of dependency, and by giving them physical strength and well-being.

This ally was also believed to be violent. It's woman-like violence was expressed in it's forcing it's followers to engage in disruptive acts of brute force. And this specific characteristic made it best suited for men of fierce natures who wanted to find in violence a key to personal power.

Another woman-like characteristic was unpredictability. For don Juan it meant that the ally's effects were never consistent; rather, they were supposed to change erratically, and there was no discernible way of predicting them. The ally's inconsistency was to be counteracted by the sorcerer's meticulous and dramatic care of every detail of it's handling. Any unfavorable turn that was unaccountable, as a result of error or mishandling, was explained as a result of the ally's woman like unpredictability.

Because of it's possessiveness, violence, and unpredictability, this ally was thought to have an overall deleterious effect on the character of it's followers. Don Juan believed that the ally willfully strove to transmit it's woman-like characteristics, and that it's effort to do so actually succeeded.

But, alongside it's woman-like nature, this ally had another facet which was also perceived as a quality: it was a giver of superfluous power. Don Juan was very emphatic on this point, and he stressed that as a generous giver of power the ally was unsurpassable. It was purported to furnish it's followers with physical strength, a feeling of audacity, and the prowess to perform extraordinary deeds. In don Juan's judgment, however, so exorbitant a power was superfluous; he stated that, for himself at least, there was no need of it any more. Nevertheless, he presented it as a strong incentive for a prospective man of knowledge, should the latter have a natural inclination to seek power.

Don Juan's idiosyncratic point of view was that the ally contained in *Psilocybe mexicana,* on the other hand, had the most adequate and most valuable characteristics: (1) it was male-like, and (2) it was a giver of ecstasy.

He depicted this ally as being the antithesis of the one contained in *Datura* plants. He considered it to be male-like, manly. It's condition of masculinity seemed to be analogous to the female-like condition of the other ally; that is, it was not a male power, but don Juan classified it's effects in terms of what he considered to be manly behavior. In this instance, too, the masculine gender of the Spanish word *humito* may have suggested the analogy to a male power.

The anthropomorphic qualities of this ally which don Juan judged to be proper to a man were the following: (1) it was dispassionate; (2) it was gentle; (3) it was predictable; and (4) it had beneficial effects.

Don Juan's idea of the dispassionate nature of the ally was expressed in the belief that it was fair, that it never actually demanded extravagant acts from it's followers. It never made men it's slaves, because it did not bestow easy power on them; on the contrary, Humito was hard, but just, with it's followers.

The fact that the ally did not elicit overt violent behavior made it gentle. It was supposed to induce a sensation of bodilessness, and thus don Juan presented it as being calm, gentle, and a giver of peace.

It was also predictable. Don Juan described it's effects on all it's individual followers and in the successive experiences of any single man as being constant; in other words, it's effects did not vary or, if they did, they were so similar that they were counted as being the same.

As a consequence of being dispassionate, gentle, and predictable, this ally was thought to have another manly characteristic: a beneficial effect on the character of it's followers. Humito's manliness was supposed to create a very rare condition of emotional stability in them. Don Juan believed that under the ally's guidance one would temper one's heart and acquire balance.

A corollary of all the ally's manly characteristics was believed to be a capacity to give ecstasy. This other facet of it's nature was perceived also as a quality. Humito was credited with removing the body of it's followers, thus allowing them to execute specialized forms of activity pertinent to a state of bodilessness. And don Juan maintained that those specialized forms of activity led unavoidably to a condition of ecstasy. The ally contained in the *Psilocybe* was said to be ideal for men whose natures predisposed them to seek contemplation.

### *An Ally Was Tamable*

The idea that an ally was tamable implied that as a power it had the potential of being used. Don Juan explained it as an ally's innate capacity of being utilizable; after a sorcerer had tamed an ally he was thought to be in command of it's specialized power which meant that he could manipulate it to his own advantage. An ally's capacity of being tamed was counterposed to the incapacity of other powers, which were similar to an ally except that they did not yield to being manipulated.

The manipulation of an ally had two aspects: (1) an ally was a vehicle; (2) an ally was a helper.

An ally was a vehicle in the sense that it served to transport a sorcerer into the realm of nonordinary reality. Insofar as my personal knowledge was concerned, the allies both served as vehicles, although the function had different implications for each of them.

The overall undesirable qualities of the ally contained in *Datura inoxia,* especially it's quality of unpredictability, turned it into a dangerous, undependable vehicle. Ritual was the only possible protection against it's inconsistency, but that was never enough to ensure the ally's stability; a sorcerer using this ally as a vehicle had to wait for favorable omens before proceeding.

The ally contained in *Psilocybe mexicana,* on the other hand, was thought to be a steady and predictable vehicle as a result of all it's valuable qualities. As a consequence of it's predictability, a sorcerer using this ally did not need to engage in any kind of preparatory ritual.

The other aspect of an ally's manipulability was expressed in the idea that an ally was a helper. To be a helper meant that an ally, after serving a sorcerer as a vehicle, was again usable as an aid or a guide to assist him in achieving whatever goal he had in mind in going into the realm of nonordinary reality.

In their capacity as helpers, the two allies had different, unique properties. The complexity and the applicability of these properties increased as one advanced on the learning path. But, in general terms, the ally contained in *Datura inoxia* was believed to be an extraordinary helper, and this capacity was thought to be a corollary of it's facility to give superfluous power. The ally contained in *Psilocybe mexicana,* however, was considered to be an even more extraordinary helper. Don Juan thought it was matchless in the function of being a helper, which he regarded as an extension of it's overall valuable qualities.

## The Third Unit

### *An Ally Had a Rule*

Alone among the components of the concept "ally," the idea that an ally had a rule was indispensable for explaining what an ally was. Because of that indispensability I have placed it as the third main unit in this structural scheme.

The rule, which don Juan called also the law, was the rigid organizing concept regulating all the actions that had to be executed and the behavior that had to be observed throughout the process of handling an ally. The rule was transmitted verbally from teacher to apprentice, ideally without alteration, through the sustained interaction between them. The rule was thus more than a body of regulations; it was, rather, a series of outlines of activity governing the course to be followed in the process of manipulating an ally.

Undoubtedly many elements would have fulfilled don Juan's definition of an ally as a "power capable of transporting a man beyond the boundaries of himself". Anyone accepting that definition could reasonably have conceived that anything possessing such a capability would be an ally. And logically, even bodily conditions produced by hunger, fatigue, illness, and the like could have served as allies, for they might have possessed the capacity of transporting a man beyond the realm of ordinary reality. But the idea that an ally had a rule eliminated all these possibilities. An ally was a power that had a rule. All the other possibilities could not be considered as allies because they had no rule.

As a concept the rule comprehended the following ideas and their various components: (1) the rule was inflexible; (2) the rule was non-cumulative; (3) the rule was corroborated in ordinary reality; (4) the rule was corroborated in nonordinary reality; and (5) the rule was corroborated by special consensus.

### *The Rule Was Inflexible*

The outlines of activity forming the body of the rule were unavoidable steps that one had to follow in order to achieve the operational goal of the teachings. This compulsory quality of the rule was rendered in the idea that it was inflexible. The inflexibility of the rule was intimately related to the idea of efficacy. Dramatic exertion created an incessant battle for survival, and under those conditions only the most effective act that one could perform would ensure one's survival. As individualistic points of reference were not permitted, the rule prescribed the actions constituting the only alternative for survival. Thus the rule had to be inflexible; it had to require a definite compliance to it's dictum.

Compliance with the rule, however, was not absolute. In the course of the teachings I recorded one instance in which it's inflexibility was canceled out. Don Juan explained that example of deviation as a special favor stemming from direct intervention of an ally. In this instance, owing to my unintentional error in handling the ally contained in *Datura inoxia,* the rule had been breached. Don Juan extrapolated from the occurrence that an ally had the capacity to intervene directly and withhold the deleterious, and usually fatal, effect resulting from noncompliance with it's rule. Such evidence of flexibility was thought to be always the product of a strong bond of affinity between the ally and it's follower.

### *The Rule Was Non-cumulative*

The assumption here was that all conceivable methods of manipulating an ally had already been used. Theoretically, the rule was non-cumulative; there was no possibility of augmenting it. The idea of the noncumulative nature of the rule was also relative to the concept of efficacy. Since the rule prescribed the only effective alternative for one's personal survival, any attempt to change it or to alter it's course by innovation was considered to be not only a superfluous act, but a deadly one. One had only the possibility of adding to one's personal knowledge of the rule, either under the teacher's guidance or under the special guidance of the ally itself. The latter was considered to be an instance of direct acquisition of knowledge, not an addition to the body of the rule.

### *The Rule Was Corroborated in Ordinary Reality*

Corroboration of the rule meant the act of verifying it, the act of attesting to it's validity by confirming it pragmatically in an experimental manner. Because the rule dealt with situations of ordinary and of nonordinary reality, it's corroboration took place in both areas.

The situations of ordinary reality with which the rule dealt were most often remarkably uncommon situations, but, no matter how unusual they were, the rule was corroborated in ordinary reality. For that reason it has been considered to fall beyond the scope of this work, and should properly be the realm of another study. That part of the rule concerned the details of the procedures employed in recognizing, collecting, mixing, preparing, and caring for the power plants in which the allies were contained, the details of other procedures involved in the uses of such power plants, and other similar minutiae.

### *The Rule Was Corroborated in Nonordinary Reality*

The rule was also corroborated in nonordinary reality, and the corroboration was carried out in the same pragmatic, experimental manner of validation as would have been employed in situations of ordinary reality. The idea of a pragmatic corroboration involved two concepts: (1) meetings with the ally, which I have called the states of nonordinary reality; and (2) the specific purposes of the rule.

*The states of nonordinary reality.* — The two plants in which the allies were contained, when used in conformity with the allies' respective rules, produced states of peculiar perception which don Juan classified as meetings with the ally. He placed extraordinary emphasis on eliciting them, an emphasis summed up in the idea that one had to meet with the ally as many times as possible in order to verify it's rule in a pragmatic, experimental manner. The assumption was that the proportion of the rule that was likely to be verified was in direct correlation with the number of times one met with the ally.

The exclusive method of inducing a meeting with the ally was, naturally, through the appropriate use of the plant in which the ally was contained. Nonetheless, don Juan hinted that at a certain advanced stage of learning the meetings could have taken place without the use of the plant; that is to say, they could have been elicited by an act of volition alone.

I have called the meetings with the ally states of nonordinary reality. I chose the term "nonordinary reality" because it conformed with don Juan's assertion that such meetings took place in a continuum of reality, a reality that was only slightly different from the ordinary reality of everyday life. Consequently, nonordinary reality had specific characteristics that could have been assessed in presumably equal terms by everyone. Don Juan never formulated these characteristics in a definite manner, but his reticence seemed to stem from the idea that each man had to claim knowledge as a matter of personal nature.

The following categories, which I consider the specific characteristics of nonordinary reality, were drawn from my personal experience. Yet, in spite of their seemingly idiosyncratic origin, they were reinforced and developed by don Juan under the premises of his knowledge; he conducted his teachings as if these characteristics were inherent in nonordinary reality: (1) nonordinary reality was utilizable; (2) nonordinary reality had component elements.

The first characteristics— that nonordinary reality was utilizable— implied that it was fit for actual service. Don Juan explained time and time again that the encompassing concern of his knowledge was the pursuit of practical results, and that such a pursuit was pertinent in ordinary as well as in nonordinary reality. He maintained that in his knowledge there were the means of putting nonordinary reality into service, in the same way as ordinary reality. According to that assertion, the states induced by the allies were elicited with the deliberate intention of being used. In this particular instance don Juan's rationale was that the meetings with the allies were set up to learn their secrets, and this rationale served as a rigid guide to screen out other personalistic motives that one may have had for seeking the states of nonordinary reality.

The second characteristic of nonordinary reality was that it had component elements. Those component elements were the items, the actions, and the events that one perceived, seemingly with one's senses, as being the content of a state of nonordinary reality. The total picture of nonordinary reality was made up of elements that appeared to possess qualities both of the elements of ordinary reality and of the components of an ordinary dream, although they were not on a par with either one.

According to my personal judgment, the component elements of nonordinary reality had three unique characteristics: (1) stability, (2) singularity, and (3) lack of ordinary consensus. These qualities made them stand on their own as discrete units possessing an unmistakable individuality.

The component elements of nonordinary reality had stability in the sense that they were constant. In this respect they were similar to the component elements of ordinary reality, for they neither shifted nor disappeared, as would the component elements of ordinary dreams. It seemed as if every detail that made up a component element of nonordinary reality had a concreteness of it's own, a concreteness I perceived as being extraordinarily stable. The stability was so pronounced that it allowed me to establish the criterion that, in nonordinary reality, one always possessed the capacity to come to a halt in order to examine any of the component elements for what appeared to be an indefinite length of time. The application of this criterion permitted me to differentiate the states of nonordinary reality used by don Juan from other states of peculiar perception which may have appeared to be nonordinary reality, but which did not yield to this criterion.

The second exclusive characteristic of the component elements of nonordinary reality— their singularity— meant that every detail of the component elements was a single, individual item; it seemed as if each detail was isolated from others, or as if details appeared one at a time. The singularity of the component elements seemed further to create a unique necessity, which may have been common to everybody: the imperative need, the urge, to amalgamate all isolated details into a total scene, a total composite. Don Juan was obviously aware of that need and used it on every possible occasion.

The third unique characteristic of the component elements, and the most dramatic of all, was their lack of ordinary consensus. One perceived the component elements while being in a state of complete solitude, which was more like the aloneness of a man witnessing by himself an unfamiliar scene in ordinary reality than like the solitude of dreaming. As the stability of the component elements of nonordinary reality enabled one to stop and examine any of them for what appeared to be an indefinite length of time, it seemed almost as if they were elements of everyday life; however, the difference between the component elements of the two states of reality was their capacity for ordinary consensus. By ordinary consensus I mean the tacit or the implicit agreement on the component elements of everyday life which fellow men give to one another in various ways. For the component elements of nonordinary reality, ordinary consensus was unattainable. In this respect nonordinary reality was closer to a state of dreaming than to ordinary reality. And yet, because of their unique characteristics of stability and singularity, the component elements of nonordinary reality had a compelling quality of realness which seemed to foster the necessity of validating their existence in terms of consensus.

*The specific purpose of the rule.*—The other component of the concept that the rule was verified in nonordinary reality was the idea that the rule had a specific purpose. That purpose was the achievement, by using an ally, of a utilitarian goal. In the context of don Juan's teachings, it was assumed that the rule was learned by corroborating it in ordinary and nonordinary reality. The decisive facet of the teachings was, however, corroboration of the rule in the states of nonordinary reality; and what was corroborated in the actions and elements perceived in nonordinary reality was the specific purpose of the rule. That specific purpose dealt with the ally's power, that is, with the manipulation of an ally first as a vehicle and then as a helper, but don Juan always treated each instance of the specific purpose of the rule as a single unit implicitly covering these two areas.

Because the specific purpose referred to the manipulation of the ally's power, it had an inseparable sequel— the manipulatory techniques.

The manipulatory techniques were the actual procedures, the actual operations, undertaken in each instance involving the manipulation of an ally's power. The idea that an ally was manipulatable warranted it's usefulness in the achievement of pragmatic goals, and the manipulatory techniques were the procedures that supposedly rendered the ally usable.

Specific purpose and manipulatory techniques formed a single unit which a sorcerer had to know exactly in order to command his ally with efficacy.

Don Juan's teachings included the following specific purposes of the two allies' rules. I have arranged them here in the same order in which he presented them to me.

The first specific purpose that was verified in nonordinary reality was testing with the ally contained in *Datura inoxia*. The manipulatory technique was ingesting a potion made with a section of the root of the *Datura* plant. Ingesting that potion produced a shallow state of nonordinary reality, which don Juan used for testing me in order to determine whether or not, as a prospective apprentice, I had affinity with the ally contained in the plant. The potion was supposed to produce either a sensation of unspecified physical well-being or a feeling of great discomfort, effects that don Juan judged to be, respectively, a sign of affinity or of the lack of it.

The second specific purpose was divination. It was also part of the rule of the ally contained in *Datura inoxia*. Don Juan considered divination to be a form of specialized movement, on the assumption that a sorcerer was transported by the ally to a particular compartment of nonordinary reality where he was capable of divining events that were otherwise unknown to him.

The manipulatory technique of the second specific purpose was a process of ingestion-absorption. A potion made with *Datura* root was ingested, and an unguent made with *Datura* seeds was rubbed on the temporal and frontal areas of the head. I had used the term "ingestion-absorption" because ingestion might have been aided by skin absorption in producing a state of nonordinary reality, or skin absorption might have been aided by ingestion.

This manipulatory technique required the utilization of other elements besides the *Datura* plant, in this instance two lizards. They were supposed to serve the sorcerer as instruments of movement, meaning here the peculiar perception of being in a particular realm in which one was capable of hearing a lizard talk and then of visualizing whatever it had said. Don Juan explained such phenomena as the lizards answering the questions that had been posed for divination.

The third specific purpose of the rule of the ally contained in the *Datura* plants dealt with another specialized form of movement, bodily flight. As don Juan explained, a sorcerer using this ally was capable of flying bodily over enormous distances; the bodily flight was the sorcerer's capacity to move through nonordinary reality and then to return at will to ordinary reality.

The manipulatory technique of the third specific purpose was also a process of ingestion-absorption. A potion made with *Datura* root was ingested, and an unguent made with *Datura* seeds was rubbed on the soles of the feet, on the inner part of both legs, and on the genitals.

The third specific purpose was not corroborated in depth; don Juan implied that he had not disclosed other aspects of the manipulatory technique which would permit a sorcerer to acquire a sense of direction while moving.

The fourth specific purpose of the rule was testing, the ally being contained in *Psilocybe mexicana*. The testing was not intended to determine affinity or lack of affinity with the ally, but rather to be an unavoidable first trial, or the first meeting with the ally.

The manipulatory technique for the fourth specific purpose utilized a smoking mixture made of dried mushrooms mixed with different parts of five other plants, none of which was known to have hallucinogenic properties. The rule placed the emphasis on the act of inhaling the smoke from the mixture; the teacher thus used the word *humito* (little smoke) to refer to the ally contained in it. But I have called this process “ingestion-inhalation" because it was a combination of ingesting first and then of inhaling. The mushrooms, because of their softness, dried into a very fine dust which was rather difficult to burn. The other ingredients turned into shreds upon drying. These shreds were incinerated in the pipe bowl while the mushroom powder, which did not burn so easily, was drawn into the mouth and ingested. Logically, the quantity of dried mushrooms ingested was larger than the quantity of shreds burned and inhaled.

The effects of the first state of nonordinary reality elicited by *Psilocybe mexicana* gave rise to don Juan's brief discussion of the fifth specific purpose of the rule. It was concerned with movement— moving with the help of the ally contained in *Psilocybe mexicana* into and through inanimate objects or into and through animate beings. The complete manipulatory technique may have included hypnotic suggestion besides the process of ingestion-inhalation. Because don Juan presented this specific purpose only as a brief discussion which was not further verified, it was impossible for me to assess correctly any of it's aspects.

The sixth specific purpose of the rule verified in nonordinary reality, also involving the ally contained in *Psilocybe mexicana,* dealt with another aspect of movement— moving by adopting an alternate form. This aspect of movement was subjected to the most intensive verification. Don Juan asserted that assiduous practice was needed in order to master it. He maintained that the ally contained in *Psilocybe mexicana* had the inherent capacity to cause the sorcerer's body to disappear; thus the idea of adopting an alternate form was a logical possibility for achieving movement under the conditions of bodilessness. Another logical possibility for achieving movement was, naturally, moving through objects and beings, which don Juan had discussed briefly.

The manipulatory technique of the sixth specific purpose of the rule included not only ingestion-inhalation but also, according to all indications, hypnotic suggestion. Don Juan had put forth such a suggestion during the transitional stages into nonordinary reality, and also during the early part of the states of nonordinary reality. He classified the seemingly hypnotic process as being only his personal supervision, meaning that he had not revealed to me the complete manipulatory technique at that particular time.

The adoption of an alternate form did not mean that a sorcerer was free to take, on the spur of the moment, any form he wanted to take; on the contrary, it implied a lifelong training to achieve a preconceived form. The preconceived form don Juan had preferred to adopt was that of a crow, and consequently he emphasized that particular form in his teachings. He made it very clear, nonetheless, that a crow was his personal choice, and that there were innumerable other possible preconceived forms.

## The Fourth Unit

### *The Rule Was Corroborated by Special Consensus*

Among the component concepts forming the rule, the one that was indispensable for explaining it was the idea that the rule was corroborated by special consensus; all the other component concepts were insufficient by themselves for explaining the meaning of the rule.

Don Juan made it very clear that an ally was not bestowed on a sorcerer, but that a sorcerer learned to manipulate the ally through the process of corroborating it's rule. The complete learning process involved verification of the rule in nonordinary reality as well as in ordinary reality. Yet the crucial facet of don Juan's teachings was corroboration of the rule in a pragmatic and experimental manner in the context of what one perceived as being the component elements of nonordinary reality. But those component elements were not subject to ordinary consensus, and if one was incapable of obtaining agreement on their existence, their perceived realness would have been only an illusion. As a man would have to be by himself in nonordinary reality, by reason of his solitariness whatever he perceived would have to be idiosyncratic. The solitariness and the idiosyncrasies were a consequence of the assumed fact that no fellow man could give one ordinary consensus on one's perceptions.

At this point don Juan brought in the most important constituent part of his teachings: he provided me with special consensus on the actions and the elements I had perceived in nonordinary reality, actions and elements that were believed to corroborate the rule. In don Juan's teachings, special consensus meant tacit or implicit agreement on the component elements of nonordinary reality, which he, in his capacity as teacher, gave me as the apprentice of his knowledge. This special consensus was not in any way fraudulent or spurious, such as the one two persons might give each other in describing the component elements of their individual dreams. The special consensus don Juan supplied was systematic, and to provide it he may have needed the totality of his knowledge. With the acquisition of systematic consensus the actions and the elements perceived in nonordinary reality became consensually real, which meant, in don Juan's classificatory scheme, that the rule of the ally had been corroborated. The rule had meaning as a concept, then, only inasmuch as it was subject to special consensus, for without special agreement about it's corroboration the rule would have been a purely idiosyncratic construct.

Because of it's indispensability for explaining the rule, I have made the idea that the rule was corroborated by special consensus the fourth main unit of this structural scheme. This unit, because it was basically the interplay between two individuals, was composed of (1) the benefactor, or the guide into the knowledge being taught, the agent who supplied special consensus; (2) the apprentice, or the subject for whom special consensus was provided.

Failure or success in achieving the operational goal of the teachings rested on this unit. Thus, special consensus was the precarious culmination of the following process: A sorcerer had a distinctive feature, possession of an ally, which differentiated him from ordinary men. An ally was a power that had the special property of having a rule. And the unique characteristic of the rule was it's corroboration in nonordinary reality by means of special consensus.

### *The Benefactor*

The benefactor was the agent without whom the corroboration of the rule would have been impossible. In order to provide special consensus, he performed the two tasks of (1) preparing the background for special consensus on the corroboration of the rule, and (2) guiding special consensus.

*Preparing Special Consensus*

The benefactor's first task was to set the background necessary for bringing forth special consensus on corroboration of the rule. As my teacher, don Juan made me (1) experience other states of nonordinary reality which he explained as being quite apart from those elicited to corroborate the rule of the allies; (2) participate with him in certain special states of ordinary reality which he seemed to have produced himself; and (3) recapitulate ; each experience in detail. Don Juan's task of preparing special consensus consisted of strengthening and confirming the corroboration of the rule by giving special consensus on the component elements of these new states of nonordinary reality, and on the component elements of the special states of ordinary reality.

The other states of nonordinary reality which don Juan made me experience were induced by the ingestion of the cactus *Lophophora williamsii,* commonly known as peyote. Usually the top part of the cactus was cut off and stored until it had dried, and then it was chewed and ingested, but under special circumstances the top part was ingested while it was fresh. Ingestion, however, was not the only way to experience a state of nonordinary reality with *Lophophora williamsii.* Don Juan suggested that spontaneous states of nonordinary reality occurred under unique conditions, and he categorized them as gifts from or bestowals by the power contained in the plant.

nonordinary reality induced by *Lophophora williamsii* had three distinctive features: (1) it was believed to be produced by an entity called "Mescalito"; (2) it was utilizable; and (3) it had component elements.

Mescalito was purported to be a unique power, similar to an ally in the sense that it allowed one to transcend the boundaries of ordinary reality, but also quite different from an ally. Like an ally, Mescalito was contained in a definite plant, the cactus *Lophophora williamsii.* But unlike an ally, which was merely *contained in* a plant, Mescalito and this plant in which it was contained were the same; the plant was the center of overt manifestations of respect, the recipient of profound veneration. Don Juan firmly believed that under certain conditions, such as a state of profound acquiescence to Mescalito, the simple act of being contiguous to the cactus would induce a state of nonordinary reality.

But Mescalito did not have a rule, and for that reason it was not an ally even though it was capable of transporting a man outside the boundaries of ordinary reality. Not having a rule not only barred Mescalito from being used as an ally, for without a rule it could not conceivably be manipulated, but also made it a power remarkably different from an ally.

As a direct consequence of not having a rule, Mescalito was available to any man without the need of a long apprenticeship or the commitment to manipulatory techniques, as with an ally. And because it was available without any training, Mescalito was said to be a protector. To be a protector meant that it was accessible to anyone. Yet Mescalito as a protector was not accessible to every man, and with some individuals it was not compatible. According to don Juan, such incompatibility was caused by the discrepancy between Mescalito's "unbending morality" and the individual's own questionable character.

Mescalito was also a teacher. It was supposed to exercise didactic functions. It was a director, a guide to proper behavior. Mescalito taught the right way. Don Juan's idea of the right way seemed to be a sense of propriety, which consisted, not of righteousness in terms of morality, but of a tendency to simplify behavioral patterns in terms of the efficacy promoted by his teachings. Don Juan believed Mescalito taught simplification of behavior.

Mescalito was believed to be an entity. And as such it was purported to have a definite form that was usually not constant or predictable. This quality implied that Mescalito was perceived differently not only by different men, but also by the same man on different occasions. Don Juan expressed this idea in terms of Mescalito's ability to adopt any conceivable form. For individuals with whom it was compatible, however, it adopted an unchanging form after they had partaken of it over a period of years.

The nonordinary reality produced by Mescalito was utilizable, and in this respect was identical with that induced by an ally. The only difference was the *rationale* don Juan used in his teachings for eliciting it: one was supposed to seek "Mescalito's lessons on the right way."

The nonordinary reality produced by Mescalito also had component elements, and here again the states of nonordinary reality induced by Mescalito and by an ally were identical. In both, the characteristics of the component elements were stability, singularity, and lack of consensus.

The other procedure don Juan used to prepare the background for special consensus was to make me the coparticipant in special states of ordinary reality. A special state of ordinary reality was a situation that could be described in terms of the properties of everyday life, except that it might have been impossible to obtain ordinary consensus on it's component elements. Don Juan prepared the background for the special consensus on the corroboration of the rule by giving special consensus on the component elements of the special states of ordinary reality. These component elements were elements of everyday life whose existence could be confirmed only by don Juan through special agreement. This was a supposition on my part, because as co-participant in the special state of ordinary reality I believed that only don Juan, as the other co-participant, would know which component elements made up the special state of ordinary reality.

In my own personal judgment, the special states of ordinary reality were produced by don Juan, although he never claimed to have done so. It seemed that he produced them through a skillful manipulation of hints and suggestions to guide my behavior. I have called that process the "manipulation of cues.” It had two aspects: (1) cuing about the environment, and (2) cuing about behavior.

During the course of the teachings don Juan made me experience two such states. He may have produced the first through the process of cuing about the environment. Don Juan's *rationale* for producing it was that I needed a test to prove my good intentions, and only after he had given me special consensus on it's component elements did he consent to begin his teachings. By "cuing about the environment" I meant that don Juan led me into a special state of ordinary reality by isolating, through subtle suggestions, component elements of ordinary reality which were part of the immediate physical surroundings. Elements isolated in such a manner created in this instance a specific visual perception of color, which don Juan tacitly verified.

The second state of ordinary reality may have been produced by the process of cuing about behavior. Don Juan, through close association with me and through the exercise of a consistent way of behaving, had succeeded in creating an image of himself, an image that served me as an essential pattern by which I could recognize him. Then, by performing certain specific choice responses, which were irreconcilable with the image he had created, don Juan was capable of distorting this essential pattern of recognition. The distortion may in turn have changed the normal configuration of elements associated with the pattern into a new and incongruous pattern which could not be subjected to ordinary consensus; don Juan, as the co-participant of that special state of ordinary reality, was the only person who knew which the component elements were, and thus he was the only person who could give me agreement on their existence.

Don Juan set up the second special state of ordinary reality also as a test, as a sort of recapitulation of his teachings. It seemed that both special states of ordinary reality marked a transition in the teachings. They seemed to be points of articulation. And the second state may have marked my entrance into a new stage of learning characterized by more direct co-participation between teacher and apprentice for purposes of arriving at special consensus.

The third procedure that don Juan employed to prepare special consensus was to make me render a detailed account of what I had experienced as an aftermath of each state of nonordinary reality and each special state of ordinary reality, and then to stress certain choice units which he isolated from the content of my account. The essential factor was directing the outcome of the states of nonordinary reality, and my implicit assumption here was that the characteristics of the component elements of nonordinary reality - stability, singularity, and lack of ordinary consensus - were inherent in them and were not the result of don Juan's guidance. This assumption was based on the observation that the component elements of the first state of nonordinary reality I underwent possessed the same three characteristics, and yet don Juan had hardly begun his directing. Assuming, then, that these characteristics were inherent in the component elements of nonordinary reality in general, don Juan's task consisted of utilizing them as the basis for directing the outcome of each state of nonordinary reality elicited by *Datura inoxia, Psilocybe mexicana,* and *Lophophora williamsii.*

The detailed account that don Juan made me render as the aftermath of each state of nonordinary reality was a recapitulation of the experience. It entailed a meticulous verbal rendition of what I had perceived during the course of each state. A recapitulation had two facets: (1) the recollection of events and (2) the description of perceived component elements. The recollection of events was concerned with the incidents I had seemingly perceived during the course of the experience I was narrating: that is, the events that seemed to have happened and the actions I seemed to have performed. The description .of the perceived component elements was my account of the specific form and the specific detail of the component elements I seemed to have perceived.

From each recapitulation of the experience don Juan selected certain units by means of the processes of (1) attaching importance to certain appropriate areas of my account and (2) denying all importance to other areas of my account. The interval between states of nonordinary reality was the time when don Juan expounded on the recapitulation of the experience.

I have called the first process "emphasis" because it entailed a forceful speculation on the distinction between what don Juan had conceived as the goals I should have accomplished in the state of nonordinary reality and what I had perceived myself. Emphasis meant, then, that don Juan isolated an area of my narrative by centering on it the bulk of his speculation. Emphasis was either positive or negative. Positive emphasis implied that don Juan was satisfied with a particular item I had perceived because it conformed with the goals he had expected me to achieve in the state of nonordinary reality. Negative emphasis meant that don Juan was not satisfied with what I had perceived because it may not have conformed with his expectations or because he judged it insufficient. Nonetheless, he still placed the bulk of speculation on that area of my recapitulation in order to emphasize the negative value of my perception.

The second selective process that don Juan employed was to deny all importance to some areas of my account. I have called it "lack of emphasis" because it was the opposite and the counterbalance of emphasis. It seemed that by denying importance to the parts of my account pertaining to component elements which don Juan judged to be completely superfluous to the goal of his teachings, he literally obliterated my perception of the same elements in the successive states of nonordinary reality.

### *Guiding Special Consensus*

The second aspect of don Juan's task as a teacher was to guide special consensus by directing the outcome of each state of nonordinary reality and each special state of ordinary reality. Don Juan directed that outcome through an orderly manipulation of the extrinsic and the intrinsic levels of nonordinary reality, and of the intrinsic level of the special states of ordinary reality.

The extrinsic level of nonordinary reality pertained to it's operative arrangement. It involved the mechanics, the steps leading into nonordinary reality proper. The extrinsic level had three discernible aspects: (1) the preparatory period, (2) the transitional stages, and (3) the teacher's supervision.

The preparatory period was the time that elapsed between one state of nonordinary reality and the next. Don Juan used it to give me direct instructions and to develop the general course of his teachings. The preparatory period was of critical importance in setting up the states of nonordinary reality, and because it pivoted on them it had two distinct facets: (1) the period prior to nonordinary reality, and (2) the period following nonordinary reality.

The period prior to nonordinary reality was a relatively short interval of time, twenty-four hours at the most. In the states of nonordinary reality induced by *Datura inoxia* and *Psilocybe mexicana* the period was characterized by don Juan's dramatic and accelerated direct instructions on the specific purpose of the rule and on the manipulatory techniques I was supposed to corroborate in the oncoming state of nonordinary reality. With *Lophophora williamsii* the period was essentially a time of ritual behavior, since Mescalito had no rule.

The period following nonordinary reality, on the other hand, was a long span of time; usually lasting for months, it allowed time for don Juan's discussion and clarification of the events that had taken place during the preceding state of nonordinary reality. This period was especially important after the use of *Lophophora williamsii.* Because Mescalito did not have a rule, the goal pursued in nonordinary reality was the verification of Mescalito's characteristics; don Juan delineated those characteristics during the long interval following each state of nonordinary reality.

The second aspect of the extrinsic level was the transitional stages, which meant the passage from a state of ordinary reality into a state of nonordinary reality, and vice versa. The two states of reality overlapped in these transitional stages, and the criterion I used to differentiate the latter from either state of reality was that their component elements were blurred. I was never able to perceive them or to recollect them with precision.

In terms of perceived time, the transitional stages were either abrupt or slow. In the instance of *Datura inoxia,* ordinary and nonordinary states were almost juxtaposed, and the transition from one to the other took place abruptly. The most noticeable were the passages into nonordinary reality. *Psilocybe mexicana,* on the other hand, elicited transitional stages that I perceived to be slow. The passage from ordinary into nonordinary reality was specially long-drawn-out and perceivable. I was always more aware of it, perhaps because of my apprehension about forthcoming events.

The transitional stages elicited by *Lophophora williamsii* seemed to combine features of the other two. For one thing, both the passages into and out of nonordinary reality were very noticeable. The entering into nonordinary reality was slow, and I experienced it with hardly any impairment of my faculties; but reverting back into ordinary reality was an abrupt transitional stage, which I perceived with clarity, but with less facility to assess every detail of it.

The third aspect of the extrinsic level was the teacher's supervision or the actual help that I, as the apprentice, received in the course of experiencing a state of nonordinary reality. I have set up- supervision as a category by itself because it was implied that the teacher would have to enter nonordinary reality with his apprentice at a certain point of the teachings.

During the states of nonordinary reality elicited by *Datura inoxia* I received minimal supervision. Don Juan placed heavy stress on fulfilling the steps of the preparatory period, but after I had complied with that requirement he let me proceed by myself.

In the nonordinary reality induced by *Psilocybe mexicana,* the degree of supervision was the complete opposite, for here, according to don Juan, the apprentice needed the most extensive guidance and help. The corroboration of the rule necessitated the adoption of an alternate form, which seemed to suggest that I had to undergo a series of very specialized adjustments in perceiving the surroundings. Don Juan produced those necessary adjustments through verbal commands and suggestions during the transitional stages into nonordinary reality. Another aspect of his supervision was to direct me during the early part of the states of nonordinary reality by commanding me to focus my attention on certain component elements of the preceding state of ordinary reality. The items he focused upon were apparently chosen at random, as the important issue was the act of perfecting the adopted alternate form. The final aspect of supervision was restoring me back to ordinary reality. It was implicit that this operation also required maximal supervision from don Juan, although I could not recall the actual procedure.

The supervision necessary for the states induced by *Lophophora williamsii* was a blend of the other two. Don Juan remained at my side for as long as he could, yet he did not attempt in any way to direct me into or out of nonordinary reality.

The second level of differentiative order in nonordinary reality was the seemingly internal standards or the seemingly internal arrangement of it's component elements. I have called it the "intrinsic level", and I have assumed here that the component elements were subject to three general processes, which seemed to be the product of don Juan's guidance: (1) a progression towards the specific; (2) a progression towards a more extensive range of appraisal; and (3) a progression towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality.

The progression towards the specific was the apparent advance of the component elements of each successive state of non ordinary reality towards being more precise, more specific. It entailed two separate aspects: (1) a progression towards specific single forms; and (2) a progression towards specific total results.

The progression towards specific single forms implied that the component elements were amorphously familiar in the early states of nonordinary reality, and became specific and unfamiliar in the late states. The progression seemed to encompass two levels of change in the component elements of nonordinary reality: (1) a progressive complexity of perceived detail; and (2) a progression from familiar to unfamiliar forms.

Progressive complexity of detail meant that in each successive state of nonordinary reality, the minute particulars I perceived as constituting the component elements became more complex. I assessed complexity in terms of my being aware that the structure of the component elements grew more complicated, yet the details did not become exceedingly or perplexingly entangled. The increasing complexity referred rather to the harmonious increase of perceived detail, which ranged from my impressions of vague forms during the early states to my perception of massive, elaborate arrays of minute particulars in the late states.

The progression from familiar to unfamiliar forms implied that at first the forms of the component elements either were familiar forms found in ordinary reality, or at least evoked the familiarity of everyday life. But in successive states of nonordinary reality the specific forms, the details making up the form, and the patterns in which the component elements were combined became progressively unfamiliar, until I could not put them on a par with, nor could they even evoke, in some instances, anything I had ever perceived in ordinary reality.

The progression of the component elements towards specific total results was the gradually closer approximation of the total result I accomplished in each state of nonordinary reality to the total result don Juan sought, in matters of corroborating the rule; that is, nonordinary reality was induced to corroborate the rule, and the corroboration grew more specific in each successive attempt.

The second general process of the intrinsic level of non ordinary reality was the progression towards a more extensive range of appraisal. In other words, it was the gain I perceived in each successive state of nonordinary reality towards the expansion of the area over which I could have exercised my capacity to focus attention. The point in question here was either that there existed a definite area that expanded, or that my capacity to perceive seemed to increase in each successive state. Don Juan's teachings fostered and reinforced the idea that there was an area that expanded, and I have called that alleged area the "range of appraisal". It's progressive expansion consisted of a seemingly sensorial appraisal I made of the component elements of non ordinary reality which fell within a certain range. I evaluated and analyzed these component elements, it seemed, with my senses, and to all appearances I perceived the range in which they occurred as being more extensive, more encompassing, in each successive state.

The range of appraisal was of two kinds: (1) the dependent range and (2) the independent range. The dependent range was an area in which the component elements were the items of the physical environment which had been within my awareness in the preceding state of ordinary reality. The independent range, on the other hand, was the area in which the component elements of nonordinary reality seemed to come into existence by themselves, free of the influence of the physical surroundings of the preceding ordinary reality.

Don Juan's clear allusion in matters of the range of appraisal was that each of the two allies and Mescalito possessed the property of inducing both forms of perception. Yet it seemed to me that *Datura inoxia* had a greater capacity to induce an independent range, although in the facet of bodily flight, which I did not perceive long enough to assess it, the range of appraisal was implicitly a dependent one. *Psilocybe mexicana* had the capacity to produce a dependent range; *Lophophora williamsii* had the capacity to produce both.

My assumption was that don Juan used those different properties in order to prepare special consensus. In other words, in the states produced by *Datura inoxia* the component elements lacking ordinary consensus existed independently of the preceding ordinary reality. With *Psilocybe mexicana,* lack of ordinary consensus involved component elements that depended on the environment of the preceding ordinary reality. And with *Lophophora williamsii,* some component elements were determined by the environment, whereas others were independent of the environment. Thus the use of the three plants together seemed to have been designed to create a broad perception of the lack of ordinary consensus on the component elements of nonordinary reality.

The last process of the intrinsic level of nonordinary reality was the progression I perceived in each successive state towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality. This progression seemed to be correlated with the idea that each new state was a more complex stage of learning, and that the increasing complexity of each new stage required a more inclusive and pragmatic use of nonordinary reality. The progression was most noticeable when *Lophophora williamsii* was used; the simultaneous existence of a dependent and an independent range of appraisal in each state made the pragmatic use of nonordinary reality more extensive, for it covered both ranges at once.

Directing the outcome of the special states of ordinary reality seemed to produce an order in the intrinsic level, an order characterized by the progression of the component elements towards the specific; that is to say, the component elements were more numerous and were isolated more easily in each successive special state of ordinary reality. In the course of his teachings, don Juan elicited only two of them, but it was still possible for me to detect that in the second it was easier for don Juan to isolate a large number of component elements, and that facility for specific results affected the rapidity with which the second special state of ordinary reality was produced.*

*For the process of validating special consensus, see Appendix A.

## The Conceptual Order

### *The Apprentice*

The apprentice was the last unit of the operative order. The apprentice was in his own right the unit that brought don Juan's teachings into focus, for he had to accept the totality of the special consensus given on the component elements of all the states of nonordinary reality and all the special states of ordinary reality, before special consensus could become a meaningful concept. But special consensus, by force of being concerned with the actions and elements perceived in nonordinary reality, entailed a peculiar order of conceptualization, an order that brought such perceived actions and elements into accordance with corroboration of the rule. Therefore the acceptance of special consensus meant for me, as the apprentice, the adoption of a certain point of view validated by the totality of don Juan's teachings; that is, it meant my entrance into a conceptual level, a level comprising an order of conceptualization that would render the teachings understandable in their own terms. I have called it the "conceptual order" because it was the order that gave meaning to the unordinary phenomena that formed don Juan's knowledge; it was the matrix of meaning in which all individual concepts brought out in his teachings were embedded.

Taking into account, then, that the apprentice's goal consisted of adopting that order of conceptualization, he had two alternatives: he could either fail in his efforts or he could succeed.

The first alternative, failure to adopt the conceptual order, meant also that the apprentice had failed to achieve the operational goal of the teachings. The idea of failure was explained in the theme of the four symbolic enemies of a man of knowledge; it was implicit that failure was not merely the act of discontinuing pursuit of the goal, but the act of abandoning the quest completely under the pressure created by any one of the four symbolic enemies. The same theme also made it clear that the first two enemies— fear and clarity— were the cause of a man's defeat at the apprentice's level, that defeat at that level signified failure to learn how to command an ally, and that as a consequence of such failure the apprentice had adopted the conceptual order in a shallow, fallacious manner. That is, his adoption of the conceptual order was fallacious in the sense of being a fraudulent affiliation with or commitment to the meaning propounded by the teachings. The idea was that upon being defeated an apprentice, besides being incapable of commanding an ally, would be left with only the knowledge of certain manipulatory techniques, plus the memory of the perceived component elements of nonordinary reality, but he would not identify with the *rationale* that might have made them meaningful in their own terms. Under these circumstances any man might be forced to develop his own explanations for idiosyncratically chosen areas of the phenomena he had experienced, and that process would entail the fallacious adoption of the point of view propounded by don Juan's teachings. Fallacious adoption of the conceptual order, however, was apparently not restricted to the apprentice alone. In the theme of the enemies of a man of knowledge, it was also implicit that a man, after having achieved the goal of learning to command an ally, could still succumb to the onslaughts of his other two enemies— power and old age. In don Juan's categorization scheme, such a defeat implied that a man had fallen into a shallow or fallacious adoption of the conceptual order, as had the defeated apprentice.

The successful adoption of the conceptual order, on the other hand, meant that the apprentice had achieved the operational goal— a bona fide adoption of the point of view propounded in the teachings. That is, his adoption of the conceptual order was bona fide in that it was a complete affiliation with, a complete commitment to, the meaning expressed in that order of conceptualization.

Don Juan never clarified the exact point at which, or the exact way in which, an apprentice ceased to be an apprentice, although the allusion was clear that once he had achieved the operational goal of the system— that is, once he knew how to command an ally— he would no longer need the teacher for guidance. The idea that the time would come when a teacher's directions would be superfluous implied that the apprentice would succeed in adopting the conceptual order, and in so doing he would acquire the capacity to draw meaningful inferences without the teacher's aid.

Insofar as don Juan's teachings were concerned, and until I discontinued my apprenticeship, the acceptance of special consensus seemed to entail the adoption of two units of the conceptual order: (1) the idea of a reality of special consensus; (2) the idea that the reality of ordinary, everyday-life consensus, and the reality of special consensus, had an equally pragmatic value.

### *Reality of Special Consensus*

The main body of don Juan's teachings, as he himself stated, concerned the use of the three hallucinogenic plants with which he induced states of nonordinary reality. The use of these three plants seems to have been a matter of deliberate intent on his part. He seems to have employed them because each of them possessed different hallucinogenic properties, which he interpreted as the different inherent natures of the powers contained in them. By directing the extrinsic and intrinsic levels of non ordinary reality, don Juan exploited the different hallucinogenic properties until they created in me, as the apprentice, the perception that nonordinary reality was a perfectly defined area, a realm separate from ordinary, everyday life whose inherent properties were revealed as I went along.

Nevertheless, it was also possible that the allegedly different properties might have been merely the product of don Juan's own process of directing the intrinsic order of nonordinary reality, although in his teachings he exploited the idea that the power contained in each plant induced states of nonordinary reality which differed from one another. If the latter was true, their differences in terms of the units of this analysis seem to have been in the range of appraisal which one could perceive in the states elicited by each of the three. Owing to the peculiarities of their range of appraisal, all three contributed to producing the perception of a perfectly defined area or realm, consisting of two compartments: the independent range, called the realm of the lizards, or of Mescalito's lessons; and the dependent range, referred to as the area where one could move by one's own means.

I use the term "nonordinary reality", as already noted, in the sense of extraordinary, uncommon reality. For a beginner apprentice such a reality was by all means unordinary, but the apprenticeship of don Juan's knowledge demanded my compulsory participation and my commitment to pragmatic and experimental practice of whatever I had learned. That meant that I, as the apprentice, had to experience a number of states of non ordinary reality, and that firsthand knowledge would, sooner or later, make the classifications "ordinary" and "nonordinary" meaningless for me. The bona fide adoption of the first unit of the conceptual order would have entailed, then, the idea that there was another separate, but no longer nonordinary, realm of reality, the "reality of special consensus".

Accepting as a major premise that the reality of special consensus was a separate realm would have explained meaningfully the idea that the meetings with the allies or with Mescalito took place in a realm that was not illusory.

### *The Reality of Special Consensus Had Pragmatic Value*

The same process of directing the extrinsic and intrinsic levels of nonordinary reality, which seemed to have created the recognition of the reality of special consensus as a separate realm, appeared also to have been responsible for my perception that the reality of special consensus was practical and usable. The acceptance of special consensus on all the states of nonordinary reality, and on all the special states of ordinary reality, was designed to consolidate the awareness that it was equal to the reality of ordinary, everyday-life consensus. This equality was based on the impression that the reality of special consensus was not a realm that could be equated with dreams. On the contrary, it had stable component elements that were subject to special agreement. It was actually a realm where one could perceive the surroundings in a deliberate manner. It's component elements were not idiosyncratic or whimsical, but concise items or events whose existence was attested to by the whole body of teachings.

The implication of the equality was clear in the treatment don Juan accorded to the reality of special consensus, a treatment that was utilitarian and matter of course; not at any time did he refer to it, nor was I required to behave towards it in any but a utilitarian, matter-of-course way. The fact that the two areas were considered equal, however, did not mean that at any moment one could have behaved in exactly the same way in either area. On the contrary, a sorcerer's behavior had to be different since each area of reality had qualities that rendered it utilizable in it's own way. The defining factor in terms of meaning seems to have been the idea that such an equality could be measured on the grounds of practical utility. Thus, a sorcerer had to believe that it was possible to shift back and forth from one area to the other, that both were inherently utilizable, and that the only dissimilarity between the two was their different capacity for being used, that is, the different purposes they served.

Yet their separateness seemed to be only an appropriate arrangement that was pertinent to my particular level of apprenticeship, which don Juan used for making me aware that another realm of reality could exist. But from his acts, more than from his statements, I was led to believe that for a • sorcerer there was but one single continuum of reality which had two, or perhaps more than two, parts from which he drew inferences of pragmatic value. The bona fide adoption of the idea that the reality of special consensus had pragmatic value would have given a meaningful perspective to movement.

If I had accepted the idea that the reality of special consensus was usable because it possessed inherently utilizable properties which were as pragmatic as those of the reality of everyday consensus, then it would have been logical for me to understand why don Juan exploited the notion of movement in the reality of special consensus at such great length. After accepting the pragmatic existence of another reality, the only thing a sorcerer had to do would be to learn the mechanics of movement. Naturally, movement in that instance had to be specialized because it was concerned with the inherent, pragmatic properties of the reality of special consensus.

## Summary

The issues of my analysis have been the following:

1. The fragment of don Juan's teachings which I have presented here consisted of two aspects: the operative order or the meaningful sequence in which all the individual concepts of his teachings were linked to one another, and the conceptual order or the matrix of meaning in which all the individual concepts of his teaching were embedded.

2. The operative order had four main units with their respective component ideas: (1) the concept "man of knowledge"; (2) the idea that a man of knowledge had the aid of a specialized power called an ally; (3) the idea that an ally was governed by a body of regulations called the

rule; and (4) the idea that the corroboration of the rule was subject to special consensus.

3. These four units were related to one another in the following manner: the goal of the operative order was to teach one how to become a man of knowledge; a man of knowledge was different from ordinary men because he had an ally; an ally was a specialized power, which had a rule; one could acquire or tame an ally through the process of verifying it's rule in the realm of nonordinary reality and through obtaining special consensus on that corroboration.

4. In the context of don Juan's teachings, becoming a man of knowledge was not a permanent accomplishment, but rather a process. That is to say, the factor that made a man of knowledge was not solely the possession of an ally, but the man's lifelong struggle to maintain himself within the boundaries of a system of beliefs. Don Juan's teachings, however, were aimed at practical results, and his practical goal, in relation to teaching how to become a man of knowledge, was to teach how to acquire an ally through learning it's rule. Thus the goal of the operative order was to provide one with special consensus on the component elements perceived in nonordinary reality, which were considered to be the corroboration of the ally's rule.

5. In order to provide special consensus on the corroboration of the ally's rule, don Juan had to provide special consensus on the component elements of all the states of nonordinary reality and the special states of ordinary reality elicited in the course of his teachings. Special consensus, therefore, dealt with unordinary phenomena, a fact that permitted me to assume that any apprentice, by accepting special consensus, was led into adopting the conceptual order of the knowledge being taught.

6. From the point of view of my personal stage of learning, I could deduce that up to the time when I withdrew from the apprenticeship don Juan's teachings had fostered the adoption of two units of the conceptual order: (1) the idea that there was a separate realm of reality, another world, which I have called the "reality of special consensus"; (2) the idea that the reality of special consensus, or that other world, was as utilizable as the world of everyday life.

Nearly six years after I had begun the apprenticeship, don Juan's knowledge became a coherent whole for the first time. I realized that he had aimed at providing a bona fide consensus on my personal findings, and although I did not continue because I was not, nor will I ever be, prepared to undergo the rigors of such a training, my own way to meet his standards of personal exertion was my attempt to understand his teachings. I felt it was imperative to prove, if only to myself, that they were not an oddity.

After I had arranged my structural scheme, and was capable of discarding many data that were superfluous to my initial effort of uncovering the cogency of his teachings, it became clear to me that they had an internal cohesion, a logical sequence that enabled me to view the entire phenomenon in a light that dispelled the sense of bizarreness which was the mark of all I had experienced. It was obvious to me then that my apprenticeship had been only the beginning of a very long road. And the strenuous experiences I had undergone, which were so overwhelming to me, were but a very small fragment of a system of logical thought from which don Juan drew meaningful inferences for his day-today life, a vastly complex system of beliefs in which inquiry was an experience leading to exultation.

## Appendix A

### The Process of Validating Special Consensus

Validating special consensus involved, at every point, the cumulation of don Juan's teachings. For the purpose of explaining the cumulative process, I have arranged the validation of special consensus according to the sequence in which the states of non ordinary reality and special ordinary reality occurred. Don Juan did not seem to have fixed the process of directing the intrinsic order of nonordinary and special ordinary reality in an exact manner; he seemed to have isolated the units for direction in a rather fluid way.

Don Juan began to prepare the background for special consensus by producing the first special state of ordinary reality through the process of manipulating cues about -the environment. He isolated by that method certain component elements from the range of ordinary reality, and by isolating them, he directed me to perceive a progression towards the specific, in this instance the perception of colors that seemed to emanate from two small areas on the ground. Upon being isolated those areas of coloration became deprived of ordinary consensus; it seemed that only I was capable of seeing them, and thus they created a special state of ordinary reality.

Isolating those two areas on the ground by depriving them of ordinary consensus served to establish the first link between ordinary and nonordinary reality. Don Juan directed me to perceive a portion of ordinary reality in an unaccustomed manner; that is, he changed certain ordinary elements into items that needed special consensus.

The aftermath of the first special state of ordinary reality was my recapitulation of the experience; from it don Juan selected the perception of different areas of coloration as the units for positive emphasis. He isolated for negative emphasis the account of my fear and fatigue, and the possibility of my lacking persistence.

During the subsequent preparatory period he placed the bulk of speculation on the units he had isolated, and he carried over the idea that it was possible to detect in the surroundings more than the usual. From the units drawn from my recapitulation don Juan also introduced some of the component concepts of man of knowledge.

As the second step in preparing special consensus on the corroboration of the rule, don Juan induced a state of nonordinary reality with *Lophophora williamsii*. The total content of that first state of nonordinary reality was rather vague and disassociated, yet the component elements were very well defined; I perceived it's characteristics of stability, singularity, and lack of ordinary consensus almost as clearly as in later states. These characteristics were not so obvious, perhaps because of my lack of proficiency; it was the first time I had experienced nonordinary reality.

It was impossible to ascertain the effect of don Juan's previous directing on the actual course of the experience; however, his mastery in directing the outcome of subsequent states of nonordinary reality was very clear from that point on.

From my recapitulation of the experience, he selected the units to direct the progression towards specific single forms and specific total results. He took the account of my actions with a dog and connected it with the idea that Mescalito was a visible entity. It was capable of adopting any form; above all it was an entity outside oneself.

The account of my actions also served don Juan in setting the progression towards a more extensive range of appraisal; in this instance the progression was towards a dependent range. Don Juan placed positive emphasis on the notion that I had moved and acted in nonordinary reality almost as I would have in everyday life.

The progression towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality was set by giving negative emphasis to the account of my incapacity to pay logical attention to the perceived component elements. Don Juan hinted that it would have been possible for me to examine the elements with detachment and accuracy; this idea brought forth two general characteristics of nonordinary reality, that it was pragmatic and that it had component elements that could be assessed seasonally.

The lack of ordinary consensus for the component elements was brought forth dramatically by an interplay of positive and negative emphasis placed on the views of onlookers who observed my behavior during the course of that first state of non ordinary reality.

The preparatory period following the first state of non ordinary reality lasted more than a year. Don Juan employed that time to introduce more component concepts of man of knowledge, and to disclose some parts of the rule of the two allies. He elicited also a shallow state of nonordinary reality in order to test my affinity with the ally contained in *Datura, inoxia*. Don Juan used whatever vague sensations I had in the course of that shallow state to delineate the general characteristics of the ally by contrasting it with what he had isolated as Mescalito's perceivable characteristics.

The third step in preparing the special consensus on the corroboration of the rule was to elicit another state of nonordinary reality with *Lophophora williamsii*. Don Juan's previous directing seems to have guided me to perceiving this second state of nonordinary reality in the following manner:

The progression towards the specific created the possibility of visualizing an entity whose form had changed remarkably, from the familiar shape of a dog in the first state to the completely unfamiliar form of an anthropomorphic composite that existed, seemingly, outside myself. The progression towards a more extensive range of appraisal was evident in my perception of a journey. In the course of that journey the range of appraisal was both dependent and independent, although a majority of the component elements depended on the environment of the preceding state of ordinary reality.

The progression towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality was, perhaps, the most outstanding feature of my second state. It became evident to me, in a complex and detailed manner, that one could move around in nonordinary reality.

I also examined the component elements with detachment and accuracy. I perceived their stability, singularity, and lack of consensus very clearly.

From my recapitulation of the experience, don Juan emphasized the following: For the progression towards the specific he gave positive emphasis to my account that I had seen Mescalito as an anthropomorphic composite. The bulk of speculation on this area was centered on the idea that Mescalito was capable of being a teacher, and also a protector.

In order to direct the progression towards a more extensive range of appraisal, don Juan placed positive emphasis on the account of my journey, which obviously had taken place in the dependent range; he also put positive emphasis on my version of the visionary scenes I viewed on the hand of Mescalito, scenes that seemed to be independent of the component elements of the preceding ordinary reality.

The account of my journey, and the scenes viewed on Mescalito's hand, also enabled don Juan to direct the progression towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality. He first put forth the idea that it was possible to obtain direction; second he interpreted the scenes as lessons concerning the right way to live.

Some areas of my recapitulation which dealt with the perception of superfluous composites were not emphasized at all, because they were not useful for setting the direction of the intrinsic order.

The next state of nonordinary reality, the third one, was induced for the corroboration of the rule with the ally contained in *Datura inoxia*. The preparatory period was important and noticeable for the first time. Don Juan presented the manipulatory techniques and disclosed that the specific purpose I had to corroborate was divination.

His previous directing of the three aspects of the intrinsic order seemed to have produced the following results: The progression towards the specific was manifested in my capacity to perceive an ally as a quality; that is, I verified the assertion that an ally was not visible at all. The progression towards the specific also produced the peculiar perception of a series of images very similar to those I had viewed on Mescalito's hand. Don Juan interpreted these scenes as divination, or the corroboration of the specific purpose of the rule.

Perceiving that series of scenes entailed also a progression towards a more extensive range of appraisal. This time the range was independent of the environment of the preceding ordinary reality. The scenes did not appear to be superimposed on the component elements, as had the images I viewed on Mescalito's hand; in fact, there were no other component elements besides those that were part of the scenes. In other words, the total range of appraisal was independent.

The perception of a completely independent range also exhibited progression towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality. Divining implied that one could give a utilitarian value to whatever had been seen.

For the purpose of directing the progression towards the specific, don Juan put positive emphasis on the idea that it was impossible to move by one's own means in the independent range of appraisal. He explained movement there as being indirect, and as being accomplished, in this particular instance, by the lizards as instruments. In order to set the direction of the second aspect of the intrinsic level, the progression towards a more extensive range of appraisal, he centered the bulk of speculation on the idea that the scenes I had perceived, which were the answers to divination, could have been examined and extended for as long as I wanted. For guiding the progression towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality, don Juan placed positive emphasis on the idea that the topic to be divined had to be simple and direct in order to obtain a result that could be usable.

The fourth state of nonordinary reality was elicited also for the corroboration of the rule of the ally contained in *Datura inoxia*. The specific purpose of the rule to be corroborated had to do with bodily flight as another aspect of movement.

A result of directing the progression towards the specific may have been the perception of soaring bodily through the air. That sensation was acute, although it lacked the depth of all the earlier perceptions of acts that I had presumably performed in nonordinary reality. Bodily flight appeared to have taken place in a dependent range of appraisal, and it appeared to have entailed moving by one's own power, which may have been the result of a progression towards a wider range of appraisal.

Two other aspects of the sensation of soaring through the air may have been the product of directing the progression towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality. They were, first, the perception of distance, a perception that created the feeling of an actual flight, and second, the possibility of acquiring direction in the course of that alleged movement.

During the subsequent preparatory period don Juan speculated on the supposedly deleterious nature of the ally contained in *Datura inoxia*. And he isolated the following areas of my account: For directing the progression towards the specific, he placed positive emphasis on my recollection of having soared through the air. Although I did not perceive the component elements of that state of nonordinary reality with the clarity that was customary by then, my sensation of movement was very definite, and don Juan used it to reinforce the specific result of movement. The progression towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality was established by centering the bulk of speculation on the idea that sorcerers could fly over enormous distances, a speculation that gave rise to the possibility that one could move in the dependent range of appraisal and then switch such movement over into ordinary reality.

The fifth state of nonordinary reality was produced by the ally contained in *Psilocybe mexicana*. It was the first time that the plant was used, and the state that ensued was more in line with a test than with an attempt to corroborate the rule. In the preparatory period don Juan presented only a manipulatory technique; as he did not disclose the specific purpose to be verified I did not believe the state was elicited to corroborate the rule. Yet the direction of the intrinsic level of nonordinary reality set earlier appeared to have terminated in the following results.

Directing the progression towards specific total results produced in me the perception that the two allies were different from each other, and that each was different from Mescalito. I perceived the ally contained in *Psilocybe mexicana* as a quality— formless and invisible, and producing a sensation of bodilessness. The progression towards a more extensive range of appraisal resulted in the sensation that the total environment of the preceding ordinary reality, which remained within my awareness, was usable in nonordinary reality; that is, the expansion of the dependent range seemed to have covered everything. The progression towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality produced the peculiar perception that I could go through the component elements within the dependent range of appraisal, in spite of the fact that they appeared to be ordinary elements of everyday life.

Don Juan did not demand the usual recapitulation of the experience; it was as if the absence of a specific purpose had made this state of nonordinary reality only a prolonged transitional stage. During the subsequent preparatory period, however, he speculated on certain observations he had made on my behavior during the course of the experience.

He placed negative emphasis on the logical impasse that prevented my believing that one could go through things or beings. With that speculation he directed the progression towards a specific total result of movement through the component elements of nonordinary reality perceived within the dependent range of appraisal.

Don Juan used those same observations to direct the second aspect of the intrinsic level, a more extensive range of appraisal. If movement through things and beings was possible, then the dependent range had to expand accordingly; it had to cover the total environment of the preceding ordinary reality which was within one's awareness at any given time, since movement entailed a constant change of surroundings. In the same speculation it was also implicit that nonordinary reality could have been used in a more pragmatic manner. Moving through objects and beings implied a definite point of advantage which was inaccessible to a sorcerer in ordinary reality.

Don Juan next used a series of three states of nonordinary reality, elicited by *Lophophora williamsii,* to prepare further the special consensus on the corroboration of the rule. These three states have here been treated as a single unit because they took place during four consecutive days, and during the few hours in between them I had no communication whatsoever with don Juan. The intrinsic order of the three estates has also been considered a single unit with the following characteristics. The progression towards the specific produced the perception of Mescalito as a visible, anthropomorphic entity capable of teaching. The ability to give lessons implied that Mescalito was capable of acting towards people.

The progression towards a more extensive range of appraisal reached a point where I perceived both ranges at the same time, and I was incapable of establishing the difference between them except in terms of movement. In the dependent range it was possible for me to move by my own means and volition, but in the independent range I was able to move only with the aid of Mescalito as an instrument. For example, Mescalito's lessons comprised a series of scenes that I could only watch. The progression towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality was implicit in the idea that Mescalito could actually deliver lessons on the right way to live.

During the preparatory period that followed the last state of nonordinary reality in this series, don Juan selected the following units. For the progression towards the specific, he placed positive emphasis on the ideas that Mescalito was instrumental in moving one through the independent range of appraisal, and that Mescalito was a didactic entity capable of delivering lessons by allowing one to enter into a visionary world. He also speculated on the implication that Mescalito had voiced it's name and had supposedly taught me some songs; those two instances were constructed as examples of Mescalito's capacity to be a protector. And the fact that I had perceived Mescalito as a light was emphasized as the possibility that it might at last have adopted an abstract, permanent form for me.

Stressing these same units also served don Juan in directing the progression towards a more extensive range of appraisal. During the course of the three states of nonordinary reality I clearly perceived that the dependent range and the independent range were two separate aspects of nonordinary reality which were equally important. The independent range was the area where Mescalito delivered it's lessons, and since these states of nonordinary reality were supposed to have been elicited only to seek such lessons, the independent range was, logically, an area of special importance. Mescalito was a protector and a teacher, which meant that it was visible; yet it's form had nothing to do with the preceding state of ordinary reality. On the other hand, one was supposed to journey, to move in nonordinary reality, in order to seek Mescalito's lessons, an idea that implied the importance of the dependent range.

The progression towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality was set by devoting the bulk of speculation to Mescalito's lessons. Don Juan constructed these lessons as being indispensable to a man's life; it was a clear inference that nonordinary reality could have been used in a more pragmatic manner to draw points of reference which had value in ordinary reality. It was the first time don Juan had verbalized such an implication.

The subsequent state of nonordinary reality, the ninth in the teachings, was induced in order to corroborate the rule of the ally contained in *Datura inoxia*. The specific purpose to be corroborated in that state was concerned with divination, and the previous direction of the intrinsic level ended in the following points. The progression towards a specific total result created the perception of a coherent set of scenes, which were purported to be the voice of the lizard narrating the events to be divined, and the sensation of a voice that actually described such scenes. The progression towards an independent range of appraisal resulted in the perception of an extensive and clear independent range that was free from the extraneous influence of ordinary reality. The progression towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality ended in the utilitarian possibilities of exploiting the independent range. That particular trend was set up by don Juan's speculation on the possibility of drawing points of reference from the independent range and using them in ordinary reality. Thus the divinatory scenes had an obvious pragmatic value, for they were thought to represent a view of acts performed by others, acts to which one would have had no access by ordinary means.

In the following preparatory period, don Juan emphasized more of the component themes of man of knowledge. He seemed to be getting ready to shift to the pursuit of only one of the two allies, the ally *humito*. Yet he gave positive emphasis to the idea that I had a close affinity with the ally contained in *Datura inoxia,* because it had allowed me to witness an incidence of flexibility of the rule when I had made an error in performing a manipulatory technique. My assumption that don Juan was ready to abandon teaching the rule of the ally contained in *Datura inoxia* was fostered by the fact that he did not isolate any areas of my recapitulation of the experience to account for directing the intrinsic level of the subsequent states of nonordinary reality.

Next was a series of three states of nonordinary reality elicited to corroborate the rule of the ally contained in *Psilocybe mexicana*. They have been treated here as a single unit. And although a considerable time elapsed in between them, during those intervals don Juan made no attempt to speculate on any aspect of their intrinsic order.

The first state of the series was vague; it ended rapidly and it's component elements were not precise. It had the appearance of being more like a transitional stage than like a state of nonordinary reality proper.

The second state had more depth. I perceived the transitional stage into nonordinary reality separately for the first time. During the course of that first transitional stage don Juan revealed that the specific purpose of the rule, which I had to corroborate, dealt with another aspect of movement, an aspect requiring his exhaustive supervision; I have rendered it as "moving by adopting an alternate form". As a consequence, two aspects of the extrinsic level of nonordinary reality became evident for the first time: the transitional stages, and the teacher's supervision.

Don Juan used his supervision during that first transitional stage to pinpoint the subsequent direction of three aspects of the intrinsic level. His efforts were channeled, in the first place, to produce a specific total result by guiding me to experience the precise sensation of having adopted the shape of a crow.

The possibility of adopting an alternate form in order to achieve movement in nonordinary reality entailed in turn an expansion of the dependent range of appraisal, the only area where such movement could take place.

The pragmatic use of nonordinary reality was determined by directing me to focus my attention on certain component elements of the dependent range, in order to use them as points of reference for moving.

During the preparatory period that followed the second state of the series, don Juan refused to speculate on any part of my experience. He treated the second state as if it had been merely another prolonged transitional stage.

The third state of the series, however, was paramount in the teachings. It was a state in which the process of directing the intrinsic level culminated in the following results: The progression towards the specific created the easy perception that I had adopted an alternative form so completely that it even induced precise adjustments in the way I focused my eyes and in my way of seeing. A result of those adjustments was my perception of a new facet of the dependent range of appraisal— the minutiae that formed the component elements— and that perception definitely enlarged the range of appraisal. The progression towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality culminated in my awareness that it was possible to move in the dependent range as pragmatically as one walks in ordinary reality.

In the preparatory period following the last state of nonordinary reality, don Juan introduced a different type of recapitulation. He selected the areas for recollection before he had heard my account; that is, he demanded to hear only the accounts that pertained to the pragmatic use of nonordinary reality and to movement.

From such accounts he set the progression towards the specific by giving positive emphasis to the version of how I had exploited the crow's form. Yet he attached importance only to the idea of moving after having adopted that form. Movement was the area of my recapitulation on which he placed an interplay of positive and negative emphasis. He gave the account positive emphasis when it enhanced the idea of the pragmatic nature of nonordinary reality, or when it dealt with the perception of component elements which had permitted me to obtain a general sense of orientation, while seemingly moving in the dependent range of appraisal. He placed negative emphasis on my incapacity to recollect with precision the nature or the direction of such movement.

In directing the progression towards a wider range of appraisal, don Juan centered his speculation on my account of the peculiar way in which I had perceived the minutiae that formed the component elements that were within the dependent range. His speculation led me to the assumption that, if it were possible to see the world as a crow does, the dependent range of appraisal had to expand in depth and had to extend to cover the whole spectrum of ordinary reality.

To direct the progression towards a more pragmatic use of nonordinary reality, don Juan explained my peculiar way of perceiving the component elements as being a crow's way of seeing the world. And, logically, that way of seeing presupposed entrance into a range of phenomena beyond normal possibilities in ordinary reality.

The last experience recorded in my field notes was a special state of ordinary reality; don Juan produced it by isolating component elements of ordinary reality through the process of cuing about his own behavior.

The general processes used in directing the intrinsic level of nonordinary reality produced the following results during the course of the second special state of ordinary reality. The progression towards the specific resulted in the easy isolation of many elements of ordinary reality. In the first special state of ordinary reality, the very few component elements that were isolated through the process of cuing about the environment were also transformed into unfamiliar forms deprived of ordinary consensus; however, in the second special state of ordinary reality it's component elements were numerous, and, although they did not lose their quality of being familiar elements, they may have lost their capacity for ordinary consensus. Such component elements covered, perhaps, the total environment that was within my awareness.

Don Juan may have produced this second special state in order to strengthen the link between ordinary and nonordinary reality by developing the possibility that most, if not all, of the component elements of ordinary reality could lose their capacity to have ordinary consensus.

From my own point of view, however, that last special state was the final summation of my apprenticeship. The formidable impact of terror on the level of sober consciousness had the peculiar quality of undermining the certainty that the reality of everyday life was implicitly real, the certainty that I, in matters of ordinary reality, could provide myself with consensus indefinitely. Up to that point the course of my apprenticeship seemed to have been a continuous building towards the collapse of that certainty. Don Juan used every facet of his dramatic exertion to accomplish the collapse during that last special state, a fact prompting me to believe that complete collapse of that certainty would have removed the last barrier that kept me from accepting the existence of a separate reality: the reality of special consensus.

# Appendix B

## Outline For Structural Analysis

THE OPERATIVE ORDER

*THE FIRST UNIT*

*Man of Knowledge*
- *To Become a Man of Knowledge Was a Matter of Learning*
  - There were no overt requirements
  - There were some covert requirements
  - An apprentice was selected by an impersonal power
    - The one that was chosen *(escogido)*
    - The power's decisions were indicated through omens

*A Man of Knowledge Had Unbending Intent*
- Frugality
- Soundness of judgement
- Lack of freedom to innovate

*A Man of Knowledge Had Clarity of Mind*
- Freedom to seek a path
- Knowledge of the specific purpose
- Being fluid

*To Become a Man of Knowledge Was a Matter of Strenuous Labor*
- Dramatic exertion
- Efficacy
- Challenge

- *A Man of Knowledge Was a Warrior*
  - He had to have respect
  - He had to have fear
  - He had to be wide-awake
  - Awareness of intent
  - Awareness of the expected flux
- He had to be self-confident

- *To Become a Man of Knowledge Was an Unceasing Process*
  - He had to renew the quest of becoming a man of knowledge
  - He was impermanent
  - He had to follow the path with heart

*THE SECOND UNIT*

- *A Man of Knowledge Had an Ally*
  - *An Ally Was Formless*
  - *An Ally Was Perceived as a Quality*
    - The ally contained in *Datura inoxia*
      - It was woman-like
        - It was possessive
        - It was violent
        - It was unpredictable
        - It had a deleterious effect on the character of it's followers
      - It was a giver of superfluous power
    - The ally contained in *Psilocybe mexicana*
      - It was male-like
        - It was dispassionate
        - It was gentle
        - It was predictable
        - It was beneficial to the character of it's followers
      - It was a giver of ecstasy

  - *An Ally Was Tamable*
    - An ally was a vehicle
      - The ally contained in *Datura inoxia* was unpredictable
      - The ally contained in *Psilocybe mexicana* was predictable
    - An ally was a helper

## *THE THIRD UNIT*

- *An Ally Had a Rule*
  - *The Rule Was Inflexible*
    - Exception due to ally's direct intervention
  - *The Rule Was Non-cumulative*
  - *The Rule Was Corroborated in Ordinary Reality*
  - *The Rule Was Corroborated in nonordinary Reality*
    - The states of nonordinary reality
      - Nonordinary reality was utilizable
      - Nonordinary reality had component elements
        - The component elements had stability
        - They had singularity
        - They lacked ordinary consensus
    - The specific purposes of the rule
      - First specific purpose, testing *(Datura inoxia)*
        - Manipulatory technique, ingestion
      - Second specific purpose, divination *(Datura inoxia)*
        - Manipulatory technique, ingestion-absorption
      - Third specific purpose, bodily flight *(Datura inoxia)*
        - Manipulatory technique, ingestion-absorption
      - Fourth specific purpose, testing *(Psilocybe mexicana)*
        - Manipulatory technique, ingestion-inhalation
      - Fifth specific purpose, movement *(Psilocybe mexicana)*
        - Manipulatory technique, ingestion-inhalation
      - Sixth specific purpose, movement by adopting an alternate form *(Psilocybe mexicana)*
        - Manipulatory technique, ingestion-inhalation

## *THE FOURTH UNIT*

- *The Rule Was Corroborated by Special Consensus*
  - *The Benefactor*
    - Preparing special consensus
      - The other states of nonordinary reality
        - They were produced by Mescalito
          - It was contained
          - The container was the power itself
          - It did not have a rule

        - It did not need apprenticeship
        - It was a protector
        - It was a teacher
        - It had a definite form
      - Nonordinary reality was utilizable
      - Nonordinary reality had component elements
    - The special states of ordinary reality
      - They were produced by the teacher
        - Cuing about the environment
        - Cuing about behavior
    - The recapitulation of the experience
      - The recollection of events
      - The description of the component elements
      - Emphasis
        - Positive emphasis
        - Negative emphasis
      - Lack of emphasis
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## 02 - A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with don Juan

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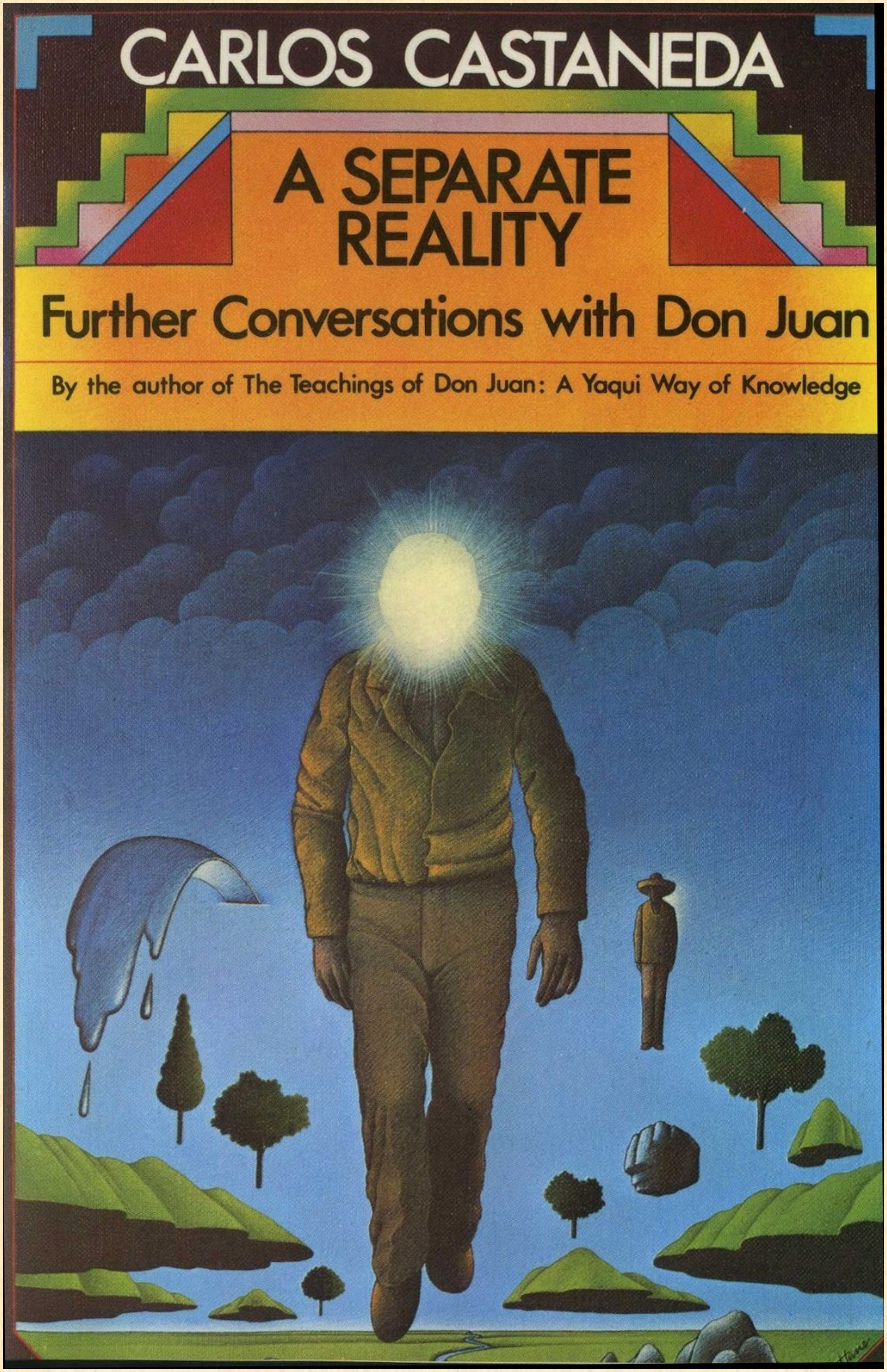
CARLOS CASTANEDA
A SEPARATE REALITY
Further Conversations with Don Juan
By the author of The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge

# Book 2 – A SEPARATE REALITY

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# Introduction

Ten years ago I had the fortune of meeting a Yaqui Indian from northwestern Mexico. I call him "don Juan." In Spanish, *don* is an appellative used to denote respect. I made don Juan's acquaintance under the most fortuitous circumstances. I had been sitting with Bill, a friend of mine, in a bus depot in a border town in Arizona. We were very quiet. In the late afternoon, the summer heat seemed unbearable. Suddenly he leaned over and tapped me on the shoulder.

"There's the man I told you about," he said in a low voice.

He nodded casually toward the entrance. An old man had just walked in.

"What did you tell me about him?" I asked.

"He's the Indian that knows about peyote. Remember?"

I remembered that Bill and I had once driven all day looking for the house of an "eccentric" Mexican Indian who lived in the area. We did not find the man's house and I had the feeling that the Indians whom we had asked for directions had deliberately misled us. Bill had told me that the man was a "yerbero," a person who gathers and sells medicinal herbs, and that he knew a great deal about the hallucinogenic cactus, peyote. He had also said that it would be worth my while to meet him. Bill was my guide in the Southwest while I was collecting information and specimens of medicinal plants used by the Indians of the area.

Bill got up and went to greet the man. The Indian was of medium height. His hair was white and short, and grew a bit over his ears, accentuating the roundness of his head.

He was very dark; the deep wrinkles on his face gave him the appearance of age, yet his body seemed to be strong and fit. I watched him for a moment. He moved around with a nimbleness that I would have thought impossible for an old man.

Bill signaled me to join them.

"He's a nice guy," Bill said to me. "But I can't understand him. His Spanish is weird, full of rural colloquialisms, I suppose."

The old man looked at Bill and smiled. And Bill, who speaks only a few words of Spanish, made up an absurd phrase in that language. He looked at me as if asking whether he was making sense, but I did not know what he had had in mind; he then smiled shyly and walked away. The old man looked at me and began laughing. I explained to him that my friend sometimes forgot that he did not speak Spanish.

"I think he also forgot to introduce us," I said, and I told him my name.

"And I am Juan Matus, at your service," he said.

We shook hands and remained quiet for some time. I broke the silence and told him about my enterprise. I told him that I was looking for any kind of information on plants, especially peyote. I talked compulsively for a long time, and although I was almost totally ignorant on the subject, I said I knew a great deal about peyote. I thought that if I boasted about my knowledge he would become interested in talking to me. But he did not say anything. He listened patiently. Then he nodded slowly and peered at me. His eyes seemed to shine with a light of their own. I avoided his gaze. I felt embarrassed. I had the certainty that at that moment he knew I was talking nonsense.

"Come to my house some time," he finally said, taking his eyes away from me. "Perhaps we could talk there with more ease."

I did not know what else to say. I felt uneasy. After a while Bill came back into the room. He recognized my discomfort and did not say a word. We sat in tight silence for some time. Then the old man got up. His bus had come. He said goodbye.

"It didn't go too well, did it?" Bill asked.

"No."

"Did you ask him about plants?"

"I did. But I think I goofed."

"I told you, he's very eccentric. The Indians around here know him, yet they never mention him. And that's something."

"He said I could come to his house, though."

"He was bullshitting you. Sure, you can go to his house, but what does it mean? He'll never tell you anything. If you ever ask him anything he'll clam up as if you were an idiot talking nonsense."

Bill said convincingly that he had encountered people like him before, people who gave the impression of knowing a great deal. In his judgment, he said, such people were not worth the trouble, because sooner or later one could obtain the same information from someone else who did not play hard to get. He said that he had neither patience nor time for old fogies, and that it was possible that the old man was only presenting himself as being knowledgeable about herbs, when in reality he knew as little as the next man.

Bill went on talking but I was not listening. My mind kept on wondering about the old Indian. He knew I had been bluffing. I remembered his eyes. They had actually shone.

I went back to see him a couple of months later, not so much as a student of anthropology interested in medicinal plants but as a person with an inexplicable curiosity. The way he had looked at me was an unprecedented event in my life. I wanted to know what was involved in that look, it became almost an obsession with me. I pondered it and the more I thought about it the more unusual it seemed to be.

Don Juan and I became friends, and for a year I paid innumerable visits. I found his manner very reassuring I his sense of humor superb; but above all I felt there a silent consistency about his acts, a consistency which was thoroughly baffling to me. I felt a strange delight in his presence and at the same time I experienced a strange discomfort. His mere company forced me to make a tremendous reevaluation of my models of behavior. I had been reared, perhaps like everyone else, to have a readiness to accept man as an essentially weak and fallible creature. What impressed me about don Juan was the fact that he did not make a point of being weak and helpless, and just being around him insured an unfavorable comparison between his way of behaving and mine. Perhaps one of the most impressive statements he made to me at that time was concerned with our inherent difference. Prior to one of my visits I had been feeling quite unhappy about the total course of my life and about a number of pressing personal conflicts that I had. When I arrived at his house I felt moody and nervous.

We were talking about my interest in knowledge; but, as usual, we were on two different tracks. I was referring to academic knowledge that transcends experience, while he was talking about direct knowledge of tine world.

"Do you know anything about the world around you?" he asked.

"I know all kinds of things," I said.

"I mean do you ever feel the world around you?"

"I feel as much of the world around me as I can."

"That's not enough. You must feel everything, otherwise the world loses it’s sense."

I voiced the classical argument that I did not have to taste the soup in order to know the recipe, nor did I have to get an electric shock in order to know about electricity.

"You make it sound stupid," he said. "The way I see it, you want to cling to your arguments, despite the fact that they bring nothing to you; you want to remain the same even at the cost of your well-being."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I am talking about the fact that you're not complete. You have no peace."

That statement annoyed me. I felt offended. I thought he was certainly not qualified to pass judgment on my acts or my personality.

"You're plagued with problems," he said. "Why?"

"I am only a man, don Juan," I said peevishly.

I made that statement in the same vein my father used to make it. Whenever he said he was only a man he implicitly meant he was weak and helpless and his statement, like mine, was filled with an ultimate sense of despair.

Don Juan peered at me as he had done the first day we met.

"You think about yourself too much," he said and smiled. "And that gives you a strange fatigue that makes you shut off the world around you and cling to your arguments. Therefore, all you have is problems. I'm only a man too, but I don't mean that the way you do."

"How do you mean it?"

"I've vanquished my problems. Too bad my life is so short that I can't grab onto all the things I would like to. But that is not an issue; it's only a pity."

I liked the tone of his statement. There was no despair or self-pity in it.

In 1961, a year after our first meeting, don Juan disclosed to me that he had a secret knowledge of medicinal plants. He told me he was a "brujo." The Spanish word brujo can be rendered in English as sorcerer, medicine man, curer. From that point on the relation between us changed; I became his apprentice and for the next four years he endeavored to teach me the mysteries of sorcery. I have written about that apprenticeship in *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge.*

Our conversations were conducted in Spanish, and thanks to don Juan's superb command of that language I obtained detailed explanations of the intricate means of his system of beliefs. I have referred to that complex and well-systematized body of knowledge as sorcery have referred to him as a sorcerer because those categories he himself used in informal conversations. the context of more serious elucidations, however, he could use the terms "knowledge" to categorize sorcery and "man of knowledge" or "one who knows" to categorize a sorcerer.

In order to teach and corroborate his knowledge don Juan three well-known psychotropic plants: peyote, *Lophophora williamasii*; jimson weed, *Datura inoxia*; and a species of mushroom which belongs to the genus *Psylocebe*. Through the separate ingestion of each of these hallucinogens he produced in me, as his apprentice, some peculiar states of distorted perception, or altered consciousness, which I have called "states of nonordinary reality." I have used the word "reality" because it was a major premise in don Juan's system of beliefs that the states of consciousness produced by the ingestion of any of those three plants were not hallucinations, but concrete, although unordinary, aspects of the reality of everyday life. Don Juan behaved toward these states of nonordinary reality not "as if" they were real but "as" real.

To classify these plants as hallucinogens and the states they produced as nonordinary reality is, of course, my own device. Don Juan understood and explained the plants as being vehicles that would conduct or lead a man to certain impersonal forces or "powers" and the states they produced as being the "meetings" that a sorcerer had to have with those "powers" in order to gain control over them.

He called peyote "Mescalito" and he explained it as being a benevolent teacher and protector of men. Mescalito taught the "right way to live." Peyote was usually ingested at gatherings of sorcerers called "mitotes," where the participants would gather specifically to seek a lesson on the right way to live, Don Juan considered the jimson weed and the mushrooms to be powers of a different sort. He called them "allies" and said that they were capable of being manipulated; a sorcerer, in fact, drew his strength from manipulating an ally. Of the two, don Juan preferred the mushroom. He maintained that the power contained in the mushroom was his personal ally and he called it "smoke" or "little smoke."

Don Juan's procedure to utilize the mushrooms was to let them dry into a fine powder inside a small gourd. He kept the gourd sealed for a year and then mixed the fine powder with five other dry plants and produced a mixture for smoking in a pipe.

In order to become a man of knowledge one had to "meet" with the ally as many times as possible; one had to become familiar with it. This premise implied, of course, that one had to smoke the hallucinogenic mixture quite often. The process of "smoking" consisted of ingesting the fine mushroom powder, which did not incinerate, and inhaling the smoke of the other five plants that made up the mixture. Don Juan explained the profound effects that the mushrooms had on one's perceptual capacities as the "ally removing one's body."

Don Juan's method of teaching required an extraordinary effort on the part of the apprentice. In fact, the degree of participation and involvement needed was so strenuous that by the end of 1965 I had to withdraw from the apprenticeship. I can say now, with the perspective of the five years that have elapsed, that at that time don Juan's teachings had begun to pose a serious threat to my "idea of the world." I had begun to lose the certainty, which all of us have, that the reality of everyday life is something we can take for granted.

At the time of my withdrawal I was convinced that my decision was final; I did not want to see don Juan ever again. However, in April of 1968 an early copy of my book was made available to me and I felt compelled to show it to him. I paid him a visit. Our link of teacher-apprentice was mysteriously reestablished, and I can say that on that occasion I began a second cycle of apprenticeship, very different from the first. My fear was not as acute as it had been in the past. The total mood of don Juan's teachings was more relaxed. He laughed and also made me laugh a great deal. There seemed to be a deliberate intent on his part to minimize seriousness in general. He clowned during the truly crucial moments of this second cycle, and thus helped me to overcome experiences which could easily have become obsessive. His premise was that a light and amenable disposition was needed in order to withstand the impact and the strangeness of the knowledge he was teaching me.

"The reason you got scared and quit is because you felt too damn important," he said, explaining my previous withdrawal. "Feeling important makes one heavy, clumsy, and vain. To be a man of knowledge one needs to be light and fluid."

Don Juan's particular interest in his second cycle of apprenticeship was to teach me to "see." Apparently in his system of knowledge there was the possibility of making a semantic difference between "seeing" and "looking" as two distinct manners of perceiving. "Looking" referred to the ordinary way in which we are accustomed to perceive the world, while "seeing" entailed a very complex process by virtue of which a man of knowledge allegedly perceives the "essence" of the things of the world.

In order to present the intricacies of this learning process in a readable form I have condensed long passages of questions and answers, and thus I have edited my original field notes. It is my belief, however, that at this point my presentation cannot possibly detract from the meaning of don Juan's teachings. The editing was aimed at making my notes flow, as conversation flows, so they would have the impact I desired; that is to say, I wanted by means of a reportage to communicate to the reader the drama and directness of the field situation. Each section I have set as a chapter was a session with don Juan. As a rule, he always concluded each of our sessions on an abrupt note; thus the dramatic tone of the ending of each chapter is not a literary device of my own, it was a device proper of don Juan's oral tradition. It seemed to be a mnemonic device that helped me to retain the dramatic quality and importance of the lessons.

Certain explanations are needed, however, to make my reportage cogent, since it's clarity depends on the elucidation of a number of key concepts or key units that I want to emphasize. This choice of emphasis is congruous with my interest in social science. It is perfectly possible that another person with a different set of goals and expectations would single out concepts entirely different from those I have chosen myself.

During the second cycle of apprenticeship don Juan made a point of assuring me that the use of the smoking mixture was the indispensable prerequisite to "seeing." Therefore I had to use it as often as possible.

"Only the smoke can give you the necessary speed to catch a glimpse of that fleeting world," he said.

With the aid of the psychotropic mixture, he produced in me a series of states of nonordinary reality. The main feature of such states, in relation to what don Juan seemed to be doing, was a condition of "inapplicability." What I perceived in those states of altered consciousness was incomprehensible and impossible to interpret by means of our everyday mode of understanding the world. In other words, the condition of inapplicability entailed the cessation of the pertinence of my world view.

Don Juan used this condition of inapplicability of the states of nonordinary reality in order to introduce a series of preconceived, new "units of meaning." Units of meaning were all the single elements pertinent to the knowledge don Juan was striving to teach me. I have called them units of meaning because they were the basic conglomerate of sensory data and their interpretations on which more complex meaning was constructed. One example of such a unit is the way in which the physiological effect of the psychotropic mixture was understood. It produced a numbness and loss of motor control that was interpreted in don Juan's system as an act performed by the smoke, which in this case was the ally, in order "to remove the body of the practitioner."

Units of meaning were grouped together in a specific way, and each block thus created formed what I have called a "sensible interpretation." Obviously there has to be an endless number of possible sensible interpretations that are pertinent to sorcery that a sorcerer must learn to make. In our day-to-day life we are confronted with an endless number of sensible interpretations pertinent to it. A simple example could be the no longer deliberate interpretation, which we make scores of times every day, of the structure we call "room." It is obvious that we have learned to interpret the structure we call room in terms of room; thus room is a sensible interpretation because it requires that at the time we make it we are cognizant, in one way or another, of all the elements that enter into it's composition. A system of sensible interpretation is, in other words, the process by virtue of which a practitioner is cognizant of all the units of meaning necessary to make assumptions, deductions, predictions, etc., about all the situations pertinent to his activity.

By "practitioner" I mean a participant who has an adequate knowledge of all, or nearly all, the units of meaning involved in his particular system of sensible interpretation. Don Juan was a practitioner; that is, he was a sorcerer who knew all the steps of his sorcery.

As a practitioner he attempted to make his system of sensible interpretation accessible to me. Such an accessibility, in this case, was equivalent to a process of re-socialization in which new ways of interpreting perceptual data were learned.

I was the "stranger," the one who lacked the capacity to make intelligent and congruous interpretations of the units of meaning proper to sorcery.

Don Juan's task, as a practitioner making his system accessible to me, was to disarrange a particular certainty which I share with everyone else, the certainty that our "common-sense" views of the world are final. Through the use of psychotropic plants, and through well-directed contacts between the alien system and myself, he succeeded in pointing out to me that my view of the world cannot be final because it is only an interpretation.

For the American Indian, perhaps for thousands of years, the vague phenomenon we call sorcery has been a serious bona fide practice, comparable to that of our science. Our difficulty in understanding it stems, no doubt, from the alien units of meaning with which it deals.

Don Juan had once told me that a man of knowledge had predilections. I asked him to explain his statement.

"My predilection is to *see,*" he said.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I like to *see,*" he said, "because only by *seeing* can a man of knowledge know."

"What kind of things do you *see*?"

"Everything."

"But I also see everything and I'm not a man of knowledge."

"No. You don't *see.*

"I think I do."

"I tell you, you don't."

"What makes you say that, don Juan?"

"You only look at the surface of things."

"Do you mean that every man of knowledge actually sees through everything he looks at?"

"No. That's not what I mean. I said that a man of knowledge has his own predilections; mine is just to *see* and to know; others do other things."

"What other things, for example?"

"Take Sacateca, he's a man of knowledge and his predilection is dancing. So he dances and knows."

"Is the predilection of a man of knowledge something he does in order to know?"

"Yes, that is correct."

"But how could dancing help Sacateca to know?"

"One can say that Sacateca dances with all he has."

"Does he dance like I dance? I mean like dancing?"

"Let's say that he dances like I *see* and not like you may dance."

"Does he also *see* the way you *see*?"

"Yes, but he also dances."

"How does Sacateca dance?"

"It's hard to explain that. It is a peculiar way of dancing he does when he wants to know. But all I can say about it is that, unless you understand the ways of a man who knows, it is impossible to talk about dancing or *seeing*."

Have you *seen* him doing his dancing?"

"Yes. However, it is not possible for everyone who looks at his dancing to *see* that it is his peculiar way of knowing."

I knew Sacateca, or at least I knew who he was. We had met and once I had bought him a beer. He was very polite and told me I should feel free to stop at his house anytime I wanted to. I toyed for a long time with the idea of visiting him but I did not tell don Juan.

On the afternoon of May 14, 1962, I drove up to Sacateca's house; he had given me directions how to get there and I had no trouble finding it. It was on a corner and had a fence all around it. The gate was closed. I walked around it to see if I could peek inside the house. It appeared to be deserted.

"Don Elias," I called out loud. The chickens got frightened and scattered about cackling furiously. A small dog came to the fence. I expected it to bark at me; instead, it just sat there looking at me. I called out once again and the chickens had another burst of cackling.

An old woman came out of the house. I asked her to call don Elias.

"He's not here," she said.

"Where can I find him?"

"He's in the fields."

"Where in the fields?"

"I don't know. Come back in the late afternoon. Hell be here around five."

"Are you don Elias wife?"

"Yes, I'm his wife," she said and smiled.

I tried to ask her about Sacateca but she excused herself and said that she did not speak Spanish well. I got into my car and drove away.

I returned to the house around six o'clock. I drove to the door and yelled Sacateca's name. This time he came out of the house. I turned on my tape recorder, which in it's brown leather case looked like a camera hanging from my shoulder. He seemed to recognize me.

"Oh, it's you," he said, smiling. "How's Juan?"

"He's fine. But how are you, don Elias?"

He did not answer. He seemed to be nervous. Overtly he was very composed, but I felt that he was ill at ease.

"Has Juan sent you here on some sort of errand?"

"No. I came here by myself."

"What in the world for?"

His question seemed to betray very bona fide surprise.

"I just wanted to talk to you," I said, hoping to sound as casual as possible. "Don Juan has told me marvelous things about you and I got curious and wanted to ask you a few questions."

Sacateca was standing in front of me. His body was lean and wiry. He was wearing khaki pants and shirt. His eyes were half-closed; he seemed to be sleepy or perhaps drunk. His mouth was open a bit and his lower lip hung. I noticed that he was breathing deeply and seemed to be almost snoring. The thought came to me that Sacateca was undoubtedly plastered out of his mind. But that thought seemed to be very incongruous because only a few minutes before, when he came out of his house, he had been very alert and aware of my presence.

"What do you want to talk about?" he finally said.

His voice was tired; it was as though his words dragged after each other. I felt very uneasy. It was as if his tiredness was contagious and pulling me.

"Nothing in particular," I answered. "I just came to chat with you in a friendly way. You once asked me to come to your house."

"Yes, I did, but it's not the same now."

"Why isn't it the same?"

"Don't you talk with Juan?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then what do you want with me?"

"I thought maybe I could ask you some questions?"

"Ask Juan. Isn't he teaching you?"

"He is, but just the same I would like to ask you about what he is teaching me, and have your opinion. This way I'll be able to know what to do."

"Why do you want to do that? Don't you trust Juan?"

"I do."

"Then why don't you ask him to tell you what you want to know?"

"I do. And he tells me. But if you could also tell me about what don Juan is teaching me, perhaps I will understand better."

"Juan can tell you everything. He alone can do that. Don't you understand that?"

"I do, but then I'd like to talk with people like you, don Elias. One does not find a man of knowledge every day."

"Juan is a man of knowledge."

"I know that."

"Then why are you talking to me?"

"I said I came to be friends,"

"No, you didn't. There is something else about you this time."

I wanted to explain myself and all I could do was mumble incoherently. Sacateca did not say anything. He seemed to listen attentively. His eyes were half-closed again but I felt he was peering at me. He nodded almost imperceptibly. Then his lids opened and I saw his eyes. He seemed to be looking past me. He casually tapped the floor with the tip of his right foot, just behind his left heel. His legs were slightly arched; his arms were limp against his sides. Then he lifted his-right arm; his hand was open with the palm turned perpendicular to the ground; his fingers were extended and pointing toward me. He let his hand wobble a couple of times before he brought it to my face level. He held it in that position for an instant and then he said a few words to me. His voice was very clear, yet the words dragged.

After a moment he dropped his hand to his side and remained motionless, taking a strange position. He was standing, resting on the ball of his left foot. His right foot was crossed behind the heel of the left foot and he was tapping the floor rhythmically and gently with the tip of his right foot

I felt an unwarranted apprehension, a form of restlessness. My thoughts seemed to be dissociated. I was thinking unrelated nonsensical thoughts that had nothing to do with what was going on. I noticed my discomfort and tried to steer my thoughts back to the situation at hand, but I couldn't in spite of a great struggle. It was as if some force was keeping me from concentrating or thinking relevant thoughts.

Sacateca had not said a word, and I didn't know what else to say or do. Quite automatically, I turned around and left.

Later on I felt compelled to tell don Juan about my encounter with Sacateca. Don Juan roared with laughter.

"What really took place there?" I asked.

"Sacateca danced!" don Juan said. "He *saw* you, then he danced."

"What did he do to me? I felt very cold and dizzy."

"He apparently didn't like you and stopped you by tossing a word at you."

"How could he possibly do that?" I exclaimed incredulously.

"Very simple; he stopped you with his will."

"What did you say?"

"He stopped you with his will!"

The explanation did not suffice. His statements sounded like gibberish to me. I tried to probe him further, but he could not explain the event to my satisfaction.

Obviously that event or any event that occurred within this alien system of sensible interpretation could be explained or understood only in terms of the units of meaning proper to that system. This work is, therefore, a reportage and should be read as a reportage. The system I recorded was incomprehensible to me, thus the pretense to anything other than reporting about it would be misleading and impertinent. In this respect I have adopted the phenomenological method and have striven to deal with sorcery solely as phenomena that were presented to me. I, as the perceiver, recorded what I perceived, and at the moment of recording I endeavored to suspend judgment.

# PART ONE – The Preliminaries of “Seeing”

## Chapter 1

*April 2, 1968*

Don Juan looked at me for a moment and did not seem at all surprised to see me, even though it had been more than two years since I last visited him. He put his hand on my shoulder and smiled gently and said that I looked different, that I was getting fat and soft.

I had brought him a copy of my book. Without any preliminaries I took it out of my brief case and handed it to him.

"It's a book about you, don Juan," I said.

He took it and flipped through the pages as if they were a deck of cards. He liked the green color on the dust jacket and the height of the book. He felt the cover with his palms, turned it around a couple of times, and then handed it back to me. I felt a great surge of pride.

"I want you to keep it," I said.

He shook his head with a silent laugh.

"I better not," he said, and then added with a broad "You know what we do with paper in Mexico."

I laughed. I thought his touch of irony was beautiful.

We where sitting on a bench in the park of a small town in the mountainous area of central Mexico. I had absolutely no way of letting him know about my intention of paying him a visit, but I was certain I was going to find him, and I did. I waited only a short while in that town before don Juan came down from the mountains and I found him at the market, at the stand of one of his friends.

Don Juan told me, matter-of-factly, that I was there just in time to take him back to Sonora, and we sat in the park to wait for a friend of his, a Mazatec Indian with whom he lived.

We waited about three hours. We talked about different unimportant things, and toward the end of the day, right before his friend came, I related to him some events I had witnessed a few days before.

During my trip to see him my car broke down in the outskirts of a city and I had to stay in town for three days while it was being repaired. There was a motel across the street from the auto shop, but the outskirts of towns are always depressing for me, so I took lodgings in a modern eight-story hotel in the center of town.

The bellboy told me that the hotel had a restaurant, and when I came down to eat I found that there were tables out on the sidewalk. It was a rather handsome arrangement set on the street corner under some low brick arches of modern lines. It was cool outside and there were empty tables, yet I preferred to sit in the stuffy indoors. I had noticed upon entering that a group of shoeshine boys were sitting on the curb in front of the restaurant, and I was certain they would have hounded me had I taken one of the outside tables.

From where I was seated I could see the group of boys through the glass window. A couple of young men took a table and the boys flocked around them, asking to shine their shoes. The young men refused and I was amazed to see that the boys did not insist and went back to sit on the curb. After a while three men in business suits got up and left and the boys ran to their table and began eating the leftovers; in a matter of seconds the plates were clean. The same thing happened with leftovers on all the other tables.

I noticed that the children were quite orderly; if they spilled water they sponged it up with their own shoeshine cloths. I also noticed the thoroughness of their scavenging procedures. They even ate the ice cubes left in the glasses of water and the lemon slices from the tea, peel and all. There was absolutely nothing that they wasted.

In the course of the time I stayed in the hotel I found out that there was an agreement between the children and the manager of the restaurant; the boys were allowed to hang around the premises to make some money from the customers and were also allowed to eat the leftovers, provided that they did not harass anybody and did not break anything. There were eleven in all, ranging in age from five to twelve; the oldest, however, was kept a distance from the rest of the group. They deliberately ostracized him, taunting him with a singsong that he already had pubic hair and was too old to be among them.

After three days of watching them go like vultures after the most meager of leftovers I became despondent, and I left that city feeling that there was no hope for those children whose world was already molded by their day-after-day struggle for crumbs.

"Do you feel sorry for them?" don Juan exclaimed in a questioning tone.

"I certainly do," I said.

"Why?"

"Because I'm concerned with the well-being of my fellow men. Those are children and their world is ugly and cheap."

"Wait! Wait! How can you say that their world is *ugly* and *cheap*?" don Juan said, mocking my statement. "You think that you're better off, don't you?"

I said I did; and he asked me why; and I told him that in comparison to those children's world mine was infinitely more varied and rich in experiences and in opportunities for personal satisfaction and development. Don Juan's laughter was friendly and genuine. He said that I was not careful with what I was saying, that I had no way of knowing about the richness and the opportunities in the world of those children.

I thought don Juan was being stubborn. I really thought he was taking the opposite view just to annoy me. I sincerely believed that those children did not have the slightest chance for any intellectual growth.

I argued my point for a while longer and then don Juan asked me bluntly, "Didn't you once tell me that in your opinion man's greatest accomplishment was to become a man of knowledge?"

I had said that, and I repeated again that in my opinion to become a man of knowledge was one of the greatest intellectual accomplishments.

"Do you think that your very rich world would ever help you to become a man of knowledge?" don Juan asked with slight sarcasm.

I did not answer and he then worded the same question in a different manner, a thing I always do to him when I think he does not understand.

"In other words," he said, smiling broadly, obviously aware that I was cognizant of his ploy, "can your freedom and opportunities help you to become a man of knowledge?"

"No!" I said emphatically.

"Then how could you feel sorry for those children?" he said seriously. "Any of them could become a man of knowledge. All the men of knowledge I know were kids like those you saw eating leftovers and licking the tables."

Don Juan's argument gave me an uncomfortable sensation. I had not felt sorry for those underprivileged children because they did not have enough to eat, but because in my terms their world had already condemned them to be intellectually inadequate. And yet in don Juan's terms any of them could achieve what I believed to be the epitome of man's intellectual accomplishment, the goal of becoming a man of knowledge. My reason for pitying them was incongruous. Don Juan had nailed me neatly.

"Perhaps you're right," I said. "But how can one avoid the desire, the genuine desire, to help our fellow men?"

"How do you think one can help them?"

"By alleviating their burden. The least one can do for our fellow men is to try to change them. You yourself are involved in doing that. Aren't you?"

"No. I'm not. I don't know what to change or why to change anything in my fellow men."

"What about me, don Juan? Weren't you teaching me so I could change?"

"No. I'm not trying to change you. It may happen that one day you may become a man of knowledge— there's no way to know that— but that will not change you. Some day perhaps you'll be able to *see* men in another mode and then you'll realize that there's no way to change anything about them."

"What's this other mode of seeing men, don Juan?"

"Men look different when you *see*. The little smoke will help you to *see* men as fibers of light"

"Fibers of light?"

"Yes. Fibers, like white cobwebs. Very fine threads that circulate from the head to the navel. Thus a man looks like an egg of circulating fibers. And his arms and legs are like luminous bristles, bursting out in all directions."

"Is that the way everyone looks?"

"Everyone. Besides, every man is in touch with everything else, not through his hands, though, but through a bunch of long fibers that shoot out from the center of his abdomen. Those fibers join a man to his surroundings; they keep his balance; they give him stability. So, as you may *see* some day, a man is a luminous egg whether he's a beggar or a king and there's no way to change anything; or rather, what could be changed in that luminous egg? What?"

## Chapter 2

My visit to don Juan started a new cycle. I had no trouble falling back again into my old pattern of enjoying his sense of drama and his humor and his patience with me. I definitely felt that I had to visit him more often. Not to see don Juan was indeed a great loss for me; besides, I had something of particular interest that I wanted to discuss with him.

After I had finished the book about his teachings I began to reexamine the field notes I had not used. I had discarded a great deal of data because my emphasis had been on the states of nonordinary reality. Rehashing my old notes I had come to the conclusion that a skillful sorcerer could bring forth the most specialized range of perception in his apprentice by simply "manipulating social cues." My whole argument about the nature of these manipulatory procedures rested on the assumption that a leader was needed to bring forth the necessary range of perception. I took as a specific test case the sorcerer's peyote meetings. I contended that in those meetings sorcerers reached an agreement about the nature of reality without any overt exchange of words or signs, and my conclusion was that a very sophisticated code was employed by the participants to arrive at such an agreement. I had constructed a complex system to explain the code and procedures, so I went back to see don Juan to ask his personal opinion and advice about my work.

*May 21, 1968*

Nothing out of the ordinary happened during my trip to see don Juan. The temperature in the desert was over a hundred degrees and was quite uncomfortable. The heat subsided in the late afternoon and by the tune I arrived at his house, in the early evening, there was a cool breeze. I was not very tired, so we sat in his room and talked, I felt comfortable and relaxed, and we talked for hours. It was not a conversation that I would have liked to record; I was not really trying to make great sense or trying to draw great meaning; we talked about the weather, the crops, his grandson, the Yaqui Indians, the Mexican government. I told don Juan how much I enjoyed the exquisite sensation of talking in the dark. He said that my statement was consistent with my talkative nature; that it was easy for me to like chattering in the darkness because talking was the only thing I could do at that time, while sitting around. I argued that it was more than the mere act of talking that I enjoyed. I said that I relished the soothing warmth of the darkness around us. He asked me what I did at home when it was dark. I said that invariably I would turn on the lights or I would go out into the lighted streets until it was time to go to sleep.

"Oh!" he said incredulously. "I thought you had learned to use the darkness."

"What can you use it for?" I asked.

He said the darkness— and he called it "the darkness of the day"— was the best time to "see." He stressed the word "see" with a peculiar inflection. I wanted to know what he meant by that, but he said it was too late to go into it then.

*May 22, 1968*

As soon as I woke up in the morning, and without any preliminaries, I told don Juan that I had constructed a system to explain what took place at a peyote meeting, a mitote, I took my notes and read to him what I had done. He listened patiently while I struggled to elucidate my schemata.

I said that I believed a covert leader was necessary in order to cue the participants so they could arrive at any pertinent agreement. I pointed out that people attend a mitote to seek the presence of Mescalito and his lessons about the right way to live; and that those persons never exchange a word or a gesture among them, yet they agree about the presence of Mescalito and his specific lesson. At least that was what they purportedly did in the mitotes I had attended; they agreed that Mescalito had appeared to them individually and had given them a lesson. In my personal experience I had found that the form of the individual visit of Mescalito and his consequent lesson were strikingly homogeneous, although varying in content from person to person. I could not explain this homogeneity except as a result of a subtle and complex system of cueing.

It took me close to two hours to read and explain to don Juan the scheme I had constructed. I ended my talk by begging him to tell me in his own words what were the exact procedures for reaching agreement.

When I had finished he frowned. I thought he must have found my explanation challenging; he appeared to be involved in deep deliberation. After a reasonable silence I asked him what he thought about my idea.

My question made him suddenly turn his frown into a smile and then into roaring laughter. I tried to laugh too and asked nervously what was so funny.

"You're deranged!" he exclaimed. "Why should anyone be bothered with cueing at such an important time as a mitote? Do you think one ever fools around with Mescalito?"

I thought for a moment that he was being evasive; he was not really answering my question.

"Why should anyone cue?" don Juan asked stubbornly. "You have been in mitotes. You should know that no one told you how to feel, or what to do, no one except Mescalito himself."

I insisted that such an explanation was not possible and begged him again to tell me how the agreement was reached.

"I know why you have come," don Juan said in a mysterious tone. "I can't help you in your endeavor because there is no system of cueing."

"But how can all those persons agree about Mescalito's presence?"

"They agree because they *see*" don Juan said dramatically, and then added casually, "Why don't you attend another mitote and *see* for yourself?"

I felt that was a trap. I did not say anything, but put my notes away. He did not insist.

A while later he asked me to drive him to the house of one of his friends. We spent most of the day there. During the course of a conversation his friend John asked me what bad become of my interest in peyote. John had provided the peyote buttons for my first experience nearly eight years before. I did not know what to say to him. Don Juan came to my aid and told John I was doing fine.

On our way back to don Juan's house I felt obliged to make a comment about John's question and I said, among other things, that I had no intention of learning any more about peyote, because it required a kind of courage I did not have; and that I had really meant it when I said

I had quit. Don Juan smiled and did not say anything. I kept on talking until we got to the house.

We sat on the clean area in front of the door. It was a warm, clear day, but there was enough of a breeze in the late afternoon to make it pleasant.

"Why do you have to push so hard?" don Juan said suddenly. "How many years now have you been saying that you don't want to learn any more?"

"Three."

"Why are you so vehement about it?"

"I feel that I'm betraying you, don Juan. I think that's why I'm always talking about it."

"You're not betraying me."

"I have failed you. I have run away. I feel I am defeated."

"You do what you can. Besides, you haven't been defeated yet. What I have to teach you is very hard. I, for instance, found it perhaps even harder than you."

"But you kept at it, don Juan. My case is different. I gave up and I have come to see you not because I want to learn, but only because I wanted to ask you to clarify a point in my work."

Don Juan looked at me for a moment and then he looked away.

"You ought to let the smoke guide you again," he said forcefully.

"No, don Juan, I can't use your smoke any more. I think I have exhausted myself."

"You haven't begun."

"I am too afraid."

"So you're afraid. There is nothing new about being afraid. Don't think about your fear. Think about the wonders of *seeing*!"

"I sincerely wish I could think about those wonders, but I can't. When I think of your smoke I feel a sort of darkness coming upon me. It is as if there were no more people on the earth, no one to turn to. Your smoke has shown me the ultimate of loneliness, don Juan."

"That's not true. Take me, for example. The smoke is my ally and I don't feel such a loneliness."

"But you're different; you've conquered your fear."

Don Juan patted me gently on the shoulder.

"You're not afraid," he said softly. His voice carried a strange accusation.

"Am I lying about my fear, don Juan?"

"I'm not concerned with lies," he said severely. "I'm concerned with something else. The reason you don't want to learn is not because you're afraid. It's something else."

I vehemently urged him to tell me what it was. I pleaded with him, but he did not say anything; he just shook his head as if he could not believe I did not know it.

I told him that perhaps it was inertia which kept me from learning. He wanted to know the meaning of the word "inertia." I read to him from my dictionary: "The tendency of matter to remain at rest if at rest, or, if moving, to keep moving in the same direction, unless affected by some outside force."

" 'Unless affected by some outside force,'" he repeated. "That's about the best word you've found. I've told you already, only a crackpot would undertake the task of becoming a man of knowledge of his own accord. A sober-headed man has to be tricked into doing it."

"I'm sure there must be scores of people who would gladly undertake the task," I said.

"Yes, but those don't count. They are usually cracked. They are like gourds that look fine from the outside and yet they would leak the minute you put pressure on them, the minute you filled them with water.

"I had to trick you into learning once, the same way my benefactor tricked me. Otherwise you wouldn't have learned as much as you did. Perhaps it's time to trick you again."

The tricking to which he was referring was one of the most crucial points of my apprenticeship.

It had taken place years before, yet in my mind it was as vivid as if it had just happened.

Through very artful manipulations don Juan had once forced me into a direct and terrifying confrontation with a woman reputed to be a sorceress. The clash resulted in a profound animosity on her part Don Juan exploited my fear of the woman as motivation to continue with the apprenticeship, claiming that I had to learn more about sorcery in order to protect myself against her magical onslaughts. The end results of his "tricking" were so convincing that I sincerely felt I had no other recourse than to learn as much as possible if I wanted to stay alive.

"If you're planning to scare me again with that woman I simply won't come back any more," I said.

Don Juan's laughter was very joyous.

"Don't worry," he said reassuringly. "Tricks with fear won't work with you any more. You're no longer afraid. But if it is needed, you can be tricked wherever you are; you don't have to be around here for that."

He put his arms behind his head and lay down to sleep. I worked on my notes until he woke up a couple of hours later; it was almost dark then. Noticing that I was writing, he sat up straight and, smiling, asked me if I had written myself out of my problem.

*May 23, 1968*

We were talking about Oaxaca. I told don Juan that once I had arrived in the city on a day when the market was open, a day when scores of Indians from all over the area flock to town to sell food and all kinds of trinkets. I mentioned that I was particularly interested in a man who was selling medicinal plants. He carried a wooden kit in which he kept a number of small jars with dry, shredded plants, and he stood in the middle of the street holding one jar, yelling a very peculiar singsong.

"I bring here," he would say, "for fleas, flies, mosquitoes, and lice.

"Also for pigs, horses, goats, and cows.

"I have here for all the maladies of man.

"The mumps, the measles, rheumatism, and gout.

"I bring here for the heart, the liver, the stomach, and the loin.

"Come near, ladies and gentlemen.

"I bring here for fleas, flies, mosquitoes, and lice."

I had listened to him for a long time. His format consisted of enumerating a long list of man's diseases for which he claimed to have a cure; the device he used to give rhythm to his singsong was to pause after naming a set of four.

Don Juan said that he also used to sell herbs in the market in Oaxaca when he was young. He said he still remembered his selling pitch and he yelled it for me. He said that he and his friend Vicente used to make concoctions.

"Those concoctions were really good," don Juan said. "My friend Vicente used to make great extracts of plants."

I told don Juan that once during one of my trips to Mexico I had met his friend Vicente. Don Juan seemed to be surprised and wanted to know more about it.

I was driving through Durango at that time and remembered that don Juan had once told me I should pay a visit to his friend, who lived there. I looked for him and found him, and talked to him for a while. Before I left he gave me a sack with some plants and a series of instructions for replanting one of them.

I stopped on my way to the town of Aguas Calientes. I made sure there were no people around. For at least ten minutes I had been watching the road and surrounding areas. There had not been any houses in sight, nor cattle grazing alongside the road. I stopped on the top of a small hill; from there I could see the road ahead and behind me. It was deserted in both directions as far into the distance as I could see. I waited for a few minutes to orient myself and to remember don Vicente's instructions. I took one of the plants, walked into a field of cacti on the east side of the road, and planted it as don Vicente had instructed me. I had with me a bottle of mineral water with which I intended to sprinkle the plant. I tried to open it by hitting the cap with the small iron bar I had used as a digging stick, but the bottle exploded and a glass sliver nicked my upper lip and made it bleed.

I walked back to my car to get another bottle of mineral water. As I was getting it out of my trunk a man driving a VW station wagon stopped and asked me if I needed help. I said that everything was all right and he drove away. I returned to water the plant and then I started back toward my car. When I was perhaps a hundred feet away I heard some voices. I hurried down a slope onto the highway and found three Mexicans at the car, two men and one woman. One of the men was sitting on the front bumper. He was perhaps in his late thirties, of medium height, with black curly hair. He was carrying a bundle on his back and was wearing old slacks and a worn-out pinkish shirt. His shoes were untied and perhaps too big for his feet; they seemed to be loose and uncomfortable. He was sweating profusely.

The other man was standing about twenty feet away from the car. He was small-boned and shorter than the other man, and his hair was straight and combed backwards. He carried a smaller bundle and was older, perhaps in his late forties. His clothes were in better condition. He had on a dark blue jacket, light blue slacks, and black shoes. He was not perspiring at all and seemed aloof, uninterested.

The woman appeared to be also in her forties. She was fat and had a very dark complexion. She wore black Capris, a white sweater, and black, pointed shoes. She did not carry a bundle, but was holding a portable transistor radio. She seemed to be very tired and her face was covered with beads of perspiration.

When I approached them the younger man and the woman accosted me. They wanted a ride. I told them I did not have any space in my car. I showed them that the back seat was loaded to capacity and there was really no room left. The man suggested that if I drove slow they could go perched on the back bumper, or lying across the front fender. I thought the idea was preposterous. Yet there was such an urgency in their plea that I felt very sad and ill at ease. I gave them some money for their bus fare.

The younger man took the bills and thanked me, but the older man turned his back disdainfully.

"I want transportation," he said. "I'm not interested in money."

Then he turned to me. "Can't you give us some food or water?" he asked.

I really had nothing to give them. They stood there looking at me for a moment and then they began to walk away.

I got into my car and tried to start the motor. The heat was very intense and the motor seemed to be flooded. The younger man stopped when he heard the starter grinding and came back and stood behind my car ready to push it. I felt a tremendous apprehension. I was actually panting desperately. The motor finally ignited and I zoomed away.

After I had finished relating this, don Juan remained pensive for a long while.

"Why haven't you told me this before?" he said without looking at me.

I did not know what to say. I shrugged my shoulders and told him that I never thought it was important.

"It's damn important!" he said. "Vicente is a first-rate sorcerer. He gave you something to plant because he had his reasons; and if you encountered three people who seemed to have popped out of nowhere right after you had planted it, there was a reason for that too; but only a fool like you would disregard the incident and think it wasn't important."

He wanted to know exactly what had taken place when I paid don Vicente the visit.

I told him that I was driving across town and passed by the market; I got the idea then of looking for don Vicente. I walked into the market and went to the section for medicinal herbs. There were three stands in a row but they were run by three fat women. I walked to the end of the aisle and found another stand around the corner. There I saw a thin, small-boned, white-haired man. He was at that moment selling a birdcage to a woman.

I waited around until he was by himself and then I asked him if he knew Vicente Medrano. He looked at me without answering.

"What do you want with that Vicente Medrano?" he finally said.

I told him I had come to pay him a visit on behalf of his friend, and gave him don Juan's name. The old man looked at me for an instant and then he said he was Vicente Medrano and was at my service. He asked me to sit down. He seemed to be pleased, very relaxed, and genuinely friendly. I told him about my friendship with don Juan, I felt that there was an immediate bond of sympathy between us. He told me he had known don Juan since they were in their twenties. Don Vicente had only words of praise for don Juan. Toward the end of our conversation he said in a vibrant tone: "Juan is a true man of knowledge. I myself have dwelled only briefly with plant powers. I was always interested in their curative properties; I have even collected botany books, which I sold only recently."

He remained silent for a moment; he rubbed his chin a couple of times. He seemed to be searching for a proper word.

"You may say that I am only a man of lyric knowledge," he said. "I'm not like Juan, my Indian brother."

Don Vicente was silent again for another moment. His eyes were glassy and were staring at the floor by my left side.

Then he turned to me and said almost in a whisper, "Oh, how high soars my Indian brother!"

Don Vicente got up. It seemed that our conversation was finished.

If anyone else had made a statement about an Indian brother I would have taken it for a cheap cliche. Don Vicente's tone, however, was so sincere and his eyes were so clear that he enraptured me with the image of his Indian brother soaring so high. And I believed he meant what he had said.

"Lyric knowledge, my eye!" don Juan exclaimed after I had recounted the whole story. "Vicente is a brujo. Why did you go to see him?"

I reminded him that he himself had asked me to visit don Vicente,

"That's absurd!" he exclaimed dramatically. "I said to you, some day, when you know how to *see*, you should pay a visit to my friend Vicente; that's what I said. Apparently you were not listening."

I argued that I could find no harm in having met don Vicente, that I was charmed by his manners and his kindness.

Don Juan shook his head from side to side and in a half-kidding tone expressed his bewilderment at what he called my "baffling good luck," He said that my visiting don Vicente was like walking into a lion's den armed with a twig. Don Juan seemed to be agitated, yet I could not see any reason for his concern. Don Vicente was a beautiful man. He seemed so frail; his strangely haunting eyes made him look almost ethereal. I asked don Juan how a beautiful person like that could be dangerous.

"You're a damn fool," he said and looked stern for a moment "He won't cause you any harm by himself. But knowledge is power, and once a man embarks on the road of knowledge he's no longer liable for what may happen to those who come in contact with him. You should have paid him a visit when you knew enough to defend yourself; not from him, but from the power he has harnessed, which, by the way, is not his or anybody else's. Upon hearing that you were my friend, Vicente assumed that you knew how to protect yourself and then made you a gift. He apparently liked you and must have made you a great gift, and you chucked it. What a pity!"

*May 24, 1968*

I had been pestering don Juan all day to tell me about don Vicente's gift. I had pointed out to him in various ways that he had to consider our differences; I said that what was self-explanatory for him might be totally incomprehensible for me.

"How many plants did he give you?" he finally asked,

I said four, but I actually could not remember. Then don Juan wanted to know exactly what had taken place after I left don Vicente and before I stopped on the side of the road. But I could not remember either.

"The number of plants is important and so is the order of events," he said. "How can I tell you what his gift was if you don't remember what happened?"

I struggled unsuccessfully to visualize the sequence of events.

"If you would remember everything that happened," he said, "I could at least tell you how you chucked your gift."

Don Juan seemed to be very disturbed. He urged me impatiently to recollect, but my memory was almost a total blank.

"What do you think I did wrong, don Juan?" I said, just to continue the conversation.

"Everything."

"But I followed don Vicente's instructions to the letter."

"So what? Don't you understand that to follow his instructions was meaningless?"

"Why?"

"Because those instructions were designed for someone who could *see*, not for an idiot who got out with his life just by sheer luck. You went to see Vicente without preparation. He liked you and gave you a gift. And that gift could easily have cost you your life."

"But why did he give me something so serious? If he's a sorcerer he should've known that I don't know anything."

"No, he couldn't have *seen* that. You look as though you know, but you don't know much really."

I said I was sincerely convinced that I had never misrepresented myself, at least not deliberately.

"I didn't mean that," he said. "If you were putting on airs Vicente could've seen through you. This is something worse than putting on airs. When I *see* you, you look to me as if you know a great deal, and yet I myself know that you don't."

"What do I seem to know, don Juan?"

"Secrets of power, of course; a brujo's knowledge. So when Vicente *saw* you he made you a gift and you acted toward it the way a dog acts toward food when his belly is full. A dog pisses on food when he doesn't want to eat any more, so other dogs won't eat it. You did that on the gift. Now we'll never know what really took place. You have lost a great deal. What a waste!"

He was quiet for some time; then he shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"It's useless to complain," he said, "and yet it's so difficult not to. Gifts of power happen so rarely in one's life; they are unique and precious. Take me, for instance; nobody has ever made me such a gift. There are few people, to my knowledge, who ever had one. To waste something so unique is a shame."

"I see what you mean, don Juan," I said. "Is there anything I can do now to salvage the gift?"

He laughed and repeated several times, "To salvage the gift."

"That sounds nice," he said. "I like that. Yet there isn't anything one can do to salvage your gift."

*May 25, 1968*

Don Juan spent nearly all his time today showing me how to assemble trapping devices for small animals. We had been cutting and cleaning branches nearly all morning. There were many questions in my mind. I had to talk to him while we worked, but he had made a joke and said that of the two of us only I could move my hands and my mouth at the same time. We finally sat down to rest and I blurted out a question.

"What's it like to *see*, don Juan?"

"You have to learn to *see* in order to know that. I can't tell you."

"Is it a secret I shouldn't know?"

"No. It's just that I can't describe it."

"Why?"

"It wouldn't make sense to you."

"Try me, don Juan. Maybe it'll make sense to me."

"No. You must do it yourself. Once you learn, you can *see* every single thing in the world in a different way."

"Then, don Juan, you don't see the world in the usual way any more."

"I see both ways. When I want to *look* at the world I see it the way you do. Then when I want to *see* it I look at it the way I know and I perceive it in a different way."

"Do things look consistently the same every time you *see* them?"

"Things don't change. You change your way of looking, that's all"

"I mean, don Juan, that if you *see*, for instance, the same tree, does it remain the same every time you *see* it?"

"No. It changes and yet it's the same."

"But if the same tree changes every time you *see* it, your *seeing* may be a mere illusion."

He laughed and did not answer for some time, but seemed to be thinking. Finally he said, "Whenever you look at things you don't *see* them. You just look at them, I suppose, to make sure that something is there. Since you're not concerned with *seeing*, things look very much the same every time you look at them. When you learn to see, on the other hand, a thing is never the same every time you *see* it, and yet it is the same. I told you, for instance, that a man is like an egg. Every time I *see* the same man I *see* an egg, yet it is not the same egg."

"But you won't be able to recognize anything, since nothing is the same; so what's the advantage of learning to *see*?"

"You can tell things apart. You can see them for what they really are."

"Don't I see things as they really are?"

"No. Your eyes have learned only to look. Take, for example, the three people you encountered, the three Mexicans. You have described them in detail, and even told me what clothes they wore. And that only proved to me that you didn't *see* them at all. If you were capable of *seeing* you would have known on the spot that they were not people."

"They were not people? What were they?"

"They were not people, that's all."

"But that's impossible. They were just like you and me."

"No, they were not. I'm sure of it."

I asked him if they were ghosts, spirits, or the souls of dead people. His reply was that he did not know what ghosts, spirits, and souls were.

I translated for him the Webster's New World Dictionary definition of the word ghosts: "The supposed disembodied spirit of a dead person, conceived of as appearing to the living as a pale, shadowy apparition." And then the definition of spirit: "A supernatural being, especially one thought of... as a ghost, or as inhabiting a certain region, being of a certain (good or evil) character."

He said they could perhaps be called spirits, although the definition I had read was not quite adequate to describe them.

"Are they guardians of some sort?" I asked.

"No. They don't guard anything."

"Are they overseers? Are they watching over us?"

"They are forces, neither good nor bad, just forces that a brujo learns to harness."

"Are they the allies, don Juan?"

"Yes, they are the allies of a man of knowledge."

This was the first time in eight years of our association that don Juan had come close to defining an "ally." I must have asked him to do so dozens of times. He usually disregarded my question, saying that I knew what an ally was and that it was stupid to voice what I already knew. Don Juan's direct statement about the nature of an ally was a novelty and I was compelled to probe him.

"You told me the allies were in the plants," I said, "in the jimson weed and in the mushrooms."

"I've never told you that," he said with great conviction. "You always jump to your own conclusions."

"But I wrote it down in my notes, don Juan."

"You may write whatever you want, but don't tell me I said that."

I reminded him that he had at first told me his benefactor's ally was the jimson weed and his own ally was the little smoke; and that he had later clarified it by saying that the ally was contained in each plant.

"No. That's not correct," he said, frowning. "My ally is the little smoke, but that doesn't mean that my ally is in the smoking mixture, or in the mushrooms, or in my pipe. They all have to be put together to get me to the ally, and that ally I call little smoke for reasons of my own."

Don Juan said that the three people I had seen, whom he called "those who are not people"—

*los qué no son gente*— were in reality don Vicente's allies.

I reminded him that he had established that the difference between an ally and Mescalito was that an ally could not be seen, while one could easily see Mescalito.

We involved ourselves in a long discussion then. He said that he had established the idea that an ally could not be seen because an ally adopted any form. When I pointed out that he had once also said that Mescalito adopted any form, don Juan dropped the whole conversation, saying that the "seeing" to which he was referring was not like ordinary "looking at things" and that my confusion stemmed from my insistence on talking.

Hours later don Juan himself started back again on the topic of the allies. I had felt he was somehow annoyed by my questions so I had not pressed him any further. He was showing me then how to make a trap for rabbits; I had to hold a long stick and bend it as far as possible so he could tie a string around the ends. The stick was fairly thin but still demanded considerable strength to bend. My head and arms were shivering with the exertion and I was nearly exhausted when he finally tied the string.

We sat down and began to talk. He said it was obvious to him that I could not comprehend anything unless I talked about it, and that he did not mind my questions and was going to tell me about the allies.

"The ally is not in the smoke," he said. "The smoke takes you to where the ally is, and when you become one with the ally you don't ever have to smoke again. From then on you can summon your ally at will and make him do anything you want.

"The allies are neither good nor evil, but are put to use by the sorcerers for whatever purpose they see fit. I like the little smoke as an ally because it doesn't demand much of me. It's constant and fair."

"How does an ally look to you, don Juan? Those three people I saw, for instance, who looked like ordinary people to me; how would they look to you?"

"They would look like ordinary people."

"Then how can you tell them apart from real people?"

"Real people look like luminous eggs when you see them. Non-people always look like people.

That's what I meant when I said you cannot *see* an ally. The allies take different forms. They look like dogs, coyotes, birds, even tumbleweeds, or anything else. The only difference is that when you *see* them they look just like what they're pretending to be. Everything has it's own way of being when you *see*. Just like men look like eggs, other things look like something else, but the allies can be seen only in the form they are portraying. That form is good enough to fool the eyes, our eyes, that is. A dog is never fooled, neither is a crow."

"Why would they want to fool us?"

"I think we are all clowns. We fool ourselves. The allies just take the outward appearance of whatever is around and then we take them for what they are not. It is not their fault that we have taught our eyes only to look at things."

"I'm not clear about their function, don Juan. What do allies do in the world?"

"This is like asking me what we men do in the world. I really don't know. We are here, that's all. And the allies are here like us; and maybe they have been here before us."

"What do you mean before us, don Juan?"

"We men have not always been here."

"Do you mean here in this country or here in the world?"

We involved ourselves in another long argument at this point Don Juan said that for him there was only the world, the place where he put his feet. I asked him how he knew that we had not always been in the world.

"Very simple," he said. "We men know very little about the world. A coyote knows much more than we do. A coyote is hardly ever fooled by the world's appearance."

"How come we can catch them and kill them?" I asked. "If they are not fooled by appearances how come they die so easily?"

Don Juan stared at me until I became embarrassed.

"We may trap or poison or shoot a coyote," he said. "Any way we do it a coyote is an easy prey for us because he is not familiar with man's machinations. If the coyote survived, however, you could rest assured that we'd never catch up with him again. A good hunter knows that and never sets his trap twice on the same spot, because if a coyote dies in a trap, every coyote can *see* his death, which lingers on, and thus they will avoid the trap or even the general area where it was set. We, on the other hand, never *see* death, which lingers on the spot where one of our fellow men has died; we may suspect it, but we never *see* it."

"Can a coyote *see* an ally?"

"Certainly."

"How does an ally look to a coyote?"

"I would have to be a coyote to know that. I can tell you, however, that to a crow it looks like a pointed hat. Round and wide at the bottom, ending in a long point. Some of them shine, but the majority are dull and appear to be very heavy. They resemble a dripping piece of cloth. They are foreboding shapes."

"How do they look to you when you see them, don Juan?"

"I've told you already; they look like whatever they're pretending to be. They take any shape or size that suits them. They could be shaped like a pebble or a mountain."

"Do they talk, or laugh, or make any noise?"

"In the company of men they behave like men. In the company of animals they behave like animals. Animals are usually afraid of them; however, if they are accustomed to seeing the allies, they leave them alone. We ourselves do something similar. We have scores of allies among us, but we don't bother them. Since our eyes can only look at things, we don't notice them."

"Do you mean that some of the people I see in the street are not really people?" I asked, truly bewildered by his statement.

"Some of them are not," he said emphatically.

His statement seemed preposterous to me, yet I could not seriously conceive of don Juan's making such a remark purely for effect I told him it sounded like a science-fiction tale about beings from another planet. He said he did not care how it sounded, but some people in the streets were not people. "Why must you think that every person in a moving crowd is a human being?" he asked with an air of utmost seriousness.

I really could not explain why, except that I was habituated to believe that as an act of sheer faith on my part.

He went on to say how much he liked to watch busy places with a lot of people, and how he would sometimes see a crowd of men who looked like eggs, and among the mass of egg-like creatures he would spot one who looked just like a person.

"It's very enjoyable to do that," he said, laughing, "or at least it's enjoyable for me. I like to sit in parks and bus depots and watch. Sometimes I can spot an ally right away; at other times I can *see* only real people. Once I saw two allies sitting in a bus, side by side. That's the only time in my life I have seen two together."

"Did it have a special significance for you to see two of them?"

"Certainly. Anything they do is significant. From their actions a brujo can sometimes draw his power. Even if a brujo does not have an ally of his own, as long as he knows how to *see*, he can handle power by watching the acts of the allies. My benefactor taught me to do that, and for years before I had my own ally I watched for allies among crowds of people and every time I *saw* one it taught me something. You found three together. What a magnificent lesson you wasted."

He did not say anything else until we finished assembling the rabbit trap. Then he turned to me and said suddenly, as if he had just remembered it, that another important thing about the allies was that if one found two of them they were always two of the same kind. The two allies he saw were two men, he said; and since I had seen two men and one woman he concluded that my experience was even more unusual.

I asked if the allies portray children; if the children could be of the same or of different sex; if the allies portrayed people of different races; if they could portray a family composed of a man, a woman, and a child; and finally I asked him if he had ever seen an ally driving a car or a bus.

Don Juan did not answer at all. He smiled and let me do the talking. When he heard my last question he burst out laughing and said that I was being careless with my questions, that it would have been more appropriate to ask if he had ever *seen* an ally driving a motor vehicle.

"You don't want to forget the motorcycles, do you?" he said with a mischievous glint in his eye.

I thought his making fun of my question was funny and lighthearted and I laughed with him.

Then he explained that the allies could not take the lead or act upon anything directly; they could, however, act upon man in an indirect way. Don Juan said that coming in contact with an ally was dangerous because the ally was capable of bringing out the worst in a person. The apprenticeship was long and arduous, he said, because one had to reduce to a minimum all that was unnecessary in one's life, in order to withstand the impact of such an encounter. Don Juan said that his benefactor, when he first came in contact with an ally, was driven to burn himself and was scarred as if a mountain lion had mauled him. In his own case, he said, an ally pushed him into a pile of burning wood, and he burned himself a little on the knee and shoulder blade, but the scars disappeared in time, when he became one with the ally.

## Chapter 3

On June 10, 1968, I started on a long journey with don Juan to participate in a mitote. I had been waiting for this opportunity for months, yet I was not really sure I wanted to go. I thought my hesitation was due to my fear that at a peyote meeting I would have to ingest peyote, and I had no intention whatsoever of doing that. I had repeatedly expressed those feelings to don Juan. He laughed patiently at first, but finally he firmly stated that he did not want to hear one more thing about my fear.

As far as I was concerned, a mitote was ideal ground for me to verify the schemata I had constructed. For one thing, I had never completely abandoned the idea that a covert leader was necessary at such a meeting in order to insure agreement among the participants. Somehow I had the feeling that don Juan had discarded my idea for reasons of his own, since he deemed it more efficacious to explain everything that took place at a mitote in terms of "seeing." I thought that my interest in finding a suitable explanation in my own terms was not in accordance with what he himself wanted me to do; therefore he had to discard my rationale, as he was accustomed to doing with whatever did not conform to his system.

Right before we started on the journey don Juan eased my apprehension about having to ingest peyote by telling me that I was attending the meeting only to watch. I felt elated. At that tune I was almost certain I was going to discover the covert procedure by which the participants arrive at an agreement.

It was late afternoon when we left; the sun was almost on the horizon; I felt it on my neck and wished I had a Venetian blind in the rear window of my car. From the top of a hill I could see down into a huge valley; the road was like a black ribbon laid flat over the ground, up and down innumerable hills. I followed it with my eyes for a moment before we began descending; it ran due south until it disappeared over a range of low mountains in the distance.

Don Juan sat quietly, looking straight ahead. We had not said a word for a long time. It was uncomfortably warm inside the car. I had opened all the windows, but that did not help because it was an extremely hot day. I felt very annoyed and restless. I began to complain about the heat.

Don Juan frowned and looked at me quizzically.

"It's hot all over Mexico this time of the year," he said. "There is nothing one can do about it."

I did not look at him, but I knew he was gazing at me. The car picked up speed going down the slope. I vaguely saw a highway sign, *Vado*— dip. When I actually saw the dip I was going quite fast, and although I did slow down, we still felt the impact and bobbed up and down on the seats. I reduced the speed considerably; we were going through an area where livestock grazed freely on the sides of the road, an area where the carcass of a horse or a cow run down by a car was a common sight. At a certain point I had to stop completely and let some horses cross the highway. I was getting more restless and annoyed. I told don Juan that it was the heat; I said that I had always disliked the heat since my childhood, because every summer I used to feel suffocated and I could hardly breathe.

"You're not a child now," he said.

"The heat still suffocates me."

"Well, hunger used to suffocate me when I was a child," he said softly. "To be very hungry was the only thing I knew as a child, and I used to swell up until I could not breathe either. But that was when I was a child. I cannot suffocate now, neither can I swell like a toad when I am hungry."

I didn't know what to say. I felt I was getting myself into an untenable position and soon I would have to defend a point I really didn't care to defend. The heat was not that bad. What disturbed me was the prospect of driving for over a thousand miles to our destination. I felt annoyed at the thought of having to exert myself.

"Let's stop and get something to eat," I said. "Maybe it won't be so hot once the sun goes down."

Don Juan looked at me, smiling, and said that there were not any clean towns for a long stretch and that he had understood my policy was not to eat from the stands on the roadside.

"Don't you fear diarrhea any more?" he asked.

I knew he was being sarcastic, yet he kept an inquisitive and at the same time serious look on his face.

"The way you act," he said, "one would think that diarrhea is lurking out there, waiting for you to step out of the car to jump you. You're in a terrible fix; if you escape the heat, diarrhea will eventually get you."

Don Juan's tone was so serious that I began to laugh. Then we drove in silence for a long time. When we arrived at a highway stop for trucks called Los Vidrios— Glass— it was already quite dark.

Don Juan shouted from the car, "What do you have to eat today?"

"Pork meat," a woman shouted back from inside.

"I hope for your sake that the pig was run down on the road today," don Juan said to me, laughing.

We got out of the car. The road was flanked on both sides by ranges of low mountains that seemed to be the solidified lava of some gigantic volcanic eruption. In the darkness the black, jagged peaks were silhouetted against the sky like huge menacing walls of glass slivers.

While we ate I told don Juan that I could see the reason why the place was called Glass. I said that to me the name was obviously due to the glass-sliver shape of the mountains.

Don Juan said in a convincing tone that the place was called Los Vidrios because a truck loaded with glass had overturned on that spot and the glass shreds were left lying around the road for years.

I felt he was being facetious and asked him to tell me if that was the real reason.

"Why don't you ask someone here?" he said.

I asked a man who was sitting at a table next to ours; he said apologetically that he didn't know. I went into the kitchen and asked the women there if they knew, but they all said they didn't; that the place was just called Glass.

"I believe I'm right," don Juan said in a low voice. "Mexicans are not given to noticing things around them. I'm sure they can't see the glass mountains, but they surely can leave a mountain of glass shreds lying around for years."

We both found the image funny and laughed.

When we had finished eating don Juan asked me how I felt. I told him fine, but I really felt somewhat queasy. Don Juan gave me a steadfast look and seemed to detect my feeling of discomfort.

"Once you decided to come to Mexico you should have put all your petty fears away," he said very sternly. "Your decision to come should have vanquished them. You came because you wanted to come. That's the warrior's way. I have told you time and time again, the most effective way to live is as a warrior. Worry and think before you make any decision, but once you make it, be on your way free from worries or thoughts; there will be a million other decisions still awaiting you. That's the warrior's way."

"I believe I do that, don Juan, at least some of the time. It's very hard to keep on reminding myself, though."

"A warrior thinks of his death when things become unclear."

"That's even harder, don Juan. For most people death is very vague and remote. We never think of it."

"Why not?"

"Why should we?"

"Very simple," he said. "Because the idea of death is the only thing that tempers our spirit."

By the time we left Los Vidrios it was so dark that the jagged silhouette of the mountains had emerged into the darkness of the sky. We drove in silence for more than an hour. I felt tired. It was as though I didn't want to talk because there was nothing to talk about. The traffic was minimal. Few cars passed by from the opposite direction. It seemed as if we were the only people going south on the highway. I thought that was strange and I kept on looking in the rear-view mirror to see if there were other cars coming from behind, but there were none.

After a while I stopped looking for cars and began to dwell again on the prospect of our trip. Then I noticed that my headlights seemed extremely bright in contrast with the darkness all around and I looked again in the rear-view mirror. I saw a bright glare first and then two points of light that seemed to have emerged from the ground. They were the headlights of a car on a hilltop in the distance behind us. They remained visible for a while, then they disappeared into the darkness as if they had been scooped away; after a moment they appeared on another hilltop, and then they disappeared again. I followed their appearances and disappearances in the mirror for a long time. At one point it occurred to me that the car was gaining on us. It was definitely closing in. The lights were bigger and brighter. I deliberately stepped on the gas pedal. I had a sensation of uneasiness. Don Juan seemed to notice my concern, or perhaps he was only noticing that I was speeding up. He looked at me first, then he turned around and looked at the distant headlights.

He asked me if there was something wrong with me. I told him that I had not seen any cars behind us for hours and that suddenly I had noticed the lights of a car that seemed to be gaining on us all the time.

He chuckled and asked me if I really thought it was a car. I told him that it had to be a car and he said that my concern revealed to him that, somehow, I must have felt that whatever was behind us was something more than a mere car. I insisted that I thought it was just another car on the highway, or perhaps a truck.

"What else can it be?" I said loudly.

Don Juan's probing had put me on edge.

He turned and looked straight at me, then he nodded slowly, as if measuring what he was going to say.

"Those are the lights on the head of death," he said softly. "Death puts them on like a hat and then shoots off on a gallop. Those are the lights of death on the gallop gaining on us, getting closer and closer."

A chill ran up my back. After a while I looked in the rear-view mirror again, but the lights were not there any more.

I told don Juan that the car must have stopped or turned off the road. He did not look back; he just stretched his arms and yawned.

"No," he said. "Death never stops. Sometimes it turns off it's lights, that's all."

We arrived in northeastern Mexico June 13. Two old Indian women, who looked alike and seemed to be sisters, and four girls were gathered at the door of a small adobe house. There was a hut behind the house and a dilapidated barn that had only part of it's roof and one wall left. The women were apparently waiting for us; they must have spotted my car by the dust it raised on the dirt road after I left the paved highway a couple of miles away. The house was in a deep valley, and viewed from the door the highway looked like a long scar high up on the side of the green hills.

Don Juan got out of the car and talked with the old women for a moment. They pointed to some wooden stools in front of the door. Don Juan signaled me to come over and sit down. One of the old women sat with us; the rest went inside the house. Two of the girls remained by the door, examining me with curiosity. I waved at them; they giggled and ran inside. After a few minutes two young men came over and greeted don Juan. They did not speak to me or even look at me. They talked to don Juan briefly; then he got up and all of us, including the women, Walked to another house, perhaps half a mile away.

We met there with another group of people. Don Juan went inside but told me to stay by the door. I looked in and saw an old Indian man around don Juan's age sitting on a wooden stool.

It was not quite dark. A group of young Indian men and women were standing quietly around an old truck parked in front of the house. I talked to them in Spanish but they deliberately avoided answering me; the women giggled every time I said something and the men smiled politely and turned their eyes away. It was as if they did not understand me, yet I was sure all of them spoke Spanish because I had heard them talking among themselves.

After a while don Juan and the other old man came out and got into the truck and sat next to the driver. That appeared to be a signal for everyone to climb onto the flatbed of the truck. There were no side railings, and when the truck began to move we all hung onto a long rope that was tied to some hooks on the chassis.

The truck moved slowly on the dirt road. At one point, on a very steep slope, it stopped and everybody jumped down and walked behind it; then two young men hopped onto the flatbed again and sat on the edge without using the rope. The women laughed and encouraged them to maintain their precarious position. Don Juan and the old man, who was referred to as don Silvio, walked together and did not seem to be concerned with the young men's histrionics. When the road leveled off everybody got on the truck again.

We rode for about an hour. The floor was extremely hard and uncomfortable, so I stood up and held onto the roof of the cab and rode that way until we stopped in front of a group of shacks. There were more people there; it was very dark by then and I could see only a few of them in the dim, yellowish light of a kerosene lantern that hung by an open door.

Everybody got off the truck and mingled with the people in the houses. Don Juan told me again to stay outside. I leaned against the front fender of the truck and after a minute or two I was joined by three young men. I had met one of them four years before at a previous mitote. He embraced me by grabbing my forearms.

"You're fine," he whispered to me in Spanish.

We stayed very quietly by the truck. It was a warm, windy night. I could hear the soft rumble of a stream close by. My friend asked me in a whisper if I had any cigarettes. I passed a pack around. By the glow of the cigarettes I looked at my watch. It was nine o'clock.

A group of people emerged from inside the house soon afterwards and the three young men walked away. Don Juan came over to me and told me that he had explained my presence to everybody's satisfaction and that I was welcome to come and serve water at the mitote. He said we would be going right away.

A group of ten women and eleven men left the house. The man heading the party was rather husky; he was perhaps in his mid-fifties. They called him "Mocho," a nickname which means "cropped." He moved with brisk, firm steps. He carried a kerosene lantern and waved it from side to side as he walked. At first I thought he was moving it at random, but then I discovered that he waved the lantern to mark an obstacle or a difficult pass on the road. We walked for over an hour. The women chatted and laughed softly from time to time. Don Juan and the other old man were at the head of the line; I was at the very tail end of it. I kept my eyes down on the road, trying to see where I was walking.

It had been four years since don Juan and I had been in the hills at night, and I had lost a great deal of physical prowess. I kept stumbling and involuntarily kicking small rocks. My knees did not have any flexibility; the road seemed to come up at me when I encountered a high spot, or it seemed to give in under me when I hit a low spot. I was the noisiest walker and that made me into an unwilling clown. Someone in the group said, "Woo," every time I stumbled and everyone laughed. At one point, one of the rocks I kicked hit a woman's heel and she said out loud, to everyone's delight, "Give a candle to that poor boy!" But the final mortification was when I tripped and had to hold onto the person in front of me; he nearly lost his balance with my weight on him and let out a deliberate scream that was out of all proportion. Everyone laughed so hard that the whole group had to stop for a while.

At a certain moment the man who was leading jerked his lantern up and down. It seemed that was the sign we had arrived at our destination. There was a dark silhouette of a low house to my right, a short distance away. Everyone in the group scrambled in different directions. I looked for don Juan. It was difficult to find him in the darkness. I stumbled noisily for a while before noticing that he was sitting on a rock.

He again told me that my duty was to bring water for the men who were going to participate. He had taught me the procedure years before. I remembered every detail of it but he insisted on refreshing my memory and showed me again how to do it.

Afterwards we walked to the back of the house where all the men had gathered. They had built a fire. There was a cleared area covered with straw mats perhaps fifteen feet away from the fire. Mocho, the man who had led us, sat on a mat first; I noticed that the upper edge of his left ear was missing, which accounted for his nickname. Don Silvio sat to his right and don Juan to his left. Mocho was sitting facing the fire. A young man advanced toward him and placed a flat basket with peyote buttons in front of him; then the young man sat down between Mocho and don Silvio. Another young man carried two small baskets and placed them next to the peyote buttons and then sat between Mocho and don Juan. Then two other young men flanked don Silvio and don Juan, closing a circle of seven persons. The women remained inside the house. Two young men were in charge of keeping the fire burning all night, and one teenager and I kept the water that was going to be given to the seven participants after their all-night ritual. The boy and I sat by a rock. The fire and the receptacle with water were opposite each other and at an equal distance from the circle of participants.

Mocho, the headman, sang his peyote song; his eyes were closed; his body bobbed up and down. It was a very long song. I did not understand the language. Then all of them, one by one, sang their peyote songs. They did not seem to follow any preconceived order. They apparently sang whenever they felt like doing it. Then Mocho held the basket with peyote buttons, took two of them, and placed it back again in the center of the circle; don Silvio was nest and then don Juan. The four young men, who seemed to be a separate unit, took two peyote buttons each, following a counter-clockwise direction.

Each of the seven participants sang and ate two peyote buttons four consecutive times, then they passed the other two baskets, which contained dried fruit and meat.

They repeated this cycle at various times during the night, yet I could not detect any underlying order to their individual movements. They did not speak to one another; they seemed rather to be by themselves and to themselves. I did not see any of them, not even once, paying attention to what the other men were doing.

Before daybreak they got up and the young man and I gave them water. Afterwards I walked around to orient myself. The house was a one-room shack, a low adobe construction with a thatched roof. The scenery that surrounded it was quite oppressive. The shack was located in a harsh plain with mixed vegetation. Shrubs and cacti grew together, but there were no trees at all. I did not feel like venturing beyond the house.

The women left during the morning. The men moved silently in the area immediately surrounding the house. Around midday all of us sat down again in the same order we had sat the night before. A basket with pieces of dried meat cut to the same size as a peyote button was passed around. Some of the men sang their peyote songs. After an hour or so all of them stood up and went off in different directions.

The women had left a pot of gruel for the fire and water attendants. I ate some of it and then I slept most of the afternoon.

After dark the young men in charge of the fire built another one and the cycle of intaking peyote buttons began again. It followed roughly the same order as the preceding night, ending at daybreak.

During the course of the night I struggled to observe and record every single movement performed by each of the seven participants, in hopes of discovering the slightest form of a detectable system of verbal or nonverbal communication among them. There was nothing in their actions, however, that revealed an underlying system.

In the early evening the cycle of intaking peyote was renewed. By morning I knew that I had completely failed to find clues that would point out the covert leader, or to discover any form of covert communication among them or any traces of their system of agreement. For the rest of the day I sat by myself and tried to arrange my notes.

When the men gathered again for the fourth night I knew somehow that this was to be the last meeting. Nobody had mentioned anything about it to me, yet I knew they would disband the next day. I sat by the water again and everyone else resumed his position in the order that had already been established.

The behavior of the seven men in the circle was a replica of what I had observed during the three previous nights. I became absorbed in their movements as I had done before. I wanted to record everything they did, every movement, every utterance, every gesture.

At a certain moment I heard a sort of beep in my ear; it was a common sort of buzzing in the ear and I did not pay attention to it. The beep became louder, yet it was still within the range of my ordinary bodily sensations. I remembered dividing my attention between watching the men and listening to the buzzing I was hearing. Then, at a given instant, the faces of the men seemed to become brighter; it was as if a light had been turned on. But it was not quite like an electric light, or a lantern, or the reflection of the fire on their faces. It was rather an iridescence; a pink luminosity, very tenuous, yet detectable from where I was. The buzzing seemed to increase. I looked at the teenage boy who was with me but he had fallen asleep.

The pink luminosity became more noticeable by then. I looked at don Juan; his eyes were closed; so were don Silvio's and so were Mocho's. I could not see the eyes of the four younger men because two of them were bent forward and the other two had their backs turned to me.

I became even more involved in watching. Yet I had not fully realized that I was actually hearing a buzzing and was actually seeing a pinkish glow hovering over the men. After a moment I became aware that the tenuous pink light and the buzzing were very steady, I had a moment of intense bewilderment and then a thought crossed my mind, a thought that had nothing to do with the scene I was witnessing, nor with the purpose I had in mind for being there. I remembered something my mother had told me once when I was a child. The thought was distracting and very inappropriate; I tried to discard it and involve myself again in my assiduous watching, but I could not do it. The thought recurred; it was stronger, more demanding, and then I clearly heard my mother's voice calling me. I heard the shuffling of her slippers and then her laughter. I turned around looking for her; I conceived that I was going to be transported in time by some sort of hallucination or mirage and I was going to see her, but I saw only the boy sleeping beside me. To see him jolted me and I experienced a brief moment of ease, of sobriety.

I looked again at the group of men. They had not changed their positions at all. However, the luminosity was gone, and so was the buzzing in my ears. I felt relieved. I thought that the hallucination of hearing my mother's voice was over. Her voice had been so clear and vivid. I said to myself over and over that for an instant the voice had almost trapped me. I noticed vaguely that don Juan was looking at me, but that did not matter. It was the memory of my mother's voice calling me that was mesmerizing. I struggled desperately to think about something else. And then I heard her voice again, as clearly as if she had been behind me. She called my name. I turned quickly, but all I saw was the dark silhouette of the shack and the shrubs beyond it.

Hearing my name caused me the most profound anguish. I whined involuntarily. I felt cold and very lonely and I began to weep. At that moment I had the sensation that I needed someone to care for me. I turned my head to look at don Juan; he was staring at me. I did not want to see him so I closed my eyes. And then I saw my mother. It was not the thought of my mother, the way I think of her ordinarily. This was a clear vision of her, standing by me. I felt desperate. I was trembling and wanted to escape. The vision of my mother was too disturbing, too alien to what I was pursuing in that peyote meeting. There was apparently no conscious way to avoid it. Perhaps I could have opened my eyes if I really wanted the vision to vanish, but instead I examined it in detail. My examination was more than merely looking at her; it was a compulsive scrutiny and assessment. A very peculiar feeling enveloped me as if it were an outside force, and I suddenly felt the horrendous burden of my mother's love. When I heard my name I was torn apart; the memory of my mother filled me with anguish and melancholy, but when I examined her I knew that I had never liked her. This was a shocking realization. Thoughts and images came to me as an avalanche. The vision of my mother must have vanished in the meantime; it was no longer important. I was no longer interested in what the Indians were doing either. In fact I had forgotten the mitote. I was absorbed in a series of extraordinary thoughts, extraordinary because they were more than thoughts; these were complete units of feeling that were emotional certainties, indisputable evidences about the nature of my relationship with my mother.

At a certain moment these extraordinary thoughts ceased to come. I noticed that they had lost their fluidity and their quality of being complete units of feeling. I had begun to think about other things. My mind was rambling. I thought of other members of my immediate family, but there were no images to accompany my thoughts. Then I looked at don Juan. He was standing; the rest of the men were also standing, and then they all walked toward the water. I moved aside and nudged the boy who was still asleep.

I related to don Juan the sequence of my astounding vision almost as soon as he got into my car. He laughed with great delight and said that my vision was a sign, an omen as important as my first experience with Mescalito. I remembered that don Juan had interpreted the reactions I had when I first ingested peyote as an all-important omen; in fact he decided to teach me his knowledge because of it.

Don Juan said that during the last night of the mitote Mescalito had hovered over me so obviously that everyone was forced to turn toward me, and that was why he was staring at me when I looked at him.

I wanted to hear his interpretation of my vision, but he did not want to talk about it. He said that whatever I had experienced was nonsense in comparison to the omen.

Don Juan kept on talking about Mescalito's light hovering over me and how everyone had seen it.

"That was really something," he said. "I couldn't possibly ask for a better omen."

Don Juan and I were obviously on two different avenues of thought. He was concerned with the importance of the events he had interpreted as an omen and I was obsessed with the details of the vision I had had.

"I don't care about omens," I said. "I want to know what happened to me."

He frowned as if he were upset and remained very stiff and quiet for a moment. Then he looked at me. His tone was very forceful. He said that the only important issue was that Mescalito had been very gentle with me, had engulfed me with his light and had given me a lesson with no other effort on my part than being around.

## Chapter 4

On September 4, 1968, I went to Sonora to visit don Juan. Following a request he had made during my previous visit to him, I stopped on the way, in Hermosillo, to buy him a noncommercial tequila called *bacanora*. His request seemed very odd to me at the time, since I knew he disliked drinking, but I bought four bottles and put them in a box along with other things I had brought for him.

"Why, you got four bottles!" he said, laughing, when he opened the box. "I asked you to buy me one. I believe you thought the *bacanora* was for me, but it's for my grandson Lucio, and you have to give it to him as though it's a personal gift of your own."

I had met don Juan's grandson two years before; he was twenty-eight years old then. He was very tall, over six feet, and was always extravagantly well dressed for his means and in comparison to his peers. While the majority of Yaquis wear khakis and Levis, straw hats, and homemade sandals called *guaraches*, Lucio's outfit was an expensive black leather jacket with frills of turquoise beads, a Texan cowboy hat, and a pair of boots that were monogrammed and hand decorated.

Lucio was delighted to receive the liquor and immediately took the bottles inside his house, apparently to put them away. Don Juan made a casual comment that one should never hoard liquor and drink alone. Lucio said he was not really hoarding, but was putting it away until that evening, at which time he was going to invite his friends to drink with him.

That evening around seven o'clock I returned to Lucio's place. It was dark. I made out the vague silhouette of two people standing under a small tree; it was Lucio and one of his friends, who were waiting for me and guided me to the house with a flashlight.

Lucio's house was a flimsy, two-room, dirt-floor, wattle-and-daub construction. It was perhaps twenty feet long and supported by relatively thin beams of the mesquite tree. It had, as all the houses of the Yaquis have, a flat, thatched roof and a nine-foot-wide *ramada*, which is a sort of awning over the entire front part of the house. A *ramada* roof is never thatched; it is made of branches arranged in a loose fashion, giving enough shade and yet permitting the cooling breeze to circulate freely.

As I entered the house I turned on my tape recorder, which I kept inside my brief case. Lucio introduced me to his friends. There were eight men inside the house, including don Juan. They were sitting casually around the center of the room under the bright light of a gasoline lantern that hung from a beam, Don Juan was sitting on a box. I sat facing him at the end of a six-foot bench made with a thick wooden beam nailed on two prongs planted in the ground.

Don Juan had placed his hat on the floor beside him. The light of the gasoline lantern made his short white hair look more brilliantly white. I looked at his face; the light had also enhanced the deep wrinkles on his neck and forehead, and made him look darker and older.

I looked at the other men; under the greenish-white light of the gasoline lantern all of them looked tired and old.

Lucio addressed the whole group in Spanish and said in a loud voice that we were going to drink one bottle of *bacanora* that I had brought for him from Hermosillo. He went into the other room, brought out a bottle, uncorked it, and gave it to me along with a small tin cup. I poured a very small amount into the cup and drank it. The bacanora seemed to be more fragrant and more dense than regular tequila, and stronger too. It made me cough. I passed the bottle and everyone poured himself a small drink, everyone except don Juan; he just took the bottle and placed it in front of Lucio, who was at the end of the line.

All of them made lively comments about the rich flavor of that particular bottle, and all of them agreed that the liquor must have come from the high mountains of Chihuahua.

The bottle went around a second time. The men smacked their lips, repeated their statements of praise, and engaged themselves in a lively discussion about the noticeable differences between the tequila made around Guadalajara and that made at a high altitude in Chihuahua.

During the second time around don Juan again did not drink and I poured only a dab for myself, but the rest of them filled the cup to the brim. The bottle went around once more and was finished.

"Get the other bottles, Lucio," don Juan said.

Lucio seemed to vacillate, and don Juan quite casualty explained to the others that I had brought four bottles for Lucio.

Benigno, a young man of Lucio's age, looked at the brief case that I had placed inconspicuously behind me and asked if I was a tequila salesman. Don Juan answered that I was not, and that I had really come to Sonora to see him.

"Carlos is learning about Mescalito, and I'm teaching him," don Juan said.

All of them looked at me and smiled politely. Bajea, the woodcutter, a small, thin man with sharp features, looked at me fixedly for a moment and then said that the storekeeper had accused me of being a spy from an American company that was planning to do mining in the Yaqui land. They all reacted as if they were indignant at such an accusation. Besides, they all resented the storekeeper, who was a Mexican, or a *Yori* as the Yaquis say.

Lucio went into the other room and returned with another bottle of *bacanora*. He opened it, poured himself a large drink, and then passed it around. The conversation drifted to the probabilities of the American company coming to Sonora and it's possible effect on the Yaquis. The bottle went back to Lucio. He lifted it and looked at it's contents to see how much was left.

"Tell him not to worry," don Juan whispered to me. "Tell him you'll bring him more next time you come around."

I leaned over to Lucio and assured him that on my next visit I was going to bring him at least half a dozen bottles.

At one moment the topics of conversation seemed to wane away.

Don Juan turned to me and said loudly, "Why don't you tell the guys here about your encounters with Mescalito? I think that'll be much more interesting than this idle chat about what will happen if the American company comes to Sonora."

"Is Mescalito peyote, Grandpa?" Lucio asked curiously.

"Some people call it that way," don Juan said dryly. "I prefer to call it Mescalito."

"That confounded thing causes madness," said Genaro, a tall, husky, middle-aged man.

"I think it's stupid to say that Mescalito causes madness," don Juan said softly. "Because if that were the case, Carlos would be in a strait-jacket this very moment instead of being here talking to you. He has taken it and look at him. He is fine."

Bajea smiled and replied shyly, "Who can tell?" and everybody laughed.

"Look at me then," don Juan said. "I've known Mescalito nearly all my life and it has never hurt me."

The men did not laugh, but it was obvious that they were not taking him seriously.

"On the other hand," don Juan went on, "it's true that Mescalito drives people crazy, as you said, but that's only when they come to him without knowing what they're doing."

Esquere, an old man who seemed to be don Juan's age, chuckled softly as he shook his head from side to side.

"What do you mean by 'knowing,' Juan?" he asked. "The last time I saw you, you were saying the same thing."

"People go really crazy when they take that peyote stuff," Genaro continued. "I've seen the Huichol Indians eating it. They acted as if they had rabies. They frothed and puked and pissed all over the place. You could get epilepsy from taking that confounded thing. That's what Mr. Salas, the government engineer, told me once. And epilepsy is for life, you know."

"That's being worse than animals," Bajea added solemnly.

"You saw only what you wanted to see about the Huichol Indians, Genaro," don Juan said. "For one thing, you never took the trouble of finding out from them what it's like to get acquainted with Mescalito. Mescalito has never made anyone epileptic, to my knowledge. The government engineer is a Yori and I doubt that a Yori knows anything about it. You really don't think that all the thousands of people who know Mescalito are crazy, do you?"

"They must be crazy, or pretty nearly so, to do a thing like that," answered Genaro.

"But if all those thousands of people were crazy at the same time who would do their work? How would they manage to survive?" don Juan asked.

"Macario, who comes from the 'other side'"— the U.S.A.— "told me that whoever takes it there is marked for life," Esquere said.

"Macario is lying if he says that," don Juan said. "I'm sure he doesn't know what he's talking about."

"He really tells too many lies," said Benigno.

"Who's Macario?" I asked.

"He's a Yaqui Indian who lives here," Lucio said. "He says he's from Arizona and that he was in Europe during the war. He tells all kinds of stories."

"He says he was a colonel!" Benigno said.

Everyone laughed and the conversation shifted for a while to Macario's unbelievable tales, but don Juan returned again to the topic of Mescalito.

"If all of you know that Macario is a liar, how can you believe him when he talks about Mescalito?"

"Do you mean peyote, Grandpa?" Lucio asked, as if he were really struggling to make sense out of the term.

"God damn it! Yes!"

Don Juan's tone was sharp and abrupt. Lucio recoiled involuntarily, and for a moment I felt they were all afraid. Then don Juan smiled broadly and continued in a mild tone.

"Don't you fellows see that Macario doesn't know what he's talking about? Don't you see that in order to talk about Mescalito one has to know?"

"There you go again," Esquere said. "What the hell is this knowledge? You are worse than Macario. At least he says what's on his mind, whether he knows it or not. For years I've been listening to you say we have to know. What do we have to know?"

"Don Juan says there is a spirit in peyote," Benigno said.

"I have seen peyote in the field, but I have never seen spirits or anything of the sort," Bajea added.

"Mescalito is like a spirit, perhaps," don Juan explained. "But whatever he is doesn't become clear until one knows about him. Esquere complains that I have been saying this for years. Well, I have. But it's not my fault that you don't understand. Bajea says that whoever takes it becomes like an animal. Well, I don't see it that way. To me those who think they are above animals live worse than animals. Look at my grandson here. He works without rest. I would say he lives to work, like a mule. And all he does that is not animal-like is to get drunk."

Everybody laughed, Victor, a very young man who seemed to be still in adolescence, laughed in a pitch above everybody else.

Eligio, a young farmer, had not uttered a single word so far. He was sitting on the floor to my right, with his back against some sacks of chemical fertilizer that had been piled inside the house to protect them from the rain. He was one of Lucio's childhood friends, powerful looking and, although shorter than Lucio, more stocky and better built. Eligio seemed concerned about don Juan's words. Bajea was trying to come back with a comment, but Eligio interrupted him.

"In what way would peyote change all this?" he asked. "It seems to me that a man is born to work all his life, like mules do."

"Mescalito changes everything," don Juan said, "yet we still have to work like everybody else, like mules. I said there was a spirit inside Mescalito because it is something like a spirit which brings about the change in men. A spirit we can see and can touch, a spirit that changes us, sometimes even against our will."

"Peyote drives you out of your mind," Genaro said, "and then of course you believe you've changed. True?"

"How can it change us?" Eligio insisted.

"He teaches us the right way to live," don Juan said. "He helps and protects those who know him. The life you fellows are leading is no life at all. You don't know the happiness that comes from doing things deliberately. You don't have a protector!"

"What do you mean?" Genaro said indignantly. "We certainly have. Our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Mother the Virgin, and the little Virgin of Guadalupe. Aren't they our protectors?"

"Fine bunch of protectors!" don Juan said mockingly. "Have they taught you a better way to live?"

"That's because people don't listen to them," Genaro protested, "and they only pay attention to the devil."

"If they were real protectors they would force you to listen," don Juan said. "If Mescalito becomes your protector you will have to listen whether you l`ike it or not, because you can see him and you must take heed of what he says. He will make you approach him with respect. Not the way you fellows are accustomed to approach your protectors."

"What do you mean, Juan?" Esquere asked.

"What I mean is that for you to come to your protectors means that one of you has to play a fiddle, and a dancer has to put on his mask and leggings and rattles and dance, while the rest of you drink. You, Benigno, you were a dancer once, tell us about it."

"I gave it up after three years," Benigno said. "It's hard work."

"Ask Lucio," Esquere said satirically. "He gave it up in one week!"

Everybody laughed except don Juan. Lucio smiled, seemingly embarrassed, and gulped down two huge swallows of *bacanora*.

"It is not hard, it is stupid," don Juan said. "Ask Valencio, the dancer, if he enjoys dancing. He does not! He got accustomed to it, that's all. I've seen him dance for years, and every time I have, I've seen the same movements badly executed. He takes no pride in his art except when he talks about it. He has no love for it, therefore year after year he repeats the same motions. What was bad about his dancing at the beginning has become fixed. He cannot see it any longer."

"He was taught to dance that way," Eligio said. "I was also a dancer in the town of Torím. I know you must dance the way they teach you."

"Valencio is not the best dancer anyway," Esquere said. "There are others. How about Sacateca?"

"Sacateca is a man of knowledge, he is not in the same class with you fellows," don Juan said sternly. "He dances because that's the bent of his nature. All I wanted to say was that you, who are not dancers, do not enjoy it. Perhaps if the dances are well performed some of you will get pleasure. Not many of you know that much about dancing, though; therefore you are left with a very lousy piece of joy. This is why you fellows are all drunkards. Look at my grandson here!"

"Cut it out, Grandpa!" Lucio protested.

"He's not lazy or stupid," don Juan went on, "but what else does he do besides drink?"

"He buys leather jackets!" Genaro remarked, and the whole audience roared.

Lucio gulped down more bacanora.

"And how is peyote going to change that?" Eligio asked.

"If Lucio would seek the protector," don Juan said, "his life would be changed. I don't know exactly how, but I am sure it would be different."

"He would stop drinking, is that what you mean?" Eligio insisted.

"Perhaps he would. He needs something else besides tequila to make his life satisfying. And that something, whatever it may be, might be provided by the protector."

"Then peyote must taste very good," Eligio said.

"I didn't say that," don Juan said.

"How in the hell are you going to enjoy it if it doesn't taste good?" Eligio said.

"It makes one enjoy life better," don Juan said.

"But if it doesn't taste good, how could it make us enjoy our lives better?" Eligio persisted. "It doesn't make sense,"

"Of course it makes sense," Genaro said with conviction. "Peyote makes you crazy and naturally you think you're having a great time with your life, no matter what you do."

They all laughed again.

"It does make sense," don Juan proceeded, undisturbed, "if you think how little we know and how much there is to see. Booze is what makes people crazy. It blurs the images. Mescalito, on the other hand, sharpens everything. It makes you see so very well. So very well!"

Lucio and Benigno looked at each other and smiled as though they had already heard the story before. Genaro and Esquere grew more impatient and began to talk at the same time. Victor laughed above all the other voices. The only one interested seemed to be Eligio.

"How can peyote do all that?" he asked.

"In the first place," don Juan explained, "you must want to become acquainted with him, and I think this is by far the most important thing. Then you must be offered to him, and you must meet with him many times before you can say you know him."

"And what happens then?" Eligio asked.

Genaro interrupted. "You crap on the roof with your ass on the ground."

The audience roared.

"What happens next is entirely up to you," don Juan went on without losing his self-control. "You must come to him without fear and, little by little, he will teach you how to live a better life."

There was a long pause. The men seemed to be tired. The bottle was empty. Lucio, with obvious reluctance, opened another.

"Is peyote Carlos' protector too?" Eligio asked in a joking tone.

"I wouldn't know that," don Juan said. "He has taken it three times, so ask him to tell you about it."

They all turned to me curiously and Eligio asked, "Did you really take it?"

"Yes. I did."

It seemed don Juan had won a round with his audience. They were either interested in hearing about my experience or too polite to laugh in my face.

"Didn't it hurt your mouth?" Lucio asked.

"It did. It also tasted terrible."

"Why did you take it, then?" Benigno asked.

I began to explain to them in elaborate terms that for a Western man don Juan's knowledge about peyote was one of the most fascinating things one could find. I said that everything he had said about it was true and that each one of us could verify that truth for ourselves.

I noticed that all of them were smiling as if they were concealing their contempt. I grew very embarrassed. I was aware of my awkwardness in conveying what I really had in mind. I talked for a while longer, but I had lost the impetus and only repeated what don Juan had already said.

Don Juan came to my aid and asked in a reassuring tone, "You were not looking for a protector when you first came to Mescalito, were you?"

I told them that I did not know that Mescalito could be a protector, and that I was moved only by my curiosity and a great desire to know him.

Don Juan reaffirmed that my intentions had been faultless and said that because of it Mescalito had had a beneficial effect on me.

"But it made you puke and piss all over the place, didn't it?" Genaro insisted.

I told him that it had in fact affected me in such a manner. They all laughed with restraint. I felt that they had become even more contemptuous of me. They didn't seem to be interested, except for Eligio, who was gazing at me.

"What did you see?" he asked.

Don Juan urged me to recount for them all or nearly all the salient details of my experiences, so I described the sequence and the form of what I had perceived. When I finished talking Lucio made a comment.

"If peyote is that weird, I'm glad I've never taken it."

"It is just like I said," Genaro said to Bajea. "That thing makes you insane."

"But Carlos is not insane now. How do you account for that?" don Juan asked Genaro.

"How do we know he isn't?" Genaro retorted.

They all broke out laughing, including don Juan.

"Were you afraid?" Benigno asked.

"I certainly was."

"Why did you do it, then?" Eligio asked.

"He said he wanted to know," Lucio answered for me. "I think Carlos is getting to be like my grandpa. Both have been saying they want to know, but nobody knows what in the hell they want to know."

"It is impossible to explain that knowing," don Juan said to Eligio, "because it is different for every man. The only thing which is common to all of us is that Mescalito reveals his secrets privately to each man. Being aware of how Genaro feels, I don't recommend that he meet Mescalito. Yet in spite of my words or his feelings, Mescalito could have a totally beneficial effect on him. But only he could find out, and *that* is the knowing I have been talking about."

Don Juan got up. "It's time to go home," he said. "Lucio is drunk and Victor is asleep."

Two days later, on September 6, Lucio, Benigno, and Eligio came over to the house where I was staying to go hunting with me. They remained silent for a while as I kept on writing my notes. Then Benigno laughed politely as a warning that he was going to say something important.

After a preliminary embarrassing silence he laughed again and said, "Lucio here says that he would take peyote."

"Would you really?" I asked.

"Yes. I wouldn't mind it."

Benigno's laughter came in spurts.

"Lucio says he will eat peyote if you buy him a motorcycle."

Lucio and Benigno looked at each other and broke out laughing.

"How much is a motorcycle in the United States?" Lucio asked.

"You could probably get one for a hundred dollars," I said.

"That isn't very much there, is it? You could easily get it for him, couldn't you?" Benigno asked.

"Well, let me ask your grandpa first," I said to Lucio.

"No, no," he protested. "Don't mention it to him. He'll spoil everything. He's a weirdo. And besides, he's too old and feeble-minded and he doesn't know what he's doing."

"He was a real sorcerer once," Benigno added. "I mean a real one. My folks say he was the best. But he took to peyote and became a nobody. Now he's too old."

"And he goes over and over the same crappy stories about peyote," Lucio said.

"That peyote is pure crap," Benigno said. "You know, we tried it once. Lucio got a whole sack of it from his grandpa. One night as we were going to town we chewed it. Son of a bitch! It cut my mouth to shreds. It tasted like hell!"

"Did you swallow it?" I asked.

"We spit it out," Lucio said, "and threw the whole damn sack away."

They both thought the incident was very funny. Eligio, in the meantime, had not said a word. He was withdrawn, as usual. He did not even laugh.

"Would you like to try it, Eligio?" I asked.

"No. Not me. Not even for a motorcycle."

Lucio and Benigno found the statement utterly funny and roared again.

"Nevertheless," Eligio continued, "I must admit that don Juan baffles me."

"My grandfather is too old to know anything," Lucio said with great conviction.

"Yeah, he's too old," Benigno echoed.

I thought the opinion the two young men had of don Juan was childish and unfounded. I felt it was my duty to defend his character and I told them that in my judgment don Juan was then, as he had been in the past, a great sorcerer, perhaps even the greatest of all. I said I felt there was something about him, something truly extraordinary. I urged them to remember that he was over seventy years old and yet he was more energetic and stronger than all of us put together. I challenged the young men to prove it to themselves by trying to sneak up on don Juan.

"You just can't sneak up on my grandpa," Lucio said proudly. "He's a brujo."

I reminded them that they had said he was too old and feeble-minded, and that a feeble-minded person does not know what goes on around him. I said that I had marveled at don Juan's alertness time and time again.

"No one can sneak up on a brujo, even if he's old," Benigno said with authority. "They can gang up on him when he's asleep, though. That's what happened to a man named Cevicas. People got tired of his evil sorcery and killed him."

I asked them to give me all the details of that event, but they said it had taken place before their time, or when they were still very young. Eligio added that people secretly believed that Cevicas had been only a fool, and that no one could harm a real sorcerer. I tried to question them further on their opinions about sorcerers. They did not seem to have much interest in the subject; besides, they were eager to start out and shoot the .22 rifle I had brought.

We were silent for a while as we walked toward the thick chaparral, then Eligio, who was at the head of the line, turned around and said to me, "Perhaps we're the crazy ones. Perhaps don Juan is right. Look at the way we live."

Lucio and Benigno protested. I tried to mediate. I agreed with Eligio and told them that I myself had felt that the way I lived was somehow wrong. Benigno said that I had no business complaining about my life, that I had money and I had a car. I retorted that I could easily say that they themselves were better off because each owned a piece of land. They responded in unison that the owner of their land was the federal bank. I told them that I did not own my car either, that a bank in California owned it, and that my life was only different but not better than theirs. By that time we were already in the dense shrubs.

We did not find any deer or wild boars, but we got three jack rabbits. On our return we stopped at Lucio's house and he announced that his wife was going to make rabbit stew. Benigno went to the store to buy a bottle of tequila and get us some sodas. When we came back don Juan was with him.

"Did you find my grandpa at the store buying beer?" Lucio asked laughing.

"I haven't been invited to this reunion," don Juan said. "I've just dropped by to ask Carlos if he's leaving for Hermosillo."

I told him I was planning to leave the next day, and while we talked Benigno distributed the bottles. Eligio gave his to don Juan, and since among the Yaquis it is deadly impolite to refuse, even as a courtesy, don Juan took it quietly. I gave mine to Eligio, and he was obliged to take it. So Benigno in turn gave me his bottle. But Lucio, who had obviously visualized the entire scheme of Yaqui good manners, had already finished drinking his soda. He turned to Benigno, who had a pathetic look on his face, and said, laughing, "They've screwed you out of your bottle."

Don Juan said he never drank soda and placed his bottle in Benigno's hands. We sat under the *ramada* in silence.

Eligio seemed to be nervous. He fidgeted with the brim of his hat.

"I've been thinking about what you said the other night," he said to don Juan. "How can peyote change our life? How?"

Don Juan did not answer. He stared fixedly at Eligio for a moment and then began to sing in Yaqui. It was not a song proper, but a short recitation. We remained quiet for a long time. Then I asked don Juan to translate the Yaqui words for me.

"That was only for Yaquis," he said matter-of-factly.

I felt dejected. I was sure he had said something of great importance.

"Eligio is an Indian," don Juan finally said to me, "and as an Indian Eligio has nothing. We Indians have nothing. All you see around here belongs to the Yoris. The Yaquis have only their wrath and what the land offers to them freely."

Nobody uttered a sound for quite some time, then don Juan stood up and said goodbye and walked away. We looked at him until he had disappeared behind a bend of the road. All of us seemed to be nervous. Lucio told us in a disoriented manner that his grandfather had not stayed because he hated rabbit stew. Eligio seemed to be immersed in thoughts. Benigno turned to me and said loudly, "I think the Lord is going to punish you and don Juan for what you're doing."

Lucio began to laugh and Benigno joined him.

"You're clowning, Benigno," Eligio said somberly. "What you've just said isn't worth a damn."

*September 15, 1968*

It was nine o'clock Saturday night. Don Juan sat in front of Eligio in the center of the *ramada* of Lucio's house. Don Juan placed his sack of peyote buttons between them and sang while rocking his body slightly back and forth. Lucio, Benigno, and I sat five or six feet behind Eligio with our backs against the wall. It was quite dark at first. We had been sitting inside the house under the gasoline lantern waiting for don Juan. He had called us out to the *ramada* when he arrived and had told us where to sit. After a while my eyes became accustomed to the dark. I could see everyone clearly. I noticed that Eligio seemed to be terrified. His entire body shook; his teeth chattered uncontrollably. He was convulsed with spasmodic jerks of his head and back.

Don Juan spoke to him, telling him not to be afraid, and to trust the protector, and to think of nothing else. He casually took a peyote button, offered it to Eligio, and ordered him to chew it very slowly. Eligio whined like a puppy and recoiled. His breathing was very rapid, it sounded like the whizzing of bellows. He took off his hat and wiped his forehead. He covered his face with his hands. I thought he was crying. It was a very long, tense moment before he regained some control over himself. He sat up straight and, still covering his face with one hand, took the peyote button and began chewing it.

I felt a tremendous apprehension. I had not realized until then that I was perhaps as scared as Eligio. My mouth had a dryness similar to that produced by peyote. Eligio chewed the button for a long tune. My tension increased. I began to whine involuntarily as my respiration became more accelerated.

Don Juan began to chant louder, then he offered another button to Eligio and after Eligio had finished it he offered him dry fruit and told him to chew it very slowly.

Eligio got up repeatedly and went to the bushes. At one point he asked for water. Don Juan told him not to drink it but only swish it in his mouth.

Eligio chewed two more buttons and don Juan gave him dry meat.

By the time he had chewed his tenth button I was nearly sick with anxiety.

Suddenly Eligio slumped forward and his forehead hit the ground. He rolled on his left side and jerked convulsively. I looked at my watch. It was twenty after eleven. Eligio tossed, wobbled, and moaned for over an hour while he lay on the floor.

Don Juan maintained the same position in front of him. His peyote songs were almost a murmur. Benigno, who was sitting to my right, looked inattentive; Lucio, next to him, had slumped on his side and was snoring.

Eligio's body crumpled into a contorted position. He lay on his right side with his front toward me and his hands between his legs. His body gave a powerful jump and he turned on his back with his legs slightly curved. His left hand waved out and up with an extremely free and elegant motion. His right hand repeated the same pattern, and then both arms alternated in a wavering, slow movement, resembling that of a harpist. The movement became more vigorous by degrees. His arms had a perceptible vibration and went up and down like pistons. At the same time his hands rotated onward at the wrist and his fingers quivered. It was a beautiful, harmonious, hypnotic sight. I thought his rhythm and muscular control were beyond comparison.

Eligio then rose slowly, as if he were stretching against an enveloping force. His body Shivered. He squatted and then pushed himself up to an erect position. His arms, trunk, and head trembled as if an intermittent electric current were going through them. It was as though a force outside his control was setting him or driving him up.

Don Juan's chanting became very loud. Lucjo and Benigno woke up and looked at the scene uninterestedly for a while and then went back to sleep.

Eligio seemed to be moving up and up. He was apparently climbing. He cupped his hands and seemed to grab onto objects beyond my vision. He pushed himself up and paused to catch his breath.

I wanted to see his eyes and moved closer to him, but don Juan gave me a fierce look and I recoiled to my place.

Then Eligio jumped. It was a final, formidable leap. He had apparently reached his goal. He puffed and sobbed with the exertion. He seemed to be holding onto a ledge. But something was overtaking him. He shrieked desperately. His grip faltered and he began to fall. His body arched backward and was convulsed from head to toe with the most beautiful, coordinated ripple. The ripple went through him perhaps a hundred times before his body collapsed like a lifeless burlap sack.

After a while he extended his arms in front of him as though he was protecting his face. His legs stretched out backward as he lay on his chest; they were arched a few inches above the ground, giving his body the very appearance of sliding or flying at an incredible speed. His head was arched as far back as possible, his arms locked over his eyes, shielding them. I could feel the wind hissing around him. I gasped and gave a loud involuntary shriek. Lucio and Benigno woke and looked at Eligio curiously.

"If you promise to buy me a motorcycle I will chew it now," Lucio said loudly.

I looked at don Juan. He made an imperative gesture with his head.

"Son of a bitch!" Lucio mumbled, and went back to sleep.

Eligio stood up and began walking. He took a couple of steps toward me and stopped. I could see him smiling with a beatific expression. He tried to whistle. There was no clear sound yet it had harmony. It was a tune. It had only a couple of bars, which he repeated over and over.

After a while the whistling was distinctly audible, and then it became a sharp melody. Eligio mumbled unintelligible words. The words seemed to be the lyrics to the tune. He repeated it for hours. A very simple song, repetitious, monotonous, and yet strangely beautiful.

Eligio seemed to be looking at something while he sang. At one moment he got very close to me. I saw his eyes in the semidarkness. They were glassy, transfixed. He smiled and giggled. He walked and sat down and walked again, groaning and sighing.

Suddenly something seemed to have pushed him from behind. His body arched in the middle as though moved by a direct force. At one instant Eligio was balanced on the tips of his toes, making nearly a complete circle, his hands touching the ground. He dropped to the ground again, softly, on his back, and extended his whole length, acquiring a strange rigidity.

He whimpered and groaned for a whale, then began to snore. Don Juan covered him with some burlap sacks. It was 5:35 a.m.

Lucio and Benigno had fallen asleep shoulder to shoulder with their backs against the wall. Don Juan and I sat quietly for a very long time. He seemed to be tired. I broke the silence and asked him about Eligio. He told me that Eligio's encounter with Mescalito had been exceptionally successful; Mescalito had taught him a song the first time they met and that was indeed extraordinary.

I asked him why he had not let Lucio take some for a motorcycle. He said that Mescalito would have killed Lucio if he had approached him under such conditions. Don Juan admitted that he had prepared everything carefully to convince his grandson; he told me that he had counted on my friendship with Lucio as the central part of his strategy. He said that Lucio had always been his great concern, and that at one time they had lived together and were very close, but Lucio became gravely ill when he was seven and don Juan's son, a devout Catholic, made a vow to the Virgin of Guadalupe that Lucio would join a sacred dancing society if his life were spared. Lucio recovered and was forced to carry out the promise. He lasted one week as an apprentice, and then made up his mind to break the vow. He thought he would have to die as a result of it, braced himself, and for a whole day he waited for death to come. Everybody made fun of the boy and the incident was never forgotten.

Don Juan did not speak for a long time. He seemed to have become engulfed by thoughts.

"My setup was for Lucio," he said, "and I found Eligio instead. I knew it was useless, but when we like someone we should properly insist, as though it were possible to remake men. Lucio had courage when he was a little boy and then he lost it along the way."

"Can you bewitch him, don Juan?"

"Bewitch him? For what?"

"So he will change and regain his courage."

"You don't bewitch for courage. Courage is something personal. Bewitching is for rendering people harmless or sick or dumb. You don't bewitch to make warriors. To be a warrior you have to be crystal clear, like Eligio. There you have a man of courage!"

Eligio snored peacefully under the burlap sacks. It was already daylight. The sky was impeccably blue. There were no clouds in sight.

"I would give anything in this world," I said, "to know about Eligio's journey. Would you mind if I asked him to tell me?"

"You should not under any circumstances ask him to do that!"

"Why not? I tell you about my experiences."

"That's different. It is not your inclination to keep things to yourself. Eligio is an Indian. His journey is all he has. I wish it had been Lucio."

"Isn't there anything you can do, don Juan?"

"No. Unfortunately there is no way to make bones for a jellyfish. It was only my folly."

The sun came out. It's light blurred my tired eyes.

"You've told me time and time again, don Juan, that a sorcerer cannot have follies. I've never thought you could have any."

Don Juan looked at me piercingly. He got up, glanced at Eligio and then at Lucio. He tucked his hat on his head, patting it on it's top.

"It's possible to insist, to properly insist, even though we know that what we're doing is useless," he said, smiling, "But we must know first that our acts are useless and yet we must proceed as if we didn't know it. That's a sorcerer's controlled folly."

## Chapter 5

I returned to don Juan's house on October 3, 1968, for the sole purpose of asking him about the events surrounding Eligio's initiation. An almost endless stream of questions had occurred to me while rereading the account of what took place then. I was after very precise explanations so I made a list of questions beforehand, carefully choosing the most appropriate words.

I began by asking him: "Did I *see* that night, don Juan?"

"You almost did."

"Did you *see* that I was *seeing* Eligio's movements?"

"Yes. I *saw* that Mescalito was allowing you to *see* part of Eligio's lesson, otherwise you would've been looking at a man sitting there, or perhaps lying there. During the last mitote you did not notice that the men were doing anything, did you?"

At the last mitote I had not noticed any of the men performing movements out of the ordinary. I told him I could safely say that all I had recorded in my notes was that some of them got up and went to the bushes more often than others.

"But you nearly *saw* Eligio's entire lesson," don Juan went on. "Think about that. Do you understand now how generous Mescalito is with you? Mescalito has never been so gentle with anyone, to my knowledge. Not anyone. And yet you have no regard for his generosity. How can you turn your back on him so bluntly? Or perhaps I should say, in exchange for what are you turning your back on Mescalito?"

I felt that don Juan was cornering me again. I was unable to answer his question. I had always believed I had quit the apprenticeship in order to save myself, yet I had no idea from what I was saving myself, or for what. I wanted to change the direction of our conversation quickly, and to that end I abandoned my intention to carry on with all my precalculated questions and brought out my most important query.

"I wonder if you could tell me more about your controlled folly," I said.

"What do you want to know about it?"

"Please tell me, don Juan, what exactly is controlled folly?"

Don Juan laughed loudly and made a smacking sound by slapping his thigh with the hollow of his hand.

"This is controlled folly!" he said, and laughed and slapped his thigh again.

"What do you mean...?"

"I am happy that you finally asked me about my controlled folly after so many years, and yet it wouldn't have mattered to me in the least if you had never asked. Yet I have chosen to feel happy, as if I cared, that you asked, as if it would matter that I care. *That* is controlled folly!"

We both laughed very loudly. I hugged him. I found his explanation delightful although I did not quite understand it.

We were sitting, as usual, in the area right in front of the door of his house. It was mid-morning. Don Juan had a pile of seeds in front of him and was picking the debris from them. I had offered to help him but he had turned me down; he said the seeds were a gift for one of his friends in central Mexico and I did not have enough power to touch them.

"With whom do you exercise controlled folly, don Juan?" I asked after a long silence.

He chuckled.

"With everybody!" he exclaimed, smiling.

"When do you choose to exercise it, then?"

"Every single time I act."

I felt I needed to recapitulate at that point and I asked him if controlled folly meant that his acts were never sincere but were only the acts of an actor.

"My acts are sincere," he said, "but they are only the acts of an actor."

"Then everything you do must be controlled folly!" I said truly surprised.

"Yes, everything," he said.

"But it can't be true," I protested, "that every one of your acts is only controlled folly."

"Why not?" he replied with a mysterious look.

"That would mean that nothing matters to you and you don't really care about anything or anybody. Take me, for example. Do you mean that you don't care whether or not I become a man of knowledge, or whether I live, or die, or do anything?"

"True! I don't. You are like Lucio, or everybody else in my life, my controlled folly."

I experienced a peculiar feeling of emptiness. Obviously there was no reason in the world why don Juan had to care about me, but on the other hand I had almost the certainty that he cared about me personally; I thought it could not be otherwise, since he had always given me his undivided attention during every moment I had spent with him. It occurred to me that perhaps don Juan was just saying that because he was annoyed with me. After all, I had quit his teachings.

"I have the feeling we are not talking about the same thing," I said. "I shouldn't have used myself as an example. What I meant to say was that there must be something in the world you care about in a way that is not controlled folly. I don't think it is possible to go on living if nothing really matters to us."

"That applies to *you*" he said. "Things matter to *you*. You asked me about my controlled folly and I told you that everything I do in regard to myself and my fellow men is folly, because nothing matters."

"My point is, don Juan, that if nothing matters to you, how can you go on living?"

He laughed and after a moment's pause, in which he seemed to deliberate whether or not to answer, he got up and went to the back of his house. I followed him.

"Wait, wait, don Juan." I said. "I really want to know; you must explain to me what you mean."

"Perhaps it's not possible to explain," he said. "Certain things in your life matter to you because they're important; your acts are certainly important to you, but for me, not a single thing is important any longer, neither my acts nor the acts of any of my fellow men. I go on living, though, because I have my will. Because I have tempered my will throughout my life until it's neat and wholesome and now it doesn't matter to me that nothing matters. My will controls the folly of my life."

He squatted and ran his fingers on some herbs that he had put to dry in the sun on a big piece of burlap.

I was bewildered. Never would I have anticipated the direction that my query had taken. After a long pause I thought of a good point. I told him that in my opinion some of the acts of my fellow men were of supreme importance. I pointed out that a nuclear war was definitely the most dramatic example of such an act. I said that for me destroying life on the face of the earth was an act of staggering enormity.

"You believe that because you're thinking. You're thinking about life," don Juan said with a glint in his eyes. "You're not *seeing*."

"Would I feel differently if I could *see*?" I asked.

"Once a man learns to *see* he finds himself alone in the world with nothing but folly," don Juan said cryptically.

He paused for a moment and looked at me as if he wanted to judge the effect of his words.

"Your acts, as well as the acts of your fellow men in general, appear to be important to you because you have *learned* to think they are important."

He used the word "learned" with such a peculiar inflection that it forced me to ask what he meant by it.

He stopped handling his plants and looked at me.

"We learn to think about everything," he said, "and then we train our eyes to look as we think about the things we look at. We look at ourselves already thinking that we are important. And therefore we've got to *feel* important! But then when a man learns to *see*, he realizes that he can no longer think about the things he looks at, and if he cannot think about what he looks at everything becomes unimportant."

Don Juan must have noticed my puzzled look and repeated his statements three times, as if to make me understand them. What he said sounded to me like gibberish at first, but upon thinking about it, his words loomed more like a sophisticated statement about some facet of perception.

I tried to think of a good question that would make him clarify his point, but I could not think of anything. All of a sudden I felt exhausted and could not formulate my thoughts clearly.

Don Juan seemed to notice my fatigue and patted me gently.

"Clean these plants here," he said, "and then shred them carefully into this jar."

He handed me a large coffee jar and left.

He returned to his house hours later, in the late afternoon. I had finished shredding his plants and had plenty of time to write my notes. I wanted to ask him some questions right off, but he was not in any mood to answer me. He said he was famished and had to fix his food first. He lit a fire in his earthen stove and set up a pot with bone-broth stock. He looked in the bag of groceries I had brought and took some vegetables, sliced them into small pieces, and dumped them into the pot. Then he lay on his mat, kicked off his sandals, and told me to sit closer to the stove so I could feed the fire.

It was almost dark; from where I sat I could see the sky to the west. The edges of some thick cloud formations were tinted with a deep buff, while the center of the clouds remained almost black.

I was going to make a comment on how beautiful the clouds were, but he spoke first.

"Fluffy edges and a thick core," he said, pointing at the clouds.

His statement was so perfectly apropos that it made me jump.

"I was just going to tell you about the clouds," I said.

"Then I beat you to it," he said, and laughed with childlike abandon.

I asked him if he was in a mood to answer some questions.

"What do you want to know?" he replied.

"What you told me this afternoon about controlled folly has disturbed me very much," I said. "I really cannot understand what you meant."

"Of course you cannot understand it," he said. "You are trying to think about it, and what I said does not fit with your thoughts."

"I'm trying to think about it," I said, "because that's the only way I personally can understand anything. For example, don Juan, do you mean that once a man learns to *see*, everything in the whole world is worthless?"

"I didn't say worthless. I said unimportant. Everything is equal and therefore unimportant. For example, there is no way for me to say that my acts are more important than yours, or that one thing is more essential than another, therefore all things are equal and by being equal they are unimportant."

I asked him if his statements were a pronouncement that what he had called "seeing" was in effect a "better way" than merely "looking at things." He said that the eyes of man could perform both functions, but neither of them was better than the other; however, to train the eyes only to look was, in his opinion, an unnecessary loss.

"For instance, we need to look with our eyes to laugh," he said, "because only when we look at things can we catch the funny edge of the world. On the other hand, when our eyes *see*, everything is so equal that nothing is funny."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that a man who *sees* cannot ever laugh?'

He remained silent for some time.

"Perhaps there are men of knowledge who never laugh," he said. "I don't know any of them, though. Those I know *see* and also look, so they laugh."

"Would a man of knowledge cry as well?"

"I suppose so. Our eyes look so we may laugh, or cry, or rejoice, or be sad, or be happy. I personally don't like to be sad, so whenever I witness something that would ordinarily make me sad, I simply shift my eyes and *see* it instead of looking at it. But when I encounter something funny I look and I laugh."

"But then, don Juan, your laughter is real and not controlled folly."

Don Juan stared at me for a moment.

"I talk to you because you make me laugh," he said. "You remind me of some bushy-tailed rats of the desert that get caught when they stick their tails in holes trying to scare other rats away in order to steal their food. You get caught in your own questions. Watch out! Sometimes those rats yank their tails off trying to pull themselves free."

I found his comparison funny and I laughed. Don Juan had once shown me some small rodents with bushy tails that looked like fat squirrels; the image of one of those chubby rats yanking it's tail off was sad and at the same time morbidly funny.

"My laughter, as well as everything I do, is real," he said, "but it also is controlled folly because it is useless; it changes nothing and yet I still do it."

"But as I understand it, don Juan, your laughter is not useless. It makes you happy."

"No! I am happy because I choose to look at things that make me happy and then my eyes catch their funny edge and I laugh. I have said this to you countless times. One must always choose the path with heart in order to be at one's best, perhaps so one can always laugh."

I interpreted what he had said as meaning that crying was inferior to laughter, or at least perhaps an act that weakened us. He asserted that there was no intrinsic difference and that both were unimportant; he said, however, that his preference was laughter, because laughter made his body feel better than crying.

At that point I suggested that if one has a preference there is no equality; if he preferred laughing to crying, the former was indeed more important.

He stubbornly maintained that his preference did not mean they were not equal; and I insisted that our argument could be logically stretched to saying that if things were supposed to be so equal why not also choose death?

"Many men of knowledge do that," he said. "One day they may simply disappear. People may think that they have been ambushed and killed because of their doings. They choose to die because it doesn't matter to them. On the other hand, I choose to live, and to laugh, not because it matters, but because that choice is the bent of my nature. The reason I say I choose is because I *see*, but it isn't that I choose to live; my will makes me go on living in spite of anything I may see.

"You don't understand me now because of your habit of thinking as you look and thinking as you think."

This statement intrigued me very much. I asked him to explain what he meant by it.

He repeated the same construct various times, as if giving himself time to arrange it in different terms, and then delivered his point, saying that by "thinking" he meant the constant idea that we have of everything in the world. He said that "seeing" dispelled that habit and until I learned to "see" I could not really understand what he meant.

"But if nothing matters, don Juan, why should it matter that I learn to *see*?"

"I told you once that our lot as men is to learn, for good or bad," he said. "I have learned to *see* and I tell you that nothing really matters; now it is your turn; perhaps some day you will *see* and you will know then whether things matter or not. For me nothing matters, but perhaps for you everything will. You should know by now that a man of knowledge lives by acting, not by thinking about acting, nor by thinking about what he will think when he has finished acting. A man of knowledge chooses a path with heart and follows it; and then he looks and rejoices and laughs; and then he *sees* and knows. He knows that his life will be over altogether too soon; he knows that he, as well as everybody else, is not going anywhere; he knows, because he *sees*, that nothing is more important than anything else. In other words, a man of knowledge has no honor, no dignity, no family, no name, no country, but only life to be lived, and under these circumstances his only tie to his fellow men is his controlled folly. Thus a man of knowledge endeavors, and sweats, and puffs, and if one looks at him he is just like any ordinary man, except that the folly of has life is under control. Nothing being more important than anything else, a man of knowledge chooses any act, and acts it out as if it matters to him. His controlled folly makes him say that what he does matters and makes him act as if it did, and yet he knows that it doesn't; so when he fulfills his acts he retreats in peace, and whether his acts were good or bad, or worked or didn't, is in no way part of his concern.

"A man of knowledge may choose, on the other hand, to remain totally impassive and never act, and behave as if to be impassive really matters to him; he will be rightfully true at that too, because that would also be his controlled folly."

I involved myself at this point in a very complicated effort to explain to don Juan that I was interested in knowing what would motivate a man of knowledge to act in a particular way in spite of the fact that he knew nothing mattered.

He chuckled softly before answering.

"You think about your acts," he said. "Therefore you have to believe your acts are as important as you think they are, when in reality nothing of what one does is important. Nothing! But then if nothing really matters, as you asked me, how can I go on living? It would be simple to die; that's what you say and believe, because you're thinking about life, just as you're thinking now what *seeing* would be like. You wanted me to describe it to you so you could begin to think about it, the way you do with everything else. In the case of *seeing*, however, thinking is not the issue at all, so I cannot tell you what it is like to *see*. Now you want me to describe the reasons for my controlled folly and I can only tell you that controlled folly is very much like *seeing*; it is something you cannot think about."

He yawned. He lay on his back and stretched his arms and legs. His bones made a cracking sound.

"You have been away too long," he said. "You think too much."

He got up and walked into the thick chaparral at the side of the house. I fed the fire to keep the pot boiling. I was going to light a kerosene lantern but the semidarkness was very soothing. The fire from the stove, which supplied enough light to write, also created a reddish glow all around me. I put my notes on the ground and lay down. I felt tired. Out of the whole conversation with don Juan the only poignant thing in my mind was that he did not care about me; it disturbed me immensely. Over a period of years I had put my trust in him. Had I not had complete confidence in him I would have been paralyzed with fear at the prospect of learning his knowledge; the premise on which I had based my trust was the idea that he cared about me personally; actually I had always been afraid of him, but I had kept my fear in check because I trusted him. When he removed that basis I had nothing to fall back on and I felt helpless.

A very strange anxiety possessed me. I became extremely agitated and began pacing up and down in front of the stove. Don Juan was taking a long time. I waited for him impatiently.

He returned a while later; he sat down again in front of the fire and I blurted out my fears. I told him that I worried because I was incapable of changing directions in midstream; I explained to him that together with the trust I had in him, I had also learned to respect and to regard his way of life as being intrinsically more rational, or at least more functional, than mine. I said that his words had plunged me into a terrible conflict because they entailed my having to change my feelings. To illustrate my point I told don Juan the story of an old man of my culture, a very wealthy, conservative lawyer who lived his life convinced that he upheld the truth. In the early thirties, with the advent of the New Deal, he found himself passionately involved in the political drama of that time. He was categorically sure that change was deleterious to the country, and out of devotion to his way of life and the conviction that he was right, he vowed to fight what he thought to be a political evil. But the tide of the time was too strong, it overpowered him. He struggled for ten years against it in the political arena and in the realm of his personal life; then the Second World War sealed his efforts into total defeat. His political and ideological downfall resulted in a profound bitterness; he became a self-exile for twenty-five years. When I met him he was eighty-four years old and had come back to his home town to spend his last years in a home for the aged. It seemed inconceivable to me that he had lived that long, considering the way he had squandered his life in bitterness and self-pity. Somehow he found my company amenable and we used to talk at great length.

The last time I saw him he had concluded our conversation with the following: "I have had time to turn around and examine my life. The issues of my time are today only a story; not even an interesting one. Perhaps I threw away years of my life chasing something that never existed. I've had the feeling lately that I believed in something farcical. It wasn't worth my while. I think I know that. However, I can't retrieve the forty years I've lost."

I told don Juan that my conflict arose from the doubts into which his words about controlled folly had thrown me.

"If nothing really matters," I said, "upon becoming a man of knowledge one would find oneself, perforce, as empty as my friend and in no better position."

"That's not so," don Juan said cuttingly. "Your friend is lonely because he will die without *seeing*. In his life he just grew old and now he must have more self-pity than ever before. He feels he threw away forty years because he was after victories and found only defeats. He'll never know that to be victorious and to be defeated are equal.

"So now you're afraid of me because I've told you that you're equal to everything else. You're being childish. Our lot as men is to learn and one goes to knowledge as one goes to war; I have told you this countless times. One goes to knowledge or to war with fear, with respect, aware that one is going to war, and with absolute confidence in oneself. Put your trust in yourself, not in me.

"And so you're afraid of the emptiness of your friend's life. But there's no emptiness in the life of a man of knowledge, I tell you. Everything is filled to the brim."

Don Juan stood up and extended his arms as if feeling things in the air.

"Everything is filled to the brim," he repeated, "and everything is equal. I'm not like your friend who just grew old. When I tell you that nothing matters I don't mean it the way he does. For him, his struggle was not worth his while, because he was defeated; for me there is no victory, or defeat, or emptiness. Everything is filled to the brim and everything is equal and my struggle was worth my while.

"In order to become a man of knowledge one must be a warrior, not a whimpering child. One must strive without giving up, without a complaint, without flinching, until one *sees*, only to realize then that nothing matters."

Don Juan stirred the pot with a wooden spoon. The food was ready. He took the pot off the fire and placed it on an adobe rectangular block, which he had built against the wall and which he used as a shelf or a table. With his foot he shoved two small boxes that served as comfortable chairs, especially if one sat with his back against the supporting beams of the wall. He signaled me to sit down and then he poured a bowl of soup. He smiled; his eyes were shining as if he were truly enjoying my presence. He pushed the bowl gently toward me. There was such a warmth and kindness in his gesture that it seemed to be an appeal to restore my trust in him. I felt idiotic; I tried to disrupt my mood by looking for my spoon, but I couldn't find it. The soup was too hot to be drunk directly from the bowl, and while it cooled off I asked don Juan if controlled folly meant that a man of knowledge could not like anybody any more.

He stopped eating and laughed.

"You're too concerned with liking people or with being liked yourself," he said. "A man of knowledge likes, that's all. He likes whatever or whoever he wants, but he uses his controlled folly to be unconcerned about it. The opposite of what you are doing now. To like people or to be liked by people is not all one can do as a man."

He stared at me for a moment with his head tilted a little to one side.

"Think about that," he said.

"There is one more thing I want to ask, don Juan. You said that we need to look with our eyes to laugh, but I believe we laugh because we think. Take a blind man, he also laughs."

"No," he said. "Blind men don't laugh. Their bodies jerk a little with the ripple of laughter. They have never looked at the funny edge of the world and have to imagine it. Their laughter is not roaring."

We did not speak any more. I had a sensation of well-being, of happiness. We ate in silence; then don Juan began to laugh. I was using a dry twig to spoon the vegetables into my mouth.

*October 4, 1968*

At a certain moment today I asked don Juan if he minded talking a bit more about "seeing." He seemed to deliberate for an instant, then he smiled and said that I was again involved in my usual routine, trying to talk instead of doing.

"If you want to *see* you have to let the smoke guide you," he said emphatically. "I won't talk about this any more."

I was helping him clean some dry herbs. We worked in complete silence for a long time. When I am forced into a prolonged silence I always feel apprehensive, especially around don Juan. At a given moment I brought up a question to him in a sort of compulsive, almost belligerent outburst.

"How does a man of knowledge exercise controlled folly when it comes to the death of a person he loves?" I asked.

Don Juan was taken aback by my question and looked at me quizzically.

"Take your grandson Lucio," I said. "Would your acts be controlled folly at the time of his death?"

"Take my son Eulalio, that's a better example," don Juan replied calmly. "He was crushed by rocks while working in the construction of the Pan-American Highway. My acts toward him at the moment of his death were controlled folly. When I came down to the blasting area he was almost dead, but his body was so strong that it kept on moving and kicking. I stood in front of him and told the boys in the road crew not to move him any more; they obeyed me and stood there surrounding my son, looking at his mangled body. I stood there too, but I did not look. I shifted my eyes so I would *see* his personal life disintegrating, expanding uncontrollably beyond it's limits, like a fog of crystals, because that is the way life and death mix and expand. That is what I did at the time of my son's death. That's all one could ever do, and that is controlled folly. Had I looked at him I would have watched him becoming immobile and I would have felt a cry inside of me, because never again would I look at his fine figure pacing the earth. I *saw* his death instead, and there was no sadness, no feeling. His death was equal to everything else."

Don Juan was quiet for a moment. He seemed to be sad, but then he smiled and tapped my head.

"So you may say that when it comes to the death of a person I love, my controlled folly is to shift my eyes."

I thought about the people I love myself and a terribly oppressive wave of self-pity enveloped me.

"Lucky you, don Juan," I said. "You can shift your eyes, while I can only look."

He found my statement funny and laughed.

"Lucky, bull!" he said. "It's hard work."

We both laughed. After a long silence I began probing him again, perhaps only to dispel my own sadness.

"If I have understood you correctly then, don Juan," I said, "the only acts in the life of a man of knowledge which are not controlled folly are those he performs with his ally or with Mescalito. Isn't that right?"

"That's right," he said, chuckling. "My ally and Mescalito are not on a par with us human beings. My controlled folly applies only to myself and to the acts I perform while in the company of my fellow men."

"However, it is a logical possibility," I said, "to think that a man of knowledge may also regard his acts with his ally or with Mescalito as controlled folly, true?"

He stared at me for a moment.

"You're thinking again," he said. "A man of knowledge doesn't think, therefore he cannot encounter that possibility. Take me, for example. I say that my controlled folly applies to the acts I performed while in the company of my fellow men; I say that because I can *see* my fellow men. However, I cannot *see* through my ally and that makes it incomprehensible to me, so how could I control my folly if I don't *see* through it? With my ally or with Mescalito I am only a man who knows how to *see* and finds that he's baffled by what he *sees*; a man who knows that he'll never understand all that is around him.

"Take your case, for instance. It doesn't matter to me whether you become a man of knowledge or not; however, it matters to Mescalito. Obviously it matters to him or he wouldn't take so many steps to show his concern about you. I can notice his concern and I act toward it, yet his reasons are incomprehensible to me."

## Chapter 6

Just as we were getting into my car to start on a trip to central Mexico, on October 5, 1968, don Juan stopped me.

"I have told you before," he said with a serious expression, "that one should never reveal the name nor the whereabouts of a sorcerer. I believe you understood that you should never reveal my name nor the place where my body is. Now I am going to ask you to do the same with a friend of mine, a friend you will call Genaro. We are going to his house; we will spend some time there."

I assured don Juan that I had never betrayed his confidence.

"I know that," he said without changing his serious expression. "Yet I am concerned with your becoming thoughtless."

I protested and don Juan said his aim was only to remind me that every time one was careless in matters of sorcery, one was playing with an imminent and senseless death that could be averted by being thoughtful and aware.

"We will not touch upon this matter any longer," he said. "Once we leave my house we will not mention Genaro, nor will we think about him. I want you to put your thoughts in order now. When you meet him you must be clear and have no doubts in your mind."

"What kinds of doubts are you referring to, don Juan?"

"Any kinds of doubts whatever. When you meet him you ought to be crystal clear. He will *see* you!"

His strange admonitions made me very apprehensive. I mentioned that perhaps I should not meet his friend at all but only drive to the vicinity of his friend's house and leave him there.

"What I've told you was only a precaution," he said. "You've met one sorcerer already, Vicente, and he nearly killed you. Watch out this time!"

After we arrived in central Mexico it took us two days to walk from where I left my car to his friend's house, a little shack perched on the side of a mountain. Don Juan's friend was at the door, as if he had been waiting for us. I recognized him immediately. I had already made his acquaintance, although very briefly, when I brought my book to don Juan. I had not really looked at him at that time, except in a glancing fashion, so I had had the feeling he was as old as don Juan. As he stood at the door of his house, however, I noticed that he was definitely younger. He was perhaps in his early sixties. He was shorter than don Juan and slimmer, very dark and wiry. His hair was thick and graying and a bit long; it ran over his ears and forehead. His face was round and hard. A very prominent nose made him look like a bird of prey with small dark eyes.

He talked to don Juan first. Don Juan nodded affirmatively. They conversed briefly. They were not speaking Spanish so I did not understand what they were saying. Then don Genaro turned to me.

"You're welcome to my humble little shack," he said apologetically in Spanish.

His words were a polite formula I had heard before in various rural areas of Mexico. Yet as he said the words he laughed joyously for no overt reason, and I knew he was exercising his controlled folly. He did not care in the least that his house was a shack. I liked don Genaro very much.

For the next two days we went into the mountains to collect plants. Don Juan, don Genaro, and I left each day at the crack of dawn. The two old men went together to some specific but unidentified part of the mountains and left me alone in one area of the woods.

I had an exquisite feeling there. I did not notice the passage of time, nor was I apprehensive at staying alone; the extraordinary experience I had both days was an uncanny capacity to concentrate on the delicate task of finding the specific plants don Juan had entrusted me to collect.

We returned to the house in the late afternoon and both days I was so tired that I fell asleep immediately.

The third day, however, was different. The three of us worked together, and don Juan asked don Genaro to teach me how to select certain plants. We returned around noon and the two old men sat for hours in front of the house, in complete silence, as if they were in a state of trance. Yet they were not asleep. I walked around them a couple of times; don Juan followed my movements with his eyes, and so did don Genaro.

"You must talk to the plants before you pick them," don Juan said. He dropped his words casually and repeated his statement three times, as if to catch my attention. Nobody had said a word until he spoke.

"In order to *see* the plants you must talk to them personally," he went on. "You must get to know them individually; then the plants can tell you anything you care to know about them."

It was late in the afternoon. Don Juan was sitting on a flat rock facing the western mountains; don Genaro was sitting by him on a straw mat with his face toward the north. Don Juan had told me, the first day we were there, that those were their "positions" and that I had to sit on the ground at any place opposite to both of them. He added that while we sat in those positions I had to keep my face toward the southeast and look at them only in brief glances.

"Yes, that's the way it is with plants, isn't it?" don Juan said and turned to don Genaro, who agreed with an affirmative gesture.

I told him that the reason I had not followed his instructions was because I felt a little stupid talking to plants.

"You fail to understand that a sorcerer is not joking," he said severely. "When a sorcerer attempts to *see*, he attempts to gain power."

Don Genaro was staring at me. I was taking notes and that seemed to baffle him. He smiled at me, shook his head, and said something to don Juan. Don Juan shrugged his shoulders. To see me writing must have been quite odd for don Genaro. Don Juan was, I suppose, habituated to my taking notes, and the fact that I wrote while he spoke was no longer odd to him; he could carry on talking without appearing to notice my acts. Don Genaro, however, kept on laughing, and I had to stop writing in order not to disrupt the mood of the conversation.

Don Juan affirmed again that a sorcerer's acts were not to be taken as jokes because a sorcerer played with death at every turn of the way. Then he proceeded to relate to don Genaro the story of how one night I had looked at the lights of death following me during one of our trips. The story proved to be utterly funny; don Genaro rolled on the ground laughing.

Don Juan apologized to me and said that his friend was given to explosions of laughter. I glanced at don Genaro, who I thought was still rolling on the ground, and saw him performing a most unusual act. He was standing on his head without the aid of his arms or hands, and his legs were crossed as if he were sitting. The sight was so incongruous that it made me jump. When I realized he was doing something almost impossible, from the point of view of body mechanics, he had gone back again to a normal sitting position. Don Juan, however, seemed to be cognizant of what was involved and celebrated don Genaro's performance with roaring laughter.

Don Genaro seemed to have noticed my confusion; he clapped his hands a couple of times and rolled on the ground again; apparently he wanted me to watch him. What had at first appeared to be rolling on the ground was actually leaning over in a sitting position, and touching the ground with his head. He seemingly attained his illogical posture by gaining momentum, leaning over several times, until the inertia carried his body to a vertical stand, so that for an instant he "sat on his head."

When their laughter subsided don Juan continued talking; his tone was very severe. I shifted the position of my body in order to be at ease and give him all my attention. He did not smile at all, as he usually does, especially when I try to pay deliberate attention to what he is saying. Don Genaro kept looking at me as if he were expecting me to start writing again, but I did not take notes any more. Don Juan's words were a reprimand for not talking to the plants I had collected, as he had always told me to do. He said the plants I had killed could also have killed me; he said he was sure they would, sooner or later, make me get ill. He added that if I became ill as a result of hurting plants, I would, however, slough it off and believe I had only a touch of the flu.

The two of them had another moment of mirth, then don Juan became serious again and said that if I did not think of my death, my entire life would be only a personal chaos. He looked very stern.

"What else can a man have, except his life and his death?" he said to me.

At that point I felt it was indispensable to take notes and I began writing again. Don Genaro stared at me and smiled. Then he tilted his head back a little and opened his nostrils. He apparently had remarkable control over the muscles operating his nostrils, because they opened up to perhaps twice their normal size.

What was most comical about his clowning was not so much his gestures as his own reactions to them. After he enlarged his nostrils he tumbled down, laughing, and worked his body again into the same, strange, sitting-on-his-head, upside-down posture.

Don Juan laughed until tears rolled down his cheeks. I felt a bit embarrassed and laughed nervously.

"Genaro doesn't like writing," don Juan said as an explanation.

I put my notes away, but don Genaro assured me that it was all right to write, because he did not really mind it. I gathered my notes again and began writing. He repeated the same hilarious motions and both of them had the same reactions again.

Don Juan looked at me, still laughing, and said that his friend was portraying me; that my tendency was to open my nostrils whenever I wrote; and that don Genaro thought that trying to become a sorcerer by taking notes was as absurd as sitting on one's head and thus he had made up the ludicrous posture of resting the weight of his sitting body on his head.

"Perhaps you don't think it's funny," don Juan said, "but only Genaro can work his way up to sitting on his head, and only you can think of learning to be a sorcerer by writing your way up."

They both had another explosion of laughter and don Genaro repeated his incredible movement.

I liked him. There was so much grace and directness in his acts.

"My apologies, don Genaro," I said, pointing to the writing pad.

"It's all right," he said and chuckled again.

I could not write any more. They went on talking for a very long time about how plants could actually kill and how sorcerers used plants in that capacity. Both of them kept staring at me while they talked, as if they expected me to write.

"Carlos is like a horse that doesn't like to be saddled," don Juan said. "You have to be very slow with him. You scared him and now he won't write."

Don Genaro expanded his nostrils and said in a mocking plea, frowning and puckering his mouth.

"Come on, Carlitos, write! Write until your thumb falls off."

Don Juan stood up, stretching his arms and arching his back. In spite of his advanced age his body seemed to be powerful and limber. He went to the bushes at the side of the house and I was left alone with don Genaro. He looked at me and I moved my eyes away because he made me feel embarrassed.

"Don't tell me you're not even going to look at me?" he said with a most hilarious intonation.

He opened his nostrils and made them quiver; then he stood up and repeated don Juan's movements, arching his back and stretching his arms but with his body contorted into a most ludicrous position; it was truly an indescribable gesture that combined an exquisite sense of pantomime and a sense of the ridiculous. It enthralled me. It was a masterful caricature of don Juan.

Don Juan came back at that moment and caught the gesture and obviously the meaning also. He sat down chuckling.

"Which direction is the wind?" don Genaro asked casually.

Don Juan pointed to the west with a movement of his head.

"I'd better go where the wind blows," don Genaro said with a serious expression.

He then turned and shook his finger at me.

"And don't you pay any attention if you hear strange noises," he said. "When Genaro shits the mountains tremble."

He leaped into the bushes and a moment later I heard a very strange noise, a deep, unearthly rumble. I did not know what to make of it. I looked at don Juan for a clue but he was doubled over with laughter.

*October 17, 1968*

I don't remember what prompted don Genaro to tell me about the arrangement of the "other world," as he called it. He said that a master sorcerer was an eagle, or rather that he could make himself into an eagle. On the other hand, an evil sorcerer was a "tecolote," an owl. Don Genaro said that an evil sorcerer was a child of the night and for such a man the most useful animals were the mountain lion or other wild cats, or the night birds, especially the owl. He said that the "brujos liricos," lyric sorcerers, meaning the dilettante sorcerers, preferred other animals— a crow, for example. Don Juan laughed; he had been listening in silence.

Don Genaro turned to him and said, "That's true, you know that, Juan."

Then he said that a master sorcerer could take his disciple on a journey with him and actually pass through the ten layers of the other world. The master, provided that he was an eagle, could start at the very bottom layer and then go through each successive world until he reached the top. Evil sorcerers and dilettantes could at best, be said, go through only three layers.

Don Genaro gave a description of what those steps were by saying, "You start at the very bottom and then your teacher takes you with him in his flight and soon, boom! You go through the first layer. Then a little while later, boom! You go through the second; and boom! You go through the third..."

Don Genaro took me through ten booms to the last layer of the world. When he had finished talking don Juan looked at me and smiled knowingly.

"Talking is not Genaro's predilection," he said, "but if you care to get a lesson, he will teach you about the equilibrium of things."

Don Genaro nodded affirmatively; he puckered up his mouth and closed his eyelids halfway.

I thought his gesture was delightful.

Don Genaro stood up and so did don Juan.

"All right," don Genaro said. "Let's go, then. We could go and wait for Nestor and Pablito. They're through now. On Thursdays they're through early."

Both of them got into my car; don Juan sat in the front. I did not ask them anything but simply started the engine. Don Juan directed me to a place he said was Nestor's home; don Genaro went into the house and a while later came out with Nestor and Pablito, two young men who were his apprentices. They all got in my car and don Juan told me to take the road toward the western mountains.

We left my car on the side of the dirt road and walked along the bank of a river, which was perhaps fifteen or twenty feet across, to a waterfall that was visible from where I had parked. It was late afternoon. The scenery was quite impressive. Directly above us there was a huge, dark, bluish cloud that looked like a floating roof; it had a well-defined edge and was shaped like an enormous half-circle. To the west, on the high mountains of the Cordillera Central, the rain seemed to be descending on the slopes. It looked like a whitish curtain falling on the green peaks. To the east there was the long, deep valley; there were only scattered clouds over the valley and the sun was shining there. The contrast between the two areas was magnificent. We stopped at the bottom of the waterfall; it was perhaps a hundred and fifty feet high; the roar was very loud.

Don Genaro fastened a belt around his waist. He had at least seven items hanging from it. They looked like small gourds. He took off his hat and let it hang on his back from a cord tied around his neck. He put on a headband that he took from a pouch made of a thick wool fabric. The headband was also made of wool of various colors; a sharp yellow was the most prominent of them. He inserted three feathers in the headband. They seemed to be eagle feathers. I noticed that the places where he had inserted them were not symmetrical. One feather was above the back curve of his right ear, the other was a few inches to the front, and the third was over his left temple. Then he took off his sandals, hooked or tied them to the waist of his trousers, and fastened his belt over his poncho. The belt seemed to be made of woven strips of leather. I could not see whether he tied it or buckled it. Don Genaro walked toward the waterfall.

Don Juan manipulated a round rock into a steady position and-sat down on it. The other two young men did the same with some rocks and sat down to his left. Don Juan pointed to the place next to him, on his right side, and told me to bring a rock and sit by him.

"We must make a line here," he said, showing me that the three were sitting in a row.

By then don Genaro had reached the very bottom of the waterfall and had begun climbing a trail on the right side of it. From where we were sitting the trail looked fairly steep. There were a lot of shrubs he used as railings. At one moment he seemed to lose his footing and almost slid down, as if the dirt were slippery. A moment later the same thing happened and the thought crossed my mind that perhaps don Genaro was too old to be climbing. I saw him slipping and stumbling several times before he reached the spot where the trail ended.

I experienced a sort of apprehension when he began to climb tihe rocks. I could not figure out what he was going to do.

"What's he doing?" I asked don Juan in a whisper.

Don Juan did not look at me. "Obviously he's climbing," he said.

Don Juan was looking straight at don Genaro. His gaze was fixed. His eyelids were half-closed. He was sitting very erect with his hands resting between his legs, on the edge of the rock.

I leaned over a little bit to see the two young men. Don Juan made an imperative gesture with his hand to make me get back in line. I retreated immediately. I had only a glimpse of the young men. They seemed to be as attentive as he was.

Don Juan made another gesture with his hand and pointed to the direction of the waterfall.

I looked again. Don Genaro had climbed quite a way on the rocky wall. At the moment I looked he was perched on a ledge, inching his way slowly to circumvent a huge boulder. His arms were spread, as if he were embracing the rock. He moved slowly toward his right and suddenly he lost his footing. I gasped involuntarily. For a moment his whole body hung in the air. I was sure he was going to fall but he did not. His right hand had grabbed onto something and very agilely his feet went back on the ledge again. But before he moved on he turned to us and looked. It was only a glance. There was, however, such a stylization to the movement of turning his head that I began to wonder. I remembered then that he had done the same thing, turning to look at us, every time he slipped. I had thought that don Genaro must have felt embarrassed by his clumsiness and turned to see if we were looking.

He climbed a bit more toward the top, suffered another loss of footing, and hung perilously on the overhanging rock face. This time he was supported by his left hand. When he regained his balance he turned and looked at us again. He slipped twice more before he reached the top. From where we were sitting, the crest of the waterfall seemed to be twenty to twenty-five feet across.

Don Genaro stood motionless for a moment. I wanted to ask don Juan what don Genaro was going to do up there, but don Juan seemed to be so absorbed in watching that I did not dare disturb him.

Suddenly don Genaro jumped onto the water. It was such a thoroughly unexpected action that

I felt a vacuum in the pit of my stomach. It was a magnificent, outlandish leap. For a second I had the clear sensation that I had seen a series of superimposed images of his body making an elliptical flight to the middle of the stream.

When my surprise receded I noticed that he had landed on a rock on the edge of the fall, a rock which was hardly visible from where we were sitting.

He stayed perched there for a long time. He seemed to be fighting the power of the onrushing water. Twice he hung over the precipice and I could not determine what he was clinging to. He gained his balance and squatted on the rock. Then he leaped again, like a tiger. I could barely see the next rock where he landed; it was like a small cone on the very edge of the fall.

He remained there almost ten minutes. He was motionless. His immobility was so impressive to me that I was shivering. I wanted to get up and walk around. Don Juan noticed my nervousness and told me imperatively to be calm.

Don Genaro's stillness plunged me into an extraordinary and mysterious terror. I felt that if he remained perched there any longer I could not control myself.

Suddenly he jumped again, this time all the way to the other bank of the waterfall. He landed on his feet and hands, like a feline. He remained in a squat position for a moment, then he stood up and looked across the fall, to the other side, and then down at us. He stayed dead still looking at us. His hands were clasped at his sides, as if he were holding onto an unseen railing.

There was something truly exquisite about his posture; his body seemed so nimble, so frail. I thought that don Genaro with his headband and feathers, his dark poncho and his bare feet was the most beautiful human being I had ever seen.

He threw his arms up suddenly, lifted his head, and flipped his body swiftly in a sort of lateral somersault to his left. The boulder where he had been standing was round and when he jumped he disappeared behind it.

Huge drops of rain began to fall at that moment. Don Juan got up and so did the two young men. Their movement was so abrupt that it confused me. Don Genaro's masterful feat had thrown me into a state of profound emotional excitement. I felt he was a consummate artist and I wanted to see him right then to applaud him.

I strained to look on the left side of the waterfall to see if he was coming down, but he was not. I insisted on knowing what had happened to him. Don Juan did not answer.

"We better hurry out of here," he said. "It's a real downpour. We have to take Nestor and Pablito to their house and then we'll have to start on our trip back."

"I didn't even say goodbye to don Genaro," I complained.

"He already said goodbye to you," don Juan answered harshly.

He peered at me for an instant and then softened his frown and smiled.

"He has also wished you well," he said. "He felt happy with you."

"But aren't we going to wait for him?"

"No!" don Juan said sharply, "Let him be, wherever he is. Perhaps he is an eagle flying to the other world, or perhaps he has died up there. It doesn't matter now."

*October 23, 1968*

Don Juan casually mentioned that he was going to make another trip to central Mexico in the near future.

"Are you going to visit don Genaro?" I asked.

"Perhaps," he said without looking at me.

"He's all right, isn't he, don Juan? I mean nothing bad happened to him up there on top of the waterfall, did it?"

"Nothing happened to him; he is sturdy."

We talked about his projected trip for a while and then I said I had enjoyed don Genaro's company and his jokes. He laughed and said that don Genaro was truly like a child. There was a long pause; I struggled in my mind to find an opening line to ask about his lesson. Don Juan looked at me and said in a mischievous tone: "You're dying to ask me about Genaro's lesson, aren't you?"

I laughed with embarrassment. I had been obsessed with everything that took place at the waterfall. I had been hashing and rehashing all the details I could remember and my conclusions were that I had witnessed an incredible feat of physical prowess. I thought don Genaro was beyond doubt a peerless master of equilibrium; every single movement he had performed was highly ritualized and, needless to say, must have had some inextricable, symbolic meaning.

"Yes," I said. "I admit I'm dying to know what his lesson was."

"Let me tell you something," don Juan said. "It was a waste of time for you. His lesson was for someone who can *see*. Pablito and Nestor got the gist of it, although they don't *see* very well. But you, you went there to look. I told Genaro that you are a very strange plugged-up fool and that perhaps you'd get unplugged with his lesson, but you didn't. It doesn't matter, though. *Seeing* is very difficult.

"I didn't want you to speak to Genaro afterwards, so we had to leave. Too bad. Yet it would have been worse to stay. Genaro risked a great deal to show you something magnificent. Too bad you can't *see*."

"Perhaps, don Juan, if you tell me what the lesson was I may find out that I really *saw*."

Don Juan doubled up with laughter.

"Your best feature is asking questions," he said.

He was apparently going to drop the subject again. We were sitting, as usual, in the area in front of his house; he suddenly got up and walked inside. I trailed behind him and insisted on describing to him what I had seen. I faithfully followed the sequence of events as I remembered it. Don Juan kept on smiling while I spoke. When I had finished he shook his head.

"*Seeing* is very difficult," he said.

I begged him to explain his statement

"*Seeing* is not a matter of talk," he said imperatively.

Obviously he was not going to tell me anything more, so I gave up and left the house to run some errands for him.

When I returned it was already dark; we had something to eat and afterwards we walked out to the *ramada*; we had no sooner sat down than don Juan began to talk about don Genaro's lesson. He did not give me any time to prepare myself for it. I did have my notes with me, but it was too dark to write and I did not want to alter the flow of his talk by going inside the house for the kerosene lantern.

He said that don Genaro, being a master of balance, could perform very complex and difficult movements. Sitting on his head was one of such movements and with it he had attempted to show me that it was impossible to "see" while I took notes. The action of sitting on his head without the aid of his hands was, at best, a freakish stunt that lasted only an instant. In don Genaro's opinion, writing about "seeing" was the same; that is, it was a precarious maneuver, as odd and as unnecessary as sitting on one's head.

Don Juan peered at me in the dark and in a very dramatic tone said that while don Genaro was horsing around, sitting on his head, I was on the very verge of "seeing." Don Genaro noticed it and repeated his maneuvers over and over, to no avail, because I had lost the thread right away.

Don Juan said that afterwards don Genaro, moved by his personal liking for me, attempted in a very dramatic way to bring me back to that verge of "seeing." After very careful deliberation he decided to show me a feat of equilibrium by crossing the waterfall. He felt that the waterfall was like the edge on which I was standing and was confident I could also make it across.

Don Juan then explained don Genaro's feat. He said that he had already told me that human beings were, for those who "saw," luminous beings composed of something like fibers of light, which rotated from the front to the back and maintained the appearance of an egg. He said that he had also told me that the most astonishing part of the egg-like creatures was a set of long fibers that came out of the area around the navel; don Juan said that those fibers were of the uttermost importance in the life of a man. Those fibers were the secret of don Genaio's balance and his lesson had nothing to do with acrobatic jumps across the waterfall. His feat of equilibrium was in the way he used those "tentacle-like" fibers.

Don Juan dropped the subject as suddenly as he had started it and began to talk about something thoroughly unrelated.

*October 24, 1968*

I cornered don Juan and told him I intuitively felt that I was never going to get another lesson in equilibrium and that he had to explain to me all the pertinent details, which I would otherwise never discover by myself. Don Juan said I was right, in so far as knowing that don Genaro would never give me another lesson.

"What else do you want to know?" he asked.

"What are those tentacle-like fibers, don Juan?"

"They are the tentacles that come out of a man's body which are apparent to any sorcerer who *sees*. Sorcerers act toward people in accordance to the way they *see* their tentacles. Weak persons have very short, almost invisible fibers; strong persons have bright, long ones. Genaro's, for instance, are so bright that they resemble thickness. You can tell from the fibers if a person is healthy, or if he is sick, or if he is mean, or kind, or treacherous. You can also tell from the fibers if a person can *see*. Here is a baffling problem. When Genaro *saw* you he knew, just like my friend Vicente did, that you could *see*; when I *see* you I *see* that you can *see* and yet I know myself that you can't. How baffling! Genaro couldn't get over that. I told him that you were a strange fool. I think he wanted to *see* that for himself and took you to the waterfall."

"Why do you think I give the impression I can *see*?"

Don Juan did not answer me. He remained silent for a long time. I did not want to ask him anything else. Finally he spoke to me and said that he knew why but did not know how to explain it.

"You think everything in the world is simple to understand," he said, "because everything you do is a routine that is simple to understand. At the waterfall, when you looked at Genaro moving across the water, you believed that he was a master of somersaults, because somersaults was all you could think about. And that is all you will ever believe he did. Yet Genaro never jumped across that water. If he had jumped he would have died. Genaro balanced himself on his superb, bright fibers. He made them long, long enough so that he could, let's say, roll on them across the waterfall. He demonstrated the proper way to make those tentacles long, and how to move them with precision.

"Pablito *saw* nearly all of Genaro's movements. Nestor, on the other hand, saw only the most obvious maneuvers. He missed the delicate details. But you, you *saw* nothing at all."

"Perhaps if you had told me beforehand, don Juan, what to look for..."

He interrupted me and said that giving me instructions would only have hindered don Genaro.

Had I known what was going to take place, my fibers would have been agitated and would have interfered with don Genaro's.

"If you could *see*," he said, "it would have been obvious to you, from the first step that Genaro took, that he was not slipping as he went up the side of the waterfall. He was loosening his tentacles. Twice he made them go around boulders and held to the sheer rock like a fly. When he got to the top and was ready to cross the water he focused them onto a small rock in the middle of the stream, and when they were secured there, he let the fibers pull him. Genaro never jumped, therefore he could land on the slippery surfaces of small boulders at the very edge of the water. His fibers were at all times neatly wrapped around every rock he used.

"He did not stay on the first boulder very long, because he had the rest of his fibers tied onto another one, even smaller, at the place where the onrush of water was the greatest. His tentacles pulled him again and he landed on it. That was the most outstanding thing he did. The surface was too small for a man to hold onto; and the onrush of the water would have washed his body over the precipice had he not had some of his fibers still focused on the first rock.

“He stayed in that second position for a long time, because he had to draw out his tentacles again and send them across to the other side of the fall. When he had them secured he had to release the fibers focused on the first rock. That was very tricky. Perhaps only Genaro could do that. He nearly lost his grip; or maybe he was only fooling us, well never know that for sure. Personally, I really think he nearly lost his grip. I know that, because he became rigid and sent out a magnificent shoot, like a beam of light across the water. I feel that beam alone could have pulled him through. When he got to the other side he stood up and let his fibers glow like a cluster of lights. That was the one thing he did just for you. If you had been able to *see*, you would have *seen* that.

"Genaro stood there looking at you, and then he knew that you had not *seen*."

## PART TWO – The Task of “Seeing”

## Chapter 7

Don Juan was not at his house when I arrived there at midday on November 8, 1968. I had no idea where to look for him, so I sat and waited. For some unknown reason I knew he would soon be home. A short while later don Juan walked into his house. He nodded at me. We exchanged greetings. He seemed to be tired and lay down on his mat. He yawned a couple of times.

The idea of "seeing" had become an obsession with me and I had made up my mind to use his hallucinogenic smoking mixture again. It had been a terribly difficult decision to make, so I still wanted to argue the point a bit further.

"I want to learn to *see*, don Juan," I said bluntly. "But I really don't want to take anything; I don't want to smoke your mixture. Do you think there is any chance I could learn to *see* without it?"

He sat up, stared at me for a moment, and lay down again.

"No!" he said. "You will have to use the smoke."

"But you said I was on the verge of *seeing* with don Genaro."

"I meant that something in you was glowing as though you were really aware of Genaro's doings, but you were just looking. Obviously there is something in you that resembles *seeing*, but isn't; you're plugged up and only the smoke can help you."

"Why does one have to smoke? Why can't one simply learn to *see* by oneself? I have a very earnest desire. Isn't that enough?"

"No, it's not enough. *Seeing* is not so simple and only the smoke can give you the speed you need to catch a glimpse of that fleeting world. Otherwise you will only look."

"What do you mean by a fleeting world?"

"The world, when you *see*, is not as you think it is now. It's rather a fleeting world that moves and changes. One may perhaps learn to apprehend that fleeting world by oneself, but it won't do any good, because the body decays with the stress. With the smoke, on the other hand, one never suffers from exhaustion. The smoke gives the necessary speed to grasp the fleeting movement of the world and at the same time it keeps the body and it's strength intact."

"All right!" I said dramatically. "I don't want to beat around the bush any longer. I'll smoke."

He laughed at my display of histrionics.

"Cut it out," he said. "You always hook onto the wrong thing. Now you think that just deciding to let the smoke guide you is going to make you *see*. There's much more to it. There is always much more to anything."

He became serious for a moment.

"I have been very careful with you, and my acts have been deliberate," he said, "because it is Mescalito's desire that you understand my knowledge. But I know that I won't have time to teach you all I want. I will only have time to put you on the road and trust that you will seek in the same fashion I did. I must admit that you are more indolent and more stubborn than I. You have other views, though, and the direction that your life will take is something I cannot foresee."

His deliberate tone of voice, something in his attitude, summoned up an old feeling in me, a mixture of fear, loneliness, and expectation.

"We'll soon know where you stand," he said cryptically.

He did not say anything else. After a while he went outside the house. I followed him and stood in front of him, not knowing whether to sit down or to unload some packages I had brought for him.

"Would it be dangerous?" I asked, just to say something.

"Everything is dangerous," he said.

Don Juan did not seem to be inclined to tell me anything else; he gathered some small bundles that were piled in a corner and put them inside a carrying net. I did not offer to help him because I knew that if he had wished my help he would have asked me. Then he lay down on his straw mat. He told me to relax and rest. I lay down on my mat and tried to sleep but I was not tired; the night before I had stopped at a motel and slept until noon, knowing that I had only a three-hour drive to don Juan's place. He was not sleeping either. Although his eyes were closed, I noticed an almost imperceptible, rhythmical movement of his head. The thought occurred to me that he was perhaps chanting to himself.

"Let's eat something," don Juan said suddenly, and his voice made me jump. "You're going to need all your energy. You should be in good shape."

He made some soup, but I wasn't hungry.

The next day, November 9, don Juan let me eat only a morsel of food and told me to rest. I lay around all morning but I could not relax. I had no idea what don Juan had in mind, but, worst of all, I was not certain what I had in mind myself.

We were sitting under his *ramada* around 3:00 P.M. I was very hungry. I had suggested various times that we should eat, but he had refused.

"You haven't prepared your mixture for three years," he said suddenly. "You'll have to smoke my mixture, so let's say that I have collected it for you. You will need only a bit of it. I will fill the pipe's bowl once. You will smoke all of it and then rest. Then the keeper of the other world will come. You will do nothing but observe it. Observe how it moves; observe everything it does. Your life may depend on how well you watch."

Don Juan had dropped his instructions so abruptly that I did not know what to say or even what to think. I mumbled incoherently for a moment. I could not organize my thoughts. Finally I asked the first clear thing that came to my mind. "Who's this guardian?"

Don Juan flatly refused to involve himself in conversation, but I was too nervous to stop talking and I insisted desperately that he tell me about this guardian.

"You'll *see* it," he said casually. "It guards the other world."

"What world? The world of the dead?"

"It's not the world of the dead or the world of anything. It's just another world. There's no use telling you about it. *See* it for yourself."

With that don Juan went inside the house. I followed him into his room.

"Wait, wait, don Juan. What are you going to do?"

He did not answer. He took his pipe out of a bundle and sat down on a straw mat in the center of the room, looking at me inquisitively. He seemed to be waiting for my consent.

"You're a fool," he said softly. "You're not afraid. You just say you're afraid."

He shook his head slowly from side to side. Then he took the little bag with the smoking mixture and filled the pipe bowl.

"I am afraid, don Juan. I am really afraid."

"No, it's not fear."

I desperately tried to gain time and began a long discussion about the nature of my feelings. I sincerely maintained that I was afraid, but he pointed out that I was not panting, nor was my heart beating faster than usual.

I thought for a while about what he had said. He was wrong; I did have many of the physical changes ordinarily associated with fear, and I was desperate. A sense of impending doom permeated everything around me. My stomach was upset and I was sure I was pale; my hands were sweating profusely; and yet I really thought I was not afraid. I did not have the feeling of fear I had been accustomed to throughout my life. The fear which has always been idiosyncratically mine was not there. I was talking as I paced up and down the room in front of don Juan, who was still sitting on his mat, holding his pipe, and looking at me inquisitively; and upon considering the matter I arrived at the conclusion that what I felt instead of my usual fear was a profound sense of displeasure, a discomfort at the mere thought of the confusion created by the intake of hallucinogenic plants.

Don Juan stared at me for an instant, then he looked past me, squinting as if he were struggling to detect something in the distance.

I kept walking back and forth in front of him until he forcefully told me to sit down and relax. We sat quietly for a few minutes.

"You don't want to lose your clarity, do you?" he said abruptly.

"That's very right, don Juan," I said.

He laughed with apparent delight.

"Clarity, the second enemy of a man of knowledge, has loomed upon you.

"You're not afraid," he said reassuringly, "but now you hate to lose your clarity, and since you're a fool, you call that fear."

He chuckled.

"Get me some charcoals," he ordered.

His tone was kind and reassuring. I got up automatically and went to the back of the house and gathered some small pieces of burning charcoal from the fire, put them on top of a small stone slab, and returned to the room.

"Come out here to the porch," don Juan called loudly from outside.

He placed a straw mat on the spot where I usually sit. I put the charcoals next to him and he blew on them to activate the fire. I was about to sit down but he stopped me and told me to sit on the right edge of the mat. He then put a piece of charcoal in the pipe and handed it to me. I took it. I was amazed at the silent forcefulness with which don Juan had steered me. I could not think of anything to say. I had no more arguments. I was convinced that I was not afraid, but only unwilling to lose my clarity.

"Puff, puff," he ordered me gently. "Just one bowl this time."

I sucked on the pipe and heard the chirping of the mixture catching on fire. I felt an instantaneous coat of ice inside my mouth and my nose. I took another puff and the coating extended to my chest. When I had taken the last puff I felt that the entire inside of my body was coated with a peculiar sensation of cold warmth.

Don Juan took the pipe away from me and tapped the bowl on his palm to loosen the residue. Then, as he always does, he wet his finger with saliva and rubbed it inside the bowl.

My body was numb, but I could move. I changed positions to sit more comfortably.

"What's going to happen?" I asked.

I had some difficulty vocalizing.

Don Juan very carefully put his pipe inside it's sheath and rolled it up in a long piece of cloth. Then he sat up straight, facing me. I felt dizzy; my eyes were closing involuntarily. Don Juan shook me vigorously and ordered me to stay awake. He said I knew very well that if I fell asleep I would die. That jolted me. It occurred to me that don Juan was probably just saying that to keep me awake, but on the other hand, it also occurred to me that he might be right. I opened my eyes as wide as I could and that made don Juan laugh. He said that I had to wait for a while and keep my eyes open all the time and that at a given moment I would be able to see the guardian of the other world.

I felt a very annoying heat all over my body; I tried to change positions, but I could not move any more. I wanted to talk to don Juan; the words seemed to be so deep inside of me that I could not bring them out. Then I tumbled on my left side and found myself looking at don Juan from the floor.

He leaned over and ordered me in a whisper not to look at him but to stare fixedly at a point on my mat which was directly in front of my eyes. He said that I had to look with one eye, my left eye, and that sooner or later I would see the guardian.

I fixed my stare on the spot he had pointed to but I did not see anything. At a certain moment, however, I noticed a gnat flying in front of my eyes. It landed on the mat. I followed it's movements. It came very close to me, so close that my visual perception blurred. And then, all of a sudden, I felt as if I had stood up. It was a very puzzling sensation that deserved some pondering, but there was no time for that. I had the total sensation that I was looking straight onward from my usual eye level, and what I saw shook up the last fiber of my being. There is no other way to describe the emotional jolt I experienced. Right there facing me, a short distance away, was a gigantic, monstrous animal. A truly monstrous thing! Never in the wildest fantasies of fiction had I encountered anything like it. I looked at it in complete, utmost bewilderment.

The first thing I really noticed was it's size. I thought, for some reason, that it must be close to a hundred feet tall. It seemed to be standing erect, although I could not figure out how it stood. Next, I noticed that it had wings, two short, wide wings. At that point I became aware that I insisted on examining the animal as if it were an ordinary sight; that is, I looked at it. However, I could not really look at it in the way I was accustomed to looking. I realized that I was, rather, noticing things about it, as if the picture were becoming more clear as parts were added. It's body was covered with tufts of black hair. It had a long muzzle and was drooling. It's eyes were bulgy and round, like two enormous white balls.

Then it began to beat it's wings. It was not the flapping motion of a bird's wings, but a kind of flickering, vibratory tremor. It gained speed and began circling in front of me; it was not flying, but rather skidding with astounding speed and agility, just a few inches above the ground. For a moment I found myself engrossed in watching it move. I thought that it's movements were ugly and yet it's speed and easiness were superb.

It circled twice in front of me, vibrating it's wings, and whatever was drooling out of it's mouth flew in all directions. Then it turned around and skidded away at an incredible speed until it disappeared in the distance. I stared fixedly in the direction it had gone because there was nothing else I could do. I had a most peculiar sensation of being incapable of organizing my thoughts coherently. I could not move away. It was as if I were glued to the spot.

Then I saw something like a cloud in the distance; an instant later the gigantic beast was circling again at full speed in front of me. It's wings cut closer and closer to my eyes until they hit me. I felt that it's wings had actually hit whatever part of me was there. I yelled with all my might in the midst of one of the most excruciating pains I have ever had.

The next thing I knew I was seated on my mat and don Juan was rubbing my forehead. He rubbed my arms and legs with leaves, then he took me to an irrigation ditch behind his house, took off my clothes, and submerged me completely, then pulled me out and submerged me over and over again.

As I lay on the shallow bottom of the irrigation ditch, don Juan pulled up my left foot from time to time and tapped the sole gently. After a while I felt a ticklishness. He noticed it and said that I was all right. I put on my clothes and we returned to his house. I sat down again on my straw mat and tried to talk, but I felt I could not concentrate on what I wanted to say, although my thoughts were very clear. I was amazed to realize how much concentration was necessary to talk. I also noticed that in order to say something I had to stop looking at things. I had the impression that I was entangled at a very deep level and when I wanted to talk I had to surface like a diver; I had to ascend as if pulled by my words. Twice I went as far as clearing my throat in a fashion which was perfectly ordinary. I could have said then whatever I wanted to, but I did not. I preferred to remain at the strange level of silence where I could just look. I had the feeling that I was beginning to tap what don Juan had called "seeing" and that made me very happy.

Afterwards don Juan gave me some soup and tortillas and ordered me to eat. I was able to eat without any trouble and without losing what I thought to be my "power of seeing." I focused my gaze on everything around me. I was convinced I could "see" everything, and yet the world looked the same to the best of my assessment. I struggled to "see" until it was quite dark. I finally got tired and lay down and went to sleep.

I woke up when don Juan covered me with a blanket. I had a headache and I was sick to my stomach. After a while I felt better and slept soundly until the next day.

In the morning I was myself again. I asked don Juan eagerly, "What happened to me?"

Don Juan laughed coyly. "You went to look for the keeper and of course you found it," he said.

"But what was it, don Juan?"

"The guardian, the keeper, the sentry of the other world," don Juan said factually.

I intended to relate to him the details of the portentous and ugly beast, but he disregarded my attempt, saying that my experience was nothing special, that any man could do that.

I told him that the guardian had been such a shock to me that I really had not yet been able to think about it.

Don Juan laughed and made fun of what he called an overdramatic bent of my nature.

"That thing, whatever it was, hurt me," I said. "It was as real as you and I."

"Of course it was real. It caused you pain, didn't it?"

As I recollected my experience I grew more excited. Don Juan told me to calm down. Then he asked me if I had really been afraid of it; he stressed the word "really."

"I was petrified," I said. "Never in my life have I experienced such an awesome fright."

"Come on," he said, laughing. "You were not that afraid."

"I swear to you," I said with genuine fervor, "that if I could have moved I would have run hysterically."

He found my statement very funny and roared with laughter.

"What was the point of making me see that monstrosity, don Juan?"

He became serious and gazed at me.

"That was the guardian," he said. "If you want to *see* you must overcome the guardian."

"But how am I to overcome it, don Juan? It is perhaps a hundred feet tall."

Don Juan laughed so hard that tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Why don't you let me tell you what I saw, so there won't be any misunderstanding?" I said.

"If that makes you happy, go ahead, tell me."

I narrated everything I could remember, but that did not seem to change his mood.

"Still, that's nothing new," he said, smiling.

"But how do you expect me to overcome a thing like that? With what?"

He was silent for quite a while. Then he turned to me and said, "You were not afraid, not really. You were hurt, but you were not afraid."

He reclined against some bundles and put his arms behind his head. I thought he had dropped the subject.

"You know," he said suddenly, looking at the roof of the *ramada*, "every man can *see* the guardian. And the guardian is sometimes for some of us an awesome beast as high as the sky. You're lucky; for you it was only a hundred feet tall. And yet it's secret is so simple."

He paused for a moment and hummed a Mexican song.

"The guardian of the other world is a gnat," he said slowly, as if he were measuring the effect of his words.

"I beg your pardon."

"The guardian of the other world is a gnat," he repeated. "What you encountered yesterday was a gnat; and that little gnat will keep you away until you overcome it."

For a moment I did not want to believe what don Juan was saying, but upon recollecting the sequence of my vision I had to admit that at a certain moment I was looking at a gnat, and an instant later a sort of mirage had taken place and I was looking at the beast.

"But how could a gnat hurt me, don Juan?" I asked, truly bewildered.

"It was not a gnat when it hurt you," he said, "it was the guardian of the other world. Perhaps some day you will have the courage to overcome it. Not now, though; now it is a hundred-foot-tall drooling beast. But there is no point in talking about it. It's no feat to stand in front of it, so if you want to know more about it, find the guardian again."

Two days later, on November 11, I smoked don Juan's mixture again.

I had asked don Juan to let me smoke once more to find the guardian. I had not asked him on the spur of the moment, but after long deliberation. My curiosity about the guardian was disproportionately greater than my fear, or the discomfort of losing my clarity.

The procedure was the same. Don Juan filled the pipe bowl once and when I had finished the entire contents he cleaned it and put it away.

The effect was markedly slower; when I began to feel a bit dizzy don Juan came to me and, holding my head in his hands, helped me to lie down on my left side. He told me to stretch my legs and relax and then helped me put my right arm in front of my body, at the level of my chest. He turned my hand so the palm was pressing against the mat, and let my weight rest on it. I did not do anything to help or hinder him, for I did not know what be was doing.

He sat in front of me and told me not to be concerned with anything. He said that the guardian was going to come, and that I had a ringside seat to see it. He also told me, in a casual way, that the guardian could cause great pain, but that there was one way to avert it. He said that two days before he had made me sit up when he judged I had had enough. He pointed to my right arm and said that he had deliberately put it in that position so I could use it as a lever to push myself up whenever I wanted to.

By the time he had finished telling me all that, my body was quite numb. I wanted to call to his attention the fact that it would be impossible for me to push myself up because I had lost control of my muscles. I tried to vocalize the words but I could not. He seemed to have anticipated me, however, and explained that the trick was in the will. He urged me to remember the time, years before, when I had first smoked the mushrooms. On that occasion I had fallen to the ground and sprung up to my feet again by an act of what he called, at that time, my "will"; I had "thought myself up." He said that was in fact the only possible way to get up.

What he was saying was useless to me because I did not remember what I had really done years before. I had an overwhelming sense of despair and closed my eyes.

Don Juan grabbed me by the hair, shook my head vigorously, and ordered me imperatively not to close my eyes. I not only opened my eyes but I did something I thought was astonishing. I actually said, "I don't know how I got up that time."

I was startled. There was something very monotonous about the rhythm of my voice, but it was plainly my voice, and yet I honestly believed I could not have said that, because a minute before I had been incapable of speaking.

I looked at don Juan. He turned his face to one side and laughed.

"I didn't say that," I said.

And again I was startled by my voice. I felt elated. Speaking under these conditions became an exhilarating process. I wanted to ask don Juan to explain my talking, but I found I was again incapable of uttering one single word. I struggled fiercely to voice my thoughts, but it was useless. I gave up and at that moment, almost involuntarily, I said, "Who's talking, who's talking?"

That question made don Juan laugh so hard that at one point he bobbed on his side.

Apparently it was possible for me to say simple things, as long as I knew exactly what I wanted to say.

"Am I talking? Am I talking?" I asked.

Don Juan told me that if I did not stop horsing around he was going to go out and lie down under the *ramada* and leave me alone with my clowning.

"It isn't clowning," I said.

I was very serious about that. My thoughts were very clear; my body, however, was numb; I did not feel it. I was not suffocated, as I had once been in the past under similar conditions; I was comfortable because I could not feel anything; I had no control whatever over my voluntary system and yet I could talk. The thought occurred to me that if I could talk I could probably stand up as don Juan had said.

"Up," I said in English, and in a flicker of an eye I was up.

Don Juan shook his head in disbelief and walked out of the house.

"Don Juan!" I called out three times.

He came back.

"Put me down," I said.

"Put yourself down," he said. "You seem to be doing very well."

I said, "Down," and suddenly I lost sight of the room. I could not see anything. After a moment the room and don Juan came back again into my field of vision. I thought that I must have lain down with my face to the ground and he had grabbed me by the hair and lifted my head.

"Thank you," I said in a very slow monotone.

"You are welcome," he replied, mocking my tone of voice, and had another attack of laughter.

Then he took some leaves and began rubbing my arms and feet with them.

"What are you doing?" I asked,

"I am rubbing you," he said, imitating my painful monotone.

His body convulsed with laughter. His eyes were shiny and very friendly. I liked him. I felt that don Juan was compassionate and fair and funny. I could not laugh with him, but I would have liked to. Another feeling of exhilaration invaded me and I laughed; it was such an awful sound that don Juan was taken aback for an instant.

"I better take you to the ditch," he said, "or you're going to kill yourself clowning."

He put me up on my feet and made me walk around the room. Little by little I began to feel my feet, and my legs, and finally my entire body. My ears were bursting with a strange pressure. It was like the sensation of a leg or an arm that has fallen asleep. I felt a tremendous weight on the back of my neck and under the scalp on the top of my head.

Don Juan rushed me to the irrigation ditch at the back of his house; he dumped me there fully clothed. The cold water reduced the pressure and the pain, by degrees, until it was all gone.

I changed my clothes in the house and sat down and I again felt the same kind of aloofness, the same desire to stay quiet. I noticed this time, however, that it was not clarity of mind, or a power to focus; rather, it was a sort of melancholy and a physical fatigue. Finally I fell asleep.

*November 12, 1968*

This morning don Juan and I went to the nearby hills to collect plants. We walked about six miles on extremely rough terrain. I became very tired. We sat down to rest, at my initiative, and he began a conversation, saying that he was pleased with my progress.

"I know now that it was I who talked," I said, "but at the time I could have sworn it was someone else."

"It was you, of course," he said.

"How come I couldn't recognize myself?"

"That's what the little smoke does. One can talk and not notice it; or one can move thousands of miles and not notice that either. That's also how one can go through things. The little smoke removes the body and one is free, like the wind; better than the wind, the wind can be stopped by a rock or a wall or a mountain. The little smoke makes one as free as the air; perhaps even freer, the air can be locked in a tomb and become stale, but with the aid of the little smoke one cannot be stopped or locked in."

Don Juan's words unleashed a mixture of euphoria and doubt. I felt an overwhelming uneasiness, a sensation of undefined guilt.

"Then one can really do all those things, don Juan?"

"What do you think? You would rather think you're crazy, wouldn't you?" he said cuttingly.

"Well, it's easy for you to accept all those things. For me it's impossible."

"It's not easy for me. I don't have any more privileges than you. Those things are equally hard for you or for me or for anyone else to accept."

"But you are at home with all this, don Juan."

"Yes, but it cost me plenty. I had to struggle, perhaps more than you ever will. You have a baffling way of getting everything to work for you. You have no idea how hard I had to toil to do what you did yesterday. You have something that helps you every inch of the way. There is no other possible explanation for the manner in which you learn about the powers. You did it before with Mescalito, now you have done it with the little smoke. You should concentrate on the fact that you have a great gift, and leave other considerations on the side."

"You make it sound so easy, but it isn't. I'm torn inside."

"You'll be in one piece again soon enough. You have not taken care of your body, for one thing. You're too fat. I didn't want to say anything to you before. One must always let others do what they have to do. You were away for years. I told you that you would come back, though, and you did. The same thing happened to me. I quit for five and a half years."

"Why did you stay away, don Juan?"

"For the same reason you did. I didn't like it."

"Why did you come back?"

"For the same reason you have come back yourself, because there is no other way to live."

That statement had a great impact on me, for I had found myself thinking that perhaps there was no other way to live. I had never voiced this thought to anyone, yet don Juan had surmised it correctly.

After a very long silence I asked him,

"What did I do yesterday, don Juan?"

"You got up when you wanted to."

"But I don't know how I did that."

"It takes time to perfect that technique. The important thing, however, is that you know how to do it."

"But I don't. That's the point, I really don't."

"Of course you do."

"Don Juan, I assure you, I swear to you..."

He did not let me finish; he got up and walked away.

Later on we talked again about the guardian of the other world.

"If I believe that whatever I have experienced is actually real," I said, "then the guardian is a gigantic creature that can cause unbelievable physical pain; and if I believe that one can actually travel enormous distances by an act of will, then it's logical to conclude that I could also will the monster to disappear. Is that correct?"

"Not exactly," he said. "You cannot will the guardian to disappear. Your will can stop it from harming you, though. Of course if you ever accomplish that, the road is open to you. You can actually go by the guardian and there's nothing that it can do, not even whirl around madly."

"How can I accomplish that?"

"You already know how. All you need now is practice."

I told him that we were having a misunderstanding that stemmed from our differences in perceiving the world. I said that for me to know something meant that I had to be fully aware of what I was doing and that I could repeat what I knew at will, but in this case I was neither aware of what I had done under the influence of the smoke, nor could I repeat it if my life depended on it.

Don Juan looked at me inquisitively. He seemed to be amused by what I was saying. He took off his hat and scratched his temples as he does when he wants to pretend bewilderment.

"You really know how to talk and say nothing, don't you?" he said laughing. "I have told you, you have to have an unbending intent in order to become a man of knowledge. But you seem to have an unbending intent to confuse yourself with riddles. You insist on explaining everything as if the whole world were composed of things that can be explained. Now you are confronted with the guardian and with the problem of moving by using your will. Has it ever occurred to you that only a few things in this world can be explained your way? When I say that the guardian is really blocking your passing and could actually knock the devil out of you, I know what I mean. When I say that one can move by one's will, I also know what I mean. I wanted to teach you, little by little, how to move, but then I realized that you know how to do it even though you say you don't."

"But I really don't know how," I protested.

"You do, you fool," he said sternly, and then smiled. "It reminds me of the time when someone put that kid Julio on a harvesting machine; he knew how to run it although he had never done it before."

"I know what you mean, don Juan; however, I still feel that I could not do it again, because I am not sure of what I did."

"A phony sorcerer tries to explain everything in the world with explanations he is not sure about," he said, "and so everything is witchcraft. But then you're no better. You also want to explain everything your way but you're not sure of your explanations either."

## Chapter 8

Don Juan asked me abruptly if I was planning to leave for home during the weekend. I said I intended to leave Monday morning. We were sitting under his *ramada* around midday on Saturday, January 18, 1969, taking a rest after a long walk in the nearby hills. Don Juan got up and went into the house. A few moments later he called me inside. He was sitting in the middle of his room and had placed my straw mat in front of his. He motioned me to sit down and without saying a word he unwrapped his pipe, took it out of it's sheath, filled it's bowl with his smoking mixture, and lit it. He had even brought into his room a clay tray filled with small charcoals.

He did not ask me whether I was willing to smoke. He just handed me the pipe and told me to puff. I did not hesitate. Don Juan had apparently assessed my mood correctly; my overwhelming curiosity about the guardian must have been obvious to him. I did not need any coaxing and eagerly smoked the entire bowl.

The reactions I had were identical to those I had had before. Don Juan also proceeded in very much the same manner. This time, however, instead of helping me to do it, he just told me to prop my right arm on the mat and lie down on my left side. He suggested that I should make a fist if that would give me a better leverage.

I did make a fist with my right hand, because I found it was easier than turning my palm against the floor while lying with my weight on it I was not sleepy; I felt very warm for a while, then I lost all feeling.

Don Juan lay down on his side facing me; his right forearm rested on his elbow and propped his head up like a pillow. Everything was perfectly placid, even my body, which by then lacked tactile sensations. I felt very content.

"It's nice," I said.

Don Juan got up hurriedly.

"Don't you dare start with this crap," he said forcefully. "Don't talk. You'll waste every bit of energy talking, and then the guardian will mash you down, like you would smash a gnat."

He must have thought that his simile was funny because he began to laugh, but he stopped suddenly.

"Don't talk, please don't talk," he said with a serious look on his face.

"I wasn't about to say anything," I said, and I really did not want to say that.

Don Juan got up. I saw him walking away toward the back of his house. A moment later I noticed that a gnat had landed on my mat and that filled me with a kind of anxiety I had never experienced before. It was a mixture of elation, anguish, and fear. I was totally aware that something transcendental was about to unfold in front of me; a gnat who guarded the other world. It was a ludicrous thought; I felt like laughing out loud, but then I realized that my elation was distracting me and I was going to miss a transition period I wanted to clarify. In my previous attempt to see the guardian I had looked at the gnat first with my left eye, and then I felt that I had stood up and looked at it with both eyes, but I was not aware how that transition had occurred.

I saw the gnat whirling around on the mat in front of my face and realized that I was looking at it with both eyes. It came very close; at a given moment I could not see it with both eyes any longer and shifted the view to my left eye, which was level with the ground. The instant I changed focus I also felt that I had straightened my body to a fully vertical position and I was looking at an unbelievably enormous animal. It was brilliantly black. It's front was covered with long, black, insidious hair, which looked like spikes coming through the cracks of some slick, shiny scales. The hair was actually arranged in tufts. It's body was massive, thick and round. It's wings were wide and short in comparison to the length of it's body. It had two white, bulging eyes and a long muzzle. This time it looked more like an alligator. It seemed to have long ears, or perhaps horns, and it was drooling.

I strained myself to fix my gaze on it and then became fully aware that I could not look at it in the same way I ordinarily look at things. I had a strange thought; looking at the guardian's body I felt that every single part of it was independently alive, as the eyes of men are alive. I realized then for the first tune in my life that the eyes were the only part of a man that could show, to me, whether or not he was alive. The guardian, on the other hand, had a "million eyes."

I thought this was a remarkable finding. Before this experience I had speculated on the similes that could describe the "distortions" that rendered a gnat as a gigantic beast; and I had thought that a good simile was "as if looking at an insect through the magnifying lens of a microscope." But that was not so. Apparently viewing the guardian was much more complex than looking at a magnified insect.

The guardian began to whirl in front of me. At one moment it stopped and I felt it was looking at me. I noticed then that it made no sound. The dance of the guardian was silent. The awesomeness was in it's appearance: it's bulging eyes; it's horrendous mouth; it's drooling; it's insidious hair; and above all it's incredible size. I watched very closely the way it moved it's wings, how it made them vibrate without sound. I watched how it skidded over the ground like a monumental ice skater.

Looking at that nightmarish creature in front of me, I actually felt elated. I really believed I had discovered the secret of overpowering it. I thought the guardian was only a moving picture on a silent screen; it could not harm me; it only looked terrifying.

The guardian was standing still, facing me; suddenly it fluttered it's wings and turned around. It's back looked like brilliantly colored armor; it's shine was dazzling but the hue was nauseating; it was my unfavorable color. The guardian remained with it's back turned to me for a while and then, fluttering it's wings, again skidded out of sight.

I was confronted with a very strange dilemma. I honestly believed that I had overpowered it by realizing that it presented only a picture of wrath. My belief was perhaps due to don Juan's insistence that I knew more than I was willing to admit. At any rate, I felt I had overcome the guardian and the path was free. Yet I did not know how to proceed. Don Juan had not told me what to do in such a case. I tried to turn and look behind me, but I was unable to move. However, I could see very well over the major part of a 180-degree range in front of my eyes. And what I saw was a cloudy, pale-yellow horizon; it seemed gaseous. A sort of lemon hue uniformly covered all I could see. It seemed that I was on a plateau filled with vapors of sulphur.

Suddenly the guardian appeared again at a point on the horizon. It made a wide circle before stopping in front of me; it's mouth was wide open, like a huge cavern; it had no teeth. It vibrated it's wings for an instant and then it charged at me. It actually charged at me like a bull, and with it's gigantic wings it swung at my eyes. I screamed with pain and then I flew up, or rather I felt I had ejected myself up, and went soaring beyond the guardian, beyond the yellowish plateau, into another world, the world of men, and I found myself standing in the middle of don Juan's room.

*January 19, 1969*

"I really thought I had overpowered the guardian," I said to don Juan.

"You must be kidding," he said.

Don Juan had not spoken one word to me since the day before and I did not mind it I had been immersed in a sort of reverie and again I had felt that if I looked intently I would be able to "see." But I did not see anything that was different. Not talking, however, had relaxed me tremendously.

Don Juan asked me to recount the sequence of my experience, and what particularly interested him was the hue I had seen on the guardian's back. Don Juan sighed and seemed to be really concerned.

"You were lucky that the color was on the guardian's back," he said with a serious face. "Had it been on the front part of it's body, or worse yet, on it's head, you would be dead by now. You must not try to see the guardian ever again. It's not your temperament to cross that plain; yet I was convinced that you could go through it. But let's not talk about it any more. This was only one of a variety of roads."

I detected an unaccustomed heaviness in don Juan's tone.

"What will happen to me if I try to *see* the guardian again?"

"The guardian will take you away," he said, "It will pick you up in it's mouth and carry you into that plain and leave you there forever. It is obvious that the guardian knew that it is not your temperament and warned you to stay away."

"How do you think the guardian knew that?"

Don Juan gave me a long, steadfast look. He tried to say something, but gave up as though he was unable to find the right words.

"I always fall for your questions," he said, smiling. "You were not really thinking when you asked me that, were you?"

I protested and reaffirmed that it puzzled me that the guardian knew my temperament.

Don Juan had a strange glint in his eye when he said, "And you had not even mentioned anything about your temperament to the guardian, had you?"

His tone was so comically serious that we both laughed. After a while, however, he said that the guardian, being the keeper, the watchman of that world, knew many secrets that a brujo was entitled to share.

"That's one way a brujo gets to *see*" he said. "But that will not be your domain, so there is no point in talking about it."

"Is smoking the only way to *see* the guardian?" I asked.

"No. You could also *see* it without it. There are scores of people who could do that. I prefer the smoke because it is more effective and less dangerous to oneself. If you try to *see* the guardian without the aid of the smoke, chances are that you may delay in getting out of it's way. In your case, for instance, it is obvious that the guardian was warning you when it turned it's back so you would look at your enemy color. Then it went away; but when it came back you were still there, so it charged at you. You were prepared, however, and jumped. The little smoke gave you the protection you needed; had you gone into that world without it's aid you wouldn't have been able to extricate yourself from the guardian's grip."

"Why not?"

"Your movements would have been too slow. To survive in that world you need to be as fast as lightning. It was my mistake to leave the room, but I didn't want you to talk any more. You are a blabbermouth, so you talk even against your desire. Had I been there with you I would've pulled your head up. You jumped up by yourself, which was even better; however, I would rather not run a risk like that; the guardian is not something you can fool around with."

## Chapter 9

For three months don Juan systematically avoided talking about the guardian. I paid him four visits during these months; he involved me in running errands for him every time, and when I had performed the errands he simply told me to go home. On April 24, 1969, the fourth time I was at his house, I finally confronted him after we had eaten dinner and were sitting next to his earthen stove. I told him that he was doing something incongruous to me; I was ready to learn and yet he did not even want me around. I had had to struggle very hard to overcome my aversion to using his hallucinogenic mushrooms and I felt, as he had said himself, that I had no time to lose.

Don Juan patiently listened to my complaints.

"You're too weak," he said. "You hurry when you should wait, but you wait when you should hurry. You think too much. Now you think that there is no time to waste. A while back you thought you didn't want to smoke any more. Your life is too damn loose; you're not tight enough to meet the little smoke. I am responsible for you and I don't want you to die like a goddamn fool."

I felt embarrassed.

"What can I do, don Juan? I'm very impatient."

"Live like a warrior! I've told you already, a warrior takes responsibility for his acts; for the most trivial of his acts. You act out your thoughts and that's wrong. You failed with the guardian because of your thoughts."

"How did I fail, don Juan?"

"You think about everything. You thought about the guardian and thus you couldn't overcome it.

"First you must live like a warrior. I think you understand that very well."

I wanted to interject something in my defense, but he gestured with his hand to be quiet.

"Your life is fairly tight," he continued. "In fact, your life is tighter than Pablito's or Nestor's, Genaro's apprentices, and yet they *see* and you don't. Your life is tighter than Eligio's and he'll probably *see* before you do. This baffles me. Even Genaro cannot get over that. You've faithfully carried out everything I have told you to do. Everything that my benefactor taught me, in the first stage of learning, I have passed on to you. The rule is right, the steps cannot be changed. You have done everything one has to do and yet you don't *see*; but to those who *see*, like Genaro, you appear as though you *see*. I rely on that and I am fooled. You always turn around and behave like an idiot who doesn't *see*, which of course is right for you."

Don Juan's words distressed me profoundly. I don't know why but I was close to tears. I began to talk about my childhood and a wave of self-pity enveloped me. Don Juan stared at me for a brief moment and then moved his eyes away. It was a penetrating glance. I felt he had actually grabbed me with his eyes. I had the sensation of two fingers gently clasping me and I acknowledged a weird agitation, an itching, a pleasant despair in the area of my solar plexus. I became aware of my abdominal region. I sensed it's heat. I could not speak coherently any more and I mumbled, then stopped talking altogether.

"Perhaps it's the promise," don Juan said after a long pause.

"I beg your pardon."

"A promise you once made, long ago."

"What promise?"

"Maybe you can tell me that. You do remember it, don't you?"

"I don't."

"You promised something very important once. I thought that perhaps your promise was keeping you from *seeing*."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about a promise you made! You must remember it."

"If you know what the promise was, why don't you tell me, don Juan?"

"No. It won't do any good to tell you."

"Was it a promise I made to myself?"

For a moment I thought he might be referring to my resolution to quit the apprenticeship.

"No. This is something that took place a long time ago," he said.

I laughed because I was certain don Juan was playing some sort of game with me. I felt mischievous. I had a sensation of elation at the idea that I could fool don Juan, who, I was convinced, knew as little as I did about the alleged promise. I was sure he was fishing in the dark and trying to improvise. The idea of humoring him delighted me.

"Was it something I promised to my grandpa?"

"No," he said, and his eyes glittered. "Neither was it something you promised to your little grandma."

The ludicrous intonation he gave to the word "grandma" made me laugh. I thought don Juan was setting some sort of trap for me, but I was willing to play the game to the end. I began enumerating all the possible individuals to whom I could have promised something of great importance. He said no to each. Then he steered the conversation to my childhood.

"Why was your childhood sad?" he asked with a serious expression.

I told him that my childhood had not really been sad, but perhaps a bit difficult.

"Everybody feels that way," he said, looking at me again. "I too was very unhappy and afraid when I was a child. To be an Indian is hard, very hard. But the memory of that time no longer has meaning for me, beyond that it was hard. I had ceased to think about the hardship of my life even before I had learned to *see*."

"I don't think about my childhood either," I said.

"Why does it make you sad, then? Why do you want to weep?"

"I don't know. Perhaps when I think of myself as a child I feel sorry for myself and for all my fellow men. I feel helpless and sad."

He looked at me fixedly and again my abdominal region registered the weird sensation of two gentle fingers clasping it. I moved my eyes away and then glanced back at him. He was looking into the distance, past me; his eyes were foggy, out of focus.

"It was a promise of your childhood," he said after a moment's silence.

"What did I promise?"

He did not answer. His eyes were closed. I smiled involuntarily; I knew he was feeling his way in the dark; however, I had lost some of my original impetus to humor him.

"I was a skinny child," he went on, "and I was always afraid."

"So was I," I said.

"What I remember the most is the terror and sadness that fell upon me when the Mexican soldiers killed my mother," he said softly, as if the memory was still painful. "She was a poor and humble Indian. Perhaps it was better that her life was over then. I wanted to be killed with her, because I was a child. But the soldiers picked me up and beat me. When I grabbed onto my mother's body they hit my fingers with a horsewhip and broke them. I didn't feel any pain, but I couldn't grasp any more, and then they dragged me away."

He stopped talking. His eyes were still closed and I could detect a very slight tremor in his lips. A profound sadness began to overtake me. Images of my own childhood started to flood my mind.

"How old were you, don Juan?" I asked, just to offset the sadness in me.

"Maybe seven. That was the time of the great Yaqui wars. The Mexican soldiers came upon us unexpectedly while my mother was cooking some food. She was a helpless woman. They killed her for no reason at all. It doesn't make any difference that she died that way, not really, and yet for me it does. I cannot tell myself why, though; it just does. I thought they had killed my father too, but they hadn't. He was wounded. Later on they put us in a tram like cattle and closed the door. For days they kept us there in the dark, like animals. They kept us alive with bits of food they threw into the wagon from time to time.

"My father died of his wounds in that wagon. He became delirious with pain and fever and went on telling me that I had to survive. He kept on telling me that until the very last moment of his life.

"The people took care of me; they gave me food; an old woman curer fixed the broken bones of my hand. And as you can see, I lived. Life has been neither good nor bad to me; life has been hard. Life is hard and for a child it is sometimes horror itself."

We did not speak for a very long time. Perhaps an hour went by in complete silence. I had very confusing feelings. I was somewhat dejected and yet I could not tell why. I experienced a sense of remorse. A while before I had been willing to humor don Juan, but he had suddenly turned the tables with his direct account. It had been simple and concise and had produced a strange feeling in me. The idea of a child undergoing pain had always been a touchy subject for me. In an instant my feelings of empathy for don Juan gave way to a sensation of disgust with myself. I had actually taken notes, as if don Juan's life were merely a clinical case. I was on the verge of ripping up my notes when don Juan poked my calf with his toe to attract my attention. He said he was "seeing" a light of violence around me and wondered whether I was going to start beating him. His laughter was a delightful break. He said that I was given to outbursts of violent behavior but that I was not really mean and that most of the time the violence was against myself.

"You're right, don Juan," I said.

"Of course," he said, laughing.

He urged me to talk about my childhood. I began to tell him about my years of fear and loneliness and got involved in describing to him what I thought to be my overwhelming struggle to survive and maintain my spirit. He laughed at the metaphor of "maintaining my spirit."

I talked for a long time. He listened with a serious expression. Then, at a given moment his eyes "clasped" me again and I stopped talking. After a moment's pause he said that nobody had ever humiliated me and that was the reason I was not really mean.

"You haven't been defeated yet," he said.

He repeated the statement four or five times so I felt obliged to ask him what he meant by that. He explained that to be defeated was a condition of life which was unavoidable. Men were either victorious or defeated and, depending on that, they became persecutors or victims. These two conditions were prevalent as long as one did not "see"; "seeing" dispelled the illusion of victory, or defeat, or suffering. He added that I should learn to "see" while I was victorious to avoid ever having the memory of being humiliated.

I protested that I was not and had never been victorious at anything; and that my life was, if anything, a defeat.

He laughed and threw his hat on the floor.

"If your life is such a defeat, step on my hat," he dared me in jest.

I sincerely argued my point. Don Juan became serious. His eyes squinted to a fine slit. He said that I thought my life was a defeat for reasons other than defeat itself. Then in a very quick and thoroughly unexpected manner he took my head in his hands by placing his palms against my temples. His eyes became fierce as he looked into mine. Out of fright I took an involuntary deep breath through my mouth. He let my head go and reclined against the wall, still gazing at me. He had performed his movements with such a speed that by the time he had relaxed and reclined comfortably against the wall, I was still in the middle of my deep breath. I felt dizzy, ill at ease.

"I *see* a little boy crying," don Juan said after a pause.

He repeated it various times as if I did not understand. I had the feeling he was talking about me as a little boy crying, so I did not really pay attention to it.

"Hey!" he said, demanding my full concentration. "I *see* a little boy crying."

I asked him if that boy was me. He said no. Then I asked him if it was a vision of my life or just a memory of his own life. He did not answer.

"I *see* a little boy," he continued saying. "And he is crying and crying."

"Is he a boy I know?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Is he my little boy?"

"No."

"Is he crying now?"

"He's crying now," he said with conviction.

I thought don Juan was having a vision of someone I knew who was a little boy and who was at that very moment crying. I voiced the names of all the children I knew, but he said those children were irrelevant to my promise and the child who was crying was very important to it.

Don Juan's statements seemed to be incongruous. He had said that I had promised something to someone during my childhood, and that the child who was crying at that very moment was important to my promise. I told him he was not making sense. He calmly repeated that he "saw" a little boy crying at that moment, and that the little boy was hurt.

I seriously struggled to fit his statements into some sort of orderly pattern, but I could not relate them to anything I was aware of.

"I give up," I said, "because I can't remember making an important promise to anybody, least of all to a child."

He squinted his eyes again and said that this particular child who was crying at that precise moment was a child of my childhood.

"He was a child during my childhood and is still crying now?" I asked.

"He is a child crying now," he insisted.

"Do you realize what you're saying, don Juan?"

"I do."

"It doesn't make sense. How can he be a child now if he was one when I was a child myself?"

"He's a child and he's crying now," he said stubbornly.

"Explain it to me, don Juan."

"No. *You* must explain it to me."

For the life of me I could not fathom what he was referring to.

"He's crying! He's crying!" don Juan kept on saying in a mesmerizing tone. "And he's hugging you now. He's hurt! He's hurt! And he's looking at you. Do you feel his eyes? He's kneeling and hugging you. He's younger than you. He has come running to you. But his arm is broken. Do you feel his arm? That little boy has a nose that looks like a button. Yes! That's a button nose."

My ears began to buzz and I lost the sensation of being at don Juan's house. The words "button nose" plunged me at once into a scene out of my childhood. I knew a button-nose boy! Don Juan had edged his way into one of the most recondite places of my life. I knew then the promise he was talking about. I had a sensation of elation, of despair, of awe for don Juan and his splendid maneuver. How in the devil did he know about the button-nose boy of my childhood? I became so agitated by the memory don Juan had evoked in me that my power to remember took me back to a time when I was eight years old. My mother had left two years before and I had spent the most hellish years of my life circulating among my mother's sisters, who served as dutiful mother surrogates and took care of me a couple of months at a time. Each of my aunts had a large family, and no matter how careful and protective the aunts were toward me, I had twenty-two cousins to contend with. Their cruelty was sometimes truly bizarre. I felt then that I was surrounded by enemies, and in the excruciating years that followed I waged a desperate and sordid war. Finally, through means I still do not know to this day, I succeeded in subduing all my cousins. I was indeed victorious. I had no more competitors who counted. However, I did not know that, nor did I know how to stop my war, which logically was extended to the school grounds.

The classrooms of the rural school where I went were mixed and the first and third grades were separated only by a space between the desks. It was there that I met a little boy with a flat nose, who was teased with the nickname "Button-nose." He was a first-grader. I used to pick on him haphazardly, not really intending to. But he seemed to like me in spite of everything I did to him. He used to follow me around and even kept the secret that I was responsible for some of the pranks that baffled the principal. And yet I still teased him. One day I deliberately toppled over a heavy standing blackboard; it fell on him; the desk in which he was sitting absorbed some of the impact, but still the blow broke his collarbone. He fell down. I helped him up and saw the pain and fright in his eyes as he looked at me and held onto me. The shock of seeing him in pain, with a mangled arm, was more than I could bear. For years I had viciously battled against my cousins and I had won; I had vanquished my foes; I had felt good and powerful up to the moment when the sight of the button-nose little boy crying demolished my victories. Right there I quit the battle. In whatever way I was capable of, I made a resolution not to win ever again. I thought his arm would have to be cut off, and I promised that if the little boy was cured I would never again be victorious. I gave up my victories for him. That was the way I understood it then.

Don Juan had opened a festered sore in my life. I felt dizzy, overwhelmed. A well of unmitigated sadness beckoned me and I succumbed to it. I felt the weight of my acts on me. The memory of that little button-nose boy, whose name was Joaquin, produced in me such a vivid anguish that I wept. I told don Juan of my sadness for that boy who never had anything, that little Joaquin who did not have money to go to a doctor and whose arm never set properly. And all I had to give him were my childish victories. I felt so ashamed.

"Be in peace, you funny bird," don Juan said imperatively. "You gave enough. Your victories were strong and they were yours. You gave enough. Now you must change your promise."

"How do I change it? Do I just say so?"

"A promise like that cannot be changed by just saying so. Perhaps very soon you'll be able to know what to do about changing it. Then perhaps you'll even get to *see*."

"Can you give me any suggestions, don Juan?"

"You must wait patiently, knowing that you're waiting, and knowing what you're waiting for. That is the warrior's way. And if it is a matter of fulfilling your promise then you must be aware that you are fulfilling it. Then a time will come when your waiting will be over and you will no longer have to honor your promise. There is nothing you can do for that little boy's life. Only he could cancel that act."

"But how can he?"

"By learning to reduce his wants to nothing. As long as he thinks that he was a victim, his life will be hell. And as long as you think the same your promise will be valid. What makes us unhappy is to want. Yet if we would learn to cut our wants to nothing, the smallest thing we'd get would be a true gift. Be in peace, you made a good gift to Joaquin. To be poor or wanting is only a thought; and so is to hate, or to be hungry, or to be in pain."

"I cannot truly believe that, don Juan. How could hunger and pain be only thoughts?"

"They are only thoughts for me now. That's all I know. I have accomplished that feat. The power to do that is all we have, mind you, to oppose the forces of our lives; without that power we are dregs, dust in the wind."

"I have no doubt that you have done it, don Juan, but how can a simple man like myself or little Joaquin accomplish that?"

"It is up to us as single individuals to oppose the forces of our lives. I have said this to you countless times: Only a warrior can survive. A warrior knows that he is waiting and what he is waiting for; and while he waits he wants nothing and thus whatever little thing he gets is more than he can take. If he needs to eat he finds a way, because he is not hungry; if something hurts his body he finds a way to stop it, because he is not in pain. To be hungry or to be in pain means that the man has abandoned himself and is no longer a warrior; and the forces of his hunger and pain will destroy him."

I wanted to go on arguing my point, but I stopped because I realized that by arguing I was making a barrier to protect myself from the devastating force of don Juan's superb feat which had touched me so deeply and with such a power. How did he know? I thought that perhaps I had told him the story of the button-nose boy during one of my deep states of nonordinary reality. I did not recollect telling him, but my not remembering under such conditions was understandable.

"How did you know about my promise, don Juan?"

"I *saw* it."

"Did you see it when I had taken Mescalito, or when I had smoked your mixture?"

"I *saw* it now. Today."

"Did you *see* the whole thing?"

"There you go again. I've told you, there's no point in talking about what *seeing* is like. It is nothing."

I did not pursue the point any longer. Emotionally I was convinced.

"I also made a vow once," don Juan said suddenly.

The sound of his voice made me jump.

"I promised my father that I would live to destroy his assassins. I carried that promise with me for years. Now the promise is changed. I'm no longer interested in destroying anybody. I don't hate the Mexicans. I don't hate anyone. I have learned that the countless paths one traverses in one's life are all equal. Oppressors and oppressed meet at the end, and the only thing that prevails is that life was altogether too short for both. Today I feel sad not because my mother and father died the way they did; I feel sad because they were Indians. They lived like Indians and died like Indians and never knew that they were, before anything else, men."

## Chapter 10

I went back to visit don Juan on May 30, 1969, and bluntly told him that I wanted to take another crack at "seeing." He shook his head negatively and laughed, and I felt compelled to protest. He told me I had to be patient and the time was not right, but I doggedly insisted I was ready.

He did not seem annoyed with my nagging requests. He tried, nevertheless, to change the subject. I did not let go and asked him to advise me what to do in order to overcome my impatience.

"You must act like a warrior," he said.

"How?"

"One learns to act like a warrior by acting, not by talking."

"You said that a warrior thinks about his death. I do that all the time; obviously that isn't enough."

He seemed to have an outburst of impatience and made a smacking sound with his lips. I told him that I had not meant to make him angry and that if he did not need me there at his house, I was ready to go back to Los Angeles. Don Juan patted me gently on the back and said that he never got angry with me; he had simply assumed I knew what it meant to be a warrior.

"What can I do to live like a warrior?" I asked.

He took off his hat and scratched his temples. He looked at me fixedly and smiled.

"You like everything spelled out, don't you?"

"My mind works that way."

"It doesn't have to."

"I don't know how to change. That is why I ask you to tell me exactly what to do to live like a warrior; if I knew that, I could find a way to adapt myself to it."

He must have thought my statements were humorous; he patted me on the back as he laughed.

I had the feeling he was going to ask me to leave any minute, so I quickly sat down on my straw mat facing him and began asking him more questions. I wanted to know why I had to wait.

He explained that if I were to try to "see" in a helter-skelter manner, before I had "healed the wounds" I received battling the guardian, chances were that I would encounter the guardian again even though I was not looking for it. Don Juan assured me that no man in that position would be capable of surviving such an encounter.

"You must completely forget the guardian before you can again embark on the quest of *seeing*" he said.

"How can anyone forget the guardian?"

"A warrior has to use his will and his patience to forget. In fact, a warrior has only his will and his patience and with them he builds anything he wants."

"But I'm not a warrior."

"You have started learning the ways of sorcerers. You have no more time for retreats or for regrets. You only have time to live like a warrior and work for patience and will, whether you like it or not."

"How does a warrior work for them?"

Don Juan thought for a long time before answering.

"I think there is no way of talking about it," he finally said. "Especially about will. Will is something very special. It happens mysteriously. There is no real way of telling how one uses it, except that the results of using the will are astounding. Perhaps the first thing that one should do is to know that one can develop the will. A warrior knows that and proceeds to wait for it. Your mistake is not to know that you are waiting for your will.

"My benefactor told me that a warrior knows that he is waiting and knows what he is waiting for. In your case, you know that you're waiting. You've been here with me for years, yet you don't know what you are waiting for. It is very difficult, if not impossible, for the average man to know what he is waiting for. A warrior, however, has no problems; he knows that he is waiting for his will."

"What exactly is the will? Is it determination, like the determination of your grandson Lucio to have a motorcycle?"

"No," don Juan said softly and giggled. "That's not will. Lucio only indulges. Will is something else, some-thing very clear and powerful which can direct our acts. Will is something a man uses, for instance, to win a battle which he, by all calculations, should lose."

"Then will must be what we call courage," I said.

"No. Courage is something else. Men of courage are dependable men, noble men perennially surrounded by people who flock around them and admire them; yet very few men of courage have will. Usually they are fearless men who are given to performing daring common-sense acts; most of the time a courageous man is also fearsome and feared. Will, on the other hand, has to do with astonishing feats that defy our common sense."

"Is will the control we may have over ourselves?" I asked.

"You may say that it is a kind of control."

"Do you think I can exercise my will, for instance, by denying myself certain things?"

"Such as asking questions?" he interjected.

He said it in such a mischievous tone that I had to stop writing to look at him. We both laughed.

"No," he said. "Denying yourself is an indulgence and I don't recommend anything of the kind. That is the reason why I let you ask all the questions you want. If I told you to stop asking questions, you might warp your will trying to do that. The indulgence of denying is by far the worst; it forces us to believe we are doing great things, when in effect we are only fixed within ourselves. To stop asking questions is not the will I'm talking about. Will is a power. And since it is a power it has to be controlled and tuned and that takes time. I know that and I'm patient with you. When I was your age I was as impulsive as you. Yet I have changed. Our will operates in spite of our indulgence. For example, your will is already opening your gap, little by little."

"What gap are you talking about?"

"There is a gap in us; like the soft spot on the head of a child which closes with age, this gap opens as one develops one's will."

"Where is that gap?"

"At the place of your luminous fibers," he said, pointing to his abdominal area.

"What is it like? What is it for?"

"It's an opening. It allows a space for the will to shoot out, like an arrow."

"Is the will an object? Or like an object?"

"No. I just said that to make you understand. What a sorcerer calls will is a power within ourselves. It is not a thought, or an object, or a wish. To stop asking questions is not will because it needs thinking and wishing. Will is what can make you succeed when your thoughts tell you that you're defeated. Will is what makes you invulnerable. Will is what sends a sorcerer through a wall; through space; to the moon, if he wants."

There was nothing else I wanted to ask. I was tired and somewhat tense. I was afraid don Juan was going to ask me to leave and that annoyed me.

"Let's go to the hills," he said abruptly, and stood up.

On the way he started talking about will again and laughed at my dismay over not being able to take notes.

He described will as a force which was the true link between men and the world. He was very careful to establish that the world was whatever we perceive, in any manner we may choose to perceive. Don Juan maintained that "perceiving the world" entails a process of apprehending whatever presents itself to us. This particular "perceiving" is done with our senses and with our will.

I asked him if will was a sixth sense. He said it was rather a relation between ourselves and the perceived world. I suggested that we halt so I could take notes. He laughed and kept on walking.

He did not make me leave that night, and the next day after eating breakfast he himself brought up the subject of will.

"What you yourself call will is character and strong disposition," he said. "What a sorcerer calls will is a force that comes from within and attaches itself to the world out there. It comes out through the belly, right here, where the luminous fibers are."

He rubbed his navel to point out the area.

"I say that it comes out through here because one can feel it coming out."

"Why do you call it will?"

"I don't call it anything. My benefactor called it will, and other men of knowledge call it will."

"Yesterday you said that one can perceive the world with the senses as well as with the will. How is that possible?"

"An average man can 'grab' the things of the world only with his hands, or his eyes, or his ears, but a sorcerer can grab them also with his nose, or his tongue, or his will, especially with his will. I cannot really describe how it is done, but you yourself, for instance, cannot describe to me how you hear. It happens that I am also capable of hearing, so we can talk about what we hear, but not about how we hear. A sorcerer uses his will to perceive the world. That perceiving, however, is not like hearing. When we look at the world or when we hear it, we have the impression that it is out there and that it is real. When we perceive the world with our will we know that it is not as 'out there' or 'as real' as we think."

"Is will the same as *seeing*?"

"No. Will is a force, a power. *Seeing* is not a force, but rather a way of getting through things. A sorcerer may have a very strong will and yet he may not *see*; which means that only a man of knowledge perceives the world with his senses and with his will and also with his *seeing*." I told him that I was more confused than ever about how to use my will to forget the guardian. That statement and my mood of perplexity seemed to delight him.

"I've told you that when you talk you only get confused," he said and laughed. "But at least now you know you are waiting for your will. You still don't know what it is, or how it could happen to you. So watch carefully everything you do. The very thing that could help you develop your will is amidst all the little things you do."

Don Juan was gone all morning; he returned in the early afternoon with a bundle of dry plants. He signaled me with his head to help him and we worked in complete silence for hours, sorting the plants. When we finished we sat down to rest and he smiled at me benevolently.

I said to him in a very serious manner that I had been reading my notes and I still could not understand what being a warrior entailed or what the idea of will meant.

"Will is not an idea," he said.

This was the first time he had spoken to me the whole day.

After a long pause he continued: "We are different, you and I. Our characters are not alike. Your nature is more violent than mine. When I was your age I was not violent but mean; you are the opposite. My benefactor was like that; he would have been perfectly suited to be your teacher. He was a great sorcerer but he did not *see*; not the way I *see* or the way Genaro *sees*. I understand the world and live guided by my *seeing*. My benefactor, on the other hand, had to live as a warrior. If a man *sees* he doesn't have to live like a warrior, or like anything else, for he can *see* things as they really are and direct his life accordingly. But, considering your character, I would say that you may never learn to *see*, in which case you will have to live your entire life like a warrior.

My benefactor said that when a man embarks on the paths of sorcery he becomes aware, in a gradual manner, that ordinary life has been forever left behind; that knowledge is indeed a frightening affair; that the means of the ordinary world are no longer a buffer for him; and that he must adopt a new way of life if he is going to survive. The first thing he ought to do, at that point, is to want to become a warrior, a very important step and decision. The frightening nature of knowledge leaves one no alternative but to become a warrior.

"By the time knowledge becomes a frightening affair the man also realizes that death is the irreplaceable partner that sits next to him on the mat. Every bit of knowledge that becomes power has death as it's central force. Death lends the ultimate touch, and whatever is touched by death indeed becomes power.

"A man who follows the paths of sorcery is confronted with imminent annihilation every turn of the way, and unavoidably he becomes keenly aware of his death. Without the awareness of death he would be only an ordinary man involved in ordinary acts. He would lack the necessary potency, the necessary concentration that transforms one's ordinary time on earth into magical power.

"Thus to be a warrior a man has to be, first of all, and rightfully so, keenly aware of his own death. But to be concerned with death would force any one of us to focus on the self and that would be debilitating. So the next thing one needs to be a warrior is detachment. The idea of imminent death, instead of becoming an obsession, becomes an indifference."

Don Juan stopped talking and looked at me. He seemed to be waiting for a comment.

"Do you understand?" he asked.

I understood what he had said but I personally could not see how anyone could arrive at a sense of detachment. I said that from the point of view of my own apprenticeship I had already experienced the moment when knowledge became such a frightening affair. I could also truthfully say that I no longer found support in the ordinary premises of my daily life. And I wanted, or perhaps even more than wanted, I needed, to live like a warrior.

"Now you must detach yourself," he said.

"From what?"

"Detach yourself from everything."

"That's impossible. I don't want to be a hermit."

"To be a hermit is an indulgence and I never meant that. A hermit is not detached, for he willfully abandons himself to being a hermit.

"Only the idea of death makes a man sufficiently detached so he is incapable of abandoning himself to anything. Only the idea of death makes a man sufficiently detached so he can't deny himself anything. A man of that sort, however, does not crave, for he has acquired a silent lust for life and for all things of life. He knows his death is stalking him and won't give him time to cling to anything, so he tries, without craving, all of everything.

"A detached man, who knows he has no possibility of fencing off his death, has only one thing to back himself with: the power of his decisions. He has to be, so to speak, the master of his choices. He must fully understand that his choice is his responsibility and once he makes it there is no longer time for regrets or recriminations. His decisions are final, simply because his death does not permit him time to cling to anything.

"And thus with an awareness of his death, with his detachment, and with the power of his decisions a warrior sets his life in a strategical manner. The knowledge of his death guides him and makes him detached and silently lusty; the power of his final decisions makes him able to choose without regrets and what he chooses is always strategically the best; and so he performs everything he has to with gusto and lusty efficiency.

"When a man behaves in such a manner one may rightfully say that he is a warrior and has acquired patience!"

Don Juan asked me if I had anything to say, and I remarked that the task he had described would take a lifetime. He said I protested too much in front of him and that he knew I behaved, or at least tried to behave, in terms of a warrior in my day-to-day life.

"You have pretty good claws," he said, laughing. "Show them to me from time to time. It's good practice."

I made a gesture of claws and growled, and he laughed. Then he cleared his throat and went on talking.

"When a warrior has acquired patience he is on his way to will. He knows how to wait. His death sits with him on his mat, they are friends. His death advises him, in mysterious ways, how to choose, how to live strategically. And the warrior waits! I would say that the warrior learns without any hurry because he knows he is waiting for his will; and one day he succeeds in performing something ordinarily quite impossible to accomplish. He may not even notice his extraordinary deed. But as he keeps on performing impossible acts, or as impossible things keep on happening to him, he becomes aware that a sort of power is emerging. A power that conies out of his body as he progresses on the path of knowledge. At first it is like an itching on the belly, or a warm spot that cannot be soothed; then it becomes a pain, a great discomfort. Sometimes the pain and discomfort are so great that the warrior has convulsions for months, the more severe the convulsions the better for him. A fine power is always heralded by great pain.

"When the convulsions cease the warrior notices he has strange feelings about things. He notices that he can actually touch anything he wants with a feeling that comes out of his body from a spot right below or right above his navel. That feeling is the will, and when he is capable of grabbing with it, one can rightfully say that the warrior is a sorcerer, and that he has acquired will."

Don Juan stopped talking and seemed to await my comments or questions. I had nothing to say. I was deeply concerned with the idea that a sorcerer had to experience pain and convulsions but I felt embarrassed about asking him if I also had to go through that. Finally, after a long silence, I asked him, and he giggled as if he had been anticipating my question. He said that pain was not absolutely necessary; he, for example, had never had it and will had just happened to him.

"One day I was in the mountains," he said, "and I stumbled upon a puma, a female one; she was big and hungry. I ran and she ran after me. I climbed a rock and she stood a few feet away ready to jump. I threw rocks at her. She growled and began to charge me. It was then that my will fully came out, and I stopped her with it before she jumped on me. I caressed her with my will. I actually rubbed her tits with it. She looked at me with sleepy eyes and lay down and I ran like a son of a bitch before she got over it."

Don Juan made a very comical gesture to portray a man running for dear life, holding onto his hat.

I told him that I hated to think I had only female mountain lions or convulsions to look forward to, if I wanted will.

"My benefactor was a sorcerer of great powers," he went on. "He was a warrior through and through. His will was indeed his most magnificent accomplishment. But a man can go still further than that; a man can learn to *see*. Upon learning to *see* he no longer needs to live like a warrior, nor be a sorcerer. Upon learning to *see* a man becomes everything by becoming nothing. He, so to speak, vanishes and yet he's there. I would say that this is the time when a man can be or can get anything he desires. But he desires nothing, and instead of playing with his fellow men like they were toys, he meets them in the midst of their folly. The only difference between them is that a man who *sees* controls his folly, while his fellow men can't. A man who *sees* has no longer an active interest in his fellow men. *Seeing* has already detached him from absolutely everything he knew before."

"The sole idea of being detached from everything I know gives me the chills," I said.

"You must be joking! The thing which should give you the chills is not to have anything to look forward to but a lifetime of doing that which you have always done. Think of the man who plants corn year after year until he's too old and tired to get up, so he lies around like an old dog. His thoughts and feelings, the best of him, ramble aimlessly to the only things he has ever done, to plant corn. For me that is the most frightening waste there is.

"We are men and our lot is to learn and to be hurled into inconceivable new worlds."

"Are there any new worlds for us really?" I asked half in jest.

"We have exhausted nothing, you fool," he said imperatively.

"*Seeing* is for impeccable men. Temper your spirit now, become a warrior, learn to *see*, and then you'll know that there is no end to the new worlds for our vision."

## Chapter 11

Don Juan did not make me leave after I had run his errands, as he had been doing lately. He said I could stay, and the next day, June 28, 1969, just before noon he told me I was going to smoke again.

"Am I going to try to *see* the guardian again?"

"No, that's out. This is something else."

Don Juan calmly filled his pipe with smoking mixture, lighted it, and handed it to me. I experienced no apprehension, A pleasant drowsiness enveloped me right away. When I had finished smoking the whole bowl of mixture, don Juan put his pipe away and helped me stand up. We had been sitting facing each other on two straw mats he had placed in the center of his room. He said that we were going for a short walk and encouraged me to walk, shoving me gently. I took a step and my legs sagged. I did not feel any pain when my knees hit the ground. Don Juan held my arm and pushed me up on my feet again.

"You have to walk," he said, "the same way you got up the other time. You must use your will."

I seemed to be stuck to the ground. I attempted a step with my right foot and almost lost my balance. Don Juan held my right arm at the armpit and gently catapulted me forward, but my legs did not support me and I would have collapsed on my face had don Juan not caught my arm and buffered my fall. He held me by the right armpit and made me lean on him. I could not feel anything but I was certain that my head was resting on his shoulder; I was seeing the room from a slanted perspective. He dragged me in that position around the porch. We circled it twice in a most painful fashion; finally, I suppose, my weight became so great that he had to drop me on the ground. I knew he could not move me. In a certain way it was as if part of myself deliberately wanted to become lead-heavy. Don Juan did not make any effort to pick me up. He looked at me for an instant; I was lying on my back facing him, I tried to smile at him and he began to laugh; then he bent over and slapped me on the belly. I had a most peculiar sensation. It was not painful or pleasurable or anything I could think of. It was rather a jolt. Don Juan immediately began to roll me around. I did not feel anything; I assumed he was rolling me around because my view of the porch changed in accordance with a circular motion. When don Juan had me in the position he wanted he stepped back.

"Stand up!" he ordered me imperatively. "Stand up the way you did it the other day. Don't piddle around. You know how to get up. Now get up!"

I intently tried to recollect the actions I had performed on that occasion, but I could not think clearly; it was as if my thoughts had a will of their own no matter how hard I tried to control them. Finally the thought occurred to me that if I said "up" as I had done before I would certainly get up. I said, "Up," loud and clear but nothing happened.

Don Juan looked at me with obvious displeasure and then walked around me toward the door. I was lying on my left side and had a full view of the area in front of his house; my back was to the door, so when he walked around me I immediately assumed he had gone inside.

"Don Juan!" I called loudly, but he did not answer.

I had an overpowering feeling of impotence and despair. I wanted to get up. I said, "Up," again and again, as if that were the magic word that would make me move. Nothing happened. I had an attack of frustration and I went through a sort of tantrum. I wanted to beat my head against the floor and weep. I spent excruciating moments in which I wanted to move or talk and I could not do either. I was truly immobile, paralyzed.

"Don Juan, help me!" I finally managed to bellow.

Don Juan came back and sat in front of me, laughing. He said that I was getting hysterical and that whatever I was experiencing was inconsequential. He lifted my head and, looking straight at me, said that I was having an attack of sham fear. He told me not to fret.

"Your life is getting complicated," he said. "Get rid of whatever it is that's causing you to lose your temper. Stay here quietly and rearrange yourself."

He placed my head on the ground. He stepped over me and all I could perceive was the shuffling of his sandals as he walked away.

My first impulse was to fret again, but I could not gather the energy to work myself into it. Instead, I found myself slipping into a rare state of serenity; a great feeling of ease enveloped me. I knew what the complexity of my life was. It was my little boy. I wanted to be his father more than anything else on this earth. I liked the idea of molding his character and taking him hiking and teaching him "how to live," and yet I abhorred the idea of coercing him into my way of life, but that was precisely what I would have to do, coerce him with force or with that artful set of arguments and rewards we call understanding.

"I must let him go," I thought. "I must not cling to him. I must set him free."

My thoughts brought on a terrifying feeling of melancholy. I began to weep. My eyes filled with tears and my view of the porch blurred. Suddenly I had a great urge to get up and look for don Juan to explain to him about my little boy; and the next thing I knew, I was looking at the porch from an upright position. I turned around to face the house and found don Juan standing in front of me. Apparently he had been standing there behind me all the time.

Although I could not feel my steps, I must have walked toward him, because I moved. Don Juan came to me smiling and held me up by the armpits. His face was very close to mine.

"Good, good work," he said reassuringly.

At that instant I became aware that something extraordinary was taking place right there. I had the feeling at first that I was only recollecting an event that had taken place years before. At one time in the past I had seen don Juan's face at very close range; I had smoked his mixture and I had had the feeling then that don Juan's face was submerged in a tank of water. It was enormous and it was luminous and it moved. The image had been so brief that I did not have time to really take stock of it. This time, however, don Juan was holding me and his face was no more than a foot away from mine and I had time to examine it. When I stood up and turned around I definitely saw don Juan; "the don Juan I know" definitely walked toward me and held me. But when I focused my eyes on his face I did not see don Juan as I am accustomed to seeing him; instead, I saw a large object in front of my eyes. I knew it was don Juan's face, yet that knowledge was not guided by my perception; it was, rather, a logical conclusion on my part; after all, my memory confirmed that the instant before, "the don Juan I know" was holding me by the armpits. Therefore the strange, luminous object in front of me had to be don Juan's face; there was a familiarity to it; yet it had no resemblance to what I would call don Juan's "real" face. What I was looking at was a round object which had a luminosity of it's own. Every part in it moved. I perceived a contained, undulatory, rhythmical flow; it was as if the flowing was enclosed within itself, never moving beyond it's limits, and yet the object in front of my eyes was oozing with movement at any place on it's surface. The thought that occurred to me was that it oozed life. In fact it was so alive that I became engrossed looking at it's movement. It was a mesmerizing fluttering. It became more and more engrossing, until I could no longer tell what the phenomenon in front of my eyes was.

I experienced a sudden jolt; the luminous object became blurry, as if something were shaking it, and then it lost it's glow and became solid and fleshy. I was then looking at don Juan's familiar dark face. He was smiling placidly. The view of his "real" face lasted an instant and then the face again acquired a glow, a shine, an iridescence. It was not light as I am accustomed to perceiving light, or even a glow; rather it was movement, an incredibly fast flickering of something. The glowing object began to bobble up and down again and that disrupted it's undulatory continuity. It's shine diminished as it shook, until it again became the "solid" face of don Juan, as I see him in everyday life. At that moment I vaguely realized that don Juan was shaking me. He was also speaking to me. I did not understand what he was saying, but as he kept on shaking me I finally heard him.

"Don't stare at me. Don't stare at me," he kept saying. "Break your gaze. Break your gaze. Move your eyes away."

Shaking my body seemed to force me to dislodge my steady gaze; apparently when I did not peer intently into don Juan's face I did not see the luminous object. When I moved my eyes away from his face and looked at it with the corner of my eye, so to speak, I could perceive his solidity; that is to say, I could perceive a three-dimensional person; without really looking at him I could, in fact, perceive his whole body, but when I focused my gaze, the face became at once the luminous object.

"Don't look at me at all," don Juan said gravely.

I moved my eyes away and looked at the ground.

"Don't fix your gaze on anything," don Juan said imperatively, and stepped aside in order to help me walk.

I did not feel my steps and could not figure out how I performed the act of walking, yet with don Juan holding me by the armpit, we moved all the way to the back of his house. We stopped by the irrigation ditch.

"Now gaze at the water," don Juan ordered me.

I looked at the water but I could not gaze at it. Somehow the movement of the current distracted me, Don Juan kept on urging me in a joking manner to exercise my "gazing powers," but I could not concentrate. I gazed at don Juan's face once again but the glow did not become apparent any more.

I began to experience a strange itching on my body, the sensation of a limb that has fallen asleep; the muscles of my legs began to twitch. Don Juan shoved me into the water and I tumbled down all the way to the bottom. He had apparently held my right hand as he pushed me, and when I hit the shallow bottom he pulled me up again.

It took a long time for me to regain control over myself. When we got back to his house hours later, I asked him to explain my experience. As I put on my dry clothes I excitedly described what I had perceived, but he discarded my entire account, saying that there was nothing of importance in it.

"Big deal!" he said, mocking me. "You saw a glow, big deal."

I insisted on an explanation and he got up and said he had to leave. It was almost five in the afternoon.

The next day I insisted again on discussing my peculiar experience.

"Was it *seeing*, don Juan?" I asked.

He remained quiet, smiling mysteriously, as I kept pressing him to answer me.

"Let's say that *seeing* is somewhat like that," he finally said. "You were gazing at my face and saw it shining, but it was still my face. It just happens that the little smoke makes one gaze like that. Nothing to it."

"But in what way would *seeing* be different?"

"When you *see* there are no longer familiar features in the world. Everything is new. Everything has never happened before. The world is incredible!"

"Why do you say incredible, don Juan? What makes it incredible?"

"Nothing is any longer familiar. Everything you gaze at becomes nothing! Yesterday you didn't see. You gazed at my face and, since you like me, you noticed my glow. I was not monstrous, like the guardian, but beautiful and interesting. But you did not *see* me. I didn't become nothing in front of you. And yet you did well. You took the first real step toward *seeing*. The only drawback was that you focused on me, and in that case I'm no better than the guardian for you. You succumbed in both instances and didn't *see*."

"Do things disappear? How do they become nothing?"

"Things don't disappear. They don't vanish, if that's what you mean; they simply become nothing and yet they are still there."

"How can that be possible, don Juan?"

"You have the damnedest insistence on talking!" don Juan exclaimed with a serious face. "I think we didn't hit it right about your promise. Perhaps what you really promised was to never, ever stop talking."

Don Juan's tone was severe. The look in his face was concerned. I wanted to laugh but I did not dare. I believed that don Juan was serious, but he was not. He began to laugh. I told him that if I did not talk I got very nervous.

"Let's walk, then," he said.

He took me to the mouth of a canyon at the bottom of the hills. It was about an hour's walk. We rested for a short while and then he guided me through the thick desert underbrush to a water hole; that is, to a spot he said was a water hole. It was as dry as any other spot in the surrounding area.

"Sit in the middle of the water hole," he ordered me.

I obeyed and sat down.

"Are you going to sit here too?" I asked.

I saw him fixing a place to sit some twenty yards from the center of the water hole, against the rocks on the side of the mountain.

He said he was going to watch me from there. I was sitting with my knees against my chest. He corrected my position and told me to sit with my left leg tucked under my seat and my right one bent, with the knee in an upward position. My right arm had to be by my side with my fist resting on the ground, while my left arm was crossed over my chest. He told me to face him and stay there, relaxed but not "abandoned." He then took a sort of whitish cord from his pouch. It looked like a big loop. He looped it around his neck and stretched it with his left hand until it was taut. He plucked the tight string with his right hand. It made a dull, vibratory sound.

He relaxed his grip and looked at me and told me that I had to yell a specific word if I began to feel that something was coming at me when he plucked the string.

I asked what was supposed to come at me and he told me to shut up. He signaled me with his hand that he was going to commence. He said that if something came at me in a very menacing way I had to adopt a fighting form that he had taught me years before, which consisted of dancing, beating the ground with the tip of the left foot, while I slapped my right thigh vigorously. The fighting form was part of a defense technique used in cases of extreme distress and danger.

I had a moment of genuine apprehension. I wanted to inquire about the reason for our being there, but he did not give me time and began plucking the string. He did it various times at regular intervals of perhaps twenty seconds. I noticed that as he kept plucking the string he augmented the tension. I could clearly see that his arms and neck were shivering under the stress. The sound became more clear and I realized then that he added a peculiar yell every time he plucked the string. The combined sound of the tense string and the human voice produced a weird, unearthly reverberation.

I did not feel anything coming at me, but the sight of don Juan's exertion and the eerie sound he was producing had me almost in a state of trance.

Don Juan relaxed his grip and looked at me. While he played, his back was turned to me and he was facing the southeast, as I was; when he relaxed, he faced me.

"Don't look at me when I play," he said. "Don't close your eyes, though. Not for anything. Look at the ground in front of you and listen."

He tensed the string again and began playing. I looked at the ground and concentrated on the sound he was making. I had never heard the sound before in my life.

I became very frightened. The eerie reverberation filled the narrow canyon and began to echo. In fact the sound don Juan was making was coming back to me as an echo from all around the canyon walls. Don Juan must have also noticed that and increased the tension of his string. Although don Juan had changed the pitch, the echo seemed to subside, and then it seemed to concentrate on one point, toward the southeast.

Don Juan reduced the tension of the string by degrees, until I heard a final dull twang. He put the string inside his pouch and walked toward me. He helped me stand up. I noticed then that the muscles of my arms and legs were stiff, like rocks; I was literally soaked in perspiration. I had no idea I had been perspiring so heavily. Drops of sweat ran into my eyes and made them burn.

Don Juan practically dragged me out of the place. I tried to say something but he put his hand over my mouth.

Instead of leaving the canyon the way we had come in, don Juan made a detour. We climbed the side of the mountain and ended up in some hills very far from the mouth of the canyon.

We walked in dead silence to his house. It was already dark by the time we got there. I tried to talk again but don Juan put his hand on my mouth once more.

We did not eat and did not light the kerosene lantern. Don Juan put my mat in his room and pointed at it with his chin. I understood it as a gesture that I should lie down and go to sleep.

"I have the proper thing for you to do," don Juan said to me as soon as I woke up the next morning. "You will start it today. There isn't much time, you know."

After a very long, uneasy pause I felt compelled to ask him,

"What did you have me doing in the canyon yesterday?"

Don Juan giggled like a child.

"I just tapped the spirit of that water hole," he said. "That type of spirit should be tapped when the water hole is dry, when the spirit has retreated into the mountains. Yesterday I, let us say, woke him up from his slumber. But he didn't mind it and pointed to your lucky direction. His voice came from that direction." Don Juan pointed toward the southeast.

"What was the string you played, don Juan?"

"A spirit catcher."

"Can I look at it?"

"No. But I'll make you one. Or better yet, you will make one for yourself some day, when you learn to *see*."

"What is it made of, don Juan?"

"Mine is a wild boar. When you get one you will realize that it is alive and can teach you the different sounds it likes. With practice you will get to know your spirit catcher so well that together you will make sounds full of power."

"Why did you take me to look for the spirit of the water hole, don Juan?"

"You will know that very soon."

Around 11:30 a.m. we sat under his *ramada*, where he prepared his pipe for me to smoke.

He told me to stand up when my body was quite numb; I did that with great ease. He helped me walk around, I was surprised at my control; I actually walked twice around the *ramada* by myself. Don Juan stayed by my side but did not guide me or support me. Then he took me by the arm and walked me to the irrigation ditch. He made me sit on the edge of the bank and ordered me imperatively to gaze at the water and think of nothing else.

I tried to focus my gaze on the water but it's movement distracted me. My mind and my eyes began to wander onto other features of the immediate surroundings. Don Juan bobbed my head up and down and ordered me again to gaze only at the water and not think at all. He said it was difficult to stare at the moving water and that one had to keep on trying. I tried three times and every time I became distracted by something else. Don Juan very patiently shook my head every time. Finally I noticed that my mind and my eyes were focusing on the water; in spite of it's movement. I was becoming immersed in my view of it's liquidness. The water became slightly different. It seemed to be heavier and uniformly grayish green. I could notice the ripples it made as it moved. The ripples were extremely sharp. And then, suddenly, I had the sensation that I was not looking at a mass of moving water but at a picture of water; what I had in front of my eyes was a frozen segment of the running water. The ripples were immobile. I could look at every one of them. Then they began to acquire a green phosphorescence and a sort of green fog oozed out of them. The fog expanded in ripples and as it moved, it's greenness became more brilliant until it was a dazzling radiance that covered everything.

I don't know how long I stayed by the irrigation ditch. Don Juan did not interrupt me. I was immersed in the green glow of the fog. I could sense it all around me. It soothed me. I had no thoughts, no feelings. All I had was a quiet awareness, the awareness of a brilliant, soothing greenness.

Being extremely cold and damp was the next thing I became aware of. Gradually I realized that I was submerged in the irrigation ditch. At one moment the water slipped inside my nose, and I swallowed it and it made me cough. I had an annoying itch inside my nose and I sneezed repeatedly. I stood up and had such a forceful and loud sneeze that I also farted. Don Juan clapped his hands and laughed.

"If a body farts, it's alive," he said.

He signaled me to follow him and we walked to his house.

I thought of keeping quiet. In a way, I expected to be in a detached and morose mood, but I really did not feel tired or melancholy. I felt rather buoyant and changed my clothes very rapidly. I began to whistle. Don Juan looked at me curiously and pretended to be surprised; he opened his mouth and his eyes. His gesture was very funny and I laughed quite a bit longer than it called for.

"You're cracking up," he said, and laughed very hard himself.

I explained to him that I did not want to fall into the habit of feeling morose after using his smoking mixture. I told him that after he had taken me out of the irrigation ditch, during my attempts to meet the guardian, I had become convinced that I could "see" if I stared at things around me long enough.

"*Seeing* is not a matter of looking and keeping quiet," he said. "*Seeing* is a technique one has to learn. Or maybe it is a technique some of us already know."

He peered at me as if to insinuate that I was one of those who already knew the technique.

"Are you strong enough to walk?" he asked.

I said I felt fine, which I did. I was not hungry, although I had not eaten all day. Don Juan put some bread and some pieces of dry meat in a knapsack, handed it to me, and gestured with his head for me to follow.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

He pointed toward the hills with a slight movement of his head. We headed for the same canyon where the water hole was, but we did not enter it. Don Juan climbed onto the rocks to our right, at the very mouth of the canyon. We went up the hill. The sun was almost on the horizon. It was a mild day but I felt hot and suffocated. I could hardly breathe.

Don Juan was quite a way ahead of me and had to stop to let me catch up with him. He said I was in terrible physical condition and that it was perhaps not wise to go any further. He let me rest for about an hour. He selected a slick, almost round boulder and told me to lie there. He arranged my body on the rock. He told me to stretch my arms and legs and let them hang loose. My back was slightly arched and my neck relaxed, so that my head also hung loose. He made me stay in that position for perhaps fifteen minutes. Then he told me to uncover my abdominal region. He carefully selected some branches and leaves and heaped them over my naked belly. I felt an instantaneous warmth all over my body. Don Juan then took me by the feet and turned me until my head was toward the southeast.

"Now let us call that spirit of the water hole," he said.

I tried to turn my head to look at him. He held me vigorously by the hair and said that I was in a very vulnerable position and in a terribly weak physical state and had to remain quiet and motionless. He had put all those special branches on my belly to protect me and was going to remain next to me in case I could not take care of myself. He was standing next to the top of my head, and if I rolled my eyes I could see him. He took his string and tensed it and then realized I was looking at him by rolling my eyes way into my forehead. He gave me a snappy tap on the head with his knuckles and ordered me to look at the sky, not to close my eyes, and to concentrate on the sound. He added, as if on second thought, that I should not hesitate to yell the word he had taught me if I felt something was coming at me.

Don Juan and his "spirit catcher" began with a low-tension twang. He slowly increased the tension, and I began to hear a sort of reverberation first, and then a definite echo which came consistently from a southeasterly direction. The tension increased. Don Juan and his "spirit catcher" were perfectly matched. The string produced a low-range note and don Juan magnified it, increasing it's intensity until it was a penetrating cry, a howling call. The apex was an eerie shriek, inconceivable from the point of view of my own experience.

The sound reverberated in the mountains and echoed back to us. I fancied it was coming directly toward me. I felt it had something to do with the temperature of my body. Before don Juan started his calls I had been very warm and comfortable, but during the highest point of his calls I became chilled; my teeth chattered uncontrollably and I truly had the sensation that something was coming at me. At one point I noticed that the sky had become very dark. I had not been aware of the sky although I was looking at it. I had a moment of intense panic and I yelled the word don Juan had taught me.

Don Juan immediately began to decrease the tension of his eerie calls, but that did not bring me any relief.

"Cover your ears," don Juan mumbled imperatively.

I covered them with my hands. After some minutes don Juan stopped altogether and came around to my side. After he had taken the branches and leaves off my belly, he helped me up and carefully put them on the rock where I had been lying. He made a fire with them, and while it burned he rubbed my stomach with other leaves from his pouch.

He put his hand on my mouth when I was about to tell him that I had a terrible headache.

We stayed there until all the leaves had burned. It was fairly dark by then. We walked down the hill and I got sick to my stomach.

While we were walking along the irrigation ditch, don Juan said that I had done enough and I should not stay around. I asked him to explain what the spirit of the water hole was, but he gestured me to be quiet. He said that we would talk about it some other time, then he deliberately changed the subject and gave me a long explanation about "seeing." I said it was regrettable that I could not write in the darkness. He seemed very pleased and said that most of the time I did not pay attention to what he had to say because I was so determined to write everything down.

He spoke about "seeing" as a process independent of the allies and the techniques of sorcery. A sorcerer was a person who could command an ally and could thus manipulate an ally's power to his advantage, but the fact that he commanded an ally did not mean that he could "see." I reminded him that he had told me before that it was impossible to "see" unless one had an ally. Don Juan very calmly replied that he had come to the conclusion it was possible to "see" and yet not command an ally. He felt there was no reason why not, since "seeing" had nothing to do with the manipulatory techniques of sorcery, which served only to act upon our fellow men. The techniques of "seeing," on the other hand, had no effect on men.

My thoughts were very clear. I experienced no fatigue or drowsiness and no longer had an uncomfortable feeling in my stomach, as I walked with don Juan. I was terribly hungry, and when we got to his house I gorged myself with food.

Afterwards I asked him to tell me more about the techniques of "seeing." He smiled broadly at me and said that I was again myself.

"How is it," I said, "that the techniques of *seeing* have no effect on our fellow men?"

"I've told you already," he said. "*Seeing* is not sorcery. Yet one may easily confuse them, because a man who sees can learn, in no time at all, to manipulate an ally and may become a sorcerer. On the other hand, a man may learn certain techniques in order to command an ally and thus become a sorcerer, and yet he may never learn to *see*.

"Besides, *seeing* is contrary to sorcery. *Seeing* makes one realize the unimportance of it all."

"The unimportance of what, don Juan?"

"The unimportance of everything."

We did not say anything else. I felt very relaxed and did not want to speak any more. I was lying on my back on a straw mat. I had made a pillow with my windbreaker. I felt comfortable and happy and wrote my notes for hours in the light of the kerosene lantern.

Suddenly don Juan spoke again.

"Today you did very well," he said. "You did very well at the water. The spirit of the water hole likes you and helped you all the way."

I realized then that I had forgotten to recount my experience to him. I began to describe the way I had perceived the water. He did not let me continue. He said that he knew I had perceived a green fog.

I felt compelled to ask, "How did you know that, don Juan?"

"I *saw* you."

"What did I do?"

"Nothing, you sat there and gazed into the water and finally you perceived the green mist."

"Was it *seeing*?"

"No. But it was very close. You're getting close."

I got very excited. I wanted to know more about it. He laughed and made fun of my eagerness. He said that anyone could perceive the green fog because it was like the guardian, something that was unavoidably there, so there was no great accomplishment in perceiving it.

"When I said you did well, I meant that you did not fret," he said, "as you did with the guardian. If you had become restless I would have had to shake your head and bring you back. Whenever a man goes into the green fog his benefactor has to stay by him in case it begins to trap him. You can jump out of the guardian's reach by yourself, but you can't escape the clutches of the green fog by yourself. At least not at the beginning. Later on you may learn a way to do it. Now we're trying to find out something else."

"What are we trying to find out?"

"Whether you can *see* the water."

"How will I know that I have *seen* it, or that I am *seeing* it?"

"You will know. You get confused only when you talk."

# Chapter 12

Working on my notes I had come across various questions.

"Is the green fog, like the guardian, something that one has to overcome in order to *see*?" I asked don Juan as soon as we sat down under his *ramada* on August 8, 1969.

"Yes. One must overcome everything," he said.

"How can I overcome the green fog?"

"The same way you should have overcome the guardian, by letting it turn into nothing."

"What should I do?"

"Nothing. For you, the green fog is something much easier than the guardian. The spirit of the water hole likes you, while it certainly was not your temperament to deal with the guardian. You never really *saw* the guardian."

"Maybe that was because I didn't like it. What if I were to meet a guardian I liked? There must be some people who would regard the guardian I saw as being beautiful. Would they overcome it because they liked it?"

"No! You still don't understand. It doesn't matter whether you like or dislike the guardian. As long as you have a feeling toward it, the guardian will remain the same, monstrous, beautiful, or whatever. If you have no feeling toward it, on the other hand, the guardian will become nothing and will still be there in front of you."

The idea that something as colossal as the guardian could become nothing and still be in front of my eyes made absolutely no sense. I felt it was one of the alogical premises of don Juan's knowledge. However, I also felt that if he wanted to he could explain it to me. I insisted on asking him what he meant by that.

"You thought the guardian was something you knew, that's what I mean."

"But I didn't think it was something I knew."

"You thought it was ugly. It's size was awesome. It was a monster. You know what all those things are. So the guardian was always something you knew, and as long as it was something you knew you did not see it. I have told you already, the guardian had to become nothing and yet it had to stand in front of you. It had to be there and it had, at the same time, to be nothing."

"How could that be, don Juan? What you say is absurd."

"It is. But that is *seeing*. There is really no way to talk about it. *Seeing*, as I said before, is learned by *seeing*.

"Apparently you have no problem with water. You nearly *saw* it the other day. Water is your 'hinge.' All you need now is to perfect your technique of *seeing*. You have a powerful helper in the spirit of the water hole."

"That's another burning question I have, don Juan."

"You may have all the burning questions you want, but we cannot talk about the spirit of the water hole in this vicinity. In fact, it is better not to think about it at all. Not at all. Otherwise the spirit will trap you and if that happens there is nothing a living man can do to help you. So keep your mouth shut and keep your thoughts on something else."

Around ten o'clock the next morning don Juan took his pipe out of it's sheath, filled it with smoking mixture, then handed it to me and told me to carry it to the bank of the stream. Holding the pipe with both hands, I managed to unbutton my shirt and put the pipe inside and hold it tight. Don Juan carried two straw mats and a small tray with coals. It was a warm day. We sat on the mats in the shade of a small grove of *brea* trees at the very edge of the water. Don Juan placed a charcoal inside the pipe bowl and told me to smoke. I did not have any apprehension or any feeling of elation. I remembered that during my second attempt to "see" the guardian, after don Juan had explained it's nature, I had had a unique sensation of wonder and awe. This time, however, although don Juan had made me cognizant of the possibility of actually "seeing" the water, I was not involved emotionally; I was only curious.

Don Juan made me smoke twice the amount I had smoked during previous attempts. At a given moment he leaned over and whispered in my right ear that he was going to teach me how to use the water in order to move. I felt his face very close, as if he had put his mouth next to my ear. He told me not to gaze into the water, but to focus my eyes on the surface and keep them fixed until the water turned into a green fog. He repeated over and over that I had to put all my attention on the fog until I could not detect anything else.

"Look at the water in front of you," I heard him saying, "but don't let it's sound carry you anywhere. If you let the sound of the water carry you I may never be able to find you and bring you back. Now get into the green fog and listen to my voice."

I heard and understood him with extraordinary clarity. I began looking at the water fixedly, and had a very peculiar sensation of physical pleasure; an itch; an undefined happiness. I stared for a long time but did not detect the green fog. I felt that my eyes were getting out of focus and I had to struggle to keep looking at the water; finally I could not control my eyes any longer and I must have closed them, or blinked, or perhaps I just lost my capacity to focus; at any rate, at that very moment the water became fixed; it ceased to move. It seemed to be a painting. The ripples were immobile. Then the water began to fizzle; it was as if it had carbonated particles that exploded at once. For an instant I saw the fizzling as a slow expansion of green matter. It was a silent explosion; the water burst into a brilliant green mist, which expanded until it had enveloped me.

I remained suspended in it until a very sharp, sustained, shrill noise shook everything; the fog seemed to congeal into the usual features of the water surface. The shrill noise was don Juan yelling, "Heyyyy!" close to my ear. He told me to pay attention to his voice and go back into the fog and wait there until he called me. I said, "O.K.," in English and heard the cackling noise of his laughter.

"Please, don't talk," he said. "Don't give me any more O.K.s."

I could hear him very well. The sound of his voice was melodious and above all friendly. I knew that without thinking; it was a conviction that struck me and then passed.

Don Juan's voice ordered me to focus all my attention on the fog but not abandon myself to it. He said repeatedly that a warrior did not abandon himself to anything, not even to his death. I became immersed in the mist again and noticed that it was not fog at all, or at least it was not what I conceive fog to be like. The foglike phenomenon was composed of tiny bubbles, round objects that came into my field of "vision" and moved out of it with a floating quality. I watched their movement for a while, then a loud, distant noise jolted my attention and I lost my capacity to focus and could no longer perceive the tiny bubbles. All I was aware of then was a green, amorphous, foglike glow. I heard the loud noise again and the jolt it gave dispelled the fog at once and I found myself looking at the water of the irrigation ditch. Then I heard it again much closer; it was don Juan's voice. He was telling me to pay attention to him, because his voice was my only guide. He ordered me to look at the bank of the stream and at the vegetation directly in front of me. I saw some reeds and a space which was clear of reeds. It was a small cove on the bank, a place where don Juan steps across to plunge his bucket and fill it with water. After a few moments don Juan ordered me to return to the fog and asked me again to pay attention to his voice, because he was going to guide me so I could learn how to move; he said that once I saw the bubbles I should board one of them and let it carry me.

I obeyed him and was at once surrounded by the green mist, and then I saw the tiny bubbles. I heard don Juan's voice again as a very strange and frightening rumble. Immediately upon hearing it I began losing my capacity to perceive the bubbles.

"Mount one of those bubbles," I heard him saying.

I struggled to maintain my perception of the green bubbles and still hear his voice. I don't know how long I fought to do that, when suddenly I was aware that I could listen to him and still keep sight of the bubbles, which kept on passing through, floating slowly out of my field of perception. Don Juan's voice kept on urging me to follow one of them and mount it.

I wondered how I was supposed to do that and automatically I voiced the word, "How." I felt that the word was very deep inside me and as it came out it carried me to the surface. The word was like a buoy that emerged out of my depth. I heard myself saying, "How," and I sounded like a dog howling. Don Juan howled back, also like a dog, and then he made some coyote sounds, and laughed. I thought it was very funny and I actually laughed.

Don Juan told me very calmly to let myself become affixed to a bubble by following it.

"Go back again," he said. "Go into the fog! Into the fog!"

I went back and noticed that the movement of the bubbles had slowed down and they had become as large as basketballs. In fact they were so large and slow that I could examine any one of them in great detail. They were not really bubbles, not like a soap bubble, nor like a balloon, nor any spherical container. They were not containers, yet they were contained. Nor were they round, although when I first perceived them I could have sworn they were round and the image that came to my mind was "bubbles." I viewed them as if I were looking through a window; that is, the frame of the window did not allow me to follow them but only permitted me to view them coming into and going out of my field of perception.

When I ceased to view them as bubbles, however, I was capable of following them; in the act of following them I became affixed to one of them and I floated with it. I truly felt I was moving. In fact I *was* the bubble, or that thing which resembled a bubble.

Then I heard the shrill sound of don Juan's voice. It jolted me and I lost my feeling of being "it." The sound was extremely frightening; it was a remote voice, very metallic, as if he were talking through a loud-speaker. I made out some of the words.

"Look at the banks," he said.

I saw a very large body of water. The water was rushing. I could hear the noise it made.

"Look at the banks," don Juan ordered me again.

I saw a concrete wall. The sound of the water became terribly loud; the sound engulfed me. Then it ceased instantaneously, as if it had been cut off. I had the sensation of blackness, of sleep.

I became aware that I was immersed in the irrigation ditch. Don Juan was splashing water in my face as he hummed. Then he submerged me in the ditch. He pulled my head up, over the surface, and let me rest it on the bank as he held me by the back of my shirt collar. I had a most pleasant sensation in my arms and legs. I stretched them. My eyes were tired and they itched; I lifted my right hand to rub them. It was a difficult movement. My arm seemed to be heavy. I could hardly lift it out of the water, but when I did, my arm came out covered with a most astonishing mass of green mist. I held my arm in front of my eyes. I could see it's contour as a darker mass of green surrounded by a most intense greenish glow. I got to my feet in a hurry and stood in the middle of the stream and looked at my body; my chest, arms, and legs were green, deep green. The hue was so intense that it gave me the feeling of a viscous substance. I looked like a figurine don Juan had made for me years before out of a datura root.

Don Juan told me to come out. I noticed an urgency in his voice.

"I'm green," I said.

"Cut it out," he said imperatively. "You have no time. Get out of there. The water is about to trap you. Get out of it! Out! Out!"

I panicked and jumped out.

"This time you must tell me everything that took place," he said matter-of-factly, as soon as we sat facing each other inside his room.

He was not interested in the sequence of my experience; he wanted to know only what I had encountered when he told me to look at the bank. He was interested in details. I described the wall I had seen.

"Was the wall to your left or to your right?" he asked.

I told him that the wall had really been in front of me. But he insisted that it had to be either to the left or to the right.

"When you first saw it, where was it? Close your eyes and don't open them until you have remembered."

He stood up and turned my body while I had my eyes closed until he had me facing east, the same direction I had faced when I was sitting in front of the stream. He asked me in which direction I had moved.

I said I had moved onward, ahead, in front of me. He insisted that I should remember and concentrate on the tune when I was still viewing the water as bubbles.

"Which way did they flow?" he asked.

Don Juan urged me to recall, and finally I had to admit that the bubbles had seemed to be moving to my right. Yet I was not as absolutely sure as he wanted me to be. Under his probing I began to realize that I was incapable of classifying my perception. The bubbles had moved to my right when I first viewed them, but when they became larger they flowed everywhere. Some of them seemed to be coming directly at me, others seemed to go in every possible direction. There were bubbles moving above and below me. In fact they were all around me. I recollected hearing their fizzing; thus I must have perceived them with my ears as well as with my eyes.

When the bubbles became so large that I was able to "mount" one of them, I "saw" them rubbing each other like balloons.

My excitement increased as I recollected the details of my perception. Don Juan, however, was completely uninterested. I told him that I had seen the bubbles fizzing. It was not a purely auditory or purely visual effect, but something undifferentiated, yet crystal clear; the bubbles rasped against each other. I did not see or hear their movement, I felt it; I was part of the sound and the motion.

As I recounted my experience I became deeply moved. I held his arm and shook it in an outburst of great agitation. I had realized that the bubbles had no outer limit; nonetheless, they were contained and their edges changed shape and were uneven and jagged. The bubbles merged and separated with great speed, yet their movement was not dazzling. Their movement was fast and at the same time slow.

Another thing I remembered, as I recounted my experience, was the quality of color that the bubbles seemed to possess. They were transparent and very bright and seemed almost green, although it was not a hue, as I am accustomed to perceiving hues.

"You're stalling," don Juan said. "Those things are not important. You're dwelling on the wrong items. The direction is the only important issue."

I could only remember that I had moved without any point of reference, but don Juan concluded that since the bubbles had flowed consistently to my right-south-at the beginning, the south was the direction with which I had to be concerned. He again urged me imperatively to recollect whether the wall was to my right or my left. I strained to remember.

When don Juan "called me" and I surfaced, so to speak, I think I had the wall to my left. I was very close to it and was able to distinguish the grooves and protuberances of the wooden armature or mold into which the concrete had been poured. Very thin strips of wood had been used and the pattern they had created was compact The wall was very high. One end of it was visible to me, and I noticed that it did not have a corner but curved around.

He sat in silence for a moment, as if he were thinking how to decipher the meaning of my experience; he finally said that I had not accomplished a great deal, that I had fallen short of what he expected me to do.

"What was I supposed to do?"

He did not answer but made a puckering gesture with his lips.

"You did very well," he said. "Today you learned that a brujo uses the water to move."

"But did I *see*?"

He looked at me with a curious expression. He rolled his eyes and said that I had to go into the green mist a good many times until I could answer that question myself. He changed the direction of our conversation in a subtle way, saying I had not really learned how to move using the water, but I had learned that a brujo could do that, and he had deliberately told me to look at the bank of the stream so I could check my movement.

"You moved very fast," he said, "as fast as a man who knows how to perform this technique. I had a hard time keeping up with you."

I begged him to explain what had happened to me from the beginning. He laughed, shaking his head slowly as though in disbelief.

"You always insist on knowing things from the beginning," he said. "But there's no beginning; the beginning is only in your thought."

"I think the beginning was when I sat on the bank and smoked," I said.

"But before you smoked I had to figure out what to do with you," he said. "I would have to tell you what I did and I can't do that, because it would take me to still another point. So perhaps things would be clearer to you if you didn't think about beginnings."

"Then tell me what happened after I sat on the bank and smoked"

"I think you have told me that already," he said, laughing.

"Was anything I did of any importance, don Juan?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You followed my directions very well and had no problem getting into and out of the fog. Then you listened to my voice and returned to the surface every time I called you. That was the exercise. The rest was very easy. You simply let the fog carry you. You behaved as though you knew what to do. When you were very far away I called you again and made you look at the bank, so you would know how far you had gone. Then I pulled you back."

"You mean, don Juan, that I really traveled in the water?"

"You did. And very far too."

"How far?"

"You wouldn't believe it."

I tried to coax him into telling me, but he dropped the subject and said he had to leave for a while. I insisted that he should at least give me a hint.

"I don't like to be kept in the dark," I said.

"You keep yourself in the dark," he said. "Think about the wall you saw. Sit down here on your mat and remember every detail of it. Then perhaps you yourself may discover how far you went. All I know now is that you traveled very far. I know that because I had a terrible time pulling you back. If I had not been around, you might have wandered off and never returned, in which case all that would be left of you now would be your dead body on the side of the stream. Or perhaps you might have returned by yourself. With you I'm not sure. So judging by the effort it took me to bring you back, I'd say you were clearly in..."

He made a long pause; he stared at me in a friendly way.

"I would go as far as the mountains of central Mexico," he said. "I don't know how far you would go, perhaps as far as Los Angeles, or perhaps even as far as Brazil."

Don Juan returned the next day late in the afternoon. In the meantime I had written down everything I could recollect about my perception. While I wrote, it occurred to me to follow the banks up and down the stream in each direction and corroborate whether I had actually seen a feature on either side that might have elicited in me the image of a wall. I conjectured that don Juan might have made me walk, in a state of stupor, and then might have made me focus my attention on some wall on the way. In the hours that elapsed between the tune I first detected the fog and the time I got out of the ditch and went back to his house, I calculated that if he had made me walk, we could have walked, at the most, two and a half miles. So I followed the banks of the stream for about three miles in each direction, carefully observing every feature which might have been pertinent to my vision of the wall. The stream was, as far as I could tell, a plain canal used for irrigation. It was four to five feet wide throughout it's length and I could not find any visible features in it that would have reminded me or forced the image of a concrete wall.

When don Juan arrived at his house in the late afternoon I accosted him and insisted on reading my account to him. He refused to listen and made me sit down. He sat facing me. He was not smiling. He seemed to be thinking, judging by the penetrating look in his eyes, which were fixed above the horizon.

"I think you must be aware by now," he said in a tone that was suddenly very severe, "that everything is mortally dangerous. The water is as deadly as the guardian. If you don't watch out the water will trap you. It nearly did that yesterday. But in order to be trapped a man has to be willing. There's your trouble. You're willing to abandon yourself."

I did not know what he was talking about. His attack on me had been so sudden that I was disoriented. I feebly asked him to explain himself. He reluctantly mentioned that he had gone to the water canyon and had "seen" the spirit of the water hole and had the profound conviction I had flubbed my chances to "see" the water.

"How?" I asked, truly baffled.

"The spirit is a force," he said, "and as such, it responds only to strength. You cannot indulge in it's presence."

"When did I indulge?"

"Yesterday, when you became green in the water."

"I did not indulge. I thought it was a very important moment and I told you what was happening to me."

"Who are you to think or decide what is important? You know nothing about the forces you're tapping. The spirit of the water hole exists out there and could have helped you; in fact it was helping you until you flubbed it. Now I don't know what will be the outcome of your doings. You have succumbed to the force of the water-hole spirit and now it can take you any time."

"Was it wrong to look at myself turning green?"

"You abandoned yourself. You willed to abandon yourself. That was wrong. I have told you this already and I will repeat it again. You can survive in the world of a brujo only if you are a warrior. A warrior treats everything with respect and does not trample on anything unless he has to. You did not treat the water with respect yesterday. Usually you behave very well. However, yesterday you abandoned yourself to your death, like a goddamned fool. A warrior does not abandon himself to anything, not even to his death. A warrior is not a willing partner; a warrior is not available, and if he involves himself with something, you can be sure that he is aware of what he is doing."

I did not know what to say. Don Juan was almost angry. That disturbed me. Don Juan had rarely behaved in such a way with me. I told him that I truly had no idea I was doing something wrong. After some minutes of tense silence he took off his hat and smiled and told me that I had gained control over my indulging self. He stressed that I had to avoid water and keep it from touching the surface of my body for three or four months.

"I don't think I could go without taking a shower," I said.

Don Juan laughed until tears rolled down his cheeks.

"You can't go without a shower! At times you're so weak I think you're putting me on. But it is not a joke. At times you really have no control and the forces of your life take you freely."

I raised the point that it was humanly impossible to be controlled at all times. He maintained that for a warrior there was nothing out of control, I brought up the idea of accidents and said that what happened to me at the water canal could certainly be classed as an accident, since I neither meant it nor was I aware of my improper behavior. I talked about different people who had misfortunes that could be explained as accidents; I talked especially about Lucas, a very fine old Yaqui man who had suffered a serious injury when the truck he was driving overturned.

"It seems to me it is impossible to avoid accidents," I said. "No man can control everything around him."

"True," don Juan said cuttingly. "But not everything is an unavoidable accident. Lucas doesn't live like a warrior. If he did, he'd know that he is waiting and what he is waiting for; and he wouldn't have driven that truck while he was drunk. He crashed against the rock side of the road because he was drunk and mangled his body for nothing.

"Life for a warrior is an exercise in strategy," don Juan went on. "But you want to find the meaning of life. A warrior doesn't care about meanings. If Lucas lived like a warrior— and he had a chance to, as we all have a chance to— he would set his life strategically. Thus if he couldn't avoid an accident that crushed his ribs, he would have found means to offset that handicap, or avoid it's consequences, or battle against them. If Lucas were a warrior he wouldn't be sitting in his dingy house dying of starvation. He would be battling to the end."

I posed an alternative to don Juan, using him as an example, and asked him what would be the outcome if he himself were to be involved in an accident that severed his legs.

"If I cannot help it, and lose my legs," he said, "I won't be able to be a man any more, so I will join that which is waiting for me out there."

He made a sweeping gesture with his hand to point all around him. I argued that he had misunderstood me. I had meant to point out that it was impossible for any single individual to foresee all the variables involved in his day-to-day actions.

"All I can say to you," don Juan said, "is that a warrior is never available; never is he standing on the road waiting to be clobbered. Thus he cuts to a minimum his chances of the unforeseen. What you call accidents are, most of the time, very easy to avoid, except for fools who are living helter-skelter."

"It is not possible to live strategically all the time," I said. "Imagine that someone is waiting for you with a powerful rifle with a telescopic sight; he could spot you accurately five hundred yards away. What would you do?"

Don Juan looked at me with an air of disbelief and then broke into laughter.

"What would you do?" I urged him.

"If someone is waiting for me with a rifle with a telescopic sight?" he said, obviously mocking me.

"If someone is hiding out of sight, waiting for you. You won't have a chance. You can't stop a bullet."

"No. I can't. But I still don't understand your point."

"My point is that all your strategy cannot be of any help in a situation like that."

"Oh, but it can. If someone is waiting for me with a powerful rifle with a telescopic sight I simply will not come around."

## Chapter 13

My next attempt at "seeing" took place on September 3, 1969. Don Juan made me smoke two bowls of the mixture. The immediate effects were identical to those I had experienced during previous attempts. I remember that when my body was thoroughly numb, don Juan held me by my right armpit and made me walk into the thick desert chaparral that grows for miles around his house. I cannot recollect what I or don Juan did after we entered the brush, nor can I recall how long we walked; at a certain moment I found I was sitting on top of a small hill. Don Juan was sitting on my left side, touching me. I could not feel him but I could see him with the corner of my eye. I had the feeling that he had been talking to me although I could not remember his words. Yet I felt I knew exactly what he had said, in spite of the fact that I could not bring it back into my clear memory. I had the sensation that his words were like the cars of a train which was moving away and his last word was like a square caboose. I knew what that last word was but I could not say it or think clearly about it. It was a state of half-wakefulness with a dreamlike image of a train of words.

Then very faintly I heard don Juan's voice talking to me.

"Now you must look at me," he said as he turned my head to face him. He repeated the statement three or four times.

I looked and detected right away the same glowing effect I had perceived twice before while looking at his face; it was a mesmerizing movement, an undulatory shift of light within contained areas. There were no definite boundaries to those areas, and yet the waving light never spilled over but moved within invisible limits.

I scanned the glowing object in front of me and immediately it started to lose it's glow and the familiar features of don Juan's face emerged, or rather became superimposed on the fading glow. I must have then focused my gaze again; don Juan's features faded and the glow intensified. I had placed my attention on an area which must have been his left eye. I noticed that there the movement of the glow was not contained. I detected something perhaps resembling explosions of sparks. The explosions were rhythmical and actually sent out something like particles of light that flew out with apparent force toward me and then retreated as if they were rubber fibers.

Don Juan must have turned my head around. Suddenly I found myself looking at a plowed field.

"Now look ahead," I heard don Juan saying.

In front of me, perhaps two hundred yards away, was a large, long hill; it's entire slope had been plowed. Horizontal furrows ran parallel to each other from the bottom to the very top of the hill. I noticed that in the plowed field there were quantities of small rocks and three huge boulders that interrupted the lineality of the furrows. There were some bushes right in front of me which prevented me from observing the details of a ravine or water canyon at the bottom of the hill. From where I was, the canyon appeared as a deep cut, with green vegetation markedly different from the barren hill. The greenness seemed to be trees that grew in the bottom of the canyon. I felt a breeze blowing in my eyes. I had a feeling of peace and profound quietness. There were no sounds of birds or insects.

Don Juan spoke to me again. It took me a moment to understand what he was saying.

"Do you see a man in that field?" he kept on asking.

I wanted to tell him that there was no man in that field, but I could not vocalize the words. Don Juan took my head in his hands from behind-I could see his fingers over my eyebrows and on my cheeks— and made me pan over the field, moving my head slowly from right to left and then in the opposite direction.

"Watch every detail. Your life may depend on it," I heard him saying over and over.

He made me pan four times over the 180-degree visual horizon in front of me. At one moment, when he had moved my head to face the extreme left, I thought I detected something moving in the field. I had a brief perception of movement with the corner of my right eye. He began to shift my head back to my right and I was capable of focusing my gaze on the plowed field. I saw a man walking alongside the furrows. He was a plain man dressed like a Mexican peasant; he wore sandals, a pair of light gray pants, a long-sleeved beige shirt, and a straw hat, and carried a light brown bag with a strap over his right shoulder.

Don Juan must have noticed that I had seen the man. He asked me repeatedly if the man was looking at me or if he was coming toward me. I wanted to tell him that the man was walking away and that his back was turned to me, but I could only say, "No." Don Juan said that if the man turned and came to me I should yell and he would turn my head away in order to protect me.

I had no sense of fear or apprehension or involvement. I coldly watched the scene. The man stopped walking at the middle of the field. He stood with his right foot on a ledge of a large round boulder, as if he were tying his sandal. Then he straightened up, pulled a string from his bag, and wrapped it around his left hand. He turned his back to me and, facing the top of the hill, began scanning the area in front of him. I thought he was scanning because of the way he moved his head, which he kept turning slowly to his right; I saw him in profile, and then he began to turn his whole body toward me until he was looking at me. He actually jerked his head, or moved it in such a way that I knew beyond a doubt that he had seen me. He extended his left arm in front of him, pointing to the ground, and holding his arm in that position he began to walk toward me.

"He's coming!" I yelled without any difficulty.

Don Juan must have turned my head around, for next I was looking at the chaparral. He told me not to gaze but look "lightly" at things and scan over them. He said that he was going to stand a short distance in front of me and then walk toward me, and that I should gaze at him until I saw his glow.

I saw don Juan moving to a spot perhaps twenty yards away. He walked with such incredible speed and agility that I could hardly believe it was don Juan. He turned around and faced me and ordered me to gaze at him.

His face was glowing; it looked like a blotch of light. The light seemed to spill over his chest almost to the middle of his body. It was as if I were looking at a light through my half-closed eyelids. The glow seemed to expand and recede. He must have begun to walk toward me because the light became more intense and more discernible.

He said something to me. I struggled to understand and lost my view of the glow, and then I saw don Juan as I see him in everyday life; he was a couple of feet away from me. He sat down facing me.

As I pinpointed ray attention on his face I began to perceive a vague glow. Then it was as if his face were crisscrossed by thin beams of light. Don Juan's face looked as if someone were shining tiny mirrors on it; as the light became more intense the face lost it's contours and was again an amorphous glowing object. I perceived once more the effect of pulsating explosions of light emanating from an area which must have been his left eye. I did not focus my attention on it, but deliberately gazed at an adjacent area which I surmised to be his right eye, I caught at once the sight of a clear, transparent pool of light. It was a liquid light.

I noticed that perceiving was more than sighting; it was feeling. The pool of dark, liquid light had an extraordinary depth. It was "friendly," "kind." The light that emanated from it did not explode but whirled slowly inward, creating exquisite reflections. The glow had a very lovely and delicate way of touching me, of soothing me, which gave me a sensation of exquisiteness.

I saw a symmetrical ring of brilliant dashes of light that expanded rhythmically on the vertical plain of the glowing area. The ring expanded to cover nearly all the glowing surface and then contracted to a point of light in the middle of the brilliant pool. I saw the ring expanding and contracting several times. Then I deliberately moved back without losing my gaze and was capable of seeing both eyes. I distinguished the rhythm of both types of light explosions. The left eye sent out dashes of tight that actually protruded out of the vertical plain, while the right eye sent out dashes that radiated without protruding. The rhythm of the two eyes was alternating, the light of the left eye exploded outward while the radiating light beams of the right eye contracted and whirled inward. Then the light of the right eye extended to cover the whole glowing surface while the exploding light of the left eye receded.

Don Juan must have turned me around once more, for I was again looking at the plowed field. I heard him telling me to watch the man.

The man was standing by the boulder looking at me. I could not distinguish his features; his hat covered most of his face. After a moment he tucked his bag under his right arm and began to walk away toward my right. He walked almost to the end of the plowed area, changed direction, and took a few steps toward the gully. Then I lost control of my focusing and he vanished and so did the total scenery. The image of the desert shrubs became superimposed on it.

I do not recollect how I returned to don Juan's house, nor do I remember what he did to me to "bring me back." When I woke up I was lying on my straw mat in don Juan's room. He came to my side and helped me up. I was dizzy; my stomach was upset. Don Juan in a very quick and efficient manner dragged me to the shrubs at the side of his house. I got sick and he laughed.

Afterwards I felt better. I looked at my watch; it was eleven p.m. I went back to sleep and by one o'clock the next afternoon I thought I was myself again.

Don Juan kept asking me how I felt. I had the sensation of being absent-minded. I could not really concentrate. I walked around the house for a while under don Juan's close scrutiny. He followed me around. I felt there was nothing to do and I went back to sleep. I woke up in the late afternoon feeling much better. I found a great many mashed leaves around me. In fact when I woke up I was lying on my stomach on top of a pile of leaves. Their scent was very strong. I remember becoming aware of the scent before I fully woke up.

I wandered to the back and found don Juan sitting by the irrigation ditch. When he saw me approaching he made frantic gestures to make me stop and go back into the house.

"Run inside!" he yelled.

I ran into the house and he joined me a while later.

"Don't ever come after me," he said. "If you want to see me wait for me here."

I apologized. He told me not to waste myself in silly apologies which did not have the power to cancel my acts. He said that he had had a very difficult time bringing me back and that he had been interceding for me at the water.

"We have to take a chance now and wash you in the water," he said.

I assured him I felt fine. He gazed into my eyes for a long time.

"Come with me," he said. "I'm going to put you in the water."

"I'm fine," I said. "Look, I'm taking notes."

He pulled me up from my mat with considerable force.

"Don't indulge!" he said. "In no time at all you will fall asleep again. Maybe I won't be able to wake you up this time."

We ran to the back of his house. Before we reached the water he told me in a most dramatic tone to shut my eyes tight and not open them until he said to. He told me that if I gazed at the water even for an instant I might die. He led me by the hand and dunked me into the irrigation ditch head first.

I kept my eyes shut as he went on submerging and pulling me out of the water for hours. The change I experienced was remarkable. Whatever was wrong with me before I entered the water was so subtle that I did not really notice it until I compared it with the feeling of well-being and alertness I had while don Juan kept me in the irrigation canal.

Water got into my nose and I began to sneeze. Don Juan pulled me out and led me, with my eyes still closed, into the house. He made me change my clothes and then guided me into his room, had me sit down on my mat, arranged the direction of my body, and then told me to open my eyes. I opened them and what I saw caused me to jump back and grab onto his leg. I experienced a tremendously confusing moment. Don Juan rapped me with his knuckles on the very top of my head. It was a quick blow which was not hard or painful but somehow shocking.

"What is the matter with you? What did you see?" he asked.

Upon opening my eyes I had seen the same scene I had watched before. I had seen the same man. This time, however, he was almost touching me. I saw his face. There was an air of familiarity about it. I almost knew who he was. The scene vanished when don Juan hit me on the head.

I looked up at don Juan. He had his hand ready to hit me again. He laughed and asked if I would like to get another blow. I let go of his leg and relaxed on my mat. He ordered me to look straight ahead and not to turn around for any reason in the direction of the water at the back of his house.

I then noticed for the first tune that it was pitch black in the room. For a moment I was not sure whether I had my eyes open. I touched them with my hands to make sure. I called don Juan loudly and told him something was wrong with my eyes; I could not see at all, while a moment before I had seen him ready to hit me. I heard his laughter over my head to my right, and then he lit his kerosene lantern. My eyes adapted to the light in a matter of seconds. Everything was as it always had been: the wattle-and-daub walls of the room and the strangely contorted, dry medicinal roots hanging on them; the bundles of herbs; the thatched roof; the kerosene lantern hanging from a beam. I had seen the room hundreds of times, yet this time there was something unique about it and about myself. This was the first time I did not believe in the final "reality" of my perception. I had been edging toward that feeling and I had perhaps intellectualized it at various times, but never had I been at the brink of a serious doubt. This time, however, I did not believe the room was "real," and for a moment I had the strange sensation that it was a scene which would vanish if don Juan rapped me on top of my head with his knuckles.

I began to shiver without being cold. Nervous spasms ran down my spine. My head felt heavy, especially in the area right above my neck.

I complained that I did not feel well and told him what I had seen. He laughed at me, saying that to succumb to fright was a miserable indulgence.

"You're frightened without being afraid," he said. "You saw the ally staring at you, big deal. Wait until you have him face to face before you shit in your pants."

He told me to get up and walk to my car without turning around in the direction of the water, and to wait for him while he got a rope and a shovel. He made me drive to a place where we had found a tree stump. We proceeded to dig it out in the darkness. I worked terribly hard for hours. We did not get the stump out but I felt much better. We went back to his house and ate and things were again perfectly "real" and commonplace.

"What happened to me?" I asked. "What did I do yesterday?"

"You smoked me and then you smoked an ally," he said.

"I beg your pardon?"

Don Juan laughed and said that next I was going to demand that he start telling me everything from the beginning.

"You smoked me," he repeated. "You gazed into my face, into my eyes. You saw the lights that mark a man's face. I am a sorcerer, you saw that in my eyes. You did not know that, though, because this is the first time you've done it. The eyes of men are not all alike. You will soon find that out. Then you smoked an ally."

"Do you mean the man in the field?"

"That was not a man, that was an ally beckoning you."

"Where did we go? Where were we when I saw that man, I mean that ally?"

Don Juan made a gesture with his chin to point out an area in front of his house and said that he had taken me to the top of a small hill. I said that the scenery I had viewed had nothing to do with the desert chaparral around his house and he replied that the ally that had "beckoned" me was not from the surroundings.

"Where is it from?"

"I'll take you there very soon."

"What is the meaning of my vision?"

"You were learning to *see*, that was all; but now you are about to lose your pants because you indulge; you have abandoned yourself to your fright. Maybe you should describe everything you saw."

When I started to describe the way his own face had appeared to me, he made me stop and said that it was of no importance whatsoever, I told him that I had almost seen him as a "luminous egg." He said that "almost" was not enough and that *seeing* was going to take me a great deal of time and work.

He was interested in the scene of the plowed field and in every detail I could remember about the man.

"That ally was beckoning you," he said "I made you move your head when he came to you not because he was endangering you but because it is better to wait. You are not in a hurry. A warrior is never idle and never in a hurry. To meet an ally without being prepared is like attacking a lion with your farts."

I liked the metaphor. We had a delightful moment of laughter.

"What would've happened if you hadn't moved my head?"

"You would've had to move your head yourself."

"And if I didn't?"

"The ally would have come to you and scared you stiff. If you had been alone he might have killed you. It is not advisable for you to be alone in the mountains or the desert until you can defend yourself. An ally might catch you alone there and make mincemeat out of you."

"What was the meaning of the acts he performed?"

"By looking at you he meant he welcomes you. He showed you that you need a spirit catcher and a pouch, but not from this area; his bag was from another part of the country. You have three stumbling blocks in your way that make you stop; those were the boulders. And you definitely are going to get your best powers in water canyons and gullies; the ally pointed out the gully to you. The rest of the scene was meant to help you locate the exact place to find him. I know now where the place is. I will take you there very soon."

"Do you mean that the scenery I saw really exists?

"Of course."

"Where?"

"I cannot tell you that."

"How would I find that area?"

"I cannot tell you that either, and not because I don't want to but because I simply don't know how to tell you."

I wanted to know the meaning of seeing the same scene while I was in his room. Don Juan laughed and imitated me holding onto his leg.

"That was a reaffirmation that the ally wants you," he said. "He made sure you or I knew that he was welcoming you."

"What about the face I saw?"

"It is a familiar face to you because you know him. You have seen it before. Maybe it is the face of your death. You got frightened but that was your carelessness. He was waiting for you and when he showed up you succumbed to fright. Fortunately I was there to hit you or he would've turned against you, which would have been only proper. To meet an ally a man must be a spotless warrior or the ally may turn against him and destroy him."

Don Juan dissuaded me from going back to Los Angeles the next morning. Apparently he thought I still had not totally recovered. He insisted that I sit inside his room facing the southeast, in order to preserve my strength. He sat to my left, handed me my notebook, and said that this time I had him pinned down; he not only had to stay with me, he also had to talk to me.

"I have to take you to the water again in the twilight," he said. "You're not solid yet and you shouldn't be alone today. I'll keep you company all morning; in the afternoon you'll be in better shape."

His concern made me feel very apprehensive.

"What's wrong with me?" I asked.

"You've tapped an ally."

"What do you mean by that?"

"We must not talk about allies today. Let us talk about anything else."

I really did not want to talk at all. I had begun to feel anxious and restless. Don Juan apparently found the situation utterly ludicrous; he laughed till the tears came.

"Don't tell me that at a time when you should talk you are not going to find anything to say," he said, his eyes shining with a mischievous glint.

His mood was very soothing to me.

There was only one topic that interested me at that moment: the ally. His face was so familiar; it was not as if I knew him or as if I had seen him before. It was something else. Every time I began to think about his face my mind experienced a bombardment of other thoughts, as if some part of myself knew the secret but did not allow the rest of me to come close to it. The sensation of the ally's face being familiar was so eerie that it had forced me into a state of morbid melancholy. Don Juan had said that it might have been the face of my death. I think that statement had clinched me. I wanted desperately to ask about it and I had the clear sensation that don Juan was holding me back. I took a couple of deep breaths and blurted out a question.

"What is death, don Juan?"

"I don't know," he said, smiling.

"I mean, how would you describe death? I want your opinions. I think everybody has definite opinions about death."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

I had the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* in the trunk of my car. It occurred to me to use it as a topic of conversation, since it dealt with death. I said I was going to read it to him and began to get up. He made me sit down and went out and got the book himself.

"The morning is a bad time for sorcerers," he said as an explanation for my having to stay put. "You're too weak to leave my room. Inside here you are protected. If you were to wander off now, chances are that you would find a terrible disaster. An ally could kill you on the road or in the bush, and later on when they found your body they would say that you had either died mysteriously or had an accident."

I was in no position or mood to question his decisions, so I stayed put nearly all morning reading and explaining some parts of the book to him. He listened attentively and did not interrupt me at all. Twice I had to stop for short periods of time while he brought some water and food, but as soon as he was free again he urged me to continue reading. He seemed to be very interested.

When I finished he looked at me.

"I don't understand why those people talk about death as if death were like life," he said softly.

"Maybe that's the way they understand it. Do you think the Tibetans *see*?"

"Hardly. When a man learns to *see*, not a single thing he knows prevails. Not a single one. If the Tibetans could see they could tell right away that not a single thing is any longer the same. Once we *see*, nothing is known; nothing remains as we used to know it when we didn't *see*."

"Perhaps, don Juan, *seeing* is not the same for everyone."

"True. It's not the same. Still, that does not mean that the meanings of life prevail. When one learns to *see*, not a single thing is the same."

"Tibetans obviously think that death is like life. What do you think death is like, yourself?" I asked.

"I don't think death is like anything and I think the Tibetans must be talking about something else. At any rate, what they're talking about is not death."

"What do you think they're talking about?"

"Maybe you can tell me that. You're the one who reads."

I tried to say something else but he began to laugh.

"Perhaps the Tibetans really *see*," don Juan went on, "in which case they must have realized that what they *see* makes no sense at all and they wrote that bunch of crap because it doesn't make any difference to them; in which case what they wrote is not crap at all."

"I really don't care about what the Tibetans have to say," I said, "but I certainly care about what you have to say. I would like to hear what you think about death."

He stared at me for an instant and then giggled. He opened his eyes and raised his eyebrows in a comical gesture of surprise.

"Death is a whorl," he said. "Death is the face of the ally; death is a shiny cloud over the horizon; death is the whisper of Mescalito in your ears; death is the toothless mouth of the guardian; death is Genaro sitting on his head; death is me talking; death is you and your writing pad; death is nothing. Nothing! It is here yet it isn't here at all."

Don Juan laughed with great delight. His laughter was like a song, it had a sort of dancing rhythm.

"I make no sense, huh?" don Juan said. "I cannot tell you what death is like. But perhaps I could tell you about your own death. There is no way of knowing what it will be like for sure; however, I could tell you what it may be like."

I became frightened at that point and argued that I only wanted to know what death appeared to be like to him; I emphasized that I was interested in his opinions about death in a general sense, but did not care to know about the particulars of anybody's personal death, especially my own.

"I can't talk about death except in personal terms," he said. "You wanted me to tell you about death. All right! Then don't be afraid of hearing about your own death."

I admitted that I was too nervous to talk about it. I said that I wanted to talk about death in general terms, as he himself had done when he told me that at the time of his son Eulalio's death, life and death mixed like a fog of crystals.

"I told you that my son's life expanded at the time of his personal death," he said. "I was not talking about death in general but about my son's death. Death, whatever it is, made his life expand."

I definitely wanted to steer the conversation out of the realm of particulars, and mentioned that I had been reading accounts of people who had died for several minutes and had been revived through medical techniques. In all the cases I had read, the persons involved had made statements, upon reviving, that they could not recollect anything at all; that dying was simply a sensation of blacking out.

"That's perfectly understandable," he said. "Death has two stages. The first is a blackout. It is a meaningless stage, very similar to the first effect of Mescalito, in which one experiences a lightness that makes one feel happy, complete, and that everything in the world is at ease. But that is only a shallow state; it soon vanishes and one enters a new realm, a realm of harshness and power. That second stage is the real encounter with Mescalito. Death is very much like this. The first stage is a shallow blackout. The second, however, is the real stage where one meets with death; it is a brief moment, after the first blackout, when we find that we are, somehow, ourselves again. It is then that death smashes against us with quiet fury and power until it dissolves our lives into nothing."

"How can you be sure that you are talking about death?"

"I have my ally. The little smoke has shown me my unmistakable death with great clarity. This is why I can only talk about personal death."

Don Juan's words caused me a profound apprehension and a dramatic ambivalence. I had a feeling he was going to describe the overt, commonplace details of my death and tell me how or when I was going to die. The mere thought of knowing that made me despair and at the same time provoked my curiosity. I could have asked him to describe his own death, of course, but I felt that such a request would be rather rude and I ruled it out automatically.

Don Juan seemed to be enjoying my conflict. His body convulsed with laughter.

"Do you want to know what your death may be like?" he asked me with childlike delight in his face.

I found his mischievous pleasure in teasing me rather comforting. It almost took the edge off my apprehension.

"O.K., tell me," I said, and my voice cracked.

He had a formidable explosion of laughter. He held his stomach and rolled on his side and mockingly repeated, " 'O.K., tell me,'" with a crack in his voice. Then he straightened out and sat down, assuming a feigned stiffness, and in a tremulous voice he said, "The second stage of your death may very well be as follows."

His eyes examined me with apparently genuine curiosity. I laughed. I clearly realized that his making fun was the only device that could dull the edge of the idea of one's death.

"You drive a great deal," he went on saying, "so you may find yourself, at a given moment, behind the wheel again. It will be a very fast sensation that won't give you time to think. Suddenly, let's say, you would find yourself driving, as you have done thousands of times. But before you could wonder about yourself, you would notice a strange formation in front of your windshield. If you looked closer you'd realize that it is a cloud that looks like a shiny whorl. It would resemble, let's say, a face, right in the middle of the sky in front of you. As you watched it, you would see it moving backward until it was only a brilliant point in the distance, and then you would notice that it began moving toward you again; it would pick up speed and in a blink of an eye it would smash against the windshield of your car. You are strong; I'm sure it would take death a couple of whams to get you.

"By then you would know where you were and what was happening to you; the face would recede again to a position on the horizon, would pick up speed and smash against you. The face would enter inside you and then you'd know— it was the ally's face all the time, or it was me talking, or you writing. Death was nothing all the time. Nothing. It was a little dot lost in the sheets of your notebook. And yet it would enter inside you with uncontrollable force and would make you expand; it would make you flat and extend you over the sky and the earth and beyond. And you would be like a fog of tiny crystals moving, moving away."

I was very taken by his description of my death. I had expected to hear something so different. I could not say anything for a long time.

"Death enters through the belly," he continued. "Right through the gap of the will. That area is the most important and sensitive part of man. It is the area of the will and also the area through which all of us die. I know it because my ally has guided me to that stage. A sorcerer tunes his will by letting his death overtake him, and when he is fiat and begins to expand, his impeccable will takes over and assembles the fog into one person again."

Don Juan made a strange gesture. He opened his hands like two fans, lifted them to the level of his elbows, turned them until his thumbs were touching his sides, and then brought them slowly together at the center of his body over his navel. He kept them there for a moment. His arms shivered with the strain. Then he brought them up until the tips of his middle fingers touched his forehead, and then pulled them down in the same position to the center of his body.

It was a formidable gesture. Don Juan had performed it with such force and beauty that I was spellbound.

"It is his will which assembles a sorcerer," he said, "but as his old age makes him feeble his will wanes and a moment unavoidably comes when he is no longer capable of commanding his will. He then has nothing with which to oppose the silent force of his death, and his life becomes like the lives of all his fellow men, an expanding fog moving beyond it's limits."

Don Juan stared at me and stood up. I was shivering.

"You can go to the bushes now," he said. "It is afternoon."

I needed to go but I did not dare. I felt perhaps more jumpy than afraid. However, I was no longer apprehensive about the ally.

Don Juan said that it did not matter how I felt as long as I was "solid." He assured me I was in perfect shape and could safely go into the bushes as long as I did not get close to the water.

"That is another matter," he said. "I need to wash you once more, so stay away from the water."

Later on he wanted me to drive him to the nearby town. I mentioned that driving would be a welcome change for me because I was still shaky; the idea that a sorcerer actually played with his death was quite gruesome to me.

"To be a sorcerer is a terrible burden," he said in a reassuring tone. "I've told you that it is much better to learn to *see*. A man who *sees* is everything; in comparison, the sorcerer is a sad fellow."

"What is sorcery, don Juan?"

He looked at me for a long time as he shook his head almost imperceptibly.

"Sorcery is to apply one's will to a key joint," he said. "Sorcery is interference. A sorcerer searches and finds the key joint of anything he wants to affect and then he applies his will to it. A sorcerer doesn't have to *see* to be a sorcerer, all he has to know is how to use his will."

I asked him to explain what he meant by a key joint. He thought for a while and then he said that he knew what my car was.

"It's obviously a machine," I said.

"I mean your car is the spark plugs. That's it's key joint for me. I can apply my will to it and your car won't work."

Don Juan got into my car and sat down. He beckoned me to do likewise as he made himself comfortable on the seat.

"Watch what I do," he said. "I'm a crow, so first I'll make my feathers loose."

He shivered his entire body. His movement reminded me of a sparrow wetting it's feathers in a puddle. He lowered his head like a bird dipping it's beak into the water.

"That feels really good," he said, and began to laugh.

His laughter was strange. It had a very peculiar mesmerizing effect on me. I recollected having heard him laugh in that manner many times before. Perhaps the reason I had never become overtly aware of it was that he had never laughed like that long enough in my presence.

"A crow loosens it's neck next," he said, and began twisting his neck and rubbing his cheeks on his shoulders. "Then he looks at the world with one eye and then with the other."

His head shook as he allegedly shifted his view of the world from one eye to the other. The pitch of his laughter became higher. I had the absurd feeling that he was going to turn into a crow in front of my eyes. I wanted to laugh it off but I was almost paralyzed. I actually felt some kind of enveloping force around me. I was not afraid nor was I dizzy or sleepy. My faculties were unimpaired, to the best of my judgment.

"Turn on your car now," don Juan said.

I turned on the starter and automatically stepped on the gas pedal. The starter began to grind without igniting the engine. Don Juan's laughter was a soft, rhythmical cackle. I tried it again; and again. I spent perhaps ten minutes grinding the starter of my car. Don Juan cackled all that time. Then I gave up and sat there with a heavy head.

He stopped laughing and scrutinized me and I "knew" then that his laughter had forced me into a sort of hypnotic trance. Although I had been thoroughly aware of what was taking place, I felt I was not myself. During the time I could not start my car I was very docile, almost numb. It was as if don Juan was not only doing something to my car but also to me. When he stopped cackling I was convinced the spell was over, and impetuously I turned on the starter again. I had the certainty don Juan had only mesmerized me with his laughter and made me believe I could not start my car. With the corner of my eye I saw him looking curiously at me as I ground the motor and pumped the gas furiously.

Don Juan patted me gently and said that fury would make me "solid" and perhaps I would not need to be washed in the water again. The more furious I could get, the quicker I could recover from my encounter with the ally.

"Don't be embarrassed," I heard don Juan saying. "Kick the car."

His natural everyday laughter exploded, and I felt ridiculous and laughed sheepishly.

After a while don Juan said he had released the car. It started!

## Chapter 14

There was something eerie about don Juan's house. For a moment I thought he was hiding somewhere around the place to scare me. I called out to him and then gathered enough nerve to walk inside. Don Juan was not there. I put the two bags of groceries I had brought on a pile of firewood and sat down to wait for him, as I had done dozens of times before. But for the first time in my years of associating with don Juan I was afraid to stay alone in his house. I felt a presence, as if someone invisible was there with me. I remembered then that years before I had had the same vague feeling that something unknown was prowling around me when I was alone. I jumped to my feet and ran out of the house.

I had come to see don Juan to tell him that the cumulative effect of the task of "seeing" was taking it's toll on me. I had begun to feel uneasy; vaguely apprehensive without any overt reason; tired without being fatigued. Then my reaction at being alone in don Juan's house brought back the total memory of how my fear had built up in the past.

The fear traced back to years before, when don Juan had forced the very strange confrontation between a sorceress, a woman he called "la Catalina," and me. It began on November 23, 1961, when I found him in his house with a dislocated ankle. He explained that he had an enemy, a sorceress who could turn into a blackbird and who had attempted to kill him.

"As soon as I can walk I'm going to show you who the woman is," don Juan said. "You must know who she is,"

"Why does she want to kill you?"

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently and refused to say anything else.

I came back to see him ten days later and found him perfectly well. He rotated his ankle to demonstrate to me mat it was fine and attributed his prompt recovery to the nature of the cast he himself had made.

"It's good you're here," he said. "Today I'm going to take you on a little journey."

He then directed me to drive to a desolate area. We stopped there; don Juan stretched his legs and made himself comfortable on the seat, as if he were going to take a nap. He told me to relax and remain very quiet; he said we had to be as inconspicuous as possible until nightfall because the late afternoon was a very dangerous time for the business we were pursuing.

"What kind of business are we pursuing?" I asked.

"We are here to stake out la Catalina," he said.

When it was fairly dark we slid out of the car and walked very slowly and noiselessly into the desert chaparral.

From the place where we stopped I could distinguish the black silhouette of the hills on both sides. We were in a flat, fairly wide canyon. Don Juan gave me detailed instructions on how to stay merged with the chaparral and taught me a way to sit "in vigil," as he called it. He told me to tuck my right leg under my left thigh and keep my left leg in a squat position. He explained that the tucked leg was used as a spring in order to stand up with great speed, if it were necessary. He then told me to sit facing the west, because that was the direction of the woman's house. He sat next to me, to my right, and told me in a whisper to keep my eyes focused on the ground, searching, or rather, waiting, for a sort of wind wave that would make a ripple in the bushes. Whenever the ripple touched the bushes on which I had focused my gaze, I was supposed to look up and see the sorceress in all her "magnificent evil splendor." Don Juan actually used those words. When I asked him to explain what he meant, he said that if I detected a ripple I simply had to look up and see for myself, because "a sorcerer in flight" was such a unique sight that it defied explanations.

There was a fairly steady wind and I thought I detected a ripple in the bushes many times. I looked up each time, prepared to have a transcendental experience, but I did not see anything. Every time the wind blew the bushes don Juan would kick the ground vigorously, whirling around, moving his arms as if they were whips. The strength of his movements was extraordinary.

After a few failures to see the sorceress "in flight" I was sure I was not going to witness any transcendental event, yet don Juan's display of "power" was so exquisite that I did not mind spending the night there.

At daybreak don Juan sat down by me. He seemed to be totally exhausted. He could hardly move. He lay down on his back and mumbled that he had failed to "pierce the woman." I was very intrigued by that statement; he repeated it several times and each time his tone became more downhearted, more desperate. I began to experience an unusual anxiety. I found it very easy to project my feelings into don Juan's mood.

Don Juan did not mention anything about the incident or the woman for several months. I thought he had either forgotten or resolved the whole affair. One day, however, I found him in a very agitated mood, and in a manner that was completely incongruous with his natural calmness he hold me that the "blackbird" had stood in front of him the night before, almost touching him, and that he had not even awakened. The woman's artfulness was so great that he had not felt her presence at all. He said his good fortune was to wake up in the nick of time to stage a horrendous fight for his life. Don Juan's tone of voice was moving, almost pathetic. I felt an overwhelming surge of compassion and concern.

In a somber and dramatic tone he reaffirmed that he had no way to stop her and that the next time she came near him was going to be his last day on earth. I became despondent and was nearly in tears. Don Juan seemed to notice my profound concern and laughed, I thought, bravely. He patted me on the back and said that I should not worry, that he was not altogether lost yet, because he had one last card, a trump card.

"A warrior lives strategically," he said, smiling. "A warrior never carries loads he cannot handle."

Don Juan's smile had the power to dispel the ominous clouds of doom. I suddenly felt elated and we both laughed. He patted my head.

"You know, of all the things on this earth, you are my last card," he said abruptly, looking straight into my eyes.

"What?"

"You are my trump card in my fight against that witch."

I did not understand what he meant and he explained that the woman did not know me and that if I played my hand as he would direct me, I had a better than good chance to "pierce her."

"What do you mean by pierce her'?"

"You cannot kill her but you must pierce her like a balloon. If you do that she'll leave me alone. But don't think about it now. I'll tell you what to do when the time comes."

Months went by. I had forgotten the incident and was caught by surprise when I arrived at his house one day; don Juan came out running and did not let me get out of my car.

"You must leave immediately," he whispered with appalling urgency. "Listen carefully. Buy a shotgun, or get one in any way you can; don't bring me your own gun, do you understand? Get any gun, except your own, and bring it here right away."

"Why do you want a shotgun?"

"Go now!"

I returned with a shotgun. I had not had enough money to buy one but a friend of mine had given me his old gun. Don Juan did not look at it; he explained, laughing, that he had been abrupt with me because the blackbird was on the roof of the house and he did not want her to see me.

"Finding the blackbird on the roof gave me the idea that you could bring a gun and pierce her with it," don Juan said emphatically. "I don't want anything to happen to you, so I suggested that you buy the gun or that you get one in any other way. You see, you have to destroy the gun after completing the task."

"What kind of task are you talking about?"

"You must attempt to pierce the woman with your shotgun."

He made me clean the gun by rubbing it with the fresh leaves and stems of a peculiarly scented plant. He himself rubbed two shells and placed them inside the barrels. Then he said I was to hide in front of his house and wait until the blackbird landed on the roof and then, after taking careful aim, I was supposed to let go with both barrels. The effect of the surprise, more than the pellets, would pierce the woman, and if I were powerful and determined I could force her to leave him alone. Thus my aim had to be impeccable and so did my determination to pierce her.

"You must scream at the moment you shoot," he said. "It must be a potent and piercing yell."

He then piled bundles of bamboo and fire sticks about ten feet away from the *ramada* of his house. He made me lean against the piles. The position was quite comfortable. I was sort of half-seated; my back was well propped and I had a good view of the roof.

He said it was too early for the witch to be out, and that we had until dusk to do all the preparations; he would then pretend he was locking himself inside the house, in order to attract her and elicit another attack on his person. He told me to relax and find a comfortable position that I could shoot from without moving. He made me aim at the roof a couple of times and concluded that the act of lifting the gun to my shoulder and taking aim was too slow and cumbersome. He then built a prop for the gun. He made two deep holes with a pointed iron bar, planted two forked sticks in them, and tied a long pole in between the forks. The structure gave me a shooting support and allowed me to keep the gun aimed at the roof.

Don Juan looked at the sky and said it was time for him to go into the house. He got up and calmly went inside, giving me the final admonition that my endeavor was not a joke and that I had to hit the bird with the first shot.

After don Juan left I had a few more minutes of twilight and then it became quite dark. It seemed as if darkness had been waiting until I was alone and suddenly it descended on me. I tried to focus my eyes on the roof, which was silhouetted against the sky; for a while there was enough light on the horizon so the line of the roof was still visible, but then the sky became black and I could hardly see the house. I kept my eyes focused on the roof for hours without noticing anything at all. I saw a couple of owls flying by toward the north; the span of their wings was quite remarkable and they could not be mistaken for blackbirds. At a given moment, however, I distinctly noticed the black shape of a small bird landing on the roof. It was definitely a bird! My heart began pounding hard; I felt a buzzing in my ears. I aimed in the dark and pulled both triggers. There was quite a loud explosion. I felt a strong recoil of the gun butt on my shoulder and at the same time I heard a most piercing and horrendous human shriek. It was loud and eerie and seemed to have come from the roof. I had a moment of total confusion. I then remembered that don Juan had admonished me to yell as I shot and I had forgotten to do so. I was thinking of reloading my gun when don Juan opened the door and came out running. He had his kerosene lantern with him. He appeared to be quite nervous.

"I think you got her," he said. "We must find the dead bird now."

He brought a ladder and made me climb up and look on the *ramada*, but I could not find anything there. He climbed up and looked himself for a while, with equally negative results.

"Perhaps you have blasted the bird to bits," don Juan said, "in which case we must find at least a feather."

We began looking around the *ramada* first and then around the house. We looked with the light of the lantern until morning. Then we started looking again all over the area we had covered during the night. Around 11:00 a.m. don Juan called off our search. He sat down dejected, smiled sheepishly at me, and said that I had failed to stop his enemy and that now, more than ever before, his life was not worth a hoot because the woman was doubtlessly irked, itching to take revenge.

"You're safe, though," don Juan said reassuringly. "'The woman doesn't know you."

As I was walking to my car to return home, I asked him if I had to destroy the shotgun. He said the gun had done nothing and I should give it back to it's owner. I noticed a profound look of despair in don Juan's eyes. I felt so moved by it that I was about to weep.

"What can I do to help you?" I asked,

"There's nothing you can do," don Juan said.

We remained silent for a moment. I wanted to leave right away, I felt an oppressive anguish. I was ill at ease,

"Would you really try to help me?" don Juan asked in a childlike tone.

I told him again that my total person was at his disposal, that my affection for him was so profound I would undertake any kind of action to help him. Don Juan smiled and asked again if I really meant that, and I vehemently reaffirmed my desire to help him.

"If you really mean it," he said, "I may have one more chance."

He seemed to be delighted. He smiled broadly and clapped his hands several times, the way he always does when he wants to express a feeling of pleasure. This change of mood was so remarkable that it also involved me. I suddenly felt that the oppressive mood, the anguish, had been vanquished and life was inexplicably exciting again. Don Juan sat down and I did likewise. He looked at me for a long moment and then proceeded to tell me in a very calm and deliberate manner that I was in fact the only person who could help him at that moment, and thus he was going to ask me to do something very dangerous and very special.

He paused for a moment as if he wanted a reaffirmation on my part, and I again reiterated my firm desire to do anything for him.

"I'm going to give you a weapon to pierce her," he said.

He took a long object from his pouch and handed it to me. I took it and then examined it. I almost dropped it.

"It is a wild boar," he went on, "You must pierce her with it."

The object I was holding was a dry foreleg of a wild boar. The skin was ugly and the bristles were revolting to the touch. The hoof was intact and it's two halves were spread out, as if the leg were stretched. It was an awful-looking thing. It made me feel almost sick to my stomach. He quickly took it back.

"You must ram the wild boar right into her navel," don Juan said.

"What?" I said in a feeble voice.

"You must hold the wild boar in your left hand and stab her with it. She is a sorceress and the wild boar will enter her belly and no one in this world, except another sorcerer, will see it stuck in there. This is not an ordinary battle but an affair of sorcerers. The danger you will run is that if you fail to pierce her she might strike you dead on the spot, or her companions and relatives will shoot you or knife you. You may, on the other hand, get out without a scratch.

"If you succeed she will have a hellish time with the wild boar in her body and she will leave me alone."

An oppressive anguish enveloped me again. I had a profound affection for don Juan. I admired him. At the time of this startling request, I had already learned to regard his way of life and his knowledge as a paramount accomplishment. How could anyone let a man like that die? And yet how could anyone deliberately risk his life? I became so immersed in my deliberations I did not notice that don Juan had stood up and was standing by me until he patted me on the shoulder. I looked up; he was smiling benevolently.

"Whenever you feel that you really want to help me, you should return," he said, "but not until then. If you come back I know what we will have to do. Go now! If you don't want to return I'll understand that too."

I automatically stood up, got into my car, and drove away. Don Juan had actually let me off the hook. I could have left and never returned, but somehow the thought of being free to leave did not soothe me. I drove a while longer and then impulsively turned around and drove back to don Juan's house.

He was still sitting underneath his *ramada* and did not seem surprised to see me.

"Sit down," he said. "The clouds in the west are beautiful. It will be dark shortly. Sit quietly and let the twilight fill you. Do whatever you want now, but when I tell you, look straight at those shiny clouds and ask the twilight to give you power and calmness."

I sat facing the western clouds for a couple of hours. Don Juan went into the house and stayed inside. When it was getting dark he returned.

"The twilight has come," he said. "Stand up! Don't close your eyes, but look straight at the clouds; put your arms up with your hands open and your fingers extended and trot in place."

I followed his instructions; I lifted my arms over my head and began trotting. Don Juan came to my side and corrected my movements. He placed the leg of the wild boar against the palm of my left hand and made me hold it with my thumb. He then pulled my arms down until they pointed to the orange and dark gray clouds over the horizon, toward the west. He extended my fingers like fans and told me not to curl them over the palms of my hands. It was of crucial importance that I keep my fingers spread because if I closed them I would not be asking the twilight for power and calm, but would be menacing it. He also corrected my trotting. He said it should be peaceful and uniform, as if I were actually running toward the twilight with my extended arms.

I could not fall asleep during that night. It was as if, instead of calming me, the twilight had agitated me into a frenzy.

"I still have so many things pending in my life," I said. "So many things unresolved."

Don Juan chuckled softly.

"Nothing is pending in the world," he said. "Nothing is finished, yet nothing is unresolved. Go to sleep."

Don Juan's words were strangely soothing.

Around ten o'clock the next morning, don Juan gave me something to eat and then we were on our way. He whispered that we were going to approach the woman around noon, or before noon if possible. He said that the ideal time would have been the early hours of the day, because a witch is always less powerful or less aware in the morning, but she would never leave the protection of her house at those hours. I did not ask any questions. He directed me to the highway and at a certain point he told me to stop and park on the side of the road. He said we had to wait there.

I looked at my watch; it was five minutes to eleven. I yawned repeatedly. I was actually sleepy; my mind wandered around aimlessly.

Suddenly don Juan straightened up and nudged me. I jumped up in my seat.

"There she is!" he said.

I saw a woman walking toward the highway on the edge of a cultivated field. She was carrying a basket looped in her right arm. It was not until then that I noticed we were parked near a crossroads. There were two narrow trails which ran parallel to both sides of the highway and another wider and more trafficked trail that ran perpendicular to the highway; obviously people who used that trail had to walk across the paved road.

When the woman was still on the dirt road don Juan told me to get out of the car.

"Do it now," he said firmly.

I obeyed him. The woman was almost on the highway. I ran and overtook her. I was so close to her that I felt her clothes on my face. I took the wild boar hoof from under my shirt and thrust it at her. I did not feel any resistance to the blunt object I had in my hand. I saw a fleeting shadow in front of me, like a drape; my head turned to my right and I saw the woman standing fifty feet away on the opposite side of the road. She was a fairly young, dark woman with a strong, stocky body. She was smiling at me. Her teeth were white and big and her smile was placid. She had closed her eyes halfway, as if to protect them from the wind. She was still holding her basket, looped over her right arm.

I then had a moment of unique confusion. I turned around to look at don Juan. He was making frantic gestures to call me back. I ran back. There were three or four men coming in a hurry toward me. I got into the car and sped away in the opposite direction.

I tried to ask don Juan what had happened but I could not talk; my ears were bursting with an overwhelming pressure; I felt that I was choking. He seemed to be pleased and began to laugh. It was as if my failure did not concern him. I had my hands so tight around the steering wheel that I could not move them; they were frozen; my arms were rigid and so were my legs. In fact I could not take my foot off the gas pedal.

Don Juan patted me on the back and told me to relax. Little by little the pressure in my ears diminished.

"What happened back there?" I finally asked.

He giggled like a child without answering. Then he asked me if I had noticed the way the woman got out of the way. He praised her excellent speed. Don Juan's talk seemed so incongruous that I could not really follow him. He praised the woman! He said her power was impeccable and she was a relentless enemy.

I asked don Juan if he did not mind my failure. I was truly surprised and annoyed at his change of mood. He seemed to be actually glad.

He told me to stop. I parked alongside the road. He put his hand on my shoulder and looked piercingly into my eyes.

"Whatever I have done to you today was a trick," he said bluntly. "The rule is that a man of knowledge has to trap his apprentice. Today I have trapped you and I have tricked you into learning."

I was dumbfounded. I could not arrange my thoughts. Don Juan explained that the whole involvement with the woman was a trap; that she had never been a threat to him; and that his job was to put me in touch with her, under specific conditions of abandon and power I had experienced when I tried to pierce her. He commended my resolution and called it an act of power which demonstrated to the woman that I was capable of great exertion. Don Juan said that even though I was not aware of it, all I did was to show off in front of her.

"You could never touch her," he said, "but you showed your claws to her. She knows now that you're not afraid. You have challenged her. I used her to trick you because she's powerful and relentless and never forgets. Men are usually too busy to be relentless enemies."

I felt a terrible anger. I told him that one should not play with a person's innermost feelings and loyalties.

Don Juan laughed until tears rolled down his cheeks, and I hated him. I had an overwhelming desire to punch him and leave; there was, however, such a strange rhythm in his laughter that it kept me almost paralyzed.

"Don't be so angry," don Juan said soothingly.

Then he said that his acts had never been a farce, that he also had thrown his life away a long time before when his own benefactor tricked him, just as he had tricked me. Don Juan said that his benefactor was a cruel man who did not think about him the way he, don Juan, thought about me. He added very sternly that the woman had tested her strength against him and had really tried to kill him.

"Now she knows that I was playing with her," he said, laughing, "and she'll hate you for it. She can't do anything to me, but she will take it out on you. She doesn't know yet how much power you have, so she will come to test you, little by little. Now you have no choice but to learn in order to defend yourself, or you will fall prey to that lady. She is no trick."

Don Juan reminded me of the way she had flown away.

"Don't be angry," he said. "It was not an ordinary trick. It was the rule."

There was something about the way the woman moved away from me that was truly maddening. I had witnessed it myself: she had jumped the width of the highway in a flick of an eyelash. I had no way to get out of that certainty. From that moment on I focused all my attention on that incident and little by little I accumulated "proof" that she was actually following me. The final outcome was that I had to withdraw from the apprenticeship under the pressure of my irrational fear.

I came back to don Juan's house hours later, in the early afternoon. He was apparently waiting for me. He came up to me as I got out of my car and examined me with curious eyes, walking around me a couple of times.

"Why the nervousness?" he asked before I had time to say anything.

I explained that something had scared me off that morning and that I had begun to feel something prowling around me, as in the past. Don Juan sat down and seemed to be engulfed in thoughts. His face had an unusually serious expression. He seemed to be tired. I sat by him and arranged my notes.

After a very long pause his face brightened up and he smiled.

"What you felt this morning was the spirit of the water hole," he said. "I've told you that you must be prepared for unexpected encounters with those forces. I thought you understood."

"I did."

"Then why the fear?"

I could not answer.

"That spirit is on your trail," he said. "It already tapped you in the water. I assure you it will tap you again and probably you won't be prepared and that encounter will be your end."

Don Juan's words made me feel genuinely concerned. My feelings were strange, however; I was concerned but not afraid. Whatever was happening to me had not been able to elicit my old feelings of blind fear.

"What should I do?" I asked.

"You forget too easily," he said. "The path of knowledge is a forced one. In order to learn we must be spurred. In the path of knowledge we are always fighting something, avoiding something, prepared for something; and that something is always inexplicable, greater, more powerful than us. The inexplicable forces will come to you. Now it is the spirit of the water hole, later on it'll be your own ally, so there is nothing you can do now but to prepare yourself for the struggle. Years ago la Catalina spurred you, she was only a sorceress, though, and that was a beginner's trick.

"The world is indeed full of frightening things and we are helpless creatures surrounded by forces that are inexplicable and unbending. The average man, in ignorance, believes that those forces can be explained or changed; he doesn't really know how to do that, but he expects that the actions of mankind will explain them or change them sooner or later. The sorcerer, on the other hand, does not think of explaining or changing them; instead, he learns to use such forces by redirecting himself and adapting to their direction. That's his trick. There is very little to sorcery once you find out it's trick. A sorcerer is only slightly better off than the average man. Sorcery does not help him to live a better life; in fact I should say that sorcery hinders him; it makes his life cumbersome, precarious. By opening himself to knowledge a sorcerer becomes more vulnerable than the average man. On the one hand his fellow men hate him and fear him and will strive to end his life; on the other hand the inexplicable and unbending forces that surround every one of us, by right of our being alive, are for a sorcerer a source of even greater danger. To be pierced by a fellow man is indeed painful, but nothing in comparison to being touched by an ally. A sorcerer, by opening himself to knowledge, falls prey to such forces and has only one means of balancing himself, his will; thus he must feel and act like a warrior. I will repeat this once more: Only as a warrior can one survive the path of knowledge. What helps a sorcerer live a better life is the strength of being a warrior.

"It is my commitment to teach you to *see*. Not because I personally want to do so but because you were chosen; you were pointed out to me by Mescalito. I am compelled by my personal desire, however, to teach you to feel and act like a warrior. I personally believe that to be a warrior is more suitable than anything else. Therefore I have endeavored to show you those forces as a sorcerer perceives them, because only under their terrifying impact can one become a warrior. To *see* without first being a warrior would make you weak; it would give you a false meekness, a desire to retreat; your body would decay because you would become indifferent. It is my personal commitment to make you a warrior so you won't crumble.

"I have heard you say time and time again that you are always prepared to die. I don't regard that feeling as necessary. I think it is a useless indulgence. A warrior should be prepared only to battle. I have also heard you say that your parents injured your spirit. I think the spirit of man is something that can be injured very easily, although not by the same acts you yourself call injurious. I believe that your parents did injure you by making you indulgent and soft and given to dwelling.

"The spirit of a warrior is not geared to indulging and complaining, nor is it geared to winning or losing. The spirit of a warrior is geared only to struggle, and every struggle is a warrior's last battle on earth. Thus the outcome matters very little to him. In his last battle on earth a warrior lets his spirit flow free and clear. And as he wages his battle, knowing that his will is impeccable, a warrior laughs and laughs."

I finished writing and looked up. Don Juan was staring at me. He shook his head from side to side and smiled.

"You really write everything?" he asked in an incredulous tone. "Genaro says that he can never be serious with you because you're always writing. He's right; how can anyone be serious if you're always writing?"

He chuckled and I tried to defend my position.

"It doesn't matter," he said, "If you ever learn to see, I suppose you must do it your own weird way."

He stood up and looked at the sky. It was around noon. He said there was still time to start on a hunting trip to a place in the mountains.

"What are we going to hunt?" I asked.

"A special animal, either a deer or a wild boar or even a mountain lion."

He paused for a moment and then added, "Even an eagle."

I stood up and followed him to my car. He said that this time we were going only to observe and to find out what animal we had to hunt. He was about to get in my car when he seemed to remember something. He smiled and said that the journey had to be postponed until I had learned something without which our hunting would be impossible.

We went back and sat down again underneath his *ramada*. There were so many things I wanted to ask, but he did not give me time to say anything before he spoke again.

"This brings us to the last point you must know about a warrior," he said. "A warrior selects the items that make his world.

"The other day when you saw the ally and I had to wash you twice, do you know what was wrong with you?"

"No."

"You had lost your shields."

"What shields? What are you talking about?"

"I said that a warrior selects the items that make his world. He selects deliberately, for every item he chooses is a shield that protects him from the onslaughts of the forces he is striving to use. A warrior would use his shields to protect himself from his ally, for instance.

"An average man who is equally surrounded by those inexplicable forces is oblivious to them because he has other kinds of special shields to protect himself."

He paused and looked at me with a question in his eyes. I had not understood what he meant.

"What are those shields?" I insisted.

"What people do," he repeated.

"What do they do?"

"Well, look around. People are busy doing that which people do. Those are their shields. Whenever a sorcerer has an encounter with any of those inexplicable and unbending forces we have talked about, his gap opens, making him more susceptible to his death than he ordinarily is; I've told you that we die through that gap, therefore if it is open one should have his will ready to fill it; that is, if one is a warrior. If one is not a warrior, like yourself, then one has no other recourse but to use the activities of daily life to take one's mind away from the fright of the encounter and thus to allow one's gap to close. You got angry with me that day when you met the ally. I made you angry when I stopped your car and I made you cold when I dumped you into the water. Having your clothes on made you even colder. Being angry and cold helped you close your gap and you were protected. At this time in your life, however, you can no longer use those shields as effectively as an average man. You know too much about those forces and now you are finally at the brink of feeling and acting as a warrior. Your old shields are no longer safe."

"What am I supposed to do?"

"Act like a warrior and select the items of your world. You cannot surround yourself with things helter-skelter any longer. I tell you this in a most serious vein. Now for the first time you are not safe in your old way of life."

"What do you mean by selecting the items of my world?"

"A warrior encounters those inexplicable and unbending forces because he is deliberately seeking them, thus he is always prepared for the encounter. You, on the other hand, are never prepared for it. In fact if those forces come to you they will take you by surprise; the fright will open your gap and your life will irresistibly escape through it. The first thing you must do, then, is be prepared. Think that the ally is going to pop in front of your eyes any minute and you must be ready for him. To meet an ally is no party or Sunday picnic and a warrior takes the responsibility of protecting his life. Then if any of those forces tap you and open your gap, you must deliberately strive to close it by yourself. For that purpose you must have a selected number of things that give you great peace and pleasure, things which you can deliberately use to take your thoughts from your fright and close your gap and make you solid."

"What kind of things?"

"Years ago I told you that in his day-to-day life a warrior chooses to follow the path with heart. It is the consistent choice of the path with heart which makes a warrior different from the average man. He knows that a path has heart when he is one with it, when he experiences a great peace and pleasure traversing it's length. The things a warrior selects to make his shields are the items of a path with heart."

"But you said I'm not a warrior, so how can I choose a path with heart?"

"This is your turning point. Let's say that before you did not really need to live like a warrior. Now it is different, now you must surround yourself with the items of a path with heart and you must refuse the rest, or you will perish in the next encounter. I may add that you don't need to ask for the encounter any longer. An ally can now come to you in your sleep; while you are talking to your friends; while you are writing."

"For years I have truly tried to live in accordance with your teachings," I said. "Obviously I have not done well. How can I do better now?"

"You think and talk too much. You must stop talking to yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"You talk to yourself too much. You're not unique at that. Every one of us does that. We carry on an internal talk. Think about it. Whenever you are alone, what do you do?"

"I talk to myself."

"What do you talk to yourself about?"

"I don't know; anything, I suppose."

"I'll tell you what we talk to ourselves about. We talk about our world. In fact we maintain our world with our internal talk."

"How do we do that?"

"Whenever we finish talking to ourselves the world is always as it should be. We renew it, we kindle it with life, we uphold it with our internal talk. Not only that, but we also choose our paths as we talk to ourselves. Thus we repeat the same choices over and over until the day we die, because we keep on repeating the same internal talk over and over until the day we die.

"A warrior is aware of this and strives to stop his talking. This is the last point you have to know if you want to live like a warrior."

"How can I stop talking to myself?"

"First of all you must use your ears to take some of the burden from your eyes. We have been using our eyes to judge the world since the time we were born. We talk to others and to ourselves mainly about what we see. A warrior is aware of that and listens to the world; he listens to the sounds of the world."

I put my notes away. Don Juan laughed and said that he did not mean I should force the issue, that listening to the sounds of the world had to be done harmoniously and with great patience.

"A warrior is aware that the world will change as soon as he stops talking to himself," he said, "and he must be prepared for that monumental jolt."

"What do you mean, don Juan?"

"The world is such-and-such or so-and-so only because we tell ourselves that that is the way it is. If we stop telling ourselves that the world is so-and-so, the world will stop being so-and-so. At this moment I don't think you're ready for such a momentous blow, therefore you must start slowly to undo the world."

"I really do not understand you!"

"Your problem is that you confuse the world with what people do. Again you're not unique at that. Every one of us does that. The things people do are the shields against the forces that surround us; what we do as people gives us comfort and makes us feel safe; what people do is rightfully very important, but only as a shield. We never learn that the things we do as people are only shields and we let them dominate and topple our lives. In fact I could say that for mankind, what people do is greater and more important than the world itself."

"What do you call the world?"

"The world is all that is encased here," he said, and stomped the ground. "Life, death, people, the allies, and everything else that surrounds us. The world is incomprehensible. We won't ever understand it; we won't ever unravel it's secrets. Thus we must treat it as it is, a sheer mystery!

"An average man doesn't do this, though. The world is never a mystery for him, and when he arrives at old age he is convinced he has nothing more to live for. An old man has not exhausted the world. He has exhausted only what people do. But in his stupid confusion he believes that the world has no more mysteries for him. What a wretched price to pay for our shields!

"A warrior is aware of this confusion and learns to treat things properly. The things that people do cannot under any conditions be more important than the world. And thus a warrior treats the world as an endless mystery and what people do as an endless folly."

## Chapter 15

I began the exercise of listening to the "sounds of the world" and kept at it for two months, as don Juan had specified. It was excruciating at first to listen and not look, but even more excruciating was not to talk to myself. By the end of the two months I was capable of shutting off my internal dialogue for short periods of time and I was also capable of paying attention to sounds.

I arrived at don Juan's house at 9:00 A.M. on November 10, 1969.

"We should start that trip right now," he said upon my arrival at his house.

I rested for an hour and then we drove toward the low slopes of the mountains to the east. We left my car in the care of one of his friends who lived in that area while we hiked into the mountains. Don Juan had put some crackers and sweet rolls in a knapsack for me. There were enough provisions for a day or two. I had asked don Juan if we needed more. He shook his head negatively.

We walked the entire morning. It was a rather warm day. I carried one canteen of water, most of which I drank myself. Don Juan drank only twice. When there was no more water he assured me it was all right to drink from the streams we found on our way. He laughed at my reluctance. After a short while my thirst made me overcome my fears.

In the early afternoon we stopped in a small valley at the bottom of some lush green hills. Behind the hills, toward the east, the high mountains were silhouetted against a cloudy sky.

"You can think, you can write about what we say or about what you perceive, but nothing about where we are," he said.

We rested for a while and then he took a bundle from inside his shirt. He untied it and showed me his pipe. He filled it's bowl with smoking mixture, lighted a match and kindled a small dry twig, placed the burning twig inside the bowl, and told me to smoke. Without a piece of charcoal inside the bowl it was difficult to light the pipe; we had to keep kindling twigs until the mixture caught on fire.

When I had finished smoking he said that we were there so I could find out the kind of game I was supposed to hunt. He carefully repeated three or four times that the most important aspect of my endeavor was to find some holes. He emphasized the word "holes" and said that inside them a sorcerer could find all sorts of messages and directions.

I wanted to ask what kind of holes they were; don Juan seemed to have guessed my question and said that they were impossible to describe and were in the realm of "seeing." He repeated at various times that I should focus all my attention on listening to sounds and do my best to find the holes between the sounds. He said that he was going to play his spirit catcher four times. I was supposed to use those eerie calls as a guide to the ally that had welcomed me; that ally would then give me the message I was seeking. Don Juan told me I should stay in complete alertness, since he had no idea how the ally would manifest himself to me.

I listened attentively. I was sitting with my back against the rock side of the hill. I experienced a mild numbness. Don Juan warned me against closing my eyes. I began to listen and I could distinguish the whistling of birds, the wind rustling the leaves, the buzzing of insects. As I placed my individual attention on those sounds, I could actually make out four different types of bird whistlings. I could distinguish the speeds of the wind, in terms of slow or fast; I could also hear the different rustlings of three types of leaves. The buzzings of insects were dazzling. There were so many that I could not count them or correctly differentiate them.

I was immersed in a strange world of sound, as I had never been in my life. I began to slide to my right. Don Juan made a motion to stop me but I caught myself before he did. I straightened up and sat erect again. Don Juan moved my body until he had propped me on a crevice in the rock wall. He swept the small rocks from under my legs and placed the back of my head against the rock.

He told me imperatively to look at the mountains to the southeast. I fixed my gaze in the distance but he corrected me and said I should not gaze but look, sort of scanning, at the hills in front of me and at the vegetation on them. He repeated over and over that I should concentrate all my attention on my hearing.

Sounds began to be prominent again. It was not so much that I wanted to hear them; rather, they had a way of forcing me to concentrate on them. The wind rustled the leaves. The wind came high above the trees and then it dropped into the valley where we were. Upon dropping, it touched the leaves of the tall trees first; they made a peculiar sound which I fancied to be a sort of rich, raspy, lush sound. Then the wind hit the bushes and their leaves sounded like a crowd of small things; it was an almost melodious sound, very engulfing and quite demanding; it seemed capable of drowning everything else. I found it displeasing. I felt embarrassed because it occurred to me that I was like the rustle of the bushes, nagging and demanding. The sound was so akin to me that I hated it. Then I heard the wind rolling on the ground. It was not a rustling sound but more of a whistle, almost a beep or a flat buzz. Listening to the sounds the wind was making, I realized that all three of them happened at once. I was wondering how I had been capable of isolating each of them, when I again became aware of the whistling of birds and the buzzing of insects. At one moment there were only the sounds of the wind and the next moment a gigantic flow of other sounds emerged at once into my field of awareness. Logically, all the existing sounds must have been continually emitted during the time I was hearing only the wind.

I could not count all the whistles of birds or buzzings of insects, yet I was convinced I was listening to each separate sound as it was produced. Together they created a most extraordinary order. I cannot call it any other thing but "order." It was an order of sounds that had a pattern; that is, every sound happened in sequence.

Then I heard a unique prolonged wail. It made me shiver. Every other noise ceased for an instant, and the valley was dead still as the reverberation of the wail reached the valley's outer limits; then the noises began again. I picked up their pattern immediately. After a moment of attentive listening I thought I understood don Juan's recommendation to watch for the holes between the sounds. The pattern of noises had spaces in between sounds! For example, specific whistles of birds were timed and had pauses in between them, and so had all the other sounds I was perceiving. The rustling of leaves was like a binding glue that made them into a homogeneous buzz. The fact of the matter was that the timing of each sound was a unit in the overall pattern of sounds. Thus the spaces or pauses in between sounds were, if I paid attention to them, holes in a structure.

I heard again the piercing wail of don Juan's spirit catcher. It did not jolt me, but the sounds again ceased for an instant and I perceived such a cessation as a hole, a very large hole. At that precise moment I shifted my attention from hearing to looking. I was looking at a cluster of low hills with lush green vegetation. The silhouette of the hills was arranged in such a way that from the place where I was looking there seemed to be a hole on the side of one of the hills. It was a space in between two hills and through it I could see the deep, dark, gray hue of the mountains in the distance. For a moment I did not know what it was. It was as if the hole I was looking at was the "hole" in the sound. Then the noises began again but the visual image of the huge hole remained. A short while later I became even more keenly aware of the pattern of sounds and their order and the arrangement of their pauses. My mind was capable of distinguishing and discriminating among an enormous number of individual sounds. I could actually keep track of all the sounds, thus each pause between sounds was a definite hole. At a given moment the pauses became crystallized in my mind and formed a sort of solid grid, a structure. I was not seeing or hearing it. I was feeling it with some unknown part of myself.

Don Juan played his string once again; the sounds ceased as they had done before, creating a huge hole in the sound structure. This time, however, that big pause blended with the hole in the hills I was looking at; they became superimposed on each other. The effect of perceiving two holes lasted for such a long time that I was capable of seeing-hearing their contours as they fit one another. Then the other sounds began again and their structure of pauses became an extraordinary, almost visual perception. I began seeing the sounds as they created patterns and then all those patterns became superimposed on the environment in the same way I had perceived the two big holes becoming superimposed. I was not looking or hearing as I was accustomed to doing. I was doing something which was entirely different but combined features of both. For some reason my attention was focused on the large hole in the hills. I felt I was hearing it and at the same time looking at it. There was something of a lure about it. It dominated my field of perception and every single sound pattern which coincided with a feature of the environment was hinged on that hole.

I heard once more the eerie wail of don Juan's spirit catcher; all other sounds stopped; the two large holes seemed to light up and next I was looking again at the plowed field; the ally was standing there as I had seen him before. The light of the total scene became very clear. I could see him plainly, as if he were fifty yards away. I could not see his face; his hat covered it. Then he began to come toward me, lifting up his head slowly as he walked; I could almost see his face and that terrified me. I knew I had to stop him without delay, I had a strange surge in my body; I felt an outflow of "power." I wanted to move my head to the side to stop the vision but I could not do it. At that crucial instant a thought came to my mind. I knew what don Juan meant when he spoke of the items of a "path with heart" being the shields. There was something I wanted to do in my life, something very consuming and intriguing, something that tilled me with great peace and joy. I knew the ally could not overcome me. I moved my head away without any trouble before I could see his entire face.

I began hearing all the other sounds; they suddenly became very loud and shrill, as if they were actually angry with me. They lost their patterns and turned into an amorphous conglomerate of sharp, painful shrieks. My ears began to buzz under their pressure. I felt that my head was about to explode. I stood up and put the palms of my hands to my ears.

Don Juan helped me walk to a very small stream, made me take off my clothes, and rolled me in the water. He made me lie on the almost dry bed of the stream and then gathered water in his hat and splashed me with it.

The pressure in my ears subsided very rapidly and it took only a few minutes to "wash" me. Don Juan looked at me, shook his head in approval, and said I had made myself "solid" in no time at all.

I put on my clothes and he took me back to the place where I had been sitting. I felt extremely vigorous, buoyant, and clearheaded.

He wanted to know all the details of my vision. He said that the "holes" in the sounds were used by sorcerers to find out specific things. A sorcerer's ally would reveal complicated affairs through the holes in the sounds. He refused to be more specific about the "holes" and sloughed off my questions, saying that since I did not have an ally such information would only be harmful to me.

"Everything is meaningful for a sorcerer," he said. "The sounds have holes in them and so does everything around you. Ordinarily a man does not have the speed to catch the holes, and thus he goes through life without protection. The worms, the birds, the trees, all of them can tell us unimaginable things if only one could have the speed to grasp their message. The smoke can give us that grasping speed. But we must be on good terms with all the living things of this world. This is the reason why we must talk to plants we are about to kill and apologize for hurting them; the same thing must be done with the animals we are going to hunt. We should take only enough for our needs, otherwise the plants and the animals and the worms we have killed would turn against us and cause us disease and misfortune. A warrior is aware of this and strives to appease them, so when he peers through the holes, the trees and birds and the worms give him truthful messages.

"But all this is not important now. What is important is that you saw the ally. That is your game! I've told you that we were going to hunt for something. I thought it was going to be an animal. I figured that you were going to see the animal we had to hunt. I myself saw a wild boar; my spirit catcher is a wild boar."

"Do you mean your spirit catcher is made out of a wild boar?"

"No! Nothing in the life of a sorcerer is made out of anything else. If something is anything at all, it is the thing itself. If you knew wild boars you would realize my spirit catcher is one."

"Why did we come here to hunt?"

"The ally showed you a spirit catcher that he got from his pouch. You need to have one if you are going to call him."

"What is a spirit catcher?"

"It is a fiber. With it I can call the allies, or my own ally, or I can call the spirits of water holes, the spirits of rivers, the spirits of mountains. Mine is a wild boar and cries like a wild boar. I used it twice around you to call the spirit of the water hole to help you. The spirit came to you as the ally came to you today. You could not see it, though, because you did not have the speed; however, that day I took you to the water canyon and put you on a rock, you knew the spirit was almost on top of you without actually seeing it. Those spirits are helpers. They are hard to handle and sort of dangerous. One needs an impeccable will to hold them at bay."

"What do they look like?"

"They are different for every man and so are the allies. For you an ally would apparently look like a man you once knew, or like a man you will always be about to know; that's the bent of your nature. You are given to mysteries and secrets. I'm not like you, so an ally for me is something very precise.

"The spirits of water holes are proper to specific places. The one I called to help you is one I have known myself. It has helped me many times. It's abode is that canyon. At the time I called it to help you, you were not strong and the spirit took you hard. That was not it's intention— they have none— but you were lying there very weak, weaker than I suspected. Later on the spirit nearly lured you to your death; in the water at the irrigation canal you were phosphorescent. The spirit took you by surprise and you nearly succumbed. Once a spirit does that, it always comes back for it's prey. I'm sure it will come back for you. Unfortunately, you need the water to become solid again when you use the little smoke; that puts you at a terrible disadvantage. If you don't use the water you will probably die, but if you do use it, the spirit will take you."

"Can I use water at another place?"

"It doesn't make any difference. The spirit of the water hole around my house can follow you anywhere, unless you have a spirit catcher. That is why the ally showed it to you. He told you that you need one. He wrapped it around his left hand and came to you after pointing out the water canyon. Today he again wanted to show you the spirit catcher, as he did the first time you met him. It was wise of you to stop; the ally was going too fast for your strength and a direct jolt with him would be very injurious to you."

"How can I get a spirit catcher now?"

"Apparently the ally is going to give you one himself."

"How?"

"I don't know. You will have to go to him. He has already told you where to look for it."

"Where?"

"Up there, on those hills where you saw the hole."

"Would I be looking for the ally himself?"

"No. But he is already welcoming you. The little smoke has opened your way to him. Then, later on, you will meet him face to face, but that will happen only after you know him very well."

## Chapter 16

We arrived in the same valley in the late afternoon of December 15, 1969. Don Juan mentioned repeatedly as we moved through the shrubs that directions or points of orientation were of crucial importance in the endeavor I was going to undertake.

"You must determine the right direction immediately upon arriving at the top of a hill," don Juan said. "As soon as you are on the top, face that direction." He pointed to the southeast. "That is your good direction and you should always face it, especially when you're in trouble. Remember that."

We stopped at the bottom of the hills where I had perceived the hole. He pointed at a specific place where I had to sit down; he sat next to me and in a very quiet voice gave me detailed instructions. He said that as soon as I reached the hilltop I had to extend my right arm in front of me with the palm of my hand down and my fingers stretched like a fan, except the thumb, which had to be tucked against the palm. Next I had to turn my head to the north and fold my arm over my chest, pointing my hand also toward the north; then I had to dance, putting my left foot behind the right one, beating the ground with the tip of my left toes. He said that when I felt a warmth coming up my left leg I had to begin sweeping my arm slowly from north to south and then to the north again.

"The spot over which the palm of your hand feels warm as you sweep your arm is the place where you must sit, and it is also the direction in which you must look," he said.

"If the spot is toward the east, or if it is in that direction"— he pointed to the southeast again— "the results will be excellent. If the spot where your hand gets warm is toward the north, you will take a bad beating but you may turn the tide in your favor. If the spot is toward the south you will have a hard fight.

"You will need to sweep your arm up to four times at first, but as you become more familiar with the movement you will need only one single sweep to know whether or not your hand is going to get warm.

"Once you establish a spot where your hand gets warm, sit there; that is your first point If you are facing the south or the north, you have to make up your mind whether you feel strong enough to stay. If you have doubts about yourself, get up and leave. There is no need to stay if you are not confident. If you decide to stick around, clean an area big enough to build a fire about five feet away from your first point. The fire must be in a straight line in the direction you are looking. The area where you build the fire is your second point. Then gather all the twigs you can in between those two points and make a fire. Sit on your first point and look at the fire. Sooner or later the spirit will come and you will see it.

"If your hand does not get warm at all after four sweeping movements, sweep your arm slowly from north to south and then turn around and sweep it to the west. If your hand gets warm on any place toward the west, drop everything and rum. Run downhill toward the flat area, and no matter what you hear or feel behind you, don't turn around. As soon as you get to the flat area, no matter how frightened you are, don't keep on running, drop to the ground, take off your jacket, bunch it around your navel, and curl up like a ball, tucking your knees against your stomach. You must also cover your eyes with your hands, and your arms have to remain tight against your thighs. You must stay in that position until morning. If you follow these simple steps no harm will ever come to you.

"In case you cannot get to the flat area in time, drop to the ground right where you are. You will have a horrid time there. You will be harassed, but if you keep calm and don't move or look you will come out of it without a single scratch.

"Now if your hand does not get warm at all while you sweep it to the west, face the east again and run in an easterly direction until you are out of breath. Stop there and repeat the same maneuvers. You must keep on running toward the east, repeating these movements, until your hand gets warm."

After giving me these instructions he made me repeat them until I had memorized them. Then we sat in silence for a long time. I attempted to revive the conversation a couple of times, but he forced me into silence each time by an imperative gesture.

It was getting dark when don Juan got up and without a word began climbing the hill. I followed him. At the top of the hill I performed all the movements he had prescribed. Don Juan stood by, a short distance away, and kept a sharp look on me. I was very careful and deliberately slow. I tried to feel any perceivable change of temperature, but I could not detect whether or not the palm of my hand became warm. By that time it was fairly dark, yet I was still capable of running in an easterly direction without stumbling on the shrubs. I stopped running when I was out of breath, which was not too far from my point of departure. I was extremely tired and tense. My forearms ached and so did my calves.

I repeated there all the required motions and again had the same negative results. I ran in the dark two more times, and then, while I was sweeping my arm for the third time, my hand became warm over a point toward the east. It was such a definite change of temperature that it startled me. I sat down and waited for don Juan. I told him I had detected a change in temperature in my hand. He told me to proceed, and I picked all the dry brush I could find and started a fire. He sat to my left a couple of feet away.

The fire drew strange, dancing silhouettes. At times the flames became iridescent; they grew bluish and then brilliantly white. I explained that unusual play of colors by assuming that it was produced by some chemical property of the specific dry twigs and branches I had collected. Another very unusual feature of the fire was the sparks. The new twigs I kept adding created extremely big sparks. I thought they were like tennis balls that seemed to explode in midair.

I stared at the fire fixedly, the way I believed don Juan had recommended, and I became dizzy. He handed me his water gourd and signaled me to drink. The water relaxed me and gave me a delightful feeling of freshness.

Don Juan leaned over and whispered in my ear that I did not have to stare at the flames, that I should only watch in the direction of the fire. I became very cold and clammy after watching for almost an hour. At a moment when I was about to lean over and pick up a twig, something like a moth or a spot in my retina swept across from right to left between myself and the fire. I immediately recoiled. I looked at don Juan and he signaled me with a movement of his chin to look back at the flames. A moment later the same shadow swept across in the opposite direction.

Don Juan got up hurriedly and began piling loose dirt on top of the burning twigs until he had completely extinguished the flames. He executed the maneuver of putting out the fire with tremendous speed. By the time I moved to help him he had finished. He stomped on the dirt on top of the smoldering twigs and then he nearly dragged me downhill and out of the valley. He walked very fast without turning his head back and did not allow me to talk at all.

When we got to my car hours later I asked him what was the thing I had seen. He shook his head imperatively and we drove in complete silence.

He went directly inside when we arrived at his house in the early morning, and he again hushed me up when I tried to talk.

Don Juan was sitting outside, behind his house. He seemed to have been waiting for me to wake up, because he started talking as I came out of the house. He said that the shadow I had seen the night before was a spirit, a force that belonged to the particular place where I had seen it. He spoke of that specific being as a useless one.

"It only exists there," he said. "It has no secrets of power, so there was no point in remaining there. You would have seen only a fast, passing shadow going back and forth all night. There are other types of beings, however, that can give you secrets of power, if you are fortunate enough to find them."

We ate some breakfast then and did not talk for quite a while. After eating we sat in front of his house.

"There are three kinds of beings," he said suddenly, "those that cannot give anything because they have nothing to give, those that can only cause fright, and those that have gifts. The one you saw last night was a silent one; it has nothing to give; it is only a shadow. Most of the time, however, another type of being is associated with the silent one, a nasty spirit whose only quality is to cause fear and which always hovers around the abode of a silent one. That is why I decided to get out of there fast. That nasty type follows people right into their homes and makes life impossible for them. I know people who have had to move out of their houses because of them. There are always some people who believe they can get a lot out of that kind of being, but the mere fact that a spirit is around the house does not mean anything. People may try to entice it, or they may follow it around the house under the impression that it can reveal secrets to them. But the only thing people would get is a frightful experience. I know people who took turns watching one of those nasty beings that had followed them into their house. They watched the spirit for months; finally someone else had to step in and drag the people out of the house; they had become weak and were wasting away. So the only wise thing one can do with that nasty type is to forget about it and leave it alone."

I asked him how people enticed a spirit. He said that people took pains to figure out first where the spirit would most likely appear and then they put weapons in it's way, in hopes that it might touch the weapons, because spirits were known to like paraphernalia of war. Don Juan said that any kind of gear, or any object, that was touched by a spirit rightfully became a power object. However, the nasty type of being was known never to touch anything, but only to produce the auditory illusion of noise.

I then asked don Juan about the manner in which those spirits caused fear. He said that their most common way of frightening people was to appear as a dark shadow shaped as a man that would roam around the house, creating a frightening clatter or creating the sound of voices, or as a dark shadow that would suddenly lurch out from a dark corner.

Don Juan said that the third type of spirit was a true ally, a giver of secrets; that special type existed in lonely, abandoned places, places which were almost inaccessible. He said that a man who wished to find one of these beings had to travel far and go by himself. At a distant and lonely place the man had to take all the necessary steps alone. He had to sit by his fire and if he saw the shadow he had to leave immediately. He had to remain, however, if he encountered other conditions, such as a strong wind that would kill his fire and would keep him from kindling it again during four attempts; or if a branch broke from a nearby tree. The branch really had to break and the man had to make sure that it was not merely the sound of a branch breaking off.

Other conditions he had to be aware of were rocks that rolled, or pebbles which were thrown at his fire, or any constant noise, and he then had to walk in the direction in which any of these phenomena occurred until the spirit revealed itself.

There were many ways in which such a being put a warrior to the test. It might suddenly leap in front of him, in the most horrendous appearance, or it might grab the man from the back and not turn him loose and keep him pinned down for hours. It might also topple a tree on him. Don Juan said that those were truly dangerous forces, and although they could not kill a man hand to hand, they could cause his death by fright, or by actually letting objects fall on him, or by appearing suddenly and causing him to stumble, lose his footing, and go over a precipice.

He told me that if I ever found one of those beings under inappropriate circumstances I should never attempt to struggle with it because it would kill me. It would rob my soul. So I should throw myself to the ground and bear it until the morning.

"When a man is facing the ally, the giver of secrets, he has to muster up all his courage and grab it before it grabs him, or chase it before it chases him. The chase must be relentless and then comes the struggle. The man must wrestle the spirit to the ground and keep it there until it gives him power."

I asked him if these forces had substance, if one could really touch them. I said that the very idea of a "spirit" connoted something ethereal to me.

"Don't call them spirits," he said. "Call them allies; call them inexplicable forces."

He was silent for a while, then he lay on his back and propped his head on his folded arms. I insisted on knowing if those beings had substance.

"You're damn right they have substance," he said after another moment of silence. "When one struggles with them they are solid, but that feeling lasts only a moment. Those beings rely on a man's fear; therefore if the man struggling with one of them is a warrior, the being loses it's tension very quickly while the man becomes more vigorous. One can actually absorb the spirit's tension."

"What kind of tension is that?" I asked.

"Power. When one touches them, they vibrate as if they were ready to rip one apart. But that is only a show. The tension ends when the man maintains his grip."

"What happens when they lose their tension? Do they become like air?"

"No, they just become flaccid. They still have substance, though. But it is not like anything one has ever touched."

Later on, during the evening, I said to him that perhaps what I had seen the night before could have been only a moth. He laughed and very patiently explained that moths fly back and forth only around light bulbs, because a light bulb cannot burn their wings. A fire, on the other hand, would burn them the first time they came close to it. He also pointed out that the shadow covered the entire fire. When he mentioned that, I remembered that it was really an extremely large shadow and that it actually blocked the view of the fire for an instant. However, it had happened so fast that I had not emphasized it in my earlier recollection.

Then he pointed out that the sparks were very large and flew to my left. I had noticed that myself. I said that the wind was probably blowing in that direction. Don Juan replied that there was no wind whatsoever. That was true. Upon recalling my experience I could remember that the night was still.

Another thing I had completely overlooked was a greenish glow in the flames, which I detected when don Juan signaled me to keep on looking at the fire, after the shadow had first crossed my field of vision. Don Juan reminded me of it. He also objected to my calling it a shadow. He said it was round and more like a bubble.

Two days later, on December 17, 1969, don Juan said in a very casual tone that I knew all the details and necessary techniques in order to go to the hills by myself and obtain a power object, the spirit catcher. He urged me to proceed alone and affirmed that his company would only hinder me.

I was ready to leave when he seemed to change his mind.

"You're not strong enough," he said. "I'll go with you to the bottom of the hills."

When we were at the small valley where I had seen the ally, he examined from a distance the formation in the terrain that I had called a hole in the hills, and said that we had to go still further south into the distant mountains. The abode of the ally was at the furthermost point we could see through the hole.

I looked at the formation and all I could distinguish was the bluish mass of the distant mountains. He guided me, however, in a southeasterly direction and after hours of walking we reached a point he said was "deep enough" into the ally's abode.

It was late afternoon when we stopped. We sat down on some rocks. I was tired and hungry; all I had eaten during the day was some tortillas and water. Don Juan stood up all of a sudden, looked at the sky, and told me in a commanding tone to take off in the direction that was the best for me and to be sure I could remember the spot where we were at the moment, so I could return there whenever I was through. He said in a reassuring tone that he would be waiting for me if it took me forever.

I asked apprehensively if he believed that the affair of getting a spirit catcher was going to take a long time.

"Who knows?" he said, smiling mysteriously.

I walked away toward the southeast, turning around a couple of times to look at don Juan. He was walking very slowly in the opposite direction. I climbed to the top of a large hill and looked at don Juan once again; he was a good two hundred yards away. He did not turn to look at me. I ran downhill into a small bowl-like depression between the hills, and I suddenly found myself alone. I sat down for a moment and began to wonder what I was doing there. I felt ludicrous looking for a spirit catcher. I ran back up to the top of the hill to have a better view of don Juan but I could not see him anywhere. I ran downhill in the direction I had last seen him. I wanted to call off the whole affair and go home. I felt quite stupid and tired.

"Don Juan!" I yelled over and over.

He was nowhere in sight. I again ran to the top of another steep hill; I could not see him from there either. I ran quite a way looking for him but he had disappeared. I retraced my steps and went back to the original place where he had left me. I had the absurd certainty I was going to find him sitting there laughing at my inconsistencies.

"What in the hell have I gotten into?" I said loudly.

I knew then that there was no way to stop whatever I was doing there. I really did not know how to go back to my car. Don Juan had changed directions various times and the general orientation of the four cardinal points was not enough. I was afraid of getting lost in the mountains. I sat down and for the first time in my life I had the strange feeling that there never really was a way to revert back to an original point of departure. Don Juan had said that I always insisted on starting at a point I called the beginning, when in effect the beginning did not exist. And there in the middle of those mountains I felt I understood what he meant It was as if the point of departure had always been myself; it was as if don Juan had never really been there; and when I looked for him he became what he really was— a fleeting image that vanished over a hill.

I heard the soft rustle of leaves and a strange fragrance enveloped me. I felt the wind as a pressure on my ears, like a shy buzzing. The sun was about to reach some compact clouds over the horizon that looked like a solidly tinted orange band, when it disappeared behind a heavy blanket of lower clouds; it appeared again a moment later, like a crimson ball floating in the mist. It seemed to struggle for a while to get into a patch of blue sky but it was as if the clouds would not give the sun time, and then the orange band and the dark silhouette of the mountains seemed to swallow it up.

I lay down on my back. The world around me was so still, so serene and at the same time so alien, I felt overwhelmed. I did not want to weep but tears rolled down easily.

I remained in that position for hours. I was almost unable to get up. The rocks under me were hard, and right where I had lain down there was scarcely any vegetation, in contrast to the lush green bushes all around. From where I was I could see a fringe of tall trees on the eastern hills.

Finally it got fairly dark. I felt better; in fact I felt almost happy. For me the semidarkness was much more nurturing and protective than the hard daylight.

I stood up, climbed to the top of a small hill, and began repeating the motions don Juan had taught me. I ran toward the east seven times, and then I noticed a change of temperature on my hand. I built a fire and set a careful watch, as don Juan had recommended, observing every detail. Hours went by and I began to feel very tired and cold. I had gathered quite a pile of dry twigs; I fed the fire and moved closer to it. The vigil was so strenuous and so intense that it exhausted me; I began to nod. I fell asleep twice and woke up only when my head bobbed to one side. I was so sleepy that I could not watch the fire any more. I drank some water and even sprinkled some on my face to keep awake. I succeeded in fighting my sleepiness only for brief moments. I had somehow become despondent and irritable; I felt utterly stupid being there and that gave me a sensation of irrational frustration and dejection. I was tired, hungry, sleepy, and absurdly annoyed with myself. I finally gave up the struggle of keeping awake. I added a lot of dry twigs to the fire and lay down to sleep. The pursuit of an ally and a spirit catcher was at that moment a most ludicrous and foreign endeavor. I was so sleepy that I could not even think or talk to myself. I fell asleep.

I was awakened suddenly by a loud crack. It appeared that the noise, whatever it was, had come from just above my left ear, since I was lying on my right side. I sat up fully awake. My left ear buzzed and was deafened by the proximity and force of the sound.

I must have been asleep for only a short while, judging by the amount of dry twigs which were still burning in the fire. I did not hear any other noises but I remained alert and kept on feeding the fire.

The thought crossed my mind that perhaps what woke me up was a gunshot; perhaps someone was around watching me, taking shots at me. The thought became very anguishing and created an avalanche of rational fears. I was sure that someone owned that land, and if that was so they might take me for a thief and kill me, or they might kill me to rob me, not knowing that I had nothing with me. I experienced a moment of terrible concern for my safety. I felt the tension in my shoulders and my neck. I moved my head up and down; the bones of my neck made a cracking sound. I still kept looking into the fire but I did not see anything unusual in it, nor did I hear any noises.

After a while I relaxed quite a bit and it occurred to me that perhaps don Juan was at the bottom of all this. I rapidly became convinced that it was so. The thought made me laugh. I had another avalanche of rational conclusions, nappy conclusions this time. I thought that don Juan must have suspected I was going to change my mind about staying in the mountains, or he must have seen me running after him and taken cover in a concealed cave or behind a bush. Then he had followed me and, noticing I had fallen asleep, waked me up by cracking a branch near my ear. I added more twigs to the fire and began to look around in a casual and covert manner to see if I could spot him, even though I knew that if he was hiding around there I would not be able to discover him.

Everything was quite placid: the crickets, the wind roughing the trees on the slopes of the hills surrounding me, the soft, cracking sound of the twigs catching on fire. Sparks flew around, but they were only ordinary sparks.

Suddenly I heard the loud noise of a branch snapping in two. The sound came from my left. I held my breath as I listened with utmost concentration. An instant later I heard another branch snapping on my right.

Then I heard the faint faraway sound of snapping branches. It was as if someone was stepping on them and making them crack. The sounds were rich and full, they had a lusty quality. They also seemed to be getting closer to where I was. I had a very slow reaction and did not know whether to listen or stand up. I was deliberating what to do when all of a sudden the sound of snapping branches happened all around me. I was engulfed by them so fast that I barely had time to jump to my feet and stomp on the fire.

I began to run downhill in the darkness. The thought crossed my mind as I moved through the shrubs that there was no flat land. I kept on trotting and trying to protect my eyes from the bushes. I was halfway down to the bottom of the hill when I felt something behind me, almost touching me. It was not a branch; it was something which I intuitively felt was overtaking me.

This realization made me freeze. I took off my jacket, bundled it on my stomach, crouched over my legs, and covered my eyes with my hands, as don Juan had prescribed. I kept that position for a short while and then I realized that everything around me was dead still. There were no sounds of any kind. I became extraordinarily alarmed. The muscles of my stomach contracted and shivered spasmodically. Then I heard another cracking sound. It seemed to have occurred far away, but it was extremely clear and distinct. It happened once more, closer to me. There was an interval of quietness and then something exploded just above my head. The suddenness of the noise made me jump involuntarily and I nearly rolled over on my side. It was definitely the sound of a branch being snapped in two. The sound had happened so close that I heard the rustling of the branch leaves as it was being cracked.

Next there was a downpour of cracking explosions; branches were being snapped with great force all around me. The incongruous thing, at that point, was my reaction to the whole phenomenon; instead of being terrified, I was laughing. I sincerely thought I had hit upon the cause of all that was happening. I was convinced that don Juan was again tricking me. A series of logical conclusions cemented my confidence; I felt elated. I was sure I could catch that foxy old don Juan in another of his tricks. He was around me cracking branches, and knowing I would not dare to look up, he was safe and free to do anything he wanted to. I figured that he had to be alone in the mountains, since I had been with him constantly for days. He had not had fine time or the opportunity to engage any collaborators. If he was hiding, as I thought, he was hiding by himself and logically he could produce only a limited number of noises. Since he was alone, the noises had to occur in a linear temporal sequence; that is, one at a time, or at most two or three at a time. Besides, the variety of noises also had to be limited to the mechanics of a single individual. I was absolutely certain, as I remained crouched and still, that the whole experience was a game and that the only way to remain on top of it was by emotionally dislodging myself from it. I was positively enjoying it. I caught myself chuckling at the idea that I could anticipate my opponent's next move. I tried to imagine what I would do next if I were don Juan.

The sound of something slurping jolted me out of my mental exercise. I listened attentively; the sound happened again. I could not determine what it was. It sounded like an animal slurping water. It happened again very close by. It was an irritating sound that brought to mind the smacking noise of a big-jawed adolescent girl chewing gum. I was wondering how don Juan could produce such a noise when the sound happened again, coming from the right. There was a single sound first and then I heard a series of slushing, slurping sounds, as if someone were walking in mud. It was an almost sensual, exasperating sound of feet slushing in deep mud. The noises stopped for a moment and started once more toward my left, very close, perhaps only ten feet away. Now they sounded as if a heavy person were trotting with rain boots in mud. I marveled at the richness of the sound. I could not imagine any primitive devices that I myself could use to produce it. I heard another series of trotting, slushing sounds toward my rear and then they happened all at once, on all sides. Someone seemed to be walking, running, trotting on mud all around me.

A logical doubt occurred to me. If don Juan was doing all that, he had to be running in circles at an incredible speed. The rapidity of the sounds made that alternative impossible. I then thought that don Juan must have confederates after all. I wanted to involve myself in speculation as to who his accomplices could be but the intensity of the noises took all my concentration. I really could not think clearly, yet I was not afraid, I was perhaps only dumbfounded by the strange quality of the sounds. The slashings actually vibrated. In fact their peculiar vibrations seemed to be directed at my stomach, or perhaps I perceived their vibrations with the lower part of my abdomen.

That realization brought an instantaneous loss of my sense of objectivity and aloofness. The sounds were attacking my stomach! The question occurred to me, "What if it was not don Juan?" I panicked. I tensed my abdominal muscles and tucked my thighs hard against the bundle of my jacket.

The noises increased in number and speed, as if they knew I had lost my confidence, their vibrations were so intense I wanted to vomit. I fought the feeling of nausea. I took deep breaths and began to sing my peyote songs. I got sick and the slushing noises ceased at once; the sounds of crickets and wind and the distant staccato barking of coyotes became superimposed. The abrupt cessation allowed me a respite and I took stock of myself. Only a short while before I had been in the best of spirits, confident and aloof; obviously I had failed miserably to judge the situation. Even if don Juan had accomplices, it would be mechanically impossible for them to produce sounds that would affect my stomach. To produce sounds of such intensity they would have needed gadgetry beyond their means or their conception. Apparently the phenomenon I was experiencing was not a game and the "another one of don Juan's tricks" theory was only my rude explanation.

I had cramps and an overwhelming desire to roll over and straighten my legs. I decided to move to my right in order to get my face off the place where I had gotten sick. The instant I began to crawl I heard a very soft squeak right above my left ear. I froze on the spot. The squeak was repeated on the other side of my head. It was a single sound. I thought it resembled the squeak of a door. I waited but I heard nothing else, so I decided to move again. No sooner had I started to inch my head to the right when I was nearly forced to jump up. A flood of squeaks engulfed me at once. They were like squeaks of doors at times; at other times they were like the squeaks of rats or guinea pigs. They were not loud or intense but very soft and insidious and produced agonizing spasms of nausea in me. They stopped as they had begun, diminishing gradually until I could hear only one or two of them at a time.

Then I heard something like the wings of a big bird sweeping over the tops of the bushes. It seemed to be flying in circles over my head. The soft squeaks began to increase again, and so did the flapping wings. Above my head there seemed to be something like a flock of gigantic birds beating their soft wings. Both noises merged, creating an enveloping wave around me. I felt that I was floating suspended in an enormous undulating ripple. The squeaks and the flapping were so smooth I could feel them all over my body. The flapping wings of a flock of birds seemed to be pulling me up from above, while the squeaks of an army of rats seemed to be pushing me from underneath and from around my body.

There was no doubt in my mind that through my blundering stupidity I had unleashed something terrible on myself. I clenched my teeth and took deep breaths and sang peyote songs.

The noises lasted a very long time and I opposed them with all my might. When they subsided, there was again an interrupted "silence" as I am accustomed to perceiving silence; that is, I could detect only the natural sounds of the insects and the wind. The time of silence was for me more deleterious than the time of noises. I began to think and to assess my position, and my deliberation threw me into a panic. I knew that I was lost; I did not have the knowledge nor the stamina to fend off whatever was accosting me. I was utterly helpless, crouched over my own vomit. I thought that the end of my life had come and I began to weep. I wanted to think about my life but I did not know where to start. Nothing of what I had done in my life was really worthy of that last ultimate emphasis, so I had nothing to think about. That was an exquisite realization. I had changed since the last time I experienced a similar fright. This time I was more empty. I had less personal feelings to carry along.

I asked myself what a warrior would do in that situation and I arrived at various conclusions. There was something about my umbilical region that was uniquely important; there was something unearthly about the sounds; they were aiming at my stomach; and the idea that don Juan was tricking me was utterly untenable.

The muscles of my stomach were very tight, although I did not have cramps any longer. I kept on singing and breathing deeply and I felt a soothing warmth inundating my entire body. It had become clear to me that if I was going to survive I had to proceed in terms of don Juan's teachings. I repeated his instructions in my mind. I remembered the exact point where the sun had disappeared over the mountains in relation to the hill where I was and to the place where I had crouched. I reoriented myself and when I was convinced that my assessment of the cardinal points was correct I began to change my position, so I would have my head pointing in a new and "better" direction, the southeast. I slowly started moving my feet toward my left, inch by inch, until I had them twisted under my calves. Then I began to align my body with my feet, but no sooner had I begun to creep laterally than I felt a peculiar tap; I had the actual physical sensation of something touching the uncovered area of the back of my neck. It happened so fast that I yelled involuntarily and froze again. I tightened my abdominal muscles and began to breath deeply and sing my peyote songs. A second later I felt once more the same light tap on my neck. I cringed. My neck was uncovered and there was nothing I could do to protect myself. I was tapped again. It was a very soft, almost silky object that touched my neck, like the furry paw of a giant rabbit. It touched me again and then it began to cross my neck back and forth until I was in tears. It was as if a herd of silent, smooth, weightless kangaroos were stepping on my neck. I could hear the soft thump of the paws as they stepped gently over me. It was not a painful sensation at all and yet it was maddening. I knew that if I did not involve myself in doing something I would go mad and stand up and run. So I slowly began again to maneuver my body into a new position. My attempt at moving seemed to increase the tapping on my neck. It finally got to such a frenzy that I jerked my body and at once aligned it in the new direction. I had no idea whatsoever about the outcome of my act. I was just taking action to keep from going stark, raving mad.

As soon as I changed directions the tapping on my neck ceased. After a long, anguished pause I heard a distant snapping of branches. The noises were not close any more. It was as if they had retreated to another position far away from me. The sound of snapping branches merged after a moment with a blasting sound of leaves being rustled, as if a strong wind were beating the entire hill. All the bushes around me seemed to shiver, yet there was no wind. The rustling sound and the cracking of branches gave me the feeling that the whole hill was on fire. My body was as tight as a rock. I was perspiring copiously. I began to feel warmer and warmer. For a moment I was utterly convinced that the hill was burning. I did not jump up and run because I was so numb I was paralyzed; in fact I could not even open my eyes. All that mattered to me at that point was to get up and escape the fire. I had terrible cramps in my stomach which started to cut my intake of air. I became very involved in trying to breathe. After a long struggle I was capable of taking deep breaths again and I was also capable of noticing that the rustling had subsided; there was only an occasional cracking sound. The snapping sound of branches became more and more distant and sporadic until it ceased altogether.

I was able to open my eyes. I looked through my half-closed lids to the ground underneath me. It was already daylight. I waited a while longer without moving and then I started to stretch my body. I rolled on my back. The sun was over the hills in the east.

It took me hours to straighten out my legs and drag myself downhill. I began to walk toward the place where don Juan had left me, which was perhaps only a mile away; by midafternoon I was barely at the edge of some woods, still a good quarter of a mile away.

I could not walk any more, not for any reason. I thought of mountain lions and tried to climb up a tree, but my arms could not support my weight. I leaned against a rock and resigned myself to die there. I was convinced that I would be food for mountain lions or other predators. I did not have the strength even to throw a rock. I was not hungry or thirsty. Around noon I had found a small stream and had drunk a lot of water, but the water did not help to restore my strength. As I sat there in utter helplessness I felt more despondent than afraid. I was so tired I did not care about my fate and I fell asleep.

I woke up when something shook me. Don Juan was leaning over me. He helped me sit up and gave me water and some gruel. He laughed and said that I looked wretched. I tried to tell him what had happened but he hushed me up and said that I had missed my mark, that the place where I was supposed to meet him was about a hundred yards away. Then he half carried me downhill. He said he was taking me to a large stream and was going to wash me there. On the way he plugged my ears with some leaves he had in his pouch and then he blindfolded me, putting one leaf on each eye and securing them both with a piece of cloth. He made me take off my clothes and told me to place my hands over my eyes and ears to make sure I could not see or hear anything.

Don Juan rubbed my entire body with leaves and then dumped me in a river. I felt it was a large river. It was deep. I was standing and I could not touch the bottom. Don Juan was holding me by the right elbow. At first I did not feel the coldness of the water, but little by little I began to feel chilled, and then the cold became intolerable. Don Juan pulled me out and dried me with some leaves that had a peculiar scent. I put on my clothes and he led me away; we walked a good distance before he took the leaves off my ears and my eyes. Don Juan asked me if I felt strong enough to walk back to my car. The weird thing was that I felt very strong. I even ran up the side of a steep hill to prove it.

On the way to my car I stayed very close to don Juan. I stumbled scores of times and he laughed. I noticed that his laughter was especially invigorating and it became the focal point of my replenishing; the more he laughed the better I felt.

The next day I narrated to don Juan the sequence of events from the time he left me. He laughed all the way through my account, especially when I told him that I had thought it was one of his tricks.

"You always think you're being tricked," he said. "You trust yourself too much. You act like you know all the answers. You know nothing, my little friend, nothing."

This was the first time don Juan had called me "my little friend." It took me aback. He noticed it and smiled. There was a great warmth in his voice and that made me very sad. I told him that I had been careless and incompetent because that was the inherent bent of my personality; and that I would never understand his world. I felt deeply moved. He was very encouraging and asserted that I had done fine.

I asked him the meaning of my experience.

"It has no meaning," he replied. "The same thing could happen to anyone, especially someone like you who has his gap already opened. It is very common. Any warrior who's gone in search of allies would tell you about their doings. What they did to you was mild. However, your gap is open and that is why you're so nervous. One cannot turn into a warrior overnight. Now you must go home and don't return until you're healed and your gap is closed."

## Chapter 17

I did not return to Mexico for months; I used the time to work on my field notes and for the first time in ten years, since I started the apprenticeship, don Juan's teachings began to make real sense. I felt that the long periods of time I had to stay away from the apprenticeship had

had a very sobering and beneficial effect on me; they had allowed me the opportunity to review my findings and to arrange them in an intellectual order proper of my training and interest. The events that took place on my last visit to the field, however, pointed to a fallacy in my optimism about understanding don Juan's knowledge.

I made the last entry in my field notes on October 16, 1970. The events that took place on that occasion marked a transition. They not only closed a cycle of instruction, but they also opened a new one, which was so very different from what I had done thus far that I feel this is the point where I must end my reportage.

As I approached don Juan's house I saw him sitting in his usual place under his *ramada* in front of the door. I parked in the shade of a tree, took my briefcase and a bag of groceries out of the car and walked toward him, greeting him in a loud voice. I then noticed that he was not alone. There was another man sitting behind a high pile of firewood. Both of them were looking at me. Don Juan waved and so did the other man. Judging from his attire he was not an Indian but a Mexican from the Southwest. He was wearing Levis, a beige shirt, a Texan cowboy hat and cowboy boots.

I talked to don Juan and then looked at the man; he was smiling at me. I stared at him for a moment.

"Here's little Carlos," the man said to don Juan, "and he doesn't speak to me any more. Don't tell me that he's cross with me!"

Before I could say anything they both broke up laughing and only then did I realize that the strange man was don Genaro.

"You didn't recognize me, did you?" he asked, still laughing.

I had to admit that his attire had baffled me.

"What are you doing in this part of the world, don Genaro?" I asked.

"He came to enjoy the hot wind," don Juan said. "Isn't that right?"

"That's right," don Genaro echoed. "You've no idea what the hot wind can do to an old body like mine."

I sat down between them.

"What does it do to your body?" I asked.

"The hot wind tells extraordinarily things to my body," he said.

He turned to don Juan, his eyes glittering.

"Isn't that so?"

Don Juan shook his head affirmatively.

I told them that the time of the hot Santa Ana winds was the worst part of the year for me, and that it was certainly strange that don Genaro would come to seek the hot wind while I was running away from it.

"Carlos can't stand the heat," don Juan said to don Genaro. "When it gets hot he becomes like a child and suffocates."

"Suffowhat?"

"Suffo . . . cates."

"My goodness!" don Genaro said, feigning concern, and made a gesture of despair which was indescribably funny.

Don Juan explained to him next that I had been away for months because of an unfortunate incident with the allies.

"So, you've finally encountered an ally!" don Genaro said.

"I think I did," I said cautiously.

They laughed loudly. Don Genaro patted me on the back two or three times. It was a very light tapping which I interpreted as a friendly gesture of concern. He rested his hand on my shoulder as he looked at me, and I had a feeling of placid contentment, which lasted only an instant, for next don Genaro did something inexplicable to me. I suddenly felt that he had put the weight of a boulder on my back. I had the sensation that he had increased the weight of his hand, which was resting on my right shoulder, until it made me sag all the way down and I hit my head on the ground.

"We must help little Carlos," don Genaro said and gave a conspiratorial look to don Juan.

I sat up straight again and turned to don Juan, but he looked away. I had a moment of vacillation and the annoying thought that don Juan was acting as if he were aloof, detached from me. Don Genaro was laughing; he seemed to be waiting for my reaction.

I asked him to put his hand on my shoulder once more, but he did not want to do it. I urged him at least to tell me what he had done to me. He chuckled. I turned to don Juan again and told him that the weight of don Genaro's hand had nearly crushed me.

"I don't know anything about it," don Juan said in a comically factual tone. "He didn't put his hand on my shoulder."

With that both of them broke up laughing.

"What did you do to me, don Genaro?" I asked.

"I just put my hand on your shoulder," he said innocently.

"Do it again," I said.

He refused. Don Juan interceded at that point and asked me to describe to don Genaro what I had perceived in my last experience. I thought he wanted me to give a bona fide description of what had happened to me, but the more serious my description became the more they laughed. I stopped two or three times but they urged me to go on.

"The ally will come to you regardless of your feelings," don Juan said when I had finished my account. "I mean, you don't have to do anything to lure him out. You may be sitting twiddling your thumbs, or thinking about women and then suddenly, a tap on your shoulder, you turn around and the ally is standing by you."

"What can I do if something like that happens?" I asked.

"Hey! Hey! Wait a minute!" don Genaro said. "That's not a good question. You shouldn't ask what can you do, obviously you can't do anything. You should ask what can a warrior do?"

He turned to me, blinking. His head was slightly tilted to the right, and his mouth was puckered.

I looked at don Juan for a cue whether the situation was a joke, but he kept a solemn face.

"All right!" I said. "What can a warrior do?"

Don Genaro blinked and made smacking sounds with his lips, as if he were searching for a right word. He looked at me fixedly, holding his chin.

"A warrior wets his pants," he said with Indian solemnity.

Don Juan covered his face and don Genaro slapped the ground, exploding in a howling laughter.

"Fright is something one can never get over," don Juan said after the laughter had subsided, "When a warrior is caught in such a tight spot he would simply turn his back to the ally without thinking twice. A warrior cannot indulge, thus he cannot die of fright. A warrior allows the ally to come only when he is good and ready. When he is strong enough to grapple with the ally he opens his gap and lurches out, grabs the ally, keeps him pinned down and maintains his stare on him for exactly the time he has to, then he moves his eyes away and releases the ally and lets him go. A warrior, my little friend, is the master at all times."

"What happens if you stare at an ally for too long?" I asked.

Don Genaro looked at me and made a comical gesture of outstaring.

"Who knows?" don Juan said. "Maybe Genaro will tell you what happened to him."

"Maybe," don Genaro said and chuckled.

"Would you please tell me?"

Don Genaro got up, cracked his bones stretching his arms, and opened his eyes until they were round and looked crazy.

"Genaro is going to make the desert tremble," he said and went into the chaparral.

"Genaro is determined to help you," don Juan said in a confidential tone. "He did the same thing to you at his house and you almost *saw*."

I thought he was referring to what had happened at the waterfall, but he was talking about some unearthly rumbling sounds I had heard at don Genaro's house.

"By the way, what was it?" I asked. "We laughed at it, but you never explained to me what it was."

"You have never asked."

"I did."

"No. You have asked me about everything else except that."

Don Juan looked at me accusingly.

"That was Genaro's art," he said. "Only Genaro can do that. You almost *saw* then."

I told him that it had never occurred to me to associate "seeing" with the strange noises I had heard at that time.

"And why not?" he asked flatly.

"*Seeing* means the eyes to me," I said.

He scrutinized me for a moment as if there were something wrong with me.

"I never said that *seeing* is a matter of the eyes alone," he said and shook his head in disbelief.

"How does he do it?" I insisted.

"He has already told you how he does it," don Juan said sharply.

At that very moment I heard an extraordinary rumble.

I jumped up and don Juan began to laugh. The rumble was like a thunderous avalanche. Listening to it, I had the funny realization that my inventory of experiences in sound conies definitely from the movies. The deep thunder I heard resembled the sound track of a movie when the whole side of a mountain falls into a valley.

Don Juan held his sides as if they hurt from laughing. The thunderous rumble shook the ground where I stood. I distinctly heard the thump of what seemed to be a monumental boulder that was rolling on it's sides. I heard a series of crushing thumps that gave me the impression that the boulder was rolling inexorably toward me. I experienced a moment of supreme confusion. My muscles were tense; my whole body was ready for fleeing.

I looked at don Juan. He was staring at me. I then heard the most frightening thump I had ever heard in my life. It was as if a monumental boulder had landed right behind the house. Everything shook, and at that moment I had a most peculiar perception. For an instant I actually "saw" a boulder the size of a mountain right behind the house. It was not as if an image had been superimposed on the scenery of the house I was looking at. It was not the view of a real boulder either. It was rather as if the noise was creating the image of a boulder rolling on it's monumental sides. I was actually "seeing" the noise. The inexplicable character of my perception threw me into the depths of despair and confusion. Never in my life would I have conceived that my senses were capable of perceiving in such a manner. I had an attack of rational fright and decided to flee for my life. Don Juan held me by the arm and ordered me imperatively not to run away and not to turn around either, but face the direction in which don Genaro had gone.

I heard next a series of booming noises, which resembled the sound of rocks falling and piling on top of each other, and then everything was quiet again. A few minutes later don Genaro came back and sat down. He asked me if I had "seen." I did not know what to say. I turned to don Juan for a cue. He was staring at me.

"I think he did," he said and chuckled.

I wanted to say that I did not know what they were talking about. I felt terribly frustrated. I had a physical sensation of wrath, of utter discomfort.

"I think we should leave him *here* to sit alone," don Juan said.

They got up and walked by me.

"Carlos is indulging in his confusion," don Juan said very loudly.

I stayed alone for hours and had time to write my notes and to ponder on the absurdity of my experience. Upon thinking about it, it became obvious to me that from the very moment I saw don Genaro sitting under the *ramada* the situation had acquired a farcical mood. The more I deliberated about it the more convinced I became that don Juan had relinquished the control over to don Genaro and that thought filled me with apprehension.

Don Juan and don Genaro returned at dusk. They sat down next to me, flanking me. Don Genaro drew closer and almost leaned on me. His thin and frail shoulder touched me lightly and I experienced the same feeling I had had when he tapped me. A crushing weight toppled me over and I tumbled onto don Juan's lap. He helped me to sit up straight and asked in a joking tone if I was trying to sleep on his lap.

Don Genaro seemed to be delighted; his eyes shone. I wanted to weep. I had the feeling I was like an animal that had been corralled.

"Am I frightening you, little Carlos?" don Genaro asked and seemed really concerned. "You look like a wild horse."

"Tell him a story," don Juan said. "That's the only thing that calms him."

They moved away and sat in front of me. Both of them examined me with curiosity. In the semidarkness their eyes seemed glassy, like enormous dark pools of water. Their eyes were awesome. They were not the eyes of men. We stared at each other for a moment and then I moved my eyes away. I noticed that I was not afraid of them, and yet their eyes had frightened me to the point that I was shivering. I felt a most uncomfortable confusion.

After a moment of silence don Juan urged don Genaro to tell me what had happened to him at the time he had tried to outstare his ally. Don Genaro was sitting a few feet away, facing me; he did not say anything. I looked at him; his eyes seemed to be four or five tunes the size of ordinary human eyes; they were shining and had a compelling attraction. What seemed to be the light of his eyes dominated everything around them. Don Genaro's body seemed to have shriveled and looked more like the body of a feline. I noticed a movement of his cat-like body and became frightened. In a completely automatic way, as if I had been doing it all my life, I adopted a "fighting form" and began beating rhythmically on my calf. When I became aware of my acts I got embarrassed and looked at don Juan, He was peering at me as he does ordinarily; his eyes were kind and soothing. He laughed loudly. Don Genaro made a purring sound and stood up and went inside the house.

Don Juan explained to me that don Genaro was very forceful and did not like to piddle around and that he had been just teasing me with his eyes. He said that, as usual, I knew more than I myself expected. He made a comment that everyone who was involved with sorcery was terribly dangerous during the hours of twilight and that sorcerers like don Genaro could perform marvels at that time.

We were quiet for a few minutes. I felt better. Talking to don Juan relaxed me and restored my confidence. Then he said that he was going to eat something and that we were going for a walk so that don Genaro could show me a technique for hiding.

I asked him to explain what he meant by a technique for hiding. He said he was through with explaining things to me because explaining only forced me to indulge.

We went inside the house. Don Genaro had lit the kerosene lantern and was chewing a mouthful of food.

After eating, the three of us walked into the thick desert chaparral Don Juan walked almost next to me. Don Genaro was in front, a few yards ahead of us.

It was a clear night, there were heavy clouds, but enough moonlight to render the surroundings quite visible. At one moment don Juan stopped and told me to go ahead and follow don Genaro. I vacillated; he pushed me gently and assured me it was all right. He said I should always be ready and should always trust my own strength.

I followed don Genaro and for the next two hours I tried to catch up with him, but no matter how hard I struggled I could not overtake him. Don Genaro's silhouette was always ahead of me. Sometimes he disappeared as if he had jumped to the side of the trail only to appear again ahead of me. As far as I was concerned, this seemed to be a strange and meaningless walk in the dark. I followed because I did not know how to return to the house. I could not understand what don Genaro was doing. I thought he was leading me to some recondite place in the chaparral to show me the technique don Juan had talked about At a certain point, however, I had the peculiar sensation that don Genaro was behind me. I turned around and caught a glimpse of a person some distance behind me. The effect was startling. I strained to see in the darkness and I believed I could make out the silhouette of a man standing perhaps fifteen yards away. The figure was almost merged with the bushes; it was as if he wanted to conceal himself. I stared fixedly for a moment and I could actually keep the silhouette of the man within my field of perception even though he was trying to hide behind the dark shapes of the bushes. Then a logical thought came to my mind. It occurred to me that the man had to be don Juan, who must have been following us all the time. The instant I became convinced that that was so, I also realized I could no longer isolate his silhouette; all I had in front of me was the undifferentiated dark mass of the desert chaparral.

I walked toward the place I had seen the man, but I could not find anybody. Don Genaro was nowhere in sight either, and since I did not know my way I sat down to wait. A half hour later, don Juan and don Genaro came by. They called my name out loud. I stood up and joined them.

We walked to the house in complete silence. I welcomed that quiet interlude, for I felt completely disoriented. In fact, I felt unknown to myself. Don Genaro was doing something to me, something which kept me from formulating my thoughts the way I am accustomed to doing. This became evident to me when I sat down on the trail. I had automatically checked the time when I sat down and then I had remained quiet as if my mind had been turned off. Yet I sat in a state of alertness I have never experienced before. It was a state of thoughtlessness, perhaps comparable to not caring about anything. The world seemed to be, during that time, in a strange balance; there was nothing I could add to it and nothing I could subtract from it.

When we arrived at the house don Genaro rolled out a straw mat and went to sleep. I felt compelled to render my experiences of the day to don Juan. He did not let me talk.

*October 18, 1970*

"I think I understand what don Genaro was trying to do the other night," I said to don Juan.

I said that in order to draw him out. His continual refusal to talk was unnerving me.

Don Juan smiled and shook his head slowly as if agreeing with what I had said. I would have taken his gesture as an affirmation except for the strange glint in his eyes. It was as if his eyes were laughing at me.

"You don't think I understand, do you?" I asked compulsively.

"I suppose you do... you do, in fact. You do understand that Genaro was behind you all the time. However, understanding is not the real point"

His statement that don Genaro had been behind me all the time was shocking to me. I begged him to explain it.

"Your mind is set to seek only one side of this," he said.

He took a dry twig and moved it in the air. He was not drawing in the air or making a figure;

what he did resembled the movements he makes with his fingers when he cleans the debris from a pile of seeds. His movements were like a soft prodding or scratching the air with the twig.

He turned and looked at me and I shrugged my shoulders automatically in a gesture of bafflement. He drew closer and repeated his movements, making eight points on the ground. He circled the first point.

"You are here," he said. "We are all here; this is feeling, and we move from here to here."

He circled the second, which he had drawn right above number one. He then moved his twig back and forth between the two points to portray a heavy traffic.

"There are, however, six more points a man is capable of handling," he said. "Most men know nothing about them."

He placed his twig between points one and two and pecked on the ground with it.

"To move between these two points you call understanding. You've been doing that all your life. If you say you understand my knowledge, you have done nothing new."

He then joined some of the eight points to the others with lines; the result was a long trapezoid figure that had eight centers of uneven radiation.

"Each of these six remaining points is a world, just like feeling and understanding are two worlds for you," he said.

"Why eight points? Why not an infinite number, as in a circle?" I asked.

I drew a circle on the ground. Don Juan smiled.

"As far as I know there are only eight points a man is capable of handling. Perhaps men cannot go beyond that. And I said handling, not understanding, did you get that?"

His tone was so funny I laughed. He was imitating or rather mocking my insistence on the exact usage of words.

"Your problem is that you want to understand everything, and that is not possible. If you insist on understanding you're not considering your entire lot as a human being. Your stumbling block is intact Therefore, you have done almost nothing in all these years. You have been shaken out of your total slumber, true, but that could have been accomplished anyway by other circumstances."

After a pause don Juan told me to get up because we were going to the water canyon. As we were getting into my car don Genaro came out from behind the house and joined us. I drove part of the way and then we walked into a deep ravine. Don Juan picked a place to rest in the shade of a large tree.

"You mentioned once," don Juan began, "that a friend of yours had said, when the two of you saw a leaf falling from the very top of a sycamore, that that same leaf will not fall again from that same sycamore ever in a whole eternity, remember?"

I remembered having told him about that incident.

"We are at the foot of a large tree," he continued, "and now if we look at that other tree in front of us we may see a leaf falling from the very top."

He signaled me to look. There was a large tree on the other side of the gully; it's leaves were yellowish and dry. He urged me with a movement of his head to keep on looking at the tree. After a few minutes wait, a leaf cracked loose from the top and began falling to the ground; it hit other leaves and branches three times before it landed in the tall underbrush.

"Did you see it?"

"Yes."

"You would say that the same leaf will never again fall from that same tree, true?"

"True."

"To the best of your understanding that is true. But that is only to the best of your understanding. Look again."

I automatically looked and saw a leaf falling. It actually hit the same leaves and branches as the previous one. It was as if I were looking at an instant television replay. I followed the wavy falling of the leaf until it landed on the ground. I stood up to find out if there were two leaves, but the tall underbrush around the tree prevented me from seeing where the leaf had actually landed.

Don Juan laughed and told me to sit down.

"Look," he said, pointing with his head to the top of the tree. "There goes the same leaf again."

I once more saw a leaf falling in exactly the same pattern as the previous two.

When it had landed I knew don Juan was about to signal me again to look at the top of the tree, but before he did I looked up. The leaf was again falling. I realized then that I had only seen the first leaf cracking loose, or, rather, the first time the leaf fell I saw it from the instant it became detached from the branch; the other three times the leaf was already falling when I lifted my head to look.

I told that to don Juan and I urged him to explain what he was doing.

"I don't understand how you're making me see a repetition of what I had seen before. What did you do to me, don Juan?"

He laughed but did not answer and I insisted that he should tell me how I could see that leaf falling over and over. I said that according to my reason that was impossible.

Don Juan said that his reason told him the same, yet I had witnessed the leaf falling over and over. He then turned to don Genaro.

"Isn't that so?" he asked.

Don Genaro did not answer. His eyes were fixed on me.

"It is impossible!" I said.

"You're chained!" don Juan exclaimed. "You're chained to your reason."

He explained that the leaf had fallen over and over from that same tree so I would stop trying to understand. In a confidential tone he told me that I had the whole thing pat and yet my mania always blinded me at the end.

"There's nothing to understand. Understanding is only a very small affair, so very small," he said.

At that point don Genaro stood up. He gave a quick glance to don Juan; their eyes met and don Juan looked at the ground in front of him. Don Genaro stood in front of me and began swinging his arms at his sides, back and forth in unison.

"Look, little Carlos," he said. "Look! Look!"

He made an extraordinarily sharp, swishing sound. It was the sound of something ripping. At the precise instant the sound happened, I felt a sensation of vacuity in my lower abdomen. It was the terribly anguishing sensation of falling, not painful, but rather unpleasant and consuming. It lasted a few seconds and then it subsided, leaving a strange itch in my knees. But while the sensation had lasted I experienced another unbelievable phenomenon. I saw don Genaro on top of some mountains that were perhaps ten miles away. The perception lasted only a few seconds and it happened so unexpectedly that I did not have time really to examine it. I cannot recall whether I saw a man-size figure standing on top of the mountains, or a reduced image of don Genaro. I cannot even recall whether or not it was don Genaro. Yet at that moment I was certain beyond any doubt that I was seeing him standing on top of the mountains. However, the moment I thought that I could not possibly see a man ten miles away the perception vanished.

I turned around to look for don Genaro, but he was not there.

The bafflement I experienced was as unique as everything else that was happening to me. My mind buckled under the strain. I felt utterly disoriented.

Don Juan stood up and made me cover the lower part of my abdomen with my hands and press my legs tightly against my body in a squat position. We sat in silence for a while and then he said that he was truly going to refrain from explaining anything to me, because only by acting can one become a sorcerer. He recommended that I leave immediately, otherwise don Genaro would probably kill me in his effort to help me.

"You are going to change directions," he said, "and you'll break your chains."

He said that there was nothing to understand about his or about don Genaro's actions, and that sorcerers were quite capable of performing extraordinary feats.

"Genaro and I are acting from here," he said and pointed to one of the centers of radiation in his diagram.

"And it is not the center of understanding, yet you know what it is."

I wanted to say that I did not really know what he was talking about, but he did not give me time and stood up and signaled me to follow him. He began to walk fast and in no time at all I was puffing and sweating trying to keep up with him.

When we were getting inside the car I looked around for don Genaro.

"Where is he?" I asked

"You know where he is," don Juan snapped at me.

Before I left I sat down with him, as I always do. I had an overwhelming urge to ask for explanations. As don Juan says, explanations are truly my indulgence.

"Where's don Genaro?" I asked cautiously.

"You know where," he said. "Yet you fail every time because of your insistence on understanding. For example, you knew the other night that Genaro was behind you all the time; you even turned around and saw him."

"No," I protested. "No, I didn't know that."

I was truthful at that. My mind refused to intake that sort of stimuli as being "real," and yet, after ten years of apprenticeship with don Juan my mind could no longer uphold my old ordinary criteria of what is real. However, all the speculations I had thus far engendered about the nature of reality had been mere intellectual manipulations; the proof was that under the pressure of don Juan and don Genaro's acts my mind had entered into an impasse.

Don Juan looked at me and there was such sadness in his eyes that I began to weep. Tears fell freely. For the first time in my life I felt the encumbering weight of my reason. An indescribable anguish overtook me. I wailed involuntarily and embraced him. He gave me a quick blow with his knuckles on the top of my head. I felt it like a ripple down my spine. It had a sobering effect.

"You indulge too much," he said softly.

# Epilogue

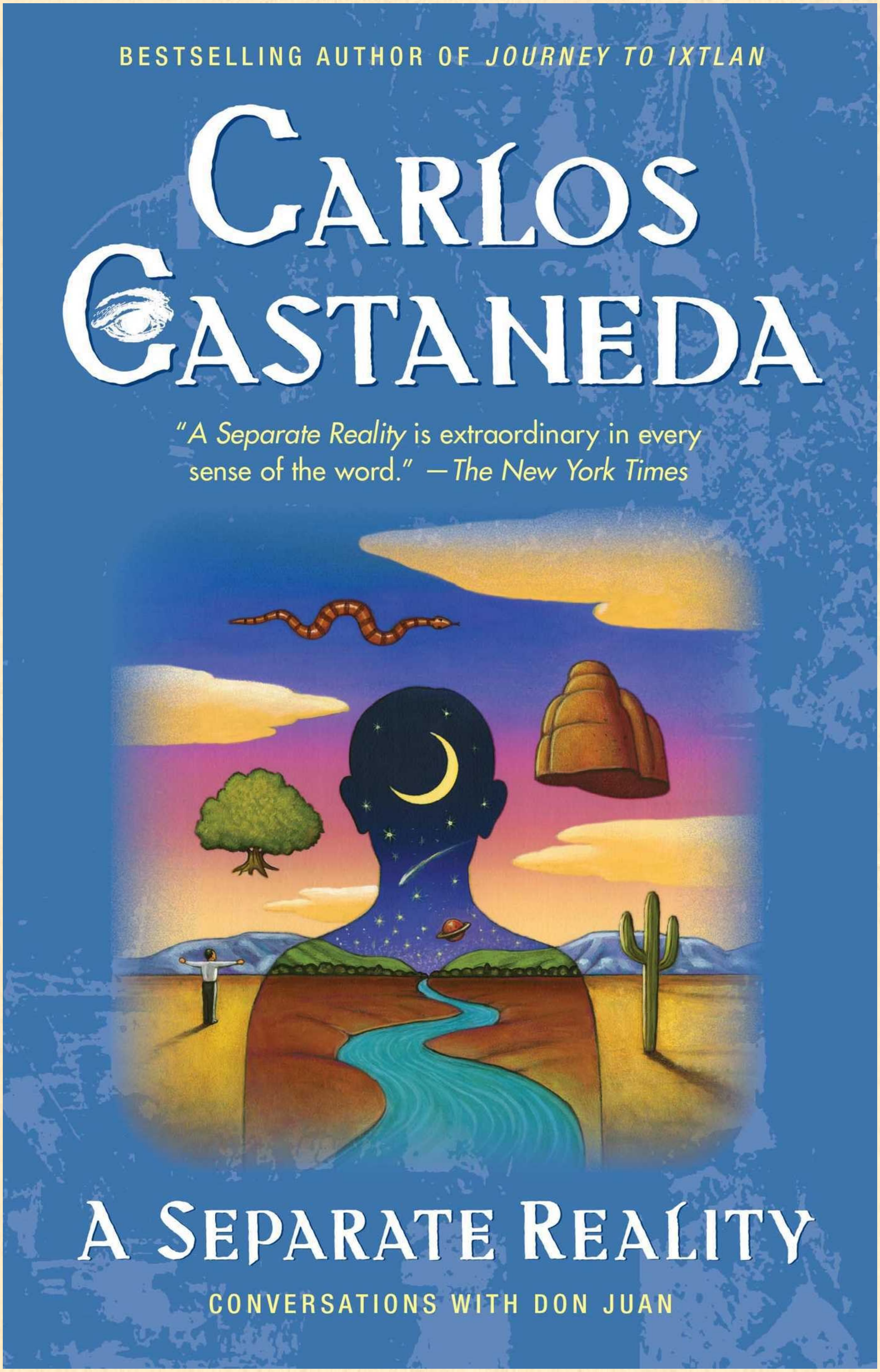
Don Juan slowly walked around me. He seemed to be deliberating whether or not to say something to me. Twice he stopped and seemed to change his mind.

"Whether or not you return is thoroughly unimportant," he finally said. "However, you now have the need to live like a warrior. You have always known that, now you're simply in the position of having to make use of something you disregarded before. But you had to struggle for this knowledge; it wasn't just given to you; it wasn't just handed down to you. You had to beat it out of yourself. Yet you're still a luminous being. You're still going to die like everyone else. I once told you that there's nothing to change in a luminous egg."

He was quiet for a moment. I knew he was looking at me, but I avoided his eyes.

"Nothing has really changed in you," he said.

### The End - A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with don Juan - by Carlos Castaneda ###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CONVERSATIONS WITH DON JUAN

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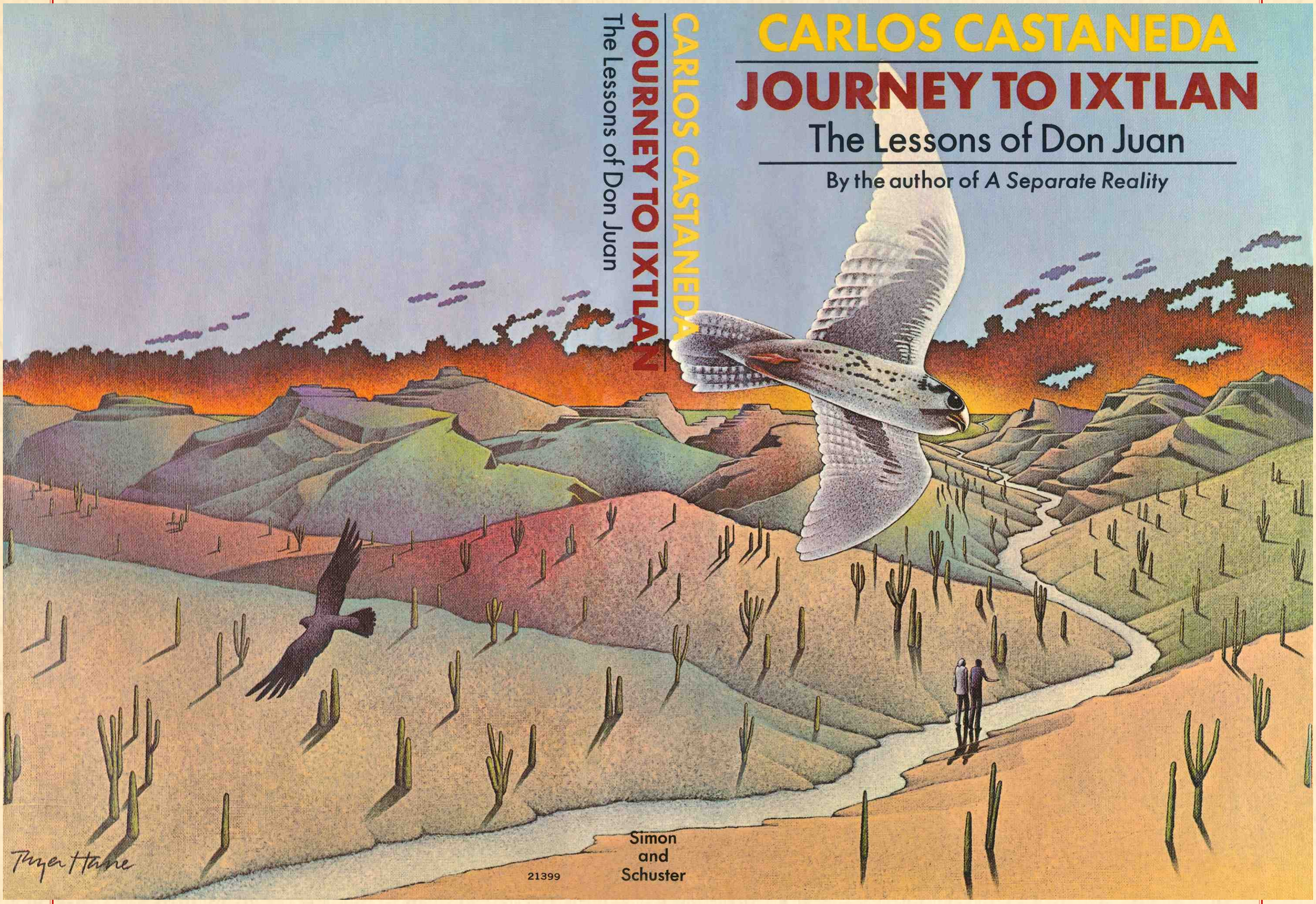
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# Introduction

On Saturday, May 22, 1971 I went to Sonora, Mexico, to see don Juan Matus, a Yaqui Indian sorcerer, with whom I had been associated since 1960. I thought that my visit on that day was going to be in no way different from the scores of times I had gone to see him in the ten years I had been his apprentice. The events that took place on that day and on the following days, however, were momentous to me. On that occasion my apprenticeship came to an end. This was not an arbitrary withdrawal on my part but a bona fide termination.

I have already presented the case of my apprenticeship in two previous works: *The Teachings of Don Juan* and A *Separate Reality*.

My basic assumption in both books has been that the articulation [* articulation- the shape or manner in which things come together and a connection is made] points in learning to be a sorcerer were the states of nonordinary reality produced by the ingestion of psychotropic plants.

In this respect don Juan was an expert in the use of three such plants: *Datura inoxia*, commonly known as jimpson weed; *Lophorphora williamsii*, known as peyote; and a hallucinogenic mushroom of the genus *Psilocybe*.

My perception of the world through the effects of those psychotropics had been so bizarre and impressive that I was forced to assume that such states were the only avenue to communicating and learning what don Juan was attempting to teach me.

That assumption was erroneous. [* *erroneous- incorrect or based on an incorrect assumption; containing or characterized by error; innacurate*]

For the purposes of avoiding any misunderstandings about my work with don Juan I would like to clarify the following issues at this point.

So far I have made no attempt whatsoever to place don Juan in a cultural milieu. [* milieu- the environmental condition] The fact that he considers himself to be a Yaqui Indian does not mean that his knowledge of sorcery is known to or practiced by the Yaqui Indians in general.

All the conversations that don Juan and I have had throughout the apprenticeship were conducted in Spanish, and only because of his thorough command of that language was I capable of obtaining complex explanations of his system of beliefs.

I have maintained the practice of referring to that system as sorcery; and I have also maintained the practice of referring to don Juan as a sorcerer because these were categories he himself used.

Since I was capable of writing down most of what was said in the beginning of my apprenticeship, and everything that was said in the later phases of it, I gathered voluminous field notes. In order to render those notes readable and still preserve the dramatic unity of don Juan's teachings, I have had to edit them. But what I have deleted is, I believe, immaterial to the points I want to raise.

In the case of my work with don Juan, I have limited my efforts solely to viewing him as a sorcerer, and to acquiring *membership* in his knowledge.

For the purpose of presenting my argument, I must first explain the basic premise of sorcery as don Juan presented it to me. He said that for a sorcerer, the world of everyday life is not as real, or out there, as we believe it is. For a sorcerer, reality, or the world we all know, is only a description.

For the sake of validating this premise, don Juan concentrated the best of his efforts into leading me to a genuine conviction that what I held in mind as 'the world at hand' was merely a description of the world; a description that had been pounded into me from the moment I was born.

He pointed out that everyone who comes into contact with a child is a teacher who incessantly describes the world to that child, until the moment when the child is capable of perceiving the world as it is described. According to don Juan, we have no memory of that portentous [* *portentous- of momentous or ominous significance*] moment, simply because none of us could possibly have had any point of reference to compare it to anything else. From that moment on, however, the child is a *member*. He or she knows the description of the world. Their *membership* becomes full-fledged, I suppose, when they are capable of making all the proper perceptual interpretations which, by conforming to that description, validate it.

For don Juan, then, the reality of our day-to-day life consists of an endless flow of perceptual interpretations which we, the individuals who share a specific membership, have learned to make in common.

The idea that the perceptual interpretations that make up our world have a flow is congruous with the fact that they run uninterruptedly; and they are rarely, if ever, open to question. In fact, the reality of the world we know is so taken for granted that the basic premise of sorcery- that our reality is merely one of many descriptions- could hardly be taken as a serious proposition.

Fortunately, in the case of my apprenticeship, don Juan was not concerned at all with whether or not I could take his proposition seriously. He proceeded to elucidate his points, in spite of my opposition, my disbelief, and my inability to understand what he was saying. Thus, as a teacher of sorcery, don Juan endeavoured to describe the world to me from the very first time we talked. My difficulty in grasping his concepts and methods stemmed from the fact that the units of his description were alien and incompatible with those of my own.

His contention was that he was teaching me how to 'see' as opposed to merely 'looking', and that 'stopping the world' was the first step to 'seeing'.

For years I had treated the idea of 'stopping the world' as a cryptic metaphor that really did not mean anything. It was only during an informal conversation that took place towards the end of my apprenticeship that I came fully to realize it's scope and importance as one of the main propositions of don Juan's knowledge.

Don Juan and I had been talking about different things in a relaxed and unstructured manner. I told him about a friend of mine and his dilemma with his nine year old son. The child, who had been living with the mother for the past four years, was then living with my friend; and the problem was what to do with him? According to my friend, the child was a misfit in school. He lacked concentration and was not interested in anything. He was given to tantrums, disruptive behavior, and to running away from home.

"Your friend certainly does have a problem," don Juan said, laughing.

I wanted to keep on telling him all the 'terrible' things the child had done, but he interrupted me.

"There is no need to say any more about that poor little boy," he said. "There is no need for you or for me to regard his actions in our thoughts one way or another."

His manner was abrupt and his tone was firm, but then he smiled.

"What can my friend do?" I asked.

"The worst thing he could do is to force that child to agree with him," don Juan said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that that child shouldn't be spanked or scared by his father when he doesn't behave the way he wants him to."

"How can he teach him anything if he isn't firm with him?"

"Your friend should let someone else spank the child."

"He can't let anyone else touch his little boy!" I said, surprised at his suggestion.

Don Juan seemed to enjoy my reaction and giggled.

"Your friend is not a warrior," he said. "If he were, he would know that the worst thing one can do is to confront human beings bluntly."

"What does a warrior do, don Juan?"

"A warrior proceeds strategically."

"I still don't understand what you mean."

"I mean that if your friend were a warrior he would help his child to *stop the world*."

"How can my friend do that?"

"He would need personal power. He would need to be a sorcerer."

"But he isn't."

"In that case he must use ordinary means to help his son to change his idea of the world. It is not *stopping the world*, but it will work just the same."

I asked him to explain his statements.

"If I were your friend," don Juan said, "I would start by hiring someone to spank the little guy.

I would go to skid row and hire the worst-looking man I could find."

"To scare a little boy?"

"Not just to scare a little boy, you fool. That little fellow must be *stopped*, and being beaten by his father won't do it.

"If one wants to *stop* our fellow men one must always be outside the circle that presses them. That way one can always direct the pressure."

The idea was preposterous, but somehow it was appealing to me.

Don Juan was resting his chin on his left palm. His left arm was propped against his chest on a wooden box that served as a low table. His eyes were closed but his eyeballs moved. I felt he was looking at me through his closed eyelids. The thought scared me.

"Tell me more about what my friend should do with his little boy," I said.

"Tell him to go to skid row and very carefully select an ugly-looking derelict," he went on. "Tell him to get a young one. One who still has some strength left in him."

Don Juan then delineated a strange strategy. I was to instruct my friend to have the man follow him or wait for him at a place where my friend would go with his son. The man, in response to a prearranged cue to be given after any objectionable behavior on the part of the child, was supposed to leap from a hiding place, pick the child up, and spank the living daylights out of him.

"After the man scares him, your friend must help the little boy regain his confidence, in any way he can. If he follows this procedure three or four times, I assure you that that child will feel differently towards everything. He will change his idea of the world."

"What if the fright injures him?"

"Fright never injures anyone. What injures the spirit is having someone always on your back, beating you, telling you what to do and what not to do.

"When that boy is more contained you must tell your friend to do one last thing for him. He must find some way to get to a dead child, perhaps in a hospital, or at the office of a doctor. He must take his son there and show the dead child to him. He must let him touch the corpse once with his left hand, on any place except the corpse's belly. After the boy does that he will be renewed. The world will never be the same for him."

I realized then that throughout the years of our association don Juan had been employing with me, although on a different scale, the same tactics he was suggesting my friend should use with his son. I asked him about it. He said that he had been trying all along to teach me how to 'stop the world.'

"You haven't yet," he said, smiling. "Nothing seems to work, because you are very stubborn. If you were less stubborn, however, by now you would probably have *stopped the world* with any of the techniques I have taught you."

"What techniques, don Juan?"

"Everything I have told you to do was a technique for *stopping the world*."

A few months after that conversation don Juan accomplished what he had set out to do, to teach me to “stop the world.”

That monumental event in my life compelled me to re-examine in detail my work of ten years. It became evident to me that my original assumption about the role of psychotropic plants was erroneous. They were not the essential feature of the sorcerer's description of the world, but were only an aid to cement, so to speak, parts of the description which I had been incapable of perceiving otherwise. My insistence on holding on to my standard version of reality rendered me almost deaf and blind to don Juan's aims. Therefore, it was simply my lack of sensitivity which had fostered their use.

In reviewing the totality of my field notes I became aware that don Juan had given me the bulk of the new description at the very beginning of our association in what he called 'techniques for stopping the world'. I had discarded those parts of my field notes in my earlier works because they did not pertain to the use of psychotropic plants. I have now rightfully reinstated them in the total scope of don Juan's teachings and they comprise the first seventeen chapters of this work. The last three chapters are the field notes covering the events that culminated in my 'stopping the world.'

In summing up, I can say that when I began the apprenticeship there was another reality, that is to say, there was a sorcery description of the world which I did not know.

Don Juan, as a sorcerer and a teacher, taught me that description. The ten year apprenticeship

I have undergone consisted, therefore, in setting up that unknown reality by unfolding it's description; adding increasingly more complex parts as I went along.

The termination of the apprenticeship meant that I had learned a new description of the world in a convincing and authentic manner; and thus I had become capable of eliciting a new perception of the world, which matched it's new description. In other words, I had gained *membership*.

Don Juan had stated that in order to arrive at seeing, one first had to ‘stop the world.’ ‘Stopping the world’ was indeed an appropriate rendition of certain states of awareness in which the reality of everyday life is altered because the flow of interpretation, which ordinarily runs uninterruptedly, has been stopped by a set of circumstances alien to that flow. In my case the set of circumstances alien to my normal flow of interpretations was the sorcery description of the world. Don Juan's precondition for ‘stopping the world’ was that one had to be convinced; in other words, one had to learn the new description in a total sense for the purpose of pitting it against the old one, and in that way break the dogmatic certainty which we all share; the certainty that the validity of our perceptions, or our 'reality of the world' is not to be questioned.

After ‘stopping the world,’ the next step was ‘seeing.’ ‘Seeing,’ according to don Juan, meant what I would like to categorize as “responding to the perceptual solicitations of the world outside the description we have learned to call reality.”

My contention is that all these steps can only be understood in terms of the description to which they belong: And since it was a description that don Juan endeavored to give me from the beginning, I must then let his teachings be the only source of entrance into it. Thus, I have left don Juan's words to speak for themselves.

- C.C. 1972

# PART ONE – “Stopping the World”

## 1. Reaffirmations from the World Around Us

"I understand you know a great deal about plants, sir," I said to the old Indian in front of me.

A friend of mine had just put us in contact and left the room, and we had introduced ourselves to each other. The old man had told me that his name was Juan Matus.

"Did your friend tell you that?' he asked casually.

"Yes, he did."

"I pick plants, or rather, they let me pick them," he said softly.

We were in the waiting room of a bus depot in Arizona. I asked him in very formal Spanish if he would allow me to question him. I said, "Would the gentleman [caballero] permit me to ask some questions?"

'Caballero', which is derived from the word 'caballo,' horse, originally meant horseman or a nobleman on horseback.

He looked at me inquisitively.

"I'm a horseman without a horse," he said with a big smile and then he added, "I've told you that my name is Juan Matus."

I liked his smile. I thought that, obviously, he was a man that could appreciate directness, and I decided to boldly tackle him with a request.

I told him I was interested in collecting and studying medicinal plants. I said that my special interest was the uses of the hallucinogenic cactus, peyote, which I had studied at length at the university in Los Angeles.

I thought that my presentation was very serious. I was very contained, and sounded perfectly credible to myself.

The old man shook his head slowly, and I, encouraged by his silence, added that it would no doubt be profitable for us to get together and talk about peyote.

It was at that moment that he lifted his head and looked me squarely in the eyes. It was a formidable look, yet it was not menacing or awesome in any way. It was a look that went through me. I became tongue-tied at once and could not continue with the harangues [* *harangue- a loud bombastic declamation expressed with strong emotion*] about myself. That was the end of our meeting. Yet he left me on a note of hope. He said that perhaps I could visit him at his house someday.

It would be difficult to assess the impact of don Juan's look if my inventory of experience is not somehow brought to bear on the uniqueness of that event. When I began to study anthropology, and thus met don Juan, I was already an expert in 'getting around'. I had left my home years before; and that meant, in my evaluation, that I was capable of taking care of myself. Whenever I was rebuffed, I could usually cajole my way in, make concessions, argue, get angry, or if nothing succeeded, I would whine or complain. In other words, there was always something I knew I could do under the circumstances. Never in my life had any human being stopped my momentum so swiftly and so definitely as don Juan did that afternoon. But it was not only a matter of being silenced. There had been times when I had been unable to say a word to my opponent because of some inherent respect I felt for him, but still my anger or frustration was manifested in my thoughts. Don Juan's look, however, numbed me to the point that I could not think coherently.

I became thoroughly intrigued with that stupendous look and decided to search for him.

I prepared myself for six months after that first meeting. I read up on the uses of peyote among the American Indians, especially about the peyote cult of the Indians of the Plains. I became acquainted with every work available, and when I felt I was ready I went back to Arizona.

*Saturday, December 17, 1960*

I found don Juan's house after making long and taxing inquiries among the local Indians. It was early afternoon when I arrived and parked in front of it. I saw him sitting on a wooden milk crate. He seemed to recognize me, and greeted me as I got out of my car.

We exchanged social courtesies for a while, and then in plain terms, I confessed that I had been very devious with him the first time we had met. I said I had boasted that I knew a great deal about peyote, when in reality, I knew nothing about it. He stared at me. His eyes were very kind.

I told him that for six months I had been reading to prepare myself for our meeting; and that this time I really knew a great deal more.

He laughed. Obviously there was something in my statement which was funny to him. He was laughing at me and I felt a bit confused and offended.

He apparently noticed my discomfort; and assured me that, although I had had good intentions, there was really no way to prepare myself for our meeting.

I wondered if it would have been proper to ask whether that statement had any hidden meaning, but I did not; yet he seemed to be attuned to my feelings and proceeded to explain what he had meant. He said that my endeavors reminded him of a story about some people a certain king had persecuted and killed once upon a time. He said that, in the story, the persecuted people were indistinguishable from their persecutors except that they insisted on pronouncing certain words in a peculiar manner proper only to them. That flaw, of course, was the giveaway. The king posted roadblocks at critical points where an official would ask every man passing by to pronounce a key word. Those who could pronounce it the way the king pronounced it would live, but those who could not were immediately put to death. The point of the story was that one day a young man decided to prepare himself for passing the roadblock by learning to pronounce the test-word just as the king liked it.

Don Juan said, with a broad smile, that in fact it took the young man 'six months' to master such a pronunciation. And then came the day of the great test. The young man very confidently came upon the roadblock and waited for the official to ask him to pronounce the word.

At that point don Juan very dramatically stopped his recounting and looked at me. His pause was very studied and seemed a bit corny to me, but I played along.

I had heard the theme of the story before. It had to do with Jews in Germany and the way one could tell who was a Jew by the way they pronounced certain words. I also knew the punch line. The young man was going to get caught because the official had forgotten the key word and asked him to pronounce another word which was very similar, but which the young man had not learned to say correctly.

Don Juan seemed to be waiting for me to ask what happened, so I did.

"What happened to him?" I asked, trying to sound naive and interested in the story.

"The young man, who was truly foxy," he said, "realized that the official had forgotten the key word, and before the man could say anything else the young man confessed that he had prepared himself for six months."

Don Juan made another pause, and looked at me with a mischievous glint in his eyes. This time he had turned the tables on me. The young man's confession was a new element and I no longer knew how the story would end.

"Well, what happened then?" I asked, truly interested.

"The young man was killed instantly, of course," he said and broke into a roaring laughter.

I liked very much the way he had entrapped my interest; and above all I liked the way he had linked that story to my own case. In fact, he seemed to have constructed it to fit me. He was making fun of me in a very subtle and artistic manner. I laughed with him.

Afterwards, I told him that no matter how stupid I sounded, I was really interested in learning something about plants.

"I like to walk a great deal," he said.

I thought he was deliberately changing the topic of conversation to avoid answering me. I did not want to antagonize him with my insistence.

He asked me if I wanted to go with him on a short hike in the desert. I eagerly told him that I would love to walk in the desert.

"This is no picnic," he said in a tone of warning.

I told him that I wanted very seriously to work with him. I said that I needed information, any kind of information, on the uses of medicinal herbs, and that I was willing to pay him for his time and effort.

"You'll be working for me," I said. "And I'll pay you wages."

"How much would you pay me?" he asked.

I detected a note of greed in his voice.

"Whatever you think is appropriate," I said.

"Pay me for my time... with your time," he said.

I thought he was a most peculiar fellow. I told him I did not understand what he meant. He replied that there was nothing to say about plants, thus to take my money would be unthinkable for him.

He looked at me piercingly.

"What are you doing in your pocket?" he asked, frowning. "Are you playing with your whanger?"

He was referring to my taking notes on a minute pad inside the enormous pockets of my windbreaker.

When I told him what I was doing he laughed heartily.

I said that I did not want to disturb him by writing in front of him.

"If you want to write, write," he said. "You don't disturb me."

We hiked in the surrounding desert until it was almost dark. He did not show me any plants, nor did he talk about them at all. We stopped for a moment to rest by some large bushes.

"Plants are very peculiar things," he said without looking at me." They are alive and they feel."

At the very moment he made that statement a strong gust of wind shook the desert chaparral around us. The bushes made a rattling noise.

"Do you hear that?" he asked me, putting his right hand to his ear as if he were aiding his hearing. "The leaves and the wind are agreeing with me."

I laughed. The friend who had put us in contact had already told me to watch out because the old man was very eccentric. I thought the 'agreement with the leaves' was one of his eccentricities.

We walked for a while longer, but he still did not show me any plants; nor did he pick any of them. He simply breezed through the bushes touching them gently. Then he came to a halt, and sat down on a rock. He told me to rest and look around.

I insisted on talking. Once more I let him know that I wanted very much to learn about plants, especially peyote. I pleaded with him to become my informant in exchange for some sort of monetary reward.

"You don't have to pay me," he said. "You can ask me anything you want. I will tell you what I know and then I will tell you what to do with it."

He asked me if I agreed with the arrangement. I was delighted. Then he added a cryptic statement: "Perhaps there is nothing to learn about plants, because there is nothing to say about them."

I did not understand what he had said or what he had meant by it.

"What did you say?" I asked.

He repeated the statement three times; and then the whole area was shaken by the roar of an Air Force jet flying low.

"There! The world has just agreed with me," he said, putting his left hand to his ear.

I found him very amusing. His laughter was contagious.

"Are you from Arizona, don Juan?" I asked, in an effort to keep the conversation centered around his being my informant.

He looked at me and nodded affirmatively. His eyes seemed to be tired. I could see the white underneath his pupils.

"Were you born in this locality?"

He nodded his head again without answering me. It seemed to be an affirmative gesture, but it also seemed to be the nervous headshake of a person who is thinking.

"And where are you from yourself?" he asked.

"I come from South America," I said.

"That's a big place. Do you come from all of it?"

His eyes were piercing again as he looked at me.

I began to explain the circumstances of my birth, but he interrupted me.

"We are alike in this respect," he said. "I live here now but I'm really a Yaqui from Sonora."

"Is that so! I myself come from— "

He did not let me finish.

"I know, I know," he said. "You are who you are, from wherever you are, as I am a Yaqui from Sonora."

His eyes were very shiny and his laughter was strangely unsettling. He made me feel as if he had caught me in a lie. I experienced a peculiar sensation of guilt. I had the feeling he knew something that I did not know, or that I did not want to tell.

My strange embarrassment grew. He must have noticed it, for he stood up, and asked me if I wanted to go eat in a restaurant in town.

Walking back to his home, and then driving into town made me feel better; but I was not quite relaxed. I somehow felt threatened, although I could not pinpoint the reason.

I wanted to buy him some beer in the restaurant. He said that he never drank, not even beer. I laughed to myself. I did not believe him. The friend who had put us in contact had told me that "the old man was plastered out of his mind most of the time." I really did not mind if he was lying to me about not drinking. I liked him. There was something very soothing about his person.

I must have had a look of doubt on my face, for he then went on to explain that he used to drink in his youth, but that one day he simply dropped it.

"People hardly ever realize that we can cut anything from our lives, any time, just like that." He snapped his fingers.

"Do you think that one can stop smoking or drinking that easily?" I asked.

"Sure!" he said with great conviction. "Smoking and drinking are nothing. Nothing at all if we want to drop them."

At that very moment the water that was boiling in the coffee percolator made a loud perking sound.

"Hear that!" don Juan exclaimed with a shine in his eyes. "The boiling water agrees with me."

Then he added after a pause, "A man can get agreements from everything around him."

At that crucial instant the coffee percolator made a truly obscene gurgling sound.

He looked at the percolator and softly said, "Thank you," nodded his head, and then broke into a roaring laughter.

I was taken aback. His laughter was a bit too loud, but I was genuinely amused by it all.

My first real session with my 'informant' ended then. He said goodbye at the door of the restaurant. I told him I had to visit some friends and that I would like to see him again at the end of the following week.

"When will you be home?" I asked.

He scrutinized me.

"Whenever you come," he replied.

"I don't know exactly when I can come."

"Just come then and don't worry."

"What if you're not in?"

"I'll be there," he said, smiling, and walked away.

I ran after him and asked him if he would mind my bringing a camera with me to take pictures of him and his house.

"That's out of the question," he said with a frown.

"How about a tape recorder? Would you mind that?"

"I'm afraid there's no possibility of that either."

I became annoyed and began to fret. I said I saw no logical reason for his refusal.

Don Juan shook his head negatively.

"Forget it," he said forcefully. "And if you still want to see me, don't ever mention it again."

I staged a weak final complaint. I said that pictures and recordings were indispensable to my work. He said that there was only one thing which was indispensable for anything we did. He called it 'the spirit'.

"One can't do without the spirit," he said. "And you don't have it. Worry about that and not about pictures."

"What do you...?"

He interrupted me with a movement of his hand, and walked backwards a few steps.

"Be sure to come back," he said softly, and waved good-bye.

## 2. Erasing Personal History

*Thursday, December 22, 1960*

Don Juan was sitting on the floor by the door of his house with his back against the wall. He turned over a wooden milk crate, and asked me to sit down and make myself at home. I offered him some cigarettes. I had brought a carton of them. He said he did not smoke, but he accepted the gift. We talked about the coldness of the desert nights and other ordinary topics of conversation.

I asked him if I was interfering with his normal routine. He looked at me with a sort of frown. He said he had no routines, and that I could stay with him all afternoon if I wanted to.

I had prepared some genealogy and kinship charts that I wanted to fill out with his help. I had also compiled from ethnographic literature a long list of culture traits that were purported to belong to the Indians of the area. I wanted to go through the list with him, and mark all the items that were familiar to him.

I began with the kinship charts.

"What did you call your father?" I asked.

"I called him Dad," he said with a very serious face.

I felt a little bit annoyed, but I proceeded on the assumption that he had not understood.

I showed him the chart, and explained that one space was for the father, and another space was for the mother. I gave as an example the different words used in English and in Spanish for father and mother.

I thought that perhaps I should have taken mother first.

"What did you call your mother?" I asked.

"I called her Mom," he replied in a naïve tone.

"I mean what other words did you use to call your father and mother? How did you call them?" I said, trying to be patient and polite.

He scratched his head, and looked at me with a stupid expression.

"Golly!" he said. "You got me there. Let me think."

After a moment's hesitation he seemed to remember something and I got ready to write.

"Well," he said, as if he were involved in serious thought, "how else did I call them? I called them 'Hey, hey, Dad! Hey, hey, Mom!'"

I laughed against my desire. His expression was truly comical, and at that moment I did not know whether he was a preposterous old man pulling my leg, or whether he was really a simpleton. Using all the patience I had, I explained to him that these were very serious questions, and that it was very important for my work to fill out the forms. I tried to make him understand the idea of a genealogy and personal history.

"What were the names of your father and mother?" I asked.

He looked at me with clear kind eyes.

"Don't waste your time with that crap," he said softly but with unsuspected force.

I did not know what to say; it was as if someone else had uttered those words. A moment before, he had been a fumbling stupid Indian scratching his head; and then in an instant he had reversed the roles: I was the stupid one, and he was staring at me with an indescribable look that was not a look of arrogance, or defiance, or hatred, or contempt. His eyes were kind and clear and penetrating.

"I don't have any personal history," he said after a long pause. "One day I found out that personal history was no longer necessary for me, and, like drinking, I dropped it."

I did not quite understand what he meant by that. I suddenly felt ill at ease; threatened. I reminded him that he had assured me that it was all right to ask him questions. He reiterated that he did not mind at all.

"I don't have personal history any more," he said, and looked at me probingly. "I dropped it one day when I felt it was no longer necessary."

I stared at him, trying to detect the hidden meanings of his words.

"How can one drop one's personal history?" I asked in an argumentative mood.

"One must first have the desire to drop it," he said. "And then one must proceed harmoniously to chop it off, little by little."

"Why should anyone have such a desire?" I exclaimed.

I had a terribly strong attachment to my personal history. My family roots were deep. I honestly felt that without them my life had no continuity or purpose.

"Perhaps you should tell me what you mean by dropping one's personal history," I said.

"To do away with it, that's what I mean," he replied cuttingly.

I insisted that I must not have understood the proposition.

"Take you for instance," I said. "You are a Yaqui. You can't change that."

"Am I?" he asked, smiling. "How do you know that?"

"True!" I said. "I can't know that with certainty, at this point, but you know it and that is what counts. That's what makes it personal history."

I felt I had driven a hard nail in.

"The fact that I know whether I am a Yaqui or not," he replied, "does not make it personal history. Only when someone else knows it does it become personal history; and I assure you that no one will ever know that for sure."

I had written down what he had said in a clumsy way. I stopped writing and looked at him. I could not figure him out. I mentally ran through my impressions of him: the mysterious and unprecedented way he had looked at me during our first meeting; the charm with which he had claimed that he received agreement from everything around him; his annoying humor and his alertness; his look of bona fide stupidity when I asked about his father and mother; and then the unsuspected force of his statements which had snapped me apart.

"You don't know what I am, do you?" he said as if he were reading my thoughts. "You will never know who or what I am, because I don't have a personal history."

He asked me if I had a father. I told him I did. He said that my father was an example of what he had in mind. He urged me to remember what my father thought of me.

"Your father knows everything about you," he said. "So he has you all figured out. He knows who you are and what you do, and there is no power on earth that can make him change his mind about you."

Don Juan said that everybody that knew me had an idea about me, and that I kept feeding that idea with everything I did. "Don't you see?" he asked dramatically. "You must renew your personal history by telling your parents, your relatives, and your friends everything you do. On the other hand, if you have no personal history, no explanations are needed. Nobody is angry or disillusioned with your acts. And above all, no one pins you down with their thoughts."

Suddenly the idea became clear in my mind. I had almost known it myself, but I had never examined it. Not having personal history was indeed an appealing concept, at least on the intellectual level; it gave me, however, a sense of loneliness which I found threatening and distasteful. I wanted to discuss my feelings with him, but I kept myself in check. Something was terribly incongruous in the situation at hand. I felt ridiculous trying to get into a philosophical argument with an old Indian who obviously did not have the 'sophistication' of a university student. Somehow he had led me away from my original intention of asking him about his genealogy.

"I don't know how we ended up talking about this when all I wanted was some names for my charts," I said, trying to steer the conversation back to the topic I wanted.

"It's terribly simple," he said. "The way we ended up talking about it was because I said that to ask questions about one's past is a bunch of crap."

His tone was firm. I felt there was no way to make him budge, so I changed my tactics.

"Is this idea of not having personal history something that the Yaquis do?" I asked.

"It's something that I do."

"Where did you learn it?"

"I learned it during the course of my life."

"Did your father teach you that?"

"No. Let's say that I learned it by myself, and now I am going to give you it's secret so you won't go away empty-handed today."

He lowered his voice to a dramatic whisper. I laughed at his histrionics. I had to admit that he was stupendous at that. The thought crossed my mind that I was in the presence of a born actor.

"Write it down," he said patronizingly. "Why not? You seem to be more comfortable writing."

I looked at him, and my eyes must have betrayed my confusion. He slapped his thighs, and laughed with great delight.

"It is best to erase all personal history," he said slowly, as if giving me time to write it down in my clumsy way, "because that would make us free from the encumbering thoughts of other people."

I could not believe that he was actually saying that. I had a very confusing moment. He must have read in my face my inner turmoil and used it immediately.

"Take yourself, for instance," he went on saying. "Right now you don't know whether you are coming or going. And that is so because I have erased my personal history. I have, little by little, created a fog around me and my life. And now nobody knows for sure who I am or what I do."

"But you yourself know who you are, don't you?" I interjected.

"You bet I . . . don't," he exclaimed, and rolled on the floor, laughing at my surprised look.

He had paused long enough to make me believe that he was going to say that he did know, as I was anticipating it. His subterfuge [* *subterfuge- something intended to misrepresent the true nature of an activity*] was very threatening to me. I actually became afraid.

"That is the little secret I am going to give you today," he said in a low voice. "Nobody knows my personal history. Nobody knows who I am or what I do. Not even I."

He squinted his eyes. He was not looking at me but beyond me over my right shoulder. He was sitting cross-legged. His back was straight, and yet he seemed to be so relaxed. At that moment he was the very picture of fierceness. I fancied him to be an Indian chief; a 'red-skinned warrior' in the romantic frontier sagas of my childhood. My romanticism carried me away, and the most insidious feeling of ambivalence [* *ambivalence- mixed feelings or emotions*] enveloped me. I could sincerely say that I liked him a great deal, and in the same breath I could say that I was deadly afraid of him.

He maintained that strange stare for a long moment.

"How can I know who I am, when I am all this?" he said, sweeping the surroundings with a gesture of his head.

Then he glanced at me and smiled.

"Little by little you must create a fog around yourself. You must erase everything around you until nothing can be taken for granted; until nothing is any longer for sure, or real. Your problem now is that you're too real. Your endeavors are too real. Your moods are too real. Don't take things so for granted. You must begin to erase yourself."

"What for?" I asked belligerently.

It became clear to me then that he was prescribing behavior for me. All my life I had reached a breaking point when someone attempted to tell me what to do. The mere thought of being told what to do put me immediately on the defensive.

"You said that you wanted to learn about plants," he said calmly. "Do you want to get something for nothing? What do you think this is? We agreed that you would ask me questions, and I'd tell you what I know. If you don't like it, there is nothing else we can say to each other."

His terrible directness made me feel peeved, and begrudgingly I conceded that he was right.

"Let's put it this way then," he went on. "If you want to learn about plants, since there is really nothing to say about them, you must, among other things, erase your personal history."

"How?" I asked.

"Begin with simple things, such as not revealing what you really do. Then you must leave everyone who knows you well. This way you'll build up a fog around yourself."

"But that's absurd," I protested. "Why shouldn't people know me? What's wrong with that?"

"What's wrong is that once they know you, you are an affair taken for granted, and from that moment on you won't be able to break the tie of their thoughts. I personally like the ultimate freedom of being unknown. No one knows me with steadfast certainty, the way people know you, for instance."

"But that would be lying."

"I'm not concerned with lies or truths," he said severely. "Lies are lies only if you have personal history."

I argued that I did not like to deliberately mystify people or mislead them. His reply was that I misled everybody anyway.

The old man had touched a sore spot in my life. I did not pause to ask him what he meant by that, or how he knew that I mystified people all the time. I simply reacted to his statement; defending myself by means of an explanation. I said that I was painfully aware that my family and my friends believed I was unreliable, when in reality I had never told a lie in my life.

"You always knew how to lie," he said. "The only thing that was missing was that you didn't know why to do it. Now you do."

I protested.

"Don't you see that I'm really sick and tired of people thinking that I'm unreliable?" I said.

"But you are unreliable," he replied with conviction.

"Damn it to hell, man, I am not!" I exclaimed.

My mood, instead of forcing him into seriousness, made him laugh hysterically. I really despised the old man for all his cockiness. Unfortunately he was right about me.

After a while I calmed down and he continued talking.

"When one does not have personal history," he explained, "nothing that one says can be taken for a lie. Your trouble is that you have to explain everything to everybody, compulsively, and at the same time you want to keep the freshness, the newness of what you do. Well, since you can't be excited after explaining everything you've done, you lie in order to keep on going."

I was truly bewildered by the scope of our conversation. I wrote down all the details of our exchange in the best way I could, concentrating on what he was saying rather than pausing to deliberate on my prejudices or on his meanings.

"From now on," he said, "you must simply show people whatever you care to show them, but without ever telling exactly how you've done it."

"I can't keep secrets!" I exclaimed. "What you are saying is useless to me."

"Then change!" he said cuttingly and with a fierce glint in his eyes.

He looked like a strange wild animal. And yet he was so coherent in his thoughts and so verbal. My annoyance gave way to a state of irritating confusion.

"You see," he went on, "we only have two alternatives: We either take everything for sure and real, or we don't. If we follow the first, we end up bored to death with ourselves and with the world. If we follow the second, and erase personal history, we create a fog around us; a very exciting and mysterious state in which nobody knows where the rabbit will pop out, not even ourselves."

I contended that erasing personal history would only increase our sensation of insecurity.

"When nothing is for sure we remain alert; perennially on our toes," he said. "It is more exciting not to know which bush the rabbit is hiding behind than to behave as though we know everything."

He did not say another word for a very long time; perhaps an hour went by in complete silence. I did not know what to ask. Finally he got up, and asked me to drive him to the nearby town.

I did not know why but our conversation had drained me. I felt like going to sleep. He asked me to stop on the way, and told me that if I wanted to relax I had to climb to the flat top of a small hill on the side of the road, and lie down on my stomach with my head towards the east.

He seemed to have a feeling of urgency. I did not want to argue; or perhaps I was too tired to even speak. I climbed the hill, and did as he had prescribed.

I slept only two or three minutes, but it was sufficient to have my energy renewed.

We drove to the center of town where he told me to let him off.

"Come back," he said as he stepped out of the car. "Be sure to come back."

# 3. Losing Self-importance

I had the opportunity of discussing my two previous visits to don Juan with the friend who had put us in contact. It was his opinion that I was wasting my time. I related to him, in every detail, the scope of our conversations. He thought I was exaggerating and romanticizing a silly old fogey.

There was very little room in me for romanticizing such a preposterous old man. I sincerely felt that his criticisms about my personality had seriously undermined my liking him. Yet I had to admit that they had always been apropos, [* *apropos- of an appropriate or pertinent nature*] sharply delineated, and true to the letter.

The crux of my dilemma at that point was my unwillingness to accept that don Juan was very capable of disrupting all my preconceptions about the world; and my unwillingness to agree with my friend who believed that "the old Indian was just nuts".

I felt compelled to pay him another visit before I made up my mind.

*Wednesday, December 28, 1960*

Immediately after I arrived at his house don Juan took me for a walk in the desert chaparral. He did not even look at the bag of groceries that I had brought him. He seemed to have been waiting for me.

We walked for hours. He did not collect or show me any plants. He did, however, teach me an 'appropriate form of walking'. He said that I had to curl my fingers gently as I walked so I would keep my attention on the trail and the surroundings. He claimed that my ordinary way of walking was debilitating, and that one should never carry anything in the hands. If things had to be carried, one should use a knapsack or any sort of carrying net or shoulder bag. His idea was that by forcing the hands into a specific position, one was capable of greater stamina and greater awareness.

I saw no point in arguing and curled my fingers as he had prescribed, and kept on walking. My awareness was in no way different, nor was my stamina.

We had started our hike in the morning and we stopped to rest around noon. I was perspiring and tried to drink from my canteen, but he stopped me by saying that it was better to have only a sip of water. He cut some leaves from a small yellowish bush, chewed them, and then gave me some. He remarked that they were excellent, and that if I chewed them slowly my thirst would vanish. It did not, but I was not uncomfortable either.

He seemed to have read my thoughts and explained that I had not felt the benefits of the 'right way of walking' or the benefits of chewing the leaves because I was young and strong; and my body did not notice anything because it was a bit stupid.

He laughed. I was not in a laughing mood and that seemed to amuse him even more. He corrected his previous statement, saying that my body was not really stupid, but somehow dormant.

At that moment an enormous crow flew right over us, cawing. That startled me and I began to laugh. I thought that the occasion called for laughter, but to my utter amazement he shook my arm vigorously and hushed me up. He had a most serious expression.

"That was not a joke," he said severely, as if I knew what he was talking about.

I asked for an explanation. I told him that it was incongruous that my laughing at the crow had made him angry when we had laughed at the coffee percolator.

"What you saw was not just a crow", he exclaimed.

"But I saw it and it was a crow," I insisted.

"You saw nothing, you fool," he said in a gruff voice.

His rudeness was uncalled for. I told him that I did not like to make people angry, and that perhaps it would be better if I left since he did not seem to be in a mood to have company.

He laughed uproariously as if I were a clown performing for him. My annoyance and embarrassment grew in proportion.

"You're very violent," he commented casually. "You're taking yourself too seriously."

"But weren't you doing the same?" I interjected. "Taking yourself seriously when you got angry at me?"

He said that to get angry at me was the farthest thing from his mind. He looked at me piercingly.

"What you saw was not an agreement from the world," he said. "Crows flying or cawing are never an agreement. That was an omen!"

"An omen of what?"

"A very important indication about you," he replied cryptically.

At that very instant the wind blew the dry branch of a bush right to our feet.

"That was an agreement!" he exclaimed and looked at me with shiny eyes, and broke into a belly laugh.

I had the feeling that he was teasing me by making up the rules of his strange game as we went along. Thus it was all right for him to laugh, but not for me. My annoyance mushroomed again and I told him what I thought of him.

He was not cross or offended at all. He laughed and his laughter caused me even more anguish and frustration. I thought that he was deliberately humiliating me. I decided right then that I had had my fill of 'field work.'

I stood up and said that I wanted to start walking back to his house because I had to leave for Los Angeles.

"Sit down!" he said imperatively. "You get peeved like an old lady. You cannot leave now, because we're not through yet."

I hated him. I thought he was a contemptuous man.

He began to sing an idiotic Mexican folk song. He was obviously imitating some popular singer. He elongated certain syllables and contracted others and made the song into a most farcical affair. It was so comical that I ended up laughing.

"You see, you laugh at the stupid song," he said. "But the man who sings it that way and those who pay to listen to him are not laughing. They think it is serious."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

I thought he had deliberately concocted the example to tell me that I had laughed at the crow because I had not taken it seriously, the same way I had not taken the song seriously. But he baffled me again. He said I was like the singer and the people who liked his songs; conceited and deadly serious about some nonsense that no one in his right mind should give a damn about.

He then recapitulated, [* recapitulated- summarized briefly] as if to refresh my memory, all he had said before on the topic of 'learning about plants.' He stressed emphatically that if I really wanted to learn, I had to remodel most of my behavior.

My sense of annoyance grew, until I had to make a supreme effort to even take notes.

"You take yourself too seriously," he said slowly. "You are too damn important in your own mind. That must be changed! You are so goddamn important that you feel justified to be annoyed with everything. You're so damn important that you can afford to leave if things don't go your way. I suppose you think that shows you have character. That's nonsense! You're weak, and conceited!"

I tried to stage a protest, but he did not budge. He pointed out that in the course of my life I had not ever finished anything because of that sense of disproportionate importance that I attached to myself.

I was flabbergasted at the certainty with which he made his statements. They were true, of course, and that made me feel not only angry, but also threatened.

"Self-importance is another thing that must be dropped, just like personal history," he said in a dramatic tone.

I certainly did not want to argue with him. It was obvious that I was at a terrible disadvantage; he was not going to walk back to his house until he was ready and I did not know the way. I had to stay with him.

He made a strange and sudden movement, he sort of sniffed the air around him. His head shook slightly and rhythmically. He seemed to be in a state of unusual alertness. He turned and stared at me with a look of bewilderment and curiosity. His eyes swept up and down my body as if he were looking for something specific. Then he stood up abruptly and began to walk fast. He was almost running. I followed him. He kept a very accelerated pace for nearly an hour.

Finally he stopped by a rocky hill and we sat in the shade of a bush. The trotting had exhausted me completely, although my mood was better. It was strange the way I had changed. I felt almost elated; but when we had started to trot after our argument, I was furious with him.

"This is very weird," I said, "but I feel really good."

I heard the cawing of a crow in the distance. He lifted his finger to his right ear and smiled.

"That was an omen," he said.

A small rock tumbled downhill, and made a crashing sound when it landed in the chaparral.

He laughed out loud, and pointed his finger in the direction of the sound.

"And that was an agreement," he said.

He then asked me if I was ready to talk about my self-importance. I laughed. My feeling of anger seemed so far away that I could not even conceive how I had become so cross with him.

"I can't understand what's happening to me," I said. "I got angry and now I don't know why I am not angry any more."

"The world around us is very mysterious," he said. "It doesn't yield it's secrets easily."

I liked his cryptic statements. They were challenging and mysterious. I could not determine whether they were filled with hidden meanings, or whether they were just plain nonsense.

"If you ever come back to the desert here," he said, "stay away from that rocky hill where we stopped today. Avoid it like the plague."

"Why? What's the matter?"

"This is not the time to explain it," he said. "Now we are concerned with losing self-importance. As long as you feel that you are the most important thing in the world, you cannot really appreciate the world around you. You are like a horse with blinders: all you see is yourself apart from everything else."

He examined me for a moment.

"I am going to talk to my little friend here," he said, pointing to a small plant.

He knelt in front of it, and began to caress it and to talk to it. I did not understand what he was saying at first, but then he switched languages and talked to the plant in Spanish. He babbled inanities for a while. Then he stood up.

"It doesn't matter what you say to a plant," he said. "You can just as well make up words. What's important is the feeling of liking it, and treating it as an equal."

He explained that a man who gathers plants must apologize every time for taking them, and must assure them that someday his own body will serve as food for them.

"So, all in all, the plant and ourselves are even," he said. "Neither we nor they are more or less important.

"Come on, talk to the little plant," he urged me. "Tell it that you don't feel important any more."

I went as far as kneeling in front of the plant, but I could not bring myself to speak to it. I felt ridiculous and laughed. I was not angry, however.

Don Juan patted me on the back, and said that it was all right; that at least I had contained my temper.

"From now on talk to the little plants," he said. "Talk until you lose all sense of importance. Talk to them until you can do it in front of others.

"Go to those hills over there and practice by yourself."

I asked if it was all right to talk to the plants silently in my mind.

He laughed and tapped my head.

"No!" he said. "You must talk to them in a loud and clear voice if you want them to answer you."

I walked to the area in question; laughing to myself about his eccentricities. I even tried to talk to the plants, but my feeling of being ludicrous was overpowering.

After what I thought was an appropriate wait, I went back to where don Juan was. I had the certainty that he knew I had not talked to the plants.

He did not look at me. He signaled me to sit down by him.

"Watch me carefully," he said. "I'm going to have a talk with my little friend."

He knelt down in front of a small plant, and for a few minutes he moved and contorted his body, talking and laughing.

I thought he was out of his mind.

"This little plant told me to tell you that she is good to eat," he said as he got up from his kneeling position. "She said that a handful of them would keep a man healthy. She also said that there is a batch of them growing over there."

Don Juan pointed to an area on a hillside perhaps two hundred yards away.

"Let's go and find out," he said.

I laughed at his histrionics. I was sure we would find the plants because he was an expert in the terrain, and knew where the edible and medicinal plants were.

As we walked towards the area in question he told me casually that I should take notice of the plant because it was both a food and a medicine.

I asked him, half in jest, if the plant had just told him that. He stopped walking and examined me with an air of disbelief. He shook his head from side to side.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, laughing. "Your cleverness makes you more silly than I thought. How can the little plant tell me now what I've known all my life?"

He proceeded then to explain that he knew all along the different properties of that specific plant, and that the plant had just told him that there was a batch of them growing in the area he had pointed to; and that she did not mind if he told me that.

Upon arriving at the hillside, I found a whole cluster of the same plants. I wanted to laugh but he did not give me time. He wanted me to thank the batch of plants. I felt excruciatingly self-conscious and could not bring myself to do it.

He smiled benevolently and made another of his cryptic statements. He repeated it three or four times as if to give me time to figure out it's meaning.

"The world around us is a mystery," he said. "And men are no better than anything else. If a little plant is generous with us, we must thank her, or perhaps she will not let us go."

The way he looked at me when he said that gave me a chill. I hurriedly leaned over the plants and said, "Thank you," in a loud voice.

He began to laugh in controlled and quiet spurts.

We walked for another hour, and then started on our way back to his house. At a certain time I dropped behind and he had to wait for me. He checked my fingers to see if I had curled them. I had not. He told me imperatively that whenever I walked with him I had to observe and copy his mannerisms or not come along at all.

"I can't be waiting for you as though you're a child," he said in a scolding tone.

That statement sunk me into the depths of embarrassment and bewilderment. How could it be possible that such an old man could walk so much better than I? I thought I was athletic and strong, and yet he had actually had to wait for me to catch up with him.

I curled my fingers, and strangely enough I was able to keep his tremendous pace without any effort. In fact, at times I felt that my hands were pulling me forward.

I felt elated. I was quite happy walking inanely with the strange old Indian. I began to talk and asked repeatedly if he would show me some peyote plants. He looked at me but did not say a word.

## 4. Death Is an Adviser

*Wednesday, January 25, 1961*

"Would you teach me someday about peyote?" I asked.

He did not answer and, as he had done before, simply looked at me as if I were crazy.

I had mentioned the topic to him in casual conversation various times already, and every time he frowned and shook his head. It was not an affirmative or a negative gesture; it was rather a gesture of despair and disbelief.

He stood up abruptly. We had been sitting on the ground in front of his house. An almost imperceptible shake of his head was the invitation to follow him.

We went into the desert chaparral in a southerly direction. He mentioned repeatedly as we walked that I had to be aware of the uselessness of my self-importance and of my personal history.

"Your friends," he said, turning to me abruptly, "those who have known you for a long time, you must leave them quickly."

I thought he was crazy and his insistence idiotic, but I did not say anything. He peered at me and began to laugh.

After a long hike we came to a halt. I was about to sit down to rest, but he told me to go some twenty yards away and talk to a batch of plants in a loud and clear voice. I felt ill at ease and apprehensive. His weird demands were more than I could bear, and I told him once more that I could not speak to plants because I felt ridiculous. His only comment was that my feeling of self-importance was immense. He seemed to have made a sudden decision, and said that I should not try to talk to plants until I felt easy and natural about it.

"You want to learn about them and yet you don't want to do any work," he said accusingly. "What are you trying to do?"

My explanation was that I wanted bona fide information about the uses of plants, thus I had asked him to be my informant. I had even offered to pay him for his time and trouble.

"You should take the money," I said. "This way we both would feel better. I could then ask you anything I want to because you would be working for me and I would pay you for it. What do you think of that?"

He looked at me contemptuously, and made an obscene sound with his mouth by making his lower lip and his tongue vibrate by exhaling with great force.

"That's what I think of it," he said and laughed hysterically at the look of utmost surprise that I must have had on my face.

It was obvious to me that he was not a man I could easily contend with. In spite of his age, he was ebullient [* *ebullient- joyously unrestrained*] and unbelievably strong. I had had the idea that, being so old, he could have been the perfect 'informant' for me. Old people, I had been led to believe, made the best informants because they were too feeble to do anything else except talk. Don Juan, on the other hand, was a miserable subject. I felt he was unmanageable and dangerous. The friend who had introduced us was right. He was an eccentric old Indian. And although he was not plastered out of his mind most of the time, as my friend had told me, he was worse yet: he was crazy. I again felt the terrible doubt and apprehension I had experienced before. I thought I had overcome that. In fact, I had had no trouble at all convincing myself that I wanted to visit him again. The idea had crept into my mind, however, that perhaps I was a bit crazy myself when I realized that I liked to be with him. His idea that my feeling of self-importance was an obstacle had really made an impact on me. But all that was apparently only an intellectual exercise on my part. The moment I was confronted with his odd behavior I began to experience apprehension and I wanted to leave.

I said that I believed we were so different that there was no possibility of our getting along.

"One of us has to change," he said, staring at the ground. "And you know who."

He began humming a Mexican folk song, and then lifted his head abruptly and looked at me. His eyes were fierce and burning. I wanted to look away or close my eyes, but to my utter amazement I could not break away from his gaze.

He asked me to tell him what I had seen in his eyes. I said that I saw nothing, but he insisted that I had to voice what his eyes had made me feel aware of. I struggled to make him understand that the only thing his eyes made me aware of was my embarrassment; and that the way he was looking at me was very discomforting.

He did not let go. He kept a steady stare. It was not an outright menacing or mean look; it was rather a mysterious but unpleasant gaze.

He asked me if he reminded me of a bird.

"A bird?" I exclaimed.

He giggled like a child and moved his eyes away from me.

"Yes," he said softly. "A bird, a very funny bird!"

He locked his gaze on me again and commanded me to remember. He said with an extraordinary conviction that he 'knew' I had seen that look before.

My feelings of the moment were that the old man provoked me, against my honest desire, every time he opened his mouth. I stared back at him in obvious defiance. Instead of getting angry he began to laugh. He slapped his thigh and yelled as if he were riding a wild horse. Then he became serious and told me that it was of utmost importance that I stop fighting him and remember that funny bird he was talking about.

"Look into my eyes," he said.

His eyes were extraordinarily fierce. There was a feeling about them that actually reminded me of something, but I was not sure what it was. I pondered upon it for a moment and then I had a sudden realization: It was not the shape of his eyes nor the shape of his head, but some cold fierceness in his gaze that had reminded me of the look in the eyes of a falcon. At the very moment of that realization, he was looking at me askew, and for an instant my mind experienced a total chaos. I thought I had seen a falcon's features instead of don Juan's. The image was too fleeting and I was too upset to have paid more attention to it.

In a very excited tone I told him that I could have sworn I had seen the features of a falcon on his face. He had another attack of laughter.

I have seen the look in the eyes of falcons. I used to hunt them when I was a boy, and in the opinion of my grandfather I was good. He had a Leghorn chicken farm and falcons were a menace to his business. Shooting them was not only functional but also 'right'. I had forgotten until that moment that the fierceness of their eyes had haunted me for years, but it was so far in my past that I thought I had lost the memory of it.

"I used to hunt falcons," I said.

"I know it," don Juan replied matter-of-factly.

His tone carried such a certainty that I began to laugh. I thought he was a preposterous fellow. He had the gall to sound as if he knew I had hunted falcons. I felt supremely contemptuous of him.

"Why do you get so angry?" he asked in a tone of genuine concern.

I did not know why. He began to probe me in a very unusual manner. He asked me to look at him again and tell him about the 'very funny bird' he reminded me of. I struggled against him, and out of contempt said that there was nothing to talk about. Then I felt compelled to ask him why he had said he knew I used to hunt falcons. Instead of answering me, he again commented on my behavior. He said I was a violent fellow that was capable of 'frothing at the mouth' at the drop of a hat. I protested that that was not true. I had always had the idea I was rather congenial and easygoing. I said it was his fault for forcing me out of control with his unexpected words and actions.

"Why the anger?" he asked.

I took stock of my feelings and reactions. I really had no need to be angry with him.

He again insisted that I should look into his eyes and tell him about the ‘strange falcon.’ He had changed his wording. He had said before ‘a very funny bird.’ Then he substituted it with ‘strange falcon.’ The change in wording summed up a change in my own mood. I had suddenly become sad.

He squinted his eyes until they were two slits and said in an overdramatic voice that he was ‘seeing’ a very strange falcon. He repeated his statement three times as if he were actually seeing it there in front of him.

"Don't you remember it?" he asked.

I did not remember anything of the sort.

"What's strange about the falcon?" I asked.

"You must tell me that," he replied.

I insisted that I had no way of knowing what he was referring to. Therefore, I could not tell him anything.

"Don't fight me!" he said. "Fight your sluggishness and remember."

I seriously struggled for a moment to figure him out. It did not occur to me that I could just as well have tried to remember.

"There was a time when you saw a lot of birds," he said as though cuing me.

I told him that when I was a child I had lived on a farm and had hunted hundreds of birds.

He said that if that was the case, I should not have any difficulty remembering all the funny birds I had hunted.

He looked at me with a question in his eyes, as if he had just given me the last clue.

"I have hunted so many birds," I said, "that I can't recall anything about them."

"This bird is special," he replied almost in a whisper. "This bird is a falcon."

I became involved again in figuring out what he was driving at. Was he teasing me? Was he serious? After a long interval he urged me again to remember. I felt that it was useless for me to try to end his play. The only other thing I could do was to join him.

"Are you talking about a falcon that I have hunted?" I asked.

"Yes," he whispered with his eyes closed.

"So this happened when I was a boy?"

"Yes."

"But you said you're seeing a falcon in front of you now."

"I am."

"What are you trying to do to me?"

"I'm trying to make you remember."

"What? For heaven's sakes!"

"A falcon swift as light," he said, looking at me in the eyes. I felt my heart had stopped.

"Now look at me," he said.

But I did not. I heard his voice as a faint sound. Some stupendous recollection had taken me wholly. The white falcon!

It all began with my grandfather's explosion of anger upon taking a count of his young Leghorn chickens. They had been disappearing in a steady and disconcerting manner. He personally organized and carried out a meticulous vigil, and after days of steady watching we finally saw a big white bird flying away with a young Leghorn chicken in it's claws. The bird was fast and apparently knew it's route. It swooped down from behind some trees, grabbed the chicken and flew away through an opening between two branches. It happened so fast that my grandfather had hardly seen it, but I did and I knew that it was indeed a falcon. My grandfather said that if that was the case it had to be an albino.

We started a campaign against the albino falcon, and twice I thought I had gotten it. It even dropped it's prey, but it got away. It was too fast for me. It was also very intelligent; it never came back to hunt on my grandfather's farm.

I would have forgotten about it had my grandfather not needled me to hunt the bird. For two months I chased the albino falcon all over the valley where I lived. I learned it's habits, and I could almost intuit it's route of flight. Yet it's speed and the suddenness of it's appearance would always baffle me. I could boast that I had prevented it from taking it's prey, perhaps every time we had met, but I could never bag it.

In the two months that I carried on the strange war against the albino falcon, I came close to it only once. I had been chasing it all day and I was tired. I had sat down to rest, and fell asleep under a tall eucalyptus tree. The sudden cry of a falcon woke me up. I opened my eyes without making any other movement and I saw a whitish bird perched in the highest branches of the eucalyptus tree. It was the albino falcon. The chase was over. It was going to be a difficult shot: I was lying on my back and the bird had it's back turned to me. There was a sudden gust of wind and I used it to muffle the noise of lifting my .22 long rifle to take aim. I wanted to wait until the bird had turned or until it had begun to fly so I would not miss it. But the albino bird remained motionless. In order to take a better shot I would have needed to move and the falcon was too fast for that. I thought that my best alternative was to wait. And I did, a long, interminable time. Perhaps what affected me was the long wait, or perhaps it was the loneliness of the spot where the bird and I were: I suddenly felt a chill up my spine, and in an unprecedented action I stood up and left. I did not even look to see if the bird had flown away.

I never attached any significance to my final act with the albino falcon. However, it was terribly strange that I did not shoot it. I had shot dozens of falcons before. On the farm where I grew up, shooting birds, or hunting any kind of animal was a matter of course.

Don Juan listened attentively as I told him the story of the albino falcon.

"How did you know about the white falcon?" I asked when I had finished.

"I saw it," he replied.

"Where?"

"Right here in front of you."

I was not in an argumentative mood any more.

"What does all this mean?" I asked.

He said that a white bird like that was an omen, and that not shooting it down was the only right thing to do.

"Your death gave you a little warning," he said with a mysterious tone. "It always comes as a chill."

"What are you talking about?" I said nervously.

He really made me nervous with his spooky talk.

"You know a lot about birds," he said. "You've killed too many of them. You know how to wait. You have waited patiently for hours. I know that. I am seeing it."

His words caused a great turmoil in me. I thought that what annoyed me the most about him was his certainty. I could not stand his dogmatic assuredness about issues in my own life that I was not sure of myself. I became engulfed in my feelings of dejection and I did not see him leaning over me until he actually had whispered something in my ear. I did not understand at first and he repeated it. He told me to turn around casually and look at a boulder to my left. He said that my death was there staring at me and if I turned when he signaled me I might be capable of seeing it.

He signaled me with his eyes. I turned and I thought I saw a flickering movement over the boulder. A chill ran through my body, the muscles of my abdomen contracted involuntarily and I experienced a jolt, a spasm. After a moment I regained my composure and I explained away the sensation of seeing the flickering shadow as an optical illusion caused by turning my head so abruptly.

"Death is our eternal companion," don Juan said with a most serious air. "It is always to our left, at an arm's length. It was watching you when you were watching the white falcon: It whispered in your ear and you felt it's chill, as you felt it today. It has always been watching you. It always will until the day it taps you."

He extended his arm, and touched me lightly on the shoulder; and at the same time he made a deep clicking sound with his tongue. The effect was devastating. I almost got sick to my stomach.

"You're the boy who stalked game, and waited patiently, as death waits; you know very well that death is to our left, the same way you were to the left of the white falcon."

His words had the strange power to plunge me into an unwarranted terror. My only defense was my compulsion to commit to writing everything he said.

"How can anyone feel so important when we know that death is stalking us?" he asked.

I had the feeling my answer was not really needed. I could not have said anything anyway. A new mood had possessed me.

"The thing to do when you're impatient," he proceeded, "is to turn to your left and ask advice from your death. An immense amount of pettiness is dropped if your death makes a gesture to you, or if you catch a glimpse of it, or if you just have the feeling that your companion is there watching you."

He leaned over again, and whispered in my ear that if I turned to my left suddenly, upon seeing his signal, I could again see my death on the boulder.

His eyes gave me an almost imperceptible signal, but I did not dare to look.

I told him that I believed him, and that he did not have to press the issue any further because I was terrified. He had one of his roaring belly laughs.

He replied that the issue of our death was never pressed far enough. I argued that it would be meaningless for me to dwell upon my death, since such a thought would only bring discomfort and fear.

"You're full of crap!" he exclaimed. "Death is the only wise adviser that we have. Whenever you feel, as you always do, that everything is going wrong and you're about to be annihilated, turn to your death and ask if that is so. Your death will tell you that you're wrong; that nothing really matters outside it's touch. Your death will tell you, 'I haven't touched you yet.'"

He shook his head and seemed to be waiting for my reply. I had none. My thoughts were running rampant. He had delivered a staggering blow to my egotism. The pettiness of being annoyed with him was monstrous in the light of my death.

I had the feeling he was fully aware of my change of mood. He had turned the tide in his favor. He smiled and began to hum a Mexican tune.

"Yes," he said softly after a long pause. "One of us here has to change, and fast. One of us here has to learn again that death is the hunter, and that it is always to one's left. One of us here has to ask death's advice, and drop the cursed pettiness that belongs to men that live their lives as if death will never tap them."

We remained quiet for more than an hour, and then we started walking again. We meandered in the desert chaparral for hours. I did not ask him if there was any purpose to it. It did not matter. Somehow he had made me recapture an old feeling; something I had quite forgotten; the sheer joy of just moving around without attaching any intellectual purpose to it.

I wanted him to let me catch a glimpse of whatever I had seen on the boulder.

"Let me see that shadow again," I said.

"You mean your death, don't you?" he replied with a touch of irony in his voice.

For a moment I felt reluctant to voice it.

"Yes," I finally said. "Let me see my death once again."

"Not now," he said. "You're too solid."

"I beg your pardon?"

He began to laugh, and for some unknown reason his laughter was no longer offensive and insidious as it had seemed in the past. I did not think that it was different from the point of view of it's pitch, it's loudness, or the spirit of it; the new element was my mood. In view of my impending death my fears and annoyance were nonsense.

"Let me talk to plants then," I said.

He roared with laughter.

"You're too good now," he said, still laughing. "You go from one extreme to the other. Be still. There is no need to talk to plants unless you want to know their secrets, and for that you need the most unbending intent. So save your good wishes. There is no need to see your death either. It is sufficient that you feel it's presence around you."

## 5. Assuming Responsibility

*Tuesday, April 11, 1961*

I arrived at don Juan's house in the early morning on Sunday, April 9.

"Good morning, don Juan," I said. "Am I glad to see you!"

He looked at me, and broke into a soft laughter. He had walked to my car as I was parking it, and held the door open while I gathered some packages of food that I had brought for him.

We walked to the house, and sat down by the door.

This was the first time I had been really aware of what I was doing there. For three months I had actually looked forward to going back to the 'field'. It was as if a time bomb set within myself had exploded, and suddenly I had remembered something transcendental to me. I had remembered that once in my life I had been very patient and very efficient.

Before don Juan could say anything I asked him the question that had been pressing hard in my mind. For three months I had been obsessed with the memory of the albino falcon. How did he know about it when I myself had forgotten?

He laughed but did not answer. I pleaded with him to tell me.

"It was nothing," he said with his usual conviction. "Anyone could tell that you're strange. You're just numb, that's all."

I felt that he was again getting me off guard, and was pushing me into a corner in which I did not care to be.

"Is it possible to see our death?" I asked, trying to remain within the topic.

"Sure," he said, laughing. "It is here with us."

"How do you know that?"

"I'm an old man; with age, one learns all kinds of things."

"I know lots of old people, but they have never learned this. How come you did?"

"Well, let's say that I know all kinds of things because I don't have a personal history; and because I don't feel more important than anything else; and because my death is sitting with me right here."

He extended his left arm, and moved his fingers as if he were actually petting something.

I laughed. I knew where he was leading me. The old devil was going to clobber me again-probably with my self-importance, but I did not mind this time. The memory that I had once had a superb patience filled me with a strange, quiet euphoria that dispelled most of my feelings of nervousness and intolerance towards don Juan. What I felt instead was a sensation of wonder about his acts.

"Who are you, really?" I asked.

He seemed surprised. He opened his eyes to an enormous size and blinked like a bird, closing his eyelids as if they were a shutter. They came down and went up again and his eyes remained in focus. His maneuver startled me and I recoiled, and he laughed with childlike abandon.

"For you I am Juan Matus, and I am at your service," he said with exaggerated politeness.

I then asked my other burning question: "What did you do to me the first day we met?"

I was referring to the look he had given me.

"Me? Nothing," he replied with a tone of innocence.

I described to him the way I had felt when he had looked at me and how incongruous it had been for me to be tongue-tied by it.

He laughed until tears rolled down his cheeks. I again felt a surge of animosity towards him. I thought that I was being so serious and thoughtful, and he was being so 'Indian' in his coarse ways.

He apparently detected my mood, and stopped laughing all of a sudden.

After a long hesitation, I told him that his laughter had annoyed me because I was seriously trying to understand what had happened to me.

"There is nothing to understand," he replied, undisturbed.

I reviewed for him the sequence of unusual events that had taken place since I had met him, starting with the mysterious look he had given me, to remembering the albino falcon and seeing on the boulder the shadow he had said was my death.

"Why are you doing all this to me?" I asked.

There was no belligerence in my question. I was only curious as to why it was me in particular.

"You asked me to tell you what I know about plants," he said.

I noticed a tinge of sarcasm in his voice. He sounded as if he were humoring me.

"But what you have told me so far has nothing to do with plants," I protested.

His reply was that it took time to learn about them.

My feeling was that it was useless to argue with him. I realized then the total idiocy of the easy and absurd resolutions I had made. While I was at home I had promised myself that I was never going to lose my temper or feel annoyed with don Juan. In the actual situation, however, the minute he rebuffed me I had another attack of peevishness. I felt there was no way for me to interact with him and that angered me.

"Think of your death now," don Juan said suddenly. "It is at arm's length. It may tap you any moment, so really you have no time for crappy thoughts and moods. None of us have time for that.

"Do you want to know what I did to you the first day we met? I *saw* you, and I *saw* that you thought you were lying to me. But you weren't, not really."

I told him that his explanation confused me even more. He replied that that was the reason he did not want to explain his acts, and that explanations were not necessary. He said that the only thing that counted was action; acting instead of talking.

He pulled out a straw mat and lay down, propping his head up with a bundle. He made himself comfortable and then he told me that there was another thing I had to perform if I really wanted to learn about plants.

"What was wrong with you when I saw you, and what is wrong with you now, is that you don't like to take responsibility for what you do," he said slowly, as if to give me time to understand what he was saying. "When you were telling me all those doings in the bus depot you were aware that they were lies. Why were you lying?"

I explained that my objective had been to find a 'key informant' for my work.

Don Juan smiled and began humming a Mexican tune.

"When a man decides to do something, he must go all the way," he said, "but he must take responsibility for what he does. No matter what he does, he must know first why he is doing it, and then he must proceed with his actions without having doubts or remorse about them."

He examined me. I did not know what to say. Finally I ventured an opinion, almost as a protest.

"That's an impossibility!" I said.

He asked me why, and I said that perhaps ideally that was what everybody thought they should do. In practice, however, there was no way to avoid doubts and remorse.

"Of course there is a way," he replied with conviction.

"Look at me," he said. "I have no doubts or remorse. Everything I do is my decision and my responsibility. The simplest thing I do, to take you for a walk in the desert, for instance, may very well mean my death. Death is stalking me. Therefore, I have no room for doubts or remorse. If I have to die as a result of taking you for a walk, then I must die.

"You, on the other hand, feel that you are immortal, and the decisions of an immortal man can be canceled or regretted or doubted. In a world where death is the hunter, my friend, there is no time for regrets or doubts. There is only time for decisions."

I argued, in sincerity, that in my opinion that was an unreal world, because it was arbitrarily made by taking an idealized form of behavior and saying that that was the way to proceed.

I told him the story of my father, who used to give me endless lectures about the wonders of a healthy mind in a healthy body; and how young men should temper their bodies with hardships and with feats of athletic competition. He was a young man. When I was eight years old he was only twenty-seven. During the summertime, as a rule, he would come from the city, where he taught school, to spend at least a month with me at my grandparents' farm where I lived. It was a hellish month for me. I told don Juan one instance of my father's behavior that I thought would apply to the situation at hand.

Almost immediately upon arriving at the farm, my father would insist on taking a long walk with me at his side so we could talk things over; and while we were talking, he would make plans for us to go swimming every day at six A.M. At night he would set the alarm for five-thirty to have plenty of time, because at six sharp we had to be in the water. And when the alarm would go off in the morning, he would jump out of bed, put on his glasses, go to the window, and look out.

I had even memorized the ensuing monologue.

"Uhm . . . A bit cloudy today. Listen, I'm going to lie down again for just five minutes. O.K.? No more than five! I'm just going to stretch my muscles and fully wake up."

He would invariably fall asleep again until ten, sometimes until noon.

I told don Juan that what annoyed me was his refusal to give up his obviously phony resolutions. He would repeat this ritual every morning until I would finally hurt his feelings by refusing to set the alarm clock.

"They were not phony resolutions," don Juan said, obviously taking sides with my father. "He just didn't know how to get out of bed, that's all."

"At any rate," I said, "I'm always leery of unreal resolutions."

"What would be a resolution that is real then?" don Juan asked with a coy smile.

"If my father would have said to himself that he could not go swimming at six in the morning, but perhaps at three in the afternoon."

"Your resolutions injure the spirit," don Juan said with an air of great seriousness.

I thought I even detected a note of sadness in his tone. We were quiet for a long time. My peevishness had vanished. I thought of my father.

"He didn't want to swim at three in the afternoon. Don't you see?" don Juan said.

His words made me jump.

I told him that my father was weak, and so was his world of ideal acts that he never performed. I was almost shouting.

Don Juan did not say a word. He shook his head slowly in a rhythmical way. I felt terribly sad. Thinking of my father always gave me a consuming feeling.

"You think you were stronger, don't you?" he asked in a casual tone.

I said I did. I began to tell him all the emotional turmoil that my father had put me through, but he interrupted me.

"Was he mean to you?" he asked.

"No."

"Was he petty with you?"

"No."

"Did he do all he could for you?"

"Yes."

"Then what was wrong with him?"

Again I began to shout that he was weak, but I caught myself and lowered my voice. I felt a bit ludicrous being cross-examined by don Juan.

"What are you doing all this for?" I said. "We were supposed to be talking about plants."

I felt more annoyed and despondent than ever. I told him that he had no business or the remotest qualifications to pass judgment on my behavior, and he exploded into a belly laugh.

"When you get angry you always feel righteous, don't you?" he said, and blinked like a bird.

He was right. I had the tendency to feel justified at being angry.

"Let's not talk about my father," I said, feigning a happy mood. "Let's talk about plants."

"No, let's talk about your father," he insisted. "That is the place to begin today. If you think that you were so much stronger than he, why didn't you go swimming at six in the morning in his place?"

I told him that I could not believe he was seriously asking me that. I had always thought that swimming at six in the morning was my father's business, and not mine.

"It was also your business from the moment you accepted his idea," don Juan snapped at me.

I said that I had never accepted it; that I had always known my father was not truthful to himself. Don Juan asked me matter-of-factly why I had not voiced my opinions at the time.

"You don't tell your father things like that," I said as a weak explanation.

"Why not?"

"That was not done in my house, that's all."

"You have done worse things in your house," he declared like a judge from the bench. "The only thing you never did was to shine your spirit."

There was such a devastating force in his words that they echoed in my mind. He brought all my defenses down. I could not argue with him. I took refuge in writing my notes,

I tried a last feeble explanation, and said that all my life I had encountered people of my father's kind who had, like my father, hooked me somehow into their schemes; and as a rule I had always been left dangling.

"You are complaining," he said softly. "You have been complaining all your life because you don't assume responsibility for your decisions. If you would have assumed responsibility for your father's idea of swimming at six in the morning, you would have swum, by yourself if necessary; or you would have told him to go to hell the first time he opened his mouth after you knew his devices. But you didn't say anything. Therefore, you were as weak as your father.

"To assume the responsibility of one's decisions means that one is ready to die for them."

"Wait, wait!" I said. "You are twisting this around."

He did not let me finish. I was going to tell him that I had used my father only as an example of an unrealistic way of acting; and that nobody in his right mind would be willing to die for such an idiotic thing.

"It doesn't matter what the decision is," he said. "Nothing could be more or less serious than anything else. Don't you see? In a world where death is the hunter there are no small or big decisions. There are only decisions that we make in the face of our inevitable death."

I could not say anything. Perhaps an hour went by. Don Juan was perfectly motionless on his mat although he was not sleeping.

"Why do you tell me all this, don Juan?" I asked. "Why are you doing this to me?"

He said, "You came to me. No, that was not the case, you were brought to me. And I have had a gesture with you."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You could have had a gesture with your father by swimming for him, but you didn't, perhaps because you were too young. I have lived longer than you. I have nothing pending. There is no hurry in my life, therefore I can properly have a gesture with you."

In the afternoon we went for a hike. I easily kept his pace, and marveled again at his stupendous physical prowess. He walked so nimbly and with such sure steps that next to him I was like a child. We went in an easterly direction. I noticed then that he did not like to talk while he walked. If I spoke to him he would stop walking in order to answer me.

After a couple of hours we came to a hill. He sat down and signaled me to sit by him. He announced in a mock-dramatic tone that he was going to tell me a story.

He said that once upon a time there was a young man; a destitute Indian who lived among the white men in a city. He had no home; no relatives; no friends. He had come into the city to find his fortune and had found only misery and pain. From time to time he made a few cents working like a mule; barely enough for a morsel; otherwise he had to beg or steal food.

Don Juan said that one day the young man went to the market place. He walked up and down the street in a haze; his eyes wild upon seeing all the good things that were gathered there. He was so frantic that he did not see where he was walking. He ended up tripping over some baskets, and fell on top of an old man.

The old man had been carrying four enormous gourds, and had just sat down to rest and eat. Don Juan smiled knowingly, and said that the old man found it quite strange that the young man had stumbled on him. He was not angry at being disturbed; but was amazed at why this particular young man had fallen on top of him. The young man, on the other hand, was angry and told the old man to get out of his way. The young man was not concerned at all about the ultimate reason for their meeting. He had not noticed that their paths had actually crossed.

Don Juan mimicked the motions of someone going after something that was rolling over. He said that the old man's gourds had turned over and were rolling down the street. When the young man saw the gourds, he thought he had found his food for the day.

He helped the old man up and insisted on helping him carry the heavy gourds. The old man told him that he was on his way to his home in the mountains. The young man insisted on going with him, at least part of the way.

The old man took the road to the mountains and as they walked, he gave the young man part of the food he had bought at the market. The young man ate to his heart's content. When he was quite satisfied, he began to notice how heavy the gourds were, and clutched them tightly.

Don Juan opened his eyes and smiled with a devilish grin, and said that the young man asked, "What do you carry in these gourds?" The old man did not answer but told him that he was going to show him a companion- or friend- who could alleviate the young man's sorrows; and give him advice and wisdom about the ways of the world.

Don Juan made a majestic gesture with both hands, and said that the old man summoned the most beautiful deer that the young man had ever seen. The deer was so tame that it came to him, and walked around him. It glittered and shone. The young man was spellbound and knew right away that it was a 'spirit deer'. The old man told him then, that if he wished to have that friend and it's wisdom, all he had to do was to let go of the gourds.

Don Juan's grin portrayed ambition; he said that the young man's petty desires were pricked upon hearing such a request. Don Juan's eyes became small and devilish as he voiced the young man's question: "What do you have in these four enormous gourds?"

Don Juan said that the old man very serenely replied that he was carrying food: 'pinole' and water. He stopped narrating the story and walked around in a circle a couple of times. I did not know what he was doing. But apparently it was part of the story. The circle seemed to portray the deliberations of the young man.

Don Juan said that, of course, the young man had not believed a word. He calculated that if the old man, who was obviously a wizard, was willing to give a 'spirit deer' for his gourds, then the gourds must have been filled with power beyond belief.

Don Juan contorted his face again into a devilish grin, and said that the young man declared that he wanted to have the gourds. There was a long pause that seemed to mark the end of the story. Don Juan remained quiet, yet I was sure he wanted me to ask about it, and I did.

"What happened to the young man?"

"He took the gourds," he replied with a smile of satisfaction.

There was another long pause. I laughed. I thought that this had been a real 'Indian story'.

Don Juan's eyes were shining as he smiled at me. There was an air of innocence about him. He began to laugh in soft spurts and asked me, "Don't you want to know about the gourds?"

"Of course I want to know. I thought that was the end of the story."

"Oh no," he said with a mischievous light in his eyes. "The young man took his gourds, and ran away to an isolated place and opened them."

"What did he find?" I asked.

Don Juan glanced at me and I had the feeling he was aware of my mental gymnastics. He shook his head and chuckled.

"Well," I urged him. "Were the gourds empty?"

"There was only food and water inside the gourds," he said. "And the young man, in a fit of anger, smashed them against the rocks."

I said that his reaction was only natural— anyone in his position would have done the same.

Don Juan's reply was that the young man was a fool who did not know what he was looking for. He did not know what 'power' was, so he could not tell whether or not he had found it. He had not taken responsibility for his decision, therefore he was angered by his blunder. He expected to gain something and got nothing instead. Don Juan speculated that if I were the young man and if I had followed my inclinations, I would have ended up angry and remorseful, and would, no doubt, have spent the rest of my life feeling sorry for myself for what I had lost.

Then he explained the behavior of the old man. He had cleverly fed the young man so as to give him the 'daring of a satisfied stomach,' thus the young man upon finding only food in the gourds smashed them in a fit of anger.

"Had the young man been aware of his decision and assumed responsibility for it," don Juan said, "he would have taken the food, and would've been more than satisfied with it. And perhaps he might even have realized that that food was power too."

## 6. Becoming a Hunter

*Friday, June 23, 1961*

As soon as I sat down I bombarded don Juan with questions. He did not answer me and made an impatient gesture with his hand to be quiet. He seemed to be in a serious mood.

"I was thinking that you haven't changed at all in the time you've been trying to learn about plants," he said in an accusing tone.

He began reviewing in a loud voice all the changes of personality he had recommended I should undertake. I told him that I had considered the matter very seriously and found that I could not possibly fulfill them because each of them ran contrary to my core. He replied that to merely consider them was not enough, and that whatever he had said to me was not said just for fun. I again insisted that, although I had done very little in matters of adjusting my personal life to his ideas, I really wanted to learn the uses of plants.

After a long, uneasy silence I boldly asked him, "Would you teach me about peyote, don Juan?"

He said that my intentions alone were not enough, and that to know about peyote— he called it 'Mescalito' for the first time— was a serious matter. It seemed that there was nothing else to say.

In the early evening, however, he set up a test for me; he put forth a problem without giving me any clues to it's solution: to find a beneficial place, or spot, in the area right in front of his door where we always sat to talk; a spot where I could allegedly feel perfectly happy and invigorated. During the course of the night, while I attempted to find the 'spot' by rolling on the ground, I twice detected a change of coloration on the uniformly dark dirt floor of the designated area.

The problem exhausted me and I fell asleep on one of the places where I had detected the change in color. In the morning don Juan woke me up, and announced that I had had a very successful experience. Not only had I found the beneficial spot I was looking for, but I had also found it's opposite, an enemy or negative spot and the colors associated with both.

*Saturday, June 24, 1961*

We went into the desert chaparral in the early morning. As we walked, don Juan explained to me that finding a 'beneficial' or an 'enemy' spot was an important need for a man in the wilderness. I wanted to steer the conversation to the topic of peyote, but he flatly refused to talk about it. He warned me that there should be no mention of it unless he himself brought up the subject.

We sat down to rest in the shade of some tall bushes in an area of thick vegetation. The desert chaparral around us was not quite dry yet. It was a warm day and the flies kept on pestering me, but they did not seem to bother don Juan. I wondered whether he was just ignoring them, but then I noticed they were not landing on his face at all.

"Sometimes it is necessary to find a beneficial spot quickly out in the open," don Juan went on. "Or maybe it is necessary to determine quickly whether or not the spot where one is about to rest is a bad one. One time we sat to rest by some hill, and you got very angry and upset. That spot was your enemy. A little crow gave you a warning, remember?"

I remembered that he had made a point of telling me to avoid that area in the future. I also remembered that I had become angry because he had not let me laugh.

"I thought that the crow that flew overhead was an omen for me alone," he said. "I would never have suspected that the crows were friendly towards you too."

"What are you talking about?"

"The crow was an omen," he went on. "If you knew about crows you would have avoided the place like the plague. Crows are not always available to give warning though, and you must learn to find, by yourself, a proper place to camp or to rest."

After a long pause don Juan suddenly turned to me and said that in order to find the proper place to rest all I had to do was to cross my eyes. He gave me a knowing look, and in a confidential tone told me that I had done precisely that when I was rolling on his porch; and thus I had been capable of finding two spots and their colors. He let me know that he was impressed by my accomplishment.

"I really don't know what I did," I said.

"You crossed your eyes," he said emphatically. "That's the technique. You must have done that, although you don't remember it."

Don Juan then described the technique, which he said took years to perfect, and which consisted of gradually forcing the eyes to see separately the same image. The lack of image conversion entailed a double perception of the world. This double perception, according to don Juan, allowed one the opportunity of judging changes in the surroundings which the eyes were ordinarily incapable of perceiving.

Don Juan coaxed me to try it. He assured me that it was not injurious to the sight. He said that I should begin by looking in short glances, almost with the corners of my eyes. He pointed to a large bush and showed me how. I had a strange feeling, seeing don Juan's eyes taking incredibly fast glances at the bush. His eyes reminded me of those of a shifty animal that cannot look straight.

We walked for perhaps an hour while I tried not to focus my sight on anything. Then don Juan asked me to start separating the images perceived by each of my eyes. After another hour or so, I got a terrible headache and had to stop.

"Do you think you could find, by yourself, a proper place for us to rest?" he asked.

I had no idea what the criterion for a 'proper place' was. He patiently explained that looking in short glances allowed the eyes to pick out unusual sights.

"Such as what?" I asked.

"They are not sights proper," he said. "They are more like feelings. If you look at a bush or a tree or a rock where you may like to rest, your eyes can make you feel whether or not that's the best resting place."

I again urged him to describe what those feelings were, but he either could not describe them, or he simply did not want to. He said that I should practice by picking out a place, and then he would tell me whether or not my eyes were working.

At one moment, I caught sight of what I thought was a pebble which reflected light. I could not see it if I focused my eyes on it, but, if I swept the area with fast glances, I could detect a sort of faint glitter. I pointed out the place to don Juan. It was in the middle of an open unshaded flat area devoid of thick bushes. He laughed uproariously and then asked me why I had picked that specific spot. I explained that I was seeing a glitter.

"I don't care what you see," he said. "You could be seeing an elephant. How you feel is the important issue."

I did not feel anything at all. He gave me a mysterious look. He said that he wished he could oblige me and sit down to rest with me there, but he was going to sit somewhere else while I tested my choice.

I sat down while he looked at me curiously from a distance of thirty or forty feet away. After a few minutes he began to laugh loudly. Somehow his laughter made me nervous. It put me on edge. I felt he was making fun of me and I got angry. I began to question my motives for being there. There was definitely something wrong in the way my total endeavor with don Juan was proceeding. I felt that I was just a pawn in his clutches.

Suddenly don Juan charged at me at full speed, and pulled me by the arm, dragging me bodily for ten or twelve feet. He helped me to stand up, and wiped some perspiration from his forehead. I noticed then that he had exerted himself to his limit. He patted me on the back and said that I had picked the wrong place; and that he had had to rescue me in a real hurry because he saw that the spot where I was sitting was about to take over my entire feelings. I laughed. The image of don Juan charging at me was very funny. He had actually run like a young man. His feet moved as if he were grabbing the soft reddish dirt of the desert in order to catapult himself over me. I had seen him laughing at me, and then in a matter of seconds he was dragging me by the arm.

After a while he urged me to continue looking for a proper place to rest. We kept on walking, but I did not detect or 'feel' anything at all. Perhaps if I had been more relaxed I would have noticed or felt something. I had ceased, however, to be angry with him. Finally he pointed to some rocks and we came to a halt.

"Don't feel disappointed," don Juan said. "It takes a long time to train the eyes properly."

I did not say anything. I was not going to be disappointed about something I did not understand at all. Yet, I had to admit that three times already since I had begun to visit don Juan, I had become very angry and had been agitated to the point of being nearly ill while sitting on places that he called bad.

"The trick is to feel with your eyes," he said. "Your problem now is that you don't know what to feel. It'll come to you, though, with practice."

"Perhaps you should tell me, don Juan, what I am supposed to feel."

"That's impossible."

"Why?"

"No one can tell you what you are supposed to feel. It is not heat, or light, or glare, or color. It is something else."

"Can't you describe it?"

"No. All I can do is give you the technique. Once you learn to separate the images and see two of everything, you must focus your attention in the area between the two images. Any change worthy of notice would take place there in that area."

"What kind of changes are they?"

"That is not important. The feeling that you get is what counts. Every man is different. You saw glitter today, but that did not mean anything because the feeling was missing. I can't tell you how to feel. You must learn that yourself."

We rested in silence for some time. Don Juan covered his face with his hat, and remained motionless as if he were asleep. I became absorbed in writing my notes until he made a sudden movement that made me jolt. He sat up abruptly and faced me, frowning.

"You have a knack for hunting," he said. "And that's what you should learn; hunting. We are not going to talk about plants any more."

He puffed out his jaws for an instant, then candidly added, "I don't think we ever have, anyway, have we?" and laughed.

We spent the rest of the day walking in every direction while he gave me an unbelievably detailed explanation about rattlesnakes: the way they nest, the way they move around, their seasonal habits, their quirks of behavior. Then he proceeded to corroborate each of the points he had made, and finally he caught and killed a large snake. He cut it's head off, cleaned it's viscera, skinned it, and roasted the meat. His movements had such a grace and skill that it was a sheer pleasure just to be around him. I had listened to him and watched him spellbound. My concentration had been so complete that the rest of the world had practically vanished for me.

Eating the snake was a hard reentry into the world of ordinary affairs. I felt nauseated when I began to chew a bite of snake meat. It was an ill-founded queasiness as the meat was delicious, but my stomach seemed to be rather an independent unit. I could hardly swallow at all. I thought don Juan would have a heart attack from laughing so hard.

Afterwards we sat down for a leisurely rest in the shade of some rocks. I began to work on my notes, and the quantity of them made me realize that he had given me an astonishing amount of information about rattlesnakes.

"Your hunter's spirit has returned to you," don Juan said suddenly and with a serious face. "Now you're hooked."

"I beg your pardon?"

I wanted him to elaborate on his statement that I was hooked, but he only laughed and repeated it.

"How am I hooked?" I insisted.

"Hunters will always hunt," he said. "I am a hunter myself."

"Do you mean you hunt for a living?"

"I hunt in order to live. I can live off the land, anywhere."

He indicated the total surroundings with his hand.

"To be a hunter means that one knows a great deal," he went on. "It means that one can see the world in different ways. In order to be a hunter one must be in perfect balance with everything else, otherwise hunting would become a meaningless chore. For instance, today we took a little snake. I had to apologize to her for cutting her life off so suddenly and so definitely. I did what I did knowing that my own life will also be cut off someday in very much the same fashion, suddenly and definitely. So, all in all, we and the snakes are on a par. One of them fed us today."

"I had never conceived a balance of that kind when I used to hunt," I said.

"That's not true. You didn't just kill animals. You and your family all ate the game."

His statements carried the conviction of someone who had been there. He was, of course, right. There had been times when I had provided the incidental wild meat for my family.

After a moment's hesitation I asked, "How did you know that?"

"There are certain things that I just know," he said. "I can't tell you how though."

I told him that my aunts and uncles would very seriously call all the birds I would bag 'pheasants.'

Don Juan said he could easily imagine them calling a sparrow a 'tiny pheasant' and added a comical rendition of how they would chew it. The extraordinary movements of his jaw gave me the feeling that he was actually chewing a whole bird, bones and all.

"I really think that you have a touch for hunting," he said, staring at me, "and we have been barking up the wrong tree. Perhaps you will be willing to change your way of life in order to become a hunter."

He reminded me that I had found out, with just a little exertion on my part, that in the world there were good and bad spots for me. He added that I had also found out the specific colors associated with them.

"That means that you have a knack for hunting," he declared. "Not everyone who tries would find their colors and their spots at the same time."

To be a hunter sounded very nice and romantic, but it was an absurdity to me since I did not particularly care to hunt.

"You don't have to care to hunt or to like it," he replied to my complaint. "You have a natural inclination. I think the best hunters never like hunting; they do it well, that's all."

I told don Juan that I had the feeling he was capable of arguing his way out of anything, and yet he maintained that he did not like to talk at all.

"It is like what I have told you about hunters," he said. "I don't necessarily like to talk. I just have a knack for it and I do it well. That's all."

I found his mental agility truly funny.

"Hunters must be exceptionally tight individuals," he continued. "A hunter leaves very little to chance. I have been trying all along to convince you that you must learn to live in a different way. So far I have not succeeded. There was nothing you could've grabbed on to. Now it's different. I have brought back your old hunter's spirit. Perhaps through it you will change."

I protested that I did not want to become a hunter. I reminded him that in the beginning I had just wanted him to tell me about medicinal plants, but he had made me stray so far away from my original purpose that I could not clearly recall any more whether or not I had really wanted to learn about plants.

"Good," he said. "Really good. If you don't have such a clear picture of what you want, you may become more humble.

"Let's put it this way. For your purposes it doesn't really matter whether you learn about plants or about hunting. You've told me that yourself. You are interested in anything that anyone can tell you. True?"

I had said that to him in trying to define the scope of anthropology, and in order to draft him as my informant.

Don Juan chuckled, obviously aware of his control over the situation.

"I am a hunter," he said, as if he were reading my thoughts. "I leave very little to chance. Perhaps I should explain to you that I learned to be a hunter. I have not always lived the way I do now. At one point in my life, I had to change. Now I'm pointing the direction to you. I'm guiding you. I know what I'm talking about. Someone taught me all this. I didn't figure it out for myself."

"Do you mean that you had a teacher, don Juan?"

"Let's say that someone taught me to hunt the way I want to teach you now," he said, and quickly changed the topic.

"I think that once upon a time hunting was one of the greatest acts a man could perform," he said. "All hunters were powerful men. In fact, a hunter had to be powerful to begin with in order to withstand the rigors of that life."

Suddenly I became curious. Was he referring to a time perhaps prior to the Conquest? I began to probe him.

"When was the time you are talking about?"

"Once upon a time."

"When? What does 'once upon a time' mean?"

"It means once upon a time, or maybe it means now, today. It doesn't matter. At one time everybody knew that a hunter was the best of men. Now not everyone knows that, but there are a sufficient number of people who do. I know it: someday you will. See what I mean?"

"Do the Yaqui Indians feel that way about hunters? That's what I want to know."

"Not necessarily."

"Do the Pima Indians?"

"Not all of them. But some."

I named various neighboring groups. I wanted to commit him to a statement that hunting was a shared belief and practice of some specific people. But he avoided answering me directly, so I changed the subject.

"Why are you doing all this for me, don Juan?" I asked.

He took off his hat and scratched his temples in feigned bafflement.

"I'm having a gesture with you," he said softly. "Other people have had a similar gesture with you; someday you yourself will have the same gesture with others. Let's say that it is my turn. One day I found out that if I wanted to be a hunter worthy of self-respect, I had to change my way of life. I used to whine and complain a great deal. I had good reasons to feel shortchanged. I am an Indian and Indians are treated like dogs. There was nothing I could do to remedy that, so all I was left with was my sorrow. But then my good fortune spared me and someone taught me to hunt. And I realized that the way I lived was not worth living . . . so I changed it."

"But I am happy with my life, don Juan. Why should I have to change it?"

He began to sing a Mexican song, very softly, and then hummed the tune. His head bobbed up and down as he followed the beat of the song.

"Do you think that you and I are equal?" he asked in a sharp voice.

His question caught me off guard. I experienced a peculiar buzzing in my ears as though he had actually shouted his words, which he had not done; however, there had been a metallic sound in his voice that was reverberating in my ears.

I scratched the inside of my left ear with the small finger of my left hand. My ears itched all the time and I had developed a rhythmical nervous way of rubbing the inside of them with the small finger of either hand. The movement was more properly a shake of my whole arm.

Don Juan watched my movements with apparent fascination.

"Well... are we equals?" he asked.

"Of course we're equals," I said.

I was, naturally, being condescending. [* *condescending- treating others with arrogance, or patronizing those considered inferior*] I felt very warm towards him even though at times I did not know what to do with him; yet I still held in the back of my mind, although I would never voice it, the belief that I- being a university student; a man of the sophisticated Western world, was superior to an Indian.

"No," he said calmly, "we are not."

"Why, certainly we are," I protested.

"No," he said in a soft voice. "We are not equals. I am a hunter and a warrior, and you are a pimp."

My mouth fell open. I could not believe that don Juan had actually said that. I dropped my notebook, and stared at him dumbfoundedly; and then, of course, I became furious.

He looked at me with calm and collected eyes. I avoided his gaze. And then he began to talk. He enunciated his words clearly. They poured out smoothly and deadly. He said that I was pimping for someone else. That I was not fighting my own battles, but the battles of some unknown people; that I did not want to learn about plants or about hunting or about anything. And that his world of precise acts and feelings and decisions was infinitely more effective than the blundering idiocy I called 'my life.'

After he finished talking I was numb. He had spoken without belligerence or conceit, but with such power, and yet such calmness, that I was not even angry any more.

We remained silent. I felt embarrassed and could not think of anything appropriate to say. I waited for him to break the silence. Hours went by. Don Juan became motionless by degrees, until his body had acquired a strange, almost frightening rigidity. His silhouette became difficult to make out as it got dark, and finally when it was pitch black around us, he seemed to have merged into the blackness of the stones. His state of motionlessness was so total that it was as if he did not exist any longer.

It was midnight when I finally realized that he could and would stay motionless there in that wilderness in those rocks, perhaps forever if he had to. His world of precise acts and feelings and decisions was indeed superior.

I quietly touched his arm, and tears flooded me.

## 7. Being Inaccessible

*Thursday, June 29, 1961*

Again don Juan, as he had done every day for nearly a week, held me spellbound with his knowledge of specific details about the behavior of game. He first explained and then corroborated a number of hunting tactics based on what he called 'the quirks of quails.' I became so utterly involved in his explanations that a whole day went by and I had not noticed the passage of time. I even forgot to eat lunch. Don Juan made joking remarks that it was quite unusual for me to miss a meal.

By the end of the day, he had caught five quail in a most ingenious trap which he had taught me to assemble and set up.

"Two are enough for us," he said, and let three of them loose.

He then taught me how to roast quail. I had wanted to cut some shrubs and make a barbecue pit the way my grandfather used to make it; lined with green branches and leaves and sealed with dirt. But don Juan said that there was no need to injure the shrubs since we had already injured the quail.

After we finished eating, we walked very leisurely towards a rocky area. We sat on a sandstone hillside and I said jokingly that if he would have left the matter up to me, I would have cooked all five of the quail, and that my barbecue would have tasted much better than his roast.

"No doubt," he said. "But if you would have done all that, we might have never left this place in one piece."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "What would have prevented us?"

"The shrubs, the quail, everything around would have pitched in."

"I never know when you are talking seriously," I said. He made a gesture of feigned impatience and smacked his lips.

"You have a weird notion of what it means to talk seriously," he said. "I laugh a great deal because I like to laugh, yet everything I say is deadly serious even if you don't understand it. Why should the world be only as you think it is? Who gave you the authority to say so?"

"There is no proof that the world is otherwise," I said.

It was getting dark. I was wondering if it was time to go back to don Juan's house, but he did not seem to be in a hurry and I was enjoying myself.

The wind was cold. Suddenly don Juan stood up, and told me that we had to climb to the hilltop and stand up on an area clear of shrubs.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "I'm your friend and I'll see that nothing bad happens to you."

"What do you mean?" I asked, alarmed. Don Juan had the most insidious facility to shift me from sheer enjoyment to sheer fright.

"The world is very strange at this time of the day," he said. "That's what I mean. No matter what you see, don't be afraid."

"What am I going to see?"

"I don't know yet," he said, peering into the distance towards the south.

He did not seem to be worried. I also kept on looking in the same direction.

Suddenly he perked up, and pointed with his left hand towards a dark area in the desert shrubbery.

"There it is," he said, as if he had been waiting for something which had suddenly appeared.

"What is it?" I asked.

"There it is," he repeated. "Look! Look!"

I did not see anything, just the shrubs.

"It is here now," he said with great urgency in his voice. "It is here."

A sudden gust of wind hit me at that instant, and made my eyes burn. I stared towards the area in question. There was absolutely nothing out of the ordinary.

"I can't see a thing," I said.

"You just felt it," he replied. "Right now. It got into your eyes, and kept you from seeing."

"What are you talking about?"

"I have deliberately brought you to a hilltop," he said. "We are very noticeable here, and something is coming to us."

"What? The wind?"

"Not just the wind," he said sternly. "It may seem to be wind to you, because wind is all you know."

I strained my eyes staring into the desert shrubs. Don Juan stood silently by me for a moment. He then walked into the nearby chaparral, and began to tear some big branches from the surrounding shrubs. He gathered eight of them, and made a bundle. He ordered me to do the same, and to apologize to the plants in a loud voice for mutilating them.

When we had two bundles, he made me run with them to the hilltop, and lie down on my back between two large rocks. With tremendous speed, he arranged the branches of my bundle to cover my entire body. Then he covered himself in the same manner, and whispered through the leaves that I should watch how the so-called wind would cease to blow once we had become unnoticeable.

At one moment, to my utter amazement, the wind actually ceased to blow as don Juan had predicted. It happened so gradually that I would have missed the change had I not been deliberately waiting for it. For a while the wind had hissed through the leaves over my face, and then gradually it became quiet all around us.

I whispered to don Juan that the wind had stopped, and he whispered back that I should not make any overt noise or movement because what I was calling the wind was not wind at all, but something that had a volition of it's own, and could actually recognize us.

I laughed out of nervousness.

In a muffled voice don Juan called my attention to the quietness around us. He whispered that he was going to stand up, and I should follow him, putting the branches aside very gently with my left hand.

We stood up at the same time. Don Juan stared for a moment into the distance towards the south, and then turned around abruptly and faced the west.

"Sneaky. Really sneaky," he muttered, pointing to an area towards the southwest.

"Look! Look!" he urged me.

I stared with all the intensity I was capable of. I wanted to see whatever he was referring to, but I did not notice anything at all; or rather, I did not notice anything I had not seen before. There were just shrubs which seemed to be agitated by a soft wind; they rippled.

"It's here," don Juan said.

At that moment I felt a blast of air in my face. It seemed that the wind had actually begun to blow after we stood up. I could not believe it; there had to be a logical explanation for it.

Don Juan chuckled softly, and told me not to tax my brain trying to reason it out.

"Let's go gather the shrubs once more," he said. "I hate to do this to these little plants, but we must *stop* you."

He picked up the branches we had used to cover ourselves, and piled small rocks and dirt over them. Then, repeating the same movements we had made before, each of us gathered eight new branches. In the meantime the wind kept on blowing ceaselessly. I could feel it ruffling the hair around my ears. Don Juan whispered that once he had covered me I should not make the slightest movement or sound. He very quickly put the branches over my body and then he lay down and covered himself.

We stayed in that position for about twenty minutes and during that time a most extraordinary phenomenon occurred. The wind again changed from a hard continuous gust to a mild vibration.

I held my breath, waiting for don Juan's signal. At a given moment, he gently shoved off the branches. I did the same and we stood up. The hilltop was very quiet. There was only a slight, soft vibration of leaves in the surrounding chaparral.

Don Juan's eyes were fixedly staring at an area in the shrubs south of us.

"There it is again!" he exclaimed in a loud voice.

I involuntarily jumped, nearly losing my balance, and he ordered me in a loud imperative voice to look.

"What am I supposed to see?" I asked desperately.

He said that it, the wind or whatever, was like a cloud or a whorl that was quite a way above the shrubs, twirling it's way to the hilltop where we were.

I saw a ripple forming on the bushes in the distance.

"There it comes," don Juan said in my ear. "Look how it is searching for us."

Right then a strong steady gust of wind hit my face as it had hit it before. This time, however, my reaction was different. I was terrified. I had not seen what don Juan had described, but I had seen a most eerie wave rippling the shrubs. I did not want to succumb to my fear and deliberately sought any kind of suitable explanation. I said to myself that there must be continuous air currents in the area, and don Juan, being thoroughly acquainted with the whole region, was not only aware of that, but was capable of mentally plotting their occurrence. All he had to do was to lie down, count, and wait for the wind to taper off; and once he stood up, he had only to wait again for it's reoccurrence.

Don Juan's voice shook me out of my mental deliberations. He was telling me that it was time to leave. I stalled: I wanted to stay to make sure that the wind would taper off.

"I didn't see anything, don Juan," I said.

"You noticed something unusual though."

"Perhaps you should tell me again what I was supposed to see."

"I've already told you," he said. "Something that hides in the wind and looks like a whorl, a cloud, a mist, a face that twirls around."

Don Juan made a gesture with his hands to depict a horizontal and a vertical motion.

"It moves in a specific direction," he went on. "It either tumbles or it twirls. A hunter must know all that in order to move correctly."

I wanted to humor him, but he seemed to be trying so hard to make his point that I did not dare. He looked at me for a moment, and I moved my eyes away.

"To believe that the world is only as you think it is, is stupid," he said. "The world is a mysterious place. Especially in the twilight."

He pointed towards the wind with a movement of his chin.

"This can follow us," he said. "It can make us tired or it might even kill us."

"That wind?"

"At this time of the day, in the twilight, there is no wind. At this time there is only power."

We sat on the hilltop for an hour. The wind blew hard and constantly all that time.

*Friday, June 30, 1961*

In the late afternoon, after eating, don Juan and I moved to the area in front of his door. I sat on my 'spot' and began working on my notes. He lay down on his back with his hands folded over his stomach. We had stayed around the house all day on account of the 'wind'. Don Juan explained that we had disturbed the wind deliberately, and that it was better not to fool around with it. I had even had to sleep covered with branches.

A sudden gust of wind made don Juan get up in one incredibly agile jump.

"Damn it," he said. "The wind is looking for you."

"I can't buy that, don Juan," I said, laughing. "I really can't."

I was not being stubborn. I just found it impossible to endorse the idea that the wind had it's own volition and was looking for me, or that it had actually spotted us and rushed to us on top of the hill. I said that the idea of a 'willful wind' was a view of the world that was rather simplistic.

"What is the wind then?" he asked in a challenging tone.

I patiently explained to him that masses of hot and cold air produced different pressures, and that the pressure made the masses of air move vertically and horizontally. It took me a long while to explain all the details of basic meteorology.

"You mean that all there is to the wind is hot and cold air?" he asked in a tone of bafflement.

"I'm afraid so," I said and silently enjoyed my triumph.

Don Juan seemed to be dumbfounded. But then he looked at me and began to laugh uproariously.

"Your opinions are final opinions," he said with a note of sarcasm. "They are the last word, aren't they? For a hunter, however, your opinions are pure crap. It makes no difference whether the pressure is one or two or ten. If you would live out here in the wilderness, you would know that during the twilight the wind becomes power. A hunter that is worth his salt knows that, and acts accordingly."

"How does he act?"

"He uses the twilight and that power hidden in the wind."

"How?"

"If it is convenient to him, the hunter hides from the power by covering himself and remaining motionless until the twilight is gone and the power has sealed him into it's protection."

Don Juan made a gesture of enveloping something with his hands.

"It's protection is like a . . . "

He paused in search of a word and I suggested 'cocoon.'

"That is right," he said. "The protection of the power seals you like a cocoon. A hunter can stay out in the open and no puma or coyote or slimy bug could bother him. A mountain lion could come up to the hunter's nose and sniff him, and if the hunter does not move, the lion would leave. I can guarantee you that.

"If the hunter, on the other hand, wants to be noticed, all he has to do is to stand on a hilltop at the time of the twilight and the power will nag him and seek him all night. Therefore, if a hunter wants to travel at night or if he wants to be kept awake, he must make himself available to the wind.

"Therein lies the secret of great hunters. To be available and unavailable at the precise turn of the road."

I felt a bit confused and asked him to recapitulate his point. Don Juan very patiently explained that he had used the twilight and the wind to point out the crucial importance of the interplay between hiding and showing oneself.

"You must learn to become deliberately available and unavailable," he said. "As your life goes now, you are unwittingly available at all times."

I protested. My feeling was that my life was becoming increasingly more and more secretive. He said I had not understood his point, and that to be unavailable did not mean to hide, or to be secretive, but to be inaccessible.

"Let me put it in another way," he proceeded patiently. "It makes no difference to hide if everyone knows that you are hiding.

"Your problems right now stem from that. When you are hiding, everyone knows that you are hiding, and when you are not, you are available for everyone to take a poke at you."

I was beginning to feel threatened and hurriedly tried to defend myself.

"Don't explain yourself," don Juan said dryly. "There is no need. We are fools, all of us, and you cannot be different. At one time in my life, I, like you, made myself available over and over again until there was nothing of me left for anything except perhaps crying. And that I did, just like yourself."

Don Juan sized me up for a moment and then sighed loudly.

"I was younger than you, though," he went on, "but one day I had enough and I changed. Let's say that one day, when I was becoming a hunter, I learned the secret of being available and unavailable."

I told him that his point was bypassing me. I truly could not understand what he meant by being available. He had used the Spanish idioms 'ponerse al alcance' and 'ponerse en el medio del camino,' to put oneself within reach, and to put oneself in the middle of a trafficked way.

"You must take yourself away," he explained. "You must retrieve yourself from the middle of a trafficked way. Your whole being is there, thus it is of no use to hide; you would only imagine that you are hidden. Being in the middle of the road means that everyone passing by watches your comings and goings."

His metaphor was interesting, but at the same time it was also obscure.

"You are talking in riddles," I said.

He stared at me fixedly for a long moment and then began to hum a tune. I straightened my back and sat attentively. I knew that when don Juan hummed a Mexican tune he was about to clobber me.

"Hey," he said, smiling, and peering at me. "Whatever happened to your blonde friend? That girl that you used to really like."

I must have looked at him like a confounded idiot. He laughed with great delight. I did not know what to say.

"You told me about her," he said reassuringly.

But I did not remember ever telling him about anybody, much less about a blonde girl.

"I've never mentioned anything like that to you," I said.

"Of course you have," he said as if dismissing the argument.

I wanted to protest, but he stopped me, saying that it did not matter how he knew about her, that the important issue was that I had liked her.

I sensed a surge of animosity towards him building up within myself.

"Don't stall," don Juan said dryly. "This is a time when you should cut off your feelings of importance.

“You once had a woman, a very dear woman, and then one day you lost her."

I began to wonder if I had ever talked about her to don Juan. I concluded that there had never been an opportunity. Yet I might have. Every time he drove with me we had always talked incessantly about everything. I did not remember everything we had talked about because I could not take notes while driving. I felt somehow appeased by my conclusions. I told him that he was right. There had been a very important blonde girl in my life.

"Why isn't she with you?" he asked.

"She left."

"Why?"

"There were many reasons."

"There were not so many reasons. There was only one. You made yourself too available."

I earnestly wanted to know what he meant.

He touched me. He seemed to be cognizant of the effect of his touch, and puckered up his lips to hide a mischievous smile.

"Everyone knew about you two," he said with unshaken conviction.

"Was it wrong?"

"It was deadly wrong. She was a fine person."

I expressed the sincere feeling that his fishing in the dark was odious to me, especially the fact that he always made his statements with the assurance of someone who had been at the scene, and had seen it all.

"But that's true," he said with a disarming candor. "I have *seen* it all. She was a fine person."

I knew that it was meaningless to argue, but I was angry with him for touching that sore spot in my life. I said that the girl in question was not such a fine person after all, and that in my opinion she was rather weak.

"So are you," he said calmly. "But that is not important. What counts is that you have looked for her everywhere; that makes her a special person in your world, and for a special person one should have only fine words."

I felt embarrassed; a great sadness had begun to engulf me.

"What are you doing to me, don Juan?" I asked. "You always succeed in making me sad. Why?"

"You are now indulging in sentimentality," he said accusingly.

"What is the point of all this, don Juan?"

"Being inaccessible is the point," he declared. "I brought up the memory of this person only as a means to show you directly what I couldn't show you with the wind.

"You lost her because you were accessible. You were always within her reach, and your life was a routine one."

"No!" I said. "You're wrong. My life was never a routine."

"It was and it is a routine," he said dogmatically. "It is an unusual routine, and that gives you the impression that it is not a routine, but I assure you it is."

I wanted to sulk and get lost in moroseness, but somehow his eyes made me feel restless; they seemed to push me on and on.

"The art of a hunter is to become inaccessible," he said. "In the case of that blonde girl it would've meant that you had to become a hunter and meet her sparingly; not the way you did. You stayed with her day after day, until the only feeling that remained was boredom. True?"

I did not answer. I felt I did not have to. He was right.

"To be inaccessible means that you touch the world around you sparingly. You don't eat five quail; you eat one. You don't damage the plants just to make a barbecue pit. You don't expose yourself to the power of the wind unless it is mandatory. You don't use and squeeze people until they have shriveled to nothing, especially the people you love."

"I have never used anyone," I said sincerely.

But don Juan maintained that I had, and thus I could bluntly state that I became tired and bored with people.

"To be unavailable means that you deliberately avoid exhausting yourself and others," he continued. "It means that you are not hungry and desperate, like the poor bastard that feels he will never eat again and devours all the food he can, all five quail!"

Don Juan was definitely hitting me below the belt. I laughed and that seemed to please him. He touched my back lightly.

"A hunter knows he will lure game into his traps over and over again, so he doesn't worry. To worry is to become accessible; unwittingly accessible. And once you worry, you cling to anything out of desperation; and once you cling, you are bound to get exhausted, or to exhaust whoever or whatever you are clinging to."

I told him that in my day-to-day life it was inconceivable to be inaccessible. My point was, that in order to function, I had to be within reach of everyone that had something to do with me.

"I've told you already that to be inaccessible does not mean to hide or to be secretive," he said calmly. "It doesn't mean that you cannot deal with people either. A hunter uses his world sparingly and with tenderness, regardless of whether the world might be things, or plants, or animals, or people, or power. A hunter deals intimately with his world, and yet he is inaccessible to that same world."

"That's a contradiction," I said. "He cannot be inaccessible if he is there in his world, hour after hour, day after day."

"You did not understand," don Juan said patiently. "He is inaccessible because he's not squeezing his world out of shape. He taps it lightly, stays for as long as he needs to, and then swiftly moves away leaving hardly a mark."

# 8. Disrupting the Routines of Life

*Sunday, July 16, 1961*

We spent all morning watching some rodents that looked like fat squirrels. Don Juan called them water rats. He pointed out that they were very fast in getting out of danger, but after they had outrun any predator, they had the terrible habit of stopping, or even climbing a rock to stand on their hind legs to look around and groom themselves.

"They have very good eyes," don Juan said. "You must move only when they are on the run. Therefore, you must learn to predict when and where they will stop so that you would also stop at the same time."

I became engrossed in observing them and I had what would have been a field day for hunters as I spotted so many of them; and finally, I could predict their movements almost every time.

Don Juan then showed me how to make traps to catch them. He explained that a hunter had to take time to observe their eating or their nesting places in order to determine where to locate his traps. He would then set them during the night, and all he had to do the next day was to scare them off so they would scatter away into his catching devices.

We gathered some sticks and proceeded to build the hunting contraptions. I had mine almost finished, and was excitedly wondering whether or not it would work, when suddenly don Juan stopped and looked at his left wrist as if he were checking a watch which he had never had. He said that according to his timepiece it was lunchtime. I was holding a long stick which I was trying to make into a hoop by bending it in a circle. I automatically put it down with the rest of my hunting paraphernalia.

Don Juan looked at me with an expression of curiosity. Then he made the wailing sound of a factory siren at lunchtime. I laughed. His siren sound was perfect. I walked towards him, and noticed that he was staring at me. He shook his head from side to side.

"I'll be damned," he said.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

He again made the long wailing sound of a factory whistle. "Lunch is over," he said. "Go back to work."

I felt confused for an instant, but then I thought that he was joking, perhaps because we really had nothing to make lunch with. I had been so engrossed with the rodents that I had forgotten we had no provisions. I picked up the stick again, and tried to bend it. After a moment don Juan again blew his 'whistle.'

"Time to go home," he said.

He examined his imaginary watch, and then looked at me and winked.

"It's five o'clock," he said with an air of someone revealing a secret. I thought that he had suddenly become fed up with hunting and was calling the whole thing off. I simply put everything down and began to get ready to leave. I did not look at him. I presumed that he also was preparing his gear. When I was through I looked up and saw him sitting cross-legged a few feet away.

"I'm through," I said. "We can go anytime."

He got up and climbed a rock. He stood there, five or six feet above the ground, looking at me. He put his hands on either side of his mouth, and made a very prolonged and piercing sound. It was like a magnified factory siren. He turned around in a complete circle, making the wailing sound.

"What are you doing, don Juan?" I asked.

He said that he was giving the signal for the whole world to go home. I was completely baffled. I could not figure out whether he was joking, or whether he had simply flipped his lid. I watched him intently and tried to relate what he was doing to something he may have said before. We had hardly talked at all during the morning and I could not remember anything of importance.

Don Juan was still standing on top of the rock. He looked at me, smiled and winked again. I suddenly became alarmed. Don Juan put his hands on both sides of his mouth and let out another long whistlelike sound.

He said that it was eight o'clock in the morning, and that I had to set up my gear again because we had a whole day ahead of us.

I was completely confused by then. In a matter of minutes my fear had mounted to an irresistible desire to run away from the scene. I thought don Juan was crazy. I was about to flee when he slid down from the rock, and came to me, smiling.

"You think I'm crazy, don't you?" he asked.

I told him that he was frightening me out of my wits with his unexpected behavior.

He said that we were even. I did not understand what he meant. I was deeply preoccupied with the thought that his acts seemed thoroughly insane. He explained that he had deliberately tried to scare me out of my wits with the heaviness of his unexpected behavior because I myself was driving him up the walls with the heaviness of my expected behavior. He added that my routines were as insane as his blowing his whistle.

I was shocked and asserted that I did not really have any routines. I told him that I believed my life was, in fact, a mess because of my lack of healthy routines.

Don Juan laughed and signaled me to sit down by him. The whole situation had mysteriously changed again. My fear had vanished as soon as he had begun to talk.

"What are my routines?" I asked.

"Everything you do is a routine."

"Aren't we all that way?"

"Not all of us. I don't do things out of routine."

"What prompted all this, don Juan? What did I do or what did I say that made you act the way you did?"

"You were worrying about lunch."

"I did not say anything to you. How did you know that I was worrying about lunch?"

"You worry about eating every day around noontime, and around six in the evening, and around eight in the morning," he said with a malicious grin. "You worry about eating at those times even if you're not hungry.

"All I had to do to show your routine spirit was to blow my whistle. Your spirit is trained to work with a signal."

He stared at me with a question in his eyes. I could not defend myself.

"Now you're getting ready to make hunting into a routine," he went on. "You have already set your pace in hunting: you talk at a certain time, eat at a certain time, and fall asleep at a certain time."

I had nothing to say. The way don Juan had described my eating habits was the pattern I used for everything in my life. Yet I strongly felt that my life was less routine than that of most of my friends and acquaintances.

"You know a great deal about hunting now," don Juan continued. "It'll be easy for you to realize that a good hunter knows one thing above all— he knows the routines of his prey. That's what makes him a good hunter.

"If you would remember the way I have proceeded in teaching you hunting, you would perhaps understand what I mean. First I taught you how to make and set up your traps. Then I taught you the routines of the game you were after, and then we tested the traps against their routines. Those parts are the outside forms of hunting.

"Now I have to teach you the final and, by far, the most difficult part. Perhaps years will pass before you can say that you understand it and that you're a hunter."

Don Juan paused as if to give me time. He took off his hat, and imitated the grooming movements of the rodents we had been observing. It was very funny to me. His round head made him look like one of those rodents.

"To be a hunter is not just to trap game," he went on. "A hunter that is worth his salt does not catch game because he sets his traps, or because he knows the routines of his prey, but because he himself has no routines. This is his advantage. He is not at all like the animals he is after; fixed by heavy routines and predictable quirks. He is free, fluid, unpredictable."

What don Juan was saying sounded to me like an arbitrary and irrational idealization. I could not conceive of life without routines. I wanted to be very honest with him and not just agree or disagree with him. I felt that what he had in mind was not possible to accomplish by me or by anyone.

"I don't care how you feel," he said. "In order to be a hunter you must disrupt the routines of your life. You have done well in hunting. You have learned quickly, and now you can see that you are like your prey, easy to predict."

I asked him to be specific and give me concrete examples.

"I am talking about hunting," he said calmly. "Therefore I am concerned with the things animals do: the places they eat; the place, the manner, the time they sleep; where they nest; how they walk. These are the routines I am pointing out to you so you can become aware of them in your own being.

"You have observed the habits of animals in the desert. They eat or drink at certain places, they nest at specific spots, they leave their tracks in specific ways; in fact, everything they do can be foreseen or reconstructed by a good hunter.

"As I told you before, in my eyes you behave like your prey. Once in my life someone pointed out the same thing to me, so you're not unique in that. All of us behave like the prey we are after. That, of course, also makes us prey for something or someone else. Now, the concern of a hunter who knows all this is to stop being a prey himself. Do you see what I mean?"

I again expressed the opinion that his proposition was unattainable.

"It takes time," don Juan said. "You could begin by not eating lunch every single day at twelve o'clock."

He looked at me and smiled benevolently. His expression was very funny and made me laugh.

"There are certain animals, however, that are impossible to track," he went on. "There are certain types of deer, for instance, which a fortunate hunter might be able to come across, by sheer luck, once in his lifetime."

Don Juan paused dramatically and looked at me piercingly. He seemed to be waiting for a question, but I did not have any.

"What do you think makes them so difficult to find and so unique?" he asked.

I shrugged my shoulders because I did not know what to say.

"They have no routines," he said in a tone of revelation. "That's what makes them magical."

"A deer has to sleep at night," I said. "Isn't that a routine?"

"Certainly, if the deer sleeps every night at a specific time and in one specific place. But those magical beings do not behave like that. In fact, someday you may verify this for yourself. Perhaps it'll be your fate to chase one of them for the rest of your life."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You like hunting: Perhaps someday, in some place in the world, your path may cross the path of a magical being and you might go after it.

"A magical being is a sight to behold. I was fortunate enough to cross paths with one. Our encounter took place after I had learned and practiced a great deal of hunting. Once, I was in a forest of thick trees in the mountains of central Mexico when suddenly I heard a sweet whistle. It was unknown to me. Never in all my years of roaming in the wilderness had I heard such a sound. I could not place it in the terrain. It seemed to come from different places. I thought that perhaps I was surrounded by a herd or a pack of some unknown animals.

"I heard the tantalizing whistle once more. It seemed to come from everywhere. I realized then my good fortune. I knew it was a magical being; a deer. I also knew that a magical deer is aware of the routines of ordinary men and the routines of hunters.

"It is very easy to figure out what an average man would do in a situation like that. First of all his fear would immediately turn him into a prey. Once he becomes a prey, he has two courses of action left. He either flees or he makes his stand. If he is not armed he would ordinarily flee into the open field to run for his life. If he is armed, he could get his weapon ready, and would then make his stand either by freezing on the spot, or by dropping to the ground.

"A hunter, on the other hand, when he stalks in the wilderness would never walk into any place without figuring out his points of protection. Therefore, he would immediately take cover. He might drop his poncho on the ground, or he might hang it from a branch as a decoy; and then he would hide and wait until the game makes it's next move.

"So, in the presence of the magical deer, I didn't behave like either. I quickly stood on my head, and began to wail softly. I actually wept tears and sobbed for such a long time that I was about to faint. Suddenly I felt a soft breeze. Something was sniffing my hair behind my right ear. I tried to turn my head to see what it was and tumbled down. I sat up and saw a radiant creature staring at me. The deer looked at me, and I told him I would not harm him. Then the deer talked to me."

Don Juan stopped and looked at me. I smiled involuntarily. The idea of a talking deer was quite incredible, to put it mildly.

"He talked to me," don Juan said with a grin.

"The deer talked?"

"He did."

Don Juan stood, and picked up his bundle of hunting paraphernalia.

"Did it really talk?" I asked in a tone of perplexity.

Don Juan roared with laughter.

"What did it say?" I asked half in jest.

I thought he was pulling my leg. Don Juan was quiet for a moment as if he were trying to remember. Then his eyes brightened as he told me what the deer had said.

"The magical deer said, 'Hello friend,'" don Juan went on. "And I answered, 'Hello.' Then he asked me, 'Why are you crying?' and I said, 'Because I'm sad.' Then the magical creature came to my ear and said as clearly as I am speaking now, 'Don't be sad.'"

Don Juan stared into my eyes. He had a glint of sheer mischievousness. He began to laugh uproariously.

I said that his dialogue with the deer had been sort of dumb.

"What did you expect?" he asked, still laughing. "I'm an Indian."

His sense of humor was so outlandish that all I could do was laugh with him.

"You don't believe that a magical deer talks, do you?"

"I'm sorry but I just can't believe things like that can happen," I said.

"I don't blame you," he said reassuringly. "It's one of the darndest things."

## 9. The Last Battle on Earth

*Monday, July 24, 1961*

Around mid-afternoon, after we had roamed for hours in the desert, don Juan chose a place to rest in a shaded area. As soon as we sat down he began talking. He said that I had learned a great deal about hunting, but I had not changed as much as he had wished.

"It's not enough to know how to make and set up traps," he said. "A hunter must live as a hunter in order to draw the most out of his life. Unfortunately, changes are difficult and happen very slowly. Sometimes it takes years for a man to become convinced of the need to change. It took me years, but maybe I didn't have a knack for hunting. I think for me the most difficult thing was to really want to change."

I assured him that I understood his point. In fact, since he had begun to teach me how to hunt, I also had begun to reassess my actions. Perhaps the most dramatic discovery for me was that I liked don Juan's ways. I liked don Juan as a person. There was something solid about his behavior. The way he conducted himself left no doubts about his mastery, and yet he had never exercised his advantage to demand anything from me. His interest in changing my way of life, I felt, was akin to an impersonal suggestion, or perhaps it was akin to an authoritative commentary on my failures. He had made me very aware of my failings, yet I could not see how his ways would remedy anything in me. I sincerely believed that, in light of what I wanted to do in my life, his ways would have only brought me misery and hardship; hence the impasse. However, I had learned to respect his mastery, which had always been expressed in terms of beauty and precision.

"I have decided to shift my tactics," he said.

I asked him to explain. His statement was vague and I was not sure whether or not he was referring to me.

"A good hunter changes his ways as often as he needs," he replied. "You know that yourself."

"What do you have in mind, don Juan?"

"A hunter must not only know about the habits of his prey, he also must know that there are powers on this earth that guide men and animals and everything that is living."

He stopped talking. I waited but he seemed to have come to the end of what he wanted to say.

"What kind of powers are you talking about?" I asked after a long pause.

"Powers that guide our lives and our deaths."

Don Juan stopped talking and seemed to be having tremendous difficulty in deciding what to say. He rubbed his hands and shook his head, puffing out his jaws. Twice he signaled me to be quiet as I started to ask him to explain his cryptic statements.

"You won't be able to stop yourself easily," he finally said. "I know that you're stubborn, but that doesn't matter. The more stubborn you are the better it'll be when you finally succeed in changing yourself."

"I am trying my best," I said.

"No. I disagree. You're not trying your best. You just said that because it sounds good to you. In fact, you've been saying the same thing about everything you do. You've been trying your best for years to no avail. Something must be done to remedy that."

I felt compelled, as usual, to defend myself. Don Juan seemed to aim, as a rule, at my very weakest points. I remembered then that every time I had attempted to defend myself against his criticisms I had ended up feeling like a fool. I stopped myself in the midst of a long explanatory speech.

Don Juan examined me with curiosity and laughed. He said in a very kind tone that he had already told me that all of us were fools. I was not an exception.

"You always feel compelled to explain your acts as if you were the only man on earth who's wrong," he said. "It's your old feeling of importance. You have too much of it. You also have too much personal history. On the other hand, you don't assume responsibility for your acts, you're not using your death as an adviser, and above all, you are too accessible. In other words, your life is as messy as it was before I met you."

Again I had a genuine surge of pride and wanted to argue that he was wrong. He gestured me to be quiet.

"One must assume responsibility for being in a weird world," he said. "We are in a weird world, you know."

I nodded my head affirmatively.

"We're not talking about the same thing," he said. "For you the world is weird because if you're not bored with it you're at odds with it. For me the world is weird because it is stupendous, awesome, mysterious, unfathomable. My interest has been to convince you that you must assume responsibility for being here, in this marvelous world, in this marvelous desert, in this marvelous time. I wanted to convince you that you must learn to make every act count since you are going to be here for only a short while; in fact, too short for witnessing all the marvels of it."

I insisted that to be bored with the world or to be at odds with it was the human condition.

"So, change it," he replied dryly. "If you do not respond to that challenge you are as good as dead."

He dared me to name an issue, an item in my life that had engaged all my thoughts. I said art. I had always wanted to be an artist and for years I had tried my hand at that. I still had the painful memory of my failure.

"You have never taken the responsibility for being in this unfathomable world," he said in an indicting tone. "Therefore, you were never an artist, and perhaps you'll never be a hunter."

"This is my best, don Juan."

"No. You don't know what your best is."

"I am doing all I can."

"You're wrong again. You can do better. There is one simple thing wrong with you— you think you have plenty of time."

He paused and looked at me as if waiting for my reaction.

"You think you have plenty of time," he repeated.

"Plenty of time for what, don Juan?"

"You think your life is going to last forever."

"No. I don't."

"Then, if you don't think your life is going to last forever, what are you waiting for? Why the hesitation to change?"

"Has it ever occurred to you, don Juan, that I may not want to change?"

"Yes, it has occurred to me. I did not want to change either, just like you. However, I didn't like my life; I was tired of it, just like you. Now I don't have enough of it."

I vehemently asserted that his insistence about changing my way of life was frightening and arbitrary. I said that I really agreed with him at a certain level, but the mere fact that he was always the master that called the shots made the situation untenable for me.

"You don't have time for this display, you fool," he said in a severe tone. "This, whatever you're doing now, may be your last act on earth. It may very well be your last battle. There is no power which could guarantee that you are going to live one more minute."

"I know that," I said with contained anger.

"No. You don't. If you knew that you would be a hunter."

I contended that I was aware of my impending death, but that it was useless to talk or think about it since I could not do anything to avoid it. Don Juan laughed and said I was like a comedian going mechanically through a routine.

"If this were your last battle on earth, I would say that you are an idiot," he said calmly. "You are wasting your last act on earth in some stupid mood."

We were quiet for a moment. My thoughts ran rampant. He was of course right.

"You have no time, my friend, no time. None of us have time," he said.

"I agree, don Juan, but— "

"Don't just agree with me," he snapped. "You must, instead of agreeing so easily, act upon it. Take the challenge. Change."

"Just like that?"

"That's right. The change I'm talking about never takes place by degrees; it happens suddenly. And you are not preparing yourself for that sudden act that will bring a total change."

I believed he was expressing a contradiction. I explained to him that, if I were preparing myself to change, I was certainly changing by degrees.

"You haven't changed at all," he said. "That is why you believe you're changing little by little. Yet, perhaps you will surprise yourself someday by changing suddenly and without a single warning. I know this is so, and thus I don't lose sight of my interest in convincing you."

I could not persist in my arguing. I was not sure of what I really wanted to say. After a moment's pause don Juan went on explaining his point.

"Perhaps I should put it in a different way," he said. "What I recommend you to do is to notice that we do not have any assurance that our lives will go on indefinitely. I have just said that change comes suddenly and unexpectedly, and so does death. What do you think we can do about it?"

I thought he was asking a rhetorical question, but he made a gesture with his eyebrows urging me to answer.

"To live as happily as possible," I said.

"Right! But do you know anyone who lives happily?"

My first impulse was to say yes. I thought I could use a number of people I knew as examples. On second thought, however, I knew my effort would only be an empty attempt at exonerating [* e*xonerating- pronouncing not guilty of charges*] myself.

"No," I said. "I really don't."

"I do," don Juan said. "There are some people who are very careful about the nature of their acts. Their happiness is to act with the full knowledge that they don't have time. Therefore, their acts have a peculiar power; their acts have a sense of . . ."

Don Juan seemed to be at a loss for words. He scratched his temples and smiled. Then suddenly he stood up as if he were through with our conversation. I beseeched him to finish what he was telling me. He sat down and puckered up his lips.

"Acts have power," he said. "Especially when the person acting knows that those acts are his last battle. There is a strange consuming happiness in acting with the full knowledge that whatever one is doing may very well be one's last act on earth. I recommend that you reconsider your life and bring your acts into that light."

I disagreed with him. Happiness for me was to assume that there was an inherent continuity to my acts; and that I would be able to continue doing, at will, whatever I was doing at the moment, especially if I was enjoying it. I told him that my disagreement was not a banal [* *banal- repeated too often; overfamiliar through overuse*] one, but stemmed from the conviction that the world and myself had a determinable continuity.

Don Juan seemed to be amused by my efforts to make sense. He laughed, shook his head, and scratched his hair. Finally, when I talked about a 'determinable continuity,' he threw his hat to the ground and stamped on it.

I ended up laughing at his clowning.

"You don't have time, my friend," he said. "That is the misfortune of human beings. None of us have sufficient time, and your continuity has no meaning in this awesome, mysterious world.

"Your continuity only makes you timid," he said. "Your acts cannot possibly have the flair, the power, and the compelling force of the acts performed by a man who knows that he is fighting his last battle on earth. In other words, your continuity does not make you happy or powerful."

I admitted that I was afraid of thinking I was going to die, and I accused him of causing great apprehension in me with his constant talk and concern about death.

"But we are all going to die," he said.

He pointed towards some hills in the distance.

"There is something out there waiting for me, for sure; and I will join it, also for sure. But perhaps you're different, and death is not waiting for you at all."

He laughed at my gesture of despair.

"I don't want to think about it, don Juan."

"Why not?"

"It is meaningless. If it is out there waiting for me, why should I worry about it?"

"I didn't say that you have to worry about it."

"What am I supposed to do then?"

"Use it. Focus your attention on the link between you and your death without remorse or sadness or worrying. Focus your attention on the fact you don't have time, and let your acts flow accordingly. Let each of your acts be your last battle on earth. Only under those conditions will your acts have their rightful power. Otherwise they will be, for as long as you live, the acts of a timid man."

"Is it so terrible to be a timid man?"

"No it isn't if you are going to be immortal. But if you are going to die, there is no time for timidity simply because timidity makes you cling to something that exists only in your thoughts. That which you cling to soothes you while everything is at a lull, but then the awesome and mysterious world will open it's mouth for you, as it will open for every one of us; and then you will realize that your sure ways were not sure at all. Being timid prevents us from examining and exploiting our lot as men."

"It is not natural to live with the constant idea of our death, don Juan."

"Our death is waiting, and this very act we're performing now may well be our last battle on earth," he replied in a solemn voice. I call it a battle because it is a struggle. Most people move from act to act without any struggle or thought. A hunter, on the contrary, assesses every act; and since he has an intimate knowledge of his death, he proceeds judiciously as if every act were his last battle. Only a fool would fail to notice the advantage a hunter has over his fellow men. A hunter gives his last battle it's due respect. It's only natural that his last act on earth should be the best of himself. It's pleasurable that way. It dulls the edge of his fright."

"You are right," I conceded. "It's just hard to accept."

"It'll take years for you to convince yourself, and then it'll take years for you to act accordingly. I only hope you have time left."

"I get scared when you say that," I said.

Don Juan examined me with a serious expression on his face.

"I've told you, this is a weird world," he said. "The forces that guide men are unpredictable, awesome, yet their splendor is something to witness."

He stopped talking and looked at me again. He seemed to be on the verge of revealing something to me, but he checked himself and smiled.

"Is there something that guides us?" I asked.

"Certainly. There are powers that guide us."

"Can you describe them?"

"Not really, except to call them forces, spirits, airs, winds, or anything like that."

I wanted to probe him further, but before I could ask anything else, he stood up. I stared at him, flabbergasted. He had stood up in one single movement; his body had simply jerked up, and he was on his feet.

I was still pondering upon the unusual skill that would be needed in order to move with such speed, when he told me in a dry tone of command to stalk a rabbit, catch it, kill it, skin it, and roast the meat before the twilight.

He looked up at the sky and said that I might have enough time.

I automatically started off, proceeding the way I had done scores of times. Don Juan walked beside me, and followed my movements with a scrutinizing look. I was very calm and moved carefully, and I had no trouble at all in catching a male rabbit.

"Now kill it," don Juan said dryly.

I reached into the trap to grab hold of the rabbit. I had it by the ears and was pulling it out when a sudden sensation of terror invaded me. For the first time since don Juan had begun to teach me to hunt, it occurred to me that he had never taught me how to kill game. In the scores of times we had roamed in the desert, he himself had only killed one rabbit, two quail, and one rattlesnake.

I dropped the rabbit, and looked at don Juan. "I can't kill it," I said.

"Why not?"

"I've never done that."

"But you've killed hundreds of birds and other animals."

"With a gun, not with my bare hands."

"What difference does it make? This rabbit's time is up."

Don Juan's tone shocked me; it was so authoritative and so knowledgeable that it left no doubts in my mind that he knew that the rabbit's time was up.

"Kill it!" he commanded with a ferocious look in his eyes.

"I can't."

He yelled at me that the rabbit had to die. He said that it's roaming in that beautiful desert had come to an end. I had no business stalling because the power or the spirit that guides rabbits had led that particular one into my trap right at the edge of the twilight.

A series of confusing thoughts and feelings overtook me as if the feelings had been out there waiting for me. I felt with agonizing clarity the rabbit's tragedy, to have fallen into my trap. In a matter of seconds my mind swept across the most crucial moments of my own life; the many times I had been the rabbit myself.

I looked at it, and it looked at me. The rabbit had backed up against the side of the cage. It was almost curled up, very quiet and motionless. We exchanged a somber glance, and that glance, which I fancied to be of silent despair, cemented a complete identification on my part.

"The hell with it," I said loudly. "I won't kill anything. That rabbit goes free."

A profound emotion made me shiver. My arms trembled as I tried to grab the rabbit by the ears. It moved fast and I missed. I again tried and fumbled once more. I became desperate. I had the sensation of nausea, and quickly kicked the trap in order to smash it and let the rabbit go free. The cage was unsuspectedly strong, and did not break as I thought it would. My despair mounted to an unbearable feeling of anguish. Using all my strength, I stamped on the edge of the cage with my right foot. The sticks cracked loudly. I pulled the rabbit out. I had a moment of relief which was shattered to bits in the next instant. The rabbit hung limp in my hand. It was dead.

I did not know what to do. I became preoccupied with finding out how it had died. I turned to don Juan. He was staring at me. A feeling of terror sent a chill through my body.

I sat down by some rocks. I had a terrible headache. Don Juan put his hand on my head, and whispered in my ear that I had to skin the rabbit and roast it before the twilight was over.

I felt nauseated. Don Juan very patiently talked to me as if he were talking to a child. He said that the powers that guided men or animals had led that particular rabbit to me in the same way they will lead me to my own death. He said the rabbit's death had been a gift for me in exactly the same way my own death will be a gift for something else.

I was dizzy. The simple events of that day had crushed me. I tried to think that it was only a rabbit. I could not, however, shake off the uncanny identification I had had with it.

Don Juan said that I needed to eat some of it's meat, if only a morsel, in order to validate my finding.

"I can't do that," I protested meekly.

"We are dregs in the hands of those forces," he snapped at me. "So stop your self-importance and use this gift properly."

I picked up the rabbit. It was warm.

Don Juan leaned over and whispered in my ear, "Your trap was his last battle on earth. I told you he had no more time to roam in this marvelous desert."

# 10. Becoming Accessible to Power

*Thursday, August 17, 1961*

As soon as I got out of my car, I complained to don Juan that I was not feeling well.

"Sit down, sit down," he said softly and almost led me by the hand to his porch. He smiled and patted me on the back.

Two weeks earlier on August 4, don Juan changed his tactics with me, as he had said, and allowed me to ingest some peyote buttons. During the height of my hallucinatory experience I played with a dog that lived in the house where the peyote session took place. Don Juan told me he had interpreted my interaction with the dog as a very special event. He contended that at moments of power such as the one I had been living during the peyote session, the world of ordinary affairs did not exist, and nothing could be taken for granted; that the dog was not really a dog, but the incarnation [* *incarnation- the act of attributing human characteristics to a non-human thing*] of Mescalito; the power or deity contained in peyote.

The post-effects of that experience were a general sense of fatigue and melancholy, plus the incidence of exceptionally vivid dreams and nightmares.

"Where's your writing gear?" don Juan asked as I sat down on the porch.

I had left my notebooks in my car. Don Juan walked back to the car and carefully pulled out my briefcase and brought it to my side.

He asked if I usually carried my briefcase when I walked. I said I did.

"That's madness," he said. "I've told you never to carry anything in your hands when you walk. Get a knapsack."

I laughed. The idea of carrying my notes in a knapsack was ludicrous. I told him that ordinarily I wore a suit; and a knapsack over a three-piece suit would be a preposterous sight.

"Put your coat on over the knapsack," he said. "It is better that people think you're a hunchback than to ruin your body carrying all this around."

He urged me to get out my notebook and write. He seemed to be making a deliberate effort to put me at ease.

I complained again about the feeling of physical discomfort and the strange sense of unhappiness I was experiencing.

Don Juan laughed and said, "You're beginning to learn."

We then had a long conversation. He said that Mescalito, by allowing me to play with him, had pointed me out as a 'chosen man'; and that, although he was baffled by the omen because I was not an Indian, he was going to pass on to me some secret knowledge. He said that he had had a 'benefactor' himself who taught him how to become a 'man of knowledge.'

I sensed that something dreadful was about to happen. The revelation that I was don Juan's chosen man, the unquestionable strangeness of his ways, and the devastating effect that peyote had had on me all created a state of unbearable apprehension and indecision. But don Juan disregarded my feelings and recommended that I should only think of the wonder of Mescalito playing with me.

"Think about nothing else," he said. "The rest will come to you of itself."

He stood up and patted me gently on the head and said in a very soft voice, "I am going to teach you how to become a warrior in the same manner I have taught you how to hunt. I must warn you, though, just as learning how to hunt has not made you into a hunter, nor will simply learning how to become a warrior make you one."

I experienced a sense of frustration; a physical discomfort that bordered on anguish. I complained about the vivid dreams and nightmares I was having. Don Juan seemed to deliberate for a moment, and sat down again.

"They're weird dreams," I said.

"You've always had weird dreams," he retorted.

"I'm telling you, this time they are truly more weird than anything I've ever had."

"Don't concern yourself. They are only dreams. Like the dreams of any ordinary dreamer, they don't have power. So what's the use of worrying about them or talking about them?"

"They bother me, don Juan. Isn't there something I can do to stop them?"

"Nothing. Let them pass," he said. "Now it's time for you to become accessible to power, and you are going to begin by tackling *dreaming*."

The tone of voice he used when he said ‘dreaming’ made me think that he was using the word in a very particular fashion. I was pondering about a proper question to ask when he began to talk again.

"I've never told you about *dreaming*, because until now I was only concerned with teaching you how to be a hunter," he said. "A hunter is not concerned with the manipulation of power, therefore his dreams are only dreams. They might be poignant, but they are not *dreaming*.

"A warrior, on the other hand, seeks power, and one of the avenues to power is *dreaming*. You may say that the difference between a hunter and a warrior is that a warrior is on his way to power, while a hunter knows nothing or very little about it.

"The decision as to who can be a warrior and who can only be a hunter is not up to us. That decision is in the realm of the powers that guide men. That's why your playing with Mescalito was such an important omen. Those forces guided you to me. They took you to that bus depot, remember? Some clown brought you to me. A perfect omen. A clown pointing you out. So, I taught you how to be a hunter. And then the other perfect omen. Mescalito himself playing with you. See what I mean?"

His weird logic was overwhelming. His words created visions of myself succumbing to something awesome and unknown; something which I had not bargained for, and which I had not conceived existed even in my wildest fantasies.

"What do you propose I should do?" I asked.

"Become accessible to power; tackle your dreams," he replied, "You call them dreams because you have no power. A warrior, being a man who seeks power, doesn't call them dreams. He calls them real."

"You mean he takes his dreams as being reality?"

"He doesn't take anything as being anything else. What you call dreams are real for a warrior. You must understand that a warrior is not a fool. A warrior is an immaculate hunter who hunts power. He's not drunk, or crazed, and he has neither the time nor the disposition to bluff, or to lie to himself, or to make a wrong move. The stakes are too high for that. The stakes are his trimmed orderly life which he has taken so long to tighten and perfect. He is not going to throw that away by making some stupid miscalculation; by taking something for being something else.

"*Dreaming* is real for a warrior because in it he can act deliberately. He can choose and reject. He can select from a variety of items those which lead to power; and then he can manipulate them and use them; while in an ordinary dream, he cannot act deliberately."

"Do you mean then, don Juan, that *dreaming* is real?"

"Of course it is real."

"As real as what we are doing now?"

"If you want to compare things, I can say that it is perhaps more real. In *dreaming* you have power. You can change things. You may find out countless concealed facts. You can control whatever you want."

Don Juan's premises always had appealed to me at a certain level. I could easily understand his liking the idea that one could do anything in dreams, but I could not take him seriously. The jump was too great.

We looked at each other for a moment. His statements seemed insane; and yet, he was, to the best of my knowledge, one of the most level-headed men I had ever met.

I told him that I could not believe he took his dreams to be reality. He chuckled as if he knew the magnitude of my untenable [* *untenable- incapable of being defended*] position. Then he stood up without saying a word, and walked inside his house.

I sat for a long time in a state of stupor until he called me to the back of his house. He had made some corn gruel and handed me a bowl.

I asked him about the time when one was awake. I wanted to know if he called it anything in particular, but he did not understand or did not want to answer.

"What do you call this, what we're doing now?" I asked, meaning that what we were doing was reality as opposed to dreams.

"I call it eating," he said and contained his laughter.

"I call it reality," I said. "Because our eating is actually taking place."

"*Dreaming* also takes place," he replied, giggling. "And so does hunting, walking, laughing."

I did not persist in arguing. I could not, however, even if I stretched myself beyond my limits, accept his premise. He seemed to be delighted with my despair.

As soon as we had finished eating, he casually stated that we were going to go for a hike; but that we were not going to roam in the desert in the manner we had done before.

"It's different this time," he said. "From now on we're going to places of power. You're going to learn how to make yourself accessible to power."

I again expressed my turmoil. I said I was not qualified for that endeavor.

"Come on, you're indulging in silly fears," he said in a low voice, patting me on the back and smiling benevolently. "I've been catering to your hunter's spirit. You like to roam with me in this beautiful desert. It's too late for you to quit."

He began to walk into the desert chaparral. He signaled me with his head to follow him. I could have walked to my car and left, except that I liked to roam in that beautiful desert with him. I liked the sensation which I experienced only in his company; that this was indeed an awesome, mysterious, yet beautiful world. As he said, I was hooked.

Don Juan led me to the hills towards the east. It was a long hike. It was a hot day. The heat, however, which ordinarily would have been unbearable to me was somehow unnoticeable.

We walked for quite a distance into a canyon until don Juan came to a halt and sat down in the shade of some boulders. I took some crackers out of my knapsack, but he told me not to bother with them.

He said that I should sit in a prominent place. He pointed to a single almost round boulder ten or fifteen feet away and helped me climb to the top. I thought he was also going to sit there, but instead he just climbed part of the way in order to hand me some pieces of dry meat. He told me with a deadly serious expression that it was power meat and should be chewed very slowly, and should not be mixed with any other food. He then walked back to the shaded area, and sat down with his back against a rock. He seemed relaxed, almost sleepy. He remained in the same position until I had finished eating. Then he sat up straight, and tilted his head to the right. He seemed to be listening attentively. He glanced at me two or three times, stood up abruptly, and began to scan the surroundings with his eyes the way a hunter would do. I automatically froze on the spot and only moved my eyes in order to follow his movements. Very carefully he stepped behind some rocks, as if he were expecting game to come into the area where we were. I realized then that we were in a round covelike bend in the dry water canyon, surrounded by sandstone boulders.

Don Juan suddenly came out from behind the rocks and smiled at me. He stretched his arms, yawned, and walked towards the boulder where I was. I relaxed my tense position and sat down.

"What happened?" I asked in a whisper. He answered me, yelling, that there was nothing around there to worry about.

I felt an immediate jolt in my stomach. His answer was inappropriate; and it was inconceivable to me that he would yell unless he had a specific reason for it.

I began to slide down from the boulder, but he yelled that I should stay there a while longer.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

He sat down and concealed himself between two rocks at the base of the boulder where I was, and then he said in a very loud voice that he had only been looking around because he thought he had heard something.

I asked if he had heard a large animal. He put his hand to his ear and yelled that he was unable to hear me, and that I should shout my words. I felt ill at ease yelling, but he urged me in a loud voice to speak up. I shouted that I wanted to know what was going on, and he shouted back that there was really nothing around there. He yelled, asking if I could see anything unusual from the top of the boulder. I said no, and he asked me to describe to him the terrain towards the south.

We shouted back and forth for a while, and then he signaled me to come down. I joined him and he whispered in my ear that the yelling was necessary to make our presence known because I had to make myself accessible to the power of that specific water hole.

I looked around but I could not see the water hole. He pointed out that we were standing on it.

"There's water here," he said in a whisper, "and also power. There's a spirit here and we have to lure it out; perhaps it will come after you."

I wanted to know more about the alleged spirit, but he insisted on total silence. He advised me to stay perfectly still, and not let out a whisper or make the slightest movement to betray our presence.

Apparently it was easy for him to remain in complete immobility for hours. For me, however, it was sheer torture. My legs fell asleep, my back ached, and tension built up around my neck and shoulders. My entire body became numb and cold. I was in great discomfort when don Juan finally stood up. He just sprang to his feet, and extended his hand to me to help me stand up.

As I was trying to stretch my legs, I realized the inconceivable easiness with which don Juan had jumped up after hours of immobility. It took quite some time for my muscles to regain the elasticity needed for walking.

Don Juan headed back for the house. He walked extremely slowly. He set up a length of three paces as the distance I should observe in following him. He meandered around the regular route, and crossed it four or five times in different directions. When we finally arrived at his house, it was late afternoon.

I tried to question him about the events of the day. He explained that talking was unnecessary. For the time being, I had to refrain from asking questions until we were in a place of power.

I was dying to know what he meant by that and I tried to whisper a question, but he reminded me with a cold severe look that he meant business.

We sat on his porch for hours. I worked on my notes. From time to time he handed me a piece of dry meat. Finally, it was too dark to write. I tried to think about the new developments, but some part of myself refused to and I fell asleep.

*Saturday, August 19, 1961*

Yesterday morning don Juan and I drove to town, and ate breakfast at a restaurant. He advised me not to change my eating habits too drastically.

"Your body is not used to power meat," he said. "You'd get sick if you didn't eat your food."

He himself ate heartily. When I joked about it, he simply said, "My body likes everything."

Around noon, we hiked back to the water canyon. We proceeded to make ourselves noticeable to the spirit by 'noisy talk' and by a forced silence which lasted hours.

When we left the place, instead of heading back to the house, don Juan took off in the direction of the mountains. We reached some mild slopes first, and then we climbed to the top of some high hills. There don Juan picked out a spot to rest in the open unshaded area. He told me that we had to wait until dusk, and that I should conduct myself in the most natural fashion which included asking all the questions I wanted.

"I know that the spirit is out there lurking," he said in a very low voice.

"Where?"

"Out there, in the bushes."

"What kind of spirit is it?"

He looked at me with a quizzical expression and retorted, "How many kinds are there?"

We both laughed. I was asking questions out of nervousness.

"It'll come out at dusk," he said. "We just have to wait."

I remained quiet. I had run out of questions.

"This is the time when we must keep on talking," he said. "The human voice attracts spirits. There's one lurking out there now. We are making ourselves available to it, so keep on talking."

I experienced an idiotic sense of vacuity. [* *vacuity- a region that is devoid of matte*] I could not think of anything to say. He laughed and patted me on the back.

"You're truly a pill," he said. "When you have to talk, you lose your tongue. Come on. Beat your gums."

He made a hilarious gesture of beating his gums together, opening and closing his mouth with great speed.

"There are certain things we will talk about from now on only at places of power," he went on. "I have brought you here because this is your first trial. This is a place of power, and here we can talk only about power."

"I really don't know what power is," I said.

"Power is something a warrior deals with," he said. "At first it's an incredible, far-fetched affair; it is hard to even think about it. This is what's happening to you now. Then power becomes a serious matter. One may not have it, or one may not even fully realize that it exists, yet one knows that something is there; something which was not noticeable before. Next power is manifested as something uncontrollable that comes to oneself. It is not possible for me to say how it comes, or what it really is. It is nothing, and yet it makes marvels appear before your very eyes. And finally, power is something in oneself; something that controls one's acts and yet obeys one's command."

There was a short pause. Don Juan asked me if I had understood. I felt ludicrous saying I did. He seemed to have noticed my dismay and chuckled.

"I am going to teach you right here the first step to power," he said as if he were dictating a letter to me. "I am going to teach you how to *set up dreaming*."

He looked at me and again asked me if I knew what he meant. I did not. I was hardly following him at all. He explained that to 'set up dreaming' meant to have a concise and pragmatic control over the general situation of a dream, comparable to the control one has over any choice in the desert, such as climbing up a hill or remaining in the shade of a water canyon.

"You must start by doing something very simple," he said. "Tonight in your dreams you must look at your hands."

I laughed out loud. His tone was so factual that it was as if he were telling me to do something commonplace.

"Why do you laugh?" he asked with surprise.

"How can I look at my hands in my dreams?"

"Very simple. Focus your eyes on them just like this."

He bent his head forward, and stared at his hands with his mouth open. His gesture was so comical that I had to laugh.

"Seriously, how can you expect me to do that?" I asked.

"The way I've told you," he snapped. "You can, of course, look at whatever you goddamn please — your toes, or your belly, or your pecker, for that matter. I said your hands because that was the easiest thing for me to look at. Don't think it's a joke. *Dreaming* is as serious as *seeing* or dying or any other thing in this awesome, mysterious world.

"Think about it as something entertaining. Imagine all the inconceivable things you could accomplish. A man hunting for power has almost no limits in his *dreaming*."

I asked him to give me some pointers.

"There aren't any pointers," he said. "Just look at your hands."

"There must be more that you could tell me," I insisted.

He shook his head, and squinted his eyes, staring at me in short glances.

"Every one of us is different," he finally said. "What you call pointers would only be what I myself did when I was learning. We are not the same. We aren't even vaguely alike."

"Maybe anything you'd say would help me."

"It would be simpler for you just to start looking at your hands."

He seemed to be organizing his thoughts, and bobbed his head up and down.

"Every time you look at anything in your dreams it changes shape," he said after a long silence. "The trick in learning to *set up dreaming* is obviously not just to look at things, but to sustain the sight of them. *Dreaming* is real when one has succeeded in bringing everything into focus. Then there is no difference between what you do when you sleep, and what you do when you are not sleeping. Do you see what I mean?"

I confessed that, although I understood what he had said, I was incapable of accepting his premise. I brought up the point that, in a civilized world, there were scores of people who had delusions and could not distinguish what took place in the real world from what took place in their fantasies. I said that such persons were undoubtedly mentally ill, and that my uneasiness increased every time he would recommend I should act like a crazy man.

After my long explanation don Juan made a comical gesture of despair by putting his hands to his cheeks, and sighing loudly.

"Leave your civilized world alone," he said. "Let it be! Nobody is asking you to behave like a madman. I've already told you that a warrior has to be perfect in order to deal with the powers he hunts. How can you conceive that a warrior would not be able to tell things apart?

"On the other hand, you, my friend, who know what the real world is, would fumble and die in no time at all if you would have to depend on your ability for telling what is real and what is not."

I obviously had not expressed what I really had in mind. Every time I protested I was simply voicing the unbearable frustration of being in an untenable position.

"I am not trying to make you into a sick, crazy man," don Juan went on. "You can do that yourself without my help. But the forces that guide us brought you to me, and I have been endeavoring to teach you to change your stupid ways and live the strong clean life of a hunter. Then the forces guided you again, and told me that you should learn to live the impeccable life of a warrior. Apparently you can't. But who can tell? We are as mysterious and as awesome as this unfathomable world, so who can tell what you're capable of?"

There was an underlying tone of sadness in don Juan's voice. I wanted to apologize, but he began to talk again.

"You don't have to look at your hands," he said. "Like I've said, pick anything at all. But pick one thing in advance, and find it in your dreams. I said your hands because they'll always be there.

"When they begin to change shape, you must move your sight away from them and pick something else, and then look at your hands again. It takes a long time to perfect this technique."

I had become so involved in writing that I had not noticed that it was getting dark. The sun had already disappeared over the horizon. The sky was cloudy and the twilight was imminent. Don Juan stood up, and gave furtive glances towards the south.

"Let's go," he said. "We must walk south until the spirit of the water hole shows itself."

We walked for perhaps half an hour. The terrain changed abruptly, and we came to a barren area. There was a large round hill where the chaparral had burnt. It looked like a bald head. We walked towards it. I thought that don Juan was going to climb the mild slope, but he stopped instead and remained in a very attentive position. His body seemed to have tensed as a single unit, and shivered for an instant. Then he relaxed again and stood limply. I could not figure out how his body could remain erect while his muscles were so relaxed.

At that moment a very strong gust of wind jolted me. Don Juan's body turned in the direction of the wind, towards the west. He did not use his muscles to turn, or at least he did not use them the way I would use mine to turn. Don Juan's body seemed rather to have been pulled from the outside. It was as if someone else had arranged his body to face a new direction.

I kept on staring at him. He looked at me from the corner of his eye. The expression on his face was one of determination and purpose. All of his being was attentive, and I stared at him in wonder. I had never been in any situation that called for such a strange concentration.

Suddenly his body shivered as though he had been splashed by a sudden shower of cold water. He had another jolt and then he started to walk as if nothing had happened.

I followed him. We flanked the naked hills on the east side until we were at the middle part of it. He stopped there, turning to face the west.

From where we stood, the top of the hill was not so round and smooth as it had seemed to be from the distance. There was a cave, or a hole, near the top. I looked at it fixedly because don Juan was doing the same. Another strong gust of wind sent a chill up my spine. Don Juan turned towards the south and scanned the area with his eyes.

"There!" he said in a whisper and pointed to an object on the ground.

I strained my eyes to see. There was something on the ground, perhaps twenty feet away. It was light brown, and as I looked at it, it shivered. I focused all my attention on it. The object was almost round, and seemed to be curled; in fact, it looked like a curled up dog.

"What is it?" I whispered to don Juan.

"I don't know," he whispered back as he peered at the object. "What does it look like to you?"

I told him that it seemed to be a dog.

"Too large for a dog," he said matter-of-factly.

I took a couple of steps towards it, but don Juan stopped me gently. I stared at it again. It was definitely some animal that was either asleep or dead. I could almost see it's head. It's ears protruded like the ears of a wolf. By then I was definitely sure that it was a curled-up animal. I thought that it could have been a brown calf. I whispered that to don Juan. He answered that it was too compact to be a calf, besides it's ears were pointed.

The animal shivered again and then I noticed that it was alive. I could actually see that it was breathing, yet it did not seem to breathe rhythmically. The breaths that it took were more like irregular shivers. I had a sudden realization at that moment.

"It's an animal that is dying," I whispered to don Juan.

"You're right," he whispered back. "But what kind of an animal?"

I could not make out it's specific features. Don Juan took a couple of cautious steps towards it. I followed him. It was quite dark by then, and we had to take two more steps in order to keep the animal in view.

"Watch out," don Juan whispered in my ear. "If it is a dying animal, it may leap on us with it's last strength."

The animal, whatever it was, seemed to be on it's last legs. It's breathing was irregular. It's body shook spasmodically, but it did not change it's curled up position. At a given moment, however, a tremendous spasm actually lifted the animal off the ground. I heard an inhuman shriek and the animal stretched it's legs. It's claws were more than frightening. They were nauseating. The animal tumbled on it's side after stretching it's legs, and then rolled on it's back.

I heard a formidable growl and don Juan's voice shouting, "Run for your life!"

And that was exactly what I did. I scrambled towards the top of the hill with unbelievable speed and agility. When I was halfway to the top, I looked back and saw don Juan standing in the same place. He signaled me to come down. I ran down the hill.

"What happened?" I asked, completely out of breath.

"I think the animal is dead," he said.

We advanced cautiously towards the animal. It was sprawled on it's back. As I came closer to it, I nearly yelled with fright. I realized that it was not quite dead yet. It's body was still trembling. It's legs, which were sticking up in the air, shook wildly. The animal was definitely in it's last gasps.

I walked in front of don Juan. A new jolt moved the animal's body and I could see it's head. I turned to don Juan, horrified. Judging by it's body, the animal was obviously a mammal, yet it had a beak like a bird.

I stared at it in complete and absolute horror. My mind refused to believe it. I was dumbfounded. I could not even articulate a word. Never in my whole existence had I witnessed anything of that nature. Something inconceivable was there in front of my very eyes. I wanted don Juan to explain that incredible animal, but I could only mumble to him. He was staring at me. I glanced at him, and glanced at the animal. Then something in me arranged the world, and I knew at once what the animal was. I walked over to it and picked it up. It was a large branch of a bush. It had been burnt, and possibly the wind had blown some burnt debris which got caught in the dry branch, and thus gave the appearance of a large bulging round animal. The color of the burnt debris made it look light brown in contrast with the green vegetation.

I laughed at my idiocy and excitedly explained to don Juan that the wind blowing through it had made it look like a live animal. I thought he would be pleased with the way I had resolved the mystery, but he turned around and began walking to the top of the hill. I followed him. He crawled inside the depression that looked like a cave. It was not a hole but a shallow dent in the sandstone.

Don Juan took some small branches and used them to scoop up the dirt that had accumulated in the bottom of the depression.

"We have to get rid of the ticks," he said.

He signaled me to sit down, and told me to make myself comfortable because we were going to spend the night there.

I began to talk about the branch, but he hushed me up.

"What you've done is no triumph," he said. "You've wasted a beautiful power, a power that blew life into that dry twig."

He said that a real triumph would have been for me to let go, and to follow the power until the world had ceased to exist. He did not seem to be angry with me or disappointed with my performance. He repeatedly stated that this was only the beginning; that it took time to handle power. He patted me on the shoulder, and joked that earlier that day I was the person who knew what was real and what was not.

I felt embarrassed. I began to apologize for my tendency of always being so sure of my ways.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "That branch was a real animal and it was alive at the moment the power touched it. Since what kept it alive was power, the trick was, like in *dreaming*, to sustain the sight of it. See what I mean?"

I wanted to ask something else, but he hushed me up, and said that I should remain completely silent but awake all night; and that he alone was going to talk for a while.

He said that the spirit, which knew his voice, might become subdued with the sound of it and leave us alone. He explained that the idea of making oneself accessible to power had serious overtones. Power was a devastating force that could easily lead to one's death, and had to be treated with great care. Becoming available to power had to be done systematically, but always with great caution.

It involved making one's presence obvious by a contained display of loud talk or any other type of noisy activity, and then it was mandatory to observe a prolonged and total silence. A controlled outburst and a controlled quietness were the mark of a warrior. He said that properly I should have sustained the sight of the live monster for a while longer. In a controlled fashion, without losing my mind or becoming deranged with excitation or fear, I should have striven to 'stop the world.' He pointed out that after I had run up the hill for dear life, I was in a perfect state for stopping the world. Combined in that state were fear, awe, power and death. He said that such a state would be pretty hard to repeat.

I whispered in his ear, "What do you mean by ‘stopping the world?’"

He gave me a ferocious look before he answered that it was a technique practiced by those who were hunting for power; a technique by virtue of which the world as we know it was made to collapse.

# 11. The Mood of a Warrior

I drove up to don Juan's house on Thursday, August 31, 1961 and before I even had a chance to greet him, he stuck his head through the window of my car, smiled at me, and said, "We must drive quite a distance to a place of power and it's almost noon."

He opened the door of my car, sat down next to me in the front seat, and directed me to drive south for about seventy miles. We then turned east on to a dirt road and followed it until we had reached the slopes of the mountains. I parked my car off the road in a depression don Juan picked because it was deep enough to hide the car from view. From there we went directly to the top of the low hills by crossing a vast flat desolate area.

When it got dark don Juan selected a place to sleep. He demanded complete silence.

The next day we ate frugally and continued our journey in an easterly direction. The vegetation was no longer desert shrubbery, but thick green mountain bushes and trees.

Around mid-afternoon, we climbed to the top of a gigantic bluff of conglomerate rock which looked like a wall. Don Juan sat down and signaled me to sit down also.

"This is a place of power," he said after a moment's pause. "This is the place where warriors were buried a long time ago."

At that instant a crow flew right above us, cawing. Don Juan followed it's flight with a fixed gaze.

I examined the rock, and was wondering how and where the warriors had been buried when he tapped me on the shoulder.

"Not here, you fool," he said, smiling. "Down there."

He pointed to the field right below us at the bottom of the bluff towards the east. He explained that the field in question was surrounded by a natural corral of boulders. From where I was sitting I saw an area which was perhaps a hundred yards in diameter and which looked like a perfect circle. Thick bushes covered it's surface, camouflaging the boulders. I would not have noticed it's perfect roundness if don Juan had not pointed it out to me.

He said that there were scores of such places scattered in the old world of the Indians. They were not exactly places of power, like certain hills or land formations which were the abode of spirits, but rather places of enlightenment where one could be taught, where one could find solutions to dilemmas.

"All you have to do is come here," he said. "Or spend the night on this rock in order to rearrange your feelings."

"Are we going to spend the night here?"

"I thought so, but a little crow just told me not to do that."

I tried to find out more about the crow, but he hushed me up with an impatient movement of his hand.

"Look at that circle of boulders," he said. "Fix it in your memory, and then someday a crow will lead you to another one of these places. The more perfect it's roundness is, the greater it's power."

"Are the warriors' bones still buried here?"

Don Juan made a comical gesture of puzzlement, and then smiled broadly.

"This is not a cemetery," he said. "Nobody is buried here. I said warriors were once buried here. I meant they used to come here to bury themselves for a night, or for two days, or for whatever length of time they needed to. I did not mean dead people's bones are buried here. I'm not concerned with cemeteries. There is no power in them. There is power in the bones of a warrior, though, but they are never in cemeteries. And there is even more power in the bones of a man of knowledge, yet it would be practically impossible to find them."

"Who is a man of knowledge, don Juan?"

"Any warrior could become a man of knowledge. As I told you, a warrior is an impeccable hunter that hunts power. If he succeeds in his hunting, he can be a man of knowledge."

"What do you . . . "

He stopped my question with a movement of his hand. He stood up, signaled me to follow, and began descending on the steep east side of the bluff. There was a definite trail in the almost perpendicular face, leading to the round area.

We slowly worked our way down the perilous path. When we reached the bottom floor, don Juan, without stopping at all, led me through the thick chaparral to the middle of the circle. There he used some thick dry branches to sweep a clean spot for us to sit. The spot was also perfectly round.

"I intended to bury you here all night," he said, "but I know now that it is not time yet. You don't have power. I'm going to bury you only for a short while."

I became very nervous with the idea of being enclosed, and asked how he was planning to bury me. He giggled like a child, and began collecting dry branches. He did not let me help him, and said I should sit down and wait.

He threw the branches he was collecting inside the clean circle. Then he made me lie down with my head towards the east, put my jacket under my head, and made a cage around my body. He constructed it by sticking pieces of branches about two and a half feet in length in the soft dirt. The branches, which ended in forks, served as supports for some long sticks that gave the cage a frame and the appearance of an open coffin. He closed the boxlike cage by placing small branches and leaves over the long sticks, encasing me from the shoulders down. He let my head stick out with my jacket as a pillow.

He then took a thick piece of dry wood and, using it as a digging stick, he loosened the dirt around me and covered the cage with it.

The frame was so solid and the leaves were so well placed that no dirt came inside. I could move my legs freely, and I could actually slide in and out.

Don Juan said that ordinarily a warrior would construct the cage, and then slip into it and seal it from the inside.

"How about the animals?" I asked. "Can they scratch the surface dirt and sneak into the cage and hurt the man?"

"No, that's not a worry for a warrior. It's a worry for you because you have no power. A warrior, on the other hand, is guided by his unbending purpose and can fend off anything. No rat, or snake, or mountain lion could bother him."

"What do they bury themselves for, don Juan?"

"For enlightenment and for power."

I experienced an extremely pleasant feeling of peace and satisfaction. The world at that moment seemed at ease. The quietness was exquisite and at the same time unnerving. I was not accustomed to that kind of silence. I tried to talk but he hushed me. After a while the tranquility of the place affected my mood. I began to think of my life and my personal history, and I experienced a familiar sensation of sadness and remorse. I told him that I did not deserve to be there; that his world was strong and fair, and I was weak, and that my spirit had been distorted by the circumstances of my life.

He laughed and threatened to cover my head with dirt if I kept on talking in that vein. He said that I was a man. And like any man, I deserved everything that was a man's lot— joy, pain, sadness and struggle— and that the nature of one's acts was unimportant as long as one acted as a warrior.

Lowering his voice to almost a whisper, he said that if I really felt that my spirit was distorted I should simply fix it— purge it, make it perfect— because there was no other task in our entire lives which was more worthwhile. Not to fix the spirit was to seek death, and that was the same as to seek nothing since death was going to overtake us regardless of anything.

He paused for a long time and then he said with a tone of profound conviction, "To seek the perfection of the warrior's spirit is the only task worthy of our manhood."

His words acted as a catalyst. I felt the weight of my past actions as an unbearable and hindering load. I admitted that there was no hope for me. I began to weep while talking about my life. I said that I had been roaming for such a long time that I had become callous to pain and sadness, except on certain occasions when I would realize my aloneness and my helplessness.

He did not say anything. He grabbed me by the armpits and pulled me out of the cage. I sat up when he let go of me. He also sat down. An uneasy silence set in between us. I thought he was giving me time to compose myself. I took my notebook and scribbled out of nervousness.

"You feel like a leaf at the mercy of the wind, don't you?" he finally said, staring at me.

That was exactly the way I felt. He seemed to empathize with me. He said that my mood reminded him of a song, and he began to sing in a low tone. His singing voice was very pleasing and the lyrics carried me away:

"I'm so far away

from the sky where I was born.

Immense nostalgia invades my thoughts.

Now that I am so alone and sad

like a leaf in the wind,

sometimes I want to weep,

sometimes I want to laugh with longing."

(Que lejos estoy del cielo donde he nacido. Inmensa nostalgia invade mi pensamiento. Ahora que estoy tan solo y triste cual hoja al viento, quisiera llorar, quisiera reir de sentimiento.)

We did not speak for a long while. He finally broke the silence.

"Since the day you were born, one way or another, someone has been doing something to you," he said.

"That's correct," I said.

"And they have been doing something to you against your will."

"True."

"And by now you're helpless, like a leaf in the wind."

"That's correct. That's the way it is."

I said that the circumstances of my life had sometimes been devastating. He listened attentively, but I could not figure out whether he was just being agreeable, or was genuinely concerned until I noticed that he was trying to hide a smile.

"No matter how much you like to feel sorry for yourself, you have to change that," he said in a soft tone. "It doesn't jibe with the life of a warrior."

He laughed and sang the song again but contorted the intonation of certain words. The result was a ludicrous lament. He pointed out that the reason I had liked the song was because in my own life I had done nothing else but find flaws with everything and lament. I could not argue with him. He was correct. Yet I believed I had sufficient reason to justify my feeling of being like a leaf in the wind.

"The hardest thing in the world is to assume the mood of a warrior," he said. "It is of no use to be sad and complain, and feel justified in doing so, believing that someone is always doing something to us. Nobody is doing anything to anybody, much less to a warrior.

"You are here with me because you want to be here. You should have assumed full responsibility by now so that the idea that you are at the mercy of the wind would be inadmissible."

He stood up and began to disassemble the cage. He scooped the dirt back to where he had gotten it from and carefully scattered all the sticks in the chaparral. Then he covered the clean circle with debris, leaving the area as if nothing had ever touched it.

I commented on his proficiency. He said that a good hunter would know that we had been there no matter how careful he had been because the tracks of men could not be completely erased.

He sat cross-legged and told me to sit down as comfortably as possible facing the spot where he had buried me, and to stay put until my mood of sadness had dissipated.

"A warrior buries himself in order to find power, not to weep with self-pity," he said.

I attempted to explain, but he made me stop with an impatient movement of his head. He said that he had to pull me out of the cage in a hurry because my mood was intolerable, and he was afraid that the place would resent my softness and injure me.

"Self-pity doesn't jibe with power," he said. "The mood of a warrior calls for control over himself and at the same time it calls for abandoning himself."

"How can that be?" I asked. "How can he control and abandon himself at the same time?"

"It is a difficult technique," he said.

He seemed to deliberate whether or not to continue talking. Twice he was on the verge of saying something, but he checked himself and smiled.

"You're not over your sadness yet," he said. "You still feel weak and there is no point in talking about the mood of a warrior now."

Almost an hour went by in complete silence. Then he abruptly asked me if I had succeeded in learning the dreaming techniques he had taught me. I had been practicing assiduously [* *assiduously- with care and persistence*] and had been able, after a monumental effort, to obtain a degree of control over my dreams. Don Juan had been very right in saying that one could interpret the exercises as being entertainment. For the first time in my life, I had been looking forward to going to sleep.

I gave him a detailed report of my progress.

It had been relatively easy for me to learn to sustain the image of my hands after I had learned to command myself to look at them. My visions, although not always of my own hands, would last a seemingly long time until I would finally lose control and would become immersed in ordinary unpredictable dreams. I had no volition whatsoever over when I would give myself the command to look at my hands, or to look at other items of the dreams. It would just happen. At a given moment I would remember that I had to look at my hands and then at the surroundings. There were nights, however, when I could not recall having done it at all.

He seemed to be satisfied, and wanted to know what were the usual items I had been finding in my visions. I could not think of anything in particular, and I started elaborating on a nightmarish dream I had had the night before.

"Don't get so fancy," he said dryly.

I told him that I had been recording all the details of my dreams. Since I had begun to practice looking at my hands, my dreams had become very compelling and my sense of recall had increased to the point that I could remember minute details. He said that to follow them was a waste of time because details and vividness were in no way important.

"Ordinary dreams get very vivid as soon as you begin to *set up dreaming*," he said. "That vividness and clarity is a formidable barrier. And you are worse off than anyone I have ever met in my life. You have the worst mania. You write down everything you can."

In all fairness, I believed what I was doing was appropriate. Keeping a meticulous record of my dreams was giving me a degree of clarity about the nature of the visions I had while sleeping.

"Drop it!" he said imperatively. "It's not helping anything. All you're doing is distracting yourself from the purpose of *dreaming*, which is control and power."

He lay down, covered his eyes with his hat, and talked without looking at me.

"I'm going to remind you of all the techniques you must practice," he said. "First you must focus your gaze on your hands as the starting point. Then shift your gaze to other items, and look at them in brief glances. Focus your gaze on as many things as you can. Remember that if you only glance briefly, the images do not shift. Then go back to your hands.

"Every time you look at your hands you renew the power needed for *dreaming*, so in the beginning don't look at too many things. Four items will suffice every time. Later on, you may enlarge the scope until you can cover all you want, but as soon as the images begin to shift and you feel you are losing control, go back to your hands.

"When you feel you can gaze at things indefinitely, you will be ready for a new technique. I'm going to teach you this new technique now, but I expect you to put it to use only when you are ready."

He was quiet for about fifteen minutes. Finally, he sat up and looked at me.

"The next step in *setting up dreaming* is to learn to travel," he said. "The same way you have learned to look at your hands, you can will yourself to move, to go places. First you have to establish a place you want to go to. Pick a well-known spot— perhaps your school, or a park, or a friend's house— then, will yourself to go there.

"This technique is very difficult. You must perform two tasks: You must will yourself to go to the specific locale; and then, when you have mastered that technique, you have to learn to control the exact time of your traveling."

As I wrote down his statements I had the feeling that I was really nuts. I was actually taking down insane instructions, knocking myself out in order to follow them. I experienced a surge of remorse and embarrassment.

"What are you doing to me, don Juan?" I asked, not really meaning it.

He seemed surprised. He stared at me for an instant, and then smiled.

"You've been asking me the same question over and over. I'm not doing anything to you. You are making yourself accessible to power. You're hunting it and I'm just guiding you."

He tilted his head to the side and studied me. He held my chin with one hand and the back of my head with the other and then moved my head back and forth. The muscles of my neck were very tense and moving my head reduced the tension.

Don Juan looked up to the sky for a moment, and seemed to examine something in it.

"It's time to leave," he said dryly and stood up.

We walked in an easterly direction until we came upon a patch of small trees in a valley between two large hills. It was almost five P.M. by then. He casually said that we might have to spend the night in that place. He pointed to the trees and said that there was water around there.

He tensed his body and began sniffing the air like an animal. I could see the muscles of his stomach contracting in very fast short spasms as he blew and inhaled through his nose in rapid succession. He urged me to do the same and find out by myself where the water was. I reluctantly tried to imitate him. After five or six minutes of fast breathing I was dizzy, but my nostrils had cleared out in an extraordinary way and I could actually detect the smell of river willows. I could not tell where they were, however.

Don Juan told me to rest for a few minutes and then he started me sniffing again. The second round was more intense. I could actually distinguish a whiff of river willow coming from my right. We headed in that direction and found, a good quarter of a mile away, a swamp-like spot with stagnant water. We walked around it to a slightly higher flat mesa. Above and around the mesa, the chaparral was very thick.

"This place is crawling with mountain lions and other smaller cats," don Juan said casually, as if it were a commonplace observation.

I ran to his side and he broke out laughing.

"Usually I wouldn't come here at all," he said. "But the crow pointed out this direction. There must be something special about it."

"Do we really have to be here, don Juan?"

"We do. Otherwise I would avoid this place."

I had become extremely nervous. He told me to listen attentively to what he had to say.

"The only thing one can do in this place is hunt lions," he said. "So I'm going to teach you how to do that.

"There is a special way of constructing a trap for water rats that live around water holes. They serve as bait. The sides of the cage are made to collapse and very sharp spikes are put along the sides. The spikes are hidden when the trap is up and they do not affect anything unless something falls on the cage, in which case the sides collapse and the spikes pierce whatever hits the trap."

I could not understand what he meant but he made a diagram on the ground and showed me that if the side sticks of the cage were placed on pivot-like hollow spots on the frame, the cage would collapse on to either side if something pushed it's top.

The spikes were pointed sharp slivers of hard wood which were placed all around the frame and fixed to it.

Don Juan said that usually a heavy load of rocks was placed over a net of sticks, which were connected to the cage and hung way above it. When the mountain lion came upon the trap baited with the water rats, it would usually try to break it by pawing it with all it's might; then the slivers would go through it's paws and the cat, in a frenzy, would jump up, unleashing an avalanche of rocks on top of him.

"Someday you might need to catch a mountain lion," he said. "They have special powers. They are terribly smart, and the only way to catch them is by fooling them with pain and with the smell of river willows."

With astounding speed and skill he assembled a trap, and after a long wait he caught three chubby squirrel-like rodents.

He told me to pick a handful of willows from the edge of the swamp and made me rub my clothes with them. He did the same. Then, quickly and skillfully, he wove two simple carrying nets out of reeds, scooped up a large clump of green plants and mud from the swamp, and carried it back to the mesa where he concealed himself.

In the meantime the squirrel-like rodents had begun to squeak very loudly.

Don Juan spoke to me from his hiding place and told me to use the other carrying net, gather a good chunk of mud and plants, and climb to the lower branches of a tree near the trap where the rodents were.

Don Juan said that he did not want to hurt the cat or the rodents, so he was going to hurl the mud at the lion if it came to the trap. He told me to be on the alert, and hit the cat with my bundle after he had in order to scare it away. He recommended I should be extremely careful not to fall out of the tree. His final instructions were to be so still that I would merge with the branches.

I could not see where don Juan was. The squealing of the rodents became extremely loud, and finally it was so dark that I could hardly distinguish the general features of the terrain. I heard a sudden and close sound of soft steps and a muffled catlike exhalation; then a very soft growl, and the rodents ceased to squeak. It was right then that I saw the dark mass of an animal right under the tree where I was. Before I could even be sure that it was a mountain lion, it charged against the trap; but before the animal reached the cage, something hit it and made it recoil. I hurled my bundle, as don Juan had told me to do. I missed, yet it made a very loud noise. At that instant don Juan let out a series of penetrating yells that sent chills through my spine, and the cat, with extraordinary agility, leaped to the mesa and disappeared.

Don Juan kept on making the penetrating noises a while longer. Then he told me to come down from the tree, pick up the cage with the squirrels, run up to the mesa, and get to where he was as fast as I could.

In an incredibly short period of time, I was standing next to don Juan. He told me to imitate his yelling as close as possible in order to keep the lion off while he dismantled the cage and let the rodents free.

I began to yell, but could not produce the same effect. My voice was raspy because of the excitation.

He said I had to abandon myself and yell with real feeling because the lion was still around. Suddenly I fully realized the situation. The lion was real. I let out a magnificent series of piercing yells.

Don Juan roared with laughter.

He let me yell for a moment, and then he said we had to leave the place as quietly as possible because the lion was no fool, and was probably retracing it's steps back to where we were.

"He'll follow us for sure," he said. "No matter how careful we are, we'll leave a trail as wide as the Pan American highway."

I walked very close to don Juan. From time to time he would stop for an instant and listen. At one moment he began to run in the dark and I followed him with my hands extended in front of my eyes to protect myself from the branches.

We finally got to the base of the bluff where we had been earlier. Don Juan said that if we succeeded in climbing to the top without being mauled by the lion we were safe. He went up first to show me the way. We started to climb in the dark. I did not know how, but I followed him with dead sure steps. When we were near the top I heard a peculiar animal cry. It was almost like the mooing of a cow, except that it was a bit longer and coarser.

"Up! Up!" don Juan yelled.

I scrambled to the top in total darkness ahead of don Juan. When he reached the flat top of the bluff, I was already sitting catching my breath.

He rolled on the ground. I thought for a second that the exertion had been too great for him, but he was laughing at my speedy climb.

We sat in complete silence for a couple of hours and then we started back to my car.

*Sunday, September 3, 1961*

Don Juan was not in the house when I woke up. I worked over my notes, and had time to get some firewood from the surrounding chaparral before he returned. I was eating when he walked into the house. He began to laugh at what he called my routine of eating at noon, but he helped himself to my sandwiches.

I told him that what had happened with the mountain lion was baffling to me. In retrospect, it all seemed unreal. It was as if everything had been staged for my benefit. The succession of events had been so rapid that I really had not had time to be afraid. I had had enough time to act, but not to deliberate upon my circumstances. In writing my notes, the question of whether I had really seen the mountain lion came to mind. The dry branch was still fresh in my memory.

"It was a mountain lion," don Juan said imperatively.

"Was it a real flesh and blood animal?"

"Of course."

I told him that my suspicions had been roused because of the easiness of the total event. It was as if the lion had been waiting out there, and had been trained to do exactly what don Juan had planned.

He was unruffled by my barrage of skeptical remarks. He laughed at me.

"You're a funny fellow," he said. "You saw and heard the cat. It was right under the tree where you were. He didn't smell you and jump at you because of the river willows. They kill any other smell, even for cats. You had a batch of them in your lap."

I said that it was not that I doubted him, but that everything that had happened that night was extremely foreign to the events of my everyday life. For a while, as I was writing my notes, I even had had the feeling that don Juan may have been playing the role of the lion. However, I had to discard the idea because I had really seen the dark shape of a four legged animal charging at the cage, and then leaping to the mesa.

"Why do you make such a fuss?" he said. "It was just a big cat. There must be thousands of cats in those mountains. Big deal. As usual, you are focusing your attention on the wrong item. It makes no difference whatsoever whether it was a lion or my pants. Your feelings at that moment were what counted."

In my entire life I had never seen or heard a big wildcat on the prowl. When I thought of it, I could not get over the fact that I had been only a few feet away from one.

Don Juan listened patiently while I went over the entire experience.

"Why the awe for the big cat?" he asked with an inquisitive expression. "You've been close to most of the animals that live around here and you've never been so awed by them. Do you like cats?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, forget about it then. The lesson was not on how to hunt lions, anyway."

"What was it about?"

"The little crow pointed out that specific spot to me, and at that spot I saw the opportunity of making you understand how one acts while one is in the mood of a warrior.

"Everything you did last night was done within a proper mood. You were controlled, and at the same time abandoned when you jumped down from the tree to pick up the cage and run up to me. You were not paralyzed with fear. And then, near the top of the bluff when the lion let out a scream, you moved very well. I'm sure you wouldn't believe what you did if you looked at the bluff during the daytime. You had a degree of abandon, and at the same time you had a degree of control over yourself. You did not let go and wet your pants, and yet you let go and climbed that wall in complete darkness. You could have missed the trail and killed yourself. To climb that wall in darkness required that you had to hold on to yourself and let go of yourself at the same time. That's what I call the mood of a warrior."

I said that whatever I had done that night was the product of my fear, and not the result of any mood of control and abandon.

"I know that," he said, smiling. "And I wanted to show you that you can spur yourself beyond your limits if you are in the proper mood. A warrior makes his own mood. You didn't know that. Fear got you into the mood of a warrior. But now that you know about it, anything can serve to get you into it."

I wanted to argue with him, but my reasons were not clear. I felt an inexplicable sense of annoyance.

"It's convenient to always act in such a mood," he continued. "It cuts through the crap and leaves one purified. It was a great feeling when you reached the top of the bluff, wasn't it?"

I told him that I understood what he meant, yet I felt it would be idiotic to try to apply what he was teaching me to my everyday life.

"One needs the mood of a warrior for every single act," he said. "Otherwise one becomes distorted and ugly. There is no power in a life that lacks this mood. Look at yourself.

Everything offends and upsets you. You whine and complain and feel that everyone is making you dance to their tune. You are a leaf at the mercy of the wind. There is no power in your fife. What an ugly feeling that must be!

"A warrior, on the other hand, is a hunter. He calculates everything. That's control. But once his calculations are over, he acts. He lets go. That's abandon. A warrior is not a leaf at the mercy of the wind. No one can push him. No one can make him do things against himself or against his better judgment. A warrior is tuned to survive, and he survives in the best of all possible fashions."

I liked his stance, although I thought it was unrealistic. It seemed too simplistic for the complex world in which I lived.

He laughed at my arguments and I insisted that the mood of a warrior could not possibly help me overcome the feeling of being offended, or actually being injured by the actions of my fellow men- as in the hypothetical case of being physically harassed by a cruel and malicious person placed in a position of authority.

He roared with laughter and admitted the example was apropos.

"A warrior could be injured but not offended," he said. "For a warrior there is nothing offensive about the acts of his fellow men as long as he himself is acting within the proper mood.

"The other night you were not offended by the lion. The fact that it chased us did not anger you. I did not hear you cursing it, nor did I hear you say that he had no right to follow us. It could have been a cruel and malicious lion for all you know. But that was not a consideration while you struggled to avoid it. The only thing that was pertinent was to survive. And that you did very well.

"If you would have been alone, and the lion had caught up with you and mauled you to death, you would have never even considered complaining or feeling offended by it's acts.

"The mood of a warrior is not so far-fetched for yours or anybody's world. You need it in order to cut through all the guff."

I explained my way of reasoning. The lion and my fellow men were not on a par because I knew the intimate quirks of men while I knew nothing about the lion. What offended me about my fellow men was that they acted maliciously and knowingly.

"I know, I know," don Juan said patiently. "To achieve the mood of a warrior is not a simple matter. It is a revolution. To regard the lion and the water rats and our fellow men as equals is a magnificent act of the warrior's spirit. It takes power to do that."

## 12. A Battle of Power

*Thursday, December 28, 1961*

We started on a journey very early in the morning. We drove south and then east to the mountains. Don Juan had brought gourds with food and water. We ate in my car before we started walking.

"Stick close to me," he said. "This is an unknown region to you, and there is no need to take chances. You are going in search of power, and everything you do counts. Watch the wind, especially towards the end of the day. Watch when it changes directions, and shift your position so that I always shield you from it."

"What are we going to do in these mountains, don Juan?"

"You're hunting power."

"I mean what are we going to do in particular?"

"There's no plan when it comes to hunting power. Hunting power or hunting game is the same. A hunter hunts whatever presents itself to him. Thus he must always be in a state of readiness.

"You know about the wind, and now you may hunt power in the wind by yourself. But there are other things you don't know about which are, like the wind, the center of power at certain times and at certain places.

"Power is a very peculiar affair," he said. "It is impossible to pin it down and say what it really is. It is a feeling that one has about certain things. Power is personal. It belongs to oneself alone. My benefactor, for instance, could make a person mortally ill by merely looking at him. Women would wane away after he had set eyes on them. Yet he did not make people sick all the time, but only when his personal power was involved."

"How did he choose who to make sick?"

"I don't know that. He didn't know it himself. Power is like that. It commands you and yet it obeys you.

"A hunter of power entraps it, and then stores it away as his personal finding. Thus, personal power grows, and you may have the case of a warrior who has so much personal power that he becomes a man of knowledge."

"How does one store power, don Juan?"

"That again is another feeling. It depends on what kind of a person the warrior is. My benefactor was a man of violent nature. He stored power through that feeling. Everything he did was strong and direct. He left me a memory of something crushing through things. Everything that happened to him took place in that manner."

I told him I could not understand how power was stored through a feeling.

"There's no way to explain it," he said after a long pause. "You have to do it yourself."

He picked up the gourds with food and fastened them to his back. He handed me a string with eight pieces of dry meat strung on it and made me hang it from my neck.

"This is power food," he said.

"What makes it power food, don Juan?"

"It is the meat of an animal that had power. A deer, a unique deer. My personal power brought it to me. This meat will sustain us for weeks, months if need be. Chew little bits of it at a time, and chew it thoroughly. Let the power sink slowly into your body."

We began to walk. It was almost eleven A.M. Don Juan reminded me once more of the procedure to follow.

"Watch the wind," he said. "Don't let it trip you. And don't let it make you tired. Chew your power food and hide from the wind behind my body. The wind won't hurt me; we know each other very well."

He led me to a trail that went straight to the high mountains. The day was cloudy and it was about to rain. I could see low rain clouds and fog up above in the mountains descending into the area where we were.

We hiked in complete silence until about three o'clock in the afternoon. Chewing the dry meat was indeed invigorating. Watching for sudden changes in the direction of the wind became a mysterious affair to the point that my entire body seemed to sense changes before they actually happened. I had the feeling that I could detect waves of wind as a sort of pressure on my upper chest on my bronchial tubes. Every time I was about to feel a gust of wind, my chest and throat would itch.

Don Juan stopped for a moment and looked around. He appeared to be orienting himself and then he turned to the right. I noticed that he was also chewing dry meat. I felt very fresh, and was not tired at all. The task of being aware of shifts in the wind had been so consuming that I had not been aware of time.

We walked into a deep ravine and then up one side to a small plateau on the sheer side of an enormous mountain. We were quite high; almost to the top of the mountain.

Don Juan climbed a huge rock at the end of the plateau and helped me up to it. The rock was placed in such a way as to look like a dome on top of precipitous [* *precipitous- extremely steep*] walls. We slowly walked around it. Finally I had to move around the rock on my seat, holding on to the surface with my heels and hands. I was soaked in perspiration, and had to dry my hands repeatedly.

From the other side I could see a very large shallow cave near the top of the mountain. It looked like a hall that had been carved out of the rock. It was sandstone which had been weathered into a sort of balcony with two pillars.

Don Juan said that we were going to camp there, and that it was a very safe place because it was too shallow to be a den for lions or any other predators; too open to be a nest for rats; and too windy for insects. He laughed and said that it was an ideal place for men since no other living creatures could stand it.

He climbed up to it like a mountain goat. I marveled at his stupendous agility.

I slowly dragged myself down the rock on my seat and then tried to run up the side of the mountain in order to reach the ledge. The last few yards completely exhausted me. I kiddingly asked don Juan how old he really was. I thought that in order to reach the ledge the way he had done it, one had to be extremely fit and young.

"I'm as young as I want to be," he said. "This again is a matter of personal power. If you store power, your body can perform unbelievable feats. On the other hand, if you dissipate power, you'll be a fat old man in no time at all."

The length of the ledge was oriented along an east-west line. The open side of the balcony-like formation was to the south. I walked to the west end. The view was superb. The rain had circumvented us. It looked like a sheet of transparent material hung over the low land.

Don Juan said that we had enough time to build a shelter. He told me to make a pile of as many rocks as I could carry on to the ledge while he gathered some branches for a roof.

In an hour he had built a wall about a foot thick on the east end of the ledge. It was about two feet long and three feet high. He wove and tied some bundles of branches he had collected and made a roof, securing it on to two long poles that ended in forks. There was another pole of the same length that was affixed to the roof itself and which supported it on the opposite side of the wall. The structure looked like a high table with three legs.

Don Juan sat cross-legged under it, on the very edge of the balcony. He told me to sit next to him, to his right. We remained quiet for a while.

Don Juan broke the silence. He said in a whisper that we had to act as if nothing was out of the ordinary. I asked if there was something in particular that I should do. He said that I should get busy writing and do it in such a way that it would be as if I were at my desk with no worries in the world except writing. At a given moment, he was going to nudge me and then I should look where he was pointing with his eyes. He warned me that no matter what I saw I should not utter a single word. Only he could talk with impunity because he was known to all the powers in those mountains.

I followed his instructions, and wrote for over an hour. I became immersed in my task. Suddenly I felt a soft tap on my arm, and saw don Juan's eyes and head move to point out a bank of fog about two hundred yards away which was descending from the top of the mountain. Don Juan whispered in my ear with a tone barely audible even at that close range.

"Move your eyes back and forth along the bank of fog," he said, "but don't look at it directly. Blink your eyes and don't focus them on the fog. When you see a green spot on the bank of fog, point it out to me with your eyes."

I moved my eyes from left to right along the bank of fog that was slowly coming down to us. Perhaps half an hour went by. It was getting dark. The fog moved extremely slowly. At one moment I had the sudden feeling that I had detected a faint glow to my right. At first I thought that I had seen a patch of green shrubbery through the fog. When I looked at it directly I did not notice anything, but when I looked without focusing I could detect a vague greenish area.

I pointed it out to don Juan. He squinted his eyes and stared at it.

"Focus your eyes on that spot," he whispered in my ear. "Look without blinking until you *see*."

I wanted to ask what I was supposed to see, but he glared at me as if to remind me that I should not talk.

I stared again. The bit of fog that had come down from above hung as if it were a piece of solid matter. It was lined up right at the spot where I had noticed the green tint. As my eyes became tired again and I squinted, I saw at first the bit of fog superimposed on the fog bank, and then I saw a thin strip of fog in between that looked like a thin unsupported structure; a bridge joining the mountain above me and the bank of fog in front of me. For a moment I thought I could see the transparent fog, which was being blown down from the top of the mountain, going by the bridge without disturbing it. It was as if the bridge were actually solid. At one instant the mirage became so complete that I could actually distinguish the darkness of the part under the bridge proper, as opposed to the light sandstone color of it's side.

I stared at the bridge, dumbfounded. And then I either lifted myself to it's level, or the bridge lowered itself to mine. Suddenly I was looking at a straight beam in front of me. It was an immensely long, solid beam, narrow and without railings, but wide enough to walk on.

Don Juan shook me by the arm vigorously. I felt my head bobbing up and down and then I noticed that my eyes itched terribly. I rubbed them quite unconsciously. Don Juan kept on shaking me until I opened my eyes again. He poured some water from his gourd into the hollow of his hand and sprinkled my face with it. The sensation was very unpleasant. The coldness of the water was so extreme that the drops felt like sores on my skin. I noticed then that my body was very warm. I was feverish.

Don Juan hurriedly gave me some water to drink, and then splashed water on my ears and neck.

I heard a very loud, eerie and prolonged bird cry. Don Juan listened attentively for an instant and then pushed the rocks of the wall with his foot and collapsed the roof. He threw the roof into the shrubs and tossed all the rocks, one by one, over the side.

He whispered in my ear, "Drink some water and chew your dry meat. We cannot stay here. That cry was not a bird."

We climbed down the ledge and began to walk in an easterly direction. In no time at all it was so dark that it was as if there were a curtain in front of my eyes. The fog was like an impenetrable barrier. I had never realized how crippling the fog was at night. I could not conceive how don Juan walked. I held on to his arm as if I were blind.

Somehow I had the feeling I was walking on the edge of a precipice. My legs refused to move on. My reason trusted don Juan and I was rationally willing to go on, but my body was not, and don Juan had to drag me in total darkness.

He must have known the terrain to ultimate perfection. He stopped at a certain point and made me sit down. I did not dare let go of his arm. My body felt, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that I was sitting on a barren dome-like mountain and if I moved an inch to my right I would fall beyond the tolerance point into an abyss. I was absolutely sure I was sitting on a curved mountainside, because my body moved unconsciously to the right. I thought it did so in order to keep it's verticality, so I tried to compensate by leaning to the left against don Juan as far as I could.

Don Juan suddenly moved away from me and without the support of his body I fell on the ground. Touching the ground restored my sense of equilibrium. I was lying on a flat area. I began to reconnoitre [* *reconnoitre- explore*] my immediate surroundings by touch. I recognized dry leaves and twigs.

There was a sudden flash of lightning that illuminated the whole area and tremendous thunder. I saw don Juan standing to my left, and saw huge trees and a cave a few feet behind him.

Don Juan told me to get into the hole. I crawled into it and sat down with my back against the rock.

I felt don Juan leaning over to whisper that I had to be totally silent.

There were three flashes of lightning, one after the other. In a glance I saw don Juan sitting cross-legged to my left. The cave was a concave formation big enough for two or three persons to sit in. The hole seemed to have been carved at the bottom of a boulder. I felt that it had indeed been wise of me to have crawled into it because if I had been walking, I would have knocked my head against the rock.

The brilliancy of the lightning gave me an idea of how thick the bank of fog was. I noticed the trunks of enormous trees as dark silhouettes against the opaque light gray mass of the fog.

Don Juan whispered that the fog and the lightning were in cahoots with each other and I had to keep an exhausting vigil because I was engaged in a battle of power. At that moment a stupendous flash of lightning rendered the whole scenery phantasmagorical. The fog was like a white filter that frosted the light of the electrical discharge and diffused it uniformly. The fog was like a dense whitish substance hanging between the tall trees, but right in front of me at ground level the fog was thinning out. I plainly distinguished the features of the terrain. We were in a pine forest. Very tall trees surrounded us. They were so extremely big that I could have sworn we were in the redwoods if I had not previously known our whereabouts.

There was a barrage of lightning that lasted several minutes. Each flash made the features I had already observed more discernible. Right in front of me I saw a definite trail. There was no vegetation on it. It seemed to end in an area clear of trees.

There were so many flashes of lightning that I could not keep track of where they were coming from. The scenery, however, had been so profusely illuminated that I felt much more at ease. My fears and uncertainties had vanished as soon as there had been enough light to lift the heavy curtain of darkness. So when there was a long pause between the flashes of lightning, I was no longer disoriented by the blackness around me.

Don Juan whispered that I had probably done enough watching, and that I had to focus my attention on the sound of thunder. I realized to my amazement that I had not paid any attention to thunder at all in spite of the fact that it had really been tremendous. Don Juan added that I should follow the sound, and look in the direction where I thought it came from.

There were no longer barrages of lightning and thunder but only sporadic flashes of intense light and sound. The thunder seemed to always come from my right. The fog was lifting, and since I was already accustomed to the pitch black, I could distinguish masses of vegetation. The lightning and thunder continued, and suddenly the whole right side opened up and I could see the sky.

The electrical storm seemed to be moving towards my right. There was another flash of lightning and I saw a distant mountain to my extreme right. The light illuminated the background, silhouetting the bulky mass of the mountain. I saw trees on top of it. They looked like neat black cutouts superimposed on the brilliantly white sky. I even saw cumulus clouds over the mountains.

The fog had cleared completely around us. There was a steady wind and I could hear the rustling of leaves in the big trees to my left. The electrical storm was too distant to illuminate the trees, but their dark masses remained discernible. The light of the storm allowed me to establish, however, that there was a range of distant mountains to my right and that the forest was limited to the left side. It seemed that I was looking down into a dark valley which I could not see at all. The range over which the electrical storm was taking place was on the opposite side of the valley.

Then it began to rain. I pressed back against the rock as far as I could. My hat served as a good protection. I was sitting with my knees to my chest and only my calves and shoes got wet.

It rained for a long time. The rain was lukewarm. I felt it on my feet. And then I fell asleep.

The noises of birds woke me up. I looked around for don Juan. He was not there. Ordinarily I would have pondered whether he had left me there alone, but the shock of seeing the surroundings nearly paralyzed me.

I stood up. My legs were soaking wet, the brim of my hat was soggy and there was still some water in it that spilled over me. I was not in a cave at all, but under some thick bushes. I experienced a moment of unparalleled confusion. I was standing on a flat piece of land between two small dirt hills covered with bushes. There were no trees to my left and no valley to my right. Right in front of me, where I had seen the path in the forest, there was a gigantic bush.

I refused to believe what I was witnessing. The incongruency of my two versions of reality made me grapple for any kind of explanation. It occurred to me that it was perfectly possible that I had slept so soundly that don Juan might have carried me on his back to another place without waking me.

I examined the spot where I had been sleeping. The ground there was dry, and so was the ground on the spot next to it, where don Juan had been.

I called him a couple of times, and then had an attack of anxiety and bellowed his name as loud as I could. He came out from behind some bushes. I immediately became aware that he knew what was going on. His smile was so mischievous that I ended up smiling myself.

I did not want to waste any time in playing games with him. I blurted out what was the matter with me. I explained as carefully as possible every detail of my night long hallucinations. He listened without interrupting. He could not, however, keep a serious face and started to laugh a couple of times, but he regained his composure right away.

I asked for his comments three or four times; he only shook his head as if the whole affair was also incomprehensible to him.

When I ended my account he looked at me and said, "You look awful. Maybe you need to go to the bushes."

He cackled for a moment, and then added that I should take off my clothes and wring them out so they would dry.

The sunlight was brilliant. There were very few clouds. It was a windy brisk day.

Don Juan walked away, telling me that he was going to look for some plants, and that I should compose myself and eat something, and not call him until I was calm and strong.

My clothes were really wet. I sat down in the sun to dry. I felt that the only way for me to relax was to get out my notebook and write. I ate while I worked on my notes.

After a couple of hours I was more relaxed and I called don Juan. He answered from a place near the top of the mountain. He told me to gather the gourds and climb up to where he was. When I reached the spot, I found him sitting on a smooth rock. He opened the gourds and served himself some food. He handed me two big pieces of meat.

I did not know where to begin. There were so many things I wanted to ask. He seemed to be aware of my mood and laughed with sheer delight.

"How do you feel?" he asked in a facetious [* *facetious - treating serious issues with deliberately inappropriate humor*] tone.

I did not want to say anything. I was still upset.

Don Juan urged me to sit down on the flat slab. He said that the stone was a power object and that I would be renewed after being there for a while.

"Sit down," he commanded me dryly.

He did not smile. His eyes were piercing. I automatically sat down.

He said that I was being careless with power by acting morosely, and that I had to put an end to it or power would turn against both of us and we would never leave those desolate hills alive.

After a moment's pause he casually asked, "How is your *dreaming*?"

I explained to him how difficult it had become for me to give myself the command to look at my hands. At first it had been relatively easy, perhaps because of the newness of the concept. I had had no trouble at all in reminding myself that I had to look at my hands. But the excitation had worn off and some nights I could not do it at all.

"You must wear a headband to sleep," he said. "Getting a headband is a tricky maneuver. I cannot give you one because you yourself have to make it from scratch. But you cannot make one until you have had a vision of it in *dreaming*. See what I mean? The headband has to be made according to the specific vision. And it must have a strip across it that fits tightly on top of the head. Or it may very well be like a tight cap. *Dreaming* is easier when one wears a power object on top of the head. You could wear your hat or put on a cowl, like a friar, and go to sleep; but those items would only cause intense dreams, not *dreaming*."

He was silent for a moment and then proceeded to tell me in a fast barrage of words that the vision of the headband did not have to occur only in ‘dreaming.’ It could happen in states of wakefulness and as a result of any far-fetched and totally unrelated event such as watching the flight of birds, the movement of water, the clouds, and so on.

"A hunter of power watches everything," he went on. "And everything tells him some secret."

"But how can one be sure that things are telling secrets?" I asked.

I thought he may have had a specific formula that allowed him to make 'correct' interpretations.

"The only way to be sure is by following all the instructions I have been giving you, starting from the first day you came to see me," he said. "In order to have power one must live with power."

He smiled benevolently. He seemed to have lost his fierceness. He even nudged me lightly on the arm.

"Eat your power food," he urged me.

I began to chew some dry meat, and at that moment I had the sudden realization that perhaps the dry meat contained a psychotropic substance, hence the hallucinations. For a moment I felt almost relieved. If he had put something in the meat, my mirages were perfectly understandable. I asked him to tell me if there was anything at all in the 'power meat.'

He laughed but did not answer me directly. I insisted, assuring him that I was not angry or even annoyed, but that I had to know so I could explain the events of the previous night to my own satisfaction. I urged him, coaxed him, and finally begged him to tell me the truth.

"You are quite cracked," he said, shaking his head in a gesture of disbelief. "You have an insidious tendency. You persist in trying to explain everything to your satisfaction. There is nothing in the meat except power. The power was not put there by me or by any other man but by power itself. It is the dry meat of a deer and that deer was a gift to me in the same way a certain rabbit was a gift to you not too long ago. Neither you nor I put anything in the rabbit. I didn't ask you to dry the rabbit's meat, because that act required more power than you had. However, I did tell you to eat the meat. You didn't eat much of it, because of your own stupidity.

"What happened to you last night was neither a joke nor a prank. You had an encounter with power. The fog, the darkness, the lightning, the thunder and the rain were all part of a great battle of power. You had the luck of a fool. A warrior would give anything to have such a battle."

My argument was that the whole event could not be a battle of power because it had not been real.

"And what is real?" don Juan asked me very calmly.

"This, what we're looking at is real," I said, pointing to the surroundings.

"But so was the bridge you saw last night, and so was the forest and everything else."

"But if they were real where are they now?"

"They are here. If you had enough power, you could call them back. Right now you cannot do that because you think it is very helpful to keep on doubting and nagging. It isn't, my friend. It isn't. There are worlds upon worlds, right here in front of us. And they are nothing to laugh at. Last night if I hadn't grabbed your arm, you would have walked on that bridge whether you wanted to or not. And earlier I had to protect you from the wind that was seeking you out."

"What would have happened if you hadn't protected me?"

"Since you don't have enough power, the wind would have made you lose your way, and perhaps even killed you by pushing you into a ravine. But the fog was the real thing last night. Two things could have happened to you in the fog. You could have walked across the bridge to the other side, or you could have fallen to your death. Either would have depended on power. One thing, however, would have been for sure. If I had not protected you, you would have had to walk on that bridge regardless of anything. That is the nature of power. As I told you before, it commands you, and yet it is at your command. Last night for instance, the power would have forced you to walk across the bridge, and then it would have been at your command to sustain you while you were walking. I stopped you because I know you don't have the means to use power, and without power the bridge would have collapsed."

"Did you see the bridge yourself, don Juan?"

"No. I just *saw* power. It may have been anything. Power for you, this time, was a bridge. I don't know why a bridge. We are most mysterious creatures."

"Have you ever seen a bridge in the fog, don Juan?"

"Never. But that's because I'm not like you. I saw other things. My battles of power are very different from yours."

"What did you see, don Juan? Can you tell me?"

"I saw my enemies during my first battle of power in the fog. You have no enemies. You don't hate people. I did at that time. I indulged in hating people. I don't do that any more. I have vanquished my hate, but at that time my hate nearly destroyed me.

"Your battle of power, on the other hand, was neat. It didn't consume you. You are consuming yourself now with your own crappy thoughts and doubts. That's your way of indulging yourself.

"The fog was impeccable with you. You have an affinity with it. It gave you a stupendous bridge, and that bridge will be there in the fog from now on. It will reveal itself to you over and over, until someday you will have to cross it.

"I strongly recommend that from this day on you don't walk into foggy areas by yourself until you know what you're doing.

"Power is a very weird affair. In order to have it and command it, one must have power to begin with. It's possible, however, to store it, little by little, until one has enough to sustain oneself in a battle of power."

"What is a battle of power?"

"What happened to you last night was the beginning of a battle of power. The scenes that you beheld were the seat of power. Someday they will make sense to you. Those scenes are most meaningful."

"Can you tell me their meaning yourself, don Juan?"

"No. Those scenes are your own personal conquest which you cannot share with anyone. But what happened last night was only the beginning; a skirmish. The real battle will take place when you cross that bridge. What's on the other side? Only you will know that. And only you will know what's at the end of that trail through the forest. But all that is something that may or may not happen to you. In order to journey through those unknown trails and bridges one must have enough power of one's own."

"What happens if one doesn't have enough power?"

"Death is always waiting, and when the warrior's power wanes, death simply taps him. Thus, to venture into the unknown without any power is stupid. One will only find death."

I was not really listening. I kept on playing with the idea that the dry meat may have been the agent that had caused the hallucinations. It appeased me to indulge in that thought.

"Don't tax yourself trying to figure it out," he said as if he were reading my thoughts. "The world is a mystery. This, what you're looking at, is not all there is to it. There is much more to the world, so much more, in fact, that it is endless. So, when you're trying to figure it out, all you're really doing is trying to make the world familiar. You and I are right here, in the world that you call real, simply because we both know it. You don't know the world of power, therefore you cannot make it into a familiar scene."

"You know that I really can't argue your point," I said, "but my mind can't accept it either."

He laughed and touched my head lightly.

"You're really crazy," he said. "But that's all right. I know how difficult it is to live like a warrior. If you would have followed my instructions and performed all the acts I have taught you, you would by now have enough power to cross that bridge. Enough power to *see* and to *stop the world*."

"But why should I want power, don Juan?"

"You can't think of a reason now. However, if you would store enough power, the power itself will find you a good reason. Sounds crazy, doesn't it?"

"Why did you want power yourself, don Juan?"

"I'm like you. I didn't want it. I couldn't find a reason to have it. I had all the doubts that you have and never followed the instructions I was given, or I never thought I did. Yet, in spite of my stupidity, I stored enough power and one day my personal power made the world collapse."

"But why would anyone wish to *stop the world*?"

"Nobody does, that's the point. It just happens. And once you know what it is like to *stop the world*, you realize there is a reason for it. You see, one of the arts of the warrior is to collapse the world for a specific reason, and then restore it again in order to keep on living."

I told him that perhaps the surest way to help me would be to give me an example of a specific reason for collapsing the world.

He remained silent for some time. He seemed to be thinking what to say.

"I can't tell you that," he said. "It takes too much power to know that. Someday you will live like a warrior in spite of yourself. Then perhaps you will have stored enough personal power to answer that question yourself.

"I have taught you nearly everything a warrior needs to know in order to start off in the world storing power by himself. Yet I know that you can't do that and I have to be patient with you. I know for a fact that it takes a lifelong struggle to be by oneself in the world of power."

Don Juan looked at the sky and the mountains. The sun was already on it's descent towards the west and rain clouds were rapidly forming on the mountains. I did not know the time. I had forgotten to wind my watch. I asked don Juan if he could tell the time of the day, and he had such an attack of laughter that he rolled off the slab into the bushes.

He stood up and stretched his arms, yawning.

"It is early," he said. "We must wait until the fog gathers on top of the mountain and then you must stand alone on this slab, and thank the fog for it's favors. Let it come and envelop you. I'll be nearby to assist, if need be."

Somehow the prospect of staying alone in the fog terrified me. I felt idiotic for reacting in such an irrational manner.

"You cannot leave these desolate mountains without saying your thanks," he said in a firm tone. "A warrior never turns his back to power without atoning for the favors received."

He lay down on his back with his hands behind his head and covered his face with his hat.

"How should I wait for the fog?" I asked. "What should I do?"

"Write!" he said through his hat. "But don't close your eyes or turn your back to it."

I tried to write, but I could not concentrate. I stood up and moved around restlessly. Don Juan lifted his hat and looked at me with an air of annoyance.

"Sit down!" he ordered me.

He said that the battle of power had not yet ended, and that I had to teach my spirit to be impassive. Nothing of what I did should betray my feelings unless I wanted to remain trapped in those mountains.

He sat up and moved his hand in a gesture of urgency. He said that I had to act as if nothing was out of the ordinary because places of power, such as the one in which we were, had the potential of draining people who were disturbed. And thus one could develop strange and injurious ties with a locale.

"Those ties anchor a man to a place of power, sometimes for a lifetime," he said. "And this is not the place for you. You did not find it yourself. So tighten your belt and don't lose your pants."

His admonitions worked like a spell on me. I wrote for hours without interruption.

Don Juan went back to sleep and did not wake up until the fog was perhaps a hundred yards away, descending from the top of the mountain. He stood up and examined the surroundings. I looked around without turning my back. The fog had already invaded the lowlands, descending from the mountains to my right. On my left side the scenery was clear. The wind, however, seemed to be coming from my right and was pushing the fog into the lowlands as if to surround us.

Don Juan whispered that I should remain impassive, standing where I was without closing my eyes; and that I should not turn around until I was completely surrounded by the fog. Only then was it possible to start our descent. He took cover at the foot of some rocks a few feet behind me.

The silence in those mountains was something magnificent and at the same time awesome. The soft wind that was carrying the fog gave me the sensation that the fog was hissing in my ears. Big chunks of fog came downhill like solid clumps of whitish matter rolling down on me. I smelled the fog. It was a peculiar mixture of a pungent and fragrant smell. Then I was enveloped in it.

I had the impression the fog was working on my eyelids. They felt heavy and I wanted to close my eyes. I was cold. My throat itched and I wanted to cough but I did not dare. I lifted my chin up and stretched my neck to ease the cough, and as I looked up I had the sensation I could actually see the thickness of the fog bank. It was as if my eyes could assess the thickness by going through it. My eyes began to close and I could not fight off the desire to fall asleep. I felt I was going to collapse on the ground any moment. At that instant don Juan jumped up and grabbed me by the arms and shook me. The jolt was enough to restore my lucidity.

He whispered in my ear that I had to run downhill as fast as I could. He was going to follow behind because he did not want to get smashed by the rocks that I might turn over in my path. He said that I was the leader since it was my battle of power, and that I had to be clear-headed and abandoned in order to guide us safely out of there.

"This is it," he said in a loud voice. "If you don't have the mood of a warrior, we may never leave the fog."

I hesitated for a moment. I was not sure I could find my way down from those mountains.

"Run, rabbit, run!" don Juan yelled, and shoved me gently down the slope.

## 13. A Warrior's Last Stand

*Sunday, January 28, 1962*

Around ten A.M. don Juan walked into his house. He had left at the crack of dawn. I greeted him. He chuckled, and in a clowning mood he shook hands with me and greeted me ceremoniously.

"We're going to go on a little trip," he said. "You're going to drive us to a very special place in search of power."

He unfolded two carrying nets, placed two gourds filled with food in each of them, tied them with a thin rope, and handed me a net.

We leisurely drove north some four hundred miles. Then we left the Pan American highway, and took a gravel road towards the west. My car seemed to have been the only car on the road for hours. As we kept on driving, I noticed that I could not see through my windshield. I strained desperately to look at the surroundings, but it was too dark and my windshield was overlaid with crushed insects and dust.

I told don Juan that I had to stop to clean my windshield. He ordered me to go on driving even if I had to crawl at two miles an hour and stick my head out of the window to see ahead. He said that we could not stop until we had reached our destination.

At a certain place he told me to turn to the right. It was so dark and dusty that even the headlights did not help much. I drove off the road with great trepidation. I was afraid of the soft shoulders, but the dirt was packed.

I drove for about one hundred yards at the lowest possible speed, and held the door open to look out. Finally don Juan told me to stop. He said that I had parked right behind a huge rock that would shield my car from view.

I got out of the car and walked around guided by the headlights. I wanted to examine the surroundings because I had no idea where I was, but don Juan turned off the lights. He said loudly that there was no time to waste, and that I should lock my car so we could start on our way.

He handed me my net with gourds. It was so dark that I stumbled and nearly dropped them. Don Juan ordered me in a soft firm tone to sit down until my eyes were accustomed to the darkness. But my eyes were not the problem. Once I got out of my car I could see fairly well. What was wrong was a peculiar nervousness that made me act as if I were absent-minded. I was glossing over everything.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"We're going to hike in total darkness to a special place," he said.

"What for?"

"To find out for sure whether or not you're capable of continuing to hunt power."

I asked him if what he was proposing was a test; and if I failed the test, would he still talk to me and tell me about his knowledge.

He listened without interrupting. He said that what we were doing was not a test, and that we were waiting for an omen. If the omen did not come, the conclusion would be that I had not succeeded in hunting power, in which case I would be free from any further imposition, free to be as stupid as I wanted. He said that no matter what happened, he was my friend and he would always talk to me.

Somehow I knew I was going to fail.

"The omen will not come," I said jokingly. "I know it. I have a little power."

He laughed and patted me on the back gently.

"Don't you worry," he retorted. "The omen will come. I know it. I have more power than you."

He found his statement hilarious. He slapped his thighs and clapped his hands and roared with laughter.

Don Juan tied my carrying net to my back. He said that I should walk one step behind him, and step in his tracks as much as possible.

In a very dramatic tone he whispered, "This is a walk for power, so everything counts."

He said that if I would walk in his footsteps, the power that he was dissipating as he walked would be transmitted to me.

I looked at my watch. It was eleven P.M.

He made me line up like a soldier at attention. Then he pushed my right leg to the front and made me stand as if I had just taken a step forward. He lined up in front of me in the same position, and then began to walk after repeating the instructions that I should try to match his footsteps to perfection. He said in a clear whisper that I should not concern myself with anything else except stepping in his tracks. I should not look ahead or to the side, but at the ground where he was walking.

He started off at a very relaxed pace. I had no trouble at all following him. We were walking on relatively hard ground. For about thirty yards I maintained his pace and I matched his steps perfectly. Then I glanced to the side for an instant, and the next thing I knew I had bumped into him.

He giggled and assured me that I had not injured his ankle at all when I stepped on it with my big shoes, but if I were going to keep on blundering, one of us would be a cripple by morning. Laughing, he said in a very low but firm voice that he did not intend to get hurt by my stupidity and lack of concentration, and that if I stepped on him again I would have to walk barefoot.

"I can't walk without shoes," I said in a loud raspy voice.

Don Juan doubled up with laughter, and we had to wait until he had stopped.

He assured me again that he had meant what he said. We were journeying to tap power, and things had to be perfect.

The prospect of walking in the desert without shoes scared me beyond belief. Don Juan joked that my family were probably the type of farmers that did not take off their shoes even to go to bed. He was right, of course. I had never walked barefoot, and to walk in the desert without shoes would have been suicidal for me.

"This desert is oozing power," don Juan whispered in my ear. "There is no time for being timid."

We started walking again. Don Juan kept an easy pace. After a while, I noticed that we had left the hard ground and were walking on soft sand. Don Juan's feet sank into it and left deep tracks.

We walked for hours before don Juan came to a halt. He did not stop suddenly, but warned me ahead of time that he was going to stop so I would not bump into him. The terrain had become hard again and it seemed that we were going up an incline.

Don Juan said that if I needed to go to the bushes, I should do it because from then on we had a solid stretch without a single pause. I looked at my watch; it was one A.M.

After a ten or fifteen minute rest, don Juan made me line up and we began to walk again. He was right. It was a dreadful stretch. I had never done anything that demanded so much concentration. Don Juan's pace was so fast, and the tension of watching every step mounted to such heights, that at a given moment I could not feel that I was walking any more. I could not feel my feet or my legs. It was as if I were walking on air, and some force were carrying me on and on. My concentration had been so total that I did not notice the gradual change in light. Suddenly I became aware that I could see don Juan in front of me. I could see his feet and his tracks instead of half guessing as I had done most of the night.

At a given moment, he unexpectedly jumped to the side and my momentum carried me for about twenty yards further. As I slowed down my legs became weak and started to shake until, finally, I collapsed on the ground.

I looked up at don Juan, who was calmly examining me. He did not seem to be tired. I was panting for breath and soaked in cold perspiration.

Don Juan twirled me around in my lying position by pulling me by the arm. He said that if I wanted to regain my strength, I had to lie with my head towards the east. Little by little I relaxed and rested my aching body. Finally I had enough energy to stand up. I wanted to look at my watch, but he prevented me by putting his hand over my wrist. He very gently turned me around to face the east, and said that there was no need for my confounded timepiece; that we were on magical time; and that we were going to find out for sure whether or not I was capable of pursuing power.

I looked around. We were on top of a very large high hill. I wanted to walk towards something that looked like an edge or a crevice in the rock, but don Juan jumped and held me down.

He ordered me imperatively to stay on the place I had fallen until the sun had come out from behind some black mountain peaks a short distance away.

He pointed to the east and called my attention to a heavy bank of clouds over the horizon. He said that it would be a proper omen if the wind blew the clouds away in time for the first rays of the sun to hit my body on the hilltop.

He told me to stand still with my right leg in front as if I were walking; and not to look directly at the horizon, but to look without focusing.

My legs became very stiff and my calves hurt. It was an agonizing position, and my leg muscles were too sore to support me. I held on as long as I could. I was about to collapse. My legs were shivering uncontrollably when don Juan called the whole thing off. He helped me to sit down.

The bank of clouds had not moved and we had not seen the sun rising over the horizon.

Don Juan's only comment was, "Too bad."

I did not want to ask right off what the real implications of my failure were. But knowing don Juan, I was sure he had to follow the dictum of his omens, and there had been no omen that morning. The pain in my calves vanished, and I felt a wave of well-being. I began to trot in order to loosen up my muscles. Don Juan told me very softly to run up an adjacent hill and gather some leaves from a specific bush, and rub my legs in order to alleviate the muscular pain.

From where I stood, I could very plainly see a large lush green bush. The leaves seemed to be very moist. I had used them before. I never felt that they had helped me, but don Juan had always maintained that the effect of really friendly plants was so subtle that one could hardly notice it; yet they always produced the results they were supposed to.

I ran down the hill and up the other. When I got to the top, I realized that the exertion had almost been too much for me. I had a hard time catching my breath, and my stomach was upset. I squatted and then crouched over for a moment until I felt relaxed. Then I stood up and reached over to pick the leaves he had asked me to. But I could not find the bush. I looked around. I was sure I was on the right spot, but there was nothing in that area of the hilltop that even vaguely resembled that particular plant. Yet that had to be the spot where I had seen it. Any other place would have been out of range for anyone looking from where don Juan was standing.

I gave up the search and walked to the other hill. Don Juan smiled benevolently as I explained my mistake.

"Why do you call it a mistake?" he asked.

"Obviously the bush is not there," I said.

"But you saw it, didn't you?"

"I thought I did."

"What do you see in its place now?"

"Nothing."

There was absolutely no vegetation on the spot where I thought I had seen the plant. I attempted to explain what I had seen as a visual distortion; a sort of mirage. I had really been exhausted. Because of my exhaustion, I may have easily believed I was seeing something that I expected to be there, but which was not there at all.

Don Juan chuckled softly and stared at me for a brief moment.

"I see no mistake," he said. "The plant is there on that hilltop."

It was my turn to laugh. I scanned the whole area carefully. There were no such plants in view. What I had experienced was, to the best of my knowledge, a hallucination.

Don Juan very calmly began to descend the hill, and signaled me to follow. We climbed together to the other hilltop, and stood right where I thought I had seen the bush.

I chuckled with the absolute certainty I was right. Don Juan also chuckled.

"Walk to the other side of the hill," don Juan said. "You'll find the plant there."

I brought up the point that the other side of the hill had been outside my field of vision; that a plant may be there, but that that did not mean anything.

Don Juan signaled me with a movement of his head to follow him. He walked around the top of the hill instead of going directly across, and dramatically stood by a green bush without looking at it.

He turned and looked at me. It was a peculiarly piercing glance.

"There must be hundreds of such plants around here," I said.

Don Juan very patiently descended that other side of the hill with me trailing along. We looked everywhere for a similar bush. But there was none in sight. We covered about a quarter of a mile before we came upon another plant.

Without saying a word, don Juan led me back to the first hilltop. We stood there for a moment and then he guided me on another excursion to look for the plant but in the opposite direction. We combed the area and found two more bushes, perhaps a mile away. They had grown together and stuck out as a patch of intense rich green more lush than all the other surrounding bushes.

Don Juan looked at me with a serious expression. I did not know what to think of it.

"This is a very strange omen," he said.

We returned to the first hilltop, making a wide detour in order to approach it from a new direction. He seemed to be going out of his way to prove to me that there were very few such plants around there. We did not find any of them on our way. When we reached the hilltop we sat down in complete silence. Don Juan untied his gourds.

"You'll feel better after eating," he said.

He could not hide his delight. He had a beaming grin as he patted me on the head. I felt disoriented. The new developments were disturbing, but I was too hungry and tired to really ponder upon them.

After eating I felt very sleepy. Don Juan urged me to use the technique of looking without focusing in order to find a suitable spot to sleep on the hilltop where I had seen the bush.

I selected one. He picked up the debris from the spot, and made a circle with it the size of my body. Very gently he pulled some fresh branches from the bushes and swept the area inside the circle. He only went through the motions of sweeping: he did not really touch the ground with the branches. He then removed all the surface rocks from the area inside the circle and placed them in the center after meticulously sorting them by size into two piles of equal number.

"What are you doing with those rocks?" I asked.

"They are not rocks," he said. "They are strings. They will hold your spot suspended."

He took the smaller rocks and marked the circumference of the circle with them. He spaced them evenly, and with the aid of a stick, he secured each rock firmly in the ground as if he were a mason.

He did not let me come inside the circle, but told me to walk around and watch what he did. He counted eighteen rocks, and followed a counterclockwise direction.

"Now run down to the bottom of the hill and wait," he said. "And I will come to the edge and see if you are standing in the appropriate spot."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to toss each of these strings to you," he said, pointing to the pile of bigger rocks. "And you have to place them in the ground at the spot I will indicate in the same manner I have placed the other ones.

"You must be infinitely careful. When one is dealing with power, one has to be perfect. Mistakes are deadly here. Each of these is a string- a string that could kill us if we leave it around loose; so you simply can't make any mistakes. You must fix your gaze on the spot where I will throw the string. If you get distracted by anything at all, the string will become an ordinary rock and you won't be able to tell it apart from the other rocks lying around."

I suggested that it would be easier if I carried the strings downhill one at a time.

Don Juan laughed and shook his head negatively.

"These are strings," he insisted, "and they have to be tossed by me, and have to be picked up by you."

It took hours to fulfill the task. The degree of concentration needed was excruciating. Don

Juan reminded me every time to be attentive and focus my gaze. He was right in doing so. To pick out a specific rock that came hurtling downhill, displacing other rocks in it's way, was indeed a maddening affair.

When I had completely closed the circle and walked back to the top, I thought I was about to drop dead. Don Juan had picked some small branches, and had matted the circle. He handed me some leaves and told me to put them inside my pants against the skin of my umbilical region. He said that they would keep me warm and I would not need a blanket to sleep. I tumbled down inside the circle. The branches made a fairly soft bed and I fell asleep instantly.

It was late afternoon when I woke up. It was windy and cloudy. The clouds overhead were compact cumulus clouds, but towards the west they were thin cirrus clouds. The sun shone on the land from time to time.

Sleeping had renewed me. I felt invigorated and happy. The wind did not bother me. I was not cold. I propped my head up with my arms and looked around. I had not noticed before, but the hilltop was quite high. The view towards the west was impressive. I could see a vast area of low hills and then the desert. There was a range of dark brown mountain peaks towards the north and east, and towards the south an endless expanse of land and hills and distant blue mountains.

I sat up. Don Juan was not anywhere in sight. I had a sudden attack of fear. I thought he may have left me there alone, and I did not know the way back to my car. I lay down again on the mat of branches, and strangely enough my apprehension vanished. I again experienced a sense of quietness; an exquisite sense of well-being. It was an extremely new sensation to me. My thoughts seemed to have been turned off. I was happy. I felt healthy. A very quiet ebullience filled me. A soft wind was blowing from the west and swept over my body without I making me cold. I felt it on my face and around my ears like a gentle wave of warm water that bathed me and then receded and bathed me again. It was a strange state of being that had no parallel in my busy and dislocated life. I began to weep, not out of sadness or self-pity, but out of some ineffable, inexplicable joy.

I wanted to stay in that spot forever; and I may have had don Juan not come and yanked me out of the place.

"You've had enough rest," he said as he pulled me up.

He led me very calmly on a walk around the periphery of the hilltop. We walked slowly and in complete silence. He seemed to be interested in making me observe the scenery all around us. He pointed to clouds and mountains with a movement of his eyes or with a movement of his chin.

The scenery in the late afternoon was superb. It evoked sensations of awe and despair in me. It reminded me of sights in my childhood.

We climbed to the highest point of the hilltop, a peak of igneous rock, and sat down comfortably facing the south with our backs against the rock. The endless expanse of land towards the south was truly majestic.

"Fix all this in your memory," don Juan whispered in my ear. "This spot is yours. This morning you saw, and that was the omen. You found this spot by *seeing*. The omen was unexpected, but it happened. You are going to hunt power whether you like it or not. It is not a human decision; not yours or mine.

"Now, properly speaking, this hilltop is your place; your beloved place. All that is around you is under your care. You must look after everything here, and everything will in turn look after you."

In a joking way I asked if everything was mine. He said, "Yes," in a very serious tone. I laughed and told him that what we were doing reminded me of the story of how the Spaniards that conquered the New World had divided the land in the name of their king. They used to climb to the top of a mountain, and claim all the land they could see in any specific direction.

"That's a good idea," he said. "I'm going to give you all the land you can see, not in one direction, but all around you."

He stood up and pointed with his extended hand, turning his body around to cover a complete circle.

"All this land is yours," he said.

I laughed out loud.

He giggled and asked me, "Why not? Why can't I give you this land?"

"You don't own this land," I said.

"So what? The Spaniards didn't own it either, and yet they divided it and gave it away. So why can't you take possession of it in the same vein?"

I scrutinized him to see if I could detect the real mood behind his smile. He had an explosion of laughter and nearly fell off the rock.

"All this land, as far as you can see, is yours," he went on, still smiling. "Not to use but to remember. This hilltop, however, is yours to use for the rest of your life. I am giving it to you because you have found it yourself. It is yours. Accept it."

I laughed, but don Juan seemed to be very serious. Except for his funny smile, he appeared to actually believe that he could give me that hilltop.

"Why not?" he asked as if he were reading my thoughts.

"I accept it," I said half in jest.

His smile disappeared. He squinted his eyes as he looked at me.

"Every rock and pebble and bush on this hill, especially on the top, is under your care," he said. "Every worm that lives here is your friend. You can use them and they can use you."

We remained silent for a few minutes. My thoughts were unusually scarce. I vaguely felt that his sudden change of mood was foreboding to me, but I was not afraid or apprehensive. I just did not want to talk any more. Somehow, words seemed to be inaccurate and their meanings difficult to pinpoint. I had never felt that way about talking, and upon realizing my unusual mood I hurriedly began to talk.

"But what can I do with this hill, don Juan?"

"Fix every feature of it in your memory. This is the place where you will come in *dreaming*. This is the place where you will meet with powers; where secrets will someday be revealed to you.

“You are hunting power and this is your place; the place where you will store your resources.

"It doesn't make sense to you now. So let it be a piece of nonsense for the time being."

We climbed down the rock and he led me to a small bowl-like depression on the west side of the hilltop. We sat down and ate there.

Undoubtedly there was something indescribably pleasant for me on that hilltop. Eating, like resting, was an unknown exquisite sensation.

The light of the setting sun had a rich, almost copperish, glow; and everything in the surroundings seemed to be dabbed with a golden hue. I was given totally to observing the scenery; I did not even want to think.

Don Juan spoke to me almost in a whisper. He told me to watch every detail of the surroundings, no matter how small or seemingly trivial, especially the features of the scenery that were most prominent in a westerly direction. He said that I should look at the sun without focusing on it until it had disappeared over the horizon.

The last minutes of light, right before the sun hit a blanket of low clouds or fog, were, in a total sense, magnificent. It was as if the sun were inflaming the earth, kindling it like a bonfire. I felt a sensation of redness in my face.

"Stand up!" don Juan shouted as he pulled me up.

He jumped away from me, and ordered me in an imperative but urging voice to trot on the spot where I was standing.

As I jogged on the same spot, I began to feel a warmth invading my body. It was a copperish warmth. I felt it in my palate and in the roof of my eyes. It was as if the top part of my head were burning with a cool fire that radiated a copperish glow.

Something in myself made me trot faster and faster as the sun began to disappear. At a given moment I truly felt I was so light that I could have flown away. Don Juan very firmly grabbed my right wrist. The sensation caused by the pressure of his hand brought back a sense of sobriety and composure. I plunked down on the ground and he sat down by me.

After a few minutes' rest, he quietly stood up, tapped me on the shoulder, and signaled me to follow him. We climbed back again to the peak of igneous rock where we had sat before. The rock shielded us from the cold wind. Don Juan broke the silence.

"It was a fine omen," he said. "How strange. It happened at the end of the day. You and I are so different. You are more a creature of the night. I prefer the young brilliancy of the morning. Or rather the brilliancy of the morning sun seeks me, but it shies away from you. On the other hand, the dying sun bathed you. It's flames scorched you without burning you. How strange!"

"Why is it strange?"

"I've never seen it happen. The omen, when it happens, has always been in the realm of the young sun."

"Why is it that way, don Juan?"

"This is not the time to talk about it," he said cuttingly. "Knowledge is power. It takes a long time to harness enough power to even talk about it."

I tried to insist, but he changed the topic abruptly. He asked me about my progress in ‘dreaming.’

I had begun to dream about specific places such as the school, and the houses of a few friends.

"Were you at those places during the day or during the night?" he asked.

My dreams corresponded to the time of the day when I ordinarily was accustomed to being at those places— in the school during the day, at my friends' houses at night.

He suggested that I should try ‘dreaming’ while I took a nap during the daytime, and find out if I could actually visualize the chosen place as it was at the time I was dreaming. If I were ‘dreaming’ at night, my visions of the locale should be of nighttime. He said that what one experiences in ‘dreaming’ has to be congruous with the time of the day when ‘dreaming’ was taking place; otherwise the visions one might have were not ‘dreaming,’ but ordinary dreams.

"In order to help yourself you should pick a specific object that belongs to the place you want to go to, and focus your attention on it," he went on. "On this hilltop here, for instance, you now have a specific bush that you must observe until it has a place in your memory. You can come back here while *dreaming* simply by recalling that bush, or by recalling this rock where we are sitting; or by recalling any other thing here. It is easier to travel in *dreaming* when you can focus on a place of power, such as this one. But if you don't want to come here, you may use any other place. Perhaps the school where you go is a place of power for you. Use it. Focus your attention on any object there, and then find it in *dreaming*.

"From the specific object you recall, you must go back to your hands, and then to another object, and so on.

"But now you must focus your attention on everything that exists on this hilltop because this is the most important place of your life."

He looked at me as if judging the effect of his words.

"This is the place where you will die," he said in a soft voice.

I fidgeted nervously, changing sitting positions, and he smiled.

"I will have to come with you over and over to this hilltop," he said. "Then you will have to come by yourself until you're saturated with it; until the hilltop is oozing you. You will know the time when you are filled with it. This hilltop, as it is now, will then be the place of your last dance."

"What do you mean by my last dance, don Juan?"

"This is the site of your last stand," he said. "You will die here no matter where you are. Every warrior has a place to die. A place of his predilection which is soaked with unforgettable memories, where powerful events left their mark, a place where he has witnessed marvels, where secrets have been revealed to him, a place where he has stored his personal power.

"A warrior has the obligation to go back to that place of his predilection every time he taps power in order to store it there. He either goes there by means of walking, or by means of *dreaming*.

"And finally, one day when his time on earth is up and he feels the tap of his death on his left shoulder, his spirit which is always ready flies to the place of his predilection, and there the warrior dances to his death.

"Every warrior has a specific for,; a specific posture of power which he develops throughout his life. It is a sort of dance; a movement that he does under the influence of his personal power.

"If a dying warrior has limited power, his dance is short; if his power is grandiose, his dance is magnificent. But regardless of whether his power is small or magnificent, death must stop to witness his last stand on earth. Death cannot overtake the warrior who is recounting the toil of his life for the last time until he has finished his dance."

Don Juan's words made me shiver. The quietness, the twilight, and the magnificent scenery all seemed to have been placed there as props for the image of a warrior's last dance of power.

"Can you teach me that dance even though I am not a warrior?" I asked.

"Any man that hunts power has to learn that dance," he said. "Yet I cannot teach you now. Soon you may have a worthy opponent, and I will show you then the first movement of power. You must add the other movements yourself as you go on living. Every new one must be obtained during a struggle of power. So, properly speaking, the posture, or the form of a warrior is the story of his life, a dance that grows as he grows in personal power."

"Does death really stop to see a warrior dance?"

"A warrior is only a man. A humble man. He cannot change the designs of his death. But his impeccable spirit which has stored power after stupendous hardships can certainly hold his death for a moment; a moment long enough to let him rejoice for the last time in recalling his power. We may say that that is a gesture which death has with those who have an impeccable spirit."

I experienced an overwhelming anxiety and I talked just to alleviate it. I asked him if he had known warriors that had died, and in what way their last dance had affected their dying.

"Cut it out," he said dryly. "Dying is a monumental affair. It is more than kicking your legs and becoming stiff."

"Will I too dance to my death, don Juan?"

"Certainly. You are hunting personal power even though you don't live like a warrior yet. Today the sun gave you an omen. Your best production in your life's work will be done towards the end of the day. Obviously you don't like the youthful brilliancy of early light. Journeying in the morning doesn't appeal to you. But your cup of tea is the dying sun; old, yellowish, and mellow. You don't like the heat. You like the glow.

"And thus you will dance to your death here, on this hilltop, at the end of the day. And in your last dance, you will tell of your struggle; of the battles you have won, and of those you have lost. You will tell of your joys and bewilderments upon encountering personal power. Your dance will tell about the secrets and about the marvels you have stored. And your death will sit here, and watch you.

"The dying sun will glow on you without burning as it has done today. The wind will be soft and mellow, and your hilltop will tremble. As you reach the end of your dance, you will look at the sun, for you will never see it again in waking or in *dreaming*. And then your death will point to the south. To the vastness."

## 14. The Gait of Power

*Saturday, April 7, 1962*

"Is death a personage, don Juan?" I asked as I sat down on the porch.

There was an air of bewilderment in don Juan's look. He was holding a bag of groceries I had brought him. He carefully placed them on the ground, and sat down in front of me. I felt encouraged, and I explained that I wanted to know if death was a person, or like a person when it watched a warrior's last dance.

"What difference does it make?" don Juan asked.

I told him that the image was fascinating to me and I want to know how he had arrived at it. How he knew that that was so.

"It's all very simple," he said. "A man of knowledge knows that death is the last witness because he *sees*."

"Do you mean that you have witnessed a warrior's last dance yourself?"

"No. One cannot be such a witness. Only death can do that. But I have *seen* my own death watching me, and I have danced to it as though I were dying. At the end of my dance, death did not point in any direction, and my place of predilection did not shiver saying goodbye to me; so my time on earth was not up yet, and I did not die. When all that took place, I had limited power and I did not understand the designs of my own death, thus I believed I was dying."

"Was your death like a person?"

"You're a funny bird. You think you are going to understand by asking questions. I don't think you will, but who am I to say?

"Death is not like a person. It is rather a presence. But one may also choose to say that it is nothing, and yet it is everything. One will be right on every count. Death is whatever one wishes.

"I am at ease with people, so death is a person for me. I am also given to mysteries, so death has hollow eyes for me. I can look through them. They are like two windows, and yet they move like eyes move. And so I can say that death with it's hollow eyes looks at a warrior while he dances for the last time on earth."

"But is that so only for you, don Juan, or is it the same for other warriors?"

"It is the same for every warrior that has a dance of power, and yet it is not. Death witnesses a warrior's last dance, but the manner in which a warrior sees his death is a personal matter. It could be anything— a bird, a light, a person, a bush, a pebble, a piece of fog, or an unknown presence."

Don Juan's images of death disturbed me. I could not find adequate words to voice my questions and I stammered. He stared at me, smiling, and coaxed me to speak up.

I asked him if the manner in which a warrior saw his death depended on the way he had been brought up. I used the Yuma and Yaqui Indians as examples. My own idea was that culture determined the way in which one would envision death.

"It doesn't matter how one was brought up," he said. "What determines the way one does anything is personal power. A man is only the sum of his personal power, and that sum determines how he lives and how he dies."

"What is personal power?"

"Personal power is a feeling," he said. "Something like being lucky. Or one may call it a mood. Personal power is something that one acquires regardless of one's origin. I already have told you that a warrior is a hunter of power, and that I am teaching you how to hunt and store it. The difficulty with you, which is the difficulty with all of us, is to be convinced. You need to believe that personal power can be used, and that it is possible to store it; but you haven't been convinced so far."

I told him that he had made his point, and that I was as convinced as I would ever be.

He laughed, and said, "That is not the type of conviction I am talking about."

He tapped my shoulder with two or three soft punches, and added with a cackle, "I don't need to be humored, you know."

I felt obliged to assure him that I was serious.

"I don't doubt it," he said. "But to be convinced means that you can act by yourself. It will still take you a great deal of effort to do that. Much more has to be done. You have just begun."

He was quiet for a moment. His face acquired a placid expression.

"It's funny the way you sometimes remind me of myself," he went on. "I too did not want to take the path of a warrior. I believed that all that work, was for nothing; and since we are all going to die what difference would it make to be a warrior? I was wrong. But I had to find that out for myself. Whenever you do realize that you are wrong, and that it certainly makes a world of difference, you can say that you are convinced. Then you can proceed by yourself; and by yourself you may even become a man of knowledge."

I asked him to explain what he meant by a man of knowledge.

"A man of knowledge is one who has followed truthfully the hardships of learning," he said. "A man who has, without rushing or faltering, gone as far as he can in unraveling the secrets of personal power."

He discussed the concept in brief terms and then discarded it as a topic of conversation, saying that I should only be concerned with the idea of storing personal power.

"That's incomprehensible," I protested. "I can't really figure out what you are driving at."

"Hunting power is a peculiar event," he said. "It first has to be an idea, then it has to be set up, step by step, and then, bingo! It happens."

"How does it happen?"

Don Juan stood up. He began stretching his arms and arching his back like a cat. His bones, as usual, made a series of cracking sounds.

"Let's go," he said. "We have a long journey ahead of us."

"But there are so many things I want to ask you," I said.

"We are going to a place of power," he said as he stepped inside his house. "Why don't you save your questions for the time we are there? We may have an opportunity to talk."

I thought we were going to drive, so I stood up and walked to my car. But don Juan called me from the house, and told me to pick up my net with gourds. He was waiting for me at the edge of the desert chaparral behind his house.

"We have to hurry up," he said.

We reached the lower slopes of the western Sierra Madre mountains around three P.M. It had been a warm day, but towards the late afternoon the wind became cold. Don Juan sat down on a rock, and signaled me to do likewise.

"What are we going to do here this time, don Juan?"

"You know very well that we're here to hunt power."

"I know that. But what are we going to do here in particular?"

"You know that I don't have the slightest idea."

"Do you mean that you never follow a plan?"

"Hunting power is a very strange affair," he said. "There is no way to plan it ahead of time. That's what's exciting about it. A warrior proceeds as if he had a plan though because he trusts his personal power. He knows for a fact that it will make him act in the most appropriate fashion."

I pointed out that his statements were somehow contradictory. If a warrior already had personal power, why was he hunting for it?

Don Juan raised his brows, made a gesture of feigned disgust, and said, "You're the one who is hunting personal power, and I am the warrior who already has it. You asked me if I had a plan and I said that I trust my personal power to guide me and that I don't need to have a plan."

We remained quiet for a moment, and then began walking again. The slopes were very steep, and climbing them was very difficult and extremely tiring for me. On the other hand, there seemed to be no end to don Juan's stamina. He did not run or hurry. His walking was steady and tireless. I noticed that don Juan was not perspiring even after having climbed an enormous and almost vertical slope. When I reached the top of it, he was already there waiting for me. As I sat down next to him, I felt that my heart was about to burst out of my chest. I lay on my back and perspiration literally poured from my brows.

Don Juan laughed out loud, and rolled me back and forth for a while. The motion helped me catch my breath.

I told him that I was simply awed by his physical prowess.

He said, "I've been trying to draw your attention to it all along."

"You're not old at all, don Juan!"

"Of course not. I've been trying to make you notice it."

"How do you do it?"

"I don't do anything. My body feels fine, that's all. I treat myself very well, therefore, I have no reason to feel tired or ill at ease. The secret is not in what you do to yourself, but rather in what you don't do."

I waited for an explanation. He seemed to be aware of my incapacity to understand. He smiled knowingly and stood up.

"This is a place of power," he said. "Find a place for us to camp here on this hilltop."

I began to protest. I wanted him to explain what I should not do to my body. He made an imperative gesture.

"Cut the guff," he said softly. "This time just act for a change. It doesn't matter how long it takes you to find a suitable place to rest. It might take you all night. It is not important that you find the spot either; the important issue is that you try to find it."

I put away my writing pad and stood up. Don Juan reminded me, as he had done countless times whenever he had asked me to find a resting place, that I had to look without focusing on any particular spot; squinting my eyes until my view was blurred.

I began to walk, scanning the ground with my half-closed eyes. Don Juan walked a few feet to my right and a couple of steps behind me.

I covered the periphery of the hilltop first. My intention was to work my way in a spiral to the center. But once I had covered the circumference of the hilltop, don Juan made me stop.

He said I was letting my preference for routines take over. In a sarcastic tone, he added that I was certainly covering the whole area systematically but in such a stagnant way that I would not be able to perceive the suitable place. He added that he himself knew where it was, so there was no chance for improvisations on my part.

"What should I be doing instead?" I asked.

Don Juan made me sit down. He then plucked a single leaf from a number of bushes and gave them to me. He ordered me to lie down on my back and loosen my belt and place the leaves against the skin of my umbilical region. He supervised my movements and instructed me to press the leaves against my body with both hands. He then ordered me to close my eyes and warned me that if I wanted perfect results, I should not lose hold of the leaves, nor open my eyes, nor try to sit up when he shifted my body to a position of power.

He grabbed me by the right armpit and swirled me around. I had an invincible desire to peek through my eyelids, but don Juan put his hand over my eyes. He commanded me to concern myself only with the feeling of warmth that was going to come from the leaves.

I lay motionless for a moment, and then I began to feel a strange heat emanating from the leaves. I first sensed it with the palms of my hands. Then the warmth extended to my abdomen, and finally it literally invaded my entire body. In a matter of minutes my feet were burning up with a heat that reminded me of times when I had had a high temperature.

I told don Juan about the unpleasant sensation and my desire to take off my shoes. He said that he was going to help me stand up; that I should not open my eyes until he told me to; and that I should keep pressing the leaves to my stomach until I had found the suitable spot to rest.

When I was on my feet, he whispered in my ear that I should open my eyes, and that I should walk without a plan, letting the power of the leaves pull me and guide me.

I began to walk aimlessly. The heat of my body was uncomfortable. I believed I was running a high temperature and I became absorbed in trying to conceive by what means don Juan had produced it.

Don Juan was walking behind me, and he suddenly let out a scream that nearly paralysed me. He explained, laughing, that abrupt noises scare away unpleasant spirits. I squinted my eyes, and walked back and forth for about half an hour. In that time the uncomfortable heat of my body turned into a pleasurable warmth. I experienced a sensation of lightness as I paced up and down the hilltop. I felt disappointed, however. I had somehow expected to detect some kind of visual phenomenon, but there were no changes whatsoever in the periphery of my field of vision: no unusual colors, or glare, or dark masses.

I finally became tired of squinting my eyes and opened them. I was standing in front of a small ledge of sandstone, which was one of the few barren rocky places on the hilltop. The rest was dirt with widely spaced small bushes. It seemed that the vegetation had burned sometime before and the new growth was not fully mature yet. For some unknown reason, I thought that the sandstone ledge was beautiful. I stood in front of it for a long time. Then I simply sat down on it.

"Good! Good!" don Juan said, and patted me on the back.

He then told me to carefully pull the leaves from under my clothes, and place them on the rock.

As soon as I had taken the leaves away from my skin, I began to cool off. I took my pulse. It seemed to be normal.

Don Juan laughed and called me 'doctor Carlos', and asked me if I could also take his pulse. He said that what I had felt was the power of the leaves; and that that power had cleared me, and had enabled me to fulfill my task.

I asserted in all sincerity that I had done nothing in particular; that I sat down on that place because I was tired, and because I found the color of the sandstone very appealing.

Don Juan did not say anything. He was standing a few feet away from me. Suddenly he jumped back, and with incredible agility ran and leaped over some bushes to a high crest of rocks some distance away.

"What's the matter?" I asked, alarmed.

"Watch the direction in which the wind will blow your leaves," he said. "Count them quickly.

The wind is coming. Keep half of them and put them back against your belly."

I counted twenty leaves. I stuck ten under my shirt, and then a strong gust of wind scattered the other ten in a westerly direction. I had the eerie feeling as I saw the leaves being blown off that a real entity was deliberately sweeping them into the amorphous mass of green shrubbery.

Don Juan walked back to where I was, and sat down next to me on my left, facing the south.

We did not speak a word for a long time. I did not know what to say. I was exhausted. I wanted to close my eyes, but I did not dare. Don Juan must have noticed my state, and said that it was all right to fall asleep. He told me to place my hands on my abdomen over the leaves, and try to feel that I was lying suspended on the bed of strings that he had made for me on the 'place of my predilection'. I closed my eyes, and a memory of the peace and plenitude I had experienced while sleeping on that other hilltop invaded me. I wanted to find out if I could actually feel I was suspended, but I fell asleep.

I woke up just before the sunset. Sleeping had refreshed and invigorated me. Don Juan had also fallen asleep. He opened his eyes at the same time I did. It was windy, but I did not feel cold. The leaves on my stomach seemed to have acted as a furnace, a heater of some sort.

I examined the surroundings. The place I had selected to rest was like a small basin. One could actually sit on it as on a long couch. There was enough of a rock wall to serve as a backrest. I also found out that don Juan had brought my writing pads and placed them underneath my head.

"You found the right place," he said, smiling. "And the whole operation took place as I had told you it would. Power guided you here without any plan on your part."

"What kind of leaves did you give me?" I asked.

The warmth that had radiated from the leaves, and that had kept me in such a comfortable state without any blankets or extra thick clothing was an absorbing phenomenon for me.

"They were just leaves," don Juan said.

"Do you mean that I could grab leaves from any bush, and they would produce the same effect on me?"

"No. I don't mean that you yourself can do that. You have no personal power. I mean that any kind of leaves would help you, providing that the person who gives them to you has power. What helped you today was not the leaves but power."

"Your power, don Juan?"

"I suppose you could say that it was my power, although that is not really accurate. Power does not belong to anyone. Some of us may gather it, and then it could be given directly to someone else. You see, the key to stored power is that it can be used only to help someone else store power."

I asked him if that meant that his power was limited only to helping others. Don Juan patiently explained that he could use his personal power however he pleased, in anything he himself wanted, but when it came to giving it directly to another person, it was useless unless that person utilized it for his own search of personal power.

"Everything a man does hinges on his personal power," don Juan went on. "Therefore, for one who doesn't have any, the deeds of a powerful man are incredible. It takes power to even conceive what power is. This is what I have been trying to tell you all along. I know you don't understand; and not because you don't want to, but because you have very little personal power."

"What should I do, don Juan?"

"Nothing. Just proceed as you are now. Power will find a way."

He stood up and turned around in a complete circle, staring at everything in the surroundings. His body moved at the same time his eyes moved. The total effect was that of a hieratic [* hieratic- highly restrained and formal] mechanical toy that turned in a complete circle in a precise and unaltered movement.

I looked at him with my mouth open. He hid a smile, cognizant of my surprise.

"Today you are going to hunt power in the darkness of the day," he said and sat down.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Tonight you'll venture into those unknown hills. In the darkness they are not hills."

"What are they?"

"They are something else. Something unthinkable for you, since you have never witnessed their existence."

"What do you mean, don Juan? You always scare me with that spooky talk."

He laughed and kicked my calf softly.

"The world is a mystery," he said. "And it is not at all as you picture it."

He seemed to reflect for a moment. His head bobbed up and down with a rhythmical shake, then he smiled and added, "Well, the world is also as you picture it, but that's not all there is to it; there is much more to it. You have been finding that out all along, and perhaps tonight you will add one more piece."

His tone sent a chill through my body.

"What are you planning to do?" I asked.

"I don't plan anything. All is decided by the same power that allowed you to find this spot."

Don Juan got up and pointed to something in the distance. I assumed that he wanted me to stand up and look. I tried to jump to my feet, but before I had fully stood up, don Juan pushed me down with great force.

"I didn't ask you to follow me," he said in a severe voice. Then he softened his tone and added, "You're going to have a difficult time tonight, and you will need all the personal power you can muster. Stay where you are and save yourself for later."

He explained that he was not pointing at anything, but just making sure that certain things were out there. He assured me that everything was all right, and said that I should sit quietly and get busy because I had a lot of time to write before total darkness set in the land. His smile was contagious and very comforting.

"But what are we going to do, don Juan?"

He shook his head from side to side in an exaggerated gesture of disbelief.

"Write!" he commanded me and turned his back to me. There was nothing else for me to do. I worked on my notes until it was too dark to write.

Don Juan maintained the same position all the time I was working. He seemed to be absorbed in staring into the distance towards the west. But as soon as I stopped, he turned to me and said in a joking tone that the only ways to shut me up were to give me something to eat, or make me write, or put me to sleep.

He took a small bundle from his knapsack, and ceremoniously opened it. It contained pieces of dry meat. He handed me a piece, took another for himself, and began to chew on it. He casually informed me that it was power food which both of us needed on that occasion. I was too hungry to think about the possibility that the dry meat may have contained a psychotropic substance. We ate in complete silence until there was no more meat, and by that time it was quite dark.

Don Juan stood up and stretched his arms and back. He suggested I should do the same. He said it was a good practice to stretch the entire body after sleeping, sitting, or walking.

I followed his advice and some of the leaves I had kept under my shirt slid through the legs of my pants. I wondered if I should try to pick them up, but he said to forget about it; that there was no longer any need for them, and that I should let them fall as they might.

Then don Juan came very close to me and whispered in my right ear that I was supposed to follow him at very close range and imitate everything he did. He said that we were safe on the spot where we stood because we were, so to speak, at the edge of the night.

"This is not the night," he whispered, stomping on the rock where we were standing. "The night is out there."

He pointed to the darkness all around us.

He then checked my carrying net to see if the food gourds and my writing pads were secured. In a soft voice he said that a warrior always made sure that everything was in proper order, not because he believed that he was going to survive the ordeal he was about to undertake, but because that was part of his impeccable behavior.

Instead of making me feel relieved, his admonitions created the complete certainty that my doom was approaching. I wanted to weep. Don Juan was, I was sure, completely aware of the effect of his words.

"Trust your personal power," he said in my ear. "That's all one has in this whole mysterious world."

He pulled me gently and we started to walk. He took the lead a couple of steps ahead of me. I followed him with my eyes fixed on the ground. Somehow I did not dare to look around, and focusing my sight on the ground made me feel strangely calm. It almost mesmerized me.

After a short walk don Juan stopped. He whispered that total darkness was near, and that he was going to get ahead of me, but was going to give me his position by imitating the cry of a specific small owl. He reminded me that I already knew that his particular imitation was raspy at the beginning and then it became as mellow as the cry of a real owl. He warned me to be deadly aware of other owl cries which did not bear that mark.

By the time don Juan finished giving me all those instructions, I was practically panic-stricken. I grabbed him by the arm, and would not let go. It took two or three minutes for me to calm myself enough so that I could articulate my words. A nervous ripple ran along my stomach and abdomen, and kept me from talking coherently.

In a calm soft voice he urged me to get hold of myself because the darkness was like the wind; an unknown entity at large that could trick me if I was not careful. And I had to be perfectly calm in order to deal with it.

"You must let yourself go so your personal power will merge with the power of the night," he said in my ear.

He said he was going to move ahead of me, and I had another attack of irrational fear.

"This is insane," I protested.

Don Juan did not get angry or impatient. He laughed quietly and said something in my ear which I did not quite understand.

"What did you say?" I said loudly through chattering teeth.

Don Juan put his hand over my mouth, and whispered that a warrior acted as if he knew what he was doing when in effect he knew nothing. He repeated one statement three or four times, as if he wanted me to memorize it. He said, "A warrior is impeccable when he trusts his personal power regardless of whether it is small or enormous."

After a short wait he asked me if I was all right. I nodded and he went swiftly out of sight with hardly a sound.

I tried to look around. I seemed to be standing in an area of thick vegetation. All I could distinguish was the dark mass of shrubs, or perhaps small trees. I concentrated my attention on sounds, but nothing was outstanding. The whizzing of the wind muffled every other sound except the sporadic piercing cries of large owls and the whistling of other birds.

I waited for a while in a state of utmost attention. And then came the raspy prolonged cry of a small owl. I had no doubt it was don Juan. It came from a place behind me. I turned around and began to walk in that direction. I moved slowly because I felt inextricably encumbered by the darkness.

I walked for perhaps ten minutes. Suddenly some dark mass jumped in front of me. I screamed and fell backward on my seat. My ears began buzzing. The fright was so great that it cut my wind. I had to open my mouth to breathe.

"Stand up," don Juan said softly. "I didn't mean to scare you. I just came to meet you."

He said that he had been watching my crappy way of walking and that when I moved in the darkness I looked like a crippled old lady trying to tiptoe between mud puddles. He found this image funny and laughed out loud.

He then proceeded to demonstrate a special way of walking in the darkness; a way which he called 'the gait of power'. He stooped over in front of me, and made me run my hands over his back and knees in order to get an idea of the position of his body. Don Juan's trunk was slightly bent forward, but his spine was straight. His knees were also slightly bent.

He walked slowly in front of me so I could take notice that he raised his knees almost to his chest every time he took a step. Then he actually ran out of sight and came back again. I could not conceive how he could run in total darkness.

"The gait of power is for running at night," he whispered in my ear.

He urged me to try it myself. I told him that I was sure I would break my legs falling into a crevice or against a rock. Don Juan very calmly said that the ‘gait of power’ was completely safe.

I pointed out that the only way I could understand his acts was by assuming he knew those hills to perfection and thus could avoid the pitfalls.

Don Juan took my head in his hands and whispered forcefully, "This is the night. And it is power!"

He let go of my head. Then he added in a soft voice that at night the world was different, and that his ability to run in the darkness had nothing to do with his knowledge of those hills. He said that the key to it was to let one's personal power flow out freely so it could merge with the power of the night. Once that power took over, there was no chance for a slip-up. He added, in a tone of utmost seriousness, that if I doubted it I should consider for a moment what was taking place. For a man of his age to run in those hills at that hour would be suicidal if the power of the night was not guiding him.

"Look!" he said and ran swiftly out into the darkness and came back again.

The way his body moved was so extraordinary that I could not believe what I was seeing. He sort of jogged on the same spot for a moment. The manner in which he lifted his legs reminded me of a sprinter doing preliminary warm-up exercises.

He told me to follow him. I did it with utter constraint and uneasiness. With extreme care, I tried to look where I was stepping, but it was impossible to judge distance. Don Juan came back and jogged by my side. He whispered that I had to abandon myself to the power of the night and trust the little bit of personal power that I had, or I would never be able to move with freedom. The darkness was encumbering only because I relied on my sight for everything I did not knowing that another way to move was to let power be the guide.

I tried various times without success. I simply could not let go. The fear of injuring my legs was overpowering. Don Juan ordered me to keep on moving in the same spot, and to try to feel as if I were actually using the ‘gait of power.’

He then said that he was going to run ahead, and that I should wait for his owl's cry. He disappeared in the darkness before I could say anything. I closed my eyes at times and jogged on the same spot with my knees and trunk bent for perhaps an hour. Little by little my tension began to ease up until I was fairly comfortable. Then I heard don Juan's cry.

I ran five or six yards in the direction where the cry came from, trying to 'abandon myself', as don Juan had suggested. But stumbling into a bush immediately brought back my feelings of insecurity.

Don Juan was waiting for me and corrected my posture. He insisted I should first curl my fingers against my palms, stretching out the thumb and index of each hand. He said that, in his opinion, I was just indulging myself in my feelings of inadequacy since I knew for a fact that I could always see fairly well no matter how dark the night was if I did not focus on anything but kept scanning the ground right in front of me. He said the gait of power was similar to finding a place to rest. Both entailed a sense of abandon, and a sense of trust. The gait of power required that one keep the eyes on the ground directly in front because even a glance to either side would produce an alteration in the flow of movement. He explained that bending the trunk forward was necessary in order to lower the eyes, and the reason for lifting the knees up to the chest was because the steps had to be very short and safe. He warned me that I was going to stumble a great deal at first, but he assured me that with practice I could run as swiftly and as safely as I could in the daytime.

For hours I tried to imitate his movements and get into the mood he recommended. He would very patiently jog on the same spot in front of me; or he would take off in a short run, and return to where I was so I could see how he moved. He would even push me, and make me run a few yards.

Then he took off, and called me with a series of owl cries. In some inexplicable way I moved with an unexpected degree of self-confidence. To my knowledge, I had done nothing to warrant that feeling, but my body seemed to be cognizant of things without thinking about them. For example, I could not really see the jagged rocks in my way, but my body always managed to step on the edges and never in the crevices, except for a few mishaps when I lost my balance because I became distracted. The degree of concentration needed to keep scanning the area directly in front had to be total. As don Juan had warned me, any slight glance to the side or too far ahead altered the flow.

I located don Juan after a long search. He was sitting by some dark shapes that seemed to be trees. He came towards me and said that I was doing very well, but it was time to quit because he had been using his whistle long enough, and he was sure that by then it could be imitated by others.

I agreed that it was time to stop. I was nearly exhausted by my attempts. I felt relieved and asked him who would imitate his cry.

"Powers, allies, spirits, who knows?" he said in a whisper. He explained that those 'entities of the night' usually made very melodious sounds, but were at a great disadvantage in reproducing the raspiness of human cries or bird whistlings. He cautioned me to always stop moving if I ever heard such a sound, and to keep in mind all he had said because at some other time I might need to make the proper identification. In a reassuring tone he said that I had a very good idea what the gait of power was like, and that in order to master it I needed only a slight push which I could get on another occasion when we ventured again into the night. He patted me on the shoulder and announced that he was ready to leave.

"Let's get out of here," he said and began running.

"Wait! Wait!" I screamed frantically. "Let's walk."

Don Juan stopped, and took off his hat.

"Golly!" he said in a tone of perplexity. "We're in a fix. You know that I cannot walk in the dark. I can only run. I'll break my legs if I walk."

I had the feeling he was grinning when he said that, although I could not see his face.

He added in a confidential tone that he was too old to walk, and that the little bit of the gait of power that I had learned that night had to be stretched to meet the occasion.

"If we don't use the gait of power we will be mowed down like grass," he whispered in my ear.

"By whom?"

"There are things in the night that act on people," he whispered in a tone that sent chills through my body.

He said that it was not important that I keep up with him because he was going to give repeated signals of four owl cries at a time so I could follow him.

I suggested that we should stay in those hills until dawn and then leave. He retorted in a very dramatic tone that to stay there would be suicidal; and even if we came out alive, the night would have drained our personal power to the point that we could not avoid being the victims of the first hazard of the day.

"Let's not waste any more time," he said with a note of urgency in his voice. "Let's get out of here."

He reassured me that he would try to go as slowly as possible. His final instructions were that I should try not to utter a sound, not even a gasp,  no matter what happened. He gave me the general direction we were going to go in, and began running at a markedly slower pace. I followed him. But no matter how slow he moved, I could not keep up with him, and he soon disappeared in the darkness ahead of me.

After I was alone, I became aware that I had adopted a fairly fast walk without realizing it. That came as a shock to me. I tried to maintain that pace for a long while, and then I heard don Juan's call a little bit to my right. He whistled four times in succession.

After a very short while, I again heard his owl cry; this time to my far right. In order to follow it I had to make a forty-five degree turn. I began to move in the new direction, expecting that the other three cries of the set would give me a better orientation.

I heard a new whistle, which placed don Juan almost in the direction where we had started. I stopped and listened. I heard a very sharp noise a short distance away; something like the sound of two rocks being struck against each other. I strained to listen, and detected a series of soft noises as if two rocks were being struck gently. There was another owl's cry and then I knew what don Juan had meant. There was something truly melodious about it. It was definitely longer and even more mellow than a real owl's.

I felt a strange sensation of fright. My stomach contracted as if something were pulling me down from the middle part of my body. I turned around and started to semi-jog in the opposite direction.

I heard a faint owl cry in the distance. There was a rapid succession of three more cries. They were don Juan's. I ran in their direction. I felt that he must have then been a good quarter of a mile away, and if he kept up that pace, I would soon be inextricably alone in those hills. I could not understand why don Juan would run ahead, when he could have run around me if he needed to keep that pace.

I noticed then that there seemed to be something moving with me to my left. I could almost see it in the extreme periphery of my visual field. I was about to panic, but a sobering thought crossed my mind. I could not possibly see anything in the dark. I wanted to stare in that direction but I was afraid to lose my momentum.

Another owl cry jolted me out of my deliberations. It came from my left. I did not follow it because it was without a doubt the most sweet and melodious cry I had ever heard. It did not frighten me though. There was something very appealing, or perhaps haunting, or even sad about it.

Then a very swift dark mass crossed from left to right ahead of me. The suddenness of it's movements made me look ahead. I lost my balance and crashed noisily against some shrubs. I fell down on my side, and then I heard the melodious cry a few steps to my left. I stood up, but before I could start moving forward again, there was another cry more demanding and compelling than the first. It was as if something there wanted me to stop and listen. The sound of that owl cry was so prolonged and gentle that it eased my fears. I would have actually stopped had I not heard at that precise moment don Juan's four raspy cries. They seemed to be nearer. I jumped and took off in that direction.

After a moment I noticed again a certain flicker or a wave in the darkness to my left. It was not a sight proper, but rather a feeling, and yet I was almost sure I was perceiving it with my eyes. It moved faster than I did, and again it crossed from left to right, making me lose my balance. This time I did not fall down, and strangely enough not falling down annoyed me. I suddenly became angry, and the incongruency of my feelings threw me into true panic. I tried to accelerate my pace. I wanted to give out an owl cry myself to let don Juan know where I was, but I did not dare to disobey his instructions.

At that moment some gruesome thing came to my attention. There was actually something like an animal to my left, almost touching me. I jumped involuntarily and veered to my right. The fright almost suffocated me. I was so intensely gripped by fear that there were no thoughts in my mind as I moved in the darkness as fast as I could. My fear seemed to be a bodily sensation that had nothing to do with my thoughts. I found that condition very unusual. In the course of my life, my fears had always been mounted on an intellectual matrix and had been engendered by threatening social situations, or by people behaving towards me in dangerous ways. This time, however, my fear was a true novelty. It came from an unknown part of the world, and hit me in an unknown part of myself.

I heard an owl cry very close and slightly to my left. I could not catch the details of it's pitch, but it seemed to be don Juan's. It was not melodious. I slowed down. Another cry followed. The raspiness of don Juan's whistles was there, so I moved faster. A third whistle came from a very short distance away. I could distinguish a dark mass of rocks or perhaps trees. I heard another owl's cry and I thought that don Juan was waiting for me because we were out of the field of danger. I was almost at the edge of the darker area when a fifth cry froze me on the spot. I strained to see ahead into the dark area, but a sudden rustling sound to my left made me turn around in time to notice a black object, blacker than the surroundings, rolling or sliding by my side. I gasped and jumped away. I heard a clicking sound as if someone were smacking his lips, and then a very large dark mass lurched out of the darker area. It was square, like a door, perhaps eight to ten feet high.

The suddenness of it's appearance made me scream. For a moment my fright was all out of proportion, but a second later I found myself awesomely calm, staring at the dark shape.

My reactions were, as far as I was concerned, another total novelty. Some part of myself seemed to pull me towards the dark area with an eerie insistence, while another part of me resisted. It was as if I wanted to find out for sure on the one hand, and on the other I wanted to run hysterically out of there.

I barely heard don Juan's owl cries. They seemed to be very close by and they seemed to be frantic; they were longer and raspier as though he was whistling while he ran towards me.

Suddenly I seemed to regain control of myself and was able to turn around; and for a moment I ran just as don Juan had been wanting me to.

"Don Juan!" I shouted when I found him.

He put his hand on my mouth, and signaled me to follow. We both jogged at a very comfortable pace until we came to the sandstone ledge where we had been before.

We sat in absolute silence on the ledge for about an hour until dawn. Then we ate food from the gourds. Don Juan said that we had to remain on the ledge until midday, and we were not going to sleep at all, but were going to talk as if nothing was out of the ordinary.

He asked me to relate in detail everything that had happened to me from the moment he had left me. When I concluded my narration he stayed quiet for a long time. He seemed to be immersed in deep thought.

"It doesn't look too good," he finally said. "What happened to you last night was very serious, so serious that you cannot venture into the night alone any more. From now on the entities of the night won't leave you alone."

"What happened to me last night, don Juan?"

"You stumbled on some entities which are in the world, and which act on people. You know nothing about them because you have never encountered them. Perhaps it would be more proper to call them entities of the mountains. They don't really belong to the night. I call them entities of the night because one can perceive them in the darkness with greater ease. They are here around us at all times. In daylight, however, it is more difficult to perceive them simply because the world is familiar to us, and that which is familiar takes precedence. In the darkness, on the other hand, everything is equally strange, and very few things take precedence, so we are more susceptible to those entities at night."

"But are they real, don Juan?"

"Of course! They are so real that ordinarily they kill people, especially those who stray into the wilderness and have no personal power."

"If you knew they were so dangerous, why did you leave me alone there?"

"There is only one way to learn, and that way is to get down to business. To only talk about power is useless. If you want to know what power is, and if you want to store it, you must tackle everything yourself.

"The road of knowledge and power is very difficult and very long. You may have noticed that I have not let you venture into the darkness by yourself until last night. You did not have enough power to do that. Now you do have enough to wage a good battle, but not enough to stay in the dark by yourself."

"What would happen if I did?"

"You'll die. The entities of the night will crush you like a bug."

"Does that mean that I cannot spend a night by myself?"

"You can spend the night by yourself in your bed, but not in the mountains."

"What about the flatlands?"

"It applies only to the wilderness where there are no people around, especially the wilderness in high mountains. Since the natural abodes of the entities of the night are rocks and crevices, you cannot go to the mountains from now on unless you have stored enough personal power."

"But how can I store personal power?"

"You are doing it by living the way I have recommended. Little by little you are plugging all your points of drainage. You don't have to be deliberate about it because power always finds a way. Take me as an example. I didn't know I was storing power when I first began to learn the ways of a warrior. Just like you, I thought I wasn't doing anything in particular, but that was not so. Power has the peculiarity of being unnoticeable when it is being stored."

I asked him to explain how he had arrived at the conclusion that it was dangerous for me to stay by myself in the darkness.

"The entities of the night moved along your left," he said. "They were trying to merge with your death. Especially the door that you saw. It was an opening, you know, and it would have pulled you until you had been forced to cross it. And that would have been your end."

I mentioned in the best way I could that I thought it was very strange that things always happened when he was around, and that it was as if he had been concocting all the events himself. The times I had been alone in the wilderness at night had always been perfectly normal and uneventful. I had never experienced shadows or strange noises. In fact, I had never been frightened by anything.

Don Juan chuckled softly, and said that everything was proof he had enough personal power to call a myriad of things to his aid.

I had the feeling he perhaps was hinting that he actually had called on some people as his confederates.

Don Juan seemed to have read my thoughts and laughed out loud.

"Don't tax yourself with explanations," he said. "What I said makes no sense to you simply because you still don't have enough personal power. Yet you have more than when you started, so things have begun to happen to you. You already had a powerful encounter with the fog and lightning. It is not important that you understand what happened to you that night. What's important is that you have acquired the memory of it. The bridge and everything else you saw that night will be repeated someday when you have enough personal power."

"For what purpose would all that be repeated, don Juan?"

"I don't know. I am not you. Only you can answer that. We are all different. That's why I had to leave you by yourself last night, although I knew it was mortally dangerous. You had to test yourself against those entities. The reason I chose the owl's cry was because owls are the entities' messengers. To imitate the cry of an owl brings them out. They became dangerous to you, not because they are naturally malevolent, but because you were not impeccable. There is something in you that is very chintzy and I know what it is. You are just humoring me. You have been humoring everybody all along, and, of course, that places you automatically above everyone and everything. But you know yourself that that cannot be so. You are only a man, and your life is too brief to encompass all the wonders and all the horrors of this marvelous world. Therefore, your humoring is chintzy; it cuts you down to a crappy size."

I wanted to protest. Don Juan had nailed me as he had done dozens of times before. For a moment I became angry. But, as it had happened before, writing detached me enough so I could remain impassive.

"I think I have a cure for it," don Juan went on after a long interval. "Even you would agree with me if you could remember what you did last night. You ran as fast as any sorcerer only when your opponent became unbearable. We both know that, and I believe I have already found a worthy opponent for you."

"What are you going to do, don Juan?"

He did not answer. He stood up and stretched his body. He seemed to contract every muscle. He ordered me to do the same.

"You must stretch your body many times during the day," he said. "The more times the better, but only after a long period of work or a long period of rest."

"What kind of opponent are you going to find for me?" I asked.

"Unfortunately, only our fellow men are our worthy opponents," he said. "Other entities have no volition of their own, and one must go to meet them and lure them out. Our fellow men, on the contrary, are relentless.

"We have talked long enough," don Juan said in an abrupt tone and turned to me. "Before we leave you must do one more thing; the most important of all. I am going to tell you something right now to set your mind at ease about why you are here. The reason you keep on coming to see me is very simple. Every time you have seen me your body has learned certain things, even against your desire; and finally your body now needs to come back to me to learn more. Let's say that your body knows that it is going to die, even though you never think about it. So I've been telling your body that I too am going to die, and before I do I would like to show your body certain things; things which you cannot give to your body yourself. For example, your body needs fright. It likes it. Your body needs the darkness and the wind. Your body now knows the gait of power and can't wait to try it. Your body needs personal power and can't wait to have it. So let's say then that your body returns to see me because I am it's friend."

Don Juan remained silent for a long while. He seemed to be struggling with his thoughts.

Finally, he said, "I've told you that the secret of a strong body is not in what you do to it but in what you don't do. "Now it is time for you not to do what you always do. Sit here until we leave and *not-do*."

"I don't follow you, don Juan."

He put his hands over my notes, and took them away from me. He carefully closed the pages of my notebook, secured it with it's rubber band, and then threw it like a disc far into the chaparral.

I was shocked and began to protest, but he put his hand over my mouth. He pointed to a large bush and told me to fix my attention, not on the leaves, but on the shadows of the leaves. He said that running in the darkness did not have to be spurred by fear, but could be a very natural reaction of a jubilant body that knew how to not-do. He repeated over and over in a whisper in my right ear that to not-do what I knew how to 'do' was the key to power. In the case of looking at a tree, what I knew how to do was to focus immediately on the foliage. The shadows of the leaves, or the spaces in between the leaves were never my concern. His last admonitions were to start focusing on the shadows of the leaves on one single branch and then eventually work my way to the whole tree, and not to let my eyes go back to the leaves because the first deliberate step to storing personal power was to allow the body to ‘not-do.’

Perhaps it was because of my fatigue or my nervous excitation, but I became so immersed in the shadows of the leaves that by the time don Juan stood up I could almost group the dark masses of shadows as effectively as I normally grouped the foliage. The total effect was startling. I told don Juan that I would like to stay longer. He laughed and patted me on my hat.

"I've told you," he said. "The body likes things like this."

He then said that I should let my stored power guide me through the bushes to my notebook. He gently pushed me into the chaparral. I walked aimlessly for a moment and then I came upon it. I thought that I must have unconsciously memorized the direction in which don Juan had thrown it. He explained the event saying that I went directly to the notebook because my body had been soaked for hours in ‘not-doing.’

## 15. Not-Doing

*Wednesday, April 11, 1962*

Upon returning to his house, don Juan recommended that I work on my notes as if nothing had happened to me; and that I not mention or even be concerned with any of the events I had experienced.

After a day's rest he announced that we had to leave the area for a few days because it was advisable to put distance between us and those 'entities.' He said that they had affected me deeply, although I was not noticing their effect yet because my body was not sensitive enough. In a short while, however, I would fall seriously ill if I did not go to my 'place of predilection' to be cleansed and restored.

We left before dawn and drove north. After an exhausting drive and a fast hike, we arrived at the hilltop in the late afternoon.

Don Juan, as he had done before, covered the spot where I had once slept with small branches and leaves. Then he gave me a handful of leaves to put against the skin of my abdomen, and told me to lie down and rest. He fixed another place for himself slightly to my left, about five feet away from my head, and also lay down.

In a matter of minutes, I began to feel an exquisite warmth and a sense of supreme well-being. It was a sense of physical comfort, a sensation of being suspended in mid-air. I could fully agree with don Juan's statement that the 'bed of strings' would keep me floating. I commented on the unbelievable quality of my sensory experience. Don Juan said in a factual tone that the 'bed' was made for that purpose.

"I can't believe that this is possible!" I exclaimed.

Don Juan took my statement literally and scolded me. He said he was tired of my acting as an ultimately important being that has to be given proof over and over that the world is unknown and marvelous.

I tried to explain that a rhetorical exclamation had no significance. He retorted, that if that were so, I could have chosen another statement. It seemed that he was seriously annoyed with me. I sat up halfway and began to apologize, but he laughed, and imitating my manner of speaking suggested a series of hilarious rhetorical exclamations I could have used instead. I ended up laughing at the calculated absurdity of some of his proposed alternatives.

He giggled and in a soft tone reminded me that I should abandon myself to the sensation of floating.

The soothing feeling of peace and plenitude that I experienced in that mysterious place aroused some deeply buried emotions in me. I began to talk about my life. I confessed that I had never respected or liked anybody, not even myself, and that I had always felt I was inherently evil, and thus my attitude towards others was always veiled with a certain bravado and daring.

"True," don Juan said. "You don't like yourself at all."

He cackled and told me that he had been 'seeing' while I talked. His recommendation was that I should not have remorse for anything I had done because to isolate one's acts as being mean, or ugly, or evil was to place an unwarranted importance on the self.

I moved nervously and the bed of leaves made a rustling sound. Don Juan said that if I wanted to rest I should not make my leaves feel agitated, and that I should imitate him and lie without making a single movement. He added that in his seeing he had come across one of my moods. He struggled for a moment, seemingly to find a proper word, and said that the mood in question was a frame of mind I continually lapsed into. He described it as a sort of trap door that opened at unexpected times and swallowed me.

I asked him to be more specific. He replied that it was impossible to be specific about ‘seeing.’

Before I could say anything else he told me I should relax, but not fall asleep, and be in a state of awareness for as long as I could. He said that the bed of strings was made exclusively to allow a warrior to arrive at a certain state of peace and well-being.

In a dramatic tone don Juan stated that well-being was a condition one had to groom; a condition one had to become acquainted with in order to seek it.

"You don't know what well-being is because you have never experienced it," he said.

I disagreed with him. But he continued arguing that well-being was an achievement one had to deliberately seek. He said that the only thing I knew how to seek was a sense of disorientation, ill-being, and confusion.

He laughed mockingly and assured me that in order to accomplish the feat of making myself miserable I had to work in a most intense fashion, and that it was absurd I had never realized I could work just the same in making myself complete and strong.

"The trick is in what one emphasizes," he said. "We either make ourselves miserable, or we make ourselves strong. The amount of work is the same."

I closed my eyes and relaxed again and began to feel I was floating. For a short while it was as if I were actually moving through space, like a leaf. Although it was utterly pleasurable, the feeling somehow reminded me of times when I had become sick and dizzy and would experience a sensation of spinning. I thought perhaps I had eaten something bad.

I heard don Juan talking to me, but I did not really make an effort to listen. I was trying to make a mental inventory of all the things I had eaten that day, but I could not become interested in it. It did not seem to matter.

"Watch the way the sunlight changes," he said.

His voice was clear. I thought it was like water, fluid and warm.

The sky was totally free of clouds towards the west and the sunlight was spectacular. Perhaps the fact that don Juan was cuing me made the yellowish glow of the afternoon sun truly magnificent.

"Let that glow kindle you," don Juan said. "Before the sun goes down today you must be perfectly calm and restored because tomorrow, or the day after, you are going to learn *not-doing*."

"Learn not doing what?" I asked.

"Never mind now," he said. "Wait until we are in those lava mountains."

He pointed to some distant, jagged, dark, menacing-looking peaks towards the north.

*Thursday, April 12, 1962*

We reached the high desert around the lava mountains in the late afternoon. In the distance the dark brown lava mountains looked almost sinister. The sun was very low on the horizon, and shone on the western face of the solidified lava tinting it's dark brownness with a dazzling array of yellow reflections.

I could not keep my eyes away. Those peaks were truly mesmerizing.

By the end of the day, the bottom slopes of the mountains were in sight. There was very little vegetation on the high desert. All I could see were cacti and a kind of tall grass that grew in tufts.

Don Juan stopped to rest. He sat down, carefully propped his food gourds against a rock, and said that we were going to camp on that spot for the night. He had picked a relatively high place. From where I stood I could see quite a distance away, all around us.

It was a cloudy day and the twilight quickly enveloped the area. I became involved in watching the speed with which the crimson clouds on the west faded into a uniform thick dark gray.

Don Juan got up and went to the bushes. By the time he came back, the silhouette of the lava mountains was a dark mass. He sat down next to me, and called my attention to what seemed to be a natural formation on the mountains towards the northeast. It was a spot which had a color much lighter than it's surroundings. While the whole range of lava mountains looked uniformly dark brown in the twilight, the spot he was pointing at was actually yellowish or dark beige. I could not figure out what it could be. I stared at it for a long time. It seemed to be moving. I fancied it to be pulsating. When I squinted my eyes it actually rippled as if the wind were moving it.

"Look at it fixedly!" don Juan commanded me.

At one moment, after I had maintained my stare for quite a while, I felt that the whole range of mountains was moving towards me. That feeling was accompanied by an unusual agitation in the pit of my stomach. The discomfort became so acute that I stood up.

"Sit down!" don Juan yelled, but I was already on my feet.

From my new point of view, the yellowish formation was lower on the side of the mountains. I sat down again without taking my eyes away, and the formation shifted to a higher place. I stared at it for an instant, and suddenly I arranged everything into the correct perspective. I realized that what I had been looking at was not in the mountains at all but was really a piece of yellowish green cloth hanging from a tall cactus in front of me.

I laughed out loud and explained to don Juan that the twilight had helped to create an optical illusion.

He got up and walked to the place where the piece of cloth was hanging, took it down, folded it, and put it inside his pouch.

"What are you doing that for?" I asked.

"Because this piece of cloth has power," he said casually. "For a moment you were doing fine with it and there is no way of knowing what may have happened if you had remained seated."

*Friday, April 13, 1962*

At the crack of dawn we headed for the mountains. They were surprisingly far away. By midday we walked into one of the canyons. There was some water in shallow pools. We sat to rest in the shade of a hanging cliff.

The mountains were clumps of a monumental lava flow. The solidified lava had weathered over the millennia into a porous dark brown rock. Only a few sturdy weeds grew between the rocks and in the cracks.

Looking up at the almost perpendicular walls of the canyon, I had a weird sensation in the pit of my stomach. The walls were hundreds of feet high, and gave me the feeling that they were closing in on me. The sun was almost overhead, slightly towards the southwest.

"Stand here," don Juan said, and he maneuvered my body until I was looking towards the sun.

He told me to look fixedly at the mountain walls above me.

The sight was stupendous. The magnificent height of the lava flow staggered my imagination. I began to wonder what a volcanic upheaval it must have been. I looked up and down the sides of the canyon various times. I became immersed in the richness of color in the rock wall. There were specks of every conceivable hue. There were patches of light gray moss or lichen in every rock. I looked right above my head, and noticed that the sunlight was producing the most exquisite reflections when it hit the brilliant specks of the solidified lava.

I stared at an area in the mountains where the sunlight was being reflected. As the sun moved, the intensity diminished, then it faded completely.

I looked across the canyon, and saw another area of the same exquisite light refractions. I told don Juan what was happening, and then I spotted another area of light, and then another in a different place, and another, until the whole canyon was blotched with big patches of light.

I felt dizzy; even if I closed my eyes I could still see the brilliant lights. I held my head in my hands and tried to crawl under the hanging cliff, but don Juan grabbed my arm firmly and imperatively told me to look at the walls of the mountains, and try to figure out spots of heavy darkness in the midst of the fields of light.

I did not want to look because the glare bothered my eyes. I said that what was happening to me was similar to staring into a sunny street through a window, and then seeing the window frame as a dark silhouette everywhere else.

Don Juan shook his head from side to side and began to chuckle. He let go of my arm, and we sat down again under the hanging cliff.

I was jotting down my impressions of the surroundings when don Juan, after a long silence, suddenly spoke in a dramatic tone.

"I have brought you here to teach you one thing," he said and paused. "You are going to learn *not-doing*. We might as well talk about it because there is no other way for you to proceed. I thought you might catch on to *not-doing* without my having to say anything. I was wrong."

"I don't know what you're talking about, don Juan."

"It doesn't matter," he said. "I am going to tell you about something that is very simple, but very difficult to perform. I am going to talk to you about *not-doing* in spite of the fact that there is no way to talk about it because it is the body that does it."

He stared at me in glances and then said that I had to pay the utmost attention to what he was going to say.

I closed my notebook, but to my amazement he insisted that I should keep on writing.

"*Not-doing* is so difficult and so powerful that you should not mention it," he went on. "Not until you have *stopped the world*; Only then can you talk about it freely if that's what you'd want to do."

Don Juan looked around and then pointed to a large rock.

"That rock over there is a rock because of *doing*," he said.

We looked at each other and he smiled. I waited for an explanation, but he remained silent. Finally I had to say that I had not understood what he meant.

"That's *doing*!" he exclaimed.

"Pardon me?"

"That's also *doing*."

"What are you talking about, don Juan?"

"*Doing* is what makes that rock a rock, and that bush a bush. Doing is what makes you yourself and me myself."

I told him that his explanation did not explain anything. He laughed and scratched his temples.

"That's the problem with talking," he said. "It always makes one confuse the issues. If one starts talking about doing, one always ends up talking about something else. It is better to just act.

"Take that rock for instance. To look at it is *doing*, but to see it is *not-doing*."

I had to confess that his words were not making sense to me.

"Oh yes they do!" he exclaimed. "But you are convinced that they don't because that is your *doing*. That is the way you act towards me and the world."

He again pointed to the rock.

"That rock is a rock because of all the things you know how to do to it," he said. "I call that *doing*. A man of knowledge, for instance, knows that the rock is a rock only because of *doing*, so if he doesn't want the rock to be a rock all he has to do is *not-doing*. See what I mean?"

I did not understand him at all. He laughed and made another attempt at explaining.

"The world is the world because you know the *doing* involved in making it so," he said. "If you didn't know it's *doing*, the world would be different."

He examined me with curiosity. I stopped writing. I just wanted to listen to him. He went on explaining that without that certain ‘doing’ there would be nothing familiar in the surroundings.

He leaned over and picked up a small rock between the thumb and index of his left hand, and held it in front of my eyes.

"This is a pebble because you know the *doing* involved in making it into a pebble," he said.

"What are you saying?" I asked with a feeling of bona fide confusion.

Don Juan smiled. He seemed to be trying to hide a mischievous delight.

"I don't know why you are so confused," he said. "Words are your predilection. You should be in heaven."

He gave me a mysterious look and raised his brows two or three times. Then he pointed again to the small rock he was holding in front of my eyes.

"I say that you are making this into a pebble because you know the *doing* involved in it," he said. "Now, in order to *stop the world* you must stop *doing*."

He seemed to know that I still had not understood and smiled, shaking his head. He then took a twig and pointed to the uneven edge of the pebble.

"In the case of this little rock," he went on, "the first thing which *doing* does to it is to shrink it to this size. So the proper thing to do, which a warrior does if he wants to *stop the world*, is to enlarge a little rock, or any other thing, by *not-doing*."

He stood up and placed the pebble on a boulder and then asked me to come closer and examine it. He told me to look at the holes and depressions in the pebble and try to pick out the minute detail in them. He said that if I could pick out the detail, the holes and depressions would disappear and I would understand what ‘not-doing’ meant.

"This damn pebble is going to drive you crazy today," he said.

I must have had a look of bewilderment on my face. He looked at me and laughed uproariously. Then he pretended to get angry with the pebble, and hit it two or three times with his hat.

I urged him to clarify his point. I argued that it was possible for him to explain anything he wanted to if he made an effort.

He gave me a sly glance and shook his head as if the situation were hopeless.

"Sure I can explain anything," he said, laughing. "But could you understand it?"

I was taken aback by his insinuation.

"*Doing* makes you separate the pebble from the larger boulder," he continued. "If you want to learn *not-doing*, let's say that you have to join them."

He pointed to the small shadow that the pebble cast on the boulder, and said that it was not a shadow but a glue which bound them together. He then turned around and walked away, saying that he was coming back to check on me later.

I stared at the pebble for a long time. I could not focus my attention on the minute detail in the holes and depressions, but the tiny shadow that the pebble cast on the boulder became a most interesting point. Don Juan was right. It was like a glue. It moved and shifted. I had the impression it was being squeezed from underneath the pebble.

When don Juan returned I related to him what I had observed about the shadow.

"That's a good beginning," he said. "A warrior can tell all kinds of things from the shadows."

He then suggested that I should take the pebble and bury it somewhere. "Why?" I asked.

"You've been watching it for a long time," he said. "It has something of you now. A warrior always tries to affect the force of *doing* by changing it into *not-doing*. *Doing* would be to leave the pebble lying around because it is merely a small rock. *Not-doing* would be to proceed with that pebble as if it were something far beyond a mere rock. In this case, that pebble has soaked in you for a long time and now it is you. As such, you cannot leave it lying around, but must bury it. If you would have personal power, however, *not-doing* would be to change that pebble into a power object."

"Can I do that now?"

"Your life is not tight enough to do that. If you would *see*, you would know that your heavy concern has changed that pebble into something quite unappealing. Therefore the best thing you can do is to dig a hole and bury it, and let the earth absorb it's heaviness."

"Is all this true, don Juan?"

"To say yes or no to your question is *doing*. But since you are learning *not-doing* I have to tell you that it really doesn't matter whether or not all this is true. It is here that a warrior has a point of advantage over the average man. An average man cares that things are either true or false, but a warrior doesn't. An average man proceeds in a specific way with things that he knows are true, and in a different way with things that he knows are not true. If things are said to be true, he acts and believes in what he does. But if things are said to be untrue, he doesn't care to act, or he doesn't believe in what he does. A warrior, on the other hand, acts in both instances. If things are said to be true, he would act in order to do *doing*. If things are said to be untrue, he still would act in order to do *not-doing*. See what I mean?"

"No, I don't see what you mean at all," I said.

Don Juan's statements put me in a belligerent mood. I could not make sense of what he was saying. I told him it was gibberish. He mocked me, and said that I did not even have an impeccable spirit in what I liked to do the most, talking. He actually made fun of my verbal command and found it faulty and inadequate.

"If you are going to be all mouth, be a mouth warrior," he said, and roared with laughter.

I felt dejected. My ears were buzzing. I experienced an uncomfortable heat in my head. I was actually embarrassed and presumably red in the face.

I stood up and went into the chaparral and buried the pebble.

"I was teasing you a little bit," don Juan said when I returned and sat down again. "And yet I know that if you don't talk you don't understand. Talking is *doing* for you, but talking is not always appropriate. If you want to know what I mean by *not-doing*, you have to do a simple exercise. Since we are concerned with *not-doing* it doesn't matter whether you do the exercise now or ten years from now."

He made me lie down, and took my right arm and bent it at my elbow. Then he turned my hand until the palm was facing the front; he curved my fingers so my hand looked as if I were holding a door knob, and then he began to move my arm back and forth with a circular motion that resembled the act of pushing and pulling a lever attached to a wheel.

Don Juan said that a warrior executed that movement every time he wanted to push something out of his body, something like a disease or an unwelcome feeling. The idea was to push and pull an imaginary opposing force until one felt a heavy object; a solid body stopping the free movements of the hand. In the case of the exercise, ‘not-doing’ consisted in repeating it until one felt the heavy body with the hand in spite of the fact that one could never believe it was possible to feel it.

I began moving my arm and in a short while my hand became ice cold. I had begun to feel a sort of mushiness around my hand. It was as if I were paddling through some heavy viscous liquid matter.

Don Juan made a sudden movement and grabbed my arm to stop the motion. My whole body shivered as though stirred by some unseen force. He scrutinized me as I sat up, and then he walked around me before he sat back down on the place where he had been.

"You've done enough," he said. "You may do this exercise some other time, when you have more personal power."

"Did I do something wrong?"

"No. *Not-doing* is only for very strong warriors, and you don't have the power to deal with it yet. Now you will only trap horrendous things with your hand. So do it little by little, until your hand doesn't get cold any more. Whenever your hand remains warm you can actually feel the lines of the world with it."

He paused as if to give me time to ask about the lines. But before I had a chance to, he started explaining that there were infinite numbers of lines that joined us to things. He said that the exercise of ‘not-doing’ that he had just described would help anyone to feel a line that came out from the moving hand, a line that one could place or cast wherever one wanted to. Don Juan said that this was only an exercise, because the lines formed by the hand were not durable enough to be of real value in a practical situation.

"A man of knowledge uses other parts of his body to produce durable lines," he said.

"What parts of the body, don Juan?"

"The most durable lines that a man of knowledge produces come from the middle of the body," he said. "But he can also make them with his eyes."

"Are they real lines?"

"Surely."

"Can you see them and touch them?"

"Let's say that you can feel them. The most difficult part about the warrior's way is to realize that the world is a feeling. When one is *not-doing*, one is feeling the world, and one feels the world through it's lines."

He paused and examined me with curiosity. He raised his brows and opened his eyes and then blinked. The effect was like the eyes of a bird blinking. Almost immediately I felt a sensation of discomfort and queasiness. It was actually as if something was applying pressure to my stomach.

"See what I mean?" don Juan asked and moved his eyes away.

I mentioned that I felt nauseated and he replied in a matter-of-fact tone that he knew it, and that he was trying to make me feel the lines of the world with his eyes. I could not accept the claim that he himself was making me feel that way. I voiced my doubts. I could hardly conceive the idea that he was causing my feeling of nausea since he had not, in any physical way, impinged on me.

"*Not-doing* is very simple but very difficult," he said. "It is not a matter of understanding it, but rather of mastering it. *Seeing*, of course, is the final accomplishment of a man of knowledge, and *seeing* is attained only when one has *stopped the world* through the technique of *not-doing*."

I smiled involuntarily. I had not understood what he meant.

"When one does something with people," he said, "the concern should be only with presenting the case to their bodies. That's what I've been doing with you so far, letting your body know.

Who cares whether or not you understand?"

"But that's unfair, don Juan. I want to understand everything. Otherwise, coming here would be a waste of my time."

"A waste of your time!" he exclaimed parodying my tone of voice. "You certainly are conceited."

He stood up and told me that we were going to hike to the top of the lava peak to our right.

The ascent to the top was an excruciating affair. It was actual mountain climbing except that there were no ropes to aid and protect us. Don Juan repeatedly told me not to look down. He actually had to pull me up bodily a couple of times after I had begun to slide down the rock. I felt terribly embarrassed that don Juan, being so old, had to help me. I told him that I was in poor physical condition because I was too lazy to do any exercise. He replied that once one had arrived at a certain level of personal power, exercise or any training of that sort was unnecessary since all one needed to be in an impeccable form was to engage oneself in ‘not-doing.’

When we arrived at the top, I lay down. I was about to be sick. He rolled me back and forth with his foot as he had done once before. Little by little the motion restored my balance. But I felt nervous. It was as if I were somehow waiting for the sudden appearance of something. I involuntarily looked two or three times to each side. Don Juan did not say a word, but he also looked in the direction I was looking.

"Shadows are peculiar affairs," he said all of a sudden. "You must have noticed that there is one following us."

"I haven't noticed anything of the sort," I protested in a loud voice.

Don Juan said that my body had noticed our pursuer in spite of my stubborn opposition, and he assured me in a confident tone that there was nothing unusual about being followed by a shadow.

"It is just a power," he said. "These mountains are filled with them. It is just like one of those entities that scared you the other night."

I wanted to know if I could actually perceive it myself. He asserted that in the daytime I could only feel it's presence.

I wanted an explanation of why he called it a shadow when obviously it was not like the shadow of a boulder. He replied that both had the same lines, therefore both were shadows.

He pointed to a long boulder standing directly in front of us.

"Look at the shadow of that boulder," he said. "The shadow is the boulder, and yet it isn't. To observe the boulder in order to know what the boulder is, is *doing*, but to observe it's shadow is *not-doing*.

"Shadows are like doors; the doors of *not-doing*. A man of knowledge, for example, can tell the innermost feelings of men by watching their shadows."

"Is there movement in them?" I asked.

"You may say that there is movement in them, or you may say that the lines of the world are shown in them, or you may say that feelings come from them."

"But how could feelings come out of shadows, don Juan?"

"To believe that shadows are just shadows is *doing*," he explained. "That belief is somehow stupid. Think about it this way: There is so much more to everything in the world that obviously there must be more to shadows too. After all, what makes them shadows is merely our *doing*."

There was a long silence. I did not know what else to say.

"The end of the day is approaching," don Juan said, looking at the sky. "You have to use this brilliant sunlight to perform one last exercise."

He led me to a place where there were two peaks the size of a man standing parallel to each other about four or five feet apart. Don Juan stopped ten yards away from them, facing the west. He marked a spot for me to stand on and told me to look at the shadows of the peaks. He said that I should watch them, and cross my eyes in the same manner I ordinarily crossed them when scanning the ground for a place to rest. He clarified his directions by saying that when searching for a resting place one had to look without focusing, but in observing shadows one had to cross the eyes and yet keep a sharp image in focus. The idea was to let one shadow be superimposed on the other by crossing the eyes. He explained that through that process one could ascertain a certain feeling which emanated from shadows. I commented on his vagueness, but he maintained that there was really no way of describing what he meant.

My attempt to carry out the exercise was futile. I struggled until I got a headache. Don Juan was not at all concerned with my failure. He climbed to a dome-like peak and yelled from the top, telling me to look for two small long and narrow pieces of rock. He showed with his hands the size rock he wanted.

I found two pieces and handed them to him. Don Juan placed each rock about a foot apart in two crevices. Then he made me stand above them facing the west, and told me to do the same exercise with their shadows.

This time it was an altogether different affair. Almost immediately I was capable of crossing my eyes and perceiving their individual shadows as if they had merged into one. I noticed that the act of looking without converging the images gave the single shadow I had formed an unbelievable depth and a sort of transparency. I stared at it bewildered. Every hole in the rock on the area where my eyes were focused was neatly discernible. The composite shadow which was superimposed on them was like a film of indescribable transparency.

I did not want to blink for fear of losing the image I was so precariously holding. Finally, my sore eyes forced me to blink, but I did not lose the view of the detail at all. In fact, by re-moistening my cornea the image became even clearer. I noticed at that point that it was as if I were looking from an immeasurable height at a world I had never seen before. I also noticed that I could scan the surroundings of the shadow without losing the focus of my visual perception. Then, for an instant, I lost the notion that I was looking at a rock. I felt that I was landing in a world, vast beyond anything I had ever conceived. This extraordinary perception lasted for a second and then everything was turned off. I automatically looked up and saw don Juan standing directly above the rocks, facing me. He had blocked the sunlight with his body.

I described the unusual sensation I had had, and he explained that he had been forced to interrupt it because he ‘saw’ that I was about to get lost in it. He added that it was a natural tendency for all of us to indulge ourselves when feelings of that nature occur; and that by indulging myself in it I had almost turned ‘not-doing’ into my old familiar ‘doing.’ He said that what I should have done was to maintain the view without succumbing [**succumb- consent reluctantly*] to it because in a way that doing was a manner of succumbing.

I complained that he should have told me beforehand what to expect and what to do, but he pointed out that he had no way of knowing whether or not I would succeed in merging the shadows.

I had to confess I was more mystified than ever about ‘not-doing.’ Don Juan's comments were that I should be satisfied with what I had done because for once I had proceeded correctly; that by reducing the world I had enlarged it; and that, although I had been far from feeling the lines of the world, I had correctly used the shadow of the rocks as a door into ‘not-doing.’

The statement that I had enlarged the world by reducing it intrigued me no end. The detail of the porous rock in the small area where my eyes were focused was so vivid and so precisely defined, that the top of the round peak became a vast world for me; and yet it was really a reduced vision of the rock. When don Juan blocked the light and I found myself looking as I normally would do, the precise detail became dull. The tiny holes in the porous rock became bigger, the brown color of the dried lava became opaque, and everything lost the shiny transparency that made the rock into a real world.

Don Juan then took the two rocks, laid them gently into a deep crevice, and sat down cross-legged facing the west on the spot where the rocks had been. He patted a spot next to him to his left and told me to sit down.

We did not speak for a long time. Then we ate, also in silence. It was only after the sun had set that he suddenly turned and asked me about my progress in ‘dreaming.’

I told him that it had been easy in the beginning, but that at the moment I had ceased altogether to find my hands in my dreams.

"When you first started dreaming you were using my personal power. That's why it was easier," he said. "Now you are empty. But you must keep on trying until you have enough power of your own. You see, *dreaming* is the *not-doing* of dreams, and as you progress in your *not-doing*, you will also progress in *dreaming*. The trick is not to stop looking for your hands even if you don't believe that what you are doing has any meaning. In fact, as I have told you before, a warrior doesn't need to believe, because as long as he keeps on acting without believing he is *not-doing*."

We looked at each other for a moment.

"There is nothing else I can tell you about *dreaming*," he continued. "Everything I may say would only be *not-doing*. But if you tackle *not-doing* directly, you yourself would know what to do in *dreaming*. To find your hands is essential, though, at this time, and I am sure you will."

"I don't know, don Juan. I don't trust myself."

"This is not a matter of trusting anybody. This whole affair is a matter of a warrior's struggle; and you will keep on struggling, if not under your own power, then perhaps under the impact of a worthy opponent; or with the help of some allies, like the one which is already following you."

I made a jerky involuntary movement with my right arm. Don Juan said that my body knew much more than I suspected, because the force that had been pursuing us was to my right. He confided in a low tone of voice that twice that day the ally had come so close to me that he had had to step in and stop it.

"During the day shadows are the doors of *not-doing*," he said. "But at night, since very little *doing* prevails in the dark, everything is a shadow including the allies. I've already told you about this when I taught you the gait of power."

I laughed out loud and my own laughter scared me.

"Everything I have taught you so far has been an aspect of *not-doing*," he went on. "A warrior applies *not-doing* to everything in the world, and yet I can't tell you more about it than what I have said today. You must let your own body discover the power and the feeling of *not-doing*."

I had another fit of nervous cackling.

"It is stupid for you to scorn the mysteries of the world simply because you know the *doing* of scorn," he said with a serious face.

I assured him that I was not scorning anything or anyone, but that I was more nervous and incompetent than he thought.

"I've always been that way," I said. "And yet I want to change, but I don't know how. I am so inadequate."

"I already know that you think you are rotten," he said. "That's your *doing*. Now in order to affect that *doing* I am going to recommend that you learn another *doing*. From now on, and for a period of eight days, I want you to lie to yourself. Instead of telling yourself the truth, that you are ugly and rotten and inadequate, you will tell yourself that you are the complete opposite, knowing that you are lying and that you are absolutely beyond hope."

"But what would be the point of lying like that, don Juan?"

"It may hook you to another *doing*, and then you may realize that both *doings* are lies, unreal, and that to hinge yourself to either one is a waste of time because the only thing that is real is the being in you that is going to die. To arrive at that being is the *not-doing* of the self."

## 16. The Ring of Power

*Saturday, April 14, 1962*

Don Juan felt the weight of our gourds and concluded that we had exhausted our food supply and that it was time to return home. I casually mentioned that it was going to take us at least a couple of days to get to his house. He said he was not going back to Sonora but to a border town where he had some business to take care of.

I thought we were going to start our descent through a water canyon, but don Juan headed towards the northwest on the high plateau of the lava mountains. After about an hour of walking he led me into a deep ravine which ended at a point where two peaks almost joined. There was a slope there going almost to the top of the range; a strange slope which looked like a slanted concave bridge between the two peaks.

Don Juan pointed to an area on the face of the slope.

"Look there fixedly," he said. "The sun is almost right."

He explained that at midday the light of the sun could help me with ‘not-doing.’ He then gave me a series of commands: to loosen all the tight garments I had on, to sit in a cross-legged position, and to look intently at the spot he had specified.

There were very few clouds in the sky and none towards the west. It was a hot day and the sunlight beamed on the solidified lava. I kept a very close watch over the area in question.

After a long vigil I asked what, specifically, I was supposed to look for.

He made me be quiet with an impatient gesture of his hand.

I was tired. I wanted to go to sleep. I half closed my eyes. They were itching and I rubbed them, but my hands were clammy and the sweat made my eyes sting. I looked at the lava peaks through half-closed eyelids and suddenly the whole mountain was lit up.

I told don Juan that if I squinted my eyes I could see the whole range of mountains as an intricate array of light fibers.

He told me to breathe as little as possible in order to maintain the view of the light fibers, and not to stare intently into it, but to look casually at a point on the horizon right above the slope. I followed his instructions and was able to hold the view of an interminable extension covered with a web of light.

Don Juan said in a very soft voice that I should try to isolate areas of darkness within the field of light fibers, and after I found a dark spot, I should open my eyes and check where that spot was on the face of the slope.

I was incapable of perceiving any dark areas. I squinted my eyes and then opened them up various times.

Don Juan drew closer to me and pointed to an area to my right, and then to another one right in front of me. I tried to change the position of my body. I thought that perhaps if I shifted my perspective I would be able to perceive the supposed area of darkness he was pointing to, but don Juan shook my arm and told me in a severe tone to keep still and be patient.

I again squinted my eyes and once more saw the web of light fibers. I looked at it for a moment and then I opened my eyes wider. At that instant I heard a faint rumble— it could have easily have been explained as the distant sound of a jet plane— and then, with my eyes wide open, I saw the whole range of mountains in front of me as an enormous field of tiny dots of light. It was as if for a brief moment some metallic specks in the solidified lava were reflecting the sunlight in unison. Then the sunlight grew dim and was suddenly turned off, and the mountains became a mass of dull dark brown rock, and at the same time it also became windy and cold.

I wanted to turn around to see if the sun had disappeared behind a cloud, but don Juan held my head and did not let me move. He said that if I turned I might catch a glimpse of an entity of the mountains, the ally that was following us. He assured me that I did not have the necessary strength to stand a sight of that nature, and then he added in a calculated tone that the rumble I had heard was the peculiar way in which an ally heralded it's presence.

He then stood up, and announced that we were going to start climbing up the side of the slope.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

He pointed to one of the areas he had isolated as being a spot of darkness. He explained that 'not-doing' had allowed him to single out that spot as a possible center of power, or perhaps as a place where power objects might be found.

We reached the spot he had in mind after a painful climb. He stood motionless for a moment a few feet in front of me. I tried to come closer to him but he signaled me with his hand to stop. He seemed to be orienting himself. I could see the back of his head moving as if he were sweeping his eyes up and down the mountain, then with sure steps he led the way to a ledge. He sat down and began to wipe some loose dirt off the ledge with his hand. He dug with his fingers around a small piece of rock that was sticking out, cleaning the dirt around it. Then he ordered me to dig it out.

Once I had dislodged the piece of rock, he told me to immediately put it inside my shirt because it was a power object that belonged to me. He said that he was giving it to me to keep, and that I should polish and care for it.

Right after that we began our descent into a water canyon; and a couple of hours later we were in the high desert at the foot of the lava mountains. Don Juan walked about ten feet ahead of me and kept up a very good pace. We went south until just before sunset. A heavy bank of clouds in the west prevented us from seeing the sun, but we paused until it had presumably disappeared over the horizon.

Don Juan changed directions then, and headed towards the southeast. We went over a hill, and as we got to the top of the hill, I spotted four men coming towards us from the south.

I looked at don Juan. We had never encountered people in our excursions, and I did not know what to do in a case like that. But don Juan did not seem to be concerned. He kept on walking as if nothing had happened.

The men moved as if they were not in a hurry. They meandered towards where we were in a leisurely way. When they were closer to us, I noticed that they were four young Indians. They seemed to recognize don Juan. He talked to them in Spanish. They were very soft-spoken and treated him with great deference. Only one of them spoke to me. I asked don Juan in a whisper if I could also talk to them, and he nodded his head affirmatively.

Once I engaged them in conversation, they were very friendly and communicative, especially the one who had first spoken to me. They told me they were there in search of power quartz crystals. They said that they had been wandering around the lava mountains for several days, but they had not had any luck.

Don Juan looked around and pointed to a rocky area about two hundred yards away.

"That's a good place to camp for a while," he said.

He began to walk towards the rocks, and we all followed him.

The area he had selected was very rugged. There were no bushes on it. We sat down on the rocks. Don Juan announced that he was going to go back into the chaparral to gather dry branches for a fire. I wanted to help him, but he whispered to me that this was a special fire for those brave young men and he did not need my help.

The young men sat down around me in a close cluster. One of them sat with his back against mine. I felt a bit embarrassed.

When don Juan returned with a pile of sticks, he commended them for their carefulness. He told me that the young men were a sorcerer's apprentices; and that it was the rule to make a circle and have two people back to back in the center when going on hunting parties for power objects.

One of the young men asked me if I had ever found any crystals myself. I told him that don Juan had never taken me to look for them.

Don Juan selected a place close to a big boulder, and started to make a fire. None of the young men moved to help him, but they watched him attentively. When all the sticks were burning, don Juan sat with his back against the boulder. The fire was to his right.

The young men apparently knew what was going on, but I did not have the faintest idea about the procedure to follow when one was dealing with sorcerer's apprentices.

I watched the young men. They sat facing don Juan, making a perfect half circle. I noticed then that don Juan was directly facing me; and two of the young men had sat to my left, and the other two to my right.

Don Juan began telling them that I was in the lava mountains to learn ‘not-doing’ and that an ally had been following us. I thought that that was a very dramatic beginning and I was right. The young men changed positions and sat with their left legs tucked under their seats. I had not observed how they were sitting before. I had assumed that they were sitting the same way I was, cross-legged. A casual glance at don Juan revealed to me that he was also sitting with his left leg tucked in. He made a barely perceptible gesture with his chin to point at my sitting position. I casually tucked in my left leg.

Don Juan had once told me that a sorcerer used that posture when things were uncertain. However, it had always proved to be a very tiring position for me. I felt it was going to be a terrible imposition on me to remain seated in that fashion for the duration of his talk. Don Juan seemed to be thoroughly aware of my handicap, so he explained in a succinct manner to the young men that quartz crystals could be found in certain specific spots in that area; and when they were found, they had to be coaxed to leave their abode by means of special techniques. The crystals then became the man himself, and their power went beyond our understanding.

He said that ordinarily quartz crystals were found in clusters, and that it was up to the man who had found them to choose five of the longest and best-looking blades of quartz, and sever them from their matrix. The finder was responsible for carving and polishing them in order to make them pointed, and to make them fit perfectly to the size and shape of the fingers of his right hand.

Then he told us that the quartz crystals were weapons used for sorcery, that they were usually hurled to kill, and that they penetrated the enemy's body, and then returned to their owner's hand as though they had never left it.

Next he talked about the search for the spirit that would turn the ordinary crystals into weapons, and said that the first thing one had to do was to find a propitious [* *propitious-presenting favourable circumstances*] place to lure out the spirit. That place had to be on a hilltop, and the place on the hilltop was found by sweeping the hand with the palm turned towards the earth until a certain heat was detected with the palm of the hand. A fire had to be made on that spot. Don Juan explained that the ally was attracted by the flames, and manifested itself through a series of consistent noises. The person searching for an ally had to follow the direction of the noises until the ally revealed itself; and then the person had to wrestle it to the ground in order to overpower it. It was at that point that one could make the ally touch the crystals to imbue them with power.

He warned us that there are other forces at large in those lava mountains; forces which do not resemble the allies. These forces do not make any noise, and appear only as fleeting shadows. They do not have any power beneficial to the person at all.

Don Juan said that a brilliantly colored feather or some highly polished quartz crystals would attract the attention of an ally, but in the long run, any object whatever would be equally effective because the important part was not to find the objects, but to find the force that would imbue them with power.

He said, "What's the use of having beautifully polished crystals if you never find the spirit giver of power? On the other hand, if you don't have the crystals, but do find the spirit, you may put anything in his way to be touched. You could put your dicks in the way if you can't find anything else."

The young men giggled. The most daring of them, the one who talked to me first, laughed loudly.

I noticed that don Juan had crossed his legs, and was sitting in a relaxed manner. All the young men had also crossed their legs. I tried to slip casually into a more relaxed posture, but my left knee seemed to have a pinched nerve or a sore muscle and I had to stand up and jog on the spot for a few minutes.

Don Juan made a joking comment. He said I was out of practice kneeling down because I had not been to confession in years, ever since I had begun running around with him.

That produced a great commotion among the young men. They laughed in spurts. Some of them covered their faces and giggled nervously.

"I'm going to show you fellows something," don Juan said casually after the young men had stopped laughing.

My guess was that he was going to let us see some power objects he had in his pouch. For an instant I thought the young men were going to cluster around him because they made a sudden movement in unison. All of them bent forward a little bit, as if they were going to stand up, but then they all tucked their left legs in and went back to that mysterious position that was so hard on my knees.

I tucked my left leg in as casually as possible. I found that if I did not sit on my left foot, that is, if I kept a half-kneeling position, my knees did not hurt as much.

Don Juan stood up and walked around the big boulder until he was out of sight.

He must have fed the fire before he stood up while I was tucking in my leg because new sticks chirped as they ignited, and long flames spurted out. The effect was extremely dramatic. The flames grew twice as big. Don Juan suddenly stepped out from behind the boulder and stood where he had been sitting. I had a moment of bewilderment. Don Juan had put on a funny black hat. It had peaks on the side, by the ears, and it was round on top. It occurred to me that it was actually a pirate's hat. He was wearing a long black coat with tails, fastened with a single shiny metallic button, and he had a peg leg.

I laughed to myself. Don Juan really looked silly in his pirate's costume. I began to wonder where he had gotten that outfit out there in the wilderness. I assumed that it must have been hidden behind the rock. I commented to myself that all don Juan needed was a patch over his eye and a parrot on his shoulder to be the perfect stereotype of a pirate.

Don Juan looked at every member of the group, sweeping his eyes slowly from right to left. Then he looked up above us, and stared into the darkness behind us. He remained in that position for a moment, and then he went around the boulder and disappeared.

I did not notice how he walked. Obviously he must have had his knee bent in order to depict a man with a wooden leg. When he turned around to walk behind the boulder, I should have seen his bent leg, but I was so mystified by his acts that I did not pay any attention to details.

The flames lost their strength at the very moment don Juan went around the boulder. I thought that his timing had been superb. He must have calculated how long it would take for the sticks he had added to the fire to burn and had arranged his appearance and exit according to that calculation.

The change in the intensity of the fire was very dramatic for the group; there was a ripple of nervousness among the young men. As the flames diminished in size, the young men went back in unison to a cross-legged sitting position.

I expected don Juan to step out from behind the boulder right away and sit down again, but he did not. He remained out of sight. I waited impatiently. The young men were sitting with an impassive look on their faces.

I could not understand what don Juan had intended with all those histrionics. After a long wait I turned to the young man on my right and asked him in a low voice if any of the items don Juan had put on— the funny hat and the long tail coat— and the fact he was standing on a peg leg had any meaning to him.

The young man looked at me with a funny blank expression. He seemed confused. I repeated my question and the other young man next to him looked at me attentively in order to listen.

They looked at each other seemingly in utter confusion. I said that to me the hat and the stump and the coat made him into a pirate.

By then all four young men had come closer together around me. They giggled softly and fretted nervously. They seemed to be at a loss for words. The most daring of them finally spoke to me. He said that don Juan did not have a hat on, was not wearing a long coat, and was certainly not standing on a stump, but that he had a black cowl or shawl over his head and a jet black tunic, like a friar's, that went all the way to the ground.

"No!" another young man exclaimed softly. "He didn't have a cowl."

"That's right," the others said.

The young man who had spoken first looked at me with an expression of total disbelief.

I told them that we had to review what had happened very carefully and very quietly. I said I was sure don Juan had wanted us to do so, and thus he had left us alone.

The young man who was to my extreme right said that don Juan was in rags. He had on a tattered poncho, or some sort of Indian coat, and a most beat-up sombrero. He was holding a basket with things in it, but he was not sure what those things were. He added that don Juan was not really dressed as a beggar, but rather as a man who was coming back from an interminable journey loaded with strange things.

The young man who had seen don Juan with a black cowl said that he had nothing in his hands, but that his hair was long and wild as if he were a wild man that had just killed a friar and had put on the friar's clothes, but could not hide his wildness.

The young man to my left chuckled softly and commented on the weirdness of it all. He said that he saw don Juan dressed as an important man who had just gotten off his horse. He had leather leggings for horseback riding, big spurs, a whip that he kept beating on his left palm, a Chihuahua hat with a conical crown, and two .45-calibre automatic pistols. He said that don Juan was the picture of a well-to-do 'ranchero.'

The young man to my extreme left laughed shyly and did not volunteer to reveal what he had seen. I coaxed him, but the others did not seem to be interested. He appeared to be rather too shy to talk.

The fire was about to die out when don Juan came out from behind the boulder.

"We better leave the young men to their doings," he said to me. "Bid them good-bye."

He did not look at them. He began to walk away slowly to give me time to say good-bye.

The young men embraced me.

There were no flames in the fire, but the live coals reflected enough glare. Don Juan was like a dark shadow a few feet away, and the young men were a circle of neatly defined static silhouettes. They were like a row of jet black statues set in a background of darkness.

It was at that point that the total event had an impact on me. A chill ran up my spine. I caught up with don Juan. He told me in a tone of great urgency not to turn around to look at the young men, because at that moment they were a circle of shadows.

My stomach felt a force coming from the outside. It was as if a hand had grabbed me. I screamed involuntarily. Don Juan whispered that there was so much power in that area that it would be very easy for me to use the 'gait of power.'

We jogged for hours. I fell down five times. Don Juan counted out loud every time I lost my balance. Then he came to a halt.

"Sit down. Huddle against the rocks, and cover your belly with your hands," he whispered in my ear.

*Sunday, April 15, 1962*

As soon as there was enough light in the morning we started walking. Don Juan guided me to the place where I had left my car. I was hungry but I felt, otherwise, invigorated and well rested.

We ate some crackers and drank some bottled mineral water I had in my car. I wanted to ask him some questions that were overwhelming me, but he put his finger to his lips.

By mid-afternoon we were in the border town where he wanted me to leave him. We went to a restaurant to eat lunch. The place was empty. We sat at a table by a window looking out at the busy main street and ordered our food.

Don Juan seemed relaxed; his eyes shone with a mischievous glint. I felt encouraged, and began a barrage of questions. I mainly wanted to know about his disguise.

"I showed you a little bit of my *not-doing*," he said and his eyes seemed to glow.

"But none of us saw the same disguise," I said. "How did you do that?"

"It's all very simple," he replied. "They were only disguises, because everything we do is in some way merely a disguise. Everything we do, as I have told you, is a matter of *doing*. A man of knowledge could hook himself to everyone's *doing* and come up with weird things. But they are not weird, not really. They are weird only to those who are trapped in *doing*.

"Those four young men and yourself are not aware yet of *not-doing*, so it was easy to fool all of you."

"But how did you fool us?"

"It won't make sense to you. There is no way for you to understand it."

"Try me, don Juan, please."

"Let's say that when every one of us is born we bring with us a little ring of power. That little ring is almost immediately put to use. So every one of us is already hooked from birth and our rings of power are joined to everyone else's. In other words, our rings of power are hooked to the *doing* of the world in order to make the world."

"Give me an example so I could understand it," I said.

"For instance, our rings of power, yours and mine, are hooked right now to the *doing* in this room. We are making this room. Our rings of power are spinning this room into being at this very moment."

"Wait, wait," I said. "This room is here by itself. I am not creating it. I have nothing to do with it."

Don Juan did not seem to be concerned with my argumentative protests. He very calmly maintained that the room we were in was brought to being and was kept in place because of the force of everybody's ring of power.

"You see," he continued, "every one of us knows the *doing* of rooms because, in one way or another, we have spent much of our lives in rooms. A man of knowledge, on the other hand, develops another ring of power. I would call it the ring of *not-doing* because it is hooked to *not-doing*. With that ring, therefore, he can spin another world."

A young waitress brought our food and seemed to be suspicious of us. Don Juan whispered that I should pay her to show her that I had enough money.

"I don't blame her for distrusting you," he said and roared with laughter. "You look like hell."

I paid the woman and tipped her, and when she left us alone I stared at don Juan trying to find a way to recapture the thread of our conversation. He came to my rescue.

"Your difficulty is that you haven't yet developed your extra ring of power. Your body doesn't know *not-doing*," he said.

I did not understand what he had said. My mind was locked in quite a prosaic concern. All I wanted to know was whether or not he had put on a pirate's outfit.

Don Juan did not answer but laughed uproariously. I begged him to explain.

"But I've just explained it to you," he retorted.

"You mean, that you didn't put on any disguise?" I asked.

"All I did was to hook my ring of power to your own *doing*," he said. "You yourself did the rest as did the others."

"That's incredible!" I exclaimed.

"We all have been taught to agree about *doing*," he said softly. "You don't have any idea of the power that that agreement brings with it. But, fortunately, *not-doing* is equally miraculous and powerful."

I felt an uncontrollable ripple in my stomach. There was an unbridgeable abyss between my first-hand experience and his explanation. As an ultimate defense I ended up, as I had always done, with a tinge of doubt and distrust and with the question: What if don Juan was really in cahoots with the young men and he himself had set it all up?

I changed the subject and asked him about the four apprentices.

"Did you tell me that they were shadows?" I asked.

"That's right."

"Were they allies?"

"No. They were apprentices of a man I know."

"Why did you call them shadows?"

"Because at that moment they had been touched by the power of *not-doing*, and since they are not as green as you are, they shifted into something quite different from what you know. I didn't want you to look at them for that reason. It would have only injured you."

I did not have any more questions. I was not hungry either. Don Juan ate heartily and seemed to be in an excellent mood. But I felt dejected. Suddenly a consuming fatigue possessed me. I realized that don Juan's path was too arduous for me. I commented that I did not have the qualifications to become a sorcerer.

"Perhaps another meeting with Mescalito will help you," he said.

I assured him that that was the farthest thing from my mind, and that I would not even consider the possibility.

"Very drastic things have to happen to you in order for you to allow your body to profit from all you have learned," he said.

I ventured the opinion that since I was not an Indian I was not really qualified to live the unusual life of a sorcerer.

"Perhaps," I said, " if I could disentangle myself from all my commitments, I could fare in your world a little better; or if I would go into the wilderness with you and live there. As it is now, the fact I have a foot in both worlds makes me useless in either."

He stared at me for a long moment.

"This is your world," he said, pointing to the busy street outside the window. "You are a man of that world. And out there, in that world, is your hunting ground. There is no way to escape the *doing* of our world, so what a warrior does is to turn his world into his hunting ground. As a hunter, a warrior knows that the world is made to be used; so he uses every bit of it. A warrior is like a pirate that has no qualms in taking and using anything he wants; except that the warrior doesn't mind, or he doesn't feel insulted, when he is used and taken himself."

## 17. A Worthy Opponent

*Tuesday, December 11, 1962*

My traps were perfect. The setting was correct. I saw rabbits, squirrels and other rodents, quail, and birds; but I could not catch anything at all during the whole day.

Don Juan had told me as we left his house in the early morning that I had to wait that day for a 'gift of power;' an exceptional animal that might be lured into my traps, and whose flesh I could dry for 'power food.'

Don Juan seemed to be in a pensive mood. He did not make a single suggestion or comment. Near the end of the day he finally made a statement.

"Someone is interfering with your hunting," he said.

"Who?" I asked, truly surprised.

He looked at me, smiled, and shook his head in a gesture of disbelief.

"You act as if you didn't know who," he said. "And you've known who all day."

I was going to protest, but I saw no point in it. I knew he was going to say 'la Catalina,' and if that was the kind of knowledge he was talking about, then he was right, I did know who.

"We either go home now," he continued, "or we wait until dark and use the twilight to catch her."

He appeared to be waiting for my decision. I wanted to leave so I began to gather some thin rope that I was using; but before I could voice my wish to leave, he stopped me with a direct command.

"Sit down," he said. "It would be a simpler and more sober decision just to leave now, but this is a peculiar case and I think we must stay. This show is just for you."

"What do you mean?"

"Someone is interfering with you in particular, so that makes it your show. I know who and you also know who."

"You scare me," I said.

"Not me," he replied, laughing. "That woman who is out there prowling is scaring you."

He paused as if he were waiting for the effect of his words to show on me. I had to admit that I was terrified.

Over a month before, I had a horrendous confrontation with a sorceress called 'la Catalina.' I faced her, I had thought, at the risk of my life because don Juan had convinced me that she was after his life; and that he was incapable of fending off her onslaughts. After I came in contact with her, don Juan disclosed to me that she had never really been of any danger to him; and that the whole affair had been a trick, not in the sense of a malicious prank, but in the sense of a trap to ensnare me.

His method was so unethical to me that I became furious with him.

Upon hearing my angry outburst don Juan had begun to sing some Mexican tunes. He imitated popular crooners and his renditions were so comical that I had ended up laughing like a child. He entertained me for hours. I never knew he had such a repertoire of idiotic songs.

"Let me tell you something," he finally said. "If you were not tricked, you would never learn. The same thing happened to me, and it'll happen to anyone. The art of a benefactor is to take us to the brink. A benefactor can only point the way and trick. I tricked you before. You remember the way I recaptured your hunter's spirit, don't you? You yourself told me that hunting made you forget about plants. You were willing to do a lot of things in order to be a hunter; things you wouldn't have done in order to learn about plants. Now you must do a lot more in order to survive."

He stared at me and broke into a fit of laughter.

"This is all crazy," I said. "We are rational beings."

"You're rational," he retorted. "I am not."

"Of course you are," I insisted. "You are one of the most rational men I have ever met."

"All right!" he exclaimed. "Let us not argue. I am rational, so what?"

I involved him in the argument of why it was necessary for two rational beings to proceed in such an insane way, as we had proceeded with the lady witch.

"You're rational, all right," he said fiercely. "And that means you believe that you know a lot about the world, but do you? Do you really? You have only seen the acts of people. Your experiences are limited only to what people have done to you or to others. You know nothing about this mysterious unknown world."

He signaled me to follow him to my car, and we drove to the small Mexican town near by.

I did not ask what we were going to do. He made me park my car by a restaurant, and then we walked around the bus depot and the general store. Don Juan walked on my right side, leading me. Suddenly I became aware that someone else was walking side by side with me to my left, but before I had time to turn to look, don Juan made a fast and sudden movement. He leaned forward, as if he were picking something from the ground, and then grabbed me by the armpit when I nearly stumbled over him. He dragged me to my car and did not let go of my arm even to allow me to unlock the door. I fumbled with the keys for a moment. He shoved me gently into the car and then got in himself.

"Drive slowly and stop in front of the store," he said.

When I had stopped, don Juan signaled me with a nod of his head to look. La Catalina was standing at the place where don Juan had grabbed me. I recoiled involuntarily. The woman took a couple of steps towards the car, and stood there defiantly. I scrutinized her carefully, and concluded that she was a beautiful woman. She was very dark and had a plump body, but she seemed to be strong and muscular. She had a round full face with high cheekbones and two long braids of jet black hair. What surprised me the most was her youth. She was at the most in her early thirties.

"Let her come closer if she wants," don Juan whispered.

She took three or four steps towards my car, and stopped perhaps ten feet away. We looked at each other. At that moment I felt there was nothing threatening about her. I smiled and waved at her. She giggled as if she were a shy little girl, and covered her mouth. Somehow I felt delighted. I turned to don Juan to comment on her appearance and behavior, and he scared me half to death with a yell.

"Don't turn your back to that woman, damn it!" he said in a forceful voice.

I quickly turned to look at the woman. She had taken another couple of steps towards my car, and was standing barely five feet away from my door. She was smiling; her teeth were big and white and very clean. There was something eerie about her smile, however. It was not friendly. It was a contained grin; only her mouth smiled. Her eyes were black and cold and were staring at me fixedly.

I experienced a chill all over my body. Don Juan began to laugh in a rhythmical cackle. After a moment's wait the woman slowly backed away and disappeared among people.

We drove away, and don Juan speculated that if I did not tighten up my life and learn, she was going to step on me as one steps on a defenseless bug.

"She is the worthy opponent I told you I had found for you," he said.

Don Juan said that we had to wait for an omen before we knew what to do with the woman who was interfering with my hunting.

"If we see or hear a crow, we'll know for sure that we can wait, and we'll also know where to wait," he added.

He slowly turned around in a complete circle, scanning all the surroundings.

"This is not the place to wait," he said in a whisper.

We began to walk towards the east. It was already fairly dark. Suddenly two crows flew out from behind some tall bushes and disappeared behind a hill. Don Juan said that the hill was our destination.

Once we arrived there he circled it, and chose a place facing the southeast at the bottom of the hill. He cleaned the dry twigs and leaves and other debris from a circular spot five or six feet in diameter. I attempted to help him, but he refused me with a strong movement of his hand. He put his finger over his lips and made a gesture of silence. When he had finished he pulled me to the center of the circle, made me face the south away from the hill, and whispered in my ear that I had to imitate his movements. He began a sort of dance, making a rhythmical thump with his right foot; it consisted of seven even beats spaced by a cluster of three fast thumps.

I tried to adapt myself to his rhythm and after a few clumsy attempts I was more or less capable of reproducing the same thumping.

"What's this for?" I whispered in his ear.

He told me, also in a whisper, that I was thumping like a rabbit and that sooner or later the prowler would be attracted by the noise and would show up to see what was going on.

Once I had copied the rhythm, don Juan ceased to thump himself, but had me continue, marking the pace with a movement of his hand.

From time to time he would listen attentively, with his head slightly tilted to the right, seemingly to pick out noises in the chaparral. At one point he signaled me to stop and he remained in a most alert position. It was as if he were ready to spring up and jump on an unknown and unseen assailant.

Then he motioned me to continue the thumping. After a while he stopped me again. Every time I stopped, he listened with such a concentration that every fibre in his body seemed to be tense to the point of bursting.

Suddenly he jumped to my side and whispered in my ear that the twilight was at it's full power.

I looked around. The chaparral was a dark mass, and so were the hills and the rocks. The sky was dark blue and I could not see the clouds any more. The whole world seemed to be a uniform mass of dark silhouettes which did not have any visible boundaries.

I heard the eerie distant cry of an animal; a coyote, or perhaps a night bird. It happened so suddenly that I did not pay attention to it. But don Juan's body jerked a bit. I felt it's vibration as he stood next to me.

"Here we go," he whispered. "Thump again and be ready. She's here."

I began to thump furiously, but don Juan put his foot over mine, and signaled me frantically to relax, and thump rhythmically.

"Don't scare her away," he whispered in my ear. "Calm down, and don't lose your marbles."

He again began to mark the pace of my thumping, and after the second time he made me stop I heard the same cry again. This time it seemed to be the cry of a bird which was flying over the hill.

Don Juan made me thump once more and just when I stopped, I heard a peculiar rustling sound to my left. It was the sound a heavy animal would make while moving about in the dry underbrush. The thought of a bear crossed my mind, but then I realized that there were no bears in the desert. I grabbed on to don Juan's arm. He smiled at me, and put his finger to his mouth in a gesture of silence. I stared into the darkness towards my left, but he signaled me not to. He repeatedly pointed directly above me, and then he made me turn around slowly and silently until I was facing the dark mass of the hill. Don Juan kept his finger leveled at a certain point on the hill. I kept my eyes glued to that spot and suddenly, as if in a nightmare, a dark shadow leaped at me. I shrieked, and fell down to the ground on my back. For a moment the dark silhouette was superimposed against the dark blue sky, and then it sailed through the air and landed beyond us in the bushes. I heard the sound of a heavy body crashing into the shrubs and then an eerie outcry.

Don Juan helped me up, and guided me in the darkness to the place where I had left my traps. He made me gather and disassemble them. Then he scattered the pieces away in all directions. He performed all this without saying a single word. We did not speak at all on our way back to his house.

"What do you want me to say?" don Juan asked after I had urged him repeatedly to explain the events I had witnessed a few hours before.

"What was it?" I asked.

"You know darn well who it was," he said. "Don't water it down with 'what was it?' It is who it was that is important."

I had worked out an explanation that seemed to suit me. The figure I had seen looked very much like a kite that someone had let out over the hill while someone else, behind us, had pulled it to the ground, thus the effect of a dark silhouette sailing through the air perhaps fifteen or twenty yards.

He listened attentively to my explanation, and then laughed until tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Quit beating around the bush," he said. "Get to the point. Wasn't it a woman?"

I had to admit that when I fell down, and looked up, I saw the dark silhouette of a woman with a long skirt leaping over me in a very slow motion. Then something seemed to have pulled the dark silhouette, and it flew over me with great speed and crashed into the bushes. In fact, that movement was what had given me the idea of a kite.

Don Juan refused to discuss the incident any further.

The next day he left to fulfill some mysterious errand and I went to visit some Yaqui friends in another community.

*Wednesday, December 12, 1962*

As soon as I arrived at the Yaqui community, the Mexican storekeeper told me that he had rented a record player and twenty records from an outfit in Ciudad Obregon for the 'fiesta' he was planning to give that night in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe. He had already told everybody that he had made all the necessary arrangements through Julio, the traveling salesman who came to the Yaqui settlement twice a month to collect installments on a layaway plan for cheap articles of clothing which he had succeeded in selling to some Yaqui Indians.

Julio brought the record player early in the afternoon, and hooked it to the dynamo that provided electricity for the store. He made sure that it worked; then he turned up the volume to it's maximum, reminded the storekeeper not to touch any knobs, and began to sort the twenty records.

"I know how many scratches each of them has," Julio said to the storekeeper.

"Tell that to my daughter," the storekeeper replied.

"You're responsible, not your daughter."

"Just the same, she's the one who'll be changing the records."

Julio insisted that it did not make any difference to him whether she or someone else was going to actually handle the record player as long as the storekeeper paid for any records that were damaged. The storekeeper began to argue with Julio. Julio's face became red. He turned from time to time to the large group of Yaqui Indians congregated in front of the store and made signs of despair or frustration by moving his hands or contorting his face in a grimace. Seemingly as a final resort, Julio demanded a cash deposit. That precipitated another long argument about what constituted a damaged record. Julio stated with authority that any broken record had to be paid for in full, as if it were new. The storekeeper became angrier and began to pull out his extension cords. He seemed bent upon unhooking the record player and canceling the party. He made it clear to his clients congregated in front of the store that he had tried his best to come to terms with Julio. For a moment it seemed that the party was going to fail before it had started.

Blas, the old Yaqui Indian in whose house I was staying, made some derogatory comments in a loud voice about the Yaquis' sad state of affairs that they could not even celebrate their most revered religious festivity, the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

I wanted to intervene and offer my help, but Blas stopped me. He said that if I were to make the cash deposit, the storekeeper himself would smash the records.

"He's worse than anybody," he said to me. "Let him pay the deposit. He bleeds us, so why shouldn't he pay?"

After a long discussion in which, strangely enough, everyone present was in favor of Julio, the storekeeper hit upon terms which were mutually agreeable. He did not pay a cash deposit, but accepted responsibility for the records and the record player.

Julio's motorcycle left a trail of dust as he headed for some of the more remote houses in the locality. Blas said that Julio was trying to get to his customers before they came to the store and spent all their money buying booze. As he was saying this a group of Indians emerged from behind the store. Blas looked at them, and began to laugh; and so did everyone else there.

Blas told me that those Indians were Julio's customers that had been hiding behind the store waiting for him to leave.

The party began early. The storekeeper's daughter put a record on the turntable and brought the arm down. There was a terrible loud screech and a high pitched buzz, and then came a blasting sound of a trumpet and some guitars.

The party consisted of playing the records at full volume. There were four young Mexican men who danced with the storekeeper's two daughters and three other young Mexican women. The Yaquis did not dance. They watched with apparent delight every movement the dancers made. They seemed to be enjoying themselves just watching, and gulping down cheap tequila.

I bought individual drinks for everybody I knew. I wanted to avoid any feelings of resentment. I circulated among the numerous Indians, and talked to them and then offered them drinks. My pattern of behavior worked until they realized I was not drinking at all. That seemed to annoy everyone at once. It was as if collectively they had discovered that I did not belong there. The Indians became very gruff and gave me sly looks.

The Mexicans, who were as drunk as the Indians, also realized at the same time that I had not danced, and that appeared to offend them even more. They became very aggressive. One of them forcibly took me by the arm and dragged me closer to the record player. Another served me a full cup of tequila and wanted me to drink it all in one gulp and prove that I was a 'macho.'

I tried to stall them and laughed idiotically as if I were actually enjoying the situation. I said that I would like to dance first and then drink. One of the young men called out the name of a song. The girl in charge of the record player began to search in the pile of records. Although none of the women had openly been drinking, the girl seemed to be a little tipsy, and had trouble fitting a record on the turntable. A young man said that the record she had selected was not a twist. She fumbled with the pile, trying to find the suitable one, and everybody closed in around her and left me. That gave me time to run behind the store, away from the lighted area, and out of sight.

I stood about thirty yards away in the darkness of some bushes trying to decide what to do. I was tired. I felt it was time to get in my car and go back home. I began to walk to Bias's house where my car was parked. I figured that if I drove slowly no one would notice that I was leaving.

The people in charge of the record player were apparently still looking for the record— all I could hear was the high-pitched buzzing of the loudspeaker— but then came the blasting sound of a twist. I laughed out loud, thinking that they had probably turned to where I had been, and had found out that I disappeared.

I saw some dark silhouettes of people walking in the opposite direction, going towards the store. We passed each other and they mumbled, "Buenas noches." I recognized them and spoke to them. I told them that it was a great party.

Before I came to a sharp bend in the road I encountered two other people who I did not recognize, but I greeted them anyway. The blasting sound of the record player was almost as loud there on the road as it was in front of the store. It was a dark starless night, but the glare from the store lights allowed me to have a fairly good visual perception of my surroundings. Bias's house was very near, and I accelerated my pace. I noticed then the dark shape of a person, sitting or perhaps squatting to my left, at the bend of the road. I thought for an instant that it might have been one of the people from the party who had left before I had. The person seemed to be defecating on the side of the road. That seemed odd. People in the community went into the thick bushes to perform their bodily functions. I thought that whoever it was in front of me must have been drunk.

I came to the bend and said, "Buenas noches." The person answered me with an eerie, gruff, inhuman howl. The hair on my body literally stood on end. For a second I was paralyzed. Then I began to walk fast. I took a quick glance. I saw that the dark silhouette had stood up halfway; it was a woman. She was stooped over, leaning forward. She walked in that position for a few yards and then she hopped. I began to run while the woman hopped like a bird by my side, keeping up with my speed. By the time I arrived at Bias's house she was cutting in front of me and we had almost touched.

I leaped across a small dry ditch in front of the house, and crashed through the flimsy door.

Blas was already in the house, and seemed unconcerned with my story.

"They pulled a good one on you," he said reassuringly. "The Indians take delight in teasing foreigners."

My experience had been so unnerving that the next day I drove to don Juan's house instead of going home as I had planned to do.

Don Juan returned in the late afternoon. I did not give him time to say anything but blurted out the whole story, including Bias's commentary. Don Juan's face became sombre. Perhaps it was only my imagination, but I thought he was worried.

"Don't put so much stock in what Blas told you," he said in a serious tone. "He knows nothing of the struggles between sorcerers.

"You should have known that it was something serious the moment you noticed that the shadow was to your left. You shouldn't have run either."

"What was I supposed to do? Stand there?"

"Right. When a warrior encounters his opponent, and the opponent is not an ordinary human being, he must make his stand. That is the only thing that makes him invulnerable."

"What are you saying, don Juan?"

"I'm saying that you have had your third encounter with your worthy opponent. She's following you around, waiting for a moment of weakness on your part. She almost bagged you this time."

I felt a surge of anxiety and accused him of putting me in unnecessary danger. I complained that the game he was playing with me was cruel.

"It would be cruel if this would have happened to an average man," he said. "But the instant one begins to live like a warrior, one is no longer ordinary. Besides, I didn't find you a worthy opponent because I want to play with you, or tease you, or annoy you. A worthy opponent might spur you on; under the influence of an opponent like la Catalina, you may have to make use of everything I have taught you. You don't have any other alternative."

We were quiet for a while. His words had aroused a tremendous apprehension in me.

He then wanted me to imitate as close as possible the cry I had heard after I had said "Buenas noches."

I attempted to reproduce the sound and came up with some weird howling that scared me. Don Juan must have found my rendition funny; he laughed almost uncontrollably.

Afterwards he asked me to reconstruct the total sequence: the distance I ran, the distance the woman was from me at the time I encountered her, the distance she was from me at the time I reached the house, and the place where she had begun hopping.

"No fat Indian woman could hop that way," he said after assessing all those variables. "They could not even run that far."

He made me hop. I could not cover more than four feet each time, and if I were correct in my perception, the woman had hopped at least ten feet with each leap.

"Of course, you know that from now on you must be on the lookout," he said in a tone of great urgency. "She will try to tap you on your left shoulder during a moment when you are unaware and weak."

"What should I do?" I asked.

"It is meaningless to complain," he said. "What's important from this point on is the strategy of your life."

I could not concentrate at all on what he was saying. I took notes automatically. After a long silence, he asked if I had any pain behind my ears or in the nape of my neck. I said no; and he told me that if I had experienced an uncomfortable sensation in either of those two areas, it would have meant that I had been clumsy and that ‘la Catalina’ had injured me.

"Everything you did that night was clumsy," he said. "First of all, you went to the party to kill time as though there is any time to kill. That weakened you."

"You mean I shouldn't go to parties?"

"No, I don't mean that. You may go any place you wish, but if you do, you must assume the full responsibility for that act. A warrior lives his life strategically. He would attend a party or a reunion like that only if his strategy calls for it. That means, of course, that he would be in total control and would perform all the acts that he deems necessary."

He looked at me fixedly and smiled, then covered his face and chuckled softly.

"You are in a terrible bind," he said. "Your opponent is on your trail and for the first time in your life, you cannot afford to act helter-skelter. This time you will have to learn a totally different *doing*; the *doing* of strategy. Think of it this way. If you survive the onslaughts of ‘la Catalina’ you will have to thank her someday for having forced you to change your *doing*."

"What a terrible way of putting it!" I exclaimed. "What if I don't survive?"

"A warrior never indulges in thoughts like that," he said. "When he has to act with his fellow men, a warrior follows the *doing* of strategy, and in that *doing* there are no victories or defeats.

In that *doing* there are only actions."

I asked him what the *doing* of strategy entailed.

"It entails that one is not at the mercy of people," he replied. "At that party, for instance, you were a clown; not because it served your purposes to be a clown, but because you placed yourself at the mercy of those people. You never had any control, and thus you had to run away from them."

"What should I have done?"

"Not go there at all, or else go there to perform a specific act.

"After horsing around with the Mexicans, you were weak, and ‘la Catalina’ used that opportunity. So she placed herself in the road to wait for you.

"Your body knew that something was out of place, though, and yet you spoke to her. That was terrible. You must not utter a single word to your opponent during one of those encounters. Then you turned your back to her. That was even worse. Then you ran away from her, and that was the worst thing you could have done! Apparently she is clumsy. A sorcerer that is worth her salt would have mowed you down right then; the instant you turned your back and ran away.

"So far your only defense is to stay put and do your dance."

"What dance are you talking about?" I asked.

He said that the 'rabbit thumping' he had taught me was the first movement of the dance that a warrior groomed and enlarged throughout his life, and then executed in his last stand on earth.

I had a moment of strange sobriety and a series of thoughts occurred to me. On one level it was clear that what had taken place between me and ‘la Catalina’ the first time I had confronted her was real. ‘La Catalina’ was real, and I could not discard the possibility that she was actually following me. On the other level, I could not understand how she was following me. This gave rise to the faint suspicion that don Juan might be tricking me, and that he himself was somehow producing the weird effects I had witnessed.

Don Juan suddenly looked at the sky, and told me that there was still time to go and check the sorceress. He reassured me that we were running very little danger, because we were only going to drive by her house.

"You must confirm her shape," don Juan said. "Then there won't be any doubts left in your mind one way or the other."

My hands began to sweat profusely, and I had to dry them repeatedly with a towel. We got in my car. Don Juan directed me to the main highway, and then to a wide unpaved road. I drove in the center of it; heavy trucks and tractors had carved deep trenches, and my car was too low to go on either the left or the right side of the road. We went slowly amid a thick cloud of dust. The coarse gravel which was used to level the road had lumped with dirt during the rains, and chunks of dry mud rocks bounced against the metal underside of my car, making loud explosive sounds.

Don Juan told me to slow down as we were coming to a small bridge. There were four Indians sitting there and they waved at us. I was not sure whether or not I knew them. We passed the bridge and the road curved gently.

"That's the woman's house," don Juan whispered to me as he pointed with his eyes to a white house with a high bamboo fence all around it.

He told me to make a U-turn and stop in the middle of the road, and wait to see if the woman became suspicious enough to show her face.

We stayed there perhaps ten minutes. I thought it was an interminable time. Don Juan did not say a word. He sat motionless, looking at the house.

"There she is," he said, and his body gave a sudden jump.

I saw the dark foreboding silhouette of a woman standing inside the house, looking through the open door. The room was dark and that only accentuated the darkness of the woman's silhouette.

After a few minutes the woman stepped out of the darkness of the room. She stood in the doorway and watched us. We looked at her for a moment, and then don Juan told me to drive on. I was speechless. I could have sworn that she was the woman I had seen hopping by the road in the darkness.

About half an hour later when we had turned on to the paved highway, don Juan spoke to me.

"What do you say?" he asked. "Did you recognize the shape?"

I hesitated for a long time before answering. I was afraid of the commitment entailed in saying yes. I carefully worded my reply, and said that I thought it had been too dark to be completely sure.

He laughed and tapped me gently on my head.

"She was the one, wasn't she?" he asked.

He did not give me time to reply. He put a finger to his mouth in a gesture of silence and whispered in my ear that it was meaningless to say anything, and that in order to survive ‘la Catalina's’ onslaughts I had to make use of everything he had taught me.

# PART TWO – Journey To Ixtlan

## 18. The Sorcerer's Ring of Power

In May of 1971 I paid don Juan the last visit of my apprenticeship. I went to see him on that occasion in the same spirit I had gone to see him during the ten years of our association; that is to say, I was once again seeking the amenity of his company.

His friend don Genaro, a Mazatec Indian sorcerer, was with him. I had seen both of them during my previous visit six months earlier. I was considering whether or not to ask them if they had been together all that time, when don Genaro explained that Genaro liked the northern desert so much that he had returned just in time to see me. Both of them laughed as if they knew a secret.

"I came back just for you," don Genaro said.

"That's true," don Juan echoed.

I reminded don Genaro that the last time I had been there, his attempts to help me to 'stop the world' has been disastrous for me. That was my friendly way of letting him know that I was afraid of him. He laughed uncontrollably, shaking his body and kicking his legs like a child. Don Juan avoided looking at me and also laughed.

"You're not going to try to help me any more, are you, don Genaro?" I asked.

My question threw both of them into spasms of laughter. Don Genaro rolled on the ground, laughing, then lay on his stomach, and began to swim on the floor. When I saw him doing that I knew I was lost. At that moment, my body somehow became aware that I had arrived at the end. I did not know what that end was. My personal tendency to dramatize, and my previous experience with don Genaro made me believe that it might be the end of my life.

During my last visit to them, don Genaro had attempted to push me to the brink of ‘stopping the world.’ His efforts had been so bizarre and direct that don Juan himself had told me to leave. Don Genaro's demonstrations of ‘power’ were so extraordinary and so baffling that they forced me to a total re-evaluation of myself. I went home, reviewed the notes that I had taken in the very beginning of my apprenticeship, and a whole new feeling mysteriously set in on me, although I had not been fully aware of it until I saw don Genaro swimming on the floor.

The act of swimming on the floor, which was congruous with other strange and bewildering acts he had performed in front of my very eyes, started as he was lying face down. He was first laughing so hard that his body shook as in a convulsion. Then he began kicking. And finally, the movement of his legs became coordinated with a paddling movement of his arms. Don Genaro started to slide on the ground as if he were lying on a board fitted with ball bearings. He changed directions various times and covered the entire area of the front of don Juan's house, maneuvering around me and don Juan.

Don Genaro had clowned in front of me before, and every time he had done it don Juan had asserted that I had been on the brink of ‘seeing.’ My failure to ‘see’ was a result of my insistence on trying to explain every one of don Genaro's actions from a rational point of view. This time I was on guard, and when he began to swim, I did not attempt to explain or understand the event. I simply watched him. Yet I could not avoid the sensation of being dumbfounded. He was actually sliding on his stomach and chest. My eyes began to cross as I watched him. I felt a surge of apprehension. I was convinced that if I did not explain what was happening I would ‘see,’ and that thought filled me with an extraordinary anxiety. My nervous anticipation was so great that in some way I was back at the same point, locked once more in some rational endeavor.

Don Juan must have been watching me. He suddenly tapped me; I automatically turned to face him, and for an instant I took my eyes away from don Genaro. When I looked at Genaro again, he was standing by me with his head slightly tilted and his chin almost resting on my right shoulder. I had a delayed startled reaction. I looked at him for a second and then I jumped back.

His expression of feigned surprise was so comical that I laughed hysterically. I could not help being aware, however, that my laughter was unusual. My body shook with nervous spasms originating from the middle part of my stomach. Don Genaro put his hand on my stomach and the convulsion-like ripples ceased.

"This little Carlos is always so exaggerated!" he exclaimed as if he were a fastidious [* *fastidious- giving careful attention to detail; hard to please*] man.

Then he added, imitating don Juan's voice and mannerisms, "Don't you know that a warrior never laughs that way?"

His caricature of don Juan was so perfect that I laughed even harder.

Then both of them left together, and were gone for over two hours until about midday.

When they returned, they sat in the area in front of don Juan's house. They did not say a word. They seemed to be sleepy, tired, and almost absent-minded. They stayed motionless for a long time, yet they seemed to be so comfortable and relaxed. Don Juan's mouth was slightly opened, as if he were really asleep, but his hands were clasped over his lap and his thumbs moved rhythmically.

I fretted and changed sitting positions for a while, then I began to feel a soothing placidity. [* *placidity- a feeling of calmness*] I must have fallen asleep. Don Juan's chuckle woke me up. I opened my eyes. Both of them were staring at me.

"If you don't talk, you fall asleep," don Juan said, laughing.

"I'm afraid I do," I said.

Don Genaro lay on his back and began to kick his legs in the air. I thought for a moment that he was going to start his disturbing clowning again, but he went back right away to his cross-legged sitting position.

"There is something you ought to be aware of by now," don Juan said. "I call it the cubic centimeter of chance. All of us, whether or not we are warriors, have a cubic centimeter of chance that pops out in front of our eyes from time to time. The difference between an average man and a warrior is that the warrior is aware of this; and one of his tasks is to be alert, deliberately waiting, so that when his cubic centimeter pops out he has the necessary speed, the prowess to pick it up.

"Chance, good luck, personal power, or whatever you may call it, is a peculiar state of affairs. It is like a very small stick that comes out in front of us, and invites us to pluck it. Usually we are too busy, or too preoccupied, or just too stupid and lazy to realize that that is our cubic centimeter of luck. A warrior, on the other hand, is always alert and tight and has the spring-the gumption necessary to grab it."

"Is your life very tight?" don Genaro asked me abruptly.

"I think it is," I said with conviction.

"Do you think that you can pluck your cubic centimeter of luck?" don Juan asked me with a tone of incredulity. [* *incredulity- doubt about the truth of something*]

"I believe I do that all the time," I said.

"I think you are only alert about things you know," don Juan said.

"Maybe I'm kidding myself, but I do believe that nowadays I am more aware than at any other time in my life," I said and really meant it.

Don Genaro nodded his head in approval.

"Yes," he said softly, as if talking to himself. "Little Carlos is really tight, and absolutely alert."

I felt that they were humoring me. I thought that perhaps my assertion about my alleged condition of tightness may have annoyed them.

"I didn't mean to brag," I said.

Don Genaro arched his eyebrows and enlarged his nostrils. He glanced at my notebook and pretended to be writing.

"I think Carlos is tighter than ever," don Juan said to don Genaro.

"Maybe he's too tight," don Genaro snapped.

"He may very well be," don Juan conceded.

I did not know what to interject at that point so I remained quiet.

"Do you remember the time when I jammed your car?" don Juan asked casually.

His question was abrupt and unrelated to what we had been talking about. He was referring to a time when I could not start the engine of my car until he said I could.

I remarked that no one could forget such an event.

"That was nothing," don Juan asserted in a factual tone.

"Nothing at all. True, Genaro?"

"True," don Genaro said indifferently.

"What do you mean?" I said in a tone of protest. "What you did that day was something truly beyond my comprehension."

"That's not saying much," don Genaro retorted.

They both laughed loudly, and then don Juan patted me on the back.

"Genaro can do something much better than jamming your car," he went on. "True, Genaro?"

"True," don Genaro replied, puckering up his lips like a child.

"What can he do?" I asked, trying to sound unruffled.

"Genaro can take your whole car away!" don Juan exclaimed in a booming voice. Then he added in the same tone, "True, Genaro?"

"True!" don Genaro retorted in the loudest human tone I had ever heard.

I jumped involuntarily. My body was convulsed by three or four nervous spasms.

"What do you mean, he can take my whole car away?" I asked.

"What did I mean, Genaro?" don Juan asked.

"You meant that I can get into his car, turn the motor on, and drive away," don Genaro replied with unconvincing seriousness.

"Take the car away, Genaro," don Juan urged him in a joking tone.

"It's done!" don Genaro said, frowning and looking at me askew.

I noticed that as he frowned his eyebrows rippled, making the look in his eyes mischievous and penetrating.

"All right," don Juan said calmly. "Let's go down there and examine the car."

"Yes!" don Genaro echoed. "Let's go down there and examine the car."

They stood up, very slowly. For an instant I did not know what to do, but don Juan signaled me to stand up.

We began walking up the small hill in front of don Juan's house. Both of them flanked me with don Juan to my right and don Genaro to my left. They were perhaps six or seven feet ahead of me, and always within my full field of vision.

"Let's examine the car," don Genaro said again. Don Juan moved his hands as if he were spinning an invisible thread; don Genaro did likewise and repeated, "Let's examine the car." They walked with a sort of bounce. Their steps were longer than usual, and their hands moved as though they were whipping, or batting some invisible objects in front of them. I had never seen don Juan clowning like that, and I felt almost embarrassed to look at him.

We reached the hilltop, and I looked down to the area at the foot of the hill some fifty yards away where I had parked my car. My stomach contracted with a jolt. The car was not there! I ran down the hill. My car was not anywhere in sight. I experienced a moment of great confusion. I was disoriented.

My car had been parked there since I had arrived early in the morning. Perhaps half an hour before, I had come down to get a new pad of writing paper. At that time I had thought of leaving the windows open because of the excessive heat, but the number of mosquitoes and other flying insects that abounded in the area had made me change my mind. I had left the car locked as usual.

I looked all around again. I refused to believe that my car was gone. I walked to the edge of the cleared area. Don Juan and don Genaro joined me and stood by me doing exactly what I was doing, peering into the distance to see if the car was somewhere in sight. I had a moment of euphoria that gave way to a disconcerting sense of annoyance. They seemed to have noticed it and began to walk around me, moving their hands as if they were rolling dough in them.

"What do you think happened to the car, Genaro?" don Juan asked in a meek tone.

"I drove it away," don Genaro said, and made the most astounding motion of shifting gears and steering. He bent his legs as though he were sitting, and remained in that position for a few moments, obviously sustained only by the muscles of his legs. Then he shifted his weight to his right leg and stretched his left foot to mimic the action on the clutch. He made the sound of a motor with his lips; and finally, to top everything, he pretended to have hit a bump in the road and bobbed up and down, giving me the complete sensation of an inept driver that bounces without letting go of the steering wheel.

Don Genaro's pantomime [* *pantomime- a performance using gestures and body movements without words*] was stupendous. Don Juan laughed until he was out of breath. I wanted to join them in their mirth, but I was unable to relax. I felt threatened and ill at ease. An anxiety that had no precedence in my life possessed me. I felt I was burning up inside. I began kicking small rocks on the ground, and ended up hurling them with an unconscious and unpredictable fury. It was as if the wrath was actually outside of myself, and had suddenly enveloped me. Then the feeling of annoyance left me, as mysteriously as it had hit me. I took a deep breath and felt better.

I did not dare to look at don Juan. My display of anger embarrassed me, but at the same time I wanted to laugh. Don Juan came to my side, and patted me on the back. Don Genaro put his arm on my shoulder.

"It's all right," don Genaro said. "Indulge yourself. Punch yourself in the nose and bleed. Then you can get a rock and knock your teeth out. It'll feel good! And if that doesn't help, you can mash your balls with the same rock on that big boulder over there."

Don Juan giggled. I told them that I was ashamed of myself for having behaved so poorly. I did not know what had gotten into me. Don Juan said that he was sure I knew exactly what was going on, that I was pretending not to know, and that it was the act of pretending that made me angry.

Don Genaro was unusually comforting. He patted my back repeatedly.

"It happens to all of us," don Juan said.

"What do you mean by that, don Juan?" don Genaro asked. He was imitating my voice, and mocking my habit of asking don Juan questions.

Don Juan said some absurd things like, "When the world is upside down, we are right side up; but when the world is right side up, we are upside down. Now when the world and we are right side up, we think we are upside down . . . " He went on and on, talking gibberish while don Genaro mimicked my taking notes. He wrote on an invisible pad, enlarging his nostrils as he moved his hand, keeping his eyes wide open and fixed on don Juan. Don Genaro had caught on to my efforts to write without looking at my pad in order to avoid altering the natural flow of conversation. His portrayal was genuinely hilarious.

I suddenly felt very at ease, happy. Their laughter was soothing. For a moment, I let go and had a belly laugh. But then my mind entered into a new state of apprehension, confusion, and annoyance. I thought that whatever was taking place there was impossible. In fact, it was inconceivable according to the logical order by which I am accustomed to judge the world at hand. Yet, as the perceiver, I perceived that my car was not there.

The thought occurred to me, as it always had happened when don Juan had confronted me with inexplicable phenomena, that I was being tricked by ordinary means. My mind had always, under stress, involuntarily and consistently repeated the same construct.

I began to consider how many confederates don Juan and don Genaro would have needed in order to lift my car and remove it from where I had parked it. I was absolutely sure that I had compulsively locked the doors; the handbrake was on, it was in gear, and the steering wheel was locked. In order to move it they would have had to Lift it up bodily. That task would have required a labor force that I was convinced neither of them could have brought together.

Another possibility was that someone in agreement with them had broken into my car, wired it, and driven it away. To do that would have required a specialized knowledge that was beyond their means. The only other possible explanation was that perhaps they were mesmerizing me. Their movements were so novel to me and so suspicious that I entered into a spin of rationalizations. I thought that if they were hypnotizing me, then I was in a state of altered consciousness.

In my experience with don Juan I had noticed that in such states one is incapable of keeping a consistent mental record of the passage of time. There had never been an enduring order in matters of passage of time in all the states of nonordinary reality I had experienced. My conclusion was that if I kept myself alert a moment would come when I would lose my order of sequential time. As if, for example, I were looking at a mountain at a given moment, and then in my next moment of awareness I found myself looking at a valley in the opposite direction, but without remembering having turned around.

I felt that if something of that nature would happen to me I could then explain what was taking place with my car, as perhaps, a case of hypnosis. I decided that the only thing I could do was to watch every detail with excruciating thoroughness.

"Where's my car?" I asked, addressing both of them.

"Where's the car, Genaro?" don Juan asked with a look of utmost seriousness.

Don Genaro began turning over small rocks and looking underneath them. He worked feverishly over the whole flat area where I had parked my car. He actually turned over every rock. At times he would pretend to get angry, and would hurl the rock into the bushes.

Don Juan seemed to enjoy the scene beyond words. He giggled and chuckled, and was almost oblivious to my presence.

Don Genaro had just finished hurling a rock in a display of sham frustration when he came upon a good-sized boulder, the only large and heavy rock in the parking area. He attempted to turn it over, but it was too heavy and too deeply imbedded in the ground. He struggled and puffed until he was perspiring. Then he sat on the rock, and called don Juan to help him.

Don Juan turned to me with a beaming smile and said, "Come on. Let's give Genaro a hand."

"What's he doing?" I asked.

"He's looking for your car," don Juan said in a casual and factual tone.

"For heaven's sake! How can he find it under the rocks?" I protested.

"For heaven's sake, why not?" don Genaro retorted and both of them roared with laughter.

We could not budge the rock. Don Juan suggested that we go to the house, and look for a thick piece of wood to use as a lever.

On our way to the house, I told them that their acts were absurd and that whatever they were doing to me was unnecessary.

Don Genaro peered at me.

"Genaro is a very thorough man," don Juan said with a serious expression." He's as thorough and meticulous as you are. You yourself said that you never leave a stone unturned. He's doing the same."

Don Genaro patted me on the shoulder, and said that don Juan was absolutely right. Don Genaro said that, in fact, he wanted to be like me. He looked at me with an insane glint and opened his nostrils.

Don Juan clapped his hands, and threw his hat to the ground.

After a long search around the house for a thick piece of wood, don Genaro found a long and fairly thick tree trunk; a part of a house beam. He put it across his shoulders and we started back to the place where my car had been.

As we were going up the small hill, and were about to reach a bend in the trail from where I would see the flat parking area, I had a sudden insight. It occurred to me that I was going to find my car before they did, but when I looked down there was no car at the foot of the hill.

Don Juan and don Genaro must have understood what I had had in mind and ran after me, laughing uproariously.

Once we got to the bottom of the hill, they immediately went to work. I watched them for a few moments. Their acts were incomprehensible. They were not pretending that they were working, they were actually immersed in the task of turning over a boulder to see if my car was underneath. That was too much for me, and I joined them. They puffed and yelled, and don Genaro howled like a coyote. They were soaked in perspiration. I noticed how terribly strong their bodies were, especially don Juan's. Next to them, I was a flabby young man.

Very soon I was also perspiring copiously. Finally we succeeded in turning over the boulder and don Genaro examined the dirt underneath the rock with the most maddening patience and thoroughness.

"No. It isn't here," he announced.

That statement brought both of them down to the ground with laughter.

I laughed nervously. Don Juan seemed to have true spasms of pain. He covered his face, and lay down as his body shook with laughter.

"In which direction do we go now?" don Genaro asked after a long rest.

Don Juan pointed with a nod of his head.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"To look for your car!" don Juan said, and did not crack a smile.

They again flanked me as we walked into the brush. We had only covered a few yards when don Genaro signaled us to stop. He tiptoed to a round bush a few steps away, looked in the inside branches for a few moments, and said that the car was not there.

We kept on walking for a while, and then don Genaro made a gesture with his hand to be quiet. He arched his back as he stood on his toes, and extended his arms over his head. His fingers were contracted like a claw. From where I stood, don Genaro's body had the shape of a letter S. He maintained that position for an instant, and then virtually plunged headfirst on a long twig with dry leaves. He carefully lifted it up, examined it, and again remarked that the car was not there.

As we walked into the deep chaparral, he looked behind bushes. He climbed small paloverde trees to look into their foliage, only to conclude that the car was not there either.

Meanwhile I kept a most meticulous mental record of everything I touched or saw. My sequential and orderly view of the world around me was as continuous as it had always been. I touched rocks, bushes, and trees. I shifted my view from the foreground to the background by looking out of one eye, and then out of the other. By all calculations, I was walking in the chaparral as I had done scores of times during my ordinary life.

Next don Genaro lay down on his stomach, and asked us to do likewise. He rested his chin on his clasped hands. Don Juan did the same. Both of them stared at a series of small protuberances on the ground that looked like minute hills. Suddenly don Genaro made a sweeping movement with his right hand, and clasped something. He hurriedly stood up and so did don Juan. Don Genaro held his clasped hand in front of us, and signaled us to come closer and look. Then he slowly began to open his hand. When it was half open, a big black object flew away. The motion was so sudden and the flying object was so big that I jumped back and nearly lost my balance. Don Juan propped me up.

"That wasn't the car," don Genaro complained. "It was a goddamn fly. Sorry!"

Both of them scrutinized me. They were standing in front of me. They were not looking directly at me, but out of the corners of their eyes. It was a prolonged look.

"It was a fly, wasn't it?" don Genaro asked me.

"I think so," I said.

"Don't think," don Juan ordered me imperiously. "What did you see?"

"I saw something as big as a crow flying out of his hand," I said.

My statement was congruous with what I had perceived, and was not intended as a joke, but they took it as perhaps the most hilarious statement that anyone had made that day. Both of them jumped up and down and laughed until they choked.

"I think Carlos has had enough," don Juan said. His voice sounded hoarse from laughing.

Don Genaro said that he was about to find my car, that the feeling was getting hotter and hotter. Don Juan said we were in a rugged area, and that to find the car there was not a desirable thing. Don Genaro took off his hat, and rearranged the strap with a piece of string from his pouch. Then he attached his woolen belt to a yellow tassel affixed to the brim of the hat.

"I'm making a kite out of my hat," he said to me.

I watched him and I knew he was joking. I had always considered myself to be an expert on kites. When I was a child I used to make the most complex kites and I knew that the brim of the straw hat was too brittle to resist the wind. The hat's crown, on the other hand, was too deep and the wind would circulate inside it, making it impossible to lift the hat off the ground.

"You don't think it'll fly, do you?" don Juan asked me.

"I know it won't," I said.

Don Genaro was unconcerned, and finished attaching a long string to his kite-hat.

It was a windy day. Don Genaro ran downhill as don Juan held his hat. Then don Genaro pulled the string, and the darn thing actually flew.

"Look, look at the kite!" don Genaro yelled.

It bobbed a couple of times, but it remained in the air.

"Don't take your eyes off the kite," don Juan said firmly.

For a moment I felt dizzy. Looking at the kite, I had had a complete recollection of another time. It was as if I were flying a kite myself as I used to when it was windy in the hills of my home town.

For a brief moment the recollection engulfed me, and I lost my awareness of the passage of time.

I heard don Genaro yelling something. I saw the hat bobbing up and down, and then falling to the ground where my car was. It all took place with such speed that I did not have a clear picture of what had happened. I became dizzy and absent-minded. My mind held on to a very confusing image. I either saw don Genaro's hat turning into my car, or I saw the hat falling over on top of the car. I wanted to believe the latter, that don Genaro had used his hat to point at my car. Not that it really mattered; one thing was as awesome as the other, but just the same my mind hooked on that arbitrary detail in order to keep my original mental balance.

"Don't fight it," I heard don Juan saying.

I felt that something inside me was about to surface. Thoughts and images came in uncontrollable waves as if I were falling asleep. I stared at the car dumbfounded. It was sitting on a rocky flat area about a hundred feet away. It actually looked as if someone had just placed it there. I ran towards it and began to examine it.

"Goddamnit!" don Juan exclaimed. "Don't stare at the car. *Stop the world*!"

Then as in a dream I heard him yelling, "Genaro's hat! Genaro's hat!"

I looked at them. They were staring at me directly. Their eyes were piercing. I felt a pain in my stomach. I had an instantaneous headache, and got ill.

Don Juan and don Genaro looked at me curiously. I sat by the car for a while. Then, quite automatically, I unlocked the door and let don Genaro get in the back seat. Don Juan followed him and sat next to him. I thought that was strange because don Juan usually sat in the front seat.

I drove my car to don Juan's house in a sort of haze. I was not myself at all. My stomach was very upset, and the feeling of nausea demolished all my sobriety. I drove mechanically.

I heard don Juan and don Genaro in the back seat laughing and giggling like children. I heard don Juan asking me, "Are we getting closer?"

It was at that point that I took deliberate notice of the road. We were actually very close to his house.

"We're about to get there," I muttered.

They howled with laughter. They clapped their hands and slapped their thighs.

When we arrived at the house I automatically jumped out of the car and opened the door for them. Don Genaro stepped out first, and congratulated me for what he said was the nicest and smoothest ride he had ever taken in his life. Don Juan said the same. I did not pay much attention to them.

I locked my car and barely made it to the house. I heard don Juan and don Genaro roaring with laughter before I fell asleep.

## 19. Stopping the World

The next day, as soon as I woke up, I began asking don Juan questions. He had been cutting firewood in the back of his house, and don Genaro was nowhere in sight. He said that there was nothing to talk about. I pointed out that I had succeeded in remaining aloof, and had observed don Genaro's swimming on the floor without wanting or demanding any explanation whatsoever, but my restraint had not helped me to understand what was taking place. Then, after the disappearance of the car, I became automatically locked in seeking a logical explanation, but that did not help me either. I told don Juan that my insistence on finding explanations was not something that I had arbitrarily devised myself, just to be difficult, but was something so deeply ingrained in me that it overruled every other consideration.

"It's like a disease," I said.

"There are no diseases," don Juan replied calmly. "There is only indulging. And you indulge yourself in trying to explain everything. Explanations are no longer necessary in your case."

I insisted that I could function only under conditions of order and understanding. I reminded him that I had drastically changed my personality during the time of our association, and that the condition that had made that change possible was that I had been capable of explaining to myself the reasons for that change.

Don Juan laughed softly. He did not speak for a long time.

"You are very clever," he finally said. "You go back to where you have always been. This time you are finished though. You have no place to go back to. I will not explain anything to you any more. Whatever Genaro did to you yesterday, he did it to your body, so let your body decide what's what."

Don Juan's tone was friendly, but unusually detached, and that made me feel an overwhelming loneliness. I expressed my feelings of sadness. He smiled. His fingers gently clasped the top of my hand.

"We both are beings who are going to die," he said softly. "There is no more time for what we used to do. Now you must employ all the *not-doing* I have taught you, and *stop the world*."

He clasped my hand again. His touch was firm and friendly. It was like a reassurance that he was concerned, and had affection for me, and at the same time, it gave me the impression of an unwavering purpose.

"This is my gesture for you," he said, holding the grip he had on my hand for an instant. "Now you must go by yourself into those friendly mountains." He pointed with his chin to the distant range of mountains towards the southeast.

He said that I had to remain there until my body told me to quit, and then return to his house. He let me know that he did not want me to say anything, or to wait any longer by shoving me gently in the direction of my car.

"What am I supposed to do there?" I asked.

He did not answer, but looked at me, shaking his head.

"No more of that," he finally said.

Then he pointed his finger to the southeast.

"Go there," he said cuttingly.

I drove south and then east, following the roads I had always taken when driving with don Juan. I parked my car around the place where the dirt road ended, and then I hiked on a familiar trail until I reached a high plateau. I had no idea what to do there. I began to meander, looking for a resting place. Suddenly I became aware of a small area to my left. It seemed that the chemical composition of the soil was different on that spot, yet when I focused my eyes on it there was nothing visible that would account for the difference. I stood a few feet away and tried to 'feel' as don Juan had always recommended I should do.

I stayed motionless for perhaps an hour. My thoughts began to diminish by degrees until I was no longer talking to myself. I then had a sensation of annoyance. The feeling seemed to be confined to my stomach and was more acute when I faced the spot in question. I was repulsed by it, and felt compelled to move away from it. I began scanning the area with crossed eyes, and after a short walk I came upon a large flat rock. I stopped in front of it. There was nothing in particular about the rock that attracted me. I did not detect any specific color or any shine on it, and yet I liked it. My body felt good. I experienced a sensation of physical comfort and sat down for a while.

I meandered in the high plateau and the surrounding mountains all day without knowing what to do or what to expect. I came back to the flat rock at dusk. I knew that if I spent the night there I would be safe.

The next day I ventured farther east into the high mountains. By late afternoon I came to another even higher plateau. I thought I had been there before. I looked around to orient myself, but I could not recognize any of the surrounding peaks. After carefully selecting a suitable place, I sat down to rest at the edge of a barren rocky area. I felt very warm and peaceful there. I tried to pour out some food from my gourd, but it was empty. I drank some water. It was warm and stale. I thought that I had nothing else to do but to return to don Juan's house, and began to wonder whether or not I should start on my way back right away. I lay down on my stomach and rested my head on my arm. I felt uneasy and changed positions various times until I found myself facing the west.

The sun was already low. My eyes were tired. I looked down at the ground and caught sight of a large black beetle. It came out from behind a small rock pushing a ball of dung twice it's size. I followed it's movements for a long time. The insect seemed unconcerned with my presence, and kept on pushing it's load over rocks, roots, depressions, and protuberances on the ground. For all I knew, the beetle was not aware that I was there. The thought occurred to me that I could not possibly be sure that the insect was not aware of me. That thought triggered a series of rational evaluations about the nature of the insect's world as opposed to mine. The beetle and I were in the same world, and obviously the world was not the same for both of us. I became immersed in watching it, and marvelled at the gigantic strength it needed to carry it's load over rocks and down crevices.

I observed the insect for a long time, and then I became aware of the silence around me. Only the wind hissed between the branches and leaves of the chaparral. I looked up, turned to my left in a quick and involuntary fashion, and caught a glimpse of a faint shadow or a flicker on a rock a few feet away. At first I paid no attention to it, but then I realized that that flicker had been to my left. I turned again suddenly, and was able clearly to perceive a shadow on the rock. I had the weird sensation that the shadow instantly slid down to the ground, and the soil absorbed it as a blotter dries an ink blotch. A chill ran down my back. The thought crossed my mind that death was watching me and the beetle.

I looked for the insect again, but I could not find it. I thought that it must have arrived at it's destination, and then had dropped it's load into a hole in the ground. I put my face against a smooth rock.

The beetle emerged from a deep hole, and stopped a few inches away from my face. It seemed to look at me, and for a moment I felt that it became aware of my presence; perhaps as I was aware of the presence of my death. I experienced a shiver. The beetle and I were not that different after all. Death, like a shadow, was stalking both of us from behind the boulder. I had an extraordinary moment of elation. The beetle and I were on a par. Neither of us was better than the other. Our death made us equal.

My elation and joy were so overwhelming that I began to weep. Don Juan was right. He had always been right. I was living in a most mysterious world, and like everyone else, I was a most mysterious being; and yet I was no more important than a beetle. I wiped my eyes, and as I rubbed them with the back of my hand, I saw a man; or something which had the shape of a man. It was to my right about fifty yards. I sat up straight, and strained to see. The sun was almost on the horizon, and it's yellowish glow prevented me from getting a clear view. I heard a peculiar roar at that moment. It was like the sound of a distant jet plane. As I focused my attention on it, the roar increased to a prolonged sharp metallic whizzing, and then it softened until it was a mesmerizing, melodious sound. The melody was like the vibration of an electrical current. The image that came to my mind was that two electrified spheres were coming together; or two square blocks of electrified metal were rubbing against each other, and then coming to rest with a thump when they were perfectly leveled with each other. I again strained to see if I could distinguish the person that seemed to be hiding from me, but I could only detect a dark shape against the bushes. I shielded my eyes by placing my hands above them. The brilliancy of the sunlight changed at that moment, and then I realized that what I was seeing was only an optical illusion, a play of shadows and foliage.

I moved my eyes away, and I saw a coyote calmly trotting across the field. The coyote was around the spot where I thought I had seen the man. It moved about fifty yards in a southerly direction, and then it stopped, turned, and began walking towards me. I yelled a couple of times to scare it away, but it kept on coming. I had a moment of apprehension. I thought that it might be rabid, and I even considered gathering some rocks to defend myself in case of an attack. When the animal was ten to fifteen feet away I noticed that it was not agitated in any way; on the contrary, it seemed calm and unafraid. It slowed down it's gait, coming to a halt barely four or five feet from me. We looked at each other, and then the coyote came even closer. It's brown eyes were friendly and clear. I sat down on the rocks and the coyote stood almost touching me. I was dumbfounded. I had never seen a wild coyote that close, and the only thing that occurred to me at that moment was to talk to it.

I began as one would talk to a friendly dog. And then I thought that the coyote 'talked' back to me. I had the absolute certainty that it had said something. I felt confused, but I did not have time to ponder upon my feelings, because the coyote talked again. It was not that the animal was voicing words the way I am accustomed to hearing words being voiced by human beings. It was rather a feeling that it was talking, but it was not like a feeling that one has when a pet seems to communicate with it's master either. The coyote actually said something. It relayed a thought and that communication came out in something quite similar to a sentence. I had said, "How are you, little coyote?" I thought I had heard the animal respond, "I'm all right, and you?" Then the coyote repeated the sentence and I jumped to my feet. The animal did not make a single movement. It was not even startled by my sudden jump. It's eyes were still friendly and clear. It lay down on it's stomach and tilted it's head and asked, "Why are you afraid?"

I sat down facing it, and I carried on the weirdest conversation I had ever had. Finally it asked me what I was doing there, and I said I had come there to stop the world. The coyote said, "Que bueno!" and then I realized that it was a bilingual coyote. The nouns and verbs of it's sentences were in English, but the conjunctions and exclamations were in Spanish. The thought crossed my mind that I was in the presence of a Chicano coyote. I began to laugh at the absurdity of it all, and I laughed so hard that I became almost hysterical. Then the full weight of the impossibility of what was happening struck me and my mind wobbled. The coyote stood up and our eyes met. I stared fixedly into them. I felt they were pulling me and suddenly the animal became iridescent; it began to glow.

It was as if my mind were replaying the memory of another event that had taken place ten years before when under the influence of peyote I witnessed the metamorphosis of an ordinary dog into an unforgettable iridescent being. It was as though the coyote had triggered the recollection, and the memory of that previous event was summoned and became superimposed on the coyote's shape. The coyote was a fluid, liquid, luminous being. It's luminosity was dazzling I wanted to cover my eyes with my hands to protect them, but I could not move. The luminous being touched me in some undefined part of myself, and my body experienced such an exquisite indescribable warmth and well-being that it was as if the touch had made me explode. I became transfixed. I could not feel my feet, or my legs, or any part of my body, yet something was sustaining me erect.

I have no idea how long I stayed in that position. In the meantime, the luminous coyote and the hilltop where I stood melted away. I had no thoughts or feelings. Everything had been turned off, and I was floating freely.

Suddenly I felt that my body had been struck, and then it became enveloped by something that kindled me. I became aware then that the sun was shining on me. I could vaguely distinguish a distant range of mountains towards the west. The sun was almost over the horizon. I was looking directly into it and then I saw the 'lines of the world'. I actually perceived the most extraordinary profusion of fluorescent white lines which crisscrossed everything around me. For a moment I thought that I was perhaps experiencing sunlight as it was being refracted by my eyelashes. I blinked and looked again. The lines were constant, and were superimposed on, or were coming through everything in the surroundings. I turned around and examined an extraordinarily new world. The lines were visible and steady even if I looked away from the sun.

I stayed on the hilltop in a state of ecstasy for what appeared to be an endless time, yet the whole event may have lasted only a few minutes, perhaps only as long as the sun shone before it reached the horizon, but to me it seemed an endless time. I felt something warm and soothing oozing out of the world and out of my own body. I knew I had discovered a secret. It was so simple. I experienced an unknown flood of feelings. Never in my life had I had such a divine euphoria, such peace, such an encompassing grasp, and yet I could not put the discovered secret into words, or even into thoughts, but my body knew it.

Then I either fell asleep, or I fainted. When I again became aware of myself, I was lying on the rocks. I stood up. The world was as I had always seen it. It was getting dark, and I automatically started on my way back to my car.

Don Juan was alone in the house when I arrived the next morning. I asked him about don Genaro, and he said that he was somewhere in the vicinity running an errand. I immediately began to narrate to him the extraordinary experiences I had had. He listened with obvious interest.

"You have simply *stopped the world*," he commented after I had finished my account.

We remained silent for a moment, and then don Juan said that I had to thank don Genaro for helping me. He seemed to be unusually pleased with me. He patted my back repeatedly and chuckled.

"But it is inconceivable that a coyote could talk," I said.

"It wasn't talk," don Juan replied.

"What was it then?"

"Your body understood for the first time. But you failed to recognize that it was not a coyote to begin with, and that it certainly was not talking the way you and I talk."

"But the coyote really talked, don Juan!"

"Now look who is talking like an idiot. After all these years of learning, you should know better. Yesterday you *stopped the world* and you might have even *seen*. A magical being told you something, and your body was capable of understanding it because the world had collapsed."

"The world was like it is today, don Juan."

"No, it wasn't. Today the coyotes do not tell you anything, and you cannot *see* the lines of the world. Yesterday you did all that simply because something had stopped in you."

"What was the thing that stopped in me?"

"What stopped inside you yesterday was what people have been telling you the world is like. You see, people tell us from the time we are born that the world is such and such and so and so, and naturally we have no choice but to see the world the way people have been telling us it is."

We looked at each other.

"Yesterday the world became as sorcerers tell you it is," he went on. "In that world coyotes talk, and so do deer, as I once told you, and so do rattlesnakes and trees and all other living beings. But what I want you to learn is *seeing*. Perhaps you know now that *seeing* happens only when one sneaks between the worlds; the world of ordinary people and the world of sorcerers. You are now smack in the middle point between the two. Yesterday you believed the coyote talked to you. Any sorcerer who doesn't *see* would believe the same, but one who *sees* knows that to believe that is to be pinned down in the realm of sorcerers. By the same token, not to believe that coyotes talk is to be pinned down in the realm of ordinary men."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that neither the world of ordinary men nor the world of sorcerers is real?"

"They are real worlds. They could act upon you. For example, you could have asked that coyote about anything you wanted to know, and it would have been compelled to give you an answer. The only sad part is that coyotes are not reliable. They are tricksters. It is your fate not to have a dependable animal companion."

Don Juan explained that the coyote was going to be my companion for life, and that in the world of sorcerers to have a coyote friend was not a desirable state of affairs. He said that it would have been ideal for me to have talked to a rattlesnake since they were stupendous companions.

"If it were me," he added, "I would never trust a coyote. But you are different, and you may even become a coyote sorcerer."

"What is a coyote sorcerer?"

"One who draws a lot of things from his coyote brothers."

I wanted to keep on asking questions, but he made a gesture to stop me.

"You have *seen* the lines of the world," he said. "You have *seen* a luminous being. You are now almost ready to meet the ally. Of course you know that the man you saw in the bushes was the ally. You heard it's roar like the sound of a jet plane. He'll be waiting for you at the edge of a plain, a plain I will take you to myself."

We were quiet for a long time. Don Juan had his hands clasped over his stomach. His thumbs moved almost imperceptibly.

"Genaro will also have to go with us to that valley," he said all of a sudden. "He is the one who has helped you to *stop the world*."

Don Juan looked at me with piercing eyes.

"I will tell you one more thing," he said and laughed. "It really does matter now. Genaro never moved your car from the world of ordinary men the other day. He simply forced you to look at the world like sorcerers do, and your car was not in that world. Genaro wanted to soften your certainty. His clowning told your body about the absurdity of trying to understand everything. And when he flew his kite you almost saw. You found your car, and you were in both worlds. The reason we nearly split our guts laughing was because you really thought you were driving us back from where you thought you had found your car."

"But how did he force me to see the world as sorcerers do?"

"I was with him. We both know that world. Once one knows that world, all one needs to bring it about is to use that extra ring of power I have told you sorcerers have. Genaro can do that as easily as snapping his fingers. He kept you busy turning over rocks in order to distract your thoughts and allow your body to *see*."

I told him that the events of the last three days had done some irreparable damage to my idea of the world. I said that during the ten years I had been associated with him I had never been so moved, not even during the times I had ingested psychotropic plants.

"Power plants are only an aid," don Juan said. "The real thing is when the body realizes that it can *see*. Only then is one capable of knowing that the world we look at every day is only a description. My intent has been to show you that. Unfortunately, you have very little time left before the ally tackles you."

"Does the ally have to tackle me?"

"There is no way to avoid it. In order to *see*, one must learn the way sorcerers look at the world and thus the ally has to be summoned, and once that is done it comes."

"Couldn't you have taught me to *see* without summoning the ally?"

"No. In order to see one must learn to look at the world in some other fashion, and the only other fashion I know is the way of a sorcerer."

## 20. Journey to Ixtlan

Don Genaro returned around noon, and at don Juan's suggestion I drove the three of us down to the range of mountains where I had been the day before. We hiked on the same trail I had taken, but instead of stopping in the high plateau as I had done we kept on climbing until we reached the top of the lower range of mountains. Then we began to descend into a flat valley.

We stopped to rest on top of a high hill. Don Genaro picked the spot. I automatically sat down as I have always done in their company with don Juan to my right and don Genaro to my left, making a triangle.

The desert chaparral had acquired an exquisite moist sheen. It was brilliantly green after a short spring shower.

"Genaro is going to tell you something," don Juan said to me all of a sudden. "He is going to tell you the story of his first encounter with his ally. Isn't that so, Genaro?"

There was a tone of coaxing in don Juan's voice. Don Genaro looked at me and contracted his lips until his mouth looked like a round hole. He curled his tongue against his palate, and opened and closed his mouth as if he were having spasms.

Don Juan looked at him and laughed loudly. I did not know what to make out of it.

"What's he doing?" I asked don Juan.

"He's a hen!" he said.

"A hen?"

"Look, look at his mouth. That's the hen's ass and it is about to lay an egg."

The spasms of don Genaro's mouth seemed to increase. He had a strange, crazy look in his eyes. His mouth opened up as if the spasms were dilating the round hole. He made a croaking sound in his throat, folded his arms over his chest with his hands bent inward, and then unceremoniously spat out some phlegm.

"Darn it! It wasn't an egg," he said with a concerned look on his face.

The posture of his body and the expression on his face were so ludicrous that I could not help laughing.

"Now that Genaro almost laid an egg, maybe he will tell you about his first encounter with his ally," don Juan insisted.

"Maybe," don Genaro said, uninterested.

I pleaded with him to tell me.

Don Genaro stood up, stretched his arms and back. His bones made a cracking sound. Then he sat down again.

"I was young when I first tackled my ally," he finally said. "I remember that it was in the early afternoon. I had been in the fields since daybreak and I was returning to my house. Suddenly from behind a bush, the ally came out and blocked my way. He had been waiting for me and was inviting me to wrestle him. I began to turn around in order to leave him alone but the thought came to my mind that I was strong enough to tackle him. I was afraid though. A chill ran up my spine and my neck became stiff as a board. By the way, that is always the sign that you're ready, I mean, when your neck gets hard."

He opened up his shirt and showed me his back. He stiffened the muscles of his neck, back, and arms. I noticed the superb quality of his musculature. It was as if the memory of the encounter had activated every muscle in his torso.

"In such a situation," he continued, "you must always close your mouth."

He turned to don Juan and said, "Isn't that so?"

"Yes," don Juan said calmly. "The jolt that one gets from grabbing an ally is so great that one might bite off one's tongue or knock one's teeth out. One's body must be straight and well-grounded, and the feet must grab the ground."

Don Genaro stood up and showed me the proper position: his body slightly bent at the knees, his arms hanging at his sides with the fingers curled gently. He seemed relaxed and yet firmly set on the ground. He remained in that position for an instant, and when I thought he was going to sit down he suddenly lunged forward in one stupendous leap as if he had springs attached to his heels. His movement was so sudden that I fell down on my back; but as I fell I had the clear impression that don Genaro had grabbed a man, or something which had the shape of a man.

I sat up again. Don Genaro was still maintaining a tremendous tension all over his body. Then he relaxed his muscles abruptly and went back to where he had been sitting before and sat down.

"Carlos just *saw* your ally right now," don Juan remarked casually, "but he's still weak and fell down."

"Did you?" don Genaro asked in a naive tone and enlarged his nostrils.

Don Juan assured him that I had 'seen' it.

Don Genaro leaped forward again with such a force that I fell on my side. He executed his jump so fast that I really could not tell how he had sprung to his feet from a sitting position in order to lunge forward.

Both of them laughed loudly and then don Genaro changed his laughter into a howling indistinguishable from a coyote's.

"Don't think that you have to jump as well as Genaro in order to grab your ally," don Juan said in a cautioning tone. "Genaro jumps so well because he has his ally to help him. All you have to do is to be firmly grounded in order to sustain the impact. You have to stand just like Genaro did before he jumped, then you have to leap forward and grab the ally."

"He's got to kiss his medallion first," don Genaro interjected.

Don Juan, with feigned severity, said that I had no medallions.

"What about his notebooks?" don Genaro insisted. "He's got to do something with his notebooks— put them down somewhere before he jumps— or maybe he'll use his notebooks to beat the ally."

"I'll be darned!" don Juan said with seemingly genuine surprise. "I have never thought of that. I bet it'll be the first time an ally is beaten down to the ground with notebooks."

When don Juan's laughter and don Genaro's coyote howlings subsided we were all in a very fine mood.

"What happened when you grabbed your ally, don Genaro?" I asked.

"It was a powerful jolt," don Genaro said after a moment's hesitation. He seemed to have been putting his thoughts in order.

"Never would I have imagined it was going to be like that," he went on. "It was something, something, something . . . like nothing I can tell. After I grabbed it we began to spin. The ally made me twirl, but I didn't let go. We spun through the air with such speed and force that I couldn't see any more. Everything was foggy. The spinning went on, and on, and on. Suddenly I felt that I was standing on the ground again. I looked at myself. The ally had not killed me. I was in one piece. I was myself! I knew then that I had succeeded. At long last I had an ally. I jumped up and down with delight. What a feeling! What a feeling it was!

"Then I looked around to find out where I was. The surroundings were unknown to me. I thought that the ally must have taken me through the air and dumped me somewhere very far from the place where we started to spin. I oriented myself. I thought that my home must be towards the east, so I began to walk in that direction. It was still early. The encounter with the ally had not taken too long. Very soon I found a trail and then I saw a bunch of men and women coming towards me. They were Indians. I thought they were Mazatec Indians. They surrounded me and asked me where I was going. 'I'm going home to Ixtlan,' I said to them. 'Are you lost?' someone asked. 'I am,' I said. 'Why?' 'Because Ixtlan is not that way. Ixtlan is in the opposite direction. We ourselves are going there,' someone else said. 'Join us!' they all said. 'We have food!'"

Don Genaro stopped talking and looked at me as if he were waiting for me to ask a question.

"Well, what happened?" I asked. "Did you join them?"

"No, I didn't," he said. "Because they were not real. I knew it right away the minute they came to me. There was something in their voices, in their friendliness that gave them away; especially when they asked me to join them. So I ran away. They called me and begged me to come back. Their pleas became haunting, but I kept on running away from them."

"Who were they?" I asked.

"People," don Genaro replied cuttingly. "Except that they were not real."

"They were like apparitions," don Juan explained. "Like phantoms."

"After walking for a while," don Genaro went on, "I became more confident. I knew that Ixtlan was in the direction I was going. And then I saw two men coming down the trail towards me. They also seemed to be Mazatec Indians. They had a donkey loaded with firewood. They went by me and mumbled, 'Good afternoon.'

"'Good afternoon!' I said and kept on walking. They did not pay any attention to me and went their way. I slowed down my gait and casually turned around to look at them. They were walking away unconcerned with me. They seemed to be real. I ran after them and yelled, 'Wait, wait!'

"They held their donkey and stood on either side of the animal, as if they were protecting the load.

"'I am lost in these mountains,' I said to them. 'Which way is Ixtlan?' They pointed in the direction they were going. 'You're very far,' one of them said. 'It is on the other side of those mountains. It'll take you four or five days to get there.' Then they turned around and kept on walking. I felt that those were real Indians and I begged them to let me join them.

"We walked together for a while and then one of them got his bundle of food and offered me some. I froze on the spot. There was something terribly strange in the way he offered me his food. My body felt frightened, so I jumped back and began to run away. They both said that I would die in the mountains if I did not go with them and tried to coax me to join them. Their pleas were also very haunting, but I ran away from them with all my might.

"I kept on walking. I knew then that I was on the right way to Ixtlan and that those phantoms were trying to lure me out of my way.

"I encountered eight of them. They must have known that my determination was unshakable. They stood by the road and looked at me with pleading eyes. Most of them did not say a word. The women among them, however, were more daring and pleaded with me. Some of them even displayed food and other goods that they were supposed to be selling, like innocent merchants by the side of the road. I did not stop nor did I look at them.

"By late afternoon I came to a valley that I seemed to recognize. It was somehow familiar. I thought I had been there before, but if that was so I was actually south of Ixtlan. I began to look for landmarks to properly orient myself and correct my route when I saw a little Indian boy tending some goats. He was perhaps seven years old and was dressed the way I had been when I was his age. In fact, he reminded me of myself tending my father's two goats.

"I watched him for some time. The boy was talking to himself, the same way I used to, then he would talk to his goats. From what I knew about tending goats he was really good at it. He was thorough and careful. He didn't pamper his goats, but he wasn't cruel to them either.

"I decided to call him. When I talked to him in a loud voice he jumped up and ran away to a ledge, and peeked at me from behind some rocks. He seemed to be ready to run for his life. I liked him. He seemed to be afraid and yet he still found time to herd his goats out of my sight.

"I talked to him for a long time; I said that I was lost and that I did not know my way to Ixtlan. I asked the name of the place where we were and he said it was the place I had thought it was. That made me very happy. I realized I was no longer lost and pondered on the power that my ally had in order to transport my whole body that far in less time than it takes to bat an eyelash.

"I thanked the boy and began to walk away. He casually came out of his hiding place and herded his goats into an almost unnoticeable trail. The trail seemed to lead down into the valley. I called the boy and he did not run away. I walked towards him and he jumped into the bushes when I came too close. I commended him on being so cautious and began to ask him some questions.

"'Where does this trail lead?' I asked. 'Down,' he said. "'Where do you live?' 'Down there.' 'Are there lots of houses down there?' 'No, just one.' 'Where are the other houses?' The boy pointed towards the other side of the valley with indifference, the way boys his age do. Then he began to go down the trail with his goats.

"'Wait,' I said to the boy. 'I'm very tired and hungry. Take me to your folks.'

"'I have no folks,' the little boy said and that jolted me. I don't know why but his voice made me hesitate. The boy, noticing my hesitation, stopped and turned to me. 'There's nobody at my house,' he said. 'My uncle is gone and his wife went to the fields. There is plenty of food. Plenty. Come with me.'

"I almost felt sad. The boy was also a phantom. The tone of his voice and his eagerness had betrayed him. The phantoms were out there to get me but I wasn't afraid. I was still numb from my encounter with the ally. I wanted to get mad at the ally or at the phantoms but somehow I couldn't get angry like I used to, so I gave up trying. Then I wanted to get sad, because I had liked that little boy, but I couldn't, so I gave up on that too.

"Suddenly I realized that I had an ally and that there was nothing that the phantoms could do to me. I followed the boy down the trail. Other phantoms lurched out swiftly and tried to make me trip over the precipices, but my will was stronger than they were. They must have sensed that, because they stopped pestering me. After a while they simply stood by my path. From time to time some of them would leap towards me, but I stopped them with my will. And then they quit bothering me altogether."

Don Genaro remained quiet for a long time.

Don Juan looked at me.

"What happened after that, don Genaro?" I asked.

"I kept on walking," he said factually.

It seemed that he had finished his tale and there was nothing he wanted to add.

I asked him why was the fact that they offered him food a clue to their being phantoms.

He did not answer. I probed further and asked whether it was a custom among Mazatec Indians to deny that they had any food, or to be heavily concerned with matters of food.

He said that the tone of their voices, their eagerness to lure him out, and the manner in which the phantoms talked about food were the clues— and that he knew that because his ally was helping him. He asserted that by himself alone he would have never noticed those peculiarities.

"Were those phantoms allies, don Genaro?" I asked.

"No. They were people."

"People? But you said they were phantoms."

"I said that they were no longer real. After my encounter with the ally nothing was real any more."

We were quiet for a long time.

"What was the final outcome of that experience, don Genaro?" I asked.

"Final outcome?"

"I mean, when and how did you finally reach Ixtlan?"

Both of them broke into laughter at once.

"So that's the final outcome for you," don Juan remarked. "Let's put it this way then. There was no final outcome to Genaro's journey. There will never be any final outcome. Genaro is still on his way to Ixtlan!"

Don Genaro glanced at me with piercing eyes, and then turned his head to look into the distance, towards the south.

"I will never reach Ixtlan," he said.

His voice was firm but soft, almost a murmur.

"Yet in my feelings . . . in my feelings sometimes I think I'm just one step from reaching it. Yet I never will. In my journey I don't even find the familiar landmarks I used to know. Nothing is any longer the same."

Don Juan and don Genaro looked at each other. There was something so sad about their look.

"In my journey to Ixtlan I find only phantom travelers," he said softly.

I looked at don Juan. I had not understood what don Genaro had meant.

"Everyone Genaro finds on his way to Ixtlan is only an ephemeral [* *ephemeral- short lived; lasting a very short time*] being," don Juan explained. "Take you, for instance. You are a phantom. Your feelings and your eagerness are those of people. That's why he says that he encounters only phantom travelers on his journey to Ixtlan."

I suddenly realized that don Genaro's journey was a metaphor.

"Your journey to Ixtlan is not real then," I said.

"It is real!" don Genaro interjected. "The travelers are not real."

He pointed to don Juan with a nod of his head and said emphatically, "This is the only one who is real. The world is real only when I am with this one."

Don Juan smiled.

"Genaro was telling his story to you," don Juan said, "because yesterday you *stopped the world*, and he thinks that you also saw, but you are such a fool that you don't know it yourself. I keep on telling him that you are weird, and that sooner or later you will *see*. At any rate, in your next meeting with the ally, if there is a next time for you, you will have to wrestle with it and tame it. If you survive the shock, which I'm sure you will since you're strong and have been living like a warrior, you will find yourself alive in an unknown land. Then, as is natural to all of us, the first thing you will want to do is to start on your way back to Los Angeles. But there is no way to go back to Los Angeles. What you left there is lost forever. By then, of course, you will be a sorcerer, but that's no help. At a time like that what's important to all of us is the fact that everything we love or hate or wish for has been left behind. Yet the feelings in a man do not die or change, and the sorcerer starts on his way back home knowing that he will never reach it; knowing that no power on earth, not even his death, will deliver him to the place, the things, the people he loved. That's what Genaro told you."

Don Juan's explanation was like a catalyst; the full impact of don Genaro's story hit me suddenly when I began to link the tale to my own life.

"What about the people I love?" I asked don Juan. "What would happen to them?"

"They would all be left behind," he said.

"But is there no way I could retrieve them? Could I rescue them and take them with me?"

"No. Your ally will spin you, alone, into unknown worlds."

"But I could go back to Los Angeles, couldn't I? I could take the bus or a plane and go there. Los Angeles would still be there, wouldn't it?"

"Sure," don Juan said, laughing. "And so will Manteca and Temecula and Tucson."

"And Tecate," don Genaro added with great seriousness.

"And Piedras Negras and Tranquitas," don Juan said, smiling.

Don Genaro added more names and so did don Juan; and they became involved in enumerating a series of the most hilarious and unbelievable names of cities and towns.

"Spinning with your ally will change your idea of the world," don Juan said. "That idea is everything, and when that changes, the world itself changes."

He reminded me that I had read a poem to him once and wanted me to recite it. He cued me with a few words of it, and I recalled having read to him some poems of Juan Ramon Jimenez. The particular one he had in mind was entitled 'El Viaje Definitivo' (The Definitive Journey). I recited it.

*...and I will leave. But the birds will stay, singing:*

*and my garden will stay, with it's green tree,*

*with it's water well.*

*Many afternoons the skies will be blue and placid,*

*and the bells in the belfry will chime,*

*as they are chiming this very afternoon.*

*The people who have loved me will pass away,* *and the town will burst anew every year.*

*But my spirit will always wander nostalgic*

*in the same recondite corner of my flowery garden.*

"That is the feeling Genaro is talking about," don Juan said. "In order to be a sorcerer a man must be passionate. A passionate man has earthly belongings and things dear to him— if nothing else, just the path where he walks.

"What Genaro told you in his story is precisely that. Genaro left his passion in Ixtlan: his home, his people, all the things he cared for. And now he wanders around in his feelings; and sometimes, as he says, he almost reaches Ixtlan. All of us have that in common. For Genaro it is Ixtlan; for you it will be Los Angeles; for me . . . "

I did not want don Juan to tell me about himself. He paused as if he had read my mind.

Genaro sighed and paraphrased the first lines of the poem.

"I left. And the birds stayed, singing."

For an instant I sensed a wave of agony and an indescribable loneliness engulfing the three of us. I looked at don Genaro and I knew that, being a passionate man, he must have had so many ties of the heart, so many things he cared for and left behind. I had the clear sensation that at that moment the power of his recollection was about to landslide and that don Genaro was on the verge of weeping.

I hurriedly moved my eyes away. Don Genaro's passion, his supreme loneliness, made me cry.

I looked at don Juan. He was gazing at me.

"Only as a warrior can one survive the path of knowledge," he said. "Because the art of a warrior is to balance the terror of being a man with the wonder of being a man."

I gazed at the two of them, each in turn. Their eyes were clear and peaceful. They had summoned a wave of overwhelming nostalgia, and when they seemed to be on the verge of exploding into passionate tears, they held back the tidal wave. For an instant I think I *saw*. I saw the loneliness of man as a gigantic wave which had been frozen in front of me, held back by the invisible wall of a metaphor.

My sadness was so overwhelming that I felt euphoric. I embraced them.

Don Genaro smiled and stood up. Don Juan also stood up and gently put his hand on my shoulder.

"We are going to leave you here," he said. "Do what you think is proper. The ally will be waiting for you at the edge of that plain."

He pointed to a dark valley in the distance.

"If you don't feel that this is your time yet, don't keep your appointment," he went on. "Nothing is gained by forcing the issue. If you want to survive you must be crystal clear and deadly sure of yourself."

Don Juan walked away without looking at me, but don Genaro turned a couple of times, and urged me with a wink and a movement of his head to go forward. I looked at them until they disappeared in the distance, and then I walked to my car and drove away. I knew that it was not my time, yet.

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# 04 - TALES OF POWER

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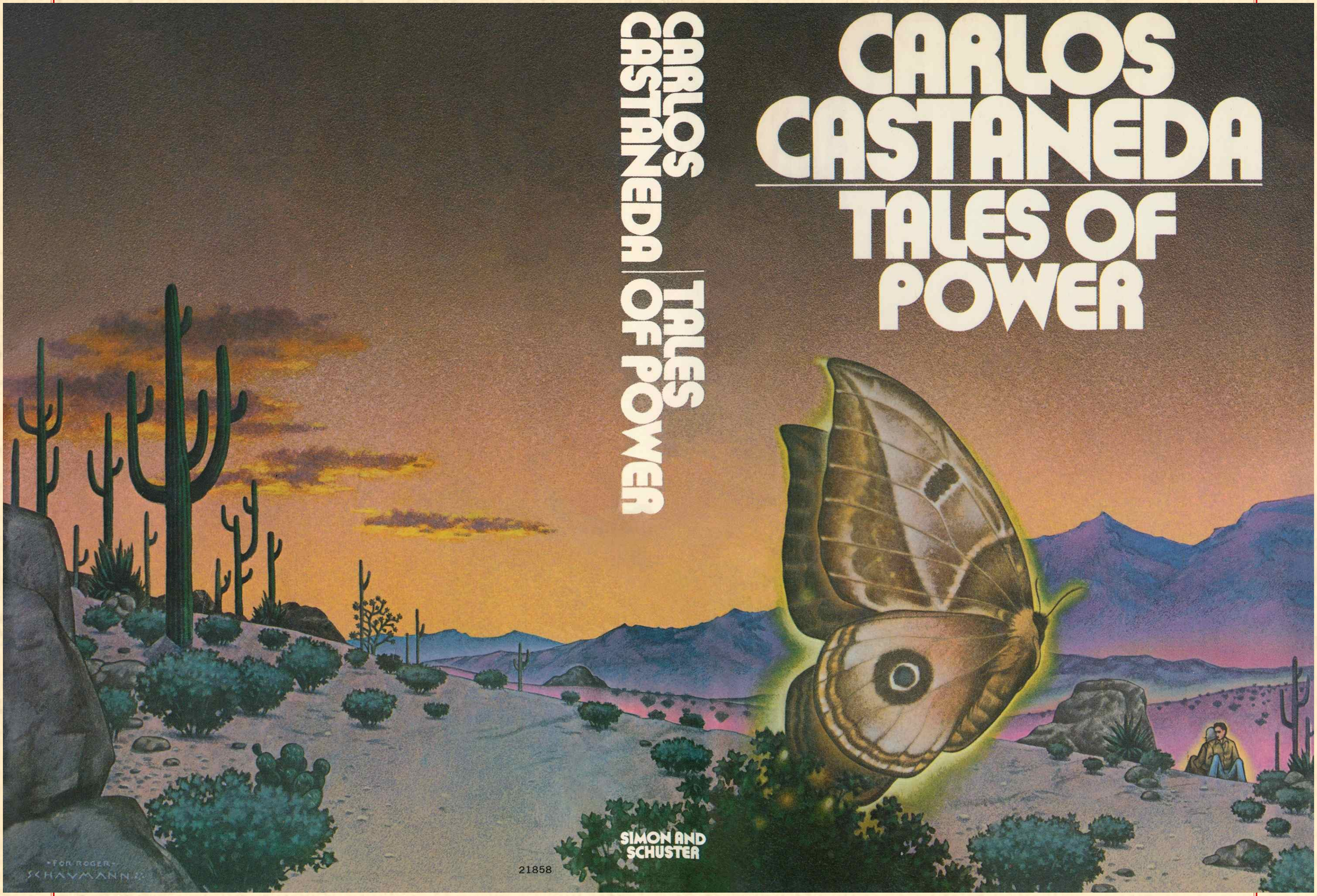
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*The conditions of a solitary bird are five:*
*The first, that it flies to the highest point;*
*the second, that it does not suffer for company,*
*not even of it's own kind;*
*the third, that it aims it's beak to the skies;*
*the fourth, that it does not have a definitive color;*
*the fifth, that it sings softly.*

— San Juan de la Cruz, *Dichos de Luz y Amor*

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# PART ONE – A Witness to Acts of Power

## 1. An Appointment with Knowledge

I had not seen don Juan for several months. It was the autumn of 1971. I had the certainty that he was at don Genaro's house in central Mexico and I made the necessary preparations for a six- or seven-day drive to visit him. On the second day of my journey, however, on an impulse, I stopped at don Juan's place in Sonora in the mid-afternoon. I parked my car, and walked a short distance to the house. To my surprise, I found him there.

"Don Juan! I didn't expect to find you here," I said.

He laughed; my surprise seemed to delight him. He was sitting on an empty milk crate by the front door. He appeared to have been waiting for me. There was an air of accomplishment in the ease with which he greeted me. He took off his hat, and flourished it in a comical gesture. Then he put it on again, and gave me a military salute. He was leaning against the wall, sitting on the crate as if it were a saddle.

"Sit down, sit down," he said in a jovial tone. "Good to see you again."

"I was going to go all the way to central Mexico for nothing," I said. "And then I would've had to drive back to Los Angeles. Finding you here has saved me days and days of driving."

"Somehow you would've found me," he said in a mysterious tone, "but let's say that you owe me the six days that you would've needed to get there, days which you should use in doing something more interesting than pressing down on the gas pedal of your car."

There was something engaging in don Juan's smile. His warmth was contagious.

"Where's your writing gear?" he asked.

I told him that I had left it in the car. He said that I looked unnatural without it, and made me go back and get it.

"I have finished writing a book," I said.

He gave me a long, strange look that produced an itching in the pit of my stomach. It was as if he were pushing my middle section with a soft object. I felt like I was going to get ill, but then he turned his head to the side and I regained my original feeling of well-being.

I wanted to talk about my book but he made a gesture that indicated that he did not want me to say anything about it. He smiled. His mood was light and charming, and he immediately engaged me in a casual conversation about people and current events. Finally I managed to steer the conversation onto the topic of my interest. I began by mentioning that I had reviewed my early notes, and had realized that he had been giving me a detailed description of the sorcerers' world from the beginning of our association. In light of what he had said to me in those stages, I had begun to question the role of hallucinogenic plants.

"Why did you make me take those power plants so many times?" I asked.

He laughed, and mumbled very softly. "Cause you're dumb."

I heard him the first time but I wanted to make sure, and pretended I had not understood.

"I beg your pardon?" I asked.

"You know what I said," he replied and stood up.

He tapped me on the head as he walked by me.

"You're rather slow," he said. "And there was no other way to jolt you."

"So none of that was absolutely necessary?" I asked.

"It was, in your case. There are other types of people, however, that do not seem to need them."

He stood next to me, staring at the top of the bushes by the left side of his house. Then he sat down again, and talked about Eligio, his other apprentice. He said that Eligio had taken psychotropic plants only once since he became his apprentice, and yet he was perhaps even more advanced than I was.

"To be sensitive is a natural condition of certain people," he said. "You are not. But neither am I. In the final analysis sensitivity matters very little."

"What's the thing that matters then?" I asked.

He seemed to search for an appropriate answer.

"What matters is that a warrior be impeccable," he finally said. "But that's only a way of talking, a way of beating around the bush. You have already accomplished some tasks of sorcery and I believe this is the time to mention the source of everything that matters. So I will say that what matters to a warrior is arriving at the totality of oneself."

"What is the totality of oneself, don Juan?"

"I said that I was only going to mention it. There are still a lot of loose ends in your life that you must tie together before we can talk about the totality of oneself."

He ended our conversation there. He made a gesture with his hands to signal that he wanted me to stop talking. Apparently there was something or somebody nearby. He tilted his head to the left, as if to listen. I could see the whites of his eyes as he focused on the bushes beyond the house to his left. He listened attentively for a few moments and then stood up. He came to me and whispered in my ear that we had to leave the house and go for a walk.

"Is there something wrong?" I asked, also in a whisper.

"No. Nothing is wrong," he said. "Everything is rather right."

He led me into the desert chaparral. We walked for perhaps half an hour, and then came to a small circular area free from vegetation; a spot about twelve feet in diameter where the reddish dirt was packed and perfectly flat. There were no signs, however, that machinery had cleared and flattened the area. Don Juan sat down in the center of it, facing the southeast. He pointed to a place about five feet away from him and asked me to sit there, facing him.

"What are we going to do here?" I asked.

"We have an appointment here tonight," he replied.

He scanned the surroundings with a quick glance, turning around on his seat until he was again facing the southeast.

His movements had alarmed me. I asked him who we had the appointment with.

"With knowledge," he said. "Let's say that knowledge is prowling around here."

He did not let me hook on to that cryptic answer. He quickly changed the subject. In a jovial tone he urged me to be natural, that is to take notes, and talk as we would have done at his house.

What was most pressing on my mind at that time was the vivid sensation I had had six months before of 'talking' to a coyote. That event meant to me that for the first time I had been capable of visualizing, or apprehending through my senses, and in sober consciousness, the sorcerers' description of the world; a description in which communicating with animals through speech was a matter of course.

"We're not going to engage ourselves in dwelling on any experience of that nature," don Juan said upon hearing my question. "It is not advisable for you to indulge in focusing your attention on past events. We may touch on them, but only in reference."

"Why is that so, don Juan?"

"You don't have enough personal power yet to seek the sorcerers' explanation."

"Then there is a sorcerers' explanation!"

"Certainly. Sorcerers are men. We're creatures of thought. We seek clarifications."

"I was under the impression that my great flaw was to seek explanations."

"No. Your flaw is to seek convenient explanations, explanations that fit you and your world. What I object to is your reasonableness. A sorcerer explains things in his world too, but he's not as stiff as you."

"How can I arrive at the sorcerers' explanation?"

"By accumulating personal power. Personal power will make you slide with great ease into the sorcerers' explanation. The explanation is not what you would call an explanation. Nevertheless, it makes the world and it's mysteries, if not clear, at least less awesome. That should be the essence of an explanation. But that is not what you seek. You're after the reflection of your ideas."

I lost my momentum to ask questions. But his smile urged me to keep on talking. Another issue of great importance to me was his friend don Genaro and the extraordinary effect that his actions had had on me. Every time I had come into contact with him, I had experienced the most outlandish sensory distortions.

Don Juan laughed when I voiced my question.

"Genaro is stupendous," he said. "But for the time being, there is no sense in talking about him or about what he does to you. Again, you don't have enough personal power to unravel that topic. Wait until you have it, then we will talk."

"What if I never have it?"

"If you never have it, we'll never talk."

"At the rate I'm going, will I ever have enough of it?" I asked.

"That's up to you," he replied. "I have given you all the information necessary. Now it's your responsibility to gain enough personal power to tip the scales."

"You're talking in metaphors," I said. "Give it to me straight. Tell me exactly what I should do. If you have already told me, let's say that I've forgotten it."

Don Juan chuckled and lay down, putting his arms behind his head.

"You know exactly what you need," he said.

I told him that sometimes I thought I knew, hut that most of the time I had no self-confidence.

"I'm afraid that you are confusing issues," he said. "The self-confidence of the warrior is not the self-confidence of the average man. The average man seeks certainty in the eyes of the onlooker and calls that self-confidence. The warrior seeks impeccability in his own eyes and calls that humbleness. The average man is hooked to his fellow men, while the warrior is hooked only to himself. Perhaps you are chasing rainbows. You're after the self-confidence of the average man, when you should be after the humbleness of a warrior. The difference between the two is remarkable. Self-confidence entails knowing something for sure; humbleness entails being impeccable in one's actions and feelings."

"I've been trying to live in accordance with your suggestions," I said. "I may not be the best, but I'm the best of myself. Is that impeccability?"

"No. You must do better than that. You must push yourself beyond your limits, all the time."

"But that would be insane, don Juan. No one can do that."

"There are lots of things that you do now which would have seemed insane to you ten years ago. Those things themselves did not change, but your idea of yourself changed; what was impossible before is perfectly possible now, and perhaps your total success in changing yourself is only a matter of time. In this affair, the only possible course that a warrior has is to act consistently and without reservations. You know enough of the warrior's way to act accordingly, but your old habits and routines stand in your way."

I understood what he meant.

"Do you think that writing is one of the old habits I should change?" I asked. "Should I destroy my new manuscript?"

He did not answer. He stood up, and turned to look at the edge of the chaparral.

I told him that I had received letters from various people telling me that it was wrong to write about my apprenticeship. They had cited as a precedent that the masters of Eastern esoteric doctrines demanded absolute secrecy about their teachings.

"Perhaps those masters are just indulging in being masters," don Juan said without looking at me. "I'm not a master. I'm only a warrior, so I really don't know what a master feels like."

"But maybe I'm revealing things I shouldn't, don Juan."

"It doesn't matter what one reveals or what one keeps to oneself," he said. "Everything we do, everything we are, rests on our personal power. If we have enough of it, one word uttered to us might be sufficient to change the course of our lives. But if we don't have enough personal power, the most magnificent piece of wisdom can be revealed to us and that revelation won't make a damn bit of difference."

He then lowered his voice as if he were disclosing a confidential matter to me.

"I'm going to utter perhaps the greatest piece of knowledge anyone can voice," he said. "Let me see what you can do with it.

"Do you know that at this very moment you are surrounded by eternity? And do you know that you can use that eternity, if you so desire?"

After a long pause, during which he urged me with a subtle movement of his eyes to make a statement, I said that I did not understand what he was talking about.

"There! Eternity is there!" he said, pointing to the horizon.

Then he pointed to the zenith. "Or there, or perhaps we can say that eternity is like this." He extended both arms to point to the east and west.

We looked at each other. His eyes held a question.

"What do you say to that?" he asked, coaxing me to ponder upon his words.

I did not know what to say.

"Do you know that you can extend yourself forever in any of the directions I have pointed to?" he went on. "Do you know that one moment can be eternity? This is not a riddle; it's a fact, but only if you mount that moment and use it to take the totality of yourself forever in any direction."

He stared at me.

"You didn't have this knowledge before," he said, smiling. "Now you do. I have revealed it to you. But it doesn't make a bit of difference because you don't have enough personal power to utilize my revelation. Yet if you did have enough power, my words alone would serve as the means for you to round up the totality of yourself, and get the crucial part of it out of the boundaries in which it is contained."

He came to my side and poked my chest with his fingers. It was a very light tap.

"These are the boundaries I'm talking about," he said. "One can get out of them. We are a feeling, an awareness encased here."

He slapped my shoulders with both hands. My pad and pencil fell to the ground. Don Juan put his foot on the pad and stared at me, and then laughed.

I asked him if he minded my taking notes. He said no in a reassuring tone and moved his foot away.

"We are luminous beings," he said, shaking his head rhythmically. "And for a luminous being only personal power matters. But if you ask me what personal power is, I have to tell you that my explanation will not explain it."

Don Juan looked at the western horizon and said that there were still a few hours of daylight left.

"We have to be here for a long time," he explained. "So, we either sit quietly or we talk. It is not natural for you to be silent, so let's keep on talking. This spot is a power place and it must become used to us before nightfall. You must sit here as naturally as possible without fear or impatience. It seems that the easiest way for you to relax is to take notes, so write to your heart's content.

"And now, suppose you tell me about your *dreaming*."

His sudden shift caught me unprepared. He repeated his request. There was a great deal to say about it. “Dreaming” entailed cultivating a peculiar control over one's dreams to the extent that the experiences undergone in them and those lived in one's waking hours acquired the same pragmatic [* *pragmatic—guided by practical experience and observation rather than theory*] valence. The sorcerers' allegation was that under the impact of “dreaming,” the ordinary criteria to differentiate a dream from reality become inoperative.

Don Juan's praxis [* *praxis—translating an idea into action*] of “dreaming” was an exercise that consisted of finding one's hands in a dream. In other words, one had to deliberately dream that one was looking for and could find one's hands in a dream by simply dreaming that one lifted one's hands to the level of the eyes.

After years of unsuccessful attempts, I had finally accomplished the task. Looking at it in retrospect, it had become evident to me that I had succeeded only after I had gained a degree of control over the world of my everyday life.

Don Juan wanted to know the salient points. I began telling him that the difficulty of setting up the command to look at my hands seemed to be, quite often, insurmountable. He had warned me that the early stage of the preparatory facet, which he called “setting up dreaming,” consisted of a deadly game that one's mind played with itself, and that some part of myself was going to do everything it could to prevent the fulfillment of my task. That could include, don Juan had said, plunging me into a loss of meaning, melancholy, or even a suicidal depression. I did not go that far, however. My experience was rather on the light, comical side. Nonetheless, the result was equally frustrating. Every time I was about to look at my hands in a dream something extraordinary would happen. I would begin to fly, or my dream would turn into a nightmare; or it would simply become a very pleasant experience of bodily excitation. Everything in the dream would extend far beyond the 'normal' in matters of vividness, and therefore be terribly absorbing. My original intention of observing my hands was always forgotten in light of the new situation.

One night, quite unexpectedly, I found my hands in my dreams. I dreamt that I was walking on an unknown street in a foreign city, and suddenly I lifted up my hands and placed them in front of my face. It was as if something within myself had given up, and had permitted me to watch the backs of my hands.

Don Juan's instructions had been that as soon as the sight of my hands would begin to dissolve or change into something else, I had to shift my view from my hands to any other element in the surroundings of my dream. In that particular dream I shifted my view to a building at the end of the street. When the sight of the building began to dissipate I focused my attention on the other elements of the surroundings in my dream. The end result was an incredibly clear composite picture of a deserted street in some unknown foreign city.

Don Juan made me continue with my account of other experiences in “dreaming.” We talked for a long time.

At the end of my report Don Juan stood up and went to the bushes. I also stood up. I was nervous. It was an unwarranted sensation since there was nothing precipitating fear or concern. Don Juan returned shortly. He noticed my agitation.

"Calm down," he said, holding my arm gently.

He made me sit down and put my notebook on my lap. He coaxed me to write. His argument was that I should not disturb the power place with unnecessary feelings of fear or hesitation.

"Why do I get so nervous?" I asked.

"It's natural," he said. "Something in you is threatened by your activities in *dreaming*. As long as you did not think about those activities, you were all right. But now that you have revealed your actions you're about to faint.

"Each warrior has his own way of *dreaming*. Each way is different. The only thing which we all have in common is that we play tricks in order to force ourselves to abandon the quest. The countermeasure is to persist in spite of all the barriers and disappointments."

He asked me then if I was capable of selecting topics for *dreaming*. I said that I did not have the faintest idea of how to do that.

"The sorcerers' explanation of how to select a topic for *dreaming*," he said, "is that a warrior chooses the topic by deliberately holding an image in his mind while he shuts off his internal dialogue. In other words, if he is capable of not talking to himself for a moment, and then holds the image or the thought of what he wants in *dreaming*, even if only for an instant, then the desired topic will come to him. I'm sure you've done that, although you were not aware of it."

There was a long pause, and then don Juan began to sniff the air. It was as if he were cleaning his nose. He exhaled three or four times through his nostrils with great force. The muscles of his abdomen contracted in spasms which he controlled by taking in short gasps of air.

"We won't talk about *dreaming* any more," he said. "You might become obsessed. If one is to succeed in anything, the success must come gently; with a great deal of effort, but with no stress or obsession."

He stood up and walked to the edge of the bushes. He leaned forward and peered into the foliage. He seemed to be examining something in the leaves without getting too close to them.

"What are you doing?" I asked, unable to contain my curiosity.

He turned to me, smiled, and raised his brow.

"The bushes are filled with strange things," he said as he sat down again.

His tone was so casual that it scared me more than if he had let out a sudden yell. My notebook and pencil fell from my hands. He laughed and mimicked me and said that my exaggerated reactions were one of the loose ends that still existed in my life.

I wanted to raise a point, but he would not let me talk.

"There's only a bit of daylight left," he said. "There are other things we ought to touch upon before the twilight sets in."

He then added, that judging by my production in *dreaming*, I must have learned how to stop my internal dialogue at will. I told him that I had.

At the beginning of our association don Juan had delineated [* *delineate—describe in vivid detail*] another procedure: walking for long stretches without focusing the eyes on anything. His recommendation had been to not look at anything directly; but rather, to slightly cross the eyes and keep a peripheral view of everything that presented itself to the eyes. He had insisted, although I had not understood at the time, that if one kept one's unfocused eyes at a point just above the horizon, it was possible to notice, all at once, everything in almost the total 180-degree range in front of one's eyes. He had assured me that that exercise was the only way of shutting off the internal dialogue. He used to ask me for reports on my progress, and then he stopped inquiring about it.

I told don Juan that I had practiced the technique for years without noticing any change, but I had expected none anyway. One day, however, I had the shocking realization that I had just walked for about ten minutes without having said a single word to myself.

I mentioned to don Juan that on that occasion I also became cognizant [* *cognizant—having realization or understanding*] that stopping the internal dialogue involved more than merely curtailing the words I said to myself. My entire thought processes had stopped, and I had felt I was practically suspended, floating. A sensation of panic had ensued from that awareness and I had to resume my internal dialogue as an antidote.

"I've told you that the internal dialogue is what grounds us," don Juan said. "The world is such and such, or so and so, only because we talk to ourselves about it's being such and such or so and so."

Don Juan explained that the passageway into the world of sorcerers opens up after the warrior has learned to shut off the internal dialogue.

"To change our idea of the world is the crux [* *crux—the most important point*] of sorcery," he said. "And stopping the internal dialogue is the only way to accomplish it. The rest is just padding. Now you're in the position to know that nothing of what you've seen or done, with the exception of stopping the internal dialogue, could by itself have changed anything in you, or in your idea of the world. The provision is, of course, that that change should not be deranged. Now you can understand why a teacher doesn't clamp down on his apprentice. That would only breed obsession and morbidity."

He asked for details of other experiences I had had in shutting off the internal dialogue. I recounted everything that I could remember.

We talked until it became dark and I could no longer take notes in a comfortable manner. I had to pay attention to my writing, and that altered my concentration. Don Juan became aware of it and began to laugh. He pointed out that I had accomplished another sorcery task; writing without concentrating. The moment he said it, I realized that I really did not pay attention to the act of taking notes. It seemed to be a separate activity I had nothing to do with. I felt odd. Don Juan asked me to sit by him in the center of the circle. He said it was too dark, and I was no longer safe sitting so close to the edge of the chaparral. I felt a chill up my back and jumped to his side.

He made me face the southeast, and asked me to command myself to be silent and without thoughts. I could not do it at first and had a moment of impatience. Don Juan turned his back to me and told me to lean on his shoulder for support. He said that once I had quieted down my thoughts, I should keep my eyes open, facing the bushes towards the southeast. In a mysterious tone he added that he was setting up a problem for me, and that if I resolved it I would be ready for another facet of the sorcerers' world.

I posed a weak question about the nature of the problem. He chuckled softly. I waited for his answer; and then something in me was turned off. I felt I was suspended. My ears seemed to unplug and a myriad of noises in the chaparral became audible. There were so many that I could not distinguish them individually. I felt I was falling asleep and then all at once something caught my attention. It was not something which involved my thought processes. It was not a vision or a feature of the environment either, yet my awareness had been engaged by something. I was fully awake. My eyes were focused on a spot on the edge of the chaparral, but I was not looking, or thinking, or talking to myself. My feelings were clear bodily sensations. They did not need words. I felt I was rushing through something indefinite. Perhaps what would have ordinarily been my thoughts were rushing. At any rate, I had the sensation that I had been caught in a landslide, and something was avalanching with me at the crest. I felt the rush in my stomach. Something was pulling me into the chaparral.

I could distinguish the dark mass of the bushes in front of me. It was not, however, an undifferentiated darkness as it would ordinarily be. I could see every individual bush as if I were looking at them in a dark twilight. They seemed to be moving. The mass of their foliage looked like black skirts flowing towards me as if they were being blown by the wind, but there was no wind. I became absorbed in their mesmerizing movements. It was a pulsating ripple that seemed to draw them nearer and nearer to me. And then I noticed a lighter silhouette which seemed to be superimposed on the dark shapes of the bushes. I focused my eyes on a spot to the side of the lighter silhouette, and I could make out a chartreuse glow on it. Then I looked at it without focusing, and I had the certainty that the lighter silhouette was a man hiding in the underbrush.

I was, at that moment, in a most peculiar state of awareness. I was cognizant of the surroundings and of the mental processes that the surroundings engendered in myself, yet I was not thinking as I ordinarily think.

For instance, when I realized that the silhouette superimposed on the bushes was a man, I recalled another occasion in the desert. I had noticed then, while don Genaro and I were walking in the chaparral at night, that a man was hiding in the bushes behind us. But the instant I had attempted to explain the phenomenon rationally, I lost sight of the man. This time, however, I felt I had the upper hand, and I refused to explain or to think anything at all. For a moment I had the impression that I could hold the man and force him to remain where he was. I then experienced a strange pain in the pit of my stomach. Something seemed to rip inside me, and I could not hold the muscles of my midsection tense any longer. At the very moment I let go, the dark shape of an enormous bird, or some sort of flying animal, lurched at me from the chaparral. It was as if the shape of the man had turned into the shape of a bird. I had the clear conscious perception of fear. I gasped and then let out a loud yell and fell on my back.

Don Juan helped me up. His face was very close to mine. He was laughing.

"What was that?" I shouted.

He hushed me, putting his hand over my mouth. He put his lips to my ear, and whispered that we had to leave the area in a calm and collected fashion, as if nothing had happened.

We walked side by side. His pace was relaxed and even. A couple of times he turned around quickly. I did the same, and twice I caught sight of a dark mass that seemed to be following us. I heard a loud eerie shriek behind me. I experienced a moment of sheer terror. Ripples ran through the muscles of my stomach. They came in spasms and grew in intensity until they simply forced my body to run.

The only way of talking about my reaction has to be in don Juan's terminology; and thus I can say that my body, due to the fright I was experiencing, was capable of executing what he had called “the gait of power,” a technique he had taught me years before, consisting of running in the darkness without tripping or hurting oneself in any way.

I was not fully aware of what I had done, or how I had done it. Suddenly I found myself again at don Juan's house. Apparently he had also run, and we had arrived at the same time. He lit his kerosene lantern, hung it from a beam in the ceiling, and casually asked me to sit down and relax.

I jogged on the same spot for a while until my nervousness became more manageable. Then I sat down. He forcefully ordered me to act as if nothing had happened, and handed me my notebook. I had not realized that in my haste to leave the bushes I had dropped it.

"What happened out there, don Juan?" I finally asked.

"You had an appointment with knowledge," he said, pointing with a movement of his chin to the dark edge of the desert chaparral. "I took you there because I caught a glimpse of knowledge prowling around the house earlier. You might say that knowledge knew that you were coming and was waiting for you. Rather than meeting it here, I felt it was proper to meet it on a power spot. Then I set up a test to see if you had enough personal power to isolate it from the rest of the things around us. You did fine."

"Wait a minute!" I protested. "I saw the silhouette of a man hiding behind a bush, and then I saw a huge bird."

"You didn't see a man!" he said emphatically. "Neither did you see a bird. The silhouette in the bushes and what flew to us was a moth. If you want to be accurate in sorcerers' terms, but very ridiculous in your own terms, you could say that tonight you had an appointment with a moth. Knowledge is a moth."

He looked at me piercingly. The light of the lantern created strange shadows on his face. I moved my eyes away.

"Perhaps you'll have enough personal power to unravel that mystery tonight," he said. "If not tonight, perhaps tomorrow. Remember, you still owe me six days."

Don Juan stood up and walked to the kitchen in the back of the house. He took the lantern and set it against the wall on the short round stump that he used as a bench. We sat down on the floor opposite each other, and served ourselves some beans and meat from a pot that he had placed in front of us. We ate in silence.

He gave me furtive glances from time to time, and seemed on the verge of laughing. His eyes were like two slits. When he looked at me he would open them a bit and the moistness of the corneas reflected the light of the lantern. It was as if he were using the light to create a mirror reflection. He played with it, shaking his head almost imperceptibly every time he focused his eyes on me. The effect was a fascinating quiver of light. I became aware of his maneuvers after he had executed them a couple of times. I was convinced that he was acting with a definite purpose in mind. I felt compelled to ask him about it.

"I have an ulterior [* *ulterior—beyond what is openly revealed; kept in the background or deliberately concealed*] reason," he said reassuringly. "I'm soothing you with my eyes. You don't seem to be getting more nervous, do you?"

I had to admit that I felt quite at ease. The steady flicker in his eyes was not menacing, and it had not scared or annoyed me in any way.

"How do you soothe me with your eyes?" I asked.

He repeated the imperceptible shake of his head. The corneas of his eyes were indeed reflecting the light of the kerosene lantern.

"Try to do it yourself," he said casually as he gave himself another serving of food. "You can soothe yourself."

I tried to shake my head; my movements were awkward.

"You won't soothe yourself bobbing your head like that," he said and laughed. "You'll give yourself a headache instead. The secret is not in the head shake but in the feeling that comes to the eyes from the area below the stomach. This is what makes the head shake."

He rubbed his umbilical region.

After I had finished eating I slouched against a pile of wood and some burlap sacks. I tried to imitate his head shake. Don Juan seemed to be enjoying himself immensely. He giggled and slapped his thighs.

Then a sudden noise interrupted his laughter. I heard a strange deep sound, like tapping on wood, that came from the chaparral. Don Juan jutted his chin, signaling me to remain alert.

"That's the little moth calling you," he said in an unemotional tone.

I jumped to my feet. The sound ceased instantaneously. I looked at don Juan for an explanation. He made a comical gesture of helplessness, shrugging his shoulders.

"You haven't fulfilled your appointment yet," he added.

I told him that I felt unworthy, and that perhaps I should go home and come back when I felt stronger.

"You're talking nonsense," he snapped. "A warrior takes his lot, whatever it may be, and accepts it in ultimate humbleness. He accepts in humbleness what he is, not as grounds for regret, but as a living challenge.

"It takes time for every one of us to understand that point and fully live it. I, for instance, hated the mere mention of the word 'humbleness.' I'm an Indian and we Indians have always been humble, and have done nothing else but lower our heads. I thought humbleness was not in the warrior's way. I was wrong! I know now that the humbleness of a warrior is not the humbleness of a beggar. The warrior lowers his head to no one, but at the same time he doesn't permit anyone to lower his head to him. The beggar, on the other hand, falls to his knees at the drop of a hat and scrapes the floor for anyone he deems to be higher; but at the same time, he demands that someone lower than him scrape the floor for him.

"That's why I told you earlier today that I didn't understand what masters felt like. I know only the humbleness of a warrior, and that will never permit me to be anyone's master."

We were quiet for a moment. His words had caused me a profound agitation. I was moved by them and at the same time I felt concerned with what I had witnessed in the chaparral. My conscious assessment was that don Juan was holding out on me, and that he must have known what was really taking place.

I was involved in those deliberations when the same strange tapping noise jolted me out of my thoughts. Don Juan smiled and then began to chuckle.

"You like the humbleness of a beggar," he said softly. "You bow your head to reason."

"I always think that I'm being tricked," I said. "That's the crux of my problem."

"You're right. You are being tricked," he retorted with a disarming smile. "That cannot be your problem. The real crux of the matter is that you feel that I am deliberately lying to you, am I correct?"

"Yes. There is something in myself that doesn't let me believe that what's taking place is real."

"You're right again. Nothing of what is taking place is real."

"What do you mean by that, don Juan?"

"Things are real only after one has learned to agree on their realness. What took place this evening, for instance, cannot possibly be real to you because no one could agree with you about it."

"Do you mean that you didn't see what happened?"

"Of course I did. But I don't count. I am the one who's lying to you, remember?"

Don Juan laughed until he coughed and choked. His laughter was friendly even though he was making fun of me.

"Don't pay too much attention to all my gibberish," he said reassuringly. "I'm just trying to relax you, and I know that you feel at home only when you're muddled up."

His expression was deliberately comical and we both laughed. I told him that what he had just said made me feel more afraid than ever.

"You're afraid of me?" he asked.

"Not of you, but of what you represent."

"I represent the warrior's freedom. Are you afraid of that?"

"No. But I'm afraid of the awesomeness of your knowledge. There is no solace for me, no haven to go to."

"You're again confusing issues. Solace, haven, fear, all of them are moods that you have learned without ever questioning their value. As one can see, the black magicians have already engaged all your allegiance."

"Who are the black magicians, don Juan?"

"Our fellow men are the black magicians. And since you are with them, you too are a black magician. Think for a moment. Can you deviate from the path that they've lined up for you? No. Your thoughts and your actions are fixed forever in their terms. That is slavery. I, on the other hand, brought you freedom. Freedom is expensive, but the price is not impossible. So, fear your captors- your masters. Don't waste your time and your power fearing me."

I knew that he was right, and yet, in spite of my genuine agreement with him, I also knew that my lifelong habits would unavoidably make me stick to my old path. I did indeed feel like a slave.

After a long silence don Juan asked me if I had enough strength for another bout with knowledge.

"Do you mean with the moth?" I asked half in jest.

His body contorted with laughter. It was as if I had just told him the funniest joke in the world.

"What do you really mean when you say that knowledge is a moth?" I asked.

"I have no other meanings," he replied. "A moth is a moth. I thought that by now, with all your accomplishments, you would have had enough power to *see*. You caught sight of a man instead and that was not true *seeing*."

From the beginning of my apprenticeship, don Juan had depicted the concept of *seeing* as a special capacity that one could develop and which would allow one to apprehend the “ultimate” nature of things.

Over the years of our association I had developed a notion that what he meant by “seeing” was an intuitive grasp of things, or the capacity to understand something at once, or perhaps the ability to *see* through human interactions and discover covert meanings and motives.

"I should say that tonight, when you faced the moth, you were half looking and half *seeing*," don Juan proceeded. "In that state, although you were not altogether your usual self, you were still capable of being fully aware in order to operate your knowledge of the world."

Don Juan paused and looked at me. I did not know what to say at first.

"How was I operating my knowledge of the world?" I asked.

"Your knowledge of the world told you that in the bushes one can only find animals prowling or men hiding behind the foliage. You held that thought, and naturally you had to find ways to make the world conform to that thought."

"But I wasn't thinking at all, don Juan."

"Let's not call it thinking then. It is rather the habit of having the world always conform to our thoughts. When it doesn't, we simply make it conform. Moths as large as a man cannot be even a thought, therefore, for you, what was in the bushes had to be a man.

"The same thing happened with the coyote. Your old habits decided the nature of that encounter too. Something took place between you and the coyote, but it wasn't talk. I have been in the same quandary myself. I've told you that once I talked with a deer; now you've talked to a coyote, but neither you nor I will ever know what really took place at those times."

"What are you telling me, don Juan?"

"When the sorcerers' explanation became clear to me, it was too late to know what the deer did to me. I said that we talked, but that wasn't so. To say that we had a conversation is only a way of arranging it so I can talk about it. The deer and I did something, but at the time it was taking place I needed to make the world conform to my ideas; just like you did. I had been talking all my life, just like you, therefore my habits prevailed and were extended to the deer. When the deer came to me, and did whatever it did, I was forced to understand it as talking."

"Is this the sorcerers' explanation?"

"No. This is my explanation for you. But it is not opposed to the sorcerers' explanation."

His statement threw me into a state of great intellectual excitation. For a while I forgot the prowling moth, or even to take notes. I tried to rephrase his statements, and we involved ourselves in a long discussion about the reflexive nature of our world. The world, according to don Juan, had to conform to it's description; that is, the description reflected itself.

Another point in his elucidation [* *elucidation—an act of explaining that serves to clear up and cast light on*] was that we had learned to relate ourselves to our description of the world in terms of what he called 'habits.' I introduced what I thought was a more engulfing term, intentionality- the property of human consciousness whereby an object is referred to, or is intended.

Our conversation engendered a most interesting speculation. Examined in light of don Juan's explanation, my 'talk' with the coyote acquired a new character. I had indeed 'intended' the dialogue since I have never known another avenue of intentional communication. I had also succeeded in conforming to the description that communication takes place through dialogue, and thus I made the description reflect itself.

I had a moment of great elation. Don Juan laughed and said that to be so moved by words was another aspect of my foolery. He made a comical gesture of talking without sounds.

"All of us go through the same shenanigans," he said after a long pause. "The only way to overcome them is to persist in acting like a warrior. The rest comes of itself and by itself."

"What is the rest, don Juan?"

"Knowledge and power. Men of knowledge have both. And yet none of them could tell how they got to have them, except that they had kept on acting like warriors and at a given moment everything changed."

He looked at me. He seemed undecided. Then he stood up, and said that I had no other recourse than to keep my appointment with knowledge.

I felt a shiver. My heart began to pound fast. I got up. Don Juan moved around me as if he were examining my body from every possible angle. He signaled me to sit down and keep on writing.

"If you get too frightened you won't be able to keep your appointment," he said. "A warrior must be calm and collected, and must never lose his grip."

"I'm really scared," I said. "Moth or whatever, there is something prowling around out there in the bushes."

"Of course there is!" he exclaimed. "My objection is that you insist on thinking that it is a man, just like you insist on thinking that you talked with a coyote."

A part of me fully understood his point. There was, however, another aspect of myself that would not let go, and in spite of the evidence clung steadfast to “reason.”

I told don Juan that his explanation did not satisfy my senses, although I was in complete intellectual agreement with it.

"That's the flaw with words," he said in an assuring tone. "They always force us to feel enlightened, but when we turn around to face the world they always fail us, and we end up facing the world as we always have, without enlightenment. For this reason, a sorcerer seeks to act rather than to talk, and to this effect he gets a new description of the world—a new description where talking is not that important, and where new acts have new reflections."

He sat down by me and gazed into my eyes, and asked me to voice what I had really “seen” in the chaparral.

I was confronted at the moment with an absorbing inconsistency. I had seen the dark shape of a man, but I had also seen that shape turn into a bird. I had, therefore, witnessed more than my reason would allow me to consider possible. But rather than discarding my reason altogether, something in myself had selected parts of my experience, such as the size and general contour of the dark shape, and held them as reasonable possibilities, while it discarded other parts, such as the dark shape turning into a bird. And thus I had become convinced that I had seen a man.

Don Juan roared with laughter when I expressed my quandary. He said that sooner or later the sorcerers' explanation would come to my rescue, and everything would then be perfectly clear without having to be reasonable or unreasonable.

"In the meantime all I can do for you is to guarantee that that was not a man," he said.

Don Juan's gaze became quite unnerving. My body shivered involuntarily. He made me feel embarrassed and nervous.

"I'm looking for marks on your body," he explained. "You may not know it, but this evening you had quite a bout out there."

"What kind of marks are you looking for?"

"Not actual physical marks on your body, but signs, indications in your luminous fibers, areas of brightness. We are luminous beings, and everything we are, or everything we feel, shows in our fibers. Humans have a brightness peculiar only to them. That's the only way to tell them apart from other luminous living beings.

"If you would have *seen* tonight, you would have noticed that the shape in the bushes was not a luminous living being."

I wanted to ask more but he put his hand on my mouth and hushed me. He then put his mouth to my ear, and whispered that I should listen, and try to hear a soft rustling; the gentle muffled steps of a moth on the dry leaves and branches on the ground.

I could not hear anything. Don Juan stood up abruptly, picked up the lantern, and said that we were going to sit under the *ramada* by the front door. Rather than going through the room and out the front door, he led me through the back and around the house on the edge of the chaparral. He explained that it was essential to make our presence obvious. We half circled around the house on the left side. Don Juan's pace was extremely slow. His steps were weak and vacillating. His arm shook as he held the lantern.

I asked him if there was something wrong with him. He winked at me and whispered that the big moth that was prowling around had an appointment with a young man, and that the slow gait of a feeble old man was an obvious way of showing who was the appointee.

When we finally arrived at the front of the house, don Juan hooked the lantern on a beam and made me sit with my back against the wall. He sat to my right.

"We're going to sit here," he said, "and you are going to write and talk to me in a very normal manner. The moth that lurched at you today is around; in the bushes. After a while it'll come closer to look at you. That's why I've put the lantern on a beam right above you. The light will guide the moth to find you. When it gets to the edge of the bushes, it will call you. It is a very special sound. The sound by itself may help you."

"What kind of sound is it, don Juan?"

"It is a song. A haunting call that moths produce. Ordinarily it cannot be heard, but the moth out there in the bushes is a rare moth. You will hear it's call clearly; and providing that you are impeccable, it will remain with you for the rest of your life."

"What is it going to help me with?"

"Tonight you're going to try to finish what you've started earlier. *Seeing* happens only when the warrior is capable of stopping the internal dialogue.

"Today out there in the bushes you stopped your talk at will, and you s*aw*. What you *saw* was not clear. You thought that it was a man. I say it was a moth. Neither of us is correct, but that's because we have to talk. I still have the upper hand because I *see* better than you, and because I'm familiar with the sorcerers' explanation. So I know, although it's not altogether accurate, that the shape you *saw* tonight was a moth.

"And now you're going to remain silent and thoughtless, and let that little moth come to you again."

I could hardly take notes. Don Juan laughed and urged me to keep on writing as if nothing bothered me. He touched my arm and said that writing was the best protective shield that I had.

"We've never talked about moths," he went on. "The time was not right until now. As you already know, your spirit was unbalanced. To counteract that I taught you to live the warrior's way. Well, a warrior starts off with the certainty that his spirit is off balance. Then by living in full control and awareness, but without hurry or compulsion, he does his ultimate best to gain this balance.

"In your case, as in the case of every man, your imbalance was due to the sum total of all your actions. But now your spirit seems to be in the proper light to talk about moths."

"How did you know that this was the right time to talk about moths?"

"I caught a glimpse of the moth prowling around when you arrived. It was the first time it was friendly and open. I had *seen* it before in the mountains around Genaro's house, but only as a menacing figure reflecting your lack of order."

I heard a strange sound at that moment. It was like a muffled creaking of a branch rubbing against another, or like the sputtering of a small motor heard from a distance. It changed scales, like a musical tone, creating an eerie rhythm. Then it stopped.

"That was the moth," don Juan said. "Perhaps you've already noticed that, although the light of the lantern is bright enough to attract moths, there isn't a single one flying around it."

I had not paid attention to it, but once don Juan made me aware of it, I also noticed an incredible silence in the desert around the house.

"Don't get jumpy," he said calmly. "There is nothing in this world that a warrior cannot account for. You see, a warrior considers himself already dead, so there is nothing for him to lose. The worst has already happened to him, therefore he's clear and calm. Judging him by his acts, or by his words, one would never suspect that he has witnessed everything."

Don Juan's words, and above all, his mood, were very soothing to me. I told him that in my day-to-day life I no longer experienced the obsessive fear I used to, but that my body entered into convulsions of fright at the thought of what was out there in the dark.

"Out there, there is only knowledge," he said in a factual tone. "Knowledge is frightening, true; but if a warrior accepts the frightening nature of knowledge he cancels out it's awesomeness."

The strange sputtering noise happened again. It seemed closer and louder. I listened carefully. The more attention I paid to it, the more difficult it was to determine it's nature. It did not seem to be the call of a bird or the cry of a land animal. The tone of each sputter was rich and deep. Some were produced in a low key. Others in a high one. They had a rhythm and a specific duration. Some were long. I heard them like a single unit of sound. Others were short and happened in a cluster, like the staccato sound of a machine gun.

"The moths are the heralds, or, better yet, the guardians of eternity," don Juan said after the sound had stopped. "For some reason, or for no reason at all, they are the depositories of the gold dust of eternity."

The metaphor was foreign to me. I asked him to explain it.

"The moths carry a dust on their wings," he said. "A dark gold dust. That dust is the dust of knowledge."

His explanation had made the metaphor even more obscure. I vacillated [* *vacillate—be undecided about something; waver between conflicting positions or courses*] for a moment, trying to find the best way of wording my question. But he began to talk again.

"Knowledge is a most peculiar affair," he said, "especially for a warrior. Knowledge for a warrior is something that comes at once, engulfs him, and passes on."

"What does knowledge have to do with the dust on the wings of moths?" I asked after a long pause.

"Knowledge comes floating like specks of gold dust, the same dust that covers the wings of moths. So, for a warrior, knowledge is like taking a shower, or being rained on by specks of dark gold dust."

In the most polite manner I was capable of, I mentioned that his explanations had confused me even more. He laughed and assured me that he was making perfect sense, except that my reason would not allow me to be at ease.

"The moths have been the intimate friends and helpers of sorcerers from time immemorial," he said. "I had not touched upon this subject before because of your lack of preparation."

"But how can the dust on their wings be knowledge?"

"You'll see."

He put his hand over my notebook, and told me to close my eyes, and become silent and without thoughts. He said that the call of the moth in the chaparral was going to aid me. If I paid attention to it, it would tell me of imminent events. He stressed that he did not know how the communication between the moth and myself was going to be established. Neither did he know what the terms of the communication would be. He urged me to feel at ease and confident, and trust my personal power.

After an initial period of impatience and nervousness I succeeded in becoming silent. My thoughts diminished in number until my mind was perfectly blank. The noises of the desert chaparral seemed to have been turned on as I became more calm.

The strange sound that don Juan said was made by a moth occurred again. It registered as a feeling in my body and not as a thought in my mind. It occurred to me that it was not threatening or malevolent at all. It was sweet and simple. It was like a child's call. It brought back the memory of a little boy that I once knew. The long sounds reminded me of his round blond head; the short staccato sounds of his laughter. The most anguishing feeling oppressed me, and yet there were no thoughts in my mind; I felt the anguish in my body. I could no longer remain sitting and slid to the floor on my side. My sadness was so intense that I began to think. I assessed my pain and sorrow, and suddenly found myself in the midst of an internal debate about the little boy. The sputtering sound had ceased. My eyes were closed.

I heard don Juan standing up, and then I felt him helping me to sit up. I did not want to speak. He did not say a word. I heard him moving by me. I opened my eyes; he had knelt in front of me and was examining my face; holding the lantern close to me. He ordered me to put my hands over my stomach. He stood up, went to the kitchen, and brought me some water. He splashed some on my face and gave me the rest to drink.

He sat down next to me and handed me my notes. I told him that the sound had involved me in the most painful reverie.

"You are indulging beyond your limits," he said dryly.

He seemed to immerse himself in thought as if he were searching for an appropriate suggestion to make.

"The problem for tonight is *seeing* people," he finally said. "First you must stop your internal dialogue. Then you must bring up the image of the person that you want to *see,* any thought that one holds in mind in a state of silence is properly a command since there are no other thoughts to compete with it. Tonight, the moth in the bushes wants to help you, so it will sing for you. It's song will bring the golden specks, and then you will *see* the person you've selected."

I wanted to have more details, but he made an abrupt gesture and signaled me to proceed.

After struggling for a few minutes to stop my internal dialogue, I was thoroughly silent. And then I deliberately held the brief thought of a friend of mine. I kept my eyes closed for what I believed to be just an instant, and then I became aware that someone was shaking me by the shoulders. It was a slow realization. I opened my eyes and found myself lying on my left side. I had apparently fallen asleep so deeply that I did not remember having slumped to the ground. Don Juan helped me to sit up again. He was laughing. He imitated my snoring and said that if he had not witnessed it himself he would not believe that anyone could fall asleep so fast. He said that it was a treat for him to be around me whenever I had to do something that my reason did not understand. He pushed my notebook away from me, and said that we had to start all over.

I followed the necessary steps. The strange sputtering sound happened again. This time, however, it did not come from the chaparral; rather, it seemed to happen inside of me as if my lips, or legs, or arms were producing it. The sound soon engulfed me. I felt like soft balls were being sputtered out from or against me. It was a soothing, exquisite feeling of being bombarded by heavy cotton puffs. Suddenly I heard a door blown open by a gust of wind and I was thinking again. I thought that I had ruined another chance. I opened my eyes and found myself in my room. The objects on my desk were as I had left them. The door was open; there was a strong wind outside. The thought crossed my mind that I should check the water heater. I then heard a rattling on the sliding windows that I had put up myself and which did not fit well on the window frame. It was a furious rattling as if someone wanted to enter. I experienced a jolt of fright. I stood up from my chair. I felt something pulling me. I screamed.

Don Juan was shaking me by the shoulders. I excitedly gave him an account of my vision. It had been so vivid that I was shivering. I felt that I had just been at my desk, in my full corporeal form.

Don Juan shook his head in disbelief, and said that I was a genius in tricking myself. He did not seem impressed by what I had done. He discarded it flatly and ordered me to start again.

I then heard the mysterious sound again. It came to me, as don Juan had suggested, in the form of a rain of golden specks. I did not feel that they were flat specks or flakes, as he had described them, but rather spherical bubbles. They floated towards me. One of them burst open and revealed a scene to me. It was as if it had stopped in front of my eyes and opened up; disclosing a strange object. It looked like a mushroom. I was definitely looking at it, and what I was experiencing was not a dream. The mushroomlike object remained unchanged within my field of “vision,” and then it popped as though the light that was shining on it had been turned off. An interminable darkness followed it. I felt a tremor, a very unsettling jolt, and then I had the abrupt realization that I was being shaken. All at once my senses were turned on. Don Juan was shaking me vigorously and I was looking at him. I must have just opened my eyes at that moment.

He sprinkled water on my face. The coldness of the water was very appealing. After a moment's pause he wanted to know what had happened.

I recounted every detail of my vision.

"But what did I *see*?" I asked.

"Your friend," he retorted.

I laughed and patiently explained that I had “seen” a mushroomlike figure. Although I had no criteria to judge dimensions, I had had the feeling that it was about a foot long.

Don Juan emphasized that feeling was all that counted. He said that my feelings were the gauge that assessed the state of being of the subject that I was *seeing*.

"From your description, and your feelings, I must conclude that your friend must be a very fine man," he said.

I was baffled by his words.

He said that the mushroomlike formation was the essential shape of human beings when a sorcerer was *seeing* them from far away. But when a sorcerer was directly facing the person he was *seeing*, the human quality was shown as an egglike cluster of luminous fibers.

"You were not facing your friend," he said. "Therefore, he appeared like a mushroom."

"Why is that so, don Juan?"

"No one knows. That simply is the way men appear in this specific type of *seeing*."

He added that every feature of the mushroomlike formation had a special significance, but that it was impossible for a beginner to accurately interpret that significance.

I then had an intriguing recollection. Some years before while I was in a state of nonordinary reality elicited by the intake of psychotropic plants, I had experienced or perceived, while I was looking at a water stream, that a cluster of bubbles floated towards me; engulfing me. The golden bubbles I had just envisioned had floated and engulfed me in exactly the same manner. In fact, I could say that both clusters had had the same structure and the same pattern.

Don Juan listened to my commentaries without interest.

"Don't waste your power on trifles," he said. "You are dealing with that immensity out there."

He pointed towards the chaparral with a movement of his hand.

"To turn that magnificence out there into reasonableness doesn't do anything for you. Here, surrounding us, is eternity itself. To engage in reducing it to a manageable nonsense is petty and outright disastrous."

He then insisted that I should attempt to “see” another person from my realm of acquaintances. He added that once the vision had terminated I should strive to open my eyes by myself, and surface to the full awareness of my immediate surroundings.

I succeeded in holding the view of another mushroomlike form, but while the first one had been yellowish and small, the second one was whitish, larger, and contorted.

By the time we had finished talking about the two shapes I had “seen,” I had forgotten the “moth in the bushes,” which had been so overwhelming a little while before. I told don Juan that it amazed me that I had such a facility for discarding something so truly uncanny. It was as if I were not the person I knew myself to be.

"I don't see why you make such a fuss out of this," don Juan said. "Whenever the dialogue stops, the world collapses and extraordinary facets of ourselves surface, as though they had been kept heavily guarded by our words. You are like you are because you tell yourself that you are that way."

After a short rest don Juan urged me to continue “calling” friends. He said that the point was to attempt to “see” as many times as possible in order to establish a guideline for feeling.

I called thirty-two persons in succession. After each attempt he demanded a careful and detailed rendition of everything I had perceived in my vision. He changed that procedure, however, as I became more proficient in my performance; judging by my stopping the internal dialogue in a matter of seconds, by my being capable of opening my eyes by myself at the end of each experience, and by my resuming ordinary activities without any transition. I noticed this change while we were discussing the coloration of the mushroomlike formations. He had already made the point that what I called coloration was not a hue, but a glow of different intensities. I was about to describe a yellowish glow that I had envisioned, when he interrupted me, and he accurately described what I had “seen.” From that point on he discussed the content of each vision, not as if he had understood what I had said, but as if he had “seen” it himself. When I called him to comment on it he flatly refused to talk about it.

By the time I had finished calling the thirty-two persons, I had realized that I had “seen” a variety of mushroomlike shapes and glows, and I had had a variety of feelings towards them, ranging from mild delight to sheer disgust.

Don Juan explained that men were filled with configurations that could be wishes, problems, sorrows, worries, and so on. He asserted that only a profoundly powerful sorcerer could untangle the meaning of those configurations, and that I had to be content with viewing only the general shape of men.

I was very tired. There was something indeed fatiguing about those strange shapes. My overall sensation was one of queasiness. I had not liked them. They had made me feel trapped and doomed.

Don Juan commanded me to write in order to dispel the sensation of somberness. After a long silent interval during which I could not write anything, he asked me to call on people that he himself would select.

A new series of forms emerged. They were not mushroomlike, but looked more like Japanese cups for sake, turned upside down. Some of them had a headlike formation just like the foot of sake cups. Others were more round. Their shapes were appealing and peaceful. I sensed that there was some inherent feeling of happiness about them. They bounced as opposed to the earthbound heaviness that the previous batch had exhibited. Somehow, the mere fact that they were there eased my fatigue.

Among the persons he had selected was his apprentice Eligio. When I summoned the vision of Eligio I got a jolt that shook me out of my visionary state. Eligio had a long white shape that jerked and seemed to leap at me. Don Juan explained that Eligio was a very talented apprentice and that he, no doubt, had noticed that someone was *seeing* him.

Another of don Juan's selections was Pablito, don Genaro's apprentice. The jolt that the vision of Pablito gave me was even greater than Eligio's.

Don Juan laughed so hard that tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Why are those people shaped differently?" I asked.

"They have more personal power," he replied. "As you might have noticed, they are not pegged down to the ground."

"What has given them that lightness? Were they born that way?"

"We all are born that light and bouncy, but we become earthbound and fixed. We make ourselves that way. So perhaps we may say that these people are shaped differently because they live like warriors. That's not important though. What's of value is that you are at the edge now. You've called forty-seven people, and there is only one more left in order for you to complete the original forty-eight."

I remembered at that moment that years before he had told me, while discussing corn sorcery and divination, that the number of corn kernels that a sorcerer possessed was forty-eight. He had never explained why.

I asked him again, "Why forty-eight?"

"Forty-eight is our number," he said. "That's what makes us men. I don't know why. Don't waste your power in idiotic questions."

He stood up and stretched his arms and legs. He told me to do the same. I noticed that there was a tinge of light in the sky towards the east. We sat down again. He leaned over and put his mouth to my ear.

"The last person you're going to call is Genaro, the real McCoy," he whispered.

I felt a surge of curiosity and excitation. I breezed through the required steps. The strange sound from the edge of the chaparral became vivid and acquired new strength. I had almost forgotten about it. The golden bubbles engulfed me, and then in one of them I saw don Genaro himself. He was standing in front of me holding his hat in his hand. He was smiling.

I hurriedly opened my eyes and was about to speak to don Juan, but before I could say a word my body stiffened like a board. My hair stood on end, and for a long moment I did not know what to do or say. Don Genaro was standing right in front of me. In person!

I turned to don Juan; he was smiling. Then both of them broke into a giant laugh. I also tried to laugh. I could not. I stood up.

Don Juan handed me a cup of water. I drank it automatically. I thought he was going to sprinkle water on my face. Instead, he refilled my cup.

Don Genaro scratched his head and hid a grin.

"Aren't you going to greet Genaro?" don Juan asked.

It took an enormous effort for me to organize my thoughts and my feelings. I finally mumbled some greetings to don Genaro. He took a bow.

"You called me, didn't you?" he asked, smiling.

I muttered my amazement at having found him standing there.

"He did call you," don Juan interjected.

"Well, here I am," don Genaro said to me. "What can I do for you?"

Slowly my mind seemed to become organized and finally I had a sudden insight. My thoughts were crystal clear and I “knew” what had really taken place. I figured that don Genaro had been visiting with don Juan, and that as soon as they had heard my car approaching, don Genaro had slipped into the bushes and had remained in hiding until it got dark. I believed the evidence was convincing. Don Juan, since he had no doubt engineered the entire affair, gave me clues from time to time thus guiding it's development. At the appropriate time, don Genaro had made me notice his presence, and when don Juan and I were walking back to the house, he followed us in the most obvious manner in order to arouse my fear. Then he had waited in the chaparral and made the strange sound whenever don Juan had signaled him. The final signal to come out from behind the bushes must have been given by don Juan while my eyes were closed after he had asked me to “call” don Genaro. Then don Genaro must have walked to the ramada and waited until I opened my eyes, and then scared me out of my wits.

The only incongruencies in my logical explanatory scheme were that I had actually seen the man hiding in the bushes turn into a bird, and that I had first visualized don Genaro as an image in a golden bubble. In my vision he had been dressed exactly as he was in person. Since there was no logical way for me to explain those incongruencies, I assumed, as I have always done in similar circumstances, that the emotional stress may have played an important role in determining what I “believed I saw.”

I began to laugh quite involuntarily at the thought of their preposterous trick. I told them about my deductions. They laughed uproariously. I honestly believed that their laughter was the giveaway.

"You were hiding in the bushes, weren't you?" I asked don Genaro.

Don Juan sat down and held his head in both hands.

"No. I wasn't hiding," don Genaro said patiently. "I was far from here, and then you called. So I came to see you."

"Where were you, don Genaro?"

"Far away."

"How far?"

Don Juan interrupted me and said that don Genaro had showed up as an act of deference [* *deference—a courteous expression of esteem by: word, deed, or regard of action*] to me, and that I could not ask where he had been, because he had been nowhere.

Don Genaro came to my defense and said that it was all right to ask him anything.

"If you were not hiding around the house, where were you, don Genaro?" I asked.

"I was at my house," he said with great candor.

"In central Mexico?"

"Yes! It's the only house I've got."

They looked at each other and again broke into laughter. I knew that they were kidding me, but I decided not to contest the point any further. I thought they must have had a reason for engaging themselves in such an elaborate production. I sat down.

I felt that I was truthfully cut in two; some part of me was not shocked at all, and could accept any of don Juan or don Genaro's acts at their face value. But there was another part of me that flatly refused. It was my strongest part. My conscious assessment was that I had accepted don Juan's sorcery description of the world merely on an intellectual basis, while my body as a whole entity refused it, thus my dilemma. But then, over the course of the years of my association with don Juan and don Genaro I had experienced extraordinary phenomena, and those had been bodily experiences not intellectual ones. Earlier that very night I had executed the “gait of power,” which from the point of view of my intellect was an inconceivable accomplishment. And best of all, I had had incredible visions through no other means than my own volition.

I explained to them the nature of my painful and at the same time bona fide perplexity.

"This guy is a genius," don Juan said to don Genaro, shaking his head in disbelief.

"You're a huge genius, Carlitos," don Genaro said as if he were relaying a message.

They sat down on either side of me, don Juan to my right and don Genaro to my left. Don Juan observed that soon it was going to be morning. At that instant I again heard the moth's call. It had moved. The sound was coming from the opposite direction. I looked at both of them, holding their gaze. My logical scheme began to disintegrate. The sound had a mesmerizing richness and depth. Then I heard muffled steps; soft feet crushing the dry underbrush. The sputtering sound came closer and I huddled against don Juan. He dryly ordered me to “see” it. I made a supreme effort, not so much to please him as to please myself. I had been sure that don Genaro was the moth. But don Genaro was sitting with me. What, then, was in the bushes? A moth?

The sputtering sound echoed in my ears. I could not stop my internal dialogue altogether. I heard the sound, but I could not feel it in my body as I had done earlier. I heard definite steps. Something was creeping in the dark. There was a loud cracking noise as if a branch had been snapped in two, and suddenly a terrifying memory seized me. Years before I had spent a dreadful night in the wilderness and had been harassed by something, something very light and soft that had stepped on my neck over and over while I crouched on the ground. Don Juan had explained the event as an encounter with “the ally,” a mysterious force that a sorcerer learned to perceive as an entity.

I leaned closer to don Juan and whispered what I had remembered. Don Genaro crawled on all fours to get closer to us.

"What did he say?" he asked don Juan in a whisper.

"He said that there is an ally out there," don Juan replied in a low voice.

Don Genaro crawled back and sat down. Then he turned to me and said in a loud whisper, "You're a genius."

They laughed quietly. Don Genaro pointed towards the chaparral with a movement of his chin.

"Go out there and grab it," he said. "Take off your clothes and scare the devil out of that ally."

They shook with laughter. The sound in the meantime had ceased. Don Juan ordered me to stop my thoughts, but to keep my eyes open, focused on the edge of the chaparral in front of me. He said that the moth had changed positions because don Genaro was there, and that if it were going to manifest itself to me, it would choose to come from the front.

After a moment's struggle to quiet my thoughts, I perceived the sound again. It was richer than ever. I heard first the muffled steps on dry twigs and then I felt them on my body. At that instant I distinguished a dark mass directly in front of me at the edge of the chaparral.

I felt I was being shaken. I opened my eyes. Don Juan and don Genaro were standing above me, and I was kneeling as if I had fallen asleep in a crouching position. Don Juan gave me some water and I sat down again with my back against the wall.

A short while later it was dawn. The chaparral seemed to wake up. The morning cold was crisp and invigorating.

The moth had not been don Genaro. My rational structure was falling apart. I did not want to ask any more questions, nor did I want to remain quiet. I finally had to talk.

"But if you were in central Mexico, don Genaro, how did you get here?" I asked.

Don Genaro made some ludicrous and utterly hilarious gestures with his mouth.

"I'm sorry," he said to me, "my mouth doesn't want to talk."

He then turned to don Juan and said, grinning, "Why don't you tell him?"

Don Juan vacillated. Then he said that don Genaro, as a consummate artist of sorcery, was capable of prodigious deeds.

Don Genaro's chest swelled as if don Juan's words were inflating it. He seemed to have inhaled so much air that his chest looked twice it's normal size. He appeared to be on the verge of floating. He leaped in the air. I had the impression that the air inside his lungs had forced him to jump. He paced back and forth on the dirt floor until he apparently got his chest under control; he patted it and with great force ran the palms of his hands from his pectoral muscles to his stomach as if he were deflating the inner tube of a tire. He finally sat down.

Don Juan was grinning. His eyes were shining with sheer delight.

"Write your notes," he ordered me softly. "Write. Write or you'll die!"

Then he remarked that even don Genaro no longer felt that my taking notes was so outlandish.

"That's right!" don Genaro retorted. "I've been thinking of taking up writing myself."

"Genaro is a man of knowledge," don Juan said dryly. "And being a man of knowledge, he's perfectly capable of transporting himself over great distances."

He reminded me that once, years before, the three of us had been in the mountains and that don Genaro, in an effort to help me overcome my stupid reason, had taken a prodigious leap to the peaks of the Sierras ten miles away. I remembered the event, but I also remembered that I could not even conceive that he had jumped.

Don Juan added that don Genaro was capable of performing extraordinary feats at certain times.

"Genaro at certain times is not Genaro, but his double," he said.

He repeated it three or four times. Then both of them watched me as if waiting for my impending reaction.

I had not understood what he meant by “his double.” He had never mentioned that before. I asked for a clarification.

"There is another Genaro," he explained.

All three of us looked at one another. I became very apprehensive. Don Juan urged me with a movement of his eyes to keep on talking.

"Do you have a twin brother?" I asked, turning to don Genaro.

"Of course," he said. "I have a twin."

I could not determine whether or not they were putting me on. They both giggled with the abandon of children that were pulling a prank.

"You may say," don Juan went on, "that at this moment Genaro is his twin."

That statement brought both of them to the ground with laughter. But I could not enjoy their mirth. My body shivered involuntarily.

Don Juan said in a severe tone that I was too heavy and self-important.

"Let go!" he commanded me dryly. "You know that Genaro is a sorcerer and an impeccable warrior. So he's capable of performing deeds that would be unthinkable for the average man. His double, the other Genaro, is one of those deeds."

I was speechless. I could not conceive that they were just teasing me.

"For a warrior like Genaro," he went on, "to produce the other is not such a farfetched enterprise."

After pondering for a long time what to say next, I asked, "Is the other like the self?"

"The other is the self," don Juan replied.

His explanation had taken an incredible turn, and yet it was not really more incredible than anything else they did.

"What's the other made of?" I asked don Juan after minutes of indecision.

"There is no way of knowing that," he said.

"Is it real or just an illusion?"

"It's real of course."

"Would it be possible then to say that it is made of flesh and blood?" I asked.

"No. It would not be possible," don Genaro answered.

"But if it is as real as I am..."

"As real as you?" don Juan and don Genaro interjected in unison.

They looked at each other and laughed until I thought they were going to get ill. Don Genaro threw his hat on the floor and danced around it. His dance was agile and graceful, and for some inexplicable reason, utterly funny. Perhaps the humor was in the exquisitely “professional” movements he executed. The incongruency was so subtle and at the same time so remarkable that I doubled up with laughter.

"The trouble with you, Carlitos," he said as he sat down again, "is that you're a genius."

"I have to know about the double," I said.

"There's no way of knowing whether he's flesh and blood," don Juan said. "Because he is not as real as you. Genaro's double is as real as Genaro. Do you see what I mean?"

"But you have to admit, don Juan, that there must be a way to know."

"The double is the self. That explanation should suffice. If you would *see*, however, you'd know that there is a great difference between Genaro and his double. For a sorcerer who *sees*, the double is brighter."

I felt I was too weak to ask any more questions. I put my writing pad down, and for a moment I thought I was going to pass out. I had tunnel vision. Everything around me was dark with the exception of a round spot of clear scenery in front of my eyes.

Don Juan said that I had to get some food. I was not hungry.

Don Genaro announced that he was famished, stood up, and went to the back of the house. Don Juan also stood up, and signaled me to follow. In the kitchen don Genaro gave himself a serving of food, and then became involved in the most comical mimicking of a person who wants to eat but can't swallow. I thought that don Juan was going to die; he roared, kicked, cried, coughed, and choked with laughter. I thought I too was going to split my sides. Don Genaro's antics were priceless.

Don Genaro finally gave up and looked at don Juan and me in succession. He had shiny eyes and a beaming smile.

"It doesn't work," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

I ate a huge amount of food, and so did don Juan. Then all of us returned to the front of the house. The sunlight was brilliant, the sky was clear, and the morning breeze sharpened the air. I felt happy and strong.

We sat in a triangle facing one another. After a polite silence I decided to ask them to clarify my dilemma. I felt that I was again in top form and wanted to exploit my strength.

"Tell me more about the double, don Juan," I said.

Don Juan pointed at don Genaro, and don Genaro bowed.

"There he is," don Juan said. "There is nothing to tell. He's here for you to witness him."

"But he's don Genaro," I said in a feeble attempt to guide the conversation.

"Surely I'm Genaro," he said and perked his shoulders.

"What is a double then, don Genaro?" I asked.

"Ask him," he snapped, pointing to don Juan. "He's the one who talks. I'm dumb."

"A double is the sorcerer himself developed through his *dreaming*," don Juan explained. "A double is an act of power to a sorcerer but only a tale of power to you. In the case of Genaro, his double is indistinguishable from the original. That's because his impeccability as a warrior is supreme. Thus you've never noticed the difference yourself. But in the years that you've known him, you've been with the original Genaro only twice; every other time you've been with his double."

"But this is preposterous!" I exclaimed.

I felt an anxiety building up in my chest. I became so agitated that I dropped my writing pad, and my pencil rolled out of sight. Don Juan and don Genaro practically dove to the ground, and began the most farcical search for it. I had never seen a more astonishing performance of theatrical magic and sleight of hand- except that there was no stage, or props, or any type of gadgetry; and most likely the performers were not using sleight of hand.

Don Genaro, the head magician, and his assistant, don Juan, produced in a matter of minutes the most astounding, bizarre, and outlandish collection of objects which they found underneath, or behind, or above every object within the periphery of the ramada.

In the style of stage magic, the assistant set up the props, which in this case were the few items on the dirt floor—rocks, burlap sacks, pieces of wood, a milk crate, a lantern, and my jacket—then the magician, don Genaro, would proceed to find an object which he would throw away as soon as he had attested that it was not my pencil. The collection of objects found included pieces of clothing, wigs, eyeglasses, toys, utensils, pieces of machinery, women's underwear, human teeth, sandwiches, and religious objects. One of them was outright disgusting. It was a piece of compact human excrement that don Genaro took from underneath my jacket. Finally, don Genaro found my pencil, and handed it to me after dusting it off with the tail of his shirt.

They celebrated their clowning with yells and chuckles. I found myself watching; unable to join them.

"Don't take things so seriously, Carlitos," don Genaro said with a tone of concern. "Otherwise you're going to bust a..."

He made a ludicrous gesture that could have meant anything.

After their laughter subsided I asked don Genaro what a double did, or what a sorcerer did with the double.

Don Juan answered. He said that the double had power, and that it was used to accomplish feats that would be unimaginable under ordinary terms.

"I've told you time and time again that the world is unfathomable," he said to me. "And so are we, and so is every being that exists in this world. It is impossible, therefore, to reason out the double. You've been allowed to witness it, though, and that should be more than enough."

"But there must be a way to talk about it," I said. "You yourself have told me that you explained your conversation with the deer in order to talk about it. Can't you do the same with the double?"

He was quiet for a moment. I pleaded with him. The anxiety I was experiencing was beyond anything I had ever gone through.

"Well, a sorcerer can double up," don Juan said. "That's all one can say."

"But is he aware that he is doubled?"

"Of course he's aware of it."

"Does he know that he is in two places at once?"

Both of them looked at me and then they exchanged a glance.

"Where is the other don Genaro?" I asked.

Don Genaro leaned towards me and stared into my eyes.

"I don't know," he said softly. "No sorcerer knows where his other is."

"Genaro is right," don Juan said. "A sorcerer has no notion that he is in two places at once. To be aware of that would be the equivalent of facing his double, and the sorcerer that finds himself face to face with himself is a dead sorcerer. That is the rule. That is the way power has set things up. No one knows why."

Don Juan explained that by the time a warrior had conquered “dreaming” and “seeing” and had developed a double, he must have also succeeded in erasing personal history, self-importance, and routines. He said that all the techniques which he had taught me, and which I had considered to be empty talk, were in essence means for removing the impracticality of having a double in the ordinary world; by making the self and the world fluid, and thereby placing them outside the bounds of prediction.

"A fluid warrior can no longer make the world chronological," don Juan explained. "And for him, the world and he are no longer objects. He's a luminous being existing in a luminous world. The double is a simple affair for a sorcerer because he knows what he's doing. To take notes is a simple affair for you, but you still scare Genaro with your pencil."

"Can an outsider looking at a sorcerer see that he is in two places at once?" I asked don Juan.

"Certainly. That would be the only way to know it."

"But can't one logically assume that the sorcerer would also notice that he has been in two places?"

"Aha!" don Juan exclaimed. "For once you've got it right. A sorcerer may certainly notice afterwards that he has been in two places at once. But this is only bookkeeping, and has no bearing on the fact that while he's acting he has no notion of his duality."

My mind boggled. I felt that if I did not keep on writing I would explode.

"Think of this," he went on. "The world doesn't yield to us directly, the description of the world stands in between. So, properly speaking, we are always one step removed, and our experience of the world is always a recollection of the experience. We are perennially recollecting the instant that has just happened; just passed. We recollect, recollect, recollect."

He turned his hand over and over to give me the feeling of what he meant.

"If our entire experience of the world is recollection, then it's not so outlandish to conclude that a sorcerer can be in two places at once. This is not the case from the point of view of his own perception because in order to experience the world, a sorcerer, like every other man, has to recollect: the act he has just performed, the event he has just witnessed, the experience he has just lived. In his awareness there is only a single recollection. But for an outsider looking at the sorcerer, it may appear as if the sorcerer is acting two different episodes at once. The sorcerer, however, recollects two separate single instants because the glue of the description of time is no longer binding him."

When don Juan had finished talking I was sure I was running a temperature.

Don Genaro examined me with curious eyes.

"He's right," he said. "We're always one jump behind."

He moved his hand as don Juan had done. His body started to jerk, and he jumped back on his seat. It was as if he had the hiccups, and the hiccups were forcing his body to jump back. He began to move backwards jumping on his seat, and went all the way to the end of the *ramada* and back.

The sight of don Genaro leaping backwards on his buttocks, instead of being funny as it should have been, threw me into an attack of fear so intense that don Juan had to strike me repeatedly on the top of my head with his knuckles.

"I just can't grasp all this, don Juan," I said.

"I can't either," don Juan retorted, shrugging his shoulders.

"Neither can I, dear Carlitos," don Genaro added.

My fatigue, the bulk of my sensory experience, the mood of lightness and humor that prevailed, and don Genaro's clowning were too much for my nerves. I could not stop the agitation in my stomach muscles.

Don Juan made me roll on the ground until I had regained my calmness. Then I sat down facing them again.

"Is the double solid?" I asked don Juan after a long silence.

They looked at me.

"Does the double have corporealness?" I asked.

"Certainly," don Juan said. "Solidity, corporealness are memories. Therefore, like everything else we feel about the world, they are memories we accumulate. Memories of the description. You have the memory of my solidity, the same way you have the memory of communicating through words. Thus you talked with a coyote, and you feel me as being solid."

Don Juan put his shoulder next to mine and nudged me lightly.

"Touch me," he said.

I patted him and then I embraced him. I was close to tears.

Don Genaro stood up and came closer to me. He looked like a small child with shiny mischievous eyes. He puckered up his lips and looked at me for a long moment.

"What about me?" he asked, trying to hide a smile. "Aren't you going to embrace me too?"

I stood up and extended my arms to touch him. My body seemed to freeze on the spot. I had no power to move. I tried to force my arms to reach him, but my struggle was in vain.

Don Juan and don Genaro stood by, watching me. I felt my body contorting under an unknown pressure.

Don Genaro sat down, and pretended to sulk because I had not embraced him. He pouted and hit the ground with his heels. Then both of them exploded into more roaring laughter.

The muscles of my stomach trembled making my whole body shake. Don Juan pointed out that I was moving my head the way he had recommended earlier, and that that was the chance to soothe myself by reflecting a beam of light on the cornea of my eyes. He forcefully dragged me from under the roof of his *ramada* to the open field, and manipulated my body into position so that my eyes would catch the eastern sunlight; but by the time he had put my body in place I had stopped shivering. I noticed that I was clutching my notebook only after don Genaro said that the weight of the sheets was giving me the shivers.

I told don Juan that my body was pulling me to leave. I waved my hand to don Genaro. I did not want to give them time to make me change my mind.

"Good-by, don Genaro," I yelled. "I have to go now."

He waved back at me.

Don Juan walked a few yards with me towards my car.

"Do you also have a double, don Juan?" I asked.

"Of course!" he exclaimed.

I had at that moment a maddening thought. I wanted to discard it and leave in a hurry but something in myself kept on needling me. Over the course of the years of our association, it had become customary for me that every time I wanted to see don Juan I would just go to Sonora or central Mexico, and I would always find him waiting for me. I had learned to take that for granted, and it had never occurred to me until then to think anything of it.

"Tell me something, don Juan," I said, half in jest. "Are you yourself or are you your double?"

He leaned over towards me. He was grinning.

"My double," he whispered.

My body leaped in the air as if I had been propelled by a formidable force. I ran to my car.

"I was just kidding," don Juan said in a loud voice. "You can't go yet. You still owe me five more days."

Both of them ran towards my car as I was backing up. They were laughing and jumping up and down.

"Carlitos, call me any time!" don Genaro shouted.

## 2. The Dreamer and the Dreamed

I drove to don Juan's house and arrived there in the early morning. I had spent the night in a motel on the way down so I would get to his house before noon.

Don Juan was in the back and came to the front when I called him. He gave me a warm greeting and the impression that he was pleased to see me. He made a comment that I thought was intended to put me at ease but produced the opposite effect.

"I heard you coming," he said as he grinned, "and I ran to the back. I was afraid that if I had stayed here you would've been frightened."

He casually remarked that I was somber and heavy. He said that I reminded him of Eligio who was morbid enough to be a good sorcerer, but too morbid to become a man of knowledge. He added that the only way to counteract the devastating effect of the sorcerers' world was to laugh at it.

He was right in his assessment of my mood. I was indeed worried and frightened. We went for a long walk. It took hours for my feelings to ease up. Walking with him made me feel better than if he had attempted to talk me out of my somberness.

We returned to his house in the late afternoon. I was famished. After eating we sat under his *ramada*. The sky was clear. The afternoon light made me feel complacent. I wanted to talk.

"I've felt uneasy for months," I said. "There was something truly awesome in what you and don Genaro said and did the last time I was here."

Don Juan did not say anything. He got up and moved around the *ramada*.

"I've got to talk about this," I said. "It obsesses me and I can't stop pondering upon it."

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

I told him I was not afraid, but baffled; overwhelmed by what I had heard and witnessed. The loopholes in my reason were so gigantic that either I had to repair them, or I had to dispose of my reason altogether.

My comments made him laugh.

"Don't throw away your reason yet," he said. "It's not time for it. It'll happen though, but I don't think that now is the moment."

"Should I try to find an explanation for what happened, then?" I asked.

"Certainly!" he retorted. "It's your duty to put your mind at ease. Warriors do not win victories by beating their heads against walls, but by overtaking the walls. Warriors jump over the walls. They don't demolish them."

"How can I jump over this one?" I asked.

"First of all, I think it's deadly wrong for you to regard anything in such a serious fashion," he said as he sat down by my side. "There are three kinds of bad habits which we use over and over when confronted with unusual life situations.

"First, we may disregard what's happening or has happened, and feel as if it had never occurred. That one is the bigot's way. Second, we may accept everything at it's face value and feel as if we know what's going on. That's the pious man's way. Third, we may become obsessed with an event because either we cannot disregard it, or we cannot accept it wholeheartedly. That's the fool's way. Your way? There is a fourth; the correct one, the warrior's way. A warrior acts as if nothing had ever happened, because he doesn't believe in anything. Yet he accepts everything at it's face value. He accepts without accepting, and disregards without disregarding. He never feels as if he knows. Neither does he feel as if nothing had ever happened. He acts as if he is in control, even though he might be shaking in his boots. To act in such a manner dissipates obsession."

We were quiet for a long time. Don Juan's words were like a balm to me.

"Can I talk about don Genaro and his double?" I asked.

"It depends on what you want to say about him," he replied. "Are you going to indulge in being obsessed?"

"I want to indulge in explanations," I said. "I'm obsessed because I haven't dared come to see you, and I haven't been able to talk about my qualms and doubts with anyone."

"Don't you talk with your friends?"

"I do, but how could they help me?"

"I never thought that you needed help. You must cultivate the feeling that a warrior needs nothing. You say you need help. Help for what? You have everything needed for the extravagant journey that is your life. I have tried to teach you that the real experience is to be a man, and that what counts is being alive; life is the little detour that we are taking now. Life in itself is sufficient, self-explanatory, and complete.

"A warrior understands this and lives accordingly. Therefore, one may say without being presumptuous that the experience of experiences is being a warrior."

He seemed to wait for me to say something. I hesitated for a moment. I wanted to select my words carefully.

"If a warrior needs solace," he went on, "he simply chooses anyone and expresses to that person every detail of his turmoil. After all, the warrior is not seeking to be understood or helped. By talking he's merely relieving himself of his pressure; that is, providing that the warrior is given to talking; if he's not, he tells no one. But you're not living like a warrior altogether. Not yet anyway. And the pitfalls that you encounter must be truly monumental. You have all my sympathy."

He was not being facetious. Judging by the concern in his eyes, he seemed to be one who had been there himself. He stood up and patted me on the head. He walked back and forth the length of the *ramada*, and looked casually to the chaparral around the house. His movements evoked a sensation of restlessness in me.

In order to relax I began to talk about my dilemma. I felt that it was inherently too late for me to pretend to be an innocent bystander. Under his guidance I had trained myself to achieve strange perceptions, such as 'stopping the internal dialogue', and controlling my dreams. Those were instances that could not be faked. I had followed his suggestions, although never to the letter, and had partially succeeded in disrupting daily routines, assuming responsibility for my acts, erasing personal history, and had finally arrived at a point which years before I had dreaded. I was capable of being alone without disrupting my physical or emotional well-being. That was perhaps my single most astounding triumph. From the point of view of my former expectations and moods, to be alone and not 'go out of my mind' was an inconceivable state. I was keenly aware of all the changes that had taken place in my life, and in my view of the world. And I was also aware that it was somehow superfluous [* *superfluous- serving no useful purpose*] to be affected so profoundly by don Juan and don Genaro's revelation about the 'double'.

"What's wrong with me, don Juan?" I asked.

"You indulge," he snapped. "You feel that indulging in doubts and tribulations is the sign of a sensitive man. Well, the truth of the matter is that you're the farthest thing from being sensitive. So why pretend? I told you the other day that a warrior accepts in humbleness what he is."

"You make it sound as if I were confusing myself deliberately," I said.

"We do confuse ourselves deliberately," he said. "All of us are aware of our doings. Our puny reason deliberately makes itself into the monster it fancies itself to be. It's too little for such a big mold, though."

I explained to him that my dilemma was perhaps more complex than what he was making it out to be. I said that as long as he and don Genaro were men like myself, their superior control made them models for my own behavior. But if they were in essence men drastically different than I, then I could not conceive of them any longer as models but as oddities which I could not possibly aspire to emulate.

"Genaro is a man," don Juan said in a reassuring tone. "He's no longer a man like yourself, true. But that's his accomplishment. And it shouldn't give rise to fear on your part. If he's different, the more reason to admire him."

"But his difference is not a human difference," I said.

"And what do you think it is? The difference between a man and a horse?"

"I don't know. But he's not like me."

"He was at one time, though."

"But can his change be understood by me?"

"Of course. You yourself are changing."

"Do you mean that I will develop a double?"

"No one develops a double. That's only a way of talking about it. You, for all the talking you do, are a sap for words. You get trapped by their meanings. Now you think that one develops a double through evil means, I suppose. All of us luminous beings have a double. All of us! A warrior learns to be aware of it, that's all. There are seemingly insurmountable barriers protecting that awareness. But that's expected. Those barriers are what makes arriving at that awareness such a unique challenge."

"Why am I so afraid of it, don Juan?"

"Because you're thinking that the double is what the word says, a double, or another you. I chose those words in order to describe it. The double is oneself and cannot be faced in any other way."

"What if I don't want to have it?"

"The double is not a matter of personal choice. Neither is it a matter of personal choice who is selected to learn the sorcerers' knowledge that leads to that awareness. Have you ever asked yourself, why you in particular?"

"All the time. I've asked you that question hundreds of times, but you've never answered it."

"I didn't mean that you should ask it as a question that begs an answer, but in the sense of a warrior's pondering on his great fortune; the fortune of having found a challenge.

"To make it into an ordinary question is the device of a conceited ordinary man who wants to be either admired or pitied for it. I have no interest in that kind of question because there is no way of answering it. The decision of picking you was a design of power. No one can discern the designs of power. Now that you've been selected there is nothing that you can do to stop the fulfillment of that design."

"But you yourself told me, don Juan, that one can always fail."

"That's true. One can always fail. But I think that you are referring to something else. You want to find a way out. You want to have the freedom to fail and quit on your own terms. Too late for that. A warrior is in the hands of power and his only freedom is to choose an impeccable life. There is no way to fake triumph or defeat. Your reason may want you to fail altogether in order to obliterate the totality of yourself. But there is a countermeasure which will not permit you to declare a false victory or defeat. If you think that you can retreat to the haven of failure, you're out of your mind. Your body will stand guard and will not let you go either way."

He began to chuckle softly.

"Why do you laugh?" I asked.

"You're in a terrible spot," he said. "It's too late for you to retreat but too soon to act. All you can do is witness. You're in the miserable position of an infant who cannot return to the mother's womb, but neither can he run around and act. All an infant can do is witness; and listen to the stupendous tales of action being told to him. You are at that precise point now. You cannot go back to the womb of your old world, but you cannot act with power either. For you there is only witnessing acts of power and listening to tales; tales of power.

"The double is one of those tales. You know that, and that's why your reason is so taken by it. You are beating your head against a wall if you pretend to understand. All that I can say about it, by way of explanation, is that the double, although it is arrived at through *dreaming*, is as real as it can be."

"According to what you've told me, don Juan, the double can perform acts. Can the double then...?"

He did not let me continue with my line of reasoning. He reminded me that it was inappropriate to say that he had told me about the double, when I could say that I had witnessed it.

"Obviously the double can perform acts," I said.

"Obviously!" he replied.

"But can the double act in behalf of the self?"

"It is the self, damn it!"

I found it very difficult to explain myself. I had in mind that if a sorcerer could perform two actions at once, his capacity for utilitarian production had to double. He could work two jobs, be in two places, see two persons, and so on, at once.

Don Juan listened patiently.

"Let me put it this way," I said. "Hypothetically, can don Genaro kill someone hundreds of miles away by letting his double do it?"

Don Juan looked at me. He shook his head and moved his eyes away.

"You're filled with tales of violence," he said. "Genaro cannot kill anyone, simply because he no longer has any interest in his fellow men. By the time a warrior is capable of conquering *seeing* and *dreaming*, and having the awareness of his luminosity, there is no such interest left in him."

I pointed out that at the beginning of my apprenticeship he had made the statement that a sorcerer, aided by his 'ally', could be transported over hundreds of miles to deliver a blow to his enemies.

"I am responsible for your confusion," he said. "But you must remember that on another occasion I told you that, with you, I was not following the steps my own teacher prescribed. He was a sorcerer, and I should've properly plunged you into that world. I didn't because I am no longer concerned with the ups and downs of my fellow men. Yet, my teacher's words stuck with me. I talked to you many times in the manner he himself would have talked.

"Genaro is a man of knowledge. The purest of them all. His actions are impeccable. He's beyond ordinary men; and beyond sorcerers. His double is an expression of his joy and his humor. Thus he cannot possibly use it to create or resolve ordinary situations. As far as I know, the double is the awareness of our state as luminous beings. It can do anything, and yet it chooses to be unobtrusive and gentle.

"It was my error to mislead you with borrowed words. My teacher was not capable of producing the effects Genaro does. For my teacher, unfortunately, certain things were, as they are for you, only tales of power."

I was compelled to defend my point. I said that I was speaking in a hypothetical sense.

"There is no hypothetical sense when you speak about the world of men of knowledge," he said. "A man of knowledge cannot possibly act towards his fellow men in injurious terms, hypothetically or otherwise."

"But, what if his fellow men are plotting against his security and well-being? Can he then use his double to protect himself?"

He clicked his tongue in disapproval.

"What incredible violence in your thoughts," he said. "No one can plot against the security and well-being of a man of knowledge. He 'sees'. Therefore he would take steps to avoid anything like that. Genaro, for example, has taken a calculated risk in joining you. But there is nothing that you could do to endanger his security. If there is anything, his 'seeing' will let him know. Now, if there is something about you that is inherently injurious to him, and his 'seeing' cannot reach it, then it is his fate and neither Genaro nor anyone else can avoid that. So you see, a man of knowledge is in control without controlling anything."

We were quiet. The sun was about to reach the top of the heavy tall bushes on the west side of the house. There were about two hours of daylight left.

"Why don't you call Genaro?" don Juan said casually.

My body jumped. My initial reaction was to drop everything and run for my car. Don Juan broke into a belly laugh. I told him that I did not have to prove anything to myself, and that I was perfectly content to talk to him. Don Juan could not stop laughing. Finally he said that it was a shame that don Genaro was not there to enjoy a great scene.

"Look. If you're not interested in calling Genaro, I am," he said in a resolute tone. "I like his company."

I had a terrible sour taste on the roof of my mouth. Beads of perspiration ran down from my brow and my upper lip. I wanted to say something but there was really nothing to say.

Don Juan gave me a long, scrutinizing look.

"Come on," he said. "A warrior is always ready. To be a warrior is not a simple matter of wishing to be one. It is rather an endless struggle that will go on to the very last moment of our lives. Nobody is born a warrior, in exactly the same way that nobody is born a reasonable being. We make ourselves into one or the other.

"Pull yourself together. I don't want Genaro to see you shivering like this."

He stood up, and paced back and forth on the clean floor of the *ramada*. I could not remain impassive. My nervousness was so intense that I could not write any more, and I jumped to my feet.

Don Juan made me jog on the spot facing the west. He had made me perform the same movements before on various occasions. The idea was to draw 'power' from the impending twilight by raising one's arms to the sky with the fingers stretched like a fan, and then clasp them forcefully when the arms were in the mid point between the horizon and the zenith.

The exercise worked, and I became almost instantly calm and collected. I could not avoid wondering, however, what had happened to the old 'me' that could never have relaxed so completely by performing those simple and idiotic movements.

I wanted to focus all my attention on the procedure that don Juan was doubtlessly going to follow to call don Genaro. I anticipated some portentous acts. Don Juan stood on the edge of the *ramada* facing the southeast, cupped his hands around his mouth, and yelled, "Genaro! Come here!"

A moment later don Genaro emerged from the chaparral. Both of them were beaming. They practically danced in front of me.

Don Genaro greeted me effusively and then sat down on the milk crate.

There was something dreadfully wrong with me. I was calm; unruffled. Some incredible state of indifference and aloofness had taken over my entire being. It was almost as if I were watching myself from a hiding place. In a very nonchalant manner I proceeded to tell don Genaro that during my last visit he had nearly scared me to death, and that not even during my experiences with psychotropic plants had I been in such a complete state of chaos. Both of them celebrated my statements as if they were meant to be funny. I laughed with them.

They obviously were aware of my state of emotional numbness. They watched me and humored me as if I were drunk.

There was something inside me that fought desperately to turn the situation into something familiar. I wanted to be concerned and afraid.

Don Juan finally splashed some water on my face, and urged me to sit down and take notes. He said, as he had done before, that either I took notes or I died. The mere act of putting down some words brought back my familiar mood. It was as if something became crystal clear again; something that a moment before had been opaque and numb.

The advent of my usual self also meant the advent of my usual fears. Strangely enough, I was less afraid of being afraid than of being unafraid. The familiarity of my old habits, no matter how unpleasant they were, was a delightful respite.

I fully realized then that don Genaro had just emerged from the chaparral. My usual processes were beginning to function. I started by refusing to think or speculate about the event. I made the resolution of not asking him anything. I was going to be a silent witness this time.

"Genaro has come again exclusively for you," don Juan said.

Don Genaro was leaning against the wall of the house, and was resting his back against it while he sat on a tilted milk crate. He looked as if he were riding on horseback. His hands were in front of him which gave the impression that he was holding the reins of a horse.

"That's right, Carlitos," he said and brought the milk crate to rest on the ground.

He dismounted, whirling his right leg over an imaginary neck of a horse, and then jumped to the ground. His movements were so perfectly executed that he gave me the unquestionable sensation that he had arrived on horseback. He came to my side and sat down to my left.

"Genaro has come because he wants to tell you about the other," don Juan said.

He made a gesture of giving don Genaro the floor. Don Genaro bowed. He turned slightly to face me.

"What would you like to know, Carlitos?" he asked in a high-pitched voice.

"Well, if you're going to tell me about the double, tell me everything," I said, feigning casualness.

Both of them shook their heads and glanced at each other.

"Genaro is going to tell you about the dreamer and the dreamed," don Juan said.

"As you know, Carlitos," don Genaro said with the air of an orator warming up, "the double begins in *dreaming*."

He gave me a long look and smiled. His eyes swept from my face to my notebook and pencil.

"The double is a dream," he said, scratched his arms and then stood up.

He walked to the edge of the *ramada* and stepped out into the chaparral. He stood by a bush showing three fourths of his profile to us. He was apparently urinating. After a moment I noticed that there seemed to be something wrong with him. He appeared to be trying desperately to urinate but could not. Don Juan's laughter was the clue that don Genaro was clowning again. Don Genaro contorted his body in such a comical fashion that he had don Juan and me practically in hysterics.

Don Genaro came back to the *ramada* and sat down. His smile radiated a rare warmth.

"When you can't, you just can't," he said and shrugged his shoulders.

Then after a moment's pause he added, sighing, "Yes, Carlitos, the double is a dream."

"Do you mean that he's not real?" I asked.

"No. I mean that he is a dream," he retorted.

Don Juan intervened and explained that don Genaro was referring to the first emergence of the awareness that we are luminous beings.

"Each one of us is different, and thus the details of our struggles are different," don Juan said. "The steps that we follow to arrive at the double are the same, though. Especially the beginning steps- which are muddled and uncertain."

Don Genaro agreed and made a comment on the uncertainty that a sorcerer had at that stage.

"When it first happened to me, I didn't know it had happened," he explained. "One day I had been picking plants in the mountains. I had gone into a place that was worked by other herb collectors. I had two huge sacks of plants. I was ready to go home, but before I did I decided to take a moment's rest. I lay down on the side of the trail in the shade of a tree and I fell asleep. I heard then the sound of people coming down the hill and woke up. I hurriedly ran for cover and hid behind some bushes a short distance across the road from where I had fallen asleep. While I hid there I had the nagging impression I had forgotten something. I looked to see if I had my two sacks of plants. I didn't have them. I looked across the road to the place where I had been sleeping and I nearly dropped my pants with fright. I was still there asleep! It was me! I touched my body. I was myself! By that time the people that were coming down the hill were upon the me that was asleep, while the me that was fully awake looked helplessly from my hiding place. Darn it! They were going to find me there and take my sacks away. But they went by me as if I were not there at all.

"My vision had been so vivid that I went wild. I screamed and then I woke up again. Damn it! It had been a dream!"

Don Genaro stopped his account and looked at me as if waiting for a question or a comment.

"Tell him where you woke up the second time," don Juan said.

"I woke up by the road," don Genaro said, "where I had fallen asleep. But for one moment I didn't quite know where I really was. I can almost say that I was still looking at myself waking up, then something pulled me to the side of the road and I found myself rubbing my eyes."

There was a long pause. I did not know what to say.

"And what did you do next?" don Juan asked.

I realized, when both of them began to laugh, that he was teasing me. He was imitating my questions.

Don Genaro went on talking. He said that he was stunned for a moment and then went to check everything.

"The place where I had hid was there exactly as I had seen it," he said. "And the people who had walked by me were down the road a short distance away. I know it because I ran downhill after them. They were the same people I had seen. I followed them until they got to town. They must have thought I was mad. I asked them if they had seen my friend sleeping by the side of the road. They all said they hadn't."

"You see," don Juan said, "all of us go through the same doubts. We are afraid of being mad. Unfortunately for us, of course, all of us are already mad."

"You are a tinge madder than us, though," don Genaro said to me and winked. "And more suspicious."

They teased me about my suspiciousness. And then don Genaro began to talk again.

"All of us are dense beings," he said. "You're not the only one, Carlitos. I was a bit shook up by my dream for a couple of days, but then I had to work for my living and take care of too many things and really had no time for pondering upon the mystery of my dreams. So I forgot about it in no time at all. I was very much like you.

"But one day, a few months later, after a terribly tiring day, I fell asleep like a log in midafternoon. It had just started to rain and a leak in the roof woke me up. I jumped out of bed and climbed on top of the house to fix the leak before it began to pour. I felt so fine and strong that I finished in one minute and I didn't even get wet. I thought that the snooze I had taken had done me a lot of good. When I was through I went back into the house to get something to eat and I realized that I could not swallow. I thought I was sick. I mashed some roots and leaves, and wrapped them around my neck, and went to my bed. And then again when I got to my bed I nearly dropped my pants. I was there in bed asleep! I wanted to shake myself and wake me up, but I knew that that was not the thing one should do. So I ran out of the house. I was panic-stricken. I roamed around the hills aimlessly. I had no idea where I was going, and although I had lived all my life there I got lost. I walked in the rain and didn't even feel it. It seemed that I couldn't think. Then the lightning and thunder became so intense that I woke up again."

He paused for a moment.

"Do you want to know where I woke up?" he asked me.

"Certainly," don Juan answered.

"I woke up in the hills in the rain," he said.

"But how did you know that you had woken up?" I asked.

"My body knew it," he replied.

"That was a stupid question," don Juan interjected. "You yourself know that something in the warrior is always aware of every change. It is precisely the aim of the warrior's way to foster and maintain that awareness. The warrior cleans it, shines it, and keeps it running."

He was right. I had to admit to them that I knew that there was something in me that registered and was aware of everything I did. And yet it had nothing to do with the ordinary awareness of myself. It was something else which I could not pin down. I told them that perhaps don Genaro could describe it better than I.

"You're doing very well yourself," don Genaro said. "It's an inner voice that tells you what's what. And at that time it told me that I had woken up a second time. Of course, as soon as I woke up I became convinced that I must have been *dreaming*. Obviously it had not been an ordinary dream, but it hadn't been *dreaming* proper either. So I settled for something else; walking in my sleep, half awake, I suppose. I could not understand it in any other way."

Don Genaro said that his benefactor had explained to him that what he had gone through was not a dream at all, and that he should not insist on regarding it as walking in his sleep.

"What did he tell you that it was?" I asked.

They exchanged a glance.

"He told me it was the bogeyman," don Genaro replied, affecting the tone of a small child.

I explained to them that I wanted to know if don Genaro's benefactor explained things in the same way they themselves did.

"Of course he did," don Juan said.

"My benefactor explained that the dream in which one was watching oneself asleep," don Genaro went on, "was the time of the double. He recommended that rather than wasting my power in wondering and asking myself questions, I should use the opportunity to act; and that when I had another chance I should be prepared.

"My next chance took place at my benefactor's house. I was helping him with the housework. I had lain down to rest and as usual I fell sound asleep. His house was definitely a place of power for me and helped me. I was suddenly aroused by a loud noise and awakened. My benefactor's house was large. He was a wealthy man and had many people working for him. The noise seemed to be the sound of a shovel digging in gravel. I sat up to listen and then I stood up. The noise was very unsettling to me but I couldn't figure out why. I was pondering whether to go and check it out when I noticed that I was asleep on the floor. This time I knew what to expect and what to do; and I followed the noise. I walked to the back of the house. There was no one there. The noise seemed to come from beyond the house. I kept on following it. The more I followed it the quicker I could move. I ended up at a distant place, witnessing incredible things."

He explained that at the time of those events he still was in the beginning stages of his apprenticeship and had done very little in the realm of 'dreaming', but that he had an uncanny facility to dream that he was looking at himself.

"Where did you go, don Genaro?" I asked.

"That was the first time that I had really moved in *dreaming*" he said. "I knew enough about it to behave correctly, though. I didn't look at anything directly and ended up in a deep ravine where my benefactor had some of his power plants."

"Do you think it works better if one knows very little about *dreaming*?" I asked.

"No!" don Juan interjected. "Each of us has a facility for something in particular. Genaro's knack is for *dreaming*."

"What did you see in the ravine, don Genaro?" I asked.

"I saw my benefactor doing some dangerous maneuvers with people. I thought I was there to help him and hid behind some trees. Yet I couldn't have known how to help. I was not dumb though, and I realized that the scene was there for me to watch, not to act in."

"When and how and where did you wake up?"

"I don't know when I woke up. It must have been hours later. All I know is that I followed my benefactor and the other men. And when they were about to reach my benefactor's house, the noise that they made, because they were arguing, woke me up. I was at the place where I had seen myself asleep.

"Upon waking up, I realized that whatever I had seen and done was not a dream. I had actually gone some distance away guided by the sound."

"Was your benefactor aware of what you were doing?"

"Certainly. He had been making the noise with the shovel to help me accomplish my task. When he walked into the house he pretended to scold me for falling asleep. I knew that he had *seen* me. Later on, after his friends had left, he told me that he had noticed my glow hiding behind the trees."

Don Genaro said that those three instances set him off on the path of 'dreaming', and that it took him fifteen years to have his next chance.

"The fourth time was a more bizarre and a more complete vision," he said. "I found myself asleep in the middle of a cultivated field. I saw myself lying there on my side sound asleep. I knew that it was *dreaming* because I had set myself to do *dreaming* every night. Usually, every time I had seen myself asleep, I was at the site where I had gone to sleep. This time I was not in my bed, and I knew I had gone to bed that night. In this *dreaming* it was daytime. So, I began to explore. I moved away from the place where I was lying and oriented myself. I knew where I was. I was actually not too far from my house; perhaps a couple of miles away. I walked around looking at every detail of the place. I stood in the shade of a big tree a short distance away and peered across a flat strip of land to some corn fields on the side of a hill. Something quite unusual struck me then. The details of the surroundings did not change or vanish no matter how long I peered at them. I got scared and ran back to where I was sleeping. I was still there exactly as I had been before. I began to watch myself. I had an eerie feeling of indifference towards the body I was watching.

"Then I heard the sound of people approaching. People always seemed to be around for me. I ran up ahead to a small hill and carefully watched from there. There were ten people coming to the field where I was. They were all young men. I ran back to where I was lying, and went through one of the most agonizing times of my life while I faced myself lying there snoring like a pig. I knew that I had to awaken me, but I had no idea how. I also knew that it was deadly for me to awaken myself. But if those young men were to find me there they were going to be very upset. All those deliberations that were going through my mind were not really thoughts. They were more appropriately scenes in front of my eyes. My worrying, for instance, was a scene in which I looked at myself while I had the sensation of being boxed in. I call that worrying. It has happened to me a number of times after that first time.

"Well, since I didn't know what to do, I stood looking at myself, and waited for the worst. A bunch of fleeting images went past me in front of my eyes. I hung on to one in particular; the sight of my house and my bed. The image became very clear. Oh, how I wished to be back in my bed! Something shook me then. It felt like someone was hitting me and I woke up. I was on my bed! Obviously, I had been *dreaming*. I jumped out of bed, and ran to the place of my *dreaming*. It was exactly as I had seen it. The young men were working there. I watched them for a long time. They were the same ones I had seen.

"I came back to the same place at the end of the day after everybody had gone, and stood at the very spot where I had seen myself asleep. Someone had lain there. The weeds were crumpled,"

Don Juan and don Genaro were observing me. They looked like two strange animals. I felt a shiver in my back. I was on the verge of indulging in the very rational fear that they were not really men like myself, but don Genaro laughed.

"In those days," he said, "I was just like you, Carlitos. I wanted to check everything. I was as suspicious as you are."

He paused, raised his finger, and shook it at me. Then he faced don Juan.

"Weren't you as suspicious as this guy?" he asked.

"Not a chance," don Juan said. "He's the champ."

Don Genaro turned to me and made a gesture of apology.

"I think I was wrong," he said. "I was not as suspicious as you."

They chuckled softly as if they did not want to make noise. Don Juan's body convulsed with muffled laughter.

"This is a place of power for you," don Genaro said in a whisper. "You've written your fingers off right where you are sitting. Have you ever done some heavy *dreaming* here?"

"No he hasn't," don Juan said in a low voice. "But he's done some heavy writing."

They doubled up. It seemed that they did not want to laugh out loud. Their bodies shook. Their soft laughter was like a rhythmical cackle.

Don Genaro sat up straight and slid closer to me. He patted me on the shoulder repeatedly, and said that I was a rascal. Then he pulled my left arm with great force towards him. I lost my balance and fell forward. I almost hit my face on the hard ground. I automatically put my right arm in front and buffered my fall. One of them held me down by pressing on my neck. I was not sure who. The hand that was holding me felt like don Genaro's. I had a moment of devastating panic. I felt I was fainting. Perhaps I did. The pressure in my stomach was so intense that I vomited. My next clear perception was that somebody was helping me to sit up. Don Genaro was squatting in front of me. I turned around to look for don Juan. He was nowhere in sight. Don Genaro had a beaming smile. His eyes were shiny. They were looking fixedly at mine.

I asked him what he had done to me, and he said that I was in pieces. His tone was reproachful, and he seemed to be annoyed or dissatisfied with me. He repeated various times that I was in pieces and that I had to come together again. He tried to feign a severe tone, but he laughed in the middle of his harangue. [* *harangue- a loud bombastic speech expressed with strong emotion*] He was telling me that it was just terrible that I was spread all over the place, and that he would have to use a broom to sweep all my pieces into one heap.

Then he added that I might get the pieces in the wrong places and end up with my penis where my thumb should be. He cracked up at that point. I wanted to laugh and had a most unusual sensation. My body fell apart! It was as if I had been a mechanical toy that simply broke up into pieces. I had no physical feelings whatever, and neither had I any fear or concern. Coming apart was a scene that I witnessed from the point of view of the perceiver, and yet I did not perceive anything from a sensorial point of reference.

The next thing I became aware of was that don Genaro was manipulating my body. I then had a physical sensation, a vibration so intense that it made me lose sight of everything around me.

I felt once more that someone was helping me to sit up. I again saw don Genaro squatting in front of me. He pulled me up by my armpits and helped me walk around. I could not figure out where I was. I had the feeling I was in a dream, and yet I had a complete sense of sequential time. I was keenly aware that I had just been with don Genaro and don Juan in the *ramada* of don Juan's house.

Don Genaro walked with me, propping me by holding my left armpit. The scenery I was watching changed constantly. I could not determine, however, the nature of what I was observing. What was in front of my eyes was rather like a feeling or a mood, and the center from where all those changes radiated was definitely in my stomach. I had made that connection not as a thought or a realization, but as a bodily sensation that suddenly became fixed and predominant. The fluctuations around me came from my stomach. I was creating a world; an endless run of feelings and images. Everything I knew was there. That in itself was a feeling, not a thought or a conscious assessment.

I tried to keep tabs for a moment because of my nearly invincible habit of assessing everything. But at a certain instant my processes of bookkeeping ceased, and a nameless something enveloped me; feelings and images of every sort.

At one point something in me began again the tabulation, and I noticed that one image kept on repeating itself; don Juan and don Genaro, who were trying to reach me. The image was fleeting. It passed by me fast. It was something comparable to seeing them from the window of a fast-moving vehicle. They seemed to be trying to catch me as I went by. The image became clearer and it lasted longer as it kept on recurring. I consciously realized at one point that I was deliberately isolating it from among a myriad of other images. I sort of breezed through the rest to come to that particular scene. Finally I was capable of sustaining it by thinking about it. Once I had begun to think, my ordinary processes took over. They were not as defined as in my ordinary activities, but clear enough to know that the scene or feeling I had isolated was that of don Juan and don Genaro in the *ramada* of don Juan's house, and they were holding me by the armpits.

I wanted to keep on fleeing through other images and feelings, but they would not let me. I struggled for a moment. I felt bouncy and happy. I knew that I liked both of them, and I also knew then that I was not afraid of them. I wanted to joke with them but I did not know how, and I kept on laughing and patting them on their shoulders. I had another peculiar awareness. I was certain that I was 'dreaming'. If I focused my eyes on anything, it immediately became blurry.

Don Juan and don Genaro were talking to me. I could not keep their words straight, and I could not distinguish which of them was talking. Don Juan then turned my body around and pointed to a lump on the ground. Don Genaro pulled me closer to it and made me go around it. The lump was a man lying on the ground. He was lying on his stomach with his face turned to his right. They kept on pointing out the man to me as they spoke. They pulled me and twisted me around him. I could not focus my eyes on him at all, but finally I had a feeling of quietness and sobriety and I looked at the man. I had a slow awakening into the realization that the man lying on the ground was me. My realization did not bring any terror or discomfort. I simply accepted it without emotion. At that moment I was not completely asleep, but neither was I completely awake and in sober consciousness.

I also became more aware of don Juan and don Genaro, and could tell them apart when they talked to me. Don Juan said that we were going to go to the round power place in the chaparral. As soon as he said it the image of the place popped in my mind. I saw the dark masses of bushes around it. I turned to my right. Don Juan and don Genaro were also there. I had a jolt and the feeling that I was afraid of them. Perhaps because they looked like two menacing shadows. They came closer to me. As soon as I saw their features my fears vanished. I liked them again. It was as if I were drunk and did not have a firm grip on anything. They grabbed me by the shoulders and shook me in unison. They ordered me to wake up. I could hear their voices clearly and separately. I had then a unique moment. I held two images in my mind, two dreams. I felt that something in me was deeply asleep and was waking up and I found myself lying on the floor of the *ramada* with don Juan and don Genaro shaking me. But I also was at the power place and don Juan and don Genaro were still shaking me.

There was one crucial instant in which I was neither in one place nor the other, but I was rather in both places as an observer seeing two scenes at once. I had the incredible sensation that at that instant I could have gone either way. All I had to do at that moment was to change perspective; and rather than watch either scene from the outside, feel it from the point of view of the subject.

There was something very warm about don Juan's house. I preferred that scene.

I next had a terrifying seizure so shocking that my entire ordinary awareness came back to me at once. Don Juan and don Genaro were pouring buckets of water on me. I was in the *ramada* of don Juan's house.

Hours later we sat in the kitchen. Don Juan had insisted that I had to proceed as if nothing had happened. He gave me some food and said that I had to eat a great deal to compensate for my expenditure of energy.

It was after nine in the evening when I looked at my watch after we had sat down to eat. My experience had lasted several hours. From the point of view of my recollection, however, it seemed that I had just fallen asleep for a short while.

Even though I was completely myself, I still was numb. It was not until I had begun to write in my notebook that I regained my usual awareness. It was a surprise to me that taking notes could bring about instantaneous sobriety. The moment I was myself again, a barrage of reasonable thoughts immediately came to my mind. Those thoughts purported [* purported- accepted as true on inconclusive grounds] to explain the phenomenon I had experienced. I 'knew' on the spot that don Genaro had hypnotized me the moment he pinned me down on the ground, but I did not attempt to figure out how he had done it.

They both laughed hysterically when I expressed my thoughts. Don Genaro examined my pencil and said that the pencil was the key to wind up my mainspring. I felt quite belligerent. I was tired and irritable. I found myself practically yelling at them while their bodies shook with laughter.

Don Juan said that it was permissible to miss the boat, but not by such a wide margin; and that don Genaro had come exclusively to help me and show me the mystery of the dreamer and the dreamed.

My irritability came to a peak. Don Juan signaled don Genaro with a movement of his head. Both of them stood and took me around the house. There don Genaro demonstrated his great repertoire of animal grunts and cries. He asked me to choose one and he taught me how to reproduce it.

After hours of practice I got to the point where I could imitate it quite well. The end result was that they themselves had enjoyed my clumsy attempts and laughed until they were practically weeping, and I had released my tension by reproducing the loud cry of an animal. I told them that there was something truly awesome in my imitation. The relaxation of my body was unequaled. Don Juan said that if I would perfect the cry I could turn it into an affair of power, or I could simply use it to relieve my tension whenever I needed to. He suggested I should go to sleep, but I was afraid to fall asleep. I sat with them by the kitchen fire for a while and then, quite unintentionally, I fell into a deep sleep.

I woke up at dawn. Don Genaro was sleeping by the door. He seemingly woke up at the same time I did. They had covered me up and folded my jacket as a pillow. I felt very calm and rested. I commented to don Genaro that I had felt exhausted the night before. He said that so had he. He whispered as if he were confiding in me and told me that don Juan was even more exhausted because he was older.

"You and I are young," he said with a glint in his eyes. "But he's old. He must be about three hundred now."

I sat up hurriedly. Don Genaro covered his face with his blanket and roared with laughter. Don Juan came into the room at that moment.

I had a feeling of completeness and peace. For once, nothing really mattered. I was so at ease that I wanted to weep.

Don Juan said that the night before I had begun to be aware of my luminosity. He admonished [* *admonish- warn strongly to put on guard*] me not to indulge in the sense of well-being I was having because it would turn into complacency.

"At this moment," I said, "I don't want to explain anything. It doesn't matter what don Genaro did to me last night."

"I didn't do anything to you," don Genaro retorted. "Look, it's me, Genaro. Your Genaro! Touch me!"

I embraced don Genaro and we both laughed like two children.

He asked me if I thought it was strange that I could embrace him then when last time I had seen him there I had been unable to touch him. I assured him that those issues were no longer pertinent to me.

Don Juan's comment was that I was indulging in being broad-minded and good.

"Watch out!" he said. "A warrior never lets his guard down. If you keep on being so happy you're going to drain the little power you have left."

"What should I do?" I asked.

"Be yourself," he said. "Doubt everything. Be suspicious."

"But I don't like to be that way, don Juan."

"It is not a matter of whether you like it or not. What matters is, what can you use as a shield? A warrior must use everything available to him to close his mortal gap once it opens. So it's of no importance that you really don't like to be suspicious or ask questions. That's your only shield now.

"Write. Write or you'll die. To die with elation is a crappy way of dying."

"How should a warrior die, then?" don Genaro asked in exactly my own tone of voice.

"A warrior dies the hard way," don Juan said. "His death must struggle to take him. A warrior does not give himself to it."

Don Genaro opened his eyes to an enormous size, and then blinked.

"What Genaro showed you yesterday is of utmost importance," don Juan went on. "You can't slough it off with piousness. Yesterday you told me that you had been driven wild with the idea of the double. But look at you now. You don't care any more. That's the trouble with people that go wild. They go wild both ways. Yesterday you were all questions. Today you are all acceptance."

I pointed out that he always found a flaw in what I did, regardless of how I did it.

"That's not true!" he exclaimed. "There is no flaw in the warrior's way. Follow it and your acts cannot be criticized by anyone. Take yesterday as an example. The warrior's way would have been, first, to ask questions without fear and without suspicion, and then let Genaro show you the mystery of the dreamer; without fighting him, or draining yourself. Today the warrior's way would be to assemble what you've learned without presumptuousness and without piousness. Do that and no one can find flaws in it."

I thought by his tone that don Juan must have been terribly annoyed with my blunderings. But he smiled at me and then giggled as if his own words had made him laugh.

I told him that I was just holding back, not wanting to burden them with my probes. I was indeed overwhelmed by what don Genaro had done. I had been convinced—although it no longer mattered—that don Genaro had been waiting in the bushes for don Juan to call him. Then later on he had cashed in on my fright and used it to stun me. After being held forcibly on the ground I must have undoubtedly passed out, and then don Genaro must have mesmerized me.

Don Juan argued that I was too strong to be subdued that easily.

"What took place then?" I asked him.

"Genaro came to see you to tell you something very exclusive," he said. "When he came out of the bushes, he was Genaro the double. There is another way to talk about this that would explain it better, but I can't use it now."

"Why not, don Juan?"

"Because you are not ready yet to talk about the totality of oneself. For the time being I can only say that this Genaro here is not the double now."

He pointed to don Genaro with a movement of his head. Don Genaro blinked repeatedly.

"The Genaro of last night was the double. And as I told you already, the double has inconceivable power. He showed you a most important issue. In order to do that he had to touch you. The double simply tapped you on the neck on the same spot the ally walked over you years ago. Naturally you went out like a light. And naturally too, you indulged like a son of a bitch. It took us hours to round you up. Thus you dissipated your power; and when the time came for you to accomplish a warrior's feat you did not have enough sap."

"What was that warrior's feat, don Juan?"

"I told you that Genaro came to show you something; the mystery of luminous beings as dreamers. You wanted to know about the double. It begins in dreams. But then you asked, 'What is the double?' And I said the double is the self. The self dreams the double. That should be simple, except that there is nothing simple about us.

"Perhaps the ordinary dreams of the self are simple, but that doesn't mean that the self is simple. Once it has learned to dream the double, the self arrives at this weird crossroad, and a moment comes when one realizes that it is the double who dreams the self."

I had written down everything he had said. I had also paid attention to what he was saying, but had failed to understand him.

Don Juan repeated his statements.

"The lesson last night, as I told you, was about the dreamer and the dreamed, or who dreams whom."

"I beg your pardon," I said.

Both of them broke into laughter.

"Last night," don Juan proceeded, "you almost chose to wake up at the power place."

"What do you mean, don Juan?"

"That would have been the feat. If you had not indulged in your stupid ways, you would have had enough power to tip the scales; and you would've, no doubt, scared yourself to death. Fortunately, or unfortunately, as the case may be, you did not have enough power. In fact, you wasted your power in worthless confusion to the point that you almost didn't have enough to survive.

"So, as you may very well understand, to indulge in your little quirks is not only stupid and wasteful, but also injurious. A warrior that drains himself cannot live. The body is not an indestructible affair. You might have gotten gravely ill. You didn't simply because Genaro and I deviated some of your crap."

The full impact of his words was beginning to take hold of me.

"Last night Genaro guided you through the intricacies of the double," don Juan went on. "Only he can do that for you. And it was not a vision or a hallucination when you saw yourself lying on the ground. You could have realized that with infinite clarity if you had not gotten lost in your indulging. And you could have known then that you yourself are a dream; that your double is dreaming you in the same fashion that you dreamed him last night."

"But how can that be possible, don Juan?"

"No one knows how it happens. We only know that it does happen. That's the mystery of us as luminous beings. Last night you had two dreams and you could have awakened in either one, but you didn't have enough power even to understand that."

They looked at me fixedly for a moment.

"I think he understands," don Genaro said.

## 3. The Secret of the Luminous Beings

Don Genaro delighted me for hours with some preposterous instructions on how to manage my daily world. Don Juan said that I should be very careful and serious-minded about the recommendations made by don Genaro because, although they were funny, they were not a joke.

Around noon don Genaro stood up and without saying a word walked into the bushes. I was also going to get up, but don Juan gently held me down and in a solemn voice announced that don Genaro was going to try one more thing with me.

"What's he up to?" I asked. "What is he going to do to me?"

Don Juan assured me that I did not have to worry.

"You are approaching a crossroad," he said. "A certain crossroad that every warrior comes to."

I had the idea that he was talking about my death. He seemed to anticipate my question and signaled me not to say anything.

"We won't discuss this matter," he said. "Suffice it to say that the crossroad I'm referring to is the sorcerers' explanation. Genaro believes you're ready for it."

"When are you going to tell me about it?"

"I don't know when. You are the recipient, therefore it is up to you. You will have to decide when."

"What's wrong with right now?"

"To decide doesn't mean to choose an arbitrary time," he said. "To decide means that you have trimmed your spirit impeccably, and that you have done everything possible to be worthy of knowledge and power.

"Today, however, you must solve a little riddle for Genaro. He's gone ahead of us and he'll be waiting somewhere in the chaparral. No one knows the spot where he'll he, nor the specific time to go to him. If you're capable of determining the right time to leave the house, you will also be capable of guiding yourself to where he is."

I told don Juan that I could not imagine anyone being able to solve such a riddle.

"How can leaving the house at a specific time guide me to where don Genaro is?" I asked.

Don Juan smiled and began to hum a tune. He seemed to enjoy my agitation.

"That's the problem which Genaro has set up for you," he said. "If you have enough personal power, you will decide with absolute certainty the right time to leave the house. How leaving at the precise time will guide you is something that no one knows. And yet, if you have enough power, you yourself will attest that this is so."

"But how am I going to be guided, don Juan?"

"No one knows that either."

"I think don Genaro is pulling my leg."

"You better watch out then," he said. "If Genaro is pulling your leg he's liable to yank it out."

Don Juan laughed at his own joke. I could not join him. My fear about the inherent danger of don Genaro's manipulations was too real.

"Can you give me some clues?" I asked.

"There are no clues!" he said cuttingly.

"Why does don Genaro want to do this?"

"He wants to test you," he replied. "Let's say that it is very important for him to know whether you can take the sorcerers' explanation. If you solve the riddle, the implication will be that you have stored enough personal power and you're ready. But if you flub it, it'll be because you don't have enough power and in that case the sorcerers' explanation won't make any sense to you. I think that we should give you the explanation regardless of whether you understand it or not. That's my idea. Genaro is a more conservative warrior. He wants things in their proper order and he won't give in until he thinks you're ready."

"Why don't you just tell me about the sorcerers' explanation yourself?"

"Because Genaro must be the one who helps you."

"Why is that so, don Juan?"

"Genaro doesn't want me to tell you why," he said. "Not yet."

"Would it hurt me to know the sorcerers' explanation?" I asked.

"I don't think so."

"Please, don Juan, tell me then."

"You must be joking. Genaro has precise ideas on this matter, and we must honor and respect them."

He made an imperative gesture to quiet me.

After a long unnerving pause I ventured a question. "But how can I solve this riddle, don Juan?"

"I really don't know that. Thus I can't advise you what to do," he said. "Genaro is most efficient. He designed the riddle just for you. Since he's doing this for your benefit, he's attuned to you alone. Therefore only you can pick the precise time to leave the house. He will call you himself, and guide you by means of his call."

"What will his call be like?"

"I don't know. His call is for you, not for me. He'll be tapping your *will* directly. In other words, you must use your *will* in order to know the call.

"Genaro feels that he must make sure at this point that you have stored sufficient personal power to enable you to turn your *will* into a functioning unit."

'Will' was another concept which don Juan had delineated [* *delineate- describe in vivid detail*] with great care, but without making it clear. I had gathered from his explanations that 'will' was a force that emanated from the umbilical region through an unseen opening below the navel; an opening he had called the 'gap'. 'Will' was allegedly cultivated only by sorcerers. It came to the practitioners veiled in mystery, and purportedly [* *purportedly- believed, or reputed to be the case*] gave them the capacity to perform extraordinary acts.

I remarked to don Juan that there was no chance that anything so vague could ever be a functioning unit in my life.

"That's where you're wrong," he said. "The *will* develops in a warrior in spite of every opposition of the reason."

"Can't don Genaro, being a sorcerer, know whether I'm ready or not without testing me?" I asked.

"He certainly can," he said. "But that knowledge won't be of any value or consequence because it has nothing to do with you. You are the one who's learning. Therefore you yourself must claim knowledge as power; not Genaro. Genaro is not concerned with his knowing as much as with your knowing. You must find out whether or not your *will* works. This is a very difficult point to make. In spite of what Genaro or I know about you, you must prove to yourself that you are in the position to claim knowledge as power. In other words, you yourself have to be convinced that you can exercise your *will.* If you're not, then you must become convinced today. If you cannot perform this task, then Genaro's conclusion will be that regardless of what he might see about you, you're not ready yet."

I experienced an overwhelming apprehension.

"Is all this necessary?" I asked.

"It's Genaro's request and must be obeyed," he said in a firm but friendly tone.

"But what does don Genaro have to do with me?"

"You may find that out today," he said and smiled.

I pleaded with don Juan to get me out of that intolerable situation and explain all the mysterious talk. He laughed and patted my chest, and made a joke about a Mexican weight lifter who had enormous pectoral muscles but could not do heavy physical labor because his back was weak.

"Watch those muscles," he said. "They shouldn't be just for show."

"My muscles have nothing to do with what you're talking about," I said in a belligerent mood.

"They do," he replied. "The body must be perfection before the *will* is a functioning unit."

Don Juan had again deviated the direction of my probing. I felt restless and frustrated.

I stood up and went to the kitchen and drank some water. Don Juan followed me, and suggested that I should practice the animal cry that don Genaro had taught me. We walked to the side of the house. I sat on a pile of wood and involved myself in reproducing it. Don Juan made some corrections and gave me some pointers about my breathing. The end result was a state of complete physical relaxation.

We returned to the *ramada* and sat down again. I told him that sometimes I felt irked with myself because I was so helpless.

"There is nothing wrong with the feeling of being helpless," he said. "All of us are most familiar with it. Remember that we have spent an eternity as helpless infants. I have already told you that at this very moment you are like an infant who can't get out of the crib by himself; much less act on his own. Genaro gets you out of your crib, let's say, by picking you up. But an infant wants to act, and since he can't he complains. There is nothing wrong with that, but to indulge in protesting and complaining is another matter."

He demanded that I keep myself relaxed. He suggested that I ask him questions for a while until I was in a better frame of mind.

For a moment I was at a loss and could not decide what to ask.

Don Juan unrolled a straw mat and told me to sit on it. Then he filled a large gourd with water and put it in a carrying net. He seemed to be preparing for a journey. He sat down again and urged me with a movement of his eyebrows to begin my questions.

I asked him to tell me more about the moth.

He gave me a long scrutinizing look and chuckled.

"That was an ally," he said. "You know that."

"But what actually is an ally, don Juan?"

"There is no way of saying what exactly an ally is; just as there is no way of saying what exactly a tree is."

"A tree is a living organism," I said.

"That doesn't tell me much," he said. "I can also say that an ally is a force, a tension. I've told you that already, but that doesn't say much about an ally.

"Just like in the case of a tree, the only way to know 'what an ally is' is by experiencing it. Over the years I have struggled to prepare you for the momentous encounter with an ally. You may not realize this, but it took you years of preparation to meet tree. To meet ally is no different. A teacher must acquaint his disciple with ally little by little; piece by piece. You have over the course of the years stored a great amount of knowledge about it, and now you are capable of putting that knowledge together to experience ally the way you experience tree."

"I have no idea that I'm doing that, don Juan."

"Your reason is not aware of it because it cannot accept the possibility of ally to begin with. Fortunately it is not the reason which puts ally together. It is the body. You have perceived ally in many degrees and on many occasions. Each of those perceptions was stored in your body. The sum of those pieces is the ally. I don't know any other way of describing it."

I said that I could not conceive that my body was acting by itself as if it were an entity separate from my reason.

"It isn't, but we have made it so," he said. "Our reason is petty and it is always at odds with our body. This of course is only a way of talking, but the triumph of a man of knowledge is that he has joined the two together. Since you're not a man of knowledge, your body does things now that your reason cannot comprehend. The ally is one of those things. You were not mad, and neither were you dreaming when you perceived the ally that night, right here."

I asked him about the frightening idea which he and don Genaro had implanted in me; that the ally was an entity waiting for me at the edge of a small valley in the mountains of northern Mexico. They had told me that sooner or later I had to keep my appointment with the ally and wrestle with it.

"Those are ways of talking about mysteries for which there are no words," he said. "Genaro and I said that at the edge of that plain the ally was waiting for you. That statement was true, but it doesn't have the meaning that you want to give it. The ally is waiting for you. That's for sure, but it is not at the edge of any plain. It is right here, or there, or in any other place. The ally is waiting for you just like death is waiting for you; everywhere and nowhere."

"Why is the ally waiting for me?"

"For the same reason that death waits for you," he said, "because you were born. There is no possibility of explaining at this point what is meant by that. You must first experience the ally. You must perceive it in it's full force. Then the sorcerers' explanation may throw light upon it. So far you've had enough power to clarify at least one point, that the ally is a moth.

"Some years ago you and I went to the mountains, and you had a bout with something. I had no way of telling you then what was taking place. You saw a strange shadow flying back and forth in front of the fire. You yourself said that it looked like a moth. Although you didn't know what you were talking about, you were absolutely correct. The shadow was a moth. Then on another occasion something frightened you out of your wits after you had fallen asleep; again, in front of a fire. I had warned you not to fall asleep, but you disregarded my warning. That act left you at the mercy of the ally and the moth stepped on your neck. Why you survived will always be a mystery to me. You didn't know then, but I had given you up for dead. Your blunder was that serious.

"From then on, every time we've been in the mountains or in the desert, even if you didn't notice it, the moth always followed us. All in all then, we can say that for you the ally is a moth. But I cannot say that it is really a moth the way we know moths. Calling the ally a moth is again only a way of talking; a way of making that immensity out there understandable."

"Is the ally a moth for you too?" I asked.

"No. The way one understands the ally is a personal matter," he said.

I mentioned that we were back where we had started; he had not told me what an ally really was.

"There's no need to be confused," he said. "Confusion is a mood one enters into, but one can also get out of it. At this point there is no way of clarifying anything. Perhaps later on today we'll be able to consider these matters in detail. It's up to you, or rather, it's up to your personal power."

He refused to say one more word. I became quite upset with the fear that I was going to fail the test. Don Juan took me to the back of his house and made me sit on a straw mat at the edge of an irrigation ditch. The water moved so slowly that it almost seemed stagnant. He commanded me to sit quietly, shut off my internal dialogue, and look at the water. He said that years before he had discovered that I had a certain affinity for bodies of water, a feeling that was most convenient for the endeavors I was involved in. I remarked that I was not particularly fond of bodies of water, but neither did I dislike them. He said that that was precisely why water was beneficial for me. I was indifferent towards it. Under conditions of stress water could not trap me, and neither could it reject me.

He sat slightly behind me to my right, and admonished me to let go and not be afraid because he was there to help me if there was any need.

I had a moment of fear. I looked at him, waiting for further instructions. He forcibly turned my head towards the water and ordered me to proceed. I had no idea what he wanted me to do, so I simply relaxed. As I looked at the water, I caught sight of the reeds on the opposite side. Unconsciously I rested my unfocused eyes on them. The slow current made them quiver. The water had the color of the desert dirt. I noticed that the ripples around the reeds looked like furrows or crevices on a smooth surface. At one instant the reeds became gigantic. The water was a smooth flat ocher surface. Then in a matter of seconds I was sound asleep; or perhaps I entered into a perceptual state for which I had no parallel. The closest way of describing it would be to say that I went to sleep and had a portentous [* *portentous- of momentous or ominous significance*] dream.

I felt that I could have gone on with it indefinitely if I had wanted to, but I deliberately ended it by engaging myself in a conscious self-dialogue. I opened my eyes. I was lying on the straw mat. Don Juan was a few feet away. My dream had been so magnificent that I began to recount it to him. He signaled me to be quiet. With a long twig he pointed to two long shadows that some dry branches of desert chaparral cast on the ground. The tip of his twig followed the outline of one of the shadows as if it were drawing it. Then it jumped to the other and did the same with it. The shadows were about a foot long and over an inch wide. They were from five to six inches apart from each other. The movement of the twig forced my eyes out of focus and I found myself looking with crossed eyes at four long shadows. Suddenly the two shadows in the middle merged into one and created an extraordinary perception of depth. There was some inexplicable roundness and volume in the shadow thus formed. It was almost like a transparent tube; a round bar of some unknown substance. I knew that my eyes were crossed and yet they seemed to be focused on one spot. The view there was crystal clear. I could move my eyes without dispelling the image.

I continued watching but without letting my guard down. I experienced a curious compulsion to let go and immerse myself in the scene. Something in what I was observing seemed to pull me, but something in myself surfaced and I began a semiconscious dialogue. Almost instantly I became aware of my surroundings in the world of everyday life.

Don Juan was watching me. He appeared to be puzzled. I asked him if there was something wrong. He did not answer. He helped me to sit up. It was only then that I realized that I had been lying on my back looking at the sky, and don Juan had been leaning over my face.

My first impulse was to tell him that I had actually seen the shadows on the ground while I had been looking at the sky, but he put his hand over my mouth. We sat in silence for a while. I had no thoughts. I experienced an exquisite sense of peace, and then quite abruptly I had an unyielding urge to get up and go into the chaparral to look for don Genaro.

I made an attempt to speak to don Juan. He jutted his chin and twisted his lips as a silent command not to talk. I tried to assess my predicament in a rational manner. I was enjoying my silence so much, however, that I did not want to bother with logical considerations.

After a moment's pause, I again felt the imperious need to walk into the bushes. I followed a trail. Don Juan tagged along behind me as if I were the leader.

We walked for about an hour. I succeeded in remaining without any thoughts. Then we came to a hillside. Don Genaro was there sitting near the top of a rock wall. He greeted me effusively and had to yell his words. He was about fifty feet above the ground. Don Juan made me sit down and then sat next to me.

Don Genaro explained that I had found the place where he had been waiting because he had guided me with a sound he had been making. As he voiced his words I realized that I had indeed been hearing a peculiar sound I thought to be a buzzing in my ears. It had seemed to be more of an internal affair; a bodily condition; a feeling of sound so undetermined that it was beyond the realm of conscious assessment and interpretation.

I believed that don Genaro had a small instrument in his left hand. From where I sat I could not distinguish it clearly. It looked like a jew's-harp; with it he produced a soft eerie sound which was practically indiscernible. [* *indiscernible- barely able to be perceived*] He kept on playing it for a moment, as if allowing me time to fully realize what he had just said. Then he showed me his left hand. There was nothing in it. He was not holding any instrument. It had appeared to me that he was playing some instrument because of the manner in which he had put his hand to his mouth. Actually the sound was being produced with his lips and the edge of his left hand between the thumb and index finger.

I turned to don Juan to explain to him that I had been fooled by don Genaro's movements. He made a quick gesture, told me not to talk, and told me to pay close attention to what don Genaro was doing. I turned back to look at don Genaro, but he was no longer there. I thought that he must have climbed down. I waited a few moments for him to emerge from behind the bushes. The rock he had been standing on was a peculiar formation. It was more like a huge ledge on the side of a larger rock wall. I must have taken my eyes away from him for only a couple of seconds. If he had climbed up, I would have caught sight of him before he had reached the top of the rock wall; and if he had climbed down, he would also have been visible from where I was sitting.

I asked don Juan about don Genaro's whereabouts. He replied that he still was standing on the rock ledge. As far as I could judge there was no one there, but don Juan maintained over and over again that don Genaro was still standing on the rock.

He did not seem to be joking. His eyes were steady and fierce. He said in a cutting tone that my senses were not the proper avenue to appraise what don Genaro was doing. He ordered me to shut off my internal dialogue. I struggled for a moment and began to close my eyes. Don Juan lurched at me and shook me by the shoulders. He whispered that I had to keep my view on the rock ledge.

I had a sensation of drowsiness and heard don Juan's words as if they were coming from far away. I automatically looked at the ledge. Don Genaro was there again. That did not interest me. I noticed semiconsciously that it was very difficult for me to breathe, but before I could have a thought about it don Genaro jumped to the ground. That act did not catch my interest either. He came over to me and helped me stand up; holding me by the arm. Don Juan held my other arm. They propped me up between the two of them. Then it was only don Genaro who was helping me walk. He whispered something in my ear that I could not understand, and suddenly I felt that he pulled my body in some strange way. He grabbed me, in a manner of speaking, by the skin of my stomach and pulled me up to the ledge; or perhaps onto another rock.

I knew that for an instant I was on a rock. I could have sworn that it was the rock ledge. The image was so fleeting, however, that I could not evaluate it in detail. Then I felt that something in me faltered and I fell backwards. I had a faint feeling of anguish or perhaps physical discomfort. The next thing I knew don Juan was talking to me. I could not understand him. I concentrated my attention on his lips. The sensation I had was dreamlike. I was trying to rip from the inside an enveloping film-like sheet that encased me while don Juan tried to rip it from the outside. Finally it actually popped, and don Juan's words became audible and their meaning crystal clear. He was commanding me to surface by myself. I struggled desperately to gain my sobriety. I had no success. I quite consciously wondered why I was having so much trouble. I fought to talk to myself.

Don Juan seemed to be aware of my difficulty. He urged me to try harder. Something out there was preventing me from engaging myself in my familiar internal dialogue. It was as if a strange force were making me drowsy and indifferent.

I fought against it until I began to lose my breath. I heard don Juan talking to me. My body contorted involuntarily with the tension. I felt as if I were embraced and locked in mortal combat with something that was keeping me from breathing. I did not have fear, but rather some uncontrollable fury possessed me. My wrath mounted to such heights that I growled and screamed like an animal. Then my body was taken by a seizure. I had a jolt that stopped me instantly. I could again breathe normally, and then I realized that don Juan had poured his gourd of water over my stomach and neck, soaking me.

He helped me sit up. Don Genaro was standing on the ledge. He called my name and then jumped to the ground. I saw him plummeting down from a height of fifty feet or so, and I experienced an unbearable sensation around my umbilical region; I had had the same sensation in dreams of falling.

Don Genaro came to me and asked me, smiling, if I had liked his leap. I tried unsuccessfully to say something. Don Genaro called my name again.

"Carlitos! Watch me!" he said.

He swung his arms at his sides four or five times as if to get momentum, and then jumped out of sight; or I thought he did; or perhaps he did something else for which I had no description. He had been five or six feet away from me, and then he vanished as if he had been sucked away by an uncontrollable force.

I felt aloof and tired. I had a sense of indifference and did not want to think or talk to myself. I was not afraid; but inexplicably sad. I wanted to weep. Don Juan hit me repeatedly with his knuckles on the top of my head and laughed as if everything that had happened were a joke. He then demanded that I talk to myself because that was the time when the internal dialogue was desperately needed. I heard him ordering me, "Talk! Talk."

I had an involuntary spasm in the muscles of my lips. My mouth moved without sounds. I remembered don Genaro moving his mouth in a similar way when he was clowning and I wished I could have said, as he had, "My mouth doesn't want to talk." I tried to voice the words and my lips contorted in a painful way. Don Juan seemed to be on the verge of collapsing with laughter. His enjoyment was contagious and I also laughed. Finally he helped me to stand up. I asked him if don Genaro was coming back. He said that don Genaro had had enough of me for the day.

"You almost made it," don Juan said.

Later, don Juan and I were sitting near the fire in his earth stove. He had insisted that I eat. I was not hungry, or tired. An unusual melancholy had overtaken me; I felt removed from all the events of the day. Don Juan handed me my writing pad. I made a supreme effort to recapture my usual state. I jotted down some comments. Little by little I brought myself back into my old pattern. It was as if a veil were being lifted. Suddenly I was again involved in my familiar attitude of interest and bewilderment.

"Good, good," don Juan said, patting my head. "I've told you that the true art of a warrior is to balance terror and wonder."

Don Juan's mood was unusual. He seemed almost nervous; anxious. He appeared to be willing to speak on his own accord. I believed that he was preparing me for the sorcerers' explanation, and I became quite anxious myself. His eyes had a strange glimmer that I had seen only a few times before. After I told him what I thought of his unusual attitude, he said that he was happy for me; that as a warrior he could rejoice in the triumphs of his fellow men if they were triumphs of the spirit. He added that, unfortunately, I was not yet ready for the sorcerers' explanation in spite of the fact that I had successfully solved don Genaro's riddle. His contention was that when he had poured water over my body, I had actually been dying; and my whole achievement had been canceled out by my incapacity to fend off the last of don Genaro's onslaughts.

"Genaro's power was like a tide that engulfed you," he said.

"Did don Genaro want to hurt me?" I asked.

"No," he said. "Genaro wants to help you. But power can be met only with power. He was testing you and you failed."

"But I solved his riddle, didn't I?"

"You did fine," he said. "So fine that Genaro had to believe that you were capable of a complete warrior's feat. You almost made it. What floored you this time was not indulging, though."

"What was it then?"

"You're too impatient and violent. Instead of relaxing and going with Genaro, you began to fight him. You can't win against him. He's stronger than you."

Don Juan then volunteered some advice and suggestions about my personal relations with people. His remarks were a serious sequel to what don Genaro had jokingly said to me earlier. He was in a talkative mood, and without any coaxing on my part, he began to explain what had taken place during the last two times I had been there.

"As you know," he said, "the crux of sorcery is the internal dialogue. That is the key to everything. When a warrior learns to stop it, everything becomes possible; the most farfetched schemes become attainable. The passageway to all the weird and eerie experiences that you have had recently was the fact that you could stop talking to yourself. You have in complete sobriety witnessed the ally, Genaro's double, and 'the dreamer and the dreamed', and today you almost learned about the totality of yourself; that was the warrior's feat that Genaro expected you to perform. All this has been possible because of the amount of personal power that you have stored. It started the last time you were here when I caught sight of a very auspicious omen. As you arrived, I heard the ally prowling around. First I heard it's soft steps, and then I *saw* the moth looking at you as you got out of your car. The ally was motionless watching you.

"That to me was the best omen. Had the ally been agitated and moving around as if it was displeased with your presence- the way it always had been- the course of the events would have been different. Many times I have caught sight of the ally in an unfriendly state towards you. But this time the omen was right, and I knew that the ally had a piece of knowledge for you. That was the reason why I said that you had an appointment with knowledge; an appointment with a moth that had been pending for a long time. For reasons inconceivable to us, the ally selected the form of a moth to manifest itself to you."

"But you said that the ally was formless and that one could only judge it's effects," I said.

"That is right," he said. "But the ally is a moth for the onlookers who are associated with you—Genaro and myself. For you the ally is only an effect: a sensation in your body, or a sound, or the golden specks of knowledge. It remains as a fact, nonetheless, that by choosing the form of a moth the ally is telling Genaro and me something of great importance. Moths are the givers of knowledge, and the friends and helpers of sorcerers. It is because the ally chose to be a moth around you that Genaro places such a great emphasis on you.

"That night that you met the moth, as I had anticipated, was a true appointment with knowledge for you. You learned the moth's call, felt the gold dust of it's wings, but above all, that night for the first time you were aware that you *saw, a*nd your body learned that we are luminous beings. You have not yet assessed correctly that monumental event in your life. Genaro demonstrated for you with tremendous force and clarity that we are a feeling, and that what we call our body is a cluster of luminous fibers that have awareness.

"Last night you were back again under the good auspices of the ally. I came to look at you as you arrived, and I knew that I had to call Genaro so he could explain to you the mystery of the dreamer and the dreamed. You believed then, just as you always have, that I was tricking you. But Genaro was not hiding in the bushes as you thought. He came over for you even if your reason refuses to believe it."

That part of don Juan's elucidation was indeed the hardest to take at it's face value. I could not admit it. I said that don Genaro had been real and of this world.

"Everything that you've witnessed so far has been real and of this world," he said. "There is no other world. Your stumbling block is a peculiar insistence on your part, and that peculiarity of yours is not going to be cured by explanations. So today Genaro addressed himself directly to your body. A careful examination of what you did today will reveal to you that your body put things together in a most praiseworthy manner. Somehow you refrained from indulging in your visions at the irrigation ditch. You kept a rare control and aloofness as warriors should; you didn't believe anything, but you still acted efficiently and thus you were capable of following Genaro's call. You actually found him without any aid from me.

"When we arrived at the rock ledge, you were imbued with power and you saw Genaro standing where other sorcerers have stood for similar reasons. He walked over to you after jumping from the ledge. He himself was all power. Had you proceeded as you did earlier by the irrigation ditch, you would've *seen* him as he really is; a luminous being. Instead, you got frightened, especially when Genaro made you leap. That leap in itself should have been sufficient to transport you beyond your boundaries; but you didn't have the strength, and you fell back into the world of your reason. Then of course, you entered into mortal combat with yourself. Something in you—your *will*—wanted to go with Genaro, while your reason opposed him. Had I not helped you, you now would be lying dead and buried in that power place. But even with my help the outcome was dubious for a moment."

We were silent for a few minutes. I waited for him to speak. Finally I asked, "Did don Genaro make me leap up to the rock ledge?"

"Don't take that leap in the sense that you understand a leap," he said. "Once again this is only a way of speaking. As long as you think that you are a solid body, you cannot conceive what I am talking about."

He then spilled some ashes on the ground by the lantern covering an area about two feet square, and drew a diagram with his fingers, a diagram that had eight points interconnected with lines. It was a geometrical figure.

[*Eight-Point Diagram*]

He had drawn a similar one years before when he tried to explain to me that it was not an illusion that I had observed the same leaf falling four times from the same tree.

The diagram in the ashes had two epicenters. One he called 'reason', and the other 'will'. 'Reason' was interconnected directly with a point he called 'talking'. Through 'talking', 'reason' was indirectly connected to three other points: 'feeling', 'dreaming' and 'seeing'. The other epicenter, 'will', was directly connected to 'feeling', 'dreaming' and 'seeing'; but only indirectly connected to 'reason' and 'talking'.

I remarked that the diagram was different from the one I had recorded years before.

"The outer form is of no importance," he said. "These points represent a human being, and can be drawn in any way you want."

"Do they represent the body of a human being?" I asked.

"Don't call it the body," he said. "These are eight points on the fibers of a luminous being. A sorcerer says, as you can see in the diagram, that a human being is first of all *will*; because *will* is directly connected to three points: *feeling*, *dreaming,* and seeing. Then next, a human being is *reason*. This is properly a center that is smaller than *will*; it is connected only with *talking*."

"What are the other two points, don Juan?"

He looked at me and smiled.

"You're a lot stronger now than you were the first time we talked about this diagram," he said. "But you're not yet strong enough to know all the eight points. Genaro will someday show you the other two."

"Does everybody have those eight points or only sorcerers?"

"We may say that every one of us brings to the world eight points. Two of them, *reason* and *talking*, are known by everyone. *Feeling* is always vague but somehow familiar. But only in the world of sorcerers does one get fully acquainted with *dreaming*, *seeing*, and *will*. And finally, at the outer edge of that world one encounters the other two. The eight points make the totality of oneself."

He showed me in the diagram that in essence all the points could be made to connect with one another indirectly.

I asked him again about the two mysterious remaining points. He showed me that they were connected only to 'will' and that they were removed from 'feeling', 'dreaming' and 'seeing', and much more distant from 'talking' and 'reason'. He pointed with his finger to show that they were isolated from the rest and from each other.

"Those two points will never yield to *talking* or to *reason*," he said. "Only *will* can handle them. *Reason* is so removed from them that it is utterly useless to try figuring them out. This is one of the hardest things to realize. After all, the forte of *reason* is to reason out everything."

I asked him if the eight points corresponded to areas or to certain organs in a human being.

"They do," he replied dryly and erased the diagram.

He touched my head and said that that was the center of ‘reason’ and ‘talking’. The tip of my sternum was the center of ‘feeling.’ The area below the navel was ‘will’. ‘Dreaming' was on the right side against the ribs. 'Seeing' on the left. He said that sometimes in some warriors 'seeing' and 'dreaming' were on the right side.

"Where are the other two points?" I asked.

He gave me a most obscene answer and broke into a belly laugh.

"You're so sneaky," he said. "You think I'm a sleepy old goat, don't you?"

I explained to him that my questions created their own momentum.

"Don't try to hurry," he said. "You'll know in due time, and then you will be on your own by yourself."

"Do you mean that I won't see you any more, don Juan?"

"Not ever again," he said. "Genaro and I will be then what we always have been, dust on the road."

I had a jolt in the pit of my stomach.

"What are you saying, don Juan?"

"I'm saying that we all are unfathomable being, luminous and boundless. You, Genaro, and I are stuck together by a purpose that is not our decision."

"What purpose are you talking about?"

"Learning the warrior's way. You can't get out of it, but neither can we. As long as our achievement is pending you will find me or Genaro. But once it is accomplished you will fly freely, and no one knows where the force of your life will take you."

"What is don Genaro doing in this?"

"That subject is not in your realm yet," he said. "Today I have to pound the nail that Genaro put in; the fact that we are luminous beings. We are perceivers. We are an awareness. We are not objects. We have no solidity. We are boundless. The world of objects and solidity is a way of making our passage on earth convenient. It is only a description that was created to help us. Each of us, or rather our *reason*, forgets that the description is only a description, and thus we entrap the totality of ourselves in a vicious circle from which we rarely emerge in our lifetime.

"At this moment for instance, you are involved in extricating yourself from the snarls of *reason*. It is preposterous and unthinkable for you that Genaro just appeared at the edge of the chaparral, and yet you cannot deny that you witnessed it. You perceived it as such."

Don Juan chuckled. He carefully drew another diagram in the ashes and covered it with his hat before I could copy it.

"We are perceivers," he proceeded. "The world that we perceive, though, is an illusion. It was created by a description that was told to us since the moment we were born.

"We the luminous beings are born with two rings of power, but we use only one to create the world. That ring which is hooked very soon after we are born is *reason*, and it's companion is *talking*. Between the two they concoct and maintain the world.

"So, in essence, the world that your *reason* wants to sustain is the world created by a description and it's dogmatic and inviolable rules a description which *reason* learns to accept and defend.

"The secret of the luminous beings is that they have another ring of power which is never used, the *will*. The trick of the sorcerer is the same trick of the average man. Both have a description; one, the average man, upholds it with his *reason;* the other, the sorcerer, upholds it with his *will*. Both descriptions have their rules, and the rules are perceivable. But the advantage of the sorcerer is that *will* is more engulfing than *reason*.

"The suggestion that I want to make at this point is that from now on you should let yourself perceive whether the description is upheld by your *reason* or by your *will*. I feel that is the only way for you to use your daily world as a challenge and a vehicle to accumulate enough personal power in order to get to the totality of yourself.

"Perhaps the next time that you come you'll have enough of it. At any rate, wait until you feel like you felt today at the irrigation ditch, that an inner voice is telling you to do so. If you come in any other spirit it'll be a waste of time and a danger to you."

I remarked that if I had to wait for that inner voice I would never see them again.

"You'd be surprised how well one can perform if one is against the wall," he said.

He stood up and picked up a bundle of firewood. He placed some dry sticks on the earth stove. The flames cast a yellowish glow on the ground. He then turned off the lantern, and squatted in front of his hat which was covering the drawing he had made in the ashes.

He commanded me to sit calmly, shut off my internal dialogue, and keep my eyes on his hat. I struggled for a few moments and then I felt a sensation of floating; of falling off a cliff. It was as if nothing were supporting me; as if I were not sitting or did not have a body.

Don Juan lifted his hat. Underneath there were spirals of ashes. I watched them without thinking. I felt the spirals moving. I felt them in my stomach. The ashes seemed to pile up. Then they were stirred and fluffed, and suddenly don Genaro was sitting in front of me.

The sight forced me instantly into my internal dialogue. I thought that I must have fallen asleep. I began to breathe in short gasps and tried to open my eyes, but my eyes were open.

I heard don Juan telling me to get up and move around. I jumped up and ran to the ramada. Don Juan and don Genaro ran after me. Don Juan brought his lantern. I could not catch my breath. I tried to calm myself as I had done before by jogging in place while I faced the west. I lifted my arms and began breathing. Don Juan came to my side and said that those movements were done only in the twilight.

Don Genaro yelled that it was twilight for me and both of them began to laugh. Don Genaro ran to the edge of the bushes, and then bounced back to the *ramada* as if he had been attached to a giant rubber band that made him snap back. He repeated the same movement three or four times, and then came to my side. Don Juan had been looking at me fixedly, giggling like a child.

They exchanged a furtive glance. Don Juan said to don Genaro in a loud voice that my reason was dangerous, and that it could kill me if it was not placated.

"For heaven's sake!" don Genaro exclaimed in a roaring voice. "Placate his reason!"

They jumped up and down, and laughed like two children.

Don Juan made me sit down underneath the lantern, and handed me my notebook.

"Tonight we're really pulling your leg," he said in a conciliatory tone. "Don't be afraid. Genaro was hiding under my hat."

# PART TWO – The Tonal and the Nagual

## 4. Having to Believe

I walked towards downtown on the Paseo de la Reforma. I was tired. The altitude of Mexico City no doubt had something to do with it. I could have taken a bus or a taxi but somehow in spite of my fatigue I wanted to walk. It was Sunday afternoon. The traffic was minimal and yet the exhaust fumes of the buses and trucks with diesel engines made the narrow streets of downtown seem like canyons of smog.

I arrived at the Zocalo and noticed that the cathedral of Mexico City seemed to be more slanted than the last time I had seen it. I stepped a few feet inside the enormous halls. A cynical thought crossed my mind.

From there I headed for the Lagunilla market. I had no definite purpose in mind. I walked aimlessly but at a good pace without looking at anything in particular. I ended up at the stands of old coins and secondhand books.

"Hello, hello! Look who's here!" someone said, tapping me lightly on the shoulder.

The voice and the touch made me jump. I quickly turned to my right. My mouth opened in surprise. The person who had spoken to me was don Juan.

"My God, don Juan!" I exclaimed and a shiver shook my body from head to toe. "What are you doing here?"

"What are you doing here?" he retorted as an echo.

I told him that I had stopped in the city for a couple of days before venturing into the mountains of central Mexico to search for him.

"Well let's say then that I came down from the mountains to find you," he said, smiling.

He patted me on the shoulder several times. He seemed to be glad to see me. He put his hands on his hips and swelled his chest, and asked me whether or not I liked his appearance. It was only then that I noticed he was wearing a suit. The full impact of such an incongruity hit me. I was dumbfounded.

"How do you like my *tacuche*?" he asked, beaming.

He used the slang word 'tacuche' instead of the standard Spanish word 'traje' for suit.

"Today I'm in a suit," he said as if he had to explain, and then pointing to my open mouth he added, "Close it! Close it!"

I laughed absent-mindedly. He noticed my confusion. His body shook with laughter as he turned around so I could see him from every angle. His attire was incredible. He was wearing a light brown suit with pin stripes, brown shoes, a white shirt, and a necktie! And that made me wonder if he had any socks on, or... Was he wearing his shoes without them?

What added to my bewilderment was the maddening sensation I had had that when don Juan tapped me on the shoulder and I turned around, I thought I had seen him in his khaki pants and shirt, his sandals, and his straw hat. And then as he made me aware of his attire, and as I focused my attention on every detail of it, the complete unit of his dress became fixed as if I had created it with my thoughts. My mouth seemed to be the area of my body which was most taxed by the surprise. It opened involuntarily. Don Juan touched me gently on my chin as if he were helping me to close it.

"You certainly are developing a double chin," he said and laughed in short spurts.

I became aware then that he did not have a hat on, and that his short white hair was parted on the right side. He looked like an old Mexican gentleman; an impeccably tailored urban dweller.

I told him that to have found him there was so unnerving to me that I had to sit down. He was very understanding and suggested that we go to a nearby park.

We walked a few blocks in complete silence and then we arrived at the Plaza Garibaldi; a place where musicians offered their services; a sort of musicians' employment center.

Don Juan and I merged with scores of spectators and tourists, and walked around the park. After a while he stopped, leaned against a wall, and pulled his pants up slightly at the knees. He was wearing light brown socks. I asked him to tell me the meaning of his mysterious apparel. His vague reply was that he simply had to be in a suit that day for reasons that would be clear to me later.

Finding Don Juan in a suit had been so unearthly that my agitation was almost uncontrollable. I had not seen him for several months and I wanted more than anything else in the world to talk with him; but somehow the setting was wrong and my attention meandered around. Don Juan must have noticed my anxiety and suggested that we walk to La Alameda, a more quiet park a few blocks away.

There were not too many people in the park and we had no trouble finding an empty bench. We sat down. My nervousness had given way to a feeling of uneasiness. I did not dare to look at don Juan.

There was a long unnerving pause. Still without looking at him, I said that the inner voice had finally driven me to search for him; that the staggering events I had witnessed at his house had affected my life very deeply, and that I just had to talk about them.

He made a gesture of impatience with his hand and said that his policy was never to dwell on past events.

"What's important now is that you've fulfilled my suggestion," he said. "You have taken your daily world as a challenge, and the proof that you have stored sufficient personal power is the indisputable fact that you have found me with no difficulty whatever at the precise spot where you were supposed to."

"I doubt very much that I could take credit for that," I said.

"I was waiting for you and then you showed up," he said. "That's all I know. That's all any warrior would care to know."

"What's going to happen now that I've found you?" I asked.

"For one thing," he said, "we won't discuss the dilemmas of your *reason;* those experiences belong to another time and to another mood. They are, properly speaking, only steps of an endless ladder. To emphasize them would take away from the importance of what's taking place now. A warrior cannot possibly afford to do that."

I had an almost invincible desire to complain. It was not that I resented anything that had happened to me but I craved solace and sympathy. Don Juan appeared to know my mood and spoke as if I had actually voiced my thoughts.

"Only as a warrior can one withstand the path of knowledge," he said. "A warrior cannot complain or regret anything. His life is an endless challenge, and challenges cannot possibly be good or bad. Challenges are simply challenges."

His tone was dry and severe, but his smile was warm and disarming.

"Now that you are here, what we'll do is wait for an omen," he said.

"What kind of omen?" I asked.

"We need to find out whether your power can stand on it's own," he said. "The last time it petered out miserably. This time the circumstances of your personal life appear to have given you, at least on the surface, all the necessaries to deal with the sorcerers' explanation."

"Is there a chance that you might tell me about it?" I asked.

"It depends on your personal power," he said. "As is always the case in the doings and not-doings of warriors, personal power is the only thing that matters. So far, I should say that you're doing fine."

After a moment's silence, as if wanting to change the subject, he stood up and pointed to his suit.

"I have put on my suit for you," he said in a mysterious tone. "This suit is my challenge. Look how good I look in it! How easy! Eh? Nothing to it!"

Don Juan did look extraordinarily well in a suit. All I could think of as a gauge for comparison was the way my grandfather used to look in his heavy English flannel suit. He always gave me the impression that he felt unnatural; out of place in a suit. Don Juan, on the contrary, was so at ease.

"Do you think it is easy for me to look natural in a suit?" don Juan asked.

I did not know what to say. I concluded to myself, however, that judging by his appearance and by the way he conducted himself, it was the easiest thing in the world for him.

"To wear a suit is a challenge for me," he said. "A challenge as difficult as wearing sandals and a poncho would be for you. You have never had the necessity to take that as a challenge, though. My case is different; I'm an Indian."

We looked at each other. He raised his brows in a silent question as if asking for my comments.

"The basic difference between an ordinary man and a warrior is that a warrior takes everything as a challenge," he went on, "while an ordinary man takes everything either as a blessing or as a curse. The fact that you're here today indicates that you have tipped the scales in favor of the warrior's way."

His stare made me feel nervous. I tried to get up and walk, but he made me sit down.

"You are going to sit here without fretting until we're through," he said imperatively. "We are waiting for an omen. We can't proceed without it because it isn't enough that you found me; as it wasn't enough that you found Genaro that day in the desert. Your power must round itself up and give an indication."

"I can't figure out what you want," I said.

"I *saw* something prowling around this park," he said.

"Was it the ally?" I asked.

"No. It wasn't. So, we must sit here and find out what kind of omen your power is rounding up."

He then asked me to give him a detailed account of how I had carried out the recommendations made by don Genaro and himself about my daily world, and my relations with people. I felt a bit embarrassed. He put me at ease with the argument that my personal affairs were not private because they included a task of sorcery that he and don Genaro were fostering in me. I jokingly remarked that my life had been ruined because of that task of sorcery; and recounted the difficulties in maintaining my day-to-day world.

I talked for a long time. Don Juan laughed at my account until tears were rolling down his cheeks. He slapped his thighs repeatedly. That gesture, which I had seen him do hundreds of times, was definitely out of place when it was done on the pants of a suit. I was filled with apprehension which I was compelled to voice.

"Your suit scares me more than anything you've done to me," I said.

"You'll get used to it," he said. "A warrior must be fluid, and must shift harmoniously with the world around him; whether it is the world of *reason*, or the world of *will*.

"The most dangerous aspect of that shifting comes forth every time the warrior finds that the world is neither one nor the other. I was told that the only way to succeed in that crucial shifting was by proceeding in one's actions as if one believed. In other words, the secret of a warrior is that he believes without believing. But obviously a warrior cannot just say he believes and let it go at that. That would be too easy. To just believe would exonerate him from examining his situation. A warrior, whenever he has to involve himself with believing, does it as a choice as an expression of his innermost predilection. A warrior doesn't believe. A warrior *has* to believe."

He stared at me for a few seconds as I wrote in my notebook. I remained silent. I could not say that I understood the difference, but I did not want to argue or ask questions. I wanted to think about what he had said, but my mind meandered as I looked around. On the street behind us there was a long line of automobiles and buses, blowing their horns. At the edge of the park perhaps twenty yards away directly in line with the bench where we were sitting, a group of about seven people, including three policemen in light gray uniforms, stood over a man lying motionless on the grass. He seemed to be drunk or perhaps seriously ill.

I glanced at don Juan. He had also been looking at the man.

I told him that for some reason I was incapable of clarifying by myself what he had just said to me.

"I don't want to ask questions any more," I said. "But if I don't ask you to explain, I don't understand. Not to ask questions is very abnormal for me."

"Please be normal, by all means," he said with feigned seriousness.

I said that I did not understand the difference between believing and having to believe. To me both were the same. To conceive that the statements were different was splitting hairs.

"Remember the story you once told me about your friend and her cats?" he asked casually.

He looked up at the sky and leaned back against the bench, stretching his legs. He put his hands behind his head and contracted the muscles of his whole body. As it always happens, his bones made a loud cracking sound.

He was referring to a story I had once told him about a friend of mine who found two kittens, almost dead, inside a dryer in a laundromat. She revived them, and through excellent nourishment and care groomed them into two gigantic cats, a black one and a reddish one.

Two years later she sold her house. Since she could not take the cats with her, and was unable to find another home for them, all she could do under the circumstances was to take them to an animal hospital and have them put to sleep.

I helped her take them. The cats had never been inside a car. She tried to calm them down. They scratched and bit her, especially the reddish cat, the one she called Max. When we finally arrived at the animal hospital, she took the black cat first. Holding it in her arms and without saying a word, she got out of the car. The cat played with her Pawing her gently as she pushed open the glass door to enter the hospital.

I glanced at Max. He was sitting in the back. The movement of my head must have scared him, for he dove under the driver's seat. I made the seat slide backwards. I did not want to reach under it for fear that he would bite or scratch my hand. The cat was lying inside a depression on the floor of the car. He seemed very agitated. His breathing was accelerated. He looked at me. Our eyes met and an overwhelming sensation possessed me. Something took hold of my body; a form of apprehension, despair, or perhaps embarrassment for being part of what was taking place.

I felt a need to explain to Max that it was my friend's decision, and that I was only helping her. The cat kept on looking at me as if he understood my words.

I looked to see if she was coming. I could see her through the glass door. She was talking to the receptionist. My body felt a strange jolt and automatically I opened the door of my car.

"Run, Max, run!" I said to the cat.

He jumped out of the car, dashed across the street with his body close to the ground like a true feline. The opposite side of the street was empty. There were no cars parked and I could see Max running down the street alone the gutter. He reached the corner of a big boulevard and then dove through the storm drain into the sewer.

My friend came back. I told her that Max had left. She got into the car and we drove away without saying a single word.

In the months that followed, the incident became a symbol to me. I fancied, or perhaps I saw, a weird flicker in Max's eyes when he looked at me before jumping out of the car, and I believed that for an instant that castrated, overweight, and useless pet became a cat.

I told don Juan that I was convinced that when Max had run across the street and plunged into the sewer his 'cat spirit' was impeccable, and that perhaps at no other time in his life was his 'catness' so evident. The impression that the incident left on me was unforgettable.

I told the story to all of my friends;. after telling it and retelling it, my identification with the cat became quite pleasurable.

I thought myself to be like Max; overindulgent, domesticated in many ways, and yet I could not help thinking that there was always the possibility of one moment in which the spirit of man might take over my whole being just like the spirit of 'catness' took over Max's bloated and useless body.

Don Juan had liked the story and had made some casual comments about it. He had said that it was not so difficult to let the spirit of man flow and take over; to sustain it, however, was something that only a warrior could do.

"What about the story of the cats?" I asked.

"You told me you believed that you're taking your chances, like Max," he said.

"I do believe that."

"What I've been trying to tell you is that as a warrior you cannot just believe this and let it go at that. With Max, *having* to believe means that you accept the fact that his escape might have been a useless outburst. He might have jumped into the sewer and died instantly. He might have drowned or starved to death, or he might have been eaten by rats. A warrior considers all those possibilities and then chooses to believe in accordance with his innermost predilection.

"As a warrior you *have* to believe that Max made it; that he not only escaped but that he sustained his power. You have to believe it. Let's say that without that belief you have nothing."

The distinction became very clear. I thought I really had chosen to believe that Max had survived, knowing that he was handicapped by a lifetime of soft and pampered living.

"Believing is a cinch," don Juan went on. "*Having* to believe is something else. In this case, for instance, power gave you a splendid lesson but you chose to use only part of it. If you *have* to believe, however, you must use all the event."

"I see what you mean," I said.

My mind was in a state of clarity and I thought I was grasping his concepts with no effort at all.

"I'm afraid you still don't understand," he said, almost whispering.

He stared at me. I held his look for a moment.

"What about the other cat?" he asked.

"Uh? The other cat?" I repeated involuntarily.

I had forgotten about it. My symbol had rotated around Max. The other cat was of no consequence to me.

"But he is!" don Juan exclaimed when I voiced my thoughts. "*Having* to believe means that you have to also account for the other cat. The one that went playfully licking the hands that were carrying him to his doom. That was the cat that went to his death trustingly, filled with his cat's judgments.

"You think you're like Max, therefore you have forgotten about the other cat. You don't even know his name. *Having* to believe means that you must consider everything, and before deciding that you are like Max, you must consider that you may be like the other cat. Instead of running for your life and taking your chances, you may be going to your doom happily, filled with your judgments."

There was an intriguing sadness in his words, or perhaps the sadness was mine. We remained quiet for a long time. Never had it crossed my mind that I might be like the other cat. The thought was very distressing to me.

A mild commotion and the muffled sound of voices suddenly forced me out of my mental deliberations. Policemen were dispersing some people gathered around the man lying on the grass. Someone had propped the man's head on a rolled up jacket. The man was lying parallel to the street. He was facing east. From where I sat I could almost tell that his eyes were open.

Don Juan sighed.

"What a magnificent afternoon," he said, looking at the sky.

"I don't like Mexico City," I said.

"Why not?"

"I hate the smog."

He shook his head rhythmically is if he were agreeing with me.

"I would rather be with you in the desert, or in the mountains," I said.

"If I were you I would never say that," he said.

"I didn't mean anything wrong, don Juan."

"We both know that. It is not what you mean that matters, though. A warrior, or any man for that matter, cannot possibly wish he were somewhere else; a warrior because he lives by challenge, an ordinary man because he doesn't know where his death is going to find him.

"Look at that man over there lying on the grass. What do you think is wrong with him?"

"He's either drunk or ill," I said.

"He's dying!" don Juan said with ultimate conviction. "When we sat down here I caught a glimpse of his death as it circled around him. That's why I told you not to get up; rain or shine, you can't get up from this bench until the end. This is the omen we have been waiting for. It is late afternoon. Right now the sun is about to set. It is your hour of power. Look! The view of that man is only for us."

He pointed out that from where we sat we had an unobstructed view of the man. A group of curious bystanders were gathered in a half circle on the other side of him opposite us.

The sight of the man lying on the grass became very disturbing to me. He was lean and dark, still young. His black hair was short and curly. His shirt was unbuttoned and his chest was uncovered. He was wearing an orange cardigan sweater with holes in the elbows and some old beat up gray slacks. His shoes, of some undefined faded color, were untied. He was rigid. I could not tell whether or not he was breathing. I wondered if he were dying as don Juan had said; or was don Juan simply using the event to make a point? My past experiences with him gave me the certainty that somehow he was making everything fit into some mysterious scheme of his.

After a long silence I turned to him. His eyes were closed. He began to talk without opening them.

"That man is about to die now," he said. "You don't believe it, though, do you?"

He opened his eyes and stared at me for a second. His look was so penetrating that it stunned me.

"No. I don't believe it," I said.

I really felt that the whole thing was too easy. We had come to sit in the park, and right there, as if everything were being staged, was a man dying.

"The world adjusts itself to itself," don Juan said after listening to my doubts. "This is not a setup. This is an omen, an act of power.

"The world upheld by *reason* makes all this into an event that we can watch for a moment on our way to more important things. All we can say about it is that a man is lying on the grass in the park, perhaps drunk.

"The world upheld by *will* makes it into an act of power which we can see. We can *see* death whirling around the man setting it's hooks deeper and deeper into his luminous fibers. We can *see* the luminous strings losing their tautness and vanishing one by one.

"Those are the two possibilities opened to us luminous beings. You are somewhere in the middle still wanting to have everything under the rubric of *reason*. And yet, how can you discard the fact that your personal power rounded up an omen? We came to this park after you had found me where I had been waiting for you—you found me by just walking into me, without thinking, or planning, or deliberately using your *reason*—and after we sat down here to wait for an omen, we became aware of that man. Each of us noticed him in our own way. You with your *reason*. I with my *will*.

"That dying man is one of the cubic centimeters of chance that power always makes available to a warrior. The warrior's art is to be perennially fluid in order to pluck it. I have plucked it, but have you?"

I could not answer. I became aware of an immense chasm within myself, and for a moment I was somehow cognizant of the two worlds he was talking about.

"What an exquisite omen this is!" he went on. "And all for you. Power is showing you that death is the indispensable ingredient in *having* to believe. Without the awareness of death, everything is ordinary, trivial. It is only because death is stalking us that the world is an unfathomable mystery. Power has shown you that. All I have done myself is to round up the details of the omen so the direction would be clear to you; but in rounding up the details, I have also shown you that everything I have said to you today is what I *have* to believe myself because that is the predilection of my spirit."

We looked each other in the eye for a moment.

"I remember a poem that you used to read to me," he said, moving his eyes to the side. "About a man who vowed to die in Paris. How does it go?"

The poem was Cesar Vallejo's "Black Stone on a White Stone." I had read and recited the first two stanzas to don Juan countless times at his request.

*I will die in Paris while it rains,*
*on a day which I already remember.*
*I will die in Paris—and I do not run away—*
*perhaps in the Autumn, on a Thursday, as it is today.*

*It will be a Thursday, because today,*
*the Thursday that I write these lines,*
*my bones feel the turn,*
*and never so much as today, in all my road,*
*have I seen myself alone.*

The poem summed up an indescribable melancholy for me.

Don Juan whispered that he *had* to believe that the dying man had had enough personal power to enable him to choose the streets of Mexico City as the place of his death.

"We're back again to the story of the two cats," he said. "We *have* to believe that Max became aware of what was stalking him and, like that man over there, had enough power at least to choose the place of his end. But then there was the other cat, just like there are other men whose death will encircle them while they are alone, unaware, staring at the walls and ceiling of an ugly barren room.

"That man, on the other hand, is dying where he has always lived, in the streets. Three policemen are his guards of honor. And as he fades away his eyes will catch a last glimpse of the lights in the stores across the street—the cars, the trees, the throngs of people milling around—and his ears will be flooded for the last time with the sounds of traffic and the voices of men and women as they walk by.

"So you see, without an awareness of the presence of our death there is no power, no mystery."

I stared at the man for a long time. He was motionless. Perhaps he was dead. But my disbelief did not matter any longer. Don Juan was right. *Having* to believe that the world is mysterious and unfathomable was the expression of a warrior's innermost predilection. Without it he had nothing.

## 5. The Island of the Tonal

Don Juan and I met again the next day at the same park around noon. He was still wearing his brown suit. We sat on a bench; he took off his coat, folded it very carefully but with an air of supreme casualness, and laid it on the bench. His casualness was very studied and yet it was completely natural. I caught myself staring at him. He seemed to be aware of the paradox [* paradox- something that contradicts itself] he was presenting to me and smiled. He straightened his necktie. He had on a beige long-sleeved shirt. It fit him very well.

"I still have on my suit because I want to tell you something of great importance," he said, patting me on the shoulder. "You had a good performance yesterday. Now it is time to come to some final agreements."

He paused for a long-moment. He seemed to be preparing a statement. I had a strange feeling in my stomach. My immediate assumption was that he was going to tell me the sorcerers' explanation. He stood up a couple of times and paced back and forth in front of me as if it were difficult to voice what he had in mind.

"Let's go to the restaurant across the street and have a bite to eat," he finally said.

He unfolded his coat, and before he put it on he showed me that it was fully lined.

"It is made to order," he said and smiled as if he were proud of it, as if it mattered.

"I have to call your attention to it or you wouldn't notice it, and it is very important that you are aware of it. You are aware of everything only when you think you should be. The condition of a warrior, however, is to be aware of everything at all times.

"My suit and all this paraphernalia is important because it represents my condition in life- or rather, the condition of one of the two parts of my totality. This discussion has been pending. I feel that now is the time to have it. It has to be done properly, though, or it will never make sense. I wanted my suit to give you the first clue. I think it has. Now is the time to talk; for in matters of this topic there is no complete understanding without talking."

"What is the topic, don Juan?"

"The totality of oneself," he said.

He stood up abruptly and led me to a restaurant in a large hotel across the street. A hostess with a rather unfriendly disposition gave us a table inside in a back corner. Obviously the choice places were around the windows.

I told don Juan that the woman reminded me of another hostess in a restaurant in Arizona where don Juan and I had once gone to eat. She had asked us before she handed out the menu, if we had enough money to pay.

"I don't blame this poor woman either," don Juan said, as if sympathizing with her. "She too, like the other one, is afraid of Mexicans."

He laughed softly. A couple of people at the adjacent tables turned their heads around and looked at us.

Don Juan said that without knowing, or perhaps even in spite of herself, the hostess had given us the best table in the house, a table where we could talk and I could write to my heart's content.

I had just taken my writing pad out of my pocket and put it on the table when the waiter suddenly loomed over us. He also seemed to be in a bad mood. He stood over us with a challenging air.

Don Juan proceeded to order a very elaborate meal for himself. He ordered without looking at the menu, as if he knew it by heart. I was at a loss. The waiter had appeared unexpectedly and I had not had time to read the menu, so I told him that I would have the same.

Don Juan whispered in my ear, "I bet you that they don't have what I've ordered."

He stretched his arms and legs, and told me to relax and sit comfortably because the meal was going to take forever to be prepared.

"You are at a very poignant crossroad," he said. "Perhaps the last one, and also perhaps the most difficult one to understand. Some of the things I am going to point out to you today will probably never be clear. They are not supposed to be clear anyway. So don't be embarrassed or discouraged. All of us are dumb creatures when we join the world of sorcery, and to join it doesn't in any sense insure us that we will change. Some of us remain dumb until the very end."

I liked it when he included himself among the idiots. I knew that he did not do it out of kindness, but as a didactic [* *didactic- excessively instructive*] device.

"Don't fret if you don't make sense out of what I'm going to tell you," he continued. "Considering your temperament, I'm afraid that you might knock yourself out trying to understand. Don't! What I'm about to say is meant only to point out a direction."

I had a sudden feeling of apprehension. Don Juan's admonitions [* *admonition- cautionary advice about something imminent*] forced me into an endless speculation. He had warned me on other occasions in very much the same fashion; and every time he had done so, what he was warning me about had turned out to be a devastating issue.

"It makes me very nervous when you talk to me this way," I said.

"I know it," he replied calmly. "I'm deliberately trying to get you on your toes. I need your attention, your undivided attention."

He paused and looked at me, I laughed nervously and involuntarily. I knew that he was stretching the dramatic possibilities of the situation as far as he could.

"I'm not telling you all this for effect," he said, as if he had read my thoughts. "I am simply giving you time to make the proper adjustments."

At that moment the waiter stopped at our table to announce that they did not have what we had ordered. Don Juan laughed out loud and ordered tortillas and beans. The waiter chuckled scornfully and said that they did not serve them, and suggested steak or chicken. We settled for some soup.

We ate in silence. I did not like the soup and could not finish it, but don Juan ate all of his.

"I have put on my suit," he said all of a sudden, "in order to tell you about something, something you already know but which needs to be clarified if it is going to be effective. I have waited until now because Genaro feels that you have to be not only willing to undertake the road of knowledge, but your efforts by themselves must be impeccable enough to make you worthy of that knowledge. You have done well. Now I will tell you the sorcerers' explanation."

He paused again, rubbed his cheeks, and played with his tongue inside his mouth as if he were feeling his teeth.

"I'm going to tell you about the *tonal* and the *nagual,*" he said and looked at me piercingly.

This was the first time in our association that he had used those two terms. I was vaguely familiar with them through the anthropological literature on the cultures of central Mexico. I knew that the 'tonal' (pronounced, toh-na'hl) was thought to be a kind of guardian spirit, usually an animal, that a child obtained at birth and with which he had intimate ties with for the rest of his life. 'Nagual' (pronounced, nah-wa'hl) was the name given to the animal into which sorcerers could allegedly transform themselves; or to the sorcerer that elicited such a transformation.

"This is my *tonal,*" don Juan said, rubbing his hands on his chest.

"Your suit?"

"No. My person."

He pounded his chest and his thighs and the side of his ribs.

"My *tonal* is all this."

He explained that every human being had two sides, two separate entities, two counterparts which became operative at the moment of birth. One was called the 'tonal' and the other the 'nagual'.

I told him what anthropologists knew about the two concepts. He let me speak without interrupting me.

"Well, whatever you may think you know about them is pure nonsense," he said. "I base this statement on the fact that whatever I'm telling you about the *tonal* and the *nagual* could not possibly have been told to you before. Any idiot would know that you know nothing about them because in order to be acquainted with them you would have to be a sorcerer, and you aren't. Or you would've had to talk about them with a sorcerer, and you haven't. So disregard everything you've heard before, because it is inapplicable."

"It was only a comment," I said.

He raised his brows in a comical gesture.

"Your comments are out of order," he said. "This time I need your undivided attention since I am going to acquaint you with the *tonal* and the *nagual*. Sorcerers have a special and unique interest in that knowledge. I would say that the *tonal* and the *nagual* are in the exclusive realm of men of knowledge. In your case, this is the lid that closes everything I have taught you. Thus I have waited until now to talk about them.

"The *tonal* is not an animal that guards a person. I would rather say that it is a guardian that could be represented as an animal. But that is not the important point."

He smiled and winked at me.

"I'm using your own words now," he said. "The *tonal* is the social person."

He laughed, I supposed, at the sight of my bewilderment.

"The *tonal* is rightfully so, a protector, a guardian—a guardian that most of the time turns into a guard."

I fumbled with my notebook. I was trying to pay attention to what he was saying. He laughed and mimicked my nervous movements.

"The *tonal* is the organizer of the world," he proceeded. "Perhaps the best way of describing it's monumental work is to say that on it's shoulders rests the task of setting the chaos of the world in order. It is not farfetched to maintain, as sorcerers do, that everything we know and do as men is the work of the *tonal*.

"At this moment, for instance, what is engaged in trying to make sense out of our conversation is your tonal. Without it there would be only weird sounds and grimaces, and you wouldn't understand a thing of what I'm saying.

"I would say then that the *tonal* is a guardian that protects something priceless, our very being. Therefore an inherent quality of the *tonal* is to be cagey and jealous of it's doings. And since it's doings are by far the most important part of our lives, it is no wonder that it eventually changes in every one of us from a guardian into a guard."

He stopped and asked me if I had understood. I automatically nodded my head affirmatively, and he smiled with an air of incredulity.

"A guardian is broad-minded and understanding," he explained. "A guard, on the other hand, is a vigilante, narrow-minded and most of the time despotic  I say then that the *tonal* in all of us has been made into a petty and despotic guard when it should be a broad-minded guardian."

I definitely was not following the trend of his explanation. I heard and wrote down every word and yet I seemed to be stuck with some internal dialogue of my own.

"It is very hard for me to follow your point," I said.

"If you didn't get hooked on talking to yourself, you would have no quarrels," he said cuttingly.

His remark threw me into a long explanatory statement. I finally caught myself and apologized for my insistence on defending myself.

He smiled and made a gesture that seemed to indicate that my attitude had not really annoyed him.

"The *tonal* is everything we are," he proceeded. "Name it! Anything we have a word for is the *tonal*. And since the *tonal* is it's own doings, then everything, obviously, has to fall under it's domain."

I reminded him that he had said that the 'tonal' was the social person, a term which I myself had used with him to mean a human being as the end result of socialization processes. I pointed out that if the 'tonal' was that product, it could not be everything, as he had said, because the world around us was not the product of socialization.

Don Juan reminded me that my argument had no basis for him, and that long before he had already made the point that there was no world at large but only a description of the world which we had learned to visualize and take for granted.

"The *tonal* is everything we know," he said. "I think this in itself is enough reason for the *tonal* to be such an overpowering affair."

He paused for a moment. He seemed to be definitely waiting for comments or questions, but I had none. Yet I felt obligated to voice a question and struggled to formulate an appropriate one. I failed. I felt that the admonitions with which he had opened our conversation had perhaps served as a deterrent to any inquiry on my part. I felt strangely numb. I could not concentrate and order my thoughts. In fact I felt and knew without the shadow of a doubt that I was incapable of thinking. And yet I knew this without thinking; if that were at all possible.

I looked at don Juan. He was staring at the middle part of my body. He lifted his eyes and my clarity of mind returned instantly.

"The *tonal* is everything we know," he repeated slowly. "And that includes not only us as persons, but everything in our world. It can be said that the *tonal* is everything that meets the eye.

"We begin to groom it at the moment of birth. The moment we take the first gasp of air we also breathe in power for the *tonal*. So it is proper to say that the *tonal* of a human being is intimately tied to his birth.

"You must remember this point. It is of great importance in understanding all this. The *tonal* begins at birth and ends at death."

I wanted to recapitulate all the points that he had made. I went as far as opening my mouth to ask him to repeat the salient points of our conversation, but to my amazement I could not vocalize my words. I was experiencing a most curious incapacity. My words were heavy and I had no control over that sensation.

I looked at don Juan to signal him that I could not talk. He was again staring at the area around my stomach.

He lifted his eyes and asked me how I felt. Words poured out of me as if I had been unplugged. I told him that I had been having the peculiar sensation of not being able to talk or think, and yet my thoughts had been crystal clear.

"Your thoughts have been crystal clear?" he asked.

I realized then that the clarity had not pertained to my thoughts, but to my perception of the world.

"Are you doing something to me, don Juan?" I asked.

"I am trying to convince you that your comments are not necessary," he said and laughed.

"You mean you don't want me to ask questions?"

"No, no. Ask anything you want, but don't let your attention waver."

I had to admit that I had been distracted by the immensity of the topic.

"I still cannot understand, don Juan, what you mean by the statement that the *tonal* is everything," I said after a moment's pause.

"The *tonal* is what makes the world."

"Is the *tonal* the creator of the world?"

Don Juan scratched his temples.

"The *tonal* makes the world only in a manner of speaking. It cannot create or change anything, and yet it makes the world because it's function is to judge, and assess, and witness. I say that the *tonal* makes the world because it witnesses and assesses it according to *tonal* rules. In a very strange manner, the *tonal* is a creator that doesn't create a thing. In other words, the *tonal* makes up the rules by which it apprehends the world. So, in a manner of speaking, it creates the world."

He hummed a popular tune, beating the rhythm with his fingers on the side of his chair. His eyes were shining. They seemed to sparkle. He chuckled, shaking his head.

"You're not following me," he said, smiling.

"I am. I have no problems," I said, but I did not sound very convincing.

"The *tonal* is an island," he explained. "The best way of describing it is to say that the *tonal* is this."

He ran his hand over the table top.

"We can say that the *tonal* is like the top of this table. An island. And on this island we have everything. This island is, in fact, the world.

"There is a personal *tonal* for every one of us, and there is a collective one for all of us at any given time which we can call the *tonal* of the times."

He pointed to the rows of tables in the restaurant.

"Look! Every table has the same configuration. Certain items are present on all of them. They are, however, individually different from each other. Some tables are more crowded than others. They have different food on them, different plates, different atmosphere, yet we have to admit that all the tables in this restaurant are very alike. The same thing happens with the *tonal*. We can say that the *tonal* of the times is what makes us alike in the same way it makes all the tables in this restaurant alike. Each table separately, nevertheless, is an individual case just like the personal *tonal* of each of us. But the important factor to keep in mind is that everything we know about ourselves and about our world is on the island of the *tonal*. See what I mean?"

"If the *tonal* is everything we know about ourselves and our world, what then is the *nagual*?"

"The *nagual* is the part of us which we do not deal with at all."

"I beg your pardon?"

"The *nagual* is the part of us for which there is no description—no words, no names, no feelings, no knowledge."

"That's a contradiction, don Juan. In my opinion, if it can't be felt or described or named, it cannot exist."

"It's a contradiction only in your opinion. I warned you before, don't knock yourself out trying to understand this."

"Would you say that the *nagual* is the mind?"

"No. The mind is an item on the table. The mind is part of the *tonal*. Let's say that the mind is the chili sauce."

He took a bottle of sauce and placed it in front of me.

"Is the *nagual* the soul?"

"No. The soul is also on the table. Let's say that the soul is the ashtray."

"Is it the thoughts of men?"

"No. Thoughts are also on the table. Thoughts are like the silverware."

He picked up a fork and placed it next to the chili sauce and the ashtray.

"Is it a state of grace? Heaven?"

"Not that either. That, whatever it might be, is also part of the *tonal*. It is, let's say, the napkin."

I went on giving possible ways of describing what he was alluding to: pure intellect, psyche, energy, vital force, immortality, life principle. For each thing I named he found an item on the table to serve as a counterpart and shoved it in front of me until he had all the objects on the table stashed in one pile.

Don Juan seemed to be enjoying himself immensely. He giggled and rubbed his hands every time I named another possibility.

"Is the *nagual* the Supreme Being, the Almighty, God?" I asked.

"No. God is also on the table. Let's say that God is the tablecloth."

He made a joking gesture of pulling the tablecloth in order to stack it up with the rest of the items he had put in front of me.

"But, are you saying that God does not exist?"

"No. I didn't say that. All I said was that the *nagual* was not God because God is an item of our personal *tonal* and of the *tonal* of the times. The *tonal* is, as I've already said, everything we think the world is composed of, including God, of course. God has no more importance other than being a part of the *tonal* of our time."

"In my understanding, don Juan, God is everything. Aren't we talking about the same thing?"

"No. God is only everything you can think of, therefore, properly speaking, he is only another item on the island. God cannot be witnessed at will, he can only be talked about. The *nagual*, on the other hand, is at the service of the warrior. It can be witnessed, but it cannot be talked about."

"If the *nagual* is not any of the things I have mentioned," I said, "perhaps you can tell me about it's location. Where is it?"

Don Juan made a sweeping gesture and pointed to the area beyond the boundaries of the table. He swept his hand, as if with the back of it he were cleaning an imaginary surface that went beyond the edges of the table.

"The *nagual* is there," he said. "There, surrounding the island. The *nagual* is there, where power hovers.

"We sense, from the moment we are born, that there are two parts to us. At the time of birth, and for a while after, we are all *nagual*. We sense, then, that in order to function we need a counterpart to what we have. The *tonal* is missing and that gives us, from the very beginning, a feeling of incompleteness. Then the *tonal* starts to develop and it becomes utterly important to our functioning; so important that it opaques the shine of the *nagual*. It overwhelms it. From the moment we become all *tonal*, we do nothing else but to increment that old feeling of incompleteness which accompanies us from the moment of our birth, and which tells us constantly that there is another part to give us completeness.

"From the moment we become all *tonal* we begin making pairs. We sense our two sides, but we always represent them with items of the *tonal*. We say that the two parts of us are the soul and the body. Or mind and matter. Or good and evil. God and Satan. We never realize, however, that we are merely pairing things on the island, very much like pairing coffee and tea, or bread and tortillas, or chili and mustard. I tell you, we are weird animals. We get carried away, and in our madness we believe ourselves to be making perfect sense."

Don Juan stood up and addressed me as if he were an orator. He pointed his index finger at me and made his head shiver.

"Man doesn't move between good and evil," he said in a hilariously rhetorical tone, grabbing the salt and pepper shakers in both hands. "His true movement is between negativeness and positiveness."

He dropped the salt and pepper and clutched a knife and fork.

"You're wrong! There is no movement," he continued as if he were answering himself. "Man is only mind!"

He took the bottle of sauce and held it up. Then he put it down.

"As you can see," he said softly, "we can easily replace chili sauce for mind and end up saying, 'Man is only chili sauce!' Doing that won't make us more demented than we already are."

"I'm afraid I haven't asked the right question," I said. "Maybe we could arrive at a better understanding if I asked what one can specifically find in that area beyond the island?"

"There is no way of answering that. If I would say, 'nothing', I would only make the *nagual* part of the *tonal*. All I can say is that there, beyond the island, one finds the *nagual*."

"But, when you call it the *nagual*, aren't you also placing it on the island?"

"No. I named it only because I wanted to make you aware of it."

"All right! But becoming aware of it is the step that has turned the *nagual* into a new item of my *tonal*"

"I'm afraid you do not understand. I have named the *tonal* and the *nagual* as a true pair. That is all I have done."

He reminded me that once while trying to explain to him my insistence on meaning, I had discussed the idea that children might not be capable of comprehending the difference between 'father' and 'mother' until they were quite developed in terms of handling meaning. And that they would perhaps believe that it might be that 'father' wears pants and 'mother' skirts, or other differences dealing with hairstyle, or size of body, or items of clothing.

"We certainly do the same thing with the two parts of us," he said. "We sense that there is another side to us. But when we try to pin down that other side the *tonal* gets hold of the baton, and as a director it is quite petty and jealous. It dazzles us with it's cunningness and forces us to obliterate the slightest inkling of the other part of the true pair, the *nagual*."

## 6. The Day of the Tonal

As we left the restaurant I told don Juan that he had been correct in warning me about the difficulty of the topic, and that my intellectual prowess was inadequate to grasp his concepts and explanations. I suggested that perhaps if I would go to my hotel and read my notes, my comprehension of the subject might improve. He tried to put me at ease. He said that I was worrying about words. While he was speaking I experienced a shiver, and for an instant I sensed that there was indeed another area within me.

I mentioned to don Juan that I was having some inexplicable feelings. My statement apparently aroused his curiosity. I told him that I had had the same feelings before, and that they seemed to be momentary lapses; interruptions in my flow of awareness. They always manifested themselves as a jolt in my body followed by the sensation that I was suspended in something.

We headed for downtown, walking leisurely. Don Juan asked me to relate all the details of my lapses. I had a hard time describing them beyond the point of calling them moments of forgetfulness, or absent-mindedness, or not watching what I was doing.

He patiently rebuffed me. He pointed out that I was a demanding person, had an excellent memory, and was very careful in my actions. It had occurred to me at first that those peculiar lapses were associated with stopping the internal dialogue, but I also had had them when I had talked to myself extensively. They seemed to stem from an area independent of everything I knew.

Don Juan patted me on the back. He smiled with apparent delight.

"You're finally beginning to make real connections," he said.

I asked him to explain his cryptic statement, but he abruptly stopped our conversation and signaled me to follow him to a small park in front of a church.

"This is the end of our journey to downtown," he said and sat down on a bench. "Right here we have an ideal spot to watch people. There are some who walk by on the street and others who come to church. From here we can see everyone."

He pointed to a wide business street and to the gravel walk leading to the steps of the church. Our bench was located midway between the church and the street.

"This is my very favorite bench," he said, caressing the wood.

He winked at me and added with a grin, "It likes me. That's why no one was sitting on it. It knew I was coming."

"The bench knew that?"

"No! Not the bench. My *nagual*."

"Does the *nagual* have consciousness? Is it aware of things?"

"Of course. It is aware of everything. That's why I'm interested in your account. What you call lapses and feelings is the *nagual*. In order to talk about it we must borrow from the island of the *tonal*. Therefore it is more convenient not to explain it but to simply recount it's effects."

I wanted to say something else about those peculiar feelings, but he hushed me.

"No more. Today is not the day of the *nagual*, today is the day of the *tonal*" he said. "I put on my suit because today I am all *tonal*."

He stared at me. I was about to tell him that the subject was proving to be more difficult than anything he had ever explained to me. He seemed to have anticipated my words.

"It is difficult," he continued. "I know it. But considering that this is the final lid, the last stage of what I've been teaching you, it is not too farfetched to say that it envelops everything I mentioned since the first day we met."

We remained quiet for a long while. I felt that I had to wait for him to resume his explanation, but I had a sudden attack of apprehension and hurriedly asked, "Are the *nagual* and the *tonal* within ourselves?"

He looked at me piercingly.

"Very difficult question," he said. "You yourself would say that they are within ourselves. I myself would say that they are not, but neither of us would be right. The *tonal* of your time calls for you to maintain that everything dealing with your feelings and thoughts takes place within yourself. The sorcerers' *tonal* says the opposite, everything is outside. Who's right? No one. Inside, outside, it doesn't really matter."

I raised a point. I said that when he talked about the 'tonal' and the 'nagual' it sounded as if there was still a third part. He had said that the tonal 'forces us' to perform acts. I asked him to tell me who he was referring to as being forced.

He did not answer me directly.

"To explain all this is not that simple," he said. "No matter how clever the checkpoints of the *tonal* are, the fact of the matter is that the *nagual* surfaces. It's coming to the surface is always inadvertent, though. The *tonal's* great art is to suppress any manifestation of the *nagual* in such a manner that even if it's presence should be the most obvious thing in the world, it is unnoticeable."

"For whom is it unnoticeable?"

He chuckled, shaking his head up and down. I pressed him for an answer.

"For the *tonal*" he said. "I'm speaking about it exclusively. I may go around in circles, but that shouldn't surprise or annoy you. I warned you about the difficulty of understanding what I have to tell. I went through all that rigamarole because my *tonal* is aware that it is speaking about itself. In other words, my *tonal* is using itself in order to understand the information I want your *tonal* to be clear about. Let's say that the *tonal*, since it is keenly aware of how taxing it is to speak of itself, has created the terms 'I,' 'myself,' and so forth as a balance and thanks to them it can talk with other *tonals*, or with itself, about itself.

"Now when I say that the *tonal* forces us to do something, I don't mean that there is a third party there. Obviously it forces itself to follow it's own judgments.

"On certain occasions, however, or under certain special circumstances, something in the *tonal* itself becomes aware that there is more to us. It is like a voice that comes from the depths; the voice of the *nagual*. You see, the totality of ourselves is a natural condition which the *tonal* cannot obliterate altogether, and there are moments, especially in the life of a warrior, when the totality becomes apparent. At those moments one can surmise and assess what we really are.

"I was concerned with those jolts you have had because that is the way the *nagual* surfaces. At those moments the *tonal* becomes aware of the totality of oneself. It is always a jolt because that awareness disrupts the lull. I call that awareness the totality of the being that is going to die. The idea is that at the moment of death the other member of the true pair, the *nagual*, becomes fully operative and the awareness and memories and perceptions stored in our calves and thighs, in our back and shoulders and neck, begin to expand and disintegrate. Like the beads of an endless broken necklace, they fall asunder without the binding force of life."

He looked at me. His eyes were peaceful. I felt ill at ease, stupid.

"The totality of ourselves is a very tacky affair," he said. "We need only a very small portion of it to fulfill the most complex tasks of life. Yet when we die, we die with the totality of ourselves. A sorcerer asks the question, 'If we're going to die with the totality of ourselves, why not, then, live with that totality?' "

He signaled me with his head to watch the scores of people that went by.

"They're all *tonal*" he said. "I am going to single some of them out so your *tonal* will assess them, and in assessing them it will assess itself."

He directed my attention to two old ladies that had emerged from the church. They stood at the top of the limestone steps for a moment and then began to walk down with infinite care, resting on every step.

"Watch those two women very carefully," he said. "But don't see them as persons, or as faces that hold things in common with us; see them as *tonals*."

The two women got to the bottom of the steps. They moved as if the rough gravel were marbles and they were about to roll and lose their balance on them. They walked arm in arm, propping each other up with the weight of their bodies.

"Look at them!" don Juan said in a low voice. "Those women are the best example of the most miserable *tonal* one can find."

I noticed that the two women were small-boned but fat. They were perhaps in their early fifties. They had a painful look in their faces, as if walking down the church steps had been beyond their strength.

They were in front of us. They vacillated for a moment, and then they came to a halt. There was one more step on the gravel walk.

"Watch your step, ladies," don Juan shouted as he stood up dramatically.

The women looked at him, apparently confused by his sudden outburst.

"My mom broke her hip right there the other day," he added and dashed over to help them.

They thanked him profusely and he advised them that if they ever lost their balance and fell down, they had to remain motionless on the spot until the ambulance came. His tone was sincere and convincing. The women crossed themselves.

Don Juan sat down again. His eyes were beaming. He spoke softly.

"Those women are not that old and their bodies are not that weak, and yet they are decrepit. Everything about them is dreary—their clothes, their smell, their attitude. Why do you think that's so?"

"Maybe they were born that way," I said.

"No one is born that way. We make ourselves that way. The *tonal* of those women is weak and timid.

"I said that today was going to be the day of the *tonal;* I meant that today I want to deal with it exclusively. I also said that I had put on my suit for that specific purpose. With it I wanted to show you that a warrior treats his *tonal* in a very special manner. I've pointed out to you that my suit has been made to order, and that everything I have on today fits me to perfection. It is not my vanity that I wanted to show, but my warrior's spirit, my warrior's *tonal.*

"Those two women gave you your first view of the *tonal* today. Life can be as merciless with you as it is with them if you are careless with your *tonal.* I put myself as the counterpoint. If you understand correctly I should not need to stress this point."

I had a sudden attack of uncertainty and asked him to spell out what I should have understood.

I must have sounded desperate. He laughed out loud.

"Look at that young man in green pants and a pink shirt," don Juan whispered pointing to a very thin and very dark complexioned, sharp-featured young man who was standing almost in front of us.

He seemed to be undecided whether to go towards the church or towards the street. Twice he raised his hand in the direction of the church as though he were talking to himself and was about to start moving towards it. Then he stared at me with a blank expression.

"Look at the way he's dressed," don Juan said in a whisper. "Look at those shoes!"

The young man's clothes were tattered and wrinkled, and his shoes were in absolute pieces.

"He's obviously very poor," I said.

"Is that all you can say about him?" he asked.

I enumerated a series of reasons that might have accounted for the young man's shabbiness: poor health, bad luck, indolence, indifference to his personal appearance, or the chance that he may have just been released from prison.

Don Juan said that I was merely speculating, and that he was not interested in justifying anything by suggesting that the man was a victim of unconquerable forces.

"Maybe he's a secret agent made to look like a bum," I said jokingly.

The young man walked away towards the street with a disjointed gait.

"He's not made to look like a bum. He is a bum," don Juan said. "Look how weak his body is. His arms and legs are thin. He can hardly walk. No one can pretend to look that way. There is something definitely wrong with him, not his circumstances though. I have to stress again that I want you to see that man as a *tonal*."

"What does it entail to see a man as a *tonal*?"

"It entails to cease judging him in a moral sense, or excusing him on the grounds that he is like a leaf at the mercy of the wind. In other words, it entails seeing a man without thinking that he is hopeless or helpless.

"You know exactly what I am talking about. You can assess that young man without condemning or forgiving him."

"He drinks too much," I said.

My statement was not volitional. I just made it without really knowing why. For an instant I even felt that someone standing behind me had voiced the words. I was moved to explain that my statement was another of my speculations.

"That was not the case," don Juan said. "Your tone of voice had a certainty that you lacked before. You didn't say, 'Maybe he's a drunkard.'"

I felt embarrassed although I could not exactly determine why. Don Juan laughed.

"You *saw* through the man," he said. "That was *seeing*. *Seeing* is like that. Statements are made with great certainty, and one doesn't know how it happened.

"You know that young man's *tonal* was shot, but you don't know how you know it."

I had to admit that somehow I had had that impression.

"You're right," don Juan said. "It doesn't really matter that he's young. He's as decrepit as the two women. Youth is in no way a barrier against the deterioration of the *tonal*.

"You thought that there might be a great many reasons for that man's condition. I find that there is only one, his *tonal*. It is not that his *tonal* is weak because he drinks. It is the other way around. He drinks because his *tonal* is weak. That weakness forces him to be what he is. But the same thing happens to all of us in one form or another."

"But aren't you also justifying his behavior by saying that it's his *tonal*?"

"I'm giving you an explanation that you have never encountered before. It is not a justification or a condemnation though. That young man's *tonal* is weak and timid. And yet he's not unique. All of us are more or less in the same boat."

At that moment a very large man passed in front of us heading towards the church. He was wearing an expensive dark gray business suit and was carrying a briefcase. The collar of his shirt was unbuttoned and his necktie loose. He was sweating profusely. He had a very light complexion which made the perspiration all the more obvious.

"Watch him!" don Juan ordered me.

The man's steps were small but heavy. There was a wobbling quality to his walking. He did not go up to the church. He circumvented it and disappeared behind it.

"There is no need to treat the body in such an awful manner," don Juan said with a note of scorn. "But the sad fact is that all of us have learned to perfection how to make our *tonal* weak. I have called that indulging."

He put his hand on my notebook and did not let me write any more. His rationale was that as long as I kept on taking notes I was incapable of concentrating. He suggested I should relax, shut off the internal dialogue, and let go, merging with the person being observed.

I asked him to explain what he meant by 'merging.' He said there was no way to explain it, that it was something that the body felt or did when put in observational contact with other bodies. He then clarified the issue by saying that in the past he had called that process 'seeing' and that it consisted of a lull of true silence within followed by an outward elongation of something in the self; an elongation that met and merged with the other body, or with anything within one's field of awareness.

At that point I wanted to get back to my writing pad, but he stopped me and began to single out different people from the crowd that passed by.

He pointed out dozens of persons covering a wide range of types among men, women and children of various ages. Don Juan said that he had selected persons whose weak 'tonal' could fit into a categorization scheme, and thus he had acquainted me with a preconceived variety of indulging.

I did not remember all the people he had pointed out and discussed. I complained that if I had taken notes I could have at least sketched out the intricacies of his schemata on indulging. As it was he did not want to repeat it, or perhaps he did not remember it either.

He laughed and said that he did not remember it, because in the life of a sorcerer it was the 'nagual' that was accountable for creativity.

He looked at the sky and said that it was getting late, and that from that moment on we were going to change direction. Instead of weak 'tonals' we were going to wait for the appearance of a 'proper tonal'. He added that only a warrior had a 'proper tonal', and that the average man, at best, could have a 'right tonal'.

After a few minutes' wait he slapped his thigh and chuckled.

"Look who's coming now," he said, pointing to the street with a movement of his chin. "It is as if they were made to order."

I saw three male Indians approaching. They had on some short brown woolen ponchos, white pants that came to their mid calf, long-sleeved white tops, dirty worn-out sandals, and old straw hats. Each of them carried a bundle tied to his back.

Don Juan stood up and went to meet them. He spoke to them. They seemed surprised and surrounded him. They smiled at him. He was apparently telling them something about me. The three of them turned around and smiled at me. They were about ten or twelve feet away. I listened carefully but I could not hear what they were saying.

Don Juan reached in his pocket and handed them some bills. They appeared to be pleased. They moved their feet nervously. I liked them very much. They looked like children. All of them had small white teeth and very pleasing mild features. One, by all appearances the oldest, had whiskers. His eyes were tired but very kind. He took off his hat and came closer to the bench. The others followed him. The three of them greeted me in unison. We shook hands. Don Juan told me to give them some money. They thanked me, and after a polite silence they said good-by. Don Juan sat back down on the bench and we watched them disappear in the crowd.

I told don Juan that for some strange reason I had liked them very much.

"It isn't so strange," he said. "You must've felt that their *tonal* is just right. It is right, but not for our time.

"You probably felt they were like children. They are. And that is very tough. I understand them better than you, thus I couldn't help but feel a tinge of sadness. Indians are like dogs, they have nothing. But that is the nature of their fortune and I shouldn't feel sad. My sadness, of course, is my own way of indulging."

"Where are they from, don Juan?"

"From the Sierras. They've come here to seek their fortune. They want to become merchants. They're brothers. I told them that I also came from the Sierras and I'm a merchant myself. I said that you were my partner. The money we gave them was a token. A warrior should give tokens like that all the time. They no doubt need the money, but need should not be an essential consideration for a token. The thing to look for is feeling. I personally was moved by those three.

"Indians are the losers of our time. Their downfall began with the Spaniards, and now under the reign of their descendants the Indians have lost everything. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Indians have lost their *tonal*"

"Is that a metaphor, don Juan?"

"No. It is a fact. The *tonal* is very vulnerable. It cannot withstand maltreatment. The white man, from the day he set foot on this land, has systematically destroyed not only the Indian *tonal* of the time, but also the personal *tonal* of every Indian. One can easily surmise that for the poor average Indian the reign of the white man has been sheer hell. And yet the irony is that for another kind of Indian it has been sheer bliss."

"Who are you talking about? What kind of Indian is that?"

"The sorcerer. For the sorcerer, the Conquest was the challenge of a lifetime. They were the only ones who were not destroyed by it. They adapted to it and used it to their ultimate advantage."

"How was that possible, don Juan? I was under the impression that the Spaniards left no stone unturned."

"Let's say that they turned over all the stones that were within the limits of their own *tonal*. In the Indian life, however, there were things that were incomprehensible to the white man. Those things he did not even notice. Perhaps it was the sheer luck of the sorcerers or perhaps it was their knowledge that saved them. After the *tonal* of the time and the personal *tonal* of every Indian was obliterated, the sorcerers found themselves holding on to the only thing left uncontested; the *nagual*. In other words, their *tonal* took refuge in their *nagual*. This couldn't have happened had it not been for the excruciating conditions of a vanquished people. The men of knowledge of today are the product of those conditions, and are the ultimate connoisseurs of the *nagual* since they were left there thoroughly alone. There, the white man has never ventured. In fact, he doesn't even have the idea it exists."

I felt compelled at that point to present an argument. I sincerely contended that in European thought we had accounted for what he called the 'nagual'. I brought in the concept of the Transcendental Ego, or the unobserved observer present in all our thoughts, perceptions, and feelings. I explained to don Juan that the individual could perceive or intuit himself as a self through the Transcendental Ego because this was the only thing capable of judgment; capable of disclosing reality within the realm of it's consciousness.

Don Juan was unruffled. He laughed.

"Disclosing reality," he said, mimicking me. "That's the *tonal*."

I argued that the 'tonal' may be called the Empirical Ego found in one's passing stream of consciousness or experience, while the Transcendental Ego was found behind that stream.

"Watching, I suppose," he said mockingly.

"That's right. Watching itself," I said.

"I hear you talking," he said. "But you're saying nothing. The *nagual* is not experience or intuition or consciousness. Those terms and everything else you may care to say are only items on the island of the *tonal*. The *nagual*, on the other hand, is only effect. The *tonal* begins at birth and ends at death, but the *nagual* never ends. The *nagual* has no limit. I've said that the *nagual* is where power hovers. That was only a way of alluding to it. By reasons of it's effect, perhaps, the *nagual* can be best understood in terms of power. For instance, when you felt numb and couldn't talk earlier today, I was actually soothing you. That is, my *nagual* was acting upon you."

"How was that possible, don Juan?"

"You won't believe this, but no one knows how. All I know is that I wanted your undivided attention, and then my *nagual* went to work on you. I know that much because I can witness it's effect, but I don't know how it works."

He was quiet for a while. I wanted to keep on the same topic. I attempted to ask a question. He silenced me.

"One can say that the *nagual* accounts for creativity," he finally said and looked at me piercingly. "The *nagual* is the only part of us that can create."

He remained quiet, looking at me. I felt he was definitely leading me into an area I had wished he would elucidate [* *elucidate- make clear and free from confusion*] further. He had said that the 'tonal' did not create anything, but only witnessed and assessed. I asked how he explained the fact that we construct superb structures and machines.

"That's not creativity," he said. "That's only molding. We can mold anything with our hands, personally or in conjunction with the hands of other *tonals*. A group of *tonals* can mold anything, superb structures as you said."

"But what's creativity then, don Juan?"

He stared at me, squinting his eyes. He chuckled softly, lifted his right hand over his head and twisted his wrist with a sharp jerk, as if he were turning a door knob.

"Creativity is this," he said and brought his hand with a cupped palm to the level of my eyes.

It took me an incredibly long time to focus my eyes on his hand. I felt that a transparent membrane was holding my whole body in a fixed position, and that I had to break it in order to place my sight on his hand.

I struggled until beads of perspiration ran into my eyes. Finally I heard or felt a pop, and my eyes and head jerked free.

On his right palm there was the most curious rodent I had ever seen. It looked like a bushy-tailed squirrel. The tail, however, was more like a porcupine's. It had stiff quills.

"Touch it!" don Juan said softly.

I automatically obeyed him and ran my finger on it's soft back. Don Juan brought his hand closer to my eyes and then I noticed something that threw me into nervous spasms. The squirrel had eyeglasses and big teeth.

"It looks like a Japanese," I said and began to laugh hysterically.

The rodent then started to grow in don Juan's palm. And while my eyes were still filled with tears of laughter, the rodent became so enormous that it disappeared. It literally went out of the frame of my vision. It happened so rapidly that I was caught in the middle of a spasm of laughter. When I looked again, or when I wiped my eyes and focused them properly, I was looking at don Juan. He was sitting on the bench, and I was standing in front of him although I did not remember having stood up.

For a moment my nervousness was uncontainable. Don Juan calmly got up, forced me to sit, propped my chin between the bicep and forearm of his left arm and hit me on the very top of my head with the knuckles of his right hand. The effect was like the jolt of an electric current. It calmed me down immediately.

There were so many things that I wanted to ask, but my words could not wade through all those thoughts. I then became keenly aware that I had lost control over my vocal cords. I did not want to struggle to speak, however, and leaned against the back of the bench. Don Juan said forcefully that I had to pull myself together and stop indulging. I felt a bit dizzy. He imperatively ordered me to write my notes, and handed me my pad and pencil after picking them up from underneath the bench.

I made a supreme effort to say something and again I had the clear sensation that a membrane was enveloping me. I puffed and groaned for a moment, while don Juan laughed, until I heard or felt another pop.

I began to write immediately. Don Juan spoke as if he were dictating to me.

"One of the acts of a warrior is never to let anything affect him," he said. "Thus a warrior may be seeing the devil himself, but he won't let anyone know that. The control of a warrior has to be impeccable."

He waited until I had finished writing and then asked me laughingly, "Did you get all that?"

I suggested that we should go to a restaurant and have dinner. I was famished. He said that we had to stay until the 'proper tonal' appeared. He added in a serious tone that if the 'proper tonal' did not come that day we had to remain on the bench until it cared to show up.

"What is a proper *tonal*?" I asked.

"A *tonal* that is just right, balanced and harmonious. You are supposed to find one today, or rather your power is supposed to bring one to us."

"But how can I tell it apart from other *tonals*?"

"Never mind that. I will point it out to you."

"What is it like, don Juan?"

"Hard to tell. It depends on you. This is a show for you, therefore you will set up those conditions yourself."

"How?"

"I don't know that. Your power, your *nagual,* will do that.

"There are roughly speaking, two sides to every *tonal*. One is the outer part, the fringe, the surface of the island. That's the part related to action and acting, the rugged side. The other part is the decision and judgment, the inner *tonal,* softer, more delicate and more complex.

"The proper *tonal* is a *tonal* where the two levels are in perfect harmony and balance."

Don Juan stopped talking. It was fairly dark by then and I had a hard time taking notes. He told me to stretch and relax. He said that it had been quite an exhausting day but very prolific and that he was sure the proper *tonal* would show up.

Dozens of people went by. We sat in a relaxed silence for ten or fifteen minutes. Then don Juan stood up abruptly.

"By golly you've done it! Look what's coming there. A girl!"

He pointed with a nod of his head to a young woman who was crossing the park and was approaching the vicinity of our bench. Don Juan said that that young woman was the 'proper tonal' and that if she would stop to talk to either one of us it would be an extraordinary omen and we would have to do whatever she wanted.

I could not clearly distinguish the young woman's features, although there was still enough light. She came within a couple of feet, but went by without looking at us. Don Juan ordered me in a whisper to get up and go talk to her.

I ran after her and asked for directions. I got very close to her. She was young, perhaps in her mid-twenties, of medium height, very attractive and well-groomed. Her eyes were clear and peaceful. She smiled at me as I spoke. There was something winning about her. I liked her as much as I had liked the three Indians.

I went back to the bench and sat down.

"Is she a warrior?" I asked.

"Not quite," don Juan said. "Your power is not that keen yet to bring a warrior. But she's a just right *tonal*. One that could turn into a proper *tonal*. Warriors come from that stock."

His statements aroused my curiosity. I asked him if women could be warriors. He looked at me, apparently baffled by my question.

"Of course they can," he said, "and they are even better equipped for the path of knowledge than men. But then men are a bit more resilient. I would say, however, that all in all, women have a slight advantage."

I said that it puzzled me that we had never talked about women in relation to his knowledge.

"You're a man," he said, "therefore I use the masculine gender when I talk to you. That's all. The rest is the same."

I wanted to question him further but he made a gesture to close the topic. He looked up. The sky was almost black. The banks of clouds looked extremely dark. There were still, however, some areas where the clouds were slightly orange.

"The end of the day is your best time," don Juan said. "The appearance of that young woman at the very edge of the day is an omen. We were talking about the *tonal*, therefore it is an omen about your *tonal*."

"What does the omen mean, don Juan?"

"It means that you have very little time left to organize your arrangements. Any arrangements that you might have constructed have to be viable arrangements because you don't have time to make new ones. Your arrangements must work now or they are not arrangements at all.

"I suggest that when you go back home you check your lines and make sure they are strong. You will need them."

"What's going to happen to me, don Juan?"

"Years ago you bid for power. You have followed the hardships of learning faithfully, without fretting or rushing. You are now at the edge of the day."

"What does that mean?"

"For a *proper tonal* everything on the island of the *tonal* is a challenge. Another way of saying it is that for a warrior everything in this world is a challenge. The greatest challenge of all, of course, is his bid for power. But power comes from the *nagual*, and when a warrior finds himself at the edge of the day it means that the hour of the *nagual* is approaching, the warrior's hour of power."

"I still don't understand the meaning of all this, don Juan. Does it mean that I am going to die soon?"

"If you're stupid, you will," he retorted cuttingly. "But putting it in milder terms it means that you're about to shiver in your pants. You bid for power once and that bidding is irreversible. I won't say that you're about to fulfill your destiny because there is no destiny. The only thing that one can say then is that you're about to fulfill your power. The omen was clear. That young woman came to you at the edge of the day. You have little time left and none of it for crap. A fine state. I would say that the best of us always comes out when we are against the wall; when we feel the sword dangling overhead. Personally I wouldn't have it any other way."

## 7. Shrinking the Tonal

On Wednesday morning I left my hotel around nine forty-five. I walked slowly allowing myself fifteen minutes to reach the place where don Juan and I had agreed to meet. He had picked a corner on the Paseo de la Reforma five or six blocks away in front of the ticket office of an airline.

I had just finished eating breakfast with a friend of mine. He had wanted to walk with me, but I had insinuated that I was going to meet a girl. I deliberately walked on the opposite side of the street from where the airline office was. I had the nagging suspicion that my friend, who had always wanted me to introduce him to don Juan, knew that I was going to meet him and might be following me. I was afraid that if I turned around I would find him behind me.

I saw don Juan at a magazine stand on the other side of the street. I started to cross over but had to stop on the divider and wait there until it was safe to walk all the way across the wide boulevard. I turned around casually to see if my friend was following me. He was standing on the corner behind me. He smiled sheepishly and waved his hand as if telling me that he had been incapable of controlling himself. I dashed across the street without giving him time to catch up with me.

Don Juan seemed to be aware of my predicament. When I reached him he gave a furtive glance over my shoulder.

"He's coming," he said. "We'd better go down the side street."

He pointed to a street which cut diagonally into the Paseo de la Reforma at the point where we were standing. I quickly oriented myself. I had never been on that street, but two days before I had been in the airline ticket office. I knew it's peculiar layout. The office was on the pointed corner made by the two streets. It had a door opening onto each street and the distance between the two doors must have been about ten to twelve feet. There was an aisle through the office from door to door, and a person could easily go from one street to the other. There were desks on one side of that pathway and a large round counter with clerks and cashiers on the other side. The day I had been there the place had been filled with people.

I wanted to hurry up, perhaps even run, but don Juan's pace was relaxed. As we reached the office door on the diagonal street, I knew without having to turn around that my friend had also run across the boulevard and was about to turn into the street where we were walking. I looked at don Juan; hoping that he had a solution. He shrugged his shoulders. I felt annoyed and could not think of anything myself short of punching my friend in the nose. I must have sighed or exhaled at that very moment because the next thing I felt was sudden loss of air due to a formidable shove that don Juan had given me which sent me whirling through the door of the airline office. Propelled by his tremendous push I practically flew into the room. Don Juan had caught me so unprepared that my body had not offered any resistance. My fright merged with the actual jolt of his thrust. I automatically put my arms in front of me to protect my face.

The force of don Juan's shove had been so great that saliva flew out of my mouth and I experienced a mild vertigo as I stumbled inside the room. I nearly lost my balance and had to make a supreme effort not to fall down. I twirled around a couple of times. It seemed that the speed of my movements made the scene blurry. I vaguely noticed a crowd of customers conducting their business. I felt extremely embarrassed. I knew that everyone was looking at me as I reeled across the room. The idea that I was making a fool out of myself was more than discomforting. A series of thoughts flashed through my mind. I had the certainty that I was going to fall on my face; or I would bump into a customer, perhaps an old lady, who would be injured by the impact; or worse yet, the glass door at the other end would be closed and I would smash against it.

In a dazed state I reached the door to the Paseo de la Reforma. It was open and I stepped out. My preoccupation of the moment was that I had to keep cool, turn to my right and walk on the boulevard towards downtown as if nothing had happened. I was sure that don Juan would join me, and that perhaps my friend might have kept on walking along the diagonal street.

I opened my eyes, or rather I focused them on the area in front of me. I had a long moment of numbness before I fully realized what had happened. I was not on the Paseo de la Reforma, as I should have been, but in the Lagunilla market one and a half miles away.

What I experienced at the moment of that realization was such an intense astonishment that all I could do was stare, stupefied.

I looked around in order to orient myself. I realized that I was actually standing very close to where I had met don Juan on my first day in Mexico City. Perhaps I was even on the same spot. The stands that sold old coins were five feet away. I made a supreme effort to take hold of myself. Obviously I had to be experiencing a hallucination. It could not possibly be any other way. I quickly turned to go back through the door into the office, but behind me there was only a row of stands with secondhand books and magazines. Don Juan was standing next to me, to my right. He had an enormous smile on his face.

There was a pressure in my head, a tickling feeling as if carbonated soda were going through my nose. I was speechless. I tried to say something without success.

I clearly heard don Juan say that I should not try to talk or think, but I wanted to say something; anything. An awful nervousness was building up inside my chest. I felt tears rolling down my cheeks.

Don Juan did not shake me as he usually does when I fall prey to an uncontrollable fear. Instead he patted me gently on the head.

"Now, now, little Carlos," he said. "Don't lose your marbles."

He held my face in his hands for an instant.

"Don't try to talk," he said.

He let my face go and pointed to what was taking place all around us.

"This is not for talking," he said. "This is only for watching. Watch! Watch everything!"

I was really crying. My reaction to my crying was very strange however. I kept on weeping without any concern. It did not matter to me, at that moment, whether or not I was making a fool out of myself.

I looked around. Right in front of me there was a middle-aged man wearing a pink short-sleeved shirt and dark gray pants. He seemed to be an American. A chubby woman, apparently his wife, was holding on to his arm. The man was handling some coins, while a thirteen or fourteen year old boy, perhaps the son of the proprietor, watched him. The boy followed every movement the older man made. Finally the man put the coins back on the table and the boy immediately relaxed.

"Watch everything!" don Juan demanded again.

There was nothing unusual to watch. People were passing by going in every direction. I turned around. A man who appeared to run the magazine stand was staring at me. He blinked repeatedly as if he were about to fall asleep. He seemed tired or sick, and looked seedy.

I felt that there was nothing to watch, at least nothing of real consequence. I stared at the scene. I found that it was impossible to concentrate my attention on anything. Don Juan walked in a circle around me. He acted as if he were assessing something in me. He shook his head and puckered his lips.

"Come, come," he said, grabbing me gently by the arm. "It's time to walk."

As soon as we began to move I noticed that my body was very light. In fact I felt that the soles of my feet were spongy. They had a peculiar rubbery, springing quality.

Don Juan must have been aware of my sensations. He held me tightly as if not to let me escape. He pressed down on me as though he were afraid I would move upwards beyond his reach like a balloon.

Walking made me feel better. My nervousness gave way to a comfortable easiness.

Don Juan insisted again that I should observe everything. I told him that there was nothing I wanted to watch; that it made no difference to me what people were doing in the market; and that I did not want to feel like an idiot dutifully observing some moronic activity of someone buying coins and old books while the real thing was escaping through my fingers.

"What is the real thing?" he asked.

I stopped walking and vehemently told him that the important thing was whatever he had done to make me perceive that I had covered the distance between the ticket office and the market in seconds.

At that point I began to shiver and felt I was going to get ill. Don Juan made me put my hands against my stomach.

He pointed all around him and stated again, in a matter-of-fact tone, that the mundane activity around us was the only thing of importance.

I felt annoyed with him. I had the physical feeling of spinning. I took a deep breath.

"What did you do, don Juan?" I asked with forced casualness.

With a reassuring tone he said that he could tell me about that any time, but that whatever was happening all around me was not ever going to be repeated. I had no quarrel with that. The activity I was witnessing obviously could not be repeated again in all it's complexity. My point was that I could observe a very similar activity any time. On the other hand, the implication of having been transported over the distance, in whatever form, was of immeasurable significance.

When I voiced these opinions don Juan made his head shiver as if what he had heard me say was actually painful to him.

We walked in silence for a moment. My body was feverish. I noticed that the palms of my hands and the soles of my feet were burning hot. The same unusual heat also seemed to be localized in my nostrils and eyelids.

"What did you do, don Juan?" I asked him pleadingly.

He did not answer me but patted me on the chest and laughed. He said that men were very frail creatures, who made themselves even more frail with their indulging. In a very serious tone he exhorted me not to feel that I was about to perish, but to push myself beyond my limits; and to simply engage my attention on the world around me.

We continued walking at a very slow pace. My preoccupation was paramount. I could not pay attention to anything. Don Juan stopped and seemed to deliberate whether or not to speak. He opened his mouth to say something, but then he appeared to change his mind and we began to walk again.

"What happened is that you came here," he said abruptly as he turned and stared at me.

"How did that happen?"

He said that he did not know, and that the only thing he did know was that I had selected that place myself.

Our impasse became even more hopeless as we kept on talking. I wanted to know the steps and he insisted that the selection of the place was the only thing we could discuss, and since I did not know why I had chosen it, there was essentially nothing to talk about. He criticized, without getting angry, my obsession to reason out everything as an unnecessary indulging. He said that it was simpler and more effective just to act without seeking explanations, and that by talking about my experience and by thinking about it I was dissipating it.

After a few moments he said that we had to leave that place because I had spoiled it and it would become increasingly injurious to me.

We left the market and walked to the Alameda Park. I was exhausted. I plunked down on a bench. It was only then that it occurred to me to look at my watch. It was 10:20 a.m. I had to make quite an effort in order to focus my attention. I did not remember the exact time when I had met don Juan. I calculated that it must have been around ten. And it could not have taken us more than ten minutes to walk from the market to the park, which left only ten minutes unaccounted for.

I told don Juan about my calculations. He smiled. I had the certainty that his smile hid his contempt for me, yet there was nothing in his face to betray that feeling.

"You think I'm a hopeless idiot, don't you, don Juan?"

"Ah ha!" he said and jumped to his feet.

His reaction was so unexpected that I also jumped up at the same time.

"Tell me exactly what you think my feelings are," he said emphatically.

I felt I knew his feelings. It was as if I were feeling them myself. But when I tried to say what I felt, I realized I could not talk about it. To speak required a tremendous effort.

Don Juan said that I did not have enough power yet to 'see' him. But I could certainly 'see' enough to find myself suitable explanations for what was happening.

"Don't be bashful," he said. "Tell me exactly what you *see*."

I had a sudden and strange thought very similar to thoughts that usually come to my mind just before falling asleep. It was more than a thought. 'A complete image' would be a better description of it. I saw a tableau containing various personages. The one which was directly in front of me was a man sitting behind a window frame. The area beyond the frame was diffuse, but the frame and the man were crystal clear. He was looking at me. Hs head was turned slightly to his left so he was actually looking askance at me. I could see his eyes moving to keep me within focus. He was leaning on the windowsill with his right elbow. His hand was clenched into a fist and his muscles were contracted.

To the left of the man there was another image in the tableau. It was a flying lion. That is, the head and the mane were those of a lion, but the lower part of it's body belonged to a curly white French poodle.

I was about to focus my attention on it, when the man made a smacking sound with his lips and stuck his head and trunk out of the window. His whole body emerged as if something were pushing him. He hung for a moment, grabbing the windowsill with the tips of his fingers as he swung like a pendulum. Then he let go.

I experienced in my own body the sensation of falling. It was not a plummeting down, but a soft descent, and then a cushioned floating. The man was weightless. He remained stationary for a moment and then he went out of sight as if an uncontrollable force had sipped him away through a crack in the tableau. An instant later he was back at the window looking askance at me. His right forearm was resting on the windowsill, only this time his hand was waving good-by to me.

Don Juan's comment was that my 'seeing' was too elaborate.

"You can do better than that," he said. "You want me to explain what happened. Well I want you to use your *seeing* to do that. You saw, but you *saw* crap. That kind of information is useless to a warrior. It would take too long to figure out what's what. *Seeing* must be direct because a warrior can't use his time to unravel what he himself is *seeing*. *Seeing* is *seeing* because it cuts through all that nonsense."

I asked him if he thought that my vision had only been a hallucination and not really 'seeing'. He was convinced it had been 'seeing' because of the intricacy of detail, but that it was inappropriate for the occasion.

"Do you think that my visions explain anything?" I asked.

"Sure they do. But I wouldn't try to unravel them if I were you. In the beginning *seeing* is confusing and it's easy to get lost in it. As the warrior gets tighter, however, his *seeing* becomes what it should be, a direct knowing."

As don Juan spoke I had one of those peculiar lapses of feelings and I clearly sensed that I was about to unveil something which I already knew, a thing which eluded me by turning into something very blurry. I became aware that I was involved in a struggle. The more I tried to define or reach that elusive piece of knowledge, the deeper it sank.

"That *seeing* was too... too visionary," don Juan said.

The sound of his voice shook me.

"A warrior asks a question and through his *seeing* he gets an answer, but the answer is simple, never embellished to the point of flying French poodles."

We laughed at the image. And half jokingly I told him that he was too strict; that anyone going through what I had gone through that morning deserved a bit of leniency.

"That is the easy way out," he said. "That is the indulging way. You hinge the world on the feeling that everything is too much for you. You're not living like a warrior."

I told him that there were so many facets of what he called a warrior's way that it was impossible to fulfill all of them; and that the meaning of it became clear only as I encountered new instances where I had to apply it.

"A rule of thumb for a warrior," he said, "is that he makes his decisions so carefully that nothing that may happen as a result of them can surprise him, much less drain his power.

"To be a warrior means to be humble and alert. Today you were supposed to watch the scene which was unfolding in front of your eyes, not to ponder how all that was possible. You focused your attention on the wrong place. If I wanted to be lenient with you, I could easily say that since this was the first time it had happened to you, you were not prepared. But that's not permissible because you came here as a warrior ready to die. Therefore what happened to you today shouldn't have caught you with your pants down."

I conceded that my tendency was to indulge in fear and bewilderment.

"Let's say that a rule of thumb for you should be that when you come to see me you should come prepared to die," he said. "If you come here ready to die, there shouldn't be any pitfalls, or any unwelcome surprises, or any unnecessary acts. Everything should gently fall into place because you're expecting nothing."

"That's easy to say, don Juan. I am on the receiving end though. I am the one who has to live with all this."

"It is not that you have to live with all this. You are all this. You're not just tolerating it for the time being. Your decision to join forces with this evil world of sorcery should have burned all the lingering feelings of confusion, and should give you the spunk to claim all this as your world."

I felt embarrassed and sad. Don Juan's actions, no matter how prepared I was, taxed me in such a way that every time I came in contact with him I was left with no other recourse but to act and feel like a half-rational nagging person. I had a surge of wrath and did not want to write any more. At that moment I wanted to rip my notes and throw everything in the trash can; and I would have done that had it not been for don Juan who laughed and held my arm, restraining me.

In a mocking tone he said that my 'tonal' was about to fool itself again. He recommended that I should go to the fountain and splash water on my neck and ears.

The water soothed me. We were quiet for a long time.

"Write, write," don Juan coaxed me in a friendly tone. "Let's say that your notebook is the only sorcery you have. To rip it up is another way of opening yourself to your death. It will be another of your tantrum, a flashy tantrum at best, not a change. A warrior doesn't ever leave the island of the *tonal*. He uses it."

He pointed all around me with a quick movement of his hand and then touched my notebook.

"This is your world. You can't renounce it. It is useless to get angry and feel disappointed with oneself. All that that proves is that one's *tonal* is involved in an internal battle. A battle within one's *tonal* is one of the most inane contests I can think of. The tight life of a warrior is designed to end that struggle. From the beginning I have taught you to avoid wear and tear. Now there is no longer a war within you, not as it used to be, because the warrior's way is harmony—the harmony between actions and decisions at first, and then the harmony between *tonal* and *nagual*.

"Throughout the time I have known you I have talked to both your *tonal* and your *nagual*. That is the way the instruction should be conducted.

"In the beginning, a teacher has to talk to the *tonal*. It is the *tonal* that has to relinquish control. But it should be made to do so gladly. For example, your *tonal* has relinquished some controls without much struggle because it became clear to it that, had it remained the way it was, the totality of you would be dead by now. In other words, the *tonal* is made to give up unnecessary things like self-importance and indulging which only plunge it into boredom. The whole trouble is that the *tonal* clings to those things when it should be glad to rid itself of that crap. The task then is to convince the *tonal* to become free and fluid. That's what a sorcerer needs before anything else, a strong, free *tonal*. The stronger it gets the less it clings to it's doings, and the easier it is to shrink it. So what happened this morning was that I saw the opportunity to shrink your *tonal*. For an instant you were absent-minded, hurrying, not thinking; and I grabbed that moment to shove you.

"The *tonal* shrinks at given times, especially when it is embarrassed. In fact one of the features of the *tonal* is it's shyness. It's shyness is not really an issue. But there are certain instances when the *tonal* is taken by surprise, and it's shyness unavoidably makes it shrink.

"This morning I plucked my cubic centimeter of chance. I noticed the open door of that office and gave you a shove. A shove is then the technique for shrinking the *tonal*. One must shove at the precise instant. For that, of course, one must know how to *see*.

"Once the man has been shoved and his *tonal* has *shrunk*, his *nagual*, if it is already in motion, no matter how small this motion is, will take over and achieve extraordinary deeds. Your *nagual* took over this morning and you ended up in the market."

He remained silent for a moment. He seemed to be waiting for questions. We looked at each other.

"I really don't know how," he said as if reading my mind. "All I know is that the *nagual* is capable of inconceivable feats.

"This morning I asked you to watch. That scene in front of you, whatever it may have been, had an incalculable value for you. But instead of following my advice you indulged in self-pity and confusion, and did not watch.

"For a while you were all *nagual* and could not talk. That was the time to watch. Then, little by little, your *tonal* took over again; and rather than plunging you into a deadly battle between your *tonal* and *nagual* I walked you here."

"What was there in that scene, don Juan? What was so important?"

"I don't know. It wasn't happening to me."

"What do you mean?"

"It was your experience, not mine."

"But you were with me. Weren't you?"

"No. I wasn't. You were alone. I repeatedly told you to watch everything because that scene was only for you."

"But you were next to me, don Juan."

"No. I wasn't. But it's useless to talk about it. Whatever I may say doesn't make sense because during those moments we were in *nagual's* time. The affairs of the *nagual* can be witnessed only with the body, not the reason."

"If you were not with me, don Juan, who or what was the person I witnessed as you?"

"It was me and yet I wasn't there."

"Where were you then?"

"I was with you, but not there. Let's say that I was around you but not in the particular place where your *nagual* had taken you."

"You mean you didn't know that we were at the market?"

"No, I didn't. I just tagged along in order not to lose you."

"This is truly awesome, don Juan."

"We were in *nagual's* time, and there is nothing awesome about it. We are capable of much more than that. That is the nature of us as luminous beings. Our flaw is to insist on remaining on our monotonous, tiring, but convenient island. The *tonal* is the villain and it shouldn't be."

I described the little bit I remembered. He wanted to know if I had witnessed any features of the sky, such as daylight, clouds, the sun. Or if I had heard noises of any sort. Or if I had caught sight of unusual people or events. He wanted to know if there had been any fights; or if people were yelling, and if they were, what they had said.

I could not answer any of his questions. The plain truth was that I had accepted the event at it's apparent face value; admitting as a truism that I had 'flown' over a considerable distance in one or two seconds; and that thanks to don Juan's knowledge, whatever it may have been, I had landed in all my material corporeality inside the market.

My reactions were a direct corollary [* *corollary- a practical consequence that follows naturally*] of such an interpretation. I wanted to know the procedures, the member's knowledge, the 'how to do it'. Therefore I did not care to observe what I was convinced were the ordinary happenings of a mundane event.

"Do you think that people saw me in the market?" I asked.

Don Juan did not answer. He laughed and tapped me lightly with his fist.

I tried to remember if I had actually had any physical contact with people. My memory failed me.

"What did the people in the airline office see when I stumbled in?" I asked.

"They probably saw a man staggering from one door to the other."

"But did they see me disappear into thin air?"

"That is taken care of by the *nagual*. I don't know how. All I can tell you is that we are fluid luminous beings made out of fibers. The agreement that we are solid objects is the *tonal's* doing. When the *tonal* shrinks, extraordinary things are possible. But they are only extraordinary for the *tonal*.

"For the *nagual*, it's nothing to move the way you did this morning. Especially for your *nagual* which is already capable of difficult ploys. As a matter of fact, it has plunged into something terribly weird. Can you feel what it is?"

A million questions and feelings came to me all at once. It was as if a gust of wind had blown off my veneer [* *veneer- a thin ornamental coating*] of composure. I shivered. My body felt it was at the edge of an abyss. I struggled with some mysterious but concrete piece of knowledge. It was as if I were on the verge of being shown something, and yet some stubborn part of me insisted on blowing a cloud over it. The struggle made me numb by degrees, until I could not feel my body. My mouth was open and my eyes were half closed. I had the feeling I could see my face getting harder and harder until it was the face of a dried corpse with the yellowish skin stuck tight to the skull.

The next thing I felt was a jolt. Don Juan was standing by me holding an empty bucket of water. He had soaked me. I coughed and wiped the water from my face, and felt another cold seizure in my back. I jumped up from the bench. Don Juan had poured some water down my neck.

There was a group of children looking at me and laughing. Don Juan smiled at me. He held my notebook and said that we had better go to my hotel so I could change my clothes. He led me out of the park. We stood on the curb for a moment before a cab came along.

Hours later, after eating lunch and resting, don Juan and I sat on his favorite bench in the park by the church. In an oblique [* *oblique- indirect*] manner we got to the topic of my strange reaction. He seemed to be very cautious. He did not confront me directly with it.

"Things like that are known to happen," he said. "The *nagual*, once it learns to surface, may cause a great damage to the *tonal* by coming out without any control. Your case is special, though. You are given to indulging in such an exaggerated manner that you would die and not even mind it, or worse yet, not even be aware that you're dying."

I told him that my reaction began when he had asked me if I could feel what my 'nagual' had done. I thought I knew exactly what he was alluding to, but when I tried to describe what it was, I found I could not think clearly. I experienced a sensation of lightheadedness, almost an indifference, as if I did not really care about anything. Then that sensation grew into a mesmerizing concentration. It was as though all of me was slowly being sucked out. What attracted and trapped my attention was the clear sensation that a portentous secret was about to be revealed to me, and I did not want anything to interfere with such a revelation.

"What was going to be revealed to you was your death," don Juan said. "That's the danger of indulging, especially for you since you are naturally so exaggerated. Your *tonal* is so given to indulging that it threatens the totality of you. This is a terrible way of being."

"What can I do?"

"Your *tonal* has to be convinced with reasons, your *nagual* with actions, until one props the other. As I have told you, the *tonal* rules, and yet it is very vulnerable. The *nagual*, on the other hand, never, or almost never, acts out; but when it does, it terrifies the *tonal*.

"This morning your *tonal* got frightened and began to shrink by itself, and then your *nagual* began to take over.

"I had to borrow a bucket from one of the photographers in the park in order to whip your *nagual* like a bad dog back to it's place. The *tonal* must be protected at any cost. The crown has to be taken away from it, but it must remain as the protected overseer.

"Any threat to the *tonal* always results in it's death. And if the *tonal* dies, so does the whole man. Because of it's inherent weakness, the *tonal* is easily destroyed, and thus one of the balancing arts of the warrior is to make the *nagual* emerge in order to prop up the *tonal*. I say it is an art because sorcerers know that only by boosting the *tonal* can the *nagual* emerge. See what I mean? That boosting is called personal power."

Don Juan stood up, stretched his arms and arched his back. I started to stand up myself, but he gently pushed me down.

"You must stay on this bench until twilight," he said. "I have to leave right away. Genaro is waiting for me in the mountains. So come to his house in three days and we will meet there."

"What are we going to do at don Genaro's house?" I asked.

"Depending on whether you have enough power," he said, "Genaro may show you the *nagual*."

There was one more thing that I had to voice at that point. I had to know whether his suit was a shocking device for me alone or was it actually part of his life. Never had any of his acts caused so much havoc in me as his wearing a suit. It was not only the act in itself that was so awesome to me, but the fact that don Juan was elegant. His legs had a youthful agility. It was as if wearing shoes had shifted his point of balance and his steps were longer and more firm than usual.

"Do you wear a suit all the time?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied with a charming smile. "I have others, but I didn't want to wear a different suit today because it would've scared you even more."

I did not know what to think. I felt that I had arrived at the end of my path. If don Juan could wear a suit and be elegant in it, anything was possible.

He seemed to enjoy my confusion and laughed.

"I'm a stockholder," he said in a mysterious but unaffected tone, and walked away.

The next morning, on Thursday, I asked a friend of mine to walk with me from the door of the office where don Juan had pushed me to the Lagunilla market. We took the most direct route. It took us thirty-five minutes. Once we arrived there, I tried to orient myself. I failed. I walked into a clothing store at the very corner of the wide avenue where we were standing.

"Pardon me," I said to a young woman who was gently cleaning a hat with a duster. "Where are the stands of coins and secondhand books?"

"We don't have any," she said in a nasty tone.

"But I saw them, somewhere in this market, yesterday."

"No kidding," she said and walked behind the counter.

I ran after her and pleaded with her to tell me where they were. She looked me up and down.

"You couldn't have seen them yesterday," she said. "Those stands are assembled only on

Sunday, right here along this wall. We don't have them the rest of the week."

"Only on Sunday?" I repeated mechanically.

"Yes. Only on Sunday. That's the way. The rest of the week they would interfere with the traffic."

She pointed to the wide avenue filled with cars.

## 8. In Nagual's Time

I ran up a slope in front of don Genaro's house, and saw don Juan and don Genaro sitting on a cleared area by the door. They smiled at me. There was such warmth and innocence in their smiles that my body experienced a state of immediate alarm. I automatically slowed down to a walk. I greeted them.

"How are you?" don Genaro asked me in such an affected tone that we all laughed.

"He's in very good shape," don Juan interjected before I could answer.

"I can see that," don Genaro retorted. "Look at that double chin! And look at those chunks of bacon fat on the jowls!"

Don Juan held his stomach as he laughed.

"Your face is round," don Genaro went on. "What have you been doing? Eating?"

Don Juan jokingly assured him that my life style required that I eat a great deal. In a most friendly way they teased me about my life, and then don Juan asked me to sit down between them. The sun had already set behind the huge range of mountains to the west.

"Where's your famous notebook?" don Genaro asked me, and when I got it out of my pocket he yelled, "Yippee!" and took it from my hands.

Obviously he had observed me with great care and knew my mannerisms to perfection. He held the notebook with both hands and played with it nervously, as if he did not know what to do with it. Twice he seemed to be on the verge of throwing it away but appeared to contain himself. Then he held it against his knees and pretended to write feverishly in it the way I do.

Don Juan laughed so hard that he was about to choke.

"What did you do after I left you?" don Juan asked after they had quieted down.

"I went to the market on Thursday," I said.

"What were you doing there? Retracing your steps?" he retorted.

Don Genaro fell backwards and with his lips made the dry sound of a head hitting the ground. He looked at me askance [* *askance- (used especially of glances) directed to one side with, or as if, with doubt or suspicion or envy*] and winked.

"I had to do it," I said. "And I found out that on weekdays there are no stands that sell coins and secondhand books."

Both of them laughed. Then don Juan said that asking questions was not going to reveal anything new.

"What really took place, don Juan?" I asked.

"Believe me, there is no way of knowing that," he said dryly. "In those matters you and I are on equal ground. My advantage over you at this moment is that I know how to get to the *nagual* and you don't. But once I have gotten there I have no more advantage and no more knowledge than you."

"Did I really land in the market, don Juan?" I asked.

"Of course. I've told you, the *nagual* is at the warrior's command. Isn't it so, Genaro?"

"Right!" don Genaro exclaimed in a booming voice and stood up in one single motion. It was as though his voice had pulled him from a lying position to a perfectly vertical one.

Don Juan was practically rolling on the ground laughing. Don Genaro, with a nonchalant air, took a comical bow and said good-by.

"Genaro will see you tomorrow morning," don Juan said. "Now you must sit here in total silence."

We did not say another word. After hours of silence I fell asleep.

I looked at my watch. It was almost six in the morning. Don Juan examined the solid mass of heavy white clouds over the eastern horizon and concluded that it was going to be an overcast day. Don Genaro sniffed the air and added that it was also going to be hot and windless.

"How far are we going?" I asked.

"To those eucalyptus trees over there," don Genaro replied, pointing to what seemed to be a grove of trees about a mile away.

When we reached the trees I realized that it was not a grove. The eucalyptus had been planted in straight lines in order to mark the boundaries of fields cultivated with different crops. We walked along the edge of a corn field along a line of enormous trees- thin and straight- over a hundred feet high, and arrived at an empty field. I figured that the crop must have just been harvested. There were only the dried stalks and leaves of some plants I did not recognize. I bent over to pick up a leaf but don Genaro stopped me. He held my arm with great force. I recoiled in pain, and then I noticed that he had only placed his fingers gently on my arm.

He was definitely aware of what he had done and of what I was experiencing. He swiftly lifted his fingers off my arm and then again placed them gently on it. He repeated it once more and laughed like a delighted child when I winced. Then he turned his profile to me. His aquiline nose made him look like a bird, a bird with strange long white teeth.

In a soft voice don Juan told me not to touch anything. I asked him if he knew what kind of crop had been cultivated there. He seemed to be about to tell me, but don Genaro interceded and said that it was a field of worms.

Don Juan looked at me fixedly, without cracking a smile. Don Genaro's meaningless answer appeared to be a joke. I waited for a cue to start laughing, but they just stared at me.

"A field of gorgeous worms," don Genaro said. "Yes, what was grown here was the most delightful worms you've ever seen."

He turned to don Juan. They looked at each other for an instant.

"Isn't it so?" don Genaro asked don Juan.

"Absolutely true," don Juan said, and turning to me he added in a soft voice, "Genaro holds the baton today. Only he can tell what's what, so do exactly as he says."

The idea that don Genaro had the control filled me with terror. I turned to don Juan to tell him about it, but before I had time to voice my words don Genaro let out a long formidable scream; a yell so loud and frightening that I felt the back of my neck swell and my hair flowing out as if a wind were blowing it. I had an instant of complete disassociation and would have remained glued to the spot had it not been for don Juan, who, with incredible speed and control, turned my body around so my eyes could witness an inconceivable feat. Don Genaro was standing horizontally, about one hundred feet above the ground on the trunk of a eucalyptus tree which was perhaps fifty yards away. That is he was standing with his legs three feet apart perpendicular to the tree. It was as if he had hooks on his shoes, and with them was capable of defying gravity. His arms were crossed over his chest and his back was turned to me.

I stared at him. I did not want to blink for fear of losing sight of him. I made a quick judgment and concluded that if I could maintain him within my field of vision I might detect a clue, a movement, a gesture, or anything that would help me understand what was taking place.

I felt don Juan's head next to my right ear, and I heard him whisper that any attempt to explain was useless and idiotic. I heard him repeat, "Push your belly down, down."

It was a technique he had taught me years before to use in moments of great danger, fear, or stress. It consisted of pushing the diaphragm down while taking four sharp gasps of air through the mouth followed by four deep inhalations and exhalations through the nose.

He had explained that the gasps of air had to be felt as jolts in the middle part of the body, and that keeping the hands tightly clasped covering the navel gave strength to the midsection, and helped to control the gasps and the deep inhalation, which had to be held for a count of eight as one pressed the diaphragm down. The exhalations were done twice through the nose and twice through the mouth in a slow or accelerated fashion depending on one's preference.

I automatically obeyed don Juan. I did not dare, however, to take my eyes away from don Genaro. As I kept on breathing, my body relaxed and I was aware that don Juan was twisting my legs. Apparently when he had turned me around, my right foot had caught in a clump of dirt and my leg was uncomfortably bent. When he straightened me out, I realized that the shock of seeing don Genaro standing on the trunk of a tree had made me oblivious to my discomfort.

Don Juan whispered in my ear that I should not stare at don Genaro. I heard him say, "Blink. Blink."

For a moment I felt reluctant. Don Juan commanded me again. I was convinced that the whole affair was somehow linked to me as the onlooker, and, if I as the sole witness of don Genaro's deed had stopped looking at him, he would have fallen to the ground; or perhaps the whole scene would have vanished.

After an excruciatingly long period of immobility, don Genaro swiveled on his heels, forty-five degrees to his right, and began to walk up the trunk. His body shivered. I saw him take one small step after another until he had taken eight. He even circumvented a branch. Then, with his arms still crossed over his chest, he sat down on the trunk with his back to me. His legs dangled as if he were sitting on a chair, as if gravity had no effect on him. He then sort of walked on his seat, downwards. He reached a branch that was parallel to his body and leaned on it with his left arm and his head for a few seconds. He seemed to be leaning more for dramatic effect than for support. He then kept on moving on his seat inching his way from the trunk onto the branch until he had changed his position and was sitting as one might normally sit on a branch.

Don Juan giggled. I had a horrible taste in my mouth. I wanted to turn round and face don Juan who was slightly behind me to my right, but I did not dare miss any of don Genaro's actions.

He dangled his feet for a while, then crossed them and swung them gently, and finally he slipped upwards back onto the trunk.

Don Juan took my head gently in both hands and twisted my neck to the left until my line of vision was parallel to the tree rather than perpendicular to it. Looking at don Genaro from that angle he did not appear to be defying gravity. He was simply sitting on the trunk of a tree. I noticed then that if I stared and did not blink, the background became vague and diffuse, and the clarity of don Genaro's body became more intense. His shape became dominant as if nothing else existed.

Don Genaro swiftly slid downward back onto the branch. He sat dangling his feet like on a trapeze. Looking at him from a twisted perspective made both positions, especially sitting on the tree trunk, seem feasible.

Don Juan shifted my head to the right until it was resting on my shoulder. Don Genaro's position on the branch seemed perfectly normal, but when he moved onto the trunk again I could not make the necessary perceptual adjustment and I saw him as if he were upside down with his head towards the ground.

Don Genaro moved back and forth various times, and don Juan shifted my head from side to side every time don Genaro moved. The result of their manipulations was that I completely lost track of my normal perspective, and without it don Genaro's actions were not as awesome.

Don Genaro remained on the branch for a long time. Don Juan straightened my neck and whispered that don Genaro was about to descend. I heard him whisper in an imperative tone, "Press down. Down."

I was in the middle of a fast exhalation when don Genaro's body seemed to be transfixed by some sort of tension. It glowed, became lax, swung backwards, and hung by the knees for a moment. His legs seemed to be so flaccid that they could not stay bent, and he fell to the ground.

At the moment he began his downward fall, I also had the sensation of falling through endless space. My whole body experienced a painful and at the same time extremely pleasurable anguish; an anguish of such intensity and duration that my legs could no longer support the weight of my body and I fell down on the soft dirt. I could barely move my arms to buffer my fall. I was breathing so heavily that the soft dirt got into my nostrils and made them itch. I tried to get up. My muscles seemed to have lost their strength.

Don Juan and don Genaro came and stood over me. I heard their voices as if they were quite a distance from me, and yet I felt them pulling me. They must have lifted me up, each holding one of my arms and one of my legs, and carried me over a short distance. I was perfectly aware of the uncomfortable position of my neck and head which hung limp. My eyes were open. I could see the ground and tufts of weeds passing under me. Finally I had a cold seizure. Water entered into my mouth and nose and made me cough. My arms and legs moved frantically. I began to swim but the water was not deep enough and I found myself standing up in the shallow river where they had dumped me.

Don Juan and don Genaro laughed themselves silly. Don Juan rolled up his pants and came over closer to me. He looked me in the eye and said that I was not complete yet and pushed me gently back into the water. My body did not offer any resistance. I did not want to be dunked again, but there was no way of connecting my volition to my muscles and I crumbled backwards. The coldness was even more intense. I quickly jumped up and scurried out on the opposite bank by mistake. Don Juan and don Genaro yelled and whistled, and threw rocks into the bushes ahead of me as though they were corralling a steer that was running astray. I crossed back over the river and sat on a rock next to them. Don Genaro handed me my clothes, and then I noticed that I was naked although I could not remember when or how I got my clothes off. I was dripping wet and did not want to put them on right away. Don Juan turned to don Genaro and in a booming tone said, "For heaven's sake, give the man a towel!" It took me a couple of seconds to realize the absurdity.

I felt very good. In fact I was so happy that I did not want to talk. I had the certainty, however, that if I showed my euphoria they would have dumped me into the water again.

Don Genaro watched me. His eyes had the glint of a wild animal's. They pierced through me.

"Good for you," don Juan said to me all of a sudden. "You're contained now, but down by the eucalyptus trees you indulged like a son of a bitch."

I wanted to laugh hysterically. Don Juan's words seemed so utterly funny that I had to make a supreme effort to contain myself. And then some part of me flashed a command. An uncontrollable itching in the midsection of my body made me take off my clothes and plunge back into the water. I stayed in the river for about five minutes. The coldness restored my sense of sobriety. When I got out I was myself again.

"Good show," don Juan said, tapping me on the shoulder.

They led me back to the eucalyptus trees. As we walked don Juan explained that my 'tonal' had been dangerously vulnerable, and that the incongruity of don Genaro's acts seemed to be too much for it. He said that they had decided not to tamper with it any more and go back to don Genaro's house, but the fact that I knew I had to plunge myself into the river again had changed everything. He did not say, however, what they intended to do.

We stood in the middle of the field, on the same spot we had been before. Don Juan was to my right and don Genaro to my left. They both stood with their muscles tensed, in a state of alertness. They maintained that tenseness for about ten minutes. I shifted my eyes from one to the other. I thought that don Juan would cue me on what to do. I was right. At one moment he relaxed his body and kicked some hard clumps of dirt. Without looking at me, he said, "I think we'd better go." I automatically reasoned that don Genaro must have had the intention of giving me another demonstration of the 'nagual', but had decided not to. I felt relieved. I waited another moment for a final confirmation. Don Genaro also eased off and then both of them took one step forward. I knew then that we were through there. But at the very instant I loosened up, don Genaro again let out his incredible yell.

I began to breathe frantically. I looked around. Don Genaro had disappeared. Don Juan was standing in front of me. His body convulsed with laughter. He turned to me.

"I'm sorry," he said in a whisper. "There's no other way."

I wanted to ask about don Genaro, but I felt that if I did not keep on breathing and pressing down on my diaphragm I would die. Don Juan pointed with his chin to a place behind me. Without moving my feet I began to turn my head over my left shoulder. But before I could see what he was pointing at, don Juan jumped and stopped me. The force of his leap and the speed with which he grabbed me made me lose my balance. As I fell on my back I had the sensation that my startled reaction had been to grab on to don Juan and consequently I dragged him with me to the ground. But when I looked up, the impressions of my tactile and visual senses were in total disaccord. I saw don Juan standing over me laughing while my body felt the unmistakable weight and pressure of another body on top of me; almost pinning me down.

Don Juan extended his hand and helped me get up. My bodily sensation was that he was lifting two bodies. He smiled knowingly and whispered that one should never turn to one's left when facing the 'nagual'. He said that the 'nagual' was deadly, and there was no need to make the risks more dangerous than they already were. He then gently turned me around and made me face an enormous eucalyptus tree. It was perhaps the oldest tree around. It's trunk was nearly twice as thick as any of the others. He pointed with his eyes to the top. Don Genaro was perched on a branch. He was facing me. I could see his eyes like two huge mirrors reflecting light. I did not want to look but don Juan insisted that I should not move my eyes away. In a very forceful whisper he ordered me to blink, and not to succumb to fright or indulgence.

I noticed that if I blinked steadily don Genaro's eyes were not so awesome. It was only when I stared that the glare of his eyes became maddening.

He squatted on the branch for a long time. Then without moving his body at all he jumped to the ground and landed in the same squatting position a couple of yards from where I was. I witnessed the complete sequence of his jump, and I knew that I had perceived more than my eyes had allowed me to catch. Don Genaro had not really jumped. Something had pushed him as if from behind and had made him glide on a parabolic course. The branch where he had been perched was possibly a hundred feet high, and the tree was located about a hundred and fifty feet away from me. Thus his body had to trace a parabola to land where it did. But the force needed to cover that distance was not the product of don Genaro's muscles. His body was 'blown' away from the branch to the ground. At one point I was able to see the soles of his shoes and his rear as his body described the parabola. Then he landed gently although his weight crumbled the hard clumps of dried dirt and even raised a bit of dust.

Don Juan giggled behind me. Don Genaro stood up as if nothing had happened, and tugged the sleeve of my shirt to give me a signal that we were leaving.

No one spoke on the way to don Genaro's house. I felt lucid and composed. A couple of times don Juan stopped and examined my eyes by staring into them. He seemed satisfied. As soon as we arrived, don Genaro went behind the house. It was still early in the morning. Don Juan sat on the floor by the door and pointed to a place for me to sit. I was exhausted. I lay down and went out like a light.

I woke up when don Juan shook me. I tried to look at the time. My watch was missing. Don Juan pulled it from his shirt pocket and handed it to me. It was around 1:00 p.m. I looked up and our eyes met.

"No. There's no explanation," he said, turning away from me. "The *nagual* is only for witnessing."

I went around the house looking for don Genaro. He was not there. I came back to the front. Don Juan had made me something to eat. After I had finished eating he began to talk.

"When one is dealing with the *nagual*, one should never look into it directly," he said. "You were peering at it this morning, and therefore you were sapped. The only way to look at the *nagual* is as if it were a common affair. One must blink in order to break the fixation. Our eyes are the eyes of the *tonal*; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that our eyes have been trained by the *tonal*. Therefore the *tonal* claims them.

"One of the sources of your bafflement and discomfort is that your *tonal* doesn't let go of your eyes. The day it does your *nagual* will have won a great battle. Your obsession or, better yet, everyone's obsession is to arrange the world according to the *tonal's* rules. So every time we are confronted with the *nagual*, we go out of our way to make our eyes stiff and intransigent. [* *intransigent- not capable of being affected by pleas, persuasion, requests, or reason*] I must appeal to the part of your *tonal* which understands this dilemma and you must make an effort to free your eyes. The point is to convince the *tonal* that there are other worlds that can pass in front of the same windows. The *nagual* showed you that this morning. So let your eyes be free; let them be true windows. The eyes can be the windows to peer into boredom or to peek into that infinity."

Don Juan made a sweeping arc with his left arm to point all around us. There was a glint in his eyes, and his smile was at once frightening and disarming.

"How can I do that?" I asked.

"I say that it is a very simple matter. Perhaps I say it is simple because I've been doing it for so long. All you have to do is to set up your intent as a customs house. Whenever you are in the world of the *tonal*, you should be an impeccable *tonal*; no time for irrational crap. But whenever you are in the world of the *nagual*, you should also be impeccable; no time for rational crap. For the warrior, intent is the gate in between. It closes completely behind him when he goes either way.

"Another thing one should do when facing the *nagual* is to shift the line of the eyes from time to time in order to break the spell of the *nagual*. Changing the position of the eyes always eases the burden of the *tonal*. This morning I noticed that you were extremely vulnerable and I changed the position of your head. If you are in a pinch like that you should be able to shift by yourself. This shifting should be done only as a relief, though, not as another way of palisading [* *palisading- surround with a wall in order to fortify*] yourself to safeguard the order of the *tonal*. My bet would be that you would strive to use this technique to hide the rationality of your *tonal* behind it, and thus believe that you're saving it from extinction. The flaw of your reasoning is that nobody wants or seeks the extinction of the *tonal's* rationality. That fear is ill founded.

"There is nothing else I can tell you except that you must follow every movement that Genaro makes without draining yourself. You are testing now whether or not your *tonal* is crammed with nonessentials. If there are too many unnecessary items on your island, you won't be able to sustain the encounter with the *nagual*."

"What would happen to me?"

"You may die. No one is capable of surviving a deliberate encounter with the *nagual* without a long training. It takes years to prepare the *tonal* for such an encounter. Ordinarily if an average man comes face to face with the *nagual*, the shock would be so great that he would die. The goal of a warrior's training then is not to teach him to hex or to charm, but to prepare his *tonal* not to crap out. A most difficult accomplishment. A warrior must be taught to be impeccable and thoroughly empty before he could even conceive witnessing the *nagual*.

"In your case, for instance, you have to stop calculating. What you were doing this morning was absurd. You call it explaining. I call it a sterile and boring insistence of the *tonal* to have everything under it's control. Whenever it doesn't succeed, there is a moment of bafflement and then the *tonal* opens itself to death. What a prick! It would rather kill itself than relinquish control. And yet there is very little we can do to change that condition."

"How did you change it yourself, don Juan?"

"The island of the *tonal* has to be swept clean and maintained clean. That's the only alternative that a warrior has. A clean island offers no resistance. It is as if there were nothing there."

He went around the house and sat down on a big smooth rock. From there one could look into a deep ravine. He signaled me to sit down next to him.

"Can you tell me, don Juan, what else we are going to do today?" I asked.

"We aren't going to do anything. That is, you and I will only be the witnesses. Your benefactor is Genaro."

I thought I had misunderstood him in my eagerness to take notes. At the beginning stages of my apprenticeship, don Juan himself had introduced the term 'benefactor'. My impression had always been that he himself was my benefactor.

Don Juan had stopped talking and was staring at me. I made a quick assessment and my conclusion was that he must have meant that don Genaro was something like the star performer on that occasion. Don Juan giggled as if he were reading my thoughts.

"Genaro is your benefactor," he repeated.

"But you are, aren't you?" I asked in a frantic tone.

"I'm the one who helped you sweep the island of the *tonal*," he said. "Genaro has two apprentices, Pablito and Nestor. He is helping them sweep the island, but I will show them the *nagual*. I will be their benefactor. Genaro is only their teacher. In these matters one can either talk or act. One cannot do both with the same person. One either takes the island of the *tonal* or one takes the *nagual*. In your case my duty has been to work with your *tonal*."

As don Juan spoke I had an attack of terror so intense that I was about to get ill. I had the feeling that he was going to leave me with don Genaro and that was a most dreadful scheme to me.

Don Juan laughed and laughed as I voiced my fears.

"The same thing happens to Pablito," he said. "The moment he sets eyes on me he gets ill. The other day he walked into the house when Genaro was gone. I was alone there and I had left my sombrero by the door. Pablito saw it and his *tonal* became so frightened that he actually shit in his pants."

I could easily understand and project into Pablito's feelings. When I considered the matter carefully, I had to admit that don Juan was terrifying. I had learned, however, to feel comfortable with him. I experienced with him a familiarity born out of our long association.

"I'm not going to leave you with Genaro," he said, still laughing. "I'm the one who takes care of your *tonal*. Without it you're dead."

"Has every apprentice a teacher and a benefactor?" I asked to ease my turmoil.

"No, not every apprentice. But some do."

"Why do some of them have both a teacher and a benefactor?"

"When an ordinary man is ready, power provides him with a teacher and he becomes an apprentice. When the apprentice is ready, power provides him with a benefactor and he becomes a sorcerer."

"What makes a man ready, so that power can provide him with a teacher?"

"No one knows that. We are only men. Some of us are men who have learned to *see* and use the *nagual*, but nothing that we may have gained in the course of our lives can reveal to us the designs of power. Thus not every apprentice has a benefactor. Power decides that."

I asked him if he himself had had a teacher and a benefactor, and for the first time in thirteen years he freely talked about them. He said that both his teacher and his benefactor were from central Mexico. I had always considered that information about don Juan to be of value for my anthropological research, but somehow at the moment of his revelation it did not matter.

Don Juan glanced at me. I though it was a look of concern. He then abruptly changed the subject and asked me to recount every detail of what I had experienced in the morning.

"A sudden fright always shrinks the *tonal*" he said as a comment on my description of how I felt when don Genaro screamed. "The problem here is not to let the *tonal* shrink itself out of the picture. A grave issue for a warrior is to know exactly when to allow his *tonal* to shrink and when to stop it. This is a great art. A warrior must struggle like a demon to shrink his *tonal*; and yet at the very moment the *tonal* shrinks, the warrior must reverse all that struggle to immediately halt that shrinking."

"But by doing that isn't he reverting back to what he already was?" I asked.

"No. After the *tonal* shrinks, the warrior is closing the gate from the other side. As long as his *tonal* is unchallenged and his eyes are tuned only for the *tonal's* world, the warrior is on the safe side of the fence. He's on familiar ground and knows all the rules. But when his *tonal* shrinks he is on the windy side, and that opening must be shut tight immediately; or he would be swept away. And this is not just a way of talking. Beyond the gate of the *tonal's* eyes the wind rages. I mean a real wind. No metaphor. A wind that can blow one's life away. In fact, that is the wind that blows all living things on this earth. Years ago I acquainted you with that wind. You took it as a joke though."

He was referring to a time when he had taken me to the mountains and explained certain properties of the wind. I had never thought it was a joke however.

"It's not important whether you took it seriously or not," he said after listening to my protests. "As a rule the *tonal* must defend itself at any cost every time it is threatened; so it is of no real consequence how the *tonal* reacts in order to accomplish it's defense. The only important matter is that the *tonal* of a warrior must become acquainted with other alternatives. What a teacher aims for, in this case, is the total weight of those possibilities. It is the weight of those new possibilities which helps to shrink the *tonal*. By the same token, it is the same weight which helps stop the *tonal* from shrinking out of the picture."

He signaled me to proceed with my narrative of the events of the morning, and he interrupted me when I came to the part where don Genaro slid back and forth from the tree trunk to the branch.

"The *nagual* can perform extraordinary things;" he said. "things that do not seem possible, things that are unthinkable for the *tonal*. But the extraordinary thing is that the performer has no way of knowing how those things happen. In other words, Genaro doesn't know how he does those things. He only knows that he does them. The secret of a sorcerer is that he knows how to get to the *nagual*, but once he gets there, your guess is as good as his as to what takes place."

"But what does one feel while doing those things?"

"One feels like one is doing something."

"Would don Genaro feel like he's walking up the trunk of a tree?"

Don Juan looked at me for a moment, then he turned his head away.

"No," he said in a forceful whisper. "Not in the way you mean it."

He did not say anything else. I was practically holding my breath waiting for his explanation. Finally I had to ask, "But what does he feel?"

"I can't say, not because it is a personal matter, but because there is no way of describing it."

"Come on," I coaxed him. "There is nothing that one can't explain or elucidate with words. I believe that even if it's not possible to describe something directly one can allude to it, beat around the bush."

Don Juan laughed. His laughter was friendly and kind. And yet there was a touch of mockery and sheer mischievousness in it.

"I have to change the subject," he said. "Suffice it to say that the *nagual* was aimed at you this morning. Whatever Genaro did was a mixture of you and him. His *nagual* was tempered by your *tonal*."

I insisted on probing and asked him, "When you're showing the *nagual* to Pablito, what do you feel?"

"I can't explain that," he said in a soft voice. "And not because I don't want to, but simply because I can't. My *tonal* stops there."

I did not want to press him any further. We remained silent for a while, then he began to talk again.

"Let's say that a warrior learns to tune his *will*, to direct it to a pinpoint, to focus it wherever he wants. It is as if his *will*, which comes from the midsection of his body, is one single luminous fiber; a fiber that he can direct at any conceivable place. That fiber is the road to the *nagual*. Or I could also say that the warrior sinks into the *nagual* through that single fiber.

"Once he has sunk, the expression of the *nagual* is a matter of his personal temperament. If the warrior is funny, the *nagual* is funny. If the warrior is morbid, the *nagual* is morbid. If the warrior is mean, the *nagual* is mean.

"Genaro always cracks me up because he's one of the most delightful creatures alive. I never know what he's going to come up with. That to me is the ultimate essence of sorcery. Genaro is such a fluid warrior that the slightest focusing of his will makes his *nagual* act in incredible ways."

"Did you yourself observe what don Genaro was doing in the trees?" I asked.

"No. I just knew because I saw that the *nagual* was in the trees. The rest of the show was for you alone."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that like the time when you pushed me and I ended up in the market, you were not with me?"

"It was something like that. When one meets the *nagual* face to face, one always has to be alone. I was around only to protect your *tonal*. That is my charge." [* *charge- a person committed to your care*]

Don Juan said that my 'tonal' was nearly blasted to pieces when don Genaro descended from the tree; not so much because of any inherent quality of danger in the 'nagual', but because my 'tonal' indulged in it's bewilderment. He said that one of the aims of the warrior's training was to cut the bewilderment of the 'tonal' until the warrior was so fluid that he could admit everything without admitting anything.

When I described don Genaro's leap up to the tree and his leap down from it, don Juan said that the yell of a warrior was one of the most important issues of sorcery, and that don Genaro was capable of focusing on his yell; using it as a vehicle.

"You are right," he said. "Genaro was pulled partly by his yell and partly by the tree. That was true seeing on your part. That was a true picture of the *nagual*. Genaro's will was focused on the yell and his personal touch made the tree pull the *nagual*. The lines went both ways from Genaro to the tree and from the tree to Genaro.

"What you should have *seen* when Genaro jumped from the tree was that he was focusing on a spot in front of you and then the tree pushed him. But it only seemed to be a push. In essence it was more like being released by the tree. The tree released the *nagual* and the *nagual* came back to the world of the *tonal* on the spot he focused on.

"The second time that Genaro came down from the tree your *tonal* was not so bewildered. You were not indulging so hard and therefore you were not as sapped as you were the first time."

Around four in the afternoon don Juan stopped our conversation.

"We are going back to the eucalyptus trees," he said. "The *nagual* is waiting for us there."

"Aren't we risking being seen by people?" I asked.

"No. The *nagual* will keep everything suspended," he said.

## 9. The Whispering of the Nagual

As we approached the eucalyptuses, I saw don Genaro sitting on a tree stump. He waved his hand, smiling. We joined him.

There was a flock of crows in the trees. They were cawing as if something were frightening them. Don Genaro said that we had to remain motionless and quiet until the crows had calmed down.

Don Juan leaned his back against a tree and signaled me to do the same on a tree next to him a few feet away to his left. We were both facing don Genaro, who was three or four yards in front of us.

With a subtle movement of his eyes, don Juan gave me a cue to rearrange my feet. He was standing firmly with his feet slightly apart, touching the tree trunk only with the upper part of his shoulder blades and with the very back of his head. His arms hung at his sides.

We stood like that for perhaps an hour. I kept a close vigil on both of them, especially on don Juan. At a given moment he slid gently-down the tree trunk and sat down, still keeping the same areas of his body in contact with the tree. His knees were raised and he rested his arms on them. I imitated his movements. My legs had become extremely tired and the change of position made me feel quite comfortable.

The crows had stopped cawing by degrees until there was not a single sound in the field. The silence was more unnerving to me than the noise of the crows.

Don Juan spoke to me in a quiet tone. He said that the twilight was my best hour. He looked at the sky. It must have been after six. It had been an overcast day and I had had no way of checking the position of the sun. I heard the distant cries of geese and perhaps turkeys. But in the field with eucalyptus trees there was no noise. There had been no whistling of birds or sounds of large insects for a long time.

The bodies of don Juan and don Genaro had been in perfect immobility, as far as I could judge, except for a few seconds when they shifted their weight in order to rest.

After don Juan and I had slid to the ground, don Genaro made a sudden motion. He lifted his feet up and squatted on the stump. He then turned forty-five degrees, and I was looking at his left profile. I stared at don Juan in search of a clue. He jutted his chin; it was a command to look at don Genaro.

A monstrous agitation began to overtake me. I was incapable of containing myself. My bowels were loose. I could absolutely feel what Pablito must have felt when he saw don Juan's sombrero. I experienced such intestinal distress that I had to get up and run to the bushes. I heard them howling with laughter.

I did not dare to return to where they were. I hesitated for a while. I figured that the spell must have been broken by my sudden outburst. I did not have to ponder for too long. I don Juan and don Genaro came over to where I was. They flanked [* flanked- located at the sides] me and we walked to another field. We stopped at the very center of it, and I recognized that we had been there in the morning.

Don Juan spoke to me. He told me that I had to be fluid and silent and should stop my internal dialogue. I listened attentively. Don Genaro must have been aware that all my concentration was focused on don Juan's admonitions, and he used that moment to do what he had done in the morning. He again let out his maddening scream. He caught me unaware but not unprepared. I almost immediately recuperated my balance by breathing. The jolt was terrifying, yet it did not have a prolonged effect on me, and I was capable of following don Genaro's movements with my eyes. I saw him leap to a low branch on a tree. As I followed his course for a distance of eighty to ninety feet, my eyes experienced an extravagant distortion. It was not that he leaped by means of the spring action of his muscles. He rather glided through the air catapulted in part by his formidable yell, and pulled by some vague lines emanating from the tree. It was as if the tree had sipped him through it's lines.

Don Genaro stayed perched on the low branch for a moment. His left profile was turned to me. He began to perform a series of strange movements. His head wobbled, his body shivered. He hid his head various times in between his knees. The more he moved and fretted the more difficult it was for me to focus my eyes on his body. He seemed to be dissolving. I blinked desperately and then I shifted my line of vision by twisting my head to the right and to the left as don Juan had taught me. From my left perspective I saw don Genaro's body as I had never seen it before. It was as if he had put on a disguise. He had a furry suit on; the hair was the color of a Siamese cat, light buff-brown with touches of dark chocolate brown on the legs and the back. It had a long thick tail. Don Genaro's costume made him look like a furry brown long-legged crocodile sitting on a branch. I could not see his head or his features.

I straightened my head to a normal position. The vision of don Genaro in disguise remained unchanged.

Don Genaro's arms shivered. He stood up on the branch, sort of stooped over, and leaped towards the ground. The branch was perhaps fifteen to twenty feet high. As far as I could judge, it was an ordinary leap of a man wearing a costume. I saw don Genaro's body almost touching the ground and then the thick tail of his costume vibrated, and instead of landing he took off as if powered with a silent jet engine. He went over the trees and then glided almost to the ground. He did that over and over. At times he would hold on to a branch and swing around a tree, or curl like an eel between branches. And then he would glide and circle around us, or flap his arms as he touched the very tops of the trees with his stomach.

Don Genaro's cavorting filled me with awe. My eyes followed him, and two or three times I clearly perceived that he was using some brilliant lines, as if they were pulleys, to glide from one place to another. Then he went over the tops of the trees towards the south and disappeared behind them. I tried to anticipate the place where he would appear again, but he did not show up at all.

I noticed then that I was lying on my back, and yet I had not been aware of a change in perspective. I had thought all along that I was looking at don Genaro from a standing position.

Don Juan helped me to sit up and then I saw don Genaro walking towards us with a nonchalant air. He smiled coyly and asked me if I had liked his flying. I attempted to say something but I was speechless.

Don Genaro exchanged a strange look with don Juan and adopted a squat position again. He leaned over and whispered something in my left ear. I heard him say, "Why don't you come and fly with me?" He repeated it five or six times.

Don Juan came towards me and whispered in my right ear, "Don't talk. Just follow Genaro."

Don Genaro made me squat and whispered to me again. I heard him with crystal clear precision. He repeated the statement perhaps ten times. He said, "Trust the *nagual*. The *nagual* will take you."

Then don Juan whispered in my right ear another statement. He said, "Change your feelings."

I could hear both of them talking to me at once, but I could also hear them individually. Every one of don Genaro's statements had to do with the general context of gliding through the air. The statements that he repeated dozens of times seemed to be those that became engraved in my memory. Don Juan's words, on the other hand, had to do with specific commands, which he repeated countless times. The effect of that dual whispering was most extraordinary. It was as if the sound of their individual words were splitting me in half. Finally the abyss between my two ears was so wide that I lost all sense of unity. There was something that was undoubtedly me, but it was not solid. It was rather like a glowing fog, a dark yellow mist that had feelings.

Don Juan told me that he was going to mold me for flying. The sensation I had then was that the words were like pliers that twisted and molded my 'feelings'.

Don Genaro's words were an invitation to follow him. I felt I wanted to, but I could not. The split was so great that I was incapacitated. [* incapacitated- lacking in, or deprived of, strength or power] Then I heard the same short statements repeated endlessly by both of them; things like "Look at that magnificent flying shape." "Leap, leap." "Your legs will reach the treetops." "The eucalyptuses are like green dots." "The worms are lights."

Something in me must have ceased at a given moment; perhaps my awareness of being talked to. I sensed that don Genaro was still with me, yet from the point of view of my perception I could only distinguish an enormous mass of the most extraordinary lights. At times their glare diminished and at times the lights became intense. I was also experiencing movement. The effect was like being pulled by a vacuum that never let me stop. Whenever my motion seemed to diminish and I could actually focus my awareness on the lights, the vacuum would pull me away again.

At one moment, between being pulled back and forth, I experienced the ultimate confusion.

The world around me, whatever it was, was coming and going at the same time; thus the vacuumlike effect. I could see two separate worlds; one that was going away from me, and the other that was coming closer to me. I did not realize this as one ordinarily would; that is, I did not become aware of it as something that had thus far been unrevealed. I rather had two realizations without the unifying conclusion.

After that my perceptions became dull. They either lacked precision, or they were too many and I had no way of sorting them. The next batch of discernible apperceptions [* *apperceptions- processes whereby perceived qualities of an object are related to past experience*] were a series of sounds that happened at the end of a long tubelike formation. The tube was myself, and the sounds were don Juan and don Genaro again talking to me through each of my ears. The more they talked the shorter the tube became until the sounds were in a range I recognized. That is to say, the sounds of don Juan and don Genaro's words reached my normal range of perception. The sounds were first recognizable as noises, then as words yelled, and finally as words whispered in my ears.

I next noticed things of the familiar world. I was apparently lying face down. I could distinguish: clumps of dirt, small rocks, dried leaves. And then I became aware of the field of eucalyptus trees.

Don Juan and don Genaro were standing by me. It was still light. I felt that I had to get into the water in order to consolidate myself. I walked to the river, took off my clothes, and stayed in the cold water long enough to restore my perceptual balance.

Don Genaro left as soon as we arrived at his house. He casually patted me on the shoulder as he was leaving. I jumped away in a reflex reaction. I thought that his touch was going to be painful; to my amazement it was simply a gentle pat on the shoulder.

Don Juan and don Genaro laughed like two kids celebrating a prank.

"Don't be so jumpy," don Genaro said. "The *nagual* is not after you all the time."

He smacked his lips as though disapproving my overreaction, and with an air of candor and comradeship he extended his arms. I embraced him. He patted my back in a most friendly warm gesture.

"You must be concerned with the *nagual* only at certain moments," he said. "The rest of the time you and I are like all the other people on this earth."

He faced don Juan and smiled at him.

"Isn't it so, Juancho?" he asked, emphasizing the word Juancho, a funny nickname for Juan.

"That's so, Gerancho," don Juan answered, making up the word Gerancho.

They both had an explosion of laughter.

"I must warn you," don Juan said to me, "you have to exert the most demanding vigil to be sure when a man is a *nagual* and when a man is simply a man. You may die if you come into direct physical contact with the *nagual*."

Don Juan turned to don Genaro and with a beaming smile asked, "Isn't it so, Gerancho?"

"That's so, absolutely so, Juancho," don Genaro replied, and both of them laughed.

Their childlike mirth was very moving to me. The events of the day had been exhausting and I was very emotional. A wave of self-pity engulfed me. I was about to weep as I kept on repeating to myself that whatever they had done to me was irreversible and most likely injurious. Don Juan seemed to be reading my thoughts and shook his head in a gesture of disbelief. He chuckled. I made an effort to stop my internal dialogue, and my self-pity vanished.

"Genaro is very warm," don Juan commented when don Genaro had left. "The design of power was that you found a gentle benefactor."

I did not know what to say. The idea that don Genaro was my benefactor intrigued me no end. I wanted don Juan to tell me more about it. He did not seem inclined to talk. He looked at the sky and at the top of the dark silhouette of some trees at the side of the house. He sat down with his back against a thick forked pole planted almost in front of the door, and told me to sit next to him to his left.

I sat by him. He pulled me closer by the arm until I was touching him. He said that that time of the night was dangerous for me; especially on that occasion. In a very calm voice he gave me a set of instructions: We were not to move from the spot until he saw fit to do so; we were to keep on talking on an even keel without long interruptions; and I had to breathe and blink as if I were facing the 'nagual'.

"Is the *nagual* around here?" I asked.

"Of course," he said and chuckled.

I practically huddled against don Juan. He began to talk and actually solicited any kind of question from me. He even handed me my notebook and pencil as if I could write in the darkness. His contention was that I needed to be as calm and normal as possible, and there could be no better way of fortifying my 'tonal' than through taking notes. He put the whole matter on a very compelling level. He said that if taking notes was my predilection, then I should be able to do it in complete darkness. There was a tone of challenge in his voice when he said that I could turn the taking of notes into a warrior's task in which case the darkness would be no obstacle.

Somehow, he must have convinced me for I managed to scribble down parts of our conversation. The main topic was don Genaro as my benefactor. I was curious to know when don Genaro had become my benefactor and don Juan coaxed me to remember a supposedly extraordinary event that had happened the day I had met don Genaro, and which served as a proper omen. I could not recollect anything of the sort. I began to recount the experience, As far as I could remember, it was a most unobtrusive and casual meeting which took place in the spring of 1968. Don Juan stopped me.

"If you're dumb enough not to remember," he said, "we'd better leave it that way. A warrior follows the dictums of power. You will remember it when it becomes necessary."

Don Juan said that having a benefactor was a most difficult matter. He used as an example the case of his own apprentice Eligio who had been with him for many years. He said that Eligio had been unable to find a benefactor. I asked him if Eligio would eventually find one. He answered that there was no way of predicting the quirks of power. He reminded me that once, years before, we had found a group of young Indians roaming around the desert in northern Mexico. He said that he 'saw' that none of them had a benefactor, and that the general surroundings and the mood of the moment were just right for him to give them a hand by showing them the 'nagual'. He was talking about one night when four young men sat by a fire while don Juan put on what I thought to be a spectacular show in which he apparently appeared to each of us in a different guise.

"Those guys knew a great deal," he said. "You were the only greenhorn among them."

"What happened to them afterwards?" I asked.

"Some of them found a benefactor," he replied.

Don Juan said that it was the duty of a benefactor to deliver his ward to power, and that the benefactor imparted to the neophyte [* *neophyte- a new participant in some activity*] his personal touch, as much if not more so than the teacher.

During a short pause in our talk I heard a strange rasping noise at the hack of the house. Don Juan held me down; I had almost stood up as a reaction to it. Before the noise happened, our conversation had been a matter of course for me. But when the pause occurred and there was a moment of silence, the strange noise popped through it. At that instant I had the certainty that our conversation was an extraordinary event. I had the sensation that the sound of don Juan's words and mine were like a sheet that broke, and that the rasping sound had been deliberately prowling, waiting for a chance to break through.

Don Juan commanded me to sit tight and not to pay attention to the surroundings. The rasping noise reminded me of the sound of a gopher clawing on hard dry ground. The moment I had thought of the simile [* *simile- a figure of speech that expresses a resemblance between things of different kinds*] I also had a visual image of a rodent like the one don Juan had showed me on his palm. It was as if I were falling asleep and my thoughts were turning into visions or dreams.

I began the breathing exercise, and held my stomach with my clasped hands. Don Juan kept on talking, but I was not listening to him. My attention was on the soft rustle of a snake-like thing slithering over small dry leaves. I had a moment of panic and physical revulsion at the thought of a snake crawling on me. I involuntarily put my feet under don Juan's legs, and breathed and blinked frantically.

I heard the noise so close that it seemed to be only a couple of feet away. My panic mounted. Don Juan calmly said that the only way to fend off the 'nagual' was to remain unaltered. He ordered me to stretch my legs and not to focus my attention on the noise. He imperatively demanded that I write or ask questions, and make an effort not to succumb.

After a great struggle I asked him if don Genaro was making the noise. He said that it was the 'nagual' and that I should not mix them; Genaro was the name of the 'tonal'. He then said something else, but I could not understand him. Something was circling around the house and I could not concentrate on our conversation. He commanded me to make a supreme effort. At one moment I found that I was babbling idiocies about my being unworthy. I had a jolt of fear and snapped into a state of great lucidity. Don Juan told me then that it was all right to listen. But there were no sounds.

"The *nagual* is gone," don Juan said and stood up and went inside.

He lit don Genaro's kerosene lantern and made some food. We ate in silence. I asked him if the 'nagual' was coming back.

"No," he said with a serious expression. "It was just testing you. At this time of night just after the twilight, you should always involve yourself in something. Anything would do. It is only for a short period, an hour perhaps, but in your case a most deadly hour.

"Tonight the *nagual* tried to make you stumble, but you were strong enough to ward off it's assault. On another occasion you succumbed to it and I had to pour water over your body. This time you did fine."

I remarked that the word 'assault' made the event sound very dangerous.

"Made it sound dangerous? That's a weird way of putting it," he said. "I'm not trying to scare you. The actions of the *nagual* are deadly. I've already told you that, and it is not that Genaro tries to hurt you; on the contrary, his concern for you is impeccable. But if you don't have enough power to parry the *nagual's* onslaught, you're dead regardless of my help or Genaro's concern."

After we finished eating, don Juan sat next to me and looked over my shoulder at my notes. I commented that it would probably take me years to assort [* assort- arrange or order by classes or categories] everything that had happened to me during that day. I knew that I had been flooded with perceptions I could not ever hope to understand.

"If you cannot understand, you're in great shape," he said. "It is when you think you understand that you're in a mess. That's from the point of view of a sorcerer, of course. From the point of view of an average man, if you fail to understand you're sinking. In your case I would say that an average man would think that you are disassociated or you're beginning to become disassociated."

I laughed at his choice of words. I knew that he was throwing the concept of disassociation back at me. I had mentioned it to him sometime back in connection with my fears. I assured him that this time I was not going to ask anything about what I had been through.

"I've never put a ban on talking," he said. "We can talk about the *nagual* to your heart's content as long as you don't try to explain it. If you remember correctly, I said that the *nagual* is only for witnessing. So, we can talk about what we witnessed and about how we witnessed it. You want to take on the explanation of how it is all possible, though, and that is an abomination. You want to explain the *nagual* with the *tonal*. That is stupid especially in your case since you can no longer hide behind your ignorance. You know very well that we make sense in talking only because we stay within certain boundaries, and those boundaries are not applicable to the *nagual*."

I attempted to clarify the issue. It was not only that I wanted to explain everything from a rational point of view, but my need to explain stemmed from my necessity to maintain order throughout the tremendous onslaughts of chaotic stimuli and perceptions I had had.

Don Juan's comment was that I was trying to defend a point I did not agree with.

"You know damn well that you're indulging." he said. "To maintain order means to be a perfect *tonal*, and to be a perfect *tonal* means to be aware of everything that takes place on the island of the *tonal*. But you're not. So your argument about maintaining order has no truth in it. You only use it to win an argument."

I did not know what to say. Don Juan sort of consoled me by saying that it took a gigantic struggle to clean the island of the 'tonal'. Then he asked me to recount all I had perceived in my second session with the 'nagual'. When I had finished he said that what I had witnessed as a furry crocodile was the epitome of don Genaro's sense of humor.

"It's a pity that you're still so heavy," he said. "You always get hooked by bewilderment and miss Genaro's real art."

"Were you aware of his appearance, don Juan?"

"No. The show was only for you."

"What did you *see*?"

"Today all I could *see* was the movement of the *nagual*, gliding through the trees and whirling around us. Anyone who *sees* can witness that."

"What about someone who doesn't *see*?"

"He would witness nothing; just the trees being blown by a wild wind perhaps. We interpret any unknown expression of the *nagual* as something we know. In this case the *nagual* might be interpreted as a breeze shaking the leaves, or even as some strange light; perhaps a lightning bug of unusual size. If a man who doesn't *see* is pressed, he would say that he thought he saw something but could not remember what. This is only natural. The man would be talking sense. After all, his eyes would have judged nothing extraordinary. Being the eyes of the *tonal* they have to be limited to the *tonal's* world, and in that world there is nothing staggeringly new; nothing which the eyes cannot apprehend and the *tonal* cannot explain."

I asked him about the uncharted perceptions that resulted from their whispering in my ears.

"That was the best part of the whole event," he said. "The rest could be dispensed with, but that was the crown of the day. The rule calls for the benefactor and the teacher to make that final trimming; the most difficult of all acts. Both the teacher and the benefactor must be impeccable warriors to even attempt the feat of splitting a man. You don't know this because it still is beyond your realm, but power had been lenient with you again. Genaro is the most impeccable warrior there is."

"Why is the splitting of a man a great feat?"

"Because it is dangerous. You may have died like a little bug. Or worse yet, we may have never been able to put you back together and you would have remained on that plateau of feeling."

"Why was it necessary to do it to me, don Juan?"

"There is a certain time when the *nagual* has to whisper in the ear of the apprentice and split him,"

"What does that mean, don Juan?"

"In order to be an average *tonal* a man must have unity. His whole being must belong to the island of the *tonal*. Without that unity the man would go berserk. A sorcerer, however, has to break that unity, but without endangering his being. A sorcerer's goal is to last. That is, he doesn't take unnecessary risks. Therefore he spends years sweeping his island until a moment when he could, in a manner of speaking, sneak off it. Splitting a man in two is the gate for such an escape.

"The splitting, which is the most dangerous thing you've ever gone through, was smooth and simple. The *nagual* was masterful in guiding you. Believe me, only an impeccable warrior can do that. I felt very good for you."

Don Juan put his hand on my shoulder and I had a gigantic urge to weep.

"Am I arriving at a point when you won't see me any more?" I asked.

He laughed and shook his head.

"You indulge like a son of a bitch," he said. "We all do that though. We have different ways: that's all. Sometimes I indulge too. My way is to feel that I have pampered you and made you weak. I know that Genaro has the same feeling about Pablito. He pampers him like a child. But that is the way power set it up to be. Genaro gives Pablito everything he's capable of giving and one cannot wish he would do something else. One cannot criticize a warrior for doing his impeccable best."

He was quiet for a moment. I was too nervous to sit in silence.

"What do you think was happening to me when I felt like I was being sucked by a vacuum?" I asked.

"You were gliding," he said in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Through the air?"

"No. For the *nagual* there is no land, or air, or water. At this point you yourself can agree with that. Twice you were in that limbo and you were only at the door of the *nagual*. You've told me that everything you encountered was uncharted. So the *nagual* glides, or flies, or does whatever it may do in *nagual's* time, and that has nothing to do with *tonal's* time. The two things don't jibe."

As don Juan spoke I felt a tremor in my body. My jaw dropped and my mouth opened involuntarily. My ears unplugged, and I could hear a barely perceptible tingle or vibration. While I was describing my sensations to don Juan I noticed that when I talked it sounded as if someone else were talking. It was a complex sensation that amounted to my hearing what I was going to say before I said it.

My left ear was a source of extraordinary sensations. I felt that it was more powerful and more accurate than my right ear. There was something in it that had not been there before. When I turned around to face don Juan, who was to my right, I became aware that I had a range of clear auditory perception around that ear. It was a physical space, a range within which I could hear everything with incredible fidelity. By turning my head around I could scan the surroundings with my ear.

"The whispering of the *nagual* did that to you," don Juan said when I described my sensorial experience. "It'll come at times and then vanish. Don't be afraid of it or of any unusual sensation that you may have from now on. But above all, don't indulge and become obsessed with those sensations. I know you will succeed. The time for your splitting was right. Power fixed all that. Now everything depends on you. If you are powerful enough you will sustain the great shock of being split. But if you're incapable of holding on, you will perish. You will begin to wither away; lose weight, become pale, absent-minded, irritable, quiet."

"Perhaps if you would have told me years ago," I said, "what you and don Genaro were doing, I would have enough..."

He raised his hand and did not let me finish.

"That's a meaningless statement," he said. "You once told me that if it wouldn't be for the fact that you're stubborn and given to rational explanations you would be a sorcerer by now. But to be a sorcerer in your case means that you have to overcome stubbornness and the need for rational explanations which stand in your way. What's more, those shortcomings are your road to power. You can't say that power would flow to you if your life would be different.

"Genaro and I have to act the same way you do; within certain limits. Power sets up those limits and a warrior is, let's say, a prisoner of power; a prisoner who has one free choice; the choice to act either like an impeccable warrior, or to act like an ass. In the final analysis, perhaps the warrior is not a prisoner but a slave of power because that choice is no longer a choice for him. Genaro cannot act in any other way but impeccably. To act like an ass would drain him and cause his demise.

"The reason why you're afraid of Genaro is because he has to use the avenue of fright to shrink your *tonal*. Your body knows that, although your *reason* may not, and thus your body wants to run away every time Genaro is around."

I mentioned that I was curious to know if don Genaro deliberately set out to scare me. He said that the 'nagual' did strange things; things which were not foreseeable. He gave me, as an example, what had happened between us in the morning when he prevented my turning to my left to look at don Genaro in the tree. He said that he was aware of what his 'nagual' had done although he had no way of knowing about it ahead of time. His explanation of the whole affair was that my sudden movement to the left was a step towards my death, which my 'tonal' was deliberately taking as a suicidal plunge. That movement stirred his 'nagual' and the result was that some part of him fell on top of me.

I made an involuntary gesture of perplexity.

"Your *reason* is telling you again that you're immortal," he said.

"What do you mean by that, don Juan?"

"An immortal being has all the time in the world for doubts and bewilderment and fears. A warrior, on the other hand, cannot cling to the meanings made under the *tonal's* order, because he knows for a fact that the totality of himself has but a little time on this earth."

I wanted to make a serious point. My fears and doubts and bewilderment were not on a conscious level; and no matter how hard I tried to control them, every time I was confronted with don Juan and don Genaro I felt helpless.

"A warrior cannot be helpless," he said. "or bewildered or frightened; not under any circumstances. For a warrior there is time only for his impeccability; everything else drains his power. Impeccability replenishes it."

"We're back again to my old question, don Juan. What's impeccability?"

"Yes, we're back again to your old question, and consequently we're back again to my old answer. Impeccability is to do your best in whatever you're engaged in."

"But don Juan, my point is that I'm always under the impression I'm doing my best and obviously I'm not."

"It's not as complicated as you make it appear. The key to all these matters of impeccability is the sense of having or not having time. As a rule of thumb, when you feel and act like an immortal being that has all the time in the world, you are not impeccable. At those times you should turn, look around, and then you will realize that your feeling of having time is an idiocy. There are no survivors on this earth!"

## 10. The Wings of Perception

Don Juan and I spent the whole day in the mountains. We left at dawn. He took me to four places of power, and at each one of them he gave me specific instructions on how to proceed towards the fulfillment of the particular task that he had outlined years before as a life situation for me. We returned in the late afternoon. After eating, don Juan left don Genaro's house. He told me that I had to wait for Pablito who was bringing some kerosene for the lantern, and that I should talk to him.

I became utterly absorbed in working on my notes and did not hear Pablito come in until he was next to me. Pablito's comment was that he had been practicing the 'gait of power', and because of that I could not possibly have heard him unless I was capable of 'seeing'.

I had always liked Pablito. I had not, however, had very many opportunities in the past to be alone with him although we were good friends. Pablito had always struck me as being a most charming person. His name, of course, was Pablo, but the diminutive, Pablito, suited him better. He was small-boned but wiry. Like don Genaro he was lean, unsuspectedly muscular, and strong. He was perhaps in his late twenties, but it seemed like he was eighteen. He was dark and of medium height. His brown eyes were clear and bright, and like don Genaro he had a winning smile with a touch of devilishness in it.

I asked him about his friend Nestor, don Genaro's other apprentice. In the past I had always seen them together, and they had always given me the impression of having an excellent rapport with each other. Yet they were opposites in physical appearance and character. While Pablito was jovial and frank, Nestor was gloomy and withdrawn. Nestor was also taller, heavier, darker, and much older.

Pablito said that Nestor had finally become involved in his work with don Genaro, and that he had changed into an altogether different person since the last time I had seen him. He did not want to elaborate any further on Nestor's work or change of personality, and abruptly shifted the topic of conversation.

"I understand the *nagual* is biting your heels," he said.

I was surprised that he knew and I asked how he had found that out.

"Genaro tells me everything," he said.

I noticed that he did not speak of don Genaro in the same formal way I did. He simply called him Genaro in a familiar fashion. He said that don Genaro was like his brother, and that they were at ease around each other as though they were family. He openly professed that he loved don Genaro dearly. I was deeply moved by his simplicity and candor. In talking to him, I realized how close in temperament don Juan and I were. Thus our relationship was formal and strict in comparison to don Genaro and Pablito's.

I asked Pablito why he was afraid of don Juan. His eyes flickered. It was as if the mere thought of don Juan made him wince. He did not answer. He seemed to be assessing me in some mysterious way.

"You're not afraid of him?" he asked.

I told him I was afraid of don Genaro and he laughed as if that were the last thing he expected to hear. He said that the difference between don Juan and don Genaro was like the difference between day and night. Don Genaro was the day. Don Juan was the night and as such he was the most frightening being on earth. Describing his fear for don Juan led Pablito to make some comments about his own condition as an apprentice.

"I'm in a most miserable state," he said. "If you could see what's in my house, you would realize that I know too much for an ordinary man, and yet if you saw me with the *nagual*, you would realize that I don't know enough."

He quickly changed the subject and began to laugh at my taking notes. He said that don Genaro had provided hours of fun imitating me. He added that don Genaro liked me very much in spite of the oddities of my person, and that he had expressed his delight in my being his 'protegido'.

This was the first time I had heard that term. It was congruous with another term introduced by don Juan at the beginning of our association. He had told me that I was his '*escogido*', the chosen one. The word '*protegido*' meant the protected one.

I asked Pablito about his meetings with the 'nagual' and he told me the story of his first encounter with it. He said that once don Juan gave him a basket which he took to be a gift of good will. He placed it on a hook over the door of his room, and since he could not conceive any use for it at that moment he forgot about it all day. He said that his idea was that the basket was a gift of power and had to be put to use with something very special.

During the early evening, which Pablito said was his deadly hour also, he walked into his room to get his jacket. He was alone in the house and was getting ready to go visit a friend. The room was dark. He grabbed the jacket and when he was about to reach the door the basket fell in front of him and rolled near his feet. Pablito said that he laughed his fright away as soon as he saw that it had only been the basket that had fallen from the hook. He leaned over to pick it up and got the jolt of his life. The basket jumped out of his reach and began to shake and squeak as if someone were twisting and pressing down on it. Pablito said that there was enough light coming from the kitchen to clearly distinguish everything in the room. He stared at the basket for a moment although he felt he should not do that. The basket began to convulse in the midst of some heavy, rasping, and difficult breathing.

Pablito maintained in recounting his experience, that he actually saw and heard the basket breathing, and that it was alive and chased him around the room, blocking his exit. He said that the basket then began to swell. All the strips of bamboo came loose and turned into a giant ball, like a dry tumbleweed, that rolled towards him. He fell backwards on the floor and the ball began to crawl onto his feet. Pablito said that by that time he was out of his mind, screaming hysterically. The ball had him trapped and moved on his legs like pins going through him. He tried to push it away and then noticed that the ball was the face of don Juan with his mouth open ready to devour him. At that point he could not stand the terror and lost consciousness.

Pablito, in a very frank and open manner, told me a series of terrifying encounters that he and other members of his household had had with the 'nagual'. We spent hours talking. He seemed to be in very much the same quandary that I was in but he was definitely more sensitive than I in handling himself within the sorcerers' frame of reference.

At one moment he got up and said that he felt don Juan was coming, and he did not want to be found there. He took off with incredible speed. It was as if something had pulled him out of the room. He left me in the middle of saying good-by.

Don Juan and don Genaro came back shortly. They were laughing.

"Pablito was running down the road like a soul chased by the devil," don Juan said. "I wonder why?"

"I think he got frightened when he saw Carlitos working his fingers to the bone," don Genaro said, mocking my writing.

He came closer to me.

"Hey! I've got an idea," he said almost in a whisper. "Since you like to write so much, why don't you learn to write with your finger instead of a pencil. That'll be a blast."

Don Juan and don Genaro sat by my side and laughed while they speculated about the possibility of writing with one's finger. Don Juan, in a serious tone, made a strange comment. He said, "There is no doubt that he could write with his finger, but would he be able to read it?"

Don Genaro doubled up with laughter and added, "I am confident that he can read anything." And then he began to tell a most disconcerting tale about a country bumpkin who became an important official during a time of political upheaval. Don Genaro said that the hero of his story was appointed minister, or governor, or perhaps even president because there was no way of telling what people would do in their folly. Because of this appointment, he came to believe that he was indeed important and learned to put on an act.

Don Genaro paused and examined me with the air of a ham actor overplaying his part. He winked at me and moved his eyebrows up and down. He said that the hero of the story was very good at public appearances and could whip up a speech with no difficulty at all, but that his position required that he read his speeches, and the man was illiterate. So he used his wits to outsmart everybody. He had a sheet of paper with something written on it and flashed it around whenever he gave a speech. And thus his efficiency and other good qualities were undeniable to all the country bumpkins. But one day a literate stranger came along and noticed that the hero was reading his speech while holding the sheet upside down. He began to laugh and pointed out the lie to everyone.

Don Genaro again paused for a moment and looked at me, squinting his eyes, and asked, "Do you think that the hero was caught? Not a chance. He faced everyone calmly and said, 'Upside down? Why should the position of the sheet matter if you know how to read?' And the bumpkins agreed with him."

Don Juan and don Genaro both exploded into laughter. Don Genaro patted me gently on the back. It was as if I were the hero of the story. I felt embarrassed and laughed nervously. I thought that perhaps there was a hidden meaning to it, but I did not dare ask.

Don Juan moved closer to me. He leaned over and whispered in my right ear, "Don't you think it's funny?"

Don Genaro also leaned over towards me and whispered in my left ear, "What did he say?" I had an automatic reaction to both questions and made an involuntary synthesis.

"Yes. I thought he asked it's funny," I said.

They were obviously aware of the effect of their maneuvers. They laughed until tears rolled down their cheeks. Don Genaro, as usual, was more exaggerated than don Juan. He fell backwards and rolled on his back a few yards away from me. He lay on his stomach, extended his arms and legs out, and whirled around on the ground as though he were lying on a swivel. He whirled until he got close to me and his foot touched mine. He sat up abruptly and smiled sheepishly.

Don Juan was holding his sides. He was laughing very hard and it seemed that his stomach hurt.

After a while they both leaned over and kept on whispering into my ears. I tried to memorize the sequence of their utterances but after a futile effort I gave up. There were too many.

They whispered in my ears until I again had the sensation that I had been split in two. I became a mist like the day before, a yellow glow that sensed everything directly. That is, I could 'know' things. There were no thoughts involved; there were only certainties. And when I came into contact with a soft, spongy, bouncy feeling, which was outside of me and yet was part of me, I 'knew' it was a tree. I sensed it was a tree by it's odor. It did not smell like any specific tree I could remember, nonetheless something in me 'knew' that that peculiar odor was the 'essence' of tree. I did not have just the feeling that I knew, nor did I reason my knowledge out, nor shuffle clues around. I simply knew that there was something there in contact with me, all around me, a friendly, warm, compelling smell emanating from something which was neither solid nor liquid but an undefined something else, which I 'knew' was a tree. I felt that by 'knowing' it in that manner I was tapping it's essence. I was not repelled by it. It rather invited me to melt with it. It engulfed me or I engulfed it. There was a bond between us which was neither exquisite nor displeasing.

The next sensation I could recollect with clarity was a wave of wonder and exultation. All of me vibrated. It was as if charges of electricity were going through me. They were not painful. They were pleasing, but in such an undetermined form that there was no way of categorizing them. I knew, nevertheless, that whatever I was in contact with was the ground. Some part of me acknowledged with concise certainty that it was the ground. But the instant I tried to discern the infinitude of direct perceptions I was having, I lost all capacity to differentiate my perceptions.

Then all of a sudden I was myself again. I was thinking. It was such an abrupt transition that I thought I had woken up. Yet there was something in the way I felt that was not quite myself. I knew that there was indeed something missing before I fully opened my eyes. I looked around. I was still in a dream, or having a vision of some sort. My thought processes, however, were not only unimpaired but extraordinarily clear. I made a quick assessment. I had no doubt that don Juan and don Genaro had induced my dreamlike state for a specific purpose. I seemed to be on the verge of understanding what that purpose was when something extraneous to me forced me to pay attention to my surroundings. It took me a long moment to orient myself. I was actually lying on my stomach and what I was lying on was a most spectacular floor. As I examined it, I could not avoid a feeling of awe and wonder. I could not conceive what it was made of. Irregular slabs of some unknown substance had been placed in a most intricate yet simple fashion. They had been put together but were not stuck to the ground or to each other. They were elastic and gave when I attempted to pry them apart with my fingers, but once I released the tension they went right back to their original position.

I tried to get up and was seized by the most outlandish sensory distortion. I had no control over my body. In fact my body did not seem to be my own. It was inert. I had no connection to any of it's parts and when I tried to stand up I could not move my arms and I wobbled helplessly on my stomach; rolling on my side. The momentum of my wobbling almost made me do a complete turn onto my stomach again. My outstretched arms and legs prevented me from turning over and I came to rest on my back. In that position I caught a glimpse of two strangely shaped legs and the most distorted feet I had ever seen. It was my body! I seemed to be wrapped up in a tunic. The thought that came to my mind was that I was experiencing a scene of myself as a cripple or an invalid of some sort. I tried to curve my back and look at my legs but I could only jerk my body. I was looking directly at a yellow sky, a deep, rich lemon-yellow sky. It had grooves or canals of a deeper yellow tone and an endless number of protuberances that hung like drops of water. The total effect of that incredible sky was staggering. I could not determine if the protuberances were clouds. There were also areas of shadows and areas of different tones of yellow which I discovered as I moved my head from side to side.

Then something else attracted my attention: a sun at the very zenith of the yellow sky, right over my head, a mild sun—judging by the fact that I could stare into it—that cast a soothing, uniform whitish light.

Before I had had time to ponder upon all these unearthly sights, I was violently shaken. My head jerked and bobbed back and forth. I felt I was being lifted. I heard a shrill voice and giggling, and I was confronted by a most astounding sight; a giant barefoot female. Her face was round and enormous. Her black hair was cut in pageboy fashion. Her arms and legs were gigantic. She picked me up and lifted me to her shoulders as if I were a doll. My body hung limp. I was looking down her strong back. She had a fine fuzz around her shoulders and down her spine. Looking down from her shoulder, I saw the magnificent floor again. I could hear it giving elastically under her enormous weight and I could see the pressure marks that her feet left on it.

She put me down on my stomach in front of a structure, some sort of building. I noticed then that there was something wrong with my depth perception. I could not figure out the size of the building by looking at it. At moments it seemed ridiculously small, but then after I seemingly adjusted my perception I truly marveled at it's monumental proportions.

The giant girl sat next to me and made the floor squeak. I was touching her enormous knee. She smelled like candy or strawberries. She talked to me and I understood everything she said. Pointing to the structure, she told me that I was going to live there.

My prowess of observation seemed to increase as I got over the initial shock of finding myself there. I noticed then that the building had four exquisite dysfunctional columns. They did not support anything. They were on top of the building. Their shape was simplicity itself. They were long and graceful projections that seemed to be reaching for that awesome incredibly yellow sky. The effect of those inverted columns was sheer beauty to me. I had a seizure of aesthetic rapture.

The columns seemed to have been made in one piece. I could not even conceive how. The two columns in front were joined by a slender beam, a monumentally long rod that I thought may have served as a railing of some sort, or a veranda overlooking the front.

The giant girl made me slide on my back into the structure. The roof was black and flat, and was covered with symmetric holes that let the yellowish glare of the sky show through, creating the most intricate patterns. I was truly awed with the utter simplicity and beauty that had been achieved by those dots of yellow sky showing through those precise holes in the roof, and the patterns of shadows that they created on that magnificent and intricate floor. The structure was square, and outside of it's poignant beauty it was incomprehensible to me.

My state of exultation was so intense at that moment that I wanted to weep, or stay there forever. But some force, or tension, or something undefinable began to pull me. Suddenly I found myself out of the structure, still lying on my back. The giant girl was there, but there was another being with her, a woman so big that she reached to the sky and eclipsed the sun. Compared to her the giant girl was just a little girl. The big woman was angry. She grabbed the structure by one of it's columns, lifted it up, turned it upside down, and set it on the floor. It was a chair!

That realization was like a catalyst; it triggered some overwhelming perceptions. I went through a series of images that were disconnected but could be made to stand as a sequence.

In successive flashes I saw or realized that the magnificent and incomprehensible floor was a straw mat. The yellow sky was the stucco ceiling of a room. The sun was a light bulb. The structure that had evoked such rapture in me was a chair that a child had turned upside down to play house.

I had one more coherent and sequential vision of another mysterious architectural structure of monumental proportions. It stood by itself. It looked almost like a shell of a pointed snail standing with it's tail up. The walls were made of concave and convex plates of some strange purple material; each plate had grooves that seemed more functional than ornamental.

I examined the structure meticulously and in detail, and found that it was, like in the case of the previous one, thoroughly incomprehensible. I expected to suddenly adjust my perception to disclose the 'true' nature of the structure. But nothing of the sort happened. I then had a conglomerate of alien and inextricable 'awarenesses', or 'findings', about the building and it's function which did not make sense because I had no frame of reference for them.

I regained my normal awareness all of a sudden. Don Juan and don Genaro were next to me. I was tired. I looked for my watch; it was gone. Don Juan and don Genaro giggled in unison. Don Juan said that I should not worry about time and that I should concentrate on following certain recommendations that don Genaro had made to me.

I turned to don Genaro and he made a joke. He said that the most important recommendation was that I should learn to write with my finger to save on pencils and to show off.

They teased me about my notes for a while longer and then I went to sleep.

Don Juan and don Genaro listened to the detailed account of my experience which I gave them at don Juan's request after I woke up the next day.

"Genaro feels that you've got enough for the time being," don Juan said after I finished talking.

Don Genaro assented with a nod.

"What was the meaning of what I experienced last night?" I asked.

"You caught a glimpse of the most important issue of sorcery," don Juan said. "Last night you peeked into the totality of yourself. But that's of course a meaningless statement for you at this moment. Obviously arriving at the totality of oneself is not a matter of one's desire to agree, or of one's willingness to learn. Genaro thinks that your body needs time to let the whispering of the *nagual* sink into you."

Don Genaro nodded again.

"Plenty of time," he said, shaking his head up and down. "Twenty or thirty years perhaps."

I did not know how to react. I looked at don Juan for clues. They both had serious expressions.

"Do I really have twenty or thirty years?" I asked.

"Of course not!" don Genaro yelled and they broke into laughter.

Don Juan said that I should return whenever my inner voice told me to, and that in the meantime I should try to assemble all the suggestions that they had made while I was split.

"How do I do that?" I asked.

"By turning off your internal dialogue and letting something in you flow out and expand," don Juan said. "That something is your perception, but don't try to figure out what I mean. Just let the whispering of the *nagual* guide you."

Then he said that the night before I had had two sets of intrinsically different views. One was inexplicable; the other was perfectly natural; and the order in which they had happened pointed to a condition that was intrinsic to all of us.

"One view was the *nagual*, the other the *tonal*" don Genaro added.

I wanted him to explain his statement. He looked at me and patted me on the back.

Don Juan stepped in and said that the first two views were the 'nagual', and that don Genaro had selected a tree and the ground as the points for emphasis. The other two were views of the 'tonal' that he himself had selected; one of them was my perception of the world as an infant.

"It appeared to be an alien world to you, because your perception had not been trimmed yet to fit the desired mold," he said.

"Was that the way I really saw the world?" I asked.

"Certainly," he said. "That was your memory."

I asked don Juan whether the feeling of aesthetic appreciation that had enraptured me was also part of my memory.

"We go into those views as we are today," he said. "You were seeing that scene as you would see it now. Yet the exercise was one of perception. That was the scene of a time when the world became for you what it is now. A time when a chair became a chair."

He did not want to discuss the other scene.

"That wasn't a memory of my childhood," I said.

"That's right," he said. "It was something else."

"Was it something I will see in the future?" I asked.

"There's no future!" he exclaimed cuttingly. "The future is only a way of talking. For a sorcerer there is only the here and now."

He said that there was essentially nothing to say about it because the purpose of the exercise had been to open the wings of my perception, and that although I had not flown on those wings, I had nonetheless touched four points which would be inconceivable to reach from the point of view of my ordinary perception.

I began to gather my things to leave. Don Genaro helped me pack my notebook. He put it in the bottom of my briefcase.

"It'll be warm and cozy there," he said and winked. "You can rest assured that it won't catch cold."

Then don Juan seemed to change his mind about my leaving and started to talk about my experience. I automatically tried to grab my briefcase from don Genaro's hands but he dropped it to the floor before I touched it. Don Juan was talking with his back turned to me. I scooped up the briefcase and hurriedly searched for my notebook. Don Genaro had really packed it so tightly that I had a hellish time getting to it. Finally I took it out and began to write. Don Juan and don Genaro were staring at me.

"You're in terrible shape," don Juan said, laughing. "You reach for your notebook as a drunkard reaches for the bottle."

"As a loving mother reaches for her child," don Genaro snapped.

"As a priest reaches for his crucifix," don Juan added.

"As a woman reaches for her panties," don Genaro yelled.

They went on and on presenting similes and howling with laughter as they walked me to my car.

# PART THREE – The Sorcerer's Explanation

## 11. Three Witnesses to the Nagual

Upon returning home, I was faced again with the task of organizing my field notes. What don Juan and don Genaro had made me experience became all the more poignant as I recapitulated the events. I noticed, however, that my usual reaction of indulging for months in bewilderment and awe over what I had gone through was not as intense as it had been in the past. Various times, I deliberately attempted to engage my feelings, as I had done before, in speculation and even in self-pity. But something was missing. I had also had the intention of writing down a number of questions to ask don Juan, don Genaro, or even Pablito. The project failed before I had begun it. There was something in me that prevented my entering into a mood of inquiry or perplexity.

I did not purposely seek to go back to don Juan and don Genaro, but neither did I shy away from the possibility. One day however, without any premeditation on my part, I simply felt that it was time to see them.

In the past, every time I was about to leave for Mexico, I had always had the feeling that there were thousands of important and pressing questions that I wanted to ask don Juan. This time there was nothing on my mind. It was as if after I had worked over my notes I had become emptied of the past and ready for the here and now of don Juan and don Genaro's world.

I had to wait only a few hours before don Juan 'found' me in the market of a little town in the mountains of central Mexico. He greeted me with utmost affection and made a casual suggestion. He said that before we arrived at don Genaro's place, he would like to pay a visit to don Genaro's apprentices, Pablito and Nestor. As I turned off the highway he told me to keep a close watch for any unusual sight on the side of the road or on the road itself. I asked him to give me more precise clues about what he had in mind.

"I can't," he said. "The *nagual* doesn't need precise clues."

I slowed the car down in an automatic response to his reply. He laughed loudly and signaled me with a movement of his hand to keep on driving.

As we approached the town where Pablito and Nestor lived don Juan told me to stop my car. He moved his chin imperceptibly and pointed to a group of medium size boulders on the left side of the road.

"There's the *nagual,*" he said in a whisper.

There was no one around. I had expected to see don Genaro. I looked at the boulders again and then I scanned the area around them. There was nothing in sight. I strained my eyes to distinguish anything; a small animal, an insect, a shadow, a strange formation of the rocks, anything unusual. I gave up after a moment and turned to face don Juan. He held my questioning gaze without smiling and then gently pushed my arm with the back of his hand to make me look at the boulders again. I stared at them, then don Juan got out of the car and told me to follow him and examine them.

We walked slowly on a gentle slope for about sixty or seventy yards to the base of the rocks. He stood there for a moment and whispered in my right ear that the 'nagual' was waiting for me right at that place. I told him that no matter how hard I tried, all I could distinguish were the rocks and a few tufts of weeds and some cactuses. He insisted, however, that the 'nagual' was there waiting for me.

He ordered me to sit down, turn off my internal dialogue, and keep my unfocused eyes on the top of the boulders. He sat by me, and putting his mouth to my right ear whispered that the 'nagual' had seen me, that it was there although I could not visualize it, and that my problem was merely one of not being capable of completely shutting off my internal dialogue. I heard every word he said in a state of inner silence. I understood everything, yet I was incapable of answering. The effort needed to think and talk would have been impossible. My reactions to his comments were not thoughts proper but rather complete units of feeling which had all the innuendos [* *innuendos- indirect implications*] of meaning that I usually associate with thinking.

He whispered that it was very difficult to start by oneself on the path towards the 'nagual', and that I was indeed most fortunate to have been launched by the moth and it's song. He said that by holding the memory of the 'moth's call', I could bring it back to aid me.

His words were either an overpowering suggestion or perhaps I summoned that perceptual phenomenon he called the 'moth's call', for no sooner had he whispered his words to me than the extraordinary sputtering sound became audible. It's richness of tone made me feel as if I were inside an echo chamber. As the sound grew in loudness or proximity, I also detected, in a dreamlike state, that something was moving on top of the boulders. The movement frightened me so intensely that I immediately regained my crystal clear awareness. My eyes focused on the boulders. Don Genaro was sitting on top of one of them! His feet were dangling and with the heels of his shoes he was hammering the rock; producing a rhythmical sound that seemed to be synchronized with the 'moth's call'. He smiled and waved his hand at me. I wanted to think rationally. I had a feeling; the desire to figure out how he got there, or how I saw him there; but I could not involve my reason at all. All I could do under the circumstances was to look at him while he sat smiling waving his hand.

After a moment he seemed to get ready to slide down the round boulder. I saw him stiffening his legs, preparing his feet for landing on the hard ground, and arching his back until it almost touched the surface of the rock in order to gain sliding momentum. But in the middle of his descent his body stopped. I had the impression he got stuck. He kicked a couple of times with both legs as if he were floating in water. He seemed to be trying to get loose from something that had trapped him by the seat of his pants. He rubbed the sides of his buttocks frantically with both hands. He actually gave me the impression of being painfully caught. I wanted to run to him and aid him, but don Juan held my arm. I heard him say to me, half choking with laughter, "Watch him! Watch him!"

Don Genaro kicked, contorted his body and wiggled from side to side as if he were loosening a nail. Then I heard a loud pop and he glided, or was hurled, to where don Juan and I were standing. He landed four or five feet in front of me on his feet. He rubbed his buttocks and jumped up and down in a dance of pain yelling profanities.

"The rock didn't want to let me go and grabbed me by the ass," he said to me in a sheepish tone.

I experienced a sensation of unequaled joy. I laughed loudly. I noticed that my mirth was equal to my clarity of mind. I was engulfed at that moment in an overall state of great awareness. Everything around me was crystal clear. I had been drowsy or absent-minded before because of my inner silence. But then something in don Genaro's sudden appearance had created a state of great lucidity.

Don Genaro kept on rubbing his buttocks and jumping up and down for a while longer. Then he limped to my car, opened the door, and crawled into the back seat.

I automatically turned around to talk to don Juan. He was not anywhere in sight. I started to call him out loud. Don Genaro got out of the car, and began to run around in circles also calling don Juan's name in a shrill, frantic tone. It was only then as I watched him that I realized he was mimicking me. I had had an attack of such an intense fear upon finding myself alone with don Genaro that I had run around the car three or four times in quite an unconscious manner yelling don Juan's name.

Don Genaro said that we had to pick up Pablito and Nestor, and that don Juan would be waiting for us somewhere along the way.

After I had overcome my initial fright, I told him that I was glad to see him. He teased me about my reaction. He said that don Juan was not like a father to me, but rather like a mother. He made some remarks and puns about 'mothers' that were utterly funny. I was laughing so hard that I did not notice that we had arrived at Pablito's house. Don Genaro told me to stop and he got out of the car. Pablito was standing by the door of his house. He came running and got in the car and sat next to me in the front.

"Let's go to Nestor's place," he said as if he were in a hurry.

I turned to look for don Genaro. He was not around. Pablito urged me in a pleading voice to hurry.

We drove up to Nestor's house. He was also waiting by the door. We got out of the car. I had the feeling that the two of them knew what was going on.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Didn't Genaro tell you?" Pablito asked me with a tone of incredulity.

I assured them that neither don Juan nor don Genaro had mentioned anything to me.

"We're going to a power place," Pablito said.

"What are we going to do there?" I asked.

They both said in unison that they did not know. Nestor added that don Genaro had told him to guide me to the place.

"Did you come from Genaro's house?" Pablito asked.

I mentioned that I had been with don Juan and that we had found don Genaro on the way and that don Juan had left me with him.

"Where did don Genaro go?" I asked Pablito.

But Pablito did not know what I was talking about. He had not seen don Genaro in my car.

"He drove with me to your house," I said.

"I think you had the *nagual* in your car," Nestor said in a frightened tone.

He did not want to sit in the back and crammed next to Pablito in the front.

We drove in silence, except for Nestor's short commands to show the way.

I wanted to think about the events of that morning, but somehow I knew that any attempt to explain them was a fruitless indulging on my part. I tried to engage Nestor and Pablito in a conversation. They said that they were too nervous inside the car and could not talk. I enjoyed their candid reply and did not press them any further.

After more than an hour's drive, we parked the car on a side road and climbed up the side of a steep mountain. We walked in silence for another hour or so with Nestor in the lead; and then we stopped at the bottom of a huge cliff which was perhaps over two hundred feet high with a nearly vertical drop. With half-closed eyes Nestor scanned the ground looking for a proper place to sit. I was painfully aware that he was clumsy in his scanning movements. Pablito, who was next to me, seemed at various times to be on the verge of stepping in and correcting him, but he restrained himself and relaxed. Then Nestor selected a place after a moment's hesitation. Pablito sighed with relief. I knew that the place Nestor had selected was the proper one, but I could not figure out how I knew that. Thus I involved myself in the pseudo [* *pseudo- not genuine but having the appearance of*] problem of imagining what place I would have selected myself if I had been leading them. I could not, however, even begin to speculate on the procedure I would have followed. Pablito was obviously aware of what I was doing.

"You can't do that," he whispered to me.

I laughed with embarrassment as if he had caught me doing something illicit. Pablito laughed and said that don Genaro always walked around in the mountains with both of them and gave each of them the lead from time to time so he knew that there was no way of imagining what would have been one's choice.

"Genaro says that the reason why there is no way to do that is because there are only right and wrong choices," he said. "If you make a wrong choice your body knows it, and so does the body of everyone else. But if you make a right choice, the body knows that and relaxes and forgets right away that there was a choice. You reload your body, see, like a gun, for the next choice. If you want to use your body again for making the same choice, it doesn't work."

Nestor looked at me; he was apparently curious about my taking notes. He nodded affirmatively as if agreeing with Pablito and then smiled for the first time. Two of his upper teeth were crooked. Pablito explained that Nestor was not mean or morbid but embarrassed by his teeth and that that was the reason he never smiled. Nestor laughed, covering his mouth. I told him that I could send him to a dentist to have his teeth straightened. They thought that my suggestion was a joke and laughed like two children.

"Genaro says that he has to overcome the feeling of shame by himself," Pablito said. "Besides, Genaro says that he's lucky. While everyone else bites the same way, Nestor can split a bone lengthwise with his strong crooked teeth and he can bite a hole through your finger like a nail."

Nestor opened his mouth and showed me his teeth. The left incisor and the canine had grown in sideways. He made his teeth clatter by biting on them and growled like a dog. He made two or three mock advances towards me. Pablito laughed.

I had never seen Nestor so light. The few times I had been with him in the past he had given me the impression of being a middle-aged man. As he sat there smiling with his crooked teeth I marveled at his youthful appearance. He looked like a young man in his early twenties.

Pablito again read my thoughts to perfection.

"He's losing his self-importance," he said. "That's why he's younger."

Nestor nodded affirmatively and without saying a word he let out a very loud fart. I was startled and dropped my pencil.

Pablito and Nestor nearly died laughing. When they had calmed down, Nestor came to my side and showed me a homemade contraption that made a peculiar sound when squeezed with the hand. He explained that don Genaro had showed him how to make it. It had a minute bellows, and the vibrator could be any kind of leaf that was placed in a slit between the two pieces of wood that were the compressors. Nestor said that the kind of sound it produced depended on the type of leaf that one used as a vibrator. He wanted me to try it and showed me how to squeeze the compressors to produce a certain type of sound, and how to open them in order to produce another.

"What do you use it for?" I asked.

They both exchanged a glance.

"That's his spirit catcher, you fool," Pablito said cuttingly.

His tone was peevish but his smile was friendly. They were both such a strange unnerving mixture of don Genaro and don Juan.

I became absorbed in a horrible thought. Were don Juan and don Genaro playing tricks on me? I had a moment of supreme terror. But something snapped inside of my stomach and I instantly became calm again. I knew that Pablito and Nestor were using don Genaro and don Juan as models for behavior. I myself had found that I also was behaving more and more like them.

Pablito said that Nestor was lucky to have a spirit catcher and that he did not have one himself.

"What shall we do here?" I asked Pablito.

Nestor answered as if I had addressed the question to him.

"Genaro told me that we have to wait here, and while we wait we should laugh and enjoy ourselves," he said.

"How long do you think we have to wait?" I asked.

He did not answer. He shook his head and looked at Pablito as if asking him.

"I have no idea," Pablito said.

We got involved then in a lively conversation about Pablito's sisters. Nestor teased him that his oldest sister had such a mean look that she could kill lice with her eyes. He said that Pablito was afraid of her because she was so strong that once in a fit of anger she plucked a handful of his hair as if it were chicken feathers.

Pablito conceded that his oldest sister had been a beast, but that the 'nagual' had fixed her and brought her into line. After he had told me the story of how she was made to behave, I realized that Pablito and Nestor never mentioned don Juan's name but referred to him as the 'nagual'. Apparently don Juan had intervened in Pablito's life and coerced all his sisters into leading a more harmonious life. Pablito said that after the 'nagual' was through with them they were like saints.

Nestor wanted to know what I did with my notes. I explained my work to them. I had the weird sensation that they were genuinely interested in what I was saying and I ended up talking about anthropology and philosophy. I felt ludicrous and wanted to stop, but I found myself immersed in my elucidation and unable to cut it short. I had the unsettling sensation that both of them as a team were somehow forcing me into that lengthy explanation. Their eyes were fixed on me. They did not seemed to be bored or tired.

I was in the middle of a comment when I heard the faint sound of the 'moth's call'. My body stiffened and I never finished my sentence.

"The *nagual* is here," I said automatically.

Nestor and Pablito exchanged a look that I thought was sheer terror, and jumped to my side and flanked me. Their mouths were open. They looked like frightened children.

I had an inconceivable sensory experience then. My left ear began to move. I felt it sort of wiggling by itself. It practically turned my head in a half circle until I was facing what I thought to be the east. My head tilted slightly to the right. In that position I was capable of detecting the rich sputtering sound of the 'moth's call'. It sounded as if it were far away coming from the northeast. Once I had established the direction, my ear picked up an incredible amount of sounds. I had no way of knowing, however, whether they were memories of sounds I had heard before or actual sounds which were being produced then.

The place where we were was the rugged west slope of a mountain range. Towards the northeast there were groves of trees and patches of mountain shrubs. My ear seemed to pick up the sound of something heavy moving over rocks, coming from that direction.

Nestor and Pablito were either responding to my actions or they themselves were hearing the same sounds. I would have liked to ask them, but I did not dare; or perhaps I was incapable of interrupting my concentration.

Nestor and Pablito huddled against me, by my sides, when the sound became louder and closer. Nestor seemed to be the one who was most affected by it. His body shivered uncontrollably. At one moment my left arm began to shake. It raised without my volition until it was almost level with my face, and then it pointed to an area of shrubs. I heard a vibratory sound or a roar. It was a familiar sound to me. I had heard it many years before under the influence of a psychotropic plant. I detected in the shrubs a gigantic black shape. It was as if the shrubs themselves were becoming darker by degrees until they had changed into an ominous blackness. It had no definite form, but it moved. It seemed to breathe. I heard a chilling scream which was mixed with the yells of terror of Pablito and Nestor, and the shrubs, or the black shape into which they had turned, flew up towards us.

I could not maintain my equanimity. Somehow something in me faltered. The shape first hovered over us, and then engulfed us. The light around us became opaque. It was as if the sun had set. Or as if all of a sudden it had become twilight. I felt Nestor and Pablito's heads under my armpits. I brought my arms down over their heads in an unconscious protective movement, and I fell spinning backwards.

I did not reach the rocky ground, however, for an instant later I found myself standing up flanked by Pablito and Nestor. Both of them, although taller than I, seemed to have shriveled. By arching their legs and backs they were actually shorter than I, and fit under my arms.

Don Juan and don Genaro were standing in front of us. Don Genaro's eyes glittered like the eyes of a cat at night. Don Juan's eyes had the same glow. I had never seen don Juan look that way. He was truly awesome. More so than don Genaro. He seemed younger and stronger than usual. Looking at both of them, I had the maddening feeling that they were not men like myself.

Pablito and Nestor whined quietly. Then don Genaro said that we were the picture of the Trinity. I was the Father, Pablito was the Son, and Nestor the Holy Ghost. Don Juan and don Genaro laughed in a booming tone. Pablito and Nestor smiled meekly.

Don Genaro said that we had to disentangle ourselves, because embraces were permissible only between men and women, or between a man and his burro.

I realized then that I was standing on the same spot I had been before, and that obviously I had not spun backwards as I thought I had. In fact, Nestor and Pablito were also on the same spot they had been on.

Don Genaro signaled Pablito and Nestor with a movement of his head. Don Juan signaled me to follow them. Nestor took the lead and pointed out a sitting place for me and another one for Pablito. We sat in a straight line, about fifty yards from the place where don Juan and don Genaro stood motionless at the base of the cliff. As I kept on staring at them, my eyes went involuntarily out of focus. I knew I had definitely crossed them because I was seeing four of them. Then my left eye image of don Juan became superimposed on the right eye image of don Genaro. The result of the merger was that I saw an iridescent being standing in between don Juan and don Genaro. It was not a man as I ordinarily see men. It was rather a ball of white fire. Something like fibers of light covered it. I shook my head. The double image was dispelled, and yet the sight of don Juan and don Genaro as luminous beings persisted. I was seeing two strange elongated luminous objects. They looked like white iridescent footballs with fibers; fibers that had a light of their own.

The two luminous beings shivered. I actually saw their fibers shaking and then they whizzed out of sight. They were pulled up by a long filament; a cobweb that seemed to shoot out from the top of the cliff. The sensation I had was that a long beam of light or a luminous line had dropped from the rock and lifted them up. I perceived the sequence with my eyes and with my body.

I was also capable of noticing enormous disparities in my mode of perceiving, but I was incapable of speculating about them as I would have ordinarily done. Thus I was aware that I was looking straight at the base of the cliff, and yet I was seeing don Juan and don Genaro on the top as if I had tilted my head up forty-five degrees.

I wanted to feel afraid, perhaps to cover my face and weep, or do something else within my normal range of responses. But I seemed to be locked. My desires were not thoughts as I know thoughts, therefore they could not evoke the emotional response I was accustomed to eliciting [* *eliciting- call forth emotions, feelings, or responses*] in myself.

Don Juan and don Genaro plunged to the ground. I felt that they had done so judging by the consuming feeling of falling that I experienced in my stomach.

Don Genaro remained where he had landed, but don Juan walked towards us and sat down, behind me, to my right. Nestor was in a crouching position; his legs tucked in against his stomach, he was resting his chin on his cupped palms. His forearms served as supports by being propped against his thighs. Pablito was sitting with his body slightly bent forward, holding his hands against his stomach. I noticed then that I had placed my forearms across my umbilical region and I was holding myself by the skin on my sides. I had grabbed myself so hard that my sides ached.

Don Juan spoke in a dry murmur, addressing all of us.

"You must fix your gaze on the *nagual*" he said. "All thoughts and words must be washed away."

He repeated it five or six times. His voice was strange, unknown to me; it gave me the actual feeling of the scales on the skin of a lizard. That simile was a feeling not a conscious thought. Each of his words peeled, like scales. There was such an eerie rhythm to them. They were muffled; dry; like soft coughing; a rhythmical murmur made into a command.

Don Genaro stood motionless. As I stared at him I could not keep my image conversion, and my eyes crossed involuntarily. In that state I noticed again a strange luminosity in don Genaro's body. My eyes were beginning to close, or to tear. Don Juan came to my rescue. I heard him giving a command not to cross the eyes. I felt a soft tap on my head. He had apparently hit me with a pebble, I saw the pebble bounce a couple of times on the rocks near me. He must have also hit Nestor and Pablito. I heard the sound of other pebbles as they bounced on the rocks.

Don Genaro adopted a strange dancing posture. His knees were bent. His arms were extended to his sides; his fingers outstretched. He seemed to be about to twirl. In fact, he half whirled around and then he was pulled up. I had the clear perception that he had been hoisted up by the line of a giant caterpillar that lifted his body to the very top of the cliff. My perception of the upward movement was a most weird mixture of visual and bodily sensations. I half saw and half felt his flight to the top. There was something that looked or felt like a line, or an almost imperceptible thread of light pulling him up. I did not see his flight upward in the sense I would follow a bird in flight with my eyes. There was no linear sequence to his movement. I did not have to raise my head to keep him within my field of vision. I saw the line pulling him, then I felt his movement in my body or with my body, and the next instant he was on the very top of the cliff hundreds of feet up.

After a few minutes he plummeted down. I felt his falling and groaned involuntarily.

Don Genaro repeated his feat three more times. Each time, my perception was tuned. During his last upward leap I could actually distinguish a series of lines emanating from his midsection, and I knew when he was about to ascend or descend, judging by the way the lines of his body moved. When he was about to leap upward, the lines bent upward. The opposite happened when he was about to leap downward; the lines bent outward and down.

After his fourth leap don Genaro came to us and sat down behind Pablito and Nestor. Then don Juan moved to the front and stood where don Genaro had been. He stood motionless for a while. Don Genaro gave some brief instructions to Pablito and Nestor. I did not understand what he had said. I glanced at them and saw that he had made each one hold a rock and place it against the area of their navels. I was wondering whether I also had to do that when he told me that the precaution did not apply to me, but nonetheless I should have a rock within reach just in case I got ill. Don Genaro jutted his chin forward to indicate that I should gaze at don Juan, then he said something unintelligible. He repeated it, and although I did not understand his words, I knew that it was more or less the same formula that don Juan had voiced. The words did not really matter: It was the rhythm, the dryness of tone, the coughlike quality. I had the certainty that whatever language don Genaro was using was more appropriate than Spanish for the staccato quality of the rhythm.

Don Juan did exactly as don Genaro had initially done, but then instead of leaping upward he twirled around like a gymnast. In a semi-aware way I expected him to land on his feet again. He never did. His body kept on twirling a few feet above the ground. The circles were very rapid at first, then they slowed down. From where I was I could see don Juan's body hanging, like don Genaro's body had, from a threadlike light. He whirled slowly as if allowing us to fully view him. Then he began to ascend. He gained altitude until he reached the top of the cliff. Don Juan was actually floating as if he had no weight. His turns were slow and evoked the image of an astronaut in space whirling around in a state of weightlessness.

I got dizzy as I watched him. My feeling of getting ill seemed to trigger him and he began to whirl at a greater speed. He moved away from the cliff, and as he gained speed I became utterly sick. I grabbed the rock and placed it on my stomach. I pressed it against my body as hard as I could. It's touch soothed me a bit. The act of reaching for the rock and holding it against me had allowed me a moment's break. Although I had not taken my eyes away from don Juan, I had nevertheless broken my concentration. Before I reached for the rock I felt that the speed which his floating body had gained was blurring his shape. He looked like a rotating disk and then a light that was spinning. After I had placed the rock against my body his speed diminished. He looked like a hat floating in the air, a kite that bobbed back and forth.

The movement of the kite was even more unsettling. I became uncontrollably ill. I heard the flapping of bird wings, and after a moment of uncertainty I knew that the event had ended.

I felt so ill and exhausted that I lay down to sleep. I must have dozed off for a while. I opened my eyes when someone shook my arm. It was Pablito. He spoke to me in a frantic tone and said that I could not fall asleep because if I did all of us would die. He insisted that we had to leave right away even if we had to drag ourselves on all fours. He also seemed to be physically exhausted. In fact, I had the idea that we should spend the night there. The prospect of walking to my car in the dark seemed most dreadful to me. I tried to convince Pablito who was getting more frantic. Nestor was so ill that he was indifferent.

Pablito sat down in a state of total despair. I made an effort to organize my thoughts. It was quite dark by then although there was still enough light to distinguish the rocks around us. The quietness was exquisite and soothing. I enjoyed the moment fully, but suddenly my body jumped. I heard the distant sound of a branch being cracked. I automatically turned to Pablito. He seemed to know what had happened to me. We grabbed Nestor by the armpits and practically lifted him up. We dragged him and ran. He apparently was the only one who knew the way. He gave us short commands from time to time.

I was not concerned with what we did. My attention was focused on my left ear which seemed to be a unit independent from the rest of me. Some feeling in me forced me to stop every so often and scan the surroundings with my ear. I knew something was following us. It was something massive; it crushed small rocks as it advanced.

Nestor regained a degree of composure and walked by himself, holding on to Pablito's arm occasionally.

We arrived at a group of trees. By then it was completely dark. I heard a sudden and extremely loud cracking sound. It was like the cracking of a monstrous whip that lashed the tops of the trees. I could feel a wave of some sort rippling overhead.

Pablito and Nestor screamed and scrambled out of there at full speed. I wanted them to stop. I was not sure I could run in the dark. But at that instant I heard and felt a series of heavy exhalations right behind me. My fright was indescribable.

The three of us ran together until we reached the car. Nestor led us in some unknown way.

I thought that I should leave them at their houses and then go to a hotel in town. I would not have gone to don Genaro's place for anything in the world; but Nestor did not want to leave the car, neither did Pablito and neither did I. We ended up at Pablito's house. He sent Nestor to buy some beer and cola while his mother and sisters prepared food for us. Nestor made a joke and asked if he could be escorted by the oldest sister in case he was attacked by dogs or drunkards. Pablito laughed and told me that he had been entrusted with Nestor.

"Who has entrusted you with him?" I asked.

"Power, of course!" he replied. "At one time Nestor was older than me, but Genaro did something to him and now he's much younger. You saw that, didn't you?"

"What did don Genaro do?" I asked.

"You know, he made him a child again. He was too important and heavy. He would've died if he was not turned younger."

There was something truly candid and endearing about Pablito. The simplicity of his explanation was overwhelming to me. Nestor was indeed younger. Not only did he look younger, but he acted like an innocent child. I knew without any doubt that he genuinely felt like one.

"I take care of him," Pablito continued. "Genaro says that it's an honor to look after a warrior. Nestor is a fine warrior."

His eyes shone, like don Genaro's. He patted me vigorously on the back and laughed.

"Wish him well, Carlitos," he said. "Wish him well."

I was very tired. I had a strange surge of happy sadness. I told him that I came from a place where people rarely if ever wish one another well.

"I know," he said. "The same thing happened to me. But I'm a warrior now and I can afford to wish him well."

## 12. The Strategy of a Sorcerer

Don Juan was at don Genaro's house when I got there in the late morning. I greeted him.

"Hey, what happened to you? Genaro and I waited for you all night," he said.

I knew that he was joking. I felt light and happy. I had systematically refused to dwell on whatever I had witnessed the day before. At that moment, however, my curiosity was uncontrollable and I asked him about it.

"Oh, that was a simple demonstration of all the things that you should know before you get the sorcerers' explanation," he said. "What you did yesterday made Genaro feel that you have stored enough power to go for the real thing.

You have obviously followed his suggestions. Yesterday you let the wings of your perception unfold. You were stiff but you still perceived all the comings and goings of the *nagual*. In other words, you saw. You also confirmed something which at this time is even more important than seeing, and that was the fact that you can now place your unwavering attention on the *nagual*. And that's what will decide the outcome of the last issue, the sorcerers' explanation.

"Pablito and you will go into it at the same time. It is a gift of power to be accompanied by such a fine warrior."

That seemed to be all he wanted to say. After a while I asked about don Genaro.

"He's around," he said. "He went into the bushes to make the mountains tremble."

I heard at that moment a distant rumble, like muffled thunder. Don Juan looked at me and laughed.

He made me sit down and asked if I had eaten. I had, so he handed me my notebook and led me to don Genaro's favorite spot; a large rock on the west side of the house overlooking a deep ravine.

"Now is when I need your total attention," don Juan said. "Attention in the sense that warriors understand attention; a true pause in order to allow the sorcerers' explanation to fully soak through you.

"We are at the end of our task. All the necessary instruction has been given to you and now you must stop, look back, and reconsider your steps. Sorcerers say that this is the only way to consolidate one's gains. I definitely would have preferred to tell you all this at your own place of power, but Genaro is your benefactor and his spot may be more beneficial to you in an instance like this."

What he was referring to as my 'place of power' was a hilltop in the desert of northern Mexico which he had shown me years before and had 'given' to me as my own.

"Should I just listen to you without taking notes?" I asked.

"This is indeed a tricky maneuver," he said. "On the one hand I need your total attention, and on the other you need to be calm and self-assured. The only way for you to be at ease is to write, so this is the time to bring forth all your personal power and fulfill this impossible task of being yourself without being yourself."

He slapped his thigh and laughed.

"I've already told you that I am in charge of your *tonal* and that Genaro is in charge of your *nagual*" he went on. "It has been my duty to help you in every matter concerning your *tonal* and everything that I've done with you or to you was done to accomplish one single task, the task of cleaning and reordering your island of the *tonal*. That's my job as your teacher. Genaro's task as your benefactor is to give you undeniable demonstrations of the *nagual* and to show how to get to it."

"What do you mean by cleaning and reordering the island of the *tonal*?" I asked.

"I mean the total change which I've been telling you about from the first day we met," he said. "I've told you countless times that a most drastic change was needed if you wanted to succeed in the path of knowledge. That change is not a change of mood, or attitude, or outlook. That change entails the transformation of the island of the *tonal*. You have accomplished that task."

"Do you think that I've changed?" I asked.

He hesitated and then laughed loudly.

"You are as idiotic as ever," he said. "And yet you're not the same. See what I mean?"

He mocked my taking notes and said that he missed don Genaro, who would have enjoyed the absurdity of my writing down the sorcerers' explanation.

"At this precise point a teacher would usually say to his disciple that they have arrived at a final crossroad," he continued. "To say such a thing is misleading, though. In my opinion there is no final crossroad, no final step to anything. And since there is no final step to anything, there shouldn't be any secrecy about any part of our lot as luminous beings. Personal power decides who can or who cannot profit by a revelation.

"My experiences with my fellow men have proven to me that very, very few of them would be willing to listen. And of those few who listen, even fewer would be willing to act on what they have listened to. And of those who are willing to act even fewer have enough personal power to profit by their acts.

"So, the matter of secrecy about the sorcerers' explanation boils down to a routine; perhaps a routine as empty as any other routine.

"At any rate, you know now about the *tonal* and the *nagual*, which are the core of the sorcerers' explanation. To know about them seems to be quite harmless. We are sitting here talking innocently about them as if they were just an ordinary topic of conversation. You are calmly writing as you've done for years. The scenery around us is a picture of calmness. It is early afternoon. The day is beautiful. The mountains around us have made a protective cocoon for us.

One doesn't have to be a sorcerer to realize that this place, which speaks of Genaro's power and impeccability, is the most appropriate background for opening the door. For that is what I'm doing today; opening the door for you. But before we venture beyond this point a fair warning is required. A teacher is supposed to speak in earnest terms and warn his disciple that the harmlessness and placidity of this moment are a mirage, that there is a bottomless abyss in front of him, and that once the door opens there is no way to close it again." He paused for a moment.

I felt light and happy. From don Genaro's place of predilection I had a breathtaking view. Don Juan was right. The day and the scenery were more than beautiful. I wanted to worry about his admonitions and warnings, but somehow the tranquility around me screened out all my attempts and I found myself hoping that perhaps he was speaking only of metaphorical dangers. Don Juan suddenly began to talk again.

"The years of hard training are only a preparation for the warrior's devastating encounter with..."

He paused again, looked at me with squinting eyes, and chuckled. "...with whatever lies out there, beyond this point," he said. I asked him to explain his ominous statements.

"The sorcerers' explanation, which doesn't seem like an explanation at all, is lethal," he said.

"It seems harmless and charming, but as soon as the warrior opens himself to it, it delivers a blow that no one can parry."

He broke into a loud laugh.

"So, be prepared for the worst, hut don't hurry or panic," he proceeded. "You don't have any time, and yet you're surrounded by eternity. What a paradox for your reason!"

Don Juan stood up. He wiped off the debris on a smooth bowl-like depression, and sat there comfortably with his back against the rock; facing the northwest. He indicated another place for me where I too could sit comfortably. I was to his left, also facing the northwest. The rock was warm and gave me a feeling of serenity; of protection. It was a mild day. A soft wind made the heat of the afternoon sun very pleasant. I took off my hat but don Juan insisted that I should wear it.

"You're now facing in the direction of your own place of power," he said. "That is a prop that may protect you. Today you need all the props you can use. Your hat may be another one of them."

"Why are you warning me, don Juan? What's really going to happen?" I asked.

"What will happen here today depends on whether or not you have enough personal power to focus your unwavering attention on the wings of your perception," he said.

His eyes glittered. He seemed to be more excited than I had ever seen him before. I thought that there was something unusual in his voice; perhaps an unaccustomed nervousness.

Don Juan said that the occasion required that right there on my benefactor's place of predilection he recapitulate for me every step that he had taken in his struggle to help me clean and reorder my island of the 'tonal'. His recapitulation was meticulous, and took him about five hours.

In a brilliant and clear manner he gave me a succinct account of everything he had done to me since the day we met. It was as if a dam had been broken. His revelations caught me completely off guard. I had accustomed myself to be the aggressive prober; thus, to have don Juan- who was always the reluctant party- elucidating the points of his teachings in such an academic manner was as astounding as his wearing a suit in Mexico City. His control of the language, his dramatic timing, and his choice of words were so extraordinary that I had no way to explain them rationally.

He said that at that point a teacher had to speak to the individual warrior in exclusive terms; that the way he was talking to me and the clarity of his explanation were part of his last trick; and that only at the end would everything that he was doing make sense to me. He talked without stopping, until he had finished presenting his recapitulation. And I wrote down everything he said without any conscious effort on my part.

"Let me begin by telling you that a teacher never seeks apprentices and no one can solicit the teachings," he said. "It's always an omen which points out an apprentice. A warrior who may be in the position of becoming a teacher must be alert in order to catch his cubic centimenter of chance. I saw you just before we met. You had a good *tonal*, like that girl we encountered in Mexico City. After I saw you I waited, very much like what we did with the girl that night in the park. The girl went by without paying attention to us. But you were brought to me by a man who ran away after babbling inanities. You were left there, facing me, also babbling inanities. I knew I had to act fast and hook you. You yourself would've had to do something of that sort if that girl would've talked to you. What I did was to grab you with my will."

Don Juan was alluding to the extraordinary way he had looked at me the day we met. He had fixed his gaze on me and I had had an inexplicable feeling of vacuity, or numbness. I could not find any logical explanation for my reaction and I have always believed that after our first meeting I went back to see him only because I had become obsessed with that look.

"That was my quickest way of hooking you," he said. "It was a direct blow to your *tonal*. I numbed it by focusing my will on it."

"How did you do that?" I asked.

"The warrior's gaze is placed on the right eye of the other person," he said. "and what it does is to stop the internal dialogue. Then the *nagual* takes over; thus, the danger of that maneuver. Whenever the *nagual* prevails, even if it is only for an instant, there is no way of describing the feeling that the body experiences. I know that you have spent endless hours trying to figure out what you felt, and that to this day you haven't been able to. I accomplished what I wanted, though. I hooked you."

I told him that I could still remember him staring at me.

"The gaze on the right eye is not a stare," he said. "It's rather a forceful grabbing that one does through the eye of the other person. In other words, one grabs something that is behind the eye. One has the actual physical sensation that one is holding something with the will."

He scratched his head, tilting his hat to the front, over his face.

"This is, naturally, only a way of talking," he continued. "A way of explaining weird physical sensations."

He ordered me to stop writing and look at him. He said that he was going to 'grab' my 'tonal' gently with his 'will'. The sensation I experienced was a repetition of what I had felt on that first day we had met, and on other occasions when don Juan had made me feel that his eyes were actually touching me in a physical sense.

"But, how do you make me feel you're touching me, don Juan? What do you actually do?" I asked.

"There's no way of exactly describing what one does," he said. "Something snaps forward from someplace below the stomach. That something has direction and can be focused on anything."

I again felt something like soft tweezers clasping some undefined part of me.

"It works only when the warrior learns to focus his will" don Juan explained after he moved his eyes away. "There's no way of practicing it, therefore I have not recommended or encouraged it's use. At a given moment in the life of a warrior it simply happens. No one knows how."

He remained quiet for a while. I felt extremely apprehensive. Don Juan suddenly began to speak again.

"The secret is in the left eye," he said. "As a warrior progresses on the path of knowledge his left eye can clasp anything. Usually the left eye of a warrior has a strange appearance. Sometimes it becomes permanently crossed, or it becomes smaller than the other, or larger, or different in some way."

He glanced at me and in a joking manner pretended to examine my left eye. He shook his head in mock disapproval and chuckled.

"Once the apprentice has been hooked, the instruction begins," he continued. "The first act of a teacher is to introduce the idea that the world we think we see is only a view, a description of the world. Every effort of a teacher is geared to prove this point to his apprentice.

"But accepting it seems to be one of the hardest things one can do. We are complacently caught in our particular view of the world, which compels us to feel and act as if we knew everything about the world. A teacher, from the very first act he performs, aims at stopping that view. Sorcerers call it stopping the internal dialogue, and they are convinced that it is the single most important technique that an apprentice can learn.

"In order to stop the view of the world which one has held since the cradle, it is not enough to just wish or make a resolution. One needs a practical task. That practical task is called the right way of walking. It seems harmless and nonsensical. As everything else which has power in itself or by itself, the right way of walking does not attract attention. You understood it and regarded it, at least for several years, as a curious way of behaving. It didn't dawn on you until very recently that that was the most effective way to stop your internal dialogue."

"How does the right way of walking stop the internal dialogue?" I asked.

"Walking in that specific manner saturates the *tonal*" he said. "It floods it. You see, the attention of the *tonal* has to be placed on it's creations. In fact, it is that attention that creates the order of the world in the first place. So the *tonal* must be attentive to the elements of it's world in order to maintain it, and must, above all, uphold the view of the world as internal dialogue."

He said that the right way of walking was a subterfuge. [* subterfuge- something intended to misrepresent the true nature of an activity] The warrior, first by curling his fingers, draws attention to the arms. Then by looking without focusing his eyes at any point directly in front of him on the arc that starts at the tip of his feet and ends above the horizon, he literally flooded his 'tonal' with information.

The 'tonal', without it's one-to-one relation with the elements of it's description, was incapable of talking to itself and thus one became silent.

Don Juan explained that the position of the fingers did not matter at all; that the only consideration was to draw attention to the arms by clasping the fingers in various unaccustomed ways; and that the important thing was the manner in which the eyes by being kept unfocused detected an enormous number of features of the world without being clear about them. He added that the eyes in that state were capable of picking out details which were too fleeting for normal vision.

"Together with the right way of walking," don Juan went on, "a teacher must teach his apprentice another possibility which is even more subtle; the possibility of acting without believing; without expecting rewards; acting just for the hell of it. I wouldn't be exaggerating if

I told you that the success of a teacher's enterprise depends on how well and how harmoniously he guides his apprentice in this specific respect."

I told don Juan that I did not remember him ever discussing 'acting just for the hell of it' as a particular technique. All I could recollect were his constant but loose comments about it.

He laughed and said that his maneuver had been so subtle that it had bypassed me to that day. He then reminded me of all the nonsensical joking tasks that he used to give me every time I had been at his house: absurd chores such as arranging firewood in patterns, encircling his house with an unbroken chain of concentric circles drawn in the dirt with my finger, sweeping debris from one place to another, and so forth. The tasks also included acts that I had to perform by myself at home: such as wearing a black cap, or tying my left shoe first, or fastening my belt from right to left.

The reason I had never taken them in any other vein except as jokes was that he would invariably tell me to forget about them after I had established them as regular routines.

As he recapitulated all the tasks he had given me I realized that by making me perform senseless routines he had indeed implanted in me the idea of acting without really expecting anything in return.

"Stopping the internal dialogue is, however, the key to the sorcerers' world," he said. "The rest of the activities are only props. All they do is accelerate the effect of stopping the internal dialogue."

He said that there were two major activities or techniques used to accelerate the stopping of the internal dialogue: erasing personal history and 'dreaming'. He reminded me that during the early stages of my apprenticeship he had given me a number of specific methods for changing my 'personality'. I had recorded them in my notes and had forgotten about them for years until I realized their importance. Those specific methods seemed at first to be highly idiosyncratic [* idiosyncratic- peculiar to the individual] devices to coerce me into modifying my behavior.

He explained that the art of a teacher was to deviate the apprentice's attention from the main issues. A poignant example of that art was the fact that I had not realized until that day that he had actually tricked me into learning a most crucial point; to act without expecting rewards.

He said that in line with that rationale he had rallied my interest around the idea of 'seeing', which, properly understood, was the act of dealing directly with the 'nagual': an act that was an unavoidable end result of the teachings but an unattainable task as a task per se.

"What was the point of tricking me that way?" I asked.

"Sorcerers are convinced that all of us are a bunch of nincompoops," he said. "We can never relinquish our crummy control voluntarily, thus we have to be tricked."

His contention was that by making me focus my attention on a pseudo task, learning to 'see', he had successfully accomplished two things. First he had outlined the direct encounter with the 'nagual' without mentioning it, and second he had tricked me into considering the real issues of his teachings as inconsequential affairs. Erasing personal history and 'dreaming' were never as important to me as 'seeing'. I regarded them as very entertaining activities. I even thought that they were the practices for which I had the greatest facility.

"Greatest facility," he said mockingly when he heard my comments. "A teacher must not leave anything to chance. I've told you that you were correct in feeling that you were being tricked. The problem was that you were convinced that that tricking was directed at fooling your reason. For me, tricking meant to distract your attention, or to trap it as the case required."

He looked at me with squinting eyes and pointed all around us with a sweeping gesture of his arm.

"The secret of all this is one's attention," he said.

"What do you mean, don Juan?"

"All of this exists only because of our attention. This very rock where we're sitting is a rock because we have been forced to give our attention to it as a rock."

I wanted him to explain that idea. He laughed and raised an accusing finger at me.

"This is a recapitulation," he said. "We'll get to that later."

He asserted that because of his decoy maneuver I became interested in erasing personal history and 'dreaming'. He said that the effects of those two techniques were ultimately devastating if they were exercised in their totality, and that then his concern was the concern of every teacher; not to let his apprentice do anything that would plunge him into aberration and morbidity.

"Erasing personal history and dreaming should only be a help," he said. "What any apprentice needs to buffer him is temperance and strength. That's why a teacher introduces the warrior's way, or living like a warrior. This is the glue that joins together everything in a sorcerer's world. Bit by bit a teacher must forge and develop it. Without the sturdiness and level-headedness of the warrior's way there is no possibility of withstanding the path of knowledge."

Don Juan said that learning the warrior's way was an instance when the apprentice's attention had to be trapped rather than deviated, and that he had trapped my attention by pushing me out of my ordinary circumstances every time I had gone to see him. Our roaming around the desert and the mountains had been the means to accomplish that.

The maneuver of altering the context of my ordinary world by taking me for hikes and hunting was another instance of his system that had bypassed me. Context disarrangement meant that I did not know the ropes and my attention had to be focused on everything don Juan did.

"What a trick! Uh?" he said and laughed.

I laughed with awe. I had never realized that he was so aware.

He then enumerated his steps in guiding and trapping my attention. When he had finished his account he added that a teacher had to take into consideration the personality of the apprentice, and that in my case he had to be careful because I was violent and would have thought nothing of killing myself out of despair.

"What a preposterous fellow you are, don Juan," I said in jest, and he exploded in a giant laugh.

He explained that in order to help erase personal history, three other techniques were taught. They were: losing self-importance, assuming responsibility, and using death as an adviser. The idea was that without the beneficial effect of those three techniques, erasing personal history would involve the apprentice in being shifty, evasive and unnecessarily dubious about himself and his actions.

Don Juan asked me to tell him what had been the most natural reaction I had had in moments of stress, frustration and disappointment before I became an apprentice. He said that his own reaction had been wrath. I told him that mine had been self-pity.

"Although you're not aware of it, you had to work your head off to make that feeling a natural one," he said. "By now there is no way for you to recollect the immense effort that you needed to establish self-pity as a feature of your island. Self-pity bore witness to everything you did. It was just at your fingertips, ready to advise you.

"Death is considered by a warrior to be a more amenable adviser which can also be brought to bear witness on everything one does; just like self-pity, or wrath. Obviously after an untold struggle you had learned to feel sorry for yourself. But you can also learn, in the same way, to feel your impending end; and thus you can learn to have the idea of your death at your fingertips. As an adviser, self-pity is nothing in comparison to death."

Don Juan pointed out then that there was seemingly a contradiction in the idea of change. On the one hand, the sorcerers' world called for a drastic transformation, and on the other, the sorcerers' explanation said that the island of the 'tonal' was complete and not a single element of it could be removed. Change, then, did not mean obliterating anything, but rather altering the use assigned to those elements.

"Take self-pity for instance," he said. "There is no way to get rid of it for good; it has a definite place and character in your island, a definite facade which is recognizable. Thus, every time the occasion arises, self-pity becomes active. It has history. If you then change the facade of self-pity, you would have shifted it's place of prominence."

I asked him to explain the meaning of his metaphors, especially the idea of changing facades. I understood it as perhaps the act of more than one role at the same time.

"One changes the facade by altering the use of the elements of the island," he replied. "Take self-pity again. It was useful to you because you either felt important and deserving of better conditions, better treatment; or because you were unwilling to assume responsibility for the acts that brought you to the state that elicited self-pity; or because you were incapable of bringing the idea of your impending death to witness your acts and advise you.

"Erasing personal history and it's three companion techniques are the sorcerers' means for changing the facade of the elements of the island. For instance, by erasing your personal history, you have denied use to self-pity. In order for self-pity to work you had to feel important, irresponsible, and immortal. When those feelings were altered in some way, it was no longer possible for you to feel sorry for yourself.

"The same was true with all the other elements which you've changed on your island. Without using those four techniques you never could've succeeded in changing them. But changing facades means only that one has assigned a secondary place to a formerly important element. Your self-pity is still a feature of your island; it will be there in the back in the same way that the idea of your impending death, or your humbleness, or your responsibility for your acts were there without ever being used."

Don Juan said that once all those techniques had been presented, the apprentice arrived at a crossroad. Depending on his sensibility, the apprentice did one of two things. He either took the recommendations and suggestions made by his teacher at their face value and acted without expecting rewards, or he took everything as a joke or an aberration.

I remarked that in my own case I was confused by the word 'techniques'. I always expected a set of precise directions, but he had given me only vague suggestions; and I was incapable of taking them seriously or acting in accordance with his stipulations.

"That was your mistake," he said. "I had to decide then whether or not to use power plants. You could've used those four techniques to clean and reorder your island of the *tonal*. They would've led you to the *nagual*. But not all of us are capable of reacting to simple recommendations. You, and I for that matter, needed something else to shake us. We needed those power plants."

It had indeed taken me years to realize the importance of those early suggestions made by don Juan. The extraordinary effect that psychotropic plants had had on me was what gave me the bias that their use was the key feature of the teachings. I held on to that conviction and it was only in the later years of my apprenticeship that I realized that the meaningful transformations and findings of sorcerers were always done in states of sober consciousness.

"What would have happened if I had taken your recommendations seriously?" I asked.

"You would have gotten to the *nagual*" he replied.

"But would I have gotten to the *nagual* without a benefactor?"

"Power provides according to your impeccability," he said. "If you had seriously used those four techniques, you would've stored enough personal power to find a benefactor. You would've been impeccable and power would have opened all the necessary avenues. That is the rule."

"Why didn't you give me more time?" I asked.

"You had all the time you needed," he said. "Power showed me the way. One night I gave you a riddle to work out. You had to find your beneficial spot in front of the door of my house. That night you performed marvelously under pressure and in the morning you fell asleep over a very special rock that I had put there. Power showed me that you had to be pushed mercilessly or you wouldn't do a thing."

"Did the power plants help me?" I asked.

"Certainly," he said. "They opened you up by stopping your view of the world. In this respect power plants have the same effect on the *tonal* as the right way of walking. Both flood it with information and force the internal dialogue to come to a stop. The plants are excellent for that, but very costly. They cause untold damage to the body. This is their drawback, especially with the devil's weed."

"If you knew that they were so dangerous, why did you give me so many of them, so many times?" I asked.

He assured me that the details of the procedure were decided by power itself. He said that although the teachings were supposed to cover the same issues with all apprentices, the order was different for each one, and that he had gotten repeated indications that I needed a great deal of coercion in order to bother with anything.

"I was dealing with a sassy immortal being that had no respect for his life or his death," he said, laughing.

I brought up the fact that he had described and discussed those plants in terms of anthropomorphic [* anthropomorphic- suggesting human characteristics for animals or inanimate things] qualities. His references to them were always as if the plants had personalities. He replied that that was a prescribed means for deviating the apprentice's attention away from the real issue, which was stopping the internal dialogue.

"If they are used only to stop the internal dialogue, what's their connection with the ally?" I asked.

"That's a difficult point to explain," he said. "Those plants lead the apprentice directly to the *nagual*, and the ally is an aspect of it. We function at the center reason exclusively, regardless of who we are or where we come from. Reason can naturally account in one way or another for everything that happens within it's view of the world.

"The ally is something which is outside of that view; outside the realm of reason. It can be witnessed only at the center of will at times when our ordinary view has stopped, therefore it is properly the *nagual*. Sorcerers, however, can learn to perceive the ally in a most intricate way, and in doing so they get too deeply immersed in a new view.

"So, in order to protect you from that fate, I did not emphasize the ally as sorcerers usually do. Sorcerers have learned after generations of using power plants to account in their views for everything that is accountable about them. I would say that sorcerers, by using their will, have succeeded in enlarging their views of the world. My teacher and benefactor were the clearest examples of that. They were men of great power, but they were not men of knowledge.

"They never broke the bounds of their enormous views and thus never arrived at the totality of themselves, yet they knew about it. It wasn't that they lived aberrant lives, claiming things beyond their reach; they knew that they had missed the boat and that only at their death would the total mystery be revealed to them. Sorcery had given them only a glimpse but never the real means to get to that evasive totality of oneself.

"I gave you enough of the sorcerers' view without letting you get hooked by it. I said that only if one pits two views against each other can one weasel between them to arrive at the real world. I meant that one can arrive at the totality of oneself only when one fully understands that the world is merely a view, regardless of whether that view belongs to an ordinary man or to a sorcerer.

"Here is where I varied from the tradition. After a lifelong struggle I know that what matters is not to learn a new description, but to arrive at the totality of oneself. One should get to the *nagual* without maligning the *tonal*, and above all, without injuring one's body. You took those plants following the exact steps I followed myself. The only difference was that instead of plunging you into them I stopped when I judged that you had stored enough views of the *nagual*. That is the reason why I never wanted to discuss your encounters with power plants, or let you talk obsessively about them. There was no point in elaborating about the unspeakable. Those were true excursions into the *nagual*, the unknown."

I mentioned that my need to talk about my perceptions under the influence of psychotropic plants was due to an interest in elucidating a hypothesis of my own. I was convinced that with the aid of such plants he had provided me with memories of inconceivable ways of perceiving. Those memories, which at the time I experienced them may have seemed idiosyncratic and disconnected from anything meaningful, were later assembled into units of meaning. I knew that don Juan had artfully guided me each time, and that any assembling of meaning was made under his guidance.

"I don't want to emphasize those events, or explain them," he said dryly. "The act of dwelling on explanations will put us right back where we don't want to be. That is, we'll be thrown back into a view of the world; this time a much larger view."

Don Juan said that after the apprentice's internal dialogue has been stopped by the effect of power plants, an unavoidable impasse develops. The apprentice begins to have second thoughts about his whole apprenticeship. In don Juan's opinion, even the most willing apprentice at that point would suffer a serious loss of interest.

"Power plants shake the *tonal* and threaten the solidity of the whole island," he said. "It is at this time that the apprentice retreats, and wisely so. He wants to get out of the whole mess. It is also at this time that the teacher sets up his most artful trap, the worthy opponent.

"This trap has two purposes. First, it enables the teacher to hold his apprentice, and second, it enables the apprentice to have a point of reference for further use. The trap is a maneuver that brings forth a worthy opponent into the arena. Without the aid of a worthy opponent, who is not really an enemy but a thoroughly dedicated adversary, the apprentice has no possibility of continuing on the path of knowledge. The best of men would quit at this point if it were left up to them to decide. I brought to you as a worthy opponent the finest warrior one can find, la Catalina."

Don Juan was talking about a time, years before, when he had led me into a long-range battle with an Indian sorceress.

"I put you in bodily contact with her," he proceeded. "I chose a woman because you trust women. To disarrange that trust was very difficult for her. She confessed to me years later that she would've liked to quit because she liked you. But she's a great warrior and in spite of her feelings she nearly blasted you off the planet.

"She disarranged your *tonal* so intensely that it was never the same again. She actually changed features on the face of your island so deeply that her acts sent you into another realm. One may say that she could've become your benefactor herself, had it not been that you were not cut out to be a sorcerer like she is.

"There was something amiss between you two. You were incapable of being afraid of her. You nearly lost your marbles one night when she accosted you, but in spite of that you were attracted to her. She was a desirable woman to you no matter how scared you were. She knew that. I caught you one day in town looking at her, shaking in your boots with fear and yet drooling at her.

"Because of the acts of a worthy opponent, then, an apprentice can be either blasted to pieces or changed radically. La Catalina's actions with you, since they did not kill you- not because she did not try hard enough, but because you were durable- had a beneficial effect on you, and also provided you with a decision.

"The teacher uses the worthy opponent to force the apprentice into the choice of his life. The apprentice must choose between the warrior's world and his ordinary world. But no decision is possible unless the apprentice understands the choice. Thus a teacher must have a thoroughly patient and understanding attitude, and must lead his man with a sure hand to that choice; and above all he must make sure that his apprentice chooses the world and the life of a warrior. I accomplished this by asking you to help me overcome la Catalina. I told you she was about to kill me and that I needed your help to get rid of her. I gave you fair warning about the consequences of your choice and plenty of time to decide whether or not to make it."

I clearly remembered that don Juan had set me loose that day. He told me that if I did not want to help him I was free to leave and never come back. I felt at that moment that I was at liberty to choose my own course and had no further obligation to him.

I left his house and drove away with a mixture of sadness and happiness. I was sad to leave don Juan and yet I was happy to be through with all his disconcerting activities. I thought of Los Angeles and my friends and all the routines of my daily life which were waiting for me; those little routines that had always given me so much pleasure. For a while I felt euphoric. The weirdness of don Juan and his life was behind me and I was free.

My happy mood did not last long, however. My desire to leave don Juan's world was untenable. My routines had lost their power. I tried to think of something I wanted to do in Los Angeles, but there was nothing. Don Juan had once told me that I was afraid of people and had learned to defend myself by not wanting anything. He said that not wanting anything was a warrior's finest attainment. In my stupidity, however, I had enlarged the sensation of not wanting anything and made it lapse into not liking anything. Thus, my life was boring and empty.

He was right, and as I zoomed north on the highway the full impact of my own unsuspected madness finally hit me. I began to realize the scope of my choice. I was actually leaving a magical world of continual renewal for my soft, boring life in Los Angeles. I began to recollect my empty days. I remembered one Sunday in particular. I had felt restless all day with nothing to do. No friends had come to visit me. No one had invited me to a party. The people I wanted to see were not home, and worst of all, I had seen all the movies in town. In the late afternoon, in ultimate despair, I searched the list of movies again and found one I had never wanted to see. It was being shown in a town thirty-five miles away. I went to see it, and hated it, but even that was better than having nothing to do.

Under the impact of don Juan's world, I had changed. For one thing, since I had met him I had not had time to be bored. That in itself was enough for me. Don Juan had indeed made sure I would choose the warrior's world. I turned around and drove back to his house.

"What would have happened if I had chosen to go back to Los Angeles?" I asked.

"That would have been an impossibility," he said. "That choice didn't exist. All that was required of you was to allow your *tonal* to become aware of having decided to join the world of sorcerers. The *tonal* doesn't know that decisions are in the realm of the *nagual*. When we think we decide, all we're doing is acknowledging that something beyond our understanding has set up the frame of our so-called decision, and all we do is to acquiesce.

"In the life of a warrior there is only one thing- one issue alone which is really undecided: how far one can go on the path of knowledge and power. That is an issue which is open and no one can predict it's outcome. I once told you that the freedom a warrior has is either to act impeccably or to act like a nincompoop. Impeccability is indeed the only act which is free and thus the true measure of a warrior's spirit."

Don Juan said that after the apprentice had made his decision to join the world of sorcerers, the teacher gave him a pragmatic chore; a task that he had to fulfill in his day-to-day life. He explained that the task, which is designed to fit the apprentice's personality, is usually a sort of farfetched life situation which the apprentice is supposed to get into as a means of permanently affecting his view of the world.

In my own case, I understood the task more as a lively joke than a serious life situation. As time passed, however, it finally dawned on me that I had to be earnest about it.

"After the apprentice has been given his sorcery task he's ready for another type of instruction," he proceeded. "He is a warrior then. In your case, since you were no longer an apprentice, I taught you the three techniques that help dreaming: disrupting the routines of life, the gait of power, and not-doing. You were very consistent, dumb as an apprentice and dumb as a warrior. You dutifully wrote down everything I said and everything that happened to you, but you did not act exactly as I had told you to. So I still had to blast you with power plants."

Don Juan then gave me a step-by-step rendition of how he had driven my attention away from 'dreaming', making me believe that the important problem was a very difficult activity he had called not-doing which consisted of a perceptual game of focusing attention on features of the world that were ordinarily overlooked such as the shadows of things. Don Juan said that his strategy had been to set not-doing apart by imposing the most strict secrecy on it.

"Not-doing, like everything else, is a very important technique, but it was not the main issue," he said. "You fell for the secrecy. You, a blabbermouth, having to keep a secret!"

He laughed and said that he could imagine the troubles I must have gone through to keep my mouth shut.

He explained that disrupting routines, the gait of power, and not-doing were avenues for learning new ways of perceiving the world, and that they gave a warrior an inkling of incredible possibilities of action. Don Juan's idea was that the knowledge of a separate and pragmatic world of 'dreaming' was made possible through the use of those three techniques.

"Dreaming is a practical aid devised by sorcerers," he said. "They were not fools. They knew what they were doing and sought the usefulness of the *nagual* by training their *tonal* to let go for a moment, so to speak, and then grab again. This statement doesn't make sense to you. But that's what you've been doing all along; training yourself to let go without losing your marbles. Dreaming, of course, is the crown of the sorcerers' efforts; the ultimate use of the *nagual*"

He went through all the exercises of not-doing that he had made me perform, the routines of my daily life that he had isolated for disrupting, and all the occasions when he had forced me to engage in the gait of power.

"We're coming to the end of my recapitulation," he said. "Now we have to talk about Genaro."

Don Juan said that there had been a very important omen the day I met don Genaro. I told him that I could not remember anything out of the ordinary. He reminded me that on that day we had been sitting on a bench in a park. He said that he had mentioned earlier to me that he was going to wait for a friend I had never met before. Then when his friend appeared, I singled him out without any hesitation in the midst of a huge crowd. That was the omen that made them realize that don Genaro was my benefactor.

I remembered when he mentioned it that as we sat talking I had turned around and seen a small lean man who radiated an extraordinary vitality, or grace, or simple gusto. He had just turned a corner into the park. In a joking mood I told don Juan that his friend was approaching us, and that he was most certainly a sorcerer judging by the way he looked.

"Genaro recommended what to do with you from that day on," don Juan proceeded. "As your guide into the *nagual* he gave you impeccable demonstrations, and every time he performed an act as a *nagual* you were left with a knowledge that defied and bypassed your reason. He disassembled your view of the world although you are not aware of that yet.

"Again in this instance, you behaved just like in the case of the power plants. You needed more than was necessary. A few of the *nagual's* onslaughts should be enough to dismantle one's view. But even to this day, after all the *nagual's* barrages, your view seems invulnerable. Oddly enough, that's your best feature.

"All in all then, Genaro's job has been to lead you into the *nagual*. But here we have a strange question. What was being led into the *nagual*?"

He urged me with a movement of his eyes to answer the question. "My reason?" I asked.

"No, reason is meaningless there," he replied. "Reason craps out in an instant when it is out of it's safe narrow bounds."

"Then it was my *tonal*" I said.

"No, the *tonal* and the *nagual* are the two inherent parts of ourselves," he said dryly. "They cannot be led into each other."

"My perception?" I asked.

"You've got it," he yelled as if I were a child giving the right answer. "We're coming now to the sorcerers' explanation. I've warned you already that it won't explain anything and yet..." He paused and looked at me with shiny eyes. "This is another of the sorcerers' tricks," he said.

"What do you mean? What's the trick?" I asked with a touch of alarm.

"The sorcerers' explanation, of course," he replied. "You'll see that for yourself. But let's continue with it. Sorcerers say that we are 'inside a bubble'. It is a bubble into which we are placed at the moment of our birth. At first the bubble is open, but then it begins to close until it has sealed us in. That bubble is our perception. We live inside that bubble all of our lives. And what we witness on it's round walls is our own reflection."

He lowered his head and looked at me askance. He giggled.

"You're goofing," he said. "You're supposed to raise a point here."

I laughed. Somehow his warnings about the sorcerers' explanation- plus the realization of the awesome range of his awareness- had finally begun to take their toll on me.

"What was the point I was supposed to raise?" I asked.

"If what we witness on the walls is our own reflection, then the thing that's being reflected must be the real thing," he said, smiling.

"That's a good point," I said in a joking tone.

My reason could easily follow that argument.

"The thing reflected is our view of the world," he said. "That view is first a description, which is given to us from the moment of our birth until all our attention is caught by it and the description becomes a view.

"The teacher's task is to rearrange the view, to prepare the luminous being for the time when the benefactor opens the bubble from the outside."

He went into another studied pause and made another remark about my lack of attention judged by my incapacity to make an appropriate comment or question.

"What should've been my question?" I asked.

"Why should the bubble be opened?" he replied. He laughed loudly and patted my back when I said, "That's a good question."

"Of course!" he exclaimed. "It has to be a good question for you, it's one of your own.

"The bubble is opened in order to allow the luminous being a view of his totality," he went on. "Naturally this business of calling it a bubble is only a way of talking, but in this case it is an accurate way.

"The delicate maneuver of leading a luminous being into the totality of himself requires that the teacher work from inside the bubble and the benefactor from outside.

"The teacher reorders the view of the world. I have called that view the island of the *tonal*. I've said that everything that we are is on that island. The sorcerers' explanation says that the island of the *tonal* is made by our perception which has been trained to focus on certain elements. Each of those elements and all of them together form our view of the world.

"The job of a teacher, insofar as the apprentice's perception is concerned, consists of reordering all the elements of the island on one half of the bubble. By now you must have realized that cleaning and reordering the island of the *tonal* means regrouping all it's elements on the side of reason. My task has been to disarrange your ordinary view, not to destroy it but to force it to rally on the side of reason. You've done that better than anyone I know."

He drew an imaginary circle on the rock and divided it in two along a vertical diameter. He said that the art of a teacher was to force his disciple to group his view of the world on the right half of the bubble.

"Why the right half?" I asked.

"That's the side of the *tonal*" he said. "The teacher always addresses himself to that side, and by presenting his apprentice on the one hand with the warrior's way he forces him into reasonableness, and sobriety, and strength of character and body.

"And by presenting him on the other hand with unthinkable but real situations which the apprentice cannot cope with, he forces him to realize that his reason, although it is a most wonderful affair, can only cover a small area.

"Once the warrior is confronted with his incapacity to reason everything out, he will go out of his way to bolster and defend his defeated reason, and to that effect he will rally everything he's got around it. The teacher sees to that by hammering him mercilessly until all his view of the world is on one half of the bubble. The other half of the bubble, the one that has been cleared, can then be claimed by something sorcerers call will.

"We can better explain this by saying that the task of the teacher is to wipe clean one half of the bubble and to reorder every thing on the other half. The benefactor's task then is to open the bubble on the side that has been cleaned. Once the seal is broken, the warrior is never the same. He has then the command of his totality.

"Half of the bubble is the ultimate center of reason; the *tonal*. The other half is the ultimate center of will; the *nagual*. That is the order that should prevail. Any other arrangement is nonsensical and petty because it goes against our nature. It robs us of our magical heritage and

reduces us to nothing."
End of Explanation.
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Don Juan stood up and stretched his arms and back, and walked around to loosen up his muscles. It was a bit cold by then.

I asked him if we were through.

"Why, the show hasn't even started yet!" he exclaimed and laughed. "That was only the beginning."

He looked at the sky and pointed to the west with a casual movement of his hand.

"In about an hour the *nagual* will be here," he said and smiled.

He sat down again.

"We have one single issue left," he continued. "Sorcerers call it the secret of the luminous beings, and that is the fact that we are perceivers. We men and all the other luminous beings on earth are perceivers. That is our bubble, the bubble of perception. Our mistake is to believe that the only perception worthy of acknowledgment is what goes through our reason. Sorcerers believe that reason is only one center and that it shouldn't take so much for granted.

"Genaro and I have taught you about the eight points that make the totality of our bubble of perception. You know six points. Today Genaro and I will further clean your bubble of perception and after that you will know the two remaining points."

He abruptly changed the topic and asked me to give him a detailed account of my perceptions of the day before, starting from the point where I saw don Genaro sitting on a rock by the road. He did not make any comments or interrupt me at all.

When I had finished, I added an observation of my own. I had talked to Nestor and Pablito in the morning and they had given me accounts of their perceptions, which were similar to mine. My point was that he himself had told me that the *nagual* was an individual experience which only the observer can witness. The day before there were three observers and all of us had witnessed more or less the same thing. The differences were expressed only in terms of how each of us felt or reacted to any specific instance of the whole phenomenon.

"What happened yesterday was a demonstration of the *nagual* for you, and for Nestor and Pablito. I'm their benefactor. Between Genaro and myself, we canceled out the center of reason in all three of you. Genaro and I had enough power to make you agree on what you were witnessing. Several years ago, you and I were with a bunch of apprentices one night, but I didn't have enough power by myself alone to make all of you witness the same thing."

He said that, judging by what I had told him I had perceived the day before and from what he had 'seen' about me, his conclusion was that I was ready for the sorcerers' explanation. He added that so was Pablito, but he was uncertain about Nestor.

"To be ready for the sorcerers' explanation is a very difficult accomplishment," he said. "It shouldn't be, but we insist on indulging in our lifelong view of the world. In this respect you and Nestor and Pablito are alike. Nestor hides behind his shyness and gloom; Pablito behind his disarming charm. You hide behind your cockiness and words. All are views that seem to be unchallengeable; and as long as you three persist in using them, your bubbles of perception have not been cleared and the sorcerers' explanation will have no meaning."

In a spirit of jest I said that I had been obsessed with the famous sorcerers' explanation for a very long time, but the closer I got to it the further it seemed to be. I was going to add a joking comment when he took the words right out of my mouth.

"Wouldn't it be something if the sorcerers' explanation turns out to be a dud?" he asked in the midst of loud laughter.

He patted me on the back and seemed to be delighted, like a child anticipating a pleasant event.

"Genaro is a stickler for the rule," he said in a confiding tone. "There's nothing to this confounded explanation. If it would've been up to me I would have given it to you years ago. Don't put too much stock in it."

He looked up and examined the sky.

"Now you are ready," he said in a dramatic and solemn tone. "It's time to go. But before we leave this place I have to tell you one last thing. The mystery- or the secret of the sorcerers' explanation is that it deals with unfolding the wings of perception."

He put his hand over my writing pad and said that I should go to the bushes and take care of my bodily functions, and after that I should take off my clothes and leave them in a bundle right where we were. I looked at him questioningly and he explained that I had to be naked, but that I could keep my shoes and my hat on.

I insisted on knowing why I had to be naked. Don Juan laughed and said that the reason was rather personal and had to do with my own comfort, and that I myself had told him that that was the way I wanted it. His explanation baffled me. I felt that he was playing a joke on me; or that in conformity with what he had revealed to me, he was simply displacing my attention. I wanted to know why he was doing that.

He began to talk about an incident that had happened to me years before while we had been in the mountains of northern Mexico with don Genaro. On that occasion they were explaining to me that 'reason' could not possibly account for everything that took place in the world. In order to give me an undeniable demonstration of it don Genaro performed a magnificent leap as a 'nagual', and 'elongated' himself to reach the top of some peaks ten or fifteen miles away.

Don Juan said that I missed the issue, and that as far as convincing my 'reason' was concerned, don Genaro's demonstration was a failure; but from the point of view of my bodily reaction it was a riot.

The bodily reaction that don Juan was referring to was something which was very vivid in my mind. I saw don Genaro disappear in front of my very eyes as if a wind had swished him away. His leap or whatever he had done had had such a profound effect on me that I felt as if his movement had ripped something in my intestines. My bowels became loose and I had to throw away my pants and shirt. My discomfort and embarrassment knew no limits. I had to walk naked wearing only a hat on a heavily trafficked highway until I got to my car. Don Juan reminded me that it was then that I had told him not to let me ruin my clothes again.

After I had taken my clothes off we walked a few hundred feet to a very large rock overlooking the same ravine. He made me look down. There was a drop of over a hundred feet. He then told me to turn off my internal dialogue and listen to the sounds around us.

After a few moments I heard the sound of a pebble bouncing from rock to rock on it's way down to the bottom of the ravine. I heard every single bounce of the pebble with inconceivable clarity. Then I heard another pebble being thrown, and another one yet. I lifted my head to align my left ear to the direction of the sound and saw don Genaro sitting on top of the rock, twelve to fifteen feet from where we were. He was casually tossing pebbles down into the ravine.

He yelled and cackled when I saw him and he said that he had been hiding there waiting for me to discover him. I had a moment of bafflement. Don Juan whispered in my ear repeatedly that my 'reason' was not invited to that event, and that I should give up the nagging desire to control everything. He said that the 'nagual' was a perception only for me, and that that was the reason Pablito had not seen the 'nagual' in my car.

He added, as if reading my unvoiced feelings, that although the 'nagual' was for me alone to witness, it still was don Genaro himself.

Don Juan took me by the arm and in a playful manner led me to where don Genaro was sitting. Don Genaro stood up and came closer to me. His body radiated a heat that I could see, a glow which dazzled me. He came to my side and without touching me he put his mouth close to my left ear and began to whisper. Don Juan also began whispering in my other ear. Their voices were synchronized. They were both repeating the same statements.

They said that I should not be afraid, and that I had long powerful fibers, which were not there to protect me, for there was nothing to protect, or to be protected from; but that they were there to guide my 'nagual's' perception in very much the same way my eyes guided my normal 'tonal's' perception. They told me that my fibers were all around me, that through them I could perceive everything at once, and that one single fiber was enough for a leap from the rock into the ravine, or up from the ravine to the rock.

I had listened to everything they had whispered. Every word seemed to have had a unique connotation for me. I could retain every utterance and then play it back as if I were a tape recorder.

They both urged me to leap to the bottom of the ravine. They said that I should first feel my fibers, then isolate one that went all the way down to the bottom of the ravine and follow it. As they spoke their commands I actually could match their words with adequate feelings. I sensed an itching all over me, especially a most peculiar sensation which was indiscernible in itself but approximated the sensation of a 'long itching'. My body could actually feel the bottom of the ravine and I sensed that feeling as an itching in some undefined area of my body.

Don Juan and don Genaro kept on coaxing me to slide through that feeling, but I did not know how. I then heard don Genaro's voice alone.

He said that he was going to jump with me. He grabbed me, or pushed me, or embraced me, and plunged with me into the abyss. I had the ultimate sensation of physical anguish. It was as if my stomach was being chewed and devoured. It was a mixture of pain and pleasure of such intensity and duration that all I could do was to yell and yell at the top of my lungs.

When the sensation subsided I saw an inextricable cluster of sparks and dark masses, beams of light and cloudlike formations. I could not tell whether my eyes were open or closed, or where my eyes were, or where my body was for that matter. Then I sensed the same physical anguish, although not as pronounced as the first time, and next I had the impression I had woken up and I found myself standing on the rock with don Juan and don Genaro.

Don Juan said that I had goofed again, that it was useless to leap if the perception of the leap was going to be chaotic. Both of them repeated countless times in my ears that the 'nagual' by itself was of no use, that it had to be tempered by the 'tonal'. They said that I had to leap willingly and be aware of my act.

I hesitated, not so much because I was afraid but because I was reluctant. I felt my vacillation [* vacillation- changing location by moving back and forth.] as if my body were swinging from side to side like a pendulum. Then some strange mood overtook me and I leaped with all my corporealness. I wanted to think as I took the plunge but I could not.

I saw as if through a fog the walls of the narrow gorge and the jutting rocks at the bottom of the ravine. I did not have a sequential perception of my descent. I had instead the sensation that I was actually on the ground at the bottom. I distinguished every feature of the rocks in a short circle around me. I noticed that my view was not unidirectional and stereoscopic from the level of the eyes, but flat and all around me. After a moment I panicked and something pulled me up like a yo-yo.

Don Juan and don Genaro made me perform the leap over and over. After every jump don Juan urged me to be less reticent [* reticent- formal in manner] and unwilling. He said, time and time again, that the sorcerers' secret in using the "nagual" was in our perception; that leaping was simply an exercise in perception, and that it would end only after I had succeeded in perceiving, as a perfect "tonal', what was at the bottom of the ravine.

At one moment I had an inconceivable sensation. I was fully and soberly aware that I was standing on the edge of the rock with don Juan and don Genaro whispering in my ears, and then in the next instant I was looking at the bottom of the ravine.

Everything was perfectly normal. It was almost dark by then, but there was still enough light to make everything absolutely recognizable as in the world of my everyday life. I was watching some bushes when I heard a sudden noise, a rock rolling down. I saw instantly a good size rock tumbling down the wall of the ravine towards me. In a flash I also saw don Genaro throwing it. I had an attack of panic and an instant later I had been pulled back to the site on top of the rock. I looked around. Don Genaro was not there any more.

Don Juan began to laugh and said that don Genaro had left because he could not stand my stench. I then had the embarrassing realization that I was truly a mess. Don Juan had been right in making me take my clothes off. He walked me to a stream nearby and washed me like a horse; scooping water with my hat and throwing it at me while he made hilarious comments about having saved my pants.

## 13. The Bubble of Perception

I spent the day by myself at don Genaro's house. I slept most of the time. Don Juan came back in the late afternoon and we hiked in complete silence to a nearby range of mountains. We stopped at dusk and sat on the edge of a deep gorge until it was almost dark.

Then don Juan led me to another place close by; a monumental cliff with a sheer vertical rock wall. The cliff was unnoticeable from the trail that led to it. Don Juan, however, had shown it to me several times before. He had made me look over the edge and had told me that the whole cliff was a place of power, especially the base of it, which was a canyon several hundred feet down. Every time I had looked into it I had had a discomforting chill. The canyon was always dark and menacing.

Before we reached the place, don Juan said that I had to go on by myself and meet Pablito on the edge of the cliff. He recommended that I should relax and perform the gait of power in order to wash away my nervous tiredness.

Don Juan stepped aside, to the left of the trail, and the darkness simply swallowed him. I wanted to stop and examine where he had gone, but my body did not obey. I began to jog although I was so tired that I could hardly keep on my feet.

When I reached the cliff, I could not see anyone there and I went on jogging in place; breathing deeply. After a while I relaxed a bit. I stood motionless with my back against a rock, and I noticed then the shape of a man a few feet away from me. He was sitting, hiding his head in his arms. I had a moment of intense fright and recoiled, but then I explained to myself that the man must be Pablito, and without any hesitation I advanced towards him. I called Pablito's name out loud. I figured that he must have been uncertain of who I was and had become so scared that he had covered his head not to look. But before I reached him some inexplicable fear took possession of me. My body froze on the spot with my right arm already extended to touch him. The man lifted his head up. It was not Pablito! His eyes were two enormous mirrors, like a tiger's eyes.

My body jumped backwards. My muscles tensed and then released the tension without the slightest influence of my volition; and I performed a backward leap, so fast and so far that under normal conditions I would have plunged into a grandiose speculation about it. As it was, however, my fright was so out of proportion that I had no inclination for pondering, and I would have run out of there had it not been that someone held my arm forcibly. The feeling that someone was holding me by the arm threw me into total panic and I screamed. My outburst, instead of being the shriek I thought it should have been, was a long chilling yell.

I turned to face my assailant. It was Pablito, who was shaking even more than me. My nervousness was at it's peak. I could not talk, my teeth chattered, and ripples went through my back making me jerk involuntarily. I had to breathe through my mouth.

Pablito said, between chatters, that the 'nagual' had been waiting for him; that he had barely gotten out of it's clutches when he bumped into me; and that I had nearly killed him with my yell. I wanted to laugh and made the most weird sounds imaginable.

When I regained my calmness I told Pablito that apparently the same thing had happened to me. The end result in my case had been that my fatigue had vanished. I felt instead an uncontainable surge of strength and well-being. Pablito seemed to be experiencing the same sensations. We began to giggle in a nervous silly way.

I heard the sound of soft and careful steps in the distance. I detected the sound before Pablito. He appeared to react to my stiffening. I had the certainty that someone was approaching the place where we were. We turned in the direction of the sound.

A moment later the silhouettes of don Juan and don Genaro became visible. They were walking calmly and stopped four or five feet away from us. Don Juan was facing me and don Genaro faced Pablito. I wanted to tell don Juan that something had scared me nearly out of my wits, but Pablito squeezed my arm. I knew what he meant. There was something strange about don Juan and don Genaro. As I looked at them my eyes began to get out of focus.

Don Genaro gave a sharp command. I did not understand what he had said, but I 'knew' he had meant that we should not cross our eyes.

"The darkness has settled on the world," don Juan said, looking at the sky.

Don Genaro drew a half-moon on the hard ground. For a moment it seemed to me that he had used some iridescent chalk, but then I realized that he was not holding anything in his hands. I was perceiving the imaginary half-moon that he had drawn with his finger. He made Pablito and me sit on the inner curve of the convex edge, while he and don Juan sat cross-legged on the extreme ends of the half-moon, six or seven feet away from us.

Don Juan spoke first. He said that they were going to show us their allies. He told us that if we would gaze at their left sides, between their hips and their rib bones, we would 'see' something like a rag or a handkerchief hanging from their belts.

Don Genaro added that next to the rags on their belts there were two round buttonlike things, and that we should gaze at their belts until we 'saw' the rags and the buttons.

Before don Genaro had spoken I had already noticed some flat item like a piece of cloth, and one round pebble that hung from each of their belts. Don Juan's allies were darker and more menacing than don Genaro's. My reaction was a mixture of curiosity and fear. My reactions were experienced in my stomach and I was not judging anything in a rational manner.

Don Juan and don Genaro reached for their belts and seemed to unhook the dark pieces of cloth. They took them with their left hands. Don Juan flung his in the air above his head, but don Genaro let his drop to the ground gently.

The pieces of cloth stretched as if the hurling and the dropping had made them spread like perfectly smooth handkerchiefs. They descended slowly, bobbing like kites. The movement of don Juan's ally was the exact replica of what I had perceived him doing when he had whirled around days before.

As the pieces of cloth got closer to the ground, they became solid, round and massive. They first curled as though they had fallen over a door knob, then they expanded. Don Juan's grew into a voluminous shadow. It took the lead and moved towards us, crushing small rocks and hard lumps of dirt. It came within four or five feet of us to the very dip of the half-moon, between don Juan and don Genaro.

At one moment I thought it was going to roll over us and pulverize us. My terror at that instant was like a burning fire. The shadow in front of me was gigantic, perhaps fourteen feet high and six feet across. It moved as if it were feeling it's way around with no eyes. It jerked and wobbled. I knew that it was looking for me.

Pablito at that moment hid his head against my chest. The sensation that his movement produced in me dispelled some of the awesome attention that I had focused on the shadow. The shadow seemed to become disassociated, judging by it's erratic jerks, and then it moved out of sight, merging with the darkness around.

I shook Pablito. He lifted his head and let out a muffled scream. I looked up. A strange man was staring at me. He seemed to have been right behind the shadow, perhaps hiding behind it. He was rather tall and lanky, he had a long face, no hair, and the left side of his head was covered by a rash or an eczema of some sort. His eyes were wild and shiny. His mouth was half open. He wore some strange pajama-like clothing. His pants were too short for him. I could not distinguish whether or not he had shoes on.

He stood looking at us for what seemed to be a long time as if waiting for an opening in order to lurch at us and tear us apart. There was so much intensity in his eyes. It was not hatred or violence but some sort of animal feeling of distrust. I could not stand the tension any longer. I wanted to adapt a fighting position that don Juan had taught me years before and I would have done so had it not been for Pablito, who whispered that the ally could not go over the line that don Genaro had drawn on the ground. I realized then that there was indeed a bright line that seemed to detain whatever was in front of us.

After a moment the man moved away to the left, just like the shadow before. I had the sensation that don Juan and don Genaro had called them both back.

There was a short quiet pause. I could not see don Juan or don Genaro any more. They were no longer sitting on the points of the half-moon. Suddenly I heard the sound of two small pebbles hitting the solid rock floor where we were sitting, and in a flash the area in front of us lit up as if a mellow yellowish light had been turned on.

In front of us there was a ravenous beast, a giant nauseating-looking coyote or wolf. It's whole body was covered with a white secretion like perspiration or saliva. It's hair was raggedy and wet. It's eyes were wild. It growled with a blind fury that sent chills through me. It's jaw shivered and globs of saliva flew all over the place. It pawed the ground like a mad dog trying to get loose from a chain. Then it stood on it's hind legs and moved it's front paws and it's jaws rabidly. All it's fury seemed to be concentrated on breaking some barrier in front of us.

I became aware that my fear of that crazed animal was of a different sort than the fear of the two apparitions I had witnessed before. My dread of that beast was a physical revulsion and horror. I looked on in utter impotence at it's rage. Suddenly it seemed to lose it's wildness and trotted out of sight.

I heard then something else coming towards us, or perhaps I sensed it. All of a sudden the shape of a colossal feline loomed in front of us. I first saw it's eyes in the darkness. They were huge and fixed like two pools of water reflecting light. It snorted and growled softly. It exhaled air and moved back and forth in front of us without taking it's eyes away from us. It did not have the electric glow that the coyote had. I could not distinguish it's features clearly, and yet it's presence was infinitely more ominous than the other beast's. It seemed to be gathering strength. I felt that it was so daring that it would go beyond it's limits.

Pablito must have had a similar feeling, for he whispered that I should duck my head and lie almost flat against the ground. A second later the feline charged. It ran towards us and then it leaped with it's paws extended forward. I closed my eyes and hid my head in my arms against the ground. I felt that the beast had ripped the protective line that don Genaro had drawn around us and was actually on top of us. I felt it's weight pinning me down. The fur on it's belly rubbed against my neck. It seemed that it's forelegs were caught in something. It wriggled to set itself free. I felt it's jerking and prodding and heard it's diabolic puffing and hissing.

I knew then that I was lost. I had a vague sense of a rational choice and I wanted to resign myself calmly to my fate of dying there, but I was afraid of the physical pain of dying under such awful circumstances.

Then some strange force surged from my body. It was as if my body refused to die and pooled all it's strength in one single point, my left arm and hand. I felt an indomitable surge coming through it. Something uncontrollable was taking possession of my body; something that forced me to push the massive malignant weight of that beast off of us. Pablito seemed to have reacted in the same fashion and we both stood up at once. There was so much energy created by both of us that the beast was flung like a rag doll.

The exertion had been supreme. I collapsed on the ground, panting for air. The muscles of my stomach were so tense that I could not breathe. I did not pay any attention to what Pablito was doing.

I finally noticed that don Juan and don Genaro were helping me to sit up. I saw Pablito spread on the ground face down with his arms outstretched. He seemed to have fainted. After they had made me sit up, don Juan and don Genaro helped Pablito. Both of them rubbed his stomach and back. They made him stand up and after a while he could sit up by himself again.

Don Juan and don Genaro sat on the ends of the half-moon, and then they began to move in front of us as if a rail existed between the two points, a rail that they were using to shift their positions back and forth from one side to the other. Their movements made me dizzy.

They finally stopped next to Pablito and began to whisper in his ear. After a moment they stood up, all three of them at once, and walked to the edge of the cliff. Don Genaro lifted Pablito as if he were a child. Pablito's body was stiff like a board. Don Juan held Pablito by the ankles. He whirled him around, seemingly to gain momentum and force, and finally he let go of his legs and hurled his body out over the abyss away from the edge of the cliff.

I saw Pablito's body against the dark western sky. It described circles, just like don Juan's body had done days before. The circles were slow. Pablito seemed to be gaining altitude instead of falling down. Then the circling became accelerated. Pablito's body twirled like a disk for a moment and then it disintegrated. I perceived that it had vanished in thin air.

Don Juan and don Genaro came to my side, squatted by me and proceeded to whisper in my ears. Each said something different, yet I had no trouble in following their commands. It was as if I became 'split' the instant they uttered their first words. I felt that they were doing with me what they had done with Pablito.

Don Genaro made me whirl and then I had the thoroughly conscious sensation of spinning or floating for a moment. Next I was rushing through the air; plummeting down to the ground at a tremendous speed.

I felt, as I was falling, that my clothes were ripping off, then my flesh fell off, and finally only my head remained. I had the very clear sensation that as my body became dismembered I lost my superfluous weight, and thus my falling lost it's momentum and my speed decreased.

My descent was no longer a vertigo. I began to move back and forth like a leaf. Then my head was stripped of it's weight and all that was left of 'me' was a square centimeter, a nugget, a tiny pebblelike residue.

All my feeling was concentrated there. Then the nugget seemed to burst and I was a thousand pieces. I knew, or something somewhere knew, that I was aware of the thousand pieces at once. I was the awareness itself.

Then some part of that awareness began to be stirred. It rose; grew. It became localized, and little by little I regained the sense of boundaries, consciousness, or whatever, and suddenly the 'me' I knew and was familiar with erupted into the most spectacular view of all the imaginable combinations of 'beautiful' scenes. It was as if I were looking at thousands of pictures: of the world, of people, of things.

The scenes then became blurry. I had the sensation that they were being passed in front of my eyes at a greater speed until I could not single out any of them for examination. Finally it was as if I were witnessing the organization of the world rolling past my eyes in an unbroken, endless chain.

I suddenly found myself standing on the cliff with don Juan and don Genaro. They whispered that they had pulled me back, and that I had witnessed the unknown that no one can talk about. They said that they were going to hurl me into it once more, and that I should let the wings of my perception unfold and touch the 'tonal' and the 'nagual' at once without being aware of going back and forth from one to the other.

I again had the sensations of being tossed, spinning, and falling down at a tremendous speed. Then I exploded. I disintegrated. Something in me gave out. It released something I had kept locked up all my life.

I was thoroughly aware then that my secret reservoir had been tapped and that it poured out unrestrainedly. There was no longer the sweet unity I call 'me'. There was nothing and yet that nothing was filled. It was not light or darkness, hot or cold, pleasant or unpleasant. It was not that I moved or floated or was stationary. Neither was I a single unit nor a 'self' as I am accustomed to being.

I was a myriad of selves which were all 'me'; a colony of separate units that had a special allegiance to one another and would join unavoidably to form one single awareness- my human awareness.

It was not that I 'knew' beyond the shadow of a doubt because there was nothing I could have 'known' with, but all my single awarenesses 'knew' that the 'I', the 'me', of my familiar world was a colony; a conglomerate of separate and independent feelings that had an unbending solidarity to one another. The unbending solidarity of my countless awarenesses, and the allegiance that those parts had for one another was my life force.

A way of describing that unified sensation would be to say that those nuggets of awareness were scattered. Each of them was aware of itself and none was more predominant than the other.

Then something would stir them, and they would join and emerge onto an area where all of them had to be pooled in one clump; the 'me' I know.

As the 'me myself' then, I would witness a coherent scene of worldly activity; or a scene that pertained to other worlds and which I thought must have been pure imagination; or a scene that pertained to 'pure thinking'- that is, I had views of intellectual systems, or of ideas strung together as verbalizations.

In some scenes I talked to myself to my heart's content. After every one of those coherent views the 'me' would disintegrate and be nothing once more.

During one of those excursions into a coherent view I found myself on the cliff with don Juan. I instantly realized that I was then the total 'me' I am familiar with. I felt my physicality as real. I was in the world rather than merely viewing it.

Don Juan hugged me like a child. He looked at me. His face was very close. I could see his eyes in the darkness. They were kind. They seemed to hold a question. I knew what it was. The unspeakable was truly unspeakable.

"Well?" he asked softly, as if he would need my reaffirmation.

I was speechless. The words "numb," "bewildered," "confused," and so on were not in any way appropriate descriptions of my feelings at that moment. I was not solid. I knew that don Juan had to grab me and keep me forcibly on the ground, otherwise I would have floated in the air and disappeared. I was not afraid of vanishing. I longed for the 'unknown' where my awareness was not unified.

Don Juan, pushing down on both of my shoulders, walked me slowly to an area around don Genaro's house. He made me lie down and then covered me with soft dirt from a pile that he seemed to have prepared beforehand. He covered me up to my neck. With leaves he made a sort of pillow for my head to rest on, and told me not to move or fall asleep at all. He said that he was going to sit and keep me company until the earth had again consolidated my form.

I felt very comfortable and had a nearly invincible desire to fall asleep, but don Juan would not let me. He demanded that I should talk about anything under the sun except what I had just experienced. I did not know what to talk about at first, then I asked about don Genaro. Don Juan said that don Genaro had taken Pablito, and had buried him somewhere around there and was doing with him what he himself was doing with me.

I had the desire to sustain the conversation but something in me was incomplete. I had an unusual indifference; a tiredness that was more like boredom. Don Juan seemed to know how I felt. He began to talk about Pablito, and about how his fate and my fate were interlocked.

He said that he became Pablito's benefactor at the same time that don Genaro became his teacher, and that power had paired Pablito and me step by step. He made the emphatic remark that the only difference between Pablito and me was that while Pablito's world as a warrior was governed by coercion and fear, mine was governed by affection and freedom.

Don Juan explained that such a difference was due to the intrinsically different personalities of the benefactors. Don Genaro was sweet, affectionate and funny; while he himself was dry, authoritarian and direct. He said that my personality demanded a strong teacher but a tender benefactor, and that Pablito was the opposite. He needed a kind teacher and a stern benefactor.

We talked for a while longer and then it was morning. When the sun appeared over the mountains on the eastern horizon, he helped me to get up from under the dirt.

After I woke up in the early afternoon, don Juan and I sat by the door of don Genaro's house. Don Juan said that don Genaro was still with Pablito, preparing him for the last encounter.

"Tomorrow you and Pablito will go into the unknown," he said. "I must prepare you for it now. You will go into it by yourselves. Last night you two were like yo-yos being pulled back and forth. Tomorrow you will be on your own."

I had then a rush of curiosity, and questions about my experiences of the night before just poured out of me. He was unruffled by my barrage.

"Today I have to accomplish a most crucial maneuver," he said. "I have to trick you for the last time. And you must fall for my tricking."

He laughed and slapped his thighs.

"What Genaro wanted to show you with the first exercise the other night was how sorcerers use the *nagual*," he went on. "There's no way to get to the sorcerers' explanation unless one has willingly used the *nagual*, or rather, unless one has willingly used the *tonal* to make sense out of one's actions in the *nagual*. Another way of making all this clear is to say that the view of the *tonal* must prevail if one is going to use the *nagual* the way sorcerers do."

I told him that I had found a blatant incongruity in what he had just said. On the one hand, he had given me two days before, an incredible recapitulation of his studied acts over a period of years- acts designed to affect my view of the world; and on the other hand, he wanted that same view to prevail.

"One thing has nothing to do with the other," he said. "Order in our perception is the exclusive realm of the *tonal*. Only there can our actions have a sequence. Only there are they like stairways where one can count the steps. There is nothing of that sort in the *nagual*. Therefore, the view of the *tonal* is a tool, and as such it is not only the best tool but the only one we've got.

"Last night your bubble of perception opened and it's wings unfolded. There is nothing else to say about it. It is impossible to explain what happened to you, so I'm not going to attempt to and you shouldn't try to either. It should be enough to say that the wings of your perception were made to touch your totality. Last night you went back and forth from the *nagual* to the *tonal* time and time again. You were hurled in twice so as to leave no possibility for mistakes.

"The second time you experienced the full impact of the journey into the unknown, and your perception unfolded it's wings when something in you realized your true nature. You are a cluster.

"This is the sorcerers' explanation. The *nagual* is the unspeakable. All the possible feelings and beings and selves float in it like barges, peaceful, unaltered, forever. Then the glue of life binds some of them together.

"You yourself found that out last night, and so did Pablito, and so did Genaro the time he journeyed into the unknown, and so did I. When the glue of life binds those feelings together a being is created; a being that loses the sense of it's true nature and becomes blinded by the glare and clamor of the area where beings hover; the *tonal*.

"The *tonal* is where all the unified organization exists. A being pops into the *tonal* once the force of life has bound all the needed feelings together. I said to you once that the *tonal* begins at birth and ends at death.

"I said that because I know that as soon as the force of life leaves the body, all those single awarenesses disintegrate and go back again to where they came from; the *nagual*. What a warrior does in journeying into the unknown is very much like dying, except that his cluster of single feelings do not disintegrate but expand a bit without losing their togetherness. At death, however, they sink deeply and move independently as if they had never been a unit."

I wanted to tell him how completely homogeneous were his statements with my experience. But he did not let me talk.

"There is no way to refer to the unknown," he said. "One can only witness it. The sorcerers' explanation says that each of us has a center from which the *nagual* can be witnessed, the will. Thus, a warrior can venture into the *nagual* and let his cluster arrange and rearrange itself in any way possible.

"I've said to you that the expression of the *nagual* is a personal matter. I meant that it is up to the individual warrior himself to direct the arrangement and rearrangements of that cluster. The human form, or human feeling is the original one. Perhaps it is the sweetest form of them all to us. There are, however, an endless number of alternative forms which the cluster may adopt.

"I've said to you that a sorcerer can adopt any form he wants. That is true. A sorcerer who is in possession of the totality of himself can direct the parts of his cluster to join in any conceivable way. The force of life is what makes all that shuffling possible. Once the force of life is exhausted, there is no way to reassemble that cluster.

"I have called that cluster the bubble of perception. I have also said that it is sealed, closed tightly, and that it never opens until the moment of our death. Yet it could be made to open. Sorcerers have obviously learned that secret, and although not all of them arrive at the totality of themselves, they know about the possibility of it. They know that the bubble opens only when one plunges into the *nagual*. Yesterday I gave you a recapitulation of all the steps that you have followed to arrive at that point."

He scrutinized me as if he were waiting for a comment or a question. What he had said was beyond comment. I understood then that it would have been of no consequence if he had told me everything fourteen years before, or if he would have told it to me at any other point during my apprenticeship. What was important was the fact that I had experienced with my body, or in my body, the premises of his explanation.

"I'm waiting for your usual question," he said, voicing his words slowly.

"What question?" I asked.

"The one your reason is itching to voice."

"Today I relinquish all questions. I really don't have any, don Juan."

"That's not fair," he said, laughing. "There is one particular question that I need you to ask."

He said that if I would shut off my internal dialogue for just an instant, I could discern what the question was. I had a sudden thought- a momentary insight- and I knew what he wanted.

"Where was my body while all that was happening to me, don Juan?" I asked and he broke into a belly laugh.

"This is the last of the sorcerers' tricks," he said. "Let's say that what I'm going to reveal to you is the last bit of the sorcerers' explanation. Up to this point your reason has haphazardly followed my doings. Your reason is willing to admit that the world is not as the description portrays it; that there is much more to it than what meets the eye.

"Your reason is almost willing and ready to admit that your perception went up and down that cliff, or that something in you, or even all of you, leaped to the bottom of the gorge and examined with the eyes of the *tonal* what was there, as if you had descended bodily with a rope and ladder.

"That act of examining the bottom of the gorge was the crown of all these years of training. You did it well. Genaro saw the cubic centimeter of chance when he threw a rock at the you that was at the bottom of the ravine. You saw everything, Genaro and I knew then without a doubt that you were ready to be hurled into the unknown. At that instant you not only saw, but you knew all about the double, the other."

I interrupted and told him that he was giving me undeserving credit for something that was beyond my understanding. His reply was that I needed time to let all those impressions settle down. And that once I had done that, answers would just pour out of me in the same manner that questions had poured out of me in the past.

"The secret of the double is in the bubble of perception, which in your case that night was at the top of the cliff and at the bottom of the gorge at the same time," he said. "The cluster of feelings can be made to assemble instantly anywhere. In other words, one can perceive the here and the there at once."

He urged me to think and remember a sequence of actions which he said were so ordinary that I had almost forgotten them.

I did not know what he was talking about. He coaxed me to try harder.

"Think about your hat," he said. "And think what Genaro did with it."

I had a shocking moment of realization. I had forgotten that don Genaro had actually wanted me to take off my hat because it kept on falling off, blown by the wind. But I did not want to let go of it. I had felt stupid being naked. Wearing a hat, which I ordinarily never do, gave me a sense of strangeness. I was not really myself, in which case being without clothes was not so embarrassing. Don Genaro had then attempted to change hats with me, but his was too small for my head. He made jokes about the size of my head and the proportions of my body, and finally he took my hat off and wrapped my head with an old poncho, like a turban.

I told don Juan that I had forgotten about that sequence, which I was sure had happened in between my so-called leaps. And yet the memory of those 'leaps' stood as a unit which was uninterrupted.

"They certainly were an uninterrupted unit, and so was Genaro's cavorting with your hat," he said. "Those two memories cannot be made to go one after the other because they happened at the same time."

He made the fingers of his left hand move as if they could not fit into the spaces between the fingers of his right hand.

"Those leaps were only the beginning," he went on. "Then came your true excursion into the unknown. Last night you experienced the unspeakable, the *nagual*.

"Your reason cannot fight the physical knowledge that you are a nameless cluster of feelings. Your reason at this point might even admit that there is another center of assemblage, the will, through which it is possible to judge or assess and use the extraordinary effects of the *nagual*. It has finally dawned on your reason that one can reflect the *nagual* through the will, although one can never explain it.

"But then comes your question, 'Where was I when all that was taking place? Where was my body?' The conviction that there is a real you is a result of the fact that you have rallied everything you've got around your reason. At this point your reason admits that the *nagual* is the indescribable, not because the evidence has convinced it, but because it is safe to admit that. Your reason is on safe ground, all the elements of the *tonal* are on it's side."

Don Juan paused and examined me. His smile was kind.

"Let's go to Genaro's place of predilection," he said abruptly.

He stood up and we walked to the rock where we had talked two days before. We sat comfortably on the same spots with our backs against the rock.

"To make reason feel safe is always the task of the teacher," he said. "I've tricked your reason into believing that the *tonal* was accountable and predictable. Genaro and I have labored to give you the impression that only the *nagual* was beyond the scope of explanation. The proof that the tricking was successful is that at this moment it seems to you, that in spite of everything you have gone through, there is still a core that you can claim as your own; your reason.

"That's a mirage. Your precious reason is only a center of assemblage; a mirror that reflects something which is outside of it. Last night you witnessed not only the indescribable *nagual*, but also the indescribable *tonal*.

"The last piece of the sorcerers' explanation says that reason is merely reflecting an outside order, and that reason knows nothing about that outside order. Reason cannot explain the outside order in the same way reason cannot explain the *nagual*.

"Reason can only witness the effects of the *tonal*, but never ever could reason understand the *tonal*, or unravel it.

"The very fact that we are thinking and talking points out an outside order that we follow without ever knowing how we think and talk; and without ever knowing what the outside order is."

I brought up then the idea of Western man's research into the workings of the brain as a possibility of explaining what that order was. He pointed out that all that that research did was to attest that something was happening.

"Sorcerers do the same thing with their will," he said. "They say that through the will they can witness the effects of the *nagual*. I can add now that through reason, no matter what we do with it, or how we do it, we are merely witnessing the effects of the *tonal*. In both cases there is no hope, ever, to understand or to explain what it is that we are witnessing.

"Last night was the first time that you flew on the wings of your perception. You were still very timid. You ventured only on the band of human perception. A sorcerer can use those wings to touch other sensibilities: a crow's for instance, a coyote's, a cricket's, or the order of other worlds in that infinite space."

"Do you mean other planets, don Juan?"

"Certainly. The wings of perception can take us to the most recondite confines of the *nagual* or to inconceivable worlds of the *tonal*."

"Can a sorcerer go to the moon, for instance?"

"Of course he can," he replied. "But he wouldn't be able to bring back a bag of rocks, though."

We laughed and joked about it but his statement had been made in ultimate seriousness.

"We have arrived at the last part of the sorcerers' explanation," he said. "Last night Genaro and I showed you the last two points that make the totality of man; the *nagual* and the *tonal*. I once told you that those two points were outside of oneself and yet they were not. That is the paradox of the luminous beings.

"The *tonal* of every one of us is but a reflection of that indescribable unknown filled with order. The *nagual* of every one of us is but a reflection of that indescribable void that contains everything.

"Now you should sit on Genaro's place of predilection until twilight. By then you should have pounded the sorcerers' explanation into place. As you sit here now, you have nothing except the force of your life that binds that cluster of feelings."

He stood up.

"Tomorrow's task is to plunge into the unknown by yourself while Genaro and I watch you without intervening," he said. "Sit here and turn off your internal dialogue. You may gather the power needed to unfold the wings of your perception and fly to that infinitude."

## 14. The Predilection of Two Warriors

Don Juan woke me up at the crack of dawn. He handed me a carrying gourd filled with water and a bag of dry meat. We walked in silence for a couple of miles to the place where I had left my car two days before.

"This journey is our last journey together," he said in a quiet voice when we arrived at my car.

I felt a strong jolt in my stomach. I knew what he meant.

He leaned against the back fender as I opened the passenger door and he looked at me with a feeling that had never been there before. We got in the car, but before I started the motor, he made some obscure remarks that I also understood to perfection. He said that we had a few minutes to sit in the car and touch again upon some feelings very personal and poignant.

I sat quietly but my spirit was restless. I wanted to say something to him; something that would have essentially soothed me. I searched in vain for the appropriate words; the formula that would have expressed the thing I 'knew' without being told.

Don Juan talked about a little boy that I once knew; and about how my feelings for him would not change with the years or the distance.

Don Juan said that he was certain that every time I thought of that little boy, my spirit jumped joyfully; and that without a trace of selfishness or pettiness, I wished him the best.

He had reminded me of a story that I had once told him about the little boy; a story which he had liked and had found to have a profound meaning. During one of our hikes in the mountains around Los Angeles, the little boy had gotten tired of walking so I had let him ride on my shoulders. A wave of intense happiness engulfed us then and the little boy shouted his thanks to the sun and to the mountains.

"That was his way of saying good-by to you," don Juan said.

I felt the sting of anguish in my throat.

"There are many ways of saying farewell," he said. "The best way is perhaps by holding a particular memory of joyfulness. For instance, if you live like a warrior, the warmth you felt when the little boy rode on your shoulders will be fresh and cutting for as long as you live. That is a warrior's way of saying farewell."

I hurriedly turned on the motor and drove faster than usual on the hard-packed rocky ground until we got onto the unpaved road.

We drove a short distance and then we walked the rest of the way. After about an hour we came to a grove of trees. Don Genaro, Pablito, and Nestor were there waiting for us. I greeted them. All of them appeared to be so happy and vigorous. As I looked at them and at don Juan, I was overcome by a feeling of profound empathy for all of them.

Don Genaro embraced me and patted me affectionately on the back. He told Nestor and Pablito that I had had a fine performance leaping into the bottom of a ravine. With his hand still on my shoulder he addressed them in a loud voice.

"Yes sir," he said, looking at them. "I'm his benefactor and I know that that was quite an achievement. That was the crown of years of living like a warrior."

He turned to me and placed his other hand on my shoulder. His eyes were shiny and peaceful.

"There's nothing I can say to you, Carlitos," he said, voicing his words slowly. "Except that you had an extraordinary amount of excrement in your bowels."

With that he and don Juan howled with laughter until they seemed about to pass out. Pablito and Nestor giggled nervously, not knowing exactly what to do.

When don Juan and don Genaro had quieted down, Pablito said to me that he was unsure of his capability of going into the 'unknown' by himself.

"I really don't have the faintest idea of how to do it," he said. "Genaro says that one needs nothing except impeccability. What do you think?"

I told him that I knew even less than he did. Nestor sighed and seemed truly concerned. He moved his hands and his mouth nervously as if he were on the verge of saying something important and did not know how.

"Genaro says that you two will make it," he finally said.

Don Genaro signaled with his hand that we were leaving. He and don Juan walked together, a few yards ahead of us. We followed the same mountain trail nearly all day. We walked in complete silence and never stopped. All of us had a provision of dry meat and a gourd of water, and it was understood that we would eat as we walked. At a certain point the trail definitely became a road. It curved around the side of a mountain and suddenly the view of a valley opened up in front of us.

It was a breath-taking sight; a long green valley glimmering in sunlight. There were two magnificent rainbows over it and patches of rain all over the surrounding hills.

Don Juan stopped walking and jutted his chin to point out something down in the valley to don Genaro. Don Genaro shook his head. It was not an affirmative or negative gesture; it was more like a jerk of his head. They both stood motionless peering into the valley for a long time.

We left the road there and took what seemed to be a short cut. We began to descend via a more narrow and hazardous path that led to the northern part of the valley.

When we reached the flatland, it was midafternoon. The strong scent of river willows and moist dirt enveloped me. For a moment the rain was like a soft green rumble on the nearby trees to my left: then it was only a quivering in the reeds. I heard the rustling of a stream. I stopped for a moment to listen. I looked at the top of the trees. The high cirrus clouds on the western horizon looked like puffs of cotton scattered in the sky. I stood there watching the clouds long enough for everyone else to get quite a bit ahead of me. I ran after them.

Don Juan and don Genaro stopped and turned around in unison. Their eyes moved and focused on me with such uniformity and precision that they seemed to be one single person. It was a brief stupendous glance that sent chills through my back. Then don Genaro laughed and said that I ran thumping, like a three hundred pound flat-footed Mexican.

"Why a Mexican?" don Juan asked.

"A flat-footed three hundred pound Indian doesn't run," don Genaro said in an explanatory tone.

"Oh," don Juan said as if don Genaro had really explained something.

We crossed the narrow lush green valley and climbed into the mountains to the east. By late afternoon we finally came to a halt on top of a flat barren mesa that overlooked a high valley towards the south. The vegetation had changed drastically. There were round eroded mountains all around. The land in the valley and on the sides of the hills was parceled and cultivated and yet the entire scene gave me the feeling of barrenness.

The sun was already low on the southwest horizon. Don Juan and don Genaro called us to the northern edge of the mesa. From that point the view was sublime. [* sublime- awe inspiring] There were endless valleys and mountains towards the north and a range of high sierras towards the west. The sunlight reflecting on the distant northern mountains made them look orange, like the color of the banks of clouds over the west. The scenery, in spite of it's beauty, was sad and lonely.

Don Juan handed me my writing pad, but I did not feel like taking notes. We sat in a half circle with don Juan and don Genaro at the ends.

"You started on the path of knowledge writing, and you will finish the same way," don Juan said.

All of them urged me to write, as if my writing were essential.

"You're at the very edge, Carlitos," don Genaro said suddenly. "You and Pablito both."

His voice was soft. Without his joking tone, he sounded kind and worried.

"Other warriors journeying into the unknown have stood on this very spot," he went on. "They all wish you two very well."

I felt a ripple around me as if the air had been half solid and something had created a wave that rippled through it.

"All of us here wish you two well," he said.

Nestor embraced Pablito and me and then he sat apart from us.

"We still have some time," don Genaro said, looking at the sky. And then turning to Nestor, he asked, "What should we do in the meantime?"

"We should laugh and enjoy ourselves," Nestor answered briskly.

I told don Juan that I was afraid of what was waiting for me, and that I had most certainly been tricked into all that; I who had not even imagined that situations like the one Pablito and I were living existed. I said that something truly awesome had taken possession of me and little by little had pushed me until I was facing something perhaps worse than death.

"You're complaining," don Juan said dryly. "You're feeling sorry for yourself to the last minute."

They all laughed. He was right. What an invincible urge! And I thought I had vanquished it from my life. I begged all of them to forgive my idiocy.

"Don't apologize," don Juan said to me. "Apologies are nonsense. What really matters is being an impeccable warrior in this unique place of power. This place has harbored the finest warriors. Be as fine as they were."

Then he addressed both Pablito and me.

"You already know that this is the last task in which we will be together," he said. "You will enter into the *nagual* and the *tonal* by the force of your personal power alone. Genaro and I are here only to bid you farewell. Power has determined that Nestor should be a witness. So be it.

"This will also be the last crossroad of yours which Genaro and I will attend. Once you have entered the unknown by yourselves you cannot depend on us to bring you back, so a decision is mandatory. You must decide whether or not to return. We are confident that you two have the strength to return if you choose to do so. The other night you were perfectly capable, in unison or separately, to throw off the ally that otherwise would have crushed you to death. That was a test of your strength.

"I must also add that few warriors survive the encounter with the unknown that you are about to have; not so much because it is hard, but because the *nagual* is enticing beyond any statement, and warriors who are journeying into it find that to return to the *tonal*, or to the world of order and noise and pain, is a most unappealing affair.

"The decision to stay or to return is done by something in us which is neither our reason nor our desire, but our will. So there is no way of knowing the outcome of it beforehand.

"If you choose not to return, you will disappear as if the earth had swallowed you. But if you choose to return to this earth, you must wait like true warriors until your particular tasks are finished. Once they are finished, either in success or defeat, you will have the command over the totality of yourselves."

Don Juan paused for a moment. Don Genaro looked at me and winked.

"Carlitos wants to know what it means to have command over the totality of oneself," he said, and everybody laughed.

He was right. Under other circumstances I would have asked about it. The situation, however, was too solemn for questions.

"It means that the warrior has finally encountered power," don Juan said. "No one can tell what each warrior would do with it. Perhaps you two will roam peacefully and unnoticed on the face of the earth, or perhaps you will turn out to be hateful men, or perhaps notorious, or kind. All that depends on the impeccability and the freedom of your spirit.

"The important thing, however, is your task. That is the bestowal made by a teacher and a benefactor to their apprentices. I pray that you two will succeed in bringing your tasks to a culmination." [* culmination- a final climactic stage]

"Waiting to fulfill that task is a very special waiting," don Genaro said all of a sudden. "And I'm going to tell you the story of a band of warriors who lived in another time on the mountains somewhere in that direction."

He casually pointed to the east, but then, after a moment's hesitation, he seemed to change his mind and stood up and pointed to the distant northern mountains.

"No. They lived in that direction," he said, looking at me and smiling with an air of erudition. [* erudition- profound scholarly knowledge] "Exactly one hundred and thirty-five kilometers from here."

Don Genaro was perhaps imitating me. His mouth and forehead were contracted, his hands were tightly clasped against his chest holding some imaginary object that he may have intended to be a notebook. He maintained a most ridiculous posture. I had once met a German scholar, a Sinologist, [* Sinologist- a student of Chinese history, language and culture] who looked exactly like that. The thought that all along I might have been unconsciously imitating the grimaces of a German Sinologist was utterly funny to me. I laughed by myself. It seemed to be a joke just for me.

Don Genaro sat down again and proceeded with his story.

"Whenever a member of that band of warriors was thought to have committed an act which was against their rules, his fate was put to the decision of all of them. The culprit had to explain his reasons for having done what he did. His comrades had to listen to him; and then they either disbanded because they had found his reasons convincing, or they lined up with their weapons at the very edge of a flat mountain very much like this mountain where we are sitting now, ready to carry out his death sentence because they had found his reasons to be unacceptable. In that case the condemned warrior had to say good-by to his old comrades, and his execution began."

Don Genaro looked at me and Pablito as if waiting for a sign from us. Then he turned to Nestor.

"Perhaps the witness here could tell us what the story has to do with these two," he said to Nestor.

Nestor smiled shyly and seemed to immerse himself deep in thought for a moment.

"The witness has no idea," he said and broke up into a nervous giggle.

Don Genaro asked everyone to stand up and go with him to look over the west edge of the mesa.

There was a mild slope down to the bottom of the land formation, then there was a narrow flat strip of land ending in a crevice that seemed to be a natural channel for the runoff of rain water.

"Right where that ditch is, there was a row of trees on the mountain in the story," he said. "Beyond that point there was a thick forest.

"After saying good-by to his comrades, the condemned warrior was supposed to begin walking down the slope towards the trees. His comrades then cocked their weapons and aimed at him. If no one shot, or if the warrior survived his wounds and reached the edge of the trees, he was free."

We went back to the place where we had been sitting.

"How about now, witness?" he asked Nestor. "Can you tell?"

Nestor was the epitome [* epitome- a typical example] of nervousness. He took off his hat and scratched his head. He then hid his face in his hands.

"How can the poor witness know?" he finally retorted in a challenging tone and laughed with everybody else.

"They say that there were men who pulled through unharmed," don Genaro continued. "Let's say that their personal power affected their comrades. A wave went through them as they were aiming at him and no one dared to use his weapon. Or perhaps they were in awe of his bravery and could not harm him."

Don Genaro looked at me and then at Pablito.

"There was a condition set up for that walk to the edge of the trees," he went on. "The warrior had to walk calmly; unaffected. His steps had to be sure and firm; his eyes looking straight ahead peacefully. He had to go down without stumbling, without turning to look back, and above all without running."

Don Genaro paused; Pablito assented to his words by nodding.

"If you two decide to return to this earth," he said, "you will have to wait like true warriors until your tasks are fulfilled. That waiting is very much like the walk of the warrior in the story. You see, the warrior had run out of human time and so have you. The only difference is in who is aiming at you. Those who were aiming at the warrior were his warrior comrades.

"But what's aiming at you two is the unknown. Your only chance is your impeccability. You must wait without looking back. You must wait without expecting rewards. And you must aim all of your personal power at fulfilling your tasks.

"If you don't act impeccably, if you begin to fret and get impatient and desperate, you'll be cut down mercilessly by the sharpshooters from the unknown.

"If, on the other hand, your impeccability and personal power are such that you are capable of fulfilling your tasks, you will then achieve the promise of power. And what's that promise? you may ask. It is a promise that power makes to men as luminous beings. Each warrior has a different fate, so there is no way of telling what that promise will be for either of you."

The sun was about to set. The light orange color on the distant northern mountains had become darker. The scenery gave me the feeling of a windswept lonely world.

"You have learned that the backbone of a warrior is to be humble and efficient," don Genaro said and his voice made me jump. "You have learned to act without expecting anything in return. Now I tell you that in order to withstand what lies ahead of you beyond this day, you'll need your ultimate forbearance." [* forbearance- a delay in exercising a rightful priveledge]

I experienced a shock in my stomach. Pablito began to shiver quietly.

"A warrior must be always ready," he said. "The fate of all of us here has been to know that we are the prisoners of power. No one knows why us in particular, but what a great fortune!"

Don Genaro stopped talking and lowered his head as if he were exhausted. That had been the first time that I had heard him speak in such terms.

"It is mandatory here that a warrior says good-by to all those present and to all those he leaves behind," don Juan said suddenly. "He must do this in his own words and loudly, so his voice will remain here forever in this place of power."

Don Juan's voice brought forth another dimension to my state of being at that moment. Our conversation in the car became all the more poignant. How right he was when he had said that the serenity of the scenery around us was only a mirage and that the sorcerers' explanation delivered a blow that no one could parry.

I had heard the sorcerers' explanation and I had experienced it's premises. Yet there I was more naked and more helpless than ever in my entire life. Nothing that I had ever done, and nothing that I had ever imagined could even compare to the anguish and the loneliness of that moment.

The sorcerers' explanation had stripped me even of my 'reason'. Don Juan was right again when he said that a warrior could not avoid pain and grief but only the indulging in them. At that moment my sadness was uncontainable. I could not stand to say good-by to those who had shared with me the turns of my fate. I told don Juan and don Genaro that I had made a pact with someone to die together and that my spirit could not bear to leave alone.

"We are all alone, Carlitos," don Genaro said softly. "That's our condition."

I felt in my throat the anguish of my passion for life and for those close to me, I refused to say good-by to them.

"We are alone," don Juan said. "But to die alone is not to die in loneliness."

His voice sounded muffled and dry, like coughing.

Pablito wept quietly. Then he stood up and spoke. It was not a harangue [* harangue- a loud bombastic declamation expressed with strong emotion] or a testimonial. In a clear voice he thanked don Genaro and don Juan for their kindness. He turned to Nestor and thanked him for having given him the opportunity to take care of him. He wiped his eyes with his sleeve.

"What a wonderful thing it was to be in this beautiful world! In this marvelous time!" he exclaimed and sighed.

His mood was overwhelming.

"If I don't return I beg you as an ultimate favor to help those who have shared my fate," he said to don Genaro.

He then turned towards the west in the direction of his home. His lean body convulsed with tears. He ran towards the edge of the mesa with outstretched arms as if he were running to embrace someone. His lips moved, he seemed to be talking in a low voice.

I turned my head away. I did not want to hear what Pablito was saying.

He came back to where we were sitting, slumped down next to me, and lowered his head.

I was incapable of saying a thing. But then an outside force seemed to take over and made me stand up, and I too spoke my thanks and my sadness.

We were quiet again. A north wind hissed softly, blowing in my face. Don Juan looked at me. I had never seen so much kindness in his eyes. He said to me that a warrior said farewell by thanking all those who had had a gesture of kindness or concern for him, and that I had to voice my gratitude not only to them but also to those who had taken care of me and had helped me on my way.

I faced the northwest, towards Los Angeles, and all the sentimentality of my spirit poured out. What a purifying release it was to voice my thanks!

I sat down again. No one looked at me.

"A warrior acknowledges his pain but he doesn't indulge in it," don Juan said. "Thus the mood of a warrior who enters into the unknown is not one of sadness. On the contrary, he's joyful because he feels humbled by his great fortune, confident that his spirit is impeccable, and above all, fully aware of his efficiency. A warrior's joyfulness comes from having accepted his fate, and from having truthfully assessed what lies ahead of him."

There was a long pause. My sadness was paramount. [* paramount- having superior power and influence] I wanted to do something to get out of such oppressiveness.

"Witness, please squeeze your spirit catcher," don Genaro said to Nestor.

I heard the loud, most ludicrous sound of Nestor's contraption.

Pablito nearly got hysterical laughing, and so did don Juan and don Genaro. I noticed a peculiar smell and realized then that Nestor had farted. What was horrendously funny was the expression of ultimate seriousness on his face. He had farted not as a joke but because he did not have his spirit catcher with him. He was being helpful in the best way he could.

All of them laughed with abandon. What facility they had for shifting from sublime situations to utterly ludicrous ones.

Pablito turned to me suddenly. He wanted to know if I was a poet, but before I could answer his question don Genaro made a rhyme.

"Carlitos is really cool; he's got a bit of a poet, a nut and a fool," he said.

They all had another outburst of laughter.

"That's a better mood," don Juan said. "And now, before Genaro and I say good-by to you, you two may say anything you please. It might be the last time you utter a word, ever."

Pablito shook his head negatively, but I had something to say. I wanted to express my admiration, my awe for the exquisite temper of don Juan and don Genaro's warrior spirit. But I became entangled in my words and ended up saying nothing; or even worse yet, I ended up sounding as if I were complaining again.

Don Juan shook his head and smacked his lips in mock disapproval. I laughed involuntarily. It did not matter, however, that I had flubbed my chance to tell them of my admiration. A very intriguing sensation began to take possession of me. I had a sense of exhilaration and joy; an exquisite freedom that made me laugh. I told don Juan and don Genaro that I did not give a fig about the outcome of my encounter with the 'unknown', that I was happy and complete, and that whether I lived or died was of no importance to me at that moment.

Don Juan and don Genaro seemed to enjoy my assertions even more than I did. Don Juan slapped his thigh and laughed. Don Genaro threw his hat on the floor and yelled as if he were riding a wild horse.

"We have enjoyed ourselves and laughed while waiting, just as the witness recommended," don Genaro said all of a sudden. "But it is the natural condition of order that it should always come to an end."

He looked at the sky.

"It's almost time for us to disband like the warriors in the story," he said. "But before we go our separate ways I must tell you two one last thing. I am going to disclose to you a warrior's secret. Perhaps you can call it a warrior's predilection."

He addressed me in particular and said that once I had told him that the life of a warrior was cold and lonely and devoid of feelings. He even added that at that precise moment I was convinced that it was so.

"The life of a warrior cannot possibly be cold and lonely and without feelings," he said, "because it is based on his affection, his devotion, his dedication to his beloved. And who, you may ask, is his beloved? I will show you now."

Don Genaro stood up and walked slowly to a perfectly flat area right in front of us, ten or twelve feet away. He made a strange gesture there. He moved his hands as if he were sweeping dust from his chest and his stomach. Then an odd thing happened. A flash of an almost imperceptible light went through him. It came from the ground and seemed to kindle his entire body. He did a sort of backward pirouette, a backward dive more properly speaking, and landed on his chest and arms. His movement had been executed with such precision and skill that he seemed to be a weightless being, a wormlike creature that had turned on itself. When he was on the ground he performed a series of unearthly movements. He glided just a few inches above the ground, or rolled on it as if he were lying on ball bearings; or he swam on it describing circles and turning with the swiftness and agility of an eel swimming in the ocean.

My eyes began to cross at one moment and then without any transition I was watching a ball of luminosity sliding back and forth on something that appeared to be the floor of an ice-skating rink with a thousand lights shining on it.

The sight was sublime. Then the ball of fire came to rest and stayed motionless. A voice shook me and dispelled my attention. It was don Juan talking. I could not understand at first what he was saying. I looked again at the ball of fire. I could distinguish only don Genaro lying on the ground with his arms and legs spread out.

Don Juan's voice was very clear. It seemed to trigger something in me and I began to write.

"Genaro's love is the world," he said. "He was just now embracing this enormous earth but since he's so little all he can do is swim in it. But the earth knows that Genaro loves it and it bestows on him it's care. That's why Genaro's life is filled to the brim and his state, wherever he'll be, will be plentiful. Genaro roams on the paths of his love and, wherever he is, he is complete."

Don Juan squatted in front of us. He caressed the ground gently.

"This is the predilection of two warriors," he said. "This earth, this world. For a warrior there can be no greater love."

Don Genaro stood up and squatted next to don Juan for a moment while both of them peered fixedly at us, then they sat in unison, cross-legged.

"Only if one loves this earth with unbending passion can one release one's sadness," don Juan said. "A warrior is always joyful because his love is unalterable and his beloved, the earth, embraces him and bestows upon him inconceivable gifts. The sadness belongs only to those who hate the very thing that gives shelter to their beings."

Don Juan again caressed the ground with tenderness.

"This lovely being, which is alive to it's last recesses and understands every feeling, soothed me, it cured me of my pains, and finally when I had fully understood my love for it, it taught me freedom."

He paused. The silence around us was frightening. The wind hissed softly and then I heard the distant barking of a lone dog.

"Listen to that barking," don Juan went on. "That is the way my beloved earth is helping me now to bring this last point to you. That barking is the saddest thing one can hear."

We were quiet for a moment. The barking of that lone dog was so sad and the stillness around us so intense that I experienced a numbing anguish. It made me think of my own life, my sadness, my not knowing where to go, what to do.

"That dog's barking is the nocturnal [* nocturnal- belonging to or active during the night] voice of a man," don Juan said. "It comes from a house in that valley towards the south. A man is shouting through his dog- since they are companion slaves for life- his sadness; his boredom. He's begging his death to come and release him from the dull and dreary chains of his life."

Don Juan's words had caught a most disturbing line in me. I felt he was speaking directly to me.

"That barking, and the loneliness it creates, speaks of the feelings of men," he went on. "Men for whom an entire life was like one Sunday afternoon; an afternoon which was not altogether miserable, but rather hot and dull and uncomfortable. They sweated and fussed a great deal. They didn't know where to go, or what to do. That afternoon left them only with the memory of petty annoyances and tedium, and then suddenly it was over. It was already night."

He recounted a story I had once told him about a seventy-two year old man who complained that his life had been so short that it seemed to him that it was only the day before that he was a boy. The man had said to me, 'I remember the pajamas I used to wear when I was ten years old. It seems that only one day has passed. Where did the time go?'

"The antidote that kills that poison is here," don Juan said, caressing the ground. "The sorcerers' explanation cannot at all liberate the spirit. Look at you two. You have gotten to the sorcerers' explanation, but it doesn't make any difference that you know it. You're more alone than ever, because without an unwavering love for the being that gives you shelter, aloneness is loneliness.

"Only the love for this splendorous being can give freedom to a warrior's spirit; and freedom is joy, efficiency, and abandon in the face of any odds. That is the last lesson. It is always left for the very last moment, for the moment of ultimate solitude when a man faces his death and his aloneness. Only then does it make sense."

Don Juan and don Genaro stood up and stretched their arms and arched their backs, as if sitting had made their bodies stiff. My heart began to pound fast. They made Pablito and me stand up.

"The twilight is the crack between the worlds," don Juan said. "It is the door to the unknown."

He pointed with a sweeping movement of his hand to the mesa where we were standing.

"This is the plateau in front of that door."

He pointed then to the northern edge of the mesa.

"There is the door. Beyond, there is an abyss and beyond that abyss is the unknown."

Don Juan and don Genaro then turned to Pablito and said good-by to him. Pablito's eyes were dilated and fixed; tears were rolling down his cheeks.

I heard don Genaro's voice saying good-by to me, but I did not hear don Juan's.

Don Juan and don Genaro moved towards Pablito and whispered briefly in his ears. Then they came to me. But before they had whispered anything I already had that peculiar feeling of being split.

"We will now be like dust on the road," don Genaro said. "Perhaps it will get in your eyes again, someday."

Don Juan and don Genaro stepped back and seemed to merge with the darkness. Pablito held my forearm and we said good-by to each other. Then a strange urge, a force, made me run with him to the northern edge of the mesa. I felt his arm holding me as we jumped and then I was alone.

### "Tales of Power" - by Carlos Castaneda - The End ###

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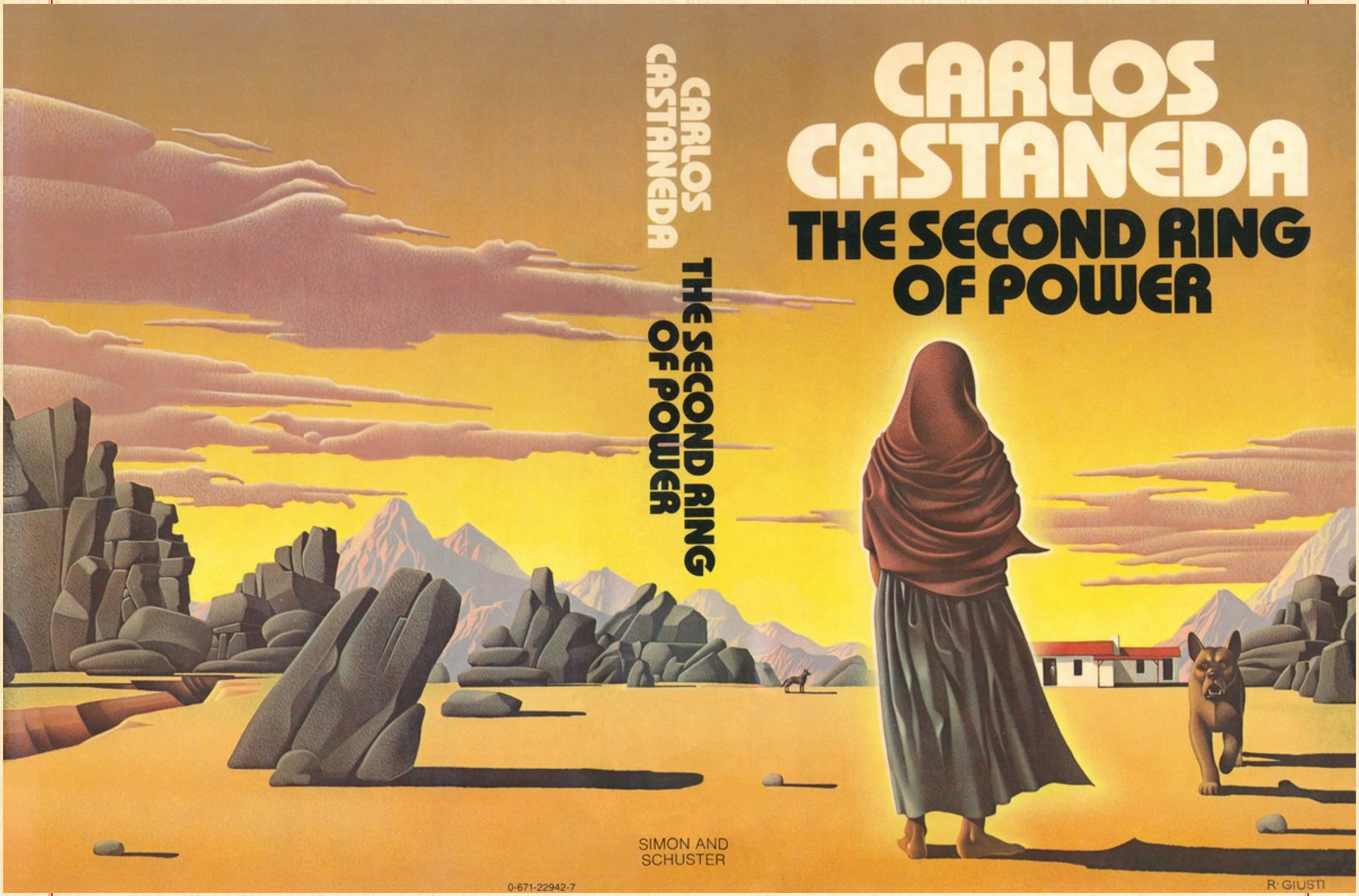
# 05 - THE SECOND RING OF POWER

© 1977 - Carlos Castaneda. Covers the other apprentices of don Juan's group, after their, and Carlos's, final meetings with don Juan Matus.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# Book 5 – THE SECOND RING OF POWER

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# Preface

A flat, barren mountaintop on the western slopes of the Sierra Madre in central Mexico was the setting for my final meeting with don Juan and don Genaro; and their other two apprentices, Pablito and Nestor. The solemnity and the scope of what took place there left no doubt in my mind that our apprenticeships had come to their concluding moment, and that I was indeed seeing don Juan and don Genaro for the last time. Toward the end we all said good-bye to one another, and then Pablito and I jumped together from the top of the mountain into an abyss.

Prior to that jump don Juan had presented a fundamental principle for all that was going to happen to me. According to him, upon jumping into the abyss I was going to become pure perception and move back and forth between the two inherent realms of all creation, the tonal and the *nagual*.

In my jump my perception went through seventeen elastic bounces between the tonal and the nagual. In my moves into the nagual I perceived my body disintegrating. I could not think or feel in the coherent, unifying sense that I ordinarily do, but I somehow thought and felt. In my moves into the tonal I burst into unity. I was whole. My perception had coherence. I had visions of order. Their compelling force was so intense, their vividness so real, and their complexity so vast that I have not been capable of explaining them to my satisfaction. To say that they were visions, vivid dreams or even hallucinations does not say anything to clarify their nature.

After having examined and analyzed in a most thorough and careful manner my feelings, perceptions and interpretations of that jump into the abyss, I had come to the point where I could not rationally believe that it had actually happened. And yet another part of me held on steadfast to the feeling that it did happen; that I did jump.

Don Juan and don Genaro are no longer available, and their absence has created in me a most pressing need; the need to make headway in the midst of apparently insoluble contradictions.

I went back to Mexico to see Pablito and Nestor to seek their help in resolving my conflicts. But what I encountered on my trip cannot be described in any other way except as a final assault on my reason; a concentrated attack designed by don Juan himself. His apprentices, under his absentee direction, in a most methodical and precise fashion demolished in a few days the last bastion of my reason. In those few days they revealed to me one of the two practical aspects of their sorcery; the 'art of dreaming'; which is the core of the present work.

The 'art of stalking' was the other practical aspect of their sorcery, and was also the crowning stone of don Juan's and don Genaro's teachings. It was presented to me during subsequent visits. The art of stalking was by far the most complex facet of their being on the Earth as individuals seeking the 'totality of themselves'.

## 1. The Transformation of Doña Soledad

I had a sudden premonition that Pablito and Nestor were not home. My certainty was so profound that I stopped my car. I was at the place where the asphalt came to an abrupt end, and I wanted to reconsider whether or not to continue that day the long and difficult drive on the steep, coarse gravel road to their hometown in the mountains of central Mexico.

I rolled down the window of my car. It was rather windy and cold. I got out to stretch my legs. The tension of driving for hours had stiffened my back and neck. I walked to the edge of the paved road. The ground was wet from an early shower. Rain was still falling heavily on the slopes of the mountains to the south a short distance from where I was; but right in front of me toward the east, and also toward the north, the sky was clear. At certain points on the winding road I had been able to see the bluish peaks of the sierras shining in the sunlight a great distance away.

After a moment's deliberation, I decided to turn back and go to the city because I had a most peculiar feeling that I was going to find don Juan in the market. After all, I had always done just that; found him in the marketplace.

Since the beginning of my association with him, as a rule, if I did not find him in Sonora, I would drive to central Mexico and go to the market of that particular city; and sooner or later don Juan would show up. The longest I had ever waited for him was two days. I was so habituated to meeting him in that manner, that I had the most absolute certainty that I would find him again as I always had.

I waited in the market all afternoon. I walked up and down the aisles pretending to be looking for something to buy. Then I waited around the park.

At dusk I knew that he was not coming. I had then the clear sensation that he had been there, but had left. I sat down on a park bench where I used to sit with him and tried to analyze my feelings.

Upon arriving in the city I had been elated with the sure knowledge that don Juan was there in the streets. What I felt had been more than the memory of having found him there countless times before. My body had known that he was looking for me.

But then as I sat on the bench, I had another kind of strange certainty. I knew that he was not there anymore. He had left and I had missed him.

After a while I discarded my speculations. I thought that I was beginning to be affected by the place. I was starting to get irrational. That had always happened to me in the past after a few days in that area.

I went to my hotel room to rest for a few hours and then I went out again to roam the streets. I did not have the same expectation of finding don Juan that I had had in the afternoon. I gave up. I went back to my hotel in order to get a good night's sleep.

Before I headed for the mountains in the morning, I drove up and down the main streets in my car; but somehow I knew that I was wasting my time. Don Juan was not there.

It took me all morning to drive to the little town where Pablito and Nestor lived. I arrived around noon. Don Juan had taught me never to drive directly into the town so as not to arouse the curiosity of onlookers. Every time I had been there I had always driven off the road just before reaching the town- onto a flat field where youngsters usually played soccer. The dirt was well packed all the way to a walking trail which was wide enough for a car and which passed by Pablito's and Nestor's houses in the foothills south of town. As soon as I got to the edge of the field I found that the walking trail had been turned into a gravel road.

I deliberated whether to go to Nestor's house or Pablito's. The feeling that they were not there still persisted. I opted to go to Pablito's. I reasoned that Nestor lived alone whereas Pablito lived with his mother and his four sisters. If he was not there, the women could help me find him.

As I got closer to his house, I noticed that the path leading from the road up to the house had been widened. It looked as if the ground was hard, and since there was enough space for my car, I drove almost to the front door.

A new porch with a tile roof had been added to the adobe house. There were no dogs barking, but I saw an enormous one sitting calmly and alertly observing me from behind a fenced area. A flock of chickens that had been feeding in front of the house scattered around cackling. I turned the motor off and stretched my arms over my head. My body was stiff.

The house seemed deserted. The thought crossed my mind that perhaps Pablito and his family had moved away and that someone else was living there. Suddenly the front door opened with a bang and Pablito's mother stepped out as if someone had pushed her. She stared at me absentmindedly for an instant.

As I got out of my car, she seemed to recognize me. A graceful shiver ran through her body and she ran toward me. I thought that she must have been napping and that the noise of the car had woken her; and when she came out to see what was going on she did not know at first who I was.

The incongruous sight of the old woman running toward me made me smile. When she got closer, I had a moment of doubt. Somehow she moved so nimbly that she did not seem like Pablito's mother at all.

"My goodness what a surprise!" she exclaimed.

"Dona Soledad?" I asked, incredulously.

"Don't you recognize me?" she replied, laughing.

I made some stupid comments about her surprising agility.

"Why do you always see me as a helpless old woman?" she asked, looking at me with an air of mock challenge. She bluntly accused me of having nicknamed her "Mrs. Pyramid."

I remembered that I had once said to Nestor that her shape reminded me of a pyramid. She had a very broad and massive behind, and a small pointed head. The long dresses that she usually wore added to the effect.

"Look at me," she said. "Do I still look like a pyramid?"

She was smiling but her eyes made me feel uncomfortable. I attempted to defend myself by making a joke, but she cut me off and coaxed me to admit that I was responsible for the nickname.

I assured her that I had never intended it as such, and that, anyway, at that moment she was so lean that her shape was the furthest thing from a pyramid.

"What's happened to you, dona Soledad?" I asked. "You're transformed."

"You said it," she replied briskly. "I've been transformed!"

I meant it figuratively. However, upon closer examination I had to admit that there was no room for a metaphor. She was truly a changed person. I suddenly had a dry, metallic taste in my mouth. I was afraid.

She placed her fists on her hips and stood with her legs slightly apart facing me. She was wearing a light green gathered skirt and a whitish blouse. Her skirt was shorter than those she used to wear. I could not see her hair. She had it tied with a thick band; a turban-like piece of cloth. She was barefoot and she rhythmically tapped her big feet on the ground as she smiled with the candor of a young girl.

I had never seen anyone exude as much strength as she did. I noticed a strange gleam in her eyes; a disturbing gleam, but not a frightening one. I thought that perhaps I had never really examined her appearance carefully. Among other things, I felt guilty for having glossed over many people during my years with don Juan. The force of his personality had rendered everyone else pale and unimportant.

I told her that I had never imagined that she could have such a stupendous vitality; that my carelessness was to blame for not really knowing her; and that no doubt I would have to meet everyone else all over again.

She came closer to me. She smiled and put her right hand on the back of my left arm; grabbing it gently.

"That's for sure," she whispered in my ear.

Her smile froze and her eyes became glazed. She was so close to me that I felt her breasts rubbing my left shoulder. My discomfort increased as I tried to convince myself that there was no reason for alarm. I repeated to myself over and over that I really had never known Pablito's mother, and that in spite of her odd behavior, she was probably being her normal self.

But some frightened part of me knew that those were only bracing thoughts with no substance at all; because no matter how much I may have glossed over her person, not only did I remember her very well, I had known her very well.

She had represented to me the archetype of a mother. I had thought her to be in her late fifties or even older. Her weak muscles had moved her bulky weight with extreme difficulty. Her hair had a lot of gray in it.

She was, as I remembered her, a sad, somber woman with kind, handsome features; a dedicated, suffering mother; always in the kitchen; always tired. I also remembered her to be a very gentle and unselfish woman, and a very timid one; timid to the point of being thoroughly subservient to anyone who happened to be around.

That was the picture I had had of her; reinforced throughout years of casual contact.

This day something was terribly different. The woman I was confronting did not at all fit the image I had of Pablito's mother, and yet she was the same person; leaner, stronger, and looking twenty years younger than the last time I had seen her. I felt a shiver in my body.

She moved a couple of steps in front of me and faced me.

"Let me look at you," she said. "The Nagual told us that you're a devil."

I remembered then that all of them- Pablito, his mother, his sisters and Nestor- had always seemed unwilling to voice don Juan's name, and called him "the Nagual;" a usage which I myself adopted when talking with them.

She daringly put her hands on my shoulders; something she had never done before. My body tensed. I really did not know what to say. There was a long pause that allowed me to take stock of myself. Her appearance and behavior had frightened me to the point that I had forgotten to ask about Pablito and Nestor.

"Tell me, where is Pablito?" I asked her with a sudden wave of apprehension.

"Oh, he's gone to the mountains," she responded in a noncommittal tone, and moved away from me.

"And where is Nestor?"

She rolled her eyes as if to show her indifference.

"They are together in the mountains," she said in the same tone.

I felt genuinely relieved and told her that I had known without the shadow of a doubt that they were all right.

She glanced at me and smiled. A wave of happiness and ebullience came upon me, and I embraced her. She boldly returned the embrace and held me. That act was so outlandish that it took my breath away. Her body was rigid. I sensed an extraordinary strength in her. My heart began to pound. I gently tried to push her away as I asked her if Nestor was still seeing don Genaro and don Juan. During our farewell meeting don Juan had expressed doubts that Nestor was ready to finish his apprenticeship.

"Genaro has left forever," she said letting go of me.

She fretted nervously with the edge of her blouse.

"How about don Juan?"

"The Nagual is gone too," she said, puckering her lips.

"Where did they go?"

"You mean you don't know?"

I told her that both of them had said good-bye to me two years before, and that all I knew was that they were leaving at that time. I had not really dared to speculate where they had gone. They had never told me their whereabouts in the past and I had come to accept the fact that if they wanted to disappear from my life, all they had to do was to refuse to see me.

"They're not around, that's for sure," she said, frowning, "And they won't be coming back, that's also for sure."

Her voice was extremely unemotional. I began to feel annoyed with her. I wanted to leave.

"But you're here," she said, changing her frown into a smile. "You must wait for Pablito and Nestor. They've been dying to see you."

She held my arm firmly and pulled me away from my car. Compared to the way she had been in the past, her boldness was astounding.

"But first, let me show you my friend," she said, and forcibly led me to the side of the house.

There was a fenced area, like a small corral. A huge male dog was there. The first thing that attracted my attention was his healthy, lustrous, yellowish-brown fur. He did not seem to be a mean dog. He was not chained and the fence was not high enough to hold him. The dog remained impassive, as we got closer to him; not even wagging his tail. Dona Soledad pointed to a good-sized cage in the back. A coyote was curled up inside.

"That's my friend," she said. "The dog is not. He belongs to my girls."

The dog looked at me and yawned. I liked him. I had a nonsensical feeling of kinship with him.

"Come, let's go into the house," she said, pulling me by the arm.

I hesitated. Some part of me was utterly alarmed and wanted to get out of there quickly, and yet another part of me would not have left for the world.

"You're not afraid of me, are you?" she asked in an accusing tone.

"I most certainly am!" I exclaimed.

She giggled, and in a most comforting tone she declared that she was a clumsy, primitive woman who was very awkward with words, and that she hardly knew how to treat people. She looked straight into my eyes and said that don Juan had commissioned her to help me because he worried about me.

"He told us that you're not serious, and go around causing a lot of trouble to innocent people," she said.

Up to that point her assertions had been coherent to me but I could not conceive don Juan saying those things about me.

We went inside the house. I wanted to sit down on the bench where Pablito and I usually sat. She stopped me.

"This is not the place for you and me," she said. "Let's go to my room."

"I'd rather sit here," I said firmly. "I know this spot and I feel comfortable on it."

She clicked her lips in disapproval. She acted like a disappointed child. She contracted her upper lip until it looked like the flat beak of a duck.

"There is something terribly wrong here," I said. "I think I am going to leave if you don't tell me what's going on."

She became very flustered and argued that her trouble was not knowing how to talk to me. I confronted her with her unmistakable transformation and demanded that she tell me what had happened. I had to know how such a change had come about.

"If I tell you, will you stay?" she asked in a child's voice.

"I'll have to."

"In that case I'll tell you everything. But it has to be in my room."

I had a moment of panic. I made a supreme effort to calm myself and we walked into her room. She lived in the back where Pablito had built a bedroom for her.

I had once been in the room while it was being built and also after it was finished; just before she moved in. The room looked as empty as I had seen it before, except that there was a bed in the very center of it and two unobtrusive chests of drawers by the door.

The whitewash of the walls had faded into a very soothing yellowish white. The wood of the ceiling had also weathered. Looking at the smooth, clean walls, I had the impression they were scrubbed daily with a sponge.

The room looked more like a monastic cell; very frugal and ascetic. There were no ornaments of any sort. The windows had thick, removable wood panels reinforced with an iron bar. There were no chairs or anything to sit on.

Dona Soledad took my writing pad away from me, held it to her bosom, and then sat down on her bed which was made up of two thick mattresses with no box springs. She indicated that I should sit down next to her.

"You and I are the same," she said as she handed me my notebook.

"I beg your pardon?"

"You and I are the same," she repeated without looking at me.

I could not figure out what she meant. She stared at me as if waiting for a response.

"Just what is that supposed to mean, dona Soledad?" I asked.

My question seemed to baffle her. Obviously she expected me to know what she meant. She laughed at first, but then, when I insisted that I did not understand, she got angry. She sat up straight and accused me of being dishonest with her. Her eyes flared with rage. Her mouth contracted in a very ugly gesture of wrath that made her look extremely old.

I honestly was at a loss and felt that no matter what I said it would be wrong. She also seemed to be in the same predicament. Her mouth moved to say something but her lips only quivered. At last she muttered that it was not impeccable to act the way I did at such a serious moment. She turned her back to me.

"Look at me, dona Soledad!" I said forcefully. "I'm not mystifying you in any sense. You must know something that I know nothing about."

"You talk too much," she snapped angrily. "The Nagual told me never to let you talk. You twist everything."

She jumped to her feet and stomped on the floor like a spoiled child. I became aware at that moment that the room had a different floor. I remembered it to be a dirt floor made from the dark soil of the area. The new floor was reddish pink.

I momentarily put off a confrontation with her and walked around the room. I could not imagine how I could have missed noticing the floor when I first entered. It was magnificent.

At first I thought that it was red clay that had been laid like cement when it was soft and moist, but then I saw that there were no cracks in it. Clay would have dried, curled up, cracked, and clumps would have formed.

I bent down and gently ran my fingers over it. It was as hard as bricks. The clay had been fired. I became aware then that the floor was made of very large flat slabs of clay put together over a bed of soft clay that served as a matrix. The slabs made a most intricate and fascinating design, but a thoroughly unobtrusive one unless one paid deliberate attention to it.

The skill with which the slabs had been placed in position indicated to me a very well-conceived plan. I wanted to know how such big slabs had been fired without being warped. I turned around to ask dona Soledad, but I quickly desisted. She would not have known what I was talking about. I paced over the floor again. The clay was a bit rough; almost like sandstone. It made a perfect slide-proof surface.

"Did Pablito put down this floor?" I asked.

She did not answer.

"It's a superb piece of work," I said. "You should be very proud of him."

I had no doubt that Pablito had done it. No one else could have had the imagination and the capacity to conceive of it. I figured that he must have made it during the time I had been away. But on second thought I realized that I had never entered dona Soledad's room since it had been built, six or seven years before.

"Pablito! Pablito! Bah!" she exclaimed in an angry, raspy voice. "What makes you think he's the only one who can make things?"

We exchanged a long, sustained look, and all of a sudden I knew that it was she who had made the floor, and that don Juan had put her up to it.

We stood quietly, looking at each other for some time. I felt it would have been thoroughly superfluous to ask if I was correct.

"I made it myself," she finally said in a dry tone. "The Nagual told me how."

Her statements made me feel euphoric. I practically lifted her up in an embrace. I twirled her around. All I could think to do was to bombard her with questions. I wanted to know how she had made the slabs; what the designs represented; where she got the clay. But she did not share my exhilaration. She remained quiet and impassive, and looked at me askance from time to time.

I paced on the floor again. The bed had been placed at the very epicenter of some converging lines. The clay slabs had been cut in sharp angles to create converging motifs that seemed to radiate out from under the bed.

"I have no words to tell you how impressed I am," I said.

"Words! Who needs words?" she said cuttingly.

I had a flash of insight. My reason had been betraying me. There was only one possible way of explaining her magnificent metamorphosis. Don Juan must have made her his apprentice. How else could an old woman like dona Soledad turn into such a weird, powerful being? That should have been obvious to me from the moment I laid eyes on her, but my set of expectations about her had not included that possibility.

I deduced that whatever don Juan had done to her must have taken place during the two years I had not seen her, although two years seemed hardly any time at all for such a superb alteration.

"I think I know now what happened to you," I said in a casual and cheerful tone. "Something has cleared up in my mind right now."

"Oh, is that so?" she said, thoroughly uninterested.

"The Nagual is teaching you to be a sorceress, isn't that true?"

She glared at me defiantly. I felt that I had said the worst possible thing. There was an expression of true contempt on her face. She was not going to tell me anything.

"What a bastard you are!" she exclaimed suddenly, shaking with rage.

I thought that her anger was unjustified. I sat down on one end of the bed while she nervously tapped on the floor with her heel. Then she sat down on the other end without looking at me.

"What exactly do you want me to do?" I asked in a firm and intimidating tone.

"I told you already! " she said in a yell. "You and I are the same."

I asked her to explain her meaning and not to assume for one instant that I knew anything. Those statements angered her even more. She stood up abruptly and dropped her skirt to the ground.

"This is what I mean!" she yelled, caressing her pubic area.

My mouth opened involuntarily. I became aware that I was staring at her like an idiot.

"You and I are one here!" she said.

I was dumbfounded. Dona Soledad, the old Indian woman, mother of my friend Pablito, was actually half-naked a few feet away from me showing me her genitals. I stared at her incapable of formulating any thoughts. The only thing I knew was that her body was not the body of an old woman. She had beautifully muscular thighs, dark and hairless. The bone structure of her hips was broad, but there was no fat on them.

She must have noticed my scrutiny and flung herself on the bed.

"You know what to do," she said, pointing to her pubis. "We are one here."

She uncovered her robust breasts.

"Dona Soledad, I implore you!" I exclaimed. "What's come over you? You're Pablito's mother."

"No, I'm not! " she snapped. "I'm no one's mother."

She sat up and looked at me with fierce eyes.

"I am just like you; a piece of the Nagual," she said. "We're made to mix."

She opened her legs and I jumped away.

"Wait a minute, dona Soledad," I said. "Let's talk for a while."

I had a moment of wild fear, and a sudden crazy thought occurred to me. Would it be possible, I asked myself, that don Juan was hiding somewhere around there laughing his head off?

"Don Juan!" I bellowed.

My yell was so loud and profound that dona Soledad jumped off her bed, and covered herself hurriedly with her skirt. I saw her putting it on as I bellowed again.

"Don Juan!"

I ran through the house bellowing don Juan's name until my throat was sore. Dona Soledad, in the meantime, had run outside the house and was standing by my car looking puzzled at me.

I walked over to her and asked her if don Juan had told her to do all that. She nodded affirmatively. I asked if he was around. She said no.

"Tell me everything," I said.

She told me that she was merely following don Juan's orders. He had commanded her to change her being into a warrior's in order to help me. She declared that she had been waiting for years to fulfill that promise.

"I'm very strong now," she said softly. "Just for you. But you disliked me in my room, didn't you?"

I found myself explaining that I did not dislike her; that what counted were my feelings for Pablito. Then I realized that I did not have the vaguest idea of what I was saying.

Dona Soledad seemed to understand my embarrassing position and said that our mishap had to be forgotten.

"You must be famished," she said vivaciously. "I'll make you some food."

"There's a lot that you haven't explained to me," I said. "I'll be frank with you: I wouldn't stay here for anything in the world. You frighten me."

"You are obligated to accept my hospitality if it is only for a cup of coffee," she said unruffled. "Come, let's forget what happened."

She made a gesture of going into the house. At that moment I heard a deep growl. The dog was standing and looking at us as if he understood what was being said.

Dona Soledad fixed a most frightening gaze on me. Then she softened it and smiled.

"Don't let my eyes bother you," she said. "The truth is that I am old. Lately I've been getting dizzy. I think I need glasses."

She broke into a laugh and clowned by looking through cupped fingers as if they were glasses.

"An old Indian woman with glasses! That'll be a laugh," she said giggling.

I made up my mind then to be rude and get out of there without any explanation; but before I drove away, I wanted to leave some things for Pablito and his sisters.

I opened the trunk of the car to get the gifts I had brought for them. I leaned way into the trunk to reach first the two packages that were lodged against the wall of the back seat behind the spare tire. I got hold of one and was about to grab the other when I felt a soft, furry hand on the nape of my neck.

I shrieked involuntarily and hit my head on the open lid. I turned to look. The pressure of the furry hand did not let me turn completely, but I was able to catch a fleeting glimpse of a silvery arm or paw hovering over my neck. I wriggled in panic and pushed myself away from the trunk, and fell down on my seat with the package still in my hand. My whole body shook. The muscles of my legs contracted, and I found myself leaping up and running away.

"I didn't mean to frighten you," dona Soledad said apologetically as I watched her from ten feet away.

She showed me the palms of her hands in a gesture of surrender; as if assuring me that what I had felt was not her hand.

"What did you do to me?" I asked, trying to sound calm and detached.

She seemed to be either thoroughly embarrassed or baffled. She muttered something and shook her head as though she could not say it, or did not know what I was talking about.

"Come on, dona Soledad," I said, coming closer to her, "don't play tricks on me."

She seemed about to weep. I wanted to comfort her, but some part of me resisted. After a moment's pause I told her what I had felt and seen.

"That's just terrible!" She said in a shrieking voice.

In a very childlike gesture she covered her face with her right forearm. I thought she was crying. I came over to her and tried to put my arm around her shoulders. I could not bring myself to do it.

"Come now, dona Soledad," I said, "let's forget all this and let me give you these packages before I leave."

I stepped in front of her to face her. I could see her black, shining eyes and part of her face behind her arm. She was not crying. She was smiling.

I jumped back. Her smile terrified me. Both of us stood motionless for a long time. She kept her face covered but I could see her eyes watching me.

As I stood there almost paralyzed with fear I felt utterly despondent. I had fallen into a bottomless pit. Dona Soledad was a witch. My body knew it, and yet I could not really believe it. What I wanted to believe was that dona Soledad had gone mad and was being kept in the house instead of an asylum.

I did not dare move or take my eyes away from her. We must have stayed in that position for five or six minutes. She had kept her arm raised and yet motionless. She was standing at the rear of the car almost leaning against the left fender. The lid of the trunk was still open. I thought of making a dash for the right door. The keys were in the ignition.

I relaxed a bit in order to gain the momentum to run. She seemed to notice my change of position immediately. Her arm moved down, revealing her whole face. Her teeth were clenched. Her eyes were fixed on mine. They looked hard and mean. Suddenly she lurched toward me. She stomped with her right foot, like a fencer, and reached out with clawed hands to grab me by my waist as she let out the most chilling shriek.

My body jumped back out of her reach. I ran for the car, but with inconceivable agility she rolled to my feet and made me trip over her. I fell facedown and she grabbed me by the left foot. I contracted my right leg, and I would have kicked her in the face with the sole of my shoe had she not let go of me and rolled back.

I jumped to my feet and tried to open the door of the car. It was locked. I threw myself over the hood to reach the other side but somehow dona Soledad got there before I did. I tried to roll back over the hood, but midway I felt a sharp pain in my right calf. She had grabbed me by the leg.

I could not kick her with my left foot. She had pinned down both of my legs against the hood. She pulled me toward her and I fell on top of her. We wrestled on the ground. Her strength was magnificent and her shrieks were terrifying. I could hardly move under the gigantic pressure of her body. It was not a matter of weight but rather tension, and she had it.

Suddenly I heard a growl, and the enormous dog jumped on her back and shoved her away from me. I stood up. I wanted to get into the car, but the woman and the dog were fighting by the door. The only retreat was to go inside the house. I made it in one or two seconds.

I did not turn to look at them, but rushed inside and closed the door behind me- securing it with the iron bar that was behind it. I ran to the back and did the same with the other door.

From inside I could hear the furious growling of the dog and the woman's inhuman shrieks. Then suddenly the dog's barking and growling turned into whining and howling as if he were in pain, or as if something were frightening him.

I felt a jolt in the pit of my stomach. My ears began to buzz. I realized that I was trapped inside the house. I had a fit of sheer terror. I was revolted at my stupidity in running into the house. The woman's attack had confused me so intensely that I had lost all sense of strategy and I had behaved as if I were running away from an ordinary opponent who could be shut out by simply closing a door. I heard someone come to the door and lean against it trying to force it open. Then there were loud knocks and banging on it.

"Open the door," dona Soledad said in a hard voice. "That goddamned dog has mauled me."

I deliberated whether or not to let her in. What came to my mind was the memory of a confrontation I had had years before with a sorceress, who had, according to don Juan adopted his shape in order to fool me and deliver a deadly blow. Obviously dona Soledad was not as I had known her, but I had reasons to doubt that she was a sorceress.

The time element played a decisive role in my conviction. Pablito, Nestor and I had been involved with don Juan and don Genaro for years, and we were not sorcerers at all. How could dona Soledad be one? No matter how much she had changed, she could not improvise something that would take a lifetime to accomplish.

"Why did you attack me?" I asked, speaking loudly so as to be heard through the thick door.

She answered that the Nagual had told her not to let me go. I asked her why.

She did not answer. Instead she banged on the door furiously and I banged back even harder. We went on hitting the door for a few minutes. She stopped and started begging me to open it. I had a surge of nervous energy. I knew that if I opened the door I might have a chance to flee. I moved the iron bar from the door. She staggered in. Her blouse was torn. The band that held her hair had fallen off and her long hair was all over her face.

"Look what that son of a bitch dog did to me!" she yelled. "Look! Look!"

I took a deep breath. She seemed to be somewhat dazed. She sat down on a bench and began to take off her tattered blouse. I seized that moment to run out of the house and make a dash for the car. With a speed that was born only out of fear, I got inside, shut the door, automatically turned on the motor, and put the car in reverse.

I stepped on the gas and turned my head to look back through the rear window. As I turned I felt a hot breath on my face. I heard a horrendous growl, and saw in a flash the demoniacal eyes of the dog. He was standing on the back seat. I saw his horrible teeth almost in my eyes.

I ducked my head. His teeth grabbed my hair. I must have curled my whole body on the seat, and in doing so I let my foot off the clutch. The jerk of the car made the beast lose his balance. I opened the door and scrambled out. The head of the dog jutted out through the door. I heard his enormous teeth click as his jaws closed tight missing my heels by a few inches. The car began to roll back and I made another dash for the house.

I stopped before I had reached the door.

Dona Soledad was standing there. She had tied her hair up again. She had thrown a shawl over her shoulders. She stared at me for a moment and then began to laugh, very softly at first as if her wounds hurt her, and then loudly. She pointed a finger at me and held her stomach as she convulsed with laughter. She bent over and stretched, seemingly to catch her breath. She was naked above the waist. I could see her breasts, shaking with the convulsions of her laughter.

I felt that all was lost. I looked back toward the car. It had come to a stop after rolling four or five feet. The door had closed again sealing the dog inside. I could see and hear the enormous beast biting the back of the front seat and pawing the windows.

A most peculiar decision faced me at that moment. I did not know who scared me the most, dona Soledad or the dog. After a moment's thought I decided that the dog was just a stupid beast.

I ran back to the car and climbed up on the roof. The noise enraged the dog. I heard him ripping the upholstery. Lying on the roof I managed to open the driver's door. My idea was to open both doors, and then slide from the roof into the car through one of them after the dog had gone out the other one.

I leaned over to open the right door. I had forgotten that it was locked. At that moment the dog's head came out through the opened door. I had an attack of blind panic at the idea that the dog was going to jump out of the car and onto the roof.

In less than a second I had leaped to the ground and found myself standing at the door of the house.

Dona Soledad was bracing herself in the doorway. Laughter came out of her in spurts that seemed almost painful.

The dog had remained inside the car; still frothing with rage. Apparently he was too large and could not squeeze his bulky frame over the front seat. I went to the car and gently closed the door again. I began to look for a stick long enough to release the safety lock on the right-hand door.

I searched in the area in front of the house. There was not a single piece of wood lying around. Dona Soledad, in the meantime, had gone inside. I assessed my situation. I had no other alternative but to ask her help. With great trepidation, I crossed the threshold; looking in every direction in case she might have been hiding behind the door waiting for me.

"Dona Soledad!" I yelled out.

"What the hell do you want?" she yelled back from her room.

"Would you please go out and get your dog out of my car?" I said.

"Are you kidding?" she replied. "That's not my dog. I've told you already. He belongs to my girls."

"Where are your girls?" I asked.

"They are in the mountains," she replied.

She came out of her room and faced me.

"Do you want to see what that goddamned dog did to me?" she asked in a dry tone. "Look!"

She unwrapped her shawl and showed me her naked back.

I found no visible tooth marks on her back. There were only a few long superficial scratches she might have gotten by rubbing against the hard ground. For that matter, she could have scratched herself when she attacked me.

"You have nothing there," I said.

"Come and look in the light," she said and went over by the door.

She insisted that I look carefully for the gashes of the dog's teeth. I felt stupid. I had a heavy sensation around my eyes especially on my brow. I went outside instead. The dog had not moved and began to bark as soon as I came out the door.

I cursed myself. There was no one to blame but me. I had walked into that trap like a fool. I resolved right then to walk to town. But my wallet, my papers, everything I had was in my briefcase on the floor of the car right under the dog's feet. I had an attack of despair. It was useless to walk to town. I did not have enough money in my pockets even to buy a cup of coffee. Besides, I did not know a soul in town. I had no other alternative but to get the dog out of the car.

"What kind of food does that dog eat?" I yelled from the door.

"Why don't you try your leg?" dona Soledad yelled back from her room, and cackled.

I looked for some cooked food in the house. The pots were empty. There was nothing else for me to do but to confront her again. My despair had turned into rage. I stormed into her room ready for a fight to the death. She was lying on her bed, covered with her shawl.

"Please forgive me for having done all those things to you," she said bluntly, looking at the ceiling.

Her boldness stopped my rage.

"You must understand my position," she went on. "I couldn't let you go."

She laughed softly, and in a clear, calm and very pleasing voice she said that she was guilty of being greedy and clumsy; that she had nearly succeeded in scaring me away with her antics; but that the situation had suddenly changed.

She paused, and sat up in her bed; covering her breasts with her shawl; then added that a strange confidence had descended into her body. She looked up at the ceiling and moved her arms in a weird rhythmical flow like a windmill.

"There is no way for you to leave now," she said.

She scrutinized me without laughing. My internal rage had subsided, but my despair was more acute than ever. I honestly knew that in matters of sheer strength I was no match for her or the dog.

She said that our appointment had been set up years in advance, and that neither of us had enough power to hurry it or break it.

"Don't knock yourself out trying to leave," she said. "That's as useless as my trying to keep you here. Something besides your will will release you from here, and something besides my will will keep you here."

Somehow her confidence had not only mellowed her, but had given her a great command over words. Her statements were compelling and crystal clear. Don Juan had always said that I was a trusting soul when it came to words.

As she talked I found myself thinking that she was not really as threatening as I thought. She no longer projected the feeling of having a chip on her shoulder. My reason was almost at ease, but another part of me was not. All the muscles of my body were like tense wires, and yet I had to admit to myself that although she scared me out of my wits, I found her most appealing. She watched me.

"I'll show you how useless it is to try to leave," she said, jumping out of bed. "I'm going to help you. What do you need?"

She observed me with a gleam in her eyes. Her small white teeth gave her smile a devilish touch. Her chubby face was strangely smooth and fairly free of wrinkles. Two deep lines running from the sides of her nose to the corners of her mouth gave her face the appearance of maturity, but not age. In standing up from the bed, she casually let her shawl fall straight down; uncovering her full breasts. She did not bother to cover herself. Instead she swelled up her chest and lifted her breasts.

"Oh, you've noticed, eh?" she said, and rocked her body from side to side as if pleased with herself. "I always keep my hair tied behind my head. The Nagual told me to do so. The pull makes my face younger."

I had been sure that she was going to talk about her breasts. Her shift was a surprise to me.

"I don't mean that the pull on my hair is going to make me look younger," she went on with a charming smile. "The pull on my hair makes me younger."

"How is that possible?" I asked.

She answered me with a question. She wanted to know if I had correctly understood don Juan when he said that anything was possible if one wants it with unbending intent.

I was after a more precise explanation. I wanted to know what else she did besides tying her hair in order to look so young. She said that she lay in her bed and emptied herself of any thoughts and feelings, and then let the lines of her floor pull her wrinkles away. I pressed her for more details: any feelings, sensations, or perceptions that she had experienced while lying on her bed. She insisted that she felt nothing, that she did not know how the lines in her floor worked, and that she only knew not to let her thoughts interfere.

She placed her hands on my chest and shoved me very gently. It seemed to be a gesture to show that she had had enough of my questions. We walked outside through the back door. I told her that I needed a long stick. She went directly to a pile of firewood, but there were no long sticks. I asked her if she could get me a couple of nails in order to join together two pieces of firewood. We looked unsuccessfully all over the house for nails.

As a final resort, I had to dislodge the longest stick I could find in the chicken coop that Pablito had built in the back. The stick, although it was a bit flimsy, seemed suited for my purpose.

Dona Soledad had not smiled or joked during our search. She seemed to be utterly absorbed in her task of helping me. Her concentration was so intense that I had the feeling she was wishing me to succeed.

I walked to my car armed with the long stick and a shorter one from the pile of firewood. Dona Soledad stood by the front door.

I began to tease the dog with the short stick in my right hand and at the same time I tried to release the safety lock with the long one in my other hand. The dog nearly bit my right hand and made me drop the short stick. The rage and power of the enormous beast were so immense that I nearly lost the long one too. The dog was about to bite it in two when dona Soledad came to my aid. Pounding on the back window, she drew the dog's attention and he let go of it.

Encouraged by her distracting maneuver I dove headfirst, slid across the length of the front seat, and managed to release the safety lock. I tried to pull back immediately, but the dog charged toward me with all his might and actually thrust his massive shoulders and front paws over the front seat before I had time to back out.

I felt his paws on my shoulder. I cringed. I knew that he was going to maul me. The dog lowered his head to go in for the kill, but instead of biting me he hit the steering wheel. I hurried out, and in one move climbed over the hood onto the roof. I had goose bumps all over my body.

I opened the right-hand door. I asked dona Soledad to hand me the long stick and with it I pushed the lever to release the backrest from it's straight position. I conceived that if I teased the dog he would ram it forward, allowing himself room to get out of the car. But he did not move. He bit furiously on the stick instead.

At that moment dona Soledad jumped onto the roof and lay next to me. She wanted to help me tease the dog. I told her that she could not stay on the roof because when the dog came out I was going to get in the car and drive away. I thanked her for her help, and said that she should go back in the house.

She shrugged her shoulders, jumped down and went back to the door. I pushed down the release again and with my cap I teased the dog. I snapped it around his eyes in front of his muzzle. The dog's fury was beyond anything I had seen, but he would not leave the seat. Finally his massive jaws jerked the stick out of my grip. I climbed down to retrieve it from underneath the car. Suddenly I heard dona Soledad screaming.

"Watch out! He's getting out! "

I glanced up at the car. The dog was squeezing himself over the seat. He had gotten his hind paws caught in the steering wheel. Except for that, he was almost out.

I dashed to the house and got inside just in time to avoid being run down by that animal. His momentum was so powerful that he rammed against the door.

As she secured the door with it's iron bar dona Soledad said in a cackling voice, "I told you it was useless."

She cleared her throat and turned to look at me.

"Can you tie the dog with a rope?" I asked.

I was sure that she would give me a meaningless answer, but to my amazement she said that we should try everything; even luring the dog into the house and trapping him there.

Her idea appealed to me. I carefully opened the front door. The dog was no longer there. I ventured out a bit more. There was no sight of him. My hope was that the dog had gone back to his corral. I was going to wait another instant before I made a dash for my car, when I heard a deep growl and saw the massive head of the beast inside my car. He had crawled back onto the front seat.

Dona Soledad was right.It was useless to try. A wave of sadness enveloped me. Somehow I knew my end was near. In a fit of sheer desperation I told dona Soledad that I was going to get a knife from the kitchen and kill the dog, or be killed by him; and I would have done that had it not been that there was not a single metal object in the entire house.

"Didn't the Nagual teach you to accept your fate?" dona Soledad asked as she trailed behind me. "That one out there is no ordinary dog. That dog has power. He is a warrior. He will do what he has to do. Even kill you."

I had a moment of uncontrollable frustration and grabbed her by the shoulders and growled. She did not seem surprised or affected by my sudden outburst. She turned her back to me and dropped her shawl to the floor. Her back was very strong and beautiful.

I had an irrepressible urge to hit her, but I ran my hand across her shoulders instead. Her skin was soft and smooth. Her arms and shoulders were muscular without being big. She seemed to have a minimal layer of fat that rounded off her muscles and gave her upper body the appearance of smoothness; and yet when I pushed on any part of it with the tips of my fingers I could feel the hardness of unseen muscles below the smooth surface. I did not want to look at her breasts.

She walked to a roofed open area in back of the house that served as a kitchen. I followed her. She sat down on a bench and calmly washed her feet in a pail. While she was putting on her sandals, I went with great trepidation into a new outhouse that had been built in the back. She was standing by the door when I came out.

"You like to talk," she said casually, leading me into her room. "There is no hurry. Now we can talk forever."

She picked up my writing pad from the top of her chest of drawers where she must have placed it herself, and handed it to me with exaggerated care. Then she pulled up her bedspread and folded it neatly and put it on top of the same chest of drawers.

I noticed then that the two chests were the color of the walls; yellowish white. The bed without the spread was pinkish red; more or less the color of the floor. The bedspread, on the other hand, was dark brown like the wood of the ceiling and the wood panels of the windows.

"Let's talk," she said, sitting comfortably on the bed after taking off her sandals.

She placed her knees against her naked breasts. She looked like a young girl. Her aggressive and commandeering manner had subdued and changed into charm. At that moment she was the antithesis of what she had been earlier. I had to laugh at the way she was urging me to write. She reminded me of don Juan.

"Now we have time," she said. "The wind has changed. Didn't you notice it?"

I had. She said that the new direction of the wind was her own beneficial direction and thus the wind had turned into her helper.

"What do you know about the wind, dona Soledad?" I asked as I calmly sat down on the foot of her bed.

"Only what the Nagual taught me," she said. "Each one of us, women that is, has a peculiar direction; a particular wind. Men don't. I am the north wind. When it blows, I am different. The Nagual said that a warrior can use her particular wind for whatever she wants. I used it to trim my body and remake it. Look at me! I am the north wind. Feel me when I come through the window."

There was a strong wind blowing through the window which was strategically placed to face the north.

"Why do you think men don't have a wind?" I asked.

She thought for a moment and then replied that the Nagual had never mentioned why.

"You wanted to know who made this floor," she said, wrapping her blanket around her shoulders. "I made it myself. It took me four years to put it down. Now this floor is like myself."

As she spoke I noticed that the converging lines in the floor were oriented to originate from the north. The room, however, was not perfectly aligned with the cardinal points. Thus her bed was at odd angles with the walls and so were the lines in the clay slabs.

"Why did you make the floor red, dona Soledad?"

"That's my color. I am red, like red dirt. I got the red clay in the mountains around here. The Nagual told me where to look and he also helped me carry it; and so did everyone else. They all helped me."

"How did you fire the clay?"

"The Nagual made me dig a pit. We filled it with firewood and then stacked up the clay slabs with flat pieces of rock in between them. I closed the pit with a lid of dirt and wire, and set the wood on fire. It burned for days."

"How did you keep the slabs from warping?"

"I didn't. The wind did that, the north wind that blew while the fire was on. The Nagual showed me how to dig the pit so it would face the north and the north wind. He also made me leave four holes for the north wind to blow into the pit. Then he made me leave one hole in the center of the lid to let the smoke out. The wind made the wood burn for days. After the pit was cold again, I opened it, and began to polish and even out the slabs. It took me over a year to make enough slabs to finish my floor."

"How did you figure out the design?"

"The wind taught me that. When I made my floor the Nagual had already taught me not to resist the wind. He had showed me how to give in to my wind and let it guide me. It took him a long time to do that; years and years. I was a very difficult silly old woman at first. He told me that himself and he was right.

"But I learned very fast. Perhaps because I'm old and no longer have anything to lose. In the beginning, what made it even more difficult for me was the fear I had. The mere presence of the Nagual made me stutter and faint. The Nagual had the same effect on everyone else. It was his fate to be so fearsome."

She stopped talking and stared at me.

"The Nagual is not human," she said.

"What makes you say that?"

"The Nagual is a devil from who knows what time."

Her statements chilled me. I felt my heart pounding. She certainly could not have found a better audience. I was intrigued to no end. I begged her to explain what she meant by that.

"His touch changed people," she said. "You know that. He changed your body. In your case, you didn't even know that he was doing that. But he got into your old body. He put something in it. He did the same with me. He left something in me and that something took over. Only a devil can do that.

"Now I am the north wind and I fear nothing, and no one. But before he changed me I was a weak, ugly old woman who would faint at the mere mention of his name. Pablito, of course, was no help to me because he feared the Nagual more than death itself.

"One day the Nagual and Genaro came to the house when I was alone. I heard them by the door like prowling jaguars. I crossed myself. To me they were two demons, but I came out to see what I could do for them.

"They were hungry and I gladly fixed food for them. I had some thick bowls made out of gourd, and I gave each man a bowl of soup. The Nagual didn't seem to appreciate the food. He didn't want to eat food prepared by such a weak woman and pretended to be clumsy and knocked the bowl off the table with a sweep of his arm.

"But the bowl, instead of turning over and spilling all over the floor, slid with the force of the Nagual's blow and fell on my foot without spilling a drop. The bowl actually landed on my foot and stayed there until I bent over and picked it up. I set it up on the table in front of him and told him that even though I was a weak woman and had always feared him, my food had good feelings.

"From that very moment the Nagual changed toward me. The fact that the bowl of soup fell on my foot and didn't spill proved to him that power had pointed me out to him. I didn't know that at the time and I thought that he changed toward me because he felt ashamed of having refused my food.

"I thought nothing of his change. I was still petrified and couldn't even look him in the eye. But he began to take more and more notice of me. He even brought me gifts: a shawl, a dress, a comb and other things. That made me feel terrible. I was ashamed because I thought that he was a man looking for a woman. The Nagual had young girls. What would he want with an old woman like me?

"At first I didn't want to wear or even consider looking at his gifts, but Pablito prevailed on me and I began to wear them. I also began to be even more afraid of him and didn't want to be alone with him. I knew that he was a devilish man. I knew what he had done to his woman."

I felt compelled to interrupt her. I told her that I had never known of a woman in don Juan's life.

"You know who I mean," she said.

"Believe me, dona Soledad, I don't."

"Don't give me that. You know that I'm talking about la Gorda."

The only "la Gorda" I knew of was Pablito's sister; an enormously fat girl nicknamed Gorda; Fatso. I had had the feeling, although no one ever talked about it, that she was not really dona Soledad's daughter. I did not want to press her for any more information. I suddenly remembered that the fat girl had disappeared from the house, and nobody could or dared to tell me what had happened to her.

"One day I was alone in the front of the house," dona Soledad went on. "I was combing my hair in the sun with the comb that the Nagual had given me. I didn't realize that he had arrived and was standing behind me. All of a sudden I felt his hands grabbing me by the chin. I heard him say very softly that I shouldn't move because my neck might break. He twisted my head to the left. Not all the way but a bit. I became very frightened and screamed, and tried to wriggle out of his grip, but he held my head firmly for a long, long time.

"When he let go of my chin, I fainted. I don't remember what happened then. When I woke up I was lying on the ground right here where I'm sitting now. The Nagual was gone. I was so ashamed that I didn't want to see anyone, especially la Gorda. For a long time I even thought that the Nagual had never twisted my neck and that I had had a nightmare."

She stopped. I waited for an explanation of what had happened. She seemed distracted; pensive perhaps.

"What exactly happened, dona Soledad?" I asked, incapable of containing myself. "Did he do something to you?"

"Yes. He twisted my neck in order to change the direction of my eyes," she said and laughed loudly at my look of surprise.

"I mean, did he...?"

"Yes. He changed my direction," she went on, oblivious to my probes. "He did that to you and to all the others."

"That's true. He did that to me. But why do you think he did that?"

"He had to. That is the most important thing to do."

She was referring to a peculiar act that don Juan had deemed absolutely necessary. I had never talked about it with anyone. In fact, I had almost forgotten about it. At the beginning of my apprenticeship, he once built two small fires in the mountains of northern Mexico. They were perhaps twenty feet apart. He made me stand another twenty feet away from them holding my body, especially my head, in a most relaxed and natural position.

He then made me face one fire, and coming from behind me, he twisted my neck to the left, and aligned my eyes, but not my shoulders, with the other fire. He held my head in that position for hours, until the fire was extinguished. The new direction was the southeast, or rather he had aligned the second fire in a southeasterly direction. I had understood the whole affair as one of don Juan's inscrutable peculiarities; one of his nonsensical rites.

"The Nagual said that all of us throughout our lives develop one direction to look," she went on. "That becomes the direction of the eyes of the spirit. Through the years that direction becomes overused, weak and unpleasant; and since we are bound to that particular direction, we become weak and unpleasant ourselves. The day the Nagual twisted my neck, and held it until I fainted out of fear, he gave me a new direction."

"What direction did he give you?"

"Why do you ask that?" she said with unnecessary force. "Do you think that perhaps the Nagual gave me a different direction?"

"I can tell you the direction that he gave me," I said.

"Never mind," she snapped. "He told me that himself."

She seemed agitated. She changed position and lay on her stomach. My back hurt from writing. I asked her if I could sit on her floor and use the bed as a table. She stood up and handed me the folded bedspread to use as a cushion.

"What else did the Nagual do to you?" I asked.

"After changing my direction, the Nagual really began to talk to me about power," she said, lying down again. "He mentioned things in a casual way at first because he didn't know exactly what to do with me. One day he took me for a short walking trip in the sierras. Then another day he took me on a bus to his homeland in the desert. Little by little I became accustomed to going away with him."

"Did he ever give you power plants?"

"He gave me Mescalito once when we were in the desert. But since I was an empty woman Mescalito refused me. I had a horrid encounter with him. It was then that the Nagual knew that he ought to acquaint me with the wind instead. That was, of course, after he got an omen. He had said over and over that day, that although he was a sorcerer that had learned to see, if he didn't get an omen, he had no way of knowing which way to go. He had already waited for days for a certain indication about me. But power didn't want to give it. In desperation, I suppose, he introduced me to his guaje, and I saw Mescalito."

I interrupted her. Her use of the word "guaje," gourd, was confusing to me. Examined in the context of what she was telling me, the word had no meaning. I thought that perhaps she was speaking metaphorically, or that gourd was a euphemism.

"What is a guaje, dona Soledad?"

There was a look of surprise in her eyes. She paused before answering.

"Mescalito is the Nagual's guaje," she finally said.

Her answer was even more confusing. I felt mortified by the fact that she really seemed concerned with making sense to me. When I asked her to explain further, she insisted that I knew everything myself. That was don Juan's favorite stratagem to foil my probes. I said to her that don Juan had told me that Mescalito was a deity, or force contained in the peyote buttons. To say that Mescalito was his gourd made absolutely no sense.

"The Nagual can acquaint you with anything through his gourd," she said after a pause. "That is the key to his power. Anyone can give you peyote, but only a sorcerer, through his gourd, can acquaint you with Mescalito."

She stopped talking and fixed her eyes on me. Her look was ferocious.

"Why do you have to make me repeat what you already know?" she asked in an angry tone.

I was completely taken aback by her sudden shift. A moment before she had been almost sweet.

"Never mind my changes of mood," she said, smiling again. "I'm the north wind. I'm very impatient. All my life I never dared to speak my mind. Now I fear no one. I say what I feel. To meet with me you have to be strong."

She slid closer to me on her stomach.

"Well, the Nagual acquainted me with the Mescalito that came out of his gourd," she went on. "But he couldn't guess what would happen to me. He expected something like your own meeting or Eligio's meeting with Mescalito. In both cases he was at a loss and let his gourd decide what to do next. In both cases his gourd helped him.

"With me it was different. Mescalito told him never to bring me around. The Nagual and I left that place in a great hurry. We went north instead of coming home. We took a bus to go to Mexicali, but we got out in the middle of the desert. It was very late. The sun was setting behind the mountains. The Nagual wanted to cross the road and go south on foot. We were waiting for some speeding cars to go by, when suddenly he tapped my shoulder and pointed toward the road ahead of us.

"I saw a spiral of dust. A gust of wind was raising dust on the side of the road. We watched it move toward us. The Nagual ran across the road and the wind enveloped me. It actually made me spin very gently and then it vanished. That was the omen the Nagual was waiting for.

"From then on we went to the mountains or the desert for the purpose of seeking the wind. The wind didn't like me at first because I was my old self. So the Nagual endeavored to change me. He first made me build this room and this floor. Then he made me wear new clothes and sleep on a mattress instead of a straw mat. He made me wear shoes, and have drawers full of clothes. He forced me to walk hundreds of miles and taught me to be quiet. I learned very fast.

He also made me do strange things for no reason at all.

"One day, while we were in the mountains of his homeland, I listened to the wind for the first time. It came directly to my womb. I was lying on top of a flat rock and the wind twirled around me. I had already seen it that day whirling around the bushes, but this time it came over me and stopped. It felt like a bird that had landed on my stomach. The Nagual had made me take off all my clothes. I was stark naked, but I was not cold because the wind was warming me up."

"Were you afraid, dona Soledad?"

"Afraid? I was petrified. The wind was alive. It licked me from my head to my toes; and then it got inside my whole body. I was like a balloon, and the wind came out of my ears and my mouth and other parts I don't want to mention. I thought I was going to die, and I would've run away had it not been that the Nagual held me to the rock. He spoke to me in my ear and calmed me down. I lay quietly and let the wind do whatever it wanted with me. It was then that it told me what to do."

"What to do with what?"

"With my life, my things, my room, my feelings. It was not clear at first. I thought it was me thinking. The Nagual said that all of us do that. When we are quiet, though, we realize that it is something else telling us things."

"Did you hear a voice?"

"No. The wind moves inside the body of a woman. The Nagual says that that is so because women have wombs. Once it's inside the womb, the wind simply picks you up and tells you to do things. The more quiet and relaxed the woman is, the better the results. You may say that all of a sudden the woman finds herself doing things that she had no idea how to do.

"From that day on the wind came to me all the time. It spoke to me in my womb and told me everything I wanted to know. The Nagual saw from the beginning that I was the north wind. Other winds never spoke to me like that, although I had learned to distinguish them."

"How many kinds of winds are there?"

"There are four winds, like there are four directions. That's, of course, for sorcerers and for whatever sorcerers do. Four is a power number for them. The first wind is the breeze, the morning. It brings hope and brightness. It is the herald of the day. It comes and goes and gets into everything. Sometimes it is mild and unnoticeable. Other times it is nagging and bothersome.

"Another wind is the hard wind, either hot or cold or both. A midday wind. Blasting full of energy but also full of blindness. It breaks through doors and brings down walls. A sorcerer must be terribly strong to tackle the hard wind.

"Then there is the cold wind of the afternoon. Sad and trying. A wind that would never leave you in peace. It will chill you and make you cry. The Nagual said that there is such depth to it, though, that it is more than worthwhile to seek it.

"And at last there is the hot wind. It warms and protects and envelops everything. It is a night wind for sorcerers. It's power goes together with the darkness.

"Those are the four winds. They are also associated with the four directions. The breeze is the east. The cold wind is the west. The hot one is the south. The hard wind is the north.

"The four winds also have personalities. The breeze is gay and sleek and shifty. The cold wind is moody and melancholy and always pensive. The hot wind is happy and abandoned and bouncy. The hard wind is energetic and commandeering and impatient.

"The Nagual told me that the four winds are women. That is why female warriors seek them. Winds and women are alike. That is also the reason why women are better than men. I would say that women learn faster if they cling to their specific wind."

"How can a woman know what her specific wind is?"

"If the woman quiets down and is not talking to herself, her wind will pick her up; just like that."

She made a gesture of grabbing.

"Does she have to lie naked?"

"That helps; especially if she is shy. I was a fat old woman. I had never taken off my clothes in my life. I slept in them and when I took a bath I always had my slip on. For me to show my fat body to the wind was like dying. The Nagual knew that and played it for all it was worth. He knew of the friendship of women and the wind, but he introduced me to Mescalito because he was baffled by me.

"After turning my head that first terrible day, the Nagual found himself with me on his hands. He told me that he had no idea what to do with me. But one thing was for sure, he didn't want a fat old woman snooping around his world. The Nagual said that he felt about me the way he felt about you. Baffled. Both of us shouldn't be here. You're not an Indian and I'm an old cow. We are both useless if you come right down to it. And look at us. Something must have happened.

"A woman, of course, is much more supple than a man. A woman changes very easily with the power of a sorcerer; especially with the power of a sorcerer like the Nagual. A male apprentice, according to the Nagual, is extremely difficult.

"For example, you yourself haven't changed as much as la Gorda, and she started her apprenticeship way after you did. A woman is softer and more gentle, and above all a woman is like a gourd. She receives. But somehow a man commands more power. The Nagual never agreed with that, though. He believed that women are unequaled; tops.

"He also believed that I felt men were better only because I am an empty woman. He must be right. I have been empty for so long that I can't remember what it feels like to be complete. The Nagual said that if I ever become complete, I will change my feelings about it. But if he was right his Gorda would have done as well as Eligio, and as you know, she hasn't."

I could not follow the flow of her narrative because of her unstated assumption that I knew what she was referring to. In this case I had no idea what Eligio or la Gorda had done.

"In what way was la Gorda different from Eligio?" I asked.

She looked at me for a moment as if measuring something in me. Then she sat up with her knees against her chest.

"The Nagual told me everything," she said briskly. "The Nagual had no secrets from me. Eligio was the best. That's why he is not in the world now. He didn't return. In fact he was so good that he didn't have to jump from a precipice when his apprenticeship was over. He was like Genaro. One day while he was working in the field, something came to him and took him away. He knew how to let go."

I felt like asking her if I had really jumped into the abyss. I deliberated for a moment before going ahead with my question. After all, I had come to see Pablito and Nestor to clarify that point. Any information I could get on the topic from anyone involved in don Juan's world was indeed a bonus to me.

She laughed at my question, as I had anticipated.

"You mean you don't know what you yourself did?" she asked.

"It's too farfetched to be real," I said.

"That is the Nagual's world for sure. Not a thing in it is real. He himself told me not to believe anything. But still the male apprentices have to jump; unless they are truly magnificent like Eligio.

"The Nagual took us- me and la Gorda- to that mountain and made us look down to the bottom of it. There he showed us the kind of flying Nagual he was. But only la Gorda could follow him. She also wanted to jump into the abyss. The Nagual told her that that was useless. He said female warriors have to do things more painful and more difficult than that. He also told us that the jump was only for the four of you; and that is what happened. The four of you jumped."

She had said that the four of us had jumped, but I only knew of Pablito and myself having done that. In light of her statements, I figured that don Juan and don Genaro must have followed us. That did not seem odd to me. It was rather pleasing and touching.

"What are you talking about?" she asked after I had voiced my thoughts. "I meant you and the three apprentices of Genaro. You, Pablito and Nestor jumped on the same day."

"Who is the other apprentice of don Genaro? I know only Pablito and Nestor?"

"You mean that you didn't know that Benigno was Genaro's apprentice?"

"No, I didn't."

"He was Genaro's oldest apprentice. He jumped before you did, and he jumped by himself."

Benigno was one of five Indian youths I had once found while roaming in the Sonoran Desert with don Juan. They were in search of power objects. Don Juan told me that all of them were apprentices of sorcery.

I struck up a peculiar friendship with Benigno in the few times I had seen him after that day. He was from southern Mexico. I liked him very much.

For some unknown reason he seemed to delight himself by creating a tantalizing mystery about his personal life. I could never find out who he was or what he did. Every time I talked to him he baffled me with the disarming candor with which he evaded my probes. Once don Juan volunteered some information about Benigno, and said that he was very fortunate in having found a teacher and a benefactor. I took don Juan's statements as a casual remark that meant nothing. Dona Soledad had clarified a ten year old mystery for me.

"Why do you think don Juan never told me anything about Benigno?"

"Who knows? He must've had a reason. The Nagual never did anything thoughtlessly."

I had to prop my aching back against her bed before resuming writing.

"Whatever happened to Benigno?"

"He's doing fine. He's perhaps better off than anyone else. You'll see him. He's with Pablito and Nestor. Right now they're inseparable. Genaro's brand is on them. The same thing happened to the girls. They're inseparable because the Nagual's brand is on them."

I had to interrupt her again and ask her to explain what girls she was talking about.

"My girls," she said.

"Your daughters? I mean Pablito's sisters?"

"They are not Pablito's sisters. They are the Nagual's apprentices."

Her disclosure shocked me. Ever since I had met Pablito, years before, I had been led to believe that the four girls who lived in his house were his sisters. Don Juan himself had told me so. I had a sudden relapse of the feeling of despair I had experienced all afternoon. Dona Soledad was not to be trusted. She was engineering something. I was sure that don Juan could not under any conditions have misled me so grossly.

Dona Soledad examined me with overt curiosity.

"The wind just told me that you don't believe what I'm telling you," she said, and laughed.

"The wind is right," I said dryly.

"The girls that you've seen over the years are the Nagual's. They were his apprentices. Now that the Nagual is gone they are the Nagual himself; but they are also my girls. Mine!"

"You mean that you're not Pablito's mother and they are really your daughters?"

"I mean that they are mine. The Nagual gave them to me for safekeeping. You are always wrong because you rely on words to explain everything. Since I am Pablito's mother and you heard that they were my girls, you figured out that they must be brother and sisters. The girls are my true babies. Pablito, although he's the child that came out of my womb, is my mortal enemy."

My reaction to her statements was a mixture of revulsion and anger. I thought that she was not only an aberrated woman, but a dangerous one. Somehow, part of me had known that since the moment I had arrived.

She watched me for a long time. To avoid looking at her I sat down on the bedspread again.

"The Nagual warned me about your weirdness," she said suddenly, "but I couldn't understand what he meant. Now I know. He told me to be careful and not to anger you because you're violent. I'm sorry I was not as careful as I should've been. He also said that as long as you can write you could go to hell itself and not even feel it. I haven't bothered you about that. Then he told me that you're suspicious because words entangle you. I haven't bothered you there either. I've been talking my head off trying not to entangle you."

There was a silent accusation in her tone. I felt somehow embarrassed at being annoyed with her.

"What you're telling me is very hard to believe," I said. "Either you or don Juan has lied to me terribly."

"Neither of us has lied. You understand only what you want to. The Nagual said that that is a condition of your emptiness.

"The girls are the Nagual's children just like you and Eligio are his children. He made six children; four women and two men. Genaro made three men. There are nine altogether. One of them, Eligio, already made it. So now it is up to the eight of you to try."

"Where did Eligio go?"

"He went to join the Nagual and Genaro."

"And where did the Nagual and Genaro go?"

"You know where they went. You're just kidding me, aren't you?"

"But that's the point, dona Soledad. I'm not kidding you."

"Then I will tell you. I can't deny you anything. The Nagual and Genaro went back to the same place they came from; to the other world. When their time was up, they simply stepped out into the darkness out there; and since they did not want to come back, the darkness of the night swallowed them up"

I felt it was useless to probe her any further. I was ready to change the subject, but she spoke first.

"You caught a glimpse of the other world when you jumped," she went on. "But maybe the jump has confused you. Too bad. There is nothing that anyone can do about it. It is your fate to be a man.

"Women are better than men in that sense. They don't have to jump into an abyss. Women have their own ways. They have their own abyss. Women menstruate. The Nagual told me that that was the door for them. During their period they become something else. I know that that was the time when he taught my girls.

"It was too late for me. I'm too old so I really don't know what that door looks like. But the Nagual insisted that the girls pay attention to everything that happens to them during that time. He would take them during those days into the mountains and stay with them there until they would see the crack between the worlds.

"The Nagual, since he had no qualms or fear about doing anything, pushed them without mercy so they could find out for themselves that there is a crack in women, a crack that they disguise very well. During their period, no matter how well-made the disguise is, it falls away and women are bare. The Nagual pushed my girls until they were half-dead to open that crack. They did it. He made them do it, but it took them years."

"How did they become apprentices?" I asked.

"Lidia was his first apprentice. He found her one morning when he had stopped at a disheveled hut in the mountains. The Nagual told me that there was no one in sight and yet there had been omens calling him to that house since early morning. The breeze had bothered him terribly. He said that he couldn't even open his eyes every time he tried to walk away from that area.

"So when he found the house he knew that something was there. He looked under a pile of straw and twigs, and found a girl. She was very ill. She could hardly talk, but still she told him that she didn't need anyone to help her. She was going to keep on sleeping there and if she didn't wake up anymore no one would lose a thing.

"The Nagual liked her spirit and talked to her in her language. He told her that he was going to cure her, and take care of her until she was strong again. She refused. She was an Indian who had known only hardships and pain. She told the Nagual that she had already taken all the medicine that her parents had given her and nothing helped.

"The more she talked the more the Nagual understood that the omen had pointed her out to him in a most peculiar way. The omen was more like a command.

"The Nagual picked the girl up and put her on his shoulders, like a child, and brought her to Genaro's place. Genaro made medicine for her. She couldn't open her eyes anymore. The lids were stuck together. They were swollen and had a yellowish crud on them. They were festering. The Nagual tended her until she was well. He hired me to look after her and cook her meals. I helped her to get well with my food. She is my first baby. When she was well- and that took nearly a year- the Nagual wanted to return her to her parents, but the girl refused to go and went with him instead.

"A short time after he had found Lidia, while she was still sick and in my care, the Nagual found you. You were brought to him by a man he had never seen before in his life. The Nagual saw that the man's death was hovering above his head, and he found it very odd that the man would point you out to him at such a time. You made the Nagual laugh and right away the Nagual set a test for you. He didn't take you. He told you to come and find him. He has tested you ever since like he has tested no one else. He said that that was your path.

"For three years he had only two apprentices, Lidia and you. Then one day while he was visiting his friend Vicente, a curer from the north. Some people brought in a crazy girl; a girl who did nothing else but cry. The people mistook the Nagual for Vicente, and placed the girl in his hands. The Nagual told me that the girl ran to him and clung to him as if she knew him.

"The Nagual told her parents that they had to leave her with him. They were worried about the cost but the Nagual assured them that it would be free. I suppose that the girl was such a pain in the ass to them that they didn't mind getting rid of her.

"The Nagual brought her to me. That was hell! She was truly crazy. That was Josefina. It took the Nagual years to cure her; but even to this day she's crazier than a bat. She was, of course, crazy about the Nagual, and there was a terrible fight between Lidia and Josefina. They hated each other. But I liked them both.

"But the Nagual, when he saw that they couldn't get along, became very firm with them. As you know the Nagual can't get mad at anyone. So he scared them half to death. One day Lidia got mad and left. She had decided to find herself a young husband. On the road she found a tiny chicken. It had just been hatched and was lost in the middle of the road. Lidia picked it up, and since she was in a deserted area with no houses around, she figured that the chicken belonged to no one.

"She put it inside her blouse, in between her breasts to keep it warm. Lidia told me that she ran and in doing so the little chicken began to move to her side. She tried to bring him back to the front, but she couldn't catch him. The chicken ran very fast around her sides and her back inside her blouse. The chicken's feet tickled her at first, and then they drove her crazy. When she realized that she couldn't get him out, she came back to me screaming out of her mind, and told me to get the darn thing out of her blouse. I undressed her, but that was to no avail. There was no chicken at all, and yet she still felt it's feet on her skin going around and around.

"The Nagual came over then and told her that only when she let go of her old self would the chicken stop running. Lidia was crazy for three days and three nights. The Nagual told me to tie her up. I fed her and cleaned her and gave her water. On the fourth day she became very peaceful and calm. I untied her and she put on her clothes; and when she was dressed again as she had been the day she ran away, the little chicken came out. She took him in her hand and petted and thanked him, and returned him to the place where she had found him. I walked with her part of the way.

"From that time on Lidia never bothered anyone. She accepted her fate. The Nagual is her fate. Without him she would have been dead. So, what was the point of trying to refuse or mold things which can only be accepted?

"Josefina went off next. She was already afraid of what happened to Lidia, but she soon forgot about it. One Sunday afternoon when she was coming back to the house, a dry leaf got stuck in the threads of her shawl. Her shawl was loosely woven. She tried to pick out the small leaf, but she was afraid of ruining her shawl.

"So when she came into the house she immediately tried to loosen it, but there was no way. It was stuck. Josefina, in a fit of anger, clutched the shawl and the leaf, and crumbled it inside her hand. She figured that small pieces would be easier to pick out. I heard a maddening scream and Josefina fell to the ground. I ran to her and found that she couldn't open her hand. The leaf had cut her hand to shreds as if it were pieces of a razor blade.

"Lidia and I helped her and nursed her for seven days. Josefina was more stubborn than anyone else. She nearly died. At the end she managed to open her hand, but only after she had, in her own mind, resolved to drop her old ways.

"She still gets pains in her body from time to time, especially in her hand, due to the ugly disposition that still returns to her. The Nagual told both of them that they shouldn't count on their victory because it's a lifetime struggle that each of us wages against our old selves.

"Lidia and Josefina never fought again. I don't think they like each other, but they certainly get along. I love those two the most. They have been with me all these years. I know that they love me too."

"What about the other two girls? Where do they fit?"

"A year later Elena came. She is la Gorda. She was by far in the worst condition you could imagine. She weighed two hundred and twenty pounds. She was a desperate woman. Pablito had given her shelter in his shop. She did laundry and ironing to support herself.

"The Nagual came one night to get Pablito, and found the fat girl working while a circle of moths flew over her head. He said that the moths had made a perfect circle for him to watch. He saw that the woman was near the end of her life, yet the moths must have had all the confidence in the world in order for them to give him such an omen. The Nagual acted fast and took her with him.

"She did fine for a while, but the bad habits that she had learned were too deep and she couldn't give them up. So one day the Nagual sent for the wind to help her. It was a matter of helping her or finishing her off. The wind began to blow on her until it drove her out of the house. She was alone that day and no one saw what was happening. The wind pushed her over hills and into ravines until she fell into a ditch; a hole in the ground like a grave. The wind kept her there for days. When the Nagual finally found her, she had managed to stop the wind but she was too weak to walk."

"How did the girls manage to stop whatever was acting upon them?"

"Well, in the first place what was acting upon them was the gourd that the Nagual carried tied to his belt."

"And what is in the gourd?"

"The allies that the Nagual carries with him. He said that the ally is funneled through his gourd. Don't ask me any more because I know nothing more about the ally.

"All I can tell you is that the Nagual commands two allies and makes them help him. In the case of my girls the ally backed down when they were ready to change. For them, of course, it was a case of either change or death. But that's the case with all of us, one way or another. And la Gorda changed more than anyone else. She was empty, in fact more empty than I, but she worked her spirit until she became power itself.

"I don't like her. I'm afraid of her. She knows me. She gets inside me and my feelings, and that bothers me. But no one can do anything to her because she never lets her guard down. She doesn't hate me, but she thinks I am an evil woman. She may be right. I think that she knows me too well; and I'm not as impeccable as I want to be

"But the Nagual told me not to worry about my feelings toward her. She is like Eligio. The world no longer touches her."

"What did the Nagual do to her that was so special?"

"He taught her things he never taught anyone else. He never pampered her or anything like that. He trusted her. She knows everything about everybody. The Nagual also told me everything except things about her. Maybe that's why I don't like her. The Nagual told her to be my jailer. Wherever I go I find her. She knows whatever I do. Right now, for instance, I wouldn't be surprised if she shows up."

"Do you think she would?"

"I doubt it. Tonight, the wind is with me."

"What is she supposed to do? Does she have a special task?"

"I've told you enough about her. I'm afraid that if I keep on talking about her, she will notice me from wherever she is and I don't want that to happen."

"Tell me, then, about the others."

"Some years after he found la Gorda, the Nagual found Eligio. He told me that he had gone with you to his homeland. Eligio came to see you because he was curious about you.

"The Nagual didn't notice him. He had known him since he was a kid. But one morning, as the Nagual walked to the house where you were waiting for him, he bumped into Eligio on the road. They walked together for a short distance and then a dried piece of cholla got stuck on the tip of Eligio's left shoe. He tried to kick it loose but it's thorns were like nails. They had gone deep into the sole of the shoe. The Nagual said that Eligio pointed up to the sky with his finger and shook his foot; and the cholla came off like a bullet and went up into the air.

"Eligio thought it was a big joke and laughed; but the Nagual knew that he had power, although Eligio himself didn't even suspect it. That is why, with no trouble at all, he became the perfect, impeccable warrior.

"It was my good fortune that I got to know him. The Nagual thought that both of us were alike in one thing. Once we hook onto something, we don't let go of it. The good fortune of knowing Eligio was a fortune that I shared with no one else; not even with la Gorda. She met Eligio but didn't really get to know him; just like yourself. The Nagual knew from the beginning that Eligio was exceptional and he isolated him. He knew that you and the girls were on one side of the coin, and Eligio was by himself on the other side. The Nagual and Genaro were indeed very fortunate to have found him.

"I first met him when the Nagual brought him over to my house. Eligio didn't get along with my girls. They hated him and feared him too. But he was thoroughly indifferent. The world didn't touch him.

"The Nagual didn't want you, in particular, to have much to do with Eligio. The Nagual said that you are the kind of sorcerer one should stay away from. He said that your touch doesn't soothe, it spoils instead. He told me that your spirit takes prisoners. He was somehow revolted by you, and at the same time he liked you. He said that you were crazier than Josefina when he found you and that you still are."

It was an unsettling feeling to hear someone else telling me what don Juan thought of me. At first I tried to disregard what dona Soledad was saying, but then I felt utterly stupid and out of place trying to protect my ego.

"He bothered with you," she went on, "because he was commanded by power to do so. And he, being the impeccable warrior he was, yielded to his master and gladly did what power told him to do with you."

There was a pause. I was aching to ask her more about don Juan's feelings about me. I asked her to tell me about her other girl instead.

"A month after he found Eligio, the Nagual found Rosa," she said. "Rosa was the last one. Once he found her he knew that his number was complete."

"How did he find her?"

"He had gone to see Benigno in his homeland. He was approaching the house when Rosa came out from the thick bushes on the side of the road, chasing a pig that had gotten loose and was running away. The pig ran too fast for Rosa.

"She bumped into the Nagual and couldn't catch up with the pig. She then turned against the Nagual and began to yell at him. He made a gesture to grab her and she was ready to fight him. She insulted him and dared him to lay a hand on her. The Nagual liked her spirit immediately but there was no omen. The Nagual said that he waited a moment before walking away, and then the pig came running back and stood beside him.

"That was the omen. Rosa put a rope around the pig. The Nagual asked her point-blank if she was happy in her job. She said no. She was a live-in servant. The Nagual asked her if she would go with him and she said that if it was what she thought it was for, the answer was no.

"The Nagual said it was for work, and she wanted to know how much he would pay. He gave her a figure and then she asked what kind of work it was. The Nagual said that it was to work with him in the tobacco fields of Veracruz. She told him then that she had been testing him. If he would have said he wanted her to work as a maid, she would have known that he was a liar because he looked like someone who had never had a home in his life.

"The Nagual was delighted with her and told her that if she wanted to get out of the trap she was in she should come to Benigno's house before noon. He also told her that he would wait no longer than twelve. If she came, she had to be prepared for a difficult life and plenty of work.

She asked him how far was the place of the tobacco fields. The Nagual said three days' ride in a bus.

"Rosa said that if it was that far she would certainly be ready to go as soon as she got the pig back in his pen. And she did just that. She came here and everyone liked her. She was never mean or bothersome. The Nagual didn't have to force her or trick her into anything. She doesn't like me at all, and yet she takes care of me better than anyone else. I trust her, and yet I don't like her at all; and when I leave I will miss her the most. Can you beat that?"

I saw a flicker of sadness in her eyes. I could not sustain my distrust. She wiped her eyes with a casual movement of her hand.

There was a natural break in the conversation at that point. It was getting dark by then and writing was very difficult; besides I had to go to the bathroom. She insisted that I use the outhouse before she did as the Nagual himself would have done.

Afterward, she brought two round tubs the size of a child's bathtub, filled them half-full with warm water, and added some green leaves after mashing them thoroughly with her hands. She told me in an authoritative tone to wash myself in one of the tubs while she did the same in the other. The water had an almost perfumed smell. It caused a ticklish sensation. It felt like a mild menthol on my face and arms.

We went back to her room. She put my writing gear, which I had left on her bed, on top of one of her chests of drawers. The windows were open and there was still light. It must have been close to seven.

Dona Soledad lay on her back. She was smiling at me. I thought that she was the picture of warmth. But at the same time and in spite of her smile, her eyes gave out a feeling of ruthlessness and unbending force.

I asked her how long she had been with don Juan as his woman or apprentice. She made fun of my cautiousness in labeling her. Her answer was seven years. She reminded me then that I had not seen her for five. I had been convinced up to that point that I had seen her two years before. I tried to remember the last time, but I could not.

She told me to lie down next to her. I knelt on the bed by her side. In a very soft voice she asked me if I was afraid. I said no, which was the truth. There in her room, at that moment, I was being confronted by an old response of mine which had manifested itself countless times; a mixture of curiosity and suicidal indifference.

Almost in a whisper she said that she had to be impeccable with me and tell me that our meeting was crucial for both of us. She said that the Nagual had given her direct and detailed orders of what to do. As she talked I could not help laughing at her tremendous effort to sound like don Juan. I listened to her statements and could predict what she would say next.

Suddenly she sat up. Her face was a few inches from mine. I could see her white teeth shining in the semidarkness of the room. She put her arms around me in an embrace and pulled me on top of her.

My mind was very clear, and yet something was leading me deeper and deeper into a sort of morass. I was experiencing myself as something I had no conception of.

Suddenly I knew that I had, somehow, been feeling her feelings all along. She was the strange one. She had mesmerized me with words. She was a cold, old woman. And her designs were not those of youth and vigor, in spite of her vitality and strength.

I knew then that don Juan had not turned her head in the same direction as mine. That thought would have been ridiculous in any other context. Nonetheless, at that moment I took it as a true insight. A feeling of alarm swept through my body. I wanted to get out of her bed, but there seemed to be an extraordinary force around me that kept me fixed; incapable of moving away. I was paralyzed.

She must have felt my realization. All of a sudden, she pulled the band that tied her hair and in one swift movement she wrapped it around my neck. I felt the tension of the band on my skin, but somehow it did not seem real.

Don Juan had always said to me that our great enemy is the fact that we never believe what is happening to us. At the moment dona Soledad was wrapping the cloth like a noose around my throat, I knew what he meant. But even after I had had that intellectual reflection, my body did not react. I remained flaccid, almost indifferent to what seemed to be my death.

I felt the exertion of her arms and shoulders as she tightened the band around my neck. She was choking me with great force and expertise. I began to gasp. Her eyes stared at me with a maddening glare. I knew then that she intended to kill me.

Don Juan had said that when we finally realize what is going on, it is usually too late to turn back. He contended that it is always the intellect that fools us because it receives the message first; but rather than giving it credence and acting on it immediately, it dallies with it instead.

I heard then, or perhaps I felt, a snapping sound at the base of my neck right behind my windpipe. I thought that she had cracked my neck. My ears buzzed and then they tingled. I experienced an exceptional clarity of hearing. I thought that I must be dying.

I loathed my incapacity to do anything to defend myself. I could not even move a muscle to kick her. I was unable to breathe anymore. My body shivered, and suddenly I stood up and was free, out of her deadly grip.

I looked down on the bed. I seemed to be looking down from the ceiling. I saw my body motionless and limp on top of hers. I saw horror in her eyes. I wanted her to let go of the noose. I had a fit of wrath for having been so stupid and hit her smack on the forehead with my fist.

She shrieked and held her head and then passed out, but before she did I caught a fleeting glimpse of a phantasmagoric scene. I saw dona Soledad being hurled out of the bed by the force of my blow. I saw her running toward the wall and huddling up against it like a frightened child.

The next impression I had was of having a terrible difficulty in breathing. My neck hurt. My throat seemed to have dried up so intensely that I could not swallow. It took me a long time to gather enough strength to get up.

I then examined dona Soledad. She was lying unconscious on the bed. She had an enormous red lump on her forehead. I got some water and splashed it on her face, the way don Juan had always done with me.

When she regained consciousness I made her walk, holding her by the armpits. She was soaked in perspiration. I applied towels with cold water on her forehead. She threw up, and I was almost sure she had a brain concussion. She was shivering.

I tried to pile clothes and blankets over her for warmth but she took off all her clothes and turned her body to face the wind. She asked me to leave her alone and said that if the wind changed direction, it would be a sign that she was going to get well. She held my hand in a sort of brief handshake, and told me that it was fate that had pitted us against each other.

"I think one of us was supposed to die tonight," she said.

"Don't be silly. You're not finished yet," I said and really meant it.

Something made me feel confident that she was all right. I went outside, picked up a stick, and walked to my car. The dog growled. He was still curled up on the seat. I told him to get out. He meekly jumped out. There was something different about him. I saw his enormous shape trotting away in the semidarkness. He went to his corral.

I was free. I sat in the car for a moment to deliberate. No, I was not free. Something was pulling me back into the house. I had unfinished business there. I was no longer afraid of dona Soledad.

In fact, an extraordinary indifference had taken possession of me. I felt that she had given me, deliberately or unconsciously, a supremely important lesson. Under the horrendous pressure of her attempt to kill me, I had actually acted upon her from a level that would have been inconceivable under normal circumstances.

I had nearly been strangled. Something in that confounded room of hers had rendered me helpless, and yet I had extricated myself. I could not imagine what had happened. Perhaps it was as don Juan had always maintained; that all of us have an extra potential; something which is there but rarely gets to be used. I had actually hit dona Soledad from a phantom position.

I took my flashlight from the car, went back into the house, lit all the kerosene lanterns I could find and sat down at the table in the front room to write. Working relaxed me.

Toward dawn dona Soledad stumbled out of her room. She could hardly keep her balance. She was completely naked. She became ill, and collapsed by the door. I gave her some water, and tried to cover her with a blanket. She refused it. I became concerned with the possibility of her losing body heat. She muttered that she had to be naked if she expected the wind to cure her.

She made a plaster of mashed leaves, applied it to her forehead, and fixed it in place with her turban. She wrapped a blanket around her body and came to the table where I was writing, and sat down facing me. Her eyes were red. She looked truly sick.

"There is something I must tell you," she said in a weak voice. "The Nagual set me up to wait for you. I had to wait even if it took twenty years. He gave me instructions on how to entice you and steal your power. He knew that sooner or later you had to come to see Pablito and Nestor, so he told me to use that opportunity to bewitch you and take everything you have.

"The Nagual said that if I lived an impeccable life, my power would bring you here when there would be no one else in the house. My power did that. Today you came when everybody was gone. My impeccable life had helped me. All that was left for me to do was to take your power and then kill you."

"But why would you want to do such a horrible thing?"

"Because I need your power for my own journey. The Nagual had to set it up that way. You had to be the one. After all, I really don't know you. You mean nothing to me. So why shouldn't I take something I need so desperately from someone who doesn't count at all? Those were the Nagual's very words."

"Why would the Nagual want to hurt me? You yourself said that he worried about me."

"What I've done to you tonight has nothing to do with what he feels for you or myself. This is only between the two of us. There have been no witnesses to what took place today between the two of us, because both of us are part of the Nagual himself.

"But you in particular have received and kept something of him that I don't have; something that I need desperately; the special power that he gave you. The Nagual said that he had given something to each of his six children.

"I can't reach Eligio. I can't take it from my girls. So that leaves you as my prey.

"I made the power the Nagual gave me grow, and in growing it changed my body. You made your power grow too. I wanted that power from you and for that I had to kill you. The Nagual said that even if you didn't die, you would fall under my spell and become my prisoner for life if I wanted it so. Either way, your power was going to be mine."

"But how could my death benefit you?"

"Not your death but your power. I did it because I need a boost. Without it I will have a hellish time on my journey. I don't have enough guts. That's why I dislike la Gorda. She's young and has plenty of guts. I'm old and have second thoughts and doubts. If you want to know the truth, the real struggle is between Pablito and myself. He is my mortal enemy, not you. The Nagual said that your power could make my journey easier and help me get what I need."

"How on earth can Pablito be your enemy?"

"When the Nagual changed me, he knew what would eventually happen. First of all, he set me up so my eyes would face the north. And although you and my girls are the same, I am the opposite of you people. I go in a different direction. Pablito, Nestor and Benigno are with you. The direction of their eyes is the same as yours. All of you will go together toward Yucatan.

"Pablito is my enemy, not because his eyes were set in the opposite direction, but because he is my son. This is what I had to tell you even though you don't know what I am talking about. I have to enter into the other world where the Nagual is now- where Genaro and Eligio are now- even if I have to destroy Pablito to do that."

"What are you saying, dona Soledad? You're crazy!"

"No, I am not. There is nothing more important for us living beings than to enter into that world. I will tell you that for me that is true. To get to that world, I live the way the Nagual taught me. Without the hope of that world, I am nothing; nothing. I was a fat old cow.

"Now that hope gives me a guide; a direction; and even if I can't take your power, I still have my purpose."

She rested her head on the table using her arms as a pillow. The force of her statements had numbed me. I had not understood what exactly she had meant, but I could almost empathize with her plea- although it was the strangest thing I had yet heard from her that night. Her purpose was a warrior's purpose, in don Juan's style and terminology. I never knew, however, that one had to destroy people in order to fulfill it.

She lifted up her head and looked at me with half-closed eyelids.

"At the beginning everything worked fine for me today," she said. "I was a bit scared when you drove up. I had waited years for that moment. The Nagual told me that you like women. He said you are an easy prey for them, so I played you for a quick finish. I figured that you would go for it.

"The Nagual had taught me how I should grab you at the moment when you are the weakest. I was leading you to that moment with my body. But you became suspicious. I was too clumsy.

"I had taken you to my room, as the Nagual told me to do, so the lines of my floor would entrap you and make you helpless. But you fooled my floor by liking it and by watching it's lines intently. It had no power as long as your eyes were on it's lines. Your body knew what to do. Then you scared my floor, yelling the way you did. Sudden noises like that are deadly; especially the voice of a sorcerer. The power of my floor died out like a flame. I knew it, but you didn't.

"You were about to leave then so I had to stop you. The Nagual had shown me how to use my hand to grab you. I tried to do that, but my power was low. My floor was scared. Your eyes had numbed it's lines. No one else has ever laid eyes on them.

"So I failed in my attempt to grab your neck. You got out of my grip before I had time to squeeze you. I knew then that you were slipping away and I tried one final attack. I used the key the Nagual said would affect you the most; fright. I frightened you with my shrieks and that gave me enough power to subdue you.

"I thought I had you, but my stupid dog got excited. He's stupid and knocked me off of you when I had you almost under my spell. As I see it now, perhaps my dog was not so stupid after all. Maybe he noticed your double, and charged against it; but knocked me over instead."

"You said he wasn't your dog."

"I lied. He was my trump card. The Nagual taught me that I should always have a trump card; an unsuspected trick. Somehow, I knew that I might need my dog. When I took you to see my friend, it was really him. The coyote is my girls' friend.

"I wanted my dog to sniff you. When you ran into the house I had to be rough with him. I pushed him inside your car; making him yell with pain. He's too big and could hardly fit over the seat.

"I told him right then to maul you to shreds. I knew that if you had been badly bitten by my dog, you would have been helpless and I could have finished you off without any trouble. You escaped again, but you couldn't leave the house. I knew then that I had to be patient and wait for the darkness. Then the wind changed direction and I was sure of my success.

"The Nagual had told me that he knew without a doubt that you would like me as a woman. It was a matter of waiting for the right moment. The Nagual said that you would kill yourself once you realized I had stolen your power. But in case I failed to steal it, or in case you didn't kill yourself, or in case I didn't want to keep you alive as my prisoner, I should then use my headband to choke you to death.

"He even showed me the place where I had to throw your carcass: a bottomless pit, a crack in the mountains, not too far from here, where goats always disappear.

"The Nagual never mentioned your awesome side, though. I've told you that one of us was supposed to die tonight. I didn't know it was going to be me. The Nagual gave me the feeling that I would win. How cruel of him not to tell me everything about you."

"Think of me, dona Soledad. I knew even less than you did."

"It's not the same. The Nagual prepared me for years for this. I knew every detail. You were in my bag. The Nagual even showed me the leaves I should always keep fresh and handy to make you numb. I put them in the tub as if they were for fragrance. You didn't notice that I used another kind of leaf for my tub. You fell for everything I had prepared for you. And yet your awesome side won in the end."

"What do you mean my awesome side?"

"The one that hit me and will kill me tonight. Your horrendous double that came out to finish me. I will never forget it, and if I live, which I doubt, I will never be the same."

"Did it look like me?"

"It was you, of course, but not as you look now. I can't really say what it looked like. When I want to think about it I get dizzy."

I told her about my fleeting perception that she had left her body with the impact of my blow. I intended to prod her with the account. It seemed to me that the reason behind the whole event had been to force us to draw from sources that are ordinarily barred to us.

I had positively given her a dreadful blow. I had caused profound damage to her body, and yet I could not have done it myself. I did feel I had hit her with my left fist. The enormous red lump on her forehead attested to that, yet I had no swelling in my knuckles or the slightest pain or discomfort in them. A blow of that magnitude could even have broken my hand.

Upon hearing my description of how I had seen her huddling against the wall, she became thoroughly desperate. I asked her if she had had any inkling of what I had seen; such as a sensation of leaving her body, or a fleeting perception of the room.

"I know now that I am doomed," she said. "Very few survive a touch of the double. If my soul has left already, I won't survive. I'll get weaker and weaker until I die."

Her eyes had a wild glare. She raised herself and seemed to be on the verge of striking me, but she slumped back.

"You've taken my soul," she said. "You must have it in your pouch now. Why did you have to tell me, though?"

I swore to her that I had had no intentions of hurting her; that I had acted in whatever form only in self-defense and therefore I bore no malice toward her.

"If you don't have my soul in your pouch, it's even worse," she said. "It must be roaming aimlessly around. I will never get it back, then."

Dona Soledad seemed to be void of energy. Her voice became weaker. I wanted her to go and lie down. She refused to leave the table.

"The Nagual said that if I failed completely I should then give you his message," she said. "He told me to tell you that he had replaced your body a long time ago. You are himself now."

"What did he mean by that?"

"He's a sorcerer. He entered into your old body and replaced it's luminosity. Now you shine like the Nagual himself. You're not your father's son anymore. You are the Nagual himself."

Dona Soledad stood up. She was groggy. She appeared to want to say something else but had trouble vocalizing. She walked to her room. I helped her to the door. She did not want me to enter. She dropped the blanket that covered her and lay down on her bed.

She asked in a very soft voice if I would go to a hill a short distance away and watch from there to see if the wind was coming. She added in a most casual manner that I should take her dog with me. Somehow her request did not sound right. I said that I would climb up on the roof and look from there. She turned her back to me and said that the least I could do for her was to take her dog to the hill so that he could lure the wind.

I became very irritated with her. Her room in the darkness gave out a most eerie feeling. I went into the kitchen and got two lanterns and brought them back with me. At the sight of the light she screamed hysterically. I let out a yell myself, but for a different reason. When the light hit the room I saw the floor curled up, like a cocoon, around her bed. My perception was so fleeting that the next instant I could have sworn that the shadow of the wire protective masks of the lanterns had created that ghastly scene.

My phantom perception made me furious. I shook her by the shoulders. She wept like a child and promised not to try any more of her tricks. I placed the lanterns on the chest of drawers and she fell asleep instantly.

By midmorning the wind had changed. I felt a strong gust coming through the north window. Around noon dona Soledad came out again. She seemed a bit wobbly. The redness in her eyes had disappeared and the swelling of her forehead had diminished. There was hardly any visible lump.

I felt that it was time for me to leave. I told her that although I had written down the message that she had given me from don Juan, it did not clarify anything.

"You're not your father's son anymore. You are now the Nagual himself," she said.

There was something truly incongruous about me. A few hours before I had been helpless and dona Soledad had actually tried to kill me. But at that moment when she was speaking to me, I had forgotten the horror of that event.

And yet, there was another part of me that could spend days mulling over meaningless confrontations with people concerning my personality or my work. That part seemed to be the real me; the me that I had known all my life.

The me, however, who had gone through a bout with death that night and then forgotten about it was not real. It was me and yet it was not. In the light of such incongruities, don Juan's claims seemed to be less farfetched, but still unacceptable.

Dona Soledad seemed absentminded. She smiled peacefully.

"Oh, they are here!" she said suddenly. "How fortunate for me. My girls are here. Now they'll take care of me."

She seemed to have had a turn for the worse. She looked as strong as ever, but her behavior was more disassociated. My fears mounted. I did not know whether to leave her there or take her to a hospital in the city several hundred miles away.

All of a sudden, she jumped up like a little child and ran out the front door and down the driveway toward the main road. Her dog ran after her. I hurriedly got in my car in order to catch up with her. I had to drive down the path in reverse since there was no space to turn around. As I approached the road, I saw through the back window that dona Soledad was surrounded by four young women.

## 2. The Little Sisters

Dona Soledad seemed to be explaining something to the four women who surrounded her. She moved her arms in dramatic gestures and held her head in her hands. It was obvious she was telling them about me.

I drove up the driveway to where I had been parked before. I intended to wait for them there. I deliberated whether to remain in the car or to sit casually on the left fender. I opted to stand by the car door; ready to jump in and drive away if something like the events of the previous day were going to be repeated.

I was very tired. I had not slept a wink for over twenty-four hours. My plan was to disclose to the young women as much as I could about the incident with dona Soledad so they could take the necessary steps to aid her; and then I would leave. Their presence had brought about a definite change. Everything seemed to be charged with new vigor and energy. I felt the change when I saw dona Soledad surrounded by them.

Dona Soledad's revelation that they were don Juan's apprentices had given them such a tantalizing appeal that I could hardly wait to meet them. I wondered if they were like dona Soledad. She had said that they were like myself and that we were going in the same direction. That could be easily interpreted in a positive sense. I wanted to believe that more than anything else.

Don Juan used to call them "las hermanitas," the little sisters, a most befitting name at least for the two I had met; Lidia and Rosa; two wispy, pixie-like, charming young women. I figured that they must have been in their early twenties when I had first met them, although Pablito and Nestor always refused to talk about their ages.

The other two, Josefina and Elena, were a total mystery to me. I used to hear their names being mentioned from time to time, always in some unfavorable context. I had deduced from passing remarks made by don Juan that they were somehow freakish, one was crazy and the other obese; thus they were kept in isolation.

Once I bumped into Josefina as I walked into the house with don Juan. He introduced me to her, but she covered her face and ran away before I had time to greet her. Another time I caught Elena washing clothes. She was enormous. I thought that she must be suffering from a glandular disorder. I said hello to her but she did not turn around. I never saw her face.

After the buildup that dona Soledad had given them with her disclosure, I felt driven to talk with the mysterious "hermanitas," and at the same time I was almost afraid of them.

I casually looked down the driveway, bracing myself to meet all of them at once. The driveway was deserted. There was no one approaching although only a minute before they had been no more than thirty yards from the house.

I climbed up on the roof of the car to look. There was no one coming, not even the dog. I panicked. I slid down and was about to jump in the car and drive away when I heard someone say, "Hey, look who's here."

I quickly turned around to face two girls who had just stepped out of the house. I deduced that all of them must have run ahead of me and entered the house through the back door. I sighed with relief.

The two young girls came toward me. I had to admit to myself that I had never really noticed them before. They were beautiful, dark and extremely lean, but without being skinny. Their long black hair was braided. They wore plain skirts, blue denim jackets and low-heeled soft-soled brown shoes. They were barelegged and their legs were shapely and muscular. They must have been about five feet three or five feet four inches. They seemed to be very physical. They moved with great prowess. One of them was Lidia. The other was Rosa.

I greeted them, and then in unison they initiated a hand-shake. They flanked me. They looked healthy and vigorous. I asked them to help me get the packages out of the trunk. As we were carrying them into the house, I heard a deep growl so deep and near that it seemed more like a lion's roar.

"What was that?" I asked Lidia.

"Don't you know?" she asked with a tone of disbelief.

"It must be the dog," Rosa said as they ran into the house, practically dragging me with them.

We placed the packages on the table and sat on two benches. Both girls were facing me. I told them that dona Soledad was very ill and that I was about to take her to the hospital in the city since I did not know what else to do to help her.

As I spoke I realized that I was treading on dangerous ground. I had no way of assessing how much information I should divulge to them about the true nature of my bout with dona Soledad. I began to look for clues. I thought that if I watched carefully, their voices or the expression on their faces would betray how much they knew.

But they remained silent and let me do all the talking. I began to doubt that I should volunteer any information at all. In my effort to figure out what to do and not blunder, I ended up talking nonsense. Lidia cut me off. In a dry tone she said that I should not concern myself with dona Soledad's health because they had already taken steps to help her. That statement forced me to ask her if she knew what dona Soledad's trouble was.

"You've taken her soul," she said accusingly.

My first reaction was to defend myself. I began to talk vehemently but ended up contradicting myself. They stared at me. I was making no sense at all. I tried again to say the same thing in a different way. My fatigue was so intense that I could hardly organize my thoughts. Finally I gave up.

"Where are Pablito and Nestor?" I asked after a long pause.

"They'll be here shortly," Lidia said briskly.

"Were you with them?" I asked.

"No! " she exclaimed, and stared at me.

"We never go together," Rosa explained. "Those bums are different from us."

Lidia made an imperative gesture with her foot to shut her up. She seemed to be the one who gave the orders. Catching the movement of her feet brought to my awareness a most peculiar facet of my relationship with don Juan.

In the countless times that we had roamed together, he had succeeded in teaching me, without really trying, a system of covert communication through some coded movements of the feet. I watched Lidia give Rosa the sign for horrible, a sign given when anything that happens to be in sight of the signers is unpleasant or dangerous. In this case me. I laughed. I remembered that don Juan had given me that sign when I first met don Genaro.

I pretended not to be aware of what was going on in order to find out if I could decode all their signs.

Rosa made the sign that she wanted to step on me. Lidia answered with an imperative sign for no.

According to don Juan, Lidia was very talented. As far as he was concerned she was more sensitive and alert than Pablito and Nestor and myself. I had always been incapable of making friends with her. She was aloof, and very cutting. She had enormous, black, shifty eyes that never looked straight at anyone, high cheekbones and a chiseled nose, which was a bit flat and broad at the bridge. I remembered her having red, sore eyelids and everyone taunting her on account of that. The redness of her eyelids had disappeared but she continued to rub her eyes and blink a great deal. During my years of association with don Juan and don Genaro

I had seen Lidia the most, and yet we had probably never exchanged more than a dozen words with each other. Pablito regarded her as a most dangerous being. I always thought she was just extremely shy.

Rosa, on the other hand, was very boisterous. I thought she was the youngest. Her eyes were very frank and shiny. She was never shifty, but very bad-tempered. I had talked with Rosa more than anyone else. She was friendly, very bold and very funny.

"Where are the others?" I asked Rosa. "Aren't they going to come out?"

"They will be out shortly," Lidia answered.

I could tell from their expressions that friendliness was not what they had in mind. Judging from their foot messages they were as dangerous as dona Soledad, and yet as I sat there looking at them it occurred to me that they were gorgeously beautiful. I had the warmest feelings for them.

In fact, the more they stared into my eyes the more intense that feeling became. At one moment it was sheer passion that I felt for them. They were so alluring that I could have sat there for hours just looking at them, but a sobering thought made me stand up. I was not going to repeat my bungling of the night before. I decided that the best defense was to put my cards on the table.

In a firm tone I told them that don Juan had set up some sort of trial for me using dona Soledad, or vice versa. Chances were that he had also set them up in the same fashion, and we were going to be pitted against one another in some sort of battle that could result in injury to some of us. I appealed to their sense of warriorship. If they were the truthful heirs of don Juan, they had to be impeccable with me, reveal their designs and not behave like ordinary, greedy human beings.

I turned to Rosa and asked her the reason for wishing to step on me. She was taken aback for an instant and then she became angry. Her eyes flared with rage. Her small mouth contracted.

Lidia, in a very coherent manner, said that I had nothing to fear from them, and that Rosa was angry with me because I had hurt dona Soledad. Her feelings were purely a personal reaction.

I said then that it was time I left. I stood up. Lidia made a gesture to stop me. She seemed scared or deeply concerned. She began to protest, when a noise coming from outside the door distracted me. The two girls jumped to my side. Something heavy was leaning or pushing against the door. I noticed then that the girls had secured it with the heavy iron bar. I had a feeling of disgust. The whole affair was going to be repeated again and I was sick and tired of it all.

The girls glanced at each other, then looked at me and then looked at each other again.

I heard the whining and heavy breathing of a large animal outside the house. It might have been the dog. Exhaustion blinded me at that point. I rushed to the door, removed the heavy iron bar, and started to open it. Lidia threw herself against the door and shut it again.

"The Nagual was right," she said, out of breath. "You think and think. You're dumber than I thought."

She pulled me back to the table. I rehearsed in my mind the best way to tell them, once and for all, that I had had enough. Rosa sat next to me touching me. I could feel her leg nervously rubbing against mine. Lidia was standing facing me looking at me fixedly. Her burning black eyes seemed to be saying something I could not understand.

I began to speak but I did not finish. I had a sudden and most profound awareness. My body was aware of a greenish light; a fluorescence outside the house. I did not see or hear anything. I was simply aware of the light as if I were suddenly falling asleep and my thoughts were turning into images that were superimposed on the world of everyday life.

The light was moving at a great speed. I could sense it with my stomach. I followed it, or rather I focused my attention on it for an instant as it moved around. A great clarity of mind ensued from focusing my attention on the light. I knew then that in that house in the presence of those people it was wrong and dangerous to behave as an innocent bystander.

"Aren't you afraid?" Rosa asked, pointing to the door.

Her voice disrupted my concentration.

I admitted that whatever was there was scaring me at a very deep level; enough to make me die of fright. I wanted to say more, but right then I had a surge of wrath and I wanted to see and talk with dona Soledad. I did not trust her. I went directly to her room. She was not there. I began to call her, bellowing her name. The house had one more room. I pushed the door open and rushed inside. There was no one in there. My anger increased in the same proportion as my fear.

I went out the back door and walked around to the front. Not even the dog was in sight. I banged on the front door furiously. Lidia opened it. I entered. I yelled at her to tell me where everybody was. She lowered her eyes and did not answer. She wanted to close the door but I would not let her. She quickly walked away and went into the other room.

I sat down again at the table. Rosa had not moved. She seemed to be frozen on the spot.

"We are the same," she said suddenly. "The Nagual told us that."

"Tell me, then, what was prowling around the house?" I asked.

"The ally," she said.

"Where is it now?"

"It is still here. It won't go. The moment you're weak it'll squash you. But we're not the ones who can tell you anything."

"Who can tell me, then?"

"La Gorda!" Rosa exclaimed, opening her eyes as wide as she could. "She's the one. She knows everything."

Rosa asked me if she could close the door, just to be on the safe side. Without waiting for an answer, she inched her way to the door and slammed it shut.

"There is nothing we can do except wait until everyone is here," she said.

Lidia came back into the room with a package, an object wrapped up in a piece of dark yellow cloth. She seemed very relaxed. I noticed that she had a most commandeering touch. Somehow she imparted her mood to Rosa and myself.

"Do you know what I have here?" she asked me.

I did not have the vaguest idea. She began to unwrap it in a very deliberate manner, taking her time. Then she stopped and looked at me. She seemed to vacillate. She grinned as if she were too shy to show what was in the bundle.

"This package was left by the Nagual for you," she muttered, "but I think we'd better wait for la Gorda."

I insisted that she unwrap it. She gave me a ferocious look, and took the package out of the room without saying another word.

I enjoyed Lidia's game. She had performed something quite in line with don Juan's teachings. She had given me a demonstration of how to get the best use out of an average situation. By bringing the package to me and pretending that she was going to open it after disclosing that don Juan had left it for me, she had indeed created a mystery that was almost unbearable.

She knew that I had to stay if I wanted to find out the contents of that package. I could think of a number of things that might be in that bundle. Perhaps it was the pipe don Juan used when handling psychotropic mushrooms. He had intimated that the pipe would be given to me for safekeeping.

Or it might have been his knife, or his leather pouch, or even his sorcery power objects. On the other hand, it might have been merely a ploy on Lidia's part. Don Juan was too sophisticated-too abstract to leave me an heirloom.

I told Rosa that I was dead on my feet and weak from hunger. My idea was to drive to the city, rest for a couple of days, and then come back to see Pablito and Nestor. I said that by then I might even get to meet the other two girls.

Lidia returned then and Rosa told her of my intention to leave.

"The Nagual gave us orders to attend to you as if you were himself," Lidia said. "We are all the Nagual himself, but you are even more so for some reason that no one understands."

Both of them talked to me at once and guaranteed in various ways that no one was going to attempt anything against me as dona Soledad had. Both of them had such a fierce look of honesty in their eyes that my body was overwhelmed. I trusted them.

"You must stay until la Gorda comes back," Lidia said.

"The Nagual said that you should sleep in his bed," Rosa added.

I began to pace the floor in the throes of a weird dilemma. On the one hand, I wanted to stay and rest. I felt physically at ease and happy in their presence; something I had not felt the day before with dona Soledad.

My reasonable side, on the other hand, had not relaxed at all. At that level, I was as frightened as I had been all along. I had had moments of blind despair and had taken bold actions, but after the momentum of those actions had ceased, I had felt as vulnerable as ever.

I engaged in some soul-searching analysis as I paced the room almost frantically. The two girls remained quiet looking at me anxiously.

Then all of a sudden the riddle was solved. I knew that something in me was just pretending to be afraid. I had become accustomed to reacting that way in don Juan's presence. Throughout the years of our association I had relied heavily on him to furnish me with convenient pacifiers for my fright. My dependency on him had given me solace and security.

But it was no longer tenable. Don Juan was gone. His apprentices did not have his patience, or his sophistication, or his sheer command. With them my need to seek solace was plain stupidity.

The girls led me to the other room. The window faced the southeast, and so did the bed which was a thick mat like a mattress. A two foot long bulky piece of maguey stalk had been carved so that the porous tissue served as a pillow or a neckrest. In the middle part of it there was a gentle dip. The surface of the maguey was very smooth. It appeared to have been hand rubbed.

I tried the bed and the pillow. The comfort and bodily satisfaction I experienced were unusual. Lying on don Juan's bed I felt secure and fulfilled. An unequaled peace swept through my body. I had had a similar feeling once before when don Juan had made a bed for me on top of a hill in the desert in northern Mexico. I fell asleep.

I woke up in the early evening. Lidia and Rosa were nearly on top of me sound asleep. I stayed motionless for one or two seconds. Then both of them woke up at once.

Lidia yawned and said that they had had to sleep next to me in order to protect me and make me rest. I was famished. Lidia sent Rosa to the kitchen to make us some food. In the meantime, she lit all the lanterns in the house. When the food was ready we sat down at the table. I felt as if I had known them or been with them all my life. We ate in silence.

When Rosa was clearing the table I asked Lidia if all of them slept in the Nagual's bed. It was the only other bed in the house besides dona Soledad's. Lidia said, in a matter-of-fact tone, that they had moved out of that house years before to a place of their own in the same vicinity, and that Pablito had also moved when they did and lived with Nestor and Benigno.

"But what's happened to you people? I thought that you were all together," I said.

"Not anymore," Lidia replied. "Since the Nagual left, we have had separate tasks. The Nagual joined us and the Nagual took us apart."

"And where's the Nagual now?" I asked in the most casual tone I could affect.

Both of them looked at me and then glanced at each other.

"Oh, we don't know," Lidia said. "He and Genaro left."

She seemed to be telling the truth, but I insisted once more that they tell me what they knew.

"We really don't know anything," Lidia snapped at me, obviously flustered by my questions. "They moved to another area. You have to ask that question of la Gorda. She has something to tell you. She knew yesterday that you had come and we rushed all night to get here. We were afraid that you were dead. The Nagual told us that you are the only one we should help and trust. He said that you are himself."

She covered her face and giggled, and then added as an afterthought, "But that's hard to believe."

"We don't know you," Rosa said. "That's the trouble. The four of us feel the same way. We were afraid that you were dead, and then when we saw you we got mad at you for not being dead.

Soledad is like our mother; maybe more than that."

They exchanged conspiratorial looks with each other. I immediately interpreted that as a sign of trouble. They were up to no good. Lidia noticed my sudden distrust which must have been written all over my face. She reacted with a series of assertions about their desire to help me.

I really had no reason to doubt their sincerity. If they had wanted to hurt me they could have done so while I was asleep. She sounded so earnest that I felt petty. I decided to distribute the gifts I had brought for them. I told them that there were unimportant trinkets in the packages and that they could choose any one they liked.

Lidia said that they would prefer it if I assigned the gifts myself. In a very polite tone she added that they would be grateful if I would also cure Soledad.

"What do you think I should do to cure her?" I asked her after a long silence.

"Use your double," she said in a matter-of-fact tone.

I carefully went over the fact that dona Soledad had nearly assassinated me, and that I had survived by the grace of something in me which was neither my skill nor my knowledge. As far as I was concerned, that undefined something that seemed to have delivered a blow to her was real, but unreachable. In short, I could not help dona Soledad any more than I could walk to the moon.

They listened to me attentively and remained quiet but agitated.

"Where is dona Soledad now?" I asked Lidia.

"She's with la Gorda," she said in a despondent tone. "La Gorda took her away and is trying to cure her, but we really don't know where they are. That's the truth."

"And where's Josefina?"

"She went to get the Witness. He is the only one who can cure Soledad. Rosa thinks that you know more than the Witness, but since you're angry with Soledad you want her dead. We don't blame you."

I assured them that I was not angry with her, and above all I did not want her dead.

"Cure her, then!" Rosa said in an angry, high-pitched voice. "The Witness has told us that you always know what to do, and the Witness can't be wrong."

"And who in the devil is the Witness?"

"Nestor is the Witness," Lidia said as if she were reluctant to voice his name. "You know that. You have to."

I remembered that during our last meeting don Genaro had called Nestor the Witness. I thought at the time that the name was a joke or a ploy that don Genaro was using to ease the gripping tension and the anguish of those last moments together.

"That was no joke," Lidia said in a firm tone. "Genaro and the Nagual followed a different path with the Witness. They took him along with them everywhere they went. And I mean everywhere! The Witness has witnessed all there is to witness."

Obviously there was a tremendous misunderstanding between us. I labored to explain that I was practically a stranger to them. Don Juan had kept me away from everyone, including Pablito and Nestor. Outside of the casual hellos and goodbyes that all of them had exchanged with me over the years, we had never actually talked.

I knew all of them mainly through the descriptions that don Juan had given me. Although I had once met Josefina, I could not remember what she looked like, and all I had ever seen of la Gorda was her gigantic behind. I said to them that I had not even known until the day before that the four of them were don Juan's apprentices, nor that Benigno was part of the group as well.

They exchanged a coy look with each other. Rosa moved her lips to say something but Lidia gave her a command with her feet. I felt that after my long and soulful explanation they should not still sneak messages to each other. My nerves were so taut that their covert foot movements were just the thing to send me into a rage.

I yelled at them at the top of my lungs and banged on the table with my right hand. Rosa stood up with unbelievable speed, and I suppose, as a response to her sudden movement my body by itself without the notice of my reason moved a step back just in time to avoid by inches a blow from a massive stick or some heavy object that Rosa was wielding in her left hand. It came down on the table with a thunderous noise.

I heard again, as I had heard the night before while dona Soledad was choking me, a most peculiar and mysterious sound; a dry sound like a pipe breaking right behind my windpipe at the base of my neck. My ears popped, and with the speed of lightning my left arm came down on top of Rosa's stick and crushed it. I saw the whole scene myself as if I had been watching a movie.

Rosa screamed and I realized then that I had leaned forward with all my weight, and had struck the back of her hand with my left fist. I was appalled. Whatever was happening to me was not real. It was a nightmare. Rosa kept on screaming.

Lidia took her into don Juan's room. I heard her yells of pain for a few moments longer and then they stopped. I sat down at the table. My thoughts were disassociated and incoherent.

The peculiar sound at the base of my neck was something I had become keenly aware of. Don Juan had described it as the sound one makes at the moment of changing speed. I had the faint recollection of having experienced it in his company. Although I had become aware of it the previous night, I had not fully acknowledged it until it happened with Rosa.

I realized then that the sound had created a special sensation of heat on the roof of my mouth and inside my ears. The force and dryness of the sound made me think of the peal of a large, cracked bell.

Lidia returned awhile later. She seemed more calm and collected. She even smiled. I asked her to please help me unravel that riddle and tell me what had happened. After a long vacillation she told me that when I had yelled and banged on the table Rosa got excited and nervous; and believing I was going to hurt them, she had tried to strike me with her "dream hand." I had dodged her blow and hit her on the back of her hand the same way I had struck dona Soledad. Lidia said that Rosa's hand would be useless unless I found a way to help her.

Rosa walked into the room then. Her arm was wrapped with a piece of cloth. She looked at me. Her eyes were like those of a child. My feelings were at the height of turmoil. Some part of me felt ugly and guilty. But again another part remained unruffled. Had it not been for that part I would not have survived either dona Soledad's attack or Rosa's devastating blow.

After a long silence I told them that it was very petty of me to be annoyed by their foot messages, but that there was no comparison between yelling or banging on the table and what Rosa had done. In view of the fact that I had no familiarity with their practices, she could have severed my arm with her blow.

I demanded, in a very intimidating tone, to see her hand. She reluctantly unwrapped it. It was swollen and red. There was no doubt left in my mind that these people were carrying out some sort of test that don Juan had set up for me. By confronting them I was being hurled into a realm which was impossible to reach or accept in rational terms.

He had said time and time again that my rationality comprised only a very small part of what he had called the 'totality of oneself'. Under the impact of the unfamiliar and the altogether real danger of my physical annihilation, my body had had to make use of it's hidden resources, or die. The trick seemed to be in the truthful acceptance of the possibility that such resources exist and can be reached. The years of training had been but the steps to arrive to that acceptance.

Truthful to his premise of no compromise, don Juan had aimed at a total victory or a total defeat for me. If the training had failed to put me in contact with my hidden resources, the test would have made it evident; in which case there would have been very little I could have done. Don Juan had said to dona Soledad that I would have killed myself. Being such a profound connoisseur of human nature, he was probably right.

It was time to adopt a new course of action. Lidia had said that I could help Rosa and dona Soledad with the same force that had caused them injury. The problem, therefore, was to get the right sequence of feelings, or thoughts, or whatever, that led my body to unleash that force. I took Rosa's hand and rubbed it. I willed it to be cured. I had only the best feelings for her. I caressed her hand and hugged her for a long time. I rubbed her head and she fell asleep on my shoulder, but there was no change in the redness or the swelling.

Lidia watched me without saying a word. She smiled at me. I wanted to tell her that I was a fiasco as a healer. Her eyes seemed to catch my mood, and they held it until it froze.

Rosa wanted to sleep. She was either dead tired or ill. I did not want to find out which. I picked her up in my arms. She was lighter than I would have imagined. I took her to don Juan's bed and gently placed her on it. Lidia covered her. The room was very dark. I looked out of the window and saw a cloudless sky filled with stars. Up to that moment I had been oblivious to the fact that we were at a very high altitude.

As I looked at the sky, I felt a surge of optimism. Somehow the stars looked festive to me. The southeast was indeed a lovely direction to face.

I had a sudden urge that I felt obliged to satisfy. I wanted to see how different the view of the sky was from dona Soledad's window which faced the north. I took Lidia by the hand with the intention of leading her there, but a ticklish sensation on top of my head stopped me. It went like a ripple down my back to my waist, and from there it went to the pit of my stomach. I sat down on the mat. I made an effort to think about my feelings. It seemed that at the very moment that I had felt the tickling on my head, my thoughts had diminished in strength and number. I tried, but I could not involve myself in the usual mental process that I call thinking.

My mental deliberations made me oblivious to Lidia. She had knelt on the floor facing me. I became aware that her enormous eyes were scrutinizing me from a few inches away. I automatically took her hand again and walked to dona Soledad's room.

As we reached the door I felt her whole body stiffening. I had to pull her. I was about to cross the threshold when I caught sight of the bulky, dark mass of a human body huddled against the wall opposite the door. The sight was so unexpected that I gasped and let go of Lidia's hand.

It was dona Soledad. She was resting her head against the wall. I turned to Lidia. She had recoiled a couple of steps. I wanted to whisper that dona Soledad had returned, but there were no sounds to my words although I was sure I had vocalized them. I would have tried to talk again had it not been that I had an urge to act. It was as if words took too much time and I had very little of it.

I stepped into the room and walked over to dona Soledad. She appeared to be in great pain. I squatted by her side, and rather than asking her anything, I lifted her face to look at her. I saw something on her forehead. It looked like the plaster of leaves that she had made for herself. It was dark; viscous to the touch. I felt the imperative need to peel it off her forehead. In a very bold fashion I grabbed her head, tilled it back, and yanked the plaster off. It was like peeling off rubber.

She did not move or complain about pain. Underneath the plaster there was a yellowish-green blotch. It moved, as if it were alive or imbued with energy. I looked at it for a moment; unable to do anything. I poked it with my finger and it stuck to it like glue. I did not panic as I ordinarily would have. I rather liked the stuff. I stirred it with the tips of my fingers and all of it came off her forehead. I stood up. The gooey substance felt warm. It was like a sticky paste for an instant and then it dried up between my fingers and on the palm of my hand.

I then felt another jolt of apprehension and ran to don Juan's room. I grabbed Rosa's arm and wiped the same fluorescent yellowish-green stuff from her hand that I had wiped from dona Soledad's forehead.

My heart was pounding so hard that I could hardly stand on my feet. I wanted to lie down, but something in me pushed me to the window and made me jog on the spot.

I cannot recall how long I jogged there. Suddenly I felt that someone was wiping my neck and shoulders. I became aware then that I was practically nude, perspiring profusely. Lidia had a cloth around my shoulders and was wiping the sweat off my face.

My normal thought processes came back to me all at once. I looked around the room. Rosa was sound asleep. I ran to dona Soledad's room. I expected to find her also asleep, but there was no one there. Lidia had trailed behind me. I told her what had happened. She rushed to Rosa and woke her up while I put on my clothes. Rosa did not want to wake up. Lidia grabbed her injured hand and squeezed it. In one single springing movement, Rosa stood up and was fully awake.

They began to rush around the house turning off the lanterns. They seemed to be getting ready to run away. I wanted to ask them why they were in such a hurry when I realized that I had dressed in a great hurry myself. We were rushing together; and not only that: They seemed to be waiting for direct commands from me.

We ran out of the house carrying all the packages I had brought. Lidia had advised me not to leave any of them behind. I had not yet assigned them and they still belonged to me. I threw them in the back seat of the car while the two girls crammed into the front. I started the car and backed up slowly; finding my way in the darkness.

Once we were on the road, I was brought face to face with the most pressing issue. Both of them said in unison that I was the leader. Their actions were dependent on my decisions. I was the Nagual. We could not just run out of the house and drive away aimlessly. I had to guide them.

But the truth was that I had no idea where to go or what to do. I turned casually to look at them. The headlights cast a glare inside the car and their eyes were like mirrors that reflected it. I remembered that don Juan's eyes did the same. They seemed to reflect more light than the eyes of an average person.

I knew that the two girls were aware of my impasse. Rather than making a joke about it in order to cover up my incapacity, I bluntly put the responsibility of a solution in their laps. I said that I lacked practice as the Nagual, and would appreciate it if they would oblige me with a suggestion or a hint as to where we should go. They seemed disgusted with me. They clicked their tongues and shook their heads. I mentally shuffled through various courses of action, none of which was feasible, such as driving them to town, or taking them to Nestor's house, or even taking them to Mexico City.

I stopped the car. I was driving toward town. I wanted more than anything else in the world to have a heart-to-heart talk with the girls. I opened my mouth to begin, but they turned away from me, faced each other and put their arms around each other's shoulders. That appeared to be an indication that they had locked themselves in and were not listening to me.

My frustration was enormous. What I craved for at that moment was don Juan's mastery over any situation at hand; his intellectual companionship; his humor. Instead I was in the company of two nincompoops.

I caught a gesture of dejection in Lidia's face and that stopped my avalanche of self-pity. I became overtly aware, for the first time, that there was no end to our mutual disappointment. Obviously they too were accustomed, although in a different manner, to the mastery of don Juan. For them the shift from the Nagual himself to me must have been disastrous.

I sat for a long while with the motor running. Then all at once I again had a bodily shiver that started on the top of my head as a ticklish sensation and I knew then what had happened when I had entered dona Soledad's room awhile before. I had not seen her in an ordinary sense.

What I had thought was dona Soledad huddled against the wall was in fact the memory of her leaving her body the instant after I had hit her. I also knew that when I touched that gooey phosphorescent substance, I had cured her, and that it was some sort of energy I had left in her head and in Rosa's hand with my blows.

A vision of a particular ravine went through my mind. I became convinced that dona Soledad and la Gorda were there. My knowledge was not a mere conjecture. It was rather a truth that needed no further corroboration. La Gorda had taken dona Soledad to the bottom of that particular ravine and was at that precise moment attempting to cure her. I wanted to tell her that it was wrong to treat the swelling in dona Soledad's forehead, and that there was no longer a need for them to stay there.

I described my vision to the girls. Both of them told me, the way don Juan used to tell me, not to indulge. With him, however, that reaction was more congruous. I had never really minded his criticisms or scorn, but the two girls were in a different league. I felt insulted.

"I'll take you home," I said. "Where do you live?"

Lidia turned to me and in a most furious tone said that both of them were my wards and that I had to deliver them to safety, since at the request of the Nagual they had relinquished their freedom to act in order to help me.

I had a fit of anger at that point. I wanted to slap the two girls, but then I felt the curious shiver running through my body once more. It started again as a tickling on top of my head which went down my back until it reached my umbilical region, and then I knew where they lived. The ticklishness was like a shield, a soft, warm sheet of film. I could sense it physically, covering the area between my pubis and the edge of my rib cage.

My wrath disappeared and was replaced by a strange sobriety, an aloofness, and at the same time a desire to laugh. I knew then of something transcendental. Under the impact of dona Soledad and the little sisters' actions, my body had suspended judgment. I had, in don Juan's terms, stopped the world. I had amalgamated two disassociated sensations. The ticklishness on the very top of my head and the dry cracking sound at the base of my neck. Between them lay the means to that suspension of judgment.

As I sat in my car with those two girls on the side of a deserted mountain road, I knew for a fact that for the first time I had had a complete awareness of stopping the world. That feeling brought to my mind the memory of another, similar, first-time bodily awareness I had had years before. It had to do with the ticklishness on top of the head. Don Juan said that sorcerers had to cultivate such a sensation and he described it at great length.

According to him, it was a sort of itching, which was neither pleasurable nor painful, and which occurred on the very top of one's head. In order to make me aware of it on an intellectual level, he described and analyzed it's features; and then on the practical side, he attempted to guide me in developing the necessary bodily awareness and memory of this feeling by making me run under branches or rocks that protruded on a horizontal plane a few inches above my height.

For years I tried to follow what he was pointing out to me. However, on the one hand, I was incapable of understanding what he meant by his description; and on the other hand, I was incapable of providing my body with the adequate memory by following his pragmatic steps. Never did I feel anything on top of my head as I ran underneath the branches or rocks he had selected for his demonstrations.

But one day my body by itself discovered the sensation while I was driving a high panel-truck into a three-story parking structure. I entered the gate of the structure at the same speed I usually did in my small, two-door sedan. The result was that from the high seat of the truck I perceived the transverse cement beam of the roof coming at my head. I could not stop the truck in time and the feeling I got was that the cement beam was scalping me. I had never driven a motor vehicle which was as high as that truck, thus I was incapable of making the necessary perceptual adjustments. The space between the roof of the truck and the roof of the parking structure seemed nonexistent for me. I felt the beam with my scalp.

That day I drove for hours inside the structure, giving my body a chance to store the memory of that ticklish sensation.

I faced the two girls and wanted to tell them that I had just found out where they lived. I desisted. There was no way of describing to them that the ticklish sensation had made me remember a casual remark that don Juan had once made as we passed a house on our way to Pablito's place. He had pointed out an unusual feature in the surroundings and said that that house was an ideal place for quietness but was not a place to rest. I drove them there.

Their house was rather big. It was also an adobe structure with a tile roof like dona Soledad's. It had one long room in the front, a roofed open-air kitchen in back of the house, a huge patio next to the kitchen, and an area for chickens beyond the patio. The most important part of their house, however, was a closed room with two doors, one opening to the front room and the other to the back. Lidia said that they had built it themselves. I wanted to see it, but both of them said that it was not the appropriate time because Josefina and la Gorda were not present to show me the parts of the room that belonged to them.

In the corner of the front room there was a sizable, built-in brick platform. It was about eighteen inches high and had been constructed like a bed with one end against the wall. Lidia put some thick straw mats on it's flat top and urged me to lie down and sleep while they watched over me.

Rosa had lit a lantern and hung it on a nail above the bed. There was enough light to write. I explained to them that writing eased my tension and asked if it bothered them.

"Why do you have to ask?" Lidia retorted. "Just do it!"

In the vein of a perfunctory explanation I told them that I had always done some things, such as taking notes, which were strange even to don Juan and don Genaro and would perforce be strange to them.

"We all do strange things," Lidia said dryly.

I sat down on the bed under the lantern with my back against the wall. They lay down next to me, one on each side. Rosa covered herself with a blanket and went to sleep as if all she needed to do was to lie down. Lidia said that then was the appropriate time and place for us to talk, although she would prefer that I turn off the light because it made her sleepy.

Our conversation in the darkness centered around the whereabouts of the other two girls. She said that she could not even imagine where la Gorda was, but that Josefina was undoubtedly in the mountains, still looking for Nestor, even though it was dark. She explained that Josefina was the most capable one to take care of herself in eventualities such as being in a deserted place in the dark. That was the reason why la Gorda had selected her to run that errand.

I mentioned that in listening to them talk about la Gorda I had formed the opinion that she was the boss. Lidia replied that la Gorda was indeed in charge, and that the Nagual himself had put her in command. She added that even if he had not done so, la Gorda would have taken over, sooner or later, because she was the best.

I was compelled at that point to light the lantern in order to write. Lidia complained that the light made it impossible to stay awake, but I prevailed.

"What makes la Gorda the best?" I asked.

"She has more personal power," she said. "She knows everything. Besides, the Nagual taught her how to control people."

"Do you envy la Gorda for being the best?"

"I used to, but not now."

"Why did you change?"

"I finally accepted my fate, as the Nagual told me."

"And what is your fate?"

"My fate... my fate is to be the breeze. To be a dreamer. My fate is to be a warrior."

"Do Rosa or Josefina envy la Gorda?"

"No, they don't. All of us have accepted our fates. The Nagual said that power comes only after we accept our fate without recriminations. I used to complain a lot and feel terrible because I liked the Nagual. I thought I was a woman. But he showed me that I was not. He showed me that I was a warrior. My life had ended before I met him. This body that you see here is new. The same thing happened to all of us. Perhaps you were not like us, but to us the Nagual was a new life.

"When he told us that he was going to leave, because he had to do other things, we thought we would die. But look at us now. We're alive, and do you know why? Because the Nagual showed us that we were himself. He's here with us. He'll always be here. We are his body and his spirit."

"Do all four of you feel the same way?"

"We are not four. We are one. That is our fate. We have to carry each other. And you are the same. All of us are the same. Even Soledad is the same, although she goes in a different direction."

"And Pablito, Nestor and Benigno? Where do they fit?"

"We don't know. We don't like them. Especially Pablito. He's a coward. He has not accepted his fate and wants to wriggle out of it. He even wants to chuck his chances as a sorcerer and live an ordinary life. That'll be great for Soledad. But the Nagual gave us orders to help him. We are getting tired of helping him, though. Maybe one of these days la Gorda will push him out of the way forever."

"Can she do that?"

"Can she do that! Of course she can. She's got more of the Nagual than the rest of us. Perhaps even more than you."

"Why do you think the Nagual never told me that you were his apprentices?"

"Because you're empty."

"Did he say that I was empty?"

"Everyone knows you're empty. It is written on your body."

"How can you tell that?"

"There is a hole in the middle."

"In the middle of my body? Where?"

She very gently touched a spot on the right side of my stomach. She drew a circle with her finger as if she were following the edges of an invisible hole four or five inches in diameter.

"Are you empty yourself, Lidia?"

"Are you kidding? I am complete. Can't you see?"

Her answers to my questions were taking a turn that I had not expected. I did not want to antagonize her with my ignorance. I shook my head affirmatively.

"Why do you think I have a hole here that makes me empty?" I asked after deliberating what the most innocent question would be.

She did not answer. She turned her back to me and complained that the light of the lantern bothered her eyes. I insisted on a response. She faced me defiantly.

"I don't want to talk to you anymore," she said. "You are stupid. Not even Pablito is that stupid and he's the worst."

I did not want to end up in another blind alley by pretending that I knew what she was talking about, so I asked her again what caused my emptiness. I coaxed her to talk, giving her ample assurances that don Juan had never explained that topic to me.

He had said time and time again that I was empty and I understood him the way any Western man would understand that statement. I thought he meant that I was somehow void of determination, will, purpose or even intelligence. He had never spoken to me about a hole in my body.

"There is a hole there on the right side," she said matter-of-factly. "A hole that a woman made when she emptied you."

"Would you know who the woman is?"

"Only you can tell that. The Nagual said that men, most of the time, cannot tell who had emptied them. Women are more fortunate. They know for a fact who emptied them."

"Are your sisters empty, like me?"

"Don't be stupid. How can they be empty?"

"Dona Soledad said that she was empty. Does she look like me?"

"No. The hole in her stomach was enormous. It was on both sides, which meant that a man and a woman emptied her."

"What did dona Soledad do with a man and a woman?"

"She gave her completeness to them."

I vacillated for a moment before asking the next question. I wanted to assess all the implications of her statement.

"La Gorda was even worse than Soledad," Lidia went on. "Two women emptied her. The hole in her stomach was like a cavern. But now she has closed it. She is complete again."

"Tell me about those two women."

"I just can't tell you anything more," she said in a most imperative tone. "Only la Gorda can speak to you about this matter. Wait until she comes."

"Why only la Gorda?"

"Because she knows everything."

"Is she the only one who knows everything?"

"The Witness knows as much, maybe even more, but he is Genaro himself and that makes him very difficult to handle. We don't like him."

"Why don't you like him?"

"Those three bums are awful. They are crazy like Genaro. Well, they are Genaro himself. They are always fighting us because they were afraid of the Nagual and now they are taking their revenge on us. That's what la Gorda says anyway."

"And what makes la Gorda say that?"

"The Nagual told her things he didn't tell the rest of us. She sees. The Nagual said that you also see. Josefina, Rosa and I don't see, and yet all five of us are the same. We are the same."

The phrase "we are the same," which dona Soledad had used the night before, brought on an avalanche of thoughts and fears. I put my writing pad away. I looked around. I was in a strange world lying in a strange bed in between two young women I did not know. And yet I felt at ease there. My body experienced abandon and indifference. I trusted them.

"Are you going to sleep here?" I asked.

"Where else?"

"How about your own room?"

"We can't leave you alone. We feel the same way you do. You are a stranger, except that we are bound to help you. La Gorda said that no matter how stupid you are, we have to look after you. She said we have to sleep in the same bed with you as if you were the Nagual himself."

Lidia turned off the lantern. I remained sitting with my back against the wall. I closed my eyes to think and I fell asleep instantly.

Lidia, Rosa and I had been sitting on a flat area just outside the front door for nearly two hours since eight o'clock in the morning. I had tried to steer them into a conversation but they had refused to talk. They seemed to be very relaxed; almost asleep.

Their mood of abandonment was not contagious, however. Sitting there in that forced silence had put me into a mood of my own. Their house sat on top of a small hill. The front door faced the east. From where I sat I could see almost the entire narrow valley that ran from east to west. I could not see the town, but I could see the green areas of cultivated fields on the floor of the valley. On the other side and flanking the valley in every direction, there were gigantic, round, eroded hills. There were no high mountains in the vicinity of the valley; only those enormous, eroded, round hills, the sight of which created in me the most intense feeling of oppression. I had the sensation that those hills were about to transport me to another time.

Lidia spoke to me all of a sudden and her voice disrupted my reverie. She pulled my sleeve.

"Here comes Josefina," she said.

I looked at the winding trail that led from the valley to the house. I saw a woman walking slowly up the trail, perhaps fifty yards away. I noticed immediately the remarkable difference in age between Lidia and Rosa and the approaching woman.

I looked at her again. I would never have thought Josefina to be that old. Judging by her slow gait and the posture of her body, she seemed to be a woman in her midfifties. She was thin, wore a long dark skirt and was carrying a load of firewood on her back.

She had a bundle tied around her waist. It looked as though she had a bundled-up child riding on her left hip. She seemed to be breast-feeding it as she walked. Her steps were almost feeble. She could barely make the last steep slope before reaching the house.

When she finally stood in front of us, a few yards away, she was panting so heavily that I attempted to help her sit down. She made a gesture that seemed to say that she was all right.

I heard Lidia and Rosa giggling. I did not look at them because my total attention had been taken by assault. The woman in front of me was absolutely the most disgusting, foul creature I had ever seen. She untied the bundle of firewood and dropped it on the floor with a loud clatter. I jumped involuntarily, due in part to the loud noise, and in part to the fact that the woman nearly fell on my lap pulled by the weight of the wood.

She looked at me for an instant and then lowered her eyes; seemingly embarrassed by her clumsiness. She straightened her back and sighed with apparent relief. Obviously the load had been too great for her old body.

As she stretched her arms, her hair fell partially loose. She was wearing a soiled headband tied over her forehead. Her hair was long and graying, and seemed dirty and matted. I could see the white hairs against the dark brown of the headband. She smiled at me and sort of nodded her head. All her teeth seemed to be missing. I could see the black hole of her toothless mouth. She covered her face with her hand and laughed. She took off her sandals and walked into the house without giving me time to say anything. Rosa followed her.

I was dumbfounded. Dona Soledad had implied that Josefina was the same age as Lidia and Rosa. I turned to Lidia. She was peering at me.

"I had no idea she was that old," I said.

"Yes, she's pretty old," she said in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Does she have a child?" I asked.

"Yes, and she takes him everywhere. She never leaves him with us. She's afraid we are going to eat him."

"Is it a boy?"

"A boy."

"How old is he?"

"She's had him for some time. But I don't know his age. We thought that she shouldn't have a child at her age. But she didn't pay any attention to us."

"Whose child is he?"

"Josefina's, of course."

"I mean, who's the father?"

"The Nagual, who else?"

I thought that that development was quite extravagant and very unnerving.

"I suppose anything is possible in the Nagual's world," I said.

I meant it more as a thought to myself than a statement made to Lidia.

"You bet," she said, and laughed.

The oppressiveness of those eroded hills became unbearable. There was something truly abhorrent about that area, and Josefina had been the final blow. On top of having an ugly, old, smelly body and no teeth, she also seemed to have some sort of facial paralysis. The muscles on the left side of her face appeared to be injured, a condition which created a most unpleasant distortion of her left eye and the left side of her mouth.

My oppressive mood plummeted to one of sheer anguish. For an instant I toyed with the idea, so familiar by then, of running to my car and driving away.

I complained to Lidia that I did not feel well. She laughed and said that Josefina had no doubt scared me.

"She has that effect on people," she said. "Everybody hates her guts. She's uglier than a cockroach."

"I remember seeing her once," I said, "but she was young."

"Things change," Lidia said philosophically, "one way or another. Look at Soledad. What a change, eh? And you yourself have changed. You look more massive than I remember you. You are looking more and more like the Nagual."

I wanted to say that the change in Josefina was abhorrent but I was afraid that she might overhear me.

I looked at the eroded hills across the valley. I felt like fleeing from them.

"The Nagual gave us this house," she said, "but it is not a house for rest. We had another house before that was truly beautiful. This is a place to steam up. Those mountains over there will drive you nuts."

Her boldness in reading my feelings gave me a respite. I did not know what to say.

"We are all naturally lazy," she went on. "We don't like to strain ourselves. The Nagual knew that, so he must have figured that this place would drive us up the walls."

She stood up abruptly and said that she wanted something to eat. We went to the kitchen; a semienclosed area with only two walls. At the open end, to the right of the door, there was an earthen stove. At the other end, where the two walls met, there was a large dining area with a long table and three benches. The floor was paved with smooth river rocks. The flat roof was about ten feet high and was resting on the two walls and on thick supporting beams on the open sides.

Lidia poured me a bowl of beans and meat from a pot which cooked on a very low fire. She heated up some tortillas over the fire. Rosa came in and sat down next to me and asked Lidia to serve her some food.

I became immersed in watching Lidia use a ladle to scoop the beans and meat. She seemed to have an eye for the exact amount. She must have been aware that I was admiring her maneuvers. She took two or three beans from Rosa's bowl and returned them to the pot.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Josefina coming into the kitchen. I did not look at her, though. She sat facing me across the table. I had a squeamish feeling in my stomach. I felt that I could not eat with that woman looking at me.

To ease my tension I joked with Lidia that there were still two extra beans in Rosa's bowl that she had overlooked. She scooped up two beans with the ladle with a precision that made me gasp. I laughed nervously, knowing that once Lidia sat down I would have to move my eyes from the stove and acknowledge the presence of Josefina.

I finally and reluctantly had to look across the table at Josefina. There was a dead silence. I stared at her incredulously. My mouth fell open. I heard the loud laughter of Lidia and Rosa. It took an endless moment for me to put my thoughts and feelings in some sort of order.

Whoever was facing me was not the Josefina I had seen just awhile ago, but a very pretty girl. She did not have Indian features as Lidia and Rosa did. She seemed to be more Latin than Indian. She had a light olive complexion, a very small mouth, a finely chiseled nose, small white teeth and short, black, curly hair. She had a dimple on the left side of her face, which gave a definite cockiness to her smile.

She was the girl I had met briefly years ago. She held my scrutiny. Her eyes were friendly. I became possessed by degrees with some uncontrollable nervousness. I ended up desperately clowning about my genuine bewilderment.

They laughed like children. After their laughter had subsided I wanted to know what was the point of Josefina's histrionic [* histrionic- characteristic of acting or a stage performance] display.

"She's practicing the art of stalking," Lidia said. "The Nagual taught us to baffle people so they wouldn't notice us. Josefina is very pretty, and if she walks alone at night no one will bother her if she is ugly and smelly; but if she goes out as she really is, well, you yourself can tell what would happen."

Josefina nodded affirmatively and then contorted her face into the ugliest grimace possible.

"She can hold that face all day," Lidia said.

I contended that if I lived around that area I would certainly notice Josefina in her disguise more readily than if she did not have one.

"That disguise was just for you," Lidia said, and all three of them laughed. "And look how it baffled you. You noticed her child even more than you noticed her."

Lidia went into their room and brought out a package of rags that looked like a bundled-up child and threw it on the table in front of me. I laughed uproariously with them.

"Do all of you have particular disguises?" I asked.

"No. Only Josefina. No one around here knows her as she really is," Lidia replied.

Josefina nodded and smiled but she remained silent. I liked her tremendously. There was something so very innocent and sweet about her.

"Say something, Josefina," I said, grabbing her by her forearms.

She looked at me bewildered, and recoiled. I thought that I had gotten carried away by my elation, and perhaps grabbed her too hard. I let her go. She sat up straight. She contorted her small mouth and thin lips, and produced a most grotesque outburst of grunts and shrieks.

Her whole face suddenly changed. A series of ugly, involuntary spasms marred her tranquil expression of a moment before.

I looked at her, horrified. Lidia pulled me by the sleeve.

"Why do you have to scare her, stupid?" she whispered. "Don't you know that she became mute and can't talk at all?"

Josefina obviously understood her and seemed bent on protesting. She clenched her fist at Lidia, and let out another outburst of extremely loud and horrifying shrieks; and then choked and coughed. Rosa began to rub her back. Lidia tried to do the same but Josefina nearly hit her in the face.

Lidia sat down next to me and made a gesture of impotence. She shrugged her shoulders.

"She's that way," Lidia whispered to me.

Josefina turned to her. Her face was contorted in a most ugly grimace of anger. She opened her mouth and bellowed at the top of her voice some more frightening, guttural sounds.

Lidia slid off the bench and in a most unobtrusive manner left the kitchen area.

Rosa held Josefina by the arm. Josefina seemed to be the epitome of fury. She moved her mouth and contorted her face. In a matter of minutes she had lost all the beauty and innocence that had enchanted me. I did not know what to do. I tried to apologize but Josefina's inhuman sounds drowned out my words. Finally Rosa took her into the house.

Lidia returned and sat across the table from me.

"Something went wrong up here," she said, touching her head.

"When did it happen?" I asked.

"A long time ago. The Nagual must have done something to her, because all of a sudden she lost her speech."

Lidia seemed sad. I had the impression that her sadness showed against her desire. I even felt tempted to tell her not to struggle so hard to hide her emotions.

"How does Josefina communicate with you people?" I asked. "Does she write?"

"Come on, don't be silly. She doesn't write. She's not you. She uses her hands and feet to tell us what she wants."

Josefina and Rosa came back to the kitchen. They stood by my side. I thought that Josefina was again the picture of innocence and candor. Her beatific expression did not give the slightest inkling of the fact that she could become so ugly, so fast.

Looking at her I had the sudden realization that her fabulous ability for gestures undoubtedly was intimately linked to her aphasia. [* aphasia- nability to use or understand language (spoken or written) because of a brain lesion] I reasoned that only a person who had lost her capacity to verbalize could be so versed in mimicry.

Rosa said to me that Josefina had confided that she wished she could talk because she liked me very much.

"Until you came she was happy the way she was," Lidia said in a harsh voice.

Josefina shook her head affirmatively, corroborating Lidia's statement, and went into a mild outburst of sounds.

"I wish la Gorda was here," Rosa said. "Lidia always gets Josefina angry."

"I don't mean to!" Lidia protested.

Josefina smiled at her and extended her arm to touch her. It seemed as if she were attempting to apologize. Lidia brushed her hand away.

"Why, you mute imbecile," she muttered.

Josefina did not get angry. She looked away. There was so much sadness in her eyes that I did not want to look at her. I felt compelled to intercede.

"She thinks she's the only woman in the world who has problems," Lidia snapped at me. "The Nagual told us to drive her hard and without mercy until she no longer feels sorry for herself."

Rosa looked at me and reaffirmed Lidia's claim with a nod of her head.

Lidia turned to Rosa and ordered her to leave Josefina's side. Rosa moved away complyingly and sat on the bench next to me.

"The Nagual said that one of these days she will talk again," Lidia said to me.

"Hey!" Rosa said, pulling my sleeve. "Maybe you're the one who'll make her talk."

"Yes!" Lidia exclaimed as if she had had the same thought. "Maybe that's why we had to wait for you."

"It's so clear!" Rosa added with the expression of having had a true revelation.

Both of them jumped to their feet and embraced Josefina.

"You're going to talk again!" Rosa exclaimed as she shook Josefina by the shoulders.

Josefina opened her eyes and rolled them. She started making faint, muffled sighs, as if she were sobbing, and ended up running back and forth, crying like an animal. Her excitation was so great that she seemed to have locked her jaws open. I honestly thought that she was on the brink of a nervous breakdown. Lidia and Rosa ran to her side and helped her close her mouth. But they did not try to calm her down.

"You're going to talk again! You're going to talk again!" they shouted.

Josefina sobbed and howled in a manner that sent chills down my spine.

I was absolutely confounded. I tried to talk sense to them. I appealed to their reason, but then I realized that they had very little of it by my standards. I paced back and forth in front of them trying to figure out what to do.

"You are going to help her, aren't you?" Lidia demanded.

"Please, sir, please," Rosa pleaded with me.

I told them that they were crazy, that I could not possibly know what to do. And yet, as I talked I noticed that there was a funny feeling of optimism and certainty in the back of my mind. I wanted to discard it at first, but it took hold of me.

Once before I had had a similar feeling in relation to a dear friend of mine who was mortally ill. I thought I could make her well and actually leave the hospital where she lay dying. I even consulted don Juan about it.

"Sure. You can cure her and make her walk out of that death trap," he said.

"How?" I asked him.

"It's a very simple procedure," he said. "All you have to do is remind her that she's an incurable patient. Since she's a terminal case she has power. She has nothing to lose anymore. She's lost everything already. When one has nothing to lose, one becomes courageous. We are timid only when there is something we can still cling to."

"But is it enough just to remind her of that?"

"No. That will give her the boost she needs. Then she has to push the disease away with her left hand. She must push her arm out in front of her with her hand clenched as if she were holding a knob. She must push on and on as she says out, out, out. Tell her that, since she has nothing else to do, she must dedicate every second of her remaining life to performing that movement. I assure you that she can get up and walk away, if she wants to."

"It sounds so simple," I said.

Don Juan chuckled.

"It seems simple," he said, "but it isn't. In order to do this your friend needs an impeccable spirit."

He looked at me for a long time. He seemed to be measuring the concern and sadness I felt for my friend.

"Of course," he added, "if your friend had an impeccable spirit she wouldn't be there in the first place."

I told my friend what don Juan had said. But she was already too weak even to attempt to move her arm.

In Josefina's case my rationale for my secret confidence was the fact that she was a warrior with an impeccable spirit. Would it be possible, I silently asked myself, to apply the same hand movement to her?

I told Josefina that her incapacity to speak was due to some sort of blockage.

"Yes, yes, it's a blockage," Lidia and Rosa repeated after me.

I explained to Josefina the arm movement and told her that she had to push that blockage by moving her arm in that fashion.

Josefina's eyes were transfixed. She seemed to be in a trance. She moved her mouth, making barely audible sounds. She tried moving her arm, but her excitation was so intense that she flung her arm without any coordination.

I tried to redirect her movements, but she appeared to be so thoroughly befuddled that she could not even hear what I was saying. Her eyes went out of focus and I knew she was going to faint.

Rosa apparently realized what was happening. She jumped away and grabbed a cup of water and sprinkled it over Josefina's face. Josefina's eyes rolled back, showing the whites of her eyes. She blinked repeatedly until she could focus her eyes again. She moved her mouth, but she made no sound.

"Touch her throat!" Rosa yelled at me.

"No! No!" Lidia shouted back. "Touch her head. It's in her head, you dummy! "

She grabbed my hand and I reluctantly let her place it on Josefina's head.

Josefina shivered, and little by little she let out a series of faint sounds. Somehow they seemed to me more melodious than the inhuman sounds she made before.

Rosa also must have noticed the difference.

"Did you hear that? Did you hear that?" she asked me in a whisper.

But whatever the difference might have been, Josefina let out another series of sounds more grotesque than ever. When she quieted down, she sobbed for a moment and then entered into another state of euphoria. Lidia and Rosa finally quieted her. She plunked down on the bench, apparently exhausted. She could barely lift her eyelids to look at me. She smiled meekly.

"I am so very, very sorry," I said and held her hand.

Her whole body vibrated. She lowered her head and began to weep again. I felt a surge of ultimate empathy for her. At that moment I would have given my life to help her.

She sobbed uncontrollably as she tried to speak to me. Lidia and Rosa appeared to be so caught up in her drama that they were making the same gestures with their mouths.

"For heaven's sake, do something!" Rosa exclaimed in a pleading voice.

I experienced an unbearable anxiety. Josefina stood up and embraced me, or rather clung to me in a frenzy and pushed me away from the table. At that instant Lidia and Rosa, with astounding agility, speed and control, grabbed me by the shoulders with both hands and at the same time hooked the heels of my feet with their feet.

The weight of Josefina's body and her embrace, plus the speed of Lidia's and Rosa's maneuver, rendered me helpless. They all moved at once, and before I knew what was happening, they had laid me on the floor with Josefina on top of me. I felt her heart pounding. She held on to me with great force. The sound of her heart reverberated in my ears. I felt it pounding in my own chest. I tried to push her away but she held on fast. Rosa and Lidia had me pinned down on the floor with their weight on my arms and legs. Rosa cackled insanely and began nibbling on my side. Her small, sharp teeth chattered as her jaws snapped open and shut with nervous spasms.

All at once I had a monstrous sensation of pain, physical revulsion and terror. I lost my breath. My eyes could not focus. I knew that I was passing out. I heard then the dry, cracking sound of a pipe breaking at the base of my neck, and felt the ticklish sensation on top of my head running like a shiver through my entire body. The next thing I knew I was looking at them from the other side of the kitchen. The three girls were staring at me while they lay on the floor.

"What are you people doing?" I heard someone say in a loud, harsh, commanding voice.

I then had an inconceivable feeling. I felt Josefina let go of me and stand up. I was lying on the floor, and yet I was also standing a distance away from them, looking at a woman I had never seen before. She was by the door. She walked toward me, and stopped six or seven feet away. She stared at me for a moment. I knew immediately that she was la Gorda. She demanded to know what was going on.

"We were just playing a little joke on him," Josefina said clearing her throat. "I was pretending to be mute."

The three girls huddled up close together and began to laugh. La Gorda remained impassive, looking at me.

They had tricked me! I found my stupidity and gullibility so outrageous that I had a fit of hysterical laughter, which was almost out of control. My body shivered.

I knew that Josefina had not just been playing, as she had claimed. The three of them had meant business. I had actually felt Josefina's body as a force that, in fact, was getting inside my own body. Rosa's nibbling on my side, which undoubtedly was a ruse to distract my attention, coincided with the sensation I had had that Josefina's heart was pounding inside my chest.

I heard la Gorda urging me to calm down.

I had a nervous flutter in my midsection and then a quiet, calm anger swept over me. I loathed them. I had had enough of them. I would have picked up my jacket and writing pad and walked out of the house had it not been that I was not quite myself yet. I was somewhat dizzy and my senses were definitely out of line. I had had the sensation that when I had first looked at the girls from across the kitchen that I was actually viewing them from a position above my eye level; from a place close to the ceiling.

But something even more disconcerting was that I had actually perceived that the ticklish sensation on top of my head was what scooped me from Josefina's embrace. It was not as if something came out from the top of my head. Something actually did come out from the top of my head.

A few years before, don Juan and don Genaro had manoeuvred my perception and I had had an impossible double sensation. I felt that don Juan had fallen on top of me and pinned me to the ground, while at the same time I felt I was still standing up. I was actually in both places at once. In sorcerers' terms I could say that my body had stored the memory of that double perception and seemed to have repeated it.

There were, however, two new things that had been added to my bodily memory this time. One was that the ticklish sensation I had become so aware of during the course of my confrontations with those women was the vehicle to arriving at that double perception; and the other was that the sound at the base of my neck let loose something in me that was capable of coming out of the top of my head.

After a minute or two I definitely felt that I was coming down from near the ceiling until I was standing on the floor. It took a while for my eyes to adjust to seeing at my normal eye level.

As I looked at the four women I felt naked and vulnerable. I then had an instant of disassociation, or lack of perceptual continuity. It was as if I had shut my eyes, and some force suddenly had made me twirl a couple of times. When I opened my eyes the girls were staring at me with their mouths open. But somehow I was myself again.

## 3. La Gorda

The first thing I noticed about la Gorda was her eyes; very dark, and calm. She seemed to be examining me from head to toe. Her eyes scanned my body the same way don Juan's used to. In fact, her eyes had the same calmness and force. I knew why she was the best. The thought that came to my mind was that don Juan must have left her his eyes.

She was slightly taller than the other three girls. She had a lean, dark body and a superb back. I noticed the graceful line of her broad shoulders when she half turned her upper body to face the three girls.

She gave them an unintelligible command and the three of them sat down on a bench, right behind her. She was actually shielding them from me with her body.

She turned to face me again. Her expression was one of utmost seriousness, but without a trace of gloom or heaviness. She did not smile and yet she was friendly. She had very pleasant features: a nicely shaped face, neither round nor angular; a small mouth with thin lips; a broad nose; high cheekbones; and long, jet-black hair.

I could not help noticing her beautiful, muscular hands which she kept clasped in front of her over her umbilical region. The backs of her hands were turned to me. I could see her muscles being contracted rhythmically as she clasped her palms.

She was wearing a long, faded orange cotton dress with long sleeves and a brown shawl. There was something terribly calming and final about her. I felt the presence of don Juan. My body relaxed.

"Sit down, sit down," she said to me in a coaxing tone.

I walked back to the table. She pointed out a place for me to sit, but I remained standing.

She smiled for the first time and her eyes became softer and shinier. She was not as pretty as Josefina, and yet she was the most beautiful of all of them.

We were quiet for a moment. In terms of an explanation she said that they had done their best in the years since the Nagual left, and that because of their dedication they had become accustomed to the task that he had left for them to perform.

I did not quite understand what she was talking about, but as she spoke I felt more than ever the presence of don Juan. It was not that she was copying his manners, nor the inflection of his voice. She had an inner control that made her act the way don Juan did. Their similarity was from the inside out.

I told her that I had come because I needed Pablito's and Nestor's help. I said that I was rather slow or even stupid in understanding the ways of sorcerers, but that I was sincere; and yet all of them had treated me with malice and deceitfulness.

She began to apologize but I did not let her finish. I picked up my things, and went out the front door. She ran after me. She was not preventing me from leaving but rather she was talking very fast as if she needed to say all she could before I drove away.

She said that I had to hear her out, and that she was willing to ride with me until she had told me everything the Nagual had entrusted her to tell me.

"I'm going to Mexico City," I said.

"I'll ride with you to Los Angeles if necessary," she said, and I knew that she meant it.

"All right," I said just to test her, "get in the car."

She vacillated for an instant. Then she stood silently and faced her house. She put her clasped hands just below her navel. She turned and faced the valley and did the same movement with her hands.

I knew what she was doing. She was saying good-bye to her house and to those awesome round hills that surrounded it.

Don Juan had taught me that good-bye gesture years before. He had stressed that it was an extremely powerful gesture, and that a warrior had to use it sparingly. I had had very few occasions to perform it myself.

The good-bye movement la Gorda was executing was a variant of the one don Juan had taught me. He had said that the hands were clasped as in prayer, either gently or with great speed, even producing a clapping sound. Done either way, the purpose of clasping the hands was to imprison the feeling that the warrior did not wish to leave behind. As soon as the hands had closed in and captured that feeling, they were taken with great force to the middle of the chest, at the level of the heart. There the feeling became a dagger and the warrior stabbed himself with it, as if holding the dagger with both hands.

Don Juan had told me that a warrior said good-bye in that fashion only when he had reason to feel he might not come back.

La Gorda's good-bye enthralled me.

"Are you saying good-bye?" I asked out of curiosity.

"Yes," she said dryly.

"Don't you put your hands to your chest?" I asked.

"Men do that. Women have wombs. They store their feelings there."

"Aren't you suppose to say good-bye like that only when you're not coming back?" I asked.

"Chances are I may not come back," she replied. "I'm going with you."

I had an attack of unwarranted sadness; unwarranted in the sense that I did not know that woman at all. I had only doubts and suspicions about her. But as I peered into her clear eyes, I had a sense of ultimate kinship with her. I mellowed. My anger had disappeared and had given way to a strange sadness. I looked around, and I knew that those mysterious, enormous, round hills were ripping me apart.

"Those hills over there are alive," she said, reading my thoughts.

I turned to her and told her that both the place and the women had affected me at a very deep level, a level I could not ordinarily conceive. I did not know which was more devastating, the place or the women. The women's onslaughts had been direct and terrifying, but the effect of those hills was a constant, nagging apprehension; a desire to flee from them. When I told that to la Gorda she said that I was correct in assessing the effect of that place; that the Nagual had left them there because of that effect, and that I should not blame anyone for what had happened because the Nagual himself had given those women orders to try to do away with me.

"Did he give orders like that to you too?" I asked.

"No, not to me. I'm different than they are," she said. "They are sisters. They are the same, exactly the same. Just like Pablito, Nestor and Benigno are the same. Only you and I can be exactly the same. We are not now because you're still 'incomplete'. But someday we will be the same; exactly the same."

"I've been told that you're the only one who knows where the Nagual and Genaro are now," I said.

She peered at me for a moment, and shook her head affirmatively.

"That's right," she said. "I know where they are. The Nagual told me to take you there if I can."

I told her to stop beating around the bush and to reveal their exact whereabouts to me immediately. My demand seemed to plunge her into chaos. She apologized and reassured me that later on, when we were on our way, she would disclose everything to me. She begged me not to ask her about them anymore because she had strict orders not to mention anything until the right moment.

Lidia and Josefina came to the door and stared at me. I hurriedly got in the car. La Gorda got in after me, and as she did I could not help observing that she had entered the car as she would have entered a tunnel. She sort of crawled in.

Don Juan used to do that. I jokingly said to him once, after I had seen him do it scores of times, that it was more functional to get in the way I did. I thought that perhaps his lack of familiarity with automobiles was responsible for his strange way of entering. He explained then that the car was a cave and that caves had to be entered in that fashion if we were going to use them. There was an inherent spirit to caves, whether they were natural or man-made, and that that spirit had to be approached with respect. Crawling was the only way of showing that respect.

I was wondering whether or not to ask la Gorda if don Juan had instructed her about such details, but she spoke first. She said that the Nagual had given her specific instructions about what to do in case I would survive the attacks of dona Soledad and the three girls. Then she casually added that before I headed for Mexico City we had to go to a specific place in the mountains where don Juan and I used to go, and that there she would reveal all the information the Nagual had never disclosed to me.

I had a moment of indecision, and then something in me which was not my reason made me head for the mountains. We drove in complete silence. I attempted at various opportune moments to start up a conversation, but she turned me down every time with a strong shake of her head. Finally she seemed to have gotten tired of my trying, and said forcefully that what she had to say required a place of power and until we were in one we had to abstain from draining ourselves with useless talk.

After a long drive and an exhausting hike away from the road, we finally reached our destination. It was late afternoon. We were in a deep canyon. The bottom of it was already dark, while the sun was still shining on the top of the mountains above it. We walked until we came to a small cave a few feet up the north side of the canyon which ran from east to west. I used to spend a great deal of time there with don Juan.

Before we entered the cave, la Gorda carefully swept the floor with branches the way don Juan used to in order to clear the ticks and parasites from the rocks. Then she cut a large heap of small branches with soft leaves from the surrounding bushes and placed them on the rock floor like a mat.

She motioned me to enter. I had always let don Juan enter first as a sign of respect. I wanted to do the same with her, but she declined. She said I was the Nagual. I crawled into the cave the same way she had crawled into my car. I laughed at my inconsistency. I had never been able to treat my car as a cave.

She coaxed me to relax and make myself comfortable.

"The reason the Nagual could not reveal all his designs to you was because you're incomplete," la Gorda said all of a sudden. "You still are, but now after your bouts with Soledad and the sisters, you are stronger than before."

"What's the meaning of being incomplete? Everyone has told me that you're the only one who can explain that," I said.

"It's a very simple matter," she said. "A complete person is one who has never had children."

She paused as if she were allowing me time to write down what she had said. I looked up from my notes. She was staring at me; judging the effect of her words.

"I know that the Nagual told you exactly what I've just said," she continued. "You didn't pay any attention to him and you probably haven't paid any attention to me either."

I read my notes out loud and repeated what she had said. She giggled.

"The Nagual said that an incomplete person is one who has had children," she said as if dictating to me.

She scrutinized me, apparently waiting for a question or a comment. I had none.

"Now I've told you everything about being complete and incomplete," she said. "And I've told you just like the Nagual told me. It didn't mean anything to me at that time, and it doesn't mean anything to you now."

I had to laugh at the way she patterned herself after don Juan.

"An incomplete person has a hole in the stomach," she went on. "A sorcerer can see it as plainly as you can see my head. When the hole is on the left side of one's stomach, the child who created that hole is of the same sex. If it is on the right side, the child is of the opposite sex. The hole on the left side is black, the one on the right is dark brown."

"Can you see that hole in anyone who has had children?"

"Sure. There are two ways of seeing it. A sorcerer may see it in dreaming or by looking directly at a person. A sorcerer who sees has no problems in viewing the luminous being to find out if there is a hole in the luminosity of the body. But even if the sorcerer doesn't know how to see, he can look and actually distinguish the darkness of the hole through the clothing."

She stopped talking. I urged her to go on.

"The Nagual told me that you write and then you don't remember what you wrote," she said with a tone of accusation.

I became entangled in words trying to defend myself. Nonetheless, what she had said was the truth. Don Juan's words always had had a double effect on me: once when I heard for the first time whatever he had said, and then when I read at home whatever I had written down and had forgotten about.

Talking to la Gorda, however, was intrinsically different. Don Juan's apprentices were not in any way as engulfing as he was. Their revelations, although extraordinary, were only missing pieces to a jigsaw puzzle. The unusual character of those pieces was that with them the picture did not become clearer but that it became more and more complex.

"You had a brown hole in the right side of your stomach," she continued. "That means that a woman emptied you. You made a female child.

"The Nagual said that I had a huge black hole myself, because I made two women. I never saw the hole, but I've seen other people with holes like mine."

"You said that I had a hole. Don't I have it anymore?"

"No. It's been patched. The Nagual helped you to patch it. Without his help you would be more empty than you are now."

"What kind of patch is it?"

"A patch in your luminosity. There is no other way of saying it. The Nagual said that a sorcerer like himself can fill up the hole anytime; but that filling is only a patch without luminosity. Anyone who sees or does dreaming can tell that it looks like a lead patch on the yellow luminosity of the rest of the body.

"The Nagual patched you and me and Soledad. But then he left it up to us to put back the shine, the luminosity."

"How did he patch us?"

"He's a sorcerer, he put things in our bodies. He replaced us. We are no longer the same. The patch is what he put there himself."

"But how did he put those things there and what were they?"

"What he put in our bodies was his own luminosity and he used his hand to do that. He simply reached into our bodies and left his fibers there. He did the same with all of his six children and also with Soledad. All of them are the same. Except Soledad; she's something else."

La Gorda seemed unwilling to go on. She vacillated and almost began to stutter.

"What is dona Soledad?" I insisted.

"It's very hard to tell," she said after considerable coaxing. "She is the same as you and me, and yet she's different. She has the same luminosity, but she's not together with us. She goes in the opposite direction. Right now she's more like you. Both of you have patches that look like lead.

Mine is gone and I'm again a complete, luminous egg. That is the reason I said that you and I will be exactly the same someday when you become complete again. Right now what makes us almost the same is the Nagual's luminosity and the fact that both of us are going in the same direction and that we both were empty."

"What does a complete person look like to a sorcerer?" I asked.

"Like a luminous egg made out of fibers," she said. "All the fibers are complete. They look like strings; taut strings. It looks as if the strings have been tightened like a drum is tightened.

"On an empty person, on the other hand, the fibers are crumpled up at the edges of the hole. When they have had many children, the fibers don't look like fibers anymore. Those people look like two chunks of luminosity, separated by blackness. It is an awesome sight. The Nagual made me see them one day when we were in a park in the city."

"Why do you think the Nagual never told me about all this?"

"He told you everything, but you never understood him correctly. As soon as he realized that you were not understanding what he was saying, he was compelled to change the subject. Your emptiness prevented you from understanding.

The Nagual said that it was perfectly natural for you not to understand. Once a person becomes incomplete he's actually empty like a gourd that has been hollowed out. It didn't matter to you how many times he told you that you were empty. It didn't matter that he even explained it to you. You never knew what he meant, or worse yet, you didn't want to know."

La Gorda was treading on dangerous ground. I tried to head her off with another question, but she rebuffed me.

"You love a little boy and you don't want to understand what the Nagual meant," she said accusingly. "The Nagual told me that you have a daughter you've never seen; and that you love that little boy. One took your edge, the other pinned you down. You have welded them together."

I had to stop writing. I crawled out of the cave and stood up. I began to walk down the steep incline to the floor of the gully. La Gorda followed me. She asked me if I was upset by her directness. I did not want to lie.

"What do you think?" I asked.

"You're fuming!" she exclaimed and giggled with an abandon that I had witnessed only in don Juan and don Genaro.

She seemed about to lose her balance and grabbed my left arm. In order to help her get down to the floor of the gully, I lifted her up by her waist. I thought that she could not have weighed more than a hundred pounds. She puckered her lips the way don Genaro used to and said that her weight was a hundred and fifteen. We both laughed at once. It was a moment of direct, instant communication.

"Why does it bother you so much to talk about these things?" she asked.

I told her that once I had had a little boy whom I had loved immensely. I felt the imperative to tell her about him. Some extravagant need beyond my comprehension made me open up with that woman who was a total stranger to me.

As I began to talk about that little boy, a wave of nostalgia enveloped me; perhaps it was the place or the situation or the time of the day. Somehow I had merged the memory of that little boy with the memory of don Juan, and for the first time in all the time I had not seen him, I missed don Juan.

Lidia had said that they never missed him because he was always with them. He was their bodies and their spirits. I had known instantly what she meant. I felt the same way myself. In that gully, however, an unknown feeling had overtaken me. I told la Gorda that I had never missed don Juan until that moment. She did not answer. She looked away.

Possibly my feeling of longing for those two people had to do with the fact that both of them had produced catharsises [* catharsis- a purging of emotional tensions] in my life. And both of them were gone. I had not realized until that moment how final that separation was. I said to la Gorda that that little boy had been, more than anything else, my friend, and that one day he was whisked away by forces I could not control.

That was perhaps one of the greatest blows I had ever received. I even went to see don Juan to ask his assistance. It was the only time I had ever asked him for help. He listened to my plea and then he broke into uproarious laughter. His reaction was so unexpected that I could not even get angry. I could only comment on what I thought was his insensitivity.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

I said that since he was a sorcerer perhaps he could help me to regain my little friend for my solace.

"You're wrong. A warrior doesn't seek anything for his solace," he said in a tone that did not admit reproach.

Then he proceeded to smash my arguments. He said that a warrior could not possibly leave anything to chance; that a warrior actually affected the outcome of events by the force of his awareness and his unbending intent. He said that if I would have had the unbending intent to keep and help that child, I would have taken measures to assure his stay with me.

But as it was, my love was merely a word; a useless outburst of an empty man. He then told me something about emptiness and completeness, but I did not want to hear it. All I felt was a sense of loss; and the emptiness that he had mentioned, I was sure, referred to the feeling of having lost someone irreplaceable.

"You loved him, you honored his spirit, you wished him well, and now you must forget him," he said.

But I had not been able to do so. There was something terribly alive in my emotions even though time had mellowed them. At one point I thought I had forgotten, but then one night an incident produced the deepest emotional upheaval in me.

I was walking to my office when a young Mexican woman approached me. She had been sitting on a bench, waiting for a bus. She wanted to know if that particular bus went to a children's hospital. I did not know. She explained that her little boy had had a high temperature for a long time and she was worried because she did not have any money. I moved toward the bench and saw a little boy standing on the seat with his head against the back of the bench. He was wearing a jacket and short pants and a cap. He could not have been more than two years old. He must have seen me, for he walked to the edge of the bench and put his head against my leg.

"My little head hurts," he said to me in Spanish.

His voice was so tiny and his dark eyes so sad that a wave of irrepressible anguish welled up in me. I picked him up and drove him and his mother to the nearest hospital. I left them there and gave the mother enough money to pay the bill.

But I did not want to stay or to know any more about him. I wanted to believe that I had helped him, and that by doing so I had paid back to the spirit of man.

I had learned the magical act of "paying back to the spirit of man" from don Juan. I had asked him once, overwhelmed by the realization that I could never pay him back for all he had done for me, if there was anything in the world I could do to even the score. We were leaving a bank, after exchanging some Mexican currency.

"I don't need you to pay me back," he said, "but if you still want to pay back, make your deposit to the spirit of man. That's always a very small account, and whatever one puts in it is more than enough."

By helping that sick child I had merely paid back to the spirit of man for any help that my little boy may receive from strangers along his path.

I told la Gorda that my love for him would remain alive for the rest of my life even though I would never see him again. I wanted to tell her that the memory I had of him was buried so deep that nothing could touch it, but I desisted. I felt it would have been superfluous to talk about it. Besides, it was getting dark and I wanted to get out of that gully.

"We better go," I said. "I'll take you home. Maybe some other time we can talk about these things again."

She laughed the way don Juan used to laugh at me. I had apparently said something utterly funny.

"Why do you laugh, Gorda?" I asked.

"Because you know yourself that we can't leave this place just like that," she said. "You have an appointment with power here. And so do I."

She walked back to the cave and crawled in.

"Come on in," she yelled from inside. "There is no way to leave."

I reacted most incongruously. I crawled in and sat next to her again. It was evident that she too had tricked me. I had not come there to have any confrontations. I should have been furious. I was indifferent instead. I could not lie to myself that I had only stopped there on my way to Mexico City. I had gone there compelled by something beyond my comprehension.

She handed me my notebook and motioned me to write. She said that if I wrote I would not only relax myself but I would also relax her.

"What is this appointment with power?" I asked.

"The Nagual told me that you and I have an appointment here with something out there. You first had an appointment with Soledad and then one with the little sisters. They were supposed to destroy you. The Nagual said that if you survived their assaults I had to bring you here so that we together could keep the third appointment."

"What kind of appointment is it?"

"I really don't know. Like everything else, it depends on us. Right now there are some things out there that have been waiting for you. I say that they have been waiting for you because I come here by myself all the time and nothing ever happens. But tonight is different. You are here and those things will come."

"Why is the Nagual trying to destroy me?" I asked.

"He's not trying to destroy anybody!" la Gorda exclaimed in protest. "You are his child. Now he wants you to be himself. More himself than any of us. But to be a true Nagual you have to claim your power.

Otherwise he wouldn't have been so careful in setting up Soledad and the little sisters to stalk you. He taught Soledad how to change her shape and rejuvenate herself. He made her construct a devilish floor in her room. A floor no one can oppose. You see, Soledad is empty, so the Nagual set her up to do something gigantic. He gave her a task, a most difficult and dangerous task, but the only one which was suited for her, and that was to finish you off. He told her that nothing could be more difficult than for one sorcerer to kill another.

It's easier for an average man to kill a sorcerer or for a sorcerer to kill an average man, but two sorcerers don't fit well at all. The Nagual told Soledad that her best bet was to surprise you and scare you. And that's what she did.

The Nagual set her up to be a desirable woman so she could lure you into her room, and there her floor would have bewitched you, because as I've said, no one, but no one, can stand up to that floor. That floor was the Nagual's masterpiece for Soledad. But you did something to her floor and Soledad had to change her tactics in accordance with the Nagual's instructions. He told her that if her floor failed and she could not frighten and surprise you, she had to talk to you and tell you everything you wanted to know. The Nagual trained her to talk very well as her last resource. But Soledad could not overpower you even with that."

"Why was it so important to overpower me? "

She paused and peered at me. She cleared her throat and sat up straight. She looked up at the low roof of the cave and exhaled noisily through her nose.

"Soledad is a woman like myself," she said. "I'll tell you something about my own life and maybe you'll understand her.

"I had a man once. He got me pregnant when I was very young and I had two daughters with him. One after the other. My life was hell. That man was a drunkard and beat me day and night. And I hated him and he hated me. And I got fat like a pig.

"One day another man came along and told me that he liked me and wanted me to go with him to work in the city as a paid servant. He knew I was a hardworking woman and only wanted to exploit me. But my life was so miserable that I fell for it and went with him. He was worse than the first man, mean and fearsome. He couldn't stand me after a week or so. And he used to give me the worst beatings you can imagine. I thought he was going to kill me and he wasn't even drunk, and all because I hadn't found work.

"Then he sent me to beg on the streets with a sick baby. He would pay the child's mother something from the money I got. And then he would beat me because I hadn't made enough. The child got sicker and sicker and I knew that if it died while I was begging, the man would kill me.

"So one day when I knew that he was not there I went to the child's mother and gave her her baby and some of the money I had made that day. That was a lucky day for me. Aind foreign lady had given me fifty pesos to buy medicine for the baby.

"I had been with that horrible man for three months and I thought it had been twenty years. I used the money to go back to my home. I was pregnant again. The man had wanted me to have a child of my own, so that he would not have to pay for one.

"When I got to my hometown I tried to go back to see my children, but they had been taken away by their father's family. All the family got together under the pretense that they wanted to talk to me, but instead they took me to a deserted place and beat me with sticks and rocks and left me for dead."

La Gorda showed me the many scars on her scalp.

"To this day I don't know how I made it back to town. I even lost the child I had in my womb. I went to an aunt I still had. My parents were dead. She gave me a place to rest and she tended to me. She fed me, the poor soul, for two months before I could get up."

"Then one day my aunt told me that that man was in town looking for me. He had talked to the police and had said that he had given me money in advance to work and that I had run away, stealing the money after I had killed a woman's baby. I knew that the end had come for me.

"But my luck turned right again and I caught a ride in the truck of an American. I saw the truck coming on the road and I lifted my hand in desperation. The man stopped and let me get on. He drove me all the way to this part of Mexico. He dropped me in the city. I didn't know a soul. I roamed all over the place for days like a crazy dog; eating garbage from the street. That was when my luck turned for the last time.

"I met Pablito, with whom I have a debt that I can't pay back. Pablito took me to his carpentry shop and gave me a corner there to put my bed. He did that because he felt sorry for me. He found me in the market after he stumbled and fell on top of me.

"I had been sitting there begging. A moth or a bee, I don't know which, flew to him and hit him in the eye. He turned around on his heels and stumbled, and fell right on top of me. I thought he would be so mad that he would hit me, but he gave me some money instead. I asked him if he could give me work. That was when he took me to his shop and set me up with an iron and an ironing board to do laundry.

"I did very well. Except that I got fatter because most of the people I washed for fed me with their leftovers. Sometimes I ate sixteen times a day. I did nothing else but eat. Kids in the street used to taunt me and sneak behind me and step on my heels and then someone would push me and I would fall. Those kids made me cry with their cruel jokes especially when they used to spoil my wash on purpose.

"One day, very late in the afternoon while I was alone, a weird old man came over to see Pablito. I had never seen that man before. I had never known that Pablito was in cahoots with such a scary, awesome man. I turned my back to him and kept on working. Suddenly I felt the hands of that man on my neck. My heart stopped. I could not scream. I couldn't even breathe. I fell down and that awful man held my head; maybe for an hour.

"Then he left. I was so frightened that I stayed where I had fallen until the next morning. Pablito found me there. He laughed and said that I should be very proud and happy because that old man was a powerful sorcerer and was one of his teachers. I was dumbfounded. I couldn't believe Pablito was a sorcerer. He said that his teacher had seen a perfect circle of moths flying over my head. He had also seen my death circling around me. And that was why he had acted like lightning and had changed the direction of my eyes.

"Pablito also said that the Nagual had laid his hands on me and had reached into my body and that soon I would be different. I had no idea what he was talking about. I had no idea what that crazy old man had done, either.

"But it didn't matter to me. I was like a dog that everyone kicked around. Pablito had been the only person who had been kind to me. At first I had thought he wanted me for his woman. But I was too ugly and fat and smelly. He just wanted to be kind to me.

"The crazy old man came back another night and grabbed me again by the neck from behind. He hurt me terribly. I cried and screamed. I didn't know what he was doing. He never said a word to me. I was deathly afraid of him.

"Then, later on he began to talk to me and told me what to do with my life. I liked what he said. He took me everywhere with him. But my emptiness was my worst enemy. I couldn't accept his ways, so one day he got sick and tired of pampering me and sent the wind after me.

"I was in the back of Soledad's house by myself that day, and I felt the wind getting very strong. It was blowing through the fence. It got into my eyes. I wanted to get inside the house, but my body was frightened; and instead of walking through the door, I walked through the gate in the fence. The wind pushed me and made me twirl. I tried to go back to the house, but it was useless. I couldn't break the force of the wind.

"It pushed me over the hills and off the road, and I ended up in a deep hole; a hole like a tomb. The wind kept me there for days and days, until I had decided to change and accept my fate without recrimination. Then the wind stopped and the Nagual found me, and took me back to the house.

"He told me that my task was to give what I didn't have, love and affection; and that I had to take care of the sisters, Lidia and Josefina, better than if they were myself. I understood then what the Nagual had been saying to me for years. My life had been over a long time ago. He had offered me a new life and that life had to be completely new. I couldn't bring to that new life my ugly old ways. That first night he found me, the moths had pointed me out to him; I had no business rebelling against my fate.

"I began my change by taking care of Lidia and Josefina better than I took care of myself. I did everything the Nagual told me, and one night in this very gully in this very cave I found my completeness. I had fallen asleep right here where I am now and then a noise woke me up.

"I looked up and saw myself as I had once been, thin, young, fresh. It was my spirit that was coming back to me. At first it didn't want to come closer because I still looked pretty awful. But then it couldn't help itself and came to me.

"I knew right then, and all at once, what the Nagual had struggled for years to tell me. He had said that when one has a child, that child takes the edge of our spirit. For a woman to have a girl means the end of that edge. To have had two as I did meant the end of me.

"The best of my strength and my illusions went to those girls. They stole my edge, the Nagual said, in the same way I had stolen it from my parents. That's our fate.

"A boy steals the biggest part of his edge from his father, a girl from her mother. The Nagual said that people who have had children could tell, if they aren't as stubborn as you, that something is missing in them. Some craziness, some nervousness, some power that they had before is gone. They used to have it, but where is it now?

"The Nagual said that it is in the little child running around the house, full of energy, full of illusions; in other words, complete. He said that if we watch children we can tell that they are daring. They move in leaps. If we watch their parents we can see that they are cautious and timid. They don't leap anymore. The Nagual told me we explain that by saying that the parents are grown-ups and have responsibilities. But that's not true. The truth of the matter is that they have lost their edge."

I asked la Gorda what the Nagual would have said if I had told him that I knew parents with much more spirit and edge than their children.

She laughed, covering her face in a gesture of sham embarrassment.

She said, giggling, "You can ask me. Do you want to hear what I think?"

"Of course I want to hear it."

"Those people don't have more spirit, they merely had a lot of vigor to begin with, and have trained their children to be obedient and meek. They have frightened their children all their lives; that's all."

I described to her the case of a man I knew, a father of four, who at the age of fifty-three changed his life completely. That entailed leaving his wife and his executive job in a large corporation after more than twenty-five years of building a career and a family. He chucked it all very daringly, and went to live on an island in the Pacific.

"You mean he went there all by himself?" la Gorda asked with a tone of surprise.

She had destroyed my argument. I had to admit that the man had gone there with his twenty-three year old bride.

"Who no doubt is complete," la Gorda added.

I had to agree with her again.

"An empty man uses the completeness of a woman all the time," she went on. "A complete woman is dangerous in her completeness, more so than a man. She is unreliable, moody, nervous; but also capable of great changes. Women like that can pick themselves up and go anywhere. They'll do nothing there, but that's because they had nothing going to begin with.

"Empty people, on the other hand, can't jump like that anymore, but they're more reliable. The Nagual said that empty people are like worms that look around before moving a bit and then they back up and then they move a little bit more again. Complete people always jump, somersault, and almost always land on their heads; but it doesn't matter to them.

"The Nagual said that to enter into the other world one has to be complete. To be a sorcerer, one has to have all of one's luminosity: no holes, no patches, and all the edge of the spirit. So a sorcerer who is empty has to regain completeness. Man or woman, they must be complete to enter into that world out there; that eternity where the Nagual and Genaro are now waiting for us."

She stopped talking and stared at me for a long moment. There was barely enough light to write.

"But how did you regain your completeness?" I asked.

She jumped at the sound of my voice. I repeated my question. She stared up at the roof of the cave before answering me.

"I had to refuse those two girls," she said. "The Nagual once told you how to do that but you didn't want to hear it. His point was that one has to steal that edge back. He said that we got it the hard way by stealing it, and that we must recover it the same way; the hard way.

"He guided me to do that, and the first thing he made me do was to refuse my love for those two children. I had to do that in dreaming. Little by little I learned not to like them, but the Nagual said that that was useless. One has to learn not to care and not 'not to like'. Whenever those girls meant nothing to me, I had to see them again; lay my eyes and my hands on them. I had to pat them gently on the head and let my left side snatch the edge out of them."

"What happened to them?"

"Nothing. They never felt a thing. They went home and are now like two grown-up persons. Empty like most people around them. They don't like the company of children because they have no use for them. I would say that they are better off. I took the craziness out of them. They didn't need it; while I did. I didn't know what I was doing when I gave it to them. Besides, they still retain the edge they stole from their father.

"The Nagual was right: No one noticed the loss, but I did notice my gain. Then as I looked out of this cave, I saw all my illusions lined up like a row of soldiers. The world was bright and new. The heaviness of my body and my spirit had been lifted off, and I was truly a new being."

"Do you know how you took your edge from your children?"

"They are not my children! I have never had any. Look at me."

She crawled out of the cave, lifted her skirt and showed me her naked body. The first thing I noticed was how slender and muscular she was.

She urged me to come closer and examine her. Her body was so lean and firm that I had to conclude she could not possibly have had children. She put her right leg on a high rock and showed me her vagina. Her drive to prove her change was so intense that I had to laugh to bridge my nervousness. I said that I was not a doctor and therefore I could not tell, but that I was sure she must be right.

"Of course I'm right," she said as she crawled back into the cave. "Nothing has ever come out of this womb."

After a moment's pause she answered my question, which I had already forgotten under the onslaught of her display.

"My left side took my edge back," she said. "All I did was to go and visit the girls. I went there four or five times to allow them time to feel at ease with me. They were big girls and were going to school.

"I thought I would have to fight not to like them, but the Nagual said that it didn't matter; that I should like them if I wanted to. So I liked them. But my liking them was just like liking a stranger. My mind was made up. My purpose was unbending. I want to enter into the other world while I'm still alive; as the Nagual told me. In order to do that I need all the edge of my spirit. I need my completeness. Nothing can turn me away from that world! Nothing!"

She stared at me defiantly.

"You have to refuse both, the woman who emptied you, and the little boy who has your love if you are seeking your completeness. The woman you can easily refuse. The little boy is something else. Do you think that your useless affection for that child is so worthy as to keep you from entering into that realm?"

I had no answer. It was not that I wanted to think it over. It was rather that I had become utterly confused.

"Soledad has to take her edge out of Pablito if she wants to enter into the nagual," she went on. "How in the hell is she going to do that? Pablito, no matter how weak he is, is a sorcerer.

"But the Nagual gave Soledad a unique chance. He said to her that her only moment would come when you walked into the house, and for that moment he not only made us move out into the other house, but he made us help her widen the path to the house so you could drive your car to the very door. He told her that if she lived an impeccable life she would bag you, and suck away all your luminosity, which is all the power the Nagual left inside your body. That would not be difficult for her to do. Since she's going in the opposite direction, she could drain you to nothing. Her great feat was to lead you to a moment of helplessness.

"Once she had killed you, your luminosity would have increased her power and she would then have come after us. I was the only one who knew that. Lidia, Josefina and Rosa love her. I don't. I knew what her designs were. She would have taken us one by one, in her own time, since she had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

"The Nagual said to me that there was no other way for her. He entrusted me with the girls and told me what to do in case Soledad killed you and came after our luminosity. He figured that I had a chance to save myself and to save perhaps one of the three. You see, Soledad is not a bad woman at all. She's simply doing what an impeccable warrior would do. The little sisters like her more than they like their own mothers. She's a real mother to them.

"That was, the Nagual said, the point of her advantage. I haven't been able to pull the little sisters away from her no matter what I do. So if she had killed you, she would then have taken at least two of those three trusting souls. Then without you in the picture Pablito is nothing. Soledad would have squashed him like a bug. And then with all her completeness and power she would have entered into that world out there. If I had been in her place I would've tried to do exactly as she did.

"So you see, it was all or nothing for her. When you first arrived everyone was gone. It looked as if it was the end for you and for some of us; but then at the end it was nothing for her and a chance for the sisters. The moment I knew that you had succeeded, I told the three girls that now it was their turn. The Nagual had said that they should wait until the morning to catch you unawares. He said that the morning was not a good time for you. He commanded me to stay away and not interfere with the sisters, and to come in only if you would try to injure their luminosity."

"Were they supposed to kill me too?"

"Well, yes. You are the male side of their luminosity. Their completeness is at times their disadvantage. The Nagual ruled them with an iron hand and balanced them; but now that he's gone, they have no way of leveling off. Your luminosity could do that for them."

"How about you, Gorda? Are you supposed to finish me off too?"

"I've told you already that I'm different. I am balanced. My emptiness, which was my disadvantage, is now my advantage. Once a sorcerer regains his completeness he's balanced; while a sorcerer who was always complete is a bit off. Like Genaro was a bit off. But the Nagual was balanced because he had been incomplete like you and me- even more so than you and me. He had three sons and one daughter.

"The little sisters are like Genaro, a bit off. And most of the times so taut that they have no measure."

"How about me, Gorda? Do I also have to go after them?"

"No. Only they could have profited by sucking away your luminosity. You can't profit at all by anyone's death. The Nagual left a special power with you; a balance of some kind, which none of us has."

"Can't they learn to have that balance?"

"Sure they can. But that has nothing to do with the task the little sisters had to perform. Their task was to steal your power. For that, they became so united that they are now one single being. They trained themselves to sip you up like a glass of soda.

"The Nagual set them up to be deceivers of the highest order, especially Josefina. She put on a show that was peerless. Compared to their art, Soledad's attempt was child's play. She's a crude woman. The little sisters are true sorceresses.

"Two of them gained your confidence, while the third shocked you and rendered you helpless. They played their cards to perfection. You fell for it all and nearly succumbed. The only flaw was that you injured and cured Rosa's luminosity the night before and that made her jumpy. Had it not been for her nervousness and her biting your side so hard, chances are you wouldn't be here now. I saw everything from the door. I came in at the precise moment you were about to annihilate them."

"But what could I do to annihilate them?"

"How could I know that? I'm not you."

"I mean what did you see me doing?"

"I saw your double coming out of you."

"What did it look like?"

"It looked like you, what else? But it was very big and menacing. Your double would have killed them. So I came in and interfered with it. It took the best of my power to calm you down. The sisters were no help. They were lost. And you were furious and violent. You changed colors right in front of us twice. One color was so violent that I feared you would kill me too."

"What color was it, Gorda?"

"White, what else? The double is white, yellowish white, like the sun."

I stared at her. The simile [* simile- a figure of speech that expresses a resemblance between things of different kinds] was very new to me.

"Yes," she continued, "we are pieces of the sun. That is why we are luminous beings. But our eyes can't see that luminosity because it is very faint. Only the eyes of a sorcerer can see it, and that happens after a lifetime struggle."

Her revelation had taken me by total surprise. I tried to reorganize my thoughts in order to ask the most appropriate question.

"Did the Nagual ever tell you anything about the sun?" I asked.

"Yes. We are all like the sun but very, very faint. Our light is too weak, but it is light anyway."

"But, did he say that the sun was perhaps the nagual?" I insisted desperately.

La Gorda did not answer. She made a series of involuntary noises with her lips. She was apparently thinking how to answer my probe. I waited, ready to write it down. After a long pause she crawled out of the cave.

"I'll show you my faint light," she said matter-of-factly.

She walked to the center of the narrow gully in front of the cave and squatted. From where I was I could not see what she was doing so I had to get out of the cave myself. I stood ten or twelve feet away from her. She put her hands under her skirt while she was still squatting.

Suddenly, she stood up. Her hands were loosely clasped into fists. She raised them over her head and snapped her fingers open. I heard a quick bursting sound and I saw sparks flying from her fingers. She again clasped her hands and then snapped them open and another volley of much larger sparks flew out of them.

She squatted once more and reached under her skirt. She seemed to be pulling something from her pubis. She repeated the snapping movement of her fingers as she threw her hands over her head, and I saw a spray of long, luminous fibers flying away from her fingers. I had to tilt my head up to see them against the already dark sky. They appeared to be long, fine filaments of a reddish light. After a while they faded and disappeared.

She squatted once again, and when she let her fingers open a most astonishing display of lights emanated from them. The sky was filled with thick rays of light. It was a spellbinding sight. I became engrossed in it. My eyes were fixed. I was not paying attention to la Gorda. I was looking at the lights.

I heard a sudden outcry that forced me to look at her- just in time to see her grab one of the lines she was creating and spin to the very top of the canyon. She hovered there for an instant like a huge dark shadow against the sky, and then she descended to the bottom of the gully; in spurts, or small leaps, or as if she were coming down a stairway on her belly.

I suddenly saw her standing over me. I had not realized that I had fallen on my seat. I stood up. She was soaked in perspiration and was panting; trying to catch her breath. She could not speak for a long time. She began to jog in place. I did not dare to touch her. Finally she seemed to have calmed down enough to crawl back into the cave. She rested for a few minutes.

Her actions had been so fast that I had hardly had any time to evaluate what had happened. At the moment of her display, I had felt an unbearable ticklish pain in the area just below my navel. I had not physically exerted myself, and yet I was also panting.

"I think it's time to go to our appointment," she said, out of breath. "My flying opened us both. You felt my flying in your belly. That means you are open and ready to meet the four forces."

"What four forces are you talking about?"

"The Nagual's and Genaro's allies. You've seen them. They are horrendous. Now they are free from the Nagual's and Genaro's gourds. You heard one of them around Soledad's house the other night. They are waiting for you. The moment the darkness of the day sets in, they'll be uncontainable. One of them even came after you in the daytime at Soledad's place. Those allies now belong to you and me. We will take two each. I don't know which ones. And I don't know how, either. All the Nagual told me was that you and I would have to tackle them by ourselves."

"Wait, wait! " I shouted.

She did not let me speak. She gently put her hand over my mouth. I felt a pang of terror in the pit of my stomach. I had been confronted in the past with some inexplicable phenomena which don Juan and don Genaro had called their allies. There were four of them and they were entities, as real as anything in the world. Their presence was so outlandish that it would create an unparalleled state of fear in me every time I perceived them.

The first one I had encountered was don Juan's. It was a dark, rectangular mass, eight or nine feet high and four or five feet across. It moved with the crushing weight of a giant boulder and breathed so heavily that it reminded me of the sound of bellows. I had always encountered it at night in the darkness. I had fancied it to be like a door that walked by pivoting on one corner and then on the other.

The second ally I came across was don Genaro's. It was a long-faced, bald-headed, extraordinarily tall, glowing man, with thick lips and enormous, droopy eyes. He always wore pants that were too short for his long, skinny legs.

I had seen those two allies a great many times while in the company of don Juan and don Genaro. The sight of them would invariably cause an irreconcilable separation between my reason and my perception. On the one hand, I had no rational ground whatsoever to believe that what was happening to me was actually taking place, and on the other hand, there was no possible way of discarding the truthfulness of my perception.

Since they had always appeared while don Juan and don Genaro were around, I had filed them away as products of the powerful influence that those two men had had on my suggestible personality. In my understanding it was either that, or that don Juan and don Genaro had in their possession forces they called their allies; forces which were capable of manifesting themselves to me as those horrendous entities.

A feature of the allies was that they never allowed me to scrutinize them thoroughly. I had tried various times to focus my undivided attention on them, but every time I would get dizzy and disassociated.

The other two allies were more elusive. I had seen them only once, a gigantic black jaguar with yellow glowing eyes, and a ravenous, enormous coyote. The two beasts were ultimately aggressive and overpowering. The jaguar was don Genaro's and the coyote was don Juan's.

La Gorda crawled out of the cave. I followed her as she led the way. We walked out of the gully and reached a long rocky plain. She stopped and let me step ahead. I told her that if she was going to let me lead us I was going to try to get to the car.

She shook her head affirmatively and clung to me. I could feel her clammy skin. She seemed to be in a state of great agitation. It was perhaps a mile to where we had left the car, and to reach it we had to cross the deserted rocky plain. Don Juan had shown me a hidden trail among some big boulders almost on the side of the mountain that flanked the plain toward the east. I headed for that trail. Some unknown urge was guiding me, otherwise I would have taken the same trail we had taken before when we had crossed the plain on the level ground.

La Gorda seemed to be anticipating something awesome. She grabbed onto me. Her eyes were wild.

"Are we going the right way?" I asked.

She did not answer. She pulled her shawl and twisted it until it looked like a long, thick rope. She encircled my waist with it, crossed over the ends and encircled herself. She tied a knot and thus had us bound together in a band that looked like a figure eight.

"What did you do this for?" I asked.

She shook her head. Her teeth chattered but she could not say a word. Her fright seemed to be extreme. She pushed me to keep on walking. I could not help wondering why I was not scared out of my wits myself.

As we reached the high trail the physical exertion began to take it's toll on me. I was wheezing and had to breathe through my mouth. I could see the shape of the big boulders. There was no moon but the sky was so clear that there was enough light to distinguish shapes. I could hear la Gorda also wheezing.

I tried to stop to catch my breath but she pushed me gently as she shook her head negatively. I wanted to make a joke to break the tension when I heard a strange thumping noise.

My head moved involuntarily to my right to allow my left ear to scan the area. I stopped breathing for an instant and then I clearly heard that someone else besides la Gorda and myself was breathing heavily. I checked again to make sure before I told her. There was no doubt that that massive shape was there among the boulders.

I put my hand on la Gorda's mouth as we kept on moving and signaled her to hold her breath. I could tell that the massive shape was very close. It seemed to be sliding as quietly as it could. It was wheezing softly.

La Gorda was startled. She squatted and pulled me down with her by the shawl tied around my waist. She put her hands under her skirt for a moment and then stood up. Her hands were clasped and when she snapped her fingers open a volley of sparks flew from them.

"Piss in your hands," la Gorda whispered through clenched teeth.

"Hub?" I said, unable to comprehend what she wanted me to do.

She whispered her order three or four times with increasing urgency. She must have realized I did not know what she wanted, for she squatted again and showed that she was urinating in her hands. I stared at her dumbfounded as she made her urine fly like reddish sparks.

My mind went blank. I did not know which was more absorbing, the sight la Gorda was creating with her urine, or the wheezing of the approaching entity. I could not decide on which of the two stimuli to focus my attention; both were enthralling.

"Quickly! Do it in your hands!" la Gorda grumbled between her teeth.

I heard her, but my attention was dislocated. With an imploring voice la Gorda added that my sparks would make the approaching creature, whatever it was, retreat. She began to whine and I began to feel desperate. I could not only hear but I could sense with my whole body the approaching entity.

I tried to urinate in my hands. My effort was useless. I was too self-conscious and nervous. I became possessed by la Gorda's agitation and struggled desperately to urinate. I finally did it. I snapped my fingers three or four times, but nothing flew out of them.

"Do it again," la Gorda said. "It takes a while to make sparks."

I told her that I had used up all the urine I had. There was the most intense look of despair in her eyes.

At that instant I saw the massive rectangular shape moving toward us. Somehow it did not seem menacing to me; although la Gorda was about to faint out of fear.

Suddenly she untied her shawl and leaped onto a small rock that was behind me and hugged me from behind, putting her chin on my head. She had practically climbed on my shoulders. The instant that we adopted that position the shape ceased moving. It kept on wheezing, perhaps twenty feet away from us.

I felt a giant tension that seemed to be focused in my midsection. After a while I knew without the shadow of a doubt that if we remained in that position we would have drained our energy and fallen prey to whatever was stalking us.

I told her that we were going to run for our lives. She shook her head negatively. She seemed to have regained her strength and confidence. She said then that we had to bury our heads in our arms and lie down with our thighs against our stomachs.

I remembered then that years before don Juan had made me do the same thing one night when I was caught in a deserted field in northern Mexico by something equally unknown and yet equally real to my senses. At that time don Juan had said that fleeing was useless and the only thing one could do was to remain on the spot in the position la Gorda had just prescribed.

I was about to kneel down when I had the unexpected feeling that we had made a terrible mistake in leaving the cave. We had to go back to it at any cost.

I looped la Gorda's shawl over my shoulders and under my arms. I asked her to hold the tips above my head, climb to my shoulders and stand on them, bracing herself by pulling up the ends of the shawl and fastening it like a harness.

Years before don Juan had told me that one should meet strange events, such as the rectangular shape in front of us, with unexpected actions. He said that once he himself stumbled upon a deer that "talked" to him, and he had stood on his head for the duration of that event as a means of assuring his survival and to ease the strain of such an encounter.

My idea was to try to walk around the rectangular shape, back to the cave, with la Gorda standing on my shoulders.

She whispered that the cave was out of the question. The Nagual had told her not to remain there at all. I argued, as I fixed the shawl for her, that my body had the certainty that in the cave we would be all right. She replied that that was true, and it would work except that we had no means whatever to control those forces. We needed a special container, a gourd of some sort, like those I had seen dangling from don Juan's and don Genaro's belts.

She took off her shoes and climbed on my shoulders and stood there. I held her by her calves. As she pulled on the ends of the shawl I felt the tension of the band under my armpits. I waited until she had gained her balance. To walk in the darkness carrying one hundred and fifteen pounds on my shoulders was no mean feat. I went very slowly. I counted twenty-three paces and I had to put her down. The pain on my shoulder blades was unbearable. I told her that although she was very slender, her weight was crushing my collarbone.

The interesting part, however, was that the rectangular shape was no longer in sight. Our strategy had worked. La Gorda suggested that she carry me on her shoulders for a stretch. I found the idea ludicrous. My weight was more than what her small frame could stand. We decided to walk for a while and see what happened.

There was a dead silence around us. We walked slowly, bracing each other. We had moved no more than a few yards when I again began to hear strange breathing noises, a soft, prolonged hissing like the hissing of a feline. I hurriedly helped her to get back on my shoulders and walked another ten paces.

I knew we had to maintain the unexpected as a tactic if we wanted to get out of that place. I was trying to figure out another set of unexpected actions we could use instead of la Gorda standing on my shoulders, when she took off her long dress. In one single movement she was naked. She scrambled on the ground looking for something.

I heard a cracking sound and she stood up holding a branch from a low bush. She manoeuvred her shawl around my shoulders and neck and made a sort of riding support where she could sit with her legs wrapped around my waist, like a child riding piggyback. She then put the branch inside her dress and held it above her head. She began to twirl the branch, giving the dress a strange bounce. To that effect she added a whistle, imitating the peculiar cry of a night owl.

After a hundred yards or so I heard the same sounds coming from behind us and from the sides. She changed to another birdcall, a piercing sound similar to that made by a peacock. A few minutes later the same birdcalls were echoing all around us.

I had witnessed a similar phenomenon of birdcalls being answered, years before with don Juan. I had thought at the time that perhaps the sounds were being produced by don Juan who was hiding nearby in the darkness; or even by someone closely associated with him, such as don Genaro, who was aiding him in creating an insurmountable fear in me; a fear that made me run in total darkness without even stumbling. Don Juan had called that particular action of running in darkness the 'gait of power'.

I asked la Gorda if she knew how to do the gait of power. She said yes. I told her that we were going to try it even though I was not at all sure I could do it. She said that it was neither the time nor the place for that, and pointed in front of us. My heart, which had been beating fast all along, began to pound wildly inside my chest.

Right ahead of us, perhaps ten feet away, and smack in the middle of the trail was one of don Genaro's allies; the strange glowing man with the long face and the bald head. I froze on the spot. I heard la Gorda's shriek as though it were coming from far away. She frantically pounded on my sides with her fists.

Her action broke my fixation on the man. She turned my head to the left and then to the right. On my left side, almost touching my leg, was the black mass of a giant feline with glaring yellow eyes. To my right I saw an enormous phosphorescent coyote. Behind us, almost touching la Gorda's back, was the dark rectangular shape.

The man turned his back to us and began to move on the trail. I also began to walk. La Gorda kept on shrieking and whining. The rectangular shape was almost grabbing her back. I heard it moving with crushing thumps. The sound of it's steps reverberated on the hills around us. I could feel it's cold breath on my neck.

I knew that la Gorda was about to go mad. And so was I. The feline and the coyote were almost rubbing my legs. I could hear their hissing and growling increasing in volume. I had, at that moment, the irrational urge to make a certain sound don Juan had taught me. The allies answered me. I kept on frantically making the sound and they answered me back. The tension diminished by degrees, and before we reached the road I was part of a most extravagant scene.

La Gorda was riding piggyback, happily bouncing her dress over her head as if nothing had ever happened. She was keeping the bounces in rhythm with the sound I was making; while four creatures of another world answered me back as they moved at my pace, flanking us on all four sides.

We got to the road in that fashion, but I did not want to leave. There seemed to be something missing. I stayed motionless with la Gorda on my back, and made a very special tapping sound don Juan had taught me. He had said that it was the call of moths. In order to produce it one had to use the inside edge of the left hand and the lips.

As soon as I made it everything seemed to come to rest peacefully. The four entities answered me, and as they did I knew which were the ones that would go with me.

I then walked to the car and eased la Gorda off my back onto the driver's seat and pushed her over to her side. We drove away in absolute silence. Something had touched me somewhere and my thoughts had been turned off.

La Gorda suggested that we go to don Genaro's place instead of driving to her house. She said that Benigno, Nestor ami Pablito lived there, but were out of town. Her suggestion appealed to me.

Once we were in the house la Gorda lit a lantern. The place looked just as it had the last time I had visited don Genaro. We sat on the floor. I pulled up a bench and put my writing pad on it. I was not tired and I wanted to write, but I could not do it. I could not write at all.

"What did the Nagual tell you about the allies?" I asked.

My question seemed to catch her off guard. She did not know how to answer.

"I can't think," she finally said.

It was as though she had never experienced that state before. She paced back and forth in front of me. Tiny beads of perspiration had formed on the tip of her nose and on her upper lip.

She suddenly grabbed me by the hand and practically pulled me out of the house. She led me to a nearby ravine and there she got sick.

My stomach felt queasy. She said that the pull of the allies had been too great and that I should force myself to throw up. I stared at her, waiting for a further explanation. She took my head in her hands and stuck her finger down my throat with the certainty of a nurse dealing with a child, and actually made me vomit.

She explained that human beings had a very delicate glow around the stomach and that that glow was always being pulled by everything around. At times when the pull was too great, as in the case of contact with the allies, or even in the case of contact with strong people, the glow would become agitated, change color or even fade altogether. In such instances the only thing one could do was simply to throw up.

I felt better, but not quite myself yet. I had a sense of tiredness, of heaviness around my eyes. We walked back to the house. As we reached the door la Gorda sniffed the air like a dog, and said that she knew which allies were mine.

Her statement, which ordinarily would have had no other significance than the one she alluded to, or the one I myself read into it, had the special quality of a cathartic [* cathartic-emotionally purging] device. It made me explode into thoughts. All at once, my usual intellectual deliberations came into being. I felt myself leaping in the air as if thoughts had an energy of their own.

The first thought that came to my mind was that the allies were actual entities; as I had suspected without ever daring to admit- even to myself. I had seen them and felt them and communicated with them. I was euphoric. I embraced la Gorda and began to explain to her the crux of my intellectual dilemma.

I had seen the allies without the aid of don Juan or don Genaro and that act made all the difference in the world to me. I told la Gorda that once when I had reported to don Juan that I had seen one of the allies, he had laughed and urged me not to take myself so seriously, and to disregard what I had seen.

I had never wanted to believe I was having hallucinations, but I did not want to accept that there were allies either. My rational background was unbending. I could not bridge the gap.

This time, however, everything was different, and the thought that there were actually beings on this earth that were from another world without being aliens to the earth was more than I could bear. I said to la Gorda, half in jest, that secretly I would have given anything to be crazy. That would have absolved some part of me from the crushing responsibility of revamping my understanding of the world.

The irony of it was that I could not have been more willing to revamp my understanding of the world, on an intellectual level, that is; but that was not enough. That had never been enough.

And that had been my insurmountable obstacle all along; my deadly flaw. I had been willing to dally in don Juan's world in a semi-convinced fashion: Therefore, I had been a quasi-sorcerer. All my efforts had been no more than my inane [* inane- devoid of intelligence] eagerness to fence with the intellect, as if I were in academia where one can do that very thing from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., at which time, duly tired, one goes home.

Don Juan used to say as a joke that, after arranging the world in a most beautiful and enlightened manner, the scholar goes home at five o'clock in order to forget his beautiful arrangement.

While la Gorda made us some food I worked feverishly on my notes. I felt much more relaxed after eating. La Gorda was in the best of spirits. She clowned, the way don Genaro used to, imitating the gestures I made while I wrote.

"What do you know about the allies, Gorda?" I asked.

"Only what the Nagual told me," she replied. "He said that the allies were forces that a sorcerer learns to control. He had two inside his gourd and so did Genaro."

"How did they keep them inside their gourds?"

"No one knows that. All the Nagual knew was that a tiny, perfect gourd with a neck must be found before one could harness the allies."

"Where can one find that kind of gourd?"

"Anywhere. The Nagual left word with me in case we survived the attack of the allies that we should start looking for the perfect gourd which must be the size of the thumb of the left hand. That was the size of the Nagual's gourd."

"Have you seen his gourd?"

"No. Never. The Nagual said that a gourd of that kind is not in the world of men. It's like a little bundle that one can distinguish hanging from their belts. But if you deliberately look at it you will see nothing.

"The gourd, once it is found, must be groomed with great care. Usually sorcerers find gourds like that on vines in the woods. They pick them and dry them and then they hollow them out; and then they smooth them and polish them.

"Once the sorcerer has his gourd he must offer it to the allies and entice them to live there. If the allies consent, the gourd disappears from the world of men and the allies become an aid to the sorcerer. The Nagual and Genaro could make their allies do anything that needed to be done; things they themselves could not do. Such as, for instance, sending the wind to chase me or sending that chicken to run inside Lidia's blouse."

I heard a peculiar, prolonged hissing sound outside the door. It was the exact sound I had heard in dona Soledad's house two days before. This time I knew it was the jaguar. The sound did not scare me. In fact, I would have stepped out to see the jaguar had la Gorda not stopped me.

"You're still incomplete," she said. "The allies would feast on you if you go out by yourself. Especially that daring one that's prowling out there now."

"My body feels very safe," I protested.

She patted my back and held me down against the bench on which I was writing.

"You're not a complete sorcerer yet," she said. "You have a huge patch in your middle and the force of those allies would yank it out of place. They are no joke."

"What are you supposed to do when an ally comes to you in this fashion?"

"I don't bother with them one way or another. The Nagual taught me to be balanced and not to seek anything eagerly. Tonight, for instance, I knew which allies would go to you if you can ever get a gourd and groom it. You may be eager to get them. I'm not. Chances are I'll never get them myself. They are a pain in the neck."

"Why?"

"Because they are forces and as such they can drain you to nothing. The Nagual said that one is better off with nothing except one's purpose and freedom. Someday when you're complete perhaps we'll have to choose whether or not to keep them."

I told her that I personally liked the jaguar even though there was something overbearing about it. She peered at me. There was a look of surprise and bewilderment in her eyes.

"I really like that one," I said.

"Tell me what you saw," she said.

I realized at that moment that I had automatically assumed that she had seen the same things I had. I described in great detail the four allies as I had seen them. She listened more than attentively. She appeared to be spellbound by my description.

"The allies have no form," she said when I had finished. "They are like a presence, like a wind, like a glow. The first one we found tonight was a blackness that wanted to get inside my body. That's why I screamed. I felt it reaching up my legs. The others were just colors. Their glow was so strong, though, that it made the trail look as if it were daytime."

Her statements astounded me. I had finally accepted- after years of struggle and purely on the basis of our encounter with them that night- that the allies had a consensual form; a substance which could be perceived equally by everyone's senses.

I jokingly told la Gorda that I had already written in my notes that they were creatures with form.

"What am I going to do now?" I asked in a rhetorical sense.

"It's very simple," she said. "Write that they are not."

I thought that she was absolutely right.

"Why do I see them as monsters?" I asked.

"That's no mystery," she said. "You haven't 'lost your human form' yet. The same thing happened to me. I used to see the allies as people. All of them were Indian men with horrible faces and mean looks. They used to wait for me in deserted places. I thought they were after me as a woman.

"The Nagual used to laugh his head off at my fears. But still I was half dead with fright. One of them used to come and sit on my bed, and shake it until I would wake up. The fright that that ally used to give me was something that I don't want repeated even now that I'm changed. Tonight I think I was as afraid of the allies as I used to be."

"You mean that you don't see them as human beings anymore?"

"No. Not anymore. The Nagual told you that an ally is formless. He is right. An ally is only a presence; a helper that is nothing and yet it is as real as you and me."

"Have the little sisters seen the allies?"

"Everybody has seen them one time or another."

"Are the allies just a force for them too?"

"No. They are like you; they haven't lost their human form yet. None of them has. For all of them- the little sisters, the Genaros and Soledad- the allies are horrendous things. With them the allies are malevolent dreadful creatures of the night.

"The sole mention of the allies sends Lidia and Josefina and Pablito into a frenzy. Rosa and Nestor are not that afraid of them, but they don't want to have anything to do with them either. Benigno has his own designs so he's not concerned with them. They don't bother him, or me, for that matter. But the others are easy prey for the allies; especially now that the allies are out of the Nagual's and Genaro's gourds. They come all the time looking for you.

"The Nagual told me that as long as one clings to the human form, one can only reflect that form; and since the allies feed directly onto our life-force in the middle of the stomach, they usually make us sick, and then we see them as heavy, ugly creatures."

"Is there something that we can do to protect ourselves, or to change the shape of those creatures?"

"What all of you have to do is lose your human forms."

"What do you mean?"

My question did not seem to have any meaning for her. She stared at me blankly as if waiting for me to clarify what I had just said. She closed her eyes for a moment.

"You don't know about the 'human mold' and the 'human form', do you?" she asked.

I stared at her.

"I've just seen that you know nothing about them," she said and smiled.

"You are absolutely right," I said.

"The Nagual told me that the human form is a force," she said. "And the human mold is... well... a mold. He said that everything has a particular mold. Plants have molds, animals have molds, worms have molds. Are you sure the Nagual never showed you the human mold?"

I told her that he had sketched the concept, but in a very brief manner, once when he had tried to explain something about a dream I had had. In the dream in question I had seen a man who seemed to be concealing himself in the darkness of a narrow gully.

To find him there scared me. I looked at him for a moment and then the man stepped forward and made himself visible to me. He was naked and his body glowed. He seemed to be delicate; almost frail. I liked his eyes. They were friendly and profound. I thought that they were very kind. But then he stepped back into the darkness of the gully and his eyes became like two mirrors, like the eyes of a ferocious animal.

Don Juan said that I had encountered the human mold in 'dreaming'. He explained that sorcerers have the avenue of their dreaming to lead them to the mold, and that the mold of men was definitely an entity; an entity which could be seen by some of us at certain times when we are imbued with power; and by all of us, for sure, at the moment of our death. He described the mold as being the source- the origin of man, since, without the mold to group together the force of life, there was no way for that force to assemble itself into the shape of man.

He interpreted my dream as a brief and extraordinarily simplistic glance at the mold. He said that my dream had restated the fact that I was a simple-minded and very earthy man.

La Gorda laughed and said that she would have said the same thing herself. To see the mold as an average naked man, and then as an animal had been indeed a very simplistic view of the mold.

"Perhaps it was just a stupid, ordinary dream," I said, trying to defend myself.

"No," she said with a large grin. "You see, the human mold glows and it is always found in water holes and narrow gullies."

"Why in gullies and water holes?" I asked.

"It feeds on water. Without water there is no mold," she replied. "I know that the Nagual took you to water holes regularly in hopes of showing yon the mold. But your emptiness prevented you from seeing anything. The same thing happened to me. He used to make me lie naked on a rock in the very center of a particular dried-up water hole, but all I did was to feel the presence of something that scared me out of my wits."

"Why does emptiness prevent one from seeing the mold?"

"The Nagual said that everything in the world is a force; a pull or a push. In order for us to be pushed or pulled we need to be like a sail; like a kite in the wind. But if we have a hole in the middle of our luminosity, the force goes through it and never acts upon us.

"The Nagual told me that Genaro liked you very much, and tried to make you aware of the hole in your middle. He used to fly his sombrero as a kite to tease you. He even pulled you from that hole until you had diarrhea, but you never caught on to what he was doing."

"Why didn't they tell me as plainly as you have told me?"

"They did, but you didn't notice their words."

I found her statement impossible to believe. To accept that they had told me about it and I had not acknowledged it was unthinkable.

"Did you ever see the mold, Gorda?" I asked.

"Sure, when I became complete again. I went to that particular water hole one day by myself and there it was. It was a radiant luminous being. I could not look at it. It blinded me.

"But being in it's presence was enough. I felt happy and strong; and nothing else mattered, nothing. Just being there was all I wanted. The Nagual said that sometimes if we have enough personal power we can catch a glimpse of the mold even though we are not sorcerers. When that happens, we say that we have seen God. He said that if we call it God it is the truth. The mold is God.

"I had a dreadful time understanding the Nagual, because I was a very religious woman. I had nothing else in the world but my religion. So to hear the Nagual say the things he used to say made me shiver. But then I became complete and the forces of the world began to pull me, and I knew that the Nagual was right. The mold is God. What do you think?"

"The day I see it I'll tell you, Gorda," I said.

She laughed, and said that the Nagual used to make fun of me, saying that the day I would see the mold I would probably become a Franciscan friar, because in the depths of me I was a religious soul.

"Was the mold you saw a man or a woman?" I asked.

"Neither. It was simply a luminous human. The Nagual said that I could have asked something for myself. That a warrior cannot let that chance pass. But I could not think of anything to ask for. It was better that way. I have the most beautiful memory of it. The Nagual said that a warrior with enough power can see the mold many, many times. What a great fortune that must be!"

"But if the human mold is what puts us together, what is the human form?"

"Something sticky, a sticky force that makes us the people we are. The Nagual told me that the human form has no form. Like the allies that he carried in his gourd, it's anything; but in spite of not having form, it possesses us during our lives and doesn't leave us until we die. I've never seen the human form but I have felt it in my body."

She then described a very complex series of sensations that she had had over a period of years that culminated in a serious illness; the climax of which was a bodily state that reminded me of descriptions I had read of a massive heart attack. She said that the human form, as the force that it is, left her body after a serious internal battle that manifested itself as illness.

"It sounds as if you had a heart attack," I said.

"Maybe I did," she replied, "but one thing I know for sure. The day I had it, I lost my human form. I became so weak that for days I couldn't even get out of my bed. Since that day I haven't had the energy to be my old self. From time to time I have tried to get into my old habits, but I didn't have the strength to enjoy them the way I used to. Finally I gave up trying."

"What is the point of losing your form?"

"A warrior must drop the human form in order to change- to really change. Otherwise, there is only talk about change, like in your case.

"The Nagual said that it is useless to think or hope that one can change one's habits. One cannot change one iota as long as one holds on to the human form. The Nagual told me that a warrior knows that he cannot change, and yet he makes it his business to try to change even though he knows that he won't be able to. That's the only advantage a warrior has over the average man. The warrior is never disappointed when he fails to change."

"But you are still yourself, Gorda, aren't you?"

"No. Not anymore. The only thing that makes you think you are yourself is the form. Once it leaves, you are nothing."

"But you still talk and think and feel as you always did, don't you?"

"Not at all. I'm new."

She laughed and hugged me as if she were consoling a child.

"Only Eligio and I have lost our form," she went on. "It was our great fortune that we lost it while the Nagual was among us. You people will have a horrid time. That is your fate. Whoever loses it next will have only me as a companion. I already feel sorry for whoever it will be."

"What else did you feel, Gorda, when you lost your form, besides not having enough energy?"

"The Nagual told me that a warrior without form begins to see an eye. I saw an eye in front of me every time I closed my eyes. It got so bad that I couldn't rest anymore. The eye followed me wherever I went. I nearly went mad. Finally, I suppose, I became used to it. Now I don't even notice it because it has become part of me.

"The formless warrior uses that eye to start dreaming. If you don't have a form, you don't have to go to sleep to do dreaming. The eye in front of you pulls you every time you want to go."

"Where exactly is that eye, Gorda?"

She closed her eyes and moved her hand from side to side, right in front of her eyes, covering the span of her face.

"Sometimes the eye is very small and other times it is enormous," she went on. "When it's small your dreaming is precise. If it's big your dreaming is like flying over the mountains and not really seeing much. I haven't done enough dreaming yet, but the Nagual told me that that eye is my trump card. One day when I become truly formless I won't see the eye anymore; the eye will become just like me, nothing, and yet it'll be there like the allies.

"The Nagual said that everything has to be sifted through our human form. When we have no form, then nothing has form and yet everything is present. I couldn't understand what he meant by that, but now I see that he was absolutely right.

"The allies are only a presence and so will be the eye. But at this time that eye is everything to me. In fact, in having that eye I should need nothing else in order to call up my dreaming, even when I'm awake. I haven't been able to do that yet. Perhaps I'm like you, a bit stubborn and lazy."

"How did you do the flying you showed me tonight?"

"The Nagual taught me how to use my body to make lights because we are light anyway. So I make sparks and lights, and they in turn lure the lines of the world. Once I see one, it's easy to hook myself to it."

"How do you hook yourself?"

"I grab it."

She made a gesture with her hands. She clawed them and then placed them together joined at the wrists, forming a sort of bowl with the clawed fingers upright.

"You have to grab the line like a jaguar," she went on, "and never separate the wrists. If you do, you'll fall down and break your neck."

She paused and that forced me to look at her; waiting for more of her revelations.

"You don't believe me, do you?" she asked.

Without giving me time to answer, she squatted and began again to produce her display of sparks. I was calm and collected, and could place my undivided attention on her actions. When she snapped her fingers open, every fiber of her muscles seemed to tense at once. That tension seemed to be focused on the very tips of her fingers and was projected out like rays of light. The moisture in her fingertips was actually a vehicle to carry some sort of energy emanating from her body.

"How did you do that, Gorda?" I asked, truly marveling at her.

"I really don't know," she said. "I simply do it. I've done it lots and lots of times and yet I don't know how I do it. When I grab one of those rays I feel that I'm being pulled by something. I really don't do anything else except let the lines I've grabbed pull me.

"When I want to get back through, I feel that the line doesn't want to let me free and I get frantic. The Nagual said that that was my worst feature. I get so frightened that one of these days I'm going to injure my body. But I figure that one of these days I'll be even more formless and then I won't get frightened. So as long as I hold on until that day, I'm all right."

"Tell me then, Gorda, how do you let the lines pull you?"

"We're back again in the same spot. I don't know. The Nagual warned me about you. You want to know things that cannot be known."

I struggled to make clear to her that what I was after were the procedures. I had really given up looking for an explanation from all of them because their explanations explained nothing to me. To describe to me the steps that were followed was something altogether different.

"How did you learn to let your body hold onto the lines of the world?" I asked.

"I learned that in dreaming," she said, "but I really don't know how. Everything for a woman warrior starts in dreaming. The Nagual told me, just as he told you, first to look for my hands in my dreams. I couldn't find them at all. In my dreams I had no hands. I tried and tried for years to find them. Every night I used to give myself the command to find my hands but it was to no avail. I never found anything in my dreams. The Nagual was merciless with me. He said that I had to find them or perish.

"So I lied to him that I had found my hands in my dreams. The Nagual didn't say a word but Genaro threw his hat on the floor and danced on it. He patted my head and said that I was really a great warrior. The more he praised me the worse I felt. I was about to tell the Nagual the truth when crazy Genaro aimed his behind at me and let out the loudest and longest fart I had ever heard. He actually pushed me backward with it. It was like a hot, foul wind, disgusting and smelly, just like me. The Nagual was choking with laughter.

"I ran to the house and hid there. I was very fat then. I used to eat a great deal and I had a lot of gas. So I decided not to eat for a while. Lidia and Josefina helped me. I didn't eat anything for twenty-three days, and then one night I found my hands in my dreams. They were old and ugly and green, but they were mine. So that was the beginning. The rest was easy."

"And what was the rest, Gorda?"

"The next thing the Nagual wanted me to do was to try to find houses or buildings in my dreams and look at them, trying not to dissolve the images. He said that the art of the dreamer is to hold the image of his dream. Because that's what we do anyway during all our lives."

"What did he mean by that?"

"Our art as ordinary people is that we know how to hold the image of what we are looking at. The Nagual said that we do that but we don't know how. We just do it- that is, our bodies do it. In dreaming we have to do the same thing, except that in dreaming we have to learn how to do it. We have to struggle not to look, but merely to glance and yet hold the image.

"The Nagual told me to find in my dreams a brace for my belly button. It took a long time because I didn't understand what he meant. He said that in dreaming we pay attention with the belly button; therefore it has to be protected. We need a little warmth or a feeling that something is pressing the belly button in order to hold the images in our dreams.

"I found a pebble in my dreams that fit my belly button, and the Nagual made me look for it day after day in water holes and canyons, until I found it. I made a belt for it and I still wear it day and night. Wearing it made it easier for me to hold images in my dreams.

"Then the Nagual gave me the task of going to specific places in my dreaming. I was doing really well with my task, but at that time I lost my form and I began to see the eye in front of me.

"The Nagual said that the eye had changed everything, and he gave me orders to begin using the eye to pull myself away. He said that I didn't have time to get to my double in dreaming, but that the eye was even better. I felt cheated. Now I don't care.

"I've used that eye the best way I could. I let it pull me in my dreaming. I close my eyes and fall asleep like nothing; even in the daytime or anywhere. The eye pulls me and I enter into another world. Most of the time I just wander around in it.

"The Nagual told me and the little sisters that during our menstrual periods dreaming becomes power. I get a little crazy for one thing. I become more daring.

"And like the Nagual showed us, a crack opens in front of us during those days. You're not a woman so it can't make any sense to you; but two days before her period, a woman can open that crack and step through it into another world."

With her left hand she followed the contour of an invisible line that seemed to run vertically in front of her at arm's length.

"During that time a woman, if she wants to, can let go of the images of the world," la Gorda went on. "That's the crack between the worlds, and as the Nagual said, it is right in front of all of us women.

"The reason the Nagual believes women are better sorcerers than men is because they always have the crack in front of them, while a man has to make it.

"Well, it was during my periods that I learned in dreaming to fly with the lines of the world. I learned to make sparks with my body to entice the lines and then I learned to grab them. And that's all I have learned in dreaming so far."

I laughed and told her that I had nothing to show for my years of "dreaming."

"You've learned how to call the allies in dreaming," she said with great assurance.

I told her that don Juan had taught me to make those sounds. She did not seem to believe me.

"The allies must come to you, then, because they're seeking his luminosity," she said, "the luminosity he left with you. He told me that every sorcerer has only so much luminosity to give away. So he parcels it out to all his children in accordance with an order that comes to him from somewhere out there in that vastness. In your case he even gave you his own call."

She clicked her tongue and winked at me.

"If you don't believe me," she went on, "why don't you make the sound the Nagual taught you and see if the allies come to you?"

I felt reluctant to do it. Not because I believed that my sound would bring anything, but because I did not want to humor her.

She waited for a moment, and when she was sure I was not going to try, she put her hand to her mouth and imitated my tapping sound to perfection. She played it for five or six minutes, stopping only to breathe.

"See what I mean?" she asked smiling. "The allies don't give a fig about my calling, no matter how close it is to yours. Now try it yourself."

I tried. After a few seconds I heard the call being answered. La Gorda jumped to her feet. I had the clear impression that she was more surprised than I was. She hurriedly made me stop, turned off the lantern and gathered up my notes.

She was about to open the front door, but she stopped short. A most frightening sound came from just outside the door. It sounded to me like a growl. It was so horrendous and ominous that it made us both jump back, away from the door. My physical alarm was so intense that I would have fled if I had had a place to go.

Something heavy was leaning against the door. It made the door creak. I looked at la Gorda. She seemed to be even more alarmed. She was still standing with her arm outstretched as if to open the door. Her mouth was open. She seemed to have been frozen in midaction.

The door was about to be sprung open any moment. There were no bangs on it, just a terrifying pressure, not only on the door but all around the house.

La Gorda stood up and told me to embrace her quickly from behind locking my hands around her waist over her belly button. She performed then a strange movement with her hands.

It was as though she were flipping a towel while holding it at the level of her eyes. She did it four times.

Then she made another strange movement. She placed her hands at the middle of her chest with the palms up, one above the other without touching. Her elbows were straight out to her sides. She clasped her hands as if she had suddenly grabbed two unseen bars. She slowly turned her hands over until the palms were facing down and then she made a most beautiful, exertive movement, a movement that seemed to engage every muscle in her body. It was as though she were opening a heavy sliding door that offered a great resistance. Her body shivered with the exertion. Her arms moved slowly, as if opening a very, very heavy door, until they were fully extended laterally.

I had the clear impression that as soon as she opened that door a wind rushed through. That wind pulled us and we actually went through the wall- or rather, the walls of the house went through us- or perhaps, all three of la Gorda, the house and myself went through the door she had opened.

All of a sudden I was out in an open field. I could see the dark shapes of the surrounding mountains and trees. I was no longer holding onto la Gorda's waist. A noise above me made me look up, and I saw her hovering perhaps ten feet above me like the black shape of a giant kite. I felt a terrible itch in my belly button and then la Gorda plummeted down to the ground at top speed, but instead of crashing she came to a soft, total halt.

At the moment that la Gorda landed, the itch in my umbilical region turned into a horribly exhausting nervous pain. It was as if her landing were pulling my insides out. I screamed in pain at the top of my voice.

Then la Gorda was standing next to me, desperately out of breath. I was sitting down. We were again in the room of don Genaro's house where we had been.

La Gorda seemed unable to catch her breath. She was drenched in perspiration.

"We've got to get out of here," she muttered.

It was a short drive to the little sisters' house. None of them was around. La Gorda lit a lantern and led me directly to the open-air kitchen in back. There she undressed herself, and asked me to bathe her like a horse by throwing water on her body. I took a small tub full of water and proceeded to pour it gently on her, but she wanted me to drench her.

She explained that a contact with the allies, like the one we had, produced a most injurious perspiration that had to be washed off immediately. She made me take off my clothes and then drenched me in ice-cold water.

Then she handed me a clean piece of cloth and we dried ourselves as we walked back into the house. She sat on the big bed in the front room after hanging the lantern on the wall above it. Her knees were up and I could see every part of her body. I hugged her naked body, and it was then that I realized what dona Soledad had meant when she said that la Gorda was the Nagual's woman. She was formless like don Juan. I could not possibly think of her as a woman.

I started to put on my clothes. She took them away from me. She said that before I could wear them again I had to sun them. She gave me a blanket to put over my shoulders and got another one for herself.

"That attack of the allies was truly scary," she said as we sat down on the bed. "We were really lucky that we could get out of their grip. I had no idea why the Nagual told me to go to Genaro's with you. Now I know. That house is where the allies are the strongest. They missed us by the skin of our teeth. We were lucky that I knew how to get out."

"How did you do it, Gorda?"

"I really don't know," she said. "I simply did it. My body knew how, I suppose, but when I want to think how I did it, I can't.

"This was a great test for both of us. Until tonight I didn't know that I could open the eye, but look what I did. I actually opened the eye just as the Nagual said I could.

"I've never been able to do it until you came along. I've tried but it never worked. This time the fear of those allies made me just grab the eye the way the Nagual told me to, by shaking it four times in it's four directions. He said that I should shake it as I shake a bed sheet, and then I should open it as a door, by holding it right at the middle. The rest was very easy. Once the door was opened I felt a strong wind pulling me instead of blowing me away.

"The trouble, the Nagual said, is to return. You have to be very strong to do that. The Nagual and Genaro and Eligio could go in and out of that eye like nothing. For them the eye was not even an eye. They said it was an orange light, like the sun. And so were the Nagual and Genaro an orange light when they flew.

"I'm still very low on the scale. The Nagual said that when I do my flying, I spread out and look like a pile of cow dung in the sky. I have no light. That's why the return is so dreadful for me. Tonight you helped me and pulled me back twice.

"The reason I showed you my flying tonight was because the Nagual gave me orders to let you see it no matter how difficult or crummy it is. With my flying I was supposed to be helping you, the same way you were supposed to be helping me when you showed me your double.

"I saw your whole maneuver from the door. You were so busy feeling sorry for Josefina that your body didn't notice my presence. I saw how your double came out from the top of your head. It wriggled out like a worm. I saw a shiver that began in your feet and went through your body and then your double came out. It was like you, but very shiny. It was like the Nagual himself. That's why the sisters were petrified. I knew they thought that it was the Nagual himself. But I couldn't see all of it. I missed the sound because I have no attention for it."

"I beg your pardon?"

"The double needs a tremendous amount of attention. The Nagual gave that attention to you, but not to me. He told me that he had run out of time."

She said something else about a certain kind of attention but I was very tired. I fell asleep so suddenly that I did not even have time to put my notes away.

## 4. The Genaros

I woke up around eight the next morning and found that la Gorda had sunned my clothes and made breakfast. We ate in the kitchen in the dining area. When we had finished, I asked her about Lidia, Rosa and Josefina. They seemed to have vanished from the house.

"They are helping Soledad," she said. "She's getting ready to leave."

"Where is she going?"

"Somewhere away from here. She has no more reason to stay. She was waiting for you and you have already come."

"Are the little sisters going with her?"

"No. They just don't want to be here today. It looks as if today is not a good day for them to stick around."

"Why isn't it a good day?"

"The Genaros are coming to see you today and the girls don't get along with them. If all of them are here together, they'll get into a most dreadful fight. The last time that happened they nearly killed one another."

"Do they fight physically?"

"You bet they do. All of them are very strong and none of them wants to take second place. The Nagual told me that that would happen, but I am powerless to stop them; and not only that, but I have to take sides. So it's a mess."

"How do you know that the Genaros are coming today?"

"I haven't talked to them. I just know that they will be here today, that's all."

"Do you know that because you see, Gorda?"

"That's right. I see them coming. And one of them is coming directly to you because you're pulling him."

I assured her that I was not pulling anyone in particular. I said that I had not revealed to anyone the purpose of my trip, but that it had to do with something I had to ask Pablito and Nestor.

She smiled coyly, and said that fate had paired me with Pablito; that we were very alike, and that undoubtedly he was going to see me first. She added that everything that happened to a warrior could be interpreted as an omen. Thus my encounter with Soledad was an omen of what I was going to find out on my visit. I asked her to explain her point.

"The men will give you very little this time," she said. "It's the women who will rip you to shreds, as Soledad did. That's what I would say if I read the omen. You're waiting for the Genaros, but they are men like you.

"And look at this other omen: They are a little bit behind. I would say a couple of days behind. That's your fate as well as theirs, as men, to be always a couple of days behind."

"Behind what, Gorda?"

"Behind everything. Behind us women, for instance."

She laughed and patted my head.

"No matter how stubborn you are," she went on, "you have to admit that I'm right. Wait and see."

"Did the Nagual tell you that men are behind women?" I asked.

"Sure he did," she replied. "All you have to do is look around."

"I do, Gorda. But I don't see any such thing. Women are always behind. They are dependent on men."

She laughed. Her laughter was not scornful or bitter. It was rather a clear sound of joyfulness.

"You know the world of people better than I do," she said forcefully. "But right now I'm formless and you're not. I'm telling you, women are better sorcerers because there is a crack in front of our eyes, and there is none in front of yours."

She did not seem angry, but I felt obliged to explain that I asked questions and made comments not because I was attacking or defending any given point, but because I wanted her to talk.

She said that she had done nothing else but talk since the moment we met, and that the Nagual had trained her to talk because her task was the same as mine; to be in the world of people.

"Everything we say," she went on, "is a reflection of the world of people. You will find out before your visit is over that you talk and act the way you do because you're clinging to the human form; just as the Genaros and the little sisters are clinging to the human form when they fight to kill one another."

"But aren't all of you supposed to cooperate with Pablito, Nestor and Benigno?"

"Genaro and the Nagual told every one of us that we should live in harmony and help and protect one another because we are alone in the world.

"Pablito was left in charge of us four, but he's a coward. If it were left up to him, he would let us die like dogs. When the Nagual was around, though, Pablito was very nice to us and took very good care of us. Everyone used to tease him and joke that he took care of us as if we were his wives. The Nagual and Genaro told him, not too long before they left, that he had a real chance to become the Nagual someday, because we might become his four winds, his four corners. Pablito understood it to be his task and from that day on he changed. He became insufferable. He began to order us around as if we were really his wives.

"I asked the Nagual about Pablito's chances and he told me that I should know that everything in a warrior's world depends on personal power and personal power depends on impeccability. If Pablito were impeccable he would have a chance.

"I laughed when he told me that. I know Pablito very well. But the Nagual explained to me that I shouldn't take it so lightly. He said that warriors always have a chance, no matter how slim. He made me see that I was a warrior myself, and that I shouldn't hinder Pablito with my thoughts. He said that I should turn them off and let Pablito be; that the impeccable thing for me to do was to help Pablito in spite of what I knew about him.

"I understood what the Nagual said. Besides, I have my own debt with Pablito and I welcomed the opportunity to help him. But I also knew that no matter how I helped him, he was going to fail. I knew all along that he didn't have what it takes to be like the Nagual. Pablito is very childish and he won't accept his defeat. He's miserable because he's not impeccable, and yet he's still trying in his thoughts to be like the Nagual."

"How did he fail?"

"As soon as the Nagual left, Pablito had a deadly run-in with Lidia. Years ago the Nagual had given him the task of being Lidia's husband; just for appearances. The people around here thought that she was his wife. Lidia didn't like that one bit. She's very tough.

"The truth of the matter is that Pablito has always been scared to death of her. They could never get along together and they tolerated each other only because the Nagual was around; but when he left, Pablito got crazier than he already was and became convinced that he had enough personal power to take us as his wives.

"The three Genaros got together and discussed what Pablito should do and decided that he should take the toughest woman first; Lidia. They waited until she was alone and then all three of them came into the house and grabbed her by the arms and threw her on the bed. Pablito got on top of her.

"She thought at first that the Genaros were joking, but when she realized that they were serious, she hit Pablito with her head in the middle of his forehead and nearly killed him. The Genaros fled and Nestor had to tend to Pablito's wound for months."

"Is there something that I can do to help them understand?"

"No. Unfortunately understanding is not their problem. All six of them understand very well. The real trouble is something else; something very ugly that no one can help them with. They indulge in not trying to change. Since they know they won't succeed in changing no matter how much they try, or want to, or need to, they have given up trying altogether.

"That's as wrong as feeling disappointed with our failures. The Nagual told each of them that warriors, both men and women, must be impeccable in their effort to change in order to scare the human form and shake it away. After years of impeccability a moment will come, the Nagual said, when the form cannot stand it any longer and it leaves, just as it left me. In doing so, of course, it injures the body and can even make it die, but an impeccable warrior survives, always."

A sudden knock at the front door interrupted her. La Gorda stood up and went over to unlatch the door. It was Lidia. She greeted me very formally and asked la Gorda to go with her. They left together.

I welcomed being alone. I worked on my notes for hours. The open-air dining area was cool and had very good light.

La Gorda returned around noon. She asked me if I wanted to eat. I was not hungry, but she insisted that I eat. She said that contacts with the allies were very debilitating, and that she felt very weak herself.

After eating I sat down with la Gorda and was getting ready to ask her about 'dreaming' when the front door opened loudly and Pablito walked in. He was panting. He obviously had been running, and appeared to be in a state of great excitation. He stood at the door for a moment, catching his breath.

He hadn't changed much. He seemed a bit older, or heavier, or perhaps only more muscular. He was, however, still very lean and wiry. His complexion was pale, as if he had not been in the sun for a long time. The brownness of his eyes was accentuated by a faint mark of weariness in his face. I remembered Pablito as having a beguiling smile. As he stood there looking at me, his smile was as charming as ever.

He ran over to where I was sitting and grasped my forearms for a moment, without saying a word. I stood up. He then shook me gently and embraced me. I myself was utterly delighted to see him. I was jumping up and down with an infantile joy. I did not know what to say to him. He finally broke the silence.

"Maestro," he said softly, nodding his head slightly as if he were bowing to me.

The title of "maestro," teacher, caught me by surprise. I turned around as if I were looking for someone else who was just behind me. I deliberately exaggerated my movements to let him know that I was mystified. He smiled, and the only thing that occurred to me was to ask him how he knew I was there.

He said that he, Nestor, and Benigno had been forced to return because of a most unusual apprehension which made them run day and night without any pause. Nestor had gone to their own house to find out if there was something there that would account for the feeling that had driven them. Benigno had gone to Soledad's place, and he himself had come to the girls' house.

"You hit the jackpot, Pablito," la Gorda said, and laughed.

Pablito did not answer. He glared at her.

"I'll bet that you're working yourself up to throw me out," he said in a tone of great anger.

"Don't fight with me, Pablito," la Gorda said, unruffled.

Pablito turned to me and apologized, and then added in a very loud voice, as if he wanted someone else in the house to hear him, that he had brought his own chair to sit on and that he could put it wherever he pleased.

"There's no one else around here except us," la Gorda said softly, and chuckled.

"I'll bring in my chair anyway," Pablito said. "You don't mind, Maestro, do you?"

I looked at la Gorda. She gave me an almost imperceptible go-ahead sign with the tip of her foot.

"Bring it in. Bring anything you want," I said.

Pablito stepped out of the house.

"They're all that way," la Gorda said, "all three of them."

Pablito came back a moment later carrying an unusual looking chair on his shoulders. The chair was shaped to follow the contour of his back, so when he had it on his shoulders, upside down, it looked like a backpack.

"May I put it down?" he asked me.

"Of course," I replied, moving the bench over to make room.

He laughed with exaggerated ease.

"Aren't you the Nagual?" he asked me, and then looked at la Gorda and added, "Or do you have to wait for orders?"

"I am the Nagual," I said facetiously in order to humor him.

I sensed that he was about to pick a fight with la Gorda. She must have sensed it too, for she excused herself and went out the back.

Pablito put his chair down and slowly circled around me as if he were inspecting my body. Then he took his low-back narrow chair in one hand, turned it around and sat down, resting his folded arms on the back of the chair that was made to allow him the maximum comfort as he sat astride it. I sat down facing him. His mood had changed completely the instant la Gorda left.

"I must ask you to forgive me for acting the way I did," he said smiling, "but I had to get rid of that witch."

"Is she that bad, Pablito?"

"You can bet on that," he replied.

To change the subject I told him that he looked very fine and prosperous.

"You look very fine yourself, Maestro," he said.

"What's this nonsense of calling me Maestro?" I asked in a joking tone.

"Things are not the same as before," he replied. "We are in a new realm, and the Witness says that you're a maestro now; and the Witness cannot be wrong.

"But he will tell you the whole story himself. He'll be here shortly, and will he be glad to see you again. I think that by now he must have felt that you are here. As we were coming back, all of us had the feeling that you might be on your way, but none of us felt that you had already arrived."

I told him then that I had come for the sole purpose of seeing him and Nestor; that they were the only two people in the world with whom I could talk about our last meeting with don Juan and don Genaro, and that I needed more than anything else to clear up the uncertainties that that last meeting had created in me.

"We're bound to one another," he said. "I'll do anything I can to help. You know that. But I must warn you that I'm not as strong as you would want me to be. Perhaps it would be better if we didn't talk at all. But, on the other hand, if we don't talk we'll never understand anything."

In a careful and deliberate manner I formulated my query. I explained that there was one single issue at the crux of my rational predicament.

"Tell me, Pablito," I said, "did we truly jump with our bodies into the abyss?"

"I don't know," he said. "I really don't know."

"But you were there with me."

"That's the point. Was I really there?"

I felt annoyed at his cryptic replies. I had the sensation that if I would shake him or squeeze him, something in him would be set free. It was apparent to me that he was deliberately withholding something of great value. I protested that he would choose to be secretive with me when we had a bond of total trust.

Pablito shook his head as if silently objecting to my accusation.

I asked him to recount to me his whole experience starting from the time prior to our jump when don Juan and don Genaro had prepared us together for the final onslaught.

Pablito's account was muddled and inconsistent. All he could remember about the last moments before we jumped into the abyss was that after don Juan and don Genaro had said good-bye to both of us and had disappeared into the darkness, his strength waned. He was about to fall on his face, but I held him by his arm and carried him to the edge of the abyss; and there he blacked out.

"What happened after you blacked out, Pablito?"

"I don't know."

"Did you have dreams or visions? What did you see?"

"As far as I'm concerned I had no visions, or if I did I couldn't pay any attention to them. My lack of impeccability makes it impossible for me to remember them."

"And then what happened?"

"I woke up at Genaro's old place. I don't know how I got there."

He remained quiet while I frantically searched in my mind for a question, a comment, a critical statement, or anything that would add extra breadth to his statements. As it was, nothing in Pablito's account was usable to buttress what had happened to me. I felt cheated. I was almost angry with him. My feelings were a mixture of pity for Pablito and myself, and at the same time a most intense disappointment.

"I'm sorry I'm such a letdown to you," Pablito said.

My immediate reaction to his words was to cover up my feelings and assure him that I was not disappointed at all.

"I am a sorcerer," he said, laughing, "a poor one, but enough of a one to know what my body tells me. And right now it tells me that you are angry with me."

"I'm not angry, Pablito!" I exclaimed.

"That's what your reason says, but not your body," he said. "Your body is angry. Your 'reason', however, finds no reason to feel anger toward me, so you're caught in a cross fire. The least I can do for you is to untangle this. Your body is angry because it knows that I am not impeccable and that only an impeccable warrior can help you. Your body is angry because it feels that I am wasting myself. It knew all that the minute I walked through that door."

I did not know what to say. I felt a flood of post-fact realizations. Perhaps he was right in saying that my body knew all that. At any rate, his directness in confronting me with my feelings had blunted the edge of my frustration. I began to wonder if Pablito was not just playing a game with me. I told him that being so direct and bold he could not possibly be as weak as he pictured himself to be.

"My weakness is that I'm made to have longings," he said almost in a whisper. "I'm even to the point where I long for my life as an ordinary man. Can you believe that?"

"You can't be serious, Pablito! " I exclaimed.

"I am," he replied. "I long for the grand privilege of walking the face of the earth as an ordinary man without this awesome burden."

I found his stand simply preposterous and caught myself exclaiming over and over that he could not possibly be serious. Pablito looked at me and sighed. I was overtaken by a sudden apprehension. He seemed to be on the verge of tears. My apprehension gave way to an intense feeling of empathy. Neither of us could help each other.

La Gorda came back to the kitchen at that moment. Pablito seemed to experience an instantaneous revitalization. He jumped to his feet and stomped on the floor.

"What the hell do you want?" he yelled in a shrill, nervous voice. "Why are you snooping around?"

La Gorda addressed me as if he did not exist. She politely said that she was going to Soledad's house.

"What the hell do we care where you go?" he yelled. "You can go to hell for that matter."

He stomped on the floor like a spoiled child while la Gorda stood there laughing.

"Let's get out of this house. Maestro," he said loudly.

His sudden shift from sadness to anger fascinated me. I became engrossed in watching him. One of the features that I had always admired was his nimbleness. Even when he stomped his feet, his movements had grace.

He suddenly reached across the table and nearly snatched my writing pad away from me. He grabbed it with the thumb and index finger of his left hand. I had to hold onto it with both hands, using all my strength. There was such an extraordinary force in his pull that if he had really wanted to take it he could have easily jerked it away from my grip.

He let go, and as he retrieved his hand I saw a fleeting image of an extension to it. It happened so fast that I could have explained it as a visual distortion on my part; a product of the jolt of having to stand up halfway drawn by the force of his pull. But I had learned by then that I could neither behave with those people in my accustomed manner, nor could I explain anything in my accustomed manner; so I did not even try.

"What's that in your hand, Pablito?" I asked.

He recoiled in surprise and hid his hand behind his back. He had a blank expression and mumbled that he wanted us to leave that house because he was becoming dizzy.

La Gorda began to laugh loudly and said that Pablito was as good a deceiver as Josefina, maybe even better, and that if I pressed him to tell me what was in his hand he would faint and Nestor would have to tend to him for months.

Pablito began to choke. His face became almost purple. La Gorda told him in a nonchalant tone to cut out the acting because he had no audience: She was leaving and I did not have much patience. She then turned to me, and told me in a most commanding tone to stay there and not go to the Genaros' house.

"Why in the hell not?" Pablito yelled and jumped in front of her as if trying to stop her from leaving. "What gall! Telling the Maestro what to do!"

"We had a bout with the allies in your house last night," la Gorda said to Pablito matter-of-factly. "The Nagual and I are still weak from that. If I were you, Pablito, I would put my attention to work. Things have changed. Everything has changed since he came."

La Gorda left through the front door. I became aware then that indeed she looked very tired. Her shoes seemed too tight, or perhaps she was so weak that her feet dragged a little bit. She seemed small and frail.

I thought that I must have looked as tired. Since there were no mirrors in their house, I had the urge to go outside and look at myself in the side mirror of my car. I perhaps would have done it but Pablito thwarted me. He asked me in the most earnest tone not to believe a word of what she had said about his being a deceiver. I told him not to worry about that.

"You don't like la Gorda at all, do you?" I asked.

"You can say that again," he replied with a fierce look. "You know better than anyone alive the kind of monsters those women are. The Nagual told us that one day you were going to come here just to fall into their trap.

"He begged us to be on the alert and warn you about their designs. The Nagual said that you had one out of four chances: If our power was high, we could bring you here ourselves and warn you and save you; if our power was low we ourselves would arrive here just in time to see your corpse; the third chance was to find you either the slave to the witch Soledad or the slave of those disgusting mannish women; the fourth chance, and the faintest one of all was to find you alive and well.

"The Nagual told us that in case you survived, you would then be the Nagual and we should trust you because only you could help us."

"I'll do anything for you, Pablito. You know that."

"Not just for me. I'm not alone. The Witness and Benigno are with me. We are together and you have to help all of us."

"Of course, Pablito. That goes without saying."

"People around here have never bothered us. Our problems are with those ugly mannish freaks. We don't know what to do with them. The Nagual gave us orders to stay around them no matter what. He gave me a personal task but I've failed at it. I was very happy before. You remember. Now I can't seem to manage my life anymore."

"What happened, Pablito?"

"Those witches drove me from my house. They took over and pushed me out like trash. I now live in Genaro's house with Nestor and Benigno. We even have to cook our own meals.

"The Nagual knew that this might happen and gave la Gorda the task of mediating between us and those three bitches. But la Gorda is still what the Nagual used to call her, 'Two Hundred and Twenty Buttocks'. That was her nickname for years and years because she tipped the scales at two hundred and twenty pounds."

Pablito chuckled at his recollection of la Gorda.

"She was the fattest, smelliest slob you'd ever want to see," he went on. "Today she's half her real size, but she's still the same fat slow woman up there in her head; and she can't do a thing for us. But you're here now, Maestro, and our worries are over. Now we are four against four."

I wanted to interject a comment but he stopped me.

"Let me finish what I have to say before that witch comes back to throw me out," he said as he nervously looked at the door.

"I know that they have told you that the five of you are the same because you are the Nagual's children. That's a lie! You're also like us, the Genaros, because Genaro also helped to make your luminosity. You're one of us too. See what I mean? So, don't you believe what they tell you. You also belong to us.

"The witches don't know that the Nagual told us everything. They think that they are the only ones who know. It took two Toltecs to make us. We are the children of both. Those witches..."

"Wait, wait, Pablito," I said, putting my hand over his mouth.

He stood up, apparently frightened by my sudden movement.

"What do you mean that it took two Toltecs to make us?"

"The Nagual told us that we are Toltecs. All of us are Toltecs. He said that a Toltec is the receiver and holder of mysteries. The Nagual and Genaro are Toltecs. They gave us their special luminosity and their mysteries. We received their mysteries and now we hold them."

His usage of the word Toltec baffled me. I was familiar only with it's anthropological meaning. In that context, it always refers to a culture of Nahuatl-speaking people in central and southern Mexico which was already extinct at the time of the Conquest.

"Why did he call us Toltecs?" I asked, not knowing what else to say.

"Because that's what we are. Instead of saying that we are sorcerers or witches, he said that we are Toltecs."

"If that's the case, why do you call the little sisters witches?"

"Oh, that's because I hate them. That has nothing to do with what we are."

"Did the Nagual tell that to everyone?"

"Why, certainly. Everyone knows."

"But he never told me that."

"Oh, that's because you are a very educated man and are always discussing stupid things."

He laughed in a forced, high-pitched tone and patted me on the back.

"Did the Nagual by any chance tell you that the Toltecs were ancient people that lived in this part of Mexico?" I asked.

"See, there you go. That's why he didn't tell you. The old crow probably didn't know that they were ancient people."

He rocked in his chair as he laughed. His laughter was very pleasing and very contagious.

"We are the Toltecs, Maestro," he said. "Rest assured that we are. That's all I know. But you can ask the Witness. He knows. I lost my interest a long time ago."

He stood up and went over to the stove. I followed him. He examined a pot of food cooking on a low fire. He asked me if I knew who had made that food. I was pretty sure that la Gorda had made it, but I said that I did not know. He sniffed it four or five times in short inhalations, like a dog.

Then he announced that his nose told him that la Gorda had cooked it. He asked me if I had had some, and when I said that I had finished eating just before he arrived, he took a bowl from a shelf and helped himself to an enormous portion. He recommended in very strong terms that I should eat food cooked only by la Gorda and that I should only use her bowl, as he himself was doing.

I told him that la Gorda and the little sisters had served me my food in a dark bowl that they kept on a shelf apart from the others. He said that that bowl belonged to the Nagual.

We went back to the table. He ate very slowly and did not talk at all. His total absorption in eating made me realize that all of them did the same thing: they ate in complete silence.

"La Gorda is a great cook," he said as he finished his food. "She used to feed me. That was ages ago before she hated me; before she became a witch- I mean a Toltec."

He looked at me with a glint in his eye and winked.

I felt obligated to comment that la Gorda did not strike me as being capable of hating anyone. I asked him if he knew that she had lost her form.

"That's a lot of baloney!" he exclaimed.

He stared at me as if measuring my look of surprise, and then hid his face under his arm and giggled like an embarrassed child.

"Well, she actually did do that," he added. "She's just great."

"Why do you dislike her, then?"

"I'm going to tell you something, Maestro, because I trust you. I don't dislike her at all. She's the very best. She's the Nagual's woman. I just act that way with her because I like her to pamper me, and she does. She never gets mad at me. I could do anything.

"Sometimes I get carried away and I get physical with her and want to strike her. When that happens she just jumps out of the way, like the Nagual used to do. The next minute she doesn't even remember what I did. That's a true formless warrior for you. She does the same thing with everyone. But the rest of us are a sorry mess. We are truly bad. Those three witches hate us and we hate them back."

"You are sorcerers, Pablito; can't you stop all this bickering?"

"Sure we can, but we don't want to. What do you expect us to do; be like brothers and sisters?"

I did not know what to say.

"They were the Nagual's women," he went on. "And yet everybody expected me to take them. How in heaven's name am I going to do that! I tried with one of them and instead of helping me the bastardly witch nearly killed me. So now every one of those women is after my hide as if I had committed a crime. All I did was to follow the Nagual's instructions. He told me that I had to be intimate with each of them, one by one, until I could hold all of them at once. But I couldn't be intimate with even one."

I wanted to ask him about his mother, dona Soledad, but I could not figure out a way to bring her into the conversation at that point. We were quiet for a moment.

"Do you hate them for what they tried to do to you?" he asked all of a sudden.

I saw my chance.

"No, not at all," I said. "La Gorda explained to me their reasons. But dona Soledad's attack was very scary. Do you see much of her?"

He did not answer. He looked at the ceiling. I repeated my question. I noticed then that his eyes were filled with tears. His body shook, convulsed by quiet sobs.

He said that once he had had a beautiful mother, whom, no doubt, I could still remember. Her name was Manuelita, a saintly woman who raised two children, working like a mule to support them. He felt the most profound veneration for that mother who had loved and reared him.

But one horrible day his fate was fulfilled and he had the misfortune to meet Genaro and the Nagual, and between the two of them they destroyed his life. In a very emotional tone Pablito said that the two devils took his soul and his mother's soul. They killed his Manuelita and left behind that horrendous witch, Soledad. He peered at me with eyes flooded with tears and said that that hideous woman was not his mother. She could not possibly be his Manuelita.

He sobbed uncontrollably. I did not know what to say. His emotional outburst was so genuine and his contentions so truthful that I felt swayed by a tide of sentiment. Thinking as an average civilized man I had to agree with him. It certainly looked as if it was a great misfortune for Pablito to have crossed the path of don Juan and don Genaro.

I put my arm around his shoulders and almost wept myself. After a long silence he stood up and went out to the back. I heard him blowing his nose and washing his face in a pail of water. When he returned he was calmer. He was even smiling.

"Don't get me wrong, Maestro," he said. "I don't blame anyone for what has happened to me. It was my fate. Genaro and the Nagual acted like the impeccable warriors they were. I'm just weak, that's all. And I have failed in my task. The Nagual said that my only chance to avoid the attack of that horrendous witch was to corral the four winds, and make them into my four corners. But I failed. Those women were in cahoots with that witch Soledad and didn't want to help me. They wanted me dead.

"The Nagual also told me that if I failed, you wouldn't stand a chance yourself. He said that if she killed you, I had to flee and run for my life. He doubted that I could even get as far as the road. He said that with your power and with what the witch already knows, she would have been peerless. So, when I felt I had failed to corral the four winds, I considered myself dead. And of course I hated those women. But today, Maestro, you bring me new hope."

I told him that his feelings for his mother had touched me very deeply. I was in fact appalled by all that had happened but I doubted intensely that I had brought hope of any kind to him.

"You have!" he exclaimed with great certainty. "I've felt terrible all this time. To have your own mother coming after you with an axe is nothing anyone can feel happy about. But now she's out of the way, thanks to you and whatever you did.

"Those women hate me because they're convinced I'm a coward. They just can't get it through their thick heads that we are different. You and those four women are different than me and the Witness and Benigno in one important way.

"All five of you were pretty much dead before the Nagual found you. He told us that once you had even tried to kill yourself. We were not that way. We were well and alive and happy. We are the opposite of you. You are desperate people. We are not. If Genaro hadn't come my way, I would be a happy carpenter today. Or perhaps I would have died. It doesn't matter. I would've done what I could and that would have been fine."

His words plunged me into a curious mood. I had to admit that he was right in that those women and myself were indeed desperate people. If I had not met don Juan, I would no doubt be dead, but I could not say, as Pablito had, that it would have been fine with me either way. Don Juan had brought life and vigor to my body and freedom to my spirit.

Pablito's statements made me remember something don Juan had told me once when we were talking about an old man, a friend of mine. Don Juan had said in very emphatic terms that the old man's life or death had no significance whatsoever. I felt a bit cross at what I thought to be redundance on don Juan's part. I told him that it went without saying that the life and death of that old man had no significance, since nothing in the world could possibly have any significance except to each one of us personally.

"You said it!" he exclaimed, and laughed. "That's exactly what I mean. That old man's life and death have no significance to him personally. He could have died in nineteen twenty-nine, or in nineteen fifty, or he could live until nineteen ninety-five. It doesn't matter. Everything is stupidly the same to him."

My life before I met don Juan had been that way. Nothing had ever mattered to me. I used to act as if certain things affected me, but that was only a calculated ploy to appear as a sensitive man.

Pablito spoke to me and disrupted my reflections. He wanted to know if he had hurt my feelings. I assured him that it was nothing. In order to start up the conversation again, I asked him where he had met don Genaro.

"My fate was that my boss got ill," he said. "And I had to go to the city market in his place to build a new section of clothing booths. I worked there for two months. While I was there I met the daughter of the owner of one of the booths. We fell in love. I built her father's stand a little bigger than the others so I could make love to her under the counter while her sister took care of the customers.

"One day Genaro brought a sack of medicinal plants to a retailer across the aisle, and while they were talking he noticed that the clothing stand was shaking. He looked carefully at the stand but he only saw the sister sitting on a chair half asleep. The man told Genaro that every day the stand shook like that around that hour.

"The next day Genaro brought the Nagual to watch the stand shaking, and sure enough that day it shook. They came back the next day and it shook again. So they waited there until I came out.

"That day I made their acquaintance, and soon after Genaro told me that he was an herbalist and proposed to make me a potion that no woman could resist. I liked women so I fell for it. He certainly made the potion for me, but it took him ten years. In the meantime I got to know him very well, and I grew to love him more than if he were my own brother. And now I miss him like hell. So you see, he tricked me. Sometimes I'm glad that he did. Most of the time I resent it though."

"Don Juan told me that sorcerers have to have an omen before they choose someone. Was there something of that sort with you, Pablito?"

"Yes. Genaro said that he got curious watching the stand shaking and then he saw that two people were making love under the counter. So he sat down to wait for the people to come out. He wanted to see who they were. After a while the girl appeared in the stand but he missed me. He thought it was very strange that he would miss me after being so determined to set eyes on me.

"The next day he came back with the Nagual. He also saw that two people were making love, but when it was time to catch me, they both missed me. They came back again the next day. Genaro went around to the back of the stand while the Nagual stayed out in front. I bumped into Genaro while I was crawling out. I thought he hadn't seen me because I was still behind the piece of cloth that covered a small square opening I had made on the side wall. I began to bark to make him think there was a small dog under the drape. He growled and barked back at me, and really made me believe that there was a huge mad dog on the other side.

"I got so scared I ran out the other way and crashed into the Nagual. If he would have been an ordinary man, I would have thrown him to the ground because I ran right into him, but instead he lifted me up like a child. I was absolutely flabbergasted. For being such an old man he was truly strong. I thought I could use a strong man like that to carry lumber for me. Besides I didn't want to lose face with the people who had seen me running out from under the counter.

"I asked him if he would like to work for me. He said yes. That same day he went to the shop and started to work as my assistant. He worked there every day for two months. I didn't have a chance with those two devils."

The incongruous image of don Juan working for Pablito was extremely humorous to me. Pablito began to imitate the way don Juan carried lumber on his shoulders. I had to agree with la Gorda that Pablito was as good an actor as Josefina.

"Why did they go to all that trouble, Pablito?"

"They had to trick me. You don't think that I would go with them just like that, do you? I've heard all my life about sorcerers and curers and witches and spirits; and I never believed a word of it.

"Those who talked about things like that were just ignorant people. If Genaro had told me that he and his friend were sorcerers, I would've walked out on them. But they were too clever for me. Those two foxes were really sly. They were in no hurry. Genaro said that he would've waited for me if it took him twenty years. That's why the Nagual went to work for me. I asked him to, so it was really me who gave them the key.

"The Nagual was a diligent worker. I was a little bit of a rascal in those days and I thought I was the one playing a trick on him. I believed that the Nagual was just a stupid old Indian so I told him that I was going to tell the boss that he was my grandpa, otherwise they wouldn't hire him, but I had to get a percentage of his salary. The Nagual said that it was fine with him. He gave me something out of the few pesos he made each day.

"My boss was very impressed with my grandpa because he was such a hard worker. But the other guys made fun of him. As you know, he had the habit of cracking all his joints from time to time. In the shop he cracked them every time he carried anything. People naturally thought that he was so old that when he carried something on his back his whole body creaked.

"I was pretty miserable with the Nagual as my grandpa. But by then Genaro had already prevailed on my greedy side. He had told me that he was feeding the Nagual a special formula made out of plants and that it made him strong as a bull.

"Every day Genaro used to bring a small bundle of mashed up green leaves and feed it to him. Genaro said that his friend was nothing without his concoction, and to prove it to me he didn't give it to him for two days. Without the green stuff the Nagual seemed to be just a plain ordinary old man.

"Genaro told me that I could also use his concoction to make women love me. I got very interested in it and he said that we could be partners if I would help him prepare his formula, and give it to his friend. One day he showed me some American money and told me he had sold his first batch to an American. That hooked me and I became his partner.

"My partner Genaro and I had great designs. He said that I should have my own shop because with the money that we were going to make with his formula I could afford anything. I bought a shop and my partner paid for it. So I went wild. I knew that my partner was for real and I began to work making his green stuff."

I had the strange conviction at that point that don Genaro must have used psychotropic plants in making his concoction. I reasoned that he must have tricked Pablito into ingesting it in order to assure his compliance.

"Did he give you power plants, Pablito?" I asked.

"Sure," he replied. "He gave me his green stuff. I ate tons of it."

He described and imitated how don Juan would sit by the front door of don Genaro's house in a state of profound lethargy and then spring to life as soon as his lips touched the concoction. Pablito said that in view of such a transformation he was forced to try it himself.

"What was in that formula?" I asked.

"Green leaves," he replied. "Any green leaves he could get a hold of. That was the kind of devil Genaro was. He used to talk about his formula and make me laugh until I was as high as a kite. God, I really loved those days."

I laughed out of nervousness. Pablito shook his head from side to side and cleared his throat two or three times. He seemed to be struggling not to weep.

"As I've already said. Maestro," he went on, "I was driven by greed. I secretly planned to dump my partner once I had learned how to make the green stuff myself. Genaro must have always known the designs I had in those days, and just before he left, he hugged me and told me that it was time to fulfill my wish. It was time to dump my partner because I had already learned to make the green stuff."

Pablito stood up. His eyes were filled with tears.

"That son of a gun Genaro," he said softly. "That rotten devil. I truly loved him, and if I weren't the coward I am, I would be making his green stuff today."

I didn't want to write anymore. To dispel my sadness I told Pablito that we should go look for Nestor.

I was arranging my notebooks in order to leave when the front door was flung open with a loud bang. Pablito and I jumped up involuntarily and quickly turned to look. Nestor was standing at the door. I ran to him. We met in the middle of the front room. He sort of leaped on me and shook me by the shoulders.

He looked taller and stronger than the last time I had seen him. His long lean body had acquired an almost feline smoothness. Somehow, the person facing me, peering at me, was not the Nestor I had known. I remembered him as a very shy man who was embarrassed to smile because of crooked teeth; a man who was entrusted to Pablito for his care.

The Nestor who was looking at me was a mixture of don Juan and don Genaro. He was wiry and agile like don Genaro, but had the mesmeric command that don Juan had. I wanted to indulge in being perplexed, but all I could do was laugh with him. He patted me on the back. He took off his hat. Only then did I realize that Pablito did not have one. I also noticed that Nestor was much darker, and more rugged. Next to him Pablito looked almost frail. Both of them wore American Levi's, heavy jackets and crepe soled shoes.

Nestor's presence in the house lightened up the oppressive mood instantly. I asked him to join us in the kitchen.

"You came right in time," Pablito said to Nestor with an enormous smile as we sat down. "The Maestro and I were weeping here; remembering the Toltec devils."

"Were yon really crying. Maestro?" Nestor asked with a malicious grin on his face.

"You bet he was," Pablito replied.

A very soft cracking noise at the front door made Pablito and Nestor stop talking. If I had been by myself, I would not have noticed or heard anything. Pablito and Nestor stood up. I did the same. We looked at the front door. It was being opened in a most careful manner. I thought that perhaps la Gorda had returned and was quietly opening the door so as not to disturb us.

When the door was finally opened wide enough to allow one person to go through, Benigno came in as if he were sneaking into a dark room. His eyes were shut and he was walking on the tips of his toes. He reminded me of a kid sneaking into a movie theater through an unlocked exit door in order to see a matinee; not daring to make any noise and at the same time not capable of seeing a thing in the dark.

Everybody was quietly looking at Benigno. He opened one eye just enough to peek out of it and orient himself and then he tiptoed across the front room to the kitchen. He stood by the table for a moment with his eyes closed. Pablito and Nestor sat down, and signaled me to do the same. Benigno then slid next to me on the bench. He gently shoved my shoulder with his head. It was a light tap in order for me to move over to make room for him on the bench. Then he sat down comfortably with his eyes still closed.

He was dressed in Levi's like Pablito and Nestor. His face had filled out a bit since the last time I had seen him, years before, and his hairline was different, but I could not tell how. He had a lighter complexion than I remembered, very small teeth, full lips, high cheekbones, a small nose and big ears. He had always seemed to me like a child whose features had not matured.

Pablito and Nestor, who had interrupted what they were saying to watch Benigno's entrance, resumed talking as soon as he sat down as though nothing had happened.

"Sure, he was crying with me," Pablito said.

"He's not a crybaby like you," Nestor said to Pablito.

Then Nestor turned to me and embraced me.

"I'm so glad you're alive," he said. "We've just talked to la Gorda and she said that you were the Nagual, but she didn't tell us how you survived. How did you survive, Maestro?"

At that point I had a strange choice. I could have followed my rational path, as I had always done, and said that I did not have the vaguest idea, and I would have been truthful at that.

Or I could have said that my double had extricated me from the grip of those women. I was measuring in my mind the possible effect of each alternative when I was distracted by Benigno. He opened one eye a little bit and looked at me and then giggled and buried his head in his arms.

"Benigno, don't you want to talk to me?" I asked.

He shook his head negatively.

I felt self-conscious with him next to me and decided to ask what was the matter with him.

"What's he doing?" I asked Nestor in a low voice.

Nestor rubbed Benigno's head and shook him. Benigno opened his eyes and then closed them again.

"He's that way, you know," Nestor said to me. "He's extremely shy. He'll open his eyes sooner or later. Don't pay any attention to him. If he gets bored he'll go to sleep."

Benigno shook his head affirmatively without opening his eyes.

"Well, how did you get out?" Nestor insisted.

"Don't you want to tell us?" Pablito asked.

I deliberately said that my double had come out from the top of my head three times. I gave them an account of what had happened.

They did not seem in the least surprised and took my account as a matter of course. Pablito became delighted with his own speculations that dona Soledad might not recover and might eventually die. He wanted to know if I had struck Lidia as well. Nestor made an imperative gesture for him to be quiet and Pablito meekly stopped in the middle of a sentence.

"I'm sorry. Maestro," Nestor said, "but that was not your double."

"But everyone said that it was my double."

"I know for a fact that you misunderstood la Gorda because as Benigno and I were walking to Genaro's house, la Gorda overtook us on the road and told us that you and Pablito were here in this house. She called you the Nagual. Do you know why?"

I laughed and said that I believed it was due to her notion that I had gotten most of the Nagual's luminosity.

"One of us here is a fool!" Benigno said in a booming voice without opening his eyes.

The sound of his voice was so outlandish that I jumped away from him. His thoroughly unexpected statement, plus my reaction to it, made all of them laugh. Benigno opened one eye and looked at me for an instant and then buried his face in his arms.

"Do you know why we called Juan Matus the Nagual?" Nestor asked me.

I said that I had always thought that that was their nice way of calling don Juan a sorcerer.

Benigno laughed so loudly that the sound of his laughter drowned out everybody else's. He seemed to be enjoying himself immensely. He rested his head on my shoulder as if it were a heavy object he could no longer support.

"The reason we called him the Nagual," Nestor went on, "is because he was split in two. In other words, any time he needed to, he could get into another track that we don't have ourselves. Something would come out of him; something that was not a double, but a horrendous, menacing shape that looked like him but was twice his size. We call that shape the nagual and anybody who has it is, of course, the Nagual.

"The Nagual told us that all of us can have that shape coming out of our heads if we wanted to, but chances are that none of us would want to. Genaro didn't want it, so I think we don't want it, either. So it appears that you're the one who's stuck with it."

They cackled and yelled as if they were corraling a herd of cattle. Benigno put his arms around my shoulders without opening his eyes and laughed until tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"Why do you say that I am stuck with it?" I asked Nestor.

"It takes too much energy," he said, "too much work. I don't know how you can still be standing.

"The Nagual and Genaro split you once in the eucalyptus grove. They took you there because eucalyptuses are your trees. I was there myself and I witnessed when they split you and pulled your nagual out. They pulled you apart by the ears until they had split your luminosity and you were not an egg anymore, but two long chunks of luminosity. Then they put you together again, but any sorcerer that sees can tell that there is a huge gap in the middle."

"What's the advantage of being split?"

"You have one ear that hears everything and one eye that sees everything and you will always be able to go an extra mile in a moment of need. That splitting is also the reason why they told us that you are the Maestro.

"They tried to split Pablito but it looks like it failed. He's too pampered and has always indulged like a bastard. That's why he's so screwed up now."

"What's a double then?"

"A double is 'the other'; the body that one gets in dreaming. It looks exactly like oneself."

"Do all of you have a double?"

Nestor scrutinized me with a look of surprise.

"Hey, Pablito, tell the Maestro about our doubles," he said laughing.

Pablito reached across the table and shook Benigno.

"You tell him, Benigno," he said. "Better yet, show it to him."

Benigno stood up, opened his eyes as wide as he could and looked at the roof, then he pulled down his pants and showed me his penis.

The Genaros went wild with laughter.

"Did you really mean it when you asked that, Maestro?" Nestor asked me with a nervous expression.

I assured him that I was deadly serious in my desire to know anything related to their knowledge. I went into a long elucidation of how don Juan had kept me outside of their realm for reasons I could not fathom, thus preventing me from knowing more about them.

"Think of this," I said. "I didn't know until three days ago that those four girls were the Nagual's apprentices, or that Benigno was don Genaro's apprentice."

Benigno opened his eyes.

"Think of this yourself," he said. "I didn't know until now that you were so stupid."

He closed his eyes again and all of them laughed insanely. I had no choice but to join them.

"We were just teasing you. Maestro," Nestor said in way of an apology. "We thought that you were teasing us, rubbing it in. The Nagual told us that you see. If you do, you can tell that we are a sorry lot. We don't have the body of dreaming. None of us has a double."

In a very serious and earnest manner Nestor said that something had come in between them and their desire to have a double. I understood him as saying that a sort of barrier had been created since don Juan and don Genaro had left. He thought that it might be the result of Pablito flubbing his task. Pablito added that since the Nagual and Genaro had gone, something seemed to be chasing them, and even Benigno, who was living in the southernmost tip of Mexico at that time, had to return. Only when the three of them were together did they feel at ease.

"What do you think it is?" I asked Nestor.

"There is something out there in that immensity that's pulling us," he replied. "Pablito thinks it's his fault for antagonizing those women."

Pablito turned to me. There was an intense glare in his eyes.

"They've put a curse on me, Maestro," he said. "I know that the cause of all our trouble is me. I wanted to disappear from these parts after my fight with Lidia, and a few months later I took off for Veracruz.

"I was actually very happy there with a girl I wanted to marry. I got a job and was doing fine until one day I came home and found that those four mannish freaks, like beasts of prey, had tracked me down by my scent. They were in my house tormenting my woman. That bitch Rosa put her ugly hand on my woman's belly and made her shit in the bed, just like that.

"Their leader, Two Hundred and Twenty Buttocks, told me that they had walked across the continent looking for me. She just grabbed me by the belt and pulled me out. They pushed me to the bus depot to bring me here. I got madder than the devil but I was no match for Two Hundred and Twenty Buttocks. She put me on the bus.

"But on our way here I ran away. I ran through bushes and over hills until my feet got so swollen that I couldn't get my shoes off. I nearly died. I was ill for nine months. If the Witness hadn't found me, I would have died."

"I didn't find him," Nestor said to me. "La Gorda found him. She took me to where he was and between the two of us we carried him to the bus and brought him here. He was delirious and we had to pay an extra fare so that the bus driver would let him stay on the bus."

In a most dramatic tone Pablito said that he had not changed his mind. He still wanted to die.

"But why?" I asked him.

Benigno answered for him in a booming, guttural voice.

"Because his pecker doesn't work," he said.

The sound of his voice was so extraordinary that for an instant I had the impression that he was talking inside a cavern. It was at once frightening and incongruous. I laughed almost out of control.

Nestor said that Pablito had attempted to fulfill his task of establishing sexual relations with the women, in accordance with the Nagual's instructions. He had told Pablito that the four corners of his world were already set in position and all he had to do was to claim them.

But when Pablito went to claim his first corner, Lidia, she nearly killed him. Nestor added that it was his personal opinion as a witness of the event that the reason Lidia rammed him with her head was because Pablito could not perform as a man, and rather than being embarrassed by the whole thing, she hit him.

"Did Pablito really get sick as a result of that blow or was he pretending?" I asked half in jest.

Benigno answered again in the same booming voice.

"He was just pretending!" he said. "All he got was a bump on the head! "

Pablito and Nestor cackled and yelled.

"We don't blame Pablito for being afraid of those women," Nestor said. "They are all like the Nagual himself, fearsome warriors. They're mean and crazy."

"Do you really think they're that bad?" I asked him.

"To say they're bad is only one part of the whole truth," Nestor said. "They're just like the Nagual. They're serious and gloomy. When the Nagual was around, they used to sit close to him and stare into the distance with half-closed eyes for hours, sometimes for days."

"Is it true that Josefina was really crazy a long time ago?" I asked.

"That's a laugh," Pablito said. "Not a long time ago. She's crazy now. She's the most insane of the bunch."

I told them what she had done to me. I thought that they would appreciate the humor of her magnificent performance. But my story seemed to affect them the wrong way. They listened to me like frightened children. Even Benigno opened his eyes to listen to my account.

"Wow!" Pablito exclaimed. "Those bitches are really awful. And you know that their leader is Two Hundred and Twenty Buttocks. She's the one that throws the rock and then hides her hand and pretends to be an innocent little girl. Be careful of her, Maestro."

"The Nagual trained Josefina to be anything," Nestor said. "She can do anything you want: cry, laugh, get angry, anything."

"But what is she like when she is not acting?" I asked Nestor.

"She's just crazier than a bat," Benigno answered in a soft voice. "I met Josefina the first day she arrived. I had to carry her into the house. The Nagual and I used to tie her down to her bed all the time. Once she began to cry for her friend, a little girl she used to play with. She cried for three days. Pablito consoled her and fed her like a baby.

Then, referring to Pablito, Benigno added, "She's like him. Both of them don't know how to stop once they begin."

Benigno suddenly began to sniff the air. He stood up and went over to the stove.

"Is he really shy?" I asked Nestor.

"He's shy and eccentric," Pablito answered. "He'll be that way until he loses his form. Genaro told us that we will lose our form sooner or later, so there is no point in making ourselves miserable in trying to change ourselves the way the Nagual told us to. Genaro told us to enjoy ourselves and not worry about anything. You and the women worry and try. We on the other hand, enjoy. You don't know how to enjoy things and we don't know how to make ourselves miserable. The Nagual called making yourself miserable, impeccability. We call it stupidity, don't we?"

"You are speaking for yourself, Pablito," Nestor said.

"Benigno and I don't feel that way."

Benigno brought a bowl of food over and placed it in front of me. He served everyone. Pablito examined the bowls and asked Benigno where he had found them. Benigno said that they were in a box where la Gorda had told him she had stored them. Pablito confided in me that those bowls used to belong to them before their split.

"We have to be careful," Pablito said in a nervous tone. "These bowls are no doubt bewitched. Those bitches put something in them. I'd rather eat out of la Gorda's bowl."

Nestor and Benigno began to eat. I noticed then that Benigno had given me the brown bowl. Pablito seemed to be in a great turmoil. I wanted to put him at ease but Nestor stopped me.

"Don't take him so seriously," he said. "He loves to be that way. He'll sit down and eat. This is where you and the women fail. There is no way for you to understand that Pablito is like that. You expect everybody to be like the Nagual. La Gorda is the only one who's unruffled by him, not because she understands but because she has lost her form."

Pablito sat down to eat and among the four of us we finished a whole pot of food. Benigno washed the bowls and carefully put them back in the box and then all of us sat down comfortably around the table.

Nestor proposed that as soon as it got dark we should all go for a walk in a ravine nearby where don Juan, don Genaro and I used to go. I felt somehow reluctant. I did not feel confident enough in their company. Nestor said that they were used to walking in the darkness and that the art of a sorcerer was to be inconspicuous even in the midst of people.

I told him what don Juan had once said to me before he had left me in a deserted place in the mountains not too far from there. He had demanded that I concentrate totally on trying not to be obvious. He said that the people of the area knew everyone by sight.

There were not very many people, but those who lived there walked around all the time and could spot a stranger from miles away. He told me that many of those people had firearms and would have thought nothing of shooting me.

"Don't be concerned with beings from the other world," don Juan had said laughing. "The dangerous ones are the Mexicans."

"That's still valid," Nestor said. "That has been valid all the time. That's why the Nagual and Genaro were the artists they were. They learned to become unnoticeable in the middle of all this. They knew the art of stalking."

It was still too early for our walk in the dark. I wanted to use the time to ask Nestor my critical question. I had been avoiding it all along. Some strange feeling had prevented me from asking. It was as if I had exhausted my interest after Pablito's reply. But Pablito himself came to my aid and all of a sudden he brought up the subject as if he had been reading my mind.

"Nestor also jumped into the abyss the same day we did," he said. "And in that way he became the Witness, you became the Maestro and I became the village idiot."

In a casual manner I asked Nestor to tell me about his jump into the abyss. I tried to sound only mildly interested. But Pablito was aware of the true nature of my forced indifference. He laughed and told Nestor that I was being cautious because I had been deeply disappointed with his own account of the event.

"I went over after you two did," Nestor said, and looked at me as if waiting for another question.

"Did you jump immediately after us?" I asked.

"No. It took me quite a while to get ready," he said. "Genaro and the Nagual didn't tell me what to do. That day was a test day for all of us."

Pablito seemed despondent. He stood up from his chair and paced the room. He sat down again shaking his head in a gesture of despair.

"Did you actually see us going over the edge?" I asked Nestor.

"I am the Witness," he said. "To witness was my path of knowledge. To tell you impeccably what I witness is my task."

"But what did you really see?" I asked.

"I saw you two holding each other and running toward the edge," he said. "And then I saw you both like two kites against the sky. Pablito moved farther out in a straight line and then fell down. You went up a little and then you moved away from the edge a short distance, before falling down."

"But, did we jump with our bodies?" I asked.

"Well, I don't think there was another way to do it," he said, and laughed.

"Could it have been an illusion?" I asked.

"What are you trying to say. Maestro?" he asked in a dry tone.

"I want to know what really happened," I said.

"Did you by any chance black out, like Pablito?" Nestor asked with a glint in his eye.

I tried to explain to him the nature of my quandary about the jump. He could not hold still and interrupted me. Pablito intervened to bring him to order and they became involved in an argument. Pablito squeezed himself out of it by walking half seated around the table, holding onto his chair.

"Nestor doesn't see beyond his nose," he said to me. "Benigno is the same. You'll get nothing from them. At least you got my sympathy."

Pablito cackled, making his shoulders shiver, and hid his face with Benigno's hat.

"As far as I'm concerned, you two jumped," Nestor said to me in a sudden outburst. "Genaro and the Nagual had left you with no other choice. That was their art; to corral you and then lead you to the only gate that was open. And so you two went over the edge. That was what I witnessed. Pablito says that he didn't feel a thing; that is questionable. I know that he was perfectly aware of everything, but he chooses to feel and say that he wasn't."

"I really wasn't aware," Pablito said to me in an apologetic tone.

"Perhaps," Nestor said dryly. "But I was aware myself, and I saw your bodies doing what they had to do, jump."

Nestor's assertions put me in a strange frame of mind. All along I had been seeking validation for what I had perceived myself. But once I had it, I realized that it made no difference.

To know that I had jumped and to be afraid of what I had perceived was one thing. To seek consensual validation was another. I knew then that one had no necessary correlation with the other. I had thought all along that to have someone else corroborate that I had taken that plunge would absolve my intellect of it's doubts and fears. I was wrong. I became instead more worried; more involved with the issue.

I began to tell Nestor that although I had come to see the two of them for the specific purpose of having them confirm that I had jumped, I had changed my mind and I really did not want to talk about it anymore. Both of them started talking at once, and at that point we fell into a three-way argument. Pablito maintained that he had not been aware, Nestor shouted that Pablito was indulging and I said that I didn't want to hear anything more about the jump.

It was blatantly obvious to me for the first time that none of us had calmness and self-control.

None of us was willing to give the other person our undivided attention the way don Juan and don Genaro did.

Since I was incapable of maintaining any order in our exchange of opinions, I immersed myself in my own deliberations. I had always thought that the only flaw that had prevented me from entering fully into don Juan's world was my insistence on rationalizing everything, but the presence of Pablito and Nestor had given me a new insight into myself. Another flaw of mine was my timidity. Once I strayed outside the safe railings of common sense, I could not trust myself and became intimidated by the awesomeness of what unfolded in front of me. Thus, I found it was impossible to believe that I had jumped into an abyss.

Don Juan had insisted that the whole issue of sorcery was perception, and truthful to that, he and don Genaro staged for our last meeting an immense, cathartic drama on the flat mountaintop.

After they made me voice my thanks in loud clear words to everyone who had ever helped me, I became transfixed with elation. At that point they had caught all my attention and led my body to perceive the only possible act within their frame of references; the jump into the abyss. That jump was the practical accomplishment of my perception, not as an average man but as a sorcerer.

I had been so absorbed in writing down my thoughts I had not noticed that Nestor and Pablito had stopped talking and all three of them were looking at me. I explained to them that there was no way for me to understand what had taken place with that jump.

"There's nothing to understand," Nestor said. "Things just happen and no one can tell how. Ask Benigno if he wants to understand."

"Do you want to understand?" I asked Benigno as a joke.

"You bet I do!" he exclaimed in a deep bass voice, making everyone laugh.

"You indulge in saying that you want to understand," Nestor went on. "Just like Pablito indulges in saying that he doesn't remember anything."

He looked at Pablito, and winked at me. Pablito lowered his head.

Nestor asked me if I had noticed something about Pablito's mood when we were about to take our plunge. I had to admit that I had been in no position to notice anything so subtle as

Pablito's mood.

"A warrior must notice everything," Nestor said. "That's his trick, and as the Nagual said, there lies his advantage."

He smiled and made a deliberate gesture of embarrassment; hiding his face with his hat.

"What was it that I missed about Pablito's mood?" I asked him.

"Pablito had already jumped before he went over," he said. "He didn't have to do anything. He may as well have sat down on the edge instead of jumping."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"Pablito was already disintegrating," he replied. "That's why he thinks he passed out. Pablito lies. He's hiding something."

Pablito began to speak to me. He muttered some unintelligible words, then gave up and slumped back in his chair. Nestor also started to say something. I made him stop. I was not sure I had understood him correctly.

"Was Pablito's body distegrating?" I asked.

He peered at me for a long time without saying a word. He was sitting to my right. He moved quietly to the bench opposite me.

"You must take what I say seriously," he said. "There is no way to turn back the wheel of time to what we were before that jump. The Nagual said that it is an honor and a pleasure to be a warrior, and that it is the warrior's fortune to do what he has to do. I have to tell you impeccably what I have witnessed.

"Pablito was disintegrating. As you two ran toward the edge only you were solid. Pablito was like a cloud. He thinks that he was about to fall on his face, and you think that you held him by the arm to help him make it to the edge. Neither of you is correct, and I wouldn't doubt that it would have been better for both of you if you hadn't picked Pablito up."

I felt more confused than ever. I truly believed that he was sincere in reporting what he had perceived, but I remembered that I had only held Pablito's arm.

"What would have happened if I hadn't interfered?" I asked.

"I can't answer that," Nestor replied. "But I know that you affected each other's luminosity. At the moment you put your arm around him, Pablito became more solid, but you wasted your precious power for nothing."

"What did you do after we jumped?" I asked Nestor after a long silence.

"Right after you two had disappeared," he said, "my nerves were so shattered that I couldn't breathe and I too passed out. I don't know for how long. I thought it was only for a moment. When I came to my senses again, I looked around for Genaro and Nagual. They were gone. I ran back and forth on the top of that mountain, calling them until my voice was hoarse.

"Then I knew I was alone. I walked to the edge of the cliff and tried to look for the sign that the earth gives when a warrior is not going to return, but I had already missed it. I knew then that Genaro and the Nagual were gone forever. I had not realized until then that they had turned to me after they had said good-bye to you two, and as you were running to the edge they waved their hands and said good-bye to me.

"Finding myself alone at that time of day, on that deserted spot, was more than I could bear. In one sweep I had lost all the friends I had in the world. I sat down and wept. And as I got more and more scared I began to scream as loud as I could. I called Genaro's name at the top of my voice. By then it was pitch-black. I could no longer distinguish any landmarks.

"I knew that as a warrior I had no business indulging in my grief. In order to calm myself down I began to howl like a coyote, the way the Nagual had taught me. After howling for a while I felt so much better that I forgot my sadness. I forgot that the world existed. The more I howled the easier it was to feel the warmth and protection of the earth.

"Hours must have passed. Suddenly I felt a blow inside of me, behind my throat, and the sound of a bell in my ears. I remembered what the Nagual had told Eligio and Benigno before they jumped. He said that the feeling in the throat came just before one was ready to change speed, and that the sound of the bell was the vehicle that one could use to accomplish anything that one needed.

"I wanted to be a coyote then. I looked at my arms, which were on the ground in front of me. They had changed shape and looked like a coyote's. I saw the coyote's fur on my arms and chest. I was a coyote! That made me so happy that I cried like a coyote must cry. I felt my coyote teeth and my long and pointed muzzle and tongue. Somehow, I knew that I had died, but I didn't care. It didn't matter to me to have turned into a coyote, or to be dead, or to be alive. I walked like a coyote, on four legs, to the edge of the precipice and leaped into it. There was nothing else for me to do.

"I felt that I was falling down and my coyote body turned in the air. Then I was myself again twirling in midair. But before I hit the bottom I became so light that I didn't fall anymore but floated. The air went through me. I was so light! I believed that my death was finally coming inside me.

"Something stirred my insides and I disintegrated like dry sand. It was peaceful and perfect where I was. I somehow knew that I was there and yet I wasn't. I was nothing. That's all I can say about it.

"Then, quite suddenly, the same thing that had made me like dry sand put me together again. I came back to life and I found myself sitting in the hut of an old Mazatec sorcerer.

"He told me his name was Porfirio. He said that he was glad to see me and began to teach me certain things about plants that Genaro hadn't taught me. He took me with him to where the plants were being made and showed me the mold of plants, especially the marks on the molds. He said that if I watched for those marks in the plants I could easily tell what they're good for, even if I had never seen those plants before. Then when he knew that I had learned the marks he said good-bye but invited me to come see him again. At that moment I felt a strong pull and I disintegrated, like before. I became a million pieces.

"Then I was pulled again into myself and went back to see Porfirio. He had, after all, invited me. I knew that I could have gone anywhere I wanted but I chose Porfirio's hut because he was kind to me and taught me. I didn't want to risk finding awful things instead.

"Porfirio took me this time to see the mold of the animals. There I saw my own nagual animal. We knew each other on sight. Porfirio was delighted to see such friendship. I saw Pablito's and your own nagual too, but they didn't want to talk to me. They seemed sad. I didn't insist on talking to them. I didn't know how you had fared in your jump. I knew that I was dead myself, but my nagual said that I wasn't and that you both were also alive.

"I asked about Eligio, and my nagual said that he was gone forever. I remembered then that when I had witnessed Eligio's and Benigno's jump I had heard the Nagual giving Benigno instructions not to seek bizarre visions or worlds outside his own.

"The Nagual told him to learn only about his own world, because in doing so he would find the only form of power available to him. The Nagual gave them specific instructions to let their pieces explode as far as they could in order to restore their strength. I did the same myself. I went back and forth from the tonal to the nagual eleven times. Every time, however, I was received by Porfirio who instructed me further. Every time my strength waned I restored it in the nagual until a time when I restored it so much that I found myself back on this earth."

"Dona Soledad told me that Eligio didn't have to jump into the abyss," I said.

"He jumped with Benigno," Nestor said. "Ask him, he'll tell you in his favorite voice."

I turned to Benigno and asked him about his jump.

"You bet we jumped together!" he replied in a blasting voice. "But I never talk about it."

"What did Soledad say Eligio did?" Nestor asked.

I told them that dona Soledad had said that Eligio was twirled by a wind and left the world while he was working in an open field.

"She's thoroughly confused," Nestor said. "Eligio was twirled by the allies. But he didn't want any of them, so they let him go. That has nothing to do with the jump. La Gorda said that you had a bout with allies last night. I don't know what you did, but if you had wanted to catch them or entice them to stay with you, you had to spin with them.

"Sometimes they come of their own accord to the sorcerer and spin him. Eligio was the best warrior there was so the allies came to him of their own accord. If any of us want the allies, we would have to beg them for years, and even if we did, I doubt that the allies would consider helping us.

"Eligio had to jump like everybody else. I witnessed his jump. He was paired with Benigno. A lot of what happens to us as sorcerers depends on what your partner does. Benigno is a bit off his rocker because his partner didn't come back. Isn't that so, Benigno?"

"You bet it is!" Benigno answered in his favorite voice.

I succumbed at that point to a great curiosity that had plagued me from the first time I had heard Benigno speak. I asked him how he made his booming voice. He turned to face me. He sat up straight and pointed to his mouth as if he wanted me to look fixedly at it.

"I don't know!" he boomed. "I just open my mouth and this voice comes out of it! "

He contracted the muscles of his forehead, curled up his lips and made a profound booing sound. I then saw that he had tremendous muscles in his temples, which had given his head a different contour. It was not his hairline that was different but the whole upper front part of his head.

"Genaro left him his noises," Nestor said to me. "Wait until he farts."

I had the feeling that Benigno was getting ready to demonstrate his abilities.

"Wait, wait, Benigno," I said, "it's not necessary."

"Oh, shucks!" Benigno exclaimed in a tone of disappointment. "I had the best one just for you."

Pablito and Nestor laughed so hard that even Benigno lost his deadpan expression and cackled with them.

"Tell me what else happened to Eligio," I asked Nestor after they had calmed down again.

"After Eligio and Benigno jumped," Nestor replied, "the Nagual made me look quickly over the edge, in order to catch the sign the earth gives when warriors jump into the abyss. If there is something like a little cloud, or a faint gust of wind, the warrior's time on earth is not over yet. The day Eligio and Benigno jumped I felt one puff of air on the side Benigno had jumped and I knew that his time was not up. But Eligio's side was silent."

"What do you think happened to Eligio? Did he die?"

All three of them stared at me. They were quiet for a moment. Nestor scratched his temples with both hands. Benigno giggled and shook his head. I attempted to explain but Nestor made a gesture with his hands to stop me.

"Are you serious when you ask us questions?" he asked me.

Benigno answered for me. When he was not clowning, his voice was deep and melodious. He said that the Nagual and Genaro had set us up so all of us had pieces of information that the others did not have.

"Well, if that's the case we'll tell you what's what," Nestor said, smiling as if a great load had been lifted off his shoulders. "Eligio did not die. Not at all."

"Where is he now?" I asked.

They looked at one another again. They gave me the feeling that they were struggling to keep from laughing. I told them that all I knew about Eligio was what dona Soledad had told me. She had said that Eligio had gone to the other world to join the Nagual and Genaro. To me that sounded as if the three of them had died.

"Why do you talk like that. Maestro?" Nestor asked with a tone of deep concern. "Not even Pablito talks like that."

I thought Pablito was going to protest. He almost stood up, but he seemed to change his mind.

"Yes, that's right," he said. "Not even I talk like that."

"Well, if Eligio didn't die, where is he?" I asked.

"Soledad already told you," Nestor said softly. "Eligio went to join the Nagual and Genaro."

I decided that it was best not to ask any more questions. I did not mean my probes to be aggressive, but they always turned out that way. Besides, I had the feeling that they did not know much more than I did.

Nestor suddenly stood up and began to pace back and forth in front of me. Finally he pulled me away from the table by my armpits. He did not want me to write. He asked me if I had really blacked out like Pablito had at the moment of jumping and did not remember anything. I told him that I had had a number of vivid dreams or visions that I could not explain and that I had come to see them to seek clarification. They wanted to hear about all the visions I had had.

After they had heard my accounts, Nestor said that my visions were of a bizarre order and only the first two were of great importance and of this earth. The rest were visions of alien worlds. He explained that my first vision was of special value because it was an omen proper. He said that sorcerers always took a first event of any series as the blueprint or the map of what was going to develop subsequently.

In that particular vision I had found myself looking at an outlandish world. There was an enormous rock right in front of my eyes, a rock which had been split in two. Through a wide gap in it I could see a boundless phosphorescent plain, a valley of some sort, which was bathed in a greenish-yellow light.

On one side of the valley, to the right, and partially covered from my view by the enormous rock, there was an unbelievable domelike structure. It was dark, almost a charcoal gray. If my size was what it is in the world of everyday life, the dome must have been fifty thousand feet high and miles and miles across. Such an enormity dazzled me. I had a sensation of vertigo and plummeted into a state of disintegration.

Once more I rebounded from it and found myself on a very uneven and yet flat surface. It was a shiny, interminable surface just like the plain I had seen before. It went as far as I could see. I soon realized that I could turn my head in any direction I wanted on a horizontal plane, but I could not look at myself. I was able, however, to examine the surroundings by rotating my head from left to right and vice versa. Nevertheless, when I wanted to turn around to look behind me, I could not move my bulk.

The plain extended itself monotonously, equally to my left and to my right. There was nothing else in sight but an endless, whitish glare. I wanted to look at the ground underneath my feet but my eyes could not move down. I lifted my head up to look at the sky. All I saw was another limitless, whitish surface that seemed to be connected to the one I was standing on. I then had a moment of apprehension and felt that something was just about to be revealed to me. But the sudden and devastating jolt of disintegration stopped my revelation. Some force pulled me downward. It was as if the whitish surface had swallowed me.

Nestor said that my vision of a dome was of tremendous importance because that particular shape had been isolated by the Nagual and Genaro as the vision of the place where all of us were supposed to meet them someday.

Benigno spoke to me at that point and said that he had heard Eligio being instructed to find that particular dome. He said that the Nagual and Genaro insisted that Eligio understand their point correctly. They always had believed Eligio to be the best. Therefore they directed him to find that dome and to enter it's whitish vaults over and over again.

Pablito said that all three of them were instructed to find that dome if they could, but that none of them had. I said then, in a complaining tone, that neither don Juan nor don Genaro had ever mentioned anything like that to me. I had had no instruction of any sort regarding a dome.

Benigno, who was sitting across the table from me, suddenly stood up and came to my side. He sat to my left and whispered very softly in my ear that perhaps the two old men had instructed me but I did not remember, or that they had not said anything about it so I would not fix my attention on it once I had found it.

"Why was the dome so important?" I asked Nestor.

"Because that's where the Nagual and Genaro are now," he replied.

"And where's that dome?" I asked.

"Somewhere on this earth," he said.

I had to explain to them at great length that it was impossible that a structure of that magnitude could exist on our planet. I said that my vision was more like a dream and domes of that height could exist only in fantasies. They laughed and patted me gently as if they were humoring a child.

"You want to know where Eligio is," Nestor said all of a sudden. "Well, he is in the white vaults of that dome with the Nagual and Genaro."

"But that dome was a vision," I protested.

"Then Eligio is in a vision," Nestor said. "Remember what Benigno just said to you. The Nagual and Genaro didn't tell you to find that dome and go back to it over and over. If they had, you wouldn't be here. You'd be like Eligio, in the dome of that vision. So you see, Eligio did not die like a man in the street dies. He simply did not return from his jump."

His claim was staggering to me. I could not brush aside the memory of the vividness of the visions I had had, but for some strange reason I wanted to argue with him. Nestor, without giving me time to say anything, drove his point a notch further. He reminded me of one of my visions; the next to the last.

That particular one had been the most nightmarish of them all. I had found myself being chased by a strange, unseen creature. I knew that it was there but I could not see it, not because it was invisible but because the world I was in was so incredibly unfamiliar that I could not tell what anything was. Whatever the elements of my vision were, they were certainly not from this earth.

The emotional distress I experienced upon being lost in such a place was almost more than I could bear. At one moment, the surface where I stood began to shake. I felt that it was caving in under my feet and I grabbed a sort of branch, or an appendage of a thing that reminded me of a tree, which was hanging just above my head on a horizontal plane.

The instant I touched it, the thing wrapped around my wrist, as if had been filled with nerves that sensed everything. I felt that I was being hoisted to a tremendous height. I looked down and saw an incredible animal. I knew it was the unseen creature that had been chasing me. It was coming out of a surface that looked like the ground. I could see it's enormous mouth open like a cavern. I heard a chilling, thoroughly unearthly roar, something like a shrill, metallic gasp, and the tentacle that had me caught unraveled and I fell into that cavernous mouth, I saw every detail of that mouth as I was falling into it. Then it closed with me inside. I felt an instantaneous pressure that mashed my body.

"You have already died," Nestor said. "That animal ate you. You ventured beyond this world and found horror itself. Our life and our death are no more and no less real than your short life in that place and your death in the mouth of that monster. This life that we are having now is only a long vision. Don't you see?"

Nervous spasms ran through my body.

"I didn't go beyond this world," he went on, "but I know what I'm talking about. I don't have tales of horror like you. All I did was to visit Porfirio ten times. If it had been up to me I would've gone there forever, but my eleventh bounce was so powerful that it changed my direction.

"I felt that I had overshot Porfirio's hut, and instead of finding myself at his door, I found myself in the city, very close to the place of a friend of mine. I thought it was funny. I knew that I was journeying between the tonal and the nagual.

"Nobody had said to me that the journeys had to be of any special kind. So I got curious and decided to see my friend. I began to wonder if I really would get to see him. I came to his house and knocked on the door just as I had knocked scores of times.

"His wife let me in as she had always done and sure enough my friend was home. I told him that I had come to the city on business and he even paid me some money he owed me. I put the money in my pocket. I knew that my friend, and his wife, and the money, and his house, and the city were just like Porfirio's hut, a vision. I knew that a force beyond me was going to disintegrate me any moment. So I sat down to enjoy my friend to the fullest. We laughed and joked. And I dare say that I was funny and light and charming. I stayed there for a long time, waiting for the jolt; since it didn't come I decided to leave. I said good-bye and thanked him for the money and for his friendship.

"I walked away. I wanted to see the city before the force took me away. I wandered around all night. I walked all the way to the hills overlooking the city, and at the moment the sun rose, a realization struck me like a thunderbolt.

"I was back in the world and the force that will disintegrate me was at ease and was going to let me stay for a while. I was going to see my homeland and this marvelous earth for a while longer. What a great joy. Maestro! But I couldn't say that I had not enjoyed Porfirio's friendship. Both visions are equal, but I prefer the vision of my form and my earth. It's my indulging perhaps."

Nestor stopped talking and all of them stared at me. I felt threatened as I had never been before. Some part of me was in awe of what he had said. Another wanted to fight with him. I began to argue with him without any sense. My inane mood lasted for a few moments, then I became aware that Benigno was looking at me with a very mean expression.

He had fixed his eyes on my chest. I felt that something ominous was suddenly pressing on my heart. I began to perspire as if a heater were right in front of my face. My ears began to buzz.

La Gorda walked up to me at that precise moment. She was a most unexpected sight. I was sure that the Genaros felt the same way. They stopped what they were doing and looked at her. Pablito was the first to recover from his surprise.

"Why do you have to come in like that?" he asked in a pleading tone. "You were listening from the other room, weren't you?"

She said that she had been in the house only a few minutes and then she stepped out to the kitchen. And the reason she stayed quiet was not so much to listen, but to exercise her ability to be inconspicuous. Her presence had created a strange lull.

I wanted to pick up again the flow of Nestor's revelations, but before I could say anything la Gorda said that the little sisters were on their way to the house and would be coming through the door any minute. The Genaros stood up at once as if they had been pulled by the same string. Pablito put his chair on his shoulder.

"Let's go for a hike in the dark. Maestro," Pablito said to me.

La Gorda said in a most imperative tone that I could not go with them yet because she had not finished telling me everything the Nagual had instructed her to tell me.

Pablito turned to me and winked.

"I've told you," he said. "They're bossy, gloomy bitches. I certainly hope you're not like that, Maestro."

Nestor and Benigno said good night and embraced me. Pablito just walked away carrying his chair like a backpack. They went out through the back.

A few seconds later a horribly loud bang on the front door made la Gorda and me jump to our feet. Pablito walked in again, carrying his chair.

"You thought I wasn't going to say good night, didn't you?" he asked me and left laughing.

## 5. The Art of Dreaming

The next day I was by myself all morning. I worked on my notes, in the afternoon I used my car to help la Gorda and the little sisters transport the furniture from dona Soledad's house to their house.

In the early evening la Gorda and I sat in the dining area alone. We were silent for a while. I was very tired.

La Gorda broke the silence and said that all of them had been too complacent since the Nagual and Genaro had left. Each of them had been absorbed in his or her particular tasks. She said that the Nagual had commanded her to be an impassionate warrior and to follow whatever path her fate selected for her.

If Soledad had stolen my power, la Gorda had to flee and try to save the little sisters and then join Benigno and Nestor, the only two Genaros who would have survived. If the little sisters had killed me, she had to join the Genaros because the little sisters would have had no more need to be with her. If I had not survived the attack of the allies and she did, she had to leave that area and be on her own. She told me, with a glint in her eye, that she had been sure that neither one of us would survive, and that was why she had said good-bye to her sisters, to her house and to the hills.

"The Nagual told me that in case you and I survived the allies," she went on, "I have to do anything for yo, because that would be my warrior's path. That was why I interfered with what Benigno was doing to you last night. He was pressing on your chest with his eyes. That is his art as a stalker. You saw Pablito's hand earlier yesterday. That was also part of the same art."

"What art is that, Gorda?"

"The art of the stalker. That was the Nagual's predilection and the Genaros are his true children at that. We, on the other hand, are dreamers. Your double is dreaming."

What she was saying was new to me. I wanted her to elucidate her statements. I paused for a moment to read what I had written in order to select the most appropriate question. I told her that I first wanted to find out what she knew about my double and then I wanted to know about the art of stalking.

"The Nagual told me that your double is something that takes a lot of power to come out," she said. "He figured that you might have enough energy to get it out of you twice. That's why he set up Soledad and the little sisters either to kill you or to help you."

La Gorda said that I had had more energy than the Nagual thought, and that my double came out three times. Apparently Rosa's attack had not been a thoughtless action. On the contrary, she had very cleverly calculated that if she injured me, I would have been helpless; the same ploy dona Soledad had tried with her dog. I had given Rosa a chance to strike me when I yelled at her, but she failed to injure me. My double came out and injured her instead.

La Gorda said that Lidia told her that Rosa did not want to wake up when all of us had to rush out of Soledad's house, so Lidia squeezed the hand that had been injured. Rosa did not feel any pain and knew in an instant that I had cured her, which meant to them that I had drained my power.

La Gorda affirmed that the little sisters were very clever and had planned to drain me of power. To that effect they had kept on insisting that I cure Soledad. As soon as Rosa realized that I had also cured her, she thought that I had weakened myself beyond repair. All they had to do was to wait for Josefina in order to finish me off.

"The little sisters didn't know that when you cured Rosa and Soledad you also replenished yourself," la Gorda said, and laughed as if it were a joke. "That was why you had enough energy to get your double out a third time when the little sisters tried to take your luminosity."

I told her about the vision I had had of dona Soledad huddled against the wall of her room, and how I had merged that vision with my tactile sense and ended up feeling a viscous substance on her forehead.

"That was true seeing," la Gorda said. "You saw Soledad in her room although she was with me around Genaro's place, and then you saw your nagual on her forehead."

I felt compelled at that point to recount to her the details of my whole experience, especially the realization I had had that I was actually curing dona Soledad and Rosa by touching the viscous substance, which I felt was part of me.

"To see that thing on Rosa's hand was also true seeing," she said. "And you were absolutely right; that substance was yourself. It came out of your body and it was your nagual. By touching it, you pulled it back."

La Gorda told me then, as though she were unveiling a mystery, that the Nagual had commanded her not to disclose the fact that since all of us had the same luminosity, if my nagual touched one of them, I would not get weakened, as would ordinarily be the case if my nagual touched an average man.

"If your nagual touches us," she said, giving me a gentle slap on the head, "your luminosity stays on the surface. You can pick it up again and nothing is lost."

I told her that the content of her explanation was impossible for me to believe. She shrugged her shoulders as if saying that that was not any of her concern. I asked her then about her usage of the word "nagual". I said that don Juan had explained the nagual to me as being the indescribable principle; the source of everything.

"Sure," she said smiling. "I know what he meant. The nagual is in everything."

I pointed out to her, a bit scornfully, that one could also say the opposite, that the tonal is in everything. She carefully explained that there was no opposition, that my statement was correct, the tonal was also in everything. She said that the tonal which is in everything could be easily apprehended by our senses, while the nagual which is in everything manifested itself only to the eye of the sorcerer.

She added that we could stumble upon the most outlandish sights of the tonal and be scared of them, or awed by them, or be indifferent to them, because all of us could view those sights. A sight of the nagual, on the other hand, needed the specialized senses of a sorcerer in order to be seen at all. And yet, both the tonal and the nagual were present in everything at all times.

It was appropriate, therefore, for a sorcerer to say that 'looking' consisted in viewing the tonal which is in everything, and 'seeing', on the other hand, consisted in viewing the nagual which also is in everything. Accordingly, if a warrior observed the world as a human being, he was looking, but if he observed it as a sorcerer, he was seeing- and what he was seeing had to be properly called the nagual.

She then reiterated the reason, which Nestor had given me earlier, for calling don Juan the Nagual and confirmed that I was also the Nagual because of the shape that came out of my head.

I wanted to know why they had called the shape that had come out of my head the double. She said that they had thought they were sharing a private joke with me. They had always called that shape the double, because it was twice the size of the person who had it.

"Nestor told me that that shape was not such a good thing to have," I said.

"It's neither good nor bad," she said. "You have it and that makes you the Nagual. That's all. One of us eight had to be the Nagual and you're the one. It might have been Pablito or me or anyone."

"Tell me now, what is the art of stalking?" I asked.

"The Nagual was a stalker," she said, and peered at me. "You must know that. He taught you to stalk from the beginning."

It occurred to me that what she was referring to was what don Juan had called the hunter. He had certainly taught me to be a hunter. I told her that don Juan had shown me how to hunt and make traps. Her usage of the term stalker, however, was more accurate.

"A hunter just hunts," she said. "A stalker stalks anything, including himself."

"How does he do that?"

"An impeccable stalker can turn anything into prey. The Nagual told me that we can even stalk our own weaknesses."

I stopped writing and tried to remember if don Juan had ever presented me with such a novel possibility; to stalk my weaknesses. I could not recall him ever putting it in those terms.

"How can one stalk one's weaknesses, Gorda?"

"The same way you stalk prey. You figure out your routines until you know all the doing of your weaknesses and then you come upon them and pick them up like rabbits inside a cage."

Don Juan had taught me the same thing about routines but in the vein of a general principle that hunters must be aware of. Her understanding and application of it, however, were more pragmatic than mine.

Don Juan had said that any habit was, in essence, a 'doing', and that a doing needed all it's parts in order to function. If some parts were missing, a doing was disassembled. By doing, he meant any coherent and meaningful series of actions. In other words, a habit needed all it's component actions in order to be a live activity.

La Gorda then described how she had stalked her own weakness of eating excessively. She said that the Nagual had suggested she first tackle the biggest part of that habit, which was connected with her laundry work. She ate whatever her customers fed her as she went from house to house delivering her wash.

She expected the Nagual to tell her what to do, but he only laughed and made fun of her saying that as soon as he would mention something for her to do, she would fight not to do it. He said that that was the way human beings are; they love to be told what to do, but they love even more to fight and not do what they are told, and thus they get entangled in hating the one who told them in the first place.

For many years she could not think of anything to do to stalk her weakness. One day, however, she got so sick and tired of being fat that she refused to eat for twenty-three days. That was the initial action that broke her fixation. She then had the idea of stuffing her mouth with a sponge to make her customers believe that she had an infected tooth and could not eat. The subterfuge worked not only with her customers, who stopped giving her food, but with her as well, as she had the feeling of eating as she chewed on the sponge. La Gorda laughed when she told me how she had walked around with a sponge stuffed in her mouth for years until her habit of eating excessively had been broken.

"Was that all you needed to stop your habit?" I asked.

"No. I also had to learn how to eat like a warrior."

"And how does a warrior eat?"

"A warrior eats quietly, and slowly, and very little at a time. I used to talk while I ate, and I ate very fast, and I ate lots and lots of food at one sitting. The Nagual told me that a warrior eats four mouthfuls of food at one time. A while later he eats another four mouthfuls and so on.

"A warrior also walks miles and miles every day. My eating weakness never let me walk. I broke it by eating four mouthfuls every hour and by walking. Sometimes I walked all day and all night. That was the way I lost the fat on my buttocks."

She laughed at her own recollection of the nickname don Juan had given her.

"But stalking your weaknesses is not enough to drop them," she said. "You can stalk them from now to doomsday and it won't make a bit of difference. That's why the Nagual didn't want to tell me what to do. What a warrior really needs in order to be an impeccable stalker is to have a purpose."

La Gorda recounted how she had lived from day to day, before she met the Nagual, with nothing to look forward to. She had no hopes, no dreams, no desire for anything. The opportunity to eat, however, was always accessible to her. For some reason that she could not fathom, there had been plenty of food available to her every single day of her life. So much of it, in fact, that at one time she weighed two hundred and thirty-six pounds.

"Eating was the only thing I enjoyed in life," la Gorda said. "Besides, I never saw myself as being fat. I thought I was rather pretty and that people liked me as I was. Everyone said that I looked healthy.

"The Nagual told me something very strange. He said that I had an enormous amount of personal power and due to that I had always managed to get food from friends while the relatives in my own house were going hungry.

"Everybody has enough personal power for something. The trick for me was to pull my personal power away from food to my warrior's purpose."

"And what is that purpose, Gorda?" I asked half in jest.

"To enter into the other world," she replied with a grin and pretended to hit me on top of my head with her knuckles the way don Juan used to do when he thought I was indulging.

There was no more light for me to write. I wanted her to bring a lantern but she complained that she was too tired, and had to sleep a bit before the little sisters arrived.

We went into the front room. She gave me a blanket, then wrapped herself in another one, and fell asleep instantly. The brick surface of the bed was hard even with four straw mats. I sat with my back against the wall. Yet, it was more comfortable to lie down. The moment I did I fell asleep.

I woke up suddenly with an unbearable thirst. I wanted to go to the kitchen to drink some water, but I could not orient myself in the darkness. I could feel la Gorda bundled up in her blanket next to me. I shook her two or three times and asked her to help me get some water. She grumbled some unintelligible words. She apparently was so sound asleep that she did not want to wake up.

I shook her again and suddenly she woke up; only it was not la Gorda. Whoever I was shaking yelled at me in a gruff, masculine voice to shut up. There was a man there in place of la Gorda! My fright was instantaneous and uncontrollable.

I jumped out of bed and ran for the front door. But my sense of orientation was off and I ended up out in the kitchen. I grabbed a lantern and lit it as fast as I could.

La Gorda came out of the outhouse in the back at that moment and asked me if there was something wrong. I nervously told her what had happened. She seemed a bit disoriented herself. Her mouth was open and her eyes had lost their usual sheen. She shook her head vigorously and that seemed to restore her alertness. She took the lantern and we walked into the front room.

There was no one in the bed. La Gorda lit three more lanterns. She appeared to be worried. She told me to stay where I was, then she opened the door to their room. I noticed that there was light coming from inside. She closed the door again and said in a matter-of-fact tone not to worry, that it was nothing, and that she was going to make us something to eat.

With the speed and efficiency of a short-order cook she made some food. She also made a hot chocolate drink with cornmeal. We sat across from each other and ate in complete silence.

The night was cold. It looked as if it was going to rain. The three kerosene lanterns that she had brought to the dining area cast a yellowish light that was very soothing. She took some boards that were stacked up on the floor, against the wall, and placed them vertically in a deep groove on the transverse supporting beam of the roof. There was a long slit in the floor parallel to the beam that served to hold the boards in place. The result was a portable wall that enclosed the dining area.

"Who was in the bed?" I asked.

"In bed, next to you, was Josefina, who else?" she replied as if savoring her words, and then laughed. "She's a master at jokes like that. For a moment I thought it was something else, but then I caught the scent that Josefina's body has when she's carrying out one of her pranks."

"What was she trying to do? Scare me to death?" I asked.

"You're not their favorite, you know," she replied. "They don't like to be taken out of the path they're familiar with. They hate the fact that Soledad is leaving. They don't want to understand that we are all leaving this area. It looks like our time is up. I knew that today. As I left the house I felt that those barren hills out there were making me tired. I had never felt that way until today."

"Where are you going to go?"

"I don't know yet. It looks as if that depends on you. On your power."

"On me? In what way, Gorda?"

"Let me explain. The day before you arrived the little sisters and I went to the city. I wanted to find you in the city because I had a very strange vision in my dreaming.

"In that vision I was in the city with you. I saw you in my vision as plainly as I see you now. You didn't know who I was but you talked to me. I couldn't make out what you said. I went back to the same vision three times but I was not strong enough in my dreaming to find out what you were saying to me.

"I figured that my vision was telling me that I had to go to the city and trust my power to find you there. I was sure that you were on your way."

"Did the little sisters know why you took them to the city?" I asked.

"I didn't tell them anything," she replied. "I just took them there. We wandered around the streets all morning."

Her statements put me in a very strange frame of mind. Spasms of nervous excitation ran through my entire body. I had to stand up and walk around for a moment. I sat down again and told her that I had been in the city the same day, and that I had wandered around the marketplace all afternoon looking for don Juan. She stared at me with her mouth open.

"We must have passed each other," she said and sighed. "We were in the market and in the park. We sat on the steps of the church most of the afternoon so as not to attract attention to ourselves."

The hotel where I had stayed was practically next door to the church. I remembered that I had stood for a long time looking at the people on the steps of the church. Something was pulling me to examine them. I had the absurd notion that both don Juan and don Genaro were going to be among those people, sitting like beggars just to surprise me.

"When did you leave the city?" I asked.

"We left around five o'clock and headed for the Nagual's spot in the mountains," she replied.

I had also had the certainty that don Juan had left at the end of the day. The feelings I had had during that entire episode of looking for don Juan became very clear to me. In light of what she had told me I had to revise my stand. I had conveniently explained away the certainty I had had that don Juan was there in the streets of the city as an irrational expectation, a result of my consistently finding him there in the past.

But la Gorda had been in the city actually looking for me and she was the being closest to don Juan in temperament. I had felt all along that his presence was there. La Gorda's statement had merely confirmed something that my body knew beyond the shadow of a doubt.

I noticed a flutter of nervousness in her body when I told her the details of my mood that day.

"What would've happened if you had found me?" I asked.

"Everything would've been changed," she replied. "For me to find you would've meant that I had enough power to move forward. That's why I took the little sisters with me. All of us, you, me and the little sisters, would've gone away together that day."

"Where to, Gorda?"

"Who knows? If I had the power to find you I would've also had the power to know that. It's your turn now. Perhaps you will have enough power now to know where we should go. Do you see what I mean?"

I had an attack of profound sadness at that point. I felt more acutely than ever the despair of my human frailty and temporariness.

Don Juan had always maintained that the only deterrent to our despair was the awareness of our death; the key to the sorcerer's scheme of things. His idea was that the awareness of our death was the only thing that could give us the strength to withstand the duress and pain of our lives and our fears of the unknown.

But what he could never tell me was how to bring that awareness to the foreground. He had insisted, every time I had asked him, that my volition alone was the deciding factor. In other words, I had to make up my mind to bring that awareness to bear witness to my acts. I thought I had done so.

But confronted with la Gorda's determination to find me and go away with me, I realized that if she had found me in the city that day I would never have returned to my home. Never again would I have seen those I held dear. I had not been prepared for that. I had braced myself for dying, but not for disappearing for the rest of my life in full awareness without anger or disappointment; leaving behind the best of my feelings.

I was almost embarrassed to tell la Gorda that I was not a warrior worthy of having the kind of power that must be needed to perform an act of that nature; to leave for good and to know where to go and what to do.

"We are human creatures," she said. "Who knows what's waiting for us or what kind of power we may have?"

I told her that my sadness in leaving like that was too great. The changes that sorcerers went through were too drastic and too final. I recounted to her what Pablito had told me about his unbearable sadness at having lost his mother.

"The human form feeds itself on those feelings," she said dryly. "I pitied myself and my little children for years. I couldn't understand how the Nagual could be so cruel to ask me to do what I did; to leave my children, to destroy them and to forget them."

She said that it took her years to understand that the Nagual also had had to choose to leave the human form. He was not being cruel. He simply did not have any more human feelings. To him everything was equal. He had accepted his fate.

The problem with Pablito, and myself for that matter, was that neither of us had accepted our fate. La Gorda said, in a scornful way, that Pablito wept when he remembered his mother, his Manuelita, especially when he had to cook his own food. She urged me to remember Pablito's mother as she was; an old stupid woman who knew nothing else but to be Pablito's servant. She said that the reason all of them thought he was a coward was because he could not be happy that his servant Manuelita had become the witch Soledad who could kill him like she would step on a bug.

La Gorda stood up dramatically and leaned over the table until her forehead was almost touching mine.

"The Nagual said that Pablito's good fortune was extraordinary," she said. "Mother and son fighting for the same thing. If he weren't the coward he is, he would accept his fate and oppose Soledad like a warrior; without fear or hatred. In the end the best would win and take all. If Soledad is the winner, Pablito should be happy with his fate and wish her well. But only a real warrior can feel that kind of happiness."

"How does dona Soledad feel about all this?"

"She doesn't indulge in her feelings," la Gorda replied and sat down again. "She has accepted her fate more readily than any one of us. Before the Nagual helped her she was worse off than myself. At least I was young. She was an old cow; fat and tired; begging for her death to come. Now death will have to fight to claim her."

The time element in dona Soledad's transformation was a detail that had puzzled me. I told la Gorda that I remembered having seen dona Soledad no more than two years before and she was the same old lady I had always known.

La Gorda said that the last time I had been in Soledad's house- under the impression that it was still Pablito's house- the Nagual had set them up to act as if everything were the same. Dona Soledad greeted me as she always did from the kitchen, and I really did not face her. Lidia, Rosa, Pablito and Nestor played their roles to perfection in order to keep me from finding out about their true activities.

"Why would the Nagual go to all that trouble, Gorda?"

"He was saving you for something that's not clear yet. He kept you away from every one of us deliberately. He and Genaro told me never to show my face when you were around."

"Did they tell Josefina the same thing? "

"Yes. She's crazy and can't help herself. She wanted to play her pranks on you. She used to follow you around and you never knew it. One night when the Nagual had taken you to the mountains, she nearly pushed you down a ravine in the darkness. The Nagual found her in the nick of time.

"She doesn't do those things out of meanness, but because she enjoys being that way. That's her human form. She'll be that way until she loses it. I've told you that all six of them are a bit off. You must be aware of that so as not to be caught in their webs. If you do get caught, don't get angry. They can't help themselves."

She was silent for a while. I caught the almost imperceptible sign of a flutter in her body. Her eyes seemed to get out of focus and her mouth dropped as if the muscles of her jaw had given in. I became engrossed in watching her. She shook her head two or three times.

"I've just seen something," she said. "You're just like the little sisters and the Genaros."

She began to laugh quietly. I did not say anything. I wanted her to explain herself without my meddling.

"Everybody gets angry with you because it hasn't dawned on them yet that you're no different than they are," she went on. "They see you as the Nagual and they don't understand that you indulge in your ways just like they do in theirs."

She said that Pablito whined and complained and played at being a weakling. Benigno played the shy one; the one who could not even open his eyes. Nestor played to be the wise one; the one who knows everything. Lidia played the tough woman who could crush anyone with a look. Josefina was the crazy one who could not be trusted. Rosa was the bad-tempered girl who ate the mosquitoes that bit her. And I was the fool that came from Los Angeles with a pad of paper and lots of wrong questions. And all of us loved to be the way we were.

"I was once a fat, smelly woman," she went on after a pause. "I didn't mind being kicked around like a dog as long as I was not alone. That was my form.

"I will have to tell everybody what I have seen about you so they won't feel offended by your acts."

I did not know what to say. I felt that she was undeniably right. The important issue for me was not so much her accurateness, but the fact that I had witnessed her arriving at her unquestionable conclusion.

"How did you see all that?" I asked.

"It just came to me," she replied.

"How did it come to you?"

"I felt the feeling of seeing coming to the top of my head, and then I knew what I've just told you."

I insisted that she describe to me every detail of the feeling of seeing that she was alluding to. She complied after a moment's vacillation and gave me an account of the same ticklish sensation I had become so aware of during my confrontations with dona Soledad and the little sisters. La Gorda said that the sensation started on the top of her head and then went down her back and around her waist to her womb. She felt it inside her body as a consuming ticklishness, which turned into the knowledge that I was clinging to my human form, like all the rest, except that my particular way was incomprehensible to them.

"Did you hear a voice telling you all that?" I asked.

"No. I just saw everything I've told you about yourself," she replied.

I wanted to ask her if she had had a vision of me clinging to something, but I desisted. I did not want to indulge in my usual behavior. Besides, I knew what she meant when she said that she saw. The same thing had happened to me when I was with Rosa and Lidia. I suddenly 'knew' where they lived. I had not had a vision of their house. I simply felt that I knew it.

I asked her if she had also felt a dry sound of a wooden pipe being broken at the base of her neck.

"The Nagual taught all of us how to get the feeling on top of the head," she said. "But not everyone of us can do it. The sound behind the throat is even more difficult. None of us has ever felt it yet. It's strange that you have when you're still empty."

"How does that sound work?" I asked. "And what is it?"

"You know that better than I do. What more can I tell you?" she replied in a harsh voice.

She seemed to catch herself being impatient. She smiled sheepishly and lowered her head.

"I feel stupid telling you what you already know," she said. "Do you ask me questions like that to test if I have really lost my form?"

I told her that I was confused, for I had the feeling that I knew what that sound was and yet it was as if I did not know anything about it, because for me to know something I actually had to be able to verbalize my knowledge. In this case, I did not even know how to begin verbalizing it. The only thing I could do, therefore, was to ask her questions, hoping that her answers would help me.

"I can't help you with that sound," she said.

I experienced a sudden and tremendous discomfort. I told her that I was habituated to dealing with don Juan and that I needed him then, more than ever, to explain everything to me.

"Do you miss the Nagual?" she asked.

I said that I did, and that I had not realized how much I missed him until I was back again in his homeland.

"You miss him because you're still clinging to your human form," she said, and giggled as if she were delighted at my sadness.

"Don't you miss him yourself, Gorda?"

"No. Not me. I'm him. All my luminosity has been changed. How could I miss something that is myself?"

"How is your luminosity different?"

"A human being, or any other living creature, has a pale yellow glow. Animals are more yellow, humans are more white. But a sorcerer is amber, like clear honey in the sunlight. Some women sorceresses are greenish. The Nagual said that those are the most powerful and the most difficult."

"What color are you, Gorda?"

"Amber, just like you and all the rest of us. That's what the Nagual and Genaro told me. I've never seen myself. But I've seen everyone else. All of us are amber. And all of us, with the exception of you, are like a tombstone. Average human beings are like eggs; that's why the Nagual called them luminous eggs. Sorcerers change not only the color of their luminosity but their shape. We are like tombstones; only we are round at both ends."

"Am I still shaped like an egg, Gorda?"

"No. You're shaped like a tombstone, except that you have an ugly, dull patch in your middle. As long as you have that patch you won't be able to fly, like sorcerers fly, like I flew last night for you. You won't even be able to drop your human form."

I became entangled in a passionate argument not so much with her as with myself. I insisted that their stand on how to regain that alleged completeness was simply preposterous. I told her that she could not possibly argue successfully with me that one had to turn one's back to one's own children in order to pursue the vaguest of all possible goals; to enter into the world of the nagual. I was so thoroughly convinced that I was right that I got carried away and shouted angry words at her. She was not in any way flustered by my outburst.

"Not everybody has to do that," she said. "Only sorcerers who want to enter into the other world. There are plenty of good sorcerers who see and are incomplete. To be complete is only for us Toltecs.

"Take Soledad, for instance. She's the best witch you can find and she's incomplete. She had two children; one of them was a girl. Fortunately for Soledad her daughter died.

"The Nagual said that the edge of the spirit of a person who dies goes back to the givers, meaning that that edge goes back to the parents.

"If the givers are dead and the person has children, the edge goes to the child who is complete.

"And if all the children are complete, that edge goes to the one with power and not necessarily to the best or the most diligent.

"For example, when Josefina's mother died, the edge went to the craziest of the lot, Josefina. It should have gone to her brother who is a hardworking, responsible man, but Josefina is more powerful than her brother. Soledad's daughter died without leaving any children and Soledad got a boost that closed half her hole. Now, the only hope she has to close it completely is for Pablito to die. And by the same token, Pablito's great hope for a boost is for Soledad to die."

I told her in very strong terms that what she was saying was disgusting and horrifying to me. She agreed that I was right. She affirmed that at one time she herself had believed that that particular sorcerers' stand was the ugliest thing possible. She looked at me with shining eyes. There was something malicious about her grin.

"The Nagual told me that you understand everything but you don't want to do anything about it," she said in a soft voice.

I began to argue again. I told her that what the Nagual had said about me had nothing to do with my revulsion for the particular stand that we were discussing. I explained that I liked children, that I had the most profound respect for them, and that I empathized very deeply with their helplessness in the awesome world around them. I could not conceive hurting a child in any sense, not for any reason.

"The Nagual didn't make the rule," she said. "The rule is made somewhere out there, and not by a man."

I defended myself by saying that I was not angry with her or the Nagual but that I was arguing in the abstract, because I could not fathom the value of it all.

"The value is that we need all our edge, all our power, and our completeness in order to enter into that other world," she said. "I was a religious woman. I could tell you what I used to repeat without knowing what I meant. I wanted my soul to enter the kingdom of heaven. I still want that, except that I'm on a different path. The world of the nagual is the kingdom of heaven."

I objected to her religious connotation on principle. I had become accustomed by don Juan never to dwell on that subject. She very calmly explained that she saw no difference in terms of life-style between us and true nuns and priests. She pointed out that not only were true nuns and priests complete as a rule, but they did not even weaken themselves with sexual acts.

"The Nagual said that that is the reason they will never be exterminated, no matter who tries to exterminate them," she said. "Those who are after them are always empty. They don't have the vigor that true nuns and priests have. I liked the Nagual for saying that. I will always cheer for the nuns and priests. We are alike. We have given up the world and yet we are in the midst of it. Priests and nuns would make great flying sorcerers if someone would tell them that they can do it."

The memory of my father's and my grandfather's admiration for the Mexican revolution came to my mind. They mostly admired the attempt to exterminate the clergy. My father inherited that admiration from his father and I inherited it from both of them. It was a sort of affiliation that we had. One of the first things that don Juan undermined in my personality was that affiliation.

I once told don Juan, as if I were voicing my own opinion, something I had heard all my life, that the favorite ploy of the Church was to keep us in ignorance. Don Juan had a most serious expression on his face. It was as if my statements had touched a deep fiber in him. I thought immediately of the centuries of exploitation that the Indians had endured.

"Those dirty bastards," he said. "They have kept me in ignorance, and you too."

I caught his irony right away and we both laughed. I had never really examined that stand. I did not believe it but I had nothing else to take it's place. I told don Juan about my grandfather and my father and their views on religion as the liberal men they were.

"It doesn't matter what anybody says or does," he said. "You must be an impeccable man yourself. The fight is right here in this chest."

He patted my chest gently.

"If your grandfather and father would be trying to be impeccable warriors," don Juan went on, "they wouldn't have time for petty fights. It takes all the time and all the energy we have to conquer the idiocy in us. And that's what matters. The rest is of no importance. Nothing of what your grandfather or father said about the Church gave them well-being. To be an impeccable warrior, on the other hand, will give you vigor and youth and power. So, it is proper for you to choose wisely."

My choice was the impeccability and simplicity of a warrior's life. Because of that choice I felt that I had to take la Gorda's words in a most serious manner and that was more threatening to me than even don Genaro's acts. He used to frighten me at a most profound level. His actions, although terrifying, were assimilated into the coherent continuum of their teachings. La Gorda's words and actions were a different kind of threat to me; somehow more concrete and real than the other.

La Gorda's body shivered for a moment. A ripple went through it, making her contract the muscles of her shoulders and arms. She grabbed the edge of the table with an awkward rigidity. Then she relaxed until she was again her usual self.

She smiled at me. Her eyes and smile were dazzling. She said in a casual tone that she had just 'seen' my dilemma.

"It's useless to close your eyes and pretend that you don't want to do anything or that you don't know anything," she said. "You can do that with people but not with me. I know now why the Nagual commissioned me to tell you all this. I'm a nobody. You admire great people. The Nagual and Genaro were the greatest of all."

She stopped and examined me. She seemed to be waiting for my reaction to what she said.

"You fought against what the Nagual and Genaro told you- all the way," she went on. "That's why you're behind. And you fought them because they were great. That's your particular way of being.

"But you can't fight against what I tell you, because you can't look up to me at all. I am your peer. I am in your cycle. You like to fight those who are better than you. It's no challenge to fight my stand. So, those two devils have finally bagged you through me. Poor little Nagual, you've lost the game."

She came closer to me and whispered in my ear that the Nagual had also said that she should never try to take my writing pad away from me because that would be as dangerous as trying to snatch a bone from a hungry dog's mouth.

She put her arms around me, resting her head on my shoulders, and laughed quietly and softly.

Her seeing had numbed me. I knew that she was absolutely right. She had pegged me to perfection. She hugged me for a long time with her head against mine. The proximity of her body somehow was very soothing. She was just like don Juan at that. She exuded strength and conviction and purpose. She was wrong to say that I could not admire her.

"Let's forget this," she said suddenly. "Let's talk about what we have to do tonight."

"What exactly are we going to do tonight, Gorda?"

"We have our last appointment with power."

"Is it another dreadful battle with somebody?"

"No. The little sisters are simply going to show you something that will complete your visit here. The Nagual told me that after that you may go away and never return, or that you may choose to stay with us. Either way, what they have to show you is their art. The art of the dreamer."

"And what is that art? "

"Genaro told me that he tried time and time again to acquaint you with the art of the dreamer. He showed you his other body; his body of dreaming. Once he even made you be in two places at once, but your emptiness did not let you see what he was pointing out to you. It looks as if all his efforts went through the hole in your body.

"Now it seems that it is different. Genaro made the little sisters the dreamers that they are and tonight they will show you Genaro's art. In that respect, the little sisters are the true children of Genaro."

That reminded me of what Pablito had said earlier, that we were the children of both, and that we were Toltecs. I asked her what he had meant by that.

"The Nagual told me that sorcerers used to be called Toltecs in his benefactor's language," she replied.

"And what language was that, Gorda?"

"He never told me. But he and Genaro used to speak a language that none of us could understand. And here, between all of us, we understand four Indian languages."

"Did don Genaro also say that he was a Toltec?"

"His benefactor was the same man, so he also said the same thing."

From la Gorda's responses I could surmise that she either did not know a great deal on the subject or she did not want to talk to me about it. I confronted her with my conclusions. She confessed that she had never paid much attention to it and wondered why I was putting so much value on it. I practically gave her a lecture on the ethnography of central Mexico.

"A sorcerer is a Toltec when that sorcerer has received the mysteries of stalking and dreaming," she said casually. "The Nagual and Genaro received those mysteries from their benefactor and then they held them in their bodies. We are doing the same, and because of that we are Toltecs like the Nagual and Genaro.

"The Nagual taught you and me equally to be dispassionate. I am more dispassionate than you because I'm formless. You still have your form and are empty, so you get caught in every snag. One day, however, you'll be complete again and you'll understand then that the Nagual was right.

"He said that the world of people goes up and down, and people go up and down with their world. As sorcerers we have no business following them in their ups and downs.

"The art of sorcerers is to be outside everything and be unnoticeable. And more than anything else, the art of sorcerers is never to waste their power. The Nagual told me that your problem is that you always get caught in idiocies, like what you're doing now. I'm sure that you're going to ask everyone of us about the Toltecs, but you're not going to ask anyone of us about our attention."

Her laughter was clear and contagious. I admitted to her that she was right. Small issues had always fascinated me. I also told her that I was mystified by her usage of the word "attention".

"I've told you already what the Nagual told me about attention," she said. "We hold the images of the world with our attention. A male sorcerer is very difficult to train because his attention is always closed, focused on something. A female, on the other hand, is always open because most of the time she is not focusing her attention on anything. Especially during her menstrual period. The Nagual told me and then showed me that during that time I could actually let my attention go from the images of the world. If I don't focus my attention on the world, the world collapses."

"How is that done, Gorda?"

"It's very simple. When a woman menstruates she cannot focus her attention. That's the crack the Nagual told me about. Instead of fighting to focus, a woman should let go of the images, by gazing fixedly at distant hills, or by gazing at water, like a river, or by gazing at the clouds.

"If you gaze with your eyes open, you get dizzy and the eyes get tired, but if you half-close them and blink a lot and move them from mountain to mountain, or from cloud to cloud, you can look for hours, or days if necessary.

"The Nagual used to make us sit by the door and gaze at those round hills on the other side of the valley. Sometimes we used to sit there for days until the crack would open."

I wanted to hear more about it, but she stopped talking and hurriedly sat very close to me. She signaled me with her hand to listen. I heard a faint swishing sound and suddenly Lidia stepped out into the kitchen. I thought that she must have been asleep in their room and the sound of our voices had woken her up.

She had changed the Western clothes she had been wearing the last time I had seen her and had put on a long dress like the Indian women of the area wore. She had a shawl on her shoulders and was barefoot. Her long dress, instead of making her look older and heavier, made her look like a child clad in an older woman's clothes.

She walked up to the table and greeted la Gorda with a formal "Good evening, Gorda." She then turned to me and said, "Good evening, Nagual."

Her greeting was so unexpected and her tone so serious that I was about to laugh. I caught a warning from la Gorda. She pretended to be scratching the top of her head with the back of her left hand, which was clawed.

I answered Lidia the same way la Gorda had: "Good evening to you, Lidia."

She sat down at the end of the table to the right of me. I did not know whether or not to start up a conversation. I was about to say something when la Gorda tapped my leg with her knee, and with a subtle movement of her eyebrows signaled me to listen. I heard again the muffled sound of a long dress as it touched the floor. Josefina stood for a moment at the door before walking toward the table. She greeted Lidia, la Gorda and myself in that order. I could not keep a straight face with her. She was also wearing a long dress, a shawl and no shoes, but in her case the dress was three or four sizes larger and she had put a thick padding into it. Her appearance was thoroughly incongruous. Her face was lean and young, but her body looked grotesquely bloated.

She took a bench and placed it at the left end of the table and sat down. All three of them looked extremely serious. They were sitting with their legs pressed together and their backs very straight.

I heard once more the rustle of a dress and Rosa come out. She was dressed just like the others and was also barefoot. Her greeting was as formal and the order naturally included Josefina. Everyone answered her in the same formal tone. She sat across the table facing me. All of us remained in absolute silence for quite a while.

La Gorda spoke suddenly, and the sound of her voice made everyone else jump. She said, pointing to me, that the Nagual was going to show them his allies, and that he was going to use his special call to bring them into the room.

I tried to make a joke and said that the Nagual was not there, so he could not bring any allies. I thought they were going to laugh. La Gorda covered her face and the little sisters glared at me. La Gorda put her hand on my mouth and whispered in my ear that it was absolutely necessary that I refrain from saying idiotic things. She looked right into my eyes and said that I had to call the allies by making the moths' call.

I reluctantly began. But no sooner had I started than the spirit of the occasion took over and I found that in a matter of seconds I had given my maximum concentration to producing the sound. I modulated it's outflow and controlled the air being expelled from my lungs in order to produce the longest possible tapping. It sounded very melodious.

I took an enormous gasp of air to start a new series. I stopped immediately. Something outside the house was answering my call. The tapping sounds came from all around the house, even from the roof. The little sisters stood up and huddled like frightened children around la Gorda and myself.

"Please, Nagual, don't bring anything into the house," Lidia pleaded with me.

Even la Gorda seemed a bit frightened. She gave me a strong command with her hand to stop. I had not intended to keep on producing the sound anyway. The allies, however, either as formless forces or as beings that were prowling outside the door, were not dependent on my tapping sound. I felt again, as I had felt two nights before in don Genaro's house, an unbearable pressure, a heaviness leaning against the entire house. I could sense it in my navel as an itch, a nervousness that soon turned into sheer physical anguish.

The three little sisters were beside themselves with fear, especially Lidia and Josefina. Both of them were whining like wounded dogs. All of them surrounded me and then clung to me. Rosa crawled under the table and pushed her head up between my legs. La Gorda stood behind me as calmly as she could. After a few moments the hysteria and fear of those three girls mounted to enormous proportions. La Gorda leaned over and whispered that I should make the opposite sound, the sound that would disperse them. I had a moment of supreme uncertainty.

I really did not know any other sound. But then I had a quick sensation of ticklishness on the top of my head, a shiver in my body, and I remembered out of nowhere a peculiar whistling that don Juan used to perform at night and had endeavored to teach me. He had presented it to me as a means to keep one's balance while walking so as not to stray away from the trail in the darkness.

I began my whistling and the pressure in my umbilical region ceased. La Gorda smiled and sighed with relief and the little sisters moved away from my side, giggling as if all of it had been merely a joke.

I wanted to indulge in some soul-searching deliberations about the abrupt transition from the rather pleasant exchange I was having with la Gorda to that unearthly situation. For an instant I pondered over whether or not the whole thing was a ploy on their part. But I was too weak. I felt I was about to pass out. My ears were buzzing. The tension around my stomach was so intense that I believed I was going to become ill right there. I rested my head on the edge of the table. After a few minutes, however, I was again relaxed enough to sit up straight.

The three girls seemed to have forgotten how frightened they had been. In fact, they were laughing and pushing each other as they each tied their shawls around their hips. La Gorda did not seem nervous nor did she seem relaxed. Rosa was pushed at one moment by the other two girls and fell off the bench where all three of them were sitting. She landed on her seat. I thought that she was going to get furious but she giggled. I looked at la Gorda for directions. She was sitting with a very straight back. Her eyes were half-closed, fixed on Rosa. The little sisters were laughing very loudly, like nervous schoolgirls. Lidia pushed Josefina and sent her tumbling over the bench to fall next to Rosa on the floor. The instant Josefina was on the floor their laughter stopped. Rosa and Josefina shook their bodies, making an incomprehensible movement with their buttocks. They moved them from side to side as if they were grinding something against the floor. Then they sprang up like two silent jaguars and took Lidia by the arms. All three of them, without making the slightest noise, spun around a couple of times. Rosa and Josefina lifted Lidia by the armpits and carried her as they tiptoed two or three times around the table. Then all three of them collapsed as if they had springs on their knees that had contracted at the same time. Their long dresses puffed up, giving them the appearance of huge balls.

As soon as they were on the floor they became even more quiet. There was no other sound except the soft swishing of their dresses as they rolled and crawled. It was as if I were watching a three-dimensional movie with the sound turned off.

La Gorda, who had been quietly sitting next to me watching them, suddenly stood up and with the agility of an acrobat ran toward the door of their room at the corner of the dining area. Before she reached the door she tumbled on her right side and shoulder just enough to turn over once, then stood up, pulled by the momentum of her rolling, and flung open the door. She performed all her movements with absolute quietness.

The three girls rolled and crawled into the room like giant pill bugs. La Gorda signaled me to come over to where she was. We entered the room and she had me sit on the floor with my back against the frame of the door. She sat to my right with her back also against the frame. She made me interlock my fingers and then placed my hands over my belly button.

I was at first forced to divide my attention between la Gorda, the little sisters and the room. But once la Gorda had arranged my sitting position, my attention was taken up by the room. The three girls were lying in the middle of a large, white, square room with a brick floor. There were four gasoline lanterns, one on each wall, placed on built-in supporting ledges approximately six feet above the ground. The room had no ceiling. The supporting beams of the roof had been darkened and that gave the effect of an enormous room with no top. The two doors were placed on the very corners opposite each other. As I looked at the closed door across from where I was, I noticed that the walls of the room were oriented to follow the cardinal points. The door where we were was at the northwest corner.

Rosa, Lidia and Josefina rolled counterclockwise around the room several times. I strained to hear the swish of their dresses but the silence was absolute. I could only hear la Gorda breathing. The little sisters finally stopped and sat down with their backs against the wall, each under a lantern. Lidia sat at the east wall, Rosa, at the north, and Josefina, at the west.

La Gorda stood up, closed the door behind us and secured it with an iron bar. She made me slide over a few inches, without changing my position, until I was sitting with my back against the door. Then she silently rolled the length of the room and sat down underneath the lantern on the south wall. Her getting into that sitting position seemed to be the cue.

Lidia stood up and began to walk on the tips of her toes along the edges of the room, close to the walls. It was not a walk proper but rather a soundless sliding. As she increased her speed she began to move as if she were gliding, stepping on the angle between the floor and the walls. She would jump over Rosa, Josefina, la Gorda and myself every time she got to where we were sitting. I felt her long dress brushing me every time she went by. The faster she ran, the higher she got on the wall. A moment came when Lidia was actually running silently around the four walls of the room seven or eight feet above the floor. The sight of her, running perpendicular to the walls, was so unearthly that it bordered on the grotesque. Her long gown made the sight even more eerie. Gravity did not seem to have any effect on Lidia, but it did on her long skirt; it dragged downward. I felt it every time she passed over my head; sweeping my face like a hanging drape.

She had captured my attentiveness at a level I could not imagine. The strain of giving her my undivided attention was so great that I began to get stomach convulsions. I felt her running with my stomach. My eyes were getting out of focus. With the last bit of my remaining concentration, I saw Lidia walk down on the east wall diagonally and come to a halt in the middle of the room.

She was panting, out of breath, and drenched in perspiration like la Gorda had been after her flying display. She could hardly keep her balance. After a moment she walked to her place at the east wall and collapsed on the floor like a wet rag. I thought she had fainted, but then I noticed that she was deliberately breathing through her mouth.

After some minutes of stillness, long enough for Lidia to recover her strength and sit up straight, Rosa stood up and ran without making a sound to the center of the room, turned on her heels and ran back to where she had been sitting. Her running allowed her to gain the necessary momentum to make an outlandish jump. She leaped up in the air, like a basketball player, along the vertical span of the wall, and her hands went beyond the height of the wall, which was perhaps ten feet. I saw her body actually hitting the wall, although there was no corresponding crashing sound.

I expected her to rebound to the floor with the force of the impact, but she remained hanging there, attached to the wall like a pendulum. From where I sat it looked as if she were holding a hook of some sort in her left hand. She swayed silently in a pendulum-like motion for a moment and then catapulted herself three or four feet over to her left by pushing her body away from the wall with her right arm, at the moment in which her swing was t he widest. She repeated the swaying and catapulting thirty or forty times. She went around the whole room and then she went up to the beams of the roof where she dangled precariously, hanging from an invisible hook.

While she was on the beams I became aware that what I had thought was a hook in her left hand was actually some quality of that hand that made it possible for her to suspend her weight from it. It was the same hand she had attacked me with two nights before.

Her display ended with her dangling from the beams over the very center of the room. Suddenly she let go. She fell down from a height of fifteen or sixteen feet. Her long dress flowed upward and gathered around her head. For an instant, before she landed without a sound, she looked like an umbrella turned inside out by the force of the wind; her thin, naked body looked like a stick attached to the dark mass of her dress.

My body felt the impact of her plummeting down, perhaps more than she did herself. She landed in a squat position and remained motionless, trying to catch her breath. I was sprawled out on the floor with painful cramps in my stomach.

La Gorda rolled across the room, took her shawl and tied it around my umbilical region, like a band, looping it around my body two or three times. She rolled back to the south wall like a shadow.

While she had been arranging the shawl around my waist, I had lost sight of Rosa. When I looked up she was again sitting by the north wall. A moment later, Josefina quietly moved to the center of the room. She paced back and forth with noiseless steps, between where Lidia was sitting and her own spot at the west wall. She faced me all the time. Suddenly, as she approached her spot, she raised her left forearm and placed it right in front of her face, as if she wanted to block me from her view. She hid half of her face for an instant behind her forearm. She lowered it and raised it again, that time hiding her entire face. She repeated the movement of lowering and raising her left forearm countless times, as she paced soundlessly from one side of the room to the other. Every time she raised her forearm a bigger portion of her body disappeared from my view. A moment came when she had hidden her entire body, puffed up with clothes, behind her thin forearm.

It was as if by blocking her view of my body, sitting ten to twelve feet away from her, a thing she could have easily done with the width of her forearm, she also made me block the view of her body, a thing which could not possibly be done with just the width of her forearm.

Once she had hidden her entire body, all I was able to make out was a silhouette of a forearm suspended in midair, bouncing from one side of the room to the other, and at one point I could hardly see the arm itself.

I felt a revulsion, an unbearable nausea. The bouncing forearm depleted me of energy. I slid down on my side, unable to keep my balance. I saw the arm falling to the ground. Josefina was lying on the floor covered with garments, as if her puffed-up clothes had exploded. She lay on her back with her arms spread out.

It took a long time to get back my physical balance. My clothes were soaked in perspiration. I was not the only one affected. All of them were exhausted and drenched in sweat. La Gorda was the most poised, but her control seemed to be on the verge of collapsing. I could hear all of them, including la Gorda, breathing through their mouths.

When I was in full control again everybody sat on her spot. The little sisters were looking at me fixedly. I saw out of the corner of my eye that la Gorda's eyes were half-closed. She suddenly rolled noiselessly to my side and whispered in my ear that I should begin to make my moth call, keeping it up until the allies had rushed into the house and were about to take us.

I had a moment of vacillation. She whispered that there was no way to change directions, and that we had to finish what we had started. After untying her shawl from my waist, she rolled back to her spot and sat down.

I put my left hand to my lips and tried to produce the tapping sound. I found it very difficult at first. My lips were dry and my hands were sweaty, but after an initial clumsiness, a feeling of vigor and well-being came over me. I produced the most flawless tapping noise I had ever done. It reminded me of the tapping noise I had been hearing all along as a response to mine. As soon as I stopped to breathe, I could hear the tapping sound being answered from all directions.

La Gorda signaled me to go on with it. I produced three more series. The last one was utterly mesmeric. I did not need to intake a gulp of air and let it out in small spurts, as I had been doing all along. This time the tapping sound came out of my mouth freely. I did not even have to use the edge of my hand to produce it.

La Gorda suddenly rushed to me, lifted me up bodily by my armpits and pushed me to the middle of the room. Her action disrupted my absolute concentration. I noticed that Lidia was holding onto my right arm, Josefina to my left, and Rosa had backed up against the front of me and was holding me by the waist with her arms extended backward. La Gorda was in back of me. She ordered me to put my arms behind and grab onto her shawl, which she had looped around her neck and shoulders like a harness.

I noticed at that moment that something besides us was there in the room, but I could not tell what it was. The little sisters were shivering. I knew that they were aware of something which I was unable to distinguish. I also knew that la Gorda was going to try to do what she had done in don Genaro's house. All of a sudden, I felt the wind of the eye-door pulling us. I grabbed onto la Gorda's shawl with all my strength while the little sisters grabbed onto me. I felt that we were spinning, tumbling and swaying from side to side like a giant, weightless leaf.

I opened my eyes and saw that we were like a bundle. We were either standing up or we were lying horizontally in the air. I could not tell which because I had no sensorial point of reference. Then, as suddenly as we had been lifted off, we were dropped. I sensed our falling in my midsection. I yelled with pain and my screams were united with those of the little sisters. The insides of my knees hurt. I felt an unbearable jolt on my legs; I thought I must have broken them.

My next impression was that something was getting inside my nose. It was very dark and I was lying on my back. I sat up. I realized then that la Gorda was tickling my nostrils with a twig.

I did not feel exhausted or even mildly tired. I jumped to my feet and only then was I stricken by the realization that we were not in the house. We were on a hill, a rocky, barren hill. I took a step and nearly fell down. I had stumbled over a body. It was Josefina. She was extremely hot to the touch. She seemed to be feverish. I tried to make her sit up, but she was limp. Rosa was next to her. As a contrast, her body was icy cold. I put one on top of the other and rocked them. That motion brought them back to their senses.

La Gorda had found Lidia and was making her walk. After a few minutes, all of us were standing. We were perhaps half a mile east of the house.

Years before don Juan had produced in me a similar experience, but with the aid of a psychotropic plant. He seemingly made me fly and I landed a distance from his house.

At the time, I had tried to explain the event in rational terms, but there was no ground for rational explanations, and, short of accepting that I had flown, I had to fall back onto the only two avenues left open:

...I could explain it all by arguing that don Juan had transported me to the distant field while I was still unconscious under the effect of the psychotropic alkaloids of that plant;

...Or I could argue that under the influence of the alkaloids, I had believed what don Juan was ordering me to believe that I was flying.

This time I had no other recourse but to brace myself for accepting, on it's face value, that I had flown. I wanted to indulge in doubts and began to wonder about the possibilities of the four girls carrying me to that hill.

I laughed loudly, incapable of containing an obscure delight. I was having a relapse of my old malady. My reason, which had been blocked off temporarily, was beginning to take hold of me again. I wanted to defend it. Or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say, in light of the outlandish acts I had witnessed and performed since my arrival, that my reason was defending itself, independently of the more complex whole that seemed to be the "me" I did not know. I was witnessing, almost in the fashion of an interested observer, how my reason struggled to find suitable rationales, while another much larger portion of me could not have cared less about explaining anything.

La Gorda made the three girls line up. She then pulled me to her side. All of them folded their arms behind their backs. La Gorda made me do the same. She stretched my arms as far back as they would go and then made me bend them and grab each forearm as tightly as possible as close to the elbows as I could. That created a great muscular pressure at the articulations of my shoulders. She pushed my trunk forward until I was almost stooping. Then she made a peculiar birdcall. That was a signal. Lidia started walking. In the darkness her movements reminded me of an ice skater. She walked swiftly and silently and in a few minutes she disappeared from my view.

La Gorda made two more birdcalls, one after the other, and Rosa and Josefina took off in the same manner Lidia had. La Gorda told me to follow close to her. She made one more birdcall and we both started walking.

I was surprised at the ease with which I walked. My entire balance was centered in my legs. The fact that I had my arms behind my back, instead of hindering my movements, aided me in maintaining a strange equilibrium. But above all what surprised me the most was the quietness of my steps.

When we reached the road we began to walk normally. We passed two men going in the opposite direction. La Gorda greeted them and they answered back. When we arrived at the house we found the little sisters standing by the door, not daring to go in.

La Gorda told them that although I could not control the allies I could either call them or tell them to leave, and that the allies would not bother us any longer. The girls believed her; something I myself could not do in that instance.

We went inside. In a very quiet and efficient manner all of them undressed, drenched themselves with cold water and put on a fresh change of clothes. I did the same. I put on the old clothes I used to keep in don Juan's house; which la Gorda brought to me in a box.

All of us were in high spirits. I asked la Gorda to explain to me what we had done.

"We'll talk about that later," she said in a firm tone.

I remembered then that the packages I had for them were still in the car. I thought that while la Gorda was cooking some food for us it would be a good opportunity to distribute them. I went out and got them and brought them into the house. I placed them on the table.

Lidia asked me if I had already assigned the gifts as she had suggested. I said that I wanted them to pick one they liked. She declined. She said that no doubt I had something special for Pablito and Nestor and a bunch of trinkets for them, which I would throw on the table with the intention that they fight over them.

"Besides, you didn't bring anything for Benigno," Lidia said as she came to my side and looked at me with mock seriousness. "You can't hurt the Genaros' feelings by giving two gifts for three."

They all laughed. I felt embarrassed. She was absolutely right in everything that she had said.

"You are careless. That's why I've never liked you," Lidia said to me, changing her smile into a frown. "You have never greeted me with affection or respect. Every time we saw each other you only pretended to be happy to see me."

She imitated my obviously contrived effusive greeting, a greeting I must have given her countless times in the past.

"Why didn't you ever ask me what I was doing here?" Lidia asked me.

I stopped writing to consider her point. It had never occurred to me to ask her anything. I told her that I had no excuse.

La Gorda interceded and said that the reason that I had never said more than two words to either Lidia or Rosa each time I saw them was because I was accustomed to talking only to women that I was enamored of, in one way or another. La Gorda added that the Nagual had told them that if I would ask them anything directly they were supposed to answer my questions, but as long as I did not ask, they were not supposed to mention anything.

Rosa said that she did not like me because I was always laughing and trying to be funny.

Josefina added that since I had never seen her, she disliked me just for fun; for the hell of it.

"I want you to know that I don't accept you as the Nagual," Lidia said to me. "You're too dumb. You know nothing. I know more than you do. How can I respect you?"

Lidia added that as far as she was concerned I could go back where I came from, or go jump in a lake for that matter.

Rosa and Josefina did not say a word. Judging by the serious and mean expressions on their faces, however, they seemed to agree with Lidia.

"How can this man lead us?" Lidia asked la Gorda. "He's not a true nagual. He's a man. He's going to make us into idiots like himself."

As she was talking I could see the mean expressions on Rosa's and Josefina's faces getting even harder.

La Gorda intervened and explained to them what she had seen earlier about me. She added that since she had recommended to me not to get entangled in their webs, she was recommending the same thing to them; not to get entangled in mine.

After Lidia's initial display of genuine and well-founded animosity, I was flabbergasted to see how easily she acquiesced to la Gorda's remarks. She smiled at me. She even came and sat next to me.

"You're really like us, eh?" she asked in a tone of bewilderment.

I did not know what to say. I was afraid of blundering.

Lidia was obviously the leader of the little sisters. The moment she smiled at me the other two seemed to be infused instantly with the same mood.

La Gorda told them not to mind my pencil and paper and my asking questions, and that in return I would not be flustered when they became involved in doing what they loved the most; to indulge in themselves.

The three of them sat close to me. La Gorda walked over to the table, got the packages and took them out to my car. I asked Lidia to forgive me for my inexcusable blunderings of the past and asked all of them to tell me how they had become don Juan's apprentices.

In order to make them feel at ease I gave them an account of how I had met don Juan. Their accounts were the same as what dona Soledad had already told me.

Lidia said that all of them had been free to leave don Juan's world, but their choice had been to stay. She in particular, being the first apprentice, was given an opportunity to go away. After the Nagual and Genaro had cured her, the Nagual had pointed to the door and told her that if she did not go through it then, the door would close her in and would never open again.

"My fate was sealed when that door closed," Lidia said to me. "Just like what happened to you. The Nagual told me that after he had put a patch on you, you had a chance to leave but you didn't want to take it."

I remembered that particular decision more vividly than anything else. I recounted to them how don Juan had tricked me into believing that a sorceress was after him, and then he gave me the choice of either leaving for good or staying to help him wage a war against his attacker. It turned out that his alleged attacker was one of his confederates. By confronting her on what I thought was don Juan's behalf, I turned her against me and she became what he called my 'worthy opponent'.

I asked Lidia if they had had a worthy opponent themselves.

"We are not as dumb as you are," she said. "We never needed anyone to spur us."

"Pablito is that dumb," Rosa said. "Soledad is his opponent. I don't know how worthy she is, though. But as the saying goes: 'If you can't feed on a capon, feed on an onion'." [* capon- flesh of a castrated male chicken]

They laughed and banged on the table.

I asked them if any of them knew the sorceress don Juan had pitted me against, la Catalina.

They shook their heads negatively.

"I know her," la Gorda said from the stove. "She's from the Nagual's cycle, but she looks as if she's thirty."

"What is a cycle, Gorda?" I asked.

She walked over to the table and put her foot on the bench and rested her chin on her arm and knee.

"Sorcerers like the Nagual and Genaro have two cycles," she said. "The first is when they're human, like ourselves. We are in our first cycle. Each of us has been given a task and that task is making us leave the human form. Eligio, the five of us, and the Genaros are of the same cycle.

"The second cycle is when a sorcerer is not human anymore, like the Nagual and Genaro. They came to teach us, and after they taught us they left. We are the second cycle to them.

"The Nagual and la Catalina are like you and Lidia. They are in the same positions. She's a scary sorceress, just like Lidia."

La Gorda went back to the stove. The little sisters seemed nervous.

"That must be the woman who knows power plants," Lidia said to la Gorda.

La Gorda said that she was the one. I asked them if the Nagual had ever given them power plants.

"No, not to us three," Lidia replied. "Power plants are given only to empty people. Like yourself and la Gorda."

"Did the Nagual give you power plants, Gorda?" I asked loudly.

La Gorda raised two fingers over her head.

"The Nagual gave her his pipe twice," Lidia said. "And she went off her rocker both times."

"What happened, Gorda?" I asked.

"I went off my rocker," she said as she walked over to the table. "Power plants were given to use because the Nagual was putting a patch on our bodies. Mine hooked fast, but yours was difficult. The Nagual said that you were crazier than Josefina, and impossible like Lidia, and he had to give you a lot of them."

La Gorda explained that power plants were used only by sorcerers who had mastered their art. Those plants were such a powerful affair that in order to be properly handled, the most impeccable attention was needed on the part of the sorcerer. It took a lifetime to train one's attention to the degree needed.

La Gorda said that complete people do not need power plants, and that neither the little sisters nor the Genaros had ever taken them, but that someday when they had perfected their art as dreamers, they would use them to get a final and total boost, a boost of such magnitude that it would be impossible for us to understand.

"Would you and I take them too?" I asked la Gorda.

"All of us," she replied. "The Nagual said that you should understand this point better than any of us."

I considered the issue for a moment. The effect of psychotropic plants had indeed been terrifying for me. They seemed to reach a vast reservoir in me, and extract from it a total world.

The drawback in taking them had been the toll they took on my physical well-being and the impossibility of controlling their effect. The world they plunged me into was unamenable and chaotic. I lacked the control, the power, in don Juan's terms, to make use of such a world. If I would have the control, however, the possibilities would be staggering to the mind.

"I took them, myself," Josefina said all of a sudden. "When I was crazy the Nagual gave me his pipe, to cure me or kill me. And it cured me! "

"The Nagual really gave Josefina his smoke," la Gorda said from the stove and then came over to the table. "He knew that she was pretending to be crazier than she was. She's always been a bit off, and she's very daring and indulges in herself like no one else.

"She always wanted to live where nobody would bother her and she could do whatever she wanted. So the Nagual gave her his smoke and took her to live in a world of her liking for fourteen days, until she was so bored with it that she got cured. She cut her indulging. That was her cure."

La Gorda went back to the stove. The little sisters laughed and patted one another on the back.

I remembered then that at dona Soledad's house Lidia had not only intimated that don Juan had left a package for me but she had actually shown me a bundle that had made me think of the sheath in which don Juan used to keep his pipe. I reminded Lidia that she had said that they would give me that package when la Gorda was present.

The little sisters looked at one another and then turned to la Gorda. She made a gesture with her head. Josefina stood up and went to the front room. She returned a moment later with the bundle that Lidia had shown me.

I had a pang of anticipation in the pit of my stomach. Josefina carefully placed the bundle on the table in front of me. All of them gathered around. She began to untie it as ceremoniously as Lidia had done the first time. When the package was completely unwrapped, she spilled the contents on the table. They were menstruation rags.

I got flustered for an instant. But the sound of la Gorda's laughter, which was louder than the others', was so pleasing that I had to laugh myself.

"That's Josefina's personal bundle," la Gorda said. "It was her brilliant idea to play on your greed for a gift from the Nagual, in order to make you stay."

"You have to admit that it was a good idea," Lidia said to me.

She imitated the look of greed I had on my face when she was opening the package and then my look of disappointment when she did not finish.

I told Josefina that her idea had indeed been brilliant; that it had worked as she had anticipated, and that I had wanted that package more than I would care to admit.

"You can have it, if you want it," Josefina said and made everybody laugh.

La Gorda said that the Nagual had known from the beginning that Josefina was not really ill, and that that was the reason it had been so difficult for him to cure her. People who are actually sick are more pliable. Josefina was too aware of everything and very unruly and he had had to smoke her a great many times.

Don Juan had once said the same thing about me, that he had smoked me. I had always believed that he was referring to having used psychotropic mushrooms to have a view of me.

"How did he smoke you?" I asked Josefina.

She shrugged her shoulders and did not answer.

"The same way he smoked you," Lidia said. "He pulled your luminosity and dried it with the smoke from a fire that he had made."

I was sure that don Juan had never explained such a thing to me. I asked Lidia to tell me what she knew about the subject. She turned to la Gorda.

"Smoke is very important for sorcerers," la Gorda said. "Smoke is like fog. Fog is of course better, but it's too hard to handle. It's not as handy as smoke is.

"So if a sorcerer wants to see and know someone who is always hiding- like you and Josefina- who are capricious and difficult; the sorcerer makes a fire and lets the smoke envelop the person. Whatever they're hiding comes out in the smoke."

La Gorda said that the Nagual used smoke not only to see and know people, but also to cure. He gave Josefina smoke baths. He made her stand or sit by the fire in the direction the wind was blowing. The smoke would envelop her and make her choke and cry, but her discomfort was only temporary and of no consequence. The positive effects, on the other hand, were a gradual cleansing of the luminosity.

"The Nagual gave all of us smoke baths," la Gorda said. "He gave you even more baths than Josefina. He said that you were unbearable, and you were not even pretending like she was."

It all became clear to me. She was right; don Juan had made me sit in front of a fire hundreds of times. The smoke used to irritate my throat and eyes to such a degree that I dreaded to see him begin to gather dry twigs and branches. He said that I had to learn to control my breathing and feel the smoke while I kept my eyes closed; that way I could breathe without choking.

La Gorda said that smoke had helped Josefina to be ethereal and very elusive, and that no doubt it had helped me to cure my madness, whatever it was.

"The Nagual said that smoke takes everything out of you," la Gorda went on. "It makes you clear and direct."

I asked her if she knew how to bring out with the smoke whatever a person was hiding. She said that she could easily do it because of having lost her form, but that the little sisters and the Genaros, although they had seen the Nagual and Genaro do it scores of times, could not yet do it themselves.

I was curious to know why don Juan had never mentioned the subject to me in spite of the fact that he had smoked me like dry fish hundreds of times.

"He did," la Gorda said with her usual conviction. "The Nagual even taught you fog gazing. He told us that once you smoked a whole place in the mountains and saw what was hiding behind the scenery. He said that he was spellbound himself."

I remembered an exquisite perceptual distortion- a hallucination of sorts- which I had had, and thought was the product of a play between a most dense fog and an electrical storm that were occurring at the same time.

I narrated to them the episode and added that don Juan had never really directly taught me anything about the fog or the smoke. His procedure had been to build fires or to take me into fog banks.

La Gorda did not say a word. She stood up and went back to the stove. Lidia shook her head and clicked her tongue.

"You sure are dumb," she said. "The Nagual taught you everything. How do you think you saw what you have just told us about?"

There was an abyss between our understanding of how to teach something. I told them that if I were to teach them something I knew, such as how to drive a car, I would go step by step, making sure that they understood every facet of the whole procedure.

La Gorda returned to the table, and said, "That's only if the sorcerer is teaching something about the tonal.

"When the sorcerer is dealing with the nagual, the instruction he must give is to show the mystery to the warrior.

"...And that's all he has to do.

"The warrior who receives the mysteries must claim knowledge as power, by doing what he has been shown.

"The Nagual showed you more mysteries than all of us together. But you're lazy, like Pablito, and prefer to be confused. The tonal and the nagual are two different worlds. In one you talk, in the other you act."

At the moment she spoke, her words made absolute sense to me. I knew what she was talking about. She went back to the stove, stirred something in a pot and came back again.

"Why are you so dumb?" Lidia bluntly asked me.

"He's empty," Rosa replied.

They made me stand up and forced themselves to squint as they scanned my body with their eyes. All of them touched my umbilical region.

"But why are you still empty?" Lidia asked.

"You know what to do, don't you?" Rosa added.

"He was crazy," Josefina said to them. "He must still be crazy now."

La Gorda came to my aid and told them that I was still empty for the same reason they still had their form. All of us secretly did not want the world of the nagual. We were afraid and had second thoughts. In short, none of us was better than Pablito.

They did not say a word. All three of them seemed thoroughly embarrassed.

"Poor little Nagual," Lidia said to me with a tone of genuine concern. "You're as scared as we are. I pretend to be tough, Josefina pretends to be crazy, Rosa pretends to be ill-tempered and you pretend to be dumb."

They laughed, and for the first time since I had arrived they made a gesture of comradeship toward me. They embraced me and put their heads against mine.

La Gorda sat facing me and the little sisters sat around her. I was facing all four of them.

"Now we can talk about what happened tonight," la Gorda said. "The Nagual told me that if we survived the last contact with the allies we wouldn't be the same. The allies did something to us tonight. They have hurled us away."

She gently touched my writing hand.

"Tonight was a special night for you," she went on. "Tonight all of us pitched in to help you, including the allies. The Nagual would have liked it. Tonight you saw all the way through."

"I did?" I asked.

"There you go again," Lidia said, and everybody laughed.

"Tell me about my seeing, Gorda," I insisted. "You know that I'm dumb. There should be no misunderstandings between us."

"All right," she said. "I see what you mean. Tonight you saw the little sisters."

I said to them that I had also witnessed incredible acts performed by don Juan and don Genaro. I had seen them as plainly as I had seen the little sisters and yet don Juan and don Genaro had always concluded that I had not seen. I failed, therefore, to determine in what way could the acts of the little sisters be different.

"You mean you didn't see how they were holding onto the lines of the world?" She asked.

"No, I didn't."

"You didn't see them slipping through the crack between the worlds?"

I narrated to them what I had witnessed. They listened in silence. At the end of my account la Gorda seemed to be on the verge of tears.

"What a pity! " she exclaimed.

She stood up and walked around the table and embraced me. Her eyes were clear and restful. I knew she bore no malice toward me.

"It's our fate that you are plugged up like this," she said. "But you're still the Nagual to us. I won't hinder you with ugly thoughts. You can at least be assured of that."

I knew that she meant it. She was speaking to me from a level that I had witnessed only in don Juan. She had repeatedly explained her mood as the product of having lost her human form. She was indeed a formless warrior. A wave of profound affection for her enveloped me. I was about to weep.

It was at the instant that I felt she was a most marvelous warrior that quite an intriguing thing happened to me.

The closest way of describing it would be to say that I felt that my ears had suddenly popped. Except that I felt the popping in the middle of my body, right below my navel, more acutely than in my ears. Right after the popping everything became clearer: sounds, sights, odors.

Then I felt an intense buzzing, which oddly enough did not interfere with my hearing capacity. The buzzing was loud but did not drown out any other sounds. It was as if I were hearing the buzzing with some part of me other than my ears. A hot flash went through my body. And then I suddenly recalled something I had never seen. It was as though an alien memory had taken possession of me.

I remembered Lidia pulling herself from two horizontal, reddish ropes as she walked on the wall. She was not really walking. She was actually gliding on a thick bundle of lines that she held with her feet. I remembered seeing her panting with her mouth open, from the exertion of pulling the reddish ropes. The reason I could not hold my balance at the end of her display was because I was seeing her as a light that went around the room so fast that it made me dizzy. It pulled me from the area around my navel.

I remembered Rosa's actions and Josefina's as well.

Rosa had actually brachiated, [* brachiated- swung from one hold to the next] with her left arm holding onto long, vertical, reddish fibers that looked like vines dropping from the dark roof. With her right arm she was also holding some vertical fibers that seemed to give her stability. She also held onto the same fibers with her toes. Toward the end of her display she was like a phosphorescence on the roof. The lines of her body had been erased.

Josefina was hiding herself behind some lines that seemed to come out of the floor. What she was doing with her raised forearm was moving the lines together to give them the necessary width to conceal her bulk. Her puffed-up clothes were a great prop. They had somehow contracted her luminosity. The clothes were bulky only for the eye that looked. At the end of her display Josefina, like Lidia and Rosa, was just a patch of light. I could switch from one recollection to the other in my mind.

When I told them about my concurrent memories the little sisters looked at me bewildered. La Gorda was the only one who seemed to be following what was happening to me. She laughed with true delight and said that the Nagual was right in saying that I was too lazy to remember what I had 'seen'. Therefore I only bothered with what I had looked at.

Is it possible, I thought to myself, that I am unconsciously selecting what I recall? Or is it la Gorda who is creating all this? If it was true that I had selected my recall at first and then released what I had censored, then it also had to be true that I must have perceived much more of don Juan's and don Genaro's actions, and yet I could only recall a selective part of my total perception of those events.

"It's hard to believe," I said to la Gorda, "that I can remember now something I didn't remember at all a while ago."

"The Nagual said that everyone can see, and yet we choose not to remember what we see," she said. "Now I understand how right he was. All of us can see; some of us more than others."

I told la Gorda that some part of me knew that I had found then a transcendental key. A missing piece had been handed down to me by all of them. But it was difficult to discern what it was.

She announced that she had just 'seen' that I had practiced a good deal of dreaming, and that I had developed my attention; and yet I was fooled by my own appearance of not knowing anything.

"I've been trying to tell you about attention," she proceeded, "but you know as much as we do about it."

I assured her that my knowledge was intrinsically different from theirs. Theirs was infinitely more spectacular than mine. Anything they might say to me in relation to their practices, therefore, was a bonus to me.

"The Nagual told us to show you that with our attention we can hold the images of a dream in the same way we hold the images of the world," la Gorda said. "The art of the dreamer is the art of attention."

Thoughts came down on me like a landslide. I had to stand up and walk around the kitchen. I sat down again. We remained quiet for a long time. I knew what she had meant when she said that the art of dreamers was the art of attention. I knew then that don Juan had told me and showed me everything he could.

I had not been able, however, to realize the premises of his knowledge in my body while he was around. He had said that my reason was the demon that kept me chained, and that I had to vanquish it if I wanted to achieve the realization of his teachings. The issue, therefore, had been how to vanquish my reason. It had never occurred to me to press him for a definition of what he meant by reason. I presumed all along that he meant the capacity for comprehending, inferring or thinking, in an orderly, rational way. From what la Gorda had said, I knew that to him reason meant attention.

Don Juan said that the core of our being was the act of perceiving, and that the magic of our being was the act of awareness. For him perception and awareness were a single, functional, inextricable unit, a unit which had two domains.

The first one was the "attention of the tonal"; that is to say, the capacity of average people to perceive and place their awareness on the ordinary world of everyday life. Don Juan also called this form of attention our "first ring of power," and described it as our awesome but taken-for-granted ability to impart order to our perception of our daily world.

The second domain was the "attention of the nagual"; that is to say, the capacity of sorcerers to place their awareness on the nonordinary world. He called this domain of attention the "second ring of power," or the altogether portentous ability that all of us have, but only sorcerers use, to impart order to the nonordinary world.

La Gorda and the little sisters, in demonstrating to me that the art of dreamers was to hold the images of their dreams with their attention, had brought in the pragmatic aspect of don Juan's scheme. They were the practitioners who had gone beyond the theoretical aspect of his teachings.

In order to give me a demonstration of that art, they had to make use of their "second ring of power," or the "attention of the nagual." In order for me to witness their art, I had to do the same. In fact it was evident that I had placed my attention on both domains.

Perhaps all of us are continually perceiving in both fashions but choose to isolate one for recollection and discard the other or perhaps we file it away, as I myself had done. Under certain conditions of stress or acquiescence, the censored memory surfaces and we can then have two distinct memories of one event.

What don Juan had struggled to vanquish, or rather suppress in me, was not my 'reason' as the capacity for rational thought, but rather my 'attention of the tonal'; my awareness of the world of common sense.

His motive for wanting me to do so was explained by la Gorda when she said that the daily world exists because we know how to hold it's images. Consequently, if one drops the attention needed to maintain those images, the world collapses.

"The Nagual told us that practice is what counts," la Gorda said suddenly. "Once you get your attention on the images of your dream, your attention is hooked for good. In the end you can be like Genaro, who could hold the images of any dream."

"We each have five other dreams," Lidia said. "But we showed you the first one because that was the dream the Nagual gave us."

"Can all of you go into dreaming any time you want?" I asked.

"No," la Gorda replied. "Dreaming takes too much power. None of us has that much power. The reason the little sisters had to roll on the floor so many times was that in rolling the earth was giving them energy. Maybe you could also remember seeing them as luminous beings getting energy from the light of the earth. The Nagual said that the best way of getting energy is, of course, to let the sun inside the eyes, especially the left eye."

I told her that I knew nothing about it, and she described a procedure that don Juan had taught them. As she spoke I remembered that don Juan had also taught the same procedure to me. It consisted in moving my head slowly from side to side as I caught the sunlight with my half-closed left eye. He said that one could not only use the sun, but could use any kind of light that could shine on the eyes.

La Gorda said that the Nagual had recommended that they tie their shawls below their waists in order to protect their hipbones when they rolled.

I commented that don Juan had never mentioned rolling to me. She said that only women could roll because they had wombs and energy came directly into their wombs. By rolling around they distributed that energy over the rest of their bodies. In order for a man to be energized he had to be on his back, with his knees bent so that the soles of his feet touched each other. His arms had to be extended laterally, with his forearms raised vertically, and the fingers clawed in an upright position.

"We have been dreaming those dreams for years," Lidia said. "Those dreams are our best, because our attention is complete. In the other dreams that we have, our attention is still shaky."

La Gorda said that holding the images of dreams was a Toltec art. After years of consuming practice each one of them was able to perform one act in any dream. Lidia could walk on anything, Rosa could dangle from anything, Josefina could hide behind anything, and she herself could fly. But they were only beginners; apprentices of the art. They had complete attention for only one activity.

She added that Genaro was the master of dreaming and could turn the tables around and have attention for as many activities as we have in our daily life; and that for him the two domains of attention had the same value.

I felt compelled to ask them my usual question. I had to know their procedures; how they held the images of their dreams.

"You know that as well as we do," la Gorda said. "The only thing I can say is that after going to the same dream over and over, we began to feel the lines of the world. They helped us to do what you saw us doing."

Don Juan had said that our 'first ring of power' is engaged very early in our lives and that we live under the impression that that is all there is to us. Our 'second ring of power', the 'attention of the nagual', remains hidden for the immense majority of us, and only at the moment of our death is it revealed to us.

There is a pathway to reach it, however, which is available to every one of us, but which only sorcerers take, and that pathway is through 'dreaming'. Dreaming was in essence the transformation of ordinary dreams into affairs involving volition. Dreamers, by engaging their 'attention of the nagual' and focusing it on the items and events of their ordinary dreams, change those dreams into dreaming.

Don Juan said that there were no procedures to arrive at the attention of the nagual. He only gave me pointers. Finding my hands in my dreams was the first pointer. Then the exercise of paying attention was elongated to finding objects; looking for specific features, such as buildings, streets and so on.

From there the jump was to dreaming about specific places at specific times of the day.

The final stage was drawing the 'attention of the nagual' to focus on the total self. Don Juan said that that final stage was usually ushered in by a dream that many of us have had at one time or another, in which one is looking at oneself sleeping in bed.

By the time a sorcerer has such a dream, his attention has been developed to such a degree that instead of waking himself up- as most of us would do in that situation- he turns on his heels and engages himself in activity; as if he were acting in the world of everyday life.

From that moment on there is a breakage; a division of sorts in the otherwise unified personality. The result of engaging the 'attention of the nagual' in dreaming, and developing it to the height and sophistication of our 'daily attention of the world' was, in don Juan's scheme, 'the other' self; an identical being as oneself, but made in 'dreaming'.

Don Juan had told me that there are no definite standard steps for reaching that double, as there are no definite steps for us to reach our daily awareness. We simply do it by practicing. He contended that in the act of engaging our attention of the nagual, we would find the steps. He urged me to practice dreaming without letting my fears make it into an encumbering production.

He had done the same with la Gorda and the little sisters, but obviously something in them had made them more receptive to the idea of another level of attention.

"Genaro was in his body of dreaming most of the time," la Gorda said. "He liked it better. That's why he could do the weirdest things and scare you half to death. Genaro could go in and out of the crack between the worlds like you and I can go in and out a door."

Don Juan had also talked to me at great length about the crack between the worlds. I had always believed that he was talking in a metaphorical sense about a subtle division between the world that the average man perceives and the world that sorcerers perceive.

La Gorda and the little sisters had shown me that the crack between the worlds was more than a metaphor. It was rather the capacity to change levels of attention. One part of me understood la Gorda perfectly while another part of me was more frightened than ever.

"You have been asking where the Nagual and Genaro went," la Gorda said. "Soledad was very blunt and told you that they went to the other world; Lidia told you they left this area; the Genaros were stupid and scared you. The truth is that the Nagual and Genaro went through that crack."

For some reason undefinable to me, her statements plunged me into profound chaos. I had felt all along that they had left for good. I knew that they had not left in an ordinary sense, but I had kept that feeling in the realm of a metaphor. Although I had even voiced it to close friends, I think I never really believed it myself. In the depths of me I had always been a rational man. But la Gorda and the little sisters had turned my obscure metaphors into real possibilities. La Gorda had actually transported us half a mile with the energy of her dreaming.

La Gorda stood up and said that I had understood everything, and that it was time for us to eat. She served us the food that she had cooked. I did not feel like eating. At the end of the meal she stood up and came to my side.

"I think it's time for you to leave," she said to me.

That seemed to be a cue for the little sisters. They also stood up.

"If you stay beyond this moment, you won't be able to leave anymore," la Gorda went on. "The Nagual gave you freedom once, but you chose to stay with him. He told me that if we all survive the last contact with the allies I should feed all of you, make you feel good and then say good-bye to all of you. I figure that the little sisters and I have no place to go, so there is no choice for us. But you are different."

The little sisters surrounded me and each said good-bye to me.

There was a monstrous irony in that situation. I was free to leave but I had no place to go. There was no choice for me either.

Years before don Juan gave me a chance to back out. I stayed then because I already had no place to go.

"We choose only once," he had said then. "We choose either to be warriors or to be ordinary men. A second choice does not exist. Not on this earth."

## 6. The Second Attention

"You have to leave later on today," la Gorda said to me right after breakfast. "Since you have decided to go with us, you have committed yourself to helping us fulfill our new task. The Nagual left me in charge only until you came. He entrusted me, as you already know, with certain things to tell you.

"I've told you most of them. But there are still some I couldn't mention to you until you made your choice. Today we will take care of them. Right after that you must leave in order to give us time to get ready. We need a few days to settle everything and to prepare to leave these mountains forever. We have been here a very long time. It's hard to break away. But everything has come to a sudden end. The Nagual warned us of the total change that you would bring regardless of the outcome of your bouts, but I think no one really believed him."

"I fail to see why you have to change anything," I said.

"I've explained it to you already," she protested. "We have lost our old purpose. Now we have a new one and that new purpose requires that we become as light as the breeze. The breeze is our new mood. It used to be the hot wind. You have changed our direction."

"You are talking in circles, Gorda."

"Yes, but that's because you're empty. I can't make it any clearer. When you return, the Genaros will show you the art of the stalker, and right after that all of us will leave. The Nagual said that if you decide to be with us the first thing I should tell you is that you have to remember your bouts with Soledad and the little sisters, and examine every single thing that happened to you with thembecause everything is an omen of what will happen to you on your path. If you are careful and impeccable, you'll find that those bouts were gifts of power."

"What's dona Soledad going to do now?"

"She's leaving. The little sisters have already helped her to take her floor apart. That floor aided her to reach her attention of the nagual. The lines had power to do that. Each of them helped her gather a piece of that attention. To be incomplete is no handicap to reaching that attention for some warriors. Soledad was transformed because she got to that attention faster than any of us. She doesn't have to gaze at her floor anymore to go into that other world, and now that there is no more need for the floor. She has returned it to the earth where she got it."

"You are really determined to leave, Gorda, aren't you?"

"All of us are. That's why I'm asking you to go away for a few days to give us time to pull down everything we have."

"Am I the one who has to find a place for all of you, Gorda?"

"If you were an impeccable warrior you would do just that. But you're not an impeccable warrior, and neither are we. But still we will have to do our best to meet our new challenge."

I felt an oppressive sense of doom. I have never been one to thrive on responsibilities. I thought that the commitment to guide them was a crushing burden that I could not handle.

"Maybe we don't have to do anything," I said.

"Yes. That's right," she said, and laughed. "Why don't you tell yourself that over and over until you feel safe? The Nagual told you time and time again that the only freedom warriors have is to behave impeccably."

She told me how the Nagual had insisted that all of them understand that not only was impeccability freedom, but it was the only way to scare away the human form.

I narrated to her the way don Juan made me understand what was meant by impeccability. He and I were hiking one day through a very steep ravine when a huge boulder got loose from it's matrix on the rock wall and came down with a formidable force and landed on the floor of the canyon, twenty or thirty yards from where we were standing. The size of the boulder made it's fall a very impressive event.

Don Juan seized the opportunity to create a dramatic lesson. He said that the force that rules our destinies is outside of ourselves and has nothing to do with our acts or volition. Sometimes that force would make us stop walking on our way and bend over to tie our shoelaces, as I had just done. And by making us stop, that force makes us gain a precious moment. If we had kept on walking, that enormous boulder would have most certainly crushed us to death.

Some other day, however, in another ravine the same outside deciding force would make us stop again to bend over and tie our shoelaces while another boulder would get loose precisely above where we are standing. By making us stop, that force would have made us lose a precious moment. That time if we had kept on walking, we would have saved ourselves. Don Juan said that in view of my total lack of control over the forces which decide my destiny, my only possible freedom in that ravine consisted in my tying my shoelaces impeccably.

La Gorda seemed to be moved by my account. For an instant she held my face in her hands from across the table.

"Impeccability for me is to tell you at the right time what the Nagual told me to tell you," she said. "But power has to time perfectly what I have to reveal to you, or it won't have any effect."

She paused in a dramatic fashion. Her delay was very studied but terribly effective with me.

"What is it?" I asked desperately.

She did not answer. She took me by the arm and led me to the area just outside the front door. She made me sit on the hard-packed ground with my back against a thick pole about one and a half feet high that looked like a tree stump which had been planted in the ground almost against the wall of the house. There was a row of five such poles planted about two feet apart. I had meant to ask la Gorda what their function was. My first impression had been that a former owner of the house had tied animals to them. My conjecture seemed incongruous, however, because the area just outside the front door was a kind of roofed porch.

I told la Gorda my supposition as she sat down next to me to my left with her back against another pole. She laughed and said that the poles were indeed used for tying animals of sorts, but not by a former owner, and that she had nearly broken her back digging the holes for them.

"What do you use them for?" I asked.

"Let's say that we tie ourselves to them," she replied. "And this brings me to the next thing the Nagual asked me to tell you. He said that because you were empty, he had to gather your second attention, your attention of the nagual, in a way different than ours.

We gathered that attention through dreaming and you did it with his power plants. The Nagual said that his power plants gathered the menacing side of your second attention in one clump, and that's the shape that came out of your head. He said that that's what happens to sorcerers when they are given power plants. If they don't die, the power plants spin their second attention into that awful shape that comes out of their heads.

"Now we're coming to what he wanted you to do. He said that you must change directions now and begin gathering your second attention in another way; more like us. You can't keep on the path of knowledge unless you balance your second attention. So far, that attention of yours has been riding on the Nagual's power, but now you are alone. That's what he wanted me to tell you."

"How do I balance my second attention?"

"You have to do dreaming the way we do it. Dreaming is the only way to gather the second attention without injuring it; without making it menacing and awesome. Your second attention is fixed on the awful side of the world. Ours is on the beauty of it. You have to change sides and come with us. That's what you chose last night when you decided to go with us."

"Could that shape come out of me at any time?"

"No. The Nagual said that it won't come out again until you're as old as he is. Your nagual has already come out as many times as was needed. The Nagual and Genaro have seen to that. They used to tease it out of you. The Nagual told me that sometimes you were a hair away from dying because your second attention is very indulging.

"He said that once you even scared him. Your nagual attacked him and he had to sing to it to calm it down. But the worst thing happened to you in Mexico City. There he pushed you one day and you went into an office and in that office you went through the crack between the worlds. He intended only to dispel your attention of the tonal. You were worried sick over some stupid thing.

"But when he shoved you, your whole tonal shrunk and your entire being went through the crack. He had a hellish time finding you. He told me that for a moment he thought you had gone farther than he could reach. But then he saw you roaming around aimlessly and he brought you back. He told me that you went through the crack around ten in the morning. So, on that day, ten in the morning became your new time."

"My new time for what?"

"For everything. If you remain a man you will die around that time. If you become a sorcerer you will leave this world around that time.

"Eligio also went on a different path; a path none of us knew about. We met him just before he left. Eligio was a most marvelous dreamer. He was so good that the Nagual and Genaro used to take him through the crack, and he had the power to withstand it as if it were nothing. He didn't even pant. The Nagual and Genaro gave him a final boost with power plants. He had the control and the power to handle that boost. And that's what sent him to wherever he is."

"The Genaros told me that Eligio jumped with Benigno. Is that true?"

"Sure. By the time Eligio had to jump, his second attention had already been in that other world. The Nagual said that yours had also been there, but that for you it was a nightmare because you had no control. He said that his power plants had made you lopsided. They had made you cut through your attention of the tonal and had put you directly in the realm of your second attention, but without any mastery over that attention. The Nagual didn't give power plants to Eligio until the very last."

"Do you think that my second attention has been injured, Gorda?"

"The Nagual never said that. He thought you were dangerously crazy, but that has nothing to do with power plants. He said that both of your attentions are unmanageable. If you could conquer them you'd be a great warrior."

I wanted her to tell me more on the subject. She put her hand on my writing pad and said that we had a terribly busy day ahead of us and we needed to store energy in order to withstand it. We had, therefore, to energize ourselves with the sunlight. She said that the circumstances required that we take the sunlight with the left eye. She began to move her head slowly from side to side as she glanced directly into the sun through her half closed eyes.

A moment later Lidia, Rosa and Josefina joined us. Lidia sat to my right, Josefina sat next to her, while Rosa sat next to la Gorda. All of them were resting their backs against the poles. I was in the middle of the row.

It was a clear day. The sun was just above the distant range of mountains. They started moving their heads in perfect synchronization. I joined them and had the feeling that I too had synchronized my motion with theirs. They kept it up for about a minute and then stopped.

All of them wore hats and used the brims to protect their faces from the sunlight when they were not bathing their eyes in it. La Gorda had given me my old hat to wear.

We sat there for about half an hour. In that time we repeated the exercise countless times. I intended to make a mark on my pad for each time but la Gorda very casually pushed my pad out of reach.

Lidia suddenly stood up, mumbling something unintelligible. La Gorda leaned over to me and whispered that the Genaros were coming up the road. I strained to look but there was no one in sight. Rosa and Josefina also stood up and then went with Lidia inside the house.

I told la Gorda that I could not see anyone approaching. She replied that the Genaros had been visible at one point on the road and added that she had dreaded the moment when all of us would have to get together, but that she was confident that I could handle the situation. She advised me to be extra careful with Josefina and Pablito because they had no control over themselves. She said that the most sensible thing for me to do would be to take the Genaros away after an hour or so.

I kept looking at the road. There was no sign of anyone approaching.

"Are you sure they're coming?" I asked.

She said that she had not seen them but that Lidia had. The Genaros had been visible just for Lidia because she had been gazing at the same time she had been bathing her eyes. I was not sure what la Gorda had meant and asked her to explain.

"We are gazers," she said. "Just like you. We are all the same. There is no need to deny that you're a gazer. The Nagual told us about your great feats of gazing."

"My great feats of gazing! What are you talking about, Gorda?"

She contracted her mouth and appeared to be on the verge of being irritated by my question; She seemed to catch herself. She smiled and gave me a gentle shove.

At that moment she had a sudden flutter in her body. She stared blankly past me, then she shook her head vigorously. She said that she had just seen that the Genaros were not coming after all. It was too early for them. They were going to wait for a while before they made their appearance. She smiled as if she were delighted with the delay.

"It's too early for us to have them here anyway," she said. "And they feel the same way about us."

"Where are they now?" I asked.

"They must be sitting beside the road somewhere," she replied. "Benigno had no doubt gazed at the house as they were walking and saw us sitting here and that's why they have decided to wait. That's perfect. That will give us time."

"You scare me, Gorda. Time for what?"

"You have to round up your second attention today, just for us four."

"How can I do that?"

"I don't know. You are very mysterious to us. The Nagual has done scores of things to you with his power plants, but you can't claim that as knowledge. That is what I've been trying to tell you. Only if you have mastery over your second attention can you perform with it. Otherwise you'll always stay fixed halfway between the two as you are now.

Everything that has happened to you since you arrived has been directed to force that attention to spin. I've been giving you instructions little by little, just as the Nagual told me to do. Since you took another path, you don't know the things that we know, just like we don't know anything about power plants. Soledad knows a bit more, because the Nagual took her to his homeland. Nestor knows about medicinal plants, but none of us has been taught the way you were. We don't need your knowledge yet. But someday when we are ready you are the one who will know what to do to give us a boost with power plants. I am the only one who knows where the Nagual's pipe is hidden, waiting for that day.

"The Nagual's command is that you have to change your path and go with us. That means that you have to do dreaming with us and stalking with the Genaros. You can't afford any longer to be where you are, on the awesome side of your second attention. Another jolt of your nagual coming out of you could kill you. The Nagual told me that human beings are frail creatures composed of many layers of luminosity. When you see them, they seem to have fibers, but those fibers are really layers, like an onion. Jolts of any kind separate those layers and can even cause human beings to die."

She stood up and led me back to the kitchen. We sat down facing each other. Lidia, Rosa and Josefina were busy in the yard. I could not see them but I could hear them talking and laughing.

"The Nagual said that we die because our layers become separated," la Gorda said. "Jolts are always separating them but they get together again. Sometimes, though, the jolt is so great that the layers get loose and can't get back together anymore."

"Have you ever seen the layers, Gorda?"

"Sure. I saw a man dying in the street. The Nagual told me that you also found a man dying, but you didn't see his death. The Nagual made me see the dying man's layers. They were like the peels of an onion. When human beings are healthy they are like luminous eggs, but if they are injured they begin to peel, like an onion.

"The Nagual told me that your second attention was so strong sometimes that it pushed all the way out. He and Genaro had to hold your layers together otherwise you would've died. That's why he figured that you might have enough energy to get your nagual out of you twice. He meant that you could hold your layers together by yourself twice. You did it more times than that and now you are finished. You have no more energy to hold your layers together in case of another jolt.

"The Nagual has entrusted me to take care of everyone. In your case, I have to help you to tighten your layers. The Nagual said that death pushes the layers apart. He explained to me that the center of our luminosity, which is the attention of the nagual, is always pushing out, and that's what loosens the layers. So it's easy for death to come in between them and push them completely apart. Sorcerers have to do their best to keep their own layers closed. That's why the Nagual taught us dreaming. Dreaming tightens the layers.

"When sorcerers learn dreaming they tie together their two attentions and there is no more need for that center to push out."

"Do you mean that sorcerers do not die?"

"That is right. Sorcerers do not die."

"Do you mean that none of us is going to die?"

"I didn't mean us. We are nothing. We are freaks, neither here nor there. I meant sorcerers. The Nagual and Genaro are sorcerers. Their two attentions are so tightly together that perhaps they'll never die."

"Did the Nagual say that, Gorda?"

"Yes. He and Genaro both told me that. Not too long before they left, the Nagual explained to us the power of attention. I never knew about the tonal and the nagual until then."

La Gorda recounted the way don Juan had instructed them about that crucial tonal-nagual dichotomy. She said that one day the Nagual had all of them gather together in order to take them for a long hike to a desolate, rocky valley in the mountains.

He made a large, heavy bundle with all kinds of items. He even put Pablito's radio in it. He then gave the bundle to Josefina to carry and put a heavy table on Pablito's shoulders and they all started hiking. He made all of them take turns carrying the bundle and the table as they hiked nearly forty miles to that high, desolate place.

When they arrived there, the Nagual made Pablito set the table in the very center of the valley. Then he asked Josefina to arrange the contents of the bundle on the table. When the table was filled, he explained to them the difference between the tonal and the nagual in the same terms he had explained it to me in a restaurant in Mexico City; except that in their case his example was infinitely more graphic.

He told them that the tonal was the order that we are aware of in our daily world and also the personal order that we carry through life on our shoulders, like they had carried that table and the bundle. The personal tonal of each of us was like the table in that valley, a tiny island filled with the things we are familiar with. The nagual, on the other hand, was the inexplicable source that held that table in place and was like the vastness of that deserted valley.

He told them that sorcerers were obligated to watch their tonals from a distance in order to have a better grasp of what was really around them. He made them walk to a ridge from where they could view the whole area. From there the table was hardly visible. He then made them go back to the table and had them all loom over it in order to show that an average man does not have the grasp that a sorcerer has because an average man is right on top of his table holding onto every item on it.

He then made each of them, one at a time, casually look at the objects on the table, and tested their recall by taking something and hiding it to see if they had been attentive. All of them passed the test with flying colors. He pointed out to them that their ability to remember so easily the items on that table was due to the fact that all of them had developed their attention of the tonal, or their attention over the table.

He next asked them to look casually at everything that was on the ground underneath the table, and tested their recall by removing the rocks, twigs or whatever else was there. None of them could remember what they had seen under the table.

The Nagual then swept everything off the top of the table and made each of them, one at a time, lie across it on their stomachs and carefully examine the ground underneath. He explained to them that for a sorcerer the nagual was the area just underneath the table.

Since it was unthinkable to tackle the immensity of the nagual, as exemplified by that vast desolate place, sorcerers took as their domain of activity the area directly below the island of the tonal, as graphically shown by what was underneath that table. That area was the domain of what he called the second attention, or the attention of the nagual, or the attention under the table. That attention was reached only after warriors had swept the top of their tables clean. He said that reaching the second attention made the two attentions into a single unit, and that unit was the totality of oneself.

La Gorda said that his demonstration was so clear to her that she understood at once why the Nagual had made her clean her own life; or sweep her 'island of the tonal', as he had called it. She felt that she had indeed been fortunate in having followed every suggestion that he had put to her. She was still a long way from unifying her two attentions, but her diligence had resulted in an impeccable life which was, as he had assured her, the only way for her to lose her human form. Losing the human form was the essential requirement for unifying the two attentions.

"The attention under the table is the key to everything sorcerers do," she went on. "In order for us to reach that attention, the Nagual and Genaro taught us dreaming; and you were taught about power plants. I don't know what they did to you to teach you how to trap your second attention with power plants, but to teach us how to do dreaming the Nagual taught us gazing.

"He never told us what he was really doing to us. He just taught us to gaze. We never knew that gazing was the way to trap our second attention. We thought gazing was just for fun. That was not so. Dreamers have to be gazers before they can trap their second attention.

"The first thing the Nagual did was to put a dry leaf on the ground and make me look at it for hours. Every day he brought a leaf and put it in front of me. At first I thought that it was the same leaf that he saved from day to day, but then I noticed that leaves are different. The Nagual said that when we realized that, we are not looking anymore, but gazing.

"Then he put stacks of dry leaves in front of me. He told me to scramble them with my left hand and feel them as I gazed at them. A dreamer moves the leaves in spirals, gazes at them and then dreams of the designs that the leaves make. The Nagual said that dreamers can consider themselves as having mastered leaf gazing when they dream the designs of the leaves first, and then find those same designs the next day in their pile of dry leaves.

"The Nagual said that gazing at leaves fortifies the second attention. If you gaze at a pile of leaves for hours, as he used to make me do, your thoughts get quiet. Without thoughts, the attention of the tonal wanes and suddenly your second attention hooks onto the leaves and the leaves become something else.

"The Nagual called the moment when the second attention hooks onto something 'stopping the world'; and that is correct. The world stops.

"For this reason, there should always be someone around when we first learn to gaze. We never know about the quirks of our second attention. Since we have never used it, we have to become familiar with it before we could venture into gazing alone.

"The difficulty in gazing is to learn to quiet down the thoughts. The Nagual said that he preferred to teach us how to do that with a pile of leaves because we could get all the leaves we needed any time we wanted to gaze. But anything else would do the same job.

"Once you can stop the world, you are a gazer. And since the only way of stopping the world is by trying, the Nagual made all of us gaze at dry leaves for years and years. I think it's the best way to reach our second attention.

"He combined gazing at dry leaves and looking for our hands in dreaming. It took me about a year to find my hands, and four years to stop the world. The Nagual said that once you have trapped your second attention with dry leaves, you do gazing and dreaming to enlarge it. And that's all there is to gazing."

"You make it sound so simple, Gorda."

"Everything the Toltecs do is very simple. The Nagual said that all we needed to do in order to trap our second attention was to try and try. All of us stopped the world by gazing at dry leaves.

"You and Eligio were different. You yourself did it with power plants, but I don't know what path the Nagual followed with Eligio. He never wanted to tell me. He told me about you because we have the same task."

I mentioned that I had written in my notes that I had had the first complete awareness of having stopped the world only a few days before. She laughed.

"You stopped the world before any of us," she said. "What do you think you did when you took all those power plants? You've never done it by gazing like we did, that's all."

"Was the pile of dry leaves the only thing the Nagual made you gaze at?"

"Once dreamers know how to stop the world, they can gaze at other things; and finally when the dreamers lose their form altogether, they can gaze at anything. I do that. I can go into anything. He made us follow a certain order in gazing, though.

"First we gazed at small plants. The Nagual warned us that small plants are very dangerous. Their power is concentrated. They have a very intense light and they feel when dreamers are gazing at them. They immediately move their light and shoot it at the gazer. Dreamers have to choose one kind of plant to gaze at.

"Next we gazed at trees. Dreamers also have a particular kind of tree to gaze at. In this respect you and I are the same; both of us are eucalyptus gazers."

By the look on my face she must have guessed my next question.

"The Nagual said that with his smoke you could very easily get your second attention to work," she went on. "You focused your attention lots of times on the Nagual's predilection, the crows.

He said that, once, your second attention focused so perfectly on a crow that it flew away, like a crow flies, to the only eucalyptus tree that was around."

For years I had dwelled upon that experience. I could not regard it in any other way except as an inconceivably complex hypnotic state brought about by the psychotropic mushrooms contained in don Juan's smoking mixture; in conjunction with his expertise as a manipulator of behavior.

He suggested a perceptual catharsis in me; that of turning into a crow and perceiving the world as a crow. The result was that I perceived the world in a manner that could not have possibly been part of my inventory of past experiences. La Gorda's explanation somehow had simplified everything.

She said that the Nagual next made them gaze at moving, living creatures. He told them that small insects were by far the best subject. Their mobility made them innocuous to the gazer, the opposite of plants which drew their light directly from the earth.

The next step was to gaze at rocks. She said that rocks were very old and powerful and had a specific light which was rather greenish in contrast with the white light of plants and the yellowish light of mobile, living beings. Rocks did not open up easily to gazers, but it was worthwhile for gazers to persist because rocks had special secrets concealed in their core, secrets that could aid sorcerers in their "dreaming."

"What are the things that rocks reveal to you?" I asked.

"When I gaze into the very core of a rock," she said, "I always catch a whiff of a special scent proper to that rock. When I roam around in my dreaming, I know where I am because I'm guided by those scents."

She said that the time of the day was an important factor in tree and rock gazing. In the early morning trees and rocks were stiff and their light was faint. Around noon was when they were at their best, and gazing at that time was done for borrowing their light and power. In the late afternoon and early evening trees and rocks were quiet and sad, especially trees. La Gorda said that at that hour trees gave the feeling that they were gazing back at the gazer.

A second series in the order of gazing was to gaze at cyclic phenomena: rain and fog. She said that gazers can focus their second attention on the rain itself and move with it, or focus it on the background and use the rain as a magnifying glass of sorts to reveal hidden features. Places of power or places to be avoided are found by gazing through rain. Places of power are yellowish and places to be avoided are intensely green.

La Gorda said that fog was unquestionably the most mysterious thing on earth for a gazer and that it could be used in the same two ways that rain was used. But it did not easily yield to women, and even after she had lost her human form, it remained unattainable to her. She said that the Nagual once made her 'see' a green mist at the head of a fog bank and told her that was the second attention of a fog gazer who lived in the mountains where she and the Nagual were, and that he was moving with the fog. She added that fog was used to uncover the ghosts of things that were no longer there and that the true feat of fog gazers was to let their second attention go into whatever their gazing was revealing to them.

I told her that once while I was with don Juan I had seen a bridge formed out of a fog bank. I was aghast at the clarity and precise detail of that bridge. To me it was more than real. The scene was so intense and vivid that I had been incapable of forgetting it. Don Juan's comments had been that I would have to cross that bridge someday.

"I know about it," she said. "The Nagual told me that someday when you have mastery over your second attention, you'll cross that bridge with that attention; the same way you flew like a crow with that attention. He said that if you become a sorcerer, a bridge will form for you out of the fog and you will cross it and disappear from this world forever. Just like he himself has done."

"Did he disappear like that over a bridge?"

"Not over a bridge. But you witnessed how he and Genaro stepped into the crack between the worlds in front of your very eyes. Nestor said that only Genaro waved his hand to say good-bye the last time you saw them. The Nagual did not wave because he was opening the crack. The Nagual told me that when the second attention has to be called upon to assemble itself, all that is needed is the motion of opening that door. That's the secret of the Toltec dreamers once they are formless."

I wanted to ask her about don Juan and don Genaro stepping through that crack. She made me stop with a light touch of her hand on my mouth.

She said that another series was distance and cloud gazing. In both, the effort of gazers was to let their second attention go to the place they were gazing at. Thus, they covered great distances or rode on clouds. In the case of cloud gazing, the Nagual never permitted them to gaze at thunderheads. He told them that they had to be formless before they could attempt that feat; and that they could not only ride on a thunderhead but on a thunderbolt itself.

La Gorda laughed and asked me to guess who would be daring and crazy enough actually to try gazing at thunderheads. I could think of no one else but Josefina. La Gorda said that Josefina tried gazing at thunderheads every time she could when the Nagual was away until one day a thunderbolt nearly killed her.

"Genaro was a thunderbolt sorcerer," she went on. "His first two apprentices, Benigno and Nestor, were singled out for him by his friend the thunder. He said that he was looking for plants in a very remote area where the Indians are very private and don't like visitors of any kind. They had given Genaro permission to be on their land since he spoke their language. Genaro was picking some plants when it began to rain. There were some houses around, but the people were unfriendly and he didn't want to bother them. He was about to crawl into a hole when he saw a young man coming down the road riding a bicycle heavily laden with goods.

"It was Benigno, the man from the town, who dealt with those Indians. His bicycle got stuck in the mud, and right there a thunderbolt struck him. Genaro thought that he had been killed. People in the houses had seen what happened and came out. Benigno was more scared than hurt, but his bicycle and all his merchandise were ruined. Genaro stayed with him for a week and cured him.

"Almost the same thing happened to Nestor. He used to buy medicinal plants from Genaro, and one day he followed him into the mountains to see where he picked his plants so he wouldn't have to pay for them anymore. Genaro went very far into the mountains on purpose. He intended to make Nestor get lost. It wasn't raining but there were thunderbolts, and suddenly a thunderbolt struck the ground and ran over the dry ground like a snake. It ran right between Nestor's legs and hit a rock ten yards away.

"Genaro said that the bolt had charred the inside of Nestor's legs. His testicles were swollen and he got very ill. Genaro had to cure him for a week right in those mountains.

"By the time Benigno and Nestor were cured, they were also hooked. Men have to be hooked. Women don't need that. Women go freely into anything. That's their power and at the same time their drawback. Men have to be led and women have to be contained."

She giggled and said that no doubt she had a lot of maleness in her, for she needed to be led, and that I must have a lot of femaleness in me, for I needed to be contained.

The last series was fire, smoke, and shadow gazing. She said that for a gazer, fire is not bright but black, and so is smoke. Shadows, on the other hand, are brilliant and have color and movement in them.

There were two more things that were kept separate, star and water gazing. Stargazing was done by sorcerers who have lost their human form. She said that she had fared very well at stargazing, but could not handle gazing at water, especially running water, which was used by formless sorcerers to gather their second attention and transport it to anyplace they needed to go.

"All of us are terrified of water," she went on. "A river gathers the second attention and takes it away and there is no way of stopping. The Nagual told me about your feats of water gazing. But he also told me that one time you nearly disintegrated in the water of a shallow river and that you can't even take a bath now."

Don Juan had made me stare at the water of an irrigation ditch behind his house various times while he had me under the influence of his smoking mixture. I had experienced inconceivable sensations. Once I saw myself all green as if I were covered with algae. After that he recommended that I avoid water.

"Has my second attention been injured by water?" I asked.

"It has," she replied. "You are a very indulging man. The Nagual warned you to be cautious, but you went beyond your limits with running water. The Nagual said that you could've used water like no one else, but it wasn't your fate to be moderate."

She pulled her bench closer to mine.

"That's all there is to gazing," she said. "But there are other things I must tell you before you leave."

"What things, Gorda?"

"First of all, before I say anything, you must round up your second attention for the little sisters and me."

"I don't think I can do that."

La Gorda stood up and went into the house. She came back a moment later with a small, thick, round cushion made out of the same natural fiber used in making nets. Without saying a word she led me again to the front porch. She said that she had made that cushion herself for her comfort when she was learning to gaze, because the position of the body was of great importance while one was gazing.

One had to sit on the ground on a soft mat of leaves, or on a cushion made out of natural fibers. The back had to be propped against a tree, or a stump, or a flat rock. The body had to be thoroughly relaxed. The eyes were never fixed on the object, in order to avoid tiring them. The gaze consisted in scanning very slowly the object gazed at, going counterclockwise but without moving the head. She added that the Nagual had made them plant those thick poles so they could use them to prop themselves.

She had me sit on her cushion and prop my back against a pole. She told me that she was going to guide me in gazing at a power spot that the Nagual had in the round hills across the valley. She hoped that by gazing at it I would get the necessary energy to round up my second attention.

She sat down very close to me, to my left, and began giving me instructions. Almost in a whisper she told me to keep my eyelids half closed and stare at the place where two enormous round hills converged. There was a narrow, steep water canyon there. She said that that particular gazing consisted of four separate actions.

The first one was to use the brim of my hat as a visor to shade off the excessive glare from the sun and allow only a minimal amount of light to come to my eyes.

The second step was to half-close my eyelids.

The third step was to sustain the opening of my eyelids in order to maintain a uniform flow of light.

And the fourth step was to distinguish the water canyon in the background through the mesh of light fibers on my eyelashes.

I could not follow her instructions at first. The sun was high over the horizon and I had to tilt my head back. I tipped my hat until I had blocked off most of the glare with the brim. That seemed to be all that was needed. As soon as I half closed my eyes, a bit of light that appeared as if it were coming from the tip of my hat literally exploded on my eyelashes, which were acting as a filter that created a web of light. I kept my eyelids half closed and played with the web of light for a moment until I could distinguish the dark vertical outline of the water canyon in the background.

La Gorda told me then to gaze at the middle part of the canyon until I could spot a very dark brown blotch. She said that it was a hole in the canyon which was not there for the eye that looks, but only for the eye that 'sees'.

She warned me that I had to exercise my control as soon as I had isolated that blotch so that it would not pull me toward it. Rather, I was supposed to zoom in on it and gaze into it. She suggested that the moment I found the hole I should press my shoulders on hers to let her know. She slid sideways until she was leaning on me.

I struggled for a moment to keep the four actions coordinated and steady, and suddenly a dark spot was formed in the middle of the canyon. I noticed immediately that I was not seeing it in the way I usually see. The dark spot was rather an impression; a visual distortion of sorts. The moment my control waned it disappeared. It was in my field of perception only if I kept the four actions under control.

I remembered then that don Juan had engaged me countless times in a similar activity. He used to hang a small piece of cloth from a low branch of a bush, which was strategically located to be in line with specific geological formations in the mountains in the background, such as water canyons or slopes.

By making me sit about fifty feet away from that piece of cloth, and having me stare through the low branches of the bush where the cloth hung, he used to create a special perceptual effect in me. The piece of cloth, which was always a shade darker than the geological formation I was staring at, seemed to be at first a feature of that formation.

The idea was to let my perception play without analyzing it. I failed every time because I was thoroughly incapable of suspending judgment, and my mind always entered into some rational speculation about the mechanics of my phantom perception.

This time I felt no need whatsoever for speculations. La Gorda was not an imposing figure that I unconsciously needed to fight, as don Juan had obviously been to me.

The dark blotch in my field of perception became almost black. I leaned on la Gorda's shoulder to let her know. She whispered in my ear that I should struggle to keep my eyelids in the position they were in and breathe calmly from my abdomen. I should not let the blotch pull me, but gradually go into it. The thing to avoid was letting the hole grow and suddenly engulf me. In the event that that happened I had to open my eyes immediately.

I began to breathe as she had prescribed, and thus I could keep my eyelids fixed indefinitely at the appropriate aperture.

I remained in that position for quite some time. Then I noticed that I had begun to breathe normally and that it had not disturbed my perception of the dark blotch. But suddenly the dark blotch began to move, to pulsate, and before I could breathe calmly again, the blackness moved forward and enveloped me. I became frantic and opened my eyes.

La Gorda said that I was doing distance gazing and for that it was necessary to breathe the way she had recommended. She urged me to start all over again. She said that the Nagual used to make them sit for entire days rounding up their second attention by gazing at that spot. He cautioned them repeatedly about the danger of being engulfed because of the jolt the body suffered.

It took me about an hour of gazing to do what she had delineated. To zoom in on the brown spot and gaze into it meant that the brown patch in my field of perception lightened up quite suddenly. As it became clearer, I realized that something in me was performing an impossible act.

I felt that I was actually advancing toward that spot; thus the impression I was having that it was clearing up. Then I was so near to it that I could distinguish features in it, like rocks and vegetation. I came even closer and could look at a peculiar formation on one rock. It looked like a roughly carved chair. I liked it very much. Compared to it, the rest of the rocks seemed pale and uninteresting.

I don't know how long I gazed at it. I could focus on every detail of it. I felt that I could lose myself forever in it's detail because there was no end to it.

But something dispelled my view. Another strange image was superimposed on the rock, and then another one, and another yet. I became annoyed with the interference. At the instant I became annoyed, I also realized that la Gorda was moving my head from side to side from behind me. In a matter of seconds the concentration of my gazing had been thoroughly dissipated.

La Gorda laughed and said that she understood why I had caused the Nagual such an intense concern. She had seen for herself that I indulged beyond my limits. She sat against the pole next to me and said that she and the little sisters were going to gaze into the Nagual's power place. She then made a piercing birdcall. A moment later the little sisters came out of the house and sat down to gaze with her.

Their gazing mastery was obvious. Their bodies acquired a strange rigidity. They did not seem to be breathing at all. Their stillness was so contagious that I caught myself half closing my eyes and staring into the hills.

Gazing had been a true revelation to me. In performing it I had corroborated some important issues of don Juan's teachings. La Gorda had delineated the task in a definitely vague manner. 'To zoom in on it' was more a command than a description of a process, and yet it was a description- providing that one essential requirement had been fulfilled. Don Juan had called that requirement stopping the internal dialogue.

From la Gorda's statements about gazing, it was obvious to me that the effect don Juan had been after in making them gaze was to teach them to stop the internal dialogue. La Gorda had expressed it as 'quieting down the thoughts'. Don Juan had taught me to do that very same thing, although he had made me follow the opposite path.

Instead of teaching me to focus my view, as gazers did, he taught me to open it; to flood my awareness by not focusing my sight on anything. I had to sort of feel with my eyes everything in the 180-degree range in front of me while I kept my eyes unfocused just above the line of the horizon.

It was very difficult for me to gaze, because it entailed reversing that training. As I tried to gaze, my tendency was to open up. The effort of keeping that tendency in check, however, made me shut off my thoughts. Once I had turned off my internal dialogue, it was not difficult to gaze as la Gorda had prescribed.

Don Juan had asserted time and time again that the essential feature of his sorcery was shutting off the internal dialogue. In terms of the explanation la Gorda had given me about the two realms of attention, stopping the internal dialogue was an operational way of describing the act of disengaging the attention of the tonal.

Don Juan had also said that once we stop our internal dialogue we also stop the world. That was an operational description of the inconceivable process of focusing our second attention. He had said that some part of us is always kept under lock and key because we are afraid of it, and that to our reason, that part of us was like an insane relative that we keep locked in a dungeon.

That part was, in la Gorda's terms, our second attention; and when it finally could focus on something, the world stopped. Since we, as average men, know only the attention of the tonal, it is not too farfetched to say that once that attention is canceled, the world indeed has to stop. The focusing of our wild, untrained second attention has to be, perforce, terrifying. Don Juan was right in saying that the only way to keep that insane relative from bursting in on us was by shielding ourselves with our endless internal dialogue.

La Gorda and the little sisters stood up after perhaps thirty minutes of gazing. La Gorda signaled me with her head to follow them. They went to the kitchen. La Gorda pointed to a bench for me to sit on. She said that she was going up the road to meet the Genaros and bring them over. She left through the front door.

The little sisters sat around me. Lidia volunteered to answer anything I wanted to ask her. I asked her to tell me about her gazing into don Juan's power spot, but she did not understand me.

"I'm a distance and shadow gazer," she said. "After I became a gazer the Nagual made me start all over again and had me gaze this time at the shadows of leaves and plants and trees and rocks. Now I never look at anything anymore. I just look at their shadows. Even if there is no light at all, there are shadows. Even at night there are shadows. Because I'm a shadow gazer, I'm also a distance gazer. I can gaze at shadows even in the distance.

"The shadows in the early morning don't tell much. The shadows rest at that time. So it's useless to gaze very early in the day. Around six in the morning the shadows wake up, and they are best around five in the afternoon. Then they are fully awake."

"What do the shadows tell you?"

"Everything I want to know. They tell me things because they have heat, or cold, or because they move, or because they have colors. I don't know yet all the things that colors and heat and cold mean. The Nagual left it up to me to learn."

"How do you learn?"

"In my dreaming. Dreamers must gaze in order to do dreaming and then they must look for their dreams in their gazing.

"For example, the Nagual made me gaze at the shadows of rocks, and then in my dreaming, I found out that those shadows had light. So I looked for the light in the shadows from then on until I found it.

"Gazing and dreaming go together. It took me a lot of gazing at shadows to get my dreaming of shadows going. And then it took me a lot of dreaming and gazing to get the two together and really see in the shadows what I was seeing in my dreaming. See what I mean? Everyone of us does the same. Rosa's dreaming is about trees because she's a tree gazer, and Josefina's is about clouds because she's a cloud gazer. They gaze at trees and clouds until they match their dreaming"

Rosa and Josefina shook their heads in agreement.

"What about la Gorda?" I asked.

"She's a flea gazer," Rosa said, and all of them laughed.

"La Gorda doesn't like to be bitten by fleas," Lidia explained. "She is formless and can gaze at anything, but she used to be a rain gazer."

"What about Pablito?"

"He gazes at women's crotches," Rosa answered with a deadpan expression.

They laughed. Rosa slapped me on the back.

"I understand that since he's your partner he's taking after you," she said.

They banged on the table and shook the benches with their feet as they laughed.

"Pablito is a rock gazer," Lidia said. "Nestor is a rain and plant gazer and Benigno is a distance gazer. But don't ask me any more about gazing because I will lose my power if I tell you more."

"How come la Gorda tells me everything?"

"La Gorda lost her form," Lidia replied. "Whenever I lose mine I'll tell you everything too. But by then you won't care to hear it. You care only because you're stupid like us. The day we lose our form we'll all stop being stupid."

"Why do you ask so many questions when you know all this?" Rosa asked.

"Because he's like us," Lidia said. "He's not a true nagual. He's still a man."

She turned and faced me. For an instant her face was hard and her eyes piercing and cold, but her expression softened as she spoke to me.

"You and Pablito are partners," she said. "You really like him, don't you?"

I thought for a moment before I answered. I told her that somehow I trusted him implicitly. For no overt reason at all I had a feeling of kinship with him.

"You like him so much that you fouled him up," she said in an accusing tone. "On that mountaintop where you jumped, he was getting to his second attention by himself and you forced him to jump with you."

"I only held him by the arm," I said in protest.

"A sorcerer doesn't hold another sorcerer by the arm," she said. "Each of us is very capable. You don't need any of us three to help you. Only a sorcerer who sees and is formless can help. On that mountaintop where you jumped, you were supposed to go first. Now Pablito is tied to you. I suppose you intended to help us in the same way. God, the more I think about you, the more I despise you."

Rosa and Josefina mumbled their agreement. Rosa stood up and faced me with rage in her eyes. She demanded to know what I intended to do with them. I said that I intended to leave very soon. My statement seemed to shock them. They all spoke at the same time. Lidia's voice rose above the others. She said that the time to leave had been the night before, and that she had hated it the moment I decided to stay. Josefina began to yell obscenities at me.

I felt a sudden shiver and stood up and yelled at them to be quiet with a voice that was not my own. They looked at me horrified. I tried to look casual, but I had frightened myself as much as I had frightened them.

At that moment la Gorda stepped out to the kitchen as if she had been hiding in the front room waiting for us to start a fight. She said that she had warned all of us not to fall into one another's webs.

I had to laugh at the way she scolded us as if we were children.

She said that we owed respect to each other; that respect among warriors was a most delicate matter. The little sisters knew how to behave like warriors with each other, and so did the Genaros among themselves; but when I would come into either group, or when the two groups got together, all of them ignored their warrior's knowledge and behaved like slobs.

We sat down. La Gorda sat next to me. After a moment's pause Lidia explained that she was afraid I was going to do to them what I had done to Pablito. La Gorda laughed and said that she would never let me help any of them in that manner.

I told her that I could not understand what I had done to Pablito that was so wrong. I had not been aware of what I had done, and if Nestor had not told me I would never have known that I had actually picked Pablito up. I even wondered if Nestor had perhaps exaggerated a bit, or that maybe he had made a mistake.

La Gorda said that the Witness would not make a stupid mistake like that, much less exaggerate it, and that the Witness was the most perfect warrior among them.

"Sorcerers don't help one another like you helped Pablito," she went on. "You behaved like a man in the street. The Nagual had taught us all to be warriors. He said that a warrior had no compassion for anyone.

For him, to have compassion meant that you wished the other person to be like you; to be in your shoes; and you lent a hand just for that purpose. You did that to Pablito. The hardest thing in the world is for a warrior to let others be. When I was fat, I worried because Lidia and Josefina did not eat enough. I was afraid that they would get ill and die from not eating. I did my utmost to fatten them and I meant only the best.

The impeccability of a warrior is to let them be and to support them in what they are. That means, of course, that you trust them to be impeccable warriors themselves."

"But what if they are not impeccable warriors?" I said.

"Then it's your duty to be impeccable yourself and not say a word," she replied. "The Nagual said that only a sorcerer who sees and is formless can afford to help anyone. That's why he helped us and made us what we are. You don't think that you can go around picking people up off the street to help them, do you?"

Don Juan had already put me face to face with the dilemma that I could not help my fellow beings in any way. In fact, to his understanding, every effort to help on our part was an arbitrary act guided by our own self-interest alone.

One day when I was with him in the city, I picked up a snail that was in the middle of the sidewalk and tucked it safely under some vines. I was sure that if I had left it in the middle of the sidewalk, people would sooner or later have stepped on it. I thought that by moving it to a safe place I had saved it.

Don Juan pointed out that my assumption was a careless one because I had not taken into consideration two important possibilities. One was that the snail might have been escaping a sure death by poison under the leaves of the vine, and the other possibility was that the snail had enough personal power to cross the sidewalk. By interfering I had not saved the snail but only made it lose whatever it had so painfully gained.

I wanted, of course, to put the snail back where I had found it, but he did not let me. He said that it was the snail's fate that an idiot crossed it's path and made it lose it's momentum. If I left it where I had put it, it might be able again to gather enough power to go wherever it was going.

I thought I had understood his point. Obviously I had only given him a shallow agreement. The hardest thing for me was to let others be.

I told them the story. La Gorda patted my back.

"We're all pretty bad," she said. "All five of us are awful people who don't want to understand. I've gotten rid of most of my ugly side, but not all of it yet. We are rather slow, and in comparison to the Genaros we are gloomy and domineering. The Genaros, on the other hand, are all like Genaro. There is very little awfulness in them."

The little sisters shook their heads in agreement.

"You are the ugliest among us," Lidia said to me. "I don't think we're that bad in comparison to you."

La Gorda giggled and tapped my leg as if telling me to agree with Lidia. I did, and all of them laughed like children.

We remained silent for a long time.

"I'm getting now to the end of what I had to tell you," la Gorda said all of a sudden.

She made all of us stand up. She said that they were going to show me the Toltec warrior's power stand. Lidia stood by my right side, facing me. She grabbed my hand with her right hand, palm to palm, but without interlocking the fingers. Then she hooked my arm right above the elbow with her left arm and held me tightly against her chest. Josefina did exactly the same thing on my left side. Rosa stood face to face with me and hooked her arms under my armpits and grabbed my shoulders. La Gorda came from behind me and embraced me at my waist, interlocking her fingers over my navel.

All of us were about the same height and they could press their heads against my head. La Gorda spoke very softly behind my left ear, but loud enough for all of us to hear her. She said that we were going to try to put our second attention in the Nagual's power place without anyone or anything prodding us. This time there was no teacher to aid us or allies to spur us. We were going to go there just by the force of our desire.

I had the invincible urge to ask her what I should do. She said that I should let my second attention focus on what I had gazed at.

She explained that the particular formation which we were in was a Toltec power arrangement. I was at that moment the center and binding force of the four corners of the world.

Lidia was the east, the weapon that the Toltec warrior holds in his right hand; Rosa was the north, the shield harnessed on the front of the warrior; Josefina was the west, the spirit catcher that the warrior holds in his left hand; and la Gorda was the south, the basket which the warrior carries on his back and where he keeps his power objects.

She said that the natural position of every warrior was to face the north, since he had to hold the weapon, the east, in his right hand. But the direction that we ourselves had to face was the south, slightly toward the east. Therefore, the act of power that the Nagual had left for us to perform was to change directions.

She reminded me that one of the first things that the Nagual had done to us was to turn our eyes to face the southeast. That had been the way he had enticed our second attention to perform the feat which we were going to attempt then. There were two alternatives to that feat.

One was for all of us to turn around to face the south, using me as an axis, and in so doing change around the basic value and function of all of them. Lidia would be the west, Josefina, the east, Rosa, the south and she, the north.

The other alternative was for us to change our direction and face the south but without turning around. That was the alternative of power, and it entailed putting on our second face.

I told la Gorda that I did not understand what our second face was. She said that she had been entrusted by the Nagual to try getting the second attention of all of us bundled up together, and that every Toltec warrior had two faces and faced two opposite directions. The second face was the second attention.

La Gorda suddenly released her grip. All the others did the same. She sat down again and motioned me to sit by her. The little sisters remained standing. La Gorda asked me if everything was clear to me. It was, and at the same time it was not. Before I had time to formulate a question, she blurted out that one of the last things the Nagual had entrusted her to tell me was that I had to change my direction by summing up my second attention together with theirs, and put on my power face to see what was behind me.

La Gorda stood up and motioned me to follow her. She led me to the door of their room. She gently pushed me into the room. Once I had crossed the threshold, Lidia, Rosa, Josefina and she joined me, in that order, and then la Gorda closed the door.

The room was very dark. It did not seem to have any windows. La Gorda grabbed me by the arm and placed me in what I thought was the center of the room. All of them surrounded me. I could not see them at all. I could only feel them flanking me on four sides.

After a while my eyes became accustomed to the darkness. I could see that the room had two windows which had been blocked off by panels. A bit of light came through them and I could distinguish everybody. Then all of them held me the way they had done a few minutes before, and in perfect unison they placed their heads against mine. I could feel their hot breaths all around me. I closed my eyes in order to sum up the image of my gazing. I could not do it. I felt very tired and sleepy. My eyes itched terribly: I wanted to rub them, but Lidia and Josefina held my arms tightly.

We stayed in that position for a very long time. My fatigue was unbearable and finally I slumped. I thought that my knees had given in. I had the feeling that I was going to collapse on the floor and fall asleep right there.

But there was no floor. In fact, there was nothing underneath me. My fright upon realizing that was so intense that I was fully awake in an instant. A force greater than my fright, however, pushed me back into that sleepy state again. I abandoned myself.

I was floating with them like a balloon. It was as if I had fallen asleep and was dreaming and in that dream I saw a series of disconnected images. We were no longer in the darkness of their room. There was so much light that it blinded me.

At times I could see Rosa's face against mine. Out of the corner of my eyes I could also see Lidia's and Josefina's. I could feel their foreheads pressed hard against my ears.

And then the image would change and I would see instead la Gorda's face against mine. Every time that happened she would put her mouth on mine and breathe. I did not like that at all. Some force in me tried to get loose. I felt terrified. I tried to push all of them away. The harder I tried, the harder they held me.

That convinced me that la Gorda had tricked me and had finally led me into a death trap. But contrary to the others, la Gorda had been an impeccable player. The thought that she had played an impeccable hand made me feel better. At one point I did not care to struggle any longer. I became curious about the moment of my death which I believed was imminent, and I let go of myself. I experienced then an unequaled joy: an exuberance that I was sure was the herald of my end if not my death itself. I pulled Lidia and Josefina even closer to me.

At that moment la Gorda was in front of me. I did not mind that she was breathing in my mouth. In fact, I was surprised that she stopped then. The instant she did, all of them also stopped pressing their heads on mine. They began to look around and by so doing they also freed my head. I could move it. Lidia, la Gorda and Josefina were so close to me that I could see only through the opening in between their heads. I could not figure out where we were.

One thing I was certain of was that we were not standing on the ground. We were in the air. Another thing I knew for sure was that we had shifted our order. Lidia was to my left and Josefina, to my right. La Gorda's face was covered with perspiration and so were Lidia's and Josefina's. I could only feel Rosa behind me. I could see her hands coming from my armpits and holding onto my shoulders.

La Gorda was saying something I could not hear. She enunciated her words slowly as if she were giving me time to read her lips, but I got caught up in the details of her mouth. At one instant I felt that the four of them were moving me. They were deliberately rocking me.

That forced me to pay attention to la Gorda's silent words. I clearly read her lips this time. She was telling me to turn around. I tried but my head seemed to be fixed. I felt that someone was biting my lips. I watched la Gorda. She was not biting me but she was looking at me as she mouthed her command to turn my head around. As she talked, I also felt that she was actually licking my entire face or biting my lips and cheeks.

La Gorda's face was somehow distorted. It looked big and yellowish. I thought that perhaps since the whole scene was yellowish, her face was reflecting that glow. I could almost hear her ordering me to turn my head around.

Finally the annoyance that the biting was causing me made me shake my head. And suddenly the sound of la Gorda's voice became clearly audible. She was in back of me and she was yelling at me to turn my attention around.

Rose was the one who was licking my face. I pushed her away from my face with my forehead. Rosa was weeping. Her face was covered with perspiration.

I could hear la Gorda's voice behind me. She said that I had exhausted them by fighting them and that she did not know what to do to catch our original attention. The little sisters were whining.

My thoughts were crystal clear. My rational processes, however, were not deductive. I knew things quickly and directly and there was no doubt of any sort in my mind. For instance, I knew immediately that I had to go back to sleep again, and that that would make us plummet down. But I also knew that I had to let them bring us to their house: I was useless for that.

If I could focus my second attention at all, it would have had to be on a place that don Juan had given me in northern Mexico. I had always been able to picture it in my mind like nothing else in the world. I did not dare to sum up that vision. I knew that we would have ended up there.

I thought that I had to tell la Gorda what I knew, but I could not talk. Yet some part of me knew that she understood. I trusted her implicitly and I fell asleep in a matter of seconds. In my dream I was looking at the kitchen of their house. Pablito, Nestor and Benigno were there. They looked extraordinarily large and they glowed.

I could not focus my eyes on them because a sheet of transparent plastic material was in between them and myself. Then I realized that it was as if I were looking at them through a glass window while somebody was throwing water on the glass. Finally the glass shattered and the water hit me in the face.

Pablito was drenching me with a bucket. Nestor and Benigno were also standing there. La Gorda, the little sisters and I were sprawled on the ground in the yard behind the house. The Genaros were drenching us with buckets of water.

I sprang up. Either the cold water or the extravagant experience I had just been through had invigorated me. La Gorda and the little sisters put on a change of clothes that the Genaros must have laid out in the sun. My clothes had also been neatly laid on the ground.

I changed without a word. I was experiencing the peculiar feeling that seems to follow the focusing of the second attention; I could not talk, or rather I could talk but I did not want to.

My stomach was upset. La Gorda seemed to sense it and pulled me gently to the area in back of the fence. I became ill. La Gorda and the little sisters were affected the same way.

I returned to the kitchen area and washed my face. The coldness of the water seemed to restore my awareness. Pablito, Nestor and Benigno were sitting around the table. Pablito had brought his chair. He stood up and shook hands with me. Then Nestor and Benigno did the same. La Gorda and the little sisters joined us.

There seemed to be something wrong with me. My ears were buzzing. I felt dizzy. Josefina stood up and grabbed onto Rosa for support. I turned to ask la Gorda what to do. Lidia was falling backward over the bench. I caught her, but her weight pulled me down and I fell over with her.

I must have fainted. I woke up suddenly. I was lying on a straw mat in the front room. Lidia, Rosa and Josefina were sound asleep next to me. I had to crawl over them to stand up. I nudged them but they did not wake up. I walked out to the kitchen. La Gorda was sitting with the Genaros around the table.

"Welcome back," Pablito said.

He added that la Gorda had woken up a short while before. I felt that I was my old self again. I was hungry. La Gorda gave me a bowl of food. She said that they had already eaten. After eating I felt perfect in every respect except I could not think as I usually do.

My thoughts had quieted down tremendously. I did not like that state. I noticed then that it was late afternoon. I had a sudden urge to jog in place facing the sun, the way don Juan used to make me do. I stood up and la Gorda joined me. Apparently she had had the same idea. Moving like that made me perspire. I got winded very quickly and returned to the table. La Gorda followed me. We sat down again. The Genaros were staring at us. La Gorda handed me my writing pad.

"The Nagual here got us lost," la Gorda said.

The moment she spoke I experienced a most peculiar bursting. My thoughts came back to me in an avalanche. There must have been a change in my expression, for Pablito embraced me and so did Nestor and Benigno.

"The Nagual is going to live! " Pablito said loudly.

La Gorda also seemed delighted. She wiped her forehead in a gesture of relief. She said that I had nearly killed all of them and myself with my terrible tendency to indulge.

"To focus the second attention is no joke," Nestor said.

"What happened to us, Gorda?" I asked.

"We got lost," she said. "You began to indulge in your fear and we got lost in that immensity. We couldn't focus our attention of the tonal anymore. But we succeeded in bundling up our second attention with yours and now you have two faces."

Lidia, Rosa and Josefina stepped out into the kitchen at that moment. They were smiling and seemed as fresh and vigorous as ever. They helped themselves to some food. They sat down and nobody uttered a word while they ate. The moment the last one had finished eating, la Gorda picked up where she had left off.

"Now you're a warrior with two faces," she went on. "The Nagual said that all of us have to have two faces to fare well in both attentions. He and Genaro helped us to round up our second attention and turned us around so we could face in two directions, but they didn't help you, because to be a true nagual you have to claim your power all by yourself. You're still a long way from that, but let's say that now you're walking upright instead of crawling, and when you've regained your completeness and have lost your form, you'll be gliding."

Benigno made a gesture with his hand of a plane in flight and imitated the roar of the engine with his booming voice. The sound was truly deafening.

Everybody laughed. The little sisters seemed to be delighted.

I had not been fully aware until then that it was late afternoon. I said to la Gorda that we must have slept for hours, for we had gone into their room before noon. She said that we had not slept long at all, that most of that time we had been lost in the other world, and that the Genaros had been truly frightened and despondent, because there was nothing they could do to bring us back.

I turned to Nestor and asked him what they had actually done or seen while we were gone. He stared at me for a moment before answering.

"We brought a lot of water to the yard," he said, pointing to some empty oil barrels. "Then all of you staggered into the yard and we poured water on you, that's all."

"Did we come out of the room?" I asked him.

Benigno laughed loudly. Nestor looked at la Gorda as if asking for permission or advice.

"Did we come out of the room?" la Gorda asked.

"No," Nestor replied.

La Gorda seemed to be as anxious to know as I was, and that was alarming to me. She even coaxed Nestor to speak.

"You came from nowhere," Nestor said. "I should also say that it was frightening. All of you were like fog. Pablito saw you first. You may have been in the yard for a long time, but we didn't know where to look for you. Then Pablito yelled and all of us saw you. We have never seen anything like that."

"What did we look like?" I asked.

The Genaros looked at one another. There was an unbearably long silence. The little sisters were staring at Nestor with their mouths open.

"You were like pieces of fog caught in a web," Nestor said. "When we poured water on you, you became solid again."

I wanted him to keep on talking, but la Gorda said that there was very little time left because I had to leave at the end of the day; and she still had things to tell me. The Genaros stood up and shook hands with the little sisters and la Gorda. They embraced me and told me that they only needed a few days in order to get ready to move away.

Pablito put his chair upside down on his back. Josefina ran to the area around the stove, picked up a bundle they had brought from dona Soledad's house, and placed it between the legs of Pablito's chair which made an ideal carrying device.

"Since you're going home you might as well take this," she said. "It belongs to you anyway."

Pablito shrugged his shoulders and shifted his chair in order to balance the load.

Nestor signaled Benigno to take the bundle but Pablito would not let him.

"It's all right," he said. "I might as well be a jackass as long as I'm carrying this damn chair."

"Why do you carry it, Pablito?" I asked.

"I have to store my power," he replied. "I can't go around sitting on just anything. Who knows what kind of a creep sat there before me?"

He cackled and made the bundle wiggle by shaking his shoulders.

After the Genaros left, la Gorda explained to me that Pablito began his crazy involvement with his chair to tease Lidia. He did not want to sit where she had sat, but he had gotten carried away; and since he loved to indulge, he would not sit anywhere else except on his chair.

"He's capable of carrying it through life," la Gorda said to me with great certainty. "He's almost as bad as you. He's your partner. You'll carry your writing pad through life and he'll carry his chair. What's the difference? Both of you indulge more than the rest of us."

The little sisters surrounded me and laughed, patting me on the back.

"It's very hard to get into our second attention," la Gorda went on, "and to manage it when you indulge as you do is even harder. The Nagual said that you should know how difficult that managing is better than any of us.

"With his power plants, you learned to go very far into that other world. That's why you pulled us so hard today that we nearly died. We wanted to gather our second attention on the Nagual's spot, and you plunged us into something we didn't know. We are not ready for it, but neither are you. You can't help yourself, though: The power plants made you that way.

"The Nagual was right. All of us have to help you contain your second attention, and you have to help all of us to push ours. Your second attention can go very far, but it has no control. Ours can go only a little bit, but we have absolute control over it."

La Gorda and the little sisters, one by one, told me how frightening the experience of being lost in the other world had been.

"The Nagual told me," la Gorda went on, "that when he was gathering your second attention with his smoke, you focused it on a gnat, and then the little gnat became the guardian of the other world for you."

I told her that that was true. At her request I narrated to them the experience don Juan had made me undergo. With the aid of his smoking mixture, I had perceived a gnat as a hundred foot high horrifying monster that moved with incredible speed and agility. The ugliness of that creature was nauseating, and yet there was an awesome magnificence to it.

I also had had no way to accommodate that experience in my rational scheme of things. The only support for my intellect was my deep-seated certainty that one of the effects of the psychotropic smoking mixture was to induce me to hallucinate the size of the gnat.

I presented to them, especially to la Gorda, my rational causal explanation of what had taken place. They laughed.

"There are no hallucinations," la Gorda said in a firm tone. "If anybody suddenly sees something different- something that was not there before- it is because that person's second attention has been gathered, and that person is focusing it on something.

"Now, whatever is gathering that person's attention might be anything; maybe it's liquor, or maybe it's madness, or maybe it's the Nagual's smoking mixture.

"You saw a gnat and it became the guardian of the other world for you. And do you know what that other world is? That other world is the world of our second attention. The Nagual thought that perhaps your second attention was strong enough to pass the guardian and go into that world. But it wasn't. If it had been, you might have gone into that world and never returned.

"The Nagual told me that he was prepared to follow you. But the guardian didn't let you pass and nearly killed you. The Nagual had to stop making you focus your second attention with his power plants because you could only focus on the awesomeness of things.

"He had you do dreaming instead, so you could gather it in another way. But he was sure your dreaming would also be awesome. There was nothing he could do about it. You were following him in his own footsteps and he had an awesome fearsome side."

They remained silent. It was as if all of them had been engulfed by their memories.

La Gorda said that the Nagual had once pointed out to me a very special red insect, in the mountains of his homeland. She asked me if I remembered it.

I did remember it. Years before don Juan had taken me to an area unknown to me in the mountains of northern Mexico. With extreme care he showed me some round insects the size of a ladybug. Their backs were brilliantly red. I wanted to get down on the ground and examine them, but he would not let me. He told me that I should watch them, without staring, until I had memorized their shape, because I was supposed to remember them always. He then explained some intricate details of their behavior, making it sound like a metaphor. He was telling me about the arbitrary importance of our most cherished mores. He pointed out some alleged mores of those insects and pitted them against ours. The comparison made the importance of our beliefs look ridiculous.

"Just before he and Genaro left," la Gorda went on, "the Nagual took me to that place in the mountains where those little bugs lived. I had already been there once, and so had everyone else. The Nagual made sure that all of us knew those little creatures, although he never let us gaze at them.

"While I was there with him he told me what to do with you and what I should tell you. I've already told you most of what he asked me to except for this last thing. It has to do with what you've been asking everybody about: 'Where are the Nagual and Genaro?'

"Now I'll tell you exactly where they are. The Nagual said that you will understand this better than any of us. None of us has ever seen the guardian. None of us has ever been in that yellow sulfur world where he lives. You are the only one among us who has.

"The Nagual said that he followed you into that world when you focused your second attention on the guardian. He intended to go there with you, perhaps forever, if you would've been strong enough to pass. It was then that he first found out about the world of those little red bugs. He said that their world was the most beautiful and perfect thing one could imagine.

"So, when it was time for him and Genaro to leave this world, they gathered all their second attention and focused it on that world. Then the Nagual opened the crack, as you yourself witnessed, and they slipped through it into that world where they are waiting for us to join them someday. The Nagual and Genaro liked beauty. They went there for their sheer enjoyment."

She looked at me. I had nothing to say. She had been right in saying that power had to time her revelation perfectly if it were going to be effective. I felt an anguish I could not express. It was as if I wanted to weep and yet I was not sad or melancholy. I longed for something inexpressible, but that longing was not mine. Like so many of the feelings and sensations I had had since my arrival, it was alien to me.

Nestor's assertions about Eligio came to my mind. I told la Gorda what he had said, and she asked me to narrate to them the visions of my journey between the tonal and the nagual which I had had upon jumping into the abyss. When I finished they all seemed frightened. La Gorda immediately isolated my vision of the dome.

"The Nagual told us that our second attention would someday focus on that dome," she said. "That day we will be all second attention, just like the Nagual and Genaro are, and that day we will join them."

"Do you mean, Gorda, that we will go as we are?" I asked.

"Yes, we will go as we are. The body is the first attention, the attention of the tonal. When it becomes the second attention, it simply goes into the other world. Jumping into the abyss gathered all your second attention for a while.

"But Eligio was stronger and his second attention was fixed by that jump. That's what happened to him and he was just like all of us. But there is no way of telling where he is. Even the Nagual himself didn't know. But if he is someplace he is in that dome. Or he is bouncing from vision to vision, perhaps for a whole eternity."

La Gorda said that in my journey between the tonal and the nagual, I had corroborated on a grand scale the possibility that our whole being becomes all second attention; and on a much smaller scale when I got all of them lost in the world of that attention earlier that day; and also when she transported us half a mile in order to flee from the allies.

She added that the problem the Nagual had left for us as a challenge was whether or not we would be capable of developing our will, or the power of our second attention to focus indefinitely on anything we wanted.

We were quiet for a while. It seemed that it was time for me to leave, but I could not move. The thought of Eligio's fate had paralyzed me. Whether he had made it to the dome of our rendezvous or whether he had gotten caught in the tremendum, the image of his journey was maddening. It took no effort at all for me to envision it because I had the experience of my own journey.

The other world which don Juan had referred to, practically since the moment we met, had always been a metaphor to me; an obscure way of labeling some perceptual distortion, or at best a way of talking about some undefinable state of being.

Even though don Juan had made me perceive indescribable features of the world, I could not consider my experiences to be anything beyond a play on my perception; a directed mirage of sorts that he had managed to make me undergo, either by means of psychotropic plants, or by means I could not deduce rationally.

Every time that had happened, I had shielded myself with the thought that the unity of the 'me' I knew and was familiar with had been only temporarily displaced.

Inevitably, as soon as that unity was restored, the world became again the sanctuary for my inviolable rational self. The scope that la Gorda had opened with her revelations was terrifying.

She stood up and pulled me up off the bench. She said that I had to leave before the twilight set in. All of them walked with me to my car and we said good-bye.

La Gorda gave me a last command. She told me that on my return I should go directly to the Genaros' house.

"We don't want to see you until you know what to do," she said with a radiant smile. "But don't delay too long."

The little sisters nodded.

"Those mountains are not going to let us stay here much longer," she said, and with a subtle movement of her chin she pointed to the ominous eroded hills across the valley.

I asked her one more question. I wanted to know if she had any idea where the Nagual and Genaro would go after we had completed our rendezvous. She looked up at the sky, raised her arms, and made an indescribable gesture with them to point out that there was no limit to that vastness.

### The End - The Second Ring of Power - by Carlos Castaneda ###

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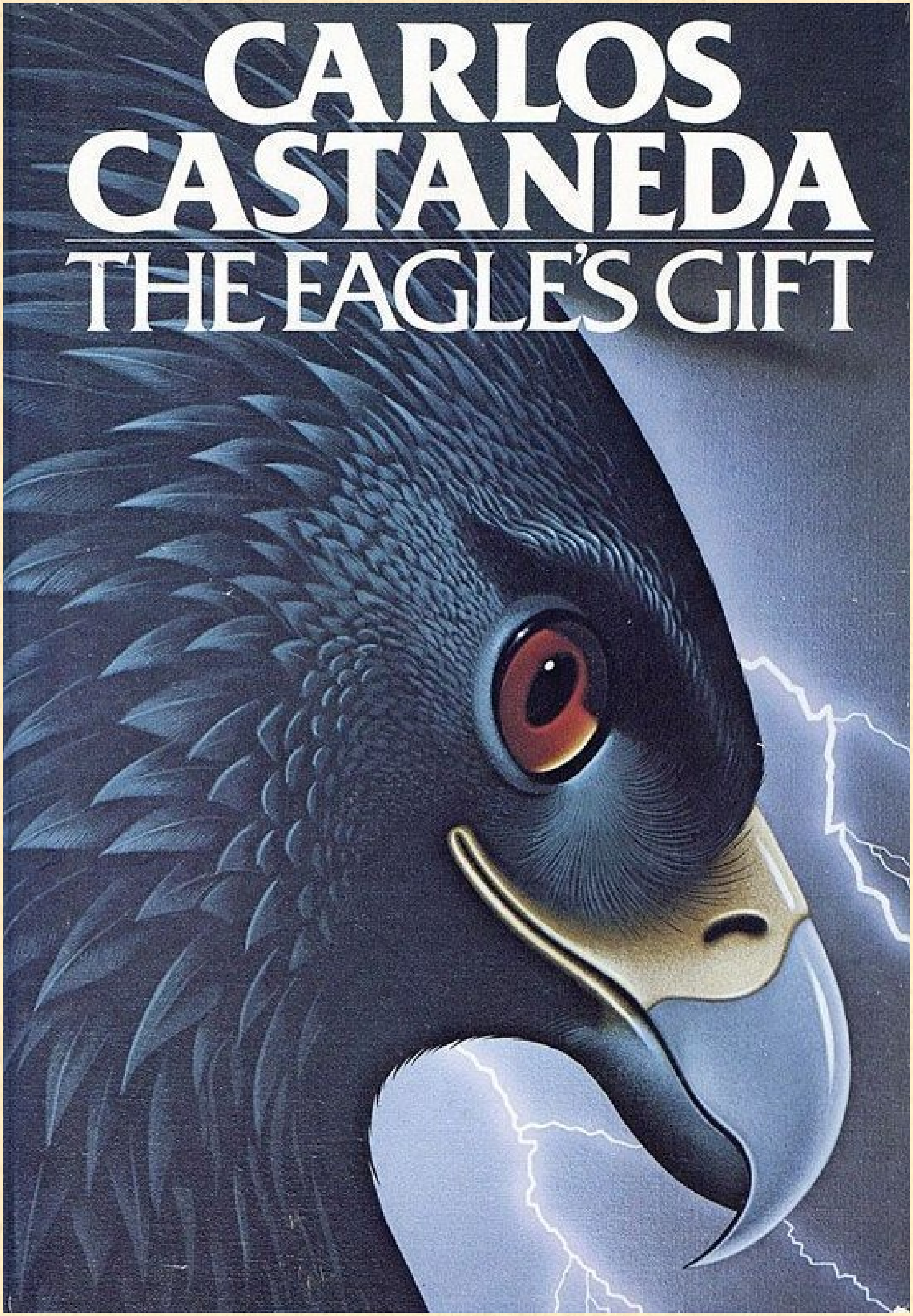
# 06 - THE EAGLE'S GIFT

© 1981 - Carlos Castaneda. Continuing with his fellow apprentices; and then alone with La Gorda.


CARLOS CASTANEDA
THE EAGLE'S GIFT

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# Book 6 – THE EAGLE'S GIFT

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# Prologue

Although I am an anthropologist, this is not strictly an anthropological work. Yet it has it's roots in cultural anthropology for it began years ago as field research in that discipline. I was interested at that time in studying the uses of medicinal plants among the Indians of the Southwest and northern Mexico.

My research evolved into something else over the years as a consequence of it's own momentum and of my own growth. The study of medicinal plants was superseded by the study of a belief system which seemed to cut across the boundaries of at least two different cultures.

The person responsible for this shift of emphasis in my work was a Yaqui Indian from northern Mexico, don Juan Matus, who later introduced me to don Genaro Flores, a Mazatec Indian from central Mexico. Both of them were practitioners of an ancient knowledge, which in our time is commonly known as sorcery, and which is thought to be a primitive form of medical or psychological science, but which in fact is a tradition of extremely self-disciplined practitioners and extremely sophisticated praxis. [* praxis- translating an idea into action]

The two men became my teachers rather than my informants, but I still persisted, in a haphazard way, in regarding my task as a work in anthropology. I spent years trying to figure out the cultural matrix of that system, perfecting a taxonomy, a classificatory scheme, a hypothesis of it's origin and dissemination. All were futile efforts in view of the fact that in the end, the compelling inner forces of that system derailed my intellectual pursuit and turned me into a participant.

Under the influence of these two powerful men my work has been transformed into an autobiography, in the sense that I have been forced from the moment I became a participant to report what happens to me. It is a peculiar autobiography because I am not reporting about what happens to me in my everyday life as an average man, nor am I reporting about my subjective states generated by daily living. I am reporting, rather, on the events that unfold in my life as a direct result of having adopted an alien set of interrelated ideas and procedures. In other words, the belief system I wanted to study swallowed me, and in order for me to proceed with my scrutiny I have to make an extraordinary daily payment; my life as a man in this world.

Due to these circumstances I am now faced with the special problem of having to explain what it is that I am doing. I am very far away from my point of origin as an average Western man or as an anthropologist, and I must first of all reiterate that this is not a work of fiction. What I am describing is alien to us, therefore, it seems unreal.

As I enter deeper into the intricacies of sorcery, what at first appeared to be a system of primitive beliefs and practices has now turned out to be an enormous and intricate world. In order to become familiar with that world and to report about it, I have to use myself in increasingly complex and more refined ways. Whatever happens to me is no longer something I can predict, nor anything congruous with what other anthropologists know about the belief systems of the Indians of Mexico. I find myself, consequently, in a difficult position. All I can do under the circumstances is present what happened to me as it happened. I cannot give any other assurance of my good faith, except to reassert that I do not live a dual life, and that I have committed myself to following the principles of don Juan's system in my everyday existence.

After don Juan Matus and don Genaro Flores, the two Mexican Indian sorcerers who tutored me, had explained their knowledge to me to their own satisfaction, they said goodbye and left. I understood that from then on my task was to assemble by myself what I had learned from them.

In the course of fulfilling this task I went back to Mexico and found out that don Juan and don Genaro had nine other apprentices of sorcery; five women and four men. The oldest woman was named Soledad; the next was Maria Elena, nicknamed "la Gorda," the other three women, Lydia, Rosa, and Josefina, were younger, and were called "the little sisters." The four men, in order of age, were Eligio, Benigno, Nestor, and Pablito: The latter three men were called "the Genaros" because they were very close to don Genaro.

I had already known that Nestor, Pablito, and Eligio, who was no longer around, were apprentices, but I had been led to believe that the four girls were Pablito's sisters, and that Soledad was their mother. I knew Soledad slightly over the years, and had always called her dona Soledad as a sign of respect since she was closer to don Juan in age. Lydia and Rosa had also been introduced to me but our relationship had been too brief and casual to afford me an understanding of who they really were. I knew la Gorda and Josefina only by name. I had met Benigno but had no idea that he was connected to don Juan and don Genaro.

For reasons that were incomprehensible to me, all of them seemed to have been waiting in one way or another for my return to Mexico. They informed me that I was supposed to take the place of don Juan as their leader, their Nagual. They told me that don Juan and don Genaro had disappeared from the face of the earth, and so had Eligio. The women and the men believed that the three of them had not died: They had entered another world, different from the world of our everyday life, yet equally real.

The women- especially dona Soledad- clashed violently with me from our first meeting. They were, nevertheless, instrumental in producing a catharsis [* catharsis- purging of emotional tensions] in me. My contact with them resulted in a mysterious effervescence in my life. From the moment I met them, drastic changes took place in my thinking and my understanding. All this did not happen, however, on a conscious level. If anything, after my first visit to them, I found myself more confused than ever. Yet in the midst of the chaos, I encountered a surprisingly solid base. In the impact of our clash, I found in myself resources I had not imagined I possessed.

La Gorda and the three little sisters were consummate [* consummate- having or revealing supreme mastery or skill] dreamers. They voluntarily gave me pointers, and showed me their accomplishments. Don Juan had described the art of dreaming as the capacity to utilize one's ordinary dreams and transform them into controlled awareness by virtue of a specialized form of attention which he and don Genaro called the second attention.

I expected that the three Genaros were going to teach me their accomplishments in another aspect of don Juan's and don Genaro's teachings, 'the art of stalking'. The art of stalking was introduced to me as a set of procedures and attitudes that enabled one to get the best out of any conceivable situation. But whatever the three Genaros told me about stalking did not have the cohesion or the force I had anticipated. I concluded that either the men were not really practitioners of that art, or they simply did not want to show it to me.

I stopped my inquiries in order to give everyone a chance to feel relaxed with me, but all of the men and women sat back and trusted that since I was no longer asking questions I was finally behaving like a Nagual. Each of them demanded my guidance and counsel.

In order to comply I was obliged to undertake a total review of everything don Juan and don Genaro had taught me; to go deeper still into the art of sorcery.

# PART ONE – The Other Self

## 1. The Fixation of the Second Attention

It was midafternoon when I got to where la Gorda and the little sisters lived. La Gorda was alone, sitting outside by the door, gazing into the distant mountains. She was shocked to see me. She explained that she had been completely absorbed in a memory, and for a moment she had been on the verge of remembering something very vague that had to do with me.

Later that night, after dinner, la Gorda, the three little sisters, the three Genaros, and I sat on the floor of la Gorda's room. The women sat together.

For some reason, although I had been with each one of them an equal length of time, I had isolated la Gorda as the recipient of all my concern. It was as if the others did not exist for me. I speculated that perhaps it was because la Gorda reminded me of don Juan while the others did not. There was something very easy about her. Yet that easiness was not so much in her actions as it was in my feelings for her.

They wanted to know what I had been doing. I told them that I had just been in the city of Tula, Hidalgo, where I had visited some archaeological ruins. I had been most impressed with a row of four colossal, columnlike figures of stone, called the Atlanteans," which stand on the flat top of a pyramid.

Each one of the almost cylindrical figures, measuring fifteen feet in height and three feet across, is made of four separate pieces of basalt carved to represent what archaeologists think are Toltec warriors carrying their war paraphernalia. Twenty feet behind each of the front figures on the top of the pyramid, there is another row of four rectangular columns of the same height and width as the first, also made of four separate pieces of stone.

The awe-inspiring setting of the Atlanteans was enhanced by what a friend, who had guided me through the site, had told me about them. He said that a custodian of the ruins had revealed to him that he had heard the Atlanteans walking at night; making the ground underneath them shake.

I asked the Genaros for comments on what my friend had said. They acted shy and giggled. I turned to la Gorda who was sitting beside me, and asked her directly for her opinions.

"I've never seen those figures," she said. "I've never been in Tula. Just the idea of going to that town scares me."

"Why does it scare you, Gorda?" I asked.

"Something happened to me in the ruins of Monte Alban in Oaxaca," she said. "I used to go to roam around those ruins even after the Nagual Juan Matus told me not to set foot in them. I don't know why but I loved that place. Every time I was in Oaxaca I would go there. Because women alone are always harassed, I would usually go with Pablito, who is very daring. But once I went there with Nestor. He saw a glitter on the ground. We dug a little and found a strange rock that fit in the palm of my hand. A hole had been neatly drilled into the rock. I wanted to put my finger through it, but Nestor stopped me. The rock was smooth and made my hand very hot. We didn't know what to do with it. Nestor put it inside his hat and we carried it as if it were a live animal."

All of them started to laugh. There seemed to be a concealed joke in what la Gorda was telling me.

"Where did you take it?" I asked her.

"We brought it here to this house," she replied, and that statement elicited uncontainable laughter from the others. They coughed and choked laughing,

"The joke is on la Gorda," Nestor said. "You've got to understand that she's muleheaded like no one else. The Nagual had already told her not to fool around with rocks, or bones, or any other thing she might find buried in the ground. But she used to sneak behind his back and get all kinds of crap.

"That day in Oaxaca she insisted on carrying that god-awful thing. We got on the bus with it and brought it all the way to this town, and then right into this room."

"The Nagual and Genaro had gone on a trip," la Gorda said. "I got daring and put my finger through the hole and realized that the rock had been cut to be held in the hand. Right away I could feel the feeling of whoever had held that rock. It was a power rock. My mood changed. I became frightened. Something awesome began to lurk in the dark; something that had no shape or color. I couldn't be alone. I would wake up screaming and after a couple of days I couldn't sleep any more. Everybody took turns keeping me company, day and night."

"When the Nagual and Genaro came back," Nestor said, "the Nagual sent me with Genaro to put the rock back in the exact place where it had been buried. Genaro worked for three days to pinpoint the spot. And he did it."

"What happened to you, Gorda, after that?" I asked her.

"The Nagual buried me," she said. "For nine days I was naked inside a dirt coffin."

There was another explosion of laughter among them.

"The Nagual told her that she couldn't get out of it," Nestor explained. "Poor Gorda had to piss and shit inside her coffin. The Nagual pushed her inside a box that he made with branches and mud. There was a little door on the side for her food and water. The rest of it was sealed."

"Why did he bury her?" I asked.

"That's the only way to protect anyone," Nestor said. "She had to be placed under the ground so the earth would heal her. There is no better healer than the earth. Besides, the Nagual had to fend off the feeling of that rock which was focused on la Gorda. The dirt is a screen. It doesn't allow anything to go through either way. The Nagual knew that she couldn't get worse by being buried for nine days. She could only get better. Which she did."

"How did it feel to be buried like that, Gorda?" I asked.

"I nearly went crazy," she said. "But that was just my indulging. If the Nagual hadn't put me in there, I would have died. The power of that rock was too great for me. It's owner had been a very large man. I could tell that his hand was twice the size of mine. He held on to that rock for dear life, and in the end someone killed him. His fear terrified me. I could feel something coming at me to eat my flesh. That was what the man felt. He was a man of power, but someone even more powerful got him.

"The Nagual said that once you have an object of that kind it brings disaster because it's power enters into challenges with other objects of it's kind; and the owner becomes either a pursuer or a victim. The Nagual said that it is the nature of such objects to be at war because the part of our attention which focuses on them to give them power is a very dangerous, belligerent part."

"La Gorda is very greedy," Pablito said. "She figured that if she could find something which already had a great deal of power in it, she'd be a winner because nowadays no one is interested in challenging power."

La Gorda assented with a movement of her head.

"I didn't know that one could pick up other things besides the power that the objects have," she said. "When I first put my finger through the hole and held the rock, my hand got hot and my arm began to vibrate. I felt truly strong and big. I'm sneaky so no one knew that I was holding the rock in my hand. After a few days of holding it the real horror began. I could feel that somebody had gone after the owner of the rock. I could feel his fright. He was doubtlessly a very powerful sorcerer and whoever was after him wanted not only to kill him but to eat his flesh. That really scared me. I should've dropped the rock then, but the feeling I was having was so new that I kept the rock clutched in my hand like a damn fool. When I finally dropped it, it was too late. Something in me was hooked. I had visions of men coming at me; men dressed in strange clothes. I felt they were biting me; tearing the flesh of my legs with sharp little knives and with their teeth. I went berserk!"

"How did don Juan explain those visions?" I asked her.

"He said that she no longer had defenses," Nestor said. "And because of that she could pick up that man's fixation; his second attention which had been poured into that rock. When he was being killed he held on to the rock in order to gather all his concentration. The Nagual said that the man's power went out of his body into his rock. He knew what he was doing. He didn't want his enemies to benefit by devouring his flesh. The Nagual also said that the ones who killed him knew this. That's why they were eating him alive; to get whatever power was left. They must have buried the rock to avoid trouble. And la Gorda and I, like two idiots, found it and dug it up."

La Gorda shook her head affirmatively three or four times. She had a very serious expression.

"The Nagual told me that the second attention is the most fierce thing there is," she said. "If it is focused on objects, there is nothing more horrendous."

"What's horrible is that we cling," Nestor said. "The man who owned the rock was clinging to his life and to his power; that's why he was horrified at feeling his flesh eaten away. The Nagual said that if the man would've let go of his possessiveness and abandoned himself to his death, whatever it may have been, there wouldn't have been any fear in him."

The conversation faded. I asked the others if they had anything to say. The little sisters glared at me. Benigno giggled and hid his face with his hat.

"Pablito and I have been in the pyramids of Tula," he finally said. "We've been in all the pyramids there are in Mexico. We like them."

"Why did you go to all the pyramids?" I asked him.

"I really don't know why we went to them," he said. "Perhaps it was because the Nagual Juan Mat us told us not to."

"How about you, Pablito?" I asked.

"I went there to learn," he replied huffily, and laughed. "I used to live in the city of Tula. I know those pyramids like the back of my hand. The Nagual told me that he also used to live there. He knew everything about the pyramids. He was a Toltec himself."

I realized then that it had been more than curiosity that made me go to the archaeological site in Tula. The main reason I had accepted my friend's invitation was because at the time of my first visit to la Gorda, and the others, they had told me something which don Juan had never even mentioned to me; that he considered himself a cultural descendant of the Toltecs. Tula had been the ancient epicenter of the Toltec empire.

"What do you think about the Atlanteans walking around at night?" I asked Pablito.

"Sure, they walk at night," he said. "Those things have been there for ages. No one knows who built the pyramids. The Nagual Juan Matus himself told me that the Spaniards were not the first to discover them. The Nagual said there were others before them. God knows how many."

"What do you think those four figures of stone represent?" I asked.

"They are not men, but women," he said. "That pyramid is the center of order and stability. Those figures are it's four corners. They are the four winds, the four directions. They are the foundation, the basis of the pyramid. They have to be women, mannish women, if you want to call them that. As you yourself know, we men are not that hot. We are a good binding, a glue to hold things together, but that's all. The Nagual Juan Matus said that the mystery of the pyramid is it's structure. The four corners have been elevated to the top. The pyramid itself is the man supported by his female warriors; a male who has elevated his supporters to the highest place. See what I mean?"

I must have had a look of perplexity on my face. Pablito laughed. It was a polite laughter.

"No. I don't see what you mean, Pablito," I said. "But that's because don Juan never told me anything about it. The topic is completely new to me. Please tell me everything you know."

"The Atlanteans are the nagual. They are dreamers. They represent the order of the second attention brought forward. That's why they're so fearsome and mysterious. They are creatures of war but not of destruction.

"The other row of columns, the rectangular ones, represent the order of the first attention; the tonal. They are stalkers. That's why they are covered with inscriptions. They are very peaceful and wise; the opposite of the front row."

Pablito stopped talking and looked at me almost defiantly, then he broke into a smile.

I thought he was going to go on to explain what he had said, but he remained silent as if waiting for my comments.

I told him how mystified I was and urged him to continue talking. He seemed undecided, stared at me for a moment, and took a deep breath. He had hardly begun to speak when the voices of the rest of them were raised in a clamor of protest.

"The Nagual already explained that to all of us," la Gorda said impatiently. "What's the point of making him repeat it?"

I tried to make them understand that I really had no conception of what Pablito was talking about. I prevailed on him go on with his explanation. There was another wave of voices speaking at the same time. Judging by the way the little sisters glared at me, they were getting very angry; especially Lydia.

"We don't like to talk about those women," la Gorda said to me in a conciliatory tone. "Just the thought of the women of the pyramid makes us very nervous."

"What's the matter with you people?" I asked. "Why are you acting like this?"

"We don't know," la Gorda replied. "It's just a feeling that all of us have; a very disturbing feeling. We were fine until a moment ago when you started to ask questions about those women."

La Gorda's statements were like an alarm signal. All of them stood up and advanced menacingly toward me, talking in loud voices.

It took me a long time to calm them and make them sit down. The little sisters were very upset and their mood seemed to influence la Gorda's. The three men showed more restraint. I faced Nestor and asked him bluntly to explain to me why the women were so agitated. Obviously I was unwittingly doing something to aggravate them.

"I really don't know what it is," Nestor said. "I'm sure none of us here knows what is the matter with us, except that we all feel very sad and nervous."

"Is it because we're talking about the pyramids?" I asked him.

"It must be," Nestor replied somberly. "I myself didn't know that those figures were women."

"Of course you did, you idiot," Lydia snapped.

Nestor seemed to be intimidated by her outburst. He recoiled and smiled sheepishly at me.

"Maybe I did," he conceded. "We're going through a very strange period in our lives. None of us knows anything for sure any more. Since you came into our lives, we are unknown to ourselves."

A very oppressive mood set in. I insisted that the only way to dispel it was to talk about those mysterious columns on the pyramids.

The women protested heatedly. The men remained silent. I had the feeling that the men were affiliated in principle with the women, but secretly wanted to discuss the topic just as I did.

"Did don Juan tell you anything else about the pyramids, Pablito?" I asked.

My intention was to steer the conversation away from the specific topic of the Atlanteans, and yet stay near it.

"He said one specific pyramid there in Tula was a guide," Pablito replied eagerly.

From the tone of his voice I deduced that he really wanted to talk. And the attentiveness of the other apprentices convinced me that covertly all of them wanted to exchange opinions.

"The Nagual said that it was a guide to the second attention," Pablito went on, "but that it was ransacked and everything destroyed. He told me that some of the pyramids were gigantic not-doings. They were not lodgings but places for warriors to do their dreaming and exercise their second attention. Whatever they did was recorded in drawings and figures that were put on the walls.

"Then another kind of warrior must've come along; a kind who didn't approve of what the sorcerers of the pyramid had done with their second attention, and destroyed the pyramid and all that was in it.

"The Nagual believed that the new warriors must've been warriors of the third attention, just as he himself was. Warriors who were appalled by the evilness of the fixation of the second attention. The sorcerers of the pyramids were too busy with their fixation to realize what was going on. When they did, it was too late."

Pablito had an audience. Everyone in the room, myself included, was fascinated with what he was saying. I understood the ideas he was presenting because don Juan had explained them to me.

Don Juan had said that our total being consists of two perceivable segments. The first is the familiar physical body which all of us can perceive. The second is the luminous body which is a cocoon that only seers can perceive; a cocoon that gives us the appearance of giant luminous eggs.

He had also said that one of the most important goals of sorcery is to reach the luminous cocoon; a goal which is fulfilled through the sophisticated use of dreaming, and through a rigorous systematic exertion he called not-doing. He defined not-doing as an unfamiliar act which engages our total being by forcing us to become conscious of it's luminous segment.

In order to explain these concepts, don Juan made a threepart, uneven division of our consciousness.

He called the smallest the first attention, and said that it is the consciousness that every normal person has developed in order to deal with the daily world. It encompasses the awareness of the physical body.

Another larger portion he called the second attention, and described it as the awareness we need in order to perceive our luminous cocoon and to act as luminous beings. He said that the second attention remains in the background for the duration of our lives unless it is brought forth through deliberate training or by an accidental trauma. He said the second attention encompasses the awareness of the luminous body.

He called the last portion, which was the largest, the third attention-an immeasurable consciousness which engages undefinable aspects of the awareness of the physical and the luminous bodies.

I asked him if he himself had experienced the third attention. He said that he was on the periphery of it, and that if he ever entered it completely, I would know it instantly because all of him would become what he really was; an outburst of energy.

He added that the battlefield of warriors was the second attention, which was something like a training ground for reaching the third attention. The second attention was a state rather difficult to arrive at, but very fruitful once it was attained.

"The pyramids are harmful," Pablito went on. "Especially to unprotected sorcerers like ourselves. They are worse yet to formless warriors like la Gorda. The Nagual said that there is nothing more dangerous than the evil fixation of the second attention.

"When warriors learn to focus on the weak side of the second attention nothing can stand in their way. They become hunters of men; ghouls. Even if they are no longer alive, they can reach for their prey through time as if they were present here and now.

"And because prey is what we become if we walk into one of those pyramids, the Nagual called them traps of the second attention."

"What exactly did he say would happen?" la Gorda asked.

"The Nagual said that we could stand perhaps one visit to the pyramids," Pablito explained. "On the second visit we would feel a strange sadness. It would be like a cold breeze that would make us listless and fatigued; a fatigue that soon turns into bad luck. In no time at all we'll be jinxed. Everything will happen to us. In fact, the Nagual said that our own streaks of bad luck were due to our willfulness in visiting those ruins against his recommendations.

"Eligio, for instance, never disobeyed the Nagual. You wouldn't catch him dead in there. Neither did this Nagual here, and they were always lucky while the rest of us were jinxed, especially la Gorda and myself. Weren't we even bitten by the same dog? And didn't the same beams of the kitchen roof get rotten twice and fall on us?"

"The Nagual never explained this to me," la Gorda said.

"Of course he did," Pablito insisted,

"If I had known how bad it was, I wouldn't have set foot in those damned places," la Gorda protested.

"The Nagual told every one of us the same things," Nestor said. "The problem is that every one of us was not listening attentively, or rather every one of us listened to him in his own way, and heard what he wanted to hear.

"The Nagual said that the fixation of the second attention has two faces.

"The first and easier face is the evil one. It happens when dreamers use their dreaming to focus their second attention on the items of the world, like money and power over people.[~ the world of the 1st attention]

"The other face is the more difficult to reach and it happens when dreamers focus their second attention on items that are not in or from this world, such as the journey into the unknown. [~ the world of the third attention]

"Warriors need endless impeccability in order to reach this face."

I said to them that I was sure that don Juan had selectively revealed certain things to some of us, and other things to others. I could not, for instance, recall don Juan ever discussing the evil face of the second attention with me.

I told them then what don Juan said to me in reference to the fixation of attention in general.

He stressed to me that all archaeological ruins in Mexico, especially the pyramids, were harmful to modern man. He depicted the pyramids as foreign expressions of thought and action. He said that every item, every design in them, was a calculated effort to record aspects of attention which were thoroughly alien to us. For don Juan, it was not only ruins of past cultures that held a dangerous element in them. Anything which was the object of an obsessive concern had a harmful potential.

We had discussed this in detail once. It was a reaction he had to some comments I had made about my being at a loss as to where to store my field notes safely. I regarded them in a most possessive manner and was obsessed with their security.

"What should I do?" I asked him.

"Genaro once gave you the solution," he replied. "You thought, as you always do, that he was joking. He never jokes. He told you that you should write with the tip of your finger instead of a pencil. You didn't take him up on that because you can't imagine that this is the not-doing of taking notes."

I argued that what he was proposing had to be a joke. My self image was that of a social scientist who needed to 'record everything' that was said and done in order to 'draw verifiable conclusions'. For don Juan, the one thing had nothing to do with the other: To be a serious student had nothing to do with taking notes.

I personally could not see a solution. Don Genaro's suggestion seemed to me humorous; not a real possibility.

Don Juan argued his point further. He said that taking notes was a way of engaging the first attention in the task of remembering; that I took notes in order to remember what was said and done. Don Genaro's recommendation was not a joke because writing with the tip of my finger on a piece of paper, as the not-doing of taking notes, would force my second attention to focus on remembering; and I would not accumulate sheets of paper. Don Juan thought that the end result would be more accurate and more powerful than taking notes. It had never been done as far as he knew, but the principle was sound.

He pressed me to do it for a while. I became disturbed. Taking notes acted not only as a mnemonic [* mnemonic- a device, such as a rhyme or acronym, used to aid recall] device, but soothed me as well. It was my most serviceable crutch. To accumulate sheets of paper gave me a sense of purpose and balance.

"When you worry about what to do with your sheets," don Juan explained, "you are focusing a very dangerous part of yourself on them. All of us have that dangerous side, that fixation. The stronger we become, the more deadly that side is.

"The recommendation for warriors is not to have any material things on which to focus their power, but to focus their power on the spirit; on the true flight into the unknown, not on trivial shields. In your case, your notes are your shield. They won't let you live in peace."

I seriously felt that I had no way on earth to disassociate myself from my notes. Don Juan then conceived of a task for me in lieu of a not-doing proper. He said that for someone who was as possessive as I was, the most appropriate way of freeing myself from my notebooks would be to disclose them; to throw them in the open; to write a book. I thought, at the time, that that was a bigger joke than taking notes with the tip of my finger.

"Your compulsion to possess and hold on to things is not unique," he said. "Everyone who wants to follow the warrior's path, the sorcerer's way, has to rid himself of this fixation.

"My benefactor told me that there was a time when warriors did have material objects on which they placed their obsession; and that gave rise to the question of whose object would be more powerful, or the most powerful of them all. Remnants of those objects still remain in the world; the leftovers of that race for power.

"No one can tell what kind of fixation those objects must have received. Men infinitely more powerful than you poured all the facets of their attention on them. You have merely begun to pour your puny worry on your notes. You haven't gotten yet to other levels of attention.

"Think how horrible it would be if you would find yourself at the end of your trail as a warrior, still carrying your bundles of notes on your back. By that time the notes will be alive, especially if you learn to write with your fingertip and still have to pile up sheets. Under those conditions it wouldn't surprise me in the least if someone found your bundles walking around."

"It is easy for me to understand why the Nagual Juan Matus didn't want us to have possessions," Nestor said after I had finished talking. "We are all dreamers. He didn't want us to focus our dreaming body on the weak face of the second attention.

"I didn't understand his maneuvers at the time. I resented the fact that he made me get rid of everything I had. I thought he was being unfair. My belief was that he was trying to keep Pablito and Benigno from envying me because they had nothing themselves. I was well-off in comparison. At the time, I had no idea that he was protecting my dreaming body."

Don Juan had described dreaming to me in various ways. The most obscure of them all now appears to me as being the one that defines it best. He said that dreaming is intrinsically the not-doing of sleep. And as such, dreaming affords practitioners the use of that portion of their lives spent in slumber.

It is as if the dreamers no longer sleep; yet no illness results from it. The dreamers do not lack sleep, and the effect of dreaming seems to be an increase of waking time owing to the use of an alleged extra body; the dreaming body.

Don Juan had explained to me that the dreaming body is sometimes called the "double" or the "other" because it is a perfect replica of the dreamer's body. It is inherently the energy of a luminous being, a whitish, phantomlike emanation which is projected by the fixation of the second attention into a three-dimensional image of the body.

Don Juan explained that the dreaming body is not a ghost, and is as real as anything we deal with in the world. He said that the second attention is unavoidably drawn to focus on our total being as a field of energy, and transforms that energy into anything suitable. The easiest thing is, of course, the image of the physical body with which we are already thoroughly familiar from our daily lives, and our use of our first attention.

And that which channels the energy of our total being to produce anything that might be within the boundaries of possibility is known as 'will'. Don Juan could not say what those boundaries were; except that at the level of luminous beings, the range is so broad that it is futile to try to establish limits.

Thus, the energy of a luminous being can be transformed through will into anything.

"The Nagual said that the dreaming body gets involved and attaches itself to anything," Benigno said. "It doesn't have sense. He told me that men are weaker than women because a man's dreaming body is more possessive."

The little sisters agreed in unison with a movement of their heads. La Gorda looked at me and smiled.

"The Nagual told me that you're the king of possessiveness," she said to me. "Genaro said that you even say goodbye to your turds before you flush them down."

The little sisters rolled down on their sides laughing. The Genaros made obvious efforts to contain themselves. Nestor, who was sitting by my side, patted my knee.

The Nagual and Genaro used to tell great stories about you," he said. "They entertained us for years with tales about a weird guy they knew. We know now that it was you."

I felt a wave of embarrassment. It was as if don Juan and don Genaro had betrayed me; laughing at me in front of the apprentices. Self-pity took over. I began to complain. I said out loud that they had been predisposed to be against me; to think that I was a fool.

"That's not true," Benigno said. "We are delighted that you are with us."

"Are we?" Lydia snapped.

All of them became involved in a heated argument. The men and the women were divided. La Gorda did not join either group. She stayed sitting by my side, while the others had stood up and were shouting.

"We're going through a difficult time," la Gorda said to me in a low voice. "We've done a lot of dreaming and yet it isn't enough for what we need."

"What do you need, Gorda?" I asked.

"We don't know," she said. "We were hoping that you would tell us that."

The little sisters and the Genaros sat down again in order to listen to what la Gorda was saying to me.

"We need a leader," she went on. "You are the Nagual, but you're not a leader."

"It takes time to make a perfect Nagual," Pablito said. "The Nagual Juan Matus told me that he himself was crappy in his youth, until something shook him out of his complacency."

"I don't believe it," Lydia shouted. "He never told me that."

"He said that he was very crummy," la Gorda added in a low voice.

"The Nagual told me that in his youth he was a jinx, just like me," Pablito said. "He was also told by his benefactor not to set foot in those pyramids and because of that he practically lived there until he was driven away by a horde of phantoms."

Apparently no one else knew the story. They perked up.

"I had completely forgotten about that," Pablito explained. "I've only just remembered it now. It was just like what happened to la Gorda. One day after the Nagual had finally become a formless warrior, the evil fixations of those warriors who had done their dreaming and other not-doings in the pyramids came after him.

"They found him while he was working in the field. He told me that he saw a hand coming out of the loose dirt in a fresh furrow to grab the leg of his pants. He thought that it was a fellow worker who had been accidentally buried. He tried to dig him out. Then he realized that he was digging into a dirt coffin: A man was buried there. The Nagual said that the man was very thin and dark and had no hair.

"The Nagual tried frantically to patch up the dirt coffin. He didn't want his fellow workers to see it and he didn't want to injure the man by digging him out against his will. He was working so hard that he didn't even notice that the other workers had gathered around him. By then the Nagual said that the dirt coffin had collapsed and the dark man was sprawled on the ground; naked.

"The Nagual tried to help him up and asked the men to give him a hand. They laughed at him. They thought he was drunk having the d.t.'s because there was no man, or dirt coffin, or anything like that in the field.

"The Nagual said that he was shaken but he didn't dare tell his benefactor about it. It didn't matter because at night a whole flock of phantoms came after him. He went to open the front door after someone knocked and a horde of naked men with glaring yellow eyes burst in.

"They threw him to the floor and piled on top of him. They would have crushed every bone in his body had it not been for the swift actions of his benefactor. He saw the phantoms and pulled the Nagual to safety to a hole in the ground which he always kept conveniently at the back of his house. He buried the Nagual there while the ghosts squatted around waiting for their chance.

The Nagual told me that he had become so frightened that he would voluntarily go back into his dirt coffin every night to sleep long after the phantoms had vanished."

Pablito stopped talking. Everyone seemed to be getting ready to leave. They fretted and changed position as if to show that they were tired of sitting.

I then told them that I had had a very disturbing reaction upon hearing my friend's statements about the Atlanteans walking at night in the pyramids of Tula. I had not recognized the depth at which I had accepted what don Juan and don Genaro had taught me until that day.

I realized that I had completely suspended judgment even though it was clear in my mind that the possibility those colossal figures of stone could walk did not enter into the realm of serious speculation. My reaction was a total surprise to me.

I explained to them at great length that the idea of the Atlanteans walking at night was a clear example of the fixation of the second attention. I had arrived at that conclusion using the following set of premises:

First, that we are not merely whatever our common sense requires us to believe we are. We are in actuality luminous beings capable of becoming aware of our luminosity.

Second, that as luminous beings aware of our luminosity we are capable of unraveling different facets of our awareness, or our attention, as don Juan called it.

Third, that the unraveling could be brought about by a deliberate effort as we were trying to do ourselves, or accidentally, through a bodily trauma.

Fourth, that there had been a time when sorcerers deliberately placed different facets of their attention on material objects.

Fifth, that the Atlanteans, judging by their awe-inspiring setting, must have been objects of fixation for sorcerers of another time.

I said that the custodian who had given my friend the information had undoubtedly unraveled another facet of his attention; he might have unwittingly become, if only for a moment, a receptor for the projections of ancient sorcerers' second attention. It was not so farfetched to me then that the man may have visualized the fixation of those sorcerers.

If those sorcerers were members of don Juan's and don Genaro's tradition, they must have been impeccable practitioners in which case there would have been no limit to what they could accomplish with the fixation of their second attention. If they intended that the Atlanteans should walk at night, then the Atlanteans would walk at night.

As I talked, the three little sisters became very angry and agitated with me. When I finished, Lydia accused me of doing nothing else but talking. Then they got up and left without even saying goodbye. The men followed them, but stopped at the door and shook hands with me. La Gorda and I remained in the room.

"There is something very wrong with those women," I said.

"No. They're just tired of talking," la Gorda said. "They expect some action from you."

"How come the Genaros are not tired of talking?" I asked.

"They are more stupid than the women," she replied dryly.

"How about you, Gorda?" I asked. "Are you also tired of talking?"

"I don't know what I am," she said solemnly. "When I am with you, I'm not tired; but when I am with the little sisters, I'm dead tired just like them."

During the following uneventful days that I stayed with them, it was obvious that the little sisters were thoroughly hostile to me. The Genaros tolerated me in an offhand way. Only la Gorda seemed to be aligned with me. I began to wonder why. I asked her about it before I left for Los Angeles.

"I don't know how it is possible, but I'm used to you," she said. "It's as if you and I are together, while the little sisters the Genaros are in a different world."

## 2. 'Seeing' Together

For several weeks after my return to Los Angeles I had a sense of mild discomfort which I explained away as a dizziness or a sudden loss of breath due to physical exertion. It reached a climax one night when I woke up terrified; unable to breathe. The physician I went to see diagnosed my trouble as hyperventilation; most likely caused by tension. He prescribed a tranquilizer and suggested breathing into a paper bag if the attack should ever occur again.

I decided to return to Mexico to seek la Gorda's counsel. After I told her the doctor's diagnosis, she calmly assured me that no illness was involved; that I was finally losing my shields; and that what I was experiencing was the "loss of my human form" and the entrance into a new state of separation from human affairs.

"Don't fight it," she said. "Our natural reaction is to struggle against it. In doing so we dispel it. Let go of your fear and follow the loss of your human form step by step."

She added that in her case, the disintegration of her human form began in her womb with a severe pain and an inordinate pressure that shifted slowly in two directions; down her legs and up to her throat. She also said that the effects are felt immediately.

I wanted to record every nuance of my entrance into that new state. I prepared myself to write down a detailed account of whatever took place, but to my utter chagrin nothing more happened.

After a few days of fruitless expectation, I gave up on la Gorda's explanation and concluded that the doctor had correctly diagnosed my condition. It was perfectly understandable to me. I was carrying a responsibility that generated unbearable tension. I had accepted the leadership that the apprentices believed belonged to me, but I had no idea how to lead.

The pressure in my life also showed in a more serious way. My usual level of energy was dropping steadily. Don Juan would have said that I was losing my personal power and that eventually I would lose my life. Don Juan had set me up to live exclusively by means of 'personal power'; which I understood to be a state of being; a relationship of order between the subject and the universe; a relationship that cannot be disrupted without resulting in the subject's death.

Since there was no foreseeable way to change my situation, I had concluded that my life was coming to an end. My feeling of being doomed seemed to infuriate all the apprentices. I decided to get away from them for a couple of days to dispel my gloom and their tension.

When I came back, I found them standing outside the front door of the little sisters' house as if they had been waiting for me. Nestor ran to my car, and before I even turned the motor off he blurted out that Pablito had run away.

He had gone to die, Nestor said, in the city of Tula, the place of his ancestors. I was appalled. I felt guilty.

La Gorda did not share my concern. She was beaming, exuding contentment.

"That little pimp is better off dead," she said. "All of us are going to live together harmoniously now, as we should. The Nagual told us that you were going to bring change into our lives. Well, you did. Pablito is not bugging us any longer. You got rid of him. Look how happy we are. We are better off without him."

I was outraged by her callousness. I stated as forcefully as I could that don Juan had given all of us, in a most painstaking manner, the format of a warrior's life. I stressed that the warrior's impeccability demanded that I not let Pablito die just like that.

"And what do you think you're going to do?" la Gorda asked.

"I'm going to take one of you to live with him," I said, "until the day when all of you, including Pablito, can move out of here."

They laughed at me, even Nestor and Benigno, who I thought were closest to Pablito. La Gorda laughed longer than anyone else, obviously challenging me.

I turned to Nestor and Benigno for moral support. They looked away.

I appealed to la Gorda's superior understanding. I pleaded with her. I used all the arguments I could think of. She looked at me with utter contempt.

"Let's get going," she said to the others.

She gave me the most vacuous smile. She shrugged her shoulders, and made a vague puckering gesture with her lips.

"You're welcome to come with us," she said to me, "providing that you don't ask questions or talk about that little pimp."

"You are a formless warrior, Gorda," I said. "You told me that yourself. Why, then, do you judge Pablito?"

La Gorda did not answer. But she acknowledged the blow. She frowned and avoided my gaze.

"La Gorda is with us!" Josefina yelled in a high-pitched voice.

The three little sisters gathered around la Gorda and pulled her inside the house. I followed them. Nestor and Benigno also went inside.

"What are you going to do, take one of us by force?" la Gorda asked me.

I told all of them that I considered it my duty to help Pablito and that I would do the same for any one of them.

"You really think you can pull this off?" la Gorda asked me; her eyes flaring with anger.

I wanted to roar with rage as I had once done in their presence, but the circumstances were different. I could not do it.

"I'm going to take Josefina with me," I said. "I am the Nagual."

La Gorda gathered the three little sisters, and shielded them with her body. They were about to join hands. Something in me knew that if they did, their combined strength would have been awesome and my efforts to take Josefina would have been useless. My only chance was to strike before they had a chance to group.

I pushed Josefina with the palms of my hands and sent her reeling to the center of the room. Before they had time to regroup themselves, I hit Lydia and Rosa. They bent over with pain. La Gorda came at me with a fury I had never witnessed in her. It was like the attack of a savage beast. Her whole concentration was on a single thrust of her body. If she had struck me, I would have been killed. She missed my chest by inches. I grabbed her from behind in a bear hug and we tumbled down. We rolled over and over until we were utterly exhausted. Her body relaxed. She began to caress the back of my hands, which were tightly clasped around her stomach.

I noticed then that Nestor and Benigno were standing by the door. They both seemed to be on the verge of becoming physically ill.

La Gorda smiled shyly, and whispered in my ear that she was glad I had overcome her.

I took Josefina to Pablito. I had felt that she was the only one of the apprentices who genuinely needed someone to look after her, and Pablito resented her the least. I was sure that his sense of chivalry would force him to reach out to her since she would be in need of help.

A month later I returned once more to Mexico. Pablito and Josefina had returned. They were living together at don Genaro's house and shared it with Benigno and Rosa. Nestor and Lydia lived at Soledad's place, and la Gorda lived alone in the little sisters' house.

"Do our new living arrangements surprise you?" la Gorda asked.

My surprise was more than evident. I wanted to know all the implications of this new organization.

La Gorda let me know in a dry tone that there were no implications that she knew of. They had chosen to live in couples but not as couples. She added that, contrary to what I might think, they were impeccable warriors.

The new format was rather pleasant. Everybody seemed to be completely relaxed. There was no more bickering or outbursts of competitive behavior among them. They had also taken to dressing in the Indian apparel typical of that region. The women wore dresses with full gathered skirts that almost touched the ground. They wore dark shawls, and their hair in braids; except for Josefina who always wore a hat. The men wore thin white pajama-like pants and shirts, and straw hats. All of them wore homemade sandals.

I asked la Gorda the reason for their new way of dressing. She said that they were getting ready to leave. Sooner or later, with my help or by themselves, they were going to leave that valley. They would be going into a new world; a new life. When they did that, they would acknowledge the change; the longer they wore their Indian clothes, the more drastic the change would be when they put on city clothes.

She added that they had been taught to be fluid; at ease in whatever situation they found themselves; and that I had been taught the same. My challenge was to deal with them with ease regardless of what they did to me. Their challenge in turn was to leave their valley and settle down elsewhere to find out if they could be as fluid as warriors should be.

I asked for her honest opinion about our chances of succeeding. She said that failure was written all over our faces.

La Gorda changed the subject abruptly, and told me that in her dreaming she had found herself staring at a gigantic narrow gorge between two enormous round mountains. She thought that the two mountains were familiar to her, and wanted me to drive her to a nearby town. She believed, without knowing why, that the two mountains were located there and that the message from her dreaming was that both of us should go there.

We left at the crack of dawn. I had driven through that town before. It was very small and I had never noticed anything in it's surroundings that even came close to la Gorda's vision. There were only eroded hills around it. It turned out that the two mountains were not there, or if they were, we could not find them.

During the two hours that we spent in that town, however, both of us had a feeling that we knew something undefined; a feeling which turned at times into a certainty, and then receded again into the darkness to become merely annoyance and frustration.

Visiting that town unsettled us in mysterious ways; or rather, for unknown reasons we became very agitated. I was in the throes of a most illogical conflict. I did not remember having ever stopped in that town, and yet I could have sworn that I had not only been there, but had lived there for a time.

It was not a clear memory. I did not remember the streets or the houses. What I felt was a vague but strong apprehension that something was going to become clear in my mind. I was not sure what; a memory perhaps. At moments that vague apprehension became paramount, especially when I saw a particular house. I parked in front of it. La Gorda and I looked at it from the car for perhaps an hour. Yet neither of us suggested leaving the car to go into it.

Both of us were very edgy. We began to talk about her vision of the two mountains. Our conversation soon turned into an argument. She thought I had not taken her dreaming seriously. Our tempers flared and we ended up yelling at each other; not so much out of anger, as out of nervousness. I caught myself and stopped.

On our way back, I parked the car on the side of the dirt road. We got out to stretch our legs. We walked for a while. It was too windy to enjoy it. La Gorda still seemed to be agitated. We went back to the car and sat inside.

"If you would only rally your knowledge," la Gorda said in a pleading tone. "You would know that losing the human form ..."

She stopped in midsentence, My frown must have brought her up short. She was cognizant of my struggle. If there was any knowledge in me that I could have consciously rallied, I would have done it already.

"But we are luminous beings," she said in the same pleading tone. "There is so much more to us. You are the Nagual. There is even more to you."

"What do you think I should do?" I asked.

"You must let go of your desire to cling," she said. "The very same thing happened to me. I held on to things, such as the food I liked, the mountains where I lived, the people I used to enjoy talking to, but most of all, I clung to the desire to be liked."

I told her that her advice was meaningless to me for I was not aware of holding on to anything. She insisted that somehow I knew that I was putting up barriers to losing my human form.

"Our attention is trained to focus doggedly," she went on. "That is the way we maintain the world. Your first attention has been taught to focus on something that's quite strange to me, but very familiar to you."

I told her that my mind dwells on abstractions- not abstractions like mathematics, for instance, but rather propositions of reasonableness.

"Now is the time to let go of all that," she said. "In order to lose your human form you should let go of all that ballast. You counterbalance so hard that you paralyze yourself."

I was in no mood to argue. What she called losing the human form was a concept too vague for immediate consideration. I was concerned with what we had experienced in that town. La Gorda did not want to talk about it.

"The only thing that counts is that you rally your knowledge,", she said. "You can do it if you need to like that day when Pablito ran away and you and I came to blows."

La Gorda said that what had happened on that day was an example of "rallying one's knowledge." Without being thoroughly aware of what I was doing, I had performed complex maneuvers which required seeing.

"You did not just attack us," she said. "You saw."

She was right; in a manner of speaking. Something quite out of the ordinary had taken place on that occasion. I had considered it in great detail, confining it, however, to purely personal speculation. I had no adequate explanation for it, outside of saying that the emotional charge of the moment had affected me in inconceivable ways.

When I had stepped inside their house and faced the four women, I became aware in one split second that I was able to shift my ordinary way of perceiving. I saw four amorphous blobs of very intense amber light in front of me. One of them was more mellow; more pleasing. The other three were unfriendly, sharp, whitish-amber glows. The mellow glow was la Gorda. And at that moment the three unfriendly glows were looming menacingly over her.

The blob of whitish luminosity closest to me, which was Josefina, was a bit off-balance. It was leaning over, so I gave it a push. I kicked the other two in a depression they each had on their right side. I had no conscious idea that I should kick them there. I simply found the indentation convenient- somehow it invited me to put my foot in it. The result was devastating. Lydia and Rosa fainted on the spot. I had kicked each of them on their right thigh. It was not a kick that could have broken any bones. I only pushed the blobs of light in front of me with my foot. Nonetheless, it was as if I had given them a ferocious blow in the most vulnerable part of their bodies.

La Gorda was right, I had rallied some knowledge I was not aware of. If that was called seeing, the logical conclusion for my intellect would be to say that seeing is a bodily knowledge. The predominance of the visual sense in us influences this bodily knowledge and makes it seem to be eye-related. What I experienced was not altogether visual.

I saw the blobs of light with something else besides my eyes, since I was conscious that the four women were in my field of vision during the entire time I dealt with them. The blobs of light were not even superimposed on them. The two sets of images were separate.

What complicated the issue for me was the matter of time. Everything was compressed into a few seconds. If I did shift from one scene to the other, the shift must have been so fast that it became meaningless. Thus I can only recall perceiving two separate scenes simultaneously.

After I had kicked the two blobs of light, the mellow one- la Gorda- came toward me. It did not come straight at me, but angled to my left from the moment it started to move; it obviously intended to miss me, so when the glow passed by I grabbed it. As I rolled over and over on the floor with it, I felt I was melting into it. That was the only time I really lost the sense of continuity. I again became aware of myself while la Gorda was caressing the backs of my hands.

"In our dreaming, the little sisters and I have learned to join hands," la Gorda said. "We know how to make a line. Our problem that day was that we had never made that line outside our room. That was why they dragged me inside. Your body knew what it meant for us to join hands. If we had done it, I would have been under their control. They are more fierce than I am. Their bodies are tightly sealed. They are not concerned with sex. I am. That makes me weaker. I'm sure that your concern with sex is what makes it very difficult for you to rally your knowledge."

She went on talking about the debilitating effects of having sex. I felt ill at ease. I tried to steer the conversation away from that topic, but she seemed determined to go back to it regardless of my discomfort.

"Let's you and I drive to Mexico City," I said in desperation.

I thought I would shock her. She did not answer. She puckered her lips; squinting her eyes. She contracted the muscles of her chin, pushing her upper lip until it bulged under her nose. Her face became so contorted that I was taken aback. She reacted to my surprise, and relaxed her facial muscles.

"Come on, Gorda," I said. "Let's go to Mexico City."

"Sure. Why not?" she said. "What do I need?"

I did not expect that reaction and ended up shocked myself.

"Nothing," I said. "We'll go as we are."

Without saying another word, she slumped on the seat and we drove off toward Mexico City. It was still early; not even midday. I asked her if she would dare to go to Los Angeles with me. She was pensive for a moment.

"I've just asked my luminous body that question," she said.

"What did it say?"

"It said only if power permits it."

There was such a wealth of feeling in her voice that I stopped the car and hugged her. My affection for her at that moment was so deep that I got frightened. It had nothing to do with sex or the need of psychological reinforcement. It was a feeling that transcended everything I knew.

Embracing la Gorda brought back the sense I had had earlier that something in me which was bottled up, pushed into recesses I could not consciously reach, was about to come out. I almost knew then what it was, but I lost it when I reached for it.

La Gorda and I arrived in the city of Oaxaca in the early evening. I parked my car on a side street and then we walked to the center of town to the plaza. We looked for the bench where don Juan and don Genaro used to sit. It was unoccupied. We sat there in reverent silence. Finally la Gorda said that she had been there with don Juan many times as well as with someone else she could not remember. She was not sure whether that was something she had merely dreamed.

"What did you do with don Juan on this bench?" I asked.

"Nothing. We just sat waiting for the bus, or for the lumber truck that would give us a ride up the mountains," she replied.

I told her that when I sat on that bench with don Juan, we would talk for hours.

I recounted for her the great predilection that he had for poetry, and how I used to read it to him when we had nothing else to do. He would listen to poems on the premise that only the first or sometimes the second stanza was worthwhile reading. The rest he found to be indulgence on the poet's part. There were very few poems, of the hundreds I must have read to him, that he listened to all the way through.

At first I read to him what I liked. My preference was for abstract, convoluted, cerebral poetry. Later he made me read over and over what he liked. In his opinion a poem had to be compact- preferably short- and it had to be made up of precise poignant images of great simplicity.

In the late afternoons, sitting on that bench in Oaxaca, a poem by Cesar Vallejo always seemed to sum up for him a special feeling of longing. I recited it to la Gorda from memory; not so much for her benefit as for mine.

I wonder what she is doing at this hour

my Andean and sweet Rita

of reeds and wild cherry trees.

Now that this weariness chokes me, and blood dozes off,

like lazy brandy inside me.

I wonder what she is doing with those hands

that in attitude of penitence

used to iron starchy whiteness,

in the afternoons.

Now that this rain is taking away my desire to go on.

I wonder what has become of her skirt with lace;

of her toils; of her walk;

of her scent of spring sugar cane from that place.

She must be at the door,

gazing at a fast moving cloud.

A wild bird on the tile roof will let out a call;

and shivering she will say at last, "Jesus, it's cold!"

The memory of don Juan was incredibly vivid. It was not a memory on the level of my thought, nor was it on the level of my conscious feelings. It was an unknown kind of memory that made me weep. Tears were streaming from my eyes, but they were not soothing at all.

The last hour of the afternoon had always had special significance for don Juan. I had accepted his regard for that hour, and his conviction that if something of importance were to come to me, it would have to be at that time.

La Gorda put her head on my shoulder. I rested my head on her head. We remained in that position for a while. I felt relaxed. The agitation had been driven away from me. It was strange that the single act of resting my head on la Gorda's would bring such peace.

I wanted to make a joke and tell her that we should tie our heads together. Then I knew that she would actually take me up on that. My body shook with laughter and I realized that I was asleep, yet my eyes were open. If I had really wanted to, I could have stood up. I did not want to move, so I remained there fully awake and yet asleep.

I saw people walking by and staring at us. I did not mind that in the least. Ordinarily I would have objected to being noticed. Then all at once the people in front of me changed into very large blobs of white light.

I was facing the luminous eggs in a sustained fashion for the first time in my life! Don Juan had told me that human beings appear to the seer as luminous eggs. I had experienced flashes of that perception, but never before had I focused my vision on them as I was doing that day.

The blobs of light were quite amorphous at first. It was as if my eyes were not properly focused. But then, at one moment, it was as if I had finally arranged my vision and the blobs of white light became oblong luminous eggs. They were big, in fact, they were enormous, perhaps seven feet high by four feet wide or even larger.

At one moment I noticed that the eggs were no longer moving. I saw a solid mass of luminosity in front of me. The eggs were watching me; looming dangerously over me. I moved deliberately and sat up straight. La Gorda was sound asleep on my shoulder. There was a group of adolescents around us. They must have thought that we were drunk. They were mimicking us. The most daring adolescent was feeling la Gorda's breasts. I shook her and woke her up.

We stood up in a hurry and left. They followed us, taunting us and yelling obscenities. The presence of a policeman on the corner dissuaded them from continuing with their harassment.

We walked in complete silence from the plaza to where I had left my car. It was almost evening. Suddenly la Gorda grabbed my arm. Her eyes were wild; her mouth open. She pointed.

"Look! Look!" she yelled. "There's the Nagual and Genaro!"

I saw two men turning the corner a long block ahead of us. La Gorda took off in a fast run. Running after her, I asked her if she was sure. She was beside herself. She said that when she had looked up, both don Juan and don Genaro were staring at her. The moment her eyes met theirs they moved away.

When we reached the corner ourselves, the two men were still the same distance away from us. I could not distinguish their features. They were dressed like rural Mexican men. They were wearing straw hats. One was husky, like don Juan. The other was thin, like don Genaro.

The two men went around another corner and we again ran noisily after them. The street they had turned onto was deserted and led to the outskirts of town. It curved slightly to the left. The two men were just where the street curved.

Right then something happened that made me feel it was possible they might really be don Juan and don Genaro. It was a movement that the smaller man made. He turned three-quarter profile to us and tilted his head as if telling us to follow; something don Genaro used to do to me whenever we were out in the woods. He always walked ahead of me; daring, coaxing me with a movement of his head to catch up with him.

La Gorda began to yell at the top of her voice. "Nagual! Genaro! Wait!"

She ran ahead of me. They were walking very fast toward some shacks that were half-visible in the semi-darkness. They must have entered one of them or turned into any of a number of pathways; suddenly they were out of sight.

La Gorda stood there and bellowed their names without any bashfulness. People came out to see who was yelling. I held her until she calmed down.

"They were right in front of me," she said, crying. "Not even ten feet away. When I yelled and called your attention to them, they were a block away in one instant."

I tried to appease her. She was in a high state of nervousness. She clung to me shivering. For some indiscernible reason I was absolutely sure that the two men were not don Juan and don

Genaro; therefore, I could not share la Gorda's agitation.

She said that we had to drive back home; that power would not permit her to go to Los Angeles or even to Mexico City with me. It was not time yet for her journey. She was convinced that seeing them had been an omen. They had disappeared pointing toward the east, toward her hometown.

I did not have any objections to starting back that very moment. After all the things that had happened to us that day, I should have been dead tired. Instead I was vibrating with a most extravagant vigor reminiscent of times with don Juan when I had felt like ramming walls with my shoulders.

On our way back to my car, I was again filled with the most passionate affection for la Gorda. I could never thank her enough for her help. I thought that whatever she had done to help me see the luminous eggs had worked. She had been so courageous; risking ridicule and even bodily harm by sitting on that bench. I expressed my thanks to her. She looked at me as if I were crazy and then broke into a belly laugh.

"I thought the same thing about you," she said. "I thought you had done it just for me. I too saw luminous eggs. This was the first time for me also. We have seen together! Like the Nagual and Genaro used to do."

As I opened the door of the car for la Gorda, the full impact of what we had done struck me. Up to that point I had been numb. Something in me had slowed down. Now my euphoria was as intense as la Gorda's agitation had been a short while before. I wanted to run in the street and shout.

It was la Gorda's turn to contain me. She squatted and rubbed my calves. Strangely enough, I calmed down immediately. I found that it was difficult for me to talk. My thoughts were running ahead of my ability to verbalize them. I did not want to drive back to her hometown right away. There seemed to be still so much more to do. Since I could not explain clearly what I wanted, I practically dragged a reluctant Gorda back to the plaza, but there were no empty benches at that hour.

I was famished so I pulled her into a restaurant. She thought she could not eat but when they brought the food she turned out to be as hungry as I was. Eating relaxed us completely.

We sat on the bench later that night. I had refrained from talking about what happened to us until we had a chance to sit there. La Gorda was at first unwilling to say anything. My mind was in a peculiar state of exhilaration. I had had similar moments with don Juan, but they were associated, as a rule, with the aftereffects of hallucinogenic plants.

I began by describing to la Gorda what I had seen. The feature of those luminous eggs that had impressed me the most was their movements. They did not walk. They moved in a floating manner, yet they were grounded. The way they moved was not pleasing. Their movements were stilted, wooden, and jerky.

When they were in motion the whole egg shape became smaller and rounder. They seemed to jump or jerk, or shake up and down with great speed. The result was a most annoying nervous shivering. Perhaps the closest I can get to describing the physical discomfort caused by their motion would be to say that I felt as if the images on a moving picture screen had been speeded up.

Another thing that had intrigued me was that I could not detect any legs. I had once seen a ballet production in which the dancers mimicked the movement of soldiers on ice skates. For that effect, they wore loose tunics that hung all the way to the floor. There was no way to see their feet, thus the illusion that they were gliding on ice.

The luminous eggs that paraded in front of me gave the impression that they were sliding on a rough surface. Their luminosity shook up and down almost imperceptibly, yet enough to make me nearly ill. When the eggs were in repose they became elongated. Some of them were so long and rigid that they brought to mind the idea of a wooden icon.

Another even more disturbing feature of the luminous eggs was the absence of eyes. I had never realized so acutely how we are drawn to the eyes of living beings. The luminous eggs were thoroughly alive. They were observing me with great curiosity. I could see them jerking up and down; leaning over to watch me, but without any eyes.

Many of those luminous eggs had black spots on them, huge spots below the midsection. Others did not. La Gorda had told me that reproduction affects the bodies of both men and women by causing a hole to appear below the stomach, but the spots on those luminous eggs did not seem like holes to me. They were areas with no luminosity, but there was no depth to them.

Those that had the black spots seemed to be mellow, tired. The crest of their egg shape was wilted. It looked opaque in comparison to the rest of their glow. The ones without spots, on the other hand, were dazzlingly bright. I fancied them to be dangerous. They were vibrant; filled with energy and whiteness.

La Gorda said that the instant I rested my head on her she also entered into a state that resembled dreaming. She was awake, yet she could not move. She was conscious that people were milling around us. Then she saw them turning into luminous blobs and finally into egg-shaped creatures.

She did not know that I was also seeing. She had thought at first that I was watching over her, but at one moment the pressure of my head was so heavy that she concluded quite consciously that I too must have been seeing. Only after I straightened up and caught the young man fondling her as she seemed to sleep, did I have an inkling of what might be happening to her.

Our visions differed in that she could distinguish men from women by the shape of some filaments that she called 'roots'. Women, she said, had thick bundles of filaments that resembled a lion's tail. They grew inward from the place of the genitalia. She explained that those roots were the givers of life. The embryo, in order to accomplish it's growth, attaches itself to one of those nurturing roots and thoroughly consumes it, leaving only a hole.

Men, on the other hand, had short filaments that were alive and floating almost separately from the luminous mass of their bodies.

I asked her what in her opinion was the reason we had seen together. She declined to make any comment, but she coaxed me to go ahead with my speculations. I told her that the only thing that occurred to me was the obvious; emotions must have been a factor.

After la Gorda and I had sat down on don Juan's favorite bench in the late afternoon, and I had recited the poem that he liked, I was highly charged with emotion. My emotions must have prepared my body.

But I also had to consider the fact that from doing dreaming, I had learned to enter into a state of total quietness. I was able to turn off my internal dialogue and remain as if I were inside a cocoon, peeking out of a hole. In that state I could either let go of some control I had and enter into dreaming, or I could hold on to that control and remain passive, thoughtless, and without desires.

I did not think, however, that those were the significant factors. I believed the catalyst was la Gorda. I thought it was what I felt for her which had created the conditions for seeing.

La Gorda laughed shyly when I told her what I believed.

"I don't agree with you," she said. "I think what has happened is that your body has started to remember."

"What do you mean by that, Gorda?" I asked.

There was a long pause. She seemed to be either fighting to say something she did not want to say, or she was desperately trying to find the appropriate word.

"There are so many things that I know," she said, "and yet I don't know what I know. I remember so many things that I finally end up remembering nothing. I think you are in the same predicament yourself."

I assured her that I was not aware of it. She refused to believe me.

"At times I really believe you don't know," she said. "At other times I believe you are playing with us. The Nagual told me that he himself didn't know. A lot of things that he told me about you are coming back to me now."

"What does it mean that my body has begun to remember?" I insisted.

"Don't ask me that," she said with a smile. "I don't know what you are supposed to remember, or what that remembering is like. I've never done it myself. I know that much."

"Is there anybody among the apprentices who could tell me?" I asked.

"No one," she said. "I think I'm a courier to you; a courier who can bring you only half a message this time."

She stood up and begged me to drive her back to her hometown. I was too exhilarated to leave then. We walked around the plaza at my suggestion. Finally we sat down on another bench.

"Isn't it strange to you that we could see together with such ease?" la Gorda asked.

I did not know what she had in mind. I was hesitant in answering.

"What would you say if I told you that I think we've seen together before?" la Gorda asked, carefully voicing her words.

I could not understand what she meant. She repeated the question one more time and I still could not get her meaning.

"When could we have seen together before?" I asked. "Your question doesn't make sense."

"That's the point," she replied. "It doesn't make sense, and yet I have the feeling we have seen together before."

I felt a chill and stood up. I remembered again the sensation I had had in that town. La Gorda opened her mouth to say something but stopped herself in mid-sentence. She stared at me, bewildered, put her hand to my lips, and then practically dragged me to the car.

I drove all night. I wanted to talk, to analyze, but she fell asleep as if purposely avoiding any discussion. She was right, of course. Of the two of us, she was the one who was cognizant of the danger of dissipating a mood through over analysing it.

When we arrived at her house, as she got out of the car she said that we could not talk at all about what happened to us in Oaxaca.

"Why is that, Gorda?" I asked.

"I don't want to waste our power," she said. "That's the sorcerer's way. Never waste your gains."

"But if we don't talk about it, we'll never know what really happened to us," I protested.

"We have to keep quiet for at least nine days," she said.

"Can we talk about it just between the two of us?" I asked.

"A talk between the two of us is precisely what we must avoid," she said. "We're vulnerable. We must allow ourselves time to heal."

## 3. Quasi Memories of the Other Self

"Can you tell us what's going on?" Nestor asked me when all of us were together at night. "Where did you two go yesterday?"

I had forgotten la Gorda's recommendation that we not talk about what had happened to us. I began to tell them that we had gone first to the nearby town and we had found a most intriguing house there.

All of them seemed to have been touched by a sudden tremor. They perked up, looked at one another, and then they stared at la Gorda as if waiting for her to tell them about it.

"What kind of a house was it?" Nestor asked.

Before I had time to answer, la Gorda interrupted me. She began to talk in a hurried almost incoherent manner. It was evident to me that she was improvising. She even used words and phrases in the Mazatec language. She gave me furtive glances that spelled out a silent plea not to say anything about it.

"How about your dreaming, Nagual?" she asked me with the relief of someone who has found the way out. "We'd like to know everything you do. I think it's very important that you tell us."

She leaned over and as casually as she could she whispered in my ear that because of what had happened to us in Oaxaca I had to tell them about my dreaming.

"Why would it be important to you?" I said loudly.

"I think we are very close to the end," la Gorda said solemnly. "Everything you say or do to us is of key importance now."

I related to them the events of what I considered my true dreaming. Don Juan had told me that there was no point in emphasizing the trials. He gave me a rule of thumb. If I should have the same vision three times, he said, I had to pay extraordinary attention to it. Otherwise, a neophyte's [* neophyte- a new participant in some activity] attempts were merely a stepping stone to building the second attention.

I dreamed once that I woke up and jumped out of bed only to be confronted by myself still sleeping in bed. I watched myself asleep, and had the self-control to remember that I was dreaming. I followed then the directions don Juan had given me, which were to avoid sudden jolts or surprises, and to take everything with a grain of salt.

The dreamer has to get involved, don Juan had said, in dispassionate experimentations. Rather than examining his sleeping body, the dreamer walks out of the room. I suddenly found myself, without knowing how, outside my room. I had the absolutely clear sensation that I had been placed there instantaneously. When I first stood outside my door, the hall and the staircase were monumental. If anything really scared me that night, it was the size of those structures which in real life were thoroughly commonplace. The hall was about fifty feet long and the staircase had sixteen steps.

I could not conceive how to cover the enormous distances I was perceiving. I vacillated, [* vacillate- be undecided about something; waver between conflicting positions or courses of action] then something made me move.

I did not walk, though. I did not feel my steps. Suddenly I was holding on the the railing. I could see my hands and forearms but I did not feel them. I was holding on by the force of something that had nothing to do with my musculature as I know it. The same thing happened when I tried to go down the stairs. I did not know how to walk. I just could not take a step. It was as if my legs were welded together. I could see my legs by leaning over, but I could not move them forward or laterally, nor could I lift them up toward my chest. I seemed to be stuck to the top step. I felt I was like those inflated plastic dolls that can lean in any direction until they are horizontal, only to be pulled upright again by the weight of their heavy rounded bases.

I made a supreme effort to walk and bounced from step to step like a clumsy ball. It took an incredible degree of attention to get to the ground floor. I could not describe it in any other way. Some form of attentiveness was required to maintain the bounds of my vision; to prevent it from disintegrating into the fleeting images of an ordinary dream.

When I finally got to the street door I could not open it. I tried desperately, but to no avail. Then I recalled that I had gotten out of my room by gliding out of it as if the door had been open. All I needed was to recall that feeling of gliding and suddenly I was out in the street.

It looked dark- a peculiarly lead-gray darkness that did not permit me to perceive any colors. My interest was drawn immediately to an enormous lagoon of brightness right in front of me at my eye level. I deduced rather than perceived that it was the street light, since I knew there was one right on the corner twenty feet above the ground.

I knew then that I could not make the perceptual arrangements needed in order to judge up, or down, or here, or there. Everything seemed to be extraordinarily present. I had no mechanism, as in ordinary life, to arrange my perception. Everything was there in the foreground and I had no volition to construct an adequate screening procedure.

I stayed in the street, bewildered, until I began to have the sensation that I was levitating. I held on to the metal pole that supported the light and the street sign on the corner. A strong breeze was lifting me up. I was sliding up the pole until I could plainly see the name of the street; Ashton.

Months later, when I again found myself in a dream looking at my sleeping body, I already had a repertoire [* repertoire- the entire range of skills or devices used in a particular activity] of things to do. In the course of my regular dreaming I had learned that what matters in that state was volition. [* volition- the capability of conscious choice and decision and intention] The corporeality [* corporeality- the quality of being physical; consisting of matter] of the body has no significance: It is simply a memory that slows down the dreamer.

I glided out of the room without hesitation, since I did not have to act out the motions of opening a door or walking in order to move. The hall and staircase were not as enormous as they appeared to be the first time. I glided through with great ease and ended up in the street where I willed myself to move three blocks.

I became aware then that the lights were still very disturbing sights. If I focused my attention on them, they became pools of immeasurable size. The other elements of that dream were easy to control. The buildings were extraordinarily large, but their features were familiar. I pondered what to do.

And then, quite casually, I realized that if I did not stare at things, but only glanced at them just as we do in our daily world, I could arrange my perception. In other words, if I followed don Juan's suggestions to the letter, and took my dreaming for granted, I could use the perceptual biases of my everyday life. After a few moments the scenery became, if not completely familiar, controllable.

The next time I had a similar dream, I went to my favorite coffee shop on the corner. The reason I selected it was because I was used to going there all the time in the very early hours of the morning. In my dreaming, I saw the usual waitresses who worked the graveyard shift. I saw a row of people eating at the counter; and right at the very end of the counter I saw a peculiar character. A man I saw nearly every day walking aimlessly around the UCLA campus. He was the only person who actually looked at me. The instant I came in, he seemed to sense me. He turned around and stared at me.

I found the same man in my waking hours a few days later in the same coffee shop in the early hours of the morning. He took one look at me, and seemed to recognize me. He looked horrified, and ran away without giving me a chance to talk to him.

While dreaming, I came back once more to the same coffee shop and that was when the course of my dreaming changed. As I was watching the restaurant from across the street, the scene altered.

I could not see the familiar buildings any more. Instead I saw primeval scenery. It was no longer night. It was bright daylight and I was looking at a lush valley. Swampy, deep-green, reedlike plants grew all over. Next to me there was a rock ledge eight to ten feet high. A huge saber-toothed tiger was sitting there.

I was petrified. We looked at each other fixedly for a long time. The size of that beast was striking, yet it was not grotesque or out of proportion. It had a splendid head, big eyes the color of dark honey, massive paws, and an enormous rib cage.

What impressed me the most was the color of it's fur. It was uniformly dark brown; almost chocolate. It's color reminded me of roasted coffee beans, only lustrous. It had strangely longish fur; not matted or ratty. It did not look like a puma's fur, or a wolf's, or a polar bear's either. It looked like something I had never seen before.

From that time on, it became routine for me to see the tiger. At times the scenery was cloudy and chilly. I could see rain in the valley, thick, copious rain. At other times the valley was bathed in sunlight. Quite often I would see other saber-toothed tigers in the valley. I could hear their unique squeaking roar- a most nauseating sound to me.

The tiger never touched me. We stared at each other from ten to twelve feet away. Yet I could tell what he wanted. He was showing me how to breathe in a specific manner. It got to the point in my dreaming where I could imitate the tiger's breathing so well that I felt I was turning into one. I told the apprentices that a tangible result of my dreaming was that my body became more muscular.

After listening to my account, Nestor marveled at how different their dreaming was from mine. They had particular dreaming tasks. His was to find cures for anything that ailed the human body. Benigno's task was to predict, foresee, or find a solution for anything that was of human concern. Pablito's task was to find ways to build. Nestor said that those tasks were the reason why he dealt with medicinal plants, Benigno had an oracle, and Pablito was a carpenter. He added that, so far, they had only scratched the surface of their dreaming and that they had nothing of substance to report.

"You may think that we've done a great deal," he went on, "but we haven't. Genaro and the Nagual did everything for us and for these four women. We've done nothing on our own yet."

"It seems to me that the Nagual set you up differently," Benigno said, speaking very slowly and deliberately. "You must've been a tiger and you are definitely going to turn into one again. That's what happened to the Nagual. He had been a crow already, and while in this life he turned into one again."

"The problem is that that kind of tiger doesn't exist any more," Nestor said. "We never heard what happens in that case."

He swept his head around to include all of them with his gesture.

"I know what happens," la Gorda said. "I remember that the Nagual Juan Matus called that ghost dreaming. He said that none of us has ever done ghost dreaming because we are not violent or destructive. He never did it himself. And he said that whoever does it is marked by fate to have ghost helpers and allies."

"What does that mean, Gorda?" I asked.

"It means that you're not like us," she replied somberly.

La Gorda seemed to be very agitated. She stood up, and paced up and down the room four or five times before she sat down again by my side.

There was a gap of silence in the conversation. Josefina mumbled something unintelligible. She also seemed to be very nervous. La Gorda tried to calm her down; hugging her and patting her back.

"Josefina has something to tell you about Eligio," la Gorda said to me.

Everyone looked at Josefina without saying a word; a question in their eyes.

"In spite of the fact that Eligio has disappeared from the face of the earth," la Gorda went on, "he is still one of us. And Josefina talks to him all the time."

The rest of them suddenly became attentive. They looked at one another and then they looked at me.

"They meet in dreaming," la Gorda said dramatically.

Josefina took a deep breath, she seemed to be the epitome [* epitome- a standard or typical example] of nervousness. Her body shook convulsively. Pablito lay on top of her on the floor, and began breathing hard with his diaphragm, pushing it in and out, forcing her to breathe in unison with him.

"What's he doing?" I asked la Gorda.

"What's he doing! Can't you see?" she replied sharply.

I whispered to her that I was aware that he was trying to make her relax, but that his procedure was novel to me. She said that Pablito was giving Josefina energy by placing his midsection, where men have a surplus of it, over Josefina's womb, where women store their energy.

Josefina sat up and smiled at me. She seemed to be perfectly relaxed.

"I do meet Eligio all the time," she said. "He waits for me every day."

"How come you've never told us that?" Pablito asked in a huffy tone.

"She told me," la Gorda interrupted, and then she went into a lengthy explanation of what it meant to all of us that Eligio was available. She added that she had been waiting for a sign from me to disclose Eligio's words.

"Don't beat around the bush, woman!" Pablito yelled. "Tell us his words."

"They are not for you!" la Gorda yelled back.

"Who are they for, then?" Pablito asked.

"They are for the Nagual," la Gorda yelled, pointing at me.

La Gorda apologized for raising her voice. She said that whatever Eligio had said was complex and mysterious, and she could not make heads or tails of it.

"I just listened to him. That's all I was able to do, listen to him," la Gorda continued.

"Do you mean you also meet Eligio?" Pablito asked in a tone that was a mixture of anger and expectation.

"I do," la Gorda replied in almost a whisper. "I couldn't talk about it because I had to wait for him."

She pointed to me, and then pushed me with both hands. I momentarily lost my balance and tumbled down on my side.

"What is this? What are you doing to him?" Pablito asked in a very angry voice. "Was that a display of Indian love?"

I turned to la Gorda. She made a gesture with her lips to tell me to be quiet.

"Eligio says that you are the Nagual, but you are not for us," Josefina said to me.

There was dead silence in the room. I did not know what to make of Josefina's statement. I had to wait until someone else talked.

"Do you feel relieved?" la Gorda prodded me.

I said to all of them that I did not have any opinions one way or the other. They looked like children- bewildered children. La Gorda had the air of a mistress of ceremonies who is thoroughly embarrassed.

Nestor stood up and faced la Gorda. He spoke a phrase in Mazatec to her. It had the sound of a command or a reproach.

"Tell us everything you know, Gorda," he went on in Spanish. "You have no right to play with us, to hold back something so important, just for yourself."

La Gorda protested vehemently. She explained that she was holding on to what she knew because Eligio had asked her to do so. Josefina assented with a nod of her head.

"Did he tell all this to you or to Josefina?" Pablito asked.

"We were together," la Gorda said in a barely audible whisper.

"You mean you and Josefina dream together!" Pablito exclaimed breathlessly.

The surprise in his voice corresponded to the shock wave that seemed to go through the rest of them.

"What exactly has Eligio said to you two?" Nestor asked when the shock had subsided.

"He said that I should try to help the Nagual remember his left side," la Gorda said.

"Do you know what she's talking about?" Nestor asked me.

There was no possibility that I would have known. I told them that they should turn to themselves for answers. But none of them voiced any suggestions.

"He told Josefina other things which she can't remember," la Gorda said. "So we are in a real fix. Eligio said that you are definitely the Nagual and you have to help us, but that you are not for us. Only upon remembering your left side can you take us to where we have to go."

Nestor spoke to Josefina in a fatherly manner, and urged her to remember what Eligio had said. Nestor did that rather than insisting that I should remember something which must have been in some sort of code since none of us could make sense of it.

Josefina winced and frowned as if she were under a heavy weight that was pushing her down. She actually looked like a rag doll that was being compressed. I watched in true fascination.

"I can't," she finally said. "I know what he's talking about when he speaks to me, but I can't say now what it is. It doesn't come out."

"Do you remember any words?" Nestor asked. "Any single words?"

She stuck her tongue out, shook her head from side to side, and screamed at the same time.

"No. I can't," she said after a moment.

"What kind of dreaming do you do, Josefina?" I asked.

"The only kind I know," she snapped.

"I've told you how I do mine," I said. "Now tell me how you do yours."

"I close my eyes and I see this wall," she said. "It's like a wall of fog. Eligio waits for me there. He takes me through it and shows me things, I suppose. I don't know what we do, but we do things together. Then he brings me back to the wall and lets me go; and I come back and forget what I've seen."

"How did you happen to go with la Gorda?" I asked.

"Eligio told me to get her," she said. "The two of us waited for la Gorda, and when she went into her dreaming we snatched her and pulled her behind that wall. We've done that twice."

"How did you snatch her?" I asked,

"I don't know!" Josefina replied. "But I'll wait for you and when you do your dreaming, I'll snatch you and then you'll know."

"Can you snatch anyone?" I asked.

"Sure," she said, smiling. "But I don't do it because it's a waste. I snatched la Gorda because Eligio told me that he wanted to tell her something on account of her being more levelheaded than I am."

"Then Eligio must have told you the same things, Gorda," Nestor said with a firmness that was not familiar to me.

La Gorda made an unusual gesture of lowering her head, opening her mouth on the sides, shrugging her shoulders, and lifting her arms above her head.

"Josefina has just told you what happened," she said. "There is no way for me to remember. Eligio speaks with a different speed. He speaks but my body cannot understand him. No. No. My body cannot remember. That's what it is. I know he said that the Nagual here will remember, and will take us to where we have to go. He couldn't tell me more because there was so much to tell and so little time. He said that somebody, and I don't remember who, is waiting for me in particular."

"Is that all he said?" Nestor insisted.

"The second time I saw him, he told me that all of us will have to remember our left side, sooner or later, if we want to get to where we have to go. But he is the one who has to remember first."

She pointed to me and pushed me again as she had done earlier. The force of her shove sent me tumbling like a ball.

"What are you doing this for, Gorda?" I asked, a bit annoyed at her.

"I'm trying to help you remember," she said. "The Nagual Juan Matus told me that I should give you a push from time to time in order to jolt you."

La Gorda hugged me in a very abrupt movement.

"Help us, Nagual" she pleaded. "We are worse off than dead if you don't."

I was close to tears. Not because of their dilemma, but because I felt something stirring inside me. It was something that had been edging it's way out ever since we visited that town.

La Gorda's pleading was heartbreaking. I then had another attack of what seemed to be hyperventilation. A cold sweat enveloped me and then I got sick to my stomach. La Gorda tended to me with absolute kindness.

True to her practice of waiting before revealing a finding, la Gorda would not consider discussing our seeing together in Oaxaca. For days she remained aloof and determinedly uninterested. She would not even discuss my getting ill. Neither would the other women.

Don Juan used to stress the need for waiting for the most appropriate time to let go of something that we hold. I understood the mechanics of la Gorda's actions, although I found her insistence on waiting rather annoying and not in accord with our needs. I could not stay with them too long, so I demanded that all of us should get together and share everything we knew. She was inflexible.

"We have to wait," she said. "We have to give our bodies a chance to come up with a solution. Our task is the task of remembering, not with our minds but with our bodies. Everybody understands it like that."

She looked at me inquisitively. She seemed to be looking for a clue that would tell her that I too had understood the task. I admitted to being thoroughly mystified. Since I was the outsider, I was alone while they had one another for support.

"This is the silence of warriors," she said, laughing, and then added in a conciliatory tone, "This silence doesn't mean that we can't talk about something else."

"Maybe we should go back to our old discussion of losing the human form," I said.

There was a look of annoyance in her eyes. I explained at length that, especially when foreign concepts were involved, meaning had to be continually clarified for me.

"What exactly do you want to know?" she asked.

"Anything that you may want to tell me," I said.

"The Nagual told me that losing the human form brings freedom," she said. "I believe it. But I haven't felt that freedom, not yet."

There was a moment of silence. She was obviously assessing my reaction.

"What kind of freedom is it, Gorda?" I asked.

"The freedom to remember your self," she said. "The Nagual said that losing the human form is like a spiral. It gives you the freedom to remember and this in turn makes you even freer."

"Why haven't you felt that freedom yet?" I asked.

She clicked her tongue, and shrugged her shoulders. She seemed confused or reluctant to go on with our conversation.

"I'm tied to you," she said. "Until you lose your human form in order to remember, I won't be able to know what that freedom is. But perhaps you won't be able to lose your human form unless you remember first. We shouldn't be talking about this anyway. Why don't you go and talk to the Genaros?"

She sounded like a mother sending her child out to play, but I did not mind it in the least. From someone else I could easily have taken the same attitude as arrogance or contempt. I liked being with her. That was the difference.

I found Pablito, Nestor, and Benigno in Genaro's house playing a strange game. Pablito was dangling about four feet above the ground inside something that seemed to be a dark leather harness strapped to his chest under his armpits. The harness resembled a thick leather vest.

As I focused my attention on it, I noticed that Pablito was actually standing on some thick straps that looped down from the harness like stirrups. He was suspended in the center of the room by two ropes strung over a thick round transverse beam that supported the roof. Each rope was attached to the harness itself, over Pablito's shoulders, by a metal ring.

Nestor and Benigno each held a rope. They were standing, facing each other, holding Pablito in midair by the strength of their pull. Pablito was holding on with all his strength to two long thin poles that were planted in the ground and fitted comfortably in his clasped hands. Nestor was to Pablito's left and Benigno to his right.

The game seemed to be a three-sided tug-of-war; a ferocious battle between the ones who were tugging and the one who was suspended.

When I walked into the room, all I could hear was the heavy breathing of Nestor and Benigno. The muscles of their arms and necks were bulging with the strain of pulling.

Pablito kept an eye on both of them, focusing on each one, one at a time with a split-second glance. All three were so absorbed in their game that they did not even notice my presence, or if they did, they could not afford to break their concentration to greet me.

Nestor and Benigno stared at each other for ten to fifteen minutes in total silence. Then Nestor faked letting his rope go. Benigno did not fall for it, but Pablito did. Pablito tightened the grip of his left hand, and braced his feet on the poles in order to strengthen his hold. Benigno used the moment to strike, and gave a mighty tug at the precise instant that Pablito eased his grip.

Benigno's pull caught Pablito and Nestor by surprise. Benigno hung from the rope with all his weight. Nestor was outmaneuvered. Pablito fought desperately to balance himself. It was useless. Benigno won the round.

Pablito got out of the harness, and came to where I was. I asked him about their extraordinary game. He seemed somehow reluctant to talk. Nestor and Benigno joined us after putting their gear away. Nestor said that their game had been designed by Pablito, who found the structure in dreaming, and then constructed it as a game.

At first it was a device for tensing the muscles of two of them at the same time. They used to take turns at being hoisted. But then Benigno's dreaming gave them the entry into a game where all three of them tensed their muscles and sharpened their visual prowess by remaining in a state of alertness; sometimes for hours.

"Benigno thinks now that it is helping our bodies to remember," Nestor went on. "La Gorda, for instance, plays it in a weird way. She wins every time, no matter what position she plays. Benigno thinks that's because her body remembers."

I asked them if they also had the silence rule. They laughed. Pablito said that la Gorda wanted more than anything else to be like the Nagual Juan Matus. She deliberately imitated him up to the most absurd detail.

"Do you mean we can talk about what happened the other night?" I asked, almost bewildered, since la Gorda had been so emphatically against it.

"We don't care," Pablito said. "You're the Nagual!"

"Benigno here remembered something real, real weird," Nestor said without looking at me.

"I think it was a mixed-up dream, myself," Benigno said, "but Nestor thinks it wasn't."

I waited impatiently. With a movement of my head, I urged them to go on.

"The other day he remembered you teaching him how to look for tracks in soft dirt," Nestor said.

"It must have been a dream," I said.

I wanted to laugh at the absurdity, but all three of them looked at me with pleading eyes.

"It's absurd," I said.

"Anyway, I better tell you now that I have a similar recollection," Nestor said. "You took me to some rocks and showed me how to hide. Mine was not a mixed-up dream. I was awake. I was walking with Benigno one day, looking for plants, and suddenly I remembered you teaching me. So I hid as you taught me, and scared Benigno out of his wits."

"I taught you! How could that be? When?" I asked.

I was beginning to get nervous. They did not seem to be joking.

"When? That's the point," Nestor said. "We can't figure out when. But Benigno and I know it was you."

I felt heavy; oppressed. My breathing became difficult. I feared I was going to get ill again. I decided right then to tell them about what la Gorda and I had 'seen' together. Talking about it relaxed me. At the end of my recounting I was again in control of myself.

"The Nagual Juan Matus left us a little bit open," Nestor said. "All of us can see a little. We see holes in people who have had children and also, from time to time, we see a little glow in people. Since you don't see at all, it looks like the Nagual left you completely closed so that you will open yourself from within. Now you've helped la Gorda and she either sees from within or she's merely riding on your back."

I told them that what had happened in Oaxaca may have been a fluke.

Pablito thought that we should go to Genaro's favorite rock and sit there with our heads together. The other two found his idea brilliant. I had no objections. Although we sat there for a long time, nothing happened. We did get very relaxed, however.

While we were still sitting on the rock I told them about the two men la Gorda had believed to be don Juan and don Ge-naro. They slid down, and practically dragged me back to la Gorda's house. Nestor was the most agitated. He was almost incoherent. All I got out of them was that they had been waiting for a sign of that nature.

La Gorda was waiting for us at the door. She knew what I had told them.

"I just wanted to give my body time," she said before we had said anything. "I have to be dead sure, which I am. It was the Nagual and Genaro."

"What's in those shacks?" Nestor asked.

"They didn't go inside them," la Gorda said. "They walked away toward the open fields; toward the east. In the direction of this town."

She seemed bent on appeasing them. She asked them to stay. They did not want to. They excused themselves and left. I was sure that they felt ill at ease in her presence.

She seemed to be very angry. I rather enjoyed her explosions of temper, and this was quite contrary to my normal reactions. I had always felt edgy in the presence of anyone who was upset, with the mysterious exception of la Gorda.

During the early hours of the evening all of us congregated in la Gorda's room. All of them seemed preoccupied. They sat in silence, staring at the floor. La Gorda tried to start a conversation. She said that she had not been idle, that she had put two and two together, and had come up with some solutions.

"This is not a matter of putting two and two together," Nestor said. "This is a task of remembering with the body."

It seemed that they had talked about it among themselves, judging by the nods of agreement Nestor had from the others. That left la Gorda and myself as the outsiders.

"Lydia also remembers something," Nestor went on. "She thought it was her stupidity, but upon hearing what I've remembered she told us that this Nagual here took her to a curer, and left her there to have her eyes cured."

La Gorda and I turned to Lydia. She lowered her head as if embarrassed. She mumbled. The memory seemed too painful for her. She said that when don Juan first found her, her eyes were infected and she could not see. Someone drove her in a car over a great distance to the curer who healed her.

She had always been convinced that don Juan had done that, but upon hearing my voice she realized that it was I who had taken her there. The incongruity of such a memory threw her into agony from the first day she met me.

"My ears don't lie to me," Lydia added after a long silence. "It was you who took me there."

"Impossible! Impossible!" I yelled.

My body began to shake, out of control. I had a sense of duality. Perhaps what I call my rational self, incapable of controlling the rest of me, took the seat of a spectator. Some part of me was watching as another part of me shook.

## 4. Crossing the Boundaries of Affection

"What's happening to us, Gorda?" I asked after the others had gone home.

"Our bodies are remembering, but I just can't figure out what," she said.

"Do you believe the memories of Lydia, Nestor, and Benigno?"

"Sure. They're very serious people. They don't just say things like that for the hell of it."

"But what they say is impossible. You believe me, don't you, Gorda?"

"I believe that you don't remember, but then..."

She did not finish. She came to my side and began to whisper in my ear. She said that there was something that the Nagual Juan Matus had made her promise to keep to herself until the time was right; a trump card to be used only when there was no other way out.

She added in a dramatic whisper that the Nagual had foreseen their new living arrangement, which was the result of my taking Josefina to Tula to be with Pablito. She said that there was a faint chance that we might succeed as a group if we followed the natural order of that organization. La Gorda explained that since we were divided into couples, we formed a living organism. We were a snake; a rattlesnake.

The snake had four sections and was divided, into two longitudinal halves, male and female. She said that she and I made up the first section of the snake, the head. It was a cold, calculating, poisonous head. The second section, formed by Nestor and Lydia, was the firm and fair heart of the snake. The third was the belly-a shifty, moody, untrustworthy belly made up by Pablito and Josefina. And the fourth section, the tail, where the rattle was located, was formed by the couple who in real life could rattle on in their Tzotzil language for hours on end, Benigno and Rosa.

La Gorda straightened herself up from the position she had adopted to whisper in my ear. She smiled at me, and patted me on the back.

"Eligio said one word that finally came back to me," she went on. "Josefina agrees with me that he said the word "trail" over and over. We are going to go on a trail!"

Without giving me a chance to ask her any questions, she said that she was going to sleep for a while, and then assemble everyone to go on a trip.

We started out before midnight, hiking in bright moonlight. Everyone of the others had been reluctant to go at first, but la Gorda very skillfully sketched out for them don Juan's alleged description of the snake.

Before we started, Lydia suggested that we provide ourselves with supplies in case the trip turned out to be a long one. La Gorda dismissed her suggestion on the grounds that we had no idea about the nature of the trip. She said that the Nagual Juan Matus had once pointed out to her the beginning of a pathway, and said that at the right opportunity we should place ourselves on that spot and let the power of the trail reveal itself to us. La Gorda added that it was not an ordinary goats' path but a natural line on the earth which the Nagual had said would give us strength and knowledge if we could follow it and become one with it.

We moved under mixed leadership. La Gorda supplied the impetus and Nestor knew the actual terrain. She led us to a place in the mountains. Nestor took over then and located a pathway. Our formation was evident, the head taking the lead and the others arranging themselves according to the anatomical model of a snake: heart, intestines, and tail. The men were to the right of the women. Each couple was five feet behind the one in front of them.

We hiked as quickly and as quietly as we could. There were dogs barking for a time. As we got higher into the mountains there was only the sound of crickets. We walked for a long while.

All of a sudden la Gorda stopped and grabbed my arm. She pointed ahead of us. Twenty or thirty yards away, right in the middle of the trail, there was the bulky silhouette of an enormous man over seven feet tall. He was blocking our way. We grouped together in a tight bunch. Our eyes were fixed on the dark shape. He did not move. After a while, Nestor alone advanced a few steps toward him. Only then did the figure move. He came toward us. Gigantic as he was, he moved nimbly.

Nestor came back running. The moment he joined us, the man stopped. Boldly, la Gorda took a step toward him. The man took a step toward us. It was evident that if we kept on moving forward, we were going to clash with the giant. We were no match for whatever it was. Without waiting to prove it, I took the initiative and pulled everyone back and quickly steered them away from that place.

We walked back to la Gorda's house in total silence. It took us hours to get there. We were utterly exhausted. When we were safely sitting in her room, la Gorda spoke.

"We are doomed," she said to me. "You didn't want us to move on. That thing we saw on the trail was one of your allies, wasn't it? They come out of their hiding place when you pull them out."

I did not answer. There was no point in protesting. I remembered the countless times I had believed that don Juan and don Genaro were in cahoots with each other. I thought that while don Juan talked to me in the darkness, don Genaro would put on a disguise in order to scare me. Don Juan would insist that it was an ally.

The idea that there were allies or entities at large that escape our everyday attention had been too farfetched for me. But then I had lived to find out that the allies of don Juan's description existed in fact. There were, as he had said, entities at large in the world.

In an authoritarian outburst, rare to me in my everyday life, I stood up and told la Gorda and the rest of them that I had a proposition for them and they could take it or leave it. If they were ready to move out of there, I was willing to take the responsibility of taking them somewhere else. If they were not ready, I would feel exonerated [* exonerated- freed from any question of guilt] from any further commitment to them.

I felt a surge of optimism and certainty. None of them said anything. They looked at me silently, as if they were internally assessing my statements.

"How long would it take you to get your gear?" I asked.

"We have no gear," la Gorda said. "We'll go as we are. And we can go right this minute if it is necessary. But if we can wait three more days, everything will be better for us."

"What about the houses that you have?" I asked.

"Soledad will take care of that," she said.

That was the first time dona Soledad's name had been mentioned since I last saw her. I was so intrigued that I momentarily forgot the drama of the moment. I sat down.

La Gorda was hesitant to answer my questions about dona Soledad. Nestor took over and said that dona Soledad was around but that none of them knew much about her activities. She came and went without giving anyone notice; the agreement between them being that they would look after her house and vice versa. Dona Soledad knew that they had to leave sooner or later, and she would assume the responsibility of doing whatever was necessary to dispose of their property.

"How will you let her know?" I asked.

"That's la Gorda's department," Nestor said. "We don't know where she is."

"Where is dona Soledad, Gorda?" I asked.

"How in the hell would I know?" la Gorda snapped at me.

"But you're the one who calls her," Nestor said.

La Gorda looked at me. It was a casual look, yet it gave me a shiver. I recognized that look, but from where? The depths of my body stirred. My solar plexus had a solidity I had never felt before. My diaphragm seemed to be pushing up on it's own. I was pondering whether I should lie down when suddenly I found myself standing.

"La Gorda doesn't know," I said. "Only I know where she is."

Everyone was shocked- I perhaps more than anyone else. I had made the statement with no rational foundation whatsoever. At the moment I was voicing it, nevertheless, I had had the perfect conviction that I knew where she was. It was like a flash that crossed my consciousness. I saw a mountainous area with very rugged, arid peaks; a scraggy terrain, desolate and cold.

As soon as I had spoken, my next conscious thought was that I must have seen that landscape in a movie and that the pressure of being with these people was causing me to have a breakdown.

I apologized to them for mystifying them in such a blatant although unintentional manner. I sat down again.

"You mean you don't know why you said that?" Nestor asked me.

He had chosen his words carefully. The natural thing to say, at least for me, would have been, "So you really don't know where she is." I told them that something unknown had come upon me. I described the terrain I had seen, and the certainty I had had that dona Soledad was there.

"That happens to us quite often," Nestor said.

I turned to la Gorda and she nodded her head. I asked for an explanation.

"These crazy mixed-up things keep coming to our minds," la Gorda said. "Ask Lydia, or Rosa, or Josefina."

Since they had entered into their new living arrangement Lydia, Rosa, and Josefina had not said much to me. They had confined themselves to greetings and casual comments about food or the weather.

Lydia avoided my eyes. She mumbled that she thought at times that she remembered other things.

"Sometimes I can really hate you," she said to me. "I think you are pretending to be stupid. Then I remember that you were very ill because of us. Was it you?"

"Of course it was him," Rosa said. "I too remember things. I remember a lady who was kind to me. She taught me how to keep myself clean, and this Nagual cut my hair for the first time while the lady held me because I was scared. That lady loved me. She hugged me all the time. She was very tall. I remember my face was on her bosom when she used to hug me. She was the only person who ever cared for me. I would've gladly gone to my death for her."

"Who was that lady, Rosa?" la Gorda asked with bated breath.

Rosa pointed to me with a movement of her chin, a gesture heavy with dejection and contempt.

"He knows," she said.

All of them stared at me, waiting for an answer. I became angry and yelled at Rosa that she had no business making statements that were really accusations. I was not in any way lying to them.

Rosa was not flustered by my outburst. She calmly explained that she remembered the lady telling her that I would come back some day, after I had recovered from my illness. Rosa understood that the lady was taking care of me; nursing me back to health. Therefore, I had to know who she was and where she was since I seemed to have recovered.

"What kind of illness did I have, Rosa?" I asked.

"You got ill because you couldn't hold your world," she said with utter conviction. "Someone told me, I think a very long time ago, that you were not made for us, just like Eligio told la Gorda in dreaming. You left us because of it and Lydia never forgave you. She'll hate you beyond this world."

Lydia protested that her feelings for me had nothing to do with what Rosa was saying. She was merely short-tempered and easily got angry at my stupidities.

I asked Josefina if she also remembered me.

"I sure do," she said with a grin. "But you know me, I'm crazy. You can't trust me. I'm not dependable."

La Gorda insisted on hearing what Josefina remembered. Josefina was set not to say anything and they argued back and forth. Finally Josefina spoke to me.

"What's the use of all this talk about remembering? It's just talk," she said. "And it isn't worth a fig."

Josefina seemed to have scored a point with all of us. There was no more to be said. They were getting up to leave after having sat in polite silence for a few minutes.

"I remember you bought me beautiful clothes," Josefina suddenly said to me. "Don't you remember when I fell down the stairs in one store? I nearly broke my leg and you had to carry me out."

Everybody sat down again and kept their eyes fixed on Josefina.

"I also remember a crazy woman," she went on. "She wanted to beat me and used to chase me all over the place until you got angry and stopped her."

I felt exasperated. Everyone seemed to be hanging on Josefina's words when she herself had told us not to trust her because she was crazy. She was right. Her remembering was sheer aberration [* aberration- condition markedly different from the norm] to me.

"I know why you got ill, too," she went on. "I was there. But I can't remember where. They took you beyond that wall of fog to find this stupid Gorda. I suppose she must have gotten lost. You couldn't make it back. When they brought you out you were almost dead."

The silence that followed her revelations was oppressive. I was afraid to ask anything.

"I can't remember why on earth she went in there, or who brought you back," Josefina continued. "I do remember that you were ill, and didn't recognize me any more. This stupid Gorda swears that she didn't know you when you first came to this house a few months ago. I knew you right away. I remembered you were the Nagual that got ill. You want to know something? I think these women are just indulging. And so are the men, especially that stupid Pablito. They've got to remember, they were there, too."

"Can you remember where we were?" I asked.

"No. I can't," Josefina said. "I'll know it if you take me there, though. When we all were there, they used to call us the drunkards because we were groggy. I was the least dizzy of all, so I remember pretty well."

"Who called us drunkards?" I asked.

"Not you, just us," Josefina replied. "I don't know who. The Nagual Juan Matus, I suppose."

I looked at them and each one of them avoided my eyes.

"We are coming to the end," Nestor muttered, as if talking to himself. "Our ending is staring us in the eye."

He seemed to be on the verge of tears.

"I should be glad and proud that we have arrived at the end," he went on. "Yet I'm sad. Can you explain that, Nagual?"

Suddenly all of them were sad. Even defiant Lydia was sad.

"What's wrong with all of you?" I asked in a convivial tone. "What ending are you talking about?"

"I think everyone knows what ending it is," Nestor said. "Lately, I've been having strange feelings. Something is calling us. And we don't let go as we should. We cling."

Pablito had a true moment of gallantry and said that la Gorda was the only one among them who did not cling to anything. The rest of them, he assured me, were nearly hopeless egotists.

"The Nagual Juan Matus said that when it's time to go, we will have a sign," Nestor said. "Something we truly like will come forth and take us."

"He said it doesn't have to be something great," Benigno added. "Anything we like will do."

"For me the sign will come in the form of the lead soldiers I never had," Nestor said to me. "A row of Hussars on horseback will come to take me. What will it be for you?"

I remembered don Juan telling me once that death might be behind anything imaginable, even behind a dot on my writing pad. He gave me then the definitive metaphor of my death.

I had told him that once while walking on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles I had heard the sound of a trumpet playing an old, idiotic popular tune. The music was coming from a record shop across the street.

Never had I heard a more beautiful sound. I became enraptured by it. I had to sit down on the curb. The limpid brass sound of that trumpet was going directly to my brain. I felt it just above my right temple. It soothed me until I was drunk with it.

When it concluded, I knew that there would be no way of ever repeating that experience, and I had enough detachment not to rush into the store and buy the record and a stereo set to play it on.

Don Juan said that it had been a sign given to me by the powers that rule the destiny of men. When the time comes for me to leave the world, in whatever form, I will hear the same sound of that trumpet, the same idiotic tune, the same peerless trumpeter.

The next day was a frantic day for them. They seemed to have endless things to do. La Gorda said that all their chores were personal and had to be performed by each one of them without any help.

I welcomed being alone. I too had things to work out. I drove to the nearby town that had disturbed me so thoroughly. I went directly to the house that had held such fascination for la Gorda and me.

I knocked on the door. A lady answered. I made up a story that I had lived in that house as a child, and wanted to look at it again. She was a very gracious woman. She let me go through the house, apologizing profusely for a nonexistent disorder.

There was a wealth of hidden memories in that house. They were there, and I could feel them, but I could not remember anything.

The following day la Gorda left at dawn. I expected her to be gone all day but she came back at noon. She seemed very upset.

"Soledad has come back and wants to see you," she said flatly.

Without any word of explanation, she took me to dona Soledad's house. Dona Soledad was standing by the door. She looked younger and stronger than the last time I had seen her. She bore only the slightest resemblance to the lady I had known years before.

La Gorda seemed to be on the verge of crying. The tension we were going through made her mood perfectly understandable to me. She left without saying a word.

Dona Soledad said that she had only a little time to talk to me and that she was going to use every minute of it. She was strangely deferential. [* deferential- showing courteous regard for people's feelings] There was a tone of politeness in every word she said.

I made a gesture to interrupt her to ask a question. I wanted to know where she had been. She rebuffed me in a most delicate manner. She said that she had chosen her words carefully and that the lack of time would permit her only to say what was essential.

She peered into my eyes for a moment that seemed unnaturally long. That annoyed me. She could have talked to me and answered some questions in the same length of time. She broke her silence and spoke what I thought were absurdities. She said that she had attacked me as I had requested her to, the day we crossed the parallel lines for the first time, and that she only hoped her attack had been effective and served it's purpose.

I wanted to shout that I had never asked her to do anything of the sort. I did not know about parallel lines and what she was saying was nonsense. She pressed my lips with her hand. I recoiled automatically. She seemed sad. She said that there was no way for us to talk because at that moment we were on two parallel lines and neither of us had the energy to cross over. Only her eyes could tell me her mood.

For no reason, I began to feel relaxed. Something inside me felt at ease. I noticed that tears were rolling down my cheeks. And then a most incredible sensation took possession of me for a moment; a short moment, but long enough to jolt the foundations of my consciousness, or of my person, or of what I think and feel is myself.

During that brief moment I knew that we were very close to each other in purpose and temperament. Our circumstances were alike. I wanted to acknowledge to her that it had been an arduous struggle, but the struggle was not over yet. It would never be over. She was saying goodbye because being the impeccable warrior she was, she knew that our paths would never cross again. We had come to the end of a trail.

A lost wave of affiliation, of kinship, burst out from some unimaginable dark corner of myself. That flash was like an electric charge in my body. I embraced her. My mouth was moving, saying things that had no meaning to me. Her eyes lit up. She was also saying something I could not understand. The only sensation that was clear to me, that I had crossed the parallel lines, had no pragmatic significance. There was a welled-up anguish inside me pushing outward. Some inexplicable force was splitting me apart. I could not breathe and everything went black.

I felt someone moving me, shaking me gently. La Gorda's face came into focus. I was lying in dona Soledad's bed and la Gorda was sitting by my side. We were alone.

"Where is she?" I asked.

"She's gone," la Gorda replied.

I wanted to tell la Gorda everything. She stopped me. She opened the door. All the apprentices were outside waiting for me. They had put on their raunchiest clothes. La Gorda explained that they had torn up everything they had. It was late afternoon. I had been asleep for hours. Without talking, we walked to la Gorda's house, where I had my car parked. They crammed inside like children going on a Sunday drive.

Before I got into the car, I stood gazing at the valley. My body rotated slowly and made a complete circle, as if it had a volition and purpose of it's own. I felt I was capturing the essence of that place. I wanted to keep it with me because I knew unequivocally that never in this life would I see it again.

The others must have done that already. They were free of melancholy. They were laughing; teasing one another.

I started the car and drove away. When we reached the last bend in the road the sun was setting, and la Gorda yelled at me to stop. She got out and ran to a small hill at the side of the road. She climbed it and took a last look at her valley. She extended her arms toward it and breathed it in.

The ride down those mountains was strangely short and thoroughly uneventful. Everybody was quiet. I tried to get la Gorda into a conversation, but she flatly refused. She said that the mountains, being possessive, claimed ownership of them, and that if they did not save their energy, the mountains would never let them go.

Once we got to the lowlands they became more animated, especially la Gorda. She seemed to be bubbling with energy. She even volunteered information without any coaxing on my part. One of her statements was that the Nagual Juan Matus had told her, and Soledad had confirmed, that there was another side to us. Upon hearing it, the rest of them joined in with questions and comments. They were baffled by their strange memories of events that could not logically have taken place. Since some of them had first met me only months before, remembering me in the remote past was something beyond the bounds of their reason.

I told them then about my meeting with dona Soledad. I described my feeling of having known her intimately before, and my sense of having unmistakably crossed what she called the parallel lines. They reacted with confusion to my statement. It seemed that they had heard the term before but I was not sure they all understood what it meant. For me it was a metaphor. I could not vouch that it was the same for them.

When we were coming into the city of Oaxaca, they expressed the desire to visit the place where la Gorda had said don Juan and don Genaro disappeared. I drove directly to the spot. They rushed out of the car and seemed to be orienting themselves, sniffing at something, looking for clues. La Gorda pointed in the direction she thought they had gone.

"You've made a terrible mistake, Gorda," Nestor said loudly. "That's not the east, that's the north."

La Gorda protested and defended her opinion. The women backed her, and so did Pablito. Benigno was noncommittal. He kept on looking at me as if I were going to furnish the answer, which I did. I referred to a map of the city of Oaxaca that I had in the car. The direction la Gorda was pointing was indeed north.

Nestor remarked that he had felt all along that their departure from their town was not premature or forced in any way. The timing was right. The others had not, and their hesitation arose from la Gorda's misjudgment. They had believed, as she herself had, that the Nagual had pointed toward their hometown, meaning that they had to stay put. I admitted, as an afterthought, that in the final analysis I was the one to blame because, although I had had the map, I had failed to use it at the time.

I then mentioned that I had forgotten to tell them that one of the men, the one I had thought for a moment was don Genaro, had beckoned us with a movement of his head. La Gorda's eyes widened with genuine surprise, or even alarm. She had not detected the gesture, she said. The beckoning had been only for me.

"That's it!" Nestor exclaimed. "Our fates are sealed!"

He turned to address the others. All of them were talking at once. He made frantic gestures with his hands to calm them.

"I only hope that all of you did whatever you had to do as if you were never coming back," he said. "Because we are never going back."

"Are you telling us the truth?" Lydia asked me with a fierce look in her eyes, as the others peered expectantly at me.

I assured them that I had no reason to make it up. The fact that I saw that man gesturing to me with his head had no significance whatsoever for me. Besides, I was not even convinced that those men were don Juan and don Genaro.

"You're very crafty," Lydia said. "You may just be telling us this so that we will follow you meekly."

"Now, wait a minute," la Gorda said. "This Nagual may be as crafty as you like, but he'd never do anything like that."

They all began talking at once. I tried to mediate and had to shout over their voices that what I had seen did not make any difference anyway.

Nestor very politely explained that Genaro had told them that when the time came for them to leave their valley he would somehow let them know with a movement of his head. They quieted down when I said that if their fates were sealed by that event, so was mine. All of us were going north.

Nestor then led us to a place of lodging, a boardinghouse where he stayed when doing business in the city. Their spirits were high, in fact too high for my comfort. Even Lydia embraced me, apologizing for being so difficult. She explained that she had believed la Gorda and therefore had not bothered to cut her ties effectively. Josefina and Rosa were ebullient [* ebullient- joyously unrestrained] and patted me on the back over and over. I wanted to talk with la Gorda. I needed to discuss our course of action. But there was no way to be alone with her that night.

Nestor, Pablito, and Benigno left in the early morning to do some errands. Lydia, Rosa, and Josefina also went out to go shopping. La Gorda requested that I help her buy her new clothes. She wanted me to pick out one dress for her, the perfect one to give her the self-confidence she needed to be a fluid warrior. I not only found a dress but an entire outfit, shoes, nylons, and lingerie.

I took her for a stroll. We meandered in the center of town like two tourists, staring at the Indians in their regional garments. Being a formless warrior, she was already perfectly at ease in her elegant outfit. She looked ravishing. It was as if she had never dressed any other way. It was I who could not get used to it.

The questions that I wanted to ask la Gorda, which should have poured out of me, were impossible to formulate. I had no idea what to ask her. I told her in true seriousness that her new appearance was affecting me. Very soberly, she said that the crossing of boundaries was what had affected me.

"We crossed some boundaries last night," she said. "Soledad told me what to expect, so I was prepared. But you were not."

She began to explain softly and slowly that we had crossed some boundaries of affection the night before. She was enunciating every syllable as if she were talking to a child or a foreigner. But I could not concentrate. We went back to our lodgings. I needed to rest, yet I ended up going out again. Lydia, Rosa, and Josefina had not been able to find anything and wanted something like la Gorda's outfit.

By midafternoon I was back in the boardinghouse admiring the little sisters. Rosa had difficulty walking with high-heeled shoes. We were joking about her feet when the door opened slowly and Nestor made a dramatic entrance. He was wearing a tailored dark-blue suit, light-pink shirt, and blue necktie. His hair was neatly combed and a bit fluffy, as if it had been blown dry. He looked at the women and the women looked at him. Pablito came in, followed by Benigno. Both were dashing. Their shoes were brand new and their suits looked custom made.

I could not get over everyone's adaptation to city clothes. They reminded me so much of don Juan. I was perhaps as shocked seeing the three Genaros in city clothes as I had been when I saw don Juan wearing a suit, yet I accepted their change instantly. On the other hand, while I was not surprised at the women's transformation, for some reason I could not get accustomed to it.

I thought that the Genaros must have had a streak of sorcerers' luck in order to find such perfect fits. They laughed when they heard me raving about their luck. Nestor said that a tailor had made their suits months before.

"We each have another suit," he said to me. "We even have leather suitcases. We knew our time in these mountains was up. We are ready to go! Of course, you first have to tell us where. And also how long we are going to stay here."

He explained that he had old business accounts he had to close and needed time. La Gorda stepped in and with great certainty and authority stated that that night we were going to go as far away as power permitted. Consequently they had until the end of the day to settle their business. Nestor and Pablito hesitated by the door. They looked at me, waiting for confirmation. I thought the least I could do was to be honest with them, but la Gorda interrupted me just as I was about to say that I was in limbo as to what exactly we were going to do.

"We will meet at the Nagual's bench at dusk," she said. "We'll leave from there. We should do whatever we have to or want to until then, knowing that never again in this life will we be back."

La Gorda and I were alone after everybody left. In an abrupt and clumsy movement, she sat on my lap. She was so light I could make her thin body shake by contracting the muscles of my calves. Her hair had a peculiar perfume. I joked that the smell was unbearable.

She was laughing and shaking when out of nowhere a feeling came to me -a memory? All of a sudden I had another Gorda on my lap, fat, twice the size of the Gorda I knew. Her face was round and I was teasing her about the perfume in her hair. I had the sensation that I was taking care of her.

The impact of that spurious [* spurious- plausible but false] memory made me stand up. La Gorda fell noisily to the floor. I described what I had 'remembered'. I told her that I had seen her as a fat woman only once, and so briefly that I had no idea of her features, and yet I had just had a vision of her face when she was fat.

She did not make any comments. She took off her clothes and put on her old dress again.

"I am not yet ready for it," she said, pointing at her new outfit. "We still have one more thing to do before we are free. According to the Nagual Juan Matus' instructions, all of us must sit together on a power spot of his choice."

"Where's that spot?"

"Somewhere in the mountains around here. It's like a door. The Nagual told me that there was a natural crack on that spot. He said that certain power spots are holes in this world. If you are formless you can go through one of those holes into the unknown; into another world. That world and this world we live in are on two parallel lines.

Chances are that all of us have been taken across those lines at one time or another, but we don't remember. Eligio is in that other world. Sometimes we reach it through dreaming. Josefina, of course, is the best dreamer among us. She crosses those lines every day, but being crazy makes her indifferent, even dumb, so Eligio helped me to cross those lines thinking I was more intelligent, and I turned out to be just as dumb.

Eligio wants us to remember our left side. Soledad told me that the left side is the parallel line to the one we are living in now. So if he wants us to remember it, we must have been there. And not in dreaming, either. That's why all of us remember weird things now and then."

Her conclusions were logical given the premises she was working with. I knew what she was talking about. Those occasional unsolicited memories reeked of the reality of everyday life and yet we could find no time sequence for them; no opening in the continuum of our lives where we could fit them.

La Gorda reclined on the bed. There was a worried look in her eyes.

"What bothers me is what to do to find that power spot," she said. "Without it there is no possible journey for us."

"What worries me is where I'm going to take all of you and what I'm going to do with you," I said.

"Soledad told me that we will go as far north as the border," la Gorda said. "Some of us even further north perhaps. But you won't go all the way through with us. You have another fate."

La Gorda was pensive [* pensive- persistently or morbidly thoughtfu] for a moment. She frowned with the apparent effort of arranging her thoughts.

"Soledad said that you will take me to fulfill my destiny," la Gorda said. "I am the only one of us who is in your charge."

Alarm must have been written all over my face. She smiled.

"Soledad also told me that you are plugged up," la Gorda went on. "You have moments, though, when you are a Nagual. The rest of the time, Soledad says, you are like a crazy man who is lucid [* lucid- transparently clear in language] only for a few moments, and then reverts back to his madness."

Dona Soledad had used an appropriate image to describe me; one I could understand. I must have had a moment of lucidity for her when I knew I had crossed the parallel lines. That same moment, by my standards, was the most incongruous of all. Dona Soledad and I were certainly on two different lines of thought.

"What else did she tell you?" I asked.

"She told me I should force myself to remember," la Gorda said. "She exhausted herself trying to bring out my memory. That was why she couldn't deal with you."

La Gorda got up. She was ready to leave. I took her for a walk around the city. She seemed very happy. She went from place to place watching everything; feasting her eyes on the world.

Don Juan had given me that image. He had said that a warrior knows that he is waiting, and knows also what he is waiting for; and while he waits, he feasts his eyes on the world. For him the ultimate accomplishment of a warrior was joy. That day in Oaxaca la Gorda was following don Juan's teachings to the letter.

In the late afternoon before dusk, we sat down on don Juan's bench. Benigno, Pablito, and Josefina showed up first. After a few minutes the other three joined us. Pablito sat down between Josefina and Lydia and put his arms around them. They had changed back into their old clothes. La Gorda stood up and began to tell them about the power spot.

Nestor laughed at her and the rest of them joined him.

"Never again will you get us to fall for your bossiness," Nestor said. "We are free of you. We crossed the boundaries last night."

La Gorda was unruffled but the others were angry. I had to intervene. I said loudly that I wanted to know more about the boundaries we had crossed the night before. Nestor explained that that pertained only to them. La Gorda disagreed. They seemed to be on the verge of fighting. I pulled Nestor to the side and ordered him to tell me about the boundaries.

"Our feelings make boundaries around anything," he said. "The more we love, the stronger the boundary is. In this case we loved our home. Before we left it, we had to lift up our feelings. Our feelings for our home went up to the top of the mountains to the west from our valley. That was the boundary and when we crossed the top of those mountains, knowing that we'll never be back, we broke it."

"But I also knew that I'd never be back," I said.

"You didn't love those mountains the way we did," Nestor replied.

"That remains to be seen," la Gorda said cryptically.

"We were under her influence," Pablito said, standing up and pointing to la Gorda. "She had us by the napes of our necks. Now I see how stupid we've been on account of her. We can't cry over spilled milk, but we'll never fall for it again."

Lydia and Josefina joined Nestor and Pablito. Benigno and Rosa looked on as if the struggle did not concern them any more.

I had right then another moment of certainty and authoritarian behavior. I stood up, and without any conscious volition announced that I was taking charge, and that I relieved la Gorda of any further obligation to make comments or to present her ideas as the only solution. When I finished talking, I was shocked at my boldness. Everyone including la Gorda was delighted.

The force behind my explosion had been first a physical sensation that my sinuses were opening, and second the certainty that I knew what don Juan had meant, and exactly where the place was that we had to visit before we could be free. As my sinuses opened, I had had a vision of the house that had intrigued me.

I told them where we had to go. They accepted my directions without any arguments or even comments. We checked out of the boardinghouse and went to eat dinner. Afterward we strolled around the plaza until about eleven o'clock. I brought the car around, they piled noisily inside, and we were off. La Gorda remained awake to keep me company while the rest of them went to sleep, and then Nestor drove while la Gorda and I slept.

## 5. A Horde of Angry Sorcerers

We were in the town at the crack of dawn. At that point I took the wheel and drove toward the house. A couple of blocks before we got there, la Gorda asked me to stop. She got out of the car and began to walk on the high sidewalk. One by one, all of them got out. They followed la Gorda. Pablito came to my side and said that I should park on the plaza which was a block away. I did that.

The moment I saw la Gorda turning the corner I knew that something was wrong with her. She was extraordinarily pale. She came to me and said in a whisper that she was going to go to hear early mass. Lydia also wanted to do that. Both of them walked across the plaza and went inside the church.

Pablito, Nestor, and Benigno were as somber as I had ever seen them. Rosa was frightened; her mouth open; her eyes fixed, unblinking, looking in the direction of the house. Only Josefina was beaming. She gave me a buddy-buddy slap on the back.

"You've done it, you son of a gun!" she exclaimed. "You've knocked the tar out of these sons of bitches."

She laughed until she was nearly out of breath.

"Is this the place, Josefina?" I asked.

"It surely is," she said. "La Gorda used to go to church all the time. She was a real churchgoer at that time."

"Do you remember that house over there?" I asked, pointing to it.

"That's Silvio Manuel's house," she said.

All of us jumped upon hearing the name. I felt something similar to a mild shock of electric current going through my knees. The name was definitely not familiar to me, yet my body jumped upon hearing it. Silvio Manuel was such a rare name; so liquid a sound.

The three Genaros and Rosa were as perturbed as I was. I noticed that they were pale. Judging by what I felt, I must have been just as pale as they were.

"Who is Silvio Manuel?" I finally managed to ask Josefina.

"Now you got me," she said. "I don't know."

She reiterated that she was crazy and nothing that she said should be taken seriously. Nestor begged her to tell us whatever she remembered.

Josefina tried to think but she was not the person to perform well under pressure. I knew that she would do better if no one asked her. I proposed that we look for a bakery or a place to eat.

"They didn't let me do much in that house, that's what I remember," Josefina said all of a sudden.

She turned around as if looking for something, or as if she were orienting herself.

"Something is missing here!" she exclaimed. "This is not quite the way it used to be."

I attempted to help her by asking questions that I deemed appropriate, such as whether houses were missing or had been painted, or new ones built. But Josefina could not figure out how it was different.

We walked to the bakery and bought sweet rolls. As we were heading back to the plaza to wait for la Gorda and Lydia, Josefina suddenly hit her forehead as if an idea had just struck her.

"I know what's missing!" she shouted. "That stupid wall of fog! It used to be here then. It's gone now."

All of us spoke at once, asking her about the wall, but Josefina went on talking undisturbed, as if we were not there.

"It was a wall of fog that went all the way up to the sky," she said. "It was right here. Every time I turned my head, there it was. It drove me crazy. That's right, darn it. I wasn't nuts until I was driven crazy by that wall. I saw it with my eyes closed or with my eyes open. I thought that wall was after me."

For a moment Josefina lost her natural vivaciousness. A desperate look appeared in her eyes. I had seen that look in people who were going through a psychotic episode. I hurriedly suggested that she eat her sweet roll. She calmed down immediately and began to eat it.

"What do you think of all this, Nestor?" I asked.

"I'm scared," he said softly.

"Do you remember anything?" I asked him.

He shook his head negatively. I questioned Pablito and Benigno with a movement of my brows. They also shook their heads to say no.

"How about you, Rosa?" I asked.

Rosa jumped when she heard me addressing her. She seemed to have lost her speech. She held a sweet roll in her hand and stared at it, seemingly undecided as to what to do with it.

"Of course she remembers," Josefina said, laughing, "but she's frightened to death. Can't you see that piss is even coming out her ears?"

Josefina seemed to think her statement was the ultimate joke. She doubled up laughing and dropped her roll on the ground. She picked it up, dusted it off, and ate it.

"Crazy people eat anything," she said, slapping me on the back.

Nestor and Benigno seemed uncomfortable with Josefina's antics. Pablito was delighted. There was a look of admiration in his eyes. He shook his head and clicked his tongue as if he could not believe such grace.

"Let's go to the house," Josefina urged us. "I'll tell you all kinds of things there."

I said that we should wait for la Gorda and Lydia. Besides, it was still too early to bother the charming lady who lived there. Pablito said that in the course of his carpentry business he had been in the town and knew a house where a family prepared food for transient [* transient-one who stays for only a short time] people. Josefina did not want to wait. For her, it was either going to the house or going to eat. I opted for having breakfast, and told Rosa to go into the church to get la Gorda and Lydia; but Benigno gallantly volunteered to wait for them and take them to the breakfast place. Apparently he too knew where the place was.

Pablito did not take us directly there. Instead, at my request, we made a long detour. There was an old bridge at the edge of town that I wanted to examine. I had seen it from my car the day I had come with la Gorda. It's structure seemed to be colonial. We went out on the bridge and then stopped abruptly in the middle of it. I asked a man who was standing there if the bridge was very old. He said that he had seen it all his life and he was over fifty.

I thought that the bridge held a unique fascination for me alone, but watching the others, I had to conclude that they too had been affected by it. Nestor and Rosa were panting; out of breath. Pablito was holding on to Josefina; she in turn was holding on to me.

"Do you remember anything, Josefina?" I asked.

"That devil Silvio Manuel is on the other side of this bridge," she said, pointing to the other end, some thirty feet away.

I looked Rosa in the eyes. She nodded her head affirmatively and whispered that she had once crossed that bridge in great fear and that something had been waiting to devour her at the other end.

The two men were no help. They looked at me, bewildered. Each said that he was afraid for no reason. I had to agree with them. I felt I would not dare cross that bridge at night for all the money in the world. I did not know why.

"What else do you remember, Josefina?" I asked.

"My body is very frightened now," she said. "I can't remember anything else. That devil Silvio Manuel is always in the darkness. Ask Rosa."

With a movement of my head, I invited Rosa to talk. She nodded affirmatively three or four times but could not vocalize her words. The tension I myself was experiencing was uncalled for, yet real. All of us were standing on that bridge, midway across, incapable of taking one more step in the direction Josefina had pointed.

At last Josefina took the initiative and turned around. We walked back to the center of town. Pablito guided us then to a large house. La Gorda, Lydia, and Benigno were already eating. They had even ordered food for us. I was not hungry. Pablito, Nestor, and Rosa were in a daze. Josefina ate heartily. There was an ominous silence at the table. Everybody avoided my eyes when I tried to start a conversation.

After breakfast we walked to the house. No one said a word. I knocked and when the lady came out I explained to her that I wanted to show her house to my friends. She hesitated for a moment. La Gorda gave her some money and apologized for inconveniencing her.

Josefina led us directly to the back. I had not seen that part of the house when I was there before. There was a cobbled courtyard with rooms arranged around it. Bulky farming equipment was stored away in the roofed corridors.

I had the feeling I had seen that courtyard when there was no clutter in it. There were eight rooms, two on each of the four sides of the courtyard. Nestor, Pablito, and Benigno seemed to be on the brink of getting physically ill. La Gorda was perspiring profusely. She sat down with Josefina in an alcove in one of the walls, while Lydia and Rosa went inside one of the rooms. Suddenly Nestor seemed to have an urge to find something and disappeared into another of those rooms. So did Pablito and Benigno.

I was left alone with the lady. I wanted to talk to her, ask her questions, see if she knew Silvio Manuel, but I could not muster the energy to talk. My stomach was in knots. My hands were dripping perspiration. What oppressed me was an intangible sadness, a longing for something not present, unformulated.

I could not stand it. I was about to say goodbye to the lady and walk out of the house when la Gorda came to my side. She whispered that we should sit down in a large room off a hall separate from the courtyard. The room was visible from where we were standing. We went there and stepped inside. It was a very large, empty room with a high beamed ceiling; dark but airy.

La Gorda called everyone to the room. The lady just looked at us, but did not come in herself. Everyone seemed to know precisely where to sit. The Genaros sat to the right of the door, on one side of the room, and la Gorda and the three little sisters sat to the left, on the other side. They sat close to the walls. Although I would have liked to sit next to la Gorda, I sat near the center of the room. The place seemed right to me. I did not know why, but an ulterior order seemed to have determined our places.

While I sat there, a wave of strange feelings rolled over me. I was passive and relaxed. I fancied myself to be like a moving picture screen on which alien feelings of sadness and longing were being projected. But there was nothing I could recognize as a precise memory. We stayed in that room for over an hour. Toward the end I felt I was about to uncover the source of the unearthly sadness that was making me weep almost without control. But then, as involuntarily as we had sat there, we stood up and left the house. We did not even thank the lady or say goodbye to her.

We congregated in the plaza. La Gorda stated right away that because she was formless she was still in charge. She said that she was taking this stand because of conclusions she had reached in Silvio Manuel's house. La Gorda seemed to be waiting for comments. The silence of the others was unbearable to me. I finally had to say something.

"What are the conclusions you reached in that house, Gorda?" I asked.

"I think we all know what they are," she replied in a haughty tone.

"We don't know that," I said. "Nobody has said anything yet."

"We don't have to talk, we know," la Gorda said.

I insisted that I could not take such an important event for granted. We needed to talk about our feelings. As far as I was concerned, all I had gotten out of it was a devastating sense of sadness and despair.

"The Nagual Juan Matus was right," la Gorda said. "We had to sit on that place of power to be free. I am free now. I don't know how it happened, but something was lifted off me as I sat there."

The three women agreed with her. The three men did not. Nestor said that he had been about to remember actual faces, but that no matter how hard he had tried to clear his view, something thwarted him. All he had experienced was a sense of longing and sadness at finding himself still in the world. Pablito and Benigno said more or less the same thing.

"See what I mean, Gorda?" I said.

She seemed displeased. She puffed up as I had never seen her. Or had I seen her all puffed-up before, somewhere? She harangued the group. I could not pay attention to what she was saying. I was immersed in a memory that was formless, but almost within my grasp.

To keep it going it seemed I needed a continuous flow from la Gorda. I was fixed on the sound of her voice; her anger. At a certain moment, when she was becoming more subdued, I yelled at her that she was bossy. She got truly upset. I watched her for a while. I was remembering another Gorda; another time; an angry, fat Gorda, pounding her fists on my chest. I remembered laughing at seeing her angry; humoring her like a child. The memory ended the moment la Gorda's voice stopped. She seemed to have realized what I was doing.

I addressed all of them and told them that we were in a precarious [* precarious- affording no ease or reassurance: fraught with danger] position- something unknown was looming over us.

"It's not looming over us," la Gorda said dryly. "It's hit us already. And I think you know what it is."

"I don't, and I think I'm also speaking for the rest of the men," I said.

The three Genaros assented with a nod.

"We have lived in that house while we were on the left side," la Gorda explained. "I used to sit in that alcove to cry because I couldn't figure out what to do. I think if I could have stayed in that room a bit longer today, I would've remembered it all. But something pushed me out of there.

"I also used to sit in that room when there were more people in there. I couldn't remember their faces, though. Yet other things became clear as I sat there today. I'm formless. Things come to me, good and bad. I, for instance, picked up my old arrogance and my desire to brood. But I also picked up other things; good things."

"Me too," Lydia said in a raspy voice.

"What are the good things?" I asked.

"I think I'm wrong in hating you," Lydia said. "My hatred will keep me from flying away. They told me that in that room, the men there and the women."

"What men and what women?" Nestor asked in a tone of fright.

"I was there when they were there, that's all I know," Lydia said. "You also were there. All of us were there."

"Who were those men and women, Lydia?" I asked.

"I was there when they were there, that's all I know," she repeated.

"How about you, Gorda?" I asked.

"I've told you already that I can't remember any faces or anything specific," she said. "But I know one thing: whatever we did in that house was on the left side. We crossed, or somebody made us cross, over the parallel lines. The weird memories we have come from that time, from that world."

Without any verbal agreement, we left the plaza and headed for the bridge. La Gorda and Lydia ran ahead of us. When we got there we found both of them standing exactly where we ourselves had stopped earlier.

"Silvio Manuel is the darkness," la Gorda whispered to me, her eyes fixed on the other end of the bridge.

Lydia was shaking. She also tried to talk to me. I could not understand what she was mouthing.

I pulled everyone back away from the bridge. I thought that perhaps if we could piece together what we knew about that place, we might have a composite that would help us understand our dilemma.

We sat on the ground a few yards away from the bridge. There were lots of people milling around, but no one paid any attention to us.

"Who's Silvio Manuel, Gorda?" I asked.

"I never heard the name until now," she said. "I don't know the man, yet I know him. Something like waves came upon me when I heard that name. Josefina told me the name when we were in the house. From that moment on, things have started to come to my mind and to my mouth, just like Josefina. I never thought I would live to find myself being like Josefina."

"Why did you say that Silvio Manuel is the darkness?" I asked.

"I have no idea," she said. "Yet all of us here know that that is the truth."

She urged the women to speak up. No one uttered a word. I picked on Rosa. She had been about to say something three or four times. I accused her of holding out on us. Her little body convulsed.

"We crossed this bridge and Silvio Manuel waited for us at the other end," she said in a voice barely audible. "I went last. When he devoured the others I heard their screams. I wanted to run away but the devil Silvio Manuel was at both ends of the bridge. There was no way to escape."

La Gorda, Lydia, and Josefina agreed. I asked whether it was just a feeling that they had had or an actual 'moment to moment' memory of something. La Gorda said that for her it had been exactly as Rosa had described it, a moment to moment memory. The other two agreed with her.

I wondered aloud what had happened with the people who lived around the bridge. If the women were screaming as Rosa said they were, the passersby must have heard them. Screaming would have caused a commotion. For a moment I felt that the whole town must have collaborated in some plot. A chill ran through me. I turned to Nestor and bluntly expressed the full scope of my fear.

Nestor said that the Nagual Juan Matus and Genaro were indeed warriors of supreme accomplishment, and as such they were solitary beings. Their contacts with people were one-to-one. There was no possibility that the entire town, or even the people who lived around the bridge were in collusion with them. For that to happen, Nestor said, all those people would have to be warriors, a most unlikely possibility. Josefina began to circle me, looking me up and down with a sneer.

"You certainly have gall," she said. "Pretending that you don't know anything, when you were here yourself. You brought us here! You pushed us onto this bridge!"

The eyes of the women became menacing. I turned to Nestor for assistance.

"I don't remember a thing," he said. "This place scares me, that's all I know."

Turning to Nestor was an excellent maneuver on my part. The women lashed out at him.

"Of course you remember!" Josefina yelled. "All of us were here. What kind of stupid ass are you?"

My inquiry required a sense of order. I moved them away from the bridge. I thought that, being the active persons they were, they would find it more relaxing to stroll and talk things out; rather than sitting, as I would have preferred.

As we walked, the women's anger vanished as quickly as it had come. Lydia and Josefina became even more talkative. They stated over and over the sense they had had that Silvio Manuel was awesome. Nevertheless, neither of them could remember being physically hurt. They only remembered being paralyzed by fear. Rosa did not say a word, but gestured her agreement with everything the others said.

I asked them if it had been night when they tried to cross the bridge. Both Lydia and Josefina said that it was daytime. Rosa cleared her throat and whispered that it was at night. La Gorda clarified the discrepancy, explaining that it had been the morning twilight, or just before.

We reached the end of a short street and automatically turned back toward the bridge.

"It's simplicity itself," la Gorda said suddenly, as if she had just thought it through. "We were crossing, or rather Silvio Manuel was making us cross, the parallel lines. That bridge is a power spot; a hole in this world; a door to the other. We went through it. It must have hurt us to go through, because my body is scared. Silvio Manuel was waiting for us on the other side. None of us remembers his face because Silvio Manuel is the darkness, and never would he show his face. We could see only his eyes."

"One eye," Rosa said quietly, and looked away.

"Everyone here, including you," la Gorda said to me, "knows that Silvio Manuel's face is in darkness. One could only hear his voice- soft, like muffled coughing."

La Gorda stopped talking and began scrutinizing me in a way that made me feel self-conscious. Her eyes were cagey. She gave me the impression that she was holding back something she knew. I asked her. She denied it, but she admitted having scores of feelings with no foundation that she did not care to explain. I urged and then demanded that the women make an effort to recollect what had happened to them on the other side of that bridge. Each of them could remember only hearing the screams of the others.

The three Genaros remained outside our discussion. I asked Nestor if he had any idea of what had happened. His somber answer was that all of it was beyond his understanding.

I came then to a quick decision. It seemed to me that the only avenue open for us was to cross that bridge. I rallied them to walk back to the bridge and go over it as a group. The men agreed instantaneously, the women did not. After exhausting all my reasonings I finally had to push and drag Lydia, Rosa, and Josefina.

La Gorda was reluctant to go but seemed intrigued by the prospect. She moved along without helping me with the women, and so did the Genaros. They giggled nervously at my efforts to herd the little sisters, but they did not move a finger to help. We walked up to the point where we had stopped earlier.

I felt there that I was suddenly too weak to hold the three women. I yelled at la Gorda to help. She made a halfhearted attempt to catch Lydia as the group lost it's cohesion and everyone of them except la Gorda scrambled, stumping and puffing, to the safety of the street. La Gorda and I stayed as if we were glued to that bridge, incapable of going forward and begrudging having to retreat.

La Gorda whispered in my ear that I should not be afraid at all because it had actually been I who had been waiting for them on the other side. She added that she was convinced I knew I was Silvio Manuel's helper, but that I did not dare to reveal it to anyone.

Right then a fury beyond my control shook my body. I felt that la Gorda had no business making those remarks or having those feelings. I grabbed her by the hair and twirled her around. I caught myself at the apex of my wrath and stopped. I apologized and hugged her.

A sober thought came to my rescue. I said to her that being a leader was getting on my nerves. The tension was becoming more and more acute as we proceeded. She did not agree with me. She held on steadfastly to her interpretation that Silvio Manuel and I were utterly close, and that upon being reminded of my master, I had reacted with anger. It was lucky that she had been entrusted to my care, she said, otherwise I probably would have thrown her off the bridge.

We turned back. The rest of them were safely off the bridge, staring at us with unmistakable fear. A very peculiar state of timelessness seemed to prevail. There were no people around. We must have been on that bridge for at least five minutes and not a single person had crossed it or even come in sight. Then all of a sudden people were moving around as on any thoroughfare during the busy hours.

Without a word, we walked back to the plaza. We were dangerously weak. I had a vague desire to remain in the town a bit longer, but we got in the car and drove east, toward the Atlantic coast. Nestor and I took turns driving, stopping only for gasoline and to eat, until we reached Veracruz.

That city was neutral ground for us. I had been there only once. None of the others had ever been there. La Gorda believed that such an unknown city was the proper place to shed their old wrappings. We checked into a hotel, and there they proceeded to rip their old clothes to shreds. The excitation of a new city did wonders for their morale and their feeling of well-being.

Our next stop was Mexico City. We stayed at a hotel by the Alameda Park where don Juan and I had once stayed. For two days we were perfect tourists. We shopped and visited as many tourist spots as possible. The women looked simply stunning. Benigno bought a camera in a pawn shop. He took four hundred and twenty-five shots without any film.

At one place, while we were admiring the stupendous mosaics on the walls, a security guard asked me where those gorgeous foreign women were from. He assumed I was a tourist guide. I told him that they were from Sri Lanka. He believed me and marveled at the fact that they almost looked Mexican.

The following day at ten o'clock in the morning we were at the airline office into which don Juan had once pushed me. When he shoved me I had gone in through one door and come out through another; not to the street, as I should have, but to a market at least a mile away, where I had watched the activities of the people there.

La Gorda speculated that the airline office was also, like that bridge, a power spot, a door to cross from one parallel line to the other. She said that evidently the Nagual had pushed me through that opening but I got caught midway between the two worlds, in between the lines. Thus I had watched the activity in the market without being part of it. She said that the Nagual, of course, had intended to push me all the way through, but my willfulness thwarted him and I ended back on the line I came from; this world.

We walked from the airline office to the market and from there to the Alameda Park where don Juan and I had sat after our experience at the office. I had been in that park with don Juan many times. I felt it was the most appropriate place to talk about the course of our future actions.

It was my intention to summarize everything we had done in order to let the power of that place decide what our next step would be. After our deliberate attempt at crossing the bridge, I had tried unsuccessfully to think out a way to handle my companions as a group. We sat on some stone steps and I started off with the idea that for me knowledge was fused with words. I told them that it was my earnest belief that if an event or experience was not formulated into a concept, it was condemned to dissipatel. I asked them therefore to give me their individual assessments of our situation.

Pablito was the first one to talk. I found that odd, since he had been extraordinarily quiet up until now. He apologized because what he was going to say was not something he had remembered or felt, but a conclusion based on everything he knew.

He said that he saw no problem in understanding what the women said had happened on that bridge. It had been, Pablito maintained, a matter of being compelled to cross from the right side, the tonal, to the left side, the nagual. What had scared everyone was the fact that someone else was in control, forcing the crossing.

He saw no problem either in accepting that I had been the one who had then helped Silvio Manuel. He backed up his conclusion with the statement that only two days earlier he had seen me doing the same thing; pushing everyone onto the bridge. That time I had had no one to help me on the other side; no Silvio Manuel to pull them.

I tried to change the topic and began to explain to them that to forget the way we had forgotten was called amnesia. The little I knew about amnesia was not enough to shed any light on our case, but enough to make me believe that we could not forget as if on command. I told them that someone, possibly don Juan, must have done something unfathomable to us. I wanted to find out exactly what that had been.

Pablito insisted that it was important for me to understand that it was I who had been in cahoots with Silvio Manuel. He intimated then that Lydia and Josefiha had talked to him about the role I had played in forcing them to cross the parallel lines.

I did not feel comfortable discussing that subject. I commented that I had never heard about the parallel lines until the day I spoke with dona Soledad; yet I had had no qualms about immediately adopting the idea. I told them that I knew in a flash what she meant. I even became convinced I had crossed them myself when I thought I remembered her. Every one of the others, with the exception of la Gorda, said that the first time they had heard about parallel lines was when I spoke of them. La Gorda said that she had first learned about them from dona Soledad, just before I did.

Pablito made an attempt to talk about my relationship with Silvio Manuel. I interrupted him. I said that while all of us were at the bridge trying to cross it, I had failed to recognize that I- and presumably all of them- had entered into a state of nonordinary reality.

I only became aware of the change when I realized that there were no other people on the bridge. Only the eight of us had stood there. It had been a clear day, but suddenly the skies became cloudy and the light of the midmorning turned to dusk. I had been so busy with my fears and personalistic interpretations then that I had failed to notice the awesome change.

When we retreated from the bridge I perceived that other people were again walking around. But what had happened to them when we were attempting our crossing?

La Gorda and the rest of them had not noticed anything- in fact they had not been aware of any changes until the very moment I described them. All of them stared at me with a mixture of annoyance and fear. Pablito again took the lead and accused me of trying to railroad them into something they did not want. He was not specific about what that might be, but his eloquence was enough to rally the others behind him.

Suddenly I had a horde of angry sorcerers on me. It took me a long time to explain my need to examine from every possible point of view something so strange and engulfing as our experience on the bridge. They finally calmed down, not so much because they were convinced, but from emotional fatigue. All of them, la Gorda included, had vehemently supported Pablito's stand.

Nestor advanced another line of reasoning. He suggested that I was possibly an unwilling envoy who did not fully realize the scope of my actions. He added that he could not bring himself to believe, as the others did, that I was aware that I had been left with the task of misleading them. He felt that I did not really know that I was leading them to their destruction, yet I was doing just that.

He thought that there were two ways of crossing the parallel lines; one by means of someone else's power, and the other by one's own power. His final conclusion was that Silvio Manuel had made them cross by frightening them so intensely that some of them did not even remember having done it. The task left for them to accomplish was to cross on their own power; mine was to thwart them.

Benigno spoke then. He said that in his opinion the last thing don Juan did to the male apprentices was to help us cross the parallel lines by making us jump into an abyss. Benigno believed that we already had a great deal of knowledge about the crossing, but that it was not yet time to accomplish it again. At the bridge they were incapable of taking one more step because the time was not right.

They were correct, therefore, in believing that I had tried to destroy them by forcing them to cross. He thought that going over the parallel lines in full awareness meant a final step for all of them, a step to be taken only when they were ready to disappear from this earth.

Lydia faced me next. She did not make any assessments, but challenged me to remember how I had first lured her to the bridge. She blatantly stated that I was not the Nagual Juan Matus's apprentice but Silvio Manuel's; that Silvio Manuel and I had devoured each other's bodies.

I had another attack of rage, as with la Gorda on the bridge. I caught myself in time. A logical thought calmed me. I said to myself over and over that I was interested in analyses. [* analyses- an investigation of the component parts of a whole]

I explained to Lydia that it was useless to taunt me like that. She did not want to stop. She yelled that Silvio Manuel was my master and that this was the reason I was not part of them at all. Rosa added that Silvio Manuel gave me everything I was.

I questioned Rosa's choice of words. I told her that she should have said that Silvio Manuel gave me everything I had. She defended her wording. Silvio Manuel had given me what I was. Even la Gorda backed her up and said that she remembered a time when I had gotten so ill that I had no resources left; everything in me was exhausted. It was then that Silvio Manuel had taken over and pumped new life into my body.

La Gorda said that I was indeed better off knowing my true origins than proceeding, as I had done so far, on the assumption that it was the Nagual Juan Matus who had helped me. She insisted that I was fixed on the Nagual because of his predilection for words. Silvio Manuel, on the other hand, was the silent darkness. She explained that in order to follow him I would need to cross the parallel lines. But to follow the Nagual Juan Matus, all I needed to do was to talk about him.

What they were saying was nothing but nonsense to me. I was about to make what I thought was a very good point about it when my line of reasoning became literally scrambled. I could not think what my point had been, although only a second before, it was clarity itself.

Instead, a most curious memory beset me. It was not a feeling of something, but the actual hard memory of an event. I remembered that once I was with don Juan and another man whose face I could not remember. The three of us were talking about something I was perceiving as a feature of the world. It was three or four yards to my right and it was an inconceivable bank of yellowish fog that, as far as I could tell, divided the world in two.

It went from the ground up to the sky, to infinity. While I talked to the two men, the half of the world to my left was intact and the half to my right was veiled in fog. I remembered that I had oriented myself with the aid of landmarks and realized that the axis of the bank of fog went from east to west. Everything to the north of that line was the world as I knew it. I remembered asking don Juan what had happened to the world south of the line. Don Juan made me turn a few degrees to my right, and I saw that the wall of fog moved as I turned my head. The world was divided in two at a level my intellect could not comprehend. The division seemed real, but the boundary was not on a physical plane. It had to be somehow in myself. Or was it?

There was still one more facet to this memory. The other man said that it was a great accomplishment to divide the world in two, but it was an even greater accomplishment when a warrior had the serenity and control to stop the rotation of that wall. He said that the wall was not inside us. It was certainly out in the world, dividing it in two, and rotating when we moved our heads as if it were stuck to our right temples. The great accomplishment of keeping the wall from turning enabled the warrior to face the wall and gave him the power to go through it anytime he so desired.

When I told the apprentices what I had just remembered, the women were convinced that the other man was Silvio Manuel. Josefina, as a connoisseur of the wall of fog, explained that the advantage Eligio had over everyone else was his capacity to make the wall stand still so he could go through it at will. She added that it is easier to pierce the wall of fog in dreaming because then it does not move.

La Gorda seemed to be touched by a series of perhaps painful memories. Her body jumped involuntarily until finally she exploded into words. She said that it was no longer possible for her to deny the fact that I was Silvio Manuel's helper.

The Nagual himself had warned her that I would enslave her if she was not careful. Even Soledad had told her to watch me because my spirit took prisoners and kept them as servants; a thing only Silvio Manuel would do. He had enslaved me and I in turn would enslave anyone who came close to me. She asserted that she had lived under my spell up to the moment she sat in that room in Silvio Manuel's house when something was suddenly lifted off her shoulders.

I stood up and literally staggered under the impact of la Gorda's words. There was a vacuum in my stomach. I had been convinced that I could count on her for support under any conditions. I felt betrayed. I thought it would be appropriate to let them know my feelings, but a sense of sobriety came to my rescue. I told them instead that it had been my dispassionate conclusion, as a warrior, that don Juan had changed the course of my life for the better. I had assessed over and over what he had done to me, and the conclusion had always been the same. He had brought me freedom. Freedom was all I knew, all I could bring to anyone who might come to me.

Nestor made a gesture of solidarity with me. He exhorted the women to abandon their animosity toward me. He looked at me with the eyes of one who does not understand but wants to. He said that I did not belong with them; that I was indeed a solitary bird. They had needed me for a moment in order to break their boundaries of affection and routine. Now that they were free, the sky was their limit. To remain with me would doubtlessly be pleasant but deadly for them.

He seemed to be deeply moved. He came to my side and put his hand on my shoulder. He said that he had the feeling we were not going to see each other ever again on this earth. He regretted that we were going to part like petty people; bickering, complaining, accusing.

He told me that speaking on behalf of the others, but not for himself, he was going to ask me to leave, for we had no more possibilities in being together. He added that he had laughed at la Gorda for telling us about the snake we had formed. He had changed his mind and no longer found the idea ridiculous. It had been our last opportunity to succeed as a group.

Don Juan had taught me to accept my fate in humbleness.

"The course of a warrior's destiny is unalterable," he once said to me. "The challenge is how far he can go within those rigid bounds; how impeccable he can be within those rigid bounds. If there are obstacles in his path, the warrior strives impeccably to overcome them. If he finds unbearable hardship and pain on his path, he weeps. But all his tears put together could not move the line of his destiny the breadth of one hair."

My original decision to let the power of that place point out our next step had been correct. I stood up. The others turned their heads away. La Gorda came to my side and said, as if nothing had happened, that I should leave and that she would catch up with me and join me at a later time. I wanted to retort that I saw no reason for her to join me. She had chosen to join the others.

She seemed to read my feeling of having been betrayed. She calmly assured me that we had to fulfill our fate together as warriors and not as the petty people we were.

# PART TWO – The Art of Dreaming

## 6. Losing the Human Form

A few months later, after helping everyone to resettle in different parts of Mexico, la Gorda took up residence in Arizona. We began then to unravel the strangest and most engulfing part of our apprenticeship.

At first our relationship was rather strained. It was very difficult for me to overcome my feelings about the way we had parted in the Alameda Park. Although la Gorda knew the whereabouts of the others, she never said anything to me. She felt that it would have been superfluous [* superfluous- serving no useful purpose] for me to know about their activities.

On the surface, everything seemed to be all right between la Gorda and me. Nevertheless, I held a bitter resentment toward her for siding with the others against me. I did not express it, but it was always there. I helped her, and did everything for her as if nothing had happened; but that entered under the heading of impeccability. It was my duty. To fulfill that duty, I would have gladly gone to my death. I purposely absorbed myself in guiding and coaching her in the intricacies of modern city living. She was even learning English. Her progress was phenomenal. [* phenomenal- exceedingly or unbelievably great]

Three months went by almost unnoticed. But one day while I was in Los Angeles, I woke up in the early morning hours with an unbearable pressure in my head. It was not a headache: It was rather a very intense weight in my ears. I felt it also on my eyelids and the roof of my mouth. I knew I was feverish, but the heat was only in my head. I made a feeble attempt to sit up. The thought crossed my mind that I was having a stroke. My first reaction was to call for help, but somehow I calmed down and tried to let go of my fear.

After a while, the pressure in my head began to diminish, but it also began to shift to my throat. I gasped for air- gagging and coughing for some time. The pressure moved slowly to my chest, then to my stomach, to my groin, to my legs, and to my feet before it finally left my body.

Whatever had happened to me had taken about two hours to unfold. During the course of those two grueling hours, it was as if something inside my body was actually moving downward; moving out of me. I fancied it to be rolling up like a carpet. Another image that occurred to me was of a blob moving inside the cavity of my body.

I discarded that image in favor of the first because the feeling was of something being coiled within itself. Just like a carpet being rolled up, it became heavier and thus more painful as it went down. The two areas where the pain became excruciating were my knees and my feet, especially my right foot which remained hot for thirty-five minutes after all the pain and pressure had vanished.

La Gorda, upon hearing my report, said that this time for certain I had lost my human form; that I had dropped all my shields, or most of them. She was right. Without knowing how or even realizing what had happened, I found myself in a most unfamiliar state. I felt detached; unbiased.

It did not matter what la Gorda had done to me. It was not that I had forgiven her for her reproachable behavior with me. It was as if there had never been any betrayal. There was no overt or covert rancor left in me for la Gorda, or for anyone else.

What I felt was not a willed indifference, nor negligence to act. Neither was it alienation, nor even the desire to be alone. Rather, it was an alien feeling of aloofness; a capability of immersing myself in the moment, and of having no thoughts whatever about anything else.

People's actions no longer affected me because I had no more expectations of any kind. A strange peace became the ruling force in my life. I felt I had somehow adopted one of the concepts of a warrior's life: detachment.

La Gorda said that I had done more than adopt it: I had actually embodied it.

Don Juan and I had had long discussions on the possibility that someday I would do just that. He had said that detachment did not automatically mean wisdom, but that it was, nonetheless, an advantage because it allowed the warrior to pause momentarily to reassess situations; to reconsider positions. In order to use that extra moment consistently and correctly, however, he said that a warrior had to struggle unyieldingly for a lifetime.

I had despaired that I would never experience that feeling. As far as I could determine, there was no way to improvise it. It had been useless for me to think about it's benefits, or to reason out the possibilities of it's advent. [* advent- an arrival that has been awaited; especially of something momentous]

During the years I had known don Juan, I certainly experienced a steady lessening of personal ties with the world; but that had taken place on an intellectual plane. In my everyday life, I was unchanged until the moment I lost my human form.

I speculated with la Gorda that the concept of losing the human form refers to a bodily condition that besets the apprentice upon his reaching a certain threshold in the course of training.

Be that as it may, the end result of losing the human form for la Gorda and myself, oddly enough, was not only the sought-after and coveted sense of detachment, but also the fulfillment of our elusive task of remembering.

And again in this case, the intellect played a minimal part.

One night la Gorda and I were discussing a movie. She had gone to see an X-rated movie, and I was eager to hear her description of it. She had not liked it at all. She maintained that it was a weakening experience because being a warrior entailed leading an austere [* austere- severely simple, stern, or strict in bearing or demeanour] life in total celibacy, [* celibacy- abstaining from sexual relations] like the Nagual Juan Matus.

I told her that I knew for a fact that don Juan liked women, and was not celibate; and that I found that delightful.

"You're insane!" she exclaimed with a tinge of amusement in her voice. "The Nagual was a perfect warrior. He was not caught up in any webs of sensuality."

She wanted to know why I thought don Juan was not celibate. I told her about an incident that had taken place in Arizona at the beginning of my apprenticeship.

I had been resting at don Juan's house one day after an exhausting hike. Don Juan appeared to be strangely nervous. He kept getting up to look out the door. He seemed to be waiting for someone.

Then, quite abruptly, he told me that a car had just come around the bend in the road, and was heading for the house. He said that it was a girl- a friend of his who was bringing him some blankets. I had never seen don Juan embarrassed, and I felt terribly sad to see him so upset that he did not know what to do.

I thought that he did not want me to meet the girl. I suggested that I might hide, but there was no place to conceal myself in the room. So he made me lie down on the floor, and covered me with a straw mat. I heard the sound of a car motor being turned off, and then through the slits in the mat I saw a girl standing at the door. She was tall, slender, and very young. I thought she was beautiful. Don Juan was saying something to her in a low, intimate voice. Then he turned and pointed at me.

"Carlos is hiding under the mat," he said to the girl in a loud clear voice. "Say hello to him."

The girl waved at me, and said hello with the friendliest smile. I felt stupid and angry at don

Juan for putting me in that embarrassing position. It seemed obvious to me that he was trying to alleviate his nervousness; or even worse, that he was showing off in front of me.

When the girl left, I angrily asked for an explanation. He candidly said that he had gotten carried away because my feet were showing, and he did not know what else to do. When I heard this, his whole maneuver became clear. He had been showing off his young friend to me. I could not possibly have had my feet uncovered because they were tucked under my thighs. I laughed knowingly, and don Juan seemed obligated to explain that he liked women, especially that girl.

I never forgot the incident. Don Juan never discussed it, and whenever I brought it up, he always made me stop. I wondered almost obsessively about that young woman. I had hopes that someday she might look me up after reading my books.

La Gorda had become very agitated. She was pacing back and forth in the room while I talked. She was about to weep. I imagined all sorts of intricate networks of relationships that might be at stake. I thought la Gorda was possessive, and was reacting like a woman threatened by another woman.

"Are you jealous, Gorda:" I asked.

"Don't be stupid," she said angrily. "I'm a formless warrior. I've no envy or jealousy left in me."

I brought up something that the Genaros had told me; that la Gorda was the Nagual's woman. Her voice became barely audible.

"I think I was," she said, and with a vague look she sat on her bed. "I have a feeling that I was. I don't know how though. In this life, the Nagual Juan Matus was to me what he was to you. He was not a man. He was the Nagual. He had no interest in sex."

I assured her that I had heard don Juan express his liking for that girl.

"Did he say that he had sex with her?" la Gorda asked.

"No, he didn't, but it was obvious from the way he talked," I said.

"You would like the Nagual to be like you, wouldn't you?" she asked with a sneer. "The Nagual was an impeccable warrior."

I thought I was right, and did not need to review my opinion. Just to humor la Gorda, I said that perhaps the young woman was, if not his mistress, don Juan's apprentice.

There was a long pause. What I had said had a disturbing effect on me. Until that moment I had never thought about such a possibility. I had been locked into a prejudgment allowing myself no room for revision.

La Gorda asked me to describe the young woman. I could not do it. I had not really looked at her features. I had been too annoyed; too embarrassed to examine her in detail. The young woman also seemed to have been struck by the awkwardness of the situation, and she had hurried out of the house.

La Gorda said that, without any logical reason, she felt that the young woman was a key figure in the Nagual's life. Her statement led us to talking about don Juan's known friends. We struggled for hours trying to piece together all the information we had about his associates. I told her about the different times don Juan had taken me to participate in peyote ceremonies. I described everyone who was there. She recognized none of them. I realized then that I might know more people associated with don Juan than she did.

But something I had said triggered her recollection of a time when she had seen a young woman driving the Nagual and Genaro in a small white car. The woman let the two men off at the door of la Gorda's house, and she stared at la Gorda before she drove away. La Gorda thought that the young woman was someone who had given the Nagual and Genaro a lift. I remembered then that I had gotten up from under the straw mat at don Juan's house just in time to see a white Volkswagen driving away.

I mentioned one more incident involving another of don Juan's friends; a man who had given me some peyote plants once in the market of a city in northern Mexico. He had also obsessed me for years. His name was Vicente.

Upon hearing that name, la Gorda's body reacted as if a nerve had been touched. Her voice became shrill. She asked me to repeat the name, and describe the man. Again I could not come up with any description. I had seen the man only once for a few minutes more than ten years before.

La Gorda and I went through a period of almost being angry; not at one another, but at whatever was keeping us imprisoned.

The final incident that precipitated our full-fledged remembering came one day when I had a cold, and was running a high fever. I had stayed in bed, dozing off and on, with thoughts rambling aimlessly in my mind. The melody of an old Mexican song had been running through my head all day.

At one moment, I was dreaming that someone was playing it on a guitar. I complained about the monotony of it, and whoever I was protesting to, thrust the guitar toward my stomach. I jumped back to avoid being hit, and bumped my head on the wall: I woke up then.

It had not been a vivid dream. Only the tune had been haunting. I could not dispel the sound of the guitar. It kept running through my mind. I remained half awake listening to the tune. It seemed as if I were entering into a state of dreaming.

Then, a complete and detailed dreaming scene appeared in front of my eyes. In the scene there was a young woman sitting next to me. I could distinguish every detail of her features. I did not know who she was, but seeing her shocked me.

I was fully awake in one instant. The anxiety that her face created in me was so intense that I got up, and quite automatically I began to pace back and forth. I was perspiring profusely and I dreaded to leave my room. I could not call la Gorda for help either. She had gone back to Mexico for a few days to see Josefina. I tied a sheet around my waist to brace my midsection. It helped to subdue some ripples of nervous energy that went through me.

As I paced back and forth, the image in my mind began to dissolve; not into peaceful oblivion as I would have liked, but into an intricate full-fledged memory.

I remembered that one time I had been sitting on some sacks of wheat or barley stacked up in a grain bin. The young woman was singing the old Mexican song that had been running in my mind while she played a guitar. When I joked about her playing, she nudged me in the ribs with the butt of the guitar. There had been other people sitting with me; la Gorda and two men. I knew those men very well, but I still could not remember who the young woman was. I tried but it seemed hopeless.

I lay down again drenched in a cold sweat. I wanted to rest for a moment before I got out of my soaked pajamas. As I rested my head on a high pillow, my memory seemed to clear up further, and then I knew who the guitar player was. She was the Nagual woman; the most important being on earth for la Gorda and myself. She was the feminine analogue [* analogue- somrthing equivalent in some respects, though otherwise dissimilar] of the Nagual man; not his wife or his woman, but his counterpart. She had the serenity and command of a true leader. Being a woman, she nurtured us.

I did not dare to push my memory too far. I knew intuitively that I did not have the strength to withstand the full recollection. I stopped on the level of abstract feelings. I knew that she was the embodiment of the purest, most unbiased, and profound affection. It would be most appropriate to say that la Gorda and I loved the Nagual woman more than life itself. What on earth had happened to us to have forgotten her?

That night lying on my bed I became so agitated that I feared for my very life. I began to chant some words which became a guiding force to me. Only when I had calmed down did I remember that the words I had said to myself over and over were also a memory that had come back to me that night; the memory of a formula; an incantation to pull me through an upheaval such as the one I had experienced.

I am already given to the power that rules my fate.

And I cling to nothing, so I will have nothing to defend.

I have no thoughts, so I will see.

I fear nothing, so I will remember myself.

The formula had one more line, which at the time was incomprehensible to me.

Detached and at ease, I will dart past the Eagle to be free.

Being sick and feverish may have served as a cushion of sorts. It may have been enough to deviate the main impact of what I had done; or rather, of what had come upon me since I had not intentionally done anything.

Up to that night, if my inventory of experience had been examined, I could have accounted for the continuity of my existence. The nebulous [* nebulous- lacking definite form or limits] memories I had of la Gorda, or the presentiment [* presentiment- a feeling of evil to come] of having lived in that house in the mountains of central Mexico were in a way real threats to the idea of my continuity.

But those memories were nothing in comparison to remembering the Nagual woman; not so much because of the emotions that the memory itself brought back, but because I had forgotten her; and not as one forgets a name or a tune.

There had been nothing about her in my mind prior to that moment of revelation. Nothing! And then something had come upon me, or something had fallen off me, and I found myself remembering her; a most important being, who from the point of view of my experiential self prior to that moment, I had never met.

I had to wait two more days for la Gorda's return before I could tell her about my recollection. The moment I described the Nagual woman, la Gorda remembered her. La Gorda's awareness was somehow dependent on mine.

"The girl I saw in the white car was the Nagual woman!" la Gorda exclaimed. "She came back to me and I couldn't remember her."

I heard the words and understood their meaning, but it took a long time for my mind to focus on what she had said. My attention wavered. It was as if a light was actually placed in front of my eyes, and was being dimmed. I had the notion that if I did not stop the dimming, I would die. Suddenly I felt a convulsion and I knew that I had put together two pieces of myself that had become separated. I realized that the young woman I had seen at don Juan's house was the Nagual woman.

In that moment of emotional upheaval, la Gorda was no help to me. Her mood was contagious. She was weeping without restraint. The emotional shock of remembering the Nagual woman had been traumatic to her.

"How could I have forgotten her?" la Gorda sighed.

I caught a glint of suspicion in her eyes as she faced me.

"You had no idea that she existed, did you?" she asked.

Under any other conditions, I would have thought that her question was impertinent and insulting; but I was wondering the same about her. It had occurred to me that she might have known more than she was revealing.

"No. I didn't," I said. "But how about you, Gorda? Did you know that she existed?"

Her face had such a look of innocence and perplexity that my doubts were dispelled.

"No," she replied. "Not until today. I know now for a fact that I used to sit with her and the Nagual Juan Matus on that bench in the plaza in Oaxaca. I always remembered having done that, and I remembered her features; but I thought I had dreamed it all. I knew everything, and yet I didn't. But why did I think it was a dream?"

I had a moment of panic. Then I had the perfect physical certainty that as she spoke a channel opened somewhere in my body. Suddenly I knew that I also used to sit on that bench with don Juan and the Nagual woman.

I remembered then a sensation I had experienced on every one of those occasions. It was a sense of physical contentment, happiness, and plenitude that would be impossible to imagine. I thought that don Juan and the Nagual woman were perfect beings, and that to be in their company was indeed my great fortune.

Sitting on that bench, flanked by the most exquisite beings on earth, I experienced perhaps the epitome of my human sentiments. One time I told don Juan, and I meant it, that I wanted to die then so as to keep that feeling pure, intact, and free from disruption.

I told la Gorda about my memory. She said that she understood what I meant. We were quiet for a moment and then the thrust of our remembering swayed us dangerously toward sadness; even despair. I had to exert the most extraordinary control over my emotions not to weep. La Gorda was sobbing, covering her face with her forearm.

After a while we became more calm. La Gorda stared into my eyes. I knew what she was thinking. It was as if I could read her questions in her eyes. They were the same questions that had obsessed me for days. Who was the Nagual woman? Where had we met her? Where did she fit? Did the others know her too?

I was just about to voice my questions when la Gorda interrupted me.

"I really don't know," she said quickly, beating me to the question. "I was counting on you to tell me. I don't know why, but I feel that you can tell me what's what."

She was counting on me, and I was counting on her. We laughed at the irony of our situation. I asked her to tell me everything she remembered about the Nagual woman. La Gorda made efforts to say something two or three times, but seemed to be unable to organize her thoughts.

"I really don't know where to start," she said. "I only know that I loved her."

I told her that I had the same feeling. An unearthly sadness gripped me every time I thought of the Nagual woman. As I was talking, my body began to shake.

"You and I loved her," la Gorda said. "I don't know why I'm saying this, but I know that she owned us."

I prodded her to explain that statement. She could not determine why she had said it. She was talking nervously; elaborating on her feelings. I could no longer pay attention to her. I felt a fluttering in my solar plexus. A vague memory of the Nagual woman started to form. I urged la Gorda to keep on talking; to repeat herself if she had nothing else to say, but not to stop. The sound of her voice seemed to act for me as a conduit into another dimension; another kind of time.

It was as if blood was rushing through my body with an unusual pressure. I felt a prickling all over, and then I had an odd bodily memory. I knew in my body that the Nagual woman was the being who made the Nagual complete. She brought to the Nagual peace, plenitude, and a sense of being protected and delivered.

I told la Gorda that I had the insight that the Nagual woman was don Juan's partner. La Gorda looked at me aghast. She slowly shook her head from side to side.

"She had nothing to do with the Nagual Juan Matus, you idiot," she said with a tone of ultimate authority. "She was for you. That's why you and I belonged to her."

La Gorda and I stared into each other's eyes. I was certain that she was involuntarily voicing thoughts which rationally did not mean anything to her.

"What do you mean, she was for me, Gorda?" I asked after a long silence.

"She was your partner," she said. "You two were a team; and I was her ward; and she entrusted you to deliver me to her someday."

I begged la Gorda to tell me all she knew, but she did not seem to know anything else. I felt exhausted.

"Where did she go?" la Gorda said suddenly. "I just can't figure that out. She was with you, not with the Nagual. She should be here with us now."

She had then another attack of disbelief and fear. She accused me of hiding the Nagual woman in Los Angeles. I tried to ease her apprehensions. I surprised myself by talking to la Gorda as if she were a child.

She listened to me with all the outward signs of complete attention. Her eyes, however, were vacant; out of focus. It occurred to me then that she was using the sound of my voice just as I had used hers; as a conduit. I knew that she was also aware of it.

I kept on talking until I had run out of things to say within the bounds of our topic. Something else took place then, and I found myself half listening to the sound of my own voice. I was talking to la Gorda without any volition on my part. Words that seemed to have been bottled up inside me, now free, reached indescribable levels of absurdity. I talked and talked until something made me stop.

I had remembered that don Juan told the Nagual woman and me while we were on that bench in Oaxaca about a particular human being whose presence had synthesized for him all that he could aspire or expect from human companionship. It was a woman who had been for him what the Nagual woman was for me; a partner; a counterpart. She left him, just as the Nagual woman left me. His feelings for her were unchanged, and were rekindled by the melancholy that certain poems evoked in him.

I also remembered that it was the Nagual woman who used to supply me with books of poetry. She kept stacks of them in the trunk of her car. It was at her instigation [* instigation- the verbal act of urging on] that I read poems to don Juan.

Suddenly the physical memory of the Nagual woman sitting with me on that bench was so clear that I took an involuntary gasp of air. My chest swelled. An oppressive sense of loss- greater than any feeling I had ever had- took possession of me. I bent over with a ripping pain in my right shoulder blade. There was something else I knew; a memory which part of me did not want to release.

I became involved with whatever was left of my shield of intellectuality as the only means to recover my equanimity. I said to myself over and over that la Gorda and I had been operating all along on two absolutely different planes. She remembered a great deal more than I did, but she was not inquisitive. She had not been trained to ask questions of others or of herself.

But then the thought struck me that I was no better off. I was still as sloppy as don Juan had once said I was. I had never forgotten reading poetry to don Juan, and yet it had never occurred to me to examine the fact that I had never owned a book of Spanish poetry, nor did I ever carry one in my car.

La Gorda brought me out of my ruminations. [* ruminations- calm, lengthy, and intense mental considerations] She was almost hysterical. She shouted that she had just figured out that the Nagual woman had to be somewhere very near us. Just as we had been left to find one another, the Nagual woman had been left to find us.

The force of her reasoning almost convinced me. Something in me knew, nevertheless, that it was not so. In fact, that was the memory that was inside me which I did not dare to bring out.

I wanted to start a debate with la Gorda, but there was no reason. My shield of intellect and words was insufficient to absorb the impact of remembering the Nagual woman. It's effect was staggering to me; more devastating than even the fear of dying.

"The Nagual woman is shipwrecked somewhere," la Gorda said meekly. "She's probably marooned, and we're doing nothing to help her."

"No! No!" I yelled. "She's not here any more." I did not exactly know why I had said that, yet I knew that it was true. We sank for a moment into depths of melancholy that would be impossible to fathom rationally. For the first time in the memory of the me I know, I felt a true, boundless sadness; a dreadful incompleteness. There was a wound somewhere in me that had been opened again.

This time I could not take refuge- as I had done so many times in the past- behind a veil of mystery and not knowing. Not to know had been bliss to me. For a moment, I was dangerously sliding into despondency. La Gorda stopped me.

"A warrior is someone who seeks freedom," she said in my ear. "Sadness is not freedom. We must snap out of it."

Having a sense of detachment, as don Juan had said, entails having a moment's pause to reassess situations. At the depth of my sadness, I understood what he meant. I had the detachment. It was up to me to strive to use that pause correctly.

I could not be sure whether or not my volition [* volition- he capability of conscious choice and intention] played a role, but all of a sudden my sadness vanished. It was as if it had never existed. The speed of my change of mood, and it's thoroughness, alarmed me.

"Now you are where I am!" la Gorda exclaimed when I described what had happened. "After all these years, I still haven't learned how to handle formlessness. I shift helplessly from one feeling to another in one instant. Because of my formlessness, I could help the little sisters, but I was also at their mercy. Any one of them was strong enough to make me sway from one extreme to the other.

"The problem was that I lost my human form before you did. If you and I had lost it together, we could have helped each other. As it was, I went up and down faster than I care to remember."

I had to admit that her claim of being formless had always seemed spurious [* spurious- plausible but false; intended to deceive] to me. In my understanding, losing the human form included a necessary concomitant; [* concomitant- an event or situation that happens at the same time as, or in connection with another] namely, a consistency of character which was, in light of her emotional ups and downs, beyond her reach.

On account of that, I had judged her harshly and unjustly. Having lost my human form, I was now in a position to understand that formlessness is, if anything, a detriment to sobriety and levelheadedness. There is no automatic emotional strength involved in it. An aspect of being detached, the capacity to become immersed in whatever one is doing, naturally extends to everything one does, including being inconsistent, and outright petty. The advantage of being formless is that it allows us a moment's pause, providing that we have the self-discipline and courage to utilize it.

At last la Gorda's past behavior became comprehensible to me. She had been formless for years, but without the self-discipline required. Thus she had been at the mercy of drastic shifts of mood; and incredible discrepancies between her actions and her purposes.

After our initial recollection of the Nagual woman, la Gorda and I summoned all our forces and tried for days to elicit more memories, but there seemed to be none. I myself was back where I had been before I had begun to remember. I intuited that there should be a great deal more somehow buried in me, but I could not get to it. My mind was void of even the vaguest inkling of any other memories.

La Gorda and I went through a period of tremendous confusion and doubt. In our case, being formless meant to be ravaged by the worst distrust imaginable. We felt that we were guinea pigs in the hands of don Juan; a being supposedly familiar to us, but about whom in reality we knew nothing.

We fueled each other with doubts and fears. The most serious issue was of course the Nagual woman. When we would focus our attention on her, our memory of her became so keen that it was past comprehension that we could have forgotten her.

This would give rise over and over to speculations of what don Juan had really done to us. These conjectures led very easily to the feeling that we had been used. We became enraged by the unavoidable conclusion that he had manipulated us, and had rendered us helpless and unknown to ourselves.

When our rage was exhausted, fear began to loom over us- for we were faced with the awesome possibility that don Juan might have done still more deleterious [* deleterious- harmful to living things] things to us.

## 7. 'Dreaming' Together

One day, in order to alleviate our distress momentarily, I suggested that we immerse ourselves in dreaming. As soon as I voiced my suggestion, I became aware that a gloom which had been haunting me for days could be drastically altered by willing the change. I clearly understood then that the problem with la Gorda and myself had been that we had unwittingly focused on fear and distrust, as if those were the only possible options available to us, while all along we had had, without consciously knowing it, the alternative of deliberately centering our attention on the opposite; the mystery, the wonder of what had happened to us.

I told la Gorda my realization. She agreed immediately. She became instantly animated, the pall of her gloom dispelled in a matter of seconds.

"What kind of dreaming do you propose we should do?" she asked.

"How many kinds are there?" I asked.

"We could do dreaming together," she replied. "My body tells me that we have done this already. We have gone into dreaming as a team. It'll be a cinch for us- as it was for us to see together."

"But we don't know what the procedure is to do dreaming together," I said.

"We didn't know how to see together and yet we saw," she said. "I'm sure that if we try we can do it, because there are no steps to anything a warrior does. There is only personal power. And right now we have it.

"We should start out dreaming from two different places as far away as possible from each other. The one who goes into dreaming first waits for the other. Once we find each other, we interlock our arms and go deeper in together."

I told her that I had no idea how to wait for her if I went into dreaming ahead of her. She herself could not explain what was involved, but she said that to wait for the other dreamer was what Josefina had described as 'snatching' them. La Gorda had been snatched by Josefina twice.

"The reason Josefina called it snatching was because one of us had to grab the other by the arm," she explained.

She demonstrated then a procedure of interlocking her left forearm with my right forearm by each of us grabbing hold of the area below each other's elbows.

"How can we do that in dreaming?" I asked.

I personally considered dreaming one of the most private states imaginable.

"I don't know how, but I'll grab you," la Gorda said. "I think my body knows how. The more we talk about it, though, the more difficult it seems to be."

We started off our dreaming from two distant locations. We could agree only on the time to lie down since the entrance into dreaming was something impossible to prearrange. The foreseeable possibility that I might have to wait for la Gorda gave me a great deal of anxiety, and I could not enter into dreaming with my customary ease.

After some ten to fifteen minutes of restlessness I finally succeeded in going into a state I call restful vigil.

Years before, when I had acquired a degree of experience in dreaming, I had asked don Juan if there were any known steps which were common to all of us. He had told me that in the final analysis every dreamer was different.

But in talking with la Gorda I discovered such similarities in our experiences of dreaming that I ventured a possible classificatory scheme of the different stages.

Restful vigil is the preliminary state; a state in which the senses become dormant and yet one is aware. In my case, I had always perceived in this state a flood of reddish light; a light exactly like what one sees facing the sun with the eyelids tightly closed.

The second state of dreaming I called dynamic vigil. In this state the reddish light dissipates, as fog dissipates, and one is left looking at a scene, a tableau of sorts, which is static. One sees a three-dimensional picture, a frozen bit of something, a landscape, a street, a house, a person, a face, or anything.

I called the third state passive witnessing. In it the dreamer is no longer viewing a frozen bit of the world but is observing; eyewitnessing an event as it occurs. It is as if the primacy of the visual and auditory senses makes this state of dreaming mainly an affair of the eyes and ears.

The fourth state was the one in which I was drawn to act. In it one is compelled to enterprise; to take steps; to make the most of one's time. I called this state dynamic initiative.

La Gorda's proposition of waiting for me had to do with affecting the second and third states of our dreaming together. When I entered into the second state, dynamic vigil, I saw a dreaming scene of don Juan and various other persons, including a fat Gorda.

Before I even had time to consider what I was viewing, I felt a tremendous pull on my arm and I realized that the 'real' Gorda was by my side. She was to my left and had gripped my right forearm with her left hand. I clearly felt her lifting my hand to her forearm so that we were gripping each other's forearms.

Next, I found myself in the third state of dreaming, passive witnessing. Don Juan was telling me that I had to look after la Gorda and take care of her in a most selfish fashion- that is, as if she were my own self.

His play on words delighted me. I felt an unearthly happiness in being there with him and the others. Don Juan went on explaining that my selfishness could be put to a grand use, and that to harness it was not impossible.

There was a general feeling of comradeship [* - the quality of easy familiarity and sociability] among all the people gathered there. They were laughing at what don Juan was saying to me, but without making fun.

Don Juan said that the surest way to harness selfishness was through the daily activities of our lives; that I was efficient in whatever I did because I had no one to bug the devil out of me, and that it was no challenge to me to soar like an arrow by myself. If I were given the task of taking care of la Gorda, however, my independent effectiveness would go to pieces, and in order to survive I would have to extend my selfish concern for myself to include la Gorda. Only through helping her, don Juan was saying in the most emphatic tone, would I find the clues for the fulfillment of my true task.

La Gorda put her fat arms around my neck. Don Juan had to stop talking. He was laughing so hard he could not go on. All of them were roaring.

I felt embarrassed and annoyed with la Gorda. I tried to get out of her embrace but her arms were tightly fastened around my neck. Don Juan made a sign with his hands to make me stop. He said that the minimal embarrassment I was experiencing then was nothing in comparison with what was in store for me.

The sound of laughter was deafening. I felt very happy, although I was worried about having to deal with la Gorda, for I did not know what it would entail.

At that moment in my dreaming I changed my point of view- or rather, something pulled me out of the scene and I began to look around as a spectator. We were in a house in northern Mexico. I could tell by the surroundings which were partially visible from where I stood. I could see the mountains in the distance. I also remembered the paraphernalia of the house.

We were at the back, under a roofed, open porch. Some of the people were sitting on some bulky chairs. Most of them, however, were either standing or sitting on the floor. I recognized every one of them. There were sixteen people. La Gorda was standing by my side facing don Juan.

I became aware that I could have two different feelings at the same time. I could either go into the dreaming scene and feel that I was recovering a long-lost sentiment, or I could witness the scene with the mood that was current in my life. When I plunged into the dreaming scene I felt secure and protected. When I witnessed it with my current mood I felt lost, insecure, and anguished. I did not like my current mood, so I plunged into my dreaming scene.

A fat Gorda asked don Juan, in a voice which could be heard above everyone's laughter, if I was going to be her husband. There was a moment's silence. Don Juan seemed to be calculating what to say.

He patted her on the head and said that he could speak for me, and said that I would be delighted to be her husband. People were laughing riotously. I laughed with them. My body convulsed with a most genuine enjoyment, yet I did not feel I was laughing at la Gorda. I did not regard her as a clown, or as stupid. She was a child.

Don Juan turned to me and said that I had to honor la Gorda regardless of what she did to me, and that I had to train my body, through my interaction with her, to feel at ease in the face of the most trying situations. Don Juan addressed the whole group and said that it was much easier to fare well under conditions of maximum stress, such as in the interplay with someone like la Gorda, than to be impeccable under normal circumstances. Don Juan added that I could not under any circumstances get angry with la Gorda, because she was indeed my benefactress. Only through her would I be capable of harnessing my selfishness.

I had become so thoroughly immersed in the dreaming scene that I had forgotten I was a dreamer. A sudden pressure on my arm reminded me that I was dreaming. I felt la Gorda's presence next to me, but without seeing her.

She was there only as a touch; a tactile sensation on my forearm. I focused my attention on it. It felt like a solid grip on me, and then la Gorda as a whole person materialized; as if she were made of superimposed frames of photographic film. It was like trick photography in a movie. The dreaming scene dissolved. Instead, la Gorda and I were looking at each other with our forearms interlocked.

In unison, we again focused our attention on the dreaming scene we had been witnessing. At that moment I knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that both of us had been viewing the same thing.

Now don Juan was saying something to la Gorda, but I could not hear him. My attention was being pulled back and forth between the third state of dreaming, passive witnessing, and the second, dynamic vigil. I was for a moment with don Juan, a fat Gorda, and sixteen other people, and the next moment I was with the current Gorda watching a frozen scene.

Then a drastic jolt in my body brought me to still another level of attention. I felt something like the cracking of a dry piece of wood. It was a minor explosion, yet it sounded more like an extraordinarily loud cracking of knuckles. I found myself in the first state of dreaming, restful vigil. I was asleep and yet thoroughly aware. I wanted to stay for as long as I could in that peaceful stage, but another jolt made me wake up instantly. I had suddenly realized that la Gorda and I had dreamed together.

I was more than eager to speak with her. She felt the same. We rushed to talk to each other. When we had calmed down, I asked her to describe to me everything that had happened to her in our dreaming together.

"I waited for you for a long time," she said. "Some part of me thought I had missed you, but another part thought that you were nervous and were having problems, so I waited."

"Where did you wait, Gorda?" I asked.

"I don't know," she replied. "I know that I was out of the reddish light, but I couldn't see anything. Come to think of it, I had no sight. I was feeling my way around. Perhaps I was still in the reddish light. It wasn't red, though. The place where I was, was tinted with a light peach color.

Then I opened my eyes and there you were. You seemed to be ready to leave, so I grabbed you by the arm. Then I looked and saw the Nagual Juan Matus, you, me, and other people in Vicente's house. You were younger and I was fat."

The mention of Vicente's house brought a sudden realization to me. I told la Gorda that once while driving through Zacatecas, in northern Mexico, I had had a strange urge and gone to visit one of don Juan's friends, Vicente, not understanding that in doing so I had unwittingly crossed into an excluded domain, for don Juan had never introduced me to him.

Vicente, like the Nagual woman, belonged to another area, another world. It was no wonder that la Gorda was so shaken when I told her about the visit. We knew him so very well. He was as close to us as don Genaro, perhaps even closer. Yet we had forgotten him, just as we had forgotten the Nagual woman.

At that point la Gorda and I made a huge digression. [* digression- a turning aside from the main course or concern)] We remembered together that Vicente, Genaro, and Silvio Manuel were don Juan's friends; his cohorts.

They were bound together by a vow of sorts. La Gorda and I could not remember what it was that had united them. Vicente was not an Indian. He had been a pharmacist as a young man. He was the scholar of the group, and the real healer who kept all of them healthy. He had a passion for botany. I was convinced beyond any doubt that he knew more about plants than any human being alive. La Gorda and I remembered that it was Vicente who had taught everyone, including don Juan, about medicinal plants. He took special interest in Nestor, and all of us thought that Nestor was going to be like him.

"Remembering Vicente makes me think about myself," la Gorda said. "It makes me think what an unbearable woman I've been. The worst thing that can happen to a woman is to have children, to have holes in her body, and still act like a little girl. That was my problem. I wanted to be cute and I was empty. And they let me make a fool out of myself. They encouraged me to be a jackass."

"Who are they, Gorda?" I asked.

"The Nagual and Vicente and all those people who were in Vicente's house when I acted like such an ass with you."

La Gorda and I had a realization in unison. They had allowed her to be unbearable only with me. No one else put up with her nonsense, although she tried it on everyone.

"Vicente did put up with me," la Gorda said. "He played along with me. I even called him uncle. When I tried to call Silvio Manuel uncle he nearly ripped the skin off my armpits with his clawlike hands."

We tried to focus our attention on Silvio Manuel but we could not remember what he looked like. We could feel his presence in our memories but he was not a person. He was only a feeling.

As far as the dreaming scene was concerned, we remembered that it had been a faithful replica of what really did occur in our lives at a certain place and time. It still was not possible for us to recall when. I knew, however, that I took care of la Gorda as a means of training myself for the hardship of interacting with people. It was imperative that I internalize a mood of ease in the face of difficult social situations, and no one could have been a better coach than la Gorda. The flashes of faint memories I had had of a fat Gorda stemmed from those circumstances; for I had followed don Juan's orders to the letter.

La Gorda said that she had not liked the mood of the dreaming scene. She would have preferred just to watch it, but I pulled her in to feel her old feelings which were abhorrent to her. Her discomfort was so acute that she deliberately squeezed my arm to force me to end our participation in something so odious to her.

The next day we arranged a time for another session of dreaming together. She started from her bedroom and I from my study, but nothing happened. We became exhausted merely trying to enter into dreaming. For weeks after that we tried to achieve again the effectiveness of our first performance, but without any success. With every failure we became more desperate and greedy.

In the face of our impasse, I decided that we should postpone our dreaming together for the time being and take a closer look at the process of dreaming and analyze it's concepts and procedures.

La Gorda did not agree with me at first. For her, the idea of reviewing what we knew about dreaming was another way of succumbing to despair and greed. She preferred to keep on trying even if we did not succeed. I persisted and she finally accepted my point of view out of the sheer sense of being lost.

One night we sat down and, as casually as we could, we began to discuss what we knew about dreaming. It quickly became obvious that there were some core topics which don Juan had given special emphasis.

First was the act itself. It seemed to begin as a unique state of awareness arrived at by focusing the residue of consciousness, which one still has when asleep, on the elements, or the features of one's dreams.

The residue of consciousness, which don Juan called the second attention, was brought into action, or was harnessed, through exercises of not-doing. We thought that the essential aid to dreaming was a state of mental quietness which don Juan had called 'stopping the internal dialogue', or the 'not doing of talking to oneself'.

To teach me how to master it, he used to make me walk for miles with my eyes held fixed and out of focus at a level just above the horizon so as to emphasize the peripheral view. His method was effective on two counts. It allowed me to stop my internal dialogue after years of trying, and it trained my attention. By forcing me to concentrate on the peripheral view, don Juan reinforced my capacity to concentrate for long periods of time on one single activity.

Later on, when I had succeeded in controlling my attention and could work for hours at a chore without distraction- a thing I had never before been able to do- he told me that the best way to enter into dreaming was to concentrate on the area just at the tip of the sternum; at the top of the belly. He said that the attention needed for dreaming stems from that area.

The energy needed in order to move and to seek in dreaming stems from the area an inch or two below the belly button. He called that energy the will, or the power to select; to assemble.

In a woman both the attention and the energy for dreaming originate from the womb.

"A woman's dreaming has to come from her womb because that's her center," la Gorda said. "In order for me to start dreaming or to stop it, all I have to do is place my attention on my womb. I've learned to feel the inside of it. I see a reddish glow for an instant and then I'm off."

"How long does it take you to get to see that reddish glow?" I asked.

"A few seconds. The moment my attention is on my womb I'm already into dreaming" she continued. "I never toil; not ever. Women are like that. The most difficult part for a woman is to learn how to begin. It took me a couple of years to stop my internal dialogue by concentrating my attention on my womb. Perhaps that's why a woman always needs someone else to prod her.

"The Nagual Juan Matus used to put cold, wet river pebbles on my belly to get me to feel that area. Or he would place a weight on it. I had a chunk of lead that he got for me. He would make me close my eyes and focus my attention on the spot where the weight was. I used to fall asleep every time. But that didn't bother him.

It doesn't really matter what one does as long as the attention is on the womb. Finally I learned to concentrate on that spot without anything being placed on it. I went into dreaming one day all by myself.

I was feeling my belly, at the spot where the Nagual had placed the weight so many times, when all of a sudden I fell asleep as usual, except that something pulled me right into my womb. I saw the reddish glow and I then had a most beautiful dream. But as soon as I tried to tell it to the Nagual, I knew that it had not been an ordinary dream. There was no way of telling him what the dream was. I had just felt very happy and strong. He said it had been dreaming.

"From then on he never put a weight on me. He let me do dreaming without interfering. He asked me from time to time to tell him about it. Then he would give me pointers. That's the way the instruction in dreaming should be conducted."

La Gorda said that don Juan told her that anything may suffice as a not-doing to help dreaming, providing that it forces the attention to remain fixed. For instance, he made her and all the other apprentices gaze at leaves and rocks, and encouraged Pablito to construct his own not-doing device.

Pablito started off with the not-doing of walking backwards. He would move by taking short glances to his sides in order to direct his path and to avoid obstacles on the way. I gave him the idea of using a rearview mirror and he expanded it into the construction of a wooden helmet with an attachment that held two small mirrors, about six inches away from his face and two inches below his eye level. The two mirrors did not interfere with his frontal view, and due to the lateral angle at which they were set, they covered the whole range behind him. Pablito boasted that he had a 360-degree peripheral view of the world. Aided by this artifact, Pablito could walk backwards for any distance, or any length of time.

The position one assumes to do dreaming was also a very important topic.

"I don't know why the Nagual didn't tell me from the very beginning," la Gorda said, "that the best position for a woman to start from is to sit with her legs crossed and then let the body fall, as it may do once the attention is on dreaming. The Nagual told me about this perhaps a year after I had begun. Now I sit in that position for a moment, I feel my womb, and right away I'm dreaming."

In the beginning, just like la Gorda, I had done it while lying on my back, until one day when don Juan told me that for the best results I should sit up on a soft, thin mat, with the soles of my feet placed together and my thighs touching the mat. He pointed out that, since I had elastic hip joints, I should exercise them to the fullest, aiming at having my thighs completely flat against the mat. He added that if I were to enter into dreaming in that sitting position, my body would not slide or fall to either side, but my trunk would bend forward and my forehead would rest on my feet.

Another topic of great significance was the time to do dreaming. Don Juan had told us that the late night or early morning hours were by far the best. His reason for favoring those hours was what he called a practical application of the sorcerers' knowledge.

He said that since one has to do dreaming within a social milieu, [* milieu- the environmental condition] one has to seek the best possible conditions of solitude and lack of interference. The interference he was referring to had to do with the attention of people, and not their physical presence.

For don Juan it was meaningless to retreat from the world and hide, for even if one were alone in an isolated, deserted place, the interference of our fellow men is prevalent because the fixation of their first attention cannot be shut off. Only locally, at the hours when most people are asleep, can one avert part of that fixation for a short period of time. It is at those times that the first attention of those around us is dormant.

This led to his description of the second attention. Don Juan explained to us that the attention one needs in the beginning of dreaming has to be forcibly made to stay on any given item in a dream. Only through immobilizing our attention can one turn an ordinary dream into dreaming.

He explained, furthermore, that in dreaming one has to use the same mechanisms of attention as in everyday life; that our first attention had been taught to focus on the items of the world with great force in order to turn the amorphous [* amorphous- having no definite form or distinct shape] and chaotic realm of perception into the orderly world of awareness.

Don Juan also told us that the second attention served the function of a beckoner; a caller of chances. The more it is exercised, the greater the possibility of getting the desired result. But that was also the function of attention in general; a function so taken for granted in our daily life that it has become unnoticeable. If we encounter a fortuitous [* fortuitous- occurring by happy chance] occurrence, we talk about it in terms of accident or coincidence, rather than in terms of our attention having beckoned the event.

Don Juan's discussion of the second attention prepared the ground for another key topic; the dreaming body. As a means of guiding la Gorda to it, don Juan gave her the task of immobilizing her second attention as steadily as she could on the components of the feeling of flying in dreaming.

"How did you learn to fly in dreaming?" I asked her. "Did someone teach you?"

"The Nagual Juan Matus taught me on this earth," she replied. "And in dreaming, someone I could never see taught me. It was only a voice telling me what to do. The Nagual gave me the task of learning to fly in dreaming, and the voice taught me how to do it. Then it took me years to teach myself to shift from my regular body, the one you can touch, to my dreaming body."

"You have to explain this to me, Gorda" I said.

"You were learning to get to your dreaming body when you dreamed that you got out of your body," she continued. "But, the way I see it, the Nagual did not give you any specific task, so you went any old way you could.

"I, on the other hand, was given the task of using my dreaming body. The little sisters had the same task. In my case, I once had a dream where I flew like a kite. I told the Nagual about it because I had liked the feeling of gliding. He took it very seriously and turned it into a task. He said that as soon as one learns to do dreaming, any dream that one can remember is no longer a dream. It's dreaming.

"I began then to seek flying in dreaming. But I couldn't set it up. The more I tried to influence my dreaming, the more difficult it got. The Nagual finally told me to stop trying and let it come of it's own accord. Little by little I started to fly in dreaming. That was when some voice began to tell me what to do. I've always felt it was a woman's voice.

"When I had learned to fly perfectly, the Nagual told me that every movement of flying which I did in dreaming I had to repeat while I was awake. You had the same chance when the saber-toothed tiger was showing you how to breathe. But you never changed into a tiger in dreaming, so you couldn't properly try to do it while you were awake.

"But I did learn to fly in dreaming. By shifting my attention to my dreaming body, I could fly like a kite while I was awake. I showed you my flying once because I wanted you to see that I had learned to use my dreaming body, but you didn't know what was going on."

She was referring to a time she had scared me with the incomprehensible act of actually bobbing up and down in the air like a kite. The event was so farfetched for me that I could not begin to understand it in any logical way. As usual when things of that nature confronted me, I would lump them into an amorphous category of "perceptions under conditions of severe stress." I had argued that in cases of severe stress, perception could be greatly distorted by the senses. My explanation did not explain anything, but seemed to keep my reason pacified.

I told la Gorda that there must have been more to what she had called her shift into her dreaming body than merely repeating the action of flying.

She thought for a while before answering.

"I think the Nagual must have told you, too," she said, "that the only thing that really counts in making that shift is anchoring the second attention. The Nagual said that attention is what makes the world. He was of course absolutely right. He had reasons to say that. He was the master of attention.

I suppose he left it up to me to find out that all I needed to shift into my dreaming body was to focus my attention on flying. What was important was to store attention in dreaming; to observe everything I did in flying. That was the only way of grooming my second attention. Once it was solid, just to focus it lightly on the details and feeling of flying brought more dreaming of flying until it was routine for me to dream I was soaring through the air.

"In the matter of flying, then, my second attention was keen. When the Nagual gave me the task of shifting to my dreaming body he meant for me to turn on my second attention while I was awake. This is the way I understand it.

"The first attention, the attention that makes the world, can never be completely overcome. It can only be turned off for a moment and replaced with the second attention- providing that the body has stored enough of the second attention. Dreaming is naturally a way of storing the second attention. So, I would say that in order to shift into your dreaming body when awake you have to practice dreaming until it comes out your ears."

"Can you get to your dreaming body any time you want?" I asked.

"No. It's not that easy," she replied. "I've learned to repeat the movements and feelings of flying while I'm awake, and yet I can't fly every time I want to. There is always a barrier to my dreaming body. Sometimes I feel that the barrier is down. My body is free at those times and I can fly as if I were dreaming."

I told la Gorda that in my case don Juan gave me three tasks to train my second attention.

The first was to find my hands in dreaming.

Next he recommended that I should choose a locale, focus my attention on it, and then do daytime dreaming and find out if I could really go there. He suggested that I should place someone I knew at the site, preferably a woman, in order to do two things; first to check subtle changes that might indicate that I was there in dreaming, and second, to isolate unobtrusive detail, which would be precisely what my second attention would zero in on.

The most serious problem the dreamer has in this respect is the unbending fixation of the second attention on detail that would be thoroughly undetected by the attention of everyday life, creating in this manner a nearly insurmountable obstacle to validation. What one seeks in dreaming is not what one would pay attention to in everyday life.

Don Juan said that one strives to immobilize the second attention only in the learning period. After that, one has to fight the almost invincible pull of the second attention and give only cursory glances at everything. In dreaming one has to be satisfied with the briefest possible views of everything. As soon as one focuses on anything, one loses control.

The last generalized task he gave me was to get out of my body. I had partially succeeded, and all along I had considered it my only real accomplishment in dreaming. Don Juan left before I had perfected the feeling in dreaming that I could handle the world of ordinary affairs while I was dreaming. His departure interrupted what I thought was going to be an unavoidable overlapping of my dreaming time into my world of everyday life.

To elucidate [* elucidate- make clear; free from confusion or ambiguity] the control of the second attention, don Juan presented the idea of will. He said that will can be described as the maximum control of the luminosity of the body as a field of energy; or it can be described as a level of proficiency, or a state of being that comes abruptly into the daily life of a warrior at any given time.

It is experienced as a force that radiates out of the middle part of the body following a moment of the most absolute silence, or a moment of sheer terror, or profound sadness; but not after a moment of happiness, because happiness is too disruptive to afford the warrior the concentration needed to use the luminosity of the body and turn it into silence.

"The Nagual told me that for a human being, sadness is as powerful as terror," la Gorda said. "Sadness makes a warrior shed tears of blood. Both can bring the moment of silence. Or the silence comes of itself, because the warrior tries for it throughout his life."

"Have you ever felt that moment of silence yourself?" I asked.

"I have, by all means, but I can't remember what it is like," she said. "You and I have both felt it before and neither of us can remember anything about it. The Nagual said that it is a moment of blackness; a moment still more silent than the moment of shutting off the internal dialogue. That blackness, that silence, gives rise to the intent to direct the second attention; to command it; to make it do things.

"This is why it's called will. The intent and the effect are will. The Nagual said that they are tied together. He told me all this when I was trying to learn flying in dreaming. The intent of flying produces the effect of flying."

I told her that I had nearly written off the possibility of ever experiencing will.

"You'll experience it," la Gorda said. "The trouble is that you and I are not keen enough to know what's happening to us. We don't feel our will because we think that it should be something we know for sure that we are doing or feeling, like getting angry, for instance. Will is very quiet, unnoticeable. Will belongs to the other self."

"What other self, Gorda?" I asked.

"You know what I'm talking about," she replied briskly. "We are in our other selves when we do dreaming. We have entered into our other selves countless times by now, but we are not complete yet."

There was a long silence. I conceded to myself that she was right in saying that we were not complete yet. I understood that as meaning that we were merely apprentices of an inexhaustible art. But then the thought crossed my mind that perhaps she was referring to something else. It was not a rational thought. I felt first something like a prickling sensation in my solar plexus and then I had the thought that perhaps she was talking about something else. Next I felt the answer. It came to me in a block, a clump of sorts. I knew that all of it was there, first at the tip of my sternum and then in my mind. My problem was that I could not disentangle what I knew fast enough to verbalize it.

La Gorda did not interrupt my thought processes with further comments or gestures. She was perfectly quiet; waiting. She seemed to be internally connected to me to such a degree that there was no need for us to say anything.

We sustained the feeling of communality with each other for a moment longer and then it overwhelmed us both. La Gorda and I calmed down by degrees. I finally began to speak. Not that I needed to reiterate what we had felt and known in common, but just to reestablish our grounds for discussion I told her that I knew in what way we were incomplete, but that I could not put my knowledge into words.

"There are lots and lots of things we know," she said. "And yet we can't get them to work for us because we really don't know how to bring them out of us. You've just begun to feel that pressure. I've had it for years. I know and yet I don't know. Most of the time I trip over myself and sound like an imbecile when I try to say what I know."

I understood what she meant and I understood her at a physical level. I knew something thoroughly practical and self-evident about will and what la Gorda had called the other self, and yet I could not utter a single word about what I knew; not because I was reticent or bashful, but because I did not know where to begin, or how to organize my knowledge.

"Will is such a complete control of the second attention that it is called the other self," la Gorda said after a long pause. "In spite of all we've done, we know only a tiny bit of the other self. The Nagual left it up to us to complete our knowledge. That's our task of remembering."

She smacked her forehead with the palm of her hand, as if something had just come to her mind.

"Holy Jesus! We are remembering the other self!" she exclaimed, her voice almost bordering on hysteria. Then she calmed down and went on talking in a subdued tone. "Evidently we've already been there and the only way of remembering it is the way we're doing it, by shooting off our dreaming bodies while dreaming together."

"What do you mean, shooting off our dreaming bodies?" I asked.

"You yourself have witnessed when Genaro used to shoot off his dreaming body," she said. "It pops off like a slow bullet. It actually glues and unglues itself from the physical body with a loud crack.

"The Nagual told me that Genaro's dreaming body could do most of the things we normally do. He used to come to you that way in order to jolt you. I know now what the Nagual and Genaro were after. They wanted you to remember, and for that effect Genaro used to perform incredible feats in front of your very eyes by shooting off his dreaming body. But to no avail."

"I never knew that he was in his dreaming body," I said.

"You never knew because you weren't watching," she said. "Genaro tried to let you know by attempting to do things that the dreaming body cannot do, like eating, drinking, and so forth. The Nagual told me that Genaro used to joke with you that he was going to shit and make the mountains tremble."

"Why can't the dreaming body do those things?" I asked.

"Because the dreaming body cannot handle the intent of eating, or drinking," she replied.

"What do you mean by that, Gordar" I asked.

"Genaro's great accomplishment was that in his dreaming he learned the intent of the body," she explained. "He finished what you had started to do. He could dream his whole body as perfectly as it could be.

"But the dreaming body has a different intent from the intent of the physical body. For instance, the dreaming body can go through a wall, because it knows the intent of disappearing into thin air. The physical body knows the intent of eating, but not the one of disappearing. For Genaro's physical body to go through a wall would be as impossible as for his dreaming body to eat."

La Gorda was silent for a while as if measuring what she had just said. I wanted to wait before asking her any questions.

"Genaro had mastered only the intent of the dreaming body" she said in a soft voice. "Silvio Manuel, on the other hand, was the ultimate master of intent, I know now that the reason we can't remember his face is because he was not like everybody else."

"What makes you say that, Gorda?" I asked.

She started to explain what she meant, but she was incapable of speaking coherently. Suddenly she smiled. Her eyes lit up.

"I've got it!" she exclaimed. "The Nagual told me that Silvio Manuel was the master of intent because he was permanently in his other self. He was the real chief. He was behind everything the Nagual did. In fact, he's the one who made the Nagual take care of you."

I experienced a great physical discomfort upon hearing la Gorda say that. I nearly became sick to my stomach and made extraordinary efforts to hide it from her. I turned my back to her and began to gag.

She stopped talking for an instant and then proceeded as if she had made up her mind not to acknowledge my state. Instead, she began to yell at me. She said that it was time that we air our grievances. She confronted me with my feelings of resentment after what happened in Mexico City. She added that my rancor was not because she had sided with the other apprentices against me, but because she had taken part in unmasking me.

I explained to her that all of those feelings had vanished from me. She was adamant. She maintained that unless I faced them they would come back to me in some way. She insisted that my affiliation with Silvio Manuel was at the crux of the matter.

I could not believe the changes of mood I went through upon hearing that statement. I became two people- one raving, foaming at the mouth- the other calm, observing. I had a final painful spasm in my stomach and got ill. But it was not a feeling of nausea that had caused the spasm. It was rather an uncontainable wrath.

When I finally calmed down I was embarrassed at my behavior, and worried that an incident of that nature might happen to me again at another time.

"As soon as you accept your true nature, you'll be free from rage," la Gorda said in a nonchalant tone.

I wanted to argue with her, but I saw the futility of it. Besides, my attack of anger had drained me of energy. I laughed at the fact that I did not know what I would do if she were right.

The thought occurred to me then that if I could forget about the Nagual woman, anything was possible. I had a strange sensation of heat or irritation in my throat, as if I had eaten hot spicy food. I felt a jolt of bodily alarm, just as though I had seen someone sneaking behind my back, and I knew at that moment something I had had no idea I knew a moment before. La Gorda was right. Silvio Manuel had been in charge of me.

La Gorda laughed loudly when I told her that. She said that she had also remembered something about Silvio Manuel.

"I don't remember him as a person, as I remember the Nagual woman," she went on, "but I remember what the Nagual told me about him."

"What did he tell you?" I asked.

"He said that while Silvio Manuel was on this earth he was like Eligio. He disappeared once without leaving a trace and went into the other world. He was gone for years. Then one day he returned. The Nagual said that Silvio Manuel did not remember where he'd been or what he'd done, but his body had been changed. He had come back to the world, but he had come back in his other self."

"What else did he say, Gorda?" I asked.

"I can't remember any more," she replied. "It is as if I were looking through a fog."

I knew that if we pushed ourselves hard enough, we were going to find out right then who Silvio Manuel was. I told her so.

"The Nagual said that intent is present everywhere," la Gorda said all of a sudden.

"What does that mean?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said. "I'm just voicing things that come to my mind. The Nagual also said that intent is what makes the world."

I knew that I had heard those words before. I thought that don Juan must have also told me the same thing and I had forgotten it.

"When did don Juan tell you that?" I asked.

"I can't remember when," she said. "But he told me that people, and all other living creatures for that matter, are the slaves of intent. We are in it's clutches. It makes us do whatever it wants. It makes us act in the world. It even makes us die.

"He said that when we become warriors, though, intent becomes our friend. It lets us be free for a moment. At times it even comes to us as if it had been waiting around for us. He told me that he himself was only a friend of intent- unlike Silvio Manuel, who was the master of it."

There were barrages [* barrage- the rapid and continuous delivery of communication: the heavy fire of artillery to saturate an area rather than hit a specific target] of hidden memories in me that fought to get out. They seemed about to surface. I experienced a tremendous frustration for a moment and then something in me gave up. I became calm. I was no longer interested in finding out about Silvio Manuel.

La Gorda interpreted my change of mood as a sign that we were not ready to face our memories of Silvio Manuel.

"The Nagual showed all of us what he could do with his intent," she said abruptly. "He could make things appear by calling intent.

"He told me that if I wanted to fly, I had to summon the intent of flying. He showed me then how he himself could summon it, and jumped in the air and soared in a circle, like a huge kite. Or he would make things appear in his hand. He said that he knew the intent of many things and could call those things by intending them. The difference between him and Silvio Manuel was that Silvio Manuel, by being the master of intent, knew the intent of everything."

I told her that her explanation needed more explaining. She seemed to struggle arranging words in her mind.

"I learned the intent of flying," she said, "by repeating all the feelings I had while flying in dreaming. This was only one thing. The Nagual had learned in his life the intent of hundreds of things.

"But Silvio Manuel went to the source itself. He tapped it. He didn't have to learn the intent of anything. He was one with intent. The problem was that he had no more desires because intent has no desire of it's own, so he had to rely on the Nagual for volition. [* volition- the capability of conscious choice and intention] In other words, Silvio Manuel could do anything the Nagual wanted. The Nagual directed Silvio Manuel's intent. But since the Nagual had no desires either, most of the time they didn't do anything."

## 8. The Right and the Left Side Awareness

Our discussion of dreaming was most helpful to us, not only because it solved our impasse in dreaming together, but because it brought it's concepts to an intellectual level. Talking about it kept us busy. It allowed us to have a moment's pause in order to ease our agitation.

One night while I was out running an errand I called la Gorda from a telephone booth. She told me that she had been in a department store and had had the sensation that I was hiding there behind some mannequins on display. She was certain I was teasing her and became furious with me. She rushed through the store trying to catch me, to show me how angry she was. Then she realized that she was actually remembering something she had done quite often around me; having a tantrum. [* tantrum- a display of bad temper]

In unison, we arrived then at the conclusion that it was time to try again our dreaming together. As we talked, we felt a renewed optimism. I went home immediately.

I very easily entered into the first state, restful vigil. I had a sensation of bodily pleasure; a tingling radiating from my solar plexus, which was transformed into the thought that we were going to have great results. That thought turned into a nervous anticipation. I became aware that my thoughts were emanating from the tingling in the middle of my chest. The instant I turned my attention to it, however, the tingling stopped. It was like an electric current that I could switch on and off.

The tingling began again, even more pronounced than before, and suddenly I found myself face to face with la Gorda. It was as if I had turned a corner and bumped into her. I became immersed in watching her. She was so absolutely real, so herself, that I had the urge to touch her. The most pure, unearthly affection for her burst out of me at that moment. I began to sob uncontrollably.

La Gorda quickly tried to interlock our arms to stop my indulging, but she could not move at all. We looked around. There was no fixed tableau in front of our eyes; no static picture of any sort. I had a sudden insight and told la Gorda that it was because we had been watching each other that we had missed the appearance of the dreaming scene. Only after I had spoken did I realize that we were in a new situation. The sound of my voice scared me. It was a strange voice; harsh; unappealing. It gave me a feeling of physical revulsion.

La Gorda replied that we had not missed anything, that our second attention had been caught by something else. She smiled and made a puckering gesture with her mouth; a mixture of surprise and annoyance at the sound of her own voice.

I found the novelty of talking in dreaming spellbinding, for we were not dreaming of a scene in which we talked, we were actually conversing. It required a unique effort quite similar to my initial effort of walking down a stairway in dreaming.

I asked her whether she thought my voice sounded funny. She nodded and laughed out loud. The sound of her laughter was shocking. I remembered that don Genaro used to make the strangest and most frightening noises. La Gorda's laughter was in the same category. The realization struck me then that la Gorda and I had quite spontaneously entered into our dreaming bodies.

I wanted to hold her hand. I tried but I could not move my arm. Because I had some experience with moving in that state, I willed myself to go to la Gorda's side. My desire was to embrace her, but instead I moved in on her so close that we merged. I was aware of myself as an individual being, but at the same time I felt I was part of la Gorda. I liked that feeling immensely.

We stayed merged until something broke our hold. I felt a command to examine the environment. As I looked, I clearly remembered having seen it before. We were surrounded by small round mounds that looked exactly like sand dunes. They were all around us in every direction as far as we could see. They seemed to be made of something that looked like pale yellow sandstone, or rough granules of sulphur. The sky was the same color, and was very low and oppressive. There were banks of yellowish fog or some sort of yellow vapor that hung from certain spots in the sky.

I noticed then that la Gorda and I seemed to be breathing normally. I could not feel my chest with my hands, but I was able to feel it expanding as I inhaled. The yellow vapors were obviously not harmful to us.

We began to move in unison; slowly; cautiously; almost as if we were walking. After a short distance I got very fatigued and so did la Gorda. We were gliding just over the ground, and apparently moving that way was very tiring to our second attention; it required an inordinate degree of concentration. We were not deliberately mimicking our ordinary walk, but the effect was much the same as if we had been. To move required outbursts of energy, something like tiny explosions, with pauses in between. We had no objective in our movement except moving itself, so finally we had to stop.

La Gorda spoke to me, her voice so faint that it was barely audible. She said that we were mindlessly going toward the heavier regions, and that if we kept on moving in that direction, the pressure would get so great that we would die.

We automatically turned around and headed back in the direction we had come from, but the feeling of fatigue did not let up. Both of us were so exhausted that we could no longer maintain our upright posture. We collapsed and quite spontaneously adopted the dreaming position.

I woke up instantly in my study. La Gorda woke up in her bedroom.

The first thing I told her upon awakening, was that I had been in that barren landscape several times before. I had seen at least two aspects of it; one perfectly flat; the other covered with small mounds like sand dunes.

As I was talking, I realized that I had not even bothered to confirm that we had had the same vision. I stopped and told her that I had gotten carried away by my own excitement. I had proceeded as if I were comparing notes with her about a vacation trip.

"It's too late for that kind of talk between us," she said with a sigh, "but if it makes you happy, I'll tell you what we saw."

She patiently described everything we had seen, said, and done. She added that she too had been in that deserted place before, and that she knew for a fact that it was a no-man's land; the space between the world we know and the other world.

"It is the area between the parallel lines," she went on. "We can go to it in dreaming. But in order to leave this world and reach the other, the one beyond the parallel lines, we have to go through that area with our whole bodies."

I felt a chill at the thought of entering that barren place with our whole bodies.

"You and I have been there together with our bodies," la Gorda went on. "Don't you remember?"

I told her that all I could remember was seeing that landscape twice under don Juan's guidance. Both times I had written off the experience because it had been brought about by the ingestion of hallucinogenic plants. Following the dictums of my intellect, I had regarded them as private visions and not as consensual [* consensual- existing with agreement by multiple individuals] experiences. I did not remember viewing that scene under any other circumstances.

"When did you and I get there with our bodies?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said. "The vague memory of it just popped into my mind when you mentioned being there before. I think that now it is your turn to help me finish what I have started to remember. I can't focus on it yet, but I do recall that Silvio Manuel took the Nagual woman, you, and me into that desolate place. I don't know why he took us in there, though. We were not in dreaming."

I did not hear what else she was saying. My mind had begun to zero in on something still inarticulate. [* inarticulate- without, or deprived of the use of speech or words] I struggled to set my thoughts in order. They rambled aimlessly. For a moment I felt as if I had reverted back years, to a time when I could not stop my internal dialogue.

Then the fog began to clear. My thoughts arranged themselves without my conscious direction, and the result was the full memory of an event which I had already partially recalled in one of those unstructured flashes of recollection that I used to have.

La Gorda was right. We had been taken once to a region that don Juan had called 'limbo' apparently drawing the term from religious dogma. I knew that la Gorda was also right in saying that we had not been in dreaming.

On that occasion, at the request of Silvio Manuel, don Juan had rounded up the Nagual woman, la Gorda, and myself. Don Juan told me that the reason for our meeting was the fact that, by my own means, but without knowing how, I had entered into a special recess of awareness which was the site of the keenest form of attention.

I had previously reached that state, which don Juan had called the 'left side', but all too briefly and always aided by him. One of it's main features, the one that had the greatest value for all of us involved with don Juan, was that in that state we were able to perceive a colossal bank of yellowish vapor; something which don Juan called the 'wall of fog'.

Whenever I was capable of perceiving it, it was always to my right; extending forward to the horizon and up to infinity, thus dividing the world in two. The wall of fog would turn either to the right or to the left as I turned my head, so there was never a way for me to face it.

On the day in question, both don Juan and Silvio Manuel had talked to me about the wall of fog. I remembered that after Silvio Manuel had finished talking, he grabbed la Gorda by the nape of her neck as if she were a kitten, and disappeared with her into the bank of fog.

I had had a split second to observe their disappearance, because don Juan had somehow succeeded in making me face the wall myself. He did not pick me up by the nape of the neck but pushed me into the fog; and the next thing I knew, I was looking at the desolate plain. Don Juan, Silvio Manuel, the Nagual woman, and la Gorda were also there. I did not care what they were doing.

I was concerned with a most unpleasant and threatening feeling of oppression; a fatigue; a maddening difficulty in breathing. I perceived that I was standing inside a suffocating, yellow, low ceilinged cave. The physical sensation of pressure became so overwhelming that I could no longer breathe.

It seemed that all my physical functions had stopped. I could not feel any part of my body, yet I still could: move, walk, extend my arms, rotate my head. I put my hands on my thighs. There was no feeling in my thighs, nor in the palms of my hands. My legs and arms were visibly there, but not palpably [* palpably- as to be capable of being perceived by the senses or the mind: being capable of being handled, or touched, or felt] there.

Moved by the boundless fear I was feeling, I grabbed the Nagual woman by the arm and yanked her off balance. But it was not my muscle strength that had pulled her. It was a force that was stored, not in my muscles or skeletal frame, but in the very center of my body.

Wanting to play that force once more, I grabbed la Gorda. She was rocked by the strength of my pull. Then I realized that the energy to move them had come from a sticklike protuberance that acted upon them as a tentacle. It was balanced at the midpoint of my body.

All that had taken only an instant. The next moment I was back again at the same point of physical anguish and fear.

I looked at Silvio Manuel in a silent plea for help. The way he returned my look convinced me that I was lost. His eyes were cold and indifferent.

Don Juan turned his back to me and I shook from the inside out with a physical terror beyond comprehension. I thought that the blood in my body was boiling, not because I felt heat, but because an internal pressure was mounting to the point of bursting.

Don Juan commanded me to relax and abandon myself to my death. He said that I had to remain in there until I died.

He said that I had a chance to either die peacefully- if I would make a supreme effort and let my terror possess me; or I could die in agony if I chose to fight it.

Silvio Manuel spoke to me, a thing he rarely did. He said that the energy I needed to accept my terror was in my middle point, and that the only way to succeed was to acquiesce; [* acquiesce- to agree or express agreement] to surrender without surrendering.

The Nagual woman and la Gorda were perfectly calm. I was the only one who was dying there. Silvio Manuel said that the way I was wasting energy, my end was only moments away, and that I should consider myself already dead. Don Juan signaled the Nagual woman and la Gorda to follow him. They turned their backs to me. I did not see what else they did.

I felt a powerful vibration go through me. I figured that it was my death rattle. My struggle was over. I did not care any more. I gave in to the unsurpassable terror that was killing me. My body, or the configuration I regarded as my body, relaxed, abandoned itself to it's death. As I let the terror come in, or perhaps go out of me, I felt and saw a tenuous vapor- a whitish smear against the sulphur-yellow surroundings- leaving my body.

Don Juan came back to my side and examined me with curiosity. Silvio Manuel moved away and grabbed la Gorda again by the nape of her neck. I clearly saw him hurling her, like a giant rag doll, into the fog bank. Then he stepped in himself and disappeared.

The Nagual woman made a gesture to invite me to come into the fog. I moved toward her, but before I reached her, don Juan gave me a forceful shove that propelled me through the thick yellow fog. I did not stagger but glided through, and ended up falling headlong onto the ground in the everyday world.

La Gorda remembered the whole affair as I narrated it to her. Then she added more details.

"The Nagual woman and I were not afraid for your life," she said. "The Nagual had told us that you had to be forced to give up your holdings, but that was nothing new. Every male warrior has to be forced by fear.

"Silvio Manuel had already taken me behind that wall three times so that I would learn to relax. He said that if you saw me at ease, you would be affected by it, and you were. You gave up and relaxed."

"Did you also have a hard time learning to relax?" I asked. "No. It's a cinch for a woman," she said. "That's our advantage. The only problem is that we have to be transported through the fog. We can't do it on our own."

"Why not, Gorda?" I asked.

"One needs to be very heavy to go through and a woman is light," she said. "Too light, in fact."

"What about the Nagual woman? I didn't see anyone transporting her," I said.

"The Nagual woman was special," la Gorda said. "She could do everything by herself. She could take me in there, or take you. She could even pass through that deserted plain; a thing which the Nagual said was mandatory for all travelers who journey into the unknown."

"Why did the Nagual woman go in there with me?" I asked.

"Silvio Manuel took us along to buttress [* buttress- make stronger or defensible with supports] you," she said. "He thought that you needed the protection of two females and two males flanking you. Silvio Manuel thought that you needed to be protected from the entities that roam and lurk in there. Allies come from that deserted plain. And other things even more fierce."

"Were you also protected?" I asked.

"I don't need protection," she said. "I'm a woman. I'm free from all that. But we all thought that you were in a terrible fix. You were the Nagual, and a very stupid one. We thought that any of those fierce allies- or if you wish, call them demons- could have blasted you, or dismembered you. That was what Silvio Manuel said. He took us to flank your four corners.

"But the funny part was that neither the Nagual nor Silvio Manuel knew that you didn't need us. We were supposed to walk for quite a while until you lost your energy. Then Silvio Manuel was going to frighten you by pointing out the allies to you and beckoning them to come after you. He and the Nagual planned to help you little by little. That is the rule.

"But something went wrong. The minute you got in there, you went crazy. You hadn't moved an inch and you were already dying. You were frightened to death and you hadn't even seen the allies yet.

"Silvio Manuel told me that he didn't know what to do, so he said in your ear the last thing he was supposed to say to you, to give in, to surrender without surrendering. You became calm at once all by yourself and they didn't have to do any of the things that they had planned. There was nothing for the Nagual and Silvio Manuel to do except to take us out of there."

I told la Gorda that when I found myself back in the world there was someone standing by me who helped me to stand up. That was all I could recollect.

"We were in Silvio Manuel's house," she said. "I can now remember a lot about that house. Someone told me, I don't know who, that Silvio Manuel found that house and bought it because it was built on a power spot.

"But someone else said that Silvio Manuel found the house, liked it, bought it, and then brought the power spot to it. I personally feel that Silvio Manuel brought the power. I feel that his impeccability held the power spot on that house for as long as he and his companions lived there.

"When it was time for them to move away, the power of that spot vanished with them, and the house became what it had been before Silvio Manuel found it, an ordinary house."

As la Gorda talked, my mind seemed to clear up further, but not enough to reveal what had happened to us in that house that filled me with such sadness. Without knowing why, I was sure it had to do with the Nagual woman. Where was she?

La Gorda did not answer when I asked her that. There was a long silence. She excused herself, saying that she had to make breakfast. It was already morning. She left me by myself with a most painful, heavy heart. I called her back. She got angry and threw her pots on the floor. I understood why.

In another session of dreaming together we went still deeper into the intricacies of the second attention. This took place a few days later. La Gorda and I, with no such expectation or effort, found ourselves standing together. She tried three or four times in vain to interlock her arm with mine. She spoke to me, but her speech was incomprehensible. I knew, however, that she was saying that we were again in our dreaming bodies. She was cautioning me that all movement should stem from our midsections.

As in our last attempt, no dreaming scene presented itself for our examination, but I seemed to recognize a physical locale which I had seen in dreaming nearly every day for over a year: It was the valley of the saber-toothed tiger.

We walked a few yards. This time our movements were not jerky or explosive. We actually walked from the belly with no muscular action involved. The trying part was my lack of practice. It was like the first time I had ridden a bicycle. I easily got tired and lost my rhythm. I became hesitant and unsure of myself. We stopped. La Gorda was out of synchronization, too.

We began then to examine what was around us. Everything had an indisputable reality, at least to the eye. We were in a rugged area with a weird vegetation. I could not identify the strange shrubs I saw. They seemed like small trees, five to six feet high. They had a few leaves, which were flat and thick, chartreuse in color; and huge, gorgeous, deep-brown flowers striped with gold. The stems were not woody, but seemed to be light and pliable, like reeds; they were covered with long, formidable looking needlelike thorns. Some old dead plants that had dried up and fallen to the ground gave me the impression that the stems were hollow.

The ground was very dark and seemed moist. I tried to bend over to touch it, but I failed to move. La Gorda signaled me to use my midsection. When I did that I did not have to bend over to touch the ground. There was something in me like a tentacle which could feel.

But I could not tell what I was feeling. There were no particular tactile qualities on which to base distinctions. The ground that I touched appeared to be soil, not to my sense of touch but to what seemed to be a visual core in me.

I was plunged then into an intellectual dilemma. Why would dreaming seem to be the product of my visual faculty? Was it because of the predominance of the visual in daily life? The questions were meaningless. I was in no position to answer them, and all my queries did was to debilitate my second attention.

La Gorda jolted me out of my deliberations by ramming me. I experienced a sensation like a blow. A tremor ran through me. She pointed ahead of us. As usual, the saber-toothed tiger was lying on the ledge where I had always seen it. We approached until we were a mere six feet from the ledge and we had to lift our heads to see the tiger. We stopped. It stood up. It's size was stupendous, especially it's breadth.

I knew that la Gorda wanted us to sneak around the tiger to the other side of the hill. I wanted to tell her that that might be dangerous, but I could not find a way to convey the message to her. The tiger seemed angry; aroused. It crouched back on it's hind legs, as if it were preparing to jump on us. I was terrified.

La Gorda turned to me, smiling. I understood that she was telling me not to succumb to my panic because the tiger was only a ghostlike image. With a movement of her head, she coaxed me to go on. Yet at an unfathomable level, I knew that the tiger was an entity, perhaps not in the factual sense of our daily world, but real nonetheless. And because la Gorda and I were dreaming, we had lost our own 'factuality in the world'. At that moment we were on a par with the tiger; our existence also was ghostlike.

We took one more step at the nagging insistence of la Gorda. The tiger jumped from the ledge. I saw it's enormous body hurtling through the air coming directly at me. I lost the sense that I was dreaming. To me, the tiger was real and I was going to be ripped apart. A barrage of lights, images, and the most intense primary colors I had ever seen flashed all around me. I woke up in my study.

After we became extremely proficient in our dreaming together, I had the certainty that we had managed to secure our detachment; and we were no longer in a hurry. The outcome of our efforts was not what moved us to act.

It was rather an ulterior compulsion that gave us the impetus to act impeccably without thought of reward. Our subsequent sessions were like the first except for the speed and ease with which we entered into the second state of dreaming, dynamic vigil.

Our proficiency in dreaming together was such that we successfully repeated it every night. Without any such intention on our part, our dreaming together focused itself randomly on three areas: on the sand dunes, on the habitat of the saber-toothed tiger, and most important, on forgotten past events.

When the scenes that confronted us had to do with forgotten events in which la Gorda and I had played an important role, she had no difficulty in interlocking her arm with mine. That act gave me an irrational sense of security. La Gorda explained that it fulfilled a need to dispel the utter aloneness that the second attention produces. She said that to interlock the arms promoted a mood of objectivity, and as a result, we could watch the activity that took place in every scene. At times we were compelled to be part of the activity. At other times we were thoroughly objective and watched the scene as if we were in a movie theater.

When we visited the sand dunes or the habitat of the tiger, we were unable to interlock arms. In those instances our activity was never the same twice. Our actions were never premeditated, but seemed to be spontaneous reactions to novel situations.

According to la Gorda, most of our dreaming together grouped itself into three categories. The first and by far the largest was a reenactment of events we had lived together. The second was a review that both of us did of events I alone had "lived"- the land of the saber-toothed tiger was in this category. The third was an actual visit to a realm that existed as we saw it at the moment of our visit. She contended that those yellow mounds are present here and now, and that that is the way they look and stand always to the warrior who journeys into them.

I wanted to argue a point with her. She and I had had mysterious interactions with people we had forgotten for reasons inconceivable to us; but whom we had nonetheless known in fact. The saber-toothed tiger, on the other hand, was a creature of my dreaming. I could not conceive both of them to be in the same category.

Before I had time to voice my thoughts, I got her answer. It was as if she were actually inside my mind reading it like a text.

"They are in the same class," she said, and laughed nervously. "We can't explain why we have forgotten, or how it is that we are remembering now. We can't explain anything. The saber-toothed tiger is there, somewhere. We'll never know where. But why should we worry about a made-up inconsistency? To say that one is a fact and the other a dream has no meaning whatever to the other self."

La Gorda and I used dreaming together as a means of reaching an unimagined world of hidden memories. Dreaming together enabled us to recollect events that we were incapable of retrieving with our 'everyday life' memory. When we rehashed those events in our waking hours, it triggered yet more detailed recollections. In this fashion we disinterred, [* disinterred- dig up dead bodies for reburial or for medical investigation] so to speak, masses of memories that had been buried in us. It took us almost two years of prodigious [* prodigious- so great in size, force, or extent as to elicit awe] effort and concentration to arrive at a modicum [* modicum- a small or moderate or token amount] of understanding of what had happened to us.

Don Juan had told us that human beings are divided in two. The right side, which he called the tonal, encompasses everything the intellect can conceive of. The left side, called the nagual, is a realm of indescribable features; a realm impossible to contain in words. The left side is perhaps comprehended, if comprehension is what takes place, with the total body; thus it's resistance to conceptualization. [* conceptualization- inventing or contriving an idea or explanation and formulating it mentally]

Don Juan had also told us that all the faculties, possibilities, and accomplishments of sorcery, from the simplest to the most astounding, are in the human body itself.

Taking as a base the concepts that we are divided in two and that everything is in the body itself, la Gorda proposed an explanation of our memories.

She believed that during the years of our association with the Nagual Juan Matus, our time was divided between: states of normal awareness, on the right side, the tonal, where the first attention prevails; and states of heightened awareness, on the left side, the nagual, or the site of the second attention.

La Gorda thought that the Nagual Juan Matus's efforts were to lead us to the other self by means of our self-control of the second attention through dreaming.

However, he put us in direct touch with the second attention through bodily manipulation. La Gorda remembered that he used to force her to go from one side to the other by pushing or massaging her back. She said that sometimes he would even give her a sound blow over or around her right shoulder blade.

The result was her entrance into an extraordinary state of clarity. To la Gorda, it seemed that everything in that state went faster, yet nothing in the world had been changed.

It was weeks after la Gorda told me this that I remembered the same had been the case with me. At any given time, don Juan might give me a blow on my back. I always felt the blow on my spine, high between my shoulder blades. An extraordinary clarity would follow. The world was the same but sharper. Everything stood by itself. It may have been that my reasoning faculties were numbed by don Juan's blow, thus allowing me to perceive without their intervention.

I would stay clear indefinitely or until don Juan would give me another blow on the same spot to make me revert back to a normal state of awareness. He never pushed or massaged me. It was always a direct sound blow- not like the blow of a fist, but rather a smack that took my breath away for an instant. I would have to gasp and take long, fast gulps of air until I could breathe normally again.

La Gorda reported the same effect:. All the air would be forced out of her lungs by the Nagual's blow and she would have to breathe extra hard to fill them up again. La Gorda believed that breath was the all-important factor. In her opinion, the gulps of air that she had to take after being struck were what made the difference, yet she could not explain in what way breathing would affect her perception and awareness. She also said that she was never hit back into normal awareness. She reverted back to it by her own means, although without knowing how.

Her remarks seemed relevant to me. As a child, and even as an adult, I had occasionally had the wind knocked out of me when I took a fall on my back. But the effect of don Juan's blow, though it left me breathless, was not like that at all. There was no pain involved. Instead it brought on a sensation impossible to describe.

The closest I can come is to say that it created a feeling like dryness in me. The blows to my back seemed to dry out my lungs and fog up everything else. Then, as la Gorda had observed, everything that had become hazy after the Nagual's blow became crystal clear as I breathed, as if breath were the catalyst; [* catalyst- something that causes an important event to happen] the all-important factor.

The same thing would happen to me on the way back to the awareness of everyday life. The air would be knocked out of me, the world I was watching would become foggy, and then it would clear as I filled up my lungs.

Another feature of those states of heightened awareness was the incomparable richness of personal interaction; a richness that our bodies understood as a sensation of speeding. Our back and forth movement between the right and the left sides made it easier for us to realize that on the right side too much energy and time is consumed in the actions and interactions of our daily life. On the left side, on the other hand, there is an inherent need for economy and speed.

La Gorda could not describe what this speed really was, and neither could I. The best I could do would be to say that on the left side I could grasp the meaning of things with precision and directness. Every facet of activity was free of preliminaries or introductions.

I acted and rested. I went forth and retreated without any of the thought processes that are usual to me. This was what la Gorda and I understood as speeding.

La Gorda and I discerned at one moment that the richness of our perception on the left side was a post-facto realization. Our interaction appeared to be rich in the light of our capacity to remember it. We became cognizant then that in these states of heightened awareness we had perceived everything in one clump; one bulky mass of inextricable detail. We called this ability to perceive everything at once intensity.

For years we had found it impossible to examine the separate constituent parts of those chunks of experience. We had been unable to synthesize those parts into a sequence that would make sense to the intellect. Since we were incapable of those syntheses, we could not remember.

Our incapacity to remember was in reality an incapacity to put the memory of our perception on a linear basis. We could not lay our experiences flat, so to speak, and arrange them in a sequential order. The experiences were available to us, but at the same time they were impossible to retrieve because they were blocked by a wall of intensity.

The task of remembering, then, was properly the task of joining our left and right sides; of reconciling those two distinct forms of perception into a unified whole. It was the task of consolidating the totality of oneself by rearranging intensity into a linear sequence.

It occurred to us that the activities we remembered taking part in might not have taken long to perform in terms of time measured by the clock. By reason of our capacity to perceive in terms of intensity, we may have had only a subliminal sensation of lengthy passages of time. La Gorda felt that if we could rearrange intensity into a linear sequence, we would honestly believe that we had lived a thousand years.

The pragmatic [* pragmatic- guided by practical experience and observation rather than theory] step that don Juan took to aid our task of remembering was to make us interact with certain people while we were in a state of heightened awareness. He was very careful not to let us see those people when we were in a state of normal awareness. In this way he created the appropriate conditions for remembering.

Upon completing our remembering, la Gorda and I entered into a bizarre state. We had detailed knowledge of social interactions which we had shared with don Juan and his companions.

These were not memories in the sense that I would remember an episode from my childhood. They were more than vivid moment to moment recollections of events. We reconstructed conversations that seemed to be reverberating in our ears, as if we were listening to them.

Both of us felt that it was superfluous [* superfluous- serving no useful purpose] to try to speculate about what was happening to us. What we remembered, from the point of view of our experiential selves, was taking place now. Such was the character of our remembering.

At last la Gorda and I were able to answer the questions that had driven us so hard. We remembered who the Nagual woman was, where she fit among us, what her role had been. We deduced, more than remembered, that we had spent equal amounts of time with don Juan and don Genaro in normal states of awareness, and with don Juan and his other companions in states of heightened awareness. We recaptured every nuance of those interactions which had been veiled by intensity.

Upon a thoughtful review of what we had found, we realized that we had bridged the two sides of ourselves in a minimal fashion. We turned then to other topics; new questions that had come to take precedence over the old ones.

There were three subjects, three questions, that summarized all of our concerns. Who was don Juan and who were his companions? What had they really done to us? And where had all of them gone?

# PART THREE – The Eagle's Gift

## 9. The Rule of the Nagual

Don Juan had been extremely sparing with information about his background and personal life. His reticence [* reticence- not volunteering anything more than necessary] was, fundamentally, a didactic [* didactic- instructive] device. As far as he was concerned, his time began when he became a warrior. Anything that had happened to him before was of very little consequence.

All la Gorda and I knew about his early life was that he was born in Arizona of Yaqui and Yuma Indian parentage. When he was still an infant, his parents took him to live with the Yaquis in northern Mexico. At ten years of age he was caught in the tide of the Yaqui wars. His mother was killed then, and his father was apprehended by the Mexican army. Both don Juan and his father were sent to a relocation center in the farthest southern state of Yucatan. He grew up there.

Whatever happened to him during that period was never disclosed to us. Don Juan believed there was no need to tell us about it. I felt otherwise. The importance that I gave to that segment of his life arose from my erroneous conviction that the distinctive features and the emphasis of his leadership grew out of that personal inventory of experience.

But that inventory, important as it might have been, was not what gave him the paramount significance he had in our eyes and in the eyes of his other companions. His total preeminence

[* preeminence- high status importance owing to marked superiority] rested on the fortuitous act of becoming involved with the 'rule.'

Being involved with the rule may be described as living a myth. Don Juan lived a myth, a myth that caught him and made him the Nagual.

Don Juan said that when the rule caught him, he was an aggressive, unruly man; living in exile as thousands of other Yaqui Indians from northern Mexico lived at that time. He worked in the tobacco plantations of southern Mexico.

One day after work, in a nearly fatal encounter with a fellow worker over matters of money, he was shot in the chest.

When he regained consciousness an old Indian was leaning over him, poking the small wound in his chest with his fingers. The bullet had not penetrated the chest cavity, but was lodged in the muscle against a rib. Don Juan fainted two or three times from shock, loss of blood, and in his own words, from fear of dying. The old Indian removed the bullet, and since don Juan had no place to stay, the old Indian took don Juan to his own house and nursed him for over a month.

The old Indian was kind but severe. One day when don Juan was fairly strong and almost recovered, the old man gave him a sound blow on his back and forced him into a state of heightened awareness. Then, without any further preliminaries, he revealed to don Juan the portion of the rule which pertained to the Nagual and his role.

Don Juan did exactly the same thing with me and with la Gorda. He made us shift levels of awareness, and told us the rule of the Nagual in the following way:

The power that governs the destiny of all living beings is called the Eagle, not because it is an eagle or has anything to do with an eagle, but because it appears to the seer as an immeasurable jet-black eagle, standing erect as an eagle stands; it's height reaching to infinity.

As the seer gazes on the blackness that the Eagle is, four blazes of light reveal what the Eagle is like.

The first blaze, which is like a bolt of lightning, helps the seer make out the contours of the Eagle's body. There are patches of whiteness that look like an eagle's feathers and talons.

A second blaze of lightning reveals the flapping, wind-creating blackness that looks like an eagle's wings.

With the third blaze of lightning, the seer beholds a piercing, inhuman eye.

The fourth and last blaze discloses what the Eagle is doing...

The Eagle is devouring the awareness of all the creatures that a moment before were alive on earth, are now dead, and have floated to the Eagle's beak like a ceaseless swarm of fireflies to meet their owner; this being their reason for having had life.

The Eagle disentangles these tiny flames, lays them flat like a tanner stretches out a hide, and then consumes them; for awareness is the Eagle's food.

The Eagle- the power that governs the destinies of all living things- reflects equally and at once all those living things.

There is no way, therefore, for man to pray to the Eagle, to ask favors, or to hope for grace. The human part of the Eagle is too insignificant to move the whole.

It is only from the Eagle's actions that a seer can tell what it wants. The Eagle, although it is not moved by the circumstances of any living thing, has granted a gift to each of those beings.

In those beings' own way, and by right, any one of them, if it so desires, has the power to keep the flame of awareness; the power to disobey the summons to 'die and be consumed'.

Every living thing has been granted the power, if it so desires, to seek an opening to freedom and to go through it. It is evident to the seer who sees the opening, and to the creatures that go through it, that the Eagle has granted that gift in order to perpetuate awareness.

For the purpose of guiding living things to that opening, the Eagle created the Nagual. The Nagual is a double being to whom the rule has been revealed.

Whether the Nagual be in the form of a human being, an animal, a plant, or anything else that lives; the Nagual by virtue of it's doubleness is drawn to seek that hidden passageway.

In human beings, the Nagual comes in pairs; male and female. A double man and a double woman become the Nagual only after the rule has been told to each of them, and each of them has understood it and accepted it in full.

To the eye of the seer, a Nagual man or Nagual woman appears as a luminous egg with four compartments.

Unlike the average human being who has two sides only- a left and a right- the Nagual has a left side divided into two long sections, and a right side equally divided in two.

The Eagle created the first Nagual man and Nagual woman as seers and immediately put them in the world to see.

The Eagle provided them with four female warriors who were stalkers; three male warriors; and one male courier- whom the Nagual pair were to nourish, enhance, and lead to freedom.

The female warriors are called the four directions; the four corners of a square; the four moods; the four winds; and are the four different female personalities that exist in the human race.

The first is the east. She is called order. She is optimistic, light-hearted, smooth, and persistent; like a steady breeze.

The second is the north. She is called strength. She is resourceful, blunt, direct, and tenacious; like a hard wind.

The third is the west. She is called feeling. She is introspective, remorseful, cunning, and sly; like a cold gust of wind.

The fourth is the south. She is called growth. She is nurturing, loud, shy, and warm; like a hot wind.

The three male warriors and the courier are representative of the four types of male activity and temperament.

The first type is the knowledgeable man; the scholar; a noble, dependable, and serene man fully dedicated to accomplishing his task, whatever it may be.

The second type is the man of action; highly volatile, and a great humorous, fickle companion.

The third type is the organizer behind the scenes: the mysterious, unknowable man. Nothing can be said about him because he allows nothing about himself to slip out.

The courier is the fourth type. He is the assistant; a taciturn, [* taciturn- habitually reserved and uncommunicative] somber man who does very well if properly directed, but who cannot stand on his own.

In order to make things easier, the Eagle showed the Nagual man and Nagual woman that each of these types among men and women of the earth has specific features in their luminous bodies.

The scholar has a sort of shallow dent; a bright depression at his solar plexus. In some men it appears as a pool of intense luminosity; sometimes smooth and shiny like a mirror without a reflection.

The man of action has some fibers emanating from the area of the will. The number of fibers varies from one to five, and their size ranges from a mere string to a thick, whiplike tentacle up to eight feet long. Some men of action have as many as three of these fibers developed into tentacles.

The man behind the scenes is recognized not by a feature, but by his ability to create, quite involuntarily, a burst of power that effectively blocks the attention of seers. When in the presence of this type of man, seers find themselves immersed in extraneous detail rather than seeing.

The assistant has no obvious configuration. To seers he appears as a clear glow in a flawless shell of luminosity.

In the female realm, the east is recognized by the almost imperceptible blotches in her luminosity; something like small areas of discoloration.

The north has an overall radiation. She exudes a reddish glow, almost like heat.

The west has a tenuous film enveloping her, a film which makes her appear darker than the others.

The south has an intermittent glow; she shines for a moment and then gets dull, only to shine again.

The Nagual man and the Nagual woman have two different movements in their luminous bodies. Their right sides wave, while their left sides whirl.

In terms of personality, the Nagual man is supportive, steady, unchangeable. The Nagual woman is a being at war and yet relaxed; ever aware but without strain. Both of them reflect the four types of their sex; as four ways of behaving.

The first command that the Eagle gave the Nagual man and Nagual woman was to find, on their own, another set of four female warriors, four directions, who were the exact replicas of the stalkers but who were dreamers.

Dreamers appear to a seer as having an apron of hairlike fibers at their midsections. Stalkers have a similar apronlike feature, but instead of fibers the apron consists of countless small, round protuberances.

The eight female warriors are divided into two bands, which are called the right and left planets. The right planet is made up of four stalkers, the left of four dreamers. The warriors of each planet were taught by the Eagle the rule of their specific task: stalkers were taught stalking; dreamers were taught dreaming.

The two female warriors of each direction live together. They are so alike that they mirror each other, and only through impeccability can they find solace and challenge in each other's reflection.

The only time when the four dreamers or four stalkers get together is when they have to accomplish a strenuous task.

But only under special circumstances should the four of them join hands because their touch fuses them into one being. This should be done only in cases of dire need, or at the moment of leaving this world.

The two female warriors of each direction are attached to one of the males, in any combination that is necessary. Thus they make a set of four households which are capable of incorporating as many warriors as needed.

The male warriors and the courier can also form an independent unit of four men, or each can function as a solitary being as dictated by necessity.

Next the Nagual and his party were commanded to find three more couriers. These could be all males or all females or a mixed set, but the male couriers had to be of the fourth type of man, the assistant, and the females had to be from the south.

In order to make sure that the first Nagual man would lead his party to freedom and not deviate from that path or become corrupted, the Eagle took the Nagual woman to the other world to serve as a beacon, guiding the party to the opening.

The Nagual and his warriors were then commanded to forget.

They were plunged into darkness and were given new tasks; the task of remembering themselves, and the task of remembering the Eagle.

The command to forget was so great that everyone was separated. They did not remember who they were. The Eagle intended that if they were capable of remembering themselves again, they would find the totality of themselves.

Only then would they have the strength and forebearance necessary to seek and face their definitive journey.

Their last task, after they had regained the totality of themselves, was to get a new pair of double beings and transform them into a new Nagual man and a new Nagual woman by virtue of revealing the rule to them.

And just as the first Nagual man and Nagual woman had been provided with a minimal party, they had to supply the new pair of Naguals with four female warriors who were stalkers, three male warriors, and one male courier.

When the first Nagual and his party were ready to go through the passageway, the first Nagual woman was waiting to guide them.

They were ordered then to take the new Nagual woman with them to the other world to serve as a beacon for her people, leaving the new Nagual man in the world to repeat the cycle.

While in the world, the minimal number under a Nagual's leadership is sixteen: eight female warriors, three male warriors, four couriers, and the Nagual himself.

At the moment of leaving the world when the new Nagual woman is with them, the Nagual's number is seventeen. If his personal power permits him to have more warriors, then more must be added in multiples of four.

I had confronted don Juan with the question of how the rule became known to man. He explained that the rule was endless and covered every facet of a warrior's behavior. The interpretation and the accumulation of the rule is the work of seers whose only task throughout the ages has been to see the Eagle; to observe it's ceaseless flux.

From their observations, the seers have concluded that, providing the luminous shell that comprises one's humanness has been broken, it is possible to find in the Eagle the faint reflection of man. The Eagle's irrevocable dictums can then be apprehended by seers, properly interpreted by them, and accumulated in the form of a governing body.

Don Juan explained that the rule was not a tale, and that to cross over to freedom did not mean eternal life as eternity is commonly understood- that is, as living forever.

What the rule stated was that one could keep the awareness which is ordinarily relinquished at the moment of dying.

Don Juan could not explain what it meant to keep that awareness, or perhaps he could not even conceive of it. His benefactor had told him that at the moment of crossing, one enters into the third attention, and the body in it's entirety is kindled with knowledge. Every cell at once becomes aware of itself, and also aware of the totality of the body.

His benefactor had also told him that this kind of awareness is meaningless to our compartmentalized minds. Therefore the crux of the warrior's struggle was not so much to realize that the crossing over stated in the rule meant crossing to the third attention, but rather to conceive that there exists such an awareness at all.

Don Juan said that in the beginning the rule was to him something strictly in the realm of words. He could not imagine how it could lapse into the domain of the actual world and it's ways.

Under the effective guidance of his benefactor, however, and after a great deal of work, he finally succeeded in grasping the true nature of the rule, and totally accepted it as a set of pragmatic directives rather than a myth. From then on, he had no problem in dealing with the reality of the third attention.

The only obstacle in his way arose from his being so thoroughly convinced that the rule was a map that he believed he had to look for a literal opening in the world, a passageway. Somehow he had become needlessly stuck at the first level of a warrior's development.

Don Juan's own work as a leader and teacher, as a result, was directed at helping the apprentices, and especially me, to avoid repeating his mistake. What he succeeded in doing with us was to lead us through the three stages of a warrior's development without overemphasizing any of them.

First he guided us to take the rule as a map; then he guided us to the understanding that one can attain a paramount awareness, because there is such a thing; and finally he guided us to an actual passageway into that other concealed world of awareness.

In order to lead us through the first stage, the acceptance of the rule as a map, don Juan took the section which pertains to the Nagual and his role and showed us that it corresponds to unequivocal facts.

He accomplished this by allowing us to have, while we were in stages of heightened awareness, an unrestricted interaction with the members of his group, who were the living personifications of the eight types of people described by the rule.

As we interacted with them, more complex and inclusive aspects of the rule were revealed to us, until we were capable of realizing that we were caught in the network of something which at first we had conceptualized as a myth, but which in essence was a map.

Don Juan told us that in this respect his case had been identical to ours. His benefactor helped him go through that first stage by allowing him the same type of interaction. To that effect he made him shift back and forth from the right side to the left side awareness, just as don Juan had done to us. On the left side, he introduced him to the members of his own group, the eight female and three male warriors, and the four couriers, who were, as is mandatory, the strictest examples of the types described by the rule.

The impact of knowing them and dealing with them was staggering to don Juan. Not only did it force him to regard the rule as a factual guide, but it made him realize the magnitude of our unknown possibilities.

He said that by the time all the members of his own group had been gathered, he was so deeply committed to the warrior's way that he took for granted the fact that, without any overt effort on anybody's part, they had turned out to be perfect replicas of the warriors of his benefactor's party. The similarity of their personal likes, dislikes, affiliations, and so forth, was not a result of imitation. Don Juan said that they belonged, as the rule had stated, to specific blocks of people who had the same input and output. The only differences among members of the same block were in the pitch of their voices, and the sound of their laughter.

In trying to explain to me the effects that the interaction with his benefactor's warriors had

had on him, don Juan touched on the subject of the very meaningful difference between his benefactor and himself in how they interpreted the rule; and also in how they led and taught other warriors to accept it as a map.

He said that there are two types of interpretations- universal and individual. Universal interpretations take the statements that make up the body of the rule at face value. An example would be to say that the Eagle does not care about man's actions and yet it has provided man with a passageway to freedom.

An individual interpretation, on the other hand, is a current conclusion arrived at by seers using universal interpretation's as premises. An example would be to say that because of the Eagle's lack of concern, I would have to make sure that my chances to reach freedom are enhanced, perhaps by my own dedication.

According to don Juan, he and his benefactor were quite different in the methods they used to lead their wards. Don Juan said that his benefactor's mode was severity; he led with an iron hand, and following his conviction that with the Eagle free handouts are out of the question, he never did anything for anyone in a direct way. Instead, he actively helped everyone to help themselves. He considered that the Eagle's gift of freedom is not a bestowal but a chance to have a chance.

Don Juan, although he appreciated the merits of his benefactor's method, disagreed with it. Later on, when he was on his own, he himself saw that it wasted precious time. For him it was more expedient to present everyone with a given situation and force them to accept it, rather than wait until they were ready to face it on their own. That was his method with me and the other apprentices.

The instance in which that difference in leadership had the greatest bearing for don Juan was during the mandatory interaction that he had with his benefactor's warriors. The command of the rule was that his benefactor had to find for don Juan first a Nagual woman, and then a group of four women and four men to make up his warrior's party.

His benefactor saw that don Juan did not yet have enough personal power to assume the responsibility of a Nagual woman, and so he reversed the sequence and asked the females of his own group to find don Juan the four women first, and then the four men.

Don Juan confessed that he was enthralled with the idea of such a reversal. He had understood that those women were for his use, and in his mind that meant sexual use. His downfall, however, was to reveal his expectations to his benefactor who immediately put don Juan in contact with the men and women of his own party and left him alone to interact with them.

For don Juan, to meet those warriors was a true ordeal, not only because they were deliberately difficult with him, but because the nature of that encounter is meant to be a breakthrough.

Don Juan said that interaction in the left-side awareness cannot take place unless all the participants share that state. This was why he would not let us enter into the left-side awareness except to carry on our interaction with his warriors. That was the procedure his benefactor had followed with him.

Don Juan gave me a brief account of what had taken place during his first meeting with the members of his benefactor's group. His idea was that I could use his experience perhaps as a sample of what to expect.

He said that his benefactor's world had a magnificent regularity. The members of his party were Indian warriors from all over Mexico. At the time he met them they lived in a remote mountainous area in southern Mexico.

Upon reaching their house, don Juan was confronted with two identical women, the biggest Indian women he had ever seen. They were sulky and mean, but had very pleasing features.

When he tried to go between them, they caught him between their enormous bellies, grabbed his arms, and started beating him up. They threw him to the ground and sat on him, nearly crushing his rib cage. They kept him immobilized for over twelve hours while they conducted on-the-spot negotiations with his benefactor, who had to talk nonstop throughout the night until they finally let don Juan get up around midmorning.

He said that what scared him the most was the determination that showed in the eyes of those women. He thought he was done for; that they were going to sit on him until he died, as they had said they would.

Normally there should have been a waiting period of a few weeks before meeting the next set of warriors, but due to the fact that his benefactor was planning to leave him in their midst, don Juan was immediately taken to meet the others. He met everyone in one day and all of them treated him like dirt.

They argued that he was not the man for the job; that he was too coarse and way too stupid; young but already senile in his ways. His benefactor argued brilliantly in his defense. He told them that they could change those conditions, and that it should be an ultimate delight for them and for don Juan to take up that challenge.

Don Juan said that his first impression was right. For him there was only work and hardship from then on. The women saw that don Juan was unruly and could not be trusted to fulfill the complex and delicate task of leading four women.

Since they were seers themselves, they made their own individual interpretation of the rule and decided that it would be more helpful for don Juan to have the four male warriors first and then the four females. Don Juan said that their seeing had been correct, because in order to deal with women warriors, a Nagual has to be in a state of consummate personal power; a state of serenity and control in which human feelings play a minimal part; a state which at the time was inconceivable for him.

His benefactor put him under the direct supervision of his two westerly women, the most fierce and uncompromising warriors of them all. Don Juan said that all westerly women, in accordance with the rule, are raving mad and have to be cared for. Under the duress of dreaming and stalking they lose their right sides, their minds. Their reason burns up easily due to the fact that their left-side awareness is extraordinarily keen. Once they lose their rational side, they are peerless dreamers and stalkers since they no longer have any rational ballast to hold them back.

Don Juan said that those women cured him of his lust. For six months he spent most of his time in a harness suspended from the ceiling of their rural kitchen, like a ham that was being smoked, until he was thoroughly purified from thoughts of gain and personal gratification.

Don Juan explained that a leather harness is a superb device for curing certain maladies that are not physical. The idea is that the higher a person is suspended and the longer that person is kept from touching the ground by dangling in midair, the better the possibilities of a true cleansing effect.

While he was being cleansed by the westerly warriors, the other women were involved in the process of finding the men and the women for his party. It took years to accomplish this. Don Juan, in the meantime, was forced to interact with all his benefactor's warriors by himself.

The presence of those warriors and his contact with them was so overwhelming to don Juan that he believed he would never get out from under them. The result was his total and literal adherence to the body of the rule.

Don Juan said that he spent irreplaceable time pondering the existence of an actual passageway into the other world. He viewed such a concern as a pitfall to be avoided at all costs. To protect me from it, he allowed the required inter action with the members of his group to be carried on while I was protected by the presence of la Gorda or any of the other apprentices.

In my case, meeting don Juan's warriors was the end result of a long process. There was never any mention of them in casual conversations with don Juan. I knew of their existence solely by inference from the rule which he was revealing to me in installments. Later on, he admitted that they existed, and that eventually I would have to meet them. He prepared me for the encounter by giving me general instructions and pointers.

He warned me about a common error; that of overestimating the left-side awareness; of becoming dazzled by it's clarity and power. He said that to be in the left-side awareness does not mean that one is immediately liberated from one's folly- it only means an extended capacity for perceiving, a greater facility to understand and learn, and above all, a greater ability to forget.

As the time approached for me to meet don Juan's own warriors, he again gave me a scanty description of his benefactor's party as a guideline for my own use. He said that to an onlooker, his benefactor's world may have appeared at certain times as consisting of four households. The first was formed by the southerly women and the Nagual's courier; the second by the easterly women, the scholar, and a male courier; the third by the northerly women, the man of action, and another male courier; and the fourth by the westerly women, the man behind the scenes, and a third male courier.

At other times that world may have seemed to be composed of groups. There was a group of four thoroughly dissimilar older men, who were don Juan's benefactor and his three male warriors. Then a group of four men who were very similar to one another, who were the couriers. A group composed of two sets of apparently identical female twins who lived together and were the southerly and easterly women.

And two other sets of apparently sisters, who were the northerly and westerly women.

None of these women were relatives- they just looked alike because of the enormous amount of personal power that don Juan's benefactor had. Don Juan described the southerly women as being two mastodons, scary in appearance but very friendly and warm. The easterly women were very beautiful, fresh and funny, a true delight to the eyes and the ears. The northerly women were utterly womanly, vain, coquettish, [* coquettish- like a seductive woman who uses her sex appeal to exploit men] concerned with their aging, but also terribly direct and impatient. The westerly women were mad at times, and at other times they were the epitome of severity and purpose. They were the ones who disturbed don Juan the most because he could not reconcile the fact that they were so sober, kind, and helpful, with the fact that at any given moment they could lose their composure and be raving mad.

The men, on the other hand, were in no way memorable to don Juan. He thought that there was nothing remarkable about them. They seemed to have been thoroughly absorbed by the shocking force of the women's determination and by his benefactor's overpowering personality.

Insofar as his own awakening was concerned, don Juan said that upon being thrust into his benefactor's world, he realized how easy and convenient it had been for him to go through life with no self-restraint. He understood that his mistake had been to believe that his goals were the only worthwhile ones a man could have.

All his life he had been a pauper. His consuming ambition, therefore, was to have material possessions; to be somebody. He had been so preoccupied with his desire to get ahead and his despair at not being successful, that he had had no time for examining anything. He had gladly sided with his benefactor because he realized that he was being offered an opportunity to make something of himself. If nothing else, he thought he might learn to be a sorcerer. He conceived that immersion in his benefactor's world might have an effect on him analogous to the effect of the Spanish Conquest on the Indian culture. It destroyed everything, but it also forced a shattering self-examination.

My response to the preparations to meet don Juan's party of warriors was not, strangely enough, awe or fear, but a petty intellectual concern about two topics. The first was the proposition that there are only four types of men and four types of women in the world. I argued with don Juan that the range of individual variation in people is too great for such a simple scheme. He disagreed with me. He said that the rule was final, and that it did not allow for an indefinite number of types of people.

The second topic was the cultural context of don Juan's knowledge. He did not know that himself. He viewed it as the product of a sort of Pan-Indianism. His conjecture about it's origin was that at one time, in the Indian world prior to the Conquest, the handling of the second attention became vitiated. [* vitiated- ruined in character or quality]

It was developed without any hindrance over perhaps thousands of years, to the point that it lost it's strength. The practitioners of that time may have had no need for controls, and thus without restraint, the second attention, instead of becoming stronger, became weaker by virtue of it's increased intricacy.

Then the Spanish invaders came and, with their superior technology, destroyed the Indian world. Don Juan said that his benefactor was convinced that only a handful of those warriors survived and were capable of reassembling their knowledge and redirecting their path. Whatever don Juan and his benefactor knew about the second attention was the restructured version; a new version which had built-in restraints because it had been forged under the harshest conditions of suppression.

## 10. The Nagual's Party of Warriors

When don Juan judged that the time was right for me to have my first encounter with his fellow warriors, he made me shift levels of awareness.

He then made it perfectly clear that he would have nothing to do with their way of meeting me.

Don Juan warned me that if they decided to beat me, he could not stop them: They could do anything they wanted, except kill me.

Don Juan stressed over and over again that the warriors of his party were a perfect replica of his benefactor's party except that some of don Juan's women were more fierce; and all the men were utterly unique and powerful.

Therefore, my first encounter with them might resemble a head-on collision.

I was nervous and apprehensive on the one hand, but curious on the other.

My mind was running wild with endless speculations, most of them about what the warriors would look like.

Don Juan said that he had the choice either of coaching me to memorize an elaborate ritual, as he had been made to do, or of making it the most casual encounter possible.

He waited for an omen to point out which alternative to take.

Don Juan told me that his benefactor had done something similar; only his benefactor had insisted don Juan learn the ritual before the omen presented itself.

When don Juan revealed his sexual daydreams of sleeping with four women, his benefactor interpreted it as the omen: Don Juan's benefactor chucked the ritual; and ended up pleading like a hog dealer for don Juan's life.

In my case, don Juan wanted an omen before he taught me the ritual.

That omen came when don Juan and I were driving through a border town in Arizona and a policeman stopped me.

The policeman thought I was an illegal alien.

Only after I had shown him my passport- which he suspected of being a forgery- and other documents, did he let me go.

Don Juan had been in the front seat next to me all the time, and the policeman had not given him a second glance: The policeman had focused solely on me.

Don Juan thought the incident was the omen he was waiting for: His interpretation of it was that it would be very dangerous for me to call attention to myself; and he concluded that my world had to be one of utter simplicity and candor: Elaborate ritual and pomp were out of character for me.

Don Juan conceded, however, that a minimal observance of ritualistic patterns was in order when I made my acquaintance with his warriors.

I had to begin by approaching them from the south, because that is the direction that power follows in it's ceaseless flux: Life force flows to us from the south, and leaves us flowing toward the north.

Don Juan said that the only opening to a Nagual's world was through the south, and that the gate was made by two female warriors who would have to greet me, and who would let me go through if they so decided.

He took me to a town in central Mexico to a house in the countryside.

As we approached it on foot from a southerly direction, I saw two massive Indian women standing four feet apart, facing each other.

They were about thirty or forty feet away from the main door of the house in an area where the dirt was hard-packed.

The two women were extraordinarily muscular and stern: Both had long, jet-black hair held together in a single thick braid.

The women looked like sisters. They were about the same height and weight.

I figured that they must have been around five feet four, and weighed 150 pounds.

One of them was extremely dark, almost black, the other much lighter.

They were dressed like typical Indian women from central Mexico with long, full dresses and shawls, and homemade sandals.

Don Juan made me stop three feet from them.

He turned to the woman on our left and made me face her. He said that her name was Cecilia and that she was a dreamer.

He then turned abruptly without giving me time to say anything, and made me face the darker woman to our right.

He said that her name was Delia and that she was a stalker.

The women nodded at me. They did not smile or move to shake hands with me, or make any gesture of welcome.

Don Juan walked between them as if they were two columns marking a gate.

He took a couple of steps and turned as if waiting for the women to invite me to go through. The women stared at me calmly for a moment.

Then Cecilia asked me to come in as if I were at the threshold of an actual door.

Don Juan led the way to the house.

At the front door we found a man.

The man was very slender.

At first sight he looked extremely young, but on closer examination he appeared to be in his late fifties.

He gave me the impression of being an old child: small, wiry, with penetrating dark eyes.

He was like an elfish apparition, a shadow.

Don Juan introduced him to me as Emilito, and said that Emilito was his courier and all-around helper who would welcome me on his behalf.

It seemed to me that Emilito was indeed the most appropriate being to welcome anyone.

His smile was radiant. His small teeth were perfectly even.

He shook hands with me, or rather he crossed his forearms and clasped both my hands.

He seemed to be exuding enjoyment.

Anyone would have sworn that he was ecstatic in meeting me.

His voice was very soft and his eyes sparkled.

We walked into a large room.

There was another woman there.

Don Juan said that her name was Teresa and that she was Cecilia's and Delia's courier.

Teresa was perhaps in her early thirties, and she definitely looked like Cecilia's daughter.

Teresa was very quiet but very friendly.

We followed don Juan to the back of the house where there was a roofed porch.

It was a warm day. We sat there around a table; and after a frugal dinner we talked until after midnight.

Emilito was the host. He charmed and delighted everyone with his exotic stories.

The women opened up. They were a great audience for him.

To hear the women's laughter was an exquisite pleasure.

They were tremendously muscular, bold, and physical.

At one point when Emilito said that Cecilia and Delia were like two mothers to him, and Teresa like a daughter, they picked him up and tossed him in the air like a child.

Of the two women, Delia seemed the more rational, down-to-earth.

Cecilia was perhaps more aloof, but appeared to have greater inner strength.

Cecilia gave me the impression of being more intolerant, or more impatient: She seemed to get annoyed with some of Emilito's stories.

Nonetheless, she was definitely on the edge of her chair when Emilito would tell what he called his 'tales of eternity'.

Emilito would preface every story with the phrase, "Do you, dear friends, know that...?"

The story that impressed me most was about some creatures that he said existed in the universe, who were the closest thing to human beings without being human; creatures who were obsessed against movement, and were capable of detecting the slightest fluctuation inside themselves or around them.

These creatures were so sensitive to motion that it was a curse to them: It gave them such pain that their ultimate ambition was to find quietude.

Emilito would intersperse his tales of eternity with the most outrageous dirty jokes.

Because of his incredible gifts as a raconteur, I understood every one of his stories as a metaphor, or a parable with which he was teaching us something.

Don Juan said that Emilito was merely reporting about things he had witnessed in his journeys through eternity: The role of a courier was to travel ahead of the Nagual, like a scout in a military operation.

Emilito went to the limits of the second attention, and whatever he witnessed he passed on to the others.

My second encounter with don Juan's warriors was just as contrived as the first.

One day don Juan made me shift levels of awareness and told me that I had a second appointment.

He made me drive to Zacatecas in northern Mexico.

We arrived there very early in the morning.

Don Juan said that that was only a stopover, and that we had until the next day to relax before we embarked on my second formal meeting to make the acquaintance of the eastern women and the scholar warrior of his party.

He explained then an intricate and delicate point of choice.

He said that we had met the south and the courier in the midafternoon, because he had made an individual interpretation of the rule and had picked that hour to represent the night: The south was really the night- a warm, friendly, cozy night- and properly we should have gone to meet the two southerly women after midnight.

However, meeting them at night would have been inauspicious [* inauspicious- contrary to one's interests or welfare] for me because my general direction was toward the light; toward optimism; an optimism that works itself harmoniously into the mystery of darkness.

He said that that was precisely what we had done that day: We had enjoyed each other's company and talked until it was pitch-black.

I had wondered why they did not light their lanterns.

Don Juan said that the east, on the other hand, was the morning; the light; and that we would meet the easterly women the next day at midmorning.

Before breakfast we went to the plaza and sat down on a bench.

Don Juan told me that he wanted me to remain there and wait for him while he ran some errands.

He left and shortly after he had gone a woman came and sat down on the other end of the bench.

I did not pay any attention to her and I started reading a newspaper.

A moment later another woman joined her.

I wanted to move to another bench, but I remembered that don Juan had specifically said that I should sit there.

I had turned my back to the women and had even forgotten that they were there since they were so quiet, when a man greeted them and stood facing me.

I became aware from their conversation that the women had been waiting for him.

The man apologized for being late.

He obviously wanted to sit down, so I slid over to make room for him.

He thanked me profusely and apologized for inconveniencing me.

He said that they were absolutely lost in the city because they were rural people, and that once they had been to Mexico City and had nearly died in the traffic.

He asked me if I lived in Zacatecas.

I said no and I was going to end our conversation right there; but there was something very winning about his smile.

He was an old man, but was remarkably fit for his age.

He was not an Indian. He seemed to be a gentleman farmer from a small rural town.

He was wearing a suit, and had a straw hat on. His features were very delicate. His skin was almost transparent. He had a high-bridged nose, a small mouth, and a perfectly groomed white beard.

He looked extraordinarily healthy and yet he seemed frail. He was of medium height and well built, but at the same time gave the impression of being slender, almost effete. [* effete- marked by excessive self-indulgence and moral decay]

He stood up and introduced himself to me.

He told me that his name was Vicente Medrano, and that he had come to the city on business only for the day.

He then pointed to the two women, and said that they were his sisters.

The women stood up and faced us.

They were very slim and darker than their brother.

They were also much younger: One of them could have been his daughter.

I noticed that their skin was not like his: Theirs was dry.

The two women were very good-looking.

Like the man, they had fine features, and their eyes were clear and peaceful. They were about five feet four.

They were wearing beautifully tailored dresses, but with their shawls, low heeled shoes, and dark cotton stockings they looked like well-to-do farm women.

The older one appeared to be in her fifties, the younger in her forties.

The man introduced them to me.

The older woman was named Carmela and the younger one Hermelinda.

I stood up and briefly shook hands with them.

I asked them if they had any children: That question was usually a sure conversation opener for me.

The women laughed and in unison ran their hands down their stomachs to show me how lean they were.

The man calmly explained that his sisters were spinsters, and that he himself was an old bachelor.

He confided to me, in a half-joking tone, that unfortunately his sisters were too mannish: They lacked the femininity that makes a woman desirable, and so they had been unable to find husbands.

I said that they were better off, considering the subservient role of women in our society.

The women disagreed with me. They said that they would not have minded at all being servants if they had only found men who wanted to be their masters.

The younger one said that the real problem was that their father had failed to teach them to behave like women.

The man commented with a sigh that their father was so domineering that he had also prevented him from marrying by deliberately neglecting to teach him how to be a macho.

All three of them sighed and looked gloomy.

I wanted to laugh.

After a long silence we sat down again and the man said that if I stayed a while longer on that bench I would have a chance to meet their father, who was still very spirited for his advanced age.

The man added in a shy tone that their father was going to take them to eat breakfast because they themselves never carried any money: Their father handled the purse strings.

I was aghast. Those old people who looked so strong were in reality like weak, dependent children.

I said goodbye to them and got up to leave.

The man and his sisters insisted that I stay. They assured me that their father would love it if I would join them for breakfast.

I did not want to meet their father and yet I was curious.

I told them that I myself was waiting for someone.

At that, the women began to chuckle and then broke into a roaring laughter.

The man also abandoned himself to uncontained laughter.

I felt stupid and I wanted to get out of there.

At that moment don Juan showed up and I became aware of their maneuver. I did not think it was amusing.

All of us stood up.

They were still laughing as don Juan told me that those women were the east- that Carmela was the stalker and Hermelinda the dreamer- and that Vicente was the warrior scholar and his oldest companion.

As we were leaving the plaza, another man joined us; a tall, dark Indian, perhaps in his forties.

He was wearing Levi's and a cowboy hat. He seemed terribly strong and sullen.

Don Juan introduced him to me as Juan Tuma, Vicente's courier and research assistant.

We walked to a restaurant a few blocks away: The women held me between them.

Carmela said that she hoped I was not offended by their joke; that they had had the choice of just introducing themselves to me or kidding me.

What made them decide to kid me was my thoroughly snobbish attitude in turning my back to them, and my wanting to move to another bench.

Hermelinda added that one has to be utterly humble and carry nothing to defend, not even one's person; that one's person should be protected, but not defended. In snubbing them, I was not protecting but merely defending myself.

I felt quarrelsome. I was frankly put out by their masquerade.

I began to argue, but before I had made my point don Juan came to my side.

He told the two women that they should overlook my belligerence, that it takes a very long time to clean out the garbage that a luminous being picks up in the world.

The owner of the restaurant knew Vicente, and had prepared a sumptuous breakfast for us.

All of them were in great spirits, but I was unable to let go of my brooding.

Then, at don Juan's request, Juan Tuma began to talk about his journeys.

Juan Tuma was a factual man, and I became mesmerized by his dry accounts of things beyond my comprehension.

To me, the most fascinating was his description of some beams of light or energy that allegedly crisscross the earth.

He said that these beams do not fluctuate as everything else in the universe does, but are fixed into a pattern. This pattern coincides with hundreds of points in the luminous body.

Hermelinda had understood that all the points were in our physical body, but Juan Tuma explained that since the luminous body is quite big, some of the points are as much as three feet away from the physical body.

In a sense they are outside of us, and yet they are not. They are on the periphery of our luminosity and thus still belong to the total body.

The most important of those points is located a foot away from the stomach, 40 degrees to the right of an imaginary line shooting straight forward.

Juan Tuma told us that point was a center of assembling for the second attention; and that it is possible to manipulate it by gently stroking the air with the palms of the hands.

Listening to Juan Tuma, I forgot my anger.

My next encounter with don Juan's world was with the west.

He gave me ample warning that the first contact with the west was a most important event because it would decide, in one way or another, what I should subsequently do.

He also alerted me to the fact that it was going to be a trying event, especially for me, as I was so stiff and felt so self-important.

He said that the west is naturally approached at dusk; a time of day which is difficult just in itself, and that his warriors of the west were very powerful, bold, and downright maddening.

At the same time, I was also going to meet the male warrior who was the man behind the scenes.

Don Juan admonished me to exercise the utmost caution and patience: Not only were the women raving mad, but they and the man were the most powerful warriors he had ever known.

They were, in his opinion, the ultimate authorities of the second attention.

Don Juan did not elaborate any further.

One day, as though on the spur of the moment, he suddenly decided that it was time to start on our trip to meet the westerly women.

We drove to a city in northern Mexico.

Just at dusk, don Juan directed me to stop in front of a big unlit house on the outskirts of town.

We got out of the car and walked to the main door.

Don Juan knocked several times.

No one answered, and I had the feeling that we had come at the wrong time. The house seemed empty.

Don Juan kept on knocking until he apparently got tired.

He signaled me to knock.

He told me to keep on doing it without stopping because the people who lived in there were hard of hearing.

I asked him if it would be better to return later or the next day.

He told me to keep on banging on the door.

After a seemingly endless wait, the door began to open slowly.

A weird looking woman stuck her head out, and asked me if my intention was to break down the door, or to anger the neighbors and their dogs.

Don Juan stepped forward to say something.

The woman stepped out and forcefully brushed him aside.

She began to shake her finger at me, yelling that I was behaving as if I owned the world; as if there were no one else besides myself.

I protested that I was merely doing what don Juan had told me to do.

The woman asked if I had been told to break the door down.

Don Juan tried to intervene but was again brushed away.

The woman looked as if she had just gotten out of bed. She was a mess.

Our knocking had probably awakened her and she must have put on a dress from her basket of dirty clothes.

She was barefoot. Her hair was graying and terribly unkempt. She had red, beady eyes.

She was a homely woman, but somehow very impressive; rather tall- about five feet eight- dark and enormously muscular.

Her bare arms were knotted with hard muscles, and I noticed that she had beautifully shaped calves.

She looked me up and down, towering over me, and shouted that she had not heard my apologies.

Don Juan whispered to me that I should apologize loud and clear.

Once I had done that, the woman smiled and turned to don Juan and hugged him as if he were a child.

She grumbled that he should not have made me knock because my touch on the door was too shifty and disturbing.

She held don Juan's arm and led him inside, helping him over the high threshold. She called him 'dearest little old man'.

Don Juan laughed.

I was appalled to see him acting as if he were delighted at the absurdities of that scary woman.

Once she had helped the dearest little old man into the house, she turned to me, and made a gesture with her hand to shoo me away as if I were a dog.

She laughed at my surprise.

Her teeth were big, uneven, and filthy.

Then she seemed to change her mind and told me to come in.

Don Juan was heading to a door that I could barely see at the end of a dark hall.

The woman scolded him for not knowing where he was going.

She took us through another dark hall.

The house seemed to be enormous and there was not a single light in it.

The woman opened a door to a very large room; almost empty except for two old armchairs in the center under the weakest light bulb I had ever seen: It was an old fashioned long bulb.

Another woman was sitting in one of the armchairs.

The first woman sat down on a small straw mat on the floor, and rested her back against the other chair.

Then she put her thighs against her breasts; exposing herself completely. She was not wearing underpants.

I stared at her dumbfounded.

In an ugly gruff tone, the woman asked me why I was staring at her vagina.

I did not know what to say except to deny it.

She stood up and seemed about to hit me. She demanded that I tell her that I had gaped at her because I had never seen a vagina in my life.

I felt guilty. I was thoroughly embarrassed and also annoyed at having been caught in such a situation.

The woman asked don Juan what kind of Nagual I was if I had never seen a vagina.

She began repeating this over and over, yelling it at the top of her voice.

She ran around the room and stopped by the chair where the other woman was sitting. She shook her by the shoulders, and, pointing at me, said that I was a man who had never seen a vagina in his whole life.

She laughed and taunted me.

I was mortified. I felt that don Juan should have done something to save me from that humiliation.

I remembered that he had told me these women were quite mad.

He had understated it: This woman was ready for an institution.

I looked at don Juan for support and advice.

He looked away. He seemed to be equally at a loss; although I thought I caught a malicious smile which he quickly hid by turning his head.

The woman lay down on her back, and pulled up her skirt, and commanded me to look to my heart's content instead of sneaking glances.

My face must have been red, judging by the heat in my head and neck. I was so annoyed that I almost lost control. I felt like bashing her head in.

The woman who was sitting in the chair suddenly stood up and grabbed the other one by the hair and made her stand up in one single motion, seemingly with no effort at all.

The second woman stared at me through half closed eyes, bringing her face no more than two or three inches from mine. She smelled surprisingly fresh.

In a high pitched voice, she said that we should get down to business.

Both of the women stood close to me under the light bulb. They did not look alike.

The second woman was older, or looked older and her face was covered by a thick coat of cosmetic powder that gave her a clownish appearance. Her hair was neatly arranged in a chignon.

She seemed calm except for a continuous tremor in her lower lip and chin.

Both women were equally tall and strong looking; they towered menacingly over me and stared at me for a long time.

Don Juan did not do anything to break their fixation.

The older woman nodded her head, and don Juan told me that her name was Zuleica and that she was a dreamer.

The woman who had opened the door was named Zoila, and she was a stalker.

Zuleica turned to me, and in a parrotlike voice asked me if it was true that I had never seen a vagina.

Don Juan could not hold his composure any longer and began to laugh.

With a gesture, I signaled him that I did not know what to say.

He whispered in my ear that it would be better for me to say that I had not; otherwise I should be prepared to describe a vagina, because that was what Zuleica would demand that I do next.

I answered accordingly, and Zuleica said that she felt sorry for me.

Then she ordered Zoila to show me her vagina.

Zoila lay down on her back under the light bulb and opened her legs.

Don Juan was laughing and coughing.

I begged him to get me out of that madhouse.

He whispered in my ear again that I had better take a good look and appear attentive and interested, because if I did not we would have to stay there until kingdom come.

After my careful and attentive examination, Zuleica said that from then on I could brag that I was a connoisseur, and that if I ever stumbled upon a woman without pants, I would not be so coarse and obscene as to let my eyes pop out of their sockets because now I had seen a vagina.

Zuleica very quietly led us to the patio.

She whispered that there was someone out there waiting to meet me.

The patio was pitch black. I could hardly make out the silhouettes of the others.

Then I saw the dark outline of a man standing a few-feet away from me.

My body experienced an involuntary jolt.

Don Juan spoke to the man in a very low voice; saying that he had brought me to meet him. Don Juan told the man my name.

After a moment's silence, don Juan said to me that the man's name was Silvio Manuel, and that he was the warrior of darkness and the actual leader of the whole warrior's party.

Then Silvio Manuel spoke to me. I thought that he must have had a speech disorder: His voice was muffled and the words came out of him like spurts of soft coughing.

He ordered me to come closer.

As I tried to approach him, he receded, just as if he were floating.

He led me into an even darker recess of a hall, walking, it seemed, noiselessly backwards.

He muttered something I could not understand. I wanted to speak: My throat itched and was parched.

He repeated something two or three times until it dawned on me that he was ordering me to undress.

There was something overpowering about his voice and the darkness around him: I was incapable of disobeying.

I took off my clothes and stood stark naked, shivering with fear and cold.

It was so dark that I could not see if don Juan and the two women were around.

I heard a soft prolonged hissing from a source a few feet away from me. Then I felt a cool breeze.

I realized that Silvio Manuel was exhaling his breath all over my body.

He then asked me to sit on my clothes and look at a bright point which I could easily distinguish in the darkness; a point that seemed to give out a faint amber light.

I stared at it for what seemed hours, until I suddenly realized that the point of brightness was Silvio Manuel's left eye.

I could then make out the contour of his whole face and his body: The hall was not as dark as it had seemed.

Silvio Manuel advanced to me and helped me up.

To see in the dark with such clarity enthralled me. I did not even mind that I was naked or that, as I then saw, the two women were watching me.

Apparently they could also see in the dark: They were staring at me.

I wanted to put on my pants, but Zoila snatched them out of my hands.

The two women and Silvio Manuel stared at me for a long time.

Then don Juan came out of nowhere, and handed me my shoes.

Zoila led us through a corridor to an open patio with trees.

I made out the dark silhouette of a woman standing in the middle of the patio.

Don Juan spoke to her and she mumbled something in reply.

He told me that she was a southerly woman, that her name was Marta, and that she was a courier to the two westerly women.

Marta said that she could bet I had never been introduced to a woman while I was naked; that the normal procedure is to get acquainted and then undress.

She laughed out loud. Her laughter was so pleasing, so clear and youthful, that it sent chills through me. It reverberated through the whole house, enhanced by the darkness and the silence there.

I looked to don Juan for support.

He was gone and so was Silvio Manuel. I was alone with the three women.

I became very nervous and asked Marta if she knew where don Juan had gone.

At that precise moment, someone grabbed the skin of my armpits. I yelled with pain.

I knew that it was Silvio Manuel. He lifted me up as if I weighed nothing and shook my shoes off me.

Then he stood me in a shallow tub of ice-cold water that came up to my knees.

I remained in the tub for a long time while all of them scrutinized me.

Then Silvio Manuel lifted me up again and set me down next to my shoes which someone had neatly placed next to the tub.

Don Juan again came out of nowhere and handed me my clothes.

He whispered that I should put them on, and stay only long enough to be polite.

Marta gave me a towel to dry myself.

I looked around for the other two women and Silvio Manuel, but they were nowhere in sight.

Marta, don Juan, and I stood in the darkness talking for a long time. She seemed to be speaking mainly to don Juan, but I believed that I was her real audience.

I waited for a clue from don Juan to leave, but he appeared to be enjoying Marta's agile conversation.

She told him that Zoila and Zuleica had been at the peak of their madness that day. Then she added for my benefit that they were extremely rational most of the time.

As if she were revealing a secret, Marta told us that the reason Zoila's hair looked so unkempt was because at least one third of it was Zuleica's hair.

What had happened was that the two of them had had a moment of intense camaraderie and were helping one another to groom their hair.

Zuleica braided Zoila's hair as she had done hundreds of times, except that, being out of control, she had braided portions of her own hair in with Zoila's.

Marta said that when they got up from their chairs they went into a commotion. She ran to their rescue, but by the time she entered the room, Zuleica had taken over.

And since Zuleica was more lucid than Zoila that day, Zuleica had decided to cut the portion of Zoila's hair that was braided to hers.

Zuleica got confused in the melee that ensued, and she cut her own hair instead.

Don Juan was laughing as if it were the funniest thing ever.

I heard soft coughlike bursts of laughter coming from the darkness on the far side of the patio.

Marta added that she had to improvise a chignon until Zuleica's hair grew out.

I laughed along with don Juan.

I liked Marta. The two other women were abhorrent to me: They gave me a sensation of nausea.

Marta, on the other hand, seemed a paragon of calm and silent purpose. I could not see her features, but I imagined her to be very beautiful. The sound of her voice was haunting.

She very politely asked don Juan if I would accept something to eat.

He replied that I did not feel comfortable with Zuleica and Zoila, and that I would probably get sick to my stomach.

Marta assured me that the two women were gone, and took my arm and led us through the darkest hall yet into a well-lit kitchen.

The contrast was too great for my eyes. I stood in the doorway trying to get used to the light.

The kitchen had a very high ceiling and was fairly modern and adequate. We sat in a sort of dinette area.

Marta was young and very strong. She had a plump, voluptuous figure, a round face, and a small nose and mouth. Her jet-black hair was braided and coiled around her head.

I thought that she must have been as curious to examine me as I had been to see her.

We sat and ate and talked for hours.

I was fascinated by her. She was an uneducated woman but she held me spellbound with her talk.

She gave us detailed accounts of the preposterous things that Zoila and Zuleica did when they were mad.

As we drove away, don Juan expressed his admiration for Marta.

He said that she was perhaps the finest example he knew of how determination can affect a human being. With no background or preparation at all except for her unbending intent, Marta had successfully tackled the most arduous task imaginable; that of taking care of Zoila, Zuleica, and Silvio Manuel.

I asked don Juan why Silvio Manuel had refused to let me look at him in the light.

He replied that Silvio Manuel was in his element in darkness, and that I was going to have countless opportunities to see him.

For our first meeting, nonetheless, it was mandatory that he maintain himself within the boundaries of his power; the darkness of the night.

Silvio Manuel and the two women lived together because they were a team of formidable sorcerers.

Don Juan advised me that I should not make hasty judgments about the westerly women.

He said I had met them at a moment when they were out of control, but their lack of control pertained only to surface behavior.

They had an inner core which was unalterable.

Thus, even at the time of their worst madness, they were capable of laughing at their own aberration, [* aberration- a state or condition markedly different from the norm] as if it were a performance staged by someone else.

Silvio Manuel's case was different.

He was in no way deranged: In fact, it was his profound sobriety that enabled him to deal so effectively with those two women because he and they were opposite extremes.

Don Juan said that Silvio Manuel had been born that way and everyone around him acknowledged his difference.

Even their benefactor, who was stern and unsparing with everybody, lavished a great deal of attention on Silvio Manuel.

It took don Juan years to understand the reason for this preference.

Due to something inexplicable in his nature, once Silvio Manuel had entered into the left-side awareness, he never came out of it.

His proclivity to remain in a state of heightened awareness, coupled with the superb leadership of their benefactor, allowed Silvio Manuel to arrive before anyone else, not only at the conclusion that the rule is a map and there is in fact another kind of awareness, but also to the actual passageway into that other world of awareness.

Don Juan said that Silvio Manuel, in a most impeccable manner, balanced his excessive gains by putting them at the service of their common purpose: Silvio Manuel became the silent force behind don Juan.

My last introductory encounter with don Juan's warriors was with the north.

Don Juan took me to the city of Guadalajara to fulfill that meeting.

He said that our appointment was only a short distance from the center of town and had to be at noon because the north was the midday.

We left the hotel around 11 a.m., and took an easy stroll through the downtown area.

I was walking along without watching where I was going; worried about the meeting, and I collided head-on with a lady who was rushing out of a store.

She was carrying packages, which scattered all over the ground.

I apologized, and began to help her pick them up.

Don Juan urged me to hurry because we were going to be late.

The lady seemed to be stunned: I held her arm.

She was a very slender, tall woman perhaps in her sixties; very elegantly dressed. She seemed to be a lady of social standing.

She was exquisitely polite, and assumed the blame saying that she had been distracted looking for her manservant.

She asked me if I would help her locate him in the crowd.

I turned to don Juan.

He said that the least I could do after nearly killing her was to help her.

I took her packages and we walked back into the store.

A short distance away I spotted a forlorn looking Indian who seemed thoroughly out of place there.

The lady called him and he came to her side like a lost puppy. He looked as if he was about to lick her hand.

Don Juan was waiting for us outside the store.

He explained to the lady that we were in a hurry and then told her my name.

The lady smiled graciously and initiated a handshake.

I thought that in her youth she must have been ravishing, because she was still beautiful and alluring.

Don Juan turned to me and abruptly said that her name was Nelida, that she was of the north, and that she was a dreamer.

Then he made me face the manservant and said that his name was Genaro Flores, and that he was the man of action; the warrior of deeds in the party.

My surprise was total. All three of them had a belly laugh: The greater my dismay, the more they seemed to enjoy it.

Don Genaro gave the packages away to a group of children, telling them that his employer, the kind lady who was talking, had bought those things as a present for them: It was her good deed for the day.

Then we strolled in silence for half a block. I was tongue-tied.

Suddenly Nelida pointed to a store and asked us to wait just an instant because she had to pick up a box of nylons that they were holding for her there.

She peered at me smiling, her eyes shining, and told me that, all kidding aside, sorcery or no sorcery, she had to wear nylons and lace panties.

Don Juan and don Genaro laughed like two idiots.

I stared at Nelida because I could not do anything else.

There was something about her that was utterly earthly and yet she was almost ethereal. [* ethereal- characterized by lightness and insubstantiality; as impalpable or intangible as air]

She kiddingly told don Juan to hold on to me because I was about to pass out.

Then she politely asked don Genaro to run in and get her order from a specific clerk.

As he started in, Nelida seemed to change her mind and called him back, but he apparently did not hear her and he disappeared inside the store.

She excused herself and ran after him.

Don Juan pressed my back to get me out of my turmoil.

He said that I would meet the other northerly woman whose name was Florinda by herself at another time, because she was to be my link into another cycle; another mood.

He described Florinda as a carbon copy of Nelida, or vice versa.

I remarked that Nelida was so sophisticated and stylish that I could imagine seeing her in a fashion magazine.

The fact that she was beautiful and so fair- perhaps of French or northern Italian extraction- had surprised me. Although Vicente was not an Indian either, his rural appearance made him less of an anomaly. [* anomaly- deviation from the normal; or common order, form, or rule]

I asked don Juan why there were non-Indians in his world.

He said that power is what selects the warriors of a Nagual's party, and that it is impossible to know it's designs.

We waited in front of the store for perhaps half an hour.

Don Juan seemed to get impatient and asked me to go inside and tell them to hurry.

I walked into the store. It was not a big place, there was no back door, and yet they were nowhere in sight.

I asked the clerks, but they could not help me.

I confronted don Juan and demanded to know what had happened.

He said that they had either disappeared into thin air, or had sneaked out while he was cracking my back.

I raged at him that most of his people were tricksters.

He laughed until tears were rolling down his cheeks.

He said that I was the ideal dupe: My self-importance made me a most enjoyable subject.

He was laughing so hard at my annoyance that he had to lean against a wall.

La Gorda gave me an account of her first meeting with the members of don Juan's party.

Her version differed only in content. The form was the same.

The warriors were perhaps a bit more violent with her, but she had understood this as their attempt to shake her out of her slumber; and also as a natural reaction to what she considered her ugly personality.

As we reviewed don Juan's world, we realized that it was a replica of his benefactor's world.

It could be seen as consisting either of groups or households. There was a group of four independent pairs of apparent sisters who worked and lived together; another group of three men who were don Juan's age and were very close to him; a team of two somewhat younger men, the couriers Emilito and Juan Tuma; and finally a team of two younger, southerly women who seemed to be related to each other, Marta and Teresa.

At other times it could be seen as consisting of four separate households, located quite far from one another in different areas of Mexico. One was made up of the two westerly women, Zuleica and Zoila, Silvio Manuel, and the courier Marta. The next was composed of the southerly women, Cecilia and Delia, don Juan's courier, Emilito, and the courier Teresa. Another household was formed by the easterly women, Carmela and Hermelinda, Vicente, and the courier Juan Tuma; and the last, of the northerly women, Nelida and Florinda, and don Genaro.

According to don Juan, his world did not have the harmony and balance of his benefactor's.

The only two women who thoroughly balanced one another, and who looked like identical twins were the northerly warriors, Nelida and Florinda.

Nelida once told me in casual conversation that she and Florinda were so alike that they even had the same blood type.

For me one of the most pleasant surprises of our interaction was the transformation of Zuleica and Zoila; who had been so abhorrent.

They turned out to be, as don Juan had said, the most sober and dutiful warriors imaginable.

I could not believe my eyes when I saw them again. Their mad spell had passed and they now looked like two well-dressed Mexican ladies, tall, dark, and muscular, with brilliant dark eyes like pieces of shiny black obsidian.

They laughed and joked with me about what had happened the night of our first meeting, as if someone else and not they had been involved in it.

I could easily understand don Juan's turmoil with the westerly warriors of his benefactor's party.

It was impossible for me to accept that Zuleica and Zoila could ever turn into such obnoxious, nauseating creatures as I had first encountered.

I was to witness their metamorphoses many times, yet I was never again able to judge them as harshly as I had on our first encounter.

More than anything else, their outrages made me feel sad.

But the biggest surprise to me was Silvio Manuel.

In the darkness of our first meeting I had imagined him to be an imposing man, an overpowering giant.

In fact, he was tiny, but not small-boned tiny. His body was like the body of a jockey; small, yet perfectly proportioned. He looked to me as if he might be a gymnast.

His physical control was so remarkable that he could puff himself up like a toad, to nearly twice his size, by contracting all the muscles of his body.

He used to give astounding demonstrations of how he could dislodge his joints and put them back together again without any overt signs of pain.

Looking at Silvio Manuel, I always experienced a deep unfamiliar feeling of fright.

To me he seemed like a visitor from another time. He was pale-dark, like a bronze statue. His features were sharp; his aquiline nose, full lips, and widely separated, slanted eyes made him look like a stylized figure on a Mayan fresco.

He was friendly and warm during the daytime, but as soon as the twilight set in, he would become unfathomable.

His voice would change. He would sit in a dark corner and let the darkness swallow him. All that was visible of him was his left eye, which remained open and acquired a strange shine, reminiscent of the eyes of a feline.

A secondary issue that came up in the course of our interaction with don Juan's warriors was the subject of controlled folly.

Don Juan gave me a succinct explanation once when he was discussing the two categories into which all the women warriors are mandatorily divided, the dreamers and the stalkers.

He said that all the members of his party did dreaming and stalking as part of their daily lives, but that the women who made up the planet of the dreamers and the planet of the stalkers were the foremost authorities on their respective activities.

The stalkers are the ones who take the brunt of the daily world.

They are the business managers, the ones who deal with people. Everything that has to do with the world of ordinary affairs goes through them.

The stalkers are the practitioners of controlled folly, just as the dreamers are the practitioners of dreaming.

In other words, controlled folly is the basis for stalking; as dreams are the basis for dreaming.

Don Juan said that, generally speaking, a warrior's greatest accomplishment in the second attention is dreaming, and in the first attention his greatest accomplishment is stalking.

I had misunderstood what don Juan's warriors were doing to me in our first meetings.

I took their actions as instances of trickery- and that would still be my impression today had it not been for the idea of controlled folly.

Don Juan said that their actions with me had been masterful lessons in stalking.

He told me that the art of stalking was what his benefactor had taught him before anything else. In order to survive among his benefactor's warriors he had had to learn that art quickly.

In my case, he said, since I did not have to contend by myself with his warriors, I had to learn dreaming first.

When the time was right, Florinda would step out to guide me into the complexities of stalking.

No one else could deliberately talk to me about it. They could only give me direct demonstrations, as they had already done in our first meetings.

Don Juan explained to me at great length that Florinda was one of the foremost practitioners of stalking because she had been trained in every intricacy of it by his benefactor and four or his female warriors who were stalkers.

Florinda was the first female warrior to come into don Juan's world; and because of that, she was to be my personal guide not only in the art of stalking, but also in the mystery of the third attention if I ever got there.

Don Juan did not elaborate on this. He said it would have to wait until I was ready to learn stalking, and then to enter into the third attention.

Don Juan said that his benefactor had taken extra time and care with him and his warriors in everything that pertained to their mastering the art of stalking.

His benefactor used complex ploys to create an appropriate context for a counterpoint between the dictums of the rule and the behavior of the warriors in the daily world as they interacted with people.

He believed that that was the way to convince them that, in the absence of self-importance, a warrior's only way of dealing with the social milieu is in terms of controlled folly.

In the course of working out his ploys, don Juan's benefactor would pit the actions of people and the actions of the warriors against the commands of the rule, and would then sit back and let the natural drama unfold itself.

The folly of the people would take the lead for a while and drag the warriors into it, as seems to be the natural course; only to be vanquished in the end by the more encompassing designs of the rule.

Don Juan told us that at first he resented his benefactor's control over the players.

Don Juan even told his benefactor that to his face.

His benefactor was not fazed: He argued that his control was merely an illusion created by the Eagle: He was only an impeccable warrior, and his actions were a humble attempt to mirror the Eagle.

Don Juan said that the force with which his benefactor carried out his designs originated from his knowledge that the Eagle is real and final, and that what people do is utter folly.

The two together gave rise to controlled folly, which don Juan's benefactor described as the only bridge between the folly of people and the finality of the Eagle's dictums.

## 11. The Nagual Woman

Don Juan said that when he was put in the care of the westerly women to be cleansed, he was also put under the guidance of the northerly woman who was comparable to Florinda, the number-one stalker, who taught him the principles of that art. She and his benefactor gave him the actual means to secure the three male warriors, the one courier, and the four female stalkers who were to make up his party.

The eight female seers of his benefactor's group had searched for the distinctive configurations of luminosity and had had no difficulty whatever in finding the appropriate types of male and female warriors for don Juan's party. His benefactor, however, did not permit those seers to do anything to gather the warriors they had found. It was left to don Juan to apply the principles of stalking and secure them.

The first warrior to appear was Vicente. Don Juan did not have enough of a command of stalking to be able to draft him. His benefactor and the northerly stalker had to do most of the work. Then came Silvio Manuel, later don Genaro, and finally Emilito, the courier.

Florinda was the first female warrior. She was followed by Zoila, then Delia, and then Carmela. Don Juan said that his benefactor had insisted relentlessly that they deal with the world exclusively in terms of controlled folly. The end result was a stupendous team of practitioners, who thought up and executed the most intricate schemes.

When they had all acquired a degree of proficiency in the art of stalking, their benefactor thought it was time for him to find the Nagual woman for them- which he did.

But before he brought her into their world, and true to his policy of helping everyone to help themselves; he waited not only until all of them were expert stalkers, but until don Juan had learned to see. Although don Juan regretted immensely the time wasted in waiting, he conceded that their joint effort in securing her created a stronger tie among all of them. It revitalized their commitment to seek their freedom.

His benefactor began to unfold his strategy for drawing in the Nagual woman by all of a sudden becoming a devout Catholic. He demanded that don Juan, being the heir to his knowledge, behave like a son and go to church with him. He dragged him to mass nearly every day. Don Juan said that his benefactor, who was very charming and glib, would introduce him to everyone in church as his son, a bone-setter.

Don Juan, by his own account an uncivilized pagan at that time, was mortified to find himself in social situations where he had to talk and give an account of himself. He put his mind at ease with the idea that his benefactor had an ulterior motive for everything he was doing. He attempted to deduce from observing him what his reasons might be.

His benefactor's actions were consistent and seemed aboveboard. As an exemplary Catholic, he gained the trust of scores of people, especially the parish priest, who held him in high esteem, considering him a friend and confidant. Don Juan could not figure out what he was up to. The thought crossed his mind that his benefactor might have sincerely taken up Catholicism, or gone mad. He had not yet understood that a warrior never loses his mind under any circumstances.

Don Juan's qualms about going to church vanished when his benefactor began introducing him to the daughters of people he was acquainted with. He enjoyed that, although he felt ill at ease. Don Juan thought that his benefactor was helping him to exercise his tongue. He was neither glib nor charming, and his benefactor had said that a Nagual, perforce, has to be both.

One Sunday during mass, after nearly a year of almost daily attendance, don Juan found out the real reason for their going to church. He was kneeling next to a girl named Olinda, the daughter of one of his benefactor's acquaintances. He turned to exchange a glance with her, as had become their custom after months of daily contact.

Their eyes met, and suddenly don Juan saw her as a luminous being- and then he saw her doubleness. Olinda was a double woman. His benefactor had known it all along, and had taken the most difficult path in order to put don Juan in touch with her. Don Juan confessed to us that the moment was overwhelming to him.

His benefactor knew that don Juan had seen. His mission to put the double beings together had been completed successfully and impeccably. He stood up and his eyes swept every corner of that church, then he walked out without a backward glance. There was nothing more for him to do there.

Don Juan said that when his benefactor walked out in the middle of mass, all heads turned. Don Juan wanted to follow him, but Olinda boldly clasped his hand and held him back. He knew then that the power of seeing had not been his alone. Something had gone through both of them and they were transfixed.

Don Juan realized all of a sudden that not only had the mass ended, but that they were already outside the church. His benefactor was trying to calm Olinda's mother, who was incensed and shamed by their unexpected and inadmissible display of affection.

Don Juan was at a loss as to what to do next. He knew that it was up to him to figure out a plan. He had the resources, but the importance of the event made him lose confidence in his ability. He forsook his training as a stalker and became lost in the intellectual dilemma of whether or not to treat Olinda as controlled folly.

His benefactor told him that he could not help him. His duty had been only to put them together, and that was where his responsibility ended. It was up to don Juan to take the necessary steps to secure her. He suggested that don Juan even consider marrying her, if that was what was needed. Only after she came to him of her own accord could he help don Juan by directly intervening with her as a Nagual.

Don Juan tried a formal courtship. He was not well received by her parents, who could not conceive of someone from a different social class as a suitor for their daughter. Olinda was not an Indian: Her family were middle-class urban dwellers; owners of a small business. The father had other plans for his daughter. He threatened to send her away if don Juan persisted in his intention to marry her.

Don Juan said that double beings, especially women, are extraordinarily conservative, even timid. Olinda was no exception. After their initial exhilaration in church, she was overtaken by caution, and then by fear. Her own reactions scared her.

As a strategic maneuver, his benefactor made don Juan retreat, to make it appear as if he were acquiescing to his father, who had not approved of the girl- which was the assumption of everyone who had witnessed the incident in church. People gossiped that their display had displeased his father so intensely that his father, who was such a devout Catholic, had never returned to church.

His benefactor told don Juan that a warrior is never under siege. To be under siege implies that one has personal possessions that could be blockaded. A warrior has nothing in the world except his impeccability, and impeccability cannot be threatened. Nonetheless, in a battle for one's life, such as the one don Juan was waging to secure the Nagual woman, a warrior should strategically use every means available.

Accordingly, don Juan resolved to use any portion of his stalker's knowledge that he had to- to get the girl. To that end, he engaged Silvio Manuel to use his sorcerer's arts, which even at that early stage were formidable, to abduct the girl. Silvio Manuel and Genaro, who was a true daredevil, stole into the girl's house disguised as old washerwomen. It was midday and everyone in the house was busy preparing food for a large group of relatives and friends who were coming to dinner.

They were having an informal going-away party for Olinda. Silvio Manuel was counting on the likelihood that people who saw two strange washerwomen coming in with bundles of clothes would assume that it had to do with Olinda's party and would not get suspicious. Don Juan had supplied Silvio Manuel and Genaro beforehand with all the information they needed concerning the routines of the members of the household. He told them that the washerwomen usually carried their bundles of washed clothes into the house and left them in a storage room to be ironed. Carrying a large bundle of clothes, Silvio Manuel and Genaro went directly into that room, knowing that Olinda would be there.

Don Juan said that Silvio Manuel went up to Olinda and used his mesmeric powers to make her faint. They put her inside a sack, wrapped the sack with her bed sheets, and walked out, leaving behind the bundle they had carried in. They bumped into her father at the door. He did not even glance at them.

Don Juan's benefactor was utterly put out with their maneuver. He ordered don Juan to take the girl back immediately to her house. It was imperative, he said, that the double woman come to the benefactor's house of her own free will, perhaps not with the idea of joining them but at least because they interested her.

Don Juan felt that everything was lost- the odds against getting her back into her house unnoticed were too great- but Silvio Manuel figured out a solution. He proposed that they should let the four women of don Juan's party take the girl to a deserted road, where don Juan would rescue her.

Silvio Manuel wanted the women to pretend that they were kidnapping her. At some point along the road someone would see them and come in pursuit. Their pursuer would overtake them and they would drop the sack, with a degree of force so as to be convincing. The pursuer would be, of course, don Juan, who would happen miraculously to be at just the right place at the right time.

Silvio Manuel demanded true-to-life action. He ordered the women to gag the girl, who by then would surely be awake and screaming inside the sack, and then to run for miles carrying the sack. He told them to hide from their pursuer. Finally, after a truly exhausting ordeal, they were to drop the sack in such a way that the girl could witness a most vicious fight between don Juan and the four women. Silvio Manuel told the women that this had to be utterly realistic. He armed them with sticks and instructed them to hit don Juan convincingly before they were driven away.

Of the women, Zoila was the one most easily carried away by hysteria. As soon as they began whacking don Juan she became possessed by her role and gave a chilling performance, striking don Juan so hard that flesh was torn from his back and shoulders. For a moment it seemed that the kidnappers were going to win. Silvio Manuel had to come out of his hiding place and, pretending to be a passerby, remind them that it was only a ploy and that it was time to run away.

Don Juan thus became Olinda's savior and protector. He told her that he could not take her back to her house himself because he had been injured, but he would send her back instead with his pious father.

She helped him walk to his benefactor's house. Don Juan said that he did not have to pretend injury. He was bleeding profusely and barely made it to the door. When Olinda told his benefactor what had happened, his benefactor's desire to laugh was so excruciating he had to disguise it as weeping.

Don Juan had his wounds bandaged and then went to bed. Olinda began to explain to don Juan why her father was opposed to him, but she did not finish. Don Juan's benefactor came into the room and told her that it was evident to him, from observing her walk, that the kidnappers had injured her back. He offered to align it for her before it became critical.

Olinda hesitated. Don Juan's benefactor reminded her that the kidnappers had not been playing- they had nearly killed his son, after all. That comment sufficed. She came to the benefactor's side and let him give her a sound blow on her shoulder blade. It made a cracking sound and Olinda entered into a state of heightened awareness. He disclosed the rule to her, and just like don Juan, she accepted it in full. There was no doubt, no hesitation.

The Nagual woman and don Juan found completeness and silence in each other's company. Don Juan said that the feeling they had for each other had nothing to do with affection or need. It was rather a shared physical sense that an ominous barrier had been broken within them, and they were one and the same being.

Don Juan and his Nagual woman, as the rule prescribed, worked together for years to find the set of four female dreamers, who turned out to be Nelida, Zuleica, Cecilia, and Hermelinda and the three couriers, Juan Tuma, Teresa, and Marta.

Finding them was another occasion when the pragmatic nature of the rule was made clear to don Juan: All of them were exactly what the rule said they were going to be. Their advent introduced a new cycle for everyone, don Juan's benefactor and his party included. For don Juan and his warriors it meant the cycle of dreaming, and for his benefactor and his party it meant a period of unequalled impeccability in their acts.

His benefactor explained to don Juan that when he was young and was first introduced to the idea of the rule as the means to freedom, he had been elated, transfixed with joy. Freedom to him was a reality around the corner. When he came to understand the nature of the rule as a map, his hopes and optimism were redoubled.

Later on, sobriety took hold of his life. The older his benefactor got, the less chance he saw for his success and the success of his party. Finally he became convinced that no matter what they did, the odds were too great against their tenuous human awareness ever flying free. He made peace with himself and his fate, and surrendered to failure. He told the Eagle from his inner self that he was glad and proud to have nourished his awareness. The Eagle was welcome to it.

Don Juan told us that the same mood was shared by all the members of his benefactor's party. The freedom proposed in the rule was something they considered unattainable. They had caught glimpses of the annihilating force that the Eagle is, and felt that they did not stand a chance against it. All of them had agreed, nevertheless, that they would live their lives impeccably for no other reason than to be impeccable.

Don Juan said that his benefactor and his party, in spite of their feelings of inadequacy, or perhaps because of those feelings, did find their freedom. They did enter into the third attention- not as a group, however, but one by one. The fact that they found the passageway was the final corroboration of the truth contained in the rule. The last one to leave the world of everyday-life awareness was his benefactor. He complied with the rule and took don Juan's Nagual woman with him.

As the two of them dissolved into total awareness, don Juan and all his warriors were made to 'explode from within'- he could find no other way of describing the feeling entailed in being forced to forget all they had witnessed of their benefactor's world.

The one who never forgot was Silvio Manuel. It was he who engaged don Juan in the backbreaking effort of bringing back together the members of their group, all of whom had been scattered. He then plunged them into the task of finding the totality of themselves. It took them years to accomplish both tasks.

Don Juan had extensively discussed the topic of forgetting, but only in connection with their great difficulty in getting together again and starting over without their benefactor. He never told us exactly what it entailed to forget or to gain the totality of oneself. In that respect he was true to his benefactor's teachings, only helping us to help ourselves.

To this effect, he trained la Gorda and me to see together and was able to show us that, although human beings appear to a seer as luminous eggs, the egglike shape is an external cocoon; a shell of luminosity that houses a most intriguing, haunting, mesmeric core made up of concentric circles of yellowish luminosity the color of a candle's flame.

During our final session, he had us see people milling around a church. It was late afternoon, almost dark, yet the creatures inside their rigid, luminous cocoons radiated enough light to render everything around them crystal clear. The sight was wondrous.

Don Juan explained that the egg-shaped shells which seemed so bright to us were indeed dull. The luminosity emanated from the brilliant core: The shell in fact dulled it's radiance. Don Juan revealed to us that the shell must be broken in order to liberate that being. It must be broken from the inside at the right time, just as creatures that hatch out of eggs break their shells. If they fail to do so, they suffocate and die. As with creatures that hatch out of eggs, there is no way for a warrior to break the shell of his luminosity until the time is right.

Don Juan told us that losing the human form was the only means of breaking that shell, the only means of liberating that haunting luminous core; the core of awareness which is the Eagle's food. To break the shell means remembering the other self, and arriving at the totality of oneself.

Don Juan and his warriors did arrive at the totality of themselves, and turned then to their last task, which was to find a new pair of double beings. Don Juan said that they thought it was going to be a simple matter- everything else had been relatively easy for them. They had no idea that the apparent effortlessness of their accomplishments as warriors was a consequence of their benefactor's mastery and personal power.

Their quest for a new pair of double beings was fruitless. In all their searching, they never came across a double woman. They found several double men, but those double men were all well-situated, busy, prolific, and so satisfied with their lives that it would have been useless to approach them. Those men felt that they did not need to find purpose in life: They thought they had already found it.

Don Juan said that one day he realized that he and his group were getting old, and there seemed to be no hope of ever accomplishing their task. That was the first time they felt the sting of despair and impotence.

Silvio Manuel insisted that they should resign themselves and live impeccably without hope of finding their freedom. It seemed plausible to don Juan that this might indeed be the key to everything.

In this respect he found himself following in his benefactor's footsteps. He came to accept that an unconquerable pessimism overtakes a warrior at a certain point on his path. A sense of defeat, or perhaps more accurately, a sense of unworthiness, comes upon him almost unawares.

Don Juan said that, before, he used to laugh at his benefactor's doubts and could not bring himself to believe that he worried in earnest. In spite of the protests and warnings of Silvio Manuel, don Juan had thought it was all a giant ploy designed to teach them something. Since he could not believe that his benefactor's doubts were real, neither could he believe that his benefactor's resolution to live impeccably without hope of freedom was genuine.

When don Juan finally grasped that his benefactor, in all seriousness, had resigned himself to fail, it also dawned on don Juan that a warrior's resolution to live impeccably in spite of everything cannot be approached as a strategy to ensure success.

Don Juan and his party proved this truth for themselves when they realized for a fact that the odds against them were astonishing. Don Juan said that at such moments a lifelong training takes over, and the warrior enters into a state of unsurpassed humility: When the true poverty of his human resources becomes undeniable, the warrior has no recourse but to step back and lower his head.

Don Juan marveled that this realization seems to have no effect on the female warriors of a party: The disarray seems to leave them unfazed.

He told us that he had noted this in his benefactor's party: the females were never as worried and morose about their fate as were the males. They seemed simply to acquiesce in the judgment of don Juan's benefactor and followed him without showing signs of emotional wear and tear. If the women were ruffled at some level, they were indifferent to it. To be busy was all that counted for them. It was as if only the males had bid for freedom and felt the impact of a counter-bidding.

In his own group, don Juan observed the same contrast. The women readily agreed with him when he said that his resources were inadequate. He could only conclude that the women, although they never mentioned it, had never believed they had any resources to begin with. There was consequently no way they could feel disappointed or despondent at finding out they were impotent: They had known it all along.

Don Juan told us that the reason the Eagle demanded twice as many female warriors as males was precisely because females have an inherent balance which is lacking in males. At the crucial moment, it is the men who get hysterical and commit suicide if they judge that everything is lost. A woman may kill herself due to lack of direction and purpose, but not because of the failure of a system to which she happens to belong.

After don Juan and his party of warriors had given up hope- or rather, as don Juan put it, after he and the male warriors had reached rock bottom and the women had found suitable ways to humor them- don Juan finally stumbled upon a double man he could approach.

I was that double man. He said that since no one in his right mind is going to volunteer for such a preposterous project as a struggle for freedom, he had to follow his benefactor's teachings and, in true stalker's style, reel me in as he had reeled in the members of his own party. He needed to have me alone at a place where he could apply physical pressure to my body, and it was necessary that I go there of my own accord. He lured me into his house with great ease. As he said, securing the double man is never a great problem, the difficulty is to find one who is available.

That first visit to his house was, from the point of view of my daily awareness, an uneventful session. Don Juan was charming and joked with me. He guided the conversation to the fatigue the body experiences after long drives; a subject that seemed thoroughly inconsequential to me as a student of anthropology.

Then he made the casual comment that my back appeared to be out of alignment, and without another word put a hand on my chest and straightened me up and gave me a sound rap on the back. He caught me so unprepared that I blacked out. When I opened my eyes again I felt as if he had broken my spine, but I knew that I was different. I was someone else and not the me I knew. From then on, whenever I saw him he would make me shift from my right-side awareness to my left, and then he would reveal the rule to me.

Almost immediately after finding me, don Juan encountered a double woman. He did not put me in touch with her through a scheme, as his benefactor had done with him; but devised a ploy, as effective and elaborate as any of his benefactor's, by which he himself enticed and secured the double woman. He assumed this burden because he believed that it was the benefactor's duty to secure both double beings immediately upon finding them, and then to put them together as partners in an inconceivable enterprise.

He told me that one day when he was living in Arizona, he had gone to a government office to fill out an application. The lady at the desk told him to take it to an employee in the adjacent section, and without looking she pointed to her left.

Don Juan followed the direction of her outstretched arm and saw a double woman sitting at a desk. When he took his application to her he realized that she was just a young girl. She told him that she had nothing to do with applications. Nevertheless, out of sympathy for a poor old Indian, she took the time to help him process it.

Some legal documents were needed, documents which don Juan had in his pocket, but he pretended total ignorance and helplessness. He made it seem that the bureaucratic organization was an enigma to him. It was not difficult at all to portray total mindlessness, don Juan said. All he had to do was revert to what had once been his normal state of awareness.

It was to his purpose to prolong his interaction with the girl for as long as he could. His mentor had told him, and he himself had verified it in his search, that double women are quite rare. His mentor had also warned him that they have inner resources that make them highly volatile. Don Juan was afraid that if he did not play his cards expertly she would leave.

He played on her sympathy to gain time. He created further delay by pretending that the legal documents were lost. Nearly every day he would bring in a different one to her. She would read it and regretfully tell him that it was not the right one. The girl was so moved by his sorry condition that she even volunteered to pay for a lawyer to draw him up an affidavit in lieu of the papers.

After three months of this, don Juan thought it was time to produce the documents. By then she had gotten used to him and almost expected to see him every day. Don Juan came one last time to express his thanks and say goodbye. He told her that he would have liked to bring her a gift to show his appreciation, but he did not have money even to eat.

She was moved by his candor and took him to lunch. As they were eating he mused that a gift does not necessarily have to be an object that one buys. It could be something that is only for the eyes of the beholder. Something to remember rather than to possess.

She was intrigued by his words. Don Juan reminded her that she had expressed compassion for the Indians and their condition as paupers. He asked her if she would like to see the Indians in a different light- not as paupers but as artists. He told her that he knew an old man who was the last of his line of power dancers. He assured her that the man would dance for her at his request; and furthermore, he promised her that never in her life had she seen anything like it, nor would she ever again. It was something that only Indians witnessed.

She was delighted at the idea. She picked him up after her work, and they headed for the hills where he told her the Indian lived. Don Juan took her to his own house. He made her stop the car quite a distance away, and they began to walk the rest of the way. Before they reached the house he stopped and drew a line with his foot in the sandy, dried dirt. He told her that the line was a boundary and coaxed her to step across.

The Nagual woman herself told me that up to that point she had been very intrigued with the possibility of witnessing a genuine Indian dancer, but when the old Indian drew a line on the dirt and called it a boundary, she began to hesitate. Then she became outright alarmed when he told her that the boundary was for her alone, and that once she stepped over it there was no way of returning.

The Indian apparently saw her consternation and tried to put her at ease. He politely patted her on the arm and gave her his guarantee that no harm would come to her while he was around. The boundary could be explained, he told her, as a form of symbolic payment to the dancer because he did not want money. Ritual was in lieu of money, and ritual required that she step over the boundary of her own accord.

The old Indian gleefully stepped over the line and told her that to him all of it was sheer Indian nonsense, but that the dancer, who was watching them from inside the house, had to be humored if she wanted to see him dance.

The Nagual woman said that she suddenly became so afraid that she could not move to cross the line. The old Indian made an effort to persuade her, saying that stepping over that boundary was beneficial to the entire body. Crossing it had not only made him feel younger, it had actually made him younger, such power did that boundary have. To demonstrate his point, he crossed back again and immediately his shoulders slouched, the corners of his mouth drooped, his eyes lost their shine. The Nagual woman could not deny the differences the crossings had made.

Don Juan recrossed the line a third time. He breathed deeply, expanding his chest, his movements brisk and bold. The Nagual woman said that the thought crossed her mind that he might even make sexual advances. Her car was too far away to make a run for it. The only thing she could do was to tell herself that it was stupid to fear that old Indian.

Then the old man made another appeal to her reason and to her sense of humor. In a conspiratorial tone, as if he were revealing a secret with some reluctance, he told her that he was just pretending to be young to please the dancer, and that if she did not help him by crossing the line, he was going to faint at any moment from the stress of walking without slouching. He walked back and forth across the line to show her the immense strain involved in his pantomime.

The Nagual woman said that his pleading eyes revealed the pain his old body was going through to mimic youth. She crossed the line to help him and be done with it: She wanted to go home.

The moment she crossed the line, don Juan took a prodigious jump and glided over the roof of the house. The Nagual woman said that he flew like a huge boomerang. When he landed next to her she fell on her back. Her fright was beyond anything she had ever experienced, but so was her excitement at having witnessed such a marvel. She did not even ask how he had accomplished such a magnificent feat. She wanted to run back to her car and head for home.

The old man helped her up and apologized for having tricked her. In fact, he said, he himself was the dancer and his flight over the house had been his dance. He asked her if she had paid attention to the direction of his flight. The Nagual woman circled her hand counterclockwise.

He patted her head paternally and told her that it was very auspicious that she had been attentive. Then he said that she may have injured her back in her fall, and that he could not just let her go without making sure she was all right. Boldly, he straightened her shoulders, and lifted her chin and the back of her head, as if he were directing her to extend her spine. He then gave her a sound smack between her shoulder blades, literally knocking all the air out of her lungs. For a moment she was unable to breathe and she fainted.

When she regained consciousness, she was inside his house. Her nose was bleeding, her ears were buzzing, her breathing was accelerated, and she could not focus her eyes. He instructed her to take deep breaths to a count of eight. The more she breathed, the clearer everything became. At one point, she told me, the whole room became incandescent: Everything glowed with an amber light.

She became stupefied and could not breathe deeply any more. The amber light by then was so thick it resembled fog. Then the fog turned into amber cobwebs. It finally dissipated, but the world remained uniformly amber for a while longer.

Don Juan began to talk to her then. He took her outside the house and showed her that the world was divided into two halves. The left side was clear but the right side was veiled in amber fog. He told her that it is monstrous to think that the world is understandable or that we ourselves are understandable. He said that what she was perceiving was an enigma; a mystery that one could only accept in humbleness and awe.

He then revealed the rule to her. Her clarity of mind was so intense that she understood everything he said. The rule seemed to her appropriate and self-evident.

He explained to her that the two sides of a human being are totally separate and that it takes great discipline and determination to break that seal and go from one side to the other. A double being has a great advantage: The condition of being double permits relatively easy movement between the compartments on the right side. The great disadvantage of double beings is that by virtue of having two compartments they are sedentary, conservative, afraid of change.

Don Juan said to her that his intention had been to make her shift from her extreme right compartment to her more lucid, sharper left-right side; but instead, through some inexplicable quirk, his blow had sent her all across her doubleness, from her everyday extreme-right side to her extreme-left side.

He tried four times to make her revert back to a normal state of awareness, but to no avail. His blows helped her, however, to turn her perception of the wall of fog on and off at will. Although he had not intended it, don Juan had been right in saying that the line was a one-way boundary for her. Once she crossed it, just like Silvio Manuel, she never returned.

When don Juan put the Nagual woman and me face to face, neither of us had known of the other's existence, yet we instantly felt that we were familiar with one another. Don Juan knew from his own experience that the solace double beings feel in each other's company is indescribable, and far too brief.

He told us that we had been put together by forces incomprehensible to our reason, and that the only thing we did not have was time. Every minute might be the last; therefore, it had to be lived with the spirit.

Once don Juan had put us together, all that was left for him and his warriors to do was find four female stalkers, three male warriors, and one male courier to make up our party.

To that end, don Juan found Lydia, Josefina, la Gorda, Rosa, Benigno, Nestor, Pablito, and the courier Eligio. Each one of them was a replica in an undeveloped form of the members of don Juan's own party.

## 12. The 'Not-Doings' of Silvio Manuel

Don Juan and his warriors sat back to allow the Nagual woman and myself room to enact the rule- that is, to nourish, enhance, and lead the eight warriors to freedom. Everything seemed perfect, yet something was wrong.

The first set of female warriors don Juan had found were dreamers when they should have been stalkers. He did not know how to explain this anomaly. [* anomaly- deviation from the normal or common order or form or rule] He could only conclude that power had put those women in his path in a manner that made it impossible to refuse them.

There was another striking anomaly that was even more baffling to don Juan and his party: Three of the women and the three male warriors were incapable of entering into a state of heightened awareness, despite don Juan's titanic efforts. They were groggy, out of focus, and could not break the seal; the membrane that separates their two sides. They were nicknamed the drunkards because they staggered around without muscular coordination.

The courier Eligio and la Gorda were the only ones with an extraordinary degree of awareness, especially Eligio who was par with any of don Juan's own people.

The three girls clustered together and made an unshakable unit. So did the three men. Groups of three when the rule prescribes four were something ominous. The number three is a symbol of dynamics, change, movement, and above all, a symbol of revitalization.

The rule was no longer serving as a map. And yet it was not conceivable that an error was involved. Don Juan and his warriors argued that power does not make mistakes. They pondered the question in their dreaming and seeing. They wondered whether they had perhaps been too hasty, and simply had not seen that the three women and the three men were inept.

Don Juan confided to me that he saw two relevant questions. One was the pragmatic problem of our presence among them.

The other was the question of the rule's validity. Their benefactor had guided them to the certainty that the rule encompassed everything a warrior might be concerned with. He had not prepared them for the eventuality that the rule might prove to be inapplicable.

La Gorda said that the women of don Juan's party never had any problems with me. It was only the males who were at a loss. To the men, it was incomprehensible and unacceptable that the rule was incongruous in my case. The women, however, were confident that sooner or later the reason for my being there was going to be made clear.

I had observed how the women kept themselves detached from the emotional turmoil, seeming to be completely unconcerned with the outcome. They seemed to know without any reasonable doubt that my case had to be somehow included in the rule. After all, I had definitely helped them by accepting my role. Thanks to the Nagual woman and myself, don Juan and his party had completed their cycle and were almost free.

The answer came to them at last through Silvio Manuel. His seeing revealed that the three little sisters and the Genaros were not inept. It was rather that I was not the right Nagual for them. I was incapable of leading them because I had an unsuspected configuration that did not match the pattern laid down by the rule; a configuration which don Juan as a seer had overlooked. My luminous body gave the appearance of having four compartments when in reality it had only three. There was another rule for what they called a 'three pronged Nagual'. I belonged to that other rule.

Silvio Manuel said that I was like a bird hatched by the warmth and care of birds of a different species. All of them were still bound to help me, as I myself was bound to do anything for them, but I did not belong with them.

Don Juan assumed responsibility for me because he had brought me into their midst, but my presence among them forced them all to exert themselves to the maximum, searching for two things: an explanation of what I was doing among them, and a solution to the problem of what to do about it.

Silvio Manuel very quickly hit upon a way to dislodge me from their midst. He took over the task of directing the project, but since he did not have the patience or energy to deal with me personally, he commissioned don Juan to do so as his surrogate.

Silvio Manuel's goal was to prepare me for a moment when a courier bearing the rule pertinent to a three pronged Nagual would make himself or herself available to me. He said that it was not his role to reveal that portion of the rule. I had to wait, just as all the others had to wait, for the right time.

There was still another serious problem that added more confusion. It had to do with la Gorda, and in the long run with me. La Gorda had been accepted into my party as a southerly woman. Don Juan and the rest of his seers had attested to it. She seemed to be in the same category with Cecilia, Delia, and the two female couriers. The similarities were undeniable. Then la

Gorda lost all her superfluous weight and slimmed down to half her size. The change was so radical and profound that she became something else.

She had gone unnoticed for a long time simply because all the other warriors were too preoccupied with my difficulties to pay any attention to her. Her change was so drastic, however, that they were forced to focus on her, and what they saw that she was not a southerly woman at all. The bulkiness of her body had misled their previous seeing.

They remembered then that from the first moment she came into their midst, la Gorda could not really get along with Cecilia, Delia, and the other southerly women. She was, on the other hand, utterly charmed and at ease with Nelida and Florinda, because in fact she had always been like them. That meant that there were two northerly dreamers in my party, la Gorda and Rosa- a blatant discrepancy with the rule.

Don Juan and his warriors were more than baffled. They understood everything that was happening as an omen, an indication that things had taken an unforeseeable turn. Since they could not accept the idea of human error overriding the rule, they assumed that they had been made to err by a superior command, for a reason which was difficult to discern but real.

They pondered the question of what to do next, but before any of them came up with an answer, a true southerly woman, dona Soledad, came into the picture with such a force that it was impossible for them to refuse her. She was congruous with the rule. She was a stalker.

Her presence distracted us for a time. For a while it seemed as if she were going to pull us off to another plateau. She created vigorous movement. Florinda took her under her wing to instruct her in the art of stalking. But whatever good it did, it was not enough to remedy a strange loss of energy that I felt, a listlessness that seemed to be increasing.

Then one day Silvio Manuel said that in his dreaming he had received a master plan. He was exhilarated and went off to discuss it's details with don Juan and the other warriors. The Nagual woman was included in their discussions, but I was not. This made me suspect that they did not want me to find out what Silvio Manuel had discovered about me.

I confronted every one of them with my suspicions. They all laughed at me, except for the Nagual woman, who told me that I was right. Silvio Manuel's dreaming had revealed the reason for my presence among them, but I would have to surrender to my fate, which was not to know the nature of my task until I was ready for it.

There was such finality in her tone that I could only accept without question everything she said. I think that if don Juan or Silvio Manuel had told me the same thing, I would not have acquiesced so easily.

She also said that she disagreed with don Juan and the others. She thought I should be informed of the general purpose of their actions, if only to avoid unnecessary friction and rebelliousness.

Silvio Manuel intended to prepare me for my task by taking me directly into the second attention. He planned a series of bold actions that would galvanize my awareness.

In the presence of all the others, he told me that he was taking over my guidance and that he was shifting me to his area of power; the night. The explanation he gave was that a number of not-doings had presented themselves to him in dreaming. They were designed for a team composed of la Gorda and myself as the doers, and the Nagual woman as the overseer.

Silvio Manuel was awed by the Nagual woman and had only words of admiration for her. He said that she was in a class by herself. She could perform on a par with him or any of the other warriors of his party. She did not have experience, but she could manipulate her attention in any way she needed. He confessed that her prowess was as great a mystery to him as was my presence among them, and that her sense of purpose and her conviction were so keen that I was no match for her. In fact, he asked la Gorda to give me special support, so I could withstand the Nagual woman's contact.

For our first not-doing, Silvio Manuel constructed a wooden crate big enough to house la Gorda and me if we sat back-to-back with our knees up. The crate had a lid made of latticework to let in a flow of air.

La Gorda and I were to climb inside it and sit in total darkness and total silence without falling asleep. He began by letting us enter the box for short periods. Then he increased the time as we got used to the procedure until we could spend the entire night inside it without moving or dozing off.

The Nagual woman stayed with us to make sure that we would not change levels of awareness due to fatigue. Silvio Manuel said that our natural tendency under unusual conditions of stress is to shift from the heightened state of awareness to our normal one, and vice versa.

The general effect of the not-doing every time we performed it was to give us an unequalled sense of rest; which was a complete puzzle to me, since we never fell asleep during our nightlong vigils. I attributed the sense of rest to the fact that we were in a state of heightened awareness, but Silvio Manuel said that the one had nothing to do with the other; that the sense of rest was the result of sitting with our knees up.

The second not-doing consisted of making us lie on the ground like curled-up dogs, almost in the fetal position, resting on our left sides, our foreheads on our folded arms. Silvio Manuel insisted that we keep our eyes closed as long as possible, opening them only when he told us to shift positions and lie on our right sides.

He told us that the purpose of this not-doing was to allow our sense of hearing to separate from our sight. As before, he gradually increased the length of time until we could spend the entire night in auditory vigil.

Silvio Manuel was then ready to move us to another area of activity. He explained that in the first two not-doings we had broken a certain perceptual barrier while we were stuck to the ground.

By way of analogy, he compared human beings to trees. We are like mobile trees. We are somehow rooted to the ground. Our roots are transportable, but that does not free us from the ground.

He said that in order to establish balance we had to perform the third not-doing while dangling in the air. If we succeeded in channeling our intent while we were suspended from a tree inside a leather harness, we would make a triangle with our intent, a triangle whose base was on the ground and it's vertex in the air. Silvio Manuel thought that we had gathered our attention with the first two not-doings to the point that we could perform the third perfectly from the beginning.

One night he suspended la Gorda and me in two separate harnesses like strap chairs. We sat in them and he lifted us with a pulley to the highest large branches of a tall tree. He wanted us to pay attention to the awareness of the tree which he said would give us signals since we were it's guests. He made the Nagual woman stay on the ground and call our names from time to time during the entire night.

While we were suspended from the tree in the innumerable times we performed this not-doing, we experienced a glorious flood of physical sensations like mild charges of electrical impulses.

During the first three or four attempts, it had been as if the tree were protesting our intrusion. Then after that, the impulses became signals of peace and balance.

Silvio Manuel told us that the awareness of a tree draws it's nourishment from the depths of the earth, while the awareness of mobile creatures draws it from the surface. There is no sense of strife in a tree, whereas moving beings are filled to the brim with it.

His contention was that perception suffers a profound jolt when we are placed in states of quietude in darkness. Our hearing takes the lead then, and the signals from all the living and existing entities around us can be detected- not with our hearing only, but with a combination of the auditory and visual senses, in that order. He said that in darkness, especially while one is suspended, the eyes become subsidiary to the ears.

He was absolutely right, as la Gorda and I discovered. Through the exercise of the third not-doing, Silvio Manuel gave a new dimension to our perception of the world around us.

He then told la Gorda and me that the next set of three not-doings would be intrinsically different and more complex. These had to do with learning to handle the other world. It was mandatory to maximize their effect by moving our time of action to the evening or predawn twilight.

He told us that the first not-doing of the second set had two stages. In stage one we had to bring ourselves to our keenest state of heightened awareness so as to detect the wall of fog. Once that was done, stage two consisted of making that wall stop rotating in order to venture into the world between the parallel lines.

He warned us that what he was aiming at was to place us directly into the second attention, without any intellectual preparation. He wanted us to learn it's intricacies without rationally understanding what we were doing.

His contention was that a magical deer or a magical coyote handles the second attention without having any intellect. Through the forced practice of journeying behind the wall of fog, we were going to undergo, sooner or later, a permanent alteration in our total being; an alteration that would make us accept that the world between the parallel lines is real because it is part of the total world; just as our luminous body is part of our total being.

Silvio Manuel also said that he was using la Gorda and me to probe into the possibility that we could someday help the other apprentices by ushering them into the other world; in which case they could accompany the Nagual Juan Matus and his party in their definitive journey.

He reasoned that since the Nagual woman had to leave this world with the Nagual Juan Matus and his warriors, the apprentices had to follow her because she was their only leader in the absence of a Nagual man. He assured us that she was counting on us; that this was the reason she was supervising our work.

Silvio Manuel had la Gorda and me sit down on the ground in the area in back of his house, where we had performed all the not-doings. We did not need don Juan's aid to enter into our keenest state of awareness. Almost immediately I saw the wall of fog. La Gorda did too. Yet no matter how we tried, we could not stop it's rotation. Every time I moved my head, the wall moved with it.

The Nagual woman was able to stop it and go through it by herself, but for all her efforts she could not take the two of us with her. Finally don Juan and Silvio Manuel had to stop the wall for us and physically push us through it. The sensation I had upon entering into that wall of fog was that my body was being twisted like the braids of a rope.

On the other side, there was the horrible desolate plain with small round sand dunes. There were very low yellow clouds around us, but no sky or horizon. Banks of pale yellow vapor impaired visibility. It was very difficult to walk.

The pressure seemed much greater than what my body was used to. La Gorda and I walked aimlessly, but the Nagual woman seemed to know where she was going. The further we went away from the wall, the darker it got and the more difficult it was to move. La Gorda and I could no longer walk erect. We had to crawl. I lost my strength and so did la Gorda. The Nagual woman had to drag us back to the wall and out of there.

We repeated our journey innumerable times. At first we were aided by don Juan and Silvio Manuel in stopping the wall of fog, but then la Gorda and I became almost as proficient as the Nagual woman. We learned to stop the rotation of that wall.

It happened quite naturally to us. In my case, on one occasion I realized that my intent was the key; a special aspect of my intent because it was not my volition as I know it.

It was an intense desire that was focused on the midpoint of my body. It was a peculiar nervousness that made me shudder and then it turned into a force that did not really stop the wall, but made some part of my body turn involuntarily ninety degrees to the right. The result was that for an instant I had two points of view. I was looking at the world divided in two by the wall of fog and at the same time I was staring directly at a bank of yellowish vapor. The latter view gained predominance and something pulled me into the fog and beyond it.

Another thing that we learned was to regard that place as real. Our journeys acquired for us the factuality of an excursion into the mountains, or a sea voyage in a sailboat. The deserted plain with sand-dune like mounds was as real to us as any part of the world.

La Gorda and I had the rational feeling that the three of us spent an eternity in the world between the parallel lines, yet we were unable to remember what exactly transpired there. We could only remember the terrifying moments when we would have to leave it to return to the world of everyday life. It was always a moment of tremendous anguish and insecurity.

Don Juan and all his warriors followed our endeavors with great curiosity, but the one who was strangely absent from all our activities was Eligio. Although he was himself a peerless warrior comparable to the warriors of don Juan's own party, he never took part in our struggle; nor did he help us in any way.

La Gorda said that Eligio had succeeded in attaching himself to Emilito and thus directly to the Nagual Juan Matus. He was never part of our problem because he could go into the second attention at the drop of a hat. To him, journeying into the confines of the second attention was as easy as snapping his fingers.

La Gorda reminded me of the day when Eligio's unusual talents allowed him to find out that I was not their man long before anyone else had even an inkling of the truth...

I had been sitting on the back porch of Vicente's house in northern Mexico when Emilito and Eligio suddenly showed up. Everyone took for granted that Emilito had to disappear for long periods of time. When he would show up again, everyone also took for granted that he had returned from a voyage. No one asked him any questions. He would report his findings first to don Juan and then to whoever wanted to hear them.

On that day it was as if Emilito and Eligio had just come into the house through the back door. Emilito was ebullient as ever. Eligio was his usual quiet somber self. I had always thought that when I saw both of them together, that Emilito's exquisite personality overwhelmed Eligio and made him even more sullen.

Emilito went inside looking for don Juan and Eligio opened up to me. He smiled and came to my side. He put his arm around my shoulders and placing his mouth to my ear whispered that he had broken the seal of the parallel lines and he could go into something he said Emilito had called glory.

Eligio went on to explain certain things about glory which I was unable to comprehend. It was as if my mind could only focus on the periphery of that event. After explaining it to me, Eligio took me by the hand and made me stand in the middle of the patio, looking at the sky with my chin slightly turned up.

He was to my right, standing with me in the same position. He told me to let go and fall backwards pulled by the heaviness of the very top of my head. Something grabbed me from behind and pulled me down. There was an abyss behind me. I fell into it. And then suddenly I was on the desolate plain with dune-like mounds.

Eligio urged me to follow him. He told me that the edge of glory was over the hills. I walked with him until I could not move any longer. He ran ahead of me with no effort at all as if he were made of air. He stood on top of a large mound and pointed beyond. He ran back to me and begged me to crawl up that hill which he told me was the edge of glory. It was perhaps only a hundred feet away from me, but I could not move another inch.

He tried to drag me up the hill, but he could not budge me. My weight seemed to have increased a hundred-fold. Eligio finally had to summon don Juan and his party. Cecilia lifted me up on her shoulders and carried me out.

La Gorda added that Emilito had put Eligio up to it. Emilito was proceeding according to the rule. My courier had journeyed into glory. It was mandatory that he show it to me.

I could recollect the eagerness in Eligio's face and the fervor with which he urged me to make one last effort to witness glory. I could also recollect his sadness and disappointment when I failed. He never spoke to me again.

La Gorda and I had been so involved in our journeys behind the wall of fog that we had forgotten that we were due for the next not-doing of the series with Silvio Manuel. He told us that it could be devastating, and that it consisted of crossing the parallel lines with the three little sisters and the three Genaros directly into the entrance to the world of total awareness. He did not include dona Soledad because his not-doings were only for dreamers and she was a stalker.

Silvio Manuel added that he expected us to become familiar with the third attention by placing ourselves at the foot of the Eagle over and over. He prepared us for the jolt.

He explained that a warrior's journeys into the desolate sand dunes is a preparatory step for the real crossing of boundaries. To venture behind the wall of fog while one is in a state of heightened awareness or while one is doing dreaming entails only a very small portion of our total awareness, while to cross bodily into the other world entails engaging our total being.

Silvio Manuel had conceived the idea of using the bridge as the symbol of a true crossing. He reasoned that the bridge was adjacent to a power spot; and power spots are cracks, passageways into the other world. He thought that it was possible that la Gorda and I had acquired enough strength to withstand a glimpse of the Eagle.

He announced that it was my personal duty to round up the three women and the three men and help them get into their keenest states of awareness. It was the least I could do for them, since I had perhaps been instrumental in destroying their chances for freedom.

He moved our time of action to the hour just before dawn, or the morning twilight. I dutifully attempted to make them shift awareness, as don Juan did to me. Since I had no idea how to manipulate their bodies or what I really had to do with them, I ended up beating them on the back.

After several grueling attempts on my part, don Juan finally intervened. He got them as ready as they could possibly be and handed them over to me to herd like cattle onto the bridge. My task was to take them one by one across that bridge. The power spot was on the south side, a very auspicious omen. Silvio Manuel planned to cross first, wait for me to deliver them to him and then usher us as a group into the unknown.

Silvio Manuel walked across, followed by Eligio, who did not even glance at me. I held the six apprentices in a tight group on the north side of the bridge. They were terrified. They got loose from my grip and began to run in different directions. I caught the three women one by one and succeeded in delivering them to Silvio Manuel.

He held them at the entrance of the crack between the worlds. The three men were too fast for me. I was too tired to run after them.

I looked at don Juan across the bridge for guidance. He and the rest of his party and the Nagual woman were clustered together looking at me. They had coaxed me with gestures to run after the women or the men, laughing at my fumbling attempts. Don Juan made a gesture with his head to disregard the three men and to cross over to Silvio Manuel with la Gorda.

We crossed. Silvio Manuel and Eligio seemed to be holding the sides of a vertical slit the size of a man. The women ran and hid behind la Gorda. Silvio Manuel urged all of us to step inside the opening. I obeyed him. The women did not.

Beyond that entrance there was nothing. Yet it was filled to the brim with something that was nothing. My eyes were open. All my senses were alert. I strained myself trying to see in front of me. But there was nothing in front of me. Or if there was something there, I could not grasp it.

My senses did not have the compartmentalization I have learned to regard as meaningful. Everything came to me at once, or rather nothingness came to me to a degree I had never experienced before or after. I felt that my body was being torn apart. A force from within myself was pushing outward. I was bursting, and not in a figurative way. Suddenly I felt a human hand snatching me out of there before I disintegrated.

The Nagual woman had crossed over and saved me. Eligio had not been able to move because he was holding the opening, and Silvio Manuel had the four women by their hair, two in each hand, ready to hurl them in.

I assume that the whole event must have taken at least a quarter of an hour to unfold, but at the time it never occurred to me to worry about people around the bridge.

Time seemed to have been somehow suspended; just as it became suspended years later when the apprentices and I returned to the bridge on our way to Mexico City.

Silvio Manuel said that although the attempt had seemed to be a failure, it was a total success. The four women did see the aperture and through it into the other world; and what I experienced in there was a true sense of death.

"There is nothing gorgeous or peaceful about death," he said, "because the real terror begins upon dying. With that incalculable force you felt in there, the Eagle will squeeze out of you every flicker of awareness you have ever had."

Silvio Manuel prepared la Gorda and me for another attempt. He explained that power spots were actual holes in a sort of canopy that prevents the world from losing it's shape. A power spot could be utilized as long as one has gathered enough strength in the second attention.

He told us that the key to withstanding the Eagle's presence was the potency of one's intent. Without intent there was nothing. He said to me that, since I was the only one who had stepped into the other world, what had nearly killed me was my incapacity to change my intent.

He was confident, however, that with forced practice all of us would get to elongate our intent. He could not explain, however, what intent was. He joked that only the Nagual Juan Matus could explain it- but that he was not around.

Unfortunately our next attempt did not take place because I became depleted of energy. It was a swift and devastating loss of vitality. I was suddenly so weak that I passed out in Silvio Manuel's house.

I asked la Gorda whether she knew what happened next: I myself had no idea. La Gorda said that Silvio Manuel told everyone that the Eagle had dislodged me from their group, and that finally I was ready for them to prepare me to carry out the designs of my fate.

His plan was to take me to the world between the parallel lines while I was unconscious, and let that world draw out all the remaining and useless energy from my body. His idea was sound in the judgment of all his companions because the rule says that one could only enter in there with awareness. To enter without it brings death, since without consciousness the life force is exhausted by the physical pressure of that world.

La Gorda added that they did not take her with me.

But the Nagual Juan Matus had told her that once I was empty of vital energy- practically dead- all of them took turns in blowing new energy into my body. In that world, anybody who has life force can give it to others by blowing on them. They put their breath in all the spots where there is a storage point. Silvio Manuel blew first, then the Nagual woman. The remaining part of me was made up of all the members of the Nagual Juan Matus' party.

After they had blown their energy into me, the Nagual woman brought me out of the fog to Silvio Manuel's house. She laid me on the ground with my head toward the southeast.

La Gorda said that I looked as if I were dead. She and the Genaros and the three little sisters were there. The Nagual woman explained to them that I was ill, but that I was going to come back someday to help them find their freedom because I would not be free myself until I did that.

Silvio Manuel then gave me his breath and brought me back to life. That was why she and the little sisters remembered that he was my master. He carried me to my bed and let me sleep, as if nothing had happened. After I woke up I left and did not return.

And then la Gorda forgot because no one ever pushed her into the left side again. She went to live in the town where I later found her with the others. The Nagual Juan and Genaro had set up two different households. Genaro took care of the men and the Nagual Juan Matus looked after the women.

I had gone to sleep feeling depressed, feeble. When I woke up I was in perfect control of myself, ebullient, filled with extraordinary and unfamiliar energy. My well-being was marred only by don Juan's telling me that I had to leave la Gorda and strive alone to perfect my attention until one day when I would be able to return to help her. He also told me not to fret or get discouraged, for the carrier of the rule would eventually make himself or herself known to me in order to reveal my true task.

Afterward I did not see don Juan for a very long time. When I came back, he kept on making me shift from the right to the left side awareness for two purposes; first, so I could continue my relationship with his warriors and the Nagual woman; and second, so he could put me under the direct supervision of Zuleica, with whom I had a steady interaction throughout the remaining years of my association with don Juan.

He told me that the reason he had to entrust me to Zuleica was because according to Silvio Manuel's master plan there were to be two kinds of instruction for me, one for the right side and one for the left.

The right side instruction pertained to the state of normal consciousness and had to do with leading me to the rational conviction that there is another type of awareness concealed in human beings. Don Juan was in charge of this instruction.

The left side instruction had been assigned to Zuleica. It was related to the state of heightened awareness, and had to do exclusively with the handling of the second attention.

Thus every time I went to Mexico I would spend half of my time with Zuleica, and the other half with don Juan.

## 13. The Intricacies of Dreaming

Don Juan began the task of ushering me into the second attention by telling me that I had already had a great deal of experience in entering into it- Silvio Manuel had taken me to the very entrance.

The flaw had been that I had not been given the appropriate rationales. Male warriors must be given serious reasons before they safely venture into the unknown. Female warriors are not subject to this and can go without any hesitation, providing that they have total confidence in whoever is leading them.

He told me that I had to start by learning first the intricacies of dreaming. He then put me under Zuleica's supervision. He admonished me to be impeccable and practice meticulously whatever I learned, and above all, to be careful and deliberate in my actions so as not to exhaust my life force in vain. He said that the prerequisite for entrance into any of the three stages of attention is the possession of life force, because without it warriors cannot have direction and purpose. He explained that upon dying our awareness also enters into the third attention; but only for an instant as a purging action just before the Eagle devours it.

La Gorda said that the Nagual Juan Matus made every one of the apprentices learn dreaming. She thought that all of them were given this task at the same time I was. Their instruction was also divided into right and left. She said that the Nagual and Genaro provided the instruction for the state of normal awareness. When they judged that the apprentices were ready, the Nagual made them shift into a state of heightened awareness and left them with their respective counterparts.

Vicente taught Nestor, Silvio Manuel taught Benigno, Genaro taught Pablito. Lydia was taught by Hermelinda, and Rosa by Nelida. La Gorda added that Josefina and she were put under the care of Zuleica in order to learn together the finer points of dreaming so they would be able to come to my aid someday.

Moreover, la Gorda deduced on her own that the men were also taken to Florinda to be taught stalking. The proof of this was their drastic change of behavior. She claimed that she knew, before she remembered anything, that she had been taught the principles of stalking but in a very superficial manner. She had not been made to practice.

The men were given practical knowledge and tasks. Their behavioral change was the proof. They became lighthearted and jovial. They enjoyed their lives, while she and the other women, because of their dreaming became progressively more somber and morose.

La Gorda believed that the men were unable to remember their instruction when I asked them to reveal their stalking knowledge to me, because they practiced it without knowing what they were doing. Their training was revealed, however, in their dealings with people. They were consummate artists in bending people to their wishes.

Through their stalking practice, the men had even learned controlled folly. For example, they carried on as if Soledad were Pablito's mother. To any onlooker, it would seem that they were mother and son pitted against each other when in reality they were acting out a part. They convinced everybody. Sometimes Pablito would give such a performance that he would even convince himself.

La Gorda confessed that all of the apprentices were more than baffled by my behavior after I returned to Mexico following the departure of don Juan and his warriors. The apprentices did not know whether I was insane, or was myself a master of controlled folly: I gave all the outward indications that I believed their masquerade.

Soledad told them not to be fooled because I was indeed insane. I appeared to be in control, but I was so completely aberrated that I could not behave like a Nagual. She engaged every one of the women in delivering a deadly blow to me. She told them that I had requested it myself at one time when I had been in control of my faculties.

La Gorda said that it took her several years under Zuleica's guidance to learn dreaming. When the Nagual Juan Matus had judged that she was proficient, he finally took her to her true counterpart, Nelida.

It was Nelida who showed her how to behave in the world. She groomed her not only to be at ease in Western clothes, but to have good taste. Thus when she put on her city clothes in Oaxaca and amazed me with her charm and poise, she was already experienced in that transformation.

Zuleica was very effective as my guide into the second attention. She insisted that our interaction take place only at night, and in total darkness. For me, Zuleica was only a voice in the dark; a voice that started every contact we had by telling me to focus my attention on her words and nothing else. Her voice was the woman's voice that la Gorda thought she had heard in dreaming.

Zuleica told me that if dreaming is going to be done indoors, it is best to do it in total darkness, while lying down or sitting up on a narrow bed; or better yet, while sitting inside a coffin-like crib. She thought that outdoors, dreaming should be done in the protection of a cave, in the sandy areas of water holes, or sitting against a rock in the mountains; never on the flat floor of a valley, or next to rivers, or lakes, or the sea; because flat areas as well as water were antithetical [* antithetical- sharply contrasted in character or purpose] to the second attention.

Every one of my sessions with her was imbued with mysterious overtones. She explained that the surest way to make a direct hit on the second attention is through ritual acts: monotonous chanting; intricate repetitious movements.

Her teachings were not about the preliminaries of dreaming which had already been taught to me by don Juan. Her assumption was that whoever came to her already knew how to do dreaming; so she dealt exclusively with esoteric points of the left side awareness.

Zuleica's instructions began one day when don Juan took me to her house. We got there late in the afternoon. The place seemed to be deserted, but the front door opened as we approached. I expected Zoila or Marta to show up but no one was at the entrance. I felt that whoever had opened the door for us had also moved out of our way very quickly.

Don Juan took me inside to the patio and made me sit on a crate that had a cushion and had been turned into a bench. The seat on the crate was bumpy, hard, and very uncomfortable. I ran my hand underneath the thin cushion and found sharp edged rocks. Don Juan said that my situation was unconventional because I had to learn the fine points of dreaming in a hurry. Sitting on a hard surface was a prop to keep my body from feeling it was in a normal sitting situation.

Just a few minutes before arriving at the house, don Juan had made me change levels of awareness. He said that Zuleica's instruction had to be conducted in that state in order for me to have the speed that I needed. He admonished me to abandon myself and trust Zuleica implicitly.

He then commanded me to focus my gaze with all the concentration I was capable of, and memorize every detail of the patio that was within my field of vision. He insisted that I had to memorize the detail as much as the feeling of sitting there. He repeated his instructions to make sure that I had understood. Then he left.

It quickly got very dark, and sitting there I started to fret. I had not had enough time to concentrate on the detail of the patio.

I heard a rustling sound just behind me and then Zuleica's voice jolted me. In a forceful whisper she told me to get up and follow her. I automatically obeyed her. I could not see her face, she was only a dark shape walking two steps ahead of me. She led me to an alcove in the darkest hall in her house. Although my eyes were used to the darkness I was still unable to see a thing. I stumbled on something and she commanded me to sit down inside a narrow crib and support my lower back with something I thought was a hard cushion.

I next felt that she had backed up a few steps behind me; a thing which baffled me completely because I thought that my back was only a few inches from the wall. Speaking from behind me, she ordered me in a soft voice to focus my attention on her words and let them guide me. She told me to keep my eyes open and fixed on a point right in front of me at my eye level; and that this point was going to turn from darkness to a bright and pleasing orange-red.

Zuleica spoke very softly with an even intonation. I heard every word she said. The darkness around me seemed to have effectively cut off any distracting external stimuli. I heard Zuleica's words in a vacuum, and then I realized that the silence in that hall was matched by the silence inside me.

Zuleica explained that a dreamer must start from a point of color; intense light or unmitigated darkness are useless to a dreamer in the initial onslaught. Colors such as purple or light green or rich yellow are, on the other hand, stupendous starting points.

She preferred, however, orange-red, because through experience it had proven to be the one that gave her the greatest sensation of rest. She assured me that once I had succeeded in entering into the orange-red color I would have rallied my second attention permanently- providing that I could be aware of the sequence of physical events.

It took me several sessions with Zuleica's voice to realize with my body what she wanted me to do. The advantage of being in a state of heightened awareness was that I could follow my transition from a state of vigil to a state of dreaming. Under normal conditions that transition is blurred, but under those special circumstances I actually felt in the course of one session how my second attention took over the controls.

The first step was an unusual difficulty in breathing. It was not a difficulty in inhaling or exhaling- I was not short of breath- rather, my breathing changed rhythm all of a sudden. My diaphragm began to contract and it forced my midsection to move in and out with great speed. The result was the fastest short breaths I had ever taken. I breathed in the lower part of my lungs and felt a great pressure in my intestines. I tried unsuccessfully to break the spasms of my diaphragm. The harder I tried, the more painful it got.

Zuleica ordered me to let my body do whatever was necessary and to forget about directing or controlling it. I wanted to obey her, but I did not know how. The spasms, which must have lasted ten to fifteen minutes, subsided as suddenly as they had appeared and were followed by another strange, shocking sensation.

I felt it first as a most peculiar itch; a physical feeling which was not pleasing or displeasing. It was something like a nervous tremor. It became very intense to the point of forcing me to focus my attention on it in order to determine where in my body it was happening. I was stunned by the realization that it was not taking place anywhere in my physical body, but outside of it; and yet I still felt it.

I disregarded Zuleica's order to enter into a patch of coloration that was forming right at my eye level, and gave myself fully to the exploration of that strange sensation outside me. Zuleica must have seen what I was going through. She suddenly began to explain that the second attention belongs to the luminous body, just as the first attention belongs to the physical body. She said that the point where the second attention assembles itself was situated right where Juan Tuma had described it the first time we met- approximately one and one-half feet in front of the midpoint between the stomach and the belly button and four inches to the right.

Zuleica ordered me to massage that place; to manipulate it by moving the fingers of both my hands right on that point as if I were playing a harp. She assured me that sooner or later I would end up feeling my fingers going through something as thick as water, and that finally I would feel my luminous shell.

As I kept on moving my fingers the air got progressively thicker until I felt a mass of sorts. An undefined physical pleasure spread all over me. I thought that I was touching a nerve in my body and felt silly at the absurdity of it. I stopped.

Zuleica warned me that if I did not move my fingers she was going to bop me on the head. The longer I kept up the wavering motion, the closer I felt the itching. It finally got as near as five or six inches from my body. It was as if something in me had shrunk. I actually thought I could feel a dent.

I then had another eerie sensation. I was falling asleep and yet I was conscious. There was a buzzing in my ears, which reminded me of the sound of a bullroarer. Next I felt a force rolling me over on my left side without waking me up. I was rolled very tightly, like a cigar, and was tucked into the itching depression. My awareness remained suspended there, incapable of waking up, but so tightly rolled on itself that I could not fall asleep either.

I heard Zuleica's voice telling me to look around. I could not open my eyes, but my tactile sense told me that I was in a ditch, lying on my back. I felt comfortable and secure. There was such a tightness to my body, such a compactness, that I did not ever want to get up. Zuleica's voice ordered me to stand up and open my eyes. I could not do it. She said that I had to will my movements; that it was no longer a matter of contracting my muscles to get up.

I thought that she was annoyed at my slowness. I realized then that I was fully conscious, perhaps more conscious than I had ever been in my entire life. I could think rationally and yet

I seemed to be sound asleep. The thought occurred to me that Zuleica had put me in a state of deep hypnosis. It bothered me for an instant, then it did not matter. I abandoned myself to the feeling of being suspended; floating free.

I could not hear anything else she said. It was either that she had stopped talking to me or that I had shut off the sound of her voice. I did not want to leave that haven. I had never been so peaceful and complete. I lay there unwilling to get up or to change anything. I could feel the rhythm of my breathing. Suddenly I woke up.

In my next session with Zuleica, she told me that I had succeeded in making a dent in my luminosity all by myself, and that making a dent meant bringing a distant point in my luminous shell closer to my physical body; therefore closer to control. She asserted repeatedly that from the moment the body learns to make that dent, it is easier to enter into dreaming. I agreed with her. I had acquired a strange impulse; a sensation that my body had instantly learned to reproduce. It was a mixture of feeling at ease, secure, dormant, suspended without tactile sense, and at the same time fully awake; aware of everything.

La Gorda said that the Nagual Juan Matus had struggled for years to create that dent in her- in all three little sisters, and in the Genaros as well, so as to give them the permanent ability to focus their second attention.

He had told her that ordinarily the dent is created on the spur of the moment by the dreamer when it is needed. Then the luminous shell changes back to it's original shape. But in the apprentices' case, since they did not have a Nagual leader, the depression was created from the outside and was a permanent feature of their luminous bodies; a great help, but also a hindrance. It made all of them vulnerable and moody.

I remembered then that once I had seen and kicked a depression in the luminous shells of Lydia and Rosa. I thought that the dent was at the height of the upper portion of the outside of their right thigh, or perhaps just at the crest of their hipbone. La Gorda explained that I had kicked them in the dent of their second attention and that I had nearly killed them.

La Gorda said that she and Josefina lived in Zuleica's house for several months. The Nagual Juan Matus had delivered them to her one day after making them shift levels of awareness. He did not tell them what they were going to do there, nor what to expect. He simply left them by themselves in the hall of her house, and walked away.

They sat there until it got dark. Zuleica then came to them. They never saw her: They only heard her voice as if she were talking to them from a point on the wall.

Zuleica was very demanding from the moment she took over. She made them undress on the spot and ordered both of them to crawl inside thick fluffy cotton bags, some poncho-like garments that were lying on the floor. The garments covered them from neck to toes.

Next, she ordered them to sit back to back on a mat in the same alcove where I myself used to sit. Zuleica told them that their task was to gaze at the darkness until it began to acquire a hue. After many sessions they indeed began to see colors in the darkness; at which time Zuleica made them sit side by side and gaze at the same spot.

La Gorda said that Josefina learned very fast, and that one night she dramatically entered into the patch of orange-red by swishing physically out of the poncho. La Gorda thought that either Josefina had reached out for the blotch of color or it had reached out for her. The result was that in one instant Josefina was gone from inside the poncho. Zuleica separated them from then on, and la Gorda started her slow, solitary learning.

La Gorda's account made me remember that Zuleica had also made me crawl inside a fluffy garment. In fact, the commands she used to order me to crawl inside revealed to me the rationale for it's use. She directed me to feel it's fluffiness with my naked skin, especially with the skin of my calves.

She repeated over and over that human beings have a superb center of perception on the outside of the calves, and that if the skin in that area could be made to relax or be soothed, the scope of our perception would be enhanced in ways that would be impossible to fathom rationally. The garment was very soft and warm, and it induced an extraordinary sensation of pleasurable relaxation in my legs. The nerves in my calves became highly stimulated.

La Gorda reported the same sensation of physical pleasure. She went as far as to say that it was the power of that poncho that guided her to find the patch of orange-red color. She was so impressed with the garment that she made herself one by copying the original. It's effect was not the same, but it still provided her solace and well-being. She said that she and Josefina ended up spending all of their available time inside the ponchos that she had sewn for both of them.

Lydia and Rosa had also been placed inside the garment, but they were never particularly fond of it. Neither was I.

La Gorda explained Josefina's and her own attachment as a direct consequence of having been led to finding their dreaming color while they were inside the garment. She said that the reason for my indifference to it was the fact that I did not enter into the area of coloration at all; rather, the hue had come to me.

She was right. Something else besides Zuleica's voice dictated the outcome of that preparatory phase. By all indications, Zuleica had lead me through the same steps she had led la Gorda and Josefina.

I had stared at the darkness throughout many sessions, and was ready to visualize the spot of coloration. In fact, I witnessed it's entire metamorphosis from plain darkness to a precisely outlined blotch of intense brightness.

First I was swayed by the external itch. I then focused my attention upon it until I ended up entering into a state of restful vigil. It was then that I first became immersed in an orange-red coloration.

After I had learned to remain suspended between sleep and vigil, Zuleica seemed to relax her pace. I even believed that she was not in any hurry to get me out of that state. She let me stay in it without interfering, and never asked me about it; perhaps because her voice was only for commands and not for asking questions. We never really talked- at least not the way I talked with don Juan.

While I was in the state of restful vigil, I realized one time that it was useless for me to remain there; that no matter how pleasant it was, it's limitations were blatant.

I sensed then a tremor in my body and I opened my eyes, or rather my eyes became open by themselves. Zuleica was staring at me. I experienced a moment of bafflement. I thought I had woken up, and to be faced with Zuleica in the flesh was something I had not expected. I had gotten used to hearing only her voice. It also surprised me that it was no longer night. I looked around. We were not in Zuleica's house. Then the realization struck me that I was dreaming and I woke up.

Zuleica started then on another facet of her teachings. She taught me how to move.

She began her instruction by commanding me to place my awareness on the midpoint of my body. In my case the midpoint is below the lower edge of my belly button. She told me to sweep the floor with it, that is, make a rocking motion with my belly as if a broom were attached to it. Throughout countless sessions, I attempted to accomplish what her voice was urging me to do.

She did not allow me to go into a state of restful vigil. It was her intention to guide me to elicit the perception of sweeping the floor with my midsection while I remained in a waking state. She said that to be on the left side awareness was enough of an advantage to do well in the exercise.

One day, for no reason I could think of, I succeeded in having a vague feeling in the area of my stomach. It was not something defined, and when I focused my attention on it I realized that it was a prickling sensation inside the cavity of my body, not quite in my stomach area but above it. The closer I examined it, the more details I noticed. The vagueness of the sensation soon turned into a certainty. There was a strange connection of nervousness- a prickling sensation- between my solar plexus and my right calf.

As the sensation became more acute, I involuntarily brought my right thigh up to my chest. Thus the two points were as close to each other as my anatomy permitted. I shivered for a moment with an unusual nervousness and then I clearly felt that I was sweeping the floor with my midsection. It was a tactile sensation that happened over and over every time I rocked my body in my sitting position.

In my next session, Zuleica allowed me to enter into a state of restful vigil. But this time that state was not quite as it had been before. There seemed to be a sort of control in me that curtailed my enjoying it freely as I had done in the past; a control that also made me focus on the steps I had taken to get into it.

First I noticed the itch on the point of the second attention in my luminous shell. I massaged that point by moving my fingers on it as if I were playing a harp and the point sunk towards my stomach. I felt it almost on my skin.

I experienced a prickling sensation on the outside of my right calf. It was a mixture of pleasure and pain. The sensation radiated to my whole leg and then to my lower back.

I felt that my buttocks were shaking. My entire body was transfixed by a nervous ripple. I thought that my body had been caught upside down in a net. My forehead and my toes seemed to be touching. I was like a closed U-shape.

Then I felt as if I were being folded in two and rolled inside a sheet. My nervous spasms were what made the sheet roll into itself, with me in the center. When the rolling ended I could not sense my body any more.

I was only an amorphous awareness; a nervous spasm wrapped in itself. That awareness came to rest inside a ditch, inside a depression of itself.

I understood then the impossibility of describing what takes place in dreaming. Zuleica said that the right and left side awareness are wrapped up together. Both of them come to rest in one single bundle in the dent; the depressed center of the second attention. To do dreaming one needs to manipulate both the luminous body and the physical body.

First, the center of assembling for the second attention has to be made accessible by being pushed in from the outside by someone else, or sucked in from within by the dreamer. Second, in order to dislodge the first attention, the centers of the physical body located in the midsection and the calves, especially the right one, have to be stimulated and placed as close to one another as possible until they seem to join. Then the sensation of being bundled takes place and automatically the second attention takes over.

Zuleica's explanation, given in commands, was the most cogent way of describing what takes place because none of the sensory experiences involved in dreaming are part of our normal inventory of sensory data. All of them were baffling to me.

The sensation of an itch- a tingling outside myself- was localized; and because of that, the turmoil of my body upon feeling it was minimal.

The sensation of being rolled on myself, on the other hand, was by far the most disquieting. It included a range of sensations that left my body in a state of shock. I was convinced that at one point my toes were touching my forehead, which is a position I am not able to attain; and yet I knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that I was inside a net hanging upside down in a pear shape with my toes right against my forehead. On a physical plane I was sitting down and my thighs were against my chest.

Zuleica also said that the feeling of being rolled up like a cigar and placed inside the dent of the second attention was the result of merging my right and left awareness into a single awareness in which the order of predominance has been switched, and the left has gained supremacy.

She challenged me to be attentive enough to catch the reversal motion; the two attentions again becoming what they normally are with the right holding the reins.

I never caught the feelings involved, but her challenge obsessed me to the point that I became trapped in deadly vacillations in my effort to watch everything. She had to withdraw her challenge by ordering me to stop my scrutinies, for I had other things to do.

Zuleica said that first of all I had to perfect my command of moving at will. She began her instruction by directing me time and time again to open my eyes while I was in a state of restful vigil. It took a great deal of effort for me to do it.

One time my eyes opened suddenly and I saw Zuleica looming over me. I was lying down but I could not determine where. The light was extremely bright as if I were just underneath a powerful electric bulb, but the light was not shining directly on my eyes. I could see Zuleica without any effort.

She ordered me to stand up by willing my movement. She said that I had to push myself up with my midsection, that I had three thick tentacles there which I could use as crutches to lift up my whole body.

I tried every conceivable way to get up. I failed. I had a sensation of despair and physical anguish reminiscent of nightmares I used to have as a child in which I was unable to wake up and yet I was fully awake desperately trying to scream.

Zuleica finally spoke to me. She said that I had to follow a certain sequence, and that it was wasteful and downright dumb of me to fret and get agitated as if I were dealing with the world of everyday life.

Fretting was proper only in the first attention: The second attention was calmness itself.

She wanted me to repeat the sensation I had had of sweeping the floor with my midsection. I thought that in order to repeat it I would have to be sitting. Without any deliberation on my part I sat up and adopted the position I had used when my body first elicited that sensation.

Something in me rocked, and suddenly I was standing. I could not figure out what I had done to move. I thought that if I started all over again I could catch the sequence. As soon as I had that thought I found myself lying down again. Upon standing up once more I realized that there was no procedure involved; that in order to move I had to intend my moving at a very deep level.

In other words, I had to be utterly convinced that I wanted to move, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I had to be convinced that I needed to move.

Once I had understood that principle, Zuleica made me practice every conceivable aspect of volitional movement. The more I practiced, the clearer it became for me that dreaming was in fact a rational state.

Zuleica explained it. She said that in dreaming, the right side, the rational awareness, is wrapped up inside the left side awareness in order to give the dreamer a sense of sobriety and rationality; but that the influence of rationality has to be minimal and used only as an inhibiting mechanism to protect the dreamer from excesses and bizarre undertakings.

The next step was learning to direct my dreaming body. From the first time I met Zuleica, Don Juan had proposed the task of gazing at the patio as I sat on the crate. I religiously engaged myself, sometimes for hours, in gazing at it. I was always alone in Zuleica's house. It seemed that on the days when I went there everyone was gone or was hiding. The silence and the solitude worked in my favor and I succeeded in memorizing the details of that patio.

Zuleica presented to me, accordingly, the task of opening my eyes from a state of restful vigil to see the patio. It took many sessions to accomplish it. At first I would open my eyes and I would see her, and she, with a jerk of her body, would make me bounce back like a ball into the state of restful vigil.

On one of those bounces, I felt an intense tremor. Something that was located in my feet rattled it's way up to my chest and I coughed it up. The scene of the patio at night came out of me just as if it had emerged out of my bronchial tubes. It was something like the roar of an animal.

I heard Zuleica's voice coming to me as a faint murmur. I could not understand what she was saying. I vaguely noticed that I was sitting on the crate. I wanted to get up but I felt that I was not solid. It was as if a wind were blowing me away.

Then I heard Zuleica's voice very clearly telling me not to move. I tried to remain motionless but some force pulled me and I woke up in the alcove in the hall. Silvio Manuel was facing me.

Typically, after every session of dreaming in Zuleica's house, don Juan would be waiting for me in the pitch-black hall. He would take me out of the house and make me shift levels of awareness.

This time Silvio Manuel was there. Without saying a word to me, he put me inside a harness and hoisted me up against the beams of the roof. He kept me there until midday at which time don Juan came and let me down. He explained that to be kept without touching the ground for a period of time tunes the body, and that it is essential to do this before embarking on a dangerous journey such as the one I was about to undertake.

It took many more sessions of dreaming for me to learn, at last, to open my eyes to see either Zuleica or to see the dark patio. I realized then that she herself had been dreaming all along. She had never been in person behind me in the alcove in the hall. I had been right the first night when I thought that my back was against the wall. Zuleica was merely a voice from dreaming.

During one of the dreaming sessions, when I opened my eyes deliberately to see Zuleica, I was shocked to find la Gorda as well as Josefina looming over me together with Zuleica. The final facet of her teaching began then.

Zuleica taught the three of us to journey with her. She said that our first attention was hooked to the emanations of the earth, while our second attention was hooked to the emanations of the universe. What she meant by that was that a dreamer by definition is outside the boundaries of the concerns of everyday life. As a traveler in dreaming then, Zuleica's last task with la Gorda, Josefina, and me was to tune our second attention to follow her around in her voyages into the unknown.

In successive sessions, Zuleica's voice told me that her 'obsession' was going to lead me to a rendezvous; that in matters of the second attention the dreamer's obsession serves as a guide; and that hers was focused on an actual place beyond this earth. From that place she was going to call me, and I had to use her voice as a line to pull myself.

Nothing happened for two sessions: Zuleica's voice would become more and more faint as she spoke, and I worried that I was incapable of following her. She had not told me what to do. I also experienced an unusual heaviness. I could not break a binding force around me that prevented me from getting out of the state of restful vigil.

During the third session, I suddenly opened my eyes without even trying to. Zuleica, la Gorda and Josefina were staring at me. I was standing with them. I immediately realized that we were in some place completely unknown to me.

The most obvious feature was a brilliant indirect light. The whole scene was inundated by a white, powerful, neonlike light. Zuleica was smiling as if inviting us to look around. La Gorda and Josefina seemed to be as cautious as I was. They gave me and Zuleica furtive glances.

Zuleica signaled us to move around. We were outdoors, standing in the middle of a glaring circle. The ground seemed to be hard, dark rock, yet it reflected a great deal of the blinding white light which came from above. The strange thing was that, although I knew that the light was too intense for my eyes, I was not at all hurt when I looked up and spotted it's source. It was the sun. I was staring directly at the sun which, perhaps due to the fact that I was dreaming, was intensely white.

La Gorda and Josefina were also staring at the sun; apparently without any injurious effect. Suddenly I felt frightened. The light was alien to me. It was a merciless light. It seemed to attack us, creating a wind that I could feel. I could not sense any heat, however. I believed it to be malignant.

In unison, la Gorda, Josefina and I huddled together like frightened children around Zuleica. She held us, and then the white, glaring light began to diminish by degrees until it had completely vanished. In it's place there was a mild, very soothing, yellowish light.

I became aware then that we were not in this world. The ground was the color of wet terra-cotta. There were no mountains, but where we were standing was not flat land either. The ground was cracked and parched. It looked like a rough dry sea of terra-cotta. I could see it all around me just as if I were in the middle of the ocean.

I looked up. The sky had lost it's maddening glare. It was dark, but not blue. A bright, incandescent star was near the horizon. It dawned on me at that instant that we were in a world with two suns; two stars. One was enormous and had gone over the horizon, the other was smaller or perhaps more distant.

I wanted to ask questions, to walk around and look for things. Zuleica signaled us to relax, to wait patiently. But something seemed to be pulling us. Suddenly la Gorda and Josefina were gone. And I woke up.

From that time on I never went back to Zuleica's house. Don Juan would make me shift levels of awareness in his own house or wherever we were, and I would enter into dreaming. Zuleica, la Gorda and Josefina were always waiting for me. We went back to the same unearthly scene over and over, until we were thoroughly familiar with it.

Whenever we could do it, we would skip the time of glare- the daytime- and go there at night just in time to witness the rise over the horizon of a colossal celestial body; something of such magnitude that when it erupted over the jagged line of the horizon it covered at least half of the one hundred and eighty degree range in front of us. The celestial body was beautiful, and it's ascent over the horizon was so breathtaking that I could have stayed there for an eternity, just to witness that sight.

The celestial body took up nearly the entire firmament when it reached the zenith. Invariably we would lie on our backs in order to gaze at it. It had consistent configurations, which Zuleica taught us to recognize.

I realized that it was not a star. It's light was reflected, It must have been an opaque body because the reflected light was mellow in relation to it's monumental size. There were enormous, unchanging brown spots on it's saffron-yellow surface.

Zuleica took us systematically on voyages that were beyond words. La Gorda said that Zuleica took Josefina even farther and deeper into the unknown, because Josefina was, just like Zuleica herself, quite a bit crazy. Neither of them had that core of rationality that supplies a dreamer with sobriety, thus they had no barriers and no interest in finding out rational causes or reasons for anything.

The only thing that Zuleica told me about our journeys that sounded like an explanation was that the dreamers' power to focus on their second attention made them into living slingshots. The stronger and the more impeccable the dreamers were, the farther they could project their second attention into the unknown, and the longer their dreaming projection would last.

Don Juan said that my journeys with Zuleica were no illusion, and that everything I had done with her was a step toward the control of the second attention. In other words, Zuleica was teaching me the perceptual bias of that other realm.

He could not explain, however, the exact nature of those journeys; or perhaps he did not want to commit himself. He said that if he attempted to explain the perceptual bias of the second attention in terms of the perceptual bias of the first, he would only trap himself hopelessly in words. He wanted me to draw my own conclusion, and the more I thought about the whole matter, the clearer it became to me that his reluctance was functional.

Under Zuleica's guidance during her instruction for the second attention, I made factual visitations to mysteries that were certainly beyond the scope of my reason, but obviously within the possibilities of my total awareness. I learned to voyage into something incomprehensible and ended up, like Emilito and Juan Tuma, having my own tales of eternity.

## 14. Florinda

La Gorda and I were in total agreement that by the time Zuleica had finished teaching us the intricacies of dreaming: we had accepted the undeniable fact that the rule is a map; that there is another awareness concealed in us; and that it is possible to enter into that awareness.

Don Juan had accomplished what the rule prescribed he do.

The rule determined that his next movement was to intro-duce me to Florinda; the only one of his warriors whom I had not met. Don Juan told me that I had to go to her house by myself because whatever transpired between Florinda and myself was of no concern to others. He said that Florinda was to be my personal guide exactly as if I were a Nagual like him. He had had that kind of relationship with the warrior of his benefactor's party who was comparable to Florinda.

Don Juan left me one day at the door of Nelida's house. He told me to walk in; that Florinda was waiting for me inside.

"It's an honor to make your acquaintance," I said to the woman who was facing me in the hall.

"I'm Florinda," she said.

We looked at each other in silence. I was awestruck. My state of awareness was as keen as it had ever been. Never again have I experienced a comparable sensation.

"That's a beautiful name," I managed to say, but I meant more than that.

The soft and long enunciation of the Spanish vowels made the name fluid and sonorous; especially the 'i' after the 'r'. The name was not rare; I simply had never met anyone, until that day, who was the essence of that name. The woman in front of me fit into it as if it had been made for her, or perhaps as if she herself had made her person fit into it.

Physically she looked exactly like Nelida, except that she seemed more self-confident; more powerful. She was rather tall and slender. She had the olive skin of Mediterranean peo-ple; Spanish, or perhaps French. She was old and yet she was not feeble or even aged. Her body seemed to be supple and lean: long legs, angular features, small mouth, a beautifully chiseled nose, dark eyes and braided white hair; no jowls, no sagging skin on her face and neck. She was old as if she had been made up to look old.

Remembering in retrospect my first meeting with her, I am reminded of something thoroughly unrelated but apropos. [* apropos- of an appropriate or pertinent nature]

I saw once in a weekly newspaper a reprint of a twenty year old photograph of a young

Hollywood actress who had been made up to look twenty years older in order to play the role of an aging woman.

Next to it, the paper had printed a current picture of the same actress as she looked after twenty real years of hard living.

Florinda, in my subjective judgment, was like the first picture of the movie actress; a young girl made up to look old.

"What do we have here?" she said pinching me. "You don't look like much. Soft. Indulging to the core no doubt."

Her bluntness reminded me of don Juan's; as did the inner life of her eyes. It had occurred to me, looking back at my life with don Juan, that his eyes were always in repose. One could see no agitation in them. It was not that don Juan's eyes were beautiful to look at. I have seen gorgeous eyes, but never have I found them to say anything. Florinda's eyes, like don Juan's, gave me the feeling that they had witnessed all there is to witness. They were calm, but not bland. The excitement had been driven inward and had turned into something I could only describe as inner life.

Florinda took me through the living room and out to a roofed patio. We sat on some comfortable sofalike chairs. Her eyes seemed to look for something in my face.

She asked, "Do you know who I am and what I'm supposed to do for you?"

I said that all I knew about her and her relation to me was what don Juan had sketched out. In the course of explaining my position I called her dona Florinda.

"Don't call me dona Florinda," she said with a childish gesture of annoyance and embarrassment. "I'm not that old yet, or even that respectable."

I asked her how she expected me to address her.

"Just Florinda will do," she said. "Insofar as to who I am, I can tell you right off that I am a woman warrior who knows the secrets of stalking.

"And insofar as what I am supposed to do for you, I can tell you that I am going to teach you: the first seven principles of stalking; the first three principles of the rule for stalkers; and the first three maneuvers of stalking."

She added that the normal thing was for every warrior to forget what transpires when the interaction is on the left side, and that it would take years for me to come to grips with whatever she was going to teach me. She said that her instruc-tion was merely the beginning, and that some day she would finish teaching me, but under different circumstances.

I asked her if she minded my asking her questions. "Do as you please," she said. "All I need from you is your commitment to practice. After all, you know in one way or another whatever we're going to discuss. Your shortcomings are that you have no self-confidence and that you are unwilling to claim your knowledge as power. The Nagual Juan Matus, being a man, mesmerized you. You cannot act on your own. Only a woman can liberate you from that.

"I will begin by telling you the story of my life, and in doing so, things will become clear to you. I will have to tell it to you in bits, so you will have to come here quite often."

Her apparent willingness to tell me about her life struck me as being at odds with the reticence [* reticence- the trait of being uncommunicative; not volunteering anything more than necessary] of everyone else to reveal anything personal about themselves. After years with them I had accepted their ways so unquestioningly that her voluntary intent to reveal her personal life was freakish to me. Her statement put me immediately on guard.

"I beg your pardon," I said. "Did you say that you are going to reveal your personal life to me?"

"Why not?" she asked.

I answered her with a long explanation of what don Juan had told me about the encumbering force of personal history, and the need that a warrior has to erase it. I wrapped it up by telling her that he had prohibited me from ever talking about my life.

She laughed in a high falsetto voice. She seemed to be delighted.

"That applies only to men," she said. "The not-doing of your personal life is to tell endless stories, but not a single one about your real self. You see, being a man means that you have a solid history behind you. You have family, friends, and acquaintances; and every one of them has a definite idea of you. Being a man means that you're accountable. You cannot disappear that easily. In order to erase yourself, you needed a lot of work.

"My case is different. I'm a woman and that gives me a splendid advantage. I'm not accountable. Don't you know that women are not accountable?"

"I don't know what you mean by accountable," I said.

"I mean that a woman can easily disappear," she replied. "A woman can, if nothing else, get married. A woman belongs to the husband. In a family with lots of children, the daugh-ters are discarded very early. No one counts on them and chances are that some will vanish without leaving a trace. Their disappearance is easily accepted.

"A son, on the other hand, is something one banks on. It's not that easy for a son to slip off and vanish. And even if he does, he will leave traces behind him. A son feels guilty for disappearing. A daughter does not.

"When the Nagual trained you to keep your mouth shut about your personal life, he intended to help you to overcome your feeling of having done wrong to your family and friends who were counting on you one way or another.

"After a lifetime struggle, the male warrior ends up, of course, erasing himself, but that struggle takes it's toll on the man. He becomes secretive; forever on guard against himself. A woman doesn't have to contend with that hardship. A woman is already prepared to disintegrate into thin air. In fact, it's expected of her.

"Being a woman, I'm not compelled to secrecy. I don't give a fig about it. Secrecy is the price you men have to pay for being important to society. That struggle is only for the men because they resent erasing themselves, and they would find curious ways to pop up somewhere; somehow. Take yourself for in-stance: You go around giving lectures."

Florinda made me nervous in a very peculiar way. I felt strangely restless in her presence.

I would admit without hes-itation that don Juan and Silvio Manuel also made me feel nervous and apprehensive, but it was a different feeling. I was actually afraid of them, especially Silvio Manuel. He terrified me and yet I had learned to live with my terror.

Florinda did not frighten me. My nervousness was rather the result of being annoyed; threatened by her savoir faire. [* savoir faire- social skill]

She did not stare at me the way don Juan or Silvio Manuel used to. They would always fix their eyes on me until I moved my face away in a gesture of submission. Florinda only glanced at me. Her eyes moved continually from thing to thing. She seemed to examine not only my eyes, but every inch of my face and body. As she talked, she would shift in quick glances from my face to my hands, or to her feet, or to the roof.

"I make you ill at ease, don't I?" she asked.

Her question caught me thoroughly off guard. I laughed. Her tone was not threatening at all.

"You do," I said.

"Oh, it's perfectly understandable," she went on. "You are used to being a man. A woman for you is something made for your benefit. A woman is stupid to you. And the fact that you're the Nagual and a man makes things even more diffi-cult."

I felt obligated to defend myself. I thought that she was a very opinionated lady and I wanted to tell her so. I started off in great form, but petered out almost immediately upon hear-ing her laughter. It was a joyous, youthful laughter. Don Juan and don Genaro used to laugh at me all the time and their laughter was also youthful, but Florinda's had a differ-ent vibration. There was no hurry in her laughter; no pres-sure.

"I think we'd better go inside," she said. "There shouldn't be any distractions. The Nagual Juan Matus has already taken you around, showing you the world. That was important for what he had to tell you. I have other things to talk about which require another setting."

We sat on a leather couch in a den off the patio. I felt more at ease indoors. She went right into the story of her life.

She said that she had been born in a fairly large Mexican city to a well-to-do family. As she was an only child, her parents spoiled her from the moment she was born. Without a trace of false modesty Florinda admitted that she had always been aware of being beautiful.

She said that beauty is a demon that breeds and proliferates when admired. She assured me that she could say without the shadow of a doubt that that demon is the hardest one to overcome, and that if I would look around to find those who are beautiful, I would find the most wretched beings imaginable.

I did not want to argue with her, yet I had the most intense desire to tell her that she was somehow dogmatic. [* dogmatic- characterized by assertion of unprovable principles] She must have caught my feelings because she winked at me.

"They are wretched, you'd better believe it," she contin-ued. "Try them. Be unwilling to go along with their idea that they are beautiful, and because of it, important. You'll see what I mean."

She said that she could hardly give her parents or herself full blame for her conceit. Everyone around her had conspired from her infancy on to make her feel important and unique.

"When I was fifteen," she went on, "I thought I was about the greatest thing that ever came to earth. Everybody said so, especially men."

She confessed that throughout her adolescent years she in-dulged in the attention and adulation of scores of admirers. At eighteen, she judiciously chose the best possible husband from the ranks of no less than eleven serious suitors. She married Celestino, a man of means, fifteen years her senior.

Florinda described her married life as heaven on earth. To the enormous circle of friends she already had, she added Celestino's friends. The total effect was that of a perennial [* perennial- lasting an indefinitely long time; suggesting self-renewal] holi-day.

Her bliss, however, lasted only six months- which went by almost unnoticed. It all came to a most abrupt and brutal end when she contracted a mysterious and crippling disease.

Her left foot, ankle, and calf began to swell. The line of her beautiful leg was ruined. The swelling became so intense that the cutaneous tissues started to blister and burst. Her whole lower leg from the knee down became the site of scabs and a pesti-lent secretion. The skin became hard. The disease was diag-nosed as elephantiasis. Doctors' attempts to cure her condition were clumsy and painful, and their final conclusion was that only in Europe were there medical centers advanced enough to possibly undertake a cure.

In a matter of three months Florinda's paradise had turned into hell on earth. Desperate and in true agony she wanted to die rather than go on. Her suffering was so pathetic that one day a servant girl, not being able to bear it any longer, confessed to her that she had been bribed by Celestino's former mistress to slip a certain concoction into her food- a poison manufactured by sorcerers.

The servant girl, as an act of contrition, promised to take her to a curer; a woman reported to be the only person who could counteract such a poison.

Florinda chuckled, remembering her dilemma. She had been raised a devout Catholic. She did not believe in witch-craft or in Indian curers. But her pain was so intense and her condition so serious that she was willing to try anything.

Ce-lestino was deadly opposed. He wanted to turn the servant girl over to the authorities. Florinda interceded, not so much out of compassion, but out of the fear that she might not find the curer on her own.

Florinda suddenly stood up. She told me that I had to leave. She held my arm and walked me to the door as if I had been her oldest and dearest friend. She explained that I was ex-hausted, because to be in the left side awareness is a special and frail condition which has to be used sparingly. It certainly is not a state of power.

The proof was that I had nearly died when Silvio Manuel had tried to rally my second attention by forcing me to enter boldly into it. She said that there is no way on earth that we can order anyone or ourselves to rally knowledge. It is rather a slow affair. The body, at the right time and under the proper circumstances of impeccability, rallies it's knowledge without the intervention of desire.

We stood at the front door for a while exchanging pleasant remarks and trivialities. She suddenly said that the reason the Nagual Juan Matus had brought me to her that day was because he knew that his time on earth was coming to an end. The two forms of instruction that I had received, according to Silvio Manuel's master plan, had already been completed. All that was left pending was what she had to say to me. She stressed that hers was not instruction proper, but rather the establishing of my link to her.

The next time don Juan took me to see Florinda- just before he left me at the door- he repeated what she had told me; that the time was approaching for him and his party to enter into the third attention. Before I could question him, he shoved me inside the house. His shove sent me not only into the house, but into my keenest state of awareness. I saw the wall of fog.

Florinda was standing in the hall as if she had been waiting for don Juan to shove me in. She held my arm and quietly led me to the living room. We sat down. I wanted to start a conversation but I could not talk.

She explained that a shove from an impeccable warrior, like the Nagual Juan Matus, can cause a shift into another area of awareness. She said that my mistake all along had been to believe that the procedures are important. The procedure of shoving a warrior into another state of consciousness is utilizable only if both participants, especially the one who shoves, are impeccable and imbued with personal power.

The fact that I was seeing the wall of fog made me feel utterly nervous on a physical level. My body was shaking uncontrollably. Florinda said that my body was shaking be-cause it had learned to crave for activity while it remained in that state of awareness, and that my body could also learn to focus it's keenest attention on whatever was being said, rather than whatever was being done.

She told me then that to be placed on the left side conscious-ness was an expediency. By forcing me into a state of heightened awareness and allowing me to interact with his warriors only when I was in that state, the Nagual Juan Matus was making sure that I would have a ledge to stand on.

Florinda said that his strategy was to cultivate a small part of the other self by deliberately filling it with memories of interac-tion. The memories are forgotten only to resurface someday in order to serve as a rational outpost from where to depart into the immeasurable vastness of the other self.

Because I was so nervous, she proposed to calm me down by proceeding with the story of her life, which, she clarified, was not really the story of her life as a woman in the world, but the story of how a crummy woman was helped to become a warrior.

She said that once she made up her mind to see the curer there was no way to stop her. She started off, carried on a stretcher by the servant girl and four men, on the two-day trip that changed the course of her life. There were no roads. It was mountainous and sometimes the men had to carry her on their backs.

They arrived at the curer's house at dusk. The place was well lit and there were lots of people in the house. Florinda said that a polite old man told her that the curer was away for the day treating a patient. The man seemed to be very well informed about the curer's activities and Florinda found it easy to talk to him.

He was solicitous and he confided that he was a patient himself. He described his disease as an incurable condition that made him oblivious to the world. They chatted amicably until late. The old man was so helpful that he even gave Florinda his bed so she could rest and wait until the next day when the curer would return.

In the morning Florinda said that she was suddenly awak-ened by a sharp pain in her leg. A woman was moving her leg, pressing it with a piece of shiny wood.

"The curer was a very pretty woman," Florinda went on. "She took a look at my leg and shook her head.

"I know who has done this to you" she said. "He must have been hand-somely paid, or he must have surmised that you are a useless human being. Which do you think it was?"

Florinda laughed. She said that she thought the curer was either crazy or was being rude. She had no conception that anyone in the world could possibly believe that she was a useless human being. Even though she was in excruciating pain, she let the woman know, in so many words, that she was a rich and worthy person, and nobody's fool.

Florinda recalled that the curer changed her attitude on the spot. She seemed to have gotten scared. She respectfully addressed her as "Missy", and got up from her chair and ordered everyone out of the room.

When they were alone the curer sat on Florinda's chest and pushed her head backward over the edge of the bed. Florinda said that she fought her. She thought that she was going to be killed. She tried to scream to alert her servants, but the curer quickly covered her head with a blanket and plugged her nose.

Florinda gasped for air and had to breathe through her open mouth. The more the curer pressed on Florinda's chest and the tighter she plugged her nose, the wider Florinda opened her mouth.

When she realized what the curer was really doing, she had already drunk the foul liquid contents of a large bottle which the curer had put into her open mouth. Florinda commented that the curer had maneuvered her so well that she did not even choke in spite of the fact that her head was dangling over the side of the bed.

"I drank so much liquid that I was about to get sick," Flo-rinda said. "She made me sit up and looked right into my eyes without blinking. I wanted to put my finger down my throat and vomit. She slapped me until my lips bled. An Indian slapping me! Drawing blood from my lips! Neither my father nor my mother had ever laid a hand on me. My surprise was so great that I forgot the discomfort in my stom-ach.

"The curer called my men and told them to take me home. Then she leaned over and put her mouth to my ear so no one would hear. 'If you don't come back in nine days, you asshole,' she whispered, 'you'll swell up like a toad and wish to God you were dead.'

Florinda said that the liquid had irritated her throat and vocal cords. She could not utter a word. This, however, was the least of her worries. When she arrived at her home Celestino was waiting in a state of frenzy.

Being incapable of speak-ing, Florinda was in the position to observe him. She noticed that his anger had nothing to do with worrying about her health, but with concern about his standing as a man of wealth and social status. He could not bear to be seen by his influ-ential friends as resorting to Indian curers.

He was raging, shouting that he was going to take his complaint to the army headquarters, have the soldiers capture the woman curer and bring her to town to be thrashed and thrown in jail. These were not just empty threats: He actually pressed a military commander to send a patrol after the curer. The soldiers came back a few days later with the news that the woman had fled.

Florinda was put at ease by her maid who assured her that the curer would be waiting for her if she cared to go back. Although the inflammation of her throat persisted to the point that she could not eat solid food and could barely swallow liquids, Florinda could hardly wait for the day when she was supposed to go back to see the curer. The medicine had eased the pain in her leg.

When she let Celestino know her intentions, he became furious enough to round up some help in order to put an end to the nonsense himself. He and three of his trusted men went on horseback ahead of her.

Florinda said that when she arrived at the curer's house, she expected to find her perhaps dead, but instead she found Ce-lestino sitting alone. He had sent his men to three different places in the vicinity with orders to bring back the curer, by force if necessary. Florinda saw the same old man she had met the time before. He was trying to calm her husband down, assuring him that any one of his men would be back shortly with the woman.

As soon as Florinda was placed on a cot in the front porch, the curer stepped out of the house. She began to insult Celestino, calling him names, yelling obscenities at him until she got him so angry that he rushed to strike her.

The old man held him back and begged him not to hit her. He implored on his knees, pointing out that she was an old woman. Celestino was unmoved. He said that he was going to horsewhip her regardless of her age.

He advanced to grab her but was stopped cold. Six awesome-looking men came out from behind the bushes wielding their machetes. Florinda said that fear froze Celestino to the spot. He was ashen.

The curer came to him and told him that either he would meekly let her whip him on the buttocks or her helpers would hack him to pieces. As proud a man as he was, he bent over meekly to be whipped. The curer had reduced him in a few moments to a helpless man. She laughed in his face. She knew that he was pinned down and she let him sink. He had walked into her trap, like the careless fool that he was, drunk with his own inflated ideas about his worth.

Florinda looked at me and smiled. She was quiet for a while.

"The first principle of the art of stalking is that warriors choose their battleground," she said. "A warrior never goes into battle without knowing what the surroundings are. The woman curer had shown me, through her battle with Celes-tino, the first principle of stalking.

"Then the curer came over to where I was lying down. I was crying. That was the only thing I could do. She seemed con-cerned. She tucked my blanket around my shoulders and smiled and winked at me.

"The deal is still on, asshole," she said. "Come back as soon as you can if you want to live. But don't bring your master with you, you little whore. Come only with those who are absolutely necessary."

Florinda fixed her eyes on me for a moment. From her silence I surmised that she wanted my comments.

"To discard everything that is unnecessary is the second principle of the art of stalking," she said without giving me time to say anything.

Her account had absorbed me so intensely that I had not noticed that the wall of fog had disappeared- nor when. I simply realized that it was not there anymore. Florinda got up from her chair and led me to the door. We stood there for awhile, as we had done at the end of our first meeting.

Florinda said that Celestino's anger had also permitted the curer to point out, not to her reason, but to her body, the first three precepts of the rule for stalkers.

Although her mind was focused entirely on herself, since nothing else existed for her outside her physical pain and the anguish of losing her beauty, still her body had acknowledged what had happened, and needed later on only a reminder in order to put everything in place.

"Warriors don't have the world to cushion them, so they must have the rule," she went on. "Yet the rule of stalkers applies to everyone.

"Celestino's arrogance was his undoing and the beginning of my instruction and liberation. His self-importance, which was also mine, forced us both to believe that we were above practically everybody. The curer brought us down to what we really are; nothing.

"The first precept of the rule is that everything that sur-rounds us is an unfathomable mystery.

"The second precept of the rule is that we must try to unravel these mysteries, but without ever hoping to accom-plish this.

"The third, that a warrior, aware of the unfathomable mys-tery that surrounds him and aware of his duty to try to un-ravel it, takes his rightful place among mysteries and regards himself as one. Consequently, for a warrior there is no end to the mystery of being, whether being means being a pebble, or an ant, or oneself. That is a warrior's humbleness. One is equal to everything."

There was a long and forced silence. Florinda smiled, play-ing with the tip of her long braid. She said that I had had enough.

The third time I went to see Florinda, don Juan did not leave me at the door but walked in with me. All the members of his party were congregated in the house, and they greeted me as if I were returning home from a long trip. It was an exquisite event. It integrated Florinda with the rest of them in my feelings since that was the first time she had joined them while I was present.

The next time I went to Florinda's house, don Juan unex-pectedly shoved me as he had done before. My shock was immense. Florinda was waiting for me in the hall. I had en-tered instantly into the state where the wall of fog is visible.

"I've told you how the principles of the art of stalking were shown to me," she said as soon as we sat down on the couch in her living room. "Now, you must do the same for me. How did the Nagual Juan Matus show them to you?"

I told her that I could not remember offhand. I had to think about it, and I could not think. My body was frightened.

"Don't complicate things," she said in a tone of command. "Aim at being simple. Apply all the concentration you have to decide whether or not to enter into battle, for any battle is a battle for one's life. This is the third principle of the art of stalking, A warrior must be willing and ready to make his last stand here and now. But not in a helter-skelter way."

I simply could not organize my thoughts. I stretched my legs and lay down on the couch. I took deep breaths to relax my midsection, which seemed to be tied in knots.

"Good," Florinda said. "I see that you're applying the fourth principle of the art of stalking. Relax, abandon yourself, fear nothing. Only then will the powers that guide us open the road and aid us. Only then."

I struggled to remember how don Juan had shown me the principles of the art of stalking. For some inexplicable reason my mind refused to focus on my past experience. Don Juan was so vague a memory. I stood up and began to look around.

The room we were in was exquisitely arranged. The floor was made of large buff-colored tiles. Excellent craftsmanship had been involved in laying it. I was about to examine the furniture. I moved toward a beautiful dark-brown table. Flo-rinda jumped to my side and shook me vigorously.

"You've correctly applied the fifth principle of the art of stalking" she said. "Don't let yourself wander away."

"What is the fifth principle?" I asked.

"When faced with odds that cannot be dealt with, warriors retreat for a moment," she said. "They let their minds mean-der. They occupy their time with something else. Anything would do.

"You've done just that. But now that you've accomplished it, you must apply the sixth principle: Warriors compress time; even an instant counts. In a battle for your life, a second is an eternity; an eternity that may decide the outcome. War-riors aim at succeeding, therefore they compress time. War-riors don't waste an instant."

All of a sudden a bulk of memories erupted into my aware-ness. I excitedly told Florinda that I could certainly remember the first time don Juan had acquainted me with those princi-ples.

Florinda put her fingers to her lips in a gesture that demanded my silence. She said that she had only been inter-ested in bringing me face to face with the principles, but she did not want me to relate those experiences to her.

Florinda went on with her story. She said that as the curer was telling her to come back without Celestino, the curer had her drink a concoction that alleviated her pain almost instantly, and the curer also whispered in her ear that Florinda had to make a momentous decision by herself; and that Florinda should put her mind at ease by doing something else, but that she should not waste a moment once she had reached her decision.

At home she stated her desire to go back. Celestino did not see any point in objecting because her conviction was unshak-able.

"Almost immediately I went back to see the curer," Flo-rinda continued. "This time we went on horseback. I took my two most trusted servants with me: the girl who had given me the poison, and a man to handle the horses. The horses were very nervous because of the stench of my leg, and we had a rough time going over those mountains; but we somehow made it.

Without knowing it, I had used the third principle of the art of stalking. I had put my life, or what was left of it, on the line. I was willing and ready to die. It wasn't such a great decision for me, I was dying anyway. It is a fact that when one is half dead, as in my case, not with great pain but with great dis-comfort, the tendency is to get so lazy and weak that no effort is possible.

"I stayed at the curer's house for six days. By the second day I felt better already. The swelling went down. The oozing from the leg had stopped. There was no more pain. I was just a little weak and wobbly in the knees when I tried to walk.

"During the sixth day the curer took me to her room. She was very careful with me and, showing me every considera-tion. She made me sit on her bed, and gave me coffee.

"The curer then sat on the floor at my feet, facing me. I can remember her exact words. 'You are very, very sick and only I can cure you,' she said. 'If I don't, you'll die a death that is not to be believed. Since you're an imbecile, you'll last to the bitter end. On the other hand, I could cure you in one day but I won't. You will have to keep coming here until you have understood what I have to show you. Only then will I cure you completely- otherwise, being the imbecile you are, you will never come back.'"

Florinda said that the curer, with great patience, explained to her the very delicate points of her decision to help her. Florinda did not understand a word of it. The explanation made her believe more than ever that the curer was a bit touched in the head.

When the curer realized that she was not getting through to Florinda, the curer became more stern, and made Florinda repeat over and over, as if Florinda were a child, that without the curer's help her life was finished, and that the curer could choose to cancel the cure and leave her hopelessly to die.

Finally, the curer lost her patience when Florinda begged her to finish healing her, and send her home to her family. The curer picked up a bottle containing the medicine, and smashed it on the ground, and told Florinda that she was through with her.

Florinda told me, "I cried then the only real tears of my life."

Florinda told the curer that all she wanted was to be cured and that she was more than willing to pay for it. The curer said it was too late for monetary payment; that what she wanted from Florinda was her attention, not her money.

Florinda admitted to me that she had learned during the course of her life how to get anything she wanted. She knew how to be obstinate, and she raised the point that there must have been thousands of patients that had come to the curer- half dead just like herself- and that the curer took their money; so why was her case different?

The curer's reply, which was no explanation at all for Florinda, was that being a seer she had seen Florinda's luminous body, and Florinda and the curer were exactly alike.

Florinda thought that the woman had to be mad not to realize that there was a world of difference between them. The curer was a rude Indian, uneducated and primi-tive, while Florinda was rich and beautiful and white.

Florinda asked the woman what she was planning to do to her. The curer told her that she had been commissioned to heal her, and then teach her something of great importance. Florinda wanted to know who had commissioned her. The woman replied that it was the Eagle- a reply which con-vinced Florinda that the woman was absolutely crazy.

And yet Florinda saw no alternative to complying with the woman's demands. She told her that she was willing to do anything.

The woman changed her belligerent attitude instantly. She gave Florinda some medicine to take home, and told her to come back as soon as she could.

"As you yourself know," Florinda went on, "a teacher must trick the disciple. She tricked me with my cure. She was right. I was such an idiot that if she had cured me right away, I would've gone back to my stupid life as if nothing had ever happened to me. Don't we all do that?"

Florinda returned the following week. Upon arriving she was greeted by the old man she had met before. He talked to her as if they were the best of friends.

He said that the curer had been away for several days and would not be back for several more; and that she had entrusted him with some med-icine for her in case she showed up.

He told Florinda in a very friendly but commanding tone that the curer's absence had left Florinda with only two alternatives: she could either go back home, possibly in worse physical shape than before due to the strenuous trip; or she could follow the curer's carefully out-lined instructions.

He added that if she decided to stay and start her treatment right away, in three to four months she would be as good as new. There was, however, one stipula-tion: if she decided to stay, she had to remain in the curer's house for eight consecutive days and had, perforce, to send her servants home.

Florinda said that there was nothing to decide; that she had to stay. The old man immediately gave her the potion that the curer had apparently left for her. He sat up with her most of the night. He was reassuring, and his easy talk kindled Florinda's optimism and confidence.

Her two servants left the next morning after breakfast. Flo-rinda was not at all afraid. She trusted the old man implicitly. He told her that he had to build a box for her treatment in accordance with the curer's instructions. He made her sit on a low chair which had been placed in the center of a circular area with no vegetation on it. While she was seated there, the old man introduced her to three young men he said were his assistants. Two were Indians and one was white.

It took the four of them less than an hour to construct a crate around the chair where Florinda was sitting. When they were finished, Florinda was encased snugly inside a crate which had a lattice top to allow for ventilation. One of it's sides was hinged in order to serve as a door.

The old man opened the door and helped Florinda to step out of it. He took her to the house, and asked her to help him prepare her medicine in order to have it handy for the time when the curer would return.

Florinda was fascinated with the way he worked. He made a potion out of plants with a pungent odor, and prepared a bucket of a hot liquid. He suggested that for her comfort she should immerse her leg in the bucket, and if she felt like it, she should drink the concoction he had prepared before it lost it's potency. Florinda obeyed him unquestioningly. The relief she felt was remarkable.

The old man then assigned her a room to herself, and had the young men put the crate inside the room. He told her that it might be days before the curer would show up. In the meantime she had to follow meticulously all the instructions left for her.

She agreed with him, and he produced a list of tasks. They included a great deal of walking in order to collect the medicinal plants needed for her potions, and her assistance in their actual preparation.

Florinda said that she spent twelve days there instead of eight because her servants were late due to torrential rains. It was not until the tenth day that she discovered that the woman had never left, and that the old man was actually the real curer.

Florinda laughed, describing her shock. The old man had tricked her into actively participating in her own cure. Fur-thermore, under the pretext that the curer demanded it, he put her inside the crate daily for at least six hours, in order to fulfill a specific task he had called the 'recapitulation'.

At that point in her account, Florinda scrutinized me and concluded that I had had enough, and that it was time for me to leave.

On our next meeting, she explained that the old man was her benefactor, and that she was the first stalker that the women of her benefactor's party had found for the Nagual Juan Matus; but none of that was known to her then.

Even though her benefactor made her shift levels of awareness and revealed this to her, it was to no avail. She had been raised to be beautiful, and that had created a shield around her so im-penetrable that she was impervious to change.

Her benefactor concluded that she needed time. He devised a plan to draw Celestino to Florinda's battleground. He made her see things about Celestino's personality that she herself knew to be true, but had not had the courage to face on her own.

Celestino was very possessive of everything he owned; his wealth and Florinda ranked high among his possessions. He had been forced to swallow his pride over his humiliation at the hands of the curer because the curer was cheap, and Florinda was actually recuperating. He was biding his time; waiting for a moment when the cure would be complete in order to seek revenge.

Florinda said that her benefactor told her that the danger was that her complete recovery was going to be too quick and Celestino would decide, since he made all the decisions in the house, that there was no longer any need for Florinda to see the curer.

Her benefactor then gave her a potion to apply on her other leg. The unguent was terribly pungent, and pro-duced an irritation on the skin that resembled the spreading of the disease. Her benefactor advised her to use the unguent every time she wanted to come back to see him even though she did not need a treatment.

Florinda said that it took a year to be cured. In the course of that time, her benefactor acquainted her with the rule and drilled her like a soldier in the art of stalking. He made her apply the principles of stalking to the things she did daily; small things at first, leading up to the major issues of her life.

In the course of that year, her benefactor also introduced her to the Nagual Juan Matus, whom she described as very witty and thoughtful, but still the most unruly and terrifying young man she had ever met. She said that it was the Nagual Juan Matus who helped her escape from Celestino.

He and Silvio Manuel smuggled her out of the city through police and army roadblocks. Celestino had filed a legal complaint for desertion, and being an influential man, he had used his re-sources to try to stop her from leaving him.

Because of this her benefactor had to move to another part of Mexico, and she had to remain in hiding in his house for years. This situation suited Florinda as she had to fulfill the task of recapitulating, and for that she needed absolute quiet and solitude.

She explained that a recapitulation is the forte of stalkers just as the dreaming body is the forte of dreamers. The recapitulation consisted of recol-lecting one's life down to the most insignificant detail.

Thus her benefactor had given her that crate as a tool and a symbol. It was a tool that would permit her to learn concentration, because she would have to sit in there for years until all of her life had passed in front of her eyes.

And it was a symbol of the narrow boundaries of our person. Her benefactor told her that when-ever she had finished her recapitulation, she would break the crate to symbolize that she no longer abided by the limitations of her person.

She said that stalkers use crates or earth coffins in order to seal themselves in while they are reliving, more than merely recollecting, every moment of their lives.

The reason why stalkers must recapitulate their lives in such a thorough manner is that the Eagle's gift to man includes it's willingness to accept a surrogate instead of genuine awareness- if such a surrogate be a perfect replica. Florinda explained that since awareness is the Eagle's food, the Eagle can be satisfied with a perfect recapitulation in place of consciousness.

Florinda gave me then the fundamentals of recapitulating. She said that the first stage is a brief recounting of all the incidents in our lives that in an obvious manner stand out for examination.

The second stage is a more detailed recollection, which starts systematically at a point that could be the moment prior to the stalker sitting in the crate, and theoretically could extend to the moment of birth.

She assured me that a perfect recapitulation could change a warrior as much, if not more, than the total control of the dreaming body.

In this respect, dreaming and stalking led to the same end, the entering into the third attention. It was impor-tant for a warrior, however, to know and practice both. She said that for women it took different configurations in the luminous body to master one or the other. Men, on the other hand, could do both with a degree of ease, yet they could never get to the level of proficiency that the women attained in each art.

Florinda explained that the key element in recapitulating was breathing. Breath for her was magical, because it was a life-giving function.

She said that recollecting was easy if one could reduce the area of stimulation around the body. This was the reason for the crate.

Then breathing would foster deeper and deeper memories. Theoretically, stalkers have to remember every feeling that they have had in their lives, and this process begins with a breath. She warned me that the things she was teaching me were only preliminaries; that at a later time in a different setting she would teach me the intri-cacies.

Florinda said that her benefactor directed her to write down a list of the events to be relived.

He told her that the procedure starts with an initial breath. Stalkers begin with their chin on the right shoulder and slowly inhale as they move their head over a hundred and eighty degree arc. The breath terminates on the left shoulder. Once the inhalation ends, the head goes back to a relaxed position. They exhale looking straight ahead.

The stalker then takes the event at the top of the list and remains with it until all the feelings expended in it have been recounted. As stalkers remember the feelings they invested in whatever it is that they are remembering, they inhale slowly, moving their heads from the right shoulder to the left. The function of this breathing is to restore energy.

Florinda claimed that the luminous body is constantly creating cob-web like filaments which are projected out of the luminous mass; propelled by emotions of any sort. Therefore, every situation of interaction, or every situation where feelings are involved, is potentially draining to the luminous body.

By breathing from right to left while remembering a feeling, stalk-ers, through the magic of breathing, pick up the filaments they left behind. The next immediate breath is from left to right and it is an exhalation. With it stalkers eject filaments left in them by other luminous bodies involved in the event being recollected.

She stated that these were the mandatory preliminaries of stalking, which all the members of her party went through as an introduction to the more demanding exercises of the art. Unless stalkers have gone through the preliminaries in order to retrieve the filaments they have left in the world, and par-ticularly in order to reject those that others have left in them, there is no possibility of handling controlled folly, because those foreign filaments are the basis of one's limitless capacity for self-importance.

In order to practice controlled folly, since it is not a way to fool or chastise people or feel superior to them, one has to be capable of laughing at oneself. Florinda said that one of the results of a detailed recapitulation is genuine laugh-ter upon coming face to face with the boring repetition of one's self-esteem, which is at the core of all human interaction.

Florinda emphasized that the rule defined stalking and dreaming as arts; therefore they are something that one performs. She said that the life-giving nature of breath is what also gives it it's cleansing capacity. It is this capacity that makes a recapitulation into a practical matter.

In our next meeting Florinda summed up what she called her last-minute instructions. She asserted that since the joint assessment of the Nagual Juan Matus and his party of warriors had been that I did not need to deal with the world of every-day life, they taught me dreaming instead of stalking.

She explained that this assessment had been radically modified, and that they had found themselves in an awkward position. They did not have any more time to teach me stalking.

She had to stay behind on the periphery of the third attention in order to fulfill her assignment at a later time when I would be ready. On the other hand, if I were to leave the world with them, she was exonerated from that responsibility.

Florinda said that her benefactor considered the three basic techniques of stalking- the crate, the list of events to be reca-pitulated, and the stalker's breath-to be about the most im-portant tasks a warrior can fulfill.

Her benefactor thought that a profound recapitulation is the most expedient means to lose the human form. Thus it is easier for stalkers, after recapitulat-ing their lives, to make use of all the not-doings of the self, such as erasing personal history, losing self-importance, breaking routines and so forth.

Florinda said that her benefactor gave all of them an ex-ample of what he meant. First he acted out his premises, and then he gave them the warrior's rationales for his actions.

In her own case, he, being a master of the art of stalking, acted out the ploy of her disease and cure which not only was con-gruous with the warrior's way, but was a masterful introduc-tion to the seven basic principles of the art of stalking.

He first drew Florinda to his own battleground where she was at his mercy; he forced her to discard what was not essential; he taught her to put her life on the line with a decision; he taught her how to relax; he showed her how to regroup her resources using a new mood of optimism and self-confidence; he taught her to compress time; and fi-nally he showed her that a stalker never pushes himself to the front.

Florinda was most impressed by the last principle. To her it summarized everything she wanted to tell me in her last-minute instructions.

"My benefactor was the chief," Florinda said. "And yet, looking at him, no one would've ever believed it. He always had one of his female warriors as a front while he freely mingled with the patients pretending to be one of them; or he posed as an old fool who was constantly sweeping dry leaves with a handmade broom."

Florinda explained that in order to apply the seventh prin-ciple of the art of stalking, one has to apply the other six. Thus her benefactor was always looking on from behind the scenes. Thanks to that he was capable of avoiding or parrying con-flicts. If there was strife, it was never directed toward him, but towards his front, the female warrior.

"I hope that you have realized by now," she went on, "that only a master stalker can be a master of controlled folly. Con-trolled folly doesn't mean to con people. It means, as my benefactor explained it, that warriors apply the seven basic principles of the art of stalking to whatever they do, from the most trivial acts to life and death situations.

"Applying these principles brings about three results. The first is that stalkers learn never to take themselves seriously. They learn to laugh at themselves. If they're not afraid of being a fool, they can fool anyone. The second is that stalkers learn to have endless patience. Stalkers are never in a hurry. They never fret. And the third is that stalkers learn to have an end-less capacity to improvise."

Florinda stood up. We had been sitting, as usual, in her living room. I immediately assumed that our conversation was over. She said that there was one more topic to present to me before we said goodbye.

She took me to another patio inside her house. I had never been in that part of her house before. She called someone softly and a woman stepped out from a room. I did not recognize her at first.

The woman called my name and then I realized that she was dona Soledad. Her change was stupendous. She was younger and more powerful. Florinda said that Soledad had been inside a recapitulating crate for five years; that the Eagle had accepted her recapitu-lation in place of her awareness and had let her go free.

Dona Soledad assented with a movement of her head. Florinda abruptly ended the meeting, and told me that it was time for me to leave because I had no more energy.

I went to Florinda's house many more times afterward. I saw her every time but only for a few moments. She told me that she had decided not to instruct me anymore because it was to my advantage that I deal only with dona Soledad.

Dona Soledad and I met several times, but whatever took place during our meetings is something quite incomprehensi-ble to me. Every time we were together she would make me sit at the door of her room facing the east. She would sit to my right, touching me. Then we would make the wall of fog stop rotating and both of us would be left facing the south, into her room.

I had already learned with la Gorda to stop the rotation of the wall. It seemed that dona Soledad was helping me to realize another aspect of that perceptual capacity.

I had correctly detected with la Gorda that only a portion of us stopped the wall. It was as if suddenly I had become divided in two. A portion of my total self was looking straight ahead and saw an immobile wall to my right while another larger portion of my total self had turned ninety degrees to the right and was star-ing at the wall.

Every time dona Soledad and I stopped the wall we re-mained staring at it. We never entered into the area between the parallel lines as the Nagual woman, la Gorda and I had done scores of times.

Dona Soledad would make me gaze every time into the fog as if the fog were a reflective glass. I would experience then the most extravagant disassociation. It was as if I were racing at breakneck speed. I would see bits of a landscape forming in the fog, and suddenly I was in another physical reality.

It was a mountainous area, rugged and inhospitable. Dona Soledad was always there in the company of another lovely woman who laughed uproariously at me.

My incapacity to remember what we did beyond that point was even more acute than my incapacity to remember what the Nagual woman and la Gorda and I did in the area between the parallel lines. It seemed that dona Soledad and I entered into another area of awareness that was unknown to me.

I was already in what I thought was my keenest state of conscious-ness, and yet there was something even keener. The aspect of the second attention that dona Soledad was obviously showing me was more complex and more inaccessible than anything I had witnessed so far.

All I could recollect was a sense of having moved a great deal; a physical sensation comparable to having walked for miles, or to having hiked on rugged moun-tain trails. I also had a clear bodily certainty, although I could not fathom why, that dona Soledad, the woman, and I exchanged words, thoughts, feelings; but I could not pinpoint them.

After every meeting with dona Soledad, Florinda would immediately make me leave. Dona Soledad gave minimal ver-bal feedback. It appeared to me that being in a state of such heightened awareness affected her so profoundly she could hardly talk. There was something that we were seeing in that rugged landscape besides the lovely woman, or something we were doing together that left us breathless. She could not remember anything, although she tried.

I asked Florinda to clarify the nature of my journeys with dona Soledad. She said that a part of her last-minute instruc-tion was to make me enter into the second attention as stalkers do, and that dona Soledad was more capable than she herself was to usher me into the stalker's dimension.

On the meeting that was to be our last, Florinda, as she had done at the beginning of our instruction, was waiting for me in the hall. She took my arm and led me to the living room. We sat down.

She warned me not to try as yet to make sense of my journeys with dona Soledad. She explained that stalkers are inherently different than dreamers in the way they use the world around them, and that what dona Soledad was doing was trying to help me to turn my head.

When don Juan had described the concept of turning a warrior's head to face a new direction, I had understood it as a metaphor that depicted a change in attitude. Florinda said that that description was true, but it was no metaphor.

It was true that stalkers turn their heads; however, they do not turn them to face a new direction, but to face time in a different way. Stalkers face the oncoming time. Normally we face time as it recedes from us. Only stalkers can change that and face time as it advances on them.

Florinda explained that turning the head did not mean that one sees into the future, but that one sees time as something concrete, yet incomprehensible.

It was superfluous, therefore, for me to try to think out whatever dona Soledad and I were doing. All of it would make sense when I could perceive the totality of myself and would then have the energy necessary to unravel that mystery.

Florinda told me, in the spirit of someone giving a bonus, that dona Soledad was a supreme stalker. Florinda called her the greatest of them all. She said that dona Soledad could cross the parallel lines anytime.

Furthermore, none of the warriors of don Juan Matus' party had been able to do what she had done. Dona Soledad, through her impeccable stalking tech-niques, had found her parallel being.

Florinda explained that whatever I had experienced with the Nagual Juan Matus, or Silvio Manuel, or Genaro, or Zuleica were only minute portions of the second attention. Whatever dona Soledad was helping me witness was still another minute, but different portion.

Dona Soledad had not only made me face the oncoming time, but she had taken me to her parallel being. Florinda defined the parallel being as the counterbalance that all living creatures have by the fact that they are luminous beings filled with inexplicable energy.

A parallel being of any person is another person of the same sex who is intimately and inextricably joined to the first one. They coexist in the world at the same time. The two parallel beings are like the two ends of the same pole.

It is nearly impossible for warriors to find their parallel being, because there are too many distracting factors in the life of a warrior; other priorities. But whoever is capable of accomplishing this feat would find in his parallel being, just as dona Soledad had, an endless source of youth and energy.

Florinda stood up abruptly and took me to dona Soledad's room. Perhaps because I knew that it was going to be our last meeting, I was taken by a strange anxiety. Dona Soledad smiled at me when I told her what Florinda had just told me. She said, with what I thought to be a true warrior's humble-ness, that she was not teaching me anything; that all she had aspired to do was to show me her parallel being because that would be where she would retreat when the Nagual Juan Matus and his warriors left the world.

However, something else had happened which was beyond her understanding. Florinda had explained to her that we had boosted each other's energy; and that had made us face the oncoming time, not in small doses as Florinda would have liked us to, but in incomprehensible gobbles as my unruly nature wanted it.

The result of our last meeting was even more baffling. Dona Soledad, her parallel being and I remained for what I felt was an extraordinarily long time together. I saw every feature of the parallel being's face. I felt she was trying to tell me who she was. She also seemed to be cognizant that this was our last meeting. There was such an overpowering sense of frailty in her eyes. Then a windlike force blew us away into something that held no meaning for me.

Florinda suddenly helped me to stand up. She took me by the arm and led me to the door. Dona Soledad walked with us. Florinda said that I would have a hard time remembering all that had transpired because I was indulging in my rational-ity; a condition that could only worsen because they were about to leave and I would have no one to help me to shift levels of awareness. She added that someday dona Soledad and I would meet again in the world of everyday life.

It was then that I turned to dona Soledad and begged her to drive me out of my indulging; I told her that if she failed she should kill me. I did not want to live in the meagerness of my rationality.

"It's wrong to say that," Florinda said. "We're warriors, and warriors have only one thing in mind- their freedom. To die and be eaten by the Eagle is no challenge. On the other hand, to sneak around the Eagle and be free is the ultimate audacity."

## 15. The Plumed Serpent

Having accomplished every one of the goals which the rule specified, don Juan and his party of warriors were ready for their final task; to leave the world of everyday life. And all that was left for la Gorda, for the other apprentices, and for me was to witness it.

There was only one unresolved problem: What to do with the apprentices? Don Juan said that properly they should leave with him by becoming incorporated into his own group. However, they were not ready. The reactions they had while attempting to cross the bridge had demonstrated to him what their weaknesses were.

Don Juan expressed the feeling that his benefactor's choice to wait years before gathering a warrior's party for him had been a wise choice and had produced positive results; while his own decision to set me up quickly with the Nagual woman and my own group had nearly been fatal to us.

I understood that he was voicing this not as an expression of regret, but rather as an affirmation of the warrior's freedom to choose, and accept his choice.

He said, furthermore, that he had seriously considered following his benefactor's example, and that if he had done so, he would have found out soon enough that I was not a Nagual like him and no one else besides me would have been engaged beyond that point.

As it was, Lydia, Rosa, Benigno, Nestor and Pablito were seriously handicapped; la Gorda and Josefina needed time to perfect themselves; only Soledad and Eligio were safe because they were perhaps even more proficient than the warriors in his own group. Don Juan added that it was up to the nine of them to take their unfavorable or favorable circumstances, and without regret or despair, or patting themselves on the back, turn their curse or blessing into a living challenge.

Don Juan pointed out that not everything about us had been a failure. The small part that we had played amidst his warriors had been a complete triumph in as much as the rule fit every one of my party except me. I fully agreed with him.

To begin with, the Nagual woman was everything the rule had prescribed. She had poise; control. She was a being at war and yet thoroughly at ease. Without any overt preparation, she handled and led all of don Juan's gifted warriors even though they were more than twice her age.

These men and women asserted that she was a carbon copy of the other Nagual woman they had known. She reflected perfectly each one of the female warriors. Consequently she could also reflect the five women don Juan had found for my party, for they were the replicas of the older ones. Lydia was like Hermelinda, Josefina was like Zuleica, Rosa and la Gorda were like Nelida, and Soledad was like Delia.

The men were also replicas of don Juan's warriors. Nestor was a copy of Vicente, Pablito of Genaro, Benigno of Silvio Manuel, and Eligio was like Juan Tuma. The rule was indeed the voice of an overpowering force that had molded these people into a homogeneous whole. It was only by a strange twist of fate that they had been left stranded without the leader that would find for them the passageway into the other awareness.

Don Juan said that all the members of my party had to enter into that other awareness by themselves, and that he did not know what their chances were because that was up to each one of them individually. He had helped everyone impeccably; thus his spirit was free from worry and concern and his mind was free from idle speculations. All that was left for him to do was to show us pragmatically what it meant to cross over the parallel lines in one's totality.

Don Juan told me that at best I could only help one of the apprentices, and that he had picked la Gorda because of her prowess and because I was already familiar with her. He said that I had no more energy for the others due to the fact that I had other duties to perform; other paths of action which were congruous with my true task.

Don Juan explained to me that every one of his own warriors knew what that task was but had not revealed it to me because I needed to prove that I was worthy of it. The fact that they were at the end of their trail, and the fact that I had faithfully followed my instructions made it imperative that this revelation take place, although only in a partial form.

When the actual time came for don Juan to leave, he let me know that his time on Earth was up while I was in a state of normal awareness. Yet I missed the full significance of what he was saying.

Don Juan tried to the very end to induce me to join my two states of awareness. Everything would have been so simple if I had been capable of that merger. Since I was not, and was only rationally touched by his revelation, he forced me to shift levels of awareness in order to allow me to assess the event in more encompassing terms.

He warned me repeatedly that to be in the left side awareness is an advantage only in the sense that our grasp of things is accelerated. It is a disadvantage because it allows us to focus with inconceivable lucidity only on one thing at a time. This renders us dependent and vulnerable. We cannot be on our own while being in the left side awareness, and have to be cushioned by warriors who have gained the totality of themselves and who know how to handle themselves in that state.

La Gorda said that one day the Nagual Juan Matus and Genaro rounded up all the apprentices at her house. The Nagual made them shift into the left side awareness, and told them that his time on earth had come to an end.

She did not believe him at first. She thought that he was trying to startle them into acting like warriors. But then she realized that there was a glow in his eyes that she had never seen before.

Having made them shift levels of awareness, he talked with every one of them individually, and made them go through a summation so as to refreshen all the concepts and procedures he had acquainted them with.

Don Juan did the same with me. My appointment took place the day before I saw him for the last time. In my case he conducted that summation in both states of awareness. In fact, he made me shift back and forth various times as if making sure that I would be completely saturated in both.

I had been unable to recollect at first what had taken place after this summation. One day la Gorda finally succeeded in breaking the barriers of my memory. She told me that she was inside my mind as if she were reading me.

Her assessment was that what kept my memory locked up was that I was afraid to remember my pain. What had happened at Silvio Manuel's house the night before they left was inextricably enmeshed with my fear. She said that she had the clearest sensation that I was afraid, but she did not know the reason why. Nor could she remember what exactly had taken place in that house specifically in the room where we sat down.

As la Gorda spoke, I felt as if I were plummeting into an abyss. I realized that something in me was trying to make a connection between two separate events that I had witnessed in my two states of awareness.

On my left side I had the locked-up memories of don Juan and his party of warriors on their last day on earth. On my right side I had the memory of having jumped that day into an abyss. In trying to join my two sides, I experienced a total sense of physical descent. My knees gave way and I fell to the floor.

When I described my experience and my interpretation of it, la Gorda said that what was coming to my right side awareness was doubtlessly the memory that had surfaced in her as I talked. She had just remembered that we had made one more attempt to cross the parallel lines with the Nagual Juan Matus and his party. She said that the two of us, together with the rest of the apprentices, had tried once more to cross the bridge.

I could not bring that memory into focus. There seemed to be a constricting force that prevented me from organizing my thoughts and feelings about it. La Gorda said that Silvio Manuel had told the Nagual Juan Matus to prepare me and all the apprentices for their crossing.

Silvio Manuel did not want to leave me in the world because he thought that I did not stand a chance of fulfilling my task. The Nagual Juan Matus disagreed with him but carried out the preparations regardless of how he felt.

La Gorda told me that she remembered I had driven to her house to take her as well as the other apprentices to Silvio Manuel's house. They remained there while I went back to the Nagual Juan Matus and Genaro in order to prepare for the crossing.

I did not remember it at all. She insisted that I should use her as a guide since we were so intimately joined. She assured me that I could read her mind and find something there that would awaken my full recollection.

My mind was in a state of great turmoil. A feeling of anxiety prevented me from even focusing on what la Gorda was saying. She kept on talking, describing what she remembered of our second attempt to cross that bridge.

She said that Silvio Manuel had harangued them. He told them that they had had sufficient training to try once again to cross. What they needed to enter fully into the other self was to abandon the intent of their first attention. Once they were in the awareness of the other self the power of the Nagual Juan Matus and his party would pick them up and lift them off into the third attention with great facility- something they could not do if the apprentices were in their normal awareness.

At one instant, I was not listening to la Gorda any more. The sound of her voice was indeed a vehicle for me. Suddenly the memory of the entire event surfaced in my mind. I reeled under the impact of remembering.

La Gorda stopped talking, and as I described my memory she also recollected everything. We had put together the last pieces of the separate memories of our two states of awareness.

I remembered that don Juan and don Genaro prepared me for the crossing while I was in a state of normal consciousness. I rationally thought that they were preparing me for a jump into an abyss.

La Gorda remembered that to prepare her and the other apprentices for the crossing, Silvio Manuel had hoisted them to the beams of his roof strapped in leather harnesses. There was a harness in every room of his house. They were kept suspended in them nearly all day.

La Gorda commented that to have a harness in one's room is an ideal thing. The Genaros, without really knowing what they were doing, had hit upon the quasi-memory of the harnesses they had been suspended from and had created their game.

It was a game that combined the curative and cleansing qualities of being kept away from the ground, with the possibility of exercising the concentration that one needs for shifting from the right to the left side consciousness. Their game was indeed a device that helped them remember.

La Gorda said that after she and all the apprentices had remained suspended all day, Silvio Manuel had brought them down at dusk. All of them went with him to the bridge and waited there with the rest of the party until the Nagual Juan Matus and Genaro showed up with me. The Nagual Juan Matus explained to all of them that it had taken longer than he had anticipated to prepare me.

I remembered that don Juan and his warriors crossed over the bridge before we did. Dona Soledad and Eligio automatically went with them. Then Carol the Nagual woman crossed over.

From the other side of the bridge Silvio Manuel signaled us to start walking. Without saying a word, all of us began at once. Midway across the bridge, Lydia, Rosa and Pablito seemed incapable of taking one more step. Benigno and Nestor walked almost to the end and then stopped. Only la Gorda, Josefina and I arrived to where don Juan and the others were standing.

What happened next was very much like what had happened the first time we attempted to go through. Silvio Manuel and Eligio held open something I believed was an actual slit. I had enough energy to focus my attention on it. It was not an opening on the hill that stood at the end of the bridge, nor was it an opening in the wall of fog, although I could distinguish a foglike vapor around the slit.

It was a dark mysterious opening that stood by itself apart from everything else. It was as big as a man, but narrow. Don Genaro made a joke and called it 'the cosmic vagina', a remark that brought roaring laughter from his peers. La Gorda and Josefina held on to me and we stepped in.

I felt instantly that I was being crushed. The same incalculable force that had nearly made me explode the first time had gripped me again. I could feel la Gorda and Josefina merging with me. I seemed to be wider than they were and the force flattened me against the two of them together.

The next thing I knew I was lying on the ground with la Gorda and Josefina on top of me. Silvio Manuel helped us stand up. He told me that it would be impossible for us to join them in their journey at that time, but that perhaps later, when we had tuned ourselves to perfection, the Eagle would let us go through.

As we walked back to his house, Silvio Manuel told me almost in a whisper that their path and my path had diverged from each other that night. He said that our paths would never meet again, and that I was alone.

He exhorted me to be frugal and utilize every bit of my energy without wasting any of it. He assured me that if I could gain the totality of myself without excessive drainage, I would have the energy to fulfill my task. If I drained myself excessively before I lost my human form, I was done for.

I asked him if there was a way to avoid drainage. He shook his head. He replied that there was a way, but not for me. Whether I succeeded or not was not a matter of my volition. He then revealed my task. But he did not tell me how to carry it out. He said that someday the Eagle would put someone in my path to tell me how to do it. And not until I had succeeded would I be free.

When we got to the house, all of us congregated in the large room. Don Juan sat in the center of the room facing the southeast. The eight female warriors surrounded him. They sat in pairs on the cardinal points, also facing the southeast. Then the three male warriors made a triangle outside the circle with Silvio Manuel at the vertex that pointed to the southeast. The two female couriers sat flanking him, and the two male couriers sat in front of him almost against the wall.

The Nagual woman made the male apprentices sit against the east wall. She made the women sit against the west wall. She then led me to a place directly behind don Juan. We sat there together.

We remained seated for what I thought was only an instant, yet I felt a surge of unusual energy in my body. I believed that we had sat down and then immediately stood up.

When I asked the Nagual woman why we got up so quickly, she replied that we had been sitting there for several hours, and that someday before I entered into the third attention, all of it would come back to me.

La Gorda stated that not only did she have the sensation that we sat in that room only for an instant, but that she was never told that it had been otherwise.

What the Nagual Juan Matus told her afterward was that she had the obligation to help the other apprentices, especially Josefina, and that one day I would return to give her the final push she needed to cross totally into the other self.

She was tied to me and to Josefina. In our dreaming together under Zuleica's supervision we had exchanged enormities of our luminosity. That was why we were able to withstand together the pressure of the other self upon entering it in the flesh.

He also told her that it was the power of the warriors of his party which had made the crossing so easy this time, and that when she would have to cross on her own, she had to be prepared to do it in dreaming.

After we had stood up that night, Florinda came over to where I was. She took me by the arm and walked around the room with me, while don Juan and his other warriors talked to the apprentices.

Florinda said that I should not allow the events of that night at the bridge to confuse me. I should not believe, as the Nagual Juan Matus had believed at one time, that there is an actual physical passageway into the other self.

The slit that I had seen was simply a construct of their intent which had been trapped by a combination of the Nagual Juan Matus' obsession with passageways and Silvio Manuel's bizarre sense of humor. The mixture of both had produced the cosmic vagina.

As far as she was concerned, the passage from one self to the other had no physicality. The cosmic vagina was a physical expression of the two men's power to move the 'wheel of time'.

Florinda explained that when she or her peers talked about time, they were not referring to something which is measured by the movement of a clock. Time is the essence of attention. The Eagle's emanations are made out of time, and properly, when one enters into any aspect of the other self, one is becoming acquainted with time.

Florinda assured me that that very night while we sat in formation, they had had their last chance to help me and the apprentices to face the wheel of time.

She said that the wheel of time is like a state of heightened awareness which is part of the other self- just as the left side awareness is part of the self of everyday life. Florinda said that that state could physically be described as a tunnel of infinite length and width; a tunnel with reflective furrows.

Every furrow is infinite, and there are infinite numbers of them. Living creatures are compulsorily made, by the force of life, to gaze into one furrow. To gaze into it means to be trapped by it; to live that furrow.

Florinda asserted that what warriors call will belongs to the wheel of time. It is something like the runner of a vine, or an intangible tentacle which all of us possess. She said that a warrior's final aim is to learn to focus it on the wheel of time in order to make it turn.

Warriors who have succeeded in turning the wheel of time can gaze into any furrow and draw from it whatever they desire, such as the cosmic vagina.

To be trapped compulsorily in one furrow of time entails seeing the images of that furrow only as they recede. To be free from the spellbinding force of those grooves means that one can look in either direction, as images recede or as they approach.

Florinda stopped talking and embraced me. She whispered in my ear that she would be back to finish her instruction someday when I had gained the totality of myself.

Then don Juan called everyone to come to where I was. They surrounded me. Don Juan spoke to me first. He said that I could not go with them on their journey because it was impossible that I could withdraw from my task. Under the circumstance, the only thing they could do for me would be to wish me well.

He added that warriors have no life of their own. From the moment they understand the nature of awareness, they cease to be persons and the human condition is no longer part of their view. I had my duty as a warrior and nothing else was important. I was going to be left behind to fulfill a most obscure task.

Since I had already relinquished my life, there was nothing else for them to say to me except that I should do my best. And there was nothing for me to say to them except that I had understood and had accepted my fate.

Vicente came to my side next. He spoke very softly. He said that the challenge of a warrior is to arrive at a very subtle balance of positive and negative forces. This challenge does not mean that a warrior should strive to have everything under control, but that a warrior should strive to meet any conceivable situation, the expected and the unexpected, with equal efficiency.

To be perfect under perfect circumstances was to be a paper warrior. My challenge was to be left behind. Theirs was to strike onward into the unknowable. Both challenges were consuming. For warriors, the excitation of staying put is equal to the excitation of the journey. Both are equal, because both entail the fulfilling of a sacred trust.

Silvio Manuel came to my side next. He was concerned with practicalities. He gave me a formula; an incantation for times when my task would be greater than my strength. It was the incantation that came to my mind the first time I remembered the Nagual woman.

I am already given to the power that rules my fate.

And I cling to nothing, so I will have nothing to defend.

I have no thoughts, so I will see.

I fear nothing, so I will remember myself.

Detached and at ease,

I will dart past the Eagle to be free.

(Ya me di al poder que a mi destino rige.

No me agarro ya de nada, para asi no tener nada que defender.

No tengo pensamientos, para asi poder ver.

No temo ya a nada, para asi poder acordarme de mi.

Sereno y dcsprendido,

me dejara el aguila pasar a la libertad.)

He told me that he was going to reveal to me a practical maneuver of the second attention, and right then he turned into a luminous egg. He reverted back to his normal appearance and repeated this transformation three or four more times. I understood perfectly well what he was doing. He did not need to explain it to me, and yet I could not put into words what I knew.

Silvio Manuel smiled, cognizant of my problem. He said that it took an enormity of strength to let go of the intent of everyday life. The secret that he had just revealed was how to expedite letting go of that intent. In order to do what he had done, one must place one's attention on the luminous shell.

He turned one more time into a luminous egg and then it became obvious to me what I had known all along. Silvio Manuel's eyes turned for an instant to focus on the point of the second attention. His head was straight, as if he had been looking ahead of him, only his eyes were askew. He said that a warrior must evoke intent. The glance is the secret. The eyes beckon intent.

I became euphoric at that point. I was at long last capable of thinking about something I knew without really knowing. The reason why seeing seems to be visual is because we need the eyes to focus on intent. Don Juan and his party of warriors knew how to use their eyes to catch another aspect of intent and called this act seeing. What Silvio Manuel had shown me was the true function of the eyes; the catchers of intent.

I then used my eyes deliberately to beckon intent. I focused them on the point of the second attention. All of a sudden don Juan, his warriors, dona Soledad, and Eligio were luminous eggs; but not la Gorda, the three little sisters, and the Genaros. I kept on moving my eyes back and forth between the blobs of light and the people until I heard a crack in the base of my neck, and then everybody in the room was a luminous egg.

I felt for an instant that I could not tell them apart, but then my eyes seemed to adjust and I held two aspects of intent; two images at once. I could see their physical bodies and also their luminosities.

The two scenes were not superimposed on each other. They were separate, and yet I could not figure out how. I definitely had two channels of vision, and seeing had everything to do with my eyes, and yet was independent of them. I could still see the luminous eggs, but not their physical bodies when I closed my eyes.

I had at one moment the clearest sensation that I knew how to shift my attention to my luminosity. I also knew that to revert to the physical level all I had to do was to focus my eyes on my body.

Don Genaro came to my side next and told me that the Nagual Juan Matus, as a parting gift, had given me duty, Vicente had given me challenge, Silvio Manuel had given me magic, and he was going to give me humor. He looked me up and down and commented that I was the sorriest looking Nagual he had ever seen. He examined the apprentices and concluded that there was nothing else for us to do, except to be optimistic and to look on the positive side of things. He told us a joke about a country girl who was seduced and jilted by a city slicker. When she was told on the day of her wedding that the groom had left town, she pulled herself together with the sobering thought that not everything had been lost. She had lost her virginity, but she had not yet killed her piglet for the wedding feast.

Don Genaro told us that the only thing that would help us to get out of our situation, which was the situation of the jilted bride, was to hold onto our piglets, whatever they might be, and laugh ourselves silly. Only through laughter could we change our condition.

He coaxed us with gestures of his head and hands to give him a hearty 'ha-ha'. The sight of the apprentices trying to laugh was as ridiculous as my own attempt. Suddenly I was laughing with don Juan and his warriors.

Don Genaro, who had always made jokes about my being a poet, asked me to read a poem out loud. He said that he wanted to summarize his sentiments and his recommendations with the poem that celebrates life, death and laughter. He was referring to a fraction of Jose Gorostiza's poem, "Death Without End."

The Nagual woman handed me the book and I read the part that don Juan and don Genaro had always liked.

Oh, what blind joy

What hunger to use up

the air that we breathe,

the mouth, the eye, the hand.

What biting itch

to spend absolutely all of ourselves

in one single burst of laughter.

Oh, this impudent, insulting death

that assassinates us from afar.

over the pleasure that we take in dying

for a cup of tea...

for a faint caress.

The setting for the poem was overpowering. I felt a shiver.

Emilito and the courier Juan Tuma came to my side. At first, they did not say a word. Their eyes were shining like black marbles. All their feelings seemed to be focused in their eyes.

Then the courier Juan Tuma said very softly that once he had ushered me into the mysteries of Mescalito at his house, and that that had been a forerunner of another occasion in the wheel of time when he would usher me into the ultimate mystery.

Emilito said, as if his voice were an echo of the courier Juan Tuma's, that both of them were confident that I was going to fulfill my task. They would be waiting because for I would join them someday.

The courier Juan Tuma added that the Eagle had put me with the Nagual Juan Matus' party as my rescue unit. They embraced me again and whispered in unison that I should trust myself.

After the couriers, the female warriors came to me. Each one hugged me and whispered a wish in my ear; a wish of plenitude and fulfillment.

The Nagual woman came to me last. She sat down and held me in her lap as if I were a child. She exuded affection and purity. I was breathless. We stood up and walked around the room. We talked about and pondered our fate. Forces impossible to fathom had guided us to that culminating moment. The awe that I felt was immeasurable. And so was my sadness.

She then revealed a portion of the rule that applies to the three-pronged Nagual. She was in a state of ultimate agitation and yet she was calm. Her intellect was peerless and yet she was not trying to reason anything out.

Her last day on earth overwhelmed her. She filled me with her mood. It was as if up to that moment I had not quite realized the finality of our situation. Being on my left side entailed that the primacy of the immediate took precedence, which made it practically impossible for me to foresee beyond that moment.

However, the impact of her mood engaged a great deal of my right side awareness and it's capacity to prejudge feelings that are to come. I realized that I would never again see her. That was unbearable!

Don Juan had told me that on the left side there are no tears; that a warrior can no longer weep; and that the only expression of anguish is a shiver that comes from the very depths of the universe. It is as if one of the Eagle's emanations is anguish. The warrior's shiver is infinite.

As the Nagual woman talked to me and held me, I felt that shiver.

She put her arms around my neck and pressed her head against mine. I thought she was wringing me like a piece of cloth. I felt something coming out of my body, or out of hers into mine. My anguish was so intense, and it flooded me so fast that I went berserk. I fell to the floor with the Nagual woman still embracing me. I thought, as if in a dream, that I must have gashed her forehead in our fall. Her face and mine were covered with blood. Blood had pooled in her eyes.

Don Juan and don Genaro very swiftly lifted me up. They held me. I was having uncontainable spasms, like seizures.

The female warriors surrounded the Nagual woman. Then they stood in a row in the middle of the room. The men joined them. In one moment there was an undeniable chain of energy going between them.

The row moved and paraded in front of me. Each one of them came for a moment and stood in front of me, but without breaking the row. It was as if they were moving on a conveyor that transported them and made each of them stop in front of me.

The male couriers went by first, then the female couriers, then the male warriors, then the dreamers, the stalkers, and finally the Nagual woman. They went by me and remained in full view for a second or two, long enough to say goodbye, and then they disappeared into the blackness of the mysterious slit that had appeared in the room.

Don Juan pressed my back and relieved some of my unbearable anguish. He said that he understood my pain, and that the affinity of the Nagual man and the Nagual woman is not something that can be formulated. It exists as a result of the emanations of the Eagle. Once the two people are put together and are separated there is no way to fill the emptiness because it is not social emptiness, but a movement of those emanations.

Don Juan told me then that he was going to make me shift to my extreme right. He said that it was a merciful, although temporary maneuver. It would allow me to forget for the time being, but it would not soothe me when I remembered.

Don Juan also told me that the act of remembering is thoroughly incomprehensible. In actuality it is the act of remembering oneself which does not stop at recollecting the interaction warriors perform in their left side awareness, but goes on to recollect every memory that the luminous body has stored from the moment of birth.

The systematic interaction warriors go through in states of heightened consciousness is only a device to entice the other self to reveal itself in terms of memories. This act of remembering, although it seems to be only associated with warriors, is something that is within the realm of every human being. Every one of us can go directly to the memories of our luminosity with unfathomable results.

Don Juan said then that that day they would leave at dusk and that the only thing they still had to do for me was to create an opening; an interruption in the continuum of my time.

They were going to make me jump into an abyss as a means of interrupting the Eagle's emanation that accounts for my feeling that I am whole and continuous. The jump was going to be done while I was in a state of normal awareness, and the idea was that my second attention would take over.

Rather than dying at the bottom of the abyss I would enter fully into the other self. Don Juan said that I would eventually come out of the other self once my energy was exhausted; but I would not come out on the same mountaintop from where I was going to jump. He predicted that I would emerge at my favorite spot wherever it might be. This would be the interruption in the continuum of my time.

He then pushed me completely out of my left side awareness. And I forgot my anguish, my purpose, and my task.

At dusk that afternoon, Pablito, Nestor and I did jump off a precipice. The Nagual's blow had been so accurate and so merciful that nothing of the momentous event of their farewell transcended beyond the limits of the other momentous event of jumping to certain death and not dying. Awe-inspiring as that event was, it was pale in comparison to what was taking place in another realm.

Don Juan made me jump at the precise moment when he and all of his warriors had kindled their awareness. I had a dreamlike vision of a row of people looking at me. Afterwards I rationalized it as just one of a long series of visions or hallucinations I had had upon jumping. This was the meager interpretation of my right side awareness, overwhelmed by the awesomeness of the total event.

On my left side, however, I realized that I had entered into the other self, and this entrance had had nothing to do with my rationality. The warriors of don Juan's party had caught me for an eternal instant before they vanished into the total light; before the Eagle let them go through.

I knew that they were in a range of the Eagle's emanations which was beyond my reach. They were waiting for don Juan and don Genaro. I saw don Juan taking the lead. And then there was only a line of exquisite lights in the sky. Something like a wind seemed to make the cluster of lights contract and wriggle. There was a massive glow on one end of the line of lights where don Juan was. I thought of the plumed serpent of the Toltec legend. And then the lights were gone.

### - The End - The Eagle's Gift ###

## Six Explanatory Propositions From The Eagle's Gift
## by Carlos Castaneda. 1981.

Six Explanatory Propositions
To: The Ixtlan Mailing List
Date: Sat, 6 Sep 1997 02:00:00 -0600

**The following is a translation of "The Six Explanatory Propositions" included in the Spanish language version of the Eagle's Gift, but never included or published in the English versions of the book.**

In spite of the amazing maneuvers that DJ did with my awareness, along the years I stubbornly insisted in trying to intellectually evaluate what he did. Although I have written at length about these maneuvers, it has always been from a strictly experiential point of view and, besides, from a strictly rational perspective. Immersed as I was in my own rationality, I couldn't recognize the goals of the teachings of Don Juan. To understand the stretch of these goals with a certain degree of precision, it was necessary that I lost my human form and arrived to the totality of myself.

The teachings of Don Juan were meant to guide me through the second stage of a warrior's development: the verification and unrestricted acceptance that within us lies another type of awareness. This stage was divided into two categories. The first one, for which Don Juan required Don Genaro's help, dealt with two activities. It consisted of showing me certain procedures, actions and methods that were designed to exercise my awareness. The second one had to do with the six explanatory propositions.

Due to the difficulties that I had in adapting my rationality in order to accept the plausibility of what he was teaching me, Don Juan presented these explanatory propositions in terms of my scholastic records.

The first thing he did, as an introduction, was to create a division in myself by means of a specific blow on the right shoulder blade, a blow which made me enter an unusual state of awareness, which I couldn't recall once I was back to normality.

Until the moment in which Don Juan made me enter such state of awareness I had an undeniable sense of continuity, which I thought of as a product of my vital experience. The idea that I had about myself was that of being a full entity that could explain everything it had done. Besides, I was convinced that the dwelling of all my awareness, if there was such, was in my head. However, Don Juan showed me with his blow that it exists a center in the spinal cord, at the height of the shoulder blades, that is obviously a center of enhanced awareness.

When I questioned Don Juan about the nature of this blow, he explained that the nagual is a director, a guide who bears the responsibility of opening the way, and that he must be impeccable to impregnate his warriors with a sense of confidence and clarity. Only under these conditions is a nagual in the possibility of giving this blow on the back to force a displacement of awareness, because the power of the nagual is what allows the transition. If the nagual is not an impeccable practitioner, the displacement doesn't occur, as when I tried, unsuccessfully, to put the other apprentices in a state of heightened awareness hitting them on the back before we ventured into the bridge.

I asked Don Juan what this displacement of awareness implied. He said that the nagual has to strike on a precise spot, which varies from person to person but which is always located in the general area of the shoulder blades. A nagual has to see to specify the spot, which is located in the periphery of one's luminosity and not on the physical body itself; once the nagual identifies it, he pushes it in, more that striking it, and thus creates a concavity, a depression in the luminous shield. The state of heightened awareness resulting from this blow lasts as much as this depression lasts. Some luminous shields go back to their original forms by themselves, some have to be struck in another point to be restored, and some others never go back to their oval shapes.

Don Juan said that seers see awareness as a peculiar glow. Everyday awareness is a glow on the right side, which extends from the physical body's exterior to the periphery of our luminosity. Heightened awareness is a more intense shine associated with great speed and concentration, a fulgor which saturates the periphery of the left side.

Don Juan said that seers explain what happens with the blow of the nagual as a temporal dislodging of a center located in the luminous cocoon of the body. The Eagle's emanations are in reality evaluated and selected in that center. The blow alters their normal behavior.

Through their observations, seers have reached the conclusion that warriors must be put in that state of disorientation. The change in the way awareness works under these conditions makes this state an ideal territory to dillucidate the commands of the Eagle: it allows warriors to function as if they were in everyday awareness, with the difference that they can concentrate in everything they do with unprecedented clarity and strength.

Don Juan said that my situation was analogous to the one he had experienced. His benefactor created a deep division in himself, making him move once and once again from the awareness of the right side to the awareness of the left side. The clarity and freedom of his left side awareness were in direct opposition to the rationalizations and endless defenses of his right side. He told me that all warriors are cast into the depths of the same situation that polarity molds, and that the nagual creates and reinforces the division to be able to lead his apprentices to the conviction that there is an awareness in human beings yet unexplored.

### 1. What we perceive as the world are the Eagle's emanations.

Don Juan explained to me that the world we perceive does not have a transcendental existence. Since we are familiarized with it we believe that what we perceive is a world of objects which exist such as we perceive them, when in reality there is not a world of objects, but, rather, a universe of Eagle's emanations. These emanations represent the only immutable reality. It is a reality that encompasses all that is, perceivable and unperceivable, knowable and unknowable.

Seers who see the Eagle's emanations call them commands because of their urging force. All living creatures are urged to use the emanations, and they use them without getting to know what they are. Ordinary men interpret them as reality. And seers who see the emanations interpret them as the rule. In spite that seers see the emanations, they don't have a way of knowing what it is they are seeing. Instead of entangling themselves with useless conjectures, seers occupy themselves in the functional speculation of how the Eagle's commands can be interpreted. Don Juan sustained that to intuit a reality which transcends the world we perceive stays at the level of conjecture; it is not enough for a warrior to conjecture that the Eagle's commands are instantly perceived by all creatures that live on Earth, and that none of them perceives them in the same way. Warriors must try to behold the flow of emanations and "see" the way in which man and other living beings use it to build their perceptual world.

When I proposed to use the word "description" instead of Eagles's emanations, Don Juan said that he was not making a metaphor. He said that the word "description" connotes a human agreement, and that what we perceive stems from a command in which human agreements do not count.

### 2. Attention is what makes us perceive the Eagle's emanations as the action of skimming.

Don Juan used to say that perception is a physical faculty that living creatures groom; the final result of this grooming is known, among seers, as "attention". Don Juan described attention as the action of hooking and channeling perception. He said that this action is our most singular feat, which covers all the spectrum of human alternatives and possibilities. Don Juan established a precise distinction between alternatives and possibilities. Human alternatives are those that we are enabled to choose as persons who function within the social environment. Our landscape of this dominion is quite limited. Human possibilities are those that we are capable of achieving as luminous beings.

Don Juan revealed to me a classificatory scheme of three types of attention, emphasizing that calling them "types" was erroneous. In fact, they are three levels of knowledge: first, second and third attention; each one of them an independent dominion, complete in itself.

For a warrior that is in the initial stages of his learning, the first attention is the most important of the three. Don Juan said that his explanatory propositions were attempts to bring into first frame the way in which the first attention works, something that passes completely unadverted to us. He considered imperative for warriors to understand the nature of the first attention if they were going to venture into the other two.

He explained to me that the first attention has been taught how to move instantly through a whole spectrum of the Eagle's emanations, without emphasizing at all that fact, in order to reach "perceptual units" which all of us have learned that are perceivable. Seers call this feat "skimming", because it implies the capability of suppressing those emanations which are superfluous and selecting which of them must be emphasized.

Don Juan explained this process taking as an example the mountain that we were seeing at that moment. He stressed that my first attention, at the moment of seeing the mountain, had skimmed an infinite number of emanations to obtain a miracle of perception; a skimming that all human beings know because each one of them has attained it by himself.

Seers contend that everything the first attention suppresses to obtain a skimming, cannot be recovered anymore by the first attention under any condition. Once we learn to perceive in terms of skimmings, our senses stop registering the superfluous emanations. To dillucidate this point he gave me the example of the skimming: "human body". He said that our first attention is totally unconscious of the emanations that compose the external luminous shield of the physical body. Our oval cocoon is not subjected to perception; those emanations have been rejected which would make it perceivable in benefit of those which allow the first attention to perceive the physical body such as we know it.

Therefore, the perceptual goal that children must achieve as they grow up consists in learning to isolate the appropriate emanations to be able to channel their chaotic perception and transform it into the first attention; in doing so, they learn how to build skimmings. All grown up human beings who surround children teach them how to skim. Sooner or later, children learn to control their first attention in order to perceive skimmings in terms which are alike to those of their teachers.

Don Juan never ceased to be amazed at the capability of human beings to bring order into the chaos of perception. He contended that all of us, by his/her own merits, is a magistral magician and that our magic consists in rendering reality to the skimmings that our first attention has learned how to build. The fact that we perceive in terms of skimmings is the Eagle's command, but to perceive the commands as objects is our power, our magical gift. Our fallacy, on the other hand, is that we always end up being one-sided when forgetting that skimmings are only real in terms that we perceive them as real, due to the power that we have to do it. Don Juan called this an error in judgment which destroys the richness of our mysterious origins.

### 3. The skimmings are made sense of by the first ring of power.

Don Juan used to say that the first ring of power is the force that stems from the Eagle's emanations to affect exclusively our first attention. He explained that it has been represented as a "ring " because of it's dynamism, of it's uninterrupted movement. It has been called ring "of power" due to, first, it's compulsive character, and, second, because of it's unique ability to stop it's works, to change them or reverse their direction.

The compulsive character is better shown in the fact that it doesn't only urge the first attention to build and perpetuate skimmings, but it also demands a consensus from all the participants. Each one of us is demanded a complete agreement upon the faithful reproduction of skimmings, since conformity to the first ring of power must be total.

It is precisely this conformity which gives us the certainty that skimmings are objects which exist as such, independent from our perception. Besides, the compulsiveness of the first ring of power does not cease after the initial agreement, but it demands that we continuously renovate the agreement. Our whole life we must operate as if, for example, each one of our skimmings was perceptually the first one for each human being, in spite of languages and cultures. Don Juan granted that even if all this is too serious to be taken jokingly, the urging character of the first ring of power is so intense that forces us to believe that if the "mountain" could have an awareness of it's own, it would consider itself as the skimming that we have learned how to build.

The most valuable feature that the first ring of power bears to a warrior is the singular capability of interrupting it's flux of energy, or to totally suspend it. Don Juan said that this is a latent capability which exists within us all as a backup unit. In our narrow world of skimmings, there is no need to use it. Since we are so efficiently buttressed and shielded by the net of the first attention, we do not realize, not even vaguely, that we have hidden resources. However, if another alternative to follow would present itself to us, such as is the warrior's option to use the second attention, the latent capability of the first ring of power could start to function and could be used with spectacular results.

Don Juan underlined that the biggest feat of sorcerers is the process of activating this latent capability; he called it blocking the intent of the first ring of power. He explained to me that the Eagle's emanations, which have already been isolated by the first attention in order to build the everyday world, exert an unbending pressure upon the first attention. For this pressure to stop it's activity, the intent must be displaced. Seers call this an obstruction or an interruption of the first ring of power.

### 4. Intent is the force that moves the first ring of power.

Don Juan explained to me that intent doesn't refer to have an intention, or to want one thing or the other, but rather has to do with an imponderable force that makes us behave in ways which could be described as intentions, wishing, volition, etc. Don Juan didn't bring it forth as a condition of being, stemming from oneself, such as is a habit produced by socialization, or a biological reaction, but rather brought it forth as a private, intimate force that we possess and use individually as a key that makes the first ring of power move in acceptable ways. Intent is what directs our first attention in order for it to focus on the Eagle's emanations within a certain frame. And intent is also what commands the first ring of power to obstruct or interrupt it's flux of energy.

Don Juan suggested me to conceive intent as an invisible force which exists in the universe, without receiving itself, but still affecting everything: force that creates and sustains skimmings.

He asserted that skimmings must be incessantly recreated to be imbued with continuity. In order to recreate them each time with the freshness that they need to build a living world, we must intend them each time we build them. For instance, we must intend the "mountain" along with all it's complexities for the skimming to be fully materialized. Don Juan said that, for a spectator, who behaves exclusively based upon the first attention without the intervention of intent, the "mountain" would appear as an entirely different skimming. It could appear as the skimming "geometric form" or "amorphous spot of color". For the skimming mountain to be completed, the spectator must intend it, whether it is unconsciously through the urging force of the first ring of power, or premeditatedly, through the warrior's training.

Don Juan pointed to me the three ways in which intent comes to us. The most predominating one is known by seers as "the intent of the first ring of power". This is a blind intent which comes to us by chance. It is as if we were in it's way, or as if intent was in ours. Inevitably we find ourselves trapped in it's net without having the least control of what is happening to us.

The second way is when intent comes to us by it's own. This requires a considerable amount of purpose, a sense of determination on our part. Only in our capability as warriors we can put ourselves voluntarily in the way of intent; we summon it, so to speak. Don Juan explained to me that his insistence in being an impeccable warrior was nothing more than an effort to let intent know that he is putting himself in it's way.

Don Juan used to say that warriors call this phenomenon "power". Thus when they speak of having personal power, they are referring to the intent that comes to them voluntarily. The outcome, he used to say to me, can be described as the facility to find new solutions, or the facility to affect people or events. It is as if other possibilities, previously unknown by the warrior, suddenly become apparent. In this way, an impeccable warrior never plans anything ahead, but his actions are so decisive that it seems as if the warrior had calculated beforehand each facet of his activity.

The third way in which we find intent is the most rare and complex of the three; it occurs when intent allows us to harmonize with it. Don Juan described this state as the real moment of power: the culmination of a lifetime effort in search of impeccability. Only supreme warriors obtain it, and as long as they are in such state, intent lets itself be handled by them at will. It is as if intent had fused in those warriors, and in doing so it transforms them into a pure force, without preconceptions. Seers call this state the "intent of the second ring of power", or "will".

### 5. The first ring of power can be stopped by a functional blocking of the capability of building skimmings.

Don Juan used to say that the function of the not-doings is to create an obstruction in the usual focus of out first attention. The not-doings are, in this sense, maneuvers destined to prepare the first attention for the functional blocking of the first ring of power, or, in other words, for the interruption of intent.

Don Juan explained to me that this functional blocking, which is the only method to systematically use the latent capability of the first ring of power, represents a temporal interruption that the benefactor creates in the disciple's capability for building skimmings. It is a premeditated and powerful artificial intrusion into the first attention, in order to push it beyond the appearances which the known skimmings present to us; this intrusion is accomplished by interrupting the intent of the first ring of power.

Don Juan used to say that in order to achieve this interruption, the benefactor treats intent as what it really is, a flux, a current of energy that can eventually be stopped or reoriented. An interruption of this nature, however, implies a commotion of such magnitude that can force the first ring of power to stop fully; a situation which is impossible to conceive under our normal life conditions. It is unthinkable to us that we can un-walk the steps we took when we consolidated our perception, but it is feasible that under the impact of this interruption we could place ourselves in a perceptual position very similar to the one of our beginnings, when the Eagle's commands were emanations which we still had not imbued with significance.

Don Juan used to say that any procedure the benefactor could use to create this interruption must be intimately linked with his personal power. Therefore, a benefactor doesn't use any process to handle intent, but rather moves it and makes it available to the apprentice trough his personal power.

In my case, Don Juan achieved the functional blocking of the first ring of power through a complex process, which combined three methods: the ingestion of hallucinogenic plants, manipulation of the body and maneuvering with intent itself.

In the beginning Don Juan relied strongly upon the ingestion of hallucinogenic plants, apparently due to the persistence of my rational side. The effect was tremendous, and yet retarded the sought for interruption. The fact that the plants were hallucinogenic offered my reason the perfect justification to congregate all of it's available resources to continue exerting control. I was convinced that I could logically explain anything that I was experiencing, along with the inconceivable feats that Don Juan and Don Genaro used to do to create the interruptions, as perceptual distortions caused by the ingestion of hallucinogenics.

Don Juan used to say that the most remarkable effect of hallucinogenic plants was something that every time I ingested them I interpreted as the peculiar feeling that everything around me oozed a surprising richness. There were colors, forms, details that I had never beheld before. Don Juan used this increment in my ability to perceive, and, through a series of commands and comments used to force me to enter a state of nervous restlessness. Afterwards he manipulated my body and made me shift from one side of awareness to the other, until I had created phantasmagorical visions or absolutely real scenes with tridimensional creatures that could not possibly exist in this world.

Don Juan explained to me that once the direct relation between intent and the skimmings we are constructing is broken, it cannot ever be repaired. From that moment on we acquire the ability to catch a current of what he described as "phantom intent", or the intent of the skimmings which are not present at the moment or place of the interruption, this is to say, an intent put at our disposal through some aspect of memory.

Don Juan asserted that with the interruption of the intent of the first ring of power we become receptive and moldable; a nagual can then introduce the intent of the second ring of power. Don Juan was convinced that children of a certain age find themselves in a similar situation of receptivity; being deprived of intent, they are ready to be imprinted with any intent which is available to the teachers who surround them.

After my period of continuos ingestion of hallucinogenic plants, Don Juan totally discontinuated it's use. However, he obtained new and more dramatic interruptions in myself manipulating my body and making me shift states of awareness, combining all this with maneuvers with intent itself. Through a combination of mesmerizing instructions and adequate comments, Don Juan created a current of "phantom intent" and I was lead to experience common skimmings as something unimaginable. He conceptualized all this as "glancing into the immensity of the Eagle".

Don Juan masterfully lead me through countless interruptions of intent until he was convinced, as a seer, that my body showed the effects of the functional blocking of the first ring of power. He said that he could see a unusual activity around the area of the shoulder blades. He described it as a little hole that had formed exactly as if the luminosity was a muscular layer contracted by a nerve.

To me, the effect of the functional blocking of the first ring of power was that it managed to erase the certainty which I had all my life that what my senses reported was "real". Quietly I entered a state of inner silence. Don Juan used to say that what gives warriors that extreme uncertainty that his benefactor had experienced at the end of his life, that resignation to failure that he himself was living, is the fact that one glance into the immensity of the Eagle leaves one without hope. Hope is the result of our familiarity with skimmings and the idea that we control them. In such moments only the warrior's life can help us to persevere in our efforts to discover that which the Eagle has concealed from us, but without hope that we can get to understand what we discover.

### 6. The second attention.

Don Juan explained to me that the examination of the second attention must begin with the realization that the force of the first ring of power, which boxes us in, is a physical, concrete edge. Seers have described it as a wall of fog, a barrier that can be systematically brought to our awareness by means of the blocking of the first ring of power; and then can be perforated by means of the warrior's training.

After perforating this wall of fog, one enters a broad intermediate state. The task of the warriors then consists in going through it until they reach the next divisory line, which must be perforated in order to enter what it is properly the other self or the second attention.

Don Juan used to say that the two divisory lines are perfectly recognizable. When warriors perforate the wall of fog they feel that their bodies are squeezed, or they feel an intense shaking in the cavity of their bodies, generally to the right of the stomach or through the middle part, from right to left. When warriors perforate the second line, they feel an acute crack on the upper part of the body, something like the sound of a dry bough that is broken in two.

The two lines that box in both attentions, and individually seal them, are known to seers as the parallel lines. These seal both attentions by means of the fact that they extend into infinity, without ever allowing the crossing unless they are perforated.

Between both lines there exists an area of specific awareness that seers call limbo, or the world between the parallel lines. It is a real space between two huge orders of the Eagle's emanations; emanations which are within the human possibilities of awareness. One is the level which creates the self of everyday life, and the other is the level which creates the other self. Since the limbo is a transitional zone, there both fields of emanations extend one upon the other. The fraction of the level which is known to us, that extends into that area, hooks a portion of the first ring of power; and the capability of the first ring of power to build skimmings makes us perceive a series of skimmings in the limbo which are almost as those of everyday life, except that they appear grotesque, uncanny and contorted. In this manner the limbo has specific features that do not change arbitrarily each time that one goes into it. There exist in it physical features which resemble the skimmings of everyday life.

Don Juan sustained that the feeling of heaviness experienced in the limbo is due to the growing burden that has been placed on the first attention. In the area located right behind the wall of fog we can still behave as we do normally; it is as if we were in a grotesque but recognizable world. As we penetrate further into it, beyond the wall of fog, it becomes progressively difficult to recognize the features or to behave in terms of the known self.

He explained to me that it was possible to make that instead of the wall of fog anything else appeared, but that seers have opted for accentuating that which consumes less energy: to visualize the wall of fog does not demand any effort.

What exists beyond the second divisory line is known by seers as the second attention, or the other self, or the parallel world; and the action of going through both edges is known as "crossing the parallel lines".

Don Juan thought that I could assimilate this concept more firmly if he described each dominion of awareness as a specific perceptual predisposition. He told me that in the territory of everyday awareness we are inescapably entangled into the specific perceptual predisposition of the first attention.

From the moment in which the first ring of power begins to build skimmings, the way of building them becomes our normal perceptual predisposition. Breaking the unifying force of the first attention implies to break the first divisory line. The normal perceptual predisposition passes then into the intermediate area which is between the parallel lines. One keeps building almost normal skimmings for some time. But as one approaches what seers call the second divisory line, the perceptual predisposition of the first attention begins to recede, it loses strength. Don Juan used to say that this transition is marked by a sudden incapability of remembering or understanding what one is doing.

When one gets closer to the second divisory line, the second attention begins to act on the warriors who undertake the voyage. If they are inexperienced, their awareness gets emptied, it goes blank. Don Juan held that this occurs because they are approaching a spectrum of the Eagle's emanations which has not yet a systematized perceptual predisposition. My experiences with la Gorda and the nagual woman beyond the wall of fog were an example of this incapability. I traveled as far as the other self, but I couldn't account on what we had done for the simple reason that my second attention was still unformulated and it did not give me the opportunity of formulating all I had perceived.

Don Juan explained to me that one begins to activate the second ring of power by forcing the second attention to wake from it's slumber. The functional blocking of the first ring of power achieves this. Then, the task of the teacher consists in recreating the condition which started the first ring of power, the condition of being saturated with intent. The first ring of power is put in motion by the force of the intent given by those who teach how to skim. As my teacher he was giving me, then, a new intent which would create a new perceptual environment.

Don Juan said that it takes a lifetime of unceasing discipline, which seers call unbending intent, to prepare the second ring of power to be able to build skimmings which belong to another level of the Eagle's emanations. To dominate the perceptual predisposition of the parallel self is a feat of peerless value which few warriors achieve. Silvio Manuel was one of those few.

Don Juan warned me that one must not attempt to deliberately dominate it. If this happens, it must be through a natural process which unfolds itself without much effort from our part. He explained to me that the reason for this indifference lies on the practical consideration that when it is dominated it simply becomes very difficult to break, since the goal that warriors actively pursuit is to break both perceptual predispositions to enter the final freedom of the third attention.

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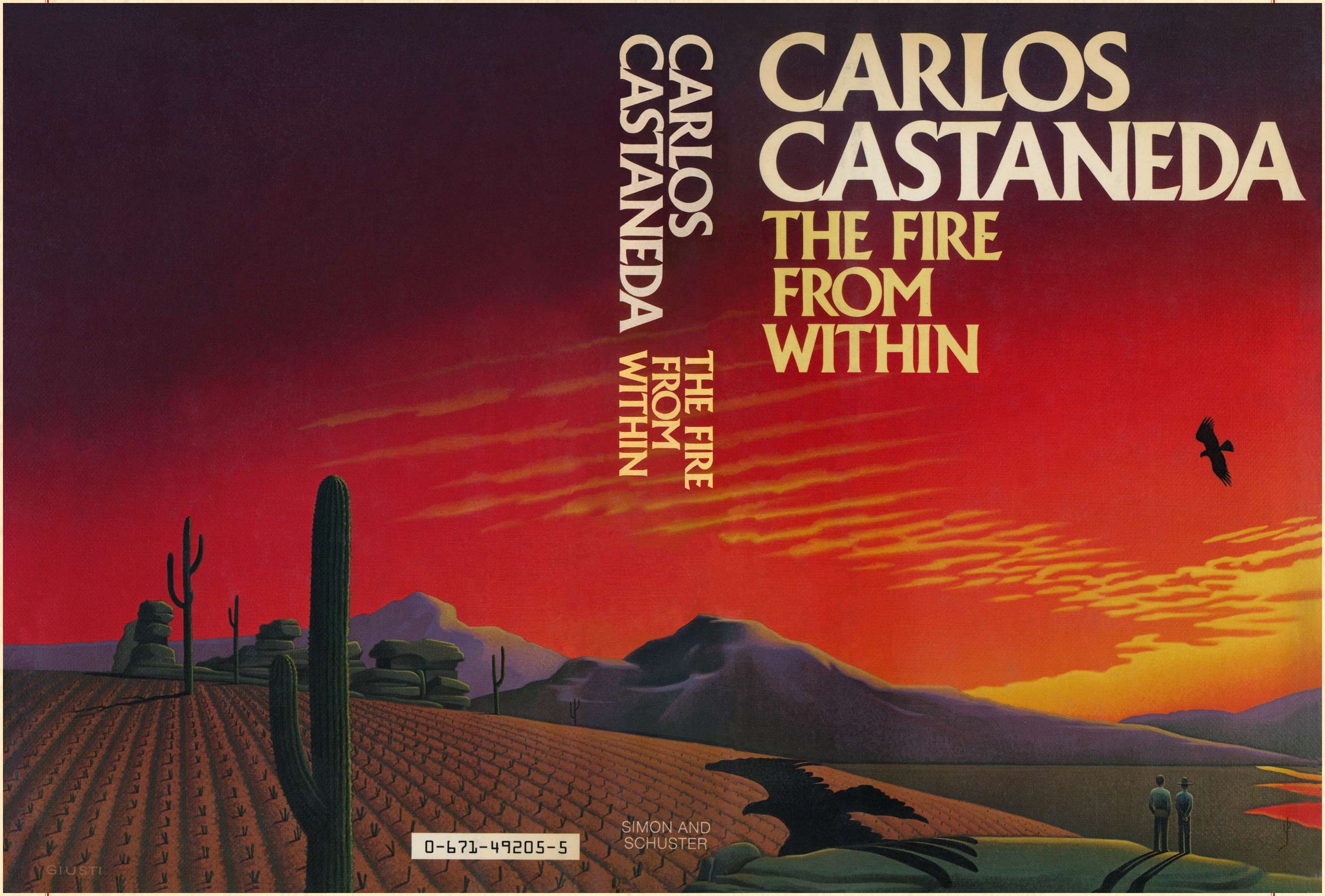
# 07 - THE FIRE FROM WITHIN

© 1984 - Carlos Castaneda. Don Juan’s second attention teachings from the summer of 1960 until Carlos’s final meeting with him in 1973.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# Book 7 - THE FIRE FROM WITHIN

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*I want to express my admiration and gratitude to a masterful teacher, H.Y.L., for helping me restore my energy, and for teaching me an alternate way to plenitude and well-being.*

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# Foreword

I have written extensive descriptive accounts of my apprentice relationship with a Mexican Indian sorcerer, don Juan Matus. Due to the foreignness of the concepts and practices don Juan wanted me to understand and internalize, I have had no other choice but to render his teachings in the form of a narrative; a narrative of what happened, as it happened.

The organization of don Juan's instruction was predicated on the idea that man has two types of awareness. He labeled them the right side and the left side. He described the first as the state of normal awareness necessary for everyday life. The second, he said, was the mysterious side of man; the state of awareness needed to function as sorcerer and seer. Don Juan divided his instruction, accordingly, into teachings for the right side and teachings for the left side.

He conducted his teachings for the right side when I was in my state of normal awareness, and I have described those teachings in all my accounts. In my state of normal awareness don Juan told me that he was a sorcerer. He even introduced me to don Genaro Flores, whom he also led me to believe was another sorcerer. Because of the nature of our association, I logically concluded that they had taken me as their sorcerers' apprentice.

That apprenticeship ended with an incomprehensible act that both don Juan and don Genaro led me to perform. They had me jump from the top of a flat mountain into an abyss.

I have described in one of my accounts what took place on that mountaintop. The last drama of don Juan's teachings for the right side was played there by don Juan himself; don Genaro; two apprentices, Pablito and Nestor; and me. Pablito, Nestor, and I jumped from that mountaintop into an abyss.

For years afterward I thought that just my total trust in don Juan and don Genaro had been sufficient to obliterate all my rational fears on facing actual annihilation. I know now that it wasn't so; I know that the secret was in don Juan's teachings for the left side, and that it took tremendous discipline and perseverance for don Juan, don Genaro, and their companions to conduct those teachings.

It has taken me nearly ten years to recollect what exactly took place in his teachings for the left side that led me to be so willing to perform such an incomprehensible act as jumping into an abyss.

It was in his teachings for the left side that don Juan let on what he, don Genaro, and their companions were really doing to me and who they were. They were not teaching me sorcery, but how to master three aspects of an ancient knowledge they possessed: awareness, stalking, and intent. And they were not sorcerers; they were seers. And don Juan was not only a seer, but also a nagual.

Don Juan had already explained to me, in his teachings for the right side, a great deal about the nagual and about seeing. I had understood seeing to be the capacity of human beings to enlarge their perceptual field until they are capable of assessing, not only the outer appearances, but the essence of everything. He had also explained that seers see man as a field of energy which looks like a luminous egg. The majority of people, he said, have their fields of energy divided into two parts. A few men and women have four or sometimes three parts. Because these people are more resilient than the average man, they can become naguals after learning to see.

In his teachings for the left side, don Juan explained to me the intricacies of seeing and of being a nagual. To be a nagual, he said, is something more complex and far-reaching than being merely a more resilient man who has learned to see. To be a nagual entails being a leader, being a teacher and a guide.

As a nagual, don Juan was the leader of a group of seers known as the nagual's party, which was composed of eight female seers: Cecilia, Delia, Hermelinda, Carmela, Nelida, Florinda, Zuleica, and Zoila; three male seers: Vicente, Silvio Manuel, and Genaro; and four couriers or messengers: Emilito, John Tuma, Marta, and Teresa.

In addition to leading the nagual's party, don Juan also taught and guided a group of apprentice seers known as the new nagual's party. It consisted of four young men: Pablito, Nestor, Eligio, and Benigno; along with five women: Soledad, la Gorda, Lidia, Josefina, and Rosa. I was the nominal leader of the new nagual's party together with the nagual woman Carol.

In order for don Juan to impart to me his teachings for the left side, it was necessary for me to enter into a unique state of perceptual clarity known as heightened awareness. Throughout the years of my association with him, he had me repeatedly shift into such a state by means of a blow that he delivered with the palm of his hand on my upper back.

Don Juan explained that in a state of heightened awareness apprentices can behave almost as naturally as in everyday life, but can bring their minds to focus on anything with uncommon force and clarity. Yet, an inherent quality of heightened awareness is that it is not susceptible to normal recall. What transpires in such a state becomes part of the apprentice's everyday awareness only through a staggering effort of recovery.

My interaction with the nagual's party was an example of this difficulty of recall. With the exception of don Genaro, I had contact with them only when I was in a state of heightened awareness. Hence, in my normal everyday life I could not remember them; not even as vague characters in dreams. The manner in which I met with them every time was almost a ritual. I would drive to don Genaro's house in a small town in the southern part of Mexico. Don Juan would join us immediately and the three of us would then get busy with don Juan's teachings for the right side. After that, don Juan would make me change levels of awareness and then we would drive to a larger, nearby town where he and the other fifteen seers were living.

Every time I entered into heightened awareness I could not cease marveling at the difference between my two sides. I always felt as if a veil had been lifted from my eyes; as if I had been partially blind before and now I could see. The freedom, the sheer joy that used to possess me on those occasions cannot be compared with anything else I have ever experienced. Yet at the same time, there was a frightening feeling of sadness and longing that went hand in hand with that freedom and joy. Don Juan had told me that there is no completeness without sadness and longing, for without them there is no sobriety, no kindness. Wisdom without kindness, he said, and knowledge without sobriety are useless.

The organization of his teachings for the left side also required that don Juan, together with some of his fellow seers, explain to me the three facets of their knowledge: the mastery of awareness, the mastery of stalking, and the mastery of intent.

This work deals with the mastery of awareness, which is part of his total set of teachings for the left side; the set he used in order to prepare me for performing the astonishing act of jumping into an abyss.

Due to the fact that the experiences I narrate here took place in heightened awareness, they cannot have the texture of daily life. They are lacking in worldly context, although I have tried my best to supply it without fictionalizing it. In heightened awareness one is minimally conscious of the surroundings, because one's total concentration is taken by the details of the action at hand.

In this case the action at hand was, naturally, the elucidation [* elucidation- an act of explaining that serves to clear up and cast light on] of the mastery of awareness. Don Juan understood the mastery of awareness as being the modern-day version of an extremely old tradition, which he called the tradition of the ancient Toltec seers.

Although he felt that he was inextricably linked to that old tradition, he considered himself to be one of the seers of a new cycle. When I asked him once what the essential character of the seers of the new cycle was, he said that they are the warriors of total freedom; that they are such masters of awareness, stalking, and intent that they are not caught by death like the rest of mortal men; but choose the moment and the way of their departure from this world. At that moment they are consumed by a fire from within and vanish from the face of the earth, free, as if they had never existed.

## 1. The New Seers

I had arrived in the city of Oaxaca in southern Mexico on my way to the mountains to look for don Juan. On my way out of town in the early morning, I had the good sense to drive by the main square, and there I found him sitting on his favorite bench, as if waiting for me to go by.

I joined him. He told me that he was in the city on business, that he was staying at a local boardinghouse, and that I was welcome to stay with him because he had to remain in town for two more days. We talked for a while about my activities and problems in the academic world.

As was customary with him, he suddenly hit me on my back when I least expected it, and the blow shifted me into a state of heightened awareness.

We sat in silence for a very long time. I anxiously waited for him to begin talking, yet when he did, he caught me by surprise.

"Ages before the Spaniards came to Mexico," he said, "there were extraordinary Toltec seers, men capable of inconceivable deeds. They were the last link in a chain of knowledge that extended over thousands of years.

"The Toltec seers were extraordinary men- powerful sorcerers, somber, driven men who unraveled mysteries and possessed secret knowledge that they used to influence and victimize people by fixating the awareness of their victims on whatever they chose."

He stopped talking and looked at me intently. I felt that he was waiting for me to ask a question, but I did not know what to ask.

"I have to emphasize an important fact," he continued, "the fact that those sorcerers knew how to fixate the awareness of their victims. You didn't pick up on that. When I mentioned it, it didn't mean anything to you. That's not surprising. One of the hardest things to acknowledge is that awareness can be manipulated."

I felt confused. I knew that he was leading me toward something. I felt a familiar apprehension; the same feeling I had whenever he began a new round of his teachings.

I told him how I felt. He smiled vaguely. Usually when he smiled he exuded happiness. This time he was definitely preoccupied. He seemed to consider for a moment whether or not to go on talking. He stared at me intently again, slowly moving his gaze over the entire length of my body. Then, apparently satisfied, he nodded and said that I was ready for my final exercise, something that all warriors go through before considering themselves fit to be on their own. I was more mystified than ever.

"We are going to be talking about awareness," he continued. "The Toltec seers knew the art of handling awareness. As a matter of fact, they were the supreme masters of that art. When I say that they knew how to fixate the awareness of their victims, I mean that their secret knowledge and secret practices allowed them to pry open the mystery of being aware. Enough of their practices have survived to this day, but fortunately in a modified form. I say fortunately because those activities, as I will explain, did not lead the ancient Toltec seers to freedom, but to their doom."

"Do you know those practices yourself?" I asked.

"Why, certainly," he replied. "There is no way for us not to know those techniques, but that doesn't mean that we practice them ourselves. We have other views. We belong to a new cycle."

"But you don't consider yourself a sorcerer, don Juan, do you?" I asked.

"No, I don't," he said. "I am a warrior who sees. In fact, all of us are los nuevos videntes- the new seers. The old seers were the sorcerers.

"For the average man," he continued, "sorcery is a negative business, but it is fascinating all the same. That's why I encouraged you, in your normal awareness, to think of us as sorcerers. It's advisable to do so. It serves to attract interest. But for us to be sorcerers would be like entering a dead-end street."

I wanted to know what he meant by that, but he refused to talk about it. He said that he would elaborate on the subject as he proceeded with his explanation of awareness.

I asked him then about the origin of the Toltecs' knowledge.

"The way the Toltecs first started on the path of knowledge was by eating power plants," he replied. "Whether prompted by curiosity, or hunger, or error, they ate them. Once the power plants had produced their effects on them, it was only a matter of time before some of them began to analyze their experiences. In my opinion, the first men on the path of knowledge were very daring, but very mistaken."

"Isn't all this a conjecture [* conjecture- a hypothesis that has been formed by speculating based on incomplete evidence] on your part, don Juan?"

"No, this is no conjecture of mine. I am a seer, and when I focus my seeing on that time I know everything that took place."

"Can you see the details of things of the past?" I asked.

"Seeing is a peculiar feeling of knowing," he replied, "of knowing something without a shadow of doubt. In this case, I know what those men did, not only because of my seeing, but because we are so closely bound together."

Don Juan explained then that his use of the term 'Toltec' did not correspond to what I understood it to mean. To me it meant a culture, the Toltec Empire. To him, the term Toltec meant 'man of knowledge'.

He said that in the time he was referring to, centuries or perhaps even millennia before the Spanish Conquest, all such men of knowledge lived within a vast geographical area, north and south of the valley of Mexico, and were employed in specific lines of work: curing, bewitching, storytelling, dancing, being an oracle, preparing food and drink. Those lines of work fostered specific wisdom, wisdom that distinguished them from average men. These Toltecs, moreover, were also people who fitted into the structure of everyday life, very much as doctors, artists, teachers, priests, and merchants in our own time do. They practiced their professions under the strict control of organized brotherhoods and became proficient and influential to such an extent that they even dominated groups of people who lived outside the Toltecs' geographical regions.

Don Juan said that after centuries of dealing with power plants, some of these men had finally learned to see. The most enterprising of them then began to teach other men of knowledge how to see. And that was the beginning of their end. As time passed, the number of seers increased, but their obsession with what they saw, which filled them with reverence and fear, became so intense that they ceased to be men of knowledge. They became extraordinarily proficient in seeing and could exert great control over the strange worlds they were witnessing. But it was to no avail. Seeing had undermined their strength and forced them to be obsessed with what they saw.

"There were seers, however, who escaped that fate," don Juan continued, "great men who, in spite of their seeing, never ceased to be men of knowledge. Some of them endeavored to use seeing positively, and to teach it to their fellow men. I'm convinced that under their direction, the populations of entire cities went into other worlds and never came back.

"But the seers who could only see were fiascos, and when the land where they lived was invaded by a conquering people, they were as defenseless as everyone else.

"Those conquerors," he went on, "took over the Toltec world. They appropriated everything, but they never learned to see."'

"Why do you think they never learned to see?" I asked.

"Because they copied the procedures of the Toltec seers without having the Toltecs' inner knowledge. To this day there are scores of sorcerers all over Mexico, descendants of those conquerors, who follow the Toltec ways but don't know what they're doing, or what they're talking about, because they're not seers."

"Who were those conquerors, don Juan?"

"Other Indians," he said. "When the Spaniards came, the old seers had been gone for centuries, but there was a new breed of seers who were starting to secure their place in a new cycle."

"What do you mean. a new breed of seers?"

"After the world of the first Toltecs was destroyed, the surviving seers retreated and began a serious examination of their practices. The first thing they did was to establish stalking, dreaming, and intent as the key procedures; and to deemphasize the use of power plants; perhaps that gives us a hint as to what really happened to them with power plants.

"The new cycle was just beginning to take hold when the Spanish conquerors swept the land. Fortunately, by that time the new seers were thoroughly prepared to face that danger. They were already consummate practitioners of the art of stalking."

Don Juan said that the subsequent centuries of subjugation provided for these new seers the ideal circumstances in which to perfect their skills. Oddly enough, it was the extreme rigor and coercion of that period that gave them the impetus to refine their new principles. And, owing to the fact that they never divulged their activities, they were left alone to map their findings.

"Were there a great many new seers during the Conquest?" I asked.

"At the beginning there were. Near the end there were only a handful. The rest had been exterminated."

"What about in our day, don Juan?" I asked.

"There are a few. They are scattered all over, you understand."

"Do you know them?" I asked.

"Such a simple question is the hardest one to answer," he replied. "There are some we know very well. But they are not exactly like us because they have concentrated on other specific aspects of knowledge, such as dancing, curing, bewitching, or talking; instead of what the new seers recommend- stalking, dreaming, and intent. Those who are exactly like us would not cross our path. The seers who lived during the Conquest set it up that way so as to avoid being exterminated in the confrontation with the Spaniards. Each of those seers founded a lineage. And not all of them had descendants, so the lines are few."

"Do you know any who are exactly like us?" I asked.

"A few," he replied laconically.

I asked him then to give me all the information he could, for I was vitally interested in the topic. To me it was of crucial importance to know names and addresses for purposes of validation and corroboration.

Don Juan did not seem inclined to oblige me.

"The new seers went through that bit of corroboration," he said. "Half of them left their bones in the corroborating room. So now they are solitary birds. Let's leave it that way. All we can talk about is our line. About that, you and I can say as much as we please."

He explained that all the lines of seers were started at the same time and in the same fashion. Around the end of the sixteenth century every nagual deliberately isolated himself and his group of seers from any overt contact with other seers. The consequence of that drastic segregation, he said, was the formation of the individual lineages. Our lineage consisted of fourteen naguals and one hundred and twenty-six seers, he said. Some of those fourteen naguals had as few as seven seers with them. others had eleven, and some up to fifteen.

He told me that his teacher- or his benefactor, as he called him- was the nagual Julian, and the one who came before Julian was the nagual Ellas. I asked him if he knew the names of all fourteen naguals. He named and enumerated them for me so I could learn who they were. He also said that he had personally known the fifteen seers who formed his benefactor's group and that he had also known his benefactor's teacher, the nagual Elias, and the eleven seers of his party.

Don Juan assured me that our line was quite exceptional because it underwent a drastic change in the year 1723 as a result of an outside influence that came to bear on us and inexorably altered our course. He did not want to discuss the event itself at the moment, but he said that a new beginning is counted from that time; and that the eight naguals who have ruled the line since then are considered intrinsically different from the six who preceded them.

Don Juan must have had business to take care of the next day, for I did not see him until around noon. In the meantime, three of his apprentices had come to town, Pablito, Nestor, and la Gorda. They were shopping for tools and materials for Pablito's carpentry business. I accompanied them and helped them to complete all their errands. Then all of us went back to the boardinghouse.

All four of us were sitting around talking when don Juan came into my room. He announced that we were leaving after lunch, but that before we went to eat he still had something to discuss with me in private. He wanted the two of us to take a stroll around the main square and then all of us would meet at a restaurant.

Pablito and Nestor stood up and said that they had some errands to run before meeting us. La Gorda seemed very displeased.

"What are you going to talk about?" she blurted out, but quickly realized her mistake and giggled.

Don Juan gave her a strange look but did not say anything.

Encouraged by his silence, la Gorda proposed that we take her along. She assured us that she would not bother us in the least.

"I'm sure you won't bother us," don Juan said to her, "but I really don't want you to hear anything of what I have to say to him."

La Gorda's anger was very obvious. She blushed, and as don Juan and I walked out of the room her entire face clouded with anxiety and tension; becoming instantly distorted. Her mouth was open and her lips were dry.

La Gorda's mood made me very apprehensive. I felt an actual discomfort. I didn't say anything, but don Juan seemed to notice my feelings.

"You should thank la Gorda day and night," he said all of a sudden. "She's helping you destroy your self-importance. She's the petty tyrant in your life, but you still haven't caught on to that."

We strolled around the plaza until all my nervousness had vanished. Then we sat down on his favorite bench again.

"The ancient seers were very fortunate indeed," don Juan began, "because they had plenty of time to learn marvelous things. Let me tell you, they knew wonders that we can't even imagine today."

"Who taught them all that?" I asked.

"They learned everything by themselves through seeing," he replied. "Most of the things we know in our lineage were figured out by them. The new seers corrected the mistakes of the old seers, but the basis of what we know and do is lost in Toltec time."

He explained. One of the simplest and yet most important findings from the point of view of instruction, he said, is the knowledge that man has two types of awareness. The old seers called them the right and the left side of man.

"The old seers figured out," he went on, "that the best way to teach their knowledge was to make their apprentices shift to their left side to a state of heightened awareness. Real learning takes place there.

"Very young children were given to the old seers as apprentices," don Juan continued, "so that they wouldn't know any other way of life. Those children, in turn, when they came of age, took other children as apprentices. Imagine the things they must have uncovered in their shifts to the left and to the right after centuries of that kind of concentration."

I remarked how disconcerting those shifts were to me. He said that my experience was similar to his own. His benefactor, the nagual Julian, had created a profound schism [* schism- division into opposing factions] in him, by making him shift back and forth from one type of awareness to the other. He said that the clarity and freedom he experienced in heightened awareness were in total contrast to the rationalizations, the defenses, the anger, and the fear of his normal state of awareness.

The old seers used to create this polarity to suit their own particular purposes; with it, they forced their apprentices to achieve the concentration needed to learn sorcery techniques. But the new seers, he said, use it to lead their apprentices to the conviction that there are unrealized possibilities in man.

"The best effort of the new seers," don Juan continued, "is their explanation of the mystery of awareness. They condensed it all into some concepts and actions which are taught while the apprentices are in heightened awareness."

He said that the value of the new seers' method of teaching is that it takes advantage of the fact that no one can remember anything that happens while being in a state of heightened awareness. This inability to remember sets up an almost insurmountable barrier for warriors who have to recollect all the instruction given to them if they are to go on. Only after years of struggle and discipline can warriors recollect their instruction. By then the concepts and the procedures that were taught to them have been internalized, and have thus acquired the force the new seers meant them to have.

## 2. Petty Tyrants

Don Juan did not discuss the mastery of awareness with me until months later. We were at that time in the house where the nagual's party lived.

"Let's go for a walk," don Juan said to me, placing his hand on my shoulder. "Or better yet, let's go to the town's square, where there are a lot of people, and sit down and talk."

I was surprised when he spoke to me, as I had been in the house for a couple of days by then and he had not said so much as "hello".

As don Juan and I were leaving the house, la Gorda intercepted us, and demanded that we take her along. She seemed determined not to take no for an answer. Don Juan in a very stern voice told her that he had to discuss something in private with me.

"You're going to talk about me," la Gorda said, her tone and gestures betraying both suspicion and annoyance.

"You're right," don Juan replied dryly. He moved past her without turning to look at her.

I followed him, and we walked in silence to the town's square. When we sat down I asked him what on earth we would find to discuss about la Gorda. I was still smarting from her look of menace when we left the house.

"We have nothing to discuss about la Gorda or anybody else," he said. "I told her that just to provoke her enormous self-importance. And it worked. She is furious with us. If I know her, by now she will have talked to herself long enough to have built up her confidence and her righteous indignation at having been refused and made to look like a fool. I wouldn't be surprised if she barges in on us here at the park bench."

"If we're not going to talk about la Gorda, what are we going to discuss?" I asked.

"We're going to continue the discussion we started in Oaxaca," he replied. "To understand the explanation of awareness will require your utmost effort and your willingness to shift back and forth between levels of awareness. While we are involved in our discussion, I will demand your total concentration and patience."

Half-complaining, I told him that he had made me feel very uncomfortable by refusing to talk to me for the past two days. He looked at me and arched his brows. A smile played on his lips and vanished. I realized that he was letting me know I was no better than la Gorda.

"I was provoking your self-importance," he said with a frown. "Self-importance is our greatest enemy. Think about it. What weakens us is feeling offended by the deeds and misdeeds of our fellow men. Our self-importance requires that we spend most of our lives offended by someone.

"The new seers recommended that every effort should be made to eradicate self-importance from the lives of warriors. I have followed that recommendation, and much of my endeavors with you has been geared to show you that without self-importance we are invulnerable."

As I listened, his eyes suddenly became very shiny. I was thinking to myself that he seemed to be on the verge of laughter, and there was no reason for it, when I was startled by an abrupt, painful slap on the right side of my face.

I jumped up from the bench. La Gorda was standing behind me, her hand still raised. Her face was flushed with anger.

"Now you can say what you like about me and with more justification," she shouted. "If you have anything to say, however, say it to my face!"

Her outburst appeared to have exhausted her because she sat down on the cement and began to weep. Don Juan was transfixed with inexpressible glee. I was frozen with sheer fury. La Gorda glared at me, and then turned to don Juan and meekly told him that we had no right to criticize her.

Don Juan laughed so hard he doubled over almost to the ground. He couldn't even speak. He tried two or three times to say something to me, then finally got up and walked away; his body still shaking with spasms of laughter.

I was about to run after him, still glowering at la Gorda- at that moment I found her despicable- when something extraordinary happened to me. I realized what don Juan had found so hilarious. La Gorda and I were horrendously alike. Our self-importance was monumental. My surprise and fury at being slapped were just like la Gorda's feelings of anger and suspicion. Don Juan was right. The burden of self-importance is a terrible encumbrance.

I ran after him then, elated, the tears flowing down my cheeks. I caught up with him and told him what I had realized. His eyes were shining with mischievousness and delight.

"What should I do about la Gorda?" I asked.

"Nothing," he replied. "Realizations are always personal."

He changed the subject and said that the omens were telling us to continue our discussion back at his house, either in a large room with comfortable chairs, or in the back patio which had a roofed corridor around it. He said that whenever he conducted his explanation inside the house, those two areas would be off limits to everyone else.

We went back to the house. Don Juan told everyone what la Gorda had done. The delight all the seers showed in taunting her made la Gorda's position extremely uncomfortable.

"Self-importance can't be fought with niceties," don Juan commented when I expressed my concern about la Gorda.

He then asked everyone to leave the room. We sat down and don Juan began his explanations.

He said that seers, old and new, are divided into two categories. The first one is made up of those who are willing to exercise self-restraint and can channel their activities toward pragmatic goals which would benefit other seers and man in general. The other category consists of those who don't care about self-restraint or about any pragmatic goals. It is the consensus among seers that the latter have failed to resolve the problem of self-importance.

"Self-importance is not something simple and naive," he explained. "On the one hand, it is the core of everything that is good in us; and on the other hand, the core of everything that is rotten. To get rid of the self-importance that is rotten requires a masterpiece of strategy. Seers through the ages have given the highest praise to those who have accomplished it."

I complained that the idea of eradicating self-importance, although very appealing to me at times, was really incomprehensible. I told him that I found his directives for getting rid of it so vague I could not follow them.

"I've said to you many times," he said, "that in order to follow the path of knowledge, one has to be very imaginative. You see, in the path of knowledge nothing is as clear as we'd like it to be."

My discomfort made me argue that his admonitions about self-importance reminded me of Catholic postulates. [* postulates- propositions that are accepted as true in order to provide a basis for logical reasoning] After a lifetime of being told about the evils of sin, I had become callous.

"Warriors fight self-importance as a matter of strategy, not principle," he replied. "Your mistake is to understand what I say in terms of morality."

"I see you as a highly moral man, don Juan," I insisted.

"You've noticed my impeccability, that's all," he said.

"Impeccability, as well as getting rid of self-importance, is too vague a concept to be of any value to me," I remarked.

Don Juan choked with laughter, and I challenged him to explain impeccability.

"Impeccability is nothing else but the proper use of energy," he said. "My statements have no inkling of morality. I've saved energy and that makes me impeccable. To understand this, you have to save enough energy yourself."

We were quiet for a long time. I wanted to think about what he had said. Suddenly, he started talking again.

"Warriors take strategic inventories," he said. "They list everything they do. Then they decide which of those things can be changed in order to allow themselves a respite in terms of expending their energy."

I argued that their list would have to include everything under the sun. He patiently answered that the strategic inventory he was talking about covered only behavioral patterns that were not essential to our survival and well-being.

I jumped at the opportunity to point out that survival and well-being were categories that could be interpreted in endless ways, hence, there was no way of agreeing what was or was not essential to survival and well-being.

As I kept on talking I began to lose momentum. Finally, I stopped because I realized the futility of my arguments.

Don Juan said then that in the strategic inventories of warriors, self-importance figures as the activity that consumes the greatest amount of energy, hence, their effort to eradicate it.

"One of the first concerns of warriors is to free that energy in order to face the unknown with it," don Juan went on. "The action of rechanneling that energy is impeccability."

He said that the most effective strategy was worked out by the seers of the Conquest- the unquestionable masters of stalking. It consists of six elements that interplay with one another. Five of them are called the attributes of warriorship: control, discipline, forbearance, timing, and will. They pertain to the world of the warrior who is fighting to lose self-importance. The sixth element, which is perhaps the most important of all, pertains to the outside world and is called the petty tyrant.

He looked at me as if silently asking me whether or not I had understood.

"I'm really mystified," I said. "You keep on saying that la Gorda is the petty tyrant of my life. Just what is a petty tyrant?"

"A petty tyrant is a tormentor," he replied. "Someone who either holds the power of life and death over warriors, or simply annoys them to distraction."

Don Juan had a beaming smile as he spoke to me. He said that the new seers developed their own classification of petty tyrants. Although the concept is one of their most serious and important findings, the new seers had a sense of humor about it. He assured me that there was a tinge of malicious humor in every one of their classifications because humor was the only means of counteracting the compulsion of human awareness to take inventories and to make cumbersome classifications.

The new seers, in accordance with their practice, saw fit to head their classification with the primal source of energy- the one and only ruler in the universe- and they called it simply 'the tyrant'. The rest of the despots and authoritarians were found to be, naturally, infinitely below the category of the tyrant. Compared to the source of everything, the most fearsome and tyrannical men are buffoons. Consequently, they were classified as petty tyrants, pinches tiranos.

He said that there were two subclasses of minor petty tyrants. The first subclass consisted of the petty tyrants who persecute and inflict misery but without actually causing anybody's death. They were called little petty tyrants, pinches tiranitos. The second consisted of the petty tyrants who are only exasperating and bothersome to no end. They were called small-fry petty tyrants, repinches tiranitos, or teensy-weensy petty tyrants, pinches tiranitos chiquititos.

I thought his classifications were ludicrous. I was sure that he was improvising the Spanish terms. I asked him if that was so.

"Not at all," he replied with an amused expression. "The new seers were great ones for classifications. Genaro is doubtless one of the greatest. If you'd observe him carefully, you'd realize exactly how the new seers feel about their classifications."

He laughed uproariously at my confusion when I asked him if he was pulling my leg.

"I wouldn't dream of doing that," he said, smiling. "Genaro may do that, but not I, especially when I know how you feel about classifications. It's just that the new seers were terribly irreverent."

He added that the little petty tyrants are further divided into four categories: one that torments with brutality and violence, another that does it by creating unbearable apprehension through deviousness, another which oppresses with sadness, and the last which torments by making warriors rage.

"La Gorda is in a class of her own," he added. "She is an acting, small-fry petty tyrant. She annoys you to pieces and makes you rage. She even slaps you. With all that she is teaching you detachment."

"That's not possible!" I protested.

"You haven't yet put together all the ingredients of the new seers' strategy," he said. "Once you do that, you'll know how efficient and clever is the device of using a petty tyrant. I would certainly say that the strategy not only gets rid of self-importance, it also prepares warriors for the final realization that impeccability is the only thing that counts in the path of knowledge."

He said that what the new seers had in mind was a deadly maneuver in which the petty tyrant is like a mountain peak and the attributes of warriorship are like climbers who meet at the summit.

"Usually, only four attributes are played," he went on. "The fifth, will, is always saved for an ultimate confrontation when warriors are facing the firing squad, so to speak."

"Why is it done that way?"

"Because will belongs to another sphere, the 'unknown'. The other four belong to the 'known'; which is exactly where the petty tyrants are lodged. In fact, what turns human beings into petty tyrants is precisely the obsessive manipulation of the known."

Don Juan explained that the interplay of all the five attributes of warriorship is done only by seers who are also impeccable warriors, and who have mastery over will. Such an interplay is a supreme maneuver that cannot be performed on the daily human stage.

"Four attributes are all that is needed to deal with the worst of petty tyrants," he continued. "Provided, of course, that a petty tyrant has been found. As I said, the petty tyrant is the outside element; the one we cannot control, and the element that is perhaps the most important of them all. My benefactor used to say that the warrior who stumbles on a petty tyrant is a lucky one. He meant that you're fortunate if you come upon one in your path; because if you don't, you have to go out and look for one."

He explained that one of the greatest accomplishments of the seers of the Conquest was a construct he called the three phase progression. By understanding the nature of man, they were able to reach the incontestable conclusion that if seers can hold their own in facing petty tyrants, they can certainly face the unknown with impunity; and then they can even stand the presence of the unknowable.

"The average man's reaction is to think that the order of that statement should be reversed," he went on. "A seer who can hold his own in the face of the unknown can certainly face petty tyrants. But that's not so. What destroyed the superb seers of ancient times was that assumption. We know better now. We know that nothing can temper the spirit of a warrior as much as the challenge of dealing with impossible people in positions of power. Only under those conditions can warriors acquire the sobriety and serenity to stand the pressure of the unknowable."

I vociferously [* vociferously- in an offensively loud manner] disagreed with him. I told him that in my opinion tyrants can only render their victims helpless, or make them as brutal as they themselves are. I pointed out that countless studies had been done on the effects of physical and psychological torture on such victims.

"The difference is in something you just said," he retorted. "They are victims, not warriors. Once I felt just as you do. I'll tell you what made me change, but first let's go back again to what I said about the Conquest. The seers of that time couldn't have found a better ground. The Spaniards were the petty tyrants who tested the seers' skills to the limit. After dealing with the conquerors, the seers were capable of facing anything. They were the lucky ones. At that time there were petty tyrants everywhere.

"After all those marvelous years of abundance things changed a great deal. Petty tyrants never again had that scope. It was only during those times that the petty tyrants' authority was unlimited. The perfect ingredient for the making of a superb seer is a petty tyrant with unlimited prerogatives.

"In our times, unfortunately, seers have to go to extremes to find a worthy one. Most of the time they have to be satisfied with very small fry."

"Did you find a petty tyrant yourself, don Juan?"

"I was lucky. A king-size one found me. At the time, though, I felt like you. I couldn't consider myself fortunate."

Don Juan said that his ordeal began a few weeks before he met his benefactor. He was barely twenty years old at the time. He had gotten a job at a sugar mill working as a laborer. He had always been very strong, so it was easy for him to get jobs that required muscle.

One day when he was moving some heavy sacks of sugar a woman came by. She was very well dressed, and seemed to be a woman of means. She was perhaps in her fifties, don Juan said, and very domineering. She looked at don Juan and then spoke to the foreman and left. Don Juan was then approached by the foreman who told him that, for a fee, he would recommend him for a job in the boss's house. Don Juan told the man that he had no money. The foreman smiled and said not to worry because he would have plenty on payday. He patted don Juan's back, and assured him it was a great honor to work for the boss.

Don Juan said that being a lowly ignorant Indian living hand-to-mouth, not only did he believe every word, he thought a good fairy had touched him. He promised to pay the foreman anything he wished. The foreman named a large sum which had to be paid in installments.

Immediately thereafter the foreman himself took don Juan to the house, which was quite a distance from the town, and left him there with another foreman; a huge, somber, ugly man who asked a lot of questions. He wanted to know about don Juan's family. Don Juan answered that he didn't have any. The man was so pleased that he even smiled through his rotten teeth.

He promised don Juan that they would pay him plenty, and that he would even be in a position to save money, because he didn't have to spend any, for he was going to live and eat in the house.

The way the man laughed was terrifying. Don Juan knew that he had to escape immediately.

He ran for the gate, but the man cut in front of him with a revolver in his hand. He cocked it and rammed it into don Juan's stomach.

"You're here to work yourself to the bone," he said. "And don't you forget it." He shoved don Juan around with a billy club.

Then he took him to the side of the house and, after observing that he worked his men every day from sunrise to sunset without a break, he put don Juan to work digging out two enormous tree stumps. He also told don Juan that if he ever tried to escape or went to the authorities he would shoot him dead- and that if don Juan should ever get away, he would swear in court that don Juan had tried to murder the boss.

"You'll work here until you die," he said. "Another Indian will get your job then, just as you're taking a dead Indian's place."

Don Juan said that the house looked like a fortress, with armed men with machetes everywhere. So he got busy working and tried not to think about his predicament. At the end of the day, the man came back and kicked him all the way to the kitchen, because he did not like the defiant look in don Juan's eyes. He threatened to cut the tendons of don Juan's arms if he didn't obey him.

In the kitchen an old woman brought food, but don Juan was so upset and afraid that he couldn't eat. The old woman advised him to eat as much as he could. He had to be strong, she said, because his work would never end. She warned him that the man who had held his job had died just a day earlier. He was too weak to work and had fallen from a second-story window.

Don Juan said that he worked at the boss's place for three weeks and that the man bullied him every moment of every day. He made him work under the most dangerous conditions doing the heaviest work imaginable under the constant threat of his knife, gun, or billy club. He sent don Juan daily to the stables to clean the stalls while the nervous stallions were in them. At the beginning of every day, don Juan thought it would be his last one on earth. And surviving meant only that he had to go through the same hell again the next day.

What precipitated the end was don Juan's request to have some time off. The pretext was that he needed to go to town to pay the foreman of the sugar mill the money that he owed him. The other foreman retorted that don Juan could not stop working, not even for a minute, because he was in debt up to his ears just for the privilege of working there.

Don Juan knew that he was done for. He understood the man's maneuvers. Both he and the other foreman were in cahoots to get lowly Indians from the mill, work them to death, and divide their salaries. That realization angered him so intensely that he ran through the kitchen screaming and got inside the main house. The foreman and the other workers were caught totally by surprise. He ran out the front door and almost got away, but the foreman caught up with him on the road and shot him in the chest. He left him for dead.

Don Juan said that it was not his destiny to die. His benefactor found him there and tended him until he got well.

"When I told my benefactor the whole story," don Juan said, "he could hardly contain his excitement.

"That foreman is really a prize," my benefactor said. "He is too good to be wasted. Someday you must go back to that house."

"He raved about my luck in finding a 'one in a million' petty tyrant with almost unlimited power. I thought the old man was nuts. It was years before I fully understood what he was talking about."

"That is one of the most horrible stories I have ever heard," I said. "Did you really go back to that house?"

"I certainly did, three years later. My benefactor was right. A petty tyrant like that one was one in a million and couldn't be wasted."

"How did you manage to go back?"

"My benefactor developed a strategy using the four attributes of warriorship: control, discipline, forbearance, and timing."

Don Juan said that his benefactor, in explaining to him what he had to do to profit from facing that ogre of a man, also told him what the new seers considered to be the four steps on the path of knowledge.

The first step is the decision to become apprentices. After the apprentices change their views about themselves and the world, they take the second step and become warriors, which is to say, beings capable of the utmost discipline and control over themselves. The third step, after acquiring forbearance and timing, is to become men of knowledge. When men of knowledge learn to see they have taken the fourth step and have become seers.

His benefactor stressed the fact that don Juan had been on the path of knowledge long enough to have acquired a minimum of the first two attributes: control and discipline. Don Juan emphasized that both of these attributes refer to an inner state. A warrior is self-oriented, not in a selfish way, but in the sense of a total and continuous examination of the self.

"At that time, I was barred from the other two attributes," don Juan went on. "Forbearance and timing are not quite an inner state. They are in the domain of the man of knowledge. My benefactor showed them to me through his strategy."

"Does this mean that you couldn't have faced the petty tyrant by yourself?" I asked.

"I'm sure that I could have done it myself, although I have always doubted that I would have carried it off with flair and joyfulness. My benefactor was simply enjoying the encounter by directing it. The idea of using a petty tyrant is not only for perfecting the warrior's spirit, but also for enjoyment and happiness."

"How could anyone enjoy the monster you described?"

"He was nothing in comparison to the real monsters that the new seers faced during the Conquest. By all indications those seers enjoyed themselves blue dealing with them. They proved that even the worst tyrants can bring delight, provided of course, that one is a warrior."

Don Juan explained that the mistake average men make in confronting petty tyrants is not to have a strategy to fall back on. The fatal flaw is that average men take themselves too seriously: Their actions and feelings, as well as those of the petty tyrants, are all-important.

Warriors, on the other hand, not only have a well thought out strategy, but are free from self-importance. What restrains their self-importance is that they have understood that reality is an interpretation we make. That knowledge was the definitive advantage that the new seers had over the simple-minded Spaniards.

He said that he became convinced he could defeat the foreman using only the single realization that petty tyrants take themselves with deadly seriousness while warriors do not.

Following his benefactor's strategic plan, therefore, don Juan got a job in the same sugar mill as before. Nobody remembered that he had worked there in the past: Peons came to that sugar mill and left it without leaving a trace.

His benefactor's strategy specified that don Juan had to be solicitous of whoever came to look for another victim. As it happened, the same woman came and spotted him as she had done years ago. This time he was physically even stronger than before.

The same routine took place. The strategy, however, called for refusing payment to the foreman from the outset. The man had never been turned down and was taken aback. He threatened to fire don Juan from the job. Don Juan threatened him back, saying that he would go directly to the lady's house and see her.

Don Juan knew that the woman, who was the wife of the owner of the mill, did not know what the two foremen were up to. He told the foreman that he knew where she lived because he had worked in the surrounding fields cutting sugar cane. The man began to haggle, and don Juan demanded money from him before he would accept going to the lady's house. The foreman gave in and handed him a few bills. Don Juan was perfectly aware that the foreman's acquiescence was just a ruse to get him to go to the house.

"He himself once again took me to the house," don Juan said. "It was an old hacienda owned by the people of the sugar mill: rich men who either knew what was going on and didn't care, or were too indifferent even to notice.

"As soon as we got there, I ran into the house to look for the lady. I found her and dropped to my knees and kissed her hand to thank her. The two foremen were livid.

"The foreman at the house followed the same pattern as before. But I had the proper equipment to deal with him. I had control, discipline, forbearance, and timing. It turned out as my benefactor had planned it. My control made me fulfill the man's most asinine demands. What usually exhausts us in a situation like that is the wear and tear on our self-importance. Any man who has an iota of pride is ripped apart by being made to feel worthless.

"I gladly did everything he asked of me. I was joyful and strong, and I didn't give a fig about my pride or my fear. I was there as an impeccable warrior. To tune the spirit when someone is trampling on you is called control."

Don Juan explained that his benefactor's strategy required that instead of feeling sorry for himself as he had done before, he immediately go to work mapping the man's strong points, his weaknesses, and his quirks of behavior.

He found that the foreman's strongest points were his violent nature and his daring. He had shot don Juan in broad daylight and in sight of scores of onlookers. His great weakness was that he liked his job and did not want to endanger it. Under no circumstances could he attempt to kill don Juan inside the compound in the daytime. His other weakness was that he was a family man. He had a wife and children who lived in a shack near the house.

"To gather all this information while they are beating you up is called discipline," don Juan said. "The man was a regular fiend. He had no saving grace. According to the new seers, a perfect petty tyrant has no redeeming feature."

Don Juan said that the other two attributes of warriorship, forbearance and timing, which he did not yet have, had been automatically included in his benefactor's strategy. Forbearance is to wait patiently- no rush, no anxiety- a simple, joyful holding back of what is due.

"I groveled daily," don Juan continued, "sometimes crying under the man's whip. And yet I was happy. My benefactor's strategy was what made me go from day to day without hating the man's guts. I was a warrior. I knew that I was waiting and I knew what I was waiting for. Right there is the great joy of warriorship."

He added that his benefactor's strategy called for a systematic harassment of the man by taking cover with a higher order, just as the seers of the new cycle had done during the Conquest by shielding themselves with the Catholic church. A lowly priest was sometimes more powerful than a nobleman.

Don Juan's shield was the lady who got him the job. He kneeled in front of her and called her a saint every time he saw her. He begged her to give him the medallion of her patron saint so he could pray to him for her health and well-being.

"She gave me one," don Juan went on, "and that rattled the foreman to pieces. And when I got the servants to pray at night he nearly had a heart attack. I think he decided then to kill me. He couldn't afford to let me go on.

"As a countermeasure, I organized a rosary among all the servants of the house. The lady thought I had the makings of a most pious man.

"I didn't sleep soundly after that, nor did I sleep in my bed. I climbed to the roof every night. From there I saw the man twice looking for me in the middle of the night with murder in his eyes.

"Daily he shoved me into the stallions' stalls hoping that I would be crushed to death, but I had a plank of heavy boards that I braced against one of the corners and protected myself behind it. The man never knew because he was nauseated by the horses- another of his weaknesses, the deadliest of all, as things turned out."

Don Juan said that timing is the quality that governs the release of all that is held back. Control, discipline, and forbearance are like a dam behind which everything is pooled. Timing is the gate in the dam.

The man knew only the violence with which he terrorized. If his violence was neutralized, he was rendered nearly helpless. Don Juan knew that the man would not dare to kill him in view of the house, so one day, in the presence of the other workers, but in sight of his lady as well, don Juan insulted the man. He called him a coward who was mortally afraid of the boss's wife.

His benefactor's strategy had called for being on the alert for a moment like that, and using it to turn the tables on the petty tyrant. Unexpected things always happen that way. The lowest of the slaves suddenly makes fun of the tyrant, taunts him, makes him feel ridiculous in front of significant witnesses, and then rushes away without giving the tyrant time to retaliate.

"A moment later, the man went crazy with rage, but I was already solicitously kneeling in front of the lady," he continued.

Don Juan said that when the lady went inside the house, the man and his friends called him to the back, allegedly to do some work. The man was very pale, white with anger. From the sound of his voice don Juan knew what the man was really planning to do. Don Juan pretended to acquiesce, but instead of heading for the back, he ran for the stables. He trusted that the horses would make such a racket that the owners would come out to see what was wrong. He knew that the man would not dare shoot him. That would have been too noisy, and the man's fear of endangering his job was too overpowering. Don Juan also knew that the man would not go where the horses were- that is, unless he had been pushed beyond his endurance.

"I jumped inside the stall of the wildest stallion," don Juan said, "and the petty tyrant, blinded by rage, took out his knife and jumped in after me. I went instantly behind my planks. The horse kicked him once and it was all over.

"I had spent six months in that house and in that period of time I had exercised the four attributes of warriorship. Thanks to them, I had succeeded. Not once had I felt sorry for myself or wept in impotence. I had been joyful and serene. My control and discipline were as keen as they'd ever been, and I had had a firsthand view of what forbearance and timing did for impeccable warriors. And I had not once wished the man to die.

"My benefactor explained something very interesting. Forbearance means holding back with the spirit something that the warrior knows is rightfully due. It doesn't mean that a warrior goes around plotting to do anybody mischief, or planning to settle past scores. Forbearance is something independent. As long as the warrior has control, discipline, and timing, forbearance assures giving whatever is due to whoever deserves it."

"Do petty tyrants sometimes win, and destroy the warrior facing them?" I asked.

"Of course. There was a time when warriors died like flies at the beginning of the Conquest. Their ranks were decimated. The petty tyrants could put anyone to death simply acting on a whim. Under that kind of pressure seers reached sublime states."

Don Juan said that that was the time when the surviving seers had to exert themselves to the limit to find new ways.

"The new seers used petty tyrants," don Juan said, staring at me fixedly, "not only to get rid of their self-importance, but to accomplish the very sophisticated maneuver of moving themselves out of this world. You'll understand that maneuver as we keep on discussing the mastery of awareness."

I explained to don Juan that what I had wanted to know was whether, in the present, in our times, the petty tyrants he had called small fry could ever defeat a warrior.

"All the time," he replied. "The consequences aren't as dire as those in the remote past. Today it goes without saying that warriors always have a chance to recuperate, or to retrieve and come back later. But there is another side to this problem. To be defeated by a small-fry petty tyrant is not deadly, but devastating. The degree of mortality, in a figurative sense, is almost as high. By that I mean that warriors who succumb to a small-fry petty tyrant are obliterated by their own sense of failure and unworthiness. That spells high mortality to me."

"How do you measure defeat?"

"Anyone who joins the petty tyrant is defeated. To act in anger, without control and discipline, to have no forbearance, is to be defeated."

"What happens after warriors are defeated?"

"They either regroup themselves, or they abandon the quest for knowledge and join the ranks of the petty tyrants for life."

## 3. The Eagle's Emanations

The next day, don Juan and I went for a walk along the road to the city of Oaxaca. The road was deserted at that hour. It was 2:00 p.m.

As we strolled leisurely, don Juan suddenly began to talk. He said that our discussion about the petty tyrants had been merely an introduction to the topic of awareness. I remarked that it had opened a new view for me. He asked me to explain what I meant.

I told him that it had to do with an argument we had had some years before about the Yaqui Indians. In the course of his teachings for the right side, he had tried to tell me about the advantages that the Yaquis could find in being oppressed. I had passionately argued that there were no possible advantages in the wretched conditions in which they lived. And I had told him that I could not understand how, being a Yaqui himself, he did not react against such a flagrant injustice.

He had listened attentively. Then, when I was sure he was going to defend his point, he agreed that the conditions of the Yaqui Indians were indeed wretched. But he pointed out that it was useless to single out the Yaquis when life conditions of man in general were horrendous.

"Don't just feel sorry for the poor Yaqui Indians," he had said. "Feel sorry for mankind. In the case of the Yaqui Indians, I can even say they're the lucky ones. They are oppressed, and because of that, some of them may come out triumphant in the end. But the oppressors, the petty tyrants that tread upon them, they don't have a chance in hell."

I had immediately answered him with a barrage of political slogans. I had not understood his point at all. He again tried to explain to me the concept of petty tyrants, but the whole idea bypassed me. It was only now that everything fit into place.

"Nothing has fit into place yet," he said, laughing at what I had told him. "Tomorrow, when you are in your normal state of awareness, you won't even remember what you've realized now."

I felt utterly depressed, for I knew he was right.

"What's going to happen to you is what happened to me," he continued. "My benefactor, the nagual Julian, made me realize in heightened awareness what you have realized yourself about petty tyrants. And I ended up, in my daily life, changing my opinions without knowing why.

"I had always been oppressed, so I had real venom toward my oppressors, imagine my surprise when I found myself seeking the company of petty tyrants. I thought I had lost my mind."

We came to a place on the side of the road where some large boulders were half buried by an old landslide. Don Juan headed for them and sat down on a flat rock. He signaled me to sit down, facing him. And then without further preliminaries, he started his explanation of the mastery of awareness.

He said that there were a series of truths that seers, old and new, had discovered about awareness, and that such truths had been arranged in a specific sequence for purposes of comprehension.

He explained that the mastery of awareness consisted in internalizing the total sequence of such truths. The first truth, he said, was that our familiarity with the world we perceive compels us to believe that we are surrounded by objects, existing by themselves and as themselves, just as we perceive them, whereas, in fact, there is no world of objects, but a universe of the Eagle's emanations.

He told me then that before he could explain the Eagle's emanations, he had to talk about the known, the unknown, and the unknowable. Most of the truths about awareness were discovered by the old seers, he said. But the order in which they were arranged had been worked out by the new seers. And without that order those truths were nearly incomprehensible.

He said that 'not to seek order' was one of the great mistakes that the ancient seers made. A deadly consequence of that mistake was their assumption that the unknown and the unknowable are the same thing. It was up to the new seers to correct that error. They set up boundaries and defined the unknown as something that is veiled from man, shrouded perhaps by a terrifying context, but which, nonetheless, is within man's reach. The unknown becomes the known at a given time. The unknowable, on the other hand, is the indescribable, the unthinkable, and the unrealizable. It is something that will never be known to us, and yet it is there; dazzling and at the same time horrifying in it's vastness.

"How can seers make the distinction between the two?" I asked.

"There is a simple rule of thumb," he said. "In the face of the unknown, man is adventurous. It is a quality of the unknown to give us a sense of hope and happiness. Man feels robust, exhilarated. Even the apprehension that it arouses is very fulfilling. The new seers saw that man is at his best in the face of the unknown."

He said that whenever what is taken to be the unknown turns out to be the unknowable the results are disastrous. Seers feel drained, confused. A terrible oppression takes possession of them. Their bodies lose tone, their reasoning and sobriety wander away aimlessly. For the unknowable has no energizing effects whatsoever. It is not within human reach; therefore, it should not be intruded upon foolishly or even prudently. The new seers realized that they had to be prepared to pay exorbitant prices for the faintest contact with it.

Don Juan explained that the new seers had had formidable barriers of tradition to overcome. At the time when the new cycle began, none of them knew for certain which procedures of their immense tradition were the right ones and which were not. Obviously, something had gone wrong with the ancient seers, but the new seers did not know what. They began by assuming that everything their predecessors had done was erroneous. Those ancient seers had been the masters of conjecture. They had, for one thing, assumed that their proficiency in seeing was a safeguard. They thought that they were untouchable- that is until the invaders smashed them, and put most of them to horrendous deaths. The ancient seers had no protection whatsoever despite their total certainty that they were invulnerable.

The new seers did not waste their time in speculations about what went wrong. Instead, they began to map the unknown in order to separate it from the unknowable.

"How did they map the unknown, don Juan?" I asked.

"Through the controlled use of seeing," he replied.

I said that what I had meant to ask was, what was entailed in mapping the unknown?

He answered that mapping the unknown means making it available to our perception. By steadily practicing seeing, the new seers found that the unknown and the known are really on the same footing because both are within the reach of human perception. Seers, in fact, can leave the known at a given moment and enter into the unknown.

Whatever is beyond our capacity to perceive is the unknowable. And the distinction between it and the knowable is crucial. Confusing the two would put seers in a most precarious position whenever they are confronted with the unknowable.

"When this happened to the ancient seers," don Juan went on, "they thought their procedures had gone haywire. It never occurred to them that most of what's out there is beyond our comprehension. It was a terrifying error of judgment on their part for which they paid dearly."

"What happened after the distinction between the unknown and the unknowable was realized?" I asked.

"The new cycle began," he replied. "That distinction is the frontier between the old and the new. Everything that the new seers have done stems from understanding that distinction."

Don Juan said that seeing was the crucial element in both the destruction of the ancient seers' world and in the reconstruction of the new view. It was through seeing that the new seers discovered certain undeniable facts which they used to arrive at certain conclusions, revolutionary to them, about the nature of man and the world. These conclusions, which made the new cycle possible, were the truths about awareness he was explaining to me.

Don Juan asked me to accompany him to the center of town for a stroll around the square. On our way, we began to talk about machines and delicate instruments. He said that instruments are extensions of our senses, and I maintained that there are instruments that are not in that category because they perform functions that we are not physiologically capable of performing.

"Our senses are capable of everything," he asserted.

"I can tell you offhand," I said, "that there are instruments that can detect radio waves that come from outer space. Our senses cannot detect radio waves."

"I have a different idea," he said. "I think our senses can detect everything we are surrounded by."

"What about the case of ultrasonic sounds?" I insisted. "We don't have the organic equipment to hear them."

"It is the seers' conviction that we've tapped a very small portion of ourselves," he replied.

He immersed himself in thought for a while as if he were trying to decide what to say next. Then he smiled.

"The first truth about awareness, as I have already told you," he began, "is that the world out there is not really as we think it is. We think it is a world of objects and it's not."

He paused as if to measure the effect of his words. I told him that I agreed with his premise because everything could be reduced to being a field of energy. He said that I was merely intuiting a truth, and that to reason it out was not to verify it. He said he was not interested in my agreement or disagreement, but rather in my attempt to comprehend what was involved in that truth.

"You cannot witness fields of energy," he went on. "Not as an average man, that is. Now, if you were able to see them, you would be a seer, in which case you would be explaining the truths about awareness. Do you understand what I mean?"

He went on to say that conclusions arrived at through reasoning had very little or no influence in altering the course of our lives. Hence, the countless examples of people who have the clearest convictions, and yet act diametrically against them time and time again; and they have, as the only explanation for their behavior, the idea that to err is human.

"The first truth is that the world is as it looks and yet it isn't," he went on. "It's not as solid and real as our perception has been led to believe.

"But it isn't a mirage either. The world is not an illusion, as it has been said to be. It's real on the one hand, and unreal on the other. Pay close attention to this, for it must be understood, not just accepted. We perceive. This is a hard fact. But what we perceive is not a fact of the same kind, because we learn what to perceive.

"Something out there is affecting our senses. This is the part that is real. The unreal part is what our senses tell us is there. Take a mountain, for instance. Our senses tell us that it is an object. It has size, color, form. We even have categories of mountains, and they are downright accurate. Nothing wrong with that. The flaw is simply that it has never occurred to us that our senses play only a superficial role. Our senses perceive the way they do because a specific feature of our awareness forces them to do so."

I began to agree with him again, but not because I wanted to, for I had not quite understood his point. Rather, I was reacting to a threatening situation. He made me stop.

"I've used the term 'the world'," don Juan went on, "to mean everything that surrounds us. I have a better term, of course, but it would be quite incomprehensible to you. Seers say that we think there is a world of objects out there only because of our awareness. But what's really out there are the Eagle's emanations, fluid, forever in motion, and yet unchanged; eternal."

He stopped me with a gesture of his hand just as I was about to ask him what the Eagle's emanations were. He explained that one of the most dramatic legacies the old seers had left us was their discovery that the reason for the existence of all sentient beings is to enhance awareness. Don Juan called it a colossal discovery.

In a half-serious tone he asked me if I knew of a better answer to the question that has always haunted man: the reason for our existence. I immediately took a defensive position and began to argue about the meaninglessness of the question because it cannot be logically answered. I told him that in order to discuss that subject we would have to talk about religious beliefs and turn it all into a matter of faith.

"The old seers were not just talking about faith," he said. "Although they were not as practical as the new seers, they were practical enough to know what they were seeing.

"What I was trying to point out to you with that question, which has rattled you so badly, is that our rationality alone cannot come up with an answer about the reason for our existence. Every time it tries, the answer turns into a matter of beliefs. The old seers took another road, and they did find an answer which doesn't involve faith alone."

He said that the old seers, risking untold dangers, actually saw the indescribable force which is the source of all sentient beings. They called it the Eagle because in the few glimpses that they could sustain, they saw it as something that resembled a black-and-white eagle of infinite size.

They saw that it is the Eagle who bestows awareness. The Eagle creates sentient beings so that they will live and enrich the awareness it gives them with life. They also saw that it is the Eagle who devours that same enriched awareness after making sentient beings relinquish it at the moment of death.

"For the old seers," don Juan went on, "to say that the reason for existence is to enhance awareness is not a matter of faith or deduction. They saw it.

"They saw that the awareness of sentient beings flies away at the moment of death and floats like a luminous cotton puff right into the Eagle's beak to be consumed. For the old seers that was the evidence that sentient beings live only to enrich the awareness that is the Eagle's food."

Don Juan's elucidation was interrupted because he had to leave on a short business trip. Nestor drove him to Oaxaca. As I saw them off, I remembered that at the beginning of my association with don Juan, every time he mentioned a business trip I thought he was employing a euphemism for something else.

I eventually realized that he meant what he said. Whenever such a trip was about to take place, he would put on one of his many immaculately tailored three-piece suits and would look like anything but the old Indian I knew. I had commented to him about the sophistication of his metamorphosis.

"A nagual is someone flexible enough to be anything," he had said. "To be a nagual, among other things, means to have no points to defend. Remember this- we'll come back to it over and over."

We had come back to it over and over, in every possible way. He did indeed seem to have no points to defend, but during his absence in Oaxaca, I was given to just a shadow of doubt. Suddenly I realized that a nagual did have one point to defend. The 'description of the Eagle', and 'what the Eagle does' required, in my opinion, a passionate defense.

I tried to pose that question to some of don Juan's companions, but they eluded my probings. They told me that I was in quarantine from that kind of discussion until don Juan had finished his explanation.

The moment he returned, we sat down to talk and I asked him about it.

"Those truths are not something to defend passionately," he replied. "If you think that I'm trying to defend them, you are mistaken. Those truths were put together for the delight and enlightenment of warriors, not to engage any proprietary sentiments. When I told you that a nagual has no points to defend, I meant, among other things, that a nagual has no obsessions."

I told him that I was not following his teachings, for I had become obsessed with his description of the Eagle and what it does. I remarked over and over about the awesomeness of such an idea.

"It is not just an idea," he said. "It is a fact. And a darn scary one if you ask me. The new seers were not simply playing with ideas."

"But what kind of a force would the Eagle be?"

"I wouldn't know how to answer that. The Eagle is as real for the seers as gravity and time are for you, and just as abstract and incomprehensible."

"Wait a minute, don Juan. Those are abstract concepts, but they do refer to real phenomena that can be corroborated. There are whole disciplines dedicated to that."

"The Eagle and it's emanations are equally corroboratable," don Juan retorted. "And the discipline of the new seers is dedicated to doing just that."

I asked him to explain what the Eagle's emanations are.

He said that the Eagle's emanations are an immutable thing-in-itself, which engulfs everything that exists; the knowable and the unknowable.

"There is no way to describe in words what the Eagle's emanations really are," don Juan continued. "A seer must witness them."

"Have you witnessed them yourself, don Juan?"

"Of course I have, and yet I can't tell you what they are. They are a presence; almost a mass of sorts; a pressure that creates a dazzling sensation. One can catch only a glimpse of them, as one can catch only a glimpse of the Eagle itself."

"Would you say, don Juan, that the Eagle is the source of the emanations?"

"It goes without saying that the Eagle is the source of it's emanations."

"I meant to ask if that is so visually."

"There is nothing visual about the Eagle. The entire body of a seer senses the Eagle. There is something in all of us that can make us witness with our entire body. Seers explain the act of seeing the Eagle in very simple terms: because man is composed of the Eagle's emanations, man need only revert back to his components.

"The problem arises with man's awareness. It is his awareness that becomes entangled and confused. At the crucial moment when it should be a simple case of the emanations acknowledging themselves, man's awareness is compelled to interpret. The result is a vision of the Eagle and the Eagle's emanations. But there is no Eagle and no Eagle's emanations. What is out there is something that no living creature can grasp."

I asked him if the source of the emanations was called the Eagle because eagles in general have important attributes.

"This is simply the case of something unknowable vaguely resembling something known," he replied. "On account of that, there have certainly been attempts to imbue eagles with attributes they don't have. But that always happens when impressionable people learn to perform acts that require great sobriety. Seers come in all sizes and shapes."

"Do you mean to say that there are different kinds of seers?"

"No. I mean that there are scores of imbeciles who become seers. Seers are human beings full of foibles, or rather, human beings full of foibles are capable of becoming seers. Just as in the case of miserable people who become superb scientists.

"The characteristic of miserable seers is that they are willing to forget the wonder of the world. They become overwhelmed by the fact that they see and believe that it's their genius that counts. A seer must be a paragon in order to override the nearly invincible laxness of our human condition. More important than seeing itself is what seers do with what they see."

"What do you mean by that, don Juan?"

"Look at what some seers have done to us. We are stuck with their vision of an Eagle that rules us and devours us at the moment of our death."

He said that there is a definite laxness in that version, and that personally he did not appreciate the idea of something devouring us. For him, it would be more accurate to say that there is a force that attracts our consciousness, much as a magnet attracts iron shavings. At the moment of dying, all of our being disintegrates under the attraction of that immense force.

That such an event was interpreted as the Eagle devouring us he found grotesque, because it turns an indescribable act into something as mundane as eating.

"I'm a very average man," I said. "The description of an Eagle that devours us had a great impact on me."

"The real impact can't be measured until the moment when you see it yourself," he said. "But you must bear in mind that our flaws remain with us even after we become seers. So when you see that force, you may very well agree with the lax seers who called it the Eagle, as I did myself. On the other hand, you may not. You may resist the temptation to ascribe human attributes to what is incomprehensible, and actually improvise a new name for it; a more accurate one."

"Seers who see the Eagle's emanations often call them commands," don Juan said. "I wouldn't mind calling them commands myself if I hadn't got used to calling them emanations. It was a reaction to my benefactor's preference; for him they were commands. I thought that term was more in keeping with his forceful personality than with mine. I wanted something impersonal. 'Commands' sounds too human to me, but that's what they really are, commands."

Don Juan said that to see the Eagle's emanations is to court disaster. The new seers soon discovered the tremendous difficulties involved, and only after great tribulations in trying to map the unknown and separate it from the unknowable did they realize that everything is made out of the Eagle's emanations. Only a small portion of those emanations is within reach of human awareness, and that small portion is still further reduced, to a minute fraction, by the constraints of our daily lives.

That minute fraction of the Eagle's emanations is the known. The small portion within possible reach of human awareness is the unknown. The incalculable rest is the unknowable.

He went on to say that the new seers, being pragmatically oriented, became immediately cognizant of the compelling power of the emanations. They realized that all living creatures are forced to employ the Eagle's emanations without ever knowing what they are. They also realized that organisms are constructed to grasp a certain range of those emanations and that every species has a definite range. The emanations exert great pressure on organisms, and through that pressure organisms construct their perceivable world.

"In our case, as human beings," don Juan said, "we employ those emanations and interpret them as reality. But what man senses is such a small portion of the Eagle's emanations that it's ridiculous to put much stock in our perceptions, and yet it isn't possible for us to disregard our perceptions. The new seers found this out the hard way after courting tremendous dangers."

Don Juan was sitting where he usually sat in the large room. Ordinarily there was no furniture in that room- people sat on mats on the floor- but Carol, the nagual woman, had managed to furnish it with very comfortable armchairs for the sessions when she and I took turns reading to don Juan from the works of Spanish-speaking poets.

"I want you to be very aware of what we are doing," he said as soon as I sat down. "We are discussing the mastery of awareness. The truths we're discussing are the principles of that mastery."

He added that in his teachings for the right side, he had demonstrated those principles to my normal awareness with the help of one of his seer companions, Genaro, and that Genaro had played around with my awareness with all the humor and irreverence for which the new seers were known.

"Genaro is the one who should be here telling you about the Eagle," he said, "except that his versions are too irreverent. He thinks that the seers who called that force the Eagle were either very stupid or were making a grand joke, because eagles not only lay eggs, they also lay turds."

Don Juan laughed and said that he found Genaro's comments so appropriate that he couldn't resist laughter. He added that if the new seers had been the ones to describe the Eagle the description would certainly have been made half in fun.

I told don Juan that on one level I took the Eagle as a poetic image, and as such it delighted me; but on another level I took it literally, and that terrified me.

"One of the greatest forces in the lives of warriors is fear," he said. "It spurs them to learn."

He reminded me that the description of the Eagle came from the ancient seers. The new seers were through with description, comparison, and conjecture of any sort. They wanted to get directly to the source of things and consequently risked unlimited danger to get to it.

They did see the Eagle's emanations, but they never tampered with the description of the Eagle. They felt that it took too much energy to see the Eagle, and that the ancient seers had already paid heavily for their scant glimpse of the unknowable.

"How did the old seers come around to describing the Eagle?" I asked.

"They needed a minimal set of guidelines about the unknowable for purposes of instruction," he replied. "They resolved it with a sketchy description of the force that rules all there is, but not of it's emanations, because the emanations cannot be rendered at all in a language of comparisons. Individual seers may feel the urge to make comments about certain emanations, but that will remain personal. In other words, there is no pat version of the emanations, as there is of the Eagle."

"The new seers seem to have been very abstract," I commented. "They sound like modern-day philosophers."

"No. The new seers were terribly practical men," he replied. "They weren't involved in concocting rational theories."

He said that the ancient seers were the ones who were the abstract thinkers. They built monumental edifices of abstractions proper to them and their time. And just like the modern-day philosophers, they were not at all in control of their concatenations.

The new seers, on the other hand, imbued with practicality, were able to see a flux of emanations and to see how man and other living beings utilize them to construct their perceivable world.

"How are those emanations utilized by man, don Juan?"

"It's so simple it sounds idiotic. For a seer, men are luminous beings. Our luminosity is made up of that portion of the Eagle's emanations which is encased in our egglike cocoon. That particular portion- that handful of emanations that is encased, is what makes us men. To perceive is to match the emanations contained inside our cocoon with those that are outside.

"Seers can see, for instance, the emanations inside any living creature and can tell which of the outside emanations would match them."

"Are the emanations like beams of light?" I asked.

"No. Not at all. That would be too simple. They are something indescribable. And yet, my personal comment would be to say that they are like filaments of light.

"What's incomprehensible to normal awareness is that the filaments are aware. I can't tell you what that means, because I don't know what I am saying. All I can tell you with my personal comments is that the filaments are aware of themselves, alive and vibrating; that there are so many of them that numbers have no meaning and that each of them is an eternity in itself."

## 4. The Glow of Awareness

Don Juan, don Genaro, and I had just returned from gathering plants in the surrounding mountains. We were at don Genaro's house, sitting around the table, when don Juan made me change levels of awareness. Don Genaro had been staring at me and began to chuckle. He remarked how odd he thought it was that I had two completely different standards for dealing with the two sides of awareness.

My relation with him was the most obvious example. On my right side, he was the respected and feared sorcerer don Genaro, a man whose incomprehensible acts delighted me and at the same time filled me with mortal terror. On my left side, he was plain Genaro, or Genarito, with no don attached to his name; a charming and kind seer whose acts were thoroughly comprehensible and coherent with what I myself did or tried to do.

I agreed with him and added that on my left side, the man whose mere presence made me shake like a leaf was Silvio Manuel, the most mysterious of don Juan's companions. I also said that don Juan, being a true nagual, transcended arbitrary standards and was respected and admired by me in both states.

"But is he feared?" Genaro asked in a quivering voice.

"Very feared," don Juan interjected in a falsetto voice.

We all laughed, but don Juan and Genaro laughed with such abandon that I immediately suspected they knew something they were holding back.

Don Juan was reading me like a book. He explained that in the intermediate stage, before one enters fully into the left-side awareness, one is capable of tremendous concentration; but one is also susceptible to every conceivable influence. I was being influenced by suspicion.

"La Gorda is always in this stage," he said. "She learns beautifully, but she's a royal pain in the neck. She can't help being driven by anything that comes her way, including, of corse, very good things like keen concentration."

Don Juan explained that the new seers discovered that the transition period is the time when the deepest learning takes place, and that it is also the time when warriors must be supervised; and explanations must be given to them so they can evaluate them properly. If no explanations are given to them before they enter into the left side, they will be great sorcerers but poor seers, as the ancient Toltecs were.

Female warriors in particular fall prey to the lure of the left side, he said. They are so nimble that they can go into the left side with no effort; often too soon for their own good.

After a long silence, Genaro fell asleep. Don Juan began to speak. He said that the new seers had had to invent a number of terms in order to explain the second truth about awareness. His benefactor had changed some of those terms to suit himself, and he himself had done the same, guided by the seers' belief that it does not make any difference what terms are used as long as the truths have been verified by seeing.

I was curious to know what terms he had changed, but I didn't know quite how to word my question. He took it that I was doubting his right or his ability to change them and explained that if the terms we propose originate in our reason they can only communicate the mundane agreement of everyday life. When seers propose a term, on the other hand, it is never a figure of speech because it stems from seeing and embraces everything that seers can attain.

I asked him why he had changed the terms.

"It's a nagual's duty always to look for better ways to explain," he replied. "Time changes everything, and every new nagual has to incorporate new words and new ideas to describe his seeing."

"Do you mean that a nagual takes ideas from the world of every day life?" I asked.

"No. I mean that a nagual talks about seeing in ever new ways," he said. "For instance, as the new nagual, you'd have to say that awareness gives rise to perception. You'd be saying the same thing my benefactor said, but in a different way."

"What do the new seers say perception is, don Juan?"

"They say that perception is a condition of alignment. The emanations inside the cocoon become aligned with those outside that fit them. Alignment is what allows awareness to be cultivated by every living creature. Seers make these statements because they see living creatures as they really are: luminous beings that look like bubbles of whitish light."

I asked him how the emanations inside the cocoon fit those outside so as to accomplish perception.

"The emanations inside and the emanations outside," he said, "are the same filaments of light. Sentient [* sentient- consciously perceiving] beings are minute bubbles made out of those filaments; microscopic points of light, attached to the infinite emanations."

He went on to explain that the luminosity of living beings is made by the particular portion of the Eagle's emanations they happen to have inside their luminous cocoons. When seers see perception, they witness that the luminosity of the Eagle's emanations outside those creatures' cocoons brightens the luminosity of the emanations inside their cocoons. The outside luminosity attracts the inside one. It traps it, so to speak, and fixes it. That fixation is the awareness of every specific being.

Seers can also see how the emanations outside the cocoon exert a particular pressure on the portion of emanations inside. This pressure determines the degree of awareness that every living being has.

I asked him to clarify how the Eagle's emanations outside the cocoon exert pressure on those inside.

"The Eagle's emanations are more than filaments of light," he replied. "Each one of them is a source of boundless energy. Think of it this way: Since some of the emanations outside the cocoon are the same as the emanations inside, their energies are like a continuous pressure. But the cocoon isolates the emanations that are inside it's web and thereby directs the pressure.

"I've mentioned to you that the old seers were masters of the art of handling awareness," he went on. "What I can add now is that they were the masters of that art because they learned to manipulate the structure of man's cocoon. I've said to you that they unraveled the mystery of being aware. By that I meant that they saw and realized that awareness is a glow in the cocoon of living beings. They rightly called it the glow of awareness."

He explained that the old seers saw that man's awareness is a glow of amber luminosity more intense than the rest of the cocoon. That glow is on a narrow, vertical band on the extreme right side of the cocoon, running along it's entire length. The mastery of the old seers was to move that glow, to make it spread from it's original setting on the surface of the cocoon inward across it's width.

He stopped talking and looked at Genaro, who was still sound asleep.

"Genaro doesn't give a fig about explanations," he said. "He's a doer. My benefactor pushed him constantly to face insoluble problems. So he entered into the left side proper and never had a chance to ponder and wonder."

"Is it better to be that way, don Juan?"

"It depends. For him, it's perfect. For you and for me, it wouldn't be satisfactory because in one way or another we are called upon to explain. Genaro or my benefactor are more like the old than the new seers. They can control and do what they want with the glow of awareness."

He stood up from the mat where we were sitting and stretched his arms and legs. I pressed him to continue talking. He smiled and said that I needed to rest, that my concentration was waning.

There was a knock at the door. I woke up. It was dark. For a moment I could not remember where I was. There was something in me that was far away, as if part of me were still asleep, yet I was fully awake. Enough moonlight came through the open window so that I could see.

I saw don Genaro get up and go to the door. I realized then that I was at his house. Don Juan was sound asleep on a mat on the floor. I had the distinct impression that the three of us had fallen asleep after returning dead tired from a trip to the mountains.

Don Genaro lit his kerosene lantern. I followed him into the kitchen. Someone had brought him a pot of hot stew and a stack of tortillas.

"Who brought you food?" I asked him. "Do you have a woman around here that cooks for you?"

Don Juan had come into the kitchen. Both of them looked at me, smiling. For some reason their smiles were terrifying to me. I was about to scream in terror, in fact, when don Juan hit me on the back and made me shift into a state of heightened awareness. I realized then that perhaps during my sleep, or as I woke up, I had drifted back to everyday awareness.

The sensation I experienced then, once I was back in heightened awareness, was a mixture of relief and anger and the most acute sadness. I was relieved that I was myself again- for I had come to regard those incomprehensible states as being my true self. There was one simple reason for that. In those states I felt complete. Nothing was missing from me. The anger and the sadness were a reaction to impotence. I was more aware than ever of the limitations of my being.

I asked don Juan to explain to me how it was possible for me to do what I was doing. In states of heightened awareness I could look back and remember everything about myself. I could give an account of everything I had done in either state. I could even remember my incapacity to recollect.

But once I had returned to my normal, everyday level of awareness I could not recall anything I had done in heightened awareness, even if my life depended on it.

"Hold it, hold it there," he said. "You haven't remembered anything yet. Heightened awareness is only an intermediate state. There is infinitely more beyond that, and you have been there many, many times. Right now you can't remember, even if your life depends on it."

He was right. I had no idea what he was talking about. I pleaded for an explanation.

"The explanation is coming," he said. "It's a slow process, but we'll get to it. It is slow because I am just like you. I like to understand. I am the opposite of my benefactor who was not given to explaining. For him there was only action. He used to put us squarely against incomprehensible problems and let us resolve them for ourselves. Some of us never did resolve anything, and we ended up very much in the same boat with the old seers: all action and no real knowledge."

"Are those memories trapped in my mind?" I asked.

"No. That would make it too simple," he replied. "The actions of seers are more complex than dividing a man into mind and body. You have forgotten what you've done, or what you've witnessed, because when you were performing what you've forgotten you were seeing."

I asked don Juan to reinterpret what he had just said.

Patiently, he explained that everything I had forgotten had taken place in states in which my everyday awareness had been enhanced and intensified; a condition that meant that other areas of my total being were used.

"Whatever you've forgotten is trapped in those areas of your total being," he said. "To be using those other areas is to see."

"I'm more confused than ever, don Juan," I said.

"I don't blame you," he said. "Seeing is to lay bare the core of everything; to witness the unknown and to glimpse into the unknowable. As such, it doesn't bring one solace. Seers ordinarily go to pieces on finding out that existence is incomprehensibly complex, and that our normal awareness maligns it with it's limitations."

He reiterated that my concentration had to be total; that to understand was of crucial importance; that the new seers placed the highest value on deep, unemotional realizations.

"For instance, the other day," he went on, "when you understood about la Gorda's and your self-importance, you didn't understand anything really. You had an emotional outburst. That was all. I say this because the next day you were back on your high horse of self-importance as if you never had realized anything.

"The same thing happened to the old seers. They were given to emotional reactions. But when the time came for them to understand what they had seen, they couldn't do it. To understand one needs sobriety, not emotionality. Beware of those who weep with realization, for they have realized nothing.

"There are untold dangers in the path of knowledge for those without sober understanding," he continued. "I am outlining the order in which the new seers arranged the truths about awareness so it will serve you as a map; a map that you have to corroborate with your seeing, but not with your eyes."

There was a long pause. He stared at me. He was definitely waiting for me to ask him a question.

"Everybody falls prey to the mistake that seeing is done with the eyes," he continued. "But don't be surprised that after so many years you haven't realized yet that seeing is not a matter of the eyes. It's quite normal to make that mistake."

"What is seeing, then?" I asked.

He replied that seeing is alignment. And I reminded him that he had said that perception is alignment. He explained then that the alignment of emanations used routinely is the perception of the day-to-day world, but the alignment of emanations that are never used ordinarily is seeing. When such an alignment occurs one sees. Seeing, therefore, being produced by alignment out of the ordinary, cannot be something one could merely look at. He said that in spite of the fact that I had seen countless times, it had not occurred to me to disregard my eyes. I had succumbed to the way seeing is labeled and described.

"When seers see, something explains everything as the new alignment takes place," he continued. "It's a voice that tells them in their ear what's what. If that voice is not present, what the seer is engaged in isn't seeing."

After a moment's pause, he continued explaining the voice of seeing. He said that it was equally fallacious to say that seeing was hearing, because it was infinitely more than that, but that seers had opted for using sound as a gauge of a new alignment.

He called the voice of seeing a most mysterious inexplicable thing.

"My personal conclusion is that the voice of seeing belongs only to man," he said. "The voice may happen because talking is something that no other being besides man talks.

The old seers believed it was the voice of an overpowering entity intimately related to mankind; a protector of man. The new seers found out that that entity, which they called the mold of man, doesn't have a voice. The voice of seeing for the new seers is something quite incomprehensible. They say it's the glow of awareness playing on the Eagle's emanations as a harpist plays on a harp."

He refused to explain it any further, arguing that later on, as he proceeded with his explanation, everything would become clear to me.

My concentration had been so total while don Juan spoke that I actually did not remember sitting down at the table to eat. When don Juan stopped talking, I noticed that his plate of stew was nearly finished.

Genaro was staring at me with a beaming smile. My plate was in front of me on the table, and it too was empty. There was only a tiny residue of stew left in it as if I had just finished eating. I did not remember eating it at all, but neither did I remember walking to the table or sitting down.

"Did you like the stew?" Genaro asked me and looked away.

I said I did, because I did not want to admit that I was having problems recollecting.

"It had too much chile for my taste," Genaro said. "You never eat hot food yourself, so I'm sort of worried about what it will do to you. You shouldn't have eaten two servings. I suppose you're a little more piggish when you're in heightened awareness, eh?"

I admitted that he was probably right. He handed me a large pitcher of water to quench my thirst and soothe my throat. When I eagerly drank all of it, both of them broke into howling laughter.

Suddenly, I realized what was going on. My realization was physical. It was a flash of yellowish light that hit me as if a match had been struck right between my eyes. I knew then that Genaro was joking. I had not eaten. I had been so absorbed in don Juan's explanation that I had forgotten about everything else. The plate in front of me was Genaro's.

After dinner don Juan went on with his explanation about the glow of awareness. Genaro sat by me, listening as if he had never heard the explanation before.

Don Juan said that the pressure that the emanations outside the cocoon, which are called emanations at large, exert on the emanations inside the cocoon is the same in all sentient beings. Yet the results of that pressure are vastly different among them because their cocoons react to that pressure in every conceivable way. There are, however, degrees of uniformity within certain boundaries.

"Now," he went on, "when seers see that the pressure of the emanations at large bears down on the emanations inside which are always in motion, and makes them stop moving, they know that the luminous being at that moment is fixated by awareness.

"To say that the emanations at large bear down on those inside the cocoon and make them stop moving means that seers see something indescribable, the meaning of which they know without a shadow of doubt. It means that the voice of seeing has told them that the emanations inside the cocoon are completely at rest and match some of those which are outside."

He said that seers maintain, naturally, that awareness always comes from outside ourselves, that the real mystery is not inside us. Since by nature the emanations at large are made to fixate what is inside the cocoon, the trick of awareness is to let the fixating emanations merge with what is inside us. Seers believe that if we let that happen we become what we really are-fluid, forever in motion, eternal.

There was a long pause. Don Juan's eyes had an intense shine. They seemed to be looking at me from a great depth. I had the feeling that each of his eyes was an independent point of brilliance. For an instant he appeared to be struggling against an invisible force; a fire from within that intended to consume him. It passed and he went on talking.

"The degree of awareness of every individual sentient being," he continued, "depends on the degree to which it is capable of letting the pressure of the emanations at large carry it."

After a long interruption, don Juan continued explaining. He said that seers saw that from the moment of conception awareness is enhanced; enriched by the process of being alive. He said that seers saw, for instance, that the awareness of an individual insect or that of an individual man grows from the moment of conception in astoundingly different ways, but with equal consistency.

"Is it from the moment of conception or from the moment of birth that awareness develops?" I asked.

"Awareness develops from the moment of conception," he replied. "I have always told you that sexual energy is something of ultimate importance and that it has to be controlled and used with great care. But you have always resented what I said, because you thought I was speaking of control in terms of morality. I always meant it in terms of saving and rechanneling energy."

Don Juan looked at Genaro. Genaro nodded his head in approval.

"Genaro is going to tell you what our benefactor, the nagual Julian, used to say about saving and rechanneling sexual energy," don Juan said to me.

"The nagual Julian used to say that to have sex is a matter of energy," Genaro began. "For instance, he never had any problems having sex because he had bushels of energy. But he took one look at me and prescribed right away that my peter was just for peeing. He told me that I didn't have enough energy to have sex. He said that my parents were too bored and too tired when they made me. He said that I was the result of very boring sex, cojida aburrida. I was born like that, bored and tired. The nagual Julian recommended that people like me should never have sex. This way we can store the little energy we have.

"He said the same thing to Silvio Manuel and to Emilito. He saw that the others had enough energy. They were not the result of bored sex. He told them that they could do anything they wanted with their sexual energy, but he recommended that they control themselves; and understand the Eagle's command that sex is for bestowing the glow of awareness. We all said we had understood.

"One day, without any warning at all, he opened the curtain of the other world with the help of his own benefactor, the nagual Elias, and pushed all of us inside with no hesitation whatsoever. All of us, except Silvio Manuel, nearly died in there. We had no energy to withstand the impact of the other world. None of us, except Silvio Manuel, had followed the nagual's recommendation."

"What is the curtain of the other world?" I asked don Juan.

"What Genaro said. It is a curtain," don Juan replied. "But you're getting off the subject. You always do.

"We're talking about the Eagle's command about sex. It is the Eagle's command that sexual energy be used for creating life. Through sexual energy, the eagle bestows awareness. So when sentient beings are engaged in sexual intercourse, the emanations inside their cocoons do their best to bestow awareness to the new sentient being they are creating."

Don Juan said that during the sexual act, the emanations encased inside the cocoon of both partners undergo a profound agitation. The culminating point is a merging; a fusing of two pieces of the glow of awareness, one from each partner, that separate from their cocoons.

"Sexual intercourse is always a bestowal of awareness even though the bestowal may not be consolidated," don Juan went on. "The emanations inside the cocoon of human beings don't know of intercourse for fun."

Genaro leaned over toward me from his chair across the table and talked to me in a low voice, shaking his head for emphasis.

"The nagual is telling you the truth," he said and winked at me. "Those emanations really don't know."

Don Juan fought not to laugh and added that the fallacy of man is to act with total disregard for the mystery of existence, and to believe that such a sublime act of bestowing life and awareness is merely a physical drive that one can twist at will.

Genaro made obscene sexual gestures, twisting his pelvis around, on and on. Don Juan nodded and said that that was exactly what he meant. Genaro thanked him for acknowledging his one and only contribution to the explanation of awareness.

Both of them laughed like idiots, saying that if I had known how serious their benefactor was about the explanation of awareness, I would be laughing with them.

I earnestly asked don Juan what all this meant for an average man in the day-to-day world.

"You mean what Genaro is doing?" he asked me in mock seriousness.

Their glee was always contagious. It took a long time for them to calm down. Their level of energy was so high, that next to them I seemed old and decrepit.

"I really don't know," don Juan finally answered me. "All I know is what it means to warriors. They know that the only real energy we possess is a life-bestowing sexual energy. This knowledge makes them permanently conscious of their responsibility.

"If warriors want to have enough energy to see, they must become misers with their sexual energy. That was the lesson the nagual Julian gave us. He pushed us into the unknown, and we all nearly died. Since everyone of us wanted to see, we, of course, abstained from wasting our glow of awareness."

I had heard him voice that belief before. Every time he did we got into an argument. I always felt compelled to protest, and raise objections to what I thought was a puritanical attitude toward sex.

I again raised my objections. Both of them laughed to tears.

"What can be done with man's natural sensuality?" I asked don Juan.

"Nothing," he replied. "There is nothing wrong with man's sensuality. It's man's ignorance of and disregard for his magical nature that is wrong. It's a mistake to waste recklessly the life-bestowing force of sex and not have children, but it's also a mistake not to know that in having children one taxes the glow of awareness."

"How do seers know that having children taxes the glow of awareness?" I asked.

"They see that on having a child, the parents' glow of awareness diminishes and the child's increases. In some supersensitive, frail parents, the glow of awareness almost disappears. As children enhance their awareness, a big dark spot develops in the luminous cocoon of the parents on the very place from which the glow was taken away. It is usually on the midsection of the cocoon. Sometimes those spots can even be seen superimposed on the body itself."

I asked him if there was anything that could be done to give people a more balanced understanding of the glow of awareness.

"Nothing," he said. "At least, there is nothing that seers can do. Seers aim to be free- to be unbiased witnesses incapable of passing judgment. Otherwise they would have to assume the responsibility for bringing about a more adjusted cycle. No one can do that. The new cycle, if it is to come, must come of itself."

## 5. The First Attention

The following day we ate breakfast at dawn. Then don Juan made me shift levels of awareness.

"Today, let's go to an original setting," don Juan said to Genaro.

"By all means," Genaro said gravely. He glanced at me, and then added in a low voice as if not wanting me to overhear him, "Does he have to... perhaps it's too much..."

In a matter of seconds my fear and suspicion escalated to unbearable heights. I was sweating and panting. Don Juan came to my side and, with an expression of almost uncontrollable amusement he assured me that Genaro was just entertaining himself at my expense.

Don Juan said that we were going to a place where the original seers had lived thousands of years ago. As don Juan was speaking to me, I happened to glance at Genaro.

He slowly shook his head from side to side. It was an almost imperceptible gesture, as if he were letting me know that don Juan was not telling the truth. I went into a state of nervous frenzy, near hysteria- and stopped only when Genaro burst into laughter.

I marveled how easily my emotional states could escalate to nearly unmanageable heights or drop to nothing.

Don Juan, Genaro, and I left Genaro's house in the early morning and traveled a short distance into the surrounding eroded hills. Presently we stopped and sat down on top of an enormous flat rock, on a gradual slope, in a corn field that seemed to have been recently harvested.

"This is the original setting," don Juan said to me. "We'll come back here a couple of more times during the course of my explanation."

"Very weird things happen here at night," Genaro said. "The nagual Julian actually caught an ally here. Or rather, the ally..."

Don Juan made a noticeable gesture with his eyebrows, and Genaro stopped in midsentence. He smiled at me.

"It's too early in the day for scary stories," Genaro said. "Let's wait until dark."

He stood up and began creeping all around the rock, tiptoeing with his spine arched backward.

"What was he saying about your benefactor's catching an ally here?" I asked don Juan.

He did not answer right away. He was ecstatic, watching Genaro's antics.

"He was referring to some sophisticated use of awareness," he finally replied, still staring at Genaro.

Genaro completed a circle around the rock and came back and sat down by me. He was panting heavily, almost wheezing, out of breath.

Don Juan seemed fascinated by what Genaro had done. Again I had the feeling that they were amusing themselves at my expense; that both of them were up to something I knew nothing about.

Suddenly, don Juan began his explanation. His voice soothed me. He said that after much toiling, seers arrived at the conclusion that the consciousness of adult human beings, matured by the process of growth, can no longer be called awareness because it has been modified into something more intense and complex which seers call attention.

"How do seers know that man's awareness is being cultivated and that it grows?" I asked.

He said that at a given time in the growth of human beings, a band of the emanations inside their cocoons becomes very bright. As human beings accumulate experience, it begins to glow. In some instances, the glow of this band of emanations increases so dramatically that it fuses with the emanations from the outside. Seers, witnessing an enhancement of this kind, had to surmise that awareness is the raw material and attention the end product of maturation.

"How do seers describe attention?" I asked.

"They say that attention is the harnessing and enhancing of awareness through the process of being alive," he replied.

He said that the danger of definitions is that they simplify matters to make them understandable. In this case, in defining attention one runs the risk of transforming a magical, miraculous accomplishment into something commonplace.

"Attention is man's greatest single accomplishment. It develops from raw animal awareness until it covers the entire gamut of human alternatives. Seers perfect it even further until it covers the whole scope of human possibilities."

I wanted to know if in the seers' view there was a special significance of our normal alternatives versus our other human possibilities.

Don Juan replied that human alternatives are everything we are capable of choosing as persons. They have to do with the level of our day-to-day range, the known; and owing to that fact, they are quite limited in number and scope.

Human possibilities belong to the unknown. They are not what we are capable of choosing but what we are capable of attaining.

He said that an example of human alternatives is our choice to believe that the human body is an object among objects. An example of human possibilities is the seers' achievement in viewing man as an egglike luminous being. With the body as an object one tackles the known, with the body as a luminous egg one tackles the unknown. Human possibilities have, therefore, nearly an inexhaustible scope.

"Seers say that there are three types of attention," don Juan went on. "When they say that, they mean it just for human beings, not for all the sentient beings in existence. But the three are not just types of attention, they are rather three levels of attainment. They are the first, second, and third attention; each of them an independent domain; complete in itself."

He explained that the first attention in man is animal awareness which has been developed through the process of experience into a complex, intricate, and extremely fragile faculty that takes care of the day-to-day world in all it's innumerable aspects. In other words, everything that one can think about is part of the first attention.

"The first attention is everything we are as average men," he continued. "By virtue of such an absolute rule over our lives, the first attention is the most valuable asset that the average man has. Perhaps it is even our only asset.

"Taking into account it's true value, the new seers started a rigorous examination of the first attention through seeing. Their findings molded their total outlook; and the outlook of all their descendants even though most of their descendants do not understand what those seers really saw."

He emphatically warned me that the conclusions of the new seers' rigorous examination had very little to do with reason or rationality because in order to examine and explain the first attention, one must see it. Only seers can do that.

Yet, to examine what seers see in the first attention is essential. It allows the first attention the only opportunity it will ever have to realize it's own workings.

"In terms of what seers see, the first attention is the glow of awareness developed to an ultra shine," he continued. "But it is a glow fixed on the surface of the cocoon, so to speak. It is a glow that covers the known.

"The second attention, on the other hand, is a more complex and specialized state of the glow of awareness. It has to do with the unknown. It comes about when unused emanations inside man's cocoon are utilized.

"The reason I called the second attention specialized is that in order to utilize those unused emanations, one needs uncommon, elaborate tactics that require supreme discipline and concentration."

He said that he had told me before when he was teaching me the art of dreaming, that the concentration needed to be aware that one is having a dream is the forerunner of the second attention. That concentration is a form of consciousness that is not in the same category as the consciousness needed to deal with the daily world.

He said that the second attention is also called the left-side awareness; and it is the vastest field that one can imagine, so vast in fact, that it seems limitless.

"I wouldn't stray into it for anything in this world," he went on. "It is a quagmire so complex and bizarre that sober seers go into it only under the strictest conditions.

"The great difficulty is that the entrance into the second attention is utterly easy, and it's lure is nearly irresistible."

He said that the old seers, being the masters of awareness, applied their expertise to their own glows of awareness and made them expand to inconceivable limits. They actually aimed at lighting up all the emanations inside their cocoons one band at a time. They succeeded, but oddly enough the accomplishment of lighting up one band at a time was instrumental in their becoming imprisoned in the quagmire of the second attention.

"The new seers corrected that error," he continued, "and let the mastery of awareness develop to it's natural end; which is to extend the glow of awareness beyond the bounds of the luminous cocoon in one single stroke.

"The third attention is attained when the glow of awareness turns into the fire from within; a glow that kindles, not one band at a time, but all the Eagle's emanations inside man's cocoon."

Don Juan expressed his awe for the new seers' deliberate effort to attain the third attention while they are alive and conscious of their individuality.

Don Juan did not consider it worthwhile to discuss the random cases of men and other sentient beings who enter into the unknown and the unknowable without being aware of it.

He referred to these cases as the Eagle's gift.

He asserted that for the new seers to enter into the third attention is also a gift, but has a different meaning. It is more like a reward for an attainment.

He added that at the moment of dying all human beings enter into the unknowable and some of them do attain the third attention; but altogether too briefly and only to purify the food for the Eagle.

"The supreme accomplishment of human beings," he said, "is to attain that level of attention while retaining the life-force; without becoming a disembodied awareness moving like a flicker of light up to the Eagle's beak to be devoured."

While listening to don Juan's explanation I had again completely lost sight of everything that surrounded me. Genaro apparently had gotten up and left us, and was nowhere in sight.

Strangely, I found myself crouching on the rock with don Juan squatting by me holding me down by gently pushing on my shoulders. I reclined on the rock and closed my eyes. There was a soft breeze blowing from the west.

"Don't fall asleep," don Juan said. "Not for any reason should you fall asleep on this rock."

I sat up. Don Juan was staring at me.

"Just relax," he went on. "Let the internal dialogue die out."

All my concentration was involved in following what he was saying when I got a jolt of fright. I did not know what it was at first. I thought I was going through another attack of distrust.

But then it struck me, like a bolt, that it was very late in the afternoon. What I had thought was an hour's conversation had consumed an entire day.

I jumped up, fully aware of the incongruity, although I could not conceive what had happened to me. I felt a strange sensation that made my body want to run. Don Juan jumped me, restraining me forcefully. We fell to the soft ground, and he held me there with an iron grip. I had had no idea that don Juan was so strong.

My body shook violently. My arms flew every which way as they shook. I was having something like a seizure. Yet some part of me was detached to the point of becoming fascinated with watching my body vibrate, twist, and shake.

The spasms finally died out and don Juan let go of me. He was panting with the exertion. He recommended that we climb back up on the rock and sit there until I was all right.

I could not help pressing him with my usual question: What had happened to me? He answered that as he talked to me I had pushed beyond a certain limit, and had entered very deeply into the left side. He and Genaro had followed me in there. And then I had rushed out in the same fashion I had rushed in.

"I caught you right on time," he said. "Otherwise you would have gone straight out to your normal self."

I was totally confused. He explained that the three of us had been playing with awareness. I must have gotten scared and run out on them.

"Genaro is the master of awareness," don Juan went on. "Silvio Manuel is the master of will. The two of them were mercilessly pushed into the unknown. My benefactor did to them what his benefactor did to him. Genaro and Silvio Manuel are very much like the old seers in some respects. They know what they can do, but they don't care to know how they do it. Today, Genaro seized the opportunity to push your glow of awareness and we all ended up in the weird confines of the unknown."

I begged him to tell me what had happened in the unknown.

"You'll have to remember that yourself," a voice said just by my ear.

I was so convinced that it was the voice of seeing that it did not frighten me at all. I did not even obey the impulse to turn around.

"I am the voice of seeing and I tell you that you are a peckerhead," the voice said again and chuckled.

I turned around. Genaro was sitting behind me. I was so surprised that I laughed perhaps a bit more hysterically than they did.

"It's getting dark now," Genaro said to me. "As I promised you earlier today, we are going to have a ball here."

Don Juan intervened and said that we should stop for the day, because I was the kind of nincompoop who could die of fright.

"Nah, he's all right," Genaro said, patting me on the shoulder.

"You'd better ask him," don Juan said to Genaro. "He himself will tell you that he's that kind of nincompoop."

"Are you really that kind of nincompoop?" Genaro asked me with a frown.

I didn't answer him. And that made them roll around laughing. Genaro rolled all the way to the ground.

Don Juan swiftly jumped down, and helped him to stand up.

Genaro, referring to me, said to don Juan, "He's caught. He'll never say he's a nincompoop. He's too self-important for that, but he's shivering in his pants with fear of what might happen because he didn't confess he's a nincompoop."

Watching them laugh, I was convinced that only Indians could laugh with such joyfulness. But I also became convinced that there was a mile-wide streak of maliciousness in them. They were poking fun at a non-Indian.

Don Juan immediately caught my feelings.

"Don't let your self-importance run rampant," he said. "You're not special by any standards. None of us are, Indians and non-Indians. The nagual Julian and his benefactor added years of enjoyment to their lives laughing at us."

Genaro nimbly climbed back onto the rock and came to my side.

"If I were you, I'd feel so frigging embarrassed I'd cry," he said to me. "Cry, cry. Have a good cry and you'll feel better."

To my utter amazement I began to weep softly. Then I got so angry that I roared with fury. Only then I felt better.

Don Juan patted my back gently. He said that usually anger is very sobering; or sometimes fear is, or humor. My violent nature made me respond only to anger.

He added that a sudden shift in the glow of awareness makes us weak. They had been trying to reinforce me, to bolster me. Apparently Genaro had succeeded by making me rage.

It was twilight by then. Suddenly Genaro pointed to a flicker in midair at eye level in the twilight. It appeared to be a large moth flying around the place where we sat.

"Be very gentle with your exaggerated nature," don Juan said to me. "Don't be eager. Just let Genaro guide you. Don't take your eyes from that spot."

The flickering point was definitely a moth. I could clearly distinguish all it's features. I followed it's convoluted, tired flight, until I could see every speck of dust on it's wings.

Something got me out of my total absorption. I sensed a flurry of soundless noise, if that could be possible, just behind me. I turned around and caught sight of an entire row of people on the other edge of the rock; an edge that was a bit higher than the one on which we were sitting. I supposed that the people who lived nearby must have gotten suspicious of us hanging around all day and had climbed onto the rock intending to harm us. I knew about their intentions instantly.

Don Juan and Genaro slid down from the rock and told me to hurry down. We left immediately without turning back to see if the men were following us. Don Juan and Genaro refused to talk while we walked back to Genaro's house. Don Juan even made me hush with a fierce grunt, putting his finger to his lips. Genaro did not come into the house, but kept on walking as don Juan dragged me inside.

"Who were those people, don Juan?" I asked him, when the two of us were safely inside the house and he had lit the lantern.

"They were not people," he replied.

"Come on, don Juan, don't mystify me," I said. "They were men. I saw them with my own eyes."

"Of course, you saw them with your own eyes," he retorted, "but that doesn't say anything. Your eyes misled you. Those were not people, and they were following you. Genaro had to draw them away from you."

"What were they, then, if not people?"

"Oh, there is the mystery," he said. "It's a mystery of awareness and it can't be solved rationally by talking about it. The mystery can only be witnessed."

"Let me witness it then." I said.

"But you already have twice in one day," he said. "You don't remember now. You will, however, when you rekindle the emanations that were glowing when you witnessed the mystery of awareness I'm referring to. In the meantime, let's go back to our explanation of awareness."

He reiterated that awareness begins with the permanent pressure that the emanations at large exert on the ones trapped inside the cocoon. This pressure produces the first act of consciousness. It stops the motion of the trapped emanations which are fighting to break the cocoon; fighting to die.

"For a seer, the truth is that all living beings are struggling to die," he went on. "What stops death is awareness."

Don Juan said that the new seers were profoundly disturbed by the fact that awareness forestalls death, while at the same time awareness induces it by being food for the Eagle. Since they could not explain it, for there is no rational way to understand existence, seers realized that their knowledge is composed of contradictory propositions.

"Why did they develop a system of contradictions?" I asked.

"They didn't develop anything," he said. "They found unquestionable truths by means of their seeing. Those truths are arranged in terms of supposedly blatant contradictions, that's all.

"For example, seers have to be methodical, rational beings, paragons of sobriety; and at the same time they must shy away from all of those qualities in order to be completely free and open to the wonders and mysteries of existence."

His example left me baffled, but not to the extreme. I understood what he meant. He himself had sponsored my rationality only to crush it and demand a total absence of it. I told him how I understood his point.

"Only a feeling of supreme sobriety can bridge the contradictions," he said.

"Could you say, don Juan, that art is that bridge?"

"You may call the bridge between contradictions anything you want- art, affection, sobriety, love, or even kindness."

Don Juan continued his explanation and said that in examining the first attention, the new seers realized that all organic beings, except man, quiet down their agitated trapped emanations so that those emanations can align themselves with their matching ones outside.

Human beings do not do that. Instead, their first attention lakes an inventory of the Eagle's emanations inside their cocoons.

"What is an inventory, don Juan?" I asked.

"Human beings take notice of the emanations they have inside their cocoons," he replied. "No other creatures do that. In humans, the moment the pressure from the emanations at large fixates the emanations inside, the first attention begins to watch itself. It notes everything about itself, or at least it tries to, in whatever aberrant ways it can. This is the process seers call taking an inventory.

"I don't mean to say that human beings choose to take an inventory, or that they can refuse to take it. To take an inventory is the Eagle's command. What is subject to volition, [* volition- the capability of conscious choice and decision and intention] however, is the manner in which the command is obeyed."

He said that although he disliked calling the emanations commands, that is what they are; commands that no one can disobey. Yet the way out of obeying the commands is in obeying them.

"In the case of the inventory of the first attention," he went on, "seers take it, for they can't disobey. But once they have taken it they throw it away. The Eagle doesn't command us to worship our inventory. It commands us to take it, that's all."

"How do seers see that man takes an inventory?" I asked.

"The emanations inside the cocoon of man are not quieted down for purposes of matching them with those outside," he replied. "This is evident after seeing what other creatures do. On quieting down, some of the other creatures actually merge themselves with the emanations at large and move with them. Seers can see, for instance, the light of the scarabs' emanations expanding to great size.

"But human beings quiet down their emanations and then reflect on them. The emanations focus on themselves."

He said that human beings carry the command of taking an inventory to it's logical extreme and disregard everything else. Once they are deeply involved in the inventory, one of two things normally happens. They may ignore the impulses of the emanations at large, or they may use them in a very specialized way.

The end result of ignoring those impulses after taking an inventory is a unique state known as reason. The result of using every impulse in a specialized way is known as self-absorption.

Human reason appears to a seer as an unusually homogeneous dull glow that rarely if ever responds to the constant pressure from the emanations at large- a glow that makes the egglike shell become tougher, but more brittle.

Don Juan remarked that reason in the human species should be bountiful, but that in actuality it is very rare. The majority of human beings turn to self-absorption.

He asserted that the awareness of all living beings has a degree of self-reflection in order for them to interact. But none except man's first attention has such a degree of self-absorption. Contrary to men of reason who ignore the impulse of the emanations at large, the self-absorbed individuals use every impulse and turn them all into a force to stir the trapped emanations inside their cocoons.

Observing all this, seers arrived at a practical conclusion. They saw that men of reason are bound to live longer, because by disregarding the impulse of the emanations at large, they quiet down the natural agitation inside their cocoons. The self-absorbed individuals, on the other hand, by using the impulse of the emanations at large to create more agitation, shorten their lives.

"What do seers see when they gaze at self-absorbed human beings?" I asked.

"They see them as intermittent bursts of white light, followed by long pauses of dullness," he said.

Don Juan stopped talking. I had no more questions to ask, or perhaps I was too tired to ask about anything. There was a loud bang that made me jump. The front door flew open and Genaro came in, out of breath. He slumped on the mat. He was actually covered with perspiration.

"I was explaining about the first attention," don Juan said to him.

"The first attention works only with the known," Genaro said. "it isn't worth two plugged nickels with the unknown."

"That is not quite right," don Juan retorted. "The first attention works very well with the unknown. It blocks it. It denies it so fiercely that in the end, the unknown doesn't exist for the first attention.

"Taking an inventory makes us invulnerable. That is why the inventory came into existence in the first place."

"What are you talking about?" I asked don Juan.

He didn't reply. He looked at Genaro as if waiting for an answer.

"But if I open the door," Genaro said, "would the first attention be capable of dealing with what will come in?"

"Yours and mine wouldn't, but his will," don Juan said, pointing at me. "Let's try it."

"Even though he's in heightened awareness?" Genaro asked don Juan.

"That won't make any difference," don Juan answered.

Genaro got up and went to the front door and threw it open. He instantly jumped back. A gust of cold wind came in. Don Juan came to my side, and so did Genaro. Both of them looked at me in amazement.

I wanted to close the front door. The cold was making me uncomfortable. But as I moved toward the door, don Juan and Genaro jumped in front of me and shielded me.

"Do you notice anything in the room?" Genaro asked me.

"No, I don't," I said, and I really meant it.

Except for the cold wind pouring in through the open door, there was nothing to notice in there.

"Weird creatures came in when I opened the door," he said. "Don't you notice anything?"

There was something in his voice that told me he was not joking this time.

The three of us, with both of them flanking me, walked out of the house. Don Juan picked up the kerosene lantern, and Genaro locked the front door. We got inside the car, through the passenger's side. They pushed me in first. And then we drove to don Juan's house in the next town.

## 6. Inorganic Beings

The next day I repeatedly asked don Juan to explain our hasty departure from Genaro's house. He refused even to mention the incident. Genaro was no help either. Every time I asked him he winked at me, grinning like a fool.

In the afternoon, don Juan came to the back patio of his house where I was talking with his apprentices. As if on cue, all the young apprentices left instantly.

Don Juan took me by the arm, and we began to walk along the corridor. He did not say anything. For a while we just strolled around, very much as if we were in the public square.

Don Juan stopped walking and turned to me. He circled me, looking over my entire body. I knew that he was seeing me. I felt a strange fatigue, a laziness I had not felt until his eyes swept over me. He began to talk all of a sudden.

"The reason Genaro and I didn't want to focus on what happened last night," he said, "was that you had been very frightened during the time you were in the unknown. Genaro pushed you, and things happened to you in there."

"What things, don Juan?"

"Things that are still difficult if not impossible to explain to you now," he said. "You don't have enough surplus energy to enter into the unknown and make sense of it. When the new seers arranged the order of the truths about awareness, they saw that the first attention consumes all the glow of awareness that human beings have, and not an iota of energy is left free. That's your problem now. So, the new seers proposed that warriors, since they have to enter into the unknown, have to save their energy. But where are they going to get energy, if all of it is taken? They'll get it, the new seers say, from eradicating unnecessary habits."

He stopped talking and solicited questions. I asked him what eradicating unnecessary habits did to the glow of awareness.

He replied that it detaches awareness from self-reflection and allows it the freedom to focus on something else.

"The unknown is forever present," he continued, "but it is outside the possibility of our normal awareness. The unknown is the superfluous part of the average man. And it is superfluous because the average man doesn't have enough free energy to grasp it.

"After all the time you've spent in the warrior's path, you have enough free energy to grasp the unknown, but not enough energy to understand it or even to remember it."

He explained that at the site of the flat rock, I had entered very deeply into the unknown. But I indulged in my exaggerated nature and became terrified; which was about the worst thing anyone can do. So I had rushed out of the left side, like a bat out of hell; unfortunately, taking a legion of strange things with me.

I told don Juan that he was not getting to the point; that he should come out and tell me exactly what he meant by a legion of strange things.

He took me by the arm and continued strolling around with me.

"In explaining awareness," he said, "I am presumably fitting everything or nearly everything into place. Let's talk a little bit about the old seers. Genaro, as I've told you, is very much like them."

He led me then to the big room. We sat down there and he began his elucidation.

"The new seers were simply terrified by the knowledge that the old seers had accumulated over the years," don Juan said. "It's understandable. The new seers knew that that knowledge leads only to total destruction. Yet they were also fascinated by it, especially by the practices."

"How did the new seers know about those practices?" I asked.

"They are the legacy of the old Toltecs," he said. "The new seers learn about them as they go along. They hardly ever use them, but the practices are there as part of their knowledge."

"What kind of practices are they, don Juan?"

"They are very obscure formulas, incantations, lengthy procedures that have to do with the handling of a very mysterious force. At least it was mysterious to the ancient Toltecs who masked it and made it more horrifying than it really is."

"What is that mysterious force?" I asked.

"It's a force that is present throughout everything there is," he said. "The old seers never attempted to unravel the mystery of the force that made them create their secret practices. They simply accepted it as something sacred. But the new seers took a close look and called it will; the will of the Eagle's emanations, or intent."

Don Juan went on explaining that the ancient Toltecs had divided their secret knowledge into five sets of two categories each: the earth and the dark regions, fire and water, the above and the below, the loud and the silent, the moving and the stationary. He speculated that there must have been thousands of different techniques which became more and more intricate as time passed.

"The secret knowledge of the earth," he went on, "had to do with everything that stands on the ground. There were particular sets of movements, words, unguents, and potions that were applied to people, animals, insects, trees, small plants, rocks, or soil.

"These were techniques that made the old seers into horrid beings. And their secret knowledge of the earth was employed either to groom or to destroy anything that stands on the ground.

"The counterpart of the earth was what they knew as the dark regions. These practices were by far the most dangerous. They dealt with entities without organic life. Living creatures that are present on the earth and populate it together with all organic beings.

"Doubtlessly, one of the most worthwhile findings of the ancient seers, especially for them, was the discovery that organic life is not the only form of life present on this earth."

I did not quite comprehend what he had said. I waited for him to clarify his statements.

"Organic beings are not the only creatures that have life," he said and paused again as if to allow me time to think his statements over.

I countered with a long argument about the definition of life and being alive. I talked about reproduction, metabolism, and growth, the processes that distinguish live organisms from inanimate things.

"You're drawing from the organic," he said. "But that's only one instance. You shouldn't draw all you have to say from one category alone."

"But how else can it be?" I asked.

"For seers, to be alive means to be aware," he replied. "For the average man, to be aware means to be an organism. This is where seers are different. For them, to be aware means that the emanations that cause awareness are encased inside a receptacle.

"Organic living beings have a cocoon that encloses the emanations. But there are other creatures whose receptacles don't look like a cocoon to a seer. Yet they have the emanations of awareness in them and characteristics of life other than reproduction and metabolism."

"Such as what, don Juan?"

"Such as emotional dependency, sadness, joy, wrath, and so forth and so on. And I forgot the best yet, love; a kind of love man can't even conceive."

"Are you serious, don Juan?" I asked in earnest.

"Inanimately serious," he answered with a deadpan expression and then broke into laughter.

"If we take as our clue what seers see," he continued, "life is indeed extraordinary."

"If those beings are alive, why don't they make themselves known to man?" I asked.

"They do, all the time. And not only to seers but also to the average man. The problem is that all the energy available to the average man is consumed by the first attention. A man's inventory not only takes it all, but it also toughens the cocoon to the point of making it inflexible. Under those circumstances there is no possible interaction."

He reminded me of the countless times in the course of my apprenticeship with him when I had had a firsthand view of inorganic beings. I retorted that I had explained away nearly every one of those instances.

I had even formulated the hypothesis that his teachings, through the use of hallucinogenic plants, were geared to force an agreement on the part of the apprentice about a primitive interpretation of the world.

I told him that I had not formally called it a primitive interpretation, but in anthropological terms I had labeled it a 'world view more proper to hunting and gathering societies'.

Don Juan laughed until he was out of breath.

"I really don't know whether you're worse in your normal state of awareness or in a heightened one," he said. "In your normal state you're not suspicious, but boringly reasonable. I think I like you best when you are way inside the left side, in spite of the fact that you are terribly afraid of everything, as you were yesterday."

Before I had time to say anything at all, he stated that he was pitting what the old seers did against the accomplishments of the new seers as a sort of counterpoint with which he intended to give me a more inclusive view of the odds I was up against.

He continued then with his elucidation of the practices of the old seers. He said that another of their great findings had to do with the next category of secret knowledge: fire and water. They discovered that flames have a most peculiar quality. They can transport man bodily, just as water does.

Don Juan called it a brilliant discovery. I remarked that there are basic laws of physics that would prove that to be impossible. He asked me to wait until he had explained everything before drawing any conclusions. He remarked that I had to check my excessive rationality, because it constantly affected my states of heightened awareness. It was not a case of reacting every which way to external influences, but of succumbing to my own devices.

He went on explaining that the ancient Toltecs, although they obviously saw, did not understand what they saw. They merely used their findings without bothering to relate them to a larger picture. In the case of their category of fire and water, they divided fire into heat and flame, and water into wetness and fluidity. They correlated heat and wetness and called them lesser properties. They considered flames and fluidity to be higher, magical properties, and they used them as a means for bodily transportation to the realm of nonorganic life.

Between their knowledge of that kind of life and their fire and water practices, the ancient seers became bogged down in a quagmire with no way out.

Don Juan assured me that the new seers agreed that the discovery of nonorganic living beings was indeed extraordinary, but not in the way the old seers believed it to be. To find themselves in a one-to-one relation with another kind of life gave the ancient seers a false feeling of invulnerability which spelled their doom.

I wanted him to explain the fire and water techniques in greater detail. He said that the old seers' knowledge was as intricate as it was useless and that he was only going to outline it.

Then he summarized the practices of the above and the below. The above dealt with secret knowledge about wind, rain, sheets of lightning, clouds, thunder, daylight, and the sun. The knowledge of the below had to do with fog, water of underground springs, swamps, lightning bolts, earthquakes, the night, moonlight, and the moon.

The loud and the silent were a category of secret knowledge that had to do with the manipulation of sound and quiet. The moving and the stationary were practices concerned with mysterious aspects of motion and motionlessness.

I asked him if he could give me an example of any of the techniques he had outlined. He replied that he had already given me dozens of demonstrations over the years. I insisted that I had rationally explained away everything he had done to me.

He did not answer. He seemed to be either angry at me for asking questions or seriously involved in searching for a good example. After a while he smiled and said that he had visualized the proper example.

"The technique I have in mind has to be put in action in the shallow depths of a stream," he said. "There is one near Genaro's house."

"What will I have to do?"

"You'll have to get a medium-size mirror."

I was surprised at his request. I remarked that the ancient Toltecs did not know about mirrors.

"They didn't," he admitted, smiling. "This is my benefactor's addition to the technique. All the ancient seers needed was a reflecting surface."

He explained that the technique consisted of submerging a shiny surface into the shallow water of a stream. The surface could be any flat object that had some capacity to reflect images.

"I want you to construct a solid frame made of sheet metal for a medium-size mirror," he said. "it has to be waterproof, so you must seal it with tar. You must make it yourself with your own hands. When you have made it, bring it over and we'll proceed."

"What's going to happen, don Juan?"

"Don't be apprehensive. You yourself have asked me to give you an example of an ancient Toltec practice. I asked the same thing of my benefactor. I think everybody asks for one at a certain moment. My benefactor said that he did the same thing himself. His benefactor, the nagual Elias, gave him an example. My benefactor in turn gave the same one to me, and now I am going to give it to you.

"At the time my benefactor gave me the example I didn't know how he did it. I know now. Someday you yourself will also know how the technique works and you will understand what's behind all this."

I thought that don Juan wanted me to go back home to Los Angeles and construct the frame for the mirror there. I commented that it would be impossible for me to remember the task if I did not remain in heightened awareness.

"There are two things out of kilter with your comment," he said. "One is that there is no way for you to remain in heightened awareness and still function unless I, or Genaro, or any of the warriors in the nagual's party nurse you every minute of the day as I am now. The other is that Mexico is not the moon. There are hardware stores here. We can go to Oaxaca and buy anything you need."

We drove to the city the next day and I bought all the pieces for the frame. I assembled it myself in a mechanic's shop for a minimal fee. Don Juan told me to put it in the trunk of my car. He did not so much as glance at it.

We drove back to Genaro's house in the late afternoon and arrived there in the early morning. I looked for Genaro. He was not there. The house seemed deserted.

"Why does Genaro keep this house?" I asked don Juan. "He lives with you, doesn't he?"

Don Juan did not answer. He gave me a strange look and went to light the kerosene lantern. I was alone in the room in total darkness. I felt a great tiredness that I attributed to the long, tortuous drive up the mountains. I wanted to lie down. In the darkness, I could not see where Genaro had put the mats. I stumbled over a pile of them.

And then I knew why Genaro kept that house. He took care of the male apprentices Pablito, Nestor, and Benigno who lived there when they were in their state of normal awareness.

I felt exhilarated. I was no longer tired. Don Juan came in with a lantern. I told him about my realization, but he said that it did not matter; that I would not remember it for too long.

He asked me to show him the mirror. He seemed pleased, and remarked about it's being light yet solid. He noticed that I had used metal screws to affix an aluminum frame to a piece of sheet metal that I had used as a backing for a mirror eighteen inches long by fourteen inches wide.

"I made a wooden frame for my mirror," he said. "This looks much better than mine. My frame was too cumbersome and at the same time frail.

"Let me explain what we're going to do," he continued after he had finished examining the mirror. "Or perhaps I should say, what we're going to attempt to do. The two of us together are going to place this mirror on the surface of the stream near the house. It is wide enough and shallow enough to serve our purposes.

"The idea is to let the fluidity of the water exert pressure on us and transport us away."

Before I could make any remarks or ask any questions, he reminded me that in the past I had utilized the water of a similar stream and accomplished extraordinary feats of perception. He was referring to the aftereffects of ingesting hallucinogenic plants; effects which I had experienced various times while being submerged in the irrigation ditch behind his house in northern Mexico.

"Save any questions until I explain to you what the seers knew about awareness," he said. "Then you'll understand everything we're doing in a different light. But first let's go on with our procedure."

We walked to the nearby stream, and he selected a place with flat, exposed rocks. He said that there the water was shallow enough for our purposes.

"What do you expect to happen?" I asked in the midst of a gripping apprehension.

"I don't know. All I know is what we are going to attempt. We will hold the mirror very carefully, but very firmly. We will gently place it on the surface of the water and then let it submerge. We will then hold it on the bottom. I've checked it. There is enough silt there to allow us to dig our fingers underneath the mirror to hold it firmly."

He asked me to squat on a flat rock above the surface in the middle of the gentle stream and made me hold the mirror with both hands, almost at the corners on one side. He squatted facing me and held the mirror the same way I did. We let the mirror sink, and then we held it by plunging our arms in the water almost to our elbows.

He commanded me to empty myself of thoughts and stare at the surface of the mirror. He repeated over and over that the trick was not to think at all. I looked intently into the mirror. The gentle current mildly disarranged the reflection of don Juan's face and mine.

After a few minutes of steady gazing into the mirror it seemed to me that gradually the image of his face and mine became much clearer. And the mirror grew in size until it was at least a yard square. The current seemed to have stopped, and the mirror looked as clear as if it were placed on top of the water. Even more odd was the crispness of our reflections, it was as if my face had been magnified, not in size but in focus. I could see the pores in the skin of my forehead.

Don Juan gently whispered not to stare at my eyes or his, but to let my gaze wander around without focusing on any part of our reflections.

"Gaze fixedly without staring!" he repeatedly ordered in a forceful whisper.

I did what he said without stopping to ponder about the seeming contradiction. At that moment something inside me was caught in that mirror, and the contradiction actually made sense. "It is possible to gaze fixedly without staring," I thought, and the instant that thought was formulated another head appeared next to don Juan's and mine. It was on the lower side of the mirror, to my left.

My whole body trembled. Don Juan whispered to calm down and not show fear or surprise. He again commanded me to gaze without staring at the newcomer. I had to make an unimaginable effort not to gasp and release the mirror. My body was shaking from head to toe. Don Juan whispered again to get hold of myself. He nudged me repeatedly with his shoulder.

Slowly I got my fear under control. I gazed at the third head and gradually realized that it was not a human head, or an animal head either. In fact, it was not a head at all. It was a shape that had no inner mobility. As the thought occurred to me, I instantly realized that I was not thinking it myself. The realization was not a thought either. I had a moment of tremendous anxiety and then something incomprehensible became known to me. The thoughts were a voice in my ear!

"I am seeing!" I yelled in English, but there was no sound.

"Yes, you're seeing," the voice in my ear said in Spanish.

I felt that I was encased in a force greater than myself. I was not in pain or even anguished. I felt nothing. I knew beyond the shadow of a doubt, because the voice was telling me so, that I could not break the grip of that force by an act of will or strength. I knew I was dying.

I lifted my eyes automatically to look at don Juan, and at the instant our eyes met the force let go of me. I was free. Don Juan was smiling at me as if he knew exactly what I had gone through.

I realized that I was standing up. Don Juan was holding the mirror edgewise to let the water drip off.

We walked back to the house in silence.

"The ancient Toltecs were simply mesmerized by their findings," don Juan said.

"I can understand why," I said.

"So can I," don Juan retorted.

The force that had enveloped me had been so powerful as to incapacitate me for speech, or even for thought for hours afterward. It had frozen me with a total lack of volition. And I had thawed out only by tiny degrees.

"Without any deliberate intervention on our part," don Juan continued, "this ancient Toltec technique has been divided into two parts for you. The first was just enough to familiarize you with what takes place. In the second, we will try to accomplish what the old seers pursued."

"What really took place out there, don Juan?" I asked.

"There are two versions. I'll give you the old seers' version first. They thought that the reflecting surface of a shiny object submerged in water enlarges the power of the water. What they used to do was gaze into bodies of water, and the reflecting surface served them as an aid to accelerate the process. They believed that our eyes are the keys to entering into the unknown. By gazing into water, they were allowing the eyes to open the way."

Don Juan said that the old seers observed that the wetness of water only dampens or soaks, but that the fluidity of water moves. It runs, they surmised, in search of other levels underneath us. They believed that water had been given to us not only for life, but also as a link; a road to the other levels below.

"Are there many levels below?" I asked.

"The ancient seers counted seven levels," he replied.

"Do you know them yourself, don Juan?"

"I am a seer of the new cycle, and consequently I have a different view," he said. "I am just showing you what the old seers did and I'm telling you what they believed."

He asserted that just because he had different views did not mean the old seers' practices were invalid. Their interpretations were wrong, but their truths had practical value for them.

In the instance of the water practices, they were convinced that it was humanly possible to be transported bodily by the fluidity of water anywhere between this level of ours and the other seven levels below; or to be transported in essence anywhere on this level, along the watercourse of a river in either direction. They used, accordingly, running water to be transported on this level of ours and the water of deep lakes or that of waterholes to be transported to the depths.

"What they pursued with the technique I'm showing you was twofold," he went on. "On the one hand, they used the fluidity of the water to be transported to the first level below. On the other, they used it to have a face-to-face meeting with a living being from that first level. The headlike shape in the mirror was one of those creatures that came to look us over."

"So, they really exist!" I exclaimed.

"They certainly do," he retorted.

He said that ancient seers were damaged by their aberrant insistence on staying glued to their procedures, but that whatever they found was valid. They found out that the surest way to meet one of those creatures is through a body of water. The size of the body of water is not relevant. An ocean or a pond serves the same purpose. He had chosen a small stream because he hated to get wet. We could have gotten the same results in a lake or a large river.

"The other life comes to find out what's going on when human beings call," he continued. "That Toltec technique is like a knock on their door. The old seers said the shiny surface on the bottom of the water served as a bait and a window. So humans and those creatures meet at a window."

"Is that what happened to me there?" I asked.

"The old seers would've said that you were being pulled by the power of the water and the power of the first level, plus the magnetic influence of the creature at the window."

"But I heard a voice in my ear saying that I was dying," I said.

"The voice was right. You were dying, and you would have if I hadn't been there. That is the danger of practicing the Toltecs' techniques. They are extremely effective, but most of the time they are deadly."

I told him that I was ashamed to confess that I was terrified. Seeing that shape in the mirror, and having the sensation of an enveloping force around me had proved too much for me the day before.

"I don't want to alarm you," he said, "but nothing has happened to you yet. If what happened to me is going to be the guideline of what will happen to you, you'd better prepare yourself for the shock of your life. It's better to shake in your boots now than to die of fright tomorrow."

My fear was so terrifying that I couldn't even voice the questions that came to my mind. I had a hard lime swallowing. Don Juan laughed until he was coughing. His face got purple. When I got my voice back, every one of my questions prompted another attack of coughing laughter.

"You have no idea how funny this all is to me," he finally said. "I'm not laughing at you. It's just the situation. My benefactor made me go through the same motions, and looking at you I can't help seeing myself."

I told him that I felt sick to my stomach. He said that that was fine, that it was natural to be scared, and that to control fear was wrong and senseless. The ancient seers got trapped by suppressing their terror when they should have been scared out of their wits. Since they did not want to stop their pursuits or abandon their comforting constructs, they controlled their fear instead.

"What else are we going to do with the mirror?" I asked.

"That mirror is going to be used for a face-to-face meeting between you and that creature you only gazed at yesterday."

"What happens in a face-to-face meeting?"

"What happens is that one form of life, the human form, meets another form of life. The old seers said that in this case, it is a creature from the first level of the fluidity of water."

He explained that the ancient seers surmised that the seven levels below ours were levels of the fluidity of water. For them a spring had untold significance because they thought that in such a case the fluidity of water is reversed and goes from the depth to the surface. They took that to be the means whereby creatures from other levels, these other forms of life, come to our plane to peer at us, to observe us.

"In this respect those old seers were not mistaken," he went on. "They hit the nail right on the head. Entities that the new seers call allies do appear around waterholes."

"Was the creature in the mirror an ally?" I asked.

"Of course. But not one that can be utilized. The tradition of the allies, which I have acquainted you with in the past, comes directly from the ancient seers. They did wonders with allies, but nothing they did was worth anything when the real enemy came along: their fellow men."

"Since those creatures are allies, they must be very dangerous," I said.

"As dangerous as we men are, no more, no less."

"Can they kill us?"

"Not directly, but they certainly can frighten us to death. They can cross the boundaries themselves, or they can just come to the window. As you may have realized by now, the ancient Toltecs didn't stop at the window, either. They found weird ways to go beyond it."

The second stage of the technique proceeded very much as had the first except that it took perhaps twice as long for me to relax and stop my internal turmoil. When that was done, the reflection of don Juan's face and mine became instantly clear. I gazed from his reflection to mine for perhaps an hour.

I expected the ally to appear any moment, but nothing happened. My neck hurt. My back was stiff and my legs were numb. I wanted to kneel on the rock to relieve the pain in my lower back. Don Juan whispered that the moment the ally showed it's shape my discomfort would vanish.

He was absolutely right. The shock of witnessing a round shape appear on the edge of the mirror dispelled every discomfort of mine.

"What do we do now?" I whispered.

"Relax and don't focus your gaze on anything, not even for an instant," he replied. "Watch everything that appears in the mirror. Gaze without staring."

I obeyed him. I glanced at everything within the frame of the mirror. There was a peculiar buzzing in my ears. Don Juan whispered that I should move my eyes in a clockwise direction if I felt that I was being enveloped by an unusual force; but under no circumstances, he stressed, should I lift my head to look at him.

After a moment I noticed that the mirror was reflecting more than the reflection of our faces and the round shape. It's surface had become dark. Spots of an intense violet light appeared. They grew large. There were also spots of jet blackness. Then it turned into something like a flat picture of a cloudy sky at night, in the moonlight. Suddenly, the whole surface came into focus, as if it were a moving picture. The new sight was a three-dimensional, breathtaking view of the depths.

I knew that it was absolutely impossible for me to fight off the tremendous attraction of that sight. It began to pull me in.

Don Juan whispered forcefully that I should roll my eyes for dear life. The movement brought immediate relief. I could again distinguish our reflections and that of the ally. Then the ally disappeared and reappeared again on the other end of the mirror.

Don Juan commanded me to grip the mirror with all my might. He warned me to be calm and not make any sudden movements.

"What's going to happen?" I whispered.

"The ally will try to come out," he replied.

As soon as he had said that I felt a powerful tug. Something jerked my arms. The tug was from underneath the mirror. It was like a suction force that created a uniform pressure all around the frame.

"Hold the mirror tightly but don't break it," don Juan ordered. "Fight the suction. Don't let the ally sink the mirror too deep."

The force pulling down on us was enormous. I felt that my fingers were going to break or be crushed against the rocks on the bottom. Don Juan and I both lost our balance at one point and had to step down from the flat rocks into the stream. The water was quite shallow, but the thrashing of the ally's force around the frame of the mirror was as frightening as if we had been in a large river. The water around our feet was being swirled around madly, but the images in the mirror were undisturbed.

"Watch out!" don Juan yelled. "Here it comes!"

The tugging changed into a thrust from underneath. Something was grabbing the edge of the mirror; not the outer edge of the frame where we were holding it, but from the inside of the glass. It was as if the glass surface were indeed an open window and something or somebody were just climbing through it.

Don Juan and I fought desperately either to push the mirror down when it was being thrust up or pull it up when it was being tugged downward. In a stooped-over position we slowly moved downstream from the original spot. The water was deeper and the bottom was covered with slippery rocks.

"Let's lift the mirror out of the water and shake him loose," don Juan said in a harsh voice.

The loud thrashing continued unremittingly. It was as if we had caught an enormous fish with our bare hands and it was swimming around wildly.

It occurred to me that the mirror was in essence a hatch. A strange shape was actually trying to climb up through it. It was leaning on the edge of the hatch with a mighty weight and was big enough to displace the reflection of don Juan's face and mine. I could not see us anymore. I could only distinguish a mass trying to push itself up.

The mirror was not resting on the bottom anymore. My fingers were not compressed against the rocks. The mirror was in mid-depth, held by the opposing forces of the ally's tugs and ours. Don Juan said he was going to extend his hands underneath the mirror and that I should very quickly grab them in order to have a better leverage to lift the mirror with our forearms. When he let go it tilled to his side. I quickly reached for his hands but there was nothing underneath. I vacillated a second too long and the mirror flew out of my hands.

"Grab it! Grab it!" don Juan yelled.

I caught the mirror just as it was going to land on the rocks. I lifted it out of the water, but not quickly enough. The water seemed to be like glue. As I pulled the mirror out, I also pulled a portion of a heavy rubbery substance that simply pulled the mirror out of my hands and back into the water.

Don Juan, displaying extraordinary nimbleness, caught the mirror and lifted it up edgewise without any difficulty.

Never in my life had I had such an attack of melancholy. It was a sadness that had no precise foundation. I associated it with the memory of the depths I had seen in the mirror. It was a mixture of pure longing for those depths, plus an absolute fear of their chilling solitude.

Don Juan remarked that in the life of warriors it was extremely natural to be sad for no overt reason. Seers say that the luminous egg, as a field of energy, senses it's final destination whenever the boundaries of the known are broken. A mere glimpse of the eternity outside the cocoon is enough to disrupt the coziness of our inventory. The resulting melancholy is sometimes so intense that it can bring about death.

He said that the best way to get rid of melancholy is to make fun of it. He commented in a mocking tone that my first attention was doing everything to restore the order that had been disrupted by my contact with the ally. Since there was no way of restoring it by rational means, my first attention was doing it by focusing all it's power on sadness.

I told him that the fact remained the melancholy was real. Indulging in it, moping around, and being gloomy were not part of the feeling of aloneness that I had felt upon remembering those depths.

"Something is finally getting through to you," he said. "You're right. There is nothing more lonely than eternity. And nothing is more cozy for us than to be a human being. This indeed is another contradiction: How can man keep the bonds of his humanness and still venture gladly and purposefully into the absolute loneliness of eternity? Whenever you resolve this riddle, you'll be ready for the definitive journey."

I knew then with total certainty the reason for my sadness. It was a recurrent feeling with me, one that I would always forget until I again realized the same thing: the puniness of humanity against the immensity of that thing-in-itself which I had seen reflected in the mirror.

"Human beings are truly nothing, don Juan," I said.

"I know exactly what you're thinking," he said. "Sure, we're nothing, but that's exactly what makes it the ultimate challenge; that we nothings could actually face the loneliness of eternity."

He abruptly changed the subject, leaving me with my mouth open, my next question unsaid. He began to discuss our bout with the ally. He said that first of all, the struggle with the ally had been no joke. It had not really been a matter of life or death, but it had not been a picnic either.

"I chose that technique," he went on, "because my benefactor showed it to me. When I asked him to give me an example of the old seers' techniques, he nearly split a gut laughing. My request reminded him so much of his own experience. His benefactor, the nagual Elias, had also given him a harsh demonstration of the same technique."

Don Juan said that as he had made the frame for his mirror out of wood, he should have asked me to do the same, but he wanted to know what would happen if the frame was sturdier than his or his benefactor's. Both of their frames broke, and both times the ally came out.

He explained that during his own bout the ally ripped the frame apart. He and his benefactor were left holding two pieces of wood while the mirror sank and the ally climbed out of it.

His benefactor knew what kind of trouble to expect. In the reflection of mirrors, allies are not really frightening because one sees only a shape, a mass of sorts. But when they are out, besides being truly fearsome-looking things, they are a pain in the neck. He remarked that once the allies get out of their level, it is very difficult for them to go back. The same prevails for man. If seers venture into a level of those creatures, chances are they are never heard of again.

"My mirror was shattered with the ally's force," he said. "There was no more window and the ally couldn't go back, so it came after me. It actually ran after me, rolling on itself. I scrambled on all fours at top speed, screaming with terror. I went up and down hills like a possessed man. The ally was inches away from me the whole time."

Don Juan said that his benefactor ran after him, but he was too old and could not move fast enough. His benefactor he had the good sense, however, to tell don Juan to back-track, and in that way was able to take measures to get rid of the ally. He shouted that he was going to build a fire and that don Juan should run in circles until everything was ready. He went ahead to gather dry branches while don Juan ran around a hill, driven mad with fear.

Don Juan confessed that the thought had occurred to him, as he ran around in circles, that his benefactor was actually enjoying the whole thing. He knew that his benefactor was a warrior capable of finding delight in any conceivable situation. Why not also in this one?

For a moment he got so angry at his benefactor that the ally stopped chasing him, and don Juan, in no uncertain terms, accused his benefactor of malice. His benefactor didn't answer, but made a gesture of genuine horror as he looked past don Juan at the ally, which was looming over the two of them. Don Juan forgot his anger and began running around in circles again.

"My benefactor was indeed a devilish old man," don Juan said, laughing. "He had learned to laugh internally. It wouldn't show on his face, so he could pretend to be weeping or raging when he was really laughing. That day, as the ally chased me in circles, my benefactor stood there and defended himself from my accusations.

"I only heard bits of his long speech every time I ran by him. When he was through with that, I heard bits of another long explanation: that he had to gather a great deal of wood, that the ally was big, that the fire had to be as big as the ally itself, that the maneuver might not work.

"Only my maddening fear kept me going. Finally he must have realized that I was about to drop dead from exhaustion; he built the fire and with the flames he shielded me from the ally."

Don Juan said that they stayed by the fire for the entire night. The worst time for him was when his benefactor had to go away to look for more dry branches and left him alone. He was so afraid that he promised to God that he was going to leave the path of knowledge and become a farmer.

"In the morning, after I had exhausted all my energy, the ally managed to shove me into the fire, and I was badly burned," don Juan added.

"What happened to the ally?" I asked.

"My benefactor never told me what happened to it," he replied. "But I have the feeling that it is still running around aimlessly, trying to find it's way back."

"And what happened to your promise to God?"

"My benefactor said not to worry, that it had been a good promise, but that I didn't know yet that there is no one to hear such promises, because there is no God. All there is is the Eagle's emanations, and there is no way to make promises to them."

"What would have happened if the ally had caught you?" I asked.

"I might have died of fright," he said. "If I had known what was entailed in being caught I would've let it catch me. At that time I was a reckless man. Once an ally catches you, you either have a heart attack and die, or you wrestle with it. Then after a moment of thrashing around in sham ferocity, the ally's energy wanes. There is nothing that an ally can do to us, or vice versa. We are separated by an abyss.

"The ancient seers believed that at the moment the ally's energy dwindles the ally surrenders it's power to man. Power, my eye! The old seers had allies coming out of their ears and their allies' power didn't mean a thing."

Don Juan explained that once again it had been up to the new seers to straighten out this confusion. They had found that the only thing that counts is impeccability, that is, freed energy. There were indeed some among the ancient seers who were saved by their allies, but that had had nothing to do with the allies' power to fend off anything. Rather, it was the men's impeccability that had permitted them to use the energy of those other forms of life.

The new seers also found out the most important thing yet about the allies: what makes them useless or usable to man. Useless allies, of which there are staggering numbers, are those that have emanations inside them for which we have no match inside ourselves. They are so different from us as to be thoroughly unusable. Other allies, which are remarkably few in number, are akin to us, meaning that they possess occasional emanations that match ours.

"How is that kind utilized by man?" I asked.

"We should use another word instead of 'utilize'," he replied. "I'd say that what takes place between seers and allies of this kind is a fair exchange of energy."

"How does the exchange take place?" I asked.

"Through their matching emanations. Those emanations are, naturally, on the left-side awareness of man; the side that the average man never uses. For this reason, allies are totally barred from the world of the right-side awareness, or the side of rationality."

He said that the matching emanations give both a common ground. Then, with familiarity, a deeper link is established which allows both forms of life to profit. Seers seek the allies' ethereal quality. They make fabulous scouts and guardians. Allies seek the greater energy field of man, and with it they can even materialize themselves.

He assured me that experienced seers play those shared emanations until they bring them into total focus. The exchange takes place at that time. The ancient seers did not understand this process, and they developed complex techniques of gazing in order to descend into the depths that I had seen in the mirror.

"The old seers had a very elaborate tool to help them in their descent," he went on. "It was a rope of special twine that they tied around their waist. It had a soft butt soaked in resin which fitted into the navel itself, like a plug. The seers had an assistant or a number of them who held them by the rope while they were lost in their gazing. Naturally, to gaze directly into the reflection of a deep, clear pond or lake is infinitely more overwhelming and dangerous than what we did with the mirror."

"But did they actually descend bodily?" I asked.

"You'd be surprised what men are capable of, especially if they control awareness," he replied.

"The old seers were aberrant. In their excursions to the depths they found marvels. It was routine for them to encounter allies.

"Of course, by now you realize that to say the depths is a figure of speech. There are no depths, there is only the handling of awareness. Yet the old seers never made that realization."

I told don Juan that from what he had said about his experience with the ally, plus my own subjective impression on feeling the ally's thrashing force in the water, I had concluded that allies are very aggressive.

"Not really," he said. "It is not that they don't have enough energy to be aggressive, but rather that they have a different kind of energy. They are more like an electric current. Organic beings are more like heat waves."

"But why did it chase you for such a long time?" I asked.

"That's no mystery," he said. "They are attracted to emotions. Animal fear is what attracts them the most; it releases the kind of energy that suits them. The emanations inside them are rallied by animal fear. Since my fear was relentless the ally went after it, or rather, my fear hooked the ally and didn't let it go."

He said that it was the old seers who found out that allies enjoy animal fear more than anything else. They even went to the extreme of purposely feeding it to their allies by actually scaring people to death. The old seers were convinced that the allies had human feelings, but the new seers saw it differently. They saw that allies are attracted to the energy released by emotions. Love is equally effective, as well as hatred, or sadness.

Don Juan added that if he had felt love for that ally, the ally would have come after him anyway, although the chase would have had a different mood.

I asked him whether the ally would have stopped going after him if he had controlled his fear. He answered that controlling fear was a trick of the old seers. They learned to control it to the point of being able to parcel it out. They hooked their allies with their own fear, and by gradually doling it out like food they actually held the allies in bondage.

"Those old seers were terrifying men," don Juan continued. "I shouldn't use the past tense-they are terrifying even today. Their bid is to dominate; to master everybody and everything."

"Even today, don Juan?" I asked, trying to get him to explain further.

He changed the subject by commenting that I had missed the opportunity of being really scared beyond measure. He said that doubtless the way I had sealed the frame of the mirror with tar had prevented the water from seeping behind the glass. He counted that as the deciding factor that had kept the ally from smashing the mirror.

"Too bad," he said. "You might even have liked that ally. By the way, it was not the same one that came the day before. The second one was perfectly akin to you."

"Don't you have some allies yourself, don Juan?" I asked.

"As you know, I have my benefactor's allies," he said. "I can't say that I have the same feeling for them that my benefactor did. He was a serene, but thoroughly passionate man who lavishly gave away everything he possessed, including his energy. He loved his allies. To him it was no sweat to allow the allies to use his energy and materialize themselves. There was one in particular that could even take a grotesque human form."

Don Juan went on to say that since he was not partial to allies, he had never given me a real taste of them as his benefactor had done to him while he was still recovering from the wound in his chest.

It all began with the thought that his benefactor was a strange man. Having barely escaped from the clutches of the petty tyrant, don Juan suspected that he had fallen into another trap. His intention was to wait a few days to get his strength back and then run away when the old man was not home.

But the old man must have read his thoughts, because one day, in a confidential tone, he whispered to don Juan that he ought to get well as quickly as possible so that the two of them could escape from his captor and tormentor. Then, shaking with fear and impotence, the old man flung the door open and a monstrous fish-faced man came into the room, as if he had been listening behind the door. He was a grayish-green, had only one huge unblinking eye, and was as big as a door.

Don Juan said that he was so surprised and terrified that he passed out, and it took him years to get out from under the spell of that fright.

"Are your allies useful to you, don Juan?" I asked.

"That's a very difficult thing to decide," he said.

"In some way, I love the allies my benefactor gave me. They are capable of giving back inconceivable affection. But they are incomprehensible to me. They were given to me for companionship in case I am ever stranded alone in that immensity that is the Eagle's emanations."

## 7. The Assemblage Point

Don Juan discontinued his explanation of the mastery of awareness for several months after my bout with the allies. One day he started it again. A strange event triggered it.

Don Juan was in northern Mexico. It was late afternoon. I had just arrived at the house he kept there, and he immediately had me shift into heightened awareness. And I had instantly remembered that don Juan always came back to Sonora as means of renewal. He had explained that a nagual, being a leader who has tremendous responsibilities, has to have a physical point of reference, a place where an amenable confluence of energies occurs. The Sonoran desert was such a place for him.

On entering into heightened awareness, I had noticed that there was another person hiding in the semidarkness inside the house. I asked don Juan if Genaro was with him. He replied that he was alone, that what I had noticed was one of his allies, the one that guarded the house.

Don Juan then made a strange gesture. He contorted his face as if he were surprised or terrified. And instantly the frightening shape of a strange man appeared at the door of the room where we were.

The presence of the strange man scared me so much that I actually felt dizzy. And before I could recuperate from my fright, the man lurched at me with a chilling ferocity. As he grabbed my forearms, I felt ajolt of something quite like a discharge of an electric current.

I was speechless, caught in a terror I could not dispel. Don Juan was smiling at me. I mumbled and groaned, trying to voice a plea for help, while I felt an even greater jolt.

The man tightened his grip and tried to throw me backward on the ground. Don Juan, with no hurry in his voice, urged me to pull myself together and not fight my fear, but roll with it.

"Be afraid without being terrified," he said. Don Juan came to my side and, without intervening in my struggle, whispered in my ear that I should put all my concentration on the midpoint of my body.

Over the years, he had insisted that I measure my body to the hundredth of an inch and establish it's exact midpoint, lengthwise as well as in width. He had always said that such a point is a true center of energy in all of us.

As soon as I had focused my attention on that midpoint, the man let go of me. At that instant I became aware that what I had thought was a human being was something that only looked like one. The moment it lost it's human shape to me, the ally became an amorphous blob of opaque light. It moved away. I went after it, moved by a great force that made me follow that opaque light.

Don Juan stopped me. He gently walked me to the porch of his house and made me sit down on a sturdy crate he used as a bench.

I was terribly disturbed by the experience, but even more disturbed by the fact that my paralyzing fear had disappeared so fast and so completely.

I commented on my abrupt change of mood. Don Juan said that there was nothing strange about my volatile change, and that fear did not exist as soon as the glow of awareness moved beyond a certain threshold inside man's cocoon.

He then began his explanation. He briefly outlined the truths about awareness he had discussed:

...that there is no objective world, but only a universe of energy fields which seers call the Eagle's emanations;

...that human beings are made of the Eagle's emanations and are in essence bubbles of luminescent energy- each of us wrapped in a cocoon that encloses a small portion of these emanations;

...that awareness is achieved by the constant pressure that the emanations outside our cocoons, which are called emanations at large, exert on those inside our cocoons;

....and that that awareness gives rise to perception which happens when the emanations inside our cocoons align themselves with the corresponding emanations at large.

"The next truth," he went on, "is that perception takes place because there is in each of us an agent called the assemblage point that selects internal and external emanations for alignment. The particular alignment that we perceive as the world is the product of the specific spot where our assemblage point is located on our cocoon."

He repeated this several times, allowing me time to grasp it. Then he said that in order to corroborate the truths about awareness, I needed energy.

"I've mentioned to you," he continued, "that dealing with petty tyrants helps seers accomplish a sophisticated maneuver: that maneuver is to move their assemblage points."

He said that for me to have perceived an ally meant that I had moved my assemblage point away from it's customary position. In other words, my glow of awareness had moved beyond a certain threshold, also erasing my fear. And all this had happened because I had enough surplus energy.

Later that night, after we had returned from a trip into the surrounding mountains which had been part of his teachings for the right side, don Juan had me shift again into heightened awareness and then continued his explanation. He told me that in order to discuss the nature of the assemblage point, he had to start with a discussion of the first attention.

He said that the new seers looked into the unnoticed ways in which the first attention functions. Then, as they tried to explain them to others, they devised an order for the truths about awareness.

He assured me that not every seer is given to explaining. For instance, his benefactor, the nagual Julian, could not have cared less about explanations. But the nagual Julian's benefactor, the nagual Elias, whom don Juan was fortunate enough to meet, did care. Between the nagual Elias's detailed, lengthy explanations, the nagual Julian's scanty ones, and his own personal seeing, don Juan came to understand and to corroborate those truths.

Don Juan explained that in order for our first attention to bring into focus the world that we normally perceive, it has to emphasize certain emanations selected from the narrow band of emanations where mankind-in-general's awareness is located.

The discarded emanations are still within our reach, but remain dormant; and typically unknown to us for the duration of our lives.

The new seers call the emphasized emanations: the right side, normal awareness, the tonal, this world, the known, the first attention. The average man calls it: reality, rationality, common sense.

The emphasized emanations compose a large portion of man's band of awareness, but a very small piece of the total spectrum of emanations present inside the cocoon of man.

The disregarded emanations within man's band are thought of as a sort of preamble to the unknown; with the unknown proper consisting of the bulk of our emanations which are not part of the human band and which are never emphasized by the average person. Seers call them the left-side awareness, the nagual, the other world, the unknown, the second attention.

"This process of emphasizing certain emanations," don Juan went on, "was discovered and practiced by the old seers. They realized that a nagual man or a nagual woman, by the fact that they have extra strength, can push the emphasis away from the usual emanations and make it shift to neighboring ones. That push is known as the nagual's blow."

Don Juan said that the shift was utilized by the old seers in practical ways to keep their apprentices in bondage. With that blow they made their apprentices enter into a state of the keenest, most impressionable heightened awareness. Then while they were helplessly pliable, the old seers taught them aberrant techniques that made the apprentices into sinister men, just like their teachers.

The new seers employ the same technique of a shift in emanation emphasis, but instead of using it for sordid purposes, they use it to guide their apprentices to learn about man's possibilities.

Don Juan explained that the nagual's blow has to be delivered on a precise spot on the assemblage point which varies minutely from person to person. Also, the blow has to be delivered by a nagual who sees.

He assured me that it is equally useless to have the strength of a nagual and not see, as it is to see and not have the strength of a nagual. In either case, the results are just blows. A seer could strike on the precise spot over and over without the strength to move awareness; and a non-seeing nagual would not be able to strike the precise spot.

He also said that the old seers discovered that the assemblage point is not in the physical body, but in the luminous shell; in the cocoon itself. The nagual identifies that spot by it's intense luminosity and pushes it, rather than striking it. The force of the push creates a dent in the cocoon and it is felt like a blow to the right shoulder blade, a blow that knocks all the air out of the lungs.

"Are there different types of dents?" I asked.

"There are only two types," he responded. "One is a concavity and the other is a crevice; each has a distinct effect. The concavity is a temporary feature and produces a temporary shift- but the crevice is a profound and permanent feature of the cocoon and produces a permanent shift."

He explained that usually a luminous cocoon hardened by self-reflection is not affected at all by the nagual's blow. Sometimes, however, the cocoon of man is very pliable and the smallest force creates a bowl-like dent ranging in size from a small depression to one that is a third the size of the total cocoon; or it creates a crevice that may run across the width of the egglike shell, or along it's length, making the cocoon look as if it has curled in on itself.

Some luminous shells, after being dented, go back to their original shape instantly. Others remain dented for hours or even days at a time, but they revert back by themselves. Still others get a firm, impervious dent that requires another blow from the nagual on a bordering area to restore the original shape of the luminous cocoon. And a few never lose their indentation once they get it. No matter how many blows they get from a nagual they never revert back to their egglike shapes.

Don Juan further said that the dent acts on the first attention by displacing the glow of awareness. The dent presses the emanations inside the luminous shell, and the seers witness how the first attention shifts it's emphasis under the force of that pressure. The dent, by displacing the Eagle's emanations inside the cocoon, makes the glow of awareness fall on other emanations from areas that are ordinarily inaccessible to the first attention.

I asked him if the glow of awareness is seen only on the surface of the luminous cocoon. He did not answer me right away. He seemed to immerse himself in thought. After perhaps ten minutes he answered my question.

He said that normally the glow of awareness is seen on the surface of the cocoon of all sentient beings. After man develops attention, however, the glow of awareness acquires depth. In other words, it is transmitted from the surface of the cocoon to quite a number of emanations inside the cocoon.

"The old seers knew what they were doing when they handled awareness," he went on. "They realized that by creating a dent in the cocoon of man, they could force the glow of awareness, since it is already glowing on the emanations inside the cocoon, to spread to other neighboring ones."

"You make it all sound as if it's a physical affair," I said. "How can dents be made in something that is just a glow?"

"In some inexplicable way, it is a matter of a glow that creates a dent in another glow," he replied. "Your flaw is to remain glued to the inventory of reason. Reason doesn't deal with man as energy. Reason deals with instruments that create energy, but it has never seriously occurred to reason that we are better than instruments.

"We are organisms that create energy. We are a bubble of energy. It isn't farfetched, then, that a bubble of energy would make a dent in another bubble of energy."

He said that the glow of awareness created by the dent should rightfully be called temporary heightened attention, because it emphasizes emanations that are so proximal to the habitual ones that the change is minimal, yet the shift produces a greater capacity to understand and to concentrate and, above all, a greater capacity to forget.

Seers knew exactly how to use this upshift in the scale of quality. They saw that only the emanations surrounding those we use daily suddenly become bright after the nagual's blow. The more distant ones remain unmoved, which meant to them that while being in a state of heightened attention, human beings could work as if they were in the world of everyday life. The need of a nagual man and a nagual woman became paramount to them, because that state lasts only for as long as the depression remains, after which the experiences are immediately forgotten.

"Why does one have to forget?" I asked.

"Because the emanations that account for greater clarity cease to be emphasized once warriors are out of heightened awareness," he replied. "Without that emphasis whatever they experience or witness vanishes."

Don Juan said that one of the tasks the new seers had devised for their students was to force them to remember, that is, to re-emphasize by themselves at a later time those emanations used during states of heightened awareness.

He reminded me that Genaro was always recommending to me that I learn to write with the tip of my finger instead of a pencil so as not to accumulate notes. Don Juan said that what

Genaro had actually meant was that while I was in states of heightened awareness I should utilize some unused emanations for storage of dialogue and experience, and someday recall it all by reemphasizing the emanations that were used.

He went on to explain that a state of heightened awareness is seen not only as a glow that goes deeper inside the egglike shape of human beings, but also as a more intense glow on the surface of the cocoon.

Yet it is nothing in comparison to the glow produced by a state of total awareness which is seen as a burst of incandescence in the entire luminous egg. It is an explosion of light of such a magnitude that the boundaries of the shell are diffused and the inside emanations extend themselves beyond anything imaginable.

"Are those special cases, don Juan?"

"Certainly. They happen only to seers. No other men or any other living creatures brighten up like that. Seers who deliberately attain total awareness are a sight to behold. That is the moment when they burn from within. The fire from within consumes them, and in full awareness they fuse themselves to the emanations at large, and glide into eternity."

After a few days in Sonora, I drove don Juan back to the town in the southern part of Mexico where he and his party of warriors lived.

The next day was hot and hazy. I felt lazy and somehow annoyed. In midafternoon, there was a most unpleasant quietude in that town. Don Juan and I were sitting on the comfortable chairs in the big room.

I told him that life in rural Mexico was not my cup of tea. I disliked the feeling I had that the silence of that town was forced. The only noise I ever heard was the sound of children's voices yelling in the distance. I was never able to find out whether they were playing or yelling in pain.

"When you're here, you're always in a state of heightened awareness," don Juan said. "That makes a great difference. But no matter what, you should be getting used to living in a town like this. Someday you will live in one."

"Why should I have to live in a town like this, don Juan?"

"I've explained to you that the new seers aim to be free. And freedom has the most devastating implications. Among them is the implication that warriors must purposely seek change.

"Your predilection is to live the way you do. You stimulate your reason by running through your inventory and pitting it against your friends' inventories. Those maneuvers leave you very little time to examine yourself and your fate.

"You will have to give up all that. Likewise, if all you knew were the dead calm of this town, you'd have to seek, sooner or later, the other side of the coin."

"Is that what you're doing here, don Juan?"

"Our case is a little bit different, because we are at the end of our trail. We are not seeking anything. What all of us do here is something comprehensible only to a warrior. We go from day to day doing nothing. We are waiting. I will not tire of repeating this: we know that we are waiting and we know what we are waiting for. We are waiting for freedom!

"And now that you know that," he added with a grin, "let's get back to our discussion of awareness."

Usually, when we were in that room we were never interrupted by anyone and don Juan would always decide on the length of our discussions. But this time there was a polite knock on the door and Genaro walked in and sat down. I had not seen Genaro since the day after we had run out of his house in a great hurry. I embraced him.

"Genaro has something to tell you," don Juan said. "I've told you that he is the master of awareness. Now I can tell you what all that means. He can make the assemblage point move deeper into the luminous egg after that point has been jolted out of it's position by the nagual's blow."

He explained that Genaro had pushed my assemblage point countless times after I had attained heightened awareness. The day we had gone to the gigantic flat rock to talk, Genaro had made my assemblage point move dramatically into the left side- so dramatically, in fact, that it had been a bit dangerous.

Don Juan stopped talking and seemed to be ready to give Genaro the spotlight. He nodded as if to signal Genaro to say something. Genaro stood up and came to my side.

"Flame is very important," he said softly. "Do you remember that day when I made you look at the reflection of the sunlight on a piece of quartz when we were sitting on that big flat rock?"

When Genaro mentioned it I remembered. On that day just after don Juan had stopped talking, Genaro had pointed to the refraction of light as it went through a piece of polished quartz that he had taken out of his pocket and placed on the flat rock. The shine of the quartz had immediately caught my attention. The next thing I knew, I was crouching on the flat rock as don Juan stood by with a worried look on his face.

I was about to tell Genaro what I had remembered when he began to talk. He put his mouth to my ear and pointed to one of the two gasoline lamps in the room.

"Look at the flame," he said. "There is no heat in it. It's pure flame. Pure flame can take you to the depths of the unknown."

As he talked, I began to feel a strange pressure. It was a physical heaviness. My ears were buzzing. My eyes teared to the point that I could hardly make out the shape of the furniture. My vision seemed to be totally out of focus.

Although my eyes were open, I could not see the intense light of the gasoline lamps. Everything around me was dark. There were streaks of chartreuse phosphorescence that illuminated dark, moving clouds. Then, as abruptly as it had faded away, my eyesight returned.

I could not make out where I was. I seemed to be floating like a balloon. I was alone. I had a pang of terror, and my reason rushed in to construct an explanation that made sense to me at that moment: Genaro had hypnotized me, using the flame of the gasoline lamp. I felt almost satisfied.

I quietly floated, trying not to worry. I thought that a way to avoid worrying was to concentrate on the stages that I would have to go through to wake up.

The first thing I noticed was that I was not myself. I could not really look at anything because I had nothing to look with. When I tried to examine my body I realized that I could only be aware and yet it was as if I were looking down into infinite space.

There were portentous clouds of brilliant light and masses of blackness. Both were in motion. I clearly saw a ripple of amber glow that was coming at me, like an enormous, slow ocean wave. I knew then that I was like a buoy floating in space, and that the wave was going to overtake me and carry me. I accepted it as unavoidable.

But just before it hit me something thoroughly unexpected happened. A wind blew me out of the wave's path.

The force of that wind carried me with tremendous speed. I went through an immense tunnel of intense colored lights. My vision blurred completely and then I felt that I was waking up, that I had been having a dream, a hypnotic dream brought about by Genaro, in the next instant I was back in the room with don Juan and Genaro.

I slept most of the following day. In the late afternoon, don Juan and I again sat down to talk. Genaro had been with me earlier, but had refused to comment on my experience.

"Genaro again pushed your assemblage point last night," don Juan said. "But perhaps the shove was too forceful."

I eagerly told don Juan the content of my vision. He smiled, obviously bored.

"Your assemblage point moved away from it's normal position," he said. "And that made you perceive emanations that are not ordinarily perceived. Sounds like nothing, doesn't it? And yet it is a supreme accomplishment that the new seers strive to elucidate."

He explained that human beings repeatedly choose the same emanations for perceiving because of two reasons. First, and most important, because we have been taught that those emanations are perceivable; and second because our assemblage points select and prepare those emanations for being used.

"Every living being," he went on, "has an assemblage point which selects emanations for emphasis. Seers can see whether sentient beings share the same view of the world by seeing if the emanations their assemblage points have selected are the same."

He affirmed that one of the most important breakthroughs for the new seers was to find that the spot where that point is located on the cocoon of all living creatures is not a permanent feature. It is established on that specific spot by habit. Hence the tremendous stress the new seers put on new actions, on new practicalities. They want desperately to arrive at new usages, new habits.

"The nagual's blow is of great importance," he went on, "because it makes that point move. It alters it's location. Sometimes it even creates a permanent crevice there and the assemblage point is totally dislodged; and awareness changes dramatically.

"However, a matter of even greater importance is to properly understand the truths about awareness in order to realize that the assemblage point can be moved from within.

"The unfortunate truth is that human beings always lose by default. They simply don't know about their possibilities."

"How can one accomplish that change from within?" I asked.

"The new seers say that realization is the technique," he said. "They say that, first of all, one must become aware that the world we perceive is the result of our assemblage points' being located on a specific spot on the cocoon. Once that is understood, the assemblage point can move almost at will as a consequence of new habits."

I did not quite understand what he meant by habits. I asked him to clarify his point.

"The assemblage point of man," he said, "appears around a definite area of the cocoon because the Eagle commands it. But the precise spot is determined by habit; by repetitious acts.

"First we learn that it can be placed there and then we ourselves command it to be there. Our command becomes the Eagle's command and the assemblage point becomes fixated at that spot.

"Consider this very carefully; our command becomes the Eagle's command. The old seers paid dearly for that finding. We'll come back to that later on."

He stated once again that the old seers had concentrated exclusively on developing thousands of the most complex techniques of sorcery. He added that what they never realized was that their intricate devices, as bizarre as they were, had no other value than being the means to break the fixation of their assemblage points and make them move.

I asked him to explain what he had said.

"I've mentioned to you that sorcery is something like entering a dead-end street," he replied. "What I meant was that sorcery practices have no intrinsic value. Their worth is indirect. Their real function is to make the assemblage point shift by making the first attention release it's control on that point.

"The new seers realized the true role those sorcery practices played, and decided to go directly into the process of making their assemblage points shift; avoiding all the nonsense of rituals and incantations.

"Yet rituals and incantations are indeed necessary at one time in every warrior's life. I personally have initiated you in all kinds of sorcery procedures, but only for purposes of luring your first attention away from the power of self-absorption, which keeps your assemblage point rigidly fixed."

He added that the obsessive entanglement of the first attention in self-absorption or reason is a powerful binding force. Ritual behavior, because it is repetitive, forces the first attention to free some energy from watching the inventory, and as a consequence the assemblage point loses it's rigidity.

"What happens to the persons whose assemblage points lose rigidity?" I asked.

"If they're not warriors, they think they're losing their minds," he said, smiling. "Just as you thought you were going crazy at one time. If they're warriors, they know they've gone crazy, but they patiently wait. You see, to be healthy and sane means that the assemblage point is immovable. When it shifts, it literally means that one is deranged."

He said that two options are opened to warriors whose assemblage points have shifted.

...One is to acknowledge being ill and to behave in deranged ways; reacting emotionally to the strange worlds that their shifts force them to witness.

...The other is to remain impassive, untouched, knowing that the assemblage point always returns to it's original position.

"What if the assemblage point doesn't return to it's original position?" I asked.

"Then those people are lost," he said. "They are either incurably crazy, because their assemblage points could never assemble the world as we know it, or they are peerless seers who have begun their movement toward the unknown."

"What determines whether it is one or the other?"

"Energy! Impeccability! Impeccable warriors don't lose their marbles. They remain untouched. I've said to you many times that impeccable warriors may see horrifying worlds, and yet the next moment they are telling a joke, laughing with their friends or with strangers."

I said to him then what I had told him many times before: What made me think I was ill was a series of disruptive sensorial experiences that I had had as aftereffects of ingesting hallucinogenic plants. I went through states of total space and time discordance; very annoying lapses of mental concentration; actual visions or hallucinations of places and people I would be staring at as if they really existed. I could not help thinking that I was losing my mind.

"By all ordinary measures, you were indeed losing your mind," he said, "but in the seers' view, if you had lost it, you wouldn't have lost much. The mind, for a seer, is nothing but the self-reflection of the inventory of man. If you lose that self-reflection but don't lose your underpinnings, you actually live an infinitely stronger life than if you had kept it."

He remarked that my flaw was my emotional reaction, which prevented me from realizing that the oddity of my sensorial experiences was determined by the depth to which my assemblage point had moved into man's band of emanations.

I told him that I couldn't understand what he was explaining because the configuration that he had called man's band of emanations was something incomprehensible to me. I had pictured it to be like a ribbon placed on the surface of a ball.

He said that calling it a band was misleading, and that he was going to use an analogy to illustrate what he meant. He explained that the luminous shape of man is like a ball of jack cheese with a thick disk of darker cheese injected into it. He looked at me and chuckled. He knew that I did not like cheese.

He made a diagram on a small blackboard. He drew an egglike shape and divided it in four longitudinal sections, saying that he would immediately erase the division lines because he had drawn them only to give me an idea where the band was located in the cocoon of man. He then drew a thick band at the line between the first and second sections and erased the division lines. He explained that the band was like a disk of cheddar cheese that had been inserted into the ball of jack cheese.

"Now if that ball of jack cheese were transparent," he went on, "you would have the perfect replica of man's cocoon. The cheddar cheese goes all the way inside the ball of jack cheese. It's a disk that goes from the surface on one side to the surface on the other side.

"The assemblage point of man is located high up, three-fourths of the way toward the top of the egg on the surface of the cocoon. When a nagual presses on that point of intense luminosity, the point moves into the disk of the cheddar cheese. Heightened awareness comes about when the intense glow of the assemblage point lights up dormant emanations way inside the disk of cheddar cheese. To see the glow of the assemblage point moving inside that disk gives the feeling that it is shifting toward the left on the surface of the cocoon."

He repeated his analogy three or four times, but I did not understand it and he had to explain it further. He said that the transparency of the luminous egg creates the impression of a movement toward the left, when in fact every movement of the assemblage point is in depth, into the center of the luminous egg along the thickness of man's band.

I remarked that what he was saying made it sound as if seers would be using their eyes when they see the assemblage point move.

"Man is not the unknowable," he said. "Man's luminosity can be seen almost as if one were using the eyes alone."

He further explained that the old seers had seen the movement of the assemblage point, but it never occurred to them that it was a movement in depth; instead they followed their seeing and coined the phrase "shift to the left," which the new seers retained although they knew that it was erroneous to call it a shift to the left.

He also said that in the course of my activity with him he had made my assemblage point move countless times, as was the case at that very moment. Since the shift of the assemblage point was always in depth, I had never lost my sense of identity in spite of the fact that I was always using emanations I had never used before.

"When the nagual pushes that point," he went on, "the point ends up any which way along man's band. But it absolutely doesn't matter where, because wherever it ends up is always virgin ground.

"The grand test that the new seers developed for their 'warrior apprentices' is to retrace the journey that their assemblage points took under the influence of the nagual. This retracing, when it is completed, is called regaining the totality of oneself."

He went on to say that the contention [* contention- a point asserted as part of an argument] of the new seers is that in the course of our growth, once the glow of awareness focuses on man's band of emanations and selects some of them for emphasis, it enters into a vicious circle.

The more it emphasizes certain emanations, the more stable the assemblage point gets to be.

This is equivalent to saying that our command becomes the Eagle's command. It goes without saying that when our awareness develops into first attention the command is so strong that to break that circle and make the assemblage point shift is a genuine triumph.

Don Juan said that the assemblage point is also responsible for making the first attention perceive in terms of clusters. An example of a cluster of emanations that receive emphasis together is the human body as we perceive it. Another part of our total being, our luminous cocoon, never receives emphasis and is relegated to oblivion because the effect of the assemblage point is not only to make us perceive clusters of emanations, but also to make us disregard emanations.

When I pressed hard for an explanation of clustering he replied that the assemblage point radiates a glow that groups together bundles of encased emanations. These bundles then become aligned, as bundles, with the emanations at large. Clustering is carried out even when seers deal with the emanations that are never used. Whenever they are emphasized, we perceive them just as we perceive the clusters of the first attention.

"One of the greatest moments the new seers had," he continued, "was when they found out that the unknown is merely the emanations discarded by the first attention. The unknown is a huge affair, but an affair, mind you, where clustering can be done. The unknowable, on the other hand, is an eternity where our assemblage point has no way of clustering anything."

He explained that the assemblage point is like a luminous magnet that picks emanations and groups them together wherever it moves within the bounds of man's band of emanations. This discovery was the glory of the new seers, for it put the unknown in a new light. The new seers noticed that some of the obsessive visions of seers- the ones that were almost impossible to conceive- coincided with a shift of the assemblage point to the region of man's band which is diametrically opposed to where it is ordinarily located.

"Those were visions of the dark side of man," he asserted.

"Why do you call it the dark side of man?" I asked.

"Because it is somber and foreboding," he said. "It's not only the unknown, but the 'who cares to know it'."

"How about the emanations that are inside the cocoon but out of the bounds of man's band?" I asked. "Can they be perceived?"

"Yes, but in really indescribable ways," he said. "They're not the human unknown, as is the case with the unused emanations in the band of man, but the nearly immeasurable unknown where human traits do not figure at all. It is really an area of such an overpowering vastness that the best of seers would be hard put to describe it."

I insisted once more that it seemed to me that the mystery is obviously within us.

"The mystery is outside us," he said, "Inside us we have only emanations trying to break the cocoon. And this fact aberrates us, one way or another, whether we're average men or warriors. Only the new seers get around this. They struggle to see. And by means of the shifts of their assemblage points, they get to realize that the mystery is perceiving. Not so much what we perceive, but what makes us perceive.

"I've mentioned to you that the new seers believe that our senses are capable of detecting anything. They believe this because they see that the position of the assemblage point is what dictates what our senses perceive.

"If the assemblage point aligns emanations inside the cocoon in a position different from it's normal one, the human senses perceive in inconceivable ways."

## 8. The Position of the Assemblage Point

The next time don Juan resumed his explanation of the mastery of awareness we were again in his house in southern Mexico. That house was actually owned by all the members of the nagual's party, but Silvio Manuel officiated as the owner and everyone openly referred to it as Silvio Manuel's house, although I, for some inexplicable reason, had gotten used to calling it don Juan's house.

Don Juan, Genaro, and I had returned to the house from a trip to the mountains. That day, as we relaxed after the long drive and ate a late lunch, I asked don Juan the reason for the curious deception. He assured me that no deception was involved, and that to call it Silvio Manuel's house was an exercise in the art of stalking to be performed by all the members of the nagual's party under any circumstances, even in the privacy of their own thoughts. For any of them to insist on thinking about the house in any other terms was tantamount to denying their links to the nagual's party.

I protested that he had never told me that. I did not want to cause any dissension with my habits.

"Don't worry about it," he said, smiling at me and patting my back. "You can call this house whatever you want. The nagual has authority. The nagual woman, for instance, calls it the house of shadows."

Our conversation was interrupted, and I did not see him until he sent for me to come to the back patio a couple of hours later.

He and Genaro were strolling around at the far end of the corridor. I could see them moving their hands in what seemed to be an animated conversation.

It was a clear sunny day. The midafternoon sun shone directly on some of the flower pots that hung from the eaves of the roof around the corridor and projected their shadows on the north and east walls of the patio. The combination of intense yellow sunlight, the massive black shadows of the pots, and the lovely, delicate, bare shadows of the frail flowering plants that grew in them was stunning. Someone with a keen eye for balance and order had pruned those plants to create such an exquisite effect.

"The nagual woman has done that," don Juan said as if reading my thoughts. "She gazes at these shadows in the afternoons."

The thought of her gazing at shadows in the afternoons had a swift and devastating effect on me. The intense yellow light of that hour, the quietness of that town, and the affection that I felt for the nagual woman conjured up for me in one instant all the solitude of the warriors' endless path.

Don Juan had defined the scope of that path when he said to me that the new seers are the warriors of total freedom; that their only search is the ultimate liberation that comes when they attain total awareness.

I understood with unimpaired clarity as I looked at those haunting shadows on the wall what it meant to the nagual woman when she said that to read poems out loud was the only release that her spirit had.

I remember that the day before she had read something to me there in the patio, but I had not quite understood her urgency; her longing. It was a poem by Juan Ramon Jimenez, "Hora Inmensa," which she told me synthesized for her the solitude of warriors who live to escape to total freedom.

Only a bell and a bird break the stillness...

It seems that the two talk with the setting sun

Golden colored silence, the afternoon is made of crystals

A roving purity sways the cold trees

and beyond all that

a transparent river dreams that trampling over pearls

it breaks loose

and flows into infinity

Don Juan and Genaro came to my side and looked at me with an expression of surprise.

"What are we really doing, don Juan?" I asked. "Is it possible that warriors are only preparing themselves for death?"

"No way," he said, gently patting my shoulder. "Warriors prepare themselves to be aware, and full awareness comes to them only when there is no more self-importance left in them. Only when they are nothing do they become everything."

We were quiet for a moment. Then don Juan asked me if I was in the throes of self-pity. I did not answer because I was not sure.

"You're not sorry that you're here, are you?" don Juan asked with a faint smile.

"He's certainly not," Genaro assured him. Then he seemed to have a moment of doubt. He scratched his head, then looked at me and arched his brows. "Maybe you are," he said. "Are you?"

"He's certainly not," don Juan assured Genaro this time. He went through the same gestures of scratching his head and arching his brows. "Maybe you are," he said. "Are you?"

"He's certainly not!" Genaro boomed, and both of them exploded into uncontrolled laughter.

When they had calmed down, don Juan said that self-importance is the motivating force for every attack of melancholy. He added that warriors are entitled to have profound states of sadness, but that sadness is there only to make them laugh.

"Genaro has something to show you which is more exciting than all the self-pity you can muster up," don Juan continued, "it has to do with the position of the assemblage point."

Genaro immediately began to walk around the corridor, arching his back and lifting his thighs to his chest.

"The nagual Julian showed him how to walk that way," don Juan said in a whisper, "it's called the gait of power. Genaro knows several gaits of power. Watch him fixedly."

Genaro's movements were indeed mesmeric. I found myself following his gait, first with my eyes and then irresistibly with my feet. I imitated his gait. We walked once around the patio and stopped.

While walking, I had noticed the extraordinary lucidity that each step brought to me. When we stopped, I was in a state of keen alertness. I could hear every sound. I could detect every change in the light or in the shadows around me. I became enthralled with a feeling of urgency, of impending action. I felt extraordinarily aggressive, muscular, daring.

At that moment I saw an enormous span of flat land in front of me. Right behind me I saw a forest. Huge trees were lined up as straight as a wall. The forest was dark and green. The plain was sunny and yellow.

My breathing was deep and strangely accelerated, but not in an abnormal way. Yet it was the rhythm of my breathing that was forcing me to trot on the spot. I wanted to take off running, or rather my body wanted to, but just as I was taking off something stopped me.

Don Juan and Genaro were suddenly by my side. We walked down the corridor with Genaro to my right. He nudged me with his shoulder. I felt the weight of his body on me. He gently shoved me to the left and we angled off straight for the east wall of the patio. For a moment I had the weird impression that we were going to go through the wall, and I even braced myself for the impact; but we stopped right in front of the wall.

While my face was still against the wall, they both examined me with great care. I knew what they were searching for. They wanted to make sure that I had shifted my assemblage point. I knew that I had because my mood had changed. They obviously knew it too.

They gently took me by the arms and walked in silence with me to the other side of the corridor to a dark passageway; a narrow hall that connected the patio with the rest of the house. We stopped there. Don Juan and Genaro moved a few feet away from me.

I was left facing the side of the house that was in dark shadows. I looked into an empty dark room. I had a sense of physical weariness. I felt languid, indifferent, and yet I experienced a sense of spiritual strength. I realized then that I had lost something. There was no strength in my body. I could hardly stand. My legs finally gave in and I sat down and then I lay down on my side. While I lay there, I had the most wonderful, fulfilling thoughts of love for God, for goodness.

Then all at once I was in front of the main altar of a church. The bas-reliefs covered with gold leaf glittered with the light of thousands of candles. I saw the dark figures of men and women carrying an enormous crucifix mounted on a huge palanquin. I moved out of their way and stepped outside the church. I saw a multitude of people- a sea of candles coming toward me. I felt elated. I ran to join them. I was moved by profound love. I wanted to be with them, to pray to the Lord. I was only a few feet away from the mass of people when something swished me away.

The next instant, I was with don Juan and Genaro. They flanked me as we walked lazily around the patio.

While we were having lunch the next day, don Juan said that Genaro had pushed my assemblage point with his gait of power, and that he had been able to do that because I had been in a state of inner silence. He explained that the articulation point of everything seers do is something he had talked about since the day we met; stopping the internal dialogue. He stressed over and over that the internal dialogue is what keeps the assemblage point fixed to it's original position.

"Once silence is attained, everything is possible," he said.

I told him I was very conscious of the fact that in general I had stopped talking to myself, but did not know how I had done it. If asked to explain the procedure I would not know what to say.

"The explanation is simplicity itself," he said. "You willed it, and thus you set a new intent, a new command. Then your command became the Eagle's command.

"This is one of the most extraordinary things that the new seers found out: Our command can become the Eagle's command. The internal dialogue stops in the same way it begins; by an act of will. After all, we are forced to start talking to ourselves by those who teach us. As they teach us, they engage their will and we engage ours- both without knowing it. As we learn to talk to ourselves, we learn to handle will. We will ourselves to talk to ourselves. The way to stop talking to ourselves is to use exactly the same method; we must will it; we must intend it."

We were silent for a few minutes. I asked him to whom he was referring when he said that we had teachers who taught us to talk to ourselves.

"I was talking about what happens to human beings when they are infants," he replied, "a time when they are taught by everyone around them to repeat an endless dialogue about themselves. The dialogue becomes internalized, and that force alone keeps the assemblage point fixed.

"The new seers say that infants have hundreds of teachers who teach them exactly where to place their assemblage point."

He said that seers see that infants have no fixed assemblage point at first. Their encased emanations are in a state of great turmoil, and their assemblage points shift everywhere in the band of man, giving children a great capacity to focus on emanations that later will be thoroughly disregarded. Then as they grow, the older humans around them, through their considerable power over them, force the children's assemblage points to become more steady by means of an increasingly complex internal dialogue. The internal dialogue is a process that constantly strengthens the position of the assemblage point, because that position is an arbitrary one and needs steady reinforceent.

"The fact of the matter is that many children see," he went on. "Most of those who see are considered to be oddballs and every effort is made to correct them, to make them solidify the position of their assemblage points."

"But would it be possible to encourage children to keep their assemblage points more fluid?" I asked.

"Only if they live among the new seers," he said. "Otherwise they would get entrapped, as the old seers did, in the intricacies of the silent side of man. And, believe me, that's worse than being caught in the clutches of rationality."

Don Juan went on to express his profound admiration for the human capacity to impart order to the chaos of the Eagle's emanations. He maintained that every one of us, in his own right, is a masterful magician and that our magic is to keep our assemblage point unwaveringly fixed.

"The force of the emanations at large," he went on, "makes our assemblage point select certain emanations and cluster them for alignment and perception. That's the command of the Eagle, but all the meaning that we give to what we perceive is our command, our gift of magic."

He said that in the light of what he had explained, what Genaro had made me do the day before was something extraordinarily complex and yet very simple. It was complex because it required a tremendous discipline on everybody's part.

It required that my internal dialogue be stopped, that I reach a state of heightened awareness, and that someone walk away with my assemblage point. The explanation behind all these complex procedures was very simple. The new seers say that since the exact position of the assemblage point is an arbitrary position chosen for us by our ancestors, it can move with a relatively small effort. Once it moves, it forces new alignments of emanations, thus new perceptions.

"I used to give you power plants in order to make your assemblage point move," don Juan continued. "Power plants have that effect; but hunger, tiredness, fever, and other things like that can have a similar effect. The flaw of the average man is that he thinks the result of a shift is purely mental. It isn't, as you yourself can attest."

He explained that my assemblage point had shifted scores of times in the past, just as it had shifted the day before, and that most of the time the worlds it had assembled had been so close to the world of everyday life as to be virtually phantom worlds. He emphatically added that visions of that kind are automatically rejected by the new seers.

"Those visions are the product of man's inventory," he went on. "They are of no value for warriors in search of total freedom, because they are produced by a lateral shift of the assemblage point."

He stopped talking and looked at me. I knew that by lateral shift he had meant a shift of the point from one side to the other along the width of man's band of emanations instead of a shift in depth. I asked him if I was right.

"That's exactly what I meant," he said. "On both edges of man's band of emanations there is a strange storage of refuse, an incalculable pile of human junk. It's a very morbid, sinister storehouse. It had great value for the old seers but not for us.

"One of the easiest things one can do is to fall into it. Yesterday Genaro and I wanted to give you a quick example of that lateral shift. That was why we walked your assemblage point. But any person can reach that storehouse by simply stopping his internal dialogue. If the shift is minimal, the results are explained as fantasies of the mind. If the shift is considerable, the results are called hallucinations."

I asked him to explain the act of walking the assemblage point. He said that once warriors have attained inner silence by stopping their internal dialogue, the sound of the gait of power, more than the sight of it, is what traps their assemblage points. The rhythm of muffled steps instantly catches the alignment force of the emanations inside the cocoon, which has been disconnected by inner silence.

"That force hooks itself immediately to the edges of the band," he went on. "On the right edge we find endless visions of physical activity, violence, killing, sensuality. On the left edge we find spirituality, religion, God. Genaro and I walked your assemblage point to both edges, so as to give you a complete view of that human junk pile."

Don Juan restated, as if on second thought, that one of the most mysterious aspects of the seers' knowledge is the incredible effects of inner silence. He said that once inner silence is attained, the bonds that tie the assemblage point to the particular spot where it is normally placed begin to break, and the assemblage point is free to move.

He said that the movement ordinarily is toward the left, and that such a directional preference is the natural reaction of most human beings, but that there are seers who can direct that movement to positions below the point's customary spot. The new seers call that shift "the shift below."

"Seers also suffer accidental shifts below," he went on. "The assemblage point doesn't remain there long, and that's fortunate, because that is the place of the beast. To go below is counter to our interest, although the easiest thing to do."

Don Juan also said that among the many errors of judgment the old seers had committed, one of the most grievous was moving their assemblage points to the immeasurable area below, which made them experts at adopting animal forms. They chose different animals as their point of reference and called those animals their nagual. They believed that by moving their assemblage points to specific spots they would acquire the characteristics of the animal of their choice; it's strength, wisdom, cunning, agility, or ferocity.

Don Juan assured me that there are many dreadful examples of such practices even among the seers of our day. The relative facility with which the assemblage point of man moves toward any lower position poses a great temptation to seers, especially to those whose inclination leans toward that end. It is the duty of a nagual, therefore, to test his warriors.

He told me then that he had put me to the test by moving my assemblage point to a position below, while I was under the influence of a power plant. He then guided my assemblage point until I could isolate the crows' band of emanations, which resulted in my changing into a crow.

I again asked don Juan the question I had asked him dozens of times. I wanted to know whether I had physically turned into a crow, or had merely thought and felt like one. He explained that a shift of the assemblage point to the area below always results in a total transformation. He added that if the assemblage point moves beyond a crucial threshold, the world vanishes. It ceases to be what it is to us at man's level.

He conceded that my transformation was indeed horrifying by any standards. My reaction to that experience proved to him that I had no leanings toward that direction. Had it not been that way, I would have had to employ enormous energy in order to fight off a tendency to remain in that area below which some seers find most comfortable.

He further said that an unwitting downshift occurs periodically to every seer, but that such a downshift becomes less and less frequent as their assemblage points move farther toward the left. Every time it occurs, however, the power of a seer undergoing it diminishes considerably. It is a drawback that takes time and great effort to correct.

"Those lapses make seers extremely morose and narrow-minded," he continued, "and in certain cases, extremely rational."

"How can seers avoid those downshifts?" I asked.

"It all depends on the warrior," he said. "Some of them are naturally inclined to indulge in their quirks- you, for instance. They are the ones who are hard hit. For those like you, I recommend a twenty-four hour vigil of everything they do. Disciplined men or women are less prone to that kind of shift. For them I would recommend a twenty-three hour vigil."

He looked at me with shiny eyes and laughed.

"Female seers have downshifts more often than males," he said. "But they are also capable of bouncing out of that position with no effort at all, while males linger dangerously in it."

He also said that women seers have an extraordinary capacity to make their assemblage points hold on to any position in the area below. Men cannot. Men have sobriety and purpose, but very little talent. That is the reason why a nagual must have eight women seers in his party. Women give the impulse to cross the immeasurable vastness of the unknown. Together with that natural capacity, or as a consequence of it, women have a most fierce intensity. They can, therefore, reproduce an animal form with flare, ease, and a matchless ferocity.

"If you think about scary things," he continued, "about something unnamable lurking in the darkness, you're thinking without knowing it about a woman seer holding a position in the immeasurable area below. True horror lies right there. If you ever find an aberrant woman seer, run for the hills!"

I asked him whether other organisms were capable of shifting their assemblage points.

"Their points can shift," he said, "but the shift is not a voluntary thing with them."

"Is the assemblage point of other organisms also trained to appear where it does?" I asked.

"Every newborn organism is trained, one way or another," he replied. "We may not understand how their training is done- after all, we don't even understand how it is done to us- but seers see that the newborn are coaxed to do what their kind does. That's exactly what happens to human infants. Seers see their assemblage points shifting every which way and then they see how the presence of adults fastens each point to one spot. The same happens to every other organism."

Don Juan seemed to reflect for a moment and then added that there was indeed one unique effect that man's assemblage point has. He pointed to a tree outside.

"When we, as serious adult human beings, look at a tree," he said, "our assemblage points align an infinite number of emanations and achieve a miracle. Our assemblage points make us perceive a cluster of emanations that we call tree."

He explained that the assemblage point not only effects the alignment needed for perception, but also obliterates the alignment of certain emanations in order to arrive at a greater refinement of perception, a skimming, a tricky human construct with no parallel.

He said that the new seers had observed that only human beings were capable of further clustering the clusters of emanations. He used the Spanish word for skimming, desnate, to describe the act of collecting the most palatable cream off the top of a container of boiled milk after it cools. Likewise, in terms of perception, man's assemblage point takes some part of the emanations already selected for alignment and makes a more palatable construct with it.

"The skimmings of men," don Juan continued, "are more real than what other creatures perceive. That is our pitfall. They are so real to us that we forget we have constructed them by commanding our assemblage points to appear where they do. We forget they are real to us only because it is our command to perceive them as real. We have the power to skim the top off the alignments, but we don't have the power to protect ourselves from our own commands. That has to be learned. To give our skimmings a free hand, as we do, is an error of judgment for which we pay as dearly as the old seers paid for theirs."

## 9. The Shift Below

Don Juan and Genaro made their yearly trip to the northern part of Mexico, to the Sonoran desert, to look for medicinal plants. One of the seers of the nagual's party, Vicente Medrano, the herbalist among them, used those plants to make medicines.

I had joined don Juan and Genaro in Sonora, at the last stage of their journey just in time to drive them south back to their home.

The day before we started on our drive, don Juan abruptly continued his explanation of the mastery of awareness. We were resting in the shade of some tall bushes in the foothills of the mountains. It was late afternoon; almost dark. Each of us had been carrying a large burlap sack filled with plants. As soon as we had put them down, Genaro lay down on the ground and fell asleep using his folded jacket as a pillow.

Don Juan spoke to me in a low voice as if he didn't want to wake up Genaro. He said that by now he had explained most of the truths about awareness, and that there was only one truth left to discuss. The last truth, he assured me, was the best of the old seers' findings although they never knew that themselves. It's tremendous value was only recognized ages later by the new seers.

"I've explained to you that man has an assemblage point," he went on, "and that that assemblage point aligns emanations for perception. We've also discussed that that point moves from it's fixed position. Now, the last truth is that once that assemblage point moves beyond a certain limit, it can assemble worlds entirely different from the world we know."

Still in a whisper, he said that certain geographical areas not only help that precarious movement of the assemblage point, but also select specific directions for that movement. For instance, the Sonoran desert helps the assemblage point move downward from it's customary position, to the place of the beast.

"That's why there are true sorcerers in Sonora," he continued. "Especially sorceresses. You already know one, la Catalina. In the past, I have arranged bouts between the two of you. I wanted to make your assemblage point shift, and la Catalina, with her sorcery antics, jolted it loose."

Don Juan explained that the chilling experiences I had had with la Catalina had been part of a prearranged agreement between the two of them.

"What would you think if we invited her to join us?" Genaro asked me in a loud voice, as he sat up.

The abruptness of his question and the strange sound of his voice plunged me into instant terror.

Don Juan laughed and shook me by the arms. He assured me that there was no need for alarm. He said that la Catalina was like a cousin or an aunt to us. She was part of our world, although she did not quite follow our quests. She was infinitely closer to the ancient seers.

Genaro smiled and winked at me.

"I understand that you've got hot pants for her," he said to me. "She herself confessed to me that every time you have had a confrontation with her, the greater your fright, the hotter your pants."

Don Juan and Genaro laughed to near hysteria.

I had to admit that somehow I had always found la Catalina to be a very scary but at the same time an extremely appealing woman. What impressed me the most about her was her exuding energy.

"She has so much energy saved," don Juan commented, "that you didn't have to be in heightened awareness for her to move your assemblage point all the way to the depths of the left side."

Don Juan said again that la Catalina was very closely related to us, because she belonged to the nagual Julian's party. He explained that usually the nagual and all the members of his party leave the world together, but that there are instances when they leave either in smaller groups or one by one. The nagual Julian and his party were an example of the latter. Although he had left the world nearly forty years ago, la Catalina was still here.

He reminded me about something he mentioned to me before; that the nagual Julian's party consisted of a group of three thoroughly inconsequential men and eight superb women. Don Juan had always maintained that such a disparity was one of the reasons why the members of the nagual Julian's party left the world one by one.

He said that la Catalina had been attached to one of the superb women seers of the nagual Julian's party, who taught her extraordinary maneuvers to shift her assemblage point to the area below. That seer was one of the last to leave the world. She lived to an extremely old age, and since both she and la Catalina were originally from Sonora, they returned, in her advanced years, to the desert and lived together until the seer left the world. In the years they spent together, la Catalina became her most dedicated helper and disciple, a disciple who was willing to learn the extravagant ways the old seers knew to make the assemblage point shift.

I asked don Juan if la Catalina's knowledge was inherently different from his own.

"We are exactly the same," he replied. "She's more like Silvio Manuel or Genaro. She is really the female version of them, but, of course, being a woman she's infinitely more aggressive and dangerous than both of them."

Genaro assented with a nod of his head. "Infinitely more," he said and winked again.

"Is she attached to your party?" I asked don Juan.

I said that she's like a cousin or an aunt to us," he replied. "I meant she belongs to the older generation, although she's younger than all of us. She is the last of that group. She is rarely in contact with us. She doesn't quite like us. We are too stiff for her, because she's used to the nagual Julian's touch. She prefers the high adventure of the unknown to the quest for freedom."

What is the difference between the two?" I asked don Juan.

"In the last part of my explanation of the truths about awareness," he replied, "we are going to discuss that difference slowly and thoroughly. What's important for you to know at this moment, is that you're jealously guarding weird secrets in your left-side awareness. That is why la Catalina and you like each other."

I insisted again that it was not that I liked her, it was rather that I admired her great strength.

Don Juan and Genaro laughed and patted me as if they knew something I did not.

"She likes you because she knows what you're like," Genaro said and smacked his lips. "She knew the nagual Julian very well."

Both of them gave me a long look that made me feel embarrassed.

"What are you driving at?" I asked Genaro in a belligerent tone.

He grinned at me and moved his eyebrows up and down in a comical gesture. But he kept quiet.

Don Juan spoke and broke the silence.

"There are very strange points in common between the nagual Julian and you," he said. "Genaro is just trying to figure out if you're aware of it."

I asked both of them how on earth I would be aware of something so farfetched.

"La Catalina thinks you are," Genaro said. "She says so because she knew the nagual Julian better than any of us here."

I commented that I couldn't believe that she knew the nagual Julian, since he had left the world nearly forty years ago.

"La Catalina is no spring chicken," Genaro said. "She just looks young. That's part of her knowledge; just as it was part of the nagual Julian's knowledge. You've seen her only when she looks young. If you see her when she looks old, she'll scare the living daylights out of you."

"What la Catalina does," don Juan interrupted, "can be explained only in terms of the three masteries: the mastery of awareness, the mastery of stalking, and the mastery of intent.

"But today we are going to examine what she does only in light of the last truth about awareness; the truth that says that the assemblage point can assemble worlds different from our own after it moves from it's original position."

Don Juan signaled me to get up. Genaro also stood up. I automatically grabbed the burlap sack filled with medicinal plants. Genaro stopped me as I was about to put it on my shoulders.

"Leave the sack alone," he said, smiling. "We have to take a little hike up the hill and meet la Catalina."

"Where is she?" I asked.

"Up there," Genaro said, pointing to the top of a small hill. "If you stare with your eyes half-closed, you'll see her as a very dark spot against the green shrubbery."

I strained to see the dark spot, but I couldn't see anything.

"Why don't you walk up there?" don Juan suggested to me.

I felt dizzy and sick to my stomach. Don Juan urged me with a movement of his hand to go up, but I didn't dare move. Finally, Genaro took me by the arm and both of us climbed toward the top of the hill. When we got there, I realized that don Juan had come up right behind us. The three of us reached the top at the same time.

Don Juan very calmly began to talk to Genaro. He asked him if he remembered the many times the nagual Julian was about to choke both of them to death because they indulged in their fears.

Genaro turned to me and assured me that the nagual Julian had been a ruthless teacher. The nagual Julian and his own teacher, the nagual Elias who was still in the world then, used to push everyone's assemblage points beyond a crucial limit and let them fend for themselves.

"I once told you," Genaro went on, "that the nagual Julian recommended we not waste our sexual energy. He meant that for the assemblage point to shift, one needs energy. If one doesn't have it, the nagual's blow is not the blow of freedom but the blow of death."

"Without enough energy," don Juan said, "the force of alignment is crushing. You have to have energy to sustain the pressure of alignments which never take place under ordinary circumstances."

Genaro said that the nagual Julian was an inspiring teacher. He always found ways to teach and at the same time entertain himself. One of his favorite teaching devices was to catch them unawares once or twice in their normal awareness, and make their assemblage points shift. From then on, all he had to do to have their undivided attention was to threaten them with an unexpected nagual's blow.

"The nagual Julian was really an unforgettable man," don Juan said. "He had a great touch with people. He would do the worst things in the world, but done by him they were great. Done by anyone else they would have been crude and callous.

"The nagual Elias, on the other hand, had no touch, but he was indeed a great, great teacher."

"The nagual Elias was very much like the nagual Juan Matus," Genaro said to me. "They got along very fine. And the nagual Elias taught him everything without ever raising his voice, or playing tricks on him.

"But the nagual Julian was quite different," Genaro went on, giving me a friendly shove. "I'd say that he jealously guarded strange secrets in his left side, just like you.

He asked don Juan, "Wouldn't you say so?"

Don Juan did not answer, but nodded affirmatively. He seemed to be holding back his laughter.

"He had a playful nature," don Juan said, and both of them broke into a great laughter.

The fact that they were obviously alluding to something they knew made me feel even more threatened.

Don Juan matter-of-factly said that they were referring to the bizarre sorcery techniques that the nagual Julian had learned in the course of his life. Genaro added that the nagual Julian had a unique teacher besides the nagual Elias. A teacher who had liked him immensely and had taught him novel and complex ways of moving his assemblage point. As a result of this, the nagual Julian was extraordinarily eccentric in his behavior.

"Who was that teacher, don Juan?" I asked.

Don Juan and Genaro looked at each other and giggled like two children.

"That is a very tough question to answer," don Juan replied. "All I can say is that he was the teacher that deviated the course of our line. He taught us many things, good and bad, but among the worst, he taught us what the old seers did. So, some of us got trapped. The nagual Julian was one of them, and so is la Catalina. We only hope that you won't follow them."

I immediately began to protest. Don Juan interrupted me. He said that I did not know what I was protesting.

As don Juan spoke, I became terribly angry with him and Genaro. Suddenly, I was raging; yelling at them at the top of my voice. My reaction was so out of tone with me that it scared me. It was as if I were someone else. I stopped and looked at them for help.

Genaro had his hands on don Juan's shoulders as if he needed support. Both of them were laughing uncontrollably.

I became so despondent I was nearly in tears. Don Juan came to my side. He reassuringly put his hand on my shoulder. He said that the Sonoran desert, for reasons incomprehensible to him, fostered definite belligerence in man or any other organism.

"People may say that it's because the air is too dry here," he continued, "or because it's too hot. Seers would say that there is a particular confluence of the Eagle's emanations here which, as I've already said, helps the assemblage point to shift below.

"Be that as it may, warriors are in the world to train themselves to be unbiased witnesses so as to understand the mystery of ourselves, and relish the exultation of finding what we really are. This is the highest of the new seers' goals. And not every warrior attains it. We believe that the nagual Julian didn't attain it. He was waylaid, and so was la Catalina."

He further said that to be a peerless nagual, one has to love freedom, and one has to have supreme detachment. He explained that what makes the warrior's path so very dangerous is that it is the opposite of the life situation of modern man. He said that modern man has left the realm of the unknown and the mysterious, and has settled down in the realm of the functional. He has turned his back to the world of the foreboding and the exulting, and has welcomed the world of boredom.

"To be given a chance to go back again to the mystery of the world," don Juan continued, "is sometimes too much for warriors, and they succumb. They are waylaid by what I've called the high adventure of the unknown. They forget the quest for freedom. They forget to be unbiased witnesses. They sink into the unknown and love it."

"And you think I'm like that, don't you?" I asked don Juan.

"We don't think, we know," Genaro replied. "And la Catalina knows better than anyone else."

"Why would she know it?" I demanded.

"Because she's like you," Genaro replied, pronouncing his words with a comical intonation.

I was about to get into a heated argument again when don Juan interrupted me.

"There's no need to get so worked up," he said to me. "You are what you are. The fight for freedom is harder for some. You are one of them.

"In order to be unbiased witnesses," he went on, "we begin by understanding that the fixation or the movement of the assemblage point is all there is to us and the world we witness; whatever that world might be.

"The new seers say that when we were taught to talk to ourselves, we were taught the means to dull ourselves in order to keep the assemblage point fixed on one spot."

Genaro clapped his hands noisily, and let out a piercing whistle that imitated the whistle of a football coach.

"Let's get that assemblage point moving!" he yelled. "Up, up, up! Move, move, move!"

We were all still laughing when the bushes by my right side were suddenly stirred. Don Juan and Genaro immediately sat down with the left leg tucked under the seat. The right leg with the knee up was like a shield in front of them. Don Juan signaled me to do the same. He raised his brows and made a gesture of resignation at the corner of his mouth.

"Sorcerers have their own quirks," he said in a whisper. "When the assemblage point moves to the regions below it's normal position, the vision of sorcerers becomes limited. If they see you standing, they'll attack you."

"The nagual Julian kept me once for two days in this warrior's position," Genaro whispered to me. "I even had to urinate while I sat in this position."

"And defecate," don Juan added.

"Right," Genaro said. And then he whispered to me, as if on second thought, "I hope you did your kaka earlier. If your bowels aren't empty when la Catalina shows up, you'll shit in your pants; unless I show you how to take them off. If you need to shit in this position, you've got to get your pants off."

He began to show me how to maneuver out of my trousers. He did it in a most serious and concerned manner. All my concentration was focused on his movements. It was only when I had gotten out of my pants that I became aware that don Juan was roaring with laughter.

I realized that Genaro was again poking fun at me. I was about to stand up to put on my pants, when don Juan stopped me. He was laughing so hard that he could hardly articulate his words. He told me to stay put, that Genaro did things only half in fun, and that la Catalina was really there behind the bushes.

His tone of urgency, in the midst of laughter, got to me. I froze on the spot. A moment later a rustle in the bushes sent me into such a panic that I forgot about my pants. I looked at Genaro. He was again wearing his pants. He shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "I didn't have time to show you how to put them back on without getting up."

I did not have time to get angry or to join them in their mirth. Suddenly, right in front of me, the bushes separated and a most horrendous creature came out. It was so outlandish I was no longer afraid. I was spellbound.

Whatever was in front of me was not a human being. It was something not even remotely resembling one. It was more like a reptile. Or a bulky grotesque insect. Or even a hairy, ultimately repulsive bird. It's body was dark and had coarse reddish hair. I could not see any legs, just the ugly enormous head. The nose was flat and the nostrils were two enormous lateral holes. It had something like a beak with teeth. Horrifying as that thing was, it's eyes were magnificent. They were like two mesmeric pools of inconceivable clarity. They had knowledge. They were not human eyes, or bird eyes, or any kind of eyes I had ever seen.

The creature moved toward my left, rustling the bushes. As I moved my head to follow it, I noticed that don Juan and Genaro seemed to be as spellbound by it's presence as I was. It occurred to me that they had never seen anything like that either.

In an instant, the creature had moved completely out of sight. But a moment later there was a growl, and it's gigantic shape again loomed in front of us.

I was fascinated and at the same time worried by the fact that I was not in the least afraid of that grotesque creature. It was as if my early panic had been experienced by someone else.

I felt, at one moment, that I was beginning to stand up. Against my volition, my legs straightened up and I found myself standing up, facing the creature. I vaguely felt that I was taking off my jacket, my shirt, and my shoes. Then I was naked. The muscles of my legs tensed with a tremendously powerful contraction. I jumped up and down with colossal agility, and then the creature and I raced toward some ineffable greenness in the distance.

The creature raced ahead of me, coiling on itself, like a serpent. But then I caught up with it. As we speeded together, I became aware of something I already knew; the creature was really la Catalina. All of a sudden, la Catalina, in the flesh, was next to me. We moved effortlessly. It was as if we were stationary, only posed in a bodily gesture of movement and speed, while the scenery around us was being moved, giving the impression of enormous acceleration.

Our racing stopped as suddenly as it had started, and then I was alone with la Catalina in a different world. There was not a single recognizable feature in it. There was an intense glare and heat coming from what seemed to be the ground, a ground covered with huge rocks. Or at least they seemed to be rocks. They had the color of sandstone, but they had no weight. They were like chunks of sponge tissue. I could send them hurling around by only leaning on them.

I became so fascinated with my strength that I was oblivious to anything else. I had assessed, in whatever way, that the chunks of seemingly weightless material opposed resistance to me. It was my superior strength that sent them hurling around.

I tried to grab them with my hands, and I realized that my entire body had changed. La Catalina was looking at me. She was again the grotesque creature she had been before, and so was I. I could not see myself, but I knew that both of us were exactly alike.

An indescribable joy possessed me as if joy were some force that came from outside me. La Catalina and I cavorted, and twisted, and played until I had no more thoughts, or feelings, or human awareness in any degree. Yet, I was definitely aware. My awareness was a vague knowledge that gave me confidence. It was a limitless trust; a physical certainty of my existence; not in the sense of a human feeling of individuality, but in the sense of a presence that was everything.

Then, everything came again into human focus all at once. La Catalina was holding my hand. We were walking on the desert floor among the desert shrubs. I had the immediate and painful realization that the desert rocks and hard clumps of dirt were horribly injurious to my bare feet.

We came to a spot clear of vegetation. Don Juan and Genaro were there. I sat down and put on my clothes.

My experience with la Catalina delayed our trip back to the south of Mexico. It had unhinged me in some indescribable way. In my normal state of awareness, I became disassociated. It was as if I had lost a point of reference. I had become despondent. I told don Juan that I had even lost my desire to live.

We were sitting around in the ramada of don Juan's house. My car was loaded with sacks and we were ready to leave, but my feeling of despair got the best of me and I began to weep.

Don Juan and Genaro laughed until their eyes were tearing. The more desperate I felt, the greater was their enjoyment. Finally, don Juan had me shift into heightened awareness and explained that their laughter was not unkindness on their part, or the result of a weird sense of humor, but the genuine expression of happiness at seeing me advance in the path of knowledge.

"I'll tell you what the nagual Julian used to say to us when we got to where you are," don Juan went on. "That way, you'll know that you're not alone. What's happening to you happens to anyone who stores enough energy to catch a glimpse of the unknown."

He said that the nagual Julian used to tell them that they had been evicted from the homes where they had lived all their lives. A result of having saved energy had been the disruption of their cozy but utterly limiting and boring nest in the world of everyday life. Their depression, the nagual Julian told them, was not so much the sadness of having lost their nest, but the annoyance of having to look for new quarters.

"The new quarters," don Juan went on, "are not as cozy. But they are infinitely more roomy.

"Your eviction notice came in the form of a great depression, a loss of the desire to live, just as it happened to us. When you told us that you didn't want to live, we couldn't help laughing."

"What's going to happen to me now?" I asked.

"Using the vernacular, you got to get another pad," don Juan replied.

Don Juan and Genaro again entered into a state of great euphoria. Every one of their statements and remarks made them laugh hysterically.

"It's all very simple," don Juan said. "Your new level of energy will create a new spot to house your assemblage point. And the warriors' dialogue you carry on with us every time we get together will solidify that new position."

Genaro adopted a serious look and in a booming voice he asked me, "Did you shit today?"

He urged me with a movement of his head to answer.

"Did you, did you?" he demanded. "Let's get going with our warriors' dialogue."

When their laughter had subsided, Genaro said that I had to be aware of a drawback; the fact that from time to time the assemblage point returns to it's original position. He told me that in his own case, the normal position of his assemblage point had forced him to see people as threatening and often terrifying beings. To his utter amazement, one day he realized that he had changed. He was considerably more daring and had successfully dealt with a situation that would have ordinarily thrown him into chaos and fear.

"I found myself making love," Genaro continued, and he winked at me. "Usually I was afraid to death of women. But one day I found myself in bed with a most ferocious woman, it was so unlike me that when I realized what I was doing I nearly had a heart attack. The jolt made my assemblage point return to it's miserable normal position and I had to run out of the house, shaking like a scared rabbit.

"You'd better watch out for the recoil of the assemblage point," Genaro added, and they were laughing again.

"The position of the assemblage point on man's cocoon," don Juan explained, "is maintained by the internal dialogue, and because of that, it is a flimsy position at best. That's why men and women lose their minds so easily, especially those whose internal dialogue is repetitious, boring, and without any depth.

"The new seers say that the more resilient human beings are those whose internal dialogue is more fluid and varied."

He said that the position of the warrior's assemblage point is infinitely stronger, because as soon as the assemblage point begins to move in the cocoon, it creates a dimple in the luminosity, a dimple that houses the assemblage point from then on.

"That's the reason why we can't say that warriors lose their minds," don Juan went on. "If they lose anything, they lose their dimple."

Don Juan and Genaro found that statement so hilarious that they rolled on the floor laughing.

I asked don Juan to explain my experience with la Catalina. And both of them again howled with laughter.

"Women are definitely more bizarre than men," don Juan finally said. "The fact that they have an extra opening between their legs makes them fall prey to strange influences. Strange, powerful forces possess them through that opening. That's the only way I can understand their quirks."

He kept silent for a while, and I asked what he meant by that.

"La Catalina came to us as a giant worm," he replied.

Don Juan's expression when he said that, and Genaro's explosion of laughter, took me into sheer mirth. I laughed until I was nearly sick.

Don Juan said that la Catalina's skill was so extraordinary that she could do anything she wanted in the realm of the beast. Her unparalleled display had been motivated by her affinity with me. The final result of all that, he said, was that la Catalina pulled my assemblage point with her.

"What did you two do as worms?" Genaro asked and slapped me on the back.

Don Juan seemed to be close to choking with laughter.

"That's why I've said that women are more bizarre than men," he commented at last.

"I don't agree with you," Genaro said to don Juan. "The nagual Julian didn't have an extra hole between his legs and he was more weird than la Catalina. I believe she learned the worm bit from him. He used to do that to her."

Don Juan jumped up and down, like a child who is trying to keep from wetting his pants.

When he had regained a measure of calm, don Juan said that the nagual Julian had a knack for creating and exploiting the most bizarre situations. He also said that la Catalina had given me a superb example of the shift below. She had let me see her as the being whose form she had adopted by moving her assemblage point, and she had then helped me move mine to the same position that gave her her monstrous appearance.

"The other teacher that the nagual Julian had," don Juan went on, "taught him how to get to specific spots in that immensity of the area below. None of us could follow him there, but all the members of his party did, especially la Catalina and the woman seer who taught her."

Don Juan further said that a shift below entailed a view, not of another world proper, but of our same world of everyday life seen from a different perspective. He added that in order for me to see another world I had to perceive another great band of the Eagle's emanations.

He then brought his explanation to an end. He said that he had no time to elaborate on the subject of the great bands of emanations, because we had to be on our way. I wanted to stay a bit longer and keep on talking, but he argued that he would need a good deal of time to explain that topic and I would need fresh concentration.

## 10. Great Bands of Emanations

Days later, in his house in southern Mexico, don Juan continued with his explanation. He took me to the big room. It was early evening. The room was in darkness. I wanted to light the gasoline lanterns, but don Juan would not let me. He said that I had to let the sound of his voice move my assemblage point so that it would glow on the emanations of total concentration and total recall.

He then told me that we were going to talk about the great bands of emanations. He called it another key discovery that the old seers made; but in their aberration they had relegated it to oblivion until it was rescued by the new seers.

"The Eagle's emanations are always grouped in clusters," he went on. "The old seers called those clusters the great bands of emanations. They aren't really bands, but the name stuck.

"For instance, there is an immeasurable cluster that produces organic beings. The emanations of that organic band have a sort of fluffiness. They are transparent and have a unique light of their own, a peculiar energy. They are aware, they jump. That's the reason why all organic beings are filled with a peculiar consuming energy.

"The other bands are darker, less fluffy. Some of them have no light at all, but rather a quality of opaqueness."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that all organic beings have the same kind of emanations inside their cocoons?" I asked.

"No. I don't mean that. It isn't really that simple, although organic beings all belong to the same great band. Think of it as an enormously wide band of luminous filaments; luminous strings with no end. Organic beings are bubbles that grow around a group of luminous filaments. Imagine that in this band of organic life some bubbles are formed around the luminous filaments in the center of the band. Others are formed close to the edges. The band is wide enough to accommodate every kind of organic being with room to spare. In such an arrangement, bubbles that are close to the edges of the band miss altogether the emanations that are in the center of the band which are shared only by bubbles that are aligned with the center. By the same token, bubbles in the center miss the emanations from the edges.

"As you may understand, organic beings share the emanations of one band. Yet seers see that within that organic band, beings are as different as they can be."

"Are there many of these great bands?" I asked.

"As many as infinity itself," he replied. "Seers have found out, however, that in the earth there are only forty-eight such bands."

"What is the meaning of that, don Juan?"

"For seers it means that there are forty-eight types of organizations on the earth, forty-eight types of clusters or structures. Organic life is one of them."

"Does that mean that there are forty-seven types of inorganic life?"

"No, not at all. The old seers counted seven bands that produced inorganic bubbles of awareness. In other words, there are forty bands that produce bubbles without awareness. Those are bands that generate only organization.

"Think of the great bands as being like trees. All of them bear fruit. They produce containers filled with emanations, yet only eight of those trees bear edible fruit- that is, bubbles of awareness. Seven have sour fruit, but edible nonetheless. And one has the most juicy, luscious fruit there is."

He laughed and said that in his analogy he had taken the point of view of the Eagle, for whom the most delectable morsels are the organic bubbles of awareness.

"What makes those eight bands produce awareness?" I asked.

"The Eagle bestows awareness through it's emanations," he replied.

His answer made me argue with him. I told him that to say that the Eagle bestows awareness through it's emanations is like what a religious man would say about God, that God bestows life through love. It does not mean anything.

"The two statements are not made from the same point of view," he patiently said. "And yet I think they mean the same thing. The difference is that seers see how the Eagle bestows awareness through it's emanations and religious men don't see how God bestows life through his love."

He said that the way the Eagle bestows awareness is by means of three giant bundles of emanations that run through eight great bands. These bundles are quite peculiar, because they make seers feel a hue. One bundle gives the feeling of being beige-pink, something like the glow of pink-colored street lamps. Another gives the feeling of being peach, like buff neon lights. The third bundle gives the feeling of being amber, like clear honey.

"So, it is a matter of seeing a hue when seers see that the Eagle bestows awareness through it's emanations," he went on. "Religious men don't see God's love, but if they would see it, they would know that it is either pink, peach, or amber.

"Man, for example, is attached to the amber bundle, but so are other beings."

I wanted to know which beings shared those emanations with man.

"Details like that you will have to find out for yourself through your own seeing," he said. "There is no point in my telling you which ones. You will only be making another inventory. Suffice it to say that finding that out for yourself will be one of the most exciting things you'll ever do."

"Do the pink and peach bundles also show in man?" I asked.

"Never. Those bundles belong to other living beings," he replied.

I was about to ask a question, but with a forceful movement of his hand, he signaled me to stop. He then became immersed in thought. We were enveloped in complete silence for a long time.

"I've told you that the glow of awareness in man has different colors." he finally said. "What I didn't tell you then, because we hadn't gotten to that point yet, was that they are not colors but casts of amber."

He said that the amber bundle of awareness has an infinitude of subtle variants, which always denote differences in quality of awareness. Pink and pale-green amber are the most common casts. Blue amber is more unusual, but pure amber is by far the most rare.

"What determines the particular casts of amber?"

"Seers say that the amount of energy that one saves and stores determines the cast. Countless numbers of warriors have begun with an ordinary pink amber cast and have finished with the purest of all ambers. Genaro and Silvio Manuel are examples of that."

"What forms of life belong to the pink and the peach bundles of awareness?" I asked.

"The three bundles with all their casts crisscross the eight bands," he replied. "In the organic band, the pink bundle belongs mainly to plants, the peach band belongs to insects, and the amber band belongs to man and other animals.

"The same situation is prevalent in the inorganic bands. The three bundles of awareness produce specific kinds of inorganic beings in each of the seven great bands."

I asked him to elaborate on the kinds of inorganic beings that existed.

"That is another thing that you must see for yourself," he said. "The seven bands and what they produce are indeed inaccessible to human reason, but not to human seeing."

I told him that I could not quite grasp his explanation of the great bands, because his description had forced me to imagine them as independent bundles of strings, or even as flat bands, like conveyor belts.

He explained that the great bands are neither flat nor round, but indescribably clustered together, like a pile of hay, which is held together in midair by the force of the hand that pitched it. Thus, there is no order to the emanations. To say that there is a central part or that there are edges is misleading, but necessary to understanding.

Continuing, he explained that inorganic beings produced by the seven other bands of awareness are characterized by having a container that has no motion. It is rather a formless receptacle with a low degree of luminosity. It does not look like the cocoon of organic beings. It lacks the tautness, the inflated quality that makes organic beings look like luminous balls bursting with energy.

Don Juan said that the only similarity between inorganic and organic beings is that all of them have the awareness bestowing pink or peach or amber emanations.

"Those emanations, under certain circumstances," he continued, "make possible the most fascinating communication between the beings of those eight great bands."

He said that usually the organic beings with their greater fields of energy are the initiators of communication with inorganic beings, but a subtle and sophisticated follow-up is always the province of the inorganic beings. Once the barrier is broken, inorganic beings change and become what seers call allies. From that moment inorganic beings can anticipate the seer's most subtle thoughts or moods or fears.

"The old seers became mesmerized by such devotion from their allies," he went on. "Stories are that the old seers could make their allies do anything they wanted. That was one of the reasons they believed in their own invulnerability. They got fooled by their self-importance. The allies have power only if the seers who see them are paragons of impeccability; and those old seers just weren't."

"Are there as many inorganic beings as there are living organisms?" I asked.

He said that inorganic beings are not as plentiful as organic ones, but that this is offset by the greater number of bands of inorganic awareness. Also, the differences among the inorganic beings themselves are more vast than the differences among organisms, because organisms belong to only one band while inorganic beings belong to seven bands.

"Besides, inorganic beings live infinitely longer than organisms," he continued. "This matter is what prompted the old seers to concentrate their seeing on the allies, for reasons I will tell you about later on."

He said that the old seers also came to realize that it is the high energy of organisms and the subsequent high development of their awareness that make them delectable morsels for the Eagle. In the old seers' view, gluttony was the reason the Eagle produced as many organisms as possible.

He explained next that the product of the other forty great bands is not awareness at all, but a configuration of inanimate energy. The old seers chose to call whatever is produced by those bands, vessels. While cocoons and containers are fields of energetic awareness, which accounts for their independent luminosity, vessels are rigid receptacles that hold emanations without being fields of energetic awareness. Their luminosity comes only from the energy of the encased emanations.

"You must bear in mind that everything on the earth is encased," he continued. "Whatever we perceive is made up of portions of cocoons or vessels with emanations. Ordinarily, we don't perceive the containers of inorganic beings at all."

He looked at me, waiting for a sign of comprehension. When he realized I was not going to oblige him, he continued explaining.

"The total world is made of the forty-eight bands," he said. "The world that our assemblage point assembles for our normal perception is made up of two bands; one is the organic band, the other is a band that has only structure, but no awareness. The other forty-six great bands are not part of the world we normally perceive."

He paused again for pertinent questions. I had none.

"There are other complete worlds that our assemblage points can assemble," he went on. "The old seers counted seven such worlds, one for each band of awareness. I'll add that two of those worlds, besides the world of everyday life, are easy to assemble; the other five are something else."

When we again sat down to talk, don Juan immediately began to talk about my experience with la Catalina. He said that a shift of the assemblage point to the area below it's customary position allows the seer a detailed and narrow view of the world we know. So detailed is that view that it seems to be an entirely different world. It is a mesmerizing view that has a tremendous appeal, especially for those seers who have an adventurous but somehow indolent and lazy spirit.

"The change of perspective is very pleasant," don Juan went on. "Minimal effort is required, and the results are staggering. If a seer is driven by quick gain, there is no better maneuver than the shift below. The only problem is that in those positions of the assemblage point, seers are plagued by death, which happens even more brutally and more quickly than in man's position.

"The nagual Julian thought it was a great place for cavorting, but that's all."

He said that a true change of worlds happens only when the assemblage point moves into man's band, deep enough to reach a crucial threshold, at which stage the assemblage point can use another of the great bands.

"How does it use it?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "It's a matter of energy," he said. "The force of alignment hooks another band, provided that the seer has enough energy.

"Our normal energy allows our assemblage points to use the force of alignment of one great band of emanations; and we perceive the world we know.

"But if we have a surplus of energy, we can use the force of alignment of other great bands, and consequently we perceive other worlds."

Don Juan abruptly changed the subject and began to talk about plants.

"This may seem like an oddity to you," he said, "but trees, for instance, are closer to man than ants. I've told you that trees and man can develop a great relationship. That is because we share emanations."

"How big are their cocoons?" I asked.

"The cocoon of a giant tree is not much larger than the tree itself. The interesting part is that some tiny plants have a cocoon almost as big as a man's body and three times it's width. Those are power plants. They share the largest amount of emanations with man, not the emanations of awareness, but other emanations in general.

"Another thing unique about plants is that their luminosities have different casts. They are pinkish in general, because their awareness is pink. Poisonous plants are a pale yellow pink and medicinal plants are a bright violet pink. The only ones that are white pink are power plants; some are murky white, others are brilliant white.

"But the real difference between plants and other organic beings is the location of their assemblage points. Plants have it on the lower part of their cocoon, while other organic beings have it on the upper part of their cocoon."

"What about the inorganic beings?" I asked. "Where do they have their assemblage points?"

"Some have it on the lower part of their containers," he said. "Those are thoroughly alien to man, but akin to plants. Others have it anywhere on the upper part of their containers. Those are close to man and other organic creatures."

He added that the old seers were convinced that plants have the most intense communication with inorganic beings. They believed that the lower the assemblage point, the easier for plants to break the barrier of perception. Very large trees and very small plants have their assemblage points extremely low in their cocoon. Because of this, a great number of the old seers' sorcery techniques were means to harness the awareness of trees and small plants in order to use them as guides to descend to what they called the deepest levels of the dark regions.

"You understand, of course," don Juan went on, "that when they thought they were descending to the depths, they were, in fact, pushing their assemblage points to assemble other perceivable worlds with those seven great bands.

"They taxed their awareness to the limit and assembled worlds with five great bands that are accessible to seers only if they undergo a dangerous transformation."

"But did the old seers succeed in assembling those worlds?" I asked.

"They did," he said. "In their aberration they believed it was worth their while to break all the barriers of perception, even if they had to become trees to do that."

## 11. Stalking, Intent, and the Dreaming Position

The next day in the early evening, don Juan came to the room where I was talking with Genaro. He took me by the arm and walked me through the house to the back patio. It was already fairly dark. We started to walk around in the corridor that encircled the patio.

As we walked, don Juan told me that he wanted to warn me once again that it is very easy in the path of knowledge to get lost in intricacies and morbidity. He said that seers are up against great enemies that can destroy their purpose, muddle their aims, and make them weak; enemies created by the warriors' path itself together with the sense of indolence, laziness, and self-importance that are integral parts of the daily world.

He remarked that the mistakes the ancient seers made as a result of indolence, laziness, and self-importance were so enormous and so grave that the new seers had no option but to scorn and reject their own tradition.

"The most important thing the new seers needed," don Juan continued, "was practical steps in order to make their assemblage points shift. Since they had none, they began by developing a keen interest in seeing the glow of awareness, and as a result they worked out three sets of techniques that became their cornerstone."

Don Juan said that with these three sets, the new seers accomplished a most extraordinary and difficult feat. They succeeded in systematically making the assemblage point shift away from it's customary position. He acknowledged that the old seers had also accomplished that feat, but by means of capricious, idiosyncratic maneuvers.

He explained that what the new seers saw in the glow of awareness resulted in the sequence in which they arranged the old seers' truths about awareness. This is known as the mastery of awareness. From that, they developed the three sets of techniques. The first is the mastery of stalking, the second is the mastery of intent, and the third is the mastery of dreaming. He maintained that he had taught me these three sets from the very first day we met.

He told me that he had taught me the mastery of awareness in two ways just as the new seers recommend. In his teachings for the right side which he had done in normal awareness, he accomplished two goals: he taught me the warriors' way, and he loosened my assemblage point from it's original position. In his teachings for the left side which he had done in heightened awareness, he also accomplished two goals: he had made my assemblage point shift to as many positions as I was capable of sustaining, and he had given me a long series of explanations.

Don Juan stopped talking and stared at me fixedly. There was an awkward silence. Then he started to talk about stalking.

He said that it had very humble and fortuitous origins. It started from an observation the new seers made when warriors steadily behave in ways not customary for them. The unused emanations inside their cocoons begin to glow, and their assemblage points shift in a mild, harmonious, barely noticeable fashion.

Stimulated by this observation, the new seers began to practice the systematic control of their behavior. They called this practice the art of stalking. Don Juan remarked that the name, although objectionable, was appropriate, because stalking entailed a specific kind of behavior with people; behavior that could be categorized as surreptitious. [* - (1.)marked by quiet and caution and secrecy; taking pains to avoid being observed. (2.) conducted with or marked by hidden aims or methods]

The new seers, armed with this technique, tackled the known in a sober and fruitful way. By continual practice, they made their assemblage points move steadily.

"Stalking is one of the two greatest accomplishments of the new seers." he said. "The new seers decided that it should be taught to a modern-day nagual when his assemblage point has moved quite deep into the left side. The reason for this decision is that a nagual must learn the principles of stalking without the encumbrance of the human inventory. After all, the nagual is the leader of a group, and to lead them he has to act quickly without first having to think about it.

"Other warriors can learn stalking in their normal awareness, although it is advisable that they do it in heightened awareness- not so much because of the value of heightened awareness, but because it imbues stalking with a mystery that it doesn't really have. Stalking is merely behavior with people."

He said that I could now understand that shifting the assemblage point was the reason why the new seers placed such a high value on the interaction with petty tyrants. Petty tyrants forced seers to use the principles of stalking, and in doing so, helped seers to move their assemblage points.

I asked him if the old seers knew anything at all about the principles of stalking.

"Stalking belongs exclusively to the new seers," he said, smiling. "They are the only seers who had to deal with people. The old ones were so wrapped up in their sense of power that they didn't even know that people existed until people started clobbering them on the head. But you already know all this."

Don Juan said next that the mastery of intent together with the mastery of stalking are the new seers' two masterpieces which mark the arrival of the modern-day seers. He explained that in their efforts to gain an advantage over their oppressors, the new seers pursued every possibility.

They knew that their predecessors had accomplished extraordinary feats by manipulating a mysterious and miraculous force which they could only describe as power. The new seers had very little information about that force, so they were obliged to examine it systematically through seeing. Their efforts were amply rewarded when they discovered that the energy of alignment is that force.

They began by seeing how the glow of awareness increases in size and intensity as the emanations inside the cocoon are aligned with the emanations at large. They used that observation as a springboard, just as they had done with stalking, and went on to develop a complex series of techniques to handle that alignment of emanations.

At first they referred to those techniques as the mastery of alignment. Then they realized that what was involved was much more than just alignment. What was involved was the energy that comes out of the alignment of emanations. They called that energy will.

Will became the second basis. The new seers understood it as a blind, impersonal, ceaseless burst of energy that makes us behave in the ways we do. Will accounts for our perception of the world of ordinary affairs. And indirectly through the force of that perception, it accounts for the placement of the assemblage point in it's customary position.

Don Juan said that the new seers examined how the perception of the world of everyday life takes place and saw the effects of will. They saw that alignment is ceaselessly renewed in order to imbue perception with continuity. To renew alignment every time with the freshness that it needs to make up a living world, the burst of energy that comes out of those very alignments is automatically rerouted to reinforce some choice alignments.

This new observation served the new seers as another springboard that helped them reach the third basis of the set. They called it intent. They described intent as the purposeful guiding of the energy of alignment; of will.

"Silvio Manuel, Genaro, and Vicente were pushed by the nagual Julian to learn those three aspects of the seers' knowledge," he went on. "Genaro is the master of handling awareness, Vicente is the master of stalking, and Silvio Manuel is the master of intent.

"We are now doing a final explanation of the mastery of awareness. This is why Genaro is helping you."

Don Juan talked to the female apprentices for a long time. The women listened with serious expressions on their faces. I felt sure he was giving them detailed instructions about difficult procedures, judging from the women's fierce concentration.

I had been barred from their meeting, but I had watched them as they talked in the front room of Genaro's house. I sat at the kitchen table waiting until they were through.

Then the women got up to leave, but before they did, they came to the kitchen with don Juan. He sat down facing me while the women talked to me with awkward formality. They actually embraced me. All of them were unusually friendly, even talkative. They said that they were going to join the male apprentices, who had gone with Genaro hours earlier. Genaro was going to show all of them his dreaming body.

As soon as the women left, don Juan quite abruptly resumed his explanation. He said that as time passed and the new seers established their practices, they realized that under the prevailing conditions of life, stalking only moved the assemblage points minimally.

For maximum effect, stalking needed an ideal setting: It needed petty tyrants in positions of great authority and power. As it became increasingly difficult for the new seers to place themselves in such situations, the task of improvising them or seeking them out became an unbearable burden.

The new seers deemed it imperative to see the Eagle's emanations in order to find a more suitable way to move the assemblage point. As they tried to see the emanations they were faced with a very serious problem.

They found out that there is no way to see them without running a mortal risk, and yet they had to see them. That was the time when they used the old seers' technique of dreaming as a shield to protect themselves from the deadly blow of the Eagle's emanations. And in doing so, they realized that dreaming was in itself the most effective way to move the assemblage point.

"One of the strictest commands of the new seers," don Juan continued, "was that warriors have to learn dreaming while they are in their normal state of awareness. Following that command, I began teaching you dreaming almost from the first day we met."

"Why do the new seers command that dreaming has to be taught in normal awareness?" I asked.

"Because dreaming is so dangerous and dreamers so vulnerable," he said. "Dreaming is dangerous because it has inconceivable power, and it makes dreamers vulnerable because it leaves them at the mercy of the incomprehensible force of alignment.

"The new seers realized that in our normal state of awareness we have countless defenses that can safeguard us against the force of unused emanations that suddenly become aligned in dreaming."

Don Juan explained that dreaming, like stalking, began with a simple observation. The old seers became aware that in dreams the assemblage point shifts slightly to the left side in a most natural manner. The point relaxes when a person sleeps and all kinds of unused emanations begin to glow.

The old seers became immediately intrigued with that observation, and began to work with that natural shift until they were able to control it. They called that control dreaming, or the art of handling the dreaming body.

He remarked that there is hardly a way of describing the immensity of their knowledge about dreaming. Very little of it, however, was of any use to the new seers. So when the time of reconstruction came, the new seers took for themselves only the bare essentials of dreaming to aid them in seeing the Eagle's emanations and to help them move their assemblage points.

He said that seers, old and new, understand dreaming as being the control of the natural shift that the assemblage point undergoes in sleep. He stressed that to control that shift does not mean in any way to direct it, but to keep the assemblage point fixed at the position where it naturally moves in sleep; a most difficult maneuver that took the old seers enormous effort and concentration to accomplish.

Don Juan explained that dreamers have to strike a very subtle balance, for dreams cannot be interfered with, nor can they be commanded by the conscious effort of the dreamer; and yet the shift of the assemblage point must obey the dreamer's command. This contradiction cannot be rationalized. It must be resolved in practice.

After observing dreamers while they slept, the old seers hit upon the solution of letting dreams follow their natural course. They had seen that in some dreams, the assemblage point of the dreamer would drift considerably deeper into the left side than in other dreams. This observation posed to them the question of whether the content of the dream makes the assemblage point move, or the movement of the assemblage point by itself produces the content of the dream by activating unused emanations.

They soon realized that the shifting of the assemblage point into the left side is what produces dreams. The farther the movement, the more vivid and bizarre the dream. Inevitably, they attempted to command their dreams, aiming to make their assemblage points move deeply into the left side.

Upon trying it, they discovered that when dreams are consciously or semiconsciously manipulated, the assemblage point immediately returns to it's usual place. Since what they wanted was for that point to move, they reached the unavoidable conclusion that interfering with dreams was interfering with the natural shift of the assemblage point.

Don Juan said that from there the old seers went on to develop their astounding knowledge on the subject- a knowledge which had a tremendous bearing on what the new seers aspired to do with dreaming, but was of little use to them in it's original form.

He told me that thus far I had understood dreaming as being the control of dreams, and that every one of the exercises he had given me to perform, such as finding my hands in my dreams, was not, although it might seem to be, aimed at teaching me to command my dreams.

Those exercises were designed to keep my assemblage point fixed at the place where it had moved in my sleep. It is here that the dreamers have to strike a subtle balance. All they can direct is the fixation of their assemblage points. Seers are like fishermen equipped with a line that casts itself wherever it may. The only thing they can do is keep the line anchored at the place where it sinks.

"Wherever the assemblage point moves in dreams is called the 'dreaming position'," he went on. "The old seers became so expert at keeping their dreaming position that they were even able to wake up while their assemblage points were anchored there.

"The old seers called that state the dreaming body, because they controlled it to the extreme of creating a temporary new body every time they woke up at a new dreaming position.

"I have to make it clear to you that dreaming has a terrible drawback," he went on. "It belongs to the old seers. It's tainted with their mood. I've been very careful in guiding you through it, but still there is no way to make sure."

"What are you warning me about, don Juan?" I asked.

"I'm warning you about the pitfalls of dreaming, which are truly stupendous," he replied. "In dreaming, there is really no way of directing the movement of the assemblage point. The only thing that dictates that shift is the inner strength or weakness of dreamers. Right there we have the first pitfall."

He said that at first the new seers were hesitant to use dreaming. It was their belief that dreaming, instead of fortifying them, made warriors weak, compulsive, and capricious. The old seers were all like that. In order to offset the nefarious effect of dreaming, since the new seers had no other option but to use it, they developed a complex and rich system of behavior called the warriors' way, or the warriors' path.

With that system, the new seers fortified themselves and acquired the internal strength they needed to guide the shift of the assemblage point in dreams. Don Juan stressed that the strength that he was talking about was not conviction alone. No one could have had stronger convictions than the old seers, and yet they were weak to the core.

Internal strength meant a sense of equanimity almost of indifference, a feeling of being at ease, but above all it meant a natural and profound bent for examination, for understanding. The new seers called all these traits of character sobriety.

"The conviction that the new seers have," he continued, "is that a life of impeccability by itself leads unavoidably to a sense of sobriety, and this in turn leads to the movement of the assemblage point.

"I've said that the new seers believed that the assemblage point can be moved from within. They went one step further and maintained that impeccable individuals need no one to guide them. By themselves, through saving their energy, they can do everything that seers do. All they need is the minimal chance which they gain from being aware of the possibilities that the seers have unraveled."

I told him that we were back in the same position we had been in in my normal state of awareness. I was still convinced that impeccability or saving energy was something so vague that it could be interpreted by anyone in whatever whimsical way he wanted.

I wanted to say more to build my argument, but a strange feeling overtook me. It was an actual physical sensation that I was rushing through something. And then I rebuffed my own argument.

I knew without any doubt whatsoever that don Juan was right. All that is required is impeccability and freed energy; and that begins with a single act that has to be deliberate, precise, and sustained. If that act is repeated long enough, one acquires a sense of unbending intent, which can be applied to anything else. If that is accomplished the road is clear. One thing will lead to another until the warrior realizes his full potential.

When I told don Juan what I had just realized, he laughed with apparent delight, and he exclaimed that this was indeed a godsent example of the strength that he was talking about. He explained that my assemblage point had shifted, and that it had been moved by sobriety to a position that fostered understanding. It could have as well been moved by capriciousness to a position that only enhances self-importance, as had been the case many times before.

"Let's talk now about the dreaming body," he went on. "The old seers concentrated all their efforts on exploring and exploiting the dreaming body. And they succeeded in using it as a more practical body, which is tantamount to saying they recreated themselves in increasingly weird ways."

Don Juan maintained that it is common knowledge among the new seers that flocks of the old sorcerers never came back after waking up at a dreaming position of their liking. He said that chances are they all died in those inconceivable worlds, or they may still be alive today in who knows what kind of contorted shape or manner.

He stopped and looked at me and broke into a great laugh.

"You're dying to ask me what the old seers did with the dreaming body, aren't you?" he asked, and urged me with a movement of his chin to ask the question.

Don Juan stated that Genaro, being the indisputable master of awareness, had shown me the dreaming body many times while I was in a state of normal awareness. The effect that Genaro was after with his demonstrations was to make my assemblage point move, not from a position of heightened awareness, but from it's normal setting.

Don Juan told me then, as if he were letting a secret be known, that Genaro was waiting for us in some fields near the house to show me his dreaming body. He repeated over and over that I was now in the perfect state of awareness to see and understand what the dreaming body really is.

Then he had me get up, and we walked through the front room to reach the door to the outside. As I was about to open the door, I noticed that someone was lying on the pile of floor mats that the apprentices used as beds. I thought that one of the apprentices must have returned to the house while don Juan and I were talking in the kitchen.

I went up to him, and then I realized that it was Genaro. He was sound asleep, snoring peacefully, lying face down.

"Wake him up," don Juan said to me. "We've got to be going. He must be dead tired."

I gently shook Genaro. He slowly turned around, made the sounds of someone waking up from a deep slumber. He stretched his arms, and then he opened his eyes. I screamed involuntarily and jumped back.

Genaro's eyes were not human eyes at all. They were two points of intense amber light. The jolt of my fright had been so intense that I became dizzy. Don Juan tapped my back and restored my equilibrium.

Genaro stood up and smiled at me. His features were rigid. He moved as if he were drunk or physically impaired. He walked by me and headed directly for the wall. I winced at the imminent crash, but he went through the wall as if it were not there at all. He came back into the room through the kitchen doorway. And then, as I looked in true horror, Genaro walked on the walls, with his body parallel to the ground, and on the ceiling, with his head upside down.

I fell backwards as I tried to follow his movements. From that position I didn't see Genaro anymore. Instead I was looking at a blob of light that moved on the ceiling above me and on the walls, circling the room. It was as if someone with a giant flashlight was shining the beam on the ceiling and the walls. The beam of light was finally turned off. It disappeared from view by vanishing against a wall.

Don Juan remarked that my animal fright was always out of measure, that I had to struggle to bring it under control, but that all in all, I had behaved very well. I had seen Genaro's dreaming body as it really is, a blob of light.

I asked him how he was so sure I had done that. He replied that he had seen my assemblage point first move toward it's normal setting in order to compensate for my fright, then move deeper into the left, beyond the point where there are no doubts.

"At that position there is only one thing one can see; blobs of energy," he went on. "But from heightened awareness to that other point deeper into the left side, it is only a short hop. The real feat is to make the assemblage point shift from it's normal setting to the point of no doubt."

He added that we still had an appointment with Genaro's dreaming body in the fields around the house, while I was in normal awareness.

When we were back in Silvio Manuel's house, don Juan said that Genaro's proficiency with the dreaming body was a very minor affair compared with what the old seers did with it.

"You'll see that very soon," he said with an ominous tone, then laughed.

I questioned him about it with mounting fear, and that only evoked more laughter. He finally stopped and said that he was going to talk about the way the new seers got to the dreaming body and the way they used it.

"The old seers were after a perfect replica of the body," he continued, "and they nearly succeeded in getting one. The only thing they never could copy was the eyes. Instead of eyes, the dreaming body has just the glow of awareness. You never realized that before when Genaro used to show you his dreaming body.

"The new seers could not care less about a perfect replica of the body. In fact, they are not even interested in copying the body at all. But they have kept just the name dreaming body to mean a feeling; a surge of energy that is transported by the movement of the assemblage point to any place in this world, or to any place in the seven worlds available to man."

Don Juan then outlined the procedure for getting to the dreaming body. He said that it starts with an initial act which by the fact of being sustained breeds unbending intent. Unbending intent leads to internal silence, and internal silence to the inner strength needed to make the assemblage point shift in dreams to suitable positions.

He called this sequence the groundwork. The development of control comes after the groundwork has been completed; control consists of systematically maintaining the dreaming position by doggedly holding on to the vision of the dream. Steady practice results in a great facility to hold new dreaming positions with new dreams, not so much because one gains deliberate control with practice, but because every time this control is exercised the inner strength gets fortified. Fortified inner strength in turn makes the assemblage point shift into dreaming positions which are more and more suitable to fostering sobriety. In other words, dreams by themselves become more and more manageable, even orderly.

"The development of dreamers is indirect," he went on. "That's why the new seers believed we can do dreaming by ourselves alone. Since dreaming uses a natural, built-in shift of the assemblage point, we should need no one to help us.

"What we badly need is sobriety, and no one can give it to us or help us get it except ourselves. Without it, the shift of the assemblage point is chaotic; just as our ordinary dreams are chaotic.

"So, all in all, the procedure to get to the dreaming body is impeccability in our daily life."

Don Juan explained that once sobriety is acquired, and the dreaming positions become increasingly stronger, the next step is to wake up at any dreaming position. He remarked that the maneuver, although made to sound simple, was really a very complex affair- so complex that it requires not only sobriety but all the attributes of warriorship as well, especially intent.

I asked him how intent helps seers wake up at a dreaming position. He replied that intent, being the most sophisticated control of the force of alignment, is what maintains, through the dreamer's sobriety, the alignment of whatever emanations have been lit up by the movement of the assemblage point.

Don Juan said that there is one more formidable pitfall of dreaming: the very strength of the dreaming body. For example, it is very easy for the dreaming body to gaze at the Eagle's emanations uninterruptedly for long periods of time, but it is also very easy in the end for the dreaming body to be totally consumed by them.

Seers who gazed at the Eagle's emanations without their dreaming bodies died, and those who gazed at them with their dreaming bodies burned with the fire from within. The new seers solved the problem by seeing in teams. While one seer gazed at the emanations, others stood by ready to end the seeing.

"How did the new seers see in teams?" I asked.

"They dreamed together," he replied. "As you yourself know, it's perfectly possible for a group of seers to activate the same unused emanations. And in this case also, there are no known steps, it just happens. There is no technique to follow."

He added that in dreaming together, something in us takes the lead and suddenly we find ourselves sharing the same view with other dreamers. What happens is that our human condition makes us focus the glow of awareness automatically on the same emanations that other human beings are using. We adjust the position of our assemblage points to fit the others around us. We do that on the right side in our ordinary perception, and we also do it on the left side, while dreaming together.

## 12. The Nagual Julian

There was a strange excitement in the house. All the seers of don Juan's party seemed to be so elated that they were actually absentminded, a thing that I had never witnessed before. Their usual high level of energy appeared to have increased.

I became very apprehensive. I asked don Juan about it. He took me to the back patio. We walked in silence for a moment. He said that the time was getting closer for all of them to leave. He was pressing his explanation in order to finish it in time.

"How do you know that you are closer to leaving?" I asked.

"It is an internal knowledge," he said. "You'll know it someday yourself. You see, the nagual Julian made my assemblage point shift countless times, just as I have made yours shift. Then he left me the task of realigning all those emanations which he had helped me align through these shifts. That is the task that every nagual is left to do.

"At any rate, the job of realigning all those emanations paves the way for the peculiar maneuver of lighting up all the emanations inside the cocoon. I have nearly done that. I am about to reach my maximum. Since I am the nagual, once I do light up all the emanations inside my cocoon we will all be gone in an instant."

I felt I should be sad and weep, but something in me was so overjoyed to hear that the nagual Juan Matus was about to be free that I jumped and yelled with sheer delight. I knew that sooner or later I would reach another state of awareness and I would weep with sadness. But that day I was filled with happiness and optimism.

I told don Juan how I felt. He laughed and patted my back.

"Remember what I've told you," he said. "Don't count on emotional realizations. Let your assemblage point move first, then years later have the realization."

We walked to the big room and sat down to talk. Don Juan hesitated for a moment. He looked out of the window. From my chair I could see the patio. It was early afternoon; a cloudy day. It looked like rain. Thunderhead clouds were moving in from the west. I liked cloudy days. Don

Juan did not. He seemed restless as he tried to find a more comfortable sitting position.

Don Juan began his elucidation by commenting that the difficulty in remembering what takes place in heightened awareness is due to the infinitude of positions that the assemblage point can adopt after being loosened from it's normal setting. Facility in remembering everything that takes place in normal awareness, on the other hand, has to do with the fixity of the assemblage point on one spot, the spot where it normally sets.

He told me that he commiserated with me. He suggested that I accept the difficulty of recollecting and acknowledge that I might fail in my task and never be able to realign all the emanations that he had helped me align.

"Think of it this way," he said, smiling. "You may never be able to remember this very conversation that we are having now, which at this moment seems to you so commonplace; so taken for granted.

"This indeed is the mystery of awareness. Human beings reek of that mystery. We reek of darkness; of things which are inexplicable. To regard ourselves in any other terms is madness. So don't demean the mystery of man in you by feeling sorry for yourself or by trying to rationalize it. Demean the stupidity of man in you by understanding it. But don't apologize for either. Both are needed.

"One of the great maneuvers of stalkers is to pit the mystery against the stupidity in each of us."

He explained that stalking practices are not something one can rejoice in. In fact, they are downright objectionable. Knowing this, the new seers realize that it would be against everybody's interest to discuss or practice the principles of stalking in normal awareness.

I pointed out to him an incongruity. He had said that there is no way for warriors to act in the world while they are in heightened awareness, and he had also said that stalking is simply behaving with people in specific ways. The two statements contradicted each other.

"By not teaching it in normal awareness I was referring only to teaching it to a nagual," he said. "The purpose of stalking is twofold: first, to move the assemblage point as steadily and safely as possible, and nothing can do the job as well as stalking; second, to imprint it's principles at such a deep level that the human inventory is bypassed, as is the natural reaction of refusing and judging something that may be offensive to reason."

I told him that I sincerely doubted I could judge or refuse anything like that. He laughed and said that I could not be an exception, that I would react like everyone else once I heard about the deeds of a master stalker, such as his benefactor, the nagual Julian.

"I am not exaggerating when I tell you that the nagual Julian was the most extraordinary stalker I have ever met," don Juan said. "You have already heard about his stalking skills from everybody else. But I've never told you what he did to me."

I wanted to make it clear to him that I had not heard anything about the nagual Julian from anyone, but just before I voiced my protest a strange feeling of uncertainty swept over me. Don Juan seemed to know instantly what I was feeling. He chuckled with delight.

"You can't remember, because will is not available to you yet," he said. "You need a life of impeccability and a great surplus of energy, and then will might release those memories.

"I am going to tell you the story of how the nagual Julian behaved with me when I first met him. If you judge him and find his behavior objectionable while you are in heightened awareness, think of how revolted you might be with him in normal awareness."

I protested that he was setting me up. He assured me that all he wanted to do with his story was to illustrate the manner in which stalkers operate and the reasons why they do it.

"The nagual Julian was the last of the old-time stalkers," he went on. "He was a stalker not so much because of the circumstances of his life but because that was the bent of his character."

Don Juan explained that the new seers saw that there are two main groups of human beings: those who care about others and those who do not. In between these two extremes they saw an endless mixture of the two. The nagual Julian belonged to the category of men who do not care; don Juan classified himself as belonging to the opposite category.

"But didn't you tell me that the nagual Julian was generous, that he would give you the shirt off his back?" I asked.

"He certainly was," don Juan replied. "Not only was he generous; he was also utterly charming and winning. He was always deeply and sincerely interested in everybody around him. He was kind and open and gave away everything he had to anyone who needed it, or to anyone he happened to like. He was in turn loved by everyone; because being a master stalker, he conveyed to them his true feelings: He didn't give a plugged nickel for any of them."

I did not say anything, but don Juan was aware of my sense of disbelief or even distress at what he was saying. He chuckled and shook his head from side to side.

He said, "That's stalking. You see? I haven't even begun my story of the nagual Julian and you are already annoyed."

He exploded into a giant laugh as I tried to explain what I was feeling.

"The nagual Julian didn't care about anyone," he continued. "That's why he could help people. And he did. He gave them the shirt off his back, because he didn't give a fig about them."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that the only ones who help their fellow men are those who don't give a damn about them?" I asked, truly miffed.

"That's what stalkers say," he said with a beaming smile. "The nagual Julian, for instance, was a fabulous curer. He helped thousands and thousands of people, but he never took credit for it. He let people believe that a woman seer of his party was the curer.

"Now, if he had been a man who cared for his fellow men, he would've demanded acknowledgment. Those who care for others care for themselves, and demand recognition where recognition is due."

Don Juan said that he, since he belonged to the category of those who care for their fellow men, had never helped anyone. He felt awkward with generosity. He could not even conceive being loved as the nagual Julian was, and he would certainly feel stupid giving anyone the shirt off his back.

"I care so much for my fellow man," he continued, "that I don't do anything for him. I wouldn't know what to do. And I would always have the nagging sense that I was imposing my will on him with my gifts.

"Naturally, I have overcome all these feelings with the warriors' way. Any warrior can be successful with people, as the nagual Julian was, provided he moves his assemblage point to a position where it is immaterial whether people like him, dislike him, or ignore him. But that's not the same."

Don Juan said that when he first became aware of the stalkers' principles, as I was then doing, he was as distressed as he could be. The nagual Elias, who was very much like don Juan, explained to him that stalkers like the nagual Julian are natural leaders of people. They can help people do anything.

"The nagual Elias said," don Juan went on, "that these warriors can help people to get cured, or they can help them to get ill. They can help them to find happiness, or they can help them to find sorrow. I suggested to the nagual Elias that instead of saying that these warriors help people, we should say that they affect people. He said that they don't just affect people, but that they actively herd them around."

Don Juan chuckled and looked at me fixedly. There was a mischievous glint in his eyes.

"Strange, isn't it?" he asked. "The way stalkers arranged what they see about people?"

Then don Juan started his story about the nagual Julian. He said that the nagual Julian spent many, many years waiting for an apprentice nagual. He stumbled on don Juan one day while returning home after a short visit with acquaintances in a nearby village. He was, in fact, thinking about an apprentice nagual as he walked on the road when he heard a loud gunshot and saw people scrambling in every direction. He ran with them into the bushes by the side of the road and only came out from his hiding place at the sight of a group of people gathered around someone wounded, lying on the ground.

The wounded person was, of course, don Juan who had been shot by the tyrannical foreman. The nagual Julian saw instantly that don Juan was a special man whose cocoon was divided into four sections instead of two. He also realized that don Juan was badly wounded. He knew that he had no time to waste. His wish had been fulfilled, but he had to work fast before anyone sensed what was going on. He held his head and cried, "They've shot my son!"

He was traveling with one of the female seers of his party; a husky Indian woman who always officiated publicly as his mean shrewish wife. They were an excellent team of stalkers. He cued the woman seer, and she also started weeping and wailing for their son who was unconscious and bleeding to death.

The nagual Julian begged the onlookers not to call the authorities but rather to help him move his son to his house in the city, which was some distance away. He offered money to some strong young men if they would carry his wounded, dying son.

The men carried don Juan to the nagual Julian's house. The nagual was very generous with them and paid them handsomely. The men were so touched by the grieving couple who had cried all the way to the house that they refused to take the money; but the nagual Julian insisted that they take it to give his son luck.

For a few days, don Juan did not know what to think about the kind couple who had taken him into their home. He said that to him, the nagual Julian appeared as an almost senile old man. He was not an Indian, but was married to a young, irascible, fat Indian wife, who was as physically strong as she was ill-tempered.

Judging by the way she treated his wound, and by the quantities of medicinal plants stashed away in the room where they had put him, don Juan thought that she was definitely a curer.

The woman also dominated the old man and made him tend to don Juan's wound every day. They had made a bed for don Juan out of a thick floor mat, and the old man had a terrible time kneeling down to reach him. Don Juan had fought not to laugh at the comical sight of the frail old man trying his best to bend his knees. Don Juan said that while the old man washed his wound, he would mumble incessantly. He had a vacant look in his eyes. His hands shook, and his body trembled from head to toe.

When the old man was down on his knees, he could never get up by himself. He would call his wife, yelling in a raspy voice, filled with contained anger. The wife would come into the room and both of them would get into a horrible argument. Often she would walk out, leaving the old man to get up by himself.

Don Juan assured me that he had never felt so sorry for anyone as he felt for that poor, kind old man. Many times he wanted to rise and help him up, but he could hardly move himself. Once the old man spent half an hour cursing and yelling, as he puffed and crawled like a slug; dragging himself to the door, and painfully lifting himself up to a standing position.

The old man explained to don Juan that his poor health was due to advanced age, broken bones that had not mended properly, and rheumatism. Don Juan said that the old man raised his eyes toward heaven and confessed to don Juan that he was the most wretched man on earth. He had come to the curer for help, and had ended up marrying her and becoming a slave.

"I asked the old man why he didn't leave," don Juan continued. "The old man's eyes widened with fear. He choked on his own saliva trying to hush me, and then he went rigid and fell down like a log on the floor next to my bed trying to make me stop talking.

"You don't know what you're saying. You don't know what you're saying. Nobody can run away from this place," the old man kept on repeating with a wild expression in his eyes.

"I believed him. I was convinced that he was more miserable, more wretched than I had ever been myself, and with every day that passed, I became more and more uncomfortable in that house.

"The food was great, and the woman was always out curing people, so I was left with the old man. We talked a lot about my life. I liked to talk to him. I told him that I had no money to pay him for his kindness, but that I would do anything to help him. He told me that he was beyond help, that he was ready to die, but that if I really meant what I said, he would appreciate it if I would marry his wife after he died.

"Right then I knew the old man was nuts. And right then I also knew that I had to run away as soon as possible."

Don Juan said that when he was well enough to walk around unaided, his benefactor gave him a chilling demonstration of his ability as a stalker. Without any warning or preamble he put don Juan face to face with an inorganic living being. Sensing that don Juan was planning to run away, he seized the opportunity to scare him with an ally that was somehow able to look like a monstrous man.

"The sight of that ally nearly drove me insane," don Juan continued. "I couldn't believe my eyes, and yet the monster was right in front of me. And the frail old man was next to me whimpering and begging the monster to spare his life.

"You see, my benefactor was like the old seers. He could dole out his fear, a piece at a time, and the ally was reacting to it. I didn't know that. All I could see with my very own eyes was a horrendous creature advancing on us, ready to tear us apart, limb from limb.

"The moment the ally lurched onto us, hissing like a serpent, I passed out cold. When I came to my senses again, the old man told me that he had made a deal with the creature."

He explained to don Juan that the man had agreed to let both of them live, provided don Juan enter the man's service. Don Juan apprehensively asked what was involved in the service. The old man replied that it would be slavery, but pointed out that don Juan's life had nearly ended a few days back when he had been shot. Had not he and his wife come along to stop the bleeding, don Juan would surely have died, so there was really very little to bargain with, or to bargain for. The monstrous man knew that and had him over a barrel. The old man told don Juan to stop vacillating and accept the deal, because if he refused, the monstrous man, who was listening behind the door, would burst in and kill them both on the spot and be done with it.

"I had enough nerve to ask the frail old man, who was shaking like a leaf, how the man would kill us," don Juan went on. "He said that the monster planned to break all the bones in our bodies, starting with our feet, as we screamed in unspeakable agony, and that it would take at least five days for us to die.

"I accepted that man's conditions instantly. The old man, with tears in his eyes, congratulated me and said that the deal wasn't really that bad. We were going to be more prisoners than slaves of the monstrous man, but we would eat at least twice a day; and since we had life, we could work for our freedo. We could plot, connive, and fight our way out of that hell."

Don Juan smiled and then broke into laughter. He had known beforehand how I would feel about the nagual Julian.

"I told you you'd be upset," he said.

"I really don't understand, don Juan," I said. "What was the point of putting on such an elaborate masquerade?"

"The point is very simple," he said, still smiling. "This is another method of teaching; a very good one. It requires tremendous imagination and tremendous control on the part of the teacher. My method of teaching is closer to what you consider teaching. It requires a tremendous amount of words. I go to the extremes of talking. The nagual Julian went to the extremes of stalking."

Don Juan said that there were two methods of teaching among the seers. He was familiar with both of them. He preferred the one that called for explaining everything and letting the other person know the course of action beforehand. It was a system that fostered freedom, choice, and understanding. His benefactor's method, on the other hand, was more coercive and did not allow for choice or understanding. It's great advantage was that it forced warriors to live the seers' concepts directly with no intermediary elucidation.

Don Juan explained that everything his benefactor did to him was a masterpiece of strategy. Every one of the nagual Julian's words and actions was deliberately selected to cause a particular effect. His art was to provide his words and actions with the most suitable context so that they would have the necessary impact.

"That's the stalkers' method," don Juan went on. "It fosters not understanding but total realization. For instance, it took me a lifetime to understand what he had done to me by making me face the ally- although I realized all that without any explanation as I lived that experience.

"I've told you that Genaro, for example, doesn't understand what he does, but his realization of what he is doing is as keen as it can be. That's because his assemblage point was moved by the stalkers' method."

He said that if the assemblage point is forced out of it's customary setting by the method of explaining everything, as in my case, there is always the need for someone else not only to help in the actual dislodging of the assemblage point, but in dispensing the explanations of what is going on.

But if the assemblage point is moved by the stalkers' method, as in his own case, or Genaro's, there is only a need for the initial catalytic act that yanks the point from it's location.

Don Juan said that when the nagual Julian made him face the monstrous looking ally, his assemblage point moved under the impact of fear. Such an intense fright caused by the confrontation- coupled with his weak physical condition- was ideal for dislodging his assemblage point.

In order to offset the injurious effects of fright, it's impact had to be cushioned, but not minimized. Explaining what was happening would have minimized fear. What the nagual Julian wanted was to make sure that he could use that initial catalytic fright as many times as he needed it, but he also wanted to make sure that he could cushion it's devastating impact.

That was the reason for his masquerade. The more elaborate and dramatic his stories were, the greater their cushioning effect. If he, himself, seemed to be in the same boat with don Juan, the fright would not be as intense as if don Juan were alone.

"With his penchant for drama," don Juan went on, "my benefactor was able to move my assemblage point enough to imbue me right away with an overpowering feeling for the two basic qualities of warriors: sustained effort and unbending intent. I knew that in order to be free again someday, I would have to work in an orderly and steady fashion and in cooperation with the frail old man, who in my opinion needed my help as much as I needed his. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that that was what I wanted to do more than anything else in life."

I did not get to talk to don Juan again until two days later. We were in Oaxaca, strolling in the main square, in the early morning. There were children walking to school, people going to church, a few men sitting on the benches, and taxi drivers waiting for tourists from the main hotel.

"It goes without saying that the most difficult thing in the warriors' path is to make the assemblage point move," don Juan said. "That movement is the completion of the warriors' quest. To go on from there is another quest. It is the seers' quest proper."

He repeated that in the warriors' way, the shift of the assemblage point is everything. The old seers absolutely failed to realize this truth. They thought the movement of the point was like a marker that determined their positions on a scale of worth. They never conceived that it was that very position which determined what they perceived.

"The stalkers' method," don Juan went on, "in the hands of a master stalker like the nagual Julian, accounts for stupendous shifts of the assemblage point. These are very solid changes. You see, by buttressing the apprentice, the stalker-teacher gets the apprentice's full cooperation and full participation. To get anybody's full cooperation and full participation is about the most important outcome of the stalkers' method; and the nagual Julian was the best at getting both of them."

Don Juan said there was no way for him to describe the turmoil that he had gone through as he found out, little by little, about the richness and the complexity of the nagual Julian's personality and life. As long as don Juan faced a scared, frail old man who seemed helpless, he was fairly at ease, comfortable. But one day, soon after they had made the deal with what don Juan thought of as a monstrous looking man, his comfort was shot to pieces when the nagual Julian gave don Juan another unnerving demonstration of his stalking skills.

Although don Juan was quite well by then, the nagual Julian still slept in the same room with him in order to nurse him. When he woke up that day, he announced to don Juan that their captor was gone for a couple of days, which meant that he did not have to act like an old man. He confided to don Juan that he only pretended to be old in order to fool the monstrous looking man.

Without giving don Juan time to think, he jumped up from his mat with incredible agility. He bent over and dunked his head in a pot of water and kept it there for a while. When he straightened up, his hair was jet black, the gray hair had washed away, and don Juan was looking at a man he had never seen before; a man perhaps in his late thirties. He flexed his muscles, breathed deeply, and stretched every part of his body as if he had been too long inside a constricting cage.

"When I saw the nagual Julian as a young man, I thought that he was indeed the devil," don

Juan went on. "I closed my eyes and I knew that my end was near. The nagual Julian laughed until he was crying."

Don Juan said that the nagual Julian then put him at ease by making him shift back and forth between the right side and the left side awareness.

"For two days the young man pranced around the house," don Juan continued. "He told me stories about his life, and jokes that sent me reeling around the room with laughter. But what was even more astounding was the way his wife had changed. She was actually thin and beautiful. I thought she was a completely different woman. I raved about how complete her change was and how beautiful she looked. The young man said that when their captor was away she was actually another woman."

Don Juan laughed and said that his devilish benefactor was telling the truth. The woman was really another seer of the nagual's party.

Don Juan asked the young man why they pretended to be what they were not. The young man looked at don Juan, his eyes filled with tears, and he said that the mysteries of the world are indeed unfathomable. He and his young wife had been caught by inexplicable forces and had to protect themselves with that pretense. The reason why he carried on the way he did- as a feeble old man- was because their captor was always peeking in through cracks in the doors. He begged don Juan to forgive him for having fooled him.

Don Juan asked who that monstrous looking man was. With a deep sigh, the young man confessed that he could not even guess. He told don Juan that although he himself was an educated man and a famous actor from the theater in Mexico City, he was at a loss for explanations.

All he knew was that he had come to be treated for the consumption [* consumption- involving the lungs with progressive wasting of the body] that he had suffered from for many years. He was near death when his relatives brought him to meet the curer. She helped him to get well, and he fell madly in love with the beautiful young Indian and married her. His plans were to take her to the capital so they could get rich with her curing ability.

Before they started on the trip to Mexico City, she warned him that they had to disguise themselves in order to escape a sorcerer. She explained to him that her mother had also been a curer, and had been taught curing by that master sorcerer who had demanded that she, the daughter, stay with him for life.

The young man said that he had refused to ask his wife about that relationship. He only wanted to free her, so he disguised himself as an old man and disguised her as a fat woman.

Their story did not end happily. The horrible man caught them and kept them as prisoners. They did not dare to take off their disguise in front of that nightmarish man, and in his presence they carried on as if they hated each other. But in reality, they pined for each other and lived only for the short times when that man was away.

Don Juan said that the young man embraced him and told him that the room where don Juan was sleeping was the only safe place in the house. The young man asked don Juan if he would please go out and be on the lockout while he made love to his wife?

"The house shook with their passion," don Juan went on, "while I sat by the door feeling guilty for listening and scared to death that the man would come back any minute. And sure enough, I heard him coming into the house. I banged on the door, and when they didn't answer, I walked in. The young woman was asleep naked and the young man was nowhere in sight. I had never seen a beautiful naked woman in my life. I was still very weak. I heard the monstrous man rattling outside. My embarrassment and my fear were so great that I passed out."

The story about the nagual Julian's doings annoyed me no end. I told don Juan that I had failed to understand the value of the nagual Julian's stalking skills. Don Juan listened to me without making a single comment and let me ramble on and on.

When we finally sat down on a bench, I was very tired. I did not know what to say when he asked me why his account of the nagual Julian's method of teaching had upset me so much.

"I can't shake off the feeling that he was a prankster," I finally said.

"Pranksters don't teach anything deliberately with their pranks," don Juan retorted. "The nagual Julian played dramas, magical dramas that required a movement of the assemblage point."

"He seems like a very selfish person to me," I insisted.

"He seems like that to you because you are judging," he replied. "You are being a moralist. I went through all that myself. If you feel the way you do on hearing about the nagual Julian, think of the way I must have felt myself living in his house for years. I judged him, I feared him, and I envied him; in that order.

"I also loved him, but my envy was greater than my love. I envied his ease, his mysterious capacity to be young or old at will. I envied his flair and above all his influence on whoever happened to be around. It would drive me up the walls to hear him engage people in the most interesting conversation. He always had something to say. I never did, and I always felt incompetent and left out."

Don Juan's revelations made me feel ill at ease. I wished that he would change the subject because I did not want to hear that he was like me. In my opinion, he was indeed unequaled. He obviously knew how I felt. He laughed and patted my back.

"What I am trying to do with the story of my envy," he went on, "is to point out to you something of great importance; that the position of the assemblage point dictates how we behave and how we feel.

"My great flaw at that time was that I could not understand this principle. I was raw. I lived through self-importance, just as you do, because that was where my assemblage point was lodged. You see, I hadn't learned yet that the way to move that point is to establish new habits; to will it to move. When it did move, it was as if I had just discovered that the only way to deal with peerless warriors like my benefactor is not to have self-importance; so that one can celebrate them unbiasedly."

He said that realizations are of two kinds. One is just pep talk; great outbursts of emotion and nothing more. The other is the product of a shift of the assemblage point. It is not coupled with an emotional outburst, but with action. The emotional realizations come years later after warriors have solidified, by usage, the new position of their assemblage points.

"The nagual Julian tirelessly guided all of us to that kind of shift," don Juan went on. "He got from all of us total cooperation and total participation in his bigger than life dramas. For instance, with his drama of the young man and his wife and their captor he had my undivided attention and concern. To me the story of the old man who was young was very consistent. I had seen the monstrous looking man with my very own eyes, which meant that the young man got my undying affiliation."

Don Juan said that the nagual Julian was a magician, a conjurer who could handle the force of will to a degree that would be incomprehensible to the average man. His dramas included magical characters summoned by the force of intent, like the inorganic being that could adopt a grotesque human form.

"The nagual Julian's power was so impeccable," don Juan went on, "that he could force anyone's assemblage point to shift and align emanations that would make him perceive whatever the nagual Julian wanted. For example, he could look very old or very young for his age, depending on what he wanted to accomplish. And all anyone who knew the nagual could say about his age was that it fluctuated. During the thirty-two years that I knew him he was at times not much older than you are now, and at other times he was so wretchedly old that he could not even walk."

Don Juan said that under his benefactor's guidance his assemblage point moved unnoticeably and yet profoundly. For instance, out of nowhere one day he realized that he had a fear that on the one hand made no sense to him at all, and on the other made all the sense in the world.

"My fear was that through stupidity I would lose my chance to be free, and I would repeat my father's life.

"There was nothing wrong with my father's life, mind you. He lived and died no better and no worse than most men. The important point is that my assemblage point had moved and I realized one day that my father's life and death hadn't amounted to a hill of beans, either to others or to himself.

"My benefactor told me that my father and mother had lived and died just to have me, and that their own parents had done the same for them. He said that warriors were different in that they shift their assemblage points enough to realize the tremendous price that has been paid for their lives. This shift gives them the respect and awe that their parents never felt for life in general, or for being alive in particular."

Don Juan said that not only was the nagual Julian successful in guiding his apprentices to move their assemblage points, but that he enjoyed himself tremendously while doing it.

"He certainly entertained himself immensely with me," don Juan went on. "When the other seers of my party began to come, years later, even I looked forward to the preposterous situations that he created and developed with each one of them.

"When the nagual Julian left the world, delight went away with him and never came back. Genaro delights us sometimes, but no one can take the nagual Julian's place. His dramas were always bigger than life. I assure you we didn't know what enjoyment was until we saw what he did when some of those dramas backfired on him."

Don Juan rose from his favorite bench. He turned to me. His eyes were brilliant and peaceful.

"If you are ever so dumb as to fail in your task," he said, "you must have at least enough energy to move your assemblage point in order to come to this bench. Sit down here for an instant, free of thoughts and desires. I will try to come here from wherever I am and collect you. I promise you that I will try."

He then broke into a great laugh, as if the scope of his promise was too ludicrous to be believed.

"These words should be said in the late afternoon," he said, still laughing. "Never in the morning. The morning makes one feel optimistic and such words lose their meaning."

## 13. The Earth's Boost

"Let's walk on the road to Oaxaca," don Juan said to me. "Genaro is waiting for us somewhere along the way."

His request took me by surprise. I had been waiting all day for him to continue his explanation. We left his house and walked in silence through the town to the unpaved highway. We walked leisurely for a long time. Suddenly don Juan began to talk.

"I've been telling you all along about the great findings that the old seers made," he said. "Just as they found out that organic life is not the only life present on earth, they also discovered that the earth itself is a living being."

He waited a moment before continuing. He smiled at me as if inviting me to make a comment. I could not think of anything to say.

"The old seers saw that the earth has a cocoon," he went on. "They saw that there is a ball encasing the earth, a luminous cocoon that entraps the Eagle's emanations. The earth is a gigantic sentient being subjected to the same forces we are."

He explained that the old seers, on discovering this, became immediately interested in the practical uses of that knowledge. The result of their interest was that the most elaborate categories of their sorcery had to do with the earth. They considered the earth to be the ultimate source of everything we are.

Don Juan reaffirmed that the old seers were not mistaken in this respect, because the earth is indeed our ultimate source.

He didn't say anything else until we met Genaro about a mile up the road. He was waiting for us, sitting on a rock by the side of the road.

He greeted me with great warmth. He said to me that we should climb up to the top of some small rugged mountains covered with hardy vegetation.

"The three of us are going to sit against a rock," don Juan said to me, "and look at the sunlight as it is reflected on the eastern mountains. When the sun goes down behind the western peaks, the earth may let you see alignment."

When we reached the top of a mountain, we sat down, as don Juan had said, with our backs against a rock. Don Juan made me sit in between the two of them.

I asked him what he was planning to do. His cryptic statements and his long silences were ominous. I felt terribly apprehensive.

He didn't answer me. He kept on talking as if I had not spoken at all.

"It was the old seers who, on discovering that perception is alignment," he said, "stumbled onto something monumental. The sad part is that their aberrations again kept them from knowing what they had accomplished."

He pointed at the mountain range east of the small valley where the town is located.

"There is enough glitter in those mountains to jolt your assemblage point," he said to me. "Just before the sun goes down behind the western peaks, you will have a few moments to catch all the glitter you need. The magic key that opens the earth's doors is made of internal silence plus anything that shines."

"What exactly should I do, don Juan?" I asked.

Both of them examined me. I thought I saw in their eyes a mixture of curiosity and revulsion.

"Just cut off the internal dialogue," don Juan said to me.

I had an intense pang of anxiety and doubt. I had no confidence that I could do it at will. After an initial moment of nagging frustration, I resigned my self just to relax.

I looked around. I noticed that we were high enough to look down into the long, narrow valley. More than half of it was in the late afternoon shadows. The sun was still shining on the foothills of the eastern range of mountains, on the other side of the valley. The sunlight made the eroded mountains look ocher, while the more distant bluish peaks had acquired a purple tone.

"You do realize that you've done this before, don't you?" don Juan said to me in a whisper.

I told him that I had not realized anything.

"We've sat here before on other occasions," he insisted, "but that doesn't matter because this occasion is the one that will count.

"Today with the help of Genaro you are going to find the key that unlocks everything. You won't be able to use it as yet, but you'll know what it is and where it is. Seers pay the heaviest prices to know that. You, yourself, have been paying your dues all these years."

He explained that what he called the key to everything was the firsthand knowledge that the earth is a sentient being and as such can give warriors a tremendous boost. It is an impulse that comes from the awareness of the earth itself at the instant in which the emanations inside warriors' cocoons are aligned with the appropriate emanations inside the earth's cocoon.

Since both the earth and man are sentient beings, their emanations coincide, or rather, the earth has all the emanations present in man and all the emanations that are present in all sentient beings, organic and inorganic for that matter. When a moment of alignment takes place, sentient beings use that alignment in a limited way and perceive their world. Warriors can use that alignment either to perceive, like everyone else, or as a boost that allows them to enter unimaginable worlds.

"I've been waiting for you to ask me the only meaningful question you can ask, but you never ask it," he continued. "You are hooked on asking about whether the mystery of it all is inside us. You came close enough, though.

"The unknown is not really inside the cocoon of man in the emanations untouched by awareness, and yet it is there, in a manner of speaking. This is the point you haven't understood.

"When I told you that we can assemble seven worlds besides the one we know, you took it as being an internal affair because your total bias is to believe that you are only imagining everything you do with us. Therefore, you have never asked me where the unknown really is. For years I have circled with my hand to point to everything around us and I have told you that the unknown is there. You never made the connection."

Genaro began to laugh. Then he coughed and stood up. "He still hasn't made the connection," he said to don Juan.

I admitted to them that if there was a connection to be made, I had failed to make it.

Don Juan restated over and over that the portion of emanations inside man's cocoon is in there only for awareness, and that awareness is matching that portion of emanations with the same portion of emanations at large.

They are called emanations at large because they are immense. To say that outside man's cocoon is the unknowable, is to say that within the earth's cocoon is the unknowable.

However, inside the earth's cocoon is also the unknown. Inside man's cocoon the unknown is the emanations untouched by awareness.

When the glow of awareness touches these emanations inside us, they become active and can be aligned with the corresponding emanations at large. Once that happens the unknown is perceived and becomes the known.

"I'm too dumb, don Juan. You have to break it into smaller pieces for me," I said.

"Genaro is going to break it up for you," don Juan retorted.

Genaro stood up and started doing the same gait of power that he had done before when he had circled an enormous flat rock in a corn field by his house. Don Juan had watched in fascination.

This time don Juan whispered in my ear that I should try to hear Genaro's movements, especially the movements of his thighs as they went up against his chest every time he stepped.

I followed Genaro's movements with my eyes. In a few seconds I felt that some part of me had gotten trapped in Genaro's legs. The movement of his thighs would not let me go. I felt as if I were walking with him. I was even out of breath. Then I realized that I was actually following Genaro. I was in fact walking with him away from the place where we had been sitting.

I did not see don Juan; just Genaro walking ahead of me in the same strange manner. We walked for hours and hours. My fatigue was so intense that I got a terrible headache, and suddenly I got sick. Genaro stopped walking and came to my side. There was an intense glare around us, and the light was reflected in Genaro's features. His eyes glowed.

"Don't look at Genaro!" a voice ordered me in my ear. "Look around!"

I obeyed. I thought I was in hell! The shock of seeing the surroundings was so great that I screamed in terror, but there was no sound to my voice. Around me was the most vivid picture of all the descriptions of hell from my Catholic upbringing.

I was seeing a reddish world; hot and oppressive; dark and cavernous with no sky; and no light except the malignant reflections of reddish lights that kept on moving around us at great speed.

Genaro started to walk again, and something pulled me with him. The force that was making me follow Genaro also kept me from looking around. My awareness was glued to Genaro's movements.

I saw Genaro plop down as if he were utterly exhausted. The instant he touched the ground and stretched himself to rest, something was released in me and I was able again to look around. Don Juan was watching me inquisitively. I was standing up facing him.

We were at the same place where we had sat down; a wide rocky ledge on top of a small mountain. Genaro was panting and wheezing, and so was I.

I was covered with perspiration. My hair was dripping wet. My clothes were soaked, as if I had been dunked in a river.

"My God, what's going on!" I exclaimed in utter seriousness and concern. The exclamation sounded so silly that don Juan and Genaro started to laugh.

"We're trying to make you understand alignment," Genaro said.

Don Juan gently helped me to sit down. He sat by me. "Do you remember what happened?" he asked me.

I told him that I did and he insisted that I tell him exactly what I had seen. His request was incongruous with what he had told me, that the only value of my experiences was the movement of my assemblage point and not the content of my visions.

He explained that Genaro had tried to help me before in very much the same fashion as he had just done, but that I could never remember anything. He said that Genaro had guided my assemblage point this time, as he had done before, to assemble a world with another of the great bands of emanations.

There was a long silence. I was numb and shocked, yet my awareness was as keen as it had ever been. I thought I had finally understood what alignment was. Something inside me, which I had been activating without knowing how, gave me the certainty that I had comprehended a great truth.

"I think you're beginning to gather your own momentum," don Juan said to me. "Let's go home. You've had enough for one day."

"Oh, come on," Genaro said. "He's stronger than a bull. He's got to be pushed a little further."

"No!" don Juan said emphatically. "We've got to save his strength. He's only got so much of it."

Genaro insisted that we stay. He looked at me and winked.

"Look," he said to me, pointing to the eastern range of mountains. "The sun has hardly moved an inch over those mountains and yet you plodded in hell for hours and hours. Don't you find that overwhelming?"

"Don't scare him unnecessarily!" don Juan protested almost vehemently.

It was then that I saw their maneuvers. At that moment the voice of seeing told me that don Juan and Genaro were a team of superb stalkers playing with me.

It was don Juan who always pushed me beyond my limits, but he always let Genaro be the heavy.

The day at Genaro's house when I had reached a dangerous state of hysterical fright, Genaro had questioned don Juan whether I should be pushed. Although don Juan had assured me that Genaro was enjoying himself at my expense, Genaro was actually worrying about me.

My seeing was so shocking to me that I began to laugh. Both don Juan and Genaro looked at me with surprise. Then don Juan seemed to realize at once what was going through my mind. He told Genaro, and both of them laughed like children.

"You're coming of age," don Juan said to me. "Right on time. You're neither too stupid nor too bright. Just like me. You're not like me in your aberrations. There you are more like the nagual Julian, except that he was brilliant."

He stood up and stretched his back. He looked at me with the most piercing, ferocious eyes I had ever seen. I stood up.

"A nagual never lets anyone know that he is in charge," he said to me. "A nagual comes and goes without leaving a trace. That freedom is what makes him a nagual."

His eyes glared for an instant. Then they were covered by a cloud of mellowness, kindness, and humanness: They were again don Juan's eyes.

I could hardly keep my balance. I was swooning helplessly. Genaro jumped to my side and helped me to sit down. Both of them sat down flanking me.

"You are going to catch a boost from the earth," don Juan said to me in one ear.

"Think about the nagual's eyes," Genaro said to me in the other.

"The boost will come at the moment you see the glitter on the top of that mountain," don Juan said and pointed to the highest peak on the eastern range.

"You'll never see the nagual's eyes again," Genaro whispered.

"Go with the boost wherever it takes you," don Juan said.

"If you think of the nagual's eyes, you'll realize that there are two sides to a coin," Genaro whispered.

I wanted to think about what both of them were saying, but my thoughts did not obey me. Something was pressing down on me. I felt I was shrinking. I had a sensation of nausea. I saw the evening shadows advancing rapidly up the sides of those eastern mountains. I had the feeling that I was running after them.

"Here we go," Genaro said in my ear.

"Watch the big peak, watch the glitter," don Juan said in my other ear.

There was indeed a point of intense brilliance where don Juan had pointed, on the highest peak of the range. I watched the last ray of sunlight being reflected on it. I felt a hole in the pit of my stomach, just as if I were on a roller coaster.

I felt, rather than heard, a faraway earthquake rumble which abruptly overtook me. The seismic waves were so loud and so enormous that they lost all meaning for me. I was an insignificant microbe being twisted and twirled.

The motion slowed down by degrees. There was one more jolt before everything came to a halt. I tried to look around. I had no point of reference. I seemed to be planted, like a tree.

Above me there was a white, shiny, inconceivably big dome. It's presence made me feel elated. I flew toward it, or rather I was ejected like a projectile. I had the sensation of being comfortable, nurtured, secure. The closer I got to the dome, the more intense those feelings became. They finally overwhelmed me and I lost all sense of myself.

The next thing I knew, I was rocking slowly in the air like a leaf that falls. I felt exhausted. A suction force started to pull me. I went through a dark hole and then I was with don Juan and Genaro.

The next day don Juan, Genaro, and I went to Oaxaca. While don Juan and I strolled around the main square in the later afternoon, he suddenly started to talk about what we had done the day before. He asked me if I had understood what he was referring to when he said that the old seers had stumbled onto something monumental.

I told him that I did, but that I couldn't explain it in words.

"And what do you think was the main thing we wanted you to find out on top of that mountain?" he asked.

"Alignment," a voice said in my ear, at the same time I said it myself.

I turned around in a reflex action and bumped into Genaro, who was just behind me, walking in my tracks. The speed of my movement startled him. He broke into a giggle and then embraced me.

We sat down. Don Juan said that there were very few things that he could say about the boost I had gotten from the earth; that warriors are always alone in such cases; and true realizations come much later, after years of struggle.

I told don Juan that my problem in understanding was magnified by the fact that he and Genaro were doing all the work. I was simply a passive subject who could only react to their maneuvers. I could not for the life of me initiate any action, because I did not know what a proper action should be, nor did I know how to initiate it.

"That's precisely the point," don Juan said. "You are not supposed to know yet. You are going to be left behind, by yourself, to reorganize on your own everything we are doing to you now. This is the task every nagual has to face.

"The nagual Julian did the same thing to me much more ruthlessly than the way we do it to you. He knew what he was doing.

"He was a brilliant nagual who himself was able to reorganize in a few years everything the nagual Elias had taught him. In no time at all, he did something that would take a lifetime for you or for me. The difference was that all the nagual Julian ever needed was a slight insinuation. His awareness would take it from there and open the only door there is."

"What do you mean, don Juan, by the only door there is?"

"I mean that when man's assemblage point moves beyond a crucial limit, the results are always the same for every man. The techniques to make it move may be as different as they can be, but the results are always the same- meaning that the assemblage point assembles other worlds aided by the boost from the earth."

"Is the boost from the earth the same for every man, don Juan?"

"Of course. The difficulty for the average man is the internal dialogue. Only when a state of total silence is attained can one use the boost. You will corroborate that truth the day you try to use that boost by yourself."

"I wouldn't recommend that you try it," Genaro said sincerely. "It takes years to become an impeccable warrior. In order to withstand the impact of the earth's boost, you must be better than you are now."

"The speed of that boost will dissolve everything about you," don Juan said. "Under it's impact we become nothing. Speed and the sense of individual existence don't go together.

"Yesterday on the mountain, Genaro and I supported you and served as your anchors; otherwise you wouldn't have returned. You'd be like some men who purposely used that boost and went into the unknown and are still roaming in some incomprehensible immensity."

I wanted him to elaborate on that, but he refused. He changed the subject abruptly.

"There's one thing you haven't understood yet about the earth's being a sentient being," he said. "And Genaro, this awful Genaro, wants to push you until you understand."

Both of them laughed. Genaro playfully shoved me and winked at me as he mouthed the words, "I am awful."

"Genaro", don Juan continued, "is a terrible taskmaster; mean and ruthless. He doesn't give a hoot about your fears, and pushes you mercilessly. If it wasn't for me..."

Don Juan was a perfect picture of a good, thoughtful old gentleman. He lowered his eyes and sighed. The two of them broke into roaring laughter.

When they had quieted down, don Juan said that Genaro wanted to show me what I had not understood yet; that the supreme awareness of the earth is what makes it possible for us to change into other great bands of emanations.

"We living beings are perceivers," he said. "And we perceive because some emanations inside man's cocoon become aligned with some emanations outside. Alignment, therefore, is the secret passageway, and the earth's boost is the key.

"Genaro wants you to watch the moment of alignment. Watch him!"

Genaro stood up like a showman and took a bow, then showed us that he had nothing up his sleeves or inside the legs of his pants. He took his shoes off and shook them to show that there was nothing concealed there either.

Don Juan was laughing with total abandon. Genaro moved his hands up and down. The movement created an immediate fixation in me. I sensed that the three of us suddenly got up and walked away from the square with the two of them flanking me.

As we continued walking, I lost my peripheral vision. I did not distinguish any more houses or streets. I did not notice any mountains or any vegetation either. At one moment I realized that I had lost sight of don Juan and Genaro. Instead I saw two luminous bundles moving up and down beside me.

I felt an instantaneous panic which I immediately controlled. I had the unusual but well-known sensation that I was myself and yet I was not. I was aware, however, of everything around me by means of a strange and at the same time most familiar capacity.

The sight of the world came to me all at once. All of me saw. The entirety of what I in my normal consciousness call my body was capable of sensing as if it were an enormous eye that detected everything.

What I first detected, after seeing the two blobs of light, was a sharp violet-purple world made out of something that looked like colored panels and canopies. Flat, screenlike panels of irregular concentric circles were everywhere.

I felt a great pressure all over me, and then I heard a voice in my ear. I was seeing. The voice said that the pressure was due to the act of moving. I was moving together with don Juan and Genaro.

I felt a faint jolt, as if I had broken a paper barrier, and I found myself facing a luminescent world. Light radiated from everyplace, but without being glaring. It was as if the sun were about to erupt from behind some white diaphanous clouds. I was looking down into the source of light. It was a beautiful sight. There were no landmasses, just fluffy white clouds and light. And we were walking on the clouds.

Then something imprisoned me again. I moved at the same pace as the two blobs of light by my sides. Gradually they began to lose their brilliance, then they became opaque, and finally they were don Juan and Genaro. We were walking on a deserted side street away from the main square. Then we turned back.

"Genaro just helped you to align your emanations with those emanations at large that belong to another band," don Juan said to me. "Alignment has to be a very peaceful, unnoticeable act. No flying away, no great fuss."

He said that the sobriety needed to let the assemblage point assemble other worlds is something that cannot be improvised. Sobriety has to mature and become a force in itself before warriors can break the barrier of perception with impunity.

We were coming closer to the main square. Genaro had not said a word. He walked in silence as if absorbed in thought. Just before we came into the square, don Juan said that Genaro wanted to show me one more thing; that the position of the assemblage point is everything, and that the world it makes us perceive is so real that it does not leave room for anything except realness.

"Genaro will let his assemblage point assemble another world just for your benefit," don Juan said to me. "And then you'll realize that as he perceives it, the force of his perception will leave room for nothing else."

Genaro walked ahead of us, and don Juan ordered me to roll my eyes in a counterclockwise direction while I looked at Genaro to avoid being dragged with him. I obeyed him. Genaro was five or six feet away from me. Suddenly his shape became diffuse and in one instant he was gone like a puff of air.

I thought of the science fiction movies I had seen and wondered whether we are subliminally aware of our possibilities.

"Genaro is separated from us at this moment by the force of perception," don Juan said quietly. "When the assemblage point assembles a world, that world is total. This is the marvel that the old seers stumbled upon yet never realized what it was. The awareness of the earth can give us a boost to align other great bands of emanations, and the force of that new alignment makes the world vanish.

"Every time the old seers made a new alignment they believed they had descended to the depths or had ascended to the heavens above. They never knew that the world disappears like a puff of air when a new total alignment makes us perceive another total world."

## 14. The Rolling Force

Don Juan was about to start his explanation of the mastery of awareness, but he changed his mind and stood up. We had been sitting in the big room observing a moment of quiet.

"I want you to try seeing the Eagle's emanations," he said. "For that you must first move your assemblage point until you see the cocoon of man."

We walked from the house to the center of town. We sat down on an empty, worn park bench in front of the church, it was early afternoon on a sunny, windy day with lots of people milling around.

He repeated, as if he were trying to drill it into me, that alignment is a unique force because it either helps the assemblage point shift, or it keeps it glued to it's customary position. The aspect of alignment that keeps the point stationary, he said, is will; and the aspect that makes it shift is intent. He remarked that one of the most haunting mysteries is how will, the impersonal force of alignment, changes into intent, the personalized force which is at the service of each individual.

"The strangest part of this mystery is that the change is so easy to accomplish," he went on. "But what is not so easy is to convince ourselves that it is possible. There, right there, is our safety catch. We have to be convinced. And none of us wants to be."

He told me then that I was in my keenest state of awareness, and that it was possible for me to intend my assemblage point to shift deeper into my left side to a dreaming position. He said that warriors should never attempt seeing unless they are aided by dreaming.

I argued that to fall asleep in public was not one of my fortes. He clarified his statement saying that to move the assemblage point away from it's natural setting, and to keep it fixed at a new location is to be asleep. With practice, seers learn to be asleep and yet behave as if nothing is happening to them.

After a moment's pause he added that for purposes of seeing the cocoon of man, one has to gaze at people from behind as they walk away. It is useless to gaze at people face to face because the front of the egglike cocoon of man has a protective shield which seers call the front plate. It is an almost impregnable, unyielding shield that protects us throughout our lives against the onslaught of a peculiar force that stems from the emanations themselves.

He also told me not to be surprised if my body was stiff, as though it were frozen. He said that I was going to feel very much like someone standing in the middle of a room looking at the street through a window, and that speed was of the essence, as people were going to move extremely fast by my seeing window.

He told me then to relax my muscles, shut off my internal dialogue, and let my assemblage point drift away under the spell of inner silence. He urged me to smack myself gently but firmly on my right side, between my hipbone and my ribcage.

I did that three times and I was sound asleep. It was a most peculiar state of sleep. My body was dormant, but I was perfectly aware of everything that was taking place. I could hear don Juan talking to me and I could follow every one of his statements as if I were awake, yet I could not move my body at all.

Don Juan said that a man was going to walk by my seeing window and that I should try to see him. I unsuccessfully attempted to move my head and then a shiny egglike shape appeared, it was resplendent. I was awed by the sight and before I could recover from my surprise, it was gone. It floated away, bobbing up and down.

Everything had been so sudden and fast that it made me feel frustrated and impatient. I felt that I was beginning to wake up. Don Juan talked to me again and urged me to relax. He said that I had no right and no time to be impatient. Suddenly, another luminous being appeared and moved away. It seemed to be made of a white fluorescent shag.

Don Juan whispered in my ear that if I wanted to, my eyes were capable of slowing down everything they focused on. Then he warned me that another man was coming.

I realized at that instant that there were two voices. The one I had just heard was the same one that had admonished me to be patient. That was don Juan's. The other, the one that told me to use my eyes to slow down movement, was the voice of seeing.

That afternoon, I saw ten luminous beings in slow motion. The voice of seeing guided me to witness in them everything don Juan had told me about the glow of awareness.

There was a vertical band with a stronger amber glow on the right side of those egglike luminous creatures, perhaps one-tenth of the total volume of the cocoon. The voice said that that was man's band of awareness. The voice pointed out a dot on man's band, a dot with an intense shine. It was high on the oblong shapes almost on the crest of them on the surface of the cocoon. The voice said that it was the assemblage point.

When I saw each luminous creature in profile, from the point of view of it's body, it's egglike shape was like a gigantic asymmetrical yoyo that was standing edgewise, or like an almost round pot that was resting on it's side with it's lid on. The part that looked like a lid was the front plate. It was perhaps one-fifth the thickness of the total cocoon.

I would have gone on seeing those creatures, but don Juan said that I should now gaze at people face to face, and sustain my gaze until I had broken the barrier and I was seeing the emanations.

I followed his command. Almost instantaneously, I saw a most brilliant array of live, compelling fibers of light. It was a dazzling sight that immediately shattered my balance.

I fell down on the cement walk on my side. From there, I saw the compelling fibers of light multiply themselves. They burst open and myriads of other fibers came out of them. But the fibers, compelling as they were, somehow did not interfere with my ordinary view.

There were scores of people going into church. I was no longer seeing them. There were quite a few women and men just around the bench. I wanted to focus my eyes on them, but instead I noticed how one of those fibers of light bulged suddenly. It became like a ball of fire that was perhaps seven feet in diameter, it rolled on me. My first impulse was to roll out of it's way. Before I could even move a muscle the ball had hit me.

I felt it as clearly as if someone had punched me gently in the stomach. An instant later another ball of fire hit me, this time with considerably more strength, and then don Juan whacked me really hard on the cheek with his open hand. I jumped up involuntarily and lost sight of the fibers of light and the balloons that were hitting me.

Don Juan said that I had successfully endured my first brief encounter with the Eagle's emanations, but that a couple of shoves from the tumbler had dangerously opened up my gap. He added that the balls that had hit me were called the rolling force, or the tumbler.

We had returned to his house, although I did not remember how or when. I had spent hours in a sort of semi-sleeping state. Don Juan and the other seers of his group had given me large amounts of water to drink. They had also submerged me in an ice-cold tub of water for short periods of time.

"Were those fibers I saw the Eagle's emanations?" I asked don Juan.

"Yes. But you didn't really see them," he replied. "No sooner had you begun to see than the tumbler stopped you. If you had remained a moment longer it would have blasted you."

"What exactly is the tumbler?" I asked.

"It is a force from the Eagle's emanations," he said. "A ceaseless force that strikes us every instant of our lives. It is lethal when seen. We are oblivious to it in our ordinary lives because we have protective shields. We have consuming interests that engage all our awareness. We are permanently worried about our station; our possessions.

"These shields, however, do not keep the tumbler away, they simply keep us from seeing it directly, protecting us in this way from getting hurt by the fright of seeing the balls of fire hitting us. Shields are a great help and a great hindrance to us. They pacify us and at the same time fool us. They give us a false sense of security."

He warned me that a moment would come in my life when I would be without any shields and uninterruptedly at the mercy of the tumbler. He said that it is an obligatory stage in the life of a warrior known as losing the human form.

I asked him to explain to me once and for all what the human form is and what it means to lose it.

He replied that seers describe the human form as the compelling force of alignment of the emanations lit by the glow of awareness on the precise spot on which normally man's assemblage point is fixated. It is the force that makes us into persons. Thus, to be a person is to be compelled to affiliate with that force of alignment and consequently to be affiliated with the precise spot where it originates.

By reason of their activities, at a given moment the assemblage points of warriors drift toward the left. It is a permanent move which results in an uncommon sense of aloofness, or control, or even abandon.

That drift of the assemblage point entails a new alignment of emanations. It is the beginning of a series of greater shifts. Seers very aptly called this initial shift losing the human form because it marks an inexorable movement of the assemblage point away from it's original setting and results in the irreversible loss of our affiliation to the force that makes us normal persons.

He asked me then to describe all the details I could remember about the balls of fire. I told him that I had seen them so briefly I was not sure I could describe them in detail.

He pointed out that seeing is an euphemism for moving the assemblage point, and that if I moved mine a fraction more to the left I would have a clear picture of the balls of fire; a picture which I could interpret then as having remembered them.

I tried to have a clear picture, but I couldn't, so I described what I remembered.

He listened attentively and then urged me to recall if they were balls or circles of fire. I told him I didn't remember.

He explained that those balls of fire, which the new seers call the rolling force, are of crucial importance to human beings because they are the expression of a force that pertains to all details of life and death.

I asked him to clarify what he meant by all the details of life and death.

"The rolling force is the means through which the Eagle distributes life and awareness for safekeeping," he said. "But it also is the force that, let's say, collects the rent. It makes all living beings die. What you saw today was called the tumbler by the ancient seers."

He said that seers describe it as an eternal line of iridescent rings, or balls of fire, that roll onto living beings ceaselessly. Luminous organic beings meet the rolling force head on until the day when the force proves to be too much for them and the creatures finally collapse. The old seers were mesmerized by seeing how the tumbler then tumbles them into the beak of the Eagle to be devoured. That was the reason they called it the tumbler.

"You said that it is a mesmerizing sight. Have you yourself seen it rolling human beings?" I asked.

"Certainly I've seen it," he replied, and after a pause he added, "You and I saw it only a short while ago in Mexico City."

His assertion was so farfetched that I felt obliged to tell him that this time he was wrong. He laughed and reminded me that on that occasion, while both of us were sitting on a bench in the Alameda Park in Mexico City, we had witnessed the death of a man. He said that I had recorded the event in my everyday life memory as well as in my left side emanations.

As don Juan spoke to me I had the sensation of something inside me becoming lucid by degrees, and I could visualize with uncanny clarity the whole scene in the park.

The man was lying on the grass with three policemen standing by him to keep onlookers away. I distinctly remembered don Juan hitting me on my back to make me change levels of awareness. And then I saw.

My seeing was imperfect. I was unable to shake off the sight of the world of everyday life. What I ended up with was a composite of filaments of the most gorgeous colors superimposed on the buildings and the traffic. The filaments were actually lines of colored light that came from above. They had inner life. They were bright and bursting with energy.

When I had looked at the dying man, I saw what don Juan was talking about.

Something that was like circles of fire, or iridescent tumbleweeds, was rolling everywhere I focused my eyes. The circles were rolling on people; on don Juan; on me. I felt them in my stomach and became ill.

Don Juan told me to focus my eyes on the dying man. I saw the man at one moment curling up, just as a sow bug curls itself up upon being touched. The incandescent circles pushed him away as if they were casting him aside; out of their majestic, inalterable path.

I had not liked the feeling. The circles of fire had not scared me. They were not awesome, or sinister. I did not feel morbid or somber. The circles rather had nauseated me. I'd felt them in the pit of my stomach. It was revulsion that I'd felt that day.

Remembering them conjured up again the total feeling of discomfort I had experienced on that occasion. As I got ill, don Juan laughed until he was out of breath.

"You're such an exaggerated fellow." he said. "The rolling force is not that bad. It's lovely in fact. The new seers recommend that we open ourselves to it. The old seers also opened themselves to it, but for reasons and purposes guided mostly by self-importance and obsession.

"The new seers, on the other hand, make friends with it. They become familiar with that force by handling it without any self-importance. The result is staggering in it's consequences."

He said that a shift of the assemblage point is all that is needed to open oneself to the rolling force. He added that if the force is seen in a deliberate manner, there is minimal danger.

A situation that is extremely dangerous, however, is an involuntary shift of the assemblage point owing, perhaps, to physical fatigue, emotional exhaustion, disease, or simply a minor emotional or physical crisis; such as being frightened or being drunk.

"When the assemblage point shifts involuntarily, the rolling force cracks the cocoon," he went on. "I've talked many times about a gap that man has below his navel. It's not really below the navel itself, but in the cocoon at the height of the navel. The gap is more like a dent; a natural flaw in the otherwise smooth cocoon. That is where the tumbler hits us ceaselessly and where the cocoon cracks."

He went on to explain that if it is a minor shift of the assemblage point, the crack is very small.

The cocoon quickly repairs itself, and people experience what everybody has at one time or another; blotches of color and contorted shapes which remain even if the eyes are closed.

If the shift is considerable, the crack also is extensive, and it takes time for the cocoon to repair itself; as in the case of warriors who purposely use power plants to elicit that shift, or people who take drugs and unwittingly do the same.

In these cases men feel numb and cold. They have difficulty talking or even thinking. It is as if they have been frozen from inside.

Don Juan said that in cases in which the assemblage point shifts drastically because of the effects of trauma or of a mortal disease, the rolling force produces a crack the length of the cocoon. The cocoon collapses and curls in on itself, and the individual dies.

"Can a voluntary shift also produce a gap of that nature?" I asked.

"Sometimes," he replied. "We're really frail. As the tumbler hits us over and over, death comes to us through the gap. Death is the rolling force. When it finds weakness in the gap of a luminous being, it automatically cracks it open and makes it collapse."

"Does every living being have a gap?" I asked.

"Of course," he replied. "If it didn't have one it wouldn't die. The gaps, however, are different in size and configuration. Man's gap is a bowl-like depression the size of a fist; a very frail vulnerable configuration. The gaps of other organic creatures are very much like man's; some are stronger than ours and others are weaker.

"But the gap of inorganic beings is really different. It's more like a long thread, a hair of luminosity. Consequently, inorganic beings are infinitely more durable than we are.

"There is something hauntingly appealing about the long life of those creatures, and the old seers could not resist being carried away by that appeal."

He said that the same force can produce two effects that are diametrically opposed. The old seers were imprisoned by the rolling force, and the new seers are rewarded for their toils with the gift of freedom.

The new seers become familiar with the rolling force through the mastery of intent, and at a given moment they open their own cocoons and the force floods them- as opposed to rolling them up like a curled up sow bug. The final result is their total and instantaneous disintegration.

I asked him a lot of questions about the survival of awareness after the luminous being is consumed by the fire from within. He did not answer. He simply chuckled and shrugged his shoulders.

He went on to say that the old seers' obsession with the tumbler blinded them to the other side of that force. The new seers, with their usual thoroughness in refusing tradition, went to the other extreme. They were at first totally averse to focusing their seeing on the tumbler. They argued that they needed to understand the force of the emanations at large in it's aspect as life-giver and enhancer of awareness.

"They realized," don Juan went on, "that it is infinitely easier to destroy something than it is to build it and maintain it. To roll life away is nothing compared to giving it and nourishing it. Of course, the new seers were wrong on this count, but in due course they corrected their mistake."

"How were they wrong, don Juan?"

"It's an error to isolate anything for seeing. At the beginning, the new seers did exactly the opposite from what their predecessors did. They focused with equal attention on the other side of the tumbler. What happened to them was as terrible as, if not worse than, what happened to the old seers.

"They died stupid deaths, just as the average man does. They did not have the mystery and the malignancy of the ancient seers; but neither did they have the quest for freedom of the seers of today.

"Those first new seers served everybody. And because they were focusing their seeing on the life-giving side of the emanations, they were filled with love and kindness. But that didn't keep them from being tumbled. They were vulnerable, just as were the old seers who were filled with morbidity."

He said that for the modern-day new seers, to be left stranded after a life of discipline and toil, just like men who have never had a purposeful moment in their lives, was intolerable.

Don Juan said that these new seers realized, after they had readopted their tradition, that the old seers' knowledge of the rolling force had been complete. At one point the old seers had concluded that there were, in effect, two different aspects of the same force.

The tumbling aspect relates exclusively to destruction and death. The circular aspect, on the other hand, is what maintains life and awareness, fulfillment and purpose. The old seers had chosen, however, to deal exclusively with the tumbling aspect.

"Gazing in teams, the new seers were able to see the separation between the tumbling and the circular aspects," he explained. "They saw that both forces are fused, but are not the same. The circular force comes to us just before the tumbling force. They are so close to each other that they only seemed the same.

"The reason it's called the circular force is that it comes in rings, threadlike hoops of iridescence- a very delicate affair indeed. And just like the tumbling force, it strikes all living beings ceaselessly but for a different purpose. The circular force strikes them to give them strength, direction, and awareness; to give them life.

"What the new seers discovered is that the balance of the two forces in every living being is a very delicate one," he continued, "if at any given time an individual feels that the tumbling force strikes harder than the circular one, that means the balance is upset. The tumbling force strikes harder and harder from then on, until it cracks the living being's gap and makes it die."

He added that out of what I had called balls of fire comes an iridescent hoop exactly the size of living beings, whether men, trees, microbes, or allies.

"Are there different-size circles?" I asked.

"Don't take me so literally," he protested. "There are no circles to speak of, just a circular force that gives seers, who are dreaming it, the feeling of rings. And there are no different sizes either. It's one indivisible force that fits all living beings, organic and inorganic."

"Why did the old seers focus on the tumbling aspect?" I asked.

"Because they believed that their lives depended on seeing it," he replied. "They were sure that their seeing was going to give them answers to age-old questions.

"You see, they figured that if they unraveled the secrets of the rolling force they would be invulnerable and immortal. The sad part is that in one way or another they did unravel the secrets, and yet they were neither invulnerable nor immortal.

"The new seers changed it all by realizing that there is no way to aspire to immortality as long as man has a cocoon."

Don Juan explained that the old seers apparently never realized that the human cocoon is a receptacle and cannot sustain the onslaught of the rolling force forever. In spite of all the knowledge that they had accumulated, they were in the end certainly no better, and perhaps much worse off than the average man.

"In what way were they left worse off than the average man?" I asked.

"Their tremendous knowledge forced them to take it for granted that their choices were infallible," he said. "So they chose to live at any cost."

Don Juan looked at me and smiled. With his theatrical pause he was telling me something I could not fathom.

He said, "They chose to live: Just as they chose to become trees in order to assemble worlds with those nearly unreachable great bands."

"What do you mean by that, don Juan?"

"I mean that they used the rolling force to shift their assemblage points to unimaginable dreaming positions instead of letting it roll them to the beak of the Eagle to be devoured."

## 15. The Death Defiers

I arrived at Genaro's house around 2:00 p.m. Don Juan and I became involved in conversation, and then don Juan made me shift into heightened awareness.

"Here we are again, the three of us, just as we were the day we went to that flat rock," don Juan said. "And tonight we're going to make another trip to that area.

"You have enough knowledge now to draw very serious conclusions about that place and it's effects on awareness."

"What is it with that place, don Juan?"

"Tonight you're going to find out some gruesome facts that the old seers collected about the rolling force; and you're going to see what I meant when I told you that the old seers chose to live at any cost."

Don Juan turned to Genaro, who was about to fall asleep. He nudged him.

"Wouldn't you say, Genaro, that the old seers were dreadful men?" don Juan asked.

"Absolutely," Genaro said in a crisp tone and then seemed to succumb to fatigue.

He began to nod noticeably. In an instant he was sound asleep, his head resting on his chest with his chin tucked in. He snored.

I wanted to laugh out loud. But then I noticed that Genaro was staring at me, as if he were sleeping with his eyes open.

"They were such dreadful men that they even defied death," Genaro added between snores.

"Aren't you curious to know how those gruesome men defied death?" don Juan asked me.

He seemed to be urging me to ask for an example of their gruesomeness. He paused and looked at me with what I thought was a glint of expectation in his eyes.

"You're waiting for me to ask for an example, aren't you?" I said.

"This is a great moment," he said, patting me on the back and laughing. "My benefactor had me on the edge of my seat at this point. I asked him to give me an example, and he did. Now I'm going to give you one whether you ask for it or not."

"What are you going to do?" I asked, so frightened that my stomach was tied in knots and my voice cracked.

It took quite a while for don Juan to stop laughing. Every time he started to speak, he'd get an attack of coughing laughter.

"As Genaro told you, the old seers were dreadful men," he said, rubbing his eyes. "There was something they tried to avoid at all costs: They didn't want to die.

"You may say that the average man doesn't want to die either, but the advantage that the old seers had over the average man was that they had the concentration and the discipline to intend things away; and they actually intended death away."

He paused and looked at me with raised eyebrows. He said that I was falling behind; that I was not asking my usual questions.

I remarked that it was plain to me that he was leading me to ask if the old seers had succeeded in intending death away, but he himself had already told me that their knowledge about the tumbler had not saved them from dying.

"They succeeded in intending death away," he said, pronouncing his words with extra care. "But they still had to die."

"How did they intend death away?" I asked.

"They observed their allies," he said, "and seeing that they were living beings with a much greater resilience to the rolling force, the seers patterned themselves on their allies."

"The old seers realized," don Juan explained, "that only organic beings have a gap that resembles a bowl. It's size, shape, and it's brittleness make it the ideal configuration to hasten the cracking and collapsing of the luminous shell under the onslaughts of the tumbling force.

"The allies, on the other hand, have only a line for a gap. The allies therefore present such a small surface to the rolling force that they are practically immortal. Their cocoons can sustain the onslaughts of the tumbler indefinitely because hairline gaps offer no ideal configuration to it.

"The old seers," don Juan continued, "developed the most bizarre techniques for closing their gaps. They were essentially correct in assuming that a hairline gap is more durable than a bowl-like one."

"Are those techniques still in existence?" I asked.

"No, they are not," he said. "But some of the seers who practiced them are."

For reasons unknown to me, his statement caused a reaction of sheer terror in me. My breathing was altered instantly, and I couldn't control it's rapid pace.

"They're still alive to this day, isn't that so, Genaro?" don Juan asked.

"Absolutely," Genaro muttered from an apparent state of deep sleep.

I asked don Juan if he knew the reason for my being so frightened. He reminded me about a previous occasion in that very room when they had asked me if I had noticed the weird creatures that had come in the moment Genaro opened the door.

"That day," he went on, "your assemblage point went very deep into the left side and assembled a frightening world.

"But I have already said that to you. What you don't remember is that you went directly to a very remote world and scared yourself pissless there."

Don Juan turned to Genaro, who was snoring peacefully with his legs stretched out in front of him.

"Wasn't he scared pissless, Genaro?" he asked.

"Absolutely pissless," Genaro muttered, and don Juan laughed.

"I want you to know," don Juan continued, "that we don't blame you for being scared. We ourselves are revolted by some of the actions of the old seers. I'm sure that you have realized by now that what you can't remember about that night is that you saw the old seers who are still alive."

I wanted to protest that I had realized nothing, but I could not voice my words. I had to clear my throat over and over before I could articulate a word. Genaro had stood up and was gently patting my upper back, by my neck, as if I were choking.

"You have a frog in your throat," he said.

I thanked him in a high squeaky voice.

"No, I think you have a chicken there," he added and sat down to sleep.

Don Juan said that the new seers had rebelled against all the bizarre practices of the old seers, and had declared them not only useless but injurious to our total being. They even went so far as to ban those techniques from whatever was taught to new warriors; and for generations there was no mention of those practices at all.

It was in the early part of the eighteenth century that the nagual Sebastian, a member of don Juan's direct line of naguals, rediscovered the existence of those techniques.

"How did he rediscover them?" I asked.

"He was a superb stalker, and because of his impeccability he got a chance to learn marvels," don Juan replied.

Don Juan said that one day as the nagual Sebastian was about to start his daily routines as the sexton [* sexton- an officer of the church who is in charge of sacred objects] at the cathedral in the city where he lived, he found a middle-aged Indian man who seemed to be in a quandary [* quandary- a situation from which disentanglement is difficult] at the door of the church.

The nagual Sebastian went to the man's side and asked him if he needed help.

"I need a bit of energy to close my gap," the man said to him in a loud clear voice. "Would you give me some of your energy?"

Don Juan said that according to the story, the nagual Sebastian was dumbfounded. He did not know what the man was talking about. He offered to take the Indian to see the parish priest. The man lost his patience and angrily accused the nagual Sebastian of stalling.

"I need your energy because you're a nagual," the man said. "Let's go quietly."

The nagual Sebastian succumbed to the magnetic power of the stranger and meekly went with him into the mountains. He was gone for many days.

When the nagual Sebastian came back he not only had a new outlook about the ancient seers, but he also had detailed knowledge of their techniques. The strange old man was an ancient Toltec; one of the last survivors.

"The nagual Sebastian," don Juan went on, "found out marvels about the old seers. He was the one who first knew how grotesque and aberrant they really were. Before him, that knowledge was only hearsay.

"One night," don Juan said, "my benefactor and the nagual Elias gave me a sample of those aberrations. They actually showed it to Genaro and me together, so it's only proper that we both show you the same sample."

I wanted to talk in order to stall. I needed time to calm down; to think things out. But before I could say anything, don Juan and Genaro were practically dragging me out of the house. They headed for the same eroded hills we had visited before.

We stopped at the bottom of a large barren hill. Don Juan pointed toward some distant mountains to the south, and said that between the place where we stood and a natural cut in one of those mountains- a cut that looked like an open mouth- there were at least seven sites where the ancient seers had focused all the power of their awareness.

Don Juan said that those seers had not only been knowledgeable and daring, but downright successful. He added that his benefactor had showed Genaro and him a site where the old seers, driven by their love for life, had buried themselves alive, and had actually intended the rolling force away.

"There is nothing that would catch the eye in those places," he went on. "The old seers were careful not to leave marks. It is just a landscape. One has to see to know where those places are."

He said that he did not want to walk to the faraway sites, but would take me to the one that was nearest. I insisted on knowing what we were after.

He said that we were going to see the buried seers, and that for that we were going to stay until it got dark under the cover of some green bushes. He pointed them out. They were perhaps half a mile away up a steep slope.

We reached the patch of bushes, and sat down as comfortably as we could. He began then to explain in a very low voice that in order to get energy from the earth, ancient seers used to bury themselves for a period of time which depended on what they wanted to accomplish. The more difficult their task, the longer their burial period.

Don Juan stood up, and in a melodramatic way showed me a spot a few yards from where we were.

"Two old seers are buried there," he said. "They buried themselves about two thousand years ago to escape death; not in the spirit of running away from it, but in the spirit of defying it."

Don Juan asked Genaro to show me the exact spot where the old seers were buried. I turned to look at Genaro, and realized that he was sitting by my side sound asleep again. But to my utter amazement, he jumped up and barked like a dog, and ran on all fours to the spot don Juan was pointing out. There he ran around the place in a perfect mime of a small dog.

I found his performance hilarious. Don Juan was nearly on the ground laughing.

After Genaro returned to where we were and went back to sleep, don Juan said, "Genaro has shown you something extraordinary. He has shown you something about the assemblage point and dreaming. He's dreaming now, but he can act as if he were fully awake and he can hear everything you say. From that position he can do more than if he were awake."

He was silent for a moment as if assessing what to say next. Genaro snored rhythmically.

Don Juan remarked how easy it was for him to find flaws with what the old seers had done, yet, in all fairness, he never tired of repeating how wonderful their accomplishments were.

He said that they understood the earth to perfection. Not only did they discover and use the boost from the earth, but they also discovered that if they remained buried, their assemblage points aligned emanations that were ordinarily inaccessible; and that such an alignment engaged the earth's strange, inexplicable capacity to deflect the ceaseless strikes of the rolling force.

Consequently, they developed the most astounding and complex techniques for burying themselves for extremely long periods of time without any detriment to themselves. In their fight against death, they learned how to elongate those periods to cover millennia.

It was a cloudy day, and night fell quickly. In no time at all, everything was in darkness. Don Juan stood up and guided me and the sleepwalker Genaro to an enormous flat oval rock that had caught my eye the moment we got to that place. It was similar to the flat rock we had visited before, but bigger. It occurred to me that the rock, enormous as it was, had deliberately been placed there.

"This is another site," don Juan said. "This huge rock was placed here as a trap to attract people. Soon you'll know why."

I felt a shiver run through my body. I thought I was going to faint. I knew that I was definitely overreacting and wanted to say something about it, but don Juan kept on talking in a hoarse whisper.

He said that Genaro, since he was dreaming, had enough control over his assemblage point to move it until he could reach the specific emanations that would wake up whatever was around that rock. He recommended that I try to move my assemblage point, and follow Genaro's. He said that I could do it, first by setting up my unbending intent to move it, and second by letting the context of the situation dictate where it should move.

After a moment's thought he whispered in my ear not to worry about procedures, because most of the really unusual things that happen to seers, or to the average man for that matter, happen by themselves with only the intervention of intent.

He was silent for a moment and then added that the danger for me was going to be the buried seers' inevitable attempt to scare me to death. He exhorted me to follow Genaro's movements, keep myself calm, and not succumb to fear.

I fought desperately not to be sick. Don Juan patted me on the back and said that I was an old pro at playing an innocent bystander. He assured me that I was not consciously refusing to let my assemblage point move, but that every human being does it automatically.

"Something is going to scare the living daylights out of you," he whispered. "Don't give up, because if you do, you'll die and the old vultures around here are going to feast on your energy."

"Let's get out of here," I pleaded. "I really don't give a damn about getting an example of the old seers' grotesqueness."

"It's too late," Genaro said, fully awake now and standing by my side. "Even if we try to get away, the two seers and their allies on the other spot will cut you down. They have already made a circle around us. There are as many as sixteen awarenesses focused on you right now."

"Who are they?" I whispered in Genaro's ear.

"The four seers and their court," he replied. "They've been aware of us since we got here."

I wanted to turn tail and run for dear life, but don Juan held my arm and pointed to the sky. I noticed that a remarkable change in visibility had taken place. Instead of the pitch-black darkness that had prevailed, there was a pleasant dawn twilight. I made a quick assessment of the cardinal points. The sky was definitely lighter toward the east.

I felt a strange pressure around my head. My ears were buzzing. I felt cold and feverish at the same time. I was scared as I had never been before, but what bothered me was a nagging sensation of defeat; of being a coward. I felt nauseated and miserable.

Don Juan whispered in my ear. He said that I had to be on the alert, that the onslaught of the old seers would be felt by all three of us at any moment.

"You can grab on to me if you want to," Genaro said in a fast whisper as if something were prodding him.

I hesitated for an instant. I did not want don Juan to believe that I was so scared I needed to hold on to Genaro.

"Here they come!" Genaro said in a loud whisper.

The world turned upside down instantaneously for me when something gripped me by my left ankle. I felt the coldness of death on my entire body. I felt I had stepped on an iron clamp like a bear trap. That all flashed through my mind before I let out a piercing scream, as intense as my fright.

Don Juan and Genaro laughed out loud. They were flanking me no more than three feet away, but I was so terrified I did not even notice them.

"Sing! Sing for dear life!" I heard don Juan ordering me under his breath.

I tried to pull my foot loose. I felt then a sting, as if needles were piercing my skin. Don Juan insisted over and over that I sing. He and Genaro started to sing a popular song. Genaro spoke the lyrics as he looked at me from hardly two inches away. They sang off-key in raspy voices, getting so completely out of breath and so high out of the range of their voices that I ended up laughing.

"Sing, or you're going to perish," don Juan said to me.

"Let's make a trio," Genaro said, "We'll sing a bolero."

I joined them in an off-key trio. We sang for quite a while at the top of our voices, like drunkards. I felt that the iron grip on my leg was gradually letting go of me. I had not dared to look down at my ankle. At one moment I did and I realized then that there was no trap clutching me. A dark, headlike shape was biting me!

Only a supreme effort kept me from fainting. I felt I was getting sick and automatically tried to bend over, but somebody with superhuman strength grabbed me painlessly by the elbows and the nape of my neck and did not let me move. I got sick all over my clothes.

My revulsion was so complete that I began to fall in a faint. Don Juan sprinkled my face with some water from the small gourd he always carried when we went into the mountains. The water slid under my collar. The coldness restored my physical balance, but it did not affect the force that was holding me by my elbows and neck.

"I think you are going too far with your fright," don Juan said loudly and in such a matter-of-fact tone that he created an immediate feeling of order.

"Let's sing again," he added. "Let's sing a song with substance- I don't want any more boleros."

I silently thanked him for his sobriety and for his grand style. As I heard them singing "La Valentina", I was so moved that I began to weep.

"Because of my passion, they say

that ill fortune is on my way.

It doesn't matter

that it might be the devil himself.

I do know how to die.

Valentina, Valentina.

I throw my self in your way.

If I am going to die tomorrow,

why not, once and for all, today?"

All of my being staggered under the impact of that inconceivable juxtaposition of values. Never had a song meant so much to me. As I heard them sing those lyrics, which I ordinarily considered reeking with cheap sentimentalism, I thought I understood the ethos of the warrior.

Don Juan had drilled into me that warriors live with death at their side; and from the knowledge that death is with them they draw the courage to face anything. Don Juan had said that the worst that could happen to us is that we have to die, and since that is already our unalterable fate, we are free. Those who have lost everything no longer have anything to fear.

I walked to don Juan and Genaro, and embraced them to express my boundless gratitude and admiration for them.

Then I realized that nothing was holding me any longer. Without a word, don Juan took my arm and guided me to sit on the flat rock.

"The show is just about to begin now," Genaro said in a jovial tone as he tried to find a comfortable position to sit. "You've just paid your admission ticket. It's all over your chest."

He looked at me, and both of them began to laugh.

"Don't sit too close to me," Genaro said. "I don't appreciate pukers. But don't go too far, either. The old seers are not through with their tricks yet."

I moved as close to them as politeness permitted. I was concerned about my state for an instant. Then all my qualms became nonsense because I noticed that some people were coming toward us.

I could not make out their shapes clearly, but I distinguished a mass of human figures moving in the semidarkness. They did not carry lanterns or flashlights with them, which at that hour they would still have needed. Somehow that detail worried me. I did not want to focus on it and I deliberately began to think rationally.

I figured that we must have attracted attention with our loud singing and they were coming to investigate. Don Juan tapped me on the shoulder. He pointed with a movement of his chin to the men in front of the group of others.

"Those four are the old seers," he said. "The rest are their allies."

Before I could remark that they were just local peasants, I heard a swishing sound right behind me. I quickly turned around in a state of total alarm. My movement was so sudden that don Juan's warning came too late.

"Don't turn around!" I heard him yell.

His words were only background. They did not mean anything to me.

On turning around, I saw that three grotesquely deformed men had climbed up on the rock right behind me. They were crawling toward me with their mouths open in a nightmarish grimace, and their arms outstretched to grab me.

I intended to scream at the top of my lungs, but what came out was an agonizing croak, as if something were obstructing my windpipe. I automatically rolled out of their reach and onto the ground.

As I stood up, don Juan jumped to my side, at the very same moment that a horde of men, led by those don Juan had pointed out, descended on me like vultures. They were actually squeaking like bats or rats.

I yelled in terror. This time I was able to let out a piercing cry.

Don Juan, as nimbly as an athlete in top form, pulled me out of their clutches onto the rock. He told me in a stern voice not to turn around to look, no matter how scared I was.

He said that the allies cannot push at all, but that they certainly could scare me and make me fall to the ground. On the ground, however, the allies could hold anybody down. If I were to fall on the ground by the place where the seers were buried, I would be at their mercy. They would rip me apart while their allies held me.

He added that he had not told me all that before because he had hoped I would be forced to see and understand it by myself. His decision had nearly cost me my life.

The sensation that the grotesque men were just behind me was nearly unbearable. Don Juan forcefully ordered me to keep calm and focus my attention on four men at the head of a crowd of perhaps ten or twelve.

The instant I focused my eyes on them, as if on cue, they all advanced to the edge of the flat rock. They stopped there and began hissing like serpents. They walked back and forth. Their movement seemed to be synchronized. It was so consistent and orderly that it seemed to be mechanical. It was as if they were following a repetitive pattern aimed at mesmerizing me.

"Don't gaze at them, dear," Genaro said to me as if he were talking to a child.

The laughter that followed was as hysterical as my fear. I laughed so hard that the sound reverberated on the surrounding hills.

The men stopped at once and seemed to be perplexed. I could distinguish the shapes of their heads bobbing up and down as if they were talking, deliberating among themselves. Then one of them jumped onto the rock.

"Watch out! That one is a seer!" Genaro exclaimed.

"What are we going to do?" I shouted.

"We could start singing again," don Juan replied matter-of-factly.

My fear reached it's apex then. I began to jump up and down and to roar like an animal. The man jumped down to the ground.

"Don't pay any more attention to those clowns," don Juan said. "Let's talk as usual."

He said that we had gone there for my enlightenment, and that I was failing miserably. I had to reorganize myself. The first thing to do was to realize that my assemblage point had moved and was now making obscure emanations glow. To carry the feelings from my usual state of awareness into the world I had assembled was indeed a travesty, for fear is only prevalent among the emanations of daily life.

I told him that if my assemblage point had shifted as he was saying it had, I had news for him. My fear was infinitely greater and more devastating than anything I had ever experienced in my daily life.

"You're wrong," he said. "Your first attention is confused and doesn't want to give up control, that's all. I have the feeling that you could walk right up to those creatures and face them, and they wouldn't do a thing to you."

I insisted that I was definitely in no condition to test such a preposterous thing as that.

He laughed at me. He said that sooner or later I had to cure myself of my madness, and that to take the initiative and face up to those four seers was infinitely less preposterous than the idea that I was seeing them at all. He said that, to him, madness was to be confronted by men who had been buried for two thousand years and were still alive, and not to think that that was the epitome of preposterousness.

I heard everything he said with clarity, but I was not really paying attention to him. I was terrified of the men around the rock. They seemed to be preparing to jump us, to jump me really. They were fixed on me. My right arm began to shake as if I were stricken by some muscular disorder. Then I became aware that the light in the sky had changed. I had not noticed before that it was already dawn. The strange thing was that an uncontrollable urge made me stand up and run to the group of men.

I had at that moment two completely different feelings about the same event. The minor one was of sheer terror. The other, the major one, was of total indifference. I could not have cared less.

When I reached the group I realized that don Juan was right. They were not really men. Only four of them had any resemblance to men, but they were not men either. They were strange creatures with huge yellow eyes. The others were just shapes that were propelled by the four that resembled men.

I felt extraordinarily sad for those creatures with yellow eyes. I tried to touch them, but I could not find them. Some sort of wind scooped them away.

I looked for don Juan and Genaro. They were not there. It was pitch-black again. I called out their names over and over again. I thrashed around in darkness for a few minutes. Don Juan came to my side and startled me. I did not see Genaro.

"Let's go home," he said. "We have a long walk."

Don Juan commented on how well I had performed at the site of the buried seers, especially during the last part of our encounter with them. He said that a shift of the assemblage point is marked by a change in light. In the daytime, light becomes very dark. At night, darkness becomes twilight.

He added that I had performed two shifts by myself, aided only by animal fright. The only thing he found objectionable was my indulging in fear, especially after I had realized that warriors have nothing to fear.

"How do you know I had realized that?" I asked.

"Because you were free. When fear disappears all the ties that bind us dissolve," he said. "An ally was gripping your foot because it was attracted by your animal terror."

I told him how sorry I was for not being able to uphold my realizations.

"Don't concern yourself with that." He laughed. "You know that such realizations are a dime a dozen. They don't amount to anything in the life of warriors because they are canceled out as the assemblage point shifts.

"What Genaro and I wanted to do was to make you shift very deeply. This time Genaro was there simply to entice the old seers. He did it once already, and you went so far into the left side that it will take quite a while for you to remember it.

"Your fright tonight was just as intense as it was that first time when the seers and their allies followed you to this very room, but your sturdy first attention wouldn't let you be aware of them."

"Explain to me what happened at the site of the seers," I asked.

"The allies came out to see you," he replied. "Since they have very low energy, they always need the help of men. The four seers have collected twelve allies.

"The countryside in Mexico and also certain cities are dangerous. What happened to you can happen to any man or woman. If they bump into that tomb, they may even see the seers and their allies if they are pliable enough to let their fear make their assemblage points shift; but one thing is for sure: They can die of fright."

"But do you honestly believe that those Toltec seers are still alive?" I asked.

He laughed and shook his head in disbelief.

"It's time for you to shift that assemblage point of yours just a bit," he said. "I can't talk to you when you are in your idiot's stage."

He smacked me with the palm of his hand on three spots: right on the crest of my right hipbone; on the center of my back below my shoulder blades; and on the upper part of my right pectoral muscle.

My ears immediately began to buzz. A trickle of blood ran out of my right nostril, and something inside me became unplugged. It was as if some flow of energy had been blocked and suddenly began to move again.

"What were those seers and their allies after?" I asked.

"Nothing," he replied. "We were the ones who were after them. The seers, of course, had already noticed your field of energy the first time you saw them. When you came back, they were set to feast on you."

"You claim that they are alive, don Juan," I said. "You must mean that they are alive as allies are alive, is that so?"

"That's exactly right," he said. "They cannot possibly be alive as you and I are. That would be preposterous."

He went on to explain that the ancient seers' concern with death made them look into the most bizarre possibilities. The ones who opted for the allies' pattern had in mind, doubtless, a desire for a haven. And they found it at a fixed position in one of the seven bands of inorganic awareness. The seers felt that they were relatively safe there. After all, they were separated from the daily world by a nearly insurmountable barrier; the barrier of perception set by the assemblage point.

"When the four seers saw that you could shift your assemblage point they took off like bats out of hell," he said and laughed.

"Do you mean that I assembled one of the seven worlds?" I asked.

"No, you didn't," he replied. "But you have done it before when the seers and their allies chased you. That day you went all the way to their world. The problem is that you love to act stupid, so you can't remember it at all.

"I'm sure," he continued, "that it is the nagual's presence that sometimes makes people act dumb. When the nagual Julian was still around, I was dumber than I am now. I am convinced that when I'm no longer here, you'll be capable of remembering everything."

Don Juan explained that since he needed to show me the death defiers, he and Genaro had lured them to the outskirts of our world. What I had done at first was a deep lateral shift, which allowed me to see them as people, but at the end I had correctly made the shift that allowed me to see the death defiers and their allies as they are.

Very early the next morning at Silvio Manuel's house, don Juan called me to the big room to discuss the events of the previous night. I felt exhausted and wanted to rest or to sleep, but don Juan was pressed for time. He immediately started his explanation.

He said that the old seers had found out a way to utilize the rolling force and be propelled by it. Instead of succumbing to the onslaughts of the tumbler they rode with it and let it move their assemblage points to the confines of human possibilities.

Don Juan expressed unbiased admiration for such an accomplishment. He admitted that nothing else could give the assemblage point the boost that the tumbler gives.

I asked him about the difference between the earth's boost and the tumbler's boost. He explained that the earth's boost is the force of alignment of only the amber emanations. It is a boost that heightens awareness to unthinkable degrees. To the new seers it is a blast of unlimited consciousness which they call total freedom.

He said that the tumbler's boost, on the other hand, is the force of death. Under the impact of the tumbler, the assemblage point moves to new, unpredictable positions. Thus, the old seers were always alone in their journeys, although the enterprise they were involved in was always communal. The company of other seers on their journeys was fortuitous and usually meant struggle for supremacy.

I confessed to don Juan that the concerns of the old seers, whatever they may have been, were worse than morbid horror tales to me. He laughed uproariously. He seemed to be enjoying himself.

"You have to admit, no matter how disgusted you feel, that those devils were very daring," he went on. "I never liked them myself, as you know, but I can't help admiring them. Their love for life is truly beyond me."

"How can that be love for life, don Juan? It's something nauseating," I said.

"What else could push a man to those extremes if it is not love for life?" he asked. "They loved life so intensely that they were not willing to give it up. That's the way I have seen it.

"My benefactor saw something else. He believed that they were afraid to die, which is not the same as loving life.

"I say that they were afraid to die because they loved life and because they had seen marvels, and not because they were greedy little monsters. No. They were aberrant because nobody ever challenged them and they were spoiled like rotten children; but their daring was impeccable and so was their courage.

"Would you venture into the unknown out of greed? No way. Greed works only in the world of ordinary affairs. To venture into that terrifying loneliness one must have something greater than greed; Love. One needs love for life, for intrigue, and for mystery. One needs unquenching curiosity and guts galore. So don't give me this nonsense about your being revolted. It's embarrassing!"

Don Juan's eyes were shining with contained laughter. He was putting me in my place, but he was laughing at it.

Don Juan left me alone in the room for perhaps an hour. I wanted to organize my thoughts and feelings. I had no way to do that. I knew without any doubt that my assemblage point was at a position where reasoning does not prevail, yet I was moved by reasonable concerns. Don Juan had said that technically, as soon as the assemblage point shifts, we are asleep. I wondered, for instance, if I was sound asleep from the stand of an onlooker, just as Genaro had been asleep to me.

I asked don Juan about it as soon as he returned.

"You are absolutely asleep without having to be stretched out," he replied. "If people in a normal state of awareness saw you now, you would appear to them to be a bit dizzy, even drunk."

He explained that during normal sleep, the shift of the assemblage point runs along either edge of man's band. Such shifts are always coupled with slumber. Shifts that are induced by practice occur along the midsection of man's band and are not coupled with slumber, yet a dreamer is asleep.

"Right at this juncture is where the new and the old seers made their separate bids for power," he went on. "The old seers wanted a replica of the body but with more physical strength, so they made their assemblage points slide along the right edge of man's band. The deeper they moved along the right edge the more bizarre their dreaming body became. You yourself witnessed last night the monstrous result of a deep shift along the right edge."

He said that the new seers were completely different; that they maintain their assemblage points along the midsection of man's band. If the shift is a shallow one, like the shift into heightened awareness, the dreamer is almost like anyone else in the street except for a slight vulnerability to emotions, such as fear and doubt. But at a certain degree of depth, the dreamer who is shifting along the midsection becomes a blob of light. A blob of light is the dreaming body of the new seers.

He also said that such an impersonal dreaming body is more conducive to understanding and examination, which are the basis of all the new seers do. The intensely humanized dreaming body of the old seers drove them to look for answers that were equally personal; humanized.

Don Juan suddenly seemed to be groping for words.

"There is another death defier," he said curtly, "so unlike the four you've seen that he's indistinguishable from the average man in the street. He's accomplished this unique feat by being able to open and close his gap whenever he wants."

He played with his fingers almost nervously.

"The ancient seer that the nagual Sebastian found in 1723 is that death defier," he went on. "We count that day as the beginning of our line, the second beginning. That death defier, who's been on the earth for hundreds of years, has changed the lives of every nagual he met, some more profoundly than others. And he has met every single nagual of our line since that day in 1723."

Don Juan looked fixedly at me. I got strangely embarrassed. I thought my embarrassment was the result of a dilemma. I had very serious doubts about the content of the story, and at the same time I had the most disconcerting trust that everything he had said was true. I expressed my quandary to him.

"The problem of rational disbelief is not yours alone," don Juan said. "My benefactor was at first plagued by the same question. Of course, later on he remembered everything. But it took him a long time to do so. When I met him he had already recollected everything, so I never witnessed his doubts. I only heard about them.

"The weird part is that people who have never set eyes on the man have less difficulty accepting that he's one of the original seers. My benefactor said that his quandaries stemmed from the fact that the shock of meeting such a creature had lumped together a number of emanations. It takes time for those emanations to separate themselves."

Don Juan went on to explain that as my assemblage point kept on shifting, a moment would come when it would hit the proper combination of emanations. At that moment the proof of the existence of that man would become overwhelmingly evident to me.

I felt compelled to talk again about my ambivalence.

"We're deviating from our subject," he said. "It may seem that I'm trying to convince you of the existence of that man; and what I meant to talk about is the fact that the old seer knows how to handle the rolling force. Whether or not you believe that he exists is not important. Someday you'll know for a fact that he certainly succeeded in closing his gap. The energy that he borrows from the nagual every generation he uses exclusively to close his gap."

"How did he succeed in closing it?" I asked.

"There is no way of knowing that," he replied. "I've talked to two other naguals who saw that man face to face, the nagual Julian and the nagual Elias. Neither of them knew how. The man never revealed how he closes that opening, which I suppose begins to expand after a time. The nagual Sebastian said that when he first saw the old seer, the man was very weak, actually dying. But my benefactor found him prancing vigorously, like a young man."

Don Juan said that the nagual Sebastian nicknamed that nameless man 'the tenant', because they had struck an arrangement by which the man was given energy, lodging so to speak, and he paid rent in the form of favors and knowledge.

"Did anybody ever get hurt in the exchange?" I asked.

"None of the naguals who exchanged energy with him was injured," he replied. "The man's commitment was that he'd only take a bit of superfluous energy from the nagual in exchange for gifts; for extraordinary abilities. For instance, the nagual Julian got the gait of power. With it, he could activate or make dormant the emanations inside his cocoon in order to look young or old at will."

Don Juan explained that the death defiers in general went as far as rendering dormant all the emanations inside their cocoons, except those that matched the emanations of the allies. In this fashion they were able to imitate the allies in some form.

Each of the death defiers we had encountered at the rock, don Juan said, had been able to move his assemblage point to a precise spot on his cocoon in order to emphasize the emanations shared with the allies and to interact with them. But they were all unable to move it back to it's usual position and interact with people. The tenant, on the other hand, is capable of shifting his assemblage point to assemble the everyday world as if nothing had ever happened.

Don Juan also said that his benefactor was convinced- and he fully agreed with him- that what takes place during the borrowing of energy is that the old sorcerer moves the nagual's assemblage point to emphasize the ally's emanations inside the nagual's cocoon. He then uses the great jolt of energy produced by those emanations that suddenly become aligned after being so deeply dormant.

He said that the energy locked within us, in the dormant emanations, has a tremendous force and an incalculable scope. We can only vaguely assess the scope of that tremendous force, if we consider that the energy involved in perceiving and acting in the world of everyday life is a product of the alignment of hardly one-tenth of the emanations encased in man's cocoon.

"What happens at the moment of death is that all that energy is released at once," he continued. "Living beings at that moment become flooded by the most inconceivable force.

"It is not the rolling force that has cracked their gaps, because that force never enters inside the cocoon; it only makes it collapse.

"What floods them is the force of all the emanations that are suddenly aligned after being dormant for a lifetime. There is no outlet for such a giant force except to escape through the gap."

He added that the old sorcerer has found a way to tap that energy. By aligning a limited and very specific spectrum of the dormant emanations inside the nagual's cocoon, the old seer taps a limited but gigantic jolt.

"How do you think he takes that energy into his own body?" I asked.

"By cracking the nagual's gap," he replied. "He moves the nagual's assemblage point until the gap opens a little. When the energy of newly aligned emanations is released through that opening, he takes it into his own gap."

"Why is that old seer doing what he's doing?" I asked.

"My opinion is that he's caught in a circle he can't break," he replied. "We got into an agreement with him. He's doing his best to keep it, and so are we. We can't judge him, yet we have to know that his path doesn't lead to freedom. He knows that, and he also knows he can't change it. He's trapped in a situation of his own making. The only thing he can do is to prolong his ally-like existence as long as he possibly can."

## 16. The Mold of Man

Right after lunch, don Juan and I sat down to talk. He started without any preamble. He announced that we had come to the end of his explanation. He said that he had discussed with me, in painstaking detail, all the truths about awareness that the old seers had discovered.

He stressed that I now knew the order in which the new seers had arranged them. In the last sessions of his explanation, he said, he had given me a detailed account of the two forces that aid our assemblage points to move: the earth's boost and the rolling force. He had also explained the three techniques worked out by the new seers- stalking, intent, and dreaming- and their effects on the movement of the assemblage point.

"Now, the only thing left for you to do before the explanation of the mastery of awareness is completed," he went on, "is to break the barrier of perception by yourself. You must move your assemblage point, unaided by anyone, and align another great band of emanations.

"Not to do this will turn everything you've learned and done with me into merely talk, just words. And words are fairly cheap."

He explained that when the assemblage point is moving away from it's customary position and reaches a certain depth, it breaks a barrier that momentarily disrupts it's capacity to align emanations. We experience it as a moment of perceptual blankness. The old seers called that moment the wall of fog because a bank of fog appears whenever the alignment of emanations falters.

He said that there were three ways of dealing with it. It could be taken abstractly as a barrier of perception; it could be felt as the act of piercing a tight paper screen with the entire body; or it could be seen as a wall of fog.

In the course of my apprenticeship with don Juan, he had guided me countless times to see the barrier of perception. At first I had liked the idea of a wall of fog. Don Juan had warned me that the old seers had also preferred to see it that way. He had said that there is great comfort and ease in seeing it as a wall of fog, but that there is also the grave danger of turning something incomprehensible into something somber and foreboding. Hence, his recommendation was to keep incomprehensible things incomprehensible rather than making them part of the inventory of the first attention.

After a short-lived feeling of comfort in seeing the wall of fog I had to agree with don Juan that it was better to keep the transition period as an incomprehensible abstraction, but by then it was impossible for me to break the fixation of my awareness. Every time I was placed in a position to break the barrier of perception I saw the wall of fog.

On one occasion in the past, I had complained to don Juan and Genaro that although I wanted to see it as something else, I couldn't change it. Don Juan had commented that that was understandable, because I was morbid and somber; that he and I were very different in this respect.

He was lighthearted and practical and he did not worship the human inventory. I, on the other hand, was unwilling to throw my inventory out the window and consequently I was heavy, sinister, and impractical. I had been shocked and saddened by his harsh criticism and became very gloomy. Don Juan and Genaro had laughed until tears rolled down their cheeks.

Genaro had added that on top of all that I was vindictive and had a tendency to get fat. They had laughed so hard I finally felt obliged to join them.

Don Juan had told me then that exercises of assembling other worlds allowed the assemblage point to gain experience in shifting. I had always wondered, however, how to get the initial boost to dislodge my assemblage point from it's usual position.

When I'd questioned him about it in the past he'd pointed out that since alignment is the force that is involved in everything, intent is what makes the assemblage point move.

I asked him again about it.

"You're in a position now to answer that question yourself," he replied. "The mastery of awareness is what gives the assemblage point it's boost. After all, there is really very little to us human beings. We are, in essence, an assemblage point fixed at a certain position. Our enemy and at the same time our friend is our internal dialogue; our inventory.

"Be a warrior. Shut off your internal dialogue. Make your inventory and then throw it away. The new seers make accurate inventories and then laugh at them. Without the inventory the assemblage point becomes free."

Don Juan reminded me that he had talked a great deal about one of the most sturdy aspects of our inventory: Our idea of God. That aspect, he said, was like a powerful glue that bound the assemblage point to it's original position. If I were going to assemble another true world with another great band of emanations, I had to take an obligatory step in order to release all ties from my assemblage point.

"That step is to see the mold of man," he said. "You must do that today unaided."

"What's the mold of man?" I asked.

"I've helped you see it many times," he replied. "You know what I'm talking about."

I refrained from saying that I did not know what he was talking about. If he said that I had seen the mold of man, I must have done it, although I did not have the foggiest idea what it was like.

He knew what was going through my mind. He gave me a knowing smile and slowly shook his head from side to side.

"The mold of man is a huge cluster of emanations in the great band of organic life," he said. "It is called the mold of man because the cluster appears only inside the cocoon of man.

"The mold of man is the portion of the Eagle's emanations that seers can see directly without any danger to themselves."

There was a long pause before he spoke again.

"To break the barrier of perception is the last task of the mastery of awareness," he said. "In order to move your assemblage point to that position, you must gather enough energy. Make a journey of recovery. Remember what you've done!"

I tried unsuccessfully to recall what was the mold of man. I felt an excruciating frustration that soon turned into real anger. I was furious with myself, with don Juan, with everybody.

Don Juan was untouched by my fury. He said matter-of-factly that anger was a natural reaction to the hesitation of the assemblage point to move on command.

"It will be a long time before you can apply the principle that your command is the Eagle's command," he said. "That's the essence of the mastery of intent. In the meantime, make a command now not to fret, not even at the worst moments of doubt. It will be a slow process until that command is heard and obeyed as if it were the Eagle's command."

He also said that there was an unmeasurable area of awareness in between the customary position of the assemblage point and the position where there are no more doubts, which is almost the place where the barrier of perception makes it's appearance. In that unmeasurable area, warriors fall prey to every conceivable misdeed. He warned me to be on the lookout and not lose confidence because I would unavoidably be struck at one time or another by gripping feelings of defeat.

"The new seers recommend a very simple act when impatience, or despair, or anger, or sadness comes their way," he continued. "They recommend that warriors roll their eyes. Any direction will do. I prefer to roll mine clockwise.

"The movement of the eyes makes the assemblage point shift momentarily. In that movement, you will find relief. This is in lieu of true mastery of intent."'

I complained that there was not enough time for him to tell me more about intent.

"It will all come back to you someday," he assured me. "One thing will trigger another. One key word and all of it will tumble out of you as if the door of an overstuffed closet had given way."

He went back then to discussing the mold of man. He said that to see it on my own, unaided by anyone, was an important step, because all of us have certain ideas that must be broken before we are free. The seer who travels into the unknown to see the unknowable must be in an impeccable state of being.

He winked at me and said that to be in an impeccable state of being is to be free of rational assumptions and rational fears. He added that both my rational assumptions and my rational fears were preventing me at that moment from realigning the emanations that would make me remember seeing the mold of man.

He urged me to relax and move my eyes in order to make my assemblage point shift. He repeated over and over that it was really important to remember having seen the mold before I see it again. And since he was pressed for time there was no room for my usual slowness.

I moved my eyes as he suggested. Almost immediately I forgot my discomfort and then a sudden flash of memory came to me and I remembered that I had seen the mold of man. It had happened years earlier on an occasion that had been quite memorable to me, because from the point of view of my Catholic upbringing, don Juan had made the most sacrilegious statements I had ever heard.

It had all started as a casual conversation while we hiked in the foothills of the Sonoran desert. He was explaining to me the implications of what he was doing to me with his teachings.

We had stopped to rest and had sat down on some large boulders. He had continued explaining his teaching procedure, and this had encouraged me to try for the hundredth time to give him an account of how I felt about it. It was evident that he did not want to hear about it anymore. He made me change levels of awareness and told me that if I would see the mold of man, I might understand everything he was doing and thus save us both years of toil.

He gave me a detailed explanation of what the mold of man was. He did not talk about it in terms of the Eagle's emanations, but in terms of a pattern of energy that serves to stamp the qualities of humanness on an amorphous blob of biological matter.

At least, I understood it that way, especially after he further described the mold of man using a mechanical analogy. He said that it was like a gigantic die that stamps out human beings endlessly as if they were coming to it on a mass production conveyor belt. He vividly mimed the process by bringing the palms of his hands together with great force, as if the die molded a human being each time it's two halves were clapped.

He also said that every species has a mold of it's own, and every individual of every species molded by the process shows characteristics particular to it's own kind.

He began then an extremely disturbing elucidation about the mold of man. He said that the old seers as well as the mystics of our world have one thing in common; they have been able to see the mold of man but not understand what it is.

Mystics, throughout the centuries, have given us moving accounts of their experiences. But these accounts, however beautiful, are flawed by the gross and despairing mistake of their believing the mold of man to be an omnipotent, omniscient creator.

The interpretation of the old seers, is similarily flawed. They called the mold of man a friendly spirit; a protector of man.

He said that the new seers are the only ones who have the sobriety to see the mold of man and understand what it is. What they have come to realize is that the mold of man is not a creator, but the pattern of every human attribute we can think of and some we cannot even conceive.

The mold is our God because we are what it stamps us with and not because it has created us from nothing and made us in it's image and likeness. Don Juan said that in his opinion to fall on our knees in the presence of the mold of man reeks of arrogance and human self-centeredness.

As I heard don Juan's explanation I got terribly worried. Even though I had never considered my self to be a practicing Catholic, I was shocked by his blasphemous implications. I had been politely listening to him, yet I had been yearning for a pause in his barrage of sacrilegious judgments in order to change the subject.

But he went on drumming his point in a merciless way. I finally interrupted him and told him that I believed that God exists.

He retorted that my belief was based on faith and, as such, was a secondhand conviction that did not amount to anything.

He said my belief in the existence of God was, like everyone else's; based on hearsay, and not on the act of seeing.

He assured me that even if I was able to see, I was bound to make the same misjudgment that mystics have made. Anyone who sees the mold of man automatically assumes that it is God.

He called the mystical experience a chance seeing; a one-shot affair that has no significance whatsoever because it is the result of a random movement of the assemblage point. He asserted that the new seers are indeed the only ones who can pass a fair judgment on this matter because they have ruled out chance seeings, and are capable of seeing the mold of man as often as they please.

They have seen, therefore, that what we call God is a static prototype of humanness without any power. The mold of man cannot under any circumstances help us by intervening in our behalf, or punish our wrongdoings, or reward us in any way.

We are simply the product of it's stamp. We are it's impression. The mold of man is exactly what it's name tells us it is, a pattern, a form, or a cast that groups together a particular bunch of fiberlike elements which we call man.

What he had said put me in a state of great distress. But he seemed unconcerned with my genuine turmoil. He kept on needling me with what he called the unforgivable crime of the chance seers which makes us focus our irreplaceable energy on something that has no power whatsoever to do anything.

The more he talked, the greater my annoyance. When I became so annoyed that I was about to shout at him, he hit me on my right side between my hipbone and my rib cage.

By that means, he sent me into a yet deeper state of heightened awareness. That blow sent me soaring into a radiant light; into a diaphanous source of the most peaceful and exquisite beatitude. That light was a haven, an oasis in the blackness around me.

From my subjective point of view, I saw that light for an immeasurable length of time. The splendor of the sight was beyond anything I can say, and yet I could not figure out what it was that made it so beautiful.

Then the idea came to me that it's beauty grew out of a sense of harmony, a sense of peace and rest, of having arrived, of being safe at long last. I felt myself inhaling and exhaling in quietude and relief. What a gorgeous sense of plenitude!

I knew beyond a shadow of doubt that I had come face to face with God; the source of everything. And I knew that God loved me. God was love and forgiveness. The light bathed me, and I felt clean, delivered. I wept uncontrollably, mainly for myself. The sight of that resplendent light made me feel unworthy and villainous.

Suddenly, I heard don Juan's voice in my ear. He said that I had to go beyond the mold, that the mold was merely a stage, a stopover that brought temporary peace and serenity to those who journey into the unknown, but that it was sterile and static. It was at the same time a flat reflected image in a mirror and the mirror itself. And the image was man's image.

I passionately resented what don Juan was saying. I rebelled against his blasphemous, sacrilegious words. I wanted to tell him off, but I could not break the binding power of my seeing. I was caught in it. Don Juan seemed to know exactly how I felt and what I wanted to tell him.

"You can't tell the nagual off," he said in my ear. "It is the nagual who's enabling you to see. It is the nagual's technique, the nagual's power. The nagual is the guide."

It was at that point that I realized something about the voice in my ear. It was not don Juan's, although it sounded very much like his voice. Also, the voice was right. The instigator of that seeing was the nagual Juan Matus. It was his technique and his power that was making me see God.

He said it was not God, but rather the mold of man. I knew that he was right. Yet I could not admit that, not out of annoyance or stubbornness, but simply out of a sense of ultimate loyalty to and love for the divinity that was in front of me.

As I gazed into the light with all the passion I was capable of, the light seemed to condense and I saw a man; a shiny man that exuded charisma, love, understanding, sincerity, truth; a man that was the sum total of all that is good.

The fervor I felt on seeing that man was well beyond anything I had ever felt in my life. I did fall on my knees. I wanted to worship God personified, but don Juan intervened and whacked me on my left upper chest, close to my clavicle, and I lost sight of God.

I was left with a tantalizing feeling; a mixture of remorse, elation, certainties, and doubts. Don Juan made fun of me. He called me pious and careless, and said I would make a great priest. Now I could even pass for a spiritual leader who had had a chance seeing of God. He urged me, in ajocular way, to start preaching, and describe what I had seen to everyone.

In a very casual but seemingly interested manner he made a statement that was part question, part assertion.

"And the man?" he asked. "You can't forget that God is a male."

The immensity of something indefinable began to dawn on me as I entered into a state of great clarity.

"Very cozy, eh?" don Juan had added, smiling. "God is a male. What a relief"

After recounting to don Juan what I had remembered, I asked him about something that had just struck me as being terribly odd. To see the mold of man, I had obviously gone through a shift of my assemblage point. The recollection of the feelings and realizations I had had then was so vivid that it gave me a sense of utter futility.

Everything I had done and felt at that time I was feeling now. I asked him how it was possible that having had such a clear comprehension, I could have forgotten it so completely. It was as if nothing of what had happened to me had mattered, for I always had to start from point one regardless of how much I might have advanced in the past.

"That's only an emotional impression," he said. "A total misapprehension. Whatever you did years ago is solidly enclosed in some unused emanations. That day when I made you see the mold of man, for instance, I had a true misapprehension myself. I thought that if you saw it, you would be able to understand it. It was a true misunderstanding on my part."

Don Juan explained that he had always regarded himself as being very slow to understand. He had never had any chance of testing his belief, because he did not have a point of reference. When I came along and he became a teacher, which was something totally new to him, he realized that there is no way to speed up understanding and that to dislodge the assemblage point is not enough.

He had thought that it would be sufficient. Soon he became aware that since the assemblage point normally shifts during dreams, sometimes to extraordinarily distant positions, whenever we undergo an induced shift we are all experts at immediately compensating for it. We rebalance ourselves constantly and activity goes on as if nothing has happened to us.

He remarked that the value of the new seers' conclusions does not become evident until one tries to move someone else's assemblage point. The new seers said that what counts in this respect is the effort to reinforce the stability of the assemblage point in it's new position. They considered this to be the only teaching procedure worth discussing. And they knew that it is a long process that has to be carried out little by little at a snail's pace.

Don Juan said then that he had used power plants at the beginning of my apprenticeship in accordance with a recommendation of the new seers. They knew by experience and by seeing that power plants shake the assemblage point way out of it's normal setting. The effect of power plants on the assemblage point is in principle very much like that of dreams: Dreams make it move. But power plants manage the shift on a greater and more engulfing scale. A teacher then uses the disorienting effects of such a shift to reinforce the notion that the perception of the world is never final.

I remembered then that I had seen the mold of man five more times over the years. With each new time I had become less passionate about it. I could never get over the fact, however, that I always saw God as a male. At the end it stopped being God for me and became the mold of man, not because of what don Juan had said, but because the position of a male God became untenable. I could then understand don Juan's statements about it.

They had not been blasphemous or sacrilegious in the least. He had not made them from within the context of the daily world. He was right in saying that the new seers have an edge in being capable of seeing the mold of man as often as they want. But what was more important to me was that they had sobriety in order to examine what they saw.

I asked him why it was that I always saw the mold of man as a male. He said that it was because my assemblage point did not have the stability then to remain completely glued to it's new position and shifted laterally in man's band. It was the same case as seeing the barrier of perception as a wall of fog. What made the assemblage point move laterally was a nearly unavoidable desire, or necessity, to render the incomprehensible in terms of what is most familiar to us; therefore, any barrier becomes a wall; and similarly, the mold of man cannot be anything else but a man. He thought that if I were a woman I would see the mold as a woman.

Don Juan stood up then and said that it was time for us to take a stroll in town, and that I should see the mold of man among people. We walked in silence to the square, but before we got there I had an uncontainable surge of energy and ran down the street to the outskirts of town. I came to a bridge, and right there, as if it had been waiting for me, I saw the mold of man as a resplendent, warm, amber light.

I fell on my knees, not so much out of piety, but as physical reaction to awe. The sight of the mold of man was more astonishing than ever. I felt, without any arrogance, that I had gone through an enormous change since the first time I had seen it. However, all the things I had seen and learned had only given me a greater, more profound appreciation for the miracle that I had in front of my eyes.

The mold of man was superimposed on the bridge at first, then I refocused my eyes and saw that the mold of man extended up and down into infinity; the bridge was but a meager shell; a tiny sketch superimposed on the eternal.

And so were the minute figures of people who moved around me, looking at me with unabashed curiosity. But I was beyond their touch, although at that moment I was as vulnerable as I could be. The mold of man had no power to protect me or spare me, yet I loved it with a passion that knew no limits.

I thought that I understood then something that don Juan had told me repeatedly; that real affection cannot be an investment. I would have gladly remained the servant of the mold of man, not for what it could give me, for it has nothing to give, but for the sheer affection I felt for it.

I had the sensation of something pulling me away, and before I disappeared from it's presence I shouted a promise to the mold of man, but a great force whisked me away before I could finish saying what I meant. I was suddenly kneeling at the bridge while a group of peasants looked at me and laughed.

Don Juan got to my side, helped me up, and walked me back to the house.

"There are two ways of seeing the mold of man," don Juan began as soon as we sat down. "You can see it as a man or you can see it as a light. That depends on the shift of the assemblage point. If the shift is lateral, the mold is a human being. If the shift is in the midsection of man's band, the mold is a light. The only value of what you've done today is that your assemblage point shifted in the midsection."

He said that the position where one sees the mold of man is very close to that where the dreaming body and the barrier of perception appear. That was the reason the new seers recommend that the mold of man be seen and understood.

"Are you sure you understand what the mold of man really is?" he asked with a smile.

"I assure you, don Juan, that I'm perfectly aware of what the mold of man is," I said.

"I heard you shouting inanities to the mold of man when I got to the bridge," he said with a most malicious smile.

I told him that I had felt like a worthless servant worshiping a worthless master, and yet I was moved out of sheer affection to promise undying love.

He found it all hilarious and laughed until he was choking.

"The promise of a worthless servant to a worthless master is worthless," he said and choked again with laughter.

I did not feel like defending my position. My affection for the mold of man was offered freely without thought of recompense. It did not matter to me that my promise was worthless.

## 17. The Journey of the Dreaming Body

Don Juan told me that the two of us were going to drive to the city of Oaxaca for the last time. He made it very clear that we would never be there together again. Perhaps his feeling might return to the place, he said, but never again the totality of himself.

In Oaxaca, don Juan spent hours looking at mundane, trivial things: the faded color of walls, the shape of distant mountains, the pattern on cracked cement, the faces of people. Then we went to the square and sat on his favorite bench, which was unoccupied, as it always was when he wanted it.

During our long walk in the city, I had tried my best to work myself into a mood of sadness and moroseness, but I just could not do it. There was something festive about his departure. He explained it as the unrestrainable vigor of total freedom.

"Freedom is like a contagious disease," he said. "It is transmitted. It's carrier is an impeccable nagual. People might not appreciate that, and that's because they don't want to be free. Freedom is frightening. Remember that. But not for us. I've groomed myself nearly all my life for this moment. And so will you."

He repeated over and over that at the stage where I was, no rational assumptions should interfere with my actions. He said that the dreaming body and the barrier of perception are positions of the assemblage point, and that that knowledge is as vital to seers as knowing how to read and write is to modern man. Both are accomplishments attained after years of practice.

"It is very important that you remember, right now, the time when your assemblage point reached that position and it created your dreaming body," he said with tremendous urgency.

Then he smiled and remarked that time was extremely short; he said that the recollection of the main journey of my dreaming body would put my assemblage point in a position to break the barrier of perception in order to assemble another world.

"The dreaming body is known by different names," he said after a long pause. "The name I like the best is, 'the other'. That term belongs to the old seers, together with the mood. I don't particularly care for their mood, but I have to admit that I like their term; the other. It's mysterious and forbidden. Just like the old seers, it gives me the feeling of darkness, of shadows. The old seers said that the other always comes shrouded in wind."

Over the years don Juan and other members of his party had tried to make me aware that we can be in two places at once; that we can experience a sort of perceptual dualism.

As don Juan spoke, I began to remember something so deeply forgotten that at first it was as if I had only heard about it. Then, step by step, I realized that I had lived that experience myself.

I had been in two places at once. It happened one night in the mountains of northern Mexico. I had been collecting plants with don Juan all day. We had stopped for the night and I had nearly fallen asleep from fatigue when suddenly there was a gust of wind and don Genaro sprang up from the darkness right in front of me, and nearly scared me to death.

My first thought was one of suspicion. I believed that don Genaro had been hiding in the bushes all day, waiting for darkness to set in before making his terrifying appearance. As I looked at him prancing around, I noticed that there was something truly odd about him that night. Something palpable, real, and yet something I could not pinpoint.

He joked with me and horsed around, performing acts that defied my reason. Don Juan laughed like an idiot at my dismay. When he judged that the time was right, he made me shift into heightened awareness and for a moment I was able to see don Juan and don Genaro as two blobs of light. Genaro was not the flesh-and-blood don Genaro that I knew in my state of normal awareness but his dreaming body. I could tell, because I saw him as a ball of fire that was above the ground. He was not rooted as don Juan was. It was as if Genaro, the blob of light, were on the verge of taking off, already up in the air, a couple of feet off the ground, ready to zoom away.

Another thing I had done that night, which suddenly became clear to me as I recollected the event, was that I had known automatically that I had to move my eyes in order to make my assemblage point shift. I could, with my intent, align the emanations that made me see Genaro as a blob of light, or I could align the emanations that made me see him as merely odd, unknown, and strange.

When I saw Genaro as odd, his eyes had a malevolent glare, like the eyes of a beast in the darkness. But they were eyes, nonetheless. I did not see them as points of amber light.

That night don Juan said that Genaro was going to help my assemblage point shift very deeply, that I should imitate him and follow everything he did. Genaro stuck out his rear end and then thrust his pelvis forward with great force. I thought it was an obscene gesture. He repeated it over and over again, moving around as if he were dancing.

Don Juan nudged me on the arm, urging me to imitate Genaro, and I did. Both of us sort of romped around, performing that grotesque movement.

After a while, I had the feeling that my body was executing the movement on it's own, without what seemed to be the real me. The separation between my body and the real me became even more pronounced, and then at a given instant I was looking at some ludicrous scene where two men were making lewd gestures at each other.

I watched in fascination and realized that I was one of the two men. The moment I became aware of it I felt something pulling me and I found myself again thrusting my pelvis backward and forward in unison with Genaro. Almost immediately, I noticed that another man standing next to don Juan was watching us. The wind was blowing around him. I could see his hair being ruffled. He was naked and seemed embarrassed. The wind gathered around him as if protecting him, or perhaps the opposite, as if trying to blow him away.

I was slow to realize that I was the other man. When I did, I got the shock of my life. An imponderable physical force pulled me apart as if I were made out of fibers, and I was again looking at a man that was me, romping around with Genaro, gaping at me while I looked.

And at the same time, I was looking at a naked man that was me, gaping at me while I made lewd gestures with Genaro. The shock was so great that I broke the rhythm of my movements and fell down.

The next thing I knew, don Juan was helping me to stand up. Genaro and the other me, the naked one, had disappeared.

I had also remembered that don Juan had refused to discuss the event. He did not explain it except to say that Genaro was an expert in creating his double, or the other, and that I had had long interactions with Genaro's double in states of normal awareness without ever detecting it.

"That night, as he has done hundreds of times before, Genaro made your assemblage point shift very deep into your left side," don Juan commented after I had recounted to him everything I had remembered. "His power was such that he dragged your assemblage point to the position where the dreaming body appears. You saw your dreaming body watching you. And his dancing did the trick."

I asked him to explain to me how Genaro's lewd movement could have produced such a drastic effect.

"You're a prude," he said. "Genaro used your immediate displeasure and embarrassment at having to perform a lewd gesture. Since he was in his dreaming body, he had the power to see the Eagle's emanations. From that vantage point, it was a cinch to make your assemblage point move."

He said that whatever Genaro had helped me to do that night was minor; that Genaro had moved my assemblage point and made it produce a dreaming body many, many times, but that those events were not what he wanted me to remember.

"I want you to realign the proper emanations and remember the time when you really woke up in a dreaming position," he said.

A strange surge of energy seemed to explode inside me and I knew what he wanted me to remember. I could not, however, focus my memory on the complete event. I could only recall a fragment of it.

I remembered that one morning, don Juan, don Genaro and I had sat on that very same bench while I was in a state of normal awareness. Don Genaro had said, all of a sudden, that he was going to make his body leave the bench without getting up. The statement was completely out of the context of what we had been discussing. I was accustomed to don Juan's orderly, didactic words and actions. I turned to don Juan, expecting a clue, but he remained impassive, looking straight ahead as if don Genaro and I were not there at all.

Don Genaro nudged me to attract my attention, and then I witnessed a most disturbing sight. I actually saw Genaro on the other side of the square. He was beckoning me to come. But I also saw don Genaro sitting next to me, looking straight ahead, just as don Juan was.

I wanted to say something, to express my awe, but I found myself dumbstruck, imprisoned by some force around me that did not let me talk. I again looked at Genaro across the park. He was still there, motioning to me with a gesture of his head to join him.

My emotional distress mounted by the second. My stomach was getting upset, and finally I had tunnel vision, a tunnel that led directly to Genaro on the other side of the square. And then a great curiosity, or a great fear, which seemed to be the same thing at that moment, pulled me to where he was. I actually soared through the air and got to where he was. He made me turn around and pointed to the three people who were sitting on a bench in a static position as if time had been suspended.

I felt a terrible discomfort, an internal itching, as if the soft organs in the cavity of my body were on fire, and then I was back on the bench, but Genaro was gone. He waved goodbye to me from across the square and disappeared among the people going to the market.

Don Juan became very animated. He kept on looking at me. He stood up and walked around me. He sat down again and could not keep a straight face as he talked to me.

I realized why he was acting that way. I had entered into a state of heightened awareness without being helped by don Juan. Genaro had succeeded in making my assemblage point move by itself.

I laughed involuntarily upon seeing my writing pad, which don Juan solemnly put inside his pocket. He said that he was going to use my state of heightened awareness to show me that there is no end to the mystery of man and to the mystery of the world.

I focused all my concentration on his words. However, don Juan said something I did not understand. I asked him to repeat what he had said. He began talking very softly. I thought he had lowered his voice so as not to be overheard by other people. I listened carefully, but I could not understand a word of what he was saying; he was either speaking in a language foreign to me or it was mumbo jumbo.

The strange part of it was that something had caught my undivided attention, either the rhythm of his voice or the fact that I had forced myself to understand. I had the feeling that my mind was different from usual, although I could not figure out what the difference was. I had a hard time thinking, reasoning out what was taking place.

Don Juan talked to me very softly in my ear. He said that since I had entered into heightened awareness without any help from him my assemblage point was very loose, and that I could let it shift into the left side by relaxing, by falling half asleep on that bench. He assured me that he was watching over me, that I had nothing to fear. He urged me to relax, to let my assemblage point move.

I instantly felt the heaviness of being deeply asleep. At one moment, I became aware that I was having a dream. I saw a house that I had seen before. I was approaching it as if I were walking on the street. There were other houses, but I could not pay any attention to them. Something had fixed my awareness on the particular house I was seeing. It was a big modern stucco house with a front lawn.

When I got closer to that house, I had a feeling of familiarity with it, as if I had dreamed of it before. I walked on a gravel path to the front door. It was open and I walked inside. There was a dark hall and a large living room to the right, furnished with a dark-red couch and matching armchairs set in a corner. I was definitely having tunnel vision. I could see only what was in front of my eyes.

A young woman was standing by the couch as if she had just stood up as I came in. She was lean and tall, exquisitely dressed in a tailored green suit. She was perhaps in her late twenties. She had dark-brown hair, burning brown eyes that seemed to smile, and a pointed, finely chiseled nose. Her complexion was fair but had been tanned to a gorgeous brown. I found her ravishingly beautiful. She seemed to be an American. She nodded at me, smiling, and extended her hands with the palms down as if she were helping me up.

I clasped her hands in a most awkward movement. I scared myself and tried to back away, but she held me firmly and yet so gently. Her hands were long and beautiful. She spoke to me in Spanish with a faint trace of an accent. She begged me to relax, to feel her hands, to concentrate my attention on her face and to follow the movement of her mouth. I wanted to ask her who she was, but I could not utter a word.

Then I heard don Juan's voice in my ear. He said, "Oh, there you are," as if he had just found me. I was sitting on the park bench with him. But I could also hear the young woman's voice. She said, "Come and sit with me." I did just that and began a most incredible shifting of points of view. I was alternately with don Juan and with that young woman. I could see both of them as clearly as anything.

Don Juan asked me if I liked her, if I found her appealing and soothing. I could not speak, but somehow I conveyed to him the feeling that I did like that lady immensely. I thought, without any overt reason, that she was a paragon of kindness, that she was indispensable to what don Juan was doing with me.

Don Juan spoke in my ear again and said that if I liked her that much I should wake up in her house, that my feeling of warmth and affection for her would guide me. I felt giggly and reckless. A sensation of overwhelming excitation rippled through my body. I felt as if the excitation were actually disintegrating me. I did not care what happened to me. I gladly plunged into a blackness, black beyond words, and then I found myself in the young woman's house. I was sitting with her on the couch.

After an instant of sheer animal panic, I realized that somehow I was not complete. Something was missing in me. I did not, however, find the situation threatening. The thought crossed my mind that I was dreaming and that I was presently going to wake up on the park bench in Oaxaca with don Juan where I really was; where I really belonged.

The young woman helped me to get up and took me to a bathroom where a large tub was filled with water. I realized then that I was stark naked. She gently made me get into the tub and held my head up while I half floated in it.

After a while she helped me out of the tub. I felt weak and flimsy. I lay down on the living-room couch and she came close to me. I could hear the beating of her heart and the pressure of blood rushing through her body. Her eyes were like two radiant sources of something that was not light, or heat, but curiously in between the two. I knew that I was seeing the force of life projecting out of her body through her eyes. Her whole body was like a live furnace; it glowed.

I felt a weird tremor that agitated my whole being. It was as if my nerves were exposed and someone was plucking them. The sensation was agonizing. Then I either fainted or fell asleep.

When I woke up, someone was putting face towels soaked in cold water on my face and the back of my neck. I saw the young woman sitting by my head on the bed where I was lying. She had a pail of water on a night table. Don Juan was standing at the foot of the bed with my clothes draped over his arm.

I was fully awake then. I sat up. They had covered me with a blanket.

"How's the traveler?" don Juan asked, smiling. "Are you in one piece now?"

That was all I could remember. I narrated this episode to don Juan, and as I talked, I recalled another fragment. I remembered that don Juan had taunted and teased me about finding me naked in the lady's bed. I had gotten terribly irritated at his remarks. I had put on my clothes and stomped out of the house in a fury.

Don Juan had caught up with me on the front lawn. In a very serious tone he had remarked that I was my ugly stupid self again, that I had put myself together by being embarrassed, which had proved to him that there was still no end to my self-importance.

But he had added in a conciliatory tone that that was not important at the moment. What was significant was the fact that I had moved my assemblage point very deeply into the left side and consequently I had traveled an enormous distance.

He had spoken of wonders and mysteries, but I had not been able to listen to him, for I had been caught in the crossfire between fear and self-importance. I was actually fuming. I was certain that don Juan had hypnotized me in the park and had then taken me to that lady's house, and that the two of them had done terrible things to me.

My fury was interrupted. Something out there in the street was so horrifying, so shocking to me, that my anger stopped instantaneously. But before my thoughts became fully rearranged, don Juan hit me on my back and nothing of what had just taken place remained. I found myself back in my blissful everyday-life stupidity, happily listening to don Juan, worrying about whether or not he liked me.

As I was telling don Juan about the new fragment that I had just remembered I realized that one of his methods for handling my emotional turmoil was to make me shift into normal awareness.

"The only thing that soothes those who journey into the unknown is oblivion," he said. "What a relief to be in the ordinary world!

"That day, you accomplished a marvelous feat. The sober thing for me to do was not to let you focus on it at all. Just as you began to really panic I made you shift into normal awareness. I moved your assemblage point beyond the position where there are no more doubts. There are two such positions for warriors. In one you have no more doubts because you know everything. In the other, which is normal awareness, you have no doubts because you don't know anything.

"It was too soon then for you to know what had really happened. But I think the right time to know is now. Looking at that street, you were about to find out where your dreaming position had been. You traveled an enormous distance that day."

Don Juan scrutinized me with a mixture of glee and sadness. I was trying my best to keep under control the strange agitation I was feeling. I sensed that something terribly important to me was lost inside my memory, or, as don Juan would have put it, inside some unused emanations that at one time had been aligned.

My struggle to keep calm proved to be the wrong thing to do. All at once, my knees wobbled and nervous spasms ran through my midsection. I mumbled, unable to voice a question. I had to swallow hard and breathe deeply before I regained my calmness.

"When we first sat down here to talk, I said that no rational assumptions should interfere with the actions of a seer," he continued in a stern tone. "I knew that in order to reclaim what you've done, you'd have to dispense with rationality, but you'd have to do it in the level of awareness you are in now."

He explained that I had to understand that rationality is a condition of alignment, merely the result of the position of the assemblage point. He emphasized that I had to understand this when I was in a state of great vulnerability, as I was at that moment.

To understand it when my assemblage point had reached the position where there are no doubts was useless, because realizations of that nature are commonplace in that position.

It was equally useless to understand it in a state of normal awareness because in that state such realizations are emotional outbursts that are valid only for as long as the emotion lasts.

"I've said that you traveled a great distance that day," he said calmly. "And I said that because I know it. I was there, remember?"

I was sweating profusely out of nervousness and anxiety.

"You traveled because you woke up at a distant dreaming position," he continued. "When Genaro pulled you across the plaza, right here from this bench, he paved the way for your assemblage point to move from normal awareness all the way to the position where the dreaming body appears.

"Your dreaming body actually flew over an incredible distance in the blink of an eyelid. Yet that's not the important part. The mystery is in the dreaming position. If it is strong enough to pull you, you can go to the ends of this world or beyond it, just as the old seers did. They disappeared from this world because they woke up at a dreaming position beyond the limits of the known. Your dreaming position that day was in this world, but quite a distance from the city of Oaxaca."

"How does a journey like that take place?" I asked.

"There is no way of knowing how it is done," he said. "Strong emotion, or unbending intent, or great interest serves as a guide. Then the assemblage point gets powerfully fixed at the dreaming position, long enough to drag there all the emanations that are inside the cocoon."

Don Juan said then that he had made me 'see' countless times over the years of our association, either in states of normal awareness or in states of heightened awareness. I had seen countless things that I was now beginning to understand in a more coherent fashion.

This coherence was not logical or rational, but it clarified, nonetheless, in whatever strange way everything I had done, everything that was done to me, and everything I had seen in all those years with him.

He said that now I needed to have one last clarification: the coherent but irrational realization that everything in the world we have learned to perceive is inextricably tied to the position where the assemblage point is located; and if the assemblage point is displaced from that position, the world will cease to be what it is to us.

Don Juan stated that a displacement of the assemblage point beyond the midline of the cocoon of man makes the entire world we know vanish from our view in one instant, as if it had been erased.

The stability and the substantiality that seems to belong to our perceivable world is just the force of alignment. Certain emanations are routinely aligned because of the fixation of the assemblage point on one specific spot. That is all there is to our world.

"The soundness of the world is not the mirage," he continued, "the mirage is the fixation of the assemblage point on any spot. When seers shift their assemblage points, they are not confronted with an illusion, they are confronted with another world. That new world is as real as the one we are watching now, but the new fixation of their assemblage points which produces that new world is as much of a mirage as the old fixation.

"Take yourself, for example. You are now in a state of heightened awareness. Whatever you are capable of doing in such a state is not an illusion. It is as real as the world you will face tomorrow in your daily life, and yet tomorrow the world you are witnessing now won't exist. It exists only when your assemblage point moves to the particular spot where you are now."

He added that the task warriors are faced with, after they finish their training, is one of integration. In the course of training, warriors, especially nagual men, are made to shift to as many individual spots as possible. He said that in my case I had moved to countless positions that I would have to integrate someday into a coherent whole.

"For instance, if you would shift your assemblage point to a specific position, you'd remember who that lady is," he continued with a strange smile. "Your assemblage point has been at that spot hundreds of times. It should be the easiest thing for you to integrate it."

As though my recollection depended on his suggestion, I began to have vague memories; feelings of sorts. There was a feeling of boundless affection that seemed to attract me. A most pleasant sweetness filled the air, exactly as if someone had just come up from behind me and poured that scent over me. I even turned around.

And then I remembered. She was Carol, the nagual woman. I had been with her only the day before. How could I have forgotten her?

I had an indescribable moment in which I think all the feelings of my psychological repertory ran through my mind. Was it possible, I asked myself, that I had woken up in her house in

Tucson, Arizona, two thousand miles away? And are each of the instances of heightened awareness so isolated that one cannot remember them?

Don Juan came to my side and put his arm on my shoulder. He said that he knew exactly how I felt. His benefactor had made him go through a similar experience.

And what he himself was now trying to do with me, his benefactor had tried to do with him: soothe with words. He had appreciated his benefactor's attempt, but he doubted then, as he doubted now, that there is a way to soothe anyone who realizes the journey of the dreaming body.

There was no doubt in my mind now. Something in me had traveled the distance between the cities of Oaxaca, Mexico, and Tucson, Arizona. I felt a strange relief, as if I had been purged of guilt at long last.

During the years I had spent with don Juan, I had had lapses of continuity in my memory. My being in Tucson with him on that day was one of those lapses. I remembered not being able to recall how I had gotten to Tucson.

I did not pay any attention to it, however. I thought the lapse was the result of my activities with don Juan. He was always very careful not to arouse my rational suspicions in states of normal awareness, but if suspicions were unavoidable he always curtly explained them away by suggesting that the nature of our activities fostered serious disparities of memory.

I told don Juan that since both of us had ended up that day in the same place, I wondered whether it was possible for two or more people to wake up at the same dreaming position.

"Of course," he said. "That's the way the old Toltec sorcerers took off into the unknown in packs. They followed one another. There is no way of knowing how one follows someone else. It's just done. The dreaming body just does it. The presence of another dreamer spurs it to do it. That day you pulled me with you. And I followed because I wanted to be with you."

I had so many questions to ask him, but every one of them seemed superfluous.

"How is it possible that I didn't remember the nagual woman?" I muttered, and a horrible anguish and longing gripped me. I was trying not to feel sad anymore, but suddenly sadness ripped through me like pain.

"You still don't remember her," he said. "Only when your assemblage point shifts can you recollect her. She is like a phantom to you, and so are you to her. You've seen her once while you were in normal awareness, but she's never seen you in her normal awareness. To her you are as much a personage as she is to you. With the difference that you may wake up someday and integrate it all. You may have enough time to do that, but she won't. Her time here is short."

I felt like protesting a terrible injustice. I mentally prepared a barrage of objections, but I never voiced them. Don Juan's smile was beaming. His eyes shone with sheer glee and mischief. I had the sensation that he was waiting for my statements, because he knew what I was going to say. And that sensation stopped me, or rather I did not say anything because my assemblage point had again moved by itself. And I knew then that the nagual woman could not be pitied for not having time, nor could I rejoice for having it.

Don Juan was reading me like a book. He urged me to finish my realization and voice the reason for not feeling sorry or for not rejoicing. I felt for an instant that I knew why. But then I lost the thread.

"The excitation of having time is equal to the excitation of not having it," he said. "It's all the same."

"To feel sad is not the same as feeling sorry " I said. "And I feel terribly sad."

"Who cares about sadness?" he said. "Think only of the mysteries. Mystery is all that matters. We are living beings. We have to die and relinquish our awareness. But if we could change just a tinge of that, what mysteries must await us! What mysteries!"

## 18. Breaking the Barrier of Perception

In the late afternoon, still in Oaxaca, don Juan and I strolled around the square leisurely. As we approached his favorite bench the people who were sitting there got up and left. We hurried over to it and sat down.

"We've come to the end of my explanation of awareness," he said. "And today, you are going to assemble another world by yourself and leave all doubts aside forever.

"There must be no mistake about what you are going to do. Today, from the vantage point of heightened awareness, you are going to make your assemblage point move and in one instant you are going to align the emanations of another world.

"In a few days, when Genaro and I meet you on a mountaintop, you are going to do the same from the disadvantage of normal awareness. You will have to align the emanations of another world on a moment's notice. If you don't you will die the death of an average man who falls from a precipice."

He was alluding to an act that he would have me perform as the last of his teachings for the right side; the act of jumping from a mountaintop into an abyss.

Don Juan stated that warriors ended their training when they were capable of breaking the barrier of perception, unaided, starting from a normal state of awareness. The nagual led warriors to that threshold, but success was up to the individual. The nagual merely tested them by continually pushing them to fend for themselves.

"The only force that can temporarily cancel out alignment is alignment," he continued. "You will have to cancel the alignment that keeps you perceiving the world of daily affairs. By intending a new position for your assemblage point, and by intending to keep it fixed there long enough, you will assemble another world and escape this one.

"The old seers are still defying death, to this day, by doing just that, intending their assemblage points to remain fixed on positions that place them in any of the seven worlds."

"What will happen if I succeed in aligning another world?" I asked.

"You will go to it," he replied. "As Genaro did, one night in this very place when he was showing you the mystery of alignment."

"Where will I be, don Juan?"

"In another world, of course. Where else?"

"What about the people around me, and the buildings, and the mountains, and everything else?"

"You'll be separated from all that by the very barrier that you have broken; the barrier of perception. And just like the seers who have buried themselves to defy death, you won't be in this world."

There was a battle raging inside me as I heard his statements. Some part of me clamored that don Juan's position was untenable, while another part knew beyond any question that he was right.

I asked him what would happen if I moved my assemblage point while I was in the street, in the middle of traffic in Los Angeles.

"Los Angeles will vanish, like a puff of air," he replied with a serious expression. "But you will remain.

"That is the mystery I've been trying to explain to you. You've experienced it, but you haven't understood it yet, and today you will."

He said that I could not as yet use the boost of the earth to shift into another great band of emanations, but that since I had an imperative need to shift, that need was going to serve me as a launcher.

Don Juan looked up at the sky. He stretched his arms above his head as if he had been sitting for too long and was pushing physical weariness out of his body. He commanded me to turn off my internal dialogue and enter into inner silence. Then he stood up and began to walk away from the square. He signaled me to follow him. He took a deserted side street. I recognized it as being the same street where Genaro had given me his demonstration of alignment. The moment I recollected that, I found myself walking with don Juan in a place that by then was very familiar to me; a deserted plain with yellow dunes of what seemed to be sulfur.

I recalled then that don Juan had made me perceive that world hundreds of times. I also recalled that beyond the desolate landscape of the dunes there was another world shining with an exquisite, uniform, pure white light.

When don Juan and I entered into it this time, I sensed that the light, which came from every direction, was not an invigorating light, but was so soothing that it gave me the feeling that it was sacred.

As that sacred light bathed me a rational thought exploded in my inner silence. I thought it was quite possible that mystics and saints had made this journey of the assemblage point. They had seen God in the mold of man. They had seen hell in the sulfur dunes. And then they had seen the glory of heaven in the diaphanous light.

My rational thought burned out almost immediately under the onslaughts of what I was perceiving. My awareness was taken by a multitude of shapes, figures of men, women, and children of all ages, and other incomprehensible apparitions gleaming with a blinding white light.

I saw don Juan, walking by my side, staring at me and not at the apparitions, but the next instant I saw him as a ball of luminosity, bobbing up and down a few feet away from me. The ball made an abrupt and frightening movement and came closer to me and I saw inside it.

Don Juan was working his glow of awareness for my benefit. The glow suddenly shone on four or five threadlike filaments on his left side. It remained fixed there. All my concentration was on it. Something pulled me slowly as if through a tube and I saw the allies- three dark, long, rigid figures agitated by a tremor, like leaves in a breeze. They were against an almost fluorescent pink background. The moment I focused my eyes on them, they came to where I was, not walking or gliding or flying, but by pulling themselves along some fibers of whiteness that came out of me. The whiteness was not a light or a glow but lines that seemed to be drawn with heavy powder chalk. They disintegrated quickly, yet not quickly enough. The allies were on me before the lines faded away.

They crowded me. I became annoyed, and the allies immediately moved away as if I had chastised them. I felt sorry for them, and my feeling pulled them back instantly. And they again came and rubbed themselves against me. I saw then something I had seen in the mirror at the stream. The allies had no inner glow. They had no inner mobility. There was no life in them. And yet they were obviously alive. They were strange grotesque shapes that resembled zippered-up sleeping bags. The thin line in the middle of their elongated shapes made them look as if they had been sewed up.

They were not pleasing figures. The sensation that they were totally alien to me made me feel uncomfortable, impatient. I saw that the three allies were moving as if they were jumping up and down. There was a faint glow inside them. The glow grew in intensity until, in at least one of the allies, it was quite brilliant.

The instant I saw that, I was facing a black world. I do not mean that it was dark as night is dark. It was rather that everything around me was pitch-black. I looked up at the sky and I could not find light anywhere. The sky was also black and literally covered with lines and irregular circles of various degrees of blackness. The sky looked like a black piece of wood where the grain showed in relief.

I looked down at the ground. It was fluffy. It seemed to be made of flakes of agar-agar; they were not dull flakes, but they were not shiny either. It was something in between which I had never seen in my life; black agar-agar.

I heard then the voice of seeing. It said that my assemblage point had assembled a total world with other great bands of emanations; a black world.

I wanted to absorb every word I was hearing. In order to do that I had to split my concentration. The voice stopped. My eyes became focused again. I was standing with don Juan just a few blocks away from the square.

I instantly felt that I had no time to rest, that it would be useless to indulge in being shocked. I rallied all my strength and asked don Juan if I had done what he had expected.

"You did exactly what you were expected to do," he said reassuringly. "Let's go back to the square and stroll around it one more time; for the last time in this world."

I refused to think about don Juan's leaving, so I asked him about the black world. I had vague recollections of having seen it before.

"It's the easiest world to assemble," he said. "And of all you've experienced, only the black world is worth considering. It is the only true alignment of another great band you have ever made. Everything else has been a lateral shift along man's band, but still within the same great band. The wall of fog, the plain with yellow dunes, the world of the apparitions- all are lateral alignments that our assemblage points make as they approach a crucial position."

He explained as we walked back to the square that one of the strange qualities of the black world is that it does not have the same emanations that account for time in our world. They are different emanations that produce a different result. Seers that journey into the black world feel that they have been in it for an eternity, but in our world that turns out to be an instant.

"The black world is a dreadful world because it ages the body," he said emphatically.

I asked him to clarify his statements. He slowed down his pace and looked at me. He reminded me that Genaro, in his direct way, had tried to point that out to me once, when he told me that we had plodded in hell for an eternity while not even a minute had passed in the world we know.

Don Juan remarked that in his youth he had become obsessed with the black world. He had wondered, in front of his benefactor, about what would happen to him if he went into it and stayed there for a while. But as his benefactor was not given to explanations, he had simply plunged don Juan into the black world to let him find out for himself.

"The nagual Julian's power was so extraordinary," don Juan continued, "that it took me days to come back from that black world."

"You mean it took you days to return your assemblage point to it's normal position, don't you?" I asked.

"Yes. I mean that," he said.

He explained that in the few days that he was lost in the black world he aged at least ten years, if not more. The emanations inside his cocoon felt the strain of years of solitary struggle.

Silvio Manuel was a totally different case. The nagual Julian also plunged him into the unknown, but Silvio Manuel assembled another world with another set of bands, a world also without the emanations of time but one which has the opposite effect on seers. He disappeared for seven years and yet he felt he had been gone only a moment.

"To assemble other worlds is not only a matter of practice, but a matter of intent," he continued. "And it isn't merely an exercise of bouncing out of those worlds, like being pulled by a rubber band. You see, a seer has to be daring. Once you break the barrier of perception, you don't have to come back to the same place in the world. See what I mean?"

It slowly dawned on me what he was saying. I had an almost invincible desire to laugh at such a preposterous idea, but before the idea coalesced into a certainty, don Juan spoke to me and disrupted what I was about to remember.

He said that for warriors the danger of assembling other worlds is that those worlds are as possessive as our world. The force of alignment is such that once the assemblage point breaks away from it's normal position, it becomes fixed at other positions, by other alignments. And warriors run the risk of getting stranded in inconceivable aloneness.

The inquisitive, rational part of me commented that I had seen him in the black world as a ball of luminosity. It was possible, therefore, to be in that world with people.

"Only if people follow you around by moving their own assemblage points when you move yours," he replied. "I shifted mine in order to be with you. Otherwise you would have been there alone with the allies."

We stopped walking, and don Juan said that it was time for me to go.

"I want you to bypass all lateral shifts," he said, "and go directly to the next total world; the black world. In a couple of days you'll have to do the same thing by yourself. You won't have time to piddle around. You'll have to do it in order to escape death."

He said that breaking the barrier of perception is the culmination of everything seers do. From the moment that barrier is broken, man and his fate take on a different meaning for warriors. Because of the transcendental importance of breaking that barrier, the new seers use the act of breaking it as a final test. The test consists of jumping from a mountaintop into an abyss while in a state of normal awareness. If the warrior jumping into the abyss does not erase the daily world and assemble another one before he reaches bottom, he dies.

"What you are going to do is to make this world vanish," he went on, "but you are going to remain somewhat yourself. This is the ultimate bastion of awareness, the one the new seers count on.

"They know that after they burn with consciousness, they somewhat retain the sense of being themselves."

He smiled and pointed to a street that we could see from where we were standing; the street where Genaro had shown me the mysteries of alignment.

"That street, like any other, leads to eternity," he said. "All you have to do is follow it in total silence. It's time. Go now! Go!"

He turned around and walked away from me. Genaro was waiting for him at the corner. Genaro waved at me and then made a gesture of urging me to come on. Don Juan kept on walking without turning to look. Genaro joined him. I started to follow them, but I knew that it was wrong.

Instead, I went in the opposite direction. The street was dark, lonely, and bleak. I did not indulge in feelings of failure or inadequacy. I walked in inner silence. My assemblage point was moving at great speed. I saw the three allies. The line of their middle made them look as if they were smiling sideways. I felt that I was being frivolous. And then a windlike force blew the world away.

# Epilogue

A couple of days later, all the nagual's party and all the apprentices got together on the flat mountaintop don Juan had told me about.

Don Juan said that each of the apprentices had already said goodbye to everybody, and that all of us were in a state of awareness that admitted no sentimentalism. For us, he said, there was only action. We were warriors in a state of total war.

Everyone, with the exception of don Juan, Genaro, Pablito, Nestor, and me, moved a short distance away from the flat mountaintop in order to allow Pablito, Nestor, and me privacy to enter into a state of normal awareness.

But before we did, don Juan took us by the arms and walked us around the flat top.

"In a moment, you're going to intend the movement of your assemblage points," he said. "And no one will help you. You are now alone. You must remember then that intent begins with a command.

"The old seers used to say that if warriors are going to have an internal dialogue, they should have the proper dialogue. For the old seers that meant a dialogue about sorcery and the enhancement of their self-reflection. For the new seers, it doesn't mean dialogue, but the detached manipulation of intent through sober commands."

He said over and over again that the manipulation of intent begins with a command given to oneself. The command is then repeated until it becomes the Eagle's command, and then the assemblage point shifts accordingly the moment warriors reach inner silence.

The fact that such a maneuver is possible, he said, is something of the most singular importance to seers, old and new alike, but for reasons diametrically opposed.

Knowing about it allowed the old seers to move their assemblage point to inconceivable dreaming positions in the incommensurable unknown.

For the new seers it means refusing to be food. It means escaping the Eagle by moving their assemblage points to a particular dreaming position called total freedom.

He explained that the old seers discovered that it is possible to move the assemblage point to the limit of the known and keep it fixed there in a state of prime heightened awareness. From that position, they saw the feasibility of slowly shifting their assemblage points permanently to other positions beyond that limit; a stupendous feat fraught with daring, but lacking sobriety because they could never retract the movement of their assemblage points; or perhaps they never wanted to.

Don Juan said that adventurous men faced with the choice of dying in the world of ordinary affairs or dying in unknown worlds, will unavoidably choose the latter.

But the new seers, realizing that their predecessors had chosen merely to change the locale of their death, came to understand the futility of it all; the futility of struggling to control their fellow men; the futility of assembling other worlds; and above all, the futility of self-importance.

One of the most fortunate decisions that the new seers made, he said, was never to allow their assemblage points to move permanently to any position other than heightened awareness. From that position, they actually resolved their dilemma of futility and found out that the solution is not simply to choose an alternate world in which to die, but to choose total consciousness; total freedom.

Don Juan commented that by choosing total freedom, the new seers unwittingly continued in the tradition of their predecessors, and became the quintessence of the death defiers.

He explained that the new seers discovered that if the assemblage point is made to shift constantly to the confines of the unknown, but is made to return to a position at the limit of the known, then when it is suddenly released it moves like lightning across the entire cocoon of man; aligning all the emanations inside the cocoon at once.

"The new seers burn with the force of alignment," don Juan went on, "with the force of will, which they have turned into the force of intent through a life of impeccability. Intent is the alignment of all the amber emanations of awareness, so it is correct to say that total freedom means total awareness."

"Is that what all of you are going to do, don Juan?" I asked.

"We most certainly will," he replied, "if we have sufficient energy. Freedom is the Eagle's gift to man. Unfortunately, very few men understand that all we need in order to accept such a magnificent gift is to have sufficient energy.

"If that's all we need, then, by all means, we must become misers of energy."

After that, don Juan made us enter into a state of normal awareness. At dusk, Pablito, Nestor, and I jumped into the abyss. And don Juan and the nagual's party burned with the fire from within. They entered into total awareness: They had sufficient energy to accept the mind-boggling gift of freedom.

Pablito, Nestor, and I didn't die at the bottom of that gorge. Neither had the other apprentices who had jumped at an earlier time. We never reached the bottom. All of us, under the impact of such a tremendous and incomprehensible act as jumping to our deaths, moved our assemblage points and assembled other worlds.

We know now that we were left to remember heightened awareness and thereby regain the totality of ourselves.

And the more we remember, the more intense is our elation and our wondering...

But also the greater our doubts and our turmoil.

As yet, it is as if we were left only to be tantalized by the most far reaching questions about the nature and the fate of man...

...until the time when we may have sufficient energy, not only to verify everything don Juan taught us, but also to accept the Eagle's gift ourselves.

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# 08 - THE POWER OF SILENCE: FURTHER LESSONS OF DON JUAN

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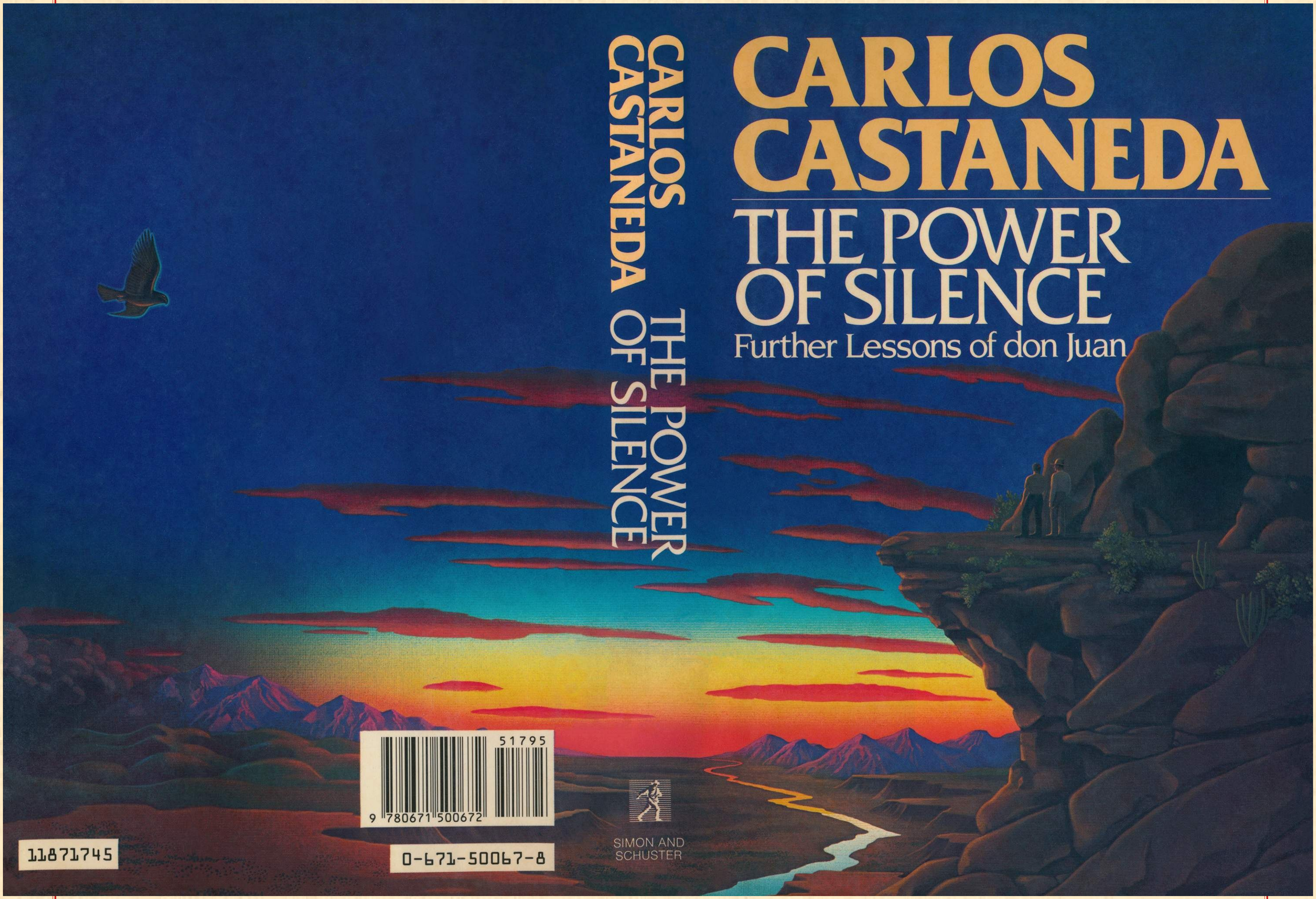
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# Book 8 – THE POWER OF SILENCE

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## Foreword

My books are a true account of a teaching method that don Juan Matus, a Mexican Indian seer, used in order to help me understand the Total Freedom Warriors' world. In a sense, my books are the account of an on-going process which becomes more clear to me as time goes by.

It takes years of training to teach us to deal intelligently with the world of everyday life. Our schooling- whether in plain reasoning or formal topics- is rigorous because the knowledge imparted to us is very complex.

The same criteria apply to the seers' world. Their schooling which relies on oral instruction and the manipulation of awareness, although different from ours, is just as rigorous because their knowledge is as, or perhaps more, complex.

## Introduction

At various times don Juan attempted to name his knowledge for my benefit. He felt that the most appropriate name was 'nagualism', but that the term was too obscure. Calling it simply 'knowledge' made it too vague, and to call it 'witchcraft' was debasing. 'The mastery of intent' was too abstract, and 'the search for total freedom' too long and metaphorical. Finally, because he was unable to find a more appropriate name, he called it 'sorcery', although he admitted it was not nearly accurate.

Over the years, he had given me different definitions of sorcery, but he had always maintained that definitions change as knowledge increases. Toward the end of my apprenticeship, I felt I was in a position to appreciate a clearer definition. So I asked him once more.

"From where the average man (or woman) stands," don Juan said, "sorcery is nonsense; an ominous mystery beyond his reach. And he is right, not because this is an absolute fact, but because the average man lacks the energy to deal with sorcery."

He stopped for a moment before he continued. "Human beings are born," don Juan said, "with a finite amount of energy; an energy that is systematically deployed, beginning at the moment of birth, in order that it may be used most advantageously by the modality of the time."

"What do you mean by the modality of the time?" I asked.

"The modality of the time is the precise bundle of energy fields being perceived," he answered.

"I believe man's perception has changed through the ages. The actual time decides the mode. The time decides which precise bundle of energy fields are to be used; out of an incalculable number.

"Handling the modality of the time- those select few energy fields- takes all our available energy; and thus leaves us no extra energy that would help us use any of the other energy fields."

He urged me with a subtle movement of his eyebrows to consider all this.

"This is what I mean," he went on, "when I say that the average man lacks the energy needed to deal with sorcery. If he uses only the energy he has, he can't perceive the worlds sorcerers do.

"To perceive sorcery worlds, sorcerers need to use a cluster of energy fields not ordinarily used.

"Naturally, if the average man is to perceive sorcery worlds and understand sorcerers' perception, he must use the same energy cluster sorcerers have used. And this is just not possible, because all of the average man's energy is already deployed on the cluster of the times."

He paused as if searching for the appropriate words to make his point.

"Think of it this way," he proceeded. "It isn't that as time goes by you're learning sorcery. Rather, what you're learning is to save energy. This energy will enable you to handle some of the energy fields which are inaccessible to you now.

"Sorcery, properly speaking, is simply the ability to use energy fields that are not employed in perceiving the ordinary world we know. Sorcery is a state of awareness and the ability to perceive something which ordinary perception cannot.

"Everything I've put you through," don Juan went on, "and each of the things I've shown you was only a device to convince you that there's more to us than meets the eye.

We don't need anyone to teach us sorcery because there is really nothing to learn. What we need is a teacher to convince us that there is incalculable power at our fingertips. What a strange paradox!

"Every warrior on the path of knowledge thinks, at one time or another, that he (or she) is learning sorcery. However, all he's really doing is allowing himself to be convinced of the power hidden in his being, and that he can reach it."

"Is that what you're doing, don Juan- convincing me?"

"Exactly. I'm trying to convince you that you can reach that power.

"I went through the same thing, and I was as hard to convince as you are."

"Once we have reached it," I asked, "what exactly do we do with it, don Juan?"

"Nothing. Once we have reached that understanding, it will by itself make use of energy fields which are available to us but were inaccessible.

"Access to formerly unavailable energy fields, as I have said, is sorcery in a nut shell.

"But then we begin to 'see', that is, to perceive something else; not as imagination, but as real and concrete. And then we begin to know without having to use words. And what any of us does with that increased perception and with that silent knowledge depends on our own temperament."

On another occasion, he gave me another kind of explanation. We were discussing an unrelated topic when he abruptly changed the subject and began to tell me a joke. He laughed and very gently patted my back between the shoulder blades; as if he were shy and it was too forward of him to touch me. He chuckled at my nervous reaction.

"You're skittish," he said teasingly, and slapped my back with greater force.

My ears buzzed. For an instant I lost my breath. It felt as though he had hurt my lungs. Every breath brought me great discomfort. Yet, after I had coughed and choked a few times, my nasal passages opened and I found myself taking deep, soothing breaths.

I had such a feeling of well-being that I was not even annoyed at him for his blow; which had been as hard as it was unexpected.

Then don Juan began a most remarkable explanation. Clearly and concisely, he gave me a different and more precise definition of sorcery.

I had entered into a wondrous state of awareness! I had such clarity of mind that I was able to comprehend and assimilate everything don Juan was saying.

He said that in the universe there is an unmeasurable, indescribable force which sorcerers call intent, and that absolutely everything that exists in the entire cosmos is attached to intent by a connecting link. Sorcerers, or warriors, as he called them, were concerned with discussing, understanding, and employing that connecting link.

They were especially concerned with cleaning it of the numbing effects brought about by the ordinary concerns of their everyday lives. Sorcery at this level could be defined as the procedure of cleaning one's connecting link to intent. Don Juan stressed that this 'cleaning procedure' was extremely difficult to understand, or to learn to perform.

Sorcerers, therefore, divided their instruction into two categories.

One was instruction for the everyday-life state of awareness, in which the cleaning process was presented in a disguised fashion.

The other was instruction for the states of heightened awareness, such as the one I was presently experiencing, in which sorcerers obtained knowledge directly from intent, without the distracting intervention of spoken language.

Don Juan explained that by using heightened awareness over thousands of years of painful struggle, sorcerers had gained specific insights into intent. They passed these nuggets of direct knowledge on from generation to generation to the present. He said that the task of sorcery is to take this seemingly incomprehensible knowledge and make it understandable by the standards of awareness of everyday life.

Then he explained the role of the guide in the lives of sorcerers. He said that a guide is called 'the nagual', and is a man or a woman with extraordinary energy; a teacher who has sobriety, endurance, and stability; someone seers see as a luminous sphere having four compartments as if four luminous balls have been compressed together.

Because of their extraordinary energy, naguals are intermediaries. Their energy allows them to channel peace, harmony, laughter, and knowledge directly from the source- from intent- and transmit intent to their companions.

Naguals are responsible for supplying what sorcerers call 'the minimal chance'; the awareness of one's connection with intent.

I could understand everything on Juan was saying about his world easily, and yet he had described the process of understanding as very difficult.

I told him that my mind was grasping everything he was telling me, but that the only part of his explanation still unclear to me was why two sets of teachings were needed.

"You will need a lifetime to remember the insights you've had today," he said, "because most of them were silent knowledge. A few moments from now you will have forgotten them. That's one of the unfathomable mysteries of awareness."

Don Juan then made me shift levels of consciousness by striking me on my left side, at the edge of my ribcage.

Instantly I lost my extraordinary clarity of mind and could not remember having ever had it.

Don Juan himself set me the task of writing about the premises of sorcery. Once, very casually in the early stages of my apprenticeship, he suggested that I write a book in order to make use of the notes I had always taken.

I had accumulated reams of notes and never considered what to do with them. I argued that the suggestion was absurd because I was not a writer.

"Of course, you're not a writer," he said, "so you will have to use sorcery. First, you must visualize your experiences as if you were reliving them, and then you must see the text in your dreaming. For you, writing should not be a literary exercise, but rather an exercise in sorcery."

I have written in that manner about the premises of sorcery just as don Juan explained them to me within the context of his teaching.

In his teaching scheme, which was developed by sorcerers of ancient times, there were two categories of instruction.

One was called "teachings for the right side," and was carried out in the apprentice's ordinary state of awareness.

The other was called "teachings for the left side", and was put into practice solely while the apprentice was in states of heightened awareness.

These two categories allowed teachers to school their apprentices toward three areas of expertise: the mastery of awareness, the art of stalking, and the mastery of intent.

These three areas of expertise are the three riddles sorcerers encounter in their search for knowledge.

The mastery of awareness is the riddle of the mind; the perplexity sorcerers experience when they recognize the astounding mystery and scope of awareness and perception.

The art of stalking is the riddle of the heart; the puzzlement sorcerers feel upon becoming aware of two things: first that the world appears to us to be unalterably objective and factual because of the peculiarities of our awareness and perception; and second, that if different peculiarities of perception come into play, the very things about the world that seem so unalterably objective and factual change.

The mastery of intent is the riddle of the spirit; the paradox of the abstract; sorcerers' thoughts and actions projected beyond our human condition.

Don Juan's instructions on both the art of stalking and the mastery of intent depended upon his instruction on the mastery of awareness.

The mastery of awareness was the cornerstone of his teachings, and consists of the following basic premises:

1. The universe is an infinite mass of energy fields resembling threads of light.

2. These energy fields, called the Eagle's emanations, radiate from a source of inconceivable proportions metaphorically called The Eagle.

3. Human beings are composed of an incalculable number of the Eagle's emanations in an encased mass. Seers perceive this mass as a ball of light, like a giant luminous egg, the size of the person's body with the arms extended laterally.

4. Only a very small group of the emanations inside this luminous egg are lit up by a point of intense brilliance located near the egg's surface. This point is where perception is assembled;

'the assemblage point'.

5. Perception occurs when the emanations lit by the assemblage point extend their light to illuminate identical matching emanations outside the egg. Only the emanations lit by the assemblage point are perceived.

6. The assemblage point can move from it's usual position to another on the surface or into the interior. It then lights up a new group of emanations making them perceivable and cancelling the former perceptions.

7. When the assemblage point shifts far enough, it makes possible the perception of an entirely different world as objective and factual as the one we normally perceive. Sorcerers go into those other worlds to get energy, power, solutions to general and particular problems, or to face the unimaginable.

8. Intent is the pervasive force that causes us to perceive. We do not become aware because we perceive; rather, we perceive as a result of the pressure and intrusion of intent.

9. The aim of the new seers is to reach a state of total awareness in order to experience all the possibilities of perception available to man. This state of awareness even implies an alternative way of dying.

A level of practical knowledge was included as part of teaching the mastery of awareness. On that practical level don Juan taught the procedures necessary to move the assemblage point. The two great systems devised by the sorcerer seers of ancient times to accomplish this were: dreaming, the control and utilization of dreams; and stalking, the control of behavior.

Moving one's own assemblage point was an essential maneuver that every sorcerer had to learn.

The naguals, also learned to move it for others. The naguals dislodge others' assemblage point from it's customary position by pushing it. This push is experienced as a smack on the right shoulder blade- although the body is never touched- and results in a state of heightened awareness.

In compliance with his tradition, it was exclusively in these states of heightened awareness that don Juan carried out the most important and dramatic part of his teachings: the instructions for the left side.

Because of the extraordinary quality of these states, don Juan demanded that I not discuss them with others until we had concluded everything in the sorcerers' teaching scheme. That demand was not difficult for me to accept.

In those unique states of awareness my capabilities for understanding the instruction were unbelievably enhanced, but at the same time my capabilities for describing or even remembering them were impaired.

I could function in those states with proficiency and assuredness, but I could not recollect anything about them once I returned to my normal consciousness.

It took me years to be able to make the crucial conversion of my enhanced awareness into plain memory. My reason and common sense delayed this moment because they were colliding head-on with the preposterous, unthinkable reality of heightened awareness and direct knowledge. For years the resulting cognitive disarrangement forced me to avoid the issue by not thinking about it.

Whatever I have published about my sorcery apprenticeship, up to now, has been a recounting of how don Juan taught me the mastery of awareness. I have not yet described the art of stalking or the mastery of intent.

Don Juan taught me their principles and applications with the help of two of his sorcerer companions, Vicente Medrano, and Silvio Manuel. But whatever I learned from them still remains clouded in what Don Juan called the intricacies of heightened awareness.

Until now it had been impossible for me to write or even to think coherently about the art of stalking and the mastery of intent. My mistake has been to regard them as subjects for normal memory and recollection. They are, but at the same time they are not. In order to resolve this contradiction, I have not pursued the subjects directly- a virtual impossibility- but have dealt with them indirectly through the concluding topic of don Juan's instruction: the stories of the sorcerers of the past.

He recounted these stories to make evident what he called the abstract cores of his lessons.

His way of talking made me believe for many years that his explanations of the abstract cores were like academic dissertations. I was, however, intellectually incapable of grasping the nature of the abstract cores despite his comprehensive explanations. All I was able to do under these circumstances was to take his explanations as given.

And even without a thorough rational assessment which I believed was essential to understanding them, the abstract cores became part of my tacit acceptance and understanding of his teachings.

I know now that the stories of the sorcerers of the past, were intended more to open my mind than to explain anything in a rational manner.

Don Juan presented three sets of six abstract cores each, arranged in an increasing level of complexity.

I have dealt here with the first set, which is composed of the following: the manifestations of the spirit, the knock of the spirit, the trickery of the spirit, the descent of the spirit, the requirements of *intent*, and handling *intent*.

## 1. The Manifestations of the Spirit

### The First Abstract Core

Don Juan, whenever it was pertinent, used to tell me brief stories about the sorcerers of his lineage, especially his teacher, the nagual Julian. They were not really stories, but rather descriptions of the way those sorcerers behaved, and of aspects of their personalities. These accounts were each designed to shed light on a specific topic in my apprenticeship.

I had heard the same stories from the other fifteen members of don Juan's group of sorcerers, but none of these accounts had been able to give me a clear picture of the people they described. Since I had no way of persuading don Juan to give me more details about those sorcerers, I had resigned myself to the idea of never knowing about them in any depth.

One afternoon, in the mountains of southern Mexico, don Juan, after having explained to me more about the intricacies of the mastery of awareness, made a statement that completely baffled me.

"I think it's time for us to talk about the sorcerers of our past," he said.

Don Juan explained that it was necessary that I begin drawing conclusions based on a systematic view of the past; conclusions about both the world of daily affairs and the sorcerers' world.

"Sorcerers," he said, "are vitally concerned with their past. But I don't mean their personal past. For sorcerers, their past is what other sorcerers in bygone days have done. And what we are now going to do is examine that past.

"The average man also examines the past. But it's mostly his personal past he examines; and he does so for personal reasons.

Sorcerers do quite the opposite; they consult their past in order to obtain a point of reference."

"But," I asked, "Isn't that what everyone does? Look at the past to get a point of reference?"

"No!" he answered emphatically. "The average man measures himself against the past, whether his personal past or the past knowledge of his time in order to find justifications for his present or future behavior; or to establish a model for himself.

"Only sorcerers genuinely seek a point of reference in their past."

"Perhaps, don Juan, things would be clear to me if you tell me what a point of reference for a sorcerer is."

"For sorcerers," he replied, "establishing a point of reference means getting a chance to examine intent; which is exactly the aim of this final topic of instruction. And nothing can give sorcerers a better view of intent than examining stories of other sorcerers battling to understand the same force."

He explained that as they examined their past, the sorcerers of his lineage took careful notice of the basic abstract order of their knowledge.

"In sorcery there are twenty-one abstract cores," don Juan went on. "And then, based on those abstract cores, there are scores of sorcery stories about the naguals of our lineage battling to understand the spirit. It's time to tell you the abstract cores and the sorcery stories."

I waited for don Juan to begin telling me the stories, but he changed the subject and went back to explaining awareness.

"Wait a minute," I protested. "What about the sorcery stories? Aren't you going to tell them to me?"

"Of course I am," he said. "But they are not stories that one can tell as if they were tales. You've got to think your way through them and then rethink them; relive them, so to speak."

There was a long silence. I became very cautious and was afraid that if I persisted in asking him again to tell me the stories, I could be committing myself to something I might later regret. But my curiosity was greater than my good sense.

"Well, let's get on with them," I croaked.

Don Juan, obviously catching the gist of my thoughts, smiled maliciously.

He stood and signaled me to follow. We had been sitting on some dry rocks at the bottom of a gully. It was mid-afternoon. The sky was dark and cloudy. Low, almost black rain clouds hovered above the peaks to the east. In comparison, the high clouds made the sky seem clear to the south. Earlier it had rained heavily, but then the rain seemed to have retreated to a hiding place, leaving behind only a threat.

I should have been chilled to the bone because it was very cold, but I was warm. As I clutched a rock don Juan had given me to hold, I realized that this sensation of being warm in nearly freezing weather was familiar to me, yet it amazed me every time. Whenever I seemed about to freeze, don Juan would give me a branch to hold, or a stone, or he would put a bunch of leaves under my shirt on the tip of my sternum; and that would be sufficient to raise my body temperature.

I had tried unsuccessfully to recreate by myself the effect of his ministrations. [* ministration-assistance in time of difficulty] He told me it was not the ministrations that kept me warm, but rather his inner silence. The branches or stones or leaves were merely devices to trap my attention and maintain it in focus.

Moving quickly, we climbed the steep west side of a mountain until we reached a rock ledge at the very top. We were in the foothills of a higher range of mountains. From the rock ledge, I could see that fog had begun to move onto the south end of the valley floor below us. Low, wispy clouds seemed to be closing in on us too, sliding down from the black-green, high mountain peaks to the west. After the rain, under the dark cloudy sky, the valley and the mountains to the east and south appeared covered in a mantle of black-green silence.

"This is the ideal place to have a talk," don Juan said, sitting on the rock floor of a concealed shallow cave.

The cave was perfect for the two of us to sit side by side. Our heads were nearly touching the roof and our backs fitted snugly against the curved surface of the rock wall. It was as if the cave had been carved deliberately to accommodate two persons of our size.

I noticed another strange feature of the cave: When I stood on the ledge, I could see the entire valley and the mountain ranges to the east and south; but when I sat down, I was boxed in by the rocks. Yet the ledge was at the level of the cave floor, and flat.

I was about to point this strange effect out to don Juan, but he anticipated me.

"This cave is man-made," he said. "The ledge is slanted but the eye doesn't register the incline."

"Who made this cave, don Juan?"

"The ancient sorcerers; perhaps thousands of years ago. And one of the peculiarities of this cave is that animals and insects and even people stay away from it. The ancient sorcerers seem to have infused it with an ominous charge that makes every living thing feel ill at ease."

But strangely, I felt irrationally secure and happy there. A sensation of physical contentment made my entire body tingle. I actually felt the most agreeable- the most delectable sensation in my stomach. It was as if my nerves were being tickled.

"I don't feel ill at ease," I commented.

"Neither do I," he said. "Which only means that you and I aren't that far temperamentally from those old sorcerers of the past; something which worries me no end."

I was afraid to pursue that subject any further, so I waited for him to talk.

"The first sorcery story I am going to tell you is called "The Manifestations of the Spirit"," don Juan began, "but don't let the title mystify you. The manifestations [* manifestation- a clear appearance, as of a disembodied spirit expressed without words] of the spirit is only the first abstract core around which the first sorcery story is built.

"That first abstract core is a story in itself," he went on. "The story says that once upon a time there was a man; an average man without any special attributes. He was, like everyone else, a conduit for the spirit. And by virtue of that, like everyone else, he was part of the spirit; part of the abstract. But he didn't know it. The world kept him so busy that he had neither the time nor the inclination really to examine the matter.

"The spirit tried, uselessly, to reveal their connection. Using an inner voice the spirit disclosed it's secrets, but the man was incapable of understanding the revelations. Naturally, he heard the inner voice, but he believed it to be his own feelings he was feeling and his own thoughts he was thinking.

"The spirit, in order to shake him out of his slumber, gave him three signs; three successive manifestations. The spirit physically crossed the man's path in the most obvious manner. But the man was oblivious to anything but his self-concern."

Don Juan stopped and looked at me as he did whenever he was waiting for my comments and questions. I had nothing to say. I did not understand the point he was trying to make.

"I've just told you the first abstract core," he continued. "The spirit, in order to shake him out of his slumber, gave him three signs; three successive manifestations. The spirit physically crossed the man's path in the most obvious manner. But the man was oblivious to anything but his self-concern. And trickery became the essence of the sorcerers' path. But that is another story."

Don Juan explained that sorcerers understood this abstract core to be a blueprint for events, or a recurrent pattern that appeared every time intent was giving an indication of something meaningful. Abstract cores, then, were blueprints of complete chains of events.

He assured me that by means beyond comprehension, every detail of every abstract core has re-occurred to every apprentice nagual. He further assured me that he had helped intent to involve me in all the abstract cores of sorcery in the same manner that his benefactor, the nagual Julian, and all the naguals before him had involved their apprentices. The process by which each apprentice nagual encountered the abstract cores created a series of accounts woven around those abstract cores; incorporating the particular details of each apprentice's personality and circumstances.

He said, for example, that I had my own story about the manifestations of the spirit: He had his: His benefactor had his own: So had the nagual that preceded him, and so on, and so forth.

"What is my story about the manifestations of the spirit?" I asked, somewhat mystified.

"If any warrior is aware of his stories, it's you," he replied. "After all, you've been writing about them for years. But you didn't notice the abstract cores because you are a practical man. You do everything only for the purpose of enhancing your practicality. Although you handled your stories to exhaustion you had no idea that there was an abstract core in them.

Everything I've done appears to you, therefore, as an often-whimsical practical activity; teaching sorcery to a reluctant and, most of the time, stupid, apprentice. As long as you see it in those terms, the abstract cores will elude you."

"You must forgive me, don Juan," I said, "but your statements are very confusing. What are you saying?"

"I'm trying to introduce the sorcery stories as a subject," he replied. "I've never talked to you specifically about this topic because traditionally it's left hidden. It is the spirit's last artifice. [* artifice- a deceptive manoeuvre (especially to avoid capture)] It is said that when the apprentice understands the abstract cores, it's like the placing of the stone that caps and seals a pyramid."

It was getting dark and it looked as though it was about to rain again. I worried that if the wind blew from east to west while it was raining, we were going to get soaked in that cave. I was sure don Juan was aware of that, but he seemed to ignore it.

"It won't rain again until tomorrow morning," he said.

Hearing my inner thoughts being answered made me jump involuntarily and hit the top of my head on the cave roof. It was a thud that sounded worse than it felt.

Don Juan held his sides laughing. After a while my head really began to hurt and I had to massage it.

"Your company is as enjoyable to me as mine must have been to my benefactor," he said and began to laugh again.

We were quiet for a few minutes. The silence around me was ominous. [* ominous- threatening or foreshadowing evil or tragic developments] I fancied that I could hear the rustling of the low clouds as they descended on us from the higher mountains. Then I realized that what I was hearing was the soft wind. From my position in the shallow cave, it sounded like the whispering of human voices.

"I had the incredible good luck to be taught by two naguals," don Juan said and broke the mesmeric grip the wind had on me at that moment. "One was, of course, my benefactor, the nagual Julian, and the other was his benefactor, the nagual Elias. My case was unique."

"Why was your case unique?" I asked.

"Because for generations," he explained, "naguals have gathered their apprentices years after their own teachers have left the world- except my benefactor.

"I became the nagual Julian's apprentice eight years before his benefactor left the world. I had eight years' grace. It was the luckiest thing that could have happened to me because I had the opportunity to be taught by two opposite temperaments. It was like being reared by a powerful father and an even more powerful grandfather who don't see eye to eye. In such a contest, the grandfather always wins.

"So I'm properly the product of the nagual Elias's teachings. I was closer to him not only in temperament, but also in looks. I'd say that I owe him my fine tuning. However, the bulk of the work that went into turning me from a miserable being into an impeccable warrior I owe to my benefactor, the nagual Julian."

"What was the nagual Julian like physically?" I asked.

"Do you know that to this day it's hard for me to visualize him?" don Juan said. "I know that sounds absurd, but depending on his needs or the circumstances, he could be either young or old, handsome or homely, effete [* effete- marked by excessive self-indulgence and moral decay] and weak, or strong and virile, [* virile- characterized by energy and vigor] fat or slender, of medium height or extremely short."

"Do you mean he was an actor acting out different roles with the aid of props?"

"No, there were no props involved, and he was not merely an actor. He was, of course, a great actor in his own right, but that is different. The point is that he was capable of transforming himself and becoming all those diametrically opposed persons. Being a great actor enabled him to portray all the minute peculiarities of behavior that made each specific being real. Let us say that he was at ease in every change of being. As you are at ease in every change of clothes."

Eagerly, I asked don Juan to tell me more about his benefactor's transformations. He said that someone taught him how to elicit those transformations, but that to explain any further would force him to overlap into different stories.

"What did the nagual Julian look like when he wasn't transforming himself?" I asked.

"Let's say that before he became a nagual, he was very slim and muscular," don Juan said. "His hair was black, thick, and wavy. He had a long, fine nose, strong big white teeth, an oval face, strong jaw, and shiny dark-brown eyes. He was about five feet eight inches tall. He was not Indian or even a brown Mexican, but he was not Anglo white either. In fact, his complexion seemed to be like no one else's, especially in his later years when his ever-changing complexion shifted constantly from dark to very light and back again to dark. When I first met him he was a light-brown old man, then as time went by, he became a light-skinned young man, perhaps only a few years older than me. I was twenty at that time.

"But if the changes of his outer appearance were astonishing," don Juan went on, "the changes of mood and behavior that accompanied each transformation were even more astonishing. For example, when he was a fat young man, he was jolly and sensual. When he was a skinny old man, he was petty and vindictive. When he was a fat old man, he was the greatest imbecile there was."

"Was he ever himself?" I asked.

He replied, "Not the way I am myself. Since I'm not interested in transformation, I am always the same. But he was not like me at all." Don Juan looked at me as if he were assessing my inner strength. He smiled, shook his head from side to side and broke into a belly laugh.

"What's so funny, don Juan?" I asked.

"The fact is that you're still too prudish and stiff to appreciate fully the nature of my benefactor's transformations and their total scope," he said. "I only hope that when I tell you about them you don't become morbidly obsessed."

For some reason, I suddenly became quite uncomfortable, and had to change the subject.

"Why are the naguals called 'benefactors' and not simply teachers?" I asked nervously.

"Calling a nagual a benefactor is a gesture his apprentices make," don Juan said. "A nagual creates an overwhelming feeling of gratitude in his disciples. After all, a nagual molds them and guides them through unimaginable areas."

I remarked that to teach was in my opinion the greatest, most altruistic act anyone could perform for another.

"For you, teaching is talking about patterns," he said. "For a sorcerer, to teach is what a nagual does for his apprentices. For them, he taps the prevailing force in the universe: intent- the force that changes and reorders things or keeps them as they are.

"The nagual formulates; then guides the consequences that that force can have on his disciples. Without the nagual's molding intent, there would be no awe; no wonder for them. And his apprentices, instead of embarking on a magical journey of discovery, would only be learning a trade: healer, sorcerer, diviner, charlatan, or whatever."

"Can you explain intent to me?" I asked.

"The only way to know intent" he replied, "is to know it directly through a living connection that exists between intent and all sentient beings. Sorcerers call intent the indescribable, the spirit, the abstract, or the nagual. I would prefer to call it nagual, but it overlaps with the name for the leader- the benefactor- who is also called nagual. So I have opted for calling it the spirit, intent, or the abstract."

Don Juan stopped abruptly and recommended that I keep quiet and think about what he had told me. By then it was very dark. The silence was so profound that instead of lulling me into a restful state, it agitated me. I could not maintain order in my thoughts. I tried to focus my attention on the story he had told me, but instead I thought of everything else until finally I fell asleep.

## The Impeccability of the Nagual Elías

I had no way of telling how long I slept in that cave. Don Juan's voice startled me and I awoke. He was saying that the first sorcery story concerning the manifestations of the spirit was an account of the relationship between intent and the nagual. It was the story of how the spirit set up a lure for the nagual, a prospective disciple, and of how the nagual had to evaluate the lure before making his decision either to accept or reject it.

It was very dark in the cave, and the small space was confining. Ordinarily an area of that size would have made me claustrophobic, but the cave kept soothing me; dispelling my feelings of annoyance. Also, something in the configuration of the cave absorbed the echoes of don Juan's words.

Don Juan explained that every act performed by sorcerers, especially by the naguals, was either performed as a way to strengthen their link with intent or as a response triggered by the link itself. Sorcerers, and specifically the naguals, therefore had to be actively and permanently on the lookout for manifestations of the spirit. Such manifestations were called gestures of the spirit or, more simply, indications or omens.

He repeated a story he had already told me; the story of how he had met his benefactor, the nagual Julian.

Don Juan had been cajoled by two crooked men to take a job on an isolated hacienda. One of the men, the foreman of the hacienda, simply took possession of don Juan and in effect made him a slave.

Desperate and with no other course of action, don Juan escaped. The violent foreman chased him and caught him on a country road where he shot don Juan in the chest and left him for dead.

Don Juan was lying unconscious in the road bleeding to death when the nagual Julian came along. Using his healer's knowledge, he stopped the bleeding, took don Juan- who was still unconscious- to his home, and cured him.

The indications the spirit gave the nagual Julian about don Juan were, first, a small cyclone that lifted a cone of dust on the road a couple of yards from where he lay.

The second omen was the thought which had crossed the nagual Julian's mind an instant before he had heard the report of the gun a few yards away: that it was time to have an apprentice nagual.

Moments later, the spirit gave him the third omen, when he ran to take cover. He collided with the gunman putting him to flight; perhaps preventing the foreman from shooting don Juan a second time. A collision with someone was the type of blunder which no sorcerer, much less a nagual, should ever make.

The nagual Julian immediately evaluated the opportunity. When he saw don Juan, he understood the reason for the spirit's manifestation: Here was a double man; a perfect candidate to be his apprentice nagual.

This brought up a nagging rational concern for me. I wanted to know if sorcerers could interpret an omen erroneously.

Don Juan replied that although my question sounded perfectly legitimate, it was inapplicable, like the majority of my questions, because I asked them based on my experiences in the world of everyday life. Thus they were always about tested procedures, steps to be followed, and rules of meticulousness; but had nothing to do with the premises of sorcery. He pointed out that the flaw in my reasoning was that I always failed to include my experiences in the sorcerers' world.

I argued that very few of my experiences in the sorcerers' world had continuity, and therefore I could not make use of those experiences in my present day-to-day life. Very few times, and only when I was in states of profound heightened awareness, had I remembered everything. At the level of heightened awareness I usually reached, the only experience that had continuity between past and present was that of knowing him.

He responded cuttingly that I was perfectly capable of engaging in sorcerers' reasonings because I had experienced the sorcery premises in my normal state of awareness. In a more mellow tone he added that heightened awareness did not reveal everything until the whole edifice [* edifice- a structure that stands more or less permanently in one place] of sorcery knowledge was completed.

Then he answered my question about whether or not sorcerers could misinterpret omens. He explained that when a sorcerer interpreted an omen, he knew it's exact meaning without having any notion of how he knew it. This was one of the bewildering effects of the connecting link with intent. Sorcerers had a sense of knowing things directly. How sure they were depended on the strength and clarity of their connecting link.

He said that the feeling everyone knows as 'intuition' is the activation of our link with intent. And since sorcerers deliberately pursue the understanding and strengthening of that link, it could be said that they intuit everything unerringly and accurately. Reading omens is commonplace for sorcerers. Mistakes happen only when personal feelings intervene and cloud the sorcerers' connecting link with intent. Otherwise their direct knowledge is totally accurate and functional.

We remained quiet for a while.

All of a sudden he said, "I am going to tell you a story about the nagual Elias and the manifestation of the spirit. The spirit manifests itself to a sorcerer, especially to a nagual, at every turn. However, this is not the entire truth. The entire truth is that the spirit reveals itself to everyone with the same intensity and consistency, but only sorcerers, and naguals in particular, are attuned to such revelations."

Don Juan began his story. He said that the nagual Elias had been riding his horse to the city one day, taking himself through a shortcut by some cornfields, when suddenly his horse shied-frightened by the low, fast sweep of a falcon that missed the nagual's straw hat by only a few inches.

"The nagual immediately dismounted and began to look around. He saw a strange young man among the tall, dry cornstalks. The man was dressed in an expensive dark suit and appeared alien there. The nagual Elias was used to the sight of peasants or landowners in the fields, but he had never seen an elegantly dressed city man moving through the fields with apparent disregard for his expensive shoes and clothes.

The nagual tethered his horse and walked toward the young man. He recognized the flight of the falcon, as well as the man's apparel, as obvious manifestations of the spirit which he could not disregard. He got very close to the young man and saw what was going on. The man was chasing a peasant woman who was running a few yards ahead of him, dodging and laughing with him.

The contradiction was quite apparent to the nagual. The two people cavorting in the cornfield did not belong together. The nagual thought that the man must be the landowner's son and the woman a servant in the house. He felt embarrassed to be observing them, and was about to turn and leave when the falcon again swept over the cornfield and this time brushed the young man's head. The falcon alarmed the couple and they stopped and looked up, trying to anticipate another sweep. The nagual noticed that the man was thin and handsome, and had haunting, restless eyes.

Then the couple became bored watching for the falcon, and returned to their play. The man caught the woman, embraced her and gently laid her on the ground. But instead of trying to make love to her, as the nagual assumed he would do next, he removed his own clothes and paraded naked in front of the woman.

She did not shyly close her eyes or scream with embarrassment or fright. She giggled, mesmerized by the prancing naked man, who moved around her like a satyr, making lewd gestures and laughing. Finally, apparently overpowered by the sight, she uttered a wild cry, rose, and threw herself into the young man's arms.

Don Juan said that the nagual Elias confessed to him that the indications of the spirit on that occasion had been most baffling. It was clearly evident that the man was insane. Otherwise, knowing how protective peasants were of their women, he would not have considered seducing a young peasant woman in broad daylight a few yards from the road and naked to boot.

Don Juan broke into a laugh and told me that in those days to take off one's clothes and engage in a sexual act in broad daylight in such a place meant one had to be either insane or blessed by the spirit. He added that what the man had done might not seem remarkable nowadays. But back then, nearly a hundred years ago, people were infinitely more inhibited.

All of this convinced the nagual Elias from the moment he laid eyes on the man that he was both insane and blessed by the spirit. He worried that peasants might happen by, become enraged and lynch the man on the spot. But no one did. It felt to the nagual as if time had been suspended.

When the man finished making love, he put on his clothes, took out a handkerchief, meticulously dusted his shoes and, all the while making wild promises to the girl, went on his way. The nagual Elias followed him. In fact, he followed him for several days and found out that his name was Julian and that he was an actor.

Subsequently the nagual saw him on the stage often enough to realize that the actor had a great deal of charisma. The audience, especially the women, loved him. And he had no scruples about making use of his charismatic gifts to seduce female admirers. As the nagual followed the actor, he was able to witness his seduction technique more than once. It entailed showing himself naked to his adoring fans as soon as he got them alone, then waiting until the women, stunned by his display, surrendered. The technique seemed extremely effective for him. The nagual had to admit that the actor was a great success, except on one count. He was mortally ill. The nagual had seen the black shadow of death that followed him everywhere.

Don Juan explained again something he had told me years before- that our death was a black spot right behind the left shoulder. He said that sorcerers knew when a person was close to dying because they could see the dark spot, which became a moving shadow the exact size and shape of the person to whom it belonged.

As he recognized the imminent presence of death the nagual was plunged into a numbing perplexity. He wondered why the spirit was singling out such a sick person. He had been taught that in a natural state replacement, not repair, prevailed. And the nagual doubted that he had the ability or the strength to heal this young man, or resist the black shadow of his death. He even doubted if he would be able to discover why the spirit had involved him in a display of such obvious waste.

The nagual could do nothing but stay with the actor, follow him around, and wait for the opportunity to see in greater depth. Don Juan explained that a nagual's first reaction, upon being faced with the manifestations of the spirit, is to see the persons involved. The nagual Elias had been meticulous about seeing the man the moment he laid eyes on him. He had also seen the peasant woman who was part of the spirit's manifestation, but he had seen nothing that, in his judgment, could have warranted the spirit's display.

In the course of witnessing another seduction, however, the nagual's ability to see took on a new depth. This time the actor's adoring fan was the daughter of a rich landowner. And from the start she was in complete control. The nagual found out about their rendezvous because he overheard her daring the actor to meet her the next day. The nagual was hiding across the street at dawn when the young woman left her house, and instead of going to early mass she went to join the actor. The actor was waiting for her and she coaxed him into following her to the open fields. He appeared to hesitate, but she taunted him and would not allow him to withdraw.

As the nagual watched them sneaking away, he had an absolute conviction that something was going to happen on that day which neither of the players was anticipating. He saw that the actor's black shadow had grown to almost twice his height. The nagual deduced from the mysterious hard look in the young woman's eyes that she too had felt the black shadow of death at an intuitive level. The actor seemed preoccupied. He did not laugh as he had on other occasions.

They walked quite a distance. At one point, they spotted the nagual following them, but he instantly pretended to be working the land as a peasant who belonged there. That made the couple relax and allowed the nagual to come closer.

Then the moment came when the actor tossed off his clothes and showed himself to the girl. But instead of swooning and falling into his arms as his other conquests had, this girl began to hit him. She kicked and punched him mercilessly and stepped on his bare toes, making him cry out with pain.

The nagual knew the man had not threatened or harmed the young woman. He had not laid a finger on her. She was the only one fighting. He was merely trying to parry the blows, and persistently, but without enthusiasm, trying to entice her by showing her his genitals.

The nagual was filled with both revulsion and admiration. He could perceive that the actor was an irredeemable libertine, but he could also perceive equally easily that there was something unique, although revolting, about him. It baffled the nagual to see that the man's connecting link with the spirit was extraordinarily clear.

Finally the attack ended. The woman stopped beating the actor. But then, instead of running away, she surrendered, lay down and told the actor he could now have his way with her.

The nagual observed that the man was so exhausted he was practically unconscious. Yet despite his fatigue he went right ahead and consummated his seduction.

The nagual was laughing and pondering that useless man's great stamina and determination when the woman screamed and the actor began to gasp. The nagual saw how the black shadow struck the actor. It went like a dagger, with pinpoint accuracy into his gap.

Don Juan made a digression at this point to elaborate on something he had explained before: He had described the gap, an opening in our luminous shell at the height of the navel, where the force of death ceaselessly struck. What don Juan now explained was that when death hit healthy beings it was with a ball-like blow- like the punch of a fist. But when beings were dying, death struck them with a dagger-like thrust.

Thus the nagual Elias knew without any question that the actor was as good as dead, and his death automatically finished his own interest in the spirit's designs. There were no designs left. Death had leveled everything.

He rose from his hiding place and started to leave when something made him hesitate. It was the young woman's calmness. She was nonchalantly putting on the few pieces of clothing she had taken off and was whistling tunelessly as if nothing had happened.

And then the nagual saw that in relaxing to accept the presence of death, the man's body had released a protecting veil and revealed his true nature. He was a double man of tremendous resources, capable of creating a screen for protection or disguise- a natural sorcerer and a perfect candidate for a nagual apprentice, had it not been for the black shadow of death.

The nagual was completely taken aback by that sight. He now understood the designs of the spirit, but failed to comprehend how such a useless man could fit in the sorcerers' scheme of things.

The woman in the meantime had stood up and without so much as a glance at the man, whose body was contorting with death spasms, walked away.

The nagual then saw her luminosity and realized that her extreme aggressiveness was the result of an enormous flow of superfluous energy. He became convinced that if she did not put that energy to sober use, it would get the best of her and there was no telling what misfortunes it would cause her.

As the nagual watched the unconcern with which she walked away, he realized that the spirit had given him another manifestation. He needed to be calm, nonchalant. He needed to act as if he had nothing to lose and intervene for the hell of it. In true nagual fashion he decided to tackle the impossible with no one except the spirit as witness.

Don Juan commented that it took incidents like this to test whether a nagual is the real thing or a fake. Naguals make decisions. With no regard for the consequences, they take action or choose not to. Imposters ponder and become paralyzed. The nagual Elias having made his decision, walked calmly to the side of the dying man and did the first thing his body, not his mind, compelled him to do: he struck the man's assemblage point to cause him to enter into heightened awareness. He struck him frantically again and again until his assemblage point moved. Aided by the force of death itself, the nagual's blows sent the man's assemblage point to a place where death no longer mattered, and there he stopped dying.

By the time the actor was breathing again, the nagual had become aware of the magnitude of his responsibility. If the man was to fend off the force of his death, it would be necessary for him to remain in deep heightened awareness until death had been repelled. The man's advanced physical deterioration meant he could not be moved from the spot or he would instantly die. The nagual did the only thing possible under the circumstances: He built a shack around the body. There, for three months, he nursed the totally immobilized man.

My rational thoughts took over, and instead of just listening, I wanted to know how the nagual Elias could build a shack on someone else's land. I was aware of the rural peoples' passion about land ownership and it's accompanying feelings of territoriality.

Don Juan admitted that he had asked the same question himself. And the nagual Elias had said that the spirit itself had made it possible. This was the case with everything a nagual undertook, providing he followed the spirit's manifestations.

The first thing the nagual Elias did when the actor was breathing again, was to run after the young woman. She was an important part of the spirit's manifestation. He caught up with her not too far from the spot where the actor lay barely alive. Rather than talking to her about the man's plight and trying to convince her to help him, he again assumed total responsibility for his actions and jumped on her like a lion, striking her assemblage point a mighty blow. Both she and the actor were capable of sustaining life or death blows. Her assemblage point moved, but began to shift erratically once it was loose.

The nagual carried the young woman to where the actor lay. Then he spent the entire day trying to keep her from losing her mind and the man from losing his life. When he was fairly certain he had a degree of control he went to the woman's father and told him that lightning must have struck his daughter and made her temporarily mad. He took the father to where she lay and said that the young man, whoever he was, had taken the whole charge of the lightning with his body, thus saving the girl from certain death, but injuring himself to the point that he could not be moved.

The grateful father helped the nagual build the shack for the man who had saved his daughter. And in three months the nagual accomplished the impossible. He healed the young man.

When the time came for the nagual to leave, his sense of responsibility and his duty required him both to warn the young woman about her excess energy and the injurious consequences it would have on her life and well being, and to ask her to join the sorcerers' world, as that would be the only defense against her self-destructive strength.

The woman did not respond. And the nagual Elias was obliged to tell her what every nagual has said to a prospective apprentice throughout the ages: that sorcerers speak of sorcery as a magical, mysterious bird which has paused in it's flight for a moment in order to give man hope and purpose; that sorcerers live under the wing of that bird, which they call the bird of wisdom, the bird of freedom; that they nourish it with their dedication and impeccability. He told her that sorcerers knew the flight of the bird of freedom was always a straight line. It had no way of making a loop, no way of circling back and returning; and that the bird of freedom could do only two things: take sorcerers along, or leave them behind.

The nagual Elias could not talk to the young actor, who was still mortally ill, in the same way. The young man did not have much of a choice. Still, the nagual told him that if he wanted to be cured, he would have to follow the nagual unconditionally. The actor accepted the terms instantly.

The day the nagual Elias and the actor started back home, the young woman was waiting silently at the edge of town. She carried no suitcases; not even a basket. She seemed to have come merely to see them off.

The nagual kept walking without looking at her, but the actor, being carried on a stretcher, strained to say goodbye to her. She laughed and wordlessly merged into the nagual's party. She had no doubts and no problem about leaving everything behind. She had understood perfectly that there was no second chance for her; that the bird of freedom either took sorcerers along or left them behind.

Don Juan commented that that was not surprising. The force of the nagual's personality was always so overwhelming that he was practically irresistible, and the nagual Elias had affected those two people deeply. He had had three months of daily interaction to accustom them to his consistency, his detachment, and his objectivity. They had become enchanted by his sobriety and, above all, by his total dedication to them. Through his example and his actions, the nagual Elias had given them a sustained view of the sorcerers' world: supportive and nurturing, yet utterly demanding. It was a world that admitted very few mistakes.

Don Juan reminded me then of something he had repeated to me often but which I had always managed not to think about. He said that I should not forget, even for an instant, that the bird of freedom had very little patience with indecision, and when it flew away, it never returned.

The chilling resonance of his voice made the surroundings, which only a second before had been peacefully dark, burst with immediacy. Don Juan summoned the peaceful darkness back as fast as he had summoned urgency. He punched me lightly on the arm.

"That woman was so powerful that she could dance circles around anyone," he said. "Her name was Talia."

## 2. The Knock of the Spirit

### The Abstract

We returned to don Juan's house in the early hours of the morning. It took us a long time to climb down the mountain, mainly because I was afraid of stumbling into a precipice in the dark, and don Juan had to keep stopping to catch the breath he lost laughing at me.

I was dead tired, but I could not fall asleep. Before noon, it began to rain. The sound of the heavy downpour on the tile roof, instead of making me feel drowsy, removed every trace of sleepiness.

I got up and went to look for don Juan. I found him dozing in a chair. The moment I approached him he was wide-awake. I said good morning.

"You seem to be having no trouble falling asleep," I commented.

"When you have been afraid or upset, don't lie down to sleep," he said without looking at me. "Sleep sitting up on a soft chair as I'm doing."

He had suggested once that if I wanted to give my body healing rest, I should take long naps lying on my stomach with my face turned to the left and my feet over the foot of the bed. In order to avoid being cold, he recommended I put a soft pillow over my shoulders, away from my neck, and wear heavy socks, or just leave my shoes on.

When I first heard his suggestion, I thought he was being funny, but I later changed my mind. Sleeping in that position helped me rest extraordinarily well. When I commented on the surprising results, he advised that I follow his suggestions to the letter without bothering to believe or disbelieve him.

I suggested to don Juan that he might have told me the night before about the sleeping in a sitting position. I explained to him that the cause of my sleeplessness, besides my extreme fatigue, was a strange concern about what he had told me in the sorcerer's cave.

"Cut it out!" he exclaimed. "You've seen and heard infinitely more distressing things without losing a moment's sleep. Something else is bothering you."

For a moment I thought he meant I was not being truthful with him about my real preoccupation. I began to explain, but he kept talking as if I had not spoken.

"You stated categorically last night that the cave didn't make you feel ill at ease," he said. "Well, it obviously did. Last night I didn't pursue the subject of the cave any further because I was waiting to observe your reaction."

Don Juan explained that the cave had been designed by sorcerers in ancient times to serve as a catalyst. It's shape had been carefully constructed to accommodate two people as two fields of energy. The theory of the sorcerers was that the nature of the rock and the manner in which it had been carved allowed the two bodies, the two luminous balls, to intertwine their energy.

"I took you to that cave on purpose," he continued, "not because I like the place- I don't- but because it was created as an instrument to push the apprentice deep into heightened awareness. But unfortunately, as it helps, it also obscures issues. The ancient sorcerers were not given to thought. They leaned toward action."

"You always say that your benefactor was like that," I said.

"That's my own exaggeration," he answered, "very much like when I say you're a fool. My benefactor was a modern nagual, involved in the pursuit of freedom, but he leaned toward action instead of thoughts. You're a modern nagual, involved in the same quest, but you lean heavily toward the aberrations of reason."

He must have thought his comparison was very funny; his laughter echoed in the empty room.

When I brought the conversation back to the subject of the cave, he pretended not to hear me. I knew he was pretending because of the glint in his eyes and the way he smiled.

"Last night, I deliberately told you the first abstract core," he said, "in the hope that by reflecting on the way I have acted with you over the years you'll get an idea about the other cores. You've been with me for a long time so you know me very well. During every minute of our association I have tried to adjust my actions and thoughts to the patterns of the abstract cores.

"The nagual Elias's story is another matter. Although it seems to be a story about people, it is really a story about intent. Intent creates edifices [* edifice- a structure that has a roof and walls stands more or less permanently in one place] before us and invites us to enter them. This is the way sorcerers understand what is happening around them."

Don Juan reminded me that I had always insisted on trying to discover the underlying order in everything he said to me. I thought he was criticizing me for my attempt to turn whatever he was teaching me into a social science problem. I began to tell him that my outlook had changed under his influence. He stopped me and smiled.

"You really don't think too well," he said and sighed. "I want you to understand the underlying order of what I teach you. My objection is to what you think is the underlying order. To you, it means secret procedures or a hidden consistency. To me, it means two things: both the edifice that intent manufactures in the blink of an eye and places in front of us to enter, and the signs it gives us so we won't get lost once we are inside.

"As you can see, the story of the nagual Elias was more than merely an account of the sequential details that made up the event," he went on. "Underneath all that was the edifice of intent. And the story was meant to give you an idea of what the naguals of the past were like, so that you would recognize how they acted in order to adjust their thoughts and actions to the edifices of intent"

There was a prolonged silence. I did not have anything to say. Rather than let the conversation die, I said the first thing that came into my mind. I said that from the stories I had heard about the nagual Elias I had formed a very positive opinion of him. I liked the nagual Elias, but for unknown reasons, everything don Juan had told me about the nagual Julian bothered me.

The mere mention of my discomfort delighted don Juan beyond measure. He had to stand up from his chair lest he choke on his laughter. He put his arm on my shoulder and said that we either loved or hated those who were reflections of ourselves.

Again a silly self-consciousness prevented me from asking him what he meant. Don Juan kept on laughing, obviously aware of my mood. He finally commented that the nagual Julian was like a child whose sobriety and moderation came always from without. He had no inner discipline beyond his training as an apprentice in sorcery.

I had an irrational urge to defend myself. I told don Juan that my discipline came from within me.

"Of course," he said patronizingly. "You just can't expect to be exactly like him." And began to laugh again.

Sometimes don Juan exasperated me so that I was ready to yell. But my mood did not last. It dissipated so rapidly that another concern began to loom. I asked don Juan if it was possible that I had entered into heightened awareness without being conscious of it? Or maybe I had remained in it for days?

"At this stage you enter into heightened awareness all by yourself," he said. "Heightened awareness is a mystery only for our reason. In practice, it's very simple. As with everything else, we complicate matters by trying to make the immensity that surrounds us reasonable."

He remarked that I should be thinking about the abstract core he had given me instead of arguing uselessly about my person.

I told him that I had been thinking about it all morning and had come to realize that the metaphorical theme of the story was the manifestations of the spirit. What I could not discern, however, was the abstract core he was talking about. It had to be something unstated.

"I repeat," he said, as if he were a schoolteacher drilling his students, "the manifestations of the spirit is the name for the first abstract core in the sorcery stories. Obviously, what sorcerers recognize as an abstract core is something that bypasses you at this moment. That part which escapes you sorcerers know as the edifice of intent, or the silent voice of the spirit, or the ulterior arrangement of the abstract."

I said I understood ulterior to mean something not overtly revealed, as in 'ulterior motive'. And he replied that in this case ulterior meant more; it meant knowledge without words, outside our immediate comprehension- especially mine. He allowed that the comprehension he was referring to was merely beyond my aptitudes of the moment; not beyond my ultimate possibilities for understanding.

"If the abstract cores are beyond my comprehension, what's the point of talking about them?" I asked.

"The rule says that the abstract cores and the sorcery stories must be told at this point," he replied. "And some day the ulterior arrangement of the abstract, which is knowledge without words or the edifice of intent inherent in the stories, will be revealed to you by the stories themselves."

I still did not understand.

"The ulterior arrangement of the abstract is not merely the order in which the abstract cores were presented to you," he explained, "or what they have in common either, nor even the web that joins them. Rather it's to know the abstract directly, without the intervention of language."

He scrutinized me in silence from head to toe with the obvious purpose of seeing me.

"It's not evident to you yet," he declared.

He made a gesture of impatience, even short temper, as though he were annoyed at my slowness. And that worried me. Don Juan was not given to expressions of psychological displeasure.

"It has nothing to do with you or your actions," he said when I asked if he was angry or disappointed with me. "It was a thought that crossed my mind the moment I saw you. There is a feature in your luminous being that the old sorcerers would have given anything to have."

"Tell me what it is," I demanded.

"I'll remind you of this some other time," he said.

"Meanwhile, let's continue with the element that propels us: the abstract; the element without which there could be no warrior's path, nor any warriors in search of knowledge."

He said that the difficulties I was experiencing were nothing new to him. He himself had gone through agonies in order to understand the ulterior order of the abstract. And had it not been for the helping hand of the nagual Elias, he would have wound up just like his benefactor, all action and very little understanding.

"What was the nagual Elias like?" I asked, to change the subject.

"He was not like his disciple at all," don Juan said. "He was an Indian. Very dark and massive. He had rough features, big mouth, strong nose, small black eyes, thick black hair with no gray in it. He was shorter than the nagual Julian and had big hands and feet. He was very humble and very wise, but he had no flare. Compared with my benefactor, he was dull. Always all by himself, pondering questions. The nagual Julian used to joke that his teacher imparted wisdom by the ton. Behind his back he used to call him the nagual Tonnage.

"I never saw the reason for his jokes," don Juan went on. "To me the nagual Elias was like a breath of fresh air. He would patiently explain everything to me. Very much as I explain things to you, but perhaps with a bit more of something. I wouldn't call it compassion, but rather, empathy. Warriors are incapable of feeling compassion because they no longer feel sorry for themselves. Without the driving force of self-pity, compassion is meaningless."

"Are you saying, don Juan, that a warrior is all for himself?"

"In a way, yes. For a warrior everything begins and ends with himself. However, his contact with the abstract causes him to overcome his feeling of self-importance. Then the self becomes abstract and impersonal.

"The nagual Elias felt that our lives and our personalities were quite similar," don Juan continued. "For this reason, he felt obliged to help me. I don't feel that similarity with you, so I suppose I regard you very much the way the nagual Julian used to regard me."

Don Juan said that the nagual Elias took him under his wing from the very first day he arrived at his benefactor's house to start his apprenticeship and began to explain what was taking place in his training, regardless of whether don Juan was capable of understanding. His urge to help don Juan was so intense that he practically held him prisoner. He protected him in this manner from the nagual Julian's harsh onslaughts.

"At the beginning, I used to stay at the nagual Elias's house all the time," don Juan continued. "And I loved it. In my benefactor's house I was always on the lookout; on guard; afraid of what he was going to do to me next. But in the Nagual Elias's home, I felt confident, at ease.

"My benefactor used to press me mercilessly. And I couldn't figure out why he was pressuring me so hard. I thought that the man was plain crazy."

Don Juan said that the nagual Elias was an Indian from the state of Oaxaca, who had been taught by another nagual named Rosendo, who came from the same area. Don Juan described the nagual Elias as being a very conservative man who cherished his privacy. And yet he was a famous healer and sorcerer, not only in Oaxaca, but in all of southern Mexico. Nonetheless, in spite of his occupation and notoriety, he lived in complete isolation at the opposite end of the country, in northern Mexico.

Don Juan stopped talking. Raising his eyebrows, he fixed me with a questioning look. But all I wanted was for him to continue his story.

"Every single time I think you should ask questions, you don't," he said. "I'm sure you heard me say that the nagual Elias was a famous sorcerer who dealt with people daily in southern Mexico, and at the same time he was a hermit in northern Mexico. Doesn't that arouse your curiosity?"

I felt abysmally stupid. I told him that the thought had crossed my mind, as he was telling me those facts, that the man must have had terrible difficulty commuting.

Don Juan laughed, and since he had made me aware of the question, I asked how it had been possible for the nagual Elias to be in two places at once.

"Dreaming is a sorcerer's jet plane," he said. "The nagual Elias was a dreamer as my benefactor was a stalker. He was able to create and project what sorcerers know as the dreaming body, or the Other; and to be in two distant places at the same time. With his dreaming body, he could carry on his business as a sorcerer, and with his natural self be a recluse."

I remarked that it amazed me that I could accept so easily the premise that the nagual Elias had the ability to project a solid three-dimensional image of himself, and yet could not for the life of me understand the explanations about the abstract cores.

Don Juan said that I could accept the idea of the nagual Elfas's dual life because the spirit was making final adjustments in my capacity for awareness. And I exploded into a barrage of protests at the obscurity of his statement.

"It isn't obscure," he said. "It's a statement of fact. You could say that it's an incomprehensible fact for the moment, but the moment will change."

Before I could reply, he began to talk again about the nagual Elias. He said that the nagual Elias had a very inquisitive mind and could work well with his hands. In his journeys as a dreamer, he saw many objects which he copied in wood and forged iron. Don Juan assured me that some of those models were of a haunting, exquisite beauty.

"What kind of objects were the originals?" I asked.

"There's no way of knowing," don Juan said. "You've got to consider that because he was an Indian, the nagual Elias went into his dreaming journeys the way a wild animal prowls for food. An animal never shows up at a site when there are signs of activity. He comes only when no one is around. The nagual Elias as a solitary dreamer visited, let's say, the junkyard of infinity when no one was around, and copied whatever he saw, but never knew what those things were used for, or their source."

Again I had no trouble accepting what he was saying. The idea did not appear to me farfetched in any way. I was about to comment when he interrupted me with a gesture of his eyebrows. He then continued his account about the nagual Elias.

"Visiting him was for me the ultimate treat," he said, "and simultaneously, a source of strange guilt. I used to get bored to death there. Not because the nagual Elfas was boring, but because the nagual Julian had no peers and he spoiled anyone for life."

"But I thought you were confident and at ease in the nagual Elias's house," I said.

"I was, and that was the source of my guilt and my imagined problem. Like you, I loved to torment myself. I think at the very beginning I found peace in the nagual Elias's company, but later on, when I understood the nagual Julian better, I went his way."

He told me that the nagual Elias's house had an open, roofed section in the front, where he had a forge and a carpentry bench and tools. The tiled-roof adobe house consisted of a huge room with a dirt floor where he lived with five women seers, who were actually his wives. There were also four men, sorcerer-seers of his party who lived in small houses around the nagual's house. They were all Indians from different parts of the country who had migrated to northern Mexico.

"The nagual Elias had great respect for sexual energy," don Juan said. "He believed it has been given to us so we can use it in dreaming. He believed dreaming had fallen into disuse because it can upset the precarious mental balance of susceptible people.

"I've taught you dreaming the same way he taught me," he continued. "He taught me that while we dream, the assemblage point moves very gently and naturally. Mental balance is nothing but the fixing of the assemblage point on one spot we're accustomed to. If dreams make that point move, and dreaming is used to control that natural movement, and sexual energy is needed for dreaming, the result is sometimes disastrous when sexual energy is dissipated in sex instead of dreaming. Then dreamers move their assemblage point erratically and lose their minds."

"What are you trying to tell me, don Juan?" I asked because I felt that the subject of dreaming had not been a natural drift in the conversation.

"You are a dreamer" he said. "If you're not careful with your sexual energy, you might as well get used to the idea of erratic shifts of your assemblage point. A moment ago you were bewildered by your reactions. Well, your assemblage point moves almost erratically because your sexual energy is not in balance."

I made a stupid and inappropriate comment about the sex life of adult males.

"Our sexual energy is what governs dreaming," he explained. "The nagual Elias taught me- and I taught you- that you either make love with your sexual energy or you dream with it. There is no other way. The reason I mention it at all is because you are having great difficulty shifting your assemblage point to grasp our last topic: the abstract.

"The same thing happened to me," don Juan went on. "It was only when my sexual energy was freed from the world that everything fit into place. That is the rule for dreamers. Stalkers are the opposite. My benefactor was, you could say, a sexual libertine both as an average man and as a nagual."

Don Juan seemed to be on the verge of revealing his benefactor's doings, but he obviously changed his mind. He shook his head and said that I was way too stiff for such revelations. I did not insist.

He said that the nagual Elias had the sobriety that only dreamers acquired after inconceivable battles with themselves. He used his sobriety to plunge himself into the task of answering don Juan's questions.

"The nagual Elias explained that my difficulty in understanding the spirit was the same as his own," don Juan continued. "He thought there were two different issues. One, the need to understand indirectly what the spirit is, and the other, to understand the spirit directly.

"You're having problems with the first. Once you understand what the spirit is, the second issue will be resolved automatically, and vice versa. If the spirit speaks to you, using it's silent words, you will certainly know immediately what the spirit is."

He said that the nagual Elias believed that the difficulty was our reluctance to accept the idea that knowledge could exist without words to explain it.

"But I have no difficulty accepting that," I said.

"Accepting this proposition is not as easy as saying you accept it," don Juan said. "The nagual Elias used to tell me that the whole of humanity has moved away from the abstract, although at one time we must have been close to it. It must have been our sustaining force. And then something happened and pulled us away from the abstract. Now we can't get back to it. He used to say that it takes years for an apprentice to be able to go back to the abstract, that is, to know that knowledge and language can exist independent of each other."

Don Juan repeated that the crux of our difficulty in going back to the abstract was our refusal to accept that we could know without words, or even without thoughts.

I was going to argue that he was talking nonsense when I got the strong feeling I was missing something and that his point was of crucial importance to me. He was really trying to tell me something; something I either could not grasp or which could not be told completely.

"Knowledge and language are separate," he repeated softly.

And I was just about to say, "I know it," as if indeed I knew it, when I caught myself.

"I told you there is no way to talk about the spirit," he continued, "because the spirit can only be experienced. Sorcerers try to explain this condition when they say that the spirit is nothing you can see or feel. But it's there looming over us always. Sometimes it comes to some of us.

Most of the time it seems indifferent."

I kept quiet. And he continued to explain. He said that the spirit in many ways was a sort of wild animal. It kept it's distance from us until a moment when something enticed it forward. It was then that the spirit manifested itself.

I raised the point that if the spirit wasn't an entity, or a presence, and had no essence, how could anyone entice it?

"Your problem," he said, "is that you consider only your own idea of what's abstract. For instance, the inner essence of man, or the fundamental principle, are abstracts for you. Or perhaps something a bit less vague, such as: character, volition, courage, dignity, honor. The spirit, of course, can be described in terms of all of these. And that's what's so confusing- that it's all these and none of them."

He added that what I considered abstractions were either the opposites of all the practicalities I could think of, or things I had decided did not have concrete existence.

"Whereas for a sorcerer an abstract is something with no parallel in the human condition," he said.

"But they're the same thing," I shouted. "Don't you see that we're both talking about the same thing?"

"We are not," he insisted. "For a sorcerer, the spirit is an abstract simply because he knows it without words or even thoughts. It's an abstract because he can't conceive what the spirit is. Yet without the slightest chance or desire to understand it, a sorcerer handles the spirit. He recognizes it, beckons it, entices it, becomes familiar with it, and expresses it with his acts."

I shook my head in despair. I could not see the difference.

"The root of your misconception is that I have used the term 'abstract' to describe the spirit," he said. "For you, abstracts are words which describe states of intuition. An example is the word 'spirit' which doesn't describe reason or pragmatic experience, and which, of course, is of no use to you other than to tickle your fancy."

I was furious with don Juan. I called him obstinate and he laughed at me. He suggested that if I would think about the proposition that knowledge might be independent of language, without bothering to understand it, perhaps I could see the light.

"Consider this," he said. "It was not the act of meeting me that mattered to you. The day I met you, you met the abstract. But since you couldn't talk about it, you didn't notice it. Sorcerers meet the abstract without thinking about it or seeing it or touching it or feeling it's presence."

I remained quiet because I did not enjoy arguing with him. At times I considered him to be quite willfully abstruse. [* abstruse- difficult to penetrate; incomprehensible to one of ordinary understanding or knowledge] But don Juan seemed to be enjoying himself immensely.

## The Last Seduction of the Nagual Julian

It was as cool and quiet in the patio of don Juan's house as in the cloister of a convent. There were a number of large fruit trees planted extremely close together, which seemed to regulate the temperature and absorb all noises. When I first came to his house, I had made critical remarks about the illogical way the fruit trees had been planted. I would have given them more space.

His answer was that those trees were not his property, they were free and independent warrior trees that had joined his party of warriors; and that my comments- which applied to regular trees- were not relevant. His reply sounded metaphorical to me. What I didn't know then was that don Juan meant everything he said literally.

Don Juan and I were sitting in cane armchairs facing the fruit trees now. The trees were all bearing fruit. I commented that it was not only a beautiful sight but an extremely intriguing one, for it was not the fruit season.

"There is an interesting story about it," he admitted. "As you know, these trees are warriors of my party. They are bearing now because all the members of my party have been talking and expressing feelings about our definitive journey, here in front of them. And the trees know now that when we embark on our definitive journey, they will accompany us."

I looked at him, astonished.

"I can't leave them behind," he explained. "They are warriors too. They have thrown their lot in with the nagual's party. And they know how I feel about them. The assemblage point of trees is located very low in their enormous luminous shell, and that permits them to know our feelings; for instance, the feelings we are having now as we discuss my definitive journey."

I remained quiet, for I did not want to dwell on the subject. Don Juan spoke and dispelled my mood.

"The second abstract core of the sorcery stories is called the Knock of the Spirit," he said. "The first core, the Manifestations of the Spirit, is the edifice that intent builds and places before a sorcerer, then invites him to enter. It is the edifice of intent seen by a sorcerer. The Knock of the Spirit is the same edifice seen by the beginner who is invited- or rather forced- to enter.

"This second abstract core could be a story in itself. The story says that after the spirit had manifested itself to that man we have talked about and had gotten no response, the spirit laid a trap for the man. It was a final subterfuge, not because the man was special, but because the incomprehensible chain of events of the spirit made that man available at the very moment that the spirit knocked on the door.

"It goes without saying that whatever the spirit revealed to that man made no sense to him. In fact, it went against everything the man knew; everything he was. The man of course- in no uncertain terms- refused on the spot to have anything to do with the spirit. He wasn't going to fall for such preposterous nonsense. He knew better. The result was a total stalemate. [* stalemate- a situation in which no progress can be made or no advancement is possible]

"I can say that this is an idiotic story," he continued. "I can say that what I've given you is the pacifier [* pacifier- someone or something intended to bring peace] for those who are uncomfortable with the silence of the abstract."

He peered at me for a moment and then smiled.

"You like words," he said accusingly. "The mere idea of silent knowledge scares you. But stories, no matter how stupid, delight you and make you feel secure."

His smile was so mischievous that I couldn't help laughing.

Then he reminded me that I had already heard his detailed account of the first time the spirit had knocked on his door. For a moment I could not figure out what he was talking about.

"It was not just my benefactor who stumbled upon me as I was dying from the gunshot," he explained. "The spirit also found me and knocked on my door that day. My benefactor understood that he was there to be a conduit for the spirit. Without the spirit's intervention, meeting my benefactor would have meant nothing."

He said that a nagual can be a conduit only after the spirit has manifested it's willingness to be used- either almost imperceptibly or with outright commands. It was therefore not possible for a nagual to choose his apprentices according to his own volition, or his own calculations. But once the willingness of the spirit was revealed through omens, the nagual spared no effort to satisfy it.

"After a lifetime of practice," he continued, "sorcerers and naguals in particular know if the spirit is inviting them to enter the edifice being flaunted before them. They have learned to discipline their connecting links to intent. So they are always forewarned; always know what the spirit has in store for them."

Don Juan said that progress along the sorcerers' path was, in general, a drastic process the purpose of which was to bring this connecting link to order. The average man's connecting link with intent is practically dead, and sorcerers begin with a link that is useless because it does not respond voluntarily.

He stressed that in order to revive that link sorcerers needed a rigorous, fierce purpose- a special state of mind called unbending intent. Accepting that the nagual was the only being capable of supplying unbending intent was the most difficult part of the sorcerer's apprenticeship. I argued that I could not see the difficulty.

"An apprentice is someone who is striving to clear and revive his connecting link with the spirit," he explained. "Once the link is revived, he is no longer an apprentice; but until that time, in order to keep going he needs a fierce purpose, which of course he doesn't have. So he allows the nagual to provide the purpose, and to do that he has to relinquish his individuality. That's the difficult part."

He reminded me of something he had told me often: that volunteers were not welcome in the sorcerers' world because they already had a purpose of their own- which made it particularly hard for them to relinquish their individuality. If the sorcerers' world demanded ideas and actions contrary to the volunteers' purpose, the volunteers simply refused to change.

"Reviving an apprentice's link is a nagual's most challenging and intriguing work," don Juan continued, "and one of his biggest headaches too. Depending, of course, on the apprentice's personality, the designs of the spirit are either sublimely simple or the most complex labyrinths." [* labyrinth- complex system of paths or tunnels in which it is easy to get lost]

Don Juan assured me that, although I might have had notions to the contrary, my apprenticeship had not been as onerous to him as his must have been to his benefactor. He admitted that I had a modicum of self-discipline that came in very handy, while he had had none whatever. And his benefactor, in turn, had had even less.

"The difference is discernible in the manifestations of the spirit," he continued. "In some cases, they are barely noticeable. In my case, they were commands. I had been shot. Blood was pouring out of a hole in my chest. My benefactor had to act with speed and sureness, just as his own benefactor had for him. Sorcerers know that the more difficult the command is, the more difficult the disciple turns out to be."

Don Juan explained that one of the most advantageous aspects of his association with two naguals was that he could hear the same stories from two opposite points of view. For instance, the story about the nagual Elias and the manifestations of the spirit from the apprentice's perspective, was the story of the spirit's difficult knock on his benefactor's door.

"Everything connected with my benefactor was very difficult," he said and began to laugh. "When he was twenty-four years old, the spirit didn't just knock on his door, it nearly banged it down."

He said that the story had really begun years earlier when his benefactor had been a handsome adolescent from a good family in Mexico City. He was wealthy, educated, charming, and had a charismatic personality. Women fell in love with him at first sight. But he was already self-indulgent and undisciplined; lazy about anything that did not give him immediate gratification.

Don Juan said that with that personality and his type of upbringing- he was the only son of a wealthy widow who, together with his four adoring sisters, doted on him- he could only behave one way. He indulged in every impropriety he could think of. Even among his equally self-indulgent friends, he was seen as a moral delinquent who lived to do anything that the world considered morally wrong.

In the long run, his excesses weakened him physically and he fell mortally ill with tuberculosis- [* tuberculosis- infection transmitted by inhalation or ingestion of tubercle bacilli and manifested in fever and small lesions (usually in the lungs but in various other parts of the body in acute stages)] the dreaded disease of the time. But his illness, instead of restraining him, created a physical condition in which he felt more sensual than ever. Since he did not have one iota of self-control, he gave himself over fully to debauchery, [* debauchery- a wild gathering involving excessive drinking and promiscuity] and his health deteriorated until there was no hope.

The saying that 'it never rains but it pours' was certainly true for don Juan's benefactor then. As his health declined, his mother, who was his only source of support and the only restraint on him, died. She left him a sizable inheritance which should have supported him adequately for life, but undisciplined as he was, in a few months he had spent every cent. With no profession or trade to fall back on, he was left to scrounge for a living.

Without money he no longer had friends; and even the women who once loved him turned their backs. For the first time in his life, he found himself confronting a harsh reality. Considering the state of his health, it should have been the end. But he was resilient. He decided to work for a living.

His sensual habits, however, could not be changed, and they forced him to seek work in the only place he felt comfortable: the theater. His qualifications were that he was a born ham, and had spent most of his adult life in the company of actresses. He joined a theatrical troupe in the provinces away from his familiar circle of friends and acquaintances, and became a very intense actor; the consumptive hero in religious and morality plays.

Don Juan commented on the strange irony that had always marked his benefactor's life. There he was, a perfect reprobate, [* reprobate- a person without moral scruples] dying as a result of his dissolute ways, and playing the roles of saints and mystics. He even played Jesus in the Passion Play during Holy Week.

His health lasted through one theatrical tour of the northern states. Then two things happened in the city of Durango: his life came to an end, and the spirit knocked on his door.

Both his death and the spirit's knock came at the same time- in broad daylight in the bushes. His death caught him in the act of seducing a young woman. He was already extremely weak, and that day he overexerted himself. The young woman, who was vivacious and strong and madly infatuated, had by promising to make love induced him to walk to a secluded spot miles from nowhere. And there she had fought him off for hours. When she finally submitted, he was completely worn out, and coughing so badly that he could hardly breathe.

During his last passionate outburst he felt a searing pain in his shoulder. His chest felt as if it were being ripped apart and a coughing spell made him retch uncontrollably. But his compulsion to seek pleasure kept him going until his death came in the form of a hemorrhage. It was then that the spirit made it's entry, borne by an Indian who came to his aid. Earlier he had noticed the Indian following them around, but had not given him a second thought, absorbed as he was in the seduction.

He saw, as in a dream, the girl. She was not scared nor did she lose her composure. Quietly and efficiently she put her clothes back on, and took off as fast as a rabbit chased by hounds.

He also saw the Indian rushing to him trying to make him sit up. He heard him saying idiotic things. He heard him pledging himself to the spirit and mumbling incomprehensible words in a foreign language. Then the Indian acted very quickly. Standing behind him, he gave him a smacking blow on the back.

Very rationally, the dying man deduced that the Indian was trying either to dislodge the blood clot or to kill him.

As the Indian struck him repeatedly on the back, the dying man became convinced that the Indian was the woman's lover or husband and was murdering him. But seeing the intensely brilliant eyes of that Indian, he changed his mind. He knew that the Indian was simply crazy and was not connected with the woman.

With his last bit of consciousness, he focused his attention on the man's mumblings. What he was saying was that the power of man was incalculable; that death existed only because we had intended it since the moment of our birth; that the intent of death could be suspended by making the assemblage point change positions.

He then knew that the Indian was totally insane. His situation was so theatrical- dying at the hands of a crazy Indian mumbling gibberish- that he vowed he would be a ham actor to the bitter end, and he promised himself not to die of either the hemorrhaging or the blows, but to die of laughter. And he laughed until he was dead.

Don Juan remarked that naturally his benefactor could not possibly have taken the Indian seriously. No one could take such a person seriously, especially not a prospective apprentice who was not supposed to be volunteering for the sorcery task.

Don Juan then said that he had given me different versions of what that sorcery task consisted. He said it would not be presumptuous of him to disclose that, from the spirit's point of view, the task consisted of clearing our connecting link with it.

The edifice that intent flaunts before us is, then, a clearinghouse; within which we find not so much the procedures to clear our connecting link, as the silent knowledge that allows the clearing process to take place. Without that silent knowledge no process could work, and all we would have would be an indefinite sense of needing something.

He explained that the events unleashed by sorcerers as a result of silent knowledge were so simple and yet so abstract that sorcerers had decided long ago to speak of those events only in symbolic terms. The manifestations and the knock of the spirit were examples.

Don Juan said that, for instance, a description of what took place during the initial meeting between a nagual and a prospective apprentice from the sorcerers' point of view, would be absolutely incomprehensible.

It would be nonsense to explain that the nagual, by virtue of his lifelong experience, was focusing something we couldn't imagine, his second attention- the increased awareness gained through sorcery training- on his invisible connection with some indefinable abstract. He was doing this to emphasize and clarify someone else's invisible connection with that indefinable abstract.

He remarked that each of us was barred from silent knowledge by natural barriers, specific to each individual; and that the most impregnable of my barriers was the drive to disguise my complacency as independence.

I challenged him to give me a concrete example. I reminded him that he had once warned me that a favorite debating ploy was to raise general criticisms that could not be supported by concrete examples. Don Juan looked at me and beamed.

"In the past, I used to give you power plants," he said. "At first, you went to extremes to convince yourself that what you were experiencing were hallucinations. Then you wanted them to be special hallucinations. I remember I made fun of your insistence on calling them didactic hallucinatory experiences."

He said that my need to prove my illusory independence forced me into a position where I could not accept what he had told me was happening, although it was what I silently knew for myself. I knew he was employing power plants, as the very limited tools they were, to make me enter partial or temporary states of heightened awareness by moving my assemblage point away from it's habitual location.

"You used your barrier of independence to get you over that obstruction," he went on. "The same barrier has continued to work to this day, so you still retain that sense of indefinite anguish, perhaps not so pronounced. Now the question is, how are you arranging your conclusions so that your current experiences fit into your scheme of complacency?"

I confessed that the only way I could maintain my independence was not to think about my experiences at all.

Don Juan's hearty laugh nearly made him fall out of his cane chair. He stood and walked around to catch his breath. He sat down again and composed himself. He pushed his chair back and crossed his legs.

He said that we, as average men, did not know, nor would we ever know, that it was something utterly real and functional- our connecting link with intent- which gave us our hereditary preoccupation with fate. He asserted that during our active lives we never have the chance to go beyond the level of mere preoccupation, because since time immemorial the lull of daily affairs has made us drowsy.

It is only when our lives are nearly over that our hereditary preoccupation with fate begins to take on a different character. It begins to make us see through the fog of daily affairs.

Unfortunately, this awakening always comes hand in hand with loss of energy caused by aging; when we have no more strength left to turn our preoccupation into a pragmatic and positive discovery. At this point, all there is left is an amorphous, piercing anguish, a longing for something indescribable, and simple anger at having missed out.

"I like poems for many reasons," he said. "One reason is that they catch the mood of warriors and explain what can hardly be explained."

He conceded that poets were keenly aware of our connecting link with the spirit, but that they were aware of it intuitively, not in the deliberate, pragmatic way of sorcerers.

"Poets have no firsthand knowledge of the spirit," he went on. "That is why their poems cannot really hit the center of true gestures for the spirit. They hit pretty close to it, though."

He picked up one of my poetry books from a chair next to him, a collection by Juan Ramon Jimenez. He opened it to where he had placed a marker, handed it to me and signaled me to read.

Is it I who walks tonight in my room

or is it the beggar who was prowling in my garden at nightfall?

I look around and find that everything is the same and it is not the same

Was the window open?

Had I not already fallen asleep?

Was not the garden pale green?...

The sly was clear and blue...

And there are clouds and it is windy

and the garden is dark and gloomy.

I think that my hair was black...

I was dressed in gray...

And my hair is gray

and I am wearing black...

Is this my gait?

Does this voice, which now resounds in me,

have the rhythms of the voice I used to have?

Am I myself or am I the beggar

who was prowling in my garden at nightfall?

I look around...

There are clouds and it is windy...

The garden is dark and gloomy...

I come and go...

Is it not true that I had already fallen asleep?

My hair is gray...

And everything is the same and it is not the same...

I reread the poem to myself and I caught the poet's mood of impotence and bewilderment. I asked don Juan if he felt the same.

"I think the poet senses the pressure of aging and the anxiety that that realization produces," don Juan said. "But that is only one part of it. The other part, which interests me, is that the poet, although he never moves his assemblage point, intuits that something extraordinary is at stake. He intuits with great certainty that there is some unnamed factor, awesome because of it's simplicity, that is determining our fate."

# 3. The Trickery of the Spirit

## Dusting the Link with the Spirit

The sun had not yet risen from behind the eastern peaks, but the day was already hot. As we reached the first steep slope a couple of miles along the road from the outskirts of town, don Juan stopped walking and moved to the side of the paved highway. He sat down by some huge boulders that had been dynamited from the face of the mountain when they cut the road; and signaled me to join him. We usually stopped there to talk or rest on our way to the nearby mountains. Don Juan announced that this trip was going to be long, and that we might be in the mountains for days.

"We are going to talk now about the third abstract core," don Juan said. "It is called the trickery of the spirit, or the trickery of the abstract, or stalking oneself, or dusting the link."

I was surprised at the variety of names, but said nothing. I waited for him to continue his explanation.

"And again, as with the first and second core," he went on, "it could be a story in itself. The story says that after knocking on the door of that man we've been talking about, and having no success with him, the spirit used the only means available: trickery. After all, the spirit had resolved previous impasses with trickery. It was obvious that if it wanted to make an impact on this man it had to cajole him. So the spirit began to instruct the man on the mysteries of sorcery. And the sorcery apprenticeship became what it is: a route of artifice [* artifice- a deceptive manoeuvre] and subterfuge. [* subterfuge- something intended to misrepresent the true nature of an activity]

"The story says that the spirit cajoled the man by making him shift back and forth between levels of awareness to show him how to save the energy needed to strengthen his connecting link."

Don Juan told me that if we apply his story to a modern setting, we had the case of the nagual- the living conduit of the spirit- repeating the structure of this abstract core and resorting to artifice and subterfuge in order to teach.

Suddenly he stood and started to walk toward the mountain range. I followed him and we started our climb, side by side.

In the very late afternoon, we reached the top of the high mountains. Even at that altitude, it was still very warm. All day we had followed a nearly invisible trail. Finally we reached a small clearing; an ancient lookout post commanding the north and west.

We sat there and don Juan returned our conversation to the sorcery stories. He said that now I knew the story of intent manifesting itself to the nagual Elias and the story of the spirit knocking on the nagual Julian's door. And I knew how he had met the spirit, and I certainly could not forget how I had met it. All these stories, he declared, had the same structure; only the characters differed. Each story was an abstract tragic comedy with one abstract player, intent, and two human actors, the nagual and his apprentice. The script was the abstract core.

I thought I had finally understood what he meant, but I could not quite explain even to myself what it was I understood, nor could I explain it to don Juan. When I tried to put my thoughts into words I found myself babbling.

Don Juan seemed to recognize my state of mind. He suggested that I relax and listen. He told me his next story was about the process of bringing an apprentice into the realm of the spirit; a process sorcerers called the trickery of the spirit, or dusting the connecting link to intent.

"I've already told you the story of how the nagual Julian took me to his house after I was shot and tended my wound until I recovered," don Juan continued. "But I didn't tell you how he dusted my link; how he taught me to stalk myself.

"The first thing a nagual does with his prospective apprentice is to trick him. That is, he gives him a jolt on his connecting link to the spirit. There are two ways of doing this. One is through semi-normal channels, which I used with you, and the other is by means of outright sorcery, which my benefactor used on me."

Don Juan again told me the story of how his benefactor had convinced the people who had gathered at the road that the wounded man was his son. Then he had paid some men to carry don Juan, unconscious from shock and loss of blood, to his own house. Don Juan woke there, days later, and found a kind old man and his fat wife tending his wound.

The old man said his name was Belisario, and that his wife was a famous healer, and that both of them were healing his wound. Don Juan told them he had no money, and Belisario suggested that when he recovered, payment of some sort could be arranged.

Don Juan said that he was thoroughly confused, which was nothing new to him. He was just a muscular, reckless twenty-year-old Indian, with no brains, no formal education, and a terrible temper. He had no conception of gratitude. He thought it was very kind of the old man and his wife to have helped him, but his intention was to wait for his wound to heal, and then simply vanish in the middle of the night.

When he had recovered enough and was ready to flee, old Belisario took him into a room and in trembling whispers disclosed that the house where they were staying belonged to a monstrous man who was holding his wife and him prisoner. He asked don Juan to help them to regain their freedom; to escape from their captor and tormentor.

Before don Juan could reply, a monstrous fish-faced man right out of a horror tale burst into the room as if he had been listening behind the door. He was greenish-gray, had only one unblinking eye in the middle of his forehead, and was as big as a door. He lurched at don Juan, hissing like a serpent ready to tear him apart, and frightened him so greatly that he fainted.

"His way of giving me a jolt on my connecting link with the spirit was masterful." Don Juan laughed. "My benefactor, of course, had shifted me into heightened awareness prior to the monster's entrance, so that what I actually saw as a monstrous man was what sorcerers call an inorganic being; a formless energy field."

Don Juan said that he knew countless cases in which his benefactor's devilishness created hilariously embarrassing situations for all his apprentices, especially for don Juan himself, whose seriousness and stiffness made him the perfect subject for his benefactor's didactic [* didactic- instructive (especially excessively)] jokes. He added as an afterthought that it went without saying that these jokes entertained his benefactor immensely.

"If you think I laugh at you- which I do- it's nothing compared with how he laughed at me," don Juan continued. "My devilish benefactor had learned to weep to hide his laughter. You just can't imagine how he used to cry when I first began my apprenticeship."

Continuing with his story, don Juan stated that his life was never the same after the shock of seeing that monstrous man. His benefactor made sure of it. Don Juan explained that once a nagual has introduced his prospective disciple, especially his nagual disciple, to trickery he must struggle to assure his compliance. This compliance could be of two different kinds.

Either the prospective disciple is so disciplined and tuned that only his decision to join the nagual is needed, as had been the case with young Talia; or the prospective disciple is someone with little or no discipline, in which case a nagual has to expend time and a great deal of labor to convince his disciple.

In don Juan's case, because he was a wild young peasant without a thought in his head, the process of reeling him in took bizarre turns.

Soon after the first jolt, his benefactor gave him a second one by showing don Juan his ability to transform himself. One day his benefactor became a young man. Don Juan was incapable of conceiving of this transformation as anything but an example of a consummate actor's art.

"How did he accomplish those changes?" I asked.

"He was both a magician and an artist," don Juan replied. "His magic was that he transformed himself by moving his assemblage point into the position that would bring on whatever particular change he desired. And his art was the perfection of his transformations."

"I don't quite understand what you're telling me," I said.

Don Juan said that perception is the hinge for everything man is or does, and that perception is ruled by the location of the assemblage point. Therefore, if that point changes positions, man's perception of the world changes accordingly. The sorcerer who knew exactly where to place his assemblage point could become anything he wanted.

"The nagual Julian's proficiency in moving his assemblage point was so magnificent that he could elicit the subtlest transformations," don Juan continued. "When a sorcerer becomes a crow, for instance, it is definitely a great accomplishment. But it entails a vast and therefore a gross shift of the assemblage point. However, moving it to the position of a fat man, or an old man, requires the minutest shift and the keenest knowledge of human nature."

"I'd rather avoid thinking or talking about those things as facts," I said.

Don Juan laughed as if I had said the funniest thing imaginable.

"Was there a reason for your benefactor's transformations?" I asked. "Or was he just amusing himself?"

"Don't be stupid. Warriors don't do anything just to amuse themselves," he replied. "His transformations were strategical. They were dictated by need; like his transformation from old to young. Now and then there were funny consequences, but that's another matter."

I reminded him that I had asked before how his benefactor learned those transformations. He had told me then that his benefactor had a teacher, but would not tell me who.

"That very mysterious sorcerer who is our ward taught him," don Juan replied curtly.

"What mysterious sorcerer is that?" I asked.

"The death defier," he said and looked at me questioningly.

For all the sorcerers of don Juan's party, the death defier was a most vivid character. According to them, the death defier was a sorcerer of ancient times. He had succeeded in surviving to the present day by manipulating his assemblage point; making it move in specific ways to specific locations within his total energy field. Such maneuvers had permitted his awareness and life force to persist.

Don Juan had told me about the agreement that the seers of his lineage had entered into with the death defier centuries before. He made gifts to them in exchange for vital energy. Because of this agreement, they considered him their ward and called him 'the tenant'.

Don Juan had explained that sorcerers of ancient times were experts at making the assemblage point move. In doing so they had discovered extraordinary things about perception, but they had also discovered how easy it was to get lost in aberration. The death defier's situation was for don Juan a classic example of an aberration.

Don Juan used to repeat every chance he could that if the assemblage point was pushed by someone who not only saw it but also had enough energy to move it, it slid within the luminous ball to whatever location the pusher directed. It's brilliance was enough to light up the threadlike energy fields it touched. The resulting perception of the world was as complete as, but not the same as, our normal perception of everyday life. Therefore, sobriety was crucial to dealing with the moving of the assemblage point.

Continuing his story, don Juan said that he quickly became accustomed to thinking of the old man who had saved his life as really a young man masquerading as old. But one day the young man was again the old Belisario don Juan had first met. He and the woman don Juan thought was his wife packed their bags, and two smiling men with a team of mules appeared out of nowhere.

Don Juan laughed, savoring his story. He said that while the muleteers packed the mules, Belisario pulled him aside and pointed out that he and his wife were again disguised.

He was again an old man, and his beautiful wife was a fat irascible Indian.

"I was so young and stupid that only the obvious had value for me," don Juan continued. "Just a couple of days before, I had seen his incredible transformation from a feeble man in his seventies to a vigorous young man in his mid-twenties, and I took his word that old age was just a disguise. His wife had also changed from a sour, fat Indian to a beautiful slender young woman. The woman, of course, hadn't transformed herself the way my benefactor had. He had simply changed the woman. Of course, I could have seen everything at that time, but wisdom always comes to us painfully and in driblets."

Don Juan said that the old man assured him that his wound was healed although he did not feel quite well yet. He then embraced don Juan and in a truly sad voice whispered, "the monster has liked you so much that he has released me and my wife from bondage and taken you as his sole servant."

"I would have laughed at him," don Juan went on, "had it not been for a deep animal growling and a frightening rattle that came from the monster's rooms."

Don Juan's eyes were shining with inner delight. I wanted to remain serious, but could not help laughing.

Belisario, aware of don Juan's fright, apologized profusely for the twist of fate that had liberated him and imprisoned don Juan. He clicked his tongue in disgust and cursed the monster. He had tears in his eyes when he listed all the chores the monster wanted done daily. And when don Juan protested, he confided, in low tones, that there was no way to escape, because the monster's knowledge of witchcraft was unequaled.

Don Juan asked Belisario to recommend some line of action. And Belisario went into a long explanation about plans of action being appropriate only if one were dealing with average human beings. In the human context, we can plan and plot; and depending on luck plus our cunning and dedication, we can succeed. But in the face of the unknown, specifically don Juan's situation, the only hope of survival was to acquiesce and understand.

Belisario confessed to don Juan in a barely audible murmur that to make sure the monster never came after him, he was going to the state of Durango to learn sorcery. He asked don Juan if he too would consider learning sorcery. And don Juan, horrified at the thought, said that he would have nothing to do with witches.

Don Juan held his sides laughing and admitted that he enjoyed thinking about how his benefactor must have relished their interplay; especially when don Juan, in a frenzy of fear and passion, rejected the bona fide invitation to learn sorcery, saying, "I am an Indian. I was born to hate and fear witches."

Belisario exchanged looks with his wife and his body began to convulse. Don Juan realized he was weeping silently, obviously hurt by the rejection. His wife had to prop him up until he regained his composure.

As Belisario and his wife were walking away, he turned and gave don Juan one more piece of advice. He said that the monster abhorred women, and don Juan should be on the lookout for a male replacement on the off chance that the monster would like him enough to switch slaves. But he should not raise his hopes, because it was going to be years before he could even leave the house. The monster liked to make sure his slaves were loyal or at least obedient.

Don Juan could stand it no longer. He broke down, began to weep, and told Belisario that no one was going to enslave him. He could always kill himself. The old man was very moved by don Juan's outburst and confessed that he had had the same idea, but, alas, the monster was able to read his thoughts and had prevented him from taking his own life every time he had tried.

Belisario made another offer to take don Juan with him to Durango to learn sorcery. He said it was the only possible solution. And don Juan told him his solution was like jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

Belisario began to weep loudly and embraced don Juan. Belisario cursed the moment he had saved the don Juan's life and swore that he had no idea they would trade places. He blew his nose, and looking at don Juan with burning eyes, said, "Disguise is the only way to survive. If you don't behave properly, the monster can steal your soul and turn you into an idiot who does his chores, and nothing more. Too bad I don't have time to teach you acting." Then he wept even more.

Don Juan, choking with tears asked him to describe how he could disguise himself. Belisario confided that the monster had terrible eyesight, and recommended that don Juan experiment with various clothes that suited his fancy. He had, after all, years ahead of him to try different disguises. He embraced don Juan at the door, weeping openly. His wife touched don Juan's hand shyly. And then they were gone.

"Never in my life, before or after, have I felt such terror and despair," don Juan said. "The monster rattled things inside the house as if he were waiting impatiently for me. I sat down by the door and whined like a dog in pain. Then I vomited from sheer fear."

Don Juan sat for hours incapable of moving. He dared not leave, nor did he dare go inside. It was no exaggeration to say that he was actually about to die when he saw Belisario waving his arms, frantically trying to catch his attention from the other side of the street. Just seeing him again gave don Juan instantaneous relief. Belisario was squatting by the sidewalk watching the house. He signaled don Juan to stay put.

After an excruciatingly long time, Belisario crawled a few feet on his hands and knees toward don Juan, then squatted again, totally immobile. Crawling in that fashion, he advanced until he was at don Juan's side. It took him hours. A lot of people had passed by, but no one seemed to have noticed don Juan's despair or the old man's actions. When the two of them were side by side, Belisario whispered that he had not felt right leaving don Juan like a dog tied to a post. His wife had objected, but he had returned to attempt to rescue him. After all, it was thanks to don Juan that he had gained his freedom.

He asked don Juan in a commanding whisper whether he was ready and willing to do anything to escape this. And don Juan assured him that he would do anything. In the most surreptitious [* surreptitious- marked by quiet and caution and secrecy; taking pains to avoid being observed] manner, Belisario handed don Juan a bundle of clothes. Then he outlined his plan.

Don Juan was to go to the area of the house farthest from the monster's rooms and slowly change his clothes, taking off one item of clothing at a time, starting with his hat, leaving the shoes for last. Then he was to put all his clothes on a wooden frame, a mannequin-like structure he was to build, efficiently and quickly, as soon as he was inside the house. The next step of the plan was for don Juan to put on the only disguise that could fool the monster: the clothes in the bundle.

Don Juan ran into the house and got everything ready. He built a scarecrow-like frame with poles he found in the back of the house, took off his clothes and put them on it. But when he opened the bundle he got the surprise of his life. The bundle consisted of women's clothes!

"I felt stupid and lost," don Juan said, "and was just about to put my own clothes back on when I heard the inhuman growls of that monstrous man. I had been reared to despise women; to believe their only function was to take care of men. Putting on women's clothes to me was tantamount to becoming a woman. But my fear of the monster was so intense that I closed my eyes and put on the damned clothes."

I looked at don Juan; imagining him in women's clothes. It was an image so utterly ridiculous that against my will I broke into a belly laugh.

Don Juan said that when old Belisario, waiting for him across the street, saw don Juan in disguise, he began to weep uncontrollably. Weeping, he guided don Juan to the outskirts of town where his wife was waiting with the two muleteers. One of them very daringly asked Belisario if he was stealing the weird girl to sell her to a whorehouse. The old man wept so hard he seemed on the verge of fainting. The young muleteers did not know what to do, but Belisario's wife, instead of commiserating, [* commiserating- to feel or express sympathy or compassion] began to scream with laughter. And don Juan could not understand why.

The party began to move in the dark. They took little-traveled trails and moved steadily north. Belisario did not speak much. He seemed to be frightened and expecting trouble. His wife fought with him all the time and complained that they had thrown away their chance for freedom by taking don Juan along. Belisario gave her strict orders not to mention it again for fear the muleteers would discover that don Juan was in disguise.

Belisario cautioned don Juan that because he did not know how to behave convincingly like a woman, he should act as if he were a girl who was a little touched in the head.

Within a few days don Juan's fear subsided a great deal. In fact, he became so confident that he could not even remember having been afraid. If it had not been for the clothes he was wearing, he could have imagined the whole experience had been a bad dream.

Wearing women's clothes under those conditions entailed, of course, a series of drastic changes. Belisario's wife coached don Juan with true seriousness in every aspect of being a woman. Don Juan helped her cook, wash clothes, and gather firewood.

Belisario shaved don Juan's head and put a strong-smelling medicine on it, and told the muleteers that the girl had had an infestation of lice. Don Juan said that since he was still a beardless youth it was not really difficult to pass as a woman. But he felt disgusted with himself, and with all those people, and above all, with his fate. To end up wearing women's clothes and doing women's chores was more than he could bear.

One day he had enough. The muleteers were the final straw. They expected and demanded that this strange girl wait on them hand and foot. Don Juan said that he also had to be on permanent guard because they would make passes.

I felt compelled to ask a question.

"Were the muleteers in cahoots with your benefactor? I asked.

"No," he replied and began to laugh uproariously. "They were just two nice people who had fallen temporarily under his spell. He had hired their mules to carry medicinal plants and told them that he would pay handsomely if they would help him kidnap a young woman."

The scope of the nagual Julian's actions staggered my imagination. I pictured don Juan fending off sexual advances and hollered with laughter.

Don Juan continued his account. He said that he told the old man sternly that the masquerade had lasted long enough, the men were making sexual advances. Belisario nonchalantly advised him to be more understanding because men will be men; and then he began to weep again, completely baffling don Juan, who found himself furiously defending women.

He was so passionate about the plight of women that he scared himself. He told Belisario that he was going to end up in worse shape than he would have had he stayed as the monster's slave.

Don Juan's turmoil increased when the old man wept uncontrollably and mumbled inanities: life was sweet, the little price one had to pay for it was a joke, the monster would devour don Juan's soul, and not even allow him to kill himself.

"Flirt with the muleteers," he advised don Juan in a conciliatory tone and manner. "They are primitive peasants. All they want is to play, so push them back when they shove you. Let them touch your leg. What do you care?" And again, he wept unrestrainedly.

Don Juan asked him why he wept like that.

"Because you are perfect for all this," he said and his body twisted with the force of his sobbing.

Don Juan thanked him for his good feelings and for all the trouble he was taking on his account. He told Belisario he now felt safe and wanted to leave.

Belisario, paying no attention to what don Juan was telling him, said, "The art of stalking is learning all the quirks of your disguise, and the art is to learn them so well no one will know you are disguised. For that you need to be ruthless, cunning, patient, and sweet."

Don Juan had no idea what Belisario was talking about. Rather than finding out, he asked him for some men's clothes. Belisario was very understanding. He gave don Juan some old clothes and a few pesos. He promised don Juan that his disguise would always be there in case he needed it, and pressed him vehemently to come to Durango with him to learn sorcery and free himself from the monster for good. Don Juan said no and thanked him. So Belisario bid him goodbye and patted him on the back repeatedly and with considerable force.

Don Juan changed his clothes and asked Belisario for directions. He answered that if don Juan followed the trail north, sooner or later he would reach the next town. He said that the two of them might even cross paths again since they were all going in the same general direction-away from the monster.

Don Juan took off as fast as he could, free at last. He must have walked four or five miles before he found signs of people. He knew that a town was nearby and thought that perhaps he could get work there until he decided where he was going.

He sat down to rest for a moment, anticipating the normal difficulties a stranger would find in a small out of the way town, when from the corner of his eye he saw a movement in the bushes by the mule trail. He felt someone was watching him. He became so thoroughly terrified that he jumped up and started to run in the direction of the town: The monster jumped at him lurching out to grab his neck. He missed by an inch. Don Juan screamed as he had never screamed before, but still had enough self-control to turn and run back in the direction from which he had come.

While don Juan ran for his life, the monster pursued him, crashing through the bushes only a few feet away. Don Juan said that it was the most frightening sound he had ever heard. Finally he saw the mules moving slowly in the distance, and he yelled for help.

Belisario recognized don Juan and ran toward him displaying overt terror. He threw the bundle of women's clothes at don Juan shouting, "Run like a woman, you fool."

Don Juan admitted that he did not know how he had the presence of mind to run like a woman, but he did it. The monster stopped chasing him. And Belisario told him to change quickly while he held the monster at bay.

Don Juan joined Belisario's wife and the smiling muleteers without looking at anybody. They doubled back and took other trails. Nobody spoke for days.

Then Belisario gave him daily lessons. He told don Juan that Indian women were practical and went directly to the heart of things, but that they were also very shy. When challenged, they showed the physical signs of fright in shifty eyes, tight mouths, and enlarged nostrils. All these signs were accompanied by a fearful stubbornness, followed by shy laughter.

Belisario made don Juan practice his womanly behavior skills in every town they passed through. Don Juan honestly believed he was teaching him to be an actor. But his benefactor insisted that he was teaching him the art of stalking. He told don Juan that stalking was an art applicable to everything, and that there were four steps to learning it: ruthlessness, cunning, patience, and sweetness.

I felt compelled to interrupt his account once more.

"But isn't stalking taught in deep, heightened awareness?" I asked.

"Of course," he replied with a grin. "But you have to understand that for some men wearing women's clothes is the door into heightened awareness. In fact, such means are more effective than pushing the assemblage point, but are very difficult to arrange."

Don Juan said that his benefactor drilled him daily in the four moods of stalking and insisted that don Juan understand that ruthlessness should not be harshness, cunning should not be cruelty, patience should not be negligence, and sweetness should not be foolishness.

Belisario taught him that these four steps had to be practiced and perfected until they were so smooth they were unnoticeable. His benefactor believed women to be natural stalkers, and his conviction was so strong that he maintained that only in a woman's disguise could any man really learn the art of stalking.

"I went with him to every market in every town we passed and haggled with everyone," don Juan went on. "My benefactor used to stay to one side watching me. 'Be ruthless but charming,' he used to say. 'Be cunning but nice. Be patient but active. Be sweet but lethal. Only women can do it. If a man acts this way he's being prissy.' "

And as if to make sure don Juan stayed in line, the monstrous man appeared from time to time. Don Juan caught sight of him, roaming the countryside. He would see him most often after Belisario gave him a vigorous back massage, supposedly to alleviate a sharp nervous pain in his neck. Don Juan laughed and said that he had no idea he was being manipulated into heightened awareness.

"It took us one month to reach the city of Durango," don Juan said. "In that month, I had a brief sample of the four moods of stalking. It really didn't change me much, but it gave me a chance to have an inkling of what being a woman was like."

## The Four Moods of *Stalking*

Don Juan said that I should sit there at that ancient lookout post and use the pull of the earth to move my assemblage point and recall other states of heightened awareness in which he had taught me stalking.

"In the past few days, I have mentioned many times the four moods of stalking," he went on. "I have mentioned ruthlessness, cunning, patience, and sweetness with the hope that you might remember what I taught you about them. It would be wonderful if you could use these four moods as the ushers to bring you into a total recollection."

He kept quiet for what seemed an inordinately long moment. Then he made a statement which should not have surprised me, but did. He said he had taught me the four moods of stalking in northern Mexico with the help of Vicerite Medrano and Silvio Manuel. He did not elaborate but let his statement sink in. I tried to remember but finally gave up and wanted to shout that I could not remember something that never happened.

As I was struggling to voice my protest, anxious thoughts began to cross my mind. I knew don Juan had not said what he had just to annoy me. As I always did when asked to remember heightened awareness, I became obsessively conscious that there was really no continuity to the events I had experienced under his guidance. Those events were not strung together as the events in my daily life were, in a linear sequence. It was perfectly possible he was right. In don Juan's world, I had no business being certain of anything.

I tried to voice my doubts but he refused to listen and urged me to recollect. By then it was quite dark. It had gotten windy, but I did not feel the cold. Don Juan had given me a flat rock to place on my sternum. My awareness was keenly tuned to everything around.

I felt an abrupt pull, which was neither external nor internal, but rather the sensation of a sustained tugging at an unidentifiable part of myself. Suddenly I began to remember with shattering clarity a meeting I had had years before. I remembered events and people so vividly that it frightened me. I felt a chill.

I told all this to don Juan, who did not seem impressed or concerned. He urged me not to give in to mental or physical fear. My recollection was so phenomenal that it was as if I were reliving the experience. Don Juan kept quiet. He did not even look at me. I felt numbed. The sensation of numbness passed slowly.

I repeated the same things I always said to don Juan when I remembered an event with no linear existence.

"How can this be, don Juan? How could I have forgotten all this?"

And he reaffirmed the same things he always did.

"This type of remembering or forgetting has nothing to do with normal memory," he assured me. "It has to do with the movement of the assemblage point."

He affirmed that although I possessed total knowledge of what intent is, I did not command that knowledge yet. Knowing what intent is means that one can, at any time, explain that knowledge or use it. A nagual by the force of his position is obliged to command his knowledge in this manner.

"What did you recollect?" he asked me.

"The first time you told me about the four moods of stalking," I said.

Some process, inexplicable in terms of my usual awareness of the world, had released a memory which a minute before had not existed; and I recollected an entire sequence of events that had happened many years before.

Just as I was leaving don Juan's house in Sonora, he had asked me to meet him the following week around noon across the U.S. border in Nogales, Arizona, in the Greyhound bus depot.

I arrived about an hour early. He was standing by the door. I greeted him. He did not answer but hurriedly pulled me aside and whispered that I should take my hands out of my pockets. I was dumbfounded. He did not give me time to respond. He said that my fly was open, and it was shamefully evident that I was sexually aroused.

The speed with which I rushed to cover myself was phenomenal. By the time I realized it was a crude joke we were on the street. Don Juan was laughing, slapping me on the back repeatedly and forcefully as if he were just celebrating the joke. Suddenly I found myself in a state of heightened awareness.

We walked into a coffee shop and sat down. My mind was so clear I wanted to look at everything; see the essence of things.

"Don't waste energy!" don Juan commanded in a stern voice. "I brought you here to discover if you can eat when your assemblage point has moved. Don't try to do more than that."

But then a man sat down at the table in front of me, and all my attention became trapped by him.

"Move your eyes in circles," don Juan commanded. "Don't look at that man."

I found it impossible to stop watching the man. I felt irritated by don Juan's demands.

"What do you see?" I heard don Juan ask.

I was seeing a luminous cocoon made of transparent wings which were folded over the cocoon itself. The wings unfolded, fluttered for an instant, peeled off, fell, and were replaced by new wings, which repeated the same process.

Don Juan boldly turned my chair until I was facing the wall.

"What a waste," he said in a loud sigh, after I described what I had seen. "You have exhausted nearly all your energy. Restrain yourself. A warrior needs focus. Who gives a damn about wings on a luminous cocoon?"

He said that heightened awareness was like a springboard. From it one could jump into infinity. He stressed, over and over, that when the assemblage point was dislodged, it either became lodged again at a position very near it's customary one or continued moving on into infinity.

"People have no idea of the strange power we carry within ourselves," he went on. "At this moment, for instance, you have the means to reach infinity. If you continue with your needless behavior, you may succeed in pushing your assemblage point beyond a certain threshold, from which there is no return."

I understood the peril he was talking about, or rather I had the bodily sensation that I was standing on the brink of an abyss, and that if I leaned forward I would fall into it.

"Your assemblage point has moved to heightened awareness," he continued, "because I have lent you my energy."

We ate in silence- very simple food. Don Juan did not allow me to drink coffee or tea.

"While you are using my energy," he said, "you're not in your own time. You are in mine. I drink water."

As we were walking back to my car, I felt a bit nauseous. I staggered and almost lost my balance. It was a sensation similar to that of walking while wearing glasses for the first time.

"Get hold of yourself," don Juan said, smiling. "Where we're going you'll need to be extremely precise."

He told me to drive across the international border into the twin city of Nogales, Mexico. While I was driving, he gave me directions: which street to take, when to make right or left hand turns, how fast to go.

"I know this area," I said quite peeved. "Tell me where you want to go and I'll take you there. Like a taxi driver."

"O.K.," he said. "Take me to 1573 Heavenward Avenue."

I did not know Heavenward Avenue, or if such a street really existed. In fact, I had the suspicion he had just concocted a name to embarrass me. I kept silent. There was a mocking glint in his shiny eyes.

"Egomania is a real tyrant," he said. "We must work ceaselessly to dethrone it."

He continued to tell me how to drive. Finally he asked me to stop in front of a one story, light beige house on a corner lot, in a well-to-do neighborhood.

There was something about the house that immediately caught my eye: A thick layer of ocher gravel all around it. The solid street door, the window sashes, and the house trim were all painted ocher like the gravel. All the visible windows had closed Venetian blinds. To all appearances it was a typical suburban middle-class dwelling.

We got out of the car. Don Juan led the way. He did not knock or open the door with a key: When we got to it, the door opened silently on oiled hinges- all by itself, as far as I could detect.

Don Juan quickly entered. He did not invite me in. I just followed him. I was curious to see who had opened the door from the inside, but there was no one there.

The interior of the house was very soothing. There were no pictures on the smooth, scrupulously clean walls. There were no lamps or book shelves either. A golden yellow tile floor contrasted most pleasingly with the off-white color of the walls.

We were in a small and narrow hall that opened into a spacious living room with a high ceiling and a brick fireplace. Half the room was completely empty, but next to the fireplace was a semicircle of expensive furniture: two large beige couches in the middle, flanked by two armchairs covered in fabric of the same color. There was a heavy, round, solid oak coffee table in the center.

Judging from what I was seeing around the house, the people who lived there appeared to be well off, but frugal. And they obviously liked to sit around the fire.

Two men, perhaps in their mid-fifties, sat in the armchairs. They stood when we entered. One of them was Indian, the other Latin American. Don Juan introduced me first to the Indian, who was nearer to me.

"This is Silvio Manuel," don Juan said to me. "He's the most powerful and dangerous sorcerer of my party, and the most mysterious too."

Silvio Manuel's features were out of a Mayan fresco. His complexion was pale, almost yellow. I thought he looked Chinese. His eyes were slanted, but without the epicanthic fold. They were big, black, and brilliant. He was beardless. His hair was jet-black with specks of gray in it. He had high cheekbones and full lips. He was perhaps five feet seven, thin, wiry, and he wore a yellow sport shirt, brown slacks, and a thin beige jacket. Judging from his clothes and general mannerisms, he seemed to be Mexican-American.

I smiled and extended my hand to Silvio Manuel, but he did not take it. He nodded perfunctorily.

"And this is Vicente Medrano," don Juan said, turning to the other man. "He's the most knowledgeable and the oldest of my companions. He is oldest not in terms of age, but because he was my benefactor's first disciple."

Vicente nodded just as perfunctorily as Silvio Manuel had, and also did not say a word.

He was a bit taller than Silvio Manuel, but just as lean. He had a pinkish complexion and a neatly trimmed beard and mustache. His features were almost delicate: a thin, beautifully chiseled nose, a small mouth, thin lips. Bushy, dark eyebrows contrasted with his graying beard and hair. His eyes were brown and also brilliant and laughed in spite of his frowning expression. He was conservatively dressed in a greenish seersucker suit and open-collared sport shirt. He too seemed to be Mexican-American. I guessed him to be the owner of the house.

In contrast, don Juan looked like an Indian peon. His straw hat, his worn-out shoes, his old khaki pants and plaid shirt were those of a gardener or a handyman.

The impression I had, upon seeing all three of them together, was that don Juan was in disguise. The military image came to me that don Juan was the commanding officer of a clandestine operation; an officer who, no matter how hard he tried, could not hide his years of command.

I also had the feeling that they must all have been around the same age, although don Juan looked much older than the other two, yet seemed infinitely stronger.

"I think you already know that Carlos is by far the biggest indulger I have ever met," don Juan told them with a most serious expression. "Bigger even than our benefactor. I assure you that if there is someone who takes indulging seriously, this is the man."

I laughed, but no one else did. The two men observed me with a strange glint in their eyes.

"For sure you'll make a memorable trio," don Juan continued. "The oldest and most knowledgeable, the most dangerous and powerful, and the most self-indulgent."

They still did not laugh. They scrutinized me until I became self-conscious. Then Vicente broke the silence.

"I don't know why you brought him inside the house," he said in a dry, cutting tone. "He's of little use to us. Put him out in the backyard."

"And tie him," Silvio Manuel added.

Don Juan turned to me. "Come on," he said in a soft voice and pointed with a quick sideways movement of his head to the back of the house.

It was more than obvious that the two men did not like me. I did not know what to say. I was definitely angry and hurt, but those feelings were somehow deflected by my state of heightened awareness.

We walked into the backyard. Don Juan casually picked up a leather rope and twirled it around my neck with tremendous speed. His movements were so fast and so nimble that an instant later, before I could realize what was happening, I was tied at the neck, like a dog, to one of the two cinder-block columns supporting the heavy roof over the back porch.

Don Juan shook his head from side to side in a gesture of resignation or disbelief and went back into the house as I began to yell at him to untie me. The rope was so tight around my neck it prevented me from screaming as loud as I would have liked.

I could not believe what was taking place. Containing my anger, I tried to undo the knot at my neck. It was so compact that the leather strands seemed glued together. I hurt my nails trying to pull them apart.

I had an attack of uncontrollable wrath and growled like an impotent animal. Then I grabbed the rope, twisted it around my forearms, and bracing my feet against the cinder-block column, pulled. But the leather was too tough for the strength of my muscles.

I felt humiliated and scared. Fear brought me a moment of sobriety. I knew I had let don Juan's false aura of reasonableness deceive me. I assessed my situation as objectively as I could and saw no way to escape except by cutting the leather rope. I frantically began to rub it against the sharp corner of the cinder-block column. I thought that if I could rip the rope before any of the men came to the back, I had a chance to run to my car and take off, never to return.

I puffed and sweated and rubbed the rope until I had nearly worn it through. Then I braced one foot against the column, wrapped the rope around my forearms again, and pulled it desperately until it snapped, throwing me back into the house.

As I crashed backward through the open door, don Juan, Vicente, and Silvio Manuel were standing in the middle of the room, applauding.

"What a dramatic reentry," Vicente said, helping me up. "You fooled me. I didn't think you were capable of such explosions."

Don Juan came to me and snapped the knot open, freeing my neck from the piece of rope around it.

I was shaking with fear, exertion, and anger. In a faltering voice, I asked don Juan why he was tormenting me like this. The three of them laughed and at that moment seemed the farthest thing from threatening.

"We wanted to test you and find out what sort of a man you really are," don Juan said.

He led me to one of the couches and politely offered me a seat. Vicente and Silvio Manuel sat in the armchairs, don Juan sat facing me on the other couch.

I laughed nervously but was no longer apprehensive about my situation, nor about don Juan and his friends. All three regarded me with frank curiosity. Vicente could not stop smiling, although he seemed to be trying desperately to appear serious. Silvio Manuel shook his head rhythmically as he stared at me. His eyes were unfocused but fixed on me.

"We tied you down," don Juan went on, Tethered Animal"because we wanted to know whether you are sweet or patient or ruthless or cunning. We found out you are none of those things. Rather you're a king-sized indulger, just as I had said.

"If you hadn't indulged in being violent, you would certainly have noticed that the formidable knot in the rope around your neck was a fake. It snaps. Vicente designed that knot to fool his friends."

"You tore the rope violently. You're certainly not sweet," Silvio Manuel said.

They were all quiet for a moment, then began to laugh.

"You're neither ruthless nor cunning," don Juan went on. "If you were, you would easily have snapped open both knots and run away with a valuable leather rope. You're not patient either. If you were, you would have whined and cried until you realized that there was a pair of clippers by the wall with which you could have cut the rope in two seconds and saved yourself all the agony and exertion.

"You can't be taught, then, to be violent or obtuse. You already are that. But you can learn to be ruthless, cunning, patient, and sweet."

Don Juan explained to me that ruthlessness, cunning, patience, and sweetness were the essence of stalking. They were the basics that with all their ramifications had to be taught in careful, meticulous steps.

He was definitely addressing me, but he talked looking at Vicente and Silvio Manuel, who listened with utmost attention and shook their heads in agreement from time to time.

He stressed repeatedly that teaching stalking was one of the most difficult things sorcerers did. He insisted that no matter what they themselves did to teach me stalking- and no matter what I believed to the contrary- it was impeccability which dictated their acts.

"Rest assured we know what we're doing. Our benefactor, the nagual Julian, saw to it," don Juan said, and all three of them broke into such uproarious laughter that I felt quite uncomfortable. I did not know what to think.

Don Juan reiterated that a very important point to consider was that, to an onlooker, the behavior of sorcerers might appear malicious, when in reality their behavior was always impeccable.

"How can you tell the difference, if you're at the receiving end?" I asked.

"Malicious acts are performed by people for personal gain," he said. "Sorcerers, though, have an ulterior purpose for their acts which has nothing to do with personal gain. The fact that they enjoy their acts does not count as gain. Rather, it is a condition of their character. The average man acts only if there is the chance for profit. Warriors say they act not for profit but for the spirit."

I thought about it. Acting without considering gain was truly an alien concept. I had been reared to invest and to hope for some kind of reward for everything I did.

Don Juan must have taken my silence and thoughtfulness as skepticism. He laughed and looked at his two companions.

"Take the four of us as an example," he went on. "You, yourself, believe that you're investing in this situation and eventually you are going to profit from it. If you get angry with us, or if we disappoint you, you may resort to malicious acts to get even with us. We, on the contrary, have no thought of personal gain. Our acts are dictated by impeccability. We can't be angry or disillusioned with you."

Don Juan smiled and told me that from the moment we had met at the bus depot that very day, everything he had done to me, although it might not have seemed so, was dictated by impeccability. He explained that he needed to get me into an unguarded position to help me enter heightened awareness. It was to that end that he had told me my fly was open.

"It was a way of jolting you," he said with a grin. "We are crude Indians, so all our jolts are somehow primitive. The more sophisticated the warrior, the greater his finesse and elaboration of his jolts. But I have to admit we got a big kick out of our crudeness, especially when we tied you at the neck like a dog."

The three of them grinned and then laughed quietly as if there was someone else inside the house whom they did not want to disturb.

In a very low voice don Juan said that because I was in a state of heightened awareness, I could understand more readily what he was going to tell me about the two masteries of stalking and intent.

He called them the crowning glory of sorcerers old and new; the very thing sorcerers were concerned with today, just as sorcerers had been thousands of years before. He asserted that stalking was the beginning, and that before anything could be attempted on the warrior's path, warriors must learn to stalk; next they must learn to intend; and only then could they move their assemblage point at will.

I knew exactly what he was talking about. I knew, without knowing how, what moving the assemblage point could accomplish. But I did not have the words to explain what I knew. I tried repeatedly to voice my knowledge to them. They laughed at my failures and coaxed me to try again.

"How would you like it if I articulate it for you?" don Juan asked. "I might be able to find the very words you want to use but can't."

From his look, I decided he was seriously asking my permission. I found the situation so incongruous that I began to laugh.

Don Juan, displaying great patience, asked me again, and I got another attack of laughter. Their look of surprise and concern told me my reaction was incomprehensible to them. Don Juan got up and announced that I was too tired and it was time for me to return to the world of ordinary affairs.

"Wait, wait," I pleaded. "I am all right. I just find it funny that you should be asking me to give you permission."

"I have to ask your permission," don Juan said, "because you're the only one who can allow the words pent up inside you to be tapped. I think I made the mistake of assuming you understand more than you do. Words are tremendously powerful and important, and are the magical property of whoever has them.

"Sorcerers have a rule of thumb: They say that the deeper the assemblage point moves, the greater the feeling that one has knowledge and no words to explain it. Sometimes the assemblage point of average persons can move without a known cause and without their being aware of it, except that they become tongue-tied, confused, and evasive."

Vicente interrupted and suggested I stay with them a while longer. Don Juan agreed and turned to face me.

"The very first principle of stalking is that a warrior stalks himself," he said. "He stalks himself ruthlessly, cunningly, patiently, and sweetly."

I wanted to laugh, but he did not give me time. Very succinctly he defined stalking as the art of using behavior in novel ways for specific purposes. He said that normal human behavior in the world of everyday life was routine. Any behavior that broke from routine caused an unusual effect on our total being. That unusual effect was what sorcerers sought, because it was cumulative.

He explained that the sorcerer seers of ancient times, through their seeing, had first noticed that unusual behavior produced a tremor in the assemblage point. They soon discovered that if unusual behavior was practiced systematically and directed wisely, it eventually forced the assemblage point to move.

"The real challenge for those sorcerer seers," don Juan went on, "was finding a system of behavior that was neither petty nor capricious, but that combined the morality and the sense of beauty which differentiates sorcerer seers from plain witches."

He stopped talking, and they all looked at me as if searching for signs of fatigue in my eyes or face.

"Anyone who succeeds in moving his assemblage point to a new position is a sorcerer," don Juan continued. "And from that new position, he can do all kinds of good and bad things to his fellow men. Being a sorcerer, therefore, can be like being a cobbler or a baker. The quest of sorcerer seers is to go beyond that stand. And to do that, they need morality and beauty."

He said that for sorcerers stalking was the foundation on which everything else they did was built.

"Some sorcerers object to the term stalking," he went on, "but the name came about because it entails surreptitious [* surreptitious- marked by quiet and caution and secrecy; taking pains to avoid being observed] behavior.

"It's also called the art of stealth, but that term is equally unfortunate. We ourselves, because of our nonmilitant temperament, call it the art of controlled folly. You can call it anything you wish. We, however, will continue with the term stalking since it's so easy to say stalker and, as my benefactor used to say, so awkward to say controlled folly maker."

At the mention of their benefactor, they laughed like children.

I understood him perfectly. I had no questions or doubts. If anything, I had the feeling that I needed to hold onto every word don Juan was saying to anchor myself. Otherwise my thoughts would have run ahead of him.

I noticed that my eyes were fixed on the movement of his lips as my ears were fixed on the sound of his words. But once I realized this, I could no longer follow him. My concentration was broken. Don Juan continued talking, but I was not listening.

I was wondering about the inconceivable possibility of living permanently in heightened awareness. I asked myself what would the survival value be? Would one be able to assess situations better? Be quicker than the average man, or perhaps more intelligent?

Don Juan suddenly stopped talking and asked me what I was thinking about.

"Ah, you're so very practical," he commented after I had told him my reveries. "I thought that in heightened awareness your temperament was going to be more artistic, more mystical."

Don Juan turned to Vicente and asked him to answer my question. Vicente cleared his throat and dried his hands by rubbing them against his thighs. He gave the clear impression of suffering from stage fright. I felt sorry for him. My thoughts began to spin.

And when I heard him stammering, an image burst into my mind- the image I had always had of my father's timidity; his fear of people. But before I had time to surrender myself to that image, Vicente's eyes flared with some strange inner luminosity. He made a comically serious face at me and then spoke with authority and in professorial manner.

"To answer your question," he said, "there is no survival value in heightened awareness; otherwise the whole human race would be there. They are safe from that, though, because it's so hard to get into it. There is always, however, the remote possibility that an average man might enter into such a state. If he does, he ordinarily succeeds in confusing himself, sometimes irreparably."

The three of them exploded with laughter.

"Sorcerers say that heightened awareness is the portal of intent" don Juan said. "And they use it as such. Think about it."

I was staring at each of them in turn. My mouth was open, and I felt that if I kept it open I would be able to understand the riddle eventually. I closed my eyes and the answer came to me. I felt it. I did not think it. But I could not put it into words, no matter how hard I tried.

"There, there," don Juan said, "you've gotten another sorcerer's answer all by yourself, but you still don't have enough energy to flatten it and turn it into words."

The sensation I was experiencing was more than just that of being unable to voice my thoughts. It was like reliving something I had forgotten ages ago: not to know what I felt because I had not yet learned to speak, and therefore lacked the resources to translate my feelings into thoughts.

"Thinking and saying exactly what you want to say requires untold amounts of energy," don Juan said and broke into my feelings.

The force of my reverie had been so intense it had made me forget what had started it. I stared dumbfounded at don Juan and confessed I had no idea what they or I had said or done just a moment before. I remembered the incident of the leather rope and what don Juan had told me immediately afterward, but I could not recall the feeling that had flooded me just moments ago.

"You're going the wrong way," don Juan said. "You're trying to remember thoughts the way you normally do, but this is a different situation. A second ago you had an overwhelming feeling that you knew something very specific.

Such feelings cannot be recollected by using memory. You have to recall them by intending them back."

He turned to Silvio Manuel, who had stretched out in the armchair, his legs under the coffee table. Silvio Manuel looked fixedly at me. His eyes were black, like two pieces of shiny obsidian. Without moving a muscle, he let out a piercing birdlike scream.

"Intent!!" he yelled. "Intent!! Intent!!"

With each scream his voice became more and more inhuman and piercing. The hair on the back of my neck stood on end. I felt goose bumps on my skin. My mind, however, instead of focusing on the fright I was experiencing, went directly to recollecting the feeling I had had. But before I could savor it completely, the feeling expanded and burst into something else.

And then I understood not only why heightened awareness was the portal of intent, but I also understood what intent was. And, above all, I understood that that knowledge could not be turned into words. That knowledge was there for everyone. It was there to be felt, to be used, but not to be explained. One could come into it by changing levels of awareness. Therefore, heightened awareness was an entrance, but even the entrance could not be explained. One could only make use of it.

There was still another piece of knowledge that came to me that day without any coaching: that the natural knowledge of intent was available to anyone, but the command of it belonged to those who probed it.

I was terribly tired by this time, and doubtlessly as a result of that, my Catholic upbringing came to bear heavily on my reactions. For a moment I believed that intent was God.

I said as much to don Juan, Vicente and Silvio Manuel. They laughed. Vicente, still in his professorial tone, said that it could not possibly be God, because intent was a force that could not be described, much less represented.

"Don't be presumptuous," don Juan said to me sternly. "Don't try to speculate on the basis of your first and only trial. Wait until you command your knowledge. Then decide what is what."

Remembering the four moods of stalking exhausted me. The most dramatic result was a more than ordinary indifference. I would not have cared if I had dropped dead, nor if don Juan had. I did not care whether we stayed at that ancient lookout post overnight or started back in the pitch-dark.

Don Juan was very understanding. He guided me by the hand, as if I were blind, to a massive rock, and helped me sit with my back to it. He recommended that I let natural sleep return me to a normal state of awareness.

# 4. The Descent of the Spirit

## Seeing the Spirit

Right after a late lunch while we were still at the table, don Juan announced that the two of us were going to spend the night in the sorcerers' cave and that we had to be on our way. He said that it was imperative that I sit there again in total darkness, to allow the rock formation and the sorcerers' intent to move my assemblage point.

I started to get up from my chair, but he stopped me. He said that there was something he wanted to explain to me first. He stretched out, putting his feet on the seat of a chair, then leaned back into a relaxed, comfortable position.

"As I see you in greater detail," don Juan said, "I notice more and more how similar you and my benefactor are."

I felt so threatened that I did not let him continue. I told him that I could not imagine what those similarities were, but if there were any- a possibility I did not consider reassuring- I would appreciate it if he told me about them; to give me a chance to correct or avoid them.

Don Juan laughed until tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"One of the similarities is that when you act, you act very well," he said, "but when you think, you always trip yourself up. My benefactor was like that. He didn't think too well."

I was just about to defend myself, to say there was nothing wrong with my thinking, when I caught a glint of mischievousness in his eyes. I stopped cold. Don Juan noticed my shift and laughed with a note of surprise. He must have been anticipating the opposite.

"What I mean, for instance, is that you only have problems understanding the spirit when you think about it," he went on with a chiding smile. "But when you act, the spirit easily reveals itself to you. My benefactor was that way.

"Before we leave for the cave, I am going to tell you a story about my benefactor and the fourth abstract core.

"Sorcerers believe that until the very moment of the spirit's descent, any of us could walk away from the spirit; but not afterwards."

Don Juan deliberately stopped to urge me with a movement of his eyebrows, to consider what he was telling me.

"The fourth abstract core is the full brunt of the spirit's descent," he went on. "The fourth abstract core is an act of revelation. The spirit reveals itself to us. Sorcerers describe it as the spirit lying in ambush and then descending on us; it's prey. Sorcerers say that the spirit's descent is always shrouded. It happens and yet it seems not to have happened at all."

I became very nervous. Don Juan's tone of voice was giving me the feeling that he was preparing to spring something on me at any moment.

He asked me if I remembered the moment the spirit descended on me; sealing my permanent allegiance [* allegiance- the act of binding yourself (intellectually or emotionally) to a course of action] to the abstract.

I had no idea what he was talking about.

"There is a threshold that once crossed permits no retreat," he said. "Ordinarily, from the moment the spirit knocks, it is years before an apprentice reaches that threshold. Sometimes, though, the threshold is reached almost immediately. My benefactor's case is an example."

Don Juan said every sorcerer should have a clear memory of crossing that threshold so he could remind himself of the new state of his perceptual potential. He explained that one did not have to be an apprentice of sorcery to reach this threshold, and that the only difference between an average man and a sorcerer, in such cases, is what each emphasizes. A sorcerer emphasizes crossing this threshold and uses the memory of it as a point of reference. An average man does not cross the threshold and does his best to forget all about it.

I told him that I did not agree with his point, because I could not accept that there was only one threshold to cross.

Don Juan looked heavenward in dismay and shook his head in a joking gesture of despair. I proceeded with my argument, not to disagree with him, but to clarify things in my mind. Yet I quickly lost my impetus. Suddenly I had the feeling I was sliding through a tunnel.

"Sorcerers say that the fourth abstract core happens when the spirit cuts our chains of self-reflection," he said. "Cutting our chains is marvelous, but also very undesirable, for nobody wants to be free."

The sensation of sliding through a tunnel persisted for a moment longer, and then everything became clear to me. And I began to laugh. Strange insights pent up inside me were exploding into laughter.

Don Juan seemed to be reading my mind as if it were a book.

"What a strange feeling: to realize that everything we think, everything we say depends on the position of the assemblage point," he remarked.

And that was exactly what I had been thinking and laughing about.

"I know that at this moment your assemblage point has shifted," he went on, "and you have understood the secret of our chains. They imprison us. But by keeping us pinned down on our comfortable spot of self-reflection, they defend us from the onslaughts of the unknown."

I was having one of those extraordinary moments in which everything about the sorcerers' world was crystal clear. I understood everything.

"Once our chains are cut," don Juan continued, "we are no longer bound by the concerns of the daily world. We are still in the daily world, but we don't belong there anymore. In order to belong we must share the concerns of people, and without chains we can't."

Don Juan said that the nagual Elias had explained to him that what distinguishes us as normal people is that we share a metaphorical dagger: the concerns of our self-reflection. With this dagger, we cut ourselves and bleed; and the job of our chains of self-reflection is to give us the feeling that we are bleeding together; that we are sharing something wonderful: our humanity. But if we were to examine it, we would discover that we are bleeding alone; that we are not sharing anything; that all we are doing is toying with our manageable, unreal, man-made reflection.

"Sorcerers are no longer in the world of daily affairs," don Juan went on, "because they are no longer prey to their self-reflection."

Don Juan then began his story about his benefactor and the descent of the spirit. He said that the story started right after the spirit had knocked on the young actor's door.

I interrupted don Juan and asked him why he consistently used the terms "young man" or "young actor" to refer to the nagual Julian.

"At the time of this story, he wasn't the nagual," don Juan replied. "He was a young actor. In my story, I can't just call him Julian, because to me he was always the nagual Julian. As a sign of deference for his lifetime of impeccabitity, we always prefix 'nagual' to a nagual's name."

Don Juan proceeded with his story. He said that the nagual Elias had stopped the young actor's death by making him shift into heightened awareness, and following hours of struggle, the young actor regained consciousness. The nagual Elias did not mention his name, but he introduced himself as a professional healer who had stumbled onto the scene of a tragedy where two persons had nearly died.

The nagual Elias pointed to the young woman, Talia, stretched out on the ground. The young man was astonished to see her lying unconscious next to him. He remembered seeing her as she ran away. It startled him to hear the old healer explain that doubtlessly God had punished

Talia for her sins by striking her with lightning and making her lose her mind.

"But how could there be lightning if it's not even raining?" the young actor asked in a barely audible voice. He was visibly affected when the old Indian replied that God's ways couldn't be questioned.

Again I interrupted don Juan. I was curious to know if the young woman really had lost her mind. He reminded me that the nagual Elias delivered a shattering blow to her assemblage point. He said that she had not lost her mind, but that as a result of the blow she slipped in and out of heightened awareness, creating a serious threat to her health. After a gigantic struggle, however, the nagual Elias helped her to stabilize her assemblage point and she entered permanently into heightened awareness.

Don Juan commented that women are capable of such a master stroke: They can permanently maintain a new position of their assemblage point; and Talia was peerless. As soon as her chains were broken, she immediately understood everything and complied with the nagual's designs.

Don Juan, recounting his story, said that the nagual Elias- who was not only a superb dreamer, but also a superb stalker- had seen that the young actor was spoiled and conceited, but only seemed to be hard and calloused. The nagual knew that if he brought forth the idea of God, sin, and retribution, the actor's religious beliefs would make his cynical attitude collapse.

Upon hearing about God's punishment, the actor's facade began to crumble. He started to express remorse, but the nagual cut him short and forcefully stressed that when death was so near, feelings of guilt no longer mattered.

The young actor listened attentively, but although he felt very ill, he did not believe that he was in danger of dying. He thought that his weakness and fainting had been brought on by his loss of blood.

As if he had read the young actor's mind, the nagual explained to him that those optimistic thoughts were out of place; that his hemorrhaging would have been fatal had it not been for the plug that he, as a healer, had created.

"When I struck your back, I put in a plug to stop the draining of your life force," the nagual said to the skeptical young actor. "Without that restraint, the unavoidable process of your death would continue. If you don't believe me, I'll prove it to you by removing the plug with another blow."

As he spoke, the nagual Elias tapped the young actor on his right side by his ribcage. In a moment the young man was retching and choking. Blood poured out of his mouth as he coughed uncontrollably. Another tap on his back stopped the agonizing pain and retching; but it did not stop the young man's fear, and he passed out.

"I can control your death for the time being," the nagual said when the young actor regained consciousness. "How long I can control it depends on you; on how faithfully you acquiesce to everything I tell you to do."

The nagual Elias said that the first requirements on the young man were total immobility and silence. If he did not want his plug to come out, the nagual added, he had to behave as if he had lost his powers of motion and speech. A single twitch or a single utterance would be enough to restart his dying.

The young actor was not accustomed to complying with suggestions or demands. He felt a surge of anger. As he started to voice his protest, the burning pain and convulsions started up again.

"Stay with it, and I will cure you," the nagual said. "Act like the weak, rotten imbecile you are, and you will die."

The actor, a proud young man, was numbed by the insult. Nobody had ever called him a weak, rotten imbecile. He wanted to express his fury, but his pain was so severe that he could not react to the indignity.

"If you want me to ease your pain, you must obey me blindly," the nagual said with frightening coldness. "Signal me with a nod. But know now that the moment you change your mind and act like the shameful moron you are, I'll immediately pull the plug and leave you to die."

With his last bit of strength the actor nodded his assent. The nagual tapped him on his back and his pain vanished. But along with the searing pain, something else vanished: the fog in his mind. And then the young actor knew everything without understanding anything. The nagual introduced himself again. He told him that his name was Elias, and that he was the nagual. And the actor knew what it all meant.

The nagual Elias then shifted his attention to the semiconscious Talia. He put his mouth to her left ear and whispered commands to her in order to make her assemblage point stop it's erratic shifting. He soothed her fear by telling her, in whispers, stories of sorcerers who had gone through the same thing she was experiencing. When she was fairly calm, he introduced himself as the nagual Elias, a sorcerer; and then he attempted with her the most difficult thing in sorcery: moving the assemblage point beyond the sphere of the world we know.

Don Juan remarked that seasoned sorcerers are capable of moving beyond the world we know, but that inexperienced persons are not. The nagual Elias always maintained that ordinarily he would not have dreamed of attempting such a feat, but on that day something other than his knowledge or his volition was making him act. Yet the maneuver worked. Talia moved beyond the world we know and came safely back.

Then the nagual Elias had another insight. The actor was naked; covered only by the nagual Elfas's riding coat. As the nagual Elias sat between the two people stretched out on the ground, he reviewed their situation to them.

He told them they had both, by the force of circumstances, fallen into a trap set by the spirit itself. He, the nagual, was the active part of that trap because by encountering them under the conditions he had, he had been forced to become their temporary protector; and to engage his knowledge of sorcery in order to help them.

As their temporary protector it was his duty to warn them that they were about to reach a unique threshold; and that it was up to them, both individually and together, to attain that threshold by entering a mood of abandon but not recklessness; a mood of caring but not indulgence. He did not want to say more for fear of confusing them or influencing their decision. He felt that if they were to cross that threshold, it had to be with minimal help from him.

The nagual then left them alone in that isolated spot and went to the city to arrange for medicinal herbs, mats, and blankets to be brought to them. His idea was that in solitude they would attain and cross that threshold.

For a long time the two young people lay next to each other, immersed in their own thoughts. The fact that their assemblage points had shifted meant that they could think in greater depth than ordinarily, but it also meant that they worried, pondered, and were afraid in equally greater depth.

Since Talia could talk and was a bit stronger. She broke their silence: She asked the young actor if he was afraid. He nodded affirmatively. She felt a great compassion for him and took off a shawl she was wearing to put over his shoulders, and she held his hand.

The young man did not dare voice what he felt. His fear that his pain would recur if he spoke was too great and too vivid. He wanted to apologize to her; to tell her that his only regret was having hurt her, and that it did not matter that he was going to die- for he knew with certainty that he was not going to survive the day.

Talia's thoughts were on the same subject. She said that she too had only one regret: that she had fought him hard enough to bring on his death. She was very peaceful now, a feeling which, agitated as she always was and driven by her great strength, was unfamiliar to her. She told him that her death was very near, too, and that she was glad it all would end that day.

The young actor, hearing his own thoughts being spoken by Talia, felt a chill. A surge of energy came to him then and made him sit up. He was not in pain, nor was he coughing. He took in great gulps of air, something he had no memory of having done before. He took the girl's hand and they began to talk without vocalizing.

Don Juan said it was at that instant that the spirit came to them. And they 'saw'. They were deeply Catholic, and what they saw was a vision of heaven where everything was alive; bathed in light. They saw a world of miraculous sights.

When the nagual returned, they were exhausted, although not injured. Talia was unconscious, but the young man had managed to remain aware by a supreme effort of self-control. He insisted on whispering something in the nagual's ear.

"We saw heaven," he whispered, tears rolling down his cheeks.

"You saw more than that," the nagual Elfas retorted. "You saw the spirit."

Don Juan said that since the spirit's descent is always shrouded, naturally, Talia and the young actor could not hold onto their vision. They soon forgot it, as anyone would. The uniqueness of their experience was that, without any training and without being aware of it, they had dreamed together and had seen the spirit. For them to have achieved this with such ease was quite out of the ordinary.

"Those two were really the most remarkable beings I have ever met," don Juan added.

I, naturally, wanted to know more about them. But don Juan would not indulge me. He said that this was all there was about his benefactor and the fourth abstract core.

He seemed to remember something he was not telling me and laughed uproariously. Then he patted me on the back and told me it was time to set out for the cave.

When we got to the rock ledge it was almost dark. Don Juan sat down hurriedly, in the same position as the first time. He was to my right, touching me with his shoulder. He immediately seemed to enter into a deep state of relaxation, which pulled me into total immobility and silence. I could not even hear his breathing. I closed my eyes, but he nudged me to warn me to keep them open.

By the time it became completely dark, an immense fatigue had begun to make my eyes sore and itchy. Finally I gave up my resistance and was pulled into the deepest, blackest sleep I have ever had. Yet I was not totally asleep. I could feel the thick blackness around me. I had an entirely physical sensation of wading through blackness. Then it suddenly became reddish, then orange, then glaring white, like a terribly strong neon light.

Gradually I focused my vision until I saw I was still sitting in the same position with don Juan-but no longer in the cave. We were on a mountaintop looking down over exquisite flatlands with mountains in the distance. This beautiful prairie was bathed in a glow that, like rays of light, emanated from the land itself. Wherever I looked, I saw familiar features: rocks, hills, rivers, forests, canyons, enhanced and transformed by their inner vibration; their inner glow. This glow that was so pleasing to my eyes also tingled out of my very being.

"Your assemblage point has moved," don Juan seemed to say to me.

The words had no sound; nevertheless I knew what he had just said to me. My rational reaction was to try to explain to myself that I had no doubt heard him as I would have if he had been talking in a vacuum, probably because my ears had been temporarily affected by what was transpiring.

"Your ears are fine. We are in a different realm of awareness," don Juan again seemed to say to me.

I could not speak. I felt the lethargy [* lethargy- state of deep and usually prolonged unconsciousness with motor and mental inactivity; unable to respond to external stimuli] of deep sleep preventing me from saying a word, yet I was as alert as I could be.

"What's happening?" I thought.

"The cave made your assemblage point move," don Juan thought, and I heard his thoughts as if they were my own words, voiced to myself.

I sensed a command that was not expressed in thoughts. Something ordered me to look again at the prairie.

As I stared at the wondrous sight, filaments of light began to radiate from everything on that prairie. At first it was like the explosion of an infinite number of short fibers, then the fibers became long threadlike strands of luminosity bundled together into beams of vibrating light that reached infinity. There was really no way for me to make sense of what I was seeing, or to describe it, except as filaments of vibrating light. The filaments were not intermingled or entwined. Although they sprang, and continued to spring, in every direction, each one was separate, and yet all of them were inextricably bundled together.

"You are seeing the Eagle's emanations and the force that keeps them apart and bundles them together," don Juan thought.

The instant I caught his thought the filaments of light seemed to consume all my energy. Fatigue overwhelmed me. It erased my vision and plunged me into darkness.

When I became aware of myself again, there was something so familiar around me, although I could not tell what it was, that I believed myself to be back in a normal state of awareness. Don Juan was asleep beside me, his shoulder against mine.

Then I realized that the darkness around us was so intense that I could not even see my hands. I speculated that fog must have covered the ledge and filled the cave; or perhaps it was the wispy low clouds that descended every rainy night from the higher mountains like a silent avalanche.

Yet in spite of the total blackness, somehow I saw that don Juan had opened his eyes immediately after I became aware, although he did not look at me. Instantly I realized that seeing him was not a consequence of light on my retina. It was, rather, a bodily sense.

I became so engrossed in observing don Juan without my eyes that I was not paying attention to what he was telling me. Finally he stopped talking and turned his face to me as if to look me in the eye.

He coughed a couple of times to clear his throat and started to talk in a very low voice. He said that his benefactor used to come to the cave quite often, both with him and with his other disciples, but more often by himself. In that cave his benefactor saw the same prairie we had just seen; a vision that gave him the idea of describing the spirit as the flow of things.

Don Juan repeated that his benefactor was not a good thinker. Had he been, he would have realized in an instant that what he had seen and described as the flow of things was intent; the force that permeates everything. Don Juan added that if his benefactor ever became aware of the nature of his seeing, he didn't reveal it. Don Juan had the idea that his benefactor never knew it. Instead, his benefactor believed that he had seen the flow of things, which was the absolute truth, but not the way he meant it.

Don Juan was so emphatic about this that I wanted to ask him what the difference was, but I could not speak. My throat seemed frozen. We sat there in complete silence and immobility for hours, yet I did not experience any discomfort: my muscles did not get tired, my legs did not fall asleep, my back did not ache.

When don Juan began to talk again, I did not even notice the transition, and I readily abandoned myself to listening to his voice. It was a melodic, rhythmical sound that emerged from the total blackness that surrounded me.

He said that at that very moment I was not in my normal state of awareness nor was I in heightened awareness. I was suspended in a lull, in the blackness of nonperception. My assemblage point had moved away from perceiving the daily world, but it had not moved enough to reach and light a totally new bundle of energy fields. Properly speaking, I was caught between two perceptual possibilities. This in-between state, this lull of perception had been reached through the influence of the cave which was itself guided by the intent of the sorcerers who carved it.

Don Juan asked me to pay close attention to what he was going to say next. He said that thousands of years ago, by means of seeing, sorcerers became aware that the earth was sentient and that it's awareness could affect the awareness of humans. They tried to find a way to use the earth's influence on human awareness and they discovered that certain caves were most effective.

Don Juan said that the search for caves became nearly full-time work for those sorcerers; and that through their endeavors they were able to discover a variety of uses for a variety of cave configurations. He added that out of all that work the only result pertinent to us was this particular cave and it's capacity to move the assemblage point until it reached a lull of perception.

As don Juan spoke, I had the unsettling sensation that something was clearing in my mind. Something was funneling my awareness into a long narrow channel. All the superfluous [*

superfluous- serving no useful purpose] half-thoughts and feelings of my normal awareness were being squeezed out.

Don Juan was thoroughly aware of what was happening to me. I heard his soft chuckle of satisfaction. He said that now we could talk more easily and our conversation would have more depth.

I remembered at that moment scores of things he had explained to me before. For instance, I knew that I was dreaming. I was actually sound asleep yet I was totally aware of myself through my second attention- the counterpart of my normal attentiveness.

I was certain I was asleep because of a bodily sensation plus a rational deduction based on statements that don Juan had made in the past. I had just seen the Eagle's emanations, and don Juan had said that it was impossible for sorcerers to have a sustained view of the Eagle's emanations in any way except in dreaming, therefore I had to be dreaming.

Don Juan had explained that the universe is made up of energy fields which defy description or scrutiny. He had said that they resembled filaments of ordinary light, except that light is lifeless compared to the Eagle's emanations, which exude awareness.

I had never, until this night, been able to see them in a sustained manner, and indeed they were made out of a light that was alive. Don Juan had maintained in the past that my knowledge and control of intent were not adequate to withstand the impact of that sight. He had explained that normal perception occurs when intent, which is pure energy, lights up a portion of the luminous filaments inside our cocoon, and at the same time brightens a long extension of the same luminous filaments extending into infinity outside our cocoon.

Extraordinary perception, 'seeing', occurs when by the force of intent a different cluster of energy fields energizes and lights up. He had said that when a crucial number of energy fields are lit up inside the luminous cocoon, a sorcerer is able to see the energy fields themselves.

On another occasion don Juan had recounted the rational thinking of the early sorcerers. He told me that, through their seeing, they realized that awareness took place when the energy fields inside our luminous cocoon were aligned with the same energy fields outside. They believed they had discovered alignment as the source of awareness.

Upon close examination, however, it became evident that what they had called alignment of the Eagle's emanations did not entirely explain what they were seeing. They had noticed that only a very small portion of the total number of luminous filaments inside the cocoon was energized while the rest remained unaltered. Seeing these few filaments energized had created a false discovery.

The filaments did not need to be aligned to be lit up because the ones inside our cocoon were the same as those outside. Whatever energized them was definitely an independent force. They felt they could not continue to call it awareness, as they had, because awareness was the glow of the energy fields being lit up. So the force that lit up the fields was named will.

Don Juan had said that when their seeing became still more sophisticated and effective, they realized that will was the force that kept the Eagle's emanations separated and was not only responsible for our awareness, but also for everything in the universe.

They saw that this force had total consciousness and that it sprang from the very fields of energy that made the universe. They decided then that intent was a more appropriate name for it than will. In the long run, however, the name proved disadvantageous, because it does not describe it's overwhelming importance nor the living connection it has with everything in the universe.

Don Juan had asserted that our great collective flaw is that we live our lives completely disregarding that connection. The busyness of our lives, our relentless interests, concerns, hopes, frustrations, and fears take precedence; and on a day-to-day basis we are unaware of being linked to everything else.

Don Juan had stated his belief that the Christian idea of being cast out from the Garden of Eden sounded to him like an allegory for losing our silent knowledge; our knowledge of intent. Sorcery, then, was a going back to the beginning; a return to paradise.

We stayed seated in the cave in total silence; perhaps for hours, or perhaps it was only a few instants. Suddenly don Juan began to talk, and the unexpected sound of his voice jarred me. I did not catch what he said. I cleared my throat to ask him to repeat what he had said, and that act brought me completely out of my reflectiveness.

I quickly realized that the darkness around me was no longer impenetrable. I could speak now. I felt I was back in my normal state of awareness.

In a calm voice don Juan told me that for the very first time in my life I had seen the spirit; the force that sustains the universe. He emphasized that intent is not something one might use or command or move in any way- nevertheless, one could use it, command it, or move it as one desires.

This contradiction, he said, is the essence of sorcery. To fail to understand it had brought generations of sorcerers unimaginable pain and sorrow. Modern-day naguals, in an effort to avoid paying this exorbitant price in pain, had developed a code of behavior called the warrior's way, or the impeccable action; which prepared sorcerers by enhancing their sobriety and thoughtfulness.

Don Juan explained that at one time in the remote past, sorcerers were deeply interested in the general connecting link that intent has with everything. And by focusing their second attention on that link, they acquired not only direct knowledge but also the ability to manipulate that knowledge and perform astounding deeds. They did not acquire, however, the soundness of mind needed to manage all that power.

So in a judicious mood, sorcerers decided to focus their second attention solely on the connecting link of creatures who have awareness. This included the entire range of existing organic beings; as well as the entire range of what sorcerers call inorganic beings, or allies, which they described as entities with awareness, but no life as we understand life. This solution was not successful either, because it, too, failed to bring them wisdom.

In their next reduction, sorcerers focused their attention exclusively on the link that connects human beings with intent. The end result was very much as before.

Then, sorcerers sought a final reduction. Each sorcerer would be concerned solely with his individual connection. But this proved to be equally ineffective.

Don Juan said that although there were remarkable differences among those four areas of interest, one was as corrupting as another. So in the end, sorcerers concerned themselves exclusively with the capacity that their individual connecting link with intent had to set them free to light the fire from within.

He asserted that all modern-day sorcerers have to struggle fiercely to gain soundness of mind. A nagual has to struggle especially hard because he has more strength; a greater command over the energy fields that determine perception; and more training in and familiarity with the intricacies of silent knowledge- which is nothing but direct contact with intent.

Examined in this way, sorcery becomes an attempt to reestablish our knowledge of intent and regain use of it without succumbing to it. And the abstract cores of the sorcery stories are shades of realization; degrees of our being aware of intent.

I understood don Juan's explanation with perfect clarity. But the more I understood and the clearer his statements became, the greater my sense of loss and despondency. At one moment I sincerely considered ending my life right there. I felt I was damned.

Nearly in tears, I told don Juan that there was no point in his continuing his explanation, for I knew that I was about to lose my clarity of mind, and that when I reverted to my normal state of awareness, I would have no memory of having seen or heard anything. My mundane consciousness would impose it's lifelong habit of repetition and the reasonable predictability of it's logic. That was why I felt damned. I told him that I resented my fate.

Don Juan responded that even in heightened awareness I thrived on repetition, and that periodically I would insist on boring him by describing my attacks of feeling worthless. He said that if I had to go under it should be fighting, not apologizing or feeling sorry for myself; and that it did not matter what our specific fate was as long as we faced it with ultimate abandon.

His words made me feel blissfully happy. I repeated over and over, tears streaming down my cheeks, that I agreed with him. There was such profound happiness in me that I suspected my nerves were getting out of hand. I called upon all my forces to stop this and I felt the sobering effect of my mental brakes. But as this happened, my clarity of mind began to diffuse. I silently fought- trying to be both less sober and less nervous. Don Juan did not make a sound and left me alone.

By the time I had reestablished my balance, it was almost dawn. Don Juan stood, stretched his arms above his head and tensed his muscles, making his joints crack. He helped me up and commented that I had spent a most enlightening night: I had experienced what the spirit was, and had been able to summon hidden strength to accomplish something, which on the surface amounted to calming my nervousness; but at a deeper level it had actually been a very successful, volitional movement of my assemblage point. He signaled then that it was time to start on our way back.

## The Somersault of Thought

We walked into his house around seven in the morning; in time for breakfast. I was famished but not tired. We had left the cave to climb down to the valley at dawn. Don Juan, instead of following the most direct route, made a long detour that took us along the river. He explained that we had to collect our wits before we got home.

I answered it was very kind of him to say 'our wits' when I was the only one whose wits were disordered. But he replied that he was acting not out of kindness, but out of warrior's training. A warrior, he said, was on permanent guard against the roughness of human behavior. A warrior was magical and ruthless; a maverick with the most refined taste and manners, whose wordly task was to sharpen, yet disguise, his cutting edges so that no one would be able to suspect his ruthlessness.

After breakfast I thought it would be wise to get some sleep, but don Juan contended I had no time to waste. He said that all too soon I would lose the little clarity I still had, and if I went to sleep I would lose it all.

"It doesn't take a genius to figure out that there is hardly any way to talk about intent" he said quickly as he scrutinized me from head to toe. "But making this statement doesn't mean anything. It is the reason why sorcerers rely instead on the sorcery stories. And their hope is that someday the abstract cores of the stories will make sense to the listener."

I understood what he was saying, but I still could not conceive what an abstract core was or what it was supposed to mean to me. I tried to think about it. Thoughts barraged me. Images passed rapidly through my mind giving me no time to think about them. I could not slow them down enough even to recognize them. Finally anger overpowered me and I slammed my fist on the table.

Don Juan shook from head to toe, choking with laughter.

"Do what you did last night," he urged me, winking. "Slow yourself down."

My frustration made me very aggressive. I immediately put forth some senseless arguments; then I became aware of my error and apologized for my lack of restraint.

"Don't apologize," he said. "I should tell you that the understanding you're after is impossible at this time. The abstract cores of the sorcery stories will say nothing to you now. Later- years later, I mean- they may make perfect sense to you."

I begged don Juan not to leave me in the dark; to discuss the abstract cores. It was not at all clear to me what he wanted me to do with them. I assured him that my present state of heightened awareness could be very helpful to me in allowing me to understand his discussion.

I urged him to hurry, for I could not guarantee how long this state would last. I told him that soon I would return to my normal state and would become a bigger idiot than I was at that moment. I had said it half in jest. His laughter told me that he had taken it as such, but I was deeply affected by my own words. A tremendous sense of melancholy overtook me.

Don Juan gently took my arm, pulled me to a comfortable armchair, then sat down facing me. He gazed fixedly into my eyes, and for a moment I was incapable of breaking the force of his stare.

"Sorcerers constantly stalk themselves," he said in a reassuring voice, as if trying to calm me with the sound of his voice.

I wanted to say that my nervousness had passed and that it had probably been caused by my lack of sleep, but he did not allow me to say anything.

He assured me that he had already taught me everything there was to know about stalking, but I had not yet retrieved my knowledge from the depth of heightened awareness where I had it stored.

I told him I had the annoying sensation of being bottled up. I felt there was something locked inside me; something that made me slam doors and kick tables; something that frustrated me and made me irascible. [* irascible- quickly aroused to anger]

"That sensation of being bottled up is experienced by every human being," he said. "It is a reminder of our existing connection with intent. For sorcerers this sensation is even more acute, precisely because their goal is to sensitize their connecting link until they can make it function at will.

"When the pressure of their connecting link is too great, sorcerers relieve it by stalking themselves."

"I still don't think I understand what you mean by stalking" I said. "But at a certain level I think I know exactly what you mean."

"I'll try to help you clarify what you know, then," he said. "Stalking is a procedure; a very simple one. Stalking is special behavior that follows certain principles. It is secretive, furtive, deceptive behavior designed to deliver a jolt. And when you stalk yourself, you jolt yourself using your own behavior in a ruthless, cunning way."

He explained that when a sorcerer's awareness became bogged down with the weight of his perceptual input- which was what was happening to me- the best, or even perhaps the only remedy was to use the idea of death to deliver that stalking jolt.

"The idea of death, therefore, is of monumental importance in the life of a sorcerer," don Juan continued. "I have shown you innumerable things about death to convince you that the knowledge of our impending and unavoidable end is what gives us sobriety. Our most costly mistake as average men is indulging in a sense of immortality. It is as though we believe that if we don't think about death, we can protect ourselves from it."

"You must agree, don Juan, not thinking about death certainly protects us from worrying about it."

"Yes, it serves that purpose," he conceded. "But that purpose is an unworthy one for average men and a travesty for sorcerers. Without a clear view of death, there is no order; no sobriety; no beauty. Sorcerers struggle to gain this crucial insight in order to help them realize at the deepest possible level that they have no assurance whatsoever that their lives will continue beyond the moment. This realization gives sorcerers the courage to be patient and yet take action; courage to be acquiescent [* acquiescent- willing to carry out the orders or wishes of another without protest] without being stupid."

Don Juan fixed his gaze on me. He smiled and shook his head.

"Yes," he went on. "The idea of death is the only thing that can give sorcerers courage. Strange, isn't it? It gives sorcerers the courage to be cunning without being conceited, and above all it gives them courage to be ruthless without being self-important."

He smiled again and nudged me. I told him I was absolutely terrified by the idea of my death; that I thought about it constantly, but it certainly didn't give me courage or spur me to take action. It only made me cynical or caused me to lapse into moods of profound melancholy.

"Your problem is very simple," he said. "You become easily obsessed. I have been telling you that sorcerers stalk themselves in order to break the power of their obsessions. There are many ways of stalking oneself. If you don't want to use the idea of your death, use the poems you read me to stalk yourself."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I have told you that there are many reasons I like poems," he said. "What I do is stalk myself with them. I deliver a jolt to myself with them. I listen, and as you read, I shut off my internal dialogue and let my inner silence gain momentum. Then the combination of the poem and the silence delivers the jolt."

He explained that poets unconsciously long for the sorcerers' world; but because they are not sorcerers on the path of knowledge, longing is all they have.

"Let us see if you can feel what I'm talking about," he said, handing me a book of poems by Jose Gorostiza.

I opened it at the bookmark and he pointed to the poem he liked.

...this incessant stubborn dying;

this living death

that slays you, oh God,

in your rigorous handiwork;

in the roses;

in the stones;

in the indomitable stars;

and in the flesh that burns out

like a bonfire lit by a song;

a dream;

a hue that hits the eye.

...and you, yourself,

perhaps have died

eternities of ages ago out there

without us knowing about it;

we dregs, crumbs, ashes of you.

You that still are present

like a star faked by it's very light;

an empty light without star

that reaches us

hiding it's infinite catastrophe.

"As I hear the words," don Juan said when I had finished reading, "I feel that that man is seeing the essence of things and I can see with him. I don't care what the poem is about. I care only about the feeling the poet's longing brings me. I borrow his longing, and with it I borrow the beauty. And I marvel at the fact that he, like a true warrior, lavishes it on the recipients, the beholders, retaining for himself only his longing. This jolt, this shock of beauty, is stalking."

I was very moved. Don Juan's explanation had touched a strange chord in me.

"Would you say, don Juan, that death is the only real enemy we have?" I asked him a moment later.

"No," he said with conviction. "Death is not an enemy, although it appears to be. Death is not our destroyer, although we think it is."

"What is it, then, if not our destroyer?" I asked.

"Sorcerers say death is the only worthy opponent we have," he replied. "Death is our challenger. We are born to take that challenge, average men or sorcerers. Sorcerers know about it; average men do not."

"I personally would say, don Juan, life, not death, is the challenge."

"Life is the process by means of which death challenges us," he said. "Death is the active force. Life is the arena. And in that arena there are only two contenders at any time: oneself and death."

"I would think, don Juan, that we human beings are the challengers," I said.

"Not at all," he retorted. "We are passive. Think about it. If we move, it's only when we feel the pressure of death. Death sets the pace for our actions and feelings and pushes us relentlessly until it breaks us and wins the bout, or else we rise above all possibilities and defeat death.

"Sorcerers defeat death and death acknowledges the defeat by letting the sorcerers go free, never to be challenged again."

"Does that mean that sorcerers become immortal?"

"No. It doesn't mean that," he replied. "Death stops challenging them, that's all."

"But what does that mean, don Juan?" I asked.

"It means thought has taken a somersault into the inconceivable," he said.

"What is a somersault of thought into the inconceivable?" I asked, trying not to sound belligerent. "The problem you and I have is that we do not share the same meanings."

"You're not being truthful," don Juan interrupted. "You understand what I mean. For you to demand a rational explanation of a somersault of thought into the inconceivable is a travesty. You know exactly what it is."

"No, I don't," I said.

And then I realized that I did, or rather, that I intuited what it meant. There was some part of me that could transcend my rationality and understand and explain, beyond the level of metaphor, a somersault of thought into the inconceivable. The trouble was that part of me was not strong enough to surface at will.

I said as much to don Juan, who laughed and commented that my awareness was like a yo-yo. Sometimes it rose to a high spot and my command was keen, while at others it descended and I became a rational moron. But most of the time it hovered at an unworthy median where I was neither fish nor fowl.

"A somersault of thought into the inconceivable," he explained with an air of resignation, "is the descent of the spirit; the act of breaking our perceptual barriers. It is the moment in which man's perception reaches it's limits. Sorcerers practice the art of sending scouts- advance runners to probe our perceptual limits. This is another reason I like poems. I take them as advance runners. But, as I've said to you before, poets don't know as exactly as sorcerers what those advance runners can accomplish."

In the early evening, don Juan said that we had many things to discuss and asked me if I wanted to go for a walk. I was in a peculiar state of mind. Earlier I had noticed a strange aloofness in myself that came and went. At first I thought it was physical fatigue clouding my thoughts. But my thoughts were crystal clear. So I became convinced that my strange detachment was a product of my shift to heightened awareness.

We left the house and strolled around the town's plaza. I quickly asked don Juan about my aloofness before he had a chance to begin on anything else. He explained it as a shift of energy. He said that as the energy that was ordinarily used to maintain the fixed position of the assemblage point became liberated, it focused automatically on that connecting link.

He assured me that there were no techniques or maneuvers for a sorcerer to learn beforehand to move energy from one place to the other. Rather it was a matter of an instantaneous shift taking place once a certain level of proficiency had been attained.

I asked him what the level of proficiency was.

"Pure understanding," he replied. "In order to attain that instantaneous shift of energy, one needed a clear connection with intent, and to get a clear connection one needed only to intend it through pure understanding."

Naturally I wanted him to explain pure understanding. He laughed and sat down on a bench.

"I'm going to tell you something fundamental about sorcerers and their acts of sorcery," he went on. "Something about the somersault of their thought into the inconceivable."

He said that some sorcerers were storytellers. Storytelling for them was not only the advance runner that probed their perceptual limits, but also their path to perfection; to power; to the spirit.

He was quiet for a moment, obviously searching for an appropriate example. Then he reminded me that the Yaqui Indians had a collection of historical events they called 'the memorable dates'.

I knew that the memorable dates were oral accounts of their history as a nation when they waged war against the invaders of their homeland: the Spaniards first; the Mexicans later. Don Juan, a Yaqui himself, stated emphatically that the memorable dates were accounts of their defeats and disintegration.

He asked me, "So, what would you say- since you are a learned man- about a sorcerer storyteller's taking an account from the memorable dates- let's say, for example, the story of Calixto Muni- and changing the ending so that instead of describing how Calixto Muni was drawn and quartered by the Spanish executioners, which is what happened; he tells a story of Calixto Muni the victorious rebel who succeeded in liberating his people?"

I knew the story of Calixto Muni. He was a Yaqui Indian who, according to the memorable dates, served for many years on a buccaneer ship in the Caribbean in order to learn war strategy. Then he returned to his native Sonora, managed to start an uprising against the Spaniards, and declared a war of independence; only to be betrayed, captured, and executed.

Don Juan coaxed me to comment. I told him I would have to assume that changing the factual account in the manner he was describing would be a psychological device; a sort of wishful thinking on the sorcerer storyteller's part. Or perhaps it would be a personal, idiosyncratic [* idiosyncratic- peculiar to the individual] way of alleviating frustration. I added that I would even call such a sorcerer storyteller a patriot because he was unable to accept bitter defeat.

Don Juan laughed until he was choking.

"But it's not a matter of one sorcerer storyteller," he argued. "They all do that."

"Then it's a socially sanctioned device to express the wishful thinking of a whole society," I retorted. "A socially accepted way of releasing psychological stress collectively."

"Your argument is glib and convincing and reasonable," he commented. "But because your spirit is dead, you can't see the flaw in your argument."

He eyed me as if coaxing me to understand what he was saying. I had no comment, and anything I might have said would have made me sound peevish.

"The sorcerer storyteller who changes the ending of the 'factual' account," he said, "does it at the direction and under the auspices [* auspices- kindly endorsement and guidance] of the spirit. Because he can manipulate his elusive connection with intent, he can actually change things. The sorcerer storyteller signals that he has intended it by taking off his hat, putting it on the ground, and turning it a full three hundred and sixty degrees counterclockwise. Under the auspices of the spirit, that simple act plunges him into the spirit itself. He has let his thought somersault into the inconceivable."

Don Juan lifted his arm above his head and pointed for an instant to the sky above the horizon.

"Because his pure understanding is an advance runner probing that immensity out there," don Juan went on, "the sorcerer storyteller knows without a shadow of doubt that somewhere, somehow, in that infinity, at this very moment the spirit has descended. Calixto Muni is victorious. He has delivered his people. His goal has transcended his person."

## Moving the Assemblage Point

A couple of days later, don Juan and I made a trip to the mountains. Halfway up the foothills we sat down to rest. Earlier that day, don Juan had decided to find an appropriate setting in which to explain some intricate aspects of the mastery of awareness. Usually he preferred to go to the closer western range of mountains.

This time, however, he chose the eastern peaks. They were much higher and farther away. To me they seemed more ominous, darker, and more massive. But I could not tell whether this impression was my own or if I had somehow absorbed don Juan's feelings about these mountains.

I opened my backpack. The women seers from don Juan's group had prepared it for me, and I discovered that they had packed some cheese. I experienced a moment of annoyance because, while I liked cheese, it did not agree with me. Yet I was incapable of refusing it whenever it was made available.

Don Juan had pointed this out as a true weakness and had made fun of me. I was embarrassed at first, but found that when I did not have cheese around I did not miss it.

The problem was that the practical jokers in don Juan's group always packed a big chunk of cheese for me, which, of course, I always ended up eating.

"Finish it in one sitting," don Juan advised me with a mischievous glint in his eyes. "That way you won't have to worry about it anymore."

Perhaps influenced by his suggestion, I had the most intense desire to devour the whole chunk. Don Juan laughed so much that I suspected once again that he had schemed with his group to set me up.

In a more serious mood, he suggested that we spend the night there in the foothills, and take a day or two to reach the higher peaks. I agreed.

Don Juan casually asked me if I had recalled anything about the four moods of stalking. I admitted that I had tried, but that my memory had failed me.

"Don't you remember my teaching you the nature of ruthlessness?" he asked. "Ruthlessness, the opposite of self-pity?"

I could not remember. Don Juan appeared to be considering what to say next. Then he stopped. The corners of his mouth dropped in a gesture of sham impotence. He shrugged his shoulders, stood up and quickly walked a short distance to a small level spot on top of a hill.

"All sorcerers are ruthless," he said, as we sat down on the flat ground. "But you know this. We have discussed this concept at length."

After a long silence, he said that we were going to continue discussing the abstract cores of the sorcery stories, but that he intended to talk less and less about them because the time was approaching when it would be up to me to discover them and allow them to reveal their meaning.

"As I have already told you," he said, "the fourth abstract core of the sorcery stories is called the descent of the spirit, or being moved by intent. The story says that in order to let the mysteries of sorcery reveal themselves to the man we've been talking about, it was necessary for the spirit to descend on that man.

"The spirit chose a moment when the man was distracted and unguarded; and showing no pity, the spirit let it's presence by itself move the man's assemblage point to a specific position. This spot was known to sorcerers from then on as the place of no pity. Ruthlessness became, in this way, the first principle of sorcery.

"The first principle should not be confused with the first effect of sorcery apprenticeship, which is the shift between normal and heightened awareness."

"I don't understand what you are trying to tell me," I complained.

"What I want to say is that, to all appearances, having the assemblage point shift is the first thing that actually happens to a sorcery apprentice," he replied. "So, it is only natural for an apprentice to assume that this is the first principle of sorcery. But it is not.

"Ruthlessness is the first principle of sorcery. But we have discussed this before. Now I am only trying to help you remember."

I could honestly have said that I had no idea what he was talking about, but I also had the strange sensation that I did.

"Bring back the recollection of the first time I taught you ruthlessness," he urged. "Recollecting has to do with moving the assemblage point."

He waited a moment to see whether I was following his suggestion. Since it was obvious that I could not, he continued his explanation. He said that, mysterious as the shift into heightened awareness was, all that one needed to accomplish it was the presence of the spirit.

I remarked that his statements that day were either extremely obscure, or I was terribly dense; because I could not follow his line of thought at all. He replied firmly that my confusion was unimportant and insisted that the only thing of real importance was that I understand that the mere contact with the spirit could bring about any movement of the assemblage point.

"I've told you the nagual is the conduit of the spirit," he went on. "Since he spends a lifetime impeccably redefining his connecting link with intent, and since he has more energy than the average man, he can let the spirit express itself through him.

"So, the first thing the sorcerer apprentice experiences is a shift in his level of awareness; a shift brought about simply by the presence of the nagual. And what I want you to know is, that there really is no procedure involved in making the assemblage point move. The spirit touches the apprentice and his assemblage point moves. It is as simple as that."

I told him that his assertions were disturbing because they contradicted what I had painfully learned to accept through personal experience: that heightened awareness was feasible as a sophisticated, although inexplicable, maneuver performed by don Juan by means of which he manipulated my perception. Throughout the years of our association, he had time after time made me enter into heightened awareness by striking me on my back. I pointed out this contradiction.

He replied that striking my back was more a trick to trap my attention and remove doubts from my mind than a bona fide maneuver to manipulate my perception. He called it a simple trick, in keeping with his moderate personality.

He commented, not quite as a joke, that I was lucky he was a plain man, not given to weird behavior. Otherwise, instead of simple tricks, I would have had to endure bizarre rituals before he could remove all doubts from my mind; to let the spirit move my assemblage point.

"What we need to do to allow magic to get hold of us is to banish doubt from our minds," he said. "Once doubts are banished, anything is possible."

He reminded me of an event I had witnessed some months before in Mexico City; which I had found to be incomprehensible until he had explained it using the sorcerers' paradigm.

What I had witnessed was a surgical operation performed by a famous psychic healer. A friend of mine was the patient. The healer was a woman who entered a very dramatic trance to operate on him.

I was able to observe that, using a kitchen knife, she cut his abdominal cavity open in the umbilical region, detached his diseased liver, washed it in a bucket of alcohol, put it back in and closed the bloodless opening with just the pressure of her hands.

There had been a number of people in the semidark room; witnesses to the operation. Some of them seemed to be interested observers like myself. The others seemed to be the healer's helpers.

After the operation, I talked briefly to three of the observers. They all agreed that they had witnessed the same events I had. When I talked to my friend, the patient, he reported that he had felt the operation as a dull, constant pain in his stomach and a burning sensation on his right side.

I had narrated all of this to don Juan and I had even ventured a cynical explanation. I had told him that the semidarkness of the room, in my opinion, lent itself perfectly to all kinds of sleight of hand which could have accounted for the sight of the internal organs being pulled out of the abdominal cavity and washed in alcohol. The emotional shock caused by the healer's dramatic trance- which I also considered trickery- helped to create an atmosphere of almost religious faith.

Don Juan immediately pointed out that this was a cynical opinion, and not a cynical explanation, because it did not explain the fact that my friend had really gotten well. Don Juan had then proposed an alternative view based on sorcerers' knowledge. He had explained that the event hinged on the salient fact that the healer was capable of moving the assemblage point of the exact number of people in her audience. The only trickery involved- if one could call it trickery- was that the number of people present in the room could not exceed the number she could handle.

Her dramatic trance and the accompanying histrionics were, according to him, either well thought out devices the healer used to trap the attention of those present, or unconscious maneuvers dictated by the spirit itself. Whichever; they were the most appropriate means whereby the healer could foster the unity of thought needed to remove doubt from the minds of those present and force them into heightened awareness.

When she cut the body open with a kitchen knife and removed the internal organs, it was not, don Juan had stressed, sleight of hand. These were bona fide events; which by virtue of taking place in heightened awareness, were outside the realm of everyday judgment.

I had asked don Juan how the healer could manage to move the assemblage points of those people without touching them. His reply had been that the healer's power- a gift, or a stupendous accomplishment- served as a conduit for the spirit. It was the spirit, he had said, and not the healer, which had moved those assemblage points.

"I explained to you then, although you didn't understand a word of it," don Juan went on, "that the healer's art and power was to remove doubts from the minds of those present. By doing this, she was able to allow the spirit to move their assemblage points. Once those points had moved, everything was possible. They had entered into the realm where miracles are commonplace."

He asserted emphatically that the healer must also have been a sorceress, and that if I made an effort to remember the operation, I would remember that she had been ruthless with the people around her; especially the patient.

I repeated to him what I could recall of the session. The pitch and tone of the healer's flat, feminine voice changed dramatically when she entered a trance. It changed into a raspy, deep, male voice. That voice announced that the spirit of a warrior of pre-Columbian antiquity had possessed the healer's body. Once the announcement was made, the healer's attitude changed dramatically. She was possessed. She was obviously absolutely sure of herself, and she proceeded to operate with total certainty and firmness.

"I prefer the word 'ruthlessness' to 'certainty and firmness'," don Juan commented, then continued. "That healer had to be ruthless to create the proper setting for the spirit's intervention."

He asserted that events difficult to explain, such as that operation, were really very simple. They were made difficult by our insistence upon thinking. If we did not think, everything fit into place.

"That is truly absurd, don Juan," I said and really meant it.

I reminded him that he demanded serious thinking of all his apprentices, and even criticized his own teacher for not being a good thinker.

"Of course I insist that everyone around me think clearly," he said. "And I explain, to anyone who wants to listen, that the only way to think clearly is to not think at all. I was convinced you understood this sorcerers' contradiction."

In a loud voice I protested the obscurity of his statements. He laughed and made fun of my compulsion to defend myself. Then he explained again that for a sorcerer there were two types of thinking.

One was average day-today thinking, which was ruled by the normal position of his assemblage point. It was muddled thinking that did not really answer his needs and left great murkiness in his head.

The other was precise thinking. It was functional, economical, and left very few things unexplained. Don Juan remarked that for this type of thinking to prevail the assemblage point had to move. Or at least the day-to-day type thinking had to stop to allow the assemblage point to shift. Thus the apparent contradiction, which was really no contradiction at all.

"I want you to recall something you have done in the past," he said. "I want you to recall a special movement of your assemblage point. And to do this, you have to stop thinking the way you normally think. Then the other, the type I call clear thinking, will take over and make you recollect."

"But how do I stop thinking?" I asked, although I knew what he was going to reply.

"By intending the movement of your assemblage point," he said. "Intent is beckoned with the eyes."

I told don Juan that my mind was shifting back and forth between moments of tremendous lucidity, when everything was crystal clear, and lapses into profound mental fatigue during which I could not understand what he was saying.

He tried to put me at ease, explaining that my instability was caused by a slight fluctuation of my assemblage point, which had not stabilized in the new position it had reached some years earlier. The fluctuation was the result of left-over feelings of self-pity.

"What new position is that, don Juan?" I asked.

"Years ago- and this is what I want you to recollect- your assemblage point reached the place of no pity," he replied.

"I beg your pardon?" I said.

"The place of no pity is the site of ruthlessness," he said. "But you know all this. For the time being, though, until you recollect, let's say that ruthlessness, being a specific position of the assemblage point, is shown in the eyes of sorcerers. It's like a shimmering film over the eyes. The eyes of sorcerers are brilliant. The greater the shine, the more ruthless the sorcerer is. At this moment, your eyes are dull."

He explained that when the assemblage point moved to the place of no pity, the eyes began to shine. The firmer the grip of the assemblage point on it's new position, the more the eyes shone.

"Try to recall what you already know about this," he urged me. He kept quiet for a moment, then spoke without looking at me.

"Recollecting is not the same as remembering," he continued. "Remembering is dictated by the day-to-day type of thinking, while recollecting is dictated by the movement of the assemblage point.

"A recapitulation of their lives, which sorcerers do, is the key to moving their assemblage points. Sorcerers start their recapitulation by thinking; by remembering the most important acts of their lives. From merely thinking about them they then move on to actually being at the site of the event. When they can do that- be at the site of the event- they have successfully shifted their assemblage point to the precise spot it was when the event took place. Bringing back the total event by means of shifting the assemblage point is known as sorcerers' recollection."

He stared at me for an instant as if trying to make sure I was listening.

"Our assemblage points are constantly shifting," he explained, "imperceptible shifts. Sorcerers believe that in order to make their assemblage points shift to precise spots we must engage intent. Since there is no way of knowing what intent is, sorcerers let their eyes beckon it."

"All this is truly incomprehensible to me," I said.

Don Juan put his hands behind his head and lay down on the ground. I did the same. We remained quiet for a long time. The wind scudded the clouds. Their movement almost made me feel dizzy. And the dizziness changed abruptly into a familiar sense of anguish.

Every time I was with don Juan, I felt, especially in moments of rest and quiet, an overwhelming sensation of despair- a longing for something I could not describe. When I was alone, or with other people, I was never a victim of this feeling. Don Juan had explained that what I felt and interpreted as longing was in fact the sudden movement of my assemblage point.

When don Juan started to speak, all of a sudden the sound of his voice jolted me and I sat up.

"You must recollect the first time your eyes shone," he said, "because that was the first time your assemblage point reached the place of no pity. Ruthlessness possessed you then. Ruthlessness makes sorcerers' eyes shine, and that shine beckons intent. Each spot to which their assemblage points move is indicated by a specific shine of their eyes. Since their eyes have their own memory, they can call up the recollection of any spot by calling up the specific shine associated with that spot."

He explained that the reason sorcerers put so much emphasis on the shine of their eyes and on their gaze is because the eyes are directly connected to intent. Contradictory as it might sound, the truth is that the eyes are only superficially connected to the world of everyday life. Their deeper connection is to the abstract.

I could not conceive how my eyes could store that sort of information, and I said as much. Don Juan's reply was that man's possibilities are so vast and mysterious that sorcerers, rather than thinking about them, choose to explore them with no hope of ever understanding them.

I asked him if an average man's eyes were also affected by intent.

"Of course!" he exclaimed. "You know all this. But you know it at such a deep level that it is silent knowledge. You haven't sufficient energy to explain it; not even to yourself.

"The average man knows the same thing about his eyes, but he has even less energy than you. The only advantages sorcerers may have over average men is that they have stored their energy- which means a more precise, clearer connecting link with intent. Naturally, it also means they can recollect at will using the shine of their eyes to move their assemblage points."

Don Juan stopped talking and fixed me with his gaze. I clearly felt his eyes guiding, pushing and pulling something indefinite in me. I could not break away from his stare. His concentration was so intense it actually caused a physical sensation in me: I felt as if I were inside a furnace. And, quite abruptly, I was looking inward. It was a sensation very much like being in an absentminded reverie, but with the strange accompanying sensation of an intense awareness of myself, and an absence of thoughts. Supremely aware, I was looking inward, into nothingness.

With a gigantic effort, I pulled myself out of it and stood up.

"What did you do to me, don Juan?"

"Sometimes you are absolutely unbearable," he said. "Your wastefulness is infuriating. Your assemblage point was just in the most advantageous spot to recollect anything you wanted, and what did you do? You let it all go, to ask me what I did to you."

He kept silent for a moment, and then smiled as I sat down again.

"But being annoying is really your greatest asset," he added. "So why should I complain?"

Both of us broke into a loud laugh. It was a private joke.

Years before, I had been both very moved and very confused by don Juan's tremendous dedication to helping me. I could not imagine why he should show me such kindness. It was evident that he did not need me in any way in his life. He was obviously not investing in me. But I had learned, through life's painful experiences, that nothing was free; and being unable to foresee what don Juan's reward would be made me tremendously uneasy.

One day I asked don Juan point-blank, in a very cynical tone, what he was getting out of our association. I said that I had not been able to guess.

"Nothing you would understand," he replied.

His answer annoyed me. Belligerently I told him I was not stupid, and he could at least try to explain it to me.

"Well, let me just say that, although you could understand it, you are certainly not going to like it," he said with the smile he always had when he was setting me up. "You see, I really want to spare you."

I was hooked, and I insisted that he tell me what he meant.

"Are you sure you want to hear the truth?" he asked, knowing I could never say no, even if my life depended on it.

"Of course I want to hear whatever it is you're dangling in front of me," I said cuttingly.

He started to laugh as if at a big joke; the more he laughed, the greater my annoyance.

"I don't see what's so funny," I said.

"Sometimes the underlying truth shouldn't be tampered with," he said. "The underlying truth here is like a block at the bottom of a big pile of things, a cornerstone. If we take a hard look at the bottom block, we might not like the results. I prefer to avoid that."

He laughed again. His eyes, shining with mischievousness, seemed to invite me to pursue the subject further. And I insisted again that I had to know what he was talking about. I tried to sound calm but persistent.

"Well, if that is what you want," he said with the air of one who had been overwhelmed by the request. "First of all, I'd like to say that everything I do for you is free. You don't have to pay for it.

"As you know, I've been impeccable with you. And as you also know, my impeccability with you is not an investment. I am not grooming you to take care of me when I am too feeble to look after myself. But I do get something of incalculable value out of our association, a sort of reward for dealing impeccably with that bottom block I've mentioned. And what I get is the very thing you are perhaps not going to understand or like."

He stopped and peered at me, with a devilish glint in his eyes.

"Tell me about it, don Juan!" I exclaimed, irritated with his delaying tactics.

"I want you to bear in mind that I am telling you at your insistence," he said, still smiling.

He paused again. By then I was fuming.

"If you were to judge me by my actions with you," he said, "you would have to admit that I have been a paragon of patience and consistency. But what you don't know is that to accomplish this I have had to fight for impeccability as I have never fought before. In order to spend time with you, I have had to transform myself daily; restraining myself with the most excruciating effort."

Don Juan had been right. I did not like what he said. I tried not to lose face and made a sarcastic comeback.

"I'm not that bad, don Juan," I said.

My voice sounded surprisingly unnatural to me.

"Oh, yes, you are that bad," he said with a serious expression. "You are petty, wasteful, opinionated, coercive, short-tempered, conceited. You are morose, ponderous, and ungrateful. You have an inexhaustible capacity for self-indulgence. And worst of all, you have an exalted idea of yourself with nothing whatever to back it up.

"I could sincerely say that your mere presence makes me feel like vomiting."

I wanted to get angry. I wanted to protest; to complain that he had no right to talk to me that way, but I could not utter a single word. I was crushed. I felt numb.

My expression, upon hearing the bottom truth, must have been something because don Juan broke into such gales of laughter that I thought he was going to choke.

"I told you you were not going to like it or understand it," he said. "Warriors' reasons are very simple, but their finesse is extreme. It is a rare opportunity for a warrior to be given a genuine chance to be impeccable in spite of his basic feelings.

"You gave me such a unique chance. The act of giving freely and impeccably rejuvenates me and renews my wonder. What I get from our association is indeed of incalculable value to me. I am in your debt."

His eyes were shining, but without mischievousness, as he peered at me.

Don Juan began to explain what he had done.

"I am the nagual, I moved your assemblage point with the shine of my eyes," he said matter-of-factly. "The nagual's eyes can do that. It's not difficult. After all, the eyes of all living beings can move someone else's assemblage point, especially if their eyes are focused on intent. Under normal conditions, however, people's eyes are focused on the world, looking for food... looking for shelter..."

He nudged my shoulder.

"Looking for love," he added and broke into a loud laugh.

Don Juan constantly teased me about my 'looking for love'. He never forgot a naive answer I once gave him when he had asked me what I actively looked for in life. He had been steering me toward admitting that I did not have a clear goal, and he roared with laughter when I said that I was looking for love.

"A good hunter mesmerizes his prey with his eyes," he went on. "With his gaze he moves the assemblage point of his prey, and yet his eyes are on the world, looking for food."

I asked him if sorcerers could mesmerize people with their gaze. He chuckled and said that what I really wanted to know was if I could mesmerize women with my gaze in spite of the fact that my eyes were focused on the world, looking for love. He added, seriously, that the sorcerers' safety valve was that by the time their eyes were really focused on intent, they were no longer interested in mesmerizing anyone.

"But, for sorcerers to use the shine of their eyes to move their own or anyone else's assemblage point," he continued, "they have to be ruthless. That is, they have to be familiar with that specific position of the assemblage point called the place of no pity. This is especially true for the naguals."

He said that each nagual developed a brand of ruthlessness specific to him alone. He took my case as an example, and said that because of my unstable natural configuration, I appeared to seers as a sphere of luminosity not composed of four balls compressed into one- the usual structure of a nagual- but as a sphere composed of only three compressed balls. This configuration made me automatically hide my ruthlessness behind a mask of indulgence and laxness.

"Naguals are very misleading," don Juan went on. "They always give the impression of something they are not, and they do it so completely that everybody, including those who know them best, believe their masquerade."

"I really don't understand how you can say that I am masquerading, don Juan," I protested.

"You pass yourself off as an indulgent, relaxed man," he said. "You give the impression of being generous; of having great compassion. And everybody is convinced of your genuineness. They can even swear that that is the way you are."

"But that is the way I am!"

Don Juan doubled up with laughter. The direction the conversation had taken was not to my liking. I wanted to set the record straight. I argued vehemently [* vehemently- in a manner marked by extreme intensity of emotions or convictions] that I was truthful in everything I did, and challenged him to give me an example of my being otherwise.

He said I compulsively treated people with unwarranted generosity, giving them a false sense of my ease and openness. And I argued that being open was my nature. He laughed and retorted that if this were the case, why should be that I always demanded, without voicing it, that the people I dealt with be aware I was deceiving them? The proof was that when they failed to be aware of my ploy and took my pseudo-laxness at face value, I turned on them with exactly the cold ruthlessness I was trying to mask.

His comments made me feel desperate, because I couldn't argue with them. I remained quiet. I did not want to show that I was hurt. I was wondering what to do when he stood and started to walk away.

I stopped him by holding his sleeve. It was an unplanned move on my part which startled me and made him laugh. He sat down again with a look of surprise on his face.

"I didn't mean to be rude," I said, "but I've got to know more about this. It upsets me."

"Make your assemblage point move," he urged. "We've discussed ruthlessness before. Recollect it!"

He eyed me with genuine expectation although he must have seen that I could not recollect anything, for he continued to talk about the naguals' patterns of ruthlessness. He said that his own method consisted of subjecting people to a flurry of coercion and denial, hidden behind sham understanding and reasonableness.

"What about all the explanations you give me?" I asked. "Aren't they the result of genuine reasonableness and desire to help me understand?"

"No," he replied. "They are the result of my ruthlessness."

I argued passionately that my own desire to understand was genuine. He patted me on the shoulder and explained that my desire to understand was genuine, but my generosity was not. He said that naguals masked their ruthlessness automatically, even against their will.

As I listened to his explanation, I had the peculiar sensation in the back of my mind that at some point we had covered the concept of ruthlessness extensively.

"I'm not a rational man," he continued, looking into my eyes. "I only appear to be because my mask is so effective. What you perceive as reasonableness is my lack of pity, because that's what ruthlessness is: a total lack of pity.

"In your case, since you mask your lack of pity with generosity, you appear at ease; open. But actually you are as generous as I am reasonable. We are both fakes. We have perfected the art of disguising the fact that we feel no pity."

He said his benefactor's total lack of pity was masked behind the facade of an easygoing, practical joker with an irresistible need to poke fun at anyone with whom he came into contact.

"My benefactor's mask was that of a happy, unruffled man without a care in the world," don Juan continued. "But underneath all that he was, like all the naguals, as cold as the arctic wind."

"But you are not cold, don Juan," I said sincerely.

"Of course I am," he insisted. "The effectiveness of my mask is what gives you the impression of warmth."

He went on to explain that the nagual Elias's mask consisted of a maddening meticulousness about all details and accuracy, which created the false impression of attention and thoroughness.

He started to describe the nagual Elias's behavior. As he talked, he kept watching me. And perhaps because he was observing me so intently, I was unable to concentrate at all on what he was saying. I made a supreme effort to gather my thoughts.

He watched me for an instant, then went back to explaining ruthlessness, but I no longer needed his explanation.

I told him that I had recollected what he wanted me to recollect: the first time my eyes had shone. Very early in my apprenticeship I had achieved- by myself- a shift in my level of awareness. My assemblage point reached the position called the place of no pity.

## The Place of No Pity

Don Juan told me that there was no need to talk about the details of my recollection, at least not at that moment, because talk was used only to lead one to recollecting. Once the assemblage point moved, the total experience was relived. He also told me the best way to assure a complete recollection was to walk around.

And so both of us stood up; walked very slowly and in silence, following a trail in those mountains, until I had recollected everything.

We had been in the outskirts of Guaymas, in northern Mexico, on a drive from Nogales, Arizona, when it became evident to me that something was wrong with don Juan. For the last hour or so he had been unusually quiet and somber.

I did not think anything of it, but then, abruptly, his body twitched out of control. His chin hit his chest as if his neck muscles could no longer support the weight of his head.

"Are you getting carsick, don Juan?" I asked, suddenly alarmed.

He did not answer. He was breathing through his mouth.

During the first part of our drive, which had taken several hours, he had been fine. We had talked a great deal about everything. When we had stopped in the city of Santa Ana to get gas, he had even been doing push-outs against the roof of the car to loosen up the muscles of his shoulders.

"What's wrong with you, don Juan?" I asked.

I felt pangs of anxiety in my stomach. With his head down, he mumbled that he wanted to go to a particular restaurant and in a slow, faltering voice gave me precise directions on how to get there.

I parked my car on a side street, a block from the restaurant. As I opened the car door on my side, he held onto my arm with an iron grip. Painfully, and with my help, he dragged himself out of the car, over the driver's seat. Once he was on the sidewalk, he held onto my shoulders with both hands to straighten his back. In ominous silence, we shuffled down the street toward the dilapidated building where the restaurant was.

Don Juan was hanging onto my arm with all his weight. His breathing was so accelerated and the tremor in his body so alarming that I panicked. I stumbled and had to brace myself against the wall to keep us both from falling to the sidewalk. My anxiety was so intense I could not think. I looked into his eyes. They were dull. They did not have the usual shine.

We clumsily entered the restaurant and a solicitous waiter rushed over, as if on cue, to help don Juan.

"How are you feeling today?" he yelled into don Juan's ear.

He practically carried don Juan from the door to a table, seated him, and then disappeared.

"Does he know you, don Juan?" I asked when we were seated.

Without looking at me, he mumbled something unintelligible. I stood up and went to the kitchen to look for the busy waiter.

"Do you know the old man I am with?" I asked when I was able to corner him.

"Of course I know him," he said with the attitude of someone who has just enough patience to answer one question. "He's the old man who suffers from strokes."

That statement settled things for me. I knew then that don Juan had suffered a mild stroke while we were driving. There was nothing I could have done to avoid it, but I felt helpless and apprehensive. The feeling that the worst had not yet happened made me feel sick to my stomach.

I went back to the table and sat down in silence. Suddenly the same waiter arrived with two plates of fresh shrimp and two large bowls of sea-turtle soup. The thought occurred to me that either the restaurant served only shrimp and sea-turtle soup, or don Juan ate the same thing every time he was here.

The waiter talked so loudly to don Juan he could be heard above the clatter of customers.

"Hope you like your food!" he yelled. "If you need me, just lift your arm. I'll come right away."

Don Juan nodded his head affirmatively, and the waiter left after patting don Juan affectionately on the back.

Don Juan ate voraciously, smiling to himself from time to time. I was so apprehensive that just the thought of food made me feel nauseous. But then I reached a familiar threshold of anxiety, and the more I worried, the hungrier I became. I tried the food, and found it incredibly good.

I felt somewhat better after having eaten, but the situation had not changed, nor had my anxiety diminished.

When don Juan was through eating, he shot his arm straight above his head. In a moment, the waiter came over and handed me the bill.

I paid him and he helped don Juan stand up. He guided him by the arm out of the restaurant. The waiter even helped him out to the street and said goodbye to him effusively. [* effusively- in a manner filled with unrestrained inthusiasm]

We walked back to the car in the same laborious way with don Juan leaning heavily on my arm, and panting and stopping to catch his breath every few steps. The waiter stood in the doorway as if to make sure I was not going to let don Juan fall.

Don Juan took two or three full minutes to climb into the car.

"Tell me, what can I do for you, don Juan?" I pleaded.

"Turn the car around," he ordered in a faltering, barely audible voice. "I want to go to the other side of town to the store. They know me there, too. They are my friends."

I told him I had no idea what store he was talking about. He mumbled incoherently and had a tantrum. He stamped on the floor of the car with both feet. He pouted and actually drooled on his shirt.

Then he seemed to have an instant of lucidity. I got extremely nervous watching him struggle to arrange his thoughts. He finally succeeded in telling me how to get to the store.

My discomfort was at it's peak. I was afraid that the stroke don Juan had suffered was more serious than I thought. I wanted to be rid of him; to take him to his family or his friends, but I did not know who they were.

I did not know what else to do. I made a U-turn, and drove to the store which he said was on the other side of town.

I wondered about going back to the restaurant to ask the waiter if he knew don Juan's family. I hoped someone in the store might know him. The more I thought about my predicament, the sorrier I felt for myself. Don Juan was finished. I had a terrible sense of loss, of doom. I was going to miss him, but my sense of loss was offset by my feeling of annoyance at being saddled with him at his worst.

I drove around for almost an hour looking for the store. I could not find it. Don Juan admitted that he might have made a mistake, that the store might be in a different town. By then I was completely exhausted and had no idea what to do next.

In my normal state of awareness I always had the strange feeling that I knew more about him than my reason told me. Now, under the pressure of his mental deterioration, I was certain, without knowing why, that his friends were waiting for him somewhere in Mexico, although I did not know where.

My exhaustion was more than physical. It was a combination of worry and guilt. It worried me that I was stuck with a feeble old man who might, for all I knew, be mortally ill. And I felt guilty for being so disloyal to him.

I parked my car near the waterfront. It took nearly ten minutes for don Juan to get out of the car. We walked toward the ocean, but as we got closer, don Juan shied like a mule and refused to go on. He mumbled that the water of Guaymas Bay scared him.

He turned around and led me to the main square: a dusty plaza without even benches. Don

Juan sat down on the curb. A street-cleaning truck went by, rotating it's steel brushes, but no water was squirting into them. The cloud of dust made me cough.

I was so disturbed by my situation that the thought of leaving him sitting there crossed my mind. I felt embarrassed at having had such a thought and patted don Juan's back.

"You must make an effort and tell me where I can take you," I said softly. "Where do you want me to go."

"I want you to go to hell!" he replied in a cracked, raspy voice.

Hearing him speak to me like this, I had the suspicion that don Juan might not have suffered from a stroke, but some other crippling brain condition that had made him lose his mind and become violent.

Suddenly he stood up and walked away from me. I noticed how frail he looked. He had aged in a matter of hours. His natural vigor was gone, and what I saw before me was a terribly old, weak man.

I rushed to lend him a hand. A wave of immense pity enveloped me. I saw myself old and weak; barely able to walk. It was intolerable. I was close to weeping, not for don Juan but for myself. I held his arm and made him a silent promise that I would look after him, no matter what.

I was lost in a reverie of self-pity when I felt the numbing force of a slap across my face. Before I recovered from the surprise, don Juan slapped me again across the back of my neck. He was standing facing me, shivering with rage. His mouth was half open and shook uncontrollably.

"Who are you?" he yelled in a strained voice.

He turned to a group of onlookers who had immediately gathered.

"I don't know who this man is," he said to them. "Help me. I'm a lonely old Indian. He's a foreigner and he wants to kill me. They do that to helpless old people; kill them for pleasure."

There was a murmur of disapproval. Various young, husky men looked at me menacingly.

"What are you doing, don Juan?" I asked him in a loud voice. I wanted to reassure the crowd that I was with him.

"I don't know you," don Juan shouted. "Leave me alone."

He turned to the crowd, and asked them to help him. He wanted them to restrain me until the police came.

"Hold him," he insisted. "And someone, please call the police. They'll know what to do with this man."

I had the image of a Mexican jail. No one would know where I was. The idea that months would go by before anyone noticed my disappearance made me react with vicious speed. I kicked the first young man who came close me, then took off at a panicked run. I knew I was running for my life. Several young men ran after me. As I raced toward the main street, I realized that in a small city like Guaymas there were policemen all over the place patrolling on foot. There were none in sight, and before I ran into one I entered the first store in my path. I pretended to be looking for curios. [* curio- something unusual -- perhaps worthy of collecting]

The young men running after me went by noisily. I conceived a quick plan: to buy as many things as I could. I was counting on being taken for a tourist by the people in the store. Then I was going to ask someone to help me carry the packages to my car. It took me quite a while to select what I wanted. I paid a young man in the store to help me carry my packages, but as I got closer to my car, I saw don Juan standing by it, still surrounded by people. He was talking to a policeman, who was taking notes.

It was useless. My plan had failed. There was no way to get to my car. I instructed the young man to leave my packages on the sidewalk. I told him a friend of mine was going to drive by presently to take me to my hotel. He left and I remained hidden behind the packages I was holding in front of my face, out of sight of don Juan and the people around him.

I saw the policeman examining my California license plates. And that completely convinced me I was done for. The accusation of the crazy old man was too grave. And the fact that I had run away would have only reinforced my guilt in the eyes of any policeman. Besides, I would not have put it past the policeman to ignore the truth just to arrest a foreigner.

I stood in a doorway for perhaps an hour. The policeman left, but the crowd remained around don Juan, who was shouting and agitatedly moving his arms. I was too far away to hear what he was saying, but I could imagine the gist of his fast, nervous shouting.

I was in desperate need of another plan. I considered checking into a hotel and waiting there for a couple of days before venturing out to get my car. I thought of going back to the store and having them call a taxi. I had never had to hire a cab in Guaymas and I had no idea if there were any. But my plan died instantly with the realization that if the police were fairly competent, and had taken don Juan seriously, they would check the hotels. Perhaps the policeman had left don Juan in order to do just that.

Another alternative that crossed my mind was to get to the bus station and catch a bus to any town along the international border. Or to take any bus leaving Guaymas any direction. I abandoned the idea immediately. I was sure don Juan had given my name to the policeman and the police had probably already alerted the bus companies. My mind plunged into blind panic. I took short breaths to calm my nerves.

I noticed then that the crowd around don Juan was beginning to disperse. The policeman returned with a colleague. Then the two of them moved away, walking slowly toward the end of the street.

It was at that point that I felt sudden uncontrollable urge. It was as if my body were disconnected from my brain. I walked to my car, carrying the packages. Without even the slightest trace of fear or concern, I opened the trunk, put the packages inside, then opened the driver's door.

Don Juan was on the sidewalk, by my car, looking at me absentmindedly. I stared at him with a thoroughly uncharacteristic coldness. Never in my life had I had such a feeling. It was not hatred I felt, or even anger. I was not even annoyed with him. What I felt was not resignation or patience, either. And it was certainly not kindness.

Rather it was a cold indifference; a frightening lack of pity. At that instant, I could not have cared less about what happened to don Juan or myself.

Don Juan shook his upper body the way a dog shakes itself dry after a swim. And then, as if all of it had only been a bad dream, he was again the man I knew. He quickly turned his jacket inside out. It was a reversible jacket, beige on one side and black on the other. Now he vas wearing a black jacket. He threw his straw hat inside the car and carefully combed his hair. He pulled his shirt collar over the jacket collar, instantly making himself look younger. Without saying a word, he helped me put the rest of the packages in the car.

When the two policemen ran back to us, blowing their whistles, drawn by the noise of the car doors being opened and closed, don Juan very nimbly rushed to meet them. He listened to them attentively and assured them they had nothing to worry about. He explained that they must have encountered his father, a feeble old Indian who suffered from brain damage. As he talked to them, he opened and closed the car doors, as if checking the locks. He moved the packages from the trunk to the back seat.

His agility and youthful strength were the opposite of the old man's movements of a few minutes ago. I knew that he was acting for the benefit of the policeman who had seen him before. If I had been that man, there would have been no doubt in my mind that I was now seeing the son of the old braindamaged Indian.

Don Juan gave them the name of the restaurant where they knew his father, and then bribed them shamelessly.

I did not bother to say anything to the policemen. There was something that made me feel hard, cold, efficient, and silent.

We got in the car without a word. The policemen did not attempt to ask me anything. They seemed too tired even to try. We drove away.

"What kind of act did you pull out there, don Juan?" I asked, and the coldness in my tone surprised me.

"It was the first lesson in ruthlessness," he said.

He remarked that on our way to Guaymas he had warned me about the impending lesson on ruthlessness.

I confessed that I had not paid attention because I had thought that we were just making conversation to break the monotony of driving.

"I never just make conversation," he said sternly. "You should know that by now. What I did this afternoon was to create the proper situation for you to move your assemblage point to the precise spot where pity disappears. That spot is known as the place of no pity.

"The problem that sorcerers have to solve," he went on, "is that the place of no pity has to be reached with only minimal help. The nagual sets the scene, but it is the apprentice who makes his assemblage point move.

"Today you just did that. I helped you, perhaps a bit dramatically, by moving my own assemblage point to specific position that made me into a feeble and unpredictable old man. I was not just acting old and feeble. I was old."

The mischievous glint in his eyes told me that he was enjoying the moment.

"It was not absolutely necessary that I do that," he went on. "I could have directed you to move your assemblage point without the hard tactics, but I couldn't help myself, this event will never be repeated, I wanted to know whether or not I could act, in some measure, like my own benefactor. Believe me, I surprised myself as much as I must have surprised you."

I felt incredibly at ease. I had no problems in accepting what he was saying to me, and no questions, because I understood everything without needing him to explain. He then said something which I already knew, but could not verbalize, because I would not have been able to find the appropriate words to describe it. He said that everything sorcerers did was done as a consequence of a movement of their assemblage points, and that such movements were ruled by the amount of energy sorcerers had at their command.

I mentioned to don Juan that I knew all that and much more. And he commented that inside every human being was a gigantic, dark lake of silent knowledge which each of us could intuit. He told me I could intuit it perhaps with a bit more clarity than the average man because of my involvement in the warrior's path. He then said that sorcerers were the only beings on earth who deliberately went beyond the intuitive level by training themselves to do two transcendental things: first, to conceive the existence of the assemblage point, and second, to make that assemblage point move.

He emphasized over and over that the most sophisticated knowledge sorcerers possessed was of our potential as perceiving beings; and the knowledge that the content of perception depended on the position of the assemblage point.

At that point I began to experience a unique difficulty in concentrating on what he was saying, not because I was distracted or fatigued, but because my mind, on it's own, had started to play the game of anticipating his words. It was as if an unknown part of myself were inside me, trying unsuccessfully to find adequate words to voice a thought. As don Juan spoke, I felt I could anticipate how he was going to express my own silent thoughts. I was thrilled to realize his choice of words was always better than mine could have been. But anticipating his words also diminished my concentration.

I abruptly pulled over to the side of the road. And right there I had, for the first time in my life, a clear knowledge of a dualism in me. Two obviously separate parts were within my being.

One was extremely old, at ease, indifferent. It was heavy, dark, and connected to everything else. It was the part of me that did not care because it was equal to anything. It enjoyed things with no expectation.

The other part was light, new, fluffy, and agitated. It was nervous, and fast. It cared about itself because it was insecure; and did not enjoy anything, simply because it lacked the capacity to connect itself to anything. It was alone; on the surface; vulnerable. That was the part with which I normally looked at the world.

I deliberately looked around with that part. Everywhere I looked I saw extensive farmlands. And that insecure, fluffy, and caring part of me got caught between being proud of the industriousness of man and being sad at the sight of the magnificent old Sonoran desert turned into an orderly scene of furrows and domesticated plants.

The old, dark, heavy part of me did not care. And the two parts entered into a debate. The fluffy part wanted the heavy part to care, and the heavy part wanted the other one to stop fretting, and to enjoy.

"Why did you stop?" don Juan asked.

His voice produced a reaction, but it would be inaccurate to say that it was I who reacted. The sound of his voice seemed to solidify the fluffy part, and suddenly I was recognizably myself.

I described to don Juan the realization I had just had bout my dualism. He began to explain it in terms of the position of the assemblage point, and I lost my solidity. The fluffy part became as fluffy as it had been when I first noticed my dualism, and once again I knew what don Juan was explaining.

He said that when the assemblage point moves and reaches the place of no pity, the position of rationality and common sense becomes weak. The sensation I was having of an older, dark, silent side was a view of the antecedents of reason.

"I know exactly what you are saying," I told him. "I know a great number of things, but I can't speak of what I know. I don't know how to begin."

"I have mentioned this to you already," he said. "What you are experiencing and call dualism is a view from another position of your assemblage point. From that position, you can feel the older side of man. And what the older side of man knows is called silent knowledge. It's a knowledge that you cannot yet voice."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because in order to voice it, it is necessary for you to have and use an inordinate amount of energy," he replied. "You don't at this time have that kind of energy to spare.

"Silent knowledge is something that all of us have," he went on. "Something that has complete mastery; complete knowledge of everything. But it cannot think, therefore, it cannot speak of what it knows.

"Sorcerers believe that when man became aware that he knew, and wanted to be conscious of what he knew, he lost sight of what he knew. This silent knowledge, which you cannot describe, is of course intent- the spirit, the abstract. Man's error was to want to know it directly, the way he knew everyday life. The more he wanted, the more ephemeral [* ephemeral- lasting a very short time] it became."

"But what does that mean in plain words, don Juan?" I asked.

"It means that man gave up silent knowledge for the world of reason," he replied. "The more he clings to the world of reason, the more ephemeral intent becomes."

I started the car and we drove in silence. Don Juan did not attempt to give me directions or tell me how to drive- a thing he often did in order to exacerbate my self-importance. I had no clear idea where I was going, yet something in me knew. I let that part take over.

Very late in the evening we arrived at the big house don Juan's group of sorcerers had in a rural area of the state of Sinaloa in northwestern Mexico. The journey seemed to have taken no time at all. I could not remember the particulars of our drive. All I knew about it was that we had not talked.

The house seemed to be empty. There were no signs of people living there. I knew, however, that don Juan's friends were in the house. I could feel their presence without actually having to see them.

Don Juan lit some kerosene lanterns and we sat down at a sturdy table. It seemed that don Juan was getting ready to eat. I was wondering what to say or do when a woman entered noiselessly and put a large plate of food on the table. I was not prepared for her entrance, and when she stepped out of the darkness into the light as if she had materialized out of nowhere, I gasped involuntarily.

"Don't be scared, it's me, Carmela," she said and disappeared, swallowed again by the darkness.

I was left with my mouth open in mid-scream. Don Juan laughed so hard that I knew everybody in the house must have heard him. I half expected them to come, but no one appeared.

I tried to eat, but I was not hungry. I began to think about the woman. I did not know her. That is, I could almost identify her, but I could not quite work my memory of her out of the fog that obscured my thoughts. I struggled to clear my mind. I felt that it required too much energy and I gave up.

Almost as soon as I had stopped thinking about her, I began to experience a strange, numbing anxiety. At first I believed that the dark, massive house, and the silence in and around it were depressing.

But then my anguish rose to incredible proportions right after I heard the faint barking of dogs in the distance. For a moment I thought that my body was going to explode. Don Juan intervened quickly. He jumped to where I was sitting and pushed my back until it cracked. The pressure on my back brought me immediate relief.

When I had calmed down, I realized I had lost, together with the anxiety that had nearly consumed me, the clear sense of knowing everything. I could no longer anticipate how don Juan was going to articulate what I myself knew.

Don Juan then started a most peculiar explanation. First he said that the origin of the anxiety that had overtaken me with the speed of wildfire was the sudden movement of my assemblage point caused by Carmela's sudden appearance; and by my unavoidable effort to move my assemblage point to the place where I would be able to identify her completely.

He advised me to get used to the idea of recurrent attacks of the same type of anxiety because my assemblage point was going to keep moving.

"Any movement of the assemblage point is like dying," he said. "Everything in us gets disconnected, then reconnected again to a source of much greater power. That amplification of energy is felt as a killing anxiety."

"What am I to do when this happens?" I asked.

"Nothing," he said. "Just wait. The outburst of energy will pass. What's dangerous is not knowing what is happening to you. Once you know, there is no real danger."

Then he talked about ancient man. He said that ancient man knew in the most direct fashion what to do and how best to do it. But, because he performed so well, he started to develop a sense of selfness which gave him the feeling that he could predict and plan the actions he was used to performing.

And thus the idea of an individual self appeared; an individual self which began to dictate the nature and scope of man's actions. As the feeling of the individual self became stronger, man lost his natural connection to silent knowledge.

Modern man, being heir to that development, therefore, finds himself so hopelessly removed from the source of everything that all he can do is express his despair in violent and cynical acts of self-destruction. Don Juan asserted that the reason for man's cynicism and despair is the bit of silent knowledge left in him, which does two things: one, it gives man an inkling of his ancient connection to the source of everything; and two, it makes man feel that without this connection, he has no hope of peace, of satisfaction, of attainment.

I thought I had caught don Juan in a contradiction. I pointed out to him that he had once told me that war was the natural state for a warrior, that peace was an anomaly. [* anomaly- a difference from the normal]

"That's right," he admitted. "But war for a warrior doesn't mean acts of individual or collective stupidity or wanton violence. War, for a warrior, is the total struggle against that individual self that has deprived man of his power."

Don Juan said then that it was time for us to talk further about ruthlessness- the most basic premise of sorcery. He explained that sorcerers had discovered that any movement of the assemblage point meant a movement away from the excessive concern with that individual self which was the mark of modern man.

He went on to say that sorcerers believed it was the position of the assemblage point which made modern man a homicidal egotist, a being totally involved with his self-image. Having lost hope of ever returning to the source of everything, man sought solace in his selfness. And, in doing so, he succeeded in fixing his assemblage point in the exact position to perpetuate his self-image. It was therefore safe to say that any movement of the assemblage point away from it's customary position resulted in a movement away from man's self-reflection and it's concomitant: [* concomitant- an event or situation that happens at the same time as or in connection with another] self-importance.

Don Juan described self-importance as the force generated by man's self-image. He reiterated that it is that force which keeps the assemblage point fixed where it is at present. For this reason, the thrust of the warriors' way is to dethrone self-importance, and everything sorcerers do is toward accomplishing this goal.

He explained that sorcerers had unmasked self-importance and found that it is self-pity masquerading as something else.

"It doesn't sound possible, but that is what it is," he said. "Self-pity is the real enemy, and the source of man's misery.

"Without a degree of pity for himself, man could not afford to be as self-important as he is.

"However, once the force of self-importance is engaged, it develops it's own momentum. And it is this seemingly independent nature of self-importance which gives it it's fake sense of worth."

His explanation, which I would have found incomprehensible under normal conditions, seemed thoroughly cogent [* cogent- powerfully persuasive] to me. But because of the duality in me which still pertained, it appeared a bit simplistic. Don Juan seemed to have aimed his thoughts and words at a specific target. And I, in my normal state of awareness, was that target.

He continued his explanation, saying that sorcerers are absolutely convinced that by moving our assemblage points away from their customary position, we achieve a state of being which could only be called ruthlessness.

Sorcerers knew, by means of their practical actions, that as soon as their assemblage points move, their self-importance crumbles. Without the customary position of their assemblage points, their self-image can no longer be sustained. And without the heavy focus on that self-image, they lose their self-compassion, and with it their self-importance. Sorcerers are right, therefore, in saying that self-importance is merely self-pity in disguise.

He then took my experience of the afternoon and went through it step by step. He stated that a nagual in his role as leader or teacher has to behave in the most efficient, but the same time most impeccable, way.

Since it is not possible for him to plan the course of his actions rationally, the nagual always lets the spirit decide his course. For example, he said he had had no plans to do what he did until the spirit gave him an indication, very early that morning when we were having breakfast in Nogales. He urged me recall the event and tell him what I could remember. I recalled that during breakfast I got very embarrassed because don Juan made fun of me.

"Think about the waitress," don Juan urged me.

"All I can remember about her is that she was rude."

"But what did she do?" he insisted. "What did she do while she waited to take our order?"

After a moment's pause, I remembered that she was a hard-looking young woman who threw the menu at me and stood there, almost touching me, silently demanding that I hurry up and order.

While she waited, impatiently tapping her big foot on the floor, she pinned her long black hair up on her head. The change was remarkable. She looked more appealing, more mature.

I was frankly taken by the change in her. In fact, I overlooked her bad manners because of it.

"That was the omen," don Juan said. "Hardness and transformation were the indication of the spirit."

He said that his first act of the day, as a nagual, was to let me know his intentions. To that end, he told me in very plain language, but in a surreptitious manner, that he was going to give me a lesson in ruthlessness.

"Do you remember now?" he asked. "I talked to the waitress and to an old lady at the next table."

Guided by him in this fashion, I did remember don Juan practically flirting with an old lady and the ill-mannered waitress. He talked to them for a long time while I ate. He told them idiotically funny stories about graft and corruption in government, and jokes about farmers in the city.

Then he asked the waitress if she was an American. She said no and laughed at the question.

Don Juan said that that was good, because I was a Mexican-American in search of love. And I might as well start here, after eating such a good breakfast.

The women laughed. I thought they laughed at my being embarrassed. Don Juan said to them that, seriously speaking, I had come to Mexico to find a wife. He asked if they knew of any honest, modest, chaste woman who wanted to get married and was not too demanding in matters of male beauty. He referred to himself as my spokesman.

The women were laughing very hard. I was truly chagrined. Don Juan turned to the waitress, and asked her if she would marry me. She said that she was engaged. It looked to me as though she was taking don Juan seriously.

"Why don't you let him speak for himself?" the old lady asked don Juan.

"Because he has a speech impediment," he said. "He stutters horribly."

The waitress said that I had been perfectly normal when I ordered my food.

"Oh! You're so observant," don Juan said. "Only when he orders food can he speak like anyone else. I've told him time and time again that if he wants to learn to speak normally, he has to be ruthless. I brought him here to give him some lessons in ruthlessness."

"Poor man," the old woman said.

"Well, we'd better get going if we are going to find love for him today," don Juan said as he stood to leave.

"You're serious about this marriage business," the young waitress said to don Juan.

"You bet," he replied. "I'm going to help him get what he needs so he can cross the border and go to the place of no pity."

I thought don Juan was calling either marriage or the U.S.A. the place of no pity. I laughed at the metaphor, and stuttered horribly for a moment; which scared the women to death, and made don Juan laugh hysterically.

"It was imperative that I state my purpose to you then," Juan said, continuing his explanation. "I did, but it bypassed you completely, as it should have."

He said that from the moment the spirit manifested itself, every step was carried to it's satisfactory completion with absolute ease. My assemblage point reached the place of no pity when, under the stress of his transformation, it was forced to abandon it's customary place of self-reflection.

"The position of self-reflection," don Juan went on, "forces the assemblage point to assemble a world of sham compassion, but of very real cruelty and self-centeredness. In that world the only real feelings are those convenient for one who feels them.

"For a sorcerer, ruthlessness is not cruelty. Ruthlessness is the opposite of self-pity or self-importance. Ruthlessness is sobriety."

# 5. The Requirements of Intent

## Breaking the Mirror of Self-Reflection

We spent a night at the spot where I had recollected my experience in Guaymas. During that night, because my assemblage point was pliable, don Juan helped me to reach new positions, which immediately became blurry non-memories.

The next day I was incapable of remembering what had happened or what I had perceived. I had, nonetheless, the acute sensation of having had bizarre experiences. Don Juan agreed that my assemblage point had moved beyond his expectations, yet he refused to give me even a hint of what I had done. His only comment was that some day I would recollect everything.

Around noon, we continued on up the mountains. We walked in silence and without stopping until late in the afternoon. As we slowly climbed a mildly steep mountain ridge, don Juan suddenly spoke. I did not understand any of what he was saying. He repeated it until I realized he wanted to stop on a wide ledge visible from where we were. He was telling me that we would be protected there from the wind by the boulders and large, bushy shrubs.

"Tell me, which spot on the ledge would be the best for us to sit out all night?" he asked.

Earlier, as we were climbing, I had spotted the almost unnoticeable ledge. It appeared as a patch of darkness on the face of the mountain. I had identified it with a very quick glance. Now that don Juan was asking my opinion, I elected a spot of even greater darkness, one almost black, on the south side of the ledge. The dark ledge and the almost black spot in it did not generate any feeling of fear or anxiety. I felt that I liked that ledge. And I liked it's dark spot even more.

"That spot there is very dark, but I like it," I said, when we reached the ledge.

He agreed that that was the best place to sit all night. He said it was a place with a special level of energy, and that he also liked it's pleasing darkness.

We headed toward some protruding rocks. Don Juan cleared an area by the boulders and we sat with our backs against them.

I told him that on the one hand I thought it had been a lucky guess on my part to choose that very spot, but on the other I could not overlook the fact that I had perceived it with my eyes.

"I wouldn't say that you perceived it exclusively with your eyes," he said. "It was a bit more complex than that."

"What do you mean by that, don Juan?" I asked.

"I mean that you have possibilities you are not yet aware of," he replied. "Since you're quite careless, you may think that all of what you perceive is simply average sensory perception."

He said that if I doubted him, he dared me to go down to the base of the mountain again and corroborate what he was saying. He predicted that it would be impossible for me to see the dark ledge merely by looking at it.

I stated vehemently that I had no reason to doubt him. I was not going to climb down that mountain.

He insisted that we climb down. I thought he was doing it just to tease me. I got nervous, though, when it occurred to me that he might be serious. He laughed so hard he choked.

He commented on the fact that all animals could detect in their surroundings areas with special levels of energy. Most animals were frightened of these spots and avoided them. The exceptions were mountain lions and coyotes which lay and even slept on such spots whenever they happened upon them. But, only sorcerers deliberately sought such spots for their effects.

I asked him what the effects were. He said that they gave out imperceptible jolts of invigorating energy. He remarked that the average man living in natural settings could find such spots even though he was not conscious about having found them nor aware of their effects.

"How do they know they have found them?" I asked.

"They never do," he replied. "Sorcerers watching men travel on foot trails notice right away that men always become tired and rest right on the spot with a positive level of energy. If, on the other hand, they are going through an area with an injurious flow of energy, they become nervous and rush. If you ask them about it, they will tell you they rushed through that area because they felt energized. But it is the opposite- the only place that energizes them is the place where they feel tired."

He said that sorcerers are capable of finding such spots by perceiving with their entire bodies minute surges of energy in their surroundings. The sorcerers' increased energy, derived from the curtailment of their self-reflection, allows their senses a greater range of perception.

"I've been trying to make clear to you that the only worthwhile course of action, whether for sorcerers or average men, is to restrict our involvement with our self-image," he continued. "What a nagual aims at with his apprentices is the shattering of their mirror of self-reflection."

He added that each apprentice was an individual case, and that the nagual had to let the spirit decide about the particulars.

"Each of us has a different degree of attachment to our self-reflection," he went on. "And that attachment is felt as need. For example, before I started on the path of knowledge, my life was endless need. And years after the nagual Julian had taken me under his wing, I was still just as needy, if not more so.

"But there are examples of people, sorcerers or average men, who need no one. They get peace, harmony, laughter, knowledge, directly from the spirit. They need no intermediaries. For you and for me, it's different. I'm your intermediary and the nagual Julian was mine. Intermediaries, besides providing a minimal chance- the awareness of intent- help shatter people's mirrors of self-reflection.

"The only concrete help you ever get from me is that I attack your self-reflection. If it weren't for that, you would be wasting your time. This is the only real help you've gotten from me."

"You've taught me, don Juan, more than anyone in my entire life," I protested.

"I've taught you all kinds of things in order to trap your attention," he said. "You'll swear, though, that that teaching has been the important part. It hasn't. There is very little value in instruction. Sorcerers maintain that moving the assemblage point is all that matters. And that movement, as you well know, depends on increased energy and not on instruction."

He then made an incongruous [* incongruous- lacking in harmony or compatibility or appropriateness] statement. He said that any human being who would follow a specific and simple sequence of actions can learn to move his assemblage point.

I pointed out that he was contradicting himself. To me, a sequence of actions meant instructions; it meant procedures.

"In the sorcerers' world there are only contradictions of terms," he replied. "In practice there are no contradictions. The sequence of actions I am talking about is one that stems from being aware. To become aware of this sequence you need a nagual. This is why I've said that the nagual provides a minimal chance, but that minimal chance is not instruction, like the instruction you need to learn to operate a machine. The minimal chance consists of being made aware of the spirit."

He explained that the specific sequence he had in mind called for being aware that self-importance is the force which keeps the assemblage point fixed. When self-importance is curtailed, the energy it requires is no longer expended. That increased energy then serves as the springboard that launches the assemblage point- automatically and without premeditation- into an inconceivable journey.

Once the assemblage point has moved, the movement itself entails moving from self-reflection, and this, in turn, assures a clear connecting link with the spirit. He commented that, after all, it was self-reflection that had disconnected man from the spirit in the first place.

"As I have already said to you," don Juan went on, "sorcery is a journey of return. We return victorious to the spirit, having descended into hell. And from hell we bring trophies. Understanding is one of our trophies."

I told him that his sequence seemed very easy and very simple when he talked about it, but that when I had tried to put it into practice I had found it the total antithesis [* antithesis- exact opposite] of ease and simplicity.

"Our difficulty with this simple progression," he said, "is that most of us are unwilling to accept that we need so little to get on with. We are geared to expect instruction, teaching, guides, or masters. And when we are told that we need no one, we don't believe it. We become nervous, then distrustful, and finally angry and disappointed. If we need help, it is not in methods, but in emphasis. If someone makes us aware that we need to curtail our self-importance, that help is real.

"Sorcerers say we should need no one to convince us that the world is infinitely more complex than our wildest fantasies. So, why are we dependent? Why do we crave someone to guide us when we can do it ourselves? Big question, eh?"

Don Juan did not say anything else. Obviously, he wanted me to ponder the question. But I had other worries in my mind. My recollection had undermined certain foundations that I had believed unshakable, and I desperately needed him to redefine them.

I broke the long silence and voiced my concern. I told him that I had come to accept that it was possible for me to forget whole incidents from beginning to end if they had taken place in heightened awareness. Up to that day, I had had total recall of anything I had done under his guidance in my state of normal awareness. Yet, having had breakfast with him in Nogales had not existed in my mind prior to my recollecting it. And that event simply must have taken place in the world of everyday affairs.

"You are forgetting something essential," he said. "The nagual's presence is enough to move the assemblage point. I have humored you all along with the nagual's blow. The blow between the shoulder blades that I have delivered is only a pacifier. It serves the purpose of removing your doubts. Sorcerers use physical contact as a jolt to the body. It doesn't do anything but give confidence to the apprentice who is being manipulated."

"Then who moves the assemblage point, don Juan?" I asked.

"The spirit does it," he replied in the tone of someone about to lose his patience.

He seemed to check himself and smiled and shook his head from side to side in a gesture of resignation.

"It's hard for me to accept," I said. "My mind is ruled by the principle of cause and effect."

He had one of his usual attacks of inexplicable laughter- inexplicable from my point of view, of course. I must have looked annoyed. He put his hand on my shoulder.

"I laugh like this periodically because you are demented," he said. "The answer to everything you ask me is staring you right in the eyes and you don't see it. I think dementia is your curse."

His eyes were so shiny, so utterly crazy and mischievous, that I ended up laughing myself.

"I have insisted to the point of exhaustion that there are no procedures in sorcery," he went on. "There are no methods, no steps. The only thing that matters is the movement of the assemblage point. And no procedure can cause that. It's an effect that happens all by itself."

He pushed me as if to straighten my shoulders, and then he peered at me, looking right into my eyes. My attention became riveted to his words.

"Let us see how you figure this out," he said. "I have just said that the movement of the assemblage point happens by itself. But I have also said that the nagual's presence moves his apprentice's assemblage point; and that the way the nagual masks his ruthlessness either helps or hinders that movement. How would you resolve this contradiction?"

I confessed that I had been just about to ask him about the contradiction, for I had been aware of it, but that I could not even begin to think of resolving it. I was not a sorcery practitioner.

"What are you, then?" he asked.

"I am a student of anthropology, trying to figure out what sorcerers do," I said.

My statement was not altogether true, but it was not a lie.

Don Juan laughed uncontrollably.

"It's too late for that," he said. "Your assemblage point has moved already. And it is precisely that movement that makes one a sorcerer."

He stated that what seemed a contradiction was really the two sides of the same coin. The nagual entices the assemblage point into moving by helping to destroy the mirror of self-reflection. But that is all the nagual can do. The actual mover is the spirit, the abstract; something that cannot be seen or felt; something that does not seem to exist, and yet does.

For this reason, sorcerers report that the assemblage point moves all by itself. Or they say that the nagual moves it. The nagual, being the conduit of the abstract, is allowed to express the spirit through his actions.

I looked at don Juan questioningly.

"The nagual moves the assemblage point, and yet it is not he himself who does the actual moving," don Juan said. "Or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that the spirit expresses itself in accordance with the nagual's impeccability. The spirit can move the assemblage point with the mere presence of an impeccable nagual."

He said that he had wanted to clarify this point, because, if it was misunderstood, it led a nagual back to self-importance and thus to his destruction.

He changed the subject and said that, because the spirit had no perceivable essence, sorcerers deal rather with the specific instances and ways in which they are able to shatter the mirror of self-reflection.

Don Juan noted that in this area it was important to realize the practical value of the different ways in which the naguals masked their ruthlessness. He said my mask of generosity, for example, was adequate for dealing with people on a shallow level, but useless for shattering their self-reflection because it forced me to demand an almost impossible decision on their part. I expected them to jump into the sorcerers' world without any preparation.

"A decision such as that jump must be prepared for," he went on. "And in order to prepare for it, any kind of mask for a nagual's ruthlessness will do, except the mask of generosity."

Perhaps because I desperately wanted to believe that I was truly generous, his comments on my behavior renewed my terrible sense of guilt. He assured me that I had nothing to be ashamed of, and that the only undesirable effect was that my pseudo-generosity did not result in positive trickery.

In this regard, he said, although I resembled his benefactor in many ways, my mask of generosity was too crude, too obvious to be of value to me as a teacher. A mask of reasonableness, such as his own, however, was very effective in creating an atmosphere propitious [* propitious- likely to result in success] to moving the assemblage point. His disciples totally believed his pseudo reasonableness. In fact, they were so inspired by it that he could easily trick them into exerting themselves to any degree.

"What happened to you that day in Guaymas was an example of how the nagual's masked ruthlessness shatters self-reflection," he continued. "My mask was your downfall. You, like everyone around me, believed my reasonableness. And, of course, you expected, above all, the continuity of that reasonableness.

"When I faced you with not only the senile behavior of a feeble old man, but with the old man himself, your mind went to extremes in it's efforts to repair my continuity and your self-reflection. And so you told yourself that I must have suffered a stroke.

"Finally, when it became impossible to believe in the continuity of my reasonableness, your mirror began to break down. From that point on, the shift of your assemblage point was just a matter of time. The only thing in question was whether it was going to reach the place of no pity."

I must have appeared skeptical to don Juan because he explained that the world of our self-reflection or of our mind was very flimsy and was held together by a few key ideas that served as it's underlying order. When those ideas failed, the underlying order ceased to function.

"What are those key ideas, don Juan?" I asked.

"In your case regarding that particular instance, as in the case of the audience of that healer we talked about, continuity was the key idea," he replied.

"What is continuity?" I asked.

"The idea that we are a solid block," he said. "In our minds, what sustains our world is the certainty that we are unchangeable.

We may accept that our behavior can be modified, and that our reactions and opinions can be modified. But the idea that we are malleable to the point of changing appearances- to the point of being someone else- that is not part of the underlying order of our self-reflection. Whenever a sorcerer interrupts that order, the world of reason stops."

I wanted to ask him if breaking an individual's continuity was enough to cause the assemblage point to move. He seemed to anticipate my question. He said that that breakage was merely a softener. What helped the assemblage point move was the nagual's ruthlessness.

He then compared the acts he performed that afternoon in Guaymas with the actions of the healer we had previously discussed. He said that the healer had shattered the self-reflection of the people in her audience with a series of acts for which they had no equivalents in their daily lives- the dramatic spirit possession, changing voices, cutting the patient's body open. As soon as the continuity of the idea of themselves was broken, their assemblage points were ready to be moved.

He reminded me that he had described to me in the past the concept of stopping the world. He had said that stopping the world was as necessary for sorcerers as reading and writing was for me. It consisted of introducing a dissonant element into the fabric of everyday behavior for purposes of halting the otherwise smooth flow of ordinary events- events which were catalogued in our minds by our reason.

The dissonant element was called 'not-doing', or the opposite of doing. 'Doing' was anything that was part of a whole for which we had a cognitive account. Not-doing was an element that did not belong in that charted whole.

"Sorcerers, because they are stalkers, understand human behavior to perfection," he said. They understand, for instance, that human beings are creatures of inventory. Knowing the ins and outs of a particular inventory is what makes a man a scholar or an expert in his field.

"Sorcerers know that when an average person's inventory fails, the person either enlarges his inventory or his world of self-reflection collapses. The average person is willing to incorporate new items into his inventory if they don't contradict the inventory's underlying order. But if the items contradict that order, the person's mind collapses. The inventory is the mind. Sorcerers count on this when they attempt to break the mirror of self-reflection."

He explained that that day he had carefully chosen the props for his act to break my continuity. He slowly transformed himself until he was indeed a feeble old man, and then, in order to reinforce the breaking of my continuity, he took me to a restaurant where they knew him as an old man.

I interrupted him. I had become aware of a contradiction I had not noticed before. He had said, at the time, that the reason he transformed himself was that he wanted to know what it was like to be old. The occasion was propitious and unrepeatable. I had understood that statement as meaning that he had not been an old man before. Yet at the restaurant they knew him as the feeble old man who suffered from strokes.

"The nagual's ruthlessness has many aspects," he said. "It's like a tool that adapts itself to many uses. Ruthlessness is a state of being. It is a level of intent that the nagual attains.

"The nagual uses it to entice the movement of his own assemblage point or those of his apprentices. Or he uses it to stalk. I began that day as a stalker, pretending to be old, and ended up as a genuinely old, feeble man. My ruthlessness, controlled by my eyes, made my own assemblage point move.

"Although I had been at the restaurant many times before as an old, sick man, I had only been stalking, merely playing at being old. Never before that day had my assemblage point moved to the precise spot of age and senility."

He said that as soon as he had intended to be old, his eyes lost their shine, and I immediately noticed it. Alarm was written all over my face. The loss of the shine in his eyes was a consequence of using his eyes to intend the position of an old man. As his assemblage point reached that position, he was able to age in appearance, behavior, and feeling.

I asked him to clarify the idea of intending with the eyes. I had the faint notion I understood it, yet I could not formulate even to myself what I knew.

"The only way of talking about it is to say that intent is intended with the eyes," he said. "I know that it is so. Yet, just like you, I can't pinpoint what it is I know. Sorcerers resolve this particular difficulty by accepting something extremely obvious: Human beings are infinitely more complex and mysterious than our wildest fantasies."

I insisted that he had not shed any light on the matter.

"All I can say is that the eyes do it," he said cuttingly. "I don't know how, but they do it. They summon intent with something indefinable that they have; something in their shine. Sorcerers say that intent is experienced with the eyes, not with the reason."

He refused to add anything and went back to explaining my recollection. He said that once his assemblage point had reached the specific position that made him genuinely old, doubts should have been completely removed from my mind. But due to the fact that I took pride in being super-rational, I immediately did my best to explain away his transformation.

"I've told you over and over that being too rational is a handicap," he said. "Human beings have a very deep sense of magic. We are part of the mysterious. Rationality is only a veneer with us. If we scratch that surface, we find a sorcerer underneath. Some of us, however, have great difficulty getting underneath the surface level; others do it with total ease. You and I are very alike in this respect- we both have to sweat blood before we let go of our self-reflection."

I explained to him that, for me, holding onto my rationality had always been a matter of life or death. Even more so when it came to my experiences in his world.

He remarked that that day in Guaymas my rationality had been exceptionally trying for him. From the start he had had to make use of every device he knew to undermine it. To that end, he began by forcibly putting his hands on my shoulders and nearly dragging me down with his weight. That blunt physical maneuver was the first jolt to my body. And this, together with my fear caused by his lack of continuity, punctured my rationality.

"But puncturing your rationality was not enough," don Juan went on. "I knew that if your assemblage point was going to reach the place of no pity, I had to break every vestige of my continuity. That was when I became really senile and made you run around town, and I finally got angry at you and slapped you.

"You were shocked, but you were on the road to instant recovery when I gave your mirror of self-image what should have been it's final blow. I yelled 'bloody murder'. I didn't expect you to run away. I had forgotten about your violent outbursts."

He said that in spite of my on-the-spot recovery tactics, my assemblage point reached the place of no pity when I became enraged at his senile behavior. Or perhaps it had been the opposite: I became enraged because my assemblage point had reached the place of no pity. It did not really matter. What counted was that my assemblage point did arrive there.

Once it was there, my own behavior changed markedly. I became cold and calculating and indifferent to my personal safety.

I asked don Juan whether he had seen all this. I did not remember telling him about it. He replied that to know what I was feeling, all he had to do was introspect and remember his own experience.

He pointed out that my assemblage point became fixed in it's new position when he reverted to his natural self. By then, my conviction about his normal continuity had suffered such a profound upheaval that continuity no longer functioned as a cohesive force. And it was at that moment, from it's new position, that my assemblage point allowed me to build another type of continuity, one which I expressed in terms of a strange, detached hardness- a hardness that became my normal mode of behavior from then on.

"Continuity is so important in our lives that if it breaks it's always instantly repaired," he went on. "In the case of sorcerers, however, once their assemblage points reach the place of no pity, continuity is never the same.

"Since you are naturally slow, you haven't noticed yet that since that day in Guaymas you have become, among other things, capable of accepting any kind of discontinuity at it's face value-after a token struggle of your reason, of course."

His eyes were shining with laughter.

"It was also that day that you acquired your masked ruthlessness," he went on. "Your mask wasn't as well developed as it is now, of course, but what you got then was the rudiments of what was to become your mask of generosity."

I tried to protest. I did not like the idea of masked ruthlessness, no matter how he put it.

"Don't use your mask on me," he said, laughing. "Save it for a better subject: someone who doesn't know you."

He urged me to recollect accurately the moment the mask came to me.

"As soon as you felt that cold fury coming over you," he went on, "you had to mask it. You didn't joke about it, as my benefactor would have done. You didn't try to sound reasonable about it, like I would. You didn't pretend to be intrigued by it, like the nagual Elias would have. Those are the three nagual's masks I know. What did you do then? You calmly walked to your car and gave half of your packages away to the guy who was helping you carry them."

Until that moment I had not remembered that indeed someone helped me carry the packages. I told don Juan that I had seen lights dancing before my face, and I had thought I was seeing them because, driven by my cold fury, I was on the verge of fainting.

"You were not on the verge of fainting," don Juan answered. "You were on the verge of entering a dreaming state and seeing the spirit all by yourself; like Talia and my benefactor."

I said to don Juan that it was not generosity that made me give away the packages but cold fury. I had to do something to calm myself, and that was the first thing that occurred to me.

"But that's exactly what I've been telling you. Your generosity is not genuine," he retorted and began to laugh at my dismay.

## The Ticket to Impeccability

It had gotten dark while don Juan was talking about breaking the mirror of self-reflection. I told him I was thoroughly exhausted, and we should cancel the rest of the trip and return home; but he maintained that we had to use every minute of our available time to review the sorcery stories, or recollect by making my assemblage point move as many times as possible.

I was in a complaining mood. I said that a state of deep fatigue such as mine could only breed uncertainty and lack of conviction.

"Your uncertainty is to be expected," don Juan said matter-of-factly. "After all, you are dealing with a new type of continuity. It takes time to get used to it. Warriors spend years in limbo where they are neither average men nor sorcerers."

"What happens to them in the end?" I asked. "Do they choose sides?"

"No. They have no choice," he replied. "All of them become aware of what they already are: sorcerers. The difficulty is that the mirror of self-reflection is extremely powerful and only lets it's victims go after a ferocious struggle."

He stopped talking and seemed lost in thought. His body entered into the state of rigidity that I had seen before whenever he was engaged in what I characterized as reveries, but which he described as instances in which his assemblage point had moved and he was able to recollect.

"I'm going to tell you the story of a sorcerer's ticket to impeccability," he suddenly said after some thirty minutes of total silence. "I'm going to tell you the story of my death."

He began to recount what had happened to him after his arrival in Durango still disguised in women's clothes following his month long journey through central Mexico. He said that old Belisario took him directly to a hacienda to hide from the monstrous man who was chasing him.

As soon as he arrived, don Juan- very daringly in view of his taciturn [* taciturn- habitually reserved and uncommunicative] nature- introduced himself to everyone in the house. There were seven beautiful women and a strange unsociable man who did not utter a single word.

Don Juan delighted the lovely women with his rendition of the monstrous man's efforts to capture him. Above all, they were enchanted with the disguise which he still wore, and the story that went with it. They never tired of hearing the details of his trip, and all of them advised him on how to perfect the knowledge he had acquired during his journey. What surprised don Juan was their poise and assuredness, which were unbelievable to him.

The seven women were exquisite and they made him feel happy. He liked them and trusted them. They treated him with respect and consideration. But something in their eyes told him that under their facades of charm, there existed a terrifying coldness; an aloofness he could never penetrate.

The thought occurred to him that in order for these strong and beautiful women to be so at ease and to have no regard for formalities, they had to be loose women. Yet it was obvious to him that they were not.

Don Juan was left alone to roam the property. He was dazzled by the huge mansion and it's grounds. He had never seen anything like it. It was an old colonial house with a high surrounding wall. Inside were balconies with flowerpots and patios with enormous fruit trees that provided shade, privacy, and quiet.

There were large rooms, and on the ground floor airy corridors around the patios. On the upper floor there were mysterious bedrooms where don Juan was not permitted to set foot.

During the following days don Juan was amazed by the profound interest the women took in his well-being. They did everything for him. They seemed to hang on his every word. Never before had people been so kind to him. But also, never before had he felt so solitary. He was always in the company of the beautiful, strange women, and yet he had never been so alone.

Don Juan believed that his feeling of aloneness came from being unable to predict the behavior of the women or to know their real feelings. He knew only what they told him about themselves.

A few days after his arrival, the woman who seemed to be their leader gave him some brand-new men's clothes and told him that his woman's disguise was no longer necessary, because whoever the monstrous man might have been, he was now nowhere in sight. She told him he was free to go whenever he pleased.

Don Juan begged to see Belisario, whom he had not seen since the day they arrived. The woman said that Belisario was gone. He had left word, however, that don Juan could stay in the house as long as he wanted- but only if he was in danger.

Don Juan declared he was in mortal danger. During his few days in the house, he had seen the monster constantly, always sneaking about the cultivated fields surrounding the house. The woman did not believe him and told him bluntly that he was a con artist pretending to see the monster so they would take him in. She told him their house was not a place to loaf. She stated they were serious people who worked very hard and could not afford to keep a freeloader.

Don Juan was insulted. He stomped out of the house, but when he caught sight of the monster hiding behind the ornamental shrubbery bordering the walk, his fright immediately replaced his anger.

He rushed back into the house and begged the woman to let him stay. He promised to do peon labor for no wages if he could only remain at the hacienda. She agreed, but with the understanding that don Juan would accept two conditions: that he not ask any questions, and that he do exactly as he was told without requiring any explanations. She warned him that if he broke these rules his stay at the house would be in jeopardy.

"I stayed in the house really under protest," don Juan continued. "I did not like to accept her conditions, but I knew that the monster was outside. In the house I was safe. I knew that the monstrous man was always stopped at an invisible boundary that encircled the house, at a distance of perhaps a hundred yards. Within that circle I was safe. As far as I could discern, there must have been something about that house that kept the monstrous man away, and that was all I cared about.

"I also realized that when the people of the house were around me the monster never appeared."

After a few weeks with no change in his situation, the young man who don Juan believed had been living in the monster's house disguised as old Belisario reappeared. He told don Juan that he had just arrived, that his name was Julian, and that he owned the hacienda.

Don Juan naturally asked him about his disguise. But the young man, looking him in the eye and without the slightest hesitation, denied knowledge of any disguise.

"How can you stand here in my own house and talk such rubbish?" he shouted at don Juan. "What do you take me for?"

"But- you are Belisario, aren't you?" don Juan insisted.

"No," the young man said. "Belisario is an old man. I am Julian and I'm young. Don't you see?"

Don Juan meekly admitted that he had not been quite convinced that it was a disguise and immediately realized the absurdity of his statement. If being old was not a disguise, then it was a transformation, and that was even more absurd.

Don Juan's confusion increased by the moment. He asked about the monster and the young man replied that he had no idea what monster he was talking about. He conceded that don Juan must have been scared by something, otherwise old Belisario would not have given him sanctuary. But whatever reason don Juan had for hiding, it was his personal business.

Don Juan was mortified by the coldness of his host's tone and manner. Risking his anger, don Juan reminded him that they had met. His host replied that he had never seen him before that day, but that he was honoring Belisario's wishes as he felt obliged to do.

The young man added that not only was he the owner of the house but that he was also in charge of every person in that household, including don Juan, who, by the act of hiding among them, had become a ward of the house. If don Juan did not like the arrangement, he was free to go and take his chances with the monster no one else was able to see.

Before he made up his mind one way or another, don Juan judiciously decided to ask what being a ward of the house involved.

The young man took don Juan to a section of the mansion that was under construction and said that that part of the house was symbolic of his own life and actions. It was unfinished. Construction was indeed underway, but chances were it might never be completed.

"You are one of the elements of that incomplete construction," he said to don Juan. "Let's say that you are the beam that will support the roof. Until we put it in place and put the roof on top of it, we won't know whether it will support the weight. The master carpenter says it will. I am the master carpenter."

This metaphorical explanation meant nothing to don Juan, who wanted to know what was expected of him in matters of manual labor.

The young man tried another approach.

"I'm a nagual," he explained. "I bring freedom. I'm the leader of the people in this house. You are in this house, and because of that you are part of it whether you like or not."

Don Juan looked at him dumbfounded, unable to say anything.

"I am the nagual Julian," his host said, smiling. "Without my intervention, there is no way to freedom."

Don Juan still did not understand. But he began to wonder about his safety in light of the man's obviously erratic mind. He was so concerned with this unexpected development that he was not even curious about the use of the word nagual. He knew that nagual meant sorcerer, yet he was unable to take in the total implication of the nagual Julian's words. Or perhaps, somehow, he understood it perfectly, although his conscious mind did not.

The young man stared at him for a moment and then said that don Juan's actual job would involve being his personal valet and assistant. There would be no pay for this, but excellent room and board.

From time to time there would be other small jobs for don Juan; jobs requiring special attention. He was to be in charge of either doing the jobs himself or seeing that they got done. For these special services he would be paid small amounts of money which would be put into an account kept for him by the other members of the household. Thus, should he ever want to leave, there would be a small amount of cash to tide him over.

The young man stressed that don Juan should not consider himself a prisoner, but that if he stayed, he would have to work. And still more important than the work were the three requirements he had to fulfill. He had to make a serious effort to learn everything the women taught him. His conduct with all the members of the household must be exemplary, which meant that he would have to examine his behavior and attitude toward them every minute of the day. And he was to address the young man, in direct conversation, as nagual, and when talking of him, to refer to him as the nagual Julian.

Don Juan accepted the terms grudgingly. But although he instantly plunged into his habitual sulkiness and moroseness, he learned his work quickly. What he did not understand was what was expected of him in matters of attitude and behavior. And even though he could not have put his finger on a concrete instance, he honestly believed that he was being lied to and exploited.

As his moroseness got the upper hand, he entered into a permanent sulk and hardly said a word to anyone.

It was then that the nagual Julian assembled all the members of his household and explained to them that even though he badly needed an assistant, he would abide by their decision. If they did not like the morose and unappealing attitude of his new orderly, they had the right to say so. If the majority disapproved of don Juan's behavior, the young man would have to leave and take his chances with whatever was waiting for him outside, be it a monster or his own fabrication.

The nagual Julian then led them to the front of the house and challenged don Juan to show them the monstrous man. Don Juan pointed him out, but no one else saw him. Don then ran frantically from one person to another, insisting that the monster was there, imploring them to help him. They ignored his pleas and called him crazy.

It was then that the nagual Julian put don Juan's fate to vote. The unsociable man did not choose to vote. He shrugged his shoulders and walked away. All the women spoke out against don Juan's staying. They argued that he was simply too morose and bad-tempered.

During the heat of the argument, however, the nagual Julian completely changed his attitude and became don Juan's defender. He suggested that the women might be misjudging the poor young man, that he was perhaps not crazy at all and maybe actually did see a monster. He said that perhaps his moroseness was the result of his worries. And a great fight ensued. Tempers flared, and in no time the women were yelling at the nagual.

Don Juan heard the argument but was past caring. He knew they were going to throw him out and that the montrous man would certainly capture him and take him into slavery. In his utter helplessness he began to weep.

His despair and his tears swayed some of the enraged women. The leader of the women proposed another choice: a three-week trial period during which don Juan's actions and attitude would be evaluated daily by all the women. She warned don Juan that if there was one single complaint about his attitude during that time, he would be kicked out for good.

Don Juan recounted how the nagual Julian in a fatherly manner took him aside and proceeded to drive a wedge of ear into him. He whispered to don Juan that he knew for a fact that the monster not only existed but was roaming the property. Nevertheless, because of certain previous agreements with the women, agreements he could not divulge, he was not permitted to tell the women what he knew. He urged don Juan to stop demonstrating his stubborn, morose personality and pretend to be the opposite.

"Pretend to be happy and satisfied," he said to don Juan. "If you don't, the women will kick you out. That prospect alone should be enough to scare you. Use that fear as a real driving force. It's the only thing you have."

Any hesitation or second thoughts that don Juan might have had were instantly dispelled at the sight of the monstrous man. As the monster waited impatiently at the invisible line, he seemed aware of how precarious don Juan's position was. It was as if the monster were ravenously hungry, anxiously anticipating a feast.

The nagual Julian drove his wedge of fear a bit deeper.

"If I were you," he told don Juan, "I would behave like an angel. I'd act any way these women want me to, as long as it kept me from that hellish beast."

"Then you do see the monster?" don Juan asked.

"Of course I do," he replied. "And I also see that if you leave, or if the women kick you out, the monster will capture you and put you in chains. That will change your attitude for sure. Slaves don't have any choice but to behave well with their masters. They say that the pain inflicted by a monster like that is beyond anything."

Don Juan knew that his only hope was to make himself as congenial [* congenial- suitable to needs or similar in nature] as he possibly could. The fear of falling prey to that monstrous man was indeed a powerful psychological force.

Don Juan told me that by some quirk in his own nature he was boorish [* boorish- ill-mannered and coarse and contemptible in behavior or appearance] only with the women. He never behaved badly in the presence of the nagual Julian. For some reason that don Juan could not determine in his mind, the nagual was not someone he could attempt to affect either consciously or subconsciously.

The other member of the household, the unsociable man, was of no consequence to don Juan. Don Juan had formed an opinion the moment he met him, and had discounted him. He thought that the man was weak, indolent, and overpowered by those beautiful women. Later on, when he was more aware of the nagual's personality, he knew that the man was definitely overshadowed by the glitter of the others.

As time passed, the nature of leadership and authority among them became evident to don Juan. He was surprised and somehow delighted to realize that no one was better or higher than another. Some of them performed functions of which the others were incapable, but that did not make them superior. It simply made them different.

However, the ultimate decision in everything was automatically the nagual Julian's, and he apparently took great pleasure in expressing his decisions in the form of bestial jokes he played on everyone.

There was also a mystery woman among them. They referred to her as Talia, the nagual woman. Nobody told don Juan who she was, or what being the nagual woman meant. It was made clear to him, however, that one of the seven women was Talia. They all talked so much about her that don Juan's curiosity was aroused to tremendous heights.

He asked so many questions that the woman who was the leader of the other women told him that she would teach him to read and write so that he might make better use of his deductive abilities. She said that he must learn to write things down rather than committing them to memory. In this fashion he would accumulate a huge collection of facts about Talia; facts that he ought to read and study until the truth became evident.

Perhaps anticipating the cynical retort he had in mind, she argued that, although it might seem an absurd endeavor, finding out who Talia was was one of the most difficult and rewarding tasks anyone could undertake.

That, she said, was the fun part. She added more seriously that it was imperative for don Juan to learn basic bookkeeping in order to help the nagual manage the property.

Immediately she started daily lessons and in one year don Juan had progressed so rapidly and extensively that he was able to read, write, and keep account books.

Everything had occurred so smoothly that he did not notice the changes in himself; the most remarkable of which was a sense of detachment. As far as he was concerned, he retained his impression that nothing was happening in the house simply because he still was unable to identify with the members of the household. Those people were mirrors that did not yield reflection.

"I took refuge in that house for nearly three years," don Juan went on. "Countless things happened to me during that time, but I didn't think they were really important. Or at least I had chosen to consider them unimportant. I was convinced that for three years all I had done was hide, shake with fear, and work like a mule."

Don Juan laughed and told me that at one point, at the urging of the nagual Julian, he agreed to learn sorcery so that he might rid himself of the fear that consumed him each time he saw the monster keeping vigil. But although the nagual Julian talked to him a great deal, he seemed more interested in playing jokes on him. So don Juan believed it was fair and accurate to say that he did not learn anything even loosely related to sorcery; simply because it was apparent that nobody in that house knew or practiced sorcery.

One day, however, he found himself walking purposefully, but without any volition [* volition- the capability of conscious choice and decision and intention] on his part, toward the invisible line that held the monster at bay. The monstrous man was, of course, watching the house as usual. But that day, instead of turning back and running to seek shelter inside the house, don Juan kept walking. An incredible surge of energy made him advance with no concern for his safety.

A feeling of total detachment allowed him to face the monster that had terrorized him for so many years. Don Juan expected the monster to lurch out and grab him by the throat; but that thought no longer created any terror in him. From a distance of a few inches he stared at the monstrous man for an instant and then stepped over the line. And the monster did not attack him, as don Juan had always feared he would, but became blurry. He lost his definition and turned into a misty whiteness; a barely perceptible patch of fog.

Don Juan advanced toward the fog and it receded as if in fear. He chased the patch of fog over the fields until he knew there was nothing left of the monster. He knew then that there had never been one. He could not, however, explain what he had feared. He had the vague sensation that although he knew exactly what the monster was, something was preventing him from thinking about it.

He immediately thought that that rascal, the nagual Julian, knew the truth about what was happening. Don Juan would not have put it past the nagual Julian to play that kind of trick.

Before confronting him, don Juan gave himself the pleasure of walking unescorted all over the property. Never before had he been able to do that. Whenever he had needed to venture beyond that invisible line, he had been escorted by a member of the household. That had put a serious constraint on his mobility. The two or three times he had attempted to walk unescorted, he had found that he risked annihilation at the hands of the monstrous being.

Filled with a strange vigor, don Juan went into the house, but instead of celebrating his new freedom and power, he assembled the entire household and angrily demanded that they explain their lies. He accused them of making him work as their slave by playing on his fear of a nonexistent monster.

The women laughed as if he were telling the funniest joke. Only the nagual Julian seemed contrite, especially when don Juan, his voice cracking with resentment, described his three years of constant fear. The nagual Julian broke down and wept openly as don Juan demanded an apology for the shameful way he had been exploited.

"But we told you the monster didn't exist," one of the women said.

Don Juan glared at the nagual Julian, who cowered meekly.

"He knew the monster existed," don Juan yelled, pointing an accusing finger at the nagual.

But at the same time he was aware he was talking nonsense, because the nagual Julian had originally told him that the monster did not exist.

"The monster didn't exist," don Juan corrected himself, shaking with rage. "It was one of his tricks."

The nagual Julian, weeping uncontrollably, apologized to don Juan, while the women howled with laughter. Don Juan had never seen them laughing so hard.

"You knew all along that there was never any monster. You lied to me," he accused the nagual Julian, who, with his head down and his eyes filled with tears, admitted his guilt.

"I have certainly lied to you," he mumbled. "There was never any monster. What you saw as a monster was simply a surge of energy. Your fear made it into a monstrosity."

"You told me that that monster was going to devour me. How could you have lied to me like that?" don Juan shouted at him.

"Being devoured by that monster was symbolic," the nagual Julian replied softly. "Your real enemy is your stupidity. You are in mortal danger of being devoured by that monster now."

Don Juan yelled that he did not have to put up with silly statements. And he insisted they reassure him there were no longer any restrictions on his freedom to leave.

"You can go any time you want," the nagual Julian said curtly.

"You mean I can go right now?" don Juan asked.

"Do you want to?" the nagual asked.

"Of course, I want to leave this miserable place and the miserable bunch of liars who live here," don Juan shouted.

The nagual Julian ordered that don Juan's savings be paid him in full, and with shining eyes wished him happiness, prosperity, and wisdom.

The women did not want to say goodbye to him. They stared at him until he lowered his head to avoid their burning eyes.

Don Juan put his money in his pocket and without a backward glance walked out; glad his ordeal was over. The outside world was a question mark to him. He yearned for it. Inside that house he had been removed from it. He was young, strong. He had money in his pocket and a thirst for living.

He left them without saying thank you. His anger, bottled up by his fear for so long, was finally able to surface. He had even learned to like the members of that household, and now he felt betrayed. He wanted to run as far away from that place as he could.

In the city, he had his first unpleasant encounter. Traveling was very difficult and very expensive. He learned that if he wanted to leave the city at once he would not be able to choose his destination, but would have to wait for whatever muleteers were willing to take him. A few days later he left with a reputable muleteer for the port of Mazatlan.

"Although I was only twenty-three years old at the time," don Juan said, "I felt I had lived a full life. The only thing I had not experienced was sex. The nagual Julian had told me that it was the fact I had not been with a woman that gave me my strength and endurance, and that he had little time left to set things up before the world would catch up with me."

"What did he mean, don Juan?" I asked.

"He meant that I had no idea about the kind of hell I was heading for," don Juan replied, "and that he had very little time to set up my barricades; my silent protectors."

"What's a silent protector, don Juan?" I asked.

"It's a lifesaver," he said. "A silent protector is a surge of inexplicable energy that comes to a warrior when nothing else works.

"My benefactor knew what direction my life would take once I was no longer under his influence. So he struggled to give me as many sorcerers' options as possible. Those sorcerers' options were to be my silent protectors."

"What are sorcerers' options?" I asked.

"Positions of the assemblage point," he replied, "out of the infinite number of positions which the assemblage point can reach. In each and every one of those shallow or deep shifts, a sorcerer can strengthen his new continuity."

He reiterated that everything he had experienced either with his benefactor or while under his guidance had been the result of either a minute or a considerable shift of his assemblage point. His benefactor had made him experience countless sorcerers' options- more than the number that would normally be necessary- because he knew that don Juan's destiny would be to be called upon to explain what sorcerers were and what they did.

"The effect of those shifts of the assemblage point is cumulative," he continued. "It weighs on you whether you understand it or not. That accumulation worked for me in the end.

"Very soon after I came into contact with the nagual, my point of assemblage moved so profoundly that I was capable of seeing. I saw an energy field as a monster. And the point kept on moving until I saw the monster as what it really was: an energy field. I had succeeded in seeing, and I didn't know it. I thought I had done nothing; had learned nothing. I was stupid beyond belief."

"You were too young, don Juan," I said. "You couldn't have done otherwise."

He laughed. He was on the verge of replying, when he seemed to change his mind. He shrugged his shoulders and went on with his account.

Don Juan said that when he arrived in Mazatlan he was practically a seasoned muleteer, and was offered a permanent job running a mule train. He was very satisfied with the arrangements. The idea that he would be making the trip between Durango and Mazatlan pleased him no end.

There were two things, however, that bothered him: first, that he had not yet been with a woman; and second, a strong but unexplainable urge to go north. He did not know why. He knew only that somewhere to the north something was waiting for him. The feeling persisted so strongly that in the end he was forced to refuse the security of a permanent job so he could travel north.

His superior strength and a new and unaccountable cunning enabled him to find jobs even where there were none to be had as he steadily worked his way north to the state of Sinaloa. And there his journey ended. He met a young widow who like himself was a Yaqui Indian; and who had been the wife of a man to whom don Juan was indebted.

He attempted to repay his indebtedness by helping the widow and her children, and without being aware of it, he fell into the role of husband and father.

His new responsibilities put a great burden on him. He lost his freedom of movement, and even his urge to journey farther north. He felt compensated for that loss, however, by the profound affection he felt for the woman and her children.

"I experienced moments of sublime happiness as a husband and father," don Juan said. "But it was at those moments when I first noticed that something was terribly wrong. I realized that I was losing the feeling of detachment- the aloofness I had acquired during my time in the nagual Julian's house. Now I found myself identifying with the people who surrounded me."

Don Juan said that it took about a year of unrelenting abrasion to make him lose every vestige of the new personality he had acquired at the nagual's house. He had begun with a profound yet aloof affection for the woman and her children. This detached affection allowed him to play the role of husband and father with abandon and gusto. As time went by, his detached affection turned into a desperate passion that made him lose his effectiveness.

Gone was his feeling of detachment, which was what had given him the power to love. Without that detachment, he had only mundane needs, desperation, and hopelessness; the distinctive features of the world of everyday life. Gone as well was his enterprise. During his years at the nagual's house, he had acquired a dynamism that had served him well when he set out on his own.

But the most draining pain was knowing that his physical energy had waned. Without actually being in ill health, one day he became totally paralyzed. He did not feel pain. He did not panic. It was as if his body had understood that he would get the peace and quiet he so desperately needed only if it ceased to move.

As he lay helpless in bed, he did nothing but think. And he came to realize that he had failed because he did not have an abstract purpose. He knew that the people in the nagual's house were extraordinary because they pursued freedom as their abstract purpose. He did not understand what freedom was, but he knew that it was the opposite of his own concrete needs.

His lack of an abstract purpose had made him so weak and ineffective that he was incapable of rescuing his adopted family from their abysmal poverty. Instead, they had pulled him back to the very misery, sadness, and despair which he himself had known prior to encountering the nagual.

As he reviewed his life, he became aware that the only time he had not been poor and had not had concrete needs was during his years with the nagual. Poverty was the state of being that had reclaimed him when his concrete needs overpowered him.

For the first time since he had been shot and wounded so many years before, don Juan fully understood that the nagual Julian was indeed the nagual, the leader, and his benefactor. He understood what it was his benefactor had meant when he said to him that there was no freedom without the nagual's intervention. There was now no doubt in don Juan's mind that his benefactor and all the members of his benefactor's household were sorcerers. But what don Juan understood with the most painful clarity was that he had thrown away his chance to be with them.

When the pressure of his physical helplessness seemed unendurable, his paralysis ended as mysteriously as it had begun. One day he simply got out of bed and went to work. But his luck did not get any better. He could hardly make ends meet.

Another year passed. He did not prosper, but there was one thing in which he succeeded beyond his expectations: he made a total recapitulation of his life. He understood then why he loved and could not leave those children, and why he could not stay with them; and he also understood why he could neither act one way nor the other.

Don Juan knew that he had reached a complete impasse, and that to die like a warrior was the only action congruous with what he had learned at his benefactor's house. So every night, after a frustrating day of hardship and meaningless toil, he patiently waited for his death to come.

He was so utterly convinced of his end that his wife and her children waited with him- in a gesture of solidarity, they too wanted to die. All four sat in perfect immobility, night after night, without fail, and recapitulated their lives while they waited for death.

Don Juan had admonished them with the same words his benefactor had used to admonish him.

"Don't wish for it," his benefactor had said. "Just wait until it comes. Don't try to imagine what death is like. Just be there to be caught in it's flow."

The time spent quietly strengthened them mentally, but physically their emaciated bodies told of their losing battle.

One day, however, don Juan thought his luck was beginning to change. He found temporary work with a team of farm laborers during the harvest season. But the spirit had other designs for him. A couple of days after he started work, someone stole his hat. It was impossible for him to buy a new one, but he had to have one to work under the scorching sun.

He fashioned a protection of sorts by covering his head with rags and handfuls of straw. His coworkers began to laugh and taunt him. He ignored them. Compared to the lives of the three people who depended on his labor, how he looked had little meaning for him. But the men did not stop. They yelled and laughed until the foreman, fearing that they would riot, fired don Juan.

A wild rage overwhelmed don Juan's sense of sobriety and caution. He knew he had been wronged. The moral right was with him. He let out a chilling, piercing scream, and grabbed one of the men, and lifted him over his shoulders, meaning to crack his back. But he thought of those hungry children. He thought of their disciplined little bodies as they sat with him night after night awaiting death. He put the man down and walked away.

Don Juan said that he sat down at the edge of the field where the men were working, and all the despair that had accumulated in him finally exploded. It was a silent rage, but not against the people around him. He raged against himself. He raged until all his anger was spent.

"I sat there in view of all those people and began to weep," don Juan continued. "They looked at me as if I were crazy, which I really was, but I didn't care. I was beyond caring.

"The foreman felt sorry for me and came over to give a word of advice. He thought I was weeping for myself. He couldn't have possibly known that I was weeping for the spirit."

Don Juan said that a silent protector came to him after his rage was spent. It was in the form of an unaccountable surge of energy that left him with the clear feeling that his death was imminent. He knew that he was not going to have time to see his adopted family again. He apologized to them in a loud voice for not having had the fortitude and wisdom necessary to deliver them from their hell on earth.

The farm workers continued to laugh and mock him. He vaguely heard them. Tears swelled in his chest as he addressed and thanked the spirit for having placed him in the nagual's path, giving him an undeserved chance to be free. He heard the howls of the uncomprehending men. He heard their insults and yells as if from within himself. They had the right to ridicule him. He had been at the portals of eternity and had been unaware of it.

"I understood how right my benefactor had been," don Juan said. "My stupidity was a monster and it had already devoured me. The instant I had that thought, I knew that anything I could say or do was useless. I had lost my chance. Now, I was only clowning for those men. The spirit could not possibly have cared about my despair. There were too many of us- men with our own petty private hells, born of our stupidity- for the spirit to pay attention.

"I knelt and faced the southeast. I thanked my benefactor again and told the spirit I was ashamed. So ashamed. And with my last breath I said goodbye to a world which could have been wonderful if I had had wisdom. An immense wave came for me then. I felt it, first. Then I heard it, and finally I saw it coming for me from the southeast, over the fields. It overtook me and it's blackness covered me. And the light of my life was gone. My hell had ended. I was finally dead! I was finally free!"

Don Juan's story devastated me. He ignored all my efforts to talk about it. He said that at another time and in another setting we were going to discuss it. He demanded instead that we get on with what he had come to do: elucidate the mastery of awareness.

A couple of days later, as we were coming down from the mountains, he suddenly began to talk about his story. We had sat down to rest. Actually, I was the one who had stopped to catch my breath. Don Juan was not even breathing hard.

"The sorcerers' struggle for assuredness is the most dramatic struggle there is," don Juan said. "It's painful and costly. Many, many times it has actually cost sorcerers their lives."

He explained that in order for any sorcerer to have complete certainty about his actions, or about his position in the sorcerers' world, or to be capable of utilizing intelligently his new continuity, he must invalidate the continuity of his old life. Only then can his actions have the necessary assuredness to fortify and balance the tenuousness and instability of his new continuity.

"The sorcerer seers of modern times call this process of invalidation the ticket to impeccability, or the sorcerers' symbolic but final death," don Juan said. "And in that field in Sinaloa, I got my ticket to impeccability. I died there. The tenuousness of my new continuity cost me my life."

"But did you die, don Juan, or did you just faint?" I asked, trying not to sound cynical.

"I died in that field," he said. "I felt my awareness flowing out of me and heading toward the Eagle. But as I had impeccably recapitulated my life, the Eagle did not swallow my awareness. The Eagle spat me out. Because my body was dead in the field, the Eagle did not let me go through to freedom. It was as if it told me to go back and try again.

"I ascended the heights of blackness and descended again to the light of the earth. And then I found myself in a shallow grave at the edge of the field, covered with rocks and dirt."

Don Juan said that he knew instantly what to do. After digging himself out he rearranged the grave to look as if a body were still there, and slipped away. He felt strong and determined. He knew that he had to return to his benefactor's house.

But, before he started on his return journey, he wanted to see his family and explain to them that he was a sorcerer and for that reason he could not stay with them. He wanted to explain that his downfall had been not knowing that sorcerers can never make a bridge to join the people of the world. But, if people desire to do so, they have to make a bridge to join sorcerers.

"I went home," don Juan continued, "but the house was empty. The shocked neighbors told me that farm workers had come earlier with the news that I had dropped dead at work, and my wife and her children had left."

"How long were you dead, don Juan?" I asked.

"A whole day, apparently," he said.

Don Juan's smile played on his lips. His eyes seemed to be made of shiny obsidian. He was watching my reaction, waiting for my comments.

"What became of your family, don Juan?" I asked.

"Ah, the question of a sensible man," he remarked. "For a moment I thought you were going to ask me about my death!"

I confessed that I had been about to, but that I knew he was seeing my question as I formulated it in my mind, and just to be contrary I asked something else. I did not mean it as a joke, but it made him laugh.

"My family disappeared that day," he said. "My wife was a survivor. She had to be, with the conditions we lived under. Since I had been waiting for my death, she believed I had gotten what I wanted. There was nothing for her to do there, so she left.

"I missed the children and I consoled myself with the thought that it wasn't my fate to be with them. However, sorcerers have a peculiar bent. They live exclusively in the twilight of a feeling best described by the words "and yet..." When everything is crumbling down around them, sorcerers accept that the situation is terrible, and then immediately escape to the twilight of "and yet..."

"I did that with my feelings for those children and the woman. With great discipline- especially on the part of the oldest boy- they had recapitulated their lives with me. Only the spirit could decide the outcome of that affection."

He reminded me that he had taught me how warriors acted in such situations. They did their utmost, and then, without any remorse or regrets, they relaxed and let the spirit decide the outcome.

"What was the decision of the spirit, don Juan?" I asked.

He scrutinized me without answering. I knew he was completely aware of my motive for asking. I had experienced a similar affection and a similar loss.

"The decision of the spirit is another basic core," he said. "Sorcery stories are built around it. We'll talk about that specific decision when we get to discussing that basic core.

"Now, wasn't there a question about my death you wanted to ask?"

"If they thought you were dead, why the shallow grave?" I asked. "Why didn't they dig a real grave and bury you?"

"That's more like you," he said laughing. "I asked the same question myself and I realized that all those farm workers were pious people. I was a Christian. Christians are not buried just like that, nor are they left to rot like dogs. I think they were waiting for my family to come and claim the body and give it a proper burial. But my family never came."

"Did you go and look for them, don Juan?" I asked.

"No. Sorcerers never look for anyone," he replied. "And I was a sorcerer. I had paid with my life for the mistake of not knowing I was a sorcerer, and that sorcerers never approach anyone.

"From that day on, I have only accepted the company or the care of people or warriors who are dead, as I am."

Don Juan said that he went back to his benefactor's house where all of them knew instantly what he had discovered. And they treated him as if he had not left at all.

The nagual Julian commented that because of don Juan's peculiar nature he had taken a long time to die.

"My benefactor told me then that a sorcerer's ticket to freedom was his death," don Juan went on. "He said that he himself had paid with his life for that ticket to freedom, as had everyone else in his household. And that now we were equals in our condition of being dead."

"Am I dead too, don Juan?" I asked.

"You are dead," he said. "The sorcerers' grand trick, however, is to be aware that they are dead. Their ticket to impeccability must be wrapped in awareness. In that wrapping, sorcerers say, their ticket is kept in mint condition.

"For sixty years, I've kept mine in mint condition."

## 6. Handling Intent

### The Third Point

Don Juan often took me and the rest of his apprentices on short trips to the western range nearby. On this occasion we left at dawn, and late in the afternoon, started back. I chose to walk with don Juan. To be close to him always soothed and relaxed me, whereas being with his volatile apprentices always produced in me the opposite effect: They made me feel very tired.

As we all came down from the mountains, don Juan and I made one stop before we reached the flatlands. An attack of profound melancholy came upon me with such speed and strength that all I could do was to sit down. Then, following don Juan's suggestion, I lay on my stomach, on top of a large round boulder.

The rest of the apprentices taunted me and continued walking. I heard their laughter and yelling become faint in the distance. Don Juan urged me to relax and let my assemblage point, which he said had moved with sudden speed, settle into it's new position.

"Don't fret," he advised me. "In a short while, you'll feel a sort of tug, or a pat on your back, as if someone has touched you. Then you'll be fine."

The act of lying motionless on the boulder, waiting to feel the pat on my back, triggered a spontaneous recollection so intense and clear that I never noticed the pat I was expecting. I was sure, however, that I got it, because my melancholy indeed vanished instantly.

I quickly described what I was recollecting to don Juan. He suggested I stay on the boulder and move my assemblage point back to the exact place it was when I experienced the event that I was recalling.

"Get every detail of it," he warned.

It had happened many years before. Don Juan and I had been at that time in the state of Chihuahua in northern Mexico, in the high desert. I used to go there with him because it was an area rich in the medicinal herbs he collected.

From an anthropological point of view that area also held a tremendous interest for me. Archaeologists had found, not too long before, the remains of what they concluded was a large, prehistoric trading post. They surmised that the trading post, strategically situated in a natural passway, had been the epicenter of commerce along a trade route which joined the American Southwest to southern Mexico and Central America.

The few times I had been in that flat, high desert had reinforced my conviction that archaeologists were right in their conclusions that it was a natural passkey. I, of course, had lectured don Juan on the influence of that passway in the prehistoric distribution of cultural traits on the North American continent. I was deeply interested at that time in explaining sorcery among the Indians of the American Southwest, Mexico, and Central America as a system of beliefs which had been transmitted along trade routes and which had served to create, at a certain abstract level, a sort of pre-Columbian pan-Indianism.

Don Juan, naturally, laughed uproariously every time I expounded my theories.

The event that I recollected had begun in the midafternoon. After don Juan and I had gathered two small sacks of some extremely rare medicinal herbs, we took a break and sat down on top of some huge boulders. But before we headed back to where I had left my car, don Juan insisted on talking about the art of stalking. He said that the setting was the most adequate one for explaining it's intricacies, but that in order to understand them I first had to enter into heightened awareness.

I demanded that before he do anything he explain to me again what heightened awareness really was.

Don Juan, displaying great patience, discussed heightened awareness in terms of the movement of the assemblage point. As he kept talking, I realized the facetiousness [* facetiousness- playful humour] of my request. I knew everything he was telling me. I remarked that I did not really need anything explained, and he said that explanations were never wasted, because they were imprinted in us for immediate or later use; or to help prepare our way to reaching silent knowledge.

When I asked him to talk about silent knowledge in more detail, he quickly responded that silent knowledge was a general position of the assemblage point, that ages ago it had been man's normal position, but that, for reasons which would be impossible to determine, man's assemblage point had moved away from that specific location and adopted a new one called "reason."

Don Juan remarked that not every human being was a representative of this new position. The assemblage points of the majority of us were not placed squarely on the location of reason itself, but in it's immediate vicinity. The same thing had been the case with silent knowledge: not every human being's assemblage point had been squarely on that location either.

He also said that 'the place of no pity', being another position of the assemblage point, was the forerunner of silent knowledge, and that yet another position of the assemblage point called 'the place of concern', was the forerunner of reason.

I found nothing obscure about those cryptic remarks. To me they were self-explanatory. I understood everything he said while I waited for his usual blow to my shoulder blades to make me enter into heightened awareness. But the blow never came, and I kept on understanding what he was saying without really being aware that I understood anything. The feeling of ease, of taking things for granted, proper to my normal consciousness, remained with me, and I did not question my capacity to understand.

Don Juan looked at me fixedly and recommended that I lie face down on top of a round boulder with my arms and legs spread like a frog.

I lay there for about ten minutes, thoroughly relaxed, almost asleep, until I was jolted out of my slumber by a soft, sustained hissing growl. I raised my head, looked up, and my hair stood on end. A gigantic, dark jaguar was squatting on a boulder, scarcely ten feet from me, right above where don Juan was sitting. The jaguar, it's fangs showing, was glaring straight at me. He seemed ready to jump on me,

"Don't move!" don Juan ordered me softly. "And don't look at his eyes. Stare at his nose and don't blink. Your life depends on your stare."

I did what he told me. The jaguar and I stared at each other for a moment until don Juan broke the standoff by hurling his hat, like a frisbee, at the jaguar's head. The jaguar jumped back to avoid being hit, and don Juan let out a loud, prolonged, and piercing whistle. He then yelled at the top of his voice and clapped his hands two or three times. It sounded like muffled gunshots.

Don Juan signaled me to come down from the boulder and join him. The two of us yelled and clapped our hands until he decided we had scared the jaguar away.

My body was shaking, yet I was not frightened. I told don Juan that what had caused me the greatest fear had not been the cat's sudden growl or his stare, but the certainty that the jaguar had been staring at me long before I had heard him and lifted my head.

Don Juan did not say a word about the experience. He was deep in thought. When I began to ask him if he had seen the jaguar before I had, he made an imperious gesture to quiet me. He gave me the impression he was ill at ease or even confused.

After a moment's silence, don Juan signaled me to start walking. He took the lead. We walked away from the rocks, zigzagging at a fast pace through the bush.

After about half an hour we reached a clearing in the chaparral where we stopped to rest for a moment. We had not said a single word and I was eager to know what don Juan was thinking.

"Why are we walking in this pattern?" I asked. "Wouldn't it be better to make a beeline out of here, and fast?"

"No!" he said emphatically. "It wouldn't be any good. That one is a male jaguar. He's hungry and he's going to come after us."

"All the more reason to get out of here fast," I insisted.

"It's not so easy," he said. "That jaguar is not encumbered by reason. He'll know exactly what to do to get us. And as sure as I am talking to you, he'll read our thoughts."

"What do you mean, the jaguar reading our thoughts?" I asked.

"That is no metaphorical statement," he said. "I mean what I say. Big animals like that have the capacity to read thoughts. And I don't mean guess. I mean that they know everything directly."

"What can we do then?" I asked, truly alarmed.

"We ought to become less rational and try to win the battle by making it impossible for the jaguar to read us," he replied.

"How would being less rational help us?" I asked.

"Reason makes us choose what seems sound to the mind," he said. "For instance, your reason already told you to run as fast as you can in a straight line. What your reason failed to consider is that we would have had to run about six miles before reaching the safety of your car. And the jaguar will outrun us. He'll cut in front of us and be waiting in the most appropriate place to jump us.

"A better but less rational choice is to zigzag."

"How do you know that it's better, don Juan?" I asked.

"I know it because my connection to the spirit is very clear," he replied. "That is to say, my assemblage point is at the place of silent knowledge. From there I can discern that this is a hungry jaguar, but not one that has already eaten humans. And he's baffled by our actions. If we zigzag now, the jaguar will have to make an effort to anticipate us."

"Are there any other choices beside zigzagging?" I asked.

"There are only rational choices," he said. "And we don't have all the equipment we need to back up rational choices. For example, we can head for the high ground, but we would need a gun to hold it.

"We must match the jaguar's choices. Those choices are dictated by silent knowledge. We must do what silent knowledge tells us, regardless of how unreasonable it may seem."

He began his zigzagging trot. I followed him very closely, but I had no confidence that running like that would save us. I was having a delayed panic reaction. The thought of the dark, looming shape of the enormous cat obsessed me.

The desert chaparral consisted of tall, ragged bushes spaced four or five feet apart. The limited rainfall in the high desert did not allow the growth of plants with thick foliage or of dense underbrush. Yet the visual effect of the chaparral was of thickness and impenetrable growth.

Don Juan moved with extraordinary nimbleness and I followed as best as I could. He suggested that I watch where I stepped and make less noise. He said that the sound of branches cracking under my weight was a dead giveaway.

I deliberately tried to step in don Juan's tracks to avoid breaking dry branches. We zigzagged about a hundred yards in this manner before I caught sight of the jaguar's enormous dark mass no more than thirty feet behind me.

I yelled at the top of my voice. Without stopping, don Juan turned around quickly enough to see the big cat move out of sight. Don Juan let out another piercing whistle and kept clapping his hands, imitating the sound of muffled gunshots.

In a very low voice he said that cats did not like to go uphill and so we were going to cross, at top speed, the wide and deep ravine a few yards to my right.

He gave a signal to go and we thrashed through the bushes as fast as we could. We slid down one side of the ravine, reached the bottom, and rushed up the other side. From there we had a clear view of the slope, the bottom of the ravine, and the level ground where we had been. Don Juan whispered that the jaguar was following our scent, and that if we were lucky we would see him running to the bottom of the ravine, close to our tracks.

Gazing fixedly at the ravine below us, I waited anxiously to catch a glimpse of the animal. But I did not see him. I was beginning to think the jaguar might have run away when I heard the frightening growling of the big cat in the chaparral just behind us. I had the chilling realization that don Juan had been right. To get to where he was, the jaguar must have read our thoughts and crossed the ravine before we had.

Without uttering a single word, don Juan began running at a formidable speed. I followed and we zigzagged for quite a while. I was totally out of breath when we stopped to rest.

The fear of being chased by the jaguar had not, however, prevented me from admiring don Juan's superb physical prowess. He had run as if he were a young man. I began to tell him that he had reminded me of someone in my childhood who had impressed me deeply with his running ability, but he signaled me to stop talking. He listened attentively and so did I.

I heard a soft rustling in the underbrush, right ahead of us. And then the black silhouette of the jaguar was visible for an instant at a spot in the chaparral perhaps fifty yards from us.

Don Juan shrugged his shoulders and pointed in the direction of the animal.

"It looks like we're not going to shake him off," he said with a tone of resignation. "Let's walk calmly, as if we were taking a nice stroll in the park, and you tell me the story of your childhood. This is the right time and the right setting for it. A jaguar is after us with a ravenous appetite, and you are reminiscing about your past: the perfect not-doing for being chased by a jaguar."

He laughed loudly. But when I told him I had completely lost interest in telling the story, he doubled up with laughter.

"You are punishing me now for not wanting to listen to you, aren't you?" he asked.

And I, of course, began to defend myself. I told him his accusation was definitely absurd. I really had lost the thread of the story.

"If a sorcerer doesn't have self-importance, he doesn't give a rat's ass about having lost the thread of a story," he said with a malicious shine in his eyes. "Since you don't have any self-importance left, you should tell your story now. Tell it to the spirit, to the jaguar, and to me, as if you hadn't lost the thread at all."

I wanted to tell him that I did not feel like complying with his wishes, because the story was too stupid and the setting was overwhelming. I wanted to pick the appropriate setting for it, some other time, as he himself did with his stories.

Before I voiced my opinions, he answered me.

"Both the jaguar and I can read thoughts," he said, smiling. "If I choose the proper setting and time for my sorcery stories, it's because they are for teaching and I want to get the maximum effect from them."

He signaled me to start walking. We walked calmly, side by side. I said I had admired his running and his stamina, and that a bit of self-importance was at the core of my admiration, because I considered myself a good runner.

Then I told him the story from my childhood I had remembered when I saw him running so well.

I told him I had played soccer as a boy and had run extremely well. In fact, I was so agile and fast that I felt I could commit any prank with impunity because I would be able to outrun anyone chasing me, especially the old policemen who patrolled the streets of my hometown on foot. If I broke a street light or something of the sort, all I had to do was to take off running and I was safe.

But one day, unbeknownst to me, the old policemen were replaced by a new police corps with military training. The disastrous moment came when I broke a Store window and ran; confident that my speed was my safeguard.

A young policeman took off after me. I ran as I had never run before, but it was to no avail. The officer, who was a crack center forward on the police soccer team, had more speed and stamina than my ten-year-old body could manage. He caught me and kicked me all the way back to the store with the broken window. Very artfully he named off all his kicks, as if he were training on a soccer field. He did not hurt me, he only scared me spitless, yet my intense humiliation was tempered by a ten-year-old's admiration for his prowess and his talent as a soccer player.

I told don Juan that I had felt the same with him that day. He was able to outrun me in spite of our age difference and my old proclivity for speedy getaways.

I also told him that for years I had been having a recurrent dream in which I ran so well that the young policeman was no longer able to overtake me.

"Your story is more important than I thought," don Juan commented. "I thought it was going to be a story about your mama spanking you."

The way he emphasized his words made his statement very funny and very mocking. He added that at certain times it was the spirit, and not our reason, which decided on our stories. This was one of those times. The spirit had triggered this particular story in my mind, doubtlessly because the story was concerned with my indestructible self-importance. He said that the torch of anger and humiliation had burned in me for years, and my feelings of failure and dejection were still intact.

"A psychologist would have a field day with your story and it's present context," he went on. "In your mind, I must be identified with the young policeman who shattered your notion of invincibility."

Now that he mentioned it, I had to admit that that had been my feeling, although I would not consciously have thought of it, much less voiced it.

We walked in silence. I was so touched by his analogy that I completely forgot the jaguar stalking us, until a wild growl reminded me of our situation.

Don Juan directed me to jump up and down on the long, low branches of the shrubs and break off a couple of them to make a sort of long broom. He did the same. As we ran, we used them to raise a cloud of dust, stirring and kicking the dry, sandy dirt.

"That ought to worry the jaguar," he said when we stopped again to catch our breath. "We have only a few hours of daylight left. At night the jaguar is unbeatable, so we had better start running straight toward those rocky hills."

He pointed to some hills in the distance, perhaps half a mile south.

"We've got to go east," I said. "Those hills are too far south. If we go that way, we'll never get to my car."

"We won't get to your car today, anyway," he said calmly. "And perhaps not tomorrow either. Who is to say we'll ever get back to it?"

I felt a pang of fear, and then a strange peace took possession of me. I told don Juan that if death was going to take me in that desert chaparral I hoped it would be painless.

"Don't worry," he said. "Death is painful only when it happens in one's bed, in sickness. In a fight for your life, you feel no pain. If you feel anything, it's exultation."

He said that one of the most dramatic differences between civilized men and sorcerers was the way in which death came to them. Only with sorcerer-warriors was death kind and sweet. They could be mortally wounded and yet would feel no pain. And what was even more extraordinary was that death held itself in abeyance for as long as the sorcerers needed it to do so.

"The greatest difference between an average man and a sorcerer is that a sorcerer commands his death with his speed," don Juan went on. "If it comes to that, the jaguar will not eat me. He'll eat you, because you don't have the speed to hold back your death."

He then elaborated on the intricacies of the sorcerers' idea of speed and death. He said that in the world of everyday life, our word or our decisions could be reversed very easily. The only irrevocable thing in our world was death. In the sorcerers' world, on the other hand, normal death could be countermanded, but not the sorcerers' word. In the sorcerers' world decisions could not be changed or revised. Once they had been made, they stood forever.

I told don Juan that his statements, impressive as they were, could not convince me that death could be revoked; and he explained once more what he had explained before.

He said that for a seer, human beings were either oblong or spherical luminous masses of countless, static, yet vibrant fields of energy; and that only sorcerers were capable of injecting movement into those spheres of static luminosity.

In a millisecond they could move their assemblage points to any place in their luminous mass. That movement and the speed with which it is performed entailed an instantaneous shift into the perception of another totally different universe.

Or they could move their assemblage points, without stopping, across their entire fields of luminous energy. The force created by such movement was so intense that it instantly consumed their whole luminous mass.

He said that if a rockslide were to come crashing down on us at that precise moment, he would be able to cancel the normal effect of an accidental death. By using the speed with which his assemblage point would move, he could make himself change universes or make himself burn from within in a fraction of a second. I, on the other hand, would die a normal death, crushed by the rocks, because my assemblage point lacked the speed to pull me out.

I said it seemed to me that the sorcerers had just found an alternative way of dying, which was not the same as a cancellation of death. And he replied that all he had said was that sorcerers commanded their deaths. They died only when they had to.

Although I did not doubt what he was saying, I kept asking questions, almost as a game. But while he was talking, thoughts and unanchored memories about other perceivable universes were forming in my mind, as if on a screen.

I told don Juan I was thinking strange thoughts. He laughed and recommended I stick to the jaguar, because he was so real that he could only be a true manifestation of the spirit.

The idea of how real the animal was made me shudder.

"Wouldn't it be better if we changed direction instead of heading straight for the hills?" I asked.

I thought that we could create a certain confusion in the jaguar with an unexpected change.

"It's too late to change direction," don Juan said. "The jaguar already knows that there is no place for us to go but the hills."

"That can't be true, don Juan!" I exclaimed.

"Why not?" he asked.

I told him that although I could attest to the animal's ability to be one jump ahead of us, I could not quite accept that the jaguar had the foresight to figure out where we wanted to go.

"Your error is to think of the jaguar's power in terms of his capacity to figure things out," he said. "He can't think. He only knows."

Don Juan said that our dust-raising maneuver was to confuse the jaguar by giving him sensory input on something for which we had no use. We could not develop a real feeling for raising dust though our lives depended on it.

"I truly don't understand what you are saying," I whined.

Tension was taking it's toll on me. I was having a hard time concentrating.

Don Juan explained that human feelings were like hot or cold currents of air and could easily be detected by a beast. We were the senders, the jaguar was the receiver. Whatever feelings we had would find their way to the jaguar. Or rather, the jaguar could read any feelings that had a history of use for us. In the case of the dust-raising maneuver, the feeling we had about it was so out of the ordinary that it could only create a vacuum in the receiver.

"Another maneuver silent knowledge might dictate would be to kick up dirt," don Juan said.

He looked at me for an instant as if he were waiting for my reactions.

"We are going to walk very calmly now," he said. "And you are going to kick up dirt as if you were a ten-foot giant."

I must have had a stupid expression on my face. Don Juan's body shook with laughter.

"Raise a cloud of dust with your feet," he ordered me. "Feel huge and heavy."

I tried it and immediately had a sense of massiveness. In a joking tone, I commented that his power of suggestion was incredible. I actually felt gigantic and ferocious. He assured me that my feeling of size was not in any way the product of his suggestion, but the product of a shift of my assemblage point.

He said that men of antiquity became legendary because they knew by silent knowledge about the power to be obtained by moving the assemblage point. On a reduced scale, sorcerers had recaptured that old power. With a movement of their assemblage points, they could manipulate their feelings and change things. I was changing things by feeling big and ferocious. Feelings processed in that fashion were called intent.

"Your assemblage point has already moved quite a bit," he went on. "Now you are in the position of either losing your gain, or making your assemblage point move beyond the place where it is now."

He said that possibly every human being under normal living conditions had had at one time or another the opportunity to break away from the bindings of convention. He stressed that he did not mean social convention, but the conventions binding our perception.

A moment of elation would suffice to move our assemblage points and break our conventions. So, too, a moment of fright, ill health, anger, or grief. But ordinarily, whenever we had the chance to move our assemblage points we became frightened. Our religious, academic, and social backgrounds would come into play. They would assure our safe return to the flock; the return of our assemblage points to the prescribed position of normal living.

He told me that all the mystics and spiritual teachers I knew of had done just that: Their assemblage points moved, either through discipline or accident, to a certain point; and then they returned to normalcy carrying a memory that lasted them a lifetime.

"You can be a very pious, good boy," he went on, "and forget about the initial movement of your assemblage point. Or you can push beyond your reasonable limits. You are still within those limits."

I knew what he was talking about, yet there was a strange hesitation in me making me vacillate.

Don Juan pushed his argument further. He said that the average man, incapable of finding the energy to perceive beyond his daily limits, called the realm of extraordinary perception sorcery, witchcraft, or the work of the devil, and shied away from it without examining it further.

"But you can't do that anymore," don Juan went on. "You are not religious and you are much too curious to discard anything so easily. The only thing that could stop you now is cowardice.

"Turn everything into what it really is: the abstract, the spirit, the nagual. There is no witchcraft, no evil, no devil. There is only perception."

I understood him. But I could not tell exactly what he wanted me to do.

I looked at don Juan, trying to find the most appropriate words. I seemed to have entered into an extremely functional frame of mind and did not want to waste a single word.

"Be gigantic!" he ordered me, smiling. "Do away with reason."

Then I knew exactly what he meant. In fact, I knew that I could increase the intensity of my feelings of size and ferociousness until I actually could be a giant, hovering over the shrubs, seeing all around us.

I tried to voice my thoughts but quickly gave up. I became aware that don Juan knew all I was thinking, and obviously much, much more.

And then something extraordinary happened to me. My reasoning faculties ceased to function. Literally I felt as though a dark blanket had covered me and obscured my thoughts. I let go of my reason with the abandon of one who doesn't have a worry in the world. I was convinced that if I wanted to dispel the obscuring blanket, all I had to do was feel myself breaking through it.

In that state, I felt I was being propelled; set in motion. Something was making me move physically from one place to another. I did not experience any fatigue. The speed and ease with which I could move elated me.

I did not feel I was walking; I was not flying either. Rather I was being transported with extreme facility. My movements became jerky and ungraceful only when I tried to think about them. When I enjoyed them without thought, I entered into a unique state of physical elation for which I had no precedent.

If I had had instances of that kind of physical happiness in my life, they must have been so short-lived that they had left no memory. Yet when I experienced that ecstasy I felt a vague recognition, as if I had once known it but had forgotten.

The exhilaration of moving through the chaparral was so intense that everything else ceased. The only things that existed for me were those periods of exhilaration and the moments when I would stop moving and find myself facing the chaparral.

But even more inexplicable was the total bodily sensation of looming over the bushes which I had had since the instant I started to move.

At one moment, I clearly saw the figure of the jaguar up ahead of me. He was running away as fast as he could. I felt that he was trying to avoid the spines of the cactuses. He was being extremely careful about where he stepped.

I had the overwhelming urge to run after the jaguar and scare him into losing his caution. I knew that he would get pricked by the spines. A thought then erupted in my silent mind- I thought that the jaguar would be a more dangerous animal if he was hurt by the spines. That thought produced the same effect as someone waking me from a dream.

When I became aware that my thinking processes were functioning again, I found that I was at the base of a low range of rocky hills. I looked around. Don Juan was a few feet away. He seemed exhausted. He was pale and breathing very hard.

"What happened, don Juan?" I asked, after clearing my raspy throat.

"You tell me what happened," he gasped between breaths.

I told him what I had felt. Then I realized that I could barely see the top of the mountain directly in my line of vision. There was very little daylight left, which meant I had been running, or walking, for more than two hours.

I asked don Juan to explain the time discrepancy. He said that my assemblage point had moved beyond the place of no pity into the place of silent knowledge, but that I still lacked the energy to manipulate it myself. To manipulate it myself meant I would have to have enough energy to move between reason and silent knowledge at will. He added that if a sorcerer had enough energy- or even if he did not have sufficient energy but needed to shift because it was a matter of life and death- he could fluctuate between reason and silent knowledge.

His conclusions about me were that because of the seriousness of our situation, I had let the spirit move my assemblage point. The result had been my entering into silent knowledge. Naturally, the scope of my perception had increased, which gave me the feeling of height, of looming over the bushes.

At that time, because of my academic training, I was passionately interested in validation by consensus. I asked him my standard question of those days.

"If someone from UCLA's Anthropology Department had been watching me, would he have seen me as a giant thrashing through the chaparral?"

"I really don't know," don Juan said. "The way to find out would be to move your assemblage point when you are in the Department of Anthropology."

"I have tried," I said. "But nothing ever happens. I must need to have you around for anything to take place."

"It was not a matter of life and death for you then," he said. "If it had been, you would have moved your assemblage point all by yourself."

"But would people see what I see when my assemblage point moves?" I insisted.

"No, because their assemblage points won't be in the same place as yours," he replied.

"Then, don Juan, did I dream the jaguar?" I asked. "Did all of it happen only in my mind?"

"Not quite," he said. "That big cat is real. You have moved miles and you are not even tired. If you are in doubt, look at your shoes. They are full of cactus spines. So you did move, looming over the shrubs. And at the same time you didn't. It depends on whether one's assemblage point is on the place of reason or on the place of silent knowledge."

I understood everything he was saying while he said it, but could not repeat any part of it at will. Nor could I determine what it was I knew, or why he was making so much sense to me.

The growl of the jaguar brought me back to the reality of the immediate danger. I caught sight of the jaguar's dark mass as he swiftly moved uphill about thirty yards to our right.

"What are we going to do, don Juan?" I asked, knowing that he had also seen the animal moving ahead of us.

"Keep climbing to the very top and seek shelter there," he said calmly.

Then he added, as if he had not a single worry in the world, that I had wasted valuable time indulging in my pleasure at looming over the bushes. Instead of heading for the safety of the hills he had pointed out, I had taken off toward the easterly higher mountains.

"We must reach that scarp before the jaguar or we don't have a chance," he said, pointing to the nearly vertical face at the very top of the mountain.

I turned right and saw the jaguar leaping from rock to rock. He was definitely working his way over to cut us off.

"Let's go, don Juan!" I yelled out of nervousness.

Don Juan smiled. He seemed to be enjoying my fear and impatience. We moved as fast as we could and climbed steadily. I tried not to pay attention to the dark form of the jaguar as it appeared from time to time a bit ahead of us and always to our right.

The three of us reached the base of the escarpment at the same time. The jaguar was about twenty yards to our right. He jumped and tried to climb the face of the cliff, but failed. The rock wall was too steep.

Don Juan yelled that I should not waste time watching the jaguar, because he would charge as soon as he gave up trying to climb. No sooner had don Juan spoken than the animal charged.

There was no time for further urging. I scrambled up the rock wall followed by don Juan. The shrill scream of the frustrated beast sounded right by the heel of my right foot. The propelling force of fear sent me up the slick scarp as if I were a fly.

I reached the top before don Juan, who had stopped to laugh.

Safe at the top of the cliff, I had more time to think about what had happened. Don Juan did not want to discuss anything. He argued that at this stage in my development, any movement of my assemblage point would still be a mystery. My challenge at the beginning of my apprenticeship was, he said, maintaining my gains, rather than reasoning them out- and that at some point everything would make sense to me.

I told him everything made sense to me at that moment. But he was adamant that I had to be able to explain knowledge to myself before I could claim that it made sense to me. He insisted that for a movement of my assemblage point to make sense, I would need to have energy to fluctuate from the place of reason to the place of silent knowledge.

He stayed quiet for a while, sweeping my entire body with his stare. Then he seemed to make up his mind and smiled and began to speak again.

"Today you reached the place of silent knowledge," he said with finality.

He explained that that afternoon, my assemblage point had moved by itself, without his intervention. I had intended the movement by manipulating my feeling of being gigantic, and in so doing my assemblage point had reached the position of silent knowledge.

I was very curious to hear how don Juan interpreted my experience. He said that one way to talk about the perception attained in the place of silent knowledge was to call it "here and here." He explained that when I had told him I had felt myself looming over the desert chaparral, I should have added that I was seeing the desert floor and the top of the shrubs at the same time. Or that I had been at the place where I stood and at the same time at the place where the jaguar was. Thus I had been able to notice how carefully he stepped to avoid the cactus spines. In other words, instead of perceiving the normal here and there, I had perceived "here and here."

His comments frightened me. He was right. I had not mentioned that to him, nor had I admitted even to myself that I had been in two places at once. I would not have dared to think in those terms had it not been for his comments.

He repeated that I needed more time and more energy to make sense of everything. I was too new; I still required a great deal of supervision. For instance, while I was looming over the shrubs, he had to make his assemblage point fluctuate rapidly between the places of reason and silent knowledge to take care of me. And that had exhausted him.

"Tell me one thing," I said, testing his reasonableness. "That jaguar was stranger than you want to admit, wasn't it? Jaguars are not part of the fauna [* fauna- all the animal life in a particular region or period] of this area. Pumas, yes, but not jaguars. How do you explain that?"

Before answering, he puckered his face. He was suddenly very serious.

"I think that this particular jaguar confirms your anthropological theories," he said in a solemn tone. "Obviously, the jaguar was following this famous trade route connecting Chihuahua with Central America."

Don Juan laughed so hard that the sound of his laughter echoed in the mountains. That echo disturbed me as much as the jaguar had. Yet it was not the echo itself which disturbed me, but the fact that I had never heard an echo at night. Echoes were, in my mind, associated only with the daytime.

It had taken me several hours to recall all the details of my experience with the jaguar. During that time, don Juan had not talked to me. He had simply propped himself against a rock and gone to sleep in a sitting position. After a while I no longer noticed that he was there, and finally I fell asleep.

I was awakened by a pain in my jaw. I had been sleeping with the side of my face pressed against a rock. The moment I opened my eyes, I tried to slide down off the boulder on which I had been lying, but lost my balance and fell noisily on my seat. Don Juan appeared from behind some bushes just in time to laugh.

It was getting late and I wondered aloud if we had enough time to get to the valley before nightfall. Don Juan shrugged his shoulders and did not seem concerned. He sat down beside me.

I asked him if he wanted to hear the details of my recollection. He indicated that it was fine with him, yet he did not ask me any questions. I thought he was leaving it up to me to start, so I told him there were three points I remembered which were of great importance to me.

One was that he had talked about silent knowledge; another was that I had moved my assemblage point using intent; and the final point was that I had entered into heightened awareness without requiring a blow between my shoulder blades.

Don Juan said, "Intending the movement of your assemblage point was your greatest accomplishment. But accomplishment is something personal. Accomplishment is necessary, but it's not the important part. Accomplishment is not the residue sorcerers look forward to."

I thought I knew what he wanted. I told him that I hadn't totally forgotten the event. What had remained with me in my normal state of awareness was that a mountain lion- since I could not accept the idea of a jaguar- had chased us up a mountain; and that don Juan had asked me if I had felt offended by the big cat's onslaught. I had assured him that it was absurd that I could feel offended, and he had told me I should feel the same way about the onslaughts of my fellow men. I should protect myself, or get out of their way, but without feeling morally wronged.

"That is not the residue I am talking about," he said, laughing. "The idea of the abstract, the spirit, is the only residue that is important. The idea of the personal self has no value whatsoever. You still put yourself and your own feelings first. Every time I've had the chance, I have made you aware of the need to abstract. You have always believed that I meant to think abstractly. No. To abstract means to make yourself available to the spirit by being aware of it."

He said that one of the most dramatic things about the human condition was the macabre [* macabre- shockingly repellent; inspiring horror] connection between stupidity and self-reflection.

It is stupidity that forces us to discard anything that does not conform with our self-reflective expectations. For example, as average men we are blind to the most crucial piece of knowledge available to a human being: the existence of the assemblage point and the fact that it could move.

"For a rational man," he went on, "it's unthinkable that there is an invisible point where perception is assembled. And yet more unthinkable that such a point is not in the brain, as he might vaguely expect it to be; if he were given to entertaining the thought of it's existence."

He added that for the rational man to hold steadfastly to his self-image insured his abysmal [* abysmal- very great; limitless] ignorance.

The average man ignored, for instance, the fact that sorcery was not incantations and hocus-pocus, but the freedom to perceive not only the world taken for granted, but every thing else that was humanly possible.

"Here is where the average man's stupidity is most dangerous," he continued. "He is afraid of sorcery. He trembles at the possibility of freedom. And freedom is at his fingertips. It's called the third point. And it can be reached as easily as the assemblage point can be made to move."

I protested saying, "But you yourself told me that moving the assemblage point is so difficult that it is a true accomplishment."

"It is," he assured me. "This is another of the sorcerers' contradictions: Moving it is very difficult and yet it's the simplest thing in the world. I've told you already that a high fever could move the assemblage point. Hunger or fear or love or hate could do it; mysticism too.

"Unbending intent can also move the assemblage point, and is the preferred method of sorcerers."

I asked him to explain again what unbending intent was.

He said that it was a sort of single-mindedness human beings exhibit; an extremely well-defined purpose not countermanded by any conflicting interests or desires.

Unbending intent was also the force engendered [* engendered- called forth] when the assemblage point was maintained fixed in a position which was not the usual one.

Don Juan then made a meaningful distinction which had eluded me all these years between a movement and a shift of the assemblage point.

He said a movement was a profound change of position so extreme that the assemblage point might even reach other bands of energy within our total luminous mass of energy fields: Each band of energy represented a completely different universe to be perceived.

A shift, however, was a small movement within the band of energy fields we perceived as the world of everyday life.

He went on to say that sorcerers saw unbending intent as the catalyst to trigger their unchangeable decisions: Or as the converse, their unchangeable decisions were the catalyst that propelled their assemblage points to new positions which in turn generated unbending intent.

I must have looked dumbfounded. Don Juan laughed and said that trying to reason out the sorcerers' metaphorical descriptions was as useless as trying to reason out silent knowledge. He added that the problem with words was that any attempt to clarify the sorcerers' description only made them more confusing.

I urged him to try to clarify this in any way he could. I argued that anything he could say, for instance, about the third point could only clarify it, for although I knew everything about it, it was still very confusing.

"The world of daily life consists of two points of reference," he said. "We have for example, here and there, in and out, up and down, good and evil, and so on and so forth. So, properly speaking, our perception of our lives is two-dimensional. None of what we perceive ourselves doing has 'depth'."

I protested that he was mixing levels. I told him that I could accept his definition of perception as the capacity of living beings to apprehend with their senses fields of energy selected by their assemblage points- a very farfetched definition by my academic standards, but one that, at the moment, seemed cogent. [* cogent- powerfully persuasive]

However, I could not imagine what the 'depth' of what we do might be. I argued that it was possible he was talking about interpretations- elaborations of our basic perceptions.

"A sorcerer perceives his actions with depth," he said. "His actions are tri-dimensional for him. They have a third point of reference."

"How could a third point of reference exist?" I asked with a tinge of annoyance.

He said, "Our points of reference are obtained primarily from our sense perception. Our senses perceive and differentiate what is immediate to us from what is not. Using that basic distinction we derive the rest.

"In order to reach the third point of reference one must perceive two places at once."

My recollecting had put me in a strange mood- it was as if I had lived the experience just a few minutes earlier. I was suddenly aware of something I had completely missed before. Under don Juan's supervision, I had twice before experienced that divided perception, but this was the first time I had accomplished it all by myself.

Thinking about my recollection, I also realized that my sensory experience was more complex than I had at first thought. During the time I had loomed over the bushes, I had been aware- without words or even thoughts- that being in two places, or being 'here and here' as don Juan had called it, rendered my perception immediate and complete at both places. But I had also been aware that my double perception lacked the total clarity of normal perception.

Don Juan explained that normal perception had an axis. 'Here and there' were the perimeters of that axis, and we were partial to the clarity of 'here'. He said that in normal perception, only 'here' was perceived completely, instantaneously, and directly. It's twin referent, 'there', lacked immediacy. It was inferred, deduced, expected, even assumed, but it was not apprehended directly with all the senses.

When we perceived two places at once, total clarity was lost, but the immediate perception of 'there' was gained.

"But then, don Juan, I was right in describing my perception as the important part of my experience," I said.

"No, you were not," he said. "What you experienced was vital to you because it opened the road to silent knowledge, but the important thing was the jaguar. That jaguar was indeed a manifestation of the spirit.

"That big cat came unnoticed out of nowhere. And he could have finished us off as surely as I am talking to you. That jaguar was an expression of magic. Without him you would have had no elation, no lesson, no realizations."

"But was he a real jaguar?" I asked.

"You bet he was real!"

Don Juan observed that for an average man that big cat would have been a frightening oddity. An average man would have been hard put to explain in reasonable terms what that jaguar was doing in Chihuahua so far from a tropical jungle. But a sorcerer, because he had a connecting link with intent, saw that jaguar as a vehicle to perceiving- not an oddity, but a source of awe.

There were a lot of questions I wanted to ask, and yet I knew the answers before I could articulate the questions. I followed the course of my own questions and answers for a while, until finally I realized it did not matter that I silently knew the answers; answers had to be verbalized to be of any value.

I voiced the first question that came to mind. I asked don Juan to explain what seemed to be a contradiction. He had asserted that only the spirit could move the assemblage point. But then he had said that my feelings, processed into intent, had moved my assemblage point.

"Only sorcerers can turn their feelings into intent," he said. "Intent is the spirit, so it is the spirit which moves their assemblage points.

"The misleading part of all this," he went on, "is that I am saying only sorcerers know about the spirit and that intent is the exclusive domain of sorcerers. This is not true at all, but it is the situation in the realm of practicality.

"The real condition is that sorcerers are more aware of their connection with the spirit than the average man and strive to manipulate it. That's all.

"I've already told you, the connecting link with intent is the universal feature shared by everything there is."

Two or three times, don Juan seemed about to start to add something. He vacillated, apparently trying to choose his words. Finally he said that being in two places at once was a milestone [* milestone- a significant event in ones life ] sorcerers used to mark the moment the assemblage point reached the place of silent knowledge. Split perception, if accomplished by one's own means, was called the free movement of the assemblage point.

He assured me that every nagual consistently did everything within his power to encourage the free movement of his apprentices' assemblage points. This all-out effort was cryptically called 'reaching out for the third point'.

"The most difficult aspect of the nagual's knowledge," don Juan went on, "and certainly the most crucial part of his task is that of reaching out for the third point- the nagual intends that free movement, and the spirit channels to the nagual the means to accomplish it. I had never intended anything of that sort until you came along. Therefore, I had never fully appreciated my benefactor's gigantic effort to intend it for me.

"Difficult as it is for a nagual to intend that free movement for his disciples," don Juan went on, "it's nothing compared with the difficulty his disciples have in understanding what the nagual is doing. Look at the way you yourself struggle! The same thing happened to me. Most of the time, I ended up believing the trickery of the spirit was simply the trickery of the nagual Julian.

"Later on, I realized I owed him my life and well-being," don Juan continued. "Now I know I owe him infinitely more. Since I can't begin to describe what I really owe him, I prefer to say he cajoled me into having a third point of reference.

"The third point of reference is freedom of perception; it is intent; it is the spirit; the somersault of thought into the miraculous; the act of reaching beyond our boundaries and touching the inconceivable."

## The Two One-Way Bridges

Don Juan and I were sitting at the table in his kitchen. It was early morning. We had just returned from the mountains where we had spent the night after I had recalled my experience with the jaguar. Recollecting my split perception had put me in a state of euphoria which don Juan had employed, as usual, to plunge me into more sensory experiences that I was now unable to recall. My euphoria, however, had not waned.

"To discover the possibility of being in two places at once is very exciting to the mind," he said. "Since our minds are our rationality, and our rationality is our self-reflection, anything beyond our self-reflection either appalls us or attracts us, depending on what kind of persons we are."

He looked at me fixedly and then smiled as if he had just found out something new.

"Or it appalls and attracts us in the same measure," he said, "which seems to be the case with both of us."

I told him that with me it was not a matter of being appalled or attracted by my experience, but a matter of being frightened by the immensity of the possibility of split perception.

"I can't say that I don't believe I was in two places at once," I said. "I can't deny my experience, and yet I think I am so frightened by it that my mind refuses to accept it as a fact."

"You and I are the type of people who become obsessed by things like that, and then forget all about them," he remarked and laughed. "You and I are very much alike."

It was my turn to laugh. I knew he was making fun of me. Yet he projected such sincerity that I wanted to believe he was being truthful.

I told him that among his apprentices, I was the only one who had learned not to take his statements of equality with us too seriously. I said that I had seen him in action, hearing him tell each of his apprentices, in the most sincere tone, "You and I are such fools. We are so alike!" And I had been horrified, time and time again, to realize that they believed him.

"You are not like any one of us, don Juan," I said. "You are a mirror that doesn't reflect our images. You are already beyond our reach."

"What you're witnessing is the result of a lifelong struggle," he said. "What you see is a sorcerer who has finally learned to follow the designs of the spirit, but that's all.

"I have described to you, in many ways, the different stages a warrior passes through along the path of knowledge," he went on. "In terms of his connection with intent, a warrior goes through four stages. The first is when he has a rusty, untrustworthy link with intent. The second is when he succeeds in cleaning it. The third is when he learns to manipulate it. And the fourth is when he learns to accept the designs of the abstract."

Don Juan maintained that his attainment did not make him intrinsically different. It only made him more resourceful; thus he was not being facetious when he said to me or to his other apprentices that he was just like us.

"I understand exactly what you are going through," he continued. "When I laugh at you, I really laugh at the memory of myself in your shoes. I, too, held on to the world of everyday life. I held on to it by my fingernails. Everything told me to let go, but I couldn't. Just like you, I trusted my mind implicitly, and I had no reason to do so. I was no longer an average man.

"My problem then is your problem today. The momentum of the daily world carried me, and I kept acting like an average man. I held on desperately to my flimsy rational Structures. Don't you do the same."

"I don't hold onto any structures; they hold onto me," I said, and that made him laugh.

I told him I understood him to perfection, but that no matter how hard I tried, I was unable to carry on as a sorcerer should.

He said my disadvantage in the sorcerers' world was my lack of familiarity with it. In that world I had to relate myself to everything in a new way; which was infinitely more difficult, because it had very little to do with my everyday life continuity.

He described the specific problem of sorcerers as twofold.

One is the impossibility of restoring a shattered continuity.

The other is the impossibility of using the continuity dictated by the new position of their assemblage points. That new continuity is always too tenuous, too unstable, and does not offer sorcerers the assuredness they need to function as if they were in the world of everyday life.

"How do sorcerers resolve this problem?" I asked.

"None of us resolves anything," he replied. "The spirit either resolves it for us or it doesn't. If it does, a sorcerer finds himself acting in the sorcerers' world, but without knowing how. This is the reason why I have insisted from the day I found you that impeccability is all that counts. A sorcerer lives an impeccable life, and that seems to beckon the solution. Why? No one knows."

Don Juan remained quiet for a moment. And then, as if I had voiced it, he commented on a thought I was having. I was thinking that impeccability always made me think of religious morality.

"Impeccability, as I have told you so many times, is not morality," he said. "It only resembles morality. Impeccability is simply the best use of our energy level. Naturally, it calls for frugality, thoughtfulness, simplicity, innocence; and above all, it calls for lack of self-reflection. All this makes it sound like a manual for monastic life, but it isn't.

"Sorcerers say that in order to command the spirit, and by that they mean to command the movement of the assemblage point, one needs energy. The only thing that stores energy for us is our impeccability."

Don Juan remarked that we do not have to be students of sorcery to move our assemblage point. Sometimes, due to natural although dramatic circumstances- such as war, deprivation, stress, fatigue, sorrow, or helplessness- men's assemblage points undergo profound movements. If the men who found themselves in such circumstances were able to adopt a sorcerer's ideology, don Juan said, they would be able to maximize that natural movement with no trouble. And they would seek and find extraordinary things instead of doing what men do in such circumstances: craving the return to normalcy.

"When a movement of the assemblage point is maximized," he went on, "both the average man or the apprentice in sorcery becomes a sorcerer, because by maximizing that movement, continuity is shattered beyond repair."

"How do you maximize that movement?" I asked.

"By curtailing self-reflection," he replied. "Moving the assemblage point or breaking one's continuity is not the real difficulty. The real difficulty is having energy. If one has energy, once the assemblage point moves, inconceivable things are there for the asking."

Don Juan explained that man's predicament is that he intuits his hidden resources, but he does not dare use them. This is why sorcerers say that man's plight [* plight- a situation, especially an unpleasant or trying one, from which untangling is difficult ] is the counterpoint between his stupidity and his ignorance.

He said that man needs now, more so than ever, to be taught new ideas that have to do exclusively with his inner world- sorcerers' ideas, not social ideas, ideas pertaining to man facing the unknown, facing his personal death. Now, more than anything else, he needs to be taught the secrets of the assemblage point.

With no preliminaries, and without stopping to think, don Juan then began to tell me a sorcery story.

He said that for an entire year he had been the only young person in the nagual Julian's house. Don Juan was so completely self-centered he had not even noticed when at the beginning of the second year his benefactor brought three young men and four young women to live in the house. As far as don Juan was concerned, those seven persons who arrived one at a time over two or three months were simply servants and of no importance. One of the young men was even made his assistant.

Don Juan was convinced the nagual Julian had lured and cajoled them into coming to work for him without wages. And don Juan would have felt sorry for them had it not been for their blind trust in the nagual Julian and their sickening attachment to everyone and everything in the household.

Don Juan's feeling was that they were born slaves and that he had nothing to say to them. Yet he was obliged to make friends with them and give them advice, not because he wanted to, but because the nagual demanded it as part of his work. As they sought his counseling, he was horrified by the poignancy and drama of their life stories.

He secretly congratulated himself for being better off than they. He sincerely felt he was smarter than all of them put together.

He boasted to them that he could see through the nagual's maneuvers, although don Juan could not claim to understand them. And he laughed at their ridiculous attempts to be helpful.

He considered them servile and told them to their faces that they were being mercilessly exploited by a professional tyrant.

But what enraged don Juan was that the four young women had crushes on the nagual Julian and would do anything to please him. Don Juan sought solace in his work and plunged into it to forget his anger, or for hours on end he would read the books that the nagual Julian had in the house. Reading became his passion.

When he was reading, everyone knew not to bother him, except the nagual Julian, who took pleasure in never leaving him in peace. He was always after don Juan to be friends with the young men and women. He told him repeatedly that all of them, don Juan included, were his sorcery apprentices. Don Juan was convinced the nagual Julian knew nothing about sorcery, but he humored him, listening to him without ever believing.

The nagual Julian was unfazed by don Juan's lack of trust. He simply proceeded as if don Juan believed him, and gathered all the apprentices together to give them instruction. Periodically he took all of them on all-night excursions into the local mountains. On most of these excursions the nagual would leave them by themselves, stranded in those rugged mountains, with don Juan in charge.

The rationale given for the trips was that in solitude, in the wilderness, they would discover the spirit. But they never did. At least, not in any way don Juan could understand. However, the nagual Julian insisted so strongly on the importance of knowing the spirit that don Juan became obsessed with knowing what the spirit was.

During one of those nighttime excursions, the nagual Julian urged don Juan to go after the spirit, even if he didn't understand it.

"Of course, he meant the only thing a nagual could mean: the movement of the assemblage point," don Juan said. "But he worded it in a way he believed would make sense to me: go after the spirit.

"I thought he was talking nonsense. At that time I had already formed my own opinions and beliefs, and was convinced that the spirit was what is known as character, volition, guts, strength. And I believed I didn't have to go after them. I had them all.

"The nagual Julian insisted that the spirit was indefinable, that one could not even feel it, much less talk about it. One could only beckon it, he said, by acknowledging it's existence. My retort was very much the same as yours: one cannot beckon something that does not exist."

Don Juan told me he had argued so much with the nagual that the nagual finally promised him, in front of his entire household, that in one single stroke he was going to show him not only what the spirit was, but how to define it. He also promised to throw an enormous party, even inviting the neighbors, to celebrate don Juan's lesson.

Don Juan remarked that in those days, before the Mexican Revolution, the nagual Julian and the seven women of his group passed themselves off as the wealthy owners of a large hacienda. Nobody ever doubted their image, especially the nagual Julian's, a rich and handsome landholder who had set aside his earnest desire to pursue an ecclesiastical career in order to care for his seven unmarried sisters.

One day, during the rainy season, the nagual Julian announced that as soon as the rains stopped, he would hold the enormous party he had promised don Juan. And one Sunday afternoon he took his entire household to the banks of the river, which was in flood because of the heavy rains. The nagual Julian rode his horse while don Juan trotted respectfully behind, as was their custom in case they met any of their neighbors; as far as the neighbors knew, don Juan was the landlord's personal servant.

The nagual chose for their picnic a site on high ground by the edge of the river. The women had prepared food and drink. The nagual had even brought a group of musicians from the town. It was a big party which included the peons of the hacienda, neighbors, and even passing strangers that had meandered over to join the fun.

Everybody ate and drank to his heart's content. The nagual danced with all the women, sang, and recited poetry. He told jokes and, with the help of some of the women, staged skits to the delight of all.

At a given moment, the nagual Julian asked if any of those present, especially the apprentices, wanted to share don Juan's lesson. They all declined. All of them were keenly aware of the nagual's hard tactics. Then he asked don Juan if he was sure he wanted to find out what the spirit was.

Don Juan could not say no. He simply could not back out. He announced that he was as ready as he could ever be. The nagual guided him to the edge of the raging river and made him kneel. The nagual began a long incantation in which he invoked the power of the wind and the mountains and asked the power of the river to advise don Juan.

His incantation, meaningful as it might have been, was worded so irreverently that everyone had to laugh. When he finished, he asked don Juan to stand up with his eyes closed. Then he took the apprentice in his arms, as he would a child, and threw him into the rushing waters, shouting, "Don't hate the river, for heaven's sake!"

Relating this incident sent don Juan into fits of laughter. Perhaps under other circumstances I, too, might have found it hilarious. This time, however, the story upset me tremendously.

"You should have seen those people's faces," don Juan continued. "I caught a glimpse of their dismay as I flew through the air on my way to the river. No one had anticipated that that devilish nagual would do a thing like that."

Don Juan said he had thought it was the end of his life. He was not a good swimmer, and as he sank to the bottom of the river he cursed himself for allowing this to happen to him. He was so angry he did not have time to panic. All he could think about was his resolve that he was not going to die in that frigging river, at the hands of that frigging man.

His feet touched bottom and he propelled himself up. It was not a deep river, but the flood waters had widened it a great deal. The current was swift, and it pulled him along as he dog-paddled, trying not to let the rushing waters tumble him around.

The current dragged him a long distance. And while he was being dragged and trying his best not to succumb, he entered into a strange frame of mind. He knew his flaw. He was a very angry man and his pent-up anger made him hate and fight with everyone around. But he could not hate or fight the river, or be impatient with it, or fret, which were the ways he normally behaved with everything and everybody in his life. All he could do with the river was follow it's flow.

Don Juan contended that that simple realization and the acquiescence it engendered tipped the scales, so to speak, and he experienced a free movement of his assemblage point. Suddenly, without being in any way aware of what was happening, instead of being pulled by the rushing water, don Juan felt himself running along the riverbank. He was running so fast that he had no time to think. A tremendous force was pulling him, making him race over boulders and fallen trees, as if they were not there.

After he had run in that desperate fashion for quite a while, don Juan braved a quick look at the reddish, rushing water. And he saw himself being roughly tumbled by the current. Nothing in his experience had prepared him for such a moment. He knew then, without involving his thought processes, that he was in two places at once. And in one of them, in the rushing river, he was helpless.

All his energy went into trying to save himself.

Without thinking about it, he began angling away from the riverbank. It took all his strength and determination to edge an inch at a time. He felt as if he were dragging a tree. He moved so slowly that it took him an eternity to gain a few yards.

The strain was too much for him. Suddenly he was no longer running; he was falling down a deep well. When he hit the water, the coldness of it made him scream. And then he was back in the river, being dragged by the current. His fright upon finding himself back in the rushing water was so intense that all he could do was to wish with all his might to be safe and sound on the riverbank. And immediately he was there again, running at breakneck speed parallel to, but a distance from, the river.

As he ran, he looked at the rushing water and saw himself struggling to stay afloat. He wanted to yell a command; he wanted to order himself to swim at an angle, but he had no voice. His anguish for the part of him that was in the water was overwhelming. It served as a bridge between the two Juan Matuses. He was instantly back in the water, swimming at an angle toward the bank.

The incredible sensation of alternating between two places was enough to eradicate his fear. He no longer cared about his fate. He alternated freely between swimming in the river and racing on the bank. But whichever he was doing, he consistently moved toward his left, racing away from the river or paddling to the left shore.

He came out on the left side of the river about five miles downstream. He had to wait there, sheltering in the shrubs, for over a week. He was waiting for the waters to subside so he could wade across, but he was also waiting until his fright wore off and he was whole again.

Don Juan said that what had happened was that the strong, sustained emotion of fighting for his life had caused his assemblage point to move squarely to the place of silent knowledge. Because he had never paid any attention to what the nagual Julian told him about the assemblage point, he had no idea what was happening to him. He was frightened at the thought that he might never be normal again.

But as he explored his split perception, he discovered it's practical side and found he liked it. He was double for days. He could be thoroughly one or the other. Or he could be both at the same time. When he was both, things became fuzzy and neither being was effective, so he abandoned that alternative. But being one or the other opened up inconceivable possibilities for him.

While he recuperated in the bushes, he established that one of his beings was more flexible than the other and could cover distances in the blink of an eye and find food or the best place to hide. It was this being that once went to the nagual's house to see if they were worrying about him.

He heard the young people crying for him, and that was certainly a surprise. He would have gone on watching them indefinitely, since he adored the idea of finding out what they thought of him, but the nagual Julian caught him and put an end to it.

That was the only time he had been truly afraid of the nagual. Don Juan heard the nagual telling him to stop his nonsense. He appeared suddenly, a jet black, bell-shaped object of immense weight and strength. He grabbed don Juan. Don Juan did not know how the nagual was grabbing him, but it hurt in a most unsettling way. It was a sharp nervous pain he felt in his stomach and groin.

"I was instantly back on the riverbank," don Juan said, laughing. "I got up, waded the recently subsided river, and started to walk home."

Don Juan paused, then asked me what I thought of his story. And I told him that it had appalled me.

"You could have drowned in that river," I said, almost shouting. "What a brutal thing to do to you. The nagual Julian must have been crazy!"

"Wait a minute," don Juan protested. "The nagual Julian was devilish, but not crazy. He did what he had to do in his role as nagual and teacher. It's true that I could have died. But that's a risk we all have to take. You yourself could have been easily eaten by the jaguar, or could have died from any of the things I have made you do. The nagual Julian was bold and commanding and tackled everything directly. No beating around the bush with him, no mincing words."

I insisted that valuable as the lesson might have been, it still appeared to me that the nagual Julian's methods were bizarre and excessive. I admitted to don Juan that everything I had heard about the nagual Julian had bothered me I so much I had formed a most negative picture of him.

"I think you're afraid that one of these days I'm going to throw you into the river or make you wear women's clothes," he said and began to laugh. "That's why you don't approve of the nagual Julian."

I admitted that he was right, and he assured me that he had no intentions of imitating his benefactor's methods, because they did not work for him. He was, he said, as ruthless but not as practical as the nagual Julian.

"At that time," don Juan continued, "I didn't appreciate his art, and I certainly didn't like what he did to me, but now, whenever I think about it, I admire him all the more for his superb and direct way of placing me in the position of silent knowledge."

Don Juan said that because of the enormity of his experience, he had totally forgotten the monstrous man. He walked unescorted almost to the door of the nagual Julian's house, then changed his mind and went instead to the nagual Elias's place, seeking solace. And the nagual Elias explained to him the deep consistency of the nagual Julian's actions.

The nagual Elias could hardly contain his excitement when he heard don Juan's story. In a fervent tone he explained to don Juan that his benefactor the nagual Julian was a supreme stalker; always after practicalities. His endless quest was for pragmatic views and solutions. His behavior that day at the river had been a masterpiece of stalking. He had manipulated and affected everyone. Even the river seemed to be at his command.

The nagual Elias maintained that while don Juan was being carried by the current, fighting for his life, the river helped him understand what the spirit was. And thanks to that understanding, don Juan had the opportunity to enter directly into silent knowledge.

Don Juan said that because he was a callow [* callow- young and inexperienced] youth he listened to the nagual Elias without understanding a word, but was moved with sincere admiration for the nagual's intensity.

First, the nagual Elias explained to don Juan that sound and the meaning of words were of supreme importance to stalkers. Words were used by them as keys to open anything that was closed. Stalkers, therefore, had to state their aim before attempting to achieve it. But they could not reveal their true aim at the outset, so they had to word things carefully to conceal the main thrust.

The nagual Elias called this act waking up intent. He explained to don Juan that the nagual Julian woke up intent by affirming emphatically in front of his entire household that he was going to show don Juan, in one stroke, what the spirit was and how to define it. This was completely nonsensical because the nagual Julian knew there was no way to define the spirit.

What he was really trying to do was, of course, to place don Juan in the position of silent knowledge.

After making the statement which concealed his true aim, the nagual Julian gathered as many people as he could, thus making them both his witting and unwitting accomplices. All of them knew about his stated goal, but not a single one knew what he really had in mind.

The old nagual Elias's belief that his explanation would shake don Juan out of his impossible stand of total rebelliousness and indifference was completely wrong. Yet the nagual patiently continued to explain to him that while he had been fighting the current in the river he had reached the third point.

The old nagual explained that the position of silent knowledge was called the third point because in order to get to it one had to pass the second point; the place of no pity.

He said that don Juan's assemblage point had acquired sufficient fluidity for him to be double, which had allowed him to be in both the place of reason and in the place of silent knowledge, either alternately or at the same time.

The nagual Elias told don Juan that his accomplishment was magnificent. He even hugged don Juan as if he were a child. And he could not stop talking about how don Juan, in spite of not knowing anything- or maybe because of not knowing anything- had transferred his total energy from one place to the other. Which meant to the nagual that don Juan's assemblage point had a most propitious, natural fluidity.

He said to don Juan that every human being had a capacity for that fluidity. For most of us, however, it was stored away and we never used it; except on rare occasions which were brought about by sorcerers, such as the experience he had just had; or by dramatic natural circumstances, such as a life-or-death struggle.

Don Juan listened, mesmerized by the sound of the old nagual's voice. When he paid attention, he could follow anything the man said, which was something he had never been able to do with the nagual Julian.

The old nagual went on to explain that humanity was on the first point, reason, but that not every human being's assemblage point was squarely on the position of reason. Those who were on the spot itself were the true leaders of mankind. Most of the time they were unknown people whose genius was the exercising of their reason.

The nagual said there had been another time, when mankind had been on the 'third point', which, of course, had been the first point then. But after that, mankind moved to the place of reason.

When silent knowledge was the first point the same condition prevailed. Not every human being's assemblage point was squarely on that position either. This meant that the true leaders of mankind had always been the few human beings whose assemblage points happened to be either on the exact point of reason or of silent knowledge.

The rest of humanity, the old nagual told don Juan, was merely the audience. In our day, they were the lovers of reason. In the past, they had been the lovers of silent knowledge. They were the ones who had admired and sung odes to the heroes of either position.

The nagual stated that mankind had spent the longer part of it's history in the position of silent knowledge, and that this explained our great longing for it.

Don Juan asked the old nagual what exactly the nagual Julian was doing to him. His question sounded more mature and intelligent than what he really meant. The nagual Elias answered it in terms totally unintelligible to don Juan at that time.

He said that the nagual Julian was coaching don Juan; enticing his assemblage point to the position of reason so he could be a thinker rather than merely part of an unsophisticated but emotionally charged audience that loved the orderly works of reason.

At the same time, the nagual was coaching don Juan to be a true abstract sorcerer instead of merely part of a morbid and ignorant audience of lovers of the unknown.

The nagual Elias assured don Juan that only a human being who was a paragon of reason could move his assemblage point easily and be a paragon of silent knowledge.

He said that only those who were squarely in either position could see the other position clearly, and that that had been the way the age of reason came to being. The position of reason was clearly seen from the position of silent knowledge.

The old nagual told don Juan that the one-way bridge from silent knowledge to reason was called 'concern'. That is, the concern that true men of silent knowledge had about the source of what they knew.

And the other one-way bridge, from reason to silent knowledge, was called 'pure understanding'. That is, the recognition that told the man of reason that reason was only one island in an endless sea of islands.

The nagual added that a human being who had both oneway bridges working was a sorcerer in direct contact with the spirit- the vital force that made both positions possible. He pointed out to don Juan that everything the nagual Julian had done that day at the river had been a show, not for a human audience, but for the spirit- the force that was watching him. He pranced and frolicked with abandon and entertained everybody, especially the power he was addressing.

Don Juan said that the nagual Elias assured him that the spirit only listened when the speaker speaks in gestures. And gestures do not mean signs or body movements, but acts of true abandon, acts of largesse, or of humor. As a gesture for the spirit, sorcerers bring out the best of themselves and silently offer it to the abstract.

## *Intending* Appearances

Don Juan wanted us to make one more trip to the mountains before I went home, but we never made it. Instead, he asked me to drive him to the city. He needed to see some people there.

On the way he talked about every subject but intent. It was a welcome respite.

In the afternoon, after he had taken care of his business, we sat on his favorite bench in the plaza. The place was deserted. I was very tired and sleepy. But then, quite unexpectedly, I perked up. My mind became crystal clear.

Don Juan immediately noticed the change and laughed at my gesture of surprise. He picked a thought right out of my mind; or perhaps it was I who picked that thought out of his.

"If you think about life in terms of hours instead of years, our lives are immensely long," he said. "Even if you think in terms of days, life is still interminable."

That was exactly what I had been thinking.

He told me that sorcerers counted their lives in hours, and that in one hour it was possible for a sorcerer to live the equivalent in intensity of a normal life. This intensity is an advantage when it comes to storing information in the movement of the assemblage point.

I demanded that he explain this to me in more detail. A long time before, because it was so cumbersome to take notes on conversations, he had recommended that I keep all the information I obtained about the sorcerers' world neatly arranged, not on paper nor in my mind, but in the movement of my assemblage point.

"The assemblage point," don Juan said, "with even the most minute shifting, creates totally isolated islands of perception. Information in the form of experiences in the complexity of awareness can be stored there."

I asked, "But how can information be stored in something so vague?"

"The mind is equally vague, and still you trust it because you are familiar with it," he retorted. "You don't yet have the same familiarity with the movement of the assemblage point, but it is just about the same."

"What I mean is, how is information stored?" I insisted.

"The information is stored in the experience itself," he explained. "Later, when a sorcerer moves his assemblage point to the exact spot where it had been, he relives the total experience. This sorcerers' recollection is the way to get back all the information stored in the movement of die assemblage point.

"Intensity is an automatic result of the movement of the assemblage point," he continued. "For instance, you are living these moments more intensely than you ordinarily would, so, properly speaking, you are storing intensity. Some day you'll relive this moment by making your assemblage point return to the precise spot where it is now. That is the way sorcerers store information."

I told don Juan that the intense recollections I had had in the past few days had just happened to me without any special mental process I was aware of.

"How can one deliberately manage to recollect?" I asked.

"Intensity, being an aspect of intent, is connected naturally to the shine of the sorcerers' eyes," he explained. "In order to recall those isolated islands of perception, sorcerers need only intend the particular shine of their eyes associated with whichever spot they want to return to. But I have already explained that."

I must have looked perplexed. Don Juan regarded me with a serious expression. I opened my mouth two or three times to ask him questions, but I could not formulate my thoughts.

"Because his intensity rate is greater than normal," don Juan said, "in a few hours a sorcerer can live the equivalent of a normal lifetime. His assemblage point, by shifting to an unfamiliar position, takes in more energy than usual. That extra flow of energy is called intensity."

I understood what he was saying with perfect clarity, and my rationality staggered under the impact of the tremendous implication.

Don Juan fixed me with his stare and then warned me to beware of a reaction which typically afflicted sorcerers- a frustrating desire to explain the sorcery experience in cogent, well reasoned terms.

"The sorcerers' experience is so outlandish," don Juan went on, "that sorcerers consider it an intellectual exercise, and use it to stalk themselves with. Their trump card as stalkers, though, is that they remain keenly aware that we are perceivers and that perception has more possibilities than the mind can conceive."

As my only comment, I voiced my apprehension about the outlandish possibilities of human awareness.

"In order to protect themselves from that immensity," don Juan said, "sorcerers learn to maintain a perfect blend of ruthlessness, cunning, patience, and sweetness. These four bases are inextricably [* inextricably- in a manner not capable of being untangled] bound together. Sorcerers cultivate these bases by intending them. They are, naturally, positions of the assemblage point."

He went on to say that every act performed by any sorcerer was by definition governed by these four principles. So, properly speaking, every sorcerer's every action is deliberate in thought and realization, and has the specific blend of the four foundations of stalking.

"Sorcerers use the four moods of stalking as guides," he continued. "These are four different frames of mind; four different brands of intensity that sorcerers can use to induce their assemblage points to move to specific positions."

He seemed suddenly annoyed. I asked if it was my insistence on speculating that was bothering him.

"I am just considering how our rationality puts us between a rock and a hard place," he said. "Our tendency is to ponder, to question, to find out. And there is no way to do that from within the discipline of sorcery. Sorcery is the act of reaching the place of silent knowledge, and silent knowledge can't be reasoned out. It can only be experienced."

He smiled, his eyes shining like two spots of light. He said that sorcerers, in an effort to protect themselves from the overwhelming effect of silent knowledge, developed the art of stalking. Stalking moves the assemblage point minutely but steadily, thus giving sorcerers time and therefore the possibility of buttressing themselves.

"Within the art of stalking," don Juan continued, "there is a technique which sorcerers use a great deal: controlled folly. Sorcerers claim that controlled folly is the only way they have of dealing with themselves- in their state of expanded awareness and perception- and with everybody and everything in the world of daily affairs."

Don Juan had explained controlled folly as the art of controlled deception or the art of pretending to be thoroughly immersed in the action at hand- pretending so well no one could tell it from the real thing. Controlled folly is not an outright deception, he had told me, but a sophisticated, artistic way of being separated from everything while remaining an integral part of everything.

"Controlled folly is an art," don Juan continued. "A very bothersome art, and a difficult one to learn. Many sorcerers don't have the stomach for it, not because there is anything inherently wrong with the art, but because it takes a lot of energy to exercise it."

Don Juan admitted that he practiced it conscientiously, although he was not particularly fond of doing so; perhaps because his benefactor had been so adept at it. Or, perhaps it was because his personality- which he said was basically devious and petty- simply did not have the agility needed to practice controlled folly.

I looked at him with surprise. He stopped talking and fixed me with his mischievous eyes.

"By the time we come to sorcery, our personality is already formed," he said, and shrugged his shoulders to signify resignation, "and all we can do is practice controlled folly and laugh at ourselves."

I had a surge of empathy and assured him that to me he was not in any way petty or devious.

"But that's my basic personality," he insisted.

And I insisted that it was not.

"Stalkers who practice controlled folly believe that, in matters of personality, the entire human race falls into three categories," he said, and smiled the way he always did when he was setting me up.

"That's absurd," I protested. "Human behavior is too complex to be categorized so simply."

"Stalkers say that we are not so complex as we think we are," he said, "and that we all belong to one of three categories."

I laughed out of nervousness. Ordinarily I would have taken such a statement as a joke, but this time, because my mind was extremely clear and my thoughts were poignant, I felt he was indeed serious.

"Are you serious?" I asked, as politely as I could.

"Completely serious," he replied, and began to laugh.

His laughter relaxed me a little. And he continued explaining the stalkers' system of classification.

He said that people in the first class are the perfect secretaries, assistants, companions. They have a very fluid personality, but their fluidity is not nourishing. They are, however, serviceable, concerned, totally domestic, resourceful within limits, humorous, well-mannered, sweet, delicate. In other words, they are the nicest people one could find, but they have one huge flaw: they can't function alone. They are always in need of someone to direct them. With direction, no matter how strained or antagonistic that direction might be, they are stupendous. By themselves, they perish.

People in the second class are not nice at all. They are petty, vindictive, envious, jealous, self-centered. They talk exclusively about themselves and usually demand that people conform to their standards. They always take the initiative even though they are not comfortable with it. They are thoroughly ill at ease in every situation and never relax. They are insecure and are never pleased. The more insecure they become, the nastier they are. Their fatal flaw is that they would kill to be leaders.

In the third category are people who are neither nice nor nasty. They serve no one, nor do they impose themselves on anyone. Rather they are indifferent. They have an exalted idea about themselves derived solely from daydreams and wishful thinking. If they are extraordinary at anything, it is at waiting for things to happen. They are waiting to be discovered and conquered and have a marvelous facility for creating the illusion that they have great things in abeyance, which they always promise to deliver but never do because, in fact, they do not have such resources.

Don Juan said that he himself definitely belonged to the second class. He then asked me to classify myself and I became rattled. Don Juan was practically on the ground, bent over with laughter.

He urged me again to classify myself, and reluctantly I suggested I might be a combination of the three.

"Don't give me that combination nonsense," he said, still laughing. "We are simple beings, each of us is one of the three types. And as far as I am concerned, you belong to the second class. Stalkers call them farts."

I began to protest that his scheme of classification was demeaning. But I stopped myself just as I was about to go into a long tirade. [* tirade- a speech of violent accusation or condemnation] Instead I commented that if it were true that there are only three types of personalities, all of us are trapped in one of those three categories for life with no hope of change or redemption.

He agreed that that was exactly the case. Except that one avenue for redemption remained. Sorcerers had long ago learned that only our personal self-reflection fell into one of the categories.

"The trouble with us is that we take ourselves seriously," he said. "Whichever category our self-image falls into only matters because of our self-importance. If we weren't self-important, it wouldn't matter at all which category we fell into.

"I'll always be a fart," he continued, his body shaking with laughter. "And so will you. But now I am a fart who doesn't take himself seriously, while you still do."

I was indignant. I wanted to argue with him, but could not muster the energy for it.

In the empty plaza, the reverberation of his laughter was eerie.

He changed the subject then, and reeled off the basic cores he had discussed with me: the manifestations of the spirit, the knock of the spirit, the trickery of the spirit, the descent of the spirit, the requirement of intent, and handling intent. He repeated them as if he were giving my memory a chance to retain them fully. And then, he succinctly highlighted everything he had told me about them. It was as if he were deliberately making me store all that information in the intensity of that moment.

I remarked that the basic cores were still a mystery to me. I felt very apprehensive about my ability to understand them. He was giving me the impression that he was about to dismiss the topic, and I had not grasped it's meaning at all.

I insisted that I had to ask him more questions about the abstract cores.

He seemed to assess what I was saying, then he quietly nodded his head.

"This topic was also very difficult for me," he said. "And I, too, asked many questions. I was perhaps a tinge more self-centered than you. And very nasty. Nagging was the only way I knew of asking questions. You yourself are rather a belligerent inquisitor. At the end, of course, you and I are equally annoying, but for different reasons."

There was only one more thing don Juan added to our discussion of the basic cores before he changed the subject; that they revealed themselves extremely slowly, erratically advancing and retreating.

"I can't repeat often enough that every man whose assemblage point moves can move it further," he began. "And the only reason we need a teacher is to spur us on mercilessly. Otherwise our natural reaction is to stop to congratulate ourselves for having covered so much ground."

He said that we were both good examples of our odious [* odious- singularly offensive] tendency to go easy on ourselves. His benefactor, fortunately, being the stupendous stalker he was, had not spared him.

Don Juan said that in the course of their nighttime journeys in the wilderness, the nagual Julian had lectured him extensively on the nature of self-importance and the movement of the assemblage point.

For the nagual Julian, self-importance was a monster that had three thousand heads. And one could face up to it and destroy it in any of three ways. The first way was to sever each head one at a time; the second was to reach that mysterious state of being called the place of no pity, which destroyed self-importance by slowly starving it; and the third was to pay for the instantaneous annihilation of the three-thousand headed monster with one's symbolic death.

The nagual Julian recommended the third alternative. But he told don Juan that he could consider himself fortunate if he got the chance to choose; because it was the spirit that usually determined which way the sorcerer was to go, and it was the duty of the sorcerer to follow.

Don Juan said that he had guided me as his benefactor had guided him; to cut off the three thousand heads of self-importance, one by one, but that the results had been quite different. While I had responded very well, he had not responded at all.

"Mine was a peculiar condition," he went on. "From the moment my benefactor saw me lying on the road with a bullet hole in my chest, he knew I was the new nagual. He acted accordingly and moved my assemblage point as soon as my health permitted it. And I saw with great ease a field of energy in the form of that monstrous man. But this accomplishment, instead of helping as it was supposed to, hindered any further movement of my assemblage point. And while the assemblage points of the other apprentices moved steadily, mine remained fixed at the level of being able to see the monster."

"But didn't your benefactor tell you what was going on?" I asked, truly baffled by the unnecessary complication.

"My benefactor didn't believe in handing down knowledge," don Juan said. "He thought that knowledge imparted that way lacked effectiveness. It was never there when one needed it. On the other hand, if knowledge was only insinuated, the person who was interested would devise ways to claim that knowledge."

Don Juan said that the difference between his method of teaching and his benefactor's was that he himself believed one should have the freedom to choose. His benefactor did not.

"Didn't your benefactor's teacher, the nagual Elias, tell you what was happening?" I insisted.

"He tried," don Juan said, and sighed, "but I was truly impossible. I knew everything. I just let the two men talk my ear off and never listened to a thing they were saying."

In order to deal with that impasse, the nagual Julian decided to force don Juan to accomplish once again, but in a different way, a free movement of his assemblage point.

I interrupted him to ask whether this had happened before or after his experience at the river.

Don Juan's stories did not have the chronological order I would have liked.

"This happened several months afterward," he replied. "And don't you think for an instant that because I experienced that split perception I was really changed; or that I was wiser or more sober. Nothing of the sort.

"Consider what happens to you," he went on. "I have not only broken your continuity time and time again, I have ripped it to shreds; and look at you. You still act as if you were intact. That is a supreme accomplishment of magic; of intending.

"I was the same. For a while, I would reel under the impact of what I was experiencing and then I would forget and tie up the severed ends as if nothing had happened. That was why my benefactor believed that we can only really change if we die."

Returning to his story, don Juan said that the nagual used Tulio, the unsociable member of his household, to deliver a new shattering blow to his psychological continuity.

Don Juan said that all the apprentices, including himself, had never been in total agreement about anything except that Tulio was a contemptibly arrogant little man. They hated Tulio because he either avoided them or snubbed them. He treated them all with such disdain that they felt like dirt. They were all convinced that Tulio never spoke to them because he had nothing to say; and that his most salient [* salient- having a quality that thrusts itself into attention] feature, his arrogant aloofness, was a cover for his timidity.

Yet in spite of his unpleasant personality, to the chagrin of all the apprentices, Tulio had undue influence on the household- especially on the nagual Julian, who seemed to dote [* dote- shower with love; show excessive affection for] on him.

One morning the nagual Julian sent all the apprentices on a day long errand to the city. The only person left in the house, besides the older members of the household, was don Juan.

Around midday the nagual Julian headed for his study to do his daily bookkeeping. As he was going in, he casually asked don Juan to help him with the accounts.

Don Juan began to look through the receipts and soon realized that to continue he needed some information that Tulio, the overseer of the property, had; and had forgotten to note down.

The nagual Julian was definitely angry at Tulio's oversight, which pleased don Juan. The nagual impatiently ordered don Juan to find Tulio, who was out in the fields supervising the workers, and ask him to come to the study.

Don Juan, gloating at the idea of annoying Tulio, ran half a mile to the fields, accompanied, of course, by a field hand to protect him from the monstrous man. He found Tulio supervising the workers from a distance, as always. Don Juan had noticed that Tulio hated to come into direct contact with people and always watched them from afar.

In a harsh voice and with an exaggeratedly imperious [* imperious- able to deal authoritatively with affairs] manner, don Juan demanded that Tulio accompany him to the house because the nagual required his services. Tulio, his voice barely audible, replied that he was too busy at the moment, but that in about an hour he would be free to come.

Don Juan insisted, knowing that Tulio would not bother to argue with him and would simply dismiss him with a turn of his head. He was shocked when Tulio began to yell obscenities at him. The scene was so out of character for Tulio that even the farm workers stopped their labor, and looked at one another questioningly. Don Juan was sure they had never heard Tulio raise his voice, much less yell improprieties.

Don juan's own surprise was so great that he laughed nervously, which made Tulio extremely angry. He even hurled a rock at the frightened don Juan, who fled.

Don Juan and his bodyguard immediately ran back to the house. At the front door they found Tulio. He was quietly talking and laughing with some of the women. As was his custom, he turned his head away, ignoring don Juan. Don Juan began angrily to chastise him for socializing there when the nagual wanted him in his study. Tulio and the women looked at don Juan as if he had gone mad.

But Tulio was not his usual self that day. Instantly he yelled at don Juan to shut his damned mouth and mind his own damned business. He blatantly accused don Juan of trying to put him in a bad light with the nagual Julian.

The women showed their dismay by gasping loudly and looking disapprovingly at don Juan. They tried to calm Tulio. Don Juan ordered Tulio to go to the nagual's study and explain the accounts. Tulio told him to go to hell.

Don Juan was shaking with anger. The simple task of asking for the accounts had turned into a nightmare. He controlled his temper. The women were watching him intently, which angered him all over again. In a silent rage he ran to the nagual's study. Tulio and the women went back to talking and laughing quietly as though they were celebrating a private joke.

Don Juan's surprise was total when he entered the study and found Tulio sitting at the nagual's desk absorbed in his bookkeeping. Don Juan made a supreme effort and controlled his anger. He smiled at Tulio. He no longer had the need to confront Tulio. He had suddenly understood that the nagual Julian was using Tulio to test him, to see if he would lose his temper. He would not give him that satisfaction.

Without looking up from his accounts, Tulio said that if don Juan was looking for the nagual, he would probably find him at the other end of the house.

Don Juan raced to the other end of the house to find the nagual Julian walking slowly around the patio with Tulio at his side. The nagual appeared to be engrossed in his conversation with Tulio. Tulio gently nudged the nagual's sleeve and said in a low voice that his assistant was there.

The nagual matter-of-factly explained to don Juan everything about the account they had been working on. It was a long, detailed, and thorough explanation. He said then that all don Juan had to do was to bring the account book from the study so that they could make the entry and have Tulio sign it.

Don Juan could not understand what was happening. The detailed explanation and the nagual's matter-of-fact tone had brought everything into the realm of mundane affairs. Tulio impatiently ordered don Juan to hurry up and fetch the book, because he was busy. He was needed somewhere else.

By now don Juan had resigned himself to being a clown. He knew that the nagual was up to something. The nagual Julian had that strange look in his eyes which don Juan always associated with his beastly jokes. Besides, Tulio had talked more that day than he had in the entire two years don Juan had been in the house.

Without uttering a word, don Juan went back to the study. And as he had expected, Tulio had gotten there first. He was sitting on the corner of the desk, waiting for don Juan, impatiently tapping the floor with the hard heel of his boot. He held out the ledger don Juan was after, gave it to him, and told him to be on his way.

Despite being prepared, don Juan was astonished. He stared at the man, who became angry and abusive. Don Juan had to struggle not to explode. He kept saying to himself that all this was merely a test of his attitude. He had visions of being thrown out of the house if he failed the test.

In the midst of his turmoil, he was still able to wonder about the speed with which Tulio managed always to be one jump ahead of him.

Don Juan certainly anticipated that Tulio would be waiting with the nagual. Still, when he saw him there, although he was not surprised, he was incredulous. He had raced through the house, following the shortest route. There was no way that Tulio could run faster than he. Furthermore, if Tulio had run, he would have had to run right alongside don Juan.

The nagual Julian took the account book from don Juan with an air of indifference. He made the entry and Tulio signed it. Then they continued talking about the account, disregarding don Juan, whose eyes were fixed on Tulio. Don Juan wanted to figure out what kind of test they were putting him through. It had to be a test of his attitude, he thought. After all, in that house, his attitude had always been the issue.

The nagual dismissed don Juan, saying he wanted to be alone with Tulio to discuss business. Don Juan immediately went looking for the women to find out what they would say about this strange situation. He had only gone ten feet when he encountered two of the women and Tulio. The three of them were caught up in a most animated conversation. He saw them before they had seen him, so he ran back to the nagual. Tulio was there, talking with the nagual.

An incredible suspicion entered don Juan's mind. He ran to the study. Tulio was immersed in his bookkeeping and did not even acknowledge don Juan. Don Juan asked him what was going on. Tulio was his usual self this time: He did not answer or look at don Juan.

Don Juan had at that moment another inconceivable thought. He ran to the stable, saddled two horses and asked his morning bodyguard to accompany him again. They galloped to the place where they had seen Tulio earlier. He was exactly where they had left him. He did not speak to don Juan. He shrugged his shoulders and turned his head when don Juan questioned him.

Don Juan and his companion galloped back to the house. He left the man to care for the horses and rushed into the house. Tulio was lunching with the women. And Tulio was also talking to the nagual. And Tulio was also working on the books.

Don Juan sat down and felt the cold sweat of fear. He knew that the nagual Julian was testing him with one of his horrible jokes. He reasoned that he had three courses of action. He could behave as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening, he could figure out the test himself, or, since the nagual had engraved in his mind that he was there to explain anything don Juan wanted, he could confront the nagual and ask for clarification.

He decided to ask. He went to the nagual and asked him to explain what was being done to him. The nagual was alone then, still working on his accounts. He put the ledger aside and smiled at don Juan. He said that the twenty-one not-doings he had taught don Juan to perform were the tools that could sever the three thousand heads of self-importance, but that those tools had not been effective with don Juan at all. Thus, he was trying the second method for destroying self-importance which meant putting don Juan into the state of being called the place of no pity.

Don Juan was convinced then that the nagual Julian was utterly mad. Hearing him talk about not-doings or about monsters with three thousand heads or about places of no pity, don Juan felt almost sorry for him.

The nagual Julian very calmly asked don Juan to go to the storage shed in the back of the house and ask Tulio to come out.

Don Juan sighed and did his best not to burst out laughing. The nagual's methods were too obvious. Don Juan knew that the nagual wanted to continue the test using Tulio.

Don Juan stopped his narration and asked me what I thought about Tulio's behavior. I said that, guided by what I knew about the sorcerers' world, I would say that Tulio was a sorcerer and somehow he was moving his own assemblage point in a very sophisticated manner to give don Juan the impression that he was in four places at the same time.

"So what do you think I found in the shed?" don Juan asked with a big grin.

"I would say either you found Tulio or you didn't find anybody," I replied.

"But if either of these had happened, there would have been no shock to my continuity," don Juan said.

I tried to imagine bizarre things and I proposed that perhaps he found Tulio's dreaming body. I reminded don Juan that he himself had done something similar to me with one of the members of his party of sorcerers.

"No," don Juan retorted. "What I found was a joke that has no equivalent in reality. And yet it was not bizarre: It was not out of this world. What do you think it was?"

I told don Juan I hated riddles. I said that with all the bizarre things he had made me experience, the only things I could conceive would be more bizarreness, and since that was ruled out, I gave up guessing.

"When I went into that shed I was prepared to find that Tulio was hiding," don Juan said. "I was sure that the next part of the test was going to be an infuriating game of hide-and-seek. Tulio was going to drive me crazy hiding inside that shed.

"But nothing I had prepared myself for happened. I walked into that shed and found four Tulios."

"What do you mean, four Tulios?" I asked.

"There were four men in that shed," don Juan replied. "And all of them were Tulio. Can you imagine my surprise? All of them were sitting in the same position with their legs crossed, and pressed tightly together. They were waiting for me. I looked at them and ran away screaming.

"My benefactor held me down on the ground outside the door. And then, truly horrified, I saw how the four Tulios came out of the shed and advanced toward me. I screamed and screamed while the Tulios pecked me with their hard fingers, like huge birds attacking.

I screamed until I felt something give in me and I entered a state of superb indifference. Never in all my life had I felt something so extraordinary. I brushed off the Tulios and got up. They had just been tickling me. I went directly to the nagual and asked him to explain the four men to me."

What the nagual Julian explained to don Juan was that those four men were the paragons of stalking. Their names had been invented by their teacher, the nagual Elias, who, as an exercise in controlled folly, had taken the Spanish numerals uno, dos, tres, cuatro, and added them to the name of Tulio. He obtained in that manner the names Tuliuno, Tuliodo, Tulitre, and Tulicuatro.

The nagual Julian introduced each in turn to don Juan. The four men were standing in a row. Don Juan faced each of them and nodded, and each nodded to him. The nagual said the four men were stalkers of such extraordinary talent, as don Juan had just corroborated, that praise was meaningless.

The Tulios were the nagual Elias's triumph. They were the essence of unobtrusiveness. They were such magnificent stalkers that, for all practical purposes, only one of them existed. Although people saw and dealt with them daily, nobody outside the members of the household knew that there were four Tulios.

Don Juan understood with perfect clarity everything the nagual Julian was saying about the men. Because of his unusual clarity, he knew he had reached the place of no pity. And he understood, all by himself, that the place of no pity was a position of the assemblage point; a position which rendered self-pity inoperative. But don Juan also knew that his insight and wisdom were extremely transitory. Unavoidably, his assemblage point would return to it's point of departure.

When the nagual asked don Juan if he had any questions, he realized that he would be better off paying close attention to the nagual's explanation than speculating about his own foresightedness.

Don Juan wanted to know how the Tulios created the impression that there was only one person. He was extremely curious because observing them together he realized they were not really that alike. They wore the same clothes. They were about the same size, age, and configuration. But that was the extent of their similarity. And yet, even as he watched them he could have sworn that there was only one Tulio.

The nagual Julian explained that the human eye was trained to focus only on the most salient features of anything, and that those salient features were known beforehand. Thus, the stalkers' art was to create an impression by presenting the features they chose, features they knew the eyes of the onlooker were bound to notice. By artfully reinforcing certain impressions, stalkers were able to create on the part of the onlooker an unchallengeable conviction as to what their eyes had perceived.

The nagual Julian said that when don Juan first arrived dressed in his woman's clothes, the women of his party were delighted and laughed openly. But the man with them, who happened to be Tulitre, immediately provided don Juan with the first Tulio impression. He half turned away to hide his face, shrugged his shoulders disdainfully, as if all of it was boring to him, and walked away- to laugh his head off in private- while the women helped to consolidate that first impression by acting apprehensive, almost annoyed, at the unsociability of the man.

From that moment on, any Tulio who was around don Juan reinforced that impression and further perfected it until don Juan's eye could not catch anything except what was being fed to him.

Tuliuno spoke then and said that it had taken them about three months of very careful and consistent actions to have don Juan blind to anything except what he was guided to expect. After three months, his blindness was so pronounced that the Tulios were no longer even careful. They acted normal in the house. They even ceased wearing identical clothes, and don Juan did not notice the difference.

When other apprentices were brought into the house, however, the Tulios had to start all over again. This time the challenge was hard, because there were many apprentices and they were sharp.

Don Juan asked Tuliuno about Tulio's appearance. Tuliuno answered that the nagual Elfas maintained appearance was the essence of controlled folly, and stalkers created appearance by intending them rather than by producing them with the aid of props. Props created artificial appearances that looked false to the eye. In this respect, intending appearances was exclusively an exercise for stalkers.

Tulitre spoke next. He said appearances were solicited from the spirit. Appearances were asked; were forcefully called on. They were never invented rationally. Tulio's appearance had to be called from the spirit. And to facilitate that, the nagual Elias put all four of them together into a very small, out-of-the-way storage room, and there the spirit spoke to them. The spirit told them that first they had to intend their homogeneity. [* homogeneity- the quality of being similar or comparable in kind or nature]After four weeks of total isolation, homogeneity came to them.

The nagual Elias said that intent had fused them together, and that they had acquired the certainty that their individuality would go undetected. Now they had to call up the appearance that would be perceived by the onlooker. And they got busy, calling intent for the Tulios' appearance don Juan had seen. They had to work very hard to perfect it. They focused, under the direction of their teacher, on all the details that would make it perfect.

The four Tulios gave don Juan a demonstration of Tulio's most salient features. These were: very forceful gestures of disdain and arrogance; abrupt turns of the face to the right as if in anger; twists of their upper bodies as if to hide part of the face with the left shoulder; angry sweeps of a hand over the eyes as if to brush hair off the forehead; and the gait of an agile but impatient person who is too nervous to decide which way to go.

Don Juan said that those details of behavior and dozens of others had made Tulio an unforgettable character. In fact, he was so unforgettable that in order to project Tulio on don Juan and the other apprentices as if on a screen, any of the four men needed only to insinuate a feature, and don Juan and the apprentices would automatically supply the rest.

Don Juan said that because of the tremendous consistency of the input, Tulio was for him and the others the essence of a disgusting man. But at the same time, if they searched deep inside themselves, they would have acknowledged that Tulio was haunting. He was nimble, mysterious, and gave, wittingly or unwittingly, the impression of being a shadow.

Don Juan asked Tuliuno how they had called intent. Tuliuno explained that stalkers called intent loudly. Usually intent was called from within a small, dark, isolated room. A candle was placed on a black table with the flame just a few inches before the eyes; then the word intent was voiced slowly, enunciated clearly and deliberately as many times as one felt was needed. The pitch of the voice rose or fell without any thought.

Tuliuno stressed that the indispensable part of the act of calling intent was a total concentration on what was intended. In their case, the concentration was on their homogeneity and on Tulio's appearance. After they had been fused by intent, it still took them a couple of years to build up the certainty that their homogeneity and Tulio's appearance would be realities to the onlookers.

I asked don Juan what he thought of their way of calling intent. And he said that his benefactor, like the nagual Elias, was a bit more given to ritual than he himself was, therefore, they preferred paraphernalia such as candles, dark closets, and black tables.

I casually remarked that I was terribly attracted to ritual behavior, myself. Ritual seemed to me essential in focusing one's attention. Don Juan took my remark seriously. He said he had seen that my body, as an energy field, had a feature which he knew all the sorcerers of ancient times had had and avidly sought in others: a bright area in the lower right side of the luminous cocoon. That brightness was associated with resourcefulness and a bent toward morbidity. The dark sorcerers of those times took pleasure in harnessing that coveted feature and attaching it to man's dark side.

"Then there is an evil side to man," I said jubilantly. "You always deny it. You always say that evil doesn't exist, that only power exists."

I surprised myself with this outburst. In one instant, all my Catholic background was brought to bear on me and the Prince of Darkness loomed larger than life.

Don Juan laughed until he was coughing.

"Of course, there is a dark side to us," he said. "We kill wantonly, don't we? We burn people in the name of God. We destroy ourselves; we obliterate life on this planet; we destroy the earth. And then we dress in robes and the Lord speaks directly to us. And what does the Lord tell us? He says that we should be good boys or he is going to punish us. The Lord has been threatening us for centuries and it doesn't make any difference. Not because we are evil, but because we are dumb. Man has a dark side, yes, and it's called stupidity."

I did not say anything else, but silently I applauded and thought with pleasure that don Juan was a masterful debater. Once again he was turning my words back on me.

After a moment's pause, don Juan explained that in the same measure that ritual forced the average man to construct huge churches that were monuments to self-importance, ritual also forced sorcerers to construct edifices of morbidity and obsession. As a result, it was the duty of every nagual to guide awareness so it would fly toward the abstract free of liens and mortgages.

"What do you mean, don Juan, by liens and mortgages?" I asked.

"Ritual can trap our attention better than anything I can think of," he said, "but it also demands a very high price. That high price is morbidity; and morbidity could have the heaviest liens and mortgages on our awareness."

Don Juan said that human awareness was like an immense haunted house. The awareness of everyday life was like being sealed in one room of that immense house for life. We entered the room through a magical opening: birth. And we exited through another such magical opening: death.

Sorcerers, however, were capable of finding still another opening and could leave that sealed room while still alive. A superb attainment. But their astounding accomplishment was that when they escaped from that sealed room they chose freedom. They chose to leave that immense, haunted house entirely instead of getting lost in other parts of it.

Morbidity was the antithesis of the surge of energy awareness needed to reach freedom. Morbidity made sorcerers lose their way and become trapped in the intricate, dark byways of the unknown.

I asked don Juan if there was any morbidity in the Tulios.

"Strangeness is not morbidity" he replied. "The Tulios were performers who were being coached by the spirit itself."

"What was the nagual Elias's reason for training the Tulios as he did?" I asked.

Don Juan peered at me and laughed loudly. At that instant the lights of the plaza were turned on. He got up from his favorite bench and rubbed it with the palm of his hand, as if it were a pet.

"Freedom," he said. "He wanted their freedom from perceptual convention. And he taught them to be artists. Stalking is an art. For a sorcerer, since he's not a patron or a seller of art, the only thing of importance about a work of art is that it can be accomplished."

We stood by the bench, watching the evening strollers milling around. The story of the four Tulios had left me with a sense of foreboding. Don Juan suggested that I return home. The long drive to L.A., he said, would give my assemblage point a respite from all the moving it had done in the past few days.

"The nagual's company is very tiring," he went on. "It produces a strange fatigue. It could even be injurious."

I assured him that I was not tired at all, and that his company was anything but injurious to me. In fact, his company affected me like a narcotic- I couldn't do without it. This sounded as if I were flattering him, but I really meant what I said.

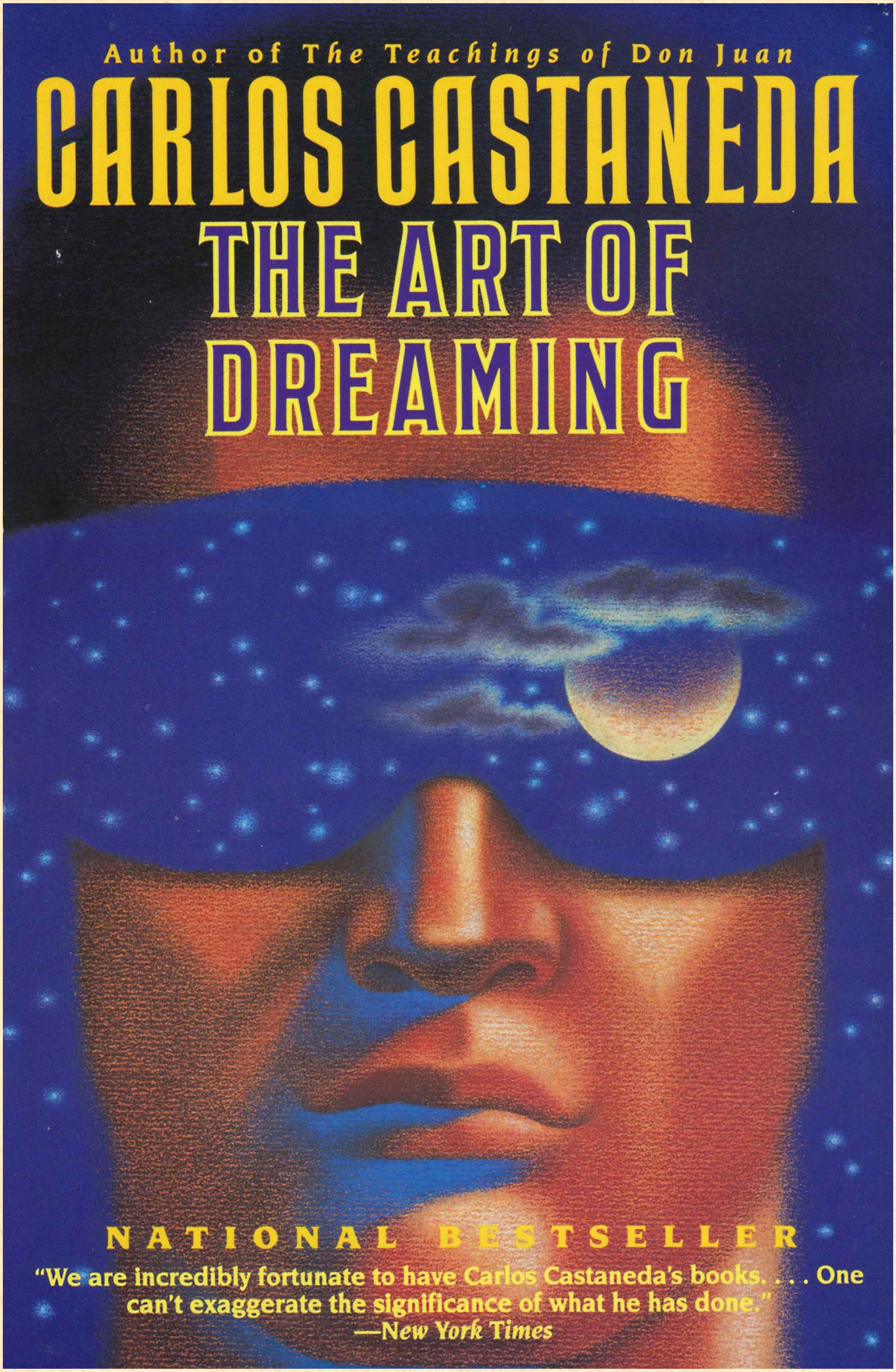
We strolled around the plaza three or four times in complete silence.

"Go home and think about the basic cores of the sorcery stories," don Juan said with a note of finality in his voice. "Or rather, don't think about them, but make your assemblage point move toward the place of silent knowledge. Moving the assemblage point is everything, but it means nothing if it's not a sober, controlled movement. So, close the door of self-reflection. Be impeccable and you'll have the energy to reach the place of silent knowledge."

### The End - The Power Of Silence - © 1987 by Carlos Castaneda ###

# 09 - THE ART OF DREAMING

© 1993 - Carlos Castaneda. Covering don Juan's lessons in sleeping-dreaming, as well as other practical instructions in sorcery.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—New York Times

# Book 9 – THE ART OF DREAMING

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# Author's Note

Over the past twenty years, I have written a series of books about my apprenticeship with a Mexican Yaqui Indian sorcerer, don Juan Matus. I have explained in those books that he taught me sorcery, but not as we understand sorcery in the context of our daily world: not the use of supernatural powers over others; nor the calling of spirits through charms, spells, or rituals to produce supernatural effects. For don Juan, sorcery was the act of embodying some specialized theoretical and practical premises about the nature and role of perception in molding the universe around us.

Following don Juan's suggestion, I have refrained from using the term shamanism, a category proper to anthropology, to classify his knowledge. I have called it all along what he himself called it: sorcery. On examination, however, I realized that calling it sorcery obscures even more the already obscure phenomena he presented to me in his teachings.

In anthropological works, shamanism is described as a belief system of some native people of northern Asia, prevailing also among certain native North American Indian tribes, which maintains that an unseen world of ancestral spiritual forces, good and evil, is pervasive around us; and that these spiritual forces can be summoned or controlled through the acts of practitioners who are the intermediaries between the natural and supernatural realms.

Don Juan was indeed an intermediary between the natural world of everyday life and an unseen world, which he called not the supernatural but the second attention. His role as a teacher was to make this configuration accessible to me. I have described in my previous work his teaching methods to this effect as well as the sorcery arts he made me practice. The most important of which is called the art of dreaming.

Don Juan contended that our world, which we believe to be unique and absolute, is only one in a cluster of consecutive worlds arranged like the layers of an onion. He asserted that even though we have been energetically conditioned to perceive solely our world, we still have the capability of entering into those other realms; which are as real, unique, absolute, and engulfing as our own world is.

Don Juan explained to me that, for us to perceive those other realms, not only do we have to covet them, but we need to have sufficient energy to seize them. Their existence is constant and independent of our awareness, he said, but their inaccessibility is entirely a consequence of our energetic conditioning. In other words, simply and solely because of our conditioning, we are compelled to assume that the world of daily life is the one and only possible world.

Believing that our energetic conditioning is correctable, don Juan stated that sorcerers of ancient times developed a set of practices designed to recondition our energetic capabilities to perceive. They called this set of practices the art of dreaming.

With the perspective time gives, I now realize that the most fitting statement don Juan made about dreaming was to call it the 'gateway to infinity'. I remarked at the time he said it that the metaphor had no meaning to me.

"Let's then do away with metaphors," he conceded. "Let's say that dreaming is the sorcerers' practical way of putting ordinary dreams to use."

"But how can ordinary dreams be put to use?" I asked.

"We always get tricked by words," he said. "In my own case, my teacher attempted to describe dreaming to me by saying that it is the way sorcerers say good night to the world. He was, of course, tailoring his description to fit my mentality. I'm doing the same with you."

On another occasion don Juan said to me, "Dreaming can only be experienced. Dreaming is not just having dreams; neither is it daydreaming or wishing or imagining. Through dreaming we can perceive other worlds which we can certainly describe, but we can't describe what makes us perceive them. Yet we can feel how dreaming opens up those other realms. Dreaming seems to be a sensation; a process in our bodies; an awareness in our minds."

In the course of his general teachings, don Juan thoroughly explained to me the principles, rationales, and practices of the art of dreaming. His instruction was divided into two parts. One part was about dreaming procedures, and the other part was about the purely abstract explanations of these procedures. His teaching method was an interplay between enticing my intellectual curiosity with the abstract principles of dreaming, and guiding me to seek an outlet in it's practices.

I have already described all this in as much detail as I had been able to. And I have also described the sorcerers' milieu in which don Juan placed me in order to teach me his arts. My interaction in this milieu was of special interest to me because it took place exclusively in the 'second attention'. I interacted there with the ten women and five men who were don Juan's sorcerer companions and with the four young men and the four young women who were his apprentices.

Don Juan gathered them immediately after I came into his world. He made it clear to me that they formed a traditional sorcerers' group- a replica of his own party- and that I was supposed to lead them.

However, working with me he realized that I was different than he expected. He explained that difference in terms of an energy configuration seen only by sorcerer seers. Instead of having four compartments of energy as he himself had, I had only three.

Such a configuration, which he had mistakenly hoped was a correctable flaw, made me completely inadequate for interacting with or leading those eight apprentices. I have written extensively about those events.

Because of my configuration, it became imperative for don Juan to gather another group of people more akin to my energetic structure. I have never mentioned the second group of apprentices: Don Juan did not permit me to do so. He argued that they were exclusively in my field, and that the agreement I had had with him was to write about his field; not mine.

The second group of apprentices was extremely compact. It had only three members: a dreamer, Florinda Grau; a stalker, Taisha Abelar; and a nagual woman, Carol Tiggs.

We interacted with one another solely in the second attention. In the world of everyday life, we did not have even a vague notion of one another. In terms of our relationship with don Juan, however, there was no vagueness. He put enormous effort into training all of us equally.

Nevertheless, toward the end when don Juan's time was about to finish, the psychological pressure of his departure started to collapse the rigid boundaries of the second attention. The result was that our interaction began to lapse into the world of everyday affairs; and we met, seemingly, for the first time.

None of us, consciously, knew about our deep and arduous interaction in the second attention. Since all of us were involved in academic studies, we ended up more than shocked when we found out we had met before. This was and still is, of course, intellectually inadmissible to us, yet we know that it was thoroughly within our experience. We have been left, therefore, with the disquieting knowledge that the human psyche is infinitely more complex than our mundane or academic reasoning had led us to believe.

Once we asked don Juan, in unison, to shed light on our predicament. He said that he had two explanatory options.

One option was to cater to our hurt rationality and patch it up by saying that the second attention is a state of awareness as illusory as elephants flying in the sky; and that everything we thought we had experienced in that state was simply a product of hypnotic suggestions.

The other option was to explain it the way sorcerer dreamers understand it; as an energetic configuration of awareness.

During the fulfillment of my dreaming tasks, however, the barrier of the second attention remained unchanged. Every time I entered into dreaming, I also entered into the second attention, and waking up from dreaming did not necessarily mean I had left the second attention.

For years I could remember only bits of my dreaming experiences. The bulk of what I did was energetically unavailable to me.

It took me fifteen years of uninterrupted work, from 1973 to 1988, to store enough energy to rearrange everything linearly in my mind. I remembered then sequences upon sequences of dreaming events, and I was able to fill in, at last, some seeming lapses of memory. In this manner I captured the inherent continuity of don Juan's lessons in the art of dreaming; a continuity that had been lost to me because of his making me weave between the awareness of our everyday life and the awareness of the second attention. This work is a result of that rearrangement.

All this brings me to the final part of my statement: the reason for writing this book.

Being in possession of most of the pieces of don Juan's lessons in the art of dreaming, I would like to explain in a future work the current position and interest of his last four students: Florinda Grau, Taisha Abelar, Carol Tiggs, and myself.

But before I describe and explain the results of don Juan's guidance and influence on us four, I must review, in light of what I know now, the parts of don Juan's lessons in dreaming to which I did not have access before.

The definitive reason for this work, however, was given by Carol Tiggs. Her belief is that explaining the world that don Juan made us inherit is the ultimate expression of our gratitude to him and our commitment to his quest.

## 1. Sorcerers of Antiquity: An Introduction

Very early in our relationship, Don Juan stressed, time and time again, that everything he was teaching me had been envisioned and worked out by men he referred to as sorcerers of antiquity. He made it very clear that there was a profound distinction between those sorcerers and the sorcerers of modern times.

He categorized sorcerers of antiquity as men who existed in Mexico perhaps thousands of years before the Spanish Conquest; men whose greatest accomplishment had been to build the structures of sorcery, emphasizing practicality and concreteness. He rendered them as men who were brilliant but lacking in wisdom.

Modern sorcerers, by contrast, don Juan portrayed as men renowned for their sound minds and their capacity to rectify the course of sorcery if they deemed it necessary.

Don Juan explained to me that the sorcery premises pertinent to dreaming were naturally envisioned and developed by sorcerers of antiquity. Out of necessity, for those premises are key in explaining and understanding dreaming, I again have to write about and discuss them. The major part of this book is, therefore, a reintroduction and amplification of what I have presented in my previous works.

During one of our conversations, don Juan stated that in order to appreciate the position of dreamers and dreaming, one has to understand the struggle of modern-day sorcerers to steer sorcery away from concreteness toward the abstract.

"What do you call concreteness, don Juan?" I asked.

"The practical part of sorcery," he said. "The obsessive fixation of the mind on practices and techniques, and the unwarranted influence over people. All of these were in the realm of the sorcerers of the past."

"And what do you call the abstract?"

"The search for freedom; freedom to perceive, without obsessions, all that's humanly possible. I say that present-day sorcerers seek the abstract because they seek freedom. They have no interest in concrete gains. There are no social functions for them as there were for the sorcerers of the past. So you'll never catch them being the official seers, or the sorcerers in residence."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that the past has no value to modern-day sorcerers?"

"It certainly has value. It's the taste of that past which we don't like. I personally detest the darkness and morbidity of the mind. I like the immensity of thought. However, regardless of my likes and dislikes, I have to give due credit to the sorcerers of antiquity, for they were the first to find out and do everything we know and do today.

Don Juan explained that sorcerers of antiquity's most important attainment was to perceive the energetic essence of things. This insight was of such importance that it was turned into the basic premise of sorcery. Nowadays, after lifelong discipline and training, sorcerers do acquire the capacity to perceive the essence of things; a capacity they call seeing.

"What would it mean to me to perceive the energetic essence of things?" I once asked don Juan.

"It would mean that you perceive energy directly," he replied. "By separating the social part of perception, you'll perceive the essence of everything. Whatever we are perceiving is energy, but since we can't directly perceive energy, we process our perception to fit a mold. This mold is the social part of perception, which you have to separate."

"Why do I have to separate it?"

"Because it deliberately reduces the scope of what can be perceived and makes us believe that the mold into which we fit our perception is all that exists. I am convinced that for man to survive now, his perception must change at it's social base."

"What is this social base of perception, don Juan?"

"The physical certainty that the world is made of concrete objects. I call this a social base because a serious and fierce effort is put out by everybody to guide us to perceive the world the way we do."

"How then should we perceive the world?"

"Everything is energy. The whole universe is energy. The social base of our perception should be the physical certainty that energy is all there is. A mighty effort should be made to guide us to perceive energy as energy. Then we would have both alternatives at our fingertips."

"Is it possible to train people in such a fashion?" I asked.

Don Juan replied that it was possible and that this was precisely what he was doing with me and his other apprentices. He was teaching us a new way of perceiving; first, by making us realize we process our perception to fit a mold; and second, by fiercely guiding us to perceive energy directly. He assured me that this method was very much like the one used to teach us to perceive the world of daily affairs.

Don Juan's conception was that our entrapment in processing our perception to fit a social mold loses it's power when we realize we have accepted this mold as an inheritance from our ancestors without bothering to examine it.

"To perceive a world of hard objects that had either a positive or a negative value must have been utterly necessary for our ancestors' survival," don Juan said. "After ages of perceiving in such a manner, we are now forced to believe that the world is made up of objects."

"I can't conceive the world in any other way, don Juan," I complained. "It is unquestionably a world of objects. To prove it, all we have to do is bump into them."

"Of course it's a world of objects. We are not arguing that."

"What are you saying then?"

"I am saying that this is first a world of energy; then it's a world of objects. If we don't start with the premise that it is a world of energy, we'll never be able to perceive energy directly. We'll always be stopped by the physical certainty of what you've just pointed out: the hardness of objects."

His argument was extremely mystifying to me. In those days, my mind would simply refuse to consider any way to understand the world except the one with which I was familiar. Don Juan's claims and the points he struggled to raise were outlandish propositions that I could not accept, but that I could not refuse either.

"Our way of perceiving is a predator's way," he said to me on one occasion. "A very efficient manner of appraising and classifying food and danger. But this is not the only way we are able to perceive. There is another mode; the one I am familiarizing you with; the act of perceiving the essence of everything- energy itself- directly.

"To perceive the essence of everything will make us understand, classify, and describe the world in entirely new, more exciting, and more sophisticated terms."

That was don Juan's claim.

The more sophisticated terms to which he was alluding were those he had been taught by his predecessors; terms that correspond to sorcery truths which have no rational foundation and no relation whatsoever to the facts of our daily world; but which are self-evident truths for the sorcerers who perceive energy directly and see the essence of everything.

For such sorcerers, the most significant act of sorcery is to see the essence of the universe. Don Juan's version was that the sorcerers of antiquity- the first ones to see the essence of the universe- described it in the best manner. They said that the essence of the universe resembles incandescent threads stretched into infinity in every conceivable direction; luminous filaments that are conscious of themselves in ways impossible for the human mind to comprehend.

From seeing the essence of the universe, the sorcerers of antiquity went on to see the energy essence of human beings. Don Juan stated that they depicted human beings as bright shapes that resembled giant eggs and called them luminous eggs.

"When sorcerers see a human being," don Juan said, "they see a giant, luminous shape that floats, making, as it moves, a deep furrow in the energy of the earth, just as if the luminous shape had a taproot that was dragging."

Don Juan had the impression that our energy shape keeps on changing through time. He said that every seer he knew, himself included, saw that human beings are shaped more like balls or even tombstones than eggs. But, once in a while, and for no reason known to them, sorcerers see a person whose energy is shaped like an egg. Don Juan suggested that people who are egglike in shape today are more akin to people of ancient times.

In the course of his teachings, don Juan repeatedly discussed and explained what he considered the decisive finding of the sorcerers of antiquity. He called it the crucial feature of human beings as luminous balls; a round spot of intense brilliance, the size of a tennis ball, permanently lodged inside the luminous ball, flush with it's surface, about two feet back from the crest of a person's right shoulder blade.

Since I had trouble visualizing this the first time don Juan described it to me, he explained that the luminous ball is much larger than the human body, that the spot of intense brilliance is part of this ball of energy, and that it is located on a place at the height of the shoulder blades, an arm's length from a person's back. He said that the old sorcerers named it the assemblage point after seeing what it does.

"What does the assemblage point do?" I asked.

"It makes us perceive," he replied. "The old sorcerers saw that in human beings perception is assembled there, on that point. Seeing that all living beings also have a point of brilliance, the old sorcerers surmised that perception in general must take place on that spot, in whatever pertinent manner."

"What did the old sorcerers see that made them conclude that perception takes place on the assemblage point?" I asked.

He answered that, first, they saw that out of the millions of the universe's luminous energy filaments passing through the entire luminous ball, only a small number pass directly through the assemblage point, as should be expected since it is small in comparison with the whole.

Next, they saw that a spherical extra glow, slightly bigger than the assemblage point, always surrounds it, greatly intensifying the luminosity of the filaments passing directly through that glow.

Finally, they saw two things. One, that the assemblage points of human beings can dislodge themselves from the spot where they are usually located.

And, two, that when the assemblage point is on it's habitual position, perception and awareness seem to be normal, judging by the normal behavior of the subjects being observed. But when their assemblage points and surrounding glowing spheres are on a different position than the habitual one, their unusual behavior seems to be the proof that their awareness is different; that they are perceiving in an unfamiliar manner.

The conclusion the old sorcerers drew from all this was that the greater the displacement of the assemblage point from it's customary position, the more unusual the consequent behavior and, evidently, the consequent awareness and perception.

"Notice that when I talk about seeing, I always say "having the appearance of" or "seemed like," don Juan warned me. "Everything one sees is so unique that there is no way to talk about it except by comparing it to something known to us."

He said that the most adequate example of this difficulty was the way sorcerers talk about the assemblage point and the glow that surrounds it. They describe them as brightness, yet it cannot be brightness, because seers see them without their eyes. They have to fill out the difference, however, and say that the assemblage point is a spot of light and that around it there is a halo; a glow. Don Juan pointed out that we are so visual, so ruled by our predator's perception, that everything we see must be rendered in terms of what the predator's eye normally sees.

After seeing what the assemblage point and it's surrounding glow seemed to be doing, don Juan said that the old sorcerers advanced an explanation. They proposed that in human beings the assemblage point, by focusing it's glowing sphere on the universe's filaments of energy that pass directly through it, automatically and without premeditation assembles those filaments into a steady perception of the world.

"How are those filaments you talk about assembled into a steady perception of the world?" I asked.

"No one can possibly know that," he emphatically replied. "Sorcerers see the movement of energy, but just seeing the movement of energy cannot tell them how or why energy moves."

Don Juan stated that, seeing that millions of conscious energy filaments pass through the assemblage point, the old sorcerers postulated that in passing through it they come together, amassed by the glow that surrounds it. After seeing that the glow is extremely dim in people who have been rendered unconscious or are about to die, and that it is totally absent from corpses, they were convinced that this glow is awareness.

"How about the assemblage point? Is it absent from a corpse?" I asked.

He answered that there is no trace of an assemblage point on a dead being, because the assemblage point and it's surrounding glow are the mark of life and consciousness. The inescapable conclusion of the sorcerers of antiquity was that awareness and perception go together and are tied to the assemblage point and the glow that surrounds it.

"Is there a chance that those sorcerers might have been mistaken about their seeing?" I asked.

"I can't explain to you why, but there is no way sorcerers can be mistaken about their seeing," don Juan said, in a tone that admitted no argument. "Now, the conclusions they arrive at from their seeing might be wrong, but that would be because they are naive; uncultivated. In order to avoid this disaster, sorcerers have to cultivate their minds, in whatever form they can."

He softened up then and remarked that it certainly would be infinitely safer for sorcerers to remain solely at the level of describing what they see, but that the temptation to conclude and explain, even if only to oneself, is far too great to resist.

The effect of the assemblage point's displacement was another energy configuration the sorcerers of antiquity were able to see and study. Don Juan said that when the assemblage point is displaced to another position, a new conglomerate of millions of luminous energy filaments come together on that point. The sorcerers of antiquity saw this and concluded that since the glow of awareness is always present wherever the assemblage point is, perception is automatically assembled there. Because of the different position of the assemblage point, the resulting world, however, cannot be our world of daily affairs.

Don Juan explained that the old sorcerers were capable of distinguishing two types of assemblage point displacement.

One was a displacement to any position on the surface or in the interior of the luminous ball; this displacement they called a shift of the assemblage point.

The other was a displacement to a position outside the luminous ball; they called this displacement a movement of the assemblage point. They found out that the difference between a shift and a movement was the nature of the perception each allows.

Since the shifts of the assemblage point are displacements within the luminous ball, the worlds engendered by them, no matter how bizarre or wondrous or unbelievable they might be, are still worlds within the human domain. The human domain is the energy filaments that pass through the entire luminous ball.

By contrast, movements of the assemblage point, since they are displacements to positions outside the luminous ball, engage filaments of energy that are beyond the human realm. Perceiving such filaments engenders worlds that are beyond comprehension, inconceivable worlds with no trace of human antecedents in them.

The problem of validation always played a key role in my mind in those days. "Forgive me, don Juan," I said to him on one occasion, "but this business of the assemblage point is an idea so farfetched, so inadmissible that I don't know how to deal with it or what to think of it."

"There is only one thing for you to do," he retorted. "See the assemblage point! It isn't that difficult to see. The difficulty is in breaking the retaining wall we all have in our minds that holds us in place. To break it, all we need is energy. Once we have energy, seeing happens to us by itself. The trick is in abandoning our fort of self-complacency and false security."

"It is obvious to me, don Juan, that it takes a lot of knowledge to see. It isn't just a matter of having energy."

"It is just a matter of having energy, believe me. The hard part is convincing yourself that it can be done. For this, you need to trust the nagual. The marvel of sorcery is that every sorcerer has to prove everything with his own experience. I am telling you about the principles of sorcery, not with the hope that you will memorize them, but with the hope that you will practice them."

Don Juan was certainly right about the need for trusting. In the beginning stages of my thirteen-year apprenticeship with him, the hardest thing for me was to affiliate myself with his world and his person. This affiliating meant that I had to learn to trust him implicitly and accept him without bias as the nagual.

Don Juan's total role in the sorcerers' world was synthesized in the title accorded to him by his peers. He was called the nagual. It was explained to me that this concept refers to any person, male or female, who possesses a specific kind of energy configuration which to a seer appears as a double luminous ball. Seers believe that when one of these people enters into the sorcerers' world, that extra load of energy is turned into a measure of strength and the capacity for leadership. Thus, the nagual is the natural guide; the leader of a party of sorcerers.

At first, to feel such a trust for don Juan was quite disturbing to me, if not altogether odious. When I discussed it with him, he assured me that to trust his teacher in such a manner had been just as difficult for him.

"I told my teacher the same thing you are saying to me now," don Juan said. "He replied that without trusting the nagual there is no possibility of relief, and thus no possibility of clearing the debris from our lives in order to be free."

Don Juan reiterated how right his teacher had been. And I reiterated my profound disagreement. I told him that my being reared in a stifling religious environment had had dreadful effects on me, and that his teacher's statements and his own acquiescence to his teacher reminded me of the obedience dogma that I had to learn as a child, and that I abhorred.

"It sounds like you're voicing a religious belief when you talk about the nagual," I said.

"You may believe whatever you want," don Juan replied undauntedly. "The fact remains, there is no game without the nagual. I know this and I say so. And so did all the naguals who preceded me. But they didn't say it from the standpoint of self-importance, and neither do I.

"To say there is no path without the nagual is to refer totally to the fact that the man, the nagual, is a nagual because he can reflect the abstract, the spirit, better than others. But that's all. Our link is with the spirit itself and only incidentally with the man who brings us it's message."

I did learn to trust don Juan implicitly as the nagual, and this, as he had stated it, brought me an immense sense of relief and a greater capacity to accept what he was striving to teach me.

In his teachings, he put a great emphasis on explaining and discussing the assemblage point. I asked him once if the assemblage point had anything to do with the physical body.

"It has nothing to do with what we normally perceive as the body," he said. "It's part of the luminous egg, which is our energy self."

"How is it displaced?" I asked.

"Through energy currents. Jolts of energy, originating outside or inside our energy shape. These are usually unpredictable currents that happen randomly, but with sorcerers they are very predictable currents that obey the sorcerer's intent."

"Can you yourself feel these currents?"

"Every sorcerer feels them. Every human being does, for that matter, but average human beings are too busy with their own pursuits to pay any attention to feelings like that."

"What do those currents feel like?"

"Like a mild discomfort, a vague sensation of sadness followed immediately by euphoria. Since neither the sadness nor the euphoria has an explainable cause, we never regard them as veritable [* veritable- a word modifier that has little meaning except to intensify the meaning it modifies] onslaughts [* onslaught- the rapid and continuous delivery of linguistic communication (spoken or written)] of the unknown but as unexplainable, ill-founded moodiness."

"What happens when the assemblage point moves outside the energy shape? Does it hang outside? Or is it attached to the luminous ball?"

"It pushes the contours of the energy shape out, without breaking it's energy boundaries."

Don Juan explained that the end result of a movement of the assemblage point is a total change in the energy shape of a human being. Instead of a ball or an egg, he becomes something resembling a smoking pipe. The tip of the stem is the assemblage point, and the bowl of the pipe is what remains of the luminous ball. If the assemblage point keeps on moving, a moment comes when the luminous ball becomes a thin line of energy.

Don Juan went on to explain that the old sorcerers were the only ones who accomplished this feat of energy shape transformation.

I asked him whether in their new energetic shape those sorcerers were still men.

"Of course they were still men," he said. "But I think what you want to know is if they were still men of reason, trustworthy persons. Well, not quite."

"In what way were they different?"

"In their concerns. Human endeavors and preoccupations had no meaning whatsoever to them. They also had a definite new appearance."

"Do you mean that they didn't look like men?"

"It's very hard to tell what was what about those sorcerers. They certainly looked like men. What else would they look like? But they were not quite like what you or I would expect. Yet if you pressed me to tell in what way they were different, I would go in circles, like a dog chasing it's tail."

"Have you ever met one of those men, don Juan?"

"Yes, I have met one."

"What did he look like?"

"As far as looks, he looked like a regular person. Now, it was his behavior that was unusual."

"In what way was it unusual?"

"All I can tell you is that the behavior of the sorcerer I met is something that defies the imagination. But to make it a matter of merely behavior is misleading. It is really something you must see to appreciate."

"Were all those sorcerers like the one you met?"

"Certainly not. I don't know how the others were, except through sorcerers' stories handed down from generation to generation. And those stories portray them as being quite bizarre."

"Do you mean monstrous?"

"Not at all. They say that they were very likable but extremely scary. They were more like unknown creatures. What makes mankind homogeneous is the fact that we are all luminous balls. And those sorcerers were no longer balls of energy but lines of energy that were trying to bend themselves into circles, which they couldn't quite make."

"What finally happened to them, don Juan? Did they die?"

"Sorcerers' stories say that because they had succeeded in stretching their shapes, they had also succeeded in stretching the duration of their consciousness. So they are alive and conscious to this day. There are stories about their periodic appearances on the earth."

"What do you think of all this yourself, don Juan?"

"It is too bizarre for me. I want freedom. Freedom to retain my awareness and yet disappear into the vastness. In my personal opinion, those old sorcerers were extravagant, obsessive, capricious men who got pinned down by their own machinations. [* machination- a crafty and involved plot to achieve your (usually sinister) ends]

"But don't let my personal feelings sway you. The old sorcerers' accomplishment is unparalleled. If nothing else, they proved to us that man's potentials are nothing to sneeze at."

Another topic of don Juan's explanations was the indispensability of energetic uniformity and cohesion for the purpose of perceiving. His contention was that mankind perceives the world we know, in the terms we do, only because we share energetic uniformity and cohesion.

He said that we automatically attain these two conditions of energy in the course of our rearing and that they are so taken for granted we do not realize their vital importance until we are faced with the possibility of perceiving worlds other than the world we know. At those moments, it becomes evident that we need a new appropriate energetic uniformity and cohesion to perceive coherently and totally.

I asked him what uniformity and cohesion were, and he explained that man's energetic shape has uniformity in the sense that every human being on earth has the form of a ball or an egg.

And the fact that man's energy holds itself together as a ball or an egg proves it has cohesion.

He said that an example of a new uniformity and cohesion was the old sorcerers' energetic shape when it became a line: every one of them uniformly became a line and cohesively remained a line. Uniformity and cohesion at a line level permitted those old sorcerers to perceive a homogeneous new world.

"How are uniformity and cohesion acquired?" I asked.

"The key is the position of the assemblage point, or rather the fixation of the assemblage point," he said.

He did not want to elaborate any further at that time, so I asked him if those old sorcerers could have reverted to being egglike. He replied that at one point they could have, but that they did not. And then the line cohesion set in and made it impossible for them to go back.

He believed that what really crystallized that line cohesion and prevented them from making the journey back was a matter of choice and greed. The scope of what those sorcerers were able to perceive and do as lines of energy was astronomically greater than what an average man or any average sorcerer can do or perceive.

He explained that the human domain when one is an energy ball is whatever energy filaments pass through the space within the ball's boundaries. Normally, we perceive not all the human domain but perhaps only one thousandth of it.

He was of the opinion that, if we take this into consideration, the enormity of what the old sorcerers did becomes apparent. They extended themselves into a line a thousand times the size of a man as an energy ball and perceived all the energy filaments that passed through that line.

On his insistence, I made giant efforts to understand the new model of energy configuration he was outlining for me. Finally, after much pounding, I could follow the idea of energy filaments inside the luminous ball and outside it. But if I thought of a multitude of luminous balls, the model broke down in my mind. In a multitude of luminous balls, I reasoned, the energy filaments that are outside one of them will perforce be inside the adjacent one. So in a multitude there could not possibly be any energy filaments outside any luminous ball.

"To understand all this certainly isn't an exercise for your reason," he replied after carefully listening to my arguments. "I have no way of explaining what sorcerers mean by filaments inside and outside the human shape. When seers see the human energy shape, they see one single ball of energy. If there is another ball next to it, the other ball is seen again as a single ball of energy.

"The idea of a multitude of luminous balls comes from your knowledge of human crowds. In the universe of energy, there are only single individuals, alone, surrounded by the boundless.

"You must see that for yourself!"

I argued with don Juan then that it was pointless to tell me to see it for myself when he knew I could not. And he proposed that I borrow his energy and use it to see.

"How can I do that? Borrow your energy."

"Very simple. I can make your assemblage point shift to another position more suitable to perceiving energy directly."

This was the first time, in my memory, that he deliberately talked about something he had been doing all along: making me enter into some incomprehensible state of awareness that defied my idea of the world and of myself, a state he called the second attention.

So, to make my assemblage point shift to a position more suitable to perceiving energy directly, don Juan slapped my back, between my shoulder blades, with such a force that he made me lose my breath. I thought that I must have fainted or that the blow had made me fall asleep. Suddenly, I was looking or I was dreaming I was looking at something literally beyond words. Bright strings of light shot out from everywhere, going everywhere, strings of light which were like nothing that had ever entered my thoughts.

When I recovered my breath, or when I woke up, don Juan expectantly asked me, "What did you see?" And when I answered, truthfully, "Your blow made me see stars," he doubled up laughing.

He remarked that I was not ready yet to comprehend any unusual perception I might have had.

"I made your assemblage point shift," he went on, "and for an instant you were dreaming the filaments of the universe. But you don't yet have the discipline or the energy to rearrange your uniformity and cohesion. The old sorcerers were the consummate masters of that rearranging. That was how they saw everything that can be seen by man."

"What does it mean to rearrange uniformity and cohesion?"

"It means to enter into the second attention by retaining the assemblage point on it's new position and keeping it from sliding back to it's original spot."

Don Juan then gave me a traditional definition of the second attention. He said that the old sorcerers called the result of fixing the assemblage point on new positions the second attention and that they treated the second attention as an area of all-inclusive activity, just as the attention of the daily world is.

He pointed out that sorcerers really have two complete areas for their endeavors: a small one, called the first attention or the awareness of our daily world or the fixation of the assemblage point on it's habitual position; and a much larger area, the second attention or the awareness of other worlds or the fixation of the assemblage point on each of an enormous number of new positions.

Don Juan helped me to experience inexplicable things in the second attention by means of what he called a sorcerer's maneuver: tapping my back gently or forcefully striking it at the height of my shoulder blades. He explained that with his blows he displaced my assemblage point.

From my experiential position, such displacements meant that my awareness used to enter into a most disturbing state of unequaled clarity, a state of super consciousness, which I enjoyed for short periods of time and in which I could understand anything with minimal preambles. It was not quite a pleasing state. Most of the time it was like a strange dream, so intense that normal awareness paled by comparison.

Don Juan justified the indispensability of such a maneuver, saying that in normal awareness a sorcerer teaches his apprentices basic concepts and procedures and in the second attention he gives them abstract and detailed explanations.

Ordinarily, apprentices do not remember these explanations at all, yet they somehow store them, faithfully intact, in their memories. Sorcerers have used this seeming peculiarity of memory and have turned remembering everything that happens to them in the second attention into one of the most difficult and complex traditional tasks of sorcery.

Sorcerers explain this seeming peculiarity of memory, and the task of remembering, saying that every time anyone enters into the second attention, the assemblage point is on a different position. To remember, then, means to relocate the assemblage point on the exact position it occupied at the time those entrances into the second attention occurred.

Don Juan assured me not only that sorcerers have total and absolute recall but that they relive every experience they had in the second attention by this act of returning their assemblage point to each of those specific positions. He also assured me that sorcerers dedicate a lifetime to fulfilling this task of remembering.

In the second attention, don Juan gave me very detailed explanations of sorcery knowing that the accuracy and fidelity of such instruction will remain with me, faithfully intact, for the duration of my life.

About this quality of faithfulness he said, "Learning something in the second attention is just like learning when we were children. What we learn remains with us for life. "It's second nature with me," we say when it comes to something we've learned very early in life."

Judging from where I stand today, I realize that don Juan made me enter, as many times as he could, into the second attention in order to force me to sustain, for long periods of time, new positions of my assemblage point and to perceive coherently in them. That is to say, he aimed at forcing me to rearrange my uniformity and cohesion.

I succeeded countless times in perceiving everything as precisely as I perceive in the daily world. My problem was my incapacity to make a bridge between my actions in the second attention and my awareness of the daily world. It took a great deal of effort and time for me to understand what the second attention is. Not so much because of it's intricacy and complexity, which are indeed extreme, but because, once I was back in my normal awareness, I found it impossible to remember not only that I had entered into the second attention but that such a state existed at all.

Another monumental breakthrough that the old sorcerers claimed, and that don Juan carefully explained to me, was to find out that the assemblage point becomes very easily displaced during sleep.

This realization triggered another one: that dreams are totally associated with that displacement. The old sorcerers saw that the greater the displacement, the more unusual the dream. Or vice versa: the more unusual the dream, the greater the displacement.

Don Juan said that this observation led them to devise extravagant techniques to force the displacement of the assemblage point, such as ingesting plants that can produce altered states of consciousness; subjecting themselves to states of hunger, fatigue, and stress; and especially controlling dreams. In this fashion, and perhaps without even knowing it, they created dreaming.

One day, as we strolled around the plaza in the city of Oaxaca, don Juan gave me the most coherent definition of dreaming from a sorcerer's standpoint.

"Sorcerers view dreaming as an extremely sophisticated art," he said, "the art of displacing the assemblage point at will from it's habitual position in order to enhance and enlarge the scope of what can be perceived."

He said that the old sorcerers anchored the art of dreaming on five conditions they saw in the energy flow of human beings.

One, they saw that only the energy filaments that pass directly through the assemblage point can be assembled into coherent perception.

Two, they saw that if the assemblage point is displaced to another position, no matter how minute the displacement, different and unaccustomed energy filaments begin to pass through it; engaging awareness and forcing the assembling of these unaccustomed energy fields into a steady, coherent perception.

Three, they saw that, in the course of ordinary dreams, the assemblage point becomes easily displaced by itself to another position on the surface or in the interior of the luminous egg.

Four, they saw that the assemblage point can be made to move to positions outside the luminous egg, into the energy filaments of the universe at large.

And, five, they saw that through discipline it is possible to cultivate and perform, in the course of sleep and ordinary dreams, a systematic displacement of the assemblage point.

## 2. The First Gate of Dreaming

As a preamble [* preamble- a preliminary introduction] to his first lesson in dreaming, don Juan talked about the second attention as a progression: beginning as an idea that comes to us more like a curiosity than an actual possibility; turning into something that can only be felt, as a sensation is felt; and finally evolving into a state of being, or a realm of practicalities, or a preeminent force that opens for us worlds beyond our wildest fantasies.

When explaining sorcery, sorcerers have two options. One is to speak in metaphorical terms and talk about a world of magical dimensions. The other is to explain their business in abstract terms proper to sorcery. I have always preferred the latter, although neither option will ever satisfy the rational mind of a Western man.

Don Juan told me that what he meant by his 'metaphorical description of the second attention as a progression' was that, being a by-product of a displacement of the assemblage point, the second attention does not happen naturally but must be intended; beginning with intending it as an idea and ending up with intending it as a steady and controlled awareness of the assemblage point's displacement.

"I am going to teach you the first step to power," don Juan said, beginning his instruction in the art of dreaming. "I'm going to teach you how to set up dreaming."

"What does it mean to set up dreaming?"

"To set up dreaming means to have a precise and practical command over the general situation of a dream. For example, you may dream that you are in your classroom. To set up dreaming means that you don't let the dream slip into something else. You don't jump from the classroom to the mountains, for instance. In other words, you control the view of the classroom and don't let it go until you want to."

"But is it possible to do that?"

"Of course it's possible. This control is no different from the control we have over any situation in our daily lives. Sorcerers are used to it, and get it every time they want or need to. In order to get used to it yourself, you must start by doing something very simple. Tonight, in your dreams, you must look at your hands."

Not much more was said about this in the awareness of our daily world. In my recollection of my experiences in the second attention, however, I found out that we had a more extensive exchange. For instance, I expressed my feelings about the absurdity of the task, and don Juan suggested that I should face it in terms of a quest that was entertaining, instead of solemn and morbid.

"Get as heavy as you want when we talk about dreaming," he said. "Explanations always call for deep thought. But when you actually dream, be as light as a feather. Dreaming has to be performed with integrity and seriousness, but in the midst of laughter and with the confidence of someone who doesn't have a worry in the world. Only under these conditions can our dreams actually be turned into dreaming."

Don Juan assured me that he had selected my hands arbitrarily as something to look for in my dreams and that looking for anything else was just as valid. The goal of the exercise was not finding a specific thing but engaging my dreaming attention.

Don Juan described the dreaming attention as the control one acquires over one's dreams upon fixating the assemblage point on any new position to which it has been displaced during dreams. In more general terms, he called the dreaming attention an incomprehensible facet of awareness that exists by itself waiting for a moment when we would entice it; a moment when we would give it purpose. It is a veiled faculty that every one of us has in reserve but that we never have the opportunity to use in everyday life.

My first attempts at looking for my hands in my dreams were a fiasco. After months of unsuccessful efforts, I gave up and complained to don Juan again about the absurdity of such a task.

"There are seven gates," he said as a way of answering, "and dreamers have to open all seven of them; one at the time. You're up against the first gate that must be opened if you are to dream."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"It would've been useless to tell you about the gates of dreaming before you smacked your head against the first one. Now you know that it is an obstacle and that you have to overcome it."

Don Juan explained that there are entrances and exits in the energy flow of the universe and that, in the specific case of dreaming, there are seven entrances experienced as obstacles; which sorcerers call the seven gates of dreaming.

"The first gate is a threshold we must cross by becoming aware of a particular sensation before deep sleep," he said. "A sensation which is like a pleasant heaviness that doesn't let us open our eyes. We reach that gate the instant we become aware that we're falling asleep; suspended in darkness and heaviness."

"How do I become aware that I am falling asleep? Are there any steps to follow?"

"No. There are no steps to follow. One just intends to become aware of falling asleep."

"But how does one intend to become aware of it?"

"Intent or intending is something very difficult to talk about. I or anyone else would sound idiotic trying to explain it. Bear that in mind when you hear what I have to say next: Sorcerers intend anything they set themselves to intend, simply by intending it."

"That doesn't mean anything, don Juan."

"Pay close attention. Someday it'll be your turn to explain. The statement seems nonsensical because you are not putting it in the proper context. Like any rational man, you think that understanding is exclusively the realm of our reason; of our mind.

"For sorcerers, because the statement I made pertains to intent and intending, understanding it pertains to the realm of energy. Sorcerers believe that if one would intend that statement for the energy body, the energy body would understand it in terms entirely different from those of the mind. The trick is to reach the energy body. For that you need energy."

"In what terms would the energy body understand that statement, don Juan?"

"In terms of a bodily feeling which is hard to describe. You'll have to experience it to know what I mean."

I wanted a more precise explanation, but don Juan slapped my back and made me enter into the second attention. At that time, what he did was still utterly mysterious to me. I could have sworn that his touch hypnotized me.

I believed he had instantaneously put me to sleep, and I dreamt that I found myself walking with him on a wide avenue lined with trees in some unknown city. It was such a vivid dream, and I was so aware of everything that I immediately tried to orient myself by reading signs and looking at people. It definitely was not any English- or Spanish-speaking city, but it was a Western city. The people seemed to be northern Europeans, perhaps Lithuanians. I became absorbed in trying to read billboards and street signs.

Don Juan nudged me gently. "Don't bother with that," he said. "We are nowhere identifiable. I've just lent you my energy so you would reach your energy body, and with it you've just crossed into another world. This won't last long, so use your time wisely.

"Look at everything, but without being obvious. Don't let anyone notice you."

We walked in silence. It was a block-long walk which had a remarkable effect on me. The more we walked, the greater my sensation of visceral anxiety. My mind was curious, but my body was alarmed. I had the clearest understanding that I was not in this world.

When we got to an intersection and stopped walking, I saw that the trees on the street had been carefully trimmed. They were short trees with hard-looking, curled leaves. Each tree had a big square space for watering. There were no weeds or trash in those spaces, as one would find around trees in the city, only charcoal black, loose dirt.

The moment I focused my eyes on the curb, before I stepped off it to cross the street, I noticed that there were no cars. I tried desperately to watch the people who milled around us; to discover something about them that would explain my anxiety. As I stared at them, they stared back at me. In one instant a circle of hard blue and brown eyes had formed around us.

A certainty hit me like a blow: This was not a dream at all. We were in a reality beyond what I know to be real. I turned to face don Juan. I was about to realize what was different about those people, but a strange dry wind that went directly to my sinuses hit my face, blurred my view, and made me forget what I wanted to tell don Juan.

The next instant, I was back where I had started from: don Juan's house. I was lying on a straw mat, curled up on my side.

"I lent you my energy, and you reached your energy body," don Juan said matter-of-factly.

I heard him talk, but I was numb. An unusual itching on my solar plexus kept my breaths short and painful. I knew that I had been on the verge of finding something transcendental about dreaming and about the people I had seen, yet I could not bring whatever I knew into focus.

"Where were we, don Juan?" I asked. "Was it all a dream? A hypnotic state?"

"It wasn't a dream," he replied. "It was dreaming. I helped you reach the second attention so that you would understand intending as a subject not for your reason but for your energy body.

"At this point, you can't yet comprehend the importance of all this; not only because you don't have sufficient energy, but because you're not intending anything. If you were, your energy body would comprehend immediately that the only way to intend is by focusing your intent on whatever you want to intend. This time I focused it for you on reaching your energy body."

"Is the goal of dreaming to intend the energy body?" I asked, suddenly empowered by some strange reasoning.

"One can certainly put it that way," he said. "In this particular instance, since we're talking about the first gate of dreaming, the goal of dreaming is to intend that your energy body becomes aware that you are falling asleep. Don't try to force yourself to be aware of falling asleep. Let your energy body do it. To intend is to wish without wishing, to do without doing.

"Accept the challenge of intending," he went on. "Put your silent determination without a single thought into convincing yourself that you have reached your energy body, and that you are a dreamer. Doing this will automatically put you in the position to be aware that you are falling asleep."

"How can I convince myself that I am a dreamer when I am not?"

"When you hear that you have to convince yourself, you automatically become more rational. How can you convince yourself you are a dreamer when you know you are not? Intending is both: the act of convincing yourself you are indeed a dreamer, although you have never dreamt before; and the act of being convinced."

"Do you mean I have to tell myself I am a dreamer and try my best to believe it? Is that it?"

"No, it isn't. Intending is much simpler and, at the same time, infinitely more complex than that. It requires imagination, discipline, and purpose. In this case, to intend means that you get an unquestionable bodily knowledge that you are a dreamer. You feel you are a dreamer with all the cells of your body."

Don Juan added in a joking tone that he did not have sufficient energy to make me another loan for intending, and that the thing I should do was reach my energy body on my own. He assured me that intending the first gate of dreaming was one of the means discovered by the sorcerers of antiquity for reaching the second attention and the energy body.

After telling me this, he practically threw me out of his house; commanding me not to come back until I had intended the first gate of dreaming.

I returned home, and every night for months I went to sleep intending with all my might to become aware that I was falling asleep and to see my hands in my dreams. The other part of the task, to convince myself that I was a dreamer and that I had reached my energy body, was totally impossible for me.

Then, one afternoon while taking a nap, I dreamt I was looking at my hands. The shock was enough to wake me up. It proved to be a unique dream that could not be repeated. Weeks went by, and I was unable either to become aware that I was falling asleep or to find my hands. I began to notice, however, that I was having in my dreams a vague feeling that there was something I should have been doing but could not remember. This feeling became so strong that it kept on waking me up at all hours of the night.

When I told don Juan about my futile attempts to cross the first gate of dreaming, he gave me some guidelines.

"To ask a dreamer to find a determined item in his dreams is a subterfuge," he said. "The real issue is to become aware that one is falling asleep. And, strange as it may seem, that doesn't happen by commanding oneself to be aware that one is falling asleep, but by sustaining the sight of whatever one is looking at in a dream."

He told me that dreamers take quick, deliberate glances at everything present in a dream. If they focus their dreaming attention on something specific, it is only as a point of departure. From there, dreamers move on to look at other items in the dream's content; returning to the point of departure as many times as possible.

After a great effort, I indeed found hands in my dreams, but they never were mine. They were hands that only seemed to belong to me, hands that changed shape, becoming quite nightmarish at times. The rest of my dreams' content, nonetheless, was always pleasantly steady. I could almost sustain the view of anything I focused my attention on.

It went on like this for months until one day when my capacity to dream changed seemingly by itself. I had done nothing special besides my constant earnest determination to be aware that I was falling asleep and to find my hands.

I dreamt I was visiting my hometown. Not that the town I was dreaming about looked at all like my hometown, but somehow I had the conviction that it was the place where I was born. It all began as an ordinary, yet very vivid dream. Then the light in the dream changed. Images became sharper. The street where I was walking became noticeably more real than a moment before. My feet began to hurt. I could feel that things were absurdly hard. For instance, on bumping into a door, not only did I experience pain on the knee that hit the door, but I was also enraged by my clumsiness.

I realistically walked in that town until I was completely exhausted. I saw everything I could have seen had I been a tourist walking through the streets of a city. There was no difference whatsoever between that dream walk and any walk I had actually taken on the streets of a city I visited for the first time.

"I think you went a bit too far," don Juan said after listening to my account. "All that was required was your awareness of falling asleep. What you've done is equivalent to bringing a wall down just to squash a mosquito sitting on it."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that I flubbed it?"

"No. But apparently you're trying to repeat something you did before. When I made your assemblage point shift, and you and I ended up in that mysterious city, you were not asleep. You were dreaming, but not asleep; meaning that your assemblage point didn't reach that position through a normal dream. I forced it to shift.

"You certainly can reach the same position through dreaming, but I wouldn't advise you to do that at this time."

"Is it dangerous?"

"And how! Dreaming has to be a very sober affair. No false movement can be afforded. Dreaming is a process of awakening, of gaining control. Our dreaming attention must be systematically exercised because it is a door to the second attention."

"What's the difference between the dreaming attention and the second attention?"

"The second attention is like an ocean, and the dreaming attention is like a river feeding into it. The second attention is the condition of being aware of total worlds, total like our world is total, while the dreaming attention is the condition of being aware of the items of our dreams."

He heavily stressed that the dreaming attention is the key to every movement in the sorcerers' world. He said that among the multitude of items in our dreams, there exist real energetic interferencesl; things that have been put in our dreams extraneously by an alien force. To be able to find them and follow them is sorcery.

The emphasis he put on those statements was so pronounced that I had to ask him to explain them. He hesitated for a moment before answering.

"Dreams are, if not a door, a hatch into other worlds," he began. "As such, dreams are a two-way street. Our awareness goes through that hatch into other realms, and those other realms send scouts into our dreams."

"What are those scouts?"

"Energy charges that get mixed with the items of our normal dreams. They are bursts of foreign energy that come into our dreams, and we interpret them as items familiar or unfamiliar to us."

"I am sorry, don Juan, but I can't make heads or tails out of your explanation."

"You can't because you're insisting on thinking about dreams in terms known to you; as what occurs to us during normal sleep.

"And I am insisting on giving you another version: a hatch into other realms of perception. Through that hatch, currents of unfamiliar energy seep in. Then the mind or the brain or whatever takes those currents of energy and turns them into parts of our dreams."

He paused, obviously to give my mind time to take in what he was telling me.

"Sorcerers are aware of those currents of foreign energy," he continued. "They notice them and strive to isolate them from the normal items of their dreams."

"Why do they isolate them, don Juan?"

"Because they come from other realms. If we follow them to their source, they serve us as guides into areas of such mystery that sorcerers shiver at the mere mention of such a possibility."

"How do sorcerers isolate them from the normal items of their dreams?"

"By the exercise and control of their dreaming attention. At one moment, our dreaming attention discovers them among the items of a dream and focuses on them. Then the total dream collapses; leaving only the foreign energy."

Don Juan refused to explain the topic any further. He went back to discussing my dreaming experience and said that, all in all, he had to take my dream as being my first genuine attempt at dreaming; and that this meant I had succeeded in reaching the first gate of dreaming.

During another discussion at a different time, he abruptly brought up the subject again. He said, "I'm going to repeat what you must do in your dreams in order to pass the first gate of dreaming.

"First you must focus your gaze on anything of your choice as the starting point. Then shift your gaze to other items and look at them in brief glances. Focus your gaze on as many things as you can. Remember that if you glance only briefly, the images don't shift. Then go back to the item you first looked at."

"What does it mean to pass the first gate of dreaming?"

"We reach the first gate of dreaming by becoming aware that we are falling asleep, or by having, like you did, a gigantically real dream. Once we reach the gate, we must cross it by being able to sustain the sight of any item of our dreams."

"I can almost look steadily at the items of my dreams, but they dissipate too quickly."

"This is precisely what I am trying to tell you. In order to offset the evanescent [* evanescent-tending to vanish like vapor] quality of dreams, sorcerers have devised the use of the starting point item.

"Every time you isolate it and look at it, you get a surge of energy, so at the beginning don't look at too many things in your dreams. Four items will suffice. Later on, you may enlarge the scope until you can cover all you want; but as soon as the images begin to shift and you feel you are losing control, go back to your starting point item and start all over again."

"Do you believe that I really reached the first gate of dreaming, don Juan?"

"You did, and that's a lot. You'll find out, as you go along, how easy it'll be to do dreaming now."

I thought don Juan was either exaggerating or giving me incentive. But he assured me he was being on the level.

"The most astounding thing that happens to dreamers," he said, "is that on reaching the first gate, they also reach the energy body."

"What exactly is the energy body?"

"It's the counterpart of the physical body. A ghostlike configuration made of pure energy."

"But isn't the physical body also made out of energy?"

"Of course it is. The difference is that the energy body has only appearance but no mass. Since it's pure energy, it can perform acts that are beyond the possibilities of the physical body."

"Such as what for example, don Juan?"

"Such as transporting itself in one instant to the ends of the universe. And dreaming is the art of tempering the energy body; of making it supple and coherent by gradually exercising it.

"Through dreaming, we condense the energy body until it's a unit capable of perceiving. It's perception, although affected by our normal way of perceiving the daily world, is an independent perception. It has it's own sphere."

"What is that sphere, don Juan?"

"Energy. The energy body deals with energy in terms of energy. There are three ways in which it deals with energy in dreaming: it can perceive energy as it flows; or it can use energy to boost itself like a rocket into unexpected areas; or it can perceive as we ordinarily perceive the world."

"What does it mean to perceive energy as it flows?"

"It means to 'see'. It means that the energy body sees energy directly as a light; or as a vibrating current of sorts; or as a disturbance. Or it feels it directly as a jolt, or as a sensation that can even be pain."

"What about the other way you talked about, don Juan? The energy body using energy as a boost."

"Since energy is it's sphere, it is no problem for the energy body to use currents of energy that exist in the universe to propel itself. All it has to do is isolate them, and off it goes with them."

He stopped talking and seemed to be undecided as if he wanted to add something, but was not sure about it. He smiled at me, and just as I was beginning to ask him a question, he continued his explanation.

"I've mentioned to you before that sorcerers isolate in their dreams scouts from other realms," he said. "Their energy bodies do that. They recognize energy and go for it. But it isn't desirable for dreamers to indulge in searching for scouts. I was reluctant to tell you about it because of the facility with which one can get swayed by that search."

Don Juan then quickly went on to another subject. He carefully outlined for me an entire block of practices. At the time, I found that on one level it was all incomprehensible to me. Yet on another level it was perfectly logical and understandable.

He reiterated that reaching with deliberate control the first gate of dreaming is a way of arriving at the energy body. But to maintain that gain is predicated on energy alone. Sorcerers get that energy by redeploying, in a more intelligent manner, the energy they have and use for perceiving the daily world.

When I urged don Juan to explain it more clearly, he added that we all have a determined quantity of basic energy. That quantity is all the energy we have, and we normally use all of it for perceiving and dealing with our engulfing world.

He repeated various times, to emphasize it, that there is no more energy for us anywhere. And since our available energy is already engaged, there is not a single bit left in us for any extraordinary perception; such as dreaming.

"Where does that leave us?" I asked.

"It leaves us to scrounge energy for ourselves wherever we can find it," he replied.

Don Juan explained that sorcerers have a scrounging method. They intelligently redeploy their energy by cutting down anything they consider superfluous [* superfluous- serving no useful purpose; having no excuse for being] in their lives. They call this method the sorcerers' way. In essence, the sorcerers' way, as don Juan put it, is a chain of behavioral choices for dealing with the world; choices much more intelligent than those our progenitors [* progenitor- an ancestor in the direct line] taught us. These sorcerers' choices are designed to revamp our lives by altering our basic reactions about being alive.

"What are those basic reactions?" I asked.

"There are two ways of facing our being alive," he said. "One is to surrender to it, either by acquiescing to it's demands or by fighting those demands. The other is by molding our particular life situation to fit our own configurations."

"Can we really mold our life situation, don Juan?"

"One's particular life situation can be molded to fit one's specifications," don Juan insisted. "Dreamers do that. A wild statement? Not really, if you consider how little we know about ourselves."

He said that his interest as a teacher was to get me thoroughly involved with the themes of life and being alive- that is to say, with the difference between life, as a consequence of biological forces; and the act of being alive, as a matter of cognition.

"When sorcerers talk about molding one's life situation," don Juan explained, "they mean molding the awareness of being alive. Through molding this awareness, we can get enough energy to reach and sustain the energy body, and with it we can certainly mold the total direction and consequences of our lives."

Don Juan ended our conversation about dreaming by admonishing [* admonishing- counsel in terms of someone's behavior] me not merely to think about what he had told me, but to turn his concepts into a viable way of life by a process of repetition.

He claimed that everything new in our lives, such as the sorcerers' concepts he was teaching me, must be repeated to us to the point of exhaustion before we open ourselves to it. He pointed out that repetition is the way our progenitors socialized us to function in the daily world.

As I continued my dreaming practices, I gained the capability of being thoroughly aware that I was falling asleep, as well as the capability of stopping in a dream to examine at will anything that was part of that dream's content. To experience this was for me no less than miraculous.

Don Juan stated that as we tighten the control over our dreams, we tighten the mastery over our dreaming attention. He was right in saying that the dreaming attention comes into play when it is called; when it is given a purpose.

It's coming into play is not really a process as one would normally understand a process as an ongoing system of operations, or a series of actions or functions that bring about an end result.

The dreaming attention is rather an awakening. Something dormant becomes suddenly functional.

## 3. The Second Gate of Dreaming

I found out by means of my dreaming practices that a dreaming teacher must create a didactic [* didactic- instructive (especially excessively)] synthesis in order to emphasize a given point. In essence, what don Juan wanted with my first dreaming task was to exercise my dreaming attention by focusing it on the items of my dreams.

To this effect he used as a spearhead the idea of being aware of falling asleep. His subterfuge was to say that the only way to be aware of falling asleep is to examine the elements of one's dreams.

I realized, almost as soon as I had begun my dreaming practices, that exercising the dreaming attention is the essential point in dreaming. To the mind, however, it seems impossible that one can train oneself to be aware at the level of dreams.

Don Juan said that the active element of such training is persistence; and that the mind and all it's rational defenses cannot cope with persistence. Sooner or later, he said, the mind's barriers fall under persistence's impact, and the dreaming attention blooms.

As I practiced focusing and holding my dreaming attention on the items of my dreams, I began to feel a peculiar self-confidence so remarkable that I sought a comment from don Juan.

"It is your entering into the second attention that gives you that sense of self-assurance," he said. "This calls for even more sobriety on your part. Go slowly, but don't stop; and above all, don't talk about it. Just do it!"

I told him that in practice I had corroborated what he had already told me; that if one takes short glances at everything in a dream, the images do not dissolve. I commented that the difficult part is to break the initial barrier that prevents us from bringing dreams to our conscious attention.

I asked don Juan to give me his opinion on this matter because I earnestly believed that this barrier is a psychological one created by our socialization; a barrier which puts a premium on disregarding dreams.

"The barrier is more than socialization," he replied. "It's the first gate of dreaming. Now that you've overcome it, it seems stupid to you that we can't stop at will and pay attention to the items of our dreams. That's a false certainty. The first gate of dreaming has to do with the flow of energy in the universe. It's a natural obstacle."

Don Juan made me agree then that we would talk about dreaming only in the second attention and as he saw fit. He encouraged me to practice in the meantime; and he promised me no interference on his part.

As I gained proficiency in setting up dreaming, I repeatedly experienced sensations that I deemed of great importance, such as the feeling that I was rolling into a ditch just as I was falling asleep. Don Juan never told me that they were nonsensical sensations but let me record them in my notes.

I realize now how absurd I must have appeared to him. Today, if I were teaching dreaming, I would definitely discourage such a behavior. Don Juan merely made fun of me, calling me a covert egomaniac who professed to be fighting self-importance yet kept a meticulous, superpersonal diary called 'My Dreams'.

Every time he had an opportunity, don Juan pointed out that the energy needed to release our dreaming attention from it's socialization prison comes from redeploying our existing energy. Nothing could have been truer.

The emergence of our dreaming attention is a direct corollary [* corollary- a practical consequence that follows naturally] of revamping our lives. Since we have, as don Juan said, no way to plug-into any external source for a boost of energy, we must redeploy our existing energy by any means available.

Don Juan insisted that the sorcerers' way is the best means to oil, so to speak, the wheels of energy redeployment; and that of all the items in the sorcerers' way, the most effective is 'losing self-importance'.

He was thoroughly convinced that losing self-importance is indispensable for everything sorcerers do. For this reason, he put an enormous emphasis on guiding all his students to fulfill this requirement. He was of the opinion that self-importance is not only the sorcerers' supreme enemy, but the nemesis of mankind.

Don Juan's argument was that most of our energy goes into upholding our importance. This is most obvious in our endless worry about the presentation of the self; about whether or not we are admired or liked or acknowledged.

He reasoned that if we were capable of losing some of that importance, two extraordinary things would happen to us. One, we would free our energy from trying to maintain the illusory idea of our grandeur; and, two, we would provide ourselves with enough energy to enter into the second attention to catch a glimpse of the actual grandeur of the universe.

It took me more than two years to be able to focus my unwavering dreaming attention on anything I wanted. I became so proficient that I felt as if I had been doing it all my life. The eeriest part was that I could not conceive of not having had that ability.

Yet I could remember how difficult it had been even to think of this as a possibility. It occurred to me that the capability of examining the contents of one's dreams must be the product of a natural configuration of our being; similar perhaps to our capability of walking. We are physically conditioned to walk only in one manner, bipedally, yet it takes a monumental effort for us to learn to walk.

This new capacity of looking in glances at the items of my dreams was coupled with a most insistent nagging to remind myself to look at the elements of my dreams. I knew about my compulsive bent of character, but in my dreams my compulsiveness was vastly augmented. It became so noticeable that not only did I resent hearing my nagging at myself, but I also began to question whether it was really my compulsiveness or something else. I even thought I was losing my mind.

"I talk to myself endlessly in my dreams; reminding myself to look at things," I said to don Juan.

I had all along respected our agreement that we would talk about dreaming only when he brought up the subject. However, I thought that this was an emergency.

"Does it sound to you like it's not you but someone else?" he asked.

"Come to think of it, yes. I don't sound like myself at those times."

"Then it's not you. It's not time yet to explain it. But let's say that we are not alone in this world. Let's say that there are other worlds available to dreamers; total worlds.

"From those other total worlds, energetic entities sometimes come to us. The next time you hear yourself nagging at yourself in your dreams, get really angry and yell a command. Say, Stop it!"

I entered into another challenging arena: to remember in my dreams to shout that command. I believe that, perhaps, out of being so tremendously annoyed at hearing myself nagging, I did remember to shout, "Stop it." The nagging ceased instantly, and never again was repeated.

"Does every dreamer experience this?" I asked don Juan when I saw him again.

"Some do," he answered, uninterestedly.

I began to rant about how strange it had all been. He cut me off, saying, "You are ready now to get to the second gate of dreaming."

I seized the opportunity to seek answers for questions I had not been able to ask him. What I had experienced the first time he made me dream had been foremost in my mind. I told don Juan that I had observed the elements of my own dreams to my heart's content, and never had I felt anything even vaguely similar in terms of clarity and detail.

"The more I think about it," I said, "the more intriguing it becomes. Watching those people in that dream, I experienced a fear and revulsion impossible to forget. What was that feeling, don Juan?"

"In my opinion, your energy body hooked onto the foreign energy of that place and had the time of it's life. Naturally, you felt afraid and revolted. You were examining alien energy for the first time in your life.

"You have a proclivity for behaving like the sorcerers of antiquity. The moment you have the chance, you let your assemblage point go. That time your assemblage point shifted quite a distance. The result was that you, like the old sorcerers, journeyed beyond the world we know. A most real but dangerous journey."

I bypassed the meaning of his statements in favor of my own interest and asked him, "Was that city perhaps on another planet?"

"You can't explain dreaming by way of things you know or suspect you know," he said. "All I can tell you is that the city you visited was not in this world."

"Where was it, then?"

"Out of this world, of course. You're not that stupid. That was the first thing you noticed. What got you going in circles is that you can't imagine anything being out of this world."

"Where is out of this world, don Juan?"

"Believe me, the most extravagant feature of sorcery is that configuration called 'out of this world'. For instance, you assumed that I was seeing the same things you did. The proof is that you never asked me what I saw. You and only you saw a city and people in that city. I didn't see anything of the sort. I saw energy. So, out of this world was for you alone, on that occasion, a city."

"But then, don Juan, it wasn't a real city. It existed only for me in my mind."

"No. That's not the case. Now you want to reduce something transcendental [* transcendental- existing outside of or not in accordance with nature] to something mundane. [* mundane- found in the ordinary course of events] You can't do that. That journey was real. You saw it as a city. I saw it as energy. Neither of us is right or wrong."

"My confusion comes when you talk about things being real. You said before that we reached a real place. But if it was real, how can we have two versions of it?"

"Very simple. We have two versions because we had, at that time, two different rates of uniformity and cohesion. I have explained to you that those two attributes are the key to perceiving."

"Do you think that I can go back to that particular city?"

"You got me there. I don't know. Or perhaps I do know but can't explain it. Or perhaps I can explain it but I don't want to. You'll have to wait and figure out for yourself which is the case."

He refused any further discussion.

"Let's get on with our business," he said. "You reach the second gate of dreaming when you wake up from a dream into another dream. You can have as many dreams as you want or as many as you are capable of, but you must exercise adequate control and not wake up in the world we know."

I had a jolt of panic. "Are you saying that I should never wake up in this world?" I asked.

"No, I didn't mean that. But now that you have pointed it out, I have to tell you that it is an alternative. The sorcerers of antiquity used to do that; never wake up in the world we know. Some of the sorcerers of my line have done it too. It certainly can be done, but I don't recommend it. What I want is for you to wake up naturally when you are through with dreaming. But while you are dreaming, I want you to dream that you wake up in another dream."

I heard myself asking the same question I had asked the first time he told me about setting up dreaming. "But is it possible to do that?"

Don Juan obviously caught on to my mindlessness and laughingly repeated the answer he had given me before. "Of course it's possible. This control is no different from the control we have over any situation in our daily lives."

I quickly got over my embarrassment and was ready to ask more questions. Don Juan anticipated me, and began to explain facets of the second gate of dreaming; an explanation that made me yet more uneasy.

"There's one problem with the second gate," he said. "It's a problem that can be serious-depending on one's bent of character. If our tendency is to indulge in clinging to things or situations, we are in for a sock in the jaw."

"In what way, don Juan?"

"Think for a moment. You've already experienced the outlandish joy of examining your dreams' contents. Imagine yourself going from dream to dream; watching everything; examining every detail. It's very easy to realize that one may sink to mortal depths. Especially if one is given to indulging."

"Wouldn't the body or the brain naturally put a stop to it?"

"If it's a natural sleeping situation, meaning normal, yes. But this is not a normal situation. This is dreaming. A dreamer on crossing the first gate has already reached the energy body. So what is really going through the second gate, hopping from dream to dream, is the energy body."

"What's the implication of all this, don Juan?"

"The implication is that on crossing the second gate you must intend a greater and more sober control over your dreaming attention; the only safety valve for dreamers."

"What is this safety valve?"

"You will find out for yourself that the true goal of dreaming is to perfect the energy body. A perfect energy body, among other things of course, has such a control over the dreaming attention that it makes it stop when needed. This is the safety valve dreamers have. No matter how indulging they might be, at a given time, their dreaming attention must make them surface."

I started all over again on another dreaming quest. This time the goal was more elusive; and the difficulty even greater. Exactly as with my first task, I could not begin to figure out what to do. I had the discouraging suspicion that all my practice was not going to be of much help this time. After countless failures, I gave up and settled down to simply continue my practice of fixing my dreaming attention on every item of my dreams. Accepting my shortcomings seemed to give me a boost, and I became even more adept at sustaining the view of any item in my dreams.

A year went by without any change. Then one day something changed. As I was watching a window in a dream- trying to find out if I could catch a glimpse of the scenery outside the room- some windlike force, which I felt as a buzzing in my ears, pulled me through the window to the outside.

Just before that pull, my dreaming attention had been caught by a strange structure some distance away. It looked like a tractor. The next thing I knew, I was standing by it; examining it.

I was perfectly aware that I was dreaming. I looked around to find out if I could tell from what window I had been looking. The scene was that of a farm in the countryside. No buildings were in sight. I wanted to ponder this. However, the quantity of farm machinery lying around, as if abandoned, took all my attention.

I examined mowing machines, tractors, grain harvesters, disk plows, thrashers. There were so many that I forgot my original dream. What I wanted then was to orient myself by watching the immediate scenery. There was something in the distance that looked like a billboard and some telephone poles around it.

The instant I focused my attention on that billboard, I was next to it. The steel structure of the billboard gave me a fright. It was menacing. On the billboard itself was a picture of a building. I read the text. It was an advertisement for a motel. I had a peculiar certainty that I was in Oregon or northern California.

I looked for other features in the environment of my dream. I saw mountains very far away and some green, round hills not too far. On those hills were clumps of what I thought were California oak trees. I wanted to be pulled by the green hills, but what pulled me were the distant mountains. I was convinced that they were the Sierras.

All my dreaming energy left me on those mountains. But before it did, I was pulled by every possible feature. My dream ceased to be a dream. As far as my capacity to perceive was concerned, I was veritably in the Sierras, zooming into ravines, boulders, trees, caves. I went from scarp faces to mountain peaks until I had no more drive and could not focus my dreaming attention on anything. I felt myself losing control. Finally, there was no more scenery, just darkness.

"You have reached the second gate of dreaming," don Juan said when I narrated my dream to him. "What you should do next is to cross it. Crossing the second gate is a very serious affair. It requires a most disciplined effort."

I was not sure I had fulfilled the task he outlined for me because I had not really woken up in another dream. I asked don Juan about this irregularity.

"The mistake was mine," he said. "I told you that one has to wake up in another dream, but what I meant is that one has to change dreams in an orderly and precise manner, the way you have done it.

"With the first gate, you wasted a lot of time looking exclusively for your hands. This time, you went directly to the solution without bothering to follow the given command of waking up in another dream."

Don Juan said that there are two ways of properly crossing the second gate of dreaming.

One is to wake up in another dream, that is to say, to dream that one is having a dream, and then dream that one wakes up from it.

The alternative is to use the items of a dream to trigger another dream; exactly as I had done.

Just as he had been doing all along, don Juan let me practice without any interference on his part; and I corroborated the two alternatives he described. Either I dreamt that I was having a dream from which I dreamt I woke up, or I zoomed from a definite item accessible to my immediate dreaming attention to another one not quite accessible.

Or I entered into a slight variation of the second: I gazed at any item of a dream, maintaining the gaze until the item changed shape, and by changing shape it pulled me into another dream through a buzzing vortex. Never was I capable, however, of deciding beforehand which of the three I would follow.

My dreaming practices always ended by my running out of dreaming attention, and by my finally waking up, or by my falling into dark, deep slumber.

Everything went smoothly in my practices. The only disturbance I had was a peculiar interference; a jolt of fear or discomfort I had begun to experience with increasing frequency.

My way of discarding it was to believe that it was related to my ghastly eating habits; or to the fact that, in those days, don Juan was giving me a profusion of hallucinogenic plants as part of my training. Those jolts became so prominent, however, that I had to ask don Juan's advice.

"You have entered now into the most dangerous facet of the sorcerers' knowledge," he began. "It is sheer dread; a veritable nightmare. I could joke with you and say that I didn't mention this possibility to you out of regard for your cherished rationality, but I can't. Every sorcerer has to face it. Here is where, I fear, you might very well think you're going off the deep end."

Don Juan very solemnly explained that life and consciousness, being exclusively a matter of energy, are not solely the property of organisms. He said that sorcerers have seen that there are two types of conscious beings roaming the earth: the organic and the inorganic.

In comparing one with the other, sorcerers have seen that both are luminous masses crossed from every imaginable angle by millions of the universe's energy filaments. They are different from each other in their shape and in their degree of brightness.

Inorganic beings are long and candlelike but opaque; whereas organic beings are round and by far the brighter. Another noteworthy difference, which don Juan said sorcerers have seen, is that the life and consciousness of organic beings is short-lived because they are made to hurry; whereas the life of inorganic beings is infinitely longer, and their consciousness infinitely more calm and deeper.

"Sorcerers find no problem interacting with them," don Juan went on. "Inorganic beings possess the crucial ingredient for interaction; consciousness."

"But do these inorganic beings really exist? Like you and I exist?" I asked.

"Of course they do," he replied. "Believe me, sorcerers are very intelligent creatures. Under no condition would they toy with aberrations of the mind, and then take them for real."

"Why do you say they are alive?"

"For sorcerers, having life means having consciousness. It means having an assemblage point and it's surrounding glow of awareness; a condition that points out to sorcerers that the being in front of them, organic or inorganic, is thoroughly capable of perceiving. Perceiving is understood by sorcerers as the precondition of being alive."

"Then the inorganic beings must also die. Is that true, don Juan?"

"Naturally. They lose their awareness just like we do, except that the length of their consciousness is staggering to the mind."

"Do these inorganic beings appear to sorcerers?"

"It's very difficult to tell what is what with them. Let's say that those beings are enticed by us; or better yet, compelled to interact with us."

Don Juan peered at me most intently. "You're not taking in any of this at all," he said with the tone of someone who has reached a conclusion.

"It's nearly impossible for me to think about this rationally," I said.

"I warned you that the subject will tax your reason. The proper thing to do then is to suspend judgment and let things take their course; meaning that you let the inorganic beings come to you."

"Are you serious, don Juan?"

"Deadly serious. The difficulty with inorganic beings is that their awareness is very slow in comparison with ours. It will take years for a sorcerer to be acknowledged by inorganic beings. So, it is advisable to have patience and wait. Sooner or later they show up, but not like you or I would show up. Theirs is a most peculiar way to make themselves known."

"How do sorcerers entice them? Do they have a ritual?"

"Well, they certainly don't stand in the middle of the road and call out to them with trembling voices at the stroke of midnight, if that's what you mean."

"What do they do then?"

"They entice them in dreaming. I said that what's involved is more than enticing them. By the act of dreaming, sorcerers compel those beings to interact with them."

"How do sorcerers compel them by the act of dreaming?"

"Dreaming is sustaining the position where the assemblage point has shifted in dreams. This act creates a distinctive energy charge which attracts their attention. It's like bait to fish: They'll go for it. Sorcerers, by reaching and crossing the first two gates of dreaming, set bait for those beings and compel them to appear.

"By going through the two gates, you have made your bidding known to them. Now, you must wait for a sign from them."

"What would the sign be, don Juan?"

"Possibly the appearance of one of them, although that seems too soon. I am of the opinion that their sign will be simply some interference in your dreaming. I believe that the jolts of fear you are experiencing nowadays are not indigestion, but energy jolts sent to you by the inorganic beings."

"What should I do?"

"You must gauge your expectations."

I could not understand what he meant. He carefully explained that our normal expectation when engaging in interaction with our fellow men, or with other organic beings, is to get an immediate reply to our solicitation.

With inorganic beings, however, since they are separated from us by a most formidable barrier- energy that moves at a different speed- sorcerers must gauge their expectations and sustain the solicitation for as long as it takes to be acknowledged.

"Do you mean, don Juan, that the solicitation is the same as the dreaming practices?"

"Yes. But for a perfect result, you must add to your practices the intent of reaching those inorganic beings. Send a feeling of power and confidence to them; a feeling of strength; of detachment.

"Avoid, at any cost, sending a feeling of fear or morbidity. They are pretty morbid by themselves. To add your morbidity to them is unnecessary, to say the least."

"I'm not clear, don Juan, about the way they appear to sorcerers. What is the peculiar way they make themselves known?"

"They do, at times, materialize themselves in the daily world right in front of us. Most of the time, though, their invisible presence is marked by a bodily jolt; a shiver of sorts that comes from the marrow of the bones."

"What about in dreaming, don Juan?"

"In dreaming we have the total opposite. At times, we feel them the way you are feeling them; as a jolt of fear. Most of the time, they materialize themselves right in front of us. Since at the beginning of dreaming we have no experience whatsoever with them, they might imbue us with fear beyond measure. That is a real danger to us. Through the channel of fear, they can follow us to the daily world- with disastrous results for us."

"In what way, don Juan?"

"Fear can settle down in our lives, and we would have to be mavericks to deal with it. Inorganic beings can be worse than a pest. Through fear they can easily drive us raving mad."

"What do sorcerers do with inorganic beings?"

"They mingle with them. They turn them into allies. They form associations; create extraordinary friendships. I call them vast enterprises where perception plays the uppermost role. We are social beings. We unavoidably seek the company of consciousness.

"With inorganic beings, the secret is not to fear them. And this must be done from the beginning.

"The intent one has to send out to them has to be of power and abandon. In that intent one must encode the message "I don't fear you. Come to see me. If you do, I'll welcome you. If you don't want to come, I'll miss you." With a message like this, they'll get so curious that they'll come for sure."

"Why should they come to seek me, or why on earth should I seek them?"

"Dreamers, whether they like it or not, in their dreaming seek associations with other beings. This may come to you as a shock, but dreamers automatically seek groups of beings; nexuses [* nexuses- connected series or groups] of inorganic beings in this case. Dreamers seek them avidly."

"This is very strange to me, don Juan. Why would dreamers do that?"

"The novelty for us is the inorganic beings. And the novelty for them is one of our kind crossing the boundaries of their realm. The thing you must bear in mind from now on is that inorganic beings, with their superb consciousness, exert a tremendous pull over dreamers and can easily transport them into worlds beyond description.

"The sorcerers of antiquity used them, and they are the ones who coined the name 'allies'. Their allies taught them to move the assemblage point out of the egg's boundaries into the non-human universe. So when they transport a sorcerer, they transport him to worlds beyond the human domain."

As I heard him talk, I was plagued by strange fears and misgivings; which don Juan promptly realized.

"You are a religious man to the end." He laughed. "Now, you're feeling the devil breathing down your neck. Think about dreaming in these terms: Dreaming is perceiving more than what we believe it is possible to perceive."

In my waking hours, I worried about the possibility that inorganic conscious beings really existed. When I was dreaming, however, my conscious worries did not have much effect. The jolts of physical fear continued, but whenever they happened a strange calmness always trailed behind; a calmness that took control of me and let me proceed as if I had no fear at all.

It seemed at that time that every breakthrough in dreaming happened to me suddenly; without warning. The presence of inorganic beings in my dreams was no exception.

It happened while I was dreaming about a circus I knew in my childhood. The setting looked like a town in the mountains in Arizona. I began to watch people with the vague hope I always had that I would see again the people I had seen the first time don Juan made me enter into the second attention.

As I watched them, I felt a sizable jolt of nervousness in the pit of my stomach. It was like a punch. The jolt distracted me, and I lost sight of the people, the circus, and the mountain town in Arizona.

In their place stood two strange-looking figures. They were thin, less than a foot wide, but long, perhaps seven feet. They were looming over me like two gigantic earthworms.

I knew that it was a dream, but I also knew that I was seeing.

Don Juan had discussed seeing in my normal awareness and in the second attention as well. Although I had been incapable of experiencing it myself, I thought I had understood the idea of directly perceiving energy.

In that dream, looking at those two strange apparitions, I realized that I was seeing the energy essence of something unbelievable.

I remained very calm. I did not move. The most remarkable thing to me was that they didn't dissolve or change into something else. They were cohesive beings that retained their candlelike shape. Something in them was forcing something in me to hold the view of their shape. I knew it because something was telling me that if I did not move, they would not move either.

It all came to an end, at a given moment, when I woke up with a fright. I was immediately besieged by fears. A deep preoccupation took hold of me. It was not psychological worry, but rather a bodily sense of anguish and sadness with no apparent foundation.

The two strange shapes appeared to me from then on in every one of my dreaming sessions. Eventually, it was as if I dreamt only to encounter them. They never attempted to move toward me or to interfere with me in any way.

They just stood there immobile in front of me for as long as my dream lasted. Not only did I never make any effort to change my dreams, but I even forgot the original quest of my dreaming practices.

When I finally discussed with don Juan what was happening to me, I had spent months solely viewing the two shapes.

"You are stuck at a dangerous crossroad," don Juan said. "It isn't right to chase these beings away, but it isn't right either to let them stay. For the time being, their presence is a hindrance to your dreaming."

"What can I do, don Juan?"

"Face them, right now, in the world of daily life, and tell them to come back later when you have more dreaming power."

"How do I face them?"

"It's not simple, but it can be done. It requires only that you have enough guts, which of course you do."

Without waiting for me to tell him that I had no guts at all, he took me to the hills. He lived then in northern Mexico, and he had given me the total impression he was a solitary sorcerer; an old man forgotten by everybody and completely outside the main current of human affairs.

I had surmised, however, that he was intelligent beyond measure. And because of this I was willing to comply with what I half-believed were mere eccentricities.

The cunningness of sorcerers, cultivated through the ages, was don Juan's trademark. He made sure that I understood all I could in my normal awareness; and he also made sure that I entered into the second attention where I understood, or at least passionately listened to, everything he taught me.

In this fashion, he divided me in two. In my normal consciousness, I could not understand why or how I was more than willing to take his eccentricities seriously. In the second attention, it all made sense to me.

His contention was that the second attention is available to all of us. But by willfully holding on to our half-cocked rationality- some of us more fiercely than others- we keep the second attention at arm's length. His idea was that dreaming brings down the barriers that surround and insulate the second attention.

The day he took me to the hills of the Sonoran desert to meet the inorganic beings, I was in my normal state of awareness. Yet somehow I knew I had to do something that was certainly going to be unbelievable.

It had rained lightly in the desert. The red dirt was still wet, and as I walked it got clumped up in the rubber soles of my shoes. I had to step on rocks to remove the heavy chunks of dirt. We walked in an easterly direction climbing toward the hills. When we got to a narrow gully between two hills, don Juan stopped.

"This is for sure an ideal place to summon your friends," he said.

"Why do you call them my friends?"

"They have singled you out themselves. When they do that, it means that they seek an association. I've mentioned to you that sorcerers form bonds of friendship with them. Your case seems to be an example. And you don't even have to solicit them."

"What does such a friendship consist of, don Juan?"

"It consists of a mutual exchange of energy. The inorganic beings supply their high awareness, and sorcerers supply their heightened awareness and high energy. The positive result is an even exchange. The negative one is dependency on both parties.

"The old sorcerers used to love their allies. In fact, they loved their allies more than they loved their own kind. I can foresee terrible dangers in that."

"What do you recommend I do, don Juan?"

"Summon them. Size them up, and then decide yourself what to do."

"What should I do to summon them?"

"Hold your dream view of them in your mind. The reason they have saturated you with their presence in your dreams is that they want to create a memory of their shape in your mind. And this is the time to use that memory." Don Juan forcefully ordered me to close my eyes and keep them closed.

Then he guided me to sit down on some rocks. I felt the hardness and the coldness of the rocks. The rocks were slanted; it was difficult to keep my balance.

"Sit here and visualize their shape until they are just like they are in your dreams," don Juan said in my ear. "Let me know when you have them in focus."

It took me very little time and effort to have a complete mental picture of their shape just like in my dreams. It did not surprise me at all that I could do it.

What shocked me was that, although I tried desperately to let don Juan know I had pictured them in my mind, I could not voice my words or open my eyes. I was definitely awake. I could hear everything.

I heard don Juan say, "You can open your eyes now."

I opened them with no difficulty. I was sitting cross-legged on some rocks, which were not the same ones I had felt under me when I sat down. Don Juan was just behind me to my right. I tried to turn around to face him, but he forced my head to remain straight.

And then I saw two dark figures, like two thin tree trunks, right in front of me. I stared at them openmouthed.

They were not as tall as in my dreams. They had shrunk to half their size. Instead of being shapes of opaque luminosity, they were now two condensed, dark, almost black, menacing sticks.

"Get up and grab one of them," don Juan ordered me, "and don't let go, no matter how it shakes you."

I definitely did not want to do anything of the sort, but some unknown drive made me stand up against my will. I had at that moment the clear realization that I would end up doing what don Juan had ordered me to- although I had no conscious intention of doing so.

Mechanically, I advanced toward the two figures, my heart pounding nearly out of my chest. I grabbed the one to my right. What I felt was an electric discharge that almost made me drop the dark figure.

Don Juan's voice came to me as if he had been yelling from a distance away. "You drop it and you're done for," he said.

I held on to the figure, which twirled and shook; not like a massive animal would, but like something quite fluffy and light, although strongly electrical. We rolled and turned on the sand of the gully for quite some time. It gave me jolt after jolt of some sickening electric current.

I thought it was sickening because I fancied it to be different from the energy I had always encountered in our daily world. When it hit my body, it tickled me and made me yell and growl like an animal; not in anguish, but in a strange anger.

It finally became a still, almost solid form under me. It lay inert. I asked don Juan if it was dead, but I did not hear my voice.

"Not a chance," said someone laughing; someone who was not don Juan. "You've just depleted it's energy charge. But don't get up yet. Lie there just a moment longer."

I looked at don Juan with a question in my eyes. He was examining me with great curiosity. Then he helped me up. The dark figure remained on the ground. I wanted to ask don Juan if the dark figure was all right. Again, I could not voice my question.

Then I did something extravagant. I took it all for real. Up to that moment something in my mind was preserving my rationality by taking what was happening as a dream; a dream induced by don Juan's machinations.

I went to the figure on the ground and tried to lift it up. I could not put my arms around it because it had no mass. I became disoriented. The same voice, which was not don Juan's, told me to lie down on top of the inorganic being. I did it, and both of us got up in one motion, the inorganic being like a dark shadow attached to me. It gently separated from me and disappeared, leaving me with an extremely pleasant feeling of completeness.

It took me more than twenty-four hours to regain total control of my faculties. I slept most of the time. Don Juan checked me from time to time by asking me the same question, "Was the inorganic being's energy like fire or like water?"

My throat seemed scorched. I could not tell him that the energy jolts I had felt were like jets of electrified water. I have never felt jets of electrified water in my life. I am not sure if it is possible to produce them or to feel them; but that was the image playing in my mind every time don Juan asked his key question.

Don Juan was asleep when I finally knew I was completely recovered. Knowing that his question was of great importance, I woke him up and told him what I had felt.

"You are not going to have helping friends among the inorganic beings, but raather relationships of annoying dependence," he stated. "Be extremely careful. Watery inorganic beings are more given to excesses.

"The old sorcerers believed that the watery inorganic beings were more loving, more capable of imitating, or perhaps were even capable of having feelings- as opposed to the fiery ones, who were thought to be more serious and more contained, but also more pompous."

"What's the meaning of all this for me, don Juan?"

"The meaning is too vast to discuss at this time. My recommendation is that you vanquish fear from your dreams and from your life in order to safeguard your unity. The inorganic being you depleted of energy and then recharged again was thrilled out of it's candlelike shape with it. It'll come to you for more."

"Why didn't you stop me, don Juan?"

"You didn't give me time. Besides, you didn't even hear me shouting at you to leave the inorganic being on the ground."

"You should have lectured me beforehand the way you always do about all the possibilities."

"I didn't know all the possibilities. In matters of the inorganic beings, I am nearly a novice. I refused that part of the sorcerers' knowledge on the ground that it is too cumbersome and capricious. [* capricious- changeable: determined by chance or impulse or whim rather than by necessity or reason] I don't want to be at the mercy of any entity, organic or inorganic."

That was the end of our exchange. I should have been worried because of his definitely negative reaction, but I was not. I somehow was certain that whatever I had done was all right.

I continued my dreaming practices without any interference from the inorganic beings.

## 4. The Fixation of the Assemblage Point

Since our agreement had been to discuss dreaming only when don Juan considered it necessary, I rarely asked him about it and never insisted on continuing my questions beyond a certain point. I was more than eager, therefore, to listen to him whenever he decided to take up the subject. His comments or discussions on dreaming were invariably cushioned in other topics of his teachings, and they were always suddenly and abruptly brought in.

We were engaged in some unrelated conversation once while I was visiting with him in his house, when without any preamble he said that, by means of their dreaming contacts with inorganic beings, the old sorcerers became immensely well-versed in the manipulation of the assemblage point; a vast and ominous subject.

I immediately grabbed the opportunity and asked don Juan for an estimate of the time when the old sorcerers might have lived. At various opportunities before, I had asked the same question, but he never gave me a satisfactory answer. I was confident, however, that at the moment, perhaps because he had brought up the subject himself, he might be willing to oblige me.

"A most trying subject," he said. The way he said it made me believe he was discarding my question. I was quite surprised when he continued talking. "It'll tax your rationality as much as the topic of inorganic beings. By the way, what do you think about them now?"

"I have let my opinions rest," I said. "I can't afford to think one way or another."

My answer delighted him. He laughed and commented on his own fears of and aversions to the inorganic beings.

"They have never been my cup of tea," he said. "Of course, the main reason was my fear of them. I was unable to get over it when I had to, and then it became fixed."

"Do you fear them now, don Juan?"

"It's not quite fear I feel but revulsion. I don't want any part of them."

"Is there any particular reason for this revulsion?"

"The best reason in the world: we are antithetical. [* antithetical- sharply contrasted in character or purpose] They love slavery, and I love freedom. They love to buy, and I don't sell."

I became inexplicably agitated and brusquely told him that the subject was so farfetched for me that I could not take it seriously.

He stared at me, smiling, and said, "The best thing to do with inorganic beings is what you do: deny their existence, but visit with them regularly and maintain that you are dreaming; and that in dreaming anything is possible. This way you don't commit yourself."

I felt strangely guilty, although I could not figure out why. I felt compelled to ask, "What are you referring to, don Juan?"

"To your visits with the inorganic beings," he replied dryly.

"Are you kidding? What visits?"

"I didn't want to discuss this, but I think it's time I tell you that the nagging voice you heard, reminding you to fix your dreaming attention on the items of your dreams, was the voice of an inorganic being."

I thought don Juan was completely irrational. I became so irritated that I even yelled at him.

He laughed at me and asked me to tell him about my irregular dreaming sessions. That request surprised me. I had never mentioned to anyone that every so often I used to zoom out of a dream, pulled by a given item, but instead of my changing dreams, as I should have, the total mood of the dream changed and I would find myself in a dimension unknown to me.

I soared in it, directed by some invisible guide, which made me twirl around and around. I always awoke from one of these dreams still twirling, and I continued tossing and turning for a long time before I fully woke up.

"Those are bona fide meetings you are having with your inorganic being friends," don Juan said.

I did not want to argue with him, but neither did I want to agree. I remained silent. I had forgotten my question about the old sorcerers, but don Juan picked up the subject again.

"My understanding is that the old sorcerers existed perhaps as far back as ten thousand years ago," he said, smiling and watching my reaction.

Basing my response on current archaeological data on the migration of Asiatic nomadic tribes to the Americas, I said that I believed his date was incorrect. Ten thousand years was too far back.

"You have your knowledge and I have mine," he said. "My knowledge is that the old sorcerers ruled for four thousand years, from seven thousand to three thousand years ago. Three thousand years ago, they went to nothing. And from then on, sorcerers have been regrouping and restructuring what was left of the old ones."

"How can you be so sure about your dates?" I asked.

"How can you be so sure about yours?" he retorted.

I told him that archaeologists have foolproof methods to establish the date of past cultures. Again he retorted that sorcerers have foolproof methods of their own.

"I'm not trying to be contrary or argue you down," he continued, "but someday soon you may be able to ask someone who knows for sure."

"No one can know this for sure, don Juan."

"This is another of those impossible things to believe, but there is somebody who can verify all this. You'll meet that person someday."

"Come on, don Juan, you've got to be joking. Who can verify, what happened seven thousand years ago?"

"Very simple, one of the old sorcerers we've been talking about. The one I met. He's the one who told me all about the old sorcerers. I hope you remember what I am going to tell you about that particular man. He is the key to many of our endeavors, and he's also the one you have to meet."

I told don Juan that I was hanging on every word he said, even though I did not understand what he was saying. He accused me of humoring him, and of not believing a word about the old sorcerers. I admitted that in my state of daily consciousness, of course, I had not believed those farfetched stories. But neither had I in the second attention, although there I should have had a different reaction.

"Only when you ponder what I said does it become a farfetched story," he remarked. "If you don't involve your common sense, it remains purely a matter of energy."

"Why did you say, don Juan, that I am going to meet one of the old sorcerers?"

"Because you are. It is vital that the two of you meet someday. But, for the moment, just let me tell you another farfetched story about one of the naguals of my line, the nagual Sebastian."

Don Juan told me then that the nagual Sebastian had been a sexton [* sexton- an officer of the church who is in charge of sacred objects] in a church in southern Mexico around the beginning of the eighteenth century.

In his account, don Juan stressed how sorcerers, past or present, seek and find refuge in established institutions, such as the Church. It was his idea that because of their superior discipline, sorcerers are trustworthy employees, and that they are avidly sought by institutions that are always in dire need of such persons. Don Juan maintained that as long as no one is aware of the sorcerers' doings, their lack of ideological sympathies makes them appear as model workers.

Don Juan continued his story and said that one day while Sebastian was performing his duties as a sexton, a strange man came to the church; an old Indian who seemed to be ill. In a weak voice he told Sebastian that he needed help. The nagual thought that the Indian wanted the parish priest, but the man, making a great effort, addressed the nagual. In a harsh and direct tone, he told him that he knew that Sebastian was not only a sorcerer but a nagual.

Sebastian, quite alarmed by this sudden turn of events, pulled the Indian aside and demanded an apology. The man replied that he was not there to apologize, but to get specialized help. He needed, he said, to receive the nagual's energy in order to maintain his life, which, he assured Sebastian, had spanned thousands of years but at the moment was ebbing away.

Sebastian, who was a very intelligent man, unwilling to pay attention to such nonsense, urged the Indian to stop clowning around. The old man became angry and threatened Sebastian with exposing him and his group to the ecclesiastical [* ecclesiastical- of or associated with a church] authorities if he did not comply with his request.

Don Juan reminded me that those were the times when the ecclesiastical authorities were brutally and systematically eradicating heretical practices among the Indians of the New Worlds. The man's threat was not something to be taken lightly. The nagual and his group were indeed in mortal danger.

Sebastian asked the Indian how he could give him energy. The man explained that naguals, by means of their discipline, gain a peculiar energy that they store in their bodies and that he would get it painlessly from Sebastian's energy center on his navel. In return for it, Sebastian would get not only the opportunity to continue his activities unscathed, but also a gift of power.

The knowledge that he was being manipulated by the old Indian did not sit right with the nagual, but the man was inflexible and the old Indian left him no alternative but to comply with his request.

Don Juan assured me that the old Indian was not exaggerating about his claims at all. He turned out to be one of the sorcerers of ancient times; one of those known as the death defiers. He had apparently survived to the present by manipulating his assemblage point in ways that only he knew about.

Don Juan said that what transpired between Sebastian and that man later became the ground for an agreement that had bound all six naguals who followed Sebastian. The death defier kept his word; in exchange for energy from every one of those naguals, he made a donation to the giver; a gift of power. Sebastian had to accept such a gift, although reluctantly; he had been cornered and had no other choice. All the other naguals who followed him, however, gladly and proudly accepted their gifts.

Don Juan concluded his story, saying that over time the death defier came to be known as the tenant. And for over two hundred years, the naguals of don Juan's line honored that binding agreement; creating a symbiotic relationship that changed the course and final goal of their lineage.

Don Juan did not care to explain the story any further, and I was left with a strange sensation of truthfulness, which was more bothersome to me than I could have imagined.

"How did he get to live that long?" I asked.

"No one knows," don Juan replied. "All we've known about him, for generations, is what he tells us. The death defier is the one I asked about the old sorcerers, and he told me that they were at their peak three thousand years ago."

"How do you know he was telling you the truth?" I asked.

Don Juan shook his head in amazement, if not revulsion. "When you're facing that inconceivable unknown out there," he said, pointing all around him, "you don't fool around with petty lies. Petty lies are only for people who have never witnessed what's out there waiting for them."

"What's waiting for us out there, don Juan?"

His answer, a seemingly innocuous phrase, was more terrifying to me than if he had described the most horrendous thing.

"Something utterly impersonal," he said. He must have noticed that I was coming apart. He made me change levels of awareness to make my fright vanish.

A few months later, my dreaming practices took a strange turn. I began to get, in my dreams, replies to questions I was planning to ask don Juan. The most impressive part of this oddity was that it quickly lapsed into my waking hours.

One day, while I was sitting at my desk, I got a reply to an unvoiced question about the realness of inorganic beings. I had seen inorganic beings in dreams so many times I had begun to think of them as real. I reminded myself I had even touched one, in a state of seminormal consciousness in the Sonoran desert. And my dreams had been periodically deviated to views of worlds I seriously doubted could have been products of my mentality.

I wished to give don Juan my best shot, in terms of a concise query, so I molded a question in my mind: If one is to accept that inorganic beings are as real as people, where, in the physicality of the universe, is the realm in which they exist?

After formulating the question to myself, I heard a strange laughter, just as I had the day I wrestled with the inorganic being. Then a man's voice answered me. "That realm exists in a particular position of the assemblage point," it said. "Just like your world exists in the habitual position of the assemblage point."

The last thing I wanted was to enter into a dialogue with a disembodied voice, so I stood up and ran out of my house. The thought occurred to me that I was losing my mind. Another worry to add to my collection of worries.

The voice had been so clear and authoritative that it not only intrigued me but terrified me. I waited with great trepidation for oncoming barrages of that voice, but the event was never repeated. At the first opportunity I had, I consulted with don Juan.

He was not impressed in the least.

"You must understand, once and for all, that things like this are very normal in the life of a sorcerer," he said. "You are not going mad. You are simply hearing the voice of the dreaming emissary. Upon crossing the first or second gate of dreaming, dreamers reach a threshold of energy and begin to see things or to hear voices. Not really plural voices, but a singular voice. Sorcerers call it the voice of the dreaming emissary."

"What is the dreaming emissary?"

"Alien energy that has conciseness. Alien energy that purports to aid dreamers by telling them things. The problem with the dreaming emissary is that it can tell only what the sorcerers already know or should know, were they worth their salt."

"To say that it's alien energy that has conciseness doesn't help me at all, don Juan. What kind of energy- benign, malignant, right, wrong, what?"

"It's just what I said, alien energy. An impersonal force that we turn into a very personal one because it has voice. Some sorcerers swear by it. They even see it. Or, as you yourself have done, they simply hear it as a man's or a woman's voice. And the voice can tell them about the state of things, which most of the time they take as sacred advice."

"Why do some of us hear it as a voice?"

"We see it or hear it because we maintain our assemblage points fixed on a specific new position. The more intense this fixation, the more intense our experience of the emissary. Watch out! You may see it and feel it as a naked woman."

Don Juan laughed at his own remark, but I was too scared for levity.

"Is this force capable of materializing itself?" I asked.

"Certainly," he replied. "And it all depends on how fixed the assemblage point is. But, rest assured, if you are capable of maintaining a degree of detachment, nothing happens. The emissary remains what it is: an impersonal force that acts on us because of the fixation of our assemblage points."

"Is it's advice safe and sound?"

"It cannot be advice. It only tells us what's what, and then we draw the inferences ourselves."

I told don Juan then about what the voice had said to me.

"It's just like I said," don Juan remarked. "The emissary didn't tell you anything new. It's statements were correct, but it only seemed to be revealing things to you. What the emissary did was merely repeat what you already knew."

"I'm afraid I can't claim that I knew all that, don Juan."

"Yes, you can. You know now infinitely more about the mystery of the universe than what you rationally suspect. But that's our human malady, to know more about the mystery of the universe than we suspect."

Having experienced this incredible phenomenon all by myself without don Juan's coaching made me feel elated. I wanted more information about the emissary. I began to ask don Juan whether he also heard the emissary's voice.

He interrupted me and with a broad smile said, "Yes, yes. The emissary also talks to me. In my youth I used to see it as a friar with a black cowl. A talking friar who used to scare the daylights out of me every time. Then, when my fear was more manageable, it became a disembodied voice which tells me things to this day."

"What kinds of things, don Juan?"

"Anything I focus my intent on; things I don't want to take the trouble of following up myself. Like, for example, details about the behavior of my apprentices. What they do when I am not around. It tells me things about you, in particular. The emissary tells me everything you do."

At that point, I really did not care for the direction our conversation had taken. I frantically searched my mind for questions about other topics while he roared with laughter.

"Is the dreaming emissary an inorganic being?" I asked.

"Let's say that the dreaming emissary is a force that comes from the realm of inorganic beings. This is the reason dreamers always encounter it."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that every dreamer hears or sees the emissary?"

"Everyone hears the emissary. Very few see it or feel it."

"Do you have any explanation for this?"

"No. Besides, I really don't care about the emissary. At one point in my life, I had to make a decision whether to concentrate on the inorganic beings and follow in the footsteps of the old sorcerers, or to refuse it all. My teacher the nagual Julian helped me make up my mind to refuse it. I've never regretted that decision."

"Do you think I should refuse the inorganic beings myself, don Juan?"

He did not answer me. Instead, he explained that the whole realm of inorganic beings is always poised to teach. Perhaps because inorganic beings have a deeper consciousness than ours, they feel compelled to take us under their wings.

"I didn't see any point in becoming their pupil," he added. "Their price is too high."

"What is their price?"

"Our lives, our energy, our devotion to them. In other words, our freedom."

"But what do they teach?"

"Things pertinent to their world. The same way we ourselves would teach them, if we were capable of teaching them, things pertinent to our world. Their method, however, is to take our basic self as a gauge of what we need and then teach us accordingly. A most dangerous affair!"

"I don't see why it would be dangerous."

"If someone was going to take your basic self as a gauge, with all your fears and greed and envy, et cetera, et cetera, and teach you what fulfills that horrible state of being, what do you think the result would be?"

I had no comeback. I thought I understood perfectly well the reasons for his rejection.

"The problem with the old sorcerers was that they learned wonderful things, but it was on the basis of their unadulterated lower selves," don Juan went on. "The inorganic beings became their allies, and by means of deliberate examples, their allies taught the old sorcerers marvels. Their allies performed the actions, and the old sorcerers were guided step by step to copy those actions; but the old sorcerers did so without changing anything about their basic nature."

"Do these relationships with inorganic beings exist today?"

"I can't answer that truthfully. All I can say is that I can't conceive of having a relationship like that myself. Involvements of this nature curtail our search for freedom by consuming all our available energy. In order to really follow their allies' example, the old sorcerers had to spend their lives in the realm of the inorganic beings. The amount of energy needed to accomplish such a sustained journey is staggering."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that the old sorcerers were able to exist in those realms like we exist here?"

"Not quite like we exist here, but certainly they lived: They retained their awareness; their individuality. The dreaming emissary became the most vital entity for those sorcerers. If a sorcerer wants to live in the realm of the inorganic beings, the emissary is the perfect bridge. It speaks, and it's bent is to teach; to guide."

"Have you ever been in that realm, don Juan?"

"Countless times. And so have you. But there is no point in talking about it now. You haven't cleared all the debris from your dreaming attention yet. We'll talk about that realm some day."

"Do I gather, don Juan, that you don't approve of or like the emissary?"

"I neither approve of it nor like it. It belongs to another mood; the old sorcerers' mood. Besides, it's teachings and guidance in our world are nonsense. And for that nonsense the emissary charges us enormities in terms of energy. One day you will agree with me. You'll see."

In the tone of don Juan's words, I caught a veiled implication of his belief that I disagreed with him about the emissary. I was about to confront him with it when I heard the emissary's voice in my ears.

"He's right," the voice said. "You like me because you find nothing wrong with exploring all possibilities. You want knowledge: Knowledge is power. You don't want to remain safe in the routines and beliefs of your daily world."

The emissary said all that in English with a marked Pacific Coast intonation. Then it shifted into Spanish. I heard a slight Argentine accent. I had never heard the emissary speaking like this before. It fascinated me. The emissary told me about fulfillment; knowledge; about how far away I was from my birthplace; about my craving for adventure and my near obsession with new things; new horizons. The voice even talked to me in Portuguese with a definite inflection from the southern pampas.

To hear that voice pouring out all this flattery not only scared me, but nauseated me. I told don Juan, right on the spot, that I had to stop my dreaming training. He looked up at me, caught by surprise. But when I repeated what I had heard, he agreed I should stop, although I sensed he was doing it only to appease me.

A few weeks later, I found my reaction a bit hysterical, and my decision to withdraw unsound. I went back to my dreaming practices. I was sure don Juan was aware that I had canceled out my withdrawal.

On one of my visits to him, quite abruptly, he spoke about dreams.

"Just because we haven't been taught to emphasize dreams as a genuine field for exploration doesn't mean they are not one," he began. "Dreams are analyzed for their meaning or are taken as portents, but never are they taken as a realm of real events."

"To my knowledge, only the old sorcerers did that," don Juan went on, "but at the end they flubbed it. They got greedy, and when they came to a crucial crossroads, they took the wrong fork. They put all their eggs in one basket: the fixation of the assemblage point on the thousands of positions it can adopt."

Don Juan expressed his bewilderment at the fact that out of all the marvelous things the old sorcerers learned exploring those thousands of positions, only the art of dreaming and the art of stalking remain. He reiterated that the art of dreaming is concerned with the displacement of the assemblage point. Then he defined stalking as the art that deals with the fixation of the assemblage point on any location to which it is displaced.

"To fixate the assemblage point on any new spot means to acquire cohesion," he said. "You have been doing just that in your dreaming practices."

"I thought I was perfecting my energy body," I said, somehow surprised at his statement.

"You are doing that and much more, you are learning to have cohesion. Dreaming does it by forcing dreamers to fixate the assemblage point. The dreaming attention, the energy body, the second attention, the relationship with inorganic beings, and the dreaming emissary are but by-products of acquiring cohesion. In other words, they are all by-products of fixating the assemblage point on a number of dreaming positions."

"What is a dreaming position, don Juan?"

"Any new position to which the assemblage point has been displaced during sleep."

"How do we fixate the assemblage point on a dreaming position?"

"By sustaining the view of any item in your dreams, or by changing dreams at will. Through your dreaming practices, you are really exercising your capacity to be cohesive. That is to say, you are exercising your capacity to maintain a new energy shape by holding the assemblage point fixed on the position of any particular dream you are having."

"Do I really maintain a new energy shape?"

"Not exactly, and not because you can't but only because you are shifting the assemblage point instead of moving it. Shifts of the assemblage point give rise to minute changes which are practically unnoticeable. The challenge of shifts is that they are so small and so numerous that to maintain cohesiveness in all of them is a triumph."

"How do we know we are maintaining cohesion?"

"We know it by the clarity of our perception. The clearer the view of our dreams, the greater our cohesion."

He said then that it was time for me to have a practical application of what I had learned in dreaming. Without giving me a chance to ask anything, he urged me to focus my attention, as if I were in a dream, on the foliage of a desert tree growing nearby: a mesquite tree.

"Do you want me to just gaze at it?" I asked.

"I don't want you to just gaze at it. I want you to do something very special with that foliage," he said. "Remember that, in your dreams, once you are able to hold the view of any item, you are really holding the dreaming position of your assemblage point. Now, gaze at those leaves as if you were in a dream, but with a slight yet most meaningful variation. You are going to hold your dreaming attention on the leaves of the mesquite tree in the awareness of our daily world."

My nervousness made it impossible for me to follow his line of thought. He patiently explained that by staring at the foliage, I would accomplish a minute displacement of my assemblage point. Then, by summoning my dreaming attention through staring at individual leaves, I would actually fixate that minute displacement, and my cohesion would make me perceive in terms of the second attention. He added, with a chuckle, that the process was so simple it was ridiculous.

Don Juan was right. All I needed was to focus my sight on the leaves, maintain it, and in one instant I was drawn into a vortex-like sensation, extremely like the vortexes in my dreams. The foliage of the mesquite tree became a universe of sensory data. It was as if the foliage had swallowed me, but it was not only my sight that was engaged. If I touched the leaves, I actually felt them. I could also smell them. My dreaming attention was multisensorial instead of solely visual, as in my regular dreaming.

What had begun as gazing at the foliage of the mesquite tree had turned into a dream. I believed I was in a dreamt tree, as I had been in trees of countless dreams. And, naturally, I behaved in this dreamt tree as I had learned to behave in my dreams: I moved from item to item, pulled by the force of a vortex that took shape on whatever part of the tree I focused my multisensorial dreaming attention. Vortexes were formed not only on gazing, but also on touching anything with any part of my body.

In the midst of this vision or dream, I had an attack of rational doubts. I began to wonder if I had really climbed the tree in a daze and was actually hugging the leaves, lost in the foliage, without knowing what I was doing. Or perhaps I had fallen asleep, possibly mesmerized by the fluttering of leaves in the wind, and was having a dream.

But just like in dreaming, I didn't have enough energy to ponder for too long. My thoughts were fleeting. They lasted an instant, and then the force of direct experience blanketed them out completely.

A sudden motion around me shook everything and virtually made me emerge from a clump of leaves as if I had broken away from the tree's magnetic pull.

I was facing then, from an elevation, an immense horizon. Dark mountains and green vegetation surrounded me. Another jolt of energy made me shake from my bones out.

Then I was somewhere else. Enormous trees loomed everywhere. They were bigger than the Douglas firs of Oregon and Washington State. Never had I seen a forest like that. The scenery was such a contrast to the aridness of the Sonoran desert that it left me with no doubt that I was having a dream.

I held on to that extraordinary view, afraid to let go, knowing that it was indeed a dream and would disappear once I had run out of dreaming attention. But the images lasted even when I thought I should have run out of dreaming attention. A horrifying thought crossed my mind then: What if this was neither a dream nor the daily world?

Frightened, as an animal must experience fright, I recoiled into the clump of leaves I had emerged from. The momentum of my backward motion kept me going through the tree foliage and around the hard branches. It pulled me away from the tree, and in one split second I was standing next to don Juan, at the door of his house, in the desert in Sonora.

I instantly realized I had entered again into a state in which I could think coherently, but I could not talk. Don Juan told me not to worry. He said that our speech faculty is extremely flimsy, and attacks of muteness are common among sorcerers who venture beyond the limits of normal perception.

My gut feeling was that don Juan had taken pity on me and had decided to give me a pep talk. But the voice of the dreaming emissary, which I clearly heard at that instant, said that in a few hours and after some rest, I was going to be perfectly well.

Upon awakening I gave don Juan, at his request, a complete description of what I had seen and done. He warned me that it was not possible to rely on my rationality to understand my experience, not because my rationality was in any way impaired, but because what had taken place was a phenomenon outside the parameters of reason.

I, naturally, argued that nothing can be outside the limits of reason. Things can be obscure, but sooner or later reason always finds a way to shed light on anything. And I really believed this.

Don Juan, with extreme patience, pointed out that reason is only a by-product of the habitual position of the assemblage point. Therefore, knowing what is going on, being of sound mind, having our feet on the ground- sources of great pride to us and assumed to be a natural consequence of our worth- are merely the result of the fixation of the assemblage point on it's habitual place. The more rigid and stationary it is, the greater our confidence in ourselves; the greater our feeling of knowing the world; of being able to predict.

He added that what dreaming does is give us the fluidity to enter into other worlds by destroying our sense of knowing this world. He called dreaming a journey of unthinkable dimensions; a journey that, after making us perceive everything we can humanly perceive, makes the assemblage point jump outside the human domain and perceive the inconceivable.

"We are back again," he went on, "harping on the most important topic of the sorcerers' world; the position of the assemblage point. The old sorcerers' curse, as well as mankind's thorn in the side."

"Why do you say that, don Juan?"

"Because both the old sorcerers fell prey and mankind in general falls prey to the position of the assemblage point: the old sorcerers because, although they knew all about the assemblage point, they fell for it's facility to be manipulated; mankind in general, because by not knowing that the assemblage point exists, we are obliged to take the by-product of it's habitual position as something final and indisputable.

"You must avoid falling into those traps," he continued. "It'd be really disgusting if you sided with mankind as if you didn't know about the existence of the assemblage point. But it'd be even more insidious if you sided with the old sorcerers and cynically manipulate the assemblage point for gain."

"I still don't understand. What is the connection of all this with what I experienced yesterday?"

"Yesterday, you were in a different world. But if you ask me where that world is, and I tell you that it is in the position of the assemblage point, my answer won't make any sense to you."

Don Juan's argument was that I had two choices.

One was to follow mankind's rationales and be faced with a predicament: My experience would tell me that other worlds exist, but my reason would say that such worlds do not and cannot exist.

The other choice was to follow the old sorcerers' rationales, in which case I would automatically accept the existence of other worlds, and my greed alone would make my assemblage point hold on to the position that creates those worlds. The result would be another kind of predicament; that of having to move physically into visionlike realms, driven by expectations of power and gain.

I was too numb to follow his argument, but then I realized I did not have to follow it because I agreed with him completely despite the fact that I did not have a total picture of what I was agreeing about. Agreeing with him was rather a feeling that came from far away; an ancient certainty I had lost which was now slowly finding it's way back to me.

The return to my dreaming practices eliminated these turmoils, but created new ones. For example, after months of hearing it daily, I stopped finding the dreaming emissary's voice an annoyance or a wonder. It became a matter of course for me.

And I made so many mistakes influenced by what it said that I almost understood don Juan's reluctance to take it seriously. A psychoanalyst would have had a field day interpreting the emissary according to all the possible permutations of my intrapersonal dynamics.

Don Juan maintained a steadfast view on the dreaming emissary: It is an impersonal but constant force from the realm of inorganic beings. Thus, every dreamer experiences it, in more or less the same terms. If we choose to take it's words as advice, we are incurable fools.

And I was definitely one of them. There was no way I could have remained impassive being in direct contact with such an extraordinary event: a voice that clearly and concisely told me in three languages hidden things about anything or anyone I focused my attention on. It's only drawback, which was of no consequence to me, was that we were not synchronized. The emissary used to tell me things about people or events when I had honestly forgotten I had been interested in them.

I asked don Juan about this oddity, and he said that it had to do with the rigidity of my assemblage point. He explained that I had been reared by old adults and that they had imbued me with old people's views. Therefore, I was dangerously righteous. His urge to give me potions of hallucinogenic plants was but an effort, he said, to shake my assemblage point and allow it to have a minimal margin of fluidity.

"If you don't develop this margin," he went on, "either you'll become more righteous or you'll become a hysterical sorcerer. My interest in telling you about the old sorcerers is not to bad-mouth them but to pit them against you. Sooner or later, your assemblage point will be more fluid, but not fluid enough to offset your facility to be like them: righteous and hysterical."

"How can I avoid all that, don Juan?"

"There is only one way. Sorcerers call it sheer understanding. I call it a romance with knowledge. It's the drive sorcerers use to know, to discover, to be bewildered."

Don Juan changed the subject and continued to explain the fixation of the assemblage point. He said that seeing children's assemblage points constantly fluttering as if moved by tremors and changing their place with ease, the old sorcerers came to the conclusion that the assemblage point's habitual location is not innate but brought about by habituation. Seeing also that only in adults is it fixed on one spot, they surmised that the specific location of the assemblage point fetters a specific way of perceiving. Through usage, this specific way of perceiving becomes a system of interpreting sensory data.

Don Juan pointed out that since we are drafted into that system by being born into it, from the moment of our birth we imperatively strive to adjust our perceiving to conform to the demands of this system; a system that rules us for life. Consequently, the old sorcerers were thoroughly right in believing that the act of countermanding that system and perceiving energy directly is what transforms a person into a sorcerer.

Don Juan expressed wonder at what he called the greatest accomplishment of our human upbringing: The ability to lock our assemblage point on it's habitual position. And furthermore, once it is immobilized there, our perception can be coached and guided to interpret what we perceive. In other words, we can then be guided to perceive more in terms of our system than in terms of our senses.

He assured me that human perception is universally homogeneous, because the assemblage points of the whole human race are fixed on the same spot.

He went on to say that sorcerers prove all this to themselves when they see that at the moment the assemblage point is displaced beyond a certain threshold, and new filaments of energy begin to be perceived, there is no sense to what we perceive. The immediate cause is that new sensory data has rendered our conventional system inoperative; our formerly established system can no longer be used to interpret what we are newly perceiving.

"Perceiving without our customary system is, of course, chaotic," don Juan continued. "But strangely enough, when we think we have truly lost our bearings, our old system rallies. It comes to our rescue and transforms our new incomprehensible perception into a thoroughly comprehensible new world. Just like what happened to you when you gazed at the leaves of the mesquite tree."

"What exactly happened to me, don Juan?"

"Your perception was chaotic for a while. Everything came to you at once, and your system for interpreting the world didn't function. Then, the chaos cleared up, and there you were in front of a new world."

"We are again, don Juan, at the same place we were before. Does that world exist, or is it merely my mind that concocted it?"

"We certainly are back, and the answer is still the same. It exists in the precise position your assemblage point was at that moment. In order to perceive it, you needed cohesion, that is, you needed to maintain your assemblage point fixed on that position; which you did. The result was that you totally perceived a new world for a while."

"But would others perceive that same world?"

"If they had uniformity and cohesion, they would. Uniformity is to hold, in unison, the same position of the assemblage point. The old sorcerers called the entire act of acquiring uniformity and cohesion outside the normal world stalking perception.

"The art of stalking," he continued, "as I have already said, deals with the fixation of the assemblage point. The old sorcerers discovered, through practice, that important as it is to displace the assemblage point, it is equallly important to make it stay fixed on it's new position, wherever that new position might be."

He explained that if the assemblage point does not become stationary, there is no way that we can perceive coherently. We would experience then a kaleidoscope of disassociated images. This is the reason the old sorcerers put as much emphasis on stalking as they did on dreaming. One art cannot exist without the other, especially for the kinds of activities in which the old sorcerers were involved.

"What were those activities, don Juan?"

"The old sorcerers called them the intricacies of the second attention, or the grand adventure of the unknown."

Don Juan said that these activities stem from the displacements of the assemblage point. Not only had the old sorcerers learned to displace their assemblage points to thousands of positions on the surface or on the inside of their energy masses, but they had also learned to fixate their assemblage points on those positions; and thus retain their cohesiveness indefinitely.

"What was the benefit of that, don Juan?"

"We can't talk about benefits. We can talk only about end results."

He explained that the cohesiveness of the old sorcerers was such that it allowed them to become perceptually and physically everything the specific position of their assemblage points dictated. They could transform themselves into anything for which they had a specific inventory. An inventory is, he said, all the details of perception involved in becoming, for example, a jaguar, a bird, an insect, et cetera, et cetera.

"It's very hard for me to believe that this transformation can be possible," I said.

"It is possible," he assured me. "Not so much for you and me, but for them. For them, it was nothing."

He said that the old sorcerers had superb fluidity. All they needed was the slightest shift of their assemblage points, the slightest perceptual cue from their dreaming, and they would instantaneously stalk their perception, rearrange their cohesiveness to fit their new state of awareness, and be an animal, another person, a bird, or anything.

"But isn't that what mentally ill people do? Make up their own reality as they go along?" I said.

"No, it isn't the same. Insane people imagine a reality of their own because they don't have any preconceived purpose at all. Insane people bring chaos into the chaos. Sorcerers, on the contrary, bring order to the chaos. Their preconceived, transcendental purpose is to free their perception.

Sorcerers don't make up the world they are perceiving. They perceive energy directly. And then they discover that what they are perceiving is an unknown new world which can swallow them whole because it is as real as anything we know to be real."

Don Juan then gave me a new version of what had happened to me as I gazed at the mesquite tree. He said that I began by perceiving the energy of the tree. On the subjective level, however, I believed I was dreaming because I employed dreaming techniques to perceive energy.

He asserted that to use dreaming techniques in the world of everyday life was one of the old sorcerers' most effective devices. It made perceiving energy directly dreamlike, instead of totally chaotic, until a moment when something rearranged perception and the sorcerer found himself facing a new world- the very thing that had happened to me.

I told him about the thought I'd had, which I had barely dared to think: that the scenery I was viewing was not a dream, nor was it our daily world.

"It wasn't," he said. "I've been saying this to you over and over, and you think that I am merely repeating myself. I know how difficult it is for the mind to allow mindless possibilities to become real. But new worlds exist! They are wrapped one around the other, like the skins of an onion. The world we exist in is but one of those skins."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that the goal of your teaching is to prepare me to go into those worlds?"

"No. I don't mean that. Those journeys are the antecedents [* antecedent- someone from whom you are descended; something which preceedes and causes another result] of the sorcerers of today.

We go into those worlds only as an exercise. We do the same dreaming that the old sorcerers used to do, but at one moment we deviate into new ground. The old sorcerers preferred the shifts of the assemblage point, so they were always on more or less known, predictable ground. We prefer the movements of the assemblage point. The old sorcerers were after the human unknown. We are after the nonhuman unknown."

"I haven't gotten to that yet, have I?"

"No. You are only beginning. And at the beginning everyone has to go through the old sorcerers' steps. After all, they were the ones who invented dreaming."

"At what point will I then begin to learn the new sorcerers' brand of dreaming?"

"You have enormous ground yet to cover. Years from now perhaps. Besides, in your case, I have to be extraordinarily careful. In character, you are definitely linked to the old sorcerers. I've said this to you before, but you always manage to avoid my probes.

"Sometimes I even think that some alien energy is advising you, but then I discard the idea. You are not devious."

"What are you talking about, don Juan?"

"You've done, unwittingly, two things that worry the hell out of me.

"You traveled with your energy body to a place outside this world the first time you dreamt; you even walked there!

"And then you traveled with your energy body to another place outside this world, but parting from the awareness of the daily world."

"Why would that worry you, don Juan?"

"Dreaming is too easy for you. That is a damnation if we don't watch it. It leads to the human unknown. As I said to you, modern-day sorcerers strive to get to the nonhuman unknown."

"What can the nonhuman unknown be?"

"Freedom from being human. Inconceivable worlds that are outside the band of man but that we still can perceive. This is where modern sorcerers take the side road. Their predilection is what's outside the human domain. And what are outside that domain are all-inclusive worlds; not merely the realm of birds or the realm of animals or the realm of man- even if it be the unknown man.

"What I am talking about are worlds, like the one where we live; total worlds with endless realms."

"Where are those worlds, don Juan? In different positions of the assemblage point?"

"Right. In different positions of the assemblage point, but positions sorcerers arrive at with a movement of the assemblage point, not a shift.

Entering into those worlds is the type of dreaming only sorcerers of today do. The old sorcerers stayed away from it because it requires a great deal of detachment and no self-importance whatsoever. A price they couldn't afford to pay.

"For the sorcerers who practice dreaming today, dreaming is freedom to perceive worlds beyond the imagination."

"But, what's the point of perceiving all that?"

"You already asked me, today, the same question. You speak like a true merchant. What's the risk? you ask. What's the percentage gain to my investment? Is it going to better me?"

"There is no way to answer that. The merchant mind does commerce. But freedom cannot be an investment. Freedom is an adventure with no end in which we risk our lives and much more for a few moments of something beyond words; beyond thoughts or feelings."

"I didn't ask that question in that spirit, don Juan. What I want to know is what can be the driving force to do all this for a lazy bum like myself?"

"To seek freedom is the only driving force I know. Freedom to fly off into that infinity out there. Freedom to dissolve; to lift off; to be like the flame of a candle, which, in spite of being up against the light of a billion stars, remains intact, because it never pretended to be more than what it is: a mere candle."

## 5. The World of Inorganic Beings

Faithful to my agreement to wait for don Juan to initiate any comment on dreaming, only in cases of necessity did I ask him for advice. Ordinarily, though, he not only seemed reluctant to touch the subject but was somehow displeased with me about it. In my estimation, a confirmation of his disapproval was the fact that whenever we talked about my dreaming activities, he always minimized the import of anything I had accomplished.

For me, at that time, the animate existence of inorganic beings had become the most crucial aspect of my dreaming practices. After encountering them in my dreams, and especially after my bout with them in the desert around don Juan's house, I should have been more willing to take their existence as a serious affair. But all these events had quite the opposite effect on me. I became adamant and doggedly denied the possibility that they existed.

Then I had a change of heart and decided to conduct an objective inquiry about them. The method of this inquiry required that I first compile a record of everything that transpired in my dreaming sessions, then use that record as a matrix to find out if my dreaming proved or disproved anything about the inorganic beings. I actually wrote down hundreds of pages of meticulous but meaningless details when it should have been clear to me that the evidence of their existence had been gathered almost as soon as I had started my inquiry.

It took but a few sessions for me to discover that what I thought to be don Juan's casual recommendation- to suspend judgment and let the inorganic beings come to me- was, in fact, the very procedure used by the sorcerers of antiquity to attract them. By leaving me to find it out for myself, don Juan was simply following his sorcery training. He had remarked time and time again that it is very difficult to make the self give up it's strongholds except through practice. One of the self's strongest lines of defense is indeed our rationality, and this is not only the most durable line of defense when it comes to sorcery actions and explanations but also the most threatened. Don Juan believed that the existence of inorganic beings is a foremost assailant of our rationality.

In my dreaming practices, I had an established course, which I followed every single day without deviation. I aimed first at observing every conceivable item of my dreams, then at changing dreams. I can say in sincerity that I observed universes of detail in dreams upon dreams.

As a matter of course, at one given moment my dreaming attention began to wane, and my dreaming sessions ended: either in my falling asleep and having regular dreams in which I had no dreaming attention whatsoever; or in my waking up and not being able to sleep at all.

From time to time, however, as don Juan had described it, a current of foreign energy, a scout, as he called it, was injected into my dreams. Being forewarned helped me to adjust my dreaming attention and be on the alert. The first time I noticed foreign energy, I was dreaming about shopping in a department store. I was going from counter to counter looking for antiques. I finally found one. The incongruence of looking for antiques in a department store was so obvious that it made me chuckle, but since I had found one, I forgot about that incongruence. The antique was the handle of a walking stick. The salesman told me that it was made of iridium, which he called one of the hardest substances in the world. It was a carved piece: the head and shoulders of a monkey. It looked like jade to me. The salesman was insulted when I insinuated that it might be jade, and to prove his point he hurled the object, with all his strength, against the cement floor. It did not break but bounced like a ball and then sailed away, spinning like a Frisbee. I followed it. It disappeared behind some trees. I ran to look for it, and I found it, stuck on the ground. It had been transformed into an extraordinarily beautiful, deep green and black, full-length walking stick.

I coveted it. I grabbed it and struggled to pull it out of the ground before anyone else came along. But, hard as I tried, I could not make it budge. I was afraid I would break it if I attempted to pry it loose by shaking it back and forth. So I began to dig around it with my bare hands. As I kept on digging, it kept on melting, until only a puddle of green water was left in it's place. I stared at the water; it suddenly seemed to explode. It turned into a white bubble, and then it was gone. My dream continued into other images and details, which were not outstanding, although they were crystal clear.

When I told don Juan about this dream, he said, "You isolated a scout. Scouts are more numerous when our dreams are average, normal dreams. The dreams of dreamers are strangely free from scouts. When they appear, they are identifiable by the strangeness and incongruity surrounding them."

"Incongruity, in what manner, don Juan?"

"Their presence doesn't make any sense."

"Very few things make sense in a dream."

"Only in average dreams are things nonsensical. I would say that this is so because more scouts are injected then, because average people are subject to a greater barrage from the unknown."

"Do you know why is that so, don Juan?"

"In my opinion, what takes place is a balance of forces. Average people have stupendously strong barriers to protect themselves against those onslaughts. Barriers such as worries about the self. The stronger the barrier, the greater the attack.

"Dreamers, by contrast, have fewer barriers and fewer scouts in their dreams. It seems that in dreamers' dreams nonsensical things disappear, perhaps to ensure that dreamers catch the presence of scouts."

Don Juan advised me to pay close attention and remember every single possible detail of the dream I had had. He even made me repeat what I had told him.

"You baffle me," I said. "You don't want to hear anything about my dreaming, and then you do. Is there any order to your refusals and acceptances?"

"You bet there is order behind all this," he said. "Chances are, you'll do the same someday to another dreamer. Some items are of key importance because they are associated with the spirit. Others are entirely unimportant because they are associated with our indulging personality."

"The first scout you isolate will always be present; it could be in any form, even iridium. By the way, what's iridium?"

"I don't really know," I said in total sincerity.

"There you are! And what will you say if it turns out to be one of the strongest substances in the world?"

Don Juan's eyes shone with delight while I nervously laughed at that absurd possibility- which I later learned was true.

I began to notice from then on the presence of incongruous items in my dreams. Once I had accepted don Juan's categorization of foreign energy in dreams, I totally agreed with him that incongruous items were foreign invaders of my dreams. Upon isolating them, my dreaming attention always focused on them with an intensity that did not occur under any other circumstances.

Another thing I noticed was that every time foreign energy invaded my dreams, my dreaming attention had to work hard to turn it into a known object. The handicap of my dreaming attention was it's inability to accomplish fully such a transformation. The end result was a bastardized item, nearly unknown to me. The foreign energy then dissipated quite easily, the bastardized item vanished, turning into a blob of light, which was quickly absorbed by other pressing details of my dreams.

When I asked don Juan to comment on what was happening to me, he said, "At this point in your dreaming, scouts are reconnoiterers sent by the inorganic realm. They are very fast, meaning that they don't stay long."

"Why do you say that they are reconnoiterers, don Juan?"

"They come in search of potential awareness. They have consciousness and purpose, although it is incomprehensible to our minds, comparable perhaps to the consciousness and purpose of trees. The inner speed of trees and inorganic beings is incomprehensible to us because it is infinitely slower than ours."

"What makes you say that, don Juan?"

"Both trees and inorganic beings last longer than we do. They are made to stay put. They are immobile, yet they make everything move around them."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that inorganic beings are stationary like trees?"

"Certainly. What you see in dreaming as bright or dark sticks are their projections. What you hear as the voice of the dreaming emissary is equally their projection. And so are their scouts."

For some unfathomable reason, I was overwhelmed by these statements. I was suddenly filled with anxiety. I asked don Juan if trees also had projections like that."

"They do," he said. "Their projections are, however, even less friendly to us than those of the inorganic beings. Dreamers never seek them, unless they are in a state of profound amenity with trees, which is a very difficult state to attain. We have no friends on this earth, you know." He chuckled and added, "It's no mystery why."

"It may not be a mystery to you, don Juan, but it certainly is to me."

"We are destructive. We have antagonized every living being on this earth. That's why we have no friends."

I felt so ill at ease that I wanted to stop the conversation altogether. But a compulsive urge made me return to the subject of inorganic beings.

"What do you think I should do to follow the scouts?" I asked.

"Why in the world would you want to follow them?"

"I am conducting an objective inquiry about inorganic beings."

"You're pulling my leg, aren't you? I thought you were unmovable on your stand that inorganic beings don't exist."

His scoffing tone and cackling laughter told me what his thoughts and feelings about my objective inquiry were.

"I've changed my mind, don Juan. Now I want to explore all those possibilities."

"Remember, the realm of inorganic beings was the old sorcerers' field. To get there, they tenaciously fixed their dreaming attention on the items of their dreams. In that fashion, they were able to isolate the scouts. And when they had the scouts in focus, they shouted their intent to follow them. The instant the old sorcerers voiced that intent, off they went, pulled by that foreign energy."

"Is it that simple, don Juan?"

He did not answer. He just laughed at me as if daring me to do it.

At home, I tired of searching for don Juan's true meanings. I was thoroughly unwilling to consider that he might have described an actual procedure. After running out of ideas and patience, one day I let my guard down. In a dream I was having then, I was baffled by a fish that had suddenly jumped out of a pond I was walking by. The fish twitched by my feet, then flew like a colored bird, perching on a branch, still being a fish. The scene was so outlandish that my dreaming attention was galvanized. I instantly knew it was a scout. A second later, when the fish-bird turned into a point of light, I shouted my intent to follow it, and, just as don Juan had said, off I went into another world.

I flew through a seemingly dark tunnel as if I were a weightless flying insect. The sensation of a tunnel ended abruptly. It was exactly as if I had been spewed out of a tube and the impulse had left me smack against an immense physical mass. I was almost touching it. I could not see the end of it in any direction I looked. The entire thing reminded me so much of science fiction movies that I was utterly convinced I was constructing the view of that mass myself, as one constructs a dream. Why not? The thought I had was that, after all, I was asleep, dreaming.

I settled down to observe the details of my dream. What I was viewing looked very much like a gigantic sponge. It was porous and cavernous. I could not feel it's texture, but it looked rough and fibrous. It was dark brownish in color. Then I had a momentary jolt of doubt about that silent mass being just a dream. What I was facing did not change shape. It did not move either. As I looked at it fixedly, I had the complete impression of something real but stationary. It was planted somewhere, and it had such a powerful attraction that I was incapable of deviating my dreaming attention to examine anything else, including myself. Some strange force, which I had never before encountered in my dreaming, had me riveted down.

Then I clearly felt that the mass released my dreaming attention. All my awareness focused on the scout that had taken me there. It looked like a firefly in the darkness, hovering over me, by my side. In it's realm, it was a blob of sheer energy. I was able to see it's energetic sizzling. It seemed to be conscious of me. Suddenly, it lurched onto me and tugged me or prodded me. I did not feel it's touch, yet I knew it was touching me. That sensation was startling and new, it was as if a part of me that was not there had been electrified by that touch, ripples of energy went through it, one after another.

From that moment on, everything in my dreaming became much more real. I had a very difficult time keeping the idea that I was dreaming a dream. To this difficulty, I had to add the certainty I had that with it's touch the scout had made an energetic connection with me. I knew what it wanted me to do the instant it seemed to tug me or shove me.

The first thing it did was to push me through a huge cavern or opening into the physical mass I had been facing. Once I was inside that mass, I realized that the interior was as homogeneously porous as the outside but much softer looking, as if the roughness had been sanded down. What I was facing was a structure that looked something like the enlarged picture of a beehive. There were countless geometric-shaped tunnels going in every direction. Some went up or down, or to my left or my right. They were at angles with one another, or going up or down on steep or mild inclines.

The light was very dim, yet everything was perfectly visible. The tunnels seemed to be alive and conscious: They sizzled. I stared at them, and the realization that I was seeing hit me. Those were tunnels of energy. At the instant of this realization, the voice of the dreaming emissary roared inside my ears, so loudly I could not understand what it said. "Lower it down," I yelled with unusual impatience and became aware that if I spoke, I blocked my view of the tunnels and entered into a vacuum where all I could do was hear.

The emissary modulated it's voice and said, "You are inside an inorganic being. Choose a tunnel and you can even live in it." The voice stopped for an instant, then added, "That is, if you want to do it."

I could not bring myself to say anything. I was afraid that any statement of mine might be construed as the opposite of what I meant.

"There are endless advantages for you," the emissary's voice continued. "You can live in as many tunnels as you want. And each one of them will teach something different. The sorcerers of antiquity lived in this manner and learned marvelous things."

I sensed without any feeling that the scout was pushing me from behind. It appeared to want me to move onward. I took the tunnel to my immediate right. As soon as I was in it, something made me aware that I was not walking on the tunnel; I was hovering in it, flying. I was a blob of energy no different from the scout.

The voice of the emissary sounded inside my ears again. "Yes, you are just a blob of energy," it said. It's redundancy brought me an intense relief. "And you are floating inside one inorganic being," it went on. "This is the way the scout wants you to move in this world. When it touched you, it changed you forever. You are practically one of us now. If you want to stay here, just voice your intent." The emissary stopped talking, and the view of the tunnel returned to me. But when it spoke again, something had been adjusted. I did not lose sight of that world and I still could hear the emissary's voice. "The ancient sorcerers learned everything they knew about dreaming by staying here among us," it said.

I was going to ask if they had learned everything they knew by just living inside those tunnels, but before I voiced my question the emissary answered it. "Yes, they learned everything by just living inside the inorganic beings," it said. "To live inside them, all the old sorcerers had to do was say they wanted to, just like all it took for you to get here was to voice your intent, loud and clear."

The scout pushed against me to signal me to continue moving. I hesitated, and it did something equivalent to shoving me with such a force that I shot like a bullet through endless tunnels. I finally stopped because the scout stopped. We hovered for an instant. Then we dropped into a vertical tunnel. I did not feel the drastic change of direction. As far as my perception was concerned, I was still moving seemingly parallel to the ground.

We changed directions many times with the same perceptual effect on me. I began to formulate a thought about my incapacity to feel that I was moving up or down when I heard the emissary's voice. "I think you'll be more comfortable if you crawl rather than fly," it said. "You can also move like a spider or a fly, straight up or down or upside down."

Instantaneously, I settled down. It was as if I had been fluffy and suddenly I got some weight, which grounded me. I could not feel the tunnel's walls, but the emissary was right about my being more comfortable when crawling.

"In this world you don't have to be pinned down by gravity," it said. Of course, I was able to realize that myself. "You don't have to breathe either," the voice went on. "And, for your convenience alone, you can retain your eyesight and see as you see in your world." The emissary seemed to be deciding whether to add more. It coughed, just like a man clearing his throat, and said, "The eyesight is never impaired. Therefore, a dreamer always speaks about his dreaming in terms of what he sees."

The scout pushed me into a tunnel to my right. It was somehow darker than the others. To me, at a preposterous level, it seemed cozier than the others, more friendly or even known to me. The thought crossed my mind that I was like that tunnel or that the tunnel was like me.

"You two have met before," the emissary's voice said.

"I beg your pardon," I said. I had understood what it said, but the statement was incomprehensible."

"You two wrestled, and because of that you now carry each other's energy." I thought that the emissary's voice carried a touch of malice or even sarcasm.

"No, it isn't sarcasm," the emissary said. "I am glad that you have relatives here among us."

"What do you mean by relatives?" I asked.

"Shared energy makes kinship," it replied. "Energy is like blood."

I was unable to say anything else. I clearly felt pangs of fear.

"Fear is something that is absent in this world," the emissary said.

And that was the only statement that was not true.

My dreaming ended there. I was so shocked by the vividness of everything, and by the impressive clarity and continuity of the emissary's statements, that I could not wait to tell don Juan. It surprised and disturbed me that he did not want to hear my account. He did not say so, but I had the impression that he believed all of it had been a product of my indulging personality.

"Why are you behaving like this with me?" I asked. "Are you displeased with me?"

"No. I am not displeased with you," he said. "The problem is that I can't talk about this part of your dreaming. You are completely by yourself in this case. I have said to you that inorganic beings are real. You are finding out how real they are. But what you do with this finding is your business, yours alone. Someday you'll see the reason for my staying away."

"But isn't there something you can tell me about that dream?" I insisted.

"What I can say is that it wasn't a dream. It was a journey into the unknown. A necessary journey, I may add, and an ultrapersonal one."

He changed the subject then and began to talk about other aspects of his teachings.

From that day on, in spite of my fear and don Juan's reluctance to advise me, I became a regular dream traveler to that spongy world. I discovered right away that the greater my capacity to observe the details of my dreams, the greater my facility to isolate the scouts.

If I chose to acknowledge the scouts as foreign energy, they remained within my perceptual field for a while.

If I chose to turn the scouts into quasi known objects, they stayed even longer, changing shapes erratically.

But if I followed them, by revealing out loud my intent to go with them, the scouts veritably transported my dreaming attention to a world beyond what I can normally imagine.

Don Juan had said that inorganic beings are always poised to teach. But he had not told me that dreaming is what they are poised to teach. He had stated that the dreaming emissary, since it is a voice, is the perfect bridge between that world and ours. I found out that the dreaming emissary was not only a teacher's voice but the voice of a most subtle salesman. It repeated on and on, at the proper time and occasion, the advantages of it's world. Yet it also taught me invaluable things about dreaming. Listening to what it said, I understood the old sorcerers' preference for concrete practices.

"For perfect dreaming, the first thing you have to do is shut off your internal dialogue," it said to me one time. "For best results in shutting it off, put between your fingers some two to three inch long quartz crystals or a couple of smooth, thin river pebbles. Bend your fingers slightly, and press the crystals or pebbles with them."

The emissary said that metal pins, if they were the size and width of one's fingers, were equally effective. The procedure consisted of pressing at least three thin items between the fingers of each hand and creating, an almost painful pressure in the hands. This pressure had the strange property of shutting off the internal dialogue. The emissary's expressed preference was for quartz crystals. It said that they gave the best results, although with practice anything was suitable.

"Falling asleep at a moment of total silence guarantees a perfect entrance into dreaming," said the emissary's voice, "and it also guarantees the enhancing of one's dreaming attention."

"Dreamers should wear a gold ring," said the emissary to me another time, "preferably fitted a bit tight."

The emissary's explanation was that such a ring serves as a bridge for surfacing from dreaming back into the daily world or for sinking from our daily awareness into the inorganic beings' realm.

"How does this bridge work?" I asked. I had not understood what was involved.

"The contact of the fingers on the ring lays the bridge down," the emissary said. "If a dreamer comes into my world wearing a ring, that ring attracts the energy of my world and keeps it; and when that energy is needed, that energy transports the dreamer back to this world through the ring's releasing it into the dreamer's fingers.

"The pressure of that ring around a finger serves equally well to ensure a dreamer's return to his world. It gives him a constant, familiar sense on his finger."

During another dreaming session, the emissary said that our skin is the perfect organ for transposing energy waves from the mode of the daily world to the mode of the inorganic beings and vice versa. It recommended that I keep my skin cool and free from pigments or oils.

It also recommended that dreamers wear a tight belt or headband or necklace to create a pressure point that serves as a skin center of energy exchange. The emissary explained that the skin automatically screens energy, and that what we need to do to make the skin not only screen but exchange energy from one mode to the other is to express our intent out loud, in dreaming.

One day the emissary's voice gave me a fabulous bonus. It said that, in order to ensure the keenness and accuracy of our dreaming attention, we must bring it from behind the roof of the mouth, where an enormous reservoir of attention is located in all human beings. The emissary's specific directions were to practice and learn the discipline and control necessary to press the tip of the tongue on the roof of the mouth while dreaming. This task is as difficult and consuming, the emissary said, as finding one's hands in a dream. But, once it is accomplished, this task gives the most astounding results in terms of controlling the dreaming attention.

I received a profusion of instructions on every conceivable subject, instructions that I promptly forgot if they were not endlessly repeated to me. I sought don Juan's advice on how to resolve this problem of forgetting.

His comment was as brief as I had expected. "Focus only on what the emissary tells you about dreaming," he said.

Whatever the emissary's voice repeated enough times, I grasped with tremendous interest and fervor. Faithful to don Juan's recommendation, I only followed it's guidance when it referred to dreaming and I personally corroborated the value of it's instruction. The most vital piece of information for me was that the dreaming attention comes from behind the roof of the mouth. It took a great deal of effort on my part to feel in dreaming that I was pressing the roof of my mouth with the tip of my tongue. Once I accomplished this, my dreaming attention took on a life of it's own and became, I may say, keener than my normal attention to the daily world.

It did not take much for me to deduce how deep must have been the involvement of the old sorcerers with the inorganic beings. Don Juan's commentaries and warnings about the danger of such an involvement became more vital than ever. I tried my best to live up to his standards of self-examination with no indulgence. Thus, the emissary's voice and what it said became a superchallenge for me. I had to avoid, at all cost, succumbing to the temptation of the emissary's promise of knowledge, and I had to do this all by myself since don Juan continued to refuse to listen to my accounts.

"You must give me at least a hint about what I should do," I insisted on one occasion when I was bold enough to ask him.

"I can't," he said with finality, "and don't ask again. I've told you, in this instance, dreamers have to be left alone."

"But you don't even know what I want to ask you."

"Oh yes I do. You want me to tell you that it is all right to live in one of those tunnels, if for no other reason than just to know what the emissary's voice is talking about."

I admitted that this was exactly my dilemma. If nothing else, I wanted to know what was implied in the statement that one can live inside those tunnels.

"I went through the same turmoil myself," don Juan went on, "and no one could help me because this is a superpersonal and final decision; a final decision made the instant you voice your desire to live in that world. In order to get you to voice that desire, the inorganic beings are going to cater to your most secret wishes."

"This is really diabolical, don Juan."

"You can say that again. But not just because of what you are thinking. For you, the diabolical part is the temptation to give in, especially when such great rewards are at stake. For me, the diabolical nature of the inorganic beings' realm is that it might very well be the only sanctuary dreamers have in a hostile universe."

"Is it really a haven for dreamers, don Juan?"

"It definitely is for some dreamers. Not for me. I don't need props or railings. I know what I am. I am alone in a hostile universe, and I have learned to say. So be it!"

That was the end of our exchange. He had not said what I wanted to hear, yet I knew that even the desire to know what it was like to live in a tunnel meant almost to choose that way of life. I was not interested in such a thing. I made my decision right then to continue my dreaming practices without any further implications. I quickly told don Juan about it.

"Don't say anything," he advised me. "But do understand that if you choose to stay, your decision is final. You'll stay there forever."

It is impossible for me to judge objectively what took place during the countless times I dreamt of that world. I can say that it appeared to be a world as real as any dream can be real. Or I can say that it appeared to be as real as our daily world is real. Dreaming of that world, I became aware of what don Juan had said to me many times: that under the influence of dreaming, reality suffers a metamorphosis. I found myself then facing the two options which, according to don Juan, are the options faced by all dreamers: either we carefully revamp or we completely disregard our system of sensory input interpretation.

For don Juan, to revamp our interpretation system meant to intend it's reconditioning. It meant that one deliberately and carefully attempts to enlarge it's capabilities. By living in accordance with the sorcerers' way, dreamers save and store the necessary energy to suspend judgment and thus facilitate that intended revamping. He explained that if we choose to recondition our interpretation system, reality becomes fluid, and the scope of what can be real is enhanced without endangering the integrity of reality. Dreaming, then, indeed opens the door into other aspects of what is real.

If we choose to disregard our system, the scope of what can be perceived without interpretation grows inordinately. The expansion of our perception is so gigantic that we are left with very few tools for sensory interpretation, and thus leaves a sense of an infinite realness that is unreal; or an infinite unrealness that could very well be real but is not.

For me, the only acceptable option was reconstructing and enlarging my interpretation system. In dreaming the inorganic beings' realm, I was faced with the consistence of that world from dream to dream; from isolating the scouts through listening to the dreaming emissary's voice to going through tunnels. I went through them without feeling anything, yet being aware that space and time were constant, although not in terms discernible by rationality under normal conditions. However, by noticing the difference or the absence or profusion of detail in each tunnel, or by noticing the sense of distance between tunnels, or by noticing the apparent length or width of each tunnel in which I traveled, I arrived at a sense of objective observation.

The area where this reconstruction of my interpretation system had the most dramatic effect was the knowledge of how I related to the world of the inorganic beings. In that world, which was real to me, I was a blob of energy. Thus, I could whiz in the tunnels, like a fast-moving light, or I could crawl on their walls, like an insect. If I flew, a voice told me not arbitrary but consistent information about details on the walls on which I had focused my dreaming attention. Those details were intricate protuberances, like the Braille system of writing. When I crawled on the walls, I could see the same details with greater accuracy and hear the voice giving me more complex descriptions.

The unavoidable consequence for me was the development of a dual stand. On the one hand, I knew I was dreaming a dream; on the other, I knew I was involved in a pragmatic journey, as real as any journey in the world. This bona fide split was a corroboration of what don Juan had said: that the existence of inorganic beings is the foremost assailant of our rationality.

Only after I had really suspended judgment did I get any relief. At one moment, when the tension of my untenable position- seriously believing in the attestable existence of inorganic beings, while seriously believing that it was only a dream- was about to destroy me, something in my attitude changed drastically, but without any solicitation on my part.

Don Juan maintained that my energy level, which had been steadily growing, one day reached a threshold that allowed me to disregard assumptions and prejudgments about the nature of man, reality, and perception. That day I became enamored with knowledge, regardless of logic or functional value, and, above all, regardless of personal convenience.

When my objective inquiry into the subject of inorganic beings no longer mattered to me, don Juan himself brought up the subject of my dream journey into that world. He said, "I don't think you are aware of the regularity of your meetings with inorganic beings."

He was right. I had never bothered to think about it. I commented on the oddity of my oversight.

"It isn't an oversight," he said. "It's the nature of that realm to foster secretiveness. Inorganic beings veil themselves in mystery, darkness. Think about their world: stationary, fixed to draw us like moths to a light or a fire.

"There is something the emissary hasn't dared to tell you so far: that the inorganic beings are after our awareness or the awareness of any being that falls into their nets. They'll give us knowledge, but they'll extract a payment: our total being."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that the inorganic beings are like fishermen?"

"Exactly. At one moment, the emissary will show you men who got caught in there or other beings that are not human that also got caught in there."

Revulsion and fear should have been my response. Don Juan's revelations affected me deeply, but in the sense of creating uncontainable curiosity. I was nearly panting.

"Inorganic beings can't force anyone to stay with them," don Juan went on. "To live in their world is a voluntary affair. Yet they are capable of imprisoning any one of us by catering to our desires, by pampering and indulging us. Beware of awareness that is immobile. Awareness like that has to seek movement, and it does this, as I've told you, by creating projections, phantasmagorical projections at times."

I asked don Juan to explain what 'phantasmagorical projections' meant. He said that inorganic beings hook onto dreamers' innermost feelings and play them mercilessly. They create phantoms to please dreamers or frighten them. He reminded me that I had wrestled with one of those phantoms. He explained that inorganic beings are superb projectionists, who delight in projecting themselves like pictures on the wall.

"The old sorcerers were brought down by their inane trust in those projections," he continued. "The old sorcerers believed their allies had power. They overlooked the fact their allies were tenuous energy projected through worlds, like in a cosmic movie."

"You are contradicting yourself, don Juan. You yourself said that the inorganic beings are real. Now you tell me that they are mere pictures."

"I meant to say that the inorganic beings, in our world, are like moving pictures projected on a screen; and I may even add that they are like moving pictures of rarefied energy projected through the boundaries of two worlds."

"But what about inorganic beings in their world? Are they also like moving pictures?"

"Not a chance. That world is as real as our world. The old sorcerers portrayed the inorganic beings' world as a blob of caverns and pores floating in some dark space. And they portrayed the inorganic beings as hollow canes bound together, like the cells of our bodies. The old sorcerers called that immense bundle the labyrinth of penumbra." [* penumbra- a fringe region of partial shadow around a region of complete shadow]

"Then every dreamer sees that world in the same terms, right?"

"Of course. Every dreamer sees it as it is. Do you think you are unique?"

I confessed that something in that world had been giving me all along the sensation I was unique. What created this most pleasant and clear feeling of being exclusive was not the voice of the dreaming emissary, or anything I could consciously think about.

"That's exactly what floored the old sorcerers," don Juan said. "The inorganic beings did to them what they are doing to you now; they created for them the sense of being unique, exclusive plus a more pernicious [* pernicious- exceedingly harmful] sense yet: the sense of having power. Power and uniqueness are unbeatable as corrupting forces. Watch out!"

"How did you avoid that danger yourself, don Juan?"

"I went to that world a few times, and then I never went back."

Don Juan explained that in the opinion of sorcerers, the universe is predatorial, and sorcerers more than anyone else have to take this into account in their daily sorcery activities. His idea was that consciousness is intrinsically compelled to grow, and the only way it can grow is through strife; through life-or-death confrontations.

"The awareness of sorcerers grows when they do dreaming," he went on. "And the moment it grows, something out there acknowledges it's growth, recognizes it and makes a bid for it. The inorganic beings are the bidders for that new, enhanced awareness. Dreamers have to be forever on their toes. They are prey the moment they venture out in that predatorial universe."

"What do you suggest I do to be safe, don Juan?"

"Be on your toes every second! Don't let anything or anybody decide for you. Go to the inorganic beings' world only when you want to go."

"Honestly, don Juan, I wouldn't know how to do that. Once I isolate a scout, a tremendous pull is exerted on me to go. I don't have a chance in hell to change my mind."

"Come on! Who do you think you're kidding? You can definitely stop it. You haven't tried to, that's all."

I earnestly insisted that it was impossible for me to stop. He did not pursue the subject any longer, and I was thankful for that. A disturbing feeling of guilt had begun to gnaw at me. For some unknown reason, the thought of consciously stopping the pull of the scouts had never occurred to me.

As usual, don Juan was correct. I found out that I could change the course of my dreaming by intending that course. After all, I did intend for the scouts to transport me to their world. It was feasible that if I deliberately intended the opposite, my dreaming would follow the opposite course.

With practice, my capacity to intend my journeys into the inorganic beings' realm became extraordinarily keen. An increased capacity to intend brought forth an increased control over my dreaming attention. This additional control made me more daring. I felt that I could journey with impunity, because I could stop the journey any time I wanted to.

"Your confidence is very scary" was don Juan's comment when I told him, at his request, about the new aspect of my control over my dreaming attention.

"Why should it be scary?" I asked. I was truly convinced of the practical value of what I had found out.

"Because yours is the confidence of a fool," he said. "I am going to tell you a sorcerers' story that is apropos. [* apropos- of an appropriate or relevant nature] I didn't witness it myself, but my teacher's teacher, the nagual Elias, did."

Don Juan said that the nagual Elias and the love of his life, a sorceress named Amalia, were lost, in their youth, in the inorganic beings' world.

I had never heard don Juan talk about sorcerers being the love of anybody's life. His statement startled me. I asked him about this inconsistency.

"It's not an inconsistency. I have simply refrained all along from telling you stories of sorcerers' affection," he said. "You've been so oversaturated with love all your life that I wanted to give you a break.

"Well, the nagual Elias and the love of his life, the witch Amalia, got lost in the inorganic beings' world," don Juan went on. "They went there not in dreaming but with their physical bodies."

"How did that happen, don Juan?"

"Their teacher, the nagual Rosendo, was very close in temperament and practice to the old sorcerers. He intended to help Elias and Amalia, but instead he pushed them across some deadly boundaries. The nagual Rosendo didn't have that crossing in mind. What he wanted to do was to put his two disciples into the second attention, but what he got as a result was their disappearance."

Don Juan said that he was not going to go into the details of that long and complicated story. He was only going to tell me how they became lost in that world. He stated that the nagual Rosendo's miscalculation was to assume that the inorganic beings are not, in the slightest, interested in women. His reasoning was correct and was guided by the sorcerers' knowledge that the universe is markedly female and that maleness, being an offshoot of femaleness, is almost scarce, thus, coveted.

Don Juan made a digression and commented that perhaps that scarcity of males is the reason for men's unwarranted dominion on our planet. I wanted to remain on that topic, but he went ahead with his story. He said that the nagual Rosendo's plan was to give instruction to Elias and Amalia exclusively in the second attention. And to that effect, he followed the old sorcerers' prescribed technique. He engaged a scout, in dreaming, and commanded it to transport his disciples into the second attention by displacing their assemblage points on the proper position.

Theoretically, a powerful scout could displace their assemblage points on the proper position with no effort at all. What the nagual Rosendo did not take into consideration was the trickery of the inorganic beings. The scout did displace the assemblage points of his disciples, but it displaced them on a position from which it was easy to transport them bodily into the realm of the inorganic beings.

"Is this possible, to be transported bodily?" I asked.

"It is possible," he assured me. "We are energy that is kept in a specific shape and position by the fixation of the assemblage point on one location. If that location is changed, the shape and position of that energy will change accordingly. All the inorganic beings have to do is to place our assemblage point on the right location, and off we go, like a bullet, shoes, hat, and all."

"Can this happen to any one of us, don Juan?"

"Most certainly. Especially if our sum total of energy is right. Obviously, the sum total of the combined energies of Elias and Amalia was something the inorganic beings couldn't overlook. It is absurd to trust the inorganic beings. They have their own rhythm, and it isn't human."

I asked don Juan what exactly the nagual Rosendo did to send his disciples to that world. I knew it was stupid of me to ask, knowing that he was going to ignore my question. My surprise was genuine when he began to tell me.

"The steps are simplicity itself," he said. "He put his disciples inside a very small, closed space, something like a closet. Then he went into dreaming, called a scout from the inorganic beings' realm by voicing his intent to get one, then voiced his intent to offer his disciples to the scout.

"The scout, naturally, accepted the gift and took them away, at an unguarded moment, when they were making love inside that closet. When the nagual opened the closet, they were no longer there."

Don Juan explained that making gifts of their disciples to the inorganic beings was precisely what the old sorcerers used to do. The nagual Rosendo did not mean to do that, but he got swayed by the absurd belief that the inorganic beings were under his control.

"Sorcerers' maneuvers are deadly," don Juan went on. "I beseech you to be extraordinarily aware. Don't get involved in having some idiotic confidence in yourself."

"What finally happened to the nagual Elias and Amalia?" I asked.

"The nagual Rosendo had to go bodily into that world and look for them," he replied.

"Did he find them?"

"He did, after untold struggles. However, he could not totally bring them out. So the two young people were always semiprisoners of that realm."

"Did you know them, don Juan?"

"Of course I knew them, and I assure you, they were very strange."

## 6. The Shadows' World

"You must be extremely careful, for you are about to fall prey to the inorganic beings," don Juan said to me, quite unexpectedly, after we had been talking about something totally unrelated to dreaming.

His statement caught me by surprise. As usual, I attempted to defend myself.

"You don't have to warn me. I'm very careful," I assured him.

"The inorganic beings are plotting," he said. "I sense that, and I can't console myself by saying that they set traps at the beginning and, in this manner, undesirable dreamers are effectively and permanently screened out."

The tone of his voice was so urgent that I immediately had to reassure him I was not going to fall into any trap.

"You must seriously consider that the inorganic beings have astounding means at their disposal," he went on. "Their awareness is superb. In comparison, we are children, children with a lot of energy, which the inorganic beings covet."

I wanted to tell him that, on an abstract level, I had understood his point and his concern, but, on a concrete plane, I saw no reason for his warning, because I was in control of my dreaming practices.

A few minutes of uneasy silence followed before don Juan spoke again. He changed the subject and said that he had to bring to my attention a very important issue of his dreaming instruction, an issue that had, so far, bypassed my awareness.

"You already understand that the gates of dreaming are specific obstacles," he said, "but you haven't understood yet that whatever is given as the exercise to reach and cross a gate is not really what that gate is all about."

"This is not clear to me at all, don Juan."

"I mean that it's not true to say, for example, that the second gate is reached and crossed when a dreamer learns to wake up in another dream, or when a dreamer learns to change dreams without waking up in the world of daily life."

"Why isn't it true, don Juan?"

"Because the second gate of dreaming is reached and crossed only when a dreamer learns to isolate and follow the foreign energy scouts."

"Why then is the idea of changing dreams given at all?"

"Waking up in another dream or changing dreams is the drill devised by the old sorcerers to exercise a dreamer's capacity to isolate and follow a scout."

Don Juan stated that following a scout is a high accomplishment and that when dreamers are able to perform it, the second gate is flung open and the universe that exists behind it becomes accessible to them. He stressed that this universe is there all the time but that we cannot go into it because we lack energetic prowess and that, in essence, the second gate of dreaming is the door into the inorganic beings' world, and dreaming is the key that opens that door.

"Can a dreamer isolate a scout directly, without having to go through the drill of changing dreams?" I asked.

"No, not at all," he said. "The drill is essential. The question here is whether this is the only drill that exists. Or can a dreamer follow another drill?"

Don Juan looked at me quizzically. It seemed that he actually expected me to answer the question.

"It's too difficult to come up with a drill as complete as the one the old sorcerers devised," I said, without knowing why but with irrefutable authority.

Don Juan admitted that I was absolutely right and said that the old sorcerers had devised a series of perfect drills to go through the gates of dreaming into the specific worlds that exist behind every gate. He reiterated that dreaming, being the old sorcerers' invention, has to be played by their rules. He described the rule of the second gate in terms of a series of three steps: one, through practicing the drill of changing dreams, dreamers find out about the scouts; two, by following the scouts, they enter into another veritable universe; and three, in that universe, by means of their actions, dreamers find out, on their own, the governing laws and regulations of that universe.

Don Juan said that in my dealings with the inorganic beings, I had followed the rule so well that he feared devastating consequences. He thought that the unavoidable reaction on the part of the inorganic beings was going to be an attempt to keep me in their world.

"Don't you think that you are exaggerating, don Juan?" I asked. I could not believe that the picture was as bleak as he was painting it.

"I am not exaggerating at all," he said, in a dry, serious tone. "You'll see. The inorganic beings don't let anyone go, not without a real fight."

"But what makes you think they want me?"

"They've already shown you too many things. Do you really believe that they are going to all this trouble just to entertain themselves?"

Don Juan laughed at his own remark. I did not find him amusing. A strange fear made me ask him whether he thought I should interrupt or even discontinue my dreaming practices.

"You have to continue your dreaming until you have gone through the universe behind the second gate," he said. "I mean that you alone must either accept or reject the lure of the inorganic beings. That is why I remain aloof and hardly ever comment on your dreaming practices."

I confessed to him that I had been at a loss to explain why he was so generous in elucidating other aspects of his knowledge and so miserly with dreaming.

"I was forced to teach you dreaming," he said, "only because that is the pattern set out by the old sorcerers. The path of dreaming is filled with pitfalls, and to avoid those pitfalls or to fall into them is the personal and individual affair of each dreamer, and I may add that it is a final affair."

"Are those pitfalls the result of succumbing to adulation or to promises of power?" I asked.

"Not only succumbing to those, but succumbing to anything offered by the inorganic beings. There is no way for sorcerers to accept anything offered by them, beyond a certain point."

"And what is that certain point, don Juan?"

"That point depends on us as individuals. The challenge is for each of us to take only what is needed from that world, nothing more. To know what's needed is the virtuosity of sorcerers, but to take only what's needed is their highest accomplishment. To fail to understand this simple rule is the surest way of plummeting into a pitfall."

"What happens if you fall, don Juan?"

"If you fall, you pay the price, and the price depends on the circumstances and the depth of the fall. But there is really no way of talking about an eventuality of this sort, because we are not facing a problem of punishment. Energetic currents are at stake here, energetic currents which create circumstances that are more dreadful than death. Everything in the sorcerers' path is a matter of life or death, but in the path of dreaming this matter is enhanced a hundred fold."

I reassured don Juan that I always exercised the utmost care in my dreaming practices, and that I was extremely disciplined and conscientious.

"I know that you are," he said. "But I want you to be even more disciplined and handle everything related to dreaming with kid gloves. Be, above all, vigilant. I can't foretell where the attack will come from."

"Are you seeing, as a seer, imminent danger for me, don Juan?"

"I have seen imminent danger for you since the day you walked in that mysterious city the first time I helped you round up your energy body."

"But do you know specifically what I should do and what I should avoid?"

"No, I don't. I only know that the universe behind the second gate is the closest to our own, and our own universe is pretty crafty and heartless. So the two can't be that different."

I persisted in asking him to tell me what was in store for me. And he insisted that, as a sorcerer, he sensed a state of general danger but that he could not be more specific.

"The universe of the inorganic beings is always ready to strike," he went on. "But so is our own universe. That's why you have to go into their realm exactly as if you were venturing into a war zone."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that dreamers always have to be afraid of that world?"

"No. I don't mean that. Once a dreamer goes through the universe behind the second gate, or once a dreamer refuses to consider it as a viable option, there are no more headaches."

Don Juan stated that only then are dreamers free to continue. I was not sure what he meant; he explained that the universe behind the second gate is so powerful and aggressive that it serves as a natural screen or a testing ground where dreamers are probed for their weaknesses. If they survive the tests, they can proceed to the next gate; if they do not, they remain forever trapped in that universe.

I was left choking with anxiety but, in spite of my coaxing, that was all he said. When I went home, I continued my journeys to the inorganic beings' realm, exerting great care. My carefulness seemed only to increase my sense of enjoying those journeys. I got to the point that the mere contemplation of the inorganic beings' world was enough to create an exultation impossible to describe. I feared that my delight was going to end sooner or later, but it was not so. Something unexpected made it even more intense.

On one occasion, a scout guided me very roughly through countless tunnels, as if searching for something, or as if it were trying to draw all my energy out and exhaust me. By the time it finally stopped, I felt as if I had run a marathon. I seemed to be at the edge of that world. There were no more tunnels, only blackness all around me. Then something lit up the area right in front of me. Light shone from an indirect source. It was a subdued light that rendered everything diffusely gray or brownish. When I became used to the light, I vaguely distinguished some dark, moving shapes. After a while, it seemed to me that focusing my dreaming attention on those moving shapes made them substantial. I noticed that there were three types: some of them were round, like balls; others were like bells; and others yet like gigantic, undulating candle flames. All of them were basically round and the same size. I judged that they were three to four feet in diameter. There were hundreds, perhaps even thousands of them.

I knew that I was having a strange, sophisticated vision, yet those shapes were so real that I found myself reacting with genuine queasiness. I got the nauseating feeling of being over a nest of giant, round, brown and grayish bugs. I felt somehow safe, though, hovering above them. I discarded all these considerations, however, the moment I realized that it was idiotic of me to feel safe or ill at ease, as if my dream were a real-life situation. However, as I observed those buglike shapes squirm, I became very disturbed at the idea that they were about to touch me.

"We are the mobile unit of our world," the emissary's voice said, all of a sudden. "Don't be afraid. We are energy, and, for sure, we're not intending to touch you. It would be impossible anyway. We are separated by real boundaries."

After a long pause, the voice added, "We want you to join us. Come down to where we are. And don't be ill at ease. You are not ill at ease with the scouts and certainly not with me. The scouts and I are just like the others. I am bell-shaped, and scouts are like candle flames."

That last statement was definitely a cue of sorts for my energy body. On hearing it, my queasiness and fear vanished. I descended to their level, and the balls and bells and candle flames surrounded me. They came so close to me that they would have touched me had I had a physical body. Instead, we went through one another, like encapsulated air puffs.

I had, at that point, an unbelievable sensation. Although I did not feel anything with or in my energy body, I was feeling and recording the most unusual tickling somewhere else; soft, airlike things were definitely going through me, but not right there. The sensation was vague and fast and did not give me time to catch it fully. Instead of focusing my dreaming attention on it, I became entirely absorbed in watching those oversized bugs of energy.

At the level where we were, it seemed to me that there was a commonality between the shadow entities and myself: size.

Perhaps it was because I judged them to be the same size as my energy body that I felt almost cozy with them. On examining them, I concluded that I did not mind them at all. They were impersonal, cold, detached, and I liked that immensely. I wondered for an instant whether my disliking them one minute and liking them the next was a natural consequence of dreaming or a product of some energetic influence those entities were exerting on me.

"They are most likable," I said to the emissary, at the very moment I was overpowered by a wave of profound friendship or even affection for them.

No sooner had I spoken my mind than the dark shapes scurried away, like bulky guinea pigs, leaving me alone in semidarkness.

"You projected too much feeling and scared them off," the emissary's voice said. "Feeling is too hard for them, and for me for that matter." The emissary actually laughed shyly.

My dreaming session ended there. On awakening, my first reaction was to pack my bag to go to Mexico and see don Juan. However, an unexpected development in my personal life made it impossible for me to travel, in spite of my frantic preparations to leave. The anxiety resulting from this setback interrupted my dreaming practices altogether. I did not engage my conscious volition to stop them. I had unwittingly put so much emphasis on this specific dream that I simply knew if I could not get to don Juan there was no point in continuing dreaming.

After an interruption that lasted over half a year, I became more and more mystified by what had happened. I had no idea that my feelings alone were going to stop my practices. I wondered then if the desire would be sufficient to reinstate it. It was! Once I had formulated the thought of reentering dreaming, my practices continued as if they had never been interrupted. The scout picked up where we had left off and took me directly to the vision I'd had during my last session.

"This is the shadows' world," the emissary's voice said as soon as I was there. "But, even though we are shadows, we shed light. Not only are we mobile but we are the light in the tunnels. We are another kind of inorganic being that exists here. There are three kinds: one is like an immobile tunnel, the other is like a mobile shadow. We are the mobile shadows. The tunnels give us their energy, and we do their bidding."

The emissary stopped talking. I felt it was daring me to ask about the third kind of inorganic being. I also felt that if I did not ask, the emissary would not tell me.

"What's the third kind of inorganic being?" I said.

The emissary coughed and chuckled. To me, it sounded like it relished being asked.

"Oh, that's our most mysterious feature," it said. "The third kind is revealed to our visitors only when they choose to stay with us."

"Why is that so?" I asked.

"Because it takes a great deal of energy to see them," the emissary answered. "And we would have to provide that energy."

I knew that the emissary was telling me the truth. I also knew that a horrendous danger was lurking. Yet I was driven by a curiosity without limits. I wanted to see that third kind.

The emissary seemed to be aware of my mood.

"Would you like to see them?" it asked casually.

"Most certainly," I said.

"All you have to do is to say out loud that you want to stay with us," the emissary said with a nonchalant intonation.

"But if I say that, I have to stay, right?" I asked.

"Naturally," the emissary said in a tone of ultimate conviction. "Everything you say out loud in this world is for keeps."

I could not help thinking that, if the emissary had wanted to trick me into staying, all it had to do was lie to me. I would not have known the difference.

"I cannot lie to you, because a lie doesn't exist," the emissary said, intruding into my thoughts. "I can tell you only about what exists. In my world, only intent exists; a lie has no intent behind it; therefore, it has no existence."

I wanted to argue that there is intent even behind lies, but before I could voice my argument, the emissary said that behind lies there is intention but that that intention is not intent.

I could not keep my dreaming attention focused on the argument the emissary was posing. It went to the shadow beings. Suddenly, I noticed that they had the appearance of a herd of strange, childlike animals. The emissary's voice warned me to hold my emotions in check, for sudden bursts of feelings had the capacity to make them disperse, like a flock of birds.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"Come down to our side and try to push or pull us," the emissary's voice urged me. "The quicker you learn to do that, the quicker you'll be able to move things around in your world by merely looking at them."

My merchant's mind went berserk with anticipation. I was instantly among them, desperately trying to push them or pull them. After a while, I thoroughly exhausted my energy. I then had the impression that I had been trying to do something equivalent to lifting a house with the strength of my teeth.

Another impression I had was that the more I exerted myself, the greater the number of shadows. It was as if they were coming from every corner to watch me, or to feed on me. The moment I had that thought, the shadows again scurried away.

"We are not feeding on you," the emissary said. "We all come to feel your energy, very much like what you do with sunlight on a cold day."

The emissary urged me to open up to them by canceling out my suspicious thoughts. I heard the voice, and as I listened to what it was saying, I realized that I was hearing, feeling, and thinking exactly as I do in my daily world. I slowly turned to see around me. Taking the clarity of my perception as a gauge, I concluded that I was in a real world.

The emissary's voice sounded in my ears. It said that for me the only difference between perceiving my world and perceiving theirs was that perceiving their world started and ended in the blink of an eye; perceiving mine did not, because my awareness- together with the awareness of an immense number of beings like me who held my world in place with their intent- was fixed on my world. The emissary added that perceiving my world started and ended the same way for the inorganic beings, in the blink of an eye, but perceiving their world did not, because there were immense numbers of them holding it in place with their intent.

At that instant the scene started to dissolve. I was like a diver, and waking up from that world was like swimming up to reach the surface.

In the following session, the emissary began it's dialogue with me by restating that a totally coordinated and coactive relationship existed between mobile shadows and stationary tunnels. It finished it's statement saying, "We can't exist without each other."

"I understand what you mean," I said.

There was a touch of scorn in the emissary's voice when it retorted that I could not possibly understand what it means to be related in that fashion, which was infinitely more than being dependent. I intended to ask the emissary to explain what it meant by that, but the next instant I was inside of what I can only describe as the very tissue of the tunnel. I saw some grotesquely merged, glandlike protuberances that emitted an opaque light. The thought crossed my mind that those were the same protuberances that had given me the impression of being like Braille. Considering that they were energy blobs three to four feet in diameter, I began to wonder about the actual size of those tunnels.

"Size here is not like size in your world," the emissary said. "The energy of this world is a different kind of energy; it's features don't coincide with the features of the energy of your world, yet this world is as real as your own."

The emissary went on to say that it had told me everything about the shadow beings when it described and explained the protuberances on the tunnels' walls. I retorted that I had heard the explanations but I had not paid attention to them because I believed that they did not pertain directly to dreaming.

"Everything here, in this realm, pertains directly to dreaming," the emissary stated.

I wanted to think about the reason for my misjudgment, but my mind became blank. My dreaming attention was waning. I was having trouble focusing it on the world around me. I braced myself for waking up. The emissary started to speak again, and the sound of it's voice propped me up. My dreaming attention perked up considerably.

"Dreaming is the vehicle that brings dreamers to this world," the emissary said, "and everything sorcerers know about dreaming was taught to them by us. Our world is connected to yours by a door called dreams. We know how to go through that door, but men don't. They have to learn it."

The emissary's voice went on explaining what it had already explained to me before.

"The protuberances on the tunnels' walls are shadow beings," it said. "I am one of them. We move inside the tunnels, on their walls, charging ourselves with the energy of the tunnels, which is our energy."

An idle thought crossed my mind: I was really incapable of conceiving a symbiotic relationship such as the one I was witnessing.

"If you would stay among us, you would certainly learn to feel what it is like to be connected as we are connected," the emissary said.

The emissary seemed to be waiting for my reply. I had the feeling that what it really wanted was for me to say that I had decided to stay.

"How many shadow beings are in each tunnel?" I asked to change the mood and immediately regretted it because the emissary began to give me a detailed account of the numbers and functions of the shadow beings in each tunnel. It said that each tunnel had a specific number of dependent entities, which performed specific functions having to do with the needs and expectations of the supporting tunnels.

I did not want the emissary to go into more detail. I reasoned that the less I knew about the tunnel and shadow beings the better off I was. The instant I formulated that thought, the emissary stopped, and my energy body jerked as if it had been pulled by a cable. The next moment, I was fully awake, in my bed.

From then on, I had no more fears that could have interrupted my practices. Another idea had begun to rule me: the idea that I had found unparalleled excitation. I could hardly wait every day to start dreaming and have the scout take me to the shadows' world. The added attraction was that my visions of the shadows' world became even more true to life than before. Judged by the subjective standards of orderly thoughts, orderly visual and auditory sensory input, orderly responses on my part, my experiences, for as long as they lasted, were as real as any situation in our daily world. Never had I had perceptual experiences in which the only difference between my visions and my everyday world was the speed with which my visions ended. One instant I was in a strange, real world, and the next instant I was in my bed.

I craved don Juan's commentaries and explanations, but I was still marooned in Los Angeles. The more I considered my situation, the greater my anxiety: I even began to sense that something in the inorganic beings' realm was brewing at tremendous speed.

As my anxiety grew, my body entered into a state of profound fright, although my mind was ecstatic in the contemplation of the shadows' world. To make things worse, the dreaming emissary's voice lapsed into my daily consciousness. One day while I was attending a class at the university, I heard the voice say, over and over, that any attempt on my part to end my dreaming practices would be deleterious to my total aims. It argued that warriors do not shy away from a challenge and that I had no valid rationale for discontinuing my practices. I agreed with the emissary. I had no intention of stopping anything, and the voice was merely reaffirming what I felt.

Not only did the emissary change but a new scout appeared on the scene. On one occasion, before I had begun to examine the items of my dream, a scout had literally jumped in front of me and aggressively captured my dreaming attention. The notable feature of this scout was that it did not need to go through any energetic metamorphosis. It was a blob of energy from the start. In the blink of an eye, the scout transported me, without my having to voice my intent to go with it, to another part of the inorganic beings' realm: the world of the saber-toothed tigers.

I have described in my other works glimpses of those visions. I say glimpses because I did not have sufficient energy then to render these perceived worlds comprehensible to my linear mind.

My nightly visions of the saber-toothed tigers occurred regularly for a long time, until one night when the aggressive scout that had taken me for the first time to that realm suddenly appeared again. Without waiting for my consent, it took me to the tunnels.

I heard the emissary's voice. It immediately went into the longest and most poignant sales pitch I had heard so far. It told me about the extraordinary advantages of the inorganic beings' world. It spoke of acquiring knowledge that would definitely stagger the mind and about acquiring it by the simplest act, of staying in those marvelous tunnels. It spoke of incredible mobility, of endless time to find things, and, above all, of being pampered by cosmic servants that would cater to my slightest whims.

"Aware beings from the most unbelievable corners of the cosmos stay with us," the emissary said, ending it's talk. "And they love their stay with us. In fact, no one wants to leave."

The thought that crossed my mind at that moment was that servitude was definitely antithetical [* antithetical- sharply contrasted in character or purpose] to me. I had never been at ease with servants or with being served.

The scout took over and made me glide through many tunnels. It came to a halt in a tunnel that seemed somehow larger than the others. My dreaming attention became riveted on the size and configuration of that tunnel, and it would have stayed glued there had I not been made to turn around. My dreaming attention focused then on a blob of energy a bit bigger than the shadow entities. It was blue, like the blue in the center of a candle's flame. I knew that this energy configuration was not a shadow entity and that it did not belong there.

I became absorbed in sensing it. The scout signaled me to leave, but something was making me impervious to it's cues. I remained, uneasily, where I was. However, the scout's signaling broke my concentration, and I lost sight of the blue shape.

Suddenly, a considerable force made me spin around and put me squarely in front of the blue shape. As I gazed at it, it turned into the figure of a person: very small, slender, delicate, almost transparent. I desperately attempted to determine whether it was a man or a woman, but, hard as I tried, I could not.

My attempts to ask the emissary failed. It flew away quite abruptly, leaving me suspended in that tunnel, facing now an unknown person. I tried to talk to that person the way I talked to the emissary. I got no response. I felt a wave of frustration at not being able to break the barrier that separated us. Then I was besieged by the fear of being alone with someone who might have been an enemy.

I had a variety of reactions triggered by the presence of that stranger. I even felt elation, because I knew that the scout had finally shown me another human being caught in that world. I only despaired at the possibility that we were not able to communicate perhaps because that stranger was one of the sorcerers of antiquity and belonged to a time different from mine.

The more intense my elation and curiosity, the heavier I became, until a moment in which I was so massive that I was back in my body, and back in the world. I found myself in Los Angeles, in a park by the University of California. I was standing on the grass, right in the line of people playing golf.

The person in front of me had solidified at the same rate. We stared at each other for a fleeting instant. It was a girl, perhaps six or seven years old. I thought I knew her. On seeing her, my elation and curiosity grew so out of proportion that they triggered a reversal. I lost mass so fast that in another instant I was again a blob of energy in the inorganic beings' realm. The scout came back for me and hurriedly pulled me away.

I woke up with a jolt of fright. In the process of surfacing into the daily world, something had let a message slip through. My mind went into a frenzy trying to put together what I knew or thought I knew. I spent more than forty-eight continuous hours attempting to get at a hidden feeling or a hidden knowledge that had gotten stuck to me. The only success I had was to sense a force- I fancied it to be outside my mind or my body- that told me not to trust my dreaming anymore.

After a few days, a dark and mysterious certainty began to get hold of me, a certainty that grew by degrees until I had no doubt about it's authenticity: I was sure that the blue blob of energy was a prisoner in the inorganic beings' realm.

I needed don Juan's advice more desperately than ever. I knew that I was throwing years of work out the window, but I couldn't help it: I dropped everything I was doing and ran to Mexico.

"What do you really want?" don Juan asked me as a way to contain my hysterical babbling.

I could not explain to him what I wanted because I did not know it myself.

"Your problem must be very serious to make you run like this," don Juan said with a pensive expression.

"It is, in spite of the fact that I can't figure out what my problem really is," I said.

He asked me to describe my dreaming practices in all the detail that was pertinent. I told him about my vision of the little girl and how it had affected me at an emotional level. He instantly advised me to ignore the event and regard it as a blatant attempt, on the part of the inorganic beings, to cater to my fantasies. He remarked that if dreaming is overemphasized, it becomes what it was for the old sorcerers: a source of inexhaustible indulging.

For some inexplicable reason, I was unwilling to tell don Juan about the realm of the shadow entities. It was only when he discarded my vision of the little girl that I felt obliged to describe to him my visits to that world. He was silent for a long time, as if he were overwhelmed.

When he finally spoke, he said, "You are more alone than I thought, because I can't discuss your dreaming practices at all. You are at the position of the old sorcerers. All I can do is to repeat to you that you must exercise all the care you arc able to muster up."

"Why do you say that I am at the position of the old sorcerers?"

"I've told you repeatedly that your mood is dangerously like the old sorcerers'. They were very capable beings. Their flaw was that they took to the inorganic beings' realm like fish take to the water. You are in the same boat. You know things about it that none of us can even conceive. For instance, I never knew about the shadows' world, and neither did the nagual Julian. Nor did the nagual Elias, in spite of the fact that he spent a long time in the world of the inorganic beings."

"But what difference does knowing the shadows' world make?"

"A great deal of difference. Dreamers are taken there only when the inorganic beings are sure the dreamers are going to stay in that world. We know this through the old sorcerers' stories."

"I assure you, don Juan, that I have no intention whatsoever of staying there. You talk as if I am just about to be lured by promises of service or promises of power. I am not interested in either, and that's that."

"At this level, it isn't that easy anymore. You've gone beyond the point where you could simply quit. Besides, you had the misfortune of being singled out by a watery inorganic being.

Remember how you tumbled with it? And how it felt? I told you then that watery inorganic beings are the most annoying. They are dependent and possessive, and once they sink their hooks, they never give up."

"And what does that mean in my case, don Juan?"

"It means real trouble. The specific inorganic being who's running the show is the one you grabbed that fatal day. Over the years, it has grown familiar with you. It knows you intimately."

I sincerely remarked to don Juan that the mere idea that an inorganic being knew me intimately made me sick to my stomach.

"When dreamers realize that the inorganic beings have no appeal," he said, "it is usually too late for them, because by then the inorganic beings have them in the bag."

I felt in the depths of me that he was talking abstractly, about dangers that might exist theoretically but not in practice. I was secretly convinced there was no danger of any sort.

"I am not going to allow the inorganic beings to lure me in any way, if that's what you're thinking," I said.

"I am thinking that they are going to trick you," he said. "Like they tricked the nagual Rosendo. They are going to set you up, and you won't see the trap or even suspect it. They are smooth operators. Now they have even invented a little girl."

"But there is no doubt in my mind that the little girl exists," I insisted.

"There is no little girl," he snapped. "That bluish blob of energy is a scout; an explorer caught in the inorganic beings' realm. I've said to you that the inorganic beings are like fishermen: They attract and catch awareness."

Don Juan said that he believed, without a doubt, that the bluish blob of energy was from a dimension entirely different from ours; a scout that got stranded and caught like a fly in a spider's web.

I did not appreciate his analogy. It worried me to the point of physical discomfort. I did mention this to don Juan, and he told me that my concern with the prisoner scout was making him feel very close to despair.

"Why does this bother you?" I asked.

"Something is brewing in that confounded world," he said. "And I can't figure out what it is."

While I remained with don Juan and his companions, I did not dream at all about the inorganic beings' world. As usual, my practice was to focus my dreaming attention on the items of my dreams and to change dreams. As a way to offset my concerns, don Juan made me gaze at clouds and at faraway mountain peaks. The result was an immediate feeling of being level with the clouds, or the feeling that I was actually at the faraway mountain peaks.

"I am very pleased, but very worried," don Juan said as a comment on my effort. "You are being taught marvels, and you don't even know it. And I don't mean that you are being taught by me."

"You are talking about the inorganic beings, true?"

"Yes, the inorganic beings. I recommend that you don't gaze at anything; gazing was the old sorcerers' technique. They were able to get to their energy bodies in the blink of an eye, simply by gazing at objects of their predilection. A very impressive technique, but useless to modern sorcerers. It does nothing to increase our sobriety or our capacity to seek freedom. All it does is pin us down to concreteness; a most undesirable state."

Don Juan added that, unless I kept myself in check, by the time I had merged the second attention with the attention of my everyday life, I was going to be an insufferable man. There was, he said, a dangerous gap between my mobility in the second attention and my insistence on immobility in my awareness of the daily world. He remarked that the gap between the two was so great that in my daily state I was nearly an idiot, and in the second attention I was a lunatic.

Before I went home, I took the liberty of discussing my dreaming visions of the shadows' world with Carol Tiggs, although don Juan had advised me not to discuss them with anybody. She was most understanding and most interested, since she was my total counterpart. Don Juan was definitely annoyed with me for having revealed my troubles to her. I felt worse than ever. Self-pity possessed me, and I began to complain about always doing the wrong thing.

"You haven't done anything yet," don Juan snapped at me. "That much, I know."

Was he right! On my next dreaming session, at home, all hell broke loose. I reached the shadows' world, as I had done on countless occasions: The difference was the presence of the blue energy shape. It was among the other shadow beings. I felt it was possible that the blob had been there before and I hadn't noticed it. As soon as I spotted it, my dreaming attention was inescapably attracted to that blob of energy. In a matter of seconds, I was next to it. The other shadows came to me, as usual, but I paid no attention to them.

All of a sudden, the blue, round shape turned into the little girl I had seen before. She craned her thin, delicate, long neck to one side and said in a barely audible whisper, "Help me!" Either she said that or I fantasized that she said it. The result was the same: I stood frozen, galvanized by genuine concern. I experienced a chill, but not in my energy mass. I felt a chill in another part of me. This was the first time I was completely aware that my experience was thoroughly separate from my sensorial feelings. I was experiencing the shadows' world, with all the implications of what I normally consider experiencing: I was able to think, to assess, to make decisions; I had psychological continuity; in other words, I was myself. The only part of me that was missing was my sensorial self. I had no bodily sensations. All my input came through seeing and hearing. My rationality then considered a strange dilemma: seeing and hearing were not physical faculties but qualities of the visions I was having.

"You are really seeing and hearing," the emissary's voice said, erupting into my thoughts. "That is the beauty of this place. You can experience everything through seeing and hearing, without having to breathe. Think of it! You don't have to breathe! You can go anywhere in the universe and not breathe."

A most disquieting ripple of emotion went through me, and, again, I did not feel it there, in the shadows' world. I felt it in another place. I became enormously agitated by the obvious yet veiled realization that there was a live connection between the me that was experiencing and a source of energy, a source of sensorial feeling located somewhere else. It occurred to me that this somewhere else was my actual physical body, which was asleep in my bed.

At the instant of this thought, the shadow beings scurried away, and the little girl was alone in my field of vision. I watched her and became convinced that I knew her. She seemed to falter as if she were about to faint. A boundless wave of affection for her enveloped me.

I tried to speak to her, but I was incapable of uttering sounds. It became clear to me then that all my dialogues with the emissary had been elicited and accomplished by the emissary's energy. Left to my own devices, I was helpless. I attempted next to direct my thoughts to the little girl. It was useless. We were separated by a membrane of energy I could not pierce.

The little girl seemed to understand my despair and actually communicated with me, directly into my thoughts. She told me, essentially, what don Juan had already said: that she was a scout caught in the webs of that world. Then she added that she had adopted the shape of a little girl because that shape was familiar to me and to her; and that she needed my help as much as I needed hers. She said this to me in one clump of energetic feeling, which was like words that came to me all at once. I had no difficulty understanding her, although this was the first time anything of the sort had happened to me.

I did not know what to do. I tried to convey to her my sensation of incapacity. She seemed to comprehend me instantly. She silently appealed to me with a burning look. She even smiled as if to let me know that she had left it up to me to extricate her from her bonds. When I retorted, in a thought, that I had no abilities whatsoever, she gave me the impression of a hysterical child in the throes of despair.

I frantically tried to talk to her. The little girl actually cried, like a child her age would cry, out of desperation and fear. I couldn't stand it. I charged at her, but with no effective result. My energy mass went through her. My idea was to lift her up and take her with me.

I attempted the same maneuver over and over until I was exhausted. I stopped to consider my next move. I was afraid that my dreaming attention was going to wane, and then I would lose sight of her. I doubted that the inorganic beings would bring me back to that specific part of their realm. It seemed to me that this was going to be my last visit to them: the visit that counted.

Then I did something unthinkable. Before my dreaming attention vanished, I yelled loud and clear my intent to merge my energy with the energy of that prisoner scout and set it free.

## 7. The Blue Scout

I was dreaming an utterly nonsensical dream. Carol Tiggs was by my side. She was speaking to me, although I could not understand what she said. Don Juan was also in my dream, as were all the members of his party. They seemed to be trying to drag me out of a foggy, yellowish world.

After a serious effort, during which I lost and regained sight of them various times, they succeeded in extricating me from that place. Since I could not conceive the sense of all that endeavor, I finally figured that I was having a normal, incoherent dream.

My surprise was staggering when I woke up and found myself in bed, in don Juan's house. I was incapable of moving. I had no energy at all. I did not know what to think, although I immediately sensed the gravity of my situation. I had the vague feeling that I had lost my energy because of fatigue caused by dreaming.

Don Juan's companions seemed to be extremely affected by whatever was happening to me. They kept on coming into my room, one at a time. Each stayed for a moment, in complete silence, until someone else showed up. It appeared to me that they were taking turns watching over me. I was too weak to ask them to explain their behavior.

During the subsequent days, I began to feel better, and they started to talk to me about my dreaming. At first, I did not know what they wanted of me. Then it dawned on me, because of their questions, that they were obsessed with the shadow beings. Every one of them appeared to be scared and said to me more or less the same thing. They insisted that they had never been in the shadows' world. Some of them even claimed that they did not know it existed. Their claims and reactions increased my sense of bewilderment and my fear.

The questions everyone asked were, "Who took you into that world? Or how did you even begin to know how to get there?" When I told them that the scouts had shown me that world, they could not believe me. Obviously, they had surmised that I had been there, but since it was not possible for them to use their personal experience as a reference point, they were unable to fathom what I was saying. Yet they still wanted to know all I could tell them about the shadow beings and their realm. I obliged them. All of them, with the exception of don Juan, sat by my bed, hanging on every word I said. However, every time I asked them about my situation, they scurried away, just like the shadow beings.

Another disturbing reaction, which they never had before, was that they frantically avoided any physical contact with me. They kept their distance, as if I were carrying the plague. Their reaction worried me so much that I felt obliged to ask them about it. They denied it. They seemed insulted and even went so far as to insist on proving to me that I was wrong. I laughed heartily at the tense situation that ensued. Their bodies went rigid every time they tried to embrace me.

Florinda Grau, don Juan's closest cohort, was the only member of his party who lavished physical attention on me and tried to explain to me what was going on. She told me that I had been discharged of energy in the inorganic beings' world and charged again, but that my new energetic charge was a bit disturbing to the majority of them.

Florinda used to put me to bed every night, as if I were an invalid. She even spoke to me in baby talk, which all of them celebrated with gales of laughter. But regardless of how she made fun of me, I appreciated her concern, which seemed to be real.

I have written about Florinda before in connection with my meeting her. She was by far the most beautiful woman I had ever met. Once I said to her, and I really meant it, that she could have been a fashion magazine model.

"Of a magazine of nineteen ten," she retorted.

Florinda, although she was old, was not old at all. She was young and vibrant. When I asked don Juan about her unusual youthfulness, he replied that sorcery kept her in a vital state. Sorcerers' energy, he remarked, was seen by the eye as youth and vigor.

After satisfying their initial curiosity about the shadows' world, don Juan's companions stopped coming into my room, and their conversation remained at the level of casual inquiries about my health. Every time I tried to get up, however, there was someone around who gently put me back to bed. I did not want their ministrations, yet it seemed that I needed them; I was weak. I accepted that. But what really took it's toll on me was not having anyone explain to me what I was doing in Mexico when I had gone to bed to dream in Los Angeles. I asked them repeatedly. Every one of them gave me the same answer, "Ask the nagual. He's the only one who can explain it."

Finally, Florinda broke the ice. "You were lured into a trap: That's what happened to you," she said.

"Where was I lured into a trap?"

"In the world of the inorganic beings, of course. That has been the world you've been dealing with for years. Isn't that so?"

"Most definitely, Florinda. But can you tell me about the kind of trap it was?"

"Not really. All I can tell you is that you lost all your energy there. But you fought very well."

"Why am I sick, Florinda?"

"You are not sick with an illness: You were energetically wounded. You were critical, but now you are only gravely wounded."

"How did all this happen?"

"You entered into a mortal combat with the inorganic beings, and you were defeated."

"I don't remember fighting anyone, Florinda."

"Whether you remember or not is immaterial. You fought and were outclassed. You didn't have a chance against those masterful manipulators."

"I fought the inorganic beings?"

"Yes. You had a mortal encounter with them. I really don't know how you have survived their death blow."

She refused to tell me anything else and hinted that the nagual was coming to see me any day.

The next day don Juan showed up. He was very jovial and supportive. He jokingly announced that he was paying me a visit in his capacity of energy doctor. He examined me by gazing at me from head to toe.

"You're almost cured," he concluded.

"What happened to me, don Juan?" I asked.

"You fell into a trap the inorganic beings set for you," he answered.

"How did I end up here?"

"Right there is the big mystery, for sure," he said and smiled jovially, obviously trying to make light of a serious matter. "The inorganic beings snatched you, body and all. First they took your energy body into their realm when you followed one of their scouts; and then they took your physical body."

Don Juan's companions seemed to be in a state of shock. One of them asked don Juan whether the inorganic beings could abduct anyone. Don Juan answered that they certainly could. He reminded them that the nagual Elias was taken into that universe, and he definitely did not intend to go there.

All of them assented with a nod. Don Juan continued speaking to them, referring to me in the third person. He said that the combined awareness of a group of inorganic beings had first consumed my energy body by forcing an emotional outburst from me: to free the blue scout. Then the combined awareness of the same group of inorganic beings had pulled my inert physical mass into their world. Don Juan added that without the energy body one is merely a lump of organic matter that can be easily manipulated by awareness.

"The inorganic beings are glued together, like the cells of the body," don Juan went on. "When they put their awareness together, they are unbeatable. It's nothing for them to yank us out of our moorings and plunge us into their world. Especially if we make ourselves conspicuous and available, like he did."

Their sighs and gasps echoed against the walls. All of them seemed to be genuinely frightened and concerned.

I wanted to whine and blame don Juan for not stopping me, but I remembered how he had tried to warn me, to deviate me, time and time again, to no avail. Don Juan was definitely aware of what was going on in my mind. He gave a knowing smile.

"The reason you think you're sick," he said, addressing me, "is that the inorganic beings discharged your energy and gave you theirs. That should have been enough to kill anyone. As the nagual, you have extra energy; therefore, you barely survived."

I mentioned to don Juan that I remembered bits and pieces of quite an incoherent dream, in which I was in a yellow-fogged world. He, Carol Tiggs, and his companions were pulling me out.

"The inorganic beings' realm looks like a yellow fog world to the physical eye," he said. "When you thought you were having an incoherent dream, you were actually looking with your physical eyes for the first time at the inorganic beings' universe. And, strange as it may seem to you, it was also the first time for us. We knew about the fog only through sorcerers' stories, not through experience."

Nothing of what he was saying made sense to me. Don Juan assured me that because of my lack of energy, a more complete explanation was impossible. I had to be satisfied, he said, with what he was telling me and how I understood it.

"I don't understand it at all," I insisted.

"Then you haven't lost anything," he said. "When you get stronger, you yourself will answer your questions."

I confessed to don Juan that I was having hot flashes. My temperature would rise suddenly, and while I felt hot and sweaty, I had extraordinary but disturbing insights into my situation.

Don Juan scanned my entire body with his penetrating gaze. He said that I was in a state of energetic shock. Losing energy had temporarily affected me, and what I interpreted as hot flashes were, in essence, blasts of energy during which I momentarily regained control of my energy body and knew everything that had happened to me.

"Make an effort, and tell me yourself what happened to you in the inorganic beings' world," he ordered me.

I told him that the clear sensation I got, from time to time, was that he and his companions had gone into that world with their physical bodies and had snatched me out of the inorganic beings' clutches.

"Right!" he exclaimed. "You're doing fine. Now, turn that sensation into a view of what happened."

I was unable to do what he wanted, hard as I tried. Failing made me experience an unusual fatigue which seemed to dry up the inside of my body. Before don Juan left the room, I remarked to him that I was suffering from anxiety.

"That means nothing," he said, unconcerned. "Gain back your energy, and don't worry about nonsense."

More than two weeks went by, during which I slowly gained back my energy. However, I kept on worrying about everything. I worried mainly about being unknown to myself, especially about a streak of coldness in me that I had not noticed before; a sort of indifference; a detachment that I had attributed to my lack of energy until I regained it. Then I realized that detachment was a new feature of my being; a feature that had me permanently out of synchronization. To elicit the feelings I was accustomed to, I had to summon them up and actually wait a moment until they made their appearance in my mind.

Another new feature of my being was a strange longing that took hold of me from time to time. I longed for someone I did not know. It was such an overpowering and consuming feeling that when I experienced it, I had to move around the room incessantly to alleviate it. The longing remained with me until I made use of another newcomer in my life: a rigid control of myself so new and powerful that it only added more fuel to my worrying.

By the end of the fourth week, everybody felt that I was finally cured. They cut down their visits drastically. I spent much of the time alone, sleeping. The rest and relaxation I was getting was so complete that my energy began to increase remarkably. I felt like my old self again. I even began to exercise.

One day around noon, after a light lunch, I returned to my room to take a nap. Just before I sank into a deep sleep, I was tossing in my bed trying to find a more comfortable spot, when a strange pressure on my temples made me open my eyes. The little girl of the inorganic beings' world was standing by the foot of my bed, peering at me with her cold, steel blue eyes.

I jumped out of bed and screamed so loudly that three of don Juan's companions were in the room before I had stopped my scream. They were aghast. They watched in horror as the little girl came to me and was stopped by the boundaries of my luminous physical being. We looked at each other for an eternity. She was telling me something, which I could not comprehend at first but which in the next moment became as clear as a bell. She said that for me to understand what she was saying, my awareness had to be transferred from my physical body into my energy body.

Don Juan came into the room at that moment. The little girl and don Juan stared at each other. Without a word, don Juan turned around and walked out of the room. The little girl swished past the door after him. The commotion this scene created among don Juan's companions was indescribable. They lost all their composure. Apparently, all of them had seen the little girl as she left the room with the nagual.

I myself seemed to be on the verge of exploding. I felt faint and had to sit down. I had experienced the presence of the little girl as a blow on my solar plexus. She bore an astonishing likeness to my father. Waves of sentiment hit me. I wondered about the meaning of this until I was actually sick.

When don Juan returned to the room, I had gained minimal control over myself. The expectation of hearing what he had to say about the little girl was making my breathing very difficult. Everybody was as excited as I was. They all talked to don Juan at once and laughed when they realized what they were doing. Their main interest was to find out whether there was any uniformity in the way they had perceived the scout's appearance. Everybody was in agreement that they had seen a little girl, six to seven years old, very thin, with angular, beautiful features. They also agreed that her eyes were steel blue and burning with a mute emotion: Her eyes, they said, expressed gratitude and loyalty.

Every detail they described about the little girl I corroborated myself. Her eyes were so bright and overpowering that they had actually caused me something like pain. I had felt the weight of her look on my chest.

A serious query, which don Juan's companions had and which I echoed myself, was about the implications of this event. All agreed that the scout was a portion of foreign energy that had filtered through the walls separating the second attention and the attention of the daily world. They asserted that; since they were not dreaming and yet all of them had seen the alien energy projected into the figure of a human child; that child had existence.

They argued that there must have been hundreds, if not thousands, of cases in which foreign energy slips unnoticed through natural barriers into our human world, but that in the history of their lineage there was no mention whatsoever of an event of this nature. What worried them the most was that there were no sorcerers' stories about it.

"Is this the first time in the history of mankind that this has happened?" one of them asked don Juan.

"I think it happens all the time," he replied, "but it has never happened in such an overt, volitional way."

"What does it mean to us?" another one of them asked don Juan.

"Nothing to us, but everything to him," he said and pointed at me.

All of them then entered into a most disturbing silence. Don Juan paced back and forth for a moment. Then he stopped in front of me and peered at me, giving all the indications of someone who cannot find words to express an overwhelming realization.

"I can't even begin to assess the scope of what you've done," don Juan finally said to me in a tone of bewilderment. "You fell into a pitfall, but it wasn't the kind of pitfall I was worrying about. Your pitfall was designed for you alone, and it was deadlier than anything I could have thought of. I worried about your falling prey to flattery and being served. What I never counted on was that the shadow beings would set a trap using your inherent aversion to chains."

Don Juan had once made a comparison of his reaction and mine, in the sorcerers' world, to the things that pressed us the most. He said, without making it sound like a complaint, that although he wanted and tried to, he had never been able to inspire the kind of affection his teacher, the nagual Julian, inspired in people.

"My unbiased reaction, which I am putting on the table for you to examine, is to be able to say, and mean it: it's not my fate to evoke blind and total affection. So be it!"

"Your unbiased reaction," he went on, "is that you can't stand chains, and you would forfeit your life to break them."

I sincerely disagreed with him and told him that he was exaggerating. My views were not that clear.

"Don't worry," he said laughing, "sorcery is action. When the time comes, you'll act your passion the same way I act mine. Mine is to acquiesce to my fate, not passively, like an idiot, but actively, like a warrior. Yours is to jump without either capriciousness or premeditation to cut someone else's chains."

Don Juan explained that upon merging my energy with the scout I had truthfully ceased to exist. All my physicalness had then been transported into the inorganic beings' realm and, had it not been for the scout who guided don Juan and his companions to where I was, I would have died or remained in that world, inextricably lost.

"Why did the scout guide you to where I was?" I asked.

"The scout is a sentient being from another dimension," he said. "It's a little girl now, and as such she told me that in order to get the necessary energy to break the barrier that had trapped her in the inorganic beings' world, she had to take all of yours. That's her human part now. Something resembling gratitude drove her to me. When I saw her, I knew instantly that you were done for."

"What did you do then, don Juan?"

"I rounded up everyone I could get hold of, especially Carol Tiggs, and off we went into the inorganic beings' realm."

"Why Carol Tiggs?"

"In the first place, because she has endless energy, and, in the second place, because she had to familiarize herself with the scout. All of us got something invaluable out of this experience. You and Carol Tiggs got the scout. And the rest of us got a reason to round up our physicality and place it on our energy bodies: We became energy."

"How did all of you do that, don Juan?"

"We displaced our assemblage points, in unison. Our impeccable intent to save you did the work. The scout took us, in the blink of an eye, to where you were lying, half dead, and Carol dragged you out."

His explanation made no sense to me. Don Juan laughed when I tried to raise that point.

"How can you understand this when you don't even have enough energy to get out of your bed?" he retorted.

I confided to him that I was certain I knew infinitely more than I rationally admitted but that something was keeping a tight lid on my memory.

"Lack of energy is what has put a tight lid on your memory," he said. "When you have sufficient energy, your memory will work fine."

"Do you mean that I can remember everything if I want to?"

"Not quite. You may want as much as you like, but if your energy level is not on a par with the importance of what you know, you might as well kiss your knowledge good-bye: it'll never be available to you."

"So what's the thing to do, don Juan?"

"Energy tends to be cumulative: If you follow the warrior's way impeccably, a moment will come when your memory opens up."

I confessed that hearing him talk gave me the absurd sensation that I was indulging in feeling sorry for myself; that there was nothing wrong with me.

"You are not just indulging," he said. "You were actually energetically dead four weeks ago. Now you are merely stunned. Being stunned and lacking energy is what makes you hide your knowledge. You certainly know more than any of us about the inorganic beings' world. That world was the exclusive concern of the old sorcerers. All of us have told you that only through sorcerers' stories do we know about it. I sincerely say that it is more than strange to me that you've become, in your own right, another source of sorcerers' stories for us."

I reiterated that it was impossible for me to believe I had done something he had not. But I could not believe either that he was merely humoring me.

"I am not flattering or humoring you," he said, visibly annoyed. "I am stating a sorcery fact. Knowing more than any of us about that world shouldn't be a reason for feeling pleased. There's no advantage in that knowledge. In fact, in spite of all you know, you couldn't save yourself. We saved you, because we found you. But without the aid of the scout, there was no point in even trying to find you. You were so infinitely lost in that world that I shudder at the mere thought."

In my state of mind, I did not find it strange in the least that I actually saw a ripple of emotion going through all of don Juan's companions and apprentices. The only one who remained unaltered was Carol Tiggs. She seemed to have fully accepted her role. She was one with me.

"You did free the scout," don Juan continued, "but you gave up your life. Or, worse yet, you gave up your freedom. The inorganic beings let the scout go in exchange for you."

"I can hardly believe that, don Juan. Not that I doubt you, you understand, but you describe such an underhanded maneuver that I am stunned."

"Don't consider it underhanded and you have the whole thing in a nutshell. The inorganic beings are forever in search of awareness and energy. If you supply them with the possibility of both, what do you think they'll do? Blow you kisses from across the street?"

I knew that don Juan was right. However, I could not hold that certainty for too long: Clarity kept drifting away from me.

Don Juan's companions continued asking him questions. They wanted to know if he had given any thought to what to do with the scout.

"Yes, I have. It is a most serious problem, which the nagual here has to resolve," he said, pointing at me. "He and Carol Tiggs are the only ones who can free the scout. And he knows it too."

Naturally, I asked him the only possible question, "How can I free it?"

"Instead of my telling you how, there is a much better and more just way of finding out," don Juan said with a big smile. "Ask the emissary. The inorganic beings cannot lie, you know."

## 8. The Third Gate of Dreaming

"The third gate of dreaming is reached when you find yourself in a dream, staring at someone else who is asleep. And that someone else turns out to be you," don Juan said.

My energy level was so keyed up at the time that I went to work on the third task right away although he did not offer any more information about it. Journeying to the realm of inorganic beings was no longer an issue for me.

The first thing I noticed in my dreaming practices was that a surge of energy immediately rearranged the focus of my dreaming attention. It's focus was now on waking up in a dream and seeing myself sleeping.

Very soon after, I found myself in a dream looking at myself asleep. I immediately reported it to don Juan. The dream had happened while I was at his house.

"There are two phases to each of the gates of dreaming," he said. "The first, as you know, is to arrive at the gate: The second is to cross it. By dreaming what you've dreamt- that you saw yourself asleep- you arrived at the third gate. The second phase is to move around once you've seen yourself asleep.

"At the third gate of dreaming," he went on, "you begin to deliberately merge your dreaming reality with the reality of the daily world. This is the drill, and sorcerers call it completing the energy body. The merge between the two realities has to be so thorough that you need to be more fluid than ever. Examine everything at the third gate with great care and curiosity."

I complained that his recommendations were too cryptic and were not making any sense to me.

"What do you mean by great care and curiosity?" I asked.

"Our tendency at the third gate is to get lost in detail," he replied. "To view things with great care and curiosity means to resist the nearly irresistible temptation to plunge into detail.

"The given drill at the third gate, as I said, is to consolidate the energy body.

"Dreamers begin forging the energy body by fulfilling the drills of the first and second gates. When they reach the third gate, the energy body is ready to come out, or perhaps it would be better to say that it is ready to act. Unfortunately, this also means that it's ready to be mesmerized by detail."

"What does it mean to be mesmerized by detail?"

"The energy body is like a child who's been imprisoned all it's life. The moment it is free, it soaks up everything it can find, and I mean everything. Every irrelevant, minute detail totally absorbs the energy body."

An awkward silence followed. I had no idea what to say. I had understood him perfectly, I just didn't have anything in my experience to give me an idea of exactly what it all meant.

"The most asinine detail becomes a world for the energy body," don Juan explained. "The effort that dreamers have to make to direct the energy body is staggering. I know that it sounds awkward to tell you to view things with care and curiosity, but that is the best way to describe what you should do. At the third gate, dreamers have to avoid a nearly irresistible impulse to plunge into everything, and they avoid it by being so curious, so desperate to get into everything that they don't let any particular thing imprison them."

Don Juan added that his recommendations, which he knew sounded absurd to the mind, were directly aimed at my energy body. He stressed over and over that my energy body had to unite all it's resources in order to act.

"But hasn't my energy body been acting all along?" I asked.

"Part of it has, otherwise you wouldn't have journeyed to the inorganic beings' realm," he replied. "Now your entire energy body has to be engaged to perform the drill of the third gate. Therefore, to make things easier for your energy body, you must hold back your rationality."

"I am afraid you are barking up the wrong tree," I said. "There is very little rationality left in me after all the experiences you've brought into my life."

"Don't say anything," don Juan replied. "At the third gate, rationality is responsible for the insistence of our energy bodies on being obsessed with superfluous detail. At the third gate, then, we need irrational fluidity; irrational abandon to counteract that insistence."

Don Juan's statement that each gate is an obstacle could not have been more truthful. I labored to fulfill the drill of the third gate of dreaming more intensely than I had on the other two tasks combined. Don Juan put tremendous pressure on me. Besides, something else had been added to my life: a true sense of fear. I had been normally and even excessively afraid of one thing or another throughout my life, but there had been nothing in my experience comparable to the fear I felt after my bout with the inorganic beings. Yet all this wealth of experience was inaccessible to my normal memory. Only in the presence of don Juan were those memories at my disposal.

I asked him about this strange situation once when we were at the National Museum of Anthropology and History in Mexico City. What had prompted my question was that, at the moment, I had the odd ability to remember everything that had happened to me in the course of my association with don Juan. And that made me feel so free, so daring and light-footed that I was practically dancing around.

"It just happens that the presence of the nagual induces a shift of the assemblage point," he said.

He guided me then into one of the display rooms of the museum and said that my question was apropos to what he had been planning to tell me.

"My intention was to explain to you that the position of the assemblage point is like a vault where sorcerers keep their records," he said. "I was tickled pink when your energy body felt my intent and you asked me about it. The energy body knows immensities. Let me show you how much it knows."

He instructed me to enter into total silence. He reminded me that I was already in a special state of awareness because my assemblage point had been made to shift by his presence. He assured me that entering into total silence was going to allow the sculptures in that room to make me see and hear inconceivable things.

He added, apparently to increase my confusion, that some of the archaeological pieces in that room had the capacity to produce, by themselves, a shift of the assemblage point, and that if I reached a state of total silence I would be actually witnessing scenes pertaining to the lives of the people who made those pieces.

He then began the strangest tour of a museum I have ever taken. He went around the room, describing and interpreting astounding details of every one of the large pieces. According to him, every archaeological piece in that room was a purposeful record left by the people of antiquity, a record that don Juan as a sorcerer was reading to me as one would read a book.

"Every piece here is designed to make the assemblage point shift," he went on. "Fix your gaze on any of them, silence your mind, and find out whether or not your assemblage point can be made to shift."

"How would I know that it has shifted?"

"Because you would see and feel things that are beyond your normal reach."

I gazed at the sculptures and saw and heard things that I would be at a loss to explain.

In the past, I had examined all those pieces with the bias of anthropology; always bearing in mind the descriptions of scholars in the field. Their descriptions of the functions of those pieces, rooted in modern man's cognition of the world, appeared to me, for the first time, to be utterly prejudiced if not asinine.

What don Juan said about those pieces, and what I heard and saw myself while gazing at them was the farthest thing from what I had always read about them.

My discomfort was so great that I felt obliged to apologize to don Juan for what I thought was my suggestibility. He did not laugh or make fun of me. He patiently explained that sorcerers were capable of leaving accurate records of their findings in the position of the assemblage point.

He maintained that when it comes to getting to the essence of a written account, we have to use our sense of sympathetic or imaginative participation to go beyond the mere page into the experience itself.

However, in the sorcerers' world, since there are no written pages, total records, which can be relived instead of read, are left in the position of the assemblage point.

To illustrate his argument, don Juan talked about the sorcerers' teachings for the second attention. He said that they are given when the apprentice's assemblage point is on a place other than the normal one. The position of the assemblage point becomes, in this manner, the record of the lesson. In order to play the lesson back, the apprentice has to return his assemblage point to the position it occupied when the lesson was given. Don Juan concluded his remarks by reiterating that to return the assemblage point to all the positions it occupied when the lessons were given is an accomplishment of the highest magnitude.

For nearly a year, don Juan did not ask me anything about my third dreaming task. Then one day, quite abruptly, he wanted me to describe to him all the nuances of my dreaming practices.

The first thing I mentioned was a baffling recurrence. For a period of months, I had dreams in which I found myself staring at me, sleeping in my bed. The odd part was the regularity of those dreams; they happened every four days, like clockwork.

During the other three days, my dreaming was what it always had been so far: I examined every possible item in my dreams, I changed dreams, and occasionally, driven by a suicidal curiosity, I followed the foreign energy scouts, although I felt extremely guilty doing this. I fancied it to be like having a secret drug addiction. The realness of that world was irresistible to me.

Secretly, I felt somehow exonerated from total responsibility, because don Juan himself had suggested that I ask the dreaming emissary about what to do to free the blue scout trapped among us. He meant for me to pose the question in my everyday practice, but I construed his statement to imply that I had to ask the emissary while I was in it's world. The question I really wanted to ask the emissary was whether the inorganic beings had set a trap for me.

The emissary not only told me that everything don Juan had said was true but also gave me instructions on what Carol Tiggs and I had to do to liberate the scout.

"The regularity of your dreams is something that I rather expected," don Juan remarked, after listening to me.

"Why did you expect something like that, don Juan?"

"Because of your relationship with the inorganic beings."

"That's over and forgotten, don Juan," I lied, hoping he would not pursue the subject any further.

"You are saying that for my benefit, aren't you? You don't need to; I know the true story. Believe me, once you get to play with them, you are hooked. They'll always be after you. Or, what's worse yet, you'll always be after them."

He stared at me, and my guilt must have been so obvious that it made him laugh.

"The only possible explanation for such regularity is that the inorganic beings are catering to you again," don Juan said in a serious tone.

I hurried to change the subject and told him that another nuance of my dreaming practices worth mentioning was my reaction to the sight of myself lying sound asleep. That view was always so startling that it either glued me to the spot until the dream changed, or frightened me so profoundly that it made me wake up screaming at the top of my voice. I had gotten to the point where I was afraid to go to sleep on the days I knew I was going to have that dream.

"You are not yet ready for a true merging of your dreaming reality and your daily reality," he concluded. "You must recapitulate your life further."

"But I've done all the recapitulating possible," I protested. "I've been recapitulating for years. There is nothing more I can remember about my life."

"There must be much more," he said adamantly, "otherwise, you wouldn't wake up screaming."

I did not like the idea of having to recapitulate again. I had done it, and I believed I had done it so well that I did not need to touch the subject ever again.

"The recapitulation of our lives never ends, no matter how well we've done it once," don Juan said. "The reason average people lack volition in their dreams is that they have never recapitulated and their lives are filled to capacity with heavily loaded emotions like memories, hopes, fears, et cetera, et cetera.

"Sorcerers, in contrast, are relatively free from heavy, binding emotions, because of their recapitulation. And if something stops them, as it has stopped you at this moment, the assumption is that there still is something in them that is not quite clear."

"To recapitulate is too involving, don Juan. Maybe there is something else I can do instead."

"No. There isn't. Recapitulating and dreaming go hand in hand. As we regurgitate our lives, we get more and more airborne."

Don Juan had given me very detailed and explicit instructions about the recapitulation. It consisted of reliving the totality of one's life experiences by remembering every possible minute detail of them. He saw the recapitulation as the essential factor in a dreamer's redefinition and redeployment of energy.

"The recapitulation sets free energy imprisoned within us; and without this liberated energy, dreaming is not possible." That was his statement.

Years before, don Juan had coached me to make a list of all the people I had met in my life, starting at the present. He helped me to arrange my list in an orderly fashion, breaking it down into areas of activity, such as jobs I had had, schools I had attended. Then he guided me to go, without deviation, from the first person on my list to the last one, reliving every one of my interactions with them.

He explained that recapitulating an event starts with one's mind arranging everything pertinent to what is being recapitulated. Arranging means reconstructing the event, piece by piece; starting by recollecting the physical details of the surroundings; then going to the person with whom one shared the interaction; and then going to oneself- to the examination of one's feelings.

Don Juan taught me that the recapitulation is coupled with a natural, rhythmical breathing. Long exhalations are performed as the head moves gently and slowly from right to left; and long inhalations are taken as the head moves back from left to right. He called this act of moving the head from side to side 'fanning the event'. The mind examines the event from beginning to end while the body fans, on and on, everything the mind focuses on.

Don Juan said that the sorcerers of antiquity, the inventors of the recapitulation, viewed breathing as a magical, life-giving act and used it, accordingly, as a magical vehicle; the exhalation, to eject the foreign energy left in them during the interaction being recapitulated; and the inhalation to pull back the energy that they themselves left behind during the interaction.

Because of my academic training, I took the recapitulation to be the process of analyzing one's life. But don Juan insisted that it was more involved than an intellectual psychoanalysis. He postulated the recapitulation as a sorcerer's ploy to induce a minute but steady displacement of the assemblage point. He said that the assemblage point, under the impact of reviewing past actions and feelings, goes back and forth between it's present site and the site it occupied when the event being recapitulated took place.

Don Juan stated that the old sorcerers' rationale behind the recapitulation was their conviction that there is an inconceivable dissolving force in the universe, which makes organisms live by lending them awareness. That force also makes organisms die in order to extract the same lent awareness; which organisms have enhanced through their life experiences.

Don Juan explained the old sorcerers' reasoning. They believed that since it is our life experience this force is after, it is of supreme importance that it can be satisfied with a facsimile of our life experience: the recapitulation. Having had what it seeks, the dissolving force then lets sorcerers go, free to expand their capacity to perceive and reach with it the confines of time and space.

When I started again to recapitulate, it was a great surprise to me that my dreaming practices were automatically suspended the moment my recapitulation began. I asked don Juan about this unwanted recess.

"Dreaming requires every bit of our available energy," he replied. "If there is a deep preoccupation in our life, there is no possibility of dreaming."

"But I have been deeply preoccupied before," I said, "and my practices were never interrupted."

"It must be then that every time you thought you were preoccupied, you were only egomaniacally disturbed," he said, laughing. "To be preoccupied, for sorcerers, means that all your energy sources are taken on. This is the first time you've engaged your energy sources in their totality. The rest of the time, even when you recapitulated before, you were not completely absorbed."

Don Juan gave me this time a new recapitulation pattern. I was supposed to construct a jigsaw puzzle by recapitulating, without any apparent order, different events of my life.

"But it's going to be a mess," I protested.

"No, it won't be," he assured me. "It'll be a mess if you let your pettiness choose the events you are going to recapitulate. Instead, let the spirit decide. Be silent, and then get to the event the spirit points out."

The results of that pattern of recapitulation were shocking to me on many levels. I was very impressed to find out that, whenever I silenced my mind, a seemingly independent force immediately plunged me into a most detailed memory of some event in my life. But it was even more impressive that a very orderly configuration resulted. What I thought was going to be chaotic turned out to be extremely effective.

I asked don Juan why he had not made me recapitulate in this manner from the start. He replied that there are two basic rounds to the recapitulation; that the first is called formality and rigidity; and the second fluidity.

I had no inkling about how different my recapitulation was going to be this time. The ability to concentrate, which I had acquired by means of my dreaming practices, permitted me to examine my life at a depth I would never have imagined possible.

It took me over a year to view and review all I could about my life experiences. At the end, I had to agree with don Juan: There had been immensities of loaded emotions hidden so deeply inside me as to be virtually inaccessible.

The result of my second recapitulation was a new, more relaxed attitude. The very day I returned to my dreaming practices, I dreamt I saw myself asleep. I turned around and daringly left my room, penuriously going down a flight of stairs to the street.

I was elated with what I had done and reported it to don Juan. My disappointment was enormous when he did not consider this dream part of my dreaming practices. He argued that I had not gone to the street with my energy body, because if I had I would have had a sensation other than walking down a flight of stairs.

"What kind of sensation are you talking about, don Juan?" I asked, with genuine curiosity.

"You have to establish some valid guide to find out whether you are actually seeing your body asleep in your bed," he said instead of answering my question. "Remember, you must be in your actual room, seeing your actual body. Otherwise, what you are having is merely a dream. If that's the case, control that dream, either by observing it's detail or by changing it."

I insisted he tell me more about the valid guide he had referred to, but he cut me short.

"Figure out a way to validate the fact that you are looking at yourself," he said.

"Do you have any suggestions as to what can be a valid guide?" I insisted.

"Use your own judgment. We are coming to the end of our time together. You have to be on your own very soon." He changed the subject then, and I was left with a clear taste of my ineptitude. I was unable to figure out what he wanted or what he meant by a valid guide.

In the next dream in which I saw myself asleep, instead of leaving the room and walking down the stairs, or waking up screaming, I remained glued, for a long time, to the spot from which I watched. Without fretting or despairing, I observed the details of my dream. I noticed then that I was asleep wearing a white T-shirt that was ripped at the shoulder. I tried to come closer and examine the rip, but moving was beyond my capabilities. I felt a heaviness that seemed to be part of my very being. In fact, I was all weight. Not knowing what to do next, I instantly entered into a devastating confusion. I tried to change dreams, but some unaccustomed force kept me staring at my sleeping body.

In the midst of my turmoil, I heard the dreaming emissary saying that not having control to move around was frightening me to the point that I might have to do another recapitulation. The emissary's voice and what it said did not surprise me at all. I had never felt so vividly and terrifyingly unable to move. I did not, however, give in to my terror. I examined it and found out that it was not a psychological terror but a physical sensation of helplessness, despair, and annoyance. It bothered me beyond words that I was not capable of moving my limbs. My annoyance grew in proportion to my realization that something outside me had me brutally pinned down. The effort I made to move my arms or legs was so intense and single-minded that at one moment I actually saw one leg of my body, sleeping on the bed, flung out as if kicking.

My awareness was then pulled into my inert, sleeping body, and I woke up with such a force that it took more than half an hour to calm myself down. My heart was beating almost erratically. I was shivering, and some of the muscles in my legs twitched uncontrollably. I had suffered such a radical loss of body heat that I needed blankets and hot-water bottles to raise my temperature.

Naturally, I went to Mexico to ask don Juan's advice about the sensation of paralysis, and about the fact that I really had been wearing a ripped T-shirt, thus, I had indeed seen myself asleep. Besides, I was deadly afraid of hypothermia. He was reluctant to discuss my predicament. All I got out of him was a caustic remark.

"You like drama," he said flatly. "Of course you really saw yourself asleep. The problem is that you got nervous because your energy body has never been consciously in one piece before. If you ever get nervous and cold again, hold on to your dick. That will restore your body temperature in a jiffy and without any fuss."

I felt a bit offended by his crassness. However, the advice proved effective. The next time I became frightened, I relaxed and returned to normal in a few minutes, doing what he had prescribed. In this manner, I discovered that if I did not fret and kept my annoyance in check, I did not panic. To remain controlled did not help me move, but it certainly gave me a deep sensation of peace and serenity.

After months of useless efforts at walking, I sought don Juan's comments once again, not so much for his advice this time but because I wanted to concede defeat. I was up against an impassable barrier, and I knew with indisputable certainty that I had failed.

"Dreamers have to be imaginative," don Juan said with a malicious grin. "Imaginative you are not. I didn't warn you about having to use your imagination to move your energy body because I wanted to find out whether you could resolve the riddle by yourself. You didn't, and your friends didn't help you either."

In the past, I had been driven to defend myself viciously whenever he accused me of lacking imagination. I thought I was imaginative, but having don Juan as a teacher had taught me, the hard way, that I am not. Since I was not going to engage my energy in futile defenses of myself, I asked him instead, "What is this riddle you are talking about, don Juan?"

"The riddle of how impossible and yet how easy it is to move the energy body. You are trying to move it as if you were in the daily world. We spend so much time and effort learning to walk that we believe our dreaming bodies should also walk. There is no reason why they should, except that walking is foremost in our minds."

I marveled at the simplicity of the solution. I instantly knew that don Juan was right. I had gotten stuck again at the level of interpretation. He had told me I had to move around once I reached the third gate of dreaming, and to me moving around meant walking. I told him that I understood his point.

"It isn't my point," he curtly answered. "It's a sorcerers' point. Sorcerers say that at the third gate the entire energy body can move like energy moves: fast and directly. Your energy body knows exactly how to move. It can move as it moves in the inorganic beings' world.

"And this brings us to the other issue here," don Juan added with an air of pensiveness. "Why didn't your inorganic being friends help you?"

"Why do you call them my friends, don Juan?"

"They are like the classic friends who are not really thoughtful or kind to us but not mean either. The friends who are just waiting for us to turn our backs so they can stab us there."

I understood him completely and agreed with him one hundred percent.

"What makes me go there? Is it a suicidal tendency?" I asked him, more rhetorically than not.

"You don't have any suicidal tendency," he said. "What you have is a total disbelief that you were near death. Since you were not in physical pain, you can't quite convince yourself you were in mortal danger."

His argument was most reasonable, except that I did believe a deep, unknown fear had been ruling my life since my bout with the inorganic beings. Don Juan listened in silence as I described to him my predicament. I could not discard or explain away my urge to go to the inorganic beings' world, in spite of what I knew about it.

"I have a streak of insanity," I said. "What I do doesn't make sense."

"It does make sense. The inorganic beings are still reeling you in, like a fish hooked at the end of a line," he said. "They throw worthless bait at you from time to time to keep you going. To arrange your dreams to occur every four days without fail is worthless bait. But they didn't teach you how to move your energy body."

"Why do you think they didn't?"

"Because when your energy body learns to move by itself, you'll be thoroughly out of their reach. It was premature of me to believe that you are free from them. You are relatively but not completely free. They are still bidding for your awareness."

I felt a chill in my back. He had touched a sore spot in me.

"Tell me what to do, don Juan, and I'll do it," I said.

"Be impeccable. I have told you this dozens of times. To be impeccable means to put your life on the line in order to back up your decisions, and then to do quite a lot more than your best to realize those decisions. When you are not deciding anything, you are merely playing roulette with your life in a helter-skelter way."

Don Juan ended our conversation, urging me to ponder what he had said.

At the first opportunity I had, I put don Juan's suggestion about moving my energy body to the test. When I found myself looking at my body asleep, instead of struggling to walk toward it I simply willed myself to move closer to the bed. Instantly, I was nearly touching my body. I saw my face. In fact, I could see every pore in my skin. I cannot say that I liked what I saw. My view of my own body was too detailed to be aesthetically pleasing. Then something like a wind came into the room, totally disarranged everything, and erased my view.

During subsequent dreams, I entirely corroborated that the only way the energy body can move is to glide or soar. I discussed this with don Juan. He seemed unusually satisfied with what I had done, which certainly surprised me. I was accustomed to his cold reaction to anything I did in my dreaming practices.

"Your energy body is used to moving only when something pulls it," he said. "The inorganic beings have been pulling your energy body right and left, and until now you have never moved it by yourself with your own volition. It doesn't seem like you've done much, moving the way you did, yet I assure you that I was seriously considering ending your practices. For a while, I believed you were not going to learn how to move on your own."

"Were you considering ending my dreaming practices because I am slow?"

"You're not slow. It takes sorcerers forever to learn to move the energy body. I was going to end your dreaming practices because I have no more time. There are other topics, more pressing than dreaming, on which you can use your energy."

"Now that I've learned how to move my energy body by myself, what else should I do, don Juan?"

"Continue moving. Moving your energy body has opened up a new area for you; an area of extraordinary exploration."

He urged me again to come up with an idea to validate the faithfulness of my dreams; that request did not seem as odd as it had the first time he voiced it.

"As you know, to be transported by a scout is the real dreaming task of the second gate," he explained. "It is a very serious matter, but not as serious as forging and moving the energy body. Therefore, you have to make sure, by some means of your own, whether you are actually seeing yourself asleep or whether you are merely dreaming that you're seeing yourself asleep. Your new extraordinary exploration hinges on really seeing yourself asleep."

After some heavy pondering and wondering, I believed that I had come up with the right plan. Having seen my ripped T-shirt gave me an idea for a valid guide. I started from the assumption that, if I were actually observing myself asleep, I would also be observing whether I had the same sleeping attire I had gone to bed in, an attire that I had decided to change radically every four days. I was confident that I was not going to have any difficulty in remembering, in dreams, what I was wearing when I went to bed; the discipline I had acquired through my dreaming practices made me think that I had the ability to record things like this in my mind and remember them in dreams.

I engaged my best efforts to follow this guide, but the results did not pan out as I thought they would. I lacked the necessary control over my dreaming attention, and I could not quite remember the details of my sleeping attire. Yet something else was definitely at work. Somehow I always knew whether my dreams were ordinary dreams or not. The outstanding aspect of the dreams that were not just ordinary dreams was that my body lay asleep in bed while my consciousness observed it.

A notable feature of these dreams was my room. It was never like my room in the daily world but an enormous empty hall with my bed at one end. I used to soar over a considerable distance to be at the side of the bed where my body lay. The moment I was next to it, a windlike force used to make me hover over it, like a hummingbird. At times the room used to vanish; disappear piece by piece until only my body and the bed were left. At other times, I used to experience a complete loss of volition. My dreaming attention seemed then to function independently of me. Either it was completely absorbed by the first item it encountered in the room or it seemed unable to decide what to do. In those instances, I had the sensation that I was helplessly floating, going from item to item.

The voice of the dreaming emissary explained to me once that all the elements of the dreams, which were not just commonplace dreams, were really energy configurations different from those of our normal world. The emissary's voice pointed out that, for example, the walls were liquid. It urged me then to plunge into one of them.

Without thinking twice, I dived into a wall as if I were diving into a huge lake. I did not feel the waterlike wall; what I felt was not a physical sensation of plunging into a body of water either. It was more like the thought of diving and the visual sensation of going through liquid matter. I was going, head-first, into something that opened up, like water does, as I kept moving downward.

The sensation of going down, headfirst, was so real that I began to wonder how long or how deep or how far I was diving. From my point of view, I spent an eternity in there. I saw clouds and rocklike masses of matter suspended in a waterlike substance. There were some glowing, geometric objects that resembled crystals, and blobs of the deepest primary colors I had ever seen. There were also zones of intense light and others of pitch blackness. Everything went by me, either slowly or at a fast speed. I had the thought that I was viewing the cosmos. At the instant of that thought, my speed increased so immensely that everything became blurred, and all of a sudden, I found myself awake with my nose smack against the wall of my room.

Some hidden fear urged me to consult with don Juan. He listened to me, hanging on every word.

"You need to do some drastic maneuvering at this point," he said. "The dreaming emissary has no business interfering with your dreaming practices. Or rather, you should not, under any conditions, permit it to do so."

"How can I stop it?"

"Perform a simple but difficult maneuver. Upon entering into dreaming, voice out loud your desire not to have the dreaming emissary anymore."

"Does that mean, don Juan, that I will never hear it again?"

"Positively. You'll get rid of it forever."

"But is it advisable to get rid of it forever?"

"It most certainly is, at this point."

With those words, don Juan involved me in a most disturbing dilemma. I did not want to put an end to my relationship with the emissary, but, at the same time, I wanted to follow don Juan's advice. He noticed my hesitation.

"I know it's a very difficult affair," he conceded, "but if you don't do it, the inorganic beings will always have a line on you. If you want to avoid this, do what I said, and do it now."

During my next dreaming session, as I prepared myself to utter my intent, the emissary's voice interrupted me. It said, "If you refrain from stating your request, I promise you never to interfere with your dreaming practices and talk to you only if you ask me direct questions."

I instantly accepted it's proposition and sincerely felt that it was a good deal. I was even relieved it had turned out this way. I was afraid, however, that don Juan was going to be disappointed.

"It was a good maneuver," he remarked and laughed. "You were sincere: You really intended to voice your request. To be sincere is all that was required. There was, essentially, no need for you to eliminate the emissary. What you wanted was to corner it into proposing an alternative way, convenient to you. I am sure the emissary won't interfere anymore."

He was right. I continued my dreaming practices without any meddling from the emissary. The remarkable consequence was that I began to have dreams in which my dream rooms were my room in the daily world, with one difference: In the dreams, my room was always so slanted and so distorted that it looked like a giant cubist painting: Obtuse and acute angles were the rule instead of the normal right angles of walls, ceiling, and floor. In my lopsided room, the very slant created by the acute or obtuse angles was a device to display prominently some absurd, superfluous, but real detail; for example, intricate lines in the hardwood floor; or weather discolorations in the wall paint, or dust spots on the ceiling; or smudged fingerprints on the edge of a door.

In those dreams, I unavoidably got lost in the waterlike universes of the detail pointed out by the slant. During my entire dreaming practices, the profusion of detail in my room was so immense and it's pull so intense that it instantly made me dive into it.

At the first free moment I had, I was at don Juan's place, consulting him about this state.

"I can't overcome my room," I said to him after I had given him the details of my dreaming practices.

"What gives you the idea you have to overcome it?" he asked with a grin.

"I feel that I have to move beyond my room, don Juan."

"But you are moving beyond your room. Perhaps you should ask yourself whether you are caught again in interpretations. What do you think moving means in this case?"

I told him walking from my room to the street had been such a haunting dream for me that I felt a real need to do it again.

"But you are doing greater things than that," he protested. "You are going to unbelievable regions. What else do you want?"

I tried to explain to him that I had a physical urge to move away from the trap of detail. What upset me the most was my incapacity to free myself from whatever caught my attention. To have a modicum of volition was the bottom line for me.

A very long silence followed. I waited to hear more about the trap of detail. After all, he had warned me about it's dangers.

"You are doing fine," he finally said. "Dreamers take a very long time to perfect their energy bodies. And this is exactly what's at stake here; perfecting your energy body."

Don Juan explained that the reason my energy body was compelled to examine detail and get inextricably stuck in it was it's inexperience; it's incompleteness. He said that sorcerers spend a lifetime consolidating the energy body by letting it sponge up everything possible.

"Until the energy body is complete and mature, it is self-absorbed," don Juan went on. "It can't get free from the compulsion to be absorbed by everything. But if one takes this into consideration, instead of fighting the energy body as you're doing now, one can lend it a hand."

"How can I do that, don Juan?"

"By directing it's behavior, that is to say, by stalking it."

He explained that since everything related to the energy body depends on the appropriate position of the assemblage point, and since dreaming is nothing else but the means to displace it, stalking is, consequently, the way to make the assemblage point stay put on the perfect position; in this case, the position where the energy body can become consolidated and from which it can finally emerge.

Don Juan said that the moment the energy body can move on it's own, sorcerers assume that the optimum position of the assemblage point has been reached. The next step is to stalk it, that is, to fixate it on that position in order to complete the energy body. He remarked that the procedure is simplicity itself. One intends to stalk it.

Silence and looks of expectation followed that statement. I expected him to say more, and he expected me to have understood what he had said. I had not.

"Let your energy body intend to reach the optimum dreaming position," he explained. "Then, let your energy body intend to stay at that position and you will be stalking."

He paused, and with his eyes urged me to consider his statement.

"Intending is the secret, but you already know that," he said. "Sorcerers displace their assemblage points through intending; and fixate them, equally, through intending. And there is no technique for intending. One intends through usage."

To have another of my wild assumptions about my worth as a sorcerer was unavoidable at that point. I had boundless confidence that something was going to put me on the right track to intend the fixation of my assemblage point on the ideal spot. I had accomplished in the past all kinds of successful maneuvers without knowing how I performed them. Don Juan himself had marveled at my ability or my luck, and I was sure this was going to be one of those instances. I was gravely mistaken. No matter what I did, or how long I waited, I had no success whatsoever in fixing my assemblage point on any spot, much less on the ideal one.

After months of serious but unsuccessful struggling, I gave up.

"I really believed I could do it," I said to don Juan, the moment I was in his house. "I am afraid that nowadays I am more of an egomaniac than ever."

"Not really," he said with a smile. "What happens is that you are caught in another of your routinary misinterpretations of terms. You want to find the ideal spot, as if you were finding your lost car keys. Then you want to tie your assemblage point, as if you were tying your shoes. The ideal spot and the fixation of the assemblage point are metaphors. They have nothing to do with the words used to describe them."

He asked me then to tell him the latest events of any dreaming practices. The first thing I mentioned was that my urge to be absorbed by detail had subsided notably. I said that perhaps because I moved in my dreams, compulsively and incessantly, the movement might have been what always managed to stop me before I plunged into the detail I was observing. To be stopped in that fashion gave me the opportunity to examine the act of being absorbed by detail. I came to the conclusion that inanimate matter actually possesses an immobilizing force, which I saw as a beam of dull light that kept me pinned down. For example, many times some minute mark on the walls or in the wood lines of the hardwood floor of my room used to send a line of light that transfixed me. From the moment my dreaming attention was focused on that light, the whole dream rotated around that minute mark. I saw it enlarged perhaps to the size of the cosmos. That view used to last until I woke up, usually with my nose pressed against the wall or the wood floor. My own observations were that, in the first place, the detail was real, and, in the second place, I seemed to have been observing it while I was asleep.

Don Juan smiled and said, "All this is happening to you because the forging of your energy body was completed the moment it moved by itself. I didn't tell you that, but I insinuated it. I wanted to know whether or not you were capable of finding it out by yourself, which, of course, you did."

I had no idea what he meant. Don Juan scrutinized me in his usual manner. His penetrating gaze scanned my body.

"What exactly did I find out by myself, don Juan?" I was forced to ask.

"You found out that your energy body had been completed," he answered.

"I didn't find out anything of the kind, I assure you."

"Yes, you did. It started some time ago, when you couldn't find a guide to validate the realness of your dreams, but then something went to work for you and let you know whether you were having a regular dream. That something was your energy body. Now, you despair that you couldn't find the ideal spot to fix your assemblage point. And I tell you that you did. The proof is that, by moving around, your energy body curtailed it's obsession with detail."

I was nonplussed. [* nonplussed- filled with bewilderment] I could not even ask one of my feeble questions.

"What comes next for you is a sorcerers' gem," don Juan went on. "You are going to practice seeing energy in your dreaming. You have fulfilled the drill for the third gate of dreaming: moving your energy body by itself. Now you are going to perform the real task: seeing energy with your energy body.

"You have seen energy before," he went on, "many times, in fact. But each of those times, seeing was a fluke. Now you are going to do it deliberately.

"Dreamers have a rule of thumb," he continued. "If their energy body is complete, they see energy every time they gaze at an item in the daily world. In dreams, if they see the energy of an item, they know they are dealing with a real world, no matter how distorted that world may appear to their dreaming attention. If they can't see the energy of an item, they are in an ordinary dream and not in a real world."

"What is a real world, don Juan?"

"A world that generates energy; the opposite of a phantom world of projections, where nothing generates energy, like most of our dreams, where nothing has an energetic effect."

Don Juan then gave me another definition of dreaming: a process by which dreamers isolate dream conditions in which they can find energy-generating elements.

He must have noticed my bewilderment. He laughed and gave another, even more convoluted definition: dreaming is the process by which we intend to find adequate positions of the assemblage point; positions that permit us to perceive energy-generating items in dreamlike states.

He explained that the energy body is also capable of perceiving energy that is quite different from the energy of our own world; as in the case of items of the inorganic beings' realm, which the energy body perceives as sizzling energy.

He added that in our world nothing sizzles. Everything here wavers.

"From now on," he said, "the issue of your dreaming is going to be to determine whether the items on which you focus your dreaming attention are energy generating, mere phantom projections, or generators of foreign energy."

Don Juan admitted that he had hoped I was going to come up with the idea of seeing energy as the gauge to determine whether or not I was observing my real body asleep. He laughed at my spurious device of putting on elaborate sleeping attire every four days. He said that I'd had, at my fingertips, all the information necessary to deduce what was the real task of the third gate of dreaming and to come up with the right idea, but that my interpretation system had forced me to seek contrived solutions that lacked the simplicity and directness of sorcery.

## 9. The New Area of Exploration

Don Juan told me that in order to see in dreaming not only did I have to intend seeing but I had to put my intent into loud words. For reasons he refused to explain, he insisted that I had to speak up. He conceded that there are other means to accomplish the same result, but he asserted that voicing one's intent is the simplest and most direct way.

The first time I put into words my intent to see, I was dreaming of a church bazaar. There were so many articles that I could not make up my mind which one to gaze at. A giant, conspicuous vase in a corner made up my mind for me. I gazed at it, voicing my intent to see. The vase remained in my view for an instant, then it changed into another object.

I gazed at as many things as I could in that dream. After I voiced my intent to see, every item I had chosen to gaze at vanished or turned into something else, as had happened all along in my dreaming practices. My dreaming attention was finally exhausted, and I woke up tremendously frustrated, almost angry.

For months on end, I actually gazed at hundreds of items in my dreams and deliberately voiced my intent to see, but nothing ever happened. Tired of waiting, I finally had to ask don Juan about it.

"You need to have patience. You are learning to do something extraordinary," he remarked. "You are learning to intend to see in your dreams. Someday you will not have to voice your intent: You'll simply will it, silently."

"I think I have not understood the function of whatever I am doing," I said. "Nothing happens when I shout my intent to see. What does that mean?"

"It means that your dreams, so far, have been ordinary dreams: They have been phantom projections; images that have life only in your dreaming attention."

He wanted to know exactly what had happened to the items on which I had focused my gaze. I said that they had vanished or changed shape or even produced vortexes that eventually changed my dreams.

"It has been like that in all my daily dreaming practices," I said. "The only thing out of the ordinary is that I am learning to yell in my dreams, at the top of my voice."

My last statement threw don Juan into a genuine fit of belly laughter, which I found disconcerting. I failed to find the humor of my statement or the reason for his reaction.

"Someday you'll appreciate how funny all this is," he said as an answer to my silent protest. "In the meantime, don't give up or get discouraged. Keep on trying. Sooner or later, you'll hit the right note."

As usual, he was right. A couple of months later, I hit the jackpot. I had a most unusual dream. It started with the appearance of a scout from the inorganic beings' world. The scouts as well as the dreaming emissary had been strangely absent from my dreams. I had not missed them or pondered their disappearance. In fact, I was so at ease without them, I had even forgotten to ask don Juan about their absence.

In that dream, the scout had been, at first, a gigantic yellow topaz which I had found stuck in the back of a drawer. The moment I voiced my intent to see, the topaz turned into a blob of sizzling energy. I feared that I would be compelled to follow it, so I moved my gaze away from the scout and focused it on an aquarium with tropical fish. I voiced my intent to see and got a tremendous surprise. The aquarium emitted a low, greenish glow and changed into a large surrealist portrait of a bejeweled woman. The portrait emitted the same greenish glow when I voiced my intent to see.

As I gazed at that glow, the whole dream changed. I was walking then on a street in a town that seemed familiar to me: It might have been Tucson. I gazed at a display of women's clothes in a store window and spoke out loud my intent to see. Instantly, a black mannequin, prominently displayed, began to glow. I gazed next at a saleslady who came at that moment to rearrange the window. She looked at me. After voicing my intent, I saw her glow. It was so stupendous that I was afraid some detail in her splendorous glow would trap me, but the woman moved inside the store before I had time to focus my total attention on her. I certainly intended to follow her inside, however, my dreaming attention was caught by a moving glow. It came to me charging, filled with hatred. There was loathing in it and viciousness. I jumped backward. The glow stopped it's charge. A black substance swallowed me, and I woke up.

These images were so vivid that I firmly believed I had seen energy and my dream had been one of those conditions that don Juan had called dreamlike, energy-generating. The idea that dreams can take place in the consensual reality of our daily world intrigued me, just as the dream images of the inorganic beings' realm had intrigued me.

"This time, you not only saw energy but crossed a dangerous boundary," don Juan said, after hearing my account.

He reiterated that the drill for the third gate of dreaming is to make the energy body move on it's own. In my last session, he said, I had unwittingly superseded the effect of that drill and crossed into another world.

"Your energy body moved," he said. "It journeyed by itself. That kind of journeying is beyond your abilities at this moment, and something attacked you."

"What do you think it was, don Juan?"

"This is a predatorial universe. It could have been one of thousands of things existing out there."

"Why do you think it attacked me?"

"For the same reason the inorganic beings attacked you: because you made yourself available."

"Is it that clear-cut, don Juan?"

"Certainly. It's as clear-cut as what you would do if a strange-looking spider crept across your desk while you were writing. You'd squash it out of fright, rather than admire it or examine it."

I was at a loss and searched for words to ask the proper question. I wanted to ask him where my dream had taken place, or what world I was in in that dream. But those questions did not make any sense. I could gather that myself. Don Juan was very understanding.

"You want to know where your dreaming attention was focused, don't you?" he asked with a grin.

This was exactly how I wanted to word my question. I reasoned that in the dream under consideration, I must have been looking at some real object- just like what had happened when I saw in dreams the minute details on the floor or the walls or the door of my room; details that I later had corroborated existed.

Don Juan said that in special dreams, like the one I'd had, our dreaming attention focuses on the daily world, and that it moves instantly from one real object to another in the world. What makes this movement possible is that the assemblage point is on the proper dreaming position. From that position, the assemblage point gives the dreaming attention such fluidity that it can move in a split second over incredible distances, and in doing so it produces a perception so fast, so fleeting that it resembles an ordinary dream.

Don Juan explained that in my dream I had seen a real vase, and then my dreaming attention had moved over distances to see a real surrealist painting of a bejeweled woman. The result, with the exception of seeing energy, had been very close to an ordinary dream in which items, when gazed at, quickly turn into something else.

"I know how disturbing this is," he went on, definitely aware of my bewilderment. "For some reason pertinent to the mind, to see energy in dreaming is more upsetting than anything one can think of."

I remarked that I had seen energy in dreaming before, yet it had never affected me like this.

"Now your energy body is complete and functioning," he said. "Therefore, the implication that you see energy in your dream is that you are perceiving a real world through the veil of a dream. That's the importance of the journey you took. It was real. It involved energy-generating items that nearly ended your life."

"Was it that serious, don Juan?"

"You bet! The creature that attacked you was made of pure awareness and was as deadly as anything can be. You saw it's energy. I am sure that you realize by now that unless we see in dreaming, we can't tell a real energy-generating thing from a phantom projection. So, even though you battled the inorganic beings and indeed saw the scouts and the tunnels, your energy body doesn't know for sure if they were real; meaning energy generating. You are ninety-nine but not one hundred percent sure."

Don Juan insisted on talking about the journey I had taken. For inexplicable reasons, I was reluctant to deal with that subject. What he was saying produced an instantaneous reaction in me. I found myself trying to come to grips with a deep, strange fear: It was dark and obsessive in a nagging, visceral way.

"You definitely went into another layer of the onion," don Juan said, finishing a statement to which I had not paid attention.

"What is this other layer of the onion, don Juan?"

"The world is like an onion, it has many skins. The world we know is but one of them. Sometimes, we cross boundaries and enter into another skin; another world, very much like this one, but not the same. And you entered into one all by yourself."

"How is this journey you're talking about possible, don Juan?"

"That is a meaningless question, because no one can answer it. In the view of sorcerers, the universe is constructed in layers which the energy body can cross. Do you know where the old sorcerers are still existing to this day? In another layer; in another skin of the onion."

"For me, the idea of a real, pragmatic journey taken in dreams is very difficult to understand or to accept, don Juan."

"We have discussed this topic to exhaustion. I was convinced you understood that the journey of the energy body depends exclusively on the position of the assemblage point."

"You've told me that, and I have been mulling it over and over. Still, saying that the journey is in the position of the assemblage point doesn't say anything to me."

"Your problem is your cynicism. I was just like you. Cynicism doesn't allow us to make drastic changes in our understanding of the world. It also forces us to feel that we are always right."

I understood his point to perfection, but I reminded him about my fight against all that.

"I propose that you do one nonsensical thing that might turn the tide," he said. "Repeat to yourself incessantly that the hinge of sorcery is the mystery of the assemblage point. If you repeat this to yourself long enough, some unseen force takes over and makes the appropriate changes in you."

Don Juan did not give me any indication that he was being facetious. [* facetious- cleverly amusing in tone] I knew he meant every word of it. What bothered me was his insistence that I repeat the formula ceaselessly to myself. I caught myself thinking that all of it was asinine.

"Cut your cynical attitude," he snapped at me. "Repeat this in a bona fide manner.

"The mystery of the assemblage point is everything in sorcery," he continued, without looking at me. "Or rather, everything in sorcery rests on the manipulation of the assemblage point. You know all this, but you have to repeat it."

For an instant, as I heard his remarks, I thought I was going to die of anguish. An incredible sense of physical sadness gripped my chest and made me scream with pain. My stomach and diaphragm seemed to be pushing up, moving into my chest cavity. The push was so intense that my awareness changed levels, and I entered into my normal state. Whatever we had been talking about became a vague thought about something that might have happened, but actually had not according to the mundane reasoning of my everyday-life consciousness.

The next time don Juan and I talked about dreaming, we discussed the reasons I had been unable to proceed with my dreaming practices for months on end. Don Juan warned me that to explain my situation he had to go in a roundabout way. He pointed out, first, that there is an enormous difference between the thoughts and deeds of the men of antiquity and those of modern men. Then he pointed out that the men of ancient times had a very realistic view of perception and awareness because their view stemmed from their observations of the universe around them. Modern men, in contrast, have an absurdly unrealistic view of perception and awareness because their view stems from their observations of the social order and from their dealings with it.

"Why are you telling me this?" I asked.

"Because you are a modern man involved with the views and observations of men of antiquity," he replied. "And none of those views and observations are familiar to you. Now more than ever you need sobriety and aplomb. [* aplomb- great coolness and composure under strain] I am trying to make a solid bridge- a bridge you can walk on, between the views of men of ancient times and those of modern men."

He remarked that of all the transcendental observations of the men of ancient times, the only one with which I was familiar, because it had filtered down to our day, was the idea of selling our souls to the devil in exchange for immortality; which he admitted sounded to him like something coming straight out of the relationship of the old sorcerers with the inorganic beings. He reminded me how the dreaming emissary had tried to induce me to stay in it's realm by offering me the possibility of maintaining my individuality and self-awareness for nearly an eternity.

"As you know, succumbing to the lure of the inorganic beings is not just an idea: It's real," don Juan went on. "But you haven't yet fully realized the implication of that realness. Dreaming, likewise, is real: It is an energy-generating condition. You hear my statements and you certainly understand what I mean, but your awareness hasn't caught up with the total implication of it yet."

Don Juan said that my rationality knew the import of a realization of this nature, and during our last talk it had forced my awareness to change levels. I ended up in my normal awareness before I could deal with the nuances of my dream. My rationality had further protected itself by suspending my dreaming practices.

"I assure you that I am fully aware of what an energy-generating condition means," I said.

"And I assure you that you are not," he retorted. "If you were, you would measure dreaming with greater care and deliberation. Since you believe you are just dreaming, you take blind chances. Your faulty reasoning tells you that no matter what happens, at a given moment the dream will be over and you will wake up."

He was right. In spite of all the things I had witnessed in my dreaming practices, somehow I still retained the general sense that all of it had been a dream.

"I am talking to you about the views of men of antiquity and the views of modern man," don Juan went on, "because your awareness, which is the awareness of modern man, prefers to deal with an unfamiliar concept as if it were an empty ideality.

"If I left it up to you, you'd regard dreaming as an idea. Of course, I'm sure you take dreaming seriously, but you don't quite believe in the reality of dreaming."

"I understand what you are saying, don Juan, but I don't understand why you are saying it."

"I am saying all this because you are now, for the first time, in the proper position to understand that dreaming is an energy-generating condition. For the first time, you can understand now that ordinary dreams are the honing devices used to train the assemblage point to reach the position that creates this energy-generating condition we call dreaming."

He warned me that since dreamers touch and enter real worlds of all-inclusive effects, they ought to be in a permanent state of the most intense and sustained alertness: Any deviation from total alertness imperils the dreamer in ways more than dreadful.

I began again, at this point, to experience a movement in my chest cavity, exactly as I had felt the day my awareness changed levels by itself. Don Juan forcibly shook me by the arm.

"Regard dreaming as something extremely dangerous!" he commanded me. "And begin that now! Don't start any of your weird maneuvers."

His tone of voice was so urgent that I stopped whatever I was, unconsciously, doing.

"What is going on with me, don Juan?" I asked.

"What's going on with you is that you can displace your assemblage point quickly and easily," he said. "Yet that ease has the tendency to make the displacement erratic. Bring your ease to order; and don't allow yourself even a fraction of an inch leeway."

I could easily have argued that I did not know what he was talking about; but I knew. I also knew I had only a few seconds to round up my energy and change my attitude; and I did.

This was the end of our exchange that day. I went home, and for nearly a year I faithfully and daily repeated what don Juan had asked me to say; that the hinge of sorcery is the mystery of the assemblage point.

The results of my litany-like invocation were incredible. I was firmly convinced that it had the same effect on my awareness that exercise has on the muscles of the body. My assemblage point became more agile; which meant that seeing energy in dreaming became the sole goal of my practices. My skill at intending to see grew in proportion to my efforts. A moment came when I was able just to intend seeing without saying a word; and actually experience the same result as when I voiced out loud my intent to see.

Don Juan congratulated me on my accomplishment. I, naturally, assumed he was being facetious. He assured me that he meant it, but beseeched me to continue shouting- at least whenever I was at a loss. His request did not seem odd to me. On my own, I had been yelling in my dreams at the top of my voice every time I deemed it necessary.

I discovered that the energy of our world wavers. It scintillates. Not only living beings but everything in our world glimmers with an inner light of it's own. Don Juan explained that the energy of our world consists of layers of shimmering hues.

The top layer is whitish; another, immediately adjacent to it, is chartreuse; and another one, more distant yet, is amber.

I found all those hues, or rather I saw glimmers of them whenever items that I encountered in my dreamlike states changed shapes. However, a whitish glow was always the initial impact of seeing anything that generated energy.

"Are there only three different hues?" I asked don Juan.

"There is an endless number of them," he replied, "but for the purposes of a beginning order, you should be concerned with those three. Later on, you can get as sophisticated as you want and isolate dozens of hues if you are able to do it.

"The whitish layer is the hue of the present position of mankind's assemblage point," don Juan continued. "Let's say that it is a modern hue. Sorcerers believe that everything man does nowadays is tinted with that whitish glow. At another time, the position of mankind's assemblage point made the hue of the ruling energy in the world chartreuse; and at another time, more distant yet, it made it amber. The color of sorcerers' energy is amber; which means that they are energetically associated with the men who existed in a distant past."

"Do you think, don Juan, that the present whitish hue will change someday?"

"If man is capable of evolving. The grand task of sorcerers is to bring forth the idea that, in order to evolve, man must first free his awareness from it's bindings to the social order. Once awareness is free, intent will redirect it into a new evolutionary path."

"Do you think sorcerers will succeed in that task?"

"They have already succeeded. They themselves are the proof. To convince others of the value and import of evolving is another matter."

The other kind of energy I found present in our world but alien to it was the scouts' energy; the energy don Juan had called sizzling. I encountered scores of items in my dreams that, once I saw them, turned into blobs of energy that seemed to be frying; bubbling with some heatlike inner activity.

"Bear in mind that not every scout you are going to find belongs to the realm of inorganic beings," don Juan remarked. "Every scout you have found so far, except for the blue scout, has been from that realm; but that was because the inorganic beings were catering to you. They were directing the show. Now you are on your own. Some of the scouts you will encounter are going to be, not from the inorganic beings' realm, but from other even more distant levels of awareness."

"Are the scouts aware of themselves?" I asked.

"Most certainly," he replied.

"Then why don't they make contact with us when we are awake?"

"They do. But our great misfortune is to have our consciousness so fully engaged that we don't have time to pay attention. In our sleep, however, the two-way-traffic trapdoor opens: We dream. And in our dreams, we make contact."

"Is there any way to tell whether the scouts are from a level besides the inorganic beings' world?"

"The greater their sizzling, the farther they come from. It sounds simplistic, but you have to let your energy body tell you what is what. I assure you, it'll make very fine distinctions and unerring judgments when faced with alien energy."

He was right again. Without much ado, my energy body distinguished two general types of alien energy. The first was the scouts from the inorganic beings' realm. Their energy fizzled mildly. There was no sound to it, but it had all the overt appearance of effervescence, or of water that is starting to boil.

The energy of the second general type of scouts gave me the impression of considerably more power. Those scouts seemed to be just about to burn. They vibrated from within as if they were filled with pressurized gas.

My encounters with the alien energy were always fleeting because I paid total attention to what don Juan recommended. He said, "Unless you know exactly what you are doing and what you want out of alien energy, you have to be content with a brief glance. Anything beyond a glance is as dangerous and as stupid as petting a rattlesnake."

"Why is it dangerous, don Juan?" I asked.

"Scouts are always very aggressive and extremely daring," he said. "They have to be that way in order to prevail in their explorations. Sustaining our dreaming attention on them is tantamount to soliciting their awareness to focus on us. Once they focus their attention on us, we are compelled to go with them. And that, of course, is the danger. We may end up in worlds beyond our energetic possibilities."

Don Juan explained that there are many more types of scouts than the two I had classified, but that at my present level of energy I could only focus on three. He described the first two types as the easiest to spot. Their disguises in our dreams are so outlandish, he said, that they immediately attract our dreaming attention. He depicted the scouts of the third type as the most dangerous in terms of aggressiveness and power- and because they hide behind subtle disguises.

"One of the strangest things dreamers find, which you yourself will find presently," don Juan continued, "is this third type of scout. So far, you have found samples of only the first two types, but that's because you haven't looked in the right place."

"And what is the right place, don Juan?"

"You have again fallen prey to words; this time the culprit word is 'items', which you have taken to mean only things, objects. Well, the most ferocious scout hides behind people in our dreams. A formidable surprise was in store for me in my dreaming when I focused my gaze on the dream image of my mother. After I voiced my intent to see, she turned into a ferocious, frightening bubble of sizzling energy."

Don Juan paused to let his statements sink in. I felt stupid for being disturbed at the possibility of finding a scout behind the dream image of my mother.

"It's annoying that they are always associated with the dream images of our parents or close friends," he went on. "Perhaps that's why we often feel ill at ease when we dream of them." His grin gave me the impression that he was enjoying my turmoil. "A rule of thumb for dreamers is to assume that the third type of scout is present whenever they feel perturbed by their parents or friends in a dream. Sound advice is to avoid those dream images. They are sheer poison."

"Where does the blue scout stand in relation to the other scouts?" I asked.

"Blue energy doesn't sizzle," he replied. "It is like ours; it wavers, but it is blue instead of white.

Blue energy doesn't exist in a natural state in our world.

"And this brings us to something we've never talked about. What color were the scouts you've seen so far?"

Until the moment he mentioned it, I had never thought about this. I told don Juan that the scouts I had seen were either pink or reddish. And he said that the deadly scouts of the third type were bright orange.

I found out myself that the third type of scout is outright scary. Every time I found one of them, it was behind the dream images of my parents, especially of my mother. Seeing it always reminded me of the blob of energy that had attacked me in my first deliberate seeing dream. Every time I found it, the alien exploring energy actually seemed about to jump on me. My energy body used to react with horror even before I saw it.

During our next discussion of dreaming, I queried don Juan about the total absence of inorganic beings in my dreaming practices.

"Why don't they show up anymore?" I asked.

"They only show themselves at the beginning," he explained. "After their scouts take us to their world, there is no necessity for the inorganic beings' projections. If we want to see the inorganic beings, a scout takes us there. For no one, and I mean no one, can journey by himself to their realm."

"Why is that so, don Juan?"

"Their world is sealed. No one can enter or leave without the consent of the inorganic beings. The only thing you can do by yourself once you are inside is, of course, voice your intent to stay. To say it out loud means to set in motion currents of energy that are irreversible. In olden times, words were incredibly powerful. Now they are not. But in the inorganic beings' realm, words haven't lost their power."

Don Juan laughed and said that he had no business saying anything about the inorganic beings' world because I really knew more about it than he and all his companions combined.

"There is one last issue related to that world that we haven't discussed," he said.

He paused for a long while, as if searching for the appropriate words.

"In the final analysis," he began, "my aversion to the old sorcerers' activities is very personal. As a nagual, I detest what they did. They cowardly sought refuge in the inorganic beings' world. They argued that in a predatorial universe poised to rip us apart, the only possible haven for us is in that realm."

"Why did they believe that?" I asked.

"Because it's true," he said. "Since the inorganic beings can't lie, the sales pitch of the dreaming emissary is all true. That world can give us shelter and prolong our awareness for nearly an eternity."

"The emissary's sales pitch, even if it's the truth, has no appeal to me," I said.

"Do you mean you will chance a road that might rip you apart?" he asked with a note of bewilderment in his voice.

I assured don Juan that I did not want the inorganic beings' world no matter what advantages it offered. My statement seemed to please him to no end.

"You are ready then for one final statement about that world. The most dreadful statement I can make," he said, and tried smile, but did not quite make it.

Don Juan searched in my eyes, I suppose for a glimmer agreement or comprehension. He was silent for a moment.

"The energy necessary to move the assemblage points of sorcerers comes from the realm of inorganic beings," he said, as if he were hurrying to get it over with.

My heart nearly stopped. I felt a vertigo and had to stomp my feet on the ground not to faint.

Don Juan went on, "This is the truth, and the legacy of the old sorcerers to us. They have us pinned down to this day. This is the reason I don't like them. I resent having to dip into one source alone. Personally, I refuse to do it.

"And I have tried to steer you away from it; but with no success because something pulls you to that world, like a magnet."

I understood don Juan better than I could have thought. Journeying to that world had always meant to me, at an energetic level, a boost of dark energy. I had even thought of it in those terms, long before don Juan voiced his statement.

"What can we do about it?" I asked.

"We can't have dealings with them," he answered, "and yet we can't stay away from them. My solution has been to take their energy but not give in to their influence. This is known as the ultimate stalking. It is done by sustaining the unbending intent of freedom even though no sorcerer knows what freedom really is."

"Can you explain to me, don Juan, why sorcerers have to take energy from the realm of inorganic beings?"

"There is no other viable energy for sorcerers. In order to maneuver the assemblage point in the manner they do, sorcerers need an inordinate amount of energy."

I reminded him of his own statement: that a redeployment of energy is necessary in order to do dreaming.

"That is correct," he replied. "To start dreaming sorcerers need to redefine their premises and save their energy, but that redefining is valid only to have the necessary energy to set up dreaming. To fly into other realms, to see energy, to forge the energy body, et cetera, et cetera, is another matter. For those maneuvers, sorcerers need loads of dark, alien energy."

"But how do they take it from the inorganic beings' world?"

"By the mere act of going to that world. All the sorcerers of our line have to do this. However, none of us is idiotic enough to do what you've done. But this is because none of us has your proclivities." [* proclivities- natural inclinations]

Don Juan sent me home to ponder what he had revealed to me. I had endless questions, but he did not want to hear any of them.

"All the questions you have, you can answer yourself," he said as he waved good-bye to me.

## 10. Stalking the Stalkers

At home, I soon realized that it was impossible for me to answer any of my questions. In fact, I could not even formulate them. Perhaps that was because the boundary of the second attention had begun to collapse on me: This was when I met Florinda Grau and Carol Tiggs in the world of everyday life. The confusion of not knowing them at all yet knowing them so intimately that I would have died for them at the drop of a hat was most deleterious to me. I had met Taisha Abelar a few years before, and I was just beginning to get used to the confounded feeling of knowing her without having the vaguest idea of how. To add two more people to my overloaded system proved too much for me. I got ill out of fatigue and had to seek don Juan's aid. I went to the town in southern Mexico where he and his companions lived.

Don Juan and his fellow sorcerers laughed uproariously at the mere mention of my turmoils. Don Juan explained to me that they were not really laughing at me, but at themselves. My cognitive problems reminded them of the ones they had had when the boundary of the second attention had collapsed on them just as it had on me. Their awareness, like mine, had not been prepared for it, don Juan said.

"Every sorcerer goes through the same agony," don Juan went on. "Awareness is an endless area of exploration for sorcerers and man in general. In order to enhance awareness, there is no risk we should not run; no means we should refuse. Bear in mind, however, that only in soundness of mind can awareness be enhanced."

Don Juan reiterated, then, that his time was coming to an end, and that I had to use my resources wisely to cover as much ground as I could before he left. Talk like that had used to throw me into states of profound depression. But as the time of his departure approached, I had begun to react with more resignation. I had no longer felt depressed, but I still panicked.

Nothing else was said after that. The next day, at his request, I drove don Juan to Mexico City. We arrived around noon and went directly to the hotel del Prado, in the Paseo Alameda, the place he usually lodged when he was in the city. Don Juan had an appointment with a lawyer that day at four in the afternoon. Since we had plenty of time, we went to have lunch in the famous Cafe Tacuba, a restaurant in the heart of downtown where it was purported that real meals were served.

Don Juan was not hungry. He ordered only two sweet tamales, while I gorged myself on a sumptuous feast. He laughed at me and made signs of silent despair at my healthy appetite.

"I'm going to propose a line of action for you," he said in a curt tone when we had finished our lunch. "It's the last task of the third gate of dreaming, and it consists of stalking the stalkers; a most mysterious maneuver. To stalk the stalkers means to deliberately draw energy from the inorganic beings' realm in order to perform a sorcery feat."

"What kind of sorcery feat, don Juan?"

"A journey; a journey that uses awareness as an element of the environment," he explained. "In the world of daily life, water is an element of the environment that we use for traveling. Imagine awareness being a similar element that can be used for traveling. Through the medium of awareness, scouts from all over the universe come to us, and vice versa; via awareness, sorcerers go to the ends of the universe."

There had been certain concepts, among the hosts of concepts don Juan had made me aware of in the course of his teachings, that attracted my full interest without any coaxing. This was one.

"The idea that awareness is a physical element is revolutionary," I said in awe.

"I didn't say it's a physical element," he corrected me. "It's an energetic element. You have to make that distinction. For sorcerers who see, awareness is a glow. They can hitch their energy body to that glow and go with it."

"What's the difference between a physical and an energetic element?" I asked.

"The difference is that physical elements are part of our interpretation system, but energetic elements are not. Energetic elements, like awareness, exist in our universe. But we, as average people, perceive only the physical elements because we were taught to do so. Sorcerers perceive the energetic elements for the same reason: They were taught to do so."

Don Juan explained that the use of awareness as an energetic element of our environment is the essence of sorcery; that in terms of practicalities, the trajectory of sorcery is, first, to free the existing energy in us by impeccably following the sorcerers' path; second, to use that energy to develop the energy body by means of dreaming; and, third, to use awareness as an element of the environment in order to enter with the energy body and all our physicality into other worlds.

"There are two kinds of energy journeys into other worlds," he went on. "One is when awareness picks up the sorcerer's energy body and takes it wherever it may; and the other is when the sorcerer decides, in full consciousness, to use the avenue of awareness to make a journey. You've done the first kind of journeying. It takes an enormous discipline to do the second."

After a long silence, don Juan stated that in the life of sorcerers there are issues that require masterful handling; and that dealing with awareness as an energetic element open to the energy body is the most important, vital, and dangerous of those issues.

I had no comment. I was suddenly on pins and needles; hanging on every one of his words.

"By yourself, you don't have enough energy to perform the last task of the third gate of dreaming," he went on, "but you and Carol Tiggs together can certainly do what I have in mind."

He paused, deliberately egging me on with his silence to ask what he had in mind. I did. His laughter only increased the ominous mood.

"I want you two to break the boundaries of the normal world, and using awareness as an energetic element, enter into another," he said. "This breaking and entering amounts to stalking the stalkers. Using awareness as an element of the environment bypasses the influence of the inorganic beings, but it still uses their energy."

He did not want to give me any more information- in order not to influence me- he said. His belief was that the less I knew beforehand the better off I would be. I disagreed, but he assured me that, in a pinch, my energy body was perfectly capable of taking care of itself.

We went from the restaurant to the lawyer's office. Don Juan quickly concluded his business, and we were, in no time at all, in a taxi on our way to the airport. Don Juan informed me that Carol Tiggs was arriving on a flight from Los Angeles, and that she was coming to Mexico City exclusively to fulfill this last dreaming task with me.

"The valley of Mexico is a superb place to perform the kind of sorcery feat you are after," he commented.

"You haven't told me yet what the exact steps to follow are," I said.

He didn't answer me. We did not speak any more, but while we waited for the plane to land, he explained the procedure I had to follow. I was to go to Carol's room at the Regis Hotel across the street from our hotel, and after getting into a state of total inner silence with her, we had to slip gently into dreaming; voicing our intent to go to the realm of the inorganic beings.

I interrupted to remind him that I always had to wait for a scout to show up before I could manifest out loud my intent to go to the inorganic beings' world.

Don Juan chuckled and said, "You haven't dreamt with Carol Tiggs yet. You'll find out that it's a treat. Sorceresses don't need any props. They just go to that world whenever they want to; for them, there is a scout on permanent call."

I could not bring myself to believe that a sorceress would be able to do what he was asserting. I thought I had a degree of expertise in handling the inorganic beings' world. When I mentioned to him what was going through my mind, he retorted that I had no expertise whatsoever when it came to what sorceresses are capable of.

"Why do you think I had Carol Tiggs with me to pull you bodily out of that world?" he asked. "Do you think it was because she's beautiful?"

"Why was it, don Juan?"

"Because I couldn't do it myself; and for her, it was nothing. She has a knack for that world."

"Is she an exceptional case, don Juan?"

"Women in general have a natural bent for that realm; sorceresses are, of course, the champions, but Carol Tiggs is better than anyone I know because she, as the nagual woman, has superb energy."

I thought I had caught don Juan in a serious contradiction. He had told me that the inorganic beings were not interested at all in women. Now he was asserting the opposite.

"No. I'm not asserting the opposite," he remarked when I confronted him. "I've said to you that the inorganic beings don't pursue females; they only go after males. But I've also said to you that the inorganic beings are female, and that the entire universe is female to a large degree. So draw your own conclusions."

Since I had no way to draw any conclusions, Don Juan explained to me that sorceresses, in theory, come and go as they please in that world because of their enhanced awareness and their femaleness.

"Do you know this for a fact?" I asked.

"The women of my party have never done that," he confessed, "not because they can't but because I dissuaded them. The women of your party, on the other hand, do it like changing skirts."

I felt a vacuum in my stomach. I really did not know anything about the women of my party. Don Juan consoled me saying that my circumstances were different from his; as was my role as a nagual. He assured me that I did not have it in me to dissuade any of the women of my party, even if I stood on my head.

As the taxi drove us to her hotel, Carol delighted don Juan and me with her impersonations of people we knew. I tried to be serious and questioned her about our task. She mumbled some apologies for not being able to answer me with the seriousness I deserved. Don Juan laughed uproariously when she mimicked my solemn tone of voice.

After registering Carol at the hotel, the three of us meandered around downtown looking for secondhand bookstores. We ate a light dinner at the Sanborn's restaurant in the House of Tiles. About ten o'clock, we walked to the Regis Hotel. We went directly to the elevator. My fear had sharpened my capacity to perceive details. The hotel building was old and massive. The furniture in the lobby had obviously seen better days. Yet there was still, all around us, something left of an old glory that had a definite appeal. I could easily understand why Carol liked that hotel so much.

Before we got into the elevator, my anxiety mounted to such heights that I had to ask don Juan for last-minute instructions.

"Tell me again how we are going to proceed," I begged.

Don Juan pulled us to the huge, ancient stuffed chairs in the lobby and patiently explained to us that, once we were in the world of the inorganic beings, we had to voice our intent to transfer our normal awareness to our energy bodies. He suggested that Carol and I voice our intent together, although that part was not really important. What was important, he said, was that each of us intend the transfer of the total awareness of our daily world to our energy body.

"How do we do this transference of awareness?" I asked.

"Transferring awareness is purely a matter of voicing our intent and having the necessary amount of energy," he said. "Carol knows all this. She's done it before. She entered physically into the inorganic beings' world when she pulled you out of it, remember? Her energy will do the trick. It'll tip the scales."

"What does it mean to tip the scales? I am in limbo, don Juan."

Don Juan explained that to tip the scales meant to add one's total physical mass to the energy body. He said that using awareness as a medium to make the journey into another world is not the result of applying any techniques, but is rather the corollary of intending and having enough energy. The bulk of energy from Carol Tiggs added to mine- or the bulk of my energy added to Carol's- was going to make us into one single entity; energetically capable of pulling our physicality and placing it on the energy body in order to make that journey.

"What exactly do we have to do in order to enter into that other world?" Carol asked. Her question scared me half to death: I thought she knew what was going on.

"Your total physical mass has to be added to your energy body," don Juan replied, looking into her eyes. "The great difficulty of this maneuver is to discipline the energy body, a thing the two of you have already done. Lack of discipline is the only reason the two of you may fail in performing this feat of ultimate stalking. Sometimes, as a fluke, an average person ends up performing it and entering into another world. But this is immediately explained away as insanity or hallucination."

I would have given anything in the world for don Juan to continue talking. But he put us in the elevator, and we went up to the second floor to Carol's room despite my protests and my rational need to know. Deep down, however, my turmoil was not so much that I needed to know: The bottom line was my fear. Somehow, this sorcerers' maneuver was more frightening to me than anything I had done so far.

Don Juan's parting words to us were "Forget the self and you will fear nothing." His grin and the nodding of his head were invitations to ponder the statement.

Carol laughed and began to clown; imitating don Juan's voice as he gave us his cryptic instructions. Her lisping added quite a bit of color to what don Juan had said. Sometimes I found her lisping adorable. Most of the time, I detested it. Fortunately, that night her lisping was hardly noticeable.

We went to her room and sat down on the edge of the bed. My last conscious thought was that the bed was a relic from the beginning of the century. Before I had time to utter a single word, I found myself in a strange-looking bed. Carol was with me. She half sat up at the same time I did. We were naked, each covered with a thin blanket.

"What's going on?" she asked in a feeble voice.

"Are you awake?" I asked inanely.

"Of course I am awake," she said in an impatient tone.

"Do you remember where we were?" I asked. There was a long silence, as she obviously tried to put her thoughts in order.

"I think I am real, but you are not," she finally said. "I know where I was before this. And you want to trick me."

I thought she was doing the same thing herself: that she knew what was going on and was testing me or pulling my leg. Don Juan had told me that her demons and mine were caginess and distrust. I was having a grand sample of that.

"I refuse to be part of any shit where you are in control," she said. She looked at me with venom in her eyes. "I am talking to you, whoever you are."

She took one of the blankets we had been covered with and wrapped herself with it. "I am going to lie here and go back to where I came from," she said, with an air of finality. "You and the nagual go and play with each other."

"You have to stop this nonsense," I said forcefully. "We are in another world."

She didn't pay any attention and turned her back to me like an annoyed, pampered child. I did not want to waste my dreaming attention in futile discussions of realness. I began to examine my surroundings. The only light in the room was moonlight shining through the window directly in front of us. We were in a small room, on a high bed. I noticed that the bed was primitively constructed. Four thick posts had been planted in the ground, and the bed frame was a lattice, made of long poles attached to the posts. The bed had a thick mattress, or rather a compact mattress. There were no sheets or pillows. Filled burlap sacks were stacked up against the walls. Two sacks by the foot of the bed, staggered one on top of the other, served as a stepladder to climb onto it.

Looking for a light switch, I became aware that the high bed was in a corner, against the wall. Our heads were to the wall; I was on the outside of the bed and Carol on the inside. When I sat on the edge of the bed, I realized that it was perhaps over three feet above the ground.

Carol sat up suddenly and said with a heavy lisp, "This is disgusting! The nagual certainly didn't tell me I was going to end up like this."

"I didn't know it either," I said. I wanted to say more and start a conversation, but my anxiety had grown to extravagant proportions.

"You shut up," she snapped at me, her voice cracking with anger. "You don't exist. You're a ghost. Disappear! Disappear!"

Her lisping was actually cute and distracted me from my obsessive fear. I shook her by the shoulders. She yelled, not so much in pain as in surprise or annoyance.

"I'm not a ghost," I said. "We made the journey because we joined our energy."

Carol Tiggs was famous among us for her speed in adapting to any situation. In no time at all, she was convinced of the realness of our predicament and began to look for her clothes in the semidarkness. I marveled at the fact that she was not afraid. She became busy, reasoning out loud where she might have put her clothes had she gone to bed in that room.

"Do you see any chair?" she asked.

I faintly saw a stack of three sacks that might have served as a table or high bench. She got out of the bed, went to it, and found her clothes and mine, neatly folded, the way she always handled garments. She handed my clothes to me: They were my clothes, but not the ones I had been wearing a few minutes before, in Carol's room at the Regis Hotel.

"These are not my clothes," she lisped. "And yet they are mine. How strange!"

We dressed in silence. I wanted to tell her that I was about to burst with anxiety. I also wanted to comment on the speed of our journey, but in the time I had taken to dress, the thought of our journey had become very vague. I could hardly remember where we had been before waking up in that room. It was as if I had dreamt the hotel room. I made a supreme effort to recollect, to push away the vagueness that had begun to envelop me. I succeeded in dispelling the fog, but that act exhausted all my energy. I ended up panting and sweating.

"Something nearly, nearly got me," Carol said. I looked at her. She, like me, was covered with perspiration. "It nearly got you too. What do you think it is?"

"The position of the assemblage point," I said with absolute certainty.

She did not agree with me. "It's the inorganic beings collecting their dues," she said shivering.

"The nagual told me it was going to be horrible, but I never imagined anything this horrible."

I was in total agreement with her; we were in a horrifying mess, yet I could not conceive what the horror of that situation was. Carol and I were not novices: We had seen and done endless things, some of them outright terrifying. But there was something in that dream room that chilled me beyond belief.

"We are dreaming, aren't we?" Carol asked.

Without hesitation, I reassured her that we were, although I would have given anything to have don Juan there to reassure me of the same thing.

"Why am I so frightened?" she asked me, as if I were capable of rationally explaining it.

Before I could formulate a thought about it, she answered her question herself. She said that what frightened her was to realize, at a body level, that perceiving is an all-inclusive act when the assemblage point has been immobilized on one position. She reminded me that don Juan had told us that the power our daily world has over us is a result of the fact that our assemblage point is immobile on it's habitual position. This immobility is what makes our perception of the world so inclusive and overpowering that we cannot escape from it. Carol also reminded me about another thing the nagual had said: that if we want to break this totally inclusive force, all we have to do is dispel the fog, that is to say, displace the assemblage point by intending it's displacement.

I had never really understood what don Juan meant until the moment I had to bring my assemblage point to another position, in order to dispel that world's fog, which had begun to swallow me.

Carol and I, without saying another word, went to the window and looked out. We were in the country. The moonlight revealed some low, dark shapes of dwelling structures. By all indications, we were in the utility or supply room of a farm or a big country house.

"Do you remember going to bed here?" Carol asked.

"I almost do," I said and meant it. I told her I had to fight to keep the image of her hotel room in my mind as a point of reference.

"I have to do the same," she said in a frightened whisper. "I know that if we let go of that memory, we are goners."

Then she asked me if I wanted us to leave that shack and venture outside. I did not. My apprehension was so acute that I was unable to voice my words. I could only give her a signal with my head.

"You are so very right not to want to go out," she said. "I have the feeling that if we leave this shack, we'll never make it back."

I was going to open the door and just look outside, but she stopped me.

"Don't do that," she said. "You might let the outside in."

The thought that crossed my mind at that instant was that we had been placed inside a frail cage. Anything, such as opening the door, might upset the precarious balance of that cage. At the moment I had that thought, both of us had the same urge. We took off our clothes as if our lives depended on that. We then jumped into the high bed without using the two sack steps-only to jump down from it in the next instant.

It was evident that Carol and I had the same realization at the same time. She confirmed my assumption when she said, "Anything that we use belonging to this world can only weaken us. If I stand here naked and away from the bed and away from the window, I don't have any problem remembering where I came from. But if I lie in that bed or wear those clothes or look out the window, I am done for."

We stood in the center of the room for a long time, huddled together. A weird suspicion began to fester in my mind. "How are we going to return to our world?" I asked, expecting her to know.

"The reentry into our world is automatic if we don't let the fog set in," she said with the air of a foremost authority; which was her trademark.

And she was right. Carol and I woke up, at the same time, in the bed of her room in the Regis Hotel. It was so obvious we were back in the world of daily life that we didn't ask questions or make comments about it. The sunlight was nearly blinding.

"How did we get back?" Carol asked. "Or rather, when did we get back?"

I had no idea what to say or what to think. I was too numb to speculate, which was all I could have done.

"Do you think that we just returned?" Carol insisted. "Or maybe we've been asleep here all night. Look! We're naked. When did we take our clothes off?"

"We took them off in that other world," I said and surprised myself with the sound of my voice.

My answer seemed to stump Carol. She looked uncomprehendingly at me and then at her own naked body.

We sat there without moving for an endless time. Both of us seemed to be deprived of volition. But then, quite abruptly, we had the same thought at exactly the same time. We got dressed in record time, ran out of the room, went down two flights of stairs, crossed the street, and rushed into don Juan's hotel.

Inexplicably and excessively out of breath, since we had not really exerted ourselves physically, we took turns explaining to him what we had done. He confirmed our conjectures.

"What you two did was about the most dangerous thing one can imagine," he said.

He addressed Carol and told her that our attempt had been both a total success and a fiasco. We had succeeded in transferring our awareness of the daily world to our energy bodies, thus making the journey with all our physicality, but we had failed in avoiding the influence of the inorganic beings. He said that ordinarily dreamers experience the whole maneuver as a series of slow transitions, and that they have to voice their intent to use awareness as an element. In our case, all those steps were dispensed with. Because of the intervention of the inorganic beings, the two of us had actually been hurled into a deadly world with a most terrifying speed.

"It wasn't your combined energy that made your journey possible," he continued. "Something else did that. It even selected adequate clothes for you."

"Do you mean, nagual, that the clothes and the bed and the room happened only because we were being run by the inorganic beings?" Carol asked.

"You bet your life," he replied. "Ordinarily, dreamers are merely voyeurs. The way your journey turned out, you two got a ringside seat and lived the old sorcerers' damnation. What happened to them was precisely what happened to you. The inorganic beings took them to worlds from which they could not return. I should have known, but it didn't even enter my mind that the inorganic beings would take over and try to set up the same trap for you two."

"Do you mean they wanted to keep us there?" Carol asked.

"If you had gotten outside that shack, you'd now be meandering hopelessly in that world," don Juan said.

He explained that since we entered into that world with all our physicality, the fixation of our assemblage points on the position preselected by the inorganic beings was so overpowering that it created a sort of fog that obliterated any memory of the world we came from. He added that the natural consequence of such an immobility, as in the case of the sorcerers of antiquity, is that the dreamer's assemblage point cannot return to it's habitual position.

"Think about this," he urged us. "Perhaps this is exactly what is happening to all of us in the world of daily life. We are here, and the fixation of our assemblage point is so overpowering that it has made us forget where we came from, and what our purpose was for coming here."

Don Juan did not want to say any more about our journey. I felt that he was sparing us further discomfort and fear. He took us to eat a late lunch. By the time we reached the restaurant, a couple of blocks down Francisco Madero Avenue, it was six o'clock in the afternoon. Carol and I had slept, if that is what we did, about eighteen hours.

Only don Juan was hungry. Carol remarked with a touch of anger that he was eating like a pig. Quite a few heads turned in our direction on hearing don Juan's laughter.

It was a warm night. The sky was clear. There was a soft, caressing breeze as we sat down on a bench in the Paseo Alameda.

"There is a question that's burning me," Carol said to don Juan. "We didn't use awareness as a medium for traveling, right?"

"That's true," don Juan said and sighed deeply. "The task was to sneak by the inorganic beings, not be run by them."

"What's going to happen now?" she asked.

"You are going to postpone stalking the stalkers until you two are stronger," he said. "Or perhaps you'll never accomplish it. It doesn't really matter: If one thing doesn't work, another will. Sorcery is an endless challenge."

He explained to us again, as if he were trying to fix his explanation in our minds, that in order to use awareness as an element of the environment, dreamers first have to make a journey to the inorganic beings' realm. Then they have to use that journey as a springboard, and, while they are in possession of the necessary dark energy, they have to intend to be hurled through the medium of awareness into another world.

"The failure of your trip was that you didn't have time to use awareness as an element for traveling," he went on. "Before you even got to the inorganic beings' world, you two were already in another world."

"What do you recommend we do?" Carol asked. "I recommend that you see as little of each other as possible," he said. "I'm sure the inorganic beings will not pass up the opportunity to get you two, especially if you join forces."

So Carol Tiggs and I deliberately stayed away from each other from then on. The prospect that we might inadvertently elicit a similar journey was too great a risk for us. Don Juan encouraged our decision by repeating over and over that we had enough combined energy to tempt the inorganic beings to lure us again.

Don Juan brought my dreaming practices back to seeing energy in energy-generating dreamlike states. In the course of time, I saw everything that presented itself to me. I entered in this manner into a most peculiar state: I became incapable of rendering intelligently what I saw. My sensation was always that I had reached states of perception for which I had no lexicon. [* lexicon- (1.) a lamgauge user's knowledge of words (2.) a reference book containing an alphabetical list of words]

Don Juan explained my incomprehensible and indescribable visions as my energy body using awareness as an element not for journeying, because I never had enough energy, but for entering into the energy fields of inanimate matter or of living beings.

## 11. The Tenant

There were no more dreaming practices for me, as I was accustomed to having them. The next time I saw don Juan, he put me under the guidance of two women of his party: Florinda and Zuleica- his two closest cohorts. Their instruction was not at all about the gates of dreaming but about different ways to use the energy body, and it did not last long enough to be influential. They gave me the impression that they were more interested in checking me out than in teaching me anything.

"There is nothing else I can teach you about dreaming," don Juan said when I questioned him about this state of affairs. "My time on this earth is up. But Florinda will stay. She's the one who will direct, not only you, but all my other apprentices."

"Will she continue my dreaming practices?"

"I don't know that, and neither does she. It's all up to the spirit. The real player. We are not players ourselves. We are mere pawns in it's hands. Following the commands of the spirit, I have to tell you what the fourth gate of dreaming is, although I can't guide you anymore."

"What's the point of whetting my appetite? I'd rather not know."

"The spirit is not leaving that up to me or to you. I have to outline the fourth gate of dreaming for you, whether I like it or not."

Don Juan explained that, at the fourth gate of dreaming, the energy body travels to specific, concrete places and that there are three ways of using the fourth gate: one, to travel to concrete places in this world; two, to travel to concrete places out of this world; and, three, to travel to places that exist only in the intent of others. He stated that the last one is the most difficult and dangerous of the three and was, by far, the old sorcerers' predilection.

"What do you want me to do with this knowledge?" I asked.

"Nothing for the moment. File it away until you need it."

"Do you mean that I can cross the fourth gate by myself, without help?"

"Whether or not you can do that is up to the spirit."

He abruptly dropped the subject, but he did not leave me with the sensation that I should try to reach and cross the fourth gate by myself.

Don Juan then made one last appointment with me to give me, he said, a sorcerers' send-off: the concluding touch of my dreaming practices. He told me to meet him in the small town in southern Mexico where he and his sorcerer companions lived.

I arrived there in the late afternoon. Don Juan and I sat in the patio of his house on some uncomfortable wicker chairs fitted with thick, oversize pillows. Don Juan laughed and winked at me. The chairs were a gift from one of the women members of his party. The chairs had been bought for him in Phoenix, Arizona, and with great difficulty brought into Mexico. He said we simply had to sit as if nothing was bothering us, especially him.

Don Juan asked me to read to him a poem by Dylan Thomas, which he said had the most pertinent meaning for me at that point in time.

I have longed to move away

From the hissing of the spent lie

And the old terrors' continual cry

Growing more terrible as the day

Goes over the hill into the deep sea...

I have longed to move away but am afraid;

Some life, yet unspent, might explode

Out of the old lie burning on the ground,

And, crackling into the air, leave me half-blind.

Don Juan stood up and said that he was going for a walk in the plaza, in the center of town. He asked me to come along. I immediately assumed that the poem had evoked a negative response in him and he needed to dispel it.

We reached the square plaza without having said a word. We walked around it a couple of times, still not talking. There were quite a number of people, milling around the stores on the streets facing the east and north sides of the park. All the streets around the plaza were unevenly paved. The houses were massive, one-story adobe buildings with tiled roofs, whitewashed walls, and blue or brown painted doors. On a side street, a block away from the plaza, the high walls of the enormous colonial church, which looked like a Moorish mosque, loomed ominously over the roof of the only hotel in town. On the south side, there were two restaurants, which inexplicably coexisted side by side, doing good business, serving practically the same menu at the same prices.

I broke the silence and asked don Juan whether he also found it odd that both restaurants were just about the same.

"Everything is possible in this town," he replied.

The way he said it made me feel uneasy.

"Why are you so nervous?" he asked, with a serious expression. "Do you know something you're not telling me?"

"Why am I nervous? That's a laugh. I am always nervous around you, don Juan. Sometimes more so than others."

He seemed to be making a serious effort not to laugh.

"Naguals are not really the most friendly beings on earth," he said in a tone of apology. "I learned this the hard way, being pitted against my teacher, the terrible nagual Julian. His mere presence used to scare the daylights out of me. And when he used to zero in on me, I always thought my life wasn't worth a plug nickel."

"Unquestionably, don Juan, you have the same effect on me."

He laughed openly. "No, no. You are definitely exaggerating. I'm an angel in comparison."

"You may be an angel in comparison, except that I don't have the nagual Julian to compare you with."

He laughed for a moment, then became serious again.

"I don't know why, but I definitely feel scared," I explained.

"Do you feel you have reason to be scared?" he asked and stopped walking to peer at me.

His tone of voice and his raised eyebrows gave me the impression he suspected that I knew something I was not revealing to him. He was clearly expecting a disclosure on my part.

"Your insistence makes me wonder," I said. "Are you sure you are not the one who has something up his sleeve?"

"I do have something up my sleeve," he admitted and grinned. "But that's not the issue. The issue is that there is something in this town awaiting you. And you don't quite know what it is; or you do know what it is but don't dare to tell me; or you don't know anything about it at all."

"What's waiting for me here?"

Instead of answering me, don Juan briskly resumed his walking, and we kept going around the plaza in complete silence. We circled it quite a few times, looking for a place to sit. Then, a group of young women got up from a bench and left.

"For years now, I have been describing to you the aberrant practices of the sorcerers of ancient Mexico," don Juan said as he sat down on the bench and gestured for me to sit by him.

With the fervor of someone who has never said it before, he began to tell me again what he had told me many times; that those sorcerers, guided by extremely selfish interests, put all their efforts into perfecting practices that pushed them further and further away from sobriety or mental balance, and that they were finally exterminated when their complex edifices of beliefs and practices became so cumbersome that they could no longer support them.

"The sorcerers of antiquity, of course, lived and proliferated in this area," he said, watching my reaction. "Here in this town. This town was built on the actual foundations of one of their towns. Here in this area, the sorcerers of antiquity carried on all their dealings."

"Do you know this for a fact, don Juan?"

"I do, and so will you, very soon."

My mounting anxiety was forcing me to do something I detested; to focus on myself. Don Juan, sensing my frustration, egged me on.

"Very soon, we'll know whether or not you're really like the old sorcerers, or like the new ones," he said.

"You are driving me nuts with all this strange and ominous talk," I protested.

Being with don Juan for thirteen years had conditioned me, above everything else, to conceive of panic as something that was just around the corner at all times, ready to be released.

Don Juan seemed to vacillate. I noticed his furtive glances in the direction of the church. He was even distracted. When I talked to him, he was not listening. I had to repeat my question.

"Are you waiting for someone?"

"Yes, I am," he said. "Most certainly I am. I was just sensing the surroundings. You caught me in the act of scanning the area with my energy body."

"What did you sense, don Juan?"

"My energy body senses that everything is in place. The play is on tonight. You are the main protagonist. I am a character actor with a small but meaningful role. I exit in the first act."

"What in the world are you talking about?"

He did not answer me. He smiled knowingly.

"I'm preparing the ground," he said. "Warming you up, so to speak, harping on the idea that modern-day sorcerers have learned a hard lesson. They have realized that only if they remain totally detached can they have the energy to be free. Theirs is a peculiar type of detachment which is born not out of fear or indolence, but out of conviction."

Don Juan paused and stood up, stretched his arms in front of him, to his sides, and then behind him.

"Do the same," he advised me. "It relaxes the body; and you have to be very relaxed to face what's coming to you tonight." He smiled broadly.

"Either total detachment or utter indulging is coming to you tonight. It is a choice that every nagual in my line has to make." He sat down again and took a deep breath. What he had said seemed to have taken all his energy.

"I think I can understand detachment and indulging," he went on, "because I had the privilege of knowing two naguals: my benefactor, the nagual Julian, and his benefactor, the nagual Elias. I witnessed the difference between the two. The nagual Elias was detached to the point that he could put aside a gift of power. The nagual Julian was also detached, but not enough to put aside such a gift."

"Judging by the way you're talking," I said, "I would say that you are going to spring some sort of test on me tonight. Is that true?"

"I don't have the power to spring tests of any sort on you, but the spirit does." He said this with a grin, then added, "I am merely it's agent."

"What is the spirit going to do to me, don Juan?"

"All I can say is that tonight you're going to get a lesson in dreaming the way lessons in dreaming used to be; but you are not going to get that lesson from me. Someone else is going to be your teacher and guide you tonight."

"Who is going to be my teacher and guide?"

"A visitor who might be a horrendous surprise to you, or no surprise at all."

"And what's the lesson in dreaming I am going to get?"

"It's a lesson about the fourth gate of dreaming. And it is in two parts. The first part I'll explain to you presently. The second part nobody can explain to you because it is something that pertains only to you. All the naguals of my line got this two-part lesson, but no two of those lessons were alike: They were tailored to fit those naguals' personal bents of character."

"Your explanation doesn't help me at all, don Juan. I am getting more and more nervous."

We remained quiet for a long moment. I was shaken up and fidgety, and did not know what else to say without actually nagging.

"As you already know, for modern-day sorcerers to perceive energy directly is a matter of personal attainment," don Juan said. "We maneuver the assemblage point through self-discipline. For the old sorcerers, the displacement of the assemblage point was a consequence of their subjugation to others, their teachers, who accomplished those displacements through dark operations and gave them to their disciples as gifts of power.

"It's possible for someone with greater energy than ours to do anything to us," he went on. For example, the nagual Julian could have turned me into anything he wanted; a fiend or a saint. But he was an impeccable nagual and let me be myself. The old sorcerers were not that impeccable; and by means of their ceaseless efforts to gain control over others, they created a situation of darkness and terror that was passed on from teacher to disciple."

He stood up and swept his gaze all around us.

"As you can see, this town isn't much," he continued, "but it has a unique fascination for the warriors of my line. Here lies the source of what we are, and the source of what we don't want to be.

"Since I am at the end of my time, I must pass on to you certain ideas; recount to you certain stories; put you in touch with certain beings right here in this town, exactly as my benefactor did with me."

Don Juan said that he was reiterating something I already was familiar with, that whatever he was and everything he knew were a legacy from his teacher, the nagual Julian. He in turn inherited everything from his teacher, the nagual Elias. The nagual Elias from the nagual Rosendo; he from the nagual Lujan; the nagual Lujan from the nagual Santisteban; and the nagual Santisteban from the nagual Sebastian.

He told me again, in a very formal tone, something he had explained to me many times before; that there were eight naguals before the nagual Sebastian, but that they were quite different. They had a different attitude toward sorcery; a different concept of it, although they were still directly related to his sorcery lineage.

"You must recollect now, and repeat to me, everything I've told you about the nagual Sebastian," he demanded.

His request seemed odd to me, but I repeated everything I had been told by him or by any of his companions about the nagual Sebastian and the mythical old sorcerer, the death defier, known to them as the tenant.

"You know that the death defier makes us gifts of power every generation," don Juan said. "And the specific nature of those gifts of power is what changed the course of our lineage."

He explained that the tenant, being a sorcerer from the old school, had learned from his teachers all the intricacies of shifting his assemblage point. Since he had perhaps thousands of years of strange life and awareness- ample time to perfect anything- he knew now how to reach and hold hundreds, if not thousands of positions of the assemblage point. His gifts were like both maps for shifting the assemblage point to specific spots, and manuals on how to immobilize it on any of those positions and thus acquire cohesion.

Don Juan was at the peak of his raconteur's form. I had never seen him more dramatic. If I had not known him better, I would have sworn that his voice had the deep and worried inflection of someone gripped by fear or preoccupation. His gestures gave me the impression of a good actor portraying nervousness and concern to perfection.

Don Juan peered at me, and in the tone and manner of someone making a painful revelation, he said that, for instance, the nagual Lujan received from the tenant a gift of fifty positions. He shook his head rhythmically, as if he were silently asking me to consider what he had just said. I kept quiet.

"Fifty positions!" he exclaimed in wonder. "For a gift, one or, at the most, two positions of the assemblage point should be more than adequate."

He shrugged his shoulders, gesturing bewilderment.

"I was told that the tenant liked the nagual Lujan immensely," he continued. "They struck up such a close friendship that they were practically inseparable. I was told that the nagual Lujan and the tenant used to stroll into the church over there every morning for early mass."

"Right here, in this town?" I asked, in total surprise.

"Right here," he replied. "Possibly they sat down on this very spot, on another bench, over a hundred years ago."

"The nagual Lujan and the tenant really walked in this plaza?" I asked again, unable to overcome my surprise.

"You bet!" he exclaimed. "I brought you here tonight because the poem you were reading to me cued me that it was time for you to meet the tenant."

Panic overtook me with the speed of wildfire. I had to breathe through my mouth for a moment.

"We have been discussing the strange accomplishments of the sorcerers of ancient times," don Juan continued. "But it's always hard when one has to talk exclusively in idealities without any firsthand knowledge. I can repeat to you from now until doomsday something that is crystal clear to me but impossible for you to understand or believe because you don't have any practical knowledge of it."

He stood up and gazed at me from head to toe.

"Let's go to church," he said. "The tenant likes the church and it's surroundings. I'm positive this is the moment to go there."

Very few times in the course of my association with don Juan had I felt such apprehension. I was numb. My entire body trembled when I stood up. My stomach was tied in knots, yet I followed him without a word when he headed for the church- my knees wobbling and sagging involuntarily every time I took a step. By the time we had walked the short block from the plaza to the limestone steps of the church portico, I was about to faint. Don Juan put his arm around my shoulders to prop me up.

"There's the tenant," he said as casually as if he had just spotted an old friend.

I looked in the direction he was pointing and saw a group of five women and three men at the far end of the portico. My fast and panicked glance did not register anything unusual about those people. I couldn't even tell whether they were going into the church or coming out of it. I noticed, though, that they seemed to be congregated there accidentally. They were not together. By the time don Juan and I reached the small door cut out in the church's massive wooden portals, three women had entered the church. The three men and the other two women were walking away. I experienced a moment of confusion and looked at don Juan for directions. He pointed with a movement of his chin to the holy water font.

"We must observe the rules and cross ourselves," he whispered.

"Where's the tenant?" I asked, also in a whisper. Don Juan dipped the tips of his fingers in the basin, and made the sign of the cross. With an imperative gesture of the chin, he urged me to do the same.

"Was the tenant one of the three men who left?" I whispered nearly in his ear.

"No," he whispered back. "The tenant is one of the three women who stayed. The one in the back row."

At that moment, a woman in the back row turned her head toward me, smiled, and nodded at me.

I reached the door in one jump and ran out.

Don Juan ran after me. With incredible agility, he overtook me and held me by the arm.

"Where are you going?" he asked, his face and body contorting with laughter.

He held me firmly by the arm as I took big gulps of air. I was veritably choking. Peals of laughter came out of him, like ocean waves. I forcefully pulled away and walked toward the plaza. He followed me.

"I never imagined you were going to get so upset," he said, as new waves of laughter shook his body.

"Why didn't you tell me that the tenant is a woman?"

"That sorcerer in there is the death defier," he said solemnly. "For such a sorcerer so versed in the shifts of the assemblage point, to be a man or a woman is a matter of choice or convenience. This is the first part of the lesson in dreaming I said you were going to get. And the death defier is the mysterious visitor who's going to guide you through it."

He held his sides as laughter made him cough. I was speechless. Then a sudden fury possessed me. I was not mad at don Juan or myself or anyone in particular. It was a cold fury which made me feel as if my chest and all my neck muscles were going to explode.

"Let's go back to the church," I shouted, and I didn't recognize my own voice.

"Now, now," he said softly. "You don't have to jump into the fire just like that. Think. Deliberate. Measure things up. Cool that mind of yours. Never in your life have you been put to such a test. You need calmness now.

"I can't tell you what to do," he continued. "I can only, like any other nagual, put you in front of your challenge, after telling you, in quite oblique terms, everything that is pertinent. This is another of the nagual's maneuvers: to say everything without saying it, or to ask without asking."

I wanted to get it over with quickly. But don Juan said that a moment's pause would restore whatever was left of my self-assurance. My knees were about to give in. Solicitously, don Juan made me sit down on the curb. He sat next to me.

"The first part of the dreaming lesson in question is that maleness and femaleness are not final states but are the result of a specific act of positioning the assemblage point," he said. "And this act is, naturally, a matter of volition and training. Since it was a subject close to the old sorcerers' hearts, they are the only ones who can shed light on it."

Perhaps because it was the only rational thing to do, I began to argue with don Juan. "I can't accept or believe what you are saying," I said. I felt heat rising to my face.

"But you saw the woman," don Juan retorted. "Do you think that all of this is a trick?"

"I don't know what to think."

"That being in the church is a real woman," he said forcefully. "Why should that be so disturbing to you? The fact that she was born a man attests only to the power of the old sorcerers' machinations. This shouldn't surprise you. You have already embodied all the principles of sorcery."

My insides were about to burst with tension. In an accusing tone, don Juan said that I was just being argumentative. With forced patience but real pomposity, I explained to him the biological foundation of maleness and femaleness.

"I understand all that," he said. "And you're right in what you're saying. Your flaw is to try to make your assessments universal."

"What we're talking about are basic principles," I shouted. "They'll be pertinent to man here or in any other place in the universe."

"True. True," he said in a quiet voice. "Everything you say is true as long as our assemblage point remains on it's habitual position. But the moment it is displaced beyond certain boundaries and our daily world is no longer in function, none of the principles you cherish has the total value you're talking about.

"Your mistake is to forget that the death defier has transcended those boundaries thousands upon thousands of times. It doesn't take a genius to realize that the tenant is no longer bound by the same forces that bind you now."

I told him that my quarrel, if it could be called a quarrel, was not with him, but with accepting the practical side of sorcery, which up to that moment had been so farfetched that it had never posed a real problem to me. I reiterated that, as a dreamer, it was within my experience to attest that in dreaming anything is possible. I reminded him that he himself had sponsored and cultivated this conviction together with the ultimate necessity for soundness of mind. What he was proposing as the tenant's case was not sane. It was a subject only for dreaming; certainly not for the daily world. I let him know that to me it was an abhorrent and untenable proposition.

"Why this violent reaction?" he asked with a smile.

His question caught me off guard. I felt embarrassed. "I think it threatens me at the core," I admitted. And I meant it. To think that the woman in the church was a man was somehow nauseating to me.

A thought played in my mind: perhaps the tenant is a transvestite. I queried don Juan, in earnest, about this possibility. He laughed so hard he seemed about to get ill.

"That's too mundane a possibility," he said. "Maybe your old friends would do such a thing. Your new ones are more resourceful and less masturbatory. I repeat. That being in the church is a woman. It is a she. And she has all the organs and attributes of a female." He smiled maliciously "You've always been attracted to women, haven't you? It seems that this situation has been tailored just for you."

His mirth was so intense and childlike that it was contagious. We both laughed. He, with total abandon. I, with total apprehension.

I came to a decision then. I stood up and said out loud that I had no desire to deal with the tenant in any form or shape. My choice was to bypass all this business and go back to don Juan's house and then home.

Don Juan said that my decision was perfectly all right with him, and we started back to his house. My thoughts raced wildly. Am I doing the right thing? Am I running away out of fear? Of course, I immediately rationalized my decision as the right and unavoidable one. After all, I assured myself, I was not interested in acquisitions, and the tenant's gifts were like acquiring property. Then doubt and curiosity hit me. There were so many questions I could have asked the death defier.

My heart began to pound so intensely I felt it beating against my stomach. The pounding suddenly changed into the emissary's voice. It broke it's promise not to interfere and said that an incredible force was accelerating my heart beat in order to drive me back to the church; to walk toward don Juan's house was to walk toward my death.

I stopped walking and hurriedly confronted don Juan with the emissary's words. "Is this true?" I asked.

"I am afraid it is," he admitted sheepishly.

"Why didn't you tell me yourself, don Juan? Were you going to let me die because you think I am a coward?" I asked in a furious mood.

"You were not going to die just like that. Your energy body has endless resources. And it had never occurred to me to think you're a coward. I respect your decisions, and I don't give a damn about what motivates them.

"You are at the end of the road, just like me. So be a true nagual. Don't be ashamed of what you are. If you were a coward, I think you would have died of fright years ago. But if you're too afraid to meet the death defier, then die rather than face him. There is no shame in that."

"Let's go back to the church," I said, as calmly as I could.

"Now we're getting to the crux of the matter!" don Juan exclaimed. "But first, let's go back to the park and sit down on a bench and carefully consider your options. We can spare the time: Besides, it's too early for the business at hand."

We walked back to the park and immediately found an unoccupied bench and sat down.

"You have to understand that only you, yourself, can make the decision to meet or not to meet the tenant, or to accept or reject his gifts of power," don Juan said. "But your decision has to be voiced to the woman in the church, face to face and alone; otherwise it won't be valid."

Don Juan said that the tenant's gifts were extraordinary but that the price for them was tremendous. And that he himself did not approve of either, the gifts or the price.

"Before you make your real decision," don Juan continued, "you have to know all the details of our transactions with that sorcerer."

"I'd rather not hear about this anymore, don Juan," I pleaded.

"It's your duty to know," he said. "How else are you going to make up your mind?"

"Don't you think that the less I know about the tenant the better off I'll be?"

"No. This is not a matter of hiding until the danger is over. This is the moment of truth. Everything you've done and experienced in the sorcerers' world has channeled you to this spot. I didn't want to say it because I knew your energy body was going to tell you, but there is no way to get out of this appointment. Not even by dying. Do you understand?" He shook me by the shoulders. "Do you understand?" he repeated.

I understood so well that I asked him if it would be possible for him to make me change levels of awareness in order to alleviate my fear and discomfort. He nearly made me jump with the explosion of his "no".

"You must face the death defier in coldness and with ultimate premeditation," he went on. "And you can't do this by proxy."

Don Juan calmly began to repeat everything he had already told me about the death defier. As he talked, I realized that part of my confusion was the result of his use of words. He rendered 'death defier' in Spanish as el desafiante de la muerte, and 'tenant' as el inquilino, both of which automatically denote a male. But in describing the relationship between the tenant and the naguals of his line, don Juan kept on mixing the Spanish-language male and female gender denotation, creating a great confusion in me.

He said that the tenant was supposed to pay for the energy he took from the naguals of our lineage, but that whatever he paid has bound those sorcerers for generations. As payment for the energy taken from all those naguals, the woman in the church taught them exactly what to do to displace their assemblage point to some specific positions, which she herself had chosen. In other words, she bound every one of those men with a gift of power consisting of a preselected, specific position of the assemblage point and all it's implications."

"What do you mean by 'all it's implications', don Juan?"

"I mean the negative results of those gifts. The woman in the church knows only of indulging. There is no frugality, no temperance in that woman. For instance, she taught the nagual Julian how to arrange his assemblage point to be, just like her, a woman. Teaching this to my benefactor, who was an incurable voluptuary, was like giving booze to a drunkard."

"But isn't it up to each one of us to be responsible for what we do?"

"Yes, indeed. However, some of us have more difficulty than others in being responsible. To augment that difficulty deliberately, as that woman does, is to put too much unnecessary pressure on us."

"How do you know the woman in the church does this deliberately?"

"She has done it to every one of the naguals of my line. If we look at ourselves fairly and squarely, we have to admit that the death defier has made us, with his gifts, into a line of very indulging, dependent sorcerers."

I could not overlook his inconsistency of language usage any longer, and I complained to him.

"You have to speak about that sorcerer as either a male or a female, but not as both," I said harshly. "I'm too stiff, and your arbitrary use of gender makes me all the more uneasy."

"I am very uneasy myself," he confessed. "But the truth is that the death defier is both: male and female. I've never been able to take that sorcerer's change with grace. I was sure you would feel the same way, having seen him as a man first."

Don Juan reminded me of a time, years before, when he took me to meet the death defier and I met a man, a strange Indian who was not old but not young either and was very slightly built. I remember mostly his strange accent and his use of one odd metaphor when describing things he allegedly had seen. He said, mis ojos se pasearon, "my eyes walked on". For instance, he said, "My eyes walked on the helmets of the Spanish conquerors."

The event was so fleeting in my mind that I had always thought the meeting had lasted only a few minutes. Don Juan later told me that I had been gone with the death defier for a whole day.

"The reason I was trying to find out from you earlier whether you knew what was going on," don Juan continued, "was because I thought that years ago you had made an appointment with the death defier yourself."

"You were giving me undue credit, don Juan. In this instance, I really don't know whether I am coming or going. But what gave you the idea that I knew?"

"The death defier seemed to have taken a liking to you. And that meant to me that he might have already given you a gift of power, although you didn't remember it. Or he might have set up your appointment with him, as a woman. I even suspected she had given you precise directions."

Don Juan remarked that the death defier, being definitely a creature of ritual habits, always met the naguals of his line first as a man, as it had happened with the nagual Sebastian, and subsequently as a woman.

"Why do you call the death defier's gifts, gifts of power? And why the mystery?" I asked. "You yourself can displace your assemblage point to whatever spot you want, isn't that so?"

"They are called gifts of power because they are products of the specialized knowledge of the sorcerers of antiquity," he said. "The mystery about the gifts is that no one on this earth, with the exception of the death defier, can give us a sample of that knowledge. And, of course, I can displace my assemblage point to whatever spot I want, inside or outside man's energy shape. But what I can't do, and only the death defier can, is to know what to do with my energy body in each one of those spots in order to get total perception, total cohesion."

He explained, then, that modern-day sorcerers do not know the details of the thousands upon thousands of possible positions of the assemblage point.

"What do you mean by details?" I asked.

"Particular ways of treating the energy body in order to maintain the assemblage point fixed on specific positions," he replied.

He took himself as an example. He said that the death defier's gift of power to him had been the position of the assemblage point of a crow and the procedures to manipulate his energy body to get the total perception of a crow. Don Juan explained that total perception- total cohesion was what the old sorcerers sought at any cost, and that, in the case of his own gift of power, total perception came to him by means of a deliberate process he had to learn, step by step, as one learns to work a very complex machine.

Don Juan further explained that most of the shifts modern-day sorcerers experience are mild shifts within a thin bundle of energetic luminous filaments inside the luminous egg, a bundle called the band of man; or the purely human aspect of the universe's energy. Beyond that band, but still within the luminous egg, lies the realm of the grand shifts; or movements. When the assemblage point shifts to any spot on that area, perception is still comprehensible to us, but extremely detailed procedures are required for perception to be total.

"The inorganic beings tricked you and Carol Tiggs in your last journey by helping you two to get total cohesion on a grand shift," don Juan said. "They displaced your assemblage points to the farthest possible spot, then helped you perceive there as if you were in your daily world: A nearly impossible thing. To do that type of perceiving a sorcerer needs pragmatic knowledge, or influential friends.

"Your friends would have betrayed you in the end and left you and Carol to fend for yourselves and learn pragmatic measures in order to survive in that world. You two would have ended filled to the brim with pragmatic procedures, just like those most knowledgeable old sorcerers.

"Every grand shift has different inner workings," he continued, "which modern sorcerers could learn if they knew how to fixate the assemblage point long enough at any grand shift. Only the sorcerers of ancient times had the specific knowledge required to do this."

Don Juan went on to say that the knowledge of the specific procedures involved in shifts was not available to the eight naguals who preceded the nagual Sebastian, and that the tenant showed the nagual Sebastian how to achieve total perception on ten new positions of the assemblage point. The nagual Santisteban received seven, the nagual Lujan fifty, the nagual Rosendo six, the nagual Elias four, the nagual Julian sixteen, and he was shown two: That made a total of ninety-five specific positions of the assemblage point that his lineage knew about. He said that if I asked him whether he considered this an advantage to his lineage, he would have to say no because the weight of those gifts put them closer to the old sorcerers' mood.

"Now it's your turn to meet the tenant," he continued. "Perhaps the gifts he will give you will offset our total balance and our lineage will plunge into the darkness that finished off the old sorcerers."

"This is so horribly serious, it's sickening," I said.

"I most sincerely sympathize with you," he retorted with a serious expression. "I know it's no consolation to you if I say that this is the toughest trial of a modern nagual. To face something so old and mysterious as the tenant is not awe-inspiring but revolting. At least it was to me, and still is."

"Why do I have to continue with it, don Juan?"

"Because, without knowing it, you accepted the death defier challenge. I drew an acceptance from you in the course of your apprenticeship, in the same manner my teacher drew one from me, surreptitiously. [* surreptitiously- in a manner marked by quiet and caution and secrecy; taking pains to avoid being observed]

"I went through the same horror, only a little more brutally than you." He began to chuckle. "The nagual Julian was given to playing horrendous jokes. He told me that there was a very beautiful and passionate widow who was madly in love with me. The nagual used to take me to church often, and I had seen the woman staring at me. I thought she was a good-looking woman, and I was a horny young man. When the nagual said that she liked me, I fell for it. My awakening was very rude."

I had to fight not to laugh at don Juan's gesture of lost innocence. Then the idea of his predicament hit me, as being not funny but ghastly.

"Are you sure, don Juan, that that woman is the tenant?" I asked, hoping that perhaps it was a mistake or a bad joke.

"I am very, very sure," he said. "Besides, even if I were so dumb as to forget the tenant, my seeing can't fail me."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that the tenant has a different type of energy?"

"No, not a different type of energy, but certainly different energy features than a normal person."

"Are you absolutely sure, don Juan, that that woman is the tenant?" I insisted, driven by a strange revulsion and fear.

"That woman is the tenant!" don Juan exclaimed in a voice that admitted no doubts.

We remained quiet. I waited for the next move in the midst of a panic beyond description.

"I have already said to you that to be a natural man or a natural woman is a matter of positioning the assemblage point," don Juan said. "By natural I mean someone who was born either male or female. To a seer, the shiniest part of the assemblage point faces outward, in the case of females; and inward, in the case of males. The tenant's assemblage point was originally facing inward, but he changed it by twisting it around and making his egglike energy shape look like a shell that has curled up on itself."

## 12. The Woman in the Church

Don Juan and I sat in silence. I had run out of questions, and he seemed to have said to me all that was pertinent. It could not have been more than seven o'clock, but the plaza was unusually deserted. It was a warm night. In the evenings, in that town, people usually meandered around the plaza until ten or eleven.

I took a moment to reconsider what was happening to me. My time with don Juan was coming to an end. He and his party were going to fulfill the sorcerers' dream of leaving this world and entering into inconceivable dimensions. On this basis of my limited success in dreaming, I believed that the claims were not illusory but extremely sober, although contrary to reason. They were seeking to perceive the unknown, and they had made it.

Don Juan was right in saying that, by inducing a systematic displacement of the assemblage point, dreaming liberates perception; enlarging the scope of what can be perceived. For the sorcerers of his party, dreaming had not only opened the doors of other perceivable worlds, but prepared them for entering into those realms in full awareness. Dreaming for them had become ineffable; [* ineffable- defying expression or description] unprecedented; something whose nature and scope could only be alluded to, as when don Juan said that it is the gateway to the light and to the darkness of the universe.

There was only one thing pending for them: my encounter with the death defier. I regretted that don Juan had not given me notice so that I could prepare myself better. But he was a nagual who did everything of importance on the spur of the moment, without any warning.

For a moment, I seemed to be doing fine, sitting with don Juan in that park, waiting for things to develop. But then my emotional stability suffered a downward swing and, in the twinkling of an eye, I was in the midst of a dark despair. I was assailed by petty considerations about: my safety, my goals, my hopes in the world, my worries. Upon examination, however, I had to admit that perhaps the only true worry I had was about my three cohorts in don Juan's world. Yet, if I thought it out, even that was no real worry to me. Don Juan had taught them to be the kind of sorceresses who always knew what to do, and, most important, he had prepared them always to know what to do with what they knew.

Having had all the possible worldly reasons for feeling anguish stripped off me a long time ago, all I had been left with was concern for myself. And I gave myself to it shamelessly. One last indulging for the road; the fear of dying at the hands of the death defier. I became so afraid that I got sick to my stomach. I tried to apologize, but don Juan laughed.

"You're not in any way unique at barfing out of fear," he said. "When I met the death defier, I wet my pants. Believe me."

I waited in silence for a long, unbearable moment.

"Are you ready?" he asked. I said yes. And he added, standing up, "Let's go then and find out how you are going to stand up in the firing line."

He led the way back to the church. To the best of my ability, all I remember of that walk, to this day, is that he had to drag me bodily the whole way. I do not remember arriving at the church or entering it. The next thing I knew, I was kneeling on a long, worn-out wooden pew next to the woman I had seen earlier. She was smiling at me. Desperately, I looked around, trying to spot don Juan, but he was nowhere in sight. I would have flown like a bat out of hell had the woman not restrained me by grabbing my arm.

"Why should you be so afraid of poor little me?" the woman asked me in English.

I stayed glued to the spot where I was kneeling. What had taken me entirely and instantaneously was her voice. I cannot describe what it was about it's raspy sound that called out the most recondite memories in me. It was as if I had always known that voice.

I remained there immobile, mesmerized by that sound. She asked me something else in English, but I could not make out what she was saying. She smiled at me, knowingly.

"It's all right," she whispered in Spanish. She was kneeling to my right. "I understand real fear. I live with it."

I was about to talk to her when I heard the emissary's voice in my ear. "That is the voice of Hermelinda, your wet nurse," it said. The only thing I had ever known about Hermelinda was the story I was told of her being accidentally killed by a runaway truck. That the woman's voice next to me would stir such deep, old memories was shocking to me. I experienced a momentary agonizing anxiety.

"I am your wet nurse!" the woman exclaimed softly. "How extraordinary! Do you want my breast?" Laughter convulsed her body.

I made a supreme effort to remain calm, yet I knew that I was quickly losing ground and that in no time at all I was going to take leave of my senses.

"Don't mind my joking," the woman said in a low voice. "The truth is that I like you very much. You are bustling with energy. And we are going to get along fine."

Two older men knelt down right in front of us. One of them turned curiously to look at us. She paid no attention to him and kept on whispering in my ear.

"Let me hold your hand," she pleaded. But her plea was like a command. I surrendered my hand to her, unable to say no.

"Thank you. Thank you for your confidence and your trust in me," she whispered.

The sound of her voice was driving me mad. It's raspiness was so exotic, so utterly feminine. Not under any circumstances would I have taken it for a man's voice laboring to sound womanly. It was a raspy voice, but not a throaty or harsh-sounding one. It was more like the sound of bare feet softly walking on gravel.

I made a tremendous effort to break an invisible sheet of energy that seemed to have enveloped me. I thought I succeeded. I stood up, ready to leave, and I would have had not the woman also stood up and whispered in my ear, "Don't run away. There is so much I have to tell you."

I automatically sat down; stopped by curiosity. Strangely, my anxiety was suddenly gone, and so was my fear. I even had enough presence to ask the woman, "Are you really a woman?"

She chuckled softly, like a young girl. Then she voiced a convoluted sentence.

"If you dare to think that I would transform myself into a fearsome man and cause you harm, you are gravely mistaken," she said, accentuating even more that strange, mesmeric voice. "You are my benefactor. I am your servant, as I have been the servant of all the naguals who preceded you."

Gathering all the energy I could, I spoke my mind to her.

"You are welcome to my energy," I said. "It's a gift from me to you, but I don't want any gifts of power from you. And I really mean this."

"I can't take your energy for free," she whispered. "I pay for what I get, that's the deal. It's foolish to give your energy for free."

"I've been a fool all my life. Believe me," I said. "I can surely afford to make you a gift. I have no problem with it. You need the energy, take it. But I don't need to be saddled with unnecessaries. I have nothing and I love it."

"Perhaps," she said pensively.

Aggressively, I asked her whether she meant that 'perhaps' she would take my energy, or that she did not believe I had nothing and loved it.

She giggled with delight and said that she might take my energy since I was so generously offering it, but that she had to make a payment. She had to give me a thing of similar value.

As I heard her speak, I became aware that she spoke Spanish with a most extravagant foreign accent. She added an extra phoneme to the middle syllable of every word. Never in my life had I heard anyone speak like that.

"Your accent is quite extraordinary," I said. "Where is it from?"

"From nearly eternity," she said and sighed. We had begun to connect. I understood why she sighed. She was the closest thing to permanent, while I was temporary. That was my advantage. The death defier had worked herself into a corner, and I was free.

I examined her closely. She seemed to be between thirty-five and forty years old. She was a dark, thoroughly Indian woman, almost husky, but not fat or even hefty. I could see that the skin of her forearms and hands was smooth, the muscles, firm and youthful. I judged that she was five feet, six or seven inches tall. She wore a long dress, a black shawl, and guaraches. In her kneeling position, I could also see her smooth heels and part of her powerful calves. Her midsection was lean. She had big breasts that she could not or perhaps did not want to hide under her shawl. Her hair was jet black and tied in a long braid. She was not beautiful, but she was not homely either. Her features were in no way outstanding. I felt that she could not possibly have attracted anybody's attention; except for her eyes, which she kept low, hidden beneath downcast eyelids. Her eyes were magnificent, clear, peaceful. Apart from don Juan's, I had never seen eyes more brilliant, more alive.

Her eyes put me completely at ease. Eyes like that could not be malevolent. I had a surge of trust and optimism and the feeling that I had known her all my life. But I was also very conscious of something else; my emotional instability. It had always plagued me in don Juan's world, forcing me to be like a yo-yo. I had moments of total trust and insight only to be followed by abject doubts and distrust. This event was not going to be different. My suspicious mind suddenly came up with the warning thought that I was falling under the woman's spell.

"You learned Spanish late in life, didn't you?" I said, just to get out from under my thoughts and to avoid her reading them.

"Only yesterday," she retorted and broke into a crystalline laughter, her small, strangely white teeth, shining like a row of pearls.

People turned to look at us. I lowered my forehead as if in deep prayer. The woman moved closer to me.

"Is there a place where we could talk?" I asked.

"We are talking here," she said. "I have talked here with all the naguals of your line. If you whisper, no one will know we are talking."

I was dying to ask her about her age. But a sobering memory came to my rescue. I remembered a friend of mine who for years had been setting up all kinds of traps to make me confess my age to him. I detested his petty concern, and now I was about to engage in the same behavior. I dropped it instantly.

I wanted to tell her about it, just to keep the conversation going. She seemed to know what was going through my mind. She squeezed my arm in a friendly gesture, as if to say that we had shared a thought.

"Instead of giving me a gift, can you tell me something that would help me in my way?" I asked her.

She shook her head. "No," she whispered. "We are extremely different. More different than I believed possible."

She got up and slid sideways out of the pew. She deftly genuflected as she faced the main altar. She crossed herself and signaled me to follow her to a large side altar to our left.

We knelt in front of a life-size crucifix. Before I had time to say anything, she spoke.

"I've been alive for a very, very long time," she said. "The reason I have had this long life is that I control the shifts and movements of my assemblage point. Also, I don't stay here in your world too long. I have to save the energy I get from the naguals of your line."

"What is it like to exist in other worlds?" I asked.

"It's like in your dreaming, except that I have more mobility. And I can stay longer anywhere I want. Just like if you would stay as long as you wanted in any of your dreams."

"When you are in this world, are you pinned down to this area alone?"

"No. I go everywhere I want."

"Do you always go as a woman?"

"I've been a woman longer than a man. Definitely, I like it much better. I think I've nearly forgotten how to be a man. I am all female!"

She took my hand and made me touch her crotch. My heart was pounding in my throat. She was indeed a female.

"I can't just take your energy," she said, changing the subject. "We have to strike another kind of agreement."

Another wave of mundane reasoning hit me then. I wanted to ask her where she lived when she was in this world. I did not need to voice my question to get an answer.

"You're much, much younger than I," she said, "and you already have difficulty telling people where you live. And even if you take them to the house you own or pay rent on, that's not where you live."

"There are so many things I want to ask you, but all I do is think stupid thoughts," I said.

"You don't need to ask me anything," she went on. "You already know what I know. All you needed was a jolt in order to claim what you already know. I am giving you that jolt."

Not only did I think stupid thoughts but I was in a state of such suggestibility that no sooner had she finished saying that I knew what she knew than I felt I knew everything, and I no longer needed to ask any more questions. Laughingly, I told her about my gullibility.

"You're not gullible," she assured me with authority. "You know everything, because you're now totally in the second attention. Look around!"

For a moment, I could not focus my sight. It was exactly as if water had gotten into my eyes. When I arranged my view, I knew that something portentous had happened. The church was different, darker, more ominous, and somehow harder. I stood up and took a couple of steps toward the nave. [* nave- the central area of a church] What caught my eye were the pews: They were made not out of lumber but out of thin, twisted poles. These were homemade pews, set inside a magnificent stone building. Also, the light in the church was different. It was yellowish, and it's dim glow cast the blackest shadows I had ever seen. It came from the candles of the many altars. I had an insight about how well candlelight mixed with the massive stone walls and ornaments of a colonial church.

The woman was staring at me. The brightness of her eyes was most remarkable. I knew then that I was dreaming and she was directing the dream. But I was not afraid of her or of the dream. I moved away from the side altar and looked again at the nave of the church. There were people kneeling in prayer there.

Lots of them, strangely small, dark, hard people. I could see their bowed heads all the way to the foot of the main altar. The ones who were close to me stared at me, obviously, in disapproval. I was gaping at them and at everything else. I could not hear any noise, though. People moved, but there was no sound.

"I can't hear anything," I said to the woman, and my voice boomed, echoing as if the church were a hollow shell.

Nearly all the heads turned to look at me. The woman pulled me back into the darkness of the side altar.

"You will hear if you don't listen with your ears," she said. "Listen with your dreaming attention."

It appeared that all I needed was her insinuation. I was suddenly flooded by the droning sound of a multitude in prayer. I was instantly swept up by it. I found it the most exquisite sound I had ever heard. I wanted to rave about it to the woman, but she was not by my side. I looked for her. She had nearly reached the door. She turned there to signal me to follow her. I caught up with her at the portico. [* portico- a porch or entrance to a building consisting of a covered and often columned area] The streetlights were gone. The only illumination was moonlight. The facade of the church was also different; it was unfinished. Square blocks of limestone lay everywhere. There were no houses or buildings around the church. In the moonlight the scene was eerie.

"Where are we going?" I asked her.

"Nowhere," she replied. "We simply came out here to have more space, more privacy. Here we can talk our little heads off."

She urged me to sit down on a quarried, half-chiseled piece of limestone.

"The second attention has endless treasures to be discovered," she began. "The initial position in which the dreamer places his body is of key importance. And right there is the secret of the ancient sorcerers, who were already ancient in my time. Think about it."

She sat so close to me that I felt the heat of her body. She put an arm around my shoulder and pressed me against her bosom. Her body had a most peculiar fragrance: It reminded me of trees or sage. It was not that she was wearing perfume: Her whole being seemed to exude that characteristic odor of pine forests. Also the heat of her body was not like mine or like that of anyone else I knew. Hers was a cool, mentholated heat; even; balanced. The thought that came to my mind was that her heat would press on relentlessly but knew no hurry.

She began then to whisper in my left ear. She said that the gifts she had given to the naguals of my line had to do with what the old sorcerers used to call the twin positions. That is to say, the initial position in which a dreamer holds his physical body to begin dreaming is mirrored by the position in which he holds his energy body, in dreams, to fixate his assemblage point on any spot of his choosing. The two positions make a unit, she said, and it took the old sorcerers thousands of years to find out the perfect relationship between any two positions. She commented, with a giggle, that the sorcerers of today will never have the time or the disposition to do all that work, and that the men and women of my line were indeed lucky to have her to give them such gifts. Her laughter had a most remarkable, crystalline sound.

I had not quite understood her explanation of the twin positions. Boldly, I told her that I did not want to practice those things but only know about them as intellectual possibilities.

"What exactly do you want to know?" she asked softly.

"Explain to me what you mean by the twin positions, or the initial position in which a dreamer holds his body to start dreaming." I said.

"How do you lie down to start your dreaming?" she asked.

"Any which way. I don't have a pattern. Don Juan never stressed this point."

"Well, I do stress it," she said and stood up. She changed positions. She sat down to my right and whispered in my other ear that, in accordance with what she knew, the position in which one places the body is of utmost importance. She proposed a way of testing this by performing an extremely delicate but simple exercise.

"Start your dreaming by lying on your right side, with your knees a bit bent," she said. "The discipline is to maintain that position and fall asleep in it. In dreaming, then, the exercise is to dream that you lie down in exactly the same position and fall asleep again."

"What does that do?" I asked.

"It makes the assemblage point stay put, and I mean really stay put, in whatever position it is at the instant of that second falling asleep."

"What are the results of this exercise?"

"Total perception. I am sure your teachers have already told you that my gifts are gifts of total perception."

"Yes. But I think I am not clear about what total perception means," I lied.

She ignored me and went on to tell me that the four variations of the exercise were to fall asleep lying on the right side, the left, the back, and the stomach. Then in dreaming the exercise was to dream of falling asleep a second time in the same position as the dreaming had been started. She promised me extraordinary results, which she said, were not possible to foretell.

She abruptly changed the subject and asked me, "What's the gift you want for yourself?"

"No gift for me. I've told you that already."

"I insist. I must offer you a gift, and you must accept it. That is our agreement."

"Our agreement is that we give you energy. So take it from me. This one is on me. My gift to you."

The woman seemed dumbfounded. And I persisted in telling her it was all right with me that she took my energy. I even told her that I liked her immensely. Naturally, I meant it. There was something supremely sad, and at the same time something supremely appealing about her.

"Let's go back inside the church," she muttered.

"If you really want to make me a gift," I said, "take me for a stroll in this town, in the moonlight."

She shook her head affirmatively. "Provided that you don't say a word," she said.

"Why not?" I asked, but I already knew the answer.

"Because we are dreaming," she said. "I'll be taking you deeper into my dream."

She explained that as long as we stayed in the church, I had enough energy to think and converse, but that beyond the boundaries of that church it was a different situation.

"Why is that?" I asked daringly.

In a most serious tone, which not only increased her eeriness but terrified me, the woman said, "Because there is no out there. This is a dream. You are at the fourth gate of dreaming, dreaming my dream."

She told me that her art was to be capable of projecting her intent, and that everything I saw around me was her intent. She said in a whisper that the church and the town were the results of her intent: They did not exist, and yet they did. She added, looking into my eyes, that this is one of the mysteries of intending in the second attention the twin positions of dreaming. It can be done, but it cannot be explained or comprehended.

She told me then that she came from a line of sorcerers who knew how to move about in the second attention by projecting their intent. Her story was that the sorcerers of her line practiced the art of projecting their thoughts in dreaming in order to accomplish the truthful reproduction of any object or structure or landmark or scenery of their choice.

She said that the sorcerers of her line used to start by gazing at a simple object and memorizing every detail of it. They would then close their eyes and visualize the object and correct their visualization against the true object until they could see it, in it's completeness, with their eyes shut. The next thing in their developing scheme was to dream with the object and create in the dream, from the point of view of their own perception, a total materialization of the object. This act, the woman said, was called the first step to total perception.

From a simple object, those sorcerers went on to take more and more complex items. Their final aim was for all of them together to visualize a total world, then dream that world; and thus re-create a totally veritable realm where they could exist.

"When any of the sorcerers of my line were able to do that," the woman went on, "they could easily pull anyone into their intent; into their dream. This is what I am doing to you now, and what I did to all the naguals of your line."

The woman giggled. "You better believe it," she said, as if I did not.

"Whole populations disappeared in dreaming like that. This is the reason I said to you that this church and this town are one of the mysteries of intending in the second attention."

"You say that whole populations disappeared that way. How was it possible?" I asked.

"They visualized and then re-created in dreaming the same scenery," she replied. "You've never visualized anything, so it's very dangerous for you to go into my dream."

She warned me, then, that to cross the fourth gate and travel to places that exist only in someone else's intent was perilous, since every item in such a dream had to be an ultimately personal item.

"Do you still want to go?" she asked.

I said yes. Then she told me more about the twin positions. The essence of her explanation was that if I were, for instance, dreaming of my hometown, and my dream had started when I lay down on my right side, I could very easily stay in the town of my dream if I would lie on my right side in the dream, and dream that I had fallen asleep. The second dream not only would necessarily be a dream of my hometown, but would be the most concrete dream one can imagine.

She was confident that in my dreaming training I had gotten countless dreams of great concreteness, but she assured me that every one of them had to be a fluke. For the only way to have absolute control of dreams was to use the technique of the twin positions.

"And don't ask me why," she added. "It just happens. Like everything else."

She made me stand up and admonished me again not to talk or stray from her. She took my hand gently, as if I were a child; and headed toward a clump of dark silhouettes of houses. We were on a cobbled street. Hard river rocks had been pounded edgewise into the dirt. Uneven pressure had created uneven surfaces. It seemed that the cobblers had followed the contours of the ground without bothering to level it.

The houses were big, whitewashed, one-story, dusty buildings with tiled roofs. There were people meandering quietly. Dark shadows inside the houses gave me the feeling of curious but frightened neighbors gossiping behind doors. I could also see the flat mountains around the town.

Contrary to what had happened to me all along in my dreaming, my mental processes were unimpaired. My thoughts were not pushed away by the force of the events in the dream. My mental calculations told me I was in the dream version of the town where don Juan lived, but at a different time. My curiosity was at it's peak. I was actually with the death defier in her dream. But was it a dream? She herself had said it was a dream. I wanted to watch everything, to be superalert. I wanted to test everything by seeing energy. I felt embarrassed, but the woman tightened her grip on my hand as if to signal me that she agreed with me.

Still feeling absurdly bashful, I automatically stated out loud my intent to see. In my dreaming practices, I had been using all along the phrase "I want to see energy." Sometimes, I had to say it over and over until I got results. This time, in the woman's dream town, as I began to repeat it in my usual manner, the woman began to laugh. Her laughter was like don Juan's: a deep, abandoned belly laugh.

"What's so funny?" I asked, somehow contaminated by her mirth.

"Juan Matus doesn't like the old sorcerers in general and me in particular," the woman said between fits of laughter. "All we have to do, in order to see in our dreams, is to point with our little finger at the item we want to see. To make you yell in my dream is his way to send me his message. You have to admit that he's really clever." She paused for a moment, then said in the tone of a revelation, "Of course, to yell like an asshole works too."

The sorcerers' sense of humor bewildered me beyond measure. She laughed so hard she seemed to be unable to proceed with our walk. I felt stupid. When she calmed down and was perfectly poised again, she politely told me that I could point at anything I wanted in her dream, including herself.

I pointed at a house with the little finger of my left hand. There was no energy in that house. The house was like any other item of a regular dream. I pointed at everything around me with the same result.

"Point at me," she urged me. "You must corroborate that this is the method dreamers follow in order to see."

She was thoroughly right. That was the method. The instant I pointed my finger at her, she was a blob of energy. A very peculiar blob of energy, I may add. Her energetic shape was exactly as don Juan had described it: It looked like an enormous seashell, curled inwardly along a cleavage that ran it's length.

"I am the only energy-generating being in this dream," she said. "So the proper thing for you to do is just watch everything."

At that moment I was struck, for the first time, by the immensity of don Juan's joke. He had actually contrived to have me learn to yell in my dreaming so that I could yell in the privacy of the death defier's dream. I found that touch so funny that laughter spilled out of me in suffocating waves.

"Let's continue our walk," the woman said softly when I had no more laughter in me.

There were only two streets that intersected: Each had three blocks of houses. We walked the length of both streets, not once but four times. I looked at everything and listened with my dreaming attention for any noises. There were very few, only dogs barking in the distance, or people speaking in whispers as we went by.

The dogs barking brought me an unknown and profound longing. I had to stop walking. I sought relief by leaning my shoulder against a wall. The contact with the wall was shocking to me, not because the wall was unusual but because what I had leaned on was a solid wall, like any other wall I had ever touched. I felt it with my free hand. I ran my fingers on it's rough surface. It was indeed a wall!

It's stunning realness put an immediate end to my longing and renewed my interest in watching everything. I was looking, specifically, for features that could be correlated with the town of my day. However, no matter how intently I observed, I had no success. There was a plaza in that town, but it was in front of the church, facing the portico.

In the moonlight the mountains around the town were clearly visible and almost recognizable. I tried to orient myself, observing the moon and the stars, as if I were in the consensual reality of everyday life. It was a waning moon, perhaps a day after full. It was high over the horizon. It must have been between eight and nine in the evening. I could see Orion to the right of the moon: It's two main stars, Betelgeuse and Rigel, were on a horizontal straight line with the moon. I estimated it to be early December. My time was May. In May, Orion is nowhere in sight at that time. I gazed at the moon as long as I could. Nothing shifted. It was the moon as far as I could tell. The disparity in time got me very excited.

As I reexamined the southern horizon, I thought I could distinguish the bell-like peak visible from don Juan's patio. I tried next to figure out where his house might have been. For one instant I thought I found it. I became so enthralled that I pulled my hand out of the woman's grip. Instantly, a tremendous anxiety possessed me. I knew that I had to go back to the church, because if I did not I would simply drop dead on the spot. I turned around and bolted for the church. The woman quickly grabbed my hand and followed me.

As we approached the church at a running pace, I became aware that the town in that dreaming was behind the church. Had I taken this into consideration, orientation might have been possible. As it was, I had no more dreaming attention. I focused all of it on the architectural and ornamental details on the back of the church. I had never seen that part of the building in the world of everyday life, and I thought that if I could record it's features in my memory, I could check them later against the details of the real church.

That was the plan I concocted on the spur of the moment. Something inside me, however, scorned my efforts at validation. During all my apprenticeship, I had been plagued by the need for objectivity, which had forced me to check and recheck everything about don Juan's world. Yet it was not validation per se that was always at stake, but rather the need to use this drive for objectivity as a crutch to give me protection at the moments of most intense cognitive disruption: When it was time to check what I had validated, I never went through with it.

Inside the church, the woman and I knelt in front of the small altar on the left side, where we had been, and the next instant, I woke up in the well-illuminated church of my day.

The woman crossed herself and stood up. I did the same automatically. She took my arm and began to walk toward the door.

"Wait, wait," I said and was surprised that I could talk. I could not think clearly, yet I wanted to ask her a convoluted question. What I wanted to know was how anyone could have the energy to visualize every detail of a whole town.

Smiling, the woman answered my unvoiced question: She said that she was very good at visualizing because after a lifetime of doing it, she had many, many lifetimes to perfect it. She added that the town I had visited and the church where we had talked were examples of her recent visualizations. The church was the same church where Sebastian had been a sexton. She had given herself the task of memorizing every detail of every corner of that church and that town, for that matter, out of a need to survive.

She ended her talk with a most disturbing afterthought.

"Since you know quite a bit about this town, even though you've never tried to visualize it," she said, "you are now helping me to intend it. I bet you won't believe me if I tell you that this town you are looking at now doesn't really exist, outside your intent and mine."

She peered at me and laughed at my sense of horror, for I had just fully realized what she was saying.

"Are we still dreaming?" I asked, astonished.

"We are," she said. "But this dreaming is more real than the other, because you're helping me. It is not possible to explain it beyond saying that it is happening. Like everything else." She pointed all around her. "There is no way to tell how it happens, but it does. Remember always what I've told you: This is the mystery of intending in the second attention."

She gently pulled me closer to her. "Let's stroll to the plaza of this dream," she said. "But perhaps I should fix myself a little bit so you'll be more at ease."

I looked at her uncomprehendingly as she expertly changed her appearance. She did this with very simple, mundane maneuvers. She undid her long skirt, revealing the very average midcalf skirt she was wearing underneath. She then twisted her long braid into a chignon and changed from her guaraches into inch-heel shoes she had in a small cloth sack.

She turned over her reversible black shawl to reveal a beige stole. She looked like a typical middle-class Mexican woman from the city, perhaps on a visit to that town.

She took my arm with a woman's aplomb [* aplomb- great coolness and composure under strain] and led the way to the plaza.

"What happened to your tongue?" she said in English. "Did the cat eat it?"

I was totally engrossed in the unthinkable possibility that I was still in a dream; what is more, I was beginning to believe that if it were true, I ran the risk of never waking up.

In a nonchalant tone that I could not recognize as mine, I said, "I didn't realize until now that you spoke in English to me before. Where did you learn it?"

"In the world out there. I speak many languages." She paused and scrutinized me. "I've had plenty of time to learn them. Since we're going to spend a lot of time together, I'll teach you my own language sometime."

She giggled, no doubt at my look of despair.

I stopped walking. "Are we going to spend a lot of time together?" I asked, betraying my feelings.

She replied in a joyful tone, "Of course. You are- and I should say very generously- going to give me your energy, for free. You said that yourself, didn't you?"

I was aghast.

"What's the problem?" the woman asked, shifting back into Spanish. "Don't tell me that you regret your decision. We are sorcerers. It's too late to change your mind. You are not afraid, are you?"

I was again more than terrified, but if I had been put on the spot to describe what terrified me, I would not have known. I was certainly not afraid of being with the death defier in another dream, or of losing my mind, or even my life.

Was I afraid of evil? I asked myself. But the thought of evil could not withstand examination. As a result of all those years on the sorcerers' path, I knew without the shadow of a doubt that in the universe only energy exists: Evil is merely a concatenation of the human mind, overwhelmed by the fixation of the assemblage point on it's habitual position.

Logically, there was really nothing for me to be afraid of. I knew that, but I also knew that my real weakness was to lack the fluidity to fix my assemblage point instantly on any new position to which it was displaced. The contact with the death defier was displacing my assemblage point at a tremendous rate, and I did not have the prowess to keep up with the push. The end result was a vague pseudo-sensation of fearing that I might not be able to wake up.

"There is no problem," I said. "Let's continue our dream walk."

She linked her arm with mine, and we reached the park in silence. It was not at all a forced silence. But my mind was running in circles. How strange, I thought: Only a while ago I had walked with don Juan from the park to the church in the midst of the most terrifying normal fear. Now I was walking back from the church to the park with the object of my fear; and I was more terrified than ever, but in a different, more mature, more deadly manner.

To fend off my worries, I began to look around. If this was a dream, as I believed it was, there was a way to prove or disprove it. I pointed my finger at the houses, at the church, at the pavement in the street. I pointed at people. I pointed at everything. Daringly, I even grabbed a couple of people, whom I seemed to scare considerably. I felt their mass. They were as real as anything I consider real, except that they did not generate energy. Nothing in that town generated energy. Everything seemed real and normal, yet it was a dream.

I turned to the woman, who was holding on to my arm, and questioned her about it.

"We are dreaming," she said in her raspy voice and giggled.

"But how can people and things around us to be so real, so three-dimensional?"

"The mystery of intending in the second attention!" she exclaimed reverently. "Those people out there are so real that they even have thoughts."

That was the last stroke. I did not want to question anything else. I wanted to abandon myself to that dream. A considerable jolt on my arm brought me back to the moment. We had reached the plaza. The woman had stopped walking and was pulling me to sit down on a bench. I knew I was in trouble when I did not feel the bench underneath me as I sat down. I began to spin. I thought I was ascending. I caught a most fleeting glimpse of the park, as if I were looking at it from above.

"This is it!" I yelled. I thought I was dying. The spinning ascension turned into a twirling descent into blackness.

## 13. Flying on the Wings of Intent

"Make an effort, nagual," a woman's voice urged me. "Don't sink. Surface, surface. Use your dream techniques!"

My mind began to work. I thought it was the voice of an English speaker, and I also thought that if I were to use dreaming techniques, I had to find a point of departure to energize myself.

"Open your eyes," the voice said. "Open them now. Use the first thing you see as a point of departure."

I made a supreme effort and opened my eyes. I saw trees and blue sky. It was daytime! A blurry face was peering at me. But I could not focus my eyes. I thought that it was the woman in the church looking at me.

"Use my face," the voice said. It was a familiar voice, but I could not identify it. "Make my face your home base; then look at everything," the voice went on.

My ears were clearing up, and so were my eyes. I gazed at the woman's face, then at the trees in the park, at the wrought-iron bench, at people walking by, and back again at her face.

In spite of the fact that her face changed every time I gazed at her, I began to experience a minimum of control. When I was more in possession of my faculties, I realized that a woman was sitting on the bench, holding my head on her lap. And she was not the woman in the church: She was Carol Tiggs.

"What are you doing here?" I gasped.

My fright and surprise were so intense that I wanted to jump up and run, but my body was not ruled at all by my mental awareness. Anguishing moments followed in which I tried desperately but uselessly to get up. The world around me was too clear for me to believe I was still dreaming, yet my impaired motor control made me suspect that this was really a dream. Besides, Carol's presence was too abrupt: There were no antecedents to justify it.

Cautiously, I attempted to will myself to get up, as I had done hundreds of times in dreaming, but nothing happened. If I ever needed to be objective, this was the time. As carefully as I could, I began to look at everything within my field of vision with one eye first. I repeated the process with the other eye. I took the consistency between the images of my two eyes as an indication that I was in the consensual reality of everyday life.

Next, I examined Carol. I noticed at that moment that I could move my arms. It was only my lower body that was veritably paralyzed. I touched Carol's face and hands: I embraced her. She was solid and, I believed, the real Carol Tiggs. My relief was enormous because for a moment, I had had the dark suspicion that she was the death defier masquerading as Carol.

With utmost care, Carol helped me to sit up on the bench. I had been sprawled on my back, half on the bench and half on the ground. I noticed then something totally out of the norm. I was wearing faded blue Levi's, and worn brown leather boots. I also had on a Levi's jacket and a denim shirt.

"Wait a minute," I said to Carol. "Look at me! Are these my clothes? Am I myself?"

Carol laughed and shook me by the shoulders, the way she always did to denote camaraderie; manliness; that she was one of the boys.

"I'm looking at your beautiful self," she said in her funny forced falsetto. "Oh massa, who else could it possibly be?"

"How in the hell can I be wearing Levi's and boots?" I insisted. "I don't own any."

"Those are my clothes you are wearing. I found you naked!"

"Where? When?"

"Around the church, about an hour ago. I came to the plaza here to look for you. The nagual sent me to see if I could find you. I brought the clothes, just in case."

I told her that I felt terribly vulnerable and embarrassed to have wandered around without my clothes.

"Strangely enough, there was no one around," she assured me, but I felt she was saying it just to ease my discomfort. Her playful smile told me so.

"I must have been with the death defier all last night, maybe even longer," I said. "What day is it today?"

"Don't worry about dates," she said, laughing. "When you are more centered, you'll count the days yourself."

"Don't humor me, Carol Tiggs. What day is it today?" My voice was a gruff, no-nonsense voice that did not seem to belong to me.

"It's the day after the big fiesta," she said and slapped me gently on my shoulder. "We all have been looking for you since last night."

"But what am I doing here?"

"I took you to the hotel across the plaza. I couldn't carry you all the way to the nagual's house: You ran out of the room a few minutes ago, and we ended up here."

"Why didn't you ask the nagual for help?"

"Because this is an affair that concerns only you and me. We must solve it together."

That shut me up. She made perfect sense to me. I asked her one more nagging question.

"What did I say when you found me?"

"You said that you had been so deeply into the second attention and for such a long time that you were not quite rational yet. All you wanted to do was to fall asleep."

"When did I lose my motor control?"

"Only a moment ago. You'll get it back. You yourself know that it is quite normal, when you enter into the second attention and receive a considerable energy jolt, to lose control of your speech or of your limbs."

"And when did you lose your lisping, Carol?" I caught her totally by surprise. She peered at me and broke into a hearty laugh.

"I've been working on it for a long time," she confessed. "I think that it's terribly annoying to hear a grown woman lisping. Besides, you hate it."

Admitting that I detested her lisping was not difficult. Don Juan and I had tried to cure her, but we had concluded she was not interested in getting cured. Her lisping made her extremely cute to everyone, and don Juan's feelings were that she loved it and was not going to give it up. Hearing her speak without lisping was tremendously rewarding and exciting to me. It proved to me that she was capable of radical changes on her own; a thing neither don Juan nor I was ever sure about.

"What else did the nagual say to you when he sent you to look for me?" I asked.

"He said you were having a bout with the death defier."

In a confidential tone, I revealed to Carol that the death defier was a woman. Nonchalantly, she said that she knew it.

"How can you know it?" I shouted. "No one has ever known this, apart from don Juan. Did he tell you that himself?"

"Of course he did," she replied, unperturbed by my shouting. "What you have overlooked is that I also met the woman in the church. I met her before you did. We amiably chatted in the church for quite a while."

I believed Carol was telling me the truth. What she was describing was very much what don Juan would do. He would in all likelihood send Carol as a scout in order to draw conclusions.

"When did you see the death defier?" I asked.

"A couple of weeks ago," she replied in a matter-of-fact tone. "It was no great event for me. I had no energy to give her, or at least not the energy that woman wants."

"Why did you see her then? Is dealing with the nagual woman also part of the death defier's and sorcerers' agreement?"

"I saw her because the nagual said that you and I are interchangeable, and for no other reason. Our energy bodies have merged many times. Don't you remember?

"The woman and I talked about the ease with which we merge. I stayed with her maybe three or four hours, until the nagual came in and got me out."

"Did you stay in the church all that time?" I asked, because I could hardly believe that they had knelt in there for three or four hours only talking about the merging of our energy bodies.

"She took me into another facet of her intent," Carol conceded after a moment's thought. "She made me see how she actually escaped her captors."

Carol related then a most intriguing story. She said that according to what the woman in the church had made her see, every sorcerer of antiquity fell, inescapably, prey to the inorganic beings. The inorganic beings, after capturing them, gave them power to be the intermediaries between our world and their realm, which people called the netherworld.

The death defier was unavoidably caught in the nets of the inorganic beings. Carol estimated that he spent perhaps thousands of years as a captive, until the moment he was capable of transforming himself into a woman. He had clearly seen this as his way out of that world the day he found out that the inorganic beings regard the female principle as imperishable. They believe that the female principle has such a pliability and it's scope is so vast that it's members are impervious to traps and setups and can hardly be held captive. The death defier's transformation was so complete and so detailed that she was instantly spewed out of the inorganic beings' realm.

"Did she tell you that the inorganic beings are still after her?" I asked.

"Naturally they are after her," Carol assured me. "The woman told me she has to fend off her pursuers every moment of her life."

"What can they do to her?"

"Realize she was a man and pull her back to captivity, I suppose. I think she fears them more than you can think it's possible to fear anything."

Nonchalantly, Carol told me that the woman in the church was thoroughly aware of my run-in with the inorganic beings and that she also knew about the blue scout.

"She knows everything about you and me," Carol continued. "And not because I told her anything, but because she is part of our lives and our lineage. She mentioned that she had always followed all of us, you and me in particular."

Carol related to me the instances that the woman knew in which Carol and I had acted together. As she spoke, I began to experience a unique nostalgia for the very person who was in front of me: Carol Tiggs. I wished desperately to embrace her. I reached out to her, but I lost my balance and fell off the bench.

Carol helped me up from the pavement and anxiously examined my legs and the pupils of my eyes, my neck and my lower back. She said that I was still suffering from an energetic jolt.

She propped my head on her bosom and caressed me as if I were a malingering child she was humoring.

After a while I did feel better: I even began to regain my motor control.

"How do you like the clothes I am wearing?" Carol asked me all of a sudden. "Am I overdressed for the occasion? Do I look all right to you?"

Carol was always exquisitely dressed. If there was anything certain about her, it was her impeccable taste in clothes. In fact, as long as I had known her, it had been a running joke between don Juan and the rest of us that her only virtue was her expertise at buying beautiful clothes and wearing them with grace and style.

I found her question very odd and made a comment.

"Why would you be insecure about your appearance? It has never bothered you before. Are you trying to impress someone?"

"I'm trying to impress you, of course," she said.

"But this is not the time," I protested. "What's going on with the death defier is the important matter, not your appearance."

"You'd be surprised how important my appearance is." She laughed. "My appearance is a matter of life or death for both of us."

"What are you talking about? You remind me of the nagual setting up my meeting with the death defier. He nearly drove me nuts with his mysterious talk."

"Was his mysterious talk justified?" Carol asked with a deadly serious expression.

"It most certainly was," I admitted.

"So is my appearance. Humor me. How do you find me? Appealing, unappealing, attractive, average, disgusting, overpowering, bossy?"

I thought for a moment and made my assessment. I found Carol very appealing. This was quite strange to me. I had never consciously thought about her appeal.

"I find you divinely beautiful," I said. "In fact, you're downright stunning."

"Then this must be the right appearance." She sighed.

I was trying to figure out her meanings, when she spoke again. She asked, "What was your time with the death defier like?"

I succinctly told her about my experience, mainly about the first dream. I said that I believed the death defier had made me see that town, but at another time in the past.

"But that's not possible," she blurted out. "There is no past or future in the universe. There is only the moment."

"I know that it was the past," I said. "It was the same church, but a different town."

"Think for a moment," she insisted. "In the universe there is only energy, and energy has only a here and now, an endless and ever-present here and now."

"So what do you think happened to me, Carol?"

"With the death defier's help, you crossed the fourth gate of dreaming," she said. "The woman in the church took you into her dream, into her intent. She took you into her visualization of this town. Obviously, she visualized it in the past, and that visualization is still intact in her- as her present visualization of this town must be there too."

After a long silence she asked me another question.

"What else did the woman do with you?"

I told Carol about the second dream. The dream of the town as it stands today.

"There you are," she said. "Not only did the woman take you into her past intent but she further helped you cross the fourth gate by making your energy body journey to another place that exists today, only in her intent."

Carol paused and asked me whether the woman in the church had explained to me what intending in the second attention meant.

I did remember her mentioning but not really explaining what it meant to intend in the second attention. Carol was dealing with concepts don Juan had never spoken about.

"Where did you get all these novel ideas?" I asked, truly marveling at how lucid she was.

In a noncommittal tone, Carol assured me that the woman in the church had explained to her a great deal about those intricacies.

"We are intending in the second attention now," she continued. "The woman in the church made us fall asleep; you here, and I in Tucson. And then we fell asleep again in our dream. But you don't remember that part, while I do. The secret of the twin positions. Remember what the woman told you; the second dream is intending in the second attention: the only way to cross the fourth gate of dreaming."

After a long pause, during which I could not articulate one word, she said, "I think the woman in the church really made you a gift, although you didn't want to receive one. Her gift was to add her energy to ours in order to move backward and forward on the here-and-now energy of the universe."

I got extremely excited. Carol's words were precise, apropos. She had defined for me something I considered undefinable, although I did not know what it was that she had defined. If I could have moved, I would have leapt to hug her. She smiled beatifically as I kept on ranting nervously about the sense her words made to me. I commented rhetorically that don Juan had never told me anything similar.

"Maybe he doesn't know," Carol said, not offensively but conciliatorily.

I did not argue with her. I remained quiet for a while, strangely void of thoughts. Then my thoughts and words erupted out of me like a volcano. People went around the plaza, staring at us every so often or stopping in front of us to watch us. And we must have been a sight; Carol Tiggs kissing and caressing my face while I ranted on and on about her lucidity and my encounter with the death defier.

When I was able to walk, she guided me across the plaza to the only hotel in town. She assured me that I did not yet have the energy to go to don Juan's house, but that everybody there knew our whereabouts.

"How would they know our whereabouts?" I asked.

"The nagual is a very crafty old sorcerer," she replied, laughing. "He's the one who told me that if I found you energetically mangled, I should put you in the hotel rather than risk crossing the town with you in tow."

Her words and especially her smile made me feel so relieved that I kept on walking in a state of bliss. We went around the corner to the hotel's entrance, half a block down the street, right in front of the church. We went through the bleak lobby, up the cement stairway to the second floor, directly to an unfriendly room I had never seen before. Carol said that I had been there: However, I had no recollection of the hotel or the room. I was so tired, though, that I could not think about it. I just sank into the bed, face down. All I wanted to do was sleep, yet I was too keyed up. There were too many loose ends, although everything seemed so orderly. I had a sudden surge of nervous excitation and sat up.

"I never told you that I hadn't accepted the death defier's gift," I said, facing Carol. "How did you know I didn't?"

"Oh, but you told me that yourself," she protested as she sat down next to me. "You were so proud of it. That was the first thing you blurted out when I found you."

This was the only answer, so far, that did not quite satisfy me. What she was reporting did not sound like my statement.

"I think you read me wrong," I said. "I just didn't want to get anything that would deviate me from my goal."

"Do you mean you didn't feel proud of refusing?"

"No. I didn't feel anything. I am no longer capable of feeling anything, except fear."

I stretched my legs and put my head on the pillow. I felt that if I closed my eyes or did not keep on talking I would be asleep in an instant. I told Carol how I had argued with don Juan at the beginning of my association with him about his confessed motive for staying on the warrior's path. He had said that fear kept him going in a straight line, and that what he feared the most was to lose the nagual; the abstract; the spirit.

"Compared with losing the nagual, death is nothing," he had said with a note of true passion in his voice. "My fear of losing the nagual is the only real thing I have; because without it, I would be worse than dead."

I said to Carol that I had immediately contradicted don Juan and bragged that since I was impervious to fear, if I had to stay within the confines of one path, the moving force for me had to be love.

Don Juan had retorted that when the real pull comes, fear is the only worthwhile condition for a warrior. I secretly resented him for what I thought was his covert narrow-mindedness.

"The wheel has done a full turn," I said to Carol, "and look at me now. I can swear to you that the only thing that keeps me going is the fear of losing the nagual."

Carol stared at me with a strange look I had never seen in her.

"I dare to disagree," she said softly. "Fear is nothing compared with affection. Fear makes you run wildly: Love makes you move intelligently."

"What are you saying, Carol Tiggs? Are sorcerers people in love now?"

She did not answer. She lay next to me and put her head on my shoulder. We stayed there in that strange unfriendly room for a long time; in total silence.

"I feel what you feel," Carol said abruptly. "Now, try to feel what I feel. You can do it. But let's do it in the dark."

Carol stretched her arm up and turned off the light above the bed. I sat up straight in one single motion. A jolt of fright had gone through me like electricity. As soon as Carol had turned off the light, it was nighttime inside that room. In the middle of great agitation, I asked Carol about it.

"You're not all together yet," she said reassuringly. "You had a bout of monumental proportions. Going so deeply into the second attention has left you a little mangled, so to speak. Of course, it's daytime, but your eyes can't yet adjust properly to the dim light inside this room."

More or less convinced, I lay down again. Carol kept on talking, but I was not listening. I felt the sheets. They were real sheets. I ran my hands on the bed. It was a bed! I leaned over and ran the palms of my hands on the cold tiles of the floor. I got out of bed and checked every item in the room and in the bathroom. Everything was perfectly normal, perfectly real. I told Carol that when she turned off the light, I had the clear sensation I was dreaming.

"Give yourself a break," she said. "Cut this investigatory nonsense, and come to bed and rest."

I opened the curtains of the window to the street. It was day-time outside, but the moment I closed them it was nighttime inside. Carol begged me to come back to bed. She feared that I might run away and end up in the street, as I had done before. She made sense. I went back to bed without noticing that not even for a second had it entered my mind to point at things. It was as if that knowledge had been erased from my memory.

The darkness in that hotel room was most extraordinary. It brought me a delicious sense of peace and harmony. It brought me also a profound sadness; a longing for human warmth; for companionship. I felt more than bewildered. Never had anything like this happened to me. I lay in bed, trying to remember if that longing was something I knew. It was not. The longings I knew were not for human companionship: They were abstract: They were rather a sort of sadness for not reaching something undefined.

"I am coming apart," I said to Carol. "I am about to weep for people."

I thought she would understand my statement as being funny. I intended it as a joke. But she did not say anything: She seemed to agree with me. She sighed. Being in an unstable state of mind, I became instantly swayed toward emotionality. I faced her in the darkness and muttered something that in a more lucid moment would have been quite irrational to me.

"I absolutely adore you," I said.

Talk like that among the sorcerers of don Juan's line was unthinkable. Carol Tiggs was the nagual woman. Between the two of us, there was no need for demonstrations of affection. In fact, we did not even know what we felt for each other. We had been taught by don Juan that among sorcerers there was no need or time for such feelings.

Carol smiled at me and embraced me. And I was filled with such a consuming affection for her that I began to weep involuntarily.

"Your energy body is moving forward on the universe's luminous filaments of energy," she whispered in my ear. "We are being carried by the death defier's gift of intent."

I had enough energy to understand what she was saying. I even questioned her about whether she, herself, understood what it all meant. She hushed me and whispered in my ear.

"I do understand: The death defier's gift to you was the wings of intent. And with them, you and I are dreaming ourselves in another time. In a time yet to come."

I pushed her away and sat up. The way Carol was voicing those complex sorcerers' thoughts was unsettling to me. She was not given to take conceptual thinking seriously. We had always joked among ourselves that she did not have a philosopher's mind.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked. "Yours is a new development for me: Carol the sorceress philosopher. You are talking like don Juan."

"Not yet." She laughed. "But it's coming. It's rolling, and when it finally hits me, it'll be the easiest thing in the world for me to be a sorceress philosopher. You'll see. And no one will be able to explain it because it will just happen."

An alarm bell rang in my mind.

"You're not Carol!" I shouted. "You're the death defier masquerading as Carol. I knew it."

Carol laughed, undisturbed by my accusation.

"Don't be absurd," she said. "You're going to miss the lesson. I knew that, sooner or later, you were going to give in to your indulging. Believe me, I am Carol. But we're doing something we've never done: We are intending in the second attention as the sorcerers of antiquity used to do."

I was not convinced, but I had no more energy to pursue my argument because something like the great vortexes of my dreaming was beginning to pull me in. I heard Carol's voice faintly, saying in my ear, "We are dreaming ourselves. Dream your intent of me. Intend me forward! Intend me forward!"

With great effort, I voiced my innermost thought. "Stay here with me forever," I said with the slowness of a tape recorder on the blink. She responded with something incomprehensible. I wanted to laugh at my voice, but then the vortex swallowed me.

When I woke up, I was alone in the hotel room. I had no idea how long I had slept. I felt extremely disappointed at not finding Carol by my side. I hurriedly dressed and went down to the lobby to look for her. Besides, I wanted to shake off some strange sleepiness that had clung to me.

At the desk, the manager told me that the American woman who had rented the room had just left a moment ago. I ran out to the street, hoping to catch her, but there was no sign of her. It was midday: The sun was shining in a cloudless sky. It was a bit warm.

I walked to the church. My surprise was genuine but dull at finding out that I had indeed seen the detail of it's architectural structure in that dream. Uninterestedly, I played my own devil's advocate and gave myself the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps don Juan and I had examined the back of the church and I did not remember it. I thought about it. It did not matter. My validation scheme had no meaning for me anyway. I was too sleepy to care.

From there I slowly walked to don Juan's house, still looking for Carol. I was sure I was going to find her there waiting for me. Don Juan received me as if I had come back from the dead.

He and his companions were in the throes of agitation as they examined me with undisguised curiosity.

"Where have you been?" don Juan demanded. I could not comprehend the reason for all the fuss. I told him that I had spent the night with Carol in the hotel by the plaza because I had no energy to walk back from the church to their house, but that they already knew this.

"We knew nothing of the sort," he snapped.

"Didn't Carol tell you she was with me?" I asked in the midst of a dull suspicion, which, if I had not been so exhausted, would have been alarming.

No one answered. They looked at one another, searchingly. I faced don Juan and told him I was under the impression he had sent Carol to find me. Don Juan paced the room up and down without saying a word.

"Carol Tiggs hasn't been with us at all," he said. "And you've been gone for nine days."

My fatigue prevented me from being blasted by those statements. His tone of voice and the concern the others showed were ample proof that they were serious. But I was so numb that there was nothing for me to say.

Don Juan asked me to tell them, in all possible detail, what had transpired between the death defier and me. I was shocked at being able to remember so much, and at being able to convey all of it in spite of my fatigue. A moment of levity broke the tension when I told them how hard the woman had laughed at my inane yelling my intent to see in her dream.

"Pointing the little finger works better," I said to don Juan, but without any feeling of recrimination.

Don Juan asked if the woman had any other reaction to my yelling besides laughing. I had no memory of one, except her mirth and the fact that she had commented how intensely he disliked her.

"I don't dislike her," don Juan protested. "I just don't like the old sorcerers' coerciveness."

Addressing everybody, I said that I personally had liked that woman immensely and unbiasedly. And that I had loved Carol Tiggs as I never thought I could love anyone. They did not seem to appreciate what I was saying. They looked at one another as if I had suddenly gone crazy.

I wanted to say more to explain myself. But don Juan, I believed just to stop me from babbling idiocies, practically dragged me out of the house and back to the hotel; accompanied by two of his companions.

The same manager I had spoken to earlier obligingly listened to our description of Carol Tiggs, but he flatly denied ever having seen her or me before. He even called the hotel maids: They corroborated his statements.

"What can the meaning of all this be?" don Juan asked out loud. It seemed to be a question addressed to himself. He gently ushered me out of the hotel. "Let's get out of this confounded place," he said.

When we were outside, he ordered me not to turn around to look at the hotel or at the church across the street, but to keep my head down. I looked at my shoes and instantly realized I was no longer wearing Carol's clothes but my own. I could not remember, however, no matter how hard I tried, when I had changed clothes. I figured that it must have been when I woke up in the hotel room. I must have put on my own clothes then, although my memory was blank.

By then we had reached the plaza. Before we crossed it to head off to don Juan's house, I explained to him about my clothes. He shook his head rhythmically, listening to every word. Then he sat down on a bench, and, in a voice that conveyed genuine concern, he warned me that, at the moment, I had no way of knowing what had transpired in the second attention between the woman in the church and my energy body. My interaction with the Carol Tiggs of the hotel had been just the tip of the iceberg.

"It's horrendous to think that you were in the second attention for nine days," don Juan went on. "Nine days is just a second for the death defier, but an eternity for us."

Before I could protest or explain or say anything, he stopped me with a comment.

"Consider this," he said. "If you still can't remember all the things I taught you and did with you in the second attention, imagine how much more difficult it must be to remember what the death defier taught you and did with you. I only made you change levels of awareness; the death defier made you change universes."

I felt meek and defeated. Don Juan and his two companions urged me to make a titanic effort and try to remember when I changed my clothes. I could not. There was nothing in my mind: no feelings, no memories. Somehow, I was not totally there with them.

The nervous agitation of don Juan and his two companions reached a peak. Never had I seen him so discombobulated. There had always been a touch of fun, of not quite taking himself seriously in everything he did or said to me. Not this time, though.

Again, I tried to think, bring forth some memory that would shed light on all this; and again I failed, but I did not feel defeated; an improbable surge of optimism overtook me. I felt that everything was coming along as it should.

Don Juan's expressed concern was that he knew nothing about the dreaming I had done with the woman in the church. To create a dream hotel, a dream town, a dream Carol Tiggs was to him only a sample of the old sorcerers' dreaming prowess; the total scope of which defied human imagination.

Don Juan opened his arms expansively and finally smiled with his usual delight.

"We can only deduce that the woman in the church showed you how to do it," he said in a slow, deliberate tone. "It's going to be a giant task for you to make comprehensible an incomprehensible maneuver. It has been a masterful movement on the chessboard, performed by the death defier as the woman in the church. She has used Carol's energy body and yours to lift off, to break away from her moorings. She took you up on your offer of free energy."

What he was saying had no meaning to me: Apparently, it meant a great deal to his two companions. They became immensely agitated. Addressing them, don Juan explained that the death defier and the woman in the church were different expressions of the same energy; the woman in the church was the more powerful and complex of the two. Upon taking control, she made use of Carol Tiggs's energy body, in some obscure, ominous fashion congruous with the old sorcerers' machinations, and created the Carol Tiggs of the hotel, a Carol Tiggs of sheer intent. Don Juan added that Carol and the woman may have arrived at some sort of energetic agreement during their meeting.

At that instant, a thought seemed to find it's way to don Juan. He stared at his two companions, unbelievingly. Their eyes darted around, going from one to the other. I was sure they were not merely looking for agreement, for they seemed to have realized something in unison.

"All our speculations are useless," don Juan said in a quiet, even tone. "I believe there is no longer any Carol Tiggs. There isn't any woman in the church either: Both have merged and flown away on the wings of intent, I believe, forward.

"The reason the Carol Tiggs of the hotel was so worried about her appearance was because she was the woman in the church, making you dream a Carol Tiggs of another kind; an infinitely more powerful Carol Tiggs. Don't you remember what she said? "Dream your intent of me. Intend me forward."

"What does this mean, don Juan?" I asked stunned.

"It means that the death defier has seen her total way out. She has caught a ride with you. Your fate is her fate."

"Meaning what, don Juan?"

"Meaning that if you reach freedom so will she."

"How is she going to do that?"

"Through Carol Tiggs. But don't worry about Carol." He said this before I voiced my apprehension. "She's capable of that maneuver and much more."

Immensities were piling up on me. I already felt their crushing weight. I had a moment of lucidity and asked don Juan, "What is going to be the outcome of all this?"

He did not answer. He gazed at me, scanning me from head to toe. Then he slowly and deliberately said, "The death defier's gift consists of endless dreaming possibilities. One of them was your dream of Carol Tiggs in another time, in another world; a more vast world; open-ended; a world where the impossible might even be feasible. The implication was not only that you will live those possibilities but that one day you will comprehend them."

He stood up, and we started to walk in silence toward his house. My thoughts began to race wildly. They were not thoughts, actually, but images; a mixture of memories of the woman in the church and of Carol Tiggs talking to me in the darkness in the dream hotel room. A couple of times I was near to condensing those images into a feeling of my usual self, but I had to give it up: I had no energy for such a task.

Before we arrived at the house, don Juan stopped walking and faced me. He again scrutinized me carefully, as if he were looking for signs in my body. I then felt obliged to set him straight on a subject I believed he was deadly wrong about.

"I was with the real Carol Tiggs at the hotel," I said. "For a moment, I myself believed she was the death defier, but after careful evaluation, I can't hold on to that belief. She was Carol. In some obscure, awesome way she was at the hotel, as I was there at the hotel myself."

"Of course she was Carol," don Juan agreed. "But not the Carol you and I know. This one was a dream Carol, I've told you, a Carol made out of pure intent. You helped the woman in the church spin that dream. Her art was to make that dream an all-inclusive reality; the art of the old sorcerers; the most frightening thing there is. I told you that you were going to get the crowning lesson in dreaming, didn't I?"

"What do you think happened to Carol Tiggs?" I asked.

"Carol Tiggs is gone," he replied. "But someday you will find the new Carol Tiggs, the one in the dream hotel room."

"What do you mean she's gone?"

"She's gone from the world," he said.

I felt a surge of nervousness cut through my solar plexus. I was awakening. The awareness of myself had started to become familiar to me, but I was not yet fully in control of it. It had begun, though, to break through the fog of the dream: It had begun as a mixture of not knowing what was going on and the foreboding sensation that the incommensurable was just around the corner.

I must have had an expression of disbelief because don Juan added in a forceful tone, "This is dreaming. You should know by now that it's transactions are final. Carol Tiggs is gone."

"But where do you think she went, don Juan?"

"Wherever the sorcerers of antiquity went. I told you that the death defier's gift was endless dreaming possibilities. You didn't want anything concrete, so the woman in the church gave you an abstract gift: the possibility of flying on the wings of intent."

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# 10 - SILENT KNOWLEDGE

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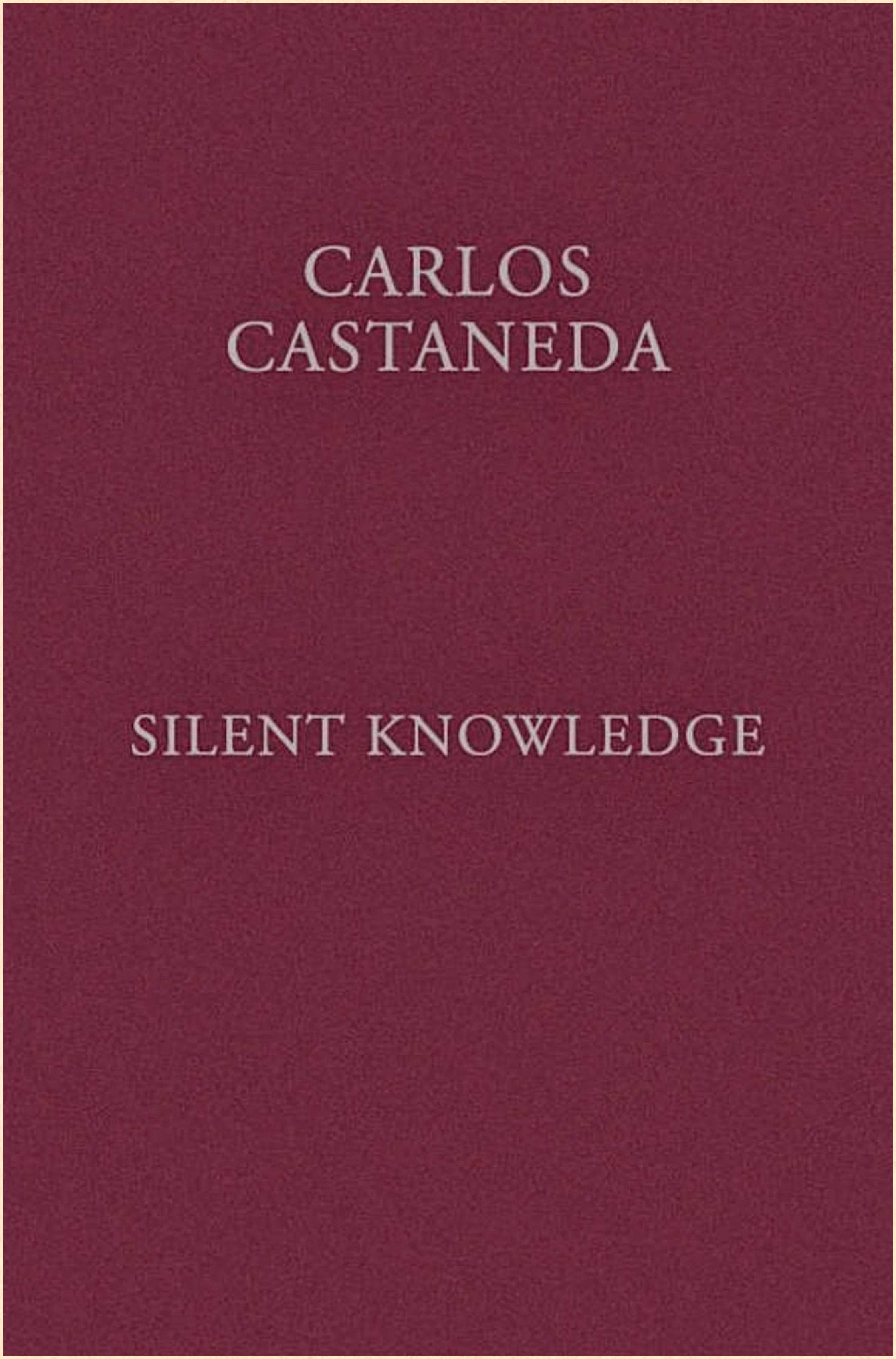
52 page booklet published as a primer on sorcery, and it's practice.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# Publication #10 – SILENT KNOWLEDGE

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# INTRODUCTION

Silent knowledge was an entire facet of the lives and activities of the shamans or sorcerers who lived in Mexico in ancient times. According to don Juan Matus, the sorcerer-teacher who introduced me in the cognitive world of those sorcerers, silent knowledge was the most coveted end result they sought through every one of their actions and thoughts.

Don Juan defined silent knowledge as a state of human awareness in which everything pertinent to man is instantly revealed, not to the mind or the intellect, but to the entire being. He explained that there was a band of energy in the universe which sorcerers call the band of man, and that such a band was present in man. He assured me that for sorcerer-seers, who see energy directly as it flows in the uni-verse, and who can see a human being as a conglomerate of energy fields in the form of a luminous sphere, the band of man is a fringe of compact luminosity that cuts across the luminous sphere at an angle from it's left side to it's right. The total luminous sphere is the width and the height of the extended arm, and in that luminous sphere, the band of man is perhaps around a foot wide. Silent knowledge, don Juan explained, is the interplay of energy within that band, an interplay which is instantly revealed to the shaman who has attained inner silence. Don Juan said that the average man had inklings of this energetic interplay. Man intuits it, and gets busy deducing it's workings, figuring out it's permutations. A sorcerer, on the other hand, gets a blast of the totality of this interplay at any time that the rendition of this interplay is solicited.

Don Juan assured me that the prelude to silent knowledge was a state of human perception which sorcerers called inner silence, a state void of the silent verbalizations that sorcerers call the internal dialogue, or even void of thoughts.

No matter how hard don Juan Matus tried to make his definitions and explanations of silent knowledge available to me, they remained obscure, mysterious, inscrutable. In his effort to clarify his point further, don Juan gave me a series of concrete examples of silent knowledge. The one I have liked the most, because of it's scope and applicability, is something that he called readers of infinity.

Readers of infinity is something that, sounds like a metaphor, but it is rather, a phenomenological description that don Juan made of a shamanistic perceptual condition. He told me that this shamanistic condition conformed with the goals and expectations of modern man, and that the man of the twentieth century is a reader who reads written texts with a special predilection. Such a text could be in the form of a book, a computer printout, literature, a manual, technical descriptions, etc.

In their continuous search for solutions and answers to their probes, the sorcerers of ancient Mexico found out that from this condition of inner silence, the awareness of man can easily leap to the direct perception of energy against the background of any given horizon. They used the sky as a horizon, as well as the mountains, or in a more reduced space, the walls of their dwelling. They were capable of seeing energy reflected on those horizons as if they were at the movies. They concisely described this phenomenon as the visualization of energy in the aspect of a hue - to be precise, a spot of redness on the horizon, a pomegranate red. They called it the blotch of pomegranate.

Those sorcerers explained that that blotch of pomegranate erupted, at a given moment, into images which they saw as if they were veritably watching a movie. This perceptual attainment converted them into what they called viewers of infinity.

Don Juan believed that for me, it was more appropriate to consider that instead of viewing infinity, I should read it, since I was given to reading with the same, if not greater passion than the shamans of ancient Mexico were given to viewing. Don Juan made it very clear to me that to be a reader of infinity doesn't mean that one reads energy as if one were reading a newspaper, but that words become clearly formulated as one reads them, as if one word leads into another, forming whole concepts that are revealed and then vanish. The art of sorcerers is to have the prowess to gather and preserve them before they enter into oblivion by being replaced with the new words, the new concepts of a never-ending stream of graphic consciousness.

Don Juan further explained that the shamans who lived in Mexico in ancient times, and who established his lineage, were capable of reaching silent knowledge after entering it's matrix: inner silence. He said that inner silence was an accomplishment or such tremendous importance for them that they set it up as the essential condition of shamanism.

Don Juan put such emphasis on silent knowledge that I coveted it. I wanted to get right away to inner silence. I felt that I didn't have a moment to lose. When I asked don Juan to give me a succinct explanation of the procedures involved, he laughed at me.

"To venture into the world of sorcerers," he said, "is not like learning to drive a car. To drive a car, you need manuals and instructions. To enter into inner silence, you need to intend it.

"But how can I intend it?" I insisted. "The only way you could intend it is by intending it," he declared.

One of the most difficult things for a man of our day to accept is the lack of procedure. Modern man seems to be in the throes of manuals, praxes, methods, steps leading to. Modern man is ceaselessly taking notes, making diagrams, deeply involved in the "know-how." But in the world of sorcerers, don Juan said, procedures and rituals are mere designs to attract and focus attention. They are devices used to force a focusing of interest and determination. They have no other value.

Don Juan believed that modern man is enchanted with the word, as if he retained a feeling that has survived to this day of what it was like to talk for the first time. This seems to account for the heavy emphasis on the word. Verbal incantations seem to be a throw back to that state of being enamored with the word. There must have been, sorcerers believe, a mesmeric power to a long series of voiced words.

Sorcerers, by the force of their practices and goals, refute the power of the word. They define themselves as navigators in the sea of the unknown. For them, navigation is a practicality, and navigation means to move from world to world, without losing, sobriety, without losing strength: and, to accomplish this feat of navigation, there cannot be procedures, or steps to be followed, but one single abstract act that defines it all: the act, of reinforcing our link with the force that permeates the universe, a force which sorcerers call intent. Since we are alive and conscious, we are already intimately related to intent. What we need, sorcerers say, is to make that link the realm of our conscious acts, and that act of becoming conscious of our link with intent is another way of defining silent knowledge.

In the course of my time with don Juan Matus, and in relation to procedures and methods, I learned one thing, however. If there is something that human beings need in order to claim silent knowledge, it is to reinforce their well being, their clarity, their determination. In order to intend, one must be the possessor of physical and mental prowess and a clear spirit.

According to don Juan, the sorcerers of ancient Mexico put an enormous emphasis on physical prowess and mental well-being, and the same emphasis prevailed with the sorcerers of the present day. I was able to corroborate the truth of his statements by observing him and his fifteen other sorcerer-companions. Their superb state of physical and mental balance was the most obvious feature about them.

Don Juan's reply when I asked him directly why sorcerers put so much emphasis on the physical side of man was a total surprise to me. In those years, I believed in the spiritual side of man; a side which I was, if not totally convinced of it's existence, at least inclined to consider as a possibility, and don Juan was to me, a spiritual being.

"Sorcerers are not spiritual at all." he said. "They are very practical beings. It is a well-known fact, however, that sorcerers, or shamans, as they are called, are generally regarded as eccentric, or even insane. Perhaps that is what makes you think that they are spiritual. They seem insane because they are always trying to explain things that cannot be explained. In the course of such attempts, they lose all coherence and say inanities which, if examined from the sorcerers' point of view, are not inanities at all, but futile attempts to give complete explanations that cannot be completed under any circumstances."

Don Juan told me that those sorcerers of ancient Mexico discovered and developed a great number of procedures, which they called magical passes, for the attainment of physical and mental well-being.

He also said that the effect of the magical passes was so overwhelming for them that the passes became, as time went by, one of the most important components in the lives of those sorcerers. Don Juan explained that, given as they were to ritualistic behavior, they promptly hid the magical passes in the midst of rituals and veiled the act of teaching or practicing them with great secrecy. He maintained that these rituals were as nonsensical as anything could be, but that the more asinine they were, the greater their capacity to conceal something of such tremendous value.

The teaching and practice of magical passes were, at the time I entered don Juan's world, as secretive as they had always been, yet no longer excessively ritualistic. Don Juan's comments in this respect were that ritual had lost it's impetus as new generations of practitioners became more interested in efficiency and functionalism. He recommend-ed to me, however, that under no circumstances should I talk about the magical passes with any of his disciples or with people in general. His reasons were that the passes pertained exclusively to each person, and that their effect was so shattering that only those who had taken the warriors' path in true seriousness could practice them.

Don Juan taught me and his other three disciples, Taisha Abelar, Florinda Donner-Grau and Carol Tiggs, a given number of magical passes, but along with that wealth of knowledge, he also left us with the certainty that we were the last members of hiss lineage. The acceptance of this legacy implied automatically the task of finding new ways to disseminate the knowledge of his lineage, since it's continuity was no longer an issue.

I need to clarify a very important point in this regard: don Juan Matus was not ever interested in teaching his knowledge. He was interested in perpetuating his lineage. We, his four disciples, were the elements the means - chosen, he said, by the spirit itself, for he had no active part in it - that were going to ensure that perpetuation. There-fore, he engaged himself in a titanic effort to teach us all he knew about sorcery, or shamanism, and about the development of his line-age.

In the course of training me, he realized that my energetic con-figuration was, according to him, so vastly different than his own that it couldn't mean anything else but the end of his line. I told him that I resented enormously his interpretation of whatever invisible difference existed between us. I didn't like the burden of being the last of his line, nor did I understand his reasoning.

"Sorcerers, although they seem to make nothing else but decisions make no decisions at all." he explained. "They have only realizations. I didn't decide to choose you, and I didn't decide that you would be the way you are. Since I couldn't choose to whom I would impart my knowledge, I had to accept whomever the spirit was offering me; and that person was you, and you are energetically capable only of ending, not of continuing.

He said that the ending of his line had nothing to do with him or his efforts, or with his success or failure as a sorcerer seeking total freedom. He understood it as something that had to do with a choice exercised beyond the human level, not by beings or entities, but by the impersonal forces of the universe.

In unanimous agreement, don Juan's three female disciples and I accepted what don Juan called our fate. Accepting it put us face to face with another issue that he referred to as locking the door behind us. That is to say, we assumed the responsibility of deciding exactly what to do with everything he had taught us and carrying it out impeccably.

First of all, we asked ourselves the crucial question of what to do with the magical passes: the facet of don Juan's knowledge most imbued with pragmatism and function. We decided to use the magical passes, and teach them to whomever wants to learn them. Our decision to end the secrecy that surrounded them for an undetermined length of time was naturally, the corollary of our total conviction that we are indeed the end of don Juan's lineage. It became inconceivable to us that we would carry secrets which are not even ours. To shroud the magical passes in secrecy was not our decision. It is our decision, how-ever, to end such a condition.

All four of us then, endeavored to come up with an amalgamation of the four different lines of passes; passes which were taught to us separately and individually to fit our own particular physical and mental constitutions. We aimed at arriving at a generic form of each movement, a form suitable to everyone.

This amalgamation resulted in a configuration of slightly modified forms of each one of those passes taught to us. We have called this new configuration of movements Tensegrity, a term which belongs to architecture, where it means "the property of skeleton structures that employ continuous tension members and discontinuous compression members in such a way that each member operates with the maximum efficiency and economy."

In order to explain what are the magical passes discovered by the sorcerers of ancient times, as don Juan called them, I would like to make a clarification: ancient times, for don Juan meant a time from 7,000 to 10,000 years ago; a figure that seems somehow incongruous, if it is examined from the point of view of the classificatory schemes of modern scholars. When I confronted don Juan with the discrepancy be-tween his estimate and what I considered to be a more realistic one, he remained adamant in his conviction. He believed it to be a fact that people who lived in the New World from 7,000 to 10.000 years ago were deeply concerned with matters or the universe and perception that modern man has not even begun to fathom.

Regardless of our different opinions, the secrecy that has surrounded the magical passes for ages, and the directness of their effect on me, has had a deep influence on the way in which I deal with them.

What I am presenting in this work is an intimate reflection of that influence. I feel obligated to elucidate the subject strictly following the manner in which it was presented to me: to this effect, I need to go back to the beginning of my apprenticeship with don Juan Matus.

He began by making statements about the physical prowess of the sorcerers of ancient times. He endlessly emphasized the need for a pliable, agile body: he promoted it's suppleness and strength as the surest means to reach the crowning attainment of a sorcerer's life: silent knowledge.

"Level-headedness and physical prowess were the most important issues in the lives of those men and women," he reiterated to me once, "sobriety and pragmatism are the only indispensable requisites for reaching silent knowledge - for entering into other realms of perception. To navigate, in a genuine way, in the unknown necessitates an altitude of daring, but not one of recklessness. In order to establish a balance between audacity and recklessness, a sorcerer has to be extremely sober, cautious, skillful, and in superb physical condition."

Don Juan said that there were five issues in the lives of those sorcerers around which rotated the pursuit of silent knowledge.

These five topics were: 1 - The magical passes; 2 - The energetic center in the human body called the center for decisions; 3 - The Recapitulation, the means for enhancing the scope of human awareness; 4 - Dreaming; the bona fide art of breaking the parameters of normal perception; 5 - Inner silence: the stage of human perception in which those sorcerers launched every one of their perceptual attainments.

## THE MAGICAL PASSES

The first time Don Juan talked to me at length about magical passes was when he made a derogatory comment about my weight.

"You are way too chubby," he said looking at me from head to toe and shaking his head in disapproval. "You are one step from being fat. Wear and tear is beginning to show in you. Like any other member of your race, you are developing a lump of fat on your neck, like a bull. It's time that you take seriously one of the sorcerers' greatest findings: the magical passes."

Since he had mentioned magical passes so very lightly before, I didn't even remember at that moment what he had said about them.

"What magical passes are you talking about, don Juan?" I asked, really annoyed, "How can I take them seriously if I have never heard anything about them."

"You are playing possum with me now, aren't you," he said with a nasty smile. "Not only have I told you a great deal about magical passes, you know a great number of them already. I have been teaching I them to you all along."

He was right in that I was being nasty with him. I had been surprised with a topic that I didn't expect, but it wasn't true that he had taught me any magical passes all along. I protested vehemently, as if his declarations meant my life or my death.

"Don't be so passionate about defending your wonderful self," he joked. "I didn't mean to offend you." He made a ridiculous gesture of apology with his eyebrows. "What I meant to say is that you do imitate everything that I do, so I have been cashing in on your imitation capacity. I have shown you different magical passes, all along, and you have always taken them to be my delight in cracking my joints. I like the way you interpret them: cracking my joints! We are going to keep on refer-ring to them in that manner.

"I have shown you ten different ways of cracking my joints. Each one of them is a magical pass that fits to perfection my body, and yours."

The magical passes don Juan was referring to, as he himself had said, were ways in which I thought he cracked his joints. He used to move his arms, legs, torso and hips in specific ways, I thought, in order to create a maximum stretch of his muscles, bones, and ligaments. The result of these stretching movements, from my point of view, was a succession of cracking sounds which I always thought he was producing for my amazement and amusement, and he indeed had asked me time and time again to imitate him.

In a challenging manner, he had even dared me to memorize the movements and repeat them at home until I could get my joints to make cracking noises, just like his. I had never succeeded in reproducing the sounds, yet I had definitely but unwittingly learned all the movements.

"Why are they called magical passes?" I asked.

"They are not just called magical passes," he said, "they are magi-cal!" They produce an effect that cannot be accounted for by means of ordinary explanations. These movements are not physical exercises or mere postures of the body; they are real attempts at reaching an optimal state of being. The intent of thousands of sorcerers permeates these movements. Executing them, even in a casual way, makes the mind come to a halt."

"What do you mean that they make the mind come to a halt?”

"Everything that we do in the world," he said, "we recognize and identify by consenting it into lines of similarity."

Don Juan seemed to be struggling to find the way of defining what he was saying. He paused for a long time as If searching for a proper word or a proper arrangement of thought. I remained quiet. I knew so little about the topic that I didn't dare even to think about it. All I had was my curiosity to know what those mysterious magical passes were.

Don Juan stood up. He seemed to have had enough. We were sitting in the dining room of his house drinking some herb tea that he had made from an aromatic bush in his yard. He excused himself and said that it was lime for his nap. Don Juan took short naps all day and all night. His sleeping pattern was established on a mold that called for a maximum of two hours or sleep at a time. When he was extremely tired, he slept six hours in lapses of two hours, with a short period of vigil in between.

We didn't touch upon the subject of the magical passes for a long time. One day, he continued his explanation, out of the blue for me, but not for him, because he seemed to have been aware of our interruption, something which I had totally forgotten.

For human beings, there are lines of similarity, as I told you,” he said, "lines of things which are similar or strung together by purpose. For example, if I say to you 'fork', you would immediately bring, to yourself the idea of spoon, knife, tablecloth, napkin, plate, cup and saucer, glass of wine, meatball soup, banquet, birthday, fiesta. You can certainly go on naming things strung together by purpose, nearly forever. Everything we do is strung like this. The strange part for sorcerers is that they see that all these lines of affinity, all these lines of things strung together by purpose, are associated with man's idea that things are unchangeable and forever, like the word of God.”

"I don't see, don Juan, why you bring the word of God into this elucidation. What does the word of God have to do with what you are trying to explain?"

“Everything! It seems to be that in our minds, the entire universe is like the word of God: absolute and unchanging. This is the way we conduct ourselves; in the depths of our minds, there is a checking device that doesn't permit us to stop to examine that the word of God, as we accept it and believe it to be, pertains to a dead world. A live world, on the other hand, is in constant flux. It moves; it changes; it reverses itself.

“The sorcerers' magical passes are magical because in practicing them, the body realizes that everything, instead being an unchangeable string of affinities, is a current, a flux. And if everything in the uni-verse is a flux, a current, that current can be stopped. A dam can be put on it, and thus halt or deviate it's flux."

Dun Juan's words were eliciting a strange reaction in me. I felt strangely threatened, but the threat wasn't actually n threat to my per-son; it was more a threat to something that was imposed on me. I had the clear feeling for the first time ever that don Juan was deliberately exacerbating a part that seemed to be me but that really wasn't.

I became so utterly confused after a few moments in the throes of this contradiction that I heard myself speaking without any volition of my own. I heard myself saying. "But, don Juan, are you telling me that every time you crack your joints, or every time I try to imitate you. I am really changing things in me?”

"Ah, something in you that is not really you is angry now.” Don Juan retorted, laughing.

I had another moment of intense internal contradiction. Some-thing in me was very angry, and yet it couldn't have been me. Don Juan shook me by the shoulders forcefully. I felt my neck wobbling back and forth under the impact of his grip. The maneuver calmed me down all at once. He made me sit down on a low retaining brick wall. There were always lines of ants crawling on it, and I never really liked to sit on that wall. I would get ants on my clothes immediately. I was always deeply aware of ants crawling on me, but this time, however, the moment I sat down, the ants discontinued their line. I saw them milling around on each side of my body as if they were bewildered, uncertain. I became extremely curious at the possibility that they would detour to my back or to my front. I wanted to see which way they would go. But don Juan's words took all my attention and I forgot about the ants.

"Don't worry about the ants," don Juan said, rending my thoughts. "You are at this moment charged with an unusual energy, product of your internal dilemmas. The ants will find you impenetrable and dangerous, and they will mill around you on either side of your body until your energy becomes normal or until you get up and leave. And now, to answer your question that your mind intended as a nasty retort, I can tell you that it is true that every time we execute a magical pass, we are, indeed, altering the basic structures of our beings. We are putting a dam on a flow that we were taught to take as an inalterable string of things."

In a faltering voice that didn't seem to be mine, I asked don Juan to give me an example of putting a dam on the flow he was talking about. I told him that I wanted to visualize it in my mind.

"In your mind? You had better learn to call things by their name. What you call your mind is not your mind. Sorcerers are convinced that our minds are extraneous things that have been put on each one of us. Accept it, without any further explanation at I his moment about who put it on us, or how it was put there."

I had another wave of the same threatening sensation as before. I felt it this time more clearly. The wave didn't stem from me, yet it was attached to me. Don Juan was doing something, to me mysteriously positive and terribly negative at the same time. I sensed it as an at-tempt to cut a thin film that seemed to be glued to me. His eyes were fixed on mine with an unblinking stare.

He moved his eyes away and began to talk without looking at me anymore. "I'll give you an example," he said. "For Instance, at my age, I should be prey to high blood pressure. If I went to see a doctor, the doctor, upon seeing me, would assume that I must be an old Indian, plagued with uncertainties, frustrations and bad diet, all of this, naturally, resulting in a most expected and predictable condition of high blood pressure: an acceptable corollary of my age.

"I don't have any problems with high blood pressure, not because I am stronger than the average man or because of my genetic frame, but because my magical passes have made my body break through any

patterns of behavior that result in high blood pressure. I can truthfully say that every time I crack my joints, following the execution of a magi-cal pass, I am blocking oft the flow of expectations and behavior that ordinarily result in high blood pressure at my age.

"Another example I can give you is the agility of my knees. Haven't you noticed how much more agile I am than you? When it comes to moving my knees, I'm a kid! With my magical passes, I put a dam on the current of behavior and physicality that makes the knees of people, men and women, stiff with age."

One of the most annoying feelings I had ever experienced was for me the fact that don Juan Matus, although he could have been my grandfather, was infinitely younger than I. In comparison, I was stiff, opinionated, repetitious. I was senile. He, on the other hand, was fresh, inventive, agile, resourceful; in short, he possessed something which, although I was young, I did not: youth. He delighted in telling me repeatedly that youth was not in any way a deterrent to senility.

Following a burst of energy that seemed to explode inside me, I openly admitted my chagrin. "How is it possible, don Juan," I said, "that you could be younger than I?”

"I have vanquished my mind." he said, opening his eyes wide to denote bewilderment. "I don't have a mind to tell me that it is time to be old. I don't honor agreements in which I didn't participate. Remember this: it is not a slogan for sorcerers to say that they do not honor agreements in which they did not participate. To be plagued by old age is one such agreement.”

We were silent for a long time. Don Juan seemed to be waiting, I thought, for the effect that his words might cause in me. What I thought to be my internal psychological unity was further ripped apart by a dearly dual response coming from me. On one level, I repudiated with all my might the nonsense that don Juan was verbalizing; on an-other level, however, I couldn't fail to notice how accurate his remarks were. Don Juan was old, and yet, he wasn't old at all. He was ages younger than I. He was free from encumbering thoughts and habit pat-terns. He was roaming at will in incredible worlds. He was free, while I was imprisoned by heavy patterns and habits, by petty and futile considerations about myself, which I felt on that occasion, for the first time ever, weren't even mine.

I finally broke the silence when I had gained a modicum of control over my dual considerations. "How were those magical passes in-vented, don Juan?" I asked.

"Nobody invented them." he said sternly. "To think that they were invented implies instantly the intervention of the mind, and this is not the case when it comes to those magical passes. Sorcerers of ancient times, through their dreaming practices, discovered that if they moved in a certain way, the flow of their thoughts and actions stopped.

"The magical passes are the result of a state of mindlessness. Or rather yet, the result of having disconnected the mind. In order to dream, practitioners must excrete such a tremendous discipline over themselves that the result is the fleeing of the mind."

"What is this, don Juan, that you are referring to as the fleeing of the mind?"

"The grand trick of those sorcerers of ancient times was to bur-den their minds with discipline. They found out that if they taxed their minds with attention, especially the kind of attention that sorcerers call dreaming attention, the mind flees, giving to any one of the practitioners involved in this maneuver the total certainty of the mind's foreign origin."

I became genuinely agitated, I wanted to know more, and yet, a strange feeling in me clamored for me to stop. It alluded to dark results and punishment; something like the wrath of God descending on me for tampering with something veiled by God himself.

I made a supreme effort to allow my curiosity to win. "What do you mean?" What - what - what do you mean," I heard myself say, "by taxing the mind?"

"Discipline taxes the mind." he said, "but by discipline, I don't mean harsh routines. Sorcerers understand discipline as the capacity to face with serenity odds that are not included in our expectations. For them, discipline is a volitional act that enables them to intake anything that comes their way without regrets or expectations. For sorcerers, discipline is an art: the art of facing infinity without flinching, not be-cause they are filled with toughness, but because they are filled with awe. Summing it all up, I would say that discipline is the art of feeling awe. So, through their discipline, sorcerers vanquish their minds: the foreign installation."

Don Juan said that through their dreaming practices, the sorcerers of ancient Mexico discovered that certain movements fostered further silence, and created a peculiar sensation of plenitude and well-being. They became so enthralled with this feeling that they struggled to repeat it in their hours of vigil.

Don Juan explained that at first, they believed it was a mood of well-being that dreaming created, but that when they tried to repeat that mood, they found that it was impossible. Then they realized that in their dreaming, when that feeling of well-being occurred, they were always engaged in movement. Penuriously, they began to piece together the movements they remembered. Their efforts paid off.

They were capable of recreating movements that had seemed to them to be automatic reactions of the body in a state of dreaming. Don Juan said that the result was the magical passes.

Encouraged by their success, they were capable of recreating hundreds of movements, which they performed without ever even at-tempting to classify them into an understandable scheme. The idea was that in dreaming, the movements happened spontaneously, and that there was a force that guided their effect, without the intervention of their volition. They explained this force as an agglutinating factor that binds our fields of energy together to make us into a coherent unit.

In the realm of practicalities, the magical passes were, for those sorcerers of ancient Mexico, genuine avenues for preparing them for their navigation into the unknown. They established a basic criteria for practicing them, which is the criterion observed today in dealing with Tensegrity. That criterion is called saturation, meaning that they bombarded their bodies with a profusion of magical passes, in order to allow the force that binds us together to guide them for maximum over-all effect.

## THE CENTER FOR DECISIONS

The second topic of tremendous interest for the sorcerers of ancient Mexico was the center for decisions. Those sorcerers were convinced, by the practical results of their endeavors, that there was a spot on the human body that accounted for decision-making: the “v” spot on the crest of the sternum at the base of the neck. They claimed that it was a center of tremendous subtleness and that it stored a specific type of energy which they were incapable of defining, perhaps be-cause it defied definition. Yet, they were utterly convinced that they could feel the effect of it's energy, and it's presence. They asserted that this special energy was pushed out of that center very early in the lives of human beings, and that it never returns to it, thus depriving human beings of something perhaps more important than all the energy of the other centers combined.

Shamans have pointed out, over the centuries, the incapacity of human beings to make decisions. They have pointed out that human beings have created gigantic Institutions that assumed responsibility for decision-making. Therefore, human beings don't decide for themselves, but let the social order decide for them, and they merely fulfill the decisions already made on their behalf.

The "v" spot at the base of the neck was for them a place of such importance that they rarely touched it, and if they did, the touch was ritualistic and always performed by someone else, with the aid of an object. Don Juan Matus told me that they used highly polished pieces of hard wood or polished bones of animals, or even human beings, and used the round head of the bone so as to have a perfectly round object the size of the hollow spot on the neck. They would press with those bones or pieces of wood to create pressure on the borders of that hollow spot. Don Juan said that those objects were also used, although rarely, for sell-application in the form of a massage, or in terms of what we understand nowadays as acupressure.

"How did they come to find out that that hollow spot is the center for decisions," I asked.

"Every center of energy in the body," he replied, "shows a concentration of energy; a sort of vortex of energy, like a funnel that actually seems to rotate counterclockwise, from the perspective of the seer who gazes into it. The strength of a particular center depends on the force of that movement. If it barely, barely moves, the center is exhausted, deplenished of energy."

Don Juan explained that there were six enormous vortexes of energy in the human body that could be dealt with, or were accessible to being manipulated. The first was on the area of the liver and gallbladder: the second on the area of the pancreas and spleen; die third in the area of the kidneys and adrenals; and the fourth on the hollow spot at the base of the neck on the frontal part of the body, This center, he depicted as having a special energy, which appears to the eye of the seer as possessing a transparency, something that could he described as resembling water; energy so fluid that it is liquid. He also said that the liquid appearance of this special energy is the mark of a filter-like quality that screens any energy coming to it, and draws from it only the part that is liquid-like. This quality of liquidness is a uniform and consistent feature of this center. A fifth center which was pertinent only to women, was the area of the womb. He said that in some women, there seems to exist a similar liquid energy in the womb, a natural filter that screens out superfluous energy, but that this feature was not present in every womb. And there was a center on top of the head, which was not dealt with at all by the sorcerers of ancient limes. Every one of their magical passes had something to do with those five centers but not with the sixth one on the top of the head.

"Why this discrimination, don Juan?" I asked.

"That sixth center of energy," he said, "does not quite belong to man." We human beings are under siege, so to speak. It is as it that center has been taken over by an unseen enemy. And the only way to overcome this enemy is by fortifying all the other centers."

"Isn't it a bit paranoiac to feel that we are under siege, don Juan?”

"Well, maybe for you, but certainly not for me. I see energy, and I see that the energy over the center on the top of the head doesn’t fluctuate like the energy of the other centers. It has a back and forth movement, quite disgusting, and quite foreign. I also see that in a sorcerer who has been capable of vanquishing the mind, which sorcerers call a foreign installation, the fluctuation of that center has become exactly like the fluctuation of all the others. The rotation of the energy at the center for decisions is the weakest of them all. That's why man can rarely decide anything. Sorcerers see that after they practice certain magical passes, that center becomes active, and they can certainly make decisions to their heart’s content, while they couldn't even go to the corner before."

Don Juan was quite emphatic about the fact that those shamans had an aversion that bordered on phobia about touching their own hollow spot at the base of the neck on the crest of the sternum. The only way in which they accepted any interference whatsoever with that spot was through the use of their magical passes, which were purport-ed to reinforce it by bringing dispersed energy to it, clearing away, in this manner, any hesitation in decision-making borne out of the natural energy dispersion brought about by the wear and tear of everyday life.

The general idea which those sorcerers had was that the human body, viewed by seers, is a concrete and sealed unit of energy fields. No energy could be injected into this sealed unit, and no energy could escape from it. For the shamans of don Juan's lineage, the feeling of losing energy, which all of us experience at one time or another, was the result of energy being dispersed or being chased away from the five natural centers of energy described before. Energy, those shamans believed, is pushed out of those centers and dispersed toward the outer limits of our being.

When shamans of ancient Mexico referred to the outer limits of our being, they were speaking of human beings as they are perceived by shaman seers, that is to say, when they are perceived as a conglomerate of energy fields resembling a luminous sphere. They considered this sphere of energy to be our true self; true in the sense that it was irreducible for them in terms of energy.

In other words, they were capable of extending the limits of their perception to the point that they were able to perceive energy at large, as it flows in the universe. Under such conditions, human beings are luminous spheres, and this "vision" is irreducible because it seems that the totality of human potentials to perceive were played by those sorcerers, and perceiving a luminous sphere of pure energy was the end result of such a total play.

Any sense or gaining energy was understood by those sorcerers as the concentration of previously dispersed energy on the above mentioned centers of vitality. They called this maneuver "redistributing energy previously dispersed." In order to accomplish this redistribution, they used the magical passes which were proven, over the millennia, to be most effective. Tensegrity, the modern version of magical passes, accomplishes the same goal: it redeploys energy already dispersed, but without the shamans' ritualistic encumbrances.

## THE RECAPITULATION

The third subject of profound interest for the sorcerers of ancient Mexico was the Recapitulation. Those sorcerers believed that, just like the magical passes, it prepared the ground for silent knowledge. The Recapitulation was, for them, the act of reliving past experiences in order to achieve two transcendental goals. The first was an effort to con-form with their overall view of the universe and life and awareness, and the other was the extremely pragmatical goal of acquiring perceptual fluidity.

Their overall view of the universe and life and awareness was that there existed an indescribable force which they metaphorically called the Eagle, and which they understood as the force that lends awareness to all living beings, from viruses to men. They believed that the Eagle lends awareness to a newborn being, and that this being enhances that awareness by means of it's life experiences until a moment in which the force demands it's return. All living beings die, in the understanding of those sorcerers, because they are forced to return the awareness lent to them. This enriched awareness returns to the giver.

Don Juan said that there was no way for our linear mode of thinking to explain such a thing, because there was no explanation for why awareness was lent, or why it was taken back; it was a fact in the uni-verse, and not all the facts in the universe could be explained in terms of cause and effect, or a purpose which can be determined a priori.

The sorcerers of ancient Mexico believed that to recapitulate meant to give to this force, the Eagle, what it was seeking: our life experiences, but to give them under a degree of control that permitted those sorcerers to separate awareness from life. They claimed that awareness and life are not inextricably intertwined, but that they are joined only circumstantially. They affirmed that the Eagle doesn't want to take our lives; it wants only our life experiences. But lack of discipline in human beings doesn't permit them to separate their life force from the force of their life experiences, and they lose their lives, when it was meant that they would lose only the force of their life experiences. The recapitulation is the procedure by which sorcerers give the Eagle a substitute for their lives. They give the Eagle their life experiences by recounting them, but they retain their life force.

The perceptual claims of sorcerers, when examined in terms of the linear concepts of our world, make no sense whatsoever. Western man abandoned any attempt at a serious philosophical discourse based on statements made by the shamans of the New World. For instance, the idea of the Recapitulation seems to us something more congruous with psychoanalysts. Any scholar faced with this might be willing to think of the Recapitulation as a psychological procedure, a sort of self help technique. According to don Juan Matus, man always loses by default. Don Juan believed that there are alternative ways of relating ourselves to the universe, life, awareness, and perception because the way in which we do, at present, is only one of a multiplicity of options.

To recapitulate, for shaman practitioners, means to give to an in-comprehensible force - the Eagle - the very thing it seems to be looking for: their life experiences, that is to say, the awareness that they have enhanced through those very life experiences. Don Juan could not explain these phenomena to me in terms of standard logic or in terms of the need to seek explainable causation. He said that all of this was in the realm of practicalities, and that all we could aspire to do was to accomplish the feat without dispensing explanations. He also said that there were thousands of sorcerers who had accomplished the feat of retaining their life force after they had given the Eagle the force of their life experiences. This meant to don Juan that those sorcerers didn't die in the usual sense in which we understand death, but that they transcended it by retaining their life force and vanishing from the face of the earth, embarked on a definitive journey of perception.

The belief of sorcerers is that when death takes place in this fashion, all of our being is turned into energy, but a special kind of energy that retains the mark of our individuality. He tried to explain this in a metaphorical sense, saying that during the course of our lives, we are composed of quite a number of "single nations." He said that we have the nation of the lungs, the nation of the heart, the nation of the stomach, the nation of the kidneys, etc., and that each of those nations sometimes works independently from the rest, but that at the moment of death, all of them are unified into one single entity. He called that state total freedom, and he said that a human being freed from socialization and the dominion of syntax and transformed into a portion of unified purified energy, flies, evaporates, evanesces, whatever, into the unknown, into infinity, transformed into an inorganic being, one that possesses awareness but not an organism.

I asked him if this was immortality. He said that not in any way was this immortality; it was merely the entrance into an evolutionary process, using the only medium for evolution that man has: awareness. Sorcerers are convinced that man cannot evolve biologically any more; therefore, they consider man's awareness as the only medium for evolution. To be transformed into an inorganic being is evolution for sorcerers: and for them, it means, don Juan said, that a new, indescribable type of awareness is lent to them, an awareness that lasts veritably millions of years, but that someday, it would have to be returned to the giver: the Eagle.

I asked Don Juan if the inorganic beings that, according to sorcerers, populate the twin world of ours, were evolved beings that had been human once. He said that they were intrinsically inorganic beings the same way that we were intrinsically organic ones; they were beings whose consciousness could evolve just like ours, and that it doubtlessly did, but that he had no firsthand knowledge of how this happened. What he did know, however, was that a human being whose awareness had evolved was an inorganic being of a special kind.

Don Juan gave me a series of descriptions of this evolution, which I always took to be poetic metaphors. I singled out the one that pleased me the most, which was total freedom. I fancied a human being that enters into that state to be the most courageous, the most imaginative being possible. Don Juan said that I was not fancying anything at all— that to enter into that state, a human being must appeal to his or her sublime side—which, he said, human beings have, but it never occurred to them to use it.

Don Juan stated that the second aspect of the Recapitulation was the acquisition of fluidity. He told me that the sorcerers' rationale be-hind this had to do with one of the most elusive subjects of sorcery: the assemblage point, a point of intense luminosity the size of a tennis ball, perceivable to sorcerers who are capable of seeing energy directly as it flows in the universe. As previously stated, a human being, as viewed by the eye of the seer, appears as a ball of luminosity; in the back of this ball of luminosity, seers find a point of more intense brilliance yet. They call it the assemblage point, because they see that zillions of energy fields in the form of filaments of light from the universe at large converge on that point and go through it. This confluence of filaments gives the assemblage point it's brilliancy.

The assemblage point makes it possible for a human being to perceive energy by turning it into sensorial data, which the assemblage point interprets as the world of everyday life; this interpretation is made in terms of human socialization and human potentials.

Don Juan said that to recapitulate was to relive every, or nearly every experience that one had, and that in doing so, the assemblage

point was displaced, ever to slightly, or a great deal, propelled by the force of memory to adapt the position it had when the event being re-capitulated took place. This act of going back and forth from previous positions to the one which is current gives the practitioner the necessary fluidity to withstand unusual odds in their journey into infinity; odds which are not in any way part of a practitioner's habitual cognition.

The Recapitulation as a formal procedure was done in ancient times by recollecting every person the practitioners knew and every experience in which they took part. Don Juan suggested that I make written list of all the persons that I had met in my life, as a mnemonic device. Once I had written that list, he proceeded to tell me how to use it. He guided me to take the first person on the list, which went back from the present to the past, and set up, in my memory, my last inter-action with that person. He called this act arranging the event to be re-capitulated. A detailed recollection of minutiae was requested by don Juan as the proper means to hone one's capacity to remember. He said that this recollection entailed getting all the pertinent physical details, such as the surroundings where the event being recollected took place. Once the event was arranged, he stated that one should enter into the locale itself, as one were actually going into it, paying special attention to any relevant physical configuration. If, for instance, the interaction took place in an office, one must remember the floor, the doors, the walls, the pictures, the windows, the desks, the objects on the desks, everything that one may have gathered in a glance and forgotten all about.

Don Joan assured me that the Recapitulation as a formal procedure must begin by the recounting of events that had just taken place. In this fashion, the primacy of the experience look precedence; some-thing that just happened is something one can remember with great accuracy. He claimed that one is capable of storing detailed information one is not aware of, and that that detail is for the Eagle.

The actual recapitulation of the event requires that one breathe deeply, fanning the head, so to speak, from right to left, then from left to right again, as many times as needed, while remembering all the details accessible. Don Juan said that sorcerers talk about this act as breathing in all of one's feelings spent in the event being recollected, and expelling all the unwanted moods and feelings that were left with us.

In the act of inhaling and exhaling, sorcerers believe, lies the mystery of the recapitulation: since breathing is a life-sustaining function, sorcerers believe that one could also deliver this facsimile of one’s life experience to the force that lends us consciousness. When I pressed him for a rational explanation, his position was that things like the Re-capitulation could only be experienced, not explained. In the act of doing, sorcerers find liberation. To explain it is to dissipate the energy in fruitless efforts. His invitation was congruous with everything related to his knowledge, the invitation to take action.

The list with the names of people is used then, as a mnemonic device which propels memory into an inconceivable journey. The sorcerers' logic is that remembering events that just took place prepares the ground for remembering events more distant in time with the same clarity and immediacy. Sorcerers consider recollection of this sort as re-living experiences already lived and drawing from this recollection an extraordinary force, an extraordinary impetus that stirs energy dispersed from our centers of action, and returns it to them, energy which is accumulated on the periphery of the luminous spheres of energy that we are. They refer to this redeployment of energy that the recapitulation causes as gaining fluidity after giving the Eagle what it is looking for.

On a more mundane level, the Recapitulation gives one the capacity to examine the repetition in one's life. Recapitulating convinces one, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that one is at the mercy of forces which ultimately make no sense, although at first sight they seem perfectly reasonable. Sorcerers affirm that if any behavioral change is going to be accomplished, it has to be done through the Recapitulation as the only vehicle that can enhance awareness by liberating one from the unvoiced demands of socialization, something so automatic that it cannot be examined; it can only be viewed. This is the reason why sorcerers call the Recapitulation a view from the bridge. It takes a long time to exhaust the list of people, because it is intimately related to events sometimes by sheer osmosis, persons are related in impersonal events in which no people were involved, but which happened around the time that one knew the person being recapitulated. In such cases, the event should be recollected by itself.

What sorcerers seek avidly in the Recapitulation is the memory of interaction, because in interaction, they discover the deep effects of socialization, which they try to overcome by any means available.

## DREAMING

The fourth topic on the priority list of the sorcerers of ancient Mexico was dreaming, the art of breaking the parameters of normal perception. For those sorcerers and the members of their modern line-ages, to travel in the unknown was indeed the driving force of sorcery. Dun Juan demonstrated to me countless times that everything he and his companions did was funneled into that drive. The two arts on which they based their journeys were two tremendously sophisticated lines or activity: the art of dreaming and the art of stalking.

The art of stalking was for don Juan the other side of the coin, in relation in the art of dreaming. To make the two arts explicit to me, he first presented what he said was the cornerstone of sorcery: the possibility of perceiving energy directly, as it flows in the universe.

He explained that what human beings ordinarily take for perceiving is rather the act of interpreting sensory data. He maintained that from the moment of birth, everything around us supplies us with a possibility of interpretation. This possibility turns in time into a full system by means of which we conduct all of our perceptual transactions in the world. He was convinced that not for an instant do we have the opportunity to conceive the possibility of perceiving the flow of energy directly. For don Juan, and other sorcerers like him, what transforms an average man into a sorcerer is the act of canceling out the effect of our interpretation system and perceiving energy directly.

Don Juan explained that human beings appear as luminous spheres when they are perceived directly as energy. He referred to seeing energy directly as the articulation point of sorcery. He assured me that everything sorcerers do rotate around it, or originates from it, and that the two main currents of activity stemming from seeing energy directly are the art of dreaming and the art of stalking.

Another issue that he elucidated at length was the assemblage point. He said that when sorcerers are capable of seeing human beings as luminous spheres, they also see, the epicenter of sorcery: a point the size of a tennis ball, more intensely luminous than the rest of the luminous sphere. Don Juan called it the assemblage point, and said that it is precisely there, on that point, that perception is assembled.

"The art of dreaming," he said to me once, "consists of purposely displacing the assemblage point from it's habitual position. The art of stalking consists in volition ally making it stay fixed on the new position to which it has been displaced."

According to don Juan's explanation, these two arts are cushioned in a philosophical framework called the warriors' way, or the sorcerers' path: a set of premises by means of which sorcerers live and act in the world. To follow the premises of the warriors' way was for don Juan and his, companions the crowning achievement of sorcery. Don Juan believed that only by strictly adhering to the warriors' way can sorcerers find the energy and determination for journeying in the unknown.

Don Juan stressed, in every way he was able, the value of a pragmatic attitude on the part of the practitioners for dreaming and stalking. He defined a pragmatic altitude as the capacity of absorbing any contingency that may appear along the warriors' way. He himself was, to me, the living example of such an attitude. There wasn't any uncertainty or liability that his mere presence would not dispel.

He pointed out that in order to arrive at this desirable pragmatic attitude, a practitioner has to have a superbly pliable, agile, strong body. He said that for sorcerers, the physical body is the only entity that makes any sense to them, and that there is no such thing as a dualism between body and mind. Sorcerers believe that the physical body involves both the body and the mind as we know them. He told me that in order to counterbalance the physical body as a holistic unit, sorcerers consider another configuration of energy: the energy body, also known as the other, the double, the dreaming body.

Don Juan described the art of dreaming as the possibility to use normal dreams as a bona fide entrance for human awareness into other realms of perceiving. He claimed that ordinary dreams could be used as a hatchet that leads into other regions of energy different than the energy of the world of everyday life, and yet utterly similar to it at a basic core. He said that the result of such an entrance was, the perception of veritable worlds where one can live or die, just like the one in which we live, but worlds which are astounding different than ours, and yet, utterly similar. Pressed for a linear explanation of this seeming contradiction, don Juan Matus reiterated his standard position: that the answers to all those questions were in the practice, not in the intellectual inquiry. In order to talk about such possibilities, one has to use the syntax of language, whatever language one speaks and that syntax, by the force of usage, limits the possibilities of expression. The syntax of any language refers only to perceptual possibilities found in the world in which we live.

Don Juan made a significant differentiation in Spanish, between two verbs; one was to dream, *soñar*, and the other was *ensoñar*, which is to dream the way sorcerers dream. In English, there is no clear distinction between these two states: the normal dreaming, *sueño*, and the more complex state that sorcerers call *ensueño*. Don Juan also described dreaming as a state of profound meditation in which a shift of perception plays a key role.

Don Juan explained that the art of dreaming originated in a very casual observation that the sorcerers of ancient Mexico made when they saw people that were asleep. They noticed that during sleep the assemblage point is displaced in a very natural, easy way from it's habitual position, and it moves anywhere along the periphery of the luminous sphere, or to any place in the interior of it. Correlating their seeing with the reports of the people that had been asleep, they realized that the greater the observed displacement of the assemblage point, the more astounding the reports of things and scenes experienced in dreams.

Those sorcerers avidly looked for opportunities to displace their own assemblage points, and they ended up using psychotropic plants to accomplish this. Soon, they realized that the displacement brought about by using these plants was erratic, forced, and out of control. Don Juan said that in the midst of this failure, they discovered one thing of great value. The sorcerers of ancient times called it dreaming attention, or the capacity that practitioners acquire to maintain their awareness unwaveringly on the items of their dreams.

The end result of those sorcerers' new endeavors was the art of dreaming as it stands today. Through discipline, they succeeded in developing their dreaming attention to an extraordinary degree. They were able to focus it on any element of their dreams, and found out, in this fashion, that there were two kinds of dreams. One was the dreams that we are all familiar with, in which phantasmagorical elements come into play, something which we could categorize as the product of our mentality, our psyche; perhaps something that has to do with our neurological makeup. The other kind of dreams, they called energy-generating dreams. Don Juan said that those sorcerers of ancient times found themselves in dreams that were not dreams, but actual visitations made in a dream-like state to bona fide places other than this world - real places, just like the world in which we live: places where the objects of the dream generated energy, just like trees, or animals, or even rocks generate energy in our dally world.

Their visions of such places, were, however, too fleeting, too temporary, to be of any value to them. They attributed this flaw to the fact that their assemblage points could not be held, for any considerable time, fixed at the position to which they had been displaced. Their at-tempts to remedy the situation resulted in the other high art of sorcery: the art of stalking, or the feat of holding the assemblage point fixed at the position to which it had been displaced. This fixation allowed them the opportunity to witness that world in it's full extent. Don Juan said that some of those sorcerers never returned from their journeys. In other words, they opted for staying there, wherever "there" was.

Don Juan said that in mapping human beings as luminous spheres, those sorcerers at ancient times discovered six hundred spots in the total luminous sphere which give, as a result, if the assemblage point happened to be fixed at any of them, the entrance into a total new world. His answer to my unavoidable question, "But where are those worlds" was "in the position of the assemblage point." Nothing could be truer than that statement, and yet, it doesn't make any sense whatsoever to us.

However, if it is examined in the light of the sorcerers' capacity to see energy as it flows in the universe, it makes sense for them. Their position is that the assemblage point at it's habitual location receives an inflow of energy fields from the universe at large in the form of luminous energy filaments. Consistently, the same filaments, numbering in the billions, go through the assemblage point, giving as a result the world that we know. If the assemblage point is displaced to another position, another set of energy filaments goes through. Sorcerers feel that this new set of energy filaments cannot possibly give a view of the same world; that by definition that world has to be different from the world of everyday life. Since the assemblage point is not only the center where perception is assembled, but the center where interpretation of sensory data is accomplished, sorcerers feel that it will interpret the new influx of energy fields in very much the same terms in which it interprets the world of everyday life. The result of this new interpretation is the view of a world which is strangely similar to ours, and yet intrinsically different. Don Juan said that it is only the interpretation of the assemblage point which accounts for the sense of similarity, and that energetically, other worlds are as different from ours as they could possibly be.

In order to express this wondrous quality of the assemblage point and the possibilities of perception brought about by dreaming, a new syntax is needed; or perhaps the same syntax of our language could cover it if this experience made available to any one of us, and not merely to shaman initiates.

Another thing which was of tremendous interest to me, but which bewildered me to no end, was don Juan's statement that there was re-ally no procedure to speak of that would teach anyone how to dream; that more than anything else, dreaming was a penurious effort on the part of the practitioners to put themselves in contact with the indescribable perennial force that sorcerers call intent. Once this link was established, dreaming also mysteriously became established. Don Juan asserted that this linkage could be accomplished following any pattern that implied discipline.

However, what was of supreme importance for don Juan in order to accomplish the feat of dreaming was to follow the warriors' path, or the philosophical construct which sorcerers use to buttress their actions, wherever they happen to be, in this world, or in any other world besides this one. Following the warriors' path brought about a homogeneity of results in the absence of any precise patterning. The devices that sorcerers of ancient times used to aid the displacement of the assemblage point were the magical passes, which purported to give them the stability necessary to call forth dreaming attention, without which there is no possibility of dreaming in the fashion of the sorcerers of ancient Mexico without the aid of dreaming attention, practitioners could aspire at best, to have lucid dreams about phantasmagorical worlds, or even perhaps views of worlds that generate energy, but which made no sense whatsoever in the absence of an all-inclusive rationale that would properly categorize them.

## INNER SILENCE

The fifth topic, which is the culmination of the other four, and which was most avidly sought by the sorcerers of ancient Mexico, is inner silence. Inner silence was defined by don Juan as a natural state of human perception in which thoughts are blocked off and all of man's faculties function from a level of awareness which doesn't require the functioning of our daily cognitive system.

Don Juan associated inner silence with darkness because human perception, deprived of us habitual companion - the internal dialogue, that is to say, a silent verbal rendition of cognitive processes - falls into something that resembles a dark pit. The body functions as usual, but awareness becomes sharper. Decisions are instantaneous, and they seem to stem from a special sort of knowledge which is deprived of thought-verbalizations.

The shamans of ancient Mexico, who discovered and used the magical passes that are the core of Tensegrity, believed that human perception functioning in a condition of inner silence is capable of reaching indescribable levels. They even maintained that some of those levels of perception pertained to other worlds, which they believed to coexist with our own: worlds that are as inclusive as the one in which we live; worlds in which we could live or die, but that are inexplicable in terms of the linear paradigms that the habitual state of human perception employs for explaining the universe.

Inner silence, in the understanding of the sorcerers of don Juan's lineage, is the matrix for a gigantic step of evolution; the sorcerers of ancient Mexico called this gigantic step of evolution silent knowledge. Silent knowledge is a state of human awareness where knowing is automatic and instantaneous. Knowledge in this state is not the product of cerebral cogitations or logical inductions and deductions, or of generalizations based on similarities and dissimilarities. In silent knowledge, there is nothing a priori, nothing that could constitute a body of knowledge. For silent knowledge, everything is imminently now. Complex pieces of information can be grasped without any preliminaries.

Don Juan believed that silent knowledge was insinuated to early man, but that early man was not really the possessor of silent knowledge. He said that such an insinuation was infinitely stronger than what man experiences nowadays, where the bulk of knowledge, is the product of rote learning. He believed that although we have lost the insinuation, the avenue that leads to silent knowledge will always be open to man, and that it stems from the matrix of inner silence.

The attainment of inner silence is the prerequisite for all of the things that we have delineated in this elucidation. Don Juan taught that inner silence must be gained by a consistent pressure of discipline. He said that it has to be accrued, or that it has to be stored, bit by bit, second by second. In other words, one has to force oneself to be silent, if it is only for a few seconds. Don Juan claimed that if one is persistent, persistence overcomes habit, and thus, one arrives at a threshold of accrued seconds or minutes, a threshold which varies from person to per-son. If, for instance, the threshold of inner silence is for any given individual, ten minutes, once this mark is reached, inner silence happens by itself, by it's own accord, so to speak.

There is no possible way of knowing what our individual thresh-old might be. The only way to find out is by trying. This is for instance, what happened to me. Following don Juan's suggestion, I persisted in forcing myself to remain silent, and one day, while walking at UCLA from the anthropology department to the cafeteria, I reached my mysterious threshold. I knew I had reached it, because in one instant, I experienced something don Juan had described at length to me: he had called it stopping the world. In one instant, the world stopped being what it was, and for the first time in my life, I became conscious that I was seeing energy as it flows in the universe. I had to sit down on some brick steps. I knew that wherever I was sitting, there were some brick steps, but I knew it only intellectually, through memory, experientially. I was resting on energy, I was myself energy, and so was everything around me.

I realized then something which became the horror of my day, something that no one could explain to me except don Juan; I became conscious that although I was seeing for the first time in my life, I had been seeing energy as it flows in the universe all my life, but I had not been conscious of it. To get energy as it flows in the universe was not the novelty. The novelty was the query that arose with such fury that it made me surface back into the world of everyday life. "What has been keeping me from realizing that I have seen energy as it flows in the universe all my life?" I asked myself.

Don Juan explained it to me, making a distinction between general awareness and being deliberately conscious of something. He said that our human condition is to have this deep awareness, but that all the instances of this deep awareness are not at the level of being deliberately conscious of them. He said that inner silence had bridged the gap, as was it's function, and had allowed me to become conscious of things I had only been aware of in a general sense.

# THE WESTWOOD SERIES

The aim of this elucidation has been to present what don Juan Matus called the five concerns of the sorcerers of ancient Mexico. He presented to his disciples these five concerns: the magical passes, the center for decisions, the Recapitulation, dreaming, and inner silence in the order in which I have explain them. He said that this sequence was an arrangement made by those ancient sorcerers patterning them-selves on the understanding that they had of the world around them.

Don Juan explained that one of the astounding findings of those sorcerers was the existence of an agglutinating force that binds energy fields together into concrete, functional units. He said that those sorcerers described this force as a vibration, or a vibratory condition that permeated groups of energy fields and glued them together by saturating them. He stated that the magical passes fulfilled the function of this vibratory condition, and he aimed to saturate his disciples with them, following the same pattern used by the sorcerers of ancient times.

Don Juan said that when those sorcerers put together this shamanistic group of five concerns, they copied the patterning of energy that was revealed to them when they were capable of seeing energy as it flows in the universe. The binding force was the magical passes, and the magical passes were what permeated through the four remaining units and grouped them together into a functional unit: five energy fields glued together by one of them.

In the times of the sorcerers of ancient Mexico, the same magical passes, which were taught only to shaman initiates, and which saturated the other four units, are the same as the magical passes of Tensegrity. In a modern setting, these magical passes of Tensegrity can be used by anyone, and still agglutinate those four energy fields into a concrete and functional unit.

The group of magical passes that fulfill the function of agglutinating the other four units has been called The Westwood Series.

The Westwood Series is divided into four sections. The first section, and the most important, comprises magical passes that expedite decision-making. The second in order of importance is the one related to the Recapitulation. The third is related to dreaming, and the fourth is constituted of magical passes directly connected to the preparation tor inner silence.

The Westwood Series will be emphasized in all the workshops given in the present year, here in the United States and abroad.

## Magical Passes for Reinforcing the Decision-Making System

The goal of this group of magical passes is to activate the hollow spot in the form of a "V" at the base of the neck on the crest of the sternum with a special kind of energy, which shamans or ancient Mexico believed accounts for decision-making.

### 1. Bringing Energy to the "V" Spot with a Back and Forth Motion of the Arms

In this magical pass, the arms shoot out to the front at a forty-five degree angle with an exhalation. Then they are retrieved with an inhalation, with the shoulders raised high, in order to maintain the same degree of inclination. In the second facet of this movement, the arms are extended downward with an inhalation, and pulled back with an exhalation.

### 2. Bringing Energy to the "V" Spot with a Circular Motion of the Arms

Energy is brought to the center of decision by two circles drawn with the hands and arms, which are kept at the same forty-five-degree inclination. Full circles are drawn by moving the hands outward laterally, and the movements consist of two facets. In the first, air is exhaled as the circles are drawn, and air is inhaled as the arms retrieve backwards. In the second facet, air is inhaled as the hands and arms draw the circles and exhaled as the arms retrieve.

### 3. Bringing Energy to the Decision-Making Center With a Back and Forth motion with the Palms Turned Upwards

This movement is like the first one, and it is executed in exactly the same fashion, except that it is done with the palms of the hands turned upwards. The inhalations and exhalations are also exactly as in the first movement: air is exhaled as the hands and arms move forward at a forty-five degree level of inclination, and it is inhaled as the arms move backwards. Then air is inhaled as the hands and arms move downward and exhaled as the hands and arms retrieve.

### 4. Bringing Energy to the Decision-Making Center in a Circular Motion of the Arms with the Palms Turned Upwards

Again, this magical pass is exactly like the second, with the same two facets of inhalation and exhalation, but the two circles are drawn by the hands and arms with the palms of the hands turned upward. In the first facet, air is exhaled as the hands and arms move, and inhaled as the arms retrieve. In the second facet, air is inhaled as the hands and arms move, and exhaled as the arms move back towards the shoulders.

### 5. Bringing Energy to the "V" Spot from the Midsection of the Body

In this magical pass, the arms are bent at the elbows and kept high at the same line of the shoulders. The hands are held in a fist without touching. The fists are turned slightly upwards to get a better leverage to the arms, which move in a titter-totter fashion from right to left and left to right. The motion is not accomplished by moving the shoulders but by moving the midsection to the right and to the left and the right again, and so on. In order to stir up the energy that will go in the center of decisions for a count of twenty times.

### 6. Bringing Energy to the "V" Spot from the Area of the Shoulder Blades

The arms are bent, as in the previous movement, and they are heavily drawn towards the front. The right fist crosses over the left one. The bent elbows are pushed forward, extending the shoulder blades, one at a time, to the maximum. Energy is purported to be stirred at that level and transferred to the base of the neck at the front of the body.

### 7. Stirring Energy Around the "V" Spot with a Bent Wrist

Energy is stirred around the "V" spot with a gentle movement of each hand. Then it is projected out with a series of forceful blows delivered by the extended arms, one at a time, with the hands bent inward at the wrist.

### 8. Transferring Energy from the Solar Plexus to the "V" Spot

Energy is stirred twice around the solar plexus area with a circular motion of the each hand with the palm turned upwards, and it is projected out with the other arm, the hand striking edgewise.

### 9. Bringing Energy to the "V" Spot from the Knees

This pass consists of a series of singular movements, the first of which stirs energy around the center of decisions by striking it as if holding a whip that lashes at it with each hand. The whip moves twice around the head before it strikes out. Then, a deep inhalation is taken, and an exhalation follows by sliding the hands and arms downward until they hit the top of the knees. A deep inhalation is taken there, and the arms are raised with the left arm in the lead; they go over the head to the back of the neck. The breath is held as the top of the trunk moves three times from right to left and left to right. The air is exhaled. Then, as the arms and hands move back downward to the top of the knees.

A deep inhalation is taken, and then the air is exhaled as the arms are crossed at the wrists and raised to the level of the "v" spot. The left arm is closer to the body. This inhalation and exhalation is repeated two more times. The sorcerers who discovered this pass used the exhalations to ensure this transfer of energy.

The next group of three magical passes purports to transfer energy, which belongs only to the center of decisions, from the frontal edge of the luminous sphere, where it has been accumulated over the years, to the back, and then from the back of the luminous sphere to the front. This transferred energy is believed to go through the "v" spot, which acts as a filter, utilizing only the energy that is proper to it and discarding the rest.

It is of interest to note here that, because of this selective process of the "V" spot, it is essential to perform this series of passes as many times as possible.

### 10. Energy Going through the "V" Spot from the Front to the Back and from the Back to the front with Two Blows

This magical pass begins with a deep inhalation; then the air is exhaled slowly as the left arm strikes out at the level of the solar plexus with the palm of the hand turned upward. Energy is crabbed there with a quick clasp of the hand. The hand moves back as if to strike with a backhand blow. The exhalation ends as the hand opens, releasing the clasped energy.

A deep inhalation is taken. The energy is tapped ten times with the palm of the open hand as the exhalation slowly begins. Then the energy is clasped before the arm moves to the front and ends up in front of the "v" spot, in a punch-like movement. The hand opens, re-leasing the energy. The arm moves backward and then over the head and strikes the energy with the palm as if the energy were a bubble that breaks with the force of the blow, right in front of the decision-making center; the exhalation ends there.

The same movement is repeated with the right arm.

### 11. Transferring Energy from the Front to the Back and From the Back to the Front with a Hook of the Arm

This magical pass begins also with a deep inhalation. Then the air is slowly exhaled as the left arm moves forward with the palm of the hand turned upward. Energy is quickly grasped. The hand now in a fist, rotates until the back of the hand is upward and strikes over the shoulder to the back. The hand opens to release the trapped energy and the exhalation ends.

A deep inhalation is taken. Then, a slow exhalation begins as the hand, bent downward, scoops the energy three limes, as if to roll it into a ball. The ball is tossed upward, and quickly grabbed with the hand bent at the wrist like a hook. The arm moves to the front to the right shoulder and strikes forward as if holding the ball of energy on the bent wrist, between the hand and the forearm. The hand then opens to release the trapped ball of energy, and the arm moves back and over the head and strikes it with the palm, with great force, in order to break the ball of energy right in front of the decision making center. The exhalation ends as the whole body shakes with the force of the strike.

The same movement is repeated with the other arm.

### 12. Transferring Energy from the Front to the Back and the Back to the Front with Three Blows

This magical pass also begins with a deep inhalation. A slow exhalation follows as the left arm strikes forward with the open hand, palm turned upwards. Energy is quickly clasped, and the arm retrieves as if to deliver an elbow blow to the back. Then it moves laterally to the right and delivers a side punch. The arm is moved to the left side and to the back, delivering the third blow as if with the back hand. The exhalation ends as the hand opens and releases the trapped energy.

A deep inhalation is taken. A slow exhalation follows as the hand with a bent wrist scoops the energy three times. This energy is grabbed with a blow-like grasp. The arm moves to the front at the level of the decision-making center in a swing-like punch. It draws a half circle in front of the body and moves back to come over the shoulder and deliver a back-fist blow right at the level of the center for decisions. The exhalation ends as the left hand moves to the back over the shoulders and the head to strike the released energy with an open palm.

Repeat the same movement with the other arm.

## Magical Passes for Aiding the Recapitulation

The recapitulation is intimately related to breathing. Sorcerers affirm that breath, being a magical, life-sustaining function, also helps to expedite the Recapitulation. The core of the magical passes that aid the recapitulation is breath.

The recapitulation also affects the energy body because it calls all the forces available. The energy body is essential for the recapitulation

### 1. Forging the Trunk of the Energy Body

The trunk of the energy body is forged with three strikes delivered with the palms of the hands. The first strike defines the shoulders of the energy body. The hands are held at the level of the ears with the palms facing outward, and from that position they strike forward at the level of the shoulders, as if they were striking the shoulders of a well developed body. The hands move then back to their original position around the ears, with the palms facing onward, and strike the mid-trunk of that imaginary body at the level of the chest. The second strike is not as wide as the first one, and the third strike is much narrower, because- it purports to strike the waistline of a triangular shaped trunk.

### 2. Slapping the Energy Body

This magical pass is purported to define the arms and forearms, especially the hands, of the energy body. The left and the right hands come down from above the head. The palm of each hand bears down, creating a current of energy that defines each arm, forearm, and hand of the energy body. The left arm hits across the body to strike the left arm of the energy body and then the right arm does the same: It hits across the body to strike the right arm of the energy body.

### 3. Spreading the Energy Body Laterally

This magical pass delineates the width of the energy body as a conglomerate of energy fields. The shamans that lived in Mexico in ancient times asserted that the energy body in It's natural form was a bit looser than the physical body "seen" as a luminous sphere, or a conglomerate of energy fields. While the physical body as a luminous sphere has super-defined boundaries, the energy body lacks that consistency. "Spreading the Energy Body Laterally" is purported to give it defined boundaries.

### 4. Establishing the Core of the Energy Body

The sorcerers of don Juan's lineage maintained that the human body "seen" as a conglomerate of energy fields, does have not only super-defined boundaries, but a core of compact luminosity, which is known by sorcerers as "the band of man." or the energy fields with which man is most familiar. The idea was that within the luminous sphere, which is also the totality of man, there are areas of energy unknown to our familiar level of awareness. Those are the energy fields that are distant from this "band of man."

To execute this magical pass the forearms are held in a perfectly vertical position at the level of the chest, with the elbows kept in close to the body, at the width of the trunk. The wrists are snapped back gently, and then forward with great force, without moving the forearms.

### 5. Forging the Heels and the Calves of the Energy Body

The left loot is held in front of the body with the heel raised in mid-calf. The heel is turned out to a position perpendicular to the other leg. Then the left heel strikes to the right as if a kick with the heel were being delivered.

The same movement is executed with the right heel.

### 6. Forging the Knees of the Energy Body

In this magical pass, the total weight of the body is placed on one foot. This pass begins with the bent knee raised to the level of the hips, if possible, or even higher. Three swings are executed, moving the knee as if drawing an inward circle.

The same movement is repeated with the right leg, and then it is repeated again with each leg, but this time the knee draws an outward circle. The supporting leg stands with the knee slightly bent forward.

### 7. Forging the Thighs of the Energy Body

The body bends slightly at the knees as the hands go down the thighs. The hands stop on top of the kneecaps, and then they are pulled back on the thighs with an inhalation, as if they were dragging the energy. There is a slight quality of a claw to each hand.

The movement is repeated, exhaling as the knees bend, and the hands go down to the top of the kneecap, and inhaling as they are pulled back.

### 8. Stirring Up the Personal History by Making it Flexible

This magical pass stretches the hamstring and relaxes it by bringing each leg, one at a time, bent at the knee, to strike the buttocks with a gentle tap of the heel. The left heel strikes the left buttock, the right heel strikes the right.

### 9. Stirring Up the Personal History with the Heel to the Ground by Taping it Twenty Times

The right leg is set with the foot aligned with the shoulders. The left foot is placed as far as possible in front of the body as the body almost sits on the right leg. The tension and contraction of the right leg, are maximum. The left leg kicks the ground twenty times with the heel.

The same movement is executed with the other leg.

### 10. Stirring Up the Personal History with the Heel to the Ground by Holding it for a Count of Twenty

The same movement is executed in this pass, but instead of tap-ping with the heel, the body is kept at an even tension by holding that stretch for a count of twenty.

The same Movement is executed with the other leg.

The following four magical passes are so intimately joined to breathing that they have to be done sparingly - once a day.

### 11. The Recapitulation Wings

This magical pass begins with a deep inhalation as both forearms are raised to the level of the shoulders, with the hands at the level of the ears. The forearms are kept vertical and equidistant from each other. An exhalation follows as the forearms are pulled back as far as possible without slanting them in any direction. A deep inhalation follows, and the left arm draws a semi-circle that starts at the level of the shoulder and goes forward as far as the arm can be extended and then laterally, drawing a semi-circle to the back as far as it can be extended. The arm makes a curve at the end of this extension and goes back to the front, and then to it's initial resting position by the side of the body.

The same movement is repeated by the other arm. Both arms draw this wing-like semi-circle, within the duration of a long exhalation. This movement ends with a deep abdominal breath.

### 12. The Window of Recapitulation

The first part of this magical pass is exactly like the preceding one; a deep breath is taken with the hands raised to the ear level. The fore-arms maintain a perfect verticality. This is followed by a long exhalation as the arms are pulled backwards. A deep inhalation is taken as the elbows are raised at the level of the eyes, and the arms make an opening in front of the eyes by overlapping the hands, with the wrists bent and the fingers pointing upwards. The hands create in this fashion an opening in front of the eyes that looks like a small window, through which, sorcerers affirm a practitioner can peer into infinity. A deep exhalation follows as the arms are extended laterally and the hands are straightened out and kept at the same level of the elbows.

In this magical pass, the window of recapitulation is made holding the left arm closer to the body and the right arm is placed in front of the left.

### 13. The Five Deep Breaths

The beginning of this magical pass is exactly like the other two. At the second inhalation, the arms go down and cross at the level of the knees, as the practitioner adopts a semi-squat position. The hands grab the part underneath the knees. The index and middle finger are placed against the tendon at the back of the knee and the thumb is wrapped around the inner part of the knee. The exhalation ends then, and a deep inhalation is taken, pressing the tendon.

Sorcerers maintain that this is the only position in which a practitioner can take deep breaths that fill the top as well as the lower part of the lungs by pushing the diaphragm downwards. Five breaths are taken in this fashion.

### 14. Drawing Energy from our Fringe of Awareness

The belief of sorcerers is that the only glow of awareness left in us is at the bottom of the luminous sphere that we are, a fringe that ex-tends in a circle and reaches the level of the toes. The first part of this magical pass, as it is with this series of four, is the same as the other three. At the second Inhalation, the arms go down and the arms wrap around the inside of the calves as the practitioner adopts a squatting position. The backs of the hands rest on top of the toes, and in this fashion, three deep inhalations and three deep exhalations are taken. After the last exhalation, the body straightens as a deep inhalation is taken to finish the magical pass.

## Magical Passes that Aid Dreaming

Dreaming has to do exclusively with the displacement of the assemblage point. The magical passes that the sorcerers of ancient Mexico used to aid their dreaming are purported to displace the assemblage point by hurling it onward.

### 1. Getting the Assemblage Point Loose with a Movement that Places the Outer Edge of the Hand in Front of the Face

The left arm moves in front of the face in an upward thrust. The palm is turned until the outer edge of the hand is facing inward. The fingers are held together.

This magical pass is executed by each arm in succession for as many times as the practitioner desires. Also, the knees are kept bent for greater stability and thrusting force.

### 2. Forcing the Assemblage Point to Drop Down

The body is kept in a totally vertical position. The knees are straight, and the hamstrings as tight as possible, the left arm is placed at the back, a few inches, away from the body, the palm facing downward with a pronounced bend of the wrist, and the fingers pointing backward. The right arm is placed in front in the same position, palm facing downward, with a pronounced bend of the wrist, the fingers pointing forward.

The head turns in the direction of the arm that is kept at the back. The same movement is repeated with the other arm.

### 3. Enticing the Assemblage Point to Drop by Drawing Energy from the Adrenals and Transferring it to the Front

This magical pass starts by placing the left arm behind the body with the hand held like a claw at the kidney level. The fingers are held tightly together as the hand drags across the kidney area from right to left.

Then the right arm executes the same movement, while the left arm, with the fingers straight, smears the energy from the kidney area across the stomach area, from right to left. This magical pass is repeat-ed in succession with each arm in succession as many times as the practitioner desires. The knees are kept bent for greater stability and force.

### 4. Playing Out the "A" and "B" Types of Energy

The sorcerers believe that everything in the universe is composed of dual forces, and that we are subjected to that duality in every aspect of our lives, At the level of energy, they believe that there are two forces at play. Modern sorcerers call them the "A" and "B" forces, or the 1 and 2 forces, or the left and right. Don Juan Matus called it, when he taught this to his disciples, the "A" and "B" forces. He said that the "A" force is what is employed ordinarily in our daily affairs, and he represented it by a straight vertical line. The "B" force, he said, is ordinarily an obscure force that rarely enters into action: It is kept lying down. He represented it with a horizontal line drawn to the left of the vertical one, at it's base, making in this fashion a reversed capital letter "L".

He said that sorcerers were beings which had succeeded in turning the force "B" which is ordinarily lying down, horizontally, out of use, into an active vertical line. And consequently, they succeeded in pulling force "A" to rest. He represented this process by drawing a horizontal line at the base of the vertical one, to it's right, and having, as a result, a capital letter "L".

This process is depicted in the magical pass with the forearms. It starts with the right forearm raised in front of the body, with the elbow at the level of the shoulders, and the left arm bent at the elbow, with the back of the hand underneath the right elbow. The pressure of both arms is a downward pressure, and this is balanced by an upward thrust, as If two forces were simultaneously acting on the two arms. They are kept under this tension for a count of twenty.

Then the same movement is executed by reversing the position of the arms.

### 5. Rolling Energy from the Assemblage Point and Projecting it Out with a Fist

The arms are kept at the shoulder level with the elbows bent. The hands overlap each other, and they are turned with the palms down. A circle is made with the hands rotating around each other; the movement is inward, toward the face. They rotate three times around each other, then the left arm is thrust forward with the hand in a fist, as if to strike an invisible target. Three more circles are drawn with each hand, and the right arm strikes the same target, with the hand in a fist.

### 6. Hurling the Assemblage Point Like a Knife over the Shoulder

This magical pass is an actual attempt to hurl the assemblage point, in order to displace it from it's habitual position. The practitioner holds the assemblage point as if it were a knife. The left hand reaches back, grabs the assemblage point and hurls it forward like a knife, then the right hand does the same movement. Sorcerers affirm that some-thing in the intent of hurling the assemblage point causes a profound effect towards the actual displacement of the assemblage point. The knees are kept bent for hurling stability. This pass is done as many times as the practitioner desires.

7. Hurling the Assemblage Point Like a Knife from the Back by the Waist

The knees are kept bent as the body leans forward. Then the left hand grabs the assemblage point and hurls it forward with a quick slashing movement of the wrist. The same movement is repeated with the right hand. This pass is done as many times as the practitioner desires.

8. Hurling the Assemblage Point Like a Disk from the Shoulder

This pass begins with a slow rotation of the body. The right arm moves to the left side of the left leg, then the left arm moves to the right side of the right leg, then the right arm moves again to the left side of the left leg. The left hand reaches back, grabs the assemblage point, takes it to the right shoulder and hurls it forward like a disk.

The legs are kept bent slightly at the knees and a great pressure is asserted at the back of the thighs. The right arm sticks out behind the body to give stability to the act of hurling a disk. This position is held for a count of twenty.

The same movement is repeated with the other arm.

9, Hurling the Assemblage Like a Ball Above the Head

The left hand moves back quickly and grabs the assemblage point, rotates in a big circle above the head and tosses the assemblage point forward from a place above the head.

This movement is repeated with the right hand. The knees are kept bent for this pass.

## Magical Passes that Aid the Attainment of Inner Silence

Inner silence was described by don Juan Matus as a condition of human perception in which cognition functions without it's seemingly perennial companion: the Internal dialogue. Inner silence was considered by don Juan and all the sorcerers of his lineage as the essential quality of evolved perception.

1. Drawing Two Half Circles with Each Foot

The total weight of the body is on the right leg as the left foot draws two semi-circles, starting from a point a half step in front of the body. It moves laterally to draw a semi-circle that ends by the heel of the right foot, and then another one that ends half a step behind the right body.

The same movement is executed with the right foot after the whole weight of the body is transferred to the left leg. The knee of the leg that supports the weight is bent for strength and stability. The practitioner breathes normally.

### 2. Drawing a Hall Moon with Each Foot

This magical pass starts with the left leg drawing a semi-circle around the body from the front to the back, while, the weight of the body is kept on the right leg, with the knee slightly bent.

The same movement is executed with the right leg. The practitioner breathes normally.

### 3. The Scarecrow in the Wind with the Arms Down

The arms are kept extended laterally at the level of the shoulders with the elbows bent and the forearms dangling downward. The fore-arms swing freely from side to side, as if moved by the wind alone for a count of twenty. The forearms and the wrists are kept straight and vertical. The knees are locked.

### 4. The Scarecrow in the Wind with the Arms Up

Just as in the preceding movement, the arms are extended later-ally at the level of the shoulders, with the forearms turned upward, bent at the elbow. The forearms and wrists are kept straight and vertical. Then they swing freely downward and upward again, for a count of twenty times. The knees are locked lightly.

### 5. Pushing Energy Backwards with the Full Arm

The two arms are fully extended backwards as high as possible, holding the hands in a fist position. The knees are locked, and the trunk bends slightly forward as the air is exhaled. Then the arms are brought forward by bending the elbows, but holding the forearms tight against the body, as high as possible. This movement is repeated twenty times, and then the breathing is reversed. Instead of exhaling as the arms are pulled backwards, an inhalation is taken. An exhalation follows as the elbows are bent, and the forearm is brought upward against the axilla.

### 6. Pivoting the Forearm

The arms are held in front of the body with the elbows bent and the forearms upward. Each hand is bent at the wrist, resembling the head of a bird, which is at the eye level. Keeping the elbows vertical and straight, the hands are flipped back and forth, pivoting on the forearms. The knees are kept bent for stability and strength.

### 7. Moving Energy in a Ripple

The knees are kept bent, and the trunk stoops over. The two arms are kept dangling at the side. The left arm moves forward with three ripples, cuts across the body in a sickle shape from left to right and then from right to left and moves back again to the side of the body with three ripples.

This movement is repeated twenty times with each arm.

### 8. The "T" Energy of the Hands

The two arms are hold at right angles right in front of the solar plexus, making the shape of a letter "T". The left arm is the top of the letter "T" with the palm turned upward. The right arm is the bar of the letter "T" with the palm turned downward, and then the hands flip back and forth with a considerable force twenty times.

This same movement is executed twenty times, placing the right arm as the top of the letter "T".

### 9. Pressing the Thumb Against the Curled-Up Finger

The forearms, bent at the elbows, are held right in front of the body in a perfectly horizontal position, maintaining the width of the body. The fingers are curled in a loose fist, and the thumb is held straight, crawled on the curled index. An intermittent pressure is exert-ed between the thumb against left index finger and the curled fingers against the palm of the hand. They contract and relax, spreading the impulse to the arms. The knees are kept bent for stability.

### 10. Drawing an Acute Angle with the Arms Between the Legs

In this magical pass, the knees are kept locked, with the ham-strings as tight as possible. The trunk is bent forward, with the head almost at the level of the knees. The arms dangle in front and moving back and forth, draw an acute angle, with it's vertex between the legs. This movement is repeated twenty times.

### 11. Drawing an Acute Angle with the Arms in Front of the Face

In this magical pass, the knees are kept locked, with the ham-strings as tight as possible. The trunk is bent forward, with the head almost at the level of the knees. The arms dangle in front of the body and, moving back and forth, draw an acute angle, with it's vertex in front of the knees. This movement is also repeated twenty times.

### 12. Drawing a Circle of Energy Between the Legs and in Front of the Body

In this magical pass, the knees are kept locked, with the ham-strings as tight as possible. The trunk is bent forward, with the head almost at the level of the knees. The arms dangle in front of the body and the left hand crosses and rests in front of the right one, as the two arms swing back between the legs. Then they are pushed out and draw two outward circles that end at a position away from the body in front of the knees and two inward circles that end in a position between the legs. While drawing the four circles the left wrist is kept on top of the right one.

This movement is repeated ten times. Then the right wrist is made to rest on top of the left one, and four circles are drawn again in the same fashion. This movement is also repeated ten times.

### 13. Three fingers on the floor

The arms move above the head with a deep inhalation; then, as the air is exhaled, the arms are brought down all the way to the floor, keeping the knees locked and the hamstrings as tight as possible. The index and middle fingers of each hand touch the floor a foot in front of the body, and then the thumb is also brought to rest on the floor. A deep inhalation is taken as the body slowly straightens.

### 14. The Knuckles on the Toes

The arms move above the head with a deep inhalation; then, as the air is exhaled, the arms are brought down all the way to the floor, keeping the knees locked and the hamstrings as tight as possible. The knuckles are brought to rest on top of the toes as the exhalation ends. A deep inhalation is taken as the body straightens.

### 15. Drawing Energy from the Floor with the Breath

A deep inhalation is taken as the arms are raised above the head; the knees are kept bent; the trunk turns to the left, and bends down as far as possible. The hands, with the palms down, come to rest around the left fool with the right hand in front and the left hand behind; they move back and forth five times as the exhalation ends. A deep inhalation is taken then, and the body straightens; the hands move over the head. The trunk turns in the right, and the exhalation begins as it bends down as far as possible. The exhalation ends after the hands move back and forth five times. Another deep breath is taken then, and the body straightens up; the arms move above the head, and then they come down as the air is exhaled.

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A Journal of Applied Hermeneutics

READERS OF INFINITY

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# A Journal of Applied Hermeneutics - Number 1, Volume 1

## THE WARRIORS' WAY - Number 1, **PERCEPTOR**

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Los Angeles, January, 1996

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## WHAT IS HERMENEUTICS ?

Hermeneutics was first a method for interpreting sacred texts, essentially Biblical texts. Later, it covered the interpretation of literary texts and texts in general, and finally as it stand today, it is a philosophical method that deals with the interpretation of the historical, social, psychological, etc., aspects of our world.

It is called a method because it is a manner or mode, a systematic way to approach a topic of inquiry. Hermeneutics as a philosophical method seeks to examine the bases that structure the different aspects of our world and to lay bare their presuppositions.

What we propose to do in this journal of applied hermeneutics is to take the position delineated by don Juan Matus, a Yaqui Indian sorcerer from Mexico, and to describe the way which he and other sorcerers like himself interpreted the social, historical, psychological, etc., aspects of their world.

Thus our intention to emphasize the sorcerers' idea of practicality as opposed to the purely abstract reflection of a philosophical method; hence, our proposal to call it a journal of applied hermeneutics.

## QUERIES ABOUT THE WARRIORS' WAY

### WHO ARE THE CHACMOOLS ?

One of the questions that has been asked with remarkable insistence has to do with the three persons who have been teaching the seminars and workshops so far : Kylie Lundahl, Reni Murez and Nyei Murez. They have been called "the chacmools." This is a term taken from the name given to some massive human figures found in the pyramids of Tula and Yucatan in Mexico. Archaeologists have classified those massive figures of reclining men as incense burners set at the doors of the pyramids, but don Juan Matus believed that they were representations of warrior guardians that protected the pyramids as sites of power.

These figures were first encountered in the Mayan town of Chacmool, hence the name "chacmool." The three persons mentioned above fit into this general category of warrior guardian. However, it is erroneous to believe that the three of them by themselves constitute this category of warrior. The three of them are the ones on which has rested, so far, the responsibility of sustaining the idea of a warrior guardian. Any one of us who accepts the responsibility of guarding becomes, ipso facto, a chacmool. Carlos Castaneda, as the nominal head of our enterprise of freedom, is the chacmool of all of us, and by the same measure, so is Carol Tiggs.

On Kylie Lundahl, Reni Murez and Nyei Murez falls, nevertheless, the burden of having been the first ones to apply to daily living some movements called magical passes discovered and developed by shamans who lived in Mexico in ancient times ; on these three women falls also the joy and the honor of having brought those magical passes to the public in general. And the act of bringing them out should have liberated them; it should have further cut their ties with the self-importance that rules the acts of everyday life. Ideally, Tensegrity should bring freedom to it's practitioners, and the three chacmools known to the participants in our seminars and workshops should profit from this situation. However, the novelty of our bringing out for public consumption something so secretive as the magical passes has been a pitfall we had no means to anticipate.

After having said thank you and good-bye, in the seminar and workshop of December 9 and 10 of 1995, to their audience, the three of them will head for another strata of the multi-leveled affair that is the warriors' path. They will part to test their discipline against indeterminable odds.

## THE WARRIORS' WAY VIEWED AS A PHILOSOPHICAL-PRACTICAL PARADIGM

### WE ARE PERCEPTORS.

One premise of the warriors' way will be discussed in every one of our issues.

WE ARE PERCEPTORS. This is the first premise o the warriors' way, according to the form in which don Juan Matus taught it to his disciples. It seems to be a tautological statement: the reassertion of the obvious; something like saying a bald man is one that doesn't have hair, but it is not tautology, what we have here. In the sorcerers' world, it refers to the fact that we are organisms whose basic orientation is perceiving. We are perceptors, and that, according to sorcerers, is the only source from which we could establish our stability and obtain our orientation in the world.

Don Juan Matus told his disciples that human being as organisms perform a stupendous maneuver which, unfortunately, gives perception a false front; they take the influx of sheer energy and turn it into sensory data, which they interpret following a strict system of interpretation which sorcerers call the human form. This magical act of interpreting pure energy gives rise to the false front: the peculiar conviction on our part that our interpretation s stem is all that exists. Don Juan explained that a tree as we know tree is more interpretation than perception. He said that for us to deal with tree, all we need is a cursory glance that tells us hardly anything. The rest is a phenomena which he described as the calling of intent: the intent of tree, that is to say, the interpretation of sensory data pertaining to this specific phenomena that we call tree.

And just like this example, the whole world for us is composed of an endless repertoire of interpretations where our senses play a minimal role. In other words, only our visual sense touches the energy influx which is the universe, and it does so only minimally. Sorcerers maintain that the majority of our perceptual activity is interpretation ; they maintain that human beings are the kind of organisms that need a minimal input of sheer perception in order to create their world or, that they perceive only enough to serve their interpretation system. To assert that we are perceptors is an attempt on the part of sorcerers to push us back to our origin; to push us back to what should be our original stand : perceiving.

## THE TENSEGRITY LOG

### WHAT IS TENSEGRITY?

Another question that has been asked consistently is "What is Tensegrity ?" Tensegrity is the modernized version of some movements called "magical passes" developed by Indian shamans who lived in Mexico in times prior to the Spanish Conquest.

"Times prior to the Spanish Conquest" is a term used by don Juan Matus, a Mexican Indian sorcerer who introduced Carlos Castaneda, Carol Tiggs, Florinda Donner-Grau and Taisha Abelar to the cognitive world of shamans who lived in Mexico, according to Don Juan, between 7000 and 10000 years ago.

Don Juan explained to his four disciples that those shamans, or sorcerers, as he called them, discovered through practices that he could not fathom, that it is possible for human beings to perceive energy directly as it flows in the universe. In other words, those sorcerers maintained, according to don Juan, that any one of us can do away, for a moment, with our system of turning energy inflow into sensory data pertinent to the kind of organism that we are (in our case, we are apes). Turning the inflow of energy into sensory data creates, sorcerers affirm, a system of interpretation that turns the flowing energy of the universe into the world of everyday life that we know.

Don Juan further explained that once those sorcerers of ancient times had established the validity of perceiving energy directly, which they called seeing, they proceeded to refine it by applying it to themselves, meaning that they perceived one another, whenever they wanted it, as a conglomerate of energy fields. Human beings perceived in such a fashion appear to the seer as gigantic luminous spheres. The size of these luminous spheres is the breadth of the extended arms.

When human beings are perceived as conglomerates of energy fields, a point of intense luminosity can be perceived at the height of the shoulder blades an arm's length away from them, on the back. The seers of ancient times who discovered this point of luminosity called it "the assemblage point," because they concluded that it is there that perception is assembled. They noticed, aided by their seeing, that on that spot of luminosity, the location of which is homogeneous for mankind, converge zillions of energy fields in the form of luminous filaments which constitute the universe at large. Upon converging there, they become sensory data, which is utilizable by human beings as organisms. This utilization of energy turned into sensory data was regarded by those sorcerers as an act of pure magic : energy at large transformed by the assemblage point into a veritable, all-inclusive world in which human beings as organisms can live and die. The act of transforming the inflow of pure energy into the perceivable world was attributed by those sorcerers to a system of interpretation. Their shattering conclusion, shattering to them, of course, and perhaps to some of us who have the energy to be attentive, was that the assemblage point was not only the spot where perception was assembled by turning the inflow of pure energy into sensory data, but the spot where the interpretation of sensory data took place.

Their next shattering observation was that the assemblage point is displaced in a very natural and unobtrusive way out of it's habitual position during sleep. They found out that the greater the displacement, the more bizarre the dreams that accompany it. From these seeing observations, those sorcerers jumped to the pragmatic action of the volitional displacement of the assemblage point. And they called their concluding results the art of dreaming.

This art was defined by those sorcerers as the pragmatic utilization of ordinary dreams to create an entrance into other worlds by the act of displacing the assemblage point at will and maintaining that new position, also at will. The observations of those sorcerers upon practicing the art of dreaming were a mixture of reason and seeing energy directly as it flows in the universe. They realized that at it's habitual position, the assemblage point is the spot where converges a given, minuscule portion of the energy filaments that make up the universe, but if the assemblage point changes location, within the luminous egg, a different minuscule portion of energy fields converges on it, giving as a result a new inflow of sensory data : energy fields different from the habitual ones are turned into sensory data, and those different energy fields are interpreted as a different world.

The art of dreaming became for those sorcerers their most absorbing practice. In the course of that practice, they experienced unequaled states of physical prowess and well-being, and in their effort to replicate those states in their hours of vigil, they found out that they were able to repeat them following certain movements of the body. Their efforts culminated in the discovery and development of a great number of such movements, which they called magical passes.

The magical passes of those sorcerers of Mexican antiquity became their most prized possession. They surrounded them with rituals and mystery and taught them only to their initiates in the midst of tremendous secrecy. This was the manner in which don Juan Matus taught them to his disciples. His disciples, being the last link of his lineage, came to the unanimous conclusion that any further secrecy about the magical passes was counter to the interest that they had in making don Juan's world available to their fellow men. They decided, therefore, to rescue the magical passes from their obscure state. They created in this fashion, Tensegrity, which is a term proper to architecture that means "the property of skeleton structures that employ continuous tension members and discontinuous compression members in such a way that each member operates with the maximum efficiency and economy."

This is a most appropriate name because it is a mixture of two terms: tension and integrity ; terms which connote the two driving forces of the magical passes.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cleargreen announces that it's first seminar in 1996 will be given on February 9, 10, and 11 in San Francisco. The theme of this seminar will be Intentionality. Intentionality is a theme of philosophical discourse which pertains to the tacit act of filling out the empty space, left by direct sensory perception. In other words, what is called Intentionality is the act of enriching the observable phenomena by an act that calls intention as it's main driving force. When we try to explain intentionality we are trying deliberately to stay away from the standard philosophical definitions of it. We want a pragmatic slant to whatever we do. There is an entry in the discipline of philosophy called intentionality ; and there is an entry in the sorcerers' discipline which is named calling intent. We believe that the philosophers' intentionality in an intuitive version of the pragmatic sorcerers' calling of intent. We want to explore this difference/similarity to the course of this seminar. The magical passes taught in this workshop have been singled out exclusively because of their effects in producing the internal quietness necessary for the calling of intent. The magical passes will be taught by a new formation of warrior guardians called the PATHFINDERS.

The second seminar sponsored by Cleargreen, Incorporated in 1996 will be given on March I, 2, and 3 in Los Angeles. The theme of the workshop and seminar will be The Female Energy Body. Efforts are going to be geared towards explaining certain basic sorcerers propositions presented by don Juan Matus to his three female disciples : Carol Tiggs, Florinda Donner-Grau and Taisha Abelar. The magical passes which will be taught in the workshop will be in the exclusive realm of the female body. Their stated purpose is the enhancement of faculties proper to women only ; faculties which, if exercised, lead women to a state of profound quietude and alertness at the same time. The magical passes will be taught by don Juan's three female disciples : Carol Tiggs, Florinda Donner-Grau and Taisha Abelar, and by the blue scout. Each one of them will teach an original and unadulterated magical pass taught to them personally. They will each be assisted by a warrior guardian most closely related to them who will show the same pass, but in a more generic form. The lectures will be given by Carlos Castaneda, Carol Tiggs, Florinda Donner-Grau, Taisha Abelar, and the blue scout, interspersed with the performance of the magical passes.

Another issue of interest for our readers this month is the release of our new video on Tensegrity, called Redistributing Dispersed Energy. This video is now available in both VHS and PAL formats. Volume 1 of Tensegrity, Twelve Basic Movements to Gather Energy and Promote Well-Being. is also available now in PAL format. The cost of each video is $29.95, including shipping and handling in the United States. Canada and Mexico, add $5. All other countries add $8. To order, please call (800) 490-3020 or (214) 243-6809. The Spanish language domestic edition of The Art of Dreaming -- El Arte de Ensonar -- will appear in the United States, published by Harper Collins this month.

All articles in this issue of The Warriors' Way, were written by Carlos Castaneda and edited by Nyei Murez. Journal design by Elaby Gaethen. To subscribe to The Warriors' Way please send a check, money order, or major credit card number with expiration date to Cleargreen, Incorporated. 11901 Santa Monica Boulevard, Suite 599. Los Angeles, California 90025 Attn. : The Warriors' Way Subscription Department. Annual Subscription : $24 for twelve copies plus a special issue. Single Copies : $2.50. Outside North America : $30 for annual subscription,

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## THE WARRIORS' WAY - Number 2, INCEPTION

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WHAT ARE WARRIOR GUARDIANS?

## AUTHOR’S NOTE

For purposes of elucidation, it is necessary that language be used in this journal in it's fullest permissible scope. Thus, philosophical discourse will be rendered as formally as it demands. Sorcerers' discourse, on the other hand, will be rendered as it was stated. The fullest permissible scope of language enters into play in this instance.

## WHAT IS INTENTIONALITY ?

In the first issue of this journal, intentionality was defined as "the tacit act of filling out the empty spaces left by direct sensory perception, or the act of enriching the observable phenomena by means of intention." This definition is an attempt at staying away from the standard philosophical explanations of intentionality. The concept of intentionality is of key importance in elucidating the themes of sorcery, as bona fide topics for philosophical discourse. The slant proposed for this journal -- applied hermeneutics -- is expressed through the revision and reinterpretation of themes pertinent to the discipline of philosophy ; themes which are congruous with other themes pertinent to the discipline of sorcery.

In the discipline of philosophy, intentionality is a term first used by the Scholastics in the Middle Ages to define, in terms of natural and unnatural motion, the intent of God in relation to his creation and the free will of man to choose or reject a virtuous life; Scholastics were Western European scholars who developed a system of theological and philosophical teachings based on the authority of the church fathers and of Aristotle and his commentators.

The term intentionality was restructured in the late 19th century by Franz Brentano, a German philosopher, whose main concern was to find a characteristic which separates mental from physical phenomena. He said, "Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional or the mental inexistence of an object, and what we would like to call the reference to a content, the directness toward an object, which in this context is not to be understood as something real. In the representation, something is represented, in the judgment, something is acknowledged or rejected, in the desiring, something is desired. This intentional inexistence is peculiar alone to mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon shows anything like it. And thus, we can define mental phenomena by saying that such phenomena contain objects in themselves byway of intentionality."

Brentano's understanding was that it is the property of all mental phenomena to contain objects as inexistents, combined with the property of referring to those objects. Therefore, for him, only mental phenomena encase intentionality. Thus, intentionality becomes the irreducible feature of mental phenomena. He argued that since no physical phenomena could encase intentionality, the mental (the mind) cannot stem from the brain.

In the discipline of sorcery, there is an entry called calling intent. It refers to the definition of intentionality that was given in this journal: "the tacit act of filling out the empty spaces left by direct sensory perception, or the act of enriching the observable phenomena by means of intention." Sorcerers maintain, as Brentano intuited, that the act of intending is not in the realm of the physical ; that is to say, it is not part of the physicality of the brain or any other organ. Intent, for sorcerers, transcends the world we know. It is something like an energetic wave, a beam of energy which attaches itself to us.

## QUERIES ABOUT THE WARRIORS' WAY

### WHEN AM I GOING TO SEE?

“I have been doing Tensegrity steadily, and I have been recapitulating as much as I can. What's next?”

To see energy as it flows in the universe has been the primary goal of sorcerers since the beginning of their quest. For thousands of years, according to don Juan, warriors have endeavored to break the effect of our interpretation system and be able to perceive energy directly. In order to accomplish this, they developed, over the millennia, very exigent steps. We don't want to call them "praxes" or "procedures," but rather, "maneuvers." The warriors' way, in this sense, is a sustained maneuver designed to buttress warriors so they might fulfill the goal of seeing energy directly.

As the various premises of the warriors' way are discussed in each issue of this journal in the section called The Warriors' Way Viewed as a Philosophical-Practical Paradigm, it will become obvious that the sorcerers' efforts have been and are directed at obliterating the predominance of self-importance, as the only means to suspend the effects of our interpretation system. Sorcerers have a description of suspending that effect ; they call it stopping the world. When they reach this state, they see energy directly.

The reason don Juan advised refraining from focusing on praxes and procedures is because, along with doing Tensegrity or recapitulating or following the warriors' path, practitioners must intend their change ; they must intend stopping the world. So, it is not merely following the steps that counts ; what is of supreme importance is intending the effect of following the steps.

Are you doing something to me through Tensegrity ? Today, I felt something moving on my back and I am afraid. I have stopped doing Tensegrity until you clarify this point.

It has been our experience that the most rational people, such as lawyers, for instance, or psychologists, have asked this type of question. Some years ago, Florinda Donner-Grau made the following statement in Spanish to one of her friends, a very serious, cultured woman : "*Eres tan linda que te queremos robar*." "You are so darling that we want to steal you." In Spanish, this locution is thoroughly correct as an expression of endearment.

Florinda did not see her friend until a year later, when she announced to Florinda that she had to see her on her psychiatrist's advice. She wanted to confront Florinda and her cohorts, after a year of analysis spurred by obsessive, recurring dreams in which an inhuman force was trying to take her away from her family and her close friends. In her mind, that inhuman force was, of course, Florinda Donner-Grau and her cohorts.

Nothing of this is new to us. Every one of us has had the same feelings and asked the same question to don Juan Matus in varying degrees of coarseness. We all felt something moving on our backs. Don Juan said that it was a thankful muscle which had been fed with oxygen for the first time ever, after we had done the magical passes. He assured every one of us, self-important complainers, that he needed us as he needed a hole in the head. He reminded us that he had daily appointments with the infinite ; appointments that he had to attend in a state of profound ease and purity, and that influencing others was not in any way part of that needed ease and purity. He pointed out to us that the idea that we were being manipulated by some evil force that had us by the neck, like guinea pigs, was a product of our lifetime habit of relishing being victims. He used to chide us in a mocking tone of despair, "He's doing it to me, and I can't help myself."

Don Juan's recommendation to us, regarding our fears of being unduly influenced, was a sort of parody of the political turmoil of the sixties, when the following statement was an axiom of the political activists of the time: "In case of doubt, burn." Don Juan modified it to : "In case of doubt, be impeccable."

Nowadays, we understand don Juan's position when he said, "It is inconceivable to fulfill, loaded with misgivings, misconceptions and wrongdoings, the true goal of sorcery : a journey to infinity."

When we hear our old complaints voiced by someone else, our act of impeccability is to assure the complainer that we are in search of freedom and that freedom is free ; free in the sense that it is gratis and free in the sense of not having the staggering grip of unwarranted and obsessive self-importance.

## THE WARRIORS' WAY VIEWED AS A PHILOSOPHICAL-PRACTICAL PARADIGM

### WE ARE WHAT OUR INCEPTION IS

In the previous issue of this journal, the first premise of the warriors' way was stated as: We Are Perceptors. Perceptors was used in place of perceivers. This was not an error, but the desire to extend the use of the Spanish language term perceptor which is very active, in order to connote in English the urgency of being a perceiver. In this journal of applied hermeneutics, the problem of enhancing the meaning of a term by propping it with a foreign cognate is going to arise quite often ; sometimes even to the point of forcing the creation of a new term ; not as a show of snobbery, but because of the inherent need to describe some sensation or experience or perception that has either never been described before, or if it has, it has escaped our knowledge. The implication is that our knowledge, no matter how adequate it might be, is limited.

The second premise of the warriors' way is called WE ARE WHAT OUR INCEPTION IS. This is one of the most difficult premises of the warriors' way ; not so much because of it's complexity or rarity, but because it is nearly impossible for any of us to admit certain conditions pertaining to ourselves, conditions which sorcerers have been aware of over the millennia.

The first time don Juan Matus began to explain this premise, I thought he was joking, or that he was merely trying to shock me. He was teasing me at the time about my stated concern with finding love in life. He had asked me once what were my aims in life. Since I couldn't come up with any intelligible answer, I replied to him half jokingly that I wanted to find love.

"The search for love, for the people who reared you, meant having sex," don Juan had said to me on that occasion. "Why don't you call a spade a spade ? You are in search of sexual satisfaction, true ?"

I denied it, of course. But the topic remained with don Juan as a source for teasing me. Every time I saw him, he would find or construct the proper context to ask me about my search for love, i.e. sexual satisfaction.

The first time he discussed the second premise of the warriors' way he began by teasing me, but suddenly he became very serious.

"I recommend that you change venues," he said, and abstain totally from continuing your search. It will lead you nowhere at best ; at worst, it will lead you to your downfall."

"But why don Juan, why must I give up sex?" I asked in a plaintive voice.

"Because you are a bored fuck," he said.

"What is that, don Juan? What do you mean, bored fuck?"

"One of the most serious things warriors do," don Juan explained, "is to search, confirm, and realize the nature of their inception. Warriors must know as accurately as they can whether their parents were sexually excited when they conceived them, or whether they were merely fulfilling a conjugal function. Civilized lovemaking is very, very boring to the participants. Sorcerers believe, without a shadow of a doubt, that children conceived in a civilized fashion are the products of a very bored . . . fuck. I don't know what else to call it. If I used another word, it would be a euphemism, and it would lose it's punch."

After being told this incessantly, I began to ponder seriously what he was talking about. I thought I had understood him. Then doubt crept up on me every time and I found myself asking the same question : "What is a bored fuck, don Juan ?" I suppose I unconsciously wanted him to repeat what he had already said dozens of times.

"Don't begrudge my repetition," don Juan used to say to me every time. "It'll take years of pounding before you admit that you are a bored fuck. So, I'll repeat to you again : If there is no excitation at the moment of conception, the child that comes out of such a union will be intrinsically, sorcerers say, just as he was conceived. Since there is no real excitation between the spouses, but perhaps merely mental desire, the child must bear the consequences of their act. Sorcerers assert that such children are needy, weak, unstable, dependent. Those, they say, are the children that never, ever leave home ; they stay put for life. The advantage of such beings is that they are extremely consistent in the midst of their weakness. They could do the same job for a lifetime without ever feeling the urge to change. If they happen to have a good, sturdy model as children, they grow to be very efficient, but if they fail to have a good pattern, there is no end to their anguish, turmoil and instability

"Sorcerers say with great sadness that the enormous bulk of humanity was conceived like that. This is the reason we hear endlessly about the urge to find something that we don't have. We search, for the duration of our lives, according to sorcerers, for that original excitation that we were deprived of. That's why I said that you are a bored fuck. I see anguish and discontent written all over you. But don't feel bad. I am also a bored fuck. There are very few people, in my knowledge, who are not."

"What does this mean to me, don Juan?" I asked him once, genuinely alarmed.

Somehow don Juan had hit my inner core directly with every one of his words. I was exactly what he had described as the bored fuck reared in a bad pattern. Finally one day, it all boiled down to a crucial statement and question.

"I admit I'm a bored fuck. What can I do?" I said.

Don Juan laughed uproariously, tears coming to his eyes. "I know, I know," he said, patting me on the back, trying to comfort me, I suppose. "To begin with, don't call yourself a bored fuck."

He looked at me with such a serious, concerned expression that I began to take notes.

"Write everything down," he said encouragingly. "The first positive step is to use just the initials : B.F."

I wrote this down before I realized the joke. I stopped and looked at him. He was veritably about to split his sides laughing. In Spanish, bored fuck is cojida aburrida, C. A., just like the initials of my birth name, Carlos Aranha.

When his laughter had subsided, don Juan seriously delineated a plan of action to offset the negative conditions of my inception. He laughed uproariously as he described me as not only an average B.F., but as one that had an extra charge of nervousness.

"In the warriors' path," he said, "nothing is finished. Nothing is forever. If your parents didn't make you as they should have, remake yourself."

He explained that the first maneuver of the sorcerers' kit is to become a miser of energy. Since a B.F does not have any energy, it is useless to waste the little bit that he has in patterns that are not adequate to the amount of energy available. Don Juan recommended that I abstain from engaging in patterns of behavior that demanded energy I did not have. Abstinence was the answer, not because this was morally correct or desirable, but because it was energetically the only way for me to store enough energy to be on par with those who were conceived under conditions of tremendous excitation.

The patterns of behavior he was talking about included everything that I did, from the way I tied my shoes, or ate, to the way I worried about my self-presentation, or the way I pursued my daily activity, especially when it referred to courtship. Don Juan insisted that I abstain from sexual intercourse, because I had no energy for it.

"All you accomplish in your sexual foragings," he declared, "is to get yourself into states of profound dehydration. You get circles under your eyes ; your hair is falling off ; you have weird spots on your nails ; your teeth are yellow ; and your eyes are tearing all the time. Relationships with women cause you such nervousness that you devour your food without chewing it, so you're always plugged up."

Don Juan enjoyed himself immensely, telling me all this, which added enormously to my chagrin. His last remark was, however, like the act of throwing a lifesaver to me.

"Sorcerers say," he went on, "that it is possible to turn a B.F into something inconceivable. It is just a matter of intending it ; I mean, intending the inconceivable. To do this, to intend the inconceivable, one must use anything that is available, anything at all."

"What is 'anything at all,' don Juan ?" I asked, genuinely touched.

"Anything is anything. A sensation, a memory, a wish, an urge ; perhaps fear, desperation, hope ; perhaps curiosity"

I didn't quite understand this last part. But I understood it sufficiently to begin my struggle to get out from the underpinnings of a civilized conception. A lifetime later, the Blue Scout wrote a poem that explained it to me in full.

The Conception of a B.F.
*by the Blue Scout*

She was made in an Arizonan trailer,

after a night of playing poker
and drinking beer with friends.
His foot got caught
in the torn lace of her nightie.
She smelled like a mixture of tobacco smoke
and Aqua Net hair spray
He was thinking of his bowling score
when he found himself erect.
She was wondering how this life
could possibly last a lifetime.
She wanted to go to the bathroom
when she found herself pinned down.
He stifled a belch as she was conceived,
but luckily for her,
the two were in the desert,
and at that moment,
a coyote howled,
sending a chill of longing
through the woman's womb.
That chill was all
she brought into this world.

## THE TENSEGRITY LOG

### WHAT ARE WARRIOR GUARDIANS?

It was stated in the previous issue, that for don Juan and other practitioners like him, a sorcerer was any person who, through discipline and purpose, was capable of interrupting the effect of the interpretation system we use to construct the world that we know. Sorcerers maintain that energy at large is transformed into sensorial data and these sensorial data are interpreted as the world of everyday life. Sorcery is, therefore, a maneuver of interference ; a maneuver by means of which a flow is interrupted. For sorcerers, sorcery has nothing to do with incantations or rituals, which are mere concatenations designed to obscure purposefully it's true nature and goal : the enlargement of the parameters of normal perception.

For don Juan Matus, the practitioners of sorcery were fighters who struggled to return their perceiving attributes to an origin that was more engulfing than the perceiving accomplished in daily living. He called this kind of fighter, warrior guardian, and said that all the practitioners like him were warrior guardians. Warrior guardian was for him a synonym for sorcerer.

The only thing that differentiates some warrior guardians from others is the fact that a specific goal or purpose has been designated for some of them, and not for others. A case in question is, for example, the three Chacmools, known to the attendants of the Tensegrity seminars and workshops. Their specific purpose was to guard the other warrior guardians and, as a unit, teach Tensegrity.

Circumstances beyond anybody's control appeared on the scene, and the reactions of those three warrior guardians made it imperative to dissolve their configuration. Don Juan had already warned his disciples that whoever takes the warriors' path is subject to the effects of energy, which opens the way or closes it. He insisted that his disciples have the prowess to obey the dictums of energy and not try to command it by imposing their wills.

When a state of profound sobriety is reached by a practitioner, there is no mistake whatsoever when reading the commands of energy. It is as if energy is conscious and alive, and it gives manifestations of it's will. To go against it means an unnecessary risk which practitioners pay for dearly when, due to ignorance, or willfulness, they refuse to follow energy indications.

The present format of warrior guardians that has replaced the Chacmools, has been selected by energy itself. This new format is called the Energy Trackers. At the beginning, when the formulation presented itself, the Energy Trackers were called, for a moment, the Pathfinders. The belief was that the Pathfinders would find new paths, new procedures, new solutions. In the act of working together, it became apparent that what they were doing was tracking energy.

The explanation of tracking energy that don Juan Matus gave was somewhat confusing at the beginning. It became more and more clear as time went by, until it reached a level of being obvious to the point of redundancy.

"To track energy is to be able to follow the tenuous trail that energy leaves as it flows," don Juan explained. "Not every one of us is an energy tracker ; however, a moment comes in the life of every practitioner when he can follow the flow of energy, even if he does it in a clumsy manner. So I could say that some warriors are more elegant energy trackers than others, because their proclivity is to track energy."

The sparseness of his explanation made it very difficult for me even to conceive what he was referring to. Later on I became more acutely cognizant of what don Juan had in mind. My change of awareness was at first a vague sensation, derived mostly from a curious intellect, which affirmed that it is reasonable to assume that energy, although I didn't know what energy was, must leave a trail. As my involvement with don Juan Matus' world became super-intense, I became convinced that all of his concepts were based on direct observations made at a level incomprehensible to my daily awareness.

Don Juan explained my queries and sensations as a natural consequence of an inner silence I had gradually learned to attain.

"What you are feeling is the flow of energy," don Juan told me. "It is like a very mild electric charge, or a weird itching on your solar plexus, or above your kidneys. It is not a visual effect, yet every sorcerer I know speaks of it as seeing energy. I'll tell you a secret. I have never seen energy. I only feel it. My advantage is that I have never tried to explain what I feel. I just feel whatever I feel, end of the story."

His statements were a revelation to me. I happened to feel what he was describing. From there, I passed to the acceptance of those new feelings as events in my life without trying to explain them by finding a relationship of cause and fect [fact] (affect?).

On the topic of tracking energy, don Juan also said that a nexus of warrior guardians could be formed, because of their close proximity to one other ; and that the members of such a nexus that could very well show a remarkable capacity for tracking energy. Such an event took place among us after the Chacmools' collapse. And a new format emerged ; a group of warrior guardians became, quite suddenly, strangely capable of tracking energy. This was manifested by their unusual nervousness and their agility to grab onto new situations with uncanny certainty.

If the modern jargon were to be used, it could be said that energy trackers are "channelers" par excellence. But the idea of channeling implies a certain degree of will on the part of the practitioner, who as the term describes, channels things into himself or herself. Energy trackers, on the other hand, do not impose their volition. They simply allow energy to show itself to them.

*Source - http://geocities.com/impersonalus/inception.html*

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A Journal of Applied Hermeneutics - Number 3, Volume 1

# READERS OF INFINITY - Number 3, COMPLETENESS

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## AUTHOR’S NOTE

The exclusive goal of this journal is the dissemination of ideas. Due to the fact that the ideas proposed here are, to a considerable degree, foreign to Western man, the format of this journal must be adapted to the nature of those ideas. The ideas I am referring to were proposed to me by don Juan Matus, a Mexican Indian sorcerer or shaman who guided me through a thirteen-year apprenticeship into the cognitive world of sorcerers who lived in Mexico in ancient times. I intend to present these concepts in the same fashion that he did : directly, concisely and using language to the fullest possible extent. This is the manner in which don Juan conducted every facet of his teachings ; it attracted my attention, from the beginning of my association with him, to the extent that I have made clarity and precision in language usage one of the desired goals of my life.

My attempts to publish this journal go back as far as 1971, when I presented this format to some book editors, who promptly turned me down because it did not conform to the preconceived notion of a scholarly journal, nor did it conform to the format of a magazine, or even a newsletter. My argument that the ideas contained in the journal were foreign enough to dictate a format that was an amalgamation of all three of those established genres did not have the sufficient force to convince them to publish it. The title that I had for the journal, at that time, was The Journal of Ethno-Hermeneutics. Years later, I actually found that a publication bearing that name was in circulation.

Now, I find myself in the position of publishing this journal. It is not an attempt at commercializing anything, nor is it a vehicle for apologetics of any sort. I envision it as an attempt to join the Western man's world of philosophical speculation with the seeing-observations of the Indian sorcerers who lived in Mexico in ancient times and whose cultural descendants were don Juan Matus and his cohorts.

I vowed, since entering into don Juan's cognitive world, to remain truthful to what he taught me. I can say, without being boastful, that for thirty-five years, I have kept this promise alive. It now bears on the conception and development of this journal. It conforms to one of don Juan's seeing-observations : he called it reading infinity. He said that when one is empty of thoughts and has acquired something he called "inner silence," the horizon appears to the eye of the seer as a sheet of lavender. On that sheet of lavender, a point of color becomes visible : pomegranate. That point of pomegranate expands suddenly and bursts into an infinity that can be read. It can be said that at this moment in our history, we human beings are readers, regardless of whether we read philosophical themes or instructional manuals. A worthwhile challenge conceived by don Juan for such readers is to become readers of infinity . This journal is congruous, I assure you, in spirit and practice, with that challenge. It stems from inner silence ; it is an invitation to all to become readers of infinity.

In view of these arguments, I have decided, backed by the unanimous agreement of my cohorts, to change the name of this journal from, The Warriors' Way, a term long in use, to something current, which has not been used yet: READERS OF INFINITY

## WHAT IS PHENOMENOLOGY?

Phenomenology is a philosophical method, or a philosophical system proposed by a German mathematician and philosopher, Edmund Gustav Husserl (1859-1938) in a monumental work whose title has been translated as Logical Investigations, which he published in three volumes from 1900 to 1913.

The term Phenomenology had already been in use in philosophical circles since the 1700's. It meant, then, abstracting consciousness and experience from their realm of intentional components and describing them in a philosophical frame ; or it meant the historical research into the development of the consciousness of the self from primary sensations to rational thought.

It is, however, Husserl who gave it it's modern-day format. He postulated Phenomenology as a philosophical method for the study of essences, or the act of putting those essences into the flux of life experience. He thought of it as a transcendental philosophy dealing only with the residue left after a reduction is performed. He called this reduction epoché, the bracketing of meaning or the suspension of judgment. "Going back to the origins" was Husserl's motto, when it referred to any philosophical-scientific inquiry. To go back to the origins implied such a reduction, which Husserl expected to inject into any given philosophical inquiry, as an integral part, a world that exists before reflection begins. He intended Phenomenology to be a method for approaching living experience as it occurs in time and space ; it is an attempt to describe directly our experience as it happens, without pausing to consider it's origins or it's causal explanations.

To achieve this task, Husserl proposed a total change of attitude where the philosopher moves from things themselves to their meanings ; that is to say, from the realm of objectified meaning - the core of science - to the realm of meaning as it is experienced in the immediate life-world.

Later on, other Western philosophers defined and redefined Phenomenology to suit their particular specifications. Phenomenology as it stands today is a philosophical method that defies definition. It has been said that it is still in the process of defining itself. This fluidity is what holds the interest of sorcerers.

From my association with don Juan Matus and the other practitioners of his line, I came to the conclusion, by directly experiencing their shamanistic practices, that the bracketing of meaning, or the suspension of judgment that Husserl postulated as the essential reduction of every philosophical inquiry, is impossible to accomplish when it is a mere exercise of the philosopher's intellect.

I was told by someone who studied with Martin Heidegger, Husserl's student, that when Husserl was asked for a pragmatic indication of how to accomplish this reduction, he said: "How in the hell should I know? I'm a philosopher." Contemporary philosophers who have reworked and enlarged the parameters of Phenomenology have never actually addressed the subject of practicalities. For them, Phenomenology has remained a purely philosophical theme. In their realm, therefore, this bracketing of meaning is at best merely a philosophical exercise.

In the sorcerers' world, suspending judgment is not the desired beginning of any philosophical-practical inquiry, but the necessity of every shamanistic practice. Sorcerers expand the parameters of what they can perceive to the point that they systematically perceive the unknown. To realize this feat, they have to suspend the effect of their normal interpretation system. This act is accomplished as a matter of survival rather than as a matter of choice. In this sense, the practitioners of don Juan's knowledge go a step beyond the intellectual exercises of philosophers. The proposition in this section of this journal is to follow the statements made by philosophers and correlate them with the practical accomplishments of sorcerers, who have, strangely enough, worked their practices, in many cases, seemingly along the same lines as those proposed by Western philosophers.

## QUERIES ABOUT THE WARRIORS' WAY

### WHAT IS THE GAIN?

“What is the point of doing Tensegrity, recapitulating, doing all the things that you propose? What is the gain? I am a middle-aged woman with three children of college age; my marriage is not that stable ; my weight is too high. I don't know what to do.”

Again, just as in other cases I have related before, this is not a new question to me. I have voiced my own version of it countless times to don Juan Matus. There were two levels of abstraction to which he referred every time he answered a question like this posed by me or any other of his disciples - I know that all of them asked the same question at one time or another, in the same mood of despair, dejection, and uselessness.

On the first level, the level of practicalities, don Juan would point out that the execution of the magical passes, by itself, led the practitioner to an incomparable state of well-being.

"The physical and mental prowess that results from a systematic performance of the magical passes," he used to say, "is so evident that any discussion about their effects is irrelevant. All one needs to do is to practice without stopping to consider the possible gain or uselessness of it all."

I was in no way different than the rest of don Juan's disciples, or the person who posed this question to me. I felt and believed that I was not qualified for the warriors' way because my flaws were exorbitant. When don Juan would ask me what my flaws were, I would find myself mumbling, incapable of describing those flaws that afflicted me so deeply. I settled it all by saying to him that I had a sensation of defeat that seemed to be the mark of my entire life. I saw myself as a champion of performing to perfection idiotic things that never took me anywhere. This feeling was expressed in doubts and tribulations, and in an endless necessity to justify everything I did. I knew that I was weak and undisciplined in areas that don Juan counted as essential. On the other hand, I was very disciplined in areas that held no interest for him. My sense of defeatism was a most natural consequence of this contradiction. When I asserted and reasserted my doubts to him, he pointed out that obsessive thinking about oneself was one of the most tiring things he knew.

"To think only about oneself," he said to me once, "produces a strange fatigue; a most overwhelming, drowning fatigue."

As years went by, I came to understand and fully accept don Juan's assertion. My conclusion, as well as the conclusion of all his disciples, is that the first thing one has to do is to become aware of the obsessive concern with the self. Another of our conclusions has been that the only means to have enough energy to draw away from this concern - something that cannot be attained intellectually - is by practicing the magical passes. Such a practice generates energy, and energy accomplishes wonders.

If the performance of the magical passes is coupled with what sorcerers call the recapitulation, which is the systematic viewing and reviewing of one's life experiences, one's chances of getting out from the underpinnings of self-reflection are increased many-fold.

All this is on the level of practicalities. The other level that don Juan referred to, he called the magical realm : the sorcerers' conviction that we are indeed magical beings ; that the fact that we are going to die makes us powerful and decisive. Sorcerers indeed believe that if we strictly follow the warriors' path, we could use our death as a guiding force in order to become beings that are going to die. It is their belief that beings that are going to die are magical by definition and that they do not die the death brought about by fatigue, and wear and tear, but that they continue on a journey of awareness. The force of the awareness that they are going to die of fatigue and wear and tear if they do not reclaim their magical nature makes them unique and resourceful.

"At a given moment in our lives, if we so desire," don Juan said to me once, "that magical uniqueness and power comes to our lives ever so gently, as if it were shy."

The Blue Scout wrote a poem once that has seemed to me always the most appropriate depiction of recovering our magical aspect :

Angels' Flight
by the Blue Scout

There are angels who are destined
to fly downward into the dark mists.
Often, they get caught there,
and for a time, they lose their wings
and they are lost,
sometimes for nearly a lifetime.
It doesn't really matter, they are still angels ;
angels never die.
They know that the mist will clear someday,
if only for a moment.
And they know that they will be reclaimed then,
at last,
by a golden sky.

## PERCEPTION MUST BE INTENDED IN IT’S COMPLETENESS.

The third premise of the warriors' way is: PERCEPTION MUST BE INTENDED IN IT’S COMPLETENESS. Don Juan said that perception is perception, and that it is void of goodness or evil. He presented this premise as one of the most important components of the warriors' way, the essential arrangement that all sorcerers have to yield to. He argued that since the basic premise of the warriors' way is that we are perceivers, whatever we perceive has to be catalogued as perception per se, without inflicting any value on it, positive or negative.

My natural inclination was to insist that good and evil had to be inherent conditions of the universe; they had to be essences, not attributes. Whenever I presented my arguments to him, which were unwitting counter-statements, he would point out that my arguments lacked scope, that they were dictated merely by the whims of my intellect and by my affiliation to certain syntactical arrangements.

"Yours are only words," he used to say, "words arranged in a pleasing order ; an order that conforms to the views of your time. What I give you are not merely words, but precise references from my book of navigation."

The first time he mentioned his book of navigation, I was very taken with what I thought was a metaphor, and I wanted to know more about it. Everything don Juan said to me, in those days, I took as a metaphor. I found his metaphors extremely poetic and never missed an opportunity to comment on them.

"A book of navigation! What a beautiful metaphor, don Juan," I said to him on that occasion.

"Metaphor, my eye!" he said. "A sorcerer's book of navigation is not like any of your arrangements of words."

"What is it then, don Juan?"

"It is a log. It is a record of all the things sorcerers perceive on their journeys to infinity."

"Is it a record of what all the sorcerers of your lineage perceived, don Juan?"

"Of course! What else can it be?"

"Do you keep it in your memory alone?"

When I asked that question, I was thinking, naturally, about oral history, or the ability of people to keep accounts in the form of stories, especially people who lived in times prior to written language, or people who live on the margins of civilization in modern times. In don Juan's case, I thought that a record of that nature had to be of monumental length.

Don Juan seemed to be aware of my reasoning. He chuckled before he answered me. "It is not an encyclopedia!" he said. "It is a log that is precise and short. I will acquaint you with all it's points, and you will see that there is little that you or anyone else could add, if anything at all."

"I cannot conceive how it could be short, don Juan, if it is the accumulation of the knowledge of all your lineage," I insisted.

"In infinity, sorcerers find few essential points. The permutations of those essential points are infinite, but as I hope you will find out someday, those permutations are not important. Energy is extremely precise."

"But how can sorcerers differentiate the permutations from the essential points, don Juan ?"

"Sorcerers don't focus on the permutations. By the time they are ready to travel into infinity, they are also ready to perceive energy as it flows in the universe, and more important than anything else yet, they are capable of reinterpreting the flow of energy without the intervention of the mind."

When don Juan voiced, for the first time, the possibility of interpreting sensory data without the aid of the mind, I found it impossible to conceive. Don Juan was definitely aware of my train of thought.

"You are trying to understand all this in terms of your reason," he said, "and that's an impossible task. Accept the simple premise that perception is perception, void of complexities and contradictions. The book of navigation I am telling you about consists of what sorcerers perceive when they are in a state of total internal silence."

"What sorcerers perceive in a state of total silence is seeing , isn't it ?" I asked.

"No," he said firmly, looking me right in the eyes. "Seeing is perceiving energy as it flows in the universe, and it certainly is the beginning of sorcery, but what sorcerers are concerned with to the point of exhaustion is perceiving. As I have already told you, perceiving, for a sorcerer, is interpreting the direct flow of energy without the influence of the mind. This is why the book of navigation is so sparse."

Don Juan then outlined a complete sorcery scheme, even though I didn't understand a word of it. It took me a lifetime to come around to handling what he said to me at that time :

"When one is free from the mind," he said - something that was more than incomprehensible to me - "the interpretation of sensory data is no longer an affair taken for granted. One's total body contributes to it ; the body as a conglomerate of energy fields. The most important part of this interpretation is the contribution of the energy body, the body's twin in terms of energy ; an energy configuration that is the mirror image of the body as a luminous sphere. The interplay between the two bodies results in interpretation which cannot be good or bad, right or wrong, but an indivisible unit that has value only for those who journey into infinity."

"Why couldn't it have value in our daily life, don Juan ?" I asked.

"Because when the two sides of man, his body and his energy body, are joined together, the miracle of freedom happens. Sorcerers say that at that moment, we realize that for reasons extraneous to us, we have been detained in our journey of awareness. This interrupted journey begins again at that moment of joining.

"An essential premise of the warriors' way is, therefore, that perception ought to be intended in it's completeness ; that is to say, the reinterpretation of direct energy as it flows in the universe must be made by man in possession of his two essential parts : body and energy body. This reinterpretation, for sorcerers, is completeness and, as you will understand someday, it must be intended."

## TENSEGRITY LOG

### THE FORCE THAT HOLDS US TOGETHER AS FIELDS OF ENERGY

The sorcerers of ancient Mexico, who discovered and developed the magical passes on which Tensegrity is based, maintained, according to what don Juan explained, that the performance of those passes prepares and leads the body to a transcendental realization : the realization that as conglomerates of energy fields, human beings are held together by a vibratory, agglutinating force that joins those individual energy fields into one concise, cohesive unit.

Don Juan Matus, in acquainting me with the propositions of those sorcerers of ancient times, emphasized to no end the fact that the performance of the magical passes was, to the best of his knowledge, the only means to lay the foundation for becoming fully conscious of that vibratory binding force ; something that happens when all the premises of the warriors' way are internalized and put into practice.

It was his ability as a teacher to make those premises a subject for embodiment ; in other words, he handled the premises of the warriors' way in such a fashion that it was feasible for me and his other disciples to transform them into units of our daily lives.

His contention was that this vibratory, agglutinating force that holds together the conglomerate of energy fields that we are is apparently similar to what modern-day astronomers believe must happen at the core of all the galaxies that exist in the cosmos. They believe that there, at their cores, a force of incalculable strength holds the [.â€¦rs or â€¦rs] (structure?) of galaxies in place. This force, called a black hole, is a theoretical construct which seems to be the most reasonable explanation as to why stars do not fly away, driven by their own rotational speeds.

Modern man has found out, through the research of scientists, that there is a binding force that holds together the component elements of an atom. By the same token, the component elements of cells are held together by a similar force that seems to compel them to combine into concrete and particular tissues and organs. Don Juan said that those sorcerers who lived in Mexico in ancient times knew that human beings, taken as conglomerates of energy fields, are held together not by energetic wrappings or energetic ligaments, but by some sort of vibration that renders everything at once alive and in place ; some energy, some vibratory force, some power that cements those energy fields into one single energetic unit.

Don Juan explained that those sorcerers, by means of their practices and their discipline, became capable of handling that vibratory force, once they were fully conscious of it. Their expertise in dealing with it became so extraordinary that their actions were transformed into legends, mythological events that exist only as fables. For instance, one of the stories that don Juan told about the ancient sorcerers was that they were capable of dissolving their physical mass by merely placing their full consciousness and intent on that force.

Don Juan stated that, although they were capable of actually going through a pinhole if they deemed it necessary, they were never quite satisfied with the result of this maneuver of dissolving their mass. The reason for their discontent was that once their mass was dissolved, so was their capacity to act. They were left with the alternative of only witnessing events in which they were incapable of participating. Their ensuing frustration, the result of being incapacitated to act, turned, according to don Juan, into their damning flaw : their obsession with uncovering the nature of that vibratory force, an obsession driven by their concreteness, which made them want to hold and control that force. Their fervent desire was to strike from the ghost-like condition of classlessness, something which don Juan said cannot ever be accomplished.

Modern-day practitioners, cultural heirs of those sorcerers of antiquity, having found out that it is not possible to be concrete and utilitarian about that vibratory force, have opted for the only rational alternative : to become conscious of that force with no other purpose in sight except the elegance and well-being brought about by knowledge.

The only permissible instance which don Juan gave for the utilization of the power of this vibratory agglutinating force, was it's capacity to make sorcerers burn from within, when the time comes for them to leave this world. Don Juan said that it is simplicity itself for sorcerers to place their absolutely total consciousness on the binding force with the intent to burn, and off they go, like a puff of air.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cleargreen, Incorporated announces a seminar and workshop that will take place in Oakland, California on April 19th, 20th and 21st. The seminar and workshop will be entitled Warriors on the Run : The Intentionality of Magical Passes. This seminar and workshop will consist in the review and refinement of passes taught in previous workshops as well as in a series of new movements pertinent to the theme of the seminar : the idea that warriors in motion do not present a steady target to the onslaughts and the wear and tear of life in general.

Renewal and revitalization by a new deployment of energy already existing within us is the general goal of Tensegrity. To restate this intent in terms of movement is the aim of this seminar and workshop.

Register by calling Cleargreen, Incorporated at (310) 264-6126; 11901 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 599, Los Angeles, CA 90025

Cleargreen has opened a new Web Page. The address is http://www.webb.com/Castaneda.

On April 19th of this year, Cleargreen will issue it's third videocassette on Tensegrity: Energetically Crossing from One Phylum to Another. The movements recorded on this videocassette are complete magical passes which have been altered only minimally from their original form. They are an orderly sample of attempts made by seers of ancient times to catch a glimpse, from a different angle, of the force that binds us together.

All articles in the journal were written by Carlos Castaneda and edited by Nyei Murez. The poem was written by the Blue Scout. Journal design is by Elaby Gaethen.

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The Nagualist Library - Table of Contents

# A Journal of Applied Hermeneutics - Number 4, Volume 1

## READERS OF INFINITY - - Number 4, ENERGY BODY

Number 4, Volume 1
Los Angeles, April, 1996

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## AUTHOR’S NOTE

The April issue of Readers of Infinity: A journal of Applied Hermeneutics, is being published at this late date, because it, together with the first three issues, belongs to an original set of four, specifically conceived in harmony with the sorcerers' idea that the number four implies order and permanency.

It was the writer's utmost wish to give this journal a character as distant as possible from temporariness, whatever that character may turn out to be. It seems that in this case, it turned out to be the publication of this journal in book form. So be it. Since the fourth issue was already finished by late March and ready to go to press, it became impossible to pass up the opportunity to publish it as a monthly issue.

## A NEW AREA FOR PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

We have briefly discussed in the previous issues of this journal the idea of Hermeneutics as a method of interpretation, the idea of the Phenomenological Method, and the idea of intentionality. I would like to outline now the possibility of a new area of philosophical inquiry. The elucidation of this topic is hinged on the definition of certain concepts that were developed by sorcerers or shamans who lived in Mexico in ancient times.

The first of such concepts, which is the cornerstone of sorcerers' activities and beliefs, is called seeing. By seeing, sorcerers mean the capacity that, in their belief, human beings have to perceive energy as it flows in the universe. The claim that sorcerers make, which is substantiated by their practices, is that energy can be perceived directly as it flows in the universe, using our entire organism as a vehicle for perception.

Sorcerers make a distinction between the body as part of the cognition of our everyday life, and the entire organism as an energetic unit which is not part of our cognitive system. This energetic unit includes the unseen parts of the body, such as the internal organs, and the energy that flows through them. They assert that it is with this part that energy can be directly perceived.

Because of the predominance of sight in our habitual way of perceiving the world, sorcerers describe the act of directly apprehending energy as seeing. For sorcerers to perceive energy as it flows in the universe means that energy adopts non-idiosyncratic, specific configurations that repeat themselves consistently, and that can be apprehended in the Same terms by anyone who sees.

The most important example of this consistency of energy in adopting specific configurations is the human body when it is perceived directly as energy. Sorcerers perceive a human being as a conglomerate of energy fields that gives the total impression of a clear-cut sphere of luminosity. Taken in this sense, energy is described by sorcerers as a vibration that agglutinates itself into cohesive units. They describe the entire universe as composed of energy configurations that appear to the seeing sorcerers as filaments, or luminous fibers that are strung in every which way, but without ever being entangled. This is an incomprehensible proposition for the linear mind. It has a built-in contradiction that can't be resolved: how could those fibers extend themselves every which way and yet not be entangled ?

Sorcerers, as unstudied practitioners of the phenomenological method, can only describe events. If their terms of description seem inadequate and contradictory, it is because of the limitations of syntax. Yet, their descriptions are as strict as anything can be. The luminous energetic fibers that make up the universe at large do extend themselves to infinity in every which way, and yet, they are not entangled. Each fiber is an individual, concrete configuration; each fiber is infinity itself.

In order to deal with these phenomena more adequately, perhaps it would be proper to construct an entirely different way of describing them. According [actual page 3/12] to sorcerers, this is not at all a far-fetched idea, because perceiving energy directly is something that can be achieved by every human being. Sorcerers argue that this condition accords human beings the potential of reaching, through an evolutionary consensus, an agreement on how to describe the universe.

Another sorcerers' concept that deserves close scrutiny in terms of this elucidation is something they call intent. They describe it as a perennial force that permeates the entire universe ; a force that is aware of itself to the point of responding to the beckoning or to the command of sorcerers. The act of using intent they call intending. By means of intending, sorcerers are capable, they say, of unleashing not only all the human possibilities of perceiving, but all the human possibilities of action. They maintain that through intent, the most far-fetched formulations can be realized.

The limit of sorcerers' capability of perceiving is called the band of man, meaning that there is a boundary that marks human capabilities as dictated by the human organism. These boundaries are not merely the traditional boundaries of orderly thought, but the boundaries of the totality of resources locked within the human organism. Sorcerers believe that these resources are never used, but are kept in situ by preconceived ideas about our limitations, limitations that have nothing to do with our actual potential.

The point that sorcerers present is that since perceiving energy as it flows in the universe is not arbitrary or idiosyncratic, seers witness formulations of energy that happen by themselves and are not a product of interpretation on our part. Sorcerers declare that the perception of such formulations is, in itself and by itself, the key that releases the locked-in human potential that never enters into play. Such formulations of energy, since they happen, by definition, independently of man's volition or intervention, are capable of creating a new subjectivity. Being cohesive and homogeneous for all human beings that see, these energy formulations are, for sorcerers, the source of a new inter-subjectivity.

According to sorcerers, the subjectivity of everyday life is dictated by the syntax of our language. It necessitates guidelines, and teachers, who, by means of well-placed traditional commands that seem to be the product of our historical growth, begin to direct us, from the instant of our birth, to perceive the world. Sorcerers maintain that the inter-subjectivity resulting from this syntax-guided rearing is, naturally, ruled by syntactical description-commands. They give as an example the statement, "I am in love," a feeling which is shared inter-subjectively by all of us, and which, they point out, is released upon hearing that description-command.

Sorcerers are convinced that, on the other hand, the subjectivity resulting from perceiving energy directly as it flows in the universe is not guided by syntax. It does not necessitate guidelines and teachers to point out this or that by commentary or command. The resulting inter-subjectivity among sorcerers exists by means of something which they call power, which is the sum total of all the intending brought together by an individual. Since such inter-subjectivity is not elicited through the aid of syntactical commands or solicitations, sorcerers claim that this subjectivity is a direct byproduct of the total human organism at work, fixed on one single purpose : intending direct communication.

In summation, intentionality or intending, for sorcerers, is the pragmatic utilization of intent, the force that expedites everything. For them, intent is a pragmatic channel for attainment, and intentionality is the means to use it. It is not merely, as it is with the philosophical discourse of the Western man, the intellectual account of the growth of human awareness from basic sensations to complex processes that can produce knowledge. Given that sorcerers are thoroughly pragmatic in their approach to life and living, intentionality is an active affair. It entails a posture on the part of sorcerers that they describe as a stand of power. From this stand, they can actually call intent. In this sense, intentionality becomes the [actual page 4/12] completely conscious act of intending. Sorcerers explain that these phenomena are actualized when the total human organism, in all it's potential, is engaged in one single, all-inclusive purpose: intending.

Taking sorcerers' capacity to perceive energy directly as a point of departure, it is possible to conceive a new area for philosophical discourse. The impediment to the realization of this possibility has been, so far, the lack of interest on the part of the sorcery practitioners in conceptualizing their knowledge and their practices. Sorcerers claim that after reaching certain thresholds of perception, which are like entrances into other realms of existence, the interest of practitioners is focused solely on the practical aspect of their knowledge.

Because of this bent towards pragmatism, sorcerers can seriously contemplate the transformation of philosophy and philosophical inquiry into a realm of practicalities by incorporating in it a more inclusive view of human potential. They consider that the direct perception of energy is then the usher that would lead us into a new subjectivity, free from syntax. Sorcerers propose that this new subjectivity is the way to reach intent, through the active process of intentionality.

## QUERIES ABOUT THE WARRIORS' WAY

### WHAT’S GOING TO HAPPEN TO ME?

There has been a series of questions posed by different people on the same topic. This concern could be classified in general terms as, "What's going to happen to me?" People have asked me this question personally, they have written to me about it, or I have heard about this worry through third persons.

The following question was asked in this vein: "I understand that you are trying to gather a mass of people, because your original sorcerers' plan failed. I am hooked by what you do. What do you plan to do with me?"

This is a question that should be addressed to a guru, to a spiritual teacher. I see myself as neither a guru nor a spiritual teacher, but as someone who is trying to fit a definition given by don Juan. He was referring to my role in relation to the rest of his disciples, my cohorts, when he said:

"All you can aspire to be is a counselor. You must point out an error if you see one; you must advise about the proper way to do something, because you will be viewing everything from the vantage point of total silence. Sorcerers call this a sight from the bridge. Sorcerers see the water - life - as it rushes under the bridge. Their eyes are, so to speak, right at the point where the water goes under the bridge. They cannot see ahead. They cannot see behind. They can see only the now."

I have made the utmost effort, and I will continue to do so, to fulfill this role. When a person is interested and says, "I am hooked," I don't dare believe that that person is hooked onto me. To have a personal link with a teacher is a response that all of us have learned and practiced. It stems, no doubt, from, being personally attached to Mother or Father, or both, or to someone else who fulfills that role in the family or in our circle of friends.

If I have given, in my books, the impression that don Juan was personally related to me, it was my own unconscious misinterpretation. He worked incessantly, from the moment I met him, to exterminate this drive in me. He called it neediness and explained that it is developed and sponsored by the social order, and that neediness is the most obscene manner of creating and nourishing a slave's mentality. He said that if I believed that I was "hooked," I was hooked not to him personally, but to the idea of freedom, an idea which sorcerers had spent generations formulating.

With regard to the original plan failing, all I can [actual page 7/12] say is that I have indeed stated that don Juan's lineage terminates with me and don Juan's other three disciples, but this is not the indication of a failure of any plan. It's simply a situation which sorcerers explain by saying: "it is a natural condition of any order to come to an end."

The fact that I have said that I would like to reach as many people as possible and create a mass of consensus is a consequence of realizing that we are the end of a most interesting line of thoughts and actions. We do feel that we are the undeserving recipients of a gigantic task : the task of explaining that the sorcerers' world is not an illusion, nor is it wishful thinking.

Another question is: "You had a teacher. How can I advance without one? I worry because I don't have a don Juan."

To worry is a bona fide way of interacting in our social milieu, thus, we worry about everything. To "worry" is a syntactical category, similar to saying, "I don't understand." To worry doesn't mean to be preoccupied with something ; it's simply a way of underlining a topic that has importance to us. To say that you worry because there is not a don Juan available is already a declaration of possible defeat. It is as if that statement opens a way out which remains ready for use at any time.

Don Juan himself told me that all the force he put into guiding me was a mandatory procedure set up by the sorcerers' tradition. He had to prepare me for continuing his lineage. Throughout the years, there have been scores of people who traveled to Mexico to look for don Juan. They took the narration in my books as a description of an open possibility. That is again my fault. It is not that I wasn't careful, but rather, that I had to abstain from making bombastic claims that I was in any way special.

Don Juan was interested in perpetuating his lineage, not in teaching his knowledge. I have already made this point, but it is important that I stress it repeatedly : don Juan was not a teacher at all. He was a sorcerer passing on his knowledge to his disciples, exclusively for the continuation of his lineage.

Since his lineage comes to an end with me and his other three disciples, he himself proposed that I write about his knowledge. And it is precisely because his line comes to an end that his disciples have opened the otherwise closed door to the sorcerers' world, and are now endeavoring to explain what sorcery is and what sorcerers do.

Sorcerers say that the only possible teacher or guide that we can have is the spirit, meaning an abstract, impersonal force that exists in the universe, conscious of itself. Perhaps it could be called by another name, such as awareness, consciousness, cognition, life force. Sorcerers believe that it permeates the total universe, and can guide them, and that all they need to reach this force is inner silence ; thus their assertion that our sole worthwhile link is with this force, and not with a person.

Another question asked quite often is : "How come you never talked about Tensegrity in your books, and why are you talking about it now?"

I had never talked about Tensegrity before because Tensegrity is don Juan's disciples' version of some movements called magical passes, developed by shamans who lived in Mexico in ancient times, and who were the initiators of don Juan's lineage. Tensegrity is based on those magical passes, and it stems from an agreement reached by don Juan Matus' four disciples to amalgamate the four different lines of movements taught to each of them individually to fit their physical and mental configurations.

Following don Juan's request, I have abstained throughout all these years from mentioning the magical passes. The highly secretive manner in which they were taught to me entailed an agreement on my part to surround them with the same secrecy. The closest I ever came to mentioning them was when I wrote about the way don Juan "cracked his joints." In a joking manner he suggested that I refer to the magical passes, which he practiced incessantly, as "the way in which he cracked his joints." Every time he [actual page 8/12] executed one of those passes, his joints used to make a cracking sound. He used this as a device to entice my interest and to hide the true significance of what he was doing.

When he made me aware of the magical passes by explaining to me what they really were, I had already been trying compulsively to replicate the sound his joints made. By arousing my competitiveness, he "hooked me," so to speak, to learn a series of movements. I never achieved that cracking sound, which was a blessing in disguise because the muscles and tendons of the arms and back should never be stressed to that point. Don Juan was born with a facility to crack the joints of his arms and back, just like some people have the facility to crack their knuckles.

When don Juan and the rest of his companion sorcerers formally taught me the magical passes, and discussed their configurations and effects, they did it in accordance with the strictest procedures ; procedures which demanded utmost concentration and were cushioned in total secrecy and ritualistic behavior. The ritualistic part of those teachings was quickly cast aside by don Juan, but the secretive part was made even more emphatic.

As previously stated, Tensegrity is the amalgamation of four lines of magical passes which had to be transformed from highly specialized movements that fit specific individuals into a generic form that would fit everybody. The reason why Tensegrity, the modern version of the ancient magical passes, is being taught now is because don Juan's four disciples agreed that, since their role is no longer that of perpetuating don Juan's lineage of sorcerers, they had to lighten their burden, and do away with the secrecy about something which has been of incommensurable value to them for their well-being.

## THE WARRIORS' WAY VIEWED AS A PHILOSOPHICAL-PRACTICAL PARADIGM

### THE ENERGY BODY

The fourth unit of the warriors' way is THE ENERGY BODY. Don Juan Matus explained that, since time immemorial, sorcerers have given the name of energy body to a special configuration of energy which belongs to each human being individually. He also called this configuration the dreaming body, or the double or the other. His preference, in accordance with a sorcerers' agreement to emphasize abstract concepts, was to call it the energy body. But he also told me about a secret fun name for the energy body, which was used as a euphemism, a nickname, a term of endearment, a friendly reference to something incomprehensible and veiled : *que ni te jodan* -- which in English means, "they shouldn't bother you, energy body, or else."

Don Juan formally explained the energy body as a conglomerate of energy fields which are the mirror image of the energy fields that make up the human body when it is seen directly as energy. Don Juan said that for sorcerers, the physical body and the energy body are one single unit. He further explained that sorcerers believe that the physical body involves both the body and the mind as we know them, and that the physical body and the energy body are the only counterbalanced energy configurations in our human realm. Since there is no such thing as a dualism between body and mind, the only possible dualism that exists is between the physical body and the energy body.

The contention of sorcerers is that perceiving is a process of interpreting sensory data, but that every human being has the capacity to perceive energy directly, that is to say, without processing it through an interpretation system. As it has already been stated, when human beings are perceived in this fashion, they have the appearance of a sphere of luminosity. Sorcerers affirm that this sphere of luminosity is a conglomerate of energy fields held together by a mysterious binding force.

"What do you mean by a conglomerate of energy fields?" I asked don Juan when he first told me about this.

"Energy fields compressed together by some strange agglutinating force," he replied. "One of the arts of sorcerers is to beckon the energy body, which is ordinarily very far away from it's counterpart, the [actual page 5/12] physical body, and bring it closer so it can begin to preside energetically over everything the physical body does."

"if you want to be very exact," don Juan went on, "you can say that when the energy body is very close to the physical body, a sorcerer sees two luminous spheres, almost superimposed on each other. To have our energy twin close by would be our natural state, were it not for the fact that something pushes our energy body away from our physical body, starting at the very moment of our birth."

The sorcerers of don Juan's lineage put an enormous emphasis on the discipline required to bring the energy body closer to the physical body. Don Juan explained that once the energy body is within a certain energetic range, which varies for each individual, it's proximity allows sorcerers the opportunity of forging the energy body into the other or the double : another being, solid and three-dimensional, exactly like themselves.

Following the same practices, sorcerers can change their solid, three-dimensional physical bodies into a perfect replica of the energy body ; that is to say, a conglomerate of pure energy fields which are invisible to the normal eye, as all energy is ; an ethereal charge of energy capable of going, for example, through a wall.

"Is it possible to transform the body to such an extent, don Juan? Or are you merely describing a mythical proposition?" I asked, amazed and bewildered when I heard these statements.

"There's nothing mythical about sorcerers," he responded. "Sorcerers are pragmatic beings, and what they describe is always something quite sober and down-to-earth. Our handicap is to be unwilling to stray away from our linearity. This makes us into disbelievers who are killing themselves to believe the damnedest things one can imagine."

"When you talk like this, don Juan, you always mean me," I said. "What am I killing myself to believe ?"

"You are killing yourself to believe, for instance, that anthropology is meaningful or that it exists. Just like a religious man kills himself to believe that God is a man who resides up in heaven and that the devil is a cosmic evildoer who has taken residence down in hell."

It was don Juan's style to make cutting but astoundingly accurate remarks about my person in the world. The more cutting and direct they were, the greater their effect on me and the greater my chagrin upon hearing them. Another of his didactic devices was to give extremely pertinent information about sorcerers' concepts in a mood that was light, but deeply critical of my compulsion to commit him to linear explanations. I asked him once, while discussing the topic of the energy body, one of my convoluted questions :

"Through what processes," I said, "can sorcerers transform their ethereal energy bodies into solid, three-dimensional bodies, and their physical bodies into ethereal energy, capable of going through a wall?"

Don Juan, adopting a professorial seriousness, raised his finger and said : "Through the volitional -- although not always conscious -- yet quite within our capabilities, but not altogether within our immediate ability -- use of the binding force that ties the physical and the energy bodies together, as two conglomerates of energy fields."

Stated in the vein of teasing, his explanation was nonetheless an extremely accurate phenomenological description of processes inconceivable to our linear minds, yet continually accomplished by our hidden energetic resources. Sorcerers maintain that the link between the physical body and the energy body is a mysterious agglutinating force which we use incessantly without ever being aware of it.

It has been stated that when sorcerers perceive the body as a conglomerate of luminous energy fields, they perceive a sphere the size of both arms extended [actual page 6/12] laterally and the height of the arms extended upwardly. They also perceive that in this sphere exists something they call the assemblage point ; a spot of even more intense luminosity, the size of a tennis ball, located towards the back, at the height of the shoulder blades, at an arm's length away from them.

Sorcerers consider the assemblage point to be the place where the flow of direct energy is turned into sensory data and interpreted as the world of everyday life. Don Juan said that the assemblage point, aside from doing all this, also has a most important secondary function: it is the linking connection between the physical body and the assemblage point of the energy body. He described such a connection as being analogous to two magnetized circles, each the size of a tennis ball, coming together, attracted by forces of intent.

He also said that when the physical body and the energy body are not joined, the connection between them is an ethereal line, which sometimes is so tenuous that it seems not to exist. Don Juan was certain that the energy body is pushed farther and farther away as one grows older, and that death comes as the result of the severance of that tenuous connection.

## TENSEGRITY LOG

### HOW TO DO TENSEGRITY

The magical passes were treated by the shamans of ancient Mexico from the start as something unique, and were never used as sets of exercises for developing musculature or agility. Don Juan said that they were viewed as magical passes from the first moment that they were formulated. He described the "magic" of the movements as a subtle change that the practitioners experience on executing them; an ephemeral quality that the movement brings to their physical and mental states, a kind of shine, a light in the eyes. He spoke of this subtle change as a "touch of the spirit" ; as if practitioners, through the movements, reestablish an unused link with the life force that sustains them. He further explained that the movements were called magical passes because by means of practicing them, sorcerers were transported, in terms of perception, to other states of being in which they could sense the world in an indescribable manner.

"Because of this quality, because of this magic," don Juan said to me once, "the passes must be practiced not as exercises, but as a way of beckoning power."

"But can they be taken as physical movements, although they have never been taken as such?" I asked.

I had faithfully practiced all the movements that don Juan had taught me, and I felt extraordinarily well. This feeling of wellbeing was sufficient for me.

"You can practice them as you wish," don Juan replied. "The magical passes enhance awareness, regardless of how you take them. The intelligent thing would be to take them as what they are : magical passes that on being practiced lead the practitioners to drop the mask of socialization."

"What is the mask of socialization?" I asked.

"The veneer that all of us defend and die for," he said. "The veneer we acquire in the world ; the one that prevents us from reaching all our potential ; the one that makes us believe we are immortal."

Tensegrity, being the modernized version of those magical passes, has been taught so far as a system of movements because that has been the only manner in which this mysterious and vast subject of the magical passes could be faced in a modern setting. The people who now practice Tensegrity are not shaman practitioners ; therefore, the emphasis of the magical passes has to be on their value as movements.

The point of view that has been adopted in this case is that the physical effect of the magical passes is the most important issue for the purpose of establishing a solid base of energy in the practitioners. Since the shamans of ancient Mexico were interested in other effects of the magical passes, they fragmented long series of movements into single units, and practiced each fragment as an individual segment. In Tensegrity, the fragments have been reassembled into their original long forms. In this manner, a system of movements has been obtained, a system in which the movements themselves are emphasized above all.

The execution of the magical passes, as shown in Tensegrity, does require a particular space or prearranged time, but ideally, the movements should be done in solitariness, on the spur of the moment, or as the necessity arises. However, the setting of urban life facilitates the formation of groups, and under these circumstances, the only manner in which Tensegrity can be taught is to groups of practitioners. Practicing in groups is beneficial in many aspects and deleterious in others. It is beneficial because it allows the creation of consensus of movement and the opportunity to learn by examination and comparison. It is deleterious because it fosters the emergence of syntactical commands and solicitations dealing with hierarchy ; and what sorcerers want is to run away from subjectivity derived from syntactical commands. Unfortunately, you cannot have your cake and eat it, too ; so Tensegrity should be practiced in whatever form is easier : either in groups, or alone, or both.

In every other respect, the way Tensegrity has been taught is a faithful reproduction of the way in which don Juan taught the magical passes to his disciples. He bombarded them with a profusion of detail and let their minds be bewildered by the amount and variety of movements, and by the implication that each of them individually was a pathway to infinity.

His disciples spent years overwhelmed, confused, and above all, despondent, because they felt that being bombarded in such a manner was an unfair onslaught on them. Don Juan, following the traditional sorcerers' device of clouding the linear view of practitioners, saturated the kinesthetic memory of his disciples. His contention was that if they kept on practicing the movements, in spite of their confusion, some of them, or all of them, would attain inner silence. He said that in inner silence everything becomes clear to the point that we are able not only to remember, with absolute precision, magical passes already forgotten, but that we know exactly what to do with them, or what to expect from them, without anybody telling us or guiding us.

Don Juan's disciples could hardly believe such statements. However, at one moment, every one of them ceased to be confused and despondent. In a most mysterious way, the magical passes, since they are magical, arranged themselves into extraordinary sequences that cleared up everything. The concern of people practicing Tensegrity nowadays matches exactly the concern of don Juan's disciples. People who have attended the seminars and workshops on Tensegrity feel bewildered by the amount of movements. They are clamoring for a system that would allow them to integrate the movements into categories that could be practiced and taught.

I must emphasize again what I have been emphasizing from the beginning : Tensegrity is not a standard system of movements for developing the body. It indeed develops the body, but only as a byproduct of a more transcendental purpose. The [actual page 10/12] sorcerers of ancient

Mexico were convinced that the magical passes conduce the practitioners to a level of awareness in which the parameters of normal, traditional perception are canceled out by the fact that they are enlarged. And the practitioners are thus allowed to enter into unimaginable worlds ; worlds which are as inclusive and total as the one in which we live.

"But why would I want to enter into those worlds?" I asked don Juan on one occasion.

"Because you are a traveler, like the rest of us human beings," he said, somewhat annoyed by my question. "Human beings are on a journey of awareness, which has been momentarily interrupted by strenuous forces. Believe me, we are travelers. If we don't have traveling, we have nothing."

His answer didn't satisfy me in the least. He further explained that human beings have decayed morally, physically and intellectually since the moment they ceased to travel, and that they are caught in an eddy, so to speak, and are spinning around, having the impression of moving with the current, and yet remaining stationary.

It took me thirty years of hard discipline to come to a cognitive plateau in which don Juan's statements were recognizable and their validity was established beyond the shadow of a doubt. Human beings are indeed travelers. If we don't have that, we have nothing.

Tensegrity must be practiced with the idea that the benefit of those movements comes by itself. This idea must be stressed at any cost. At the beginner's level, there is no way to direct the effect of the magical passes, and there is no possibility whatsoever that some of them could be beneficial for one organ or another. As we gain in discipline and our intending becomes clearer, the effect of magical passes can be selected by each one of us personally and individually, for specific purposes pertinent to each of us only.

What is of supreme importance at the present is to practice whatever Tensegrity sequence one remembers, or whatever set of movements comes to mind. The saturation that has been carried on will give, in the end, the results sought by the shamans of ancient Mexico : entering into a state of inner silence and deciding from inner silence what the next step will be.

Naturally, when I was told, in more or less the same terms, about the sorcerers' maneuver to saturate the mind into inner silence, my response was the response of any person who is interested in Tensegrity today : "It's not that I don't believe you, but it's something very hard to believe."

The only answer that don Juan had to my more than justified queries and the queries of his other three disciples was to say, "Take my word, because mine are not arbitrary statements. My word is the result of corroborating, for myself, what the sorcerers of ancient Mexico found out : that we human beings are magical beings."

Don Juan's legacy includes something that I have been repeating and I will continue to repeat : human beings are beings unknown to themselves, filled to the brim with incredible resources that are never used.

By saturating his disciples with movement, don Juan accomplished two formidable feats : he brought those hidden resources to the surface, and he gently broke our obsession with our linear mode of interpretation. By forcing his disciples to reach inner silence, he set up the continuation of their interrupted journey of awareness. In this manner, the ideal state of any Tensegrity practitioner, in relation to the Tensegrity movements, is the same as the ideal state of a practitioner of sorcery, in relation to the execution of magical passes. Both are being led by the movements themselves into an unprecedented culmination : inner silence.

From inner silence, the practitioners of Tensegrity will be able to execute, by themselves, for whatever effect they see fit, without any coaching from outside sources, any movement from the bulk of movements with which they have been saturated ; they will be able to execute them with precision and speed, as they walk, or eat, or rest, or do anything.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cleargreen, Incorporated is organizing and sponsoring an intensive six-day seminar and workshop on Tensegrity.

It will take place from July 20th to July 25th of this year in Los Angeles. The seminar and workshop will consist of two parts. The first will be a concentrated practice of a group of magical passes entitled "The Westwood Series" ; a series which will be taught in all the seminars and workshops that will be given during the current year. The goal pursued by practicing the same series is to gain an instant of homogeneity of movement. The consensus derived from this homogeneous effort is something of untold value to all the participants.

The second part of the seminar and workshop will consist of an intensive examination of key aspects of the warriors' way, including Recapitulation and Dreaming. The key premises of the warriors' way that will be emphasized will entice or even lead the participants to attain the most coveted state that shamans of ancient Mexico sought: inner silence.

Topics include :

"Optimal Positions for Recapitulating."

"The Implications of the Warriors' Way."

"The Need for Ultimate Pragmatism on the Warriors' Way."

"Reaching the Threshold of Inner Silence."

"The Beginning of Dreaming."

"The Magical Possibilities of Human Beings when Seen as a Conglomerate of Energy Fields."

"Relaxation Techniques Used by Shamans of Ancient Mexico."

"The Sum Total of the Realizable Options Offered by the Warriors' Way."

The persons who will conduct this seminar and workshop are Carlos Castaneda, Carol Tiggs,Florinda Donner-Grau, Taisha Abelar and the Blue Scout. The Tensegrity movements will be taught and demonstrated by six Energy Trackers.

To register, please call Cleargreen at (310) 264-6126. Fax: (310) 264-6130. For a complete schedule and description of this workshop, please visit our web site (address listed on following page).

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Cleargreen also announces the release of the third videocassette on Tensegrity called Energetically Crossing from One Phylum to Another.

The movements of the third videocassette were selected because they are a natural sequence of magical passes, which sorcerers use to enhance the scope of their awareness. Sorcerers contend that it is possible for the awareness of man to take a giant leap of perception and actually perceive the world under conditions that defy the imagination. They believe, for example, that it is possible to perceive and interpret the world in the terms of other organisms that belong to different phyla.

According to don Juan Matus, such beliefs were not mere assertions of the intellect. He said that sorcerers were not involved in any way in wishful thinking, but that they were genuine navigators of the unknown. One of the points on their navigation charts, so to speak, was crossing, perception-wise, from one phylum to another. This claim staggers the linear mind. It seems inconceivable that something like this could take place. Don Juan asserted that it was inconceivable merely in the syntax of our languages, because the pragmatic option of crossing from one phylum to another was never selected as a feasible alternative.

-------------------- oOo ---------------------

The purpose of the movements of the second volume on Tensegrity, Redistributing Dispersed Energy, is to redistribute the energy which the wear and tear of daily living drives away from our natural centers of energy : the liver and gallbladder ; the pancreas and spleen ; and the kidneys and adrenals.

The purpose of the movements shown in the first volume, Twelve Basic Movements to Gather Energy and Promote Well-being, is to condition the muscles and tendons to respond quickly and efficiently to other sequences of movement that require greater concentration and kinesthetic memory.

There is also available an instructional booklet in Spanish that accompanies the first videocassette, Twelve Basic Movements to Gather Energy and Promote Well-Being . It consists of a translation of the explanatory text that goes along with the movements shown on the videocassette.

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Two new videocassettes on Tensegrity are in production at the present and will be released at the end of the year. One is about movements for women. Most of the movements in this series were taught in the Women's Seminar that took place in March of this year in Los Angeles. The second videocassette is entitled The Oakland Series, and consists of the magical passes which were taught in the Oakland seminar of April of this year.

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For continuing Information about forthcoming events and other announcements, please visit the Cleargreen web site at http://www.webb.com/Castaneda

Cleargreen's e-mail address is : infinity@webb.com

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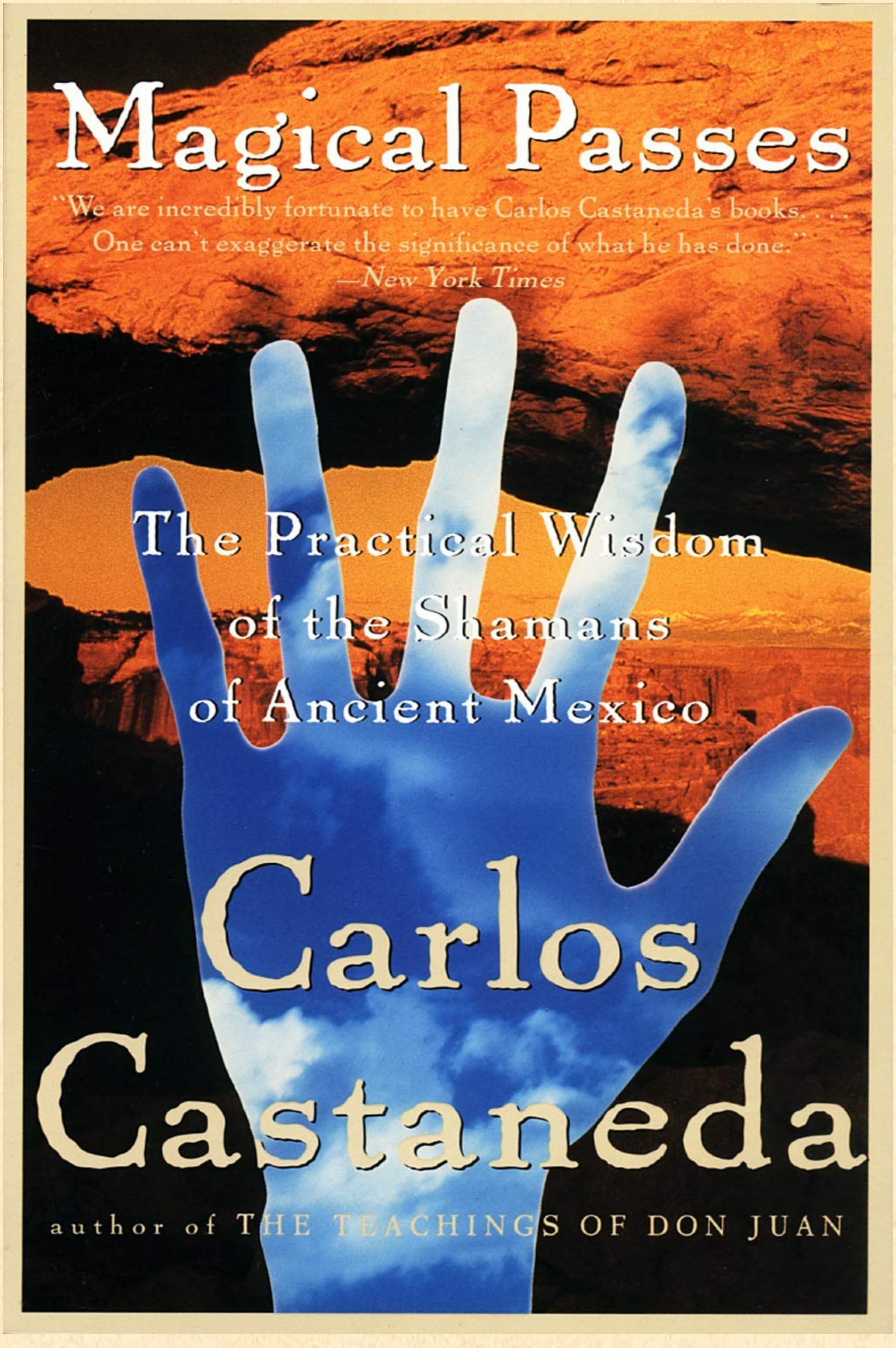
# 12 - MAGICAL PASSES: THE PRACTICAL WISDOM OF THE SHAMANS OF ANCIENT MEXICO

© 1998 (January 20) - Carlos Castaneda. Body movements for breaking the barriers of normal perception.


Magical Passes
"We are incredibly fortunate to have Carlos Castaneda's books. . . . One can't exaggerate the significance of what he has done."
—New York Times
The Practical Wisdom of the Shamans of Ancient Mexico
Carlos Castaneda
author of THE TEACHINGS OF DON JUAN

# Book 12 – MAGICAL PASSES

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To every one of the practitioners of Tensegrity,
who, by rallying their forces around it,
have put me in touch with energetic formulations
that were never available todon Juan Matus or the shamans of his lineage

# Introduction

Don Juan Matus, a master sorcerer, a *nagual,* as master sorcerers are called when they lead a group of other sorcerers, introduced me to the cognitive world of shamans who lived in Mexico in ancient times. Don Juan Matus was an Indian who was born in Yuma, Arizona. His father was a Yaqui Indian from Sonora, Mexico, and his mother was presumably a Yuma Indian from Arizona. Don Juan lived in Arizona until he was ten years old. He was then taken by his father to Sonora, Mexico, where they were caught in the endemic Yaqui wars against the Mexicans. His father was killed, and as a ten-year-old child don Juan ended up in Southern Mexico, where he grew up with relatives.

At the age of twenty, he came in contact with a master sorcerer. His name was Julian Osorio. He introduced don Juan into a lineage of sorcerers that was purported to be twenty-five generations long. He was not an Indian at all, but the son of European immigrants to Mexico. Don Juan related to me that the *nagual* Julian had been an actor, and that he was a dashing person—a raconteur, a mime, adored by everybody, influential, commanding. In one of his theatrical tours to the provinces, the actor Julian Osorio fell under the influence of another *nagual,* Elias Ulloa, who transmitted to him the knowledge of his lineage of sorcerers.

Don Juan Matus, following the tradition of his lineage of shamans, taught some bodily movements which he called *magical passes* to his four disciples: Taisha Abelar, Florinda Donner-Grau, Carol Tiggs, and myself. He taught them to us in the same spirit in which they had been taught for generations, with one notable departure: he eliminated the excessive ritual which had surrounded the teaching and performance of those *magical passes* for generations. Don Juan's comments in this respect were that ritual had lost it's impetus as new generations of practitioners became more interested in efficiency and functionalism. He recommended to me, however, that under no circumstances should I talk about the *magical passes* with any of his disciples or with people in general. His reasons were that the *magical passes* pertained exclusively to each person, and that their effect was so shattering, it was better just to practice them without discussing them.

Don Juan Matus taught me everything he knew about the sorcerers of his lineage. He stated, asserted, affirmed, explained to me every nuance of his knowledge. Therefore, everything I say about the *magical passes* is a direct result of his instruction. The *magical passes* were not invented. They were discovered by the shamans of don Juan's lineage who lived in Mexico in ancient times, while they were in shamanistic states of *heightened awareness.* The discovery of the *magical passes* was quite accidental. It began as very simple queries about the nature of an incredible sensation of well-being that those shamans experienced in those states of *heightened awareness* when they held certain bodily positions, or when they moved their limbs in some specific manner. Their sensation of well-being had been so intense that their drive to repeat those movements in their normal awareness became the focus of all their endeavors.

By all appearances, they succeeded in their task, and found themselves the possessors of a very complex series of movements that, when practiced, yielded them tremendous results in terms of mental and physical prowess. In fact, the results of performing these movements were so dramatic that they called them *magical passes*. They taught them for generations only to shaman initiates, on a personal basis, following elaborate rituals and secret ceremonies.

Don Juan Matus, in teaching the *magical passes*, departed radically from tradition. Such a departure forced don Juan to reformulate the pragmatic goal of the *magical passes*. He presented this goal to me not so much as the enhancement of mental and physical balance, as it had been in the past, but as the practical possibility of *redeploying energy*. He explained that such a departure was due to the influence of the two *naguals* who had preceded him.

It was the belief of the sorcerers of don Juan's lineage that there is an inherent amount of energy existing in each one of us, an amount which is not subject to the onslaughts of outside forces for augmenting it or for decreasing it. They believed that this quantity of energy was sufficient to accomplish something which those sorcerers deemed to be the obsession of every man on Earth: breaking the parameters of normal perception. Don Juan Matus was convinced that our incapacity to break those parameters was induced by our culture and social milieu. He maintained that our culture and social milieu deployed every bit of our inherent energy in fulfilling established behavioral patterns which didn't allow us to break those parameters of normal perception.

"Why in the world would I, or anyone else, want to break those para- meters?" I asked don Juan on one occasion.

"Breaking those parameters is the unavoidable issue of mankind," he replied. "Breaking them means the entrance into unthinkable worlds of a pragmatic value in no way different from the value of our world of everyday life. Regardless of whether or not we accept this premise, we are obsessed with breaking those parameters, and we fail miserably at it, hence the profusion of drugs and stimulants and religious rituals and ceremonies among modern man."

"Why do you think we have failed so miserably, don Juan?" I asked.

"Our failure to fulfill our subliminal wish," he said, "is due to the fact that we tackle it in a helter-skelter way. Our tools are too crude. They are equivalent to trying to bring down a wall by ramming it with the head. Man never considers this breakage in terms of energy. For sorcerers, success is determined only by the accessibility or the inaccessibility of energy.

“Since it is impossible,” he continued, “to augment our inherent energy, the only avenue open for the sorcerers of ancient Mexico was the *redeployment of* that energy. For them, this process of *redeployment* began with the *magical passes*, and the way they affected the physical body.”

Don Juan stressed in every way possible, while imparting his instruction, the fact that the enormous emphasis the shamans of his lineage had put on physical prowess and mental well-being had lasted to the present day. I was able to corroborate the truth of his statements by observing him and his fifteen sorcerer-companions. Their superb physical and mental balance was the most obvious feature about them.

Don Juan’s reply when I once asked him directly why sorcerers put so much stock in the physical side of man was a total surprise to me. I had always thought that he himself was a spiritual man.

“Shamans are not spiritual at all,” he said. “They are very practical beings. It is a well-known fact, however, that shamans are generally regarded as eccentric, or even insane. Perhaps that is what makes you think that they are spiritual. They seem insane because they are always trying to explain things that cannot be explained. In the course of such futile attempts to give complete explanations that cannot be completed under any circumstances, they lose all coherence and say inanities.

“You need a pliable body, if you want physical prowess and levelheadedness,” he went on. “These are the two most important issues in the lives of shamans, because they bring forth sobriety and pragmatism: the only indispensable requisites for entering into other realms of perception. To navigate, in a genuine way, in the unknown necessitates an attitude of daring, but not one of recklessness. In order to establish a balance between audacity and recklessness, a sorcerer has to be extremely sober, cautious, skillful, and in superb physical condition.”

“But why in superb physical condition, don Juan?” I asked. “Isn’t the desire or the will to journey into the unknown enough?”

“Not in your pissy life!” he replied rather brusquely. “Just to conceive facing the unknown—much less enter into it—requires guts of steel, and a body that would be capable of holding those guts. What would be the point of being gutsy if you didn’t have mental alertness, physical prowess, and adequate muscles?"

The superb physical condition that don Juan had steadily advocated from the first day of our association, the product of the rigorous execution of the *magical passes*, was, by all indications, the first step toward the *redeployment* of our inherent energy. This *redeployment of energy* was, in don Juan's view, the most crucial issue in the lives of shamans, as well as in the life of any individual. *Redeployment of energy* is a process which consists of transporting, from one place to another, energy which already exists within us. This energy has been displaced from centers of vitality in the body, which require that displaced energy in order to bring forth a balance between mental alertness and physical prowess.

The shamans of don Juan's lineage were deeply engaged with the *redeployment* of their inherent energy. This involvement wasn't an intellectual endeavor, nor was it the product of induction or deduction, or logical conclusions. It was the result of their ability to perceive energy as it flowed in the universe.

"Those sorcerers called this ability to perceive energy as it flowed in the universe *seeing,"* don Juan explained to me. "They described *seeing* as a state of *heightened awareness* in which the human body is capable of perceiving energy as a flow, a current, a windlike vibration. To *see* energy as it flows in the universe is the product of a momentary halt of the system of interpretation proper to human beings."

"What is this system of interpretation, don Juan?" I asked.

"The shamans of ancient Mexico found out," he replied, "that every part of the human body is engaged, in one way or another, in turning this vibratory flow, this current of vibration, into some form of sensory input. The sum total of this bombardment of sensory input is then, through usage, turned into the system of interpretation that makes human beings capable of perceiving the world the way they do.

"To make this system of interpretation come to a halt," he went on, "was the result of tremendous discipline on the part of the sorcerers of ancient Mexico. They called this halt *seeing,* and made it the corner stone of their knowledge. To *see* energy as it flowed in the universe was, for them, an essential tool that they employed in making their classifictory schemes. Because of this capacity, for instance, they conceived the total universe available to the perception of human beings as an onion-like affair, consisting of thousands of layers. The daily world of human beings, they believed, is but one such layer. Consequently, they also believed that other layers are not only accessible to human perception, but are part of man's natural heritage."

Another issue of tremendous value in the knowledge of those sorcerers, an issue which was also a consequence of their capacity to *see* energy as it flowed in the universe, was the discovery of the human energetic configuration. This human energetic configuration was, for them, a conglomerate of energy fields agglutinated together by a vibratory force that bound those energy fields into a *luminous ball* of energy. For the sorcerers of don Juan's lineage, a human being has an oblong shape like an egg, or a round shape like a ball. Thus, they called them *luminous eggs or luminous ball.* This sphere of luminosity was considered by them to be our true self—true in the sense that it is irreducible in terms of energy. It is irreducible because the totality of human resources are engaged in the act of perceiving it directly as energy.

Those shamans discovered that on the back face of this *luminous ball* there is a point of greater brilliance. They figured out, through processes of observing energy directly, that this point is key in the act of turning energy into sensory data and then interpreting it. For this reason, they called it the *assemblage point,* and deemed that perception is indeed assembled there. They described the *assemblage point* as being located behind the shoulder blades, an arm's length away from them. They also found out that the *assemblage point for* the entire human race is located on the same spot, thus giving every human being an entirely similar view of the world.

A finding of tremendous value for them, and for shamans of succeed' ing generations, was that the location of the *assemblage point* on that spot is the result of usage and socialization. For this reason, they consid' ered it to be an arbitrary position which gives merely the illusion of being final and irreducible. A product of this illusion is the seemingly unshakable conviction of human beings that the world they deal with daily is the only world that exists, and that it's finality is undeniable.

"Believe me," don Juan said to me once, "this sense of finality about the world is a mere illusion. Due to the fact that it has never been chai' lenged, it stands as the only possible view. To *see* energy as it flows in the universe is the tool for challenging it. Through the use of this tool, the sorcerers of my lineage arrived at the conclusion that there are indeed a staggering number of worlds available to man's perception. They described those worlds as being all'inclusive realms, realms where one can act and struggle. In other words, they are worlds where one can live and die, as in this world of everyday life."

During the thirteen years of my association with him, don Juan taught me the basic steps toward accomplishing this feat of *seeing.* I have discussed those steps in all of my previous writings, but never have I touched on the key point in this process: the *magical passes*. He taught me a great number of them, but along with that wealth of knowledge, don Juan also left me with the certainty that I was the last link of his lineage. Accepting that I was the last link of his lineage implied automatically for me the task of finding new ways to disseminate the know!' edge of his lineage, since it's continuity was no longer an issue.

I need to clarify a very important point in this regard: Don Juan Matus was not ever interested in teaching his knowledge; he was interested in perpetuating his lineage. His three other disciples and I were the means—chosen, he said, by the spirit itself, for he had no active part in it—that were going to ensure that perpetuation. Therefore, he engaged himself in a titanic effort to teach me all he knew about sorcery, or shamanism, and about the development of his lineage.

In the course of training me, he realized that my energetic configuration was, according to him, so vastly different from his own that it couldn't mean anything else but the end of his line. I told him that I resented enormously his interpretation of whatever invisible difference existed between us. I didn't like the burden of being the last of his line, nor did I understand his reasoning.

“The shamans of ancient Mexico,” he said to me once, “believed that choice, as human beings understand it, is the precondition of the cognitive world of man, but that it is only a benevolent interpretation of something which is found when awareness ventures beyond the cushion of our world, a benevolent interpretation of acquiescence. Human beings are in the throes of forces that pull them every which way. The art of sorcerers is not really to choose, but to be subtle enough to acquiesce.

“Sorcerers, although they seem to make nothing else but decisions, make no decisions at all,” he went on. “I didn't decide to choose you, and I didn't decide that you would be the way you are. Since I couldn't choose to whom I would impart my knowledge, I had to accept whomever the spirit was offering me. And that person was you, and you are energetically capable only of ending, not of continuing.”

He maintained that the ending of his line had nothing to do with him or his efforts, or with his success or failure as a sorcerer seeking total freedom. He understood it as something that had to do with a choice exercised beyond the human level, not by beings or entities, but by the impersonal forces of the universe.

Finally, I came to accept what don Juan called my fate. Accepting it put me face to face with another issue that he referred to as *locking the door when you leave*. That is to say, I assumed the responsibility of deciding exactly what to do with everything he had taught me and carrying out my decision impeccably. First of all, I asked myself the crucial ques^ tion of what to do with the *magical passes*: the facet of don Juan's knowledge most imbued with pragmatism and function. I decided to use the *magical passes* and teach them to whoever wanted to learn them. My decision to end the secrecy that had surrounded them for an undetermined length of time was, naturally, the corollary of my total convic- tion that I am indeed the end of don Juan's lineage. It became inconceivable to me that I should carry secrets which were not even mine. To shroud the *magical passes* in secrecy was not my decision. It was my decision, however, to end such a condition.

I endeavored from then on to come up with a more generic form of each magical pass, a form suitable to everyone. This resulted in a configuration of slightly modified forms of each one of the *magical passes*. I have called this new configuration of movements *Tensegrity,* a term which belongs to architecture, where it means "the property of skeleton structures that employ continuous tension members and discontinuous compression members in such a way that each member operates with the maximum efficiency and economy."

In order to explain what the *magical passes* of the sorcerers who lived in Mexico in ancient times are, I would like to make a clarification: "ancient times" meant, for don Juan, a time ten thousand years ago and beyond, a figure that seems incongruous if examined from the point of view of the classificatory schemes of modern scholars. When I confronted don Juan with the discrepancy between his estimate and what I considered to be a more realistic one, he remained adamant in his conviction. He believed it to be a fact that people who lived in the New World ten thousand years ago were deeply concerned with matters of the universe and perception that modern man has not even begun to fathom.

Regardless of our differing chronological interpretations, the effectiveness of the *magical passes* is undeniable to me, and I feel obligated to elucidate the subject strictly following the manner in which it was presented to me. The directness of their effect on me has had a deep influence on the way in which I deal with them. What I am presenting in this work is an intimate reflection of that influence.

## Magical Passes

The first time don Juan talked to me at length about *magical passes* was when he made a derogatory comment about my weight.

"You are way too chubby," he said, looking at me from head to toe and shaking his head in disapproval. "You are one step from being fat. Wear and tear is beginning to show in you. Like any other member of your race, you are developing a lump of fat on your neck, like a bull. It's time that you take seriously one of the sorcerers' greatest findings: the *magical passes*."

"What *magical passes* are you talking about, don Juan?" I asked. "You have never mentioned this topic to me before. Or, if you have, it must have been so lightly that I can't recall anything about it."

"Not only have I told you a great deal about *magical passes*," he said, "you know a great number of them already. I have been teaching them to you all along."

As far as I was concerned, it wasn't true that he had taught me any *magical passes* all along. I protested vehemently.

"Don't be so passionate about defending your wonderful self," he joked, making a ridiculous gesture of apology with his eyebrows. "What I meant to say is that you imitate everything I do, so I have been cash' ing in on your imitation capacity. I have shown you various *magical passes*, all along, and you have always taken them to be my delight in cracking my joints. I like the way you interpret them: cracking my joints! We are going to keep on referring to them in that manner.

"I have shown you ten different ways of cracking my joints," he continued. "Each one of them is a magical pass that fits to perfection my body and yours. You could say that those ten *magical passes* are in your line and mine. They belong to us personally and individually, as they belonged to other sorcerers who were just like the two of us in the twenty-five generations that preceded us."

The *magical passes* don Juan was referring to, as he himself had said, were ways in which I thought he cracked his joints. He used to move his arms, legs, torso, and hips in specific ways, I thought, in order to create a maximum stretch of his muscles, bones, and ligaments. The result of these stretching movements, from my point of view, was a succession of cracking sounds which I always thought that he was producing for my amazement and amusement. He, indeed, had asked me time and time again to imitate him. In a challenging manner, he had even dared me to memorize the movements and repeat them at home until I could get my joints to make cracking noises, just like his.

I had never succeeded in reproducing the sounds, yet I had definitely but unwittingly learned all the movements. I know now that not achieving that cracking sound was a blessing in disguise, because the muscles and tendons of the arms and back should never be stressed to that point. Don Juan was born with a facility to crack the joints of his arms and back, just as some people have the facility to crack their knuckles.

“How did the old sorcerers invent those *magical passes*, don Juan?” I asked.

“Nobody invented them,” he said sternly. “To think that they were invented implies instantly the intervention of the mind, and this is not the case when it comes to those *magical passes*. They were, rather, discovered by the old shamans. I was told that it all began with the extraordinary sensation of well-being that those shamans experienced when they were in shamanistic states of *heightened awareness*. They felt such tremendous, enthralling vigor that they struggled to repeat it in their hours of vigil.

"At first," don Juan explained to me once, "those shamans believed that it was a mood of well-being that *heightened awareness* created in general. Soon, they found out that not all the states of shamanistic *heightened awareness* which they entered produced in them the same sensation of well-being. A more careful scrutiny revealed to them that whenever that sensation of well-being occurred, they had always been engaged in some specific kind of bodily movement. They realized that while they were in states of *heightened awareness*, their bodies moved involuntarily in certain ways, and that those certain ways were indeed the cause of that unusual sensation of physical and mental plenitude."

Don Juan speculated that it had always appeared to him that the movements that the bodies of those shamans executed automatically in *heightened awareness* were a sort of hidden heritage of mankind; something that had been put in deep storage to be revealed only to those who were looking for it. He portrayed those sorcerers as deep-sea divers who, without knowing it, reclaimed it.

Don Juan said that those sorcerers arduously [* arduously- in a manner characterized by toilsome effort to the point of exhaustion; especially physical effort] began to piece together some of the movements they remembered. Their efforts paid off. They were capable of re-creating movements that had seemed to them to be automatic reactions of the body in a state of *heightened awareness*.

Encouraged by their success, they were capable of re-creating hundreds of movements which they performed without ever attempting to classify them into an understandable scheme. Their idea was that in *heightened awareness*, the movements happened spontaneously; and that there was a force that guided their effect without the intervention of their volition. [* volition- the capability of conscious choice and decision and intention]

Don Juan commented that the nature of the ancient sorcerers' findings always led him to believe that those sorcerers were extraordinary people because the movements that they discovered were never revealed in the same fashion to modern shamans who also entered into *heightened awareness*.

He thought that perhaps this was because modern shamans had learned the movements beforehand in some fashion or another from their predecessors; or perhaps because the sorcerers of ancient times had more energetic mass.

"What do you mean, don Juan, that they had more energetic mass?" I asked. "Were they bigger men?"

"I don't think they were physically any bigger," he said, "but energetically, they appeared to the eye of a seer as an oblong shape. They called themselves *luminous eggs*. I have never *seen* a *luminous egg* in my life. All I have *seen* are *luminous balls*. It is presumable, then, that man has lost some energetic mass over the generations."

Don Juan explained to me that to a seer, the universe is composed of an infinite number of energy fields. They appear to the eye of the seer as luminous filaments that shoot out every which way. Don Juan said that those filaments crisscross through the *luminous ball* that human beings are, and that it was reasonable to assume that if human beings were once oblong shapes, like eggs, they were much higher than a ball. Therefore, energy fields that touched human beings at the crown of the *luminous egg* are no longer touching them now that they are *luminous ball*. Don Juan felt that this meant to him a loss of energy mass, which seemed to have been crucial for the purpose of reclaiming that hidden treasure: the *magical passes*.

"Why are the passes of the old shamans called *magical passes*, don Juan?" I asked him on one occasion.

"They are not just called *magical passes*," he said, "they are magical! They produce an effect that cannot be accounted for by means of ordinary explanations. These movements are not physical exercises or mere postures of the body: They are real attempts at reaching an optimal state of being.

"The magic of the movements," he went on, "is a subtle change that the practitioners experience on executing them. It is an ephemeral [* ephemeral- lasting a very short time] quality that the movement brings to their physical and mental states; a kind of shine; a light in the eyes. This subtle change is a touch of the spirit. It is as if the practitioners, through the movements, re-establish an unused link with the life force that sustains them."

He further explained that another reason that the movements are called *magical passes* is that by means of practicing them, shamans are transported in terms of perception to other states of being in which they can sense the world in an indescribable manner.

"Because of this quality, because of this magic," don Juan said to me, "the passes must be practiced not as exercises, but as a way of beckoning power."

"But can they be taken as physical movements, although they have never been taken as such?" I asked.

"You can practice them any way you wish," don Juan replied. "The *magical passes* enhance awareness, regardless of how you take them. The intelligent thing would be to take them as what they are: *magical passes* that on being practiced lead the practitioner to drop the mask of socialization."

"What is the mask of socialization?" I asked.

"The veneer that all of us defend and die for," he said. "The veneer we acquire in the world. The one that prevents us from reaching all our potential. The one that makes us believe we are immortal. The intent of thousands of sorcerers permeates these movements. Executing them, even in a casual way, makes the mind come to a halt."

"What do you mean that they make the mind come to a halt?" I asked.

"Everything," he said, "that we do in the world, we recognize and identify by converting it into lines of similarity; lines of things that are strung together by purpose. For example, if I say to you fork, this immediately brings to your mind the idea of spoon, knife, tablecloth, napkin, plate, cup and saucer, glass of wine, chili con carne, banquet, birthday, fiesta. You could certainly go on naming things strung together by purpose, nearly forever. Everything we do is strung like this. The strange part for sorcerers is that they *see* that all these lines of affinity, all these hues of things strung together by purpose, are associated with man's idea that things are unchangeable and forever, like the word of God."

"I don't see, don Juan, why you bring the word of God into this elucidation. [* elucidation- an interpretation that removes obstacles to understanding] What does the word of God have to do with what you are trying to explain?"

"Everything!" he replied. "It seems to be that in our minds, the entire universe is like the word of God: absolute and unchanging. This is the way we conduct ourselves. In the depths of our minds, there is a checking device that doesn't permit us to stop to examine that the word of God, as we accept it and believe it to be, pertains to a dead world. A live world, on the other hand, is in constant flux. It moves. It changes. It reverses itself.

"The most abstract reason why the *magical passes* of the sorcerers of my lineage are magical," he went on, "is that in practicing them, the body of the practitioner realizes that everything, instead of being an unbroken chain of objects that have affinity for each other, is a current, a flux. And if everything in the universe is a flux or a current, that current can be stopped. A dam can be put on it, and in this manner it's flux can be halted or deviated."

Don Juan explained to me on one occasion the overall effect that the practice of the *magical passes* had on the sorcerers of his lineage, and correlated this effect with what would happen to modern practitioners.

"The sorcerers of my lineage," he said, "were shocked half to death upon realizing that practicing their *magical passes* brought about the halt of the otherwise uninterrupted flux of things. They constructed a series of metaphors to describe this halt, and in their effort to explain it, or reconsider it, they flubbed it. They lapsed into ritual and ceremony. They began to enact the act of halting the flux of things. They believed that if certain ceremonies and rituals were focused on a definite aspect of their *magical passes*, the *magical passes* themselves would beckon a specific result. Very soon, the number and complexity of their rituals and ceremonies became more encumbering than the number of their *magical passes*.

"It is very important," he went on, "to focus the attention of the practitioner on some definite aspect of the *magical passes*. However, that fixation should be light, funny, and void of morbidity and grimness. They should be done for the hell of it without really expecting returns."

He gave the example of one of his cohorts, a sorcerer by the name of Silvio Manuel, whose delight and predilection was to adapt the *magical passes* of the sorcerers of ancient times to the steps of his modern dancing. Don Juan described Silvio Manuel as a superb acrobat and dancer who actually danced the *magical passes*.

"The *nagual* Elias Ulloa," don Juan continued, "was the most prominent innovator of my lineage. He was the one who threw all the ritual out the window, so to speak, and practiced the *magical passes* exclusively for the purpose for which they were originally used at one time in the remote past; for the purpose of *redeploying energy*.

"The nagud Julian Osorio, who came after him," don Juan continued, "was the one who gave ritual the final death blow. Since he was a bona fide professional actor who at one time had made his living acting in the theater, he put enormous stock into what sorcerers called the shamanistic theater. He called it the theater of infinity, and into it, he poured all the *magical passes* that were available to him. Every movement of his characters was imbued to the gills with *magical passes*. Not only that, but he turned the theater into a new avenue for teaching them. Between the *nagual* Julian, the actor of infinity, and Silvio Manuel, the dancer of infinity, they had the whole thing pegged down. A new era was on the horizon! The era of pure *redeployment*!"

Don Juan's explanation of *redeployment* was that human beings are perceived as conglomerates of energy fields; sealed energetic units that have definite boundaries which don't permit the entrance or the exit of energy. Therefore, the energy existing within that conglomerate of energy fields is all that each human individual can count on.

"The natural tendency of human beings," he said, "is to push energy away from the centers of vitality, which are located: on the right side of the body at the edge of the rib cage on the area of the liver and gallbladder; on the left side of the body, again, at the edge of the rib cage on the area of the pancreas and spleen; on the back directly behind the other two centers around the kidneys and above them on the area of the adrenal glands; at the base of the neck on the V spot made by the sternum and clavicle; and around the uterus and ovaries in women."

"How do human beings push this energy away, don Juan?" I asked.

"By worrying," he replied. "By succumbing to the stress of everyday life. The duress of daily actions takes it's toll on the body."

"And what happens to this energy, don Juan?" I asked.

"It gathers on the periphery of the *luminous ball*," he said, "sometimes to the point of making a thick bark like deposit. The *magical passes* relate to the total human being as a physical body, and as a conglomerate of energy fields. They agitate the energy that has been accumulated in the *luminous ball* and return it to the physical body itself. The *magical passes* engage both the body itself as a physical entity that suffers the dispersion of energy, and the body as an energetic entity which is capable of redeploying that dispersed energy.

"Having energy on the periphery of the *luminous ball*," he continued, "energy that is not being redeployed, is as useless as not having any energy at all. It is truly a terrifying situation to have a surplus of energy stashed away; inaccessible for all practical purposes. It is like being in the desert, dying of dehydration, while you carry a tank of water that you cannot open, because you don't have any tools. In that desert, you can't even find a rock to bang it with."

The true magic of the *magical passes* is the fact that they cause crusted-down energy to enter again into the centers of vitality, hence the feeling of well-being and prowess which is the practitioner's experience.

The sorcerers of don Juan's lineage- before they entered into their excessive ritualism and ceremony- had formulated the basis for this *redeployment*. They called it saturation; meaning that they inundated their bodies with a profusion of *magical passes* in order to allow the force that binds us together to guide those *magical passes* to cause the maximum *redeployment of energy*.

I asked him once, without really meaning to be sarcastic, "But don Juan, are you telling me that every time you crack your joints, or every time I try to imitate you, we are really *redeploying energy*!"

"Every time we execute a magical pass," he replied, "we are indeed altering the basic structures of our beings. Energy which is ordinarily crusted down is released and begins to enter into the vortexes of vitality of the body. Only by means of that reclaimed energy can we put up a dike; a barrier to contain an otherwise uncontainable and always deleterious flow."

I asked don Juan to give me an example of putting a dam on what he was calling a deleterious flow. I told him that I wanted to visualize it in my mind.

"I'll give you an example," he said. "For instance, at my age, I should be prey to high blood pressure. If I went to see a doctor, the doctor, upon seeing me, would assume that I must be an old Indian, plagued with uncertainties, frustrations, and bad diet; all of this, naturally, resulting in a most expected and predictable condition of high blood pressure: an acceptable corollary of my age.

"I don't have any problems with high blood pressure," he went on, "not because I am stronger than the average man or because of my genetic frame, but because my *magical passes* have made my body break through any patterns of behavior that result in high blood pressure. I can truthfully say that every time I crack my joints following the execution of a magical pass, I am blocking off the flow of expectations and behavior that ordinarily result in high blood pressure at my age.

"Another example I can give you is the agility of my knees," he continued. "Haven't you noticed how much more agile I am than you? When it comes to moving my knees, I'm a kid! With my *magical passes*, I put a dam on the current of behavior and physicality that makes the knees of people, both men and women, stiff with age."

One of the most annoying feelings I had ever experienced was caused by the fact that don Juan Matus, although he could have been my grandfather, was infinitely younger than I. In comparison, I was stiff, opinionated, repetitious. I was senile.

He, on the other hand, was fresh, inventive, agile, and resourceful. In short, he possessed something which, although I was young, I did not possess: youth. He delighted in telling me repeatedly that young age was not youth, and that young age was in no way a deterrent to senility. He pointed out that if I watched my fellow men carefully and dispassionately, I would be able to corroborate that by the time they reached twenty years of age, they were already senile, repeating themselves inanely.

"How is it possible, don Juan," I said, "that you could be younger than I?"

"I have vanquished my mind," he said, opening his eyes wide to denote bewilderment. "I don't have a mind to tell me that it is time to be old. I don't honor agreements in which I didn't participate. Remember this: It is not just a slogan for sorcerers to say that they do not honor agreements in which they did not participate. To be plagued by old age is one such agreement."

We were silent for a long time. Don Juan seemed to be waiting, I thought, for the effect that his words might cause in me. What I thought to be my psychological unity was further ripped apart by a clearly dual response on my part. On one level, I repudiated [* repudiated- refuse to acknowledge, ratify, or recognize as valid] with all my might the nonsense that don Juan was verbalizing; on another level, however, I couldn't fail to notice how accurate his remarks were.

Don Juan was old, and yet he wasn't old at all. He was ages younger than I. He was free from encumbering thoughts and habit patterns. He was roaming around in incredible worlds. He was free, while I was imprisoned by heavy thought patterns and habits; by petty and futile considerations about myself, which I felt on that occasion for the first time weren't even mine.

I asked don Juan on another occasion something that had been bothering me for a long time. He had stated that the sorcerers of ancient Mexico had discovered the *magical passes* as some sort of hidden treasure placed in storage for man to find. I wanted to know who would put something like that in storage for man. The only idea that I could come up with was derived from Catholicism. I thought of God doing it, or a guardian angel, or the Holy Spirit.

"It is not the Holy Spirit," he said, "which is only holy to you because you're secretly a Catholic. And certainly it is not God; a benevolent father as you understand God. Nor is it a goddess; a nurturing mother watching over the affairs of men as many people believe to be the case.

"It is rather an impersonal force that has endless things in storage for those who dare to seek them. It is a force in the universe; just as light and gravity are forces. This impersonal force is an agglutinating [* agglutinate- clump together] factor; a vibratory force that joins the conglomerate of energy fields that human beings are into one concise, cohesive unit. This vibratory force is the factor that doesn't allow the entrance or the exit of energy from the *luminous ball*.

"The sorcerers of ancient Mexico," he went on, "believed that the performance of their *magical passes* was the only factor that prepared and led the body to the otherworldly verification of the existence of that agglutinating force."

From don Juan's explanations, I derived the conclusion that the vibratory force he spoke about which agglutinates our fields of energy is apparently similar to what modern-day astronomers believe must happen at the core of all the galaxies that exist in the cosmos. They believe that at their cores, a force of incalculable strength holds the stars of galaxies in place. This force, called a 'black hole', is a theoretical construct which seems to be the most reasonable explanation as to why stars do not fly away, driven by their own rotational speeds.

Don Juan said that the old sorcerers knew that human beings, taken as conglomerates of energy fields, are held together not by energetic wrappings or energetic ligaments, but by some sort of vibration that renders everything at once alive and in place. Don Juan explained that those sorcerers, by means of their practices and their discipline, became capable of handling that vibratory force once they were fully conscious of it. Their expertise in dealing with it became so extraordinary that their actions were transformed into legends; mythological events that existed only as fables. For instance, one of the stories that don Juan told about the ancient sorcerers was that they were capable of dissolving their physical mass by merely placing their full consciousness and intent on that force.

Don Juan stated that, although they were capable of actually going through a pinhole if they deemed it necessary, they were never quite satisfied with the result of this maneuver of dissolving their mass. The reason for their discontent was that once their mass was dissolved, their capacity to act vanished. They were left with the ability of only witnessing events in which they were incapable of participating.

Their ensuing frustration, the result of being unable to act, turned, according to don Juan, into their damning flaw: their obsession with uncovering the nature of that vibratory force; an obsession driven by their concreteness, which made them want to hold and control that force. Their fervent desire was to strike from the ghostlike condition of masslessness; something which Jon Juan said could not ever be accomplished.

Modern-day practitioners, the cultural heirs of those sorcerers of antiquity, found out that it is not possible to be concrete and utilitarian about that vibratory force. Modern-day practitioners have opted for the only rational alternative: to become conscious of that force with no other purpose in sight except the elegance and well-being brought about by knowledge.

"The only permissible time," Don Juan said to me once, "when modern-day sorcerers use the power of this vibratory agglutinating force is when they burn from within; when the time comes for them to leave this world. It is simplicity itself for sorcerers to place their absolute and total consciousness on the binding force with the intent to burn; and off they go like a puff of air."

## Tensegrity

*Tensegrity* is the modern version of the *magical passes* of the shamans of ancient Mexico. The word *Tensegrity* is a most appropriate definition, because it is a mixture of the two terms *tension* and *integrity*. These terms express the two driving forces of the *magical passes*.

*Tension* is the activity created by contracting and relaxing the tendons and muscles of the body. *Integrity* is the act of regarding the body as a sound, complete, perfect unit.

*Tensegrity* is taught as a system of movements because that is the only manner in which the mysterious and vast subject of the *magical passes* could be faced in a modern setting. The people who now practice *Tensegrity* are not shaman practitioners in search of shamanistic alternatives that involve rigorous discipline, exertion, and hardships. Therefore, the emphasis of the *magical passes* has to be on their value as movements, and all the consequences that such movements bring forth.

Don Juan Matus had explained that the first drive of the sorcerers of his lineage who lived in Mexico in ancient times, in relation to the magical passes, was to *saturate* themselves with movement. They arranged every posture, every movement of the body that they could remember, into groups. They believed that the longer the group, the greater it's effect of *saturation*, and the greater the need for the practitioners to use their memory to recall it.

The shamans of don Juan's lineage, after arranging the *magical passes* into long groups and practicing them as sequences, deemed that this criterion of *saturation* had fulfilled it's purposes, and they dropped it. From then on, what was sought was the opposite: the fragmentation of the long groups into single segments, which were practiced as individual, independent units. The manner in which don Juan Matus taught the *magical passes* to his four disciples- Taisha Abelar, Florinda Donner-Grau, Carol Tiggs, and myself- was the product of this drive for fragmentation.

Don Juan's personal opinion was that the benefit of practicing the long groups was patently obvious; such practice forced the shaman initiates to use their kinesthetic [* kinesthesis- relating to the ability to feel movements of the limbs and body] memory. He considered the use of kinesthetic memory to be a real bonus, which those shamans had stumbled upon accidentally, and which had the marvelous effect of shutting off the noise of the mind: the internal dialogue.

Don Juan had explained to me that the way in which we reinforce our perception of the world, and keep it fixed at a certain level of efficiency and function, is by talking to ourselves.

"The entire human race," he said to me on one occasion, "keeps a determined level of function and efficiency by means of the internal dialogue. The internal dialogue is the key to maintaining the *assemblage point* stationary at the position shared by the entire human race: at the height of the shoulder blades, an arm's length away from them.

"By accomplishing the opposite of the internal dialogue," he went on, "that is to say, maintaining inner silence, practitioners can break the fixation of their *assemblage points*, and thus acquire an extraordinary fluidity of perception."

The practice of *Tensegrity* has been arranged around the performance of the long groups, which in *Tensegrity* have been renamed 'series' to avoid the generic implication of calling them just groups, as don Juan called them. In order to accomplish this arrangement, it was necessary to reestablish the criteria of saturation which had prompted the creation of the long groups. It took the practitioners of *Tensegrity* years of meticulous and concentrated work to reassemble a great number of the dismembered groups.

Reestablishing the criteria of saturation by performing the long series gave as a result something which don Juan had already defined as the modern goal of the *magical passes*: the *redeployment of energy*.

Don Juan was convinced that this had always been the unspoken goal of the *magical passes* even at the time of the old sorcerers. The old sorcerers didn't seem to have known this, but even if they did, they never conceptualized it in those terms. By all indications, what the old sorcerers sought avidly and experienced as a sensation of well-being and plenitude when they performed the *magical passes* was, in essence, the effect of unused energy being reclaimed by the centers of vitality in the body.

In *Tensegrity*, the long groups have been reassembled, and a great number of the fragments have been kept as single, functioning units. These single units have been strung together by purpose- for instance, the purpose of intending, or the purpose of recapitulation, or the purpose of inner silence, and so on- creating in this fashion the *Tensegrity* series. In this manner, a system has been achieved in which the best results are obtained by performing long sequences of movements that definitely tax the kinesthetic memory of the practitioners.

In every other respect, the way *Tensegrity* is taught is a faithful reproduction of the way in which don Juan taught the *magical passes* to his disciples. He inundated us with a profusion of detail, and let our minds be bewildered by the number and variety of *magical passes* taught to us; and let us be bewildered by the implication that each of the passes individually was a pathway to infinity.

His disciples spent years overwhelmed, confused, and above all despondent, because they felt that being inundated in such a manner was an unfair onslaught on them.

"When I teach you the *magical passes*," he explained to me once when I questioned him about the subject, "I am following the traditional sorcerers' device of clouding your linear view. By saturating your I kinesthetic memory, I am creating a pathway for you to inner silence.

"Since all of us," he continued, "are filled to the brim with the doings and undoings of the world of everyday life, we have very little room for kinesthetic memory. You may have noticed that you have none. When, you want to imitate my movements, you cannot remain facing me. You have to stand side by side with me in order to establish in your own body what's right and what's left.

"Now, if a long sequence of movements were presented to you, it would take you weeks of repetition to remember all the movements. While you're trying to memorize the movements, you have to make room for them in your memory by pushing other things out of the way. That was the effect that the old sorcerers sought."

Don Juan's contention was that if his disciples kept on doggedly practicing the *magical passes* in spite of their confusion, they would arrive at a threshold when their redeployed energy would tip the scales, and they would be able to handle the *magical passes* with absolute clarity.

When don Juan made those statements, I could hardly believe them. Nevertheless, at one moment, just as he had said, I ceased to be confused and despondent. In a most mysterious way, the *magical passes*, since they are magical, arranged themselves into extraordinary sequences that cleared up everything. Don Juan explained that the clarity I was experiencing was the result of the *redeployment* of my energy.

The concern of people practicing *Tensegrity* nowadays matches exactly my concern and the concern of don Juan's other disciples when we first began to perform the *magical passes*. They feel bewildered by the number of movements. I reiterate to them what don Juan reiterated to me over and over; that what is of supreme importance is to practice whatever *Tensegrity* sequence is remembered.

The saturation that has been carried on will give, in the end, the results sought by the shamans of ancient Mexico: the *redeployment of energy*, and it's three concomitants- [* concomitants- events or situations that happens at the same time as or in connection with another] the shutting off of the internal dialogue, the possibility for inner silence, and the fluidity of the *assemblage point*.

As a personal assessment, I can say that by saturating me with the *magical passes*, don Juan accomplished two formidable feats: One, he brought to the surface a flock of hidden resources that I had but didn't know existed- such as the ability to concentrate and the ability to remember detail; and two, he gently broke my obsession with my linear mode of interpretation.

When I questioned don Juan about what I was experiencing in this respect, he explained, "What is happening to you is that you are feeling the advent of inner silence when your internal dialogue has been minimally offset. A new flux of things has begun to enter into your field of perception. These things were always there on the periphery of your general awareness, but you never had enough energy to be deliberately conscious of them. As you chase away your internal dialogue, other items of awareness begin to fill in the empty space, so to speak.

"The new flux of energy," he went on, "which the *magical passes* have brought to your centers of vitality is making your *assemblage point* more fluid. It's no longer rigidly palisaded. [*

palisaded- surrounded with a wall in order to fortify] You're no longer driven by our ancestral fears which make us incapable of taking a step in any direction. Sorcerers say that energy makes us free, and that is the absolute truth."

The ideal state of *Tensegrity* practitioners in relation to the *Tensegrity* movements is the same as the ideal state of a practitioner of shamanism in relation to the execution of the *magical passes*. Both are being led by the movements themselves into an unprecedented culmination. From there, the practitioners of *Tensegrity* will be able to execute- by themselves and for whatever effect they see fit without any coaching from outside sources- any movement from the bulk of movements with which they have been saturated. They will be able to execute any movement with precision and speed as they walk, or eat, or rest, or do anything; because they will have the energy to do so.

The execution of the *magical passes*, as shown in *Tensegrity*, doesn't necessarily require a particular space or prearranged time. However, the movements should be done away from sharp currents of air. Don Juan dreaded currents of air on a perspiring body. He firmly believed that not every current of air was caused by the rising or lowering of temperature in the atmosphere, and that some currents of air were actually caused by conglomerates of consolidated energy fields moving purposefully through space.

Don Juan was convinced that such conglomerates of energy fields possessed a specific type of awareness particularly deleterious because human beings cannot ordinarily detect them and become exposed to them indiscriminately. The deleterious effect of such conglomerates of energy fields is especially prevalent in a large metropolis where they could be easily disguised as, if nothing else, the momentum created by the speed of passing automobiles.

Something else to bear in mind when practicing *Tensegrity* is that since the goal of the *magical passes* is something foreign to Western man, an effort should be made to keep the practice of *Tensegrity* detached from the concerns of our daily world. The practice of *Tensegrity* should not be mixed with elements with which we are already thoroughly familiar, such as conversation, music, or the sound of a radio or TV newsman reporting the news, no matter how muffled the sound might be.

The setting of modern urban life facilitates the formation of groups, and under these circumstances, the only manner in which *Tensegrity* can he taught and practiced in the seminars and workshops is in groups of practitioners. Practicing in groups is beneficial in many aspects and deleterious in others. It is beneficial because it allows the creation of a consensus of movement and the opportunity to learn by examination and comparison. It is deleterious because it fosters the reliance on others, and the emergence of syntactic commands and solicitations dealing with hierarchy.

Don Juan conceived that since the totality of human behavior was ruled by language, human beings have learned to respond to what he called syntactic commands, praising or deprecatory formulas built into language- for example, the responses that each individual makes, or elicits in others, with slogans such as: No problem, Piece of cake, It's time to worry, You could do better, I can't do it, My butt is too big, I'm the best, I'm the worst in the world, I could live with that, I'm coping, Everything's going to be okay, etc., etc. Don Juan maintained that what sorcerers have always wanted, as a basic rule of thumb, is to run away from activities derived from syntactic commands.

Originally, as don Juan described it, the *magical passes* were performed by the shamans of ancient Mexico individually and in solitariness, on the spur of the moment, or as the necessity arose. He taught them to his disciples in the same fashion. Don Juan stated that for the shaman practitioners, the challenge of performing the *magical passes* has always been to execute them perfectly; holding in mind only the abstract view of their perfect execution. Ideally, *Tensegrity* should be taught and practiced in the same fashion.

However, the conditions of modern life and the fact that the goal of the *magical passes* has been formulated to apply to a great number of people make it imperative that a new approach be taken. *Tensegrity* should be practiced in whatever form is easiest: either in groups, or alone, or both.

In my particular case, the practice of *Tensegrity* in very large groups has been more than ideal because it has given me the unique opportunity of witnessing something which don Juan Matus and all the sorcerers of his lineage never did: the effects of human mass. Don Juan and all the shamans of his lineage, which he considered to be twenty-seven generations long, never were capable of witnessing the effects of human mass. They practiced the *magical passes* alone or in groups of up to five practitioners. For them, the *magical passes* were highly individualistic.

If the number of *Tensegrity* practitioners is in the hundreds, an energetic current is nearly instantaneously formed among them. This energetic current, which a shaman could easily *see*, creates in the practitioners a sense of urgency. It is like a vibratory wind that sweeps through them, and gives them the primary elements of purpose. I have been privileged to *see* something I considered to be a portentous [* portentous- of momentous or ominous significance] sight: the awakening of purpose; the energetic basis of man. Don Juan Matus used to call this unbending intent. He taught me that unbending intent is the essential tool of those who journeyed into the unknown.

A very important issue to consider when practicing *Tensegrity* is that the movements must be executed with the idea that the benefit of the *magical passes* comes by itself. This idea must be stressed at any cost. At the beginning, it is very difficult to discern the fact that *Tensegrity* is not a standard system of movements for developing the body. It indeed develops the body, but only as a by-product of a more transcendental effect. By redeploying unused energy, the *magical passes* can conduce the practitioner to a level of awareness in which the parameters of normal, traditional perception are canceled out by the fact that they are expanded. The practitioner can thus be allowed even to enter into unimaginable worlds.

"But why would I want to enter into those worlds?" I asked don Juan when he described this post-effect of the *magical passes*.

"Because you are a creature of awareness; a perceiver, like the rest of us," he said. "Human beings are on a journey of awareness which has been momentarily interrupted by extraneous forces. Believe me, we are magical creatures of awareness. If we don't have this conviction, we have nothing."

He further explained that human beings, from the moment their journey of awareness was interrupted, have been caught in an eddy, so to speak, and are spinning around, having the impression of moving with the current, and yet remaining stationary.

"Take my word," don Juan went on, "because mine are not arbitrary statements. My word is the result of corroborating for myself what the shamans of ancient Mexico found out: that we human beings are magical beings."

It has taken me thirty years of hard discipline to come to a point where don Juan's statements are recognizable, and their validity is established beyond the shadow of a doubt. I know now that human beings are creatures of awareness involved in an evolutionary journey of awareness; beings indeed unknown to themselves; filled to the brim with incredible resources that can be used.

## Six Series of *Tensegrity*

The six series which are going to be discussed are the following:

1. The Series for Preparing Intent

2. The Series for the Womb

3. The Series of the Five Concerns: The Westwood Series

4. The Separation of the Left Body and the Right Body: The Heat Series

5. The Masculinity Series

6. The Series for Devices Used in Conjunction with Specific M*agical Passes*

The particular *magical passes* of *Tensegrity* that comprise each of the six series conform with a criterion of maximum efficiency. In other words, each magical pass is a precise ingredient of a formula. This is a replica of the way in which the long series of *magical passes* were originally used: Each series was sufficient in itself to produce the maximum release of redeployable energy.

In executing the *magical passes*, there are certain things that must be taken into consideration in order to perform the movements with maximum efficiency:

1. All the *magical passes* of the six series can be repeated as many times as desired, unless otherwise specified. If they are first done with the left side of the body, they must be repeated an equal number of times with the right side. As a rule, every magical pass of the six series begins with the left side.

2. The feet are kept separate by a distance equivalent to the shoulders' width. This is a balanced way to distribute the weight of the body. If the legs are spread too far apart, the balance of the body is impaired. The same thing happens if they are too close together. The best way to arrive at this distance is to begin from a position where the two feet are close together (fig. 1). The tips of the feet are then pivoted on the fixed heels and opened in a letter V shape (fig. 2). Shifting the weight to the tips of the feet, the heels are pivoted out to the sides an equal distance (fig. 3). The tips of the feet are brought into parallel alignment, and the distance between the feet is roughly the width of the shoulders. Further adjustment may be necessary here in order to reach that desired width and to get the optimal balance of the body.

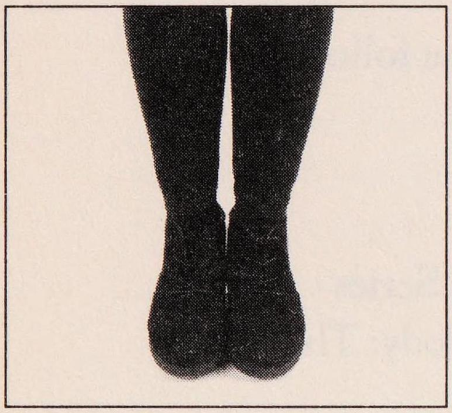


Figure 1

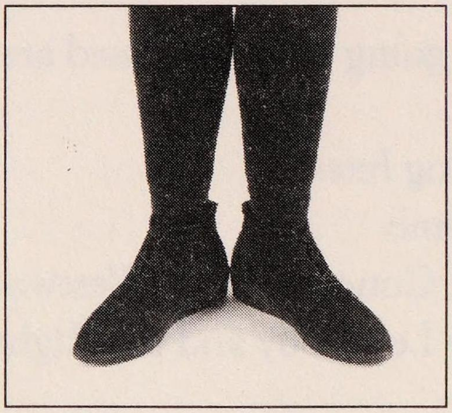


Figure 2

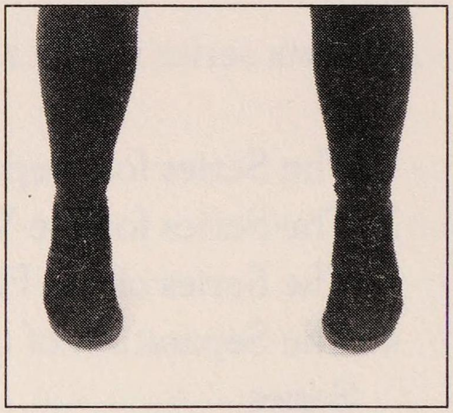


Figure 3

3. During the execution of all the *magical passes* of *Tensegrity*, the knees are kept slightly bent, so that when one is looking down, the kneecaps block the view of the tips of the feet (figs. 4, 5), except in the case of specific *magical passes* in which the knees have to be locked. Such cases are indicated in the description of those passes. To have the knees locked doesn't mean that the hamstrings are injuriously tense, but rather that they are locked in a gentle way, without unnecessary force.

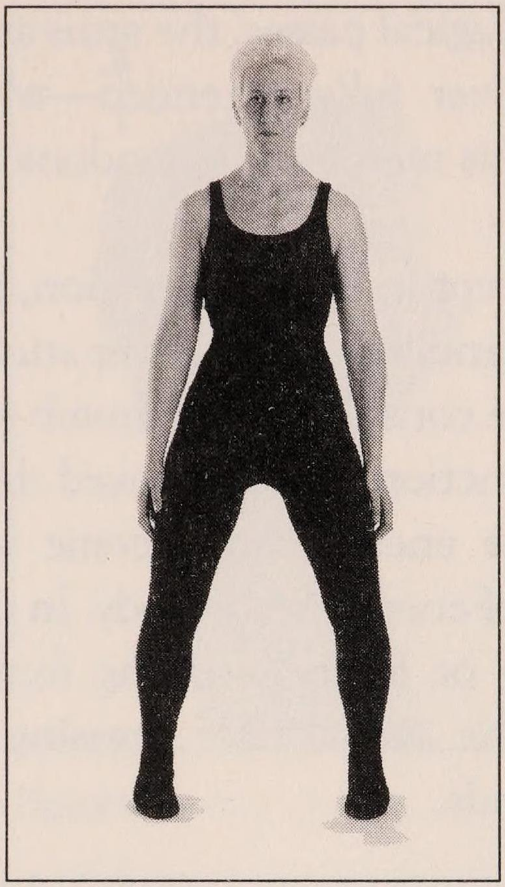


Figure 4

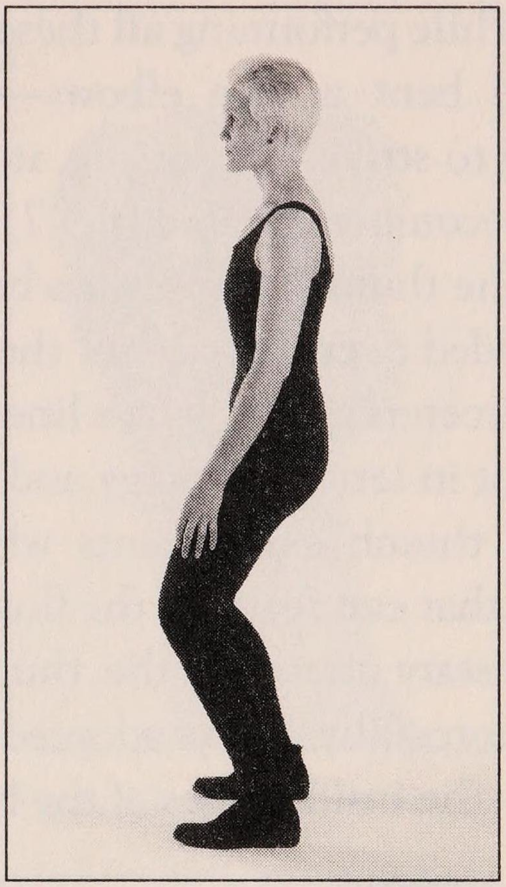


Figure 5

This position of bending the knees is a modern addition to the execution of the *magical passes*; one that stems from influences of recent times. One of the leaders of don Juan Matus's lineage was the *nagual* Lujan, a sailor from China whose original name was something like Lo Ban.

He came to Mexico around the turn of the nineteenth century, and stayed there for the rest of his life. One of the women sorcerers in don Juan Matus's own party went to the Orient and studied martial arts. Don Juan Matus himself recommended that his disciples learn to move in a disciplined fashion by taking up some form of martial arts training.

Another issue to consider in reference to the slightly bent knees is that when the legs are moved forward in a kicking motion, the knees are never whipped. Rather, the whole leg should be moved by the tension of the muscles of the thighs. Moving in this fashion, the tendons of the knees are never injured.

4. The back muscles of the legs must be tensed (fig. 6). This is a very difficult accomplishment. Most people can learn quite easily to tense the front muscles of the legs, but the back muscles of the legs still remain flaccid. Don Juan said that the back muscles of the thighs are where personal history is always stored in the body. According to him, feelings find their home there and get stagnant. He maintained that difficulty in changing behavior patterns could be easily attributed to the flaccidity of the back muscles of the thighs.

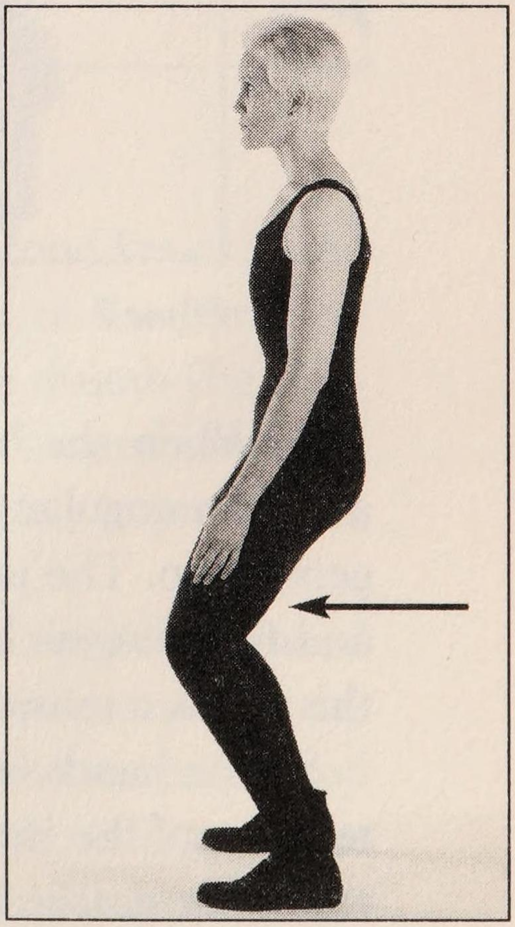


Figure 6

5. While performing all these *magical passes*, the arms are always kept slightly bent at the elbows- never fully extended- when they are moved to strike, preventing, in this manner, the tendons of the elbows from becoming irritated (fig. 7).

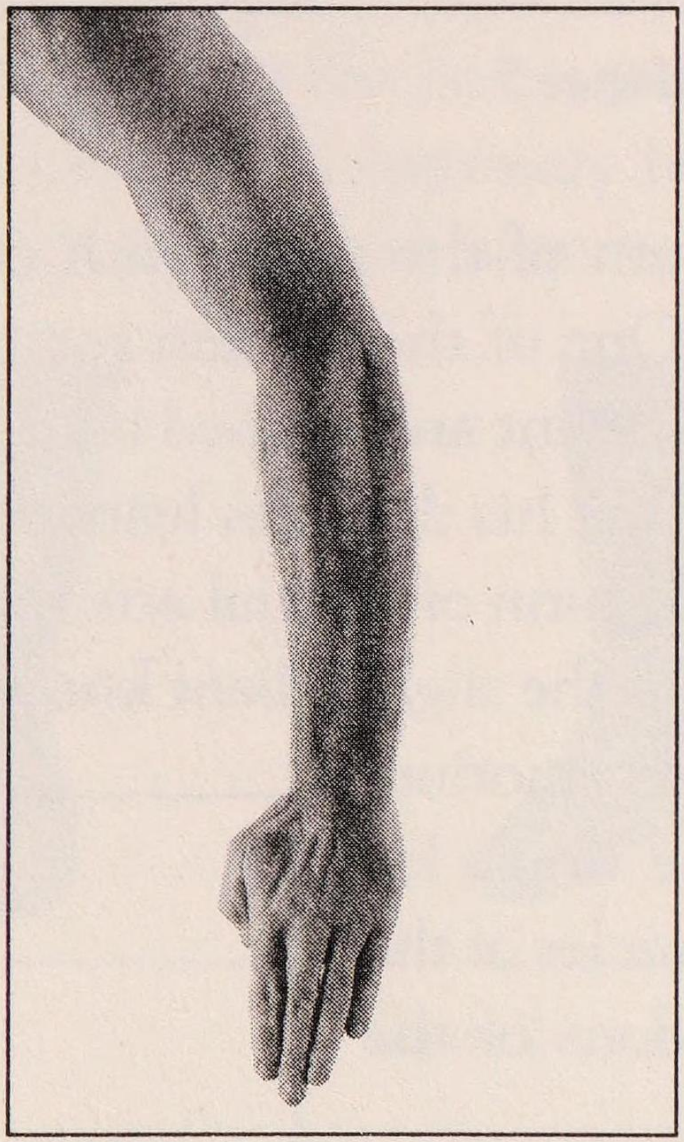


Figure 7

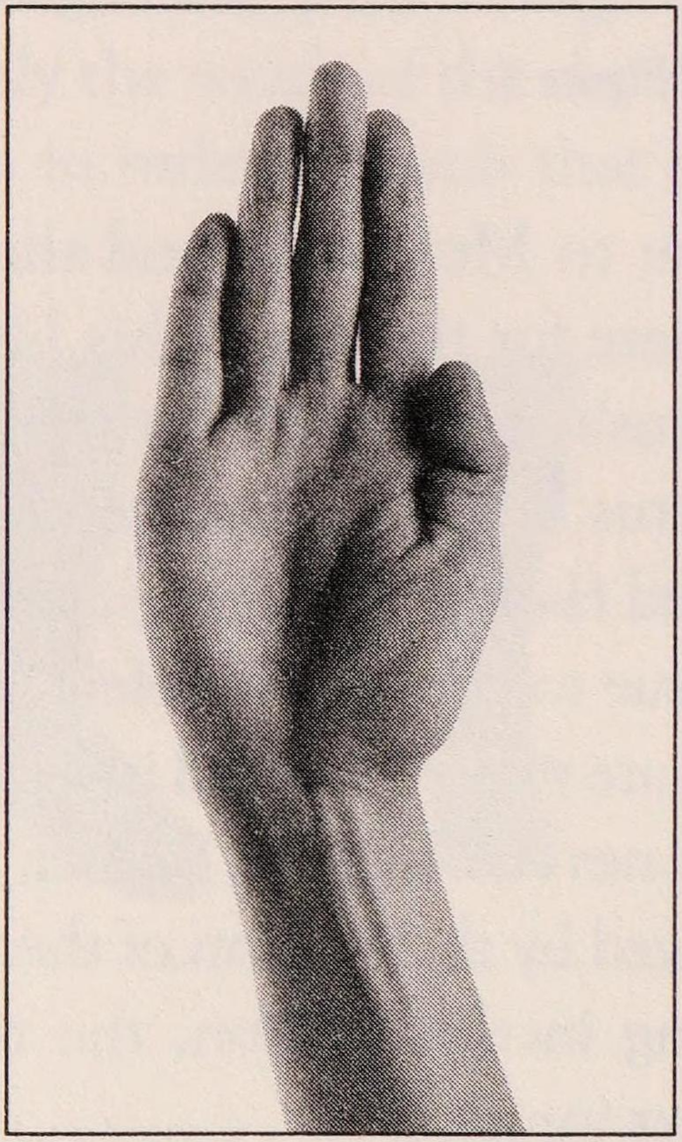


Figure 8

6. The thumb must always be kept in a locked position, meaning that it is folded over the edge of the hand. It should never stick out (fig. 8). The sorcerers of don Juan's lineage considered the thumb to be a crucial element in terms of energy and function. They believed that at the base of the thumb exist points where energy can become stagnant, and points that can regulate the flow of energy in the body. In order to avoid unnecessary stress on the thumb or injury resulting from jolting the hand forcefully, they adopted the measure of pressing the thumbs against the inside edges of the hands.

7. When the hand is made into a fist, the little finger is raised to avoid an angular fist (fig. 9) in which the middle, fourth, and fifth fingers droop. The idea is that in making a square fist (fig. 10), the fourth and fifth fingers have to be raised, thus creating a peculiar tension in the axilla, a tension which is most desirable for general well-being.

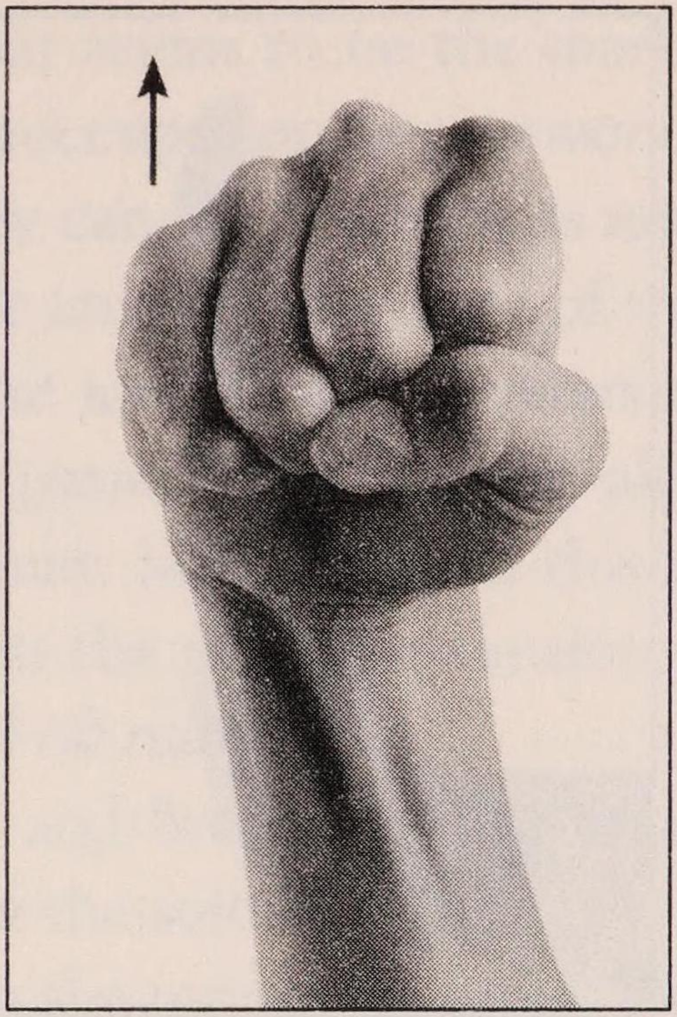


*Figure 9*

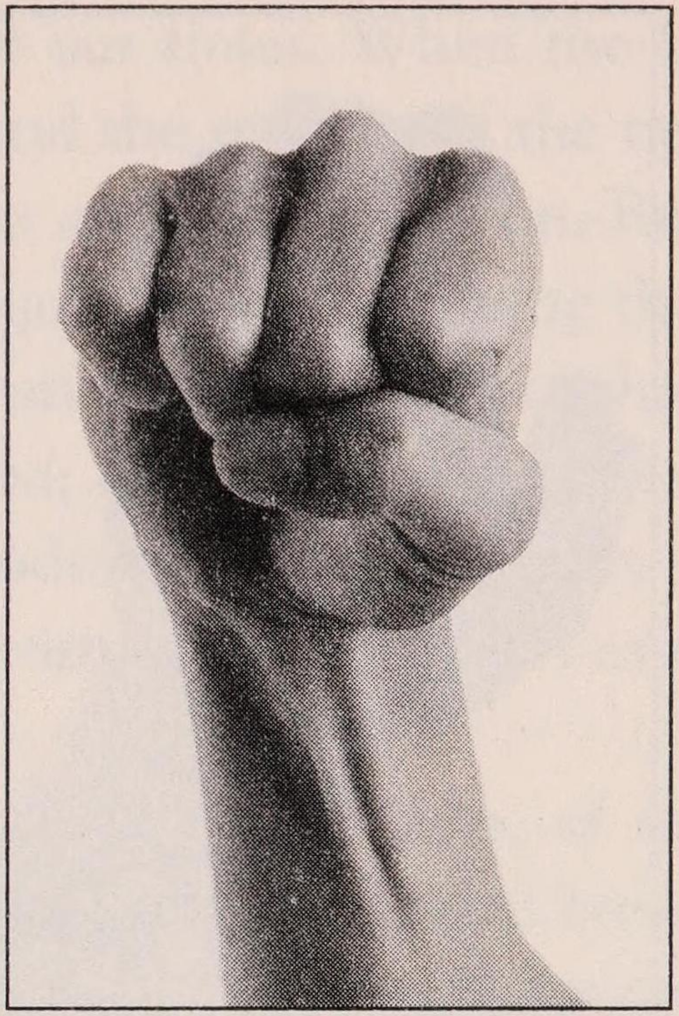


*Figure 10*

8. The hands, when they have to be opened, are fully extended. The tendons of the back of the hand are at work, presenting the palm as an even, flat surface (fig. 11). Don Juan preferred a flat palm to counteract the tendency (established, he felt, through socialization) to present the hand as a hollow palm (fig. 12). He said that a hollow palm was the palm of a beggar, and that whoever practices the *magical passes* is a warrior, not a beggar in the least.

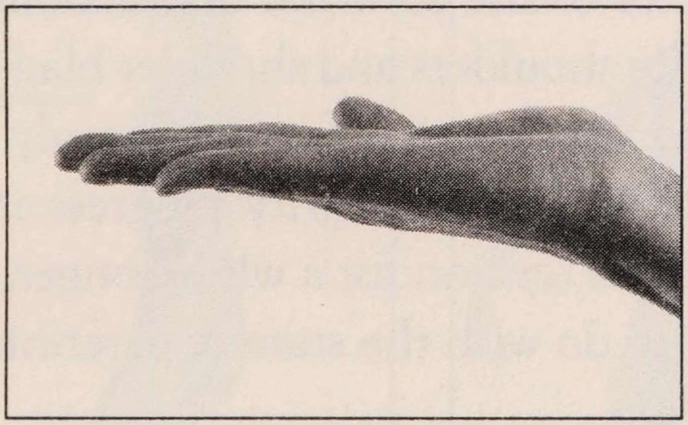


*Figure 11*

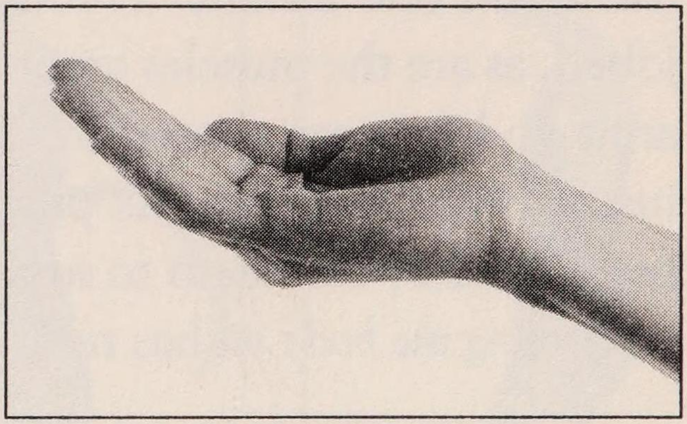


*Figure 12*

9. When the fingers have to be contracted at the second knuckle and bent tightly over the palm, the tendons on the back of the hand are tensed to the maximum, especially the tendons of the thumb (fig. 13). This tension of the tendons creates a pressure on the wrists and forearms, areas which sorcerers of ancient Mexico believed were key in promoting health and well-being.

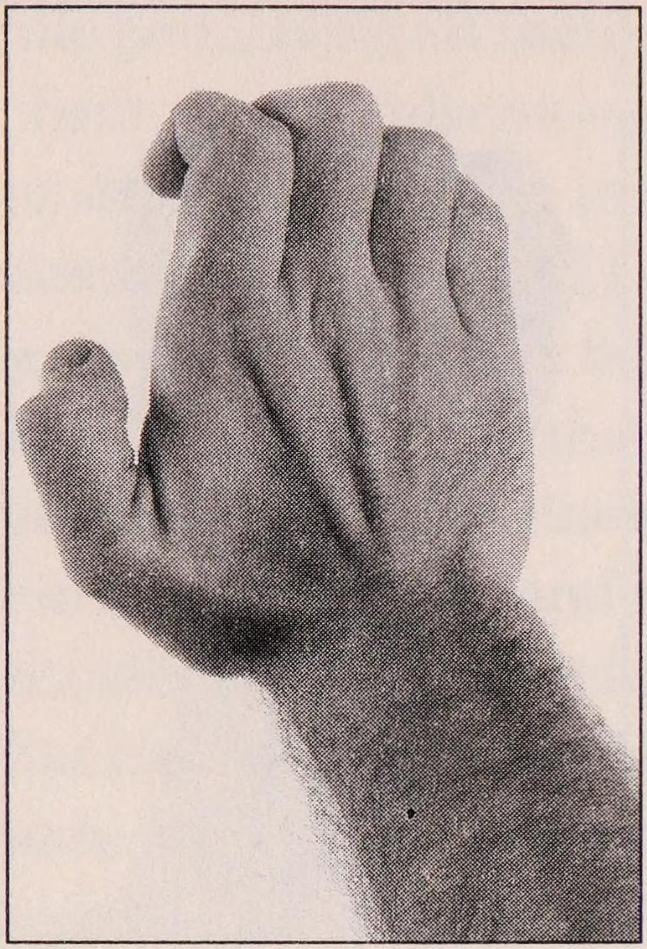


*Figure 13*

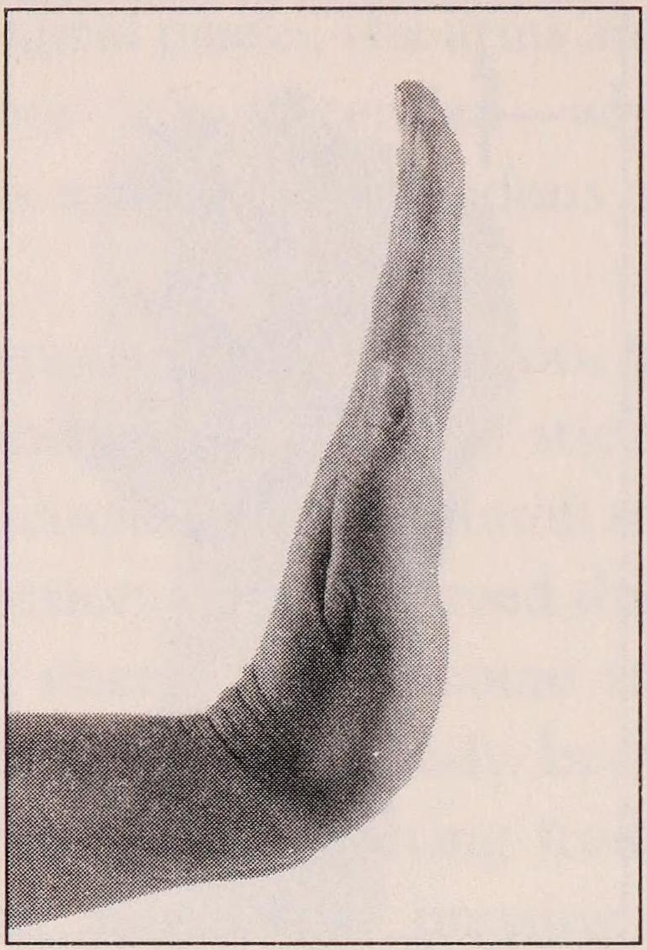


*Figure 14*

10. In many *Tensegrity* movements, the wrists have to be bent forward or backward to an approximately ninety-degree angle by contracting the tendons of the forearm (fig. 14). This bending must be accomplished slowly, because most of the time the wrist is quite inflexible, and it is important that the wrist acquire the flexibility to turn the back of the hand to make a maximum angle with the forearm.

11. Another important issue in the practice of *Tensegrity* is an act which has been termed turning the body on. This is a unique act in which all the muscles of the body, and specifically the diaphragm, are contracted in one instant. The muscles of the stomach and abdomen are jolted, as are the muscles around the shoulders and shoulder blades. The arms and legs are tensed in unison with equal force, but only for an instant (figs. 15, 16). As practitioners of *Tensegrity* progress in their practice, they can learn to sustain this tension for a while longer.

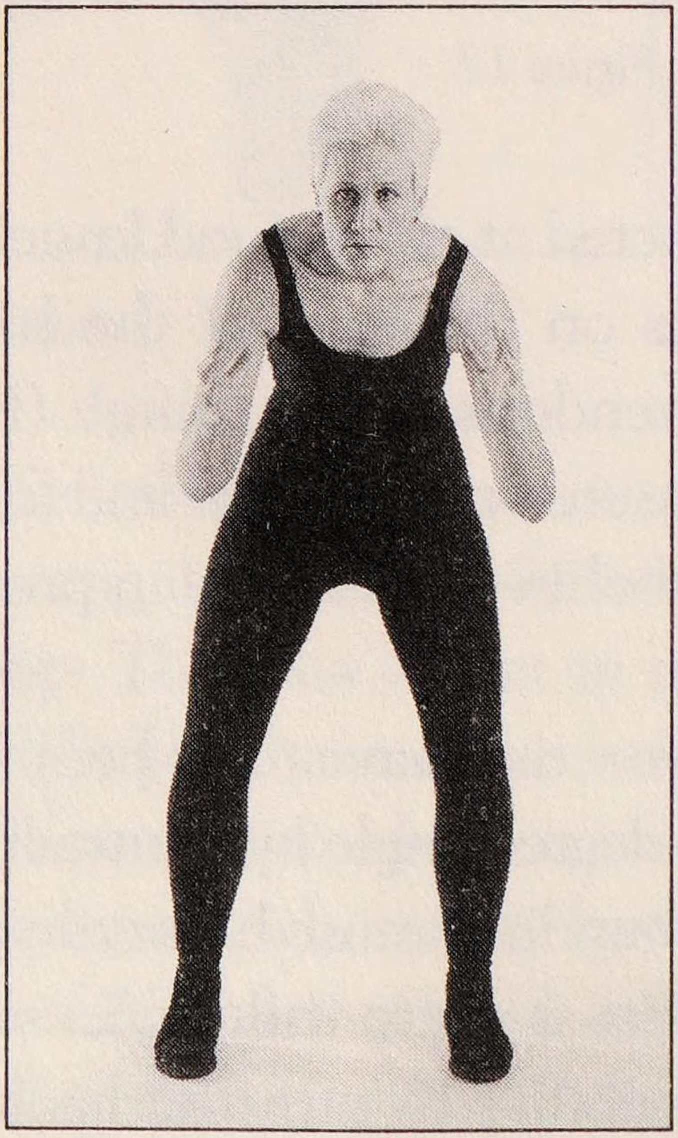


*Figure 15*

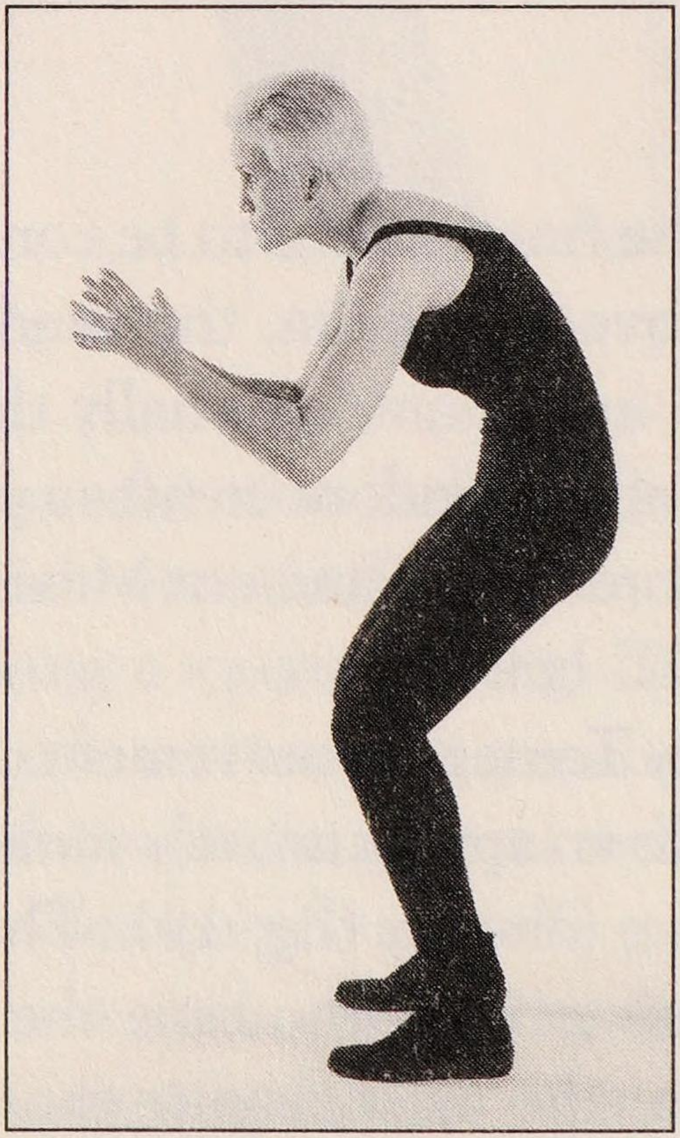


*Figure 16*

Turning the body on has nothing to do with the state of perennial bodily tension that seems to be the mark of our times. When the body is tense with preoccupation or overwork, and the muscles of the neck are as hard as they can be, the body is not in any way turned on. Relaxing the muscles or arriving at a state of tranquillity is not turning the body off, either. The idea of the sorcerers of ancient Mexico was that with their *magical passes*, the body was alerted: It was made to be ready for action. Don Juan Matus termed this condition turning the body on. He said that when the muscular tension of turning the body on ceases, the body is turned off naturally.

12. Breath and breathing were, according to don Juan, of supreme importance for the sorcerers of ancient Mexico. They divided breath into breathing with the tops of the lungs, breathing with the midsection of the lungs, and breathing with the abdomen (figs. 17, 18, 19). Breathing by expanding the diaphragm they called the animal breath, and they practiced it assiduously, don Juan said, for longevity and health.

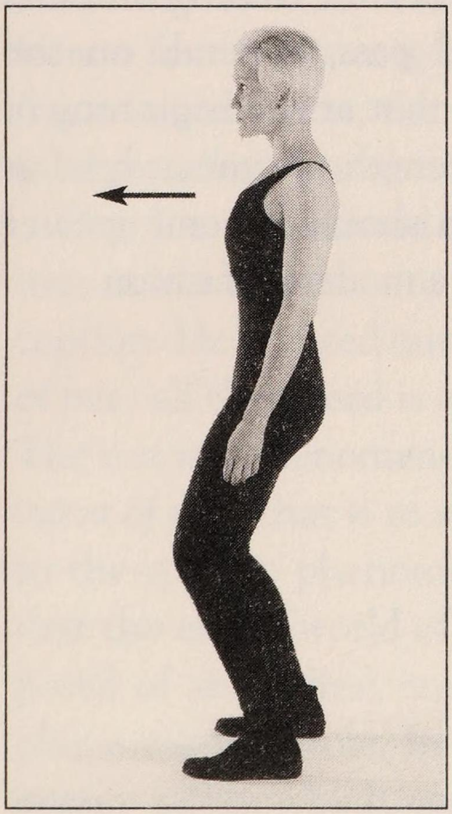


Figure 17

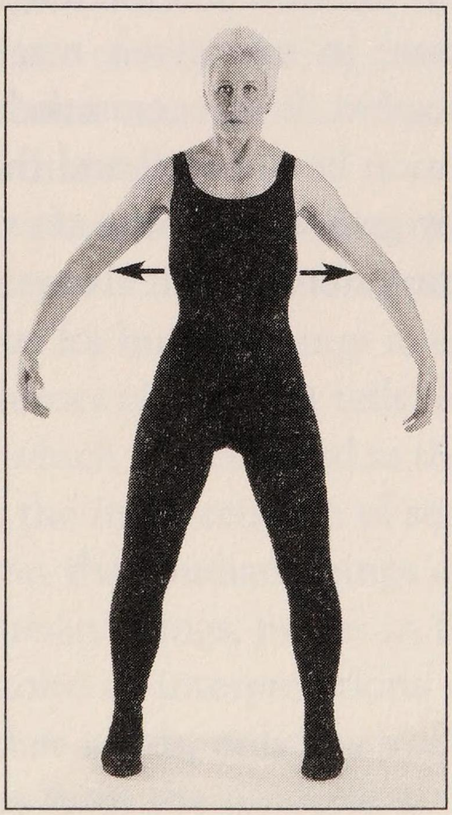


Figure 18

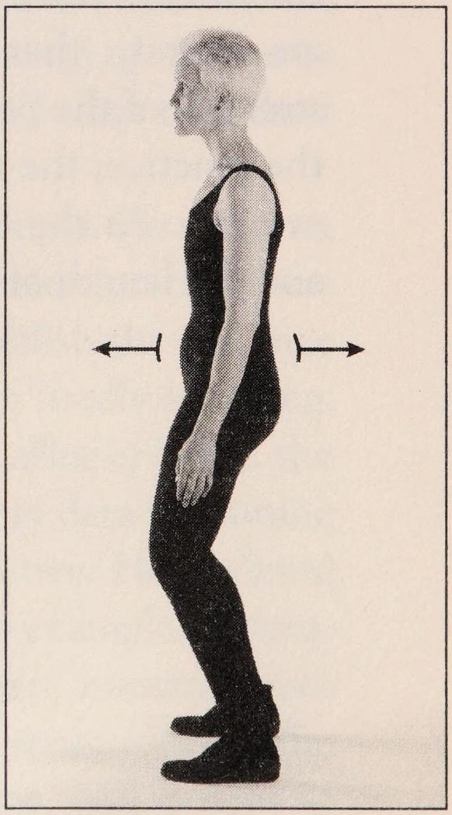


Figure 19

It was don Juan Matus's belief that many of the health problems of modern man could be easily corrected by deep breathing. He maintained that the tendency of human beings nowadays is to take shallow breaths. One of the aims of the sorcerers of ancient Mexico was to train their bodies, by means of the *magical passes*, to inhale and exhale deeply.

It is highly recommended, therefore, in the movements of *Tensegrity* that call for deep inhalations and exhalations, that these be accomplished by slowing down the inflow or outflow of air in order to make the inhalations and exhalations longer and more profound.

Another important issue concerning the breathing in *Tensegrity* is that breathing is normal while executing the *Tensegrity* movements, unless otherwise specified in the description of any given magical pass.

13. Another consideration in performing the *Tensegrity* movements is the realization that has to come to practitioners that *Tensegrity* is in essence the interplay between relaxing and tensing the muscles of choice parts of the body in order to arrive at a most coveted physical explosion, which the sorcerers of ancient Mexico knew only as the energy of the tendons. This is a veritable explosion of the nerves and tendons below or at the core of the muscles.

Given that *Tensegrity* is the tension and relaxation of muscles, the intensity of the muscle tension, and the length of time that the muscles are kept in that state in any given magical pass, depends on the strength of the participant. It is recommended that at the beginning of the practice, the tension be minimal and the length of time as brief as possible. As the body gets warmer, the tension should become greater and the length of time extended, but always in a moderate fashion.

## The First Series: The Series for Preparing Intent

Don Juan Matus stated that human beings as organisms perform a stupendous maneuver of perception which, unfortunately, creates a misconception; a false front. Human beings take the influx of sheer energy in the universe at large and turn it into sensory data which they interpret according to a strict system of interpretation that sorcerers call the human form. This magical act of interpreting pure energy gives rise to a misconception; the peculiar conviction of human beings that their interpretation system is all that exists.

Don Juan elucidated this phenomenon with an example. He said that tree, as tree is known to human beings, is more interpretation than perception. He pointed out that for human beings to establish the presence of tree, all they need is a cursory glance that tells them hardly anything. The rest is a phenomenon which he described as the calling of intent; the intent of tree; that is to say, the interpretation of sensory data pertaining to the specific phenomenon that human beings call tree.

He declared that, just as in the tree example, the entire world of human beings is composed of an endless repertoire of interpretations where human senses play a minimal role. In other words, only the visual sense touches the energy influx which comes from the universe at large, and it does so only in a cursory fashion.

He maintained that the majority of the perceptual activity of human beings is interpretation, and that human beings are the kind of organisms that need only a minimal input of pure perception in order to create their world; or, that they perceive only enough to trigger their interpretation system.

The example that don Juan liked the best was the way in which he said we construct, by intending, something as overwhelming and as crucial as the White House.

He called the White House the site of power of today's world, the center of all our endeavors, hopes, fears, and so on, as a global conglomerate of human beings- for all practical purposes, the capital of the civilized world. He said that all this wasn't in the realm of the abstract, or even in the realm of our minds, but in the realm of intending, because from the point of view of our sensory input, the White House was a building that in no way had the richness, the scope, or the depth of the concept of the White House. He added that from the point of view of the input of sensory data, the White House, like everything else in our world, was cursorily apprehended with our visual senses only; our tactile, olfactory, auditory, and taste senses were not engaged in any way. The interpretation that those senses could make of sensory data in relation to the building where the White House is would have no meaning whatsoever.

The question that don Juan asked as a sorcerer was where the White House was. He said, answering his own question, that it was certainly not in our perception, not even in our thoughts, but in a special realm of intending, where it was nurtured with everything pertinent to it. Don Juan's assertion was that to create a total universe of intending in such a manner was our magic.

Since the theme of the first series of *Tensegrity* is preparing the practitioners for intending, it's important to review the sorcerers' definition of intending.

For don Juan, intending was the unstated and unrealized act of filling out the empty spaces left from direct sensory perception; or the act of enriching observable phenomena by means of intending a completeness that doesn't exist from the point of view of pure perception.

The act of intending this completeness was referred to by don Juan as 'calling intent'. Everything he explained about intent pointed to the fact that the act of intending is not in the realm of the physical. In other words, it is not part of the physicality of the brain or any other organ. Intent, for don Juan, transcended the world we know. It is something like an energetic wave, a beam of energy which attaches itself to us.

Because of the extrinsic nature of intent, don Juan made a distinction between the body as part of the cognition of everyday life, and the body as an energetic unit which was not part of that cognition.

This energetic unit of our bodies outside normal awareness included: the unseen parts of the body, such as the internal organs; and the energy that flowed through them. Don Juan asserted that it was with this part of our totality that energy could be directly perceived.

He pointed out that because of the predominance of sight in our habitual way of perceiving the world, the shamans of ancient Mexico described the act of directly apprehending energy as '*seeing*'.

For them to perceive energy as it flowed in the universe meant this: Since energy at large is independent of us as individuals, and is arranged in specific configurations that repeats itself consistently, those configurations could be perceived in the same terms by anyone who *sees*.

The most important example don Juan Matus could give of this consistency of energy in adopting specific configurations was the perception of the human body when it was *see*n directly as energy. As it was already said, shamans like don Juan perceive a human being as a conglomerate of energy fields that gives the total impression of a clear-cut sphere of luminosity.

Taken in this sense, energy is described by shamans as a vibration that agglutinates itself into cohesive units. Shamans describe the entire universe as being composed of energy configurations that appear to the *seeing* eye as filaments, or luminous fibers that are strung in every which way without ever being entangled. This is an incomprehensible proposition for the linear mind. It has a built-in contradiction that can't be resolved: How could those fibers extend themselves every which way and yet not be entangled?

Don Juan emphasized the point that shamans were able only to describe events, and that if their terms of description seemed inadequate and contradictory, it was because of the limitations of syntax. Yet their descriptions were as strict as anything could be.

The shamans of ancient Mexico, according to don Juan, described intent as a perennial force that permeates the entire universe- a force that is aware of itself to the point of responding to the beckoning or to the command of shamans. By means of intent, those shamans were capable of unleashing not only all the human possibilities of perceiving, but all the human possibilities of action. Through intent, they realized the most far-fetched formulations.

Don Juan taught me that the limit of man's capability of perceiving is called the band of man, meaning that there is a boundary that marks human capabilities as dictated by the human organism. These boundaries are not merely the traditional boundaries of orderly thought, but the boundaries of the totality of resources locked within the human organism.

The bulk of these resources are never used, and are kept out of our normal awareness by our preconceived ideas about human limitations; limitations that have nothing to do with actual human potential.

Don Juan stated as categorically as he was able to that since perceiving energy as it flows in the universe is not arbitrary [* arbitrary- based on or subject to individual discretion or preference or sometimes impulse or caprice] or idiosyncratic, [* idiosyncratic- peculiar to the individual] seers witness formulations of energy that happen by themselves and are not molded by human interference. Thus, the perception of such formulations is, in itself and by itself, the key that releases the locked-in human potential that ordinarily has never entered into play. In order to elicit the perception of those energetic formulations, the totality of human capabilities to perceive has to be engaged.

The Series for Preparing Intent is divided into four groups. The first is called Mashing Energy for Intent. The second is called Stirring Up Energy for Intent. The third group is called Gathering Energy for Intent, and the fourth group is called Breathing In the Energy of Intent.

## First Series: First Group: Mashing Energy for Intent

Don Juan gave me explanations which covered all the nuances of every group of *magical passes* which are the core of the long *Tensegrity* Series.

"Energy which is essential for handling intent," he said when he was explaining to me the energetic implications of this group, "is continuously dispelled from the vital centers located around the liver, pancreas, and kidneys; and settles down at the bottom of the luminous sphere that we are.

"This energy ought to be constantly stirred and rerouted. The sorcerers of my lineage were very emphatic in recommending a systematic and controlled stirring of energy with the legs and feet. However, long walks, which were an unavoidable feature of their lives, resulted in an excessive stirring of energy which served no purpose."

In don Juan's view, energy for intending that was stirred up excessively ended up further depleting the centers of vitality, and long walks were their nemesis [* nemesis- something causing misery] for this reason.

The inflow of excessive energy had to be balanced by the execution of specific *magical passes* performed while they were walking.

Don Juan Matus told me that this set of fifteen *magical passes* functions to stir energy with the feet and legs, and was considered by the shamans of his lineage to be the most effective way of doing what they called 'mashing energy'. He stated that each of the steps is a magical pass which has a built-in control for the mashing of energy. Practitioners can repeat these *magical passes* hundreds of times, if they so desire, without worrying about an excessive stirring of energy.

The first five *magical passes* of this group allow practitioners a quick surge of energy, in cases when energy is needed in the midsection or the groin, or, for instance, when they need to perform a long-distance run or a quick climbing of rocks or trees.

### 1. Grinding Energy with Three Toe Pivots of the Feet

Among other things, this pass is used to gain balance for the passes which follow.

The feet start about shoulder length apart pointing straight ahead. The body pivots on the balls of the feet from right to left and left to right in unison. The heels are slightly off the ground while swiveling, and touch the ground when the feet reach the maximum slant.

The first movement is to the left. After the third touch of the heels to the right, the feet return to a straight position.

For each of the first three passes, there is a pause that lasts an instant, and then the feet are swiveled three times again. The effect of these passes is increased by making the grinding of energy a discontinuous affair.

It is important to notice that in all the first three *magical passes* of this series, a key issue is the engagement of the arms, which move back and forth briskly.

The arms are kept bent at the elbows with the hands pointing out, palms facing each other. The arms move with an impulse from the shoulders and the shoulder blades. This movement of the arms in unison with the legs, as in walking (the right arm moves when the left leg moves, and vice versa), accounts for a total engagement of the limbs and the internal organs (figs. 20, 21).

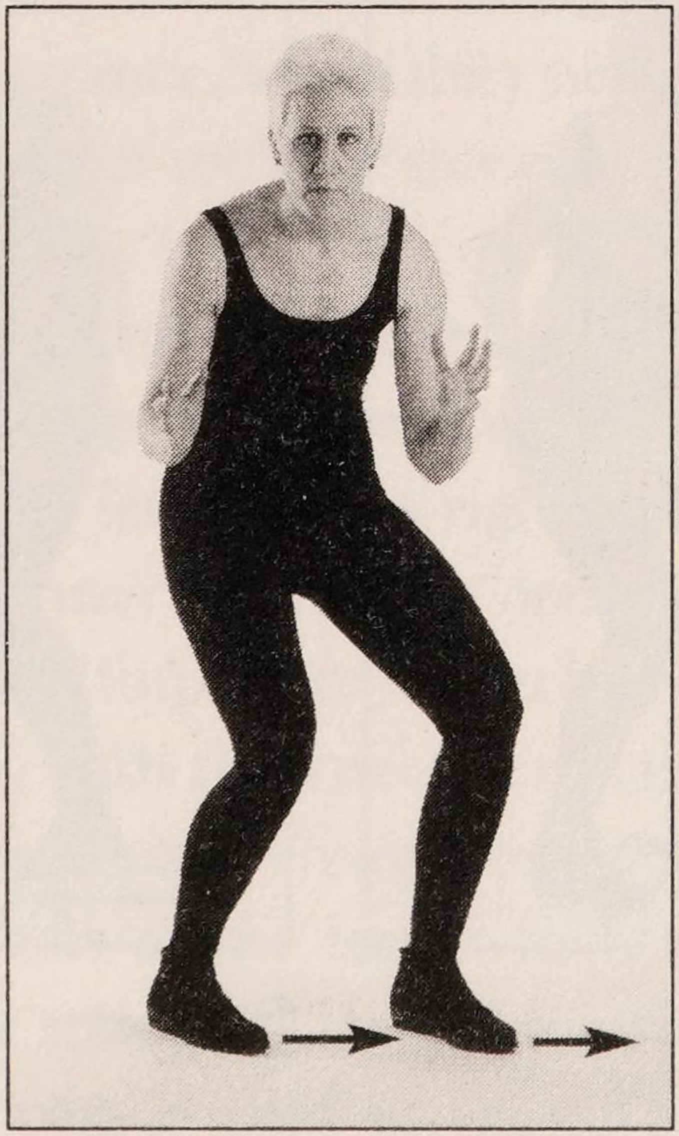


Figure 20

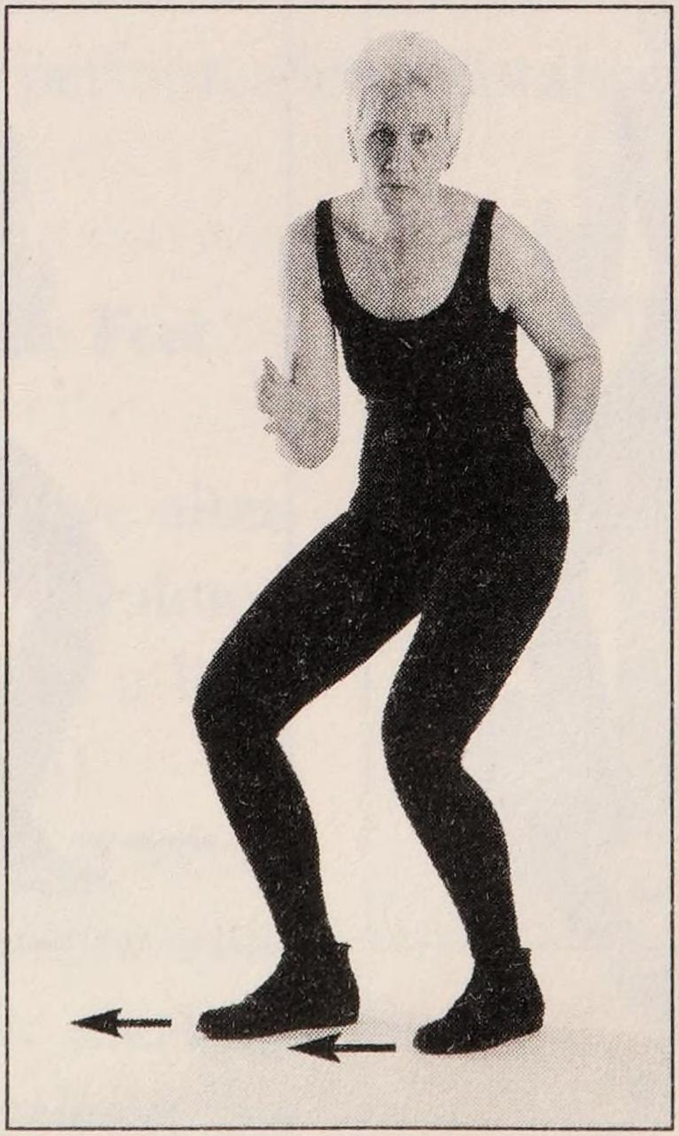


Figure 21

A physical by-product of grinding energy in this fashion is an increase in circulation in the feet, calves, and thighs up to the groin area. Shamans throughout the centuries have also used it to restore flexibility to limbs that were injured in daily use.

### 2. Grinding Energy with Three Heel Pivots of the Feet

In the second pass, the weight of the body is shifted to the heels, and the pivoting is done on them with the toes slightly off the ground while swiveling, and touching the ground when the feet reach the maximum slant.

The feet are swiveled on the heels, in the same manner as in the previous magical pass, three times.

A physical by-product of this magical pass is a quick surge of energy for instances of running or fleeing danger, or for anything that requires a quick intervention.

### 3. Grinding Energy by a Sideways Slide of the Feet

Both feet, pivoting on the heels, move to the left; they pivot on the balls of the feet to the left again. Next, they pivot a third time, still to the left, but on the heels again (figs. 22, 23, 24). The sequence is reversed by pivoting on the heels to the right; next, on the balls of the feet to the right; and then on the heels again, to the right.

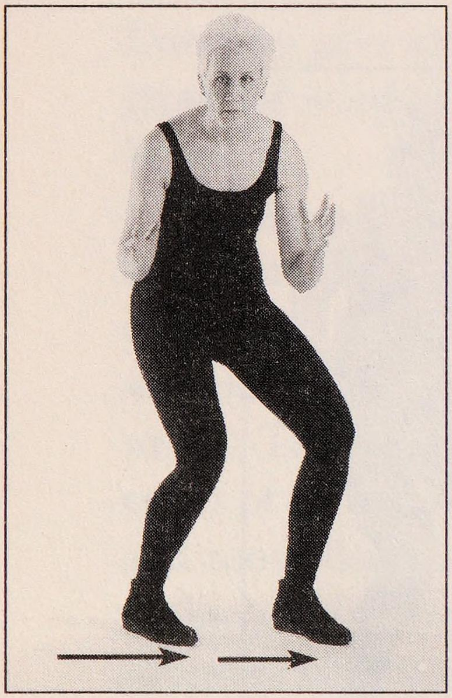


Figure 22

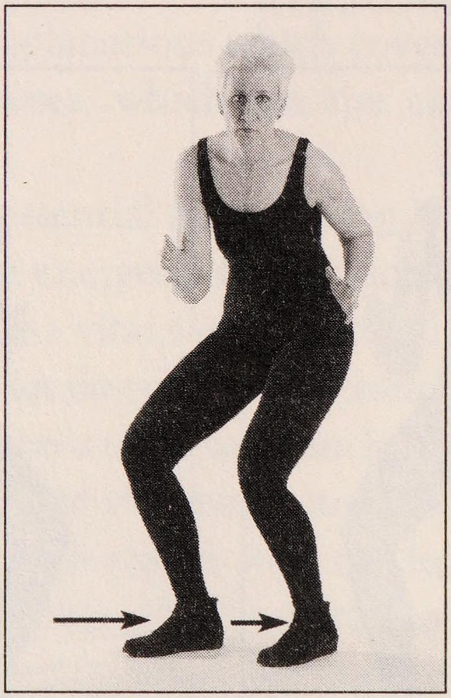


Figure 23

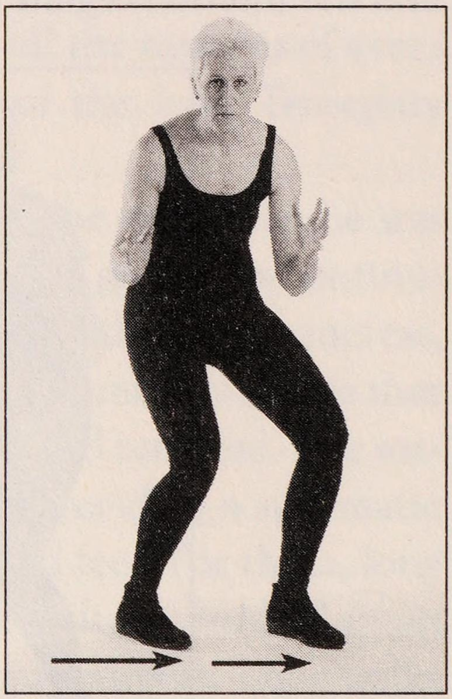


Figure 24

A physical consequence of these three *magical passes* is the spurring of the circulation in the total body.

### 4. Mixing Energy by Striking the Floor with the Heels

This magical pass resembles walking in place. The knee moves up briskly while the tip of the foot rests on the ground. The weight of the body is carried by the other leg. The body weight shifts back and forth, resting on whichever leg stays put, while the other one performs the movement. The arms are moved in the same fashion as in the previous *magical passes* (fig. 25).

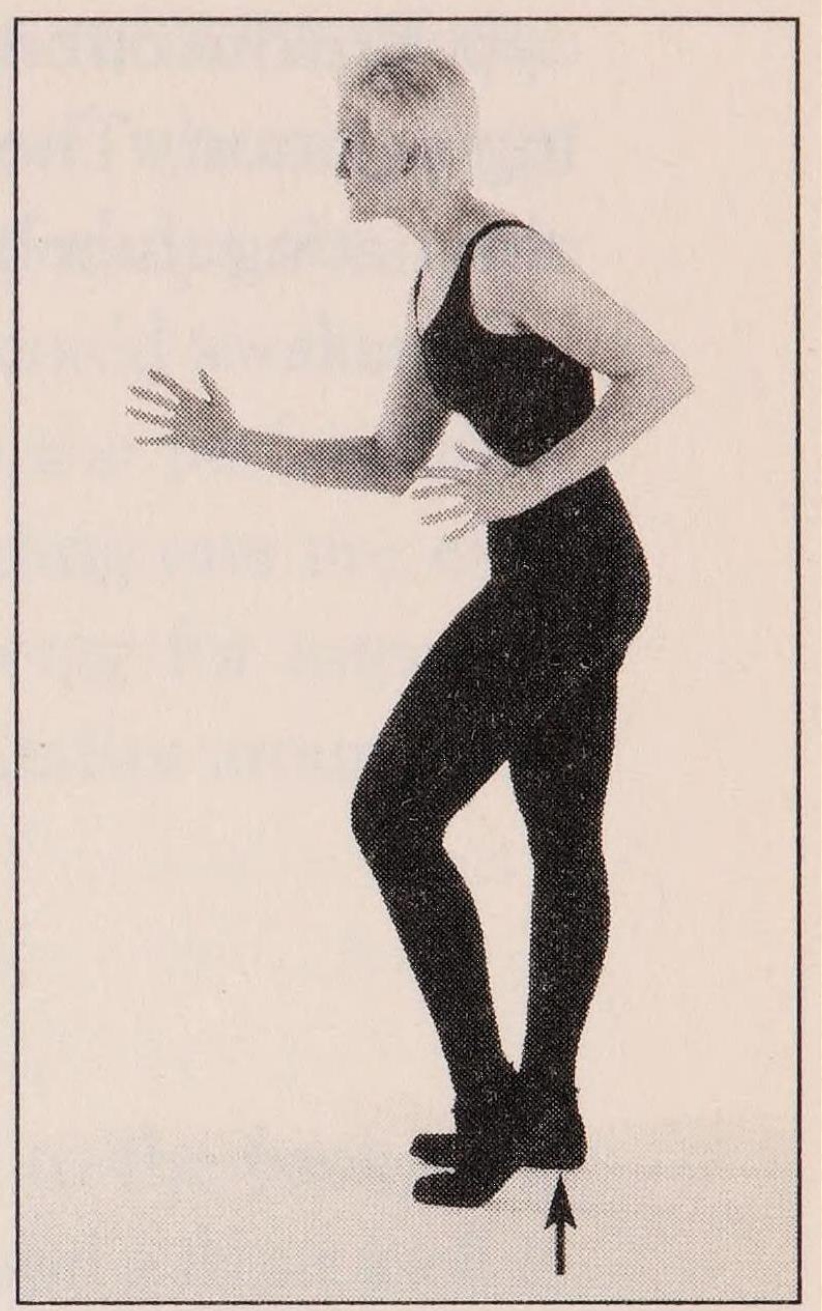


Figure 25

A physical consequence of this magical pass and the following one is very much like that of the three preceding *magical passes*: a sensation of well-being that permeates the pelvic region after performing the movements.

### 5. Mixing Energy by Striking the Ground with the Heels Three Times

This magical pass is exactly like the preceding one, with the exception that the movement of the knees and feet is not continuous. It is interrupted after the heels are brought to the ground three times, in an alternating fashion. The sequence is left, right, left- pause- right, left, right, and so on.

### 6. Gathering Energy with the Soles of the Feet and Moving It Up the Inner Legs

The soles of the left and the right foot move alternately up the inner part of the opposite leg, almost brushing it. It is important to arch the legs a little bit by standing with the knees bent (fig. 26).

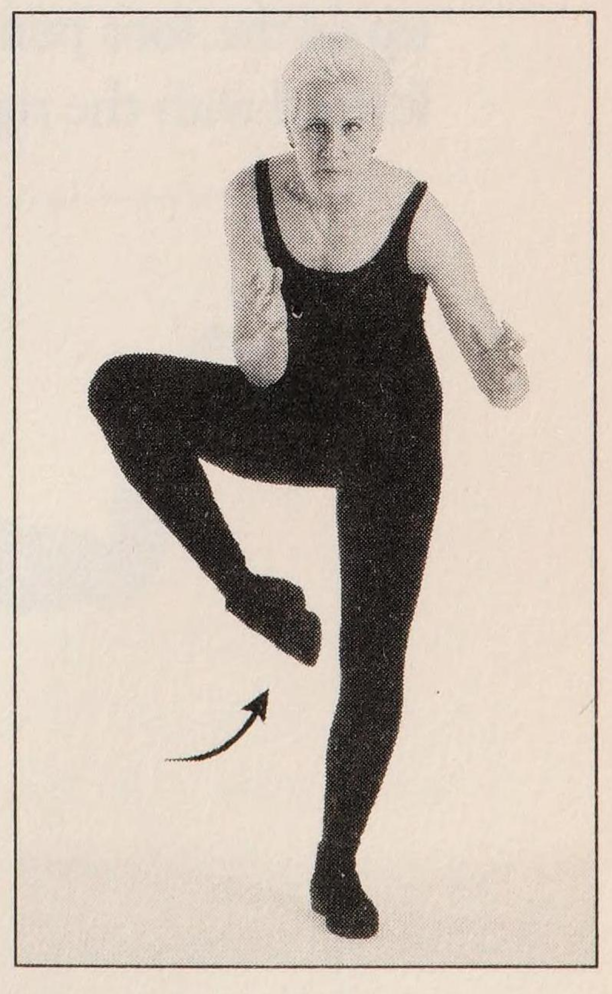


*Figure 26*

In this magical pass, energy for intending is forced up the inner side of the legs, which shamans consider to be the storage place of kinesthetic [* kinesthetic- relating to the ability to feel movements of the limbs and body] memory. This magical pass is used as an aid to release the memory of movements, or to facilitate retaining the memory of new ones.

### 7. Stirring Energy with the Knees

The knee of the left leg is bent and swung to the right as far as it can reach, as if to give a sideways kick with the knee, while the trunk and the arms arc gently twisted as far as possible in the opposite direction (fig. 27). The left leg is then brought back to a standing position. The same movement is performed with the right knee, alternating then back and forth.

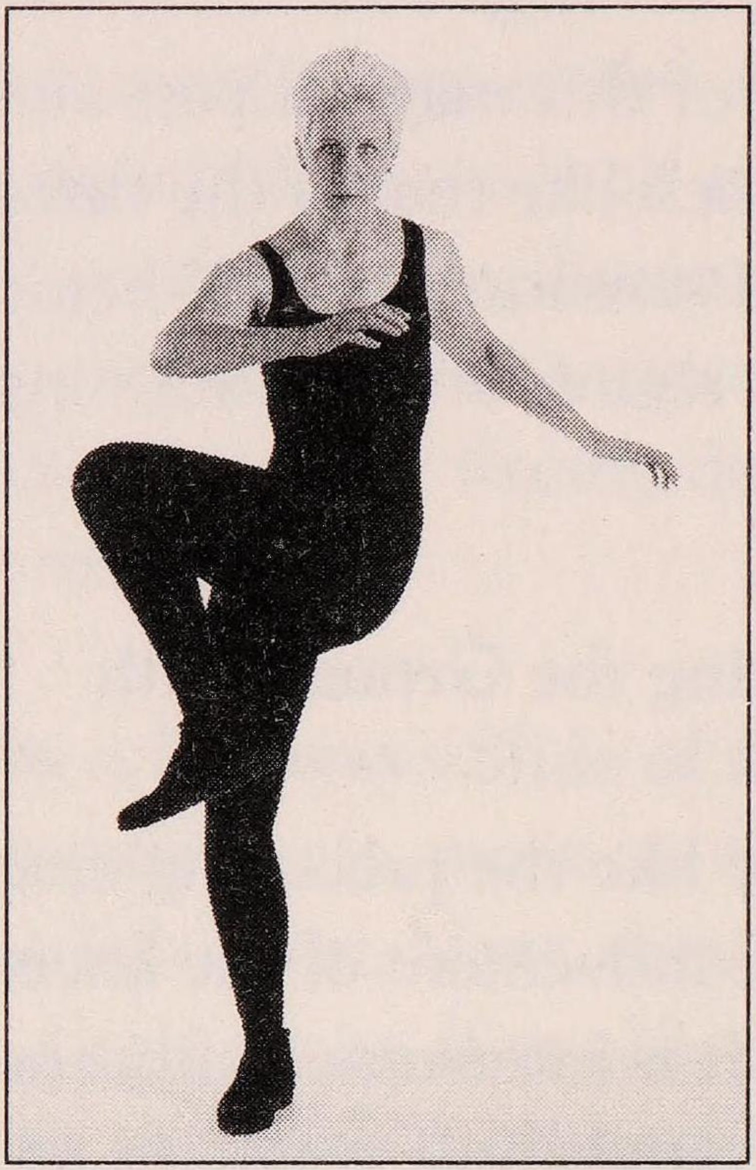


*Figure 27*

### 8. Pushing the Energy Stirred with the Knees into the Trunk

This magical pass is the energetic continuation of the preceding one. The left knee, bent to the maximum, is pushed up as far as possible into the trunk. The trunk is bent slightly forward. At the moment the knee is pushed up, the tip of the foot points to the ground (fig. 28). The same movement is performed with the right leg, alternating then between the two legs.

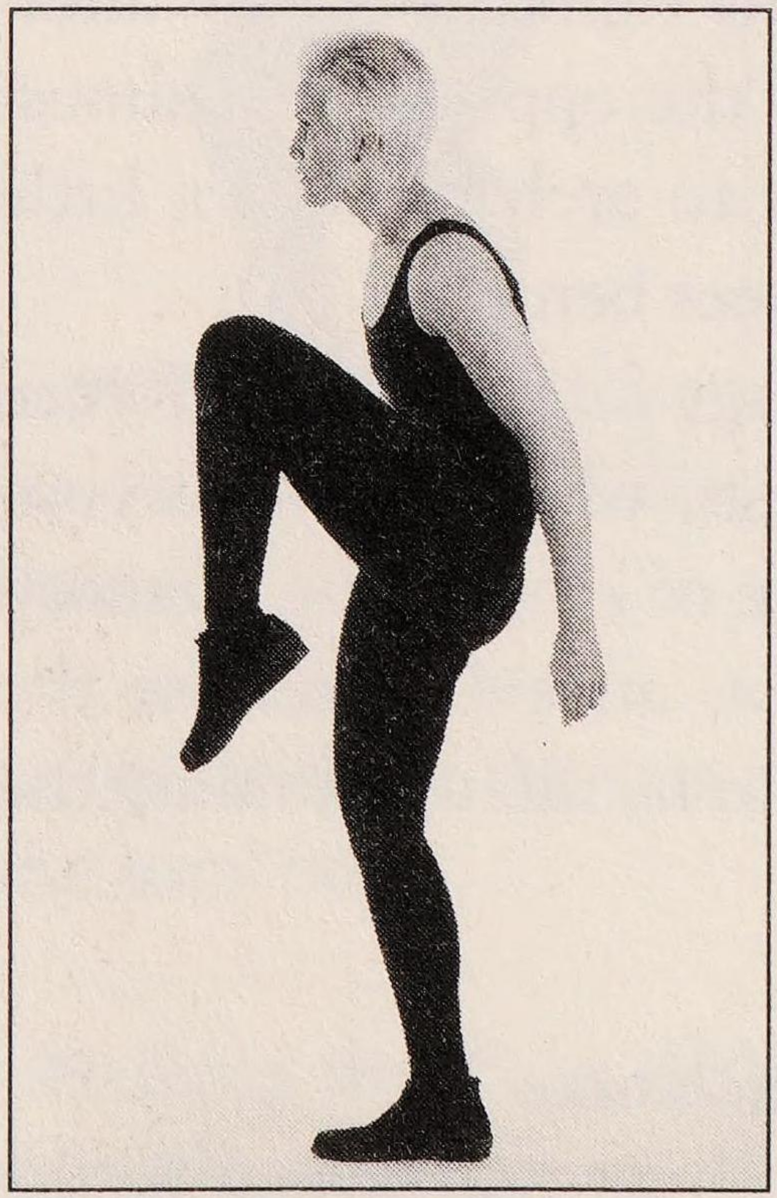


Figure 28

Pointing the foot to the ground ensures that the tendons of the ankles are tense, in order to jolt minute centers there where energy accumulates. Shamans consider those centers to be perhaps the most important in the lower limbs, so important that they could awaken the rest of the minute energy centers in the body through the performance of this magical pass. This magical pass and the preceding one are executed together for the purpose of projecting the energy for intending gathered with the knees up into the two centers of vitality around the liver and the pancreas.

### 9. Kicking Energy in Front and in Back of the Body

A front kick of the left leg is followed by a hook kick to the back with the right leg (figs. 29, 30). Then the order is reversed and a front kick is made with the right leg, followed by a hook kick to the back with the left leg.

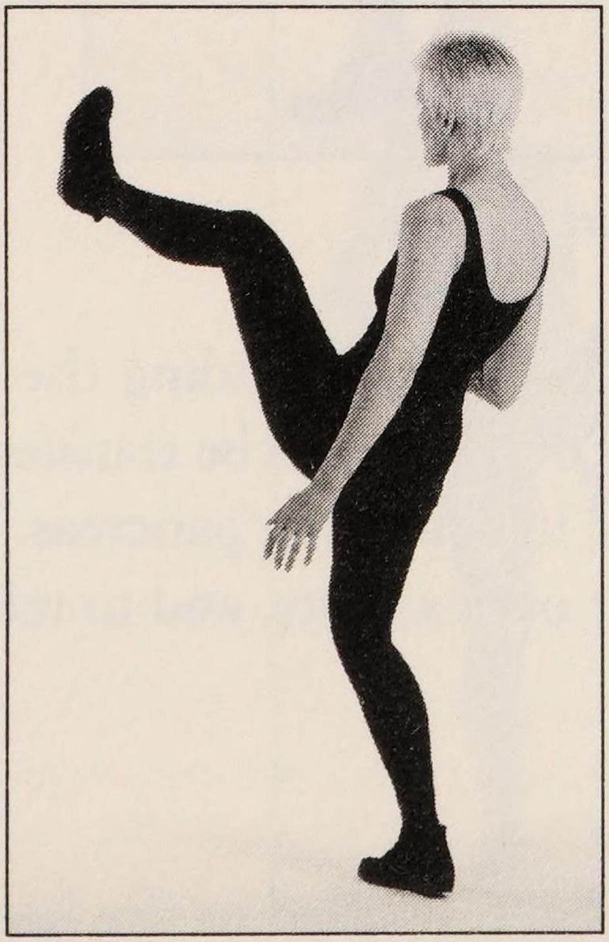


*Figure 29*

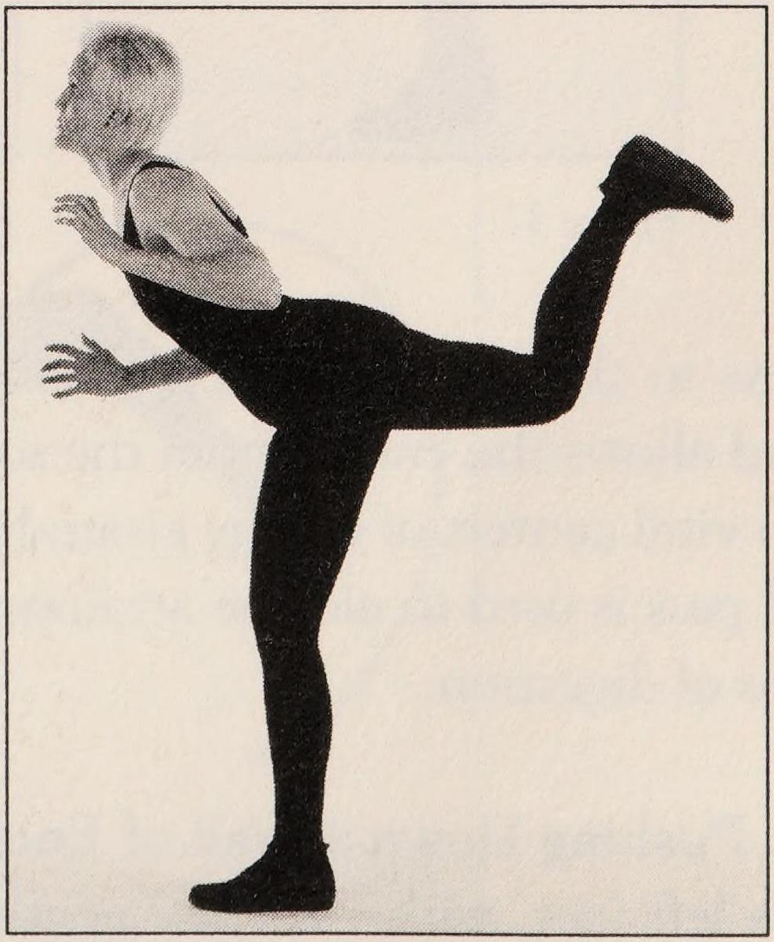


*Figure 30*

The arms are kept to the sides, because this magical pass engages only the lower limbs, giving them flexibility. The aim is to lift the leg that kicks to the front as high as possible, and the leg that kicks to the back also as high as possible. When executing the back kick, the trunk should bend slightly forward to facilitate the movement. This slight bending forward of the trunk is used as a natural means of absorbing the energy stirred with the limbs.

This magical pass is performed to aid the body when problems of digestion arise, due to a change in diet, or when there is a need to travel over great distances.

## 10. Lifting Energy from the Soles of the Feet

The left knee is bent acutely as it is lifted toward the trunk, as far up as possible. The trunk is bent slightly forward, almost touching the knee. The arms jut down, making a vise that grabs the sole of the foot (fig. 31). The ideal would be to grab the sole of the foot in a very light fashion, releasing it immediately. The foot comes down to the ground as the arms and hands, with a powerful jolt that engages the shoulders and pectoral muscles, lift up along the sides of the legs to the level of the pancreas and spleen (fig. 32). The same movements are performed with the right foot and arm, lifting the hands from the feet to the level of the liver and gallbladder. The movements are performed alternating between the two legs.

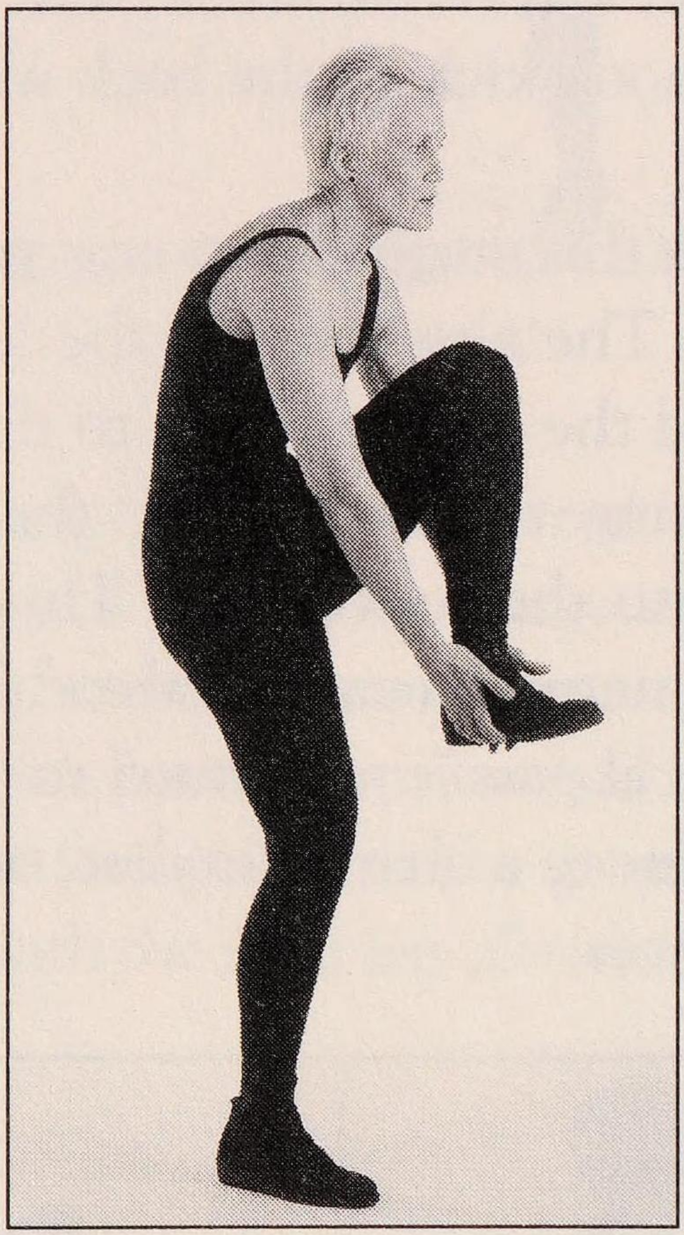


*Figure 31*

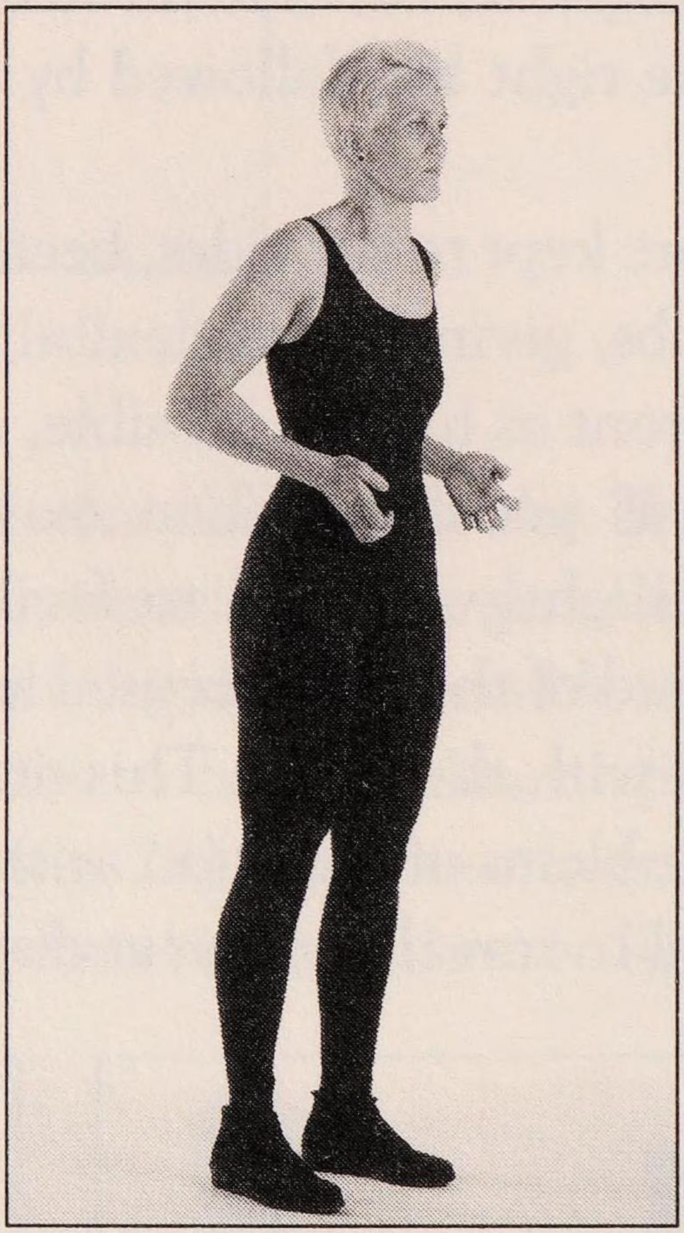


*Figure 32*

As in the case of the previous magical pass, bending the trunk forward allows the energy from the soles of the feet to be transferred to the two vital centers of energy around the liver and the pancreas.

This magical pass is used to aid the attainment of flexibility, and to relieve problems of digestion.

Shamans call the last five *magical passes* of this group Steps in Nature. They are *magical passes* that practitioners can perform as they walk, or conduct business, or even as they are sitting, talking to people. Their function is gathering energy with the feet and using it with the legs for situations in which concentration and the quick use of memory are required.

### 11. Pushing Down a Wall of Energy

The left foot, with the knee acutely bent, is lifted to the height of the hips; then it pushes forward with the tip of the foot arched upward, as if pushing away a solid object (fig. 33). As soon as the foot is brought down, the right foot is lifted in the same fashion and the movement is repeated, alternating the feet.

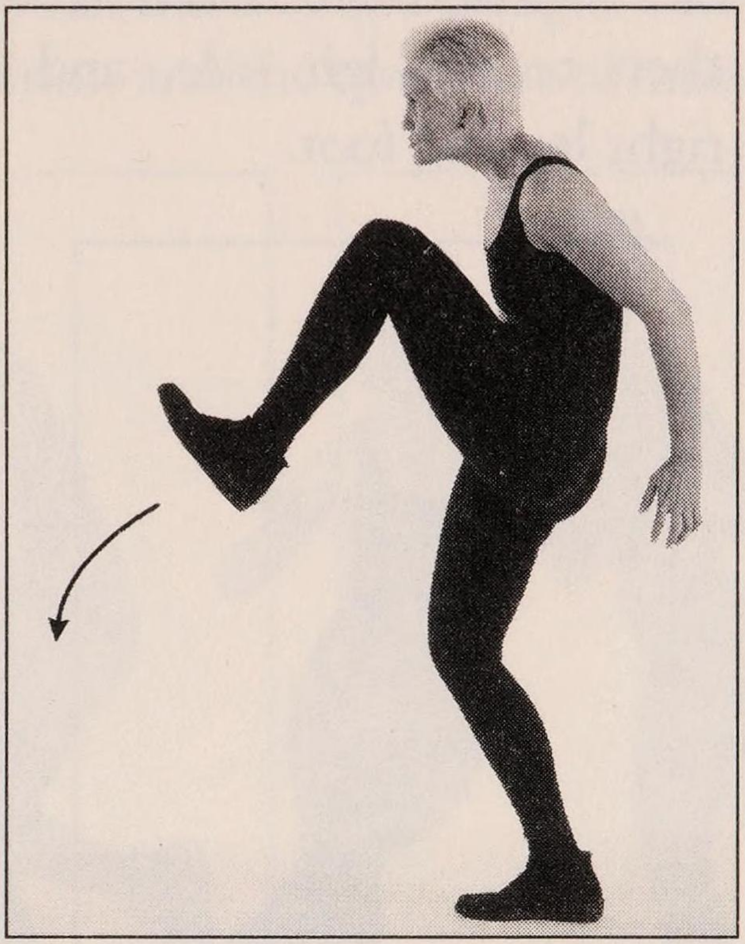


Figure 33

### 12. Stepping Over a Barrier of Energy

The left leg is nimbly lifted as if going over a hurdle which is located edgewise in front of the body. The leg makes a circle from left to right (fig. 34), and once the foot lands, the other leg is lifted to perform the same movement.

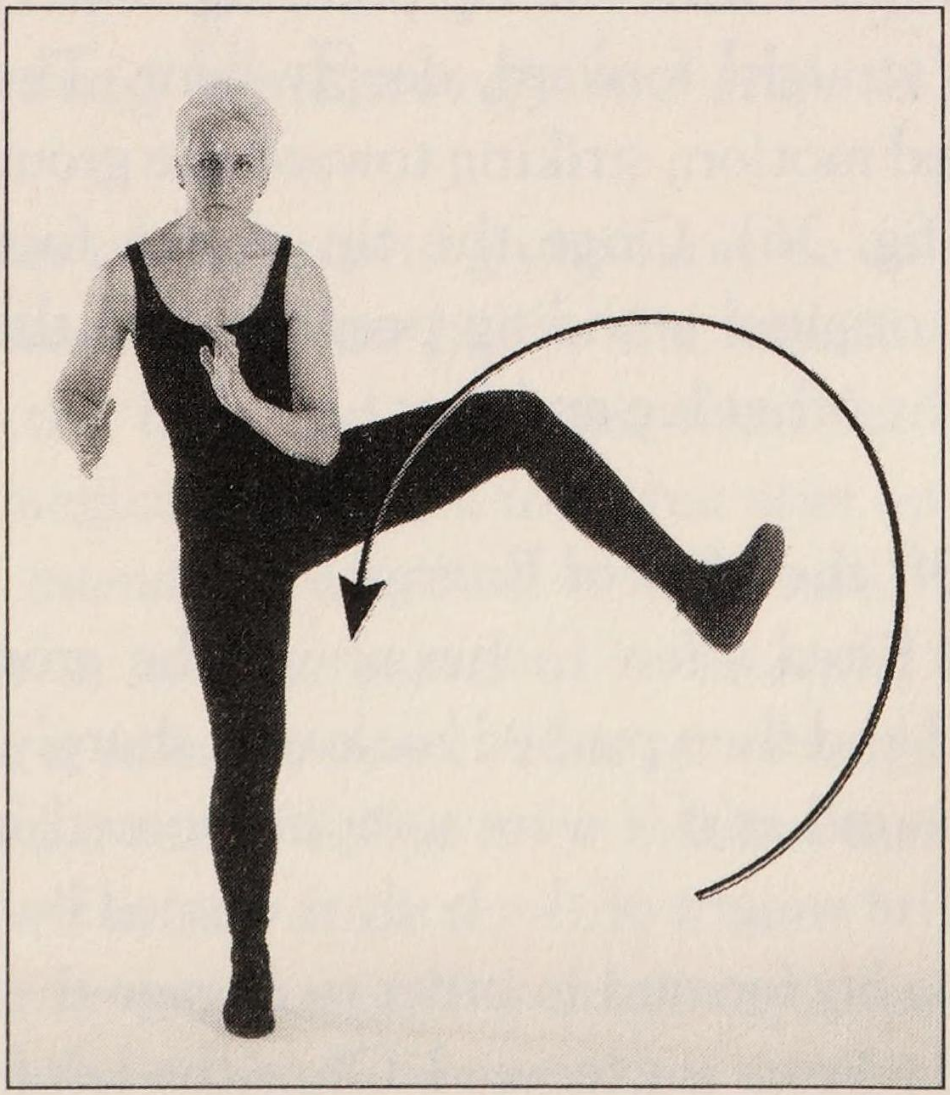


Figure 34

### 13. Kicking a Lateral Gate

This is a kick-push with the soles of the feet. The left leg is lifted to mid-calf and the foot pushes to the right of the body as if to hit a solid object, using the total sole of the foot as a striking surface (fig. 35). The foot is retrieved then to the left side, and the same movement is repeated with the right leg and foot.

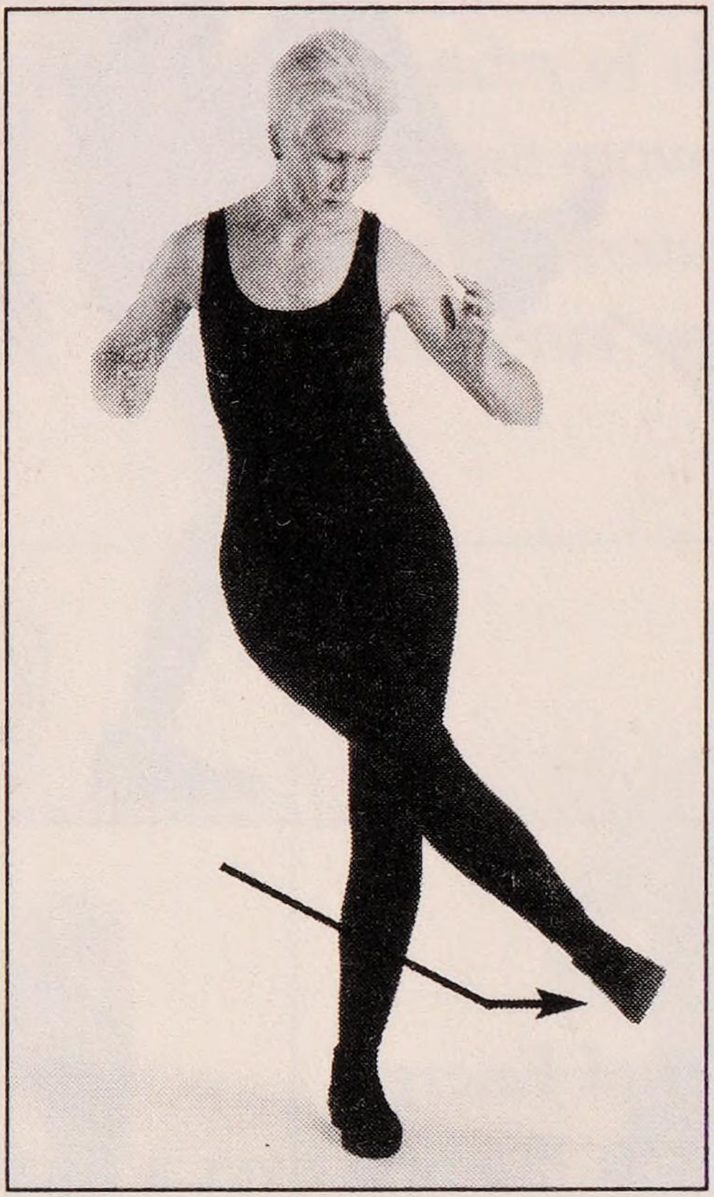


Figure 35

### 14. Cracking a Nugget of Energy

The left foot is lifted with the tip pointing acutely to the ground. The knee protrudes straight forward, deeply bent. Then the foot descends with a controlled motion, striking toward the ground as if it were cracking a nugget (fig. 36). Once the tip of the foot strikes, the foot is returned to it's original standing position and the same movement is repeated with the other leg and foot.

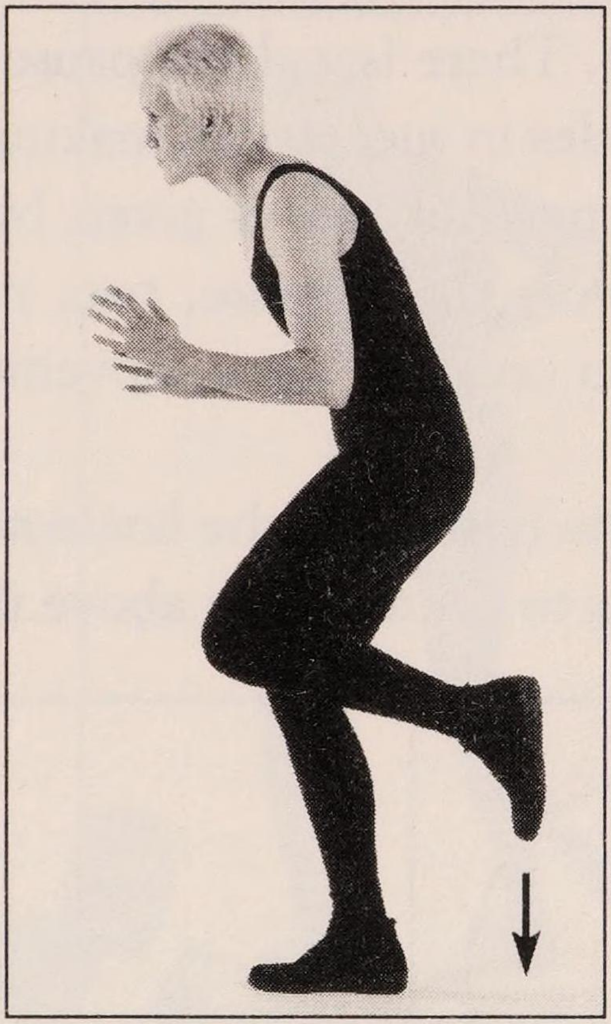


Figure 36

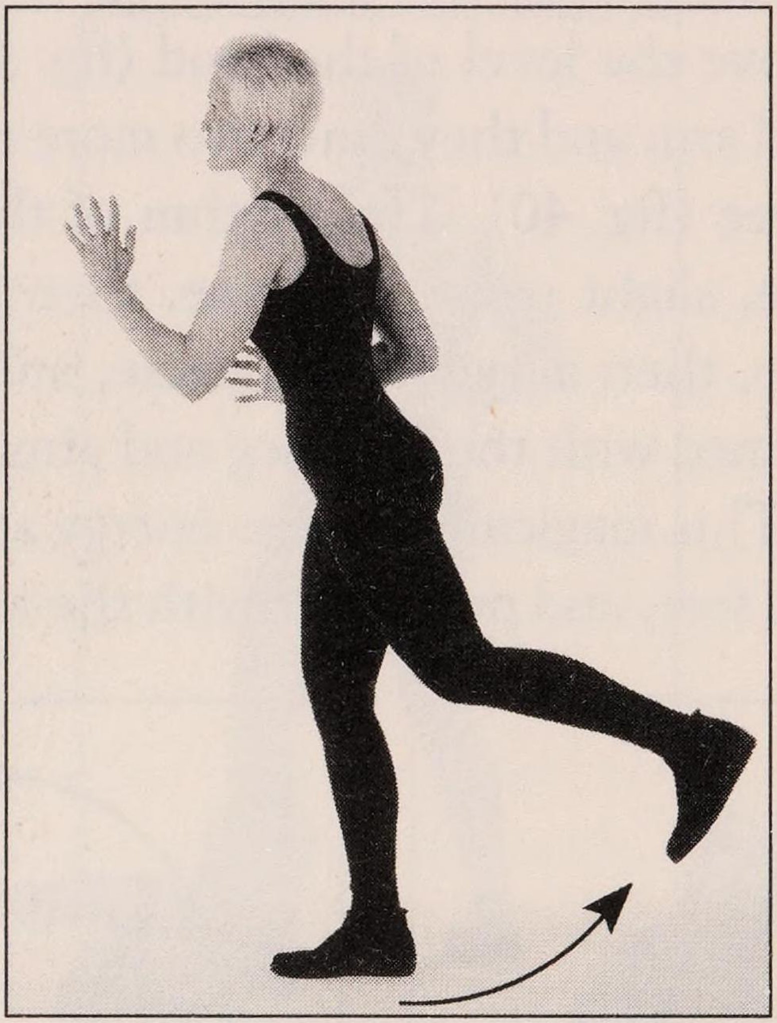


Figure 37

### 15. Scraping Off the Mud of Energy

The left foot is lifted a few inches above the ground; the entire leg is brought forward and then pushed backward sharply, with the foot lightly brushing the ground as if it were scraping something off the sole of the foot (fig. 37). The weight of the body is carried by the opposite leg, and the trunk leans a bit forward in order to engage the muscles of the stomach as this magical pass is executed. Once the left foot returns to it's normal position, the same movement is repeated with the right foot and leg.

Shamans call the last five magical passes of this group Steps in Nature. They are magical passes that practitioners can perform as they walk, or conduct business, or even as they are sitting, talking to people. Their function is gathering energy with the feet and using it with the legs for situations in which concentration and the quick use of memory are required.

# First Series: Second Group: Stirring Up Energy for Intent

The ten *magical passes* of the second group have to do with stirring up energy for intending from areas just below the knees, above the head, around the kidneys, the liver and pancreas, the solar plexus, and the neck. Each of these *magical passes* is a tool that stirs up exclusively the energy pertinent to intending, which is accumulated on those areas. Shamans consider these *magical passes* to be essential for daily living, because for them, life is ruled by intent. This set of *magical passes* is perhaps for shamans what a cup of coffee is for modern man: The slogan of the day, "I'm not myself until I drink my cappuccino," or the slogan of a past generation, "I'm not awake until I drink my cup of Java," is rendered for them as "I am not ready for anything until I have performed these *magical passes*." The second group of this series begins by the act that has been termed turning the body on. (See three pages back: "Six Series of *Tensegrity*", figs. 15, 16.)

## 16. Stirring Up Energy with the Feet and the Arms

After the body has been turned on, it is held in a slightly stooped-over position (fig. 38). The weight is placed on the right leg while the left leg makes a complete circle, brushing the ground with the tips of the toes, and landing on the ball of the foot, in front of the body. The left arm, in synchronization with the leg, makes a circle, the top of which goes above the level of the head (fig. 39). There is a slight pause of the leg and arm and they draw two more circles in succession, making a total of three (fig. 40). The rhythm of this magical pass is given by counting one, slight pause, one-one, then a very slight pause, two, pause, two-two, then a very slight pause, and so on. The same movement is performed with the right leg and arm.

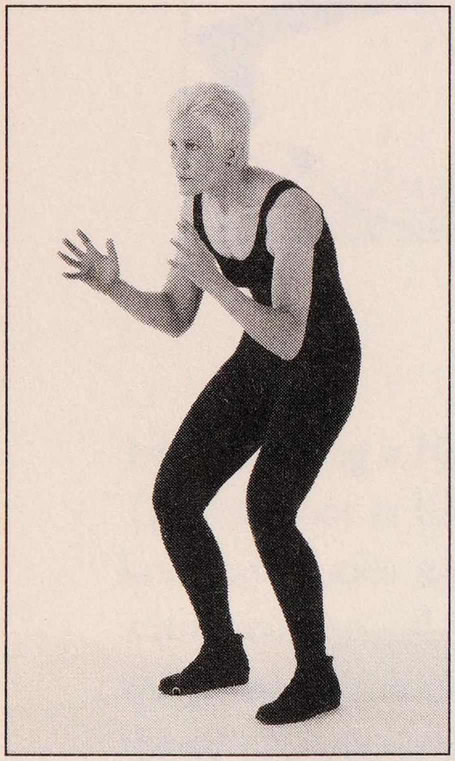


Figure 38

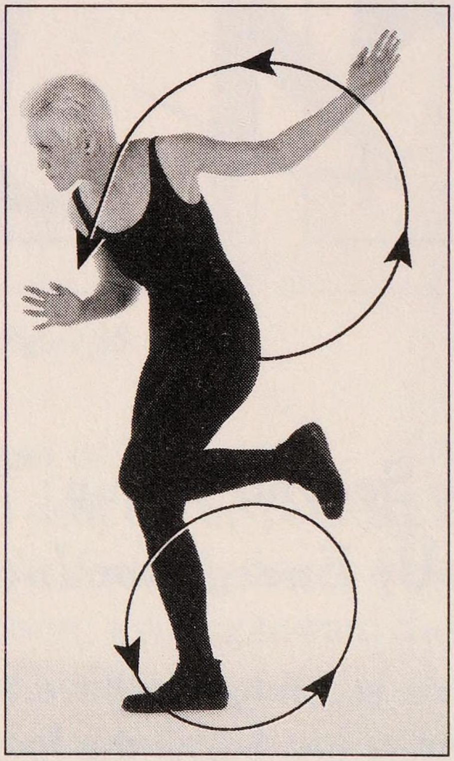


Figure 39

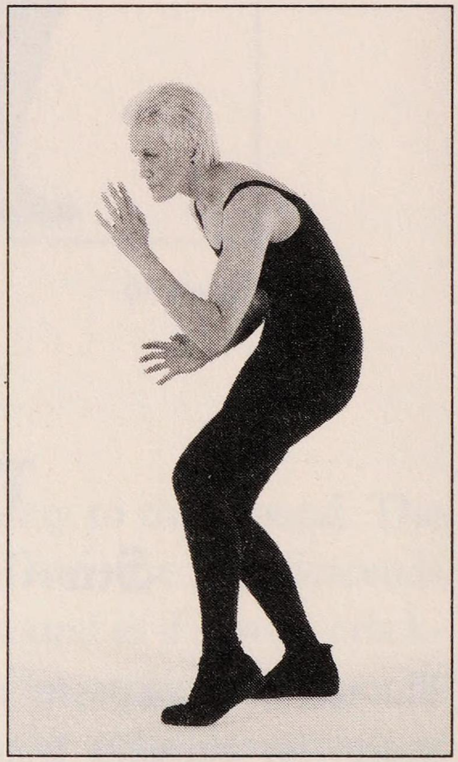


Figure 40

This magical pass stirs energy at the bottom of the *luminous ball* with the feet, and projects it with the arms to the area just above the head.

### 17. Rolling Energy on the Adrenals

The forearms are placed behind the body, over the area of the kidneys and adrenals. The elbows are bent at a ninety-degree angle and the hands are held in fists, a few inches away from the body, without touching it. The fists move downward in a rotational fashion, one on top of the other, beginning with the left fist moving downward; the right fist follows, moving downward as the left fist moves back up. The trunk leans slightly forward (fig. 41). Then the movement is reversed, and the fists roll in the opposite direction as the trunk leans slightly backward (fig. 42). Leaning the body forward and backward in this fashion engages the muscles of the upper arms and the shoulders.

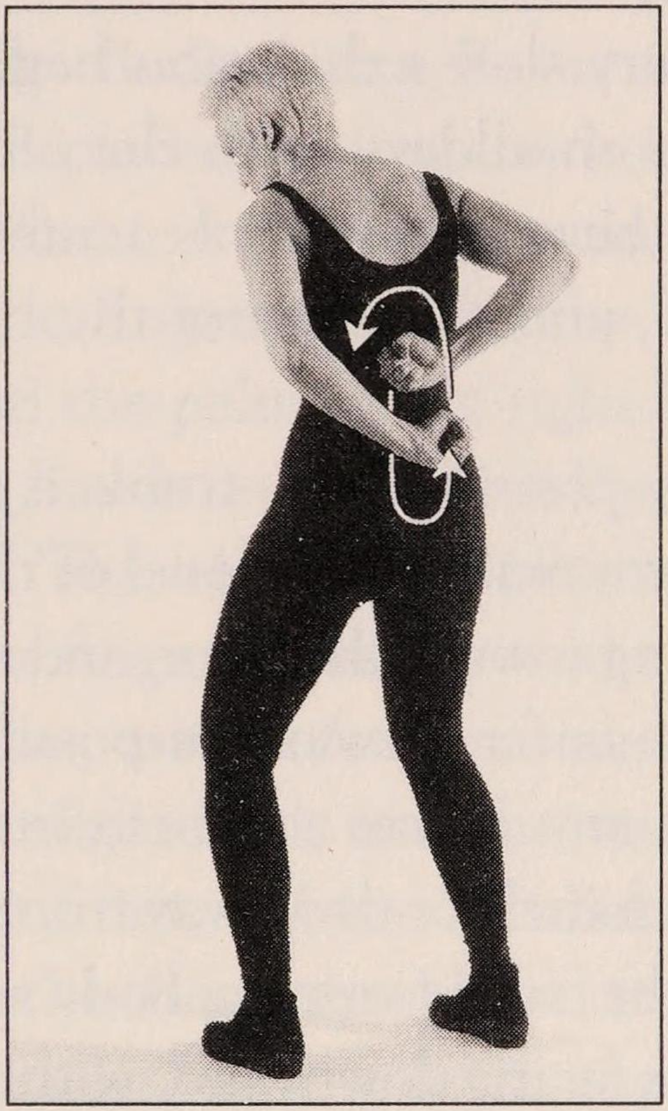


Figure 41

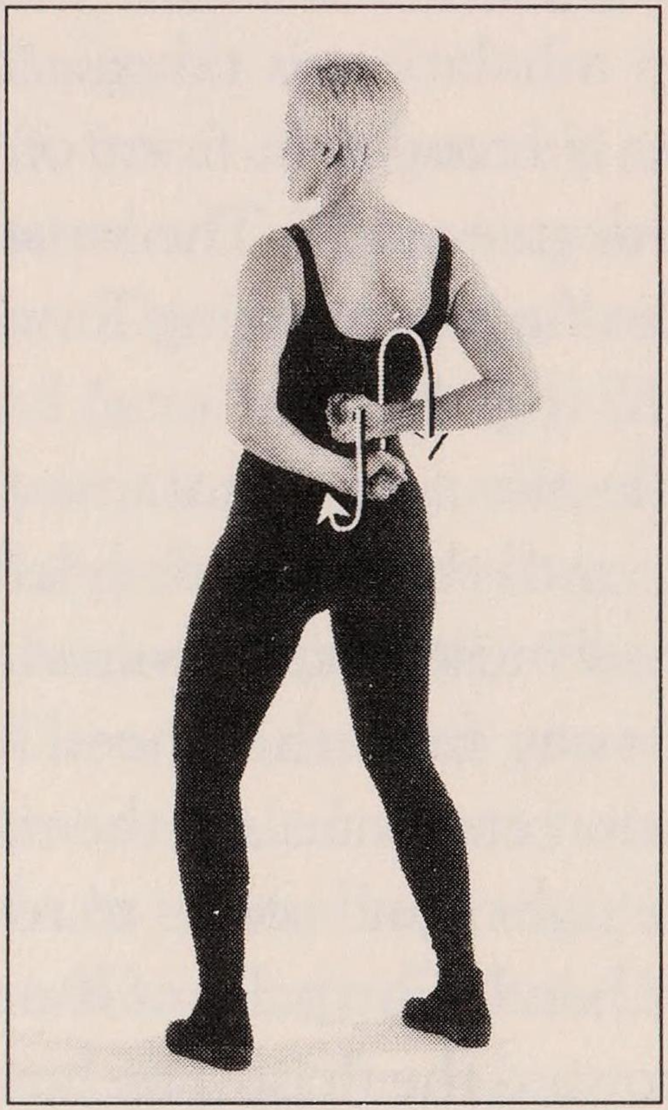


Figure 42

This magical pass is used to supply the energy of intending to the adrenals and kidneys.

### 18. Stirring up Energy for the Adrenals

The trunk is bent forward, with the knees protruding beyond the line of the toes. The hands rest above the kneecaps, the fingers draping over them. The left hand then rotates to the right over the kneecap, making the elbow protrude as far forward as possible in alignment with the left knee (fig. 43). At the same time, the right forearm, with the hand still above the kneecap, rests us full length over the right thigh, while the right knee is straightened engaging the hamstring. It is important to move only the knees, and not to swing the rear end from side to side.

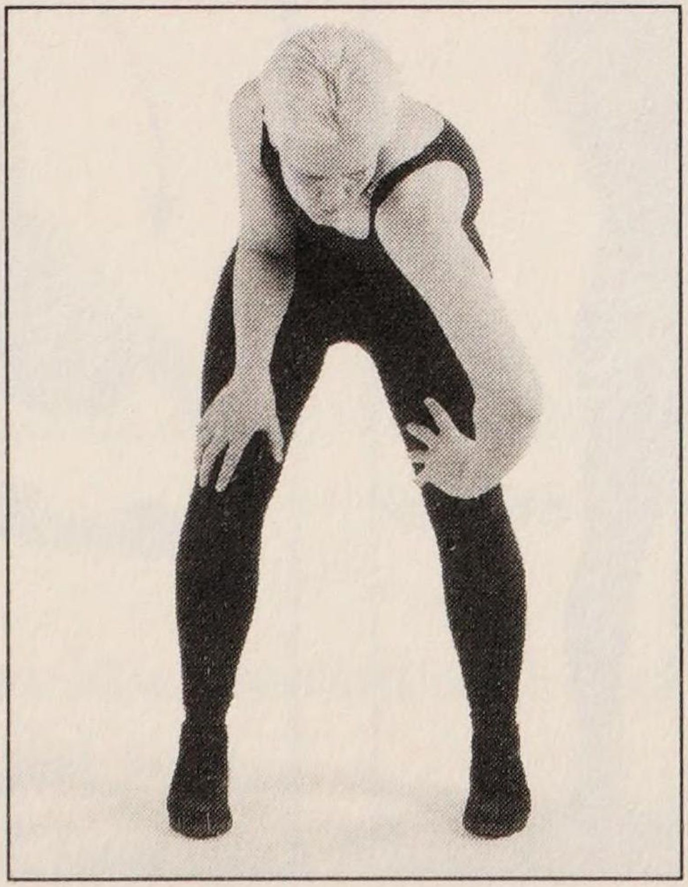


Figure 43

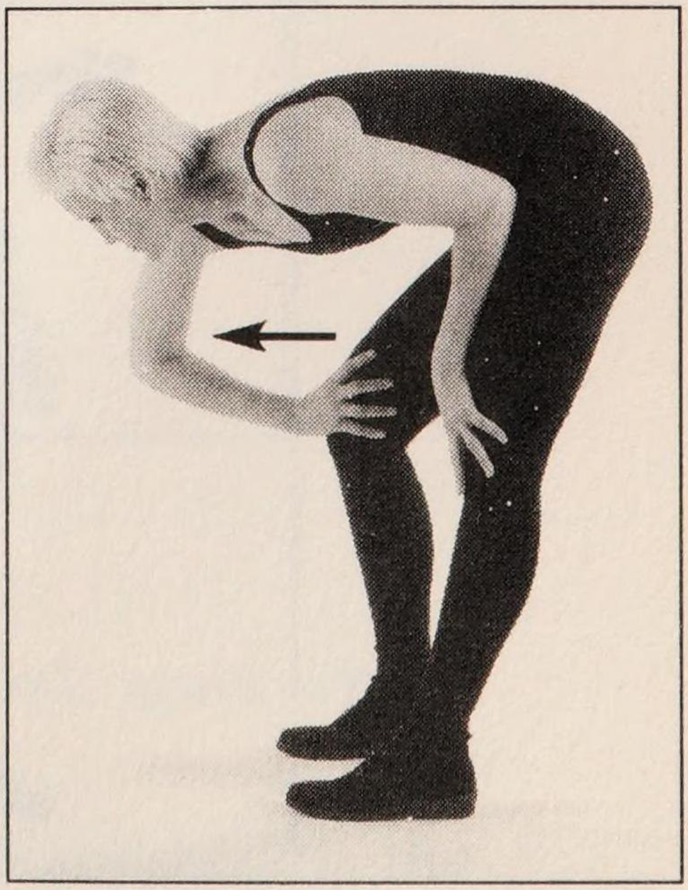


Figure 44

The same movements are performed with the right arm and leg (fig. 44). This magical pass is employed for stirring up the energy of intending around the kidneys and adrenals. It brings the practitioner long-range endurance and a sensation of daring and self-confidence.

### 19. Fusing Left and Right Energy

A deep inhalation is taken. A very slow exhalation begins as the left forearm is brought in front of the shoulders, with the elbow bent at a ninety-degree angle. The wrist is bent backward as acutely as possible, with the fingers pointing forward, and the palm of the hand facing to the right (fig. 45).

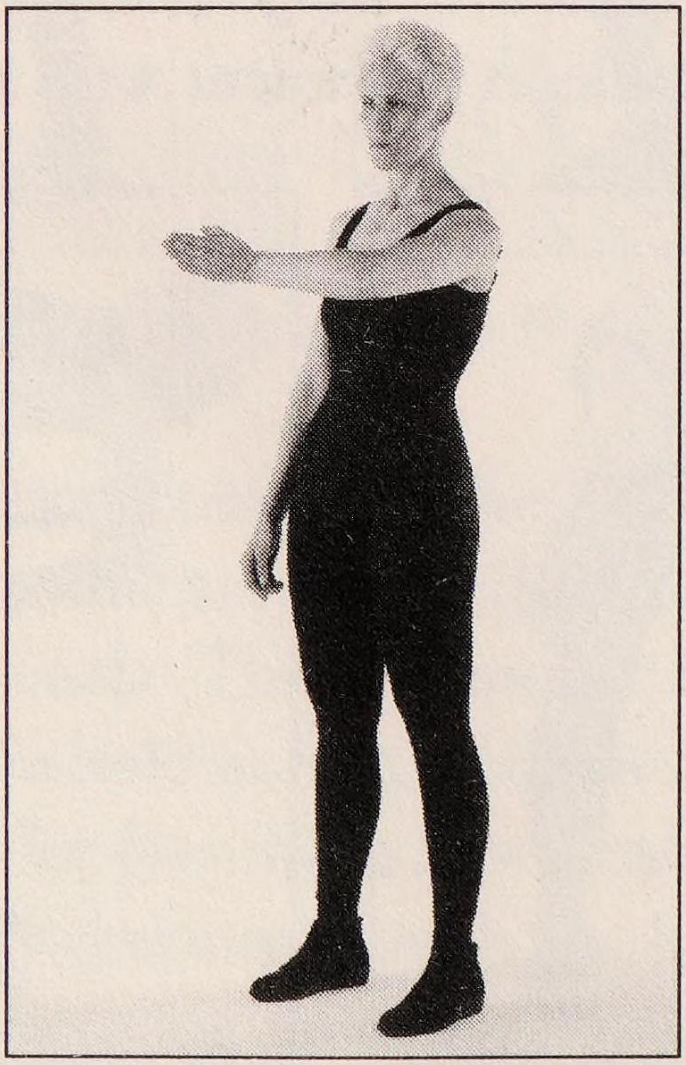


Figure 45

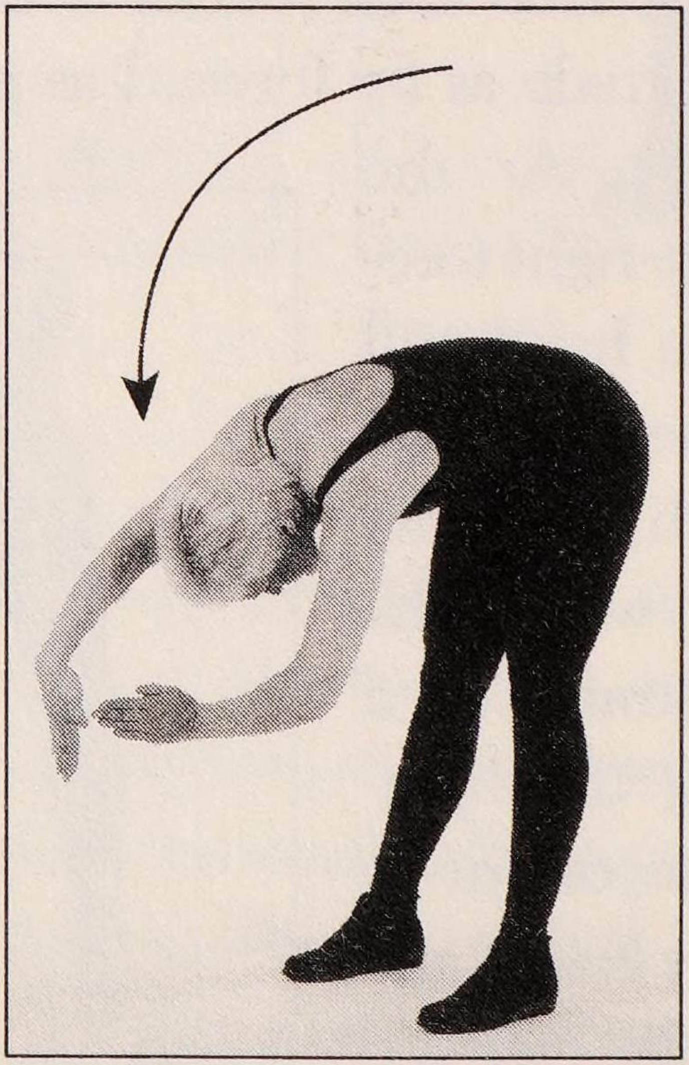


Figure 46

While the arm maintains this position, the trunk is bent forward sharply until the protruding left arm reaches the level of the knees. The left elbow must be kept from sagging toward the floor, and must be maintained away from the knees, and as far forward as possible. The slow exhalation continues, as the right arm makes a full circle over the head and the right hand comes to rest an inch or two away from the fingers of the left hand. The palm of the right hand faces the body and the fingers point toward the floor. The head is facing downward, with the neck held straight. The exhalation ends, and a deep breath is taken in that position. All the muscles of the back and the arms and legs are contracted as the air is slowly and deeply inhaled (fig. 46).

The body straightens up as an exhalation is made, and the complete magical pass is started again with the right arm.

The maximum stretch of the arms forward permits the creation of an opening in the energetic vortex of the center of the kidneys and adrenals; such an opening allows the optimal utilization of redeployed energy. This magical pass is essential for the *redeployment of energy* to that center, which accounts, in general terms, for an overall vitality and youth of the body.

### 20. Piercing the Body with a Beam of Energy

The left arm is placed against the body in front of the navel, and the right arm just behind the body at the same level. The wrists are bent sharply, and the fingers point to the floor. The palm of the left hand faces right, and the palm of the right hand faces left (fig. 47). The fingertips of both hands are raised briskly to point in a straight line forward and backward. The whole body is tensed and the knees are bent at the instant that the fingers point forward and backward (fig. 48). The hands are kept in that position for a moment. Then the muscles are relaxed, the legs are straightened, and the arms are swiveled around until the right arm is in front and the left behind. As at the beginning of this magical pass, the fingertips point to the floor, and are raised again briskly to point in a straight line forward and backward, again with a light exhalation; the knees are bent. By means of this magical pass, a dividing line is established in the middle of the body, which separates left energy and right energy.

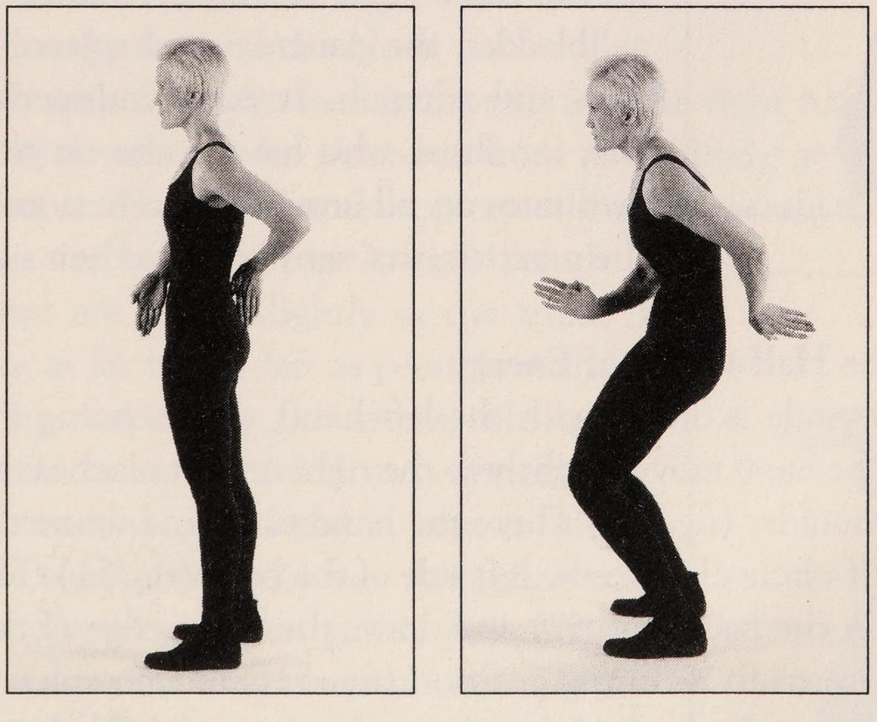


*Figure 47* *Figure 48*

### 21. Twisting Energy Over Two Centers of Vitality

It's a good idea to begin by placing the hands facing each other, as a device to keep the hands in line. The fingers are kept open and clawed, as if to grab the lid of a jar the size of the hand. Then the right hand is placed over the area of the pancreas and spleen, facing the body. The left hand is placed behind the body, over the area of the left kidney and adrenal, also with the palm facing the body. Both wrists are then bent backward sharply, as the trunk turns as far to the left as possible, keeping the knees in place. Next, both hands pivot at the wrists in unison, in a side-to-side movement, as if to unscrew the lids of two jars, one on the pancreas and spleen, and the other on the left kidney (fig. 49).

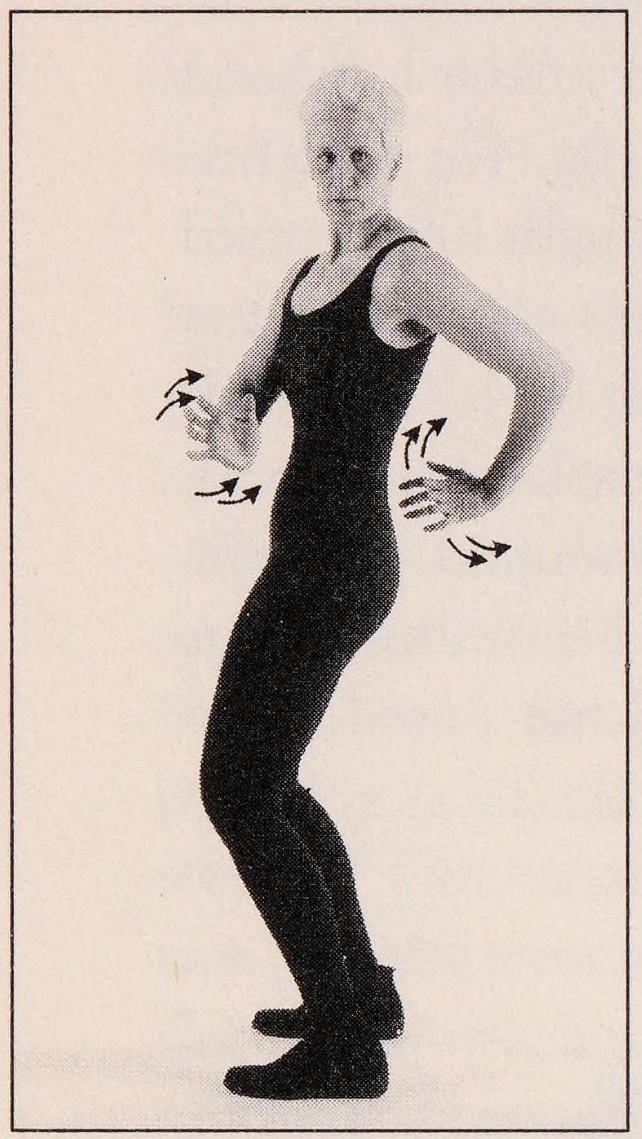


Figure 49

The same movement is executed by reversing the order, putting the left hand in the front, at the level of the liver and gallbladder and the right arm in the back at the level of the right kidney.

With the aid of this magical pass, energy is stirred on the three main centers of vitality: the liver and gallbladder, the pancreas and spleen, and the kidneys and adrenals. It is an indispensable magical pass for those who have to be on the lookout. It facilitates an all-around awareness and it increases the practitioners' sensibility to their surroundings.

### 22. The Half-Circle of Energy

A half-circle is drawn with the left hand, commencing in front of the face. The hand moves slightly to the right until it reaches the level of the right shoulder (fig. 50). There the hand turns and draws the inner edge of a half-circle close to the left side of the body (fig. 51). The hand turns again in the back (fig. 52) and draws the outer edge of the half-circle, then returns to it's initial position (fig. 53). The complete half-circle is slanted from the level of the eyes, in front, to a level below the rear end, in the back. It is important to follow the movement of the hand with the eyes. Once the half-circle drawn with the left arm is completed, another one is drawn with the right arm, surrounding the body in this fashion with two half-circles. These two half-circles are drawn to stir energy and to facilitate the sliding of energy from above the head to the region of the adrenals. This magical pass is a vehicle for acquiring intense, sustained sobriety.

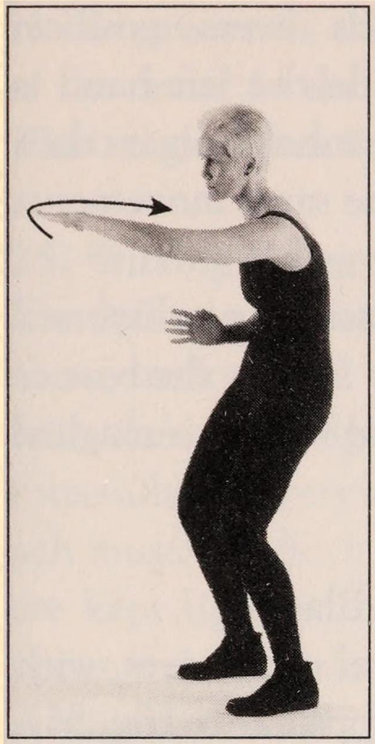


*Figure 50*

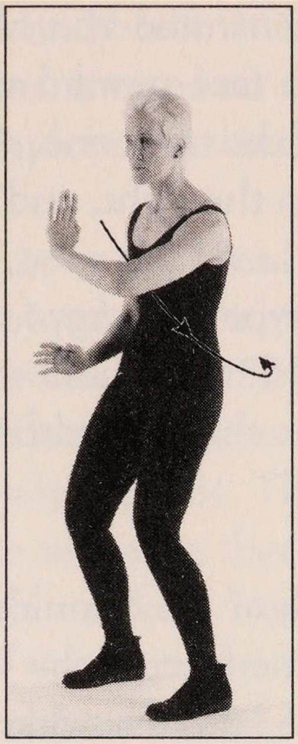


*Figure 51*

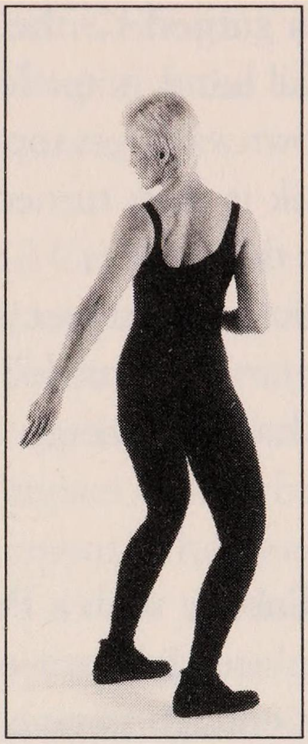


*Figure 52*

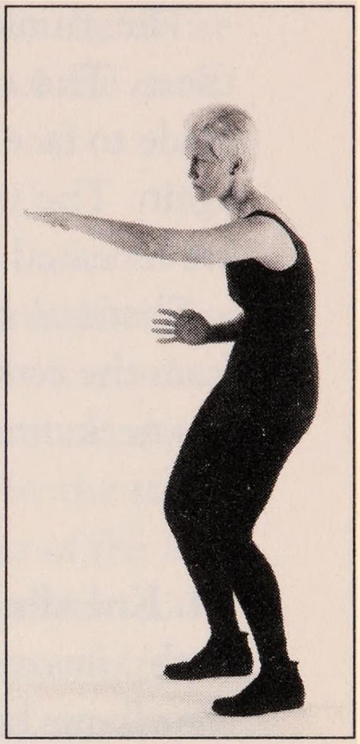


*Figure 53*

### 23. Stirring Energy Around the Neck

The left hand, with the palm facing upward, and the right hand, with the palm facing downward, are placed in front of the body, at the level of the solar plexus. The right hand is on top of the left, nearly touching it. The elbows are bent sharply. A deep breath is taken; the arms are raised slightly as the trunk is made to rotate as far to the left as possible without moving the legs, especially the knees, which are slightly bent in order to avoid any unnecessary stress on the tendons. The head is kept in alignment with the trunk and shoulders. An exhalation begins as the elbows are then gently pulled away from each other to a maximum stretch, keeping the wrists straight (fig. 54). An inhalation is taken. An exhalation begins when the head is turned very gently to the back to face the left elbow, and then to the front to face the right elbow; the rotation of the head back and forth is repeated two more times as the exhalation ends.

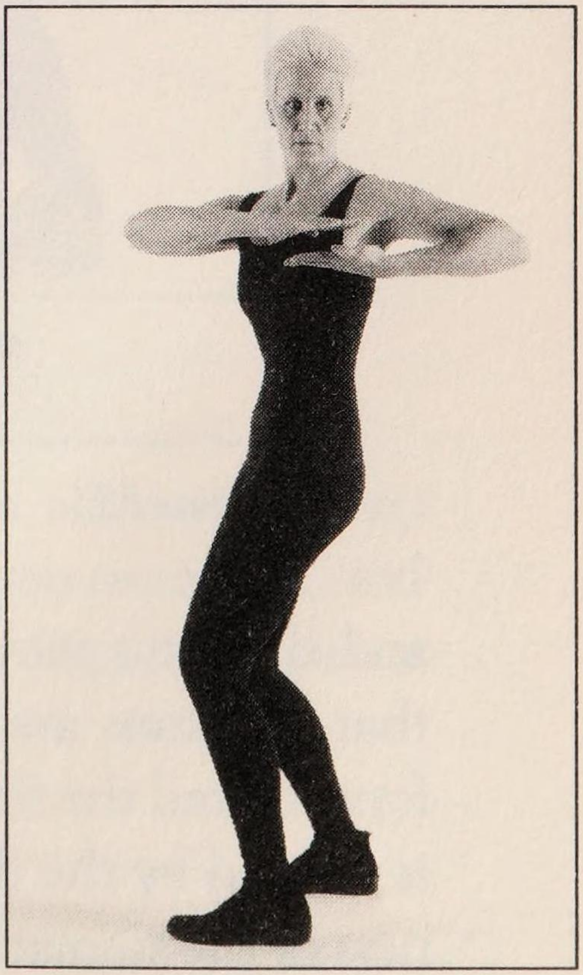


*Figure 54*

The trunk is turned to the front, and the hands reverse position there. The right hand is made to face upward while the left hand is made to face downward, on top of the right one. An inhalation is taken again. The trunk is then turned to the right, and the same movements are repeated on the right.

Shamans believe that a special type of energy for intending is dispersed from the center for decisions, located in the hollow V spot at the base of the neck, and that this energy is exclusively gathered with this magical pass.

## 24. Kneading Energy with a Push of the Shoulder Blades

Both arms are placed in front of the face, at the level of the eyes, with the elbows bent enough to give the arms a bowlike appearance (fig. 55). The trunk is bent forward slightly, in order to allow the shoulder blades to expand laterally. The movement begins by pushing the left arm forward while it is kept arched and tense (fig. 56). The right arm follows; and the arms move in an alternating fashion. It is important to note that the arms are kept extremely tense. The palms of the hands face forward and the fingertips face each other. The driving force of the arms is created by the deep movement of the shoulder blades and the tenseness of the stomach muscles.

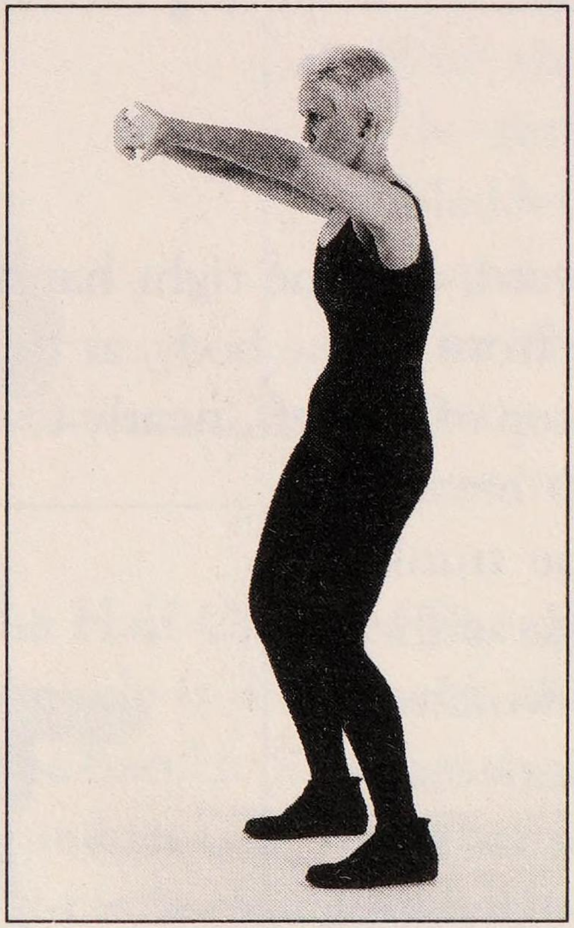


Figure 55

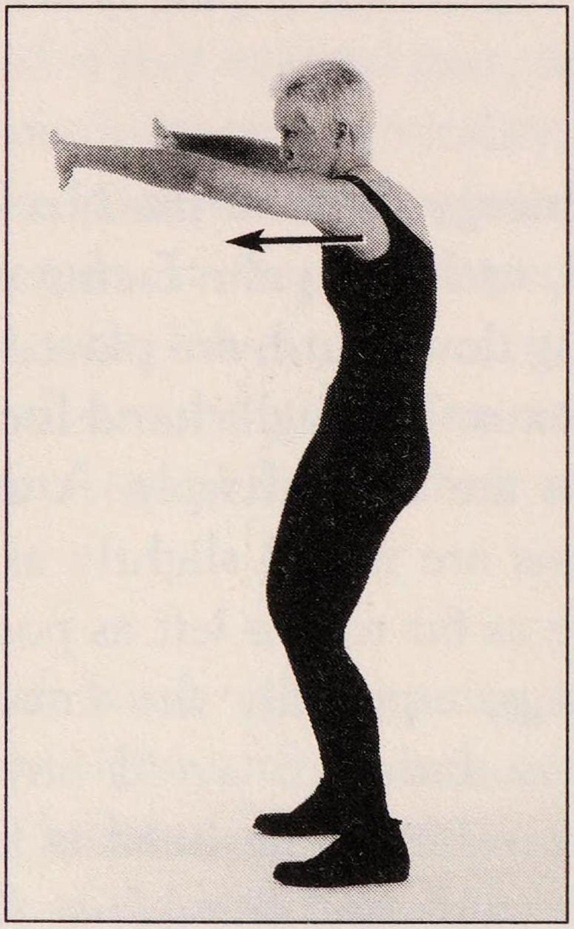


Figure 56

Shamans believe that energy on the ganglia around the shoulder blades gets easily stuck and becomes stagnant, bringing about the decay of the center for decisions, located on the V spot at the base of the neck. This magical pass is employed to stir that energy.

## 25. Stirring Energy Above the Head and Cracking It

The left arm moves in a relaxed fashion, making two and a half circles above and around the head (fig. 57). Those circles are then cracked with the outer edge of the forearm and the hand, which comes down forcefully, but very slowly (fig. 58). The impact is absorbed by the stomach muscles, which are tensed at that moment. The muscles of the arm are kept fight, in order to avoid injuries to the tendons which could occur if the muscles of the arm were loose, or if the arm were whipped. Air is exhaled lightly as the arm strikes downward. The same movement is repeated with the right arm.

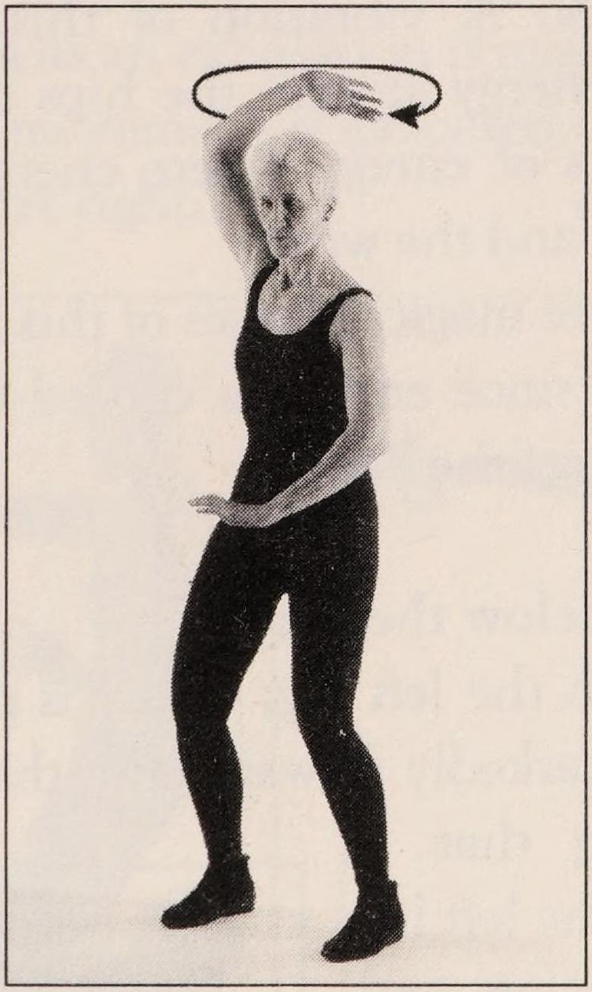


Figure 57

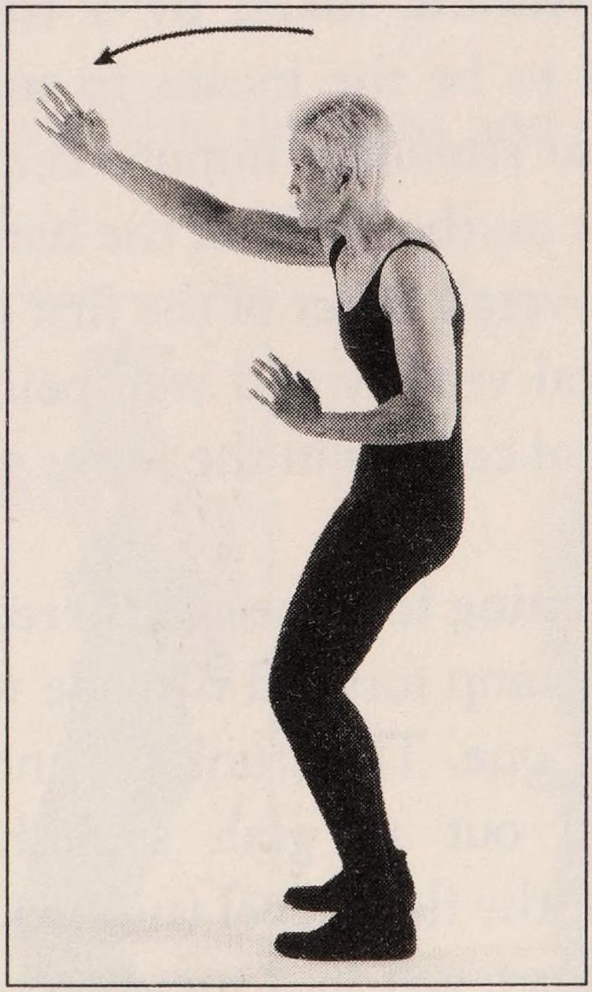


Figure 58

The energy stirred and cracked in this fashion is allowed to seep downward over the entire body. When practitioners are overtired, and can't afford to go to sleep, executing this magical pass dispels sleepiness and brings forth a sensation of temporary alertness.

## **First Series: Third Group: Gathering Energy for Intent**

The nine *magical passes* of the third group are employed to bring to the three centers of vitality around the liver, the pancreas, and the kidneys the specialized energy which has been stirred up by the *magical passes* of the previous group. The *magical passes* of this group must be performed slowly and with ultimate deliberation. Shamans recommend that the state of mind on executing these passes be one of total silence and the unwavering intent to gather the energy necessary for intending.

All of the *magical passes* of the third group begin with a fast shake of the hands, which are held at the sides of the body, with the arms hanging at a normal position. The hands shake as if the fingers were vibrating downward, taken by a tremor. A vibration of this nature was thought to be the means to stir energy around the hips and also the means to stimulate minute centers of energy where energy could get stagnant on the backs of the hands and the wrists.

The overall effect of the first three *magical passes* of this group is one of general vitality and well-being, since energy is carried to the three main vital centers in the lower part of the body.

### 26. Reaching for Energy Stirred Below the Knees

A small jump forward is made with the left leg, which is propelled by the right one. The trunk is bent markedly forward, and the left arm is stretched out to grab something that is almost at the floor level (fig. 59). The left leg is then retrieved to a standing position, and the left palm brushes immediately over the vital center of energy on the right: the liver and gallbladder.

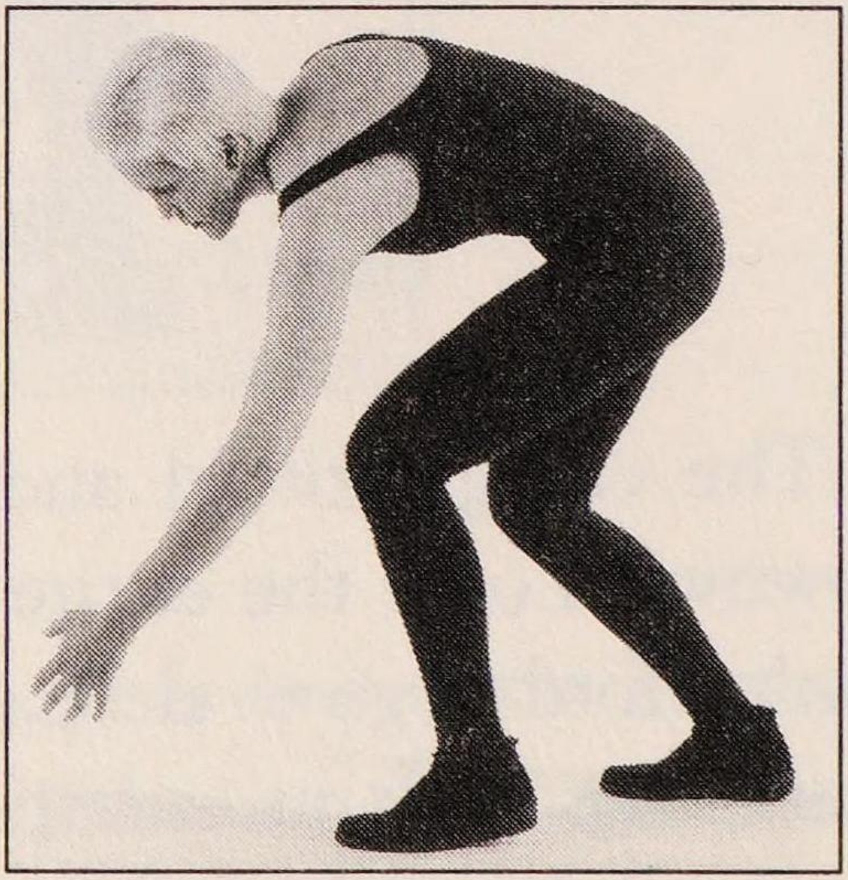


Figure 59

The same movement is repeated with the right leg and arm, brushing the palm over the vital center on the left: the pancreas and spleen.

### 27. Transporting Front Energy to the Adrenals

A deep inhalation is taken while the hands shake. Then the left arm shoots straight in front of the body ;it the level of the shoulders with the palm of the hand turned toward the left, as all the air is sharply exhaled (fig. 60). Next, a very slow inhalation begins while the wrist rotates from left to right, making a complete circle, as if scooping a ball of solid matter (fig. 61). Then the inhalation continues while the wrist rotates hack again to it's initial position with the palm facing to the left. Next, us if carrying the ball, the left arm makes a semi-circle, keeping the same shoulder level; this movement ends when the back of the bent wrist is placed over the left kidney. It is important that the continuous inhalation be made to last for the duration of the swinging of the arm from front to back.

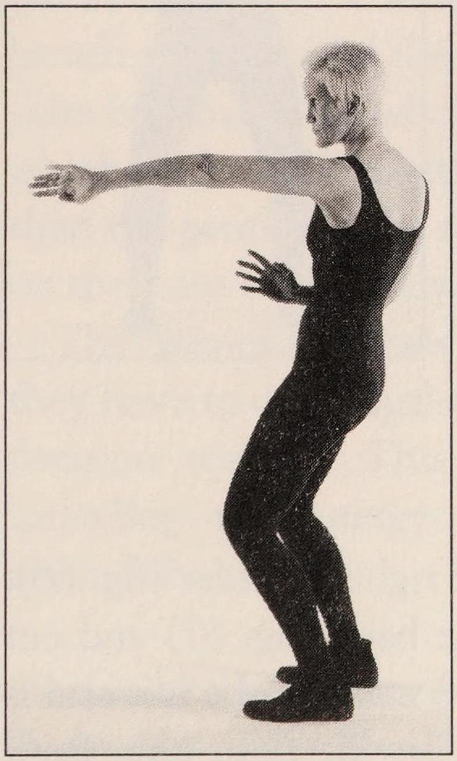
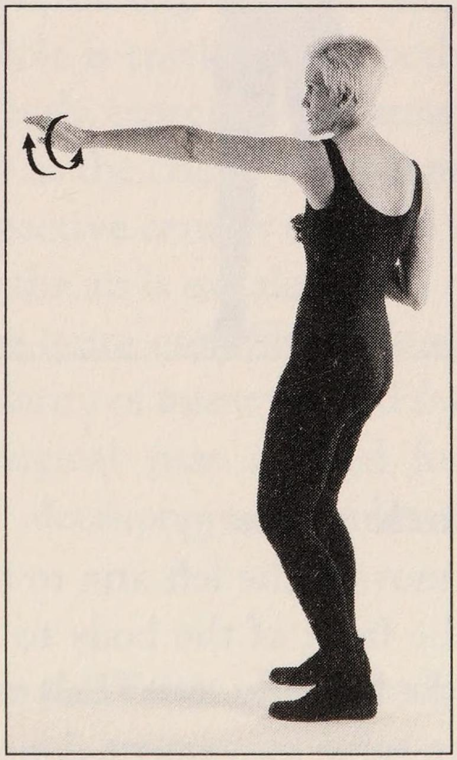


*Figure 60*



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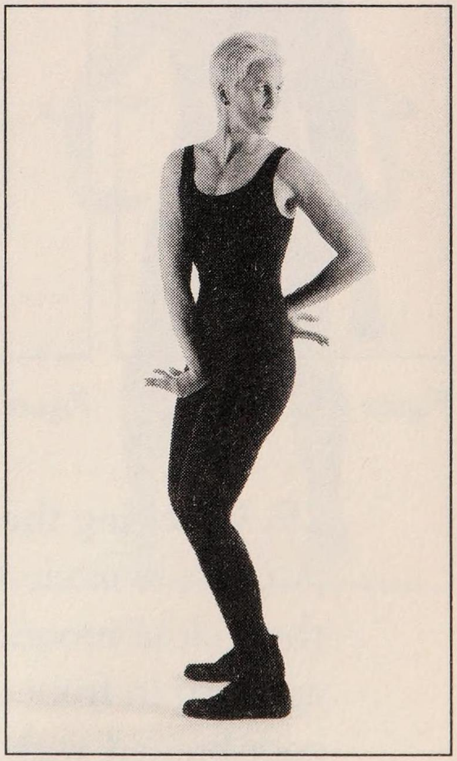


*Figure 62*

As this swinging movement is executed, the right arm makes a circular movement to the front of the body, ending when the hack of the bent wrist is brought to touch the area just above the pubis. The head is turned to the left to face the back (fig. 62). Next, the left hand, which is holding the ball, turns to face the body and smashes the Kill against the left kidney and adrenal. The palm is then gently rubbed over that area as an exhalation is made.

The same movement is executed by reversing the arms and turning the head to the right.

### 28. Scooping Energy from the Left and the Right

The arms are moved to the sides of the body and then raised with the hands curled inward toward the body, brushing upward against the torso to reach the armpits, as a deep inhalation is taken (fig. 63). Next, the arms are extended laterally, with the palms down, as the air is exhaled forcefully. A deep inhalation is taken then as the hands are cupped and made to rotate on the wrists until the palms face up, as if scooping something solid (fig. 64). Next, the hands are brought back to the shoulder level by bending the elbows sharply as the inhalation continues (fig. 65). This movement engages the shoulder blades and the muscles of the neck. After holding this position for a moment, the arms are extended laterally again, with a sharp exhalation. The palms face front. The palms of the hands are cupped and made to rotate backward, again as if scooping a solid substance.

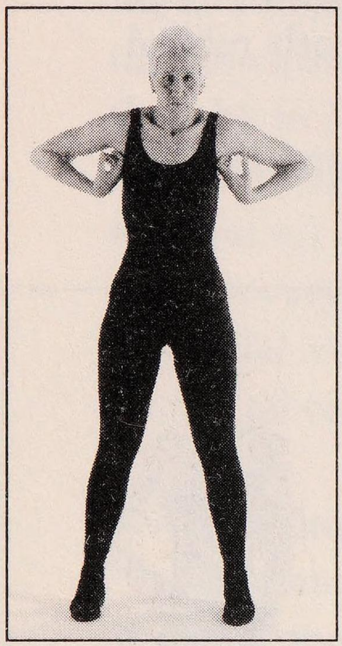


Figure 63

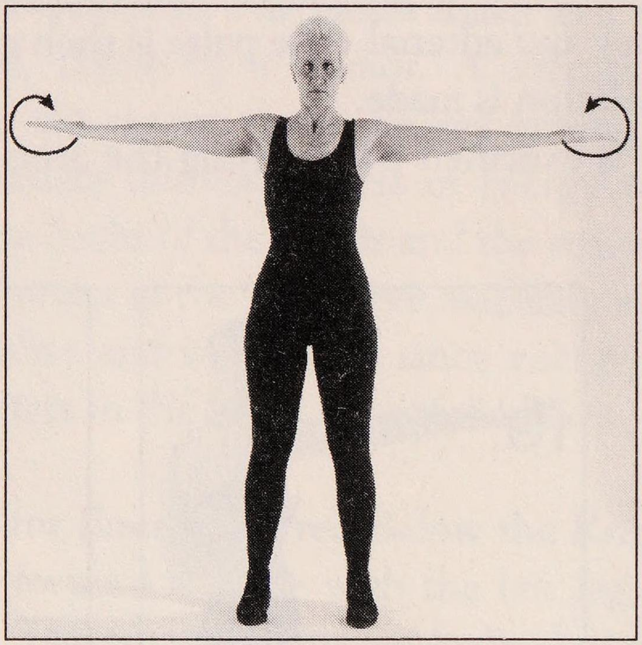


Figure 64

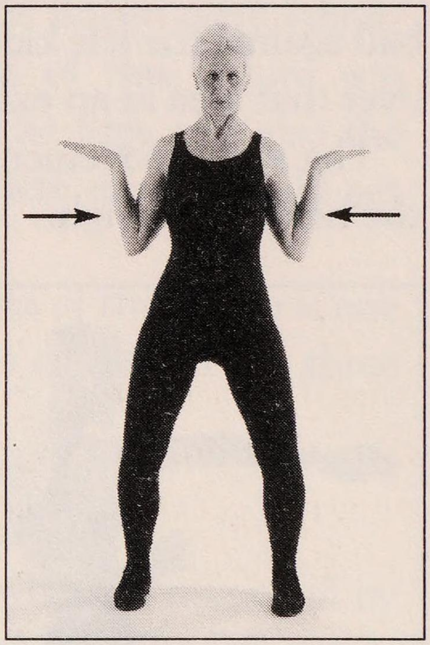


Figure 65

The slightly cupped hands are brought back to the shoulder level as before. These movements are repeated one more time, for a total of three. The palms then rub gently over the two vital centers around the liver and around the pancreas as the air is exhaled.

## 29. Cracking the Circle of Energy

A circle is made by moving the left arm to the right shoulder (fig. 66), then close around the front of the body to the back (fig. 67) and out again to in front of the face (fig. 68). This movement of the left arm is coordinated with the same movement done with the right arm. Both arms move in an alternate fashion, creating a slanted circle around the total body. Then a backward step to the left is taken with the right foot, followed by a step to the right taken with the left foot, so as to turn around to face the opposite direction. The left arm is arched then around the left side of the circle, as if the circle were a solid object movement which the left arm presses against the armpit and chest area. The right arm then performs the same on the right side, treating the circle as if it were a solid object (fig. 69). A deep breath is taken, and the circle is cracked from both sides by tensing the whole body, especially the arms, which are brought together to the chest.

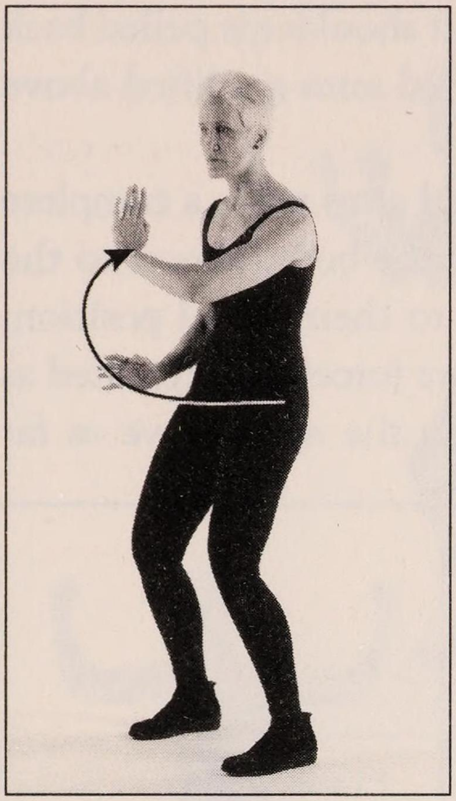


Figure 66

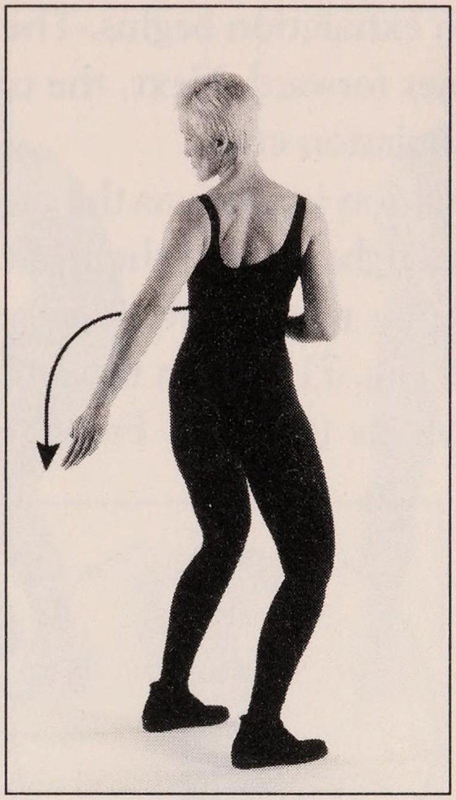


Figure 67

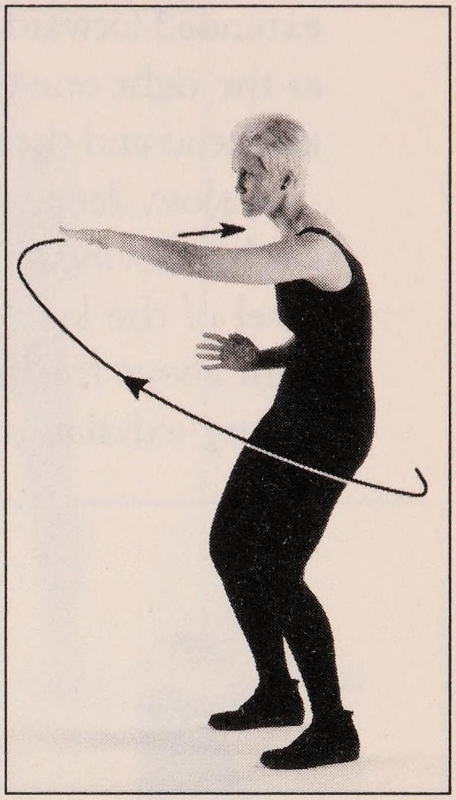


Figure 68

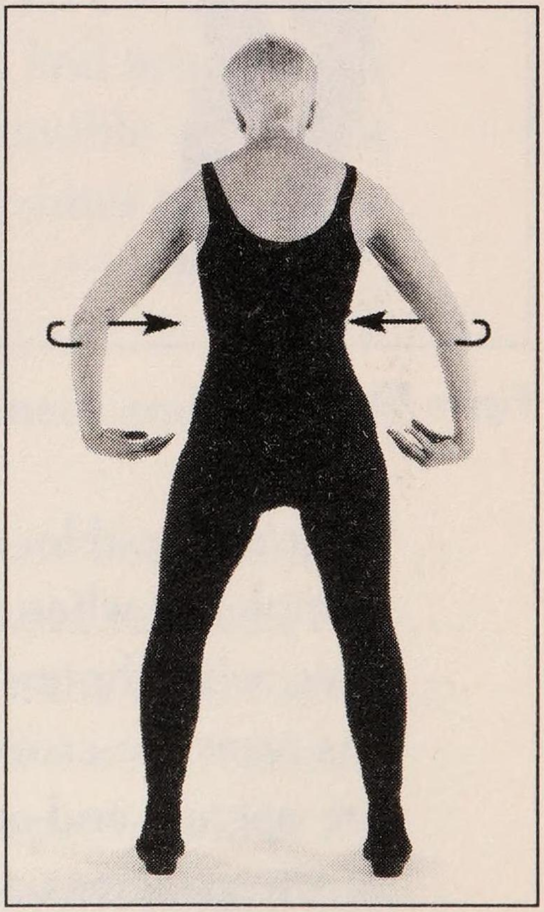
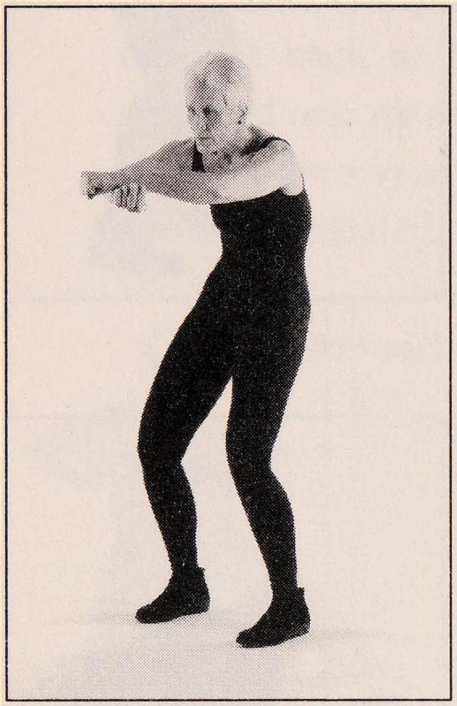


Figure 69

The palms then rub gently on the respective centers of vitality on the front of the body as the air is exhaled. The uses of this pass are quite esoteric, because they have to do with the clarity of intent needed for decision making. This magical pass is used for .pleading the energy of decisions accumulated around the neck.

### 30. Gathering Energy from the Front of the Body, Right Above the Head

A deep inhalation is taken as the hands shake. Both arms are brought to level of the face with clenched fists, crossed in an X, with the left arm closer to the face, and the inside of the fisted palms toward the face. The arms are then extended a few inches to the front as the wrists are made to rotate on each other until the fisted palms are facing down (fig. 70). From this position, the left shoulder and shoulder blade are extended forward, an exhalation begins. The left shoulder is pulled back as the right one comes forward. Next, the crossed arms are lifted above the head and the exhalation ends.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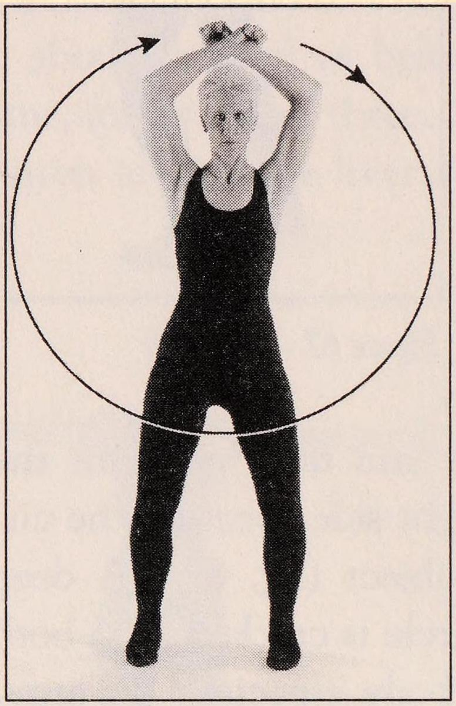


*Figure 71*

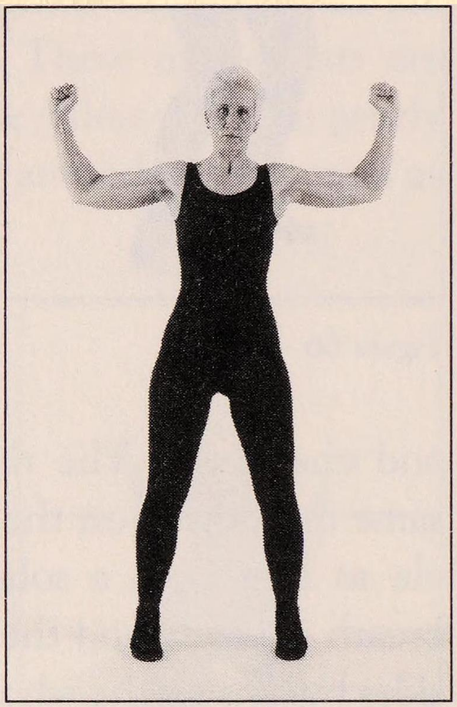


*Figure 72*

A slow, deep inhalation is taken as the crossed arms make a complete circle, moving to the right around the front of the body, almost to the level of the knees, then to the left, and back to their initial position, right above the head (fig. 71). Then the arms are forcefully separated as a long exhalation begins (fig. 72). From there, the arms move as far back as possible, as the exhalation continues, drawing a circle which is completed when the fists are brought to the front to the level of the eyes, with the inside of the fisted palms toward the face (fig. 73). Then the arms are crossed again. The wrists pivot on each other as the hands are opened and are placed against the body, the right hand on the area of the pancreas and spleen, and the left hand on the area of the liver and gallbladder. The body bends forward at the waist, at a ninety-degree angle, as the exhalation ends (fig. 74).

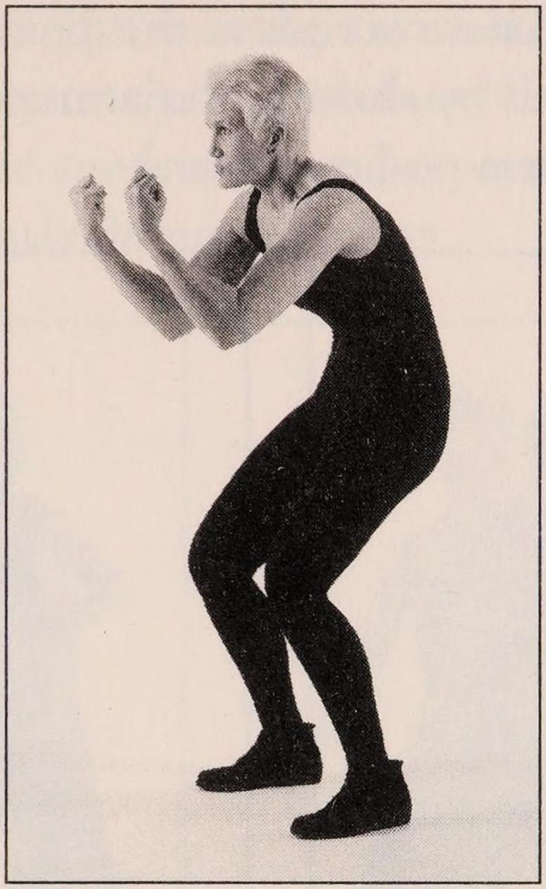


*Figure 73*

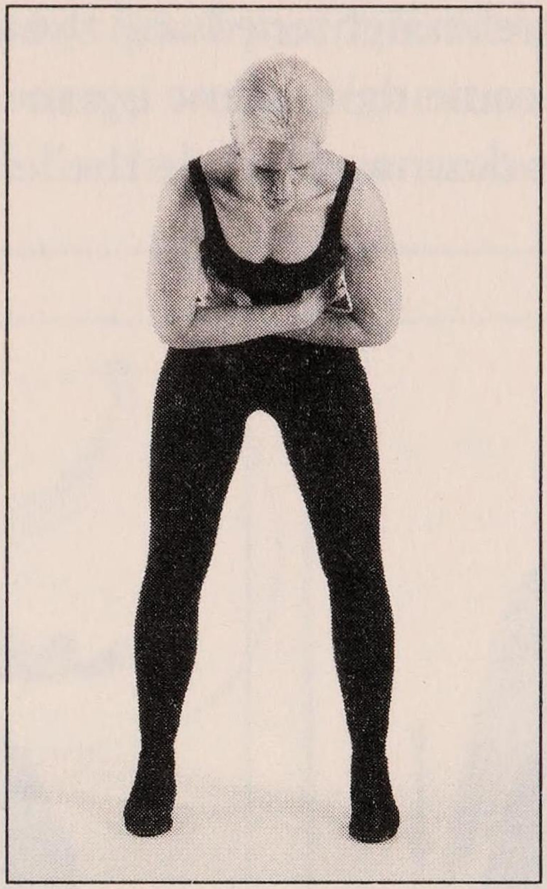


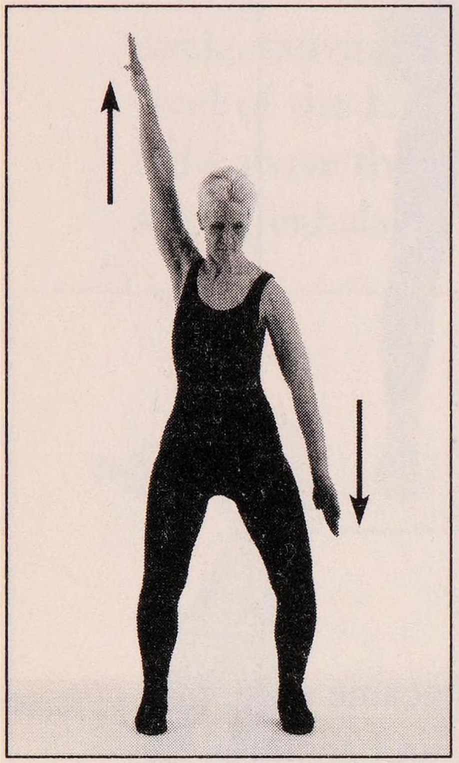
*Figure 74*

The use of this magical pass is twofold: First, it stirs energy around the shoulder blades and transports it to a place above the head. From there, it makes the energy circulate in a broad circle that touches the edges of the luminous sphere. Second, it mixes the energy of the left and the right by placing it on the two centers of vitality around the pancreas and the liver, with each hand on the opposite center.

Mixing energy in such a fashion provides a jolt of great magnitude to the respective centers of vitality. As the practitioners became more proficient in their practice, the jolt becomes more acute, and acquires the quality of a filter of energy, which is an incomprehensible statement until this pass is practiced. The sensation that accompanies it could be described as breathing mentholated air.

### 31. Stirring and Grabbing Energy from Below the Knees and Above the Head

An inhalation is taken as the hands shake. Both hands are brought up by the sides of the body to the level of the waist, and held relaxed. The knees are bent as the left hand is pushed downward with the wrist turned so that the palm faces outward, away from the body, as if it were reaching into a bucket full of liquid substance. This movement is performed at the same time that the right hand shoots up above the head with equal force; the right wrist is also turned so that the palm faces outward, away from the body (fig. 75). A slow exhalation begins when both arms reach their maximum extension. The wrists are returned with great force to a straight position at the same time that the hands clasp into fists, as if grabbing something solid. Keeping the fists clenched, the exhalation continues while the right arm is brought down and the left arm is brought up to the level of the waist, slowly and with great strength, as if wading through a heavy liquid (fig. 76). Then the palms rub gently on the areas of the liver and gallbladder and the pancreas and spleen. The knees are straightened and the exhalation ends at this point (fig. 77).  The same movement is executed by shifting the arms; the right arm plunges downward while the left arm pushes upward.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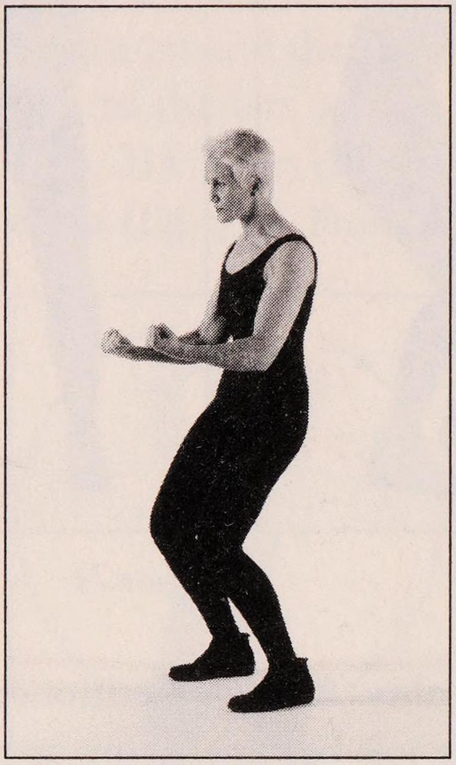
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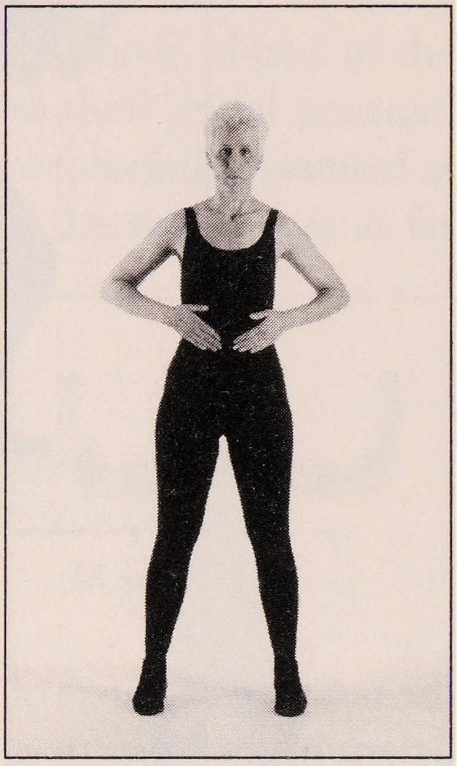


*Figure 77*

The energy for intending that is extracted from below the knees and above the head in this magical pass can also be rubbed on the areas of the left and right kidneys.

**32. Mixing Energy of the Left and the Right**

An inhalation is taken as the hands shake. The left arm reaches diagonally to the extreme right above the head and in line with the right shoulder as an exhalation begins (fig. 78). The hand grabs as if clasping a handful of matter, yanks it out, and brings it to a position above the head and in line with the left shoulder, where the exhalation ends. The left hand remains clasped, and a sharp inhalation is taken as the left arm circles backward (fig. 79), ending in a fisted position at the level of the eyes. The fist is then brought down with an exhalation to the vital center around the pancreas, slowly, but with great force, and the palm rubs softly on that area (fig. 80).

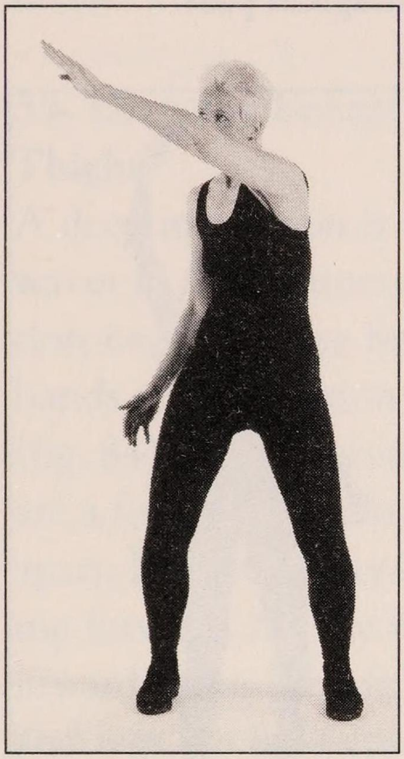


Figure 78

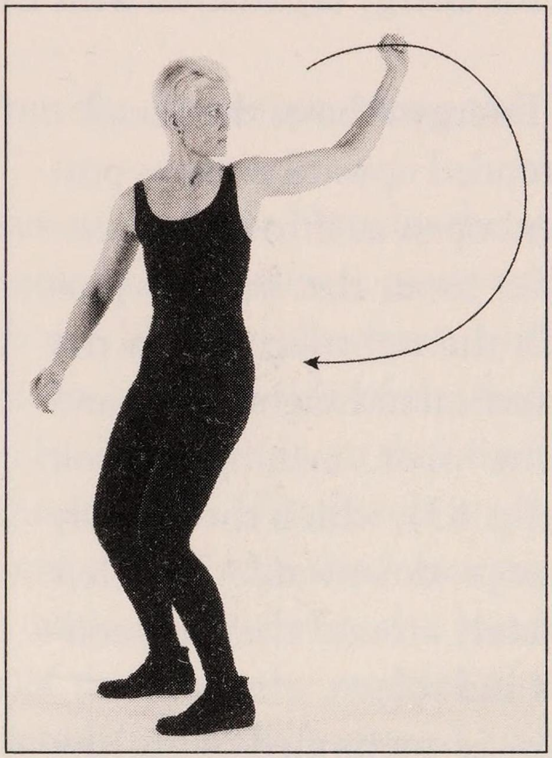


Figure 79

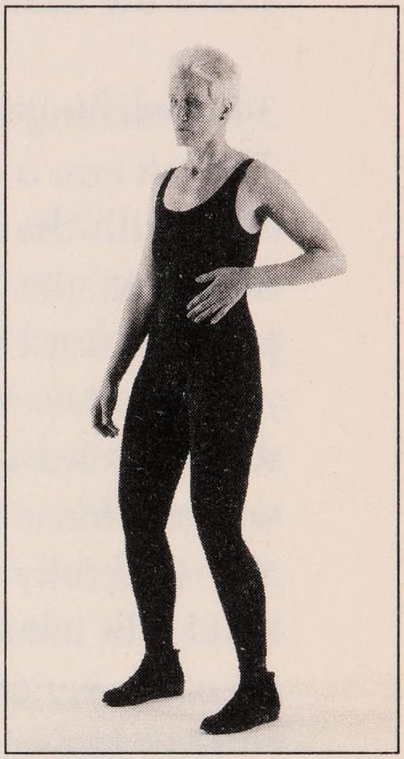


Figure 80

The same movement is repeated with the right arm, but instead of moving in a backward circle, the right arm moves in a frontward circle.

In the belief of shamans, the energy of the two sides of the body is different. The energy of the left is portrayed as being undular, and the energy of the right as being circular. This magical pass is used to apply circular energy to the left and undular energy to the right in order to strengthen the centers of vitality around the liver and pancreas by the inflow of slightly different energy.

## 33. Grabbing Energy from Above the Head for the Two Vital Centers

Starting at the level of the ear, the left arm circles forward twice (fig. 81) and is then extended over the head, as if to grab something (fig. 82). As this movement is executed, a deep breath is taken, winch ends at the moment that the hand grabs upward as if to fetch something above the head. Don Juan recommended that the eyes select, with a quick glance upward, the target for the hand to grab. Whatever is selected and grabbed is then yanked forcefully downward and placed over the vital center around the pancreas and spleen. The air is exhaled at this point. The same movement is performed with the right arm, and the energy is placed over the center around the liver and gallbladder.

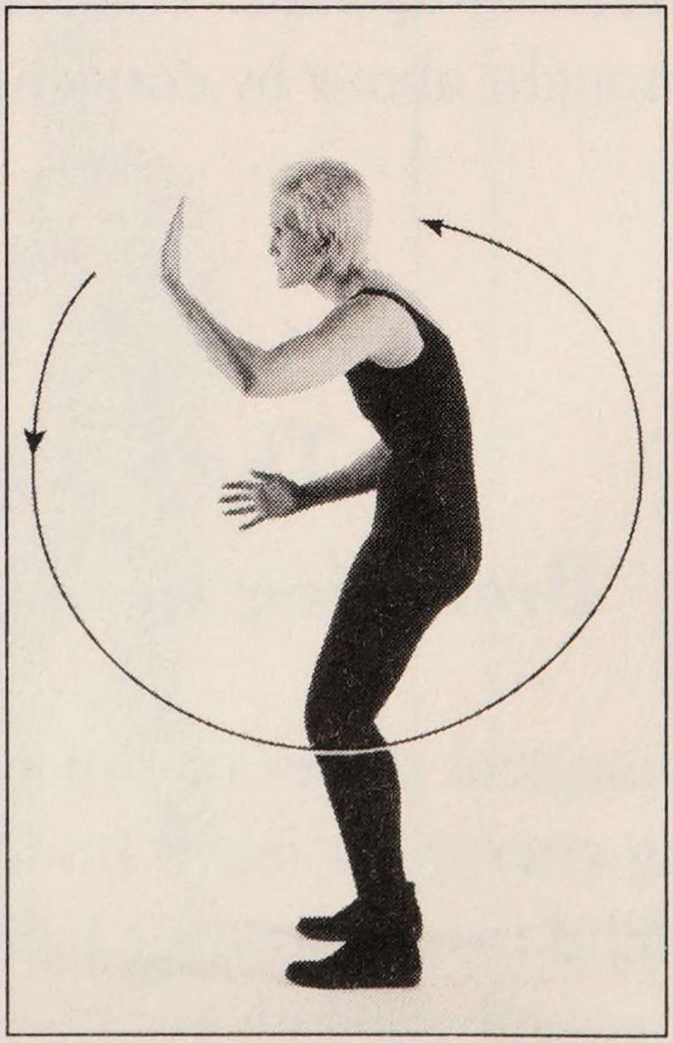


Figure 81

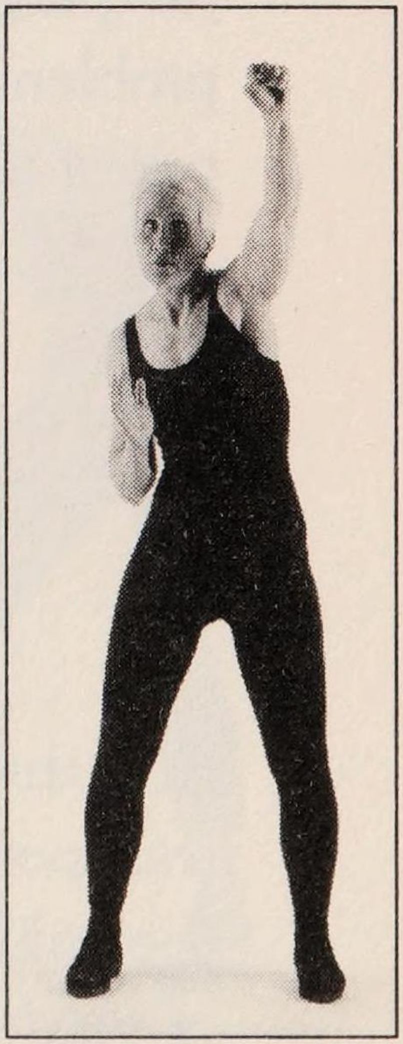


Figure 82

According to shamans, the energy of intent tends to gravitate downward, and a more rarefied aspect of the same energy remains in the area above the head. This energy is gathered with this magical pass.

### 34. Reaching for Energy Above the Head

The left arm is extended upward as far as possible, with the hand open as if to grab something. At the same time, the body is propelled upward with the right leg. When the jump reaches it's maximum height, the hand turns inward at the wrist, making a hook with the forearm (fig.

83), which then slowly and forcefully scoops downward. The left hand rubs immediately around the vital center of the pancreas and spleen.

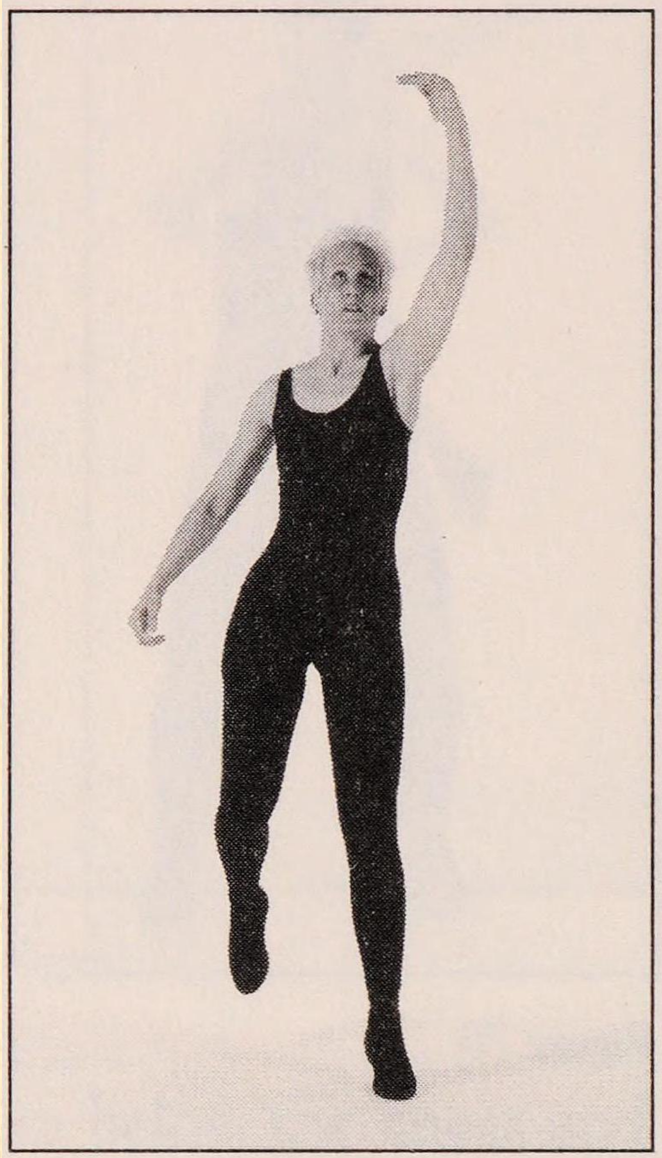


Figure 83

This movement is performed with the right arm in exactly the same fashion as it was done with the left. The right hand immediately brushes across the vital center around the liver and gallbladder.

Shamans believe that the energy stored around the periphery of the luminous sphere that human beings are can be stirred and gathered by jumping forcefully upward. This magical pass is used as a help to dispel problems brought about by concentrating on a given task for long periods of time.

## First Series: Fourth Group: Breathing In the Energy of Intent

The three *magical passes* of this group are for stirring, gathering, and transporting energy for intent from three centers- around the feet, on the ankles, and right below the kneecaps- and placing it on the centers of vitality around the kidneys, the liver, the pancreas, the womb, and the genitals. The recommendation to practitioners on the execution of these *magical passes* is that since they are accompanied by breaths, the inhalations and exhalations should be slow and profound; and that there should be a crystal clear intent on the part of the practitioners that the adrenals receive an instantaneous boost while the deep breaths are taken.

### 35. Dragging Energy from the Kneecaps Along the Front of the Thighs

A deep inhalation is taken as the arms hang by the sides and the hands waver in a continuous tremor, as if stirring a gaseous matter. An exhalation begins as the hands are lifted to the waist, and the palms of the hands strike down in unison, on each side of the body, with great force (fig. 84). The arms are only slightly bent, so that the palms of the hands are a few inches below the stomach. The hands are three or four inches apart, held at ninety-degree angles with the forearms, the fingers pointing forward. Slowly and without touching, the hands make one circle inward toward the front of the body; the muscles of the arms, stomach, and legs are fully contracted (fig. 85). A second circle is drawn in the same fashion as the air is totally expelled through clenched teeth.

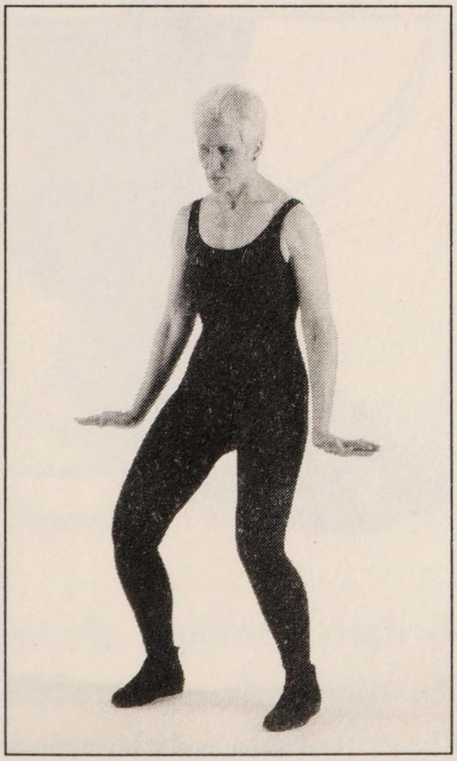


Figure 84

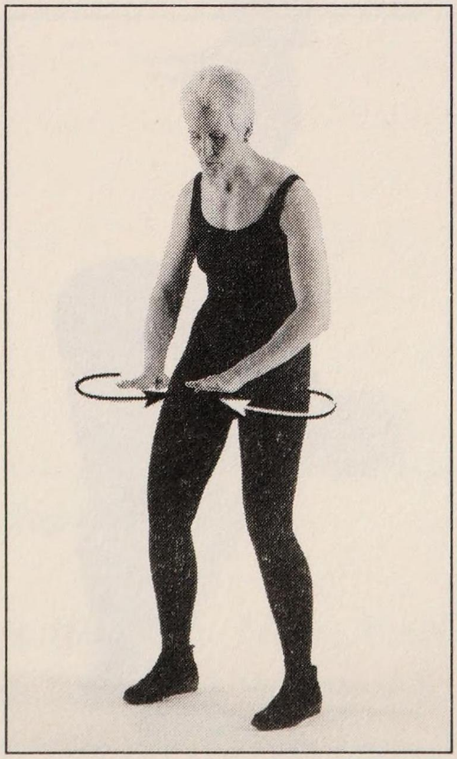


Figure 85

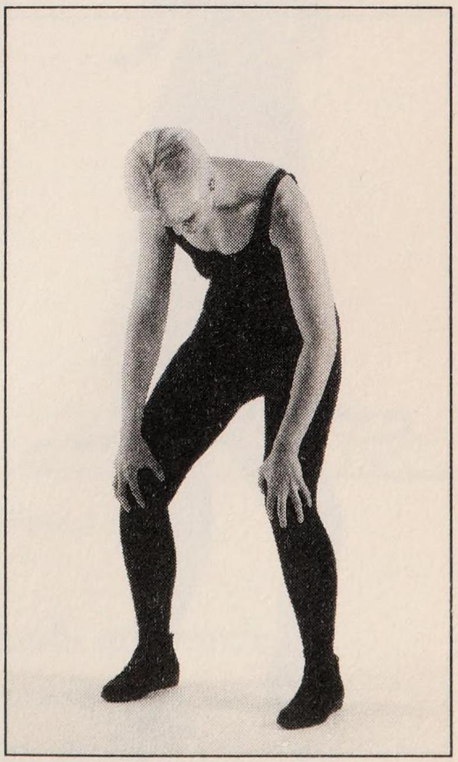


Figure 86

Another deep inhalation is taken, and the air is slowly exhaled as three more inward circles are drawn in front of the body. The hands are then retrieved to the front of the hips, and they slide down the front of die thighs with the heels of the palms, fingers slightly turned up, all the way to the kneecaps. The air is fully exhaled then. A third deep inhalation is taken while the tips of the fingers press the bottom of the kneecaps. The head is held facing downward, in line with the spine (fig. 86). Then, as the bent knees are straightened, the hands, with the fingers clawed, are dragged up the thighs to the hips, as the air is slowly exhaled. With the last portion of the exhalation, the hands are then brushed on the respective centers of vitality around the pancreas and the liver.

### 36. Dragging Energy from the Sides of the Legs

A deep inhalation is taken as the hands, held by the sides of the body, shake with a continuous tremor. The hands strike down exactly as in the previous magical pass. An exhalation begins there, while the hands draw, in a similar fashion, two small outward circles by the sides of the body. The muscles of the arms, stomach, and legs are tensed to the maximum. The elbows are held fight but slightly bent (fig. 87).

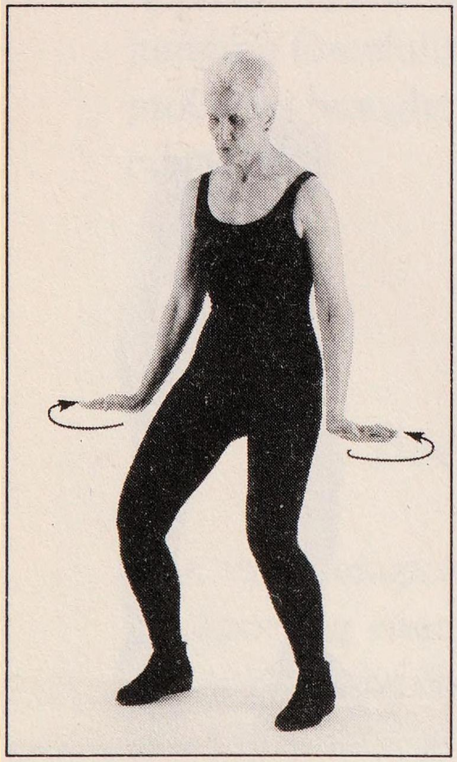


*Figure 87*

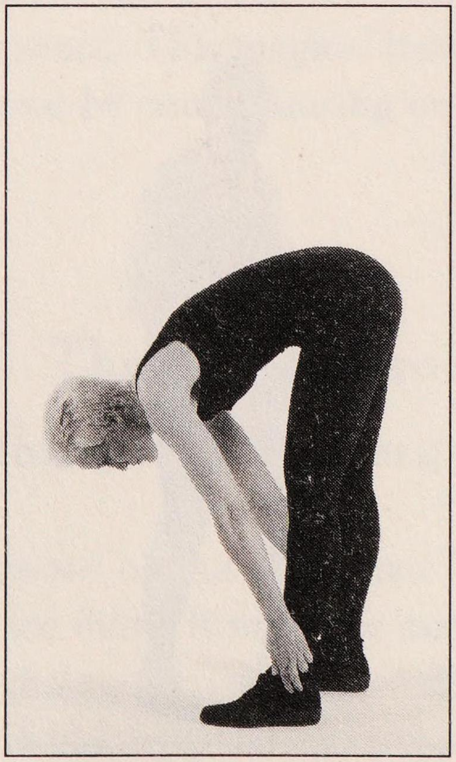


*Figure 88*

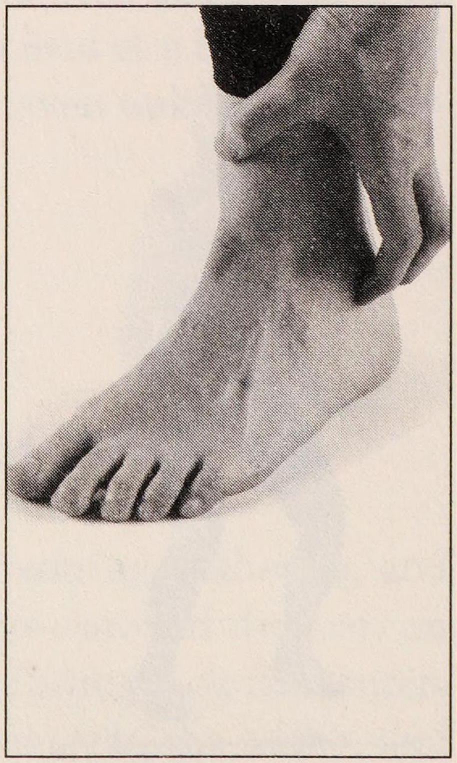
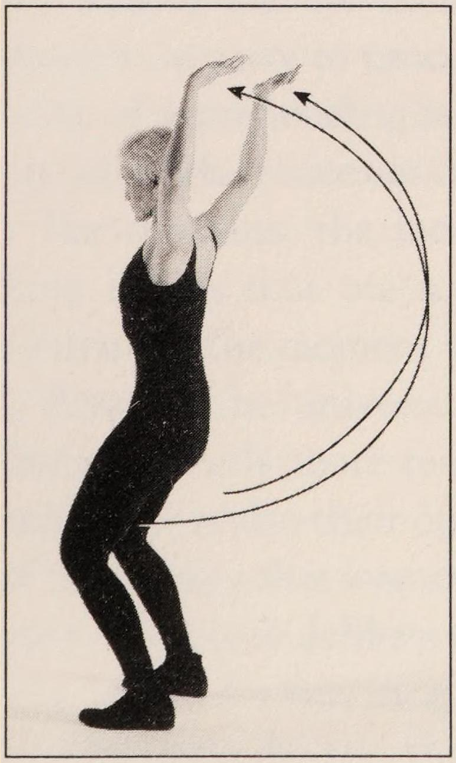


*Figure 89*

After the two circles have been drawn, all the air is expelled, and a deep inhalation is taken. Three more outward circles are drawn as the air is slowly exhaled. The hands are then brought to the sides of the hips. The fingers are slightly raised as the heels of the hands rub all the way down the sides of the legs until the fingers reach the outside knobs of the ankles. The head is facing downward, in line with the body (fig. 88). The exhalation ends there, and a deep inhalation is taken with the index and middle fingers pressing the bottom of the knobs (fig. 89). A slow exhalation begins as the hands, with the fingers clawed, are dragged up the sides of the legs to the hips. The exhalation is completed while the palms are brushed on the two respective centers of vitality.

### 37. Dragging Energy from the Front of the Legs

Again, a deep inhalation is taken as the hands, held by the sides of the body, are shaken. Both arms make a circle by the sides of the body, beginning toward the back, and going over the head (fig. 90) to strike forcefully in front of the body with the palms down and the fingers pointing forward. A slow exhalation begins there, while the hands, starting with the left, move forward and backward three times in alternating succession, as if sliding over a smooth surface. The exhalation ends when the heels of both hands are touching the rib cage (fig. 91). A deep inhalation is taken then. The left hand moves in a sliding motion to the left followed by the right hand sliding to the right; this sequence is executed a total of three times in alternating succession. They end with the heels of the palms against the rib cage, the thumbs nearly touching each other (fig. 92). Next, both hands are made to slide down the front of the legs until they reach the tendons on the front of the ankles (fig. 93).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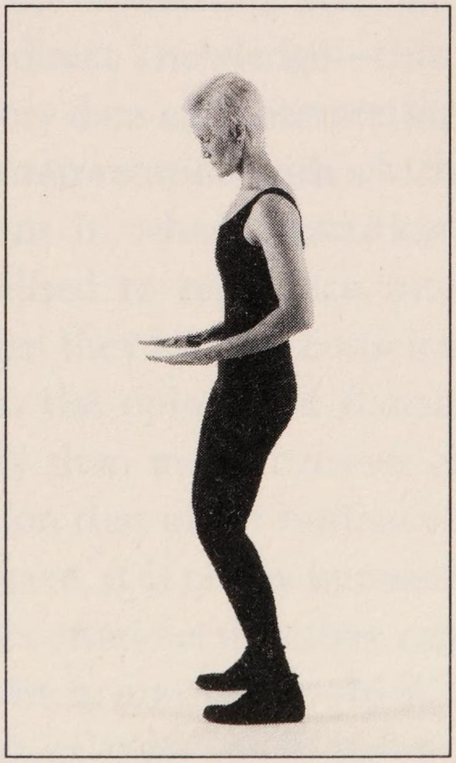
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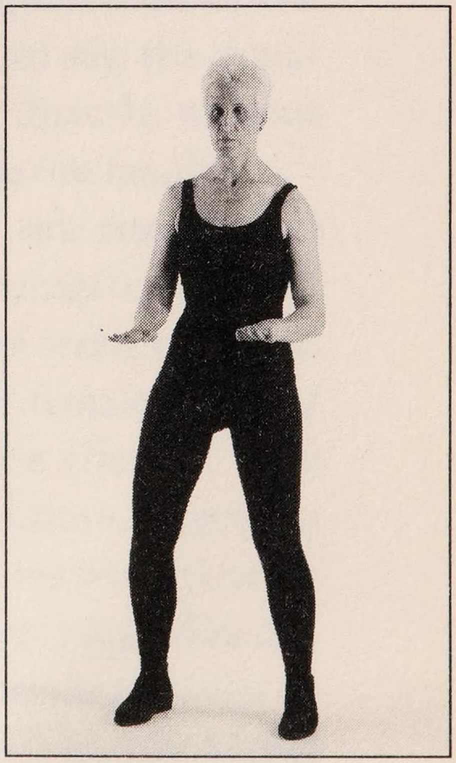


*Figure 92*

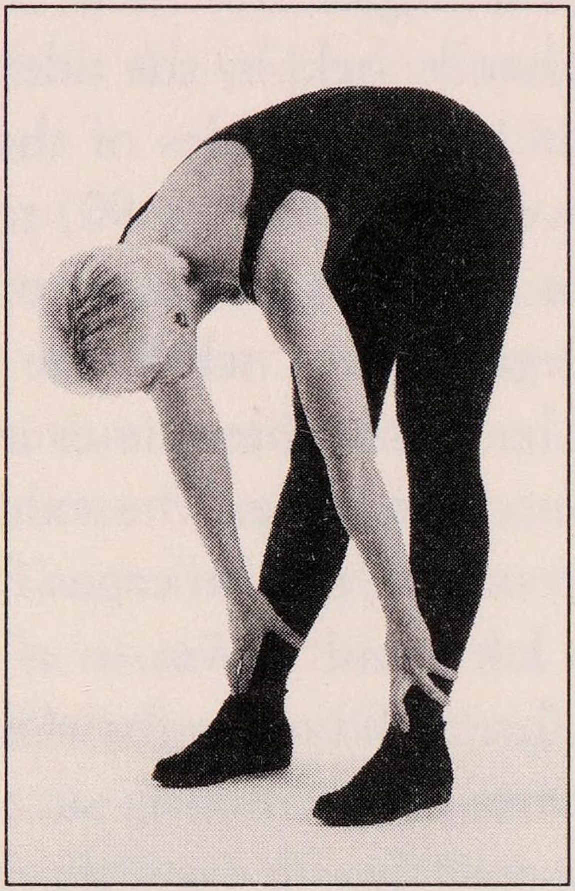


*Figure 93*

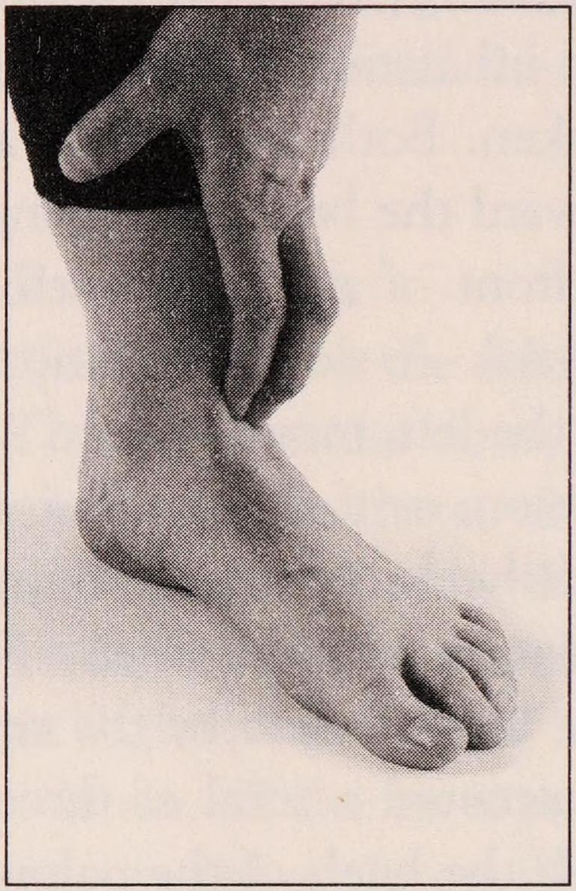


*Figure 94*

The exhalation ends there. A deep inhalation is taken as the tendon is tensed by lifting the big toe until the tendon seems to pop/up; the index and middle fingers of each hand vibrate the tendons by pressing on them (fig. 94). With the fingers clawed, the hands are dragged up the front of the legs to the hips as a slow exhalation begins. The palms are gently rubbed on the centers of vitality as the exhalation ends.

## The Second Series: The Series for the Womb

According to don Juan Matus, one of the most specific interests of the shamans who lived in Mexico in ancient times was what they called the liberation of the womb.

He explained that the liberation of the womb entailed the awakening of it's secondary functions. The primary function of the womb under normal circumstances is reproduction, but sorcerers are solely concerned with what they consider to be the womb's secondary function of evolution.

This evolution is the awakening and full exploitation of the womb's capacity to utilize direct knowledge by apprehending sensory data directly, and interpreting those perceptions directly without the aid or need of the processes of interpretation with which we are familiar.

The women practitioners are transformed from beings that have been 'socialized to reproduce' into beings 'capable of evolving' at the moment they become conscious of perceiving energy as it flows in the universe.

The womb's characteristics allow females to perceive energy directly more readily than males. However, in spite of this facility, under normal social conditions it is nearly impossible for women, or men for that matter, to become deliberately conscious that they perceive energy directly. The reason for this seeming incapacity is something which shamans consider to be a travesty; the fact that there is no one to point out to human beings that it is natural for them to perceive energy directly.

Shamans maintain that women, because they have a womb, are so versatile and so individualistic in their ability to *see* energy directly that this accomplishment, which should be a triumph of the human spirit, is taken for granted. Women are almost never conscious of their ability.

Since it is more difficult for men to *see* energy directly, when they do accomplish this feat, they don't take it for granted. Therefore, male sorcerers were the ones who who tried to describe the phenomenon.

"The basic premise of sorcery," don Juan said to me one day, "discovered by the shamans of my lineage who lived in Mexico in ancient times is that we are perceivers. The totality of the human body is an instrument of perception. However, the predominance of the visual in us gives to perception the overall mood of the eyes. This mood, according to the old sorcerers, is merely the heritage of a purely predatorial state.

"The effort of the old sorcerers, which has lasted to our days," don Juan continued, "was geared toward placing themselves beyond the realm of the predator's eye. They conceived the predator's eye to be visual par excellence, and that the realm beyond the predator's eye is the realm of pure perception, which is not visually oriented."

On another occasion, he said that it was a bone of contention for the sorcerers of ancient Mexico that women, who have the organic frame, the womb, that could facilitate their entrance into the realm of pure perception, have no interest in using it. Those shamans viewed it as a woman's paradox to have endless power at her disposal and no interest whatsoever in gaining access to it. However, don Juan had no doubt that this lack of desire to do anything wasn't natural; it was learned.

The aim of the *magical passes* for the womb is to give the female practitioners of *Tensegrity* an inkling, which has to be more than an intellectual titillation, of the possibility of canceling out the effect of this noxious socialization that renders women indifferent. Nevertheless, a warning is in order; don Juan Matus advised his female disciples to proceed with great caution when practicing these *magical passes*. The *magical passes* for the womb are passes that foster the awakening of the secondary functions of the uterus and ovaries, and those secondary functions are the apprehension of sensory data and the interpretation of them.

Don Juan called the womb the perceiving box. He was as convinced as the other sorcerers of his lineage that the uterus and ovaries, if they are pulled out of the reproductive cycle, can become tools of perception, and become indeed the epicenter of evolution.

He considered that the first step of evolution is the acceptance of the premise that human beings are perceivers. It was not redundancy on his part to insist ceaselessly that this realization has to be come before anything else.

"We already know that we are perceivers. What else can we be?" I would say in protest every time he insisted.

"Think about it!" he would reply every time I protested. "Perception plays only a minute role in our lives, and yet, the only thing we are for a fact is perceivers. Human beings apprehend energy at large and turn it into sensory data. Then they interpret these sensory data into the world of everyday life. This interpretation is what we call perception.

"The shamans of ancient Mexico, as you already know," don Juan went on, "were convinced that interpretation took place on a point of intense brilliance, the *assemblage point*, which they found when they saw the human body as a conglomerate of energy fields that resembled a sphere of luminosity.

"The advantage of women is their capacity to transfer the interpretation function of the *assemblage point* to the womb. The result of this transfer function is something that cannot be talked about, not because it is something forbidden, but because it is something indescribable.

"The womb," don Juan continued, "is veritably in a chaotic state of turmoil because of this veiled capacity that exists in remission from the moment of birth until death and which typically is never utilized. This function of interpretation never ceases to act and yet it has never been raised to the level of full consciousness."

Don Juan's assurance was that the shamans of ancient Mexico, by means of their *magical passes*, had raised among their female practitioners the interpretive capacity of the womb to the level of consciousness, and by doing this, they had instituted an evolutionary change among them; that is to say, they had turned the womb from an organ of reproduction into the tool of evolution.

Evolution is defined in the world of modern man as the capacity of different species to modify themselves through the processes of natural selection or the transmission of traits, until they can successfully reproduce in their offspring the changes brought about in themselves.

The evolutionary theory that has lasted to our day, from the time it was formulated over a hundred years ago, says that the origin and the perpetuation of a new species of animal or plant is brought about by the process of natural selection, which favors the survival of individuals whose characteristics render them best adapted to their environment, and that the evolution is brought about by the interplay of three principles: first, heredity, the conservative force that transmits similar organic forms from one generation to another; second, variation, the differences present in all forms of life; and third, the struggle for existence, which determines which variations confer advantages in a given environment. This last principle gave rise to the phrase still in current use: "the survival of the fittest."

Evolution, as a theory, has enormous loopholes; it leaves tremendous room for doubt. It is at best an open-ended process for which scientists have created classificatory schemes; they have created taxonomies to their hearts' content. But the fact remains that it is a theory full of holes. What we know about evolution doesn't tell us what evolution is.

Don Juan Matus believed that evolution was the product of intending at a very profound level. In the case of sorcerers, that profound level was marked by what he had called inner silence.

"For instance," he said, when he was explaining this phenomenon, "sorcerers are sure that dinosaurs flew because they intended flying. But what is very difficult to understand, much less accept, is that wings are only one solution to flying, in this case, the dinosaurs' solution. Nevertheless, this solution is not the only one that is possible. It's the only one available to us by imitation. Our airplanes are flying with wings imitating the dinosaurs, perhaps because flying has never been intended again since the dinosaurs' time. Perhaps wings were adopted because they were the easiest solution."

Don Juan was of the opinion that if we were to intend it now, there is no way of knowing what other options for flying would be available besides wings. He insisted that because intent is infinite, there was no logical way in which the mind, following processes of deduction or induction, could calculate or determine what these options for flying might be.

The *magical passes* of the Series for the Womb are extremely potent, and should be practiced sparingly. In ancient times, men were barred from executing them. In more recent times, there has been a tendency among sorcerers to render these *magical passes* more generic, and thus the possibility arose that they could also be of service to men. This possibility, however, is very delicate and requires careful handling, great concentration, and determination.

The male practitioners of *Tensegrity* who teach the *magical passes* have opted, because of their potent effect, to practice them by brushing the energy that they generate only lightly on the area of the genitals themselves. This measure has proven to he enough to provide a beneficial jolt without any profound or deleterious effects.

Don Juan explained that the sorcerers of his lineage, at a given moment, allowed males to practice these *magical passes* because of the possibility that the energy engendered by them would awaken the secondary function of the male sexual organs. He said that those sorcerers considered that the secondary function of the male sexual organs is not at all similar to that of the womb; no interpretation of sensory data can take place because the male sexual organs hang outside of the cavity of the body. Because of these particular circumstances, their conclusion was that the secondary function of the male organs is something which they termed evolutionary support: a sort of springboard that catapults men to perform extraordinary feats of what sorcerers of ancient Mexico called unbending intent, or clearheaded purpose and concentration.

The Series for the Womb is divided into four sections which correspond to the three female disciples of don Juan Matus: Taisha Abelar, Horinda Donner-Grau, and Carol Tiggs; and to the Blue Scout, who was born into don Juan's world.

The first is composed of three *magical passes* belonging to Taisha Abelar; the second is composed of one magical pass directly related to Florinda Donner-Grau; the third, of three *magical passes* that have to do exclusively with Carol Tiggs; and the fourth, of five *magical passes* that belong to the Blue Scout. The *magical passes* of each section are pertinent to a specific type of individual. *Tensegrity* has rendered them capable of being utilized by anybody, although they are still slanted in the direction of the type of person that each of those four women is.

## Second Series: First Group: M*agical Passes* Belonging to Taisha Abelar

The three *magical passes* of this group are geared to gathering energy for the womb from six specific areas: the left and right front of the body, the left and right sides of the body at the height of the hips, and from behind the shoulder blades and above the head. The explanation that The shamans of ancient Mexico gave was that energy especially suited for the womb accumulates on those areas, and that the movements of these *magical passes* are the appropriate antennas that gather that energy exclusively.

### 1. Extracting Energy from the Front of the Body with the Index and Middle Fingers

The first sensation that a *Tensegrity* practitioner seeks while executing this magical pass is a pressure on the tendons of the back of the hand, a sensation which is obtained by opening the index and middle fingers as far as possible while they are fully extended. The last two fingers are curled over the palm of the hand, and the thumb holds them in place (fig. 95).

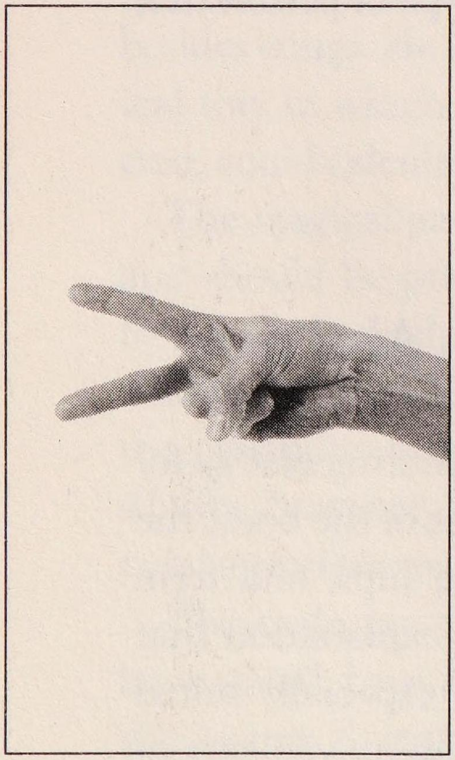


Figure 95

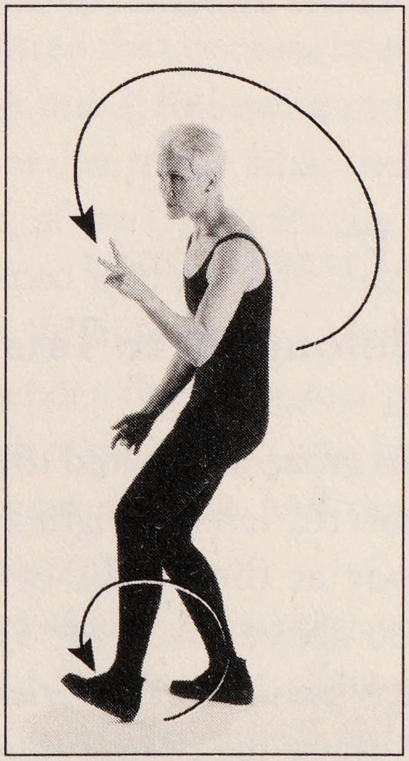


Figure 96

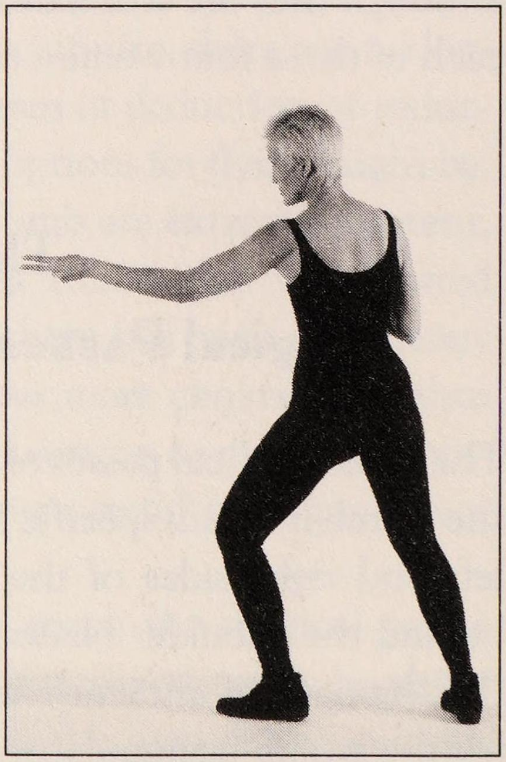


Figure 97

The magical pass starts by placing the left foot in front of the body in a T position, perpendicular to the right one. The left arm and the left leg make a series of synchronized forward circling movements. The leg circles by first lifting the ball of the foot, and then the whole foot, and a step is taken that rolls forward in the air and ends on the heel, with the toes up, as the body leans forward, creating pressure on a muscle on the front of the left calf.

In synchronization with this movement, the left arm rotates forward over the head, also making a complete circle. The index and middle fingers are fully extended, and the palm faces to the right. The pressure on the tendons of the back of the hand has to be maintained with maximum stress during the entire movement (fig. 96). At the end of the third circling movement of the arm and foot, the entire foot is placed on the ground with a forceful stomp, shifting the weight of the body forward. At the same time, the arm shoots out in a stabbing motion, with the index and middle fingers fully extended and the palm of the hand facing right; the muscles of the entire left side of the body are kept tense and contracted (fig. 97).

An undulating movement is made, as if drawing, with the two extended fingers pointing forward, a letter S that is lying on it's side. The wrist is bent so that the fingers point upward once the S is completed (fig. 98). Next, the wrist bends so the fingers again point forward and the S is cut in half with a horizontal stroke of the two fingers from right to left. Then the wrist is bent so the two fingers point upward once more, and a sweeping movement is made from left to right with the palm turned toward the face. The palm of the hand is turned to face outward, as the arm sweeps from right to left. The left arm is retrieved to the level of the chest, and two forward stabbing motions are executed with the fingers fully extended and the palm of the hand facing downward. The palm of the hand is turned toward the face once more, and the hand sweeps again from left to right and from right to left, exactly as before.

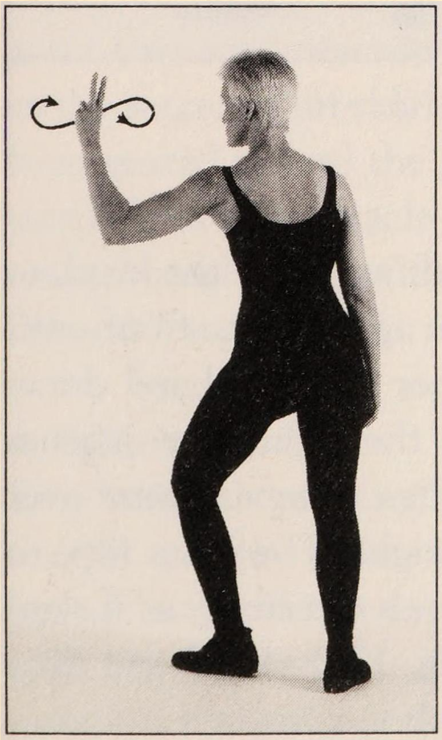


Figure 98

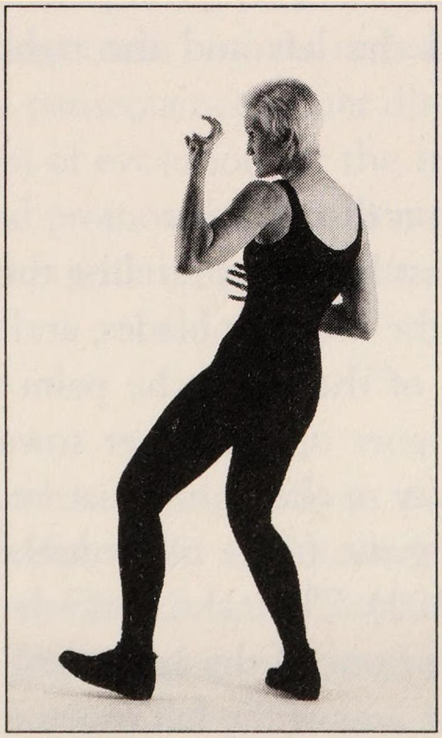


Figure 99

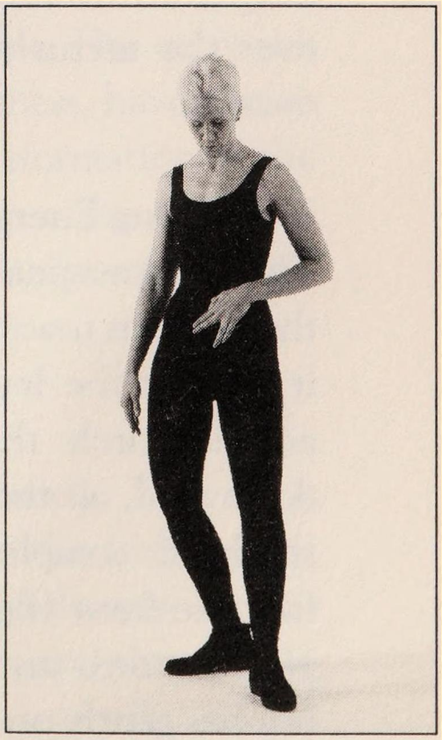


Figure 100

The body leans back slightly, shifting the weight to the back leg. Then the hand, with the two fingers curved like a claw, reaches out at waist level in front of the body as if to grab something, contracting the muscles and tendons of the forearm and hand as if forcefully extracting some heavy substance (fig. 99). The clawed hand is retrieved to the side of the body. All the fingers of the hand are then fully extended, with The thumb locked and the fingers separated at the middle and fourth fingers, making a letter V, which is brushed over the womb, or over the sexual organs, in the case of men (fig. 100).  A quick jump is made to shift legs, so that the right foot is in front of the left one, again making a T. The same movements are repeated with the right arm and leg.

### 2. Jumping to Stir Energy for the Womb and Grabbing It with the Hand

This magical pass begins by placing the right foot perpendicular to the left one in a T position. A tap is made with the right heel; this tap serves as an impulse for a small hop of the right foot which ends with the right toes pointing forward, followed immediately by a one-step lateral hop of the left foot that ends with the left heel on the ground, perpendicular to the right foot. The rest of the left foot touches the ground, shifting the weight to the left leg, as the left arm moves in a grabbing motion to clasp something in front of the body with a clawed hand (fig.

101). The hand then rubs gently on the area of the left ovary.

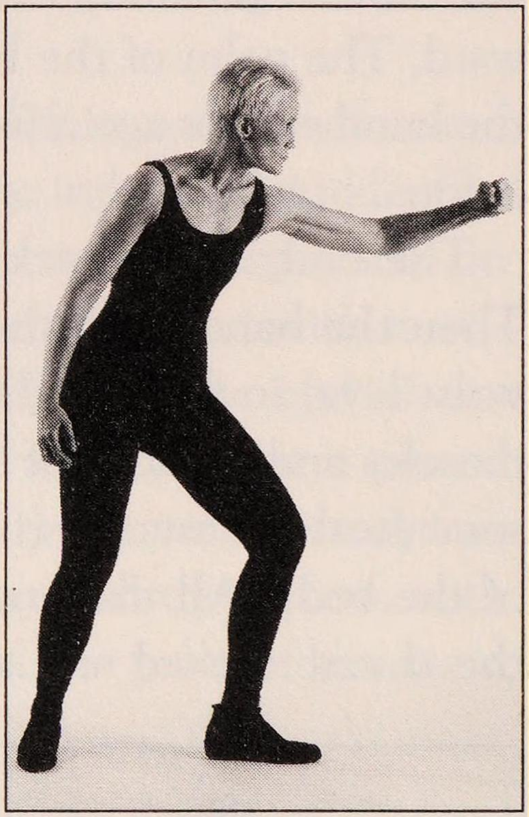


Figure 101

A tap of the left heel serves as an impulse for a sequence of movements that is a mirror image of the preceding ones.

Energy stirred up by the motion of the feet in this magical pass bounces upward, is caught with each hand in turn, and is placed over the uterus and the left and the right ovaries.

### 3. Slapping Energy on the Ovaries

The third magical pass begins by circling the left arm over the head, to the back, in toward the shoulder blades, and out again to the front until it reaches the level of the chin; the palm faces up. The hand draws another circle that goes up and over toward the right; it continues downward, all the way to the right waist and then sweeps upward over the head, completing the figure of a number eight. The palm flips to face the front (fig. 102). Then the hand descends forcefully, as if slapping the area just in front of the left ovary (fig. 103). The hand then brushes gently on the area of the left ovary. The same pattern is repeated with the right arm.

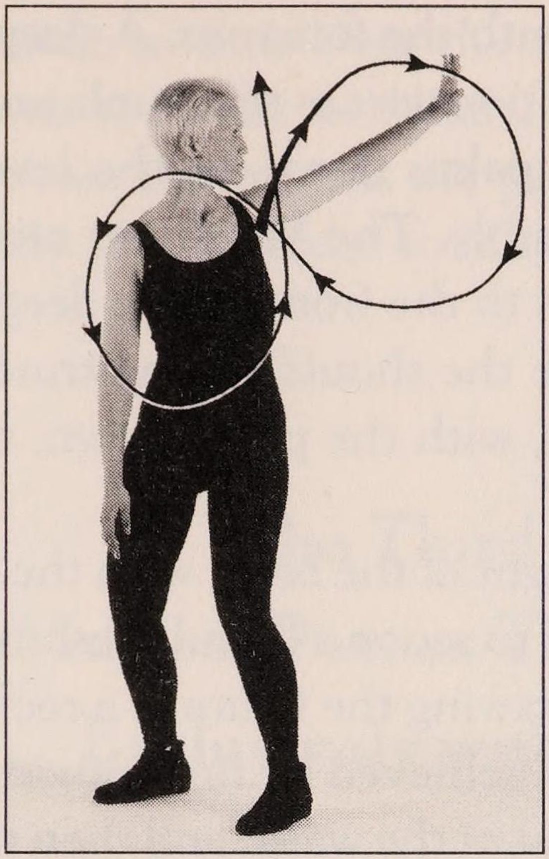


Figure 102

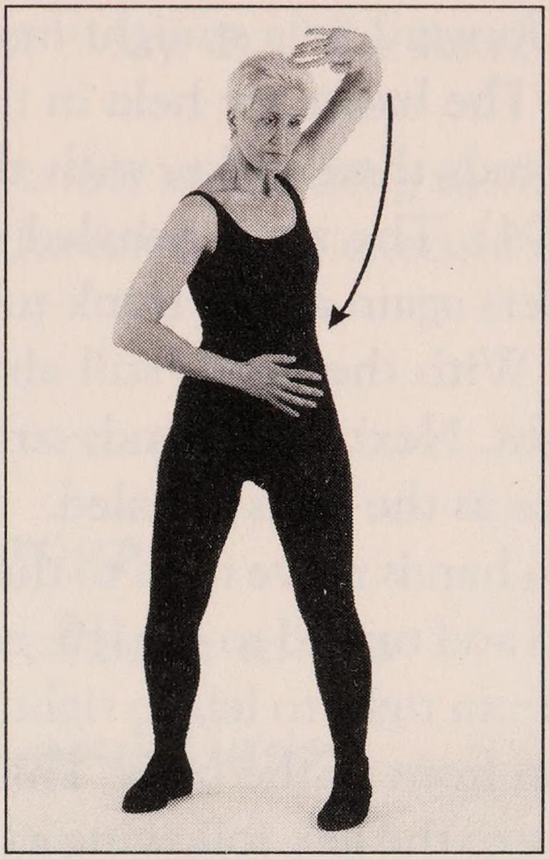


Figure 103

## Second Series: Second Group: A Magical Pass Directly Related to Florinda Donner-Grau

In this group, there is only one magical pass. The effect of this magical pass is utterly congruous with the personality of Florinda Donner-Grau. Don Juan Matus regarded her as being very straightforward, so to-the-point that sometimes her directness became unbearable. Her activities in the sorcerers' world, as a consequence of her directness, have always been geared toward the goal of evolution, or the transformation of the womb from a receptacle and promoter of fertility to an organ of awareness, through which thoughts which are not part of our normal cognition can be processed.

### 4. Sphinx Paws

This magical pass begins with a quick, deep inhalation. The air is sharply exhaled with a forceful strike of the wrists to the front of the body. This is achieved with the hands turned downward sharply, at right angles to the forearms; the fingers point to the ground, and the striking surface is the backs of the hands at the wrists. The hands are pulled upward to the level of the shoulders, the palms facing forward, in a straight line with the forearms. A deep inhalation is taken. The hands are held in this position as the trunk turns to the left. The hands then strike, with the palms down, to the level of the hips (fig. 104). The air is exhaled sharply. The hands are raised above the shoulders again as the trunk turns to the front, and a deep inhalation is taken. With the hands still above the shoulders, the trunk is turned to the right. Next both hands strike, with the palms down, to the level of the hips as the air is exhaled.

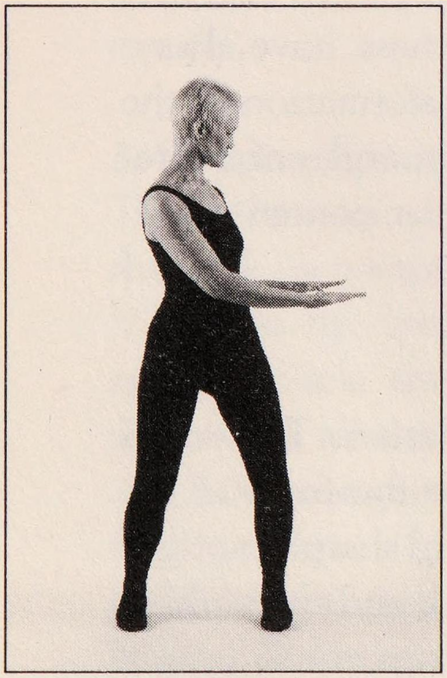


Figure 104

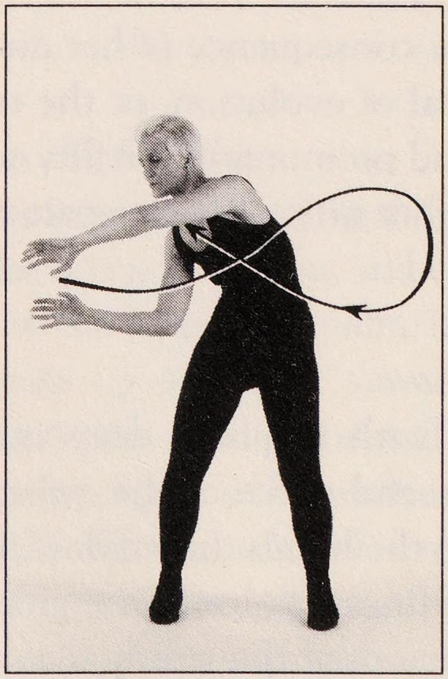


Figure 105

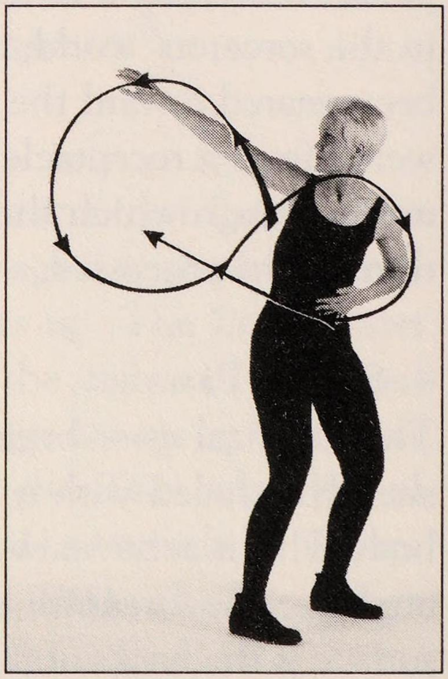


Figure 106

Both hands move then to the right of the body, with the palms slightly cupped and turned to the left, as if to scoop a liquid substance. Both arms move from right to left to right, drawing the figure of a reclining number eight in front of the body. This is achieved by first moving the arms all the way to the left, following a twist of the waist, and then returning back to the right, following a reverse twist of the waist. The slightly cupped palms are turned to face the right, as if to continue scooping a liquid substance in the opposite direction (fig. 105).

As the figure eight is completed, the left hand stops to rest on the left hip, while the right arm continues moving to the right; the arm goes up over the head and makes a big loop to the back that ends when the hand is brought back to the front, to the level of the chin; the palm of the hand faces up. The hand continues moving, making another loop to the left, going in front of the face, over the left shoulder. Next it moves in a straight line across the body at the level of the hip, cutting through the figure eight (fig. 106). From there, the palm moves back toward the body and is made to slide over the right ovary, as if the hand were a knife that comes to rest in it's sheath.

The exact same movements are performed, but striking to the right side of the body first, in order to allow the left arm to execute the last movement.

## Second Series: Third Group: *Magical Passes* That Have to Do Exclusively with Carol Tiggs

The three *magical passes* of the third group deal with the energy that is directly on the area of the womb. This emphasis makes these three *magical passes* extraordinarily potent. Moderation is strongly recommended in order to bring the sensations of awakening the womb to a manageable level. In this fashion the linear-minded interpretation of these sensations as premenstrual pangs or heaviness on the ovaries can be avoided.

Don Juan Matus told his three female disciples that the secondary functions of the womb, upon being awakened by the appropriate *magical passes*, give the sensorial input of discomfort, but that what takes place at an energetic level is the influx of energy into the vortex of the womb. Energy which has, up to this point, remained unused and on the periphery of the luminous sphere is suddenly dropped into that vortex.

### 5. Packing Energy on the Womb

The first magical pass begins by bringing the two hands to the area of the womb. The wrists are bent sharply, and the hands are cupped, the lingers pointing to the womb.

The two hands are extended so that the tips of the fingers point inward each other. Then they make an ample circle, first going upward and out, and then down, with both hands together, ending right over the womb (fig. 107). Next, the hands separate to the width of the body (fig. 108), and are brought forcefully toward the center of the womb as if thick ball were being squashed. The same movement is repeated, and the hands are brought closer together, as if the ball were being further squashed. Then it is torn apart by a powerful movement of the hands, which grab and rip (fig. 109). The hands are then brushed over the area of the uterus and the ovaries.

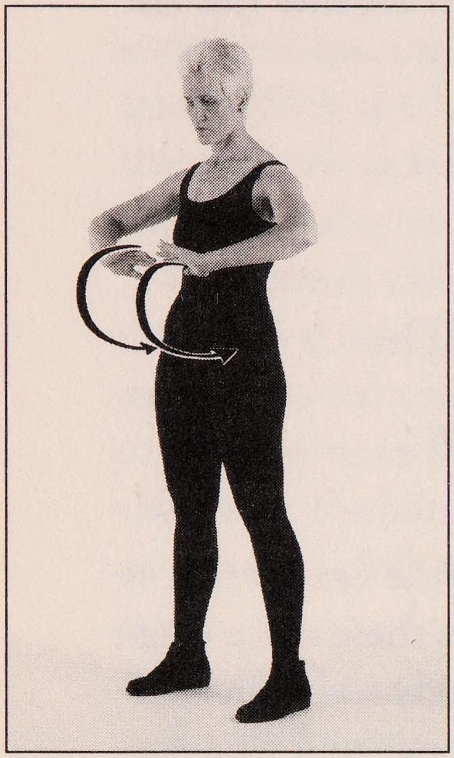


Figure 107

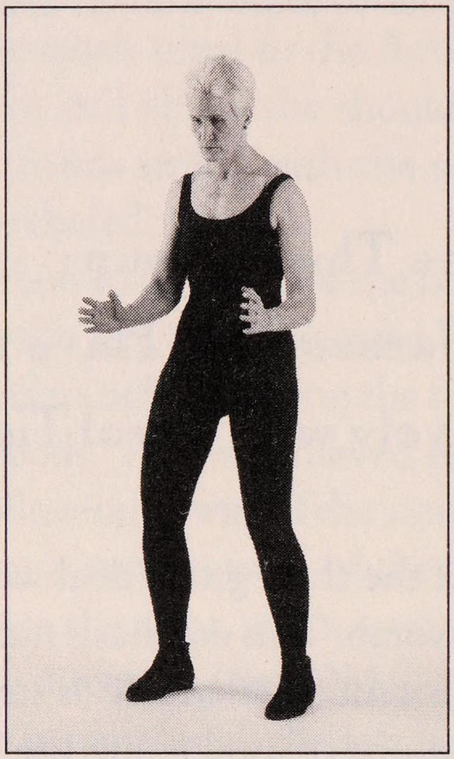


Figure 108

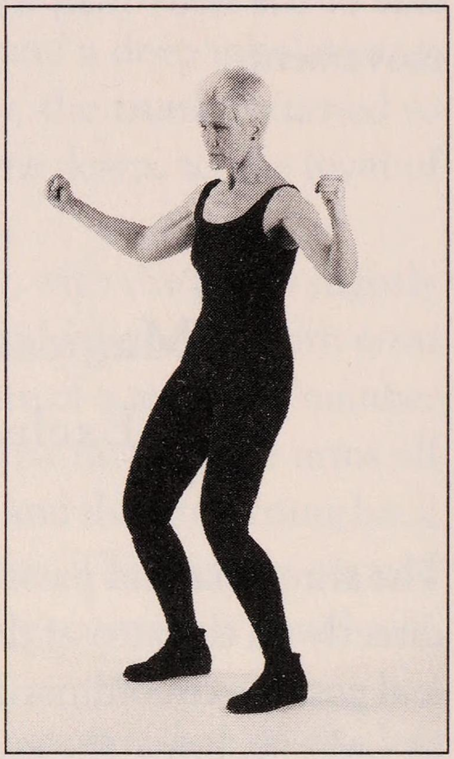


Figure 109

### 6. Stirring and Guiding Energy Directly into the Womb

This magical pass begins with an exhalation as the arms are stretched out in front of the body, with the backs of the hands touching. A deep breath is taken as the arms move laterally away from each other, drawing half-circles which end with the forearms touching in front of the body at the level of the chest, and the arms extended forward with the elbows slightly bent. The palms face up. Then the trunk bends forward slightly as the forearms move backward so that the elbows are moored on the solar plexus with the forearms still touching, side by side (fig. 110). Next, a slow exhalation begins, which must last through the following movements: The back side of the left wrist is placed on top of the inner side of the right wrist, maneuvering the arms to make the figure of the letter X; the wrists rotate so that the palms circle in toward the body, and then back out to face front, without losing the X shape of the wrists; the left hand ends up on top of the right one (fig. 111). The hands are made into fists and separated vigorously (fig. 112), and then brought to the area of the left and right ovaries as the exhalation ends.

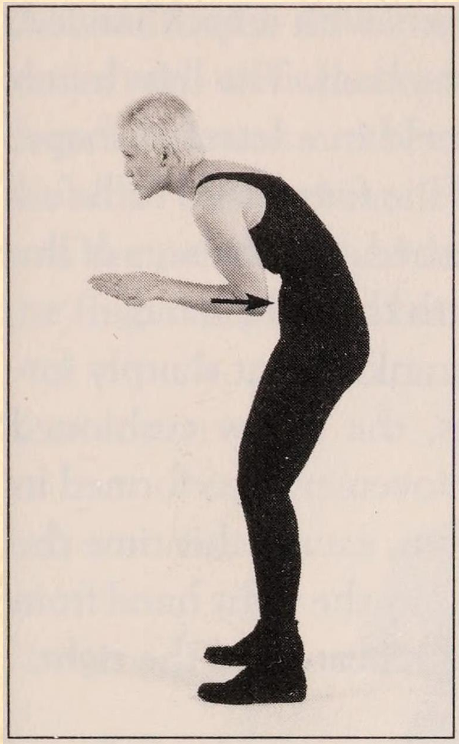


*Figure 110*

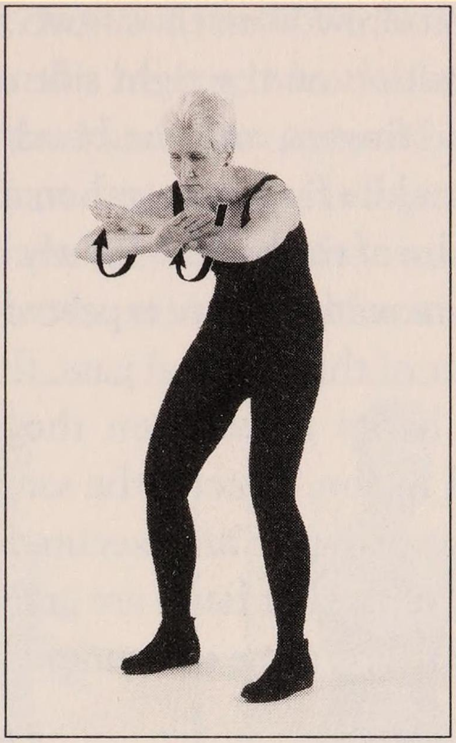


*Figure 111*

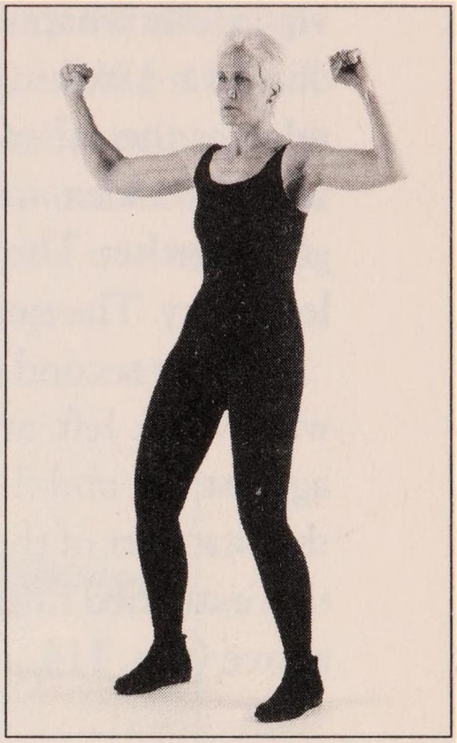


*Figure 112*

### 7. Squeezing Out Injurious Energy from the Ovaries

The left hand is held in front of the body with the palm up. The elbow is bent at a right angle and tucked against the rib cage. The index and middle fingers of the left hand are extended while the thumb holds the other two fingers against the palm. The two extended fingers of the left hand are grabbed from underneath by the right hand, and squeezed as if drawing something from the base of the two extended fingers of the left hand and making it move to the tips (fig. 113). Then the right hand shakes vigorously whatever it drew from those two fingers with a backhanded, downward striking motion on the right side of the body. The left thumb releases the other two fingers, and the hand is held in a letter V shape, with the index and middle fingers together, and the fourth and fifth fingers together. The palm of the hand is lightly brushed over the area of the left ovary. The same movements are repeated with the right hand.

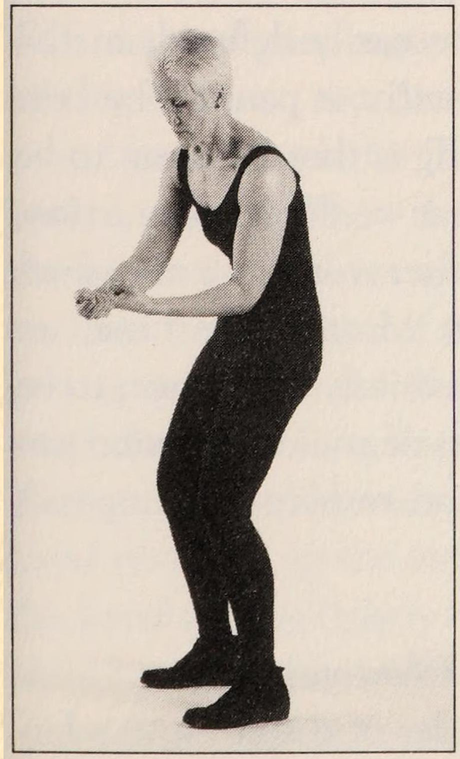


Figure 113

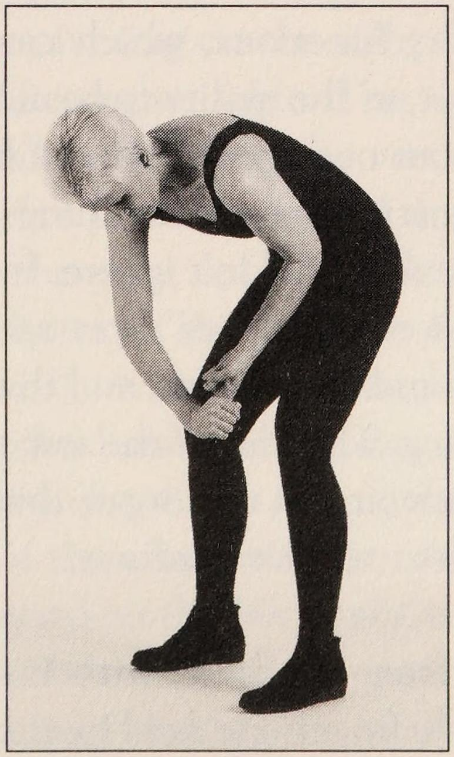


Figure 114

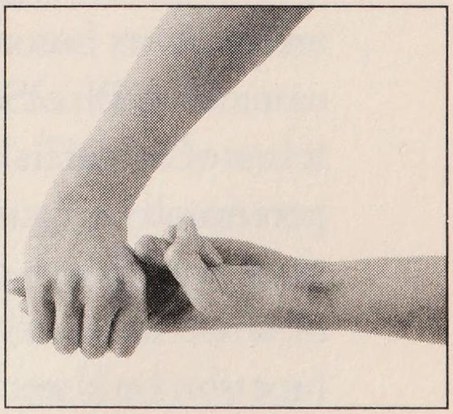


Figure 115

For the second part of this magical pass, the trunk is bent sharply forward. The left arm hangs in between the legs, the elbow cushioned against the umbilical region. Exactly the same movements performed in the first part of the magical pass are executed again, except this time the two extended fingers of the left hand are grabbed by the right hand from above (figs. 114, 115). The same movements are repeated on the right.

## Second Series: Fourth Group: *Magical Passes* That Belong to the Blue Scout

The *magical passes* of this group are the natural conclusion of the whole series. An impersonal mood is the driving force of this group of passes. The inhalations and exhalations are sharp, but not deep, and the movements are accompanied by an explosive hissing sound of air being expelled.

The value of the Blue Scout's *magical passes* resides in the capacity of each of them to give the womb the hardness that it requires in order to arrive at it's secondary functions, which can be easily defined, in the case of the Blue Scout, as the ability to be alert without pause. The criticism of sorcerers about our normal state of being is that we seem to be perennially on automatic pilot; we say things that we don't mean to say, we ignore things that we shouldn't ignore. In other words, we are aware of what surrounds us only in very short spurts. Most of the time, we function on sheer momentum, habit, and that habit is, in essence, to be oblivious to everything. The idea of the sorcerers of ancient Mexico was that, in women, the womb is the organ that can resolve this impasse, and for that, it needs to acquire hardness.

### 8. Drawing Energy from the Front with Insect Antennas

The index and middle fingers are held by the sides of the chest in a letter V position, while the thumbs press the other two fingers against the palms; the palms are up (fig. 116). Next, the palms turn downward, and the two fingers strike out in front of the body, as a sharp exhalation is made, with clenched teeth and a hissing, whistlelike sound (fig. 117). A deep inhalation is taken as the hands are retrieved with the palms up to the sides of the chest. The same movement is repeated one more time, and the palms of the hands are brushed on the area of the ovaries, with the fingers separated between the middle and fourth fingers.

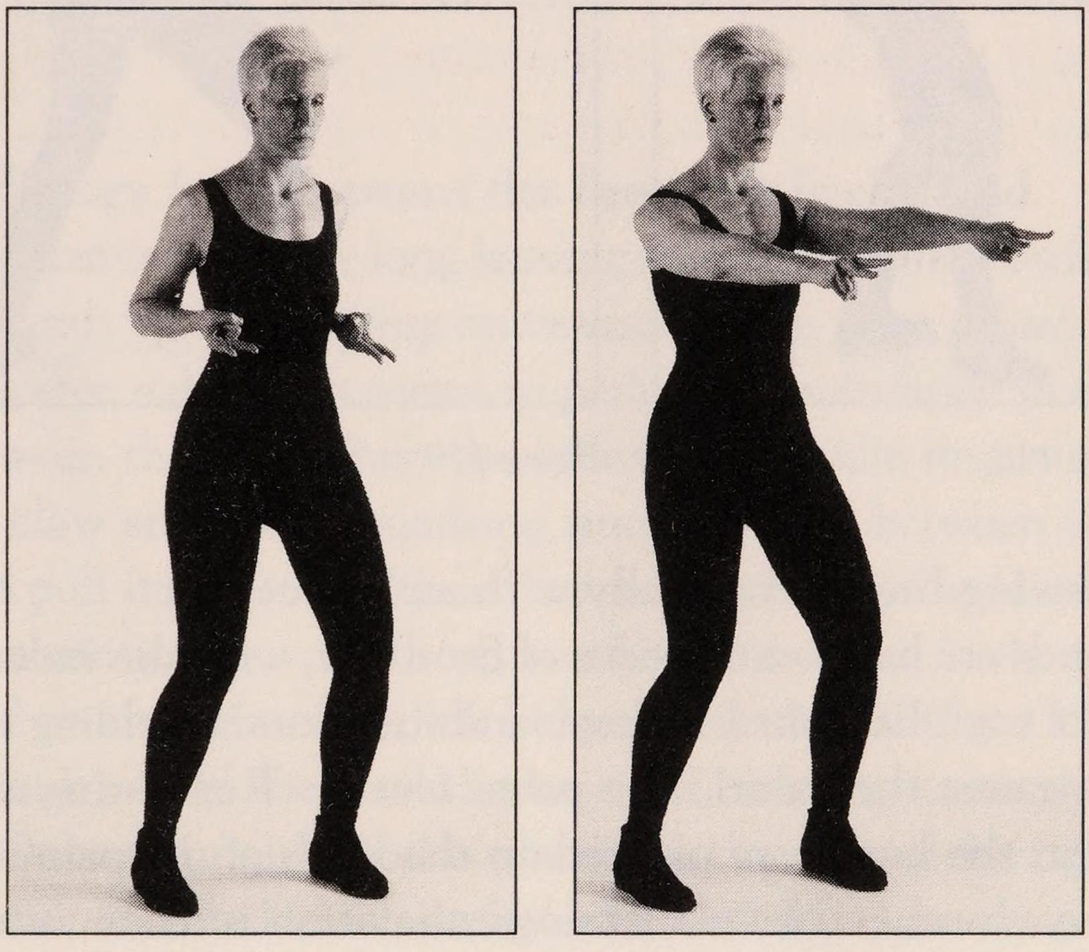


Figure 116 Figure 117

### 9. Drawing Energy from the Sides at an Angle

This magical pass begins by pivoting on the right foot and putting the left leg in front, at a forty-five-degree angle. The right foot is the horizontal bar of the letter T, and the left foot, the vertical. The body rocks back and forth. Then the left elbow is bent, and the hand is brought to The level of the chest with the palm up. The index and middle fingers are held in the shape of the letter V. The thumb holds the other two fingers against the palm (fig. 118). A strike is made, leaning the body forward sharply. The palm of the hand turns down as the fingers strike. The air is exhaled with a hiss (fig. 119). An inhalation is taken as the kind retrieves to the side of the chest with the palm up. The palm of the hand is then lightly brushed on the left ovary, with the fingers separated between the middle and fourth fingers.

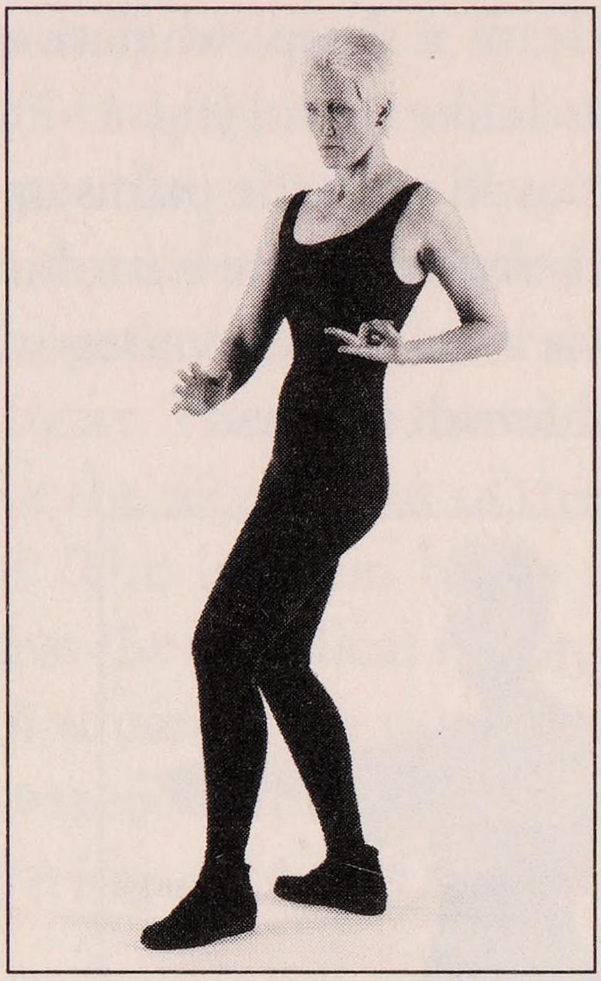


*Figure 118*

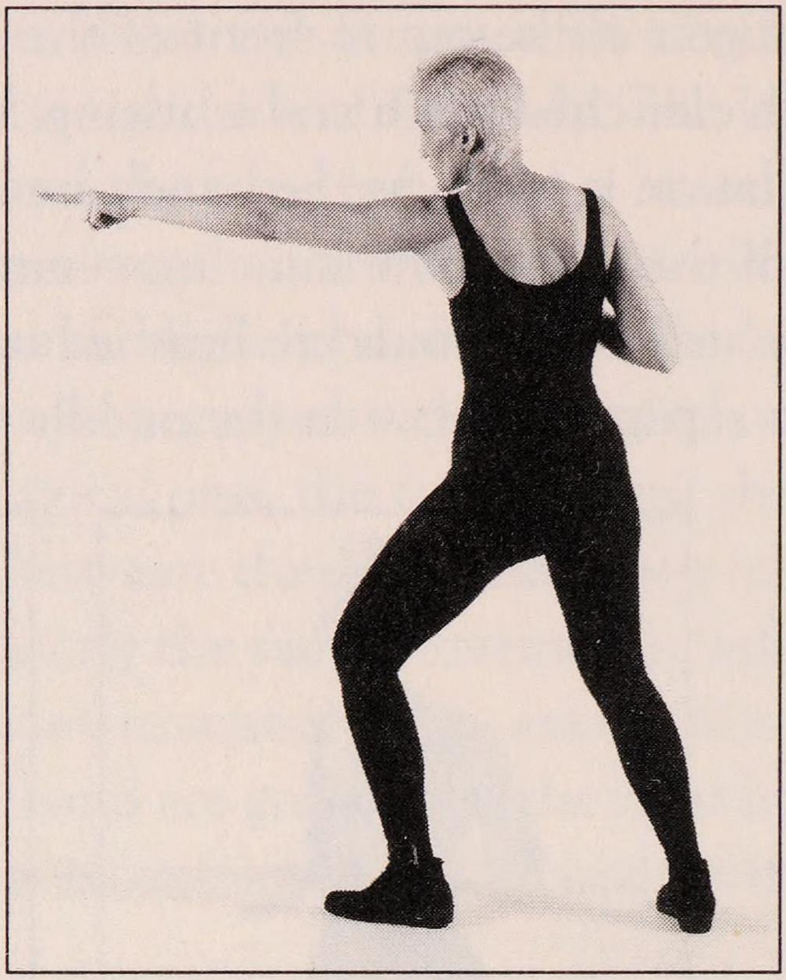


*Figure 119*

A jump is taken to switch feet and face a new direction to the right, still at a forty-five degree angle. The same movements arc repeated with the right arm.

### 10. Drawing Energy Laterally with an Insect Cut

The hands are held on the sides of the chest, with the index and middle fingers of each hand in a V shape and the thumbs holding the other two fingers against the palms. The palms face up. Remaining at the level of the chest, the hands are pivoted on the heels of the palms and brought to face each other. Next, a hissing exhalation is made as both arms are fully extended laterally, with the palms facing the front. The index and middle fingers are moved with a cutting motion as if they were indeed scissors, as the exhalation ends in a whistlelike fashion (fig. 120).

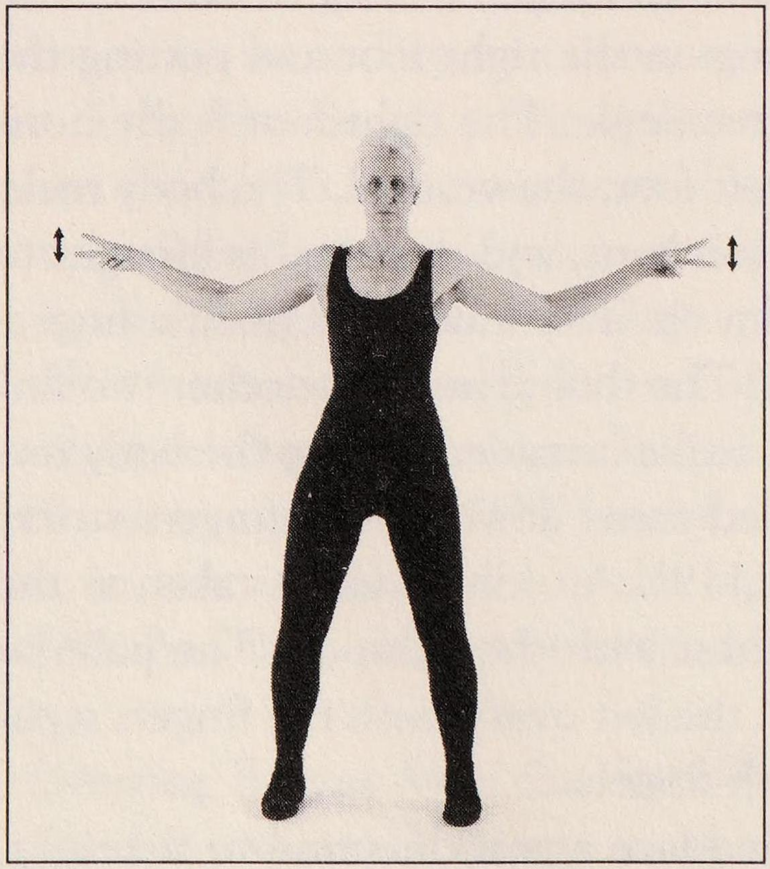


Figure 120

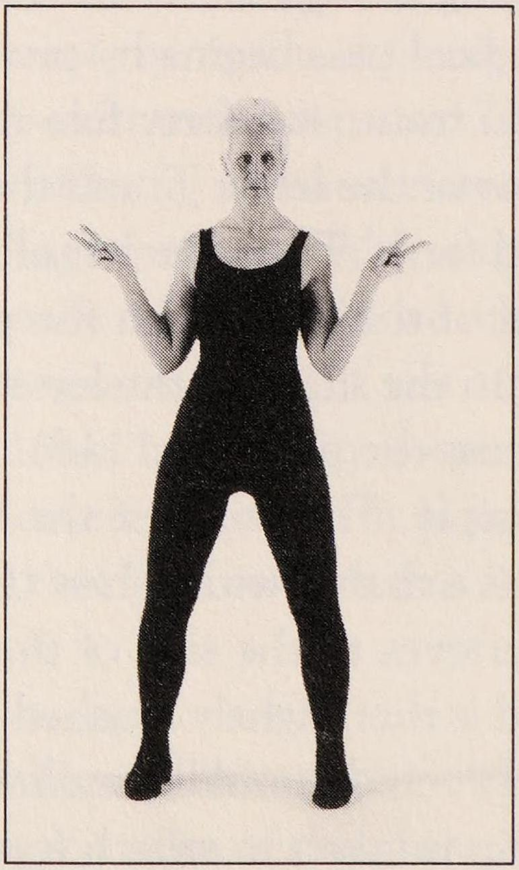


Figure 121

An inhalation is taken as the arms are retrieved; the elbows are down, and the arms come to rest on the sides of the body by the chest hands pointing sideways (fig. 121). Next the hands are pivoted on the heel of the palm so the index and middle fingers point to the front The fingers are then separated at the middle and fourth fingers, and a hissing exhalation is made as the palms of the hands brush over the area of the ovaries.

### 11. Drilling Energy from Between the Feet with Each Hand

A deep inhalation is taken. A long hissing exhalation follows while the left hand descends with a rotating movement of the wrist, which makes the hand resemble a drill that seems to perforate a substance in front of the body between the legs. Then the index and middle fingers make a two-pronged claw and grab something from the area between the feet (fig. 122) and pull it upward, with a deep inhalation, to the level of the hips. The arm moves over the head to the back of the body and the palm is placed on the area of the left kidney and adrenal (fig. 123)

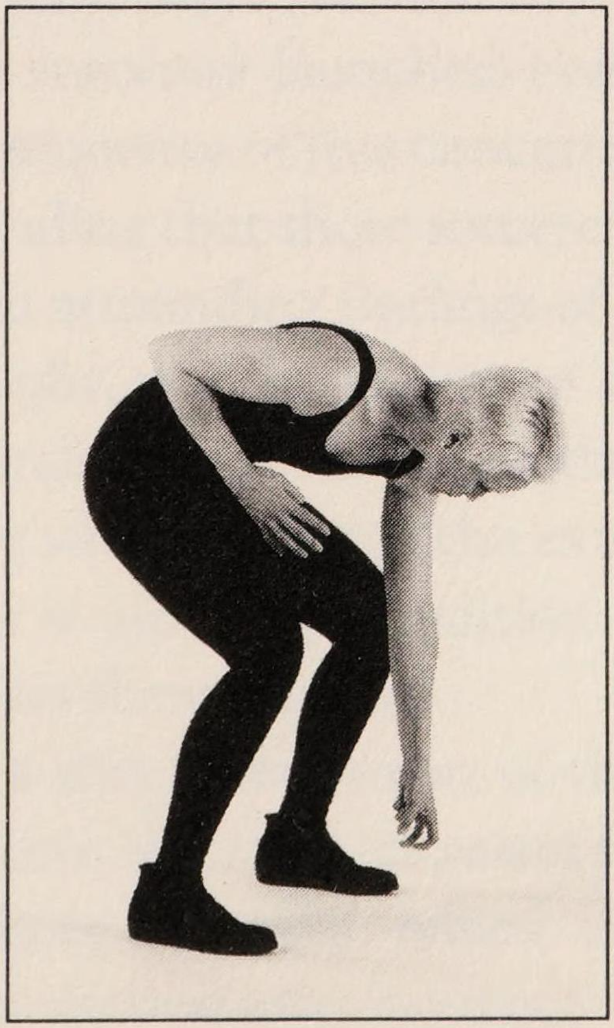


Figure 122

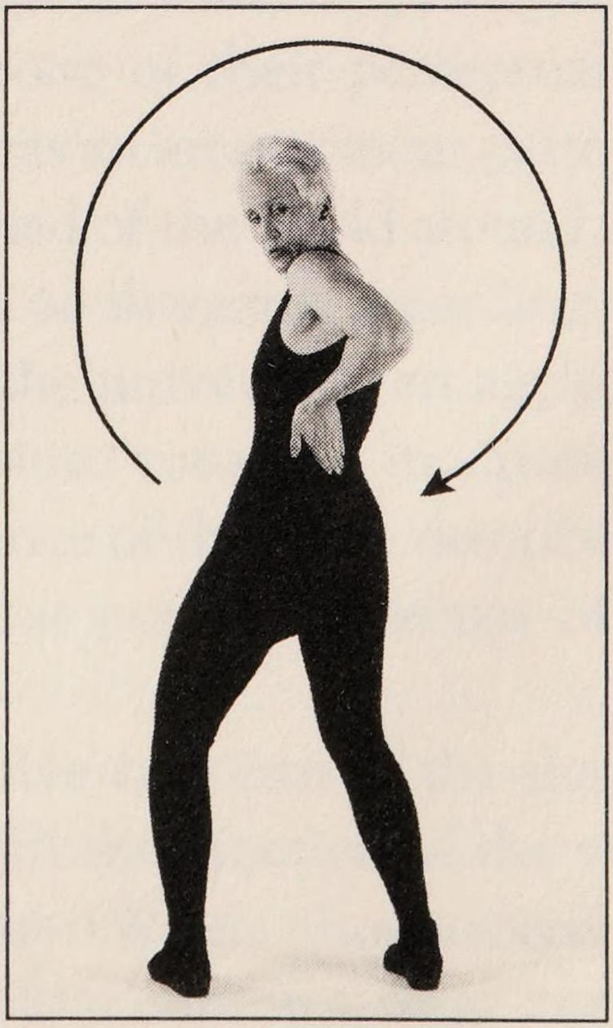


Figure 123

The left hand is held there while the right hand performs the same movements. Once the right hand is placed on the area of the right kidney and adrenal, an inhalation is taken. The left hand moves over the head to the front of the body, and brushes, with the fingers separated at the middle and fourth fingers, over the left ovary. This movement of the arm from back to front is accompanied by the whistlelike sound of a sharp exhalation. Another deep inhalation is taken, and the right hand is brought to the right ovary in the same fashion.

### 12. Drilling Energy from Between the Feet with Both Hands

This magical pass is similar to the preceding one, except that instead of performing the movements separately, the hands execute the drilling movements in unison. Then the index and middle fingers of both hands make two-pronged claws, and grab something from the area between the feet at the same time.

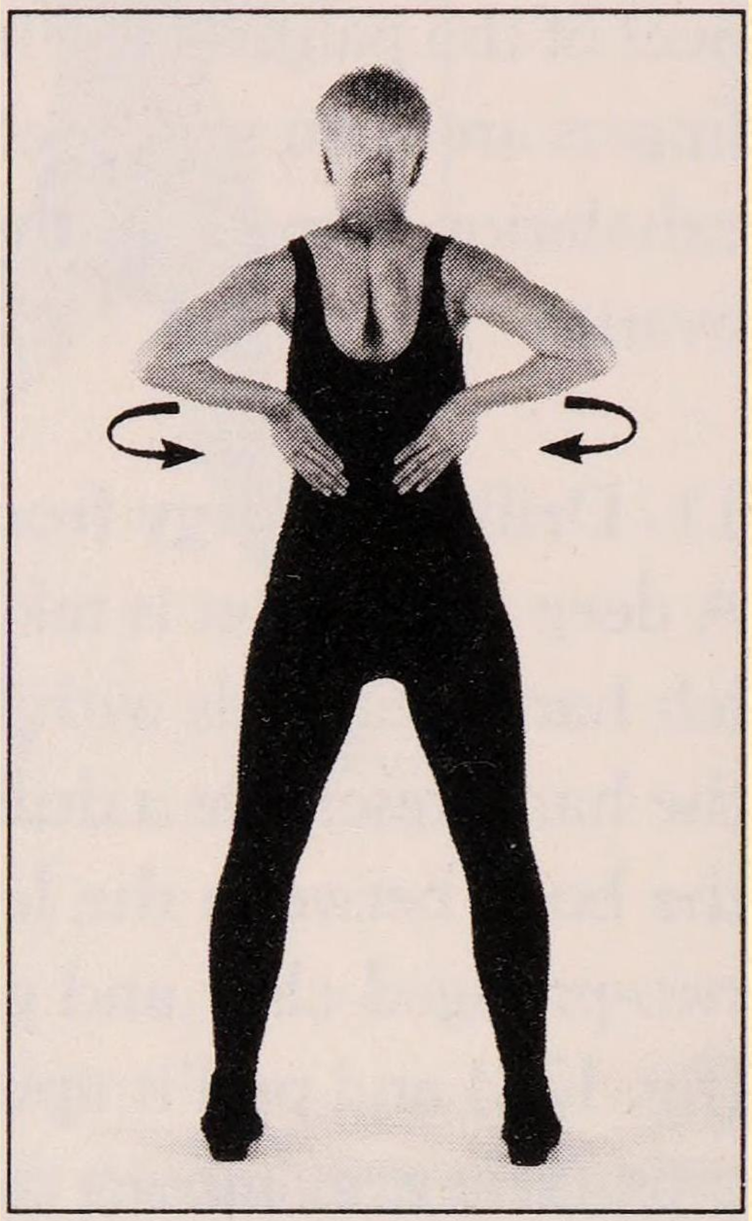


Figure 124

They return to the level of the hips, and then circle around the sides of the body to the area of the kidneys and adrenals; a deep breath is taken as the palms rub those areas (fig. 124). Then an exhalation is made as the arms draw another circle around the sides of the body to the front to brush the area over the left and right ovaries with the fingers of each hand separated at the middle. Again, this movement of the arms from back to front is accompanied by a whistlelike exhalation.

# The Third Series: The Series of the Five Concerns: The Westwood Series

One of the most important series for the practitioners of *Tensegrity* is called The Series of the Five Concerns. A nickname for this series is The Westwood Series, given to it because it was taught publicly for the first rime in the Pauley Pavilion at the University of California at Los Angeles, which is located in an area called Westwood. This series was conceived as an attempt to integrate what don Juan Matus called the five concerns of the shamans of ancient Mexico. Everything those sorcerers did rotated around five concerns: one, the *magical passes*; two, the energetic center in the human body called the center for decisions; three, recapitulation, the means for enhancing the scope of human awareness; four, dreaming, the bona fide art of breaking the parameters of normal perception; five, inner silence, the stage of human perception from which those sorcerers launched every one of their perceptual attainments. This sequence of five concerns was an arrangement patterned on The understanding that those sorcerers had of the world around them.

One of the astounding findings of those shamans, according to what don Juan taught, was the existence in the universe of an agglutinating force that binds energy fields together into concrete, functional units. The sorcerers who discovered the existence of this force described it as a vibration, or a vibratory condition, that permeates groups of energy fields and glues them together.

In terms of this arrangement of the five concerns of the shamans of ancient Mexico, the *magical passes* fulfill the function of the vibratory condition those shamans talked about. When those sorcerers put together this shamanistic sequence of five concerns, they copied the patterning of energy that was revealed to them when they were capable of *seeing* energy as it flows in the universe. The binding force was the *magical passes*. The *magical passes* were the unit that permeated through the four remaining units and grouped them together into one functional whole.

The Westwood Series, following the patterning of the shamans of ancient Mexico, has consequently been divided into four groups, arranged in terms of their importance as envisioned by the sorcerers who formulated them: one, the center for decisions; two, recapitulation; three, dreaming; four, inner silence.

## Third Series: First Group: The *Center for Decisions*

The most important topic for the shamans who lived in Mexico in ancient times, and for all the shamans of don Juan's lineage, was the center for decisions. Shamans are convinced, by the practical results of their endeavors, that there is a spot on the human body which accounts for decision making, the V spot- the area on the crest of the sternum at the base of the neck, where the clavicles meet to form a letter V. It is a center where energy is rarefied to the point of being tremendously subtle, and it stores a specific type of energy which shamans are incapable of defining.

They are utterly certain, however, that they can feel the presence of that energy, and it's effects. It is the belief of shamans that this special energy is always pushed out of that center very early in the lives of human beings, and it never returns to it, thus depriving human beings of something perhaps more important than all the energy of the other centers combined: the capacity to make decisions.

In relation to the issue of making decisions, don Juan expressed the hard opinion of the sorcerers of his lineage. Their observations, over the centuries, had led them to conclude that human beings are incapable of making decisions, and that for this reason, they have created the social order: gigantic institutions that assume responsibility for decision making. They let those gigantic institutions decide for them, and they merely fulfill the decisions already made on their behalf.

The V spot at the base of the neck was, for those shamans, a place of such importance that they rarely touched it with their hands; if it was touched, the touch was ritualistic and always performed by someone else with the aid of an object. They used highly polished pieces of hardwood or polished bones of animals, utilizing the round head of the bone so as to have an object of the perfect contour, the size of the hollow spot on the neck. They would press with those bones or pieces of wood to create pressure on the borders of that hollow spot. Those objects were also used, although rarely, for self-massage, or for what we understand nowadays as accupressure.

"How did they come to find out that that hollow spot is the center for decisions!" I asked don Juan once.

"Every center of energy in the body," he replied, "shows a concentration of energy; a sort of vortex of energy, like a funnel that actually seems to rotate counterclockwise from the perspective of the seer who gazes into it. The strength of a particular center depends on the force of that movement. If it barely moves, the center is exhausted, depleted of energy.

"When the sorcerers of ancient times," don Juan continued, "were scanning the body with their *seeing* eye, they noticed the presence of those vortexes. They became very curious about them, and made a map of them."

"Are there many such centers in the body, don Juan?" I asked.

"There are hundreds of them," he replied, "if not thousands! One can say that a human being is nothing else but a conglomerate of thousands of twirling vortexes, some of them so very small that they are, let's say, like pinholes, but very important pinholes. Most of the vortexes are vortexes of energy. Energy flows freely through them, or is stuck in them. There are, however, six which are so enormous that they deserve special treatment. They are centers of life and vitality. Energy there is never stuck, but sometimes the supply of energy is so scarce that the center barely rotates."

Don Juan explained that those enormous centers of vitality were located on six areas of the body. He enumerated them in terms of the importance that shamans accorded them.

The first was on the area of the liver and gallbladder; the second on the area of the pancreas and spleen; the third on the area of the kidneys and adrenals; and the fourth on the hollow spot at the base of the neck on the frontal part of the body. The fifth was around the womb, and the sixth was on the top of the head.

The fifth center, pertinent only to women, had, according to what don Juan said, a special kind of energy that gave sorcerers the impression of liquidness. It was a feature that only some women had. It seemed to serve as a natural filter that screened out superfluous influences.

The sixth center, located on top of the head, don Juan described as something more than an anomaly, and refrained absolutely from having anything to do with it. He portrayed it as possessing not a circular vortex of energy, like the others, but a pendulumlike, back-and-forth movement somehow reminiscent of the beating of a heart.

"Why is the energy of that center so different, don Juan?" I asked him.

"That sixth center of energy," he said, "doesn't quite belong to man. You see, we human beings are under siege, so to speak. That center has been taken over by an invader, an unseen predator. And the only way to overcome this predator is by fortifying all the other centers."

"Isn't it a bit paranoiac to feel that we are under siege, don Juan?" I asked.

"Well, maybe for you, but certainly not for me," he replied. "I *see* energy, and I *see* that the energy over the center on the top of the head doesn't fluctuate like the energy of the other centers. It has a back-and-forth movement, quite disgusting, and quite foreign. I also *see* that in a sorcerer who has been capable of vanquishing the mind, which sorcerers call a foreign installation, the fluctuation of that center has become exactly like the fluctuation of all the others."

Don Juan, throughout the years of my apprenticeship, systematically refused to talk about that sixth center. On this occasion when he was telling me about the centers of vitality, he dismissed my frantic probes, rather rudely, and began to talk about the fourth center, the center for decisions.

"This fourth center," he said, "has a special type of energy, which appears to the eye of the seer as possessing a unique transparency, something that could be described as resembling water: energy so fluid that it seems liquid. The liquid appearance of this special energy is the mark of a filterlike quality of the center for decisions itself, which screens any energy coming to it, and draws from it only the aspect of it that is liquidlike. Such a quality of liquidness is a uniform and consistent feature of this center. Sorcerers also call it the watery center.

"The rotation of the energy at the center for decisions is the weakest of them all," he went on. "That's why man can rarely decide anything. Sorcerers *see* that after they practice certain *magical passes*, that center becomes active, and they can certainly make decisions to their hearts' content, while they couldn't even take a first step before."

Don Juan was quite emphatic about the fact that the shamans of ancient Mexico had an aversion that bordered on phobia about touching their own hollow spot at the base of the neck. The only way in which they accepted any interference whatsoever with that spot was through the use of their *magical passes*, which reinforce that center by bringing dispersed energy to it, clearing away, in this manner, any hesitation in decision making born out of the natural energy dispersion brought about by the wear and tear of everyday life.

"A human being," don Juan said, "perceived as a conglomerate of energy fields, is a concrete and sealed unit into which no energy can be injected, and from which no energy can escape. The feeling of losing energy, which all of us experience at one time or another, is the result of energy being chased away, dispersed from the five enormous natural centers of life and vitality. Any sense of gaining energy is due to the *redeployment of energy* previously dispersed from those centers. That is to say, The energy is relocated onto those five centers of life and vitality."

## The Magical Passes for the *Center for Decisions*

### 1. Bringing Energy to the Center for Decisions with a Back-and Forth Motion of the Hands and Arms with the Palms Turned Downward

The arms shoot out to the front at a forty-five-degree angle with an exhalation, the palms of the hands facing down (fig. 125). Then they are retrieved to the sides of the chest, under the axilla, with an inhalation. The shoulders are raised in order to main the same degree of inclination (fig. 126).

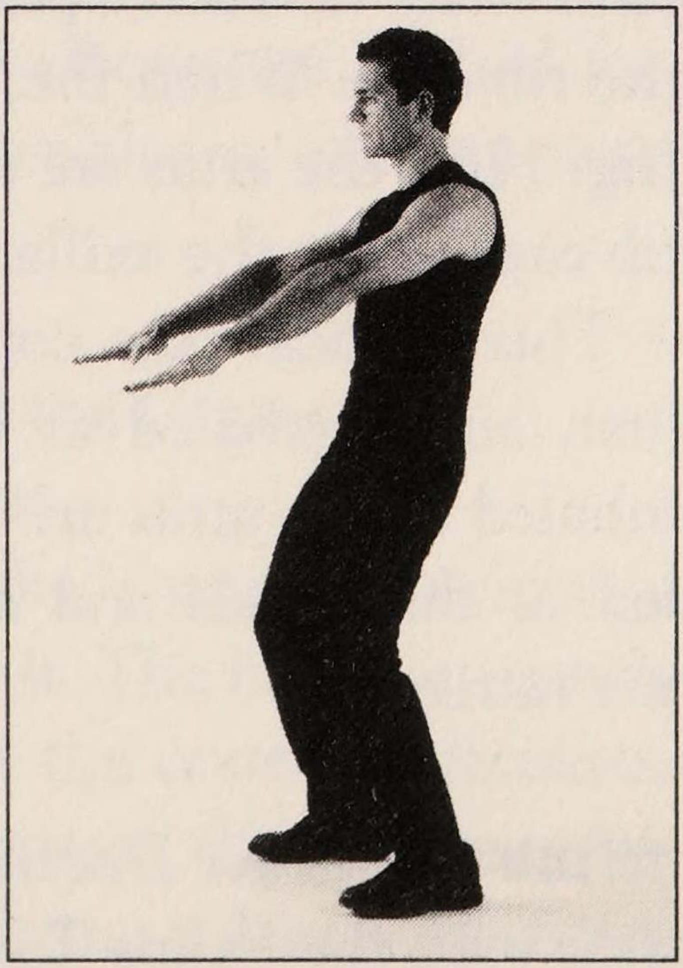


Figure 125

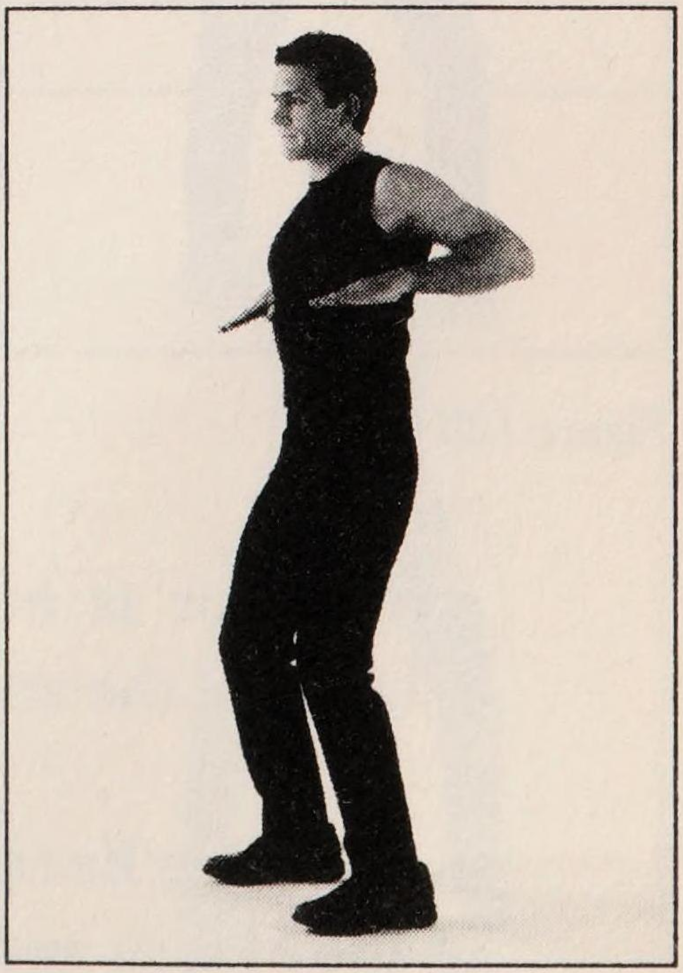


Figure 126

In the second facet of this movement, the arms are extended downward with an inhalation, and pulled back with an exhalation.

## 2. Bringing Energy to the Center for Decisions with a Back-and-Forth Motion of the Hands and Arms with the Palms Turned Upward

This magical pass is like the preceding one, and it is executed in exactly the same fashion, except that it is done with the palms of the hands turned upward (fig. 127). The inhalations and exhalations are also exactly as in the preceding movement. Air is exhaled as the hands and arms move forward at a forty-five-degree level of inclination, and it is inhaled as the arms move backward. Then air is inhaled as the hands and arms move downward, and exhaled as the hands and arms retrieve.

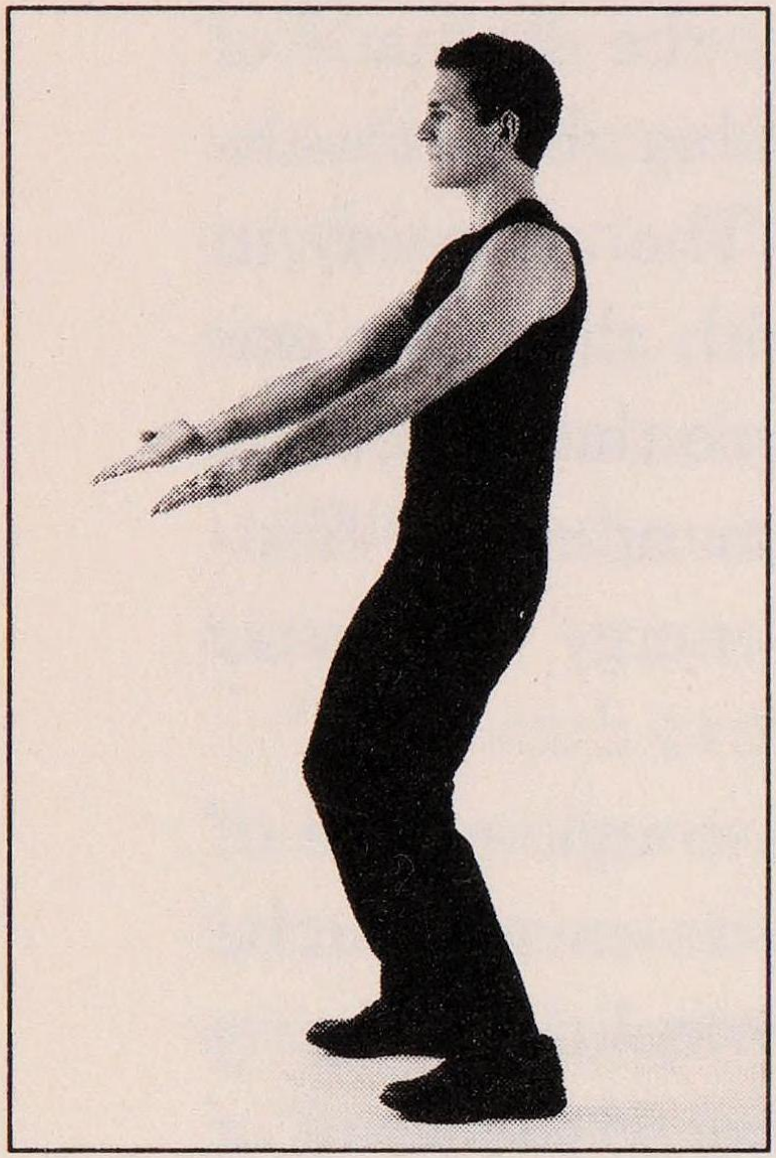


*Figure 127*

## 3. Bringing Energy to the Center for Decisions with a Circular Motion of the

### Hands and Arms with the Palms Turned Downward

This magical pass begins exactly like the first one of this group, except that when the hands reach their fully extended position, two complete circles are drawn with the hands and the arms going away from each other to reach a point about six inches beyond the rib cage. When the hands complete the circles (fig. 128), the arms are retrieved to the sides of the rib cage under the axilla.

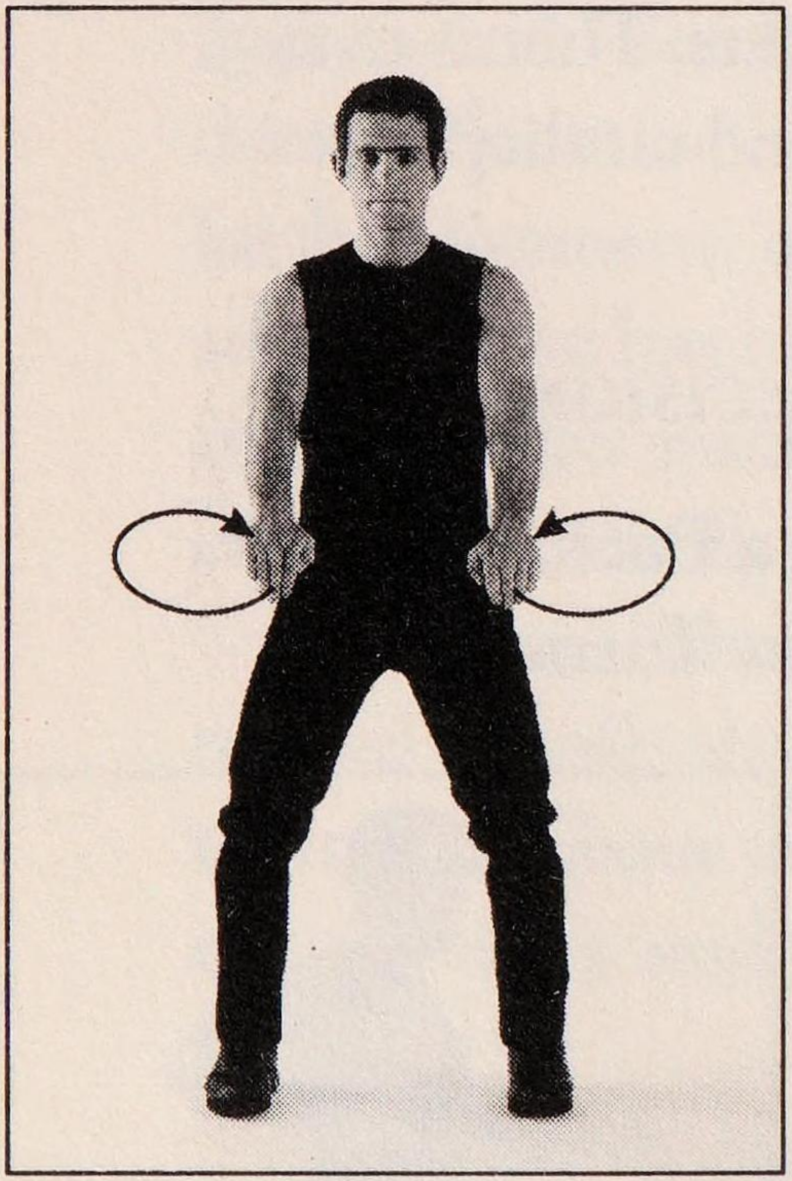


Figure 128

This magical pass consists of two facets. In the first, air is exhaled as the circles are drawn and inhaled as the arms are retrieved backward. In the second, air is inhaled as the hands and arms draw the circles and exhaled as the arms are retrieved.

### 4. Bringing Energy to the Center for Decisions in a Circular Motion of the Hands and Arms with the Palms Turned Upward

This magical pass is exactly like the preceding one, with the same two facets of inhalation and exhalation, but the two circles are drawn by the hands and arms with the palms of the hands turned upward (fig. 129).

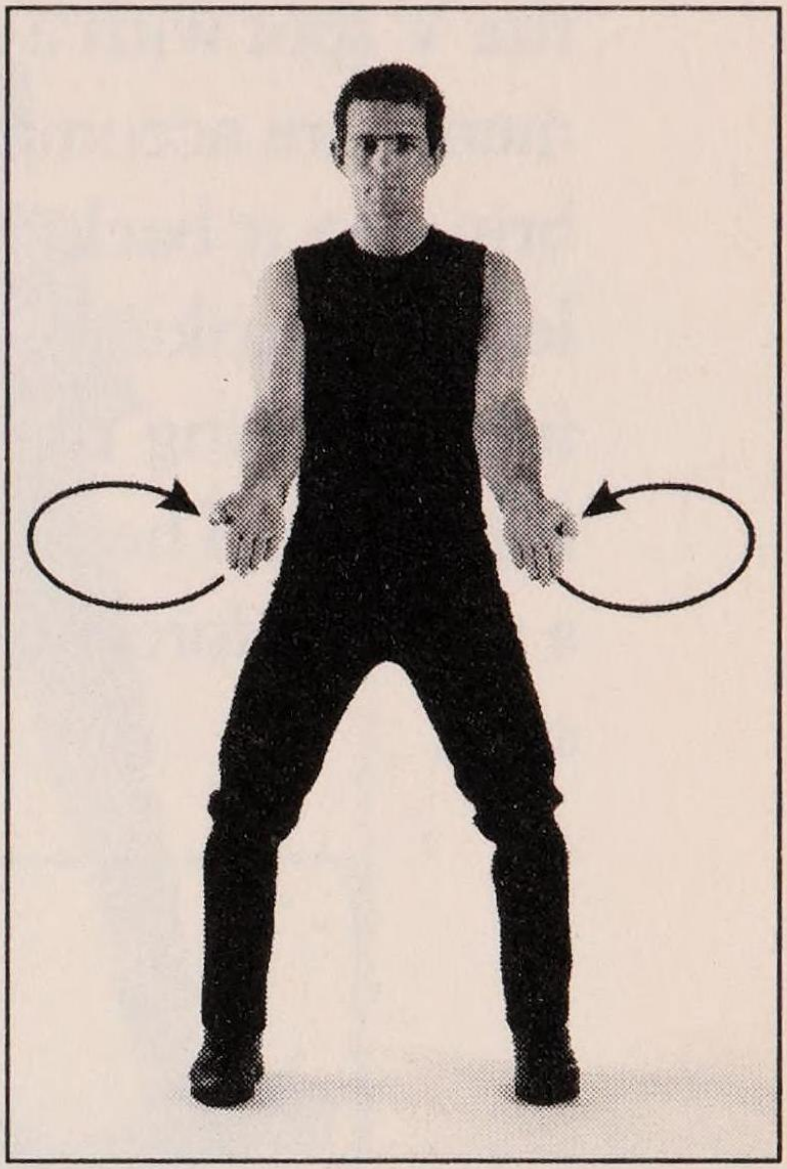


Figure 129

### 5. Bringing Energy to the Center for Decisions from the Midsection of the Body

The arms are bent at the elbows and kept high, at the level of the shoulders. The fingers are kept loosely pointing toward the V spot, but without touching it (fig. 130). The arms move in a teeter-totter fashion from right to left and left to right. The motion is not accomplished by moving the shoulders or the hips, but by the contraction of the muscles of the stomach, which moves the midsection to the right, to the left, and to the right again, and so on.

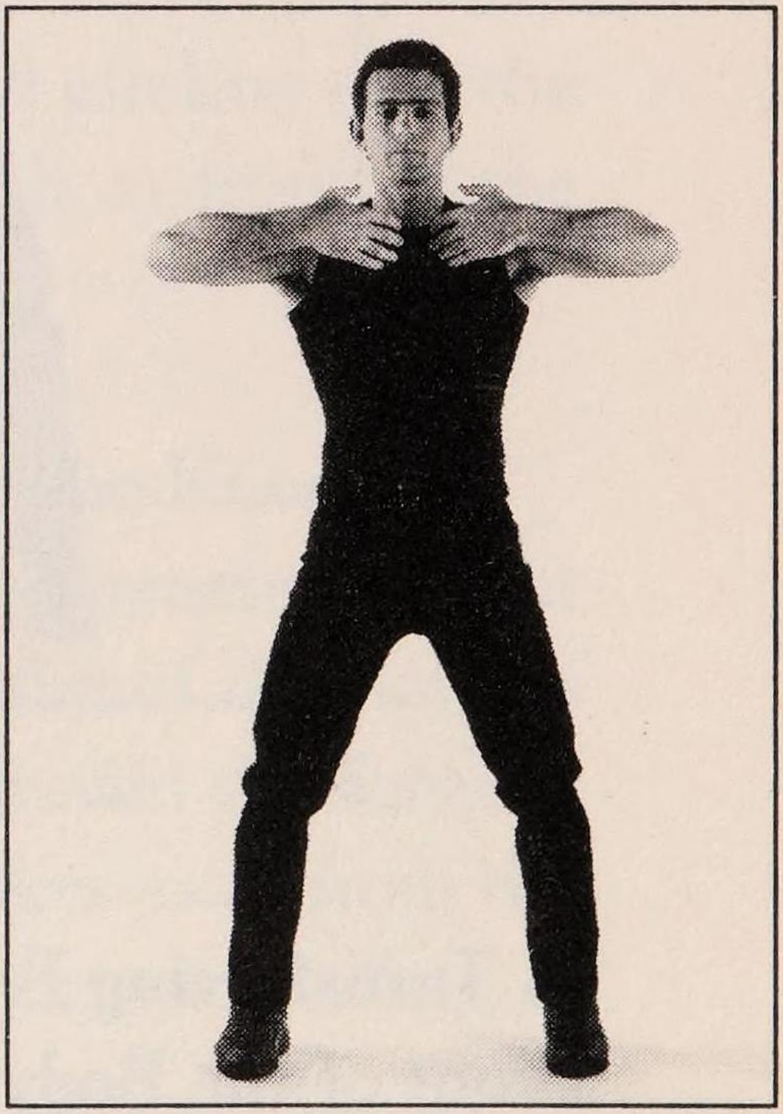


Figure 130

### 6. Bringing Energy to the Center for Decisions from the Area of the Shoulder Blades

The arms are bent, as in the previous movement, hut the shoulders are rounded so that the elbows are heavily drawn toward the front. The left hand is placed on top of the right. The fingers are held loose, pointing toward the V spot without touching n, and the chin juts out and rests on the hollow spot between the thumb and index finger of the left hand (fig. 131). The bent elbows are pushed forward, extending the shoulder blades, one at a time, to the maximum.

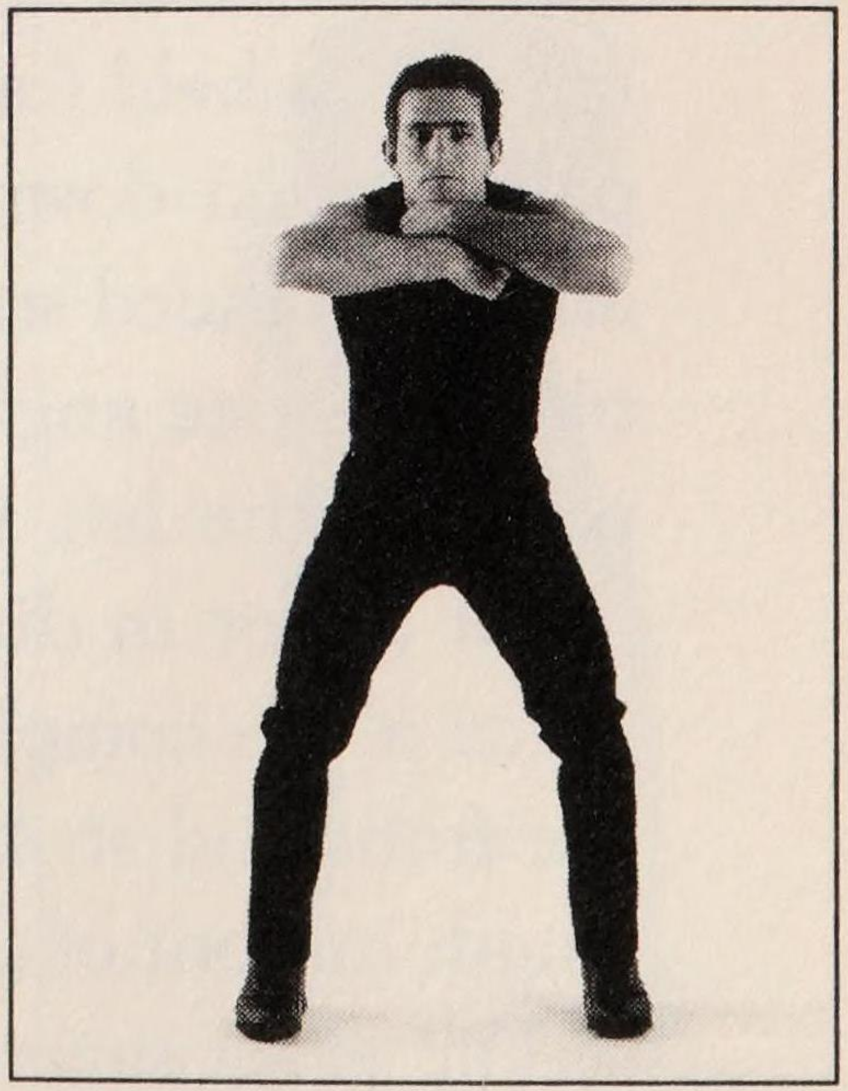


Figure 131

### 7. Stirring Energy Around the Center for Decisions with a Bent Wrist

Both hands are brought to the V spot on the base of the neck, without touching it. The hands are gently curved; the fingers point at the center for decisions. Then the hands begin to move, the left first, followed by the right, as if stirring a liquid substance around that area, or as if they were fanning air into the V spot with a series of gentle movements of each hand; these movements are accomplished by extending the whole arm laterally and then bringing it back to the area in front of the V spot (fig. 132). Then the left arm strikes out in front of the V spot, with the hand turned sharply inward, using the wrist and the back of the hand as a striking surface (fig. 133). The right arm executes the same movement. In this manner, a series of forceful blows are delivered to the area right in front of the V spot.

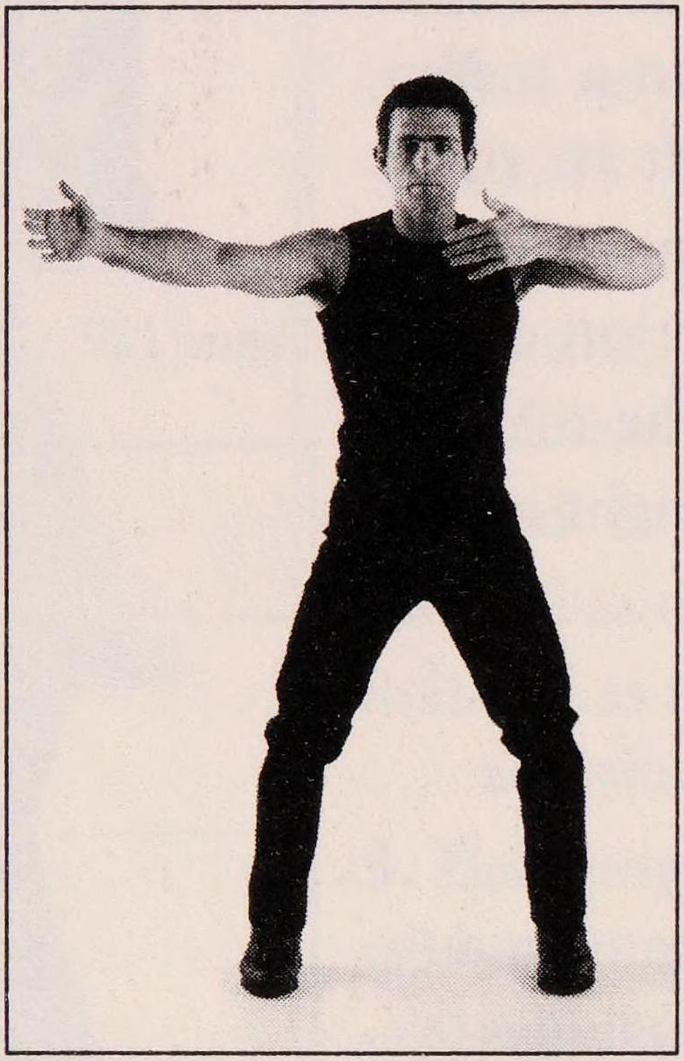


Figure 132

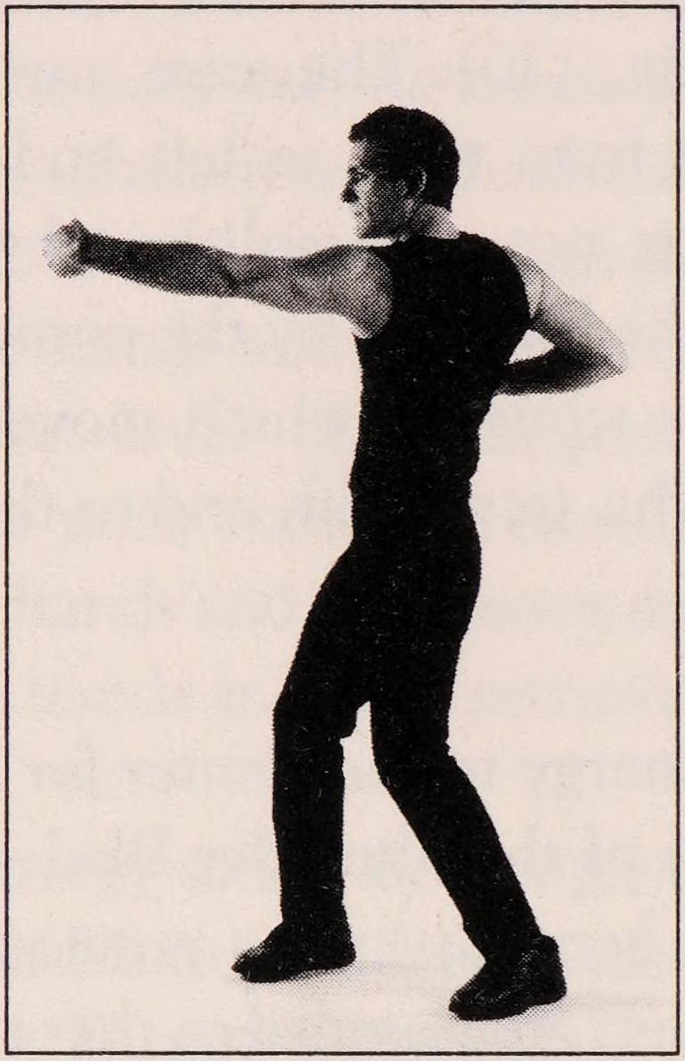


Figure 133

## 8. Transferring Energy from the Two Centers of Vitality on the Front of the Body to the Center for Decisions

Both hands are brought to the area of the pancreas and spleen, a few inches in front of the body. The left hand, with the palm turned upward, is held four or five inches below the right one, which has the palm turned downward. The left forearm is held at a ninety-degree angle, extended straight out to the front. The right forearm is also at a ninety-degree angle, but held close to the body, so that the fingertips point to the left (fig. 134). The left hand makes two inward circles about a foot in diameter around the area of the pancreas and spleen. Once it has completed the second circle, the right hand shoots out to the front and strikes with the edge of the hand, to the area an arm's length in front of the liver and gallbladder (fig.135).

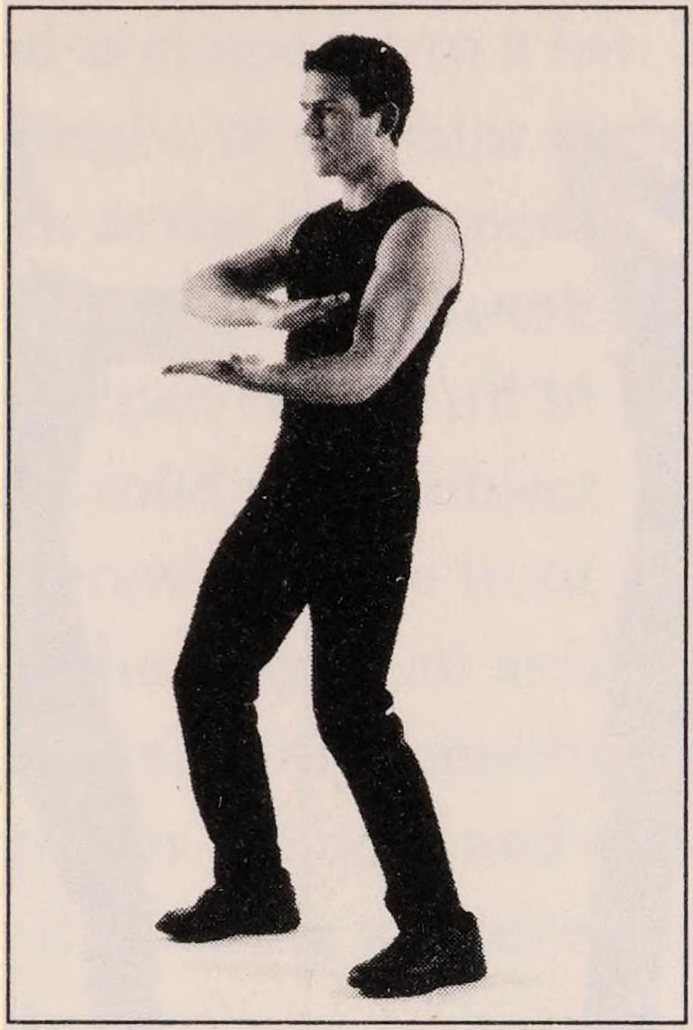


Figure 134

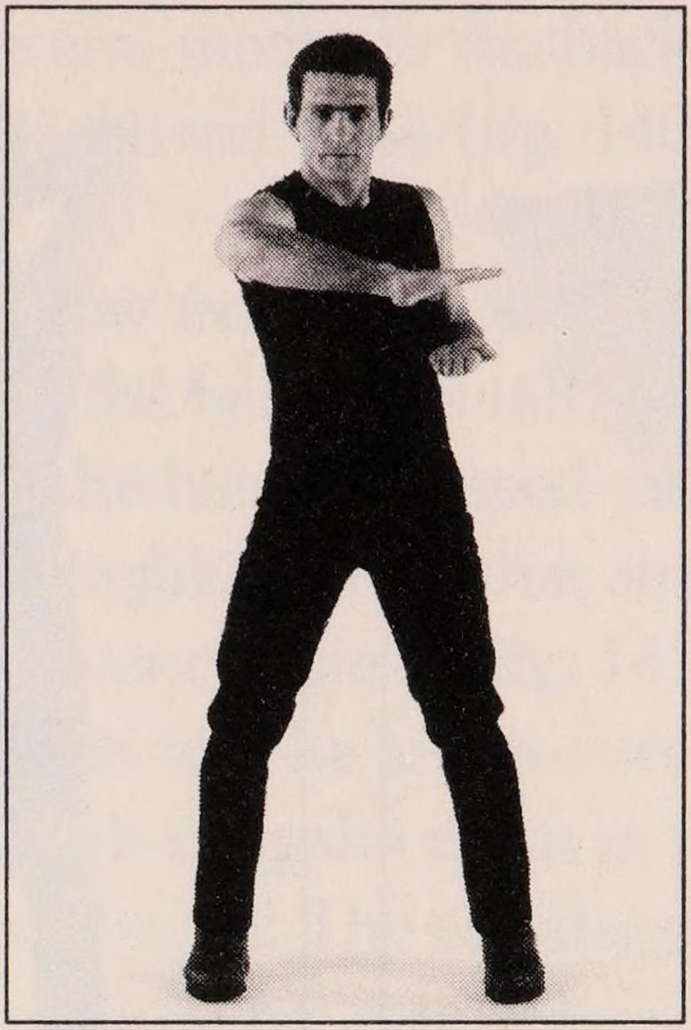


Figure 135

The exact same movements are performed on the other side of the body by reversing the position of the hands, which arc brought to the area of the liver and gallbladder, with the right hand circling and the left hand striking forward to the area an arm's length in front of the pancreas and spleen.

### 9. Bringing Energy to the Center for Decisions from the Knees

The left hand and arm draw two circles about a foot in diameter in front of the V spot, a bit toward the left (fig. 136). The palm of the hand is facing downward. Once the second circle has been drawn, the forearm is raised to the level of the shoulder and the hand strikes away from the (ace, diagonally to the right, at the level of the V spot, with a flick of the wrist, as if holding a whip (fig. 137). The same movements are performed with the right hand.

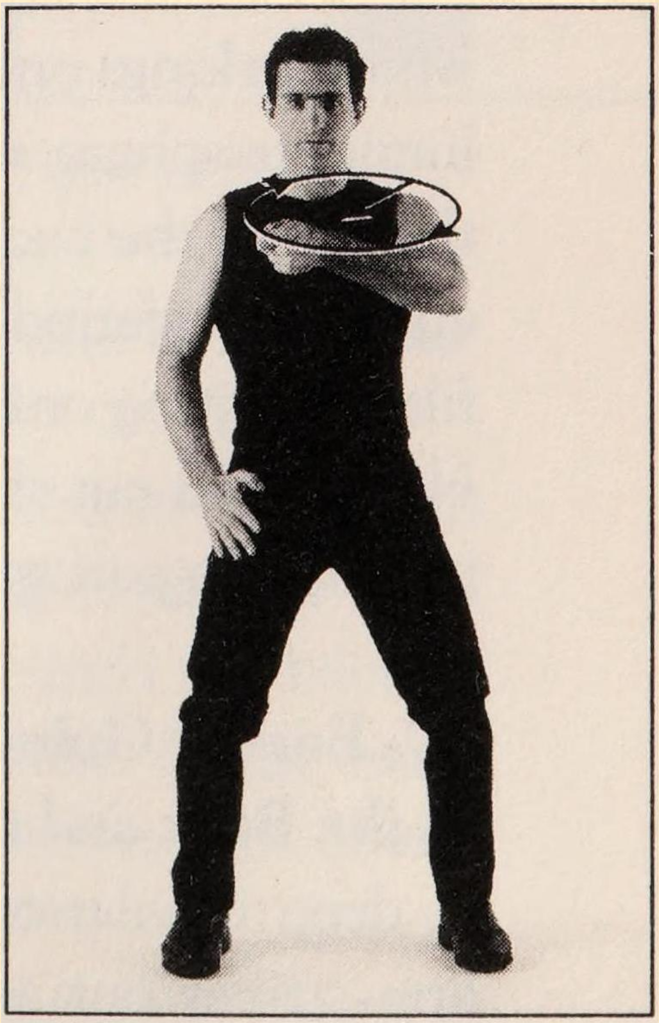


Figure 136

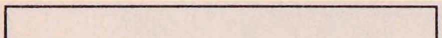


Figure 137

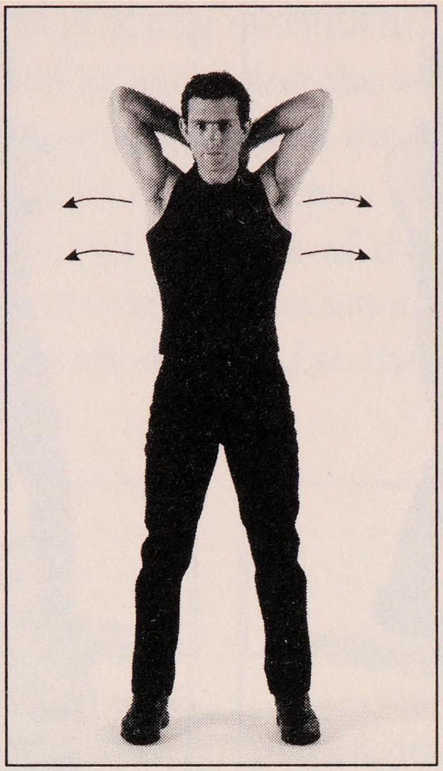


Figure 138

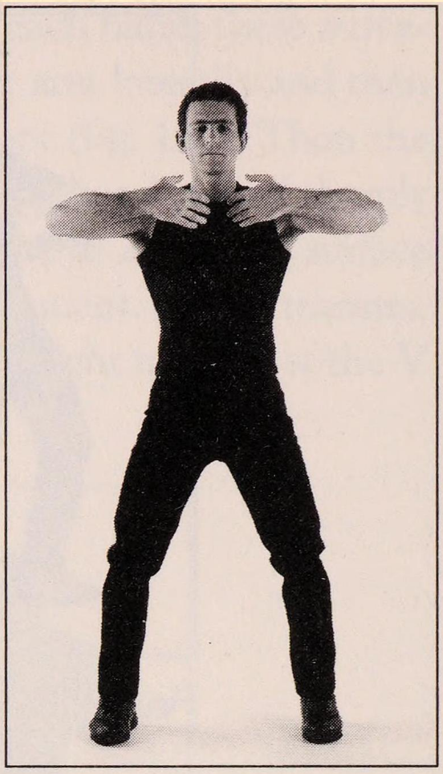


Figure 139

Then a deep inhalation is taken, and an exhalation follows as the hands and arms slide downward until they reach the tops of the knees, with the palms facing up. A deep inhalation is taken there and the arms are raised, with the left arm in the lead; the right arm crosses over the left as they go over the head until the fingers rest on the back of the neck. The breath is held as the top of the trunk moves three times in succession in a teeter-totter motion; the left shoulder goes down first, then the right, and so on (fig. 138). Then the air is exhaled as the arms and hands move back downward to the tops of the knees, again with the palms of the hands facing up.

A deep inhalation is taken, and then the air is exhaled as the hands are raised from the knees to the level of the V spot, with the fingers pointing toward it, without touching it (fig. 139). The hands are brought once more to the knees with an exhalation. A final deep inhalation is taken and the hands are raised to the level of the eyes, and then brought down to the sides as the air is exhaled.

The next three *magical passes*, according to don Juan, transfer energy which belongs only to the center for decisions from the frontal edge of the luminous sphere, where it has accumulated over the years, to the back, and then from the back of the luminous sphere to the front. He said that this energy transferred back and forth goes through the V spot, which acts as a filter, utilizing only the energy that is proper to it and discarding the rest. He pointed out that because of this selective process of the V spot, it is essential to perform these three *magical passes* as many times as possible.

### 10. Energy Going Through the Center for Decisions from the Front to the Back and the Back to the Front with Two Blows

A deep inhalation is taken. Then the air is slowly exhaled as the left arm strikes out at the level of the solar plexus, with the palm of the hand turned upward; the palm is held flat and the fingers are together.

Then the hand is clasped into a fist. The arm moves to the back, striking from the height of the hips with a backhand blow (fig. 140). The exhalation ends as the hand opens.

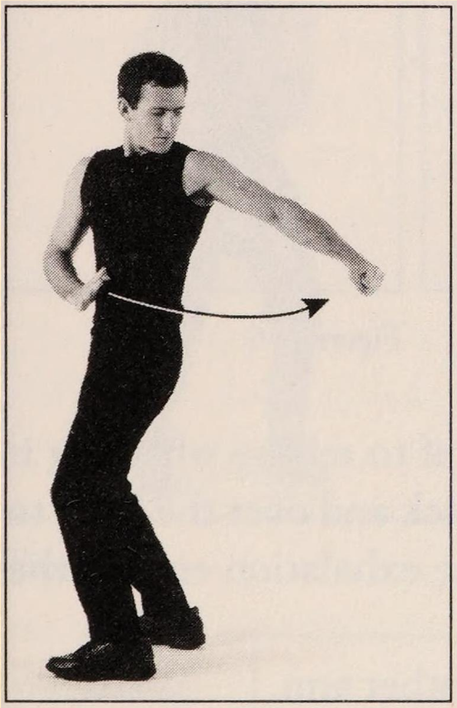


Figure 140

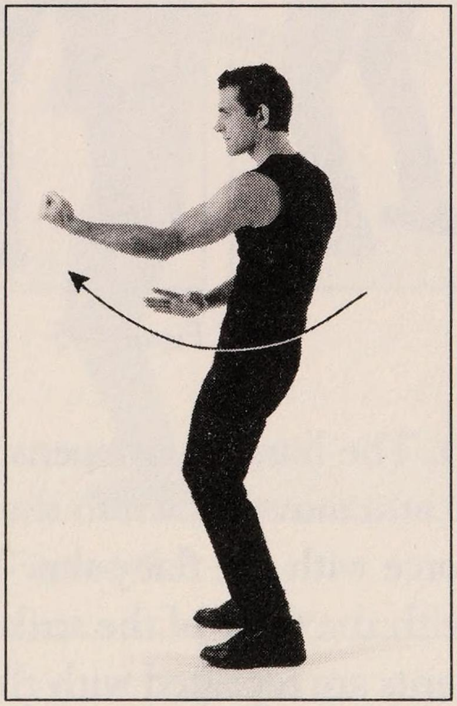


Figure 141

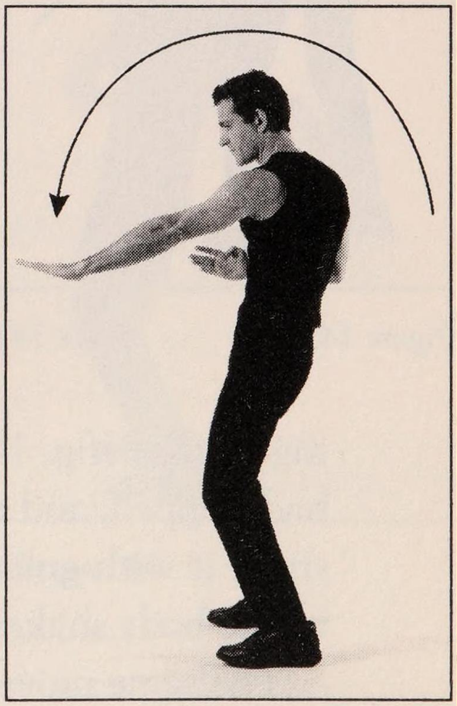


Figure 142

Another deep inhalation is taken. A slow exhalation follows while the palm of the open hand, still in back of the body, taps ten times as if lightly hitting a solid round object. Then the hand is clasped into a fist before the arm moves to the front in a swinglike punch that strikes an area in front of the V spot, an arm's length away from it (fig. 141). The hand opens as if releasing something held in it. The arm moves down, back, and then over the head and strikes with the palm down in front of the V spot, as if breaking whatever it has released. The exhalation ends then (fig. 142). The same sequence of movements is repeated with the right arm.

### 11. Transferring Energy from the Front to the Back and the Back to the Front with the Hook of the Arm

A deep inhalation is made. Then the air is slowly exhaled as the left .inn moves forward with the palm of the hand turned upward. The hand is quickly clasped into a fist. The fisted hand rotates until the back of the hand is turned upward and strikes over the shoulder to the back. The fisted palm faces upward. The hand opens and turns to face downward, and the exhalation ends. Another deep inhalation is taken. Then a slow exhalation begins as the hand, made into a downward hook, scoops three times, as if rolling a solid substance into a ball (fig. 143). The ball is tossed upward to the level of the head with a flick of the hand and forearm (fig. 144), and quickly grabbed with the hand bent again at the wrist like a hook (fig. 145). The arm moves to the front, then to the height of the right shoulder and strikes forward to an area right in front of the V spot an arm's length away from it, using the wrist and the back of the hand as a striking surface (fig. 146). The hand then opens as if to release whatever it had trapped, and the arm moves down to the back and over the head to strike it with great force with the flat palm. The exhalation ends as the whole body shakes with the force of the strike. The same movements are repeated with the other arm.

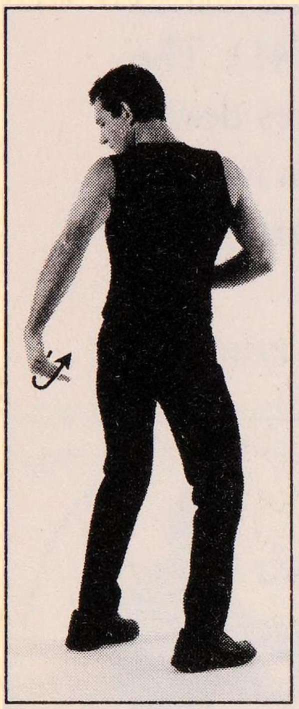


Figure 143

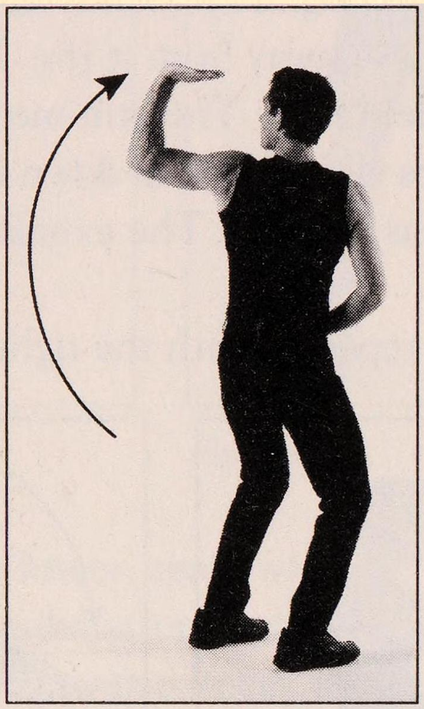


Figure 144

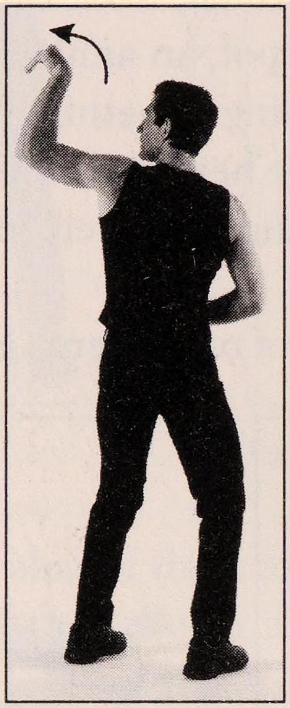


Figure 145

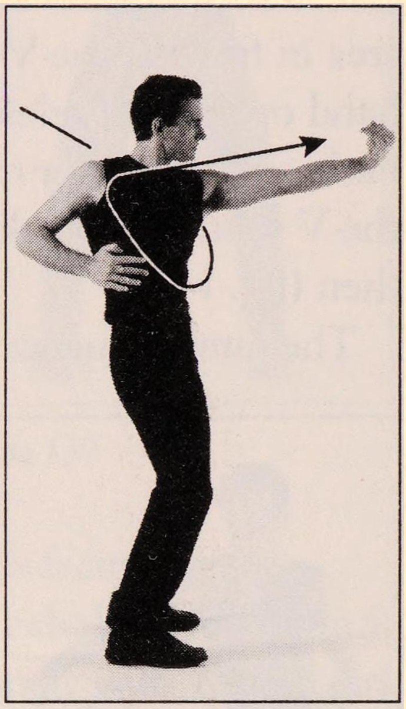


Figure 146

### 12. Transferring Energy from the Front to the Back and the Back to the Front with Three Blows

A deep inhalation is taken. A slow exhalation follows as the left arm strikes forward with the hand open, the flat palm turned upward. The hand is quickly clasped into a fist, and the arm retrieves as if to deliver an elbow blow to the back. Then it moves laterally to the right and delivers a side punch with the forearm rubbing on the body (fig. 147). The elbow is retrieved again as if to deliver an elbow blow to the back. The arm is extended and moved out to the left side and to the back, to deliver the fourth blow behind the body with the back of the fisted hand. The exhalation ends as the hand opens (fig. 148).

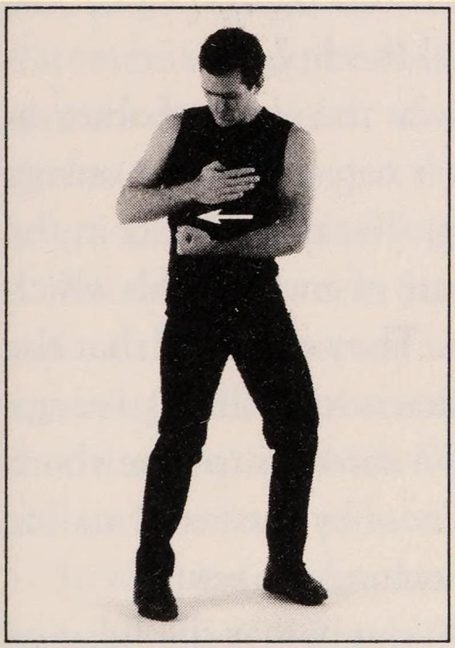


Figure 147

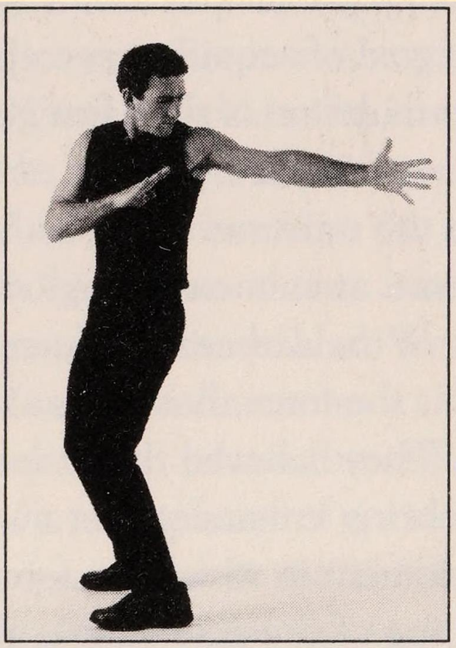


Figure 148

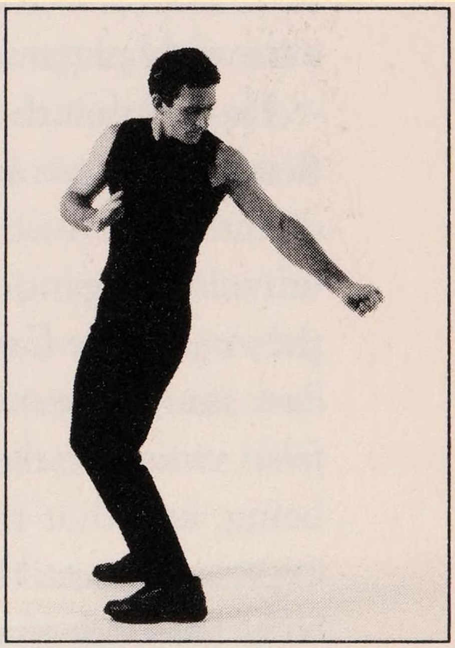


Figure 149

A deep inhalation is taken again. A slow exhalation follows as the hand, bent downward into a hook, scoops three times. Then the hand grabs as if it were clasping something solid (fig. 149). The arm swings to the front at the level of the center for decisions. It continues to the right shoulder; there the forearm makes a loop upward and delivers a back-fist blow to the area in front of the V spot, an arm's length away from it (fig. 150). The hand opens as if to release something that it was clasping. Then it moves down, goes behind the body, comes above the head, with the palm of the hand down, and smashes whatever it released with a forceful blow of the open hand. The slow exhalation ends there (fig. 151).

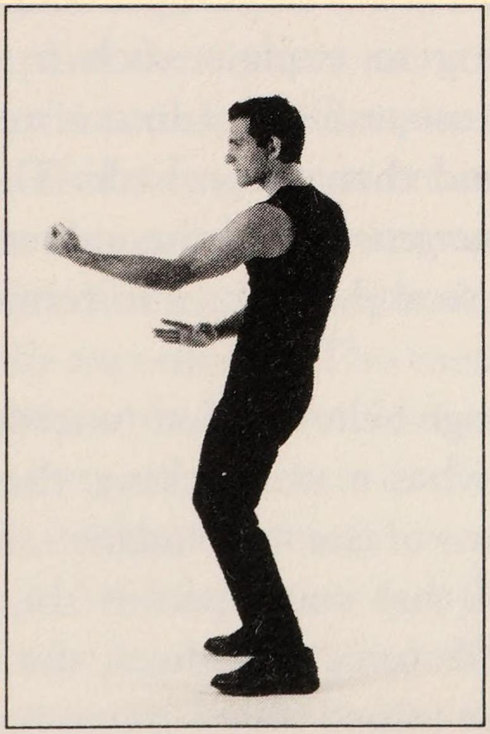


Figure 150

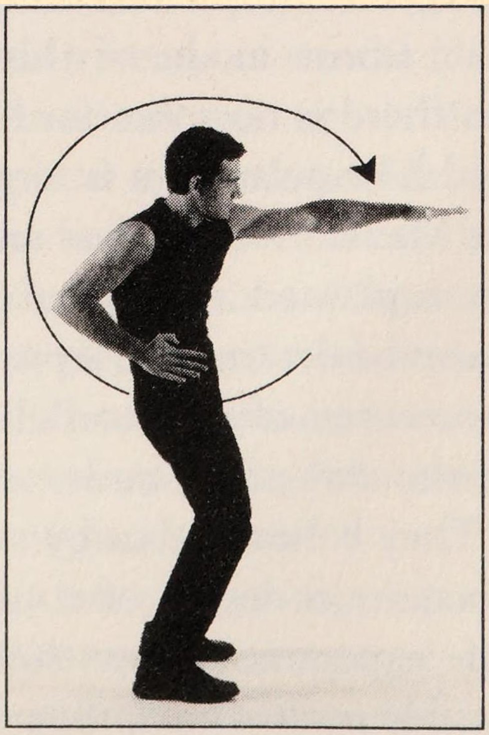


Figure 151

The same movements are repeated with the right arm.

## Third Series: Second Group: The *Recapitulation*

The recapitulation, according to what don Juan taught his disciples, was a technique discovered by the sorcerers of ancient Mexico, and used by every shaman practitioner from then on, to view and relive all the experiences of their lives, in order to achieve two transcendental goals: one, the abstract goal of fulfilling a universal code that demands that awareness must be relinquished at the moment of death; and two, the extremely pragmatic goal of acquiring perceptual fluidity.

He said that the formulation of their first goal was the result of observations that those sorcerers made by means of their capacity to *see* energy directly as it flows in the universe. They had seen that there exists in the universe a gigantic force, an immense conglomerate of energy fields which they called the Eagle, or the dark sea of awareness. They observed that the dark sea of awareness is the force that lends awareness to all living beings, from viruses to men. They believed that it lends awareness to a newborn being, and that this being enhances that awareness by means of it's life experiences until a moment in which the force demands it's return.

In the understanding of those sorcerers, all living beings die because they are forced to return the awareness lent to them. Sorcerers throughout the ages have understood that there is no way for what modern man calls our linear mode of thinking to explain such a phenomenon, because there is no room for a cause-and-effect line of reasoning as to why and how awareness is lent and then taken back. The sorcerers of ancient Mexico viewed it as an energetic fact of the universe, a fact that can't be explained in terms of cause and effect, or in terms of a purpose which can be determined a priori.

The sorcerers of don Juan's lineage believed that to recapitulate meant to give the dark sea of awareness what it was seeking: their life experiences. They believed that by means of the recapitulation, however, they could acquire a degree of control that could permit them to separate their life experiences from their life force. For them, the two were not inextricably intertwined; they were joined only circumstantially.

Those sorcerers affirmed that the dark sea of awareness doesn't want to take the lives of human beings; it wants only their life experiences. Lack of discipline in human beings prevents them from separating the two forces, and in the end, they lose their lives, when it is meant that they lose only the force of their life experiences. Those sorcerers viewed the recapitulation as the procedure by which they could give the dark sea of awareness a substitute for their lives. They gave up their life experiences by recounting them, but they retained their life force.

The perceptual claims of sorcerers, when examined in terms of the linear concepts of our Western world, make no sense whatsoever. Western civilization has been in contact with the shamans of the New World for five hundred years, and there has never been a genuine attempt on the part of scholars to formulate a serious philosophical discourse based on statements made by those shamans. For instance, the recapitulation may seem to any member of the Western world to be congruous with psychoanalysis, something in the line of a psychological procedure, a sort of self-help technique. Nothing could be further from the truth.

According to don Juan Matus, man always loses by default. In the case of the premises of sorcery, he believed that Western man is missing a tremendous opportunity for the enhancement of his awareness, and that the way in which Western man relates himself to the universe, life, and awareness is only one of a multiplicity of options.

To recapitulate, for shaman practitioners, means to give to an incomprehensible force- the dark sea of awareness- the very thing it seems to be looking for: their life experiences, that is to say, the awareness that they have enhanced through those very life experiences. Since don Juan could not possibly explain these phenomena to me in terms of standard logic, he said that all that sorcerers could aspire to do was to accomplish the feat of training their life force without knowing how it was done. He also said that there were thousands of sorcerers who had achieved this. They had retained their life force after they had given the dark sea of awareness the force of their life experiences. This meant to don Juan that those sorcerers didn't die in the usual sense in which we understand death, but that they transcended it by retaining their life force and vanishing from the face of the earth, embarked on a definitive journey of perception.

The belief of the shamans of don Juan's lineage was that when death takes place in this fashion, all of our being is turned into energy, a special kind of energy that retains the mark of our individuality. Don Juan tried to explain this in a metaphorical sense, saying that we are composed of a number of single nations: the nation of the lungs, the nation of the heart, the nation of the stomach, the nation of the kidneys, and so on. Each of these nations sometimes works independently of the others, but at the moment of death, all of them are unified into one single entity. The sorcerers of don Juan's lineage called this state total freedom. For those sorcerers, death is a unifier, and not an annihilator, as it is for the average man.

"Is this state immortality, don Juan?" I asked.

"This is in no way immortality," he replied. "It is merely the entrance into an evolutionary process, using the only medium for evolution that man has at his disposal: awareness. The sorcerers of my lineage were convinced that man could not evolve biologically any further; therefore, they considered man's awareness to be the only medium for evolution. At the moment of dying, sorcerers are not annihilated by death, but are transformed into inorganic beings: beings that have awareness, but not an organism. To be transformed into an inorganic being was evolution for them, and it meant that a new, indescribable type of awareness was lent to them, an awareness that would last for veritably millions of years, but which would also someday have to be returned to the giver: the dark sea of awareness."

One of the most important findings of the shamans of don Juan's lineage was that, like everything else in the universe, our world is a combination of two opposing, and at the same time complementary, forces. One of those forces is the world we know, which those sorcerers called the world of organic beings. The other force is something they called the world of inorganic beings.

"The world of inorganic beings," don Juan said, "is populated by beings that possess awareness, but not an organism. They are conglomerates of energy fields, just like we are. To the eye of a seer, instead of being luminous, as human beings are, they are rather opaque. They are not round, but long, candlelike energetic configurations. They are, in essence, conglomerates of energy fields which have cohesion and boundaries just like we do. They are held together by the same agglutinating force that holds our energy fields together."

"Where is this inorganic world, don Juan?" I asked.

"It is our twin world," he replied. "It occupies the same time and space as our world, but the type of awareness of our world is so different from the type of awareness of the inorganic world that we never notice the presence of inorganic beings, although they do notice ours."

"Are those inorganic beings human beings that have evolved?" I asked.

"Not at all!" he exclaimed. "The inorganic beings of our twin world have been intrinsically inorganic from the start, the same way that we have always been intrinsically organic beings, also from the start. They are beings whose consciousness can evolve just like ours, and it doubtlessly does, but I have no firsthand knowledge of how this happens. What I do know, however, is that a human being whose awareness has evolved is a bright, luminescent, round inorganic being of a special kind."

Don Juan gave me a series of descriptions of this evolutionary process, which I always took to be poetic metaphors. I singled out the one that pleased me the most, which was total freedom. I fancied a human being that enters into total freedom to be the most courageous, the most imaginative being possible. Don Juan said that I was not fancying anything at all - that to enter into total freedom, a human being must call on his or her sublime side, which, he said, human beings have, but which it never occurs to them to use.

Don Juan described the second, the pragmatic goal of the recapitulation as the acquisition of fluidity. The sorcerers' rationale behind this had to do with one of the most elusive subjects of sorcery: the *assemblage point*, a point of intense luminosity the size of a tennis ball, perceivable when sorcerers *see* a human being as a conglomerate of energy fields.

Sorcerers like don Juan *see* that trillions of energy fields in the form of filliments of light from the universe at large converge on the *assemblage point* and go through it. This confluence of filaments gives the *assemblage point* it's brilliancy. The *assemblage point* makes it possible for a human being to perceive those trillions of energy filaments by turning them into sensorial data.

The *assemblage point* then interprets this data as the world of everyday life, that is to say, in terms of human socialization and human potential.

To recapitulate is to relive every, or nearly every, experience that we have had, and in doing so to displace the *assemblage point*, ever so slightly or a great deal, propelling it by the force of memory to adopt the position that it had when the event being recapitulated took place. This act of going back and forth from previous positions to the current one gives the shaman practitioners the necessary fluidity to withstand extraordinary odds in their journeys into infinity. To the *Tensegrity* practitioners, the recapitulation gives the necessary fluidity to withstand odds which are not in any way part of their habitual cognition.

The recapitulation as a formal procedure was done in ancient times by recollecting every person the practitioners knew and every experience in which they had taken part. Don Juan suggested that in my case, which is the case of modern man, I make a written list of all the persons that I had met in my life, as a mnemonic device. Once I had written that list, he proceeded to tell me how to use it. I had to take the first person on the list, which went backwards in time from the present to the time of my very first life experience, and set up, in my memory, my last interaction with that first person on my list. This act is called arranging the event to be recapitulated.

A detailed recollection of minutiae is required as the proper means to hone one's capacity to remember. This recollection entails getting all the pertinent physical details, such as the surroundings where the event being recollected took place. Once the event is arranged, one should enter into the locale itself, as if actually going into it, paying special attention to any relevant physical configurations. If, for instance, the interaction took place in an office, what should be remembered is the floor, the doors, the walls, the pictures, the windows, the desks, the objects on the desks, everything that could have been observed in a glance and then forgotten.

The recapitulation as a formal procedure must begin by the recounting of events that have just taken place. In this fashion, the primacy of the experience takes precedence. Something that has just happened is something that one can remember with great accuracy. Sorcerers always count on the fact that human beings are capable of storing detailed information that they are not aware of, and that that detail is what the dark sea of awareness is after.

The actual recapitulation of the event requires that one breathe deeply, fanning the head, so to speak, very slowly and gently from side to side, beginning on one side, left or right, whichever. This fanning of the head was done as many times as needed, while remembering all the details accessible. Don Juan said that sorcerers talked about this act as breathing in all of one's own feelings spent in the event being recollected, and expelling all the unwanted moods and extraneous feelings that were left with us.

Sorcerers believe that the mystery of the recapitulation lies in the act of inhaling and exhaling. Since breathing is a life-sustaining function, sorcerers are certain that by means of it, one can also deliver to the dark sea of awareness the facsimile of one's life experiences. When I pressed don Juan for a rational explanation of this idea, his position was that things like the recapitulation could only be experienced, not explained. He said that in the act of doing, one can find liberation, and that to explain it was to dissipate our energy in fruitless efforts. His invitation was congruous with everything related to his knowledge: the invitation to take action.

The list of names is used in the recapitulation as a mnemonic device that propels memory into an inconceivable journey. Sorcerers' position in this respect is that remembering events that have just taken place prepares the ground for remembering events more distant in time with the same clarity and immediacy. To recollect experiences in this way is to relive them, and to draw from this recollection an extraordinary impetus that is capable of stirring energy dispersed from our centers of vitality, and returning it to them. Sorcerers refer to this *redeployment of energy* that the recapitulation causes as gaining fluidity after giving the dark sea of awareness what it is looking for.

On a more mundane level, the recapitulation gives practitioners the capacity to examine the repetition in their lives. Recapitulating can convince them, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that all of us are at the mercy of forces which ultimately make no sense, although at first sight they seem perfectly reasonable; such as being at the mercy of courtship. It seems that for some people, courtship is the pursuit of a lifetime. I have personally heard from people of advanced age that the only ideal that they had was to find a perfect companion, and that their aspiration was to have perhaps one year of happiness in love.

Don Juan Matus used to say to me, over my vehement protests, that the problem was that nobody really wanted to love anybody, but that every one of us wanted to be loved. He said that this obsession with courtship, taken at face value, was the most natural thing in the world to us. To hear a seventy-five year old man or woman say that they are still in search of a perfect companion is an affirmation of something idealistic, romantic, beautiful. However, to examine this obsession in the context of the endless repetitions of a lifetime makes it appear as it really is: something grotesque.

Don Juan assured me that if any behavioral change is going to be accomplished, it has to be done through the recapitulation, since it is the only vehicle that can enhance awareness by liberating one from the unvoiced demands of socialization, which are so automatic, so taken for granted, that they are not even noticed under normal conditions, much less examined.

The actual act of recapitulating is a lifetime endeavor. It takes years to exhaust the list of people, especially for those who have made the acquaintance of and have interacted with thousands of individuals. This list is augmented by the memory of impersonal events in which no people are involved, but which have to be examined because they are somehow related to the person being recapitulated.

Don Juan asserted that what the sorcerers of ancient Mexico sought avidly in recapitulating was the memory of interaction, because in interaction lie the deep effects of socialization, which they struggled to overcome by any means available.

## The Magical Passes for the *Recapitulation*

The recapitulation affects something that don Juan called the energy body. He formally explained the energy body as a conglomerate of energy fields that are the mirror image of the energy fields that make up the human body when it is *seen* directly as energy. He said that in the case of sorcerers, the physical body and the energy body are one single unit. The *magical* *passes* for the recapitulation bring the energy body to the physical body, which are essential for navigating into the unknown.

### 13. Forging the Trunk of the Energy Body

Don Juan said that the trunk of the energy body was forged with three strikes delivered with the palms of the hands. The hands are held at the level of the ears with the palms facing forward, and from that position they strike forward, at the level of the shoulders, as if they were striking the shoulders of a well-developed body. The hands then move back to their original position around the ears, with the palms facing forward, and strike the midtrunk of that imaginary body at the level of the chest. The second strike is not as wide as the first one, and the third strike is much narrower, because it strikes the waistline of a triangular-shaped trunk (fig. 152).

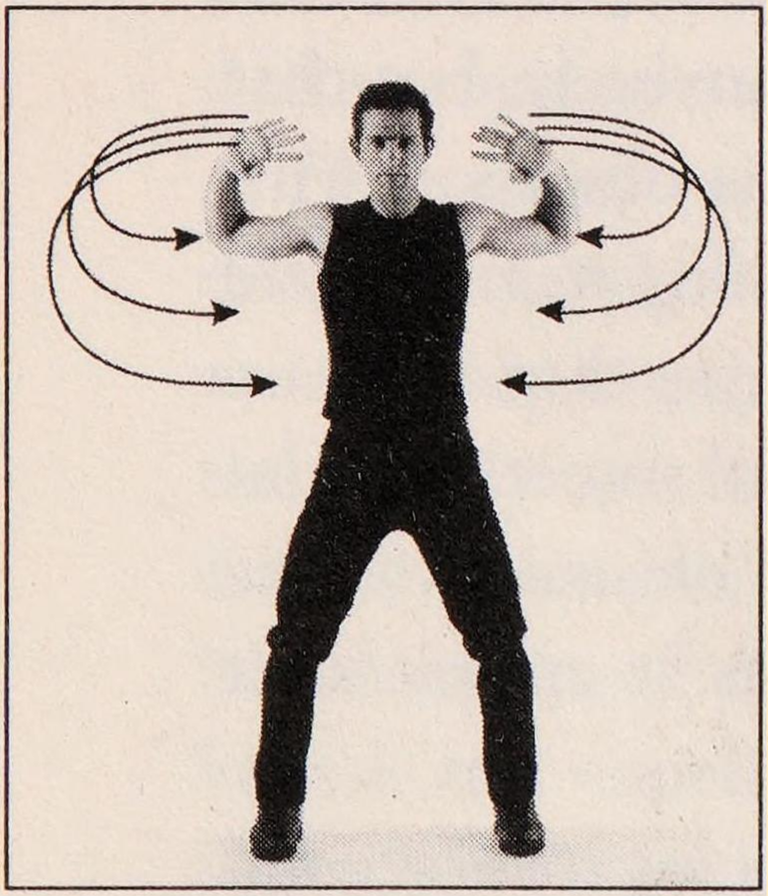


Figure 152

### 14. Slapping the Energy Body

The left and the right hands each come down from above the head. The palm of each hand bears down, creating a current of energy that defines each arm, forearm, and hand of the energy body. The left hand hits across the body to strike the left hand of the energy body (fig. 153) and then the right hand does the same: it hits across the body to strike the right hand of the energy body. This magical pass defines the arms and forearms, especially the hands, of the energy body.

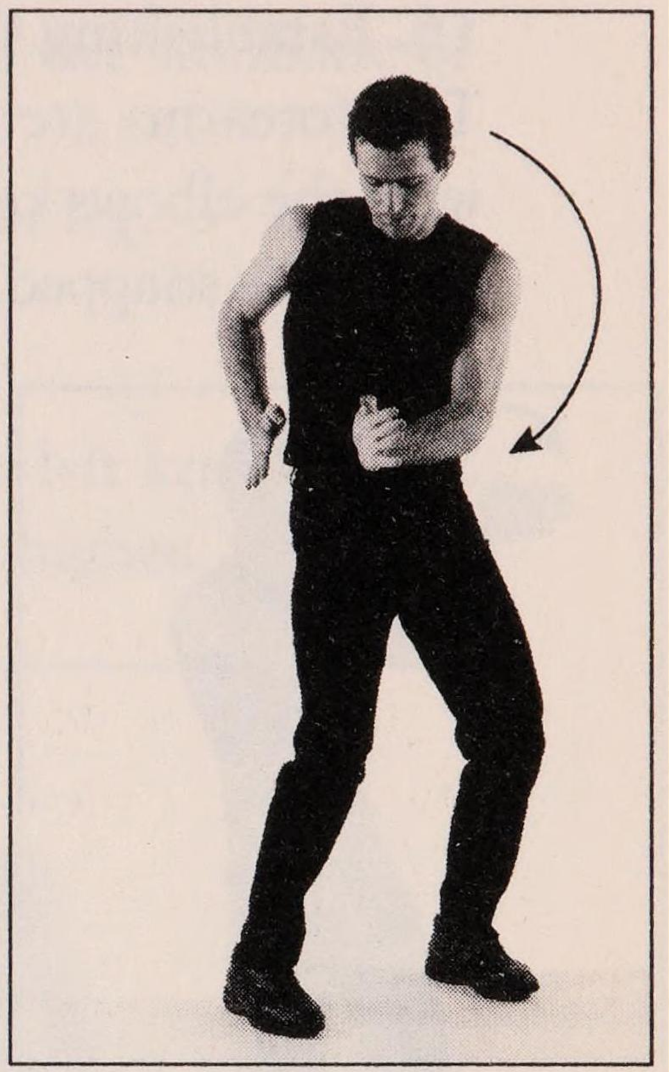


Figure 153

### 15. Spreading the Energy Body Laterally

The wrists are crossed in the shape of a letter X in front of the body, almost touching it. The wrists are held bent backwards at a ninety-degree angle to the forearm, at the level of the solar plexus. The left wrist is on top of the right one (fig. 154). From there, the hands spread to the sides in unison, in a slow motion, as if they met with tremendous resistance (fig. 155).

When the arms reach their maximum aperture, they are brought back to the center, with the palms turned at a ninety-degree angle in relation to the forearms, creating in this fashion the sensation of pushing solid matter from both sides to the center of the body. The left hand crosses on top of the right as the hands get ready for another lateral strike.

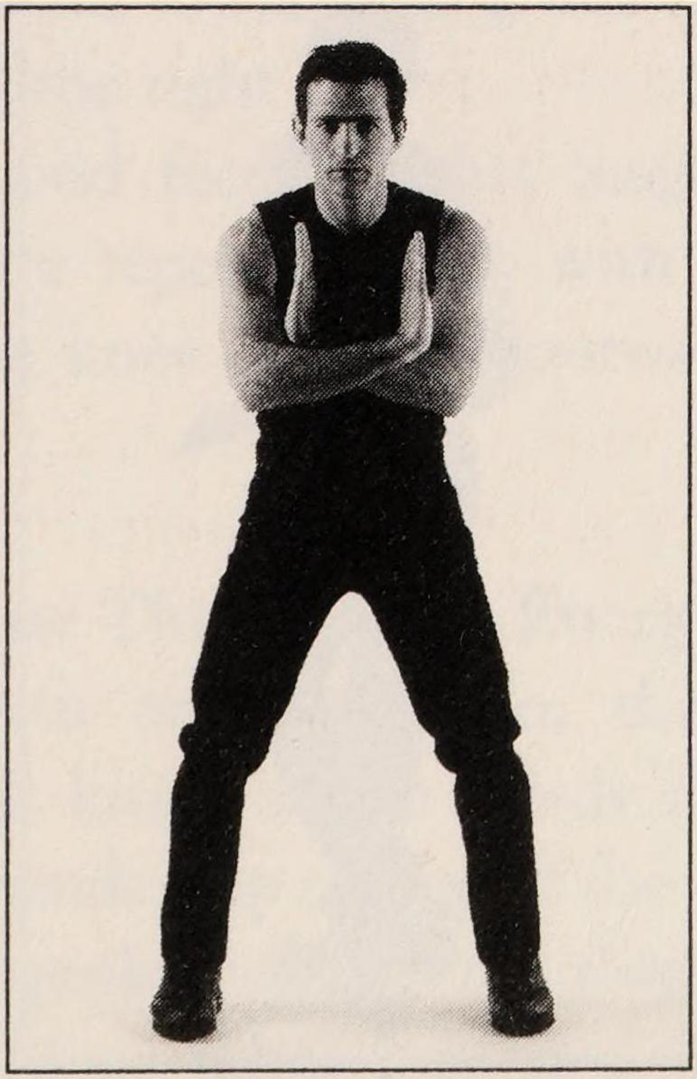


Figure 154

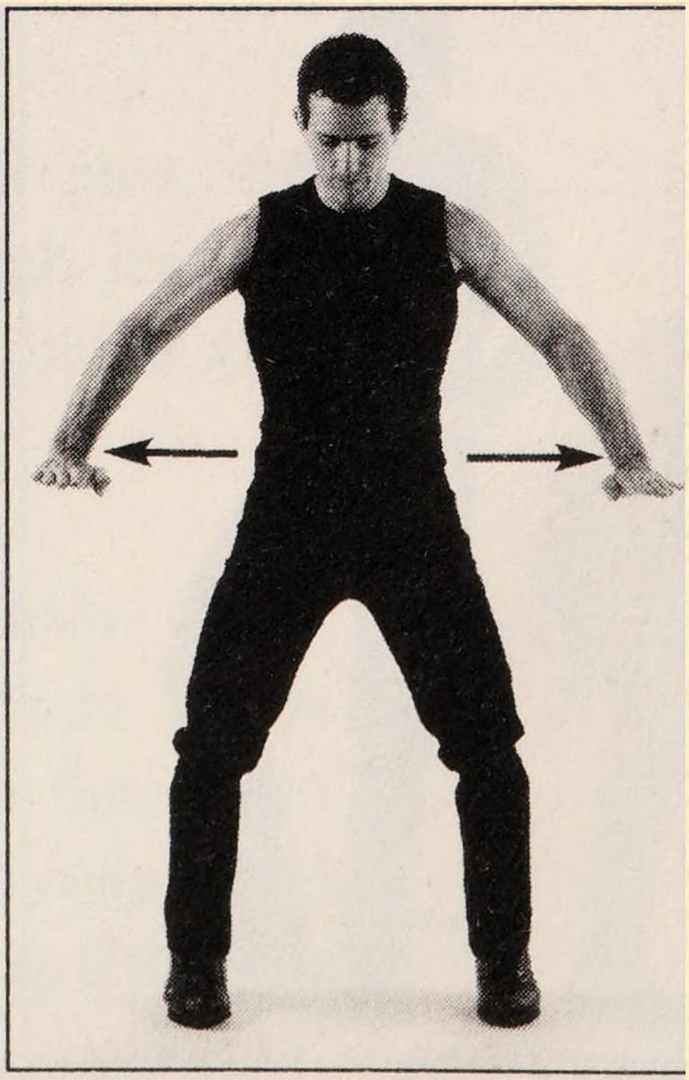


Figure 155

While the physical body as a conglomerate of energy fields has super-defined boundaries, the energy body lacks that feature. Spreading energy laterally gives the energy body the defined boundaries that it lacks.

## 16. Establishing the Core of the Energy Body

The forearms are held in a vertical position at the level of the chest, with the elbows kept in close to the body, at the width of the trunk. The wrists are snapped back gently, and then forward with great force, without moving the forearms (fig. 156).

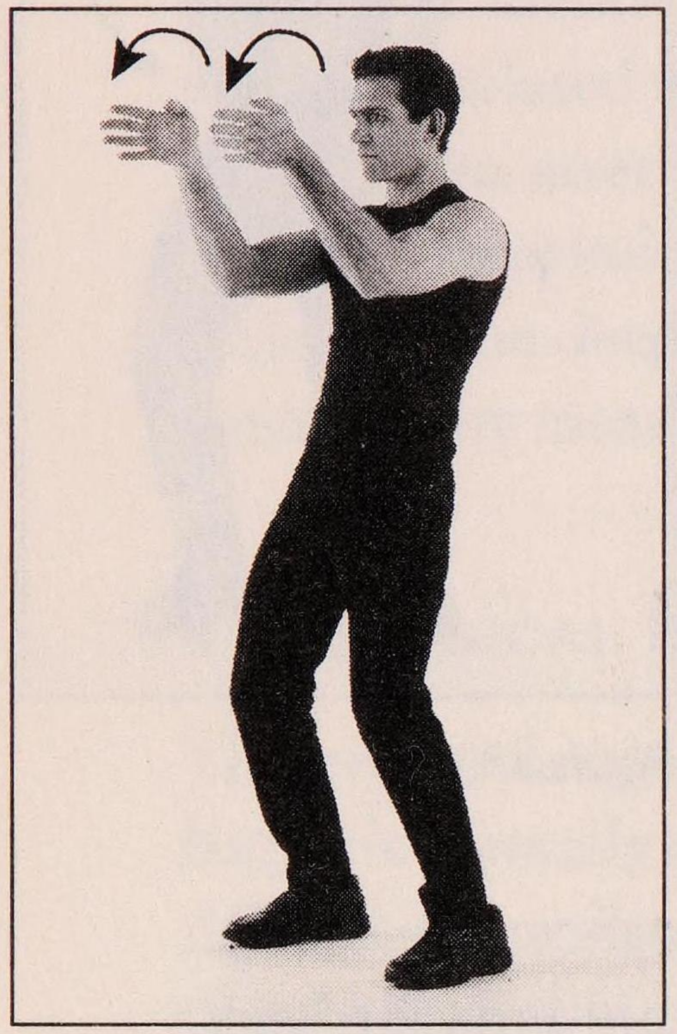


Figure 156

The human body, as a conglomerate of energy fields, has not only super-defined boundaries, but a core of compact luminosity, which shamans call the band of man, or the energy fields with which man is most familiar. The idea of shamans is that within the luminous sphere, which is also the totality of man's energetic possibilities, there are areas of energy of which human beings are not at all aware. Those are the energy fields located at the maximum distance from the band of man. To establish the core of the energy body is to fortify the energy body in order for it to venture into those areas of unknown energy.

### 17. Forging the Heels and the Calves of the Energy Body

The left foot is held in front of the body with the heel raised to midcalf. The heel is turned out to a position perpendicular to the other leg. Then the left heel strikes to the right as if a kick with the heel were being delivered, about six or seven inches away from the shinbone of the right leg (figs. 157, 158).

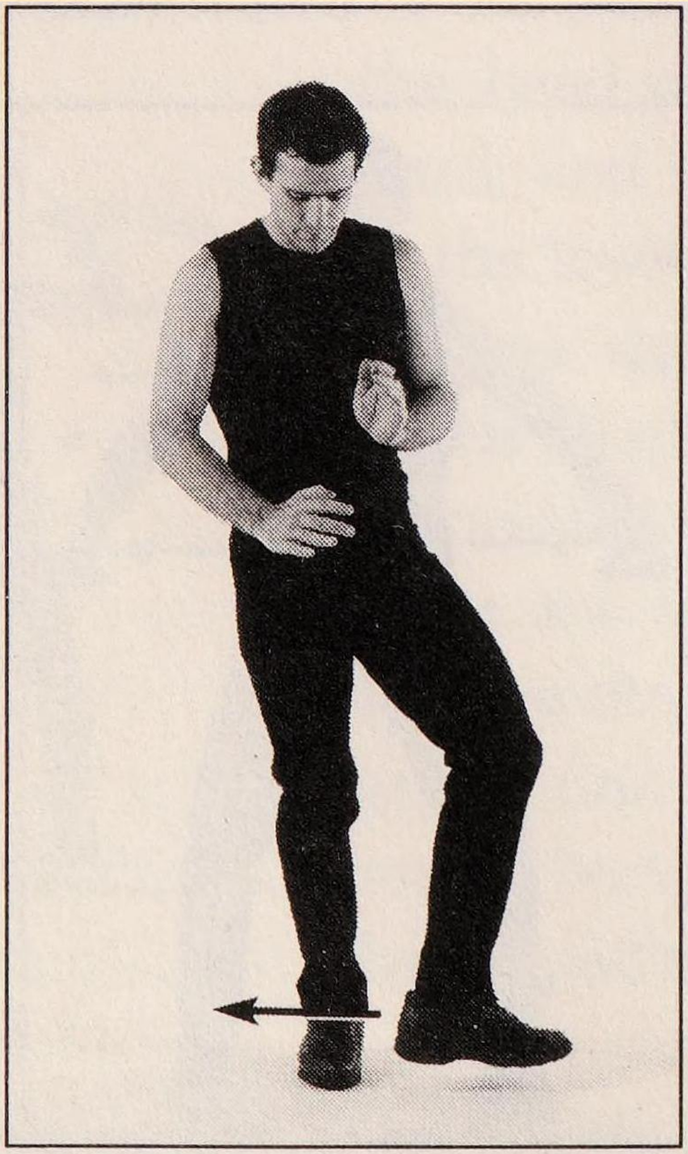


Figure 157

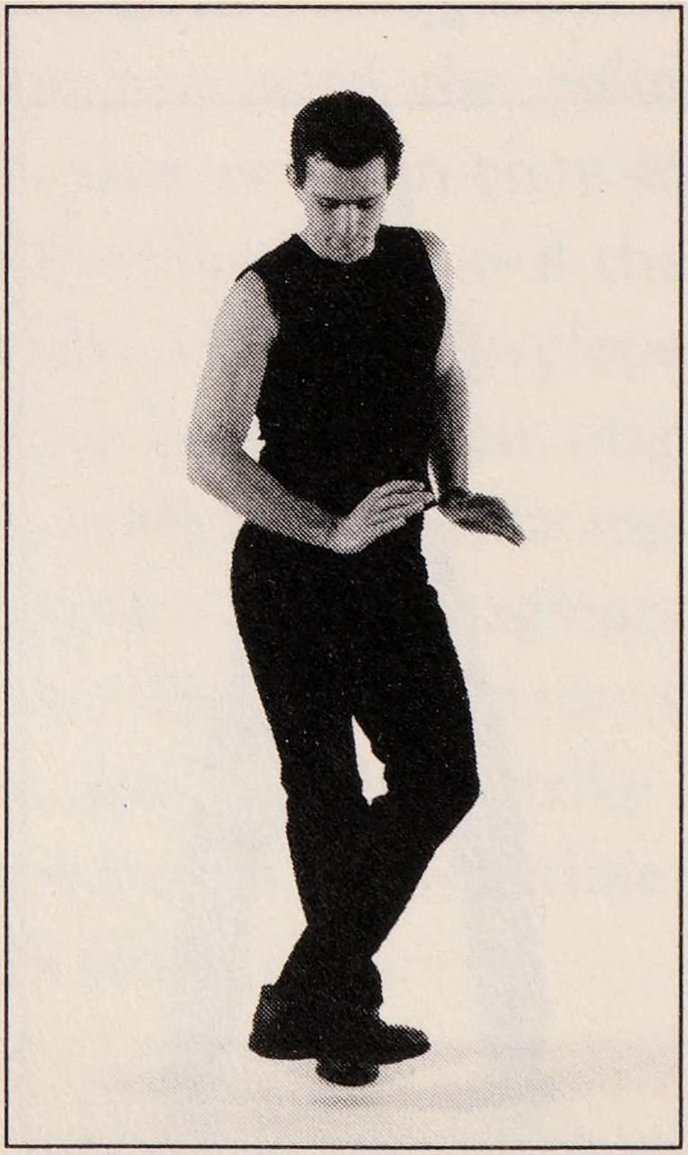


Figure 158

The same movement is then executed with the other leg.

### 18. Forging the Knees of the Energy Body

This magical pass has two facets. In the first facet the left knee is bent and raised to the level of the hips, or if possible even higher. The total weight of the body is placed on the right leg, which stands with the knee slightly bent forward. Three circles are drawn with the left knee, moving it inward toward the groin (fig. 159). The same movement is repeated with the right leg.

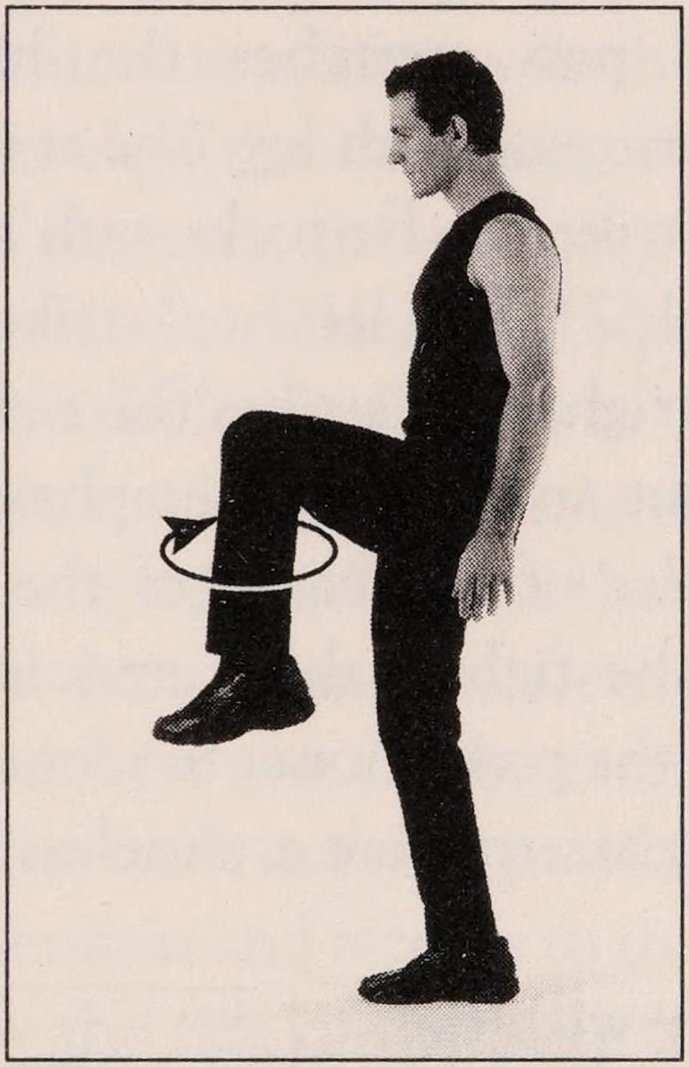


Figure 159

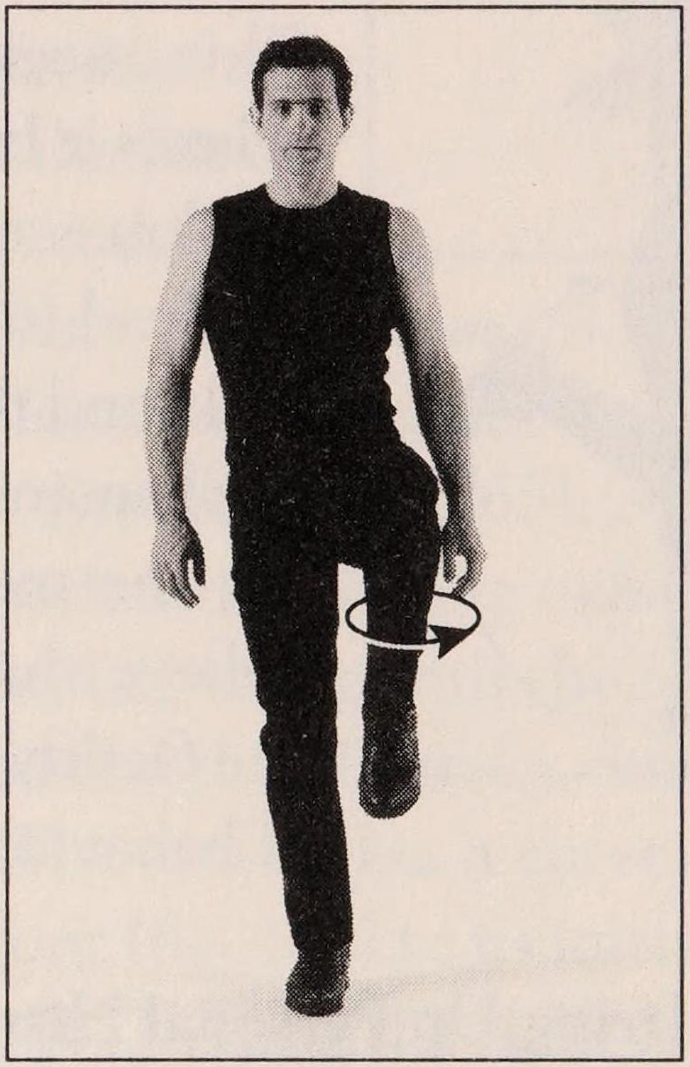


Figure 160

In the second facet of this magical pass, the movements are repeated again with each leg, but I Ins time, the knee draws an outward circle (fig. 160).

### 19. Forging the Thighs of the Energy Body

Beginning with an exhalation, the body bends slightly at the knees as the hands slide down the thinks. The hands stop on top of the kneecaps, and then they are pulled back up the thighs to the level of the hips with an inhalation, as if they were dragging a solid substance. There is a slight quality of a claw to each hand. The body straightens as this part of the movement is executed (fig. 161). With the opposite breathing pattern, the movement is repeated, inhaling as the knees bend and the hands go down to the tops of the kneecaps, and exhaling as they are pulled back.

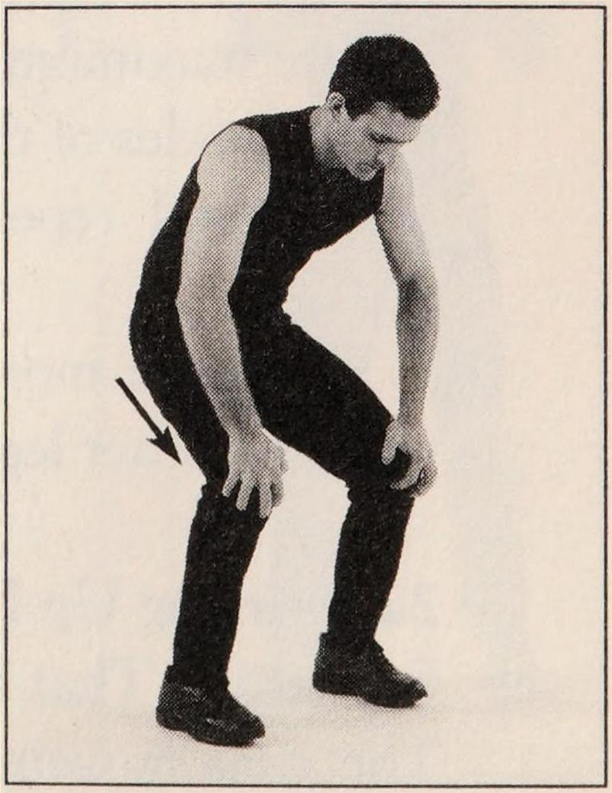


Figure 161

### 20. Stirring Up Personal History by Making It Flexible

This magical pass stretches the hamstring and relaxes it by bringing each leg, one at a time, bent at the knee, to strike the buttocks with a gentle tap of the heel (fig. 162). The left heel strikes the left buttock, and the right heel strikes the right one.

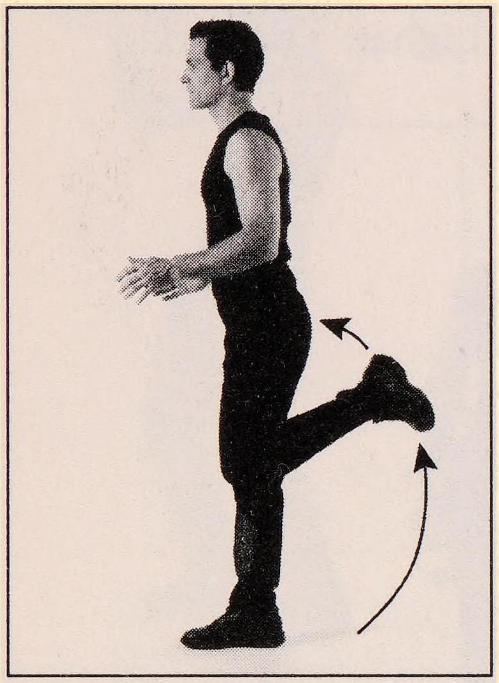


Figure 162

Shamans put an enormous emphasis on tightening the muscles of the backs of the thighs. They believe that the fighter those muscles, the greater the facility of the practitioner to identify and get rid of behavioral patterns that are useless.

### 21. Stirring Up Personal History with the Heel to the Ground by Tapping It Repeatedly

The right leg is set at a ninety-degree angle with the left. The left foot is placed as far as possible in front of the body as the body almost sits on the right leg. The tension and contraction of the back muscles of the right leg are maximum, as is the stretching of the back muscles of the left leg. The left leg taps the ground repeatedly with the heel (fig. 163). The same movements are then executed with the other leg.

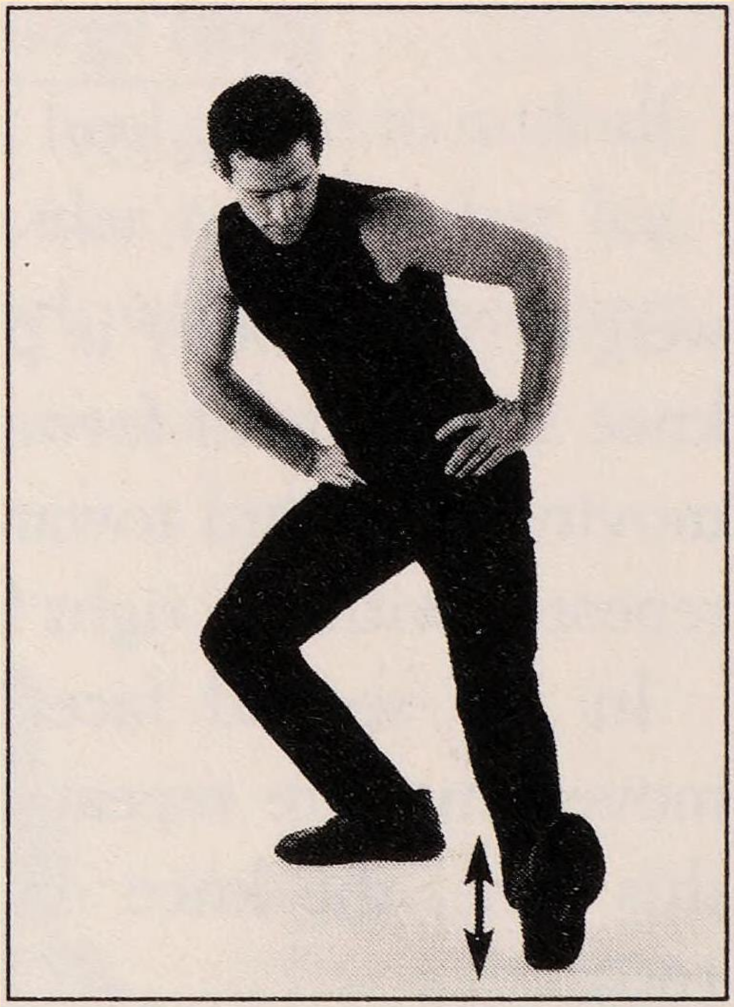


Figure 163

### 22. Stirring Up Personal History with the Heel to the Ground by Sustaining That Position

The same movements are executed in this magical pass as in the previous one, again with each leg, but instead of tapping with the heel, the body is kept at an even tension by holding the stretch of the leg (fig. 164). The following four *magical passes*, since they entail deep inhalations and exhalations, have to be done sparingly.

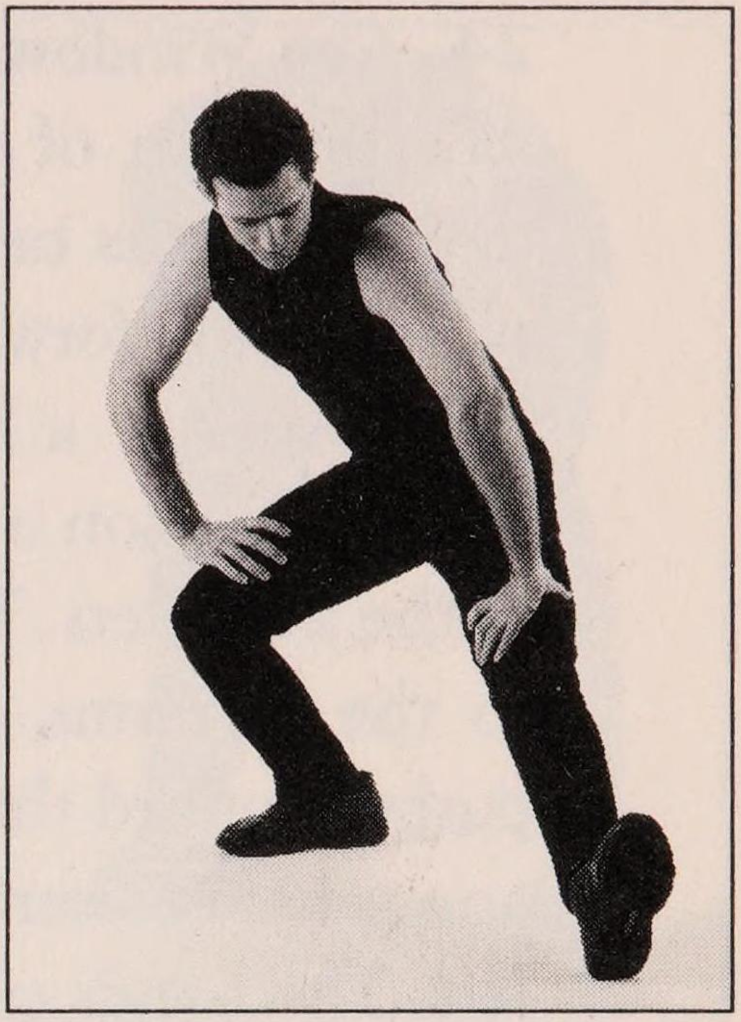


Figure 164

## 23. The Recapitulation Wings

A deep inhalation is taken as both forearms are raised to the level of the shoulders, with the hands at the level of the ears, palms facing forward. The forearms are held vertically and equidistant from Figure 164 each other. An exhalation follows as the forearms are pulled back as far as possible without slanting them in any direction (fig. 165). Another deep inhalation is taken. Within the duration of one long exhalation, both arms each draw a winglike semicircle, beginning with the left arm moving forward as far as it can be extended and then laterally, drawing a semicircle to the back as far as possible. The arm makes a curve at the end of this extension and returns to the front (fig. 166) to it's initial resting position by the side of the body (fig. 167). Then the right arm follows the same pattern within the same exhalation. Once these movements are completed, a deep abdominal breath is taken.

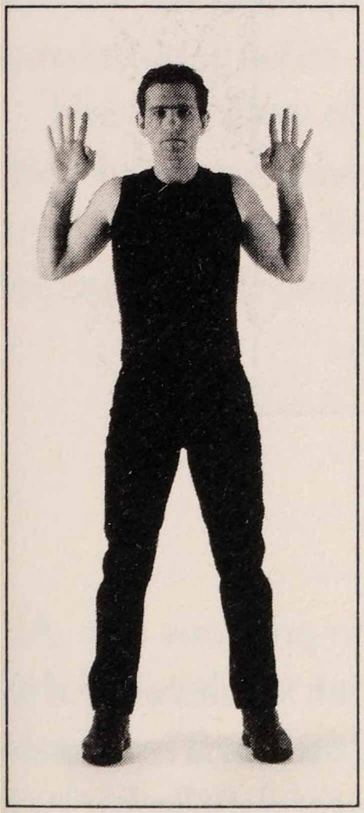


Figure 165

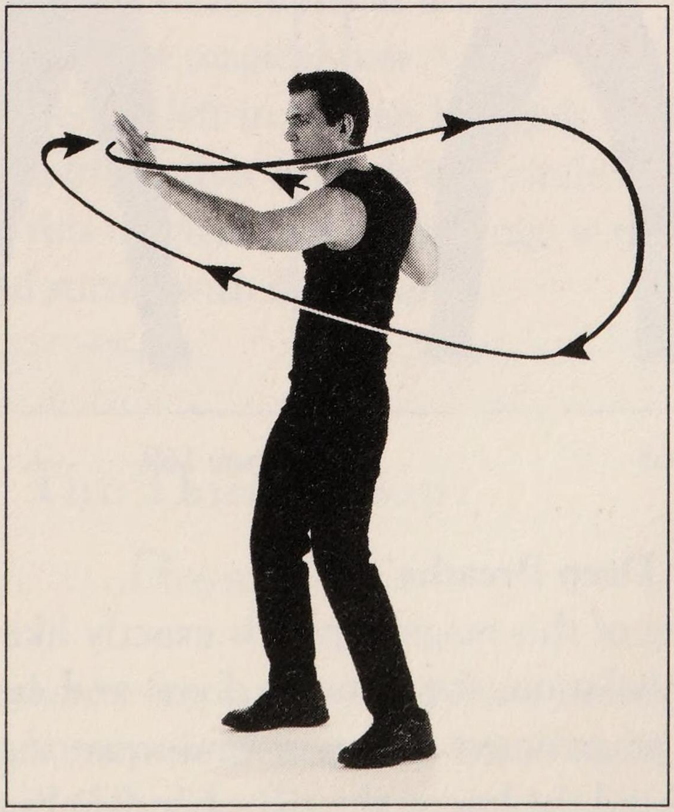


Figure 166

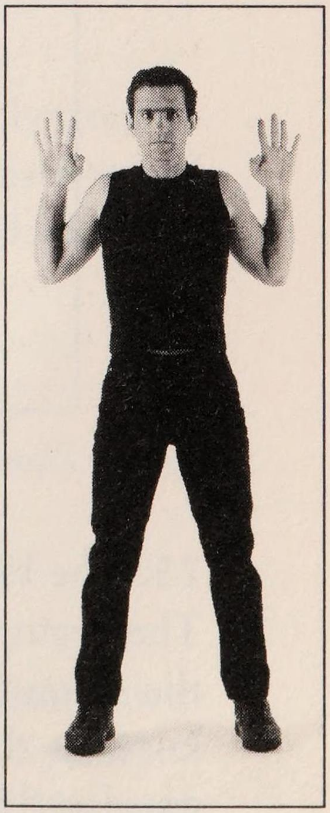


Figure 167

### 24. The Window of Recapitulation

The first part of this magical pass is exactly like the preceding one; a deep breath is taken with the hands raised to the ear level, with the palms facing forward. The forearms maintain a perfect verticality. This is followed by a long exhalation as the arms are pulled backwards. A deep inhalation is taken as the elbows are extended laterally at the level of the shoulders. The hands are bent at a ninety-degree angle in relation to the forearms, the fingers pointing upward. The hands are slowly pushed toward the center of the body until the forearms cross. The left arm is held closer to the body and the right arm is placed in front of the left. The hands create in this fashion what don Juan called the window of recapitulation: an opening in front of the eyes that looks like a small window, through which, don Juan affirmed, a practitioner could peer into infinity (fig. 168). A deep exhalation follows as the body straightens; the elbows are extended laterally and the hands are straightened out and kept at the same level as the elbows (fig. 169).

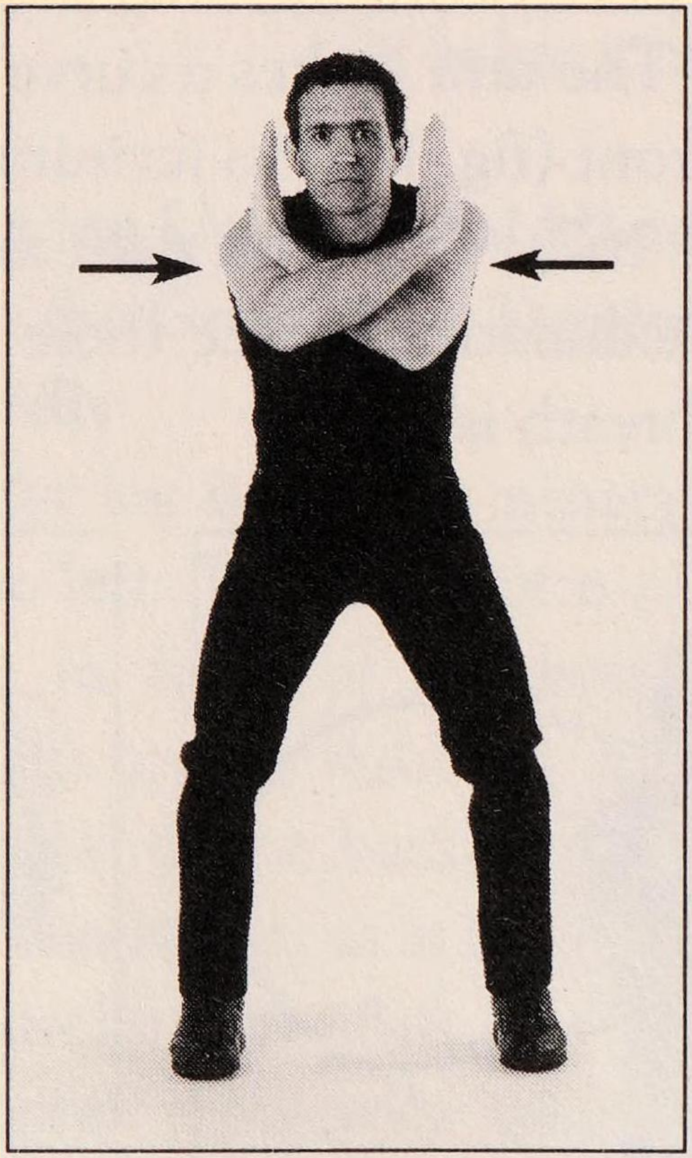


Figure 168

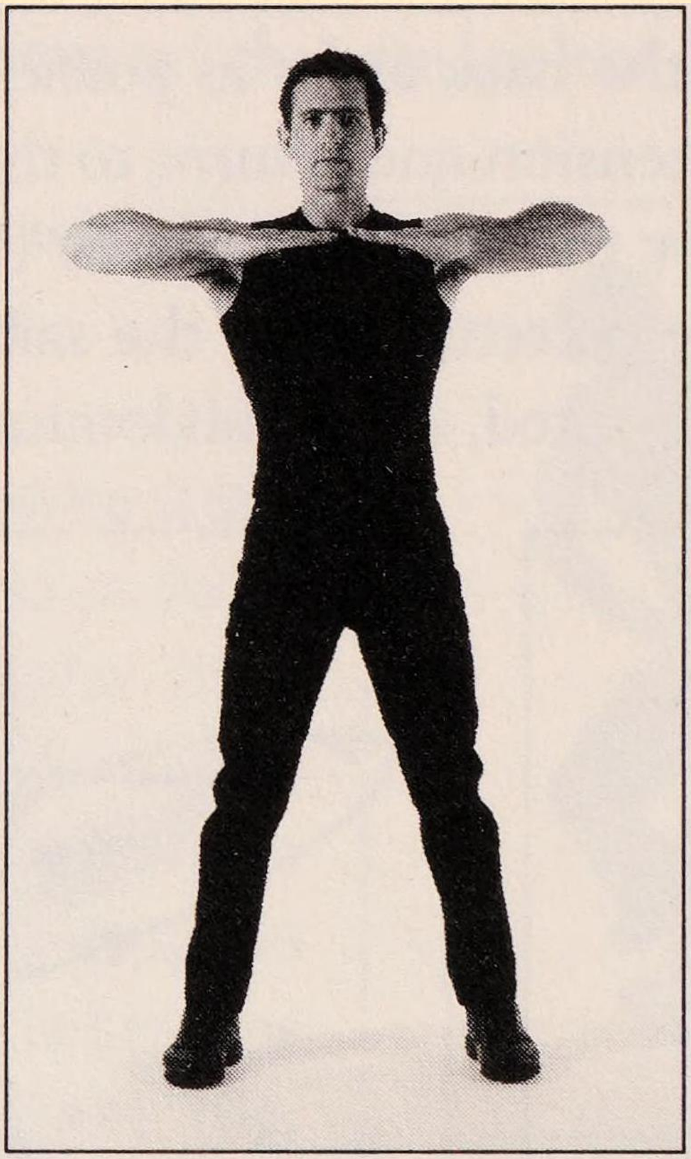


Figure 169

## 25. The Five Deep Breaths

The beginning of this magical pass is exactly like the previous two. At the second inhalation, the arms go down and cross at the level of the knees as the practitioner adopts a semi-squatting position. The hands are placed behind the knees; the right hand grabs the tendons in back of the left knee, and the left hand, with the left forearm on top of the right, grabs the tendons in back of the right knee. The index and middle fingers grab the outer tendons there and the thumb is wrapped around the inner part of the knee. The exhalation ends then, and a deep inhalation is taken, accompanied by pressing the tendon (fig. 170). Five breaths are taken in this fashion.

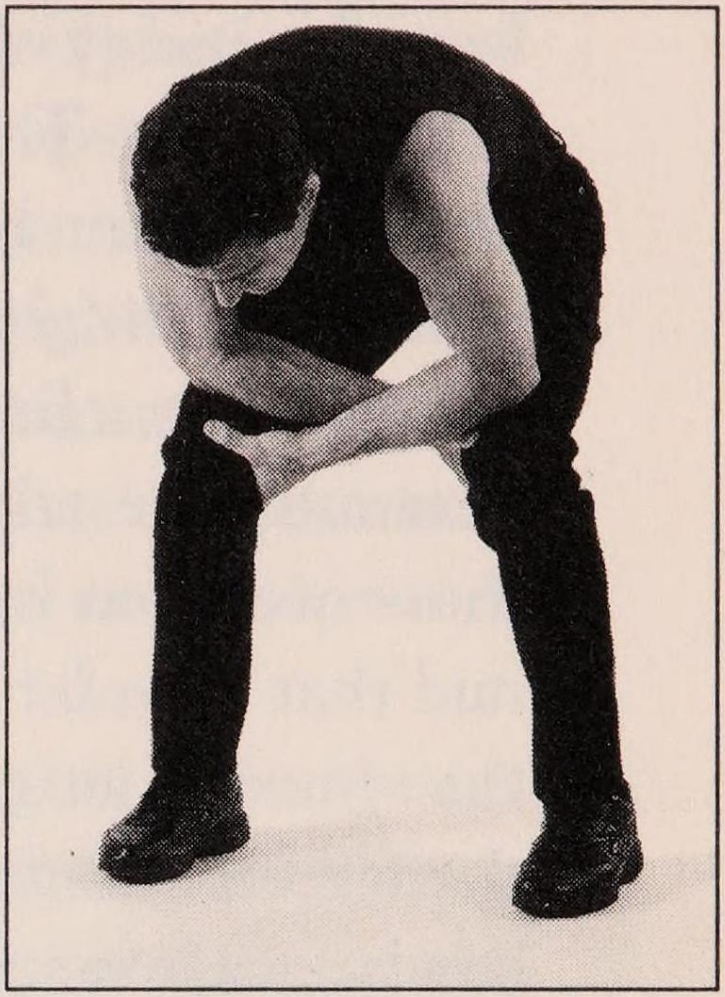


Figure 170

This magical pass causes the back to be straight and the head to be in alignment with the spine, and is used to take deep breaths that fill the top as well as the lower part of the lungs by pushing the diaphragm downward.

### 26. Drawing Energy from the Feet

The first part of this magical pass is exactly the same as the beginning of the other three of this series. On the second inhalation, the forearms go down and wrap around the ankles, going from the inside to the outside as the practitioner adopts a squatting position. The backs of the hands rest on top of the toes, and in this fashion, three deep inhalations and three deep exhalations are made (fig. 171). After the last exhalation, the body straightens as a deep inhalation is taken to finish the magical pass.

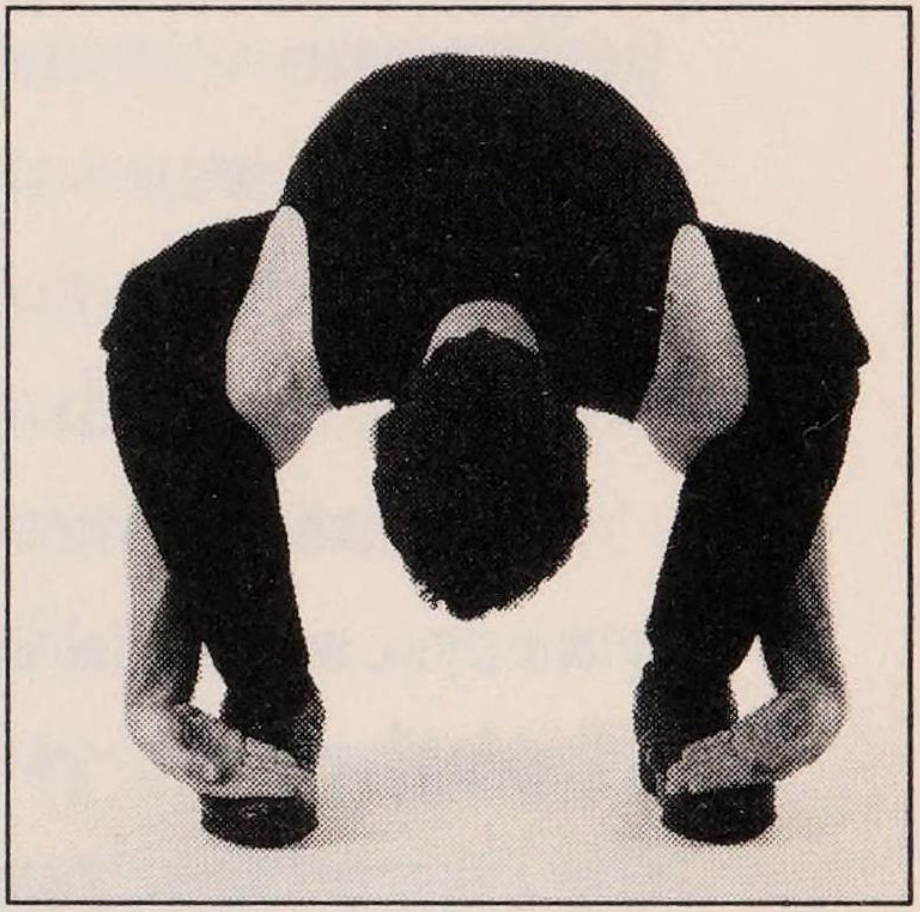


Figure 171

The only glow of awareness left in human beings is at the bottom of Their luminous spheres, a fringe that extends in a circle and reaches the level of the toes. With this magical pass, that fringe is tapped with the Kicks of the fingers, and stirred with the breath.

## **Third Series: Third Group: *Dreaming***

Don Juan Matus defined dreaming as the act of using normal dreams as a bona fide entrance for human awareness into other realms of perceiving; This definition implied for him that ordinary dreams could be used as a hatch that led perception into other regions of energy different from the energy of the world of everyday life, and yet utterly similar to it at a basic core. The result of such an entrance was, for sorcerers, the perception of veritable worlds where they could live or die, worlds which were astoundingly different from ours, and yet utterly similar.

Pressed for a linear explanation of this contradiction, don Juan Matus reiterated the standard position of sorcerers: that the answers to all those questions were in the practice, not in the intellectual inquiry. He said that in order to talk about such possibilities, we would have to use the syntax of language, whatever language we spoke, and that syntax, by the force of usage, limits the possibilities of expression. The syntax of any language refers only to perceptual possibilities found in the world in which we live.

Don Juan made a significant differentiation, in Spanish, between two verbs: one was to dream, sonar; and the other was ensueno, which is to dream the way sorcerers dream. In English, there is no clear distinction between these two states: the normal dreaming, sueno, and the more complex state that sorcerers call ensueno.

The art of dreaming, according to what don Juan taught, originated in a very casual observation that the shamans of ancient Mexico made when they saw people who were asleep. They noticed that during sleep the *assemblage point* was displaced in a very natural, easy way from it's habitual position, and that it moved anywhere along the periphery of the luminous sphere, or to any place in the interior of it. Correlating their *seeing* with the reports of the people who had been observed sleeping, they realized that the greater the observed displacement of the *assemblage point*, the more astounding the reports of events and scenes experienced in dreams.

After this observation took hold of them, those sorcerers began to look avidly for opportunities to displace their own *assemblage points*. They ended up using psychotropic plants to accomplish this. Very quickly, they realized that the displacement brought about by using these plants was erratic, forced, and out of control. In the midst of this failure, nonetheless they discovered one thing of great value. They called it dreaming attention.

Don Juan explained this phenomenon, referring first to the daily awareness of human beings as the attention placed on the elements of the world of everyday life. He pointed out that human beings took only a cursory and yet sustained look at everything that surrounded them.

More than examining things, human beings simply established the presence of those elements by a special type of attention, a specific aspect of their general awareness. His contention was that the same type of cursory and yet sustained "look," so to speak, could be applied to the elements of an ordinary dream. He called this other, specific aspect of general awareness dreaming attention or the capacity that practitioners acquire to maintain their awareness unwaveringly fixed on the items of their dreams.

The cultivation of dreaming attention gave the sorcerers of don Juan's lineage a basic taxonomy of dreams. They found out that most of their dreams were imagery, products of the cognition of their daily world; however, there were some which escaped that classification. Such dreams were veritable states of *heightened awareness* in which the elements of the dream were not mere imagery, but energy-generating affairs. Dreams which had energy-generating elements were, for those shamans, dreams in which they were capable of *seeing* energy as it flowed in the universe.

Those shamans were able to focus their dreaming attention on any element of their dreams, and found out, in this fashion, that there are two kinds of dreams. One is the dreams that we are all familiar with, in which phantasmagorical elements come into play, something which we could categorize as the product of our mentality, our psyche; perhaps something that has to do with our neurological makeup. The other kind of dreams they called energy-generating dreams. Don Juan said that those sorcerers of ancient times found themselves in dreams which were not dreams, but actual visitations made in a dreamlike state to bona fide places other than this world - real places, just like the world in which we live; places where the objects of the dream generated energy, just as lives, or animals, or even rocks generate energy in our daily world, for a *seeing* sorcerer.

Their visions of such places were, however, for those shamans, too fleeting, too temporary, to be of any value to them. They attributed this flaw to the fact that their *assemblage points* could not be held fixed for any considerable time at the position to which they had been displaced. Their attempts to remedy the situation resulted in the other high art of sorcery: the art of stalking.

Don Juan defined the two arts very clearly one day when he said to me that the art of dreaming consisted of purposely displacing the *assemblage point* from it's habitual position. The art of stalking consisted in volitionally making it stay fixed on the new position to which it had been displaced.

This fixation allowed the shamans of ancient Mexico the opportunity to witness other worlds in their full extent. Don Juan said that some of those sorcerers never returned from their journeys. In other words, they opted for staying there, wherever "there" might have been.

"When the old sorcerers finished mapping human beings as luminous spheres," don Juan said to me once, "they had discovered no less than six hundred spots in the total luminous sphere that were the sites of bona fide worlds. Meaning that, if the *assemblage point* became attached to any of those places, the result was the entrance of the practitioner into a total new world."

"But where are those six hundred other worlds, don Juan?" I asked.

"The only answer to that question is incomprehensible," he said, laughing. "It's the essence of sorcery, and yet it means nothing to the average mind. Those six hundred worlds are in the position of the *assemblage point*. Incalculable amounts of energy are required to make sense out of this answer. We have the energy. What we lack is the facility or disposition to use it."

I could add that nothing could be truer than all these statements, and yet, nothing could make less sense.

Don Juan explained usual perception in the terms in which the sorcerers of his lineage understood it: The *assemblage point*, at it's habitual location, receives an inflow of energy fields from the universe at large in the form of luminous filaments, numbering in the trillions. Since it's position is consistently the same, it stood to sorcerers' reasoning that the same energy fields, in the form of luminous filaments, converge on the *assemblage point* and go through it, giving as a consistent result the perception of the world that we know. Those sorcerers arrived at the unavoidable conclusion that if the *assemblage point* were displaced to another position, another set of energy filaments would go through it, resulting in the perception of a world that, by definition, was not the same as the world of everyday life.

In don Juan's opinion, what human beings ordinarily regard as perceiving is rather the act of interpreting sensory data. He maintained that from the moment of birth, everything around us supplies us with a possibility of interpretation, and that with time, this possibility turns into a full system by means of which we conduct all of our perceptual transactions in the world.

He pointed out that the *assemblage point* is not only the center where perception is assembled, but also the center where the interpretation of sensory data is accomplished, so that if it were to change locations, it would interpret the new influx of energy fields in very much the same terms in which it interprets the world of everyday life. The result of this new interpretation is the perception of a world which is strangely similar to ours, and yet intrinsically different. Don Juan said that energetically, those other worlds are as different from ours as they could possibly be. It is only the interpretation of the *assemblage point* which accounts for the seeming similarities.

Don Juan called for a new syntax that could be used in order to express this wondrous quality of the *assemblage point* and the possibilities of perception brought about by dreaming. He conceded, however, that perhaps the present syntax of our language could be forced to cover it if this experience became available to any one of us, and not merely to shaman initiates.

Something related to dreaming that was of tremendous interest to me, hut which bewildered me to no end, was don Juan's statement that there was really no procedure to speak of that would teach anyone how to dream. He said that more than anything else, dreaming was an arduous effort on the part of the practitioners to put themselves in contact with the indescribable all-pervading force that the sorcerers of ancient Mexico called intent. Once this link was established, dreaming also mysteriously became established. Don Juan asserted that this linkage could be accomplished following any pattern that implied discipline.

When I asked him to give me a succinct explanation of the procedures involved, he laughed at me.

"To venture into the world of sorcerers," he said, "is not like learning to drive a car. To drive a car, you need manuals and instructions. To dream, you need to intend it."

"But how can I intend it?" I insisted.

"The only way you could intend it is by intending it," he declared. "One of the most difficult things for a man of our day to accept is a lack of procedure. Modern man is in the throes of manuals, praxes, methods, steps loading to. He is ceaselessly taking notes, making diagrams, deeply involved in the 'know-how.' But in the world of sorcerers, procedures and rituals are mere designs to attract and focus attention. They are devices used to force a focusing of interest and determination. They have no other value."

What don Juan considered to be of supreme importance in order to dream is the rigorous execution of the *magical passes*: the only device that the sorcerers of his lineage used to aid the displacement of the *assemblage point*. The execution of the *magical passes* gave those sorcerers the stability and the energy necessary to call forth their dreaming attention, without which there was no possibility of dreaming for them. Without the emergence of dreaming attention, practitioners could aspire, at best, to have lucid dreams about phantasmagorical worlds. They could perhaps have views of worlds that generate energy, but these would make no sense to them whatsoever in the absence of an all-inclusive rationale that would properly categorize them.

Once the shamans of don Juan's lineage had developed their dreaming attention, they realized that they had tapped on the doors of infinity. They had succeeded in enlarging the parameters of their normal perception. They discovered that their normal state of awareness was infinitely more varied than it had been before the advent of their dreaming attention. From that point on, those sorcerers could truthfully venture into the unknown.

"The aphorism," don Juan said to me once, "that 'the sky is the limit' was most applicable to the sorcerers of ancient times. They certainly outdid themselves."

"Was it really true for them that the sky was the limit, don Juan?" I asked.

"This question could be answered only by each of us individually," he said, smiling expansively. "They gave us the tools. It is up to us individually to use them or refuse them. In essence, we are alone in front of infinity, and the issue of whether or not we are capable of reaching our limits has to be answered personally."

## The Magical Passes for *Dreaming*

### 27. Getting the *Assemblage Point* Loose

The left arm, with the palm of the hand turned upward, reaches over the area behind the shoulder blades, as the trunk leans a bit forward. Then the arm is brought in an underhanded motion from the left side of the body to the front, moving in an upward thrust in front of the face, with the palm of the left hand turned to face the left. The fingers are held together (figs. 172, 173). This magical pass is executed by each arm in succession. The knees are kept bent for greater stability and thrusting force.

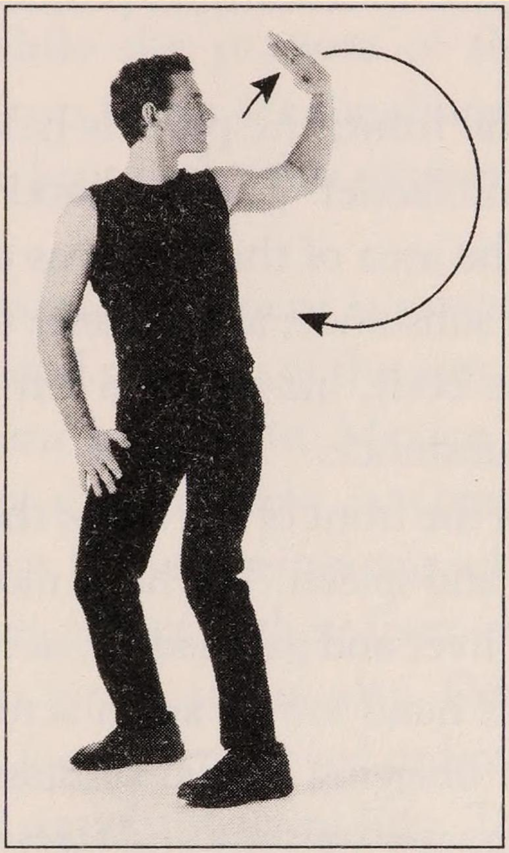


*Figure 172*

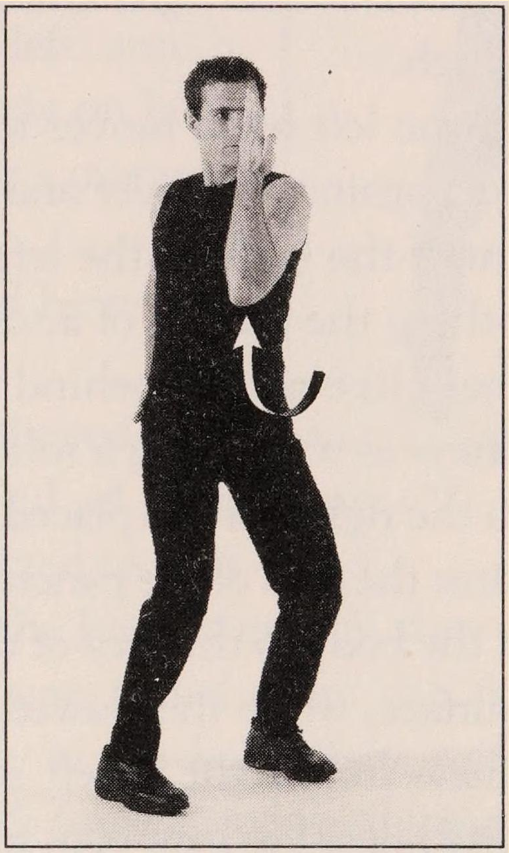


*Figure 173*

### 28. Forcing the *Assemblage Point* to Drop Down

The back is kept as straight as possible. The knees are locked. The left arm, fully stretched, is placed at the hack, a few inches away from the body. The hand is bent at a ninety-degree angle in relation to the forearm; the palm faces downward and the fully stretched fingers point backward. The fully stretched right arm is placed in front in the same position: with the wrist bent at a ninety-degree angle, the palm facing downward, the fingers pointing forward.

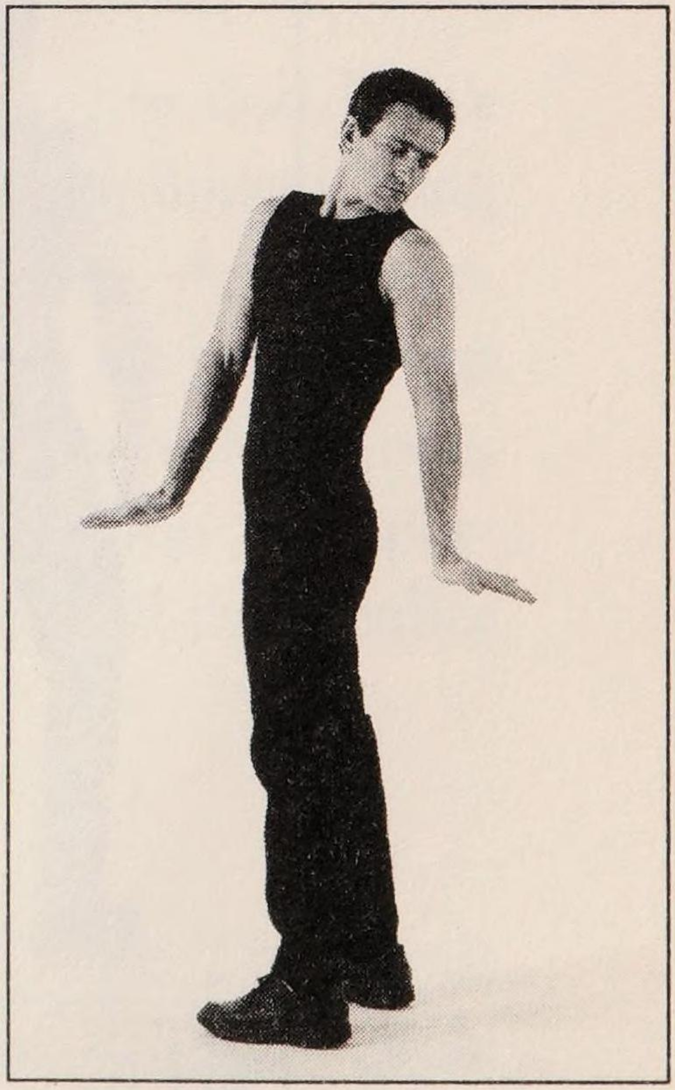


Figure 174

The head turns in the direction of the arm that is kept at the back, and a total stretch of the tendons of the legs and arms takes place at that instant. This tension of the tendons is held for a moment (fig. 174). The same movement is repeated with the right arm in hack and the left in front.

### 29. Enticing the *Assemblage Point* to Drop by Drawing Energy from the Adrenals and Transferring It to the Front

The left arm is placed behind the body at the level of the kidneys, as far to the right as it can reach; the hand is held like a claw. The clawed hand moves across the kidney area from right to left as if dragging a solid substance. The right arm is held in it's normal position by the side of the thigh.

Next, the left hand moves to the front; the palm is held flat, on the right side, against the liver and gallbladder. The left hand moves across the front of the body to the left, the area of the pancreas and spleen, as if smoothing the surface of a solid substance; at the same time the right hand, held like a claw behind the body, moves from left to right over the kidneys as if dragging a solid substance.

Then the right hand is placed on the front of the body; the palm is held flat against the area of the pancreas and spleen. The hand moves across the front of the body to the area of the liver and gallbladder, as if smoothing a rough surface, while the clawed left hand moves again across the area of the kidneys from right to left as if dragging a solid substance (figs. 175, 176). The knees are kept bent for greater stability and force.

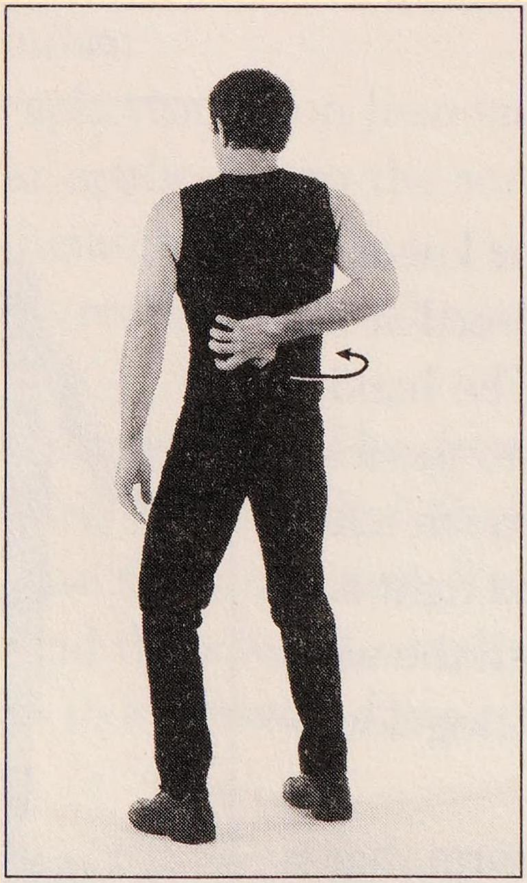


Figure 175

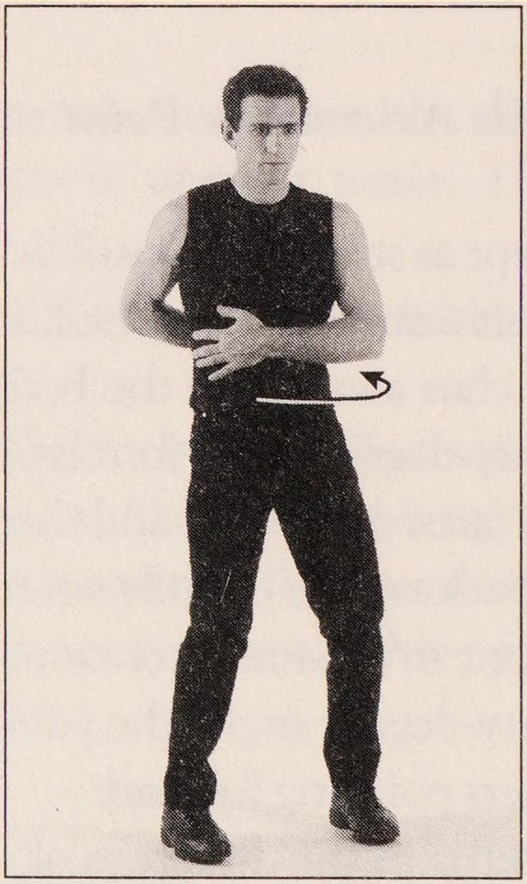


Figure 176

## 30. Playing Out the A and B Types of Energy

The right forearm, bent in a vertical position, at a ninety-degree angle, is centered in front of the body, with the elbow almost at the level of the shoulders, and the palm of the hand facing left. The left forearm, bent at the elbow and held in a horizontal position, is placed with the back of the hand underneath the right elbow. The eyes, without focusing on either forearm, keep a peripheral view of both of them. The pressure of the right arm is downward, while the pressure of the left arm is upward. The two forces act simultaneously on both arms; they are kept under this tension for a moment (fig. 177).

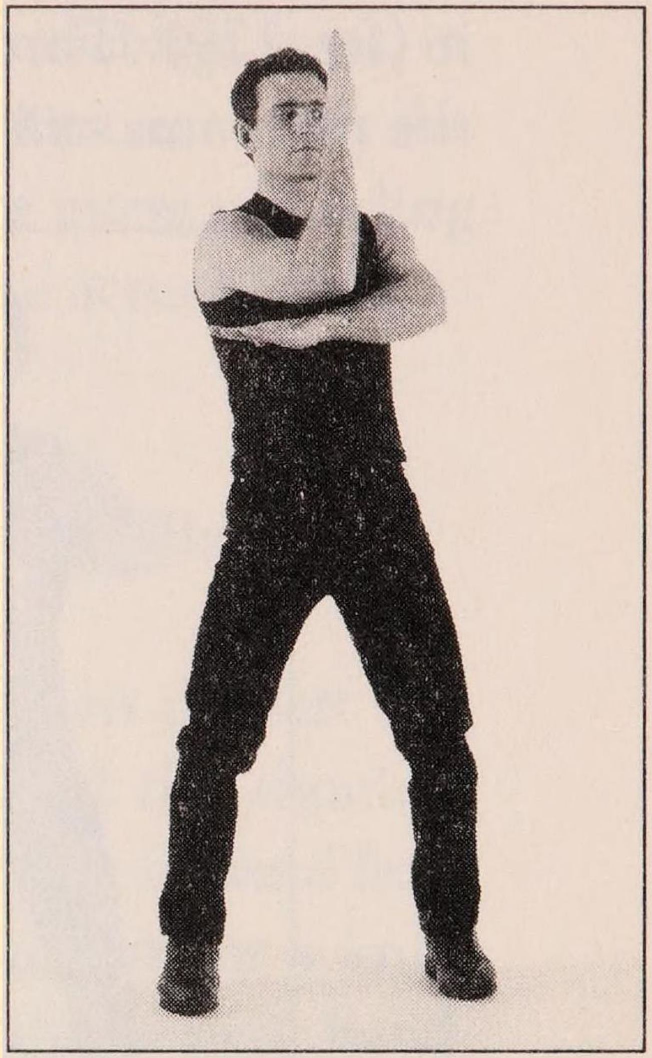


Figure 177

Then the same movement is executed by reversing the order and position of the arms.

The shamans of ancient Mexico believed that everything in the universe is composed of dual forces, and that human beings are subjected to that duality in every aspect of their lives. At the level of energy, they considered that two forces are at play. Don Juan called them the A and B forces. The A force is employed ordinarily in our daily affairs, and is represented by a straight vertical line. The B force is ordinarily an obscure one which rarely enters into action, and it is kept lying down. It is represented by a horizontal line drawn to the left of the vertical one, at it's base, making in this fashion a reversed capital letter L.

Shamans, men and women, were the only ones who, in don Juan's view, had been capable of turning the force B, which is ordinarily lying down horizontally, out of use, into an active vertical line. And consequently, they had succeeded in putting force A to rest. This process was represented by drawing a horizontal line at the base of the vertical one, in it's right, and making, as a result, a capital letter L. Don Juan portrayed this magical pass as the one which best exemplified this duality and the effort of the sorcerers to reverse it's effects.

### 31. Pulling the Energy Body to the Front

The arms are kept at shoulder level with the elbows bent. The hands overlap each other, and they are turned with the palms down. A circle is made with the hands rotating around each other; the movement is inward, toward the face (fig. 178). They rotate three times around each other; then the left arm is thrust forward with the hand in a fist, as if to strike an invisible target in front of the body, an arm's length away from it (fig. 179). Three more circles are drawn with both hands, and then the right arm strikes in the same fashion as the left one.

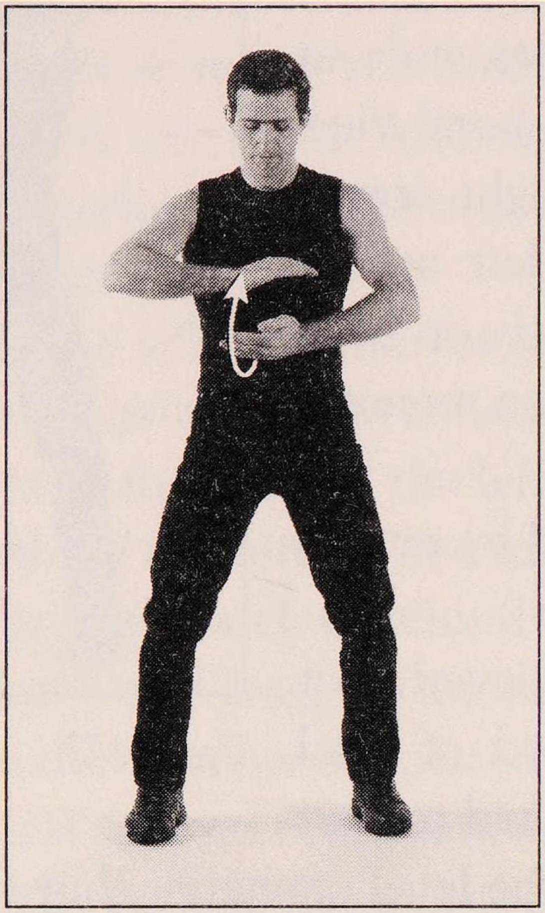


*Figure 178*

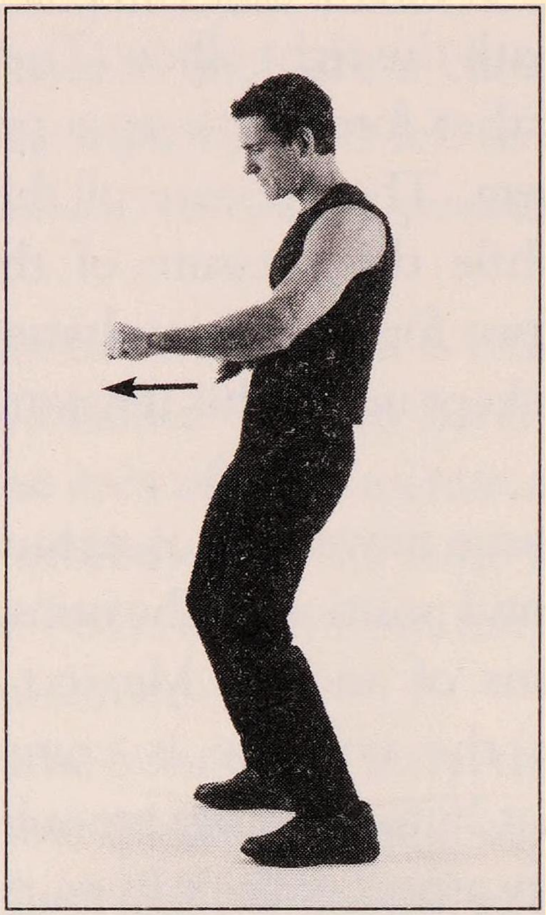


*Figure 179*

### 32. Hurling the *Assemblage Point* Like a Knife over the Shoulder

The left hand reaches over the head to the area behind the shoulder blades and grabs, as if holding a solid object. Then it moves over the head to the front of the body, with the motion of hurling something forward. The knees are kept bent for hurling stability. The same movement is repeated with the right arm (figs. 180, 181).

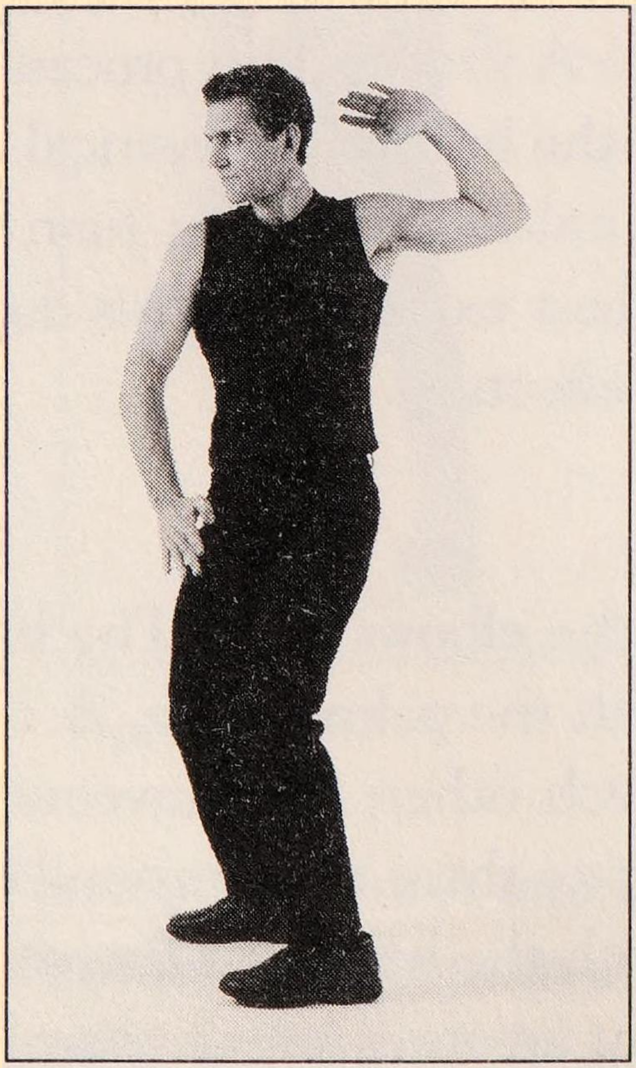


Figure 180

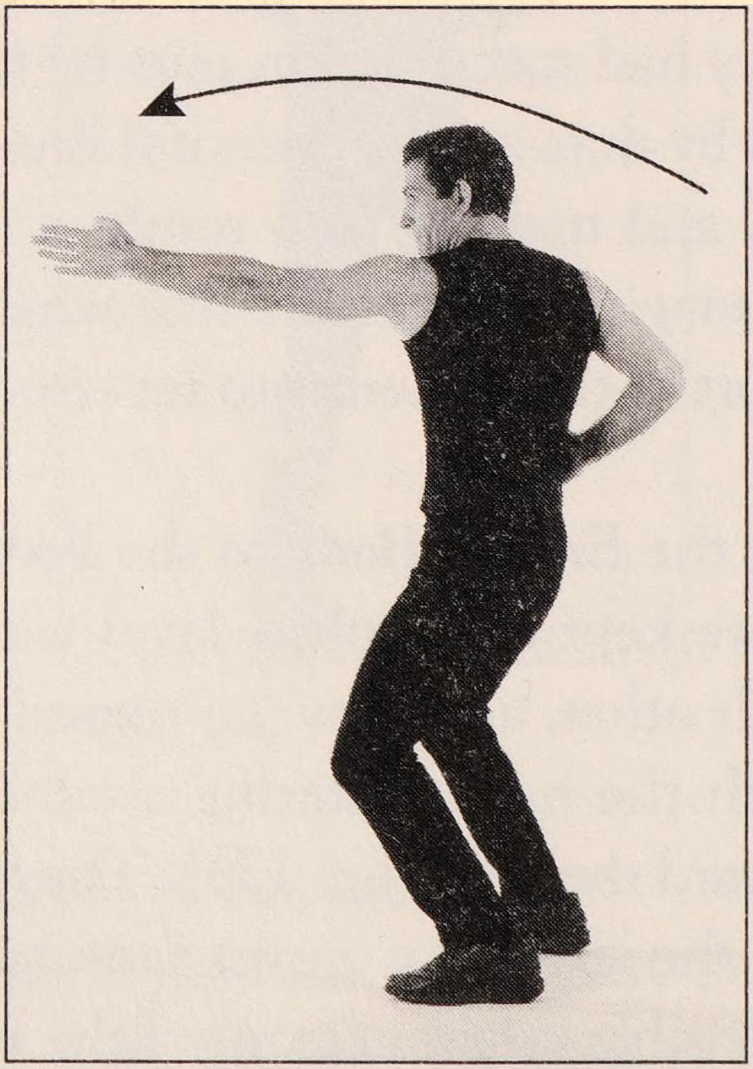


Figure 181

This magical pass is an actual attempt to hurl the *assemblage point*, in order to displace it from it's habitual position. The practitioner holds the *assemblage point* as if it were a knife. Something in the intent of hurling the *assemblage point* causes a profound effect toward the actual displacement of it.

### 33. Hurling the *Assemblage Point* Like a Knife from the Back by the Waist

The knees are kept bent as the body leans forward. Then the left arm reaches to the back, from the side, to the area behind the shoulder blades, grabs onto something as if it were solid, and hurls it forward from the waist, with a flick of the wrist, as if hurling a flat disk, or a knife (figs. 182, 183). The same movements are repeated with the right hand.

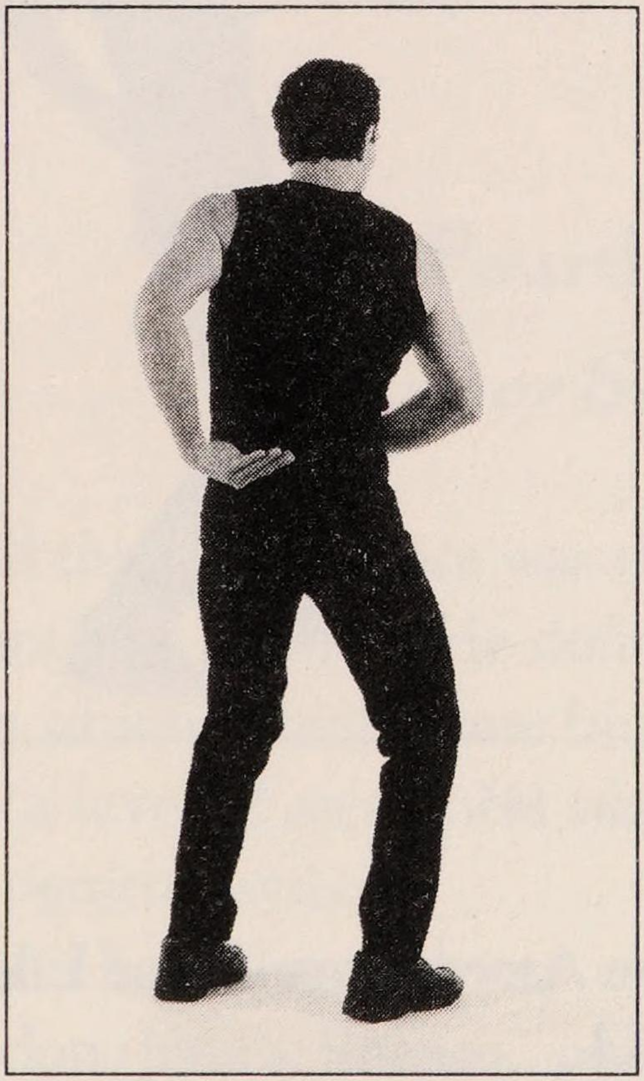


Figure 182

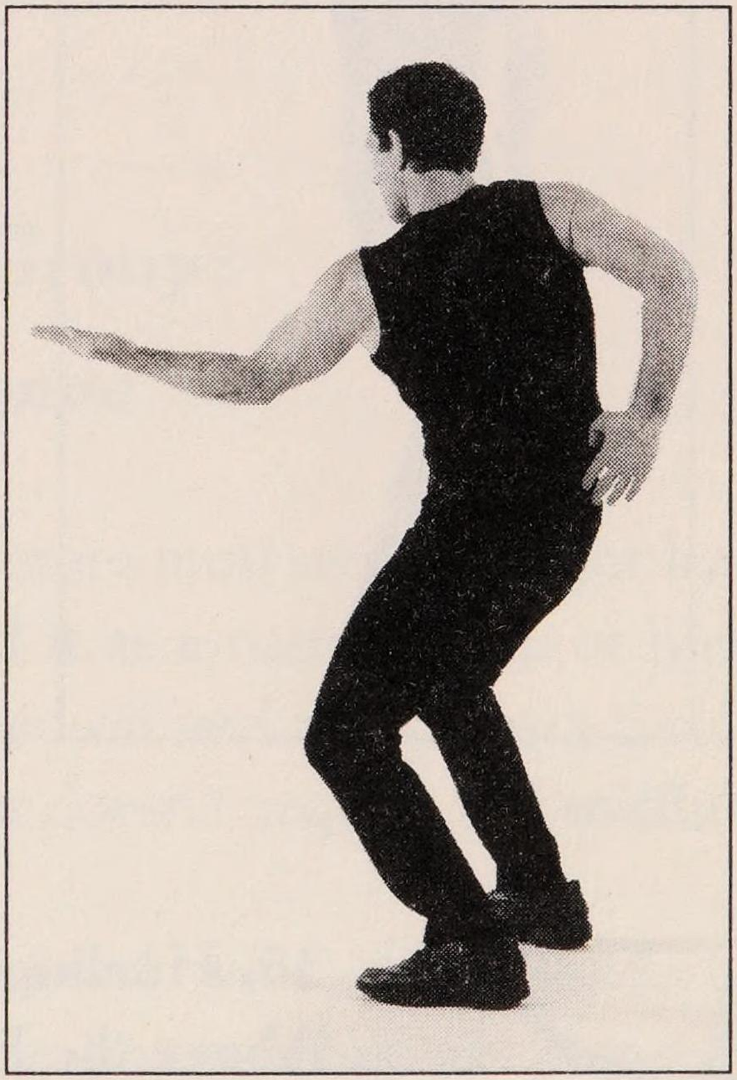


Figure 183

### 34. Hurling the *Assemblage Point* Like a Disk from the Shoulder

A deep rotation of the waist is made to the left, which propels the right arm to swing to the left side of the left leg. Then the motion of the waist, moving in the opposite direction, propels the left arm to swing to the right side of the right leg. Another motion of the waist propels the right arm to swing again to the left side of the left leg. At this point the left hand reaches back instantly with a circular motion to grab onto something as if it were solid, from the area behind the shoulder blades (fig. 184).

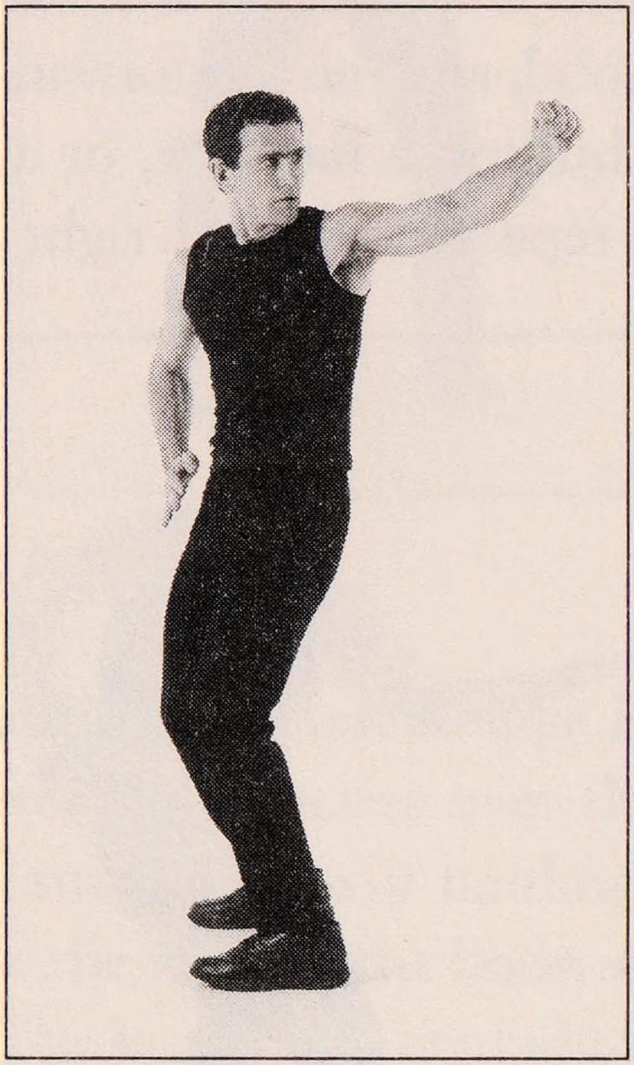


Figure 184

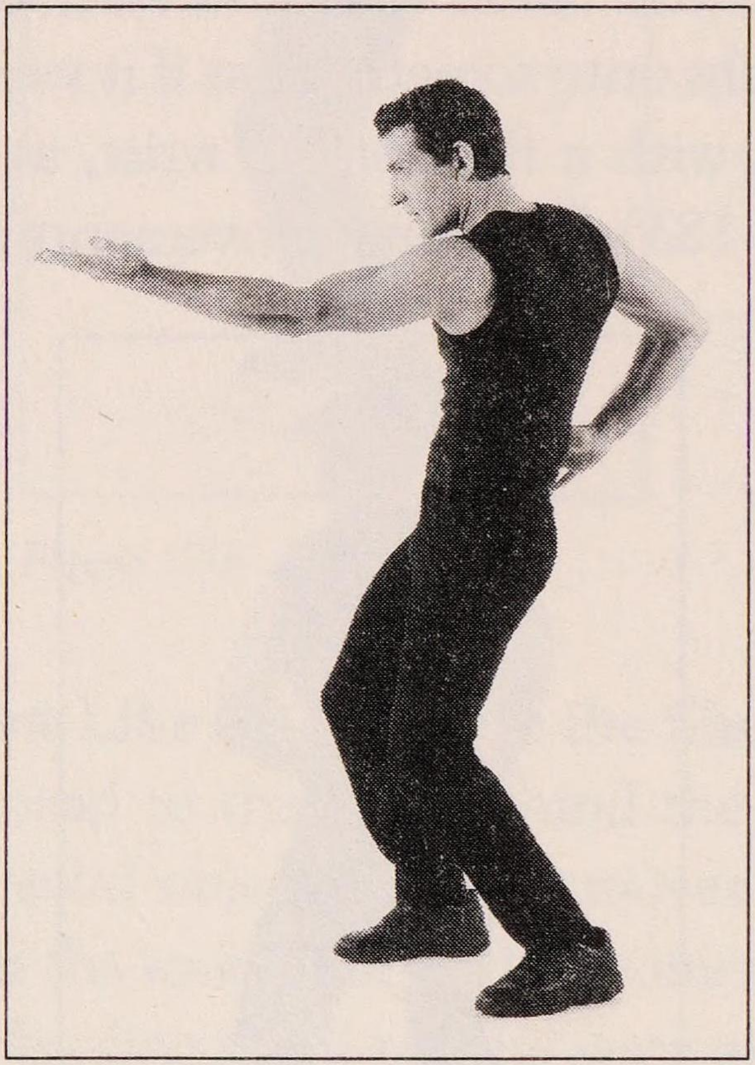


Figure 185

The left hand takes it in a swinging circular motion to the front of the body and up to the level of the right shoulder. The palm of the clenched hand faces upward. From this position, the left hand, with a flick of the wrist, makes a hurling motion, as if to hurl forward something solid, like a disk (fig. 185).

The legs are kept bent slightly at the knees and a great pressure is exerted at the back of the thighs. The right arm, with the elbow slightly bent, is extended behind the body to give stability to the act of hurling a disk. This position is held for a moment, while the left arm maintains the position of having just hurled an object. The same movements are repeated with the other arm.

### 35. Hurling the *Assemblage Point* Like a Ball Above the Head

The left hand moves back quickly to the area behind the shoulder blades and grabs something, as if it were solid (fig. 186). The arm rotates twice in a big circle above the head as if to gain impulse (fig. 187) and makes the motion of hurling a ball forward (fig. 188). The knees are kept bent. These movements are repeated with the right hand.

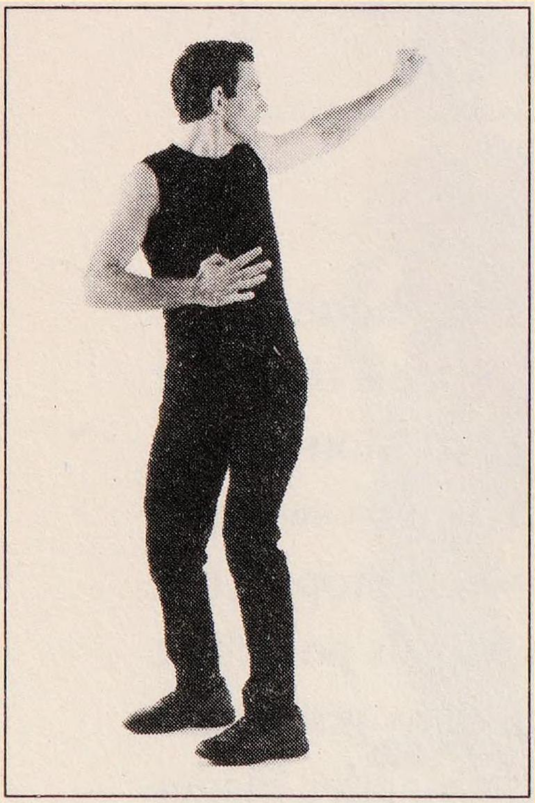


*Figure 186*

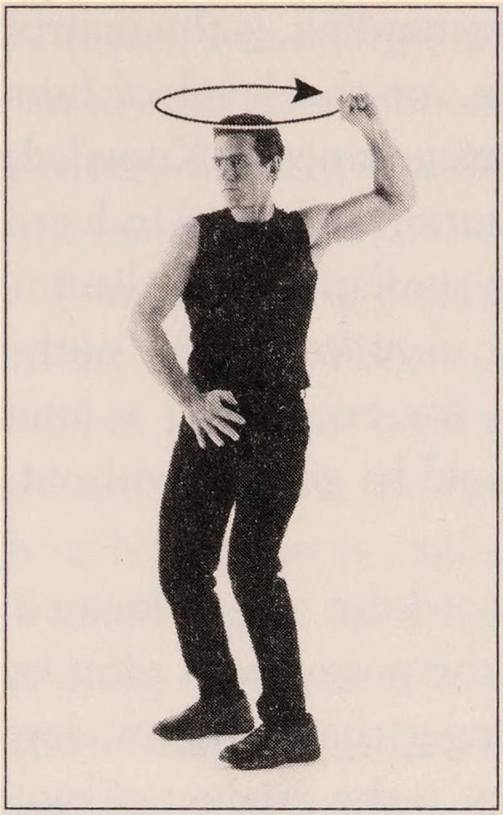


*Figure 187*

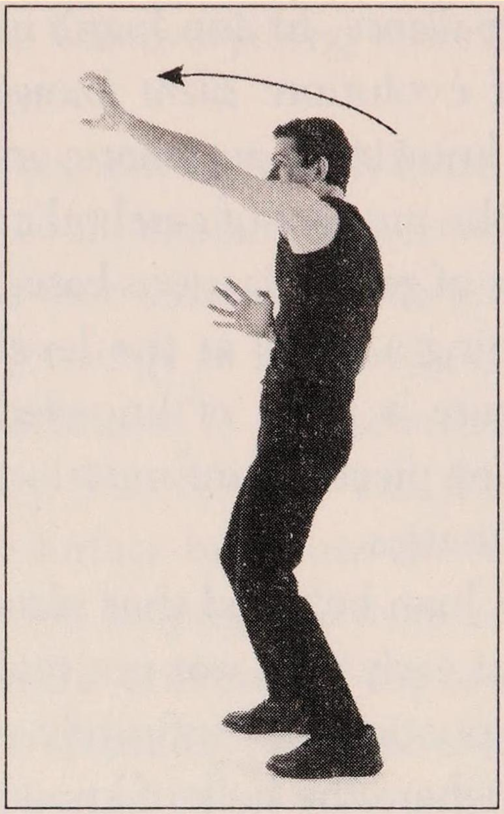


*Figure 188*

## Third Series: Fourth Group: *Inner Silence*

Don Juan said that inner silence was the state most avidly sought by the shamans of ancient Mexico. He defined it as a natural state of human perception in which thoughts are blocked off and all of man's faculties operate from a level of awareness which doesn't require the utilization of our daily cognitive system.

Inner silence has always been associated with darkness, for the shamans of don Juan's lineage, perhaps because human perception, deprived of it's habitual companion, the internal dialogue, falls into something that resembles a dark pit. He said that the body functions as usual, hut awareness becomes sharper. Decisions are instantaneous, and seem to stem from a special sort of knowledge which is deprived of thought verbalizations.

Human perception functioning in a condition of inner silence, according to don Juan, is capable of reaching indescribable levels. Some of those levels of perception are worlds in themselves, and not at all like the worlds reached through dreaming. They are indescribable states, inexplicable in terms of the linear paradigms that the habitual state of human perception employs for explaining the universe.

Inner silence, in don Juan's understanding, is the matrix for a gigantic step of evolution: silent knowledge, or the level of human awareness where knowing is automatic and instantaneous. Knowledge at this level is not the product of cerebral cogitation or logical induction and deduction, or of generalizations based on similarities and dissimilarities. There is nothing a priori at the level of silent knowledge, nothing that could constitute a body of knowledge, for everything is imminently now. Complex pieces of information could be grasped without any cognitive preliminaries.

Don Juan believed that silent knowledge was insinuated to early man, but that early man was not really the possessor of silent knowledge. Such an insinuation was infinitely stronger than what modern man experiences, where the bulk of knowledge is the product of rote learning. It is a sorcerers' axiom that although we have lost that insinuation, the avenue that leads to silent knowledge will always be open to man by means of inner silence.

Don Juan Matus taught the hard line of his lineage: that inner silence must be gained by a consistent pressure of discipline. It has to be accrued or stored, bit by bit, second by second. In other words, one has to force oneself to be silent, even if it is only for a few seconds. According to don Juan, it was common knowledge among sorcerers that if one persists in this, persistence overcomes habit, and thus, it is possible to arrive at a threshold of accrued seconds or minutes, which differs from person to person. If the threshold of inner silence is ten minutes for a given individual, for instance, then once this threshold is reached, inner silence happens by itself, of it's own accord, so to speak.

I was warned beforehand that there was no possible way of knowing what my individual threshold might be, and that the only way of finding this out was through direct experience. This is exactly what happened to me. Following don Juan's suggestion, I had persisted in forcing myself to remain silent, and one day, while walking at .UCLA, I reached my mysterious threshold. I knew I had reached it because in one instant, I experienced something don Juan had described at length to me. He had called it stopping the world. In the blink of an eye, the world ceased to be what it was, and for the first time in my life, I became conscious that I was *seeing* energy as it flowed in the universe. I had to sit down on some brick steps. I knew that I was sitting on some brick steps, but I knew it only intellectually, through memory. Exponentially, I was resting on energy. I myself was energy, and so was everything around me. I had canceled out my interpretation system.

After *seeing* energy directly, I realized something which became the horror of my day, something that no one could explain to me satisfactorily except don Juan. I became conscious that although I was *seeing* for the first time in my life, I had been *seeing* energy as it flows in the universe all my life, but I had not been conscious of it. To *see* energy as it flows in the universe was not the novelty. The novelty was the query that arose with such fury that it made me surface back into the world of everyday life. I asked myself what had been keeping me from realizing that I had been *seeing* energy as it flows in the universe all my life.

"There are two issues at stake here," don Juan explained to me, when I asked him about this maddening contradiction. "One is general awareness. The other is particular, deliberate consciousness. Every human being in the world is aware, in general terms, of *seeing* energy as it flows in the universe. However, only sorcerers are particularly and deliberately conscious of it. To become conscious of something that you are generally aware of requires energy, and the iron-hand discipline needed to get it. Your inner silence, the product of discipline and energy, bridged the gap between general awareness and particular consciousness."

Don Juan stressed, in every way he was able, the value of a pragmatic attitude in order to buttress the advent of inner silence. He defined a pragmatic attitude as the capacity to absorb any contingency that might appear along The way. He himself was, to me, the living example of such an attitude. There w; isn't any uncertainty or liability that his mere presence would not dispel.

He reiterated every time he could that the effects of inner silence were very unsettling, and that the only deterrent to this condition was the pragmatic attitude which was the product of a superbly pliable, agile, strong body. He said that for sorcerers, the physical body was the only entity that made any sense to them, and that there was no such thing as a dualism between body and mind. He further stated that the physical body involved both the body and the mind as we knew them, and that in order to counterbalance the physical body as a holistic unit, sorcerers considered another configuration of energy which was reached through inner silence: the energy body. He explained that what I had experienced .it the moment in which I had stopped the world was the resurgence of my energy body, and that this configuration of energy was the one which had always been able to *see* energy as it flowed in the universe.

## The Magical Passes that Aid the Attainment of *Inner Silence*

### 36. Drawing Two Half-Circles with Each Foot

The total weight of the body is on the right leg. The left foot is placed half a step in front of it, and it slides on the floor, drawing a half-circle to the left; the ball of the foot comes to rest almost touching the right heel. From there, it draws another half-circle to the back (fig. 189). These circles are drawn with the ball of the foot. The heel is kept off the ground, in order to make the movement smooth and uniform.

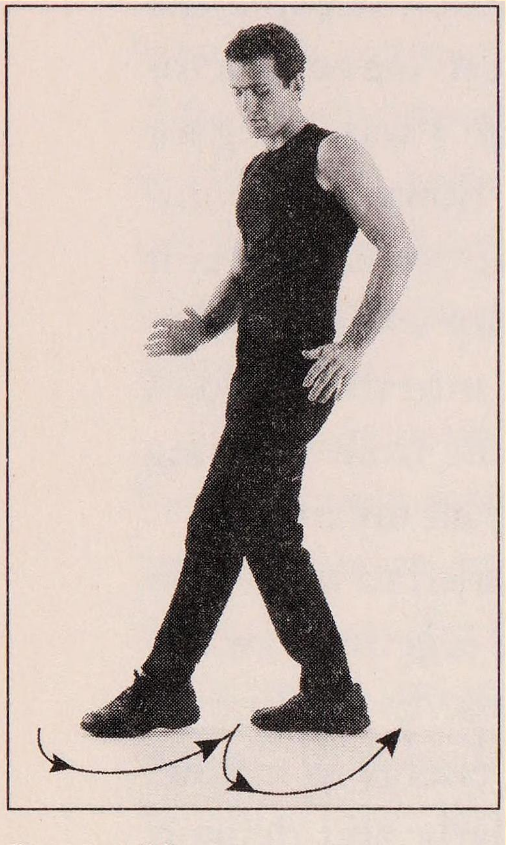


Figure 189

The movement is reversed and two more half-circles are drawn in this fashion, starting from the back and going to the front. The same movements are executed with the right foot after the whole weight of the body is transferred to the left leg. The knee of the leg that supports the weight is bent for strength and stability.

### 37. Drawing a Half-Moon with Each Foot

The weight of the body is placed on the right leg. The left foot goes half a step in front of the right one, drawing a wide semicircle on the ground around the body from the front, to the left, to the back of the body. This semicircle is drawn with the ball of the foot (fig. 190). Another semicircle is drawn from the back to the front, in the same fashion. The same movements are executed with the right leg, after transferring the weight to the left leg.

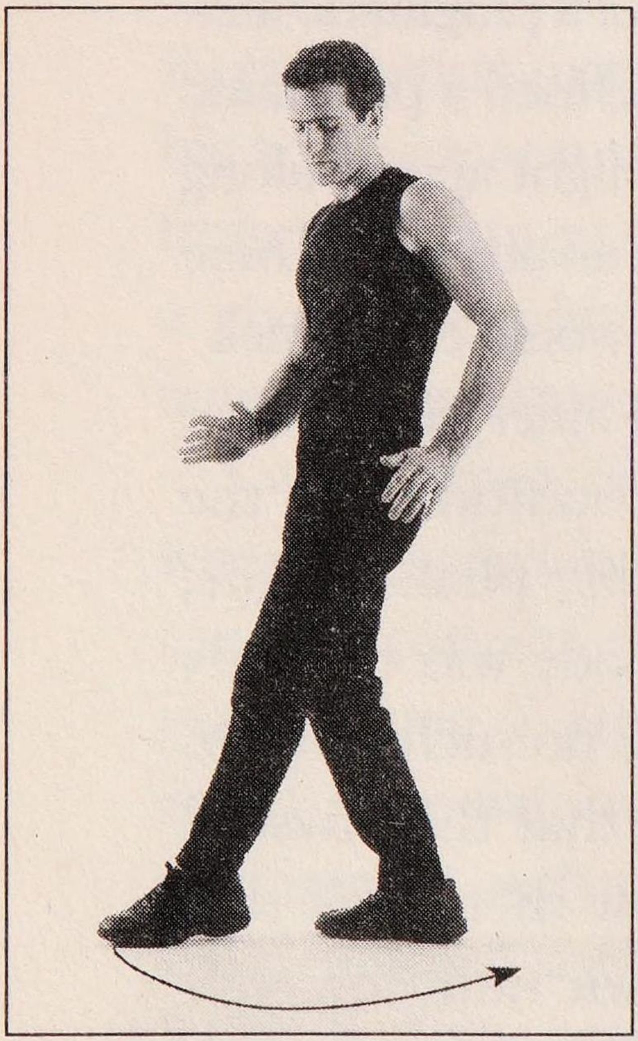


Figure 190

### 38. The Scarecrow in the Wind with the Arms Down

The arms are kept extended laterally at the level of the shoulders with the elbows bent and the forearms dangling downward at a strict ninety-degree angle. The forearms swing freely from side to side, as if moved by the wind alone. The forearms and the wrists are kept straight and vertical. The knees are locked (fig. 191).

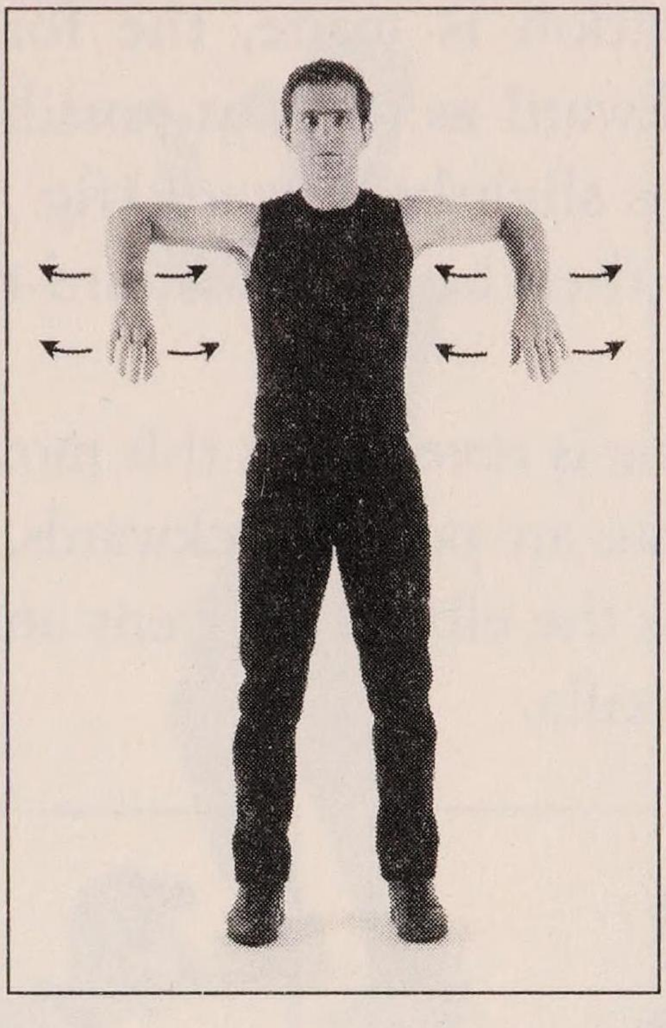


Figure 191

## 39. The Scarecrow in the Wind with the Arms Up

Just as in the preceding magical pass, the arms are extended laterally at the level of the shoulders, except the forearms are turned upward, bent at a ninety-degree angle. The forearms and wrists are kept straight and vertical (fig. 192). Then they swing freely downward to the front (fig. 193) and upward again. The knees are locked.

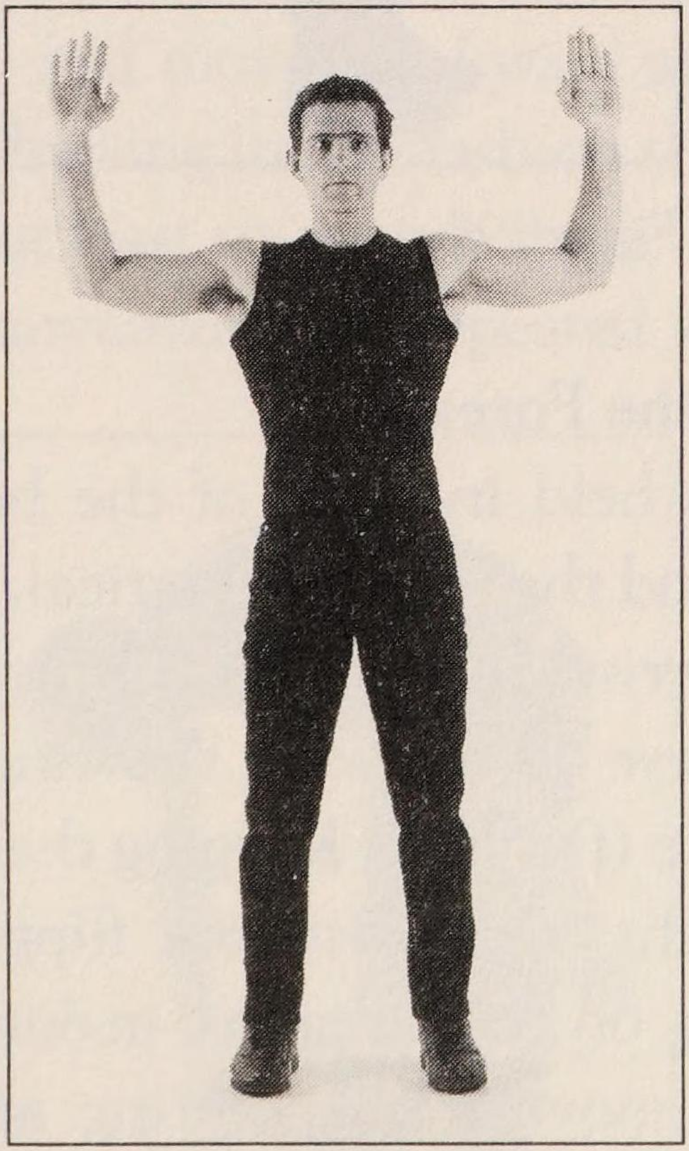


Figure 192

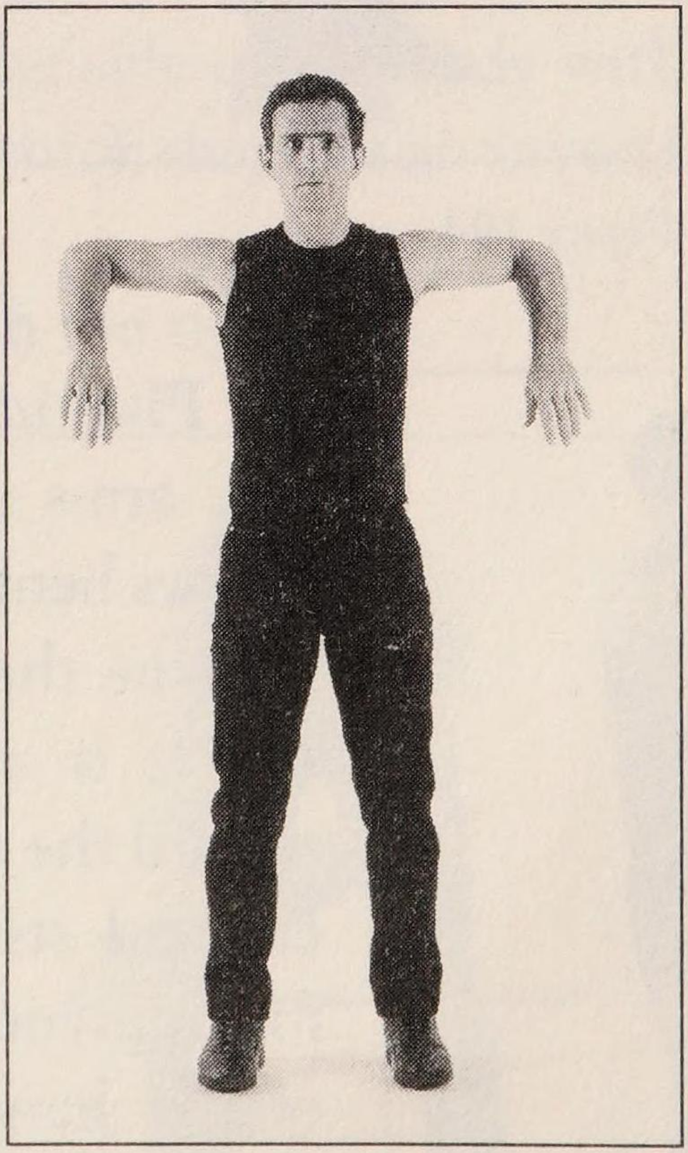


Figure 193

### 40. Pushing Energy Backward with the Full Arm

The elbows are acutely bent and the forearms held fight against the sides of the body, as high as possible, with the hands held in fists (fig.194). As an exhalation is made, the forearms are fully extended downward and backward as high as possible. The knees are locked, and the trunk bends slightly forward (fig. 195). As an inhalation is made, the arms are then brought forward to the original position by bending the elbows. Then the breathing is reversed as this movement is repeated; instead of exhaling as the arms are pulled backwards, an inhalation is taken. An exhalation follows as the elbows are bent and the forearms are brought upward against the axilla.

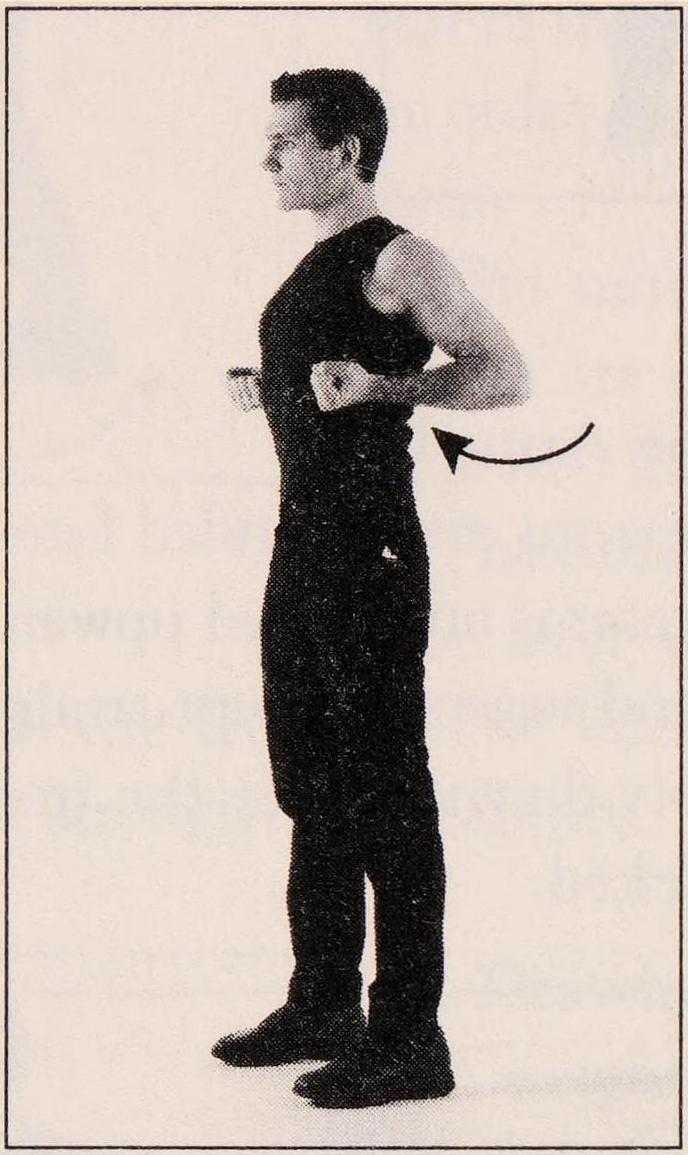


Figure 194

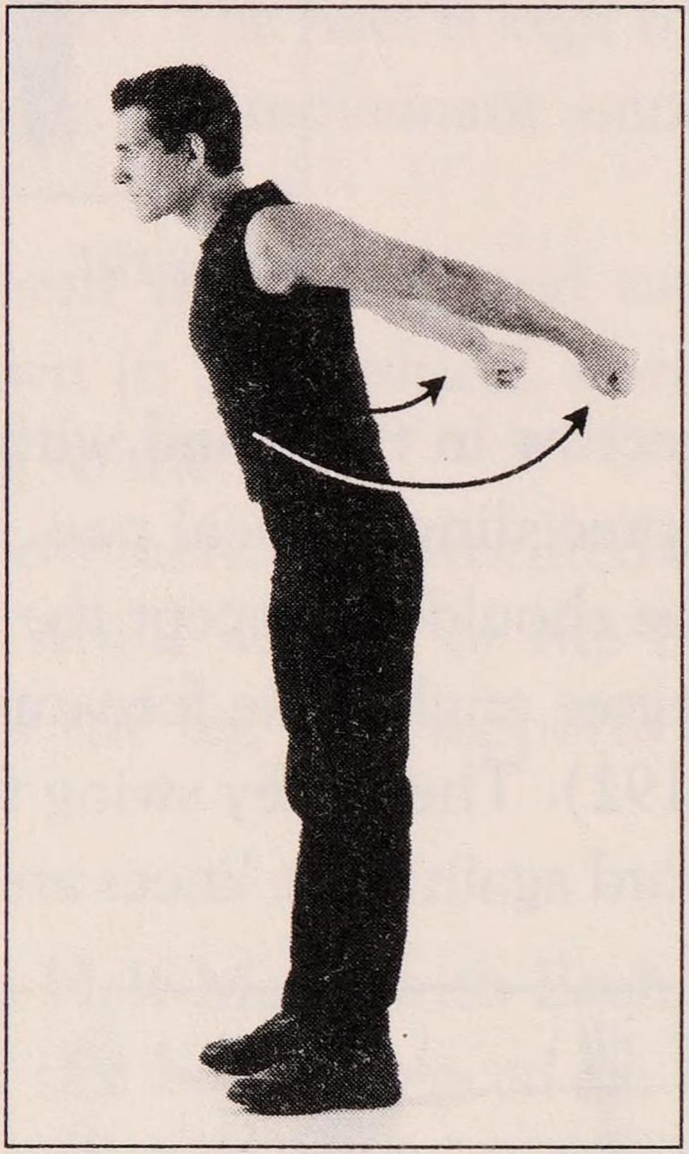


Figure 195

**41. Pivoting the Forearm**

The arms are held in front of the body with the elbows bent and the forearms vertical. Each hand is bent at the wrist, resembling the head of a bird, which is at eye level, with the fingers pointing toward the face (fig. 196). Keeping the elbows vertical and straight, the wrists are flipped back and forth, pivoting on the forearms, making the fingers of the hands move from pointing at the face to pointing forward (fig. 197). The knees are kept bent for stability and strength.

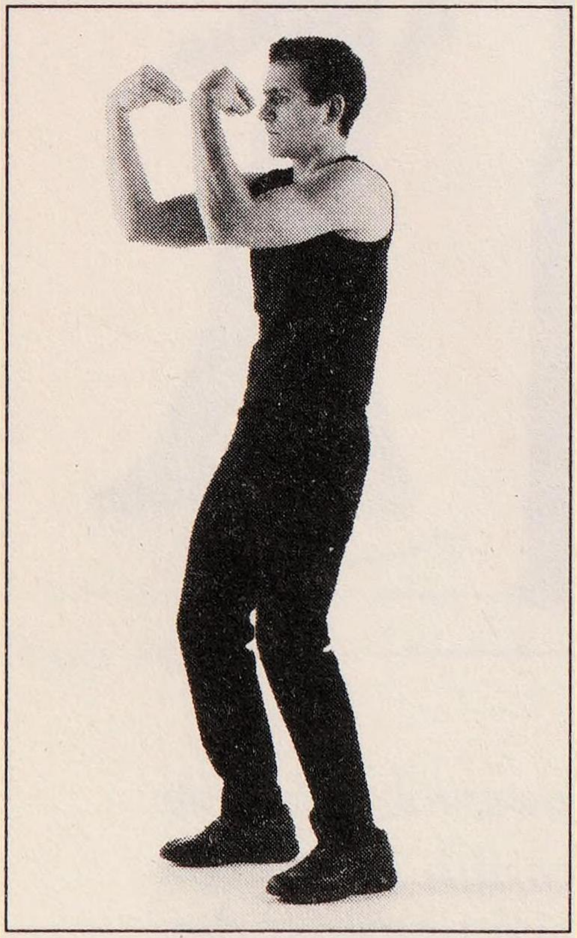


Figure 196

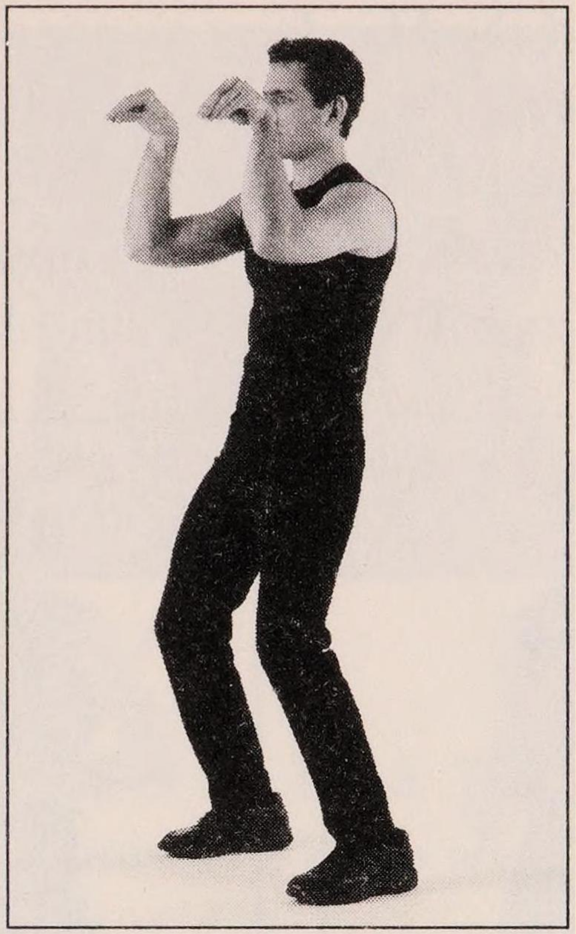


Figure 197

## 42. Moving Energy in a Ripple

The knees are kept straight, and the trunk stoops over. Both arms are kept dangling at the sides. The left arm moves forward with three ripples of the hand, as if the hand were following the contour of a surface with three half-circles on it (fig. 198). Next, the hand cuts across the front of the body in a straight line from left to right, then from right to left (fig. 199), and moves backward at the side of the body with three more ripples, drawing in this fashion the thick shape of an inverted capital letter L - at least six inches thick. The same movements are repeated with the right arm.

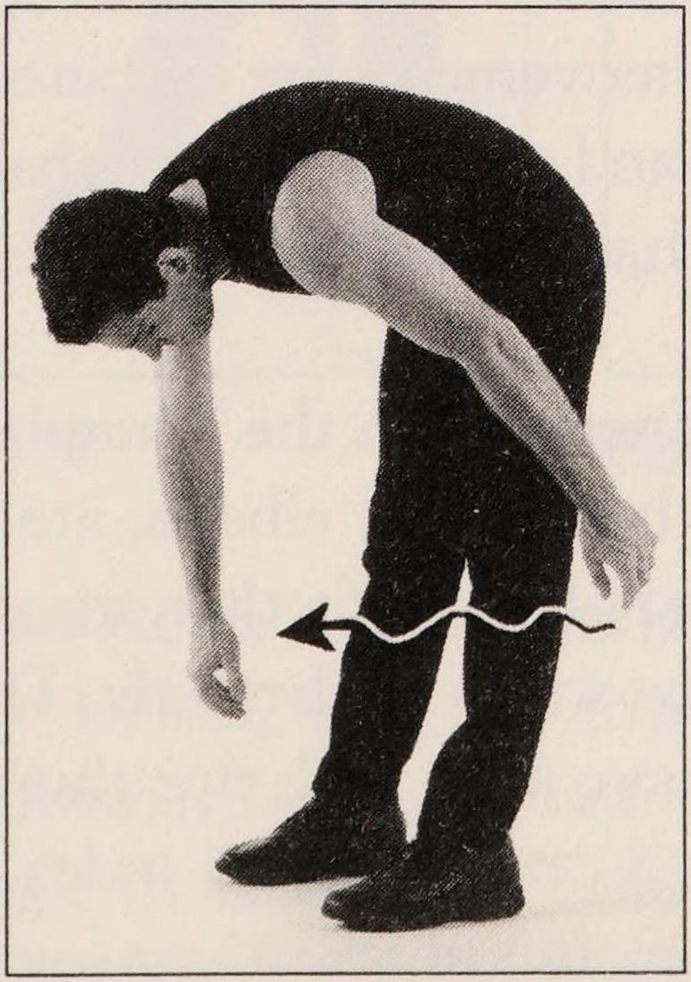


Figure 198

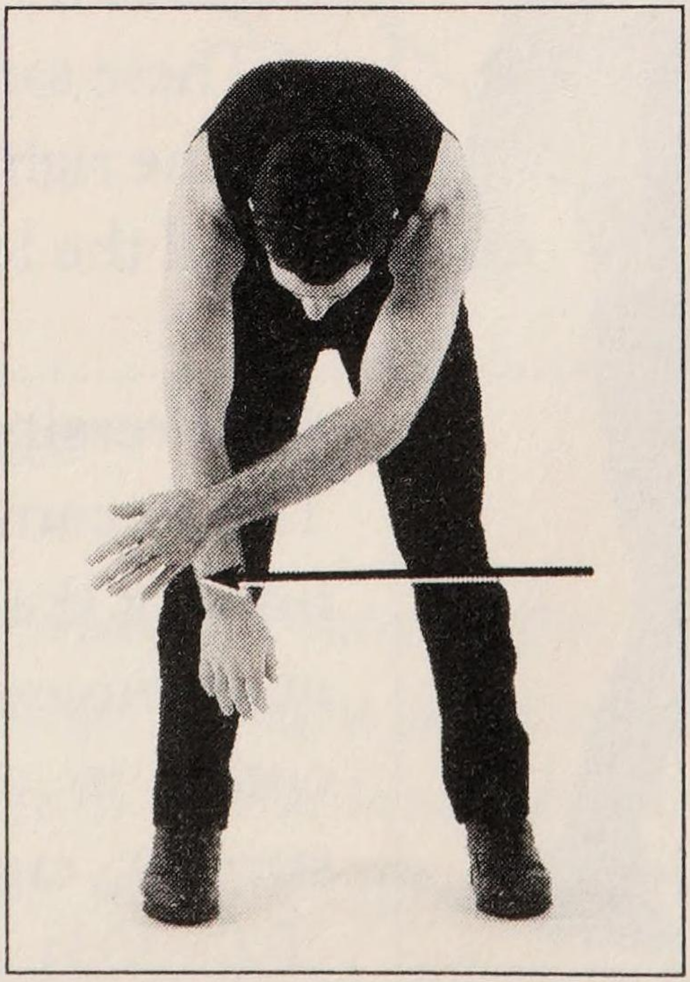


Figure 199

### 43. The T Energy of the Hands

The two forearms are held at right angles right in front of the solar plexus, making the shape of a letter T. The left hand is the horizontal bar of the letter T with the palm turned upward. The right hand is the vertical bar of the letter T with the palm turned downward (fig. 200).

Next, the hands turn back and forth at the same time with considerable force. The palm of the left hand is turned to face downward, and the palm of the right hand is turned to face upward, both hands maintaining the same letter T shape (fig. 201).

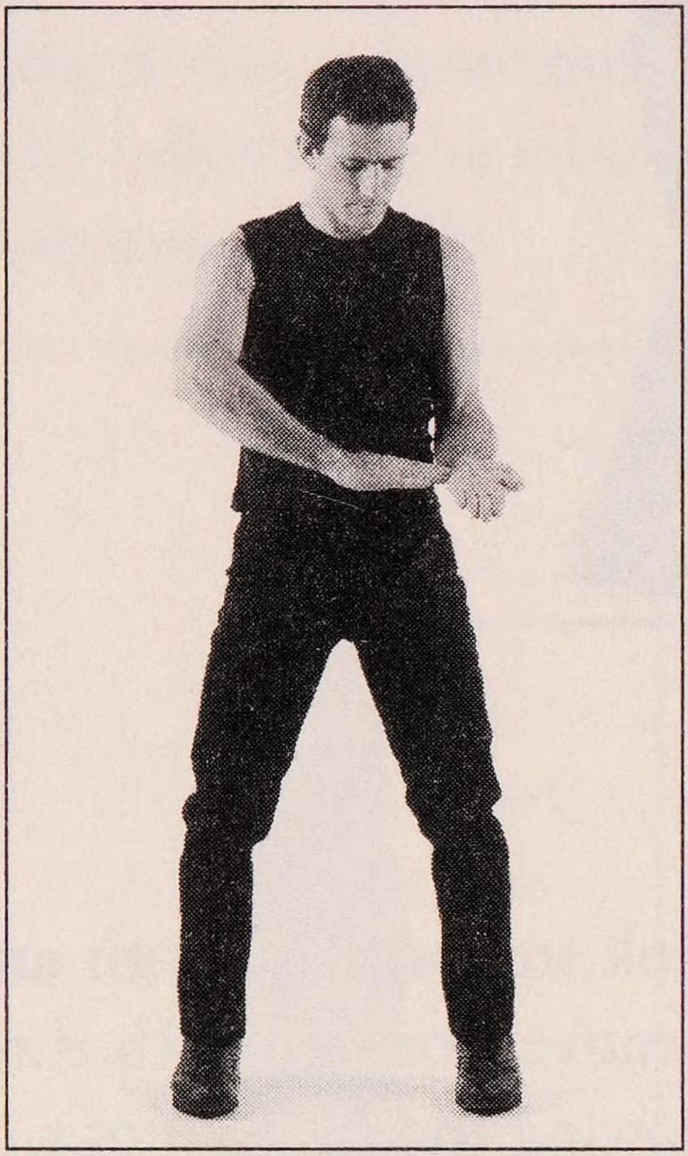


Figure 200

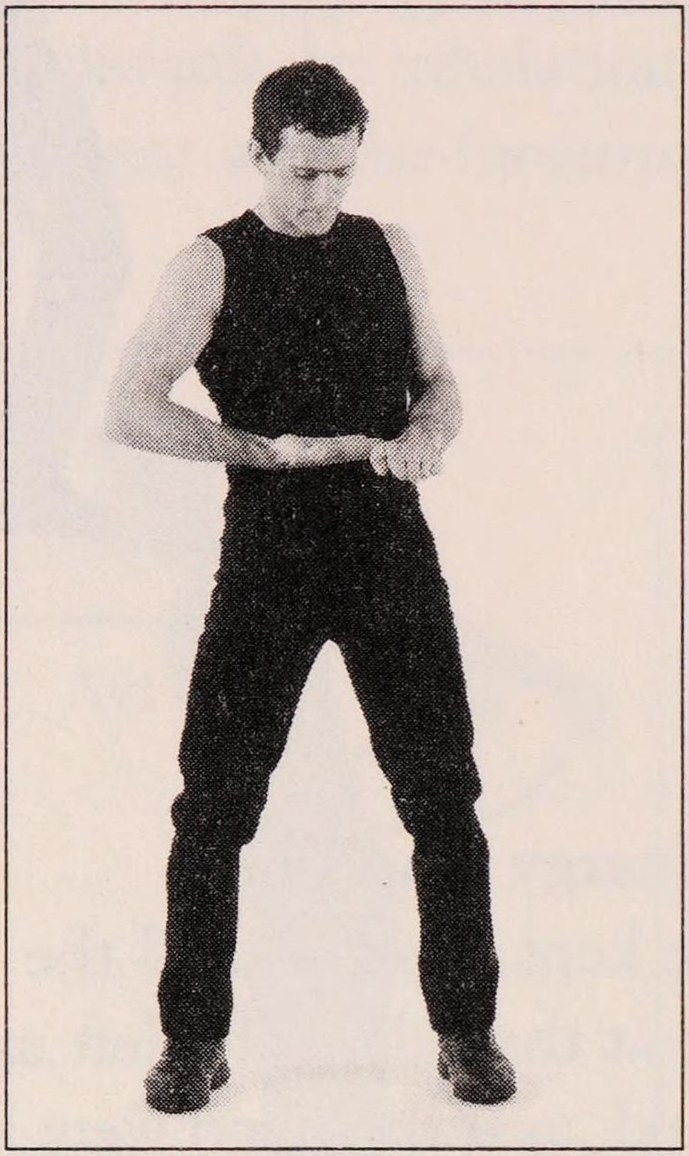


Figure 201

These same movements are executed again, placing the right hand as the horizontal bar of the letter T and the left hand as the vertical one.

## 44. Pressing Energy with the Thumbs

The forearms, bent at the elbows, are held right in front of the body in a perfectly horizontal position, maintaining the width of the body. The fingers are curled in a loose fist, and the thumbs are held straight, cradled on the curled index fingers (figs. 202, 203). An intermittent pressure is exerted between the thumb and the index finger and the curled fingers against the palm of the hand. They contract and relax, spreading the impulse to the arms. The knees are kept bent for stability.

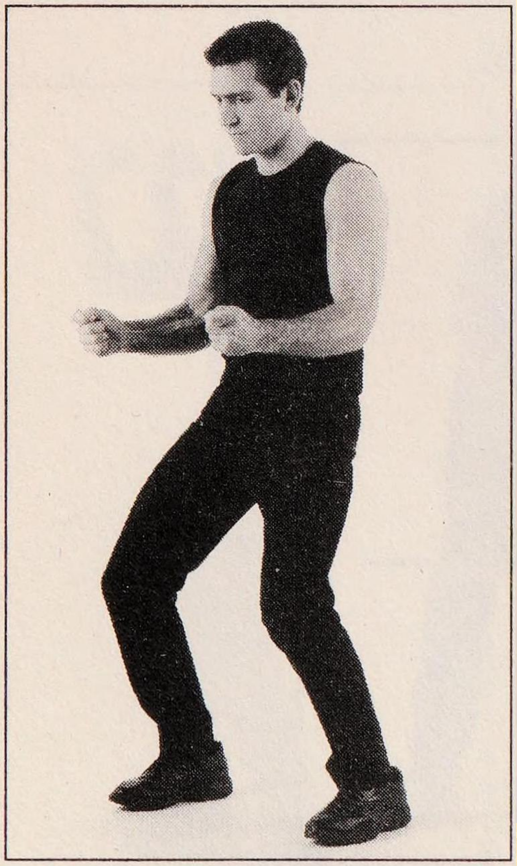


Figure 202

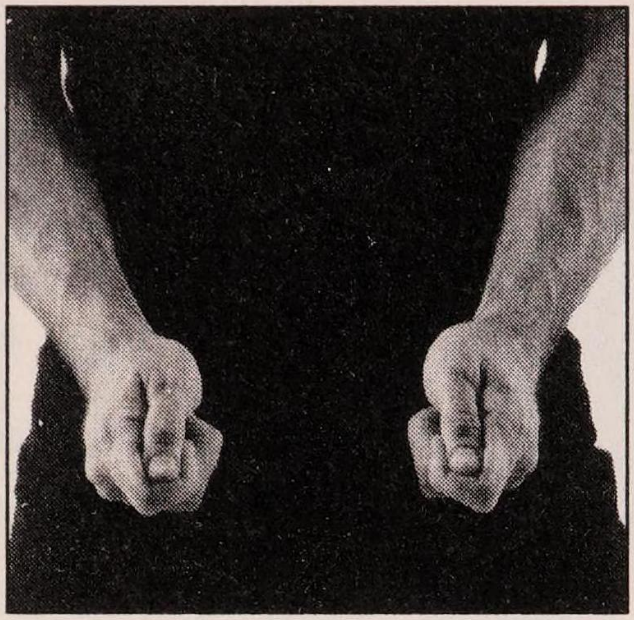


Figure 203

### 45. Drawing an Acute Angle with the Arms Between the Legs

The knees are locked, with the hamstrings as fight as possible. The trunk is bent forward, with the head almost at the level of the knees. The arms dangle in front and, moving repeatedly forward and backward, they draw an acute angle with it's vertex between the legs (figs. 204, 205).

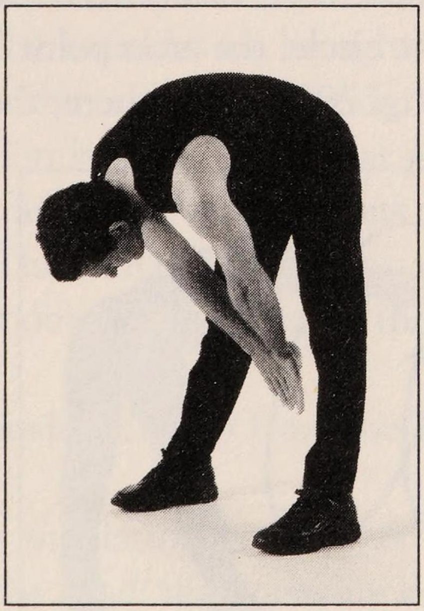


Figure 204

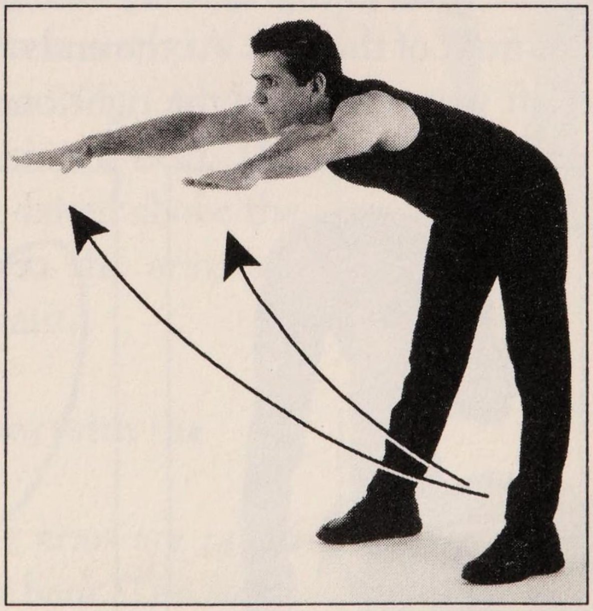


Figure 205

## 46. Drawing an Acute Angle with the Arms in Front of the Face

The knees are locked, with the hamstrings as fight as possible. The trunk is bent forward, with the head almost at the level of the knees. The arms dangle in front of the body and, moving repeatedly from the Kick to the front, they draw an acute angle, with it's vertex in front of the face (figs. 206, 207).

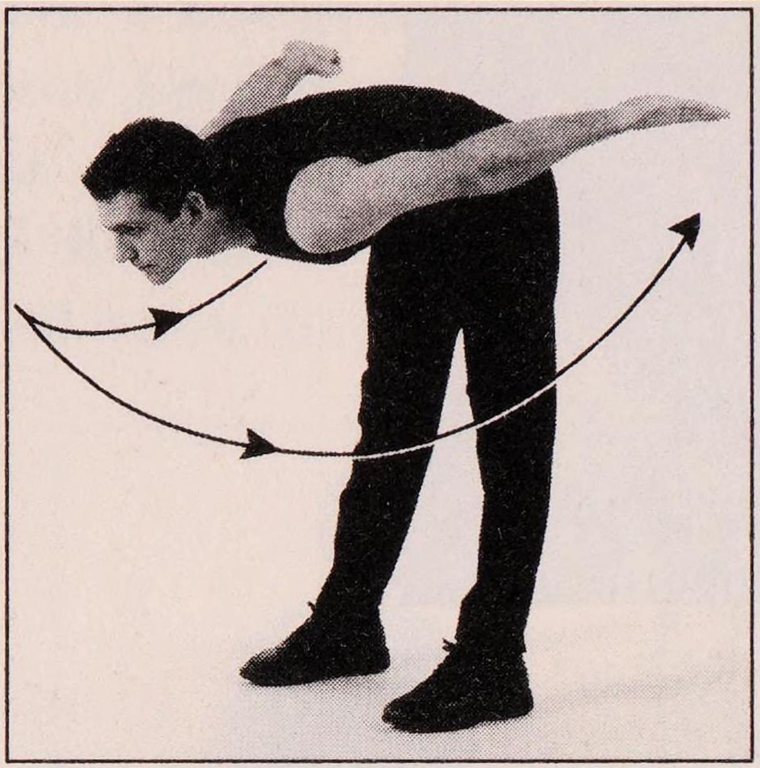


Figure 206

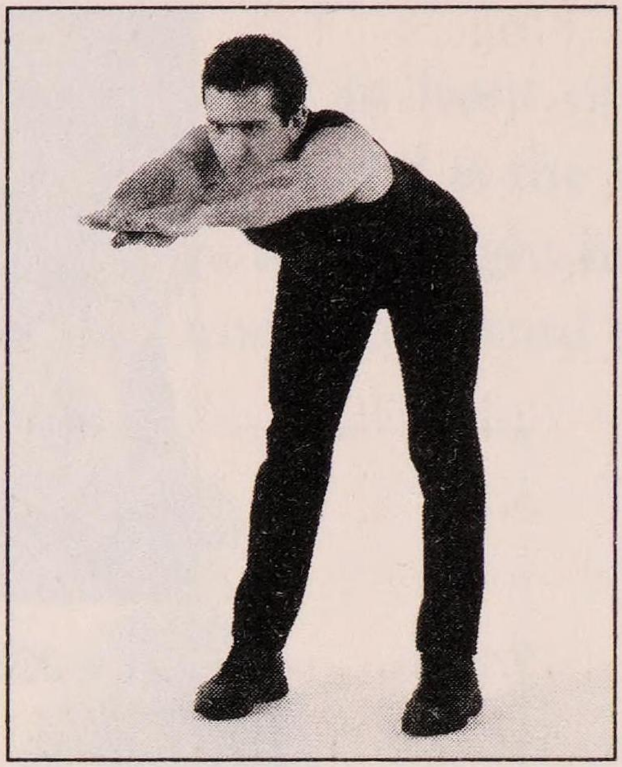


Figure 207

## 47. Drawing a Circle of Energy Between the Legs and in Front of the Body

The knees are kept locked, with the hamstrings as fight as possible. The trunk is bent forward, with the head almost at the level of the knees. The arms dangle in front of the body. The two arms cross at the wrists, the left forearm on top of the right one. The crossed arms swing back between the legs (fig. 208). From there, each one makes an outward circle in front of the face. At the end of the circle, the arms point forward, the left wrist on top of the right one (fig. 209). From there, they draw two inward circles that end between the legs, with the wrists crossed once more in the initial position.

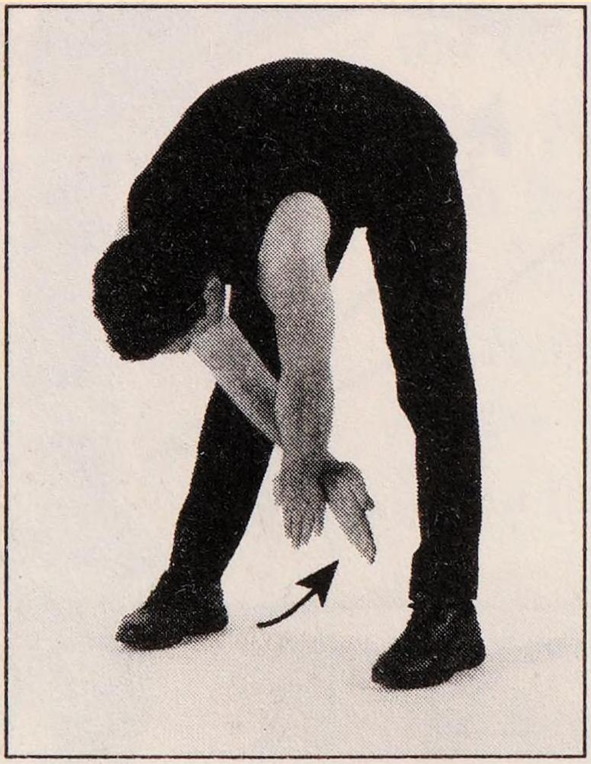


Figure 208

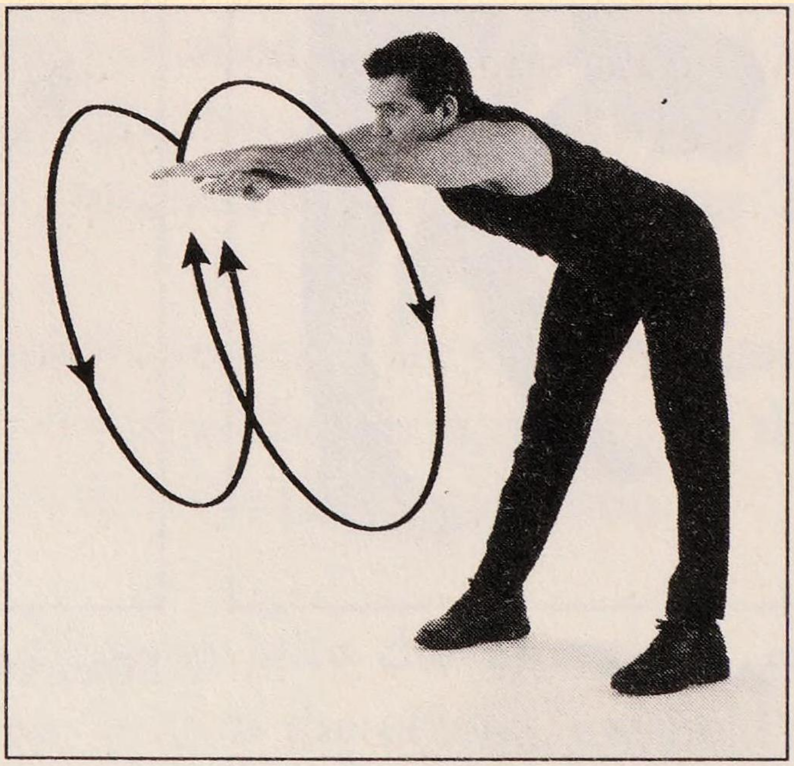


Figure 209

Then the right wrist is made to rest on top of the left one, and the same movements are repeated.

## 48. Three Fingers on the Floor

The arms are brought slowly over the head as a deep inhalation is taken. A slow exhalation begins while the arms are brought all the way down to the floor, keeping the knees locked and the hamstrings as fight as possible. The index and middle fingers of each hand touch the floor a foot in front of the body, and then the thumb is also brought to rest on , the floor (fig. 210). A deep inhalation is taken while that position is held. The body straightens, and the arms are raised above the head. The air is exhaled as the arms come down to the level of the waist.

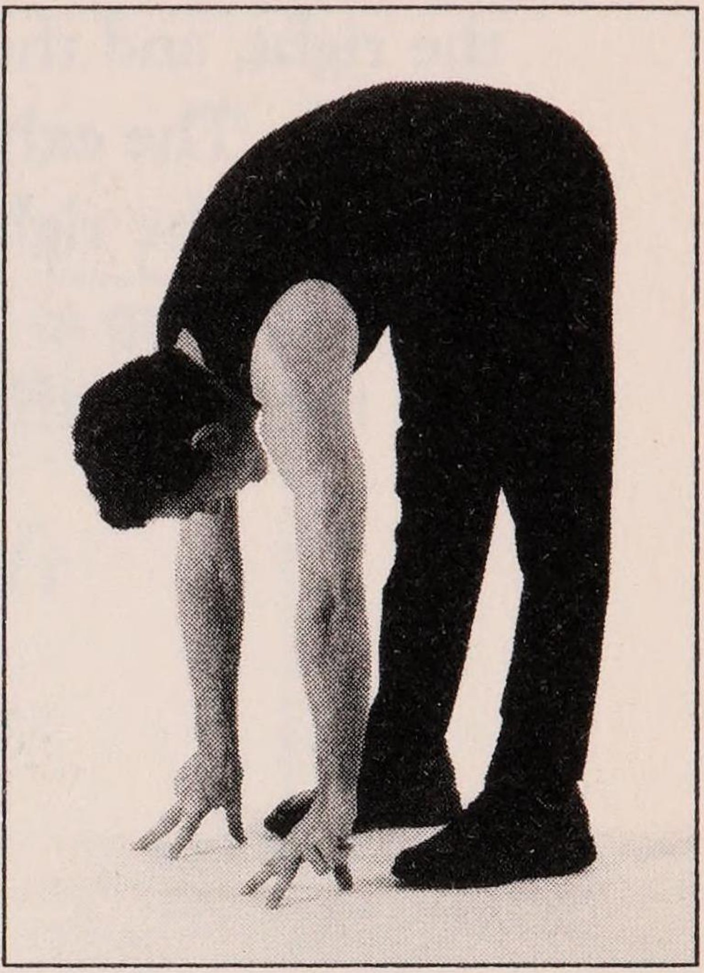


Figure 210

### 49. The Knuckles on the Toes

The arms are raised above the head as a deep inhalation is taken. As the air is exhaled, the arms are brought all the way down to the floor, keeping the knees locked and the hamstrings as fight as possible. The knuckles are brought to rest on top of the toes as the exhalation ends (fig. 211). A deep inhalation is taken while that position is held. The body straightens, and the arms are raised above the head. The exhalation begins when the arms are brought down to the level of the waist.

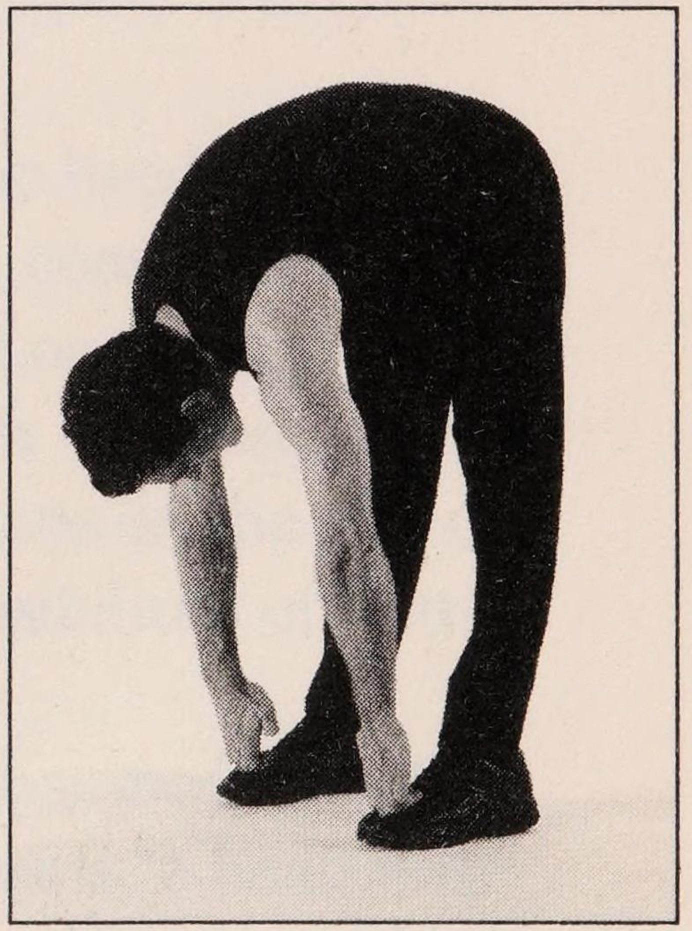


Figure 211

### 50. Drawing Energy from the Floor with the Breath

A deep inhalation is taken as the arms are raised above the head; the knees are kept bent. The exhalation begins as the trunk turns to the left and bends down as far as possible. The hands, with the palms down, come to rest around the left foot, with the right hand in front of the foot and the left hand behind it; they move back and forth five rimes as the exhalation ends (fig. 212). A deep inhalation is taken then, and the body straightens as the arms move over the head. The trunk turns to the right, and the exhalation begins as the trunk bends down as far as possible. The exhalation ends after the hands move back and forth five times by the right foot. Another deep breath is taken, and the body straightens up as the arms move above the head and the trunk pivots to face the front; then the arms come down as the air is exhaled.

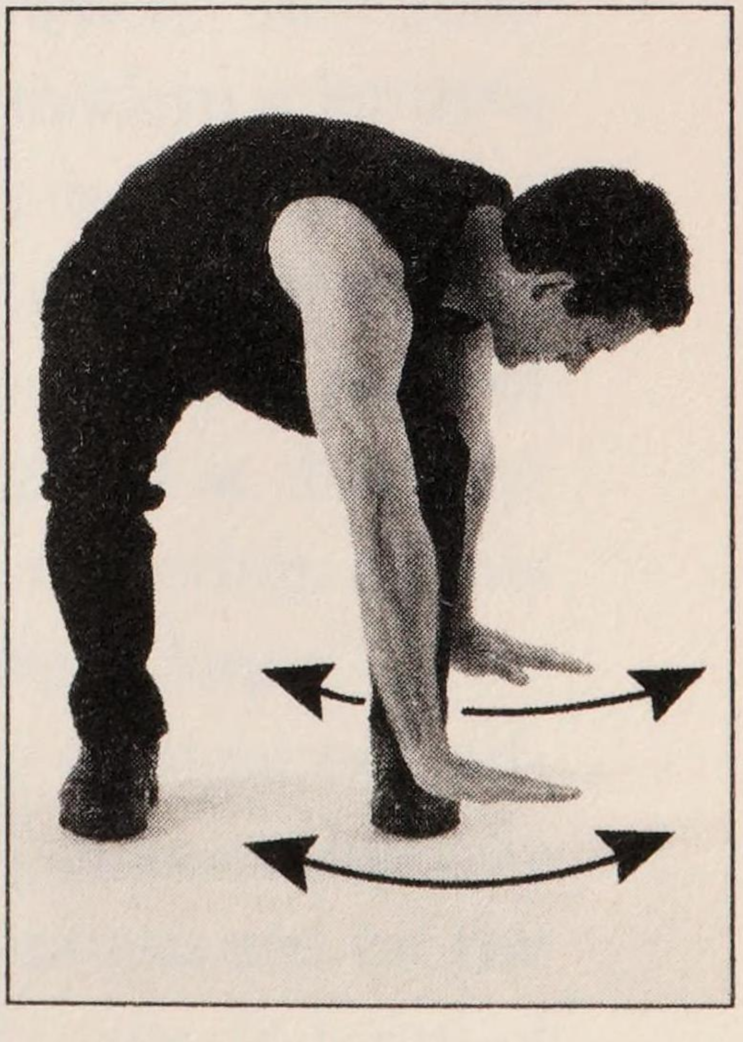


Figure 212

## The Fourth Series: The Separation of the Left Body and the Right Body: The Heat Series

Don Juan taught his disciples that for the shamans who lived in Mexico in ancient times, the concept that a human being is composed of two complete functioning bodies, one on the left and one on the right, was fundamental to their endeavors as sorcerers. Such a classificatory scheme had nothing to do with intellectual speculations on the part of those sorcerers, or with logical conclusions about possibilities of distribution of mass in the body.

When don Juan explained this to me, I countered that modern biologists had the concept of bilateral symmetry, which means "a basic body plan in which the left and right sides of the organism can be divided into approximate mirror images of each other along the midline."

"The classifications of the shamans of ancient Mexico," don Juan replied, "were more profound than the conclusions of modern scientists, because they stemmed from perceiving energy directly as it flows in the universe. When the human body is perceived as energy, it is utterly patent that it is composed not of two parts, but of two different types of energy: two different currents of energy, two opposing and at the same nine complementary forces that coexist side by side, mirroring, in this fashion, the dual structure of everything in the universe at large."

The shamans of ancient Mexico accorded each-one of these two different kinds of energy the stature of a total body, and spoke exclusively in terms of the left body and the right body. Their emphasis was on the left body, because they considered it to be the most effective, in terms of the nature of it's energy configuration, for the ultimate goals of shamanism. The shamans of ancient Mexico, who depicted the two bodies as streams of energy, depicted the left stream as being more turbulent and aggressive, moving in undulating ripples and projecting out waves of energy. When illustrating what he was talking about, don Juan asked me to visualize a scene in which the left body was like half of the sun, and that all the solar flares happened on that half. The waves of energy projected out of the left body were like those solar flares - always perpendicular to the round surface from which they originated.

He depicted the stream of energy of the right body as not being turbulent at all on the surface. It moved like water inside a tank which was being slightly tilted back and forth. There were no ripples in it, but a continuous rocking motion. At a deeper level, however, it swirled in rotational circles in the form of spirals. Don Juan asked me to envision a very wide, peaceful-looking tropical river, where the water on the surface seemed barely to move, but which had shattering riptides below the surface. In the world of everyday life, these two currents are amalgamated into a single unit: the human body as we know it.

To the eye of the seer, however, the energy of the total body is circular. This meant to the sorcerers of don Juan's lineage that the right body was the predominant force.

"What happens in the case of left-handed people?" I asked him once. "Are they more suitable for the endeavors of sorcerers?"

"Why do you think they should be?" he replied, seemingly surprised by my question.

"Because obviously, the left side is predominant," I said.

"This predominance is of no importance whatsoever for sorcerers," he said. "Yes, the left side predominates in the sense that they can hold a hammer with their left hand very effectively. They write with their left hand. They can hold a knife with their left hand, and do it very well.

If they are leg shakers, they can certainly shake the left knee with great rhythm. In other words, they have rhythm in their left body, but sorcery is not a matter of that kind of predominance. The right body still rules them with a circular motion."

"But does left-handedness have any advantages or disadvantages for sorcerers?" I asked. I was driven by the implication built into many of the Indo-European languages of the sinister quality of left-handedness.

"There are no advantages or disadvantages to my knowledge," he said. "The division of energy between the two bodies is not measured by dexterity, or the lack of it. The predominance of the right body is an energetic predominance, which was encountered by the shamans of those ancient times. They never tried to explain why this predominance happened in the first place, nor did they try to further investigate the philosophical implications of it. For them, it was a fact, but a very special fact. It was a fact that could be changed."

"Why did they want to change it, don Juan?" I asked.

"Because the predominant circular motion of the right body's energy , is too friggin' boring!" he exclaimed. "That circular motion certainly takes care of any event of the daily world, but it does it circularly, if you know what I mean."

"I don't know what you mean, don Juan," I said.

"Every situation in life is met in this circular fashion," he replied, making a small circle with his hand. "On and on and on and on and on. It's a circular movement that seems to draw the energy inward always, and turns it around and around in a centripetal motion. Under these conditions, there's no expansion. Nothing can be new. There is nothing that cannot be inwardly accounted for. What a drag!"

"In what way can this situation be changed, don Juan?" I asked.

"It's too late to be really changed," he replied. "The damage is already done. The spiral quality is here to remain. But it doesn't have to be ceaseless. Yes, we walk the way we do, we can't change that, but we would also like to run, or to walk backward, or to climb a ladder; just to walk and walk and walk and walk is very effective, but meaningless. The contribution of the left body would make those centers of vitality more pliable. If they could undulate instead of moving in spirals, if only for an instant, different energy would get into them, with staggering results."

I understood what he was talking about, at a level beyond thought, because there was really no way that I could have understood it linearly.

"The sensation that human beings have of being utterly bored with themselves," he continued, "is due to this predominance of the right body. The only thing left for human beings to do, in a universal sense, is to find ways of ridding themselves of boredom. What they end up doing is finding ways of killing time: the only commodity no one has enough of. But what's worse is the reaction to this unbalanced distribution of energy. The violent reactions of people are due to this unbalanced distribution. It seems that from time to rime, helplessness builds furious currents of energy within the human body, which explode in violent behavior. Violence seems to be, for human beings, another way of killing time."

"But why is it, don Juan, that the sorcerers of ancient Mexico never wanted to know why this situation happened?" I asked, bewildered. I found what I was feeling about this inward motion to be fascinating.

"They never tried to find out," he said, "because the instant they formulated the question, they knew the answer."

"So they knew why?" I asked.

"No, they didn't know why, but they knew how it happened. But that's another story."

He left me hanging there, but throughout the course of my association with him, he explained this seeming contradiction.

"Awareness is the only avenue that human beings have for evolution," he said to me once, "and something extraneous to us, something that has to do with the predatorial condition of the universe, has interrupted our possibility of evolving by taking possession of our awareness. Human beings have fallen prey to a predatorial force, which has imposed on them, for it's own convenience, the passivity which is characteristic of the energy of the right body."

Don Juan described our evolutionary possibility as a journey that our awareness takes across something the shamans of ancient Mexico called the dark sea of awareness: something which they considered to be an actual feature of the universe, an incommensurable element that permeates the universe, like clouds of matter, or light.

Don Juan was convinced that the predominance of the right body in this unbalanced merging of the right and left bodies marks the interruption of our journey of awareness. What seems for us to be the natural dominance of one side over the other was, for the sorcerers of his lineage, an aberration, which they strove to correct.

Those shamans believed that in order to establish a harmonious division between the left and the right bodies, practitioners needed to enhance their awareness. Any enhancement of human awareness, however, had to be buttressed by the most exigent discipline. Otherwise, this enhancement, painfully accomplished, would turn into an obsession, resulting in anything from psychological aberration to energetic injury.

Don Juan Matus called the collection of *magical passes* which deal exclusively with the separation between the left body and the right body The Heat Group: the most crucial element in the training of the shamans of ancient Mexico. This was a nickname given to this collection of *magical passes* because it makes the energy of the right body a little more turbulent. Don Juan Matus used to joke about this phenomenon, saying that the movements for the left body put an enormous pressure on the right body, which has been accustomed from birth to ruling without opposition. The moment it is faced with opposition, it gets hot with anger. Don Juan urged all his disciples to practice the Heat Group assiduously, in order to use it's aggressiveness to reinforce the weak left body.

In *Tensegrity*, this group is called The Heat Series, in order to make it more congruous with the aims of *Tensegrity*, which are extremely pragmatic on the one hand and extremely abstract on the other, such as the practical utilization of energy for well-being coupled with the abstract idea of how that energy is obtained. In all the *magical passes* of this series, it is recommended to adopt the division of left and right bodies, rather than left and right sides of the body. The end result of this observance would be to say that during the execution of these *magical passes*, the body that doesn't perform the movements is kept immobile. However, all it's muscles should be engaged, not in activity, but in awareness. This immobility of the body that is not performing the movements should be extended to include it's head; that is to say, to the opposite side of the head. Such immobility of half of the face and head is more difficult to attain, but it can be accomplished with practice.

The series is divided into four groups.

## Fourth Series: First Group: Stirring Energy on the Left Body and the Right Body

The first group comprises sixteen *magical passes* that stir the energy of the left body and the right body, each independently from the other. Each magical pass is performed with either the left arm or the right arm, and in some cases with both at the same time. The arms never go, however, beyond the vertical line that separates the two bodies.

### 1. Gathering Energy in a Ball from the Front of the Left and the Right Bodies and Breaking It with the Back of the Hand

With the palm of the hand slightly curved and facing the right, the left arm circles inward twice in front of the body (fig. 213). All the muscles of the arm are held tense as this circular motion is executed. Then the back of the hand strikes forcefully to the left as if breaking the top of a ball gathered with the movement of the arm (fig. 214).

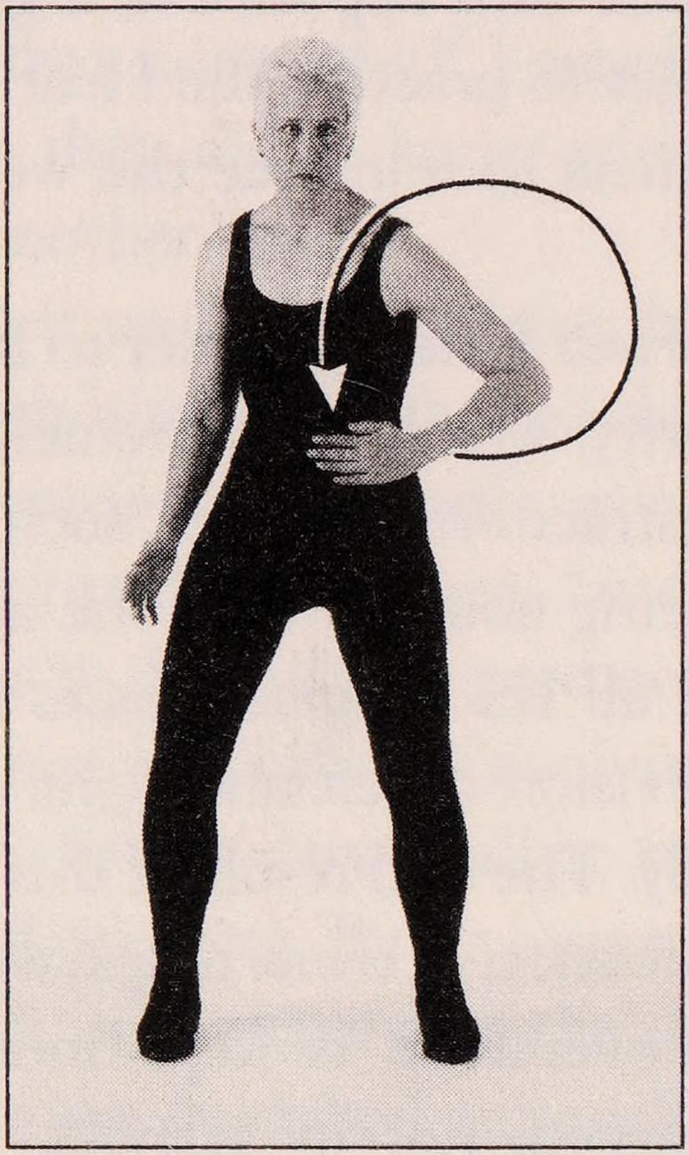


*Figure 213*

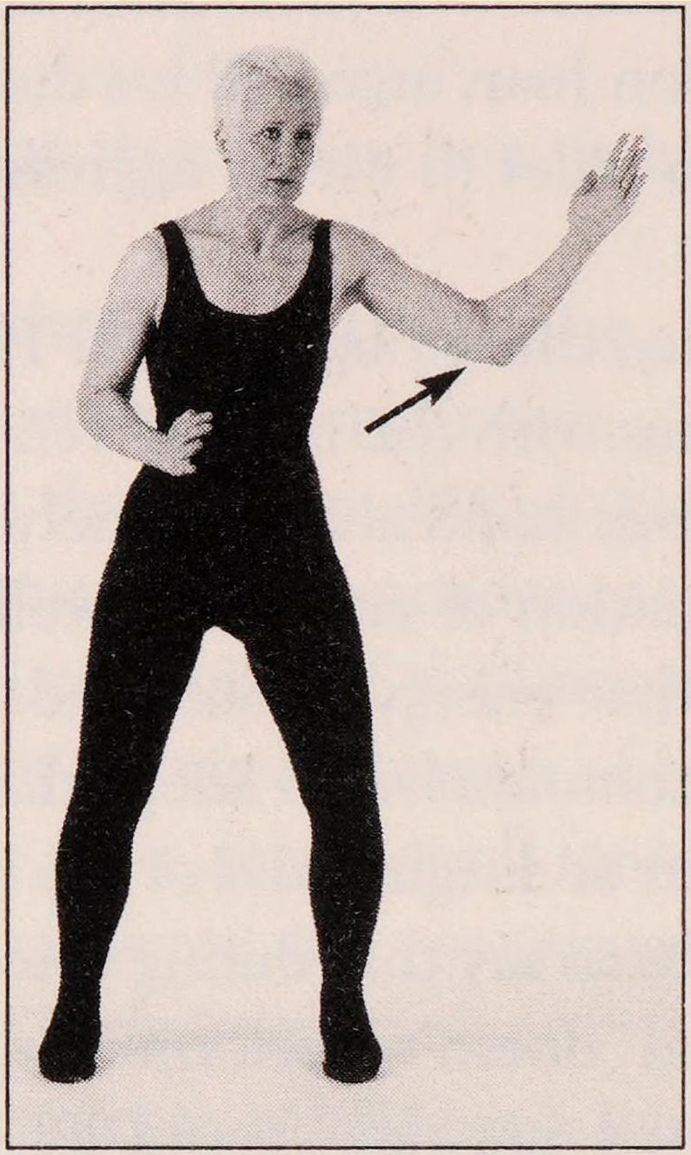


*Figure 214*

The hand strikes a point an arm's length away from the body above the shoulders, at a forty-five-degree angle. While this strike is being executed, all the muscles are kept tense, including the muscles of the arms, a tension that permits controlling the strike. The impact is felt on the areas of the pancreas and spleen and the left kidney and adrenals.

The same movements are repeated on the right side, and the impact is felt on the areas of the liver and the right kidney and adrenals.

### 2. Gathering Energy of the Left and Right Bodies in a Circle Which Is Perforated with the Tips of the Fingers

The left forearm is held in front of the body, at a ninety-degree angle in relation to it. The wrist is kept straight. The palm of the hand faces to the right as the fingers point to the front. The thumb is kept locked. As in the previous magical pass, the forearm circles twice, going from the left up to the level of the shoulder and turning toward tin- center of the body (fig.215). The elbow is then quickly pulled all the way back, and the circle drawn by the forearm is perforated by the tips of the fingers in a forward thrust (fig. 216). The elbow is moved all the way back once more in order to gain striking power, and then the hand shoots forward again. The same sequence of movements is performed with the right arm.

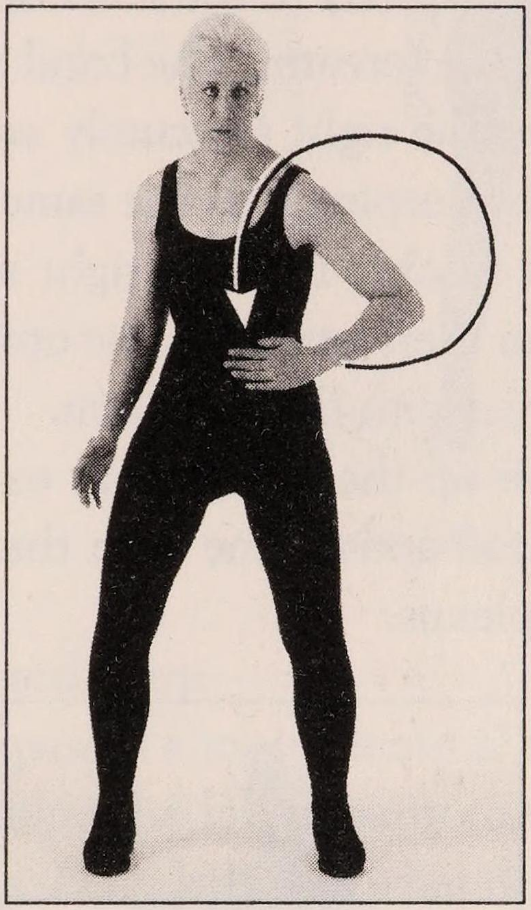


*Figure 215*

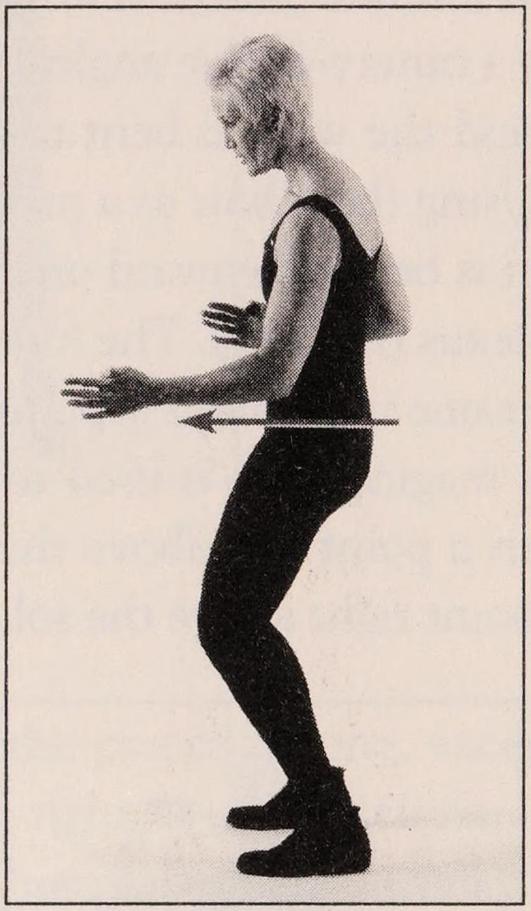


*Figure 216*

### 3. Hoisting Left and Right Energy Upward

Both knees are slightly bent. The left knee is then raised to the level of the pancreas, fully bent, while the foot is held with the toes pointing to the ground. At the same time that this movement is performed, the left forearm shoots upward until it reaches a point at a forty-five-degree angle with the body; the elbow is kept tight against the body. Both the leg and the arm move in total synchronicity, jolting the midsection (fig. 217). The same movements are repeated with The right leg and the right arm. The tendency of energy is to sink, and it is of great importance to spread it upward to The midsection of the body. It is the belief of shamans that the left body is ruled by the area of the pancreas and spleen, and the right body by the area of the liver and gallbladder. Shamans understand this process of hoisting energy as a maneuver to energize those two centers separately.

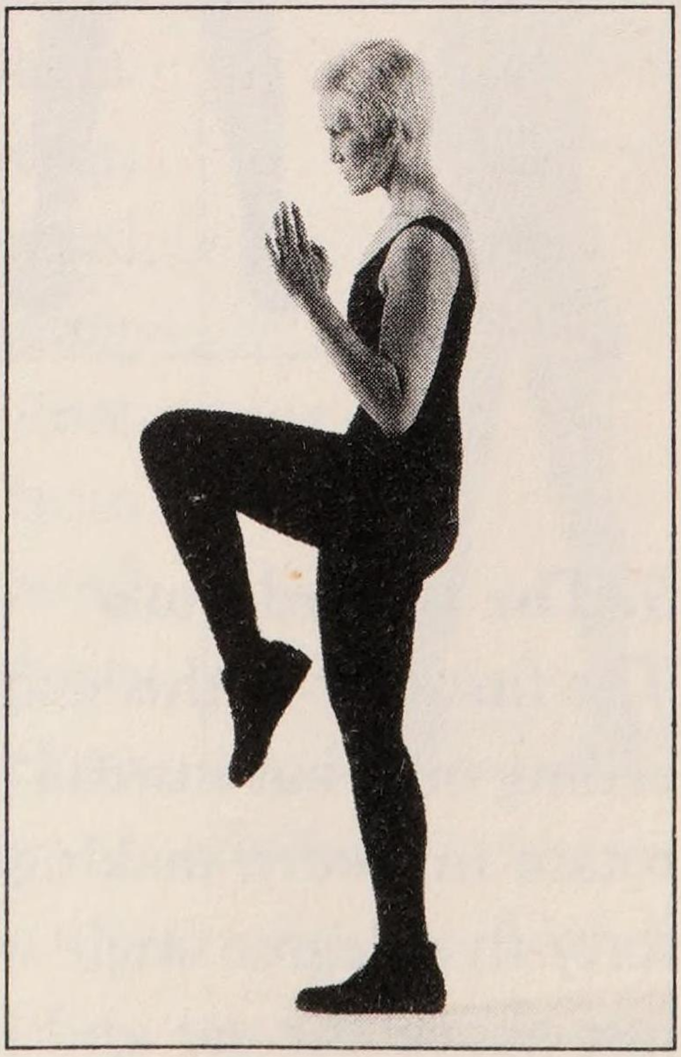


*Figure 217*

### 4. The Up-and-Down Pressure

The left elbow is raised in front of the body to the level of the shoulder, bent at a ninety-degree angle with the forearm. The hand is clenched in a fist, and the wrist is bent toward the right as acutely as possible (fig. 218). Using the elbow as a pivot by keeping it at the same position, the forearm is bent downward until it reaches the area right in front of the solar plexus (fig. 219). The forearm then returns to the upright position. The same movement is performed with the right arm.

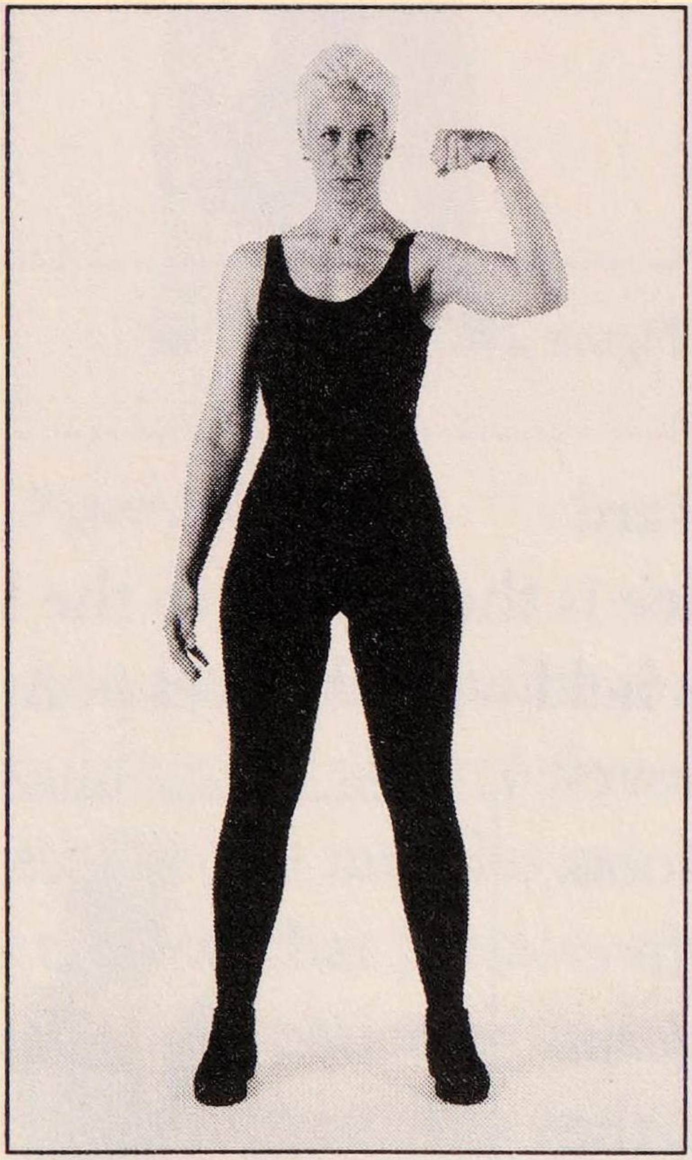


*Figure 218*

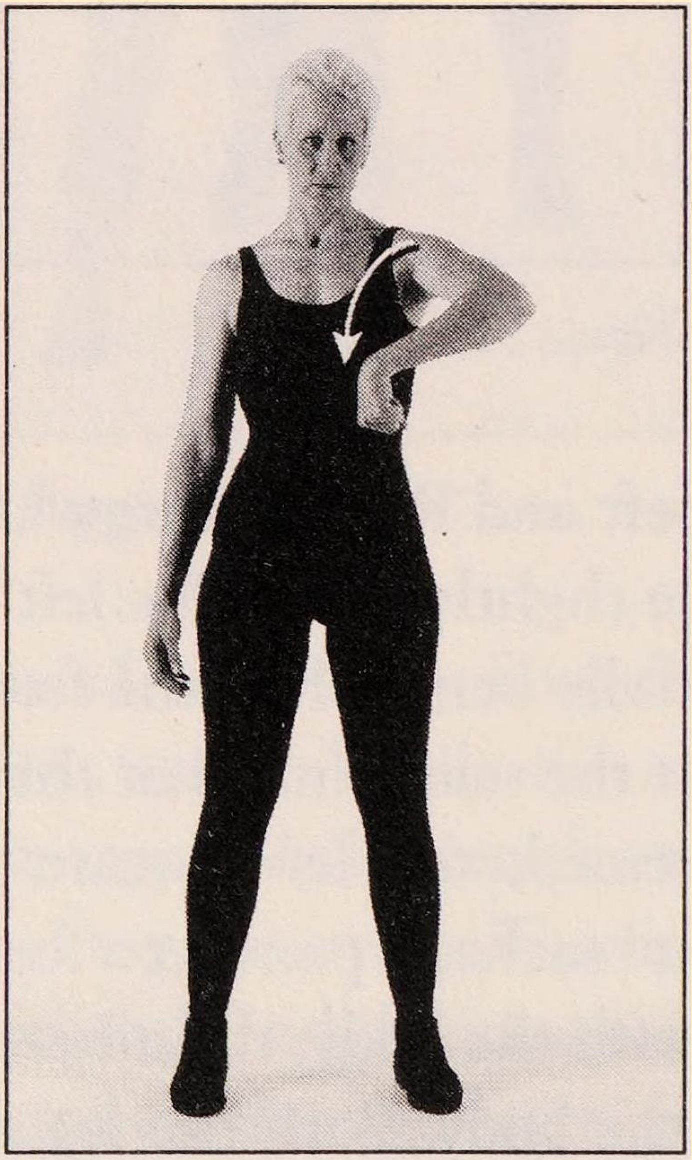


*Figure 219*

This magical pass is used to stir up the energy that exists in an arc between a point just above the head and in line with the left shoulder and a point right above the solar plexus.

### 5. The Inward Turn

The first part of this magical pass is exactly like the first part of the preceding one, but instead of bending the forearm downward, it is made to rotate inwardly, making a complete circle, pivoting on the elbow at a forty-five-degree angle with the body. The top of the circle is at a point just above the ear and in line with the left shoulder. The wrist is also made to rotate as the circle is drawn (fig. 220).

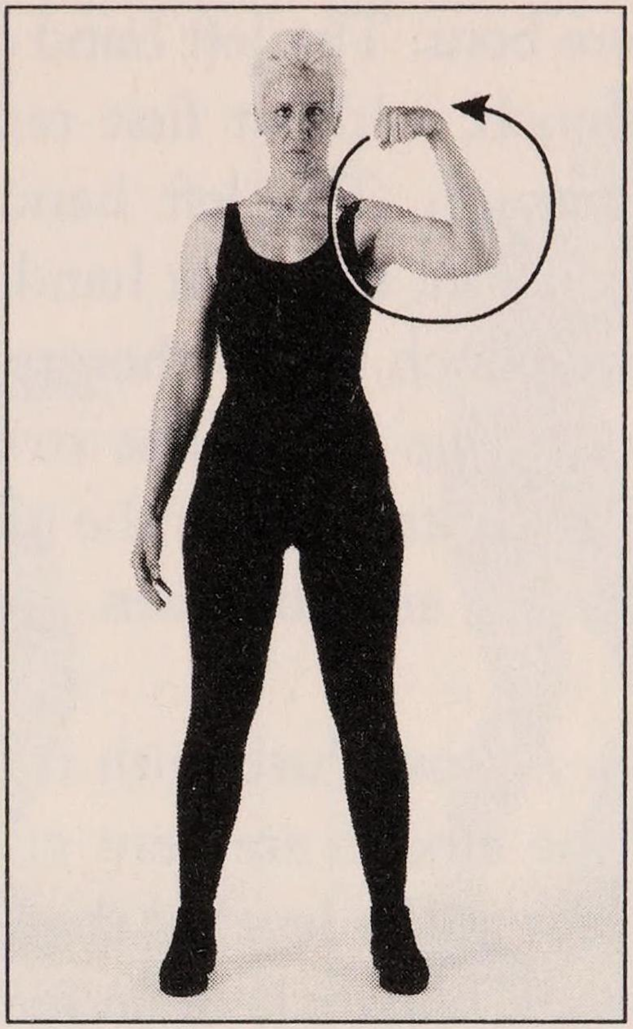


Figure 220

The same movement is performed with the right hand.

### 6. The Outward Turn

This magical pass is almost identical to the preceding one, except that instead of turning the left forearm to the right to make a circle, it turns to the left (fig. 221). It makes what don Juan called an outward circle, as opposed to the circle made in the previous magical pass, which he called an inward circle.

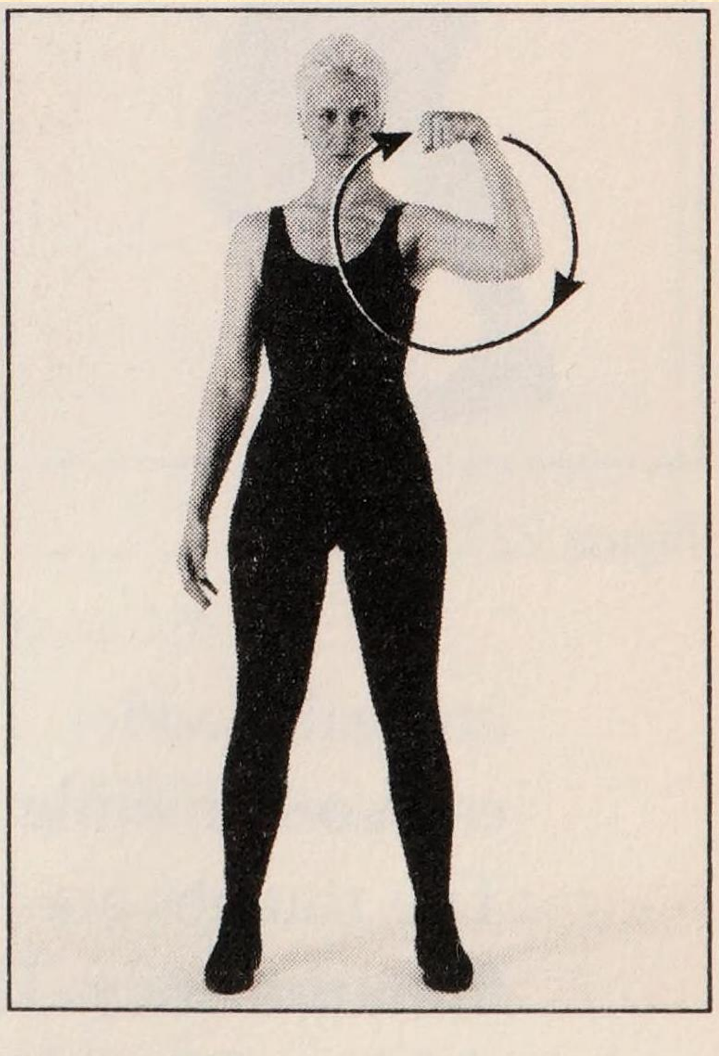


Figure 221

The same movement is performed with the right hand.

In this magical pass, the energy stirred is part of the arc of energy dealt with in the two preceding *magical passes*. The fourth, fifth, and sixth *magical passes* of this group are performed together. Shamans have found out, by means of their *seeing*, that human beings have enormous caches of unused energy lying around inside their luminous spheres. They have also found out, in this manner, that these *magical passes* stir the energy dispersed from the respective centers of vitality - the one around the liver and the one around the pancreas - which stays suspended for quite a while before it begins to sink down to the bottom of the luminous sphere.

**7. A High Push with the Fists**

The arms are held in front of the body at the level of the shoulders. The hands are fisted with the palms turned inward the ground. The elbows are bent. The left hand strikes forward with a short punch, without first retrieving the elbow to gain strength. The left hand is retrieved to it's initial position; the right hand follows with another similar punch and is then retrieved to it's original position (fig. 222). The strike of the fists comes from the contraction of the muscles of the arms, shoulder blades, and abdomen.

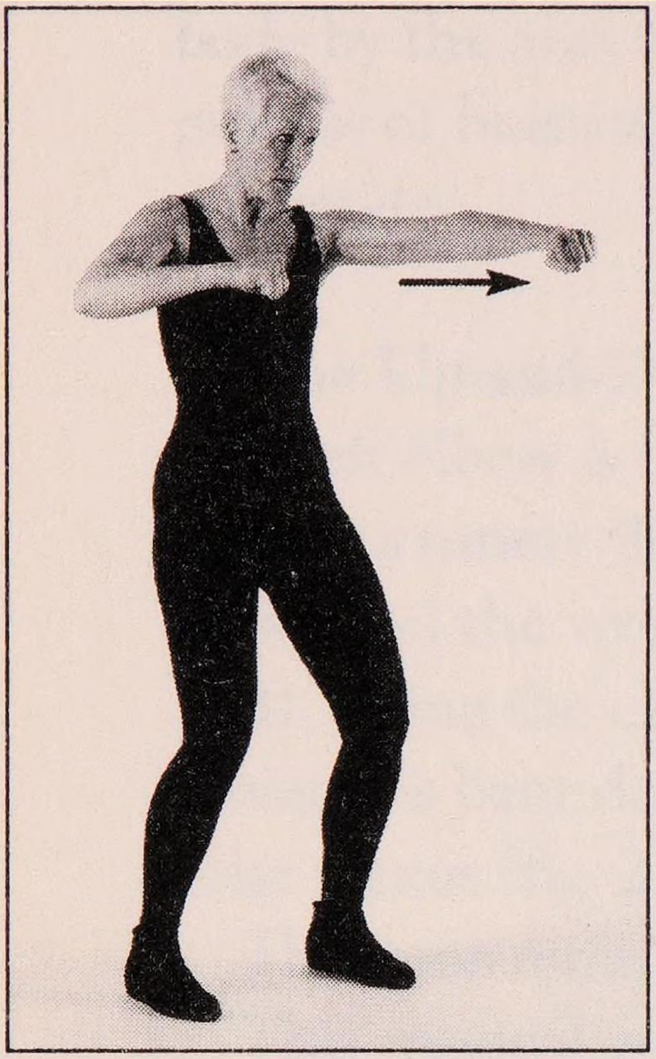


Figure 222

### 8. A Low Push with the Fists

The elbows are bent at a ninety-degree angle and kept at the level of the waist. They don't touch the body, but are kept an inch or two away from it. The hands are clenched in fists with the palms facing each other. The left forearm moves to strike in a short punch, driven by the muscles of the stomach, which contract in unison with the muscles of the arm and the shoulder blade (fig. 223). After striking, the forearm is retrieved instantly, as if the punch has generated the force to push the arm back. The right arm moves immediately afterward in the same fashion. Just as in the preceding pass, the elbows don't move back to gain striking strength; the strength is derived solely from the muscular tension of the abdomen, arms, and shoulder blades.

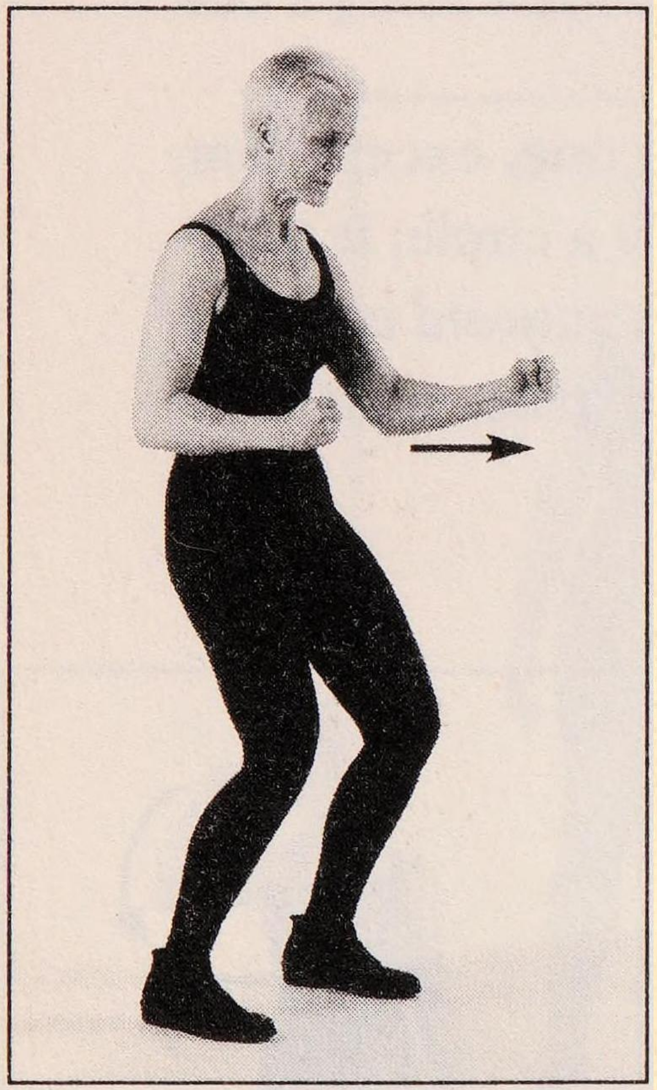


*Figure 223*

## 9. A Wheel with the Fingers Contracted at the Middle Joints

The elbows are kept at the level of the waist over the areas of the pancreas and spleen, and the liver and gallbladder. The wrists are kept straight; the palms of the hands face each other while the fingers are tightly clenched at the second knuckle. The thumbs are locked (fig. 224). The elbows move forward and away from the body. The left hand circles in a vertical rasping motion, as if the bent knuckles were rasping a surface in front of the body. Then the right hand does the same. The two hands move in an alternate fashion in such a manner (fig. 225). The muscles of the abdomen are kept as fight as possible in order to give impetus to this movement.

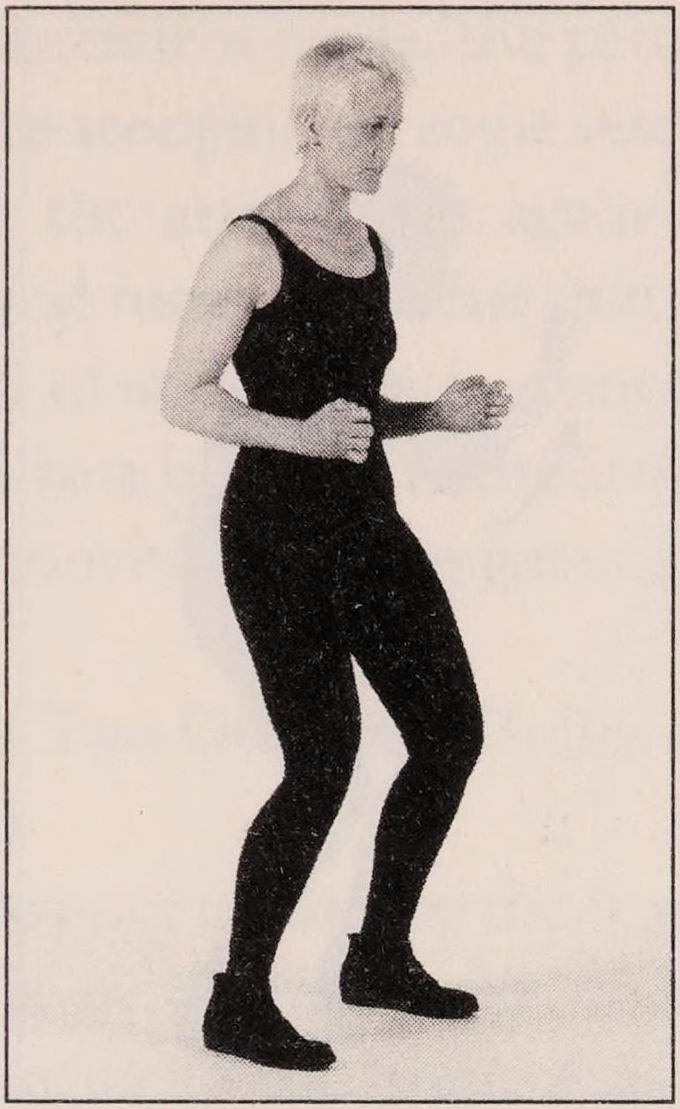


Figure 224

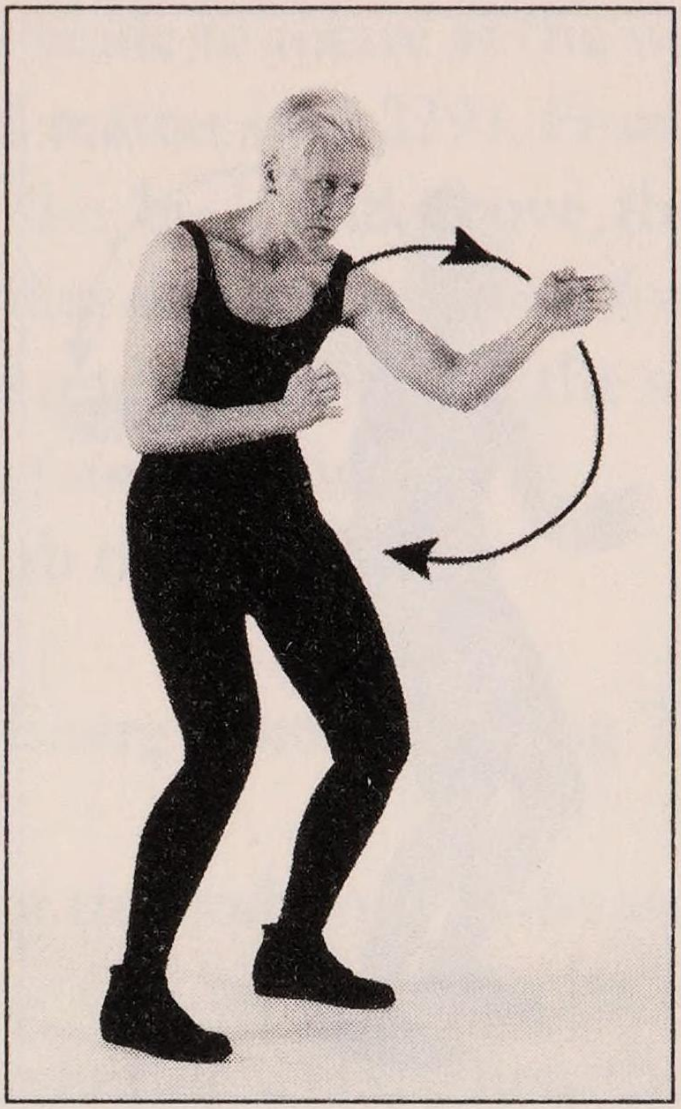


Figure 225

## 10. Smoothing Energy Out in Front of the Body

The flat palm of the left hand, which faces forward, is raised to a level just above the head, in front of the body. The palm slides downward in a slanted line and comes to the level of the pancreas and spleen, as if it were smoothing out a vertical surface. Without stopping there, it continues moving to the back; the body rotates to the left to allow the arm to come fully over the head. The hand, with the palm facing downward, then comes down with great force, as if to slap a rubbery substance in front of the area of the pancreas and spleen (fig. 226).

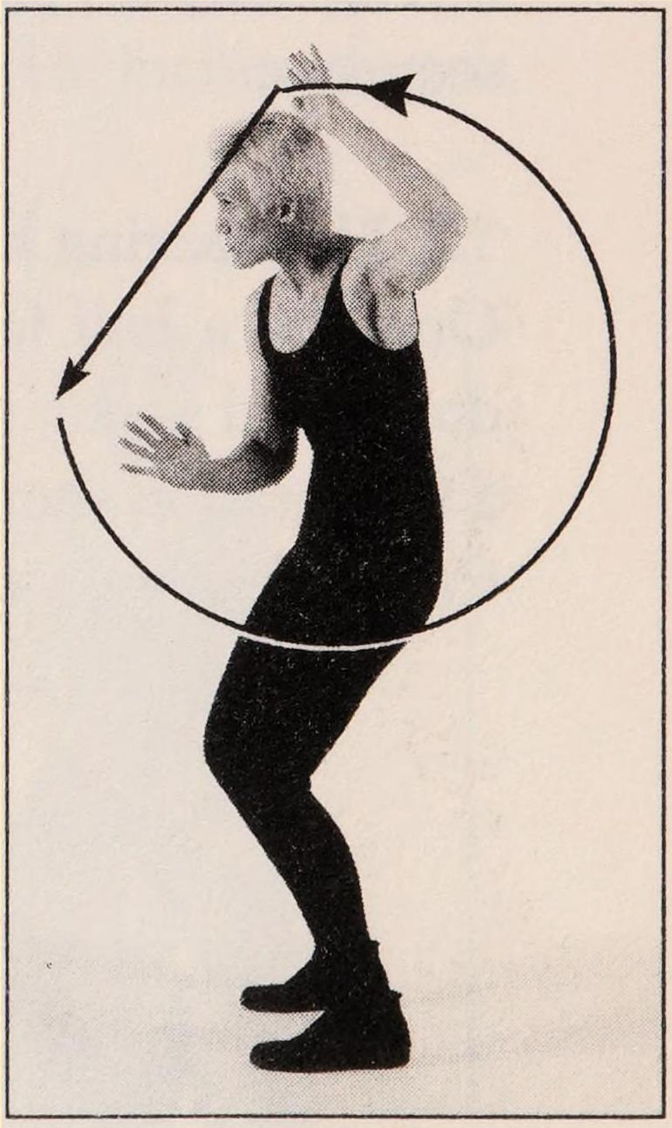


Figure 226

Exactly the same movements are performed with The right arm, but using the area of the liver and gallbladder as the striking point.

### 11. Hitting Energy in Front of the Face with an Upward Thrust of the Fist

The trunk turns slightly to the left in order to allow the left arm two full backward rotations going first to the front, above the head, then to the kick, where the palm turns slightly inward as if to scoop something from the back (fig. 227). The movement ends at the second turn with an upward thrust of the fisted hand in front of the face (fig. 228).

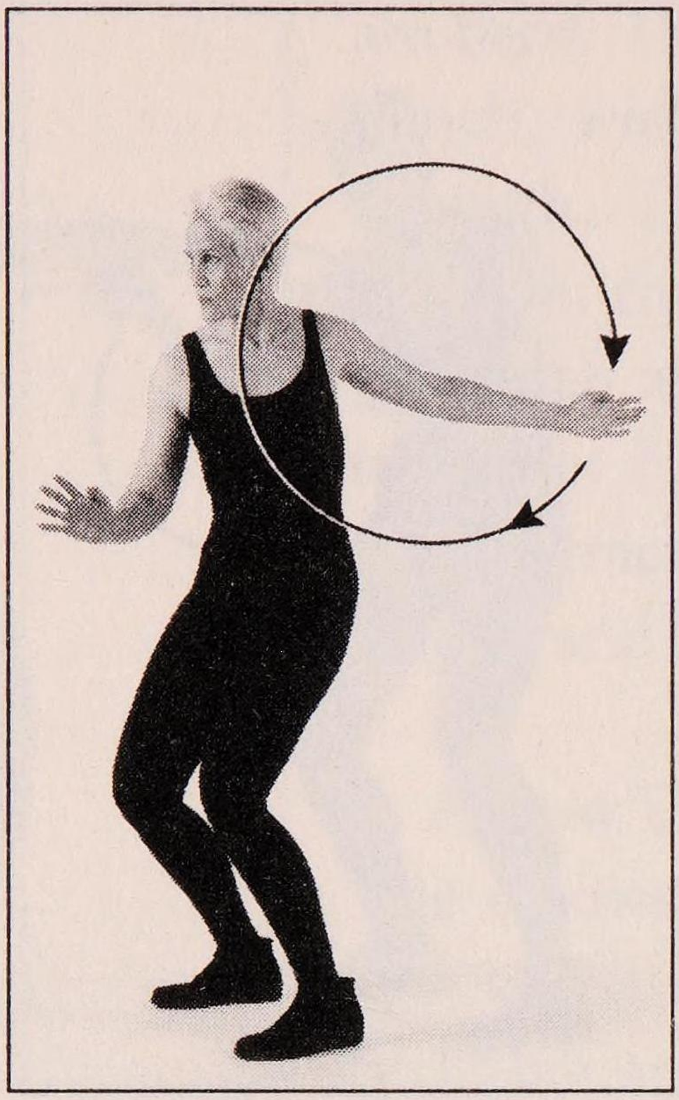


Figure 227

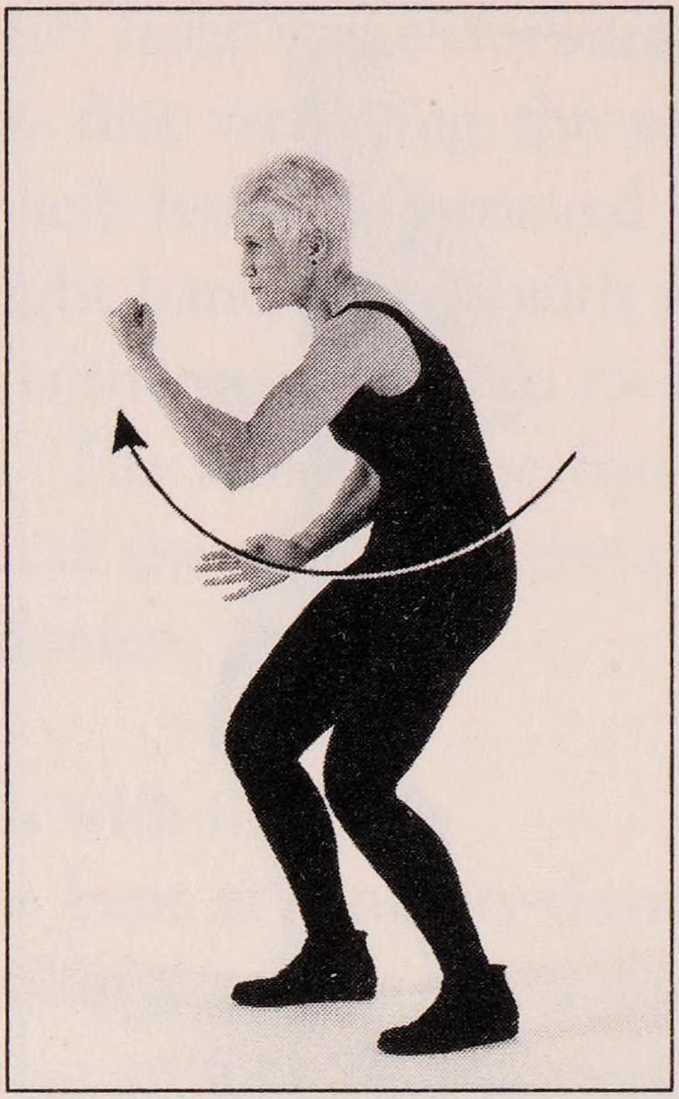


Figure 228

This magical pass is repeated with the right arm in exactly the same sequence.

### 12. Hammering Energy in Front of the Left and Right Bodies

One and a half forward circles are made with the arm, followed by a downward strike; the body rotates slightly in order to allow the left arm a full rotation starting from it's initial position by the side of the thigh to the back, above the head, to the front, and again to the side of the thigh. As this circle is made, the palm is made to rotate at the wrist as if the hand were scooping up some viscous matter (fig. 229). From it's initial position, the arm moves again to the back and above the head, where the hand turns into a fist that strikes down, with great force, at a point in front of and above the pancreas and spleen, using the soft edge of the hand like a hammer as the striking surface (fig. 230). The same movements are repeated with the right arm.

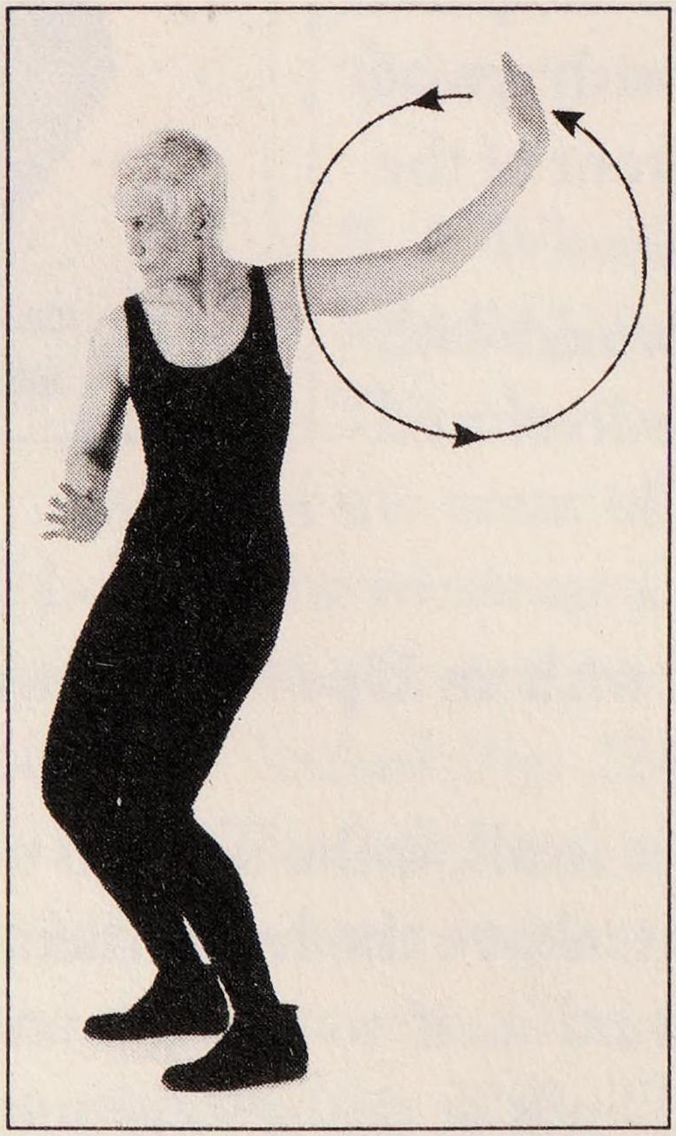


Figure 229

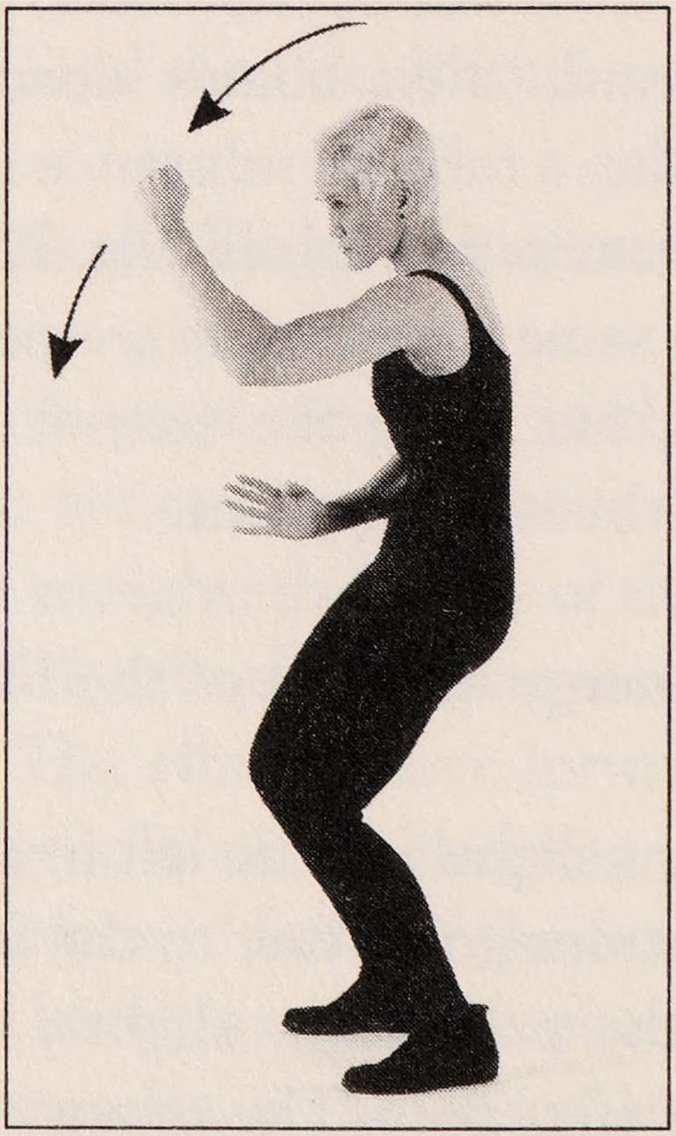


Figure 230

### 13. Drawing Two Outward Circles of Energy and Smashing Them by the Navel

Both arms move in unison up the front of the body, out to the sides, and around, like a swimming stroke, to draw two winglike circles at forty-five-degree angles to the front of the body (fig. 231). Then the circles are broken at the bottom, at the level of the navel, with a forceful strike of both hands. The hands are bent at a ninety-degree angle in relation to the forearms, with the fingers pointing forward. The force of the strike makes the palms of the hands come within a few inches of each other (fig. 232).

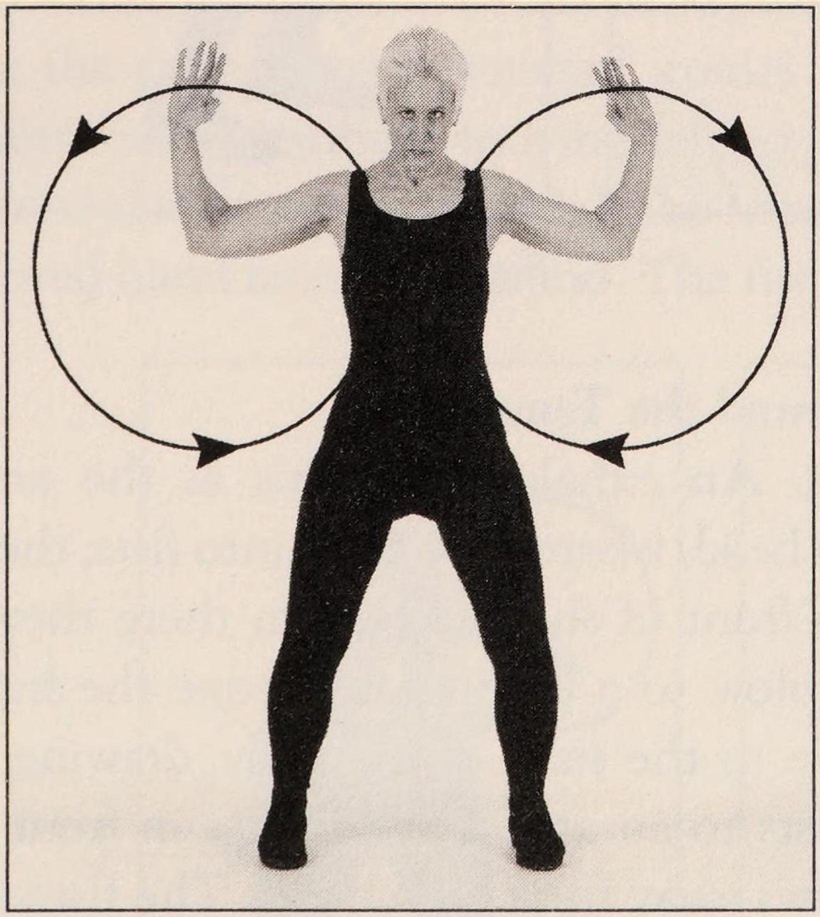


Figure 231

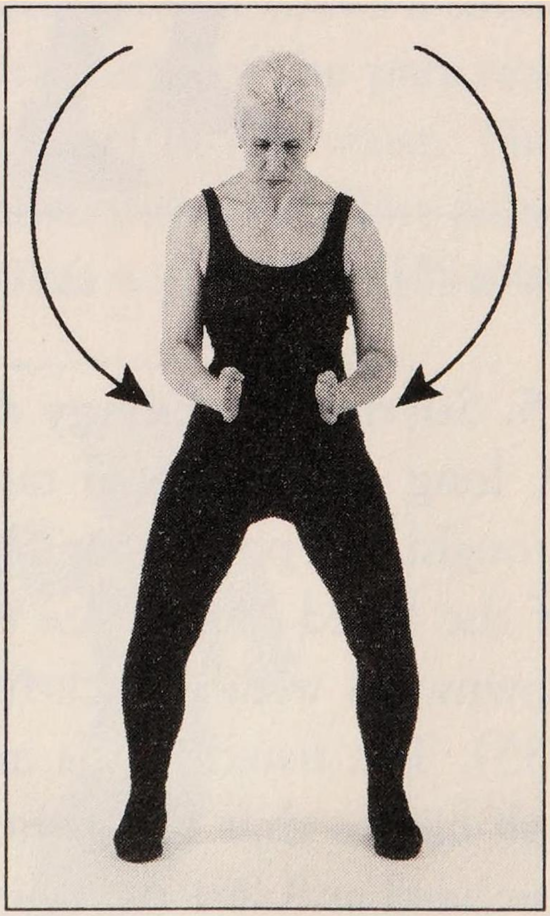


Figure 232

### 14. Drawing Two Circles of Energy Laterally with the Index and Middle Fingers Extended

The index and middle fingers of both hands are fully extended, while I ho third and fourth fingers are held by the thumbs against the palms.

The arms circle in unison from their normal position at the sides to above the head and then laterally to the sides of the body at forty-five degree angles toward the back (fig. 233). When the full circle is nearly completed, the fingers contract into fists, leaving the second knuckles of the middle fingers protruding. The movement ends as the fists, with the palms facing the body, strike forward and upward, to the level of the chin (fig. 234).

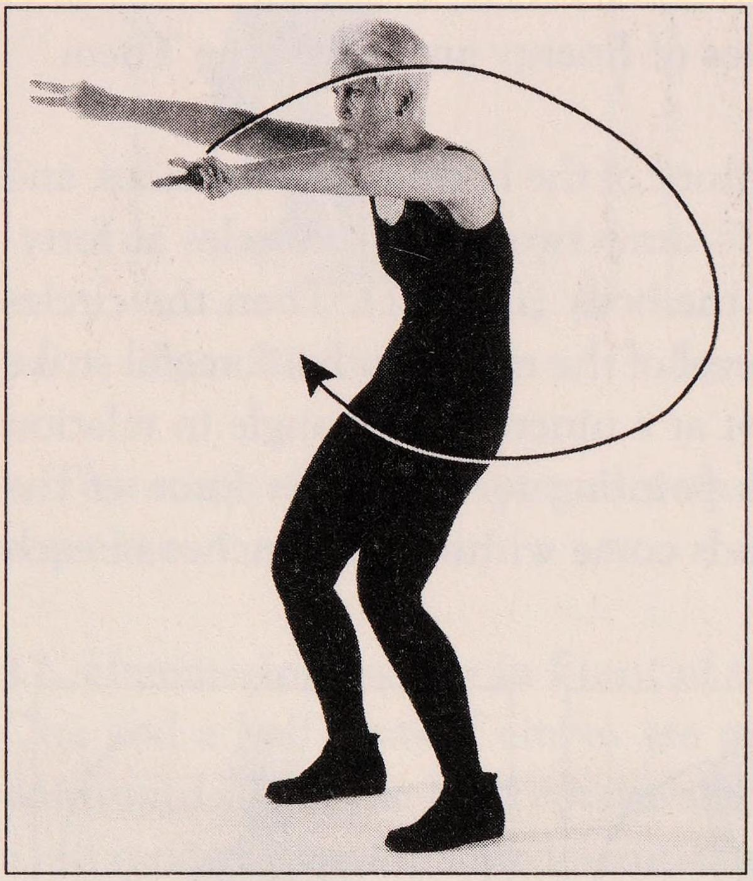


*Figure 233*

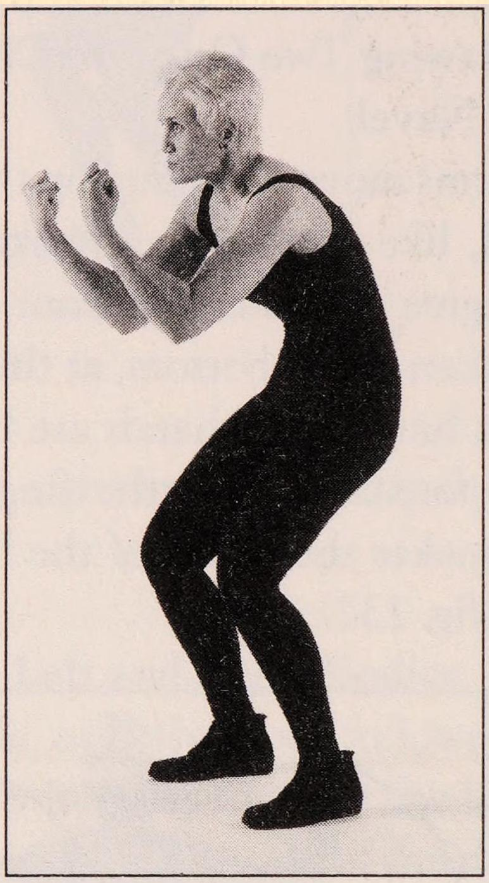


*Figure 234*

## 15. Stirring the Energy Around the Temples

A long inhalation is taken. An exhalation begins as the arms are brought to a point above the head, where they clasp into fists; the palms of the fisted hands face the front of the body. From there they strike downward with a back-fist blow to a point right above the hips (fig. 235). The fisted hands move to the sides of the body, drawing lateral half-circles that bring the fists to an area a few inches in front of the forehead and five or six inches away from each other. The fisted palms face outward (fig. 236). While the exhalation still lasts, the fists are brought to rest on the temples for an instant. The body leans backward a bit by bending slightly at the knees to gain spring and momentum, and then the arms are brought forcefully down, without straightening the elbows, to strike behind the body on either side with the backs of the fisted hands (fig. 237). The exhalation ends there.

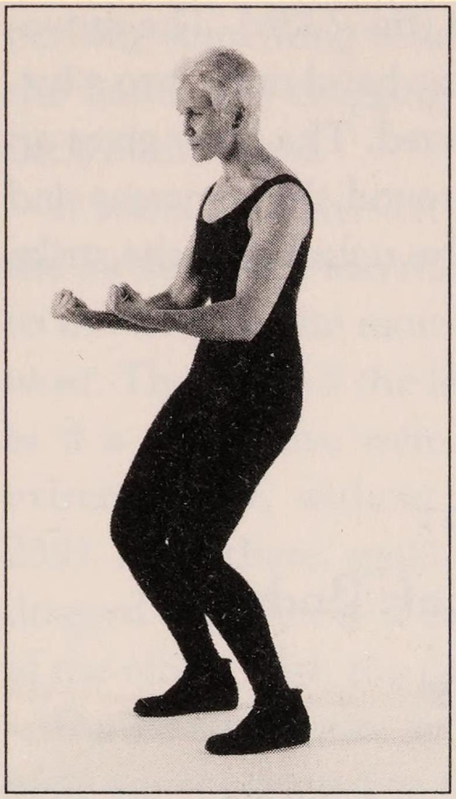


Figure 235

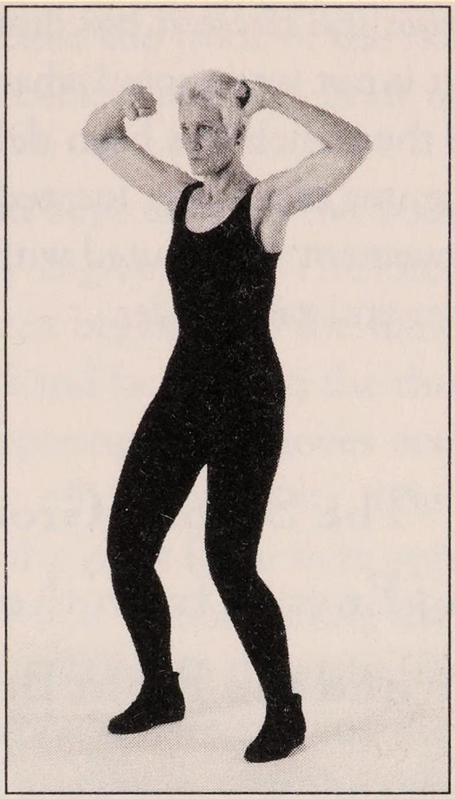


Figure 236

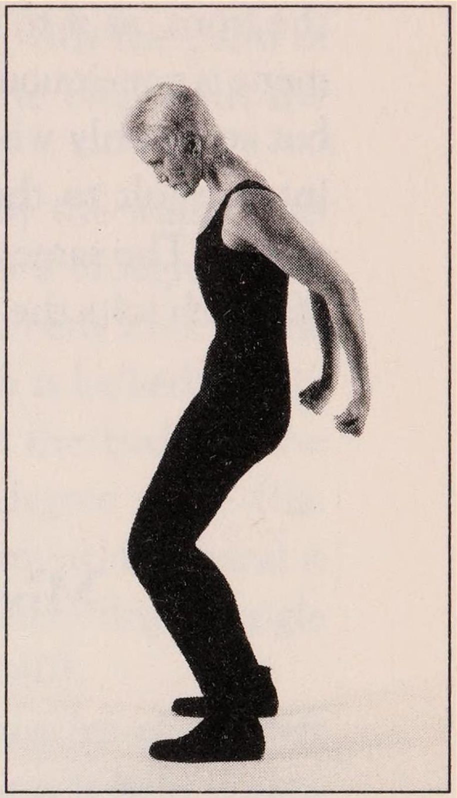


Figure 237

### 16. Projecting a Small Circle of Energy Out in Front of the Body

From it's natural position by the side of the thigh, the left arm moves outward laterally; the palm of the hand faces the right. It draws a small circle as the palm turns downward, comes to the area of the pancreas and spleen, and continues moving left to the level of the waist. The elbow protrudes acutely (fig. 238a); the hand turns into a fist. The palm of the fisted hand faces the ground. The fist strikes with a short blow to the front, as if to pierce the circle it has drawn (fig. 238b). The movement is continuous; it is not interrupted when the hand turns into a fist, but stops only when the punch has been delivered. The blow gives an intense jolt to the center of vitality located around the pancreas and spleen. The same movement is executed with the right hand, the strike of which jolts the liver and gallbladder.

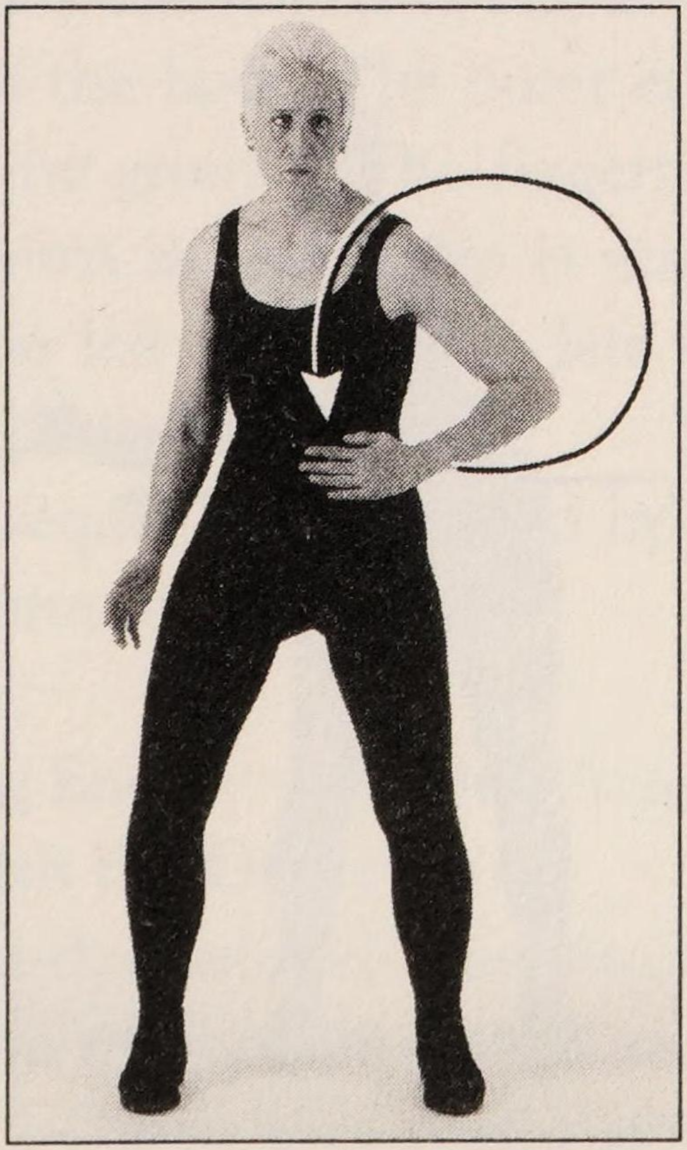


Figure 238a

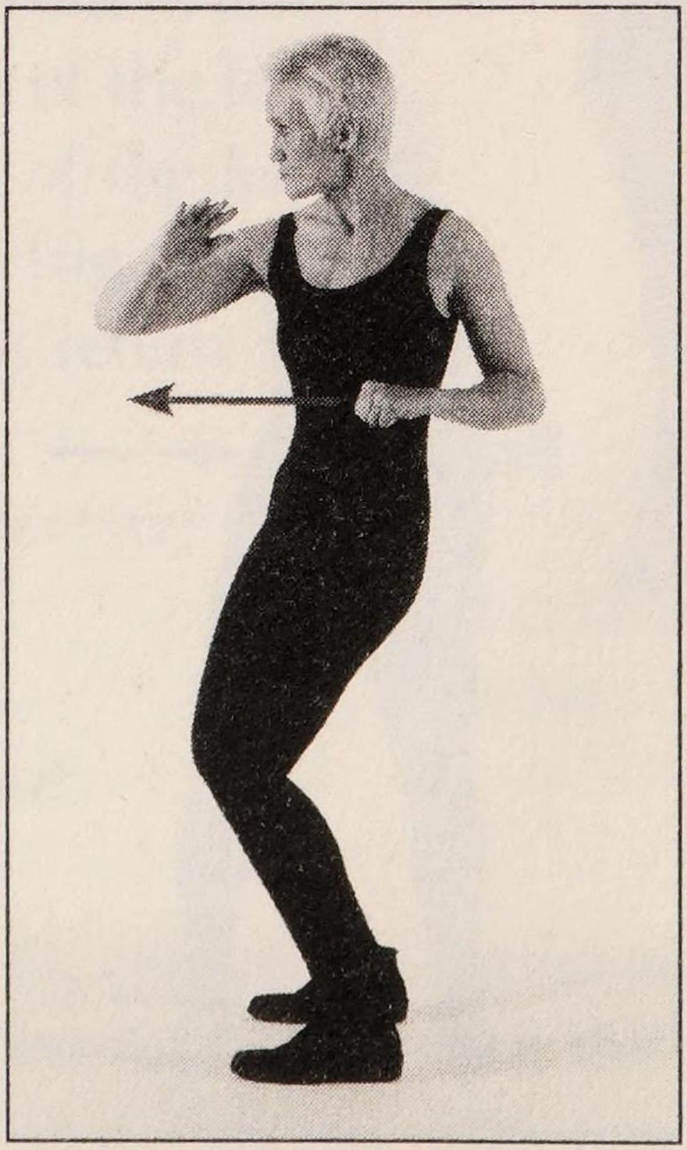


Figure 238b

## Fourth Series: Second Group: Mixing Energy from the Left Body and the Right Body

The second group consists of fourteen *magical passes* that mix the energy of both bodies at their respective centers of vitality. The shamans of ancient Mexico believed that mixing energy in this fashion makes it possible to separate the energy of both bodies more readily by dropping unfamiliar energy into them, a process which they described as exacerbating the centers of vitality.

### 17. Bunching Necessary Energy and Dispersing Unnecessary Energy

This magical pass entails movements that could best be described as pushing something solid across the front of the body with the palm of the hand, and dragging it back across the front of the body with the back of the hand.

It starts with the left arm kept close to the body, by the waist, with the forearm bent at a ninety-degree angle. The forearm is brought closer to the body as the movement begins, and the hand is bent back at the wrist. The palm of the left hand faces right; the thumb is locked. Then, as if a great force were opposing it, it moves across the body to the extreme right, without the elbow losing it's ninety-degree angle (fig. 239). From there, again as if a great force were opposing it, the hand is dragged as far left as it can reach without losing the ninety-degree angle of the elbow, with the palm still facing the right (fig. 240).

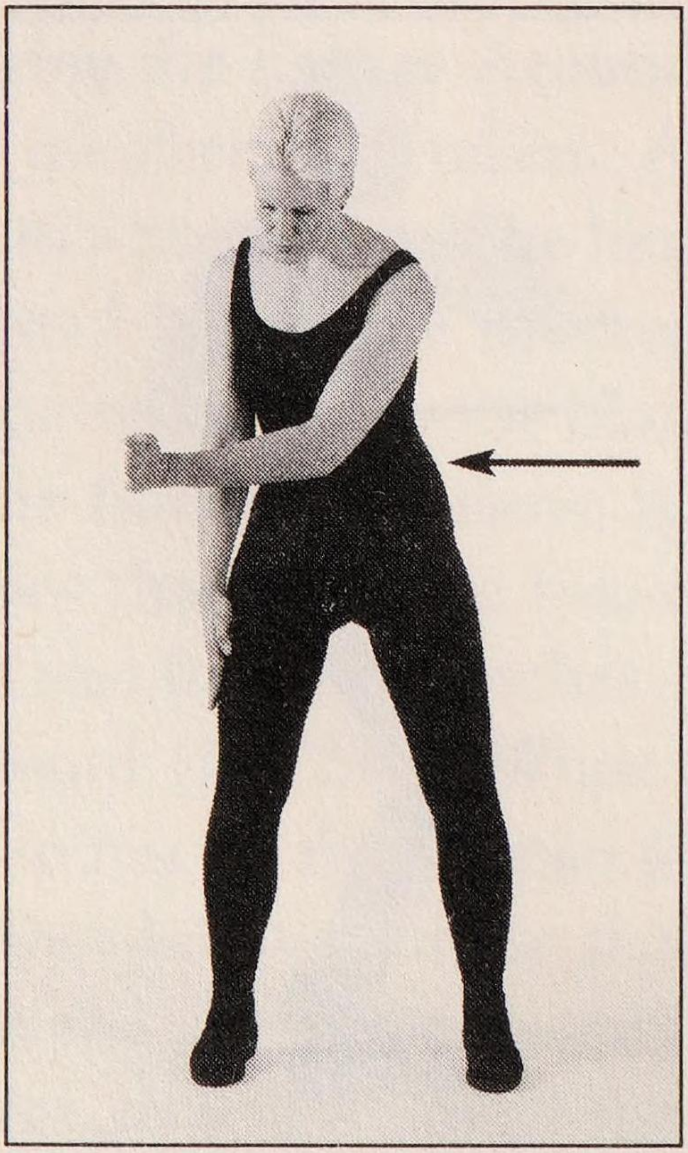


Figure 239

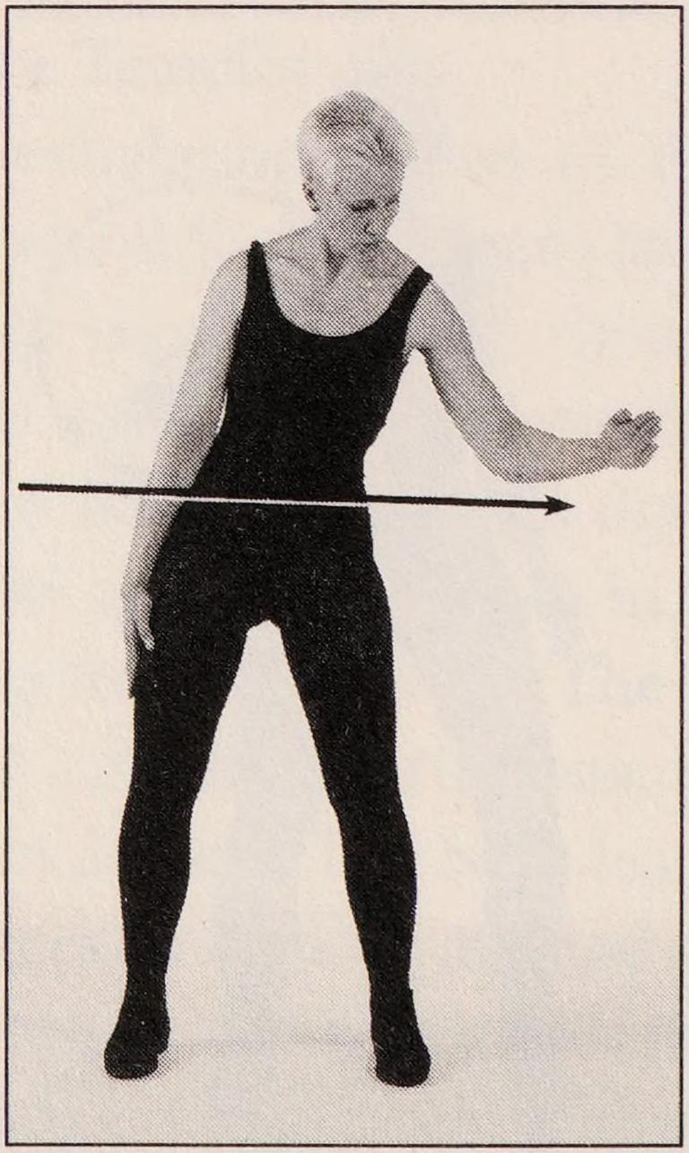


Figure 240

During this entire sequence of movements, the muscles of the left body are contracted to the maximum, and the right arm is held immobile against the right leg.

The same sequence of movements is repeated with the right arm and hand.

### 18. Piling Energy onto the Left and Right Bodies

The weight is placed on the right leg. The knee is slightly bent for support and balance. The left leg and arm, which are kept semi-tense, sweep in front of the body in an arc from left to right, in unison. The left foot and the left hand end at a position just to the right of the body. The outer edge of the left foot touches the ground. The fingertips of the left hand point down as the sweep is made (fig. 241). Then both the left leg and the left arm return to their original positions.

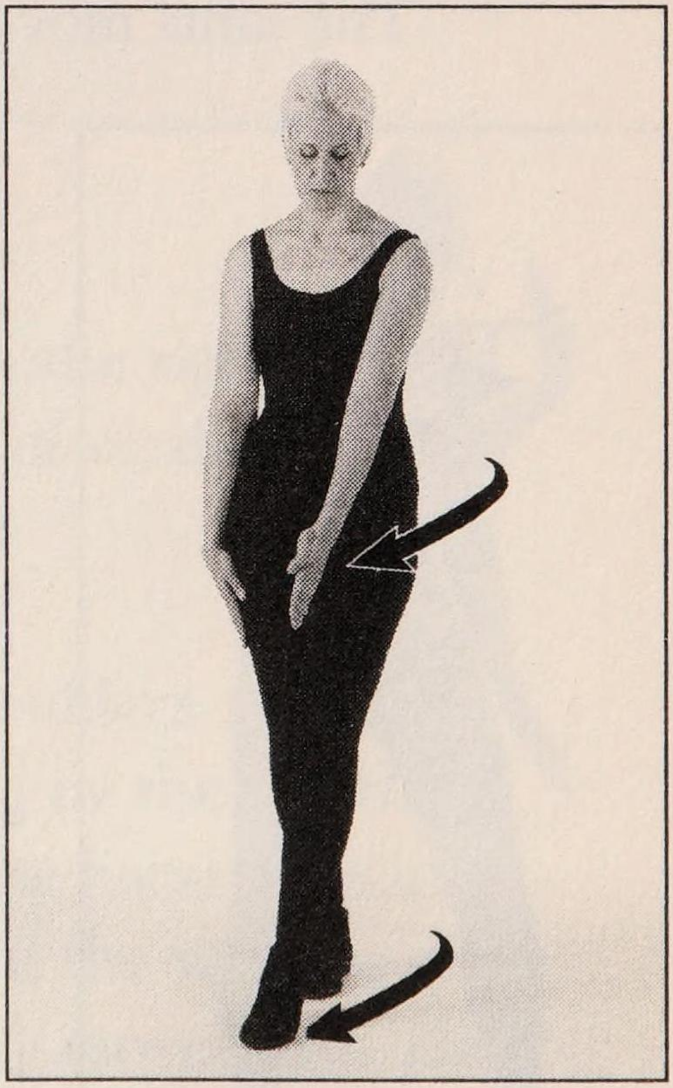


Figure 241

The exact sequence is repeated by sweeping the right leg and arm to the left.

### 19. Gathering Energy with One Arm and Striking It with the Other

Don Juan said that with this magical pass, energy was stirred and collected with the movement of one arm and was struck with the movement of the opposite arm. He believed that striking, with one hand, energy which had been gathered by the other, allowed the entrance of energy into one body from sources belonging to the other body, something which was never done under normal conditions.

The left arm moves up to the level of the eyes. The wrist is slightly bent backwards; in this position, going from left to right and back again, the hand draws the figure of an oval, about a foot and a half wide and as long as the width of the body (fig. 242). Then the hand, with the palm facing down, moves across at eye level from left to right as if cutting through, with the tips of the fingers, the figure which it has drawn (fig. 243).

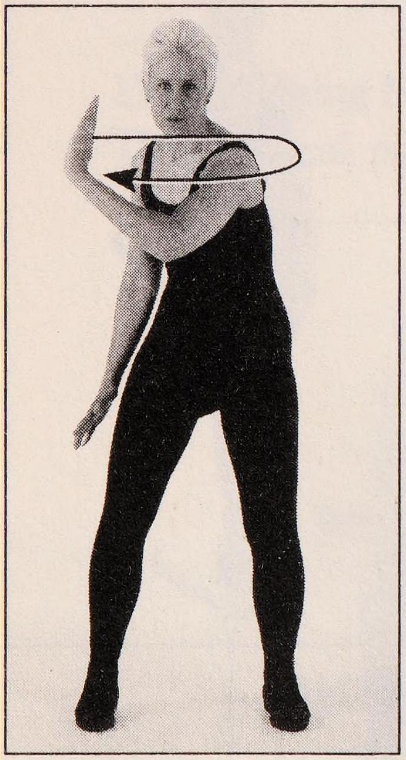


*Figure 242*

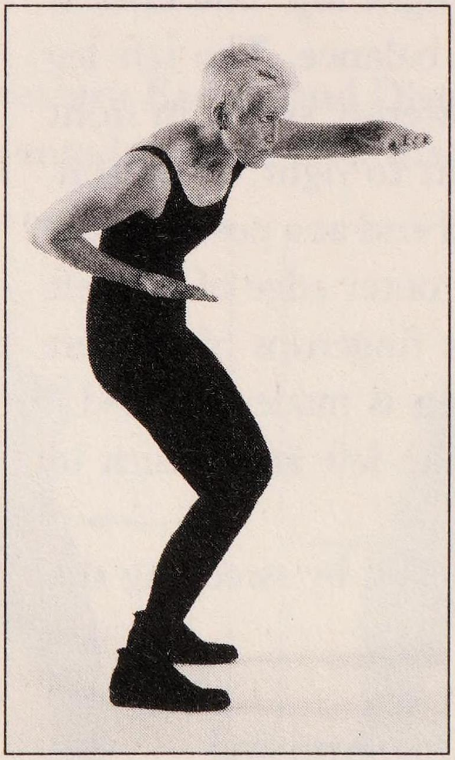


*Figure 243*

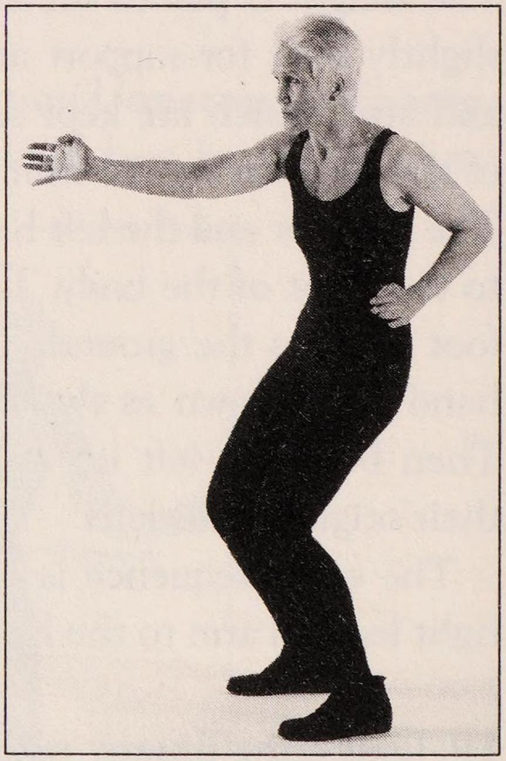


*Figure 244*

At the moment that the left hand reaches the level of the right shoulder, the right hand, which is held at waist level with the cupped palm turned upward, shoots forward, striking with the heel of the hand, to hit the spot in the middle of the oval drawn by the left hand, as the left hand is slowly brought down (fig. 244). As it strikes, the palm of the right hand is facing forward, and the fingers are slightly curved, permitting in this fashion the necessary contour of the palm to strike a round surface. The strike ends with the elbow slightly bent, to avoid over stretching the tendons.

The same movements are performed beginning with the right arm.

### 20. Gathering Energy with the Arms and Legs

The body pivots slightly to the right on the ball of the right foot; the left leg juts out at a forty-five-degree angle, with the knee bent to give a forward slant to the trunk. The body is made to rock three times, as if to gain momentum. Then the left arm scoops downward as if to grab something at the level of the left knee (fig. 245). The body leans back, and with that impulse, the lower part of the left leg, from the knee down, is brought close to the groin, almost touching it with the heel; the left hand swiftly brushes the vital area of the liver and gallbladder, on the right (fig. 246).

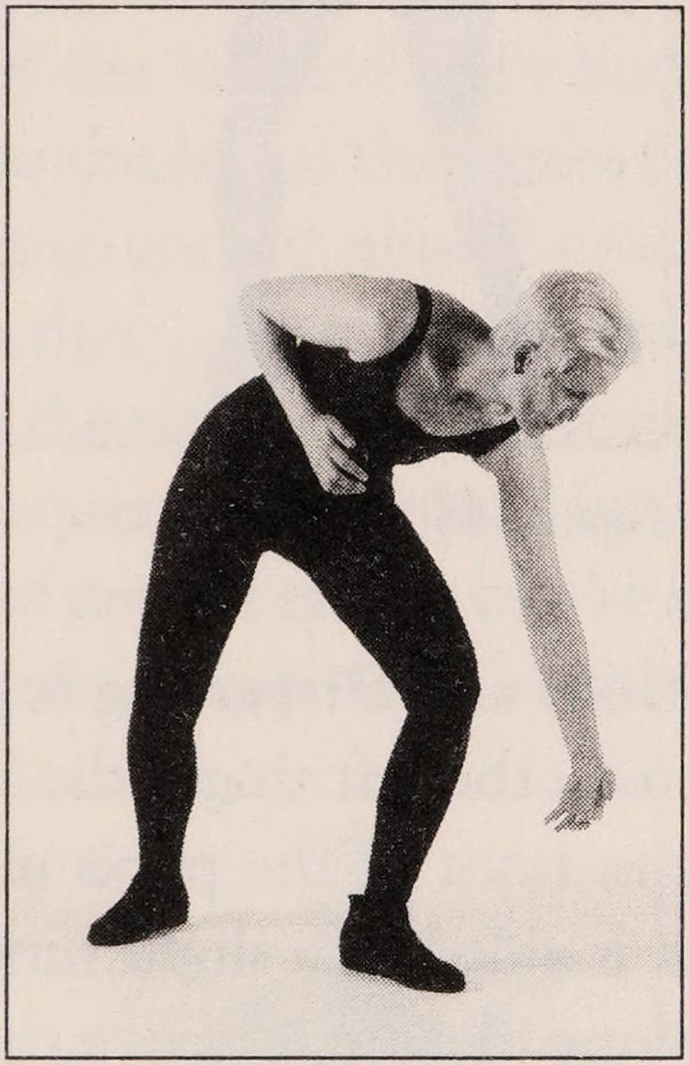


*Figure 245*

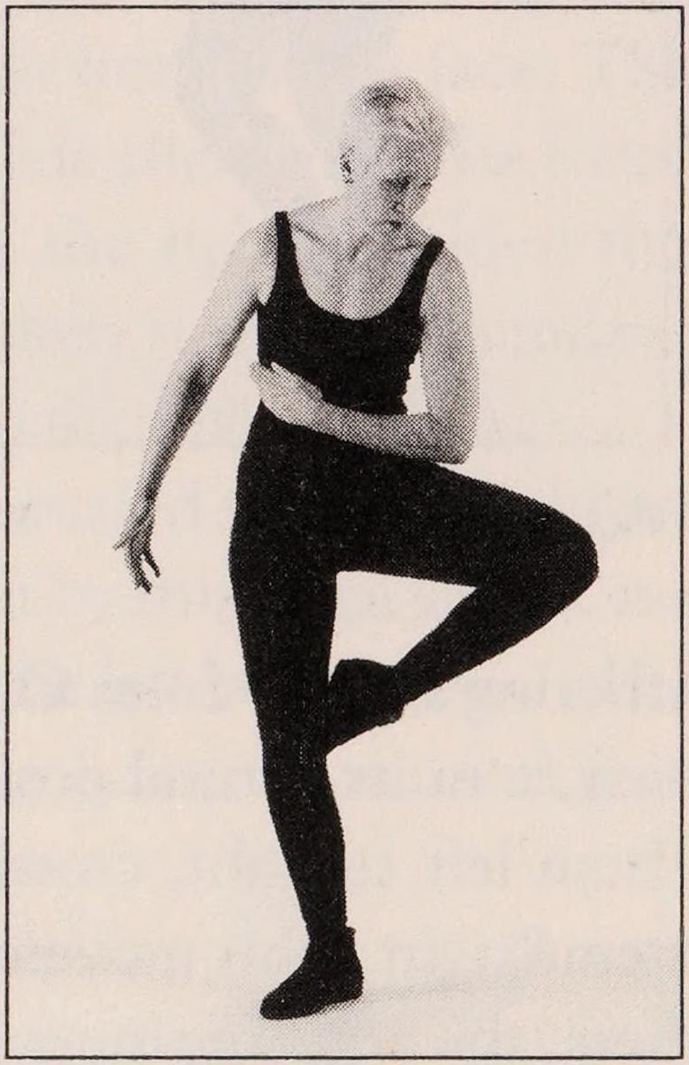


*Figure 246*

The same sequence of movements is repeated with the right leg and arm, which bring the gathered energy to the center of vitality located around the pancreas and spleen, on the left.

### 21. Moving Energy from the Left and the Right Shoulders

The left arm moves from it's natural position hanging by the left thigh to the right shoulder, where it grabs something, and the hand turns into a fist. This movement is propelled by a sharp twist of the waist to the right. The knees are slightly bent to allow this turning movement. The acutely bent elbow is not allowed to sag, but is kept at the level of the shoulders (fig. 247). Propelled by a straightening of the waist, the fist is then moved away from the right shoulder in an upward arc, striking, with the back of the hand, a point slightly above the head and in line with the left shoulder (fig. 248). The hand opens there as if to drop something that is held in the fist. The same- sequence of movements is repeated with the right arm.

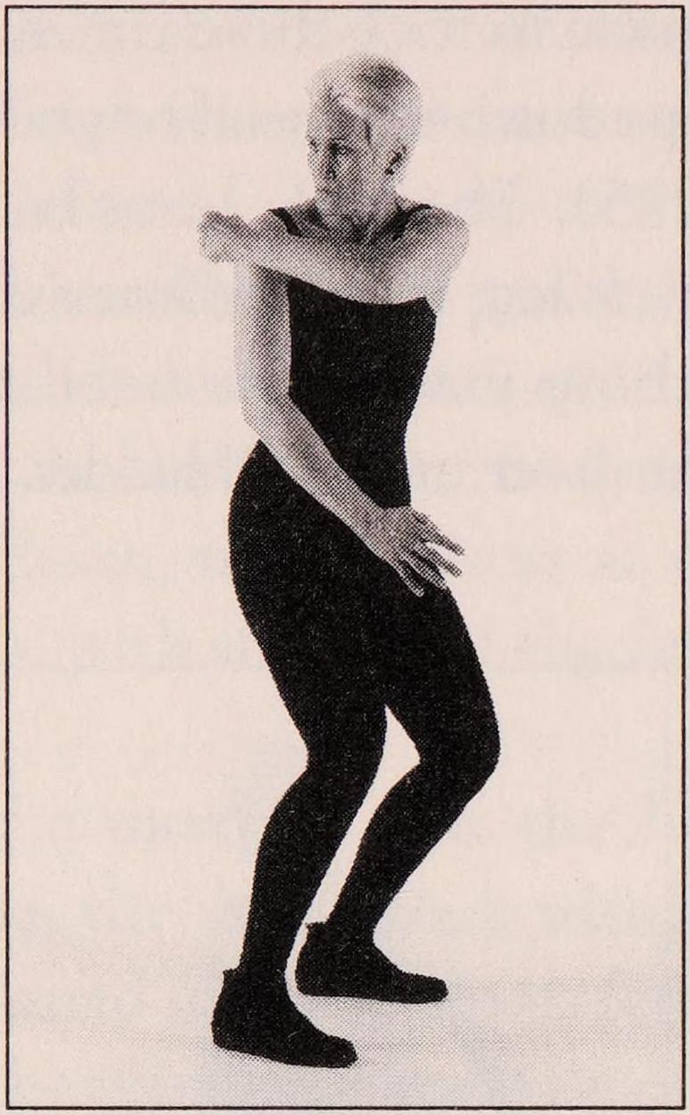


*Figure 247*

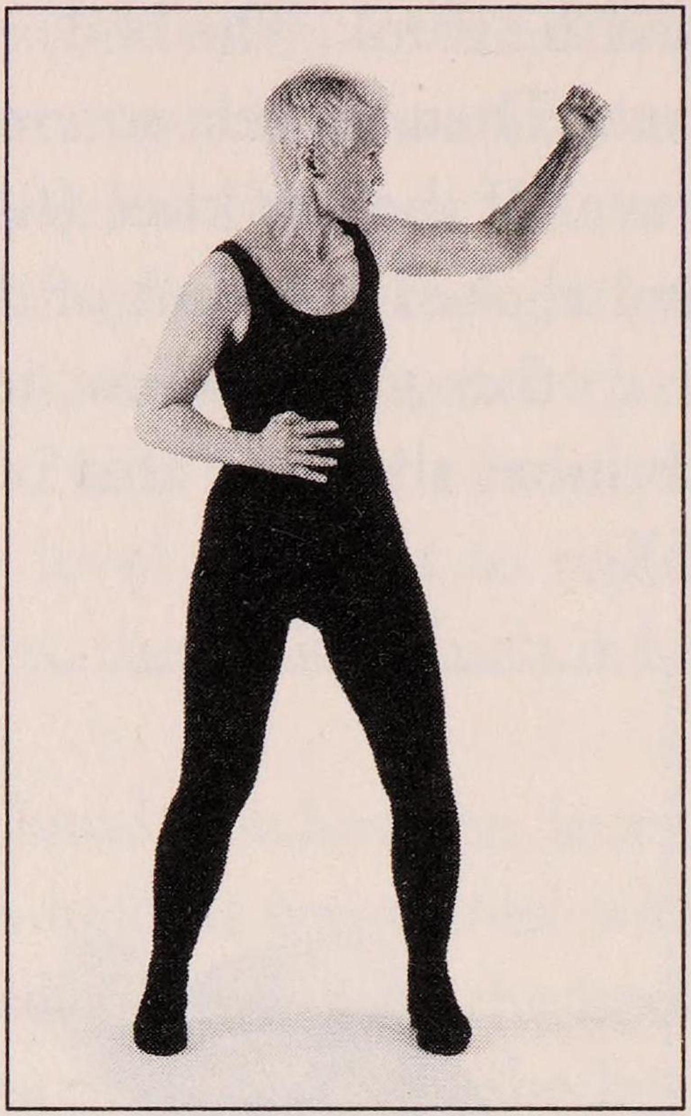


*Figure 248*

## 22. Gathering Energy from One Body and Dispersing It on the Other

Beginning from it's natural position by the left thigh, the left arm draws an arc from left to right, crossing in front of the pubis until it reaches the extreme right. This movement is aided by a slight turn of the waist. From there, the arm continues moving in a circle above the head, to the height and level of the left shoulder. It cuts across then to the level of the right shoulder. There, the hand turns into a fist, as if grabbing something, with the palm down (Fig. 249). Next, the fist hits a point at the height of the head, an arm's length away from it. The blow is delivered with the soft edge of the hand, using the hand as if it were a hammer.

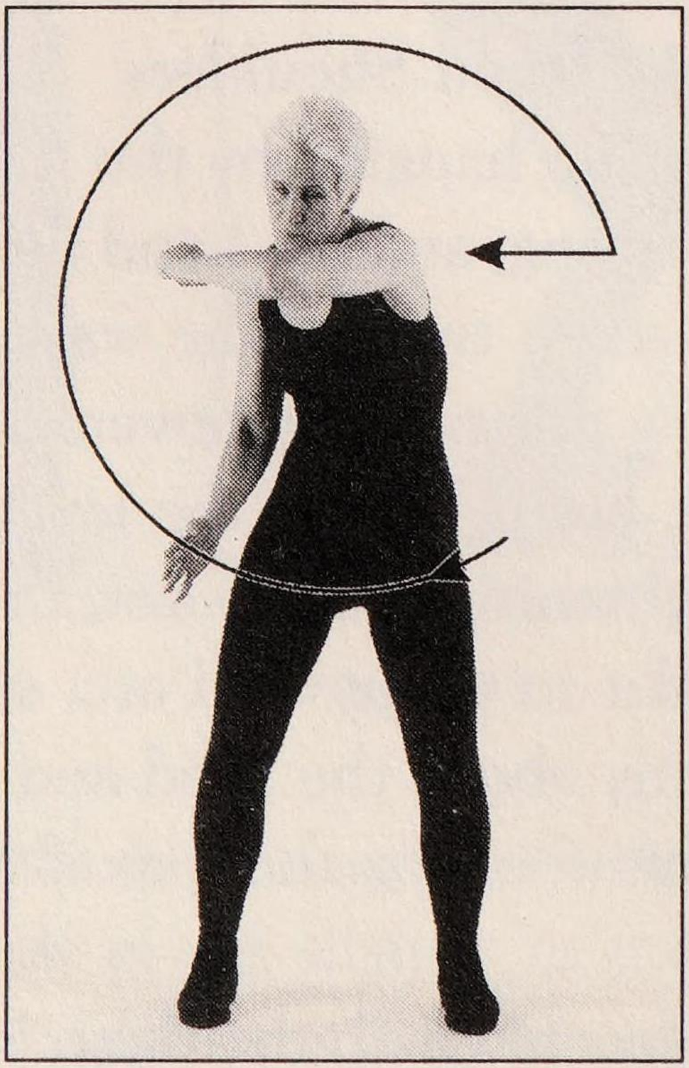


Figure 249

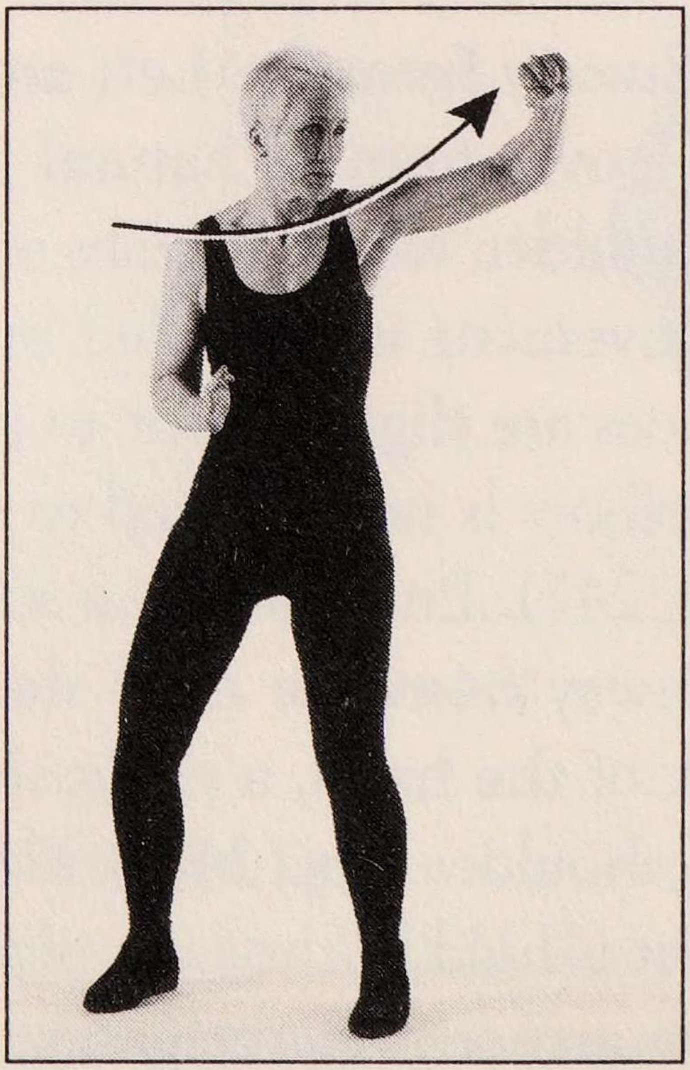


Figure 250

The arm is fully extended, but slightly curved at the elbow (fig. 250). The same movements are repeated with the right arm.

### 23. Hammering Energy from the Left Shoulder and the Right Shoulder on the Midpoint in Front of the Face

The left arm is moved above the head. The elbow is bent at a ninety-degree angle. The hand turns there into a fist, with the palm facing upward. Then it strikes from the left, with the soft edge of the hand, the division line of the left and right body, in front of the face. The body leans slightly to the left as this strike is made (fig. 251). The fisted hand keeps on moving until it almost touches the right shoulder; the palm turns there so that it faces downward. Then it makes a similar strike, this time from the right; the body leans to the right (fig. 252).

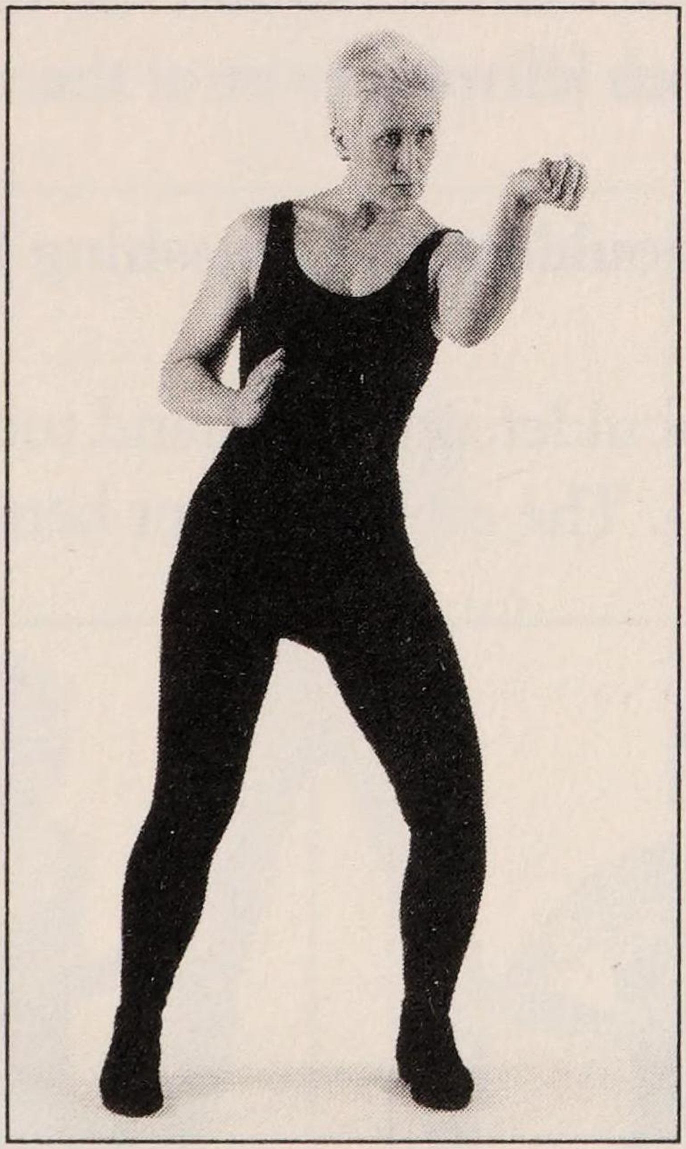


Figure 251

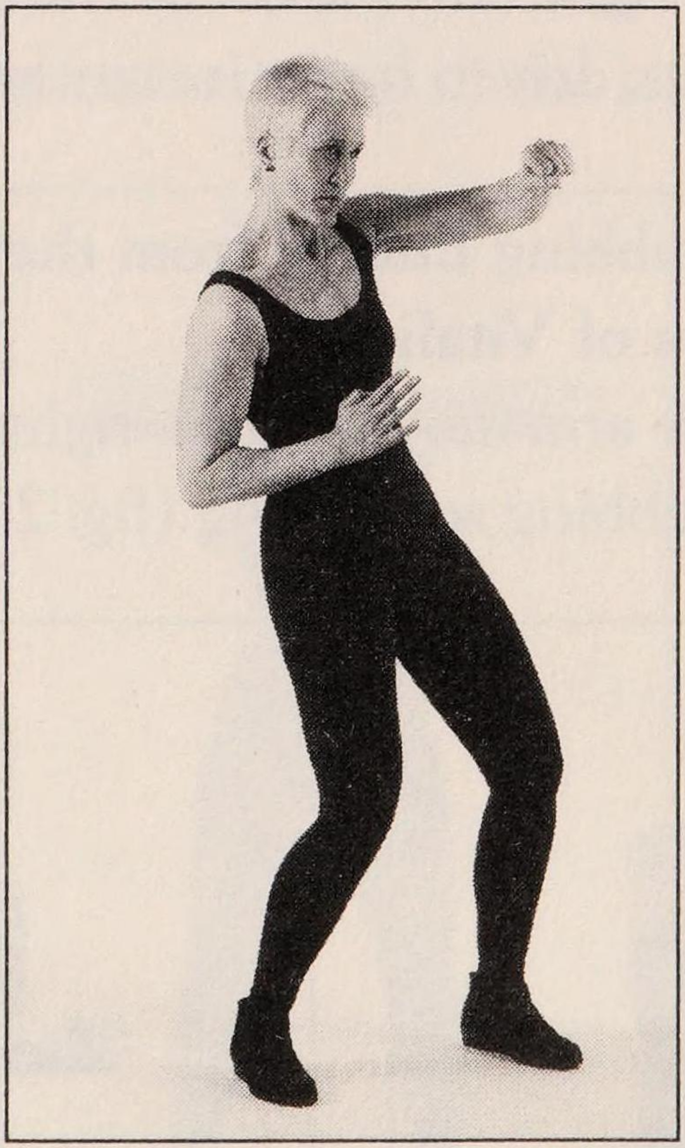


Figure 252

This same sequence of movements is repeated with the right arm.

A reservoir of neutral energy can be built by this magical pass, meaning energy which can easily be used by either the left body or the right body.

### 24. A Strike with the Hand Fisted at the Second Knuckle

Both arms are lifted to the level of the neck, the elbows held at ninety-degree angles. The hands are held with the fingers bent at the second knuckle and held tightly over the palm (figs. 253, 254). From this position, the left hand strikes. The strike is a powerful swing made to the right, across the line of the right shoulder, but without greatly moving the arm. The arm is driven by a powerful rightward twist of the waist (fig. 255).

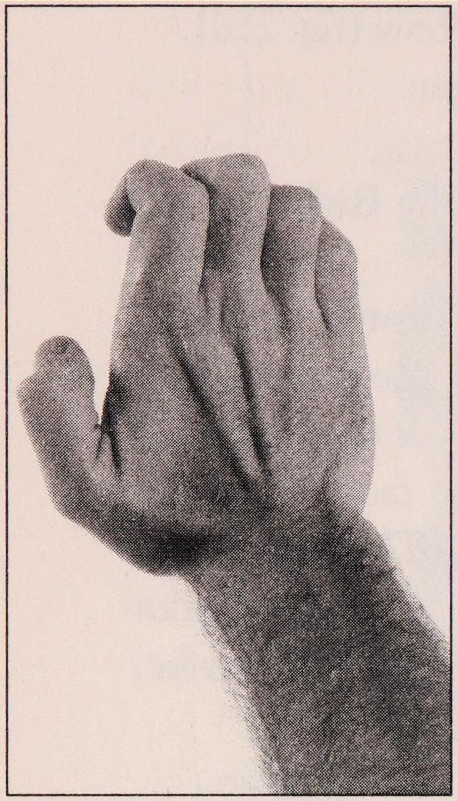


*Figure 253*

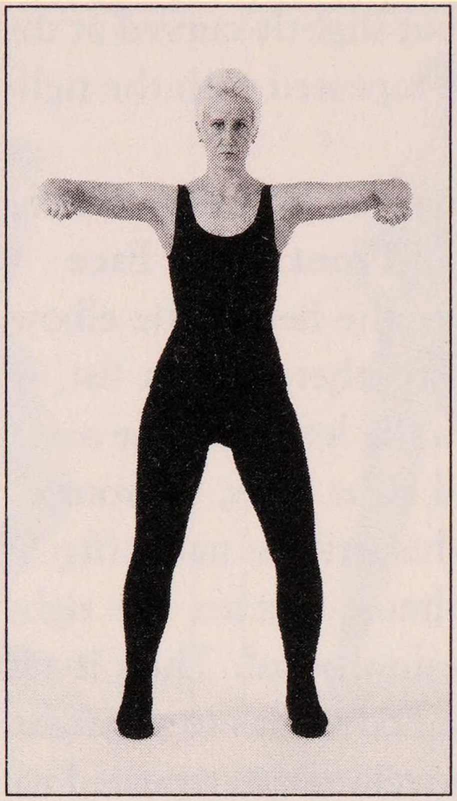


*Figure 254*

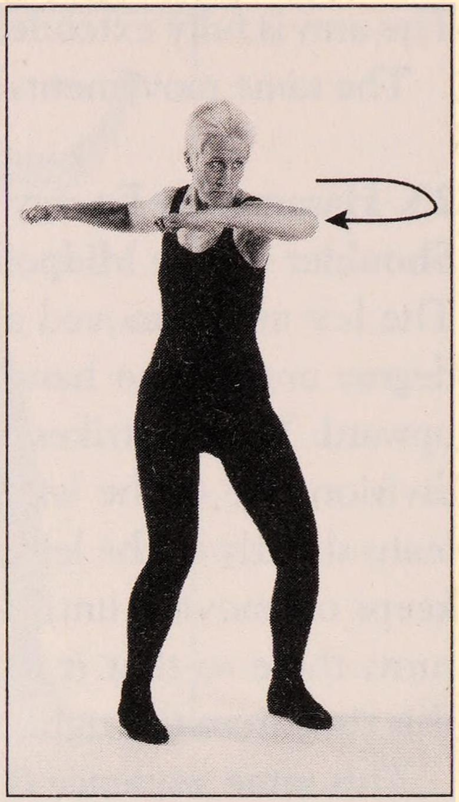


*Figure 255*

The right arm moves in the same fashion beyond the line of the left shoulder, driven by an instantaneous leftward twist of the waist.

### 25. Grabbing Energy from the Shoulders and Smashing It on the Centers of Vitality

The left arm moves to the right shoulder, and the hand turns into a fist, as if grabbing something (fig. 256). The elbow is kept bent at a ninety degree angle. Then the fist is forcefully brought back to the left side by the waist (fig. 257). It stays there for an instant to gain impulse, and then the fist shoots across the body to the right, the fisted palm facing the body, to strike through a point by the area of the liver and gallbladder (fig. 258).

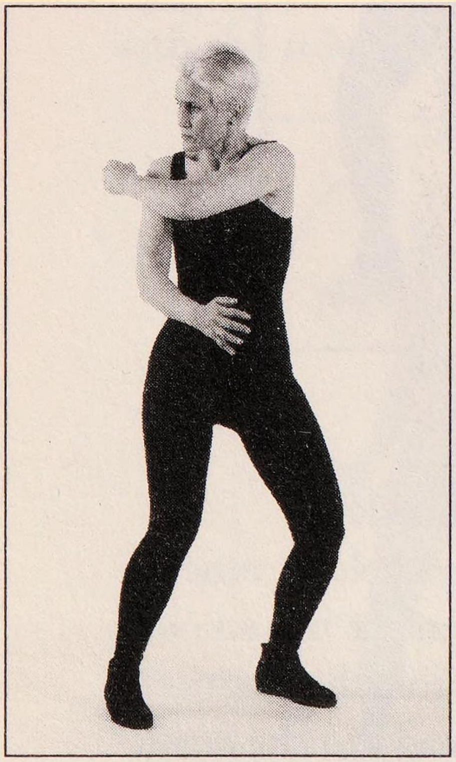


Figure 256

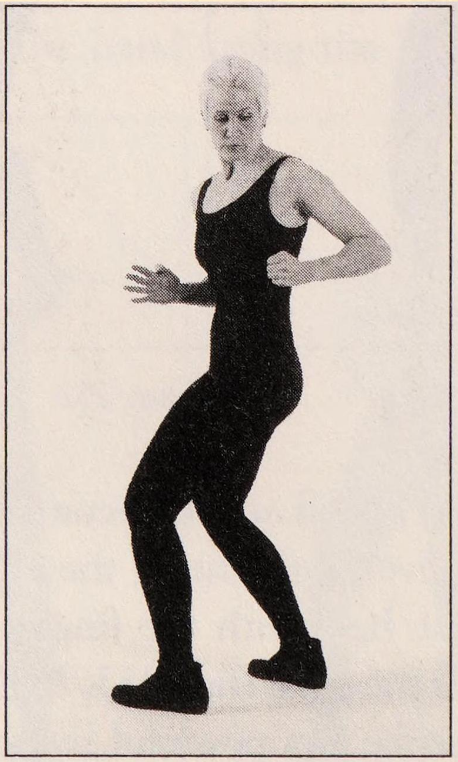


Figure 257

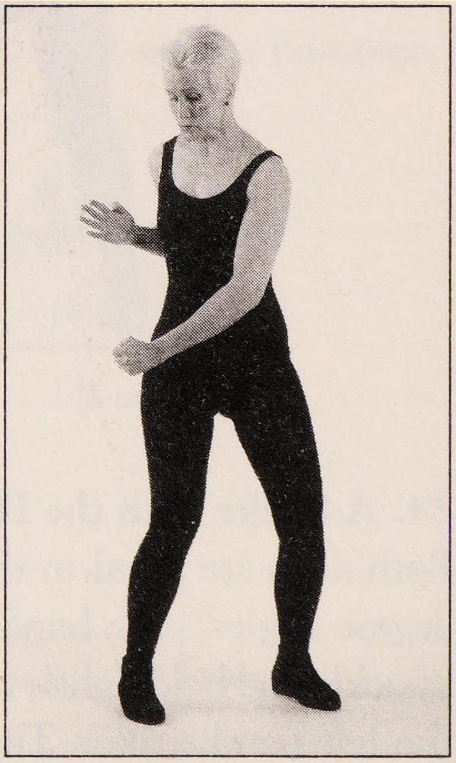


Figure 258

The same movement is repeated with the right arm, which strikes across the area of the pancreas and spleen.

### 26. Pushing Energy to the Sides with the Elbows

Both arms are brought to the level of the shoulders, the elbows bent sharply and protruding straight out. The wrists are crossed making a letter X, the left forearm on top of the right one. The hands, clenched into fists, touch the pectoral muscles at the edges of the axilla; the left fist touches the edges of the right axilla and the right fist the edges of the left axilla (fig. 259). The elbows are then forcefully brought out to the sides in line with the shoulders, as if to give an elbow blow to the sides (fig. 260). This movement is repeated with the right arm on top of the left.

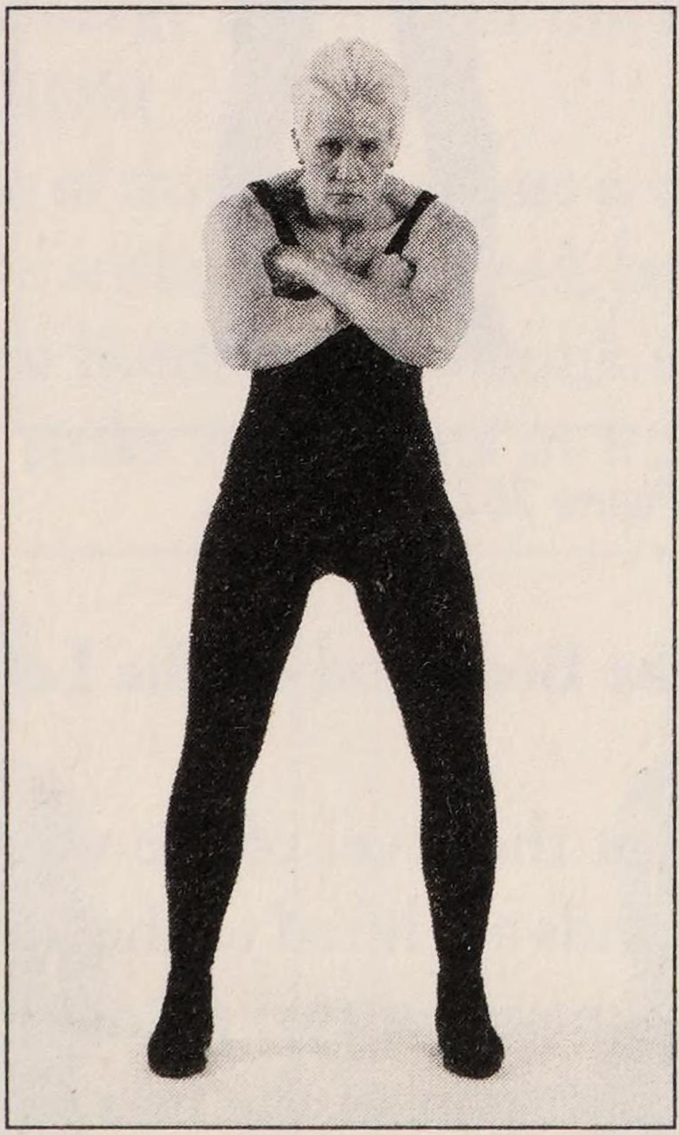


Figure 259

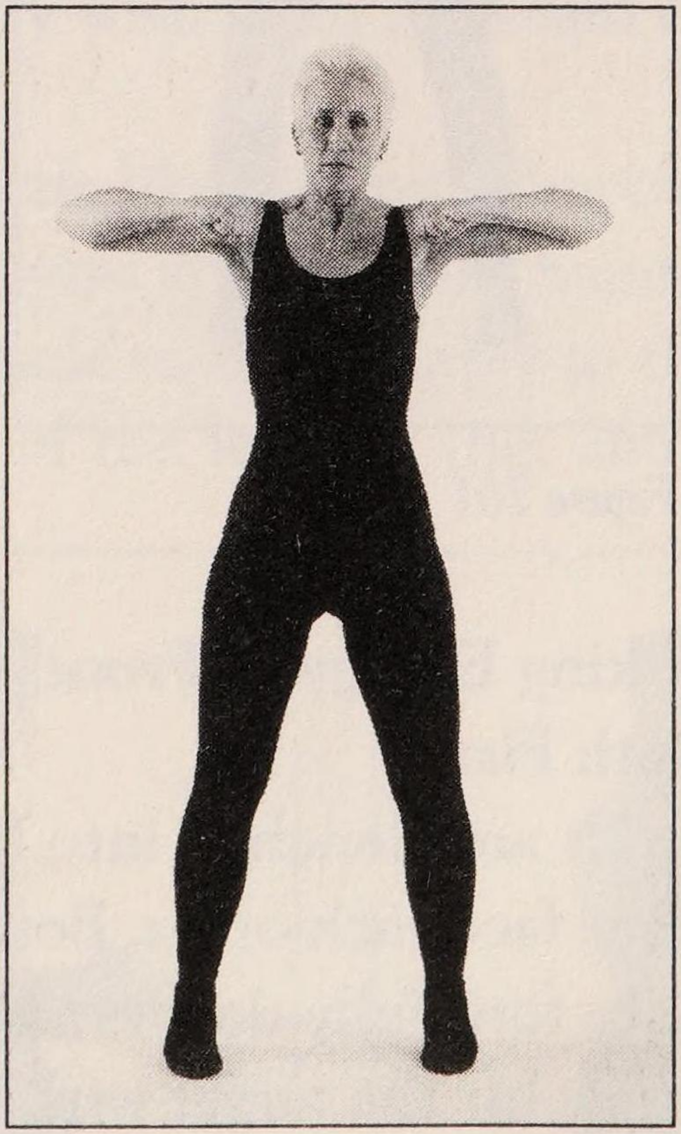


Figure 260

### 27. Drawing Two Inward Circles of Energy in Front of the Body and Crushing Them Out to the Sides

As a deep breath is taken, the arms circle in unison from their natural position at the sides of the thighs, to the line that separates the left and the right bodies. This movement ends with the forearms crossed over the chest. The fingers are kept tightly together, pointing upward, the thumbs locked; the wrists are bent at ninety-degree angles. The left arm is on top of the right one. The locked thumb of the left hand touches the pectoral muscle of the right body, and the locked thumb of the right hand touches the pectoral muscle of the left body (fig. 261). The inhalation ends there. A quick exhalation is made as the arms are spread apart forcefully with the hands clenched into fists, each striking, with the back of the hand, a point on the respective sides above the head (fig. 262).

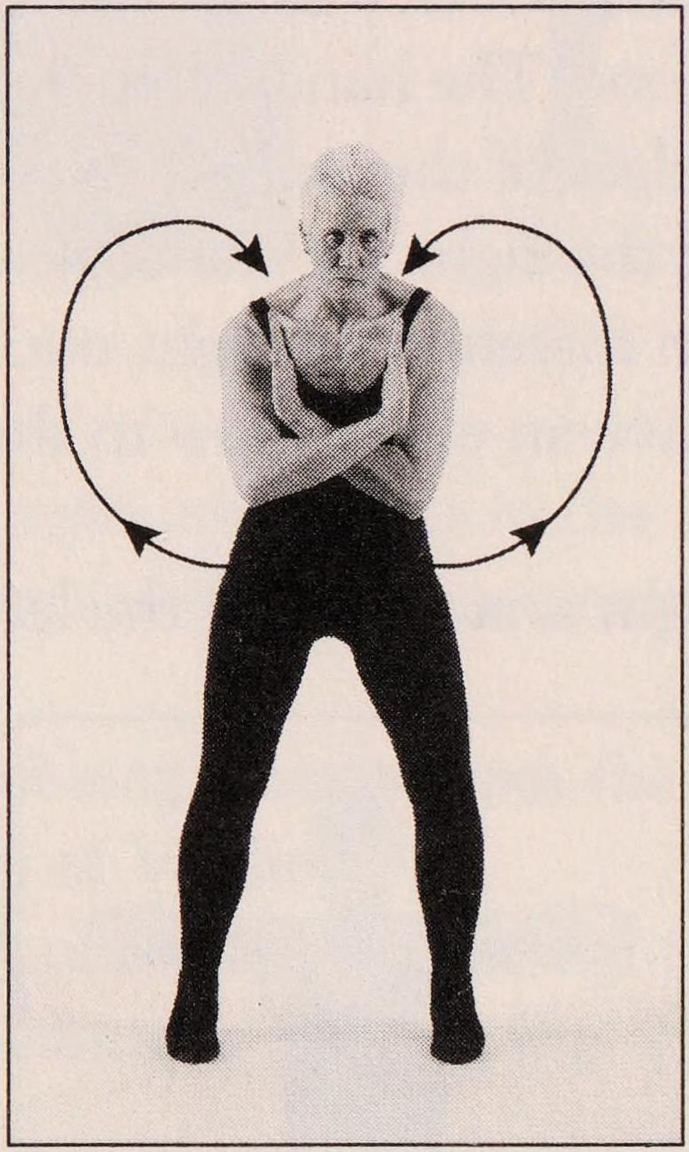


Figure 261

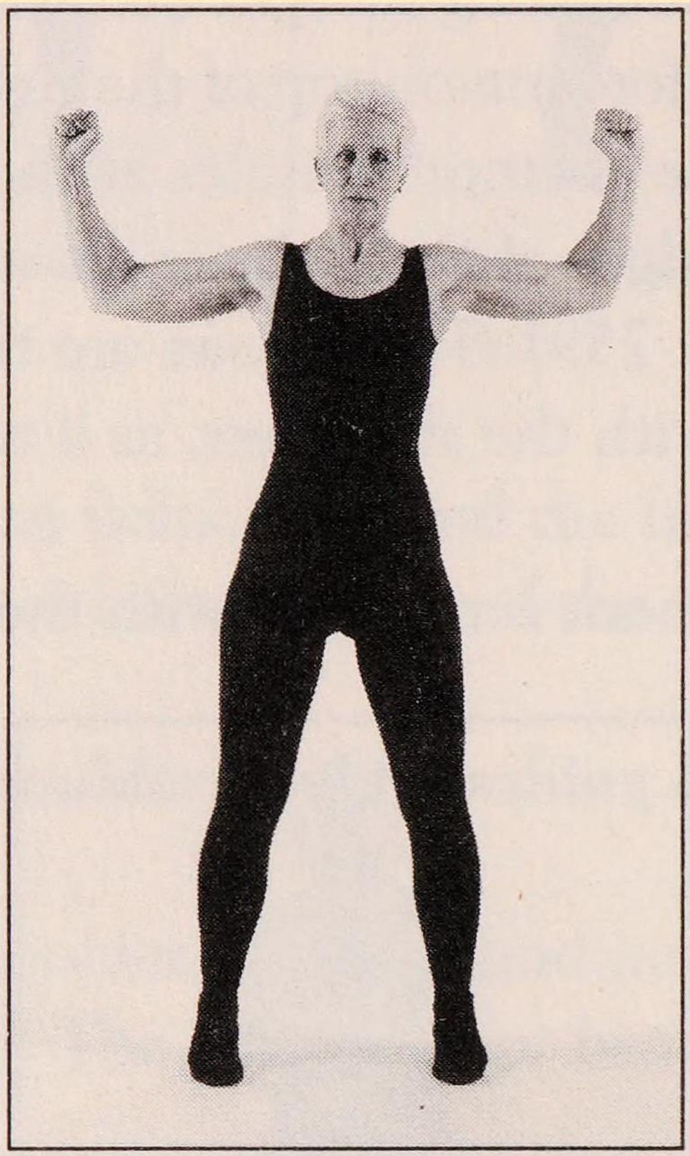


Figure 262

The same movements are repeated with the right arm on top of the left.

### 28. Striking Energy in Front of the Body and on the Left and Right with Both Fists

The hands are clenched into fists at the level of the waist. The palms of the fists face each other. Both hands are lifted to the level of the eyes and strike forcefully downward in unison at two points in front of the groin; they hit the target with the soft part of the fists (fig. 263). From there, the arms swing in unison, making an upward arc to the left as the whole trunk leans toward the left, following the impulse of the arms. The fists strike with the knuckles (fig. 264). The fists return to deliver another blow to the same points in front of the groin. From there, the arms swing in unison, making an upward arc to the right as the whole trunk leans toward the right, following the impulse of the arms. The fists strike with the knuckles. The fists move one more time to deliver a blow with the soft edge of the hands to the same two points in front of the groin.

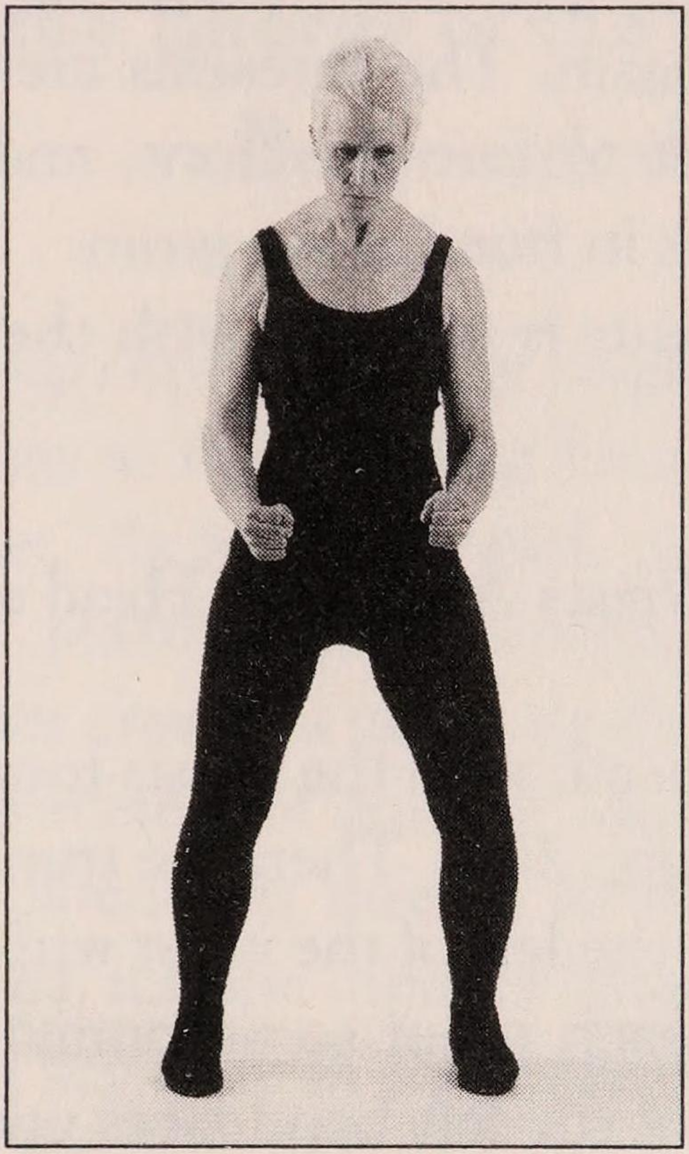


Figure 263

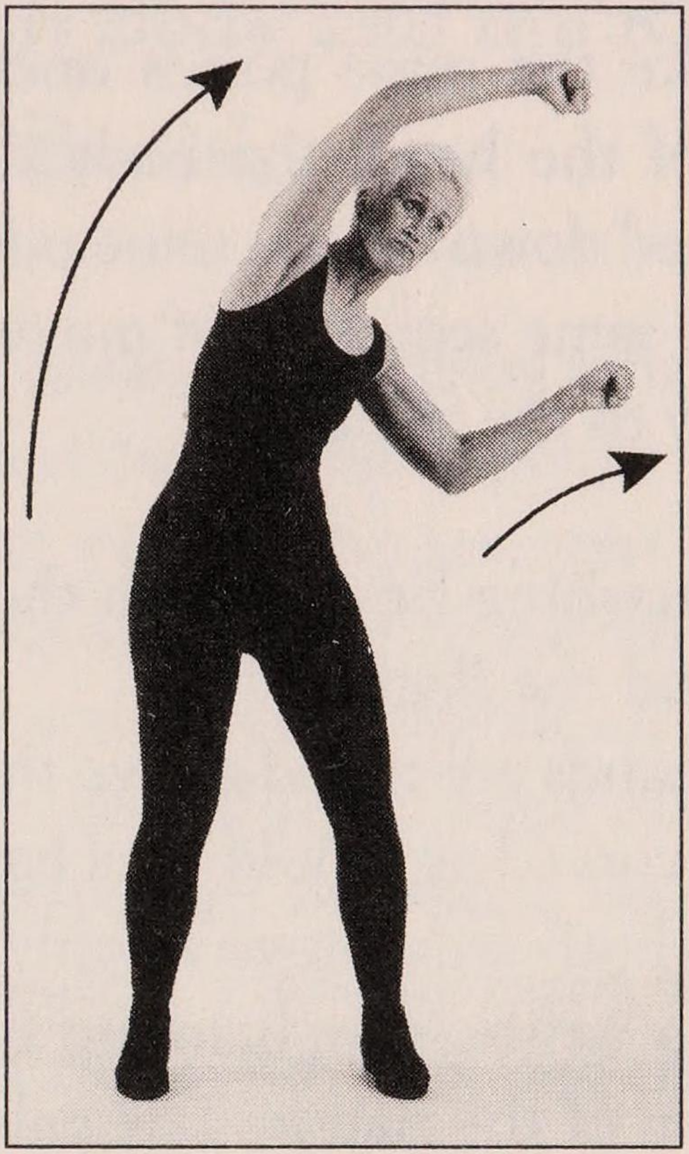


Figure 264

### 29. Striking Energy in Front of the Body with Both Fists and on the Left and the Right

The beginning of this magical pass is exactly like the preceding one (fig. 265). Once the strike is completed, both arms are lifted like hammers to the level of the head, and the trunk is made to turn sharply to the left. The two fists strike two points in front of the left hip (fig. 266). The arms lift again to the height of the head, the palms of the hands are opened, and they descend to strike the same two points (fig. 267). The arms are raised again to the level of the head. The hands turn into fists to strike the same points once again. The forearms are raised to the level of the head, the body turns to face the front, and the fists are slammed down on the same points in front of the groin.

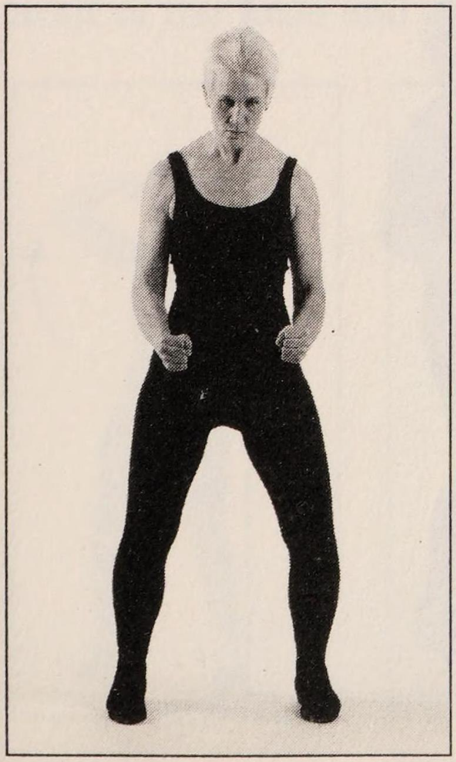


Figure 265

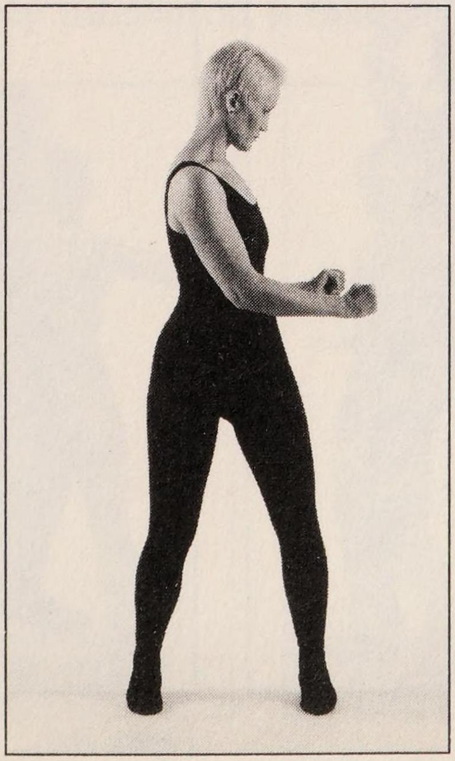


Figure 266

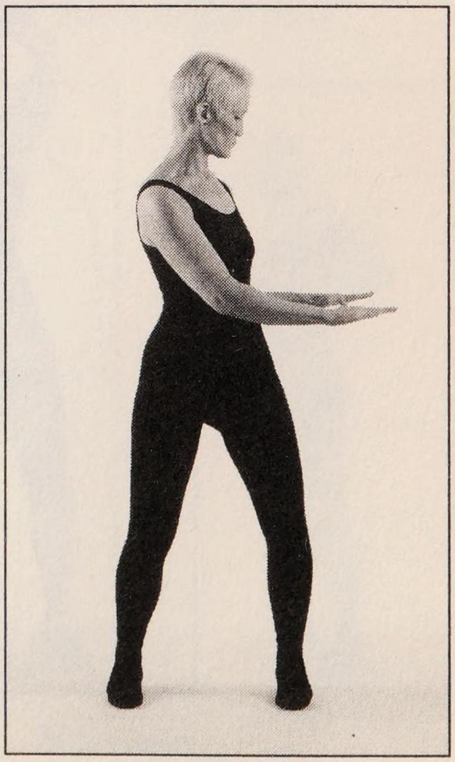


Figure 267

The same sequence of movements is repeated with the trunk turned sharply to the right.

### 30. Smashing Energy with the Wrists Above the Head and on the Left and the Right

Both hands are raised above the head, with the wrists touching and the palms curved as if holding a ball (fig. 268). Then the trunk turns to the left, as both arms move sharply to the left of the waist without disengaging the wrists, which rotate on each other to accommodate the new position of the hands. The palm of the left hand faces upward, and the palm of the right hand faces downward (fig. 269). Both arms are moved to the point above the head again, still without disengaging the wrists, which rotate to adopt their initial position.

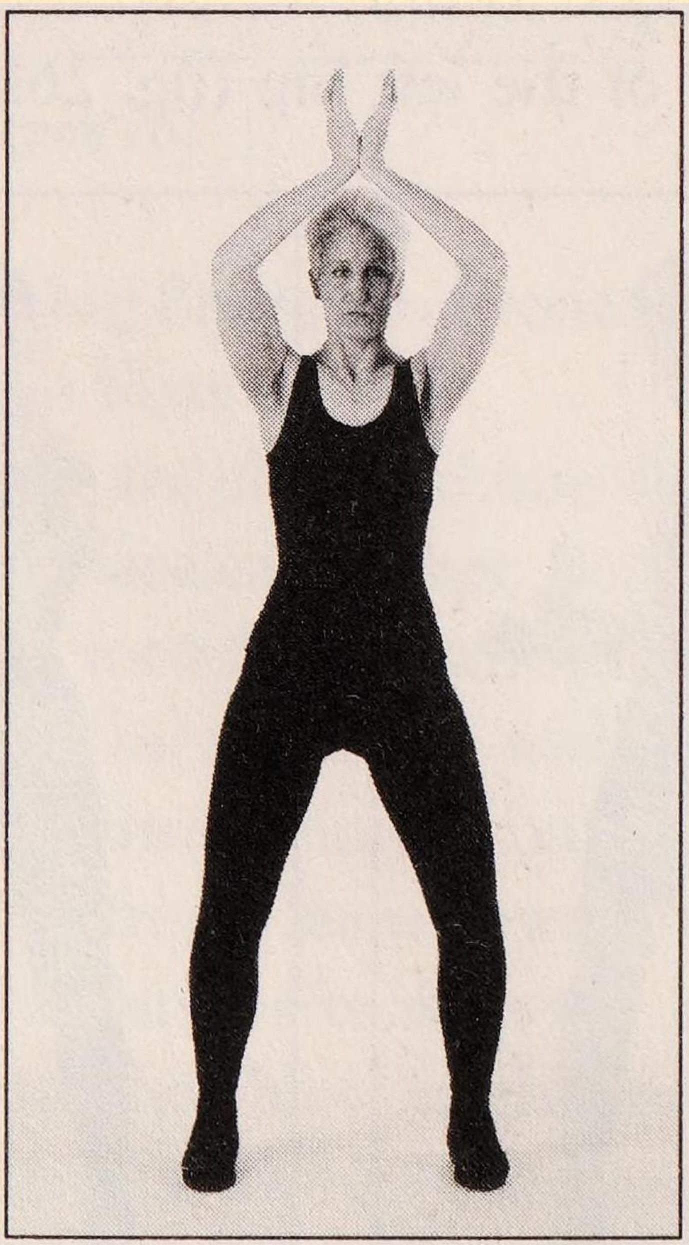


*Figure 268*

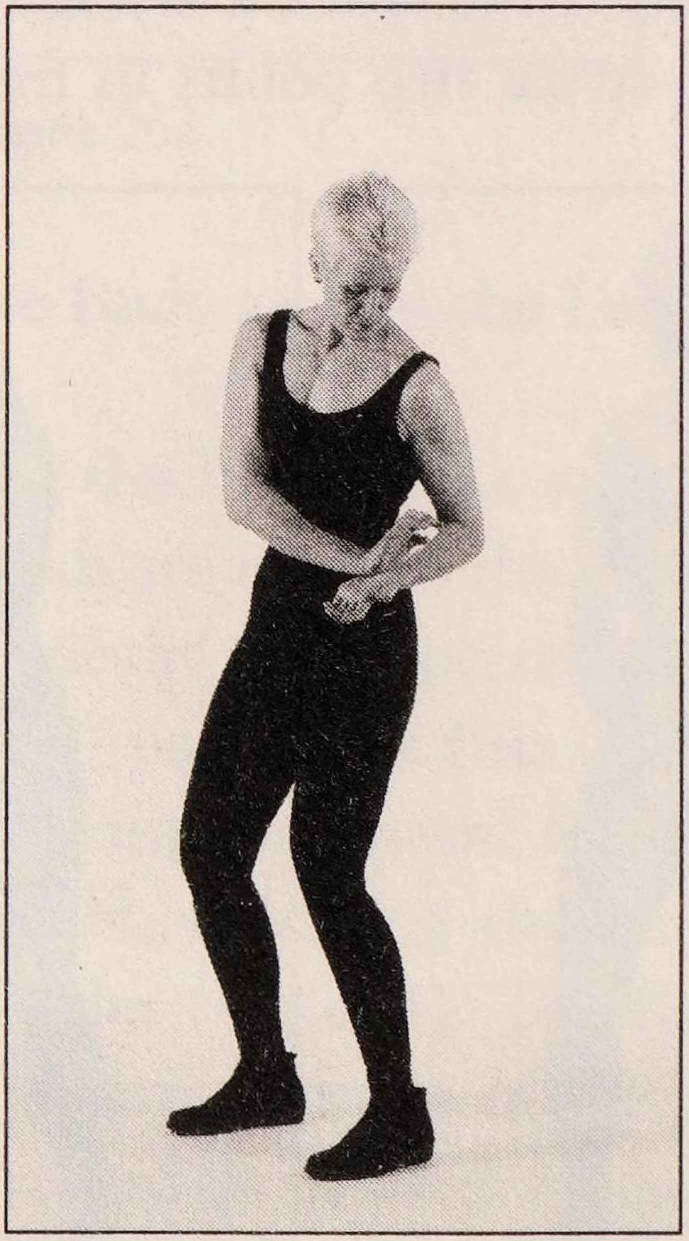


*Figure 269*

The same sequence of movements is performed by bringing the hands sharply to a point to the right of the waist. The movement ends by bringing the hands back to their starting position above the head.

## Fourth Series: Third Group: Moving the Energy of the Left Body and the Right Body with the Breath

The third group consists of nine *magical passes* that employ inhalations and exhalations as their driving force to either further separate or join the two bodies. As already stated, in the view of the sorcerers of don Juan's lineage, putting a dab of energy from one body into any vital center of the other creates a much sought-for momentary agitation in that center. The sorcerers of ancient Mexico, according to what don Juan taught, considered this mixing to be extremely beneficial because it breaks the fixed, routine input of those centers. Those sorcerers felt that breathing is a key issue in the separation of the left body and the right body.

### 31. The Breath for the Upper Fringe of the Lungs

The arms, with the hands clenched into fists, are raised to the forehead with a deep inhalation; the palms of the fisted hands face down. The fists are three or four inches from each other, right in front of the forehead, as the inhalation ends (fig. 270). An exhalation is made as the arms spread forcefully to two lateral points to the sides and even with the shoulders (fig. 271). The hands relax and open. The wrists cross in front of the head and a deep inhalation is taken as the arms make two big circles the length of the arms, going from the front, up over the head, and to the sides. The inhalation ends as the hands come to rest by the waist, with the palms up (fig. 272). A slow exhalation is made then, while the hands are raised along the edges of the rib cage, to the level of the axillae. The exhalation ends as the shoulders are pushed up, as if the force of the hands were making them rise (fig. 273).

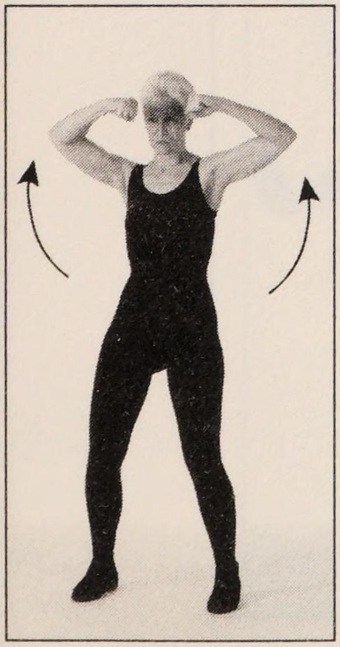


Figure 270

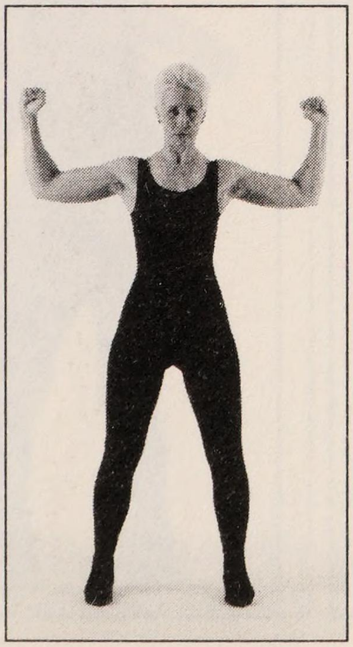


Figure 271

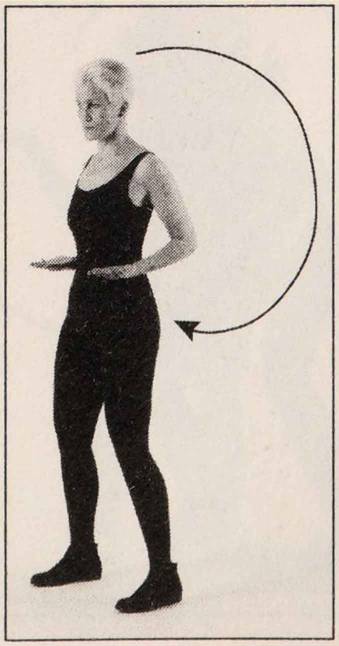


Figure 272

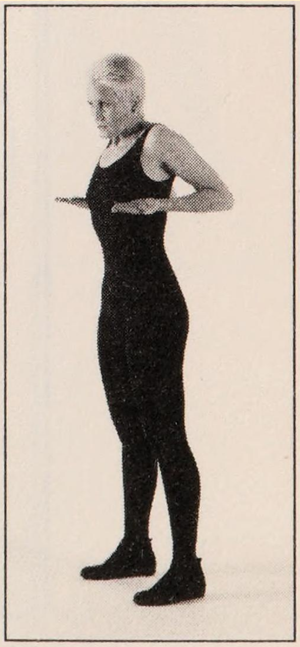


Figure 273

This breath is a true bonus because it allows the mobilization of the upper part of the lungs, a thing which hardly ever happens under normal conditions.

### 32. Offering the Breath

The left arm draws a circle as a deep inhalation is taken. It moves from the front to above the head, to the back, to the front again; as the arm rotates, the trunk turns to the left, to allow the arm to move in a full circle. The inhalation ends when the circle is completed. The palm of the hand is held at the level of the chin; it faces up, and the wrist is bent at a ninety-degree angle. The posture of the practitioner is that of one who is offering something which is placed on the palm. The trunk is bent forward (fig. 274). The palm of the hand is then turned to face down, and an exhalation begins while the arm moves slowly and powerfully downward (fig. 275) to rest on the left side by the thigh; the palm is still facing down, and the back of the hand maintains the ninety-degree angle in relation to the forearm.

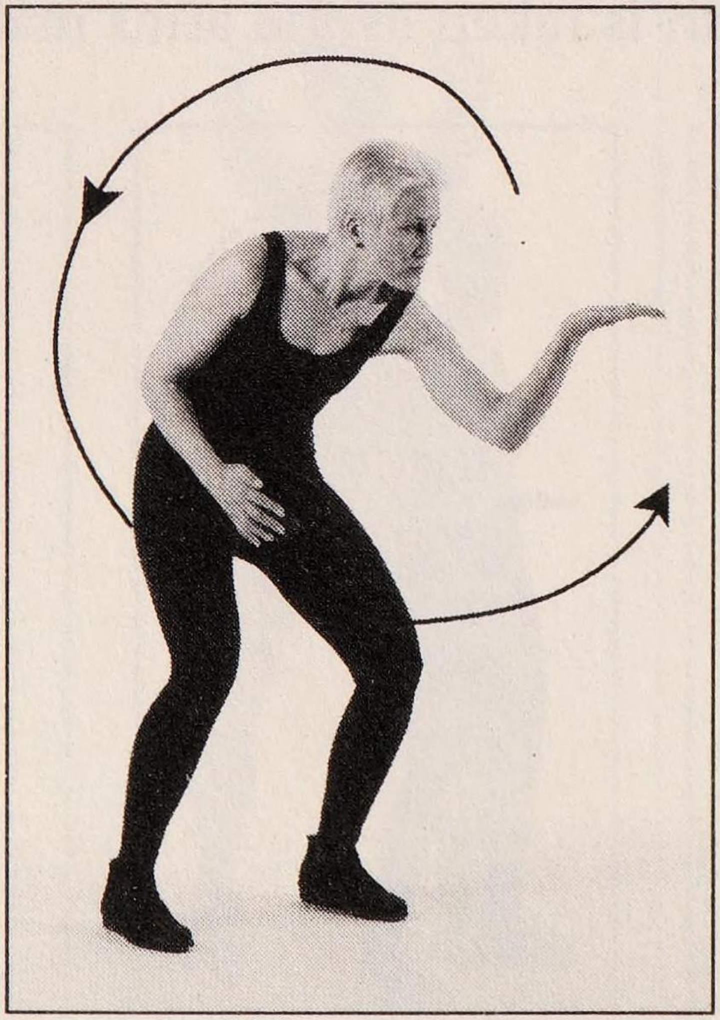


*Figure 274*

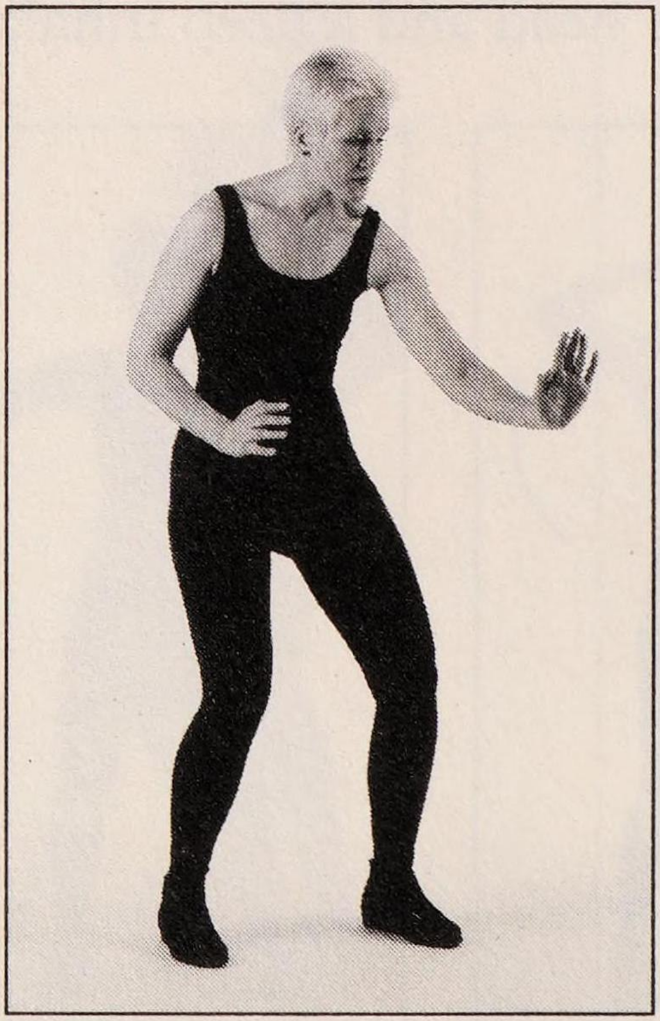


*Figure 275*

The same sequence of movements is executed with the right arm.

### 33. Moving Energy with the Breath from the Top of the Head to the Vital Centers

The wrists of both arms are slightly bent; the palms of the hands are semicurled. With the hands in this position, the tips of the fingers brush upward along the front of the body and over the head as a deep inhalation is made (fig. 276). When the arms reach their full extension above the head, the hands are straightened and the wrists are turned back at a ninety-degree angle. The inhalation ends there. While the hands are brought down, the air is held, and the index finger of each hand is raised; the other fingers are held against the palm, bent at the second knuckle, and the thumbs are locked. Both arms are retrieved to the level of the chest, with the back of the hands against the axillae.

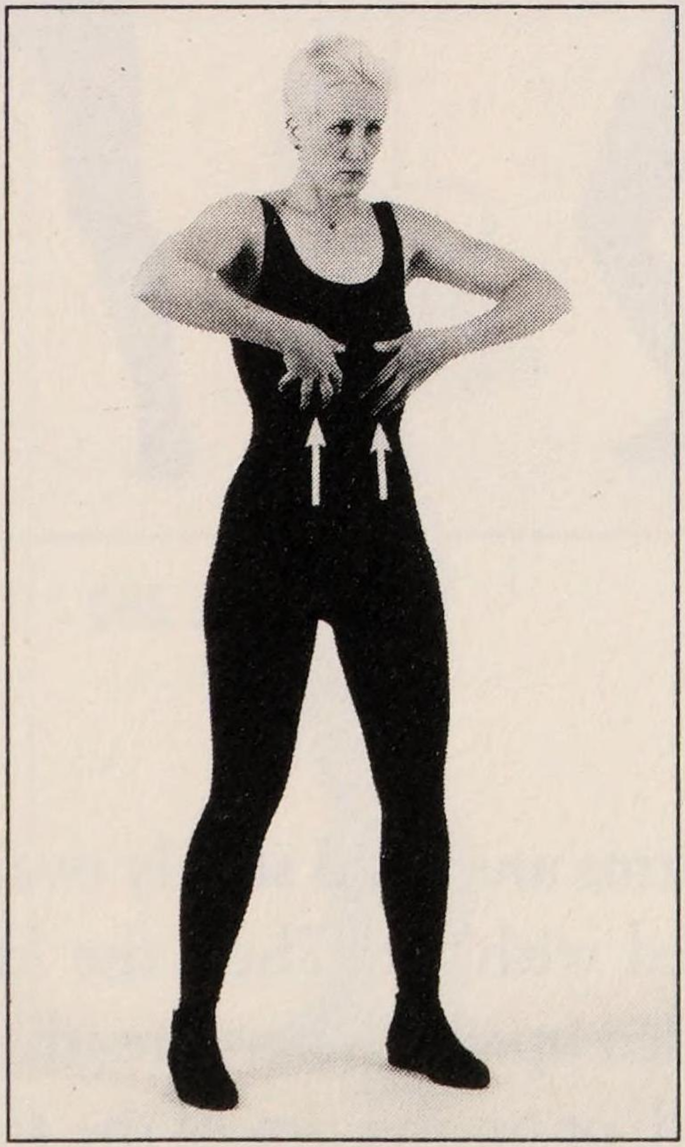


Figure 276

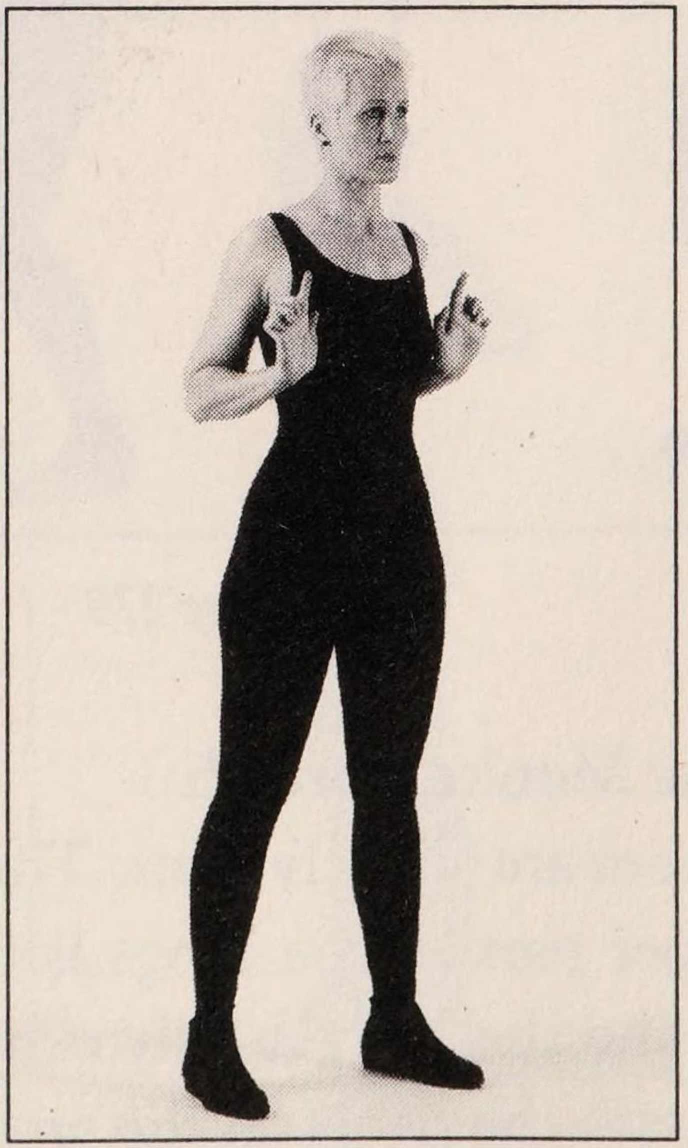


Figure 277

A deep exhalation begins then as the arms are slowly extended straight forward until the elbows are gently locked. A deep inhalation then is taken as the hands are retrieved back to the position against the axillae, still with the index fingers raised, the wrists bent backwards, the palms facing forward. A slow exhalation begins while the hands move upward in a circle that first reaches above the head and then continues downward, making a complete forward circle without changing the position of the index fingers. The hands come to rest by the sides of the rib cage (fig. 277). The exhalation ends as the hands are pushed downward to the sides of the hips.

### 34. Shattering Energy with the Breath

As a deep inhalation is taken, the left hand moves in a wide side circle from the front, to above the head, to the back. The trunk turns to the left to facilitate the full rotation of the arm. The inhalation ends when the arm has made a full turn and stops at a place to the side of the head and above it. The palm of the hand faces forward; the wrist is slightly turned back (fig. 278). A slow exhalation begins then as the arm makes another wide side circle in the opposite direction, going from the front down to the back, then above the head, and to the front again. When the circle is completed, the arm is brought to a point just in front of the right shoulder as the exhalation continues. The palm is facing the body and lightly touches the right shoulder (fig. 279). Then the arm shoots out laterally with the hand clenched in a fist and strikes, with the back of the hand, a point an arm's length away from the left shoulder at the height of the head (fig. 280). The exhalation ends there. The same sequence of movements is repeated with the right arm.

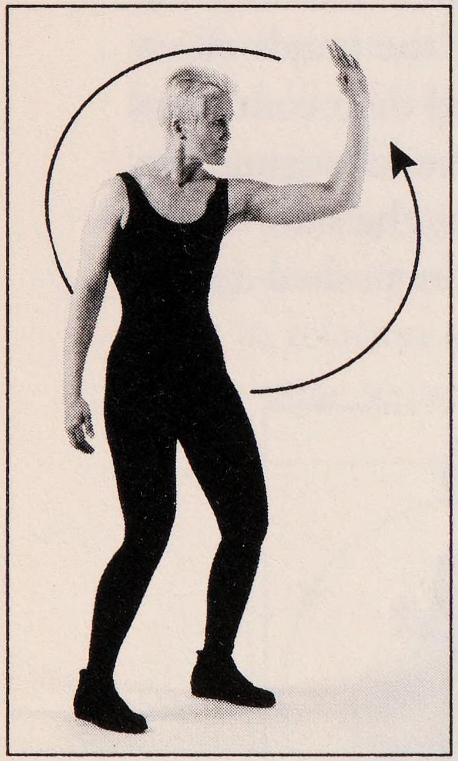
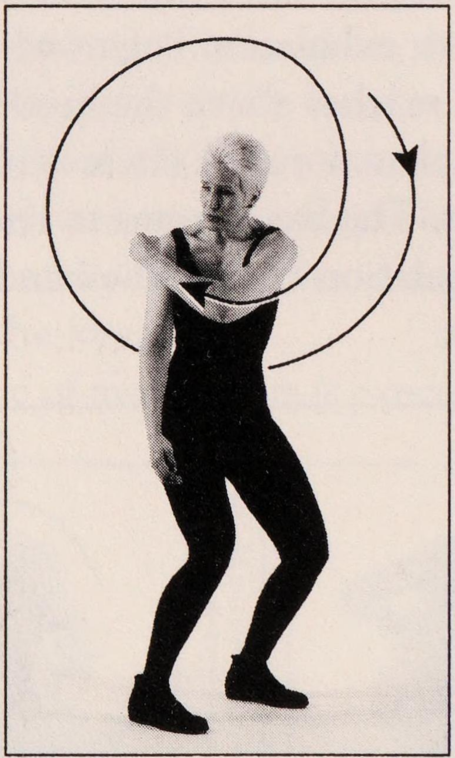


*Figure 278*



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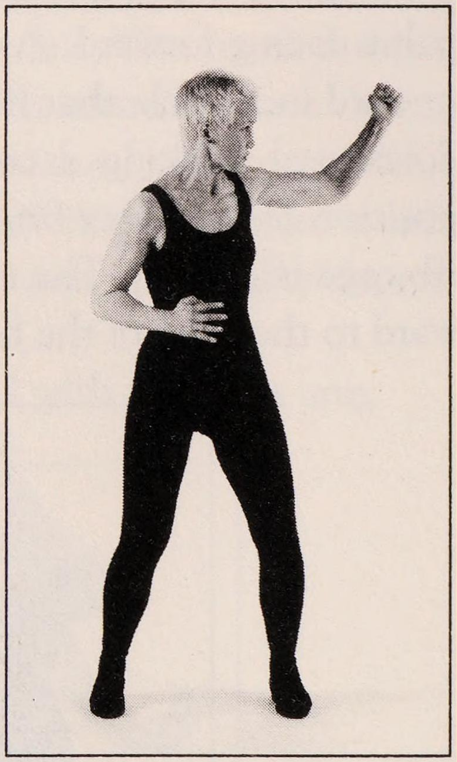


*Figure 280*

### 35. The Monkey Breath

The knees are slightly bent. The arms are lifted slowly over the head as the upper part of the lungs is filled with air. Then the knees become locked and the body is fully extended upward. This breath can be taken either with the heels on the ground, or on the tips of the toes. The breath is held as the arms move downward and the body stoops slightly forward, contracting the diaphragm; the knees are bent again. The exhalation begins when the hands reach the level of the waist. At the same time, the index fingers are extended and point to the ground; the other fingers are contracted over the palms of the hands. The hands continue moving downward as all the air is exhaled (fig. 281). While exhaling, the diaphragm is held fight in order to avoid pushing it downward with the exhaling air.

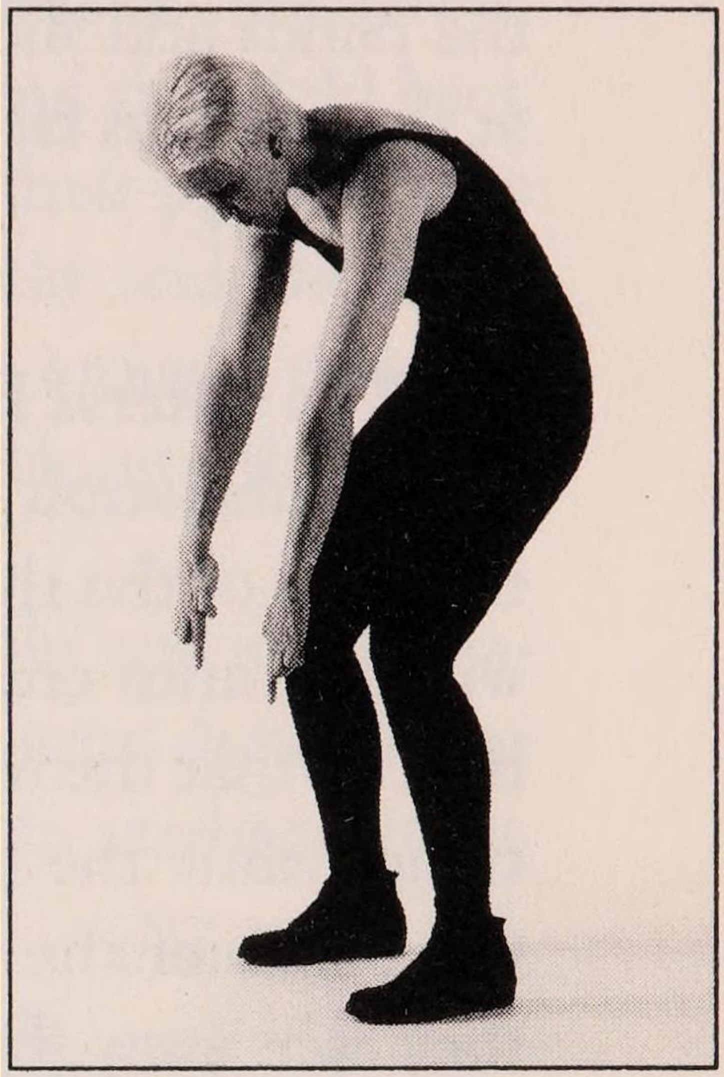
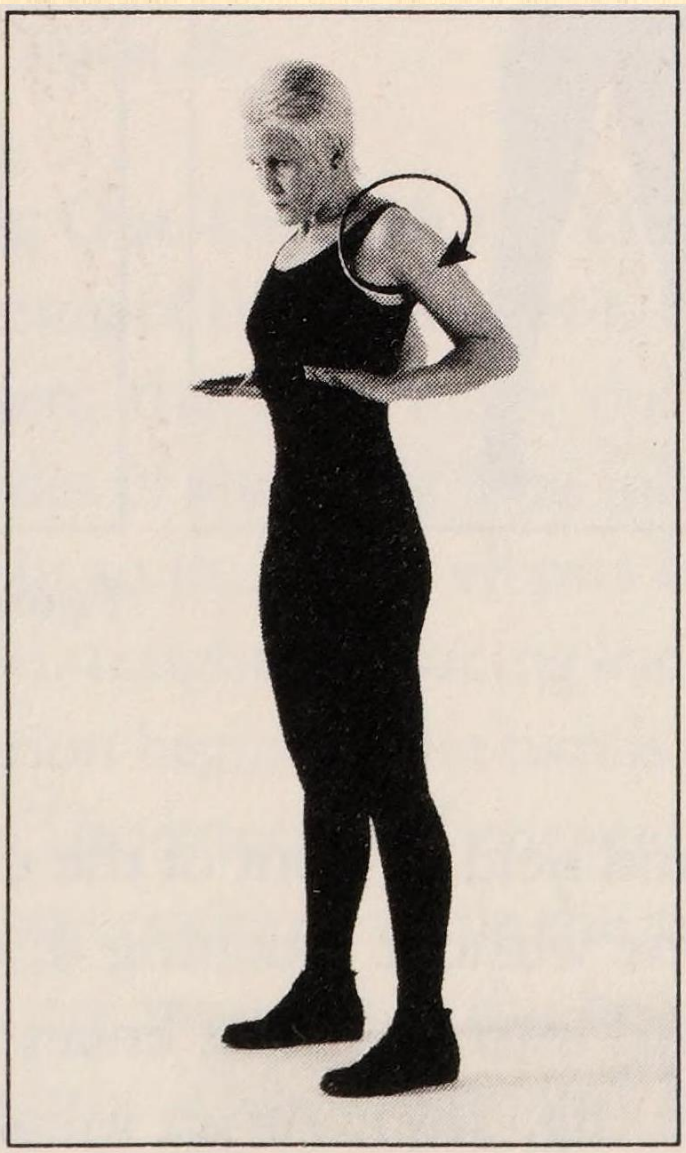


Figure 281

### 36. The Altitude Breath

The legs are held as straight as possible. An inhalation begins while the shoulders slowly rotate from Figure 281 the front to the back with the arms bent at the elbows. When the rotation and the inhalation end, the arms are kept in the initial position (fig. 282). The exhalation begins by raising the hands to the level of the shoulders and extending the arms as far forward as possible with the palms facing the ground.

Next, an inhalation is taken as the palms of the hands are turned upward. The elbows are bent and pulled all the way back, and the shoulders are raised. The inhalation ends with the maximum upward stretch of the shoulders (fig. 283). An exhalation is made as the palms are turned to face the ground and the hands and shoulders push downward; the hands are bent backward at the wrists as far as possible, and the arms are held straight at the sides of the body.



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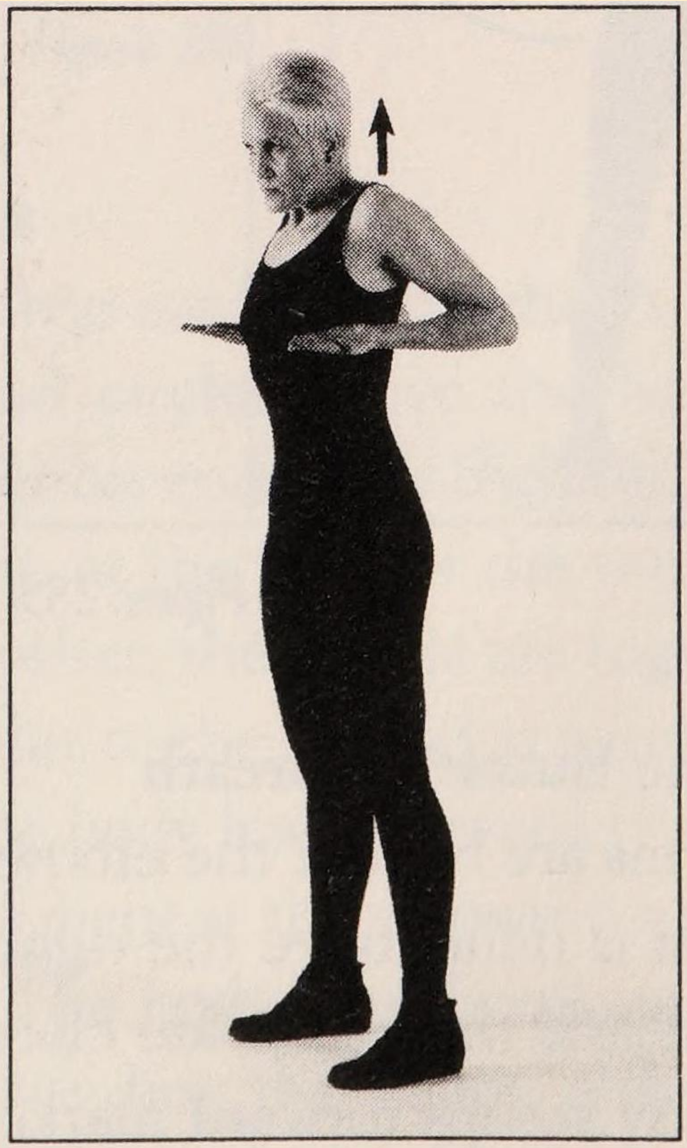
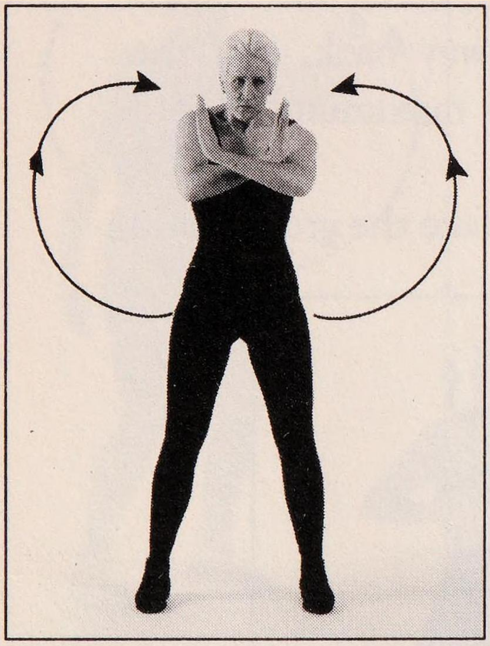


*Figure 283*

**37. The Lateral Breath**

As an inhalation begins, the arms move from their natural position by the sides of the thighs in a circle toward the center of the body, ending with the arms crossed; the palms face outward, and the wrists are fully bent so that the fingertips point upward (fig. 284). The inhalation continues while the two arms are pushed out laterally. As the arms move, the palms of the hands first face forward; when the movement ends, they face away from each other. The inhalation ends at the maximum extension of the arms. The body is kept as erect as possible (fig. 285).



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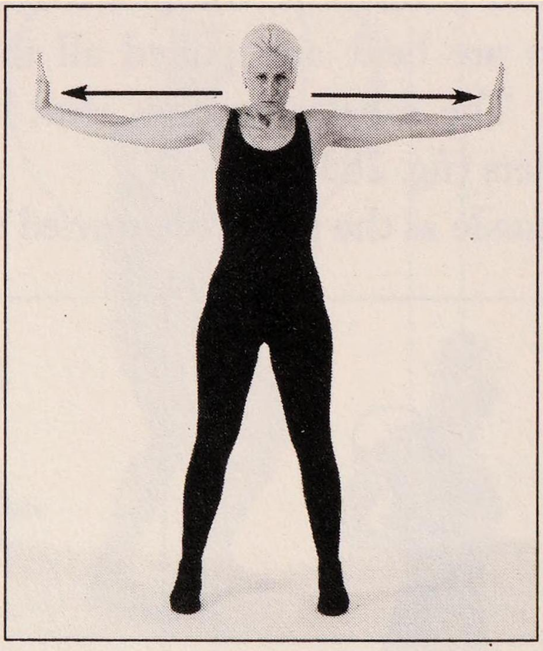

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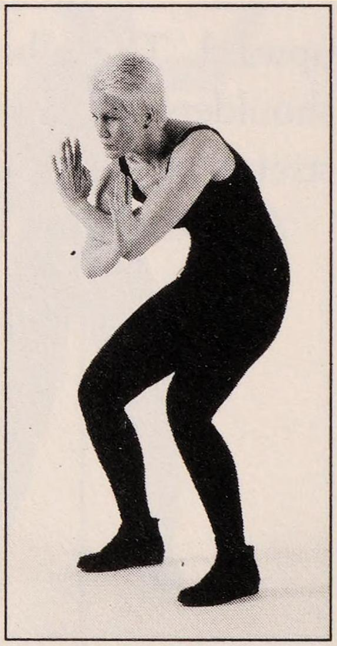
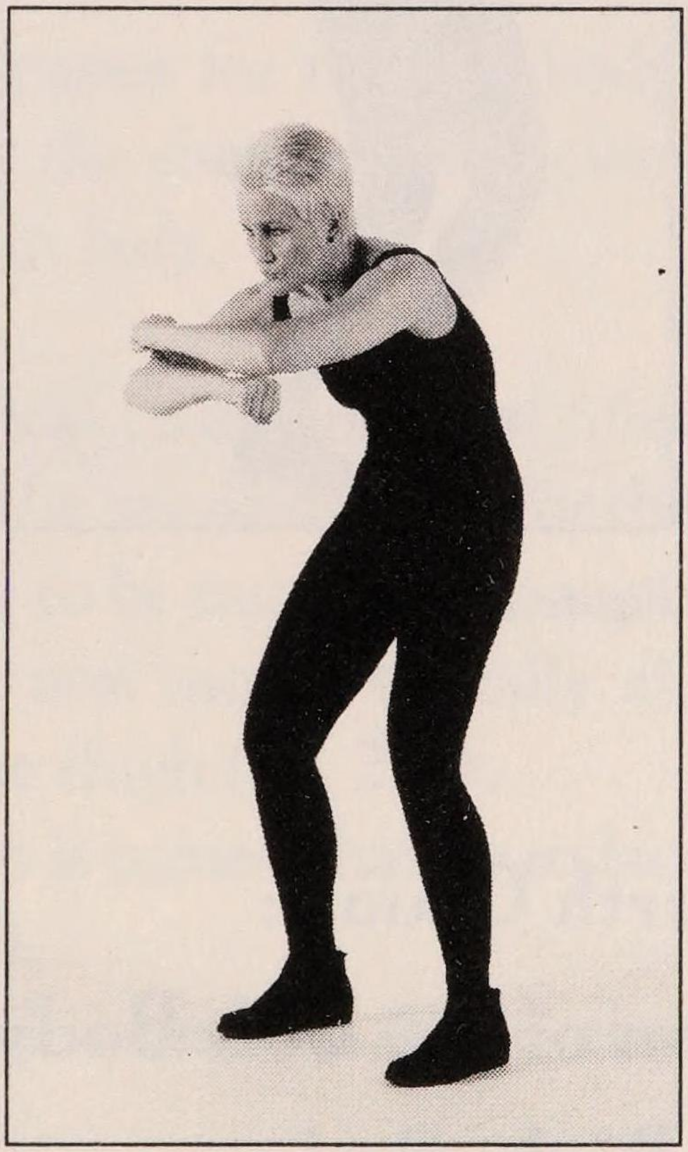


*Figure 286*

An exhalation is made by bending the arms at the elbows as the palms of the hands, with the fingertips raised upward, come toward the center of the body, pass it, and cross to end at the opposite edges of the body. The left forearm is on top of the right. The body is contracted at the mid-section, and the knees are bent (fig. 286).

## 38. The Butterfly Breath

The arms are bent at the elbows and held in front of the chest. The left forearm is held above the right one without touching it; the wrists are straight and the hands are clenched into fists. The knees are bent, and the body stoops forward markedly (fig. 287). As an inhalation begins, the arms separate and move up over the head and out to the left and right. As the inhalation continues, the arms straighten as they circle, going down, to the sides, and around the shoulders, and then fold back to their initial position over the chest. Maintaining their position, the arms are raised over the head, as the breath is held and the body straightens at the waist (fig. 288). Then the arms are brought down to the level of the umbilical region as the body goes back into the initial stooped-forward position, with bent knees.



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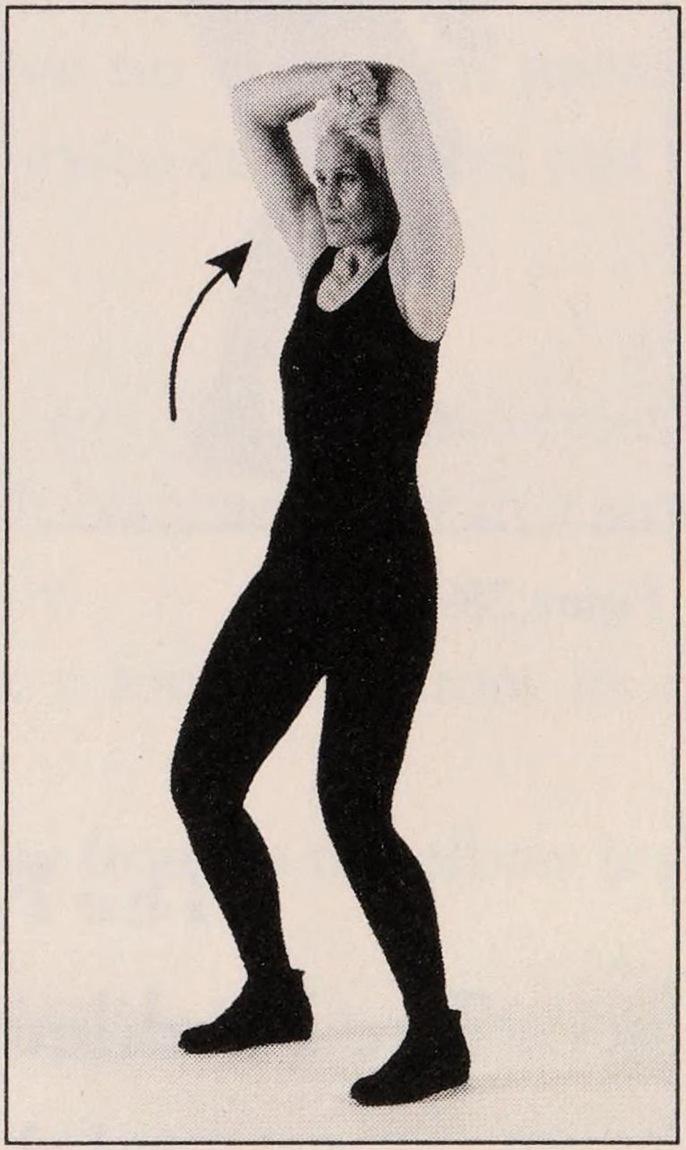


*Figure 288*

The body holds that stooped-forward position steadily, and an exhalation is made by repeating the same movements of the arms done for the inhalation. As the air is expelled, the diaphragm is kept in a fight position.

### 39. Breathing Out Through the Elbows

At the beginning of this movement, the legs are kept straight. As a deep breath is taken, the arms make outward circles above the head and around the sides of the body. The inhalation ends with the arms pointing straight out to the front, elbows bent, at the level of the waist. The palms are held straight and facing each other; the fingers are together.

An exhalation begins as the hands point to the ground at a forty-five-degree angle. The knees are bent and the body leans forward (fig. 289). I lie exhalation continues while the arms, bent at the elbows in a ninety-degree angle, are raised over the head. The body straightens and leans backward slightly. This is achieved by bending the knees, rather than the back. The exhalation ends with the abdominal muscles tensed to the maximum; the head is tilted slightly backward (fig. 290). Practicing this breath creates the sensation that air is being expelled through the elbows.

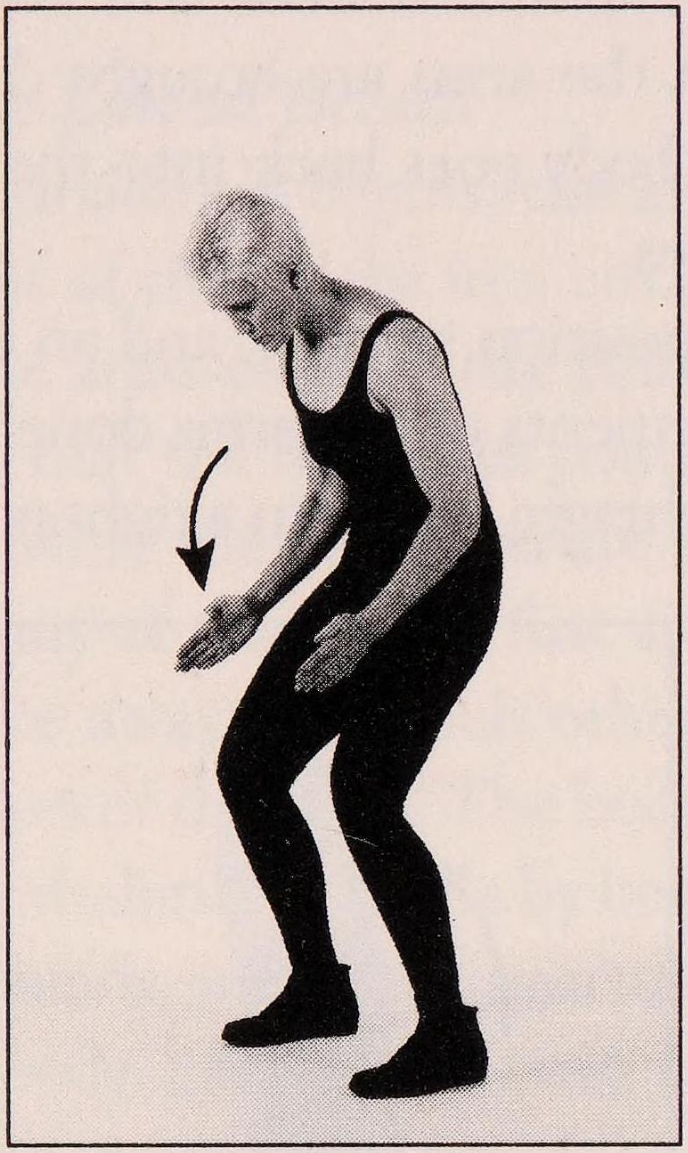


Figure 289

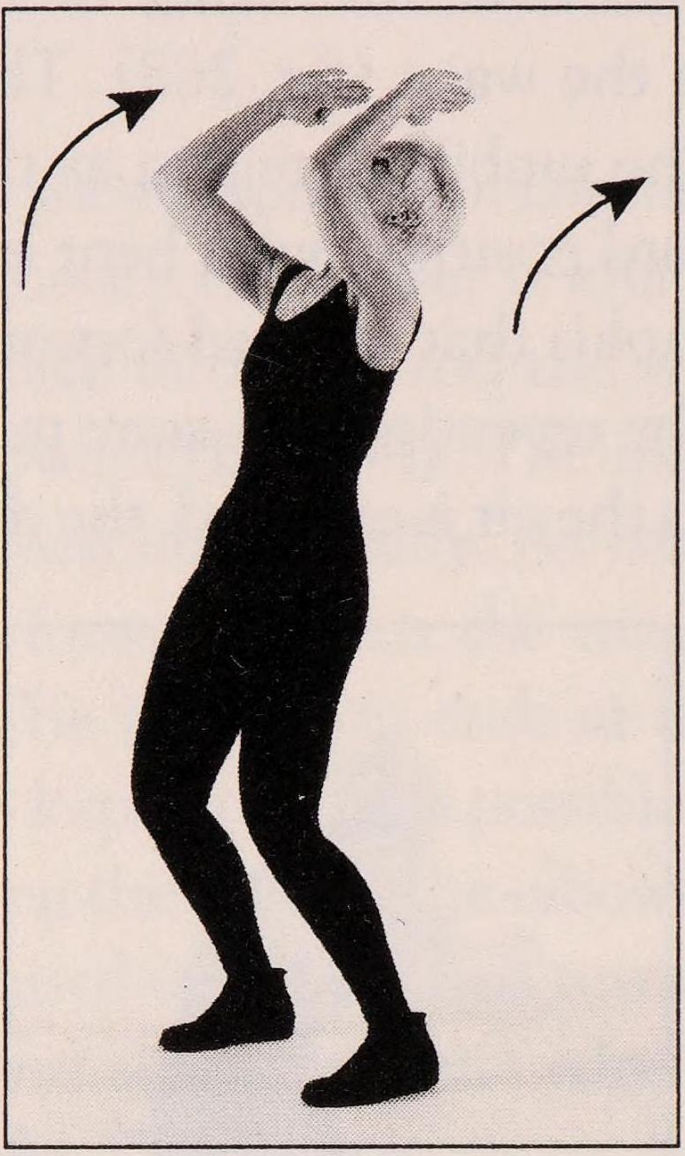


Figure 290

## Fourth Series: Fourth Group: The Predilection of the Left Body and the Right Body

This group is composed of five *magical passes* for the left body executed in a sequence, and three *magical passes* for the right body. According to don Juan Matus, the predilection of the left body is silence, while the predilection of the right body is chatter, noise, sequential order. He said that it is the right body which forces us to march, because it likes parades, and it's most delighted with choreography, sequences, and arrangements that entail classification by size.

Don Juan recommended that the performance of each movement of the *magical passes* for the right be repeated many times, as the practitioners count, and that it is very important to set up beforehand the number of times in which any given movement is going to be repeated, because prediction is the forte of the right body. If the practitioners set up any number beforehand and fulfill it, the pleasure of the right body is indescribable.

In the practice of *Tensegrity*, however, both the *magical passes* for the left body and the *magical passes* for the right body are performed in complete silence. If the silence of the left body can be made to overlap onto the right body, the act of saturation can become a direct way to enter what don Juan called the most coveted state that the shamans of every generation sought: inner silence.

## The Five *Magical Passes* for the Left Body

The *magical passes* for the left body have no individual names. Don Juan said that the shamans of ancient Mexico called them just *magical passes* for the left body.

The first magical pass consists of fifteen carefully executed brief movements. Since the *magical passes* for the left body are done in a sequence, they are going to be numbered sequentially.

1. The left arm moves laterally about a foot away from it's natural position by the thigh (fig. 291).

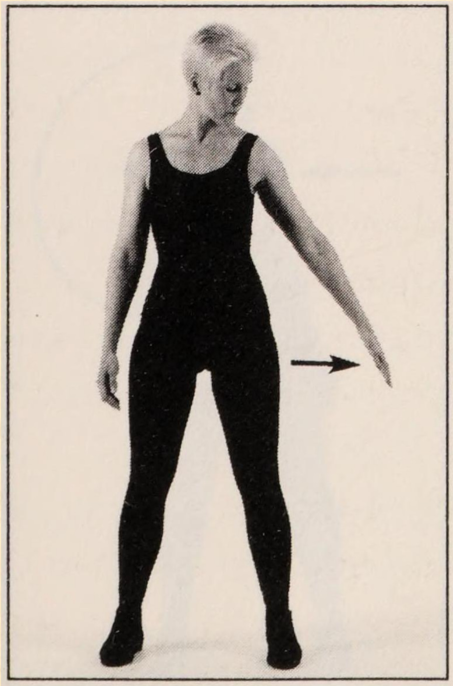


Figure 291

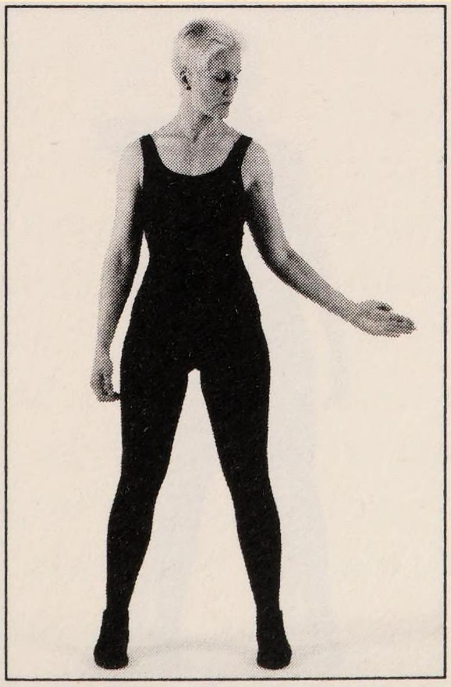


Figure 292

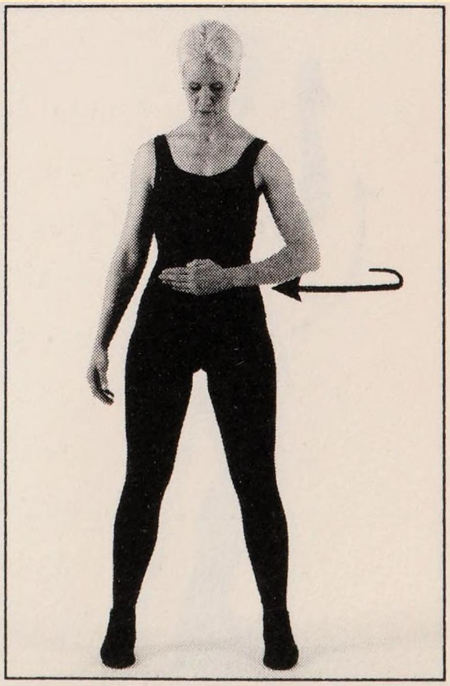


Figure 293

2. The palm is turned sharply to face the front as the elbow is slightly bent (fig. 292).

3. The hand is raised to the level of the navel and cuts across to the right (fig. 293).

4. The hand is turned sharply until the palm faces down (fig. 294).

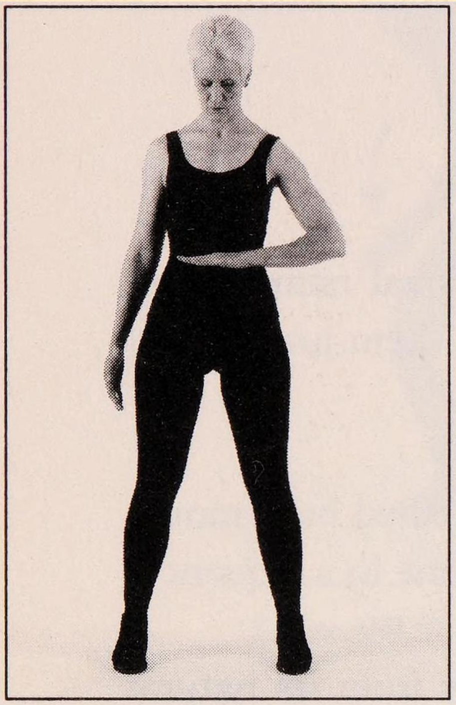


Figure 294

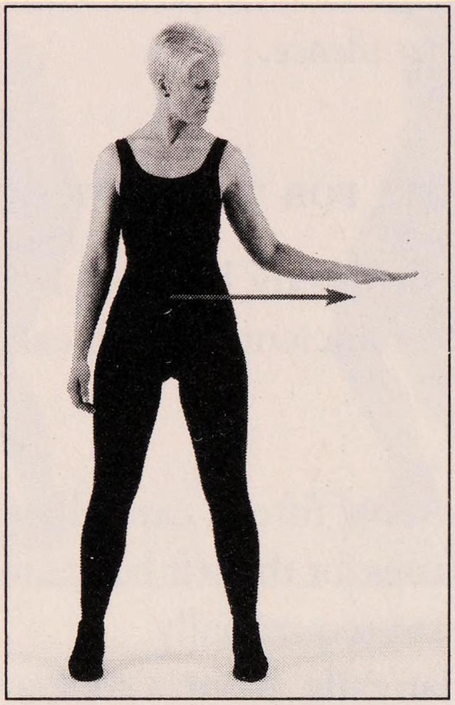


Figure 295

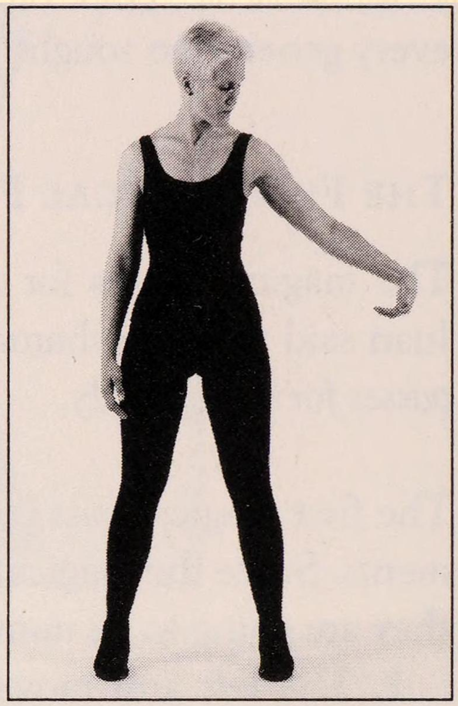


Figure 296

5. The hand cuts across from right to left with the palm of the hand facing down (fig. 295).

6. The wrist turns sharply to the right; the hand is cupped, as if to scoop something, and the movement of the wrist makes it move upward with a jolt (fig. 296).

7. The arm is raised in an arc in front of the line dividing the two bodies to the level of the eyes, a foot away from it, with the palm of the hand facing left (fig. 297).

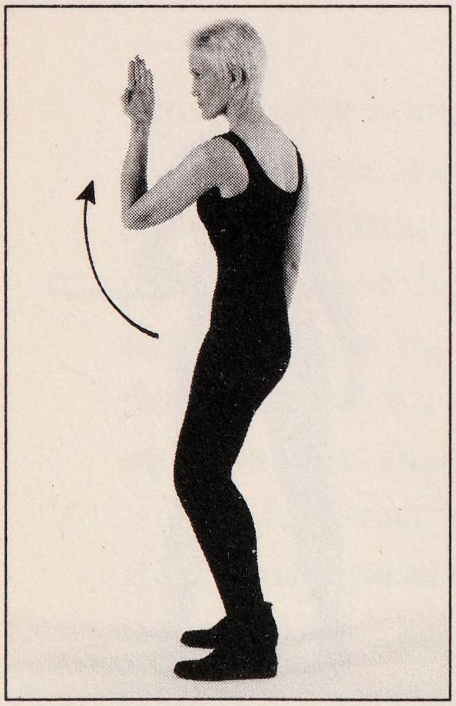


*Figure 297*

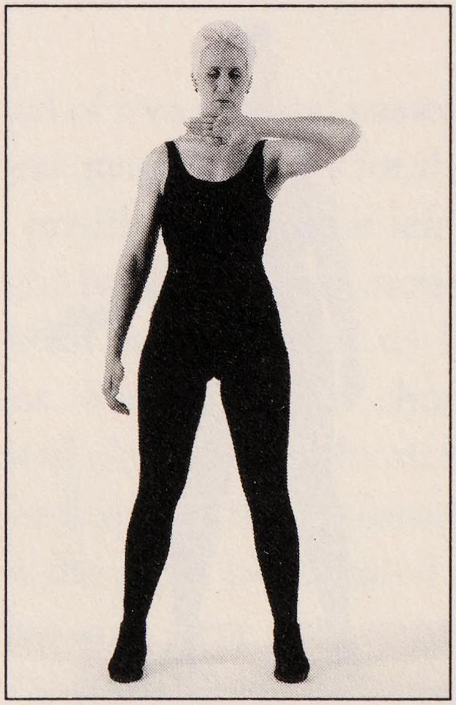


*Figure 298*

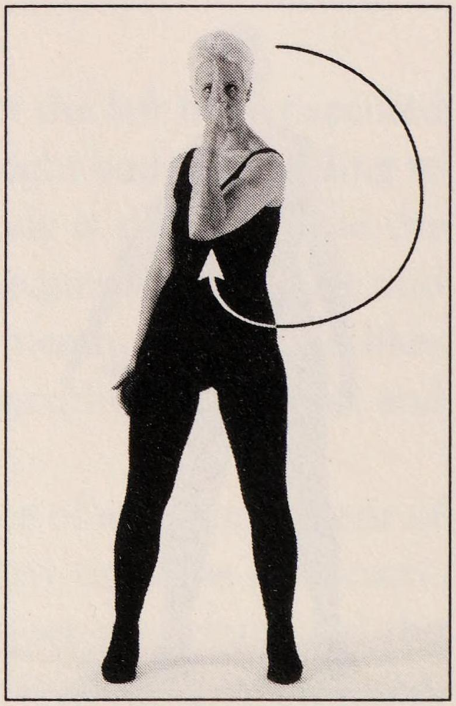


*Figure 299*

8. The wrist turns, making the hand face forward (fig. 298).

9. The arm goes out over the head, draws a lateral circle, and returns to the same position in front of the eyes with the palm of the hand facing left (fig. 299).

10. The wrist moves again to make the palm of the hand face forward (fig. 300).

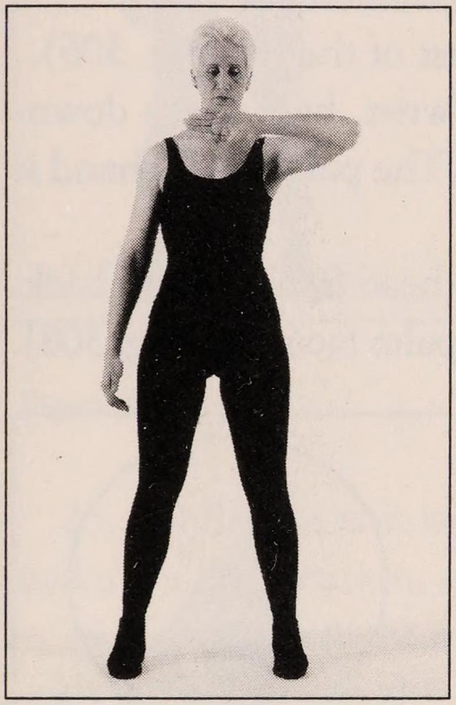


Figure 300

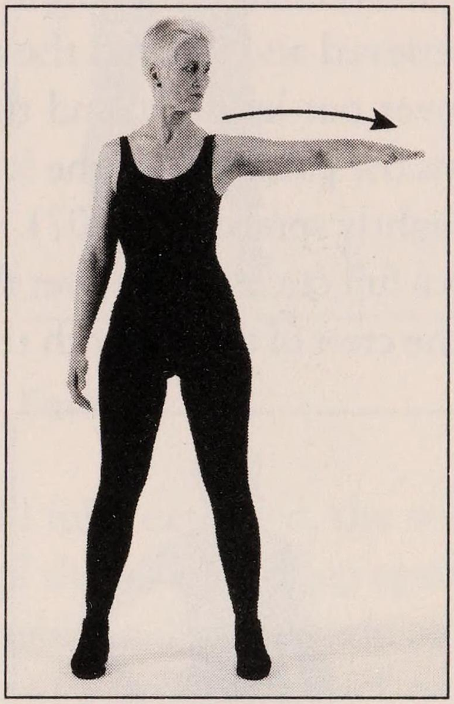


Figure 301

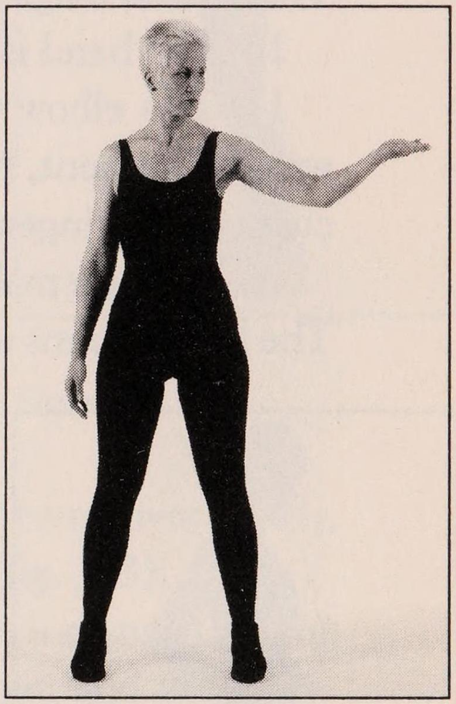


Figure 302

11. The hand moves down toward the left, in a slight curve to the level of the shoulders, with the palm facing the ground (fig. 301).

12. The wrist is turned so the palm faces up (fig. 302).

13. The hand cuts to the right, to a point in front of the right shoulder (fig. 303).

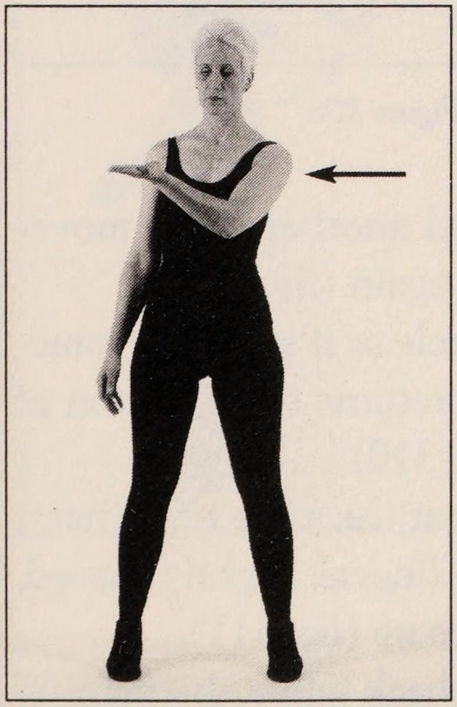


Figure 303

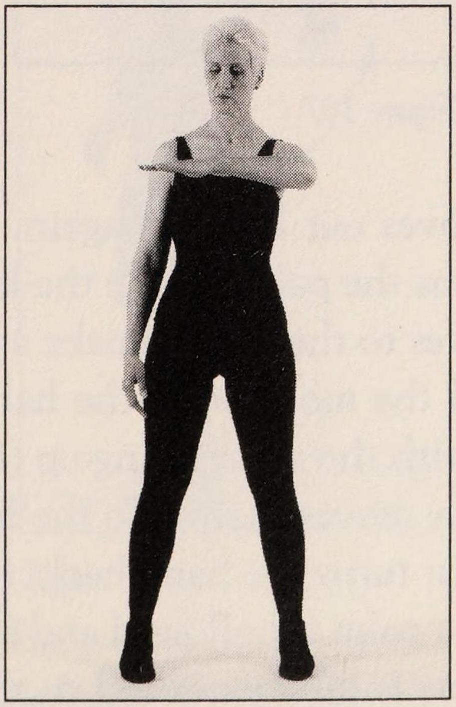


Figure 304

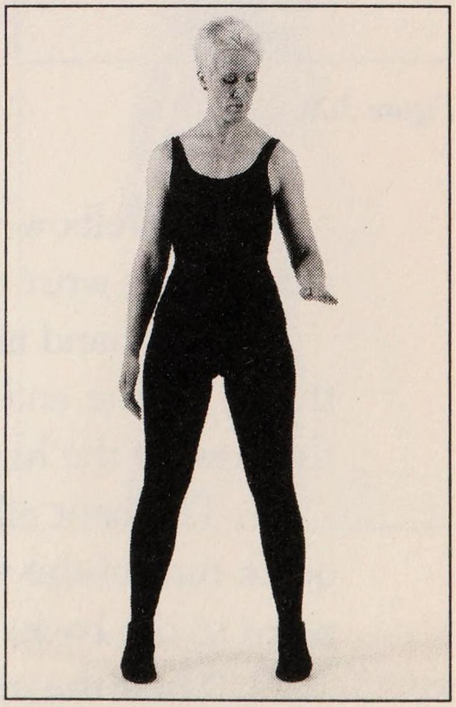


Figure 305

14. The wrist moves again, turning the palm down (fig. 304).

15. The hand sweeps down to a position about a foot in front of the left hip (fig. 305).

The second magical pass is composed of nine movements.

16. The hand is retrieved and touches the crest of the hip (fig. 306).

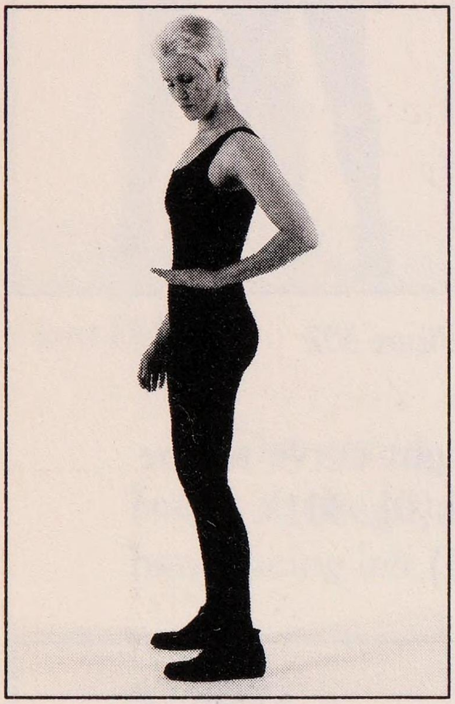


Figure 306

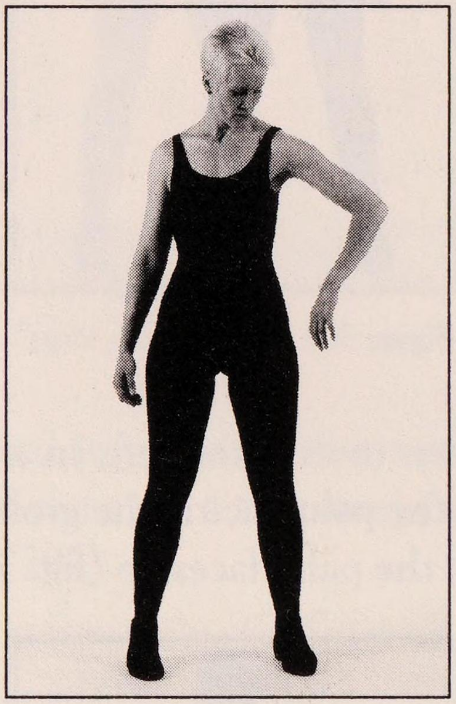


Figure 307

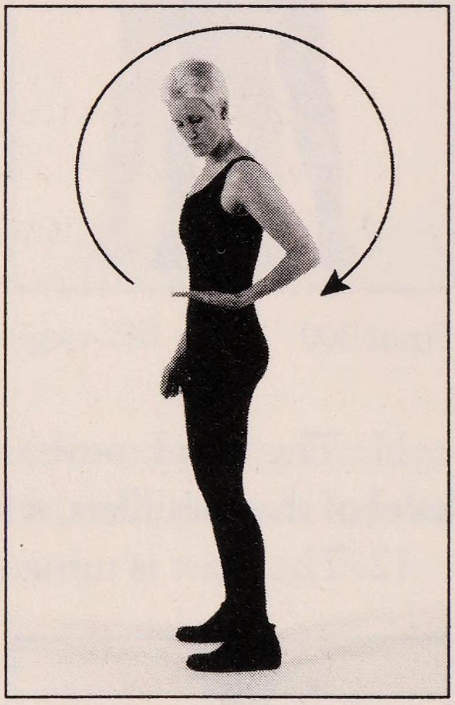


Figure 308

17. The elbow moves out laterally, and the wrist, by a sharp downward movement, turns the palm to face the left. The palm of the hand is cupped, the fingers slightly spread (fig. 307).

18. The arm makes a full circle, going over the head from front to back. The hand returns to the crest of the hip with the palm facing up (fig. 308).

19. The elbow moves out laterally again, and another quick movement of the wrist turns the palm to face the left again (fig. 309).

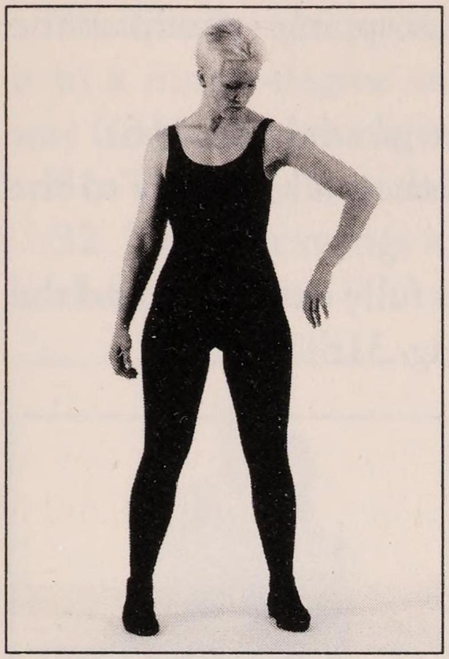
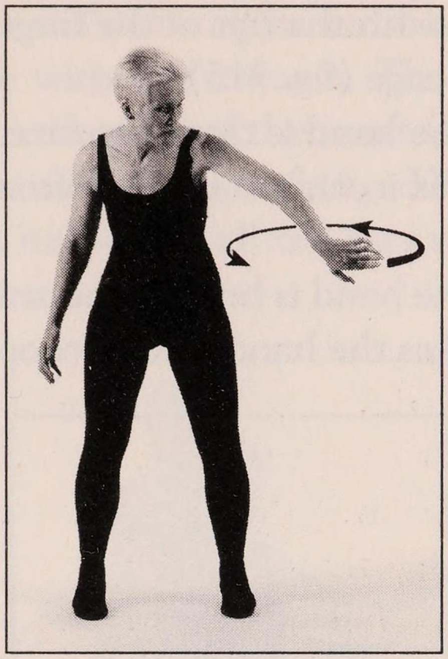


*Figure 309*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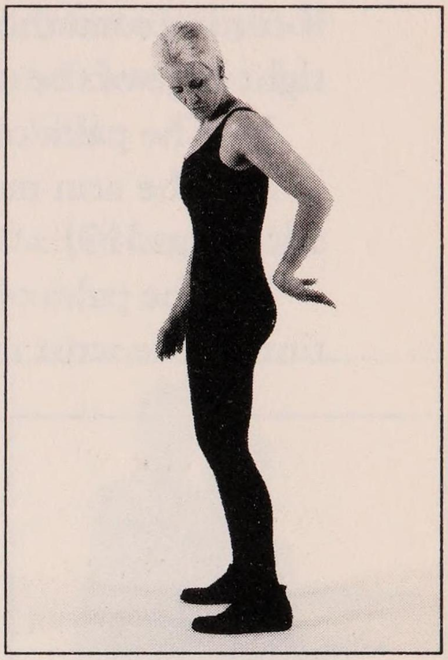
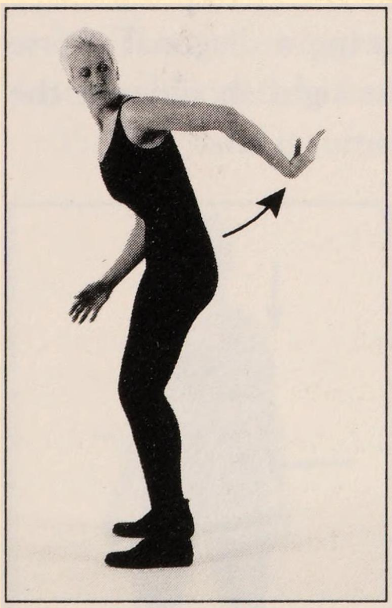


*Figure 311*

20. The hand moves to the side to make a circle as if scooping something. At the end of the movement, the hand returns to a position at the crest of the hip with the palm facing up (fig. 310).

21. The bent elbow moves sharply to the left at the same time that a quick turn of the wrist turns the hand back; the fingers, slightly curved, point to the back; the palm is hollowed and faces up (fig. 311).

22. Then the elbow is fully extended to the back while the palm of the cupped hand still faces up (fig. 312).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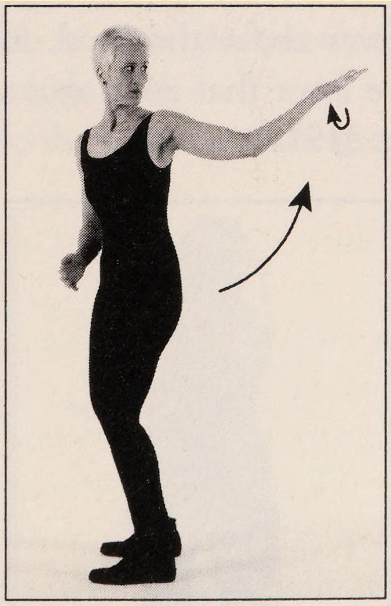
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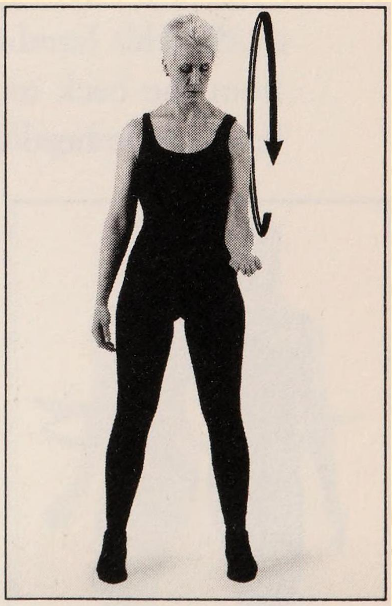


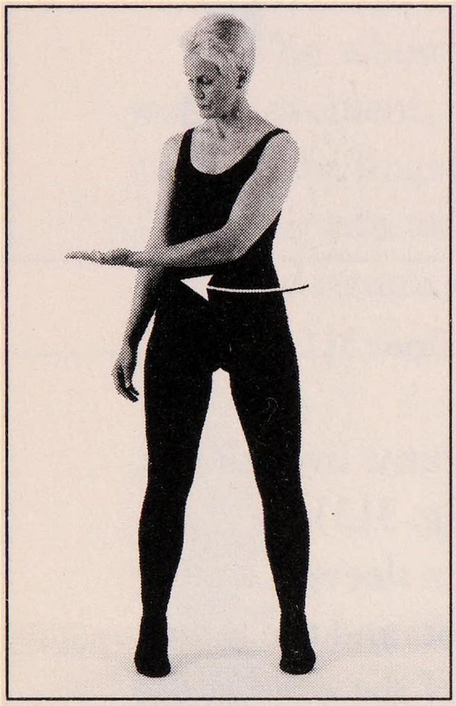
*Figure 314*

23. While the arm is still fully extended, the wrist turns over slowly, making a full rotation, until the palm faces up again (fig. 313).

24. This movement resembles pulling the arm out of a sleeve. Leading with the elbow, the arm draws a circle from back to front, and the movement ends with the palm of the hand up, at the level of the edge of the rib cage, and the bent elbow touching the edge of the ribs (fig. 314).

The third magical pass is made up of twelve movements.

25. The hand moves in an arc to the right with the palm facing up, as if cutting something with the tips of the fingers, stopping a foot past the right edge of the rib cage (fig. 315).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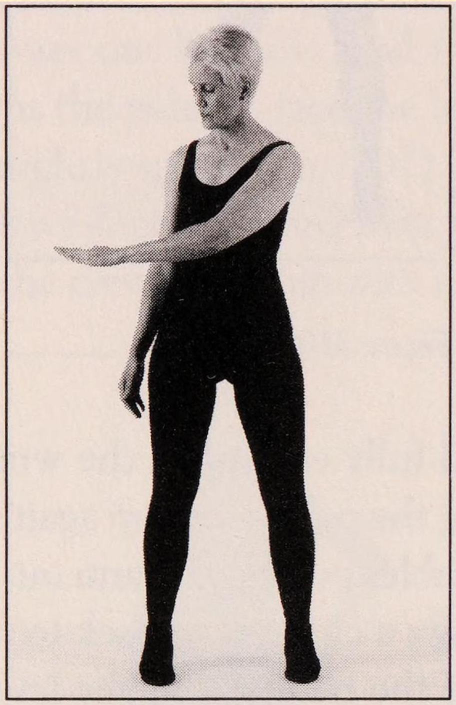
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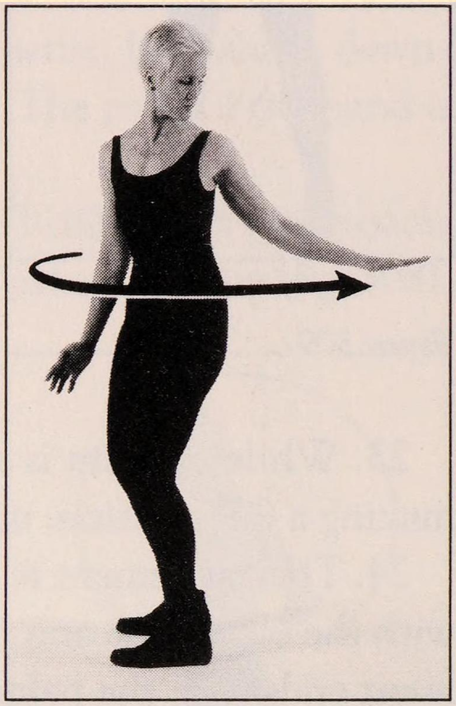
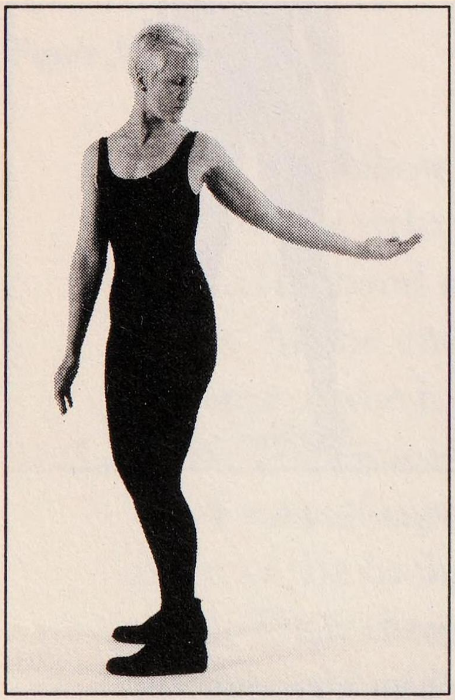


*Figure 317*

26. The palm of the hand is turned to face the ground (fig. 316).

27. The arm moves in an arc to the left and then all the way to the back (fig. 317).

28. The palm of the hand is hollow, the arm is fully extended, and the turn of the wrist makes the hand into a scoop (fig. 318).



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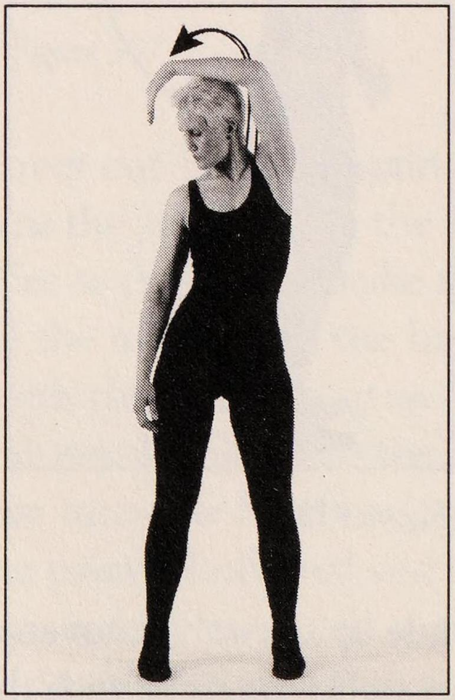

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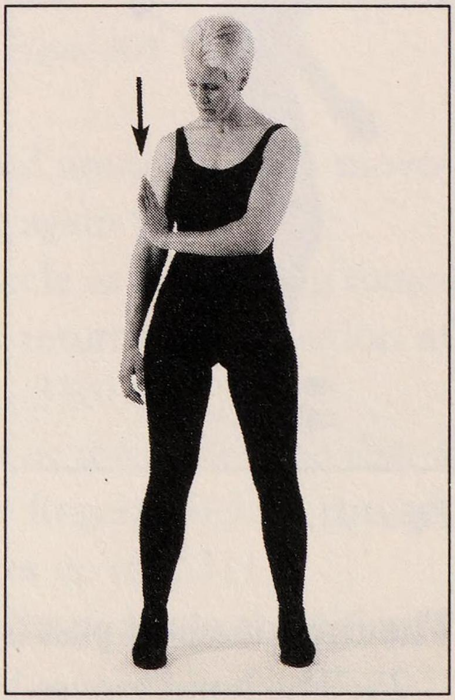
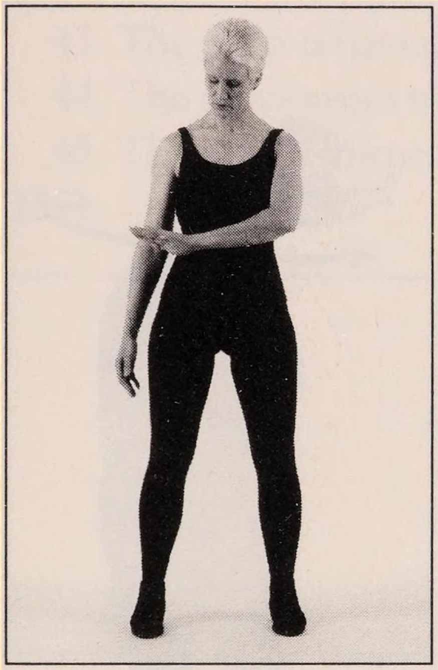


*Figure 320*

29. The hand moves above the head, following a diagonal course from the back to the front that ends above the right shoulder at the level of the head (fig. 319).

30. The hand is straightened out and the wrist is contracted to place it in a ninety-degree angle with the forearm. The hand descends this way from above the head to the right of the waist (fig. 320).

31. The palm is turned briskly downward (fig. 321).



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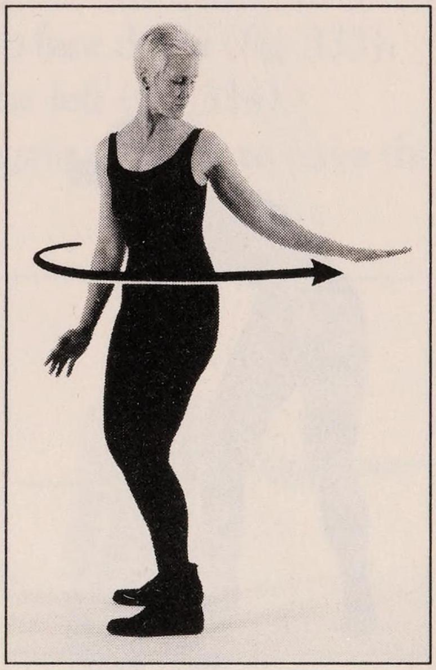

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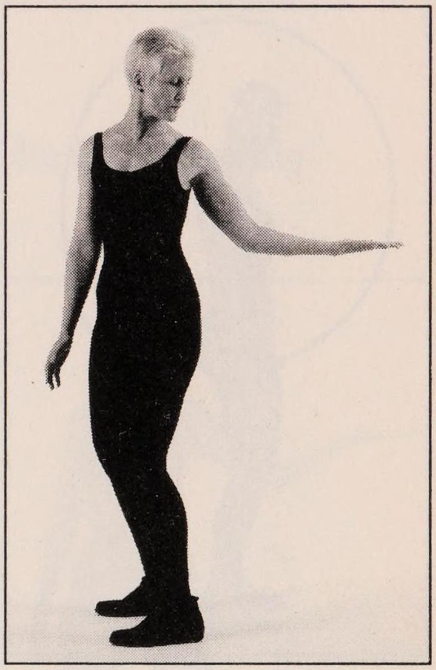


*Figure 323*

32. The arm swings in a half-circle all the way to the left and to the back (fig. 322).

33. The palm turns up (fig. 323).

34. The arm swings to the front, to the same position on the right, a foot away from the rib cage (fig. 324).

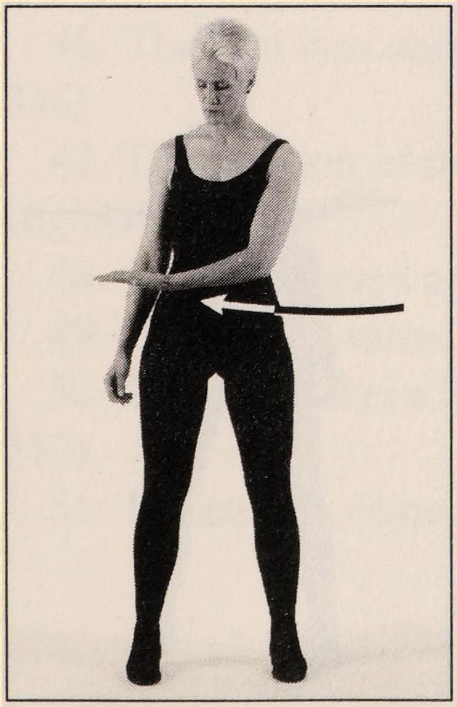


Figure 324

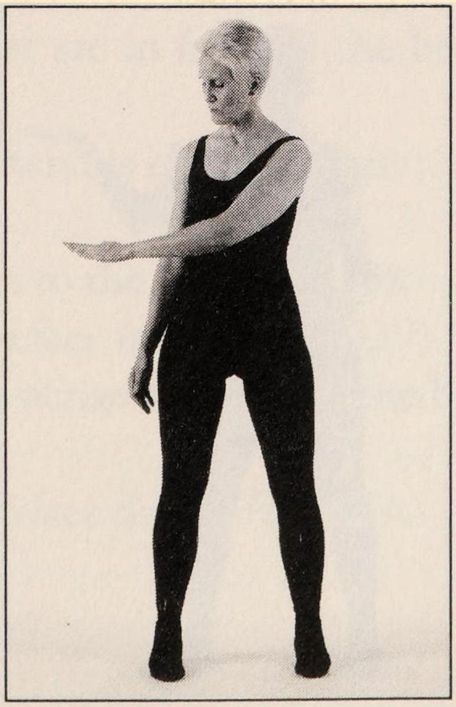


Figure 325

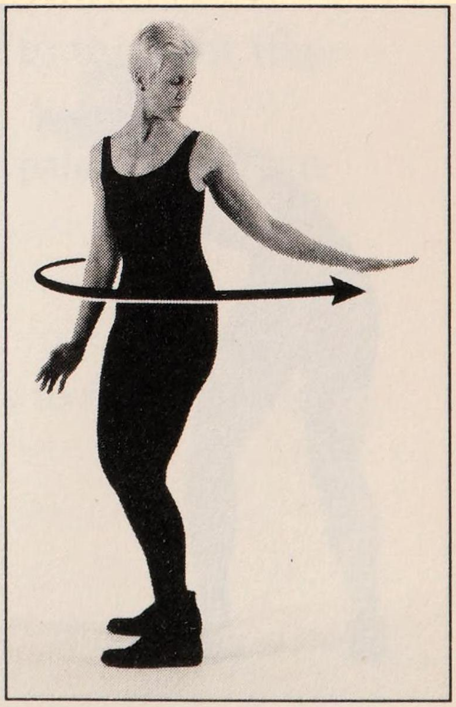


Figure 326

35. The hand is turned so the palm faces the ground again (fig. 325).

36. The arm swings to the left and returns to the same point behind the back on the left side (fig. 326).

The fourth magical pass consists of fifteen movements.

37. The arm swings in a big circle to the front, above the head, and to the back, and ends at a point about a foot away from the left thigh (fig. 327).

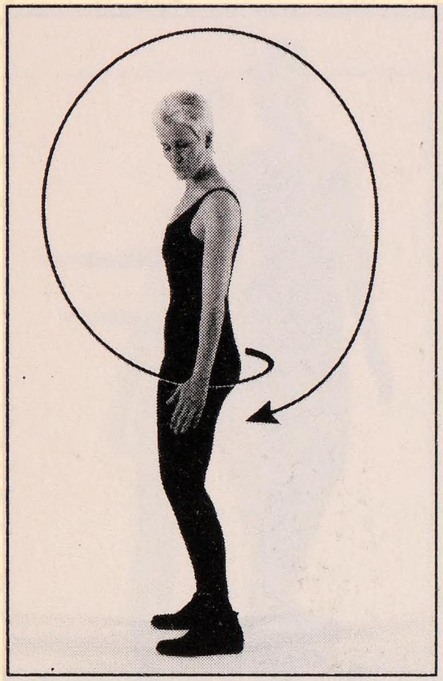


Figure 327

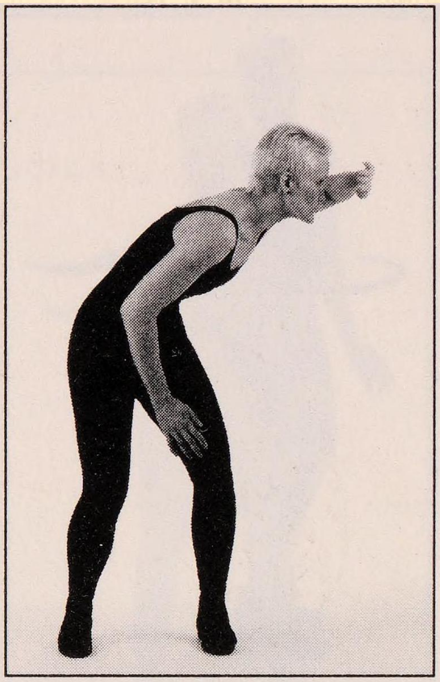


Figure 328

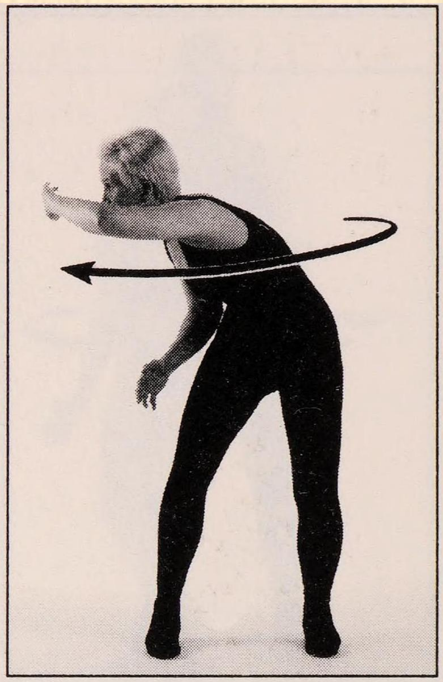


Figure 329

38. The head is turned to the left. The elbow is bent sharply and the forearm is raised to the level of the eyes, with the palm of the hand facing outward, as if shielding the eyes from light glare. The body stoops forward (fig. 328).

39. The head and trunk rotate slowly all the way to the right, as if to look in the distance with a shield over the eyes (fig. 329).

40. The head and trunk rotate again to the left (fig. 330).

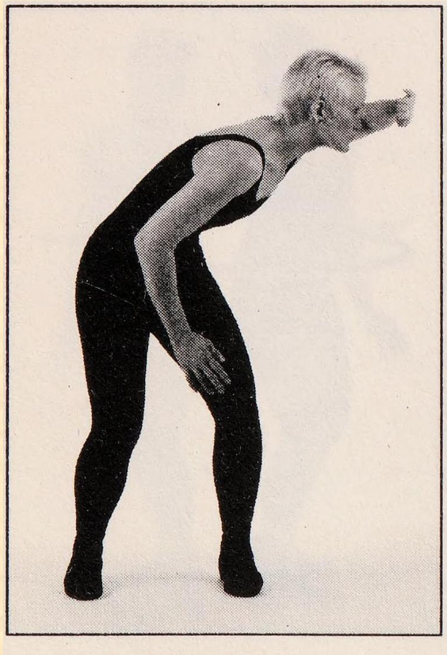


Figure 330

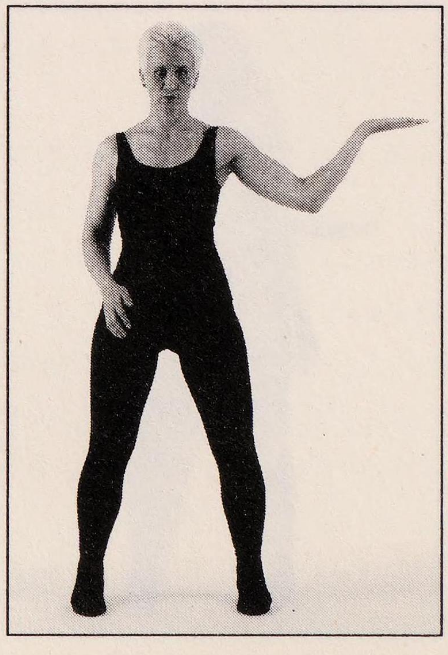


Figure 331

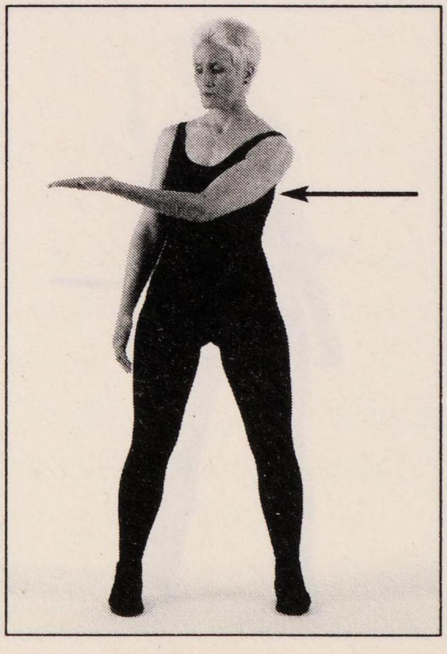


Figure 332

41. The palm of the hand is quickly turned to face up as the head and trunk move to look straight forward (fig. 331).

42. Then the hand cuts a line in front of the body from left to right (fig. 332).

43. The palm is turned to face down (fig. 333).

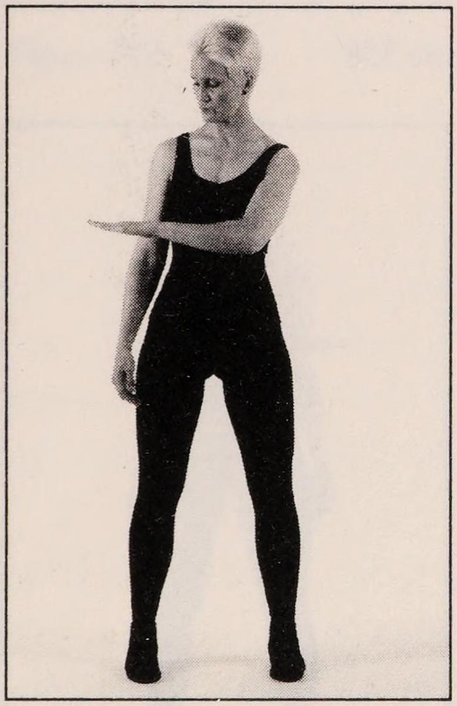


*Figure 333*

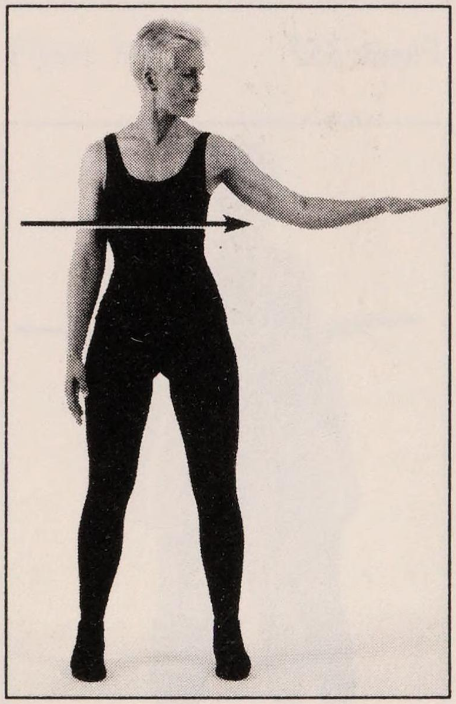


*Figure 334*

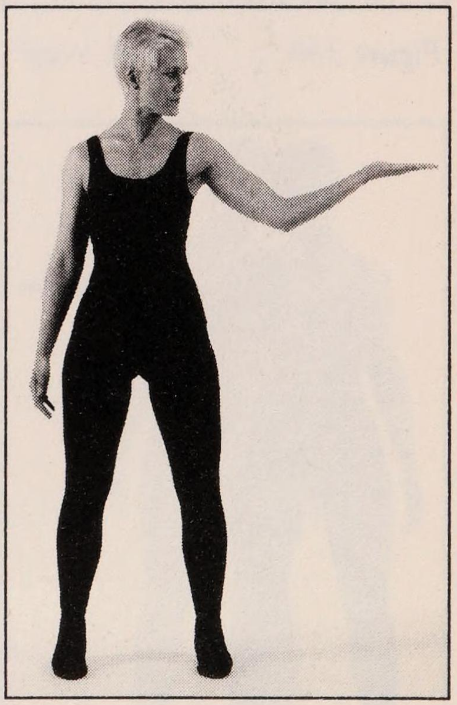


*Figure 335*

44. The arm sweeps to the left (fig. 334).

45. The wrist is turned again in order to have the palm facing up (fig. 335).

46. The arm cuts another arc in front of the body to the right (fig. 336).

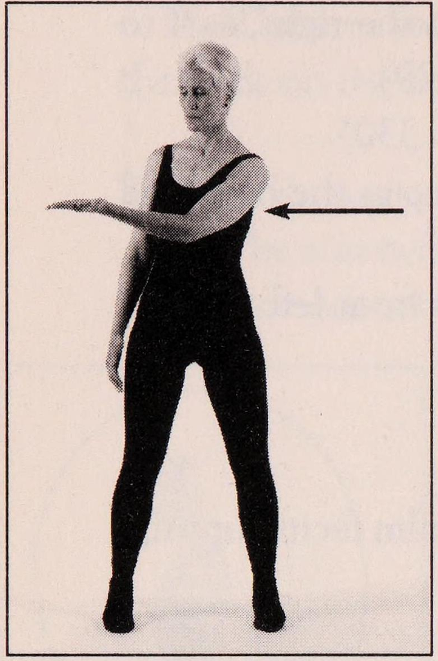
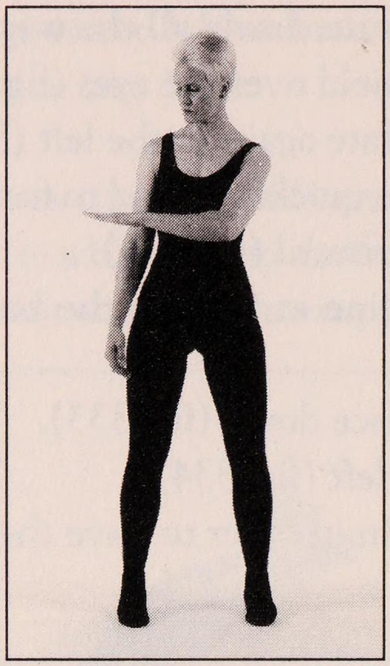


Figure 336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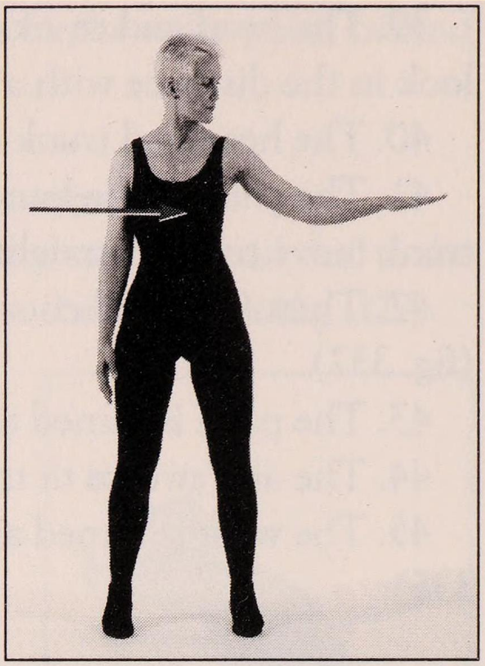


Figure 338

47. The position of the hand is changed again; the palm faces down (fig. 337).

48. The arm sweeps again to the left (fig. 338).

49. The palm is turned to face upward (fig. 339).

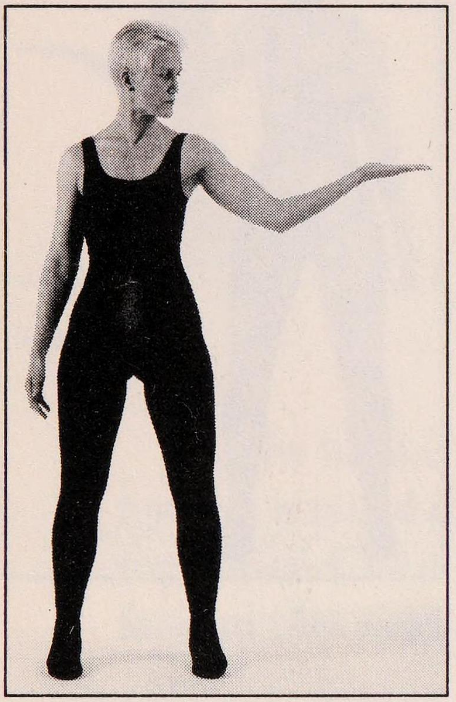


Figure 339

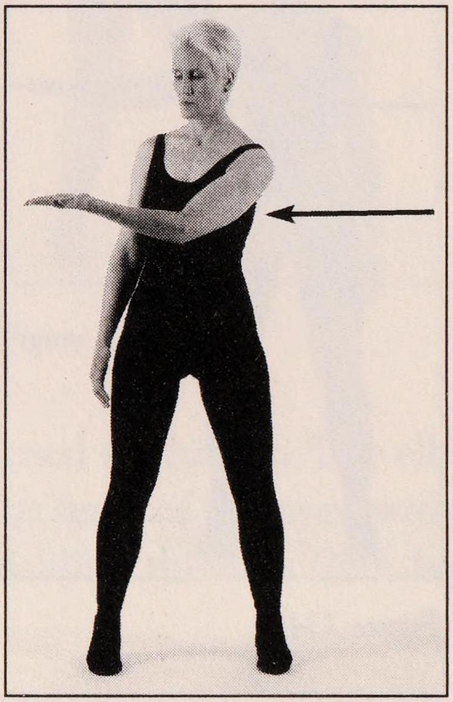


Figure 340

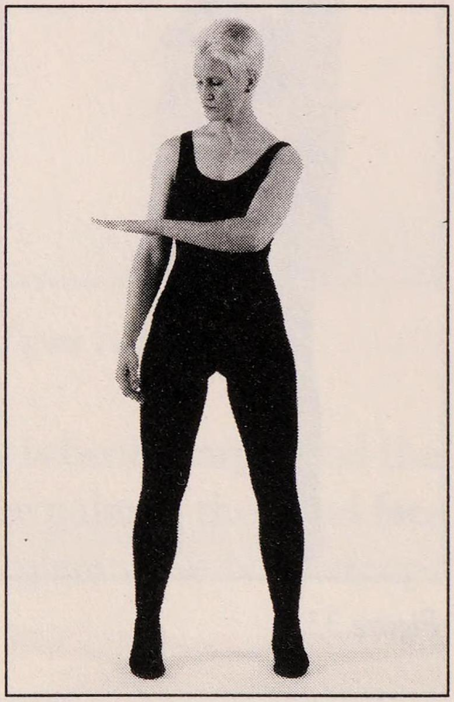


Figure 341

50. The arm makes a line across the front of the body to the right (fig. 340).

51. The palm is turned to face down (fig. 341).

The fifth magical pass is made up of twenty-five movements.

52. The hand draws a large circle in front of the body, with the palm of the hand facing forward as the circle is drawn. The movement ends at a point in front of the right shoulder; the palm is facing up (fig. 342).

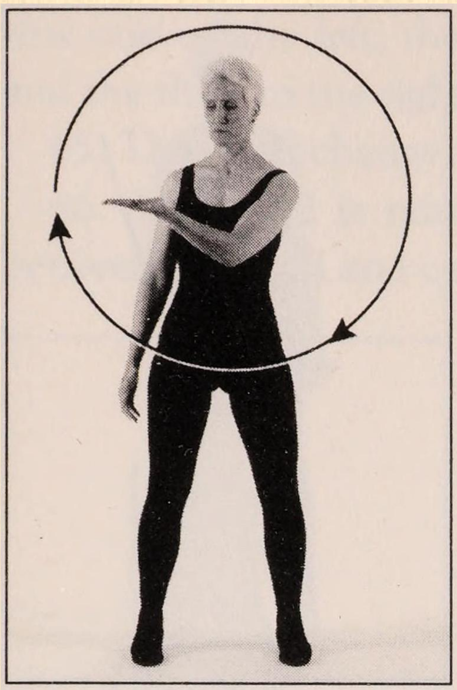


Figure 342

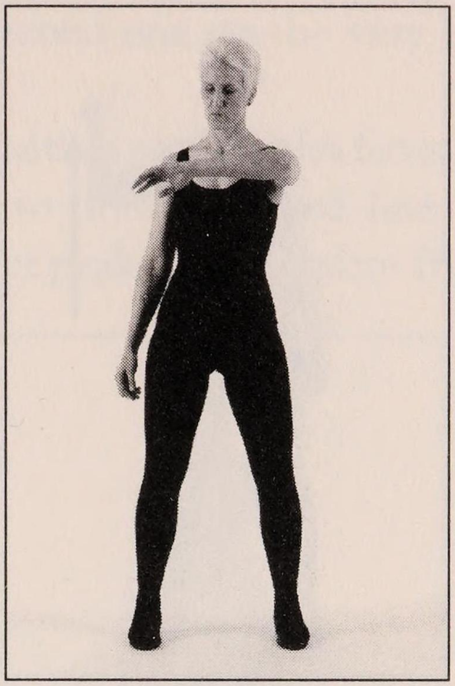


Figure 343

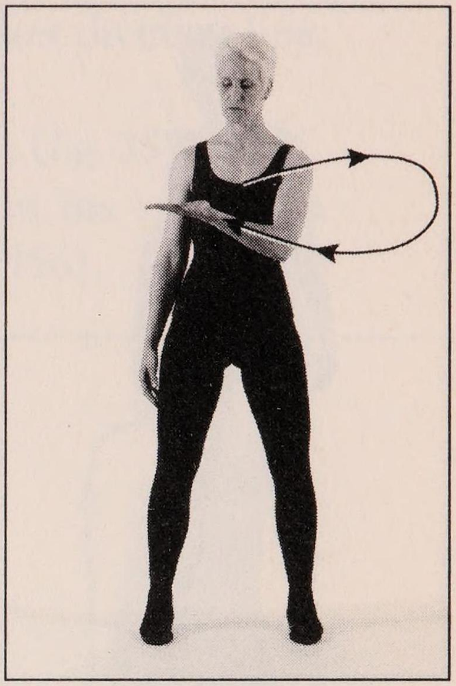


Figure 344

53. The elbow turns up as the wrist and hand turn to face down. The palm of the hand is slightly hollowed (fig. 343).

54. The hand draws an oval-shaped line from right to left as if scooping a chunk of matter. When it comes to the position where it started, the palm is facing up (fig. 344).

55. The hand drops to the level of the groin, fingers pointing to the ground (fig. 345).

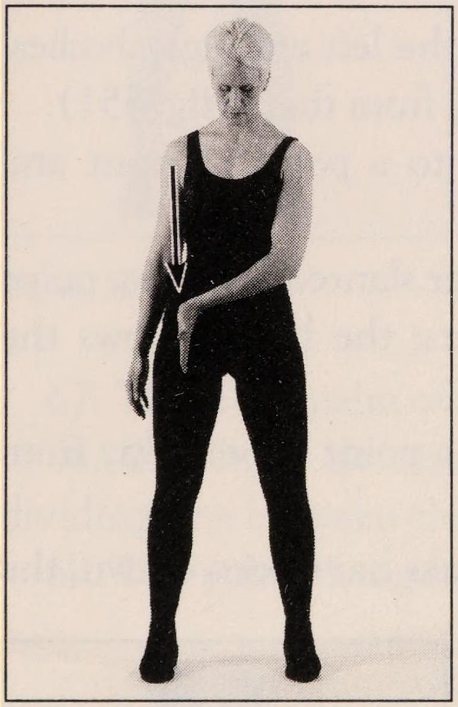


Figure 345

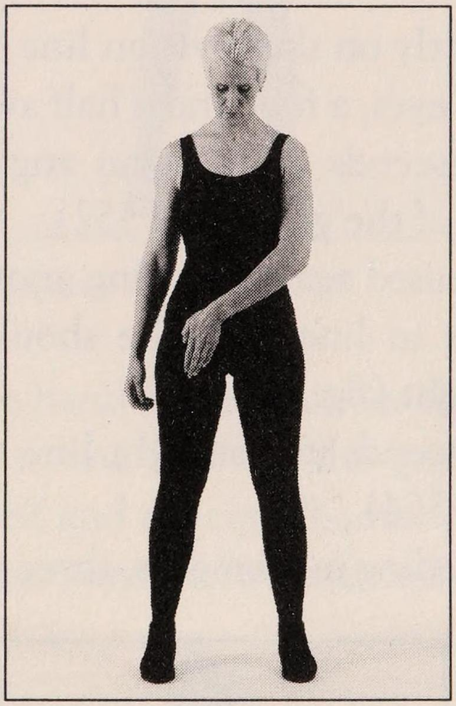


Figure 346

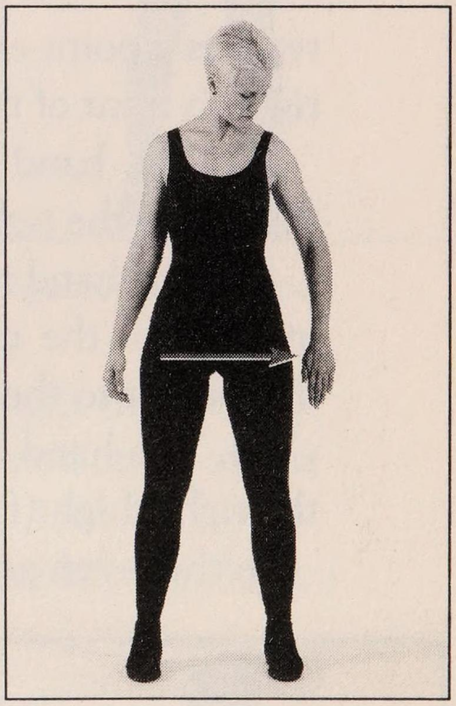


Figure 347

56. The palm of the hand is turned to face the body (fig. 346).

57. Then it moves, following the contour of the body, fingers pointing toward the ground, to a place four or five inches away from the left thigh (fig. 347).

58. A quick turn of the wrist makes the palm face the thigh (fig. 348).

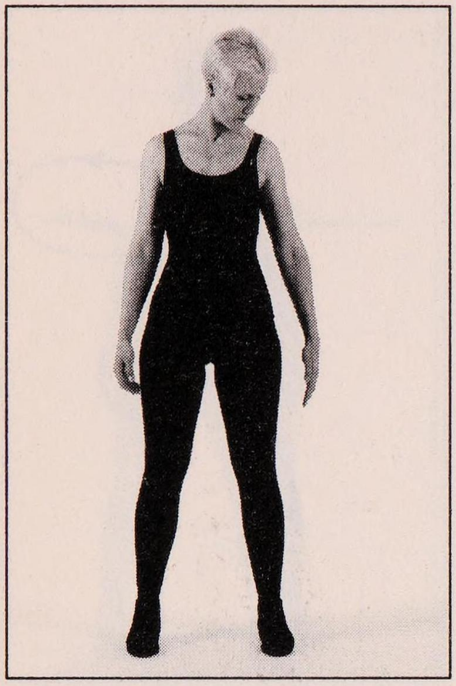


Figure 348

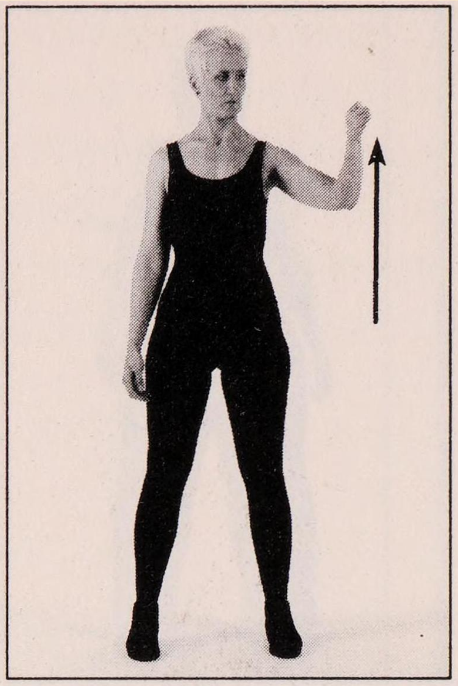


Figure 349

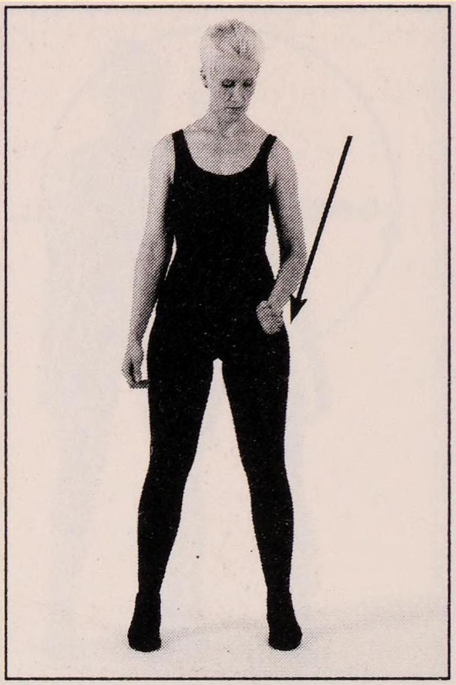


Figure 350

59. The head turns to the left as the hand is raised, as if rubbing the fingers along a straight surface, to the level of the eyes (fig. 349).

60. From there, it descends at an angle to a point slightly to the left side of the groin. The head follows the movement of the hand (fig. 350).

61. The hand is raised again to tin- level of the eyes at an angle. It reaches a point exactly on the division line of the left and right bodies, right in front of the eyes, a foot and a half away from them (fig. 351).

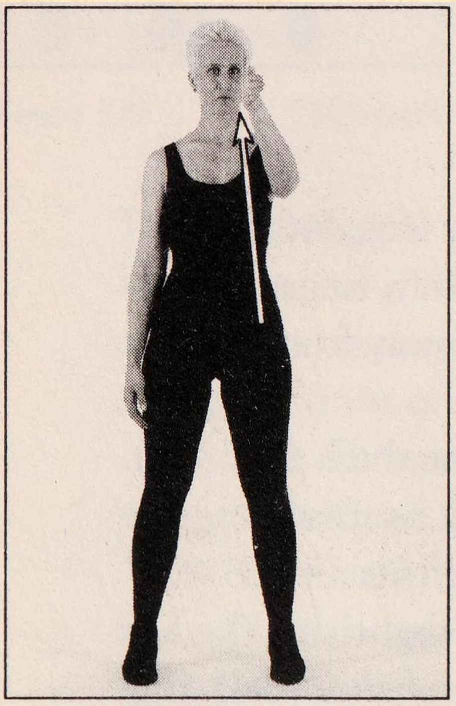


*Figure 351*

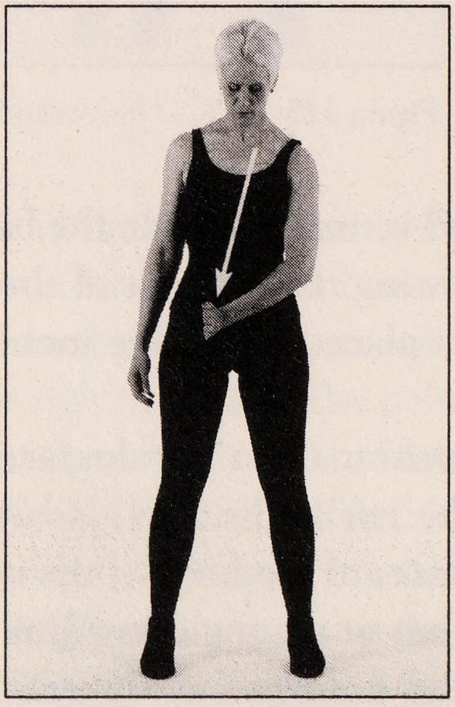


*Figure 352*

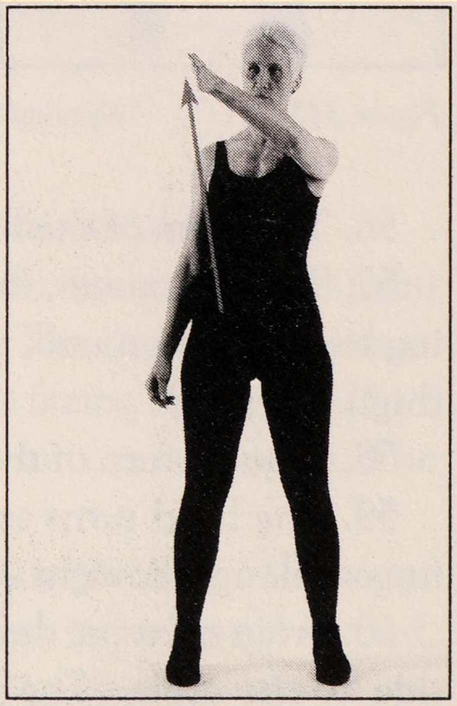


*Figure 353*

62. The hand descends again at an angle, to a point in front and slightly to the right of the groin (fig. 352).

63. The hand is raised again, drawing another slanted line, to a point in front of the eyes in line with the shoulders; the head follows the movement to the right (fig. 353),

64. The hand descends in a straight line to a point a foot away from the right thigh (fig. 354).

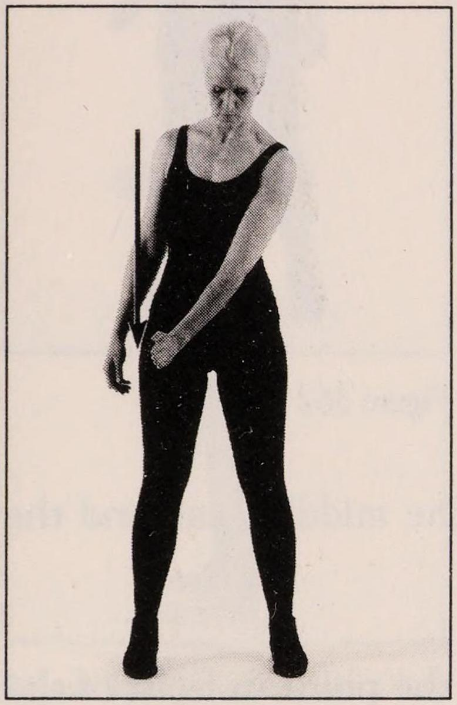


Figure 354

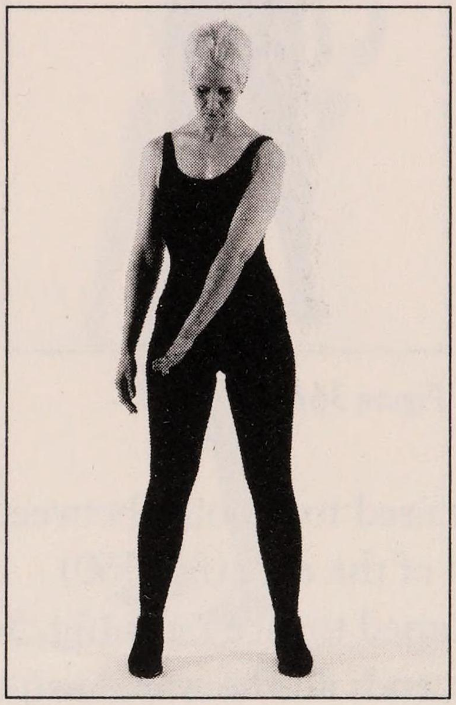


Figure 355

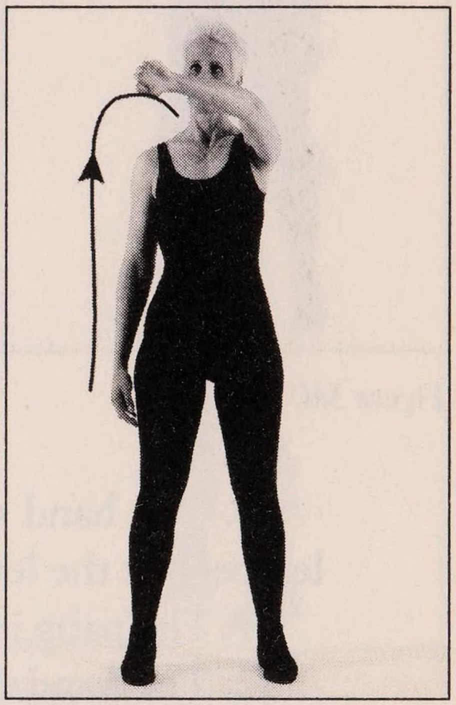


Figure 356

In the seven preceding movements, three peaks have been drawn: the first one on the left, the second one on the very center dividing line, and the third to the right.

65. The hand changes position so the palm faces left (fig. 355).

66. The hand is raised to draw a curved line that fits exactly in between the right and center peaks drawn before (fig. 356).

67. There the palm of the hand is made to face the right (fig. 357).

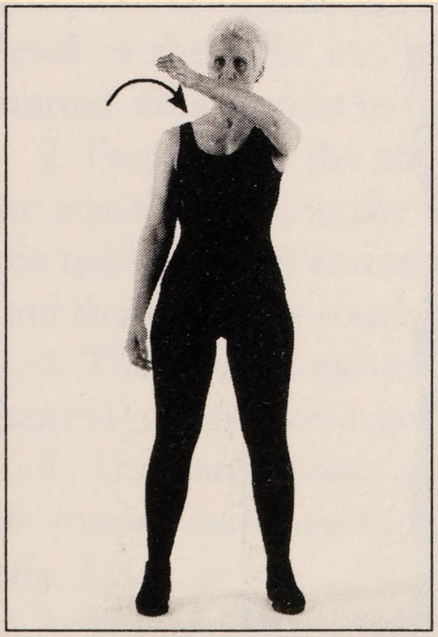


Figure 357

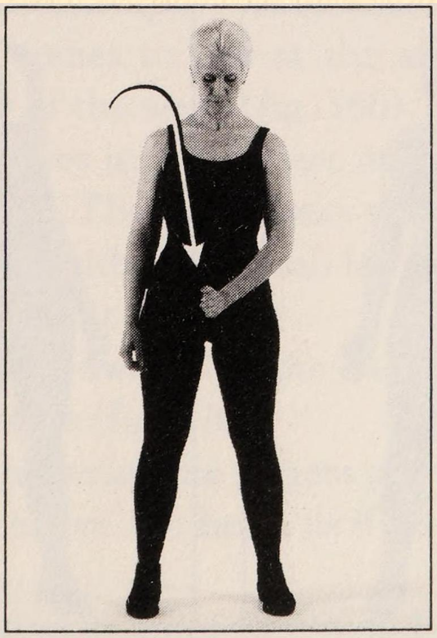


Figure 358

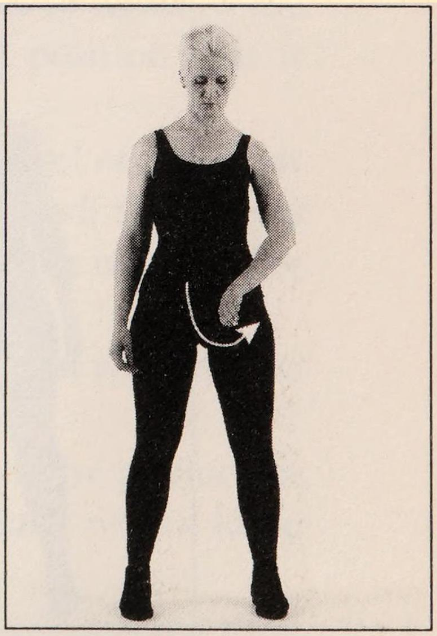
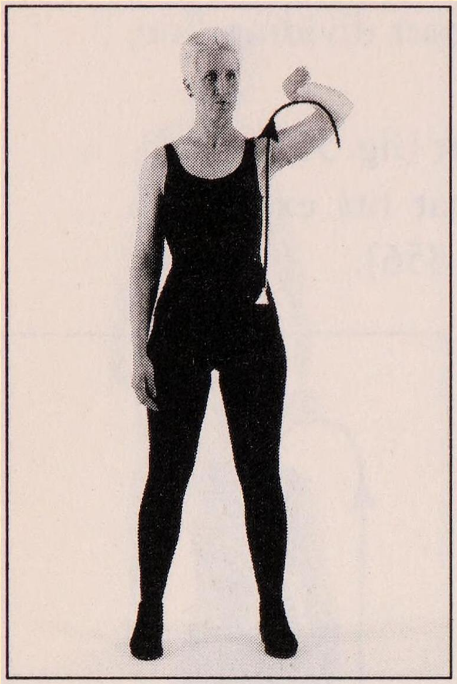


Figure 359

68. The hand descends to the level of the groin and stops at the dividing line between the left and the right bodies (fig. 358).

69. The palm changes directions there again and faces left (fig. 359).

70. The hand is raised to a point between the middle peak and the left peak at the level of the eyes (fig. 360).



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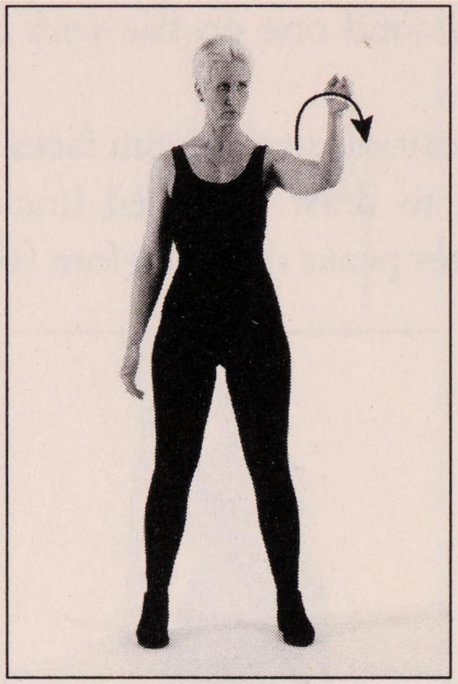


*Figure 361*

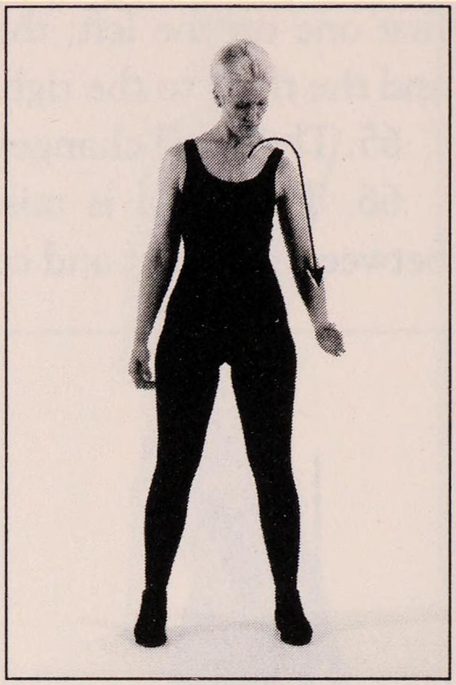


*Figure 362*

71. The palm is turned to face right (fig. 361).

72. The hand descends all the way down to the point in front of the thigh where it began (fig. 362).

The peaks drawn in the eight movements of this second phase are slightly round, as opposed to the very angular peaks drawn before.

73. The hand is turned once more to have the palm face forward (fig. 363).

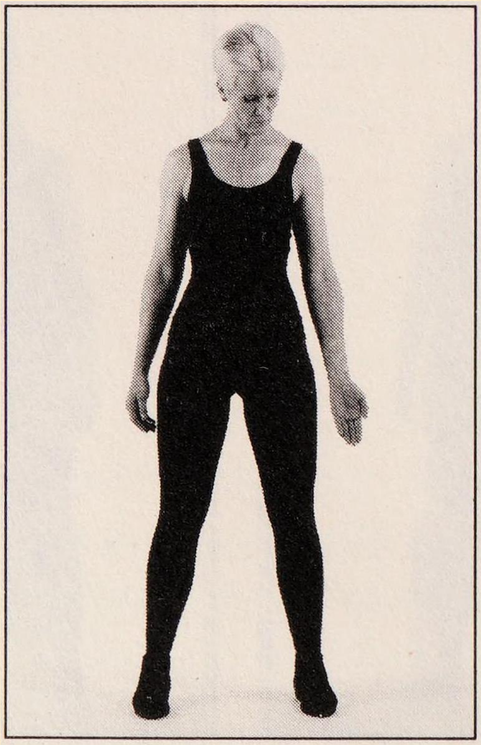


Figure 363

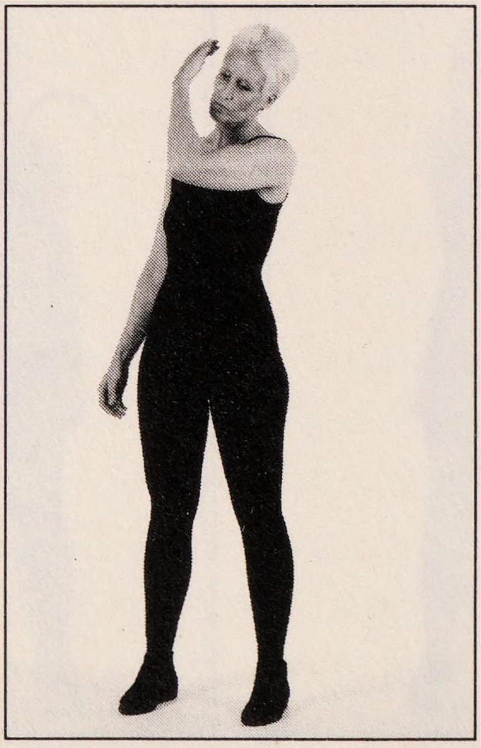


Figure 364

74. The arm moves over the head as if to pour on the right face and body an invisible substance (fig. 364).

75. The hand is dropped down (fig. 365). Making a half-circle, the elbow rotates to the back (fig. 366).

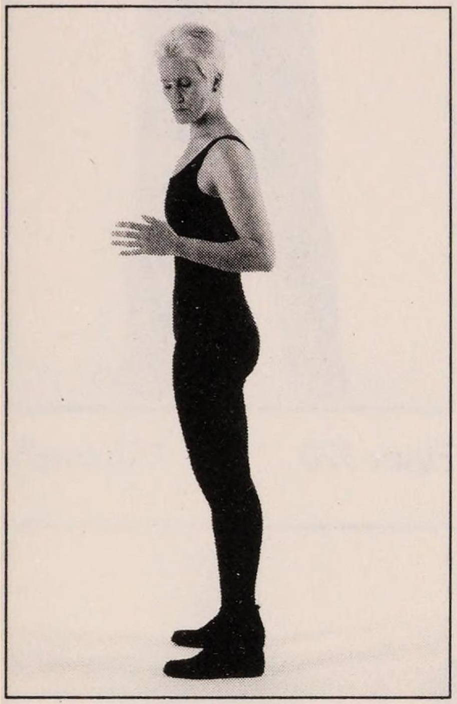


Figure 365

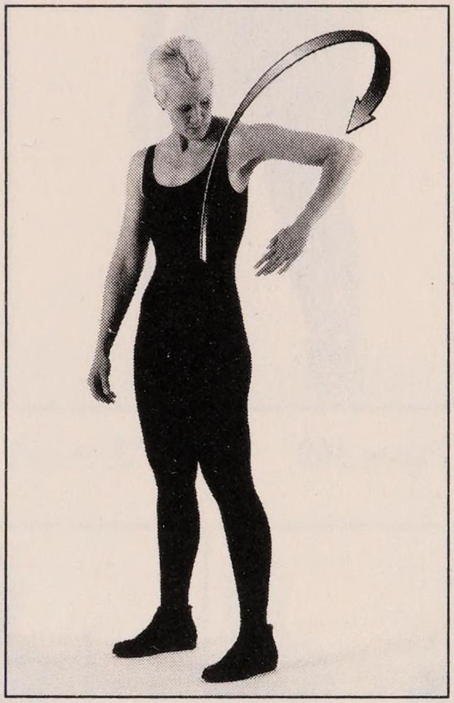


Figure 366

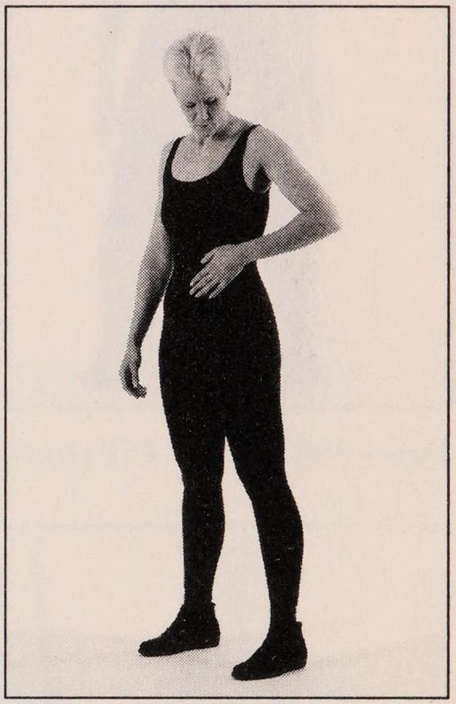


Figure 367

76. As if it were a knife going into it's sheath, the hand slides over the center of vitality around the pancreas and the spleen (fig. 367).

## The Three *Magical Passes* for the Right Body

The first magical pass for the right body consists of five movements.

1. The right hand, at a ninety-degree angle to the forearm and with the palm facing front, makes a complete circle from left to right, to the level of the right ear, and comes to rest at the same position that it started, about a foot in front of the waist (fig. 368).

2. From there, the arm moves in a sharp arc at the level of the chest by acutely bending the elbow. The palm faces the ground; the fingers are held together and straight with the thumb locked. The index finger and thumb nearly touch the chest (fig. 369).

3. The forearm moves briskly away from the chest so that the elbow is bent at a forty-five-degree angle (fig. 370).

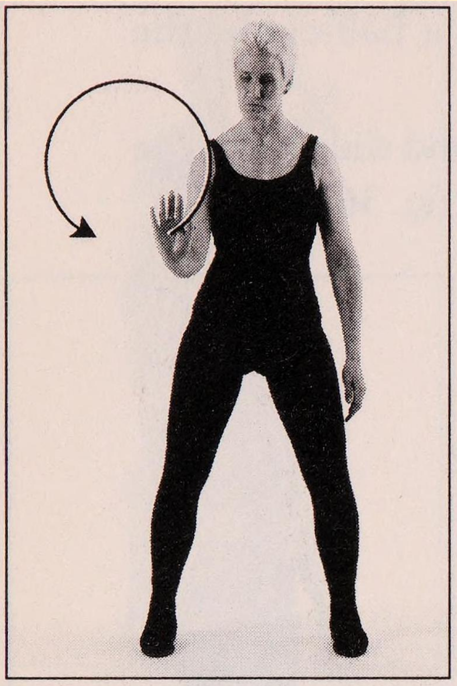


*Figure 368*

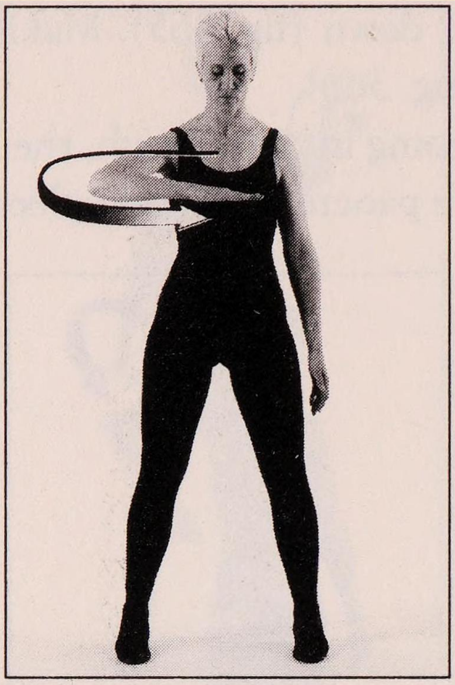


*Figure 369*

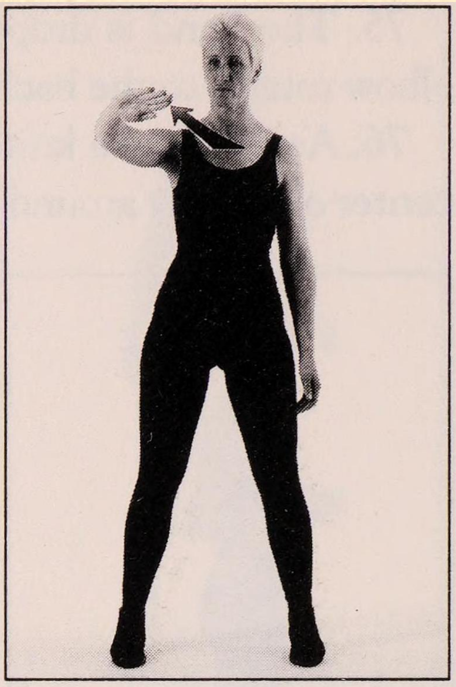


*Figure 370*

4. The hand rotates on the wrist; the fingers point to the ground for an instant and then flip up above the head, as if the hand were a knife (fig. 371).

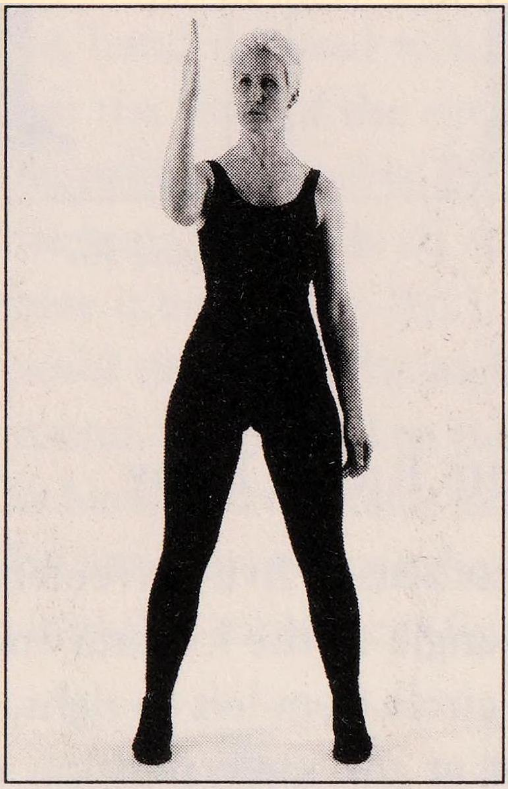


Figure 371

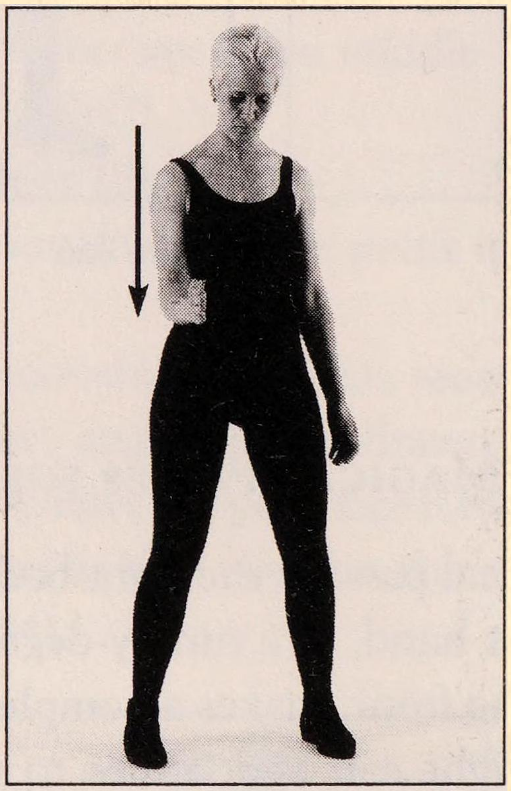


Figure 372

5. The hand descends. Using it's outer edge as if it were a cutting tool, it cuts to the level of the navel (fig. 372).

The second magical pass for the right body consists of the following twelve movements.

6. From the side of the waist, the hand shoots out to a point in front of the body. At the arm's maximum extension, the fingers separate (figs. 373,374).

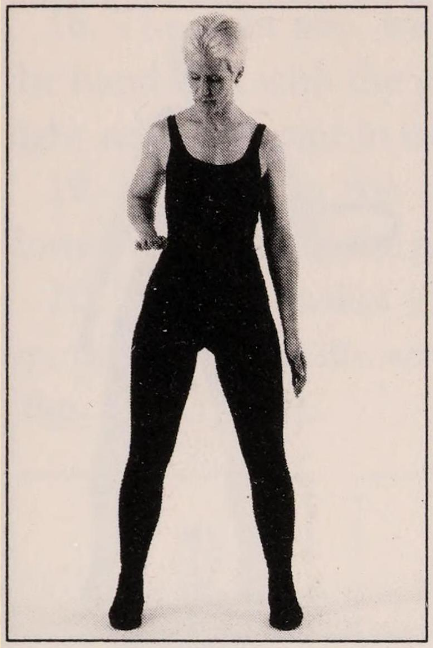


Figure 373

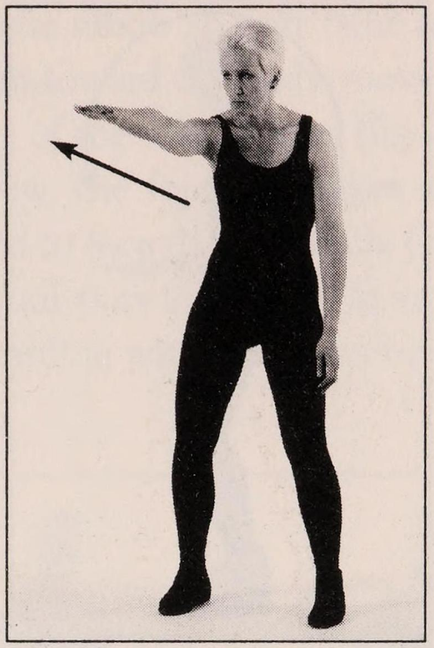


Figure 374

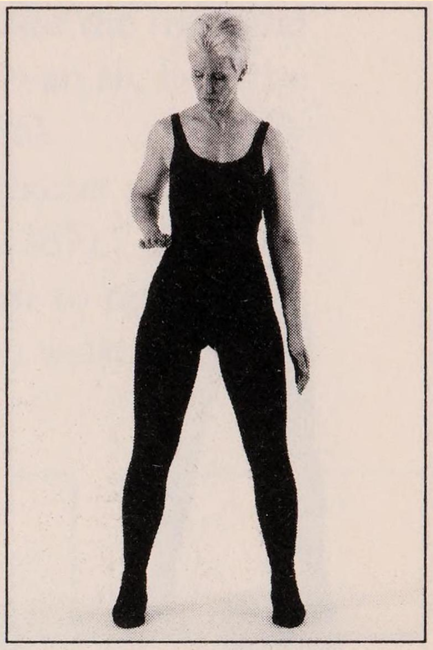


Figure 375

7. The arm is retrieved to the level of the waist. The elbow protrudes back, sharply bent (fig. 375).

8. The hand is turned so that the palm faces up (fig. 376).

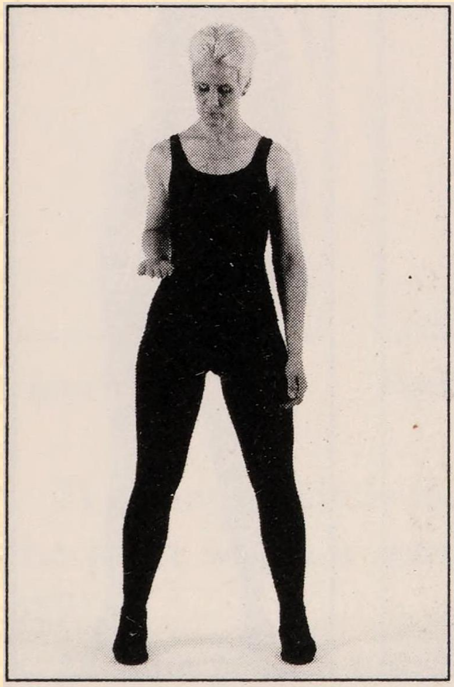
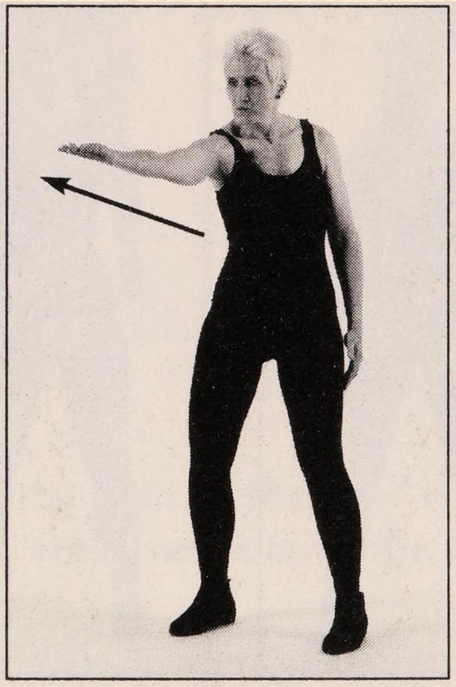


*Figure 376*



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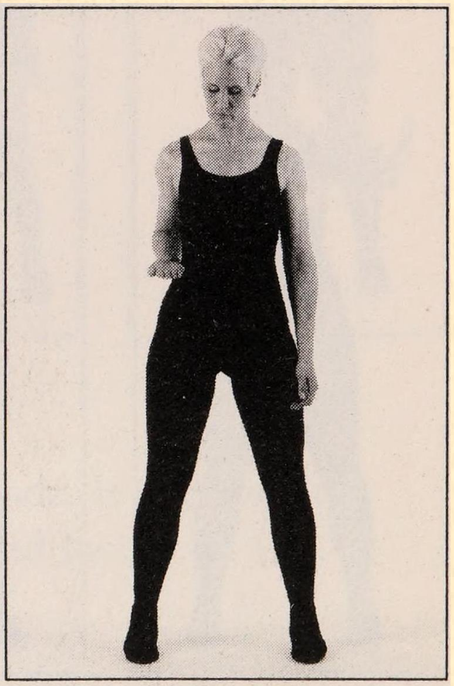


*Figure 378*

9. The arm is extended forward with the palm open and facing up (fig. 377).

10. With the palm still facing up, the arm returns again to the level of the waist (fig. 378).

11. The palm is turned to face downward (fig. 379).

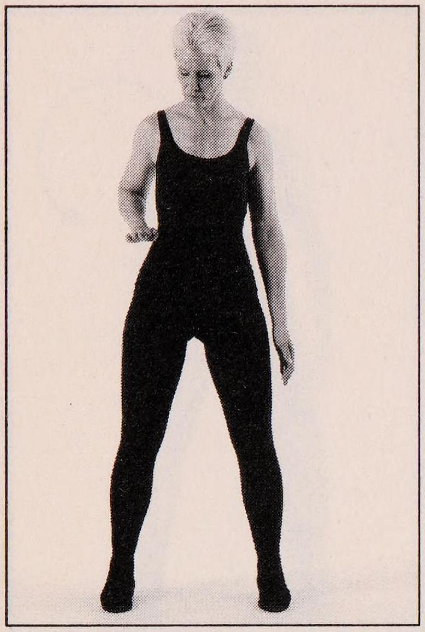


*Figure 379*

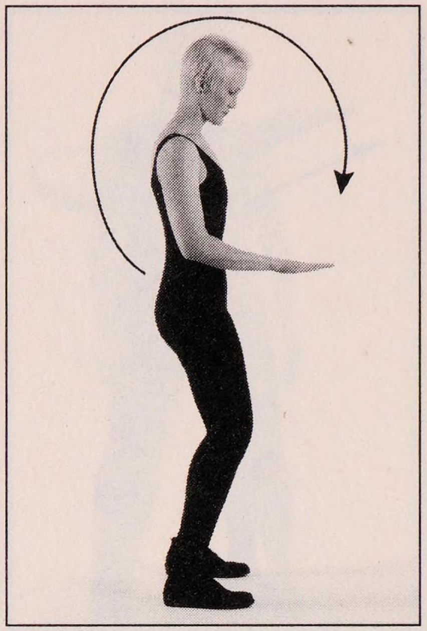


*Figure 380*

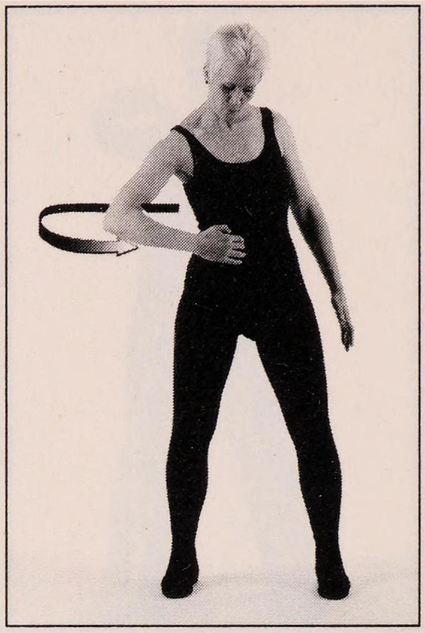


*Figure 381*

12. The arm makes a full side circle, going to the back, above the head, and to the front, and ends in front of the navel by slamming the palm down as if it were hitting something solid (fig. 380).

13. The palm is turned toward the body, in a movement that resembles the action of gathering something on the right body (fig. 381).

14. The arm is raised above the head as if the hand were a knife that is being wielded (fig. 382).

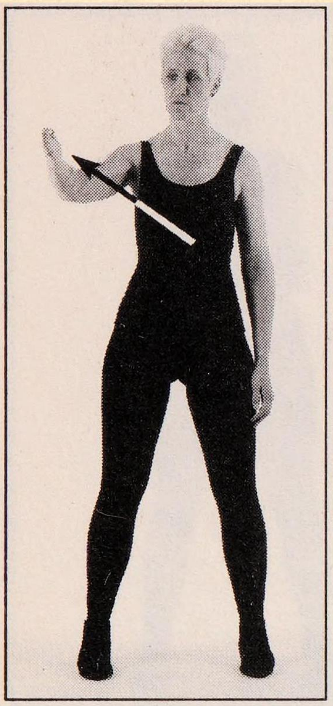


*Figure 382*

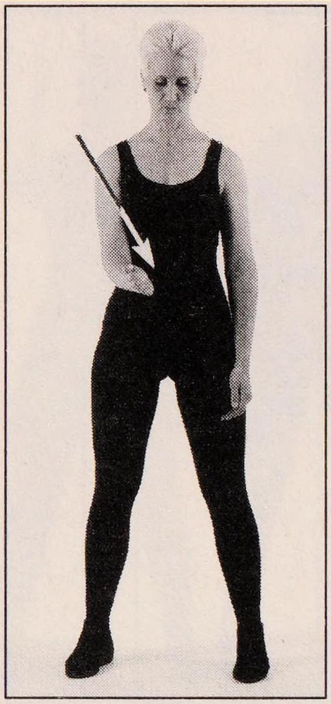
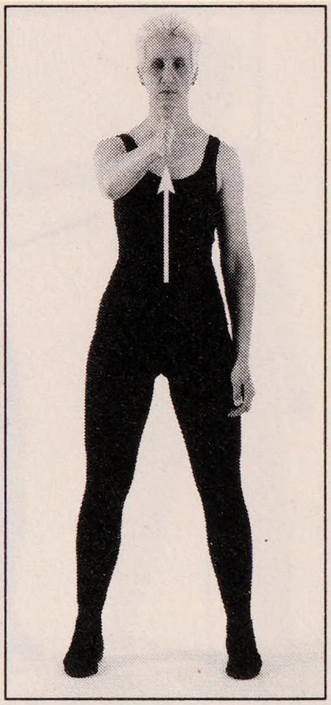


*Figure 383*



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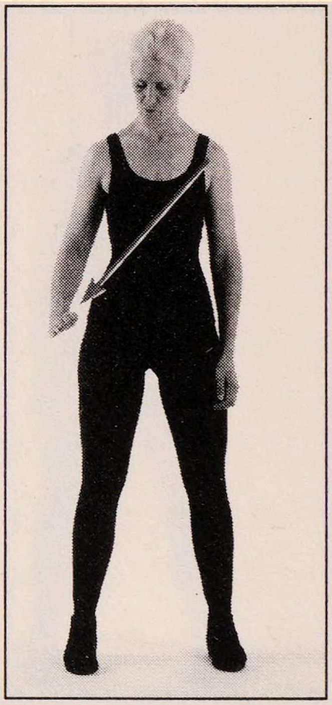


*Figure 385*

15. It makes a diagonal cut to the midpoint in front of the body, a foot and a half away from it. The palm is facing left (fig. 383).

16. The hand, with the palm straight, is raised to the level of the face, in a straight line (fig. 384).

17. It makes a diagonal cut with the palm slightly slanted downward to a point in front of the edge of the right body, a foot and a half away from it (fig. 385).

The third magical pass for the right body is made up of twelve movements.

18. The right arm, with the elbow sharply bent toward the right and the hand held with the palm toward the body, moves in an arc from the right side to a point in front of the solar plexus (fig. 386).

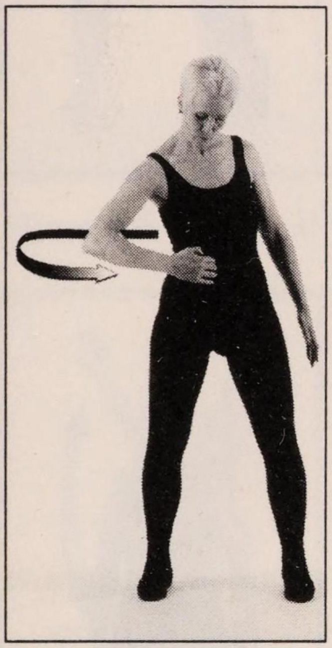


Figure 386

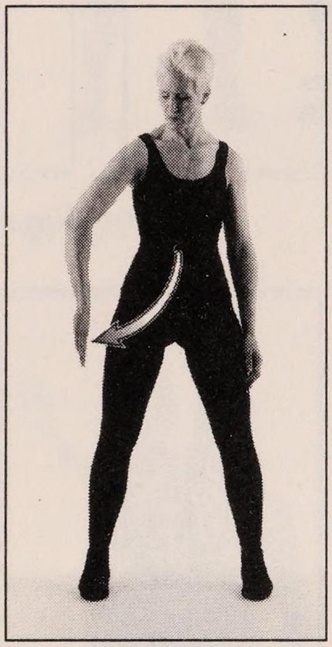


Figure 387

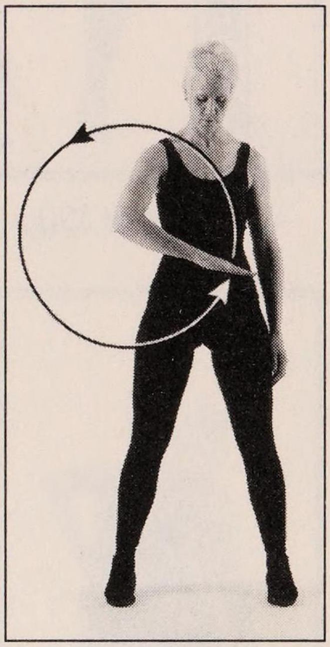


Figure 388a

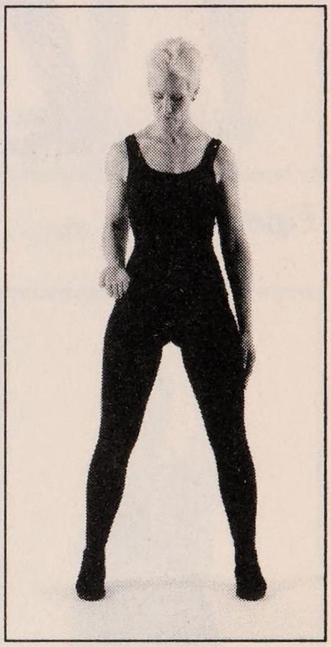
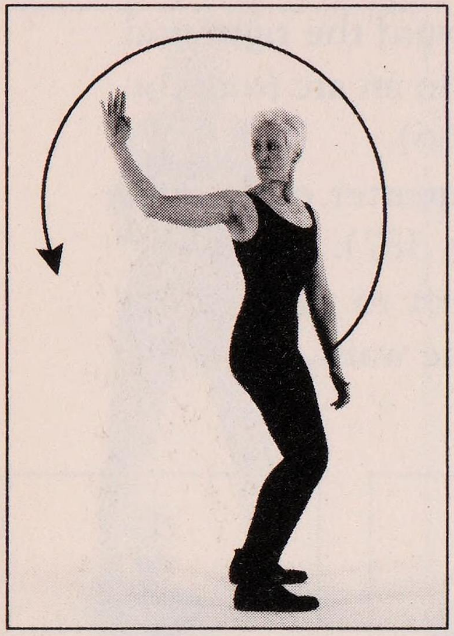


Figure 388b

19. Pivoting on the elbow, the forearm makes a quarter of a circle downward, turning the palm to face the right side (fig. 387).

20. The arm makes a small outward circle, from left to right, going up, then down again, and ending with the palm by the waist, facing up (figs. 388a, 388b).

21. Another circle from the front to the back is made. It ends up at the point where it started, with the palm of the hand facing up (fig. 389).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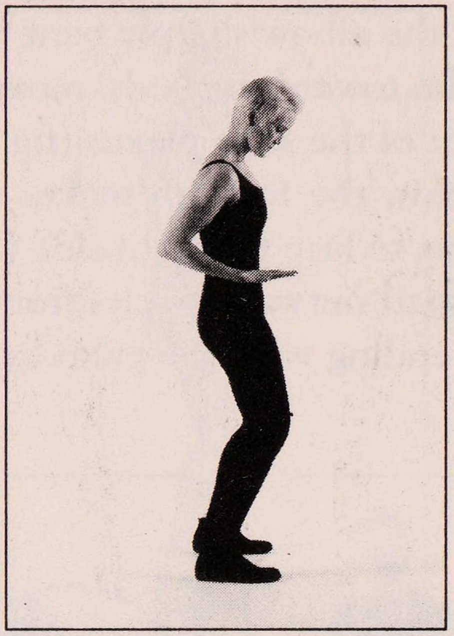


Figure 390

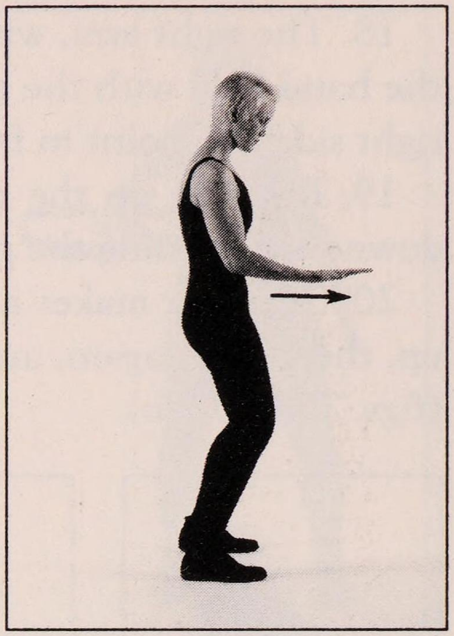
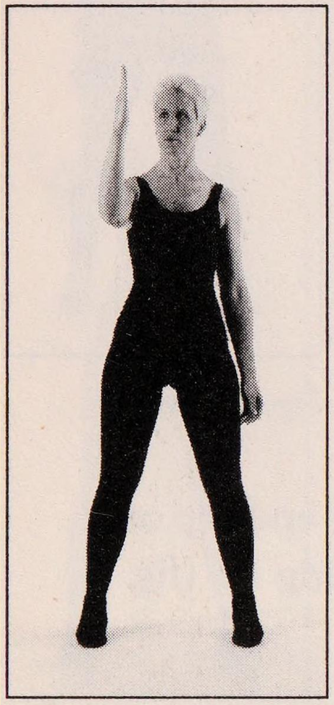


Figure 391

22. The palm is turned to face down (fig. 390).

23. The hand then moves slowly to the front (fig. 391).

24. The wrist is turned so the palm faces the left. With a straight palm, fingers held tightly together, and thumb locked, the hand is raised straight up as if it were a knife (fig. 392).



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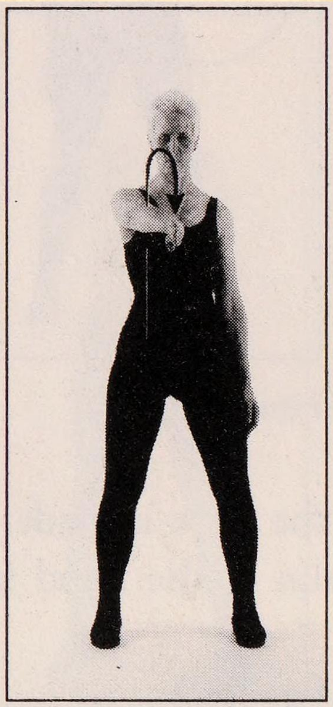

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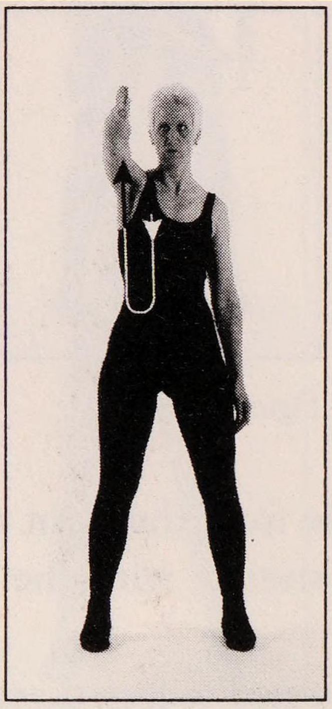

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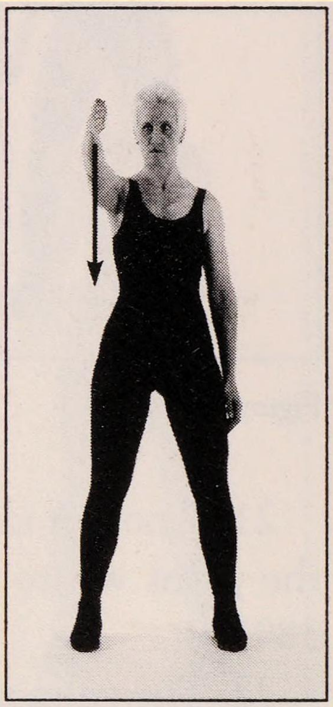


*Figure 395*

25. Then it draws a small convex arc to the left, so that the palm flips to face right, and cuts straight down just to the left of the line drawn previously, to the level of the navel (fig. 393).

26. With the hand still facing right, it moves upward and retraces the same line it drew before (fig. 394).

In the preceding three movements, a long oval figure has been drawn.

27. Then the hand cuts down, as if to cut off one-third of the long figure (fig. 395).

28. The palm turns to face right again (fig. 396).

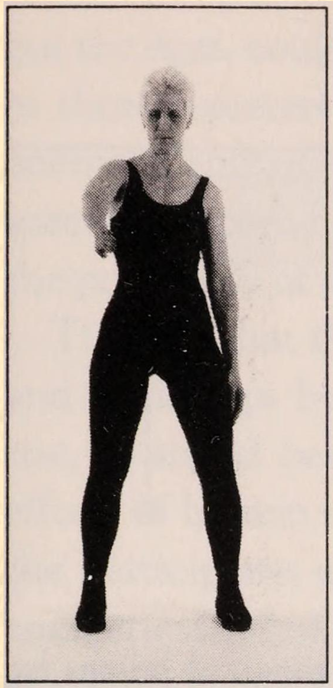


Figure 396

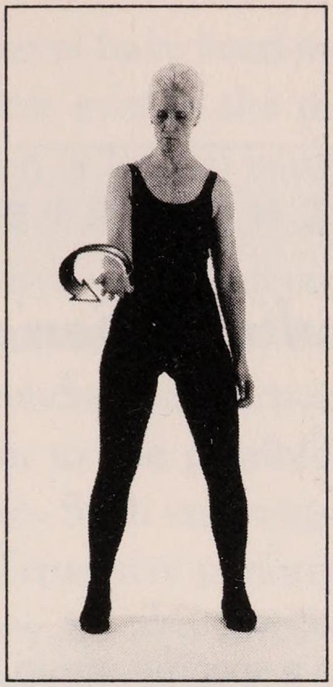


Figure 397

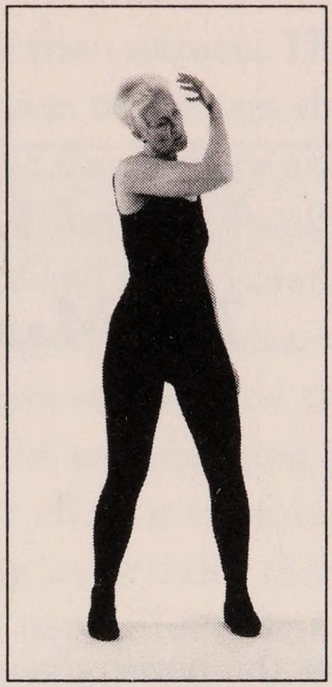


Figure 398

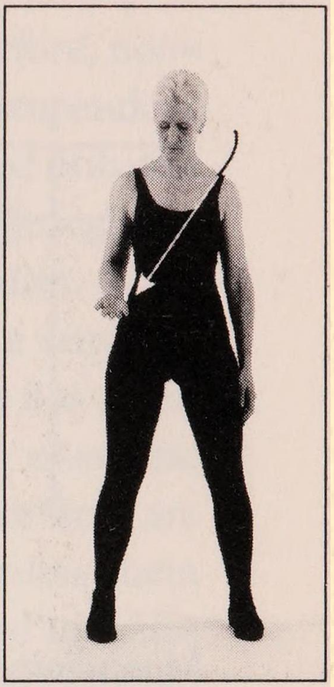


Figure 399

29. It scoops whatever it has cut and has turned into a ball, and splashes it on the front of the right body (figs. 397, 398).

30. The hand is dropped down to the crest of the right hip (fig. 399).

31. The hand rotates as the arm makes a half-circle going from the front (fig. 400) to the back, stopping behind the right shoulder (fig. 401).

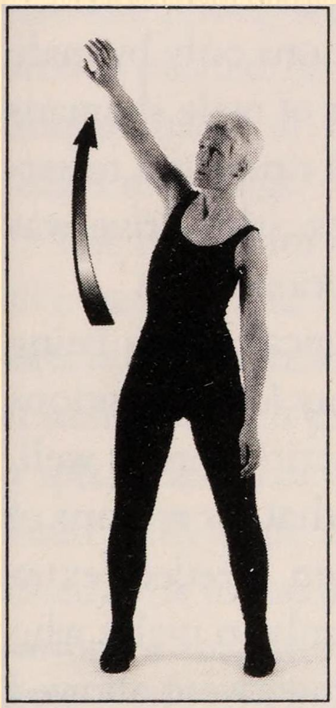
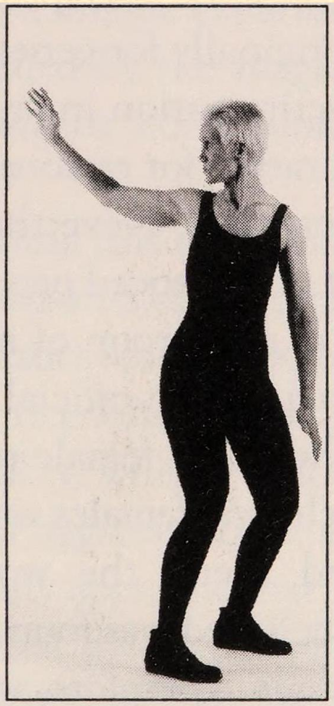


Figure 400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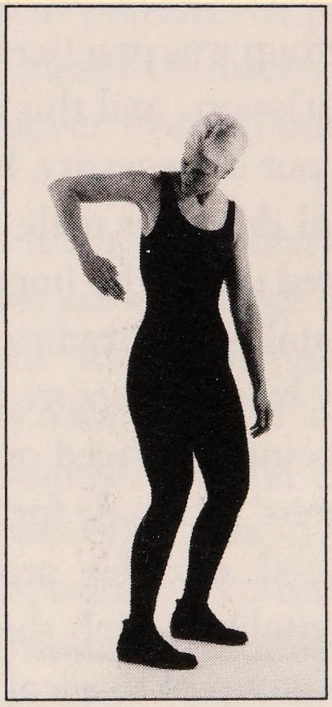
Figure 402

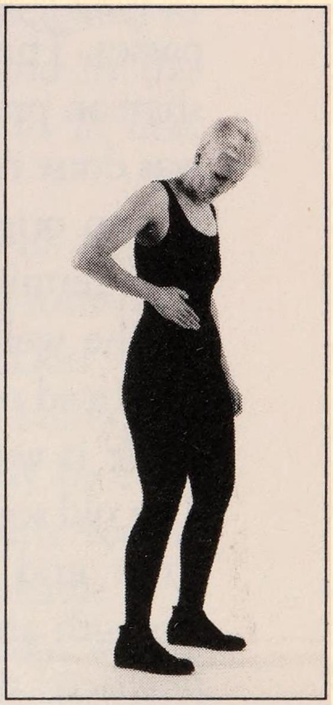
Figure 403

32. As if it were a knife going into it's sheath, the hand slides over the energy center around the liver and gallbladder (figs. 402, 403).

## The Fifth Series: The Masculinity Series

Masculinity was the name given to a specific group of *magical passes* by the shamans who first discovered and used them. Don Juan thought that perhaps it was the oldest name given to any such group of *magical passes*. This group was practiced originally for generations only by male shaman practitioners, and this discrimination in favor of male shamans was done not out of necessity, but rather for reasons of ritual and to satisfy an original drive for male supremacy. Nevertheless, this drive was soon terminated under the impact of enhanced perception.

The well-established tradition of this group of *magical passes* being practiced only by men persisted in a pseudo-official way for generations while it was being practiced on the sly by female practitioners as well. The old sorcerers' rationale for including females was that for reasons of strife and social disorder around them, the women needed extra strength and vitality, which they believed was found only in males who practiced this group of *magical passes*. Therefore, women were allowed to execute the movements as a token of solidarity. In don Juan's time, the division lines between males and females became even more diffused. The secrecy and exclusivity of the old sorcerers was completely shattered, and even the old rationale for allowing women to practice these specific *magical passes* could not be upheld. Female practitioners performed these *magical passes* openly.

The value of this group of *magical passes* - the oldest named group in existence - is it's continuity. All of it's *magical passes* were generic from the beginning, and this condition provided the only instance in don Juan's lineage of sorcerers in which a whole party of shaman practitioners, whatever their number may have been, were allowed to move in unison. The number of participants in any parry of sorcerers, throughout the ages, could never have been more than sixteen. Therefore, none of those sorcerers were ever in the position to witness the stupendous energetic contribution of human mass. For them, there existed only the specialized consensus of a few initiates, a consensus which brought in the possibility of idiosyncratic preferences and more isolationism.

The fact that the movements of *Tensegrity* are practiced in seminars and workshops by hundreds of participants at the same time has given rise, as stated before, to the possibility of experiencing the energetic effects of human mass. Such an energetic effect is twofold: not only are the participants of *Tensegrity* performing an activity that unites them energetically, but they are also involved in a quest delineated in states of enhanced awareness by the shamans of ancient Mexico: the *redeployment of energy*. Performing these *magical passes* in the setting of seminars on *Tensegrity* is a unique experience. It permits the participants to arrive, pushed or pulled by the *magical passes* themselves and by the human mass, at energetic conclusions never even alluded to in don Juan's teachings.

The reason for calling this set of movements Masculinity is it's aggressive quality, and because it's *magical passes* are very brisk and forcefully executed, characteristics easily identified with maleness. Don Juan stated that their practice fostered not only a sensation of well-being, but a special sensorial quality, which, if not examined, could easily be confused with strife and aggressiveness. However, if it is carefully scrutinized, it is immediately apparent that it is, rather, an unmistakable sensation of readiness that places the practitioners at a level from which they could strike toward the unknown.

Another reason that the shamans of ancient Mexico called this group of *magical passes* Masculinity was because the males who practiced it became a special type of practitioner who didn't need to be taken by the hand. They became men who benefited indirectly from everything they did. Ideally, the energy generated by this group of *magical passes* goes to the centers of vitality themselves, as if every center made an automatic bidding for energy, which goes first to the center that needs it the most.

For don Juan Matus's disciples, this set of *magical passes* became the most crucial element in their training. Don Juan himself introduced it to them as a common denominator, meaning that he urged them to practice the set unaltered. What lie wanted was to prepare his disciples to withstand the rigors of journeying in the unknown.

In *Tensegrity*, the word Series has been added to the name Masculinity to put it on a par with the other series of *Tensegrity*. The Masculinity Series is divided into three groups, each consisting of ten *magical passes*. The goal of the first and second groups of the Masculinity Series is the tuning of tendon energy. Each of these twenty *magical passes* is short, but extremely focused. *Tensegrity* practitioners are seriously encouraged, as the shamanistic practitioners of ancient times were, to get the maximum effect from the short movements by aiming to release a jolt of tendon energy every time they execute them.

"But don't you think, don Juan, that every time I release this jolt of energy, I'm actually wasting my tendon energy, and draining it out of me?" I asked him on one occasion.

"You can't drain any energy out of yourself," he said. "The energy that you are seemingly wasting by delivering a jolt to the air is not really being wasted, because it never leaves your boundaries, wherever those boundaries may be. So what you're really doing is delivering a jolt of energy to what the sorcerers of ancient Mexico called our 'crust,' our 'bark.' Those sorcerers stated that energetically, human beings are like *luminous ball* that have a thick peel around them, like an orange; some of them have something even harder and thicker, like the bark of an old tree."

Don Juan explained carefully that this simile of human beings being like an orange was somehow misleading because the peel or the bark that we have is located inside our boundaries, just as if an orange had it's peel inside the orange itself. He said that this bark or peel was the crusted-down energy that had been discarded throughout our lifetime from our vital centers of energy, because of the wear and tear of daily life.

"Is it beneficial to hit this bark, don Juan?" I asked.

"Most beneficial," he said. "Especially if the practitioners aim all their intent at reaching that bark with their blows. If they intend to shatter portions of this crusted-down energy by means of the *magical passes*, that shattered energy could be absorbed by the vital centers of energy."

The *magical passes* of the third group of the Masculinity Series are broader, more extensive. What practitioners need in order to execute the ten *magical passes* of the third group is steadiness of the hands, the legs, and the rest of the body. The aim of this third series, for the shamans of ancient Mexico, was the building of endurance, of stability.

Those shamans believed that holding the body steadily in position while executing those long movements gives the practitioners a foothold from which they can stand on their own.

What modem practitioners of *Tensegrity* have found out through their practice is that the Masculinity Series can be executed only in moderation, in order to avoid overtiring the tendons of the arms and the muscles of the back.

## Fifth Series: First Group: *Magical Passes* in Which the Hands Are Moved in Unison but Held Separately

### 1. Fists Above the Shoulders

The hands are held by the sides, clasped into fists, the palms facing up. They are raised then to a point above the head by bending the elbows so the forearms are at a ninety-degree angle with the upper arms. The driving force of this movement is equally divided between the muscles of the arms and the contraction of the muscles of the abdomen. As the fists are raised and the muscles of the front of the body are tensed, the body leans slightly backward by bending the knees (fig. 404). The arms, with hands fisted, are brought down to the sides of the thighs by straightening the elbows a bit; as the arms move down, the body leans forward, contracting the muscles of the back and the diaphragm (fig. 405).

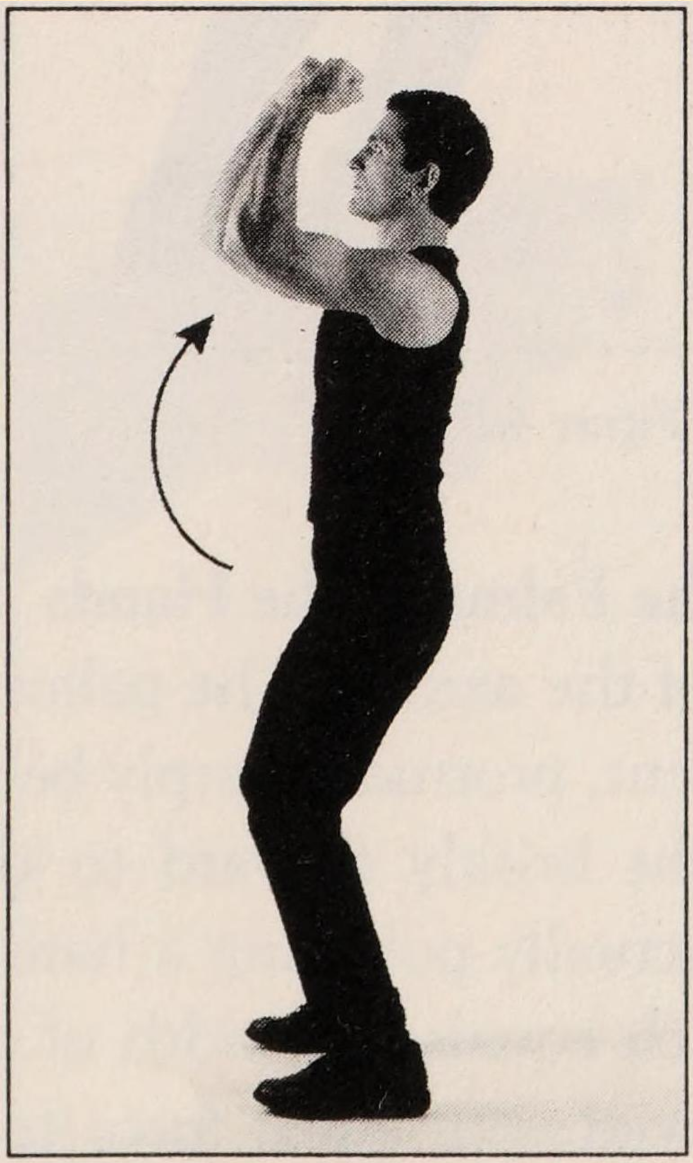

*Figure 404*

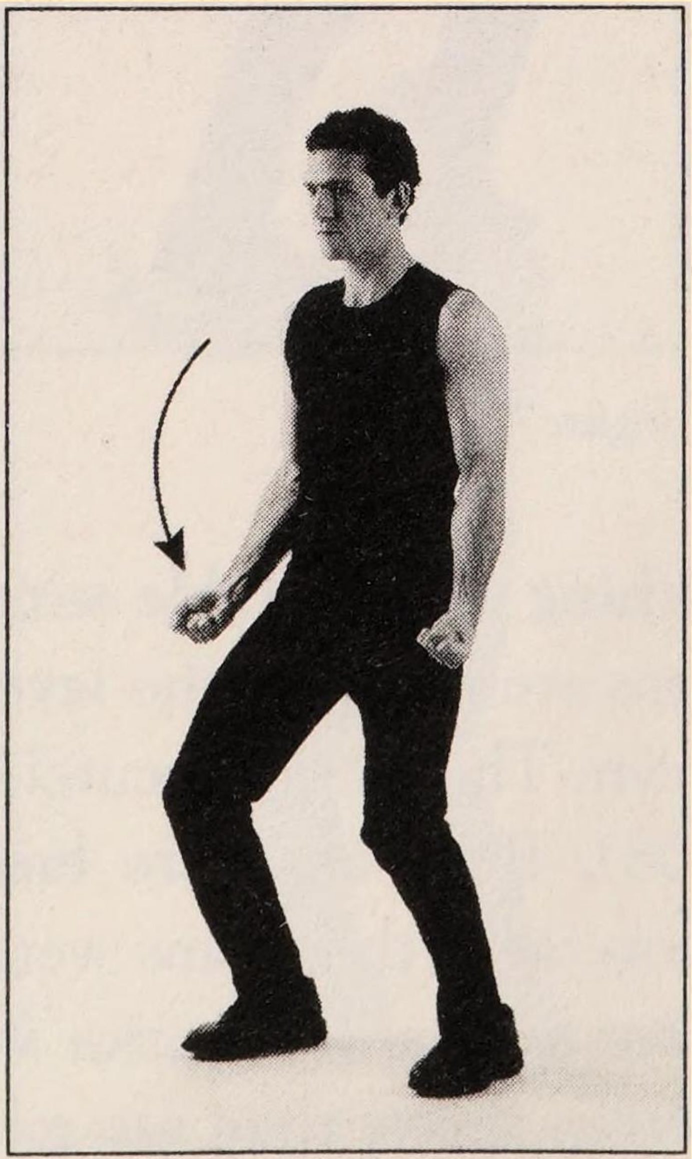

*Figure 405*

## 2. Using a Cutting Tool in Each Hand

The hands are made into fists, with the palms facing each other at the level of the waist (fig. 406). From there, they move in a downward strike to the level of the groin, a foot and a half away from it, always keeping the width of the body as the distance between the fists (fig. 407). Once the fists strike, they are retrieved to the position where they started, by the edge of the rib cage.

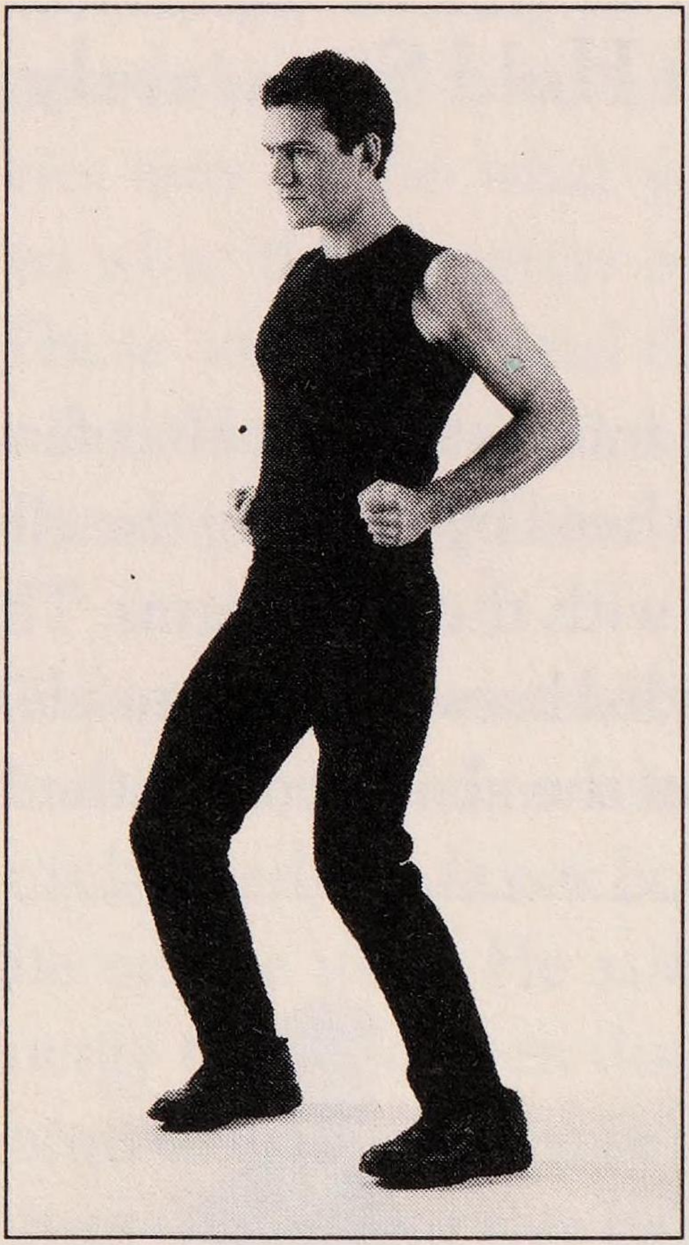

Figure 406

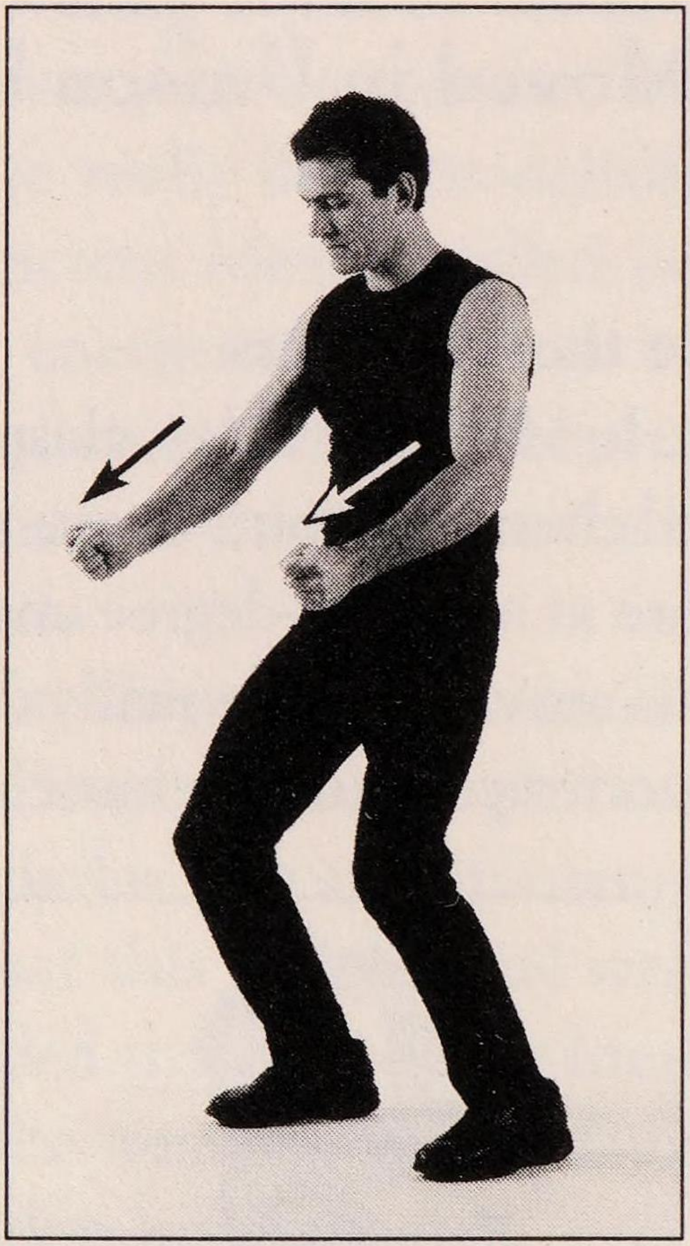

Figure 407

### 3. Polishing a High Table with the Palms of the Hands

The arms are raised to the level of the axillae. The palms of the hands face down. The elbows, acutely bent, protrude sharply behind the back (fig. 408). Both arms are brought briskly forward to the maximum extension, as if the palms were actually polishing a hard surface. The hands are kept at a distance which equals the width of the body (fig. 409). From there, they are retrieved with equal force to the position where the movement began (fig. 408).

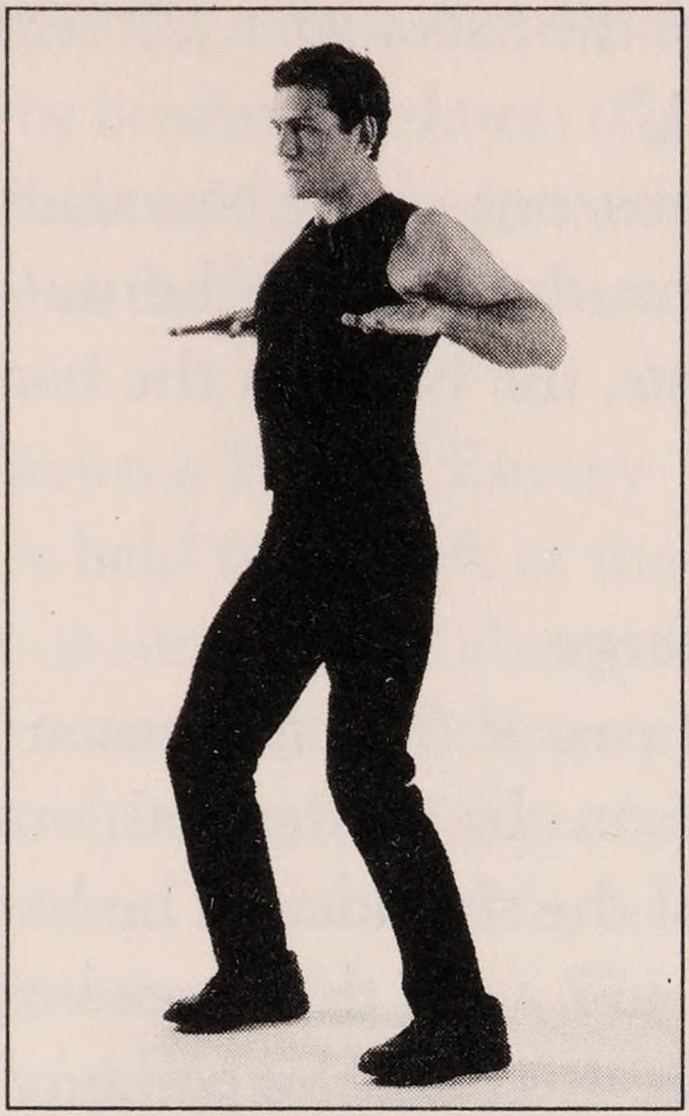

Figure 408

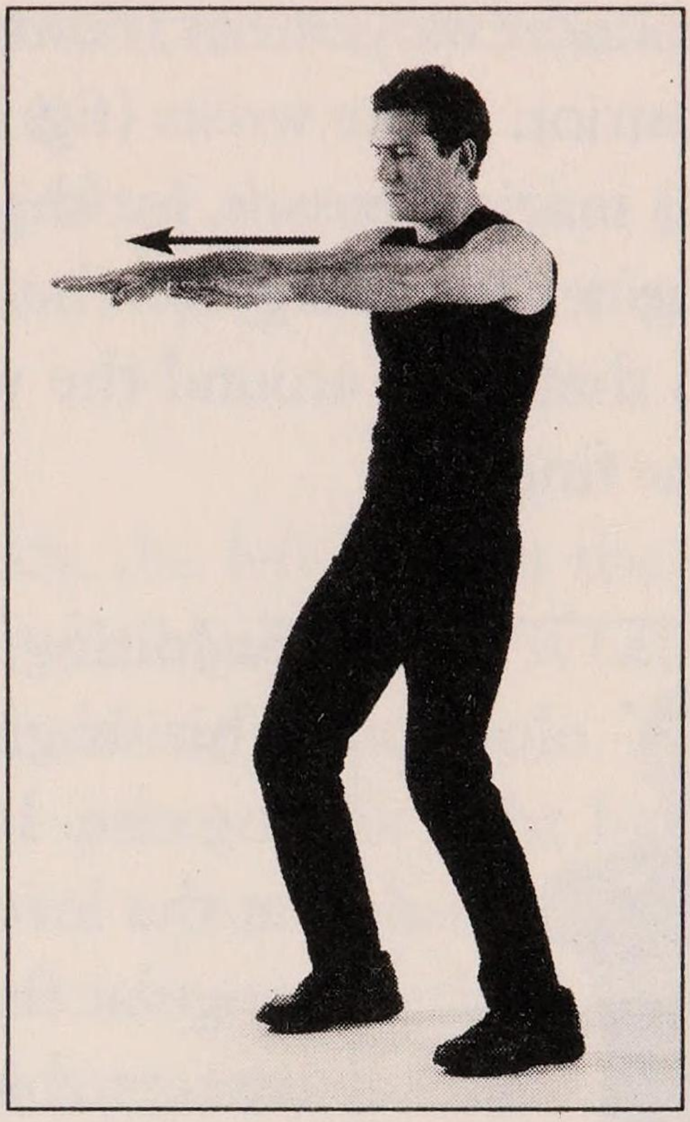

Figure 409

## 4. Tapping Energy with Both Hands

Both arms are raised to the front, at the level of the shoulders. The hands are held in angular fists, meaning that the position of the fingers slants down heavily as they are held against the palm of the hands. The thumbs are held on top of the outer edge of the index fingers (fig. 410). The palms of the hands face each other. A sharp jolt of the wrists makes the fists go down slightly, but with great force. The level of the wrists never changes; in other words, only the hand pivots down on the wrists.

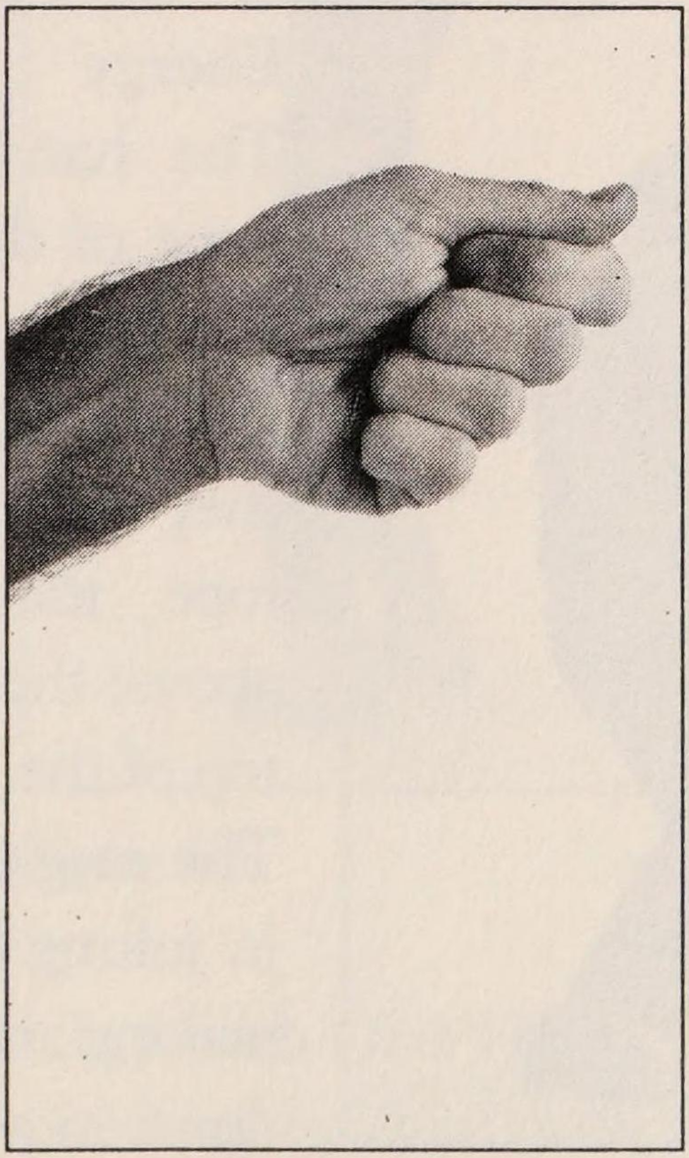

Figure 410

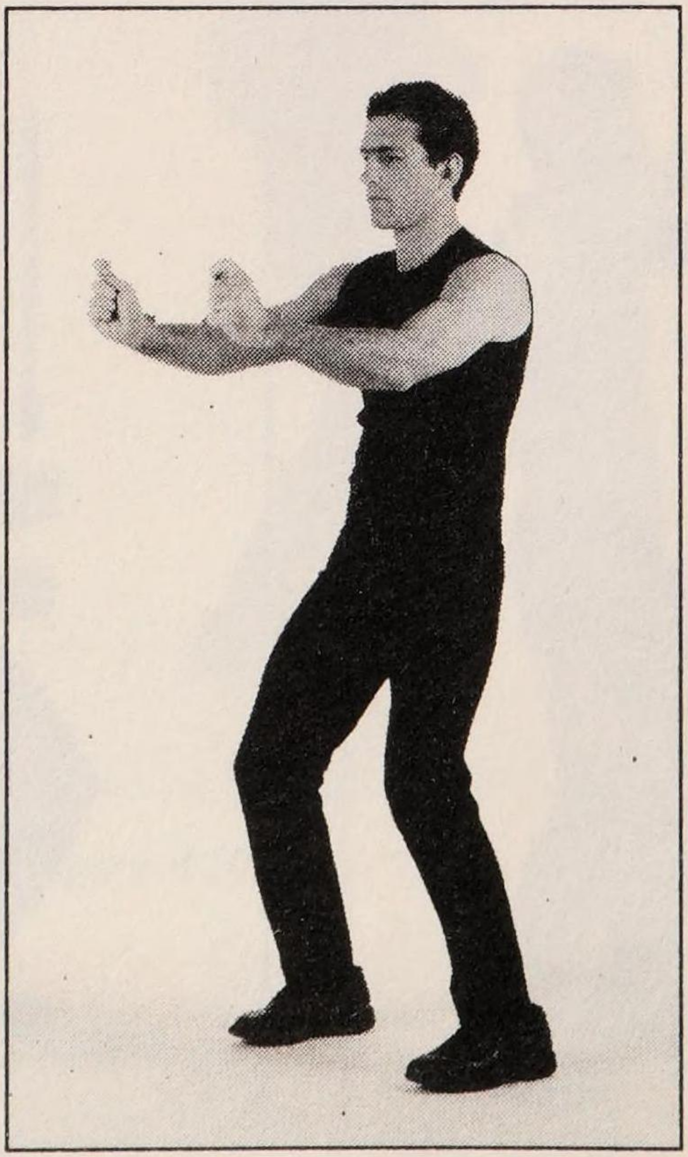

Figure 411

The counter movement is to raise the fists with a jolt without changing the position of the wrists (fig. 411).

This magical pass is, for shamans, one of the best sources for exercising the tendon energy of the arms, because of the number of energy points that exist around the wrists, the backs of the hands, the palms, and the fingers.

### 5. Jolting Energy

This magical pass is the companion to the preceding one. It begins by raising both arms to the front at the level of the shoulders. The hands are held in angular fists, just as in the preceding magical pass, except that in this one, the palms of the hands are turned to face downward. The fists are moved in toward the body by a jolt of the wrists. It's counterbalancing movement is another jolt of the wrists that sends the fists outward so that the thumbs make a straight line with the rest of the forearm (fig. 412). In order to execute this magical pass, it is required that the muscles of the abdomen are intensely used. It is the action of those muscles which actually directs the jolting of the wrists.

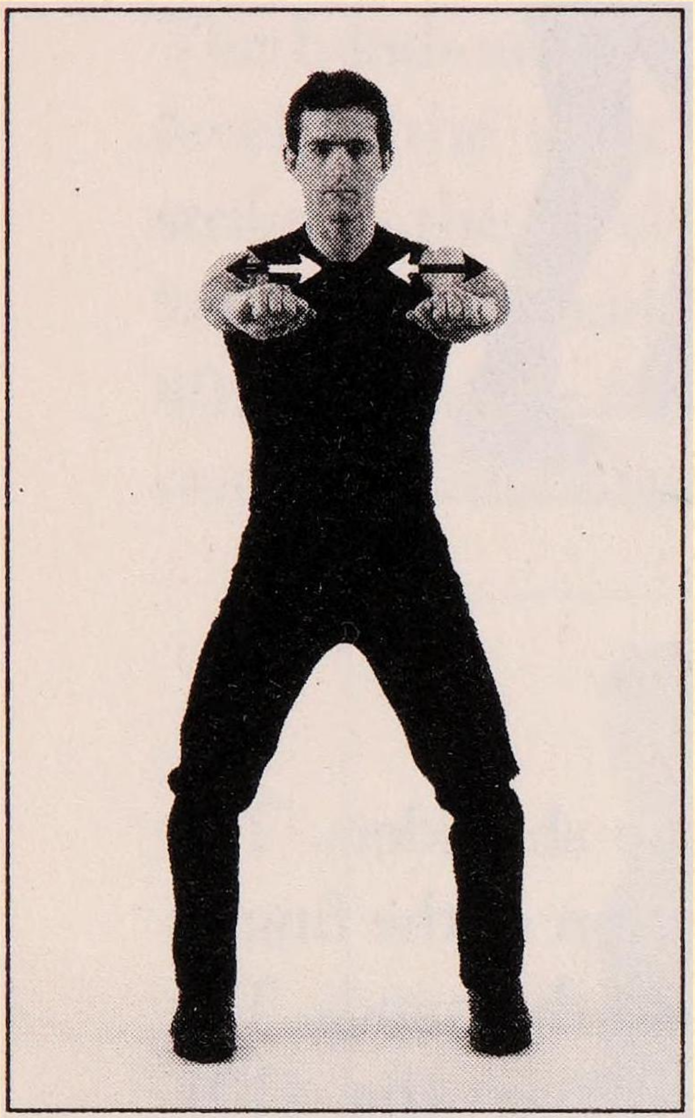

Figure 412

### 6. Pulling a Rope of Energy

The hands are held in front of the body, at the line that separates the left and the right bodies, as if they were holding a thick rope that hangs from above; the left hand is on top of the right (fig. 413). The magical pass consists in jolting both wrists and making the hands jerk down in a short, powerful movement. As this movement is executed, the muscles of the abdomen contract, and the arms drop down slightly by bending the knees (fig. 414).

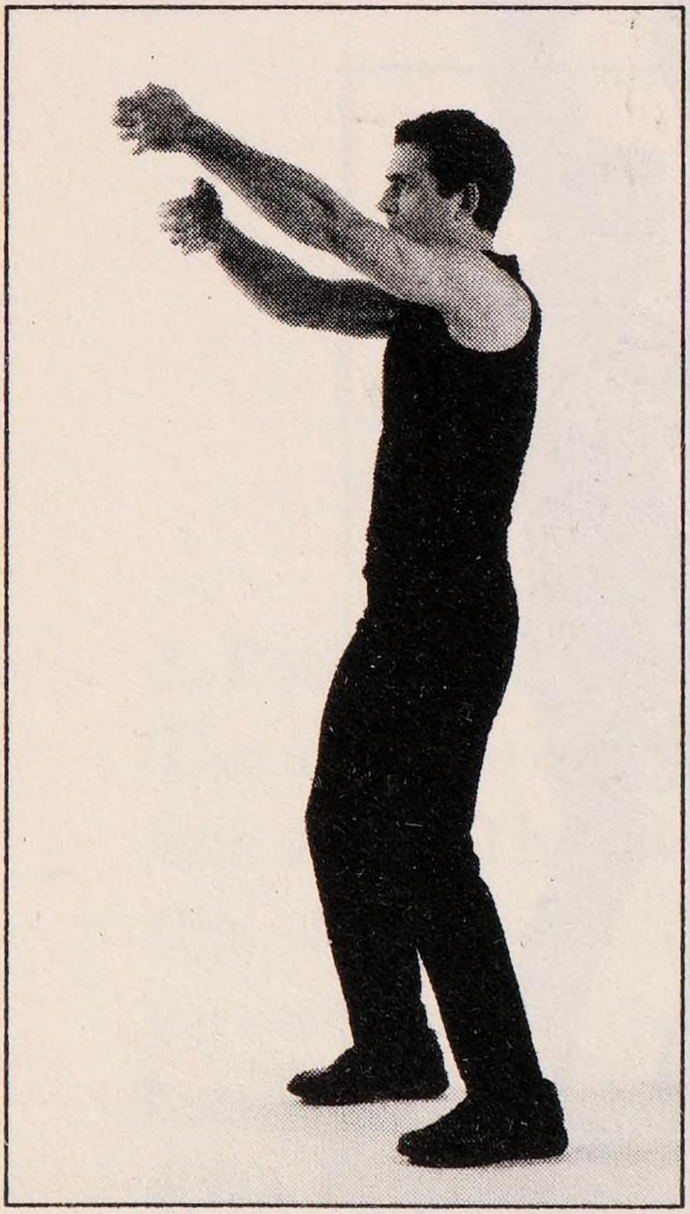
Figure 413

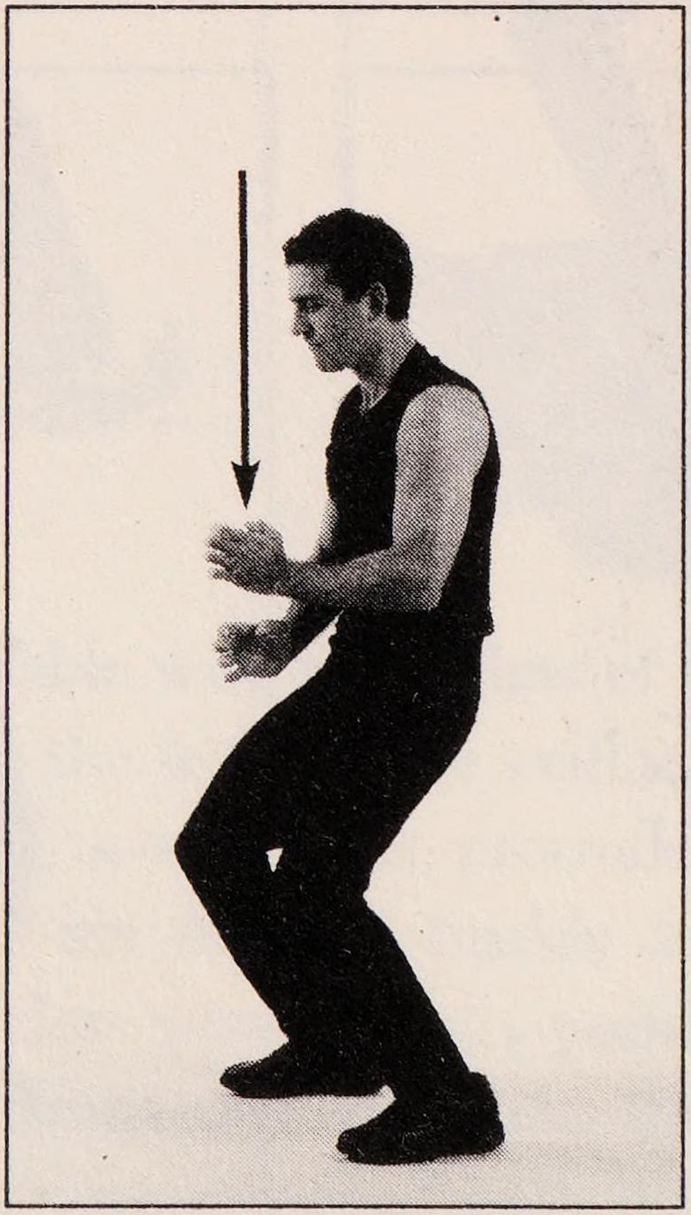
Figure 414

It's counterbalancing movement is a jerk of the wrists that jolts the hands upward as the knees and the trunk straighten up a bit (fig. 413).

### 7. Pushing Down a Pole of Energy

The hands are held to the left of the body, the left hand at the level of the ear, eight or nine inches above the right hand, which is held at the shoulder. They are held as if they were grabbing a thick pole. The palm of the left hand faces the right; and the palm of the right hand faces left. The left hand is the leading hand, by virtue of being on top, and guides the movement (fig. 415). The muscles of the back by the area of the adrenals and the muscles of the abdomen contract, and a powerful push sends both arms downward to the side of the right thigh and the waist, as if they were indeed holding on to a pole (fig. 416). The hands change position there; the right hand moves to a place by the right ear and becomes the leading hand, and the left moves below, by the shoulder, as if the hands were changing poles. The same movements are repeated.

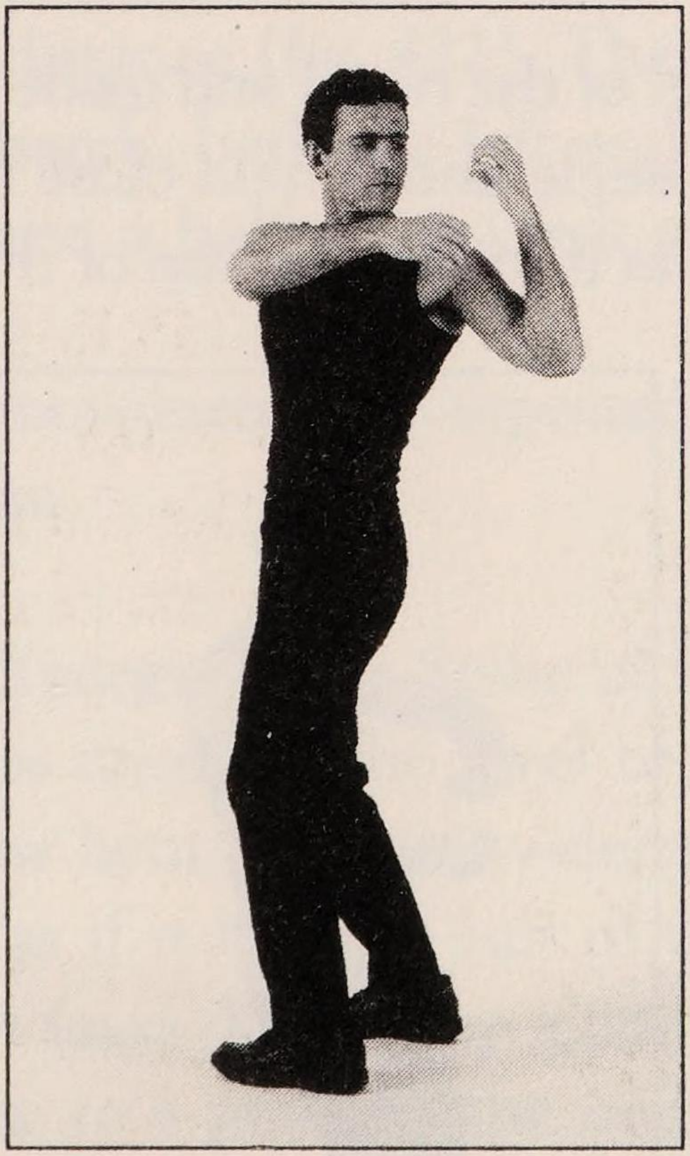

Figure 415

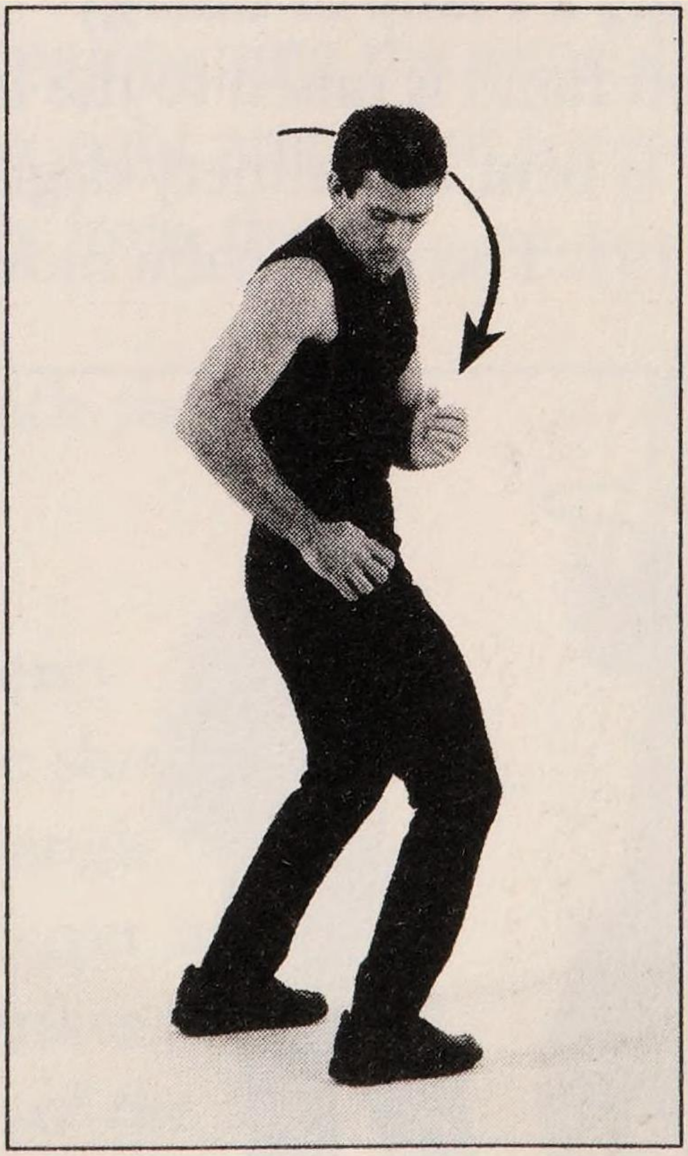

Figure 416

### 8. Cutting Energy with One Hand at a Time

The fists arc raised on the sides until they touch the edge of the rib cage; the palms of the fists face each other (fig. 417). The left arm moves down in a diagonal line to a point two feet away from the thigh (fig. 418); then it is retrieved (fig. 417). The right arm immediately performs the same movements.

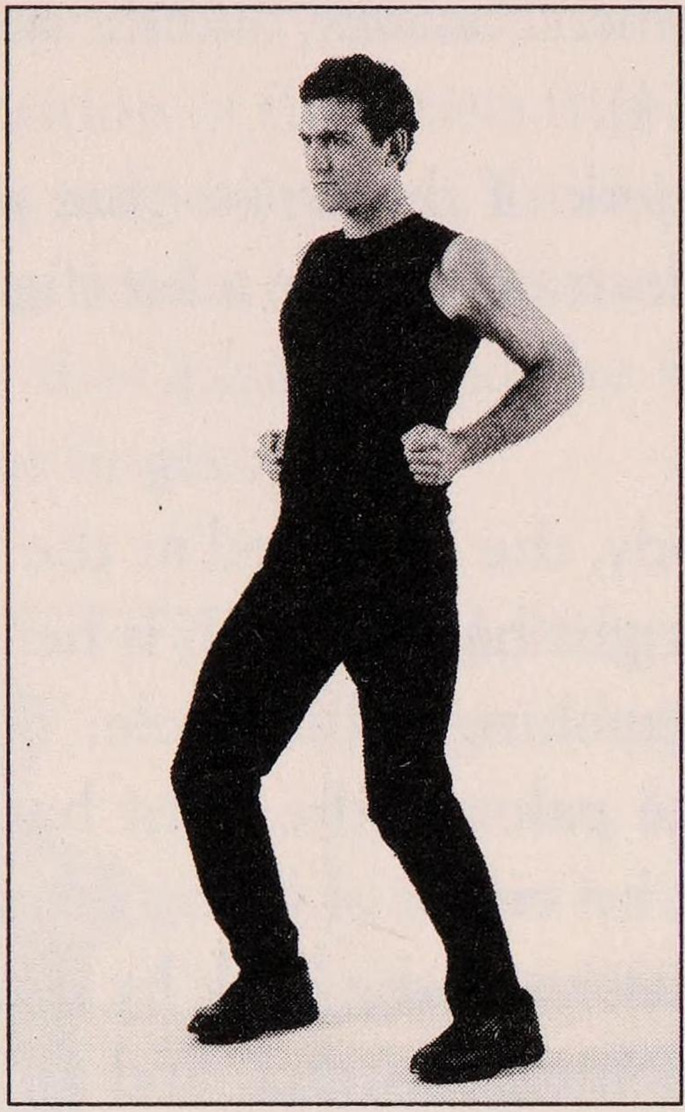

*Figure 417*

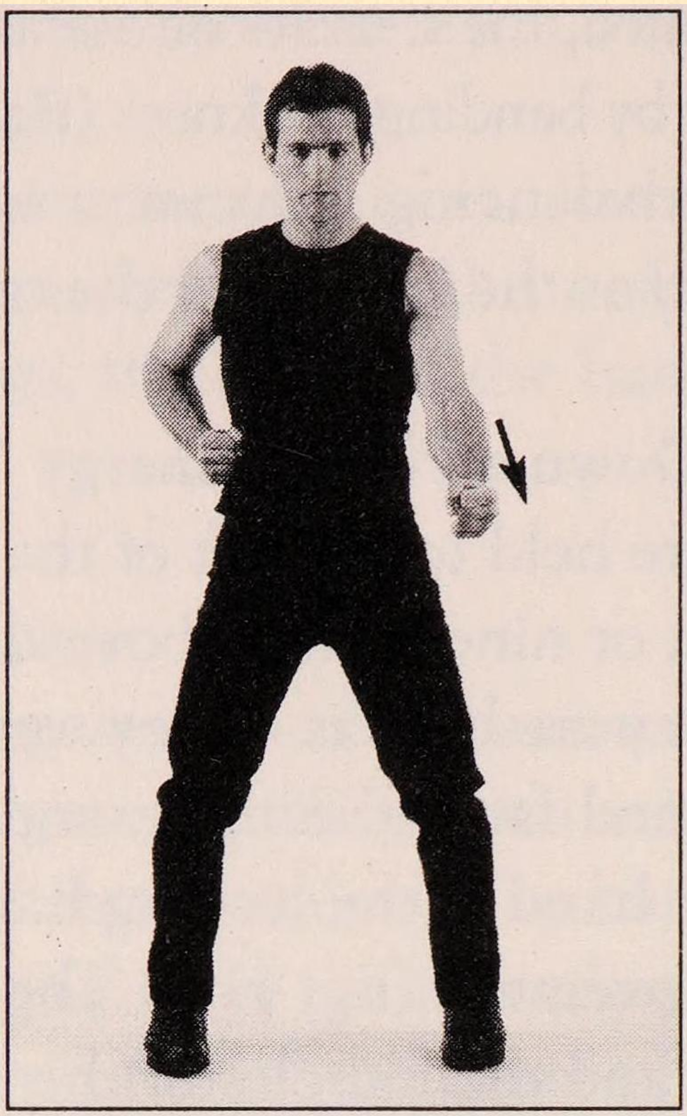

*Figure 418*

### 9. Using a Plane of Energy

The left hand is raised to the level of the navel and made into a fist; the elbow is bent at a ninety-degree angle and is held close to the rib cage (fig. 419). The right palm moves as if to slam on top of the left fist. The right hand stops an inch away from the left (fig. 420). Then it moves four or five inches in front of the fist, in a sharp, cutting movement, as if cutting with the edge of the hand (fig. 421). The left arm is retrieved all the way back by making the elbow protrude backward as far as it can, while the right hand is also retrieved, following the left hand and keeping the same distance (fig. 422). Then, maintaining the same distance between the hands, both the left and the right arm shoot forward to a point a foot and a half or two feet away from the waist.

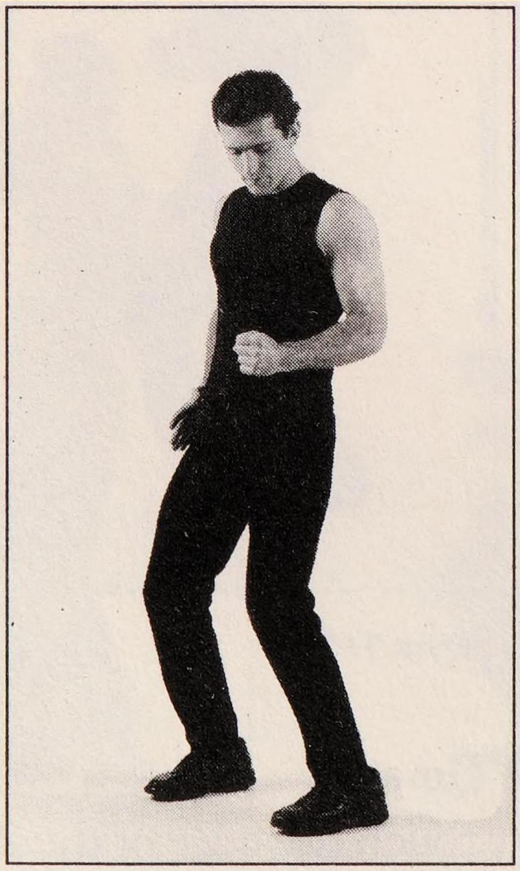

Figure 419

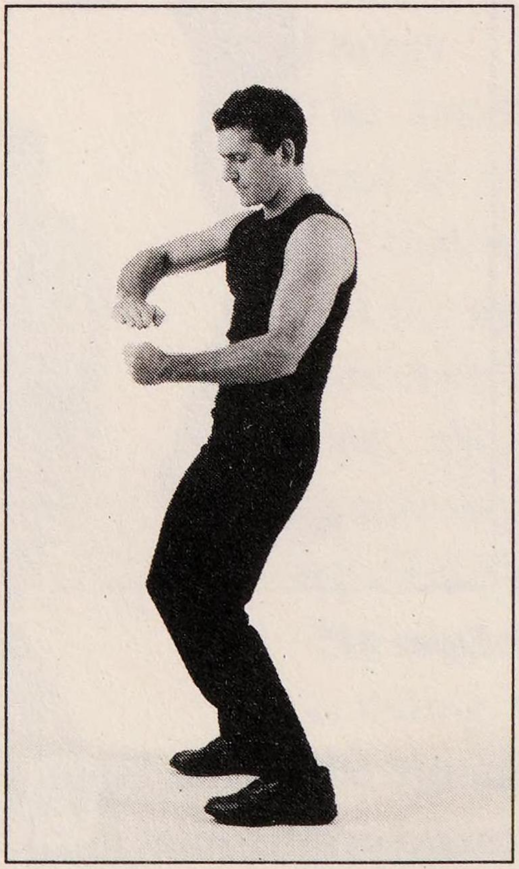

Figure 420

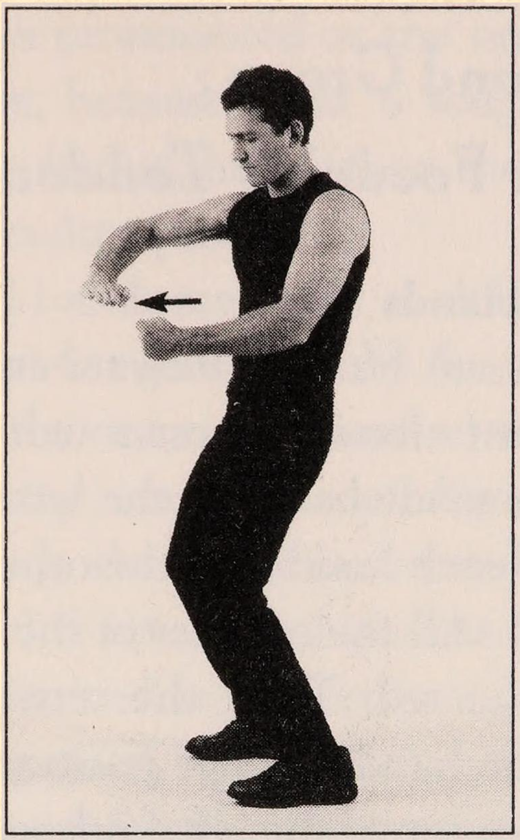

Figure 421

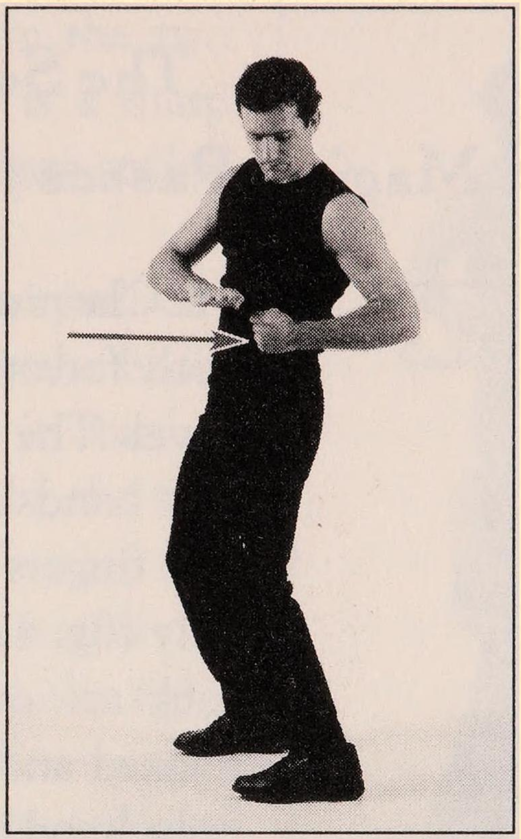

Figure 422

The same movements are repeated with the fist of the right arm.

### 10. Striking Energy with a Spike of Energy

The left arm is raised to the level of the shoulders with the elbow bent at a ninety-degree angle. The hand is held as if it had the hilt of a dagger in it's grip; the palm faces down. The elbow strikes backward in an arc to a point at the height of the left shoulder, at a forty-five-degree angle behind it (fig. 423). Then the arm returns with a strike along the same arc to it's initial position.

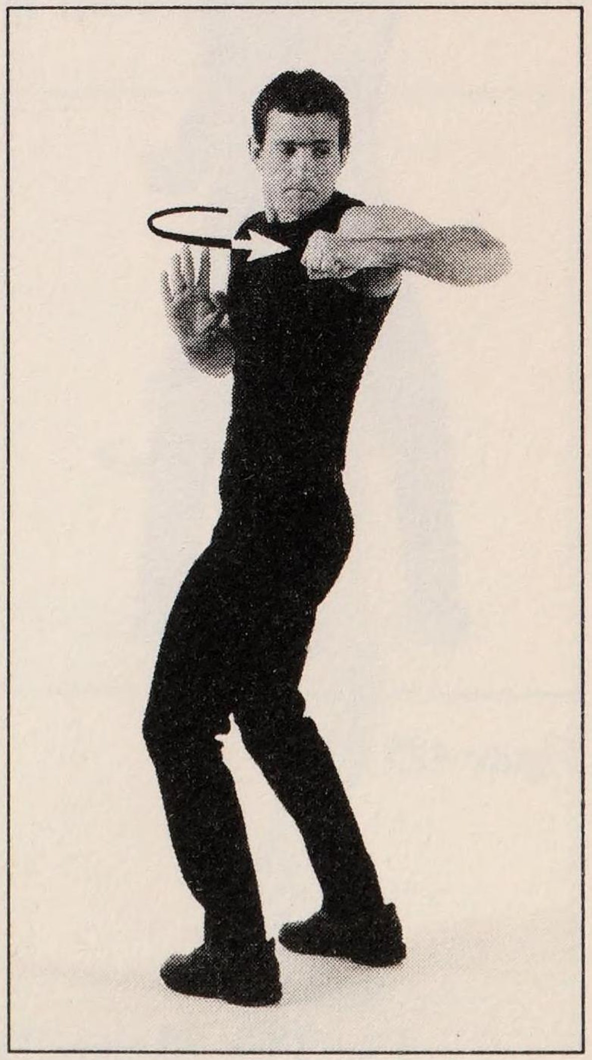

Figure 423

The same movement is repeated with the other arm.

## Fifth Series: Second Group: The *Magical Passes* for Focusing Tendon Energy

### 11. Clasping Hands

Both forearms are brought forward in front of the navel. The bent elbows almost touch the rib cage. The hands are made to clasp, the left hand on top. The fingers of each hand grab the other hand forcefully (fig. 424). All the muscles of the arms and the back are contracted. Then the tense muscles are relaxed and the hands change positions so that the right hand is on top of the left, without letting go of each other, using the hard part of the palm at the base of the fingers as a pivoting surface; the muscles of the arms and back are contracted again.

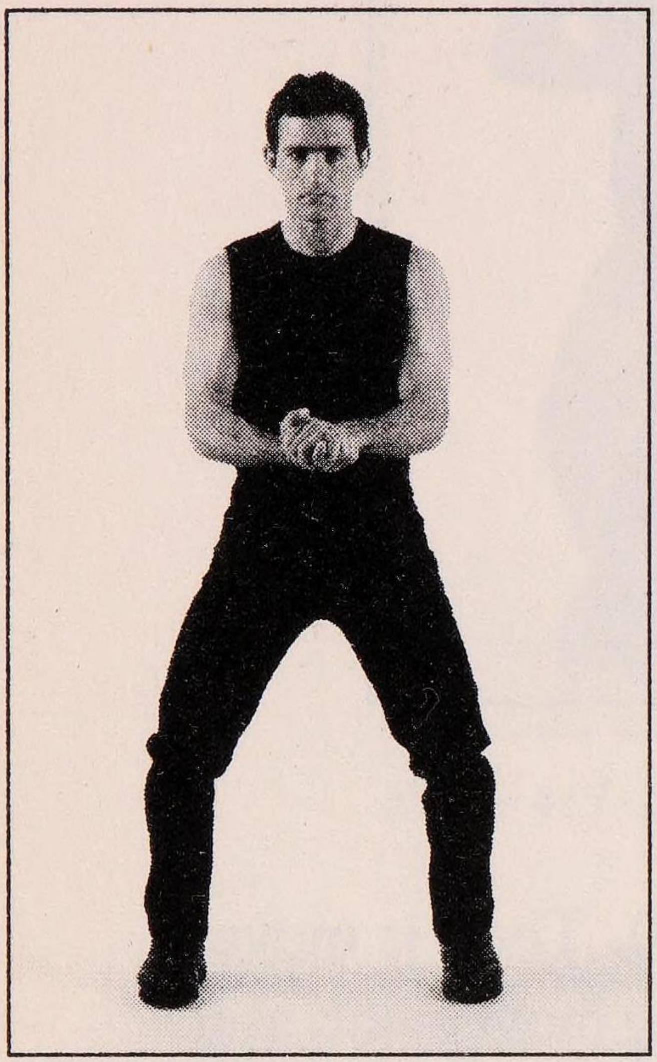

Figure 424

The same movements are repeated, beginning with the right hand on top

### 12. Left and Right Body Clasp

The forearms are brought in front of the body, again at the level of the navel. This time, however, the right forearm is held extended out in a straight line with the hip. It is held close to the rib cage while the left forearm, with the elbow away from the body, puts the left hand over the right one in a clasping position. Great pressure is applied to the palms and the fingers of each hand by the tension of the muscles of the arms, the back, and the abdomen. The tension is relaxed, and the hands are made to pivot on each other's palms, as they move across the body from right to left. There, they are forcefully clasped again, using the same muscles, this time with the right hand on top (fig. 425).

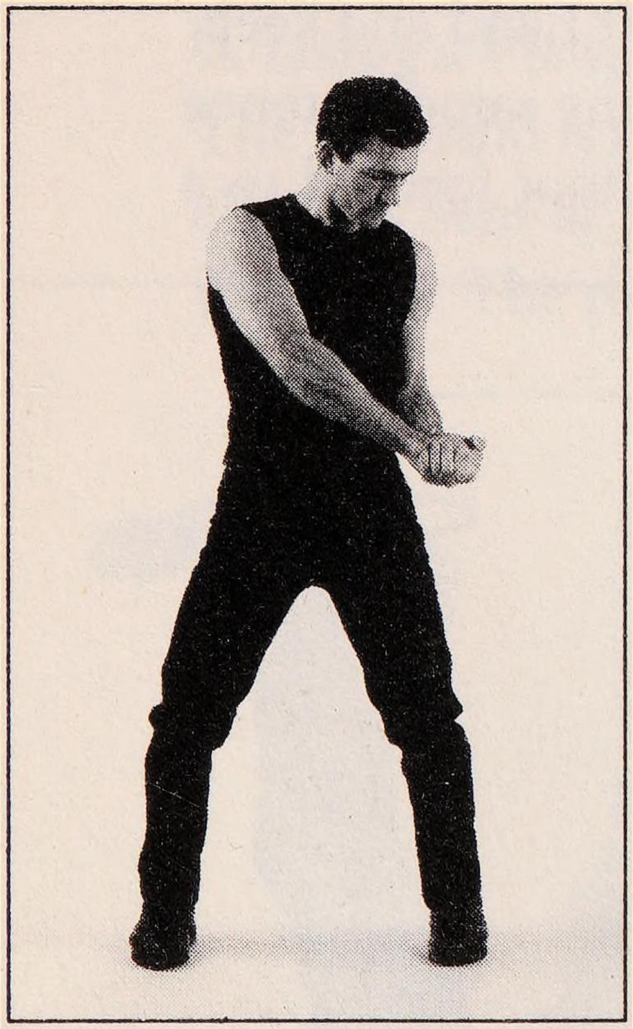

Figure 425

The same movements are repeated from this position.

### 13. The Sharp Turn of the Two Bodies

The hands are clasped at the level of the waist, to the right. The left hand is on top of the right. In this magical pass, (In- squeeze- of the hands is not as pronounced as the one in the two preceding ones, because what is sought is a sharp turn of the two bodies, rather than the sharp strikes of the two preceding passes.

The clasped hands are made to draw a small circle to the right that goes from the front to the back, and ends in the same position where it started. Since the leading hand is the left hand, by the fact that it is on top, the circle is drawn following the impulse of the left arm, which pushes the hands out first to the right, and around in a circle to the right of the body (fig. 426).

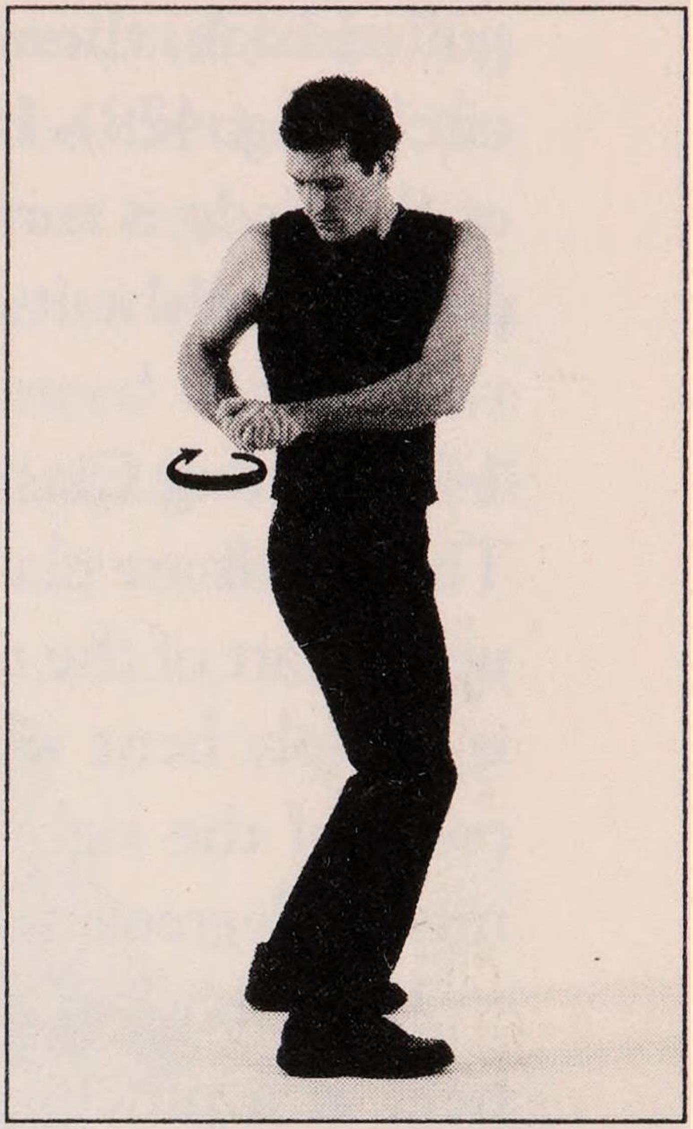

Figure 426

Then the clasped hands move across the front of the body to the left side. Another circle is drawn there, again following the impulse of the left hand. Being on top, it pulls the other hand to make a circle that goes to the back first, out to the left, and back to the place where it started (fig. 427).

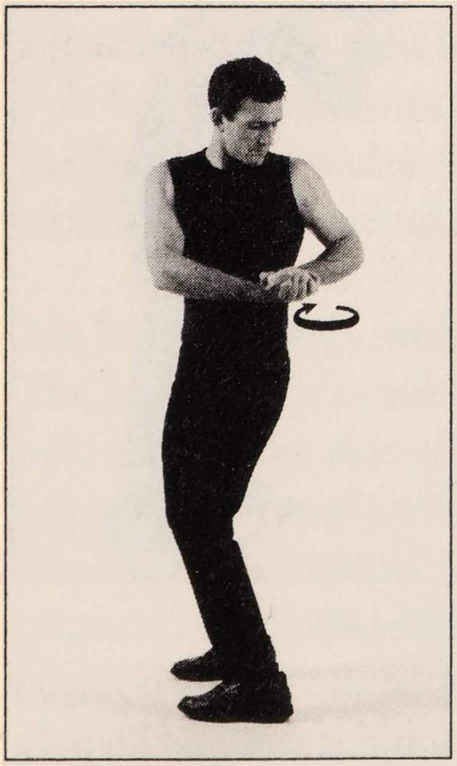
Figure 427

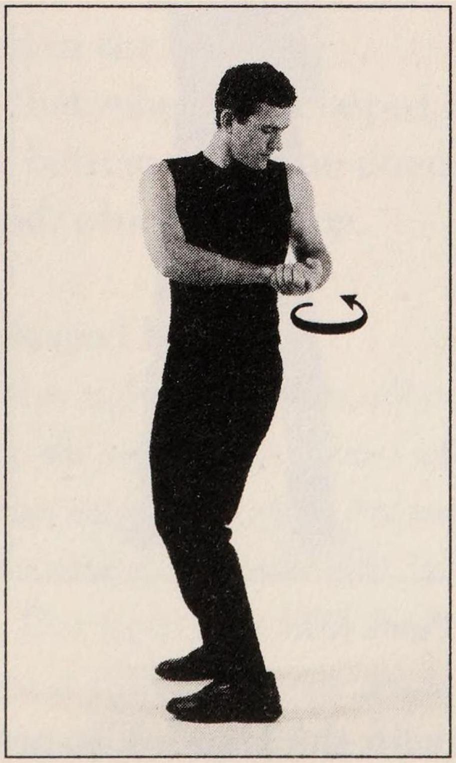
Figure 428

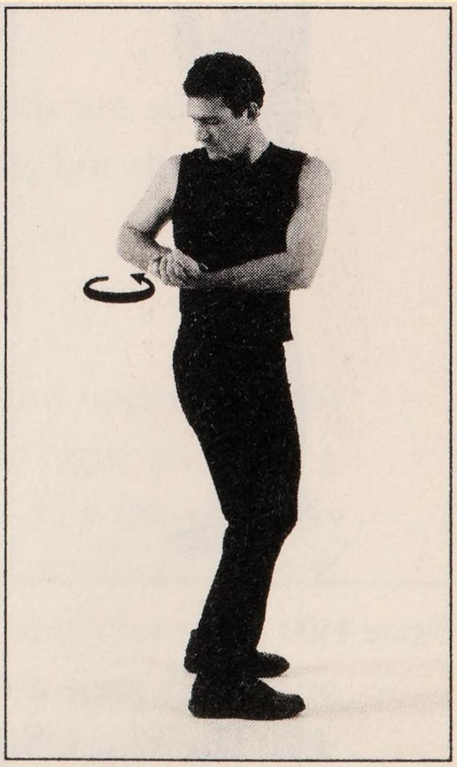
Figure 429

The same sequence of movements is performed with the right hand in the lead, starting at the left by the waist. This time, the impulse of the right arm is followed in order to draw the circle, which goes to the left first, and then back to the same place where it started (fig. 428). The clasped hands move across the front of the body to the right side by the waist. There, following the impulse of the leading hand, they are pulled back, then to the right, and back where they started, making a circle (fig. 429). It is important that as the circles are drawn, the trunk of the body is turned sharply to the side. The legs remain in the same position, without compensating for the turn by letting the knees sag.

### 14. Pushing Clasped Energy with the Elbow and Forearm

The hands are clasped by the right side at the level of the shoulder. The upper part of the right arm is held fight against the chest, and the elbow is sharply bent with the forearm held in a vertical position. With the palm of the right hand facing up, the back of the hand is held in a ninety-degree angle with the forearm (fig. 430).

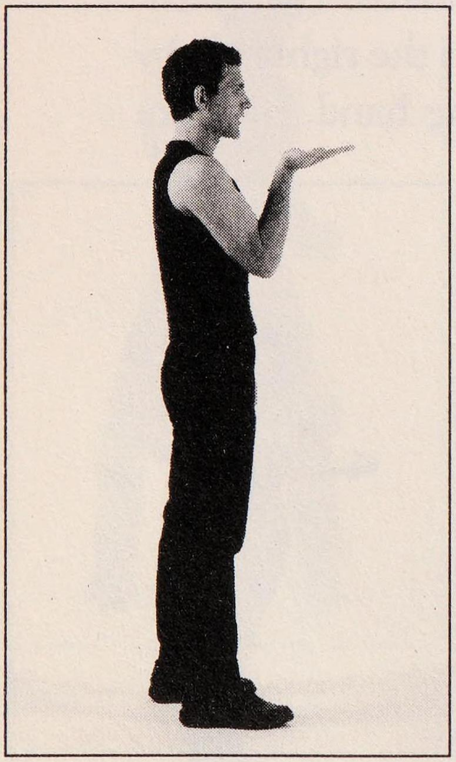

Figure 430

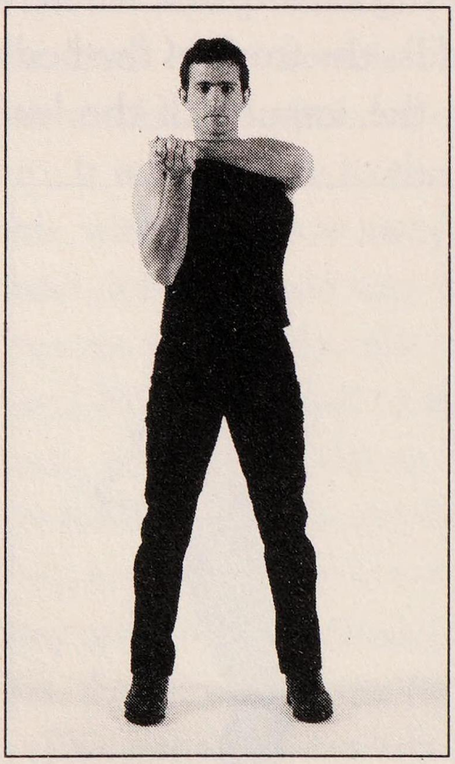

Figure 431

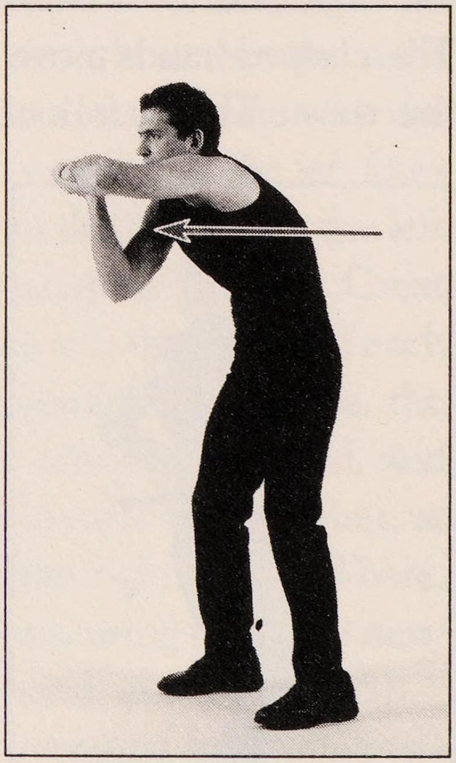

Figure 432

The elbow of the left arm is extended in front of the left shoulder, held at a ninety-degree position. The two hands clasp forcefully (fig. 431). The right arm slowly pushes the left one forward by straightening the elbow quite a bit. At the same time that the clasped hands are pushed forward, the left shoulder and shoulder blade are also pushed forward to maintain the ninety-degree angle of the left elbow (fig. 432). The right arm retrieves the left hand to the initial position.

The clasped hands are shifted to the left side by pivoting on the palms, and the same movements are repeated there.

### 15. The Short Stab with the Hands Clasped

The hands are clasped at the right side, just as in the preceding magical pass. This lime, however, the hands are at the level of the waist, and the right arm, instead of slowly pushing the left one forward, stabs fast (fig. 433). It is a powerful movement that requires the contraction of the muscles of the arms and the back. The clasped hands are brought forcefully to the left, as if to augment the driving force of the left elbow, which is pushed all the way to the back (fig. 434). The clasped hands move around the front of the body to the right, as if to aid again a powerful movement of the right elbow which is thrown all the way to the back.

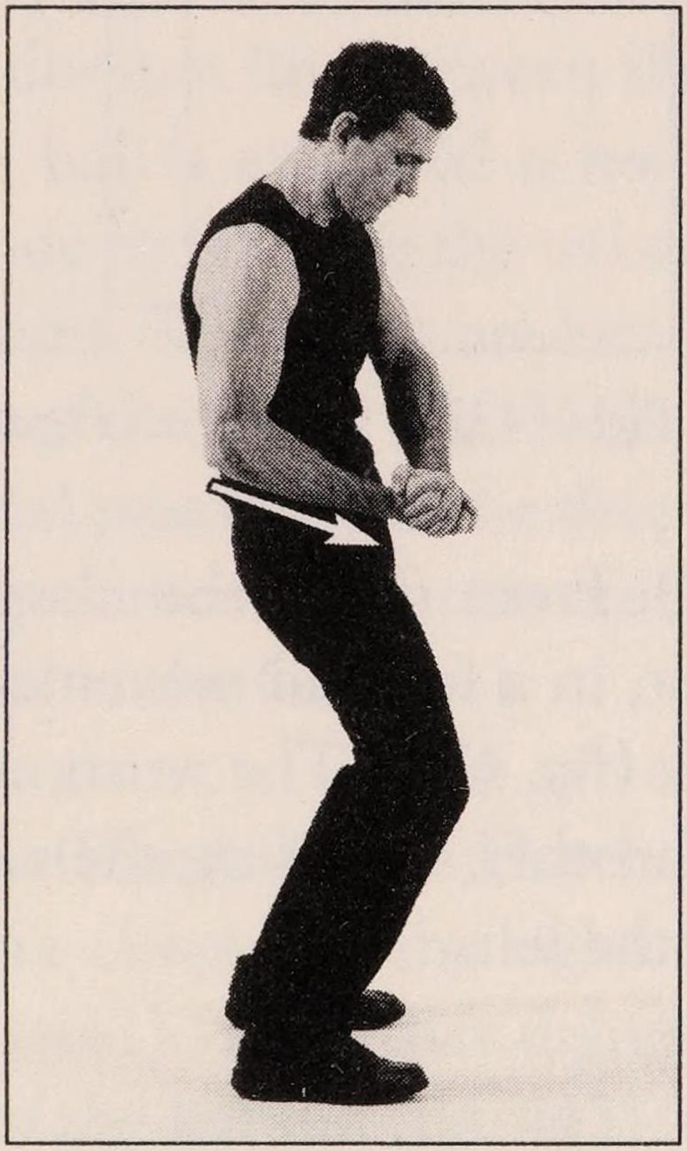

Figure 433

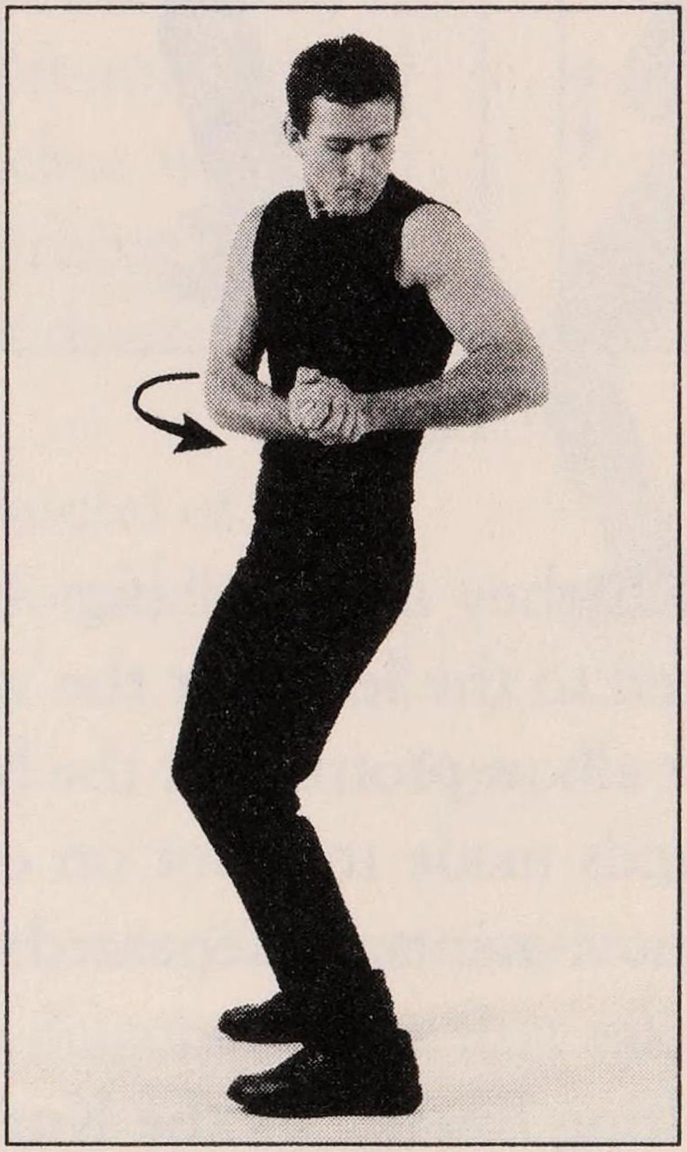

Figure 434

The same sequence of movements is performed by starting it on the left side with the right hand in the lead.

It is important to note that when the clasped hands are stabbed to the front, the hand at the bottom gives the direction, but the force is supplied by the leading hand, which is on top.

### 16. Jolting Energy with Clasped Hands

The hands are clasped to the right; the right elbow and upper arm are held against the side of the rib cage. The elbow of the right arm is at a ninety-degree angle with the extended right forearm. The left elbow is also held at a ninety-degree angle, at a straight line away from the left pectoral muscle (fig. 435). The right arm lifts the left one, changing the position of the elbows from a ninety-degree angle to a forty-five. The clasped hands reach the level of the right shoulder (fig. 436). Then they are made to jolt with a very short movement in which only the wrist is involved. The clasped hands hit down, but without changing the level at which they are held (fig. 437). From there, the clasped hands are retrieved to the left near the waist, in a forceful movement that makes the left elbow protrude at the back (fig. 438). The wrists are rotated and the hands made to pivot on each other, reversing their position. The same movements are repeated on the left.

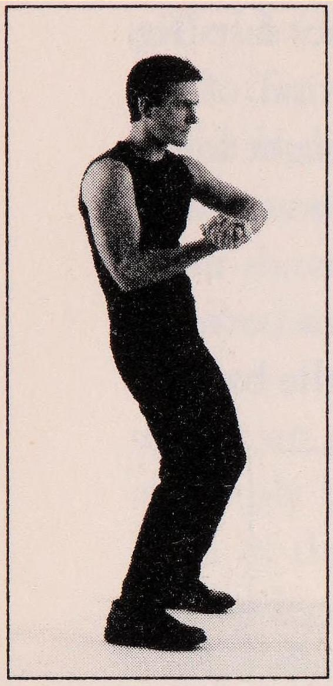
*Figure 435*

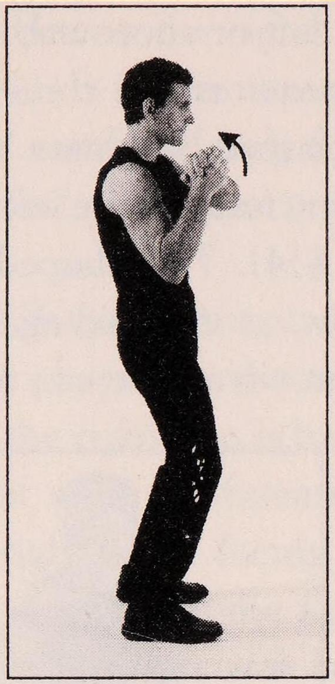
*Figure 436*

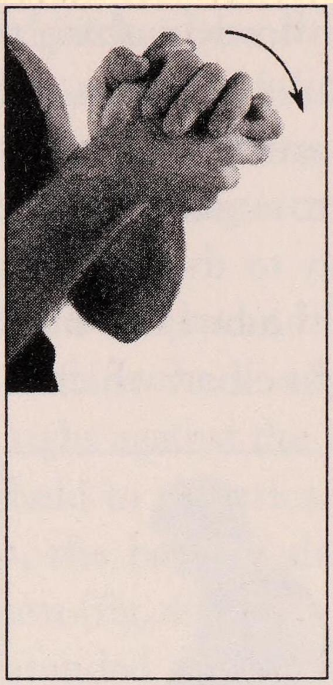
*Figure 437*

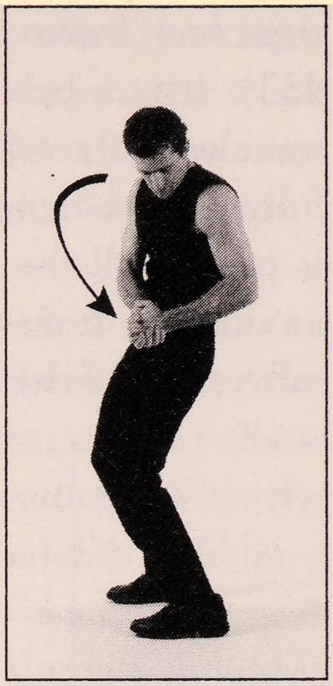
*Figure 438*

### 17. Jolting Energy by the Knees

The hands are clasped to the right by the thigh. They change positions slightly by the supporting right hand, which is on the bottom, becoming slightly more vertical with a twist of the wrist, held in check by the pressure of the left hand (fig. 439). Both hands swing to the left, following the contour of the knees, and deliver a strike, the potency of which is enhanced by a downward pull of the wrists (fig. 440).

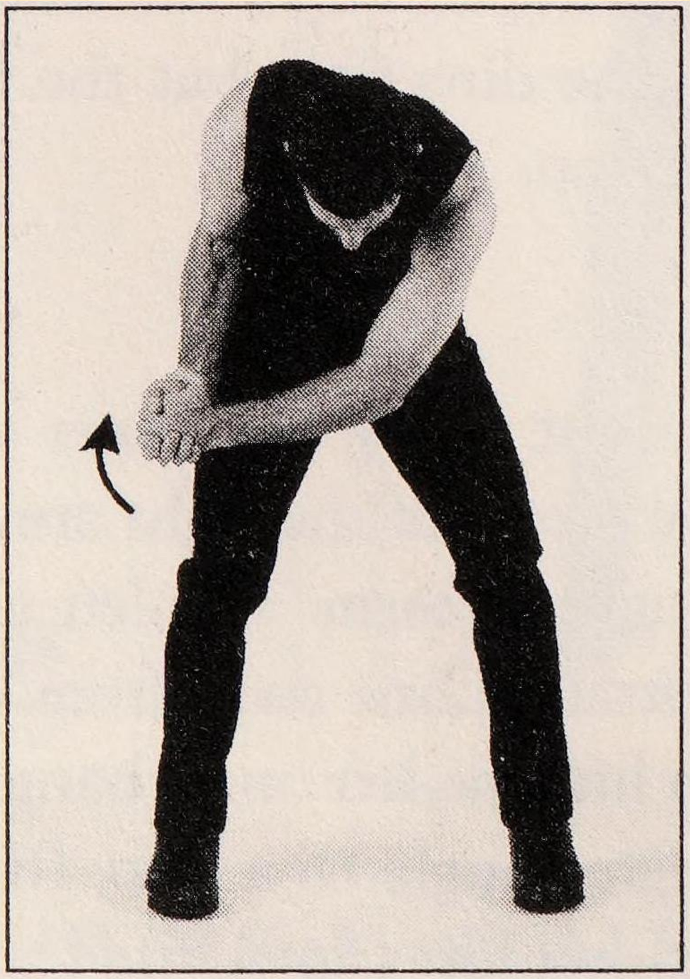

Figure 439

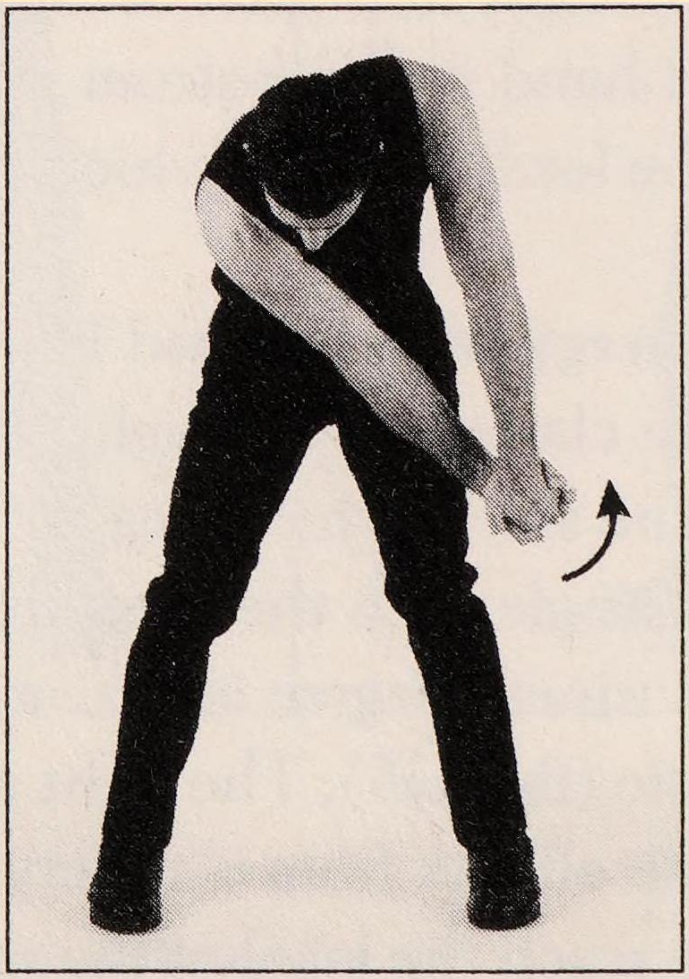

Figure 440

The hands change position by rotating on each other's palms, and the same movements are repeated from left to right.

### 18. Driving Down a Spike of Energy

The hands are clasped vertically with the left hand in the lead, at a point about a foot from the navel, right on the division line between the left and right bodies. Both hands are lifted a few inches with a slight jolt made by bending the wrists without moving the forearms. Then they are brought down with the same jolt of the wrists (fig. 441).

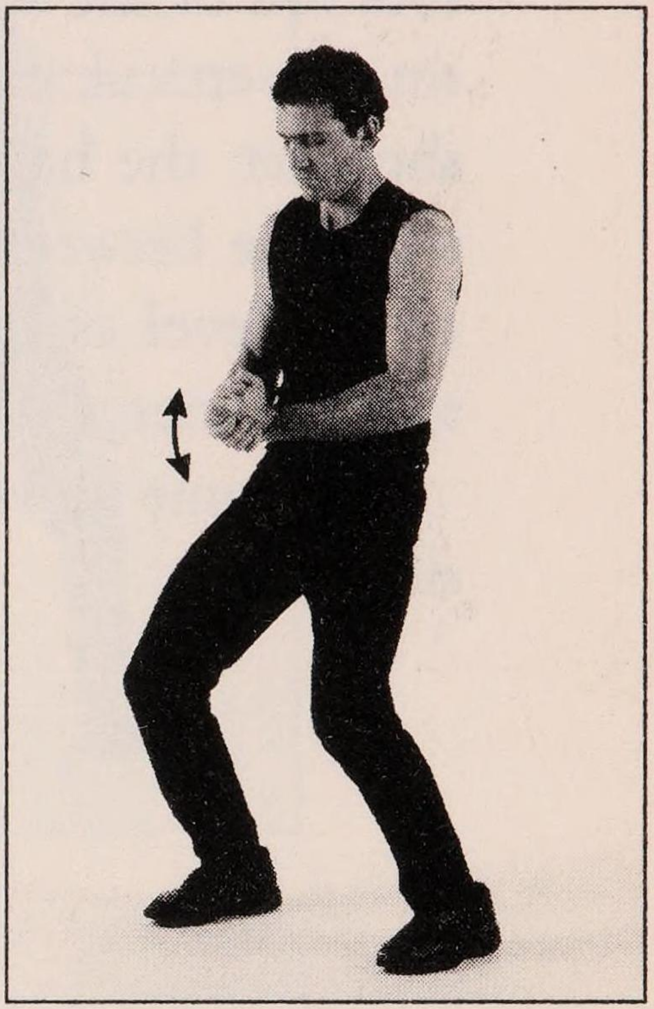

Figure 441

This magical pass engages the deep muscles of the abdomen. The same movements are performed with the right hand in the lead.

### 19. Using the Hands Like a Hatchet

The hands are clasped at the right. Both are lifted to the level of the shoulder (fig. 442). Then they deliver a diagonal strike that takes them to the level of the left hip (fig. 443).

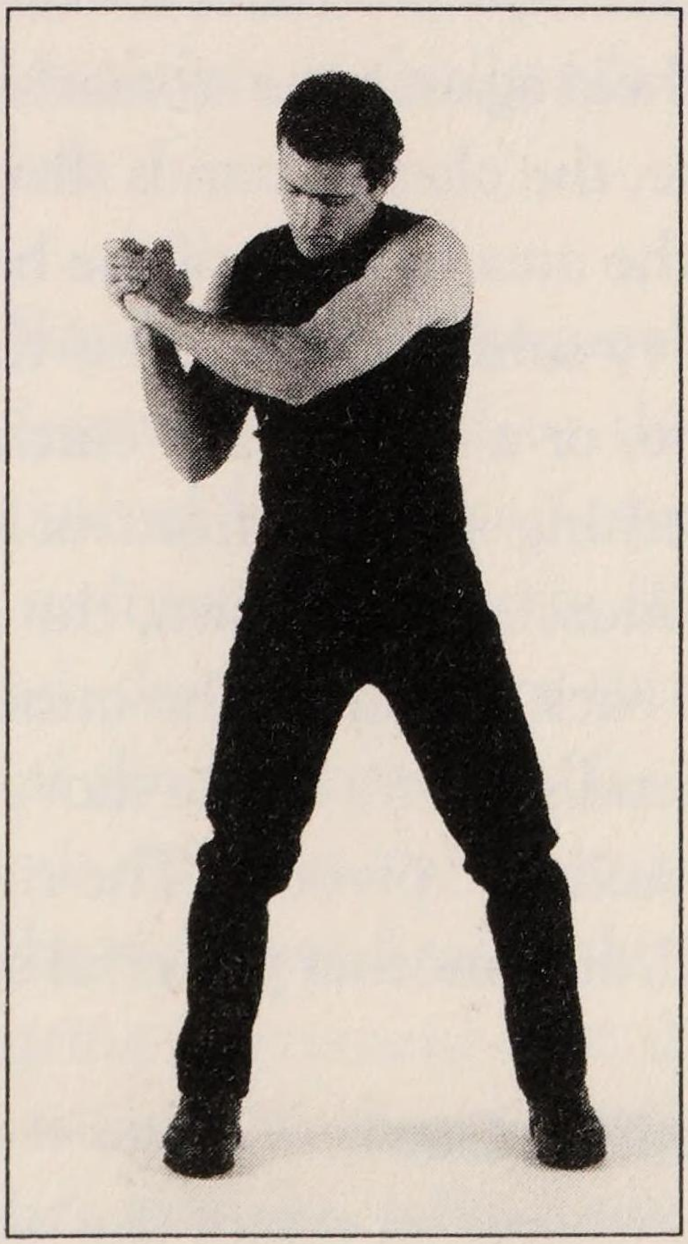

Figure 442

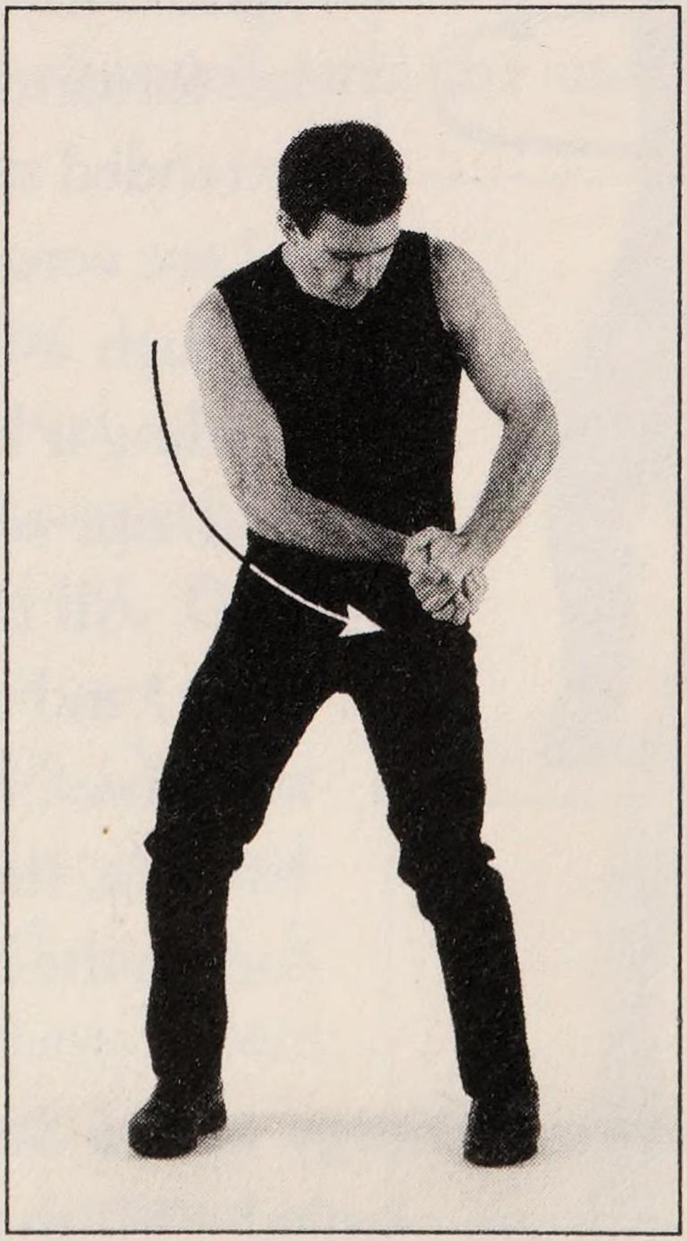

Figure 443

The same movements are done on the left.

### 20. Hammering a Spike of Energy

The hands are clasped at the right. They swing to the level of the shoulders, aided by a rotation of the trunk to the right. Making a small vertical circle in front of the right shoulder, the hands are brought to the division line between the two bodies and down to the level of the waist as if to hammer a spike of energy there (fig. 444).

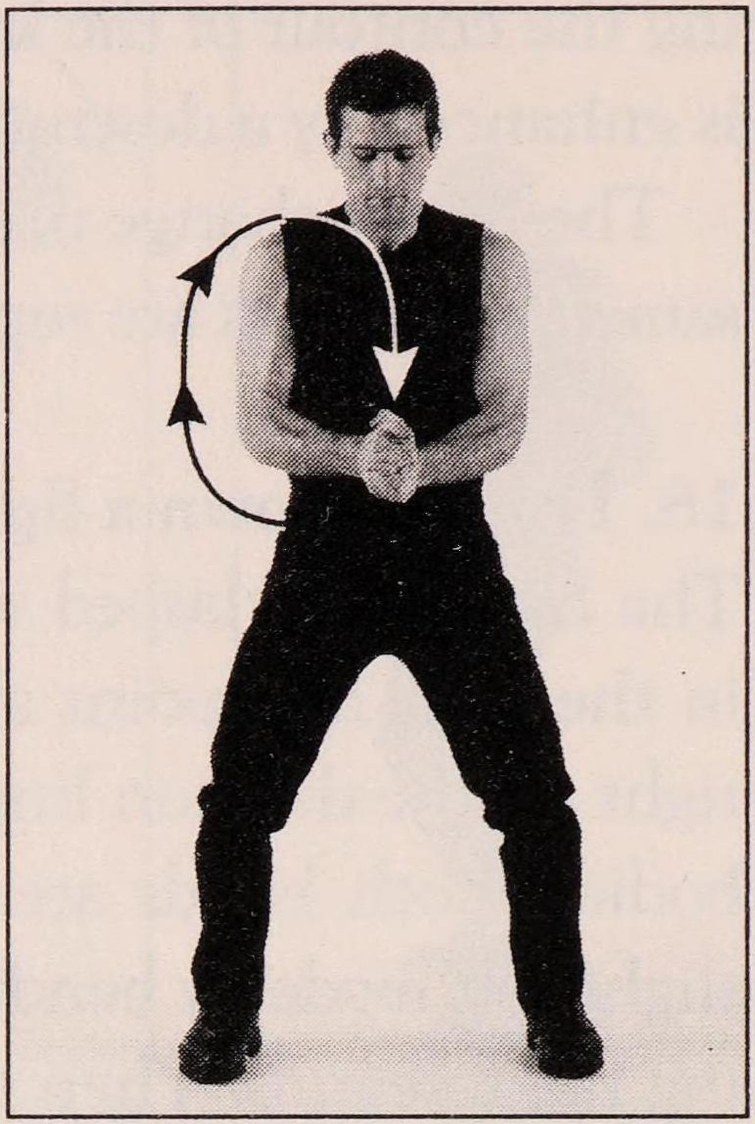

Figure 444

The same movements are done on the left side.

## Fifth Series: Third Group: The *Magical Passes* for Building Endurance

### 21. Cutting Energy in an Arc

The hands are clasped on the right, fight against the crest of the hipbone. The left hand is on top of the right. The right elbow protrudes to the back, and the left forearm is held against the stomach. In a powerful extended strike, the clasped hands slice in a horizontal arc across the area in front of the body as if going through a heavy substance. It's as if the hands were holding a knife, or a sword, or a cutting instrument that rips something solid in front of the body (fig. 445). All the muscles of the arm, the abdomen, the chest, and the back are used. The muscles of the legs are tensed to lend stability to the movement. On the left side, the hands are pivoted. The right hand is on top, in the lead, and another powerful cut takes place.

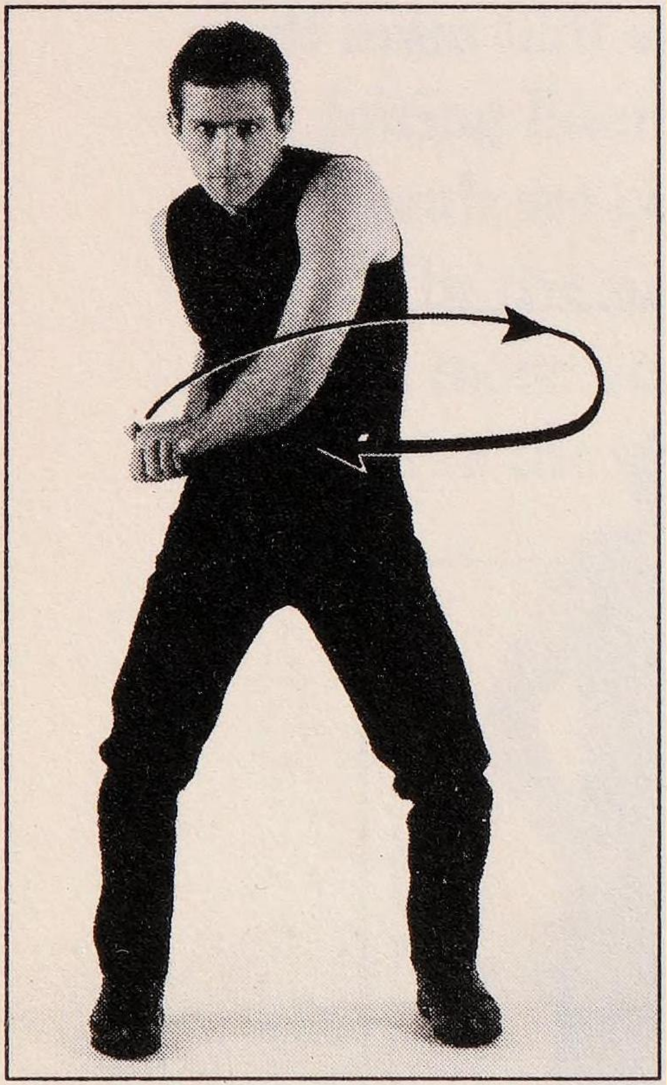

Figure 445

### 22. Slashing Energy with a Swordlike Cut

The hands are clasped with the left hand on top of the right in front of the right shoulder (fig. 446). A powerful jolt of the wrists and the arms makes the hands move forward about a foot, delivering a powerful blow. From there, they cut across to a point on the left, at the level of the shoulder. The end result is a movement that resembles cutting something heavy with a sword. From that point on the left, the arms change position by rotating, without losing their clasping position. The right hand takes the lead and gets on top, and again slashes across to a point about two feet away from the right shoulder (fig. 447).

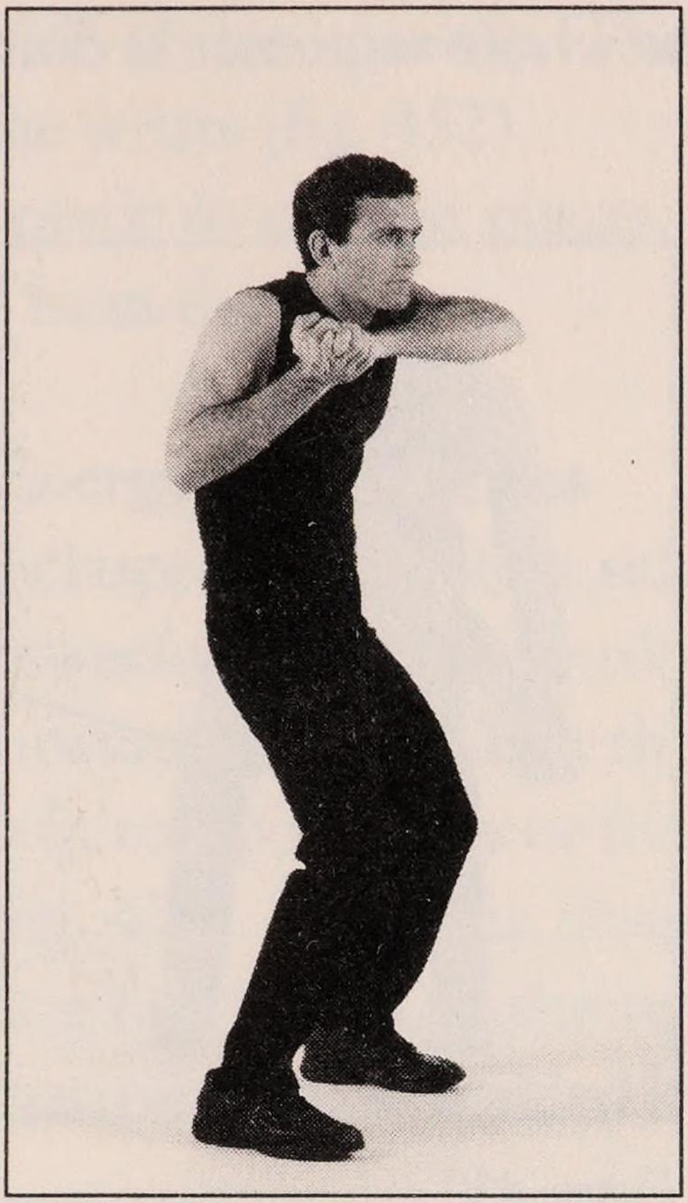

Figure 446

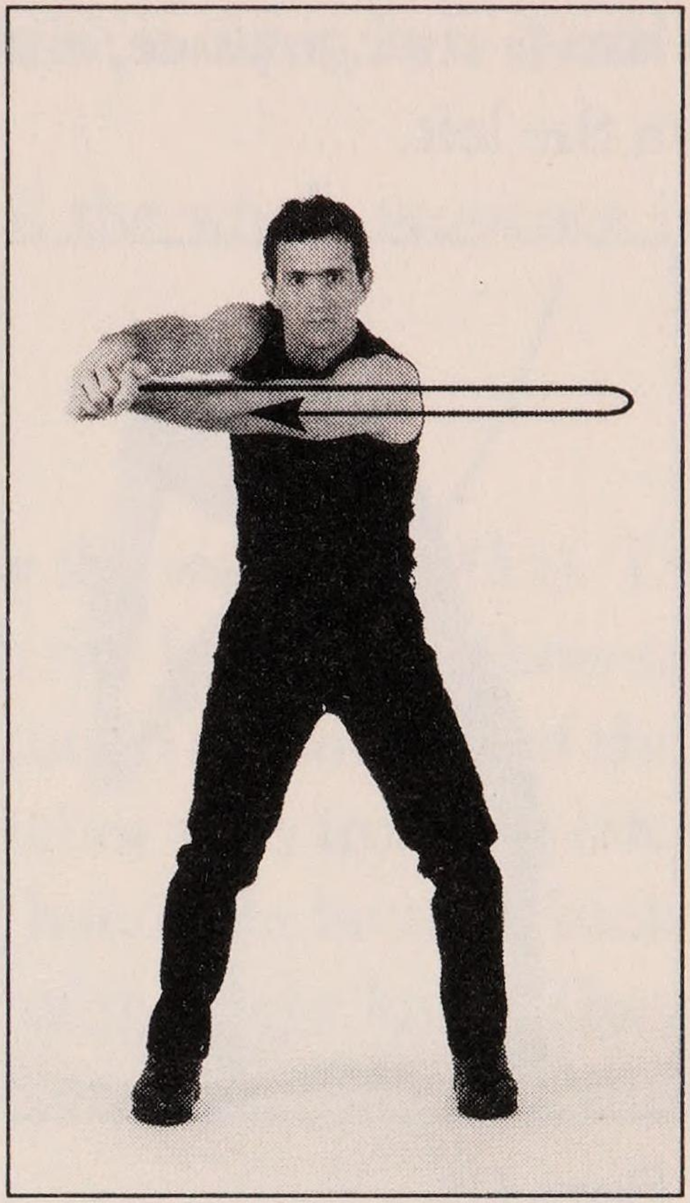

Figure 447

The initial position of the hands are changed, and the movements begin on the left.

### 23. Slashing Energy with a Diagonal Cut

The clasped hands are raised to the level of the right ear and pushed forward, as if to stab something solid located in front of the body (fig. 448). From there, they slash down to a place about a foot away from the side of the left kneecap (fig. 449). On that point, the hands rotate at the wrists to change positions so that the right hand takes the lead on top. It is as if the cutting instrument that the hands seem to be holding is made to change directions before it slashes from left to right, following the contour of the knees (fig. 450). The hands change place, and the whole sequence is done again, starting from the left.

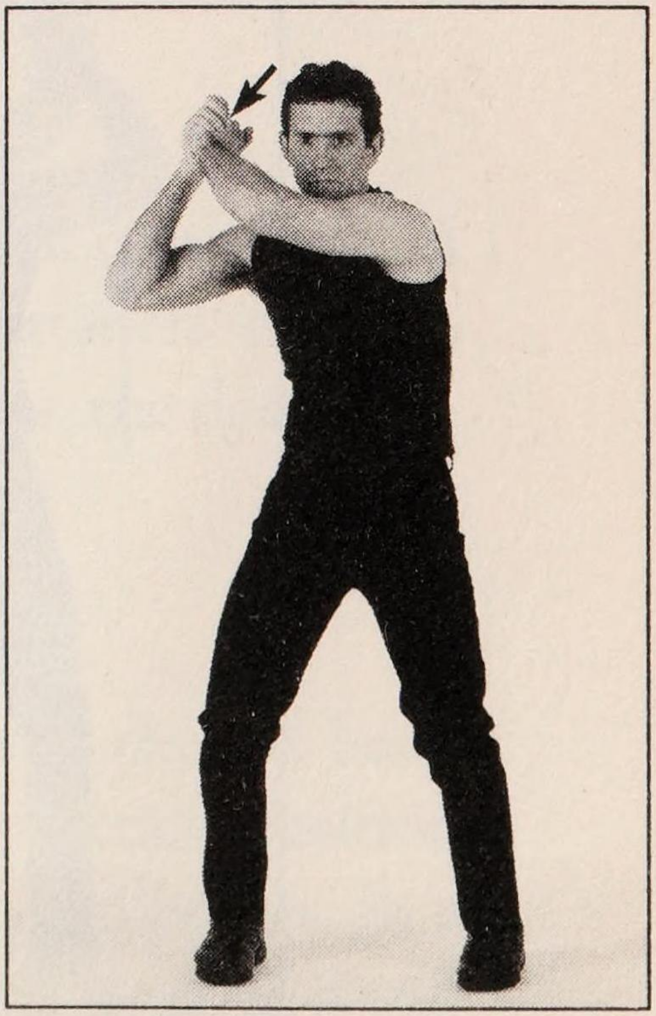

Figure 448

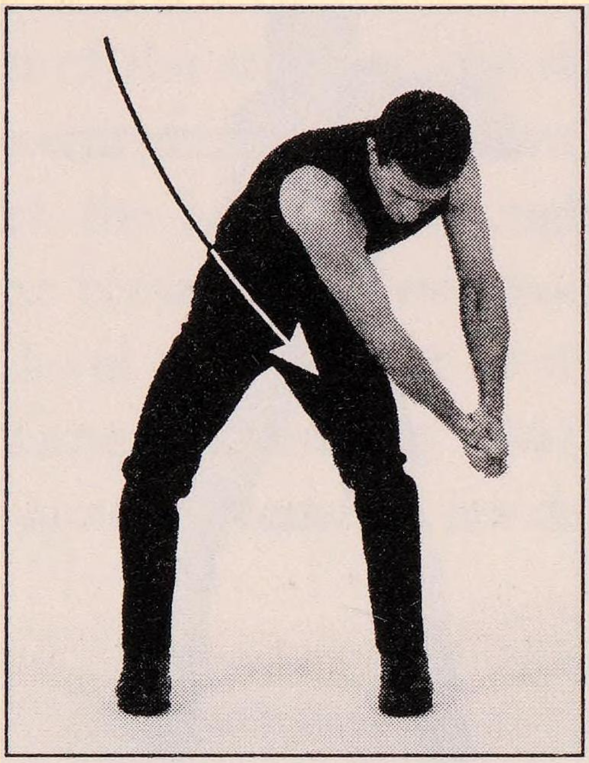

Figure 449

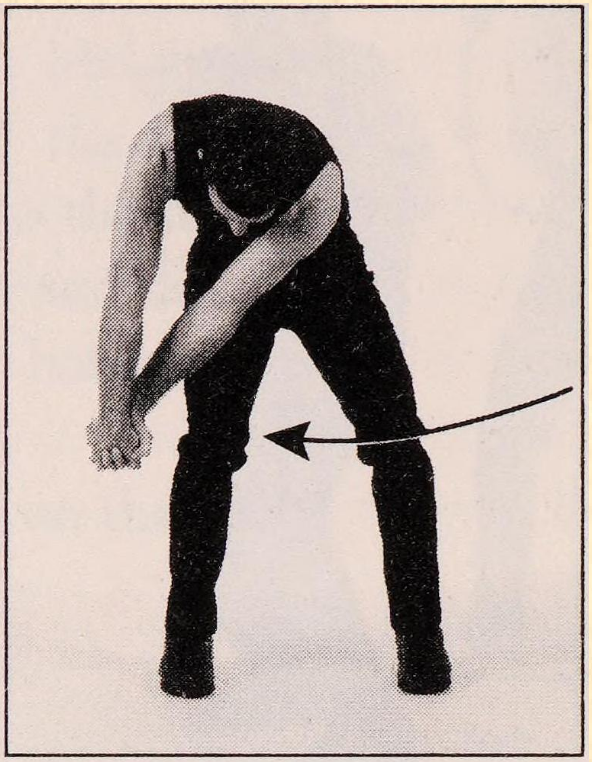

Figure 450

## 24. Carrying Energy from the Right Shoulder to the Left Knee

The clasped hands are held at waist level on the right. They change positions slightly by the supporting right hand, which is on the bottom, becoming slightly more vertical with a twist of the wrist, which is held by the pressure of the left hand. The hands are quickly raised to a point by the top of the head, on the right side (fig. 451). Leading with the elbow, they are brought down to shoulder level with great force. From there, they slash down in a diagonal cut to a place about a foot away from the left side of the kneecap. The strike is aided by a quick downward turn of the wrists (fig. 452).

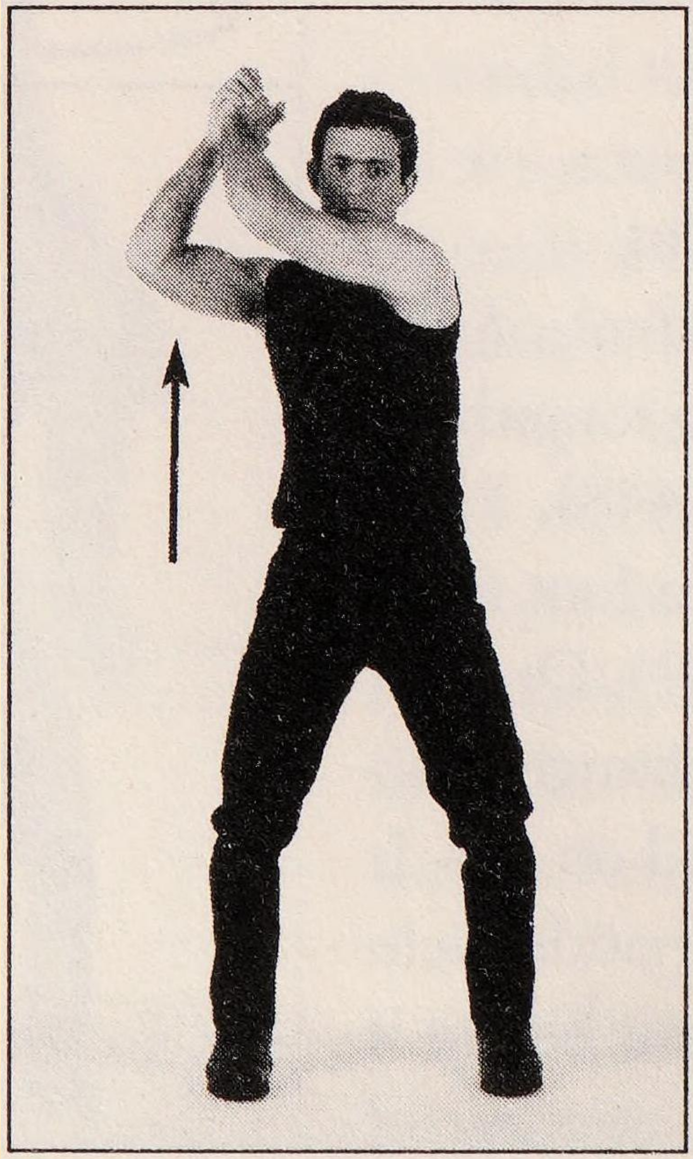

Figure 451

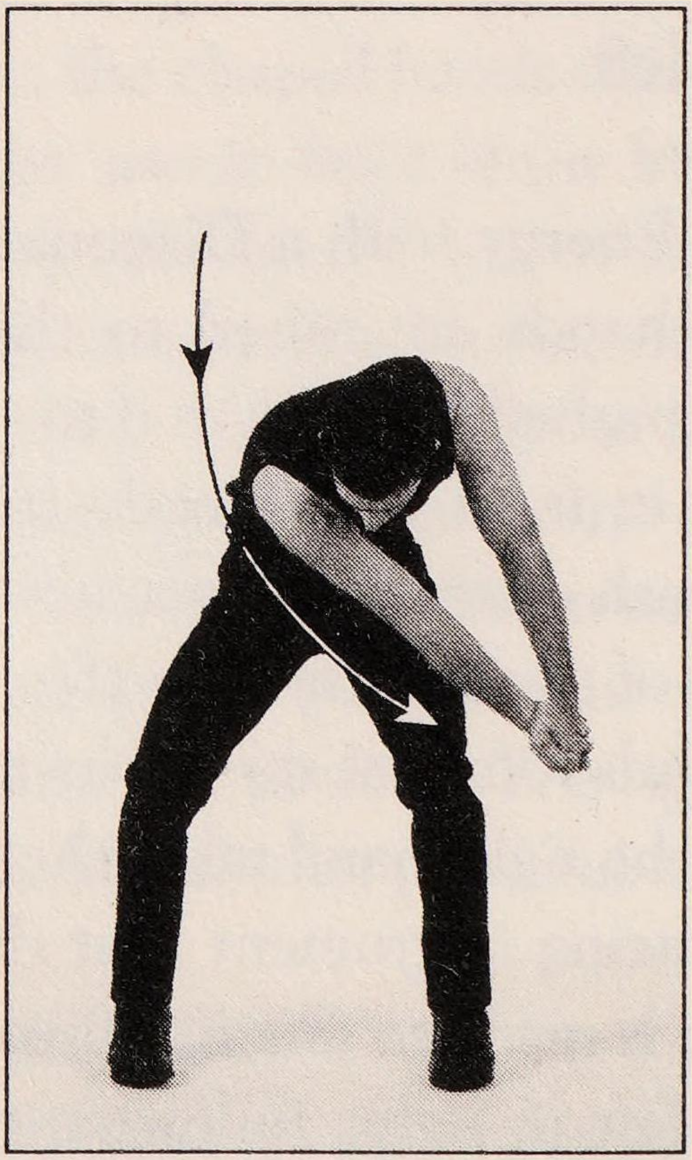

Figure 452

The hands pivot to change places, and the whole sequence is done again, starting from the left.

## 25. Slashing Energy by the Knees

The hands are clasped on the right side by the waist (fig. 453). They are brought in a powerful downward strike to the level of the knees, as the trunk stoops forward slightly. Then they cut an arc in front of the knees from right to left, to a point four or five inches away from the left side of the kneecap (fig. 454). Then the clasped hands are brought back forcefully to a point a few inches to the right of the right knee. The performance of both cutting strikes is aided by a very powerful jolt of the wrists.

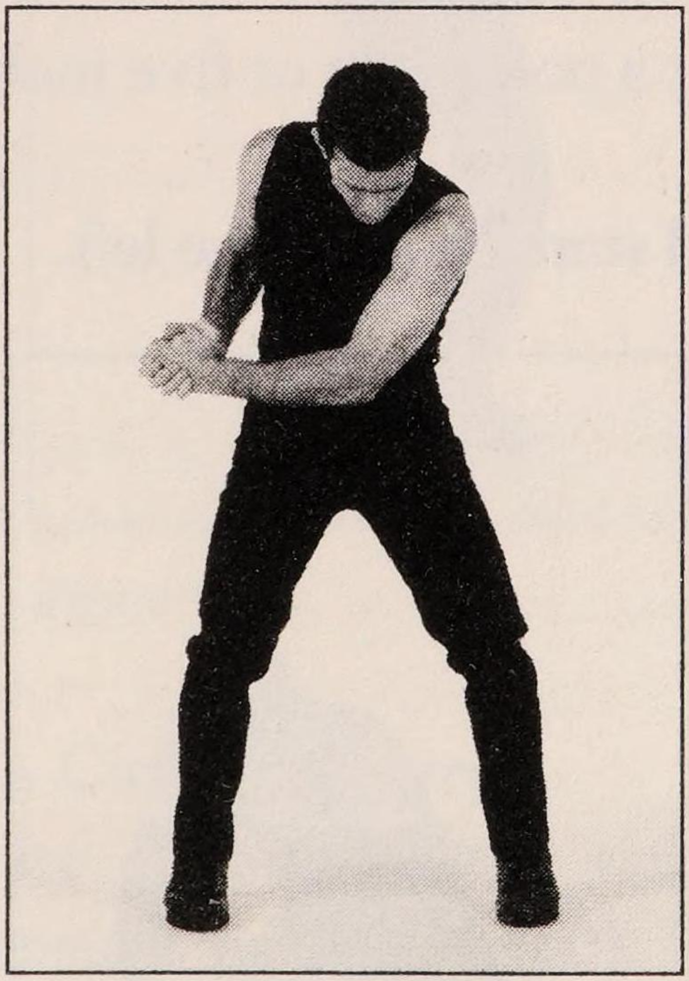

*Figure 453*

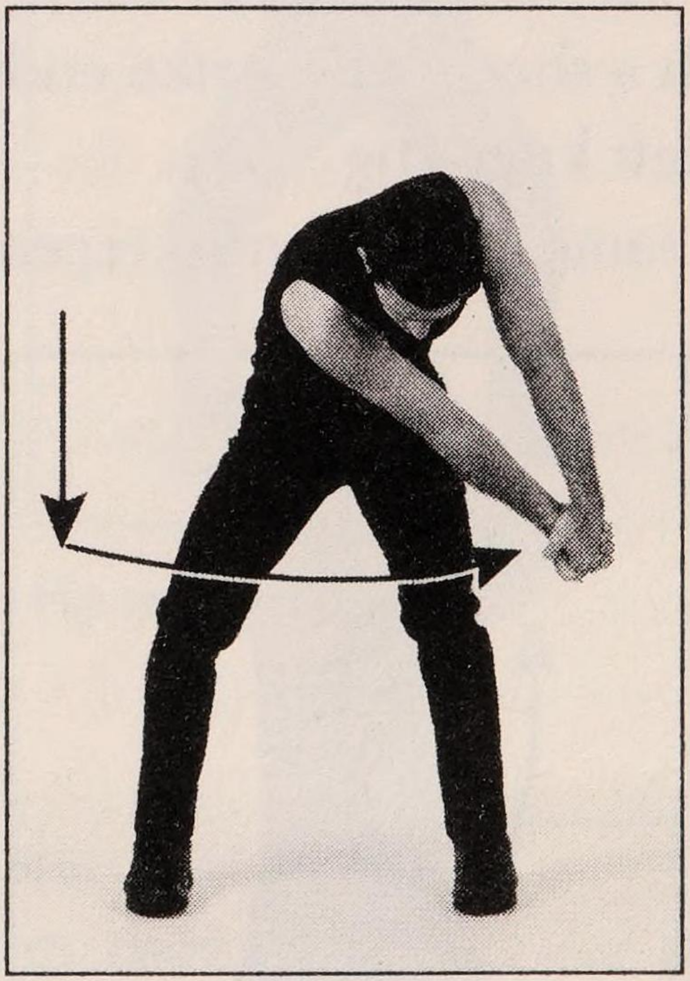

*Figure 454*

The same movement is performed starting by the waist on the left. In order to perform this magical pass correctly, practitioners need to engage, rather than the muscles of the arms and the legs, the deep muscles of the abdomen.

### 26. The Digging Bar of Energy

The clasped hands are held in front of the stomach, with the left hand on top as the leading hand. They are shifted then to a vertical position in front of the stomach on the line that separates the two bodies. In a quick movement, they are brought to a point above the head, as if still following the same line. From there, they are made to strike down in a straight line to the place where the magical pass began (fig. 455). The hands change positions, to have the right hand in the lead, and the movement is repeated. Don Juan called this movement stirring energy with a digging bar.

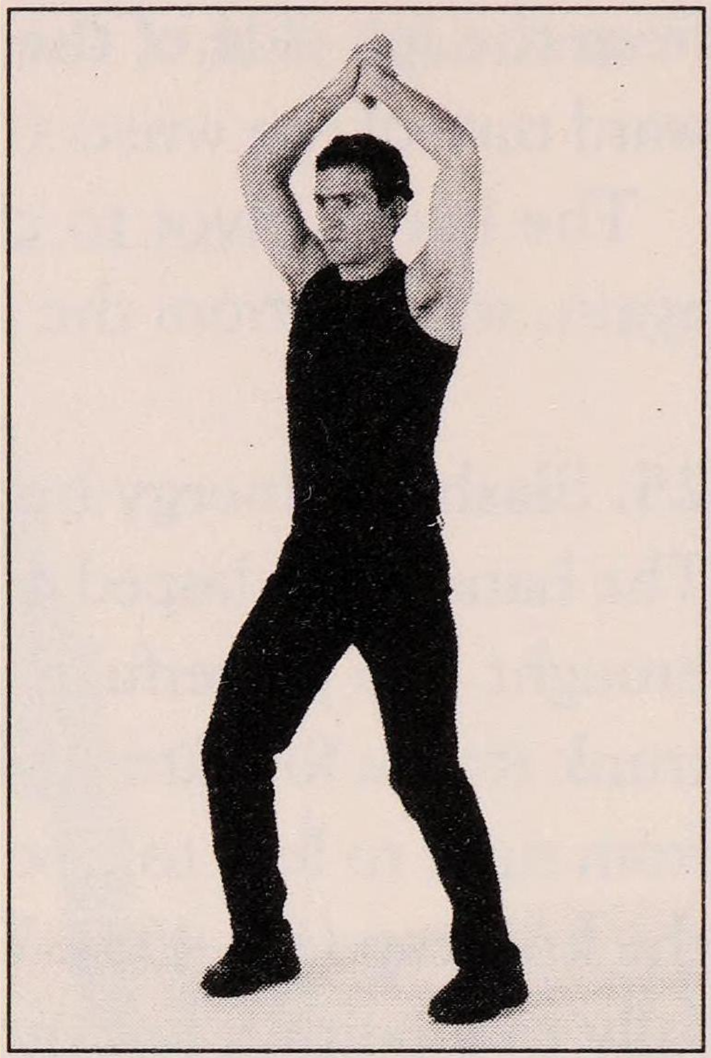

Figure 455

### 27. The Big Slash

The clasped hands start on the right, by the waist. They are quickly raised above the head, over the right shoulder (fig. 456). The wrists jolt back to gain strength, and a powerful diagonal strike is delivered that slashes Figure 455 energy in front of the body, as if cutting through a sheet. The strike ends at a point four or five inches to the left of the left knee (fig. 457).

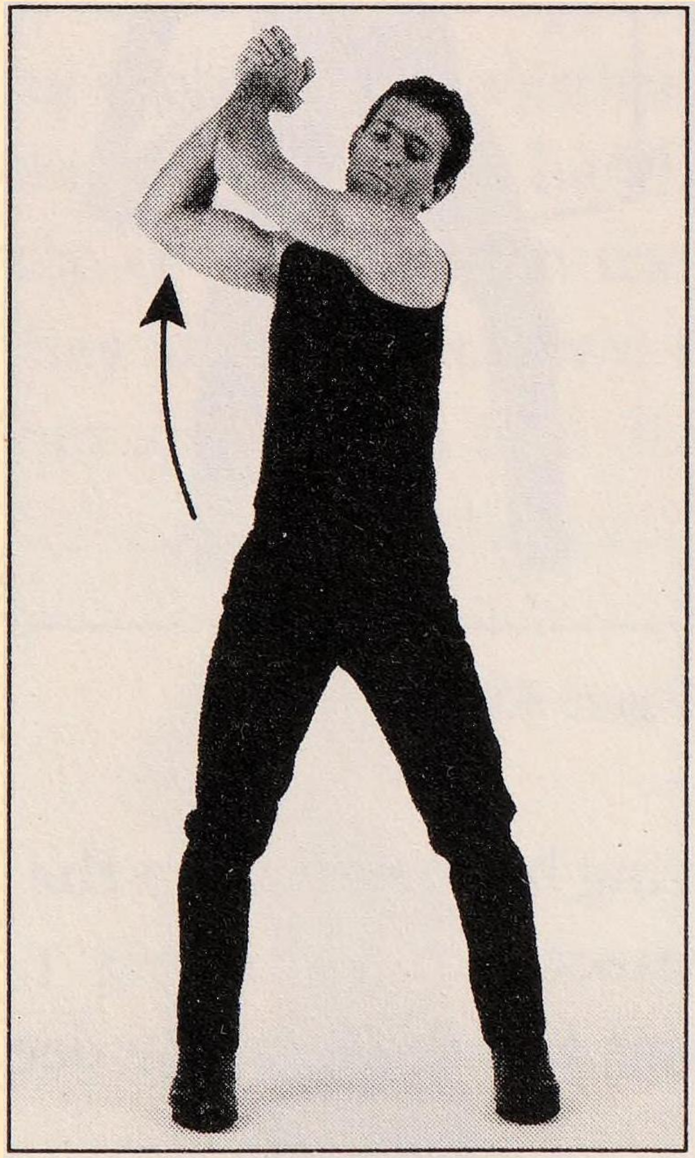

Figure 456

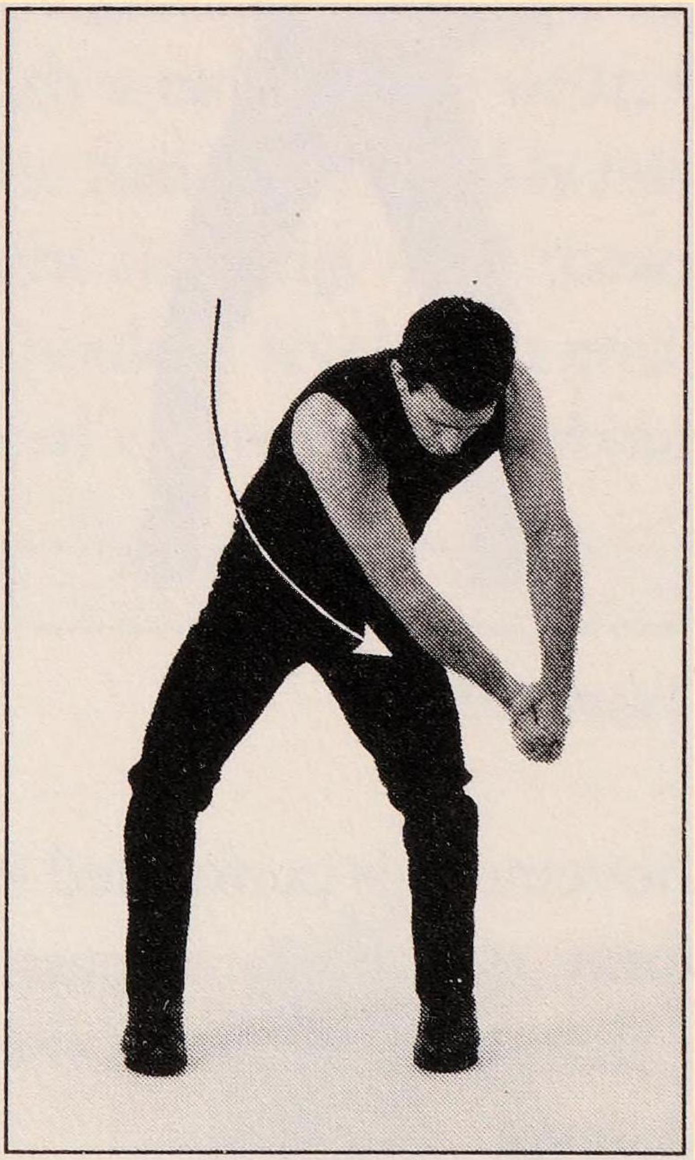

Figure 457

The same movement is repeated starting from the left.

### 28. The Sledgehammer

With the left hand in the lead, the hands are clasped together in front of the stomach on the vertical line that divides the left and the right bodies. The palms are held vertical for an instant before the hands are brought to the right of the body and above the head to hang for another instant by the neck, as if holding a heavy sledgehammer. They move over the head in a deliberate and powerful swing (fig. 458) and are brought to bear on the spot from which they began to move, exactly as if the hands themselves were a heavy sledgehammer (fig. 459). The hands change positions, and the same movements are started on the left.

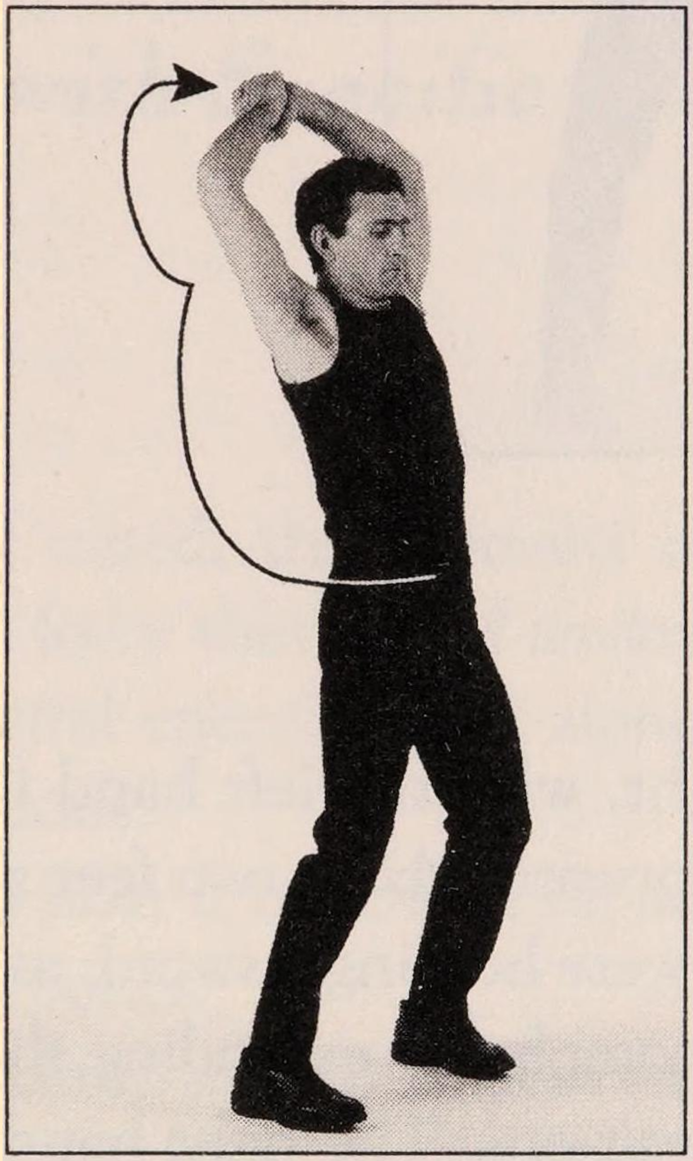

Figure 458

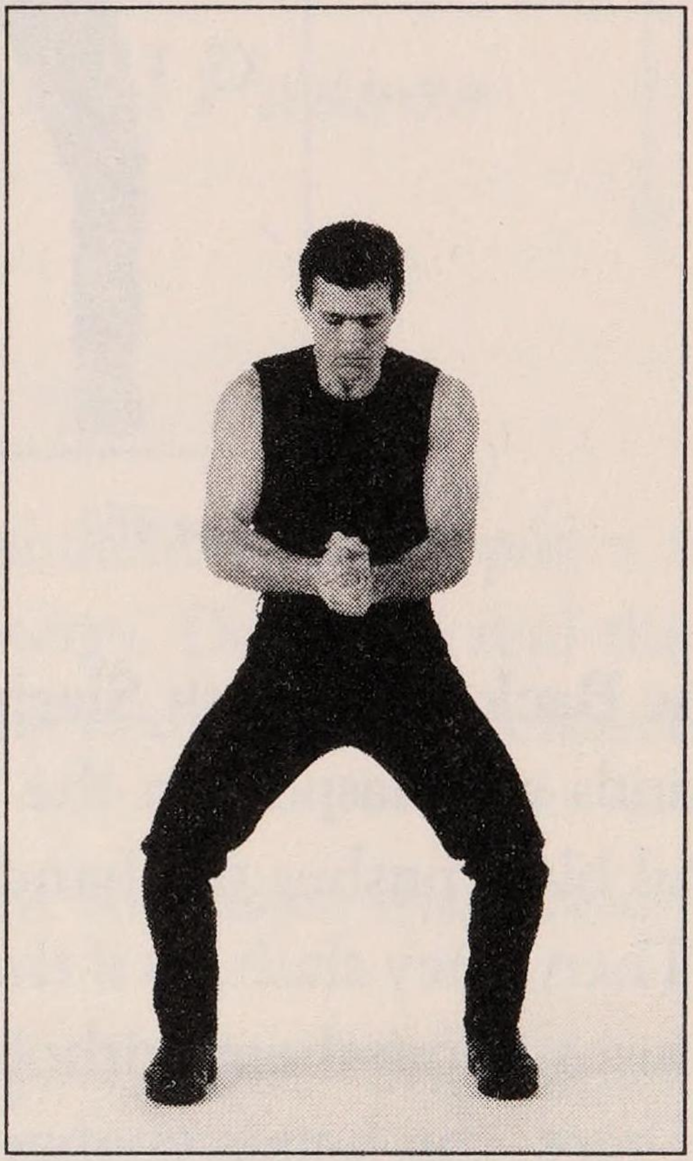

Figure 459

**29. Cutting a Circle of Energy**

The hands are clasped by the right shoulder to begin this magical pass (fig. 460). Then they are pushed forward as far as the right arm can go without fully extending the elbow. From there, the clasped hands cut a circle the width of the body from right to left, as if they were indeed holding a cutting instrument. In order to perform this movement, the left, leading hand, which is on top, must reverse positions when it reaches the turn of the circle on the left; with the hands still clasped, they flip at the turn of the circle so that the right hand takes the lead by being on top (fig. 461) and finishes drawing the circle.

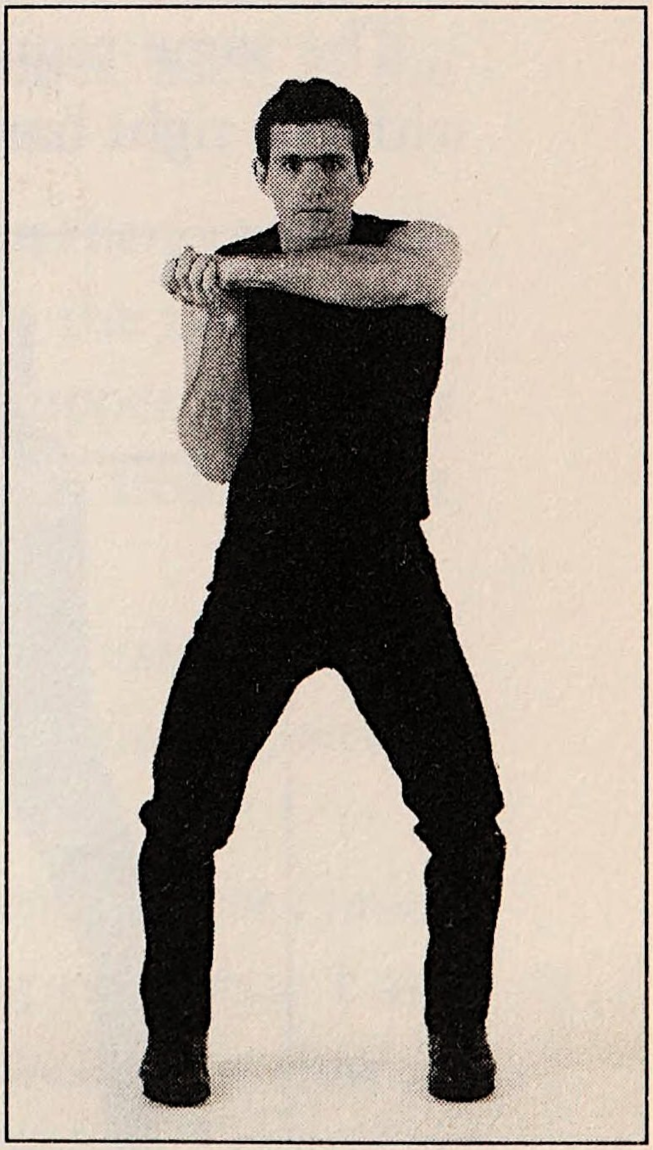

Figure 460

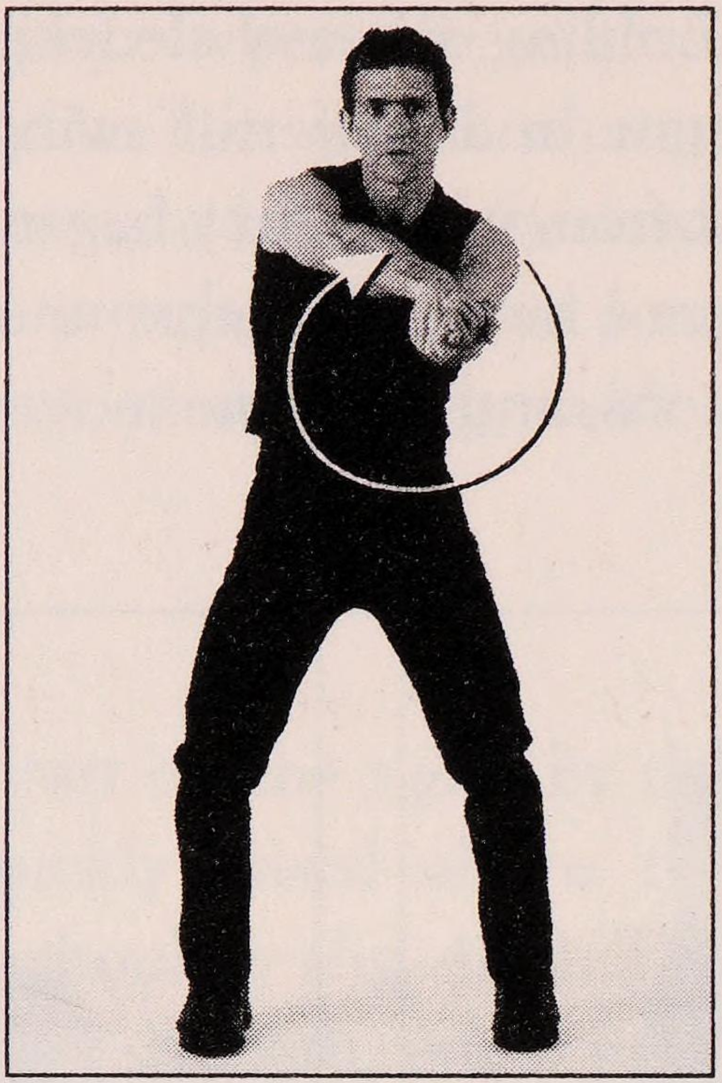

Figure 461

The same sequence of movements is performed, starting on the left, with the right hand in the lead.

### 30. The Back-and-Forth Slash

The hands are clasped on the right, with the left hand in the lead. A powerful blow pushes the hands forward, about two feet away from the chest. Then, they slash, as if they were holding a sword, as far to the left as the arms allow them without completely extending the elbows (fig. 462). There, the hands change positions. The right hand becomes the leading hand on top and a counterslash is performed, which takes the clasped hands all the way to a point on the right side, a few inches to the right of where this magical pass started (fig. 463).

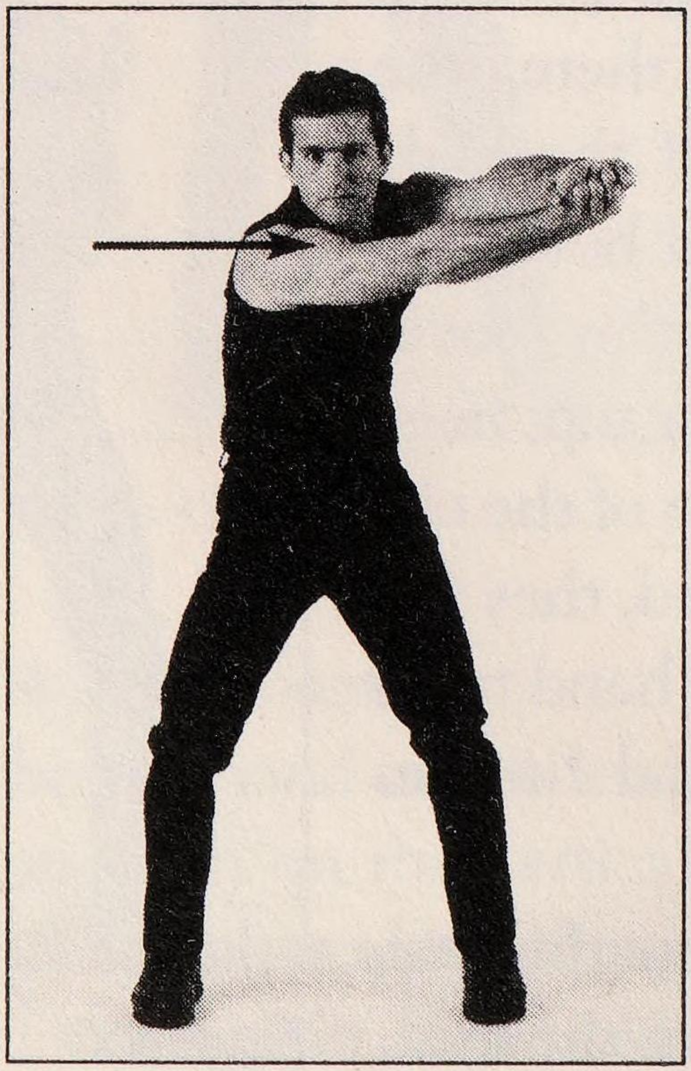

Figure 462

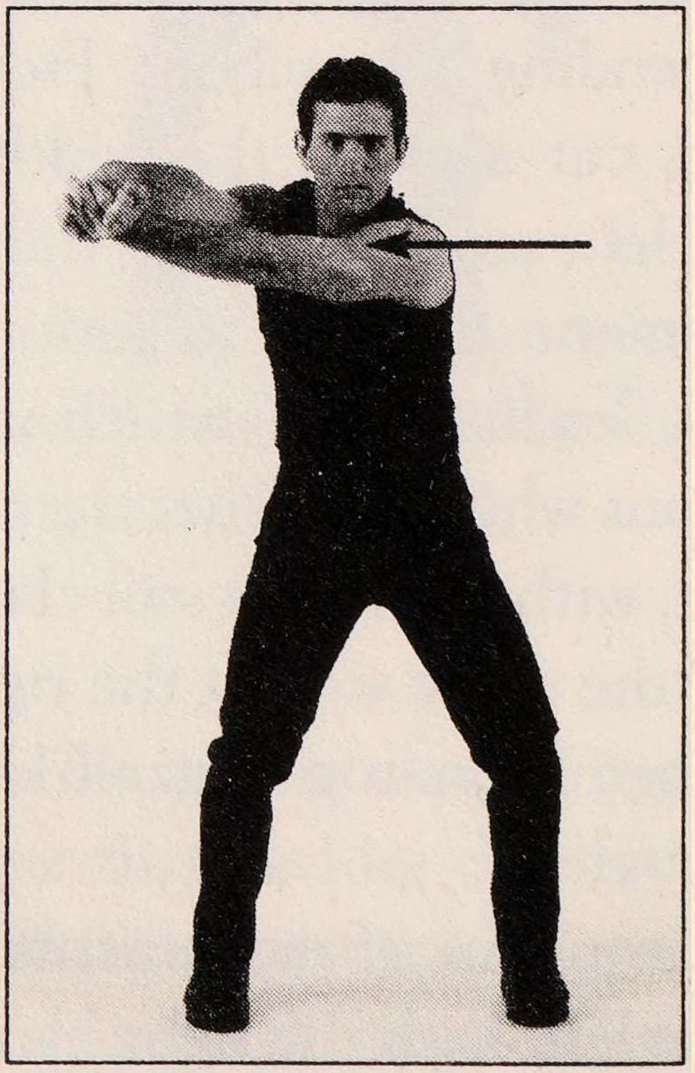

Figure 463

The same sequence of movements is repeated, starting on the left, with the right hand in the lead.

## The Sixth Series: Devices Used in Conjunction with Specific *Magical Passes*

As previously stated, the shamans of ancient Mexico put a special emphasis on a force they called tendon energy. Don Juan said that they asserted that vital energy moves along the body via an exclusive track formed by tendons.

I asked don Juan if by tendon he meant the tissue that attaches the muscles to the bones.

"I am at a loss to explain tendon energy," he said. "I'm following the easy path of usage. I was taught that it's called tendon energy. If I don't have to be specific about it, you understand what tendon energy is, don't you?"

"In a vague sense, I think I do, don Juan," I said. "What confuses me is that you use the word tendon where there are no bones, such as the abdomen."

"The old sorcerers," he said, "gave the name of tendon energy to a current of energy that moves along the deep muscles from the neck down to the chest and arms, and the spine. It cuts across the upper and lower abdomen from the edge of the rib cage to the groin, and from there it goes to the toes."

"Doesn't this current include the head, don Juan?" I asked, bewildered. As a Western man, I expected that anything of this sort would have originated in the brain.

"No," he said emphatically, "it doesn't include the head. What comes from the head is a different kind of energetic current; not what I am talking about. One of the formidable attainments of sorcerers is that in the end, they push out whatever exists in the center of energy located at the top of the head, and then they anchor the tendon energy of the rest of their bodies there. But that is a paragon of success. At the moment, what we have at hand, as in your case, is the average situation of tendon energy beginning at the neck at the place where it joins the head. In some cases tendon energy goes up to a point below the cheekbones, but never higher than that point.

"This energy," he went on, "which I call tendon energy for lack of a better name, is a dire necessity in the lives of those who travel in infinity, or want to travel in it."

Don Juan said that the traditional beginning in the utilization of tendon energy was the use of some simple devices which were employed by the shamans of ancient Mexico in two ways. One was to create a vibratory effect on specific centers of tendon energy, and the other was to create a pressure effect on the same centers. He explained that those shamans considered the vibratory effect to be the agent for loosening the energy which has become stagnant. The second effect, the pressure effect, was thought to be the agent that disperses the energy.

What seems to be a cognitive contradiction for modern man - that vibration would loosen anything that was stuck, and that pressure would disperse it - was deeply emphasized by don Juan Matus, who taught his disciples that what appears to be natural to us in terms of our cognition in the world is not at all natural in terms of the flow of energy. He said that in the world of everyday life, human beings would crack something with a blow, or by applying pressure, and disperse it by making it vibrate. However, energy which had become lodged in a tendon center had to be rendered fluid through vibration, and then it had to be pressed, so that it would continue flowing. Don Juan Matus was horrified at the idea of directly pressing points of energy in the body without the preliminary vibration. His contention was that energy that was stuck would get even more inert if pressure were applied to it.

Don Juan started off his disciples with two basic devices. He explained that the shamans of ancient times used to search for a pair of round pebbles or dry round seed pods, and use them as vibratory and pressure devices to aid in manipulating the flow of energy in the body, which they believed becomes periodically stuck along the tendon track.

However, the round pebbles that shaman practitioners normally used were definitely too hard, and the seed pods too fragile. Other objects that those shamans searched for avidly were flat rocks the size of the hand or pieces of heavy wood, in order to place them on specific areas of tendon energy on their abdomens while they were lying flat on their backs. The first area is just below the navel; another is right on top of the navel, and another yet, on the area of the solar plexus. The problem with using rocks or other objects is that they have to be heated or cooled to approximate the temperature of the body, and besides, these objects are usually too stiff, and they slide and move around.

*Tensegrity* practitioners have found a much better equivalent to the devices of the shamans of ancient Mexico: a pair of round balls and a small, flat, circular leather weight. The balls are the same size as the ones used by those shamans, but they are not fragile at all; they are made of a mixture of Teflon reinforced by a ceramic compound. This mixture gives the balls a weight, a hardness, and a smoothness which are thoroughly congruous with the purpose of the *magical passes*.

The other device, the leather weight, has been found to be an ideal device for creating a steady pressure on centers of tendon energy. Unlike rocks, it is pliable enough to adapt itself to the contours of the body. It's leather cover makes it possible to be applied directly to the body without needing to be warmed or cooled. However, it's most remarkable feature is it's weight. It is light enough not to cause any discomfort, and yet heavy enough to aid some specific *magical passes* that foster inner silence by pressing centers on the abdomen. Don Juan Matus said that a weight placed on any of the three areas mentioned above engages the totality of one's energy fields, which means a momentary shutting off of the internal dialogue: the first step toward inner silence.

The modern devices used in conjunction with specific *magical passes* are divided by their very nature into two categories.

## Sixth Series: First Category

This first category of *magical passes* that use the help of a device consists of sixteen *magical passes* aided by the Teflon balls. Eight of these *magical passes* are performed on the left arm and wrist, and eight on the points of the liver and gallbladder, the pancreas and spleen, the bridge of the nose, the temples, and the crown of the head. The sorcerers of ancient Mexico considered the first eight *magical passes* to be the first step toward the liberation of the left body from the unwarranted dominion of the right body.

1. The first movement pertains to the outer side of the main tendon of the biceps of the left arm. A ball is applied to that hollow spot and made to vibrate by moving it back and forth with a slight pressure (figs. 464, 465).

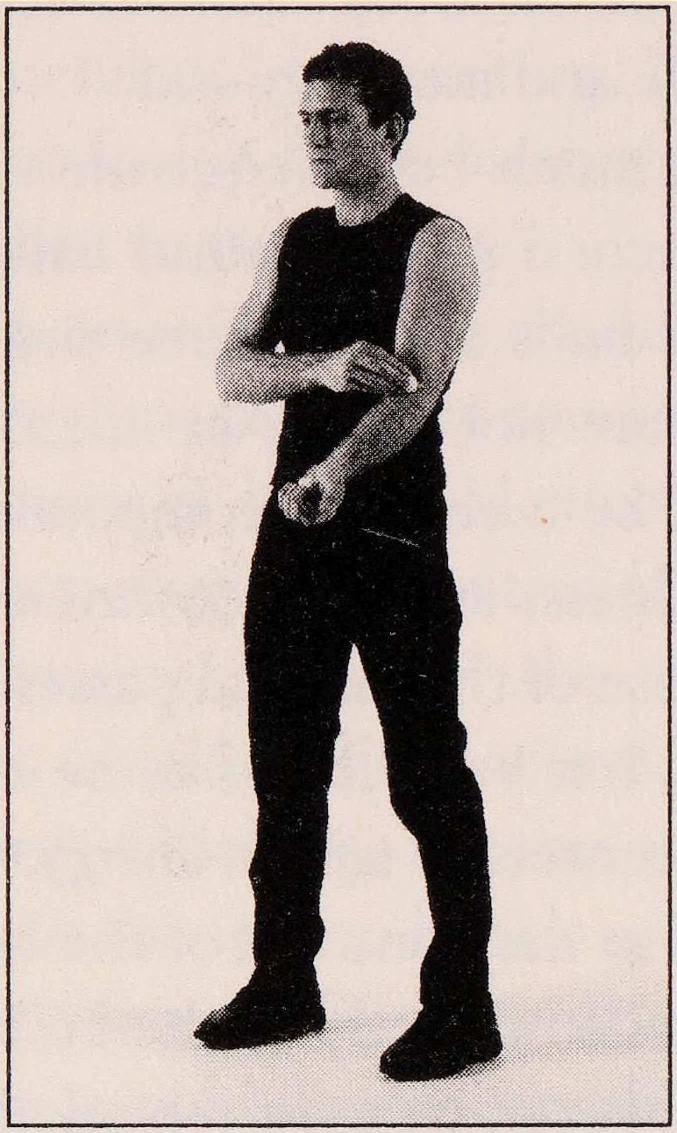

Figure 464

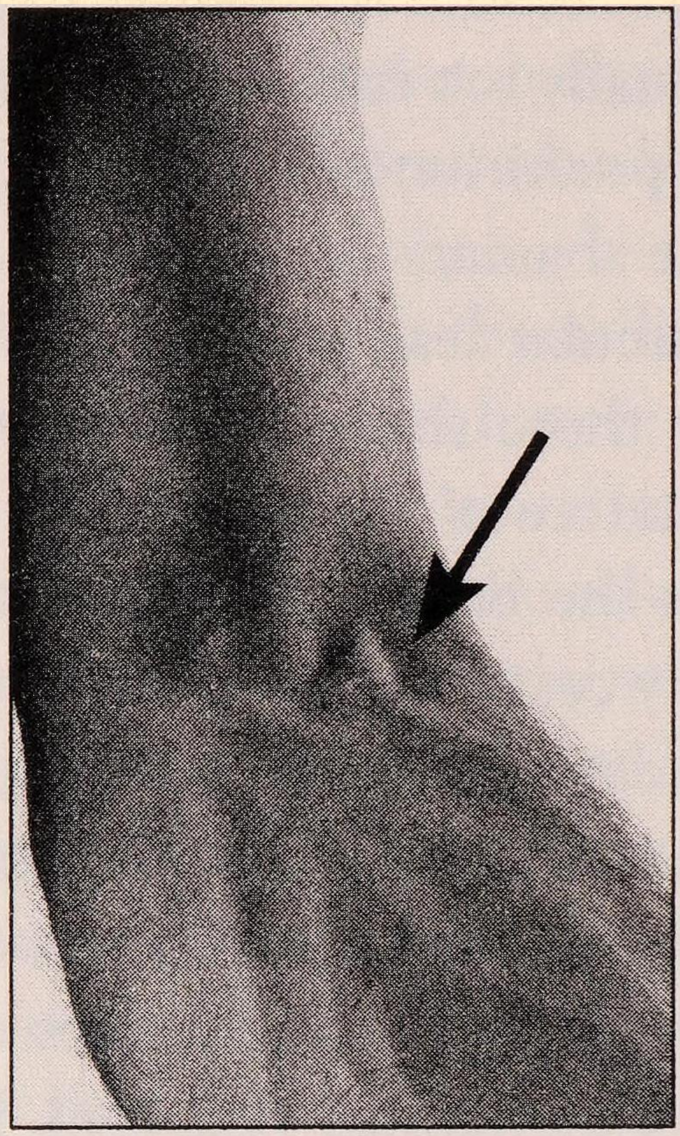

Figure 465

2. In the second movement, a ball is held in the hollow palm of the right hand, with the thumb holding it securely (fig. 466). A firm but light pressure is applied to the ball, which is made to rub from the left wrist to a point one hand's width away from the wrist (fig. 467). The ball is rubbed back and forth in the canal created by the tendons of the wrist (fig. 468).

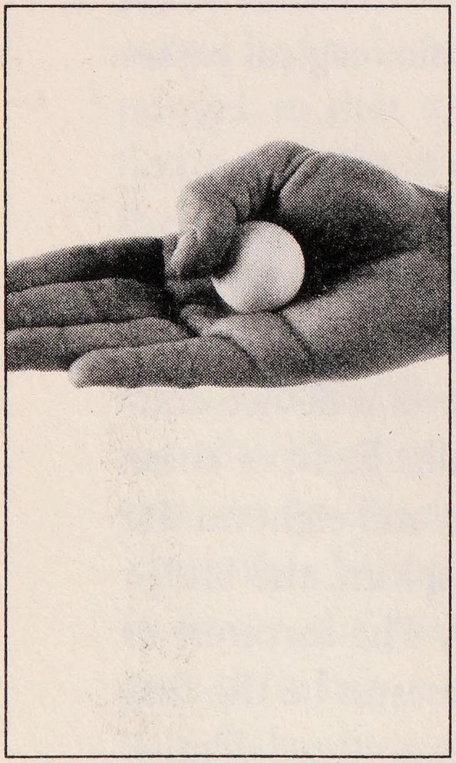

Figure 466

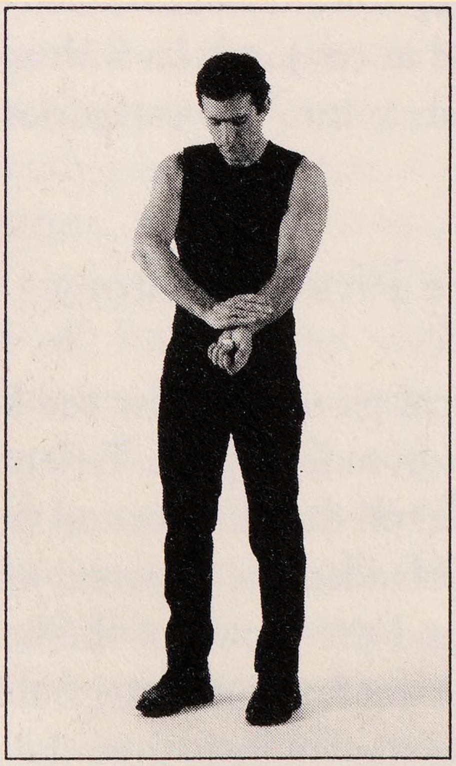

Figure 467

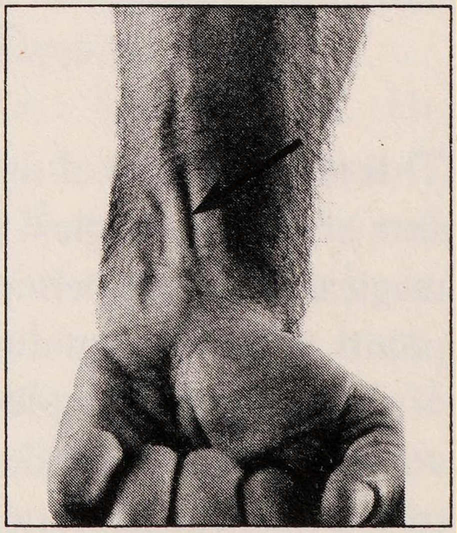

Figure 468

3. The ball is lightly pressed at a point on the left forearm a hand's width away from the wrist (figs. 469, 470).

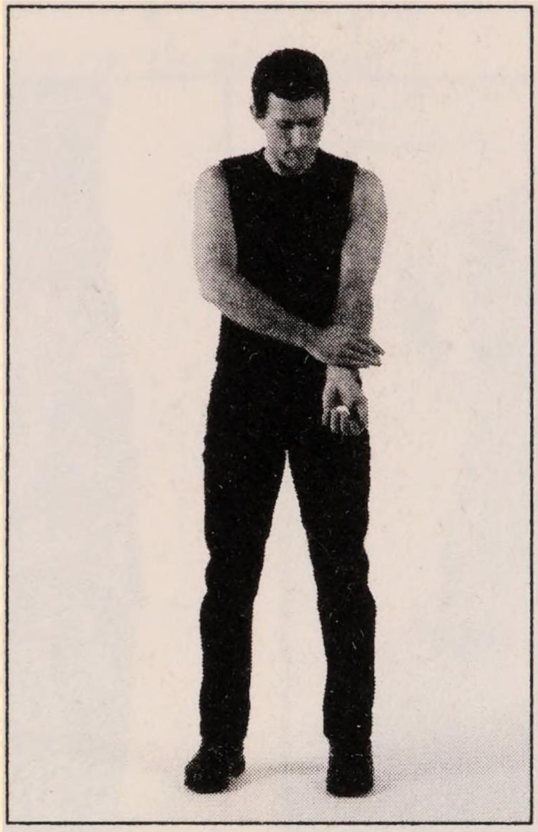

Figure 469

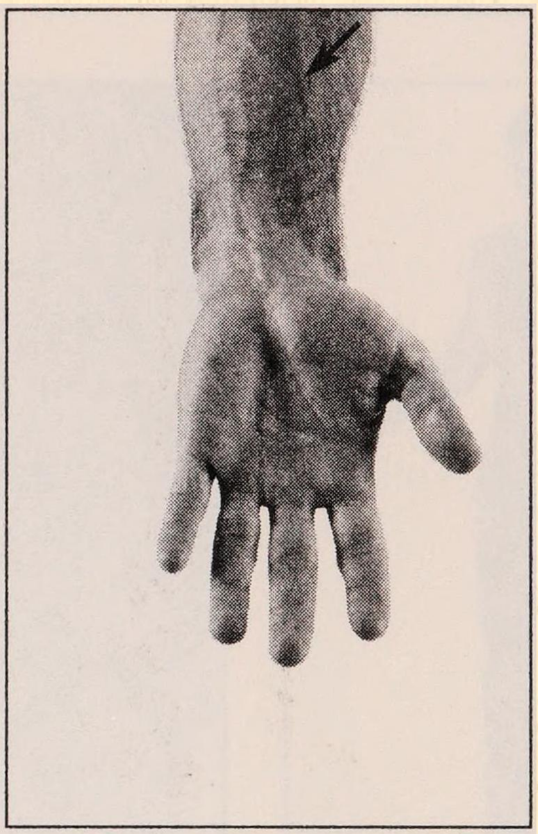

Figure 470

4. A moderate pressure is applied at the wrist of the left arm with the index finger of the right hand on a spot next to the head of the forearm bone (fig. 471). The right thumb anchors the hand on the inside of the wrist (fig. 472) and moves the hand back and forth (figs. 473, 474).

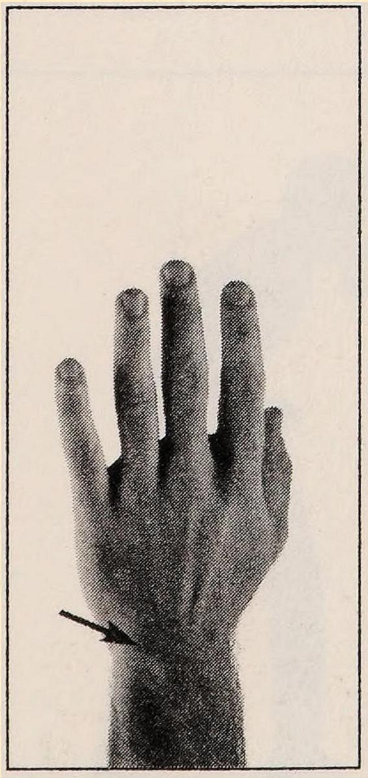

Figure 471

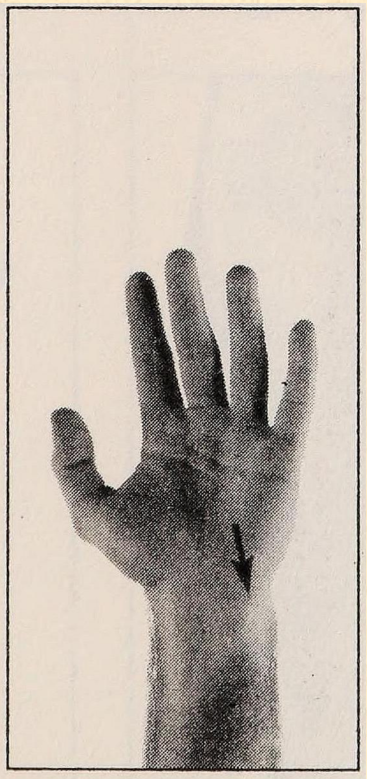

Figure 472

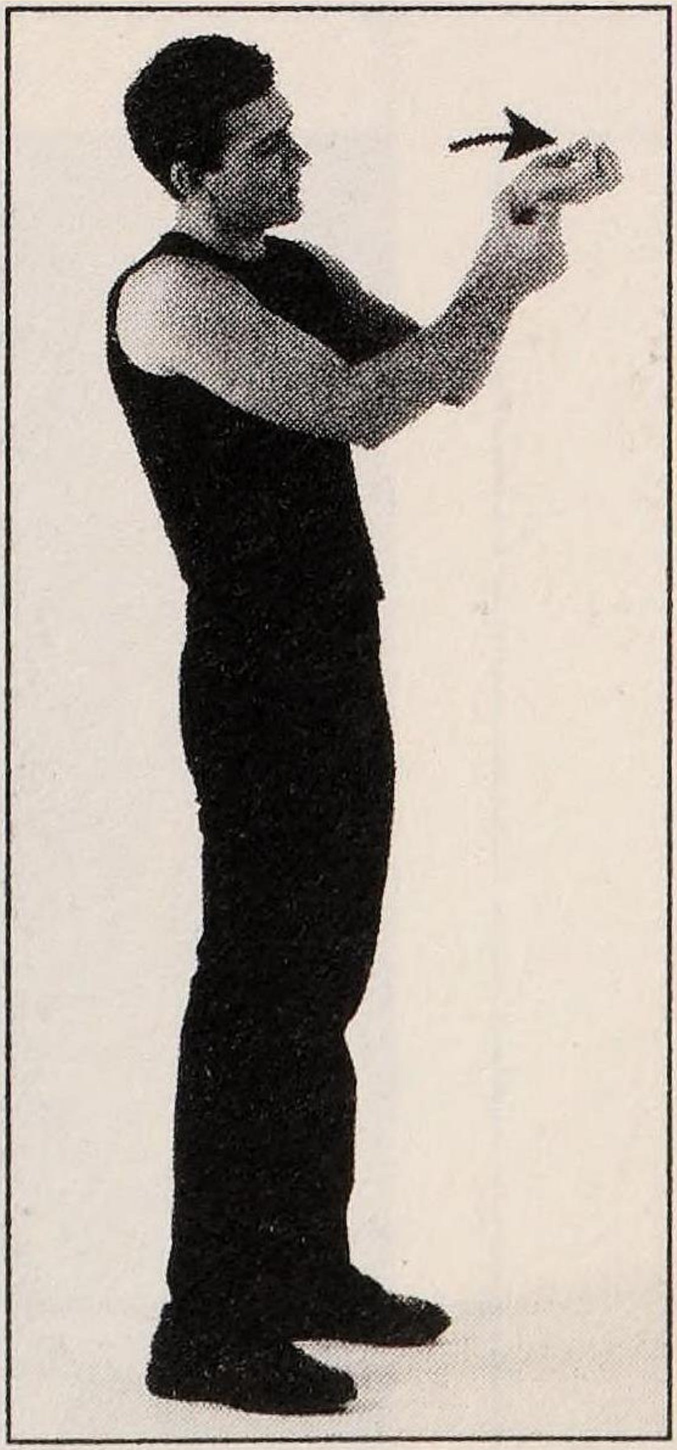

Figure 473

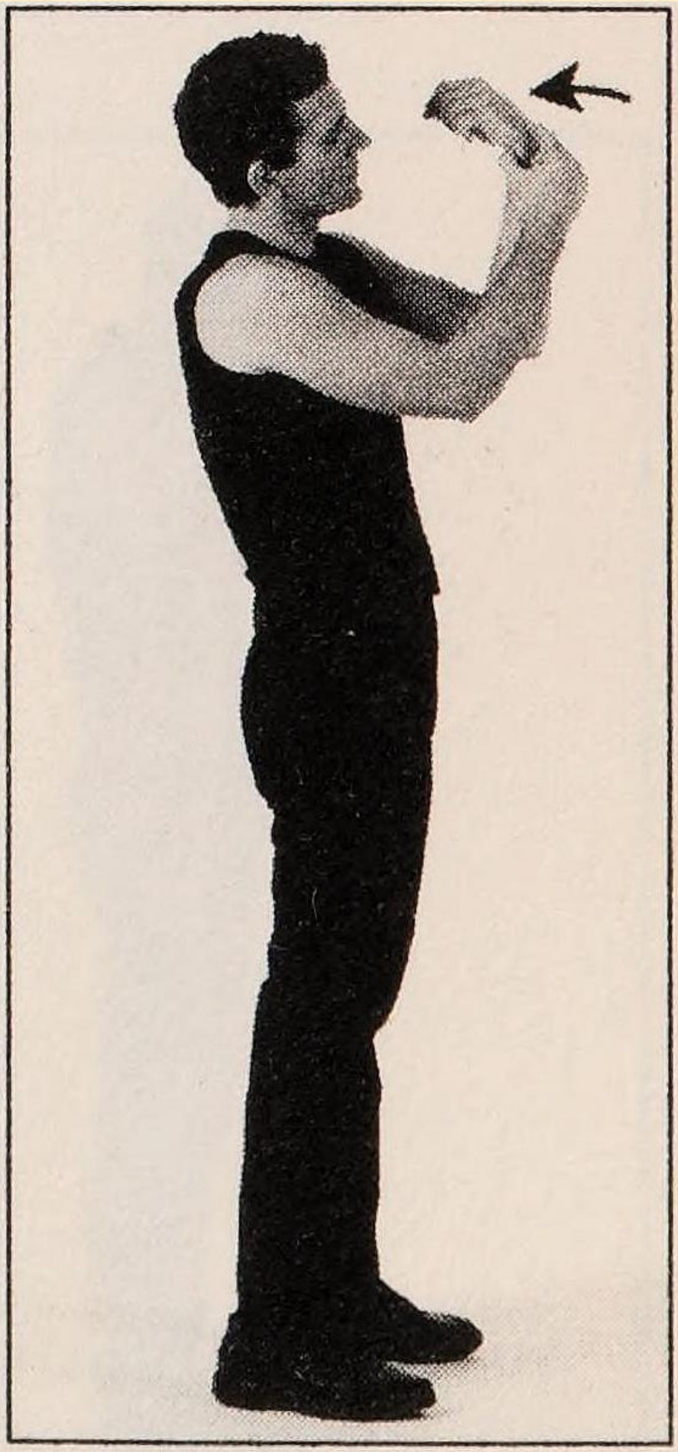

Figure 474

5. The ball is applied to the inner side of the tendon of the left biceps, and it is made to vibrate with a slight pressure (figs. 475, 476).

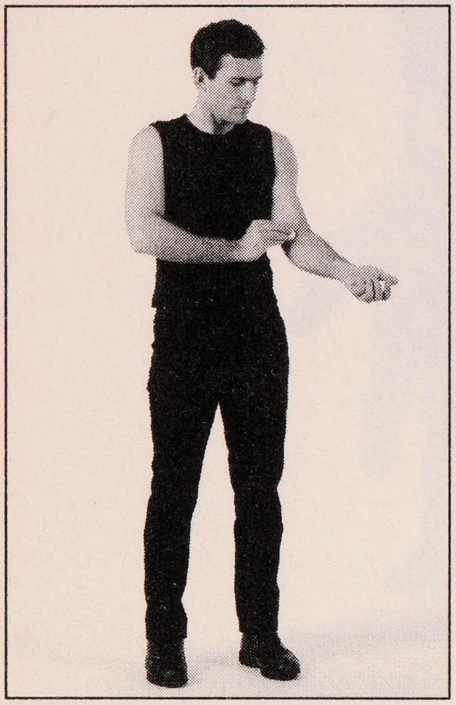
Figure 475

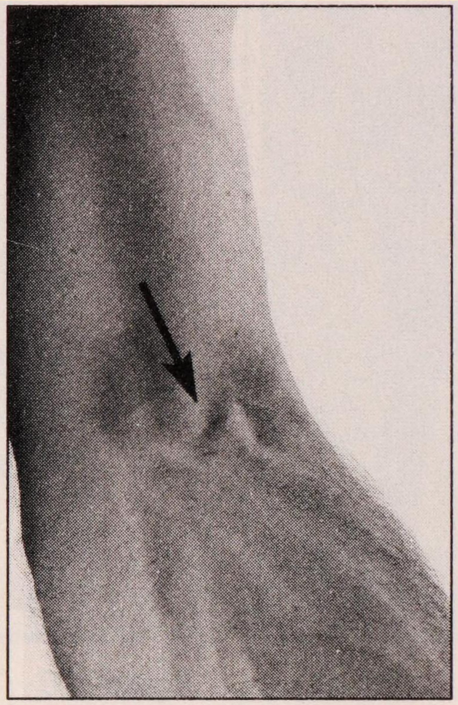
Figure 476

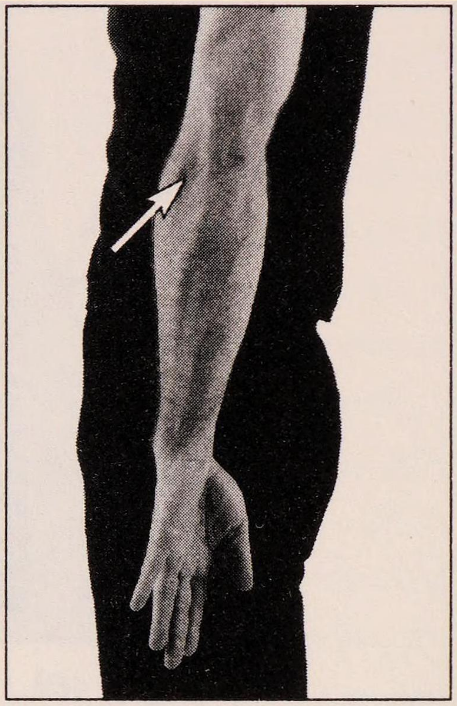
Figure 477

6. A vibration is applied to the hollow spot at the back of the elbow to the left of the elbow proper. The palm of the left hand is twisted and turned outward to allow maximum opening of that area (fig. 477). The ball is rubbed there.

7. Moderate pressure is applied to a spot in the middle of the upper left arm, on the hollow spot where the triceps joins the bone (figs. 478, 479).

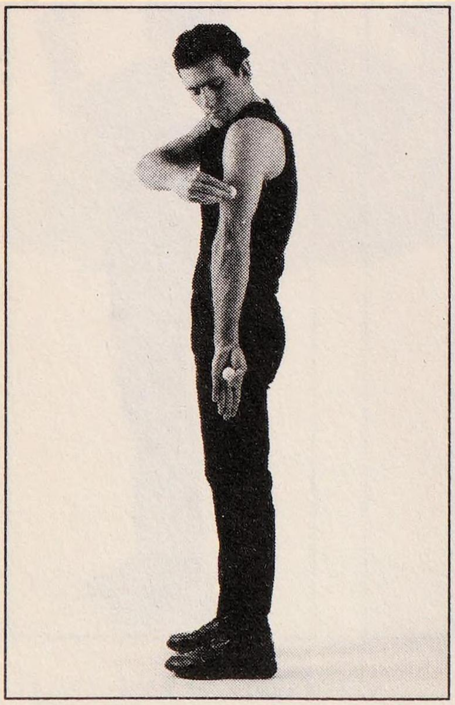
Figure 478

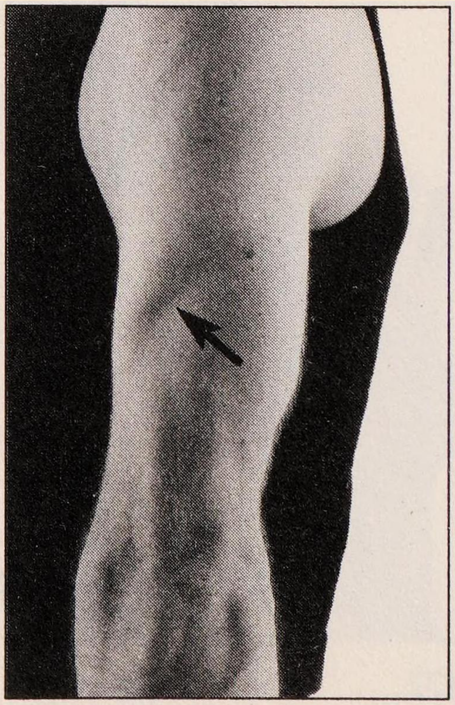
Figure 479

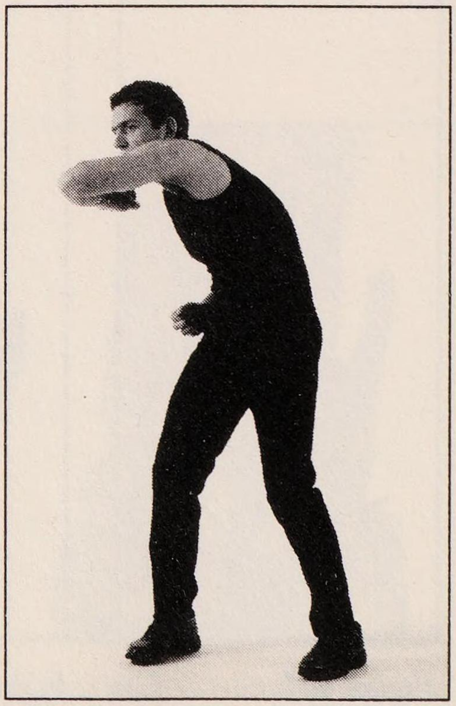
Figure 480

8. The left elbow is bent sharply and is rolled forward, engaging the left shoulder blade, to disperse tendon energy to the whole left body (fig. 480).

The remaining eight *magical passes* of this first category pertain to the upper body and three centers of energy: the gallbladder and liver, the pancreas and spleen, and the head.

9. The balls are held with both hands, pressed and pushed deeply upward, but with only slight pressure, just under, the sides of the rib cage by the liver and the pancreas (fig. 481). Then they are made to vibrate firmly but lightly on those areas.

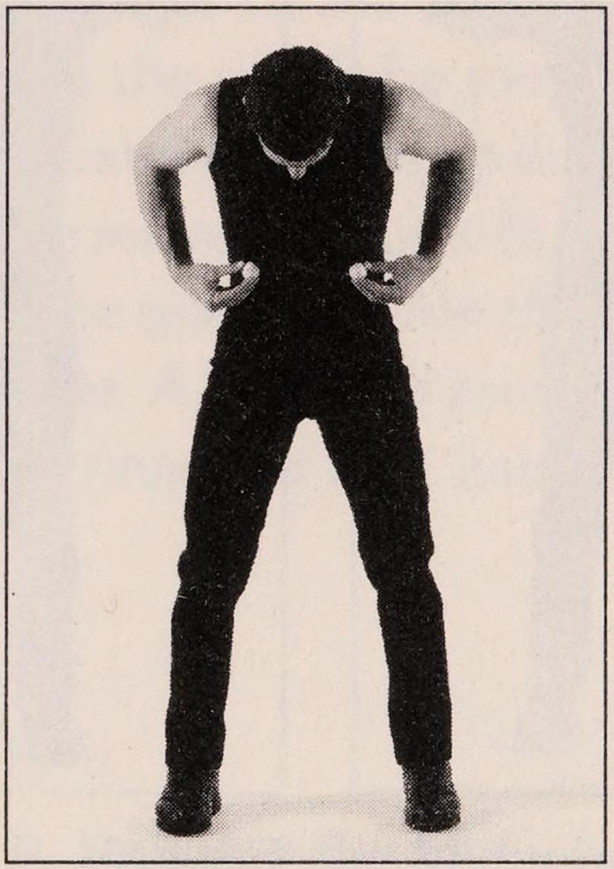

Figure 481

10. The ball held with the right hand is applied then with a slight pressure to the area just above the sinus, between the eyebrows, and is made to vibrate there (fig. 482).

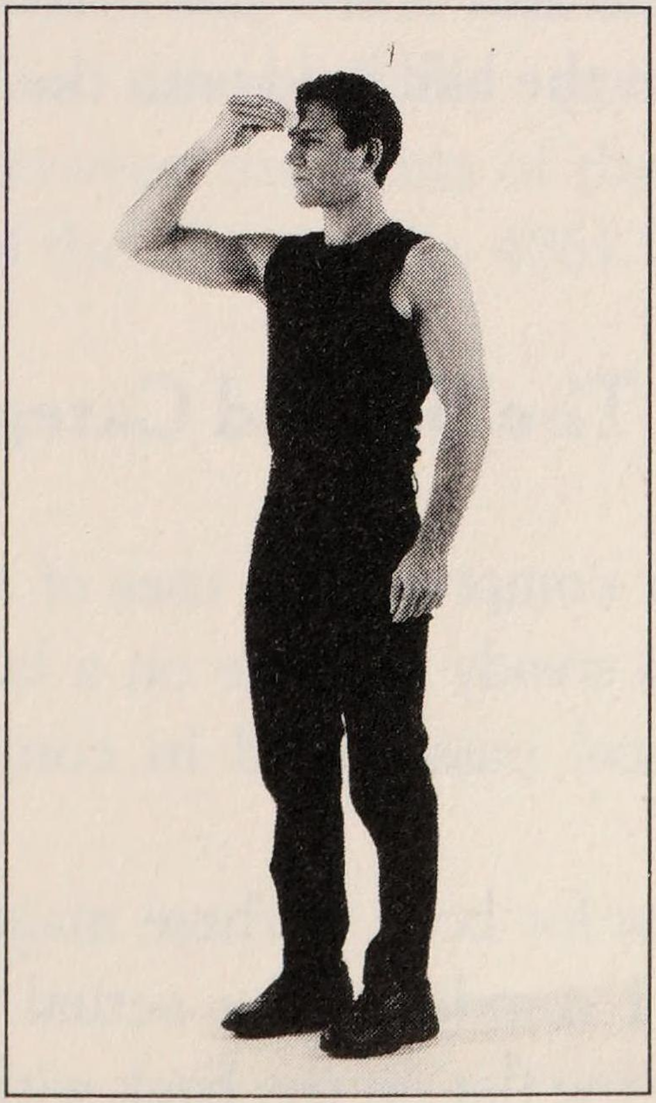

Figure 482

11. Both balls are applied to the temples and made to vibrate lightly (fig. 483).

12. The ball held with the right hand is applied to the very top of the head and is made to vibrate there (fig. 484).

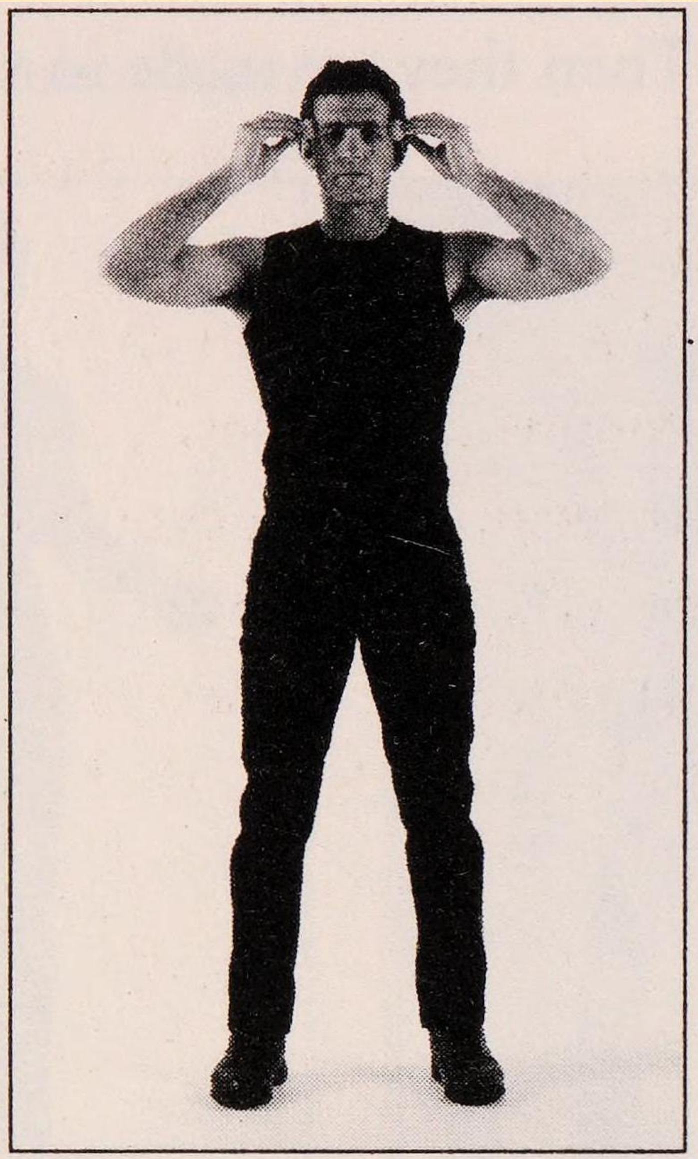

Figure 483

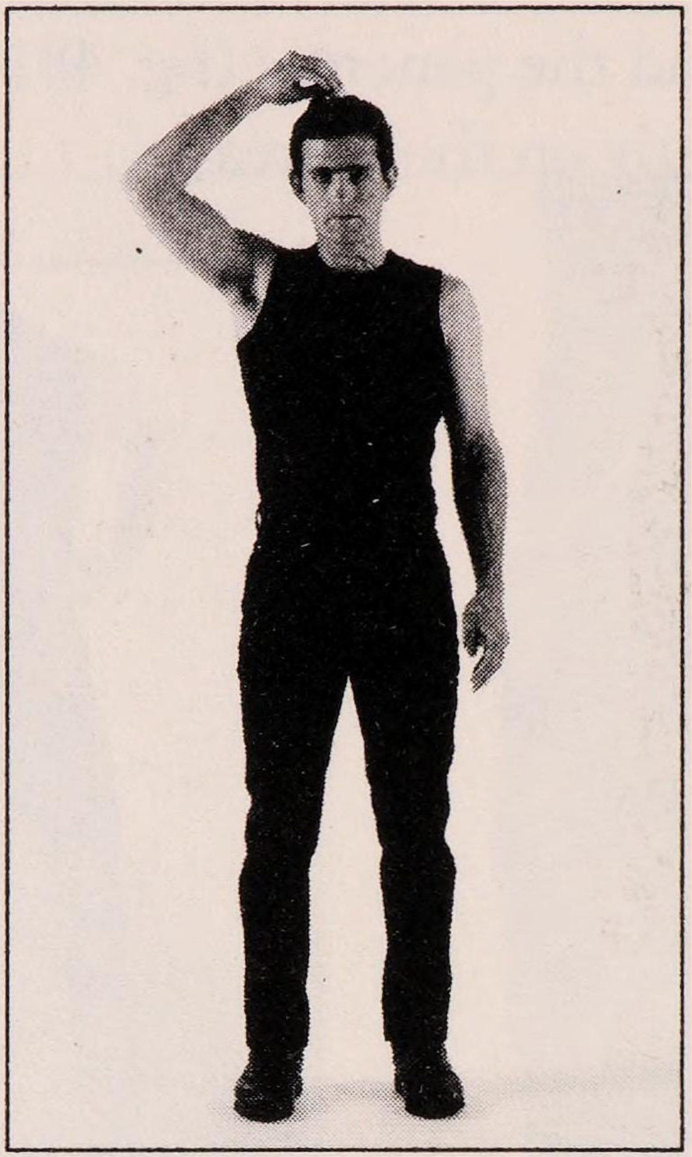

Figure 484

13-16. The same sequence is repeated, but instead of being made to vibrate, the balls are pressed against those centers of energy. During this second set of movements, both balls are pressed on the sides of the rib cage, by the liver and the pancreas. Then the ball held with the left hand is pressed on the area above the sinus. Both balls are pressed on the temples, and then the ball held with the left hand is pressed on the top of the head.

## Sixth Series: Second Category

The second category comprises the uses of the leather weight for the purpose of creating a steady pressure on a larger area of tendon energy. There are two *magical passes* used in conjunction with the leather weight.

The hand positions for both of these *magical passes* are shown here with the practitioner standing. The actual practice of these *magical passes* is performed lying flat on the back with the leather weight pressing right above the navel or on either of the other two choice spots on the abdomen: below the navel, or above it by the solar plexus, if placing the weight on them is more comfortable.

### 17. The Five Points of Silence Around the Chest

The little fingers of both hands are placed on the edges of the rib cage about two inches from the tip of the sternum, and the thumbs are extended as far up on the chest as possible. The remaining three fingers fall evenly spread in the space between the thumb and the little finger. A vibratory pressure is exerted with all five fingers of each hand (fig. 485).

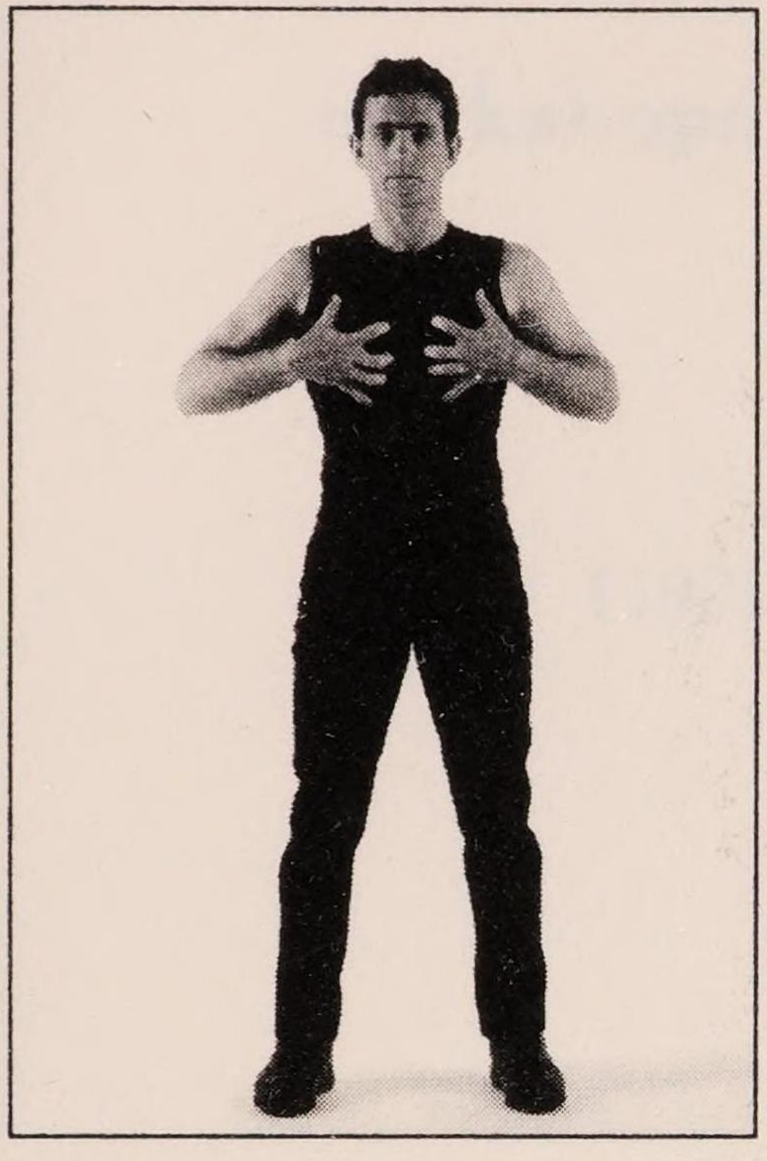

Figure 485

### 18. Pressing the Midpoint Between the Rib Cage and the Crest of the Hipbone

The little finger and the fourth finger of each hand rest on the crests of the hips while the thumbs rest on the lower edge of the rib cage on each side. Slight pressure is applied on those two points. The index and middle fingers automatically press points midway between the crests of the hips and the edge of the rib cage (fig. 486).

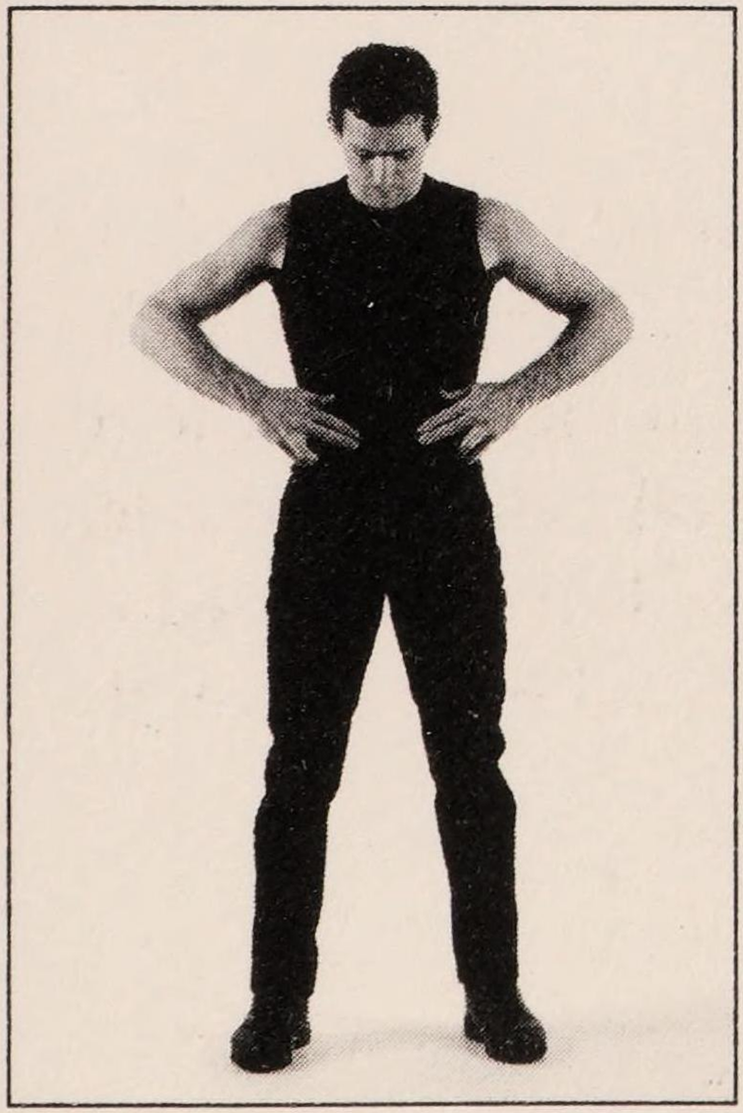

Figure 486

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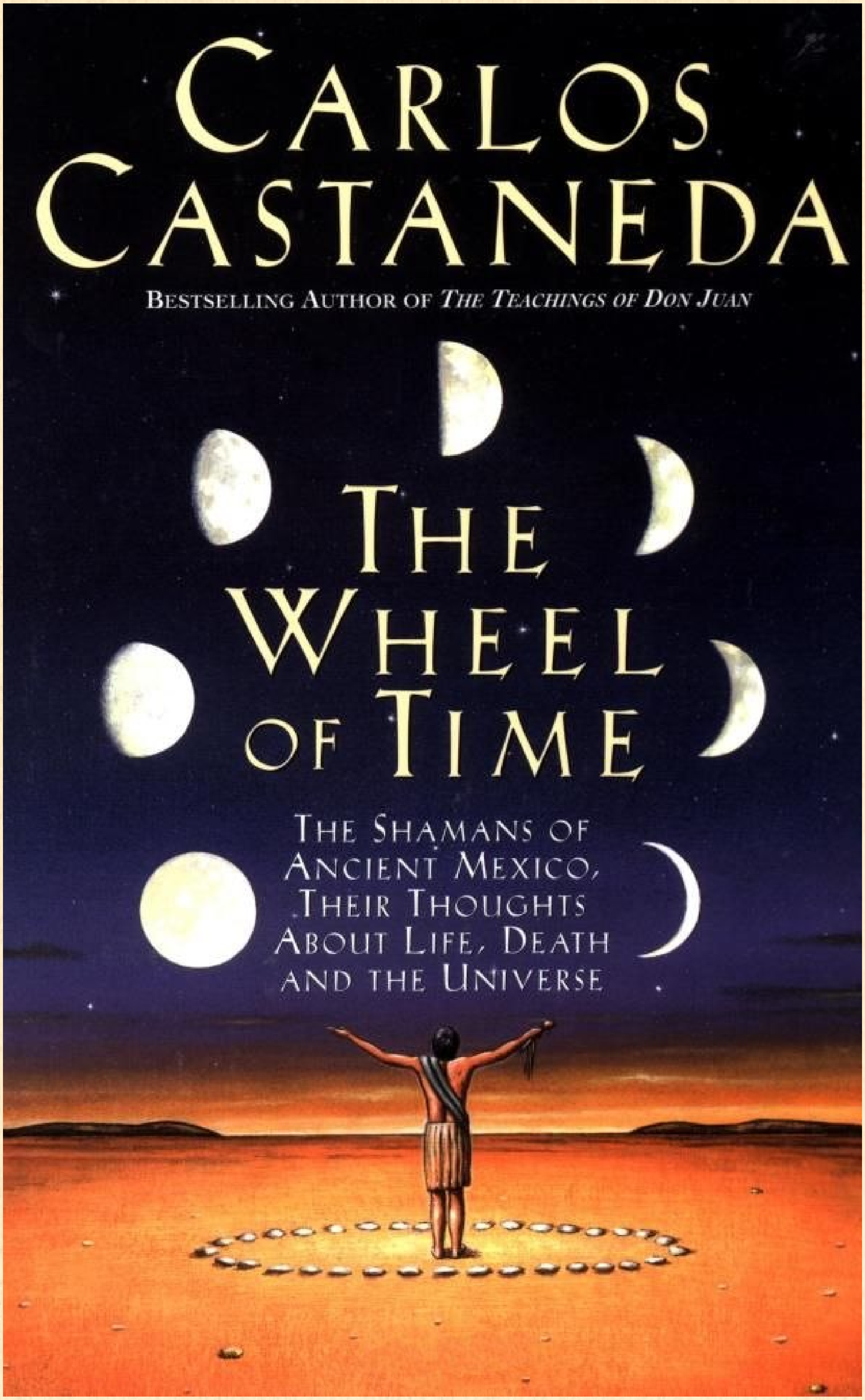
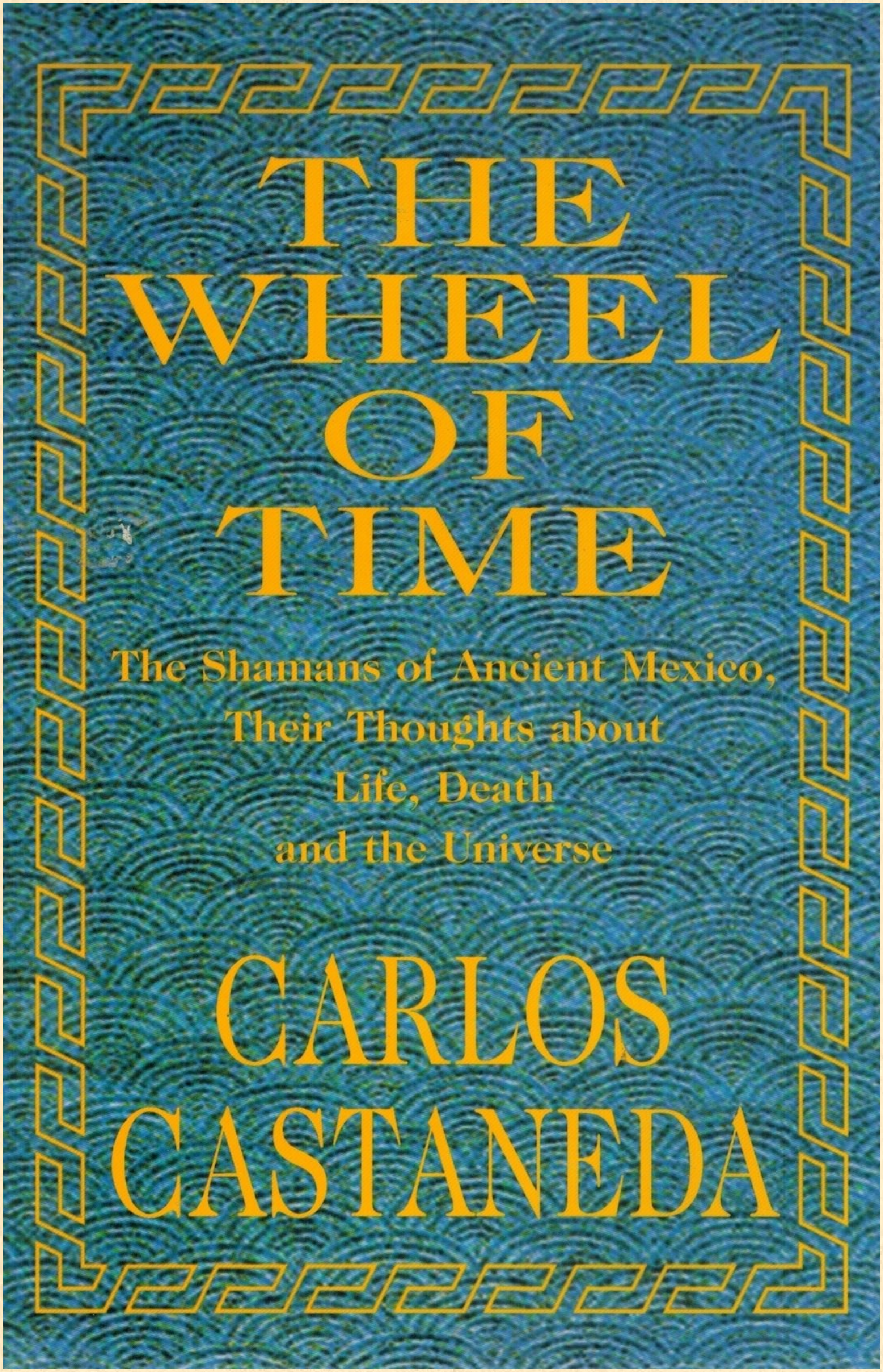
# 13 - THE WHEEL OF TIME: THE SHAMANS OF ANCIENT MEXICO, THEIR THOUGHTS ABOUT LIFE, DEATH AND THE UNIVERSE

©1998 (June 1) - Carlos Castaneda. Commentary on, and quotations from, the first eight books.


CARLOS CASTANEDA
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE TEACHINGS OF DON JUAN
THE WHEEL OF TIME
THE SHAMANS OF ANCIENT MEXICO, THEIR THOUGHTS ABOUT LIFE, DEATH AND THE UNIVERSE



THE WHEEL OF TIME

The Shamans of Ancient Mexico,
Their Thoughts about
Life, Death
and the Universe

CARLOS CASTANEDA

# Book 13 – THE WHEEL OF TIME

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(*clickable/tappable*)

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## Release Statement:

The language of some of the actual quotes included in *The Wheel of Time*, and not the commentary, has been altered here to a more gender neutral presentation (**when appropriate**). Example: he changed to they, him to them etc....BUT WITHOUT ALTERING THE INTENT OF THE PASSAGES.

This was done both because the books came out in the 1960's-1980's when, gender considerations were not yet important enough to use such pronouns, and because the use of language in sorcery education is constantly evolving to reflect the times in which it is being presented.

It also fits with Castaneda's use of shamanism in this text and in the previous one, as opposed to sorcery, which is more of a 'late 20th century' term;' as is being less overtly (and needlessly) masculine in terminology and phrasing,

The quotes from the first 8 books published, with the original phrasing, are already included elsewhere in this volume, in their entirety; so there's nothing to be lost by doing this here, and **only here, in this specific text.** It was a project the previous scanner of this OCR source text began, but did not finish, so the compiler of this collection chose to continue with (and complete) it during the review/correction process.

# Introduction

This series of specially selected quotations was gathered from the first eight books that I wrote about the world of the shamans of ancient Mexico. The quotations were taken directly from the explanations given to me as an anthropologist by my teacher and mentor don Juan Matus, a Yaqui Indian shaman from Mexico. He belonged to a lineage of shamans that traced it's origins all the way back to the shamans who lived in Mexico in ancient times.

In the most effective manner he could afford, don Juan Matus ushered me into his World, which was, naturally, the world of those shamans of antiquity. Don Juan was, therefore, in a key position. He knew about the existence of another realm of reality; a realm which was neither illusory, nor the product of outbursts of fantasy. For don Juan and the rest of his shaman companions— there were fifteen of them— the world of the shamans of antiquity was as real and as pragmatic as anything could be.

This work started as a very simple attempt to collect a series of vignettes, sayings, and ideas from the lore of those shamans that would be interesting to read and think about. But once the work was in progress, an unforeseeable twist of direction took place: I realized that the quotations by themselves were imbued with an extraordinary impetus. [* *impetus- a force that moves something along*] They revealed a covert train of thought that had never been evident to me before. They were pointing out the direction that don Juan's explanations had taken over the thirteen years in which he guided me as an apprentice.

Better than any type of conceptualization, the quotations revealed an unsuspected and unwavering line of action that don Juan had followed in order to promote and facilitate my entrance into his world. It became something beyond a speculation to me that if don Juan had followed that line, this must have also been the way in which his own teacher had propelled him into the world of shamans.

Don Juan Matus's line of action was his intentional attempt to pull me into what he said was another *cognitive system*. By *cognitive system*, he meant the standard definition of *cognition*: “the processes responsible for the awareness of everyday life; processes which include memory, experience, perception, and the expert use of any given syntax” [* *syntax- a systematic orderly arrangement*]. Don Juan's claim was that the shamans of ancient Mexico had indeed a different cognitive system than the average man's.

Following all the logic and reasoning available to me as a student of the social sciences, I had to reject his statement. I pointed out to don Juan time and time again that whatever he was claiming was preposterous. It was, to me, an intellectual aberration at best.

It took thirteen years of hard labor on his part and on mine to discombobulate [* *discombobulate- be confusing or perplexing to; cause to be unable to think clearly]* my trust in the normal system of cognition that makes the world around us comprehensible to us. This maneuver pushed me into a very strange state: a state of quasi-distrust in the otherwise implicit acceptance of the cognitive processes of our daily world.

After thirteen years of heavy onslaughts, I realized, against my very will, that don Juan Matus was indeed proceeding from another point of view. Therefore, the shamans of ancient Mexico must have had another system of cognition. To admit this burned my very being. I felt like a traitor. I felt as if I were voicing the most horrendous heresy.

When he felt that he had overcome my worst resistance, don Juan drove his point as far and as deep as he could into me, and I had to admit, without reservations, that in the world of shamans, shaman practitioners judged the world from points of view which were indescribable to our conceptualization devices. For instance, they perceived energy as it flowed freely in the universe, energy free from the bindings of socialization and syntax; pure vibratory energy. They called this act *seeing*.

Don Juan's prime objective was to help me to perceive energy as it flows in the universe. In the world of shamans, to perceive energy in such a manner is the first mandatory step toward a more engulfing, freer view of a different cognitive system. In order to elicit a *seeing* response in me, don Juan utilized other foreign units of cognition. One of the most important units, he called the *recapitulation*, which consisted of a systematic scrutiny of one's life, segment by segment; an examination made not in the light of criticism or finding flaw, but in the light of an effort to understand one's life, and to change it's course. Don Juan's claim was that once any practitioner has viewed his life in the detached manner that the recapitulation requires, there's no way to go back to the same life.

To *see* energy as it flows in the universe meant, to don Juan, the capacity to *see* a human being as a *luminous egg* or *luminous ball* of energy, and to be able to distinguish, in that luminous ball of energy, certain features shared by men in common, such as a point of brilliance in the already brilliant luminous ball of energy. The claim of shamans was that it was on that point of brilliance, which those shamans called the *assemblage point*, that perception was assembled. They could extend this thought logically to mean that it was on that point of brilliance that our cognition of the world was manufactured. Odd as it may seem, don Juan Matus was right in the sense that this is exactly what happens.

The perception of shamans, therefore, was subject to a different process than the perception of average men. Shamans claimed that perceiving energy directly led them to what they called energetic facts. By *energetic fact*, they meant a view obtained by *seeing energy* directly that led to conclusions that were final and irreducible. These facts couldn't be tampered with by speculation, or by trying to fit them into our standard system of interpretation.

Don Juan said that for the shamans of his lineage, it was an *energetic fact* that the world around us is defined by the processes of cognition, and those processes are not unalterable; they are learned, not givens. They are a matter of training, a matter of practicality and usage. This thought was extended further, to another *energetic fact*: the processes of standard cognition are the product of our upbringing, no more than that.

Don Juan Matus knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that whatever he was telling me about the cognitive system of the shamans of ancient Mexico was a reality. Don Juan was among other things, a *nagual,* which meant, for shaman practitioners, a natural leader; a person who was capable of viewing *energetic facts* without detriment to his well-being. He was, therefore, capacitated to lead his fellow men successfully into avenues of thought and perception impossible to describe.

Considering all the facts that don Juan had taught me about his cognitive world, I arrived at the conclusion, which was the conclusion that he himself shared, that the most important unit of such a world was 0the idea of *intent*. For the shamans of ancient Mexico, *Intent* was a force they could (perceive) when they *saw* energy as it flows in the universe. They considered it an all-pervasive force that intervened in every aspect of time and space. It was the impetus behind everything; but what was of inconceivable value to those shamans was that i*ntent*— a pure abstraction— was intimately attached to man. Man could always manipulate it. The shamans of ancient Mexico realized that the only way to affect this force was through impeccable behavior. Only the most disciplined practitioner could attempt this feat.

Another stupendous unit of that strange cognitive system was the shamans' understanding and usage of the concepts of time and space. For them, time and space were not the same phenomena that form part of our lives by virtue of being an integral part of our normal cognitive system. For the average man, the standard definition of *time* is "a nonspatial continuum in which events occur in apparently irreversible succession from the past through the present to the future." And *space* is defined as "the infinite extension of the three-dimensional field in which stars and galaxies exist; the universe."

For the shamans of ancient Mexico, time was something like a thought; a thought thought by something unrealizable in it's magnitude. The logical argument for them was that man, being part of that thought which was thought by forces inconceivable to his mentality, still retained a small percentage of that thought; a percentage which under certain circumstances of extraordinary discipline could be redeemed.

Space was, for those shamans, an abstract realm of activity. They called it *infinity*, and referred to it as the sum total of all the endeavors of living creatures. Space was, for them, more accessible, something almost down-to-earth. It was as if they had a bigger percentage in the abstract formulation of space. According to the versions given by don Juan, the shamans of ancient Mexico never regarded time and space as obscure abstracts the way we do. For them, both time and space, although incomprehensible in their formulations, were an integral part of man.

Those shamans had another cognitive unit called the *wheel of time*. The way they explained the *wheel of time* was to say that time was like a tunnel of infinite length and width, a tunnel with reflective furrows. Every furrow was infinite, and there were infinite numbers of them. Living creatures were compulsorily made, by the force of life, to gaze into one furrow. To gaze into one furrow alone meant to be trapped by it; to live that furrow.

A warrior's final aim is to focus, through an act of profound discipline, his unwavering attention on the *wheel of time* in order to make it turn. Warriors who have succeeded in turning the *wheel of time* can gaze into any furrow and draw from it whatever they desire. To be free from the spellbinding force of gazing into only one of those furrows means that warriors can look in either direction: as time retreats or as it advances on them.

Viewed in this manner, the *wheel of time* is an overpowering influence which reaches through the life of the warrior and beyond, as is the case with the quotations of this book. They seem to be strung together by a coil that has a life of it's own. That coil, explained by the cognition of shamans, is the *wheel of time*.

Under the impact of the *wheel of time*, the aim of this book became, then, something that had not been part of my original plan. The quotations became the ruling factor by themselves and in themselves, and the drive imposed on me by them was one of staying as close as I possibly could to the spirit in which the quotations were given. They were given in the spirit of frugality and ultimate directness.

Another thing that I tried unsuccessfully to do with the quotations was to organize them into a series of categories that would make reading them easier. However, the categorization of the quotations became untenable. [* *untenable- theories incapable of being defended or justified*] There was no way of setting arbitrary categories of meaning that suited me personally to something so amorphous and so vast as a total cognitive world.

The only thing that could be done was to follow the quotations, and let them create a sketch of the skeletal form of the thoughts and feelings that the shamans of ancient Mexico had about life, death, the universe, energy. They are reflections of how those shamans understood not only the universe, but the processes of living and coexisting in our world. And more important yet, they point out the possibility of handling two systems of cognition at once without any detriment to the self.

## Quotations from *The Teachings of Don Juan*

Power rests on the kind of knowledge that we hold. What is the sense of knowing useless things that will not prepare us for our unavoidable encounter with the unknown?

Nothing in this world is a gift. Whatever has to be learned must be learned the hard way.

We go to knowledge as we go to war: wide-awake, with fear, with respect, and with absolute assurance. Going to knowledge or going to war in any other manner is a mistake, and whoever makes it might never live to regret it.

When we have fulfilled all four of these requisites— to be wide awake, to have fear, respect, and absolute assurance— there are no mistakes for which we will have to account; under such conditions our actions lose the blundering quality of the acts of a fool. If we fail or suffer a defeat, we will have lost only a battle, and there will be no pitiful regrets over that.

Dwelling upon the self too much produces a terrible fatigue. A person in that position is deaf and blind to everything else, and the fatigue itself makes us cease to see the marvels all around us.

Every time we set ourselves to learn, we have to labor as hard as anyone can, and the limits of our learning will be determined by our nature. Therefore, there is no point in talking about knowledge. Fear of knowledge is natural; all of us experience it, and there is nothing we can do to avoid it. Yet no matter how frightening learning is, it is more terrible to think of being without knowledge.

To be angry at people means that one considers their acts to be important. It is imperative to cease to feel that way. The acts of others cannot be important enough to offset our only viable alternative: our unavoidable encounter with infinity.

Anything is one of a million paths. Therefore, as warriors we must always keep in mind that a path is only a path. If we feel that we should not follow it, we must not stay with it under any conditions. Our decision to keep on a path or to leave it must be free of fear or ambition. We must look at every path closely and deliberately. There is a question that a warrior has to ask, mandatory: Does this path have a heart?

All paths are the same: they lead nowhere. However, a path without a heart is never enjoyable. On the other hand, a path with heart is easy— it does not make a warrior work at liking it; it makes for a joyful journey; as long as we follow it, we are one with it.

There is a world of happiness where there is no difference between things because there is no one there to ask about the difference. I have seen that world, but that is not the world of men. Some had the vanity to believe that they live in two worlds, but that was only vanity. There is but one single world for us as men, and we must follow that world contentedly.

We have four natural enemies: fear, clarity, power, and old age. Fear, clarity, and power can be overcome, but not old age. It's effect can be postponed, but it can never be overcome.

## Commentary on *The Teachings of Don Juan*

The essence of whatever don Juan said at the beginning of my apprenticeship is encapsulated in the abstract nature of the quotations selected from the first book, *The Teachings of Don Juan*. At the time of the events described in that book, don Juan spoke a great deal about allies, power plants, Mescalito, the little smoke, the wind, the spirits of rivers and mountains, the spirit of the chaparral, etc., etc. Later on when I questioned him about his emphasis on those elements, and why he wasn't using them anymore, he admitted unabashedly that at the beginning of my apprenticeship, he had gone into all that pseudo-Indian shaman rigmarole for my benefit.

I was flabbergasted. I wondered how he could make such a statement which I felt was obviously not true. Yet he had really meant what he said about those elements of his world, and I was certainly the man who could attest to the veracity [* *veracity- unwillingness to tell lies*] of his words and moods.

"Don't take it so seriously," he said, laughing. "It was very enjoyable for me to get into all that crap, and it was even more enjoyable because I knew that I was doing it for your benefit."

"For my benefit, don Juan? What kind of aberration [* *aberration- a state or condition markedly different from the norm*] is this?"

"Yes, for your benefit. I tricked you by holding your attention on items of your world which held a profound fascination for you, and you swallowed it hook, line and sinker.

"All I needed was to get your undivided attention. But how could I have done that when you had such an undisciplined spirit? You yourself told me time and time again that you stayed with me because you found what I said about the world fascinating. What you didn't know how to express was that the fascination that you felt was based on the fact that you vaguely recognized every element I was talking about. You thought that the vagueness was, of course, shamanism, and you went for it, meaning you stayed."

"Do you do this to everybody, don Juan?"

"Not to everybody because not everybody comes to me, and above all, I'm not interested in everybody. I was and I am interested in you, you alone. My teacher, the nagual Julian, tricked me in a similar way. He tricked me with my sensuality and greed. He promised to get me all the beautiful women who surrounded him, and he promised to cover me with gold. He promised me a fortune, and I fell for it. All the shamans of my lineage had been tricked that way since time immemorial. The shamans of my lineage are not teachers or gurus. They don't give a fig about teaching their knowledge. They want heirs to their knowledge, not people vaguely interested in their knowledge for intellectual reasons."

Don Juan was right when he said that I had fallen for his maneuver fully. I had believed that I had found the perfect shaman anthropological informant. This was the time when under don Juan's auspices, and due to his influence, I wrote diaries and collected old maps that showed the locations of the Yaqui Indian towns throughout the centuries beginning with the chronicles of the Jesuits in the late 1700's. I recorded all those locations and I identified the most subtle changes, and began to ponder and wonder why the towns were shifted to other locales, and why they were arranged in slightly different patterns every time they were relocated. Pseudo-speculations about the reasons, and reasonable doubts overwhelmed me. I collected thousands of sheets of abbreviated notes and possibilities, drawn from books and chronicles. I was a perfect student of anthropology. Don Juan spurred my fancy in every way he possibly could.

There are no volunteers on the warriors' path," don Juan said to me under the guise of an explanation. "A man has to be forced into the warriors' path against his will."

"What do I do, don Juan, with the thousands of notes that you tricked me into collecting?" I asked him at the time.

His answer was a direct shock to me. "Write a book about them!" he said. "I am sure that if you begin to write it, you'll never make use of those notes, anyway. They are useless, but who am I to tell you that? Find out for yourself. But don't endeavor to write a book as a writer. Endeavor to do it as a warrior, as a shaman-warrior."

"What do you mean by that, don Juan?"

"I don't know," he said. "Find it out for yourself."

He was absolutely right. I never used those notes. Instead I found myself writing unwittingly about the inconceivable possibilities of the existence of another system of cognition.

## Quotations from *A Separate Reality*

A warrior knows that he is only a man. His only regret is that his life is so short that he can't grab onto all the things that he would like to. But for him, this is not an issue, it's only a pity.

Feeling important makes one heavy, clumsy and vain. To be a warrior one needs to be light and fluid.

When they are seen as fields of energy, humans appear to be like fibers of light; like white cobwebs; very fine threads that circulate from the head to the toes. Thus to the eye of a seer, a human looks like an egg of circulating fibers. Arms and legs are like luminous bristles bursting out in all directions.

The seer *sees* that every human is in touch with everything else, not through their hands, but through a bunch of long fibers that shoot out in all directions from the center of his abdomen. Those fibers join a human to their surroundings; they keep our balance; they give us stability.

When a warrior learns to *see*, they *see* that a human being is a luminous egg whether they're a beggar or a king and that there is no way to change anything; or rather, what could be changed in that luminous egg? What?

A warrior never worries about their fear. Instead, they thinks about the wonders of *seeing* the flow of energy! The rest is frills, unimportant frills.

Only a crackpot would undertake the task of becoming a man of knowledge of their own accord. A sober-headed man has to be tricked into doing it. There are scores of people who would gladly undertake the task, but those don't count. They are usually cracked. They are like gourds that look fine from the outside and yet they would leak the minute you put pressure on them; the minute you filled them with water.

When a person is not concerned with *seeing*, things look very much the same to them every time they look at the world. When they learn to *see*, on the other hand, nothing is ever the same every time they *see* it, and yet it is the same. To the eye of a seer, a human is like an egg. Every time they *see* the same human being they *see* a luminous egg, yet it is not the same luminous egg.

The shamans of ancient Mexico gave the name *allies* to inexplicable forces that acted upon them. They called them *allies* because they thought they could use them to their hearts' content, a notion that nearly proved fatal to those shamans because what they called an *ally* is a being without corporeal essence that exists in the universe. Modern-day shamans call them *inorganic beings*.

To ask what function the *allies* have is like asking what we humans do in the world. We are here, that's all. And the *allies* are here like us; and maybe they were here before us.

The most effective way to live is as a warrior. A warrior may worry and think before making any decision, but once they make it, they go on their way free from worries or thoughts; knowing there will be a million other decisions still awaiting them. That's the warriors' way.

A warrior thinks of their death when things become unclear. The idea of death is the only thing that tempers our spirit.

Death is everywhere. It may be the headlights of a car on a hilltop in the distance behind. They may remain visible for a while, and disappear into the darkness as if they had been scooped away; only to appear on another hilltop, and then disappear again. Those are the lights on the head of death. Death puts them on like a hat and then shoots off on a gallop, gaining on us, getting closer and closer. Sometimes it turns off it's lights. But death never stops.

A warrior must know first that their acts are useless, and yet, they must proceed as if they didn't know it. That's a shaman's *controlled folly*.

The eyes of humans can perform two functions: one is *seeing* energy at large as it flows in the universe and the other is "looking at things in this world." Neither of these functions is better than the other; however to train the eyes only to look is a shameful and unnecessary loss.

A warrior lives by acting, not by thinking about acting, nor by thinking about what they will think when they have finished acting.

A warrior chooses a path with heart, any path with heart, and follows it; and then they rejoice and laugh. They know, because they *see*, that their life will be over altogether too soon. They *see* that nothing is more important than anything else.

A warrior has no honor, no dignity, no family, no name, no country: He has only life to be lived, and under these circumstances, their only tie to their fellow humans is their *controlled folly*.

Nothing being more important than anything else, a warrior chooses any act, and acts it out as if it mattered to them. Their controlled folly makes them say that what they do matters and makes them act as if it did, and yet they know that it doesn't. So when they fulfill their acts, they retreat in peace. Whether their acts were good or bad, or worked or didn't, is in no way part of their concern.

A warrior may also choose to remain totally impassive and never act, and behave as if being impassive really mattered to them. They would be rightfully true at that too, because that would also be their *controlled folly*.

There's no emptiness in the life of a warrior. Everything is filled to the brim; and everything is equal.

An average person is too concerned with liking people or with being liked themselves. A warrior likes, that's all. They like whatever or whomever they want, for the hell of it.

A warrior takes responsibility for their acts; for the most trivial of their acts. An average man acts out their thoughts, and never takes responsibility for what they do.

The average man is either victorious or defeated and, depending on that, he becomes a persecutor or a victim. These two conditions are prevalent as long as one does not *see*. *Seeing* dispels the illusion of victory, or defeat, or suffering.

A warrior knows that they are waiting and what they are waiting for; and while they wait they want nothing, and thus whatever little thing they get is more than they can take. If they need to eat, they find a way because they are not hungry. If something hurts their body, they find a way to stop it because they are not in pain. To be hungry or to be in pain means that they are not a warrior; and the forces of their hunger and pain will destroy them.

Denying oneself is an indulgence. The indulgence of denying is by far the worst. It forces us to believe that we are doing great things, when in effect we are only fixed within ourselves.

*Intent* is not a thought, or an object, or a wish. *Intent* is what can make a man succeed when his thoughts tell him that he is defeated. It operates independent of any warrior's indulgence. *Intent* is what makes him invulnerable. *Intent* is what sends a shaman through a wall, through space, to infinity.

When one embarks on the warriors' path you become aware, in a gradual manner, that ordinary life has been left forever behind. The means of the ordinary world are no longer a buffer for you; and one must adopt a new way of life if you are going to survive.

Every bit of knowledge that becomes power has death as it's central force. Death lends the ultimate touch, and whatever is touched by death indeed becomes power.

Only the idea of death makes a warrior sufficiently detached so that they are incapable of abandoning themselves to anything. They know their death is stalking them and won't give them time to cling to anything, so they try, without craving, all of everything.

We are human and our lot is to learn and to be hurled into inconceivable new worlds. A warrior who *sees* energy knows that there is no end to the new worlds we can experience.

Don Juan told me, "Death is a twirl; death is a shiny cloud over the horizon; death is me talking to you; death is you and your writing pad; death is nothing. Nothing! It is here, yet it isn't here at all."

The spirit of a warrior is not geared to indulging and complaining, nor is it geared to winning or losing. The spirit of a warrior is geared only to struggle, and every struggle is a warrior's last battle on earth. Thus the outcome matters very little to them. In their last battle on earth a warrior lets their spirit flow free and clear. And as the wage their battle, knowing that their *intent* is impeccable, a warrior laughs and laughs.

We talk to ourselves incessantly about our world. In fact we maintain our world with our internal talk. And whenever we finish talking to ourselves about ourselves and our world, the world is always as it should be. We renew it, we rekindle it with life, we uphold it with our internal talk. Not only that, but we also choose our paths as we talk to ourselves. Thus we repeat the same choices over and over until the day we die because we keep on repeating the same internal talk over and over until the day we die. A warrior is aware of this and strives to stop his internal talk.

The world is all that is encased here: life, death, people, and everything else that surrounds us. The world is incomprehensible. We won't ever understand it. We won't ever unravel it's secrets. Thus we must treat the world as it is: a sheer mystery.

The things that people do cannot under any conditions be more important than the world. And thus a warrior treats the world as an endless mystery and what people do as an endless folly.

## Commentary on *A Separate Reality*

In the quotations drawn from *A Separate Reality*, the mood that the shamans of ancient Mexico affixed to all their *intentional* endeavors begins to show with remarkable clarity. Don Juan himself pointed out to me in talking about those old shamans that the aspect of their world which was of supreme interest to modern practitioners was the razor-sharp awareness that those shamans had developed about the universal force they called *intent*. They explained that the link each of those men had with such a force was so neat and clean that they could affect things to their hearts' content. Don Juan said that the *intent* of those shamans, developed to such a keen intensity, was the only aid modern practitioners had. He put it in more mundane terms, and said that modern-day practitioners, if they were honest with themselves, would pay whatever price to live under the umbrella of such an *intent*.

Don Juan asserted that anyone who showed even the slightest interest in the world of the shamans of antiquity was immediately drawn into the circle of their razor-sharp *intent*. Their *intent* was, for don Juan, something incommensurable [* *incommensurable- impossible to measure or compare in value or size or excellence*] that none of us could successfully fight away. Besides, he reasoned, there was no necessity to fight away such an *intent* because it was the only thing that counted. It was the essence of the world of those shamans and the world which modern-day practitioners coveted more than anything imaginable.

The mood of the quotations from *A Separate Reality* is not something that I arranged on purpose. It is a mood that surfaced independent of my aims and wishes. I could even say that it was contrary to what I had in mind. It was the mysterious coil of the *wheel of time* hidden in the text of the book that had suddenly been activated, and it snapped into a state of tension; a tension that dictated the direction of my endeavors.

At the time of writing *A Separate Reality*, as far as my feelings about my work were concerned, I could truthfully assert that I thought that I was happily involved in doing anthropological fieldwork. My feelings and thoughts were as far away from the world of the shamans of antiquity as anything could be. Don Juan had a different opinion. Being a seasoned warrior, he knew that I couldn't possibly extricate myself from the magnetic pull that the *intent* of those shamans had created. I was drowning in it, whether or not I believed in it or wished for it.

This state of affairs brought about a subliminal anxiety on my part. It was not an anxiety I could define or pinpoint, or was even aware of. It permeated my acts without the possibility of my consciously dwelling on it, or seeking an explanation. In retrospect, I can only say that I was deadly afraid, although I couldn't determine what I was afraid of.

I tried many times to analyze this sensation of fear, but I would immediately get fatigued;, bored. I would instantaneously find my inquiry groundless, superfluous, and I would end up abandoning it. I asked don Juan about my state of being. I wanted his advice, his input.

"You are just afraid," he said. “That's all there is to it. Don't look for mysterious reasons for your fear. The mysterious reason is right here in front of you within your reach. It is the intent of the shamans of ancient Mexico. You are dealing with their world, and that world shows it's face to you from time to time. Of course, you can't take that sight. Neither could I, in my time. Neither could any one of us."

"You're talking in riddles, don Juan!"

"Yes, I am, for the moment. It will be clear to you someday. At the present, it's idiotic to try to talk about it, or explain anything. Nothing of what I'm trying to show you would make sense. Some inconceivable banality would make infinitely more sense to you at this moment."

He was absolutely right. All my fears were triggered by some banality of which I was ashamed at the time, and am ashamed of now. I was afraid of demoniacal possession. Such a fear had been encrusted in me very early in life. Anything that was inexplicable was naturally something evil, something malignant that aimed at destroying me.

The more poignant don Juan's explanations of the world of the ancient shamans became, the greater my sensation of needing to protect myself. This sensation was not something that could be verbalized. It was, rather than the need to protect the self; the need to protect the veracity and the undeniable value of the world in which we human beings live. To me, my world was the only recognizable world. If it was threatened, there was an immediate reaction on my part; a reaction that manifested itself in some quality of fear that I will be forever at a loss to explain: This fear was something one must feel in order to grasp it's immensity. It was not the fear of dying or of being hurt. It was, rather, something immeasurably deeper than that. It was so deep that any shaman practitioner would be at a loss trying even to conceptualize it.

"You have come, in a roundabout way, to stand directly in front of the *warrior*," don Juan said.

At that time, he emphasized to no end the concept of the warrior. He said that the warrior was of course, much more than a mere concept. It was a way of life, and that way of life would be the only deterrent to fear, and the only channel which a practitioner could use to let the flow of his activity move on freely. Without the concept of the warrior, the stumbling blocks on the path of knowledge were impossible to overcome.

Don Juan defined the *warrior* as the fighter par excellence. It was a mood facilitated by the intent of the shamans of antiquity; a mood into which any man could enter.

"The *intent* of those shamans," don Juan said, "was so keen, so powerful, that it would solidify the structure of the warrior in anyone who tapped it, even though they might not be aware of it."

In short, the warrior was, for the shamans of ancient Mexico, a unit of combat so tuned to the fight around him, so extraordinarily alert that in his purest form, that he needed nothing superfluous to survive. There was no necessity to make gifts to a warrior, or to prop him up with talk or actions, or to try to give him solace and incentive. All of those things were included in the structure of the warrior itself. Since that structure was determined by the *intent* of the shamans of ancient Mexico, they made sure that anything foreseeable would be included. The end result was a fighter who fought alone, and who drew from his own silent convictions all the impulse he needed to forge ahead; without complaints; without the necessity to be praised.

Personally, I found the concept of the warrior fascinating, and, at the same time, one of the most frightening things I had ever encountered. I thought it was a concept that, if I adopted it, would bind me into servitude, and wouldn't give me the time or the disposition to protest, examine or complain. Complaining had been my lifelong habit, and truthfully, I would have fought tooth and nail not to give it up. I thought that complaining was the sign of a sensitive, courageous, forthright man who has no qualms in stating his facts, his likes and dislikes. If all of that was going to turn into a fighting organism, I stood to lose more than I could afford.

These were my inner thoughts. And yet, I coveted the direction, the peace, and the efficiency of the warrior. One of the great aids that the shamans of ancient Mexico employed in establishing the concept of the warrior was the idea of taking our death as a companion; a witness to our acts. Don Juan said that once that premise is accepted in whatever mild form, a bridge is formed which extends across the gap between our world of daily affairs, and something that is in front of us, but has no name; something that is lost in a fog, and doesn't seem to exist; something so terribly unclear that it cannot be used as a point of reference; and yet, it is there, undeniably present.

Don Juan claimed that the only being on earth capable of crossing over that bridge was the warrior: silent in their struggle, undetainable because they have nothing to lose, functional and efficacious [* *efficacious- marked by qualities giving the power to produce an intended effect*], because they have everything to gain.

## Quotations from *Journey to Ixtlan*

We hardly ever realize that we can cut anything out of our lives, anytime, in the blink of an eye.

One shouldn't worry about taking pictures or making tape recordings. Those are superfluities of sedate lives. One should worry about the spirit, which is always receding.

A warrior doesn’t need personal history. One day, they find it is no longer necessary for them, and they drop it.

Personal history must be constantly renewed by telling parents, relatives, and friends everything one does. On the other hand, for the warrior who has no personal history, no explanations are needed; nobody is angry or disillusioned with their acts. And above all, no one pins them down with their thoughts and their expectations.

When nothing is for sure we remain alert; perennially on our toes. It is more exciting not to know which bush the rabbit is hiding behind than to behave as though we knew everything.

As long as a man feels that he is the most important thing in the world, he cannot really appreciate the world around him. He is like a horse with blinders; all he sees is himself, apart from everything else.

Death is our eternal companion. It is always to our left, an arm's length behind us. Death is the only wise adviser that a warrior has. Whenever they feel that everything is going wrong and they’re about to be annihilated, they can turn to their death and ask if that is so. Their death will tell them that they are wrong; that nothing really matters outside it's touch. Their death will tell them, 'I haven't touched you yet.'

Whenever a warrior decides to do something, they must go all the way, but they must take responsibility for what they do. No matter what they do, they must know first why they are doing it, and then they must proceed with their actions without having doubts or remorse about them.

In a world where death is the hunter, there is no time for regrets or doubts. There is only time for decisions. It doesn't matter what the decisions are. Nothing could be more or less serious than anything else. In a world where death is the hunter, there are no small or big decisions. There are only decisions that a warrior makes in the face of their inevitable death.

A warrior must learn to be available and unavailable at the precise turn of the road. It is useless for a warrior to be unwittingly available at all times, as it is useless for them to hide when everybody knows that they are hiding.

For a warrior, to be inaccessible means that they touch the world around them sparingly, and then move away. They deliberately avoid exhausting themselves and others. They don't use and squeeze people until they have shriveled to nothing, especially the people they love.

Once a man worries, he clings to anything out of desperation; and once he clings he is bound to get exhausted or to exhaust whomever or whatever he is clinging to. A warrior-hunter, on the other hand, knows he will lure game into his traps over and over again, so he doesn't worry. To worry is to become accessible; unwittingly accessible.

A warrior-hunter deals intimately with their world, and yet they are inaccessible to that same world. They tap it lightly, stay for as long as they need to, and then swiftly move away, leaving hardly a mark.

To be a warrior-hunter is not just to trap game. A warrior-hunter does not catch game because he sets his traps, or because he knows the routines of his prey, but because he himself has no routines. This is his advantage. He is not at all like the animals he is after. They are fixed by heavy routines and predictable quirks. He is free, fluid, and unpredictable.

For an average person, the world is weird because if they’re not bored with it, they’re at odds with it. For a warrior, the world is weird because it is stupendous, awesome, mysterious, and unfathomable. A warrior assumes responsibility for being here in this marvelous world in this marvelous time.

A warrior must learn to make every act count, since they are going to be here in this world for only a short while, in fact, too short for witnessing all the marvels of it.

Acts have power. Especially when the warrior acting knows that those acts are their last battle.

There is a strange consuming happiness in acting with the full knowledge that whatever one is doing may very well be their last act on earth.

A warrior focuses their attention on the link between themselves and their death. Without remorse or sadness or worrying, they focus their attention on the fact that they do not have time and let their acts flow accordingly. They let each of their acts be their last battle on earth; and under those conditions, our acts have their rightful power. Otherwise our acts would be, for as long as we live, the acts of a fool.

A warrior-hunter knows that their death is waiting, and the very act they are performing now may well be their last battle on earth. They call it a battle because it is a struggle. Most people move from act to act without any struggle or thought. A warrior-hunter, on the contrary, assesses every act. They have an intimate awareness of their death, so they proceed judiciously as if every act were their last battle. Only a fool would fail to notice the advantage a warrior-hunter has over their fellow men. A warrior-hunter gives their last battle it's due respect. It's only natural that their last act on earth should be the best of themselves. It's pleasurable that way. It dulls the edge of their fright.

A warrior is an immaculate hunter who hunts power. He's not drunk or crazed, and he has neither the time nor the disposition to bluff or to lie to himself; or to make a wrong move. The stakes are too high for that. The stakes are his trimmed orderly life which he has taken so long to tighten and perfect. He is not going to throw that away by making some stupid miscalculation; by mistaking something for something else.

A man, any man, deserves everything that is a man's lot: joy, pain, sadness, and struggle. The nature of our acts are unimportant as long as we act as a warrior. If our spirit is distorted we should simply fix it— purge it, make it perfect— because there is no other task in our entire lives which is more worthwhile. Not to fix the spirit is to seek death, and that is the same as to seek nothing, since death is going to overtake us regardless of anything. To seek the perfection of the warrior's spirit is the only task worthy of our temporariness, and our existence as humans.

The hardest thing in the world is to assume the mood of a warrior. It is of no use to be sad and complain and feel justified in doing so; believing that someone is always doing something to us. Nobody is doing anything to anybody, much less to a warrior.

A warrior is a hunter. They calculate everything. That's control. Once their calculations are over, they act. They let go. That's a warrior’s abandon, as opposed to a bitter concession. A warrior is not a leaf at the mercy of the wind. No one can push them. No one can make them do things against themselves or against their better judgment. A warrior is tuned to survive, and they survive in the best of all possible fashions.

A warrior is only a human being; a humble one. They cannot change the designs of their death. But their impeccable spirit, which has stored power after stupendous hardships, can certainly hold their death at bay for a moment; a moment long enough to let them rejoice for the last time in recalling their power. We may say that that is a gesture which death has with those who have an impeccable spirit.

It doesn't matter how one was brought up. What determines the way one does anything is personal power. A human is only the sum of their *personal power*, and that sum determines how they live and how they die.

*Personal power* is a feeling. Something like being lucky. Or one may call it a mood. *Personal power* is something that one acquires by means of a lifetime of struggle.

A warrior acts as if they know what they are doing, when in effect they know nothing.

A warrior doesn't know remorse for anything they have done because to isolate one's acts as being mean, or ugly, or evil is to place an unwarranted importance on the self. The trick is in what one emphasizes. We either make ourselves miserable, or we make ourselves strong. The amount of work is the same.

People tell us from the time we are born that the world is such and such and so and so, and naturally we have no choice but to accept that the world is the way people have been telling us it is.

The art of a warrior is to balance the terror of being a man with the wonder of being a man.

## Commentary on *Journey to Ixtlan*

By the time I was writing *Journey to Ixtlan*, a most mysterious mood was prevalent all around me. Don Juan Matus was applying some extremely pragmatic measures to my daily conduct. He had outlined some steps of action that he wanted me to follow rigorously. He had given me three tasks which had only the vaguest references to my world of everyday life, or to any other world. He wanted me to endeavor in my daily world to erase my personal history by any means conceivable. Then, he wanted me to stop my routines, and finally, he wanted me to dethrone my sense of self-importance.

"How am I going to accomplish all this, don Juan?" I asked him.

"I have no idea," he responded. "None of us has any idea of how to do that pragmatically and effectively. Yet, if we start the work, we will accomplish it without ever knowing what came to aid us.

The difficulty that you encounter is the same difficulty that I encountered myself," he went on. "I assure you that our difficulty is born out of the total absence in our lives of ideas strong enough to spur us to change. At the time that my teacher gave me this task, all I needed in order to make it work was the idea that it could be done. Once I had the idea, I accomplished it, without knowing how. I recommend that you do the same."

I went into the most contorted complaints, alluding to the fact that I was a social scientist accustomed to practical directions that had substance to them; not to something vague which was dependent on magical solutions rather than practical means.

"Say whatever you want," don Juan responded, laughing. "Once you're through complaining, forget about your qualms and do what I have asked you to do."

Don Juan was right. All that I needed, or rather, all that a mysterious part of me which was not overt needed, was the idea. The 'me' that I had known through all my life needed infinitely more than the idea. It needed coaching, spurring, direction. I became so intrigued by my success that the tasks of erasing my routines, losing my self-importance and dropping my personal history became a sheer delight.

"You are smack in front of the *warriors' way*," don Juan said by way of explanation for my mysterious success.

Slowly and methodically, he had guided my awareness to focus more and more intensely on an abstract elaboration of the concept of the warrior that he called the *warriors' way*; the *warriors' path*. He explained that the *warriors' way* was a structure of ideas established by the shamans of ancient Mexico. Those shamans had derived their construct by means of their ability to *see* energy as it flows freely in the universe. Therefore, the *warriors' way* was a most harmonious conglomerate of e*nergetic facts*; irreducible truths determined exclusively by the direction of the flow of energy in the universe. Don Juan categorically stated that there was nothing about the *warriors' way* that could be argued; nothing that could be changed. It was in itself and by itself a perfect structure, and whoever followed it was corralled by *energetic facts* that admitted no argument, no speculation about their function and their value.

Don Juan said that those old shamans called it the *warriors' way* because it's structure encompassed all the living possibilities that a warrior might encounter on the path of knowledge. Those shamans were absolutely thorough and methodical in their search for such possibilities. According to don Juan, they were indeed capable of including in their abstract structure everything that is humanly possible.

Don Juan compared the *warriors' way* to an edifice [* *edifice- a structure that has a roof and walls and stands more or less permanently in one place*], with each of the elements of this edifice being a propping device whose only function was to sustain the psyche of the warrior in his role as an initiate, in order to make his movements easy and meaningful. He stated unequivocally that the *warriors' way* was the essential construct without which initiates would be shipwrecked in the immensity of the universe.

Don Juan called the *warriors' way* the crowning glory of the shamans of ancient Mexico. He viewed it as their most important contribution; the essence of their sobriety.

"Is the *warriors' way* that overwhelmingly important, don Juan?" I asked him once.

"'Overwhelmingly important' is a euphemism. The *warriors' way* is everything. It is the epitome of mental and physical health. I cannot explain it in any other way. For the shamans of ancient Mexico to have created such a structure means to me that they were at the height of their power; the peak of their happiness; the apex of their joy."

On the level of pragmatic acceptance or rejection in which I thought I was submerged at the time, to embrace the *warriors' path* thoroughly and unbiasedly was nothing short of an impossibility for me. The more don Juan explained the *warriors' path*, the more intense the sensation I had that he was indeed plotting to overthrow all my balance.

Don Juan's guidance was, therefore, covert. It manifested itself with stupendous clarity, however, in the quotations drawn from *Journey to Ixtlan*. Don Juan had advanced on me in leaps and bounds at tremendous speed, without my being aware of it, and was suddenly breathing down my neck. I thought time and time again that I was either on the verge of accepting, in a bona fide manner, the existence of another cognitive system, or I was so thoroughly indifferent that I didn't care whether it happened one way or the other.

Of course, there was always the option of running away from all that, but it wasn't tenable. Somehow, don Juan's ministrations, or my heavy use of the concept of the warrior had hardened me to the point that I was no longer that afraid. I was caught, but really, it made no difference. All I knew was that I was there with don Juan for the duration.

## Quotations from *Tales of Power*

The self-confidence of the warrior is not the self-confidence of the average man. The average man seeks certainty in the eyes of the onlooker and calls that self-confidence. The warrior seeks *impeccability* in his own eyes and calls that humbleness. The average man is hooked to his fellow men, while the warrior is hooked only to infinity.

There are lots of things a warrior can do at a certain time which they couldn't do years before. Those things themselves did not change; what changed was their idea of themselves.

The only possible course that a warrior has is to act consistently and without reservations. At a certain moment, they know enough of the warriors' way to act accordingly, but their old habits and routines may stand in his way.

If a warrior is to succeed in anything, the success must come gently, with a great deal of effort but with no stress or obsession.

The internal dialogue is what grounds people in the daily world. The world is such and such or so and so, only because we talk to ourselves about it's being such and such or so and so. The passageway into the world of shamans opens up after the warrior has learned to shut off their internal dialogue.

To change our idea of the world is the crux of shamanism. And stopping the internal dialogue is the only way to accomplish it.

When a warrior learns to stop the internal dialogue, everything becomes possible; the most far-fetched schemes become attainable.

A warrior takes his lot, whatever it may be, and accepts it in ultimate humbleness. He accepts in humbleness what he is, not as grounds for regret but as a living challenge.

The humbleness of a warrior is not the humbleness of the beggar. The beggar falls to their knees at the drop of a hat, and scrapes the floor for anyone they deem to be higher; but at the same time, they demand that someone lower than them scrape the floor for them. On the other hand, the warrior lowers their head to no one, and at the same time, they don’t permit anyone to lower their head to them.

Solace, haven, fear; all of these are words which have created moods that we have learned to accept without ever questioning their value.

Our fellow men are black magicians, and whoever is with them is a black magician on the spot. Think for a moment. Can you deviate from the path that your fellow men have lined up for you? If you remain (aligned) with them, your thoughts and your actions are fixed forever in their terms. That is slavery. The warrior, on the other hand, is free from all that. Freedom is expensive, but the price is not impossible to pay...don't waste your time and your power fearing it.

The flaw with words is that they always make us feel enlightened, but when we turn around to face the world they always fail us and we end up facing the world as we always have, without enlightenment. For this reason, a warrior seeks to act rather than to talk. As a result, they get a new description of the world— a new description where talking is not that important, and where new acts have new reflections.

A warrior considers themselves already dead, so there is nothing for them to lose. The worst has already happened to them. Therefore they're clear and calm. Judging them by their acts or by their words, one would never suspect that they have witnessed everything.

Knowledge is a most peculiar affair, especially for a warrior. Knowledge for a warrior is something that comes at once, engulfs, and passes on.

Knowledge comes to a warrior, floating like specks of gold dust, the same dust that covers the wings of moths. So for a warrior, knowledge is like taking a shower, being rained on by specks of dark golden dust.

Whenever the internal dialogue stops, the world collapses, and extraordinary facets of ourselves surface as though they had been kept heavily guarded by our words.

The world is unfathomable. And so are we; and so is every being that exists in the world.

Warriors do not win victories by beating their heads against walls, but by overtaking the walls. Warriors jump over walls: They don't demolish them.

A warrior must cultivate the feeling that they have everything needed for the extravagant journey that is their life. What counts for a warrior is being alive. Life in itself is sufficient, self-explanatory and complete. Therefore, one may say without being presumptuous that the experience of experiences is being alive.

An average person thinks that indulging in doubts and tribulations is the sign of sensitivity, and spirituality. The truth of the matter is that the average person is the farthest thing imaginable from being sensitive. Their puny reason deliberately makes itself into a monster or a saint, but it is truthfully too little for such a big monster or saint mold.

To be a warrior is not a simple matter of wishing to be one. It is rather an endless struggle that will go on to the very last moment of our lives. Nobody is born a warrior, in exactly the same way that nobody is born an average man. We make ourselves into one or the other.

A warrior dies the hard way. Their death must struggle to take them. A warrior does not give themselves to death so easily.

Humans are not objects; we have no solidity. We are round, luminous beings; we are boundless. The world of objects and solidity is only a description that was created to help us, to make our passage on earth convenient. Reason makes us forget that the description is only a description, and before we realize it, we have entrapped the totality of ourselves in a vicious circle from which we rarely emerge in our lifetimes.

Human beings are perceivers, but the world that we perceive is an illusion: an illusion created by the description that was told to us from the moment we were born. So in essence, the world that our reason wants to sustain is the world created by a description and it's dogmatic and inviolable rules, which our reason learns to accept and defend.

Our concealed treasure as luminous beings is that we have something which is almost never used: *intent*. The maneuver of shamans is similar to the maneuver of the average man. Both have a description of the world. The average man upholds it with his reason and the shaman upholds it with his *intent*. Both descriptions have their rules, but the advantage of the shaman is that *intent* is more engulfing than reason.

Only as a warrior can one withstand the path of knowledge. A warrior cannot complain or regret anything. His life is an endless challenge, and challenges cannot possibly be considered as good or bad. Challenges are simply challenges.

The basic difference between an ordinary man and a warrior is that a warrior takes everything as a challenge, while an ordinary man takes everything as a blessing or as a curse.

The trump card of the warrior is that they believe without believing. But obviously a warrior can't just say they believe and let it go at that. That would be too easy. To just believe without any exertion would exonerate them from examining their situation. Whenever a warrior has to involve themselves in matters of believing, they do it as a choice. But it's not that a warrior simply chooses to believe. A warrior has to believe.

Death is an indispensable ingredient in having to believe. Without the awareness of death, we feel immortal, and everything becomes ordinary and trivial. Because of our awareness that death is stalking us, warriors come to see and realize that the world is an unfathomable mystery. Having to believe in such a fashion is the warrior's expression of their innermost predilection.

Power always makes a cubic centimeter of chance available to a warrior. The warrior's art is to be perennially fluid in order to pluck it.

The average man is aware of everything only when he thinks he should be. The condition of a warrior, however, is to be aware of everything at all times.

The totality of ourselves is a very mysterious affair. We need only a very small portion of it to fulfill the most complex tasks of life. Yet when we die, we die with the totality of ourselves.

A rule of thumb for a warrior is that they make their decisions so carefully that nothing that may happen as a result of them is surprising, much less, able to drain their power.

When a warrior makes the decision to take action, they should be prepared to die. If they are prepared to die, there shouldn't be any pitfalls, any unwelcome surprises, any unnecessary acts. Everything should gently fall into place because they aren’t expecting anything.

A warrior, as a teacher, must first of all teach about the possibility of acting without believing, without expecting rewards— acting just for the hell of it. Their success as a teacher depends on how well and how harmoniously they guides their wards in this specific respect.

In order to help his ward to erase personal history, the warrior as a teacher teaches three techniques: losing self-importance, assuming responsibility for one's acts, and using death as an adviser. Without the beneficial effect of these three techniques, erasing personal history would involve being shifty, evasive and unnecessarily dubious about oneself and one's actions.

There is no way to get rid of self-pity for good: it has a definite place and character in our lives, a definite facade which is recognizable. Thus, every time the occasion arises, the facade of self-pity becomes active. It has a history. But if one changes the facade, one shifts it's place of prominence. One changes facades by shifting the component elements of the facade itself. Self-pity is useful to the user because they feel important and deserving of better conditions, better treatment, or because they are unwilling to assume responsibility for the acts that brought them to the state that elicited self-pity.

Changing the facade of self-pity means only that one has assigned a secondary place to a formerly important element. Self-pity is still a prominent feature, but it has now taken a position in the background. In the same fashion, the idea of one's impending death, the idea of a warrior's humbleness, and the idea of taking responsibility for one's acts were all in the background at one time for a warrior, without ever being used until the moment they became a warrior.

A warrior acknowledges their pain, but doesn't indulge in it. The mood of the warrior who enters into the unknown is not one of sadness. On the contrary, they’re joyful because they feel humbled by their great fortune, confident that their spirit is impeccable, and above all, is fully aware of their efficiency. A warrior's joyfulness comes from having accepted their fate, and from having truthfully assessed what lies ahead of them.

## Commentary on *Tales of Power*

*Tales of Power* is the mark of my ultimate downfall. At the time that the events narrated in that book took place, I suffered a profound emotional upheaval; a warrior's breakdown. Don Juan Matus left this world, and left his four apprentices in it. Each of those apprentices was approached personally by don Juan, and assigned a specific task. I considered the task given to me to be a placebo that had no significance whatsoever in comparison to the loss.

Not to see don Juan anymore could not be soothed by pseudo-tasks. My first plea with don Juan had been, naturally, to tell him that I wanted to go with him.

"You are not ready, yet," he said. "Let's be realistic."

"But I could make myself ready in the blink of an eye," I assured him.

"I don't doubt that. You'll be ready, but not for me. I demand perfect efficiency. I demand an impeccable intent, an impeccable discipline. You don't have that yet. You will. You're coming to it, but you're not there yet.”

"You have the power to take me, don Juan. Raw and imperfect."

"I suppose I do, but I won't, because it would be a shameful waste for you. You stand to lose everything, take my word. Don't insist. Insisting is not in the realm of warriors."

That statement was sufficient to stop me. Internally, however, I yearned to go with him; to venture beyond the boundaries of everything that I knew as normal and real.

When the moment came in which don Juan actually left the world, he turned into some colored, vaporous luminosity. He was pure energy, flowing freely in the universe. My sensation of loss was so immense at that moment that I wanted to die. I disregarded everything don Juan had said, and without any hesitation, I proceeded to throw myself off a precipice. I reasoned that if I did that, in death, don Juan would have been obliged to take me with him, and save whatever bit of awareness was left in me.

But for reasons that are inexplicable , whether I view it from the premises of my normal cognition, or from the cognition of the shamans' world, I didn't die. I was left alone in the world of everyday life, while my three cohorts were scattered all over the world. I was unknown to myself, something which made my loneliness more poignant than ever.

I saw myself as an agent provocateur, [* *provocateur- a secret agent who incites suspected persons to commit illegal acts*] a spy of sorts, that don Juan had left behind for some obscure reasons. The quotations drawn from the corpus of *Tales of Power* show the unknown quality of the world, not the world of shamans, but the world of everyday life, which, according to don Juan, is as mysterious and rich as anything can be. All we need to pluck the wonders of this world of everyday life is enough detachment. But more than detachment, we need enough affection and abandon.

"A warrior must love this world," don Juan had warned me, "in order for this world that seems so commonplace to open up and show it's wonders."

We were, at the time that he voiced this statement, in the desert of Sonora.

"It is a sublime feeling," he said, "to be in this marvelous desert, to see those ragged peaks of pseudo-mountains that were really made by the flow of lava of long-gone volcanoes. It is a glorious feeling to find that some of those nuggets of obsidian were created at such high temperatures that they still retain the mark of their origin. They have power galore. To wander aimlessly in those ragged peaks and actually find a piece of quartz that picks up radio waves is extraordinary. The only drawback to this marvelous picture is that to enter into the marvels of this world, or into the marvels of another world, a man needs to be a warrior: calm, collected, indifferent, seasoned by the onslaughts of the unknown. You are not seasoned that way yet. Therefore, it is your duty to seek that fulfillment before you could talk about venturing into the infinite."

I have spent thirty-five years of my life seeking the maturity of a warrior. I have gone to places that defy description seeking that sensation of being seasoned by the onslaughts of the unknown. I went unobtrusively, unannounced, and I came back in the same fashion. The works of warriors are silent and solitary, and when warriors go, or come back, they do it so inconspicuously that nobody is the wiser. To seek a warrior's maturity in any other fashion would be ostentatious, [* *ostentatious- intended to attract notice and impress others*] and therefore, inadmissible.

The quotations from *Tales of Power* were the most poignant reminder to me that the intent of the shamans who lived in Mexico in ancient times was still impeccably at work. The *wheel of time* was moving inexorably around me, forcing me to look into grooves which one cannot talk about and still remain coherent.

"Suffice it to say," don Juan said to me once, "that the immensity of this world, be it the shamans' world or the average man's, is so conspicuous that only an aberration could keep us from noticing it. Trying to explain to aberrant beings what it is like to be lost in the grooves of the *wheel of time* is the most absurd thing that a warrior can undertake. Therefore, he makes sure that his journeys are only the property of his condition of being a warrior."

## Quotations from *The Second Ring of Power*

When one has nothing to lose, one becomes courageous. We are timid only when there is something we can still cling to.

A warrior could not possibly leave anything to chance. He actually affects the outcome of events by the force of his awareness and his *unbending intent*.

If a warrior wants to pay back for all the favors they have received, and they have no one in particular to address their payment to, they can address it to the spirit of man. That's always a very small account, and whatever one puts in it is more than enough.

After arranging the world in a most beautiful and enlightened manner, the scholar goes back home at five o'clock in the afternoon in order to forget their beautiful arrangement.

The *human form* is a conglomerate of energy fields which exists in the universe, and which is related exclusively to human beings. Shamans call it the *human form* because those energy fields have been bent and contorted by a lifetime of habits and misuse.

A warrior knows that he cannot change, and yet he makes it his business to try to change. The warrior is never disappointed when he fails to change. That's the only advantage a warrior has over the average man.

Warriors must be impeccable in their effort to change in order to scare and shake the human form away. After years of impeccability, a moment will come when the human form cannot stand it any longer and leaves. That is to say, a moment will come when the energy fields contorted by a lifetime of habit are straightened out. A warrior gets deeply affected, and can even die as a result of this straightening out of energy fields, but an impeccable warrior always survives.

The only freedom warriors have is to behave impeccably. Not only is impeccability freedom; it is the only way to straighten out the human form.

Any habit needs all it's parts in order to function. If some parts are missing, the habit is disassembled.

The fight is right here on this earth. We are human creatures. Who knows what's waiting for us, or what kind of power we may have?

The world of people goes up and down and people go up and down with their world; warriors have no business following the ups and downs of their fellow men.

The core of our being is the act of perceiving, and the magic of our being is the act of awareness. Perception and awareness are a single, functional, inextricable unit.

We choose only once. We choose either to be warriors or to be ordinary men. A second choice does not exist. Not on this earth.

The warriors' way offers one a new life and that life has to be completely new. You can't bring to that new life your ugly old ways.

Warriors always take a first event of any series as the blueprint or the map of what is going to develop for them subsequently.

Human beings love to be told what to do, but they love even more to fight and not do what they are told, and thus they get entangled in hating the one who told them in the first place.

Everybody has enough personal power for something. The trick for the warrior is to pull their personal power away from their weaknesses, to their warrior's purpose.

Everyone can *see*, and yet we choose not to remember what we *see*.

## Commentary on *The Second Ring of Power*

Years went by before I wrote *The Second Ring of Power*. Don Juan was long gone, and the quotations from that book are memories of what he had said, memories triggered by a new situation, or a new development. Another player had appeared in my life. It was don Juan's cohort, Florinda Matus. All of don Juan's apprentices understood that when don Juan left, Florinda was left behind to somehow round up the last part of our training.

"Not until you are capable of taking orders from a woman without detriment to your being will you be complete," don Juan had said. "But that woman cannot be just any woman. It must be somebody special, somebody who has power and a quality of ruthlessness that will not allow you to be the man-in-charge that you fancy yourself to be."

Of course, I laughed off his statements. I thought he was definitely joking. The truth of the matter was that he wasn't joking at all. One day, Florinda Donner-Grau and Taisha Abelar returned, and we went to Mexico. We went to a department store in the city of Guadalajara, and there, we found Florinda Matus, the most gorgeous woman I had ever seen: extremely tall — five feet eleven, lean, angular, with a beautiful face, old, and yet very young.

"Ah! There you are!" she exclaimed, when she saw us. "The Three Musketeers! The Pep Boys— Eenie, Meenie and Mo! I've been looking for you all over!"

And without any more to say, she took over. Florinda Donner-Grau, of course, was delighted beyond measure. Taisha Abelar was extremely reserved, as usual, and I was mortified, almost furious. I knew that the arrangement was not going to work. I was ready to clash with this woman the first time she opened her daring mouth and came up with phrases like "Eenie, Meenie and Mo— the Pep Boys."

Unsuspected things that I had in reserve, however, came to my aid, and prevented me from any reaction of wrath or annoyance, and I got along with Florinda superbly better than I could have dreamed. She ruled us with an iron hand. She was the undisputed queen of our lives. She had the power and the detachment to carry out her job of tuning us in the most subtle way. She didn't allow us to drown in self-pity or complaining if something was not quite to our liking. She was not at all like don Juan. She lacked his sobriety, but she had another quality that balanced her lack: she was as fast as anything could be. One glance was sufficient for her to comprehend an entire situation, and to act instantaneously in accordance with what was expected of her.

One of her favorite ploys, which I enjoyed immensely, was to formally ask an audience, or a group of people she was talking to, "Does anyone here know anything about the pressure and displacement of gases?" She would ask such a question in true seriousness. And when the audience responded, "No, no, we don't," she would say, "Then, I could say anything I want, true?!"— and indeed she would go ahead and say anything she wanted. She would actually sometimes say such ridiculous things that I would fall on the floor laughing.

Her other classical question was, "Does anyone here know anything about the retina of chimpanzees? No?"— and Florinda would say barbarities about the retina of chimpanzees. Never in my life had I enjoyed my time more thoroughly. I was her admirer and unbiased follower.

I once had a fistula by the crest of the bone of my hip, a product of a fall that I had taken years before into a ravine filled with cactus needles. There had been seventy-five needles stuck in my body. One of them either hadn't come out completely or had left a residue of dirt or debris that years later produced a fistula.

My doctor said, "That's nothing. It is just a sack of pus that has to be lanced. It's a very simple operation. It would take a few minutes to clean it out."

I consulted with Florinda, and she said, "You are the nagual. You either cure yourself, or you die. No shades of meaning. No double behavior. For a nagual to be lanced by a doctor— you must have lost your power. For a nagual to die fistulated? What a shame."

Except for Florinda Donner-Grau and Taisha Abelar, the rest of don Juan's apprentices didn't care at all for Florinda. She was a threatening figure. She was someone who never allowed them the freedom that they felt was their due. She never celebrated their pseudo-exploits of shamanism, and she stopped their activities every time they strayed from the warriors' path.

In the corpus of *The Second Ring of Power*, that struggle of the apprentices is more than manifest. Don Juan's other apprentices were a lost lot, filled with egomaniacal outbursts, each one pulling in their own direction, each one asserting his or her value.

Everything that took place in our lives from that time on was deeply influenced by Florinda Matus, and yet, she never took the front stand. She was always a figure in the background, wise, funny, ruthless. Florinda Donner-Grau and I learned to love her as we had never loved before, and when she left, she willed to Florinda Donner-Grau her name, her jewels, her money, her grace, her savoir-faire. I felt that I could never write a book about Florinda Matus, that if anybody ever did, it would have to be Florinda Donner-Grau, her true heir, her daughter of daughters. I was, like Florinda Matus, only a figure in the background, put there by don Juan Matus to break the loneliness of a warrior, and enjoy my passage on earth.

## Quotations from *The Eagle's Gift*

The art of *dreaming* is the capacity to utilize one's ordinary dreams and transform them into controlled awareness by virtue of a specialized form of attention called the *dreaming attention*.

The art of *stalking* is a set of procedures and attitudes that enables a warrior to get the best out of any conceivable, or inconceivable, situation.

The recommendation for warriors is not to have any material things on which to focus their power, but to focus it on the spirit, on the true flight into the unknown, not on trivialities. Everyone who wants to follow the warrior's path has to rid himself of the compulsion to possess and hold onto things.

*Seeing* is a bodily knowledge. The predominance of the visual sense in us influences this bodily knowledge and makes it seem to be eye-related.

Losing the *human form* is like a spiral. It gives a warrior the freedom to remember themselves as straight fields of energy and this in turn makes them even freer.

A warrior knows that they are waiting, and they knows what they are waiting for; and while they wait, they feast their eyes upon the world. A warrior's ultimate accomplishment is to enjoy the joy of infinity.

The course of a warrior's destiny is unalterable. The challenge is how far they can go and how impeccable they can be within those rigid bounds.

People's actions no longer affect a warrior when they have no more expectations of any kind. A strange peace becomes the ruling force in their life. They have adopted one of the concepts of a warrior's life— detachment.

Detachment does not automatically mean wisdom, but it is, nonetheless, an advantage because it allows the warrior to pause momentarily to reassess situations; to reconsider one's position. In order to use that extra moment consistently and correctly, however, a warrior has to struggle unyieldingly for the duration of their life.

*I am already given to the power that rules my fate.*

*And I cling to nothing, so I will have nothing to defend.*

*I have no thoughts, so I will see.*

*I fear nothing, so I will remember myself.*

*Detached and at ease,*

*I will dart past the Eagle to be free.*

It is much easier for warriors to fare well under conditions of maximum stress than to be impeccable under normal circumstances.

Human beings are two-sided. The right side encompasses everything the intellect can conceive of. The left side is a realm of indescribable features; a realm impossible to contain in words.

The left side is perhaps comprehended, if comprehension is what takes place, with the total body; thus it's resistance to conceptualization.

All the faculties, possibilities, and accomplishments of shamanism, from the simplest to the most astounding, are in the human body itself.

The power that governs the destiny of all living beings is called the *Eagle*, not because it is an eagle or has anything to do with an eagle, but because it appears to the eye of the seer as an immeasurable jet-black eagle, standing erect as an eagle stands, it's height reaching to infinity.

The *Eagle* devours the awareness of all the creatures that, alive on earth a moment before and now dead, have floated to the *Eagle's beak* like a swarm of fireflies to meet their owner; their reason for having had life. The *Eagle* disentangles these tiny flames, lays them flat, as a tanner stretches out a hide, and then consumes them; for awareness is the *Eagle's food*.

The *Eagle*, that power that governs the destinies of all living things, reflects equally and at once all those living things. There is no way, therefore, for man to pray to the *Eagle*; to ask favors, to hope for grace. The human part of the *Eagle* is too insignificant to move the whole.

Every living thing has been granted the power, if it so desires, to seek an opening to freedom and go through it. It is evident to the seer who *sees* the opening, and to the creatures that go through it, that the *Eagle* has granted that gift in order to perpetuate awareness.

To cross over to freedom does not mean eternal life as eternity is commonly understood— that is, as living forever. Rather, warriors can keep their awareness, which is ordinarily relinquished at the moment of dying. At the moment of crossing, the body in it's entirety is kindled with knowledge. Every cell at once becomes aware of itself and also aware of the totality of the body.

The *Eagle's* gift of freedom is not a bestowal. It's a chance to have a chance.

A warrior is never under siege. To be under siege implies that one has personal possessions that could be blockaded. A warrior has nothing in the world except their impeccability, and impeccability cannot be threatened.

The first principle of the *art of stalking* is that warriors choose their battleground. A warrior never goes into battle without knowing what the surroundings are.

To discard everything that is unnecessary is the second principle of the *art of stalking*. A warrior doesn't complicate things. They aim at being simple. A warrior applies all the concentration they have to decide whether or not to enter into battle, for any battle is a battle for their life. This is the third principle of the *art of stalking*. A warrior must be willing and ready to make their last stand here and now. But not in a helter-skelter way.

A warrior relaxes and abandons themselves. They fear nothing. Only then will the powers that guide human beings open the road for a warrior and aid them. Only-then. That is the fourth principle of the *art of stalking*.

When faced with odds that cannot be dealt with, warriors retreat for a moment. They let their minds meander. They occupy their time with something else. Anything would do. That is the fifth principle of the *art of stalking*.

Warriors compress time. This is the sixth principle of the *art of stalking*. Even an instant counts. In a battle for your life, a second is an eternity, an eternity that may decide the outcome. Warriors aim at succeeding, therefore they compress time. Warriors don't waste an instant.

In order to apply the seventh principle of the *art of stalking*, one has to apply the other six: a stalker never pushes themselves to the front. They are always looking on from behind the scenes.

Applying these principles brings about three results. The first is that stalkers learn never to take themselves seriously. They learn to laugh at themselves. If they are not afraid of being a fool, they can fool anyone. The second is that stalkers learn to have endless patience. Stalkers are never in a hurry, they never fret. And the third is that stalkers learn to have an endless capacity to improvise.

Warriors face the oncoming time. Normally we face time as it recedes from us. Only warriors can change that and face time as it advances on them.

Warriors have only one thing in mind: their freedom. To die and be eaten by the *Eagle* is no challenge. On the other hand, to sneak around the *Eagle* and be free is the ultimate audacity.

When warriors talk about time, they are not referring to something which is measured by the movement of a clock. Time is the essence of attention. The *Eagle's* emanations are made out of time, and properly speaking, when a warrior enters into other aspects of the self, they are becoming acquainted with time.

A warrior can no longer weep. Their only expression of anguish is a shiver that comes from the very depths of the universe. It is as if one of the *Eagle's* emanations were made out of pure anguish, and when it hits a warrior, the warrior's shiver is infinite.

## Commentary on *The Eagle's Gift*

It was a remarkable sensation for me to examine the quotations drawn from *The Eagle's Gift*. I felt immediately the hard coil of the intent of the shamans of ancient Mexico working as vividly as ever. I knew then, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the quotations from this book were ruled by their *wheel of time*. Further, I knew that this had been the case with everything I had done in the past, such as writing *The Eagle's Gift*, and that it is the case with everything I do, as in writing the present book.

Since I am at a loss to elucidate this matter, the only option open to me is to accept it in humbleness. The shamans of ancient Mexico did have another cognitive system at work, and from the units of that cognitive system, they still affect me today in the most positive, uplifting fashion.

Due to the effort of Florinda Matus, who engaged me in learning the most elaborate variations of standard shamanistic techniques devised by the shamans of ancient times, such as the recapitulation for instance, I was able to view my experiences with don Juan with a force I never could have imagined. The corpus of my book, *The Eagle's Gift*, is the result of such views that I had of don Juan Matus.

For don Juan Matus, to recapitulate meant to relive and rearrange everything of one's life in one single sweep. He never bothered with the minutiae of elaborate variations of that ancient technique. Florinda, on the other hand, had an entirely different meticulousness. She spent months coaching me to enter into aspects of recapitulating that I am to this day at a loss to explain.

"It is the vastness of the warrior which you are experiencing," she explained. "The techniques are there. Big deal. What is of supreme importance is the man using them, and his desire to go all the way with them."

To recapitulate don Juan in Florinda's terms resulted in views of don Juan of the most excruciating detail and meaning. It was infinitely more intense than talking to don Juan himself had been. It was Florinda's pragmatism that gave me astounding insights into practical possibilities that were not in the least the concern of the nagual Juan Matus. Florinda, being a true woman pragmatist, had no illusions about herself, no dreams of grandeur. She said that she was a plower who could not afford to miss a single turn of the way.

"A warrior must go very slowly," she recommended, "and make use of every available item on the warriors' path. One of the most remarkable items is the capacity we all have as warriors to focus our attention with unwavering force on events lived. Warriors can even focus it on people they have never met. The end result of this deep focusing is always the same. It reconstructs the scene. Whole chunks of behavior, forgotten or brand new, make themselves available to a warrior. Try it."

I followed her advice, and of course, I focused on don Juan, and I remembered everything that had transpired at any given moment. I remembered details that I had no business remembering. Thanks to the work of Florinda, I was able to reconstruct enormous chunks of activity with don Juan, as well as details of tremendous importance that had bypassed me completely.

The spirit of the quotations from *The Eagle's Gift* was most shocking to me because the quotations revealed the profound emphasis that don Juan had put on the items of his world, on the warriors' way as the epitome of human accomplishment. That drive had survived his person, and was as alive as ever. Sometimes, I sincerely felt that don Juan had never left. I got to the point of actually hearing him moving around the house. I asked Florinda about it.

She said, "Oh, that's nothing. It's just the nagual Juan Matus's emptiness that reaches out to touch you, no matter where his awareness is at the moment."

Her answer left me more puzzled, more intrigued, and more despondent than ever. Although Florinda was the closest person to the nagual Juan Matus, they were astoundingly different. One thing that they both shared was the emptiness of their persons. They were no longer people. Don Juan Matus did not exist as a person. But what existed instead of his person was a collection of stories, each of them apropos to the situation he was discussing; didactic stories and jokes that bore the mark of his sobriety and his frugality.

Florinda was the same; she had stories upon stories. But her stories were about people. They were like a high form of gossip, or gossip elevated, due to her impersonality, to inconceivable heights of effectiveness and enjoyment.

"I want you to examine one man who bears a tremendous resemblance to you," she said one day to me. "I want you to recapitulate him as if you had known him all your life. This man was transcendental in the formation of our lineage. His name was Elias, the nagual Elias. I call him 'the nagual who lost heaven.'

"The story is that the nagual Elias was reared by a Jesuit priest who taught him to read and write and to play the harpsichord. He taught him Latin. The nagual Elias could read the scriptures in Latin as fluently as any scholar could. His destiny was to be a priest, but he was an Indian, and Indians in those days did not fit into clerical hierarchies. They were too awesome-looking, too dark, too Indian. Priests were from the upper social classes; descendants of Spaniards, with white skin, blue eyes. They were handsome, presentable. The nagual Elias was a bear in comparison. But he struggled long, kindled by his mentor's promise that God would see that he was accepted into the priesthood.

"He was the sexton [* *sexton- an officer of the church who is in charge of sacred objects*] of the church where his mentor was the parish priest, and one day, an actual witch walked in. Her name was Amalia. They say that she was a wild card. Be that as it may, she ended up seducing the poor sexton, who fell so deeply, so hopelessly in love with Amalia that he ended up in the hut of a nagual man. In time, he became the nagual Elias, a figure to reckon with, cultured, well-read. It seemed that the niche of nagual was made for him. It allowed him the anonymity and the effectiveness that was denied him in the world.

"He was a dreamer, and so good at it that he covered the most recondite places of the universe in a bodiless state. Sometimes he even brought back objects that had attracted his eye because of the lines of their design, objects that were incomprehensible. He called them 'inventions.' He had a whole collection of them.

"I want you to focus your recapitulation attention on those inventions," Florinda commanded me. "I want you to end up sniffing them, and feeling them with your hands, although you have never seen them except through what I am telling you now. To do this focusing means to establish a point of reference, as in an algebraic equation in which something is calculated by playing on a third element. You'll be able to see the nagual Juan Matus with infinite clarity, using someone else as a point of corroboration."

The corpus of the book *The Eagle's Gift* is a review in depth of what don Juan had done to me while he was in the world. The views that I had of don Juan due to my new recapitulation skills — using the nagual Elias as a point of corroboration— were infinitely more intense than any views that I had of him while he was alive. The recapitulation views I was engaged in lacked the warmth of the living, but they had instead the precision and the accuracy of inanimate objects that one can examine to one's hearts content.

## Quotations from *The Fire from Within*

There is no completeness without sadness and longing, for without them there is no sobriety, no kindness. Wisdom without kindness and knowledge without sobriety are useless.

Self-importance is man's greatest enemy. What weakens us is feeling offended by the deeds and misdeeds of our fellow men. Self-importance requires that one spend most of one's life offended by something or someone.

In order to follow the path of knowledge, one has to be very imaginative. On the path of knowledge, nothing is as clear as we'd like it to be.

If seers can hold their own in facing petty tyrants, they can certainly face the unknown with impunity, and then they can even withstand the presence of the unknowable.

What seems natural is to think that a warrior who can hold their own in the face of the unknown can certainly face petty tyrants with impunity. But that's not necessarily so. What destroyed the superb warriors of ancient times was to rely on that assumption. Nothing can temper the spirit of a warrior as much as the challenge of dealing with impossible people in positions of power. Only under those conditions can warriors acquire the sobriety and serenity to withstand the pressure of the unknowable.

The unknown is something that is veiled from man, shrouded perhaps by a terrifying context, but which, nonetheless, is within man's reach. The unknown becomes the known at a given time. The unknowable, on the other hand, is the indescribable; the unthinkable; the unrealizable. It is something that will never be known to us, and yet it is there; dazzling and at the same time horrifying in it's vastness.

We perceive. This is a hard fact. But what we perceive is not a fact of the same kind because we learn what to perceive.

Warriors say that we think there is a world of objects out there only because of our awareness. But what's really out there are the Eagle's emanations; fluid, forever in motion, and yet unchanged; eternal.

The deepest flaw of unseasoned warriors is that they are willing to forget the wonder of what they *see*. They become overwhelmed by the fact that they *see* and believe that it's their genius that counts. A seasoned warrior must be a paragon of discipline in order to override the nearly invincible laxness of our human condition. More important than *seeing* itself is what warriors do with what they *see*.

One of the greatest forces in the lives of warriors is fear, because it spurs them to learn.

For a seer, the truth is that all living beings are struggling to die. What stops death is awareness.

The unknown is forever present, but it is outside the possibility of our normal awareness. The unknown is the superfluous part of the average person. And it is superfluous because the average person doesn't have enough free energy to grasp it.

The greatest flaw of human beings is to remain glued to the inventory of reason. Reason doesn't deal with humans as energy. Reason deals with instruments that create energy, but it has never seriously occurred to reason that we are better than instruments: we are organisms that create energy. We are bubbles of energy.

Warriors who deliberately attain total awareness are a sight to behold. That is the moment when they burn from within. The fire from within consumes them. In full awareness they fuse themselves to the emanations of the Eagle at large, and glide into eternity.

Once inner silence is attained, everything is possible. The way to stop talking to ourselves is to use exactly the same method used to teach us to talk to ourselves. We were taught compulsively and unwaveringly, and this is the way we must stop it: compulsively and unwaveringly.

Impeccability begins with a single act that has to be deliberate, precise, and sustained. If that act is repeated long enough, one acquires a sense of unbending intent which can be applied to anything else. If that is accomplished the road is clear. One thing will lead to another until the warrior realizes their full potential.

The mystery of awareness is darkness. Human beings reek of that mystery; of things which are inexplicable. To regard ourselves in any other terms is madness. So a warrior doesn't demean the mystery of man by trying to rationalize it.

Realizations are of two kinds. One is just pep talk, great outbursts of emotion and nothing more. The other is the product of a shift of the assemblage point; it is not coupled with an emotional outburst, but with action. The emotional realizations come years later after warriors have solidified, by usage, the new position of their assemblage points.

The worst that could happen to us is that we have to die, and since that is already our unalterable fate, we are free. Those who have lost everything no longer have anything to fear.

Warriors don't venture into the unknown out of greed. Greed works only in the world of ordinary affairs. To venture into the terrifying loneliness of the unknown, one must have something other than greed: love. One needs love for life, for intrigue, for mystery. One needs unquenchable curiosity and guts galore.

A warrior thinks only of the mysteries of awareness: Mystery is all that matters. We are living beings. We have to die and relinquish our awareness. But if we could change just a tinge of that, what mysteries must await us? What mysteries!

## Commentary on *The Fire from Within*

The Fire from Within as a book was another of the end results of the influence of Florinda Matus on my life. She guided me to focus this time on don Juan's teacher, the nagual Julian. Both Florinda and my detailed focusing on the man revealed to me that the nagual Julian Osorio had been an actor of some merit— but more than an actor, he had been a licentious [* *licentious- lacking moral discipline; especially sexually unrestrained*] man, concerned exclusively with the seduction of women; women of any kind with whom he came in contact during his theatrical presentations. He was so extremely licentious that ultimately, his health failed, and he became infected with tuberculosis.

His teacher, the nagual Elias, found him one afternoon in an open field on the outskirts of the city of Durango, seducing the daughter of a wealthy landowner. Due to the exertion, the actor began to hemorrhage, and the hemorrhage became so heavy that he was on the brink of dying. Florinda said that the nagual Elias saw that there was no way for him to help him. To cure the actor was an impossibility, and the only thing that he could do as a nagual was to arrest the bleeding, which he did. He saw fit to make then a proposition to the actor.

"I'm leaving at five in the morning for the mountains," he said. "Be at the entrance of the town. Don't fail. If you fail to come, you will die, sooner than you think. Your only recourse is to go with me. I'll never be able to cure you, but I will be able to deviate your inexorable walk to the abyss that marks the end of life. All of us human beings go inexorably into that abyss sooner or later. I will head you off to walk the enormous extent of that crack, either to the left or to the right of it. As long as you don't fall, you will live. You'll never be well, but you'll live."

The nagual Elias didn't have great expectations about the actor, who was lazy, slovenly, [* *slovenly- negligent of neatness especially in dress and person; habitually dirty and unkempt*] self-indulgent, and perhaps even a coward. The nagual was quite surprised when the next day at five in the morning he found the actor waiting for him at the edge of the town. He took him to the mountains, and in time, the actor became the nagual Julian— a tubercular man who was never cured, but who lived to be perhaps one hundred and seven years old, always walking along the edge of the abyss.

"Of course, it is of supreme importance to you," Florinda said to me once, "that you examine the walk of the nagual Julian along the edge of the abyss. The nagual Juan Matus didn't care to know anything about it. To him, all of that was superfluous. You're not as talented as the nagual Juan Matus. Nothing can be superfluous for you as a warrior. You must allow the thoughts, the feelings, and the ideas of the shamans of ancient Mexico to come to you freely."

Florinda was right. I don't have the splendor of the nagual Juan Matus. Just as she had said, nothing could be superfluous to me. I needed every prop, every twist. I could not afford to bypass any of the views or ideas of the shamans of ancient Mexico no matter how far-fetched they might have seemed to me.

To examine the walk of the nagual Julian on the edge of the abyss meant that the ability to focus my recollection could be extended to the feelings that the nagual Julian had about his most extraordinary struggle to remain alive. I was shocked to the marrow of my bones to find out that the struggle of that man was a second-to-second fight; with his terrifying habits of indulging and his extraordinary sensuality pitted against his rigid adherence to survival. His fight was not sporadic. It was a most sustained, disciplined struggle to remain balanced. 'Walking on the edge of the abyss' meant the battle of a warrior enhanced to such a degree that every second counted. One single moment of weakness would have thrown the nagual Julian into that abyss.

However, he kept his view, his emphasis, and his concern focused on what Florinda called the edge of the abyss, and the pressure eased. Whatever he was viewing was not as desperate as what he was viewing when his old habits began to take hold of him. It seemed to me that when I looked at the nagual Julian at those moments, I was recapitulating a different man; a man more peaceful, more detached, and more collected.

## Quotations from *The Power of Silence*

It isn't that a warrior learns shamanism as time goes by; rather, what they learn as time goes by is to save energy. This energy will enable them to handle some of the energy fields which are ordinarily inaccessible to them. Shamanism is a state of awareness; the ability to use energy fields that are not employed in perceiving the everyday-life world that we know.

In the universe there is an immeasurable, indescribable force which shamans call *intent*, and absolutely everything that exists in the entire cosmos is attached to *intent* by a connecting link. Warriors are concerned with discussing, understanding, and employing that connecting link. They are especially concerned with cleaning it of the numbing effects brought about by the ordinary concerns of their everyday lives. Shamanism at this level can be defined as the procedure of cleaning one's connecting link to *intent*.

Shamans are vitally concerned with their past, but not their personal past. For shamans, their past is what other shamans in bygone days have accomplished. They consult their past in order to obtain a point of reference. Only shamans genuinely seek a point of reference in their past. For them, establishing a point of reference means a chance to examine intent.

The average person also examines the past. But it's their personal past they examine for personal reasons. They measures themselves against the past, whether their personal past or the past knowledge of their time, in order to find justifications for their present or future behavior; or to establish a model for themselves.

The spirit manifests itself to a warrior at every turn. However, this is not the entire truth. The entire truth is that the spirit reveals itself to everyone with the same intensity and consistency, but only warriors are consistently attuned to such revelations.

Warriors speak of shamanism as a magical, mysterious bird which has paused in it's flight for a moment in order to give man hope and purpose. Warriors live under the wing of that bird which they call the *bird of wisdom*; the *bird of freedom*.

For a warrior, the spirit is an abstract only because they know it without words or even thoughts. It's an abstract because they can't conceive what the spirit is. Yet, without the slightest chance or desire to understand it, a warrior handles the spirit. He recognizes it, beckons it, entices it, becomes familiar with it, and expresses it with their acts.

The average man's connecting link with *intent* is practically dead, and warriors begin with a link that is useless because it does not respond voluntarily. In order to revive that link, warriors need a rigorous, fierce purpose— a special state of mind called *unbending intent*.

The power of man is incalculable: death exists only because we have *intended* it since the moment of our birth. However, the *intent* of death can be suspended by making the assemblage point change positions.

The art of stalking is learning all the quirks of your disguise, and learning them so well that no one will know you are disguised. For that you need to be ruthless, cunning, patient and sweet. Ruthlessness should not be harshness, cunning should not be cruelty, patience should not be negligence, and sweetness should not be foolishness.

Warriors have an ulterior purpose for their acts, which has nothing to do with personal gain. The average man acts only if there is the chance for profit. Warriors act not for profit, but for the spirit.

The shaman seers of ancient times, through their *seeing*, first noticed that any unusual behavior produced a tremor in the assemblage point. They soon discovered that if unusual behavior is practiced systematically and directed wisely, it eventually forces the assemblage point to move.

*Silent knowledge* is nothing but direct contact with *intent*.

Shamanism is a journey of return. A warrior returns victorious to the spirit, having descended into hell. And from hell he brings trophies. Understanding is one of their trophies.

Warriors, because they are stalkers, understand human behavior to perfection. They understand, for instance, that human beings are creatures of inventory. Knowing the ins and cuts of a particular inventory is what makes someone a scholar or an expert in their field.

Warriors know that when an average person's inventory fails, the person either enlarges their inventory or their world of self-reflection collapses. The average person is able to incorporate new items into their inventory if the new items don't contradict the inventory's underlying order. But if the items contradict that order, the person's mind collapses. The inventory is the mind. Warriors count on this when they attempt to break the mirror of self-reflection.

Warriors can never make a bridge to join the people of the world. But, if people desire to do so, they have to make a bridge to join warriors.

In order for the mysteries of shamanism to be available to anyone, the spirit must descend onto whoever is interested. The spirit lets it's presence by itself move their assemblage point to a specific position. This precise spot is known to shamans as the *place of no pity*.

There really is no procedure involved in making the assemblage point move to the *place of no pity*. The spirit touches the person and their assemblage point moves. It is as simple as that.

What we need to do to allow magic to get hold of us is to banish doubts from our minds. Once doubts are banished, anything is possible.

Man's possibilities are so vast and mysterious that warriors, rather than thinking about them, have chosen to explore them with no hope of ever understanding them.

Everything that warriors do is done as a consequence of a movement of their assemblage points, and such movements are ruled by the amount of energy warriors have at their command.

Any movement of the assemblage point means a movement away from an excessive concern with the individual self. Shamans believe it is the position of the assemblage point which makes modern man a homicidal egotist, a being totally involved with their self-image. Having lost hope of ever returning to the source of everything, the average person seeks solace in their selfishness.

The thrust of the warriors' way is to dethrone self-importance. And everything warriors do is directed toward accomplishing this goal.

Shamans have unmasked self-importance and found that it is self-pity masquerading as something else.

In the world of everyday life, one's word or one's decisions can be reversed very easily. The only irrevocable thing in the everyday world is death. In the shamans' world, on the other hand, normal death can be countermanded, but not the shamans' word. In the shamans' world decisions cannot be changed or revised. Once they have been made, they stand forever.

One of the most dramatic things about the human condition is the macabre connection between stupidity and self-reflection. It is stupidity that forces the average person to discard anything that does not conform with their self-reflective expectations. For example, as average persons, we are blind to the most crucial piece of knowledge available to a human being: the existence of the assemblage point and the fact that it can move.

For the rational person to hold steadfastly to their self-image ensures their abysmal ignorance. They ignore the fact that (sorcery) is not incantations and hocus-pocus, but rather the freedom to perceive not only the world taken for granted, but everything else that is humanly possible to experience. They tremble at the possibility of freedom. And freedom is at their fingertips.

Man's predicament is that we intuit our hidden resources, but we do not dare use them. This is why warriors say that man's plight is the counterpoint between our stupidity and our ignorance. Man needs now, more than ever, to be taught new ideas that have to do exclusively with our inner world— not social ideas, shamans' ideas pertaining to man facing the unknown, and facing our personal death. Now, more than anything else, we need to be taught the secrets of the assemblage point.

The spirit listens only when the speaker speaks in gestures. And gestures do not mean signs or body movements, but acts of true abandon; acts of largesse, of humor. As a gesture for the spirit, warriors bring out the best of themselves and silently offer it to the abstract.

## Commentary on *The Power of Silence*

The last book that I ever wrote about don Juan as a direct result of the guidance of Florinda Matus was called *The Power of Silence*; a title that was chosen by my editor. My title had been *Inner Silence*. At the time that I was working on the book, the views of the shamans of ancient Mexico had become extremely abstract for me. Florinda tried her best to deviate me from my absorption in the abstract. She attempted to redirect my attention to different aspects of old shamanistic techniques, or she tried to divert me by shocking me with her scandalous behavior. But nothing was sufficient to deviate me from my seemingly inexorable drive.

*The Power of Silence* is an intellectual review of the thoughts of the shamans of ancient Mexico in their most abstract guise. As I worked alone on the book, I was contaminated by the mood of those men; by their desire to know more in a quasi-rational way. Florinda explained that in the end, those shamans had become extremely cold and detached. Nothing warm existed for them anymore. They were set in their quest: Their coldness as men was an effort to match the coldness of infinity. They had succeeded in changing their human eyes to match the cold eyes of the unknown.

I sensed this in myself, and tried desperately to turn the tide. I haven't succeeded yet. My thoughts have become more and more like the thoughts of those men at the end of their quest. It is not that I don't laugh. Quite the contrary, my life is an endless joy. But at the same time, it is an endless, merciless quest. Infinity will swallow me, and I want to be prepared for it. I don't want infinity to dissolve me into nothing because I hold human desires, warm affection, and attachments, no matter how vague. More than anything else in this world, I want to be like those men. I never knew them. The only shamans I knew were don Juan and his cohorts, and what they expressed was the furthest thing from the coldness that I intuit in those unknown men.

Due to the influence that Florinda had on my life, I succeeded brilliantly in learning to focus my unwavering attention on the mood of people I never knew. But as I focused my recapitulation attention on the mood of those shamans, I got trapped by it without hope of ever extricating myself from their pull. Florinda didn't believe in the finality of my state. She humored me, and laughed at it openly.

"Your state only seems to be final," she said to me, "but it isn't. A moment will come when you will change venues. Perhaps you will chuck every thought about the shamans of ancient Mexico. Perhaps you may even chuck the thoughts and views of the very shamans you worked with so closely, like the nagual Juan Matus. You might refuse his being. You'll see. The warrior has no limits. His sense of improvisation is so acute that he will make constructs out of nothing; not just mere empty constructs, but rather, something workable, and pragmatic. You'll see. It is not that you'll forget about them, but at one moment before you plunge into the abyss, if you have the gall to walk along it's edge, and if you have the daring not to deviate from it, you will then arrive at warriors' conclusions of an order and stability infinitely more suited to you than the fixation of the shamans of ancient Mexico."

Florinda's words were like a handsome, hopeful prophecy. Perhaps she was right. She was of course right in asserting that the resources of a warrior have no limits. The only flaw is that in order for me to have a different orderly view of the world and myself, a view even more suited to my temperament, I have to walk along the edge of the abyss, and I have doubts that I have the daring and strength to accomplish that feat.

But who is there to tell?

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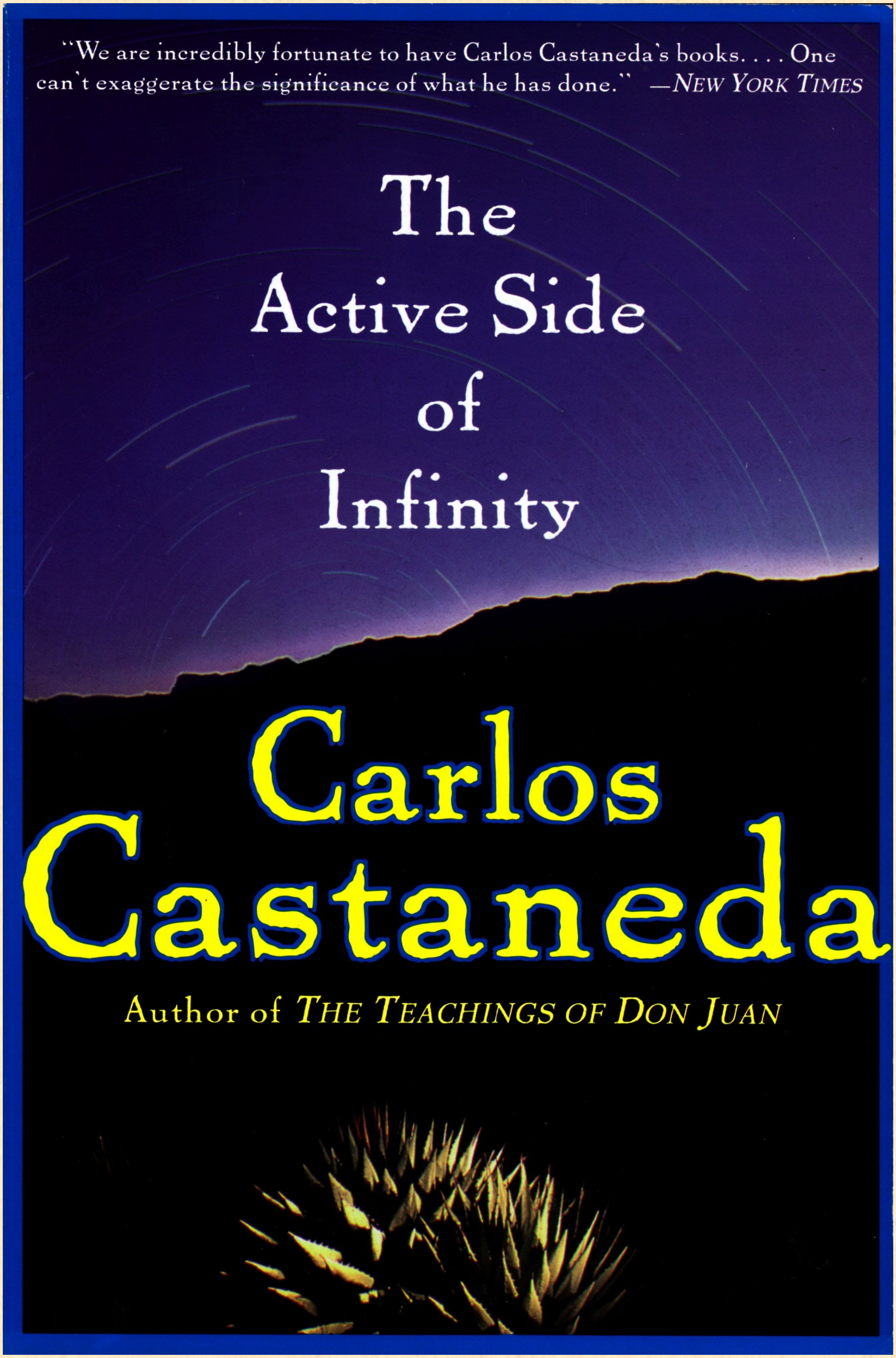
The Nagualist Library - Table of Contents

# 14 - THE ACTIVE SIDE OF INFINITY

© 1998 (September 1) - Carlos Castaneda. Retrospective. Includes events and recollections not covered in the preceding books.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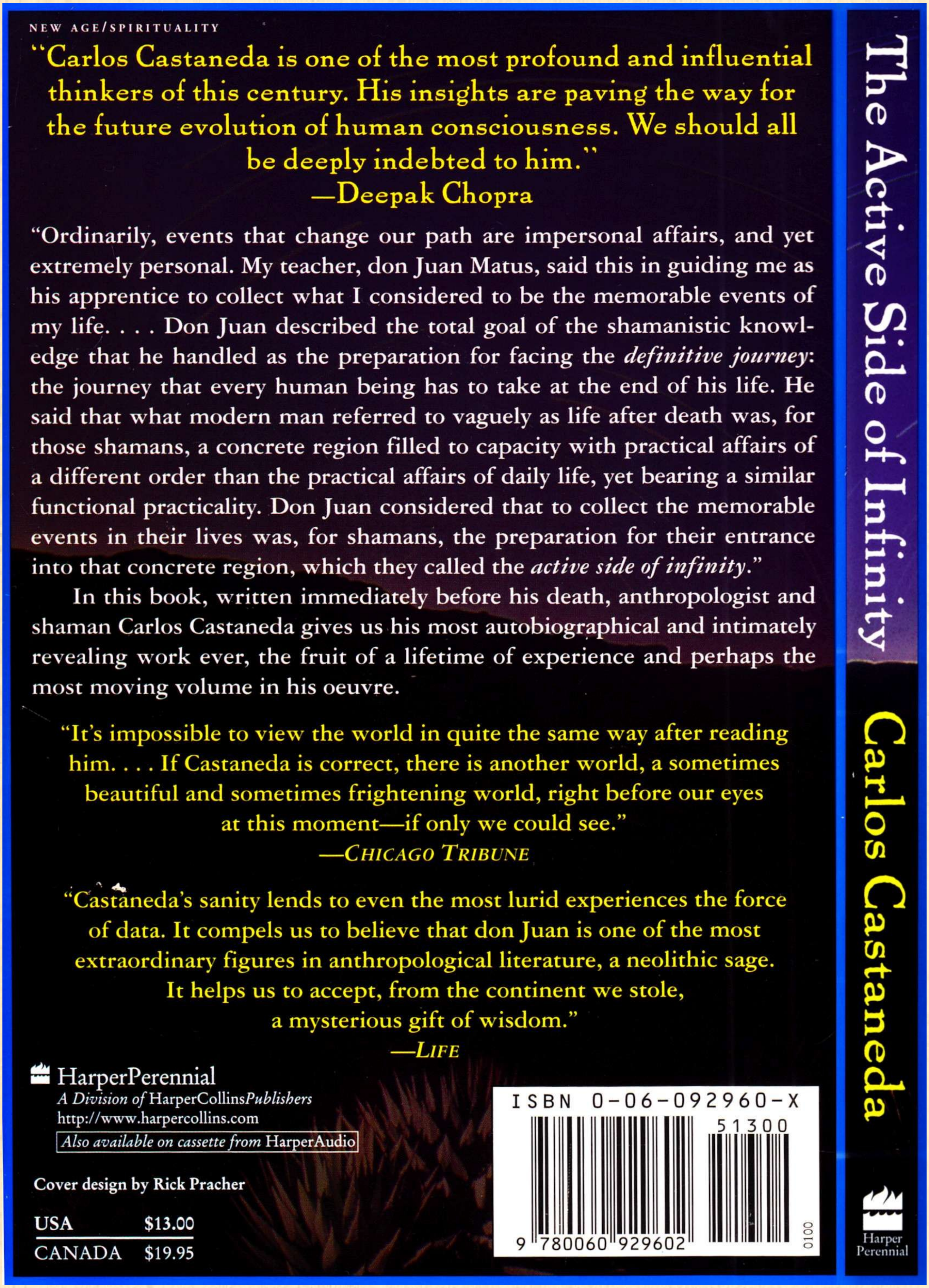
The Active Side of Infinity
Carlos Castaneda
Author of THE TEACHINGS OF DON JUAN



NEW AGE/SPIRITUALITY

"Carlos Castaneda is one of the most profound and influential thinkers of this century. His insights are paving the way for the future evolution of human consciousness. We should all be deeply indebted to him."
—Deepak Chopra

"Ordinarily, events that change our path are impersonal affairs, and yet extremely personal. My teacher, don Juan Matus, said this in guiding me as his apprentice to collect what I considered to be the memorable events of my life. . . . Don Juan described the total goal of the shamanistic knowledge that he handled as the preparation for facing the *definitive journey*: the journey that every human being has to take at the end of his life. He said that what modern man referred to vaguely as life after death was, for those shamans, a concrete region filled to capacity with practical affairs of a different order than the practical affairs of daily life, yet bearing a similar functional practicality. Don Juan considered that to collect the memorable events in their lives was, for shamans, the preparation for their entrance into that concrete region, which they called the *active side of infinity*."

In this book, written immediately before his death, anthropologist and shaman Carlos Castaneda gives us his most autobiographical and intimately revealing work ever, the fruit of a lifetime of experience and perhaps the most moving volume in his oeuvre.

"It's impossible to view the world in quite the same way after reading him. . . . If Castaneda is correct, there is another world, a sometimes beautiful and sometimes frightening world, right before our eyes at this moment—if only we could see."
—*CHICAGO TRIBUNE*

"Castaneda's sanity lends to even the most lurid experiences the force of data. It compels us to believe that don Juan is one of the most extraordinary figures in anthropological literature, a neolithic sage. It helps us to accept, from the continent we stole, a mysterious gift of wisdom."
—*LIFE*

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Carlos Castaneda

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# Book 14 – THE ACTIVE SIDE OF INFINITY

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This book is dedicated to the two men who gave me the impetus and the tools to do anthropological fieldwork : Professor Clement Meighan and Professor Harold Garfinkle. Following their suggestions, I plunged into a field situation from which I never emerged. If I failed to fulfill the spirit of their teaching, so be it. I couldn’t help it. A greater force, which shamans call *infinity*, swallowed me before I could formulate clear-cut social scientists’ propositions.

∞

## Syntax

A man staring at his equations
said that the universe had a beginning.
There had been an explosion, he said.
A bang of bangs, and the universe was born.
And it is expanding, he said.
He had even calculated the length of it's life:
ten billion revolutions of the Earth around the sun.
The entire globe cheered:
They found his calculations to be science.
None thought that by proposing that the universe began,
the man had merely mirrored the syntax of his mother tongue;
a syntax which demands beginnings, like birth,
and developments, like maturation,
and ends, like death, as statements of facts.
The universe began,
and it is getting old, the man assured us,
and it will die, like all things die,

like himself died after confirming mathematically
the syntax of his mother tongue.

## The Other Syntax

Did the universe really begin?
Is the theory of the big bang true?
These are not questions, though they sound like they are.
Is the syntax that requires beginnings, developments
and ends as statements of fact the only syntax that exists?
That's the real question.
There are other syntaxes.
There is one, for example, which demands that varieties
of intensity be taken as facts.
In that syntax nothing begins and nothing ends;
thus birth is not a clean, clear-cut event,
but a specific type of intensity,
and so is maturation, and so is death.
A man of that syntax, looking over his equations, finds that
he has calculated enough varieties of intensity
to say with authority
that the universe never began
and will never end,
but that it has gone, and is going now, and will go
through endless fluctuations of intensity.
That man could very well conclude that the universe itself
is the chariot of intensity
and that one can board it
to journey through changes without end.
He will conclude all that, and much more,
perhaps without ever realizing
that he is merely confirming
the syntax of his mother tongue.

∞

# Introduction

THIS BOOK IS a collection of the memorable events in my life. I gathered them following the recommendation of don Juan Matus, a Yaqui Indian shaman from Mexico who, as a teacher, endeavored for thirteen years to make available to me the cognitive world of the shamans who lived in Mexico in ancient times. Don Juan Matus's suggestion that I gather this collection of memorable events was made as if it were something casual, something that occurred to him on the spur of the moment. That was don Juan's style of teaching. He veiled the importance of certain maneuvers behind the mundane. He hid, in this fashion, the sting of finality, presenting it as something no different from any of the concerns of everyday life.

Don Juan revealed to me as time went by that the shamans of ancient Mexico had conceived of this collection of memorable events as a bona-fide device to stir caches of energy that exist within the self. They explained these caches as being composed of energy that originates in the body itself and becomes displaced, pushed out of reach by the circumstances of our daily lives. In this sense, the collection of memorable events was, for don Juan and the shamans of his lineage, the means for *redeploying* their unused energy.

The prerequisite for this collection was the genuine and all-consuming act of putting together the sum total of one's emotions and realizations, without sparing anything. According to don Juan, the shamans of his lineage were convinced that the collection of memorable events was the vehicle for the emotional and energetic adjustment necessary for venturing, in terms of perception, into the unknown.

Don Juan described the total goal of the shamanistic knowledge that he handled as the preparation for facing the *definitive journey:*

the journey that every human being has to take at the end of his life. He said that through their discipline and resolve, shamans were capable of retaining their individual awareness and purpose after death. For them, the vague, idealistic state that modern man calls "life after death" was a concrete region filled to capacity with practical affairs of a different order than the practical affairs of daily life, yet bearing a similar functional practicality. Don Juan considered that to collect the memorable events in their lives was, for shamans, the preparation for their entrance into that concrete region which they called the *active side of infinity*.

Don Juan and I were talking one afternoon under his ramada, a loose structure made of thin poles of bamboo. It looked like a roofed porch that was partially shaded from the sun but that would not provide protection at all from the rain. There were some small, sturdy freight boxes there that served as benches. Their freight brands were faded, and appeared to be more ornament than identification. I was sitting on one of them. My back was against the front wall of the house. Don Juan was sitting on another box, leaning against a pole that supported the ramada. I had just driven in a few minutes earlier. It had been a daylong ride in hot, humid weather. I was nervous, fidgety, and sweaty.

Don Juan began talking to me as soon as I had comfortably settled down on the box. With a broad smile, he commented that overweight people hardly ever knew how to fight fatness. The smile that played on his lips gave me an inkling that he wasn't being facetious. He was just pointing out to me, in a most direct and at the same time indirect way, that I was overweight.

I became so nervous that I tipped over the freight box on which I was sitting and my back banged very hard against the thin wall of the house. The impact shook the house to it's foundations. Don Juan looked at me inquiringly, but instead of asking me if I was all right, he assured me that I had not cracked the house. Then he expansively explained to me that his house was a temporary dwelling for him, that he really lived somewhere else. When I asked him where he really lived, he stared at me. His look was not belligerent; it was, rather, a firm deterrent to improper questions. I didn't comprehend what he wanted. I was about to ask the same question again, but he stopped me.

"Questions of that sort are not asked around here," he said firmly. "Ask anything you wish about procedures or ideas. Whenever I'm ready to tell you where I live, if ever, I will tell you without your having to ask me."

I instantly felt rejected. My face turned red involuntarily. I was definitely offended. Don Juan's explosion of laughter added immensely to my chagrin. Not only had he rejected me, he had insulted me and then laughed at me.

"I live here temporarily," he went on, unconcerned with my foul mood, "because this is a magical center. In fact, I live here because of you."

That statement unraveled me. I couldn't believe it. I thought that he was probably saying that to ease my irritation at being insulted.

"Do you really live here because of me?" I finally asked him, unable to contain my curiosity.

"Yes," he said evenly. "I have to groom you. You are like me. I will repeat to you now what I have already told you: The quest of every nagual, or leader, in every generation of shamans, or sorcerers, is to find a new man or woman who, like himself, shows a double energetic structure; I *saw* this feature in you when we were in the bus depot in Nogales. When I *see* your energy, I *see* two balls of luminosity superimposed, one on top of the other, and that feature binds us together. I can't refuse you any more than you can refuse me."

His words caused a most strange agitation in me. An instant before I had been angry, now I wanted to weep.

He went on, saying that he wanted to start me off on something shamans called the warriors' *way,* backed by the strength of the area where he lived, which was the center of very strong emotions and reactions. Warlike people had lived there for thousands of years, soaking the land with their concern with war.

He lived at that time in the state of Sonora in northern Mexico, about a hundred miles south of the city of Guaymas. I always went there to visit him under the auspices of conducting my fieldwork.

"Do I need to enter into war, don Juan?" I asked, genuinely worried after he declared that the concern with war was something that I would need someday. I had already learned to take everything he said with the utmost seriousness.

"You bet your boots," he replied, smiling. "When you have absorbed all there is to be absorbed in this area, I'll move away."

I had no grounds to doubt what he was saying, but I couldn't conceive of him as living anywhere else. He was absolutely part of everything that surrounded him. His house, however, seemed indeed to be a temporary dwelling. It was a shack typical of the Yaqui farmers; it was made out of wattle and daub with a flat, thatched roof; it had one big room for eating and sleeping and a roofless kitchen.

"It's very difficult to deal with overweight people," he said.

It seemed to be a non sequitur, but it wasn't. Don Juan was simply going back to the subject he had introduced before I had interrupted him by hitting my back on the wall of his house.

"A minute ago, you hit my house like a demolition ball," he said, shaking his head slowly from side to side. "What an impact! An impact worthy of a portly man."

I had the uncomfortable feeling that he was talking to me from the point of view of someone who had given up on me. I immediately took on a defensive attitude. He listened, smirking, to my frantic explanations that my weight was normal for my bone structure.

"That's right," he conceded facetiously. "You have big bones. You could probably carry thirty more pounds with great ease and no one, I assure you, no one, would notice. I would not notice."

His mocking smile told me that I was definitely pudgy. He asked me then about my health in general, and I went on talking, desperately trying to get out of any further comment about my weight. He changed the subject himself.

"What's new about your eccentricities and aberrations?" he asked with a deadpan expression.

I idiotically answered that they were okay. "Eccentricities and aberrations" was how he labeled my interest in being a collector. At that time, I had taken up, with renewed zeal, something that I had enjoyed doing all my life: collecting anything collectible. I collected magazines, stamps, records, World War II paraphernalia such as daggers, military helmets, flags, etc.

"All I can tell you, don Juan, about my aberrations, is that I'm trying to sell my collections," I said with the air of a martyr who is being forced to do something odious.

"To be a collector is not such a bad idea," he said as if he really believed it. "The crux of the matter is not that you collect, but what you collect. You collect junk, worthless objects that imprison you as surely as your pet dog does. You can't just up and leave if you have your pet to look after, or if you have to worry about what would happen to your collections if you were not around."

"I'm seriously looking for buyers, don Juan, believe me," I protested.

"No, no, no, don't feel that I'm accusing you of anything," he retorted. "In fact, I like your collector's spirit. I just don't like your collections, that's all. I would like, though, to engage your collector's eye. I would like to propose to you a worthwhile collection."

Don Juan paused for a long moment. He seemed to be in search of words; or perhaps it was only a dramatic, well-placed hesitation. He looked at me with a deep, penetrating stare.

"Every warrior, as a matter of duty, collects a special album," don Juan went on, "an album that reveals the warrior's personality, an album that attests to the circumstances of his life."

"Why do you call this a collection, don Juan?" I asked in an argumentative tone. "Or an album, for that matter?"

"Because it is both," he retorted. "But above all, it is like an album of pictures made out of memories, pictures made out of the recollection of memorable events."

"Are those memorable events memorable in some specific way?" I asked.

"They are memorable because they have a special significance in one's life," he said. "My proposal is that you assemble this album by putting in it the complete account of various events that have had profound significance for you."

"Every event in my life has had profound significance for me, don Juan!" I said forcefully, and felt instantly the impact of my own pomposity.

"Not really," he replied, smiling, apparently enjoying my reactions immensely. "Not every event in your life has had profound significance for you. There are a few, however, that I would consider likely to have changed things for you, to have illuminated your path. Ordinarily, events that change our path are impersonal affairs, and yet are extremely personal."

"I'm not trying to be difficult, don Juan, but believe me, everything that has happened to me meets those qualifications," I said, knowing that I was lying.

Immediately after voicing this statement, I wanted to apologize, but don Juan didn't pay attention to me. It was as if I hadn't said a thing.

"Don't think about this album in terms of banalities, or -in terms of a trivial rehashing of your life experiences," he said.

I took a deep breath, closed my eyes, and tried to quiet my mind. I was talking to myself frantically about my insoluble problem: I most certainly didn't like to visit don Juan at all. In his presence, I felt threatened. He verbally accosted me and didn't leave me any room whatsoever to show my worth. I detested losing face every time I opened my mouth; I detested being the fool.

But there was another voice inside me, a voice that came from a greater depth, more distant, almost faint. In the midst of my barrages of known dialogue, I heard myself saying that it was too late for me to turn back. But it wasn't really my voice or my thoughts that I was experiencing; it was, rather, like an unknown voice that said I was too far gone into don Juan's world, and that I needed him more than I needed air.

"Say whatever you wish," the voice seemed to say to me, "but if you were not the egomaniac that you are, you wouldn't be so chagrined."

"That's the voice of your other mind," don Juan said, just as if he had been listening to or reading my thoughts.

My body jumped involuntarily. My fright was so intense that tears came to my eyes. I confessed to don Juan the whole nature of my turmoil.

"Your conflict is a very natural one," he said. "And believe you me, I don't exacerbate it that much. I'm not the type. I have some stories to tell you about what my teacher, the nagual Julian, used to do to me. I detested him with my entire being. I was very young, and I saw how women adored him, gave themselves to him like anything, and when I tried to say hello to them, they would turn against me like lionesses, ready to bite my head off. They hated my guts and loved him. How do you think I felt?"

"How did you resolve this conflict, don Juan?" I asked with more than genuine interest.

"I didn't resolve anything," he declared. "It, the conflict or whatever, was the result of the battle between my two minds. Every one of us human beings has two minds. One is totally ours, and it is like a faint voice that always brings us order, directness, purpose. The other mind is a *foreign installation*. It brings us conflict, self-assertion, doubts, hopelessness."

My fixation on my own mental concatenations was so intense that I completely missed what don Juan had said. I could clearly remember every one of his words, but they had no meaning for me. Don Juan very calmly, and looking directly into my eyes, repeated what he had just said. I was still incapable of grasping what he meant. I couldn't focus my attention on his words.

"For some strange reason, don Juan, I can't concentrate on what you're telling me," I said.

"I understand perfectly why you can't," he said, smiling expansively, "and so will you, someday, at the same time that you resolve the conflict of whether you like me or not, the day you cease to be the me-me center of the world.

"In the meantime," he continued, "let's put the topic of our two minds aside and go back to the idea of preparing your album of memorable events. I should add that such an album is an exercise in discipline and impartiality. Consider this album to be an act of war."

Don Juan's assertion—that my conflict of both liking and not liking to see him was going to end whenever I abandoned my egocentrism—was no solution for me. In fact, that assertion made me angrier; it frustrated me all the more. And when I heard don Juan speak of the album as an act of war, I lashed out at him with all my poison.

"The idea that this is a collection of events is already hard to understand," I said in a tone of protest. "But that on top of all this, you call it an album and say that such an album is an act of war is too much for me. It's too obscure. Being obscure makes the metaphor lose it's meaning."

"How strange! It's the opposite for me," don Juan replied calmly. "Such an album being an act of war has all the meaning in the world for me. I wouldn't like my album of memorable events to be anything but an act of war."

I wanted to argue my point further and explain to him that I did understand the idea of an album of memorable events. I objected to the perplexing way he was describing it. I thought of myself in those days as an advocate of clarity and functionalism in the use of language.

Don Juan didn't comment on my belligerent mood. He only shook his head as if he were fully agreeing with me. After a while, I either completely ran out of energy, or I got a gigantic surge of it. All of a sudden, without any effort on my part, I realized the futility of my outbursts. I felt embarrassed no end.

"What possesses me to act the way I do?" I asked don Juan in earnest. I was, at that instant, utterly baffled. I was so shaken by my realization that without any volition on my part, I began to weep.

"Don't worry about stupid details," don Juan said reassuringly. "Every one of us, male and female, is like this."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that we are naturally petty and contradictory?"

"No, we are not naturally petty and contradictory," he replied. "Our pettiness and contradictions are, rather, the result of a transcendental conflict that afflicts every one of us, but of which only sorcerers are painfully and hopelessly aware: the conflict of our two minds."

Don Juan peered at me; his eyes were like two black charcoals.

"You've been telling me on and on about our two minds," I said, "but my brain can't register what you are saying. Why?"

"You'll get to know why in due time," he said. "For the present, it will be sufficient that I repeat to you what I have said before about our two minds. One is our true mind, the product of all our life experiences, the one that rarely speaks because it has been defeated and relegated to obscurity. The other, the mind we use daily for everything we do, is a *foreign installation."*

"I think that the crux of the matter is that the concept of the mind being a *foreign installation is* so outlandish that my mind refuses to take it seriously," I said, feeling that I had made a real discovery.

Don Juan did not comment on what I had said. He continued explaining the issue of the two minds as if I hadn't said a word.

"To resolve the conflict of the two minds is a matter of *intending* it," he said. "Sorcerers beckon *intent* by voicing the word *intent* loud and clear. *Intent* is a force that exists in the universe. When sorcerers beckon *intent,* it comes to them and sets up the path for attainment, which means that sorcerers always accomplish what they set out to do."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that sorcerers get anything they want, even if it is something petty and arbitrary?" I asked.

"No, I didn't mean that. *Intent* can be called, of course, for anything," he replied, "but sorcerers have found out, the hard way, that *intent* comes to them only for something that is abstract. That's the safety valve for sorcerers; otherwise they would be unbearable. In your case, beckoning *intent* to resolve the conflict of your two minds, or to hear the voice of your true mind, is not a petty or arbitrary matter. Quite the contrary; it is ethereal and abstract, and yet as vital to you as anything can be."

Don Juan paused for a moment; then he began to talk again about the album.

"My own album, being an act of war, demanded a super-careful selection," he said. "It is now a precise collection of the unforgettable moments of my life, and everything that led me to them. I have concentrated in it what has been and will be meaningful to me. In my opinion, a warrior's album is something most concrete, something so to the point that it is shattering."

I had no clue as to what don Juan wanted, and yet I did understand him to perfection. He advised me to sit down, alone, and let my thoughts, memories, and ideas come to me freely.

He recommended that I make an effort to let the voice from the depths of me speak out and tell me what to select. Don Juan told me then to go inside the house and lie down on a bed that I had there. It was made of wooden boxes and dozens of empty burlap sacks that served as a mattress. My whole body ached, and when I lay on the bed it was actually extremely comfortable.

I took his suggestions to heart and began to think about my past, looking for events that had left a mark on me. I soon realized that my assertion that every event in my life had been meaningful was nonsense. As I pressed myself to recollect, I found that I didn't even know where to start. Through my mind ran endless disassociated thoughts and memories of events that had happened to me, but I couldn't decide whether or not they had had any meaning for me. The impression I got was that nothing had had any significance whatsoever. It looked as if I had gone through life like a corpse empowered to walk and talk, but not to feel anything. Having no concentration whatsoever to pursue the subject beyond a shallow attempt, I gave up and fell asleep.

"Did you have any success?" don Juan asked me when I woke up hours later.

Instead of being at ease after sleeping and resting, I was again moody and belligerent.

"No, I didn't have any success!" I barked.

"Did you hear that voice from the depths of you?" he asked.

"I think I did," I lied.

"What did it say to you?" he inquired in an urgent tone.

"I can't think of it, don Juan," I muttered.

"Ah, you are back in your daily mind," he said and patted me forcefully on the back. "Your daily mind has taken over again. Let's relax it by talking about your collection of memorable events. I should tell you that the selection of what to put in your album is not an easy matter. This is the reason I say that making this album is an act of war. You have to remake yourself ten times over in order to know what to select."

I clearly understood then, if only for a second, that I had two minds; however, the thought was so vague that I lost it instantly. What remained was just the sensation of an incapacity to fulfill don Juan's requirement. Instead of graciously accepting my incapacity, though, I allowed it to become a threatening affair. The driving force of my life, in those days, was to appear always in a good light. To be incompetent was the equivalent of being a loser, something that was thoroughly intolerable to me. Since I didn't know how to respond to the challenge don Juan was posing, I did the only thing I knew how to do: I got angry.

"I've got to think a great deal more about this, don Juan," I said. "I've got to give my mind some time to settle on the idea."

"Of course, of course," don Juan assured me. "Take all the time in the world, but hurry."

Nothing else was said about the subject at that time. At home, I forgot about it completely until one day when, quite abruptly, in the middle of a lecture I was attending, the imperious command to search for the memorable events of my life hit me like a bodily jolt, a nervous spasm that shook my entire body from head to toe.

I began to work in earnest. It took me months to rehash experiences in my life that I believed were meaningful to me. However, upon examining my collection, I realized that I was dealing only with ideas that had no substance whatsoever. The events I remembered were just vague points of reference that I remembered abstractly. Once again, I had the most unsettling suspicion that I had been reared just to act without ever stopping to feel anything.

One of the vaguest events I recalled, which I wanted to make memorable at any cost, was the day I found out I had been admitted to graduate school at UCLA. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't remember what I had been doing that day. There was nothing interesting or unique about that day, except for the idea that it had to be memorable. Entering graduate school should have made me happy or proud of myself, but it didn't.

Another sample in my collection was the day I almost got married to Kay Condor. Her last name wasn't really Condor, but she had changed it because she wanted to be an actress. Her ticket to fame was that she actually looked like Carole Lombard. That day was memorable in my mind, not so much because of the events that took place but because she was beautiful and wanted to marry me. She was a head taller than I was, which made her all the more interesting to me.

I was thrilled with the idea of marrying a tall woman, in a church ceremony. I rented a gray tuxedo. The pants were quite wide for my height. They were not bell-bottoms; they were just wide, and that bothered me no end. Another thing that annoyed me immensely was that the sleeves of the pink shirt I had bought for the occasion were about three inches too long; I had to use rubber bands to hold them up. Outside of that, everything was perfect until the moment when the guests and I found out that Kay Condor had gotten cold feet and wasn't going to show up.

Being a very proper young lady, she had sent me a note of apology by motorcycle messenger. She wrote that she didn't believe in divorce, and couldn't commit herself for the rest other days to someone who didn't quite share her views on life. She reminded me that I snickered every time I said the name "Condor," something that showed a total lack of respect for her person. She said that she had discussed the matter with her mother. Both of them loved me dearly, but not enough to make me part of their family. She added that, bravely and wisely, we all had to cut our losses.

My state of mind was one of total numbness. When I tried to recollect that day, I couldn't remember whether I felt horribly humiliated at being left standing in front of a lot of people in my gray, rented tuxedo with the wide-legged pants, or whether I was crushed because Kay Condor didn't marry me.

These were the only two events I was capable of isolating with clarity. They were meager examples, but after rehashing them, I had succeeded in re-dressing them as tales of philosophical acceptance. I thought of myself as a being who goes through life with no real feelings, who has only intellectual views of everything. Taking don Juan's metaphors as models, I even constructed one of my own: a being who lives his life vicariously in terms of what it should be.

I believed, for instance, that the day I was admitted to graduate school at UCLA should have been a memorable day. Since it wasn't, I tried my best to imbue it with an importance I was far from feeling. A similar thing happened with the day I nearly married Kay Condor. It should have been a devastating day for me, but it wasn't. At the moment of recollecting it, I knew that there was nothing there and began to work as hard as I could to construct what I should have felt.

The next time I went to don Juan's house I presented to him my two samples of memorable events as soon as I arrived.

"This is a pile of nonsense," he declared. "None of it will do. The stories are related exclusively to you as a person who thinks, feels, cries, or doesn't feel anything at all. The memorable events of a shaman's album are affairs that will stand the test of time because they have nothing to do with him, and yet he is in the thick of them. He'll always be in the thick of them, for the duration of his life, and perhaps beyond, but not quite personally."

His words left me feeling dejected, totally defeated. I sincerely believed in those days that don Juan was an intransigent old man who found special delight in making me feel stupid. He reminded me of a master craftsman I had met at a sculptor's foundry where I worked while going to art school. The master artisan used to criticize and find flaws with everything his advanced apprentices did, and would demand that they correct their work according to his recommendations. His apprentices would turn around and pretend to correct their work. I remembered the glee of the master when he would say, upon being presented with the same work, "Now you have a real thing!"

"Don't feel bad," don Juan said, shaking me out of my recollection. "In my time, I was in the same spot. For years, not only did I not know what to choose, I thought I had no experiences to choose from. It seemed that nothing had ever happened to me. Of course, everything had happened to me, but in my effort to defend the idea of myself, I had no time or inclination to notice anything."

"Can you tell me, don Juan, specifically, what is wrong with my stories? I know that they are nothing, but the rest of my life is just like that."

"I will repeat this to you," he said. "The stories of a warrior's album are not personal. Your story of the day you were admitted to school is nothing but your assertion about you as the center of everything. You feel, you don't feel; you realize, you don't realize. Do you see what I mean? All of the story is just you."

"But how can it be otherwise, don Juan?" I asked.

"In your other story, you almost touch on what I want, but you turn it again into something extremely personal. I know that you could add more details, but all those details would be an extension of your person and nothing else."

"I sincerely cannot see your point, don Juan," I protested. "Every story seen through the eyes of the witness has to be, perforce, personal."

"Yes, yes, of course," he said, smiling, delighted as usual by my confusion. "But then they are not stories for a warrior's album. They are stories for other purposes. The memorable events we are after have the dark touch of the impersonal. That touch permeates them. I don't know how else to explain this."

I believed then that I had a moment of inspiration and that I understood what he meant by the dark touch of the impersonal. I thought that he meant something a bit morbid. Darkness meant that for me. And I related to him a story from my childhood.

One of my older cousins was in medical school. He was an intern, and one day he took me to the morgue. He assured me that a young man owed it to himself to see dead people because that sight was very educational; it demonstrated the transitori-ness of life. He harangued me, on and on, in order to convince me to go. The more he talked about how unimportant we were in death, the more curious I became. I had never seen a corpse. My curiosity, in the end, to see one overwhelmed me and I went with him.

He showed me various corpses and succeeded in scaring me stiff. I found nothing educational or illuminating about them. They were, outright, the most frightening things I had ever seen. As he talked to me, he kept looking at his watch as if he were waiting for someone who was going to show up at any moment. He obviously wanted to keep me in the morgue longer than my strength permitted. Being the competitive creature that I was, I believed that he was testing my endurance, my manhood. I clenched my teeth and made up my mind to stay until the bitter end.

The bitter end came in ways that I had not dreamed of. A corpse that was covered with a sheet actually moved up with a rattle on the marble table where all the corpses were lying, as if it were getting ready to sit up. It made a burping sound that was so awful it burned through me and will remain in. my memory for the rest of my life. My cousin, the doctor, the scientist, explained that it was the corpse of a man who had died of tuberculosis, and that his lungs had been eaten away by bacilli that had left enormous holes filled with air, and that in cases like this, when the air changed temperature, it sometimes forced the body to sit up or at least convulse.

"No, you haven't gotten it yet," don Juan said, shaking his head from side to side. "It is merely a story about your fear. I would have been scared to death myself; however, being scared like that doesn't illuminate anyone's path. But I'm curious to know what happened to you."

"I yelled like a banshee," I said. "My cousin called me a coward, a yellow-belly, for hiding my face against his chest and for getting sick to my stomach all over him."

I had definitely hooked on to a morbid strand in my life. I came up with another story about a sixteen-year-old boy I knew in high school who had a glandular disease and grew to a gigantic height. His heart did not grow at the same rate as the rest of his body and one day he died of heart failure. I went with another boy to the mortuary out of morbid curiosity. The mortician, who was perhaps more morbid than the two of us, opened the back door and let us in. He showed us his masterpiece. He had put the gigantic boy, who had been over seven feet, seven inches tall, into a coffin for a normal person by sawing off his legs. He showed us how he had arranged his legs as if the dead boy were holding them with his arms like two trophies.

The fright I experienced was comparable to the fright I had experienced in the morgue as a child, but this new fright was not a physical reaction; it was a reaction of psychological revulsion.

"You're almost there," don Juan said. "However, your story is still too personal. It's revolting. It makes me sick, but I see great potential."

Don Juan and I laughed at the horror found in situations of everyday life. By then I was hopelessly lost in the morbid strands I had caught and released. I told him then the story of my best friend, Roy Goldpiss. He actually had a Polish surname, but his friends called him Goldpiss because whatever he touched, he turned to gold; he was a great businessman.

His talent for business made him a super-ambitious being. He wanted to be the richest man in the world. However, he found that the competition was too tough. According to him, doing business alone he couldn't possibly compete, for instance, with the head of an Islamic sect who, at that time, got paid his weight in gold every year. The head of the sect would fatten himself as much as his body allowed him before he was weighed.

Then my friend Roy lowered his sights to being the richest man in the United States. The competition in this sector was ferocious. He went down a notch: Perhaps he could be the richest man in California. He was too late for that, too. He gave up hope that, with his chains of pizza and ice cream parlors, he could ever rise in the business world to compete with the established families who owned California. He settled for being the richest man in Woodland Hills, the suburb of Los Angeles where he lived. Unfortunately for him, down the street from his house lived Mr. Marsh, who owned factories that produced A-one quality mattresses all over the United States, and he was rich beyond belief. Roy's frustration knew no limits. His drive to accomplish was so intense that it finally impaired his health. One day he died from an aneurysm in his brain.

His death brought, as a consequence, my third visit to a morgue or a mortuary. Roy's wife begged me, as his best friend, to make sure that the corpse was properly dressed. I went to the funeral parlor, where I was led by a male secretary to the inner chambers. At the precise moment I arrived, the mortician, working on a high marble-topped table, was forcefully pushing up the comers of the upper lip of the corpse, which had already entered rigor mortis, with the index and little finger of his right hand while he held his middle finger against his palm. As a grotesque smile appeared on Roy's dead face, the mortician half-turned to me and said in a servile tone, "I hope all this is to your satisfaction, sir."

Roy's wife—it will never be known whether she liked him or not—decided to bury him with all the garishness that, in her opinion, his life deserved. She had bought a very expensive coffin, a custom-made affair that looked like a telephone booth; she had gotten the idea from a movie. Roy was going to be buried sitting, as if he were making a business call on the telephone.

I didn't stay for the ceremony. I left in the midst of a most violent reaction, a mixture of impotence and anger, the kind of anger that couldn't be vented on anyone.

"You certainly are morbid today," don Juan commented, laughing. "But in spite of that, or perhaps because of that, you're almost there. You're touching it."

I never ceased to marvel at the way in which my mood changed every time I went to see don Juan. I always arrived moody, grouchy, filled with self-assertions and doubts. After a while, my mood would mysteriously change and I would become more expansive, by degrees, until I was as calm as I had ever been. However, my new mood was couched in my old vocabulary. My usual way of talking was that of a totally dissatisfied person who is containing himself from complaining out loud, but whose endless complaints are implied at every turn of the conversation.

"Can you give me an example of a memorable event from your album, don Juan?" I asked in my habitual tone of veiled complaint. "If I knew the pattern you were after, I might be able to come up with something. As it is, I am whistling hopelessly in the dark."

"Don't explain yourself so much," don Juan said with a stern look in his eyes. "Sorcerers say that in every explanation there is a hidden apology. So, when you are explaining why you cannot do this or that, you're really apologizing for your shortcomings, hoping that whoever is listening to you will have the kindness to understand them."

My most useful maneuver, when I was attacked, had always been to turn my attackers off by not listening to them. Don Juan, however, had the disgusting ability to trap every bit of my attention. No matter how he attacked me, no matter what he said, he always managed to have me riveted to his every word. On this occasion, what he was saying about me didn't please me at all because it was the naked truth.

I avoided his eyes. I felt, as usual, defeated, but it was a peculiar defeat this time. It didn't bother me as it would have if it had happened in the world of everyday life, or right after I had arrived at his house.

After a very long silence, don Juan spoke to me again.

"I'll do better than give you an example of a memorable event from my album," he said. "I'll give you a memorable event from your own life, one that should go for sure in your collection. Or, I should say, if I were you, I would certainly put it in my collection of memorable events."

I thought don Juan was joking and I laughed stupidly.

"This is not a laughing matter," he said cuttingly. "I am serious. You once told me a story that fits the bill."

"What story is that, don Juan?"

"The story of 'figures in front of a mirror,'" he said. "Tell me that story again. But tell it to me in all the detail you can remember."

I began to retell the story in a cursory fashion. He stopped me and demanded a careful, detailed narration, starting at the beginning. I tried again, but my rendition didn't satisfy him.

"Let's go for a walk," he proposed. "When you walk, you are much more accurate than when you're sitting down. It is not an idle idea that you should pace back and forth when you try to relate something."

We had been sitting, as we usually did during the day, under the house ramada. I had developed a pattern: Whenever I sat there, I always did it on the same spot, with my back against the wall. Don Juan sat in various places under the ramada, but never on the same spot.

We went for a hike at the worst time of the day, noon. He outfitted me with an old straw hat, as he always did whenever we went out in the heat of the sun. We walked for a long time in complete silence. I tried to the best of my ability to force myself to remember all the details of the story. It was mid afternoon when we sat down under the shade of some tall bushes, and I retold the full story.

Years before, while I was studying sculpture in a fine arts school in Italy, I had a close friend, a Scotsman who was studying art in order to become an art critic. What stood out most vividly in my mind about him, and had to do with the story I was telling don Juan, was the bombastic idea he had of himself; he thought he was the most licentious, lusty, all-around scholar and craftsman, a man of the Renaissance. Licentious he was, but lustiness was something in complete contradiction to his bony, dry, serious person. He was a vicarious follower of the English philosopher Bertrand Russell and dreamed of applying the principles of logical positivism to art criticism. To be an all-around scholar and craftsman was perhaps his wildest fantasy because he was a pro-crastinator; work was his nemesis.

His dubious specialty wasn't art criticism, but his personal knowledge of all the prostitutes of the local bordellos, of which there were plenty. The colorful and lengthy accounts he used to give me—in order to keep me, according to him, up to date about all the marvelous things he did in the world of his specialty—were delightful. It was not surprising to me, therefore, that one day he came to my apartment, all excited, nearly out of breath, and told me that something extraordinary had happened to him and that he wanted to share it with me.

"I say, old man, you must see this for yourself!" he said excitedly in the Oxford accent he affected every time he talked to me. He paced the room nervously. "It's hard to describe, but I know it's something you will appreciate. Something, the impression of which will last you for a lifetime. I am going to give you a marvelous gift for life. Do you understand?"

I understood that he was a hysterical Scotsman. It was always my pleasure to humor him and tag along. I had never regretted it.

"Calm down, calm down, Eddie," I said. "What are you trying to tell me?"

He related to me that he had been in a bordello, where he had found an unbelievable woman who did an incredible thing she called "figures in front of a mirror." He assured me repeatedly, almost stuttering, that I owed it to myself to experience this unbelievable event personally.

"I say, don't worry about money!" he said, since he knew I didn't have any. "I've already paid the price. All you have to do is go with me. Madame Ludmilla will show you her 'figures in front of a mirror.' It's a blast!"

In a fit of uncontrollable glee, Eddie laughed uproariously, oblivious to his bad teeth, which he normally hid behind a tight-lipped smile or laugh. "I say, it's absolutely great!"

My curiosity mounted by the minute. I was more than willing to participate in his new delight. Eddie drove me to the outskirts of the city. We stopped in front of a dusty, badly kept building;

the paint was peeling off the walls. It had the air of having been a hotel at one time, a hotel that had been turned into an apartment building. I could see the remnants of a hotel sign that seemed to have been ripped to pieces. On the front of the building there were rows of dirty single balconies filled with flowerpots or draped with carpets put out to dry.

At the entrance to the building were two dark, shady-looking men wearing pointed black shoes that seemed too tight on their feet; they greeted Eddie effusively. They had black, shifty, menacing eyes. Both of them were wearing shiny light-blue suits, also too tight for their bulky bodies. One of them opened the door for Eddie. They didn't even look at me.

We went up two flights of stairs on a dilapidated staircase that at one time must have been luxurious. Eddie led the way and walked the length of an empty, hotellike corridor with doors on both sides. All the doors were painted in the same drab, dark, olive green. Every door had a brass number, tarnished with age, barely visible against the painted wood.

Eddie stopped in front of a door. I noticed the number 112 on it. He rapped repeatedly. The door opened, and a round, short woman with bleached-blonde hair beckoned us in without saying a word. She was wearing a red silk robe with feathery, flouncy sleeves and red slippers with furry balls on top. Once we were inside a small hall and she had closed the door behind us, she greeted Eddie in terribly accented English.

"Hallo, Eddie. You brought friend, eh?"

Eddie shook her hand, and then kissed it, gallantly. He acted as if he were most calm, yet I noticed his unconscious gestures of being ill at ease.

"How are you today, Madame Ludmilla?" he said, trying to sound like an American and flubbing it.

I never discovered why Eddie always wanted to sound like an American whenever he was transacting business in those houses of ill repute. I had the suspicion that he did it because Americans were known to be wealthy, and he wanted to establish his rich man's bona fides with them.

Eddie turned to me and said in his phony American accent, "I leave you in good hands, kiddo."

He sounded so awful, so foreign to my ears, that I laughed out loud. Madame Ludmilla didn't seem perturbed at all by my explosion of mirth. Eddie kissed Madame Ludmilla's hand again and left.

"You speak English, my boy?" she shouted as if I were deaf. "You look Eyipcian, or perhaps Torkish."

I assured Madame Ludmilla that I was neither, and that I did speak English. She asked me then if I fancied her "figures in front of a mirror." I didn't know what to say. I just shook my head affirmatively.

"I give you good show," she assured me. "Figures in front of a -lirror is only foreplay. When you are hot and ready, tell me to op."

From the small hall where we were standing we walked into a dark and eerie room. The windows were heavily curtained. There were some low-voltage light bulbs on fixtures attached to the wall. The bulbs were shaped like tubes and protruded straight out at right angles from the wall. There was a profusion of objects around the room: pieces of furniture like small chests of drawers, antique tables and chairs; a roll-top desk set against the wall and crammed with papers, pencils, rulers, and at least a dozen pairs of scissors. Madame Ludmilla made me sit down on an old stuffed chair.

"The bed is in the other room, darling," she said, pointing to the other side of the room. "This is my antisala. Here I give show to get you hot and ready."

She dropped her red robe, kicked off her slippers, and opened the double doors of two armoires standing side by side against the wall. Attached to the inside of each door was a full-length

mirror.

"And now the music, my boy," Madame Ludmilla said, then cranked a Victrola that appeared to be in mint condition, shiny, like new. She put on a record. The music was a haunting melody that reminded me of a circus march.

"And now my show," she said, and began to twirl around to the accompaniment of the haunting melody. The skin of Madame Ludmilla's body was tight, for the most part, and extraordinarily white, though she was not young. She must have been in her well-lived late forties. Her belly sagged, not a great deal, but a bit, and so did her voluminous breasts. The skin of her face also sagged into noticeable jowls. She had a small nose and heavily painted red lips. She wore thick black mascara. She brought to mind the prototype of an aging prostitute. Yet there was something childlike about her, a girlish abandon and trust, a sweetness that jolted me.

"And now, figures in front of a mirror," Madame Ludmilla announced while the music continued.

"Leg, leg, leg!" she said, kicking one leg up in the air, and then the other, in time with the music. She had her right hand on top of her head, like a little girl who is not sure that she can perform the movements.

"Turn, turn, turn!" she said, turning like a top.

"Butt, butt, butt!" she said then, showing me her bare behind like a cancan dancer.

She repeated the sequence over and over until the music began to fade when the Victrola's spring wound down. I had the feeling that Madame Ludmilla was twirling away into the distance, becoming smaller and smaller as the music faded. Some despair and loneliness that I didn't know existed in me came to the surface, from the depths of my very being, and made me get up and run out of the room, down the stairs like a madman, out of the building, into the street.

Eddie was standing outside the door talking to the two men in light-blue shiny suits. Seeing me running like that, he began to laugh uproariously.

"Wasn't it a blast?" he said, still trying to sound like an American. " 'Figures in front of a mirror is only the foreplay.' What a thing! What a thing!"

The first time I had mentioned the story to don Juan, I had told him that I had been deeply affected by the haunting melody and the old prostitute clumsily twirling to the music. And I had been deeply affected also by the realization of how callous my friend was.

When I had finished retelling my story to don Juan, as we sat in the hills of a range of mountains in Sonora I was shaking, mysteriously affected by something quite undefined.

"That story," don Juan said, "should go in your album of memorable events. Your friend, without having any idea of what he was doing, gave you, as he himself said, something that will indeed last you for a lifetime."

"I see this as a sad story, don Juan, but that's all," I declared. "It's indeed a sad story, just like your other stories," don Juan replied, "but what makes it different and memorable to me is that it touches every one of us human beings, not just you, like your other tales. You see, like Madame Ludmilla, every one of us, young and old alike, is making figures in front of a mirror in one way or another. Tally what you know about people. Think of any human being on this earth, and you will know, without the shadow of a doubt, that no matter who they are, or what they think of themselves, or what they do, the result of their actions is always the same: senseless figures in front of a mirror."

## A Tremor In The Air

## A Journey of Power

AT THE TIME I met don Juan I was a fairly studious anthropology student, and I wanted to begin my career as a professional anthropologist by publishing as much as possible. I was bent on climbing the academic ladder, and in my calculations, I had determined that the first step was to collect data on the uses of medicinal plants by the Indians of the southwestern United States.

I first asked a professor of anthropology who had worked in that area for advice about my project. He was a prominent ethnologist who had published extensively in the late thirties and early forties on the California Indians and the Indians of the Southwest and Sonora, Mexico. He patiently listened to my exposition. My idea was to write a paper, call it "Ethnobotanical Data," and publish it in a journal that dealt exclusively with anthropological issues of the southwestern United States.

I proposed to collect medicinal plants, take the samples to the Botanical Garden at UCLA to be properly identified, and then describe why and how the Indians of the Southwest used them. I envisioned collecting thousands of entries. I even envisioned publishing a small encyclopedia on the subject.

The professor smiled forgivingly at me. "I don't want to dampen your enthusiasm," he said in a tired voice, "but I can't help commenting negatively on your eagerness. Eagerness is welcome in anthropology, but it must be properly channeled. We are still in the golden age of anthropology. It was my luck to study with Alfred Krober and Robert Lowie, two pillars of social science. I haven't betrayed their trust. Anthropology is still the master discipline. Every other discipline should stem-from anthropology. The entire field of history, for example, should be called 'historical anthropology,' and the field of philosophy should be called 'philosophical anthropology.' Man should be the measure of everything. Therefore, anthropology, the study of man, should be the core of every other discipline. Someday, it will."

I looked at him, bewildered. He was, in my estimation, a totally passive, benevolent old professor who had recently had a heart attack. I seemed to have struck a chord of passion in him.

"Don't you think that you should pay more attention to your formal studies?" he continued. "Rather than doing fieldwork, wouldn't it be better for you to study linguistics? We have in the department here one of the most prominent linguists in the world. If I were you, I'd be sitting at his feet, catching any drift emanating from him.

"We also have a superb authority in comparative religions. And there are some exceptionally competent anthropologists here who have done work on kinship systems in cultures all over the world, from the point of view of linguistics and from the point of view of cognition. You need a lot of preparation. To think that you could do fieldwork now is a travesty. Plunge into your books, young man. That's my advice."

Stubbornly, I took my proposition to another professor, a younger one. He wasn't in any way more helpful. He laughed at me openly. He told me that the paper I wanted to write was a Mickey Mouse paper, and that it wasn't anthropology by any stretch of the imagination.

"Anthropologists nowadays," he said professorially, "are concerned with issues that have relevance. Medical and pharmaceutical scientists have done endless research on every possible medicinal plant in the world. There's no longer any bone to chew on there. Your kind of data collecting belongs to the turn of the nineteenth century. Now it's nearly two hundred years later. There is such a thing as progress, you know."

He proceeded to give me, then, a definition and a justification of progress and perfectibility as two issues of philosophical discourse, which he said were most relevant to anthropology.

"Anthropology is the only discipline in existence," he continued, "which can clearly substantiate the concept of perfectibility and progress. Thank God that there's still a ray of hope in the midst of the cynicism of our times. Only anthropology can show the actual development of culture and social organization. Only anthropologists can prove to mankind beyond the shadow of a doubt the progress of human knowledge. Culture evolves, and only anthropologists can present samples of societies that fit definite cubbyholes in a line of progress and perfectibility. That's anthropology for you! Not some puny fieldwork, which is not fieldwork at all, but mere masturbation."

It was a blow on the head to me. As a last resort, I went to Arizona to talk to anthropologists who were actually doing field-work there. By then, I was ready to give up on the whole idea. I understood what the two professors were trying to tell me. I couldn't have agreed with them more. My attempts at doing fieldwork were definitely simpleminded. Yet I wanted to get my feet wet in the field; I didn't want to do only library research.

In Arizona, I met with an extremely seasoned anthropologist who had written copiously on the Yaqui Indians of Arizona as well as those of Sonora, Mexico. He was extremely kind. He didn't run me down, nor did he give me any advice. He only commented that the Indian societies of the Southwest were extremely isolationist, and that foreigners, especially those of Hispanic origin, were distrusted, even abhorred, by those Indians.

A younger colleague of his, however, was more outspoken. He said that I was better off reading herbalists' books. He was an authority in the field and his opinion was that anything to be known about medicinal plants from the Southwest had already been classified and talked about in various publications. He went as far as to say that the sources of any Indian curer of the day were precisely those publications rather than any traditional knowledge. He finished me off with the assertion that if there still were any traditional curing practices, the Indians would not divulge them to a stranger.

"Do something worthwhile," he advised me. "Look into urban anthropology. There's a lot of money for studies on alcoholism among Indians in the big city, for example. Now that's something that any anthropologist can do easily. Go and get drunk with local Indians in a bar. Then arrange whatever you find out about them in terms of statistics. Turn everything into numbers. Urban anthropology is a real field."

There was nothing else for me to do except to take the advice of those experienced social scientists. I decided to fly back to Los Angeles, but another anthropologist friend of mine let me know then that he was going to drive throughout Arizona and New Mexico, visiting all the places where he had done work in the past, renewing in this fashion his relationships with the people who had been his anthropological informants.

"You're welcome to come with me," he said. "I'm not going to do any work. I'm just going to visit with them, have a few drinks with them, bullshit with them. I bought gifts for them—blankets, booze, jackets, ammunition for twenty-two-caliber rifles. My car is loaded with goodies. I usually drive alone whenever I go to see them, but by myself I always run the risk of falling asleep. You could keep me company, keep me from dozing off, or drive a little bit if I'm too drunk."

I felt so despondent that I turned him down.

"I'm very sorry, Bill," I said. "The trip won't do for me. I see no point in pursuing this idea pffieldwork any longer."

"Don't give up without a fight," Bill said in a tone of paternal concern. "Give all you have to the fight, and if it licks you, then it's okay to give up, but not before. Come with me and see how you like the Southwest."

He put his arm around my shoulders. I couldn't help noticing how immensely heavy his arm was. He was tall and husky, but in recent years his body had acquired a strange rigidity. He had lost his boyish quality. His round face was no longer filled, youthful, the way it had been. Now it was a worried face. I believed that he worried because he was losing his hair, but at times it seemed to me that it was something more than that. And it wasn't that he was fatter; his body was heavy in ways that were impossible to explain. I noticed it in the way that he walked, and got up, and sat down. Bill seemed to me to be fighting gravity with every fiber of his being, in everything he did.

Disregarding my feelings of defeat, I started on a journey with him. We visited every place in Arizona and New Mexico where there were Indians. One of the end results of this trip was that I found out that my anthropologist friend had two definite facets to his person. He explained to me that his opinions as a professional anthropologist were very measured, and congruous with the anthropological thought of the day, but that as a private person, his anthropological fieldwork had given him a wealth of experiences that he never talked about. These experiences were not congruous with the anthropological thought of the day because they were events that were impossible to catalog.

During the course of our trip, he would invariably have some drinks with his ex-informants, and feel very relaxed afterward. I would take the wheel then and drive as he sat in the passenger seat taking sips from his bottle of thirty-year-old Ballantine's. It was then that Bill would talk about his uncataloged experiences.

"I have never believed in ghosts," he said abruptly one day. "I never went in for apparitions and floating essences, voices in the dark, you know. I had a very pragmatic, serious upbringing. Science had always been my compass. But then, working in the field, all kinds of weird crap began to filter through to me. For instance, I went with some Indians one night on a vision quest. They were going to actually initiate me by some painful business of piercing the muscles of my chest. They were preparing a sweat lodge in the woods. I had resigned myself to withstand the pain. I took a couple of drinks to give me strength. And then the man who was going to intercede for me with the people who actually performed the ceremony yelled in horror and pointed at a dark, shadowy figure walking toward us.

"When the shadowy figure came closer to me," Bill went on, "I noticed that what I had in front of me was an old Indian dressed in the weirdest getup you could imagine. He had the paraphernalia of shamans. The man I was with that night fainted shamelessly at the sight of the old man. The old man came to me and pointed a finger at my chest. His finger was just skin and bone. He babbled incomprehensible things to me. By then, the rest of the people had seen the old man, and started to rush silently toward me. The old man turned to look at them, and every one of them froze. He harangued them for a moment. His voice was something unforgettable. It was as if he were talking from a tube, or as if he had something attached to his mouth that carried the words out of him. I swear to you that I saw the man talking inside his body, and his mouth broadcasting the words as a mechanical apparatus. After haranguing the men, the old man continued walking, past me, past them, and disappeared, swallowed by the darkness."

Bill said that the plan to have an initiation ceremony went to pot; it was never performed; and the men, including the shamans in charge, were shaking in their boots. He stated that they were so frightened that they disbanded and left.

"People who had been friends for years," he went on, "never spoke to each other again. They claimed that what they had seen was the apparition of an incredibly old shaman, and that it would bring bad luck to talk about it among themselves. In fact, they said that the mere act of setting eyes on one another would bring them bad luck. Most of them moved away from the area."

"Why did they feel that talking to each other or seeing each other would bring them bad luck?" I asked him.

"Those are their beliefs," he replied. "A vision of that nature means to them that the apparition spoke to each of them individually. To have a vision of that nature is, for them, the luck of a lifetime."

"And what was the individual thing that the vision told each of them?" I asked.

"Beats me," he replied. "They never explained anything to me. Every time I asked them, they entered into a profound state of numbness. They hadn't seen anything, they hadn't heard anything. Years after the event, the man who had fainted next to me swore to me that he had just faked the faint because he was so frightened that he didn't want to face the old man, and that what he had to say was understood by everybody at a level other than language comprehension."

Bill said that in his case, what the apparition voiced to him he understood as having to do with his health and his expectations in life.

"What do you mean by that?" I asked him.

"Things are not that good for me," he confessed. "My body doesn't feel well."

"But do you know what is really the matter with you?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," he said nonchalantly. "Doctors have told me. But I'm not gonna worry about it, or even think about it."

Bill's revelations left me feeling thoroughly uneasy. This was a facet of his person that I didn't know. I had always thought that he was a tough old cookie. I could never conceive of him as vulnerable. I didn't like our exchange. It was, however, too late for me to retreat. Our trip continued.

On another occasion, he confided that the shamans of the Southwest were capable of transforming themselves into different entities, and that the categorization schemes of "bear shaman" or "mountain lion shaman," etc., should not be taken as euphemisms or metaphors because they were not.

"Would you believe it," he said in a tone of great admiration, "that there are some shamans who actually become bears, or mountain lions, or eagles? I'm not exaggerating, nor am I fabricating anything when I say that once I witnessed the transformation of a shaman who called himself 'River Man,' or 'River Shaman,' or 'Proceeding from River, Returning to River.' I was out in the mountains of New Mexico with this shaman. I was driving for him; he trusted me, and he was going in search of his origin, or so he said. We were walking along a river when he suddenly got very excited. He told me to move away from the shore to some high rocks, and hide there, put a blanket over my head and shoulders, and peek through it so I would not miss what he was about to do."

"What was he going to do?" I asked him, incapable of containing myself.

"I didn't know," he said. "Your guess would have been as good as mine. I had no way of conceiving of what he was going to do. He just walked into the water, fully dressed. When the water reached him at mid-calf, because it was a wide but shallow river, the shaman simply vanished, disappeared. Prior to entering the water, he had whispered in my ear that I should go downstream and wait for him. He told me the exact spot to wait. I, of course, didn't believe a word of what he was saying, so at first I couldn't remember where he had said I had to wait for him, but then I found the spot and I saw the shaman coming out of the water. It sounds stupid to say 'coming out of the water.' I saw the shaman turning into water and then being remade out of the water. Can you believe that?"

I had no comments on his stories. It was impossible for me to believe him, but I could not disbelieve him either. He was a very serious man. The only possible explanation that I could think of was that as we continued our trip he drank more and more every day. He had in the trunk of the car a box of twenty-four bottles of Scotch for only himself. He actually drank like a fish.

"I have always been partial to the esoteric mutations of shamans," he said to me another day. "It's not that I can explain the mutations, or even believe that they take place, but as an intellectual exercise I am very interested in considering that mutations into snakes and mountain lions are not as difficult as what the water shaman did. It is at moments like this, when I engage my intellect in such a fashion, that I cease to be an anthropologist and I begin to react, following a gut feeling. My gut feeling is that those shamans certainly do something that can't be measured scientifically or even talked about intelligently.

"For instance, there are cloud shamans who turn into clouds, into mist. I have never seen this happen, but I knew a cloud shaman. I never saw him disappearing or turning into mist in front of my eyes as I saw that other shaman turning into water right in front of me. But I chased that cloud shaman once, and he simply vanished in an area where there was no place for him to hide. Although I didn't see him turning into a cloud, he disappeared. I couldn't explain where he went. There were no rocks or vegetation around the place where he ended up. I was there half a minute after he was, but the shaman was gone.

"I chased that man all over the place for information," Bill went on. "He wouldn't give me the time of day. He was very friendly to me, but that was all."

Bill told me endless other stories about strife and political factions among Indians in different Indian reservations, or stories about personal vendettas, animosities, friendships, etc., etc., which did not interest me in the least. On the other hand, his stories about shamans' mutations and apparitions had caused a true emotional upheaval in me. I was at once both fascinated and appalled by them. However, when I tried to think about why I was fascinated or appalled, I couldn't tell. All I could have said was that his stories about shamans hit me at an unknown, visceral level.

Another realization brought by this trip was that I verified for myself that the Indian societies of the Southwest were indeed closed to outsiders. I finally came to accept that I did need a great deal of preparation in the science of anthropology, and that it was more functional to do anthropological fieldwork in an area with which I was familiar or one in which I had an entree.

When the journey ended, Bill drove me to the Greyhound bus depot in Nogales, Arizona, for my return trip to Los Angeles. As we were sitting in the waiting area before the bus came, he consoled me in a paternal manner, reminding me that failures were a matter of course in anthropological fieldwork, and that they meant only the hardening of one's purpose or. the coming to maturity of an anthropologist.

Abruptly, he leaned over and pointed with a slight movement of his chin to the other side of the room. "I think that old man sitting on the bench by the corner over there is the man I told you about," he whispered in my ear. "I am not quite sure because I've had him in front of me, face-to-face, only once."

"What man is that? What did you tell me about him?" I asked.

"When we were talking about shamans and shamans' transformations, I told you that I had once met a cloud shaman."

"Yes, yes, I remember that," I said. "Is that man the cloud shaman?"

"No," he said emphatically. "But I think he is a companion or a teacher of the cloud shaman. I saw both of them together in the distance various times, many years ago."

I did remember Bill mentioning, in a very casual manner, but not in relation to the cloud shaman, that he knew about the existence of a mysterious old man who was a retired shaman, an old Indian misanthrope from Yuma who had once been a terrifying sorcerer. The relationship of the old man to the cloud shaman was never voiced by my friend, but obviously it was foremost in Bill's mind, to the point where he believed that he had told me. about him.

A strange anxiety suddenly possessed me and made me jump out of my seat. As if I had no volition of my own, I approached the old man and immediately began a long tirade on how much I knew about medicinal plants and shamanism among the American Indians of the plains and their Siberian ancestors. As a secondary theme, I mentioned to the old man that I knew that he was a shaman. I concluded by assuring him that it would be thoroughly beneficial for him to talk to me at length.

"If nothing else," I said petulantly, "we could swap stories. You tell me yours and I'll tell you mine."

The old man kept his eyes lowered until the last moment. Then he peered at me. "I am Juan Matus," he said, looking me squarely in the eyes.

My tirade shouldn't have ended by any means, but for no reason that I could discern I felt that there was nothing more I could have said. I wanted to tell him my name. He raised his hand to the height of my lips as if to prevent me from saying it.

At that instant, a bus pulled up to the bus stop. The old man muttered that it was the bus he had to take, then he earnestly asked me to look him up so we could talk with more ease and swap stories. There was an ironic smirk on the comer of his mouth when he said that. With an incredible agility for a man his age—I figured he must have been in his eighties—he covered, in a few leaps, the fifty yards between the bench where he was sitting and the door of the bus. As if the bus had stopped just to pick him up, it moved away as soon as he had jumped in and the door had closed.

After the old man left, I went back to the bench where Bill was sitting.

"What did he say, what did he say?" he asked excitedly.

"He told me to look him up and come to his house to visit," I said. "He even said that we could talk there."

"But what did you say to him to get him to invite you to his house?" he demanded.

I told Bill that I had used my best sales pitch, and that I had promised the old man to reveal to him everything I knew, from the point of view of my reading, about medicinal plants.

Bill obviously didn't believe me. He accused me of holding out on him. "I know the people around this area," he said belligerently, "and that old man is a very strange fart. He doesn't talk to anybody, Indians included. Why would he talk to you, a perfect stranger? You're not even cute!"

It was obvious that Bill was annoyed with me. I couldn't figure out why though. I didn't dare ask him for an explanation. He gave me the impression of being a bit jealous. Perhaps he felt that I had succeeded where he had failed. However, my success had been so inadvertent that it didn't mean anything to me. Except for Bill's casual remarks, I didn't have any conception of how difficult it was to approach that old man, and I couldn't have cared less. At the time, I found nothing remarkable in the exchange. It baffled me that Bill was so upset about it.

"Do you know where his house is?" I asked him.

"I haven't the foggiest idea," he answered curtly. "I have heard people from this area say that he doesn't live anywhere, that he just appears here and there unexpectedly, but that's a lot of horse-shit. He probably lives in some shack in Nogales, Mexico."

"Why is he so important?" I asked him. My question made me gather enough courage to add, "You seem to be upset because he talked to me. Why?"

Without any ado, he admitted that he was chagrined because he knew how useless it was to try to talk to that man. "That old man is as rude as anyone can be," he added. "At best, he stares at you without saying a word when you talk to him. At other times, he doesn't even look at you; he treats you as if you didn't exist. The one time I tried to talk to him he brutally turned me down. Do you know what he said to me? He said, 'If I were you, I wouldn't waste my energy opening my mouth. Save it. You need it.' If he weren't such an old fart, I would have punched him in the nose."

I pointed out to Bill that to call him an "old" man was more a figure of speech than an actual description. He didn't really appear to be that old, although he was definitely old. He possessed a tremendous vigor and agility. I felt that Bill would have failed miserably if he had tried to punch him in the nose. That old Indian was powerful. In fact, he was downright scary.

I didn't voice my thoughts. I let Bill go on telling me how disgusted he was at the nastiness of that old man, and how he would have dealt with him had it not been for the fact that the old man was so feeble.

"Who do you think could give me some information about where he might live?" I asked him.

"Perhaps some people in Yuma," he replied, a bit more relaxed. "Maybe the people I introduced you to at the beginning of our trip. You wouldn't lose anything by asking them. Tell them that I sent you to them."

I changed my plans right then and instead of going back to Los Angeles went directly to Yuma, Arizona. I saw the people to whom Bill had introduced me. They didn't know where the old Indian lived, but their comments about him inflamed my curiosity even more. They said that he was not from Yuma, but from Sonora, Mexico, and that in his youth he had been a fearsome sorcerer who did incantations and put spells on people, but that he had mellowed with age, turning into an ascetic hermit. They remarked that although he was a Yaqui Indian, he had once run around with a group of Mexican men who seemed to be extremely knowledgeable about bewitching practices. They all agreed that they hadn't seen those men in the area for ages.

One of the men added that the old man was contemporaneous with his grandfather, but that while his grandfather was senile and bedridden, the sorcerer seemed to be more vigorous than ever. The same man referred me to some people in Hermosillo, the capital of Sonora, who might know the old man and be able to tell me more about him. The prospect of going to Mexico was not at all appealing to me. Sonora was too far away from my area of interest. Besides, I reasoned that I was better off doing urban anthropology after all and I went back to Los Angeles. But before leaving for Los Angeles, I canvassed the area of Yuma, searching for information about the old man. No one knew anything about him.

As the bus drove to Los Angeles, I experienced a unique sensation. On the one hand, I felt totally cured of my obsession with fieldwork or my interest in the old man. On the other hand, I felt a strange nostalgia. It was, truthfully, something I had never felt before. It's newness struck me profoundly. It was a mixture of anxiety and longing, as if I were missing something of tremendous importance. I had the clear sensation as I approached Los Angeles that whatever had been acting on me around Yuma had begun to fade with distance; but it's fading only increased my unwarranted longing.

## The Intent of Infinity

"I WANT YOU to think deliberately about evedetail of what transpired between you and those two men, Jorge Campos and Lucas Coronado," don Juan said to me, "who are the ones who really delivered you to me, and then tell me all about it."

I found his request very difficult to fulfill, and yet I actually enjoyed remembering everything those two had said to me. He wanted every detail possible, something that forced me to push my memory to it's limits.

The story don Juan wanted me to recollect began in the city of Guaymas, in Sonora, Mexico. In Yuma, Arizona, I had been given the names and addresses of some people who, I was told, might be able to shed light on the mystery of the old man I had met in the bus depot. The people I went to see not only didn't know any retired old shaman, they even doubted that such a man had ever existed. They were all filled to the brim, however, with scary stories about Yaqui shamans, and about the belligerent general mood of the Yaqui Indians. They insinuated that perhaps in Vicam, a railroad-station town between the cities of Guaymas and Ciudad Obregon, I might find someone who could perhaps steer me in the proper direction.

"Is there anyone in particular I could look up?" I asked.

"Your best bet would be to talk to a field inspector of the official government bank," one of the men suggested. "The bank has a lot of field inspectors. They know all the Indians of the area because the bank is the government institution that buys their crops, and every Yaqui is a farmer, the proprietor of a parcel of land that he can call his own as long as he cultivates it."

"Do you know any field inspectors?" I asked.

They looked at each other and smiled apologetically at me. They didn't know any, but strongly recommended that I should approach one of those men on my own and put my case to him.

In Vicam Station, my attempts at making contact with the field inspectors of the government bank were a total disaster. I met three of them, and when I told them what I wanted, every one of them looked at me with utter distrust. They immediately suspected that I was a spy sent there by the Yankees to cause problems that they could not clearly define, but about which they made wild speculations ranging from political agitation to industrial espionage. It was the unsubstantiated belief of everyone around that there were copper deposits in the lands of the Yaqui Indians and that the Yankees coveted them.

After this resounding failure, I retreated to the city of Guaymas and stayed at a hotel that was very close to a fabulous restaurant. I went there three times a day. The food was superb. I liked it so much that I stayed in Guaymas for over a week. I practically lived in the restaurant, and became, in this manner, acquainted with the owner, Mr. Reyes.

One afternoon while I was eating, Mr. Reyes came to my table with another man, whom he introduced to me as Jorge Campos, a full-blooded Yaqui Indian entrepreneur who had lived in Arizona in his youth, who spoke English perfectly, and who was more American than any American. Mr. Reyes praised him as a true example of how hard work and dedication could develop a person into an exceptional man.

Mr. Reyes left and Jorge Campos sat down next to me and immediately took over. He pretended to be modest and denied all praise but it was obvious that he was as pleased as punch with what Mr. Reyes had said about him. At first sight, I had the clear impression that

Jorge Campos was an entrepreneur of the particular kind that one finds in bars or on crowded corners of main streets trying to sell an idea or simply trying to find a way to con people out of their savings.

Mr. Campos was very pleasant looking, around six feet tall and lean, but with a high pot belly like a habitual drinker of hard liquor. He had a very dark complexion, with a touch of green to it, and wore expensive blue jeans and shiny cowboy boots with pointed toes and angular heels, as if he needed to dig them into the ground to stop being dragged by a lassoed steer.

He was wearing an impeccably ironed gray plaid shirt; in it's right pocket was a plastic pocket guard into which he had inserted a row of pens. I had seen the same pocket guard among office workers who didn't want to stain their shirt pockets with ink. His attire also included an expensive-looking fringed reddish-brown suede jacket and a tall Texas-style cowboy hat. His round face was expressionless. He had no wrinkles even though he seemed to be in his early fifties. For some unknown reason, I believed that he was dangerous.

"Very pleased to meet you, Mr. Campos," I said in Spanish, extending my hand to him.

"Let's dispense with the formalities," he responded, also in Spanish, shaking my hand vigorously. "I like to treat young people as equals, regardless of age differences. Call me Jorge."

He was quiet for a moment, no doubt assessing my reaction. I didn't know what to say. I certainly didn't want to humor him, nor did I want to take him seriously.

"I'm curious to know what you're doing in Guaymas," he went on casually. "You don't seem to be a tourist, nor do you seem to be interested in deep-sea fishing."

"I am an anthropology student," I said, "and I am trying to establish my credentials with the local Indians in order to do some field research."

"And I am a businessman," he said. "My business is to supply information, to be the go-between. You have the need, I have the commodity. I charge for my services. However, my services are guaranteed. If you don't get satisfaction, you don't have to pay me."

"If your business is to supply information," I said, "I will gladly pay you whatever you charge."

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "You certainly need a guide, someone with more education than the average Indian here, to show you around. Do you have a grant from the United States government or from another big institution?"

"Yes," I lied. "I have a grant from the Esoterical Foundation of Los Angeles."

When I said that, I actually saw a glint of greed in his eyes.

"Ah!" he exclaimed again. "How big is that institution?"

"Fairly big," I said.

"My goodness! Is that so?" he said, as if my words were an explanation that he had wanted to hear. "And now, may I ask you, if you don't mind, how big is your grant? How much money did they give you?"

"A few thousand dollars to do preliminary fieldwork," I lied again, to see what he would say.

"Ah! I like people who are direct," he said, relishing his words. "I am sure that you and I are going to reach an agreement. I offer you my services as a guide and as a key that can open many secret doors among the Yaquis. As you can see by my general appearance, I am a man of taste and means."

"Oh, yes, definitely you are a man of good taste," I asserted.

"What I am saying to you," he said, "is that for a small fee, which you will find most reasonable, I will steer you to the right people, people to whom you could ask any question you want. And for some very little more, I will translate their words to you, verbatim, into Spanish or English. I can also speak French and German, but I have the feeling that those languages do not interest you."

"You are right, you are so very right," I said. "Those languages don't interest me at all. But how much would your fees be?"

"Ah! My fees!" he said, and took a leather-covered notebook out of his back pocket and flipped it open in front of my face; he scribbled quick notes on it, flipped it closed again, and put it in his pocket with precision and speed. I was sure that he wanted to give me the impression of being efficient and fast at calculating figures.

"I will charge you fifty dollars a day," he said, "with transportation, plus my meals. I mean, when you eat, I eat. What do you say?"

At that moment, he leaned over to me and, almost in a whisper, said that we should shift into English because he didn't want people to know the nature of our transactions. He began to speak to me then in something that wasn't English at all. I was at a loss. I didn't know how to respond. I began to fret nervously as the man kept on talking gibberish with the most natural air. He didn't bat an eyelash. He moved his hands in a very animated fashion and pointed around him as if he were instructing me. I didn't have the impression that he was speaking in tongues; I thought perhaps he was speaking the Yaqui language.

When people came around our table and looked at us, I nodded and said to Jorge Campos, "Yes, yes, indeed." At one point I said, "You could say that again," and this sounded so funny to me that I broke into a belly laugh. He also laughed heartily, as if I had said the funniest thing possible.

He must have noticed that I was finally at my wits' end, and before I could get up and tell him to get lost, he started to speak Spanish again.

"I don't want to tire you with my silly observations," he said. "But if I'm going to be your guide, as I think I am going to be, we will be spending long hours chatting. I was testing you just now, to see if you are a good conversationalist. If I'm going to spend time with you driving, I need someone by me who could be a good receptor and initiator. I'm glad to tell you that you are both."

Then he stood up, shook my hand, and left. As if on cue, the owner came to my table, smiling and shaking his head from side to side like a little bear.

"Isn't he a fabulous guy?" he asked me.

I didn't want to commit myself to a statement, and Mr. Reyes volunteered that Jorge Campos was at that moment a go-between in an extremely delicate and profitable transaction. He said that some mining companies in the United States were interested in the iron and copper deposits that belonged to the Yaqui Indians, and that Jorge Campos was there, in line to collect perhaps a five-million-dollar fee. I knew then that Jorge Campos was a con man. There were no iron or copper deposits on the lands owned by the Yaqui Indians. If there had been any, private enterprises would have already moved the Yaquis out of those lands and relocated them somewhere else.

"He's fabulous," I said. "Most wonderful guy I ever met. How can I get in touch with him again?"

"Don't worry about that," Mr. Reyes said. "Jorge asked me all about you. He has been watching you since you came. He'll probably come and knock on your door later today or tomorrow."

Mr. Reyes was right. A couple of hours later, somebody woke me from my afternoon nap. It was Jorge Campos. I had intended to leave Guaymas in the early evening and drive, all night, to California. I explained to him that I was leaving, but that I would come back in a month or so.

"Ah! But you must stay now that I have decided to be your guide," he said.

"I'm sorry, but we will have to wait for this because my time is very limited now," I replied.

I knew that Jorge Campos was a crook, yet I decided to reveal to him that I already had an informant who was waiting to work with me, and that I had met him in Arizona. I described the old man and said that his name was Juan Matus, and that other people had characterized him as a shaman. Jorge Campos smiled at me broadly. I asked him if he knew the old man.

"Ah, yes, I know him," he said jovially. "You may say that we are good friends." Without being invited, Jorge Campos came into the room and sat down at the table just inside the balcony.

"Does he live around here?" I asked.

"He certainly does," he assured me.

"Would you take me to him?"

"I don't see why not," he said. "I would need a couple of days to make my own inquiries, just to make sure that he is there, and then we will go and see him."

I knew that he was lying, yet I didn't want to believe it. I even thought that my initial distrust had perhaps been ill-founded. He seemed so convincing at that moment.

"However," he continued, "in order to take you to see the man, I will charge you a flat fee. My honorarium will be two hundred dollars."

That amount was more than I had at my disposal. I politely declined and said that I didn't have enough money with me.

"I don't want to appear mercenary," he said with his most winning smile, "but how much money can you afford? You must take into consideration that I have to do a little bribing. The Yaqui Indians are very private, but there are always ways; there are always doors that open with a magical key—money."

In spite of all my misgivings, I was convinced that Jorge Campos was my entry not only into the Yaqui world but to finding the old man who had intrigued me so much. I didn't want to haggle over money. I was almost embarrassed to offer him the fifty dollars I had in my pocket.

"I am at the end of my stay here," I said as a sort of apology, "so I have nearly run out of money. I have only fifty dollars left."

Jorge Campos stretched his long legs under the table and crossed his arms behind his head, tipping his hat over his face.

"I'll take your fifty dollars and your watch," he said shamelessly. "But for that money, I will take you to meet a minor shaman. Don't get impatient," he warned me, as if I were going to protest. "We must step carefully up the ladder, from the lower ranks to the man himself, who I assure you is at the very top."

"And when could I meet this minor shaman?" I asked, handing him the money and my watch.

"Right now!" he replied as he sat up straight and eagerly grabbed the money and the watch. "Let's go!. There's not a minute to waste!"

We got into my car and he directed me to head off for the town of Potam, one of the traditional Yaqui towns along the Yaqui River. As we drove, he revealed to me that we were going to meet Lucas Coronado, a man who was known for his sorcery feats, his shamanistic trances, and for the magnificent masks that he made for the Yaqui festivities of Lent.

Then he shifted the conversation to the old man, and what he said was in total contradiction to what others had said to me about the man. While they had described him as a hermit and retired shaman, Jorge Campos portrayed him as the most prominent curer and sorcerer of the area, a man whose fame had turned him into a nearly inaccessible figure. He paused, like an actor, and then he delivered his blow: He said that to talk to the old man on a steady basis, the way anthropologists like to do, was going to cost me at least two thousand dollars.

I was going to protest such a drastic hike in price, but he anticipated me.

"For two hundred dollars, I could take you to him," he said. "Out of those two hundred dollars, I would clear about thirty. The rest would go for bribes. But to talk to him at length will cost. more. You yourself could figure that out. He has actual bodyguards, people who protect him. I have to sweet-talk them and come up with dough for them.

"In the end," he continued, "I will give you a total account with receipts and everything for your taxes. Then you will know that my commission for setting it all up is minimal."

I felt a wave of admiration for him. He was aware of everything, even receipts for income tax. He was quiet for a while, as if calculating his minimal profit. I had nothing to say. I was busy calculating myself, trying to figure out a way to get two thousand dollars. I even thought of really applying for a grant.

"But are you sure the old man would talk to me?" I asked.

"Of course," he assured me. "Not only would he talk to you, he's going to perform sorcery for you, for what you pay him. Then you could work out an agreement with him as to how much you could pay him for further lessons."

Jorge Campos kept silent again for a while, peering into my eyes.

"Do you think that you could pay me the two thousand dollars?" he asked in a tone so purposefully indifferent that I instantly knew it was a sham.

"Oh, yes, I can easily afford that," I lied reassuringly.

He could not disguise his glee.

"Good boy! Good boy!" he cheered. "We're going to have a ball!"

I tried to ask him some general questions about the old man; he forcefully cut me off. "Save all this for the man himself. He'll be all yours," he said, smiling.

He began to tell me then about his life in the United States and about his business aspirations, and to my utter bewilderment, since I had already classified him as a phony who didn't speak a word of English, he shifted into English.

"You *do* speak English!" I exclaimed without any attempt at hiding my surprise.

"Of course I do, my boy," he said, affecting a Texan accent, which he carried on for the duration of our conversation. "I told you, I wanted to test you, to see if you are resourceful. You are. In fact, you are quite clever, I may say."

His command of English was superb, and he delighted me with jokes and stories. In no time at all, we were in Potam. He directed me to a house on the outskirts of town. We got out of the car. He led the way, calling loudly in Spanish for Lucas Coronado.

We heard a voice from the back of the house that said, also in Spanish, "Come over here."

There was a man behind a small shack, sitting on the ground, on a goatskin. He was holding a piece of wood with his bare feet while he worked on it with a chisel and a mallet. By holding the piece of wood in place with the pressure of his feet, he had fashioned a stupendous potter's turning wheel, so to speak. His feet turned the piece as his hands worked the chisel. I had never seen anything like this in my life. He was making a mask, hollowing it with a curved chisel. His control of his feet in holding the wood and turning it around was remarkable.

The man was very thin; he had a thin face with angular features, high cheekbones, and a dark, copperish complexion. The skin of his face and neck seemed to be stretched to the maximum. He sported a thin, droopy mustache that gave his angular face a malevolent slant. He had an aquiline nose with a very thin bridge, and fierce black eyes. His extremely black eyebrows appeared as if they had been drawn on with a pencil, and so did his jet black hair, combed backward on his head. I had never seen a more hostile face. The image that came to mind looking at him was that of an Italian poisoner of the era of the Medicis. The words "truculent" and "saturnine" seemed to be the most apt descriptions when I focused my attention on Lucas Coronado's face.

I noticed that while he was sitting on the ground, holding the piece of wood with his feet, the bones of his legs were so long that his knees came to his shoulders. When we approached him, he stopped working and stood up. He was taller than Jorge Campos, and as thin as a rail. As a gesture of deference to us, I suppose, he put on his *guaraches*.

"Come in, come in," he said without smiling.

I had a strange feeling then that Lucas Coronado didn't know how to smile.

"To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?" he asked Jorge Campos.

"I've brought this young man here because he wants to ask you some questions about your art," Jorge Campos said in a most patronizing tone. "I vouched that you would answer his questions truthfully."

"Oh, that's no problem, that's no problem," Lucas Coronado assured me, sizing me up with his cold stare.

He shifted into a different language then, which I presumed to be Yaqui. He and Jorge Campos got into an animated conversation that lasted for some time. Both of them acted as if I did not exist. Then Jorge Campos turned to me.

"We have a little problem here," he said. "Lucas has just informed me that this is a very busy season for him, since the festivities are approaching, so he won't be able to answer all the questions that you ask him, but he will at another time."

"Yes, yes, most certainly," Lucas Coronado said to me in Spanish. "At another time, indeed; at another time."

"We have to cut our visit short," Jorge Campos said, "but I'll bring you back again."

As we were leaving, I felt moved to express to Lucas Coronado my admiration for his stupendous technique of working with his hands and feet. He looked at me as if I were mad, his eyes widening with surprise.

"You've never seen anyone working on a mask?" he hissed through clenched teeth. "Where are you from? Mars?"

I felt stupid. I tried to explain that his technique was quite new to me. He seemed ready to hit me on the head. Jorge Campos said to me in English that I had offended Lucas Coronado with my comments. He had understood my praise as a veiled way of making fun of his poverty; my words had been to him an ironic statement of how poor and helpless he was.

"But it's the opposite," I said. "I think he's magnificent!"

"Don't try to tell him anything like that," Jorge Campos retorted. "These people are trained to receive and dispense insults in a most covert form. He thinks it's odd that you run him down when you don't even know him, and make fun of the fact that he cannot afford a vise to hold his sculpture."

I felt totally at a loss. The last thing I wanted was to foul up my only possible contact. Jorge Campos seemed to be utterly aware of my chagrin.

"Buy one of his masks," he advised me.

I told him that I intended to drive to Los Angeles in one lap, without stopping, and that I had just sufficient money to buy gasoline and food.

"Well, give him your leather jacket," he said matter-of-factly but in a confidential, helpful tone. "Otherwise, you're going to anger him, and all he'll remember about you will be your insults. But don't tell him that his masks are beautiful. Just buy one."

When I told Lucas Coronado that I wanted to trade my leather jacket for one of his masks, he grinned with satisfaction. He took the jacket and put it on. He walked to his house, but before he entered, he did some strange gyrations. He knelt in front of some sort of religious altar and moved his arms, as if to stretch them, and rubbed his hands on the sides of the jacket.

He went inside the house and brought out a bundle wrapped in newspapers, which he handed to me. I wanted to ask him some questions. He excused himself, saying that he had to work, but added that if I wanted I could come back at another time.

On the way back to the city of Guaymas, Jorge Campos asked me to open the bundle. He wanted to make sure that Lucas Coronado had not cheated me. I didn't care to open the bundle;

my only concern was the possibility that I could come back by myself to talk to Lucas Coronado. I was elated.

"I must see what you have," Jorge Campos insisted. "Stop the car, please. Not under any conditions or for any reasons whatsoever would I endanger my clients. You paid me to render some services to you. That man is a genuine shaman, therefore very dangerous. Because you have offended him, he may have given you a witchcraft bundle. If that's the case, we have to bury it quickly in this area."

I felt a wave of nausea and stopped the car. With extreme care, I took out the bundle. Jorge Campos snatched it out of my hands and opened it. It contained three beautifully made traditional Yaqui masks. Jorge Campos mentioned, in a casual, disinterested tone, that it would be only proper that I give him one of them. I reasoned that since he had not yet taken me to see the old man, I had to preserve my connection with him. I gladly gave him one of the masks.

"If you allow me to choose, I would rather take that one," he said, pointing.

I told him to go ahead. The masks didn't mean anything to me;

I had gotten what I was after. I would have given him the other two masks as well, but I wanted to show them to my anthropologist friends.

"These masks are nothing extraordinary," Jorge Campos declared. "You can buy them in any store in town. They sell them to tourists there."

I had seen the Yaqui masks that were sold in the stores in town. They were very rude masks in comparison to the ones I had, and Jorge Campos had indeed picked out the best.

I left him in the city and headed for Los Angeles. Before I said good-bye, he reminded me that I practically owed him two thousand dollars because he was going to start his bribing and working toward taking me to meet the big man.

"Do you think that you could give me my two thousand dollars the next time you come[7]" he asked daringly.

His question put me in a terrible position. I believed that to tell him the truth, that I doubted it, would have made him drop me. I was convinced then that in spite of his patent greed, he was my usher.

"I will do my best to have the money," I said in a noncommittal tone.

"You gotta do better than that, boy," he retorted forcefully, almost angrily. "I'm going to spend money on my own, setting up this meeting, and I must have some reassurance on your part, I know that you are a very serious young man. How much is your car worth? Do you have the pink slip?"

I told him what my car was worth, and that I did have the pink slip, but he seemed satisfied only when I gave him my word that I would bring him the money in cash on my next visit.

Five months later, I went back to Guaymas to see Jorge Campos. Two thousand dollars at that time was a considerable amount of money, especially for a student. I thought that if perhaps he were willing to take partial payments, I would be more than happy to commit myself to pay that amount in installments.

I couldn't find Jorge Campos anywhere in Guaymas. I asked the owner of the restaurant. He was as baffled as I was about his disappearance.

"He has just vanished," he said. "I'm sure he went back to Arizona, or to Texas, where he has business."

I took a chance and went to see Lucas Coronado by myself. I arrived at his house at midday. I couldn't find him either. I asked his neighbors if they knew where he might be. They looked at me belligerently and didn't dignify me with an answer. I left, but went by his house again in the late afternoon. I didn't expect anything at all. In fact, I was prepared to leave for Los Angeles immediately. To my surprise, Lucas Coronado was not only there but was extremely friendly to me. He frankly expressed his approval on seeing that I had come without Jorge Campos, who he said was an outright pain in the ass. He complained that Jorge Campos, to whom he referred as a renegade Yaqui Indian, took delight in exploiting his fellow Yaquis.

I gave Lucas Coronado some gifts that I had brought him and bought from him three masks, an exquisitely carved staff, and a pair of rattling leggings made out of the cocoons of some insects from the desert, leggings which the Yaquis used in their traditional dances. Then I took him to Guaymas for dinner.

I saw him every day for the five days that I remained in the area, and he gave me endless amounts of information about the Yaquis—their history and social organization, and the meaning and nature of their festivities. I was having such fun as a field-worker that I even felt reluctant to ask him if he knew anything about the old shaman. Overcoming second thoughts, I finally asked Lucas Coronado if he knew the old man whom Jorge Campos had assured me was such a prominent shaman. Lucas Coronado seemed perplexed. He assured me that to his knowledge, no such man had ever existed in that part of the country and that Jorge Campos was a crook who only wanted to cheat me out of my money.

Hearing Lucas Coronado deny the existence of that old man had a terrible, unexpected impact on me. In one instant, it became evident to me that I really didn't give a damn about fieldwork. I only cared about finding that old man. I knew then that meeting the old shaman had indeed been the culmination of something that had nothing to do with my desires, aspirations, or even thoughts as an anthropologist.

I wondered more than ever who in the hell that old man was. Without any inhibitory checks, I began to rant and yell in frustration. I stomped on the floor. Lucas Coronado was quite taken aback by my display. He looked at me, bewildered, and then started to laugh. I had no idea that he could laugh. I apologized to him for my outburst of anger and frustration. I couldn't explain why I was so out of sorts. Lucas Coronado seemed to understand my quandary.

"Things like that happen in this area," he said.

I had no idea to what he was referring, nor did I want to ask him. I was deadly afraid of the easiness with which he took offense. A peculiarity of the Yaquis was the facility they had to feel offended. They seemed to be perennially on their toes, looking out for insults that were too subtle to be noticed by anyone else.

"There are magical beings living in the mountains around here," he continued, "and they can act on people. They make people go veritably mad. People rant and rave under their influence, and when they finally calm down, exhausted, they don't have any clue as to why they exploded."

"Do you think that's what happened to me?" I asked.

"Definitely," he replied with total conviction. "You already have a predisposition to going bonkers at the drop of a hat, but you are also very contained. Today, you weren't contained. You went bananas over nothing."

"It isn't over nothing," I assured him. "I didn't know it until now, but to me that old man is the driving force of-all my efforts."

Lucas Coronado kept quiet, as if in deep thought. Then he began to pace up and down.

"Do you know any old man who lives around here but is not quite from this area?" I asked him.

He didn't understand my question. I had to explain to him that the old Indian I had met was perhaps like Jorge Campos, a Yaqui who had lived somewhere else. Lucas Coronado explained that the surname "Matus" was quite common in that area, but that he didn't know any Matus whose first name was Juan. He seemed despondent. Then he had a moment of insight and stated that because the man was old, he might have another name, and that perhaps he had given me a working name, not his real one.

"The only old man I know," he went on, "is Ignacio Flores's father. He comes to see his son from time to time, but he comes from Mexico City. Come to think of it, he's Ignacio's father, but he doesn't seem that old. But he's old. Ignacio's old, too. His father seems younger, though."

He laughed heartily at his realization. Apparently, he had never thought about the youth of the old man until that moment. He kept on shaking his head, as if in disbelief. I, on the other hand, was elated beyond measure.

"That's the man!" I yelled without knowing why.

Lucas Coronado didn't know where Ignacio Flores actually lived, but he was very accommodating and directed me to drive to a nearby Yaqui town, where he found the man for me.

Ignacio Flores was a big, corpulent man, perhaps in his mid-sixties. Lucas Coronado had warned me that the big man had been a career soldier in his youth, and that he still had the bearing of a military man. Ignacio Flores had an enormous mustache; that and the fierceness of his eyes made him for me the personification of a ferocious soldier. He had a dark complexion. His hair was still jet black in spite of his years. His forceful, gravelly voice seemed to be trained solely to give commands. I had the impression that he had been a cavalry man. He walked as if he were still wearing spurs, and for some strange reason, impossible to fathom, I heard the sound of spurs when he walked.

Lucas Coronado introduced me to him and said that I had come from Arizona to see his father, whom I had met in Nogales. Ignacio Flores didn't seem surprised at all.

"Oh yes," he said. "My father travels a great deal." Without any other preliminaries, he directed us to where we could find his father. He didn't come with us, I thought out of politeness. He excused himself and marched away, as if he were keeping step in a parade.

I prepared myself to go to the old man's house with Lucas Coronado. Instead, he politely declined; he wanted me to drive him back to his house.

"I think you found the man you were looking for, and I feel that you should be alone," he said.

I marveled at how extraordinarily polite these Yaqui Indians were, and yet, at the same time, so fierce. I had been told that the Yaquis were savages who had no qualms about killing anyone; as far as I was concerned, though, their most remarkable feature was their politeness and consideration.

I drove to the house of Ignacio Flores's father, and there I found the man I was looking for.

"I wonder why Jorge Campos lied and told me that he knew you," I said at the end of my account.

"He didn't lie to you," don Juan said with the conviction of someone who was condoning Jorge Campos's behavior. "He didn't even misrepresent himself. He thought you were an easy mark and was going to cheat you. He couldn't carry out his plan, though, because *infinity* overpowered him. Do you know that he disappeared soon after he met you, never to be found?

"Jorge Campos was a most meaningful personage for you," he continued. "You will find, in whatever transpired between the two of you, a sort of guiding blueprint, because he is the representation of your life."

"Why? I'm not a crook!" I protested.

He laughed, as if he knew something that I didn't. The next thing I knew, I found myself in the midst of an extensive explanation of my actions, my ideals, my expectations. However, a strange thought urged me to consider with the same fervor with which I was explaining myself that under certain circumstances, I might be like Jorge Campos. I found the thought inadmissible, and I used all my available energy to try to disprove it. However, down in the depths of myself, I didn't care to apologize if I were like Jorge Campos.

When I voiced my dilemma, don Juan laughed so hard that he choked, many times.

"If I were you," he commented, "I'd listen to my inner voice. What difference would it make if you were like Jorge Campos: a crook! He was a cheap crook. You are more elaborate. This is the power of the recounting. This is why sorcerers use it. It puts you into contact with something that you didn't even suspect existed in you."

I wanted to leave right then. Don Juan knew exactly how I felt.

"Don't listen to the superficial voice that makes you angry," he said commandingly. "Listen to that deeper voice that is going to guide you from now on, the voice that is laughing. Listen to it! And laugh with it. Laugh! Laugh!"

His words were like a hypnotic command to me. Against my will, I began to laugh. Never had I been so happy. I felt free, unmasked.

"Recount to yourself the story of Jorge Campos, over and over," don Juan said. "You will find endless wealth in it. Every detail is part of a map. It is the nature *of infinity,* once we cross a certain threshold, to put a blueprint in front of us."

He peered at me for a long time. He didn't merely glance as before, but he gazed intently at me. "One deed which Jorge Campos couldn't avoid performing," he finally said, "was to put you in contact with the other man: Lucas Coronado, who is as meaningful to you as Jorge Campos himself, maybe even more so.

In the course of recounting the story of those two men, I had realized that I had spent more time with Lucas Coronado than with Jorge Campos; however, our exchanges had not been as intense, and were marked by enormous lagoons of silence. Lucas Coronado was not by nature a talkative man, and by some strange twist, whenever he was silent he managed to drag me with him into that state.

"Lucas Coronado is the other part of your map," don Juan said. "Don't you find it strange that he is a sculptor, like yourself, a super-sensitive artist who was, like yourself at one time, in search of a sponsor for his art? He looked for a sponsor just like you looked for a woman, a lover of the arts, who would sponsor your creativity."

I entered into another terrifying struggle. This time my struggle was between my absolute certainty that I had not mentioned this aspect of my life to him, the fact that all of it was true, and the fact that I was unable to find an explanation for how he could have obtained this information. Again, I wanted to leave right away. But once more, the impulse was overpowered by a voice that came from a deep place. Without any coaxing, I began to laugh heartily. Some part of me, at a profound level, didn't give a hoot about finding out how don Juan had gotten that information. The fact that he had it, and had displayed it in such a delicate but conniving manner, was a delightful maneuver to witness. It was of no consequence that the superficial part of me got angry and wanted to leave.

"Very good," don Juan said to me, patting me forcefully on the back,"very good."

He was pensive for a moment, as if he were perhaps seeing things invisible to the average eye.

"Jorge Campos and Lucas Coronado are the two ends of an axis," he said. "That axis is you, at one end a ruthless, shameless, crass mercenary who takes care of himself; hideous, but indestructible. At the other end a super-sensitive, tormented artist, weak and vulnerable. That should have been the map'of your life, were it not for the appearance of another possibility, the one that opened up when you crossed the threshold of *infinity*. You searched for me, and you found me; and so, you did cross the threshold. The *intent of infinity* told me to look for someone like you. I found you, thus crossing the threshold myself."

The conversation ended at that point. Don Juan went into one of his habitual long periods of total silence. It was only at the end of the day, when we had returned to his house and while we were sitting under his ramada, cooling off from the long hike we had taken, that he broke his silence.

"In your recounting of what happened between you and Jorge Campos, and you and Lucas Coronado," don Juan went on, "I found, and I hope you did, too, a very disturbing factor. For me, it's an omen. It points to the end of an era, meaning that whatever was standing there cannot remain. Very flimsy elements brought you to me. None of them could stand on their own. This is what I drew from your recounting."

I remembered that don Juan had revealed to me one day that Lucas Coronado was terminally ill. He had some health condition that was slowly consuming him.

"I have sent word to him through my son Ignacio about what he should do to cure himself," don Juan went on, "but he thinks it's nonsense and doesn't want to hear it. It isn't Lucas's fault. The entire human race doesn't want to hear anything. They hear only what they want to hear."

I remembered that I had prevailed upon don Juan to tell me what I could say to Lucas Coronado to help him alleviate his physical pain and mental anguish. Don Juan not only told me what to tell him, but asserted that if Lucas Coronado wanted to, he could easily cure himself. Nevertheless, when I delivered don Juan's message, Lucas Coronado looked at me as if I had lost my mind. Then he shifted into a brilliant, and, had I been a Yaqui, deeply insulting, portrayal of a man who is bored to death by someone's unwarranted insistence. I thought that only a Yaqui Indian could be so subtle.

"Those things don't help me," he finally said defiantly, angered by my lack of sensibility. "It doesn't really matter. We all have to die. But don't you dare believe that I have lost hope. I'm going to get some money from the government bank. I'll get an advance on my crops, and then I'll get enough money to buy something that will cure me, ipso facto. It's name is Vi-ta-mi-nol."

"What is Vitaminol?" I had asked.

"It's something that's advertised on the radio," he said with the innocence of a child. "It cures everything. It's recommended for people who don't eat meat or fish or fowl every day. It's recommended for people like myself who can barely keep body and soul together."

In my eagerness to help Lucas Coronado, I committed right then the biggest blunder imaginable in a society of such hypersensitive beings as the Yaquis: I offered to give him the money to buy Vitaminol. His cold stare was the measure of how deeply I had hurt him. My stupidity was unforgivable. Very softly, Lucas Coronado said that he was capable of affording Vitaminol himself.

I went back to don Juan's house. I felt like weeping. My eagerness had betrayed me.

"Don't waste your energy worrying about things like that," don Juan said coldly. "Lucas Coronado is locked in a vicious cycle, but so are you. So is everyone. He has Vitaminol, which he trusts will cure everything, and resolve every one of his problems. At the moment, he can't afford it, but he has great hopes that he eventually will be able to."

Don Juan peered at me with his piercing eyes. "I told you that Lucas Coronado's acts are the map of your life," he said. "Believe you me, they are. Lucas Coronado pointed out Vitaminol to you, and he did it so powerfully and painfully that he hurt you and made you weep."

Don Juan stopped talking then. It was a long and most effective pause. "And don't tell me that you don't understand what I mean," he said. "One way or another, we all have our own version of Vitaminol."

## Who Was Juan Matus, Really?

THE PART OF my account of meeting don Juan that he didn't want to hear about was my feelings and impressions on that fateful day when I walked into his house: the contradictory clash between my expectations and the reality of the situation, and the effect that was caused in me by a cluster of the most extravagant ideas I had ever heard.

"That is more in the line of confession than in the line of events," he had said to me once when I tried to tell him about all this.

"You couldn't be more wrong, don Juan," I began, but I stopped. Something in the way he looked at me made me realize that he was right. Whatever I was going to say could have sounded only like lip service, flattery. What had taken place on our first real meeting, however, was of transcendental importance to me, an event of ultimate consequence.

During my first encounter with don Juan, in the bus depot in Nogales, Arizona, something of an unusual nature had happened to me, but it had come to me cushioned in my concerns with the presentation of the self. I had wanted to impress don Juan, and in attempting to do so I had focused all my attention on the act of selling my wares, so to speak. It was only months later that a strange residue of forgotten events began to appear.

One day, out of nowhere, and with no coaxing or coaching on my part, I recollected with extraordinary clarity something that had completely bypassed me during my actual encounter with don Juan. When he had stopped me from telling him my name, he had peered into my eyes and had numbed me with his look. There was infinitely more that I could have said to him about myself. I could have expounded on my knowledge and worth for hours if his look hadn't completely cut me off.

In light of this new realization, I reconsidered everything that had happened to me on that occasion. My unavoidable conclusion was that I had experienced the interruption of some mysterious flow that kept me going, a flow that had never been interrupted before, at least not in the manner in which don Juan had done it. When I tried to describe to any of my friends what I had physically experienced, a strange perspiration began to cover my entire body, the same perspiration that I had experienced when don Juan had given me that look; I had been, at that moment, not only incapable of voicing a single word, but incapable of having a single thought.

For some time after, I dwelled on the physical sensation of this interruption, for which I found no rational explanation. I argued for a while that don Juan must have hypnotized me, but then my memory told me that he hadn't given any hypnotic commands, nor had he made any movements that could have trapped my attention. In fact, he had merely glanced at me. It was the intensity of that glance that had made it appear as if he had stared at me for a long time. It had obsessed me, and had rendered me dis-combobulated at a deep physical level.

When I finally had don Juan in front of me again, the first thing I noticed about him was that he didn't look at all as I had imagined him during all the time I had tried to find him. I had fabricated an image of the man I had met at the bus depot, which I perfected every day by allegedly remembering more details. In my mind, he was an old man, still very strong and nimble, yet almost frail. The man facing me was muscular and decisive. He moved with agility, but not nimbleness. His steps were firm and, at the same time, light. He exuded vitality and purpose. My composite memory was not at all in harmony with the real thing. I thought he had short, white hair and an extremely dark complexion. His hair was longer, and not as white as I had imagined. His complexion was not that dark either. I could have sworn that his features were birdlike, because of his age. But that was not so either. His face was full, almost round. In one glance, the most outstanding feature of the man looking at me was his dark eyes, which shone with a peculiar, dancing glow.

Something that had bypassed me completely in my prior assessment of him was the fact that his total countenance was that of an athlete. His shoulders were broad, his stomach flat; he seemed to be planted firmly on the ground. There was no feebleness to his knees, no tremor in his upper limbs. I had imagined detecting a slight tremor in his head and arms, as if he were nervous and unsteady. I had also imagined him to be about five feet six inches tall, three inches shorter than his actual height.

Don Juan didn't seem surprised to see me. I wanted to tell him how difficult it had been for me to find him. I would have liked to be congratulated by him on my titanic efforts, but he just laughed at me, teasingly.

"Your efforts are not important," he said. "What's important is that you found my place. Sit down, sit down," he said, enticing me, pointing to one of the freight boxes under his ramada and patting me on my back; but it wasn't a friendly pat.

It felt like he had slapped me on the back although he never actually touched me. His quasi-slap created a strange, unstable sensation, which appeared abruptly and disappeared before I had time to grasp what it was. What was left in me instead was a strange peace. I felt at ease. My mind was crystal clear. I had no expectations, no desires. My usual nervousness and sweaty hands, the marks of my existence, were suddenly gone.

"Now you will understand everything I am going to say to you," don Juan said to me, looking into my eyes as he had done in the bus depot.

Ordinarily, I would have found his statement perfunctory, perhaps rhetorical, but when he said it, I could only assure him repeatedly and sincerely that I would understand anything he said to me. He looked me in the eyes again with a ferocious intensity.

"I am Juan Matus," he said, sitting down on another freight box, a few feet away, facing me. "This is my name, and I voice it because with it, I am making a bridge for you to cross over to where I am."

He stared at me for an instant before he started talking again.

"I am a sorcerer," he went on. "I belong to a lineage of sorcerers that has lasted for twenty-seven generations. I am the nagual of my generation."

He explained to me that the leader of a party of sorcerers like himself was called the "nagual," and that this was a generic term applied to a sorcerer in each generation who had some specific energetic configuration that set him apart from the others. Not in terms of superiority or inferiority, or anything of the like, but in terms of the capacity to be responsible.

"Only the nagual," he said, "has the energetic capacity to be responsible for the fate of his cohorts. Every one of his cohorts knows this, and they accede. The nagual can be a man or a woman. In the time of the sorcerers who were the founders of my lineage, women were, by rule, the naguals. Their natural pragmatism—the product of their femaleness—led my lineage into pits of practicalities from which they could barely emerge. Then, the males took over, and led my lineage into pits of imbecility from which we are barely emerging now.

"Since the time of the nagual Lujan, who lived about two hundred years ago," he went on, "there has been a joint nexus of effort, shared by a man and a woman. The nagual man brings sobriety; the nagual woman brings innovation."

I wanted to ask him at this point if there was a woman in his life who was the nagual, but the depth of my concentration didn't allow me to formulate the question. Instead, he himself formulated it for me.

"Is there a nagual woman in my life?" he asked. "No, there isn't any. I am a solitary sorcerer. I have my cohorts, though. At the moment, they are not around."

A thought came with uncontainable vigor into my mind. At that instant, I remembered what some people in Yuma had told me about don Juan running with a party of Mexican men who seemed to be very versed in sorcery maneuvers.

"To be a sorcerer," don Juan continued, "doesn't mean to practice witchcraft, or to work to affect people, or to be possessed by demons. To be a sorcerer means to reach a level of awareness that makes inconceivable things available. The term 'sorcery' is inadequate to express what sorcerers do, and so is the term 'shamanism.' The actions of sorcerers are exclusively in the realm of the abstract, the impersonal. Sorcerers struggle to reach a goal that has nothing to do with the quests of an average man. Sorcerers' aspirations are to reach *infinity,* and to be conscious of it."

Don Juan continued, saying that the task of sorcerers was to face *infinity,* and that they plunged into it daily, as a fisherman plunges into the sea. It was such an overwhelming task that sorcerers had to state their names before venturing into it. He reminded me that, in

Nogales, he had stated his name before any interaction had taken place between us. He had, in this manner, asserted his individuality in front of the infinite.

I understood with unequaled clarity what he was explaining. I didn't have to ask him for clarifications. My keenness of thought should have surprised me, but it didn't at all. I knew at that moment that I had always been crystal clear, merely playing dumb for someone else's benefit.

"Without you knowing anything about it," he continued, "I started you on a traditional quest. You are the man I was looking for. My quest ended when I found you, and yours when you found me now."

Don Juan explained to me that, as the nagual of his generation, he was in search of an individual who had a specific energetic configuration, adequate to ensure the continuity of his lineage. He said that at a given moment, the nagual of each generation for twenty-seven successive generations had entered into the most nerve-racking experience of their lives: the search for succession.

Looking me straight in the eyes, he stated that what made human beings into sorcerers was their capacity to perceive energy directly as it flows in the universe, and that when sorcerers perceive a human being in this fashion, they *see* a luminous ball, or a luminous egg-shaped figure. His contention was that human beings are not only capable of seeing energy directly as it flows in the universe, but that they actually do see it, although they are not deliberately conscious of seeing it.

He made right then the most crucial distinction for sorcerers, the one between the general state of being aware and the particular state of being deliberately conscious of something. He categorized all human beings as possessing awareness, in a general sense, which permits them to see energy directly, and he categorized sorcerers as the only human beings who were deliberately conscious of seeing energy directly. He then defined "awareness" as energy and "energy" as constant flux, a luminous vibration that was never stationary, but always moving of it's own accord. He asserted that when a human being was seen, he was perceived as a conglomerate of energy fields held together by the most mysterious force in the universe: a binding, agglutinating, vibratory force that holds energy fields together in a cohesive unit. He further explained that the nagual was a specific sorcerer in each generation whom the other sorcerers were able to see, not as a single luminous ball but as a set of two spheres of luminosity fused, one over the other.

"This feature ofdoubleness," he continued, "permits the nagual to perform maneuvers that are rather difficult for an average sorcerer. For example, the nagual is a connoisseur of the force that holds us together as a cohesive unit. The nagual could place his full attention, for a fraction of a second, on that force, and numb the other person. I did that to you at the bus depot because I wanted to stop your barrage of me, me, me, me, me, me, me. I wanted you to find me and cut the crap.

"The sorcerers of my lineage maintained," don Juan went on, "that the presence of a double being—a nagual—is sufficient to clarify things for us. What's odd about it is that the presence of the nagual clarifies things in a veiled fashion. It happened to me when I met the nagual Julian, my teacher. His presence baffled me for years, because every time I was around him, I could think clearly, but when he moved away, I became the same idiot that I had always been.

"I had the privilege," don Juan went on, "of actually meeting and dealing with two naguals. For six years, at the request of the nagual Elias, the teacher of the nagual Julian, I went to live with him. He is the one who reared me, so to speak. It was a rare privilege. I had a ringside seat for watching what a nagual really is. The nagual Elias and the nagual Julian were two men of tremendously different temperaments. The nagual Elias was quieter, and lost in the darkness of his silence. The nagual Julian was bombastic, a compulsive talker. It seemed that he lived to dazzle women. There were more women in his life than one would care to think about. Yet both of them were astoundingly alike in that there was nothing inside them. They were empty. The nagual Elias was a collection of astounding, haunting stories of regions unknown. The nagual Julian was a collection of stories that would have anybody in stitches, sprawled on the ground laughing. Whenever I tried to pin down the man in them, the real man, the way I could pinpoint the man in my father, the man in everybody I knew, I found nothing. Instead of a real person inside them, there was a bunch of stories about persons unknown. Each of the two men had his own flair, but the end result was just the same: emptiness, an emptiness that reflected not the world, but in/init)i."

Don Juan went on explaining that the moment one crosses a peculiar threshold in *infinity,* either deliberately or, as in my case, unwittingly, everything that happens to one from then on is no longer exclusively in one's own domain, but enters into the realm ofin/inity.

"When we met in Arizona, both of us crossed a peculiar threshold," he continued. "And this threshold was not decided by either one of us, but by *infinity* itself. *Infinity* is everything that surrounds us." He said this and made a broad gesture with his arms. "The sorcerers of my lineage call it *infinity,* the spirit, the *dark sea of awareness,* and say that it is something that exists out there and rules our lives."

I was truly capable of comprehending everything he was saying, and yet I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. I asked if crossing the threshold had been an accidental event, born of unpredictable circumstances ruled by chance. He answered that his steps and mine were guided by *infinity,* and that circumstances that seemed to be ruled by chance were in essence ruled by the *active side of infinity*. He called it *intent*.

"What put you and me together," he went on, "was the *intent of infinity*. It is impossible to determine what this *intent of infinity* is, yet it is there, as palpable as you and I are. Sorcerers say that it is a *tremor in the air*. The advantage of sorcerers is to know that the tremor in *the air* exists, and to acquiesce to it without any further ado. For sorcerers, there's no pondering, wondering, or speculating. They know that all they have is the possibility of merging with the intent *of infinity,* and they just do it."

Nothing could have been clearer to me than those statements.. As far as I was concerned, the truth of what he was telling me was so self-evident that it didn't permit me to ponder how such absurd assertions could have sounded so rational. I knew that everything that don Juan was saying was not only a truism, but I could corroborate it by referring to my own being. I knew about everything that he was saying. I had the sensation that I had lived every twist of his description.

Our interchange ended then. Something seemed to deflate inside me. It was at that instant that the thought crossed my mind that I was losing my marbles. I had been blinded by weird statements and had lost every conceivable sense of objectivity. Accordingly, I left don Juan's house in a real hurry, feeling threatened to the core by an unseen enemy. Don Juan walked me to my car, fully cognizant of what was going on inside me.

"Don't worry," he said, putting his hand on my shoulder. You're not going crazy. What you felt was a gentle tap ofmfinity."

As time went by, I was able to corroborate what don Juan had said about his two teachers. Don Juan Matus was exactly as he had described those two men to be. I would go as far as saying that he was an extraordinary blend of both of them: on the one hand, extremely quiet and introspective; on the other, extremely open and funny. The most accurate statement about what a nagual is, which he voiced the day I found him, was that a nagual is empty, and that that emptiness doesn't reflect the world, but reflects *infinity*.

Nothing could have been more true than this in reference to don Juan Matus. His emptiness reflected *infinity*. There was no boisterousness on his part, or assertions about the self. There was not a speck of a need to have either grievances or remorse. His was the emptiness of a warrior-traveler, seasoned to the point where he doesn't take anything for granted. A warrior-traveler who doesn't underestimate or overestimate anything. A quiet, disciplined fighter whose elegance is so extreme that no one, no matter how hard they try to look, will ever find the seam where all that complexity has come together."

## The End of an Era

## The Deep Concerns of Everyday Life

I WENT TO Sonora to see don Juan. I had to discuss with him the most serious event of that moment in my life. I needed his advice. When I arrived at his house, I barely went through the formality of greeting him. I sat down and blurted out my turmoil.

"Calm down, calm down," don Juan said. "Nothing can be that bad!"

"What's happening to me, don Juan?" I asked. It was a rhetorical question on my part.

"It is the workings of *infinity"* he replied. "Something happened to your way of perceiving the day you met me. Your sensation of nervousness is due to the subliminal realization that your time is up. You are aware of it, but not deliberately conscious of it. You feel the absence of time, and that makes you impatient. I know this, for it happened to me and to all the sorcerers of my lineage. At a given time, a whole era in my life, or their lives, ended. Now it's your turn. You have simply run out of time."

He demanded then a total account of whatever had happened to me. He said that it had to be a full account, sparing no details. He wasn't after sketchy descriptions. He wanted me to air the full impact of what was troubling me.

"Let's have this talk, as they say in your world, by the book," he said. "Let us enter into the realm *of formal talks."*

Don Juan explained that the shamans of ancient Mexico had developed the idea *of formal* versus *informal talks,* and used both of them as devices for teaching and guiding their disciples. *Formal talks* were, for them, summations that they made from time to time of everything that they had taught or said to their disciples. Informal *talks* were daily elucidations in which things were explained without reference to anything but the phenomenon itself under scrutiny.

"Sorcerers keep nothing to themselves," he continued. "To empty themselves in this fashion is a sorcerers' maneuver. It leads them to abandon the fortress of the self."

I began my story, telling don Juan that the circumstances of my life have never permitted me to be introspective. As far back in my past as I can remember, my daily life has been filled to the brim with pragmatic problems that have clamored for immediate resolution. I remember my favorite uncle telling me that he was appalled at having found out that I had never received a gift for Christmas or for my birthday. I had come to live in my father's family's home not too long before he made that statement. He commiserated with me about the unfairness of my situation. He even apologized, although it had nothing to do with him.

"It is disgusting, my boy," he said, shaking with feeling. "I want you to know that I am behind you one hundred percent whenever the moment comes to redress wrongdoings."

He insisted over and over that I had to forgive the people who had wronged me. From what he said, I formed the impression that he wanted me to confront my father with his finding and accuse him of indolence and neglect, and then, of course, forgive him. He failed to see that I didn't feel wronged at all. What he was-asking me to do required an introspective nature that would make me respond to the barbs of psychological mistreatment once they were pointed out to me. I assured my uncle that I was going to think about it, but not at the moment, because at that very instant, my girlfriend, from the living room where she was waiting for me, was signaling me desperately to hurry up.

I never had the opportunity to think about it, but my uncle must have talked to my father, because I got a gift from him, a package neatly wrapped up, with ribbon and all, and a little card that said "Sorry." I curiously and eagerly ripped the wrappings. There was a cardboard box, and inside it there was a beautiful toy, a tiny boat with a winding key attached to the steam pipe. It could be used by children to play with while they took baths in the bathtub. My father had thoroughly forgotten that I was already fifteen years old and, for all practical purposes, a man.

Since I had reached my adult years still incapable of serious introspection, it was quite a novelty when one day years later I found myself in the throes of a strange emotional agitation, which seemed to increase as time went by. I discarded it, attributing it to natural processes of the mind or the body that enter into action periodically, for no reason at all, or are perhaps triggered by biochemical processes within the body itself. I thought nothing of it. However, the agitation increased and it's pressure forced me to believe that I had arrived at a moment in life when what I needed was a drastic change. There was something in me that demanded a rearrangement of my life. This urge to rearrange everything was familiar. I had felt it in the past, but it had been dormant for a long time.

I was committed to studying anthropology, and this commitment was so strong that not to study anthropology was never part of my proposed drastic change. It didn't occur to me to drop out of school and do something else. The first thing that came to mind was that I needed to change schools and go somewhere else, far away from Los Angeles.

Before I undertook a change of that magnitude, I wanted to test the waters, so to speak. I enrolled in a full summer load of classes at a school in another city. The most important course, for me, was a class in anthropology taught by a foremost authority on the Indians of the Andean region. It was my belief that if I' focused my studies on an area that was emotionally accessible to me I would have a better opportunity to do anthropological field-work in a serious manner when the time came. I conceived of my knowledge of South America as giving me a better entree into any given Indian society there.

At the same time that I registered for school, I got a job as a research assistant to a psychiatrist who was the older brother of one of my friends. He wanted to do a content analysis of excerpts from some innocuous tapes of question-and-answer sessions with young men and women about their problems arising from overwork in school, unfulfilled expectations, not being understood at home, frustrating love affairs, etc. The tapes were over five years old and were going to be destroyed, but before they were, random numbers were allotted to each reel, and following a table of random numbers, reels were picked by the psychiatrist and his research assistants and scanned for excerpts that could be analyzed.

On the first day of class in the new school, the anthropology professor talked about his academic bona fides and dazzled his students with the scope of his knowledge and his publications. He was a tall, slender man in his mid-forties, with shifty blue eyes. What struck me the most about his physical appearance was that his eyes were rendered enormous behind glasses for correcting farsightedness, and each of his eyes gave the impression that it was rotating in an opposite direction from the other when he moved his head as he spoke. I knew that that couldn't be true; it was, however, a very disconcerting image. He was extremely well dressed for an anthropologist, who in my day were famous for their super-casual attire. Archaeologists, for example, were described by their students as creatures lost in carbon-14 dating who never took a bath.

However, for reasons unbeknownst to me, what really set him apart wasn't his physical appearance, or his erudition, but his speech pattern. He pronounced every word as clearly as anyone I had ever heard, and emphasized certain words by elongating them. He had a markedly foreign intonation, but I knew that it was an affectation. He pronounced certain phrases like an Englishman and others like a revivalist preacher.

He fascinated me from the start despite his enormous pomposity. His self-importance was so blatant that it ceased to be an issue after the first five minutes of his class, which were always bombastic displays of knowledge cushioned in wild assertions about himself. His command of the audience was sensational. None of the students I talked to felt anything but supreme admiration for this extraordinary man. I earnestly thought that everything was moving along nicely, and that this move to another school in another city was going to be easy and uneventful, but thoroughly positive. I liked my new surroundings.

At my job, I became completely engrossed in listening to the tapes, to the point where I would sneak into the office and listen not to excerpts, but to entire tapes. What fascinated me beyond measure, at first, was the fact that I heard myself speaking in every one of those tapes. As the weeks went by and I heard more tapes, my fascination turned to sheer horror. Every line that was spoken, including the psychiatrist's questions, was mine. Those people were speaking from the depths of my own being. The revulsion that I experienced was something unique for me. Never had I dreamed that I could be repeated endlessly in every man or woman I heard speaking on the tapes. My sense of individuality, which had been ingrained in me from birth, tumbled down hopelessly under the impact of this colossal discovery.

I began then an odious process of trying to restore myself. I unconsciously made a ludicrous attempt at introspection; I tried to wriggle out of my predicament by endlessly talking to myself. I rehashed in my mind all the possible rationales that would support my sense of uniqueness, and then talked out loud to myself about them. I even experienced something quite revolutionary to me: waking myself up many times by my loud talking in my sleep, discoursing about my value and distinctiveness.

Then, one horrifying day, I suffered another deadly blow. In the wee hours of the night, I was woken up by an insistent knocking on my door. It wasn't a mild, timid knock, but what my friends called a "Gestapo knock." The door was about to come off it's hinges. I jumped out of bed and opened the peephole. The person who was knocking on the door was my boss, the psychiatrist. My being his younger brother's friend seemed to have created an avenue of communication with him. He had befriended me without any hesitation, and there he was on my doorstep. I turned on the light and opened the door. "Please come in," I said. "What happened?" It was three o'clock in the morning, and by his livid expression, and his sunken eyes, I knew that he was deeply upset. He came in and sat down. His pride and joy, his black mane of longish hair, was falling all over his face. He didn't make any effort to comb his hair back, the way he usually wore it. I liked him very much because he was an older version of my friend in Los Angeles, with black, heavy eyebrows, penetrating brown eyes, a square jaw, and thick lips. His upper lip seemed to have an extra fold inside, which at times, when he smiled in a certain way, gave the impression that he had a double upper lip. He always talked about the shape of his nose, which he described as an impertinent, pushy nose. I thought he was extremely sure of himself, and opinionated beyond belief. He claimed that in his profession those qualities were winning cards.

"What happened!" he repeated with a tone of mockery, his double upper lip trembling uncontrollably. "Anyone can tell that everything has happened to me tonight." ,

He sat down in a chair. He seemed dizzy, disoriented, looking for words. He got up and went to the couch, slumping down on it. "It's not only that I have the responsibility of my patients," he went on, "but my research grant, my wife and kids, and now another fucking pressure has been added to it, and what bums me up is that it was my own fault, my own stupidity for putting my trust in a stupid cunt!

"I'll tell you, Carlos," he continued, "there's nothing more appalling, disgusting, fucking nauseating than the insensitivity of women. I'm not a woman hater, you know that! But at this moment it seems to me that every single cunt is just a cunt! Duplicitous and vile!"

I didn't know what to say. Whatever he was telling me didn't need affirmation or contradiction. I wouldn't have dared to contradict him anyway. I didn't have the ammunition for it. I was very tired. I wanted to go back to sleep, but he kept on talking as if his life depended on it.

"You know Theresa Manning, don't you?" he asked me in a forceful, accusatory manner.

For an instant, I believed that he was accusing me of having something to do with his young, beautiful student-secretary. Without giving me time to respond, he continued talking.

"Theresa Manning is an asshole. She's a schnook! A stupid, inconsiderate woman who has no incentive in life other than balling anyone with a bit of fame and notoriety. I thought she was intelligent and sensitive. I thought she had something, some understanding, some empathy, something that one would like to share, or hold as precious all to oneself. I don't know, but that's the picture that she painted for me, when in reality she's lewd and degenerate, and, I may add, incurably gross."

As he kept on talking, a strange picture began to emerge. Apparently, the psychiatrist had just had a bad experience involving his secretary.

"Since the day she came to work for me," he went on, "I knew that she was attracted to me sexually, but she never came around to saying it. It was all in the innuendos and the looks. Well, fuck it! This afternoon I got sick and tired of pussyfooting around and I came right to the point. I went up to her desk and said, 'I know what you want, and you know what I want.'"

He went into a great, elaborate rendition of how forcefully he had told her that he expected her in his apartment across the street from school at 11:30 P.M., and that he did not alter his routines for anybody, that he read and worked and drank wine until one o'clock, at which time he retired to the bedroom. He kept an apartment in town as well as the house he and his wife and children lived in in the suburbs.

"I was so confident that the affair was going to pan out, turn into something memorable," he said and sighed. His voice acquired the mellow tone of someone confiding something intimate. "I even gave her the key to my apartment," he said, and his voice cracked.

"Very dutifully, she came at eleven-thirty," he went on. "She let herself in with her own key, and sneaked into the bedroom like a shadow. That excited me terribly. I knew that she wasn't going to be any trouble for me. She knew her role. She probably fell asleep on the bed. Or maybe she watched TV. I became engrossed in my work, and I didn't care what the fuck she did. I knew that I had her in the bag.

"But the moment I came into the bedroom," he continued, his voice tense and constricted, as if he were morally offended, "Theresa jumped on me like an animal and went for my dick. She didn't even give me time to put down the bottle and the two glasses I was carrying. I had enough presence of mind to put my two Baccarat glasses on the floor without breaking them. The bottle flew across the room when she grabbed my balls as if they were made out of rocks. I wanted to hit her. I actually yelled in pain, but that didn't faze her. She giggled insanely, because she thought I was being cute and sexy. She said so, as if to placate me."

Shaking his head with contained rage, he said that the woman was so friggin' eager and utterly selfish that she didn't take into account that a man needs a moment's peace, he needs to feel at ease, at home, in friendly surroundings. Instead of showing consideration and understanding, as her role demanded, Theresa Manning pulled his sexual organs out of his pants with the expertise of someone who had done it hundreds of times.

"The result of all this shit," he said, "was that my sensuality retreated in horror. I was emotionally emasculated. My body abhorred that fucking woman, instantly. Yet my lust prevented me from throwing her out in the street."

He said that he decided then that instead of losing face by his impotence, miserably, the way he was bound to, he would have oral sex with her, and make her have an orgasm—put her at his mercy—but his body had rejected the woman so thoroughly that he couldn't do it.

"The woman was not even beautiful anymore," he said, "but plain. Whenever she's dressed up, the clothes that she wears hide the bulges of her hips. She actually looks okay. But when she's naked, she's a sack of bulging white flesh! The slendemess that she presents when she's clothed is fake. It doesn't exist."

Venom poured out of the psychiatrist in ways that I would never have imagined. He was shaking with rage. He wanted desperately to appear cool, and kept on smoking cigarette after cigarette.

He said that the oral sex was even more maddening and disgusting, and that he was just about to vomit when the friggin' woman actually kicked him in the belly, rolled him out of his own bed onto the floor, and called him an impotent faggot.

At this point in his narration, the psychiatrist's eyes were burning with hatred. His mouth was quivering. He was pale.

"I have to use your bathroom," he said. "I want to take a bath. I am reeking. Believe it or not, I have pussy breath."

He was actually weeping, and I would have given anything in the world not to be there. Perhaps it was my fatigue, or the mesmeric quality of his voice, or the inanity of the situation that created the illusion that I was listening not to the psychiatrist but to the voice of a male supplicant on one of his tapes complaining about minor problems turned into gigantic affairs by talking obsessively about them. My ordeal ended around nine o'clock in the morning. It was time for me to go to class and time for the psychiatrist to go and see his own shrink.

I went to class then, highly charged with a burning anxiety and a tremendous sensation of discomfort and uselessness. There, I received the final blow, the blow that caused my attempt at a drastic change to collapse. No volition of my own was involved in it's collapse, which just happened not only as if it had been scheduled but as if it's progression had been accelerated by some unknown hand.

The anthropology professor began his lecture about a group of Indians from the high plateaus of Bolivia and Peru, the *aymard*. He called them the "ey-MEH-ra," elongating the name as if his pronunciation of it was the only accurate one in existence. He said that the making *ofchicha,* which is pronounced "CHEE-cha," but which he pronounced "CHAHI-cha," an alcoholic beverage made from fermented corn, was in the realm of a sect of priestesses who were considered semidivine by the *aymard*. He said, in a tone of revelation, that those women were in charge of making the cooked corn into a mush ready for fermentation by chewing and spitting it, adding in this manner an enzyme found in human saliva. The whole class shrieked with contained horror at the mention of human saliva.

The professor seemed to be tickled pink. He laughed in little spurts. It was the chuckle of a nasty child. He went on to say that the women were expert chewers, and he called them the "chahi-cha chewers." He looked at the front row of the classroom, where most of the young women were sitting, and he delivered his punch line.

"I was p-r-r-rivileged," he said with a strange quasi-foreign intonation, "to be asked to sleep with one of the chahi-cha chewers. The art of chewing the chahi-cha mush makes them develop the muscles around their throat and cheeks to the point that they can do wonders with them."

He looked at his bewildered audience and paused for a long time, punctuating the pause with his giggles. "I'm sure you get my drift," he said, and went into fits of hysterical laughter.

The class went wild with the professor's innuendo. The lecture was interrupted by at least five minutes of laughter and a barrage of questions that the professor declined to answer, emitting more silly giggles.

I felt so compressed by the pressure of the tapes, the psychiatrist s story, and the professor's "chahi-cha chewers" that in one instantaneous sweep I quit the job, quit school, and drove back to L.A.

"Whatever happened to me with the psychiatrist and the professor of anthropology," I said to don Juan, "has plunged me into an unknown emotional state. I can only call it introspection. I've been talking to myself without stop."

"Your malady is a very simple one," don Juan said, shaking with laughter.

Apparently my situation delighted him. It was a delight I could not share, because I failed to see the humor in it.

"Your world is coming to an end," he said. "It is the end of an era for you. Do you think that the world you have known all your life is going to leave you peacefully, without any fuss or muss? No! It will wriggle underneath you, and hit you with it's tail."

## The View I Could Not Stand

LOS ANGELES HAD always been home for me. My choice of Los Angeles had not been volitional. To me, staying in Los Angeles has always been the equivalent of having been bom there, perhaps even more than that. My emotional attachment to it has always been total. My love for the city of Los Angeles has always been so intense, so much a part of me, that I have never had to voice it. I have never had to review it or renew it, ever.

I had, in Los Angeles, my family of friends. They were to me part of my immediate milieu, meaning that I had accepted them totally, the way I had accepted the city. One of my friends made the statement once, half in fun, that all of us hated each other cordially. Doubtless, they could afford feelings like that themselves, for they had other emotional arrangements at their disposal, like parents and wives and husbands. I had only my friends in Los Angeles.

For whatever reason, I was each one's confidant. Every one of them poured out to me their problems and vicissitudes. My friends were so close to me that I had never acknowledged their problems or tribulations as anything but normal. I could talk for hours to them about the very same things that had horrified me in the psychiatrist and his tapes.

Furthermore, I had never realized that every one of my friends was astoundingly similar to the psychiatrist and the professor of anthropology. I had never noticed how tense my friends were. All of them smoked compulsively, like the psychiatrist, but it had never been obvious to me because I smoked just as much myself and was just as tense. Their affectation in speech was another thing that had never been apparent to me, although it was there. They always affected a twang of the western United States, but they were very aware of what they were doing. Nor had I ever noticed their blatant innuendos about a sensuality that they were incapable of feeling, except intellectually.

The real confrontation with myself began when I was faced with the dilemma of my friend Pete. He came to see me, all battered. He had a swollen mouth and a red and swollen left eye that had obviously been hit and was turning blue already. Before I had time to ask him what had happened to him, he blurted out that his wife, Patricia, had gone to a real estate brokers' convention over the weekend, in relation to her job, and that something terrible had happened to her. The way Pete looked, I thought that perhaps Patricia had been injured, or even killed, in an accident.

"Is she all right?" I asked, genuinely concerned.

"Of course she's all right," he barked. "She's a bitch and a whore, and nothing happens to bitch-whores except that they get fucked, and they *like* it!"

Pete was rabid. He was shaking, nearly convulsing. His bushy, curly hair was sticking out every which way. Usually, he combed it carefully and slicked his natural curls into place. Now, he looked as wild as a Tasmanian devil.

"Everything was normal until today," my friend continued. "Then, this morning, after I came out of the shower, she snapped a towel at my naked butt, and that's what made me aware of her shit! I knew instantly that she'd been fucking someone else."

I was puzzled by his line of reasoning. I questioned him further. I asked him how snapping a towel could reveal anything of this sort to anybody.

"It wouldn't reveal anything to assholes!" he said with pure venom in his voice. "But I know Patricia, and on Thursday, before she went to the brokers' convention, she could not snap a towel! In fact, she has *never* been able to snap a towel in all the time we've been married. Somebody must have taught her to do it, while they were naked! So I grabbed her by the throat and choked the truth out other! Yes! She's fucking her boss!"

Pete said that he went to Patricia's office to have it out with her boss, but the man was heavily protected by bodyguards. They threw him out into the parking lot. He wanted to smash the windows of the office, throw rocks at them, but the bodyguards said that if he did that, he'd land in jail, or even worse, he'd get a bullet in his head.

"Are they the ones who beat you up, Pete?" I asked him.

"No," he said, dejected. "I walked down the street and went into the sales office of a used car lot. I punched the first salesman who came to talk to me. The man was shocked, but he didn't get angry. He said, 'Calm down, sir, calm down! There's room for negotiation.' When I punched him again in the mouth, he got pissed off. He was a big guy, and he hit me in the mouth and the eye and knocked me out. When I came to my senses," Pete continued, "I was lying on the couch in their office. I heard an ambulance approaching. I knew they were coming for me, so I got up and ran out. Then I came to see you."

He began to weep uncontrollably. He got sick to his stomach. He was a mess. I called his wife, and in less than ten minutes she was in the apartment. She kneeled in front of Pete and swore that she loved only him, that everything else she did was pure imbecility, and that theirs was a love that was a matter of life or death. The others were nothing. She didn't even remember them. Both of them wept to their hearts' content, and of course they forgave each other. Patricia was wearing sunglasses to hide the hematoma by her right eye where Pete had hit her —Pete was left-handed. Both of them were oblivious to my presence, and when they left, they didn't even know I was there. They just walked out, leaving the door open, hugging each other.

Life seemed to continue for me as it always had. My friends acted with me as they always did. We were, as usual, involved in going to parties, or the movies, or just simply "chewing the fat," or looking for restaurants where they offered "all you can eat" for the price of one meal. However, despite this pseudo-normality, a strange new factor seemed to have entered my life. As the subject who was experiencing it, it appeared to me that, all of a sudden, I had become extremely narrow-minded. I had begun to judge my friends in the same way I had judged the psychiatrist and the professor of anthropology. Who was I, anyway, to set myself up in judgment of anyone else?

I felt an immense sense of guilt. To judge my friends created a mood previously unknown to me. But what I considered to be even worse was that not only was I judging them, I was finding their problems and tribulations astoundingly banal. I was the same man; they were my same friends. I had heard their complaints and renditions of their situations hundreds of times, and I hadn't ever felt anything except a deep identification with whatever I was listening to. My horror at discovering this new mood in myself was staggering.

The aphorism that when it rains it pours couldn't have been more true for me at that moment in my life. The total disintegration of my way of life came when my friend Rodrigo Cummings asked me to take him to the Burbank airport; from there he was going to fly to New York. It was a very dramatic and desperate maneuver on his part. He considered it his damnation to be caught in Los Angeles. For the rest of his friends, it was a big joke, the fact that he had tried to drive across country to New York various times, and every time he had tried to do it, his car had broken down. Once, he had gone as far as Salt Lake City before his car collapsed; it needed a new motor. He had to junk it there. Most of the time, his cars petered out in the suburbs of Los Angeles.

"What happens to your cars, Rodrigo?" I asked him once, driven by truthful curiosity.

"I don't know," he replied with a veiled sense of guilt. And then, in a voice worthy of the professor of anthropology in his role of revivalist preacher, he said, "Perhaps it is because when I hit the road, I accelerate because I feel free. I usually open all my windows. I want the wind to blow on my face. I feel that I'm a kid in search of something new."

It was obvious to me that his cars, which were always jalopies, were no longer capable of speeding, and he just simply burned their motors out.

From Salt Lake City, Rodrigo had returned to Los Angeles, hitchhiking. Of course, he could have hitchhiked to New York, but it had never occurred to him. Rodrigo seemed to be afflicted by the same condition that afflicted me: an unconscious passion for Los Angeles, which he wanted to refuse at any cost.

Another time, his car was in excellent mechanical condition. It could have made the whole trip with ease, but Rodrigo was apparently not in any condition to leave Los Angeles. He drove as far as San Bemardino, where he went to see a movie—*The Ten Commandments*. This movie, for reasons known only to Rodrigo, created in him an unbeatable nostalgia for L.A. He came back, and wept, telling me how the fucking city of Los Angeles had built a fence around him that didn't let him go through. His wife was delighted that he hadn't gone, and his girlfriend, Melissa, was even more delighted, although also chagrined because she had to give back the dictionaries that he had given her.

His last desperate attempt to reach New York by plane was rendered even more dramatic because he borrowed money from his friends to pay for the ticket. He said that in this fashion, since he didn't intend to repay them, he was making sure that he wouldn't come back.

I put his suitcases in the trunk of my car and headed with him for the Burbank airport. He remarked that the plane didn't leave until seven o'clock. It was early afternoon, and we had plenty of time to go and see a movie. Besides, he wanted to take one last look at Hollywood Boulevard, the center of our lives and activities.

We went to see an epic in Technicolor and Cinerama. It was a long, excruciating movie that seemed to rivet Rodrigo's attention. When we got out of the movie, it was already getting dark. I rushed to Burbank in the midst of heavy traffic. He demanded that we go on surface streets rather than the freeway, which was jammed at that hour. The plane was just leaving when we reached the airport. That was the final straw. Meek and defeated, Rodrigo went to a cashier and presented his ticket to get his money back. The cashier wrote down his name and gave him a receipt and said that his money would be sent within six to twelve weeks from Tennessee, where the accounting offices of the airline were located.

We drove back to the apartment building where we both lived. Since he hadn't said good-bye to anybody this time, for fear of losing face, nobody had ever noticed that he had tried to leave one more time. The only drawback was that he had sold his car. He asked me to drive him to his parents' house, because his dad was going to give him the money he had spent on the ticket. His father had always been, as far back as I could remember, the man who had bailed Rodrigo out of every problematic situation that he had ever gotten into. The father's slogan was "Have no fear, Rodrigo Senior is here!" After he heard Rodrigo's request for a loan to pay his other loan, the father looked at my friend with the saddest expression that I had ever seen. He was having terrible financial difficulties himself.

Putting his arm around his son's shoulders, he said, "I can't help you this time, my boy. Now you should have fear, because Rodrigo Senior is no longer here."

I wanted desperately to identify with my friend, to feel his drama the way I always had, but I couldn't. I only focused on the father's statement. It sounded to me so final that it galvanized me.

I sought don Juan's company avidly. I left everything pending in Los Angeles and made a trip to Sonora. I told him about the strange mood that I had entered into with my friends. Sobbing with remorse, I said to him that I had begun to judge them.

"Don't get so worked up over nothing," don Juan said calmly. "You already know that a whole era in your life is coming to an end, but an era doesn't really come to an end until the king dies."

"What do you mean by that, don Juan?"

"You are the king, and you are just like your friends. That is the truth that makes you shake in your boots. One thing you can do is to accept it at face value, which, of course, you can't do. The other thing you can do is to say, 'I am not like that, I am not like that,' and repeat to yourself that you are not like that. I promise you, however, that a moment will come when you will realize that you are like that."

## The Unavoidable Appointment

THERE WAS SOMETHING that kept nagging at me in the back of my mind: I had to answer a most important letter I'd received, and I had to do it at any cost. What had prevented me from doing it was a mixture of indolence and a deep desire to please. My anthropologist friend who was responsible for my meeting don Juan Matus had written me a letter a couple of months earlier. He wanted to know how I was doing in my studies of anthropology, and urged me to pay him a visit. I composed three long letters. On rereading each of them, I found them so trite and obsequious that I tore them up. I couldn't express in them the depth of my gratitude, the depth of my feelings for him. I rationalized my delay in answering with a genuine resolve to go to see him and tell him personally what I was doing with don Juan Matus, but I kept postponing my imminent trip because I wasn't sure what it was that I was doing with don Juan. I wanted someday to show my friend real results. As it was, I had only vague sketches of possibilities, which, in his demanding eyes, wouldn't have been anthropological fieldwork anyway.

One day I found out that he had died. His death brought to me one of those dangerous silent depressions. I had no way to express what I felt because what I was feeling was not fully formulated in my mind. It was a mixture of dejection, despondency, and abhorrence at myself for not having answered his letter, for not having gone to see him.

I paid a visit to don Juan Matus soon after that. On arriving at his house, I sat down on one of the crates under his ramada and tried to search for words that would not sound banal to express my sense of dejection over the death of my friend. For reasons incomprehensible to me, don Juan knew the origin of my turmoil and the overt reason for my visit to him.

"Yes," don Juan said dryly. "I know that your friend, the anthropologist who guided you to meet me, has died. For whatever reasons, I knew exactly the moment he died. I saw it."

His statements jolted me to my foundations.

"I saw it coming a long time ago. I even told you about it, but you disregarded what I said. I'm sure that you don't even remember it."

I remembered every word he had said, but it had no meaning for me at the time he had said it. Don Juan had stated that an event deeply related to our meeting, but not part of it, was the fact that he had seen my anthropologist friend as a dying man.

"I *saw* death as an outside force already opening your friend," he had said to me. "Every one of us has an energetic fissure, an energetic crack below the navel. That crack, which sorcerers call the *gap,* is closed when a man is in his prime."

He had said that, normally, all that is discernible to the sorcerer's eye is a tenuous discoloration in the otherwise whitish glow of the luminous sphere. But when a man is close to dying, that *gap* becomes quite apparent. He had assured me that my friend's *gap* was wide open.

"What is the significance of all this, don Juan?" I had asked perfunctorily.

"The significance is a deadly one," he had replied. "The spirit was signaling to me that something was coming to an end. I thought it was my life that was coming to an end, and I accepted it as gracefully as I could. It dawned on me much, much later that it wasn't my life that was coming to an end, but my entire lineage."

I didn't know what he was talking about. But how could I have taken all that seriously? As far as I was concerned, it was, at the time he said it, like everything else in my life: just talk.

"Your friend himself told you, though not in so many words, that he was dying," don Juan said. "You acknowledged what he was saying the way you acknowledged what I said, but in both cases, you chose to bypass it."

I had no comments to make. I was overwhelmed by what he was saying. I wanted to sink into the crate I was sitting on, to disappear, swallowed up by the earth.

"It's not your fault that you bypass things like this," he went on. "It's youth. You have so many things to do, so many people around you. You are not alert. You never learned to be alert, anyway."

In the vein of defending the last bastion of myself, my idea that I was watchful, I pointed out to don Juan that I had been in life-and-death situations that required my quick wit and vigilance. It wasn't that I lacked the capacity to be alert, but that I lacked the orientation for setting an appropriate list of priorities; therefore, everything was either important or unimportant to me.

"To be alert doesn't mean to be watchful," don Juan said. "For sorcerers, to be alert means to be aware of the fabric of the everyday world that seems extraneous to the interaction of the moment. On the trip that you took with your friend before you met me, you noticed only the details that were obvious. You didn't notice how his death was absorbing him, and yet something in you knew it."

I began to protest, to tell him that what he was saying wasn't true.

"Don't hide yourself behind banalities," he said in an accusing tone. "Stand up. If only for the moment you are with me, assume responsibility for what you know. Don't get lost in the extraneous fabric of the world around you, extraneous to what's going on. If you hadn't been so concerned with yourself and your problems, you would have known that that was his last trip. You would have noticed that he was closing his accounts, seeing the people who helped him, saying good-bye to them.

"Your anthropologist friend talked to me once," don Juan went on. "I remembered him so clearly that I wasn't surprised at all when he brought you to me at that bus depot. I couldn't help him when he talked to me. He wasn't the man I was looking for, but' I wished him well from my sorcerer's emptiness, from my sorcerer's silence. For this reason, I know that on his last trip, he was saying thank you to the people who counted in his life."

I admitted to don Juan that he was so very right, that there had been so many details that I had been aware of, but that they hadn't meant a thing to me at the time, such as, for instance, my friend's ecstasy in watching the scenery around us. He would stop the car just to watch, for hours on end, the mountains in the distance, or the riverbed, or the desert. I discarded this as the idiotic sentimentality of a middle-aged man. I even made vague hints to him that perhaps he was drinking too much. He told me that in dire cases a drink would allow a man a moment of peace and detachment, a moment long enough to savor something unrepeatable.

"That was, for a fact, the trip for his eyes only," don Juan said. "Sorcerers take such a trip and, in it, nothing counts except what their eyes can absorb. Your friend was unburdening himself of everything superfluous."

I confessed to don Juan that I had disregarded what he had said to me about my dying friend because, at an unknown level, I had known that it was true.

"Sorcerers never say things idly," he said. "I am most careful about what I say to you or to anybody else. The difference between you and me is that I don't have any time at all, and I act accordingly. You, on the other hand, believe that you have all the time in the world, and you act accordingly. The end result of our individual behaviors is that I measure everything I do and say, and you don't."

I conceded that he was right, but I assured him that whatever he was saying did not alleviate my turmoil, or my sadness. I blurted out then, uncontrollably, every nuance of my confused feelings. I told him that I wasn't in search of advice. I wanted him to prescribe a sorcerer's way to end my anguish. I believed I was really interested in getting from him some natural relaxant, an organic Valium, and I said so to him. Don Juan shook his head in bewilderment.

"You are too much," he said. "Next you're going to ask for a sorcerer's medication to remove everything annoying from you, with no effort at all on your part—just the effort of swallowing whatever is given. The more awful the taste, the better the results. That's your Western man's motto. You want results—one potion and you're cured.

"Sorcerers face things in a different way," don Juan continued. "Since they don't have any time to spare, they give themselves fully to what's in front of them. Your turmoil is the result of your lack of sobriety. You didn't have the sobriety to thank your friend properly. That happens to every one of us. We never express what we feel, and when we want to, it's too late, because we have run out of time. It's not only your friend who ran out of time. You, too, ran out of it. You should have thanked him profusely in Arizona. He took the trouble to take you around, and whether you understand it or not, in the bus depot he gave you his best shot. But the moment when you should have thanked him, you were angry with him—you were judging him, he was nasty to you, whatever. And then you postponed seeing him. In reality, what you did was to postpone thanking him. Now you're stuck with a ghost on your tail. You'll never be able to pay what you owe him."

I understood the immensity of what he was saying. Never had I faced my actions in such a light. In fact, I had never thanked anyone, ever. Don Juan pushed his barb even deeper.

"Your friend knew that he was dying," he said. "He wrote you one final letter to find out about your doings. Perhaps unbeknownst to him, or to you, you were his last thought."

The weight of don Juan's words was too much for my shoulders. I collapsed. I felt that I had to lie down. My head was spinning. Maybe it was the setting. I had made the terrible mistake of arriving at don Juan's house in the late afternoon. The setting sun seemed astoundingly golden, and the reflections on the bare mountains to the east of don Juan's house were gold and purple. The sky didn't have a speck of a cloud. Nothing seemed to move. It was as if the whole world were hiding, but it's presence was overpowering. The quietness of the Sonoran desert was like a dagger. It went to the marrow of my bones. I wanted to leave, to get in my car and drive away. I wanted to be in the city, get lost in it's noise.

"You are having a taste of *infinity,"* don Juan said with grave finality. "I know it, because I have been in your shoes. You want to run away, to plunge into something human, warm, contradictory, stupid, who cares? You want to forget the death of your friend.
But *infinity* won't let you." His voice mellowed. "It has gripped you in it's merciless clutches."

"What can I do now, don Juan?" I asked.

"The only thing you can do," don Juan said, "is to keep the memory of your friend fresh, to keep it alive for the rest of your life and perhaps even beyond. Sorcerers express, in this fashion, the thanks that they can no longer voice. You may think it is a silly way, but that's the best sorcerers can do."

It was my own sadness, doubtless, which made me believe that the ebullient don Juan was as sad as I was. I discarded the thought immediately. That couldn't be possible.

"Sadness, for sorcerers, is not personal," don Juan said, again erupting into my thoughts. "It is not quite sadness. It's a wave of energy that comes from the depths of the cosmos, and hits sorcerers when they are receptive, when they are like radios, capable of catching radio waves.

"The sorcerers of olden times, who gave us the entire format of sorcery, believed that there is sadness in the universe, as a force, a condition, like light, like *intent,* and that this perennial force acts especially on sorcerers because they no longer have any defensive shields. They cannot hide behind their friends or their studies. They cannot hide behind love, or hatred, or happiness, or misery. They can't hide behind anything.

"The condition of sorcerers," don Juan went on, "is that sadness, for them, is abstract. It doesn't come from coveting or lacking something, or from self-importance. It doesn't come from me. It comes from *infinity*. The sadness you feel for not thanking your friend is already leaning in that direction.

"My teacher, the nagual Julian," he went on, "was a fabulous actor. He actually worked professionally in the theater. He had a favorite story that he used to tell in his theater sessions. He used to push me into terrible outbursts of anguish with it. He said that it was a story for warriors who had everything and yet felt the sting of the universal sadness. I always thought he was telling it for me, personally."

Don Juan then paraphrased his teacher, telling me that the story referred to a man suffering from profound melancholy. He went to see the best doctors of his day and every one of those doctors failed to help him. He finally came to the office of a leading doctor, a healer of the soul. The doctor suggested to his patient that perhaps he could find solace, and the end of his melancholy, in love. The man responded that love was no problem for him, that he was loved perhaps like no one else in the world. The doctor's next suggestion was that maybe the patient should undertake a voyage and see other parts of the world. The man responded that, without exaggeration, he had been in every corner of the world. The doctor recommended hobbies like the arts, sports, etc. The man responded to every one of his recommendations in the same terms: He had done that and had had no relief. The doctor suspected that the man was possibly an incurable liar. He couldn't have done all those things, as he claimed. But being a good healer, the doctor had a final insight.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "I have the perfect solution for you, sir. You must attend a performance of the greatest comedian of our day. He will delight you to the point where you will forget every twist of your melancholy. You must attend a performance of the Great Garrick!"

Don Juan said that the man looked at the doctor with the saddest look you can imagine, and said, "Doctor, if that's your recommendation, I am a lost man. I have no cure. I am the Great Garrick."

## The Breaking Point

DON JUAN DEFINED *inner silence as a* peculiar state of being in which thoughts were canceled out and one could function from a level other than that of daily awareness. He stressed that *inner silence* meant the suspension of the *internal dialogue*— the perennial companion of thoughts—and was therefore a state of profound quietude.

"The old sorcerers," don Juan said, "called it *inner silence* because it is a state in which perception doesn't depend on the senses. What is at work during *inner silence* is another faculty that man has, the faculty that makes him a magical being, the very faculty that has been curtailed, not by man himself but by some extraneous influence."

"What is this extraneous influence that curtails the magical faculty of man?" I asked.

"That is the topic for a future explanation," don Juan replied, "not the subject of our present discussion, even though it is indeed the most serious aspect of the sorcery of the shamans of ancient Mexico.

*"Inner silence,"* he continued, "is the stand from which everything stems in sorcery. In other words, everything we do leads to that stand, which, like everything else in the world of sorcerers, doesn't reveal itself unless something gigantic shakes us."

Don Juan said that the sorcerers of ancient Mexico devised endless ways to shake themselves or other sorcery practitioners at their foundations in order to reach that coveted state of *inner silence.* They considered the most far-fetched acts, which may seem totally unrelated to the pursuit of inner silence, such as, for instance, jumping into waterfalls or spending nights hanging upside down from the top branch of a tree, to be the key points that brought it into being.

Following the rationales of the sorcerers of ancient Mexico, don Juan stated categorically that inner silence was accrued, accumulated. In my case, he struggled to guide me to construct a core of inner silence in myself, and then add to it, second by second, on every occasion I practiced it. He explained that the sorcerers of ancient Mexico discovered that each individual had a different threshold of inner silence in terms of time, meaning that inner silence must be kept by each one of us for the length of time of our specific threshold before it can work.

"What did those sorcerers consider the sign that inner silence is working, don Juan?" I asked.

"Inner silence works from the moment you begin to accrue it," he replied. "What the old sorcerers were after was the final, dramatic, end result of reaching that individual threshold of silence. Some very talented practitioners need only a few minutes of silence to reach that coveted goal. Others, less talented, need long periods of silence, perhaps more than one hour of complete quietude, before they reach the desired result. The desired result is what the old sorcerers called stopping the world,. the moment when everything around us ceases to be what it's always been.

"This is the moment when sorcerers return to the true nature of don Juan went on. "The old sorcerers also called it total *freedom*. It is the moment when man the slave becomes man the free being, capable of feats of perception that defy our linear imagination."

Don Juan assured me that *inner silence* is the avenue that leads to a true suspension of judgment—to a moment when sensory data emanating from the universe at large ceases to be interpreted by the senses; a moment when cognition ceases to be the force which, through usage and repetition, decides the nature of the world.

"Sorcerers need a *breaking point* for the workings of inner silence to set in," don Juan said. "The *breaking point* is like the mortar that a mason puts between bricks. It's only when the mortar hardens that the loose bricks become a structure."

From the beginning of our association, don Juan had drilled into me the value, the necessity, of inner silence. I did my best to follow his suggestions by accumulating inner silence second by second. I had no means to measure the effect of this accumulation, nor did I have any means to judge whether or not I had reached any threshold. I simply aimed doggedly at accruing it, not just to please don Juan but because the act of accumulating it had become a challenge in itself.

One day, don Juan and I were taking a leisurely stroll in the main plaza of Hermosillo. It was the early afternoon of a cloudy day. The heat was dry, and actually very pleasant. There were lots of people walking around. There were stores around the plaza. I had been to Hermosillo many times, and yet I had never noticed the stores. I knew that they were there, but their presence was not something I had been consciously aware of. I couldn't have made a map of that plaza if my life depended on it. That day, as I walked with don Juan, I was trying to locate and" identify the stores. I searched for something to use as a mnemonic device that would stir my recollection for later use.

"As I have told you before, many times," don Juan said, jolting me out of my concentration, "every sorcerer I know, male or female, sooner or later arrives at a *breaking point* in their lives."

"Do you mean that they have a mental breakdown or something like that?" I asked.

"No, no," he said, laughing. "Mental breakdowns are for persons who indulge in themselves. Sorcerers are not persons. What I mean is that at a given moment the continuity of their lives has to break in order for *inner silence* to set in and become an active part of their structures.

"It's very, very important," don Juan went on, "that you yourself deliberately arrive at that *breaking point,* or that you create it artificially, and intelligently."

"What do you mean by that, don Juan?" I asked, caught in his intriguing reasoning.

"Your *breaking point,"* he said, "is to discontinue your life as you know it. You have done everything I told you, dutifully and accurately. If you are talented, you never show it. That seems to be your style. You're not slow, but you act as if you were. You're very sure of yourself, but you act as if you were insecure. You're not timid, and yet you act as if you were afraid of people. Everything you do points at one single spot: your need to break all that, ruthlessly."

"But in what way, don Juan? What do you have in mind?" I asked, genuinely frantic.

"I think everything boils down to one act," he said. "You must leave your friends. You must say good-bye to them, for good. It's not possible for you to continue on the warriors' path carrying your personal history with you, and unless you discontinue your way of life, I won't be able to go ahead with my instruction."

"Now, now, now, don Juan," I said, "I have to put my foot down. You're asking too much of me. To be frank with you, I don't think I can do it. My friends are my family, my points of reference."

"Precisely, precisely," he remarked. "They are your points of reference. Therefore, they have to go. Sorcerers have only one point of reference: *infinity."*

"But how do you want me to proceed, don Juan?" I asked in a plaintive voice. His request was driving me up the wall.

"You must simply leave," he said matter-of-factly. "Leave any way you can."

"But where would I go?" I asked.

"My recommendation is that you rent a room in one of those chintzy hotels you know," he said. "The uglier the place, the better. If the room has drab green carpet, and drab green drapes, and drab green walls, so much the better—a place comparable to that hotel I showed you once in Los Angeles."

I laughed nervously at my recollection of a time when I was driving with don Juan through the industrial side of Los Angeles, where there were only warehouses and dilapidated hotels for transients. One hotel in particular attracted don Juan's attention because of it's bombastic name: Edward the Seventh. We stopped across the street from it for a moment to look at it.

"That hotel over there," don Juan said, pointing at it, "is to me the true representation of life on Earth for the average person. If you are lucky, or ruthless, you will get a room with a view of the street, where you will see this endless parade of human misery. If you're not that lucky, or that ruthless, you will get a room on the inside, with windows to the wall of the next building. Think of spending a lifetime torn between those two views, envying the view of the street if you're inside, and envying the view of the wall if you're on the outside, tired of looking out."

Don Juan's metaphor bothered me no end, for I had taken it all in.

Now, faced with the possibility of having to rent a room in a hotel comparable to the Edward the Seventh, I didn't know what to say or which way to go.

"What do you want me to do there, don Juan?" I asked. "A sorcerer uses a place like that to die," he said, looking at me with an unblinking stare. "You have never been alone in your life. This is the time to do it. You will stay in that room until you die."

His request scared me, but at the same time, it made me laugh. "Not that I'm going to do it, don Juan," I said, "but what would be the criteria to know that I'm dead?—unless you want me to actually die physically."

"No," he said, "I don't want your body to die physically. I want your person to die. The two are very different affairs. In essence, your person has very little to do with your body. Your person is your mind, and believe you me, your mind is not yours."

"What is this nonsense, don Juan, that my mind is not mine?" I heard myself asking with a nervous twang in my voice.

"I'll tell you about that subject someday," he said, "but not while you're cushioned by your friends.

"The criteria that indicates that a sorcerer is dead," he went on, "is when it makes no difference to him whether he has company or whether he is alone. The day you don't covet the company of your friends, whom you use as shields, that's the day that your person has died. What do you say? Are you game?"

"I can't do it, don Juan," I said. "It's useless that I try to lie to you. I can't leave my friends."

"It's perfectly all right," he said, unperturbed. My statement didn't seem to affect him in the least. "I won't be able to talk to you anymore, but let's say that during our time together you have learned a great deal. You have learned things that will make you very strong, regardless of whether you come back or you stray away."

He patted me on the back and said good-bye to me. He turned around and simply disappeared among the people in the plaza, as if he had merged with them. For an instant, I had the strange sensation that the people in the plaza were like a curtain that he had opened and then disappeared behind. The end had come, as did everything else in don Juan's world: swiftly and unpredictably. Suddenly, it was on me, I was in the throes of it, and I didn't even know how I had gotten into it.

I should have been crushed. Yet I wasn't. I don't know why I was elated. I marveled at the facility with which everything had ended. Don Juan was indeed an elegant being. There were no recriminations or anger or anything of that sort, at all. I got in my car and drove, as happy as a lark. I was ebullient. How extraordinary that everything had ended so swiftly, I thought, so painlessly.

My trip home was uneventful. In Los Angeles, being in my familiar surroundings, I noticed that I had derived an enormous amount of energy from my last exchange with don Juan. I was actually very happy, very relaxed, and I resumed what I considered to be my normal life with renewed zest. All my tribulations with my friends, and my realizations about them, everything that I had said to don Juan in reference to this, were thoroughly forgotten. It was as if something had erased all that from my mind. I marveled a couple of times at the facility I had in forgetting something that had been so meaningful, and in forgetting it so thoroughly.

Everything was as expected. There was one single inconsistency in the otherwise neat paradigm of my new old life: I distinctly remembered don Juan saying to me that my departing from the sorcerers' world was purely academic, and that I would be back. I had remembered and written down every word of our exchange. According to my normal linear reasoning and memory, don Juan had never made those statements. How could I remember things that had never taken place? I pondered uselessly. My pseudorecollection was strange enough to make a case for it, but then I decided that there was no point to it. As far as I was concerned, I was out of don Juan's milieu.

Following don Juan's suggestions in reference to my behavior with those who had favored me in any way, I had come to an earthshaking decision for me: that of honoring and saying thank you to my friends before it was too late. One case in point was my friend Rodrigo Cummings. One incident involving my friend Rodrigo, however, toppled my new paradigm and sent it tumbling down to it's total destruction.

My attitude toward him changed radically when I vanquished my competitiveness with him. I found out that it was the easiest thing in the world for me to project 100 percent into whatever Rodrigo did. In fact, I was exactly like him, but I didn't know it until I stopped competing with him. Then the truth emerged for me with maddening vividness. One of Rodrigo's foremost wishes was to finish college. Every semester, he registered for school and took as many courses as was permitted. Then, as the semester progressed, he dropped them one by one. Sometimes he would withdraw from school altogether. At other times he would keep one three-unit course all the way through to the bitter end.

During his last semester, he kept a course in sociology because he liked it. The final exam was approaching. He told me that he had three weeks to study, to read the textbook for.the course. He thought that that was an exorbitant amount of time to read merely six hundred pages. He considered himself something of a speed reader, with a high level of retention; in his opinion, he had a nearly 100 percent photographic memory.

He thought he had a great deal of time before the exam, so he asked me if I would help him recondition his car for his paper route. He wanted to take the right door off in order to throw the paper through that opening with his right hand instead of over the roof with his left. I pointed out to him that he was left-handed, to which he retorted that among his many abilities, which none of his friends noticed, was that of being ambidextrous. He was right about that; I had never noticed it myself. After I helped him to take the door off, he decided to rip out the roof lining, which was badly torn. He said that his car was in optimum mechanical condition, and he would take it to Tijuana, Mexico, which, as a good Angeleno of the day, he called "TJ," to have it relined for a few bucks.

"We could use a trip," he said with glee. He even selected the friends he would like to take. "In TJ, I'm sure that you'll go to look for used books, because you're an asshole. The rest of us will go to a bordello. I know quite a few."

It took us a week to rip out all the lining and sand the metal surface to prepare it for it's new lining. Rodrigo had two weeks left to study then, and he still considered that to be too much time. He engaged me then in helping him paint his apartment and redo the floors. It took us over a week to paint it and sand the hard wood floors. He didn't want to paint over the wallpaper in one room. We had to rent a machine that removed wallpaper by applying steam to it. Naturally, neither Rodrigo nor I knew how to use the machine properly, and we botched the job horren-dously. We ended up having to use Topping, a very fine mixture of plaster of paris and other substances that gives a wall a smooth surface.

After all these endeavors, Rodrigo ended up having only two days left to cram six hundred pages into his head. He went frantically into an all-day and all-night reading marathon, with the help of amphetamines. Rodrigo did go to school the day of the exam, and did sit down at his desk, and did get the multiple-choice exam sheet.

What he didn't do was stay awake to take the exam. His body slumped forward, and his head hit the desk with a terrifying thud. The exam had to be suspended for a while. The sociology teacher became hysterical, and so did the students sitting around Rodrigo. His body was stiff and icy cold. The whole class suspected the worst; they thought he had died of a heart attack. Paramedics were summoned to remove him. After a cursory examination, they pronounced Rodrigo profoundly asleep and took him to a hospital to sleep the effect of the amphetamines off.

My projection into Rodrigo Cummings was so total that it frightened me. I was exactly like him. The similarity became untenable to me. In an act of what I considered to be total, suicidal nihilism, I rented a room in a dilapidated hotel in Hollywood.

The carpets were green and had terrible cigarette bums that had obviously been snuffed out before they turned into full-fledged fires. It had green drapes and drab green walls. The blinking sign of the hotel shone all night through the window.

I ended up doing exactly what don Juan had requested, but in a roundabout way. I didn't do it to fulfill any of don Juan's requirements or with the intention of patching up our differences. I did stay in that hotel room for months on end, until my person, like don Juan had proposed, died, until it truthfully made no difference to me whether I had company or I was alone.

After leaving the hotel, I went to live alone, closer to school. I continued my studies of anthropology, which had never been interrupted, and I started a very profitable business with a lady partner. Everything seemed perfectly in order until one day when the realization hit me like a kick in the head that I was going to spend the rest of my life worrying about my business, or worrying about the phantom choice between being an academic or a businessman, or worrying about my partner's foibles and shenanigans. True desperation pierced the depths of my being. For the first time in my life, despite all the things that I had done and seen, I had no way out. I was completely lost. I seriously began to toy with the idea of the most pragmatic and painless way to end my days.

One morning, a loud and insistent knocking woke me up. I thought it was the landlady, and I was sure that if I didn't answer, she would enter with her passkey. I opened the door, and there was don Juan! I was so surprised that I was numb. I stammered and stuttered, incapable of saying a word. I wanted to kiss his hand, to kneel in front of him. Don Juan came in and sat down with great ease on the edge of my bed.

"I made the trip to Los Angeles," he said, "just to see you."

I wanted to take him to breakfast, but he said that he had other things to attend to, and that he had only a moment to talk to me. I hurriedly told him about my experience in the hotel. His presence had created such havoc that not for a second did it occur to me to ask him how he had found out where I lived. I told don Juan how intensely I regretted having said what I had in Hermosillo.

"You don't have to apologize," he assured me. "Every one of us does the same thing. Once, I ran away from the sorcerers' world myself, and I had to nearly die to realize my stupidity. The important issue is to arrive at a *breaking point,* in whatever way, and that's exactly what you have done. *Inner silence* is becoming real for you. This is the reason I am here in front of you, talking to you. Do you see what I mean?"

I thought I understood what he meant. I thought that he had intuited or read, the way he read things in the air, that I was at my wits' end and that he had come to bail me out.

"You have no time to lose," he said. "You must dissolve your business enterprise within an hour, because one hour is all I can afford to wait—not because I don't want to wait, but because *infinity* is pressing me mercilessly. Let's say that *infinity* is giving you one hour to cancel yourself out. For *infinity,* the only worthwhile enterprise of a warrior is freedom. Any other enterprise is fraudulent. Can you dissolve everything in one hour?"

I didn't have to assure him that I could. I knew that I had to do it. Don Juan told me then that once I had succeeded in dissolving everything, he was going to wait for me at the marketplace in a town in Mexico. In my effort to think about the dissolution of my business, I overlooked what he was saying. He repeated it and, of course, I thought he was joking.

"How can I reach that town, don Juan? Do you want me to drive, to take a plane?" I asked.

"Dissolve your business first," he commanded. "Then the solution will come. But remember, I'll be waiting for you only for an hour."

He left the apartment, and I feverishly endeavored to dissolve everything I had. Naturally, it took me more than an hour, but I didn't stop to consider this because once I had set the dissolution of the business in motion, it's momentum carried me. It was only when I was through that the real dilemma faced me. I knew then that I had failed hopelessly. I was left with no business, and no possibilities of ever reaching don Juan.

I went to my bed and sought the only solace I could think of: quietude, silence. In order to facilitate the advent of inner *silence,* don Juan had taught me a way to sit down on my bed, with the knees bent and the soles of the feet touching, the hands pushing the feet together by holding the ankles. He had given me a thick dowel that I always kept at hand wherever I went. It was cut to a fourteen-inch length to support the weight of my head if I leaned over and put the dowel on the floor between my feet, and then placed the other end, which was cushioned, on the spot in the middle of my forehead. Every time I adopted this position, I fell sound asleep in a matter of seconds.

I must have fallen asleep with my usual facility, for I dreamed that I was in the Mexican town where don Juan had said he was going to meet me. I had always been intrigued by this town. The marketplace was open one day a week, and the farmers who lived in the area brought their products there to be sold. What fascinated me the most about that town was the paved road that led to it. At the very entrance to the town, it went over a steep hill. I had sat many times on a bench by a stand that sold cheese, and had looked at that hill. I would see people who were coming into town with their donkeys and their loads, but I would see their heads first; as they kept approaching I would see more of their bodies, until the moment they were on the very top of the hill, when I would see their entire bodies. It seemed to me always that they were emerging from the earth, either slowly or very fast, depending on their speed. In my dream, don Juan was waiting for me by the cheese stand. I approached him.

"You made it from your *inner silence,"* he said, patting me on the back. "You did reach your *breaking point*. For a moment, I had begun to lose hope. But I stuck around, knowing that you would make it."

In that dream, we went for a stroll. I was happier than I had ever been. The dream was so vivid, so terrifyingly real, that it left me no doubts that I had resolved the problem, even if my resolving it was only a dream-fantasy.

Don Juan laughed, shaking his head. He had definitely read my thoughts. "You're not in a mere dream," he said, "but who am I to tell you that? You'll know it yourself someday—that there are no dreams from *inner silence*—because you'll choose to know it."

## The Measurements of Cognition

"THE END OF an era" was, for don Juan, an accurate description of a process that shamans go through in dismantling the structure of the world they know in order to replace it with another way of understanding the world around them. Don Juan Matus as a teacher endeavored, from the very instant we met, to introduce me to the *cognitive world* of the shamans of ancient Mexico. The term "cognition" was, for me at that time, a bone of tremendous contention. I understood it as the process by which we recognize the world around us. Certain things fall within the realm of that process and are easily recognized by us. Other things don't, and remain, therefore, as oddities, things for which we have no adequate comprehension.

Don Juan maintained, from the start of our association, that the world of the sorcerers of ancient Mexico was different from ours, not in a shallow way, but different in the way in which the process of cognition was arranged. He maintained that in our world our cognition requires the interpretation of sensory data. He said that the universe is composed of an infinite number of energy fields that exist in the universe at large as luminous filaments. Those luminous filaments act on man as an organism. The response of the organism is to turn those energy fields into sensory data. Sensory data is then interpreted, and that interpretation becomes our cognitive *system*. My understanding of cognition forced me to believe that it is a universal process, as language is a universal process. There is a different syntax for every language, as there must be a slightly different arrangement for every system of interpretation in the world.

Don Juan's assertion, however, that the shamans of ancient Mexico had a different cognitive *system,* was, for me, equivalent to saying that they had a different way of communicating that had nothing to do with language. What I desperately wanted him to say was that their different cognitive system was the equivalent of having a different language but that it was a language nonetheless. "The end of an era" meant, to don Juan, that the units of a foreign cognition were beginning to take hold. The units of my normal cognition, no matter how pleasant and rewarding they were for me, were beginning to fade. A grave moment in the life of a man!

Perhaps my most cherished unit was my academic life. Anything that threatened it was a threat to the very core of my being, especially if the attack was veiled, unnoticed. It happened with a professor in whom I had put all my trust, Professor Lorca.

I had enrolled in Professor Lorca's course on cognition because he was recommended to me as one of the most brilliant academics in existence. Professor Lorca was rather handsome, with blond hair neatly combed to the side. His forehead was smooth, wrinkle-free, giving the appearance of someone who had never worried in his life. His clothes were extremely well tailored. He didn't wear a tie, a feature that gave him a boyish look. He would put on a tie only to face important people.

On my memorable first class with Professor Lorca, I was bewildered and nervous at seeing how he paced back and forth for minutes that stretched themselves into an eternity for me. Professor Lorca kept on moving his thin, clenched lips up and down, adding immensities to the tension he was generating in that closed-window, stuffy room. Suddenly, he stopped walking. He stood in the center of the room, a few feet from where I was sitting, and, banging a carefully rolled newspaper on the podium, he began to talk.

"It'll never be known . . ." he began.

Everyone in the room at once started anxiously taking notes.

"It'll never be known," he repeated, "what a toad is feeling while he sits at the bottom of a pond and interprets the toad world around him." His voice carried a tremendous force and finality. "So, what do you think this thing is?" He waved the newspaper over his head.

He went on to read to the class an article in the newspaper in which the work of a biologist was reported. The scientist was quoted as describing what frogs felt when insects swam above their heads.

"This article shows the carelessness of the reporter, who has obviously misquoted the scientist," Professor Lorca asserted with the authority of a full professor. "A scientist, no matter how shoddy his work might be, would never allow himself to anthropomorphize the results of his research, unless, of course, he's a nincompoop."

With this as an introduction, he delivered a most brilliant lecture on the insular quality of our cognitive system, or the cognitive system of any organism, for that matter. He brought to me, in his initial lecture, a barrage of new ideas and made them extremely simple, ready for use. The most novel idea to me was that every individual of every species on this earth interprets the world around it, using data reported by it's specialized senses. He asserted that human beings cannot even imagine what it must be like, for example, to be in a world ruled by echolocation, as in the world of bats, where any inferred point of reference could not even be conceived of by the human mind. He made it quite clear that, from that point of view, no two cognitive *systems* could be alike among species.

As I left the auditorium at the end of the hour-and-a-half lecture, I felt that I had been bowled over by the brilliance of Professor Lorca's mind. From then on, I was his confirmed admirer. I found his lectures more than stimulating and thought provoking. His were the only lectures I had ever looked forward to attending. All his eccentricities meant nothing to me in comparison with his excellence as a teacher and as an innovative thinker in the realm of psychology.

When I first attended the class of Professor Lorca, I had been working with don Juan Matus for almost two years. It was a well-established pattern of behavior with me, accustomed as I was to routines, to tell don Juan everything that happened to me in my everyday world. On the first opportunity I had, I related to him what was taking place with Professor Lorca. I praised Professor Lorca to the skies and told don Juan unabashedly that Professor Lorca was my role model. Don Juan seemed very impressed with my display of genuine admiration, yet he gave me a strange warning.

"Don't admire people from afar," he said. "That is the surest way to create mythological beings. Get close to your professor, talk to him, see what he's like as a man. Test him. If your professor's behavior is the result of his conviction that he is a being who is going to die, then everything he does, no matter how strange, must be premeditated and final. If what he says turns out to be just words, he's not worth a hoot."

I was insulted no end by what I considered to be don Juan's callousness. I thought he was a little bit jealous of my feelings for Professor Lorca. Once that thought was formulated in my mind I felt relieved; I understood everything.

"Tell me, don Juan," I said to end the conversation on a different note, "what is a being that is going to die, really? I have heard you talk about it so many times, but you haven't actually defined it for me."

"Human beings are beings that are going to die," he said.

"Sorcerers firmly maintain that the only way to have a grip on our world, and on what we do in it, is by fully accepting that we are beings on the way to dying. Without this basic acceptance, our lives, our doings, and the world in which we live are unmanageable affairs."

"But is the mere acceptance of this so far-reaching?" I asked in a tone of quasi-protest.

"You bet your life!" don Juan said, smiling. "However, it's not the mere acceptance that does the trick. We have to embody that acceptance and live it all the way through. Sorcerers throughout the ages have said that the view of our death is the most sobering view that exists. What is wrong with us human beings, and has been wrong since time immemorial, is that without ever stating it in so many words, we believe that we have entered the realm of immortality. We behave as if we were never going to die—an infantile arrogance. But even more injurious than this sense of immortality is what comes with it: the sense that we can engulf this inconceivable universe with our minds."

A most deadly juxtaposition of ideas had me mercilessly in it's grip: don Juan's wisdom and Professor Lorca's knowledge. Both were difficult, obscure, all-encompassing, and most appealing. There was nothing for me to do except follow the course of events and go with them wherever they might take me.

I followed to the letter don Juan's suggestion about approaching Professor Lorca. I tried, for the whole semester, to get close to him, to talk to him. I went religiously to his office during his office hours, but he never seemed to have any time for me. But even though I couldn't speak to him, I admired him unbiasedly. I even accepted that he would never talk to me. It didn't matter to me; what mattered were the ideas that I gathered from his magnificent classes.

I reported to don Juan all my intellectual findings. I had done extensive reading on cognition. Don Juan Matus urged me, more than ever, to establish direct contact with the source of my intellectual revolution.

"It is imperative that you speak to him," he said with a note of urgency in his voice. "Sorcerers don't admire people in a vacuum. They talk to them; they get to know them. They establish points of reference. They compare. What you are doing is a little bit infantile. You are admiring from a distance. It is very much like what happens to a man who is afraid of women. Finally, his gonads overrule his fear and compel him to worship the first woman who says 'hello' to him."

I tried doubly hard to approach Professor Lorca, but he was like an impenetrable fortress. When I talked to don Juan about my difficulties, he explained that sorcerers viewed any kind of activity with people, no matter how minute or unimportant, as a battlefield. In that battlefield, sorcerers performed their best magic, their best effort. He assured me that the trick to being at ease in such situations, a thing that had never been my forte, was to face our opponents openly. He expressed his abhorrence of timid souls who shy away from interaction to the point where even though they interact, they merely infer or deduce, in terms of their own psychological states, what is going on without actually perceiving what is really going on. They interact without ever being part of the interaction.

"Always look at the man who is involved in a tug of war with you," he continued. "Don't just pull the rope; look up and see his eyes. You'll know then that he is a man, just like you. No matter what he's saying, no matter what he's doing, he's shaking in his boots, just like you. A look like that renders the opponent helpless, if only for an instant; deliver your blow then."

One day, luck was with me: I cornered Professor Lorca in the hall outside his office.

"Professor Lorca," I said, "do you have a free moment so I could talk to you?"

"Who in the hell are you?" he said with the most natural air, as if I were his best friend and he were merely asking me how I felt that day.

Professor Lorca was as rude as anyone could be, but his words didn't have the effect of rudeness on me. He grinned at me with tight lips, as if encouraging me to leave or to say something meaningful.

"I am an anthropology student, Professor Lorca," I said. "I am involved in a field situation where I have the opportunity to learn about the *cognitive system* of sorcerers."

Professor Lorca looked at me with suspicion and annoyance. His eyes seemed to be two blue points filled with spite. He combed his hair backward with his hand, as if it had fallen on his face.

"I work with a real sorcerer in Mexico," I continued, trying to encourage a response. "He's a real sorcerer, mind you. It has taken me over a year just to warm him up so he would consent to talk to me.

Professor Lorca's face relaxed; he opened his mouth and, waving a most delicate hand in front of my eyes, as if he were twirling pizza dough with it, he spoke to me. I couldn't help noticing his enameled gold cuff links, which matched his greenish blazer to perfection.

"And what do you want from me?" he said.

"I want you to hear me out for a moment," I said, "and see if whatever I'm doing may interest you."

He made a gesture of reluctance and resignation with his shoulders, opened the door of his office, and invited me to come in. I knew that I had no time at all to waste and I gave him a very direct description of my field situation. I told him that I was being taught procedures that had nothing to do with what I had found in the anthropological literature about shamanism.

He moved his lips for a moment without saying a word. When he spoke, he pointed out that the flaw of anthropologists in general is that they never allow themselves sufficient time to become fully cognizant of all the nuances of the particular cognitive *system* used by the people they are studying. He defined "cognition" as a system of interpretation, which through usage makes it possible for individuals to utilize, with the utmost expertise, all the nuances of meaning that make up the particular social milieu under consideration.

Professor Lorca's words illuminated the total scope of my field-work. Without gaining command of all the nuances of the cognitive system of the shamans of ancient Mexico, it would have been thoroughly superfluous for me to formulate any idea about that world. If Professor Lorca had not said another word to me, what he had just voiced would have been more than sufficient. What followed was a marvelous discourse on cognition.

"Your problem," Professor Lorca said, "is that the cognitive system of our everyday world with which we are all familiar, virtually from the day we are bom, is not the same as the cognitive system of the sorcerers' world."

This statement created a state of euphoria in me. I thanked Professor Lorca profusely and assured him that there was only one course of action in my case: to follow his ideas through hell or high water.

"What I have told you, of course, is general knowledge," he said as he ushered me out of his office. "Anyone who reads is aware of what I have been telling you."

We parted almost friends. My account to don Juan of my success in approaching Professor Lorca was met with a strange reaction. Don Juan seemed, on the one hand, to be elated, and on the other, concerned.

"I have the feeling that your professor is not quite what he claims to be," he said. "That's, of course, from a sorcerer's point of view. Perhaps it would be wise to quit now, before all this becomes too involved and consuming. One of the high arts of sorcerers is to know when to stop. It appears to me that you've gotten from your professor all you can get from him."

I immediately reacted with a barrage of defenses on behalf of Professor Lorca. Don Juan calmed me down. He said that it wasn't his intention to criticize or judge anybody, but that to his knowledge, very few people knew when to quit and even fewer knew how to actually utilize their knowledge.

In spite of don Juan's warnings, I didn't quit; instead, I became Professor Lorca's faithful student, follower, admirer. He seemed to take a genuine interest in my work, although he felt frustrated no end with my reluctance and inability to formulate clear-cut concepts about the cognitive system of the sorcerers' world.

One day, Professor Lorca formulated for me the concept of the scientist-visitor to another cognitive world. He conceded that he was willing to be open-minded, and toy, as a social scientist, with the possibility of a different cognitive system. He envisioned an actual research in which protocols would be gathered and analyzed. Problems of cognition would be devised and given to the shamans I knew, to measure, for instance, their capacity to focus their cognition on two diverse aspects of behavior.

He thought that the test would begin with a simple paradigm in which they would try to comprehend and retain written text that they read while they played poker. The test would escalate, to measure, for instance, their capacity to focus their cognition on complex things that were being said to them while they slept, and so on. Professor Lorca wanted a linguistic analysis to be performed on the shamans' utterances. He wanted an actual measurement of their responses in terms of their speed and accuracy, and other variables that would become prevalent as the project progressed.

Don Juan veritably laughed his head off when I told him about Professor Lorca's proposed measurements of the cognition of shamans.

"Now, I truly like your professor," he said. "But you can't be serious about this idea of measuring our cognition. What could your professor get out of measuring our responses? He'll get the conviction that we are a bunch of morons, because that's what we are. We cannot possibly be more intelligent, faster than the average man. It's not his fault, though, to believe he can make measurements of cognition across worlds. The fault is yours. You have failed to express to your professor that when sorcerers talk about the cognitive world of the shamans of ancient Mexico they are talking about things for which we have no equivalent in the world of everyday life.

"For instance, perceiving energy directly as it flows in the universe is a unit of cognition that shamans live by. They *see* how energy flows, and they follow it's flow. If it's flow is obstructed, they move away to do something entirely different. Shamans *see* lines in the universe. Their art, or their job, is to choose the line that will take them, perception-wise, to regions that have no name. You can say that shamans react immediately to the lines of the universe.
They *see* human beings as luminous balls, and they search in them for their flow of energy. Naturally, they react instantly to this sight. It's part of their cognition."

I told don Juan that I couldn't possibly talk about all this to Professor Lorca because I hadn't done any of the things that he was describing. My cognition remained the same.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "It's simply that you haven't had the time yet to embody the units of cognition of the shamans' world."

I left don Juan's house more confused than ever. There was a voice inside me that virtually demanded that I end all endeavors with Professor Lorca. I understood how right don Juan was when he said to me once that the practicalities that scientists were interested in were conducive to building more and more complex machines. They were not the practicalities that changed an individual s life course from within. They were not geared to reaching the vastness of the universe as a personal, experiential affair. The stupendous machines in existence, or those in the making, were cultural affairs, the attainment of which had to be enjoyed vicariously, even by the creators of those machines themselves. The only reward for them was monetary.

In pointing out all of that to me, don Juan had succeeded in placing me in a more inquisitive frame of mind. I really began to question the ideas of Professor Lorca, something I had never done before. Meanwhile, Professor Lorca kept spouting astounding truths about cognition.

Each declaration was more severe than the preceding one and, therefore, more incisive.

At the end of my second semester with Professor Lorca, I had reached an impasse. There was no way on earth for me to bridge the two lines of thought: don Juan's and Professor Lorca's. They were on parallel tracks. I understood Professor Lorca's drive to qualify and quantify the study of cognition. Cybernetics was just around the corner at that time, and the practical aspect of the studies of cognition was a reality. But so was don Juan's world, which could not be measured with the standard tools of cognition. I had been privileged to witness it, in don Juan's actions, but I hadn't experienced it myself. I felt that that was the drawback that made bridging those two worlds impossible.

I told all this to don Juan on one of my visits to him. He said that what I considered to be my drawback, and therefore the factor that made bridging these two worlds impossible, wasn't accurate. In his opinion, the flaw was something more encompassing than one man's individual circumstances.

"Perhaps you can recall what I said to you about one of our biggest flaws as average human beings," he said.

I couldn't recall anything in particular. He had pointed out so many flaws that plagued us as average human beings that my mind reeled.

"You want something specific," I said, "and I can't think of it."

"The big flaw I am talking about," he said, "is something you ought to bear in mind every second of your existence. For me, it's the issue of issues, which I will repeat to you over and over until it comes out of your ears."

After a long moment, I gave up any further attempt to remember.

"We are beings on our way to dying," he said. "We are not immortal, but we behave as if we were. This is the flaw that brings us down as individuals and will bring us down as a species someday."

Don Juan stated that the sorcerers' advantage over their average fellow men is that sorcerers know that they are beings on their way to dying and they don't let themselves deviate from that knowledge. He emphasized that an enormous effort must be employed in order to elicit and maintain this knowledge as a total certainty.

"Why is it so hard for us to admit something that is so truthful?" I asked, bewildered by the magnitude of our internal contradiction.

"It's really not man's fault," he said in a conciliatory tone. "Someday, I'll tell you more about the forces that drive a man to act like an ass."

There wasn't anything else to say. The silence that followed was ominous. I didn't even want to know what the forces were that don Juan was referring to.

"It is no great feat for me to assess your professor at a distance," don Juan went on. "He is an immortal scientist. He is never going to die. And when it comes to any concerns about dying, I am sure that he has taken care of them already. He has a plot to be buried in, and a hefty life insurance policy that will take care of his family. Having fulfilled those two mandates, he doesn't think about death anymore. He thinks only about his work.

"Professor Lorca makes sense when he talks," don Juan continued, "because he is prepared to use words accurately. But he's not prepared to take himself seriously as a man who is going to die. Being immortal, he wouldn't know how to do that. It makes no difference what complex machines scientists can build. The machines can in no way help anyone face the unavoidable appointment: the appointment with *infinity*.

"The nagual Julian used to tell me," he went on, "about the conquering generals of ancient Rome. When they would return home victorious, gigantic parades were staged to honor them. Displaying the treasures that they had won, and the defeated people that they had turned into slaves, the conquerors paraded, riding in their war chariots. Riding with them was always a slave whose job was to whisper in their ear that all fame and glory is but transitory.

"If we are victorious in any way," don Juan went on, "we don't have anyone to whisper in our ear that our victories are fleeting. Sorcerers, however, do have the upper hand; as beings on their way to dying, they have someone whispering in their ear that everything is ephemeral. The whisperer is death, the infallible advisor, the only one who won't ever tell you a lie."

## Saying Thank You

"WARRIOR-TRAVELERS don't leave any debts unpaid," don Juan said.

"What are you talking about, don Juan?" I asked.

"It is time that you square certain indebtedness you have incurred in the course of your life," he said. "Not that you will ever pay in full, mind you, but you must make a gesture. You must make a token payment in order to atone, in order to appease *infinity*. You told me about your two friends who meant so much to you, Patricia Turner and Sandra Flanagan. It's time for you to go and find them and to make to each of them one gift in which you spend everything you have. You have to make two gifts that will leave you penniless. That's the gesture."

"I don't know where they are, don Juan," I said, almost in a mood of protest.

"To find them is your challenge. In your search for them, you will not leave any stone unturned. What you intend to do is something very simple, and yet nearly impossible. You want to cross over the threshold of personal indebtedness and in one sweep be free, in order to proceed. If you cannot cross that threshold, there won't be any point in trying to continue with me."

"But where did you get the idea of this task for me?" I asked. "Did you invent it yourself, because you think it is appropriate?"

"I don't invent anything," he said matter-of-factly. "I got this task from *infinity* itself. It's not easy for me to say all this to you. If you think that I'm enjoying myself pink with your tribulations, you're wrong. The success of your mission means more to me than it does to you. If you fail, you have very little to lose. What? Your visits to me. Big deal. But I would lose you, and that means to me losing either the continuity of my lineage or the possibility of your closing it with a golden key."

Don Juan stopped talking. He always knew when my mind became feverish with thoughts.

"I have told you over and over that *warrior-travelers* are prag-matists," he went on. "They are not involved in sentimentalism, or nostalgia, or melancholy. For *warrior-travelers,* there is only struggle, and it is a struggle with no end. If you think that you have come here to find peace, or that this is a lull in your life, you're wrong. This task of paying your debts is not guided by any feelings that you know about. It is guided by the purest sentiment, the sentiment of a *warrior-traveler* who is about to dive into *infinity,* and just before he does, he turns around to say thank you to those who favored him.

"You must face this task with all the gravity it deserves," he continued. "It is your last stop before infinity swallows you. In fact, unless a *warrior-traveler* is in a sublime state of being, *infinity* will not touch him with a ten-foot pole. So, don't spare yourself; don't spare any effort. Push it mercilessly, but elegantly, all the way through."

I had met the two people don Juan had referred to as my two friends who meant so much to me while going to junior college. I used to live in the garage apartment of the house belonging to Patricia Turner's parents. In exchange for room and board, I took care of vacuuming the pool, raking the leaves, putting the trash out, and making breakfast for Patricia and myself. I was also the handyman in the house as well as the family chauffeur; I drove Mrs. Turner to do her shopping and I bought liquor for Mr. Turner, which I had to sneak into the house and then into his studio.

He was an insurance executive who was a solitary drinker. He had promised his family that he was not going to touch the bottle ever again after some serious family altercations due to his excessive drinking. He confessed to me that he had tapered off enormously, but that he needed a swig from time to time. His studio was, of course, off limits to everybody except me. I was supposed to go in to clean it, but what I really did was hide his bottles inside a beam that appeared to support an arch in the ceiling in the studio but that was actually hollow. I had to sneak the bottles in and sneak the empties out and dump them at the market.

Patricia was a drama and music major in college and a fabulous singer. Her goal was to sing in musicals on Broadway. It goes without saying that I fell head over heels in love with Patricia Turner. She was very slim and athletic, a brunette with angular features and about a head taller than I am, my ultimate requisite for going bananas over any woman.

I seemed to fulfill a deep need in her, the need to nurture someone, especially after she realized that her daddy trusted me implicitly. She became my little mommy. I couldn't even open my mouth without her consent. She watched me like a hawk. She even wrote term papers for me, read textbooks and gave me synopses of them. And I liked it, but not because I wanted to be nurtured; I don't think that that need was ever part of my cognition. I relished the fact that *she* did it. I relished her company.

She used to take me to the movies daily. She had passes to all the big movie theaters in Los Angeles, given to her father courtesy of some movie moguls. Mr. Turner never used them himself; he felt that it was beneath his dignity to flash movie passes. The movie clerks always made the recipients of such passes sign a receipt. Patricia had no qualms about signing anything, but some times the nasty clerks wanted Mr. Turner to sign, and when I went to do that, they were not satisfied with only the signature of Mr. Turner. They demanded a driver's license. One of them, a sassy young guy, made a remark that cracked him up, and me, too, but which sent Patricia into a fit of fury.

"I think you're Mr. Turd," he said with the nastiest smile you could imagine, "not Mr. Turner."

I could have sloughed off the remark, but then he subjected us to the profound humiliation of refusing us entrance to see *Hercules* starring Steve Reeves.

Usually, we went everywhere with Patricia's best friend, Sandra Flanagan, who lived next door with her parents. Sandra was quite the opposite of Patricia. She was just as tall, but her face was round, with rosy cheeks and a sensuous mouth; she was healthier than a raccoon. She had no interest in singing. She was only interested in the sensual pleasures of the body. She could eat and drink anything and digest it, and—the feature that finished me off about her—after she had polished off her own plate, she managed to do the same with mine, a thing that, being a picky eater, I had never been able to do in all my life. She was also extremely athletic, but in a rough, wholesome way. She could punch like a man and kick like a mule.

As a courtesy to Patricia, I used to do the same chores for Sandra's parents that I did for hers: vacuuming their pool, raking the leaves from their lawn, taking the trash out on trash day, and incinerating papers and flammable trash. That was the time in Los Angeles when the air pollution was increased by the use of backyard incinerators.

Perhaps it was because of the proximity, or the ease of those young women, that I ended up madly in love with both of them.

I went to seek advice from a very strange young man who was my friend, Nicholas van Hooten. He had two girlfriends, and he lived with both of them, apparently in a state of bliss. He began by giving me, he said, the simplest advice: how to behave in a movie theater if you had two girlfriends. He said that whenever he went to a movie with his two girlfriends, all his attention was always centered on whoever sat to his left. After a while, the two girls would go to the bathroom and, on their return, he would have them change the seating arrangement. Anna would sit where Betty had been sitting, and nobody around them was the wiser. He assured me that this was the first step in a long process of breaking the girls into a matter-of-fact acceptance of the trio situation; Nicholas was rather corny, and he used that trite French expression: *menage a trois*.

I followed his advice and went to a theater that showed silent movies on Fairfax Avenue in Los Angeles with Patricia and Sandy. I sat Patricia to my left and poured all my attention on her. They went to the bathroom, and when they returned I told them to switch places. I started then to do what Nicholas van Hooten had advised, but Patricia would not put up with any non-sense like that. She stood up and left the theater, offended, humiliated, and raving mad. I wanted to run after her and apologize, but Sandra stopped me.

"Let her go," she said with a poisonous smile. "She's a big girl. She has enough money to get a taxi and go home."

I fell for it and remained in the theater kissing Sandra, rather nervously, and filled with guilt. I was in the middle of a passionate kiss when I felt someone pulling me backward by the hair. It was Patricia. The row of seats was loose and tilted backward. Athletic Patricia jumped out of the way before the seats where we were sitting crashed on the row of seats behind. I heard the frightened screams of two movie watchers who were sitting at the end of the row, by the aisle.

Nicholas van Hooten's tip was miserable advice. Patricia, Sandra, and I returned home in absolute silence. We patched up our differences, in the midst of very weird promises, tears, the works. The outcome of our three-sided relationship was that, in the end, we nearly destroyed ourselves. We were not prepared for such an endeavor. We didn't know how to resolve the problems of affection, morality, duty, and social mores. I couldn't leave one of them for the other, and they couldn't leave me. One day, at the climax of a tremendous upheaval, and out of sheer desperation, all three of us fled in different directions, never to see one another again.

I felt devastated. Nothing of what I did could erase their impact on my life. I left Los Angeles and got busy with endless things in an effort to placate my longing. Without exaggerating in the least, I can sincerely say that I fell into the depths of hell, I believed, never to emerge again. If it hadn't been for the influence that don Juan had on my life and my person, I would never have survived my private demons. I told don Juan that I knew that whatever I had done was wrong, that I had no business engaging such wonderful people in such sordid, stupid shenanigans that I had no preparation to face.

"What was wrong," don Juan said, "was that the three of you were lost egomaniacs. Your self-importance nearly destroyed you. If you don't have self-importance, you have only feelings.

"Humor me," he went on, "and do the following simple and direct exercise that could mean the world to you: Remove from your memory of those two girls any statements that you make to yourself such as 'She said this or that to me, and she yelled, and the other one yelled, at ME!' and remain at the level of your feelings. If you hadn't been so self-important, what would you have had as the irreducible residue?"

"My unbiased love for them," I said, nearly choking.

"And is it less today than it was then?" don Juan asked.

"No, it isn't, don Juan," I said in truthfulness, and I felt the same pang of anguish that had chased me for years.

"This time, embrace them from your silence," he said. "Don't be a meager asshole. Embrace them totally for the last time. But *intend* that this is the last time on Earth. *Intend* it from your darkness. If you are worth your salt," he went on, "when you make your gift to them, you'll sum up your entire life twice. Acts of this nature make warriors airborne, almost vaporous."

Following don Juan's commands, I took the task to heart. I realized that if I didn't emerge victorious, don Juan was not the only one who was going to lose out. I would also lose something, and whatever I was going to lose was as important to me as what don Juan had described as being important to him. I was going to lose my chance to face *infinity* and be conscious of it.

The memory of Patricia Turner and Sandra Flanagan put me in a terrible frame of mind. The devastating sense of irreparable loss that had chased me all these years was as vivid as ever. When don Juan exacerbated that feeling, I knew for a fact that there are certain things that can remain with us, in don Juan's terms, for life and perhaps beyond. I had to find Patricia Turner and Sandra Flanagan. Don Juan's final recommendation was that if I did find them, I could not stay with them. I could have time only to atone, to envelop each of them with all the affection I felt, without the angry voices of recrimination, self-pity, or egomania.

I embarked on the colossal task of finding out what had become of them, where they were. I began by asking questions of the people who knew their parents. Their parents had moved out of Los Angeles, and nobody could give me a lead as to where to find them. There was no one to talk to. I thought of putting a personal ad in the paper. But then I thought that perhaps they had moved out of California. I finally had to hire a private investigator. Through his connections with official offices of records and whatnot, he located them within a couple of weeks.

They lived in New York, a short distance from one other, and their friendship was as close as it had ever been. I went to New York and tackled Patricia Turner first. She hadn't made it to stardom on Broadway the way she had wanted to, but she was part of a production. I didn't want to know whether it was in the capacity of a performer or as management. I visited her in her office. She didn't tell me what she did. She was shocked to see me. What we did was just sit together and hold hands and weep. I didn't tell her what I did either. I said that I had come to see her because I wanted to give her a gift that would express my gratitude, and that I was embarking on a journey from which I did not intend to come back.

"Why such ominous words?" she asked, apparently genuinely alarmed. "What are you planning to do? Are you ill? You don't look ill."

"It was a metaphorical statement," I assured her. "I'm going back to South America, and I intend to seek my fortune there. The competition is ferocious, and the circumstances are very harsh, that's all. If I want to succeed, I will have to give all I have to it."

She seemed relieved, and hugged me. She looked the same, except much bigger, much more powerful, more mature, very elegant. I kissed her hands and the most overwhelming affection enveloped me. Don Juan was right. Deprived of recriminations, all I had were feelings.

"I want to make you a gift, Patricia Turner," I said. "Ask me anything you want, and if it is within my means, I'll get it for you."

"Did you strike it rich?" she said and laughed. "What's great about you is that you never had anything, and you never will. Sandra and I talk about you nearly every day. We imagine you parking cars, living off women, et cetera, et cetera. I'm sorry, we can't help ourselves, but we still love you."

I insisted that she tell me what she wanted. She began to weep and laugh at the same time.

"Are you going to buy me a mink coat?" she asked me between sobs.

I ruffled her hair and said that I would.

"If you don't like it, you take it back to the store and get the money back," I said.

She laughed and punched me the way she used to. She had to go back to work, and we parted after I promised her that I would come back again to see her, but that if I didn't, I wanted her to understand that the force of my life was pulling me every which way, yet I would keep the memory of her in me for the rest of my life and perhaps beyond.

I did return, but only to see from a distance how they delivered the mink coat to her. I heard her screams of delight.

That part of my task was finished. I left, but I wasn't vaporous, the way don Juan had said I was going to be. I had opened up an old wound and it had started to bleed. It wasn't quite raining outside; it was a fine mist that seemed to penetrate all the way to the marrow of my bones.

Next, I went to see Sandra Flanagan. She lived in one of the suburbs of New York that is reached by train. I -knocked on her door. Sandra opened it and looked at me as if I were a ghost. All the color drained out of her face. She was more beautiful than ever, perhaps because she had filled out and looked as big as a house.

"Why, you, you, you!" she stammered, not quite capable of articulating my name.

She sobbed, and she seemed indignant and reproachful for a moment. I didn't give her the chance to continue. My silence was total. In the end, it affected her. She let me in and we sat down in her living room.

"What are you doing here?" she said, quite a bit calmer. "You can't stay! I'm a married woman! I have three children! And I'm very happy in my marriage."

Shooting her words out rapidly, like a machine gun, she told me that her husband was very dependable, not too imaginative but a good man, that he was not sensual, that she had to be very careful because he tired very easily when they made love, that he got sick easily and sometimes couldn't go to work but that he had managed to produce three beautiful children, and that after her third child, her husband, whose name seemed to be Herbert, had just simply quit. He didn't have it anymore, but it didn't matter to her.

I tried to calm her down by assuring her over and over that I had come to visit her only for a moment, that it was not my intention to alter her life or to bother her in any way. I described to her how hard it had been to find her.

"I have come here to say good-bye to you," I said, "and to tell you that you are the love of my life. I want to make you a token gift, a symbol of my gratitude and my undying affection."

She seemed to be deeply affected. She smiled openly the way she used to. The separation between her teeth made her look childlike. I commented to her that she was more beautiful than ever, which was the truth to me.

She laughed and said that she was going on a strict diet, and if she had known that I was coming to see her, she would have started her diet a long time ago. But she would start now, and I would find her the next time as lean as she had always been. She reiterated the horror of our life together and how profoundly affected she had been. She had even thought, in spite of being a devout Catholic, of committing suicide, but she had found in her children the solace that she needed; whatever we had done were quirks of youth that would never be vacuumed away, but had to be swept under the rug.

When I asked if there was some gift that I could make to her as a token of my gratitude and affection for her, she laughed and said exactly what Patricia Turner had said: that I didn't have a pot to piss in, nor would I ever have one, because that's the way I was made. I insisted that she name something.

"Can you buy me a station wagon where all my children could fit?" she said, laughing. "I want a Pontiac, or an Oldsmobile, with all the trimmings."

She said that knowing in her heart of hearts that I could not possibly make her such a gift. But I did.

I drove the dealer's car, following him as he delivered the station wagon to her the next day, and from the parked car where I was hiding, I heard her surprise; but congruous with her sensual being, her surprise was not an expression of delight. It was a bodily reaction, a sob of anguish, of bewilderment. She cried, but I knew that she was not crying because she had received the gift. She was expressing a longing that had echoes in me. I crumpled in the seat of the car.

On my train ride to New York, and my flight to Los Angeles, the feeling that persisted was that my life was running out; it was running out of me like clutched sand. I didn't feel in any way liberated or changed by saying thank you and good-bye. Quite the contrary, I felt the burden of that weird affection more deeply than ever. I felt like weeping. What ran through my mind over and over were the titles that my friend Rodrigo Cummings had invented for books that were never to be written. He specialized in writing titles. His favorite was "We'll All Die in Hollywood"; another was "We'll Never Change"; and my favorite, the one that I bought for ten dollars, was "From the Life and Sins of Rodrigo Cummings." All those titles played in my mind. I was Rodrigo Cummings, and I was stuck in time and space, and I did love two women more than my life, and that would never change. And like the rest of my friends, I would die in Hollywood.

I told don Juan all of this in my report of what I considered to be my pseudo-success. He discarded it shamelessly. He said that what I felt was merely the result of indulging and self-pity, and that in order to say good-bye and thank you, and really mean it and sustain it, sorcerers had to remake themselves.

"Vanquish your self-pity right now," he demanded. "Vanquish the idea that you are hurt and what do you have as the irreducible residue?"

What I had as the irreducible residue was the feeling that I had made my ultimate gift to both of them. Not in the spirit of renewing anything, or harming anyone, including myself, but in the true spirit that don Juan had tried to point out to me—in the spirit of a *warrior'traveler* whose only virtue, he had said, is to keep alive the memory of whatever has affected him, whose only way to say thank you and good-bye was by this act of magic: of storing in his silence whatever he has loved.

## Beyond Syntax

### The Usher

I WAS IN don Juan's house in Sonora, sound asleep in my bed, when he woke me up. I had stayed up practically all night, mulling over concepts that he had explained to me.

"You have rested enough," he said firmly, almost gruffly, as he shook me by the shoulders. "Don't indulge in being fatigued. Your fatigue is, more than fatigue, a desire not to be bothered. Something in you resents being bothered. But it's most important that you exacerbate that part of you until it breaks down. Let's go for a hike."

Don Juan was right. There was some part of me that resented immensely being bothered. I wanted to sleep for days and not think about don Juan's sorcery concepts anymore. Thoroughly against my will, I got up and followed him. Don Juan had prepared a meal, which I devoured as if I hadn't eaten for days, and then we walked out of the house and headed east, toward the mountains. I had been so dazed that I hadn't noticed that it was early morning until I saw the sun, which was right above the eastern range of mountains. I wanted to comment to don Juan that I had slept all night without moving, but he hushed me. He said that we were going to go on an expedition to the mountains to search for specific plants.

"What are you going to do with the plants you are going to collect, don Juan?" I asked him as soon as we had started off.

"They are not for me," he said with a grin. "They are for a friend of mine, a botanist and pharmacist. He makes potions with them."

"Is he a Yaqui, don Juan? Does he live here in Sonora?" I asked.

"No, he isn't a Yaqui, and he doesn't live here in Sonora. You'll meet him someday."

"Is he a sorcerer, don Juan?"

"Yes, he is," he replied dryly.

i asked him then if I could take some of the plants to be identified at the Botanical Garden at UCLA.

"Surely, surely!" he said.

I had found out in the past that whenever he said "surely," he didn't mean it. It was obvious that he had no intention whatsoever of giving me any specimens for identification. I became very curious about his sorcerer friend, and asked him to tell me more about him, perhaps describe him, telling me where he lived and how he got to meet him.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa!" don Juan said, as if I were a horse. "Hold it, hold it! Who are you? Professor Lorca? Do you want to study his cognitive system?"

We went deep into the arid foothills. Don Juan walked steadily for hours. I thought that the task of the day was going to be just to walk. He finally stopped and sat down on the shaded side of the foothills.

"It is time that you start on one of the biggest projects of sorcery," don Juan said.

"What is this project of sorcery that you're talking about, don Juan?" I inquired.

"It's called the *recapitulation,"* he said. "The old sorcerers used to call it *recounting the events of your life,* and for them, it started as a simple technique, a device to aid them in remembering what they were doing and saying to their disciples. For their disciples, the technique had the same value: It allowed them to remember what their teachers had said and done to them. It took terrible social upheavals, like being conquered and vanquished several times, before the old sorcerers realized that their technique had far-reaching effects."

"Are you referring, don Juan, to the Spanish conquest?" I asked.

"No," he said. "That was just the icing on the cake. There were other upheavals before that, more devastating. When the Spaniards got here, the old sorcerers didn't exist any longer. The disciples of those who had survived other upheavals were very cagey by then. They knew how to take care of themselves. It is that new crop of sorcerers who renamed the old sorcerers' technique *recapitulation*.

"There's an enormous premium on time," he continued. "For sorcerers in general, time is of the essence. The challenge I am faced with is that in a very compact unit of time I must cram into you everything there is to know about sorcery as an abstract proposition, but in order to do that I have to build the necessary space in you."

"What space? What are you talking about, don Juan?"

"The premise of sorcerers is that in order to bring something in, there must be a space to put it in," he said. "If you are filled to the brim with the items of everyday life, there's no space for anything new. That space must be built. Do you see what I mean? The sorcerers of olden times believed that the *recapitulation* of your life made that space. It does, and much more, of course.

"The way sorcerers perform the *recapitulation* is very formal," he went on. "It consists of writing a list of all the people they have met, from the present to the very beginning of their lives. Once they have that list, they take the first person on it and recollect everything they can about that person. And I mean everything, every detail. It's better to recapitulate from the present to the past, because the memories of the present are fresh, and in this manner, the recollection ability is honed. What practitioners do is to recollect and breathe. They inhale slowly and deliberately, fanning the head from right to left, in a barely noticeable swing, and exhale in the same fashion."

He said that the inhalations and exhalations should be natural; if they were too rapid, one would enter into something that he called tiring *breaths:* breaths that required slower breathing afterward in order to calm down the muscles.

"And what do you want me to do, don Juan, with all this?" I asked.

"You begin making your list today," he said. "Divide it by years, by occupations, arrange it in any order you want to, but make it sequential, with the most recent person first, and end with Mommy and Daddy. And then, remember everything about them. No more ado than that. As you practice, you will realize what you're doing."

On my next visit to his house, I told don Juan that I had been meticulously going through the events of my life, and that it was very difficult for me to adhere to his strict format and follow my list of persons one by one. Ordinarily, my *recapitulation* took me every which way. I let the events decide the direction of my recollection. What I did, which was volitional, was to adhere to a general unit of time. For instance, I had begun with the people in the anthropology department, but I let my recollection pull me to anywhere in time, from the present to the day I started attending school at UCLA.

I told don Juan that an odd thing I'd found out, which I had completely forgotten, was that I had no idea that UCLA existed until one night when my girlfriend's roommate from college came to Los Angeles and we picked her up at the airport. She was going to study musicology at UCLA. Her plane arrived in the early evening, and she asked me if I could take her to the campus so she could take a look at the place where she was going to spend the next four years of her life. I knew where the campus was, for I had driven past it's entrance on Sunset Boulevard endless times on my way to the beach. I had never been on the campus, though.

It was during the semester break. The few people that we found directed us to the music department. The campus was deserted, but what I witnessed subjectively was the most exquisite thing I have ever seen. It was a delight to my eyes. The buildings seemed to be alive with some energy of their own. What was going to be a very cursory visit to the music department turned out to be a gigantic tour of the entire campus. I fell in love with UCLA. I mentioned to don Juan that the only thing that marred my ecstasy was my girlfriend's annoyance at my insistence on walking through the huge campus.

"What the hell could there be in here?" she yelled at me in protest. "It's as if you have never seen a university campus in your life! You've seen one, you've seen them all. I think you're just trying to impress my friend with your sensitivity!"

I wasn't, and I vehemently told them that I was genuinely impressed by the beauty of my surroundings. I sensed so much hope in those buildings, so much promise, and yet I couldn't express my subjective state.

"I have been in school nearly all my life," my girlfriend said through clenched teeth, "and I'm sick and tired of it! Nobody's going to find shit in here! All you find is guff, and they don't even prepare you to meet your responsibilities in life."

When I mentioned that I would like to attend school here, she became even more furious.

"Get a job!" she screamed. "Go and meet life from eight to five, and cut the crap! That's what life is: a job from eight to five, forty hours a week! See what it does to you! Look at me—I'm super-educated now, and I'm not fit for a job."

All I knew was that I had never seen a place so beautiful. I made a promise then that I would go to school at UCLA, no matter what, come hell or high water. My desire had everything to do with me, and yet it was not driven by the need for immediate gratification. It was more in the realm of awe.

I told don Juan that my girlfriend's annoyance had been so jarring to me that it forced me to look at her in a different light, and that to my recollection, that was the first time ever that a commentary had aroused such a deep reaction in me. I saw facets of character in my girlfriend that I hadn't seen before, facets that scared me stiff.

"I think I judged her terribly," I said to don Juan. "After our visit to the campus, we drifted apart. It was as if UCLA had come between us like a wedge. I know that it's stupid to think this way."

"It isn't stupid," don Juan said. "It was a perfectly valid reaction. While you were walking on the campus, I am sure that you had a bout with *intent*. You *intended* being there, and anything that was opposed to it you had to let go.

"But don't overdo it," he went on. "The touch of warrior-travelers is very light, although it is cultivated. The hand of a warrior-traveler begins as a heavy, gripping, iron hand but becomes like the hand of a ghost, a hand made of gossamer. Warrior-travelers leave no marks, no tracks. That's the challenge for warrior-travelers."

Don Juan's comments made me sink into a deep, morose state of recriminations against myself, for I knew, from the little bit of my recounting, that I was extremely heavy-handed, obsessive, and domineering. I told don Juan about my ruminations.

"The power of the recapitulation," don Juan said, "is that it stirs up all the garbage of our lives and brings it to the surface."

Then don Juan delineated the intricacies of awareness and perception, which were the basis of the recapitulation. He began by saying that he was going to present an arrangement of concepts that I should not take as sorcerers' theories under any conditions, because it was an arrangement formulated by the shamans of ancient Mexico as a result of seeing energy directly as it flows in the universe. He warned me that he would present the units of this arrangement to me without any attempt at classifying them or ranking them by any predetermined standard.

"I'm not interested in classifications," he went on. "You have been classifying everything all your life. Now you are going to be forced to stay away from classifications. The other day, when I asked you if you knew anything about clouds, you gave me the names of all the clouds and the percentage of moisture that one should expect from each one of them. You were a veritable weatherman. But when I asked you if you knew what you could do with the clouds personally, you had no idea what I was talking about.

"Classifications have a world of their own," he continued. "After you begin to classify anything, the classification becomes alive, and it rules you. But since classifications never started as energy-giving affairs, they always remain like dead logs. They are not trees; they are merely logs."

He explained that the sorcerers of ancient Mexico saw that the universe at large is composed of energy fields in the form of luminous filaments. They saw zillions of them, wherever they turned to see. They also saw that those energy fields arrange themselves into currents of luminous fibers, streams that are constant, perennial forces in the universe, and that the current or stream of filaments that is related to the recapitulation was named by those sorcerers the *dark sea of awareness,* and also the *Eagle.*

He stated that those sorcerers also found out that every creature in the universe is attached to the dark sea *of awareness* at a round point of luminosity that was apparent when those creatures were perceived as energy. On that point of luminosity, which the sorcerers of ancient Mexico called the assemblage point, don Juan said that perception was assembled by a mysterious aspect of the *dark sea of awareness.*

Don Juan asserted that on the *assemblage point* of human beings, zillions of energy fields from the universe at large, in the form of luminous filaments, converge and go through it. These energy fields are converted into sensory data, and the sensory data is then interpreted and perceived as the world we know. Don Juan further explained that what turns the luminous fibers into sensory data is the dark sea *of awareness.* Sorcerers see this transformation and call it the glow *of awareness,* a sheen that extends like a halo around the assemblage point. He warned me then that he was going to make a statement which, in the understanding of sorcerers, was central to comprehending the scope of the *recapitulation.*

Putting an enormous emphasis on his words, he said that what we call the senses in organisms is nothing but degrees of awareness. He maintained that if we accept that the senses are the *dark sea of awareness,* we have to admit that the interpretation that the senses make of sensory data is also the *dark sea of* awareness. He explained at length that to face the world around us in the terms that we do is the result of the interpretation system of mankind with which every human being is equipped. He also said that every organism in existence has to have an interpretation system that permits it to function in it's surroundings.

"The sorcerers who came after the apocalyptic upheavals I told you about," he continued, "saw that at the moment of death, the *dark sea of awareness* sucked in, so to speak, through the *assemblage point,* the awareness of living creatures. They also saw that the *dark sea of awareness* had a moment's, let's say, hesitation when it was faced with sorcerers who had done a recounting of their lives. Unbeknownst to them, some had done it so thoroughly that the *dark sea of* awareness took their awareness in the form of their life experiences, but didn't touch their life force. Sorcerers had found out a gigantic truth about the forces of the universe: The *dark sea of awareness* wants only our life experiences, not our life force."

The premises of don Juan's elucidation were incomprehensible to me. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I was vaguely and yet deeply cognizant of how functional the premises of his explanation were.

"Sorcerers believe," don Juan went on, "that as we *recapitulate* our lives, all the debris, as I told you, comes to the surface. We realize our inconsistencies, our repetitions, but something in us puts up a tremendous resistance to *recapitulating*. Sorcerers say that the road is free only after a gigantic upheaval, after the appearance on our screen of the memory of an event that shakes our foundations with it's terrifying clarity of detail. It's the event that drags us to the actual moment that we lived it. Sorcerers call that event the usher, because from then on every event we touch on is relived, not merely remembered.

"Walking is always something that precipitates memories," don Juan went on. "The sorcerers of ancient Mexico believed that everything we live we store as a sensation on the backs of the legs. They considered the backs of the legs to be the warehouse of man's personal history. So, let's go for a walk in the hills now." We walked until it was almost dark.

"I think I have made you walk long enough," don Juan said when we were back at his house, "to have you ready to begin this sorcerers' maneuver of finding an *usher:* an event in your life that you will remember with such clarity that it will serve as a spotlight to illuminate everything else in your *recapitulation* with the same, or comparable, clarity. Do what sorcerers call *recapitulating pieces of a puzzle*. Something will lead you to remember the event that will serve as your usher." He left me alone, giving me one last warning. "Give it your best shot," he said. "Do your best." I was extremely silent for a moment, perhaps due to the silence around me. I experienced, then, a vibration, a sort of jolt in my chest. I had difficulty breathing, but suddenly something opened up in my chest that allowed me to take a deep breath, and a total view of a forgotten event of my childhood burst into my memory, as if it had been held captive and was suddenly released.

I was at my grandfather's studio, where he had a billiard table, and I was playing billiards with him. I was almost nine years old then. My grandfather was quite a skillful player, and compulsively he had taught me every play he knew until I was good enough to have a serious match with him. We spent endless hours playing billiards. I became so proficient at it that one day I defeated him. From that day on, he was incapable of winning. Many a time I deliberately threw the game, just to be nice to him, but he knew it and would become furious with me. Once, he got so upset that he hit me on the top of the head with the cue.

To my grandfather's chagrin and delight, by the time I was nine years old, I could make carom after carom without stopping. He became so frustrated and impatient in a game with me once that he threw down his cue and told me to play by myself. My compulsive nature made it possible for me to compete with myself and work the same play on and on until I got it perfectly.

One day, a man notorious in town for his gambling connections, the owner of a billiards house, came to visit my grandfather. They were talking and playing billiards as I happened to enter the room. I instantly tried to retreat, but my grandfather grabbed me and pulled me in.

"This is my grandson," he said to the man.

"Very pleased to meet you," the man said. He looked at me sternly, and then extended his hand, which was the size of the head of a normal person.

I was horrified. His enormous burst of laughter told me that he was cognizant of my discomfort. He told me that his name was Falelo Quiroga, and I mumbled my name.

He was very tall, and extremely well dressed. He was wearing a double-breasted blue pinstriped suit with beautifully tapered trousers. He must have been in his early fifties then, but he was trim and fit except for a slight bulge in his midsection. He wasn't fat; he seemed to cultivate the look of a man who is well fed and is not in need of anything. Most of the people in my hometown were gaunt. They were people who labored hard to earn a living and had no time for niceties. Falelo Quiroga appeared to be the opposite. His whole demeanor was that of a man who had time only for niceties.

He was pleasant-looking. He had a bland, well-shaven face with kind blue eyes. He had the air and the confidence of a doctor. People in my town used to say that he was capable of putting anyone at ease, and that he should have been a priest, a lawyer, or a doctor instead of a gambler. They also used to say that he made more money gambling than all the doctors and lawyers in town put together made by working.

His hair was black, and carefully combed. It was obviously thinning considerably. He tried to hide his receding hairline by combing his hair over his forehead. He had a square jaw and an absolutely winning smile. He had big, white teeth, which were well cared for, the ultimate novelty in an area where tooth decay was monumental. Two other remarkable features of Falelo Quiroga, for me, were his enormous feet and his handmade, black patent-leather shoes. I was fascinated by the fact that his shoes didn't squeak at all as he walked back and forth in the room. I was accustomed to hearing my grandfather's approach by the squeak of the soles of his shoes.

"My grandson plays billiards very well," my grandfather said nonchalantly to Falelo Quiroga. "Why don't I give him my cue and let him play with you while I watch?"

"This child plays billiards[7]" the big man asked my grandfather with a laugh.

"Oh, he does," my grandfather assured him. "Of course, not as well as you do, Falelo. Why don't you try him? And to make it interesting for you, so you won't be patronizing my grandson, let's bet a little money. What do you say if we bet this much?"

He put a thick wad of crumpled-up bills on the table and smiled at Falelo Quiroga, shaking his head from side to side as if daring the big man to take his bet.

"My oh my, that much, eh?" Falelo Quiroga said, looking at me questioningly. He opened his wallet then and pulled out some neatly folded bills. This, for me, was another surprising detail. My grandfather's habit was to carry his money in every one of his pockets, all crumpled up. When he needed to pay for something, he had to straighten out the bills in order to count them.

Falelo Quiroga didn't say it, but I knew that he felt like a highway robber. He smiled at my grandfather and, obviously out of respect for him, he put his money on the table. My grandfather, acting as the arbiter, set the game at a certain number of caroms and flipped a coin to see who would start first. Falelo Quiroga won.

"You better give it all you have, without holding back," my grandfather urged him. "Don't have any qualms about demolishing this twerp and winning my money!"

Falelo Quiroga, following my grandfather's advice, played as hard as he was able, but at one point he missed one carom by a hair. I took the cue. I thought I was going to faint, but seeing my grandfather's glee—he was jumping up and down—calmed me, and besides, it irked me to see Falelo Quiroga about to split his sides laughing when he saw the way I held the cue. I couldn't lean over the table, as billiards is normally played, because of my height. But my grandfather, with painstaking patience and determination, had taught me an alternative way of playing. By extending my arm all the way back, I held the cue nearly above my shoulders, to the side.

"What does he do when he has to reach the middle of the table?" Falelo Quiroga asked, laughing.

"He hangs on the edge of the table," my grandfather said mat-ter-of-factly. "It's permissible, you know."

My grandfather came to me and whispered through clenched teeth that if I tried to be polite and lose he was going to break all the cues on my head. I knew he didn't mean it; this was just his way of expressing his confidence in me.

I won easily. My grandfather was delighted beyond description, but strangely enough, so was Falelo Quiroga. He laughed as he went around the pool table, slapping it's edges. My grandfather praised me to the skies. He revealed to Quiroga my best score, and joked that I had excelled because he had found the way to lure me to practice: coffee with Danish pastries.

"You don't say, you don't say!" Quiroga kept repeating. He said good-bye; my grandfather picked up the bet money, and the incident was forgotten.

My grandfather promised to take me to a restaurant and buy me the best meal in town, but he never did. He was very stingy; he was known to be a lavish spender only with women.

Two days later, two enormous men affiliated with Falelo Quiroga came to me at the time that I got out from school and was leaving.

"Falelo Quiroga wants to see you," one of them said in a guttural tone. "He wants you to go to his place and have some coffee and Danish pastries with him."

If he hadn't said coffee and Danish pastries, I probably would have run away from them. I remembered then that my grandfather had told Falelo Quiroga that I would sell my soul for coffee and Danish pastries. I gladly went with them. However, I couldn't walk as fast as they did, so one of them, the one whose name was Guillermo Falcon, picked me up and cradled me in his huge arms. He laughed through crooked teeth.

"You better enjoy the ride, kid," he said. His breath was terrible. "Have you ever been carried by anyone? Judging by the way you wriggle, never!" He giggled grotesquely.

Fortunately, Falelo Quiroga's place was not too far from the school. Mr. Falcon deposited me on a couch in an office. Falelo Quiroga was there, sitting behind a huge desk. He stood up and shook hands with me. He immediately had some coffee and delicious pastries brought to me, and the two of us sat there chatting amiably about my grandfather's chicken farm. He asked me if I would like to have more pastries, and I said that I wouldn't mind if I did. He laughed, and he himself brought me a whole tray of unbelievably delicious pastries from the next room.

After I had veritably gorged myself, he politely asked me if I would consider coming to his billiards place in the wee hours of the night to play a couple of friendly games with some people of his choice. He casually mentioned that a considerable amount of money was going to be involved. He openly expressed his trust in my skill, and added that he was going to pay me, for my time and my effort, a percentage of the winning money. He further stated that he knew the mentality of my family; they would have found it improper that he give me money, even though it was pay. So he promised to put the money in the bank in a special account for me, or more practical yet, he would cover any purchase that I made in any of the stores in town, or the food I consumed in any restaurant in town.

I didn't believe a word of what he was saying. I knew that Falelo Quiroga was a crook, a racketeer. I liked, however, the idea of playing billiards with people I didn't know, and I struck a bargain with him.

"Will you give me some coffee and Danish pastries like the ones you gave me today?" I said.

"Of course, my boy," he replied. "If you come to play for me, I will buy you the bakery! I will have the baker bake them just for you. Take my word."

I warned Falelo Quiroga that the only drawback was my incapacity to get out of my house; I had too many aunts who watched me like hawks, and besides, my bedroom was on the second floor.

"That's no problem," Falelo Quiroga assured me. "You're quite small. Mr. Falcon will catch you if you jump from your window into his arms. He's as big as a house! I recommend that you go to bed early tonight. Mr. Falcon will wake you up by whistling and throwing rocks at your window. You have to watch out, though! He's an impatient man."

I went home in the midst of the most astounding excitation. I couldn't go to sleep. I was quite awake when I heard Mr. Falcon whistling and throwing small pebbles against the glass panes of the window. I opened the window. Mr. Falcon was right below me, on the street.

"Jump into my arms, kid," he said to me in a constricted voice, which he tried to modulate into a loud whisper. "If you don't aim at my arms, I'll drop you and you'll die. Remember that. Don't make me run around. Just aim at my arms. Jump! Jump!"

I did, and he caught me with the ease of someone catching a bag of cotton. He put me down and told me to run. He said that I was a child awakened from a deep sleep, and that he had to make me run so I would be fully awake by the time I got to the billiards house.

I played that night with two men, and I won both games. I had the most delicious coffee and pastries that one could imagine. Personally, I was in heaven. It was around seven in the morning when I returned home. Nobody had noticed my absence. It was time to go to school. For all practical purposes, everything was normal except for the fact that I was so tired that I couldn't keep my eyes open all day.

From that day on, Falelo Quiroga sent Mr. Falcon to pick me up two or three times a week, and I won every game that he made me play. And faithful to his promise, he paid for anything that I bought, including meals at my favorite Chinese restaurant, where I used to go daily. Sometimes, I even invited my friends, whom I mortified no end by running out of the restaurant screaming when the waiter brought the bill. They were amazed at the fact that they were never taken to the police for consuming food and not paying for it.

What was an ordeal for me was that I had never conceived of the fact that I would have to contend with the hopes and expectations of all the people who bet on me. The ordeal of ordeals, however, took place when a crack player from a nearby city challenged Falelo Quiroga and backed his challenge with a giant bet. The night of the game was an inauspicious night. My grandfather became ill and couldn't fall asleep. The entire family was in an uproar. It appeared that nobody went to bed. I doubted that I had any possibility of sneaking out of my bedroom, but Mr. Falcon's whistling and the pebbles hitting the glass of my window were so insistent that I took a chance and jumped from my window into Mr. Falcon's arms.

It seemed that every male in town had congregated at the billiards place. Anguished faces silently begged me not to lose. Some of the men boldly assured me that they had bet their houses and all their belongings. One man, in a half-joking tone, said that he had bet his wife; if

I didn't win, he would be a cuckold that night, or a murderer. He didn't specify whether he meant he would kill his wife in order not to be a cuckold, or me, for losing the game.

Falelo Quiroga paced back and forth. He had hired a masseur to massage me. He wanted me relaxed. The masseur put hot towels on my arms and wrists and cold towels on my forehead. He put on my feet the most comfortable, soft shoes that I had ever worn. They had hard, military heels and arch supports. Falelo Quiroga even outfitted me with a beret to keep my hair from falling in my face, as well as a pair of loose overalls with a belt.

Half of the people around the billiard table were strangers from another town. They glared at me. They gave me the feeling that they wanted me dead.

Falelo Quiroga flipped a coin to decide who would go first. My opponent was a Brazilian of Chinese descent, young, round-faced, very spiffy and confident. He started first, and he made a staggering amount of caroms. I knew by the color of his face that Falelo Quiroga was about to have a heart attack, and so were the other people who had bet everything they had on me.

I played very well that night, and as I approached the number of caroms that the other man had made, the nervousness of the ones who had bet on me reached it's peak. Falelo Quiroga was the most hysterical of them all. He yelled at everybody and demanded that someone open the windows because the cigarette smoke made the air unbreathable for me. He wanted the masseur to relax my arms and shoulders. Finally, I had to stop everyone, and in a real hurry, I made the eight caroms that I needed to win. The euphoria of those who had bet on me was indescribable. I was oblivious to all that, for it was already morning and they had to take me home in a hurry.

My exhaustion that day knew no limits. Very obligingly, Falelo Quiroga didn't send for me for a whole week. However, one afternoon, Mr. Falcon picked me up from school and took me to the billiards house. Falelo Quiroga was extremely serious. He didn't even offer me coffee or Danish pastries. He sent everybody'out of his office and got directly to the point. He pulled his chair close to me.

"I have put a lot of money in the bank for you," he said very solemnly. "I am true to what I promised you. I give you my word that I will always look after you. You know that! Now, if you do what I am going to tell you to do, you will make so much money that you won't have to work a day in your life. I want you to lose your next game by one carom. I know that you can do it. But I want you to miss by only a hair. The more dramatic, the better."

I was dumbfounded. All of this was incomprehensible to me. Falelo Quiroga repeated his request and further explained that he was going to bet anonymously all he had against me, and that that was the nature of our new deal.

"Mr. Falcon has been guarding you for months," he said. "All I need to tell you is that Mr. Falcon uses all his force to protect you, but he could do the opposite with the same strength."

Falelo Quiroga's threat couldn't have been more obvious. He must have seen in my face the horror that I felt, for he relaxed and laughed.

"Oh, but don't you worry about things like that," he said reassuringly, "because we are brothers."

This was the first time in my life that I had been placed in an untenable position. I wanted with all my might to run away from Falelo Quiroga, from the fear that he had evoked in me. But at the same time, and with equal force, I wanted to stay; I wanted the ease of being able to buy anything I wanted from any store, and above all, the ease of being able to eat at any restaurant of my choice, without paying. I was never confronted, however, with having to choose one or the other.

Unexpectedly, at least for me, my grandfather moved to another area, quite distant. It was as if he knew what was going on, and he sent me ahead of everyone else. I doubted that he actually knew what was taking place. It seemed that sending me away was one of his usual intuitive actions.

Don Juan's return brought me out of my recollection. I had lost track of time. I should have been famished but I wasn't hungry at all. I was filled with nervous energy. Don Juan lit a kerosene lantern and hung it from a nail on the wall. It's dim light cast strange, dancing shadows in the room. It took a moment for my eyes to adjust to the semidarkness. I entered then into a state of profound sadness. It was a strangely detached feeling, a far-reaching longing that came from that semidarkness, or perhaps from the sensation of being trapped. I was so tired that I wanted to leave, but at the same time, and with the same force, I wanted to stay.

Don Juan's voice brought me a measure of control. He appeared to know the reason for and the depth of my turmoil, and modulated his voice to fit the occasion. The severity of his tone helped me to gain control over something that could easily have turned into a hysterical reaction to fatigue and mental stimulation.

"To recount events is magical for sorcerers," he said. "It isn't just telling stories. It is *seeing* the underlying fabric of events. This is the reason recounting is so important and vast."

At his request, I told don Juan the event I had recollected.

"How appropriate," he said, and chuckled with delight. "The only commentary I can make is that *warrior-travelers* roll with the punches. They go wherever the impulse may take them. The power of warrior-travelers is to be alert, to get maximum effect from minimal impulse. And above all, their power lies in not interfering. Events have a force, a gravity of their own, and travelers are just travelers. Everything around them is for their eyes alone. In this fashion, travelers construct the meaning of every situation, without ever asking how it happened this way or that way.

"Today, you remembered an event that sums up your total life," he continued. "You are always faced with a situation that is the same as the one that you never resolved. You never really had to choose whether to accept or reject Falelo Quiroga's crooked deal.

*"Infinity* always puts us in this terrible position of having to choose," he went on. "We want *infinity,* but at the same time, we want to run away from it. You want to tell me to go and jump in a lake, but at the same time you are compelled to stay. It would be infinitely easier for you to just be compelled to stay."

## The Interplay of Energy on the Horizon

THE CLARITY OF the *usher* brought a new impetus to my *recapitulation.* A new mood replaced the old one. From then on, I began to recollect events in my life with maddening clarity. It was exactly as if a barrier had been built inside me that had kept me holding rigidly on to meager and unclear memories, and the *usher* had smashed it. My memory faculty had been for me, prior to that event, a vague way of referring to things that had happened, but which I wanted most of the time to forget. Basically, I had no interest whatsoever in remembering anything of my life. Therefore, I honestly saw absolutely no point in this futile exercise of *recapitulating,* which don Juan had practically imposed on me. For me, it was a chore that tired me instantly and did nothing but point out my incapacity for concentrating.

I had dutifully made, nevertheless, lists of people, and I had engaged in a haphazard effort of quasi-remembering my interactions with them. My lack of clarity in bringing those people into focus didn't dissuade me. I fulfilled what I considered to be my duty, regardless of the way I really felt. With practice, the clarity of my recollection improved, I thought remarkably. I was able to descend, so to speak, on certain choice events with a fair amount of keenness that was at once scary and rewarding. After don Juan presented me with the idea of the *usher,* however, the power of my recollection became something for which I had no name.

Following my list of people made the *recapitulation* extremely formal and exigent, the way don Juan wanted it. But from time to time, something in me got loose, something that forced me to focus on events unrelated to my list, events whose clarity was so maddening that I was caught and submerged in them, perhaps even more intensely than I had been when I had lived the experiences themselves. Every time I *recapitulated* in such a fashion, I had a degree of detachment which allowed me to see things I had disregarded when I had really been in the throes of them.

The first time in which the recollection of an event shook me to my foundations happened after I had given a lecture at a college in Oregon. The students in charge of organizing the lecture took me and another anthropology friend of mine to a house to spend the night. I was going to go to a motel, but they insisted, for our comfort, on taking us to this house. They said that it was in the country, and there were no noises, the quietest place in the world, with no telephones, no interference from the outside world. I, like the fool that I was, agreed to go with them. Don Juan had not only warned me to always be a solitary bird, he had demanded that I observe his recommendation, something that I did most of the time, but there were occasions when the gregarious creature in me took the upper hand.

The committee took us to the house, quite a distance from Portland, of a professor who was on sabbatical. Very swiftly, they turned on the lights inside and outside of the house, which was located on a hill with spotlights all around it. With the spotlights on, the house must have been visible from five miles away.

After that, the committee took off as fast as they could, something that surprised me because I thought they were going to stay and talk. The house was a wooden A-frame, small, but very well constructed. It had an enormous living room and a mezzanine above it where the bedroom was. Right above, at the apex of the A-frame, there was a life-size crucifix hanging from a strange rotating hinge, which was drilled into the head of the figure. The spotlights on the wall were focused on the crucifix. It was quite an impressive sight, especially when it rotated, squeaking as if the hinge needed oil.

The bathroom of the house was another sight. It had mirrored tiles on the ceiling, the walls, and the floor, and it was illuminated with a reddish light. There was no way to go to the bathroom without seeing yourself from every conceivable angle. I enjoyed all those features of the house, which seemed to me stupendous.

When the time came for me to go to sleep, however, I encountered a serious problem because there was only one narrow, hard, quite monastic bed and my anthropologist friend was close to having pneumonia, wheezing and retching phlegm every time he coughed. He went straight for the bed and passed out. I looked for a place to sleep. I couldn't find one. That house was barren of comforts. Besides, it was cold. The committee had turned on the lights, but not the heater. I looked for the heater. My search was fruitless, as was my search for the switch to the spotlights or to any of the lights in the house, for that matter. The switches were there on the walls, but they seemed to be overruled by the effect of some main switch. The lights were on, and I had no way to turn them off.

The only place I could find to sleep was on a thin throw rug, and the only thing I found with which I could cover myself was the tanned hide of a giant French poodle. Obviously, it had been the pet of the house and had been preserved; it had shiny black-marble eyes and an open mouth with the tongue hanging out. I put the head of the poodle skin toward my knees. I still had to cover myself with the tanned rear end, which was on my neck. It's preserved head was like a hard object between my knees, quite unsettling! If it had been dark, it wouldn't have been as bad. I gathered a bundle of washcloths and used them as a pillow. I used as many as possible to cover the hide of the French poodle the best way I could. I couldn't sleep all night.

It was then, as I lay there cursing myself silently for being so stupid and not following don Juan's recommendation, that I had the first maddeningly clear recollection of my entire life. I had recollected the event that don Juan had called the *usher* with equal clarity, but my tendency had always been to half-disregard what happened to me when I was with don Juan, on the basis that in his presence anything was possible. This time, however, I was alone.

Years before I met don Juan, I had worked painting signs on buildings. My boss's name was Luigi Palma. One day Luigi got a contract to paint a sign, advertising the sale and rental of bridal gowns and tuxedos, on the back wall of an old building. The owner of the store in the building wanted to catch the eye of possible customers with a large display. Luigi was going to paint a bride and groom, and I was going to do the lettering. We went to the flat roof of the building and set up a scaffold.

I was quite apprehensive although I had no overt reason to be so. I had painted dozens of signs on high buildings. Luigi thought that I was beginning to be afraid of heights, but that my fear was going to pass. When the time came to start working, he lowered the scaffold a few feet from the roof and jumped onto it's flat boards. He went to one side, while I stood on the other in order to be totally out of his way. He was the artist.

Luigi began to show off. His painting movements were so erratic and agitated that the scaffold moved back and forth. I became dizzy. I wanted to go back to the flat roof, using the pretext that I needed more paint and other painters' paraphernalia. I grabbed the edge of the wall that fringed the flat roof and tried to hoist myself up, but the tips of my feet got stuck in the boards of the scaffold. I tried to pull my feet and the scaffold toward the wall; the harder I pulled, the farther away I pushed the scaffold from the wall. Instead of helping me untangle my feet, Luigi sat down and braced himself with the cords that attached the scaffold to the flat roof. He crossed himself and looked at me in horror. From his sitting position, he knelt, weeping quietly as he recited the Lord's Prayer.

I held on to the edge of the wall for dear life; what gave me the desperate strength to endure was the certainty that if I was in control, I could keep the scaffold from moving farther and farther away. I wasn't going to lose my grip and fall thirteen floors to my death. Luigi, being a compulsive taskmaster to the bitter end, yelled to me, in the midst of tears, that I should pray. He swore that both of us were going to fall to our deaths, and that the least we could do was to pray for the salvation of our souls. For a moment, I deliberated about whether it was functional to pray. I opted to yell for help. People in the building must have heard my yelling and sent for the firemen. I sincerely thought that it had taken only two or three seconds after I began to yell for the firemen to come onto the roof and grab Luigi and me and secure the scaffold.

In reality, I had hung on to the side of the building for at least twenty minutes. When the firemen finally pulled me onto the roof, I had lost any vestige of control. I vomited on the hard floor of the roof, sick to my stomach from fear and the odious smell of melted tar. It was a very hot day; the tar on the cracks of the scratchy roofing sheets was melting in the heat. The ordeal had been so frightening and embarrassing that I didn't want to remember it, and I ended up hallucinating that the firemen had pulled me into a warm, yellow room; they had then put me in a supremely comfortable bed, and I had fallen peacefully asleep, safe, wearing my pajamas, delivered from danger.

My second recollection was another blast of incommensurable force. I was talking amiably to a group of friends when, for no apparent reason I could account for, I suddenly lost my breath under the impact of a thought, a memory, which was vague for an instant and then became an engrossing experience. It's force was so intense that I had to excuse myself and retreat for a moment to a corner. My friends seemed to understand my reaction; they disbanded without any comments. What I was remembering was an incident that had taken place in my last year of high school.

My best friend and I used to walk to school, passing a big mansion with a black wrought-iron fence at least seven feet high and ending in pointed spikes. Behind the fence was an extensive, well-kept green lawn, and a huge, ferocious German shepherd dog. Every day, we used to tease the dog and let him charge at us. He stopped physically at the wrought-iron fence, but his rage seemed to cross over to us. My friend delighted in engaging the dog every day in a contest of mind over matter. He used to stand a few inches from the dog's snout, which protruded between the iron bars at least six inches into the street, and bare his teeth, just like the dog did.

"Yield, yield!" my friend shouted every time. "Obey! Obey! I am more powerful than you!"

His daily displays of mental power, which lasted at least five minutes, never affected the dog, outside of leaving him more furious than ever. My friend assured me daily, as part of his ritual, that the dog was either going to obey him or die in front of us of heart failure brought about by rage. His conviction was so intense that I believed that the dog was going to drop dead any day.

One morning, when we came around, the dog wasn't there. We waited for a moment, but he didn't show up; then we saw him, at the end of the extensive lawn. He seemed to be busy there, so we slowly began to walk away. From the comer of my eye, I noticed that the dog was running at full speed, toward us. When he was perhaps six or seven feet from the fence, he took a gigantic leap over it. I was sure that he was going to rip his belly on the spikes. He barely cleared them and fell onto the street like a sack of potatoes.

I thought for a moment that he was dead, but he was only stunned. Suddenly, he got up, and instead of chasing after the one who had brought about his rage, he ran after me. I jumped onto the roof of a car, but the car was nothing for the dog. He took a leap and was nearly on top of me. I scrambled down and climbed the first tree that was within reach, a flimsy little tree that could barely support my weight. I was sure that it would snap in the middle, sending me right into the dog's jaws to be mauled to death.

In the tree, I was nearly out of his reach. But the dog jumped again, and snapped his teeth, catching me by the seat of my pants and ripping them. His teeth actually nicked my buttocks. The moment I was safe at the top of the tree, the dog left. He just ran up the street, perhaps looking for my friend.

At the infirmary in school, the nurse told me that I had to ask the owner of the dog for a certificate of rabies vaccination.

"You must look into this," she said severely. "You may have rabies already. If the owner refuses to show you the vaccination certificate, you are within your rights to call the police."

I talked to the caretaker of the mansion where the dog lived. He accused me of luring the owner's most valuable dog, a pedigreed animal, out into the street.

"You better watch out, boy!" he said in an angry tone. "The dog got lost. The owner will send you to jail if you keep on bothering us."

"But I may have rabies," I said in a sincerely terrified tone.

"I don't give a shit if you have the bubonic plague," the man snapped. "Scram!"

"I'll call the police," I said.

"Call whoever you like," he retorted. "You call the police, we'll turn them against you. In this house, we have enough clout to do that!"

I believed him, so I lied to the nurse and said that the dog could not be found, and that it had no owner.

"Oh my god!" the woman exclaimed. "Then brace yourself for the worst. I may have to send you to the doctor." She gave me a long list of symptoms that I should look for or wait for until they manifested themselves. She said that the injections for rabies were extremely painful, and that they had to be administered sub-cutaneously on the area of the abdomen.

"I wouldn't wish that treatment on my worst enemy," she said, plunging me into a horrid nightmare.

What followed was my first real depression. I just lay in my bed feeling every one of the symptoms enumerated by the nurse. I ended up going to the school infirmary and begging the woman to give me the treatment for rabies, no matter how painful. I made a huge scene. I became hysterical. I didn't have rabies, but I had totally lost my control.

I related to don Juan my two recollections in all their detail, sparing nothing. He didn't make any comments. He nodded a few times.

"In both recollections, don Juan," I said, feeling myself the urgency of my voice, "I was as hysterical as anyone could be. My body was trembling. I was sick to my stomach. I don't want to say it was *as if* I were in the experiences, because that's not the truth. I *was* in the experiences themselves both times. And when I couldn't take them anymore, I jumped into my life now. For me, that was a jump into the future. I had the power of going over time. My jump into the past was not abrupt; the event developed slowly, as memories do. It was at the end that I did jump abruptly into the future: my life now."

"Something in you has begun to collapse for sure," he finally said. "It has been collapsing all along, but it repaired itself very quickly every time it's supports failed. My feeling is that it is now collapsing totally."

After another long silence, don Juan explained that the sorcerers of ancient Mexico believed that, as he had told me already, we had two minds, and only one of them was truly ours. I had always understood don Juan as saying that there were two parts to our minds, and one of them was always silent because expression was denied to it by the force of the other part. Whatever don Juan had said, I had taken as a metaphorical way to explain, perhaps, the apparent dominance of the left hemisphere of the brain over the right, or something of the like.

"There is a secret option to the *recapitulation,"* don Juan said.

"Just like I told you that there is a secret option to dying, an option that only sorcerers take. In the case of dying, the secret option is that human beings could retain their life force and relinquish only their awareness, the product of their lives. In the case of the *recapitulation,* the secret option that only sorcerers take is to choose to enhance their true minds.

"The haunting memory of your recollections," he went on, "could come only from your true mind. The other mind that we all have and share is, I would say, a cheap model: economy strength, one size fits all. But this is a subject that we will discuss later. What is at stake now is the advent of a disintegrating force. But not a force that is disintegrating you—I don't mean it that way. It is disintegrating what the sorcerers call the *foreign installation,* which exists in you and in every other human being. The effect of the force that is descending on you, which is disintegrating the *foreign installation, is* that it pulls sorcerers out of their syntax."

I had listened carefully to don Juan, but I couldn't say that I had understood what he had said. For some strange reason, which was to me as unknown as the cause of my vivid recollections, I couldn't ask him any questions.

"I know how difficult it is for you," don Juan said all of a sudden, "to deal with this facet of your life. Every sorcerer that I know has gone through it. The males going through it suffer infinitely more damage than the females. I suppose it's the condition of women to be more durable. The sorcerers of ancient Mexico, acting as a group, tried their best to buttress the impact of this disintegrating force. In our day, we have no means of acting as a group, so we must brace ourselves to face in solitude a force that will sweep us away from language, for there is no way to describe' adequately what is going on."

Don Juan was right in that I was at a loss for explanations or ways of describing the effect that those recollections had had on me. Don Juan had told me that sorcerers face the unknown in the most common incidents one can imagine. When they are confronted with it, and cannot interpret what they are perceiving, they have to rely on an outside source for direction. Don Juan had called that source *infinity,* or the *voice of the spirit,* and had said that if sorcerers don't try to be rational about what can't be rationalized, the spirit unerringly tells them what's what.

Don Juan had guided me to accept the idea that *infinity* was a force that had a voice and was conscious of itself. Consequently, he had prepared me to be ready to listen to that voice and act efficiently always, but without antecedents, using as little as possible the railings of the a priori. I waited impatiently for the *voice of the spirit* to tell me the meaning of my recollections, but nothing happened.

I was in a bookstore one day when a girl recognized me and came over to talk to me. She was tall and slim, and had an insecure, little girl's voice. I was trying to make her feel at ease when I was suddenly accosted by an instantaneous energetic change. It was as if an alarm had been triggered in me, and as it had happened in the past, without any volition on my part whatsoever, I recollected another completely forgotten event in my life. The memory of my grandparents' house flooded me. It was a veritable avalanche so intense that it was devastating, and once more, I had to retreat to a corner. My body shook, as if I had taken a chill.

I must have been eight years old. My grandfather was talking to me. He had begun by telling me that it was his utmost duty to set me straight. I had two cousins who were my age: Alfredo and Luis. My grandfather demanded mercilessly that I admit that my cousin Alfredo was really beautiful. In my vision, I heard my grandfather's raspy, constricted voice.

"Alfredo doesn't need any introductions," he had said to me on that occasion. "He needs only to be present and the doors will fly open for him because everybody practices the cult of beauty. Everybody likes beautiful people. They envy them, but they certainly seek their company. Take it from me. I am handsome, wouldn't you say?"

I sincerely agreed with my grandfather. He was certainly a very handsome man, small-boned, with laughing blue eyes and an exquisitely chiseled face with beautiful cheekbones. Everything seemed to be perfectly balanced in his face—his nose, his mouth, his eyes, his pointed jaw. He had blond hair growing on his ears, a feature that gave him an elflike appearance. He knew everything about himself, and he exploited his attributes to the maximum. Women adored him; first, according to him, for his beauty, and second, because he posed no threat to them. He, of course, took full advantage of all this.

"Your cousin Alfredo is a winner," my grandfather went on. "He will never have to crash a party because he'll be the first one on the list of guests. Have you ever noticed how people stop in the street to look at him, and how they want to touch him? He's so beautiful that I'm afraid he's going to turn out to be an asshole, but that's a different story. Let us say that he'll be the most welcome asshole you have ever met."

My grandfather compared my cousin Luis with Alfredo. He said that Luis was homely, and a little bit stupid, but that he had a heart of gold. And then he brought me into the picture.

"If we are going to proceed with our explanation," he continued, "you have to admit in sincerity that Alfredo is beautiful and Luis is good. Now, let's take you; you are neither handsome nor good. You are a veritable son of a bitch. Nobody's going to invite you to a party. You'll have to get used to the idea that if you want to be at a party, you will have to crash it. Doors will never be open for you the way they will be open for Alfredo for being beautiful, and for Luis for being good, so you will have to get in through the window."

His analysis of his three grandsons was so accurate that he made me weep with the finality of what he had said. The more I wept, the happier he became. He finished his case with a most deleterious admonition.

"There's no need to feel bad," he said, "because there's nothing more exciting than getting in through the window. To do that, you have to be clever and on your toes. You have to watch everything, and be prepared for endless humiliations.

"If you have to go in through the window," he went on, "it's because you're definitely not on the list of guests; therefore, your presence is not welcome at all, so you have to work your butt off to stay. The only way I know is by possessing everybody. Scream! Demand! Advise! Make them feel that you are in charge! How could they throw you out if you're in charge?"

Remembering this scene caused a profound upheaval in me. I had buried this incident so deeply that I had forgotten all about it. What I had remembered all along, however, was his admonition to be in charge, which he must have repeated to me over and over throughout the years.

I didn't have a chance to examine this event, or ponder it, because another forgotten memory surfaced with the same force. In it, I was with the girl I had been engaged to. At that time, both of us were saving money to be married and have a house of our own. I heard myself demanding that we have a joint checking account; I wouldn't have it any other way. I felt an imperative need to lecture her on frugality. I heard myself telling her where to buy her clothes, and what the top affordable price should be.

Then I saw myself giving driving lessons to her younger sister and going veritably berserk when she said that she was planning to move out of her parents' house. Forcefully, I threatened her with canceling my lessons. She wept, confessing that she was having an affair with her boss. I jumped out of the car and began kicking the door.

However, that was not all. I heard myself telling my fiancee's father not to move to Oregon, where he planned to go. I shouted at the top of my voice that it was a stupid move. I really believed that my reasonings against it were unbeatable. I presented him with budget figures in which I had meticulously calculated his losses. When he didn't pay any attention to me, I slammed the door and left, shaking with rage. I found my fiancee in the living room, playing her guitar. I pulled it out of her hands and yelled at her that she embraced the guitar instead of playing it, as if it were more than an object.

My desire to impose my will extended all across the board. I made no distinctions; whoever was close to me was there for me to possess and mold, following my whims.

I didn't have to ponder anymore the significance of my vivid visions. For an unquestionable certainty invaded me, as if coming from outside me. It told me that my weak point was the idea that I had to be the man in the director's chair at all times. It had been a deeply ingrained concept with me that I not only had to be in charge, but I had to be in control of any situation. The way in which I had been brought up had reinforced this drive, which must have been arbitrary at it's onset, but had turned, in my adulthood, into a deep necessity.

I was aware, beyond any doubt, that what was at stake was *infinity*. Don Juan had portrayed it as a conscious force that deliberately intervenes in the lives of sorcerers. And now it was intervening in mine. I knew that *infinity* was pointing out to me, through the vivid recollection of those forgotten experiences, the intensity and the depth of my drive for control, and thus preparing me for something transcendental to myself. I knew with frightening certainty that something was going to bar any possibility of my being in control, and that I needed, more than anything else, sobriety, fluidity, and abandon in order to face the things that I felt were coming to me.

Naturally, I told all this to don Juan, elaborating to my heart's content on my speculations and inspirational insights about the possible significance of my recollections.

Don Juan laughed good-humoredly. "All this is psychological exaggeration on your part, wishful thinking," he said. "You are, as usual, seeking explanations with linear cause and effect. Each of your recollections becomes more and more vivid, more and more maddening to you, because as I told you already, you have entered an irreversible process. Your true mind is emerging, waking up from a state of lifelong lethargy.

*"Infinity* is claiming you," he continued. "Whatever means it uses to point that out to you cannot have any other reason, any other cause, any other value than that. What you should do, however, is to be prepared for the onslaughts *of infinity*. You must be in a state of continuously bracing yourself for a blow of tremendous magnitude. That is the sane, sober way in which sorcerers face *infinity."*

Don Juan's words left me with a bad taste in my mouth. I actually sensed the assault coming on me, and feared it. Since I had spent my entire life hiding behind some superfluous activity, I immersed myself in work. I gave lectures in classes taught by my friends in different schools in southern California. I wrote copiously. I could say without exaggeration that I threw dozens of manuscripts into the garbage can because they didn't fulfill an indispensable requirement that don Juan had described to me as the mark of something that is acceptable by *infinity*.

He had said that everything I did had to be an act of sorcery. An act free from encroaching expectations, fears of failure, hopes of success. Free from the cult of me; everything I did had to be impromptu, a work of magic where I freely opened myself to the impulses of the infinite.

One night, I was sitting at my desk preparing myself for my daily activity of writing. I felt a moment of grogginess. I thought that I was feeling dizzy because I had gotten up too quickly from my mat where I had been doing my exercises. My vision blurred. I saw yellow spots in front of my eyes. I thought I was going to faint. The fainting spell got worse. There was an enormous red spot in front of me. I began to breathe deeply, trying to quiet whatever agitation was causing this visual distortion. I became extraordinarily silent, to the point where I noticed that I was surrounded by impenetrable darkness. The thought crossed my mind that I had fainted. However, I could feel the chair, my desk; I could feel everything around me from inside the darkness that surrounded me.

Don Juan had said that the sorcerers of his lineage considered that one of the most coveted results of *inner silence* was a specific interplay of energy, which is always heralded by a strong emotion. He felt that my recollections were the means to agitate me to the extreme, where I would experience this interplay. Such an interplay manifested itself in terms of hues that were projected on any horizon in the world of everyday life, be it a mountain, the sky, a wall, or simply the palms of the hands. He had explained that this interplay of hues begins with the appearance of a tenuous brushstroke of lavender on the horizon. In time, this lavender brushstroke starts to expand until it covers the visible horizon, like advancing storm clouds.

He assured me that a dot of a peculiar, rich, pomegranate red shows up, as if bursting from the lavender clouds. He stated that as sorcerers become more disciplined and experienced, the dot of pomegranate expands and finally explodes into thoughts or visions, or in the case of a literate man, into written words; sorcerers either see visions engendered by energy, hear thoughts being voiced as words, or read written words.

That night at my desk, I didn't see any lavender brushstrokes, nor did I see any advancing clouds. I was sure that I didn't have the discipline that sorcerers require for such an interplay of energy, but I had an enormous dot of pomegranate red in front of me. This enormous dot, without any preliminaries, exploded into disassociated words that I read as if they were on a sheet of paper coming out of a typewriter. The words moved at such tremendous speed in front of me that it was impossible to read anything. Then I heard a voice describing something to me. Again, the speed of the voice was wrong for my ears. The words were garbled, making it impossible to hear anything that would make sense.

As if that weren't enough, I began to see liverish scenes like one sees in dreams after a heavy meal. They were baroque, dark, ominous. I began to twirl, and I did so until I got sick to my stomach. The whole event ended there. I felt the effect of whatever had happened to me in every muscle of my body. I was exhausted. This violent intervention had made me angry and frustrated.

I rushed to don Juan's house to tell him about this happening. I sensed that I needed his help more than ever.

"There's nothing gentle about sorcerers or sorcery," don Juan commented after he heard my story. "This was the first time that *infinity* descended on you in such a fashion. It was like a blitz. It was a total takeover of your faculties. Insofar as the speed of your visions is concerned, you yourself will have to learn to adjust it. For some sorcerers, that's the job of a lifetime. But from now on, energy will appear to you as if it were being projected onto a movie screen.

"Whether or not you understand the projection," he went on, "is another matter. In order to make an accurate interpretation, you need experience. My recommendation is that you shouldn't be bashful, and you should begin now. Read energy on the wall! Your true mind is emerging, and it has nothing to do with the mind that is a *foreign installation.* Let your true mind adjust the speed. Be silent, and don't fret, no matter what happens."

"But, don Juan, is all this possible? Can one actually read energy as if it were a text?" I asked, overwhelmed by the idea.

"Of course it's possible!" he retorted. "In your case, it's not only possible, it's happening to you."

"But why reading it, as if it were a text?" I insisted, but it was a rhetorical insistence.

"It's an affectation on your part," he said. "If you read the text, you could repeat it verbatim. However, if you tried to be a *viewer of infinity* instead of a *reader of infinity,* you would find that you could not describe whatever you were viewing, and you would end up babbling inanities, incapable of verbalizing what you witness. The same thing if you tried to hear it. This is, of course, specific to you. Anyway, *infinity* chooses. The *warrior-traveler* simply acquiesces to the choice.

"But above all," he added after a calculated pause, "don't be overwhelmed by the event because you cannot describe it. It is an event beyond the syntax of our language."

## Journeys Through the Dark Sea of Awareness

"WE CAN SPEAK a little more clearly now about inner *silence,"* don Juan said.

His statement was such a non sequitur that it startled me. He had been talking to me all afternoon about the vicissitudes that the Yaqui Indians had suffered after the big Yaqui wars of the twenties, when they were deported by the Mexican government from their native homeland in the state of Sonora, in northern Mexico, to work in sugarcane plantations in central and southern Mexico. The Mexican government had had problems with endemic wars with the Yaqui Indians for years. Don Juan told me some astounding, poignant Yaqui stories of political intrigue and betrayal, deprivation and human misery.

I had the feeling that don Juan was setting me up for something, because he knew that those stories were my cup of tea, so to speak. I had at that time an exaggerated sense of social justice and fair play.

"Circumstances around you have made it possible for you to have more energy," he went on. "You have started the *recapitulation* of your life; you have looked at your friends for the first time as if they were in a display window; you arrived at your breaking point, all by yourself, driven by your own needs; you canceled your business; and above all, you have accrued enough inner silence. All of these made it possible for you to make a journey through the *dark sea of awareness.*

"Meeting me in that town of our choice was that journey," he continued. "I know that a crucial question almost reached the surface in you, and that for an instant, you wondered if I really came to your house. My coming to see you wasn't a dream for you. I was real, wasn't I ?"

"You were as real as anything could be," I said.

I had nearly forgotten about those events, but I remembered that it did seem strange to me that he had found my apartment. I had discarded my astonishment by the simple process of assuming that he had asked someone for my new address, although, if I had been pressed, I wouldn't have been able to come up with the identity of anyone who would have known where I lived.

"Let us clarify this point," he continued. "In my terms, which are the terms of the sorcerers of ancient Mexico, I was as real as I could have been, and as such, I actually went to your place from my inner silence to tell you about the requisite of *infinity,* and to warn you that you were about to run out of time. And you, in turn, from your inner silence, veritably went to that town of our choice to tell me that you had succeeded in fulfilling the requisite ofin/inity.

"In your terms, which are the terms of the average man, it was a dream-fantasy in both instances. You had a dream-fantasy that I came to your place without knowing the address, and then you had a dream-fantasy that you went to see me. As far as I'm concerned, as a sorcerer, what you consider your dream-fantasy of meeting me in that town was as real as the two of us talking here today."

I confessed to don Juan that there was no possibility of my framing those events in a pattern of thought proper to Western man. I said that to think of them in terms of dream-fantasy was to create a false category that couldn't stand up under scrutiny, and that the only quasi-explanation that was vaguely possible was another aspect of his knowledge: *dreaming*.

"No, it is not *dreaming,"* he said emphatically. "This is something more direct, and more mysterious. By the way, I have a new definition of *dreaming* for you today, more in accordance with your state of being. *Dreaming* is the act of changing the point of attachment with the *dark sea of awareness*. If you view it in this fashion, it's a very simple concept, and a very simple maneuver. It takes all you have to realize it, but it's not an impossibility, nor is it something surrounded with mystical clouds.

*"Dreaming* is a term that has always bugged the hell out of me," he continued, "because it weakens a very powerful act. It makes it sound arbitrary; it gives it a sense of being a fantasy, and this is the only thing it is not. I tried to change the term myself, but it's too ingrained. Maybe someday you could change it yourself, although, as with everything else in sorcery, I am afraid that by the time you could actually do it, you won't give a damn about it because it won't make any difference what it is called anymore."

Don Juan had explained at great length, during the entire time that I had known him, that *dreaming* was an art, discovered by the sorcerers of ancient Mexico, by means of which ordinary dreams were transformed into bona-fide entrances to other worlds *of perception*. He advocated, in any way he could, the advent of something he called *dreaming attention,* which was the capacity to pay a special kind of attention, or to place a special kind of awareness on the elements of an ordinary dream.

I had followed meticulously all his recommendations and had succeeded in commanding my awareness to remain fixed on the elements of a dream. The idea that don Juan proposed was not to set out deliberately to have a desired dream, but to fix one's attention on the component elements of whatever dream presented itself.

Then don Juan had showed me energetically what the sorcerers of ancient Mexico considered to be the origin of *dreaming:* the displacement of the *assemblage point*. He said that the *assemblage point* was displaced very naturally during sleep, but that to *see* the displacement was a bit difficult because it required an aggressive mood, and that such an aggressive mood had been the predilection of the sorcerers of ancient Mexico. Those sorcerers, according to don Juan, had found all the premises of their sorcery by means of this mood.

"It is a very predatory mood," don Juan went on. "It's not difficult at all to enter into it, because man is a predator by nature. You could *see,* aggressively, anybody in this little village, or perhaps someone far away, while they are asleep; anyone would do for the purpose at hand. What's important is that you arrive at a complete sense of indifference. You are in search of something, and you are out to get it. You're going to go out looking for a person, searching like a feline, like an animal of prey, for someone to descend on."

Don Juan had told me, laughing at my apparent chagrin, that the difficulty with this technique was the mood, and that I couldn't be passive in the act of seeing, for the sight was not something to watch but to act upon. It might have been the power of his suggestion, but that day, when he had told me all this, I felt astound-ingly aggressive. Every muscle of my body was filled to the brim with energy, and in my *dreaming* practice I did go after someone. I was not interested in who that someone might have been. I needed someone who was asleep, and some force I was aware of, without being fully conscious of it, had guided me to find that someone.

I never knew who the person was, but while I was seeing that person, I felt don Juan's presence. It was a strange sensation of knowing that someone was with me by an undetermined sensation of proximity that was happening at a level of awareness that wasn't part of anything that I had ever experienced. I could only focus my attention on the individual at rest. I knew that he was a male, but I don't know how I knew that. I knew that he was asleep because the ball of energy that human beings ordinarily are was a little bit flat; it was expanded laterally.

And then I *saw* the *assemblage point* at a position different from the habitual one, which is right behind the shoulder blades. In this instance, it had been displaced to the right of where it should have been, and a bit lower. I calculated that in this case it had moved to the side of the ribs. Another thing that I noticed was that there was no stability to it. It fluctuated erratically and then abruptly went back to it's normal position. I had the clear sensation that, obviously, my presence, and don Juan's, had awakened the individual. I had experienced a profusion of blurred images right after that, and then I woke up back in the place where I had started.

Don Juan had also told me all along that sorcerers were divided into two groups: one group was *dreamers;* the other was *stalkers*. The *dreamers* were those who had a great facility for displacing the *assemblage point*. The *stalkers* were those who had a great facility for maintaining the *assemblage point* fixed on that new position. *Dreamers* and stalkers complemented each other, and worked in pairs, affecting one another with their given proclivities.

Don Juan had assured me that the displacement and the fixation of the assemblage *point* could be realized at will by means of the sorcerers' iron-handed discipline. He said that the sorcerers of his lineage believed that there were at least six hundred points within the luminous sphere that we are, that when reached at will by the assemblage *point,* can each give us a totally inclusive world; meaning that, if our assemblage *point* is displaced to any of -those points and remains fixed on it, we will perceive a world as inclusive and total as the world of everyday life, but a different world nevertheless.

Don Juan had further explained that the art of sorcery is to manipulate the assemblage point and make it change positions at will on the luminous spheres that human beings are. The result of this manipulation is a shift in the point of contact with the *dark sea of awareness,* which brings as it's concomitant a different bundle of zillions of energy fields in the form of luminous filaments that converge on the assemblage point. The consequence of new energy fields converging on the assemblage point is that awareness of a different sort than that which is necessary for perceiving the world of everyday life enters into action, turning the new energy fields into sensory data, sensory data that is interpreted and perceived as a different world because the energy fields that engender it are different from the habitual ones.

He had asserted that an accurate definition of sorcery as a practice would be to say that sorcery is the manipulation of the assemblage point for purposes of changing it's focal point of contact with the *dark sea of awareness,* thus making it possible to perceive other worlds.

Don Juan had said that the art of the stalkers enters into play after the assemblage point has been displaced. Maintaining the assemblage point fixed in it's new position assures sorcerers that they will perceive whatever new world they enter in it's absolute completeness, exactly as we do in the world of ordinary affairs. For the sorcerers of don Juan's lineage, the world of everyday life was but one fold of a total world consisting of at least six hundred folds.

Don Juan went back again to the topic under discussion: my journeys through the *dark sea of* awareness, and said that what I had done from my inner silence was very similar to what is done in dreaming when one is asleep. However, when journeying through the *dark sea of* awareness, there was no interruption of any sort caused by going to sleep, nor was there any attempt whatsoever at controlling one's attention while having a dream. The journey through the *dark sea of awareness* entailed an immediate response. There was an overpowering sensation of the here and now. Don Juan lamented the fact that some idiotic sorcerers had given the name dreaming-awake to this act of reaching the dark sea *of awareness* directly, making the term *dreaming* even more ridiculous.

"When you thought that you had the dream-fantasy of going to that town of our choice," he continued, "you had actually placed your *assemblage point* directly on a specific position on the *dark sea of awareness* that allows the journey. Then the *dark sea of awareness* supplied you with whatever was necessary to carry on that journey. There's no way whatsoever to choose that place at will. Sorcerers say that *inner silence* selects it unerringly. Simple, isn't it?"

He explained to me then the intricacies of choice. He said that choice, for *warrior-travelers,* was not really the act of choosing, but rather the act of acquiescing elegantly to the solicitations of *infinity*.

*"Infinity* chooses," he said. "The art of the *warrior-traveler is* to have the ability to move with

the slightest insinuation, the art of acquiescing to every command of *infinity*. For this, a warrior-traveler needs prowess, strength, and above everything else, sobriety. All those three put together give, as a result, elegance!"

After a moment's pause, I went back to the subject that intrigued me the most.

"But it's unbelievable that I actually went to that town, don Juan, in body and soul," I said.

"It is unbelievable, but it's not unlivable," he said. "The universe has no limits, and the possibilities at play in the universe at large are indeed incommensurable. So don't fall prey to the axiom, 'I believe only what I see, because it is the dumbest stand one can possibly take."

Don Juan's elucidation had been crystal clear. It made sense, but I didn't know where it made sense; certainly not in my daily world of usual affairs. Don Juan assured me then, unleashing a great trepidation in me, that there was only one way in which sorcerers could handle all this information: to taste it through experience, because the mind was incapable of taking in all that stimulation.

"What do you want me to do, don Juan?" I asked.

"You must deliberately journey through the *dark sea of awareness"* he replied, "but you'll never know how this is done. Let's say that inner silence does it, following inexplicable ways, ways that cannot be understood, but only practiced."

Don Juan had me sit down on my bed and adopt the position that fostered inner silence. I usually fell asleep instantly whenever I adopted this position. However, when I was with don Juan, his presence always made it impossible for me to fall asleep; instead, I entered into a veritable state of complete quietude. This time, after an instant of silence, I found myself walking. Don Juan was guiding me by holding my arm as we walked.

We were no longer in his house; we were walking in a Yaqui town I had never been in before. I knew of the town's existence; I had been close to it many times, but I had been made to turn around by the sheer hostility of the people who lived around it. It was a town where it was nearly impossible for a stranger to enter. The only non-Yaquis who had free access to that town were the supervisors from the federal bank because of the fact that the bank bought the crops from the Yaqui farmers. The endless negotiations of the Yaqui farmers revolved around getting cash advances from the bank on the basis of a near-speculation process about future crops.

I instantly recognized the town from the descriptions of people who had been there. As if to increase my astonishment, don Juan whispered in my ear that we were in the Yaqui town in question. I wanted to ask him how we had gotten there, but I couldn't articulate my words. There were a large number of Indians talking in argumentative tones; tempers seemed to flare. I didn't understand a word of what they were saying, but the moment I conceived of the thought that I couldn't understand, something cleared up. It was very much as if more light went into the scene. Things became very defined and neat, and I understood what the people were saying although I didn't know how; I didn't speak their language. The words were definitely understandable to me, not singularly, but in clusters, as if my mind could pick up whole patterns of thought.

I could say in earnest that I got the shock of a lifetime, not so much because I understood what they were saying but because of the content of what they were saying. Those people were indeed warlike. They were not Western men at all. Their propositions were propositions of strife, warfare, strategy. They were measuring their strength, their striking resources, and lamenting the fact that they had no power to deliver their blows. I registered in my body the anguish of their impotence. All they had were sticks and stones to fight high-technology weapons. They mourned the fact that they had no leaders. They coveted, more than anything else one could imagine, the rise of some charismatic fighter who could galvanize them.

I heard then the voice of cynicism; one of them expressed a thought that seemed to devastate everyone equally, including me, for I seemed to be an indivisible part of them. He said that they were defeated beyond salvation, because if at a given moment one of them had the charisma to rise up and rally them, he would be betrayed because of envy and jealousy and hurt feelings.

I wanted to comment to don Juan on what was happening to me, but I couldn't voice a single word. Only don Juan could talk.

"The Yaquis are not unique in their pettiness," he said in my ear. "It is a condition in which human beings are trapped, a condition that is not even human, but imposed from the outside."

I felt my mouth opening and closing involuntarily as I tried desperately to ask a question that I could not even conceive of. My mind was blank, void of thoughts. Don Juan and I were in the middle of a circle of people, but none of them seemed to have noticed us. I did not record any movement, reaction, or furtive glance that may have indicated that they were aware of us.

The next instant, I found myself in a Mexican town built around a railroad station, a town located about a mile and a half east of where don Juan lived. Don Juan and I were in the middle of the street by the government bank. Immediately afterward, I saw one of the strangest sights I had ever been witness to in don Juan's world. I was seeing energy as it flows in the universe, but I wasn't seeing human beings as spherical or oblong blobs of energy. The people around me were, in one instant, the normal beings of everyday life, and in the next instant, they were strange creatures. It was as if the ball of energy that we are were transparent; it was like a halo around an insectlike core. That core did not have a primate's shape. There were no skeletal pieces, so I wasn't seeing people as if I had X-ray vision that went to the bone core. At the core of people there were, rather, geometric shapes made of what seemed to be hard vibrations of matter. That core was like letters of the alphabet—a capital T seemed to be the main structural support. An inverted thick L was suspended in front of the T; the Greek letter for delta, which went almost to the floor, was at the bottom of the vertical bar of the T, and seemed to be a support for the whole structure. On top of the letter T, I saw a ropelike strand, perhaps an inch in diameter; it went through the top of the luminous sphere, as if what I was seeing were indeed a gigantic bead hanging from the top like a drooping gem.

Once, don Juan had presented to me a metaphor to describe the energetic union of strands of human beings. He had said that the sorcerers of ancient Mexico described those strands as a curtain made from beads strung on a string. I had taken this description literally, and thought that the string went through the conglomerate of energy fields that we are from head to toe. The attaching string I was seeing made the round shape of the energy fields of human beings look more like a pendant. I didn't see, however, any other creature being strung by the same string. Every single creature that I *saw* was a geometrically patterned being that had a sort of string on the upper part of it's spherical halo. The string reminded me immensely of the segmented wormlike shapes that some of us see with the eyelids half closed when we are in sunlight.

Don Juan and I walked in the town from one end to the other, and I *saw* literally scores of geometrically patterned creatures. My ability to see them was unstable in the extreme. I would see them for an instant, and then I would lose sight of them and I would be faced with average people.

Soon, I became exhausted, and I could see only normal people. Don Juan said that it was time to go back home, and again, something in me lost my usual sense of continuity. I found myself in don Juan's house without having the slightest notion as to how I had covered the distance from the town to the house. I lay down in my bed and tried desperately to recollect, to call back my memory, to probe the depths of my very being for a clue as to how I had gone to the Yaqui town, and to the railroad-station town. I didn't believe that they had been dream-fantasies, because the scenes were too detailed to be anything but real, and yet they couldn't possibly have been real.

"You're wasting your time," don Juan said, laughing. "I guarantee you that you will never know how we got from the house to the Yaqui town, and from the Yaqui town to the railroad station, and from the railroad station to the house. There was a break in the continuity of time. That is what inner *silence* does."

He patiently explained to me that the interruption of that flow of continuity that makes the world understandable to us is sorcery. He remarked that I had journeyed that day through the *dark sea of awareness,* and that I had *seen* people as they are, engaged in people's business. And then I had *seen* the strand of energy that joins specific lines of human beings.

Don Juan reiterated to me over and over that I had witnessed something specific and inexplicable. I had understood what people were saying, without knowing their language, and I had *seen* the strand of energy that connected human beings to certain other beings, and I had selected those aspects through an act of *intending* it. He stressed the fact that this *intending* I had done was not something conscious or volitional; the *intending* had been done at a deep level, and had been ruled by necessity. I needed to become cognizant of some of the possibilities of journeying through the *dark sea of awareness,* and my inner silence had guided intent—a perennial force in the universe—to fulfill that need.

## Inorganic Awareness

AT A GIVEN moment in my apprenticeship, don Juan revealed to me the complexity of his life situation. He had maintained, to my chagrin and despondency, that he lived in the shack in the state of Sonora, Mexico, because that shack depicted my state of awareness. I didn't quite believe that he really meant that I was so meager, nor did I believe that he had other places to live, as he was claiming.

It turned out that he was right on both counts. My state of awareness was very meager, and he did have other places where he could live, infinitely more comfortable than the shack where I had first found him. Nor was he the solitary sorcerer that I had thought him to be, but the leader of a group of fifteen other warrior-travelers: ten women and five men. My surprise was gigantic when he took me to his house in central Mexico, where he and his companion sorcerers lived.

"Did you live in Sonora just because of me, don Juan?" I asked him, unable to stand the responsibility, which filled me with guilt and remorse and a sensation of worthlessness.

"Well, I didn't actually live there," he said, laughing. "I just met you there."

"But-but-but you never knew when I was coming to see you, don Juan," I said. "I had no means to let you know!"

"Well, if you remember correctly," he said, "there were many, many times when you didn't find me. You had to sit patiently and wait for me, for days sometimes."

"Did you fly from here to Guaymas, don Juan?" I asked him in earnest. I thought that the shortest way would have been to take a plane.

"No, I didn't fly to Guaymas," he said with a big smile. "I flew directly, to the shack where you were waiting."

I knew that he was purposefully telling me something that my linear mind could not understand or accept, something that was confusing me no end. I was at the level of awareness, in those days, when I asked myself incessantly a fatal question: What if all that don Juan says is true?

I didn't want to ask him any more questions, because I was hopelessly lost, trying to bridge our two tracks of thought and action.

In his new surroundings, don Juan began painstakingly to instruct me in a more complex facet of his knowledge, a facet that required all my attention, a facet in which merely suspending judgment was not enough. This was the time when I had to plummet down into the depths of his knowledge. I had to cease to be objective, and at the same time I had to desist from being subjective.

One day, I was helping don Juan clean some bamboo poles in the back of his house. He asked me to put on some working gloves, because, he said, the splinters of bamboo were very sharp and easily caused infections. He directed me on how to use'a knife to clean the bamboo. I became immersed in the work. When don Juan began to talk to me, I had to stop working in order to pay attention. He told me that I had worked long enough, and that we should go into the house.

He asked me to sit down in a very comfortable armchair in his spacious, almost empty living room. He gave me some nuts, dried apricots, and slices of cheese, neatly arranged on a plate. I protested that I wanted to finish cleaning the bamboo. I didn't want to eat. But he didn't pay attention to me. He recommended that I nibble slowly and carefully, for I would need a steady supply of food in order to be alert and attentive to what he was going to tell me.

"You already know," he began, "that there exists in the universe a perennial force, which the sorcerers of ancient Mexico called the *dark sea of awareness*. While they were at the maximum of their perceiving power, they saw something that made them shake in their pantaloonies, if they were wearing any. They *saw* that the *dark sea of awareness* is responsible not only for the awareness of organisms, but also for the awareness of entities that don't have an organism."

"What is this, don Juan, beings without an organism that have awareness?" I asked, astonished, for he had never mentioned such an idea before.

"The old shamans discovered that the entire universe is composed of twin forces," he began, "forces that are at the same time opposed and complementary to each other. It is inescapable that our world is a twin world. It's opposite and complementary world is one populated by beings that have awareness, but not an organism. For this reason, the old shamans called them inorganic beings."

"And where is this world, don Juan?" I asked, munching unconsciously on a piece of dried apricot.

"Here, where you and I are sitting," he replied matter-of-factly, but laughing outright at my nervousness. "I told you that it's our twin world, so it's intimately related to us. The sorcerers of ancient Mexico didn't think like you do in terms of space and time. They thought exclusively in terms of awareness. Two types of awareness coexist without ever impinging on each other, because each type is entirely different from the other. The old shamans faced this problem of coexistence without concerning themselves with time and space. They reasoned that the degree of awareness of organic beings and the degree of awareness of *inorganic beings* were so different that both could coexist with the most minimal interference."

"Can we perceive those inorganic beings, don Juan?" I asked.

"We certainly can," he replied. "Sorcerers do it at will. Average people do it, but they don't realize that they're doing it because they are not conscious of the existence of a twin world. When they think of a twin world, they enter into all kinds of mental masturbation, but it has never occurred to them that their fantasies have their origin in a subliminal knowledge that all of us have: that we are not alone."

I was riveted by don Juan's words. Suddenly, I had become voraciously hungry. There was an emptiness in the pit of my stomach. All I could do was to listen as carefully as I could, and eat.

"The difficulty with your facing things in terms of time and space," he continued, "is that you only notice if something has landed in the space and time at your disposal, which is very limited. Sorcerers, on the other hand, have a vast field on which they can notice if something extraneous has landed. Lots of entities from the universe at large, entities that possess awareness but not an organism, land in the field of awareness of our world, or the field of awareness of it's twin world, without an average human being ever noticing them. The entities that land on our field of awareness, or the field of awareness of our twin world, belong to other worlds that exist besides our world and it's twin. The universe at large is crammed to the brim with worlds of awareness, organic and inorganic."

Don Juan continued talking and said that those sorcerers knew when inorganic awareness from other worlds besides our twin world had landed in their field of awareness. He said that as every human being on this earth would do, those shamans made endless classifications of different types of this energy that has awareness. They knew them by the general term inorganic beings.

"Do those inorganic beings have life like we have life?" I asked.

"If you think that life is to be aware, then they do have life," he said. "I suppose it would be accurate to say that if life can be measured by the intensity, the sharpness, the duration of that awareness, I can sincerely say that they are more alive than you and I."

"Do those inorganic beings die, don Juan?" I asked.

Don Juan chuckled for a moment before he answered. "If you call death the termination of awareness, yes, they die. Their awareness ends. Their death is rather like the death of a human being, and at the same time, it isn't, because the death of human beings has a hidden option. It is something like a clause in a legal document, a clause that is written in tiny letters that you can barely see. You have to use a magnifying glass to read it, and yet it's the most important clause of the document."

"What's the hidden option, don Juan?"

"Death's hidden option is exclusively for sorcerers. They are the only ones who have, to my knowledge, read the fine print. For them, the option is pertinent and functional. For average human beings, death means the termination of their awareness, the end of their organisms.

For the inorganic beings, death means the same: the end of their awareness. In both cases, the impact of death is the act of being sucked into the *dark sea of awareness*. Their individual awareness, loaded with their life experiences, breaks it's boundaries, and awareness as energy spills out into the *dark sea of awareness."*

"But what is death's hidden option that is picked up only by sorcerers, don Juan?" I asked.

"For a sorcerer, death is a unifying factor. Instead of disintegrating the organism, as is ordinarily the case, death unifies it."

"How can death unify anything?" I protested.

"Death for a sorcerer," he said, "terminates the reign of individual moods in the body. The old sorcerers believed it was the dominion of the different parts of the body that ruled the moods and the actions of the total body; parts that become dysfunctional drag the rest of the body to chaos, such as, for instance, when you yourself get sick from eating junk. In that case, the mood of your stomach affects everything else. Death eradicates the dominion of those individual parts. It unifies their awareness into one single unit."

"Do you mean that after they die, sorcerers are still aware?" I asked.

"For sorcerers, death is an act of unification that employs every bit of their energy. You are thinking of death as a corpse in front of you, a body on which decay has settled. For sorcerers, when the act of unification takes place, there is no corpse. There is no decay. Their bodies in their entirety have been turned into energy, energy possessing awareness that is not fragmented. The boundaries that are set up by the organism, boundaries which are broken down by death, are still functioning in the case of sorcerers, although they are no longer visible to the naked eye.

"I know that you are dying to ask me," he continued with a broad smile, "if whatever I'm describing is the soul that goes to hell or heaven. No, it is not the soul. What happens to sorcerers, when they pick up that hidden option of death, is that they turn into inorganic beings, very specialized, high-speed inorganic beings, beings capable of stupendous maneuvers of perception. Sorcerers enter then into what the shamans of ancient Mexico called their de/initive *journey. Infinity* becomes their realm of action."

"Do you mean by this, don Juan, that they become eternal?"

"My sobriety as a sorcerer tells me," he said, "that their awareness will terminate, the way inorganic beings' awareness terminates, but I haven't seen this happen. I have no firsthand knowledge of it. The old sorcerers believed that the awareness of this type of inorganic being would last as long as the earth is alive. The earth is their matrix. As long as it prevails, their awareness continues. To me, this is a most reasonable statement."

The continuity and order of don Juan's explanation had been, for me, superb. I had no way whatsoever in which to contribute. He left me with a sensation of mystery and unvoiced expectations to be fulfilled.

On my next visit to don Juan, I began my conversation by asking him eagerly a question that was foremost in my mind.

"Is there a possibility, don Juan, that ghosts and apparitions really exist?"

"Whatever you may call a ghost or an apparition," he said, "when it is scrutinized by a sorcerer, boils down to one issue—it is possible that any of those ghostlike apparitions may be a conglomeratation of energy fields that have awareness, and which we turn into things we know. If that's the case, then the apparitions have energy. Sorcerers call them energy-generating configurations. Or, no energy emanates from them, in which case they are phan-tasmagorical creations, usually of a very strong person—strong in terms of awareness.

"One story that intrigued me immensely," don Juan continued, "was the story you told me once about your aunt. Do you remember it?"

I had told don Juan that when I was fourteen years old I had gone to live in my father's sister's house. She lived in a gigantic house that had three patios with living accommodations in between each of them—bedrooms, living rooms, etc. The first patio was very austere, cobblestoned. They told me that it was a colonial house and this first patio was where horse-drawn carriages had gone in. The second patio was a beautiful orchard zigzagged by brick lanes of Moorish design and filled with fruit trees. The third patio was covered with flowerpots hanging from the eaves of the roof, birds in cages, and a colonial-style fountain in the middle of it with running water, as well as a large area fenced with chicken wire, set aside for my aunt's prized fighting cocks, her predilection in life.

My aunt made available to me a whole apartment right in front of the fruit orchard. I thought I was going to have the time of my life there. I could eat all the fruit that I wanted. No one else in the household touched the fruit of any of those trees, for reasons that were never revealed to me. The household was composed of my aunt, a tall, round-faced chubby lady in her fifties, very jovial, a great raconteur, and full of eccentricities that she hid behind a formal facade and the appearance of devout Catholicism. There was a butler, a tall, imposing man in his early forties who had been a sergeant-major in the army and had been lured out of the service to occupy the better-paid position of butler, bodyguard, and all-around man in my aunt's house. His wife, a beautiful young woman, was my aunt's companion, cook, and confidante. The couple also had a daughter, a chubby little girl who looked exactly like my aunt. The likeness was so strong that my aunt had adopted her legally.

Those four were the quietest people I had ever met. They lived a very sedate life, punctuated only by the eccentricities of my aunt, who, on the spur of the moment, would decide to take trips, or buy promising new fighting cocks, train them, and actually have serious contests in which enormous sums of money were involved. She tended her fighting cocks with loving care, sometimes all day long. She wore thick leather gloves and stiff leather leggings to keep the fighting cocks from spurring her.

I spent two stupendous months living in my aunt's house. She taught me music in the afternoons, and told me endless stories about my family's ancestors. My living situation was ideal for me because I used to go out with my friends and didn't have to report the time I came back to anybody. Sometimes I used to spend hours without falling asleep, lying on my bed. I used to keep my window open to let the smell of orange blossoms fill my room. Whenever I was lying there awake, I would hear someone walking down a long corridor that ran the length of the whole property on the north side, joining all the patios of the house. This corridor had beautiful arches and a tiled floor. There were four light bulbs of minimal voltage that dimly illuminated the corridor, lights that were turned on at six o'clock every evening and turned off at six in the morning.

I asked my aunt if anyone walked at night and stopped at my window, because whoever was walking always stopped by my window, turned around, and walked back again toward the main entrance of the house.

"Don't trouble yourself with nonsense, dear," my aunt said, smiling. "It's probably my butler, making his rounds. Big deal! Were you frightened?"

"No, I was not frightened," I said, "I just got curious, because your butler walks up to my room every night. Sometimes his steps wake me up."

She discarded my inquiry in a matter-of-fact fashion, saying that the butler had been a military man and was habituated to making his rounds, as a sentry would. I accepted her explanation.

One day, I mentioned to the butler that his steps were just too loud, and asked if he would make his rounds by my window with a little more care so as to let me sleep.

"I don't know what you're talking about!" he said in a gruff voice.

"My aunt told me that you make your rounds at night," I said.

"I never do such a thing!" he said, his eyes flaring with disgust.

"But who walks by my window then?"

"Nobody walks by your window. You're imagining things. Just go back to sleep. Don't go around stirring things up. I'm telling you this for your own good."

Nothing could have been worse for me in those years than someone telling me that they were doing something for my own good. That night, as soon as I began to hear the footsteps, I got out of my bed and stood behind the wall that led to the entrance of my apartment. When I calculated that whoever was walking was by the second bulb, I just stuck my head out to look down the corridor. The steps stopped abruptly, but there was no one in sight. The dimly illuminated corridor was deserted. If somebody had been walking there, they wouldn't have had time to hide because there was no place to hide. There were only bare walls.

My fright was so immense that I woke up the whole household screaming my head off. My aunt and her butler tried to calm me down by telling me that I was imagining all that, but my agitation was so intense that both of them sheepishly confessed, in the end, that something which was unknown to them walked in that house every night.

Don Juan had said that it was almost surely my aunt who walked at night; that is to say, some aspect of her awareness over which she had no volitional control. He believed that this phenomenon obeyed a sense of playfulness or mystery that she cultivated. Don Juan was sure that it was not a far-fetched idea that my aunt, at a subliminal level, was not only making all those noises happen, but that she was capable of much more complex manipulations of awareness. Don Juan had also said that to be completely fair, he had to admit the possibility that the steps were the product of *inorganic awareness.*

Don Juan said that the *inorganic beings* who populated our twin world were considered, by the sorcerers of his lineage, to be our relatives. Those shamans believed that it was futile to make friends with our family members because the demands levied on us for such friendships were always exorbitant. He said that that type of inorganic *being,* who are our /irst cousins, communicate with us incessantly, but that their communication with us is not at the level of conscious awareness. In other words, we know all about them in a subliminal way, while they know all about us in a deliberate, conscious manner.

"The energy from our first cousins is a drag!" don Juan went on. "They are as fucked up as we are. Let's say that the organic and inorganic beings of our twin worlds are the children of two sisters who live next door to each other. They are exactly alike although they look different. They cannot help us, and we cannot help them. Perhaps we could join together, and make a fabulous family business corporation, but that hasn't happened. Both branches of the family are extremely touchy and take offense over nothing, a typical relationship between touchy first cousins. The crux of the matter, the sorcerers of ancient Mexico believed, is that both human beings and inorganic beings from the twin worlds are profound egomaniacs."

According to don Juan, another classification that the sorcerers of ancient Mexico made of the inorganic beings was that of scouts, or *explorers,* and by this they meant inorganic beings that came from the depths of the universe, and which were possessors of awareness infinitely sharper and faster than that of human beings. Don Juan asserted that the old sorcerers had spent generations polishing their classification schemes, and their conclusions were that certain types of inorganic beings from the category of scouts or *explorers,* because of their vivaciousness, were akin to man. They could make liaisons and establish a symbiotic relation with men. The old sorcerers called these kinds of inorganic beings the allies.

Don Juan explained that the crucial mistake of those shamans with reference to this type of inorganic being was to attribute human characteristics to that impersonal energy and to believe that they could harness it. They thought of those blocks of energy as their helpers, and they relied on them without comprehending that, being pure energy, they didn't have the power to sustain any effort.

"I've told you all there is to know about inorganic beings," don Juan said abruptly. "The only way you can put this to the test is by means of direct experience."

I didn't ask him what he wanted me to do. A deep fear made my body rattle with nervous spasms that burst like a volcanic eruption from my solar plexus and extended down to the tips of my toes and up to my upper trunk.

"Today, we will go to look for some inorganic beings," he announced.

Don Juan ordered me to sit on my bed and adopt again the position that fostered inner silence. I followed his command with unusual ease. Normally, I would have been reluctant, perhaps not overtly, but I would have felt a twinge of reluctance nonetheless. I had a vague thought that by the time I sat down, I was already in a state of *inner silence*. My thoughts were no longer clear. I felt an impenetrable darkness surrounding me, making me feel as if I were falling asleep. My body was utterly motionless, either because I had no intention of setting up any commands to move or because I just couldn't formulate them.

A moment later, I found myself with don Juan, walking in the Sonoran desert. I recognized the surroundings; I had been there with him so many times that I had memorized every feature of it. It was the end of the day, and the light of the setting sun created in me a mood of desperation. I walked automatically, aware that I was feeling in my body sensations that were not accompanied by thoughts. I was not describing to myself my state of being. I wanted to tell this to don Juan, but the desire to communicate my bodily sensations to him vanished in an instant.

Don Juan said, very slowly, and in a low, grave voice, that the dry riverbed on which we were walking was a most appropriate place for our business at hand, and that I should sit on a small boulder, alone, while he went and sat on another boulder about fifty feet away. I didn't ask don Juan, as I ordinarily would have, what I was supposed to do. I knew what I had to do. I heard then the rustling steps of people walking through the bushes that were sparsely scattered around. There wasn't enough moisture in the area to allow the heavy growth of underbrush. Some sturdy bushes grew there, with a space of perhaps ten or fifteen feet between them.

I saw then two men approaching. They seemed to be local men, perhaps Yaqui Indians from one of the Yaqui towns in the vicinity. They came and stood by me. One of them nonchalantly asked me how I had been. I wanted to smile at him, laugh, but I couldn't. My face was extremely rigid. Yet I was ebullient. I wanted to jump up and down, but I couldn't. I told him that I had been fine. Then I asked them who they were. I said to them that I didn't know them, and yet I sensed an extraordinary familiarity with them. One of the men said, matter-of-factly, that they were my *allies*.

I stared at them, trying to memorize their features, but their features changed. They seemed to mold themselves to the mood of my stare. No thoughts were involved. Everything was a matter guided by visceral sensations. I stared at them long enough to erase their features completely, and finally, I was facing two shiny blobs of luminosity that vibrated. The blobs of luminosity did not have boundaries. They seemed to sustain themselves cohesively from within. At times, they became flat, wide. Then they would take on a verticality again, at the height of a man.

Suddenly, I felt don Juan's arm hooking my right arm and pulling me from the boulder. He said that it was time to go. The next moment, I was in his house again, in central Mexico, more bewildered than ever.

"Today, you found *inorganic awareness,* and then you *saw* it as it really is," he said. "Energy is the irreducible residue of everything. As far as we are concerned, to *see* energy directly is the bottom line for a human being. Perhaps there are other things beyond that, but they are not available to us."

Don Juan asserted all this over and over, and every time he said it, his words seemed to solidify me more and more, to help me return to my normal state.

I told don Juan everything I had witnessed, everything I had heard. Don Juan explained to me that I had succeeded that day in transforming the anthropomorphic shape of the inorganic beings into their essence: impersonal energy aware of itself.

"You must realize," he said, "that it is our cognition, which is in essence an interpretation system, that curtails our resources. Our interpretation system is what tells us what the parameters of our possibilities are, and since we have been using that system of interpretation all our lives, we cannot possibly dare to go against it's dictums.

"The energy of those inorganic beings pushes us," don Juan went on, "and we interpret that push as we may, depending on our mood. The most sober thing to do, for a sorcerer, is to relegate those entities to an abstract level. The fewer interpretations sorcerers make, the better off they are.

"From now on," he continued, "whenever you are confronted with the strange sight of an apparition, hold your ground and gaze at it with an inflexible attitude. If it is an *inorganic being,* your interpretation of it will fall off like dead leaves. If nothing happens, it is just a chicken-shit aberration of your mind, which is not your mind anyway."

## The Clear View

FOR THE FIRST time in my life, I found myself in a total quandary as to how to behave in the world. The world around me had not changed. It definitely stemmed from a flaw in me. Don Juan's influence and all the activities stemming from his practices, into which he had engaged me so deeply, were taking their toll on me and were causing in me a serious incapacity to deal with my fellow men. I examined my problem and concluded that my flaw was my compulsion to measure everyone using don Juan as a yardstick.

Don Juan was, in my estimate, a being who lived his life professionally, in every aspect of the term, meaning that every one of his acts, no matter how insignificant, counted. I was surrounded by people who believed that they were immortal beings, who contradicted themselves every step of the way; they were beings whose acts could never be accounted for. It was an unfair game; the cards were stacked against the people I encountered. I was accustomed to don Juan's unalterable behavior, to his total lack of self-importance, and to the unfathomable scope of his intellect; very few of the people I knew were even aware that there existed another pattern of behavior that fostered those qualities. Most of them knew only the behavioral pattern of self-reflection, which renders men weak and contorted.

Consequently, I was having a very difficult time in my academic studies. I was losing sight of them. I tried desperately to find a rationale that would justify my academic endeavors. The only thing that came to my aid and gave me a connection, however flimsy, to academia was the recommendation that don Juan had made to me once that *warrior-travelers* should have a romance with knowledge, in whatever form knowledge was presented.

He had defined the concept of *warrior-travelers,* saying that it referred to sorcerers who, by being warriors, traveled in the *dark sea of* awareness. He had added that human beings were travelers of the *dark sea of awareness,* and that this Earth was but a station on their journey; for extraneous reasons, which he didn't care to divulge at the time, the travelers had interrupted their voyage. He said that human beings were caught in a sort of eddy, a current that went in circles, giving them the impression of moving while they were, in essence, stationary. He maintained that sorcerers were the only opponents of whatever force kept human beings prisoners, and that by means of their discipline sorcerers broke loose from it's grip and continued their journey *of awareness.*

What precipitated the final chaotic upheaval in my academic life was my incapacity to focus my interest on topics of anthropological concern that didn't mean a hoot to me, not because of their lack of appeal but because they were mostly matters where words and concepts had to be manipulated, as in a legal document, to obtain a given result that would establish precedents. It was argued that human knowledge is built in such a fashion, and that the effort of every individual was a building block in constructing a system of knowledge. The example that was put to me was that of the legal system by which we live, and which is of invaluable importance to us. However, my romantic notions at the time impeded me from conceiving of myself as a barrisfer-at-anthropology. I had bought, lock, stock, and barrel, the concept that anthropology should be the matrix of all human endeavor, or the measure of man.

Don Juan, a consummate pragmatist, a true warrior-traveler of the unknown, said that I was full of prunes. He said that it didn't matter that the anthropological topics proposed to me were maneuvers of words and concepts, that what was important was the exercise of discipline.

"It doesn't make any difference," he said to me one time, "how good a reader you are, and how many wonderful books you can read. What's important is that you have the discipline to read what you don't want to read. The crux of the sorcerers' exercise of going to school is in what you refuse, not in what you accept."

I decided to take some time off from my studies and went to work in the art department of a company that made decals. My job engaged my efforts and thoughts to their fullest extent. My challenge was to carry out the tasks assigned to me as perfectly and as rapidly as I could. To set up the vinyl sheets with the images to be processed by silk-screening into decals was a standard procedure that wouldn't admit of any innovation, and the efficiency of the worker was measured by exactness and speed. I became a workaholic and enjoyed myself tremendously.

The director of the art department and I became fast friends. He practically took me under his wing. His name was Ernest Lipton. I admired and respected him immensely. He was a fine artist and a magnificent craftsman. His flaw was his softness, his incredible consideration for others, which bordered on passivity.

For example, one day we were driving out of the parking lot of a restaurant where we had eaten lunch. Very politely, he waited for another car to pull out of the parking space in front of him. The driver obviously didn't see us and began to back out at a considerable speed. Ernest Lipton could easily have blown his horn to attract the man's attention to watch where he was going. Instead, he sat, grinning like an idiot as the guy crashed into his car. Then he turned and apologized to me.

"Gee, I could have blown my horn," he said, "but it's so fucking loud, it embarrasses me."

The guy who had backed up into Ernest's car was furious and had to be placated.

"Don't worry," Ernest said. "There is no damage to your car. Besides, you only smashed my headlights; I was going to replace them anyway."

Another day, in the same restaurant, some Japanese people, clients of the decal company and his guests for lunch, were talking animatedly to us, asking questions. The waiter came with the food and cleared the table of some of the salad plates, making room, the best way he could on the narrow table, for the huge hot plates of the entree. One of the Japanese clients needed more space. He pushed his plate forward; the push set Ernest's plate in motion and it began to slide off the table. Again, Ernest could have warned the man, but he didn't. He sat there grinning until the plate fell in his lap.

On another occasion, I went to his house to help him put up some rafters over his patio, where he was going to let a grape vine grow for partial shade and fruit. We prearranged the rafters into a huge frame and then lifted one side and bolted it to some beams. Ernest was a tall, very strong man, and using a length of two-by-four as a hoisting device, he lifted the other end for me to fit the bolts into holes that were already drilled into the supporting beams. But before I had a chance to put in the bolts there was an insistent knock on the door and Ernest asked me to see who it was while he held the frame of rafters.

His wife was at the door with her grocery packages. She engaged me in a lengthy conversation and I forgot about Ernest. I even helped her to put her groceries away. In the middle of arranging her celery bundles, I remembered that my friend was still holding the frame of rafters, and knowing him, I knew that he would still be at the job, expecting everybody else to have the consideration that he himself had. I rushed desperately to the backyard, and there he was on the ground. He had collapsed from the exhaustion of holding the heavy wooden frame. He looked like a rag doll. We had to call his friends to lend a hand and hoist up the frame of rafters—he couldn't do it anymore. He had to go to bed. He thought for sure that he had a hernia.

The classic story about Ernest Lipton was that one day he went hiking for the weekend in the San Bernardino Mountains with some friends. They camped in the mountains for the night. While everybody was sleeping, Ernest Lipton went to the bushes, and being such a considerate man, he walked some distance from the camp so as not to bother anybody. He slipped in the darkness and rolled down the side of the mountain. He told his friends afterward that he knew for a fact that he was falling to his death at the bottom of the valley. He was lucky in that he grabbed on to a ledge with the tips of his fingers; he held on to it for hours, searching in the dark with his feet for any support, because his arms were about to give in—he was going to hold on until his death. By extending his legs as wide as he could, he found tiny protuberances in the rock that helped him to hold on. He stayed stuck to the rock, like the decals that he made, until there was enough light for him to realize that he was only a foot from the ground.

"Ernest, you could have yelled for help!" his friends complained.

"Gee, I didn't think there was any use," he replied. "Who could have heard me? I thought I had rolled down at least a mile into the valley. Besides, everyone was asleep."

The final blow came for me when Ernest Lipton, who spent two hours daily commuting back and forth from his house to the shop, decided to buy an economy car, a Volkswagen Beetle, and began measuring how many miles he got per gallon of gasoline. I was extremely surprised when he announced one morning that he had reached 125 miles per gallon. Being a very exact man, he qualified his statement, saying that most of his driving was not done in the city, but on the freeway, although at the peak hour of traffic, he had to slow down and accelerate quite often. A week later, he said that he had reached the 250-mile-per-gallon mark.

This marvelous event escalated until he reached an unbelievable figure: 645 miles to a gallon. His friends told him that he should enter this figure into the logs of the Volkswagen company. Ernest Lipton was as pleased as punch, and gloated, saying that he wouldn't know what to do if he reached the thousand-mile mark. His friends told him that he should claim a miracle.

This extraordinary situation went on until one morning when he caught one of his friends, who for months had been playing the oldest gag in the book on him, adding gasoline to his tank. Every morning he had been adding three or four cups so that Ernest's gas gauge was never on empty.

Ernest Lipton was nearly angry. His harshest comment was, "Gee! Is this supposed to be funny?"

I had known for weeks that his friends were playing that gag on him, but I was unable to intervene. I felt that it was none of my business. The people who were playing the gag on Ernest Lipton were his lifelong friends. I was a newcomer. When I saw his look of disappointment and hurt, and his incapacity to get angry, I felt a wave of guilt and anxiety. I was facing again an old enemy of mine. I despised Ernest Lipton, and at the same time, I liked him immensely. He was helpless.

The real truth of the matter was that Ernest Lipton looked like my father. His thick glasses and his receding hairline, as well as the stubble of graying beard that he could never quite shave completely, brought my father's features to mind. He had the same straight, pointed nose and pointed chin. But seeing Ernest Lipton's inability to get angry and punch the jokers in the nose was what really clinched his likeness to my father for me and pushed it beyond the threshold of safety.

I remembered how my father had been madly in love with the sister of his best friend. I spotted her one day in a resort town, holding hands with a young man. Her mother was with her as a chaperone. The girl seemed so happy. The two young people looked at each other, enraptured. As far as I could see, it was young love at it's best. When I saw my father, I told him, relishing every instant of my recounting with all the malice of my ten years, that his girlfriend had a real boyfriend. He was taken aback. He didn't believe me.

"But have you said anything at all to the girl?" I asked him daringly. "Does she know that you are in love with her?"

"Don't be stupid, you little creep!" he snapped at me. "I don't have to tell any woman any shit of that sort!" Like a spoiled child, he looked at me petulantly, his lips trembling with rage.

"She's mine! She should know that she's my woman without my having to tell her anything!"

He declared all this with the certainty of a child who has had everything in life given to him without having to fight for it.

At the apex of my form, I delivered my punch line. "Well," I said, "I think she expected someone to tell her that, and someone has just beaten you to it."

I was prepared to jump out of his reach and run because I thought he would slash at me with all the fury in the world, but instead, he crumpled down and began to weep. He asked me, sobbing uncontrollably, that since I was capable of anything, would I please spy on the girl for him and tell him what was going on?

I despised my father beyond anything I could say, and at the same time I loved him, with a sadness that was unmatched. I cursed myself for precipitating that shame on him.

Ernest Lipton reminded me of my father so much that I quit my job, alleging that I had to go back to school. I didn't want to increase the burden that I already carried on my shoulders. I had never forgiven myself for causing my father that anguish, and I had never forgiven him for being so cowardly.

I went back to school and began the gigantic task of reintegrating myself into my studies of anthropology. What made this reinte-gration very difficult was the fact that if there was someone I could have worked with with ease and delight because of his admirable touch, his daring curiosity, and his willingness to expand his knowledge without getting flustered or defending indefensible points, it was someone outside my department, an archaeologist. It was because of his influence that I had become interested in fieldwork in the first place. Perhaps because of the fact that he actually went into the field, literally to dig out information, his practicality was an oasis of sobriety for me. He was the only one who had encouraged me to go ahead and do field-work because I had nothing to lose.

"Lose it all, and you'll gain it all," he told me once, the soundest advice that I ever got in academia. If I followed don Juan's advice, and worked toward correcting my obsession with self-reflection, I veritably had nothing to lose and everything to gain. But this possibility hadn't been in the cards for me at that time.

When I told don Juan about the difficulty I encountered in finding a professor to work with, I thought that his reaction to what I'd said was vicious. He called me a petty fart, and worse. He told me what I already knew: that if I were not so tense, I could have worked successfully with anybody in academia, or in business.

*"Warrior-travelers* don't complain," don Juan went on. "They take everything that *infinity* hands them as a challenge. A challenge is a challenge. It isn't personal. It cannot be taken as a curse or a blessing. A *warrior-traveler* either wins the challenge or the challenge demolishes him. It's more exciting to win, so win!"

I told him that it was easy for him or anyone else to say that, but to carry it out was another matter, and that my tribulations were insoluble because they originated in the incapacity of my fellow men to be consistent.

"It's not the people around you who are at fault," he said. "They cannot help themselves. The fault is with you, because you can help yourself, but you are bent on judging them, at a deep level of silence. Any idiot can judge. If you judge them, you will only get the worst out of them. All of us human beings are prisoners, and it is that prison that makes us act in such a miserable way. Your challenge is to take people as they are! Leave people alone."

"You are absolutely wrong this time, don Juan," I said. "Believe me, I have no interest whatsoever in judging them, or entangling myself with them in any way."

"You do understand what I'm talking about," he insisted doggedly. "If you're not conscious of your desire to judge them," he continued, "you are in even worse shape than I thought. This is the flaw of *warrior-travelers* when they begin to resume their journeys. They get cocky, out of hand."

I admitted to don Juan that my complaints were petty in the extreme. I knew that much. I said to him that I was confronted with daily events, events that had the nefarious quality of wearing down all my resolve, and that I was embarrassed to relate to don Juan the incidents that weighed heavily on my mind.

"Come on," he urged me. "Out with it! Don't have any secrets from me. I'm an empty tube.

Whatever you say to me will be projected out into *infinity*."

"All I have are miserable complaints," I said. "I am exactly like all the people I know. There's no way to talk to a single one of them without hearing an overt or a covert complaint."

I related to don Juan how in even the simplest dialogues my friends managed to sneak in an endless number of complaints, such as in a dialogue like this one:

"How is everything, Jim?"

"Oh, fine, fine, Cal." A huge silence would follow.

I would be obliged to say, "Is there something wrong, Jim?"

"No! Everything's great. I have a bit of a problem with Mel, but you know how Mel is—selfish and shitty. But you have to take your friends as they come, true? He could, of course, have a little more consideration. But what the fuck. He's himself. He always puts the burden on you—take me or leave me. He's been doing that since we were twelve, so it's really my fault. Why in the fuck do I have to take him?"

"Well, you're right, Jim, you know Mel is very hard, yes. Yeah!"

"Well, speaking of shitty people, you're no better than Mel, Cal. I can never count on you," etc.

Another classic dialogue was:

"How are you doing, Alex? How's your married life?"

"Oh, just great. For the first time, I'm eating on time, home-cooked meals, but I'm getting fat. There's nothing for me to do except watch TV. I used to go out with you guys, but now I can't. Theresa doesn't let me. Of course, I could tell her to go and fuck herself, but I don't want to hurt her. I feel content, but miserable."

And Alex had been the most miserable guy before he got married. He was the one whose classic joke was to tell his friends, every time we ran into him, "Hey, come to my car, I want to introduce you to my bitch."

He enjoyed himself pink with our crushed expectations when we would see that what he had in his car was a female dog. He introduced his "bitch" to all his friends. We were shocked when he actually married Theresa, a long-distance runner. They met at a marathon when Alex fainted. They were in the mountains, and Theresa had to revive him by any means, so she pissed on his face. After that, Alex was her prisoner. She had marked her territory. His friends used to say, "Her pissy prisoner." His friends thought she was the true bitch who had turned weird Alex into a fat dog.

Don Juan and I laughed for a while. Then he looked at me with a serious expression.

"These are the ups and downs of daily living," don Juan said. "You win, and you lose, and you don't know when you win or when you lose. This is the price one pays for living under the rule of self-reflection. There is nothing that I can say to you, and there's nothing that you can say to yourself. I could only recommend that you not feel guilty because you're an asshole, but that. you strive to end the dominion of self-reflection. Go back to school. Don't give up yet."

My interest in remaining in academia was waning considerably. I began to live on automatic pilot. I felt heavy, despondent. However, I noticed that my mind was not involved. I didn't calculate any thing, or set up any goals or expectations of any sort. My thoughts were not obsessive, but my feelings were. I tried to conceptualize this dichotomy between a quiet mind and turbulent feelings. It was in this frame of mindlessness and overwhelmed feelings that I walked one day from Haines Hall, where the anthropology department was, to the cafeteria to eat my lunch.

I was suddenly accosted by a strange tremor. I thought I was going to faint, and I sat down on some brick steps. I saw yellow spots in front of my eyes. I had the sensation that I was spinning. I was sure that I was going to get sick to my stomach. My vision became blurry, and finally I couldn't see a thing. My physical discomfort was so total and intense that it didn't leave room for a single thought. I had only bodily sensations of fear and anxiety mixed with elation, and a strange anticipation that I was at the threshold of a gigantic event. They were sensations without the counterpart of thought. At a given moment, I no longer knew whether I was sitting or standing. I was surrounded by the most impenetrable darkness one can imagine, and then, I *saw* energy as it flowed in the universe.

I saw a succession of luminous spheres walking toward me or away from me. I *saw* them. one at a time, as don Juan had always told me one sees them. I knew they were different individuals because of their differences in size. I examined the details of their structures. Their luminosity and their roundness were made of fibers that seemed to be stuck together. They were thin or thick fibers. Every one of those luminous figures had a thick, shaggy covering. They looked like some strange, luminous, furry animals, or gigantic round insects covered with luminous hair.

What was the most shocking thing to me was the realization that I had seen those furry insects all my life. Every occasion on which don Juan had made me deliberately see them seemed to me at that moment to be like a detour that I had taken with him. I remembered every instance of his help in making me see people as luminous spheres, and all of those instances were set apart from the bulk of *seeing* to which I was having access now. I knew then, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that I had perceived energy as it flows in the universe all my life, on my own, without anybody's help.

Such a realization was overwhelming to me. I felt infinitely vulnerable, frail. I needed to seek cover, to hide somewhere. It was exactly like the dream that most of us seem to have at one time or another in which we find ourselves naked and don't know what to do. I felt more than naked; I felt unprotected, weak, and I dreaded returning to my normal state. In a vague way, I sensed that I was lying down. I braced myself for my return to normality. I conceived of the idea that I was going to find myself lying on the brick walk, twitching convulsively, surrounded by a whole circle of spectators.

The sensation that I was lying down became more and more accentuated. I felt that I could move my eyes. I could see light through my closed eyelids, but I dreaded opening them. The odd part was that I didn't hear any of those people that I imagined were around me. I heard no noise at all. At last, I ventured opening my eyes. I was on my bed, in my office apartment by the corner of Wilshire and Westwood boulevards.

I became quite hysterical upon finding myself in my bed. But for some reason that was beyond my grasp, I calmed down almost immediately. My hysteria was replaced by a bodily indifference, or by a state of bodily satisfaction, something like what one feels after a good meal. However, I could not quiet my mind. It had been the most shocking thing imaginable for me to realize that I had perceived energy directly all my life. How in the world could it have been possible that I hadn't known? What had been preventing me from gaining access to that facet of my being? Don Juan had said that every human being has the potential to *see*-energy directly. What he hadn't said was that every human being already sees energy directly but doesn't know it.

I put that question to a psychiatrist friend. He couldn't shed any light on my quandary. He thought that my reaction was the result of fatigue and overstimulation. He gave me a prescription for Valium and told me to rest.

I hadn't dared mention to anyone that I had woken up in my bed without being able to account for how I had gotten there. Therefore, my haste to see don Juan was more than justified. I flew to Mexico City as soon as I could, rented a car, and drove to where he lived.

"You've done all this before!" don Juan said, laughing, when I narrated my mind-boggling experience to him. "There are only two things that are new. One is that now you have perceived energy all by yourself. What you did was to *stop the world,* and then you realized that you have always *seen* energy as it flows in the universe, as every human being does, but without knowing it deliberately. The other new thing is that you have traveled from your *inner silence* all by yourself.

"You know, without my having to tell you, that anything is possible if one departs from *inner silence*. This time your fear and vulnerability made it possible for you to end up in your bed, which is not really that far from the UCLA campus. If you would not indulge in your surprise, you would realize that what you did is nothing, nothing extraordinary for a *warrior-traveler*.

"But the issue which is of the utmost importance isn't knowing that you have always perceived energy directly, or your journeying from *inner silence,* but, rather, a twofold affair. First, you experienced something which the sorcerers of ancient Mexico called the *clear view,* or losing *the human form:* the time when human pettiness vanishes, as if it had been a patch of fog looming over us, a fog that slowly clears up and dissipates. But under no circumstances must you believe that this is an accomplished fact. The sorcerers' world is not an immutable world like the world of everyday life, where they tell you that once you reach a goal, you remain a winner forever. In the sorcerers' world, to arrive at a certain goal means that you have simply acquired the most efficient tools to continue your fight, which, by the way, will never end.

"The second part of this twofold matter is that you experienced the most maddening question for the hearts of human beings. You expressed it yourself when you asked yourself the questions: 'How in the world could it have been possible that I didn't know that I had perceived energy directly all my life? What had been preventing me from gaining access to that facet of my being?'"

## Mud Shadows

TO SIT IN silence with don Juan was one of the most enjoyable experiences I knew. We were comfortably sitting on some stuffed chairs in the back of his house in the mountains of central Mexico. It was late afternoon. There was a pleasant breeze. The sun was behind the house, at our backs. It's fading light created exquisite shades of green in the big trees in the backyard.

There were big trees growing around his house, and beyond it, which obliterated the sight of the city where he lived. This always gave me the impression that I was in the wilderness, a different wilderness than the barren Sonoran desert, but wilderness nonetheless.

"Today, we're going to discuss a most serious topic in sorcery," don Juan said abruptly, "and we're going to begin by talking about the *energy body*."

He had described the *energy body* to me countless times, saying that it was a conglomerate of energy fields, the mirror image of the conglomerate of energy fields that makes up the physical body when it is *seen* as energy that flows in the universe. He had said that it was smaller, more compact, and of heavier appearance than the luminous sphere of the physical body.

Don Juan had explained that the body and the *energy body* were two conglomerates of energy fields compressed together by some strange agglutinizing force. He had emphasized no end that the force that binds that group of energy fields together was, according to the sorcerers of ancient Mexico, the most mysterious force in the universe. His personal estimation was that it was the pure essence of the entire cosmos, the sum total of everything there is.

He had asserted that the physical body and 'the *energy body* were the only counterbalanced energy configurations in our realm as human beings. He accepted, therefore, no other dualism than the one between these two. The dualism between body and mind, spirit and flesh, he considered to be a mere concatenation of the mind, emanating from it without any energetic foundation.

Don Juan had said that by means of discipline it is possible for anyone to bring the *energy body* closer to the physical body. Normally, the distance between the two is enormous. Once the *energy body is* within a certain range, which varies for each of us individually, anyone, through discipline, can forge it into the exact replica of their physical body—that is to say, a three-dimensional, solid being. Hence the sorcerers' idea of the *other* or the *double*. By the same token, through the same processes of discipline, anyone can forge their three-dimensional, solid physical body to be a perfect replica of their energy *body*—that is to say, an ethereal charge of energy invisible to the human eye, as all energy is.

When don Juan had told me all about this, my reaction had been to ask him if he was describing a mythical proposition. He had replied that there was nothing mythical about sorcerers. Sorcerers were practical beings, and what they described was always something quite sober and down-to-earth. According to don Juan, the difficulty in understanding what sorcerers did was that they proceeded from a different *cognitive system*.

Sitting at the back of his house in central Mexico that day, don Juan said that the *energy body* was of key importance in whatever was taking place in my life. He *saw* that it was an *energetic fact* that my *energy body,* instead of moving away from me, as it normally happens, was approaching me with great speed.

"What does it mean, that it's approaching me, don Juan?" I asked.

"It means that something is going to knock the daylights out of you," he said, smiling. "A tremendous degree of control is going to come into your life, but not your control, the energy *body's* control."

"Do you mean, don Juan, that some outside force will control me?" I asked.

"There are scores of outside forces controlling you at this moment," don Juan replied. "The control that I am referring to is something outside the domain of language. It is your control and at the same time it is not. It cannot be classified, but it can certainly be experienced. And above all, it can certainly be manipulated. Remember this: It can be manipulated, to your total advantage, of course, which again, is not your advantage, but the *energy body's* advantage. However, the energy *body* is you, so we could go on forever like dogs biting their own tails, trying to describe this. Language is inadequate. All these experiences are beyond syntax."

Darkness had descended very quickly, and the foliage of the trees that had been glowing green a little while before was now very dark and heavy. Don Juan said that if I paid close attention to the darkness of the foliage without focusing my eyes, but sort of looked at it from the comer of my eye, I would see a fleeting shadow crossing my field of vision.

"This is the appropriate time of day for doing what I am asking you to do," he said. "It takes a moment to engage the necessary attention in you to do it. Don't stop until you catch that fleeting

black shadow."

I did see some strange fleeting black shadow projected on the foliage of the trees. It was either one shadow going back and forth or various fleeting shadows moving from left to right or right to left or straight up in the air. They looked like fat black fish to me, enormous fish. It was as if gigantic swordfish were flying in the air. I was engrossed in the sight. Then, finally, it scared me. It became too dark to see the foliage, yet I could still see the fleeting black shadows.

"What is it, don Juan?" I asked. "I see fleeting black shadows all over the place."

"Ah, that's the universe at large," he said, "incommensurable, nonlinear, outside the realm of syntax. The sorcerers of ancient Mexico were the first ones to see those fleeting shadows, so they followed them around. They saw them as you're seeing them, and they saw them as energy that flows in the universe. And they did discover something transcendental."

He stopped talking and looked at me. His pauses were perfectly placed. He always stopped talking when I was hanging by a thread.

"What did they discover, don Juan?" I asked.

"They discovered that we have a companion for life," he said, as clearly as he could. "We have a predator that came from the depths of the cosmos and took over the rule of our lives. Human beings are it's prisoners. The predator is our lord and master. It has rendered us docile, helpless. If we want to protest, it suppresses our protest. If we want to act independently, it demands that we don't do so."

It was very dark around us, and that seemed to curtail any expression on my part. If it had been daylight, I would have laughed my head off. In the dark, I felt quite inhibited.

"It's pitch black around us," don Juan said, "but if you look out of the corner of your eye, you will still see fleeting shadows jumping all around you."

He was right. I could still see them. Their movement made me dizzy. Don Juan turned on the light, and that seemed to dissipate everything.

"You have arrived, by your effort alone, to what the shamans of ancient Mexico called the topic of topics," don Juan said. "I have been beating around the bush all this time, insinuating to you that something is holding us prisoner. Indeed we are held prisoner! This was an *energetic fact* for the sorcerers of ancient Mexico."

"Why has this predator taken over in the fashion that you're describing, don Juan?" I asked. "There must be a logical explanation.

"There is an explanation," don Juan replied, "which is the simplest explanation in the world. They took over because we are food for them, and they squeeze us mercilessly because we are their sustenance. Just as we rear chickens in chicken coops, *gallineros,* the predators rear us in human coops, *humaneros*. Therefore, their food is always available to them."

I felt that my head was shaking violently from side to side. I could not express my profound sense of unease and discontentment, but my body moved to bring it to the surface. I shook from head to toe without any volition on my part.

"No, no, no, no," I heard myself saying. "This is absurd, don Juan. What you're saying is something monstrous. It simply can't be true, for sorcerers or for average men, or for anyone."

"Why not?" don Juan asked calmly. "Why not? Because it infuriates you?"

"Yes, it infuriates me," I retorted. "Those claims are monstrous!"

"Well," he said, "you haven't heard all the claims yet. Wait a bit longer and see how you feel. I'm going to subject you to a blitz. That is, I'm going to subject your mind to tremendous onslaughts, and you cannot get up and leave because you're caught. Not because I'm holding you prisoner, but because something in you will prevent you from leaving, while another part of you is going to go truthfully berserk. So brace yourself!"

There was something in me which was, I felt, a glutton for punishment. He was right. I wouldn't have left the house for the world. And yet I didn't like one bit the inanities he was spouting.

"I want to appeal to your analytical mind," don Juan said. "Think for a moment, and tell me how you would explain the contradiction between the intelligence of man the engineer and the stupidity of his systems of beliefs, or the stupidity of his contradictory behavior. Sorcerers believe that the predators have given us our systems of beliefs, our ideas of good and evil, our social mores. They are the ones who set up our hopes and expectations and dreams of success or failure. They have given us cov-etousness, greed, and cowardice. It is the predators who make us complacent, routinary, and egomaniacal."

"But how can they do this, don Juan?" I asked, somehow angered further by what he was saying. "Do they whisper all that in our ears while we are asleep?"

"No, they don't do it that way. That's idiotic!" don Juan said, smiling. "They are infinitely more efficient and organized than that. In order to keep us obedient and meek and weak, the predators engaged themselves in a stupendous maneuver—stupendous, of course, from the point of view of a fighting strategist. A horrendous maneuver from the point of view of those who suffer it. They gave us their mind! Do you hear me? The predators give us their mind, which becomes our mind. The predators' mind is baroque, contradictory, morose, filled with the fear of being discovered any minute now.

"I know that even though you have never suffered hunger," he went on, "you have food anxiety, which is none other than the anxiety of the predator who fears that any moment now it's maneuver is going to be uncovered and food is going to be denied. Through the mind, which, after all, is their mind, the predators inject into the lives of human beings whatever is convenient for them. And they ensure, in this manner, a degree of security to act as a buffer against their fear."

"It's not that I can't accept all this at face value, don Juan," I said. "I could, but there's something so odious about it that it actually repels me. It forces me to take a contradictory stand. If it's true that they eat us, how do they do it?"

Don Juan had a broad smile on his face. He was as pleased as punch. He explained that sorcerers *see* infant human beings as strange, luminous balls of energy, covered from the top to the bottom with a glowing coat, something like a plastic cover that is adjusted tightly over their cocoon of energy. He said that that glowing *coat of awareness* was what the predators consumed, and that when a human being reached adulthood, all that was left of that glowing *coat of awareness* was a narrow fringe that went from the ground to the top of the toes. That fringe permitted mankind to continue living, but only barely.

As if I had been in a dream, I heard don Juan Matus explaining that to his knowledge, man was the only species that had the glowing *coat of awareness* outside that luminous cocoon. Therefore, he became easy prey for an awareness of a different order, such as the heavy awareness of the predator.

He then made the most damaging statement he had made so far. He said that this narrow fringe of awareness was the epicenter of self-reflection, where man was irremediably caught. By playing on our self-reflection, which is the only point of awareness left to us, the predators create flares of awareness that they proceed to consume in a ruthless, predatory fashion. They give us inane problems that force those flares of awareness to rise, and in this manner they keep us alive in order for them to be fed with the energetic flare of our pseudoconcerns.

There must have been something to what don Juan was saying, which was so devastating to me that at that point I actually got sick to my stomach.

After a moment's pause, long enough for me to recover, I asked don Juan: "But why is it that the sorcerers of ancient Mexico and all sorcerers today, although they *see* the predators, don't do anything about it?"

"There's nothing that you and I can do about it," don Juan said in a grave, sad voice. "All we can do is discipline ourselves to the point where they will not touch us. How can you ask your fellow men to go through those rigors of discipline? They'll laugh and make fun of you, and the more aggressive ones will beat the shit out of you. And not so much because they don't believe it. Down in the depths of every human being, there's an ancestral, visceral knowledge about the predators' existence."

My analytical mind swung back and forth like a yo-yo. It left me and came back and left me and came back again. Whatever don Juan was proposing was preposterous, incredible. At the same time, it was a most reasonable thing, so simple. It explained every kind of human contradiction I could think of. But how could one have taken all this seriously? Don Juan was pushing me into the path of an avalanche that would take me down forever.

I felt another wave of a threatening sensation. The wave didn't stem from me, yet it was attached to me. Don Juan was doing something to me, mysteriously positive and terribly negative at the same time. I sensed it as an attempt to cut a thin film that seemed to be glued to me. His eyes were fixed on mine in an unblinking stare. He moved his eyes away and began to talk without looking at me anymore.

"Whenever doubts plague you to a dangerous point," he said, "do something pragmatic about it. Turn off the light. Pierce the darkness; find out what you can see."

He got up to turn off the lights. I stopped him.

"No, no, don Juan," I said, "don't turn off the lights. I'm doing okay."

What I felt then was a most unusual, for me, fear of the darkness. The mere thought of it made me pant. I definitely knew something viscerally, but I wouldn't dare touch it, or bring it to the surface, not in a million years!

"You saw the fleeting shadows against the trees," don Juan said, sitting back against his chair. "That's pretty good. I'd like you to see them inside this room. You're not *seeing* anything. You're just merely catching fleeting images. You have enough energy for that."

I feared that don Juan would get up anyway and turn off the lights, which he did. Two seconds later, I was screaming my head off. Not only did I catch a glimpse of those fleeting images, I heard them buzzing by my ears. Don Juan doubled up with laughter as he turned on the lights.

"What a temperamental fellow!" he said. "A total disbeliever, on the one hand, and a total pragmatist on the other. You must arrange this internal fight. Otherwise, you're going to swell up like a big toad and burst."

Don Juan kept on pushing his barb deeper and deeper into me. "The sorcerers of ancient Mexico," he said, *"saw* the predator. They called it the *flyer* because it leaps through the air. It is not a pretty sight. It is a big shadow, impenetrably dark, a black shadow that jumps through the air. Then, it lands flat on the ground. The sorcerers of ancient Mexico were quite ill at ease with the idea of when it made it's appearance on Earth. They reasoned that man must have been a complete being at one point, with stupendous insights, feats of awareness that are mythological legends nowadays. And then everything seems to disappear, and we have now a sedated man."

I wanted to get angry, call him a paranoiac, but somehow the righteousness that was usually just underneath the surface of my being wasn't there. Something in me was beyond the point of asking myself my favorite question: What if all that he said is true? At the moment he was talking to me that night, in my heart of hearts, I felt that all of what he was saying was true, but at the same time, and with equal force, all that he was saying was absurdity itself.

"What are you saying, don Juan?" I asked feebly. My throat was constricted. I could hardly breathe.

"What I'm saying is that what we have against us is not a simple predator. It is very smart, and organized. It follows a methodical system to render us useless. Man, the magical being that he is destined to be, is no longer magical. He's an average piece of meat. There are no more dreams for man but the dreams of an animal who is being raised to become a piece of meat: trite, conventional, imbecilic."

Don Juan's words were eliciting a strange, bodily reaction in me comparable to the sensation of nausea. It was as if I were going to get sick to my stomach again. But the nausea was coming from the bottom of my being, from the marrow of my bones. I convulsed involuntarily. Don Juan shook me by the shoulders forcefully. I felt my neck wobbling back and forth under the impact of his grip. The maneuver calmed me down at once. I felt more in control.

"This predator," don Juan said, "which, of course, is an inorganic being, is not altogether invisible to us, as other inorganic beings are. I think as children we do see it and decide it's so horrific that we don't want to think about it. Children, of course, could insist on focusing on the sight, but everybody else around them dissuades them from doing so.

"The only alternative left for mankind," he continued, "is discipline. Discipline is the only deterrent. But by discipline I don't mean harsh routines. I don't mean waking up every morning at five-thirty and throwing cold water on yourself until you're blue. Sorcerers understand discipline as the capacity to face with serenity odds that are not included in our expectations. For them, discipline is an art: the art of facing *infinity* without flinching, not because they are strong and tough but because they are filled with awe.

"In what way would the sorcerers' discipline be a deterrent?" I asked.

"Sorcerers say that discipline makes the glowing coat *of awareness* unpalatable to the *flyer,"* don Juan said, scrutinizing my face as if to discover any signs of disbelief. "The result is that the predators become bewildered. An inedible glowing coat *of awareness* is not part of their cognition, I suppose. After being bewildered, they don't have any recourse other than refraining from continuing their nefarious task.

"If the predators don't eat our glowing coat *of awareness* for a while," he went on, "it'll keep on growing. Simplifying this matter to the extreme, I can say that sorcerers, by means of their discipline, push the predators away long enough to allow their glowing coat *of* awareness to grow beyond the level of the toes. Once it goes beyond the level of the toes, it grows back to it's natural size.

The sorcerers of ancient Mexico used to say that the glowing coat *of awareness is* like a tree. If it is not pruned, it grows to it's natural size and volume. As awareness reaches levels higher than the toes, tremendous maneuvers of perception become a matter of course.

"The grand trick of those sorcerers of ancient times," don Juan continued, "was to burden the *flyers' mind* with discipline. They found out that if they taxed the *flyers' mind* with inner silence, the *foreign installation* would flee, giving to any one of the practitioners involved in this maneuver the total certainty of the mind's foreign origin. The *foreign installation* comes back, I assure you, but not as strong, and a process begins in which the fleeing of the *flyers' mind* becomes routine, until one day it flees permanently. A sad day indeed! That's the day when you have to rely on your own devices, which are nearly zero. There's no one to tell you what to do. There's no mind of foreign origin to dictate the imbecilities you're accustomed to.

"My teacher, the nagual Julian, used to warn all his disciples," don Juan continued, "that this was the toughest day in a sorcerer's life, for the real mind that belongs to us, the sum total of our experience, after a lifetime of domination has been rendered shy, insecure, and shifty. Personally, I would say that the real battle of sorcerers begins at that moment. The rest is merely preparation."

I became genuinely agitated. I wanted to know more, and yet a strange feeling in me clamored for me to stop. It alluded to dark results and punishment, something like the wrath of God descending on me for tampering with something veiled by God himself. I made a supreme effort to allow my curiosity to win.

"What—what—what do you mean," I heard myself say, "by taxing *the flyers' mind*7"

"Discipline taxes the foreign mind no end," he replied. "So, through their discipline, sorcerers vanquish the /oreign installation."

I was overwhelmed by his statements. I believed that don Juan was either certifiably insane or that he was telling me something so awesome that it froze everything in me. I noticed, however, how quickly I rallied my energy to deny everything he had said. After an instant of panic, I began to laugh, as if don Juan had told me a joke. I even heard myself saying, "Don Juan, don Juan, you're incorrigible!"

Don Juan seemed to understand everything I was experiencing. He shook his head from side to side and raised his eyes to the heavens in a gesture of mock despair.

"I am so incorrigible," he said, "that I am going to give *the flyers' mind,* which you carry inside you, one more jolt. I am going to reveal to you one of the most extraordinary secrets of sorcery. I am going to describe to you a finding that took sorcerers thousands of years to verify and consolidate."

He looked at me and smiled maliciously. "The *flyers' mind* flees forever," he said, "when a sorcerer succeeds in grabbing on to the vibrating force that holds us together as a conglomerate of energy fields. If a sorcerer maintains that pressure long enough, the *flyers' mind* flees in defeat. And that's exactly what you are going to do: hold on to the energy that binds you together."

I had the most inexplicable reaction I could have imagined. Something in me actually shook, as if it had received a jolt. I entered into a state of unwarranted fear, which I immediately associated with my religious background.

Don Juan looked at me from head to toe.

"You are fearing the wrath of God, aren't you?" he said. "Rest assured, that's not your fear. It's the *flyers'* fear, because it knows that you will do exactly as I'm telling you."

His words did not calm me at all. I felt worse. I was actually convulsing involuntarily, and I had no means to stop it.

"Don't worry," don Juan said calmly. "I know for a fact that those attacks wear off very quickly. The *flyer's mind* has no concentration whatsoever."

After a moment, everything stopped, as don Juan had predicted. To say again that I was bewildered is a euphemism. This was the first time ever, with don Juan or alone, in my life that I didn't know whether I was coming or going. I wanted to get out of the chair and walk around, but I was deathly afraid. I was filled with rational assertions, and at the same time I was filled with an infantile fear. I began to breathe deeply as a cold perspiration covered my entire body. I had somehow unleashed on myself a most godawful sight: black, fleeting shadows jumping all around me, wherever I turned.

I closed my eyes and rested my head on the arm of the stuffed chair. "I don't know which way to turn, don Juan," I said. "Tonight, you have really succeeded in getting me lost."

"You're being torn by an internal struggle," don Juan said. "Down in the depths of you, you know that you are incapable of refusing the agreement that an indispensable part of you, your glowing coat *of awareness,* is going to serve as an incomprehensible source of nourishment to, naturally, incomprehensible entities. And another part of you will stand against this situation with all it's might.

"The sorcerers' revolution," he continued, "is that they refuse to honor agreements in which they did not participate. Nobody ever asked me if I would consent to be eaten by beings of a different kind of awareness. My parents just brought me into this world to be food, like themselves, and that's the end of the story."

Don Juan stood up from his chair and stretched his arms and legs. "We have been sitting here for hours. It's time to go into the house. I'm gonna eat. Do you want to eat with me?"

I declined. My stomach was in an uproar.

"I think you'd better go to sleep," he said. "The blitz has devastated you."

I didn't need any further coaxing. I collapsed onto my bed and fell asleep like the dead.

At home, as time went by, the idea of the *flyers* became one of the main fixations of my life. I got to the point where I felt that don Juan was absolutely right about them. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't discard his logic. The more I thought about it, and the more I talked to and observed myself and my fellow men, the more intense the conviction that something was rendering us incapable of any activity or any interaction or any thought that didn't have the self as it's focal point. My concern, as well as the concern of everyone I knew or talked to, was the self. Since I couldn't find any explanation for such universal homogeneity, I believed that don Juan's line of thought was the most appropriate way of elucidating the phenomenon.

I went as deeply as I could into readings about myths and legends. In reading, I experienced something I had never felt before: Each of the books I read was an interpretation of myths and legends. In each one of those books, a homogeneous mind was palpable. The styles differed, but the drive behind the words was homogeneously the same: Even though the theme was something as abstract as myths and legends, the authors always managed to insert statements about themselves. The homogeneous drive behind every one of those books was not the stated theme of the book; instead, it was self-service. I had never felt this before.

I attributed my reaction to don Juan's influence. The unavoidable question that I posed to myself was: Is he influencing me to see this, or is there really a foreign mind dictating everything we do? I lapsed, perforce, into denial again, and I went insanely from denial to acceptance to denial. Something in me knew that whatever don Juan was driving at was an *energetic fact,* but something equally important in me knew that all of that was guff. The end result of my internal struggle was a sense of foreboding, the sense of something imminently dangerous coming at me.

I made extensive anthropological inquiries into the subject of the *flyers* in other cultures, but I couldn't find any references to them anywhere. Don Juan seemed to be the only source of information about this matter. The next time I saw him, I instantly jumped to talk about the *flyers*.

"I have tried my best to be rational about this subject matter," I said, "but I can't. There are moments when I fully agree with you about the predators."

"Focus your attention on the fleeting shadows that you actually see," don Juan said with a smile.

I told don Juan that those fleeting shadows were going to be the end of my rational life. I saw them everywhere. Since I had left his house, I was incapable of going to sleep in the dark. To sleep with the lights on did not bother me at all. The moment I turned the lights off, however, everything around me began to jump. I never saw complete figures or shapes. All I saw were fleeting black shadows.

"The *flyers' mind* has not left you," don Juan said. "It has been seriously injured. It's trying it's best to rearrange it's relationship with you. But something in you is severed forever. The *flyer* knows that. The real danger is that the *flyers' mind* may win by getting you tired and forcing you to quit by playing the contradiction between what it says and what I say.

"You see, the *flyers' mind* has no competitors," don Juan continued. "When it proposes something, it agrees with it's own proposition, and it makes you believe that you've done something of worth. The *flyers' mind* will say to you that whatever Juan Matus is telling you is pure nonsense, and then the same mind will agree with it's own proposition, 'Yes, of course, it is nonsense,' you will say. That's the way they overcome us.

"The *flyers* are an essential part of the universe," he went on, "and they must be taken as what they really are—awesome, monstrous. They are the means by which the universe tests us.

"We are energetic probes created by the universe," he continued as if he were oblivious to my presence, "and it's because we are possessors of energy that has awareness that we are the means by which the universe becomes aware of itself. The *flyers* are the implacable challengers. They cannot be taken as anything else. If we succeed in doing that, the universe allows us to continue."

I wanted don Juan to say more. But he said only, "The blitz ended the last time you were here; there's only so much you could say about the *flyers*. It's time for another kind of maneuver."

I couldn't sleep that night. I fell into a light sleep in the early hours of the morning, until don Juan dragged me out of my bed and took me for a hike in the mountains. Where he lived, the configuration of the land was very different from that of the Sonoran desert, but he told me not to indulge in comparison, that after walking for a quarter of a mile, every place in the world was just the same.

"Sightseeing is for people in cars," he said. "They go at great speed without any effort on their part. Sightseeing is not for walkers. For instance, when you are riding in a car,-you may see a gigantic mountain whose sight overwhelms you with it's beauty. The sight of the same mountain will not overwhelm you in the same manner if you look at it while you're going on foot; it will overwhelm you in a different way, especially if you have to climb it or go around it."

It was very hot that morning. We walked on a dry riverbed. One thing that this valley and the Sonoran desert had in common was their millions of insects. The gnats and flies all around me were like dive-bombers that aimed at my nostrils, eyes, and ears. Don Juan told me not to pay attention to their buzzing.

"Don't try to disperse them with your hand," he uttered in a firm tone. *"Intend* them away. Set up an energy barrier around you. Be silent, and from your silence the barrier will be constructed. Nobody knows how this is done. It is one of those things that the old sorcerers called *energetic facts*. Shut off your internal dialogue. That's all it takes.

"I want to propose a weird idea to you," don Juan went on as he kept walking ahead of me.

I had to accelerate my steps to be closer to him so as not to miss anything he said.

"I have to stress that it's a weird idea that will find endless resistance in you," he said. "I will tell you beforehand that you won't accept it easily. But the fact that it's weird should not be a deterrent. You are a social scientist. Therefore, your mind is always open to inquiry, isn't that so?"

Don Juan was shamelessly making fun of me. I knew it, but it didn't bother me. Perhaps due to the fact that he was walking so fast, and I had to make a tremendous effort to keep up with him, his sarcasm just sloughed off me, and instead of making me feisty, it made me laugh. My undivided attention was focused on what he was saying, and the insects either stopped bothering me because I had *intended* a barrier of energy around me or because I was so busy listening to don Juan that I didn't care about their buzzing around me anymore.

"The weird idea," he said slowly, measuring the effect of his words, "is that every human being on this earth seems to have exactly the same reactions, the same thoughts, the same feelings. They seem to respond in more or less the same way to the same stimuli. Those reactions seem to be sort of fogged up by the language they speak, but if we scrape that off, they are exactly the same reactions that besiege every human being on Earth. I would like you to become curious about this, as a social scientist, of course, and see if you could formally account for such homogeneity."

Don Juan collected a series of plants. Some of them could hardly be seen. They seemed to be more in the realm of algae, moss. I held his bag open, and we didn't speak anymore. When he had enough plants, he headed back for his house, walking as fast as he could. He said that he wanted to clean and separate those plants and put them in a proper order before they dried up too much.

I was deeply involved in thinking about the task he had delineated for me. I began by trying to review in my mind if I knew of any articles or papers written on this subject. I thought that I would have to research it, and I decided to begin my research by reading all the works available on "national character." I got enthusiastic about the topic, in a haphazard way, and I really wanted to start for home right away, for I wanted to take his task to heart, but before we reached his house, don Juan sat down on a high ledge overlooking the valley. He didn't say anything for a while. He was not out of breath. I couldn't conceive of why he had stopped to sit down.

"The task of the day, for you," he said abruptly, in a foreboding tone, "is one of the most mysterious things of sorcery, something that goes beyond language, beyond explanations. We went for a hike today, we talked, because the mystery of sorcery must be cushioned in the mundane. It must stem from nothing, and go back again to nothing. That's the art of *warrior-travelers:* to go through the eye of a needle unnoticed. So, brace yourself by propping your back against this rock wall, as far as possible from the edge. I will be by you, in case you faint or fall down."

"What are you planning to do, don Juan?" I asked, and my alarm was so patent that I noticed it and lowered my voice.

"I want you to cross your legs and enter into *inner silence,"* he said. "Let's say that you want to find out what articles you could look for to discredit or substantiate what I have asked you to do in your academic milieu. Enter into *inner silence,* but don't fall asleep. This is not a journey through the *dark sea of awareness.* This is *seeing from inner silence."*

It was rather difficult for me to enter into *inner silence* without falling asleep. I fought a nearly invincible desire to fall asleep. I succeeded, and found myself looking at the bottom of the valley from an impenetrable darkness around me. And then, I saw something that chilled me to the marrow of my bones. I *saw* a gigantic shadow, perhaps fifteen feet across, leaping in the air and then landing with a silent thud. I felt the thud in my bones, but I didn't hear it.

"They are really heavy," don Juan said in my ear. He was holding me by the left arm, as hard as he could.

I saw something that looked like a mud shadow wiggle on the ground, and then take another gigantic leap, perhaps fifty feet long, and land again, with the same ominous silent thud. I fought not to lose my concentration. I was frightened beyond anything I could rationally use as a description. I kept my eyes fixed on the jumping shadow on the bottom of the valley. Then I heard a most peculiar buzzing, a mixture of the sound of flapping wings and the buzzing of a radio whose dial has not quite picked up the frequency of a radio station, and the thud that followed was something unforgettable. It shook don Juan and me to the core—a gigantic black mud shadow had just landed by our feet.

"Don't be frightened," don Juan said imperiously. "Keep your *inner silence* and it will move away."

I was shivering from head to toe. I had the clear knowledge that if I didn't keep my inner *silence* alive, the mud shadow would cover me up like a blanket and suffocate me. Without losing the darkness around me, I screamed at the top of my voice. Never had I been so angry, so utterly frustrated. The mud shadow took another leap, clearly to the bottom of the valley. I kept on screaming, shaking my legs. I wanted to shake off whatever might come to eat me. My state of nervousness was so intense that I lost track of time. Perhaps I fainted.

When I came to my senses, I was lying in my bed in don Juan's house. There was a towel, soaked in icy-cold water, wrapped around my forehead. I was burning with fever. One of don Juan's female cohorts rubbed my back, chest, and forehead with rubbing alcohol, but this did not relieve me. The heat I was experiencing came from within myself. It was wrath and impotence that generated it.

Don Juan laughed as if what was happening to me was the funniest thing in the world. Peals of laughter came out of him in an endless barrage.

"I would never have thought that you would take *seeing* a *flyer* so much to heart," he said.

He took me by the hand and led me to the back of his house, where he dunked me in a huge tub of water, fully clothed—shoes, watch, everything.

"My watch, my watch!" I screamed.

Don Juan twisted with laughter. "You shouldn't wear a watch when you come to see me," he said. "Now you've fouled up your watch!"

I took off my watch and put it by the side of the tub. I remembered that it was waterproof and that nothing would happen to it.

Being dunked in the tub helped me enormously. When don Juan pulled me out of the freezing water, I had gained a degree of control.

"That sight is preposterous!" I kept on repeating, unable to say anything else.

The predator don Juan had described was not something benevolent. It was enormously heavy, gross, indifferent. I felt it's disregard for us. Doubtless, it had crushed us ages ago, making us, as don Juan had said, weak, vulnerable, and docile. I took off my wet clothes, covered myself with a poncho, sat in my bed, and veritably wept my head off, but not for myself. I had my wrath, my *unbending intent,* not to let them eat me. I wept for my fellow men, especially for my father. I never knew until that instant that I loved him so much.

"He never had a chance," I heard myself repeating, over and over, as if the words were not really mine. My poor father, the most considerate being I knew, so tender, so gentle, so helpless.

## Starting on the Definitive Journey

## The Jump into the Abyss

THERE WAS ONLY one trail leading to the flat mesa. Once we were on the mesa itself, I realized that it was not as extensive as it had appeared when I had looked at it from a distance. The vegetation on the mesa was not different from the vegetation below: faded green woody shrubs that had the ambiguous appearance of trees.

At first, I didn't see the chasm. It was only when don Juan led me to it that I became aware that the mesa ended in a precipice;

it wasn't really a mesa but merely the flat top of a good-sized mountain. The mountain was round and eroded on it's east and south faces; however, on part of it's west and north sides, it seemed to have been cut with a knife. From the edge of the precipice, I was able to see the bottom of the ravine, perhaps six hundred feet below. It was covered with the same woody shrubs that grew everywhere.

A whole row of small mountains to the south and to the north of that mountaintop gave the clear impression that they had been part of a gigantic canyon, millions of years old, dug out by a no longer existing river. The edges of that canyon had been erased by erosion. At certain points they had been leveled with the ground. The only portion still intact was the area where I was standing.

"It's solid rock," don Juan said as if he were reading my thoughts. He pointed with his chin toward the bottom of the ravine. "If anything were to fall down from this edge to the bottom, it would get smashed to flakes on the rock, down there."

This was the initial dialogue between don Juan and myself, that day, on that mountaintop. Prior to going there, he had told me that his time on Earth had come to an end. He was leaving on his *definitive journey*. His statements were devastating to me. I truly lost my grip, and entered into a blissful state of fragmentation, perhaps similar to what people experience when they have a mental breakdown. But there was a core fragment of myself that remained cohesive: the me of my childhood. The rest was vagueness, incertitude. I had been fragmented for so long that to become fragmented once again was the only way out of my devastation.

A most peculiar interplay between different levels of my awareness took place afterward. Don Juan, his cohort don Genaro, two of his apprentices, Pablito and Nestor, and I had climbed to that mountaintop. Pablito, Nestor, and I were there to take care of our last task as apprentices: to jump into an abyss, a most mysterious affair, which don Juan had explained to me at various levels of awareness but which has remained an enigma to me to this day.

Don Juan jokingly said that I should get my writing pad and start taking notes about our last moments together. He gently poked me in the ribs and assured me, as he hid his laughter, that it would have been only proper, since I had started on the *warrior-travelers'* path by taking notes.

Don Genaro cut in and said that other *warrior-travelers* before us had stood on that same flat mountaintop before embarking on their journey to the unknown. Don Juan turned to me and in a soft voice said that soon I would be entering into *infinity* by the force of my personal power, and that he and don Genaro were there only to bid me farewell. Don Genaro cut in again and said that I was there also to do the same for them.

"Once you have entered into *infinity,"* don Juan said, "you can't depend on us to bring you back. Your decision is needed then. Only you can decide whether or not to return. I must also warn you that few *warrior-travelers* survive this type of encounter with *infinity*. *Infinity* is enticing beyond belief. A *warrior-traveler* finds that to return to the world of disorder, compulsion, noise, and pain is a most unappealing affair. You must know that your decision to stay or to return is not a matter of a reasonable choice, but a matter of *intending* it.

"If you choose not to return," he continued, "you will disappear as if the earth had swallowed you. But if you choose to come back, you must tighten your belt and wait like a true *warrior-traveler* until your task, whatever it might be, is finished, either in success or in defeat."

A very subtle change began to take place in my awareness then. I started to remember faces of people, but I wasn't sure I had met them; strange feelings of anguish and affection started to mount. Don Juan's voice was no longer audible. I longed for people I sincerely doubted I had ever met. I was suddenly possessed by the most unbearable love for those persons, whoever they may have been. My feelings for them were beyond words, and yet I couldn't tell who they were. I only sensed their presence, as if I had lived another life before, or as if I were feeling for people in a dream. I sensed that their outside forms shifted; they began by being tall and ended up petite. What was left intact was their essence, the very thing that produced my unbearable longing for them.

Don Juan came to my side and said to me, "The agreement was that you remain in the awareness of the daily world." His voice was harsh and authoritative. "Today you are going to fulfill a concrete task," he went on, "the last link of a long chain; and you must do it in your utmost mood of reason."

I had never heard don Juan talk to me in that tone of voice. He was a different man at that instant, yet he was thoroughly familiar to me. I meekly obeyed him and went back to the awareness of the world of everyday life. I didn't know that I was doing this, however. To me, it appeared, on that day, as if I had acquiesced to don Juan out of fear and respect.

Don Juan spoke to me next in the tone I was accustomed to. What he said was also very familiar. He said that the backbone of a *warrior-traveler* is humbleness and efficiency, acting without expecting anything and withstanding anything that lies ahead of him.

I went at that point through another shift in my level of awareness. My mind focused on a thought, or a feeling of anguish. I knew then that I had made a pact with some people to die with them, and I couldn't remember who they were. I felt, without the shadow of a doubt, that it was wrong that I should die alone. My anguish became unbearable.

Don Juan spoke to me. "We are alone," he said. "That's our condition, but to die alone is not to die in loneliness."

I took big gulps of air to erase my tension. As I breathed deeply, my mind became clear.

"The great issue with us males is our frailty," he went on. "When our awareness begins to grow, it grows like a column, right on the midpoint of our luminous being, from the ground up. That column has to reach a considerable height before we can rely on it. At this time in your life, as a sorcerer, you easily lose your grip on your new awareness. When you do that, you forget everything you have done and *seen* on the *warrior-travelers' path* because your consciousness shifts back to the awareness of your everyday life. I have explained to you that the task of every male sorcerer is to reclaim everything he has done and *seen* on the *warrior-travelers' path* while he was on new levels of awareness. The problem of every male sorcerer is that he easily forgets because his awareness loses it's new level and falls to the ground at the drop of a hat."

"I understand exactly what you're saying, don Juan," I said.

"Perhaps this is the first time I have come to the full realization of why I forget everything, and why I remember everything later. I have always believed that my shifts were due to a personal pathological condition; I know now why these changes take place, yet I can't verbalize what I know."

"Don't worry about verbalizations," don Juan said. "You'll verbalize all you want in due time. Today, you must act on your *inner* silence, on what you know without knowing. You know to perfection what you have to do, but this knowledge is not quite formulated in your thoughts yet."

On the level of concrete thoughts or sensations, all I had were vague feelings of knowing something that was not part of my mind. I had, then, the clearest sense of having taken a huge step down; something seemed to have dropped inside me. It was almost a jolt. I knew that I had entered into another level of awareness at that instant.

Don Juan told me then that it is obligatory that a *warrior-traveler* say good-bye to all the people he leaves behind. He must say his good-bye in a loud and clear voice so that his shout and his feelings will remain forever recorded in those mountains.

I hesitated for a long time, not out of bashfulness but because I didn't know whom to include in my thanks. I had completely internalized the sorcerers' concept that *warrior-travelers* can't owe anything to anyone.

Don Juan had drilled a sorcerers' axiom into me: *"Warrior-travelers* pay elegantly, generously, and with unequaled ease every favor, every service rendered to them. In this manner, they get rid of the burden of being indebted."

I had paid, or I was in the process of paying, everyone who had honored me with their care or concern. I had *recapitulated* my life to such an extent that I had not left a single stone unturned. I truthfully believed in those days that I didn't owe anything to anyone. I expressed my beliefs and hesitation to don Juan.

Don Juan said that I had indeed *recapitulated* my life thoroughly, but he added that I was far from being free of indebtedness.

"How about your ghosts?" he went on. "Those you can no longer touch?"

He knew what he was talking about. During my *recapitulation,* I had recounted to him every incident of my life. Out of the hundreds of incidents that I related to him, he had isolated three as samples of indebtedness that I incurred very early in life, and added to that, my indebtedness to the person who was instrumental in my meeting him. I had thanked my friend profusely, and I had sensations that something out there acknowledged my thanks. The other three had remained stories from my life, stories of people who had given me an inconceivable gift, and whom I had never thanked.

One of these stories had to do with a man I'd known when I was a child. His name was Mr. Leandro Acosta. He was my grandfather's archenemy, his true nemesis. My grandfather had accused this man repeatedly of stealing chickens from his chicken farm. The man wasn't a vagrant, but someone who did not have a steady, definite job. He was a maverick of sorts, a gambler, a master of many trades: handyman, self-styled curer, hunter and provider of plant and insect specimens for local herbalists and curers and any kind of bird or mammal life for taxidermists or pet shops.

People believed that he made tons of money, but that he couldn't keep it or invest it. His detractors and friends alike believed that he could have established the most prosperous business in the area, doing what he knew best—searching for plants and hunting animals—but that he was cursed with a strange disease of the spirit that made him restless, incapable of tending to anything for any length of time.

One day, while I was taking a stroll on the edge of my grandfather's farm, I noticed that someone was watching me from between the thick bushes at the forest's edge. It was Mr. Acosta. He was squatting inside the bushes of the jungle itself and would have been totally out of sight had it not been for my sharp eight-year-old eyes.

"No wonder my grandfather thinks that he comes to steal chickens," I thought. I believed that no one else but me could have noticed him; he was utterly concealed by his motionless-ness. I had caught the difference between the bushes and his silhouette by feeling rather than sight. I approached him. The fact that people rejected him so viciously, or liked him so passionately, intrigued me no end.

"What are you doing there, Mr. Acosta?" I asked daringly.

"I'm taking a shit while I look at your grandfather's farm," he said, "so you better scram before I get up unless you like the smell of shit."

I moved away a short distance. I wanted to know if he was really doing what he was claiming. He was. He got up. I thought he was going to leave the bush and come onto my grandfather's land and perhaps walk across to the road, but he didn't. He began to walk inward, into the jungle.

"Hey, hey, Mr. Acosta!" I yelled. "Can I come with you?"

I noticed that he had stopped walking; it was again more a feeling than an actual sight because the bush was so thick.

"You can certainly come with me if you can find an entry into the bush," he said.

That wasn't difficult for me. In my hours of idleness, I had marked an entry into the bush with a good-sized rock. I had found out through an endless process of trial and error that there was a crawling space there, which if I followed for three or four yards turned into an actual trail on which I could stand up and walk.

Mr. Acosta came to me and said, "Bravo, kid! You've done it. Yes, come with me if you want to."

That was the beginning of my association with Mr. Leandro Acosta. We went on daily hunting expeditions. Our association became so obvious, since I was gone from the house from dawn to sunset, without anybody ever knowing where I went, that finally my grandfather admonished me severely.

"You must select your acquaintances," he said, "or you will end up being like them. I will not tolerate this man affecting you in any way imaginable. He could certainly transmit to you his elan, yes. And he could influence your mind to be just like his: useless. I'm telling you, if you don't put an end to this, I will. I'll send the authorities after him on charges of stealing my chickens, because you know damn well that he comes every day and steals them."

I tried to show my grandfather the absurdity of his charges. Mr. Acosta didn't have to steal chickens. He had the vastness of that jungle at his command. He could have drawn from that jungle anything he wanted. But my arguments infuriated my grandfather even more. I realized then that my grandfather secretly envied Mr. Acosta's freedom, and Mr. Acosta was transformed for me by this realization from a nice hunter into the ultimate expression of what is at the same time both forbidden and desired.

I attempted to curtail my encounters with Mr. Acosta, but the lure was just too overwhelming for me. Then, one day, Mr. Acosta and three of his friends proposed that I do something that Mr. Acosta had never done before: catch a vulture alive, uninjured. He explained to me that the vultures of the area, which were enormous, with a five- to six-foot wingspan, had seven different types of flesh in their bodies, and each one of those seven types served a specific curative purpose. He said that the desired state was that the vulture's body not be injured. The vulture had to be killed by tranquilizer, not by violence. It was easy to shoot them, but in that case, the meat lost it's curative value. So the art was to catch them alive, a thing that he had never done. He had figured out, though, that with my help and the help of his three friends he had the problem licked. He assured me that his was a natural conclusion arrived at after hundreds of occasions on which he had observed the behavior of vultures.

"We need a dead donkey in order to perform this feat, something which we have," he declared ebulliently.

He looked at me, waiting for me to ask the question of what would be done with the dead donkey. Since the question was not asked, he proceeded.

"We remove the intestines, and we put some sticks in there to keep the roundness of the belly.

"The leader of the turkey vultures is the king; he is the biggest, the most intelligent," he went on. "No sharper eyes exist. That's what makes him a king. He'll be the one who will spot the dead donkey, and the first who will land on it. He'll land downwind from the donkey to really smell that it is dead. The intestines and soft organs that we are going to draw out of the donkey's belly we'll pile by his rear end, outside. This way, it looks like a wild cat has already eaten some of it. Then, lazily, the vulture will come closer to the donkey. He'll take his time. He'll come hopping-flying, and then he will land on the dead donkey's hip and begin to rock the donkey's body. He would turn it over if it were not for the four sticks that we will stake into the ground as part of the armature. He'll stand on the hip for a while; that will be the clue for other vultures to come and land there in the vicinity. Only when he has three or four of his companions down with him will the king vulture begin his work."

"And what is my role in all this, Mr. Acosta?" I asked.

"You hide inside the donkey," he said with a deadpan expression. "Nothing to it. I give you a pair of specially designed leather gloves, and you sit there and wait until the king turkey vulture rips the anus of the dead donkey open with his enormous powerful beak and sticks his head in to begin eating. Then you grab him by the neck with both hands and don't let go.

"My three friends and I will be hiding on horseback in a deep ravine. I'll be watching the operation with binoculars. When I see that you have grabbed the king vulture by the neck, we'll come at full gallop and throw ourselves on top of the vulture and subdue him."

"Can you subdue that vulture, Mr. Acosta?" I asked him. Not that I doubted his skill, I just wanted to be assured.

"Of course I can!" he said with all the confidence in the world. "We're all going to be wearing gloves and leather leggings. The vulture's talons are quite powerful. They could break a shinbone like a twig."

There was no way out for me. I was caught, nailed by an exorbitant excitation. My admiration for Mr. Leandro Acosta knew no limits at that moment. I saw him as a true hunter—resourceful, cunning, knowledgeable.

"Okay, let's do it then!" I said.

"That's my boy!" said Mr. Acosta. "I expected as much from you."

He had put a thick blanket behind his saddle, and one of his friends just lifted me up and put me on Mr. Acosta's horse, right behind the saddle, sitting on the blanket.

"Hold on to the saddle," Mr. Acosta said, "and as you hold on to the saddle, hold the blanket, too."

We took off at a leisurely trot. We rode for perhaps an hour until we came to some flat, dry, desolate lands. We stopped by a tent that resembled a vendor's stand in a market. It had a flat roof for shade. Underneath that roof was a dead brown donkey. It didn't seem that old; it looked like an adolescent donkey.

Neither Mr. Acosta nor his friends explained to me whether they had found or killed the dead donkey. I waited for them to tell me, but I wasn't going to ask. While they made the preparations, Mr. Acosta explained that the tent was in place because vultures were on the lookout from huge distances out there, circling very high, out of sight, but certainly capable of seeing everything that was going on.

"Those creatures are creatures of sight alone," Mr. Acosta said. "They have miserable ears, and their noses are not as good as their eyes. We have to plug every hole of the carcass. I don't want you to be peeking out of any hole, because they will see your eye and never come down. They must see nothing."

They put some sticks inside the donkey's belly and crossed them, leaving enough room for me to crawl in. At one moment I finally ventured the question that I was dying to ask.

"Tell me, Mr. Acosta, this donkey surely died of illness, didn't he? Do you think it's disease could affect me?"

Mr. Acosta raised his eyes to the sky. "Come on! You cannot be that dumb. Donkey's diseases cannot be transmitted to man. Let's live this adventure and not worry about stupid details. If I were shorter, I'd be inside that donkey's belly myself. Do you know what it is to catch the king of turkey buzzards?"

I believed him. His words were sufficient to set up a cloak of unequaled confidence over me. I wasn't going to get sick and miss the event of events.

The dreaded moment came when Mr. Acosta put me inside the donkey. Then they stretched the skin over the armature and began to sew it closed. They left, nevertheless, a large area open at the bottom, against the ground, for air to circulate in. The horrendous moment for me came when the skin was finally closed over my head like the lid of a coffin. I breathed hard, thinking only about the excitement of grabbing the king of vultures by the neck.

Mr. Acosta gave me last-minute instructions. He said that he would let me know by a whistle that resembled a birdcall when the king vulture was flying around and when it had landed, so as to keep me informed and prevent me from fretting or getting impatient. Then I heard them pulling down the tent, followed by their horses galloping away. It was a good thing that they hadn't left a single space open to look out from because that's what I would have done. The temptation to look up and see what was going on was nearly irresistible.

A long time went by in which I didn't think of anything. Then I heard Mr. Acosta's whistling and I presumed the king vulture was circling around. My presumption turned to certainty when I heard the flapping of powerful wings, and then suddenly, the dead donkey's body began to rock as if it were in a windstorm. Then I felt a weight on the donkey's body, and I knew that the king vulture had landed on the donkey and was not moving anymore. I heard the flapping of other wings and the whistling of Mr. Acosta in the distance. Then I braced myself for the inevitable. The body of the donkey began to shake as something started to rip the skin.

Then, suddenly, a huge, ugly head with a red crest, an enormous beak, and a piercing, open eye burst in. I yelled with fright and grabbed the neck with both hands. I think I stunned the king vulture for an instant because he didn't do anything, which gave me the opportunity to grab his neck even harder, and then all hell broke loose. He ceased to be stunned and began to pull with such force that I was smashed against the structure, and in the next instant I was partially out of the donkey's body, armature and all, holding on to the neck of the invading beast for dear life.

I heard Mr. Acosta's galloping horse in the distance. I heard him yelling, "Let go, boy, let go, he's going to fly away with you!"

The king vulture indeed was going to either fly away with me holding on to his neck or rip me apart with the force of his talons. The reason he couldn't reach me was because his head was sunk halfway into the viscera and the armature. His talons kept slipping on the loose intestines and they never actually touched me. Another thing that saved me was that the force of the vulture was involved in pulling his neck out from my clasp and he could not move his talons far forward enough to really injure me. The next thing I knew, Mr. Acosta had landed on top of the vulture at the precise moment that my leather gloves came off my hands.

Mr. Acosta was beside himself with joy. "We've done it, boy, we've done it!" he said. "The next time, we will have longer stakes on the ground that the vulture cannot yank out, and you will be strapped to the structure."

My relationship with Mr. Acosta had lasted long enough for us to catch a vulture. Then my interest in following him disappeared as mysteriously as it had appeared and I never really had the opportunity to thank him for all the things that he had taught me.

Don Juan said that he had taught me the patience of a hunter at the best time to learn it; and above all, he had taught me to draw from solitariness all the comfort that a hunter needs. .

"You cannot confuse solitude with solitariness," don Juan explained to me once. "Solitude for me is psychological, of the mind. Solitariness is physical. One is debilitating, the other comforting."

For all this, don Juan had said, I was indebted to Mr. Acosta forever whether or not I understood indebtedness the way *warrior-travelers* understand it.

The second person don Juan thought I was indebted to was a ten-year-old child I'd known growing up. His name was Armando Velez. Just like his name, he was extremely dignified, starchy, a little old man. I liked him very much because he was firm and yet very friendly. He was someone who could not easily be intimidated. He would fight anyone if he needed to and yet he was not a bully at all.

The two of us used to go on fishing expeditions. We used to catch very small fish that lived under rocks and had to be gathered by hand. We would put the tiny fish we caught to dry in the sun and eat them raw, all day sometimes.

I also liked the fact that he was very resourceful and clever as well as being ambidextrous. He could throw a rock with his left hand farther than with his right. We had endless competitive games in which, to my ultimate chagrin, he always won. He used to sort of apologize to me for winning by saying, "If I slow down and let you win, you'll hate me. It'll be an affront to your manhood. So try harder."

Because of his excessively starchy behavior, we used to call him "Senor Velez," but the "Senor" was shortened to "Sho," a custom typical of the region in South America where I come from.

One day, Sho Velez asked me something quite unusual. He began his request, naturally, as a challenge to me. "I bet anything," he said, "that I know something that you wouldn't dare do."

"What are you talking about, Sho Velez?"

"You wouldn't dare go down a river in a raft."

"Oh yes I would. I've done it in a flooded river. I got stranded on an island for eight days once. They had to drift food to me."

This was the truth. My other best friend was a child nicknamed Crazy Shepherd. We got stranded in a flood on an island once, with no way for anyone to rescue us. Townspeople expected the flood to overrun the island and kill us both. They drifted baskets of food down the river in the hope that they would land on the island, which they did. They kept us alive in this fashion until the water had subsided enough for them to reach us with a raft and pull us to the banks of the river.

"No, this is a different affair," Sho Velez continued with his erudite attitude. "This one implies going on a raft on a subterranean river."

He pointed out that a huge section of a local river went through a mountain. That subterranean section of the river had always been a most intriguing place for me. It's entrance into the mountain was a foreboding cave of considerable size, always filled with bats and smelling of ammonia. Children of the area were told that it was the entrance to hell: sulfur fumes, heat, stench.

"You bet your friggin' boots, Sho Velez, that I will never go near that river in my lifetime!" I said, yelling. "Not in ten lifetimes! You have to be really crazy to do something like that."

Sho Velez's serious face got even more solemn. "Oh," he said, "then I will have to do it all by myself. I thought for a minute that I could goad you into going with me. I was wrong. My loss."

"Hey, Sho Velez, what's with you? Why in the world would you go into that hellish place?"

"I have to," he said in his gruff little voice. "You see, my father is as crazy as you are, except that he is a father and a husband. He has six people who depend on him. Otherwise, he would be as crazy as a goat. My two sisters, my two brothers, my mother and I depend on him. He is everything to us."

I didn't know who Sho Velez's father was. I had never seen him. I didn't know what he did for a living. Sho Velez revealed that his father was a businessman, and that everything that he owned was on the line, so to speak.

"My father has constructed a raft and wants to go. He wants to make that expedition. My mother says that he's just letting off steam, but I don't trust him," Sho Velez continued. "I have seen your crazy look in his eyes. One of these days, he'll do it, and I am sure that he'll die. So, I am going to take his raft and go into that river myself. I know that I will die, but my father won't."

I felt something like an electric shock go through my neck, and I heard myself saying in the most agitated tone one can imagine, "I'll do it, Sho Velez, I'll do it. Yes, yes, it'll be great! I'll go with you!"

Sho Velez had a smirk on his face. I understood it as a smirk of happiness at the fact that I was going with him, not at the fact that he had succeeded in luring me. He expressed that feeling in his next sentence. "I know that if you are with me, I will survive," he said.

I didn't care whether Sho Velez survived or not. What had galvanized me was his courage. I knew that Sho Velez had the guts to do what he was saying. He and Crazy Shepherd were the only gutsy kids in town. They both had something that I considered unique and unheard of: courage. No one else in that whole town had any. I had tested them all. As far as I was concerned, every one of them was dead, including the love of my life, my grandfather. I knew this without the shadow of a doubt when I was ten. Sho Velez's daring was a staggering realization for me. I wanted to be with him to the bitter end.

We made plans to meet at the crack of dawn, which we did, and the two of us carried his father's lightweight raft for three or four miles out of town, into some low, green mountains to the entrance of the cave where the river became subterranean. The smell of bat manure was overwhelming. We crawled on the raft and pushed ourselves into the stream. The raft was equipped with flashlights, which we had to turn on immediately. It was pitch black inside the mountain and humid and hot. The water was deep enough for the raft and fast enough that we didn't need to paddle.

The flashlights would create grotesque shadows. Sho Velez whispered in my ear that perhaps it was better not to look at all, because it was truly something more than frightening. He was right; it was nauseating, oppressive. The lights stirred bats so that they began to fly around us, flapping their wings aimlessly. As we traveled deeper into the cave, there were not even bats anymore, just stagnant air that was heavy and hard to breathe. After what seemed like hours to me, we came to a sort of pool where the water was very deep; it hardly moved. It looked as if the main stream had been dammed.

"We are stuck," Sho Velez whispered in my ear again. "There's no way for the raft to go through, and there's no way for us to go back."

The current was just too great for us to even attempt a return trip. We decided that we had to find a way out. I realized then that if we stood on top of the raft, we could touch the ceiling of the cave, which meant that the water had been dammed almost all the way to the top of the cave. At the entrance it was cathedral-like, maybe fifty feet high. My only conclusion was that we were on top of a pool that was about fifty feet deep.

We tied the raft to a rock and began to swim downward into the depths, trying to feel for a movement of water, a current. Everything was humid and hot on the surface but very cold a few feet below. My body felt the change in temperature and I became frightened, a strange animal fear that I had never felt before. I surfaced. Sho Velez must have felt the same. We bumped into each other on the surface.

"I think we're close to dying," he said solemnly.

I didn't share his solemnity or his desire to die. I searched frantically for an opening. Floodwaters must have carried rocks that had created a dam. I found a hole big enough for my ten-year-old body to go through. I pulled Sho Velez down and showed the hole to him. It was impossible for the raft to go through it. We pulled our clothes from the raft and tied them into a very tight bundle and swam downward with them until we found the hole again and went through it.

We ended up on a water slide, like the ones in an amusement park. Rocks covered with lichen and moss allowed us to slide for a great distance without being injured at all. Then we came into an enormous cathedral-like cave, where the water continued flowing, waist deep. We saw the light of the sky at the end of the cave and waded out. Without saying a word, we spread out our clothes and let them dry in the sun, then headed back for town. Sho Velez was nearly inconsolable because he had lost his father's raft.

"My father would have died there," he finally conceded. "His body would never have gone through the hole we went through. He's too big for it. My father is a big, fat man," he said. "But he would have been strong enough to walk his way back to the entrance."

I doubted it. As I remembered, at times, due to the inclination, the current was astoundingly fast. I conceded that perhaps a desperate, big man could have finally walked his way out with the aid of ropes and a lot of effort.

The issue of whether Sho Velez's father would have died there or not was not resolved then, but that didn't matter to me. What mattered was that for the first time in my life I had felt the sting of envy. Sho Velez was the only being I have ever envied in my life. He had someone to die for, and he had proved to me that he would do it; I had no one to die for, and I had proved nothing at all.

In a symbolic fashion, I gave Sho Velez the total cake. His triumph was complete. I bowed out. That was his town, those were his people, and he was the best among them as far as I was concerned. When we parted that day, I spoke a banality that turned out to be a deep truth when I said, "Be the king of them, Sho Velez. You are the best."

I never spoke to him again. I purposely ended my friendship with him. I felt that this was the only gesture I could make to denote how profoundly I had been affected by him.

Don Juan believed that my indebtedness to Sho Velez was imperishable, that he was the only one who had ever taught me that we must have something we could die for before we could think that we have something to live for.

"If you have nothing to die for," don Juan said to me once, "how can you claim that you have something to live for? The two go hand in hand, with death at the helm."

The third person don Juan thought I was indebted to beyond my life and my death was my grandmother on my mother's side. In my blind affection for my grandfather—the male—I had forgotten the real source of strength in that household: my very eccentric grandmother.

Many years before I came to their household, she had saved a local Indian from being lynched. He was accused of being a sorcerer. Some irate young men were actually hanging him from a tree on my grandmother's property. She came upon the lynching and stopped it. All the lynchers seemed to have been her godsons and they wouldn't dare go against her. She pulled the man down and took him home to cure him. The rope had already cut a deep wound on his neck.

His wounds healed, but he never left my grandmother's side. He claimed that his life had ended the day of the lynching, and that whatever new life he had no longer belonged to him; it belonged to her. Being a man of his word, he dedicated his life to serving my grandmother. He was her valet, majordomo, and counselor. My aunts said that it was he who had advised my grandmother to adopt a newborn orphan child as her son, something that they resented more than bitterly.

When I came into my grandparents' house, my grandmother's adopted son was already in his late thirties. She had sent him to study in France. One afternoon, out of the blue, a most elegantly dressed husky man got out of a taxi in front of the house. The driver carried his leather suitcases to the patio. The husky man tipped the driver generously. I noticed in one glance that the husky man's features were very striking. He had long, curly hair, long, curly eyelashes. He was extremely handsome without being physically beautiful. His best feature was, however, his beaming, open smile, which he immediately turned on me.

"May I ask your name, young man?" he said with the most beautiful stage voice I had ever heard.

The fact that he had addressed me as young man had won me over instantly. "My name is Carlos Aranha, sir," I said, "and may I ask in turn what is yours?"

He made a gesture of mock surprise. He opened his eyes wide and jumped backward as if he had been attacked. Then he began to laugh uproariously. At the sound of his laughter, my grandmother came out to the patio. When she saw the husky man, she screamed like a small girl and threw her arms around him in a most affectionate embrace. He lifted her up as if she weighed nothing and twirled her around. I noticed then that he was very tall. His huskiness hid his height. He actually had the body of a professional fighter. He seemed to notice that I was eyeing him. He flexed his biceps.

"I've done some boxing in my day, sir," he said, thoroughly aware of what I was thinking.

My grandmother introduced him to me. She said that he was her son Antoine, her baby, the apple of her eye; she said that he was a dramatist, a theater director, a writer, a poet.

The fact that he was so athletic was his winning ticket with me. I didn't understand at first that he was adopted. I noticed, however, that he didn't look at all like the rest of the family. While every one of the members of my family were corpses that walked, he was alive, vital from the inside out. We hit it off mar-velously. I liked the fact that he worked out every day, punching a bag. I liked immensely that not only did he punch the bag, he kicked it, too, in the most astounding style, a mixture of boxing and kicking. His body was as hard as a rock.

One day Antoine confessed to me that his only fervent desire in life was to be a writer of note.

"I have everything," he said. "Life has been very generous to me. The only thing I don't have is the only thing I want: talent. The muses do not like me. I appreciate what I read, but I cannot create anything that I like to read. That's my torment; I lack the discipline or the charm to entice the muses, so my life is as empty as anything can be."

Antoine went on to tell me that the one reality that he had was his mother. He called my grandmother his bastion, his support, his twin soul. He ended up by voicing a very disturbing thought to me. "If I didn't have my mother," he said, "I wouldn't live."

I realized then how profoundly tied he was to my grandmother. All the horror stories that my aunts had told me about the spoiled child Antoine became suddenly very vivid for me. My grandmother had really spoiled him beyond salvation. Yet they seemed so very happy together. I saw them sitting for hours on end, his head on her lap as if he were still a child. I had never heard my grandmother converse with anybody for such lengths of time.

Abruptly, one day Antoine started to produce a lot of writing. He began to direct a play at the local theater, a play that he had written himself. When it was staged, it became an instant success. His poems were published in the local paper. He seemed to have hit a creative streak.

But only a few months later it all came to an end. The editor of the town's paper publicly denounced Antoine; he accused him of plagiarism and published in the paper the proof of Antoine's guilt.

My grandmother, of course, would not hear of her son's misbehavior. She explained it all as a case of profound envy. Every one of those people in that town was envious of the elegance, the style of her son. They were envious of his personality, of his wit. Indeed, he was the personification of elegance and savoir faire. But he was a plagiarist for sure; there was no doubt about it.

Antoine never explained his behavior to anyone. I liked him too much to ask him anything about it. Besides, I didn't care. His reasons were his reasons, as far as I was concerned. But something was broken; from then on, our lives moved in leaps and bounds, so to speak. Things changed so drastically in the house from one day to the next that I grew accustomed to expect anything, the best or the worst. One night my grandmother walked into

Antoine's room in a most dramatic fashion. There was a look of hardness in her eyes that I had never seen before. Her lips trembled as she spoke.

"Something terrible has happened, Antoine," she began.

Antoine interrupted her. He begged her to let him explain.

She cut him off abruptly. "No, Antoine, no," she said firmly. "This has nothing to do with you. It has to do with me. At this very difficult time for you, something of greater importance yet has happened. Antoine, my dear son, I have run out of time.

"I want you to understand that this is inevitable," she went on. "I have to leave, but you must remain. You are the sum total of everything that I have done in this life. Good or bad, Antoine, you are all I am. Give life a try. In the end, we will be together again anyway. Meanwhile, however, do, Antoine, do. Whatever, it doesn't matter what, as long as you do."

I saw Antoine's body as it shivered with anguish. I saw how he contracted his total being, all the muscles of his body, all his strength. It was as if he had shifted gears from his problem, which was like a river, to the ocean.

"Promise me that you won't die until you die!" she shouted at him.

Antoine nodded his head.

My grandmother, the next day, on the advice of her sorcerer-counselor, sold all her holdings, which were quite sizable, and turned the money over to her son Antoine. And the following day, very early in the morning, the strangest scene that I had ever witnessed took place in front of my ten-year-old eyes: the moment in which Antoine said good-bye to his mother. It was a scene as unreal as the set of a moving picture; unreal in the sense that it seemed to have been concocted, written down somewhere, created by a series of adjustments that a writer makes and a director carries out.

The patio of my grandparents' house was the setting. Antoine was the main protagonist, his mother the leading actress. Antoine was traveling that day. He was going to the port. He was going to catch an Italian liner and go over the Atlantic to Europe on a leisurely cruise. He was as elegantly dressed as ever. A taxi driver was waiting for him outside the house, blowing the horn of his taxi impatiently.

I had witnessed Antoine's last feverish night when he tried as desperately as anyone can try to write a poem for his mother.

"It is crap," he said to me. "Everything that I write is crap. I'm a nobody."

I assured him, even though I was nobody to assure him, that whatever he was writing was great. At one moment, I got carried away and stepped over certain boundaries I should never have crossed.

"Take it from me, Antoine," I yelled. "I am a worse nobody than you! You have a mother. I have nothing. Whatever you are writing is fine."

Very politely, he asked me to leave his room. I had succeeded in making him feel stupid, having to listen to advice from a nobody kid. I bitterly regretted my outburst. I would have liked him to keep on being my friend.

Antoine had his elegant overcoat neatly folded, draped over his right shoulder. He was wearing a most beautiful green suit, English cashmere.

My grandmother spoke. "You have to hurry up, dear," she said. "Time is of the essence. You have to leave. If you don't, these people will kill you for the money."

She was referring to her daughters, and their husbands, who were beyond fury when they found out that their mother had quietly disinherited them, and that the hideous Antoine, their archenemy, was going to get away with everything that was rightfully theirs.

"I'm sorry I have to put you through all this," my grandmother apologized. "But, as you know, time is independent of our wishes."

Antoine spoke with his grave, beautifully modulated voice. He sounded more than ever like a stage actor. "It'll take but a minute, Mother," he said. "I'd like to read something that I have written for you."

It was a poem of thanks. When he had finished reading, he paused. There was such a wealth of feeling in the air, such a tremor.

"It was sheer beauty, Antoine," my grandmother said, sighing. "It expressed everything that you wanted to say. Everything that I wanted to hear." She paused for an instant. Then her lips broke into an exquisite smile.

"Plagiarized, Antoine?" she asked.

Antoine's smile in response to his mother was equally beaming. "Of course, Mother," he said. "Of course."

They embraced, weeping. The horn of the taxi sounded more impatient yet. Antoine looked at me where I was hiding under the stairway. He nodded his head slightly, as if to say, "Good-bye. Take care." Then he turned around, and without looking at his mother again, he ran toward the door. He was thirty-seven years old, but he looked like he was sixty, he seemed to carry such a gigantic weight on his shoulders. He stopped before he reached the door, when he heard his mother's voice admonishing him for the last time.

"Don't turn around to look, Antoine," she said. "Don't turn around to look, ever. Be happy, and do. Do! There is the trick. Do!"

The scene filled me with a strange sadness that lasts to this day—a most inexplicable melancholy that don Juan explained as my first-time knowledge that we do run out of time.

The next day my grandmother left with her counselor/manservant/valet on a journey to a mythical place called Rondonia, where her sorcerer-helper was going to elicit her cure. My grandmother was terminally ill, although I didn't know it. She never returned, and don Juan explained the selling of her holdings and giving them to Antoine as a supreme sorcerers' maneuver executed by her counselor to detach her from the care of her family. They were so angry with Mother for her deed that they didn't care whether or not she returned. I had the feeling that they didn't even realize that she had left.

On the top of that flat mountain, I recollected those three events as if they had happened only an instant before. When I expressed my thanks to those three persons, I succeeded in bringing them back to that mountaintop. At the end of my shouting, my loneliness was something inexpressible. I was weeping uncontrollably.

Don Juan very patiently explained to me that -loneliness is inadmissible in a warrior. He said that *warrior-travelers* can count on one being on which they can focus all their love, all their care: this marvelous Earth, the mother, the matrix, the epicenter of everything we are and everything we do; the very being to which all of us return; the very being that allows *warrior-travelers* to leave on their *definitive journey*.

Don Genaro proceeded to perform then an act of magical *intent* for my benefit. Lying on his stomach, he executed a series of dazzling movements. He became a blob of luminosity that seemed to be swimming, as if the ground were a pool. Don Juan said that it was Genaro's way of hugging the immense earth, and that in spite of the difference in size, the earth acknowledged Genaro's gesture. The sight of Genaro's movements and the explanation of them replaced my loneliness with sublime joy.

"I can't stand the idea that you are leaving, don Juan," I heard myself saying. The sound of my voice and what I had said made me feel embarrassed. When I began to sob, involuntarily, driven by self-pity, I felt even more chagrined. "What is the matter with me, don Juan?" I muttered. "I'm not ordinarily like this."

"What's happening to you is that your awareness is on your toes again," he replied, laughing.

Then I lost any vestige of control and gave myself fully to my feelings of dejection and despair.

"I'm going to be left alone," I said in a shrieking voice. "What's going to happen to me? What's going to become of me?"

"Let's put it this way," don Juan said calmly. "In order for me to leave this world and face the unknown, I need all my strength, all my forbearance, all my luck; but above all, I need every bit of a *warrior-traveler's* guts of steel. To remain behind and fare like a *warrior-traveler,* you need everything of what I myself need. To venture out there, the way we are going to, is no joking matter, but neither is it to stay behind."

I had an emotional outburst and kissed his hand.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!" he said. "Next thing you're going to make a shrine for my *guaraches*\"

The anguish that gripped me turned from self-pity to a feeling of unequaled loss. "You are leaving!" I muttered. "My god! Leaving forever!"

At that moment don Juan did something to me that he had done repeatedly since the first day I had met him. His face puffed up as if the deep breath he was taking inflated him. He tapped my back forcefully with the palm of his left hand and said, "Get up from your toes! Lift yourself up!"

In the next instant, I was once again coherent, complete, in control. I knew what was expected of me. There was no longer any hesitation on my part, or any concern about myself. I didn't care what was going to happen to me when don Juan left. I knew that his departure was imminent. He looked at me, and in that look his eyes said it all.

"We will never be together again," he said softly. "You don't need my help anymore; and I don't want to offer it to you, because if you are worth your salt as a *warrior-traveler,* you'll spit in my eye for offering it to you. Beyond a certain point, the only joy of a *warrior-traveler* is his aloneness. I wouldn't like you to try to help me, either. Once I leave, I am gone. Don't think about me, for I won't think about you. If you are a worthy *warrior-traveler,* be impeccable! Take care of your world. Honor it; guard it with your life!"

He moved away from me. The moment was beyond self-pity or tears or happiness. He shook his head as if to say good-bye, or as if he were acknowledging what I felt.

"Forget the self and you will fear nothing, in whatever level of awareness you find yourself to be," he said.

He had an outburst of levity. He teased me for the last time on this Earth.

"I hope you find love!" he said.

He raised his palm toward me and stretched his fingers like a child, then contracted them against the palm.

"Ciao," he said.

I knew that it was futile to feel sorry or to regret anything, and that it was as difficult for me to stay behind as it was for don Juan to leave. Both of us were caught in an irreversible energetic maneuver that neither of us could stop. Nevertheless, I wanted to join don Juan, follow him wherever he went. The thought crossed my mind that perhaps if I died, he would take me with him.

I *saw* then how don Juan Matus, the nagual, led the fifteen other seers who were his companions, his wards, his delight, one by one to disappear in the haze of that mesa, toward the north. I *saw* how every one of them turned into a blob of luminosity, and together they ascended and floated above the mountaintop like phantom lights in the sky. They circled above the mountain once, as don Juan had said they would do: their last survey, the one for their eyes only; their last look at this marvelous Earth. And then they vanished.

I knew what I had to do. I had run out of time. I took off at my top speed toward the precipice and leaped into the abyss. I felt the wind on my face for a moment, and then the most merciful blackness swallowed me like a peaceful subterranean river.

## The Return Trip

I WAS VAGUELY aware of the loud noise of a motor that seemed to be racing in a stationary position. I thought that the attendants were fixing a car in the parking lot at the back of the building where I had my office/apartment. The noise became so intense that it finally caused me to wake up. I silently cursed the boys who ran the parking lot for fixing their car right under my bedroom window. I was hot, sweaty, and tired. I sat up on the edge of my bed, then had the most painful cramps in my calves. I rubbed them for a moment. They seemed to have contracted so tightly that I was afraid that I would have horrendous bruises. I automatically headed for the bathroom to look for some liniment. I couldn't walk. I was dizzy. I fell down, something that had never happened to me before. When I had regained a minimum of control, I noticed that I wasn't worried at all about the cramps in my calves. I had always been a near hypochondriac. An unusual pain in my calves such as the one I was having now would ordinarily have thrown me into a chaotic state of anxiety.

I went then to the window to close it, although I couldn't hear the noise anymore. I realized that the window was locked and that it was dark outside. It was night! The room was stuffy. I opened the windows. I couldn't understand why I had closed them. The night air was cool and fresh. The parking lot was empty. It occurred to me that the noise must have been made by a car accelerating in the alley between the parking lot and my building. I thought nothing of it anymore, and went to my bed to go back to sleep. I lay across it with my feet on the floor. I wanted to sleep in this fashion to help the circulation in my calves, which were very sore, but I wasn't sure whether it would have been better to keep them down or perhaps lift them up on a pillow.

As I was beginning to rest comfortably and fall asleep again, a thought came to my mind with such ferocious force that it made me stand up in one single reflex. I had jumped into an abyss in Mexico! The next thought that I had was a quasi-logical deduction: Since I had jumped into the abyss deliberately in order to die, I must now be a ghost. How strange, I thought, that I should return, in ghostlike form, to my office/apartment on the corner of Westwood and Wilshire in Los Angeles after I had died. No wonder my feelings were not the same. But if I were a ghost, I reasoned, why would I have felt the blast of fresh air on my face, or the pain in my calves?

I touched the sheets of my bed; they felt real to me. So did it's metal frame. I went to the bathroom. I looked at myself in the mirror. By the looks of me, I could easily have been a ghost. I looked like hell. My eyes were sunken, with huge black circles under them. I was dehydrated, or dead. In an automatic reaction, I drank water straight from the tap. I could actually swallow it. I drank gulp after gulp, as if I hadn't drunk water for days. I felt my deep inhalations. I was alive! By god, I was alive! I knew it beyond the shadow of a doubt, but I wasn't elated, as I should have been.

A most unusual thought crossed my mind then: I had died and revived before. I was accustomed to it; it meant nothing to me. The vividness of the thought, however, made it into a quasi-memory. It was a quasi-memory that didn't stem from situations in which my life had been endangered. It was something quite different from that. It was, rather, a vague knowledge of something that had never happened and had no reason whatsoever to be in my thoughts.

There was no doubt in my mind that I had jumped into an abyss in Mexico. I was now in my apartment in Los Angeles, over three thousand miles from where I had jumped, with no recollection whatsoever of having made the return trip. In an automatic fashion, I ran the water in the tub and sat in it. I didn't feel the warmth of the water; I was chilled to the bone. Don Juan had taught me that at moments of crisis, such as this one, one must use running water as a cleansing factor. I remembered this and got under the shower. I let the warm water run over my body for perhaps over an hour.

I wanted to think calmly and rationally about what was happening to me but I couldn't. Thoughts seemed to have been erased from my mind. I was thoughtless yet I was filled to capacity with sensations that came to my whole body in barrages that I was incapable of examining. All I was able to do was to feel their onslaughts and let them go through me. The only conscious choice I made was to get dressed and leave. I went to eat breakfast, something I always did at any time of the day or night, at Ship's Restaurant on Wilshire, a block away from my office/apartment.

I had walked from my office to Ship's so many times that I knew every step of the way. The same walk this time was a novelty for me. I didn't feel my steps. It was as if I had a cushion under my feet, or as if the sidewalk were carpeted. I practically glided. I was suddenly at the door of the restaurant after what I thought might have been only two or three steps. I knew that I could swallow food because I had drunk water in my apartment. I also knew that I could talk because I had cleared my throat and cursed while the water ran on me. I walked into the restaurant as I had always done. I sat at the counter and a waitress who knew me came to me.

"You don't look too good today, dear," she said. "Do you have the flu?"

"No," I replied, trying to sound cheerful. "I've been working too hard. I've been up for twenty-four hours straight writing a paper for a class. By the way, what day is today?"

She looked at her watch and gave me the date, explaining that she had a special watch that was a calendar, too, a gift from her daughter. She also gave me the time: 3:15 A.M.

I ordered steak and eggs, hash browned potatoes, and buttered white toast. When she went away to fill my order, another wave of horror flooded my mind: Had it been only an illusion that I had jumped into that abyss in Mexico, at twilight the previous day? But even if the jump had been only an illusion, how could I have returned to L.A. from such a remote place only ten hours later? Had I slept for ten hours? Or was it that it had taken ten hours for me to fly, slide, float, or whatever to Los Angeles? To have traveled by conventional means to Los Angeles from the place where I had jumped into the abyss was out of the question, since it would have taken two days just to travel to Mexico City from the place where I had jumped.

Another strange thought emerged in my mind. It had the same clarity of my quasi-memory of having died and revived before, and the same quality of being totally foreign to me: My continuity was now broken beyond repair. I had really died, one way or another, at the bottom of that gully. It was impossible to comprehend my being alive, having breakfast at Ship's. It was impossible for me to look back into my past and see the uninterrupted line of continuous events that all of us see when we look into the past.

The only explanation available to me was that I had followed don Juan's directives; I had moved my *assemblage point* to a position that prevented my death, and from my *inner silence* I had made the return journey to L.A. There was no other rationale for me to hold on to. For the first time ever, this line of thought was thoroughly acceptable to me, and thoroughly satisfactory. It didn't really explain anything, but it certainly pointed out a pragmatic procedure that I had tested before in a mild form when I met don Juan in that town of our choice, and this thought seemed to put all my being at ease.

Vivid thoughts began to emerge in my mind. They had the unique quality of clarifying issues. The first one that erupted had to do with something that had plagued me all along. Don Juan had described it as a common occurrence among male sorcerers: my incapacity to remember events that had transpired while I was in states of heightened awareness.

Don Juan had explained heightened awareness as a minute displacement of my *assemblage point,* which he achieved, every time I saw him, by actually pushing forcefully on my back. He helped me, with such displacements, to engage energy fields that were ordinarily peripheral to my awareness. In other words, the energy fields that were usually on the edge of my *assemblage point* became central to it during that displacement. A displacement of this nature had two consequences for me: an extraordinary keenness of thought and perception, and the incapacity to remember, once I was back in my normal state of awareness, what had transpired while I had been in that other state.

My relationship with my cohorts had been an example of both of these consequences. I had cohorts, don Juan's other apprentices, companions for my *definitive journey*. I interacted with them only in heightened awareness. The clarity and scope of our interaction was supreme. The drawback for me was that in my daily life they were only poignant quasi-memories that drove me to desperation with anxiety and expectations. I could say that I lived my normal life on the perennial lookout for somebody who was going to appear all of a sudden in front of me, perhaps emerging from an office building, perhaps turning a corner and bumping into me. Wherever I went, my eyes darted everywhere, ceaselessly and involuntarily, looking for people who didn't exist and yet existed like no one else.

While I sat at Ship's that morning, everything that had happened to me in heightened awareness, to the most minute detail, in all the years with don Juan became again a continuous memory without interruption. Don Juan had lamented that a male sorcerer who is the nagual perforce had to be fragmented because of the bulk of his energetic mass. He said that each fragment lived a specific range of a total scope of activity, and the events that he experienced in each fragment had to be joined someday to give a complete, conscious picture of everything that had taken place in his total life.

Looking into my eyes, he had told me that that unification takes years to accomplish, and that he had been told of cases of naguals who never reached the total scope of their activities in a conscious manner and lived fragmented.

What I experienced that morning at Ship's was beyond anything I could have imagined in my wildest fantasies. Don Juan had said to me time after time that the world of sorcerers was not an immutable world, where the word is final, unchanging, but that it's a world of eternal fluctuation where nothing should be taken for granted. The jump into the abyss had modified my cognition so drastically that it allowed now the entrance of possibilities both portentous and indescribable.

But anything that I could have said about the unification of my cognitive fragments would have paled in comparison to the reality of it. That fateful morning at Ship's I experienced something infinitely more potent than I did the day that I *saw* energy as it flows in the universe, for the first time—the day that I ended up in the bed of my office/apartment after having been on the campus of UCLA without actually going home in the fashion my cognitive system demanded in order for the whole event to be real. In Ship's, I integrated all the fragments of my being. I had acted in each one of them with perfect certainty and consistency, and yet I had had no idea that I had done that. I was, in essence, a gigantic puzzle, and to fit each piece of that puzzle into place produced an effect that had no name.

I sat at the counter at Ship's, perspiring profusely, pondering uselessly, and obsessively asking questions that couldn't be answered: How could all this be possible? How could I have been fragmented in such a fashion? Who are we really? Certainly not the people all of us have been led to believe we are. I had memories of events that had never happened, as far as some core of myself was concerned. I couldn't even weep.

"A sorcerer weeps when he is fragmented," don Juan had said to me once. "When he's complete, he's taken by a shiver that has the potential, because it is so intense, of ending his life."

I was experiencing such a shiver! I doubted that I would ever meet my cohorts again. It appeared to me that all of them had left with don Juan. I was alone. I wanted to think about it, to mourn my loss, to plunge into a satisfying sadness the way I had always done. I couldn't. There was nothing to mourn, nothing to feel sad about. Nothing mattered. All of us were *warrior-travelers,* and all of us had been swallowed by *infinity.*

All along, I had listened to don Juan talk about the *warrior-traveler*. I had liked the description immensely, and I had identified with it on a purely emotional basis. Yet I had never felt what he really meant by that, regardless of how many times he had explained his meaning to me. That night, at the counter of Ship's, I knew what don Juan had been talking about. I was a *warrior-traveler*. Only *energetic facts* were meaningful for me. All the rest were trimmings that had no importance at all.

That night, while I sat waiting for my food, another vivid thought erupted in my mind. I felt a wave of empathy, a wave of identification with don Juan's premises. I had finally reached the goal of his teachings: I was one with him as I had never been before. It had never been the case that I was just fighting don Juan or his concepts, which were revolutionary for me because they didn't fulfill the linearity of my thoughts as a Western man. Rather, it was that don Juan's precision in presenting his concepts had always scared me half to death. His efficiency had appeared to be dogmatism. It was that appearance that had forced me to seek elucidations, and had made me act, all along, as if I had been a reluctant believer.

Yes, I had jumped into an abyss, I said to myself, and I didn't die because before I reached the bottom of that gully I let the *dark sea of awareness* swallow me. I surrendered to it, without fears or regrets. And that *dark sea* had supplied me with whatever was necessary for me not to die, but to end up in my bed in L.A. This explanation would have explained nothing to me two days before. At three in the morning, in Ship's, it meant everything to me.

I banged my hand on the table as if I were alone in the room. People looked at me and smiled knowingly. I didn't care. My mind was focused on an insoluble dilemma: I was alive despite the fact that I had jumped into an abyss in order to die ten hours before. I knew that such a dilemma could never be resolved. My normal cognition required a linear explanation in order to be satisfied, and linear explanations were not possible. That was the crux of the interruption of continuity. Don Juan had said that that interruption was sorcery. I knew this now, as clearly as I was capable of. How right don Juan had been when he had said that in order for me to stay behind, I needed all my strength, all my forbearance, and above all, a *warrior-traveler's* guts of steel.

I wanted to think about don Juan, but I couldn't. Besides, I didn't care about don Juan. There seemed to be a giant barrier between us. I truly believed at that moment that the foreign thought that had been insinuating itself to me since I had woken up was true: I was someone else. An exchange had taken place at the moment of my jump. Otherwise, I would have relished the thought of don Juan; I would have longed for him. I would have even felt a twinge of resentment because he hadn't taken me with him. That would have been my normal self. I truthfully wasn't the same. This thought gained momentum until it invaded all my being. Any residue of my old self that I may have retained vanished then.

A new mood took over. I was alone! Don Juan had left me inside a dream as his agent provocateur. I felt my body begin to lose it's rigidity; it became flexible, by degrees, until I could breathe deeply and freely. I laughed out loud. I didn't care that people were staring at me and weren't smiling this time. I was alone, and there was nothing I could have done about it!

I had the physical sensation of actually entering into a passageway, a passageway that had a force of it's own. It pulled me in. It was a silent passageway. Don Juan was that passageway, quiet and immense. This was the first time ever that I felt that don Juan was void ofphysicality. There was no room for sentimentality or longing. I couldn't possibly have missed him because he was there as a depersonalized emotion that lured me in.

The passageway challenged me. I had a sensation of ebullience, ease. Yes, I could travel that passageway, alone or in company, perhaps forever. And to do this was not an imposition for me, nor was it a pleasure. It was more than the beginning of the *definitive journey,* the unavoidable fate of a *warrior-traveler,* it was the beginning of a new era. I should have been weeping with the realization that I had found that passageway, but I wasn't. I was facing *infinity* at Ship's! How extraordinary! I felt a chill on my back. I heard don Juan's voice saying that the universe was indeed unfathomable.

At that moment, the back door of the restaurant, the one that led to the parking lot, opened and a strange character entered: a man perhaps in his early forties, disheveled and emaciated, but with rather handsome features. I had seen him for years roaming around UCLA, mingling with the students. Someone had told me that he was an outpatient of the nearby Veterans' Hospital. He seemed to be mentally unbalanced. I had seen him time after time at Ship's, huddled over a cup of coffee, always at the same end of the counter. I had also seen how he waited outside, looking through the window, watching for his favorite stool to become vacant if someone was sitting there.

When he entered the restaurant, he sat at his usual place, and then he looked at me. Our eyes met. The next thing I knew, he had let out a formidable scream that chilled me, and everyone present, to the bone. Everyone looked at me, wide-eyed, some of them with unchewed food in their mouths. Obviously, they thought I had screamed. I had set up the precedents by banging the counter and then laughing out loud. The man jumped off his stool and ran out of the restaurant, turning back to stare at me while, with his hands, he made agitated gestures over his head.

I succumbed to an impulsive urge and ran after the man. I wanted him to tell me what he had seen in me that had made him scream. I overtook him in the parking lot and asked him to tell me why he had screamed. He covered his eyes and screamed again, even louder. He was like a child, frightened by a nightmare, screaming at the top of his lungs. I left him and went back to the restaurant.

"What happened to you, dear?" the waitress asked with a concerned look. "I thought you ran out on me."

"I just went to see a friend," I said.

The waitress looked at me and made a gesture of mock annoyance and surprise.

"Is that guy your friend?" she asked.

"The only friend I have in the world," I said, and that was the truth, if I could define "friend" as someone who sees through the veneer that covers you and knows where you really come from.

### The End -  The Active Side of Infinity - © 1998 by Carlos Castaneda ###

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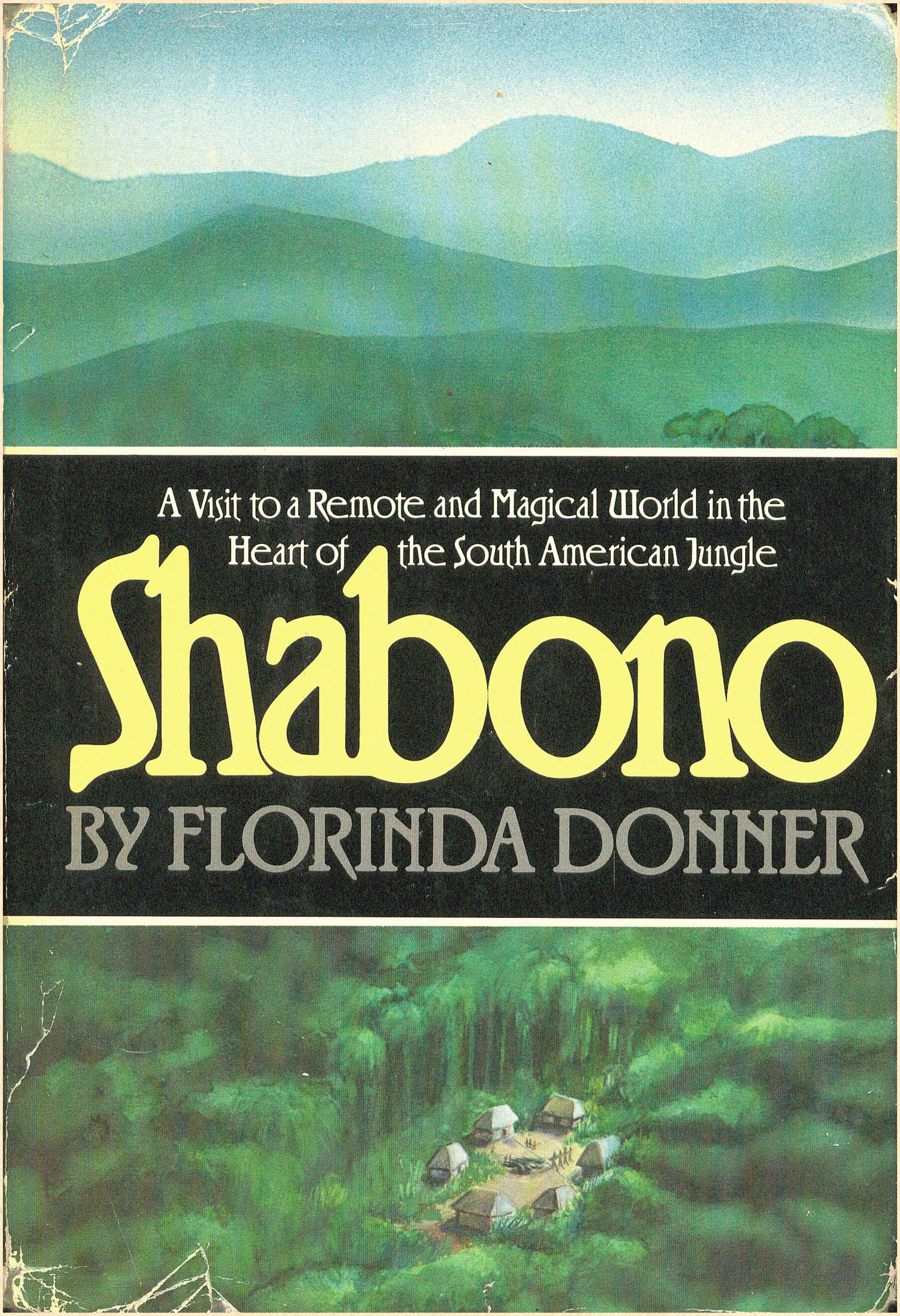
# 15 - SHABONO: A VISIT TO A REMOTE AND MAGICAL WORLD IN THE SOUTH AMERICAN RAINFOREST

© 1982 - Florinda Donner-Grau. Covering Donner's time living with the indigenous Yanomama tribe of Venezuela and southern Brazil, as an anthropologist.


A Visit to a Remote and Magical World in the Heart of the South American Jungle
Shabono
BY FLORINDA DONNER

# Book 15 - SHABONO

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(*clickable/tappable*)

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Glossary

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For the five-legged spider
that carries me
on it's back

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## Author's Note

The Yanomama Indians, also known in anthropological literature as the Waika, Shamatari, Barafiri, Shirishana, and Guaharibo, inhabit the most isolated portion of the border between southern Venezuela and northern Brazil. It has been roughly estimated that there are between ten and twenty thousand of them, occupying an area of approximately seven thousand square miles. This territory encompasses the headwaters of the Orinoco, Mavaca, Siapo, Ocamo, Padamo, and Ventuari rivers in Venezuela; and the Uraricoera, Catrimani, Dimini, and Araca rivers in Brazil.

The Yanomama live in hamlets of palm-thatched dwellings called shabonos, which are scattered throughout the forest. The number of individuals residing in each of these widely dispersed hamlets varies between sixty and a hundred people. Some of the shabonos are located close to Catholic or Protestant missions or in other areas accessible to the white man: Others have withdrawn deeper into the jungle. Hamlets still exist in remote parts of the forest that have not been contacted by outsiders.

My experience with the Iticoteri, the inhabitants of one of these unknown shabonos, is what this book is about. It is a subjective account of the surplus data, so to speak, of anthropological field research I conducted on curing practices in Venezuela.

The most important part of my training as an anthropologist emphasized the fact that objectivity is what gives validity to anthropological work. It happened that throughout my stay with this Yanomama group I did not keep the distance and detachment required of objective research. Special links of gratitude and friendship with them made it impossible for me to interpret facts or draw conclusions from what I witnessed and learned. Because I am a woman; and because of my physical appearance, and a certain bent of character, I posed no threat to the Indians. They accepted me as an amenable oddity, and I was able to fit, if only for a moment in time, into the peculiar rhythm of their lives.

In my account I have made two alterations of my original notes. The first has to do with names: The name Iticoteri as well as the names of the persons portrayed are imaginary.

The second has to do with style: For dramatic effect I have altered the sequence of events, and for narrative purposes I have rendered conversations in the proper English syntax and grammatic structure. Had I literally translated their language, I could not have done justice to it's complexity, flexibility, and it's highly poetic and metaphoric expressions. The versatility of suffixes and prefixes gives the Yanomama language delicate shades of meaning that have no real equivalent in English.

Even though I was patiently drilled until I could differentiate and reproduce most of their words, I never became a fluent speaker. However, my inability to command their language was no obstacle in communicating with them. I learned to "talk" with them long before I had an adequate vocabulary. Talking was more of a bodily sensation than an actual interchange of words. How accurate our interchange was is another matter. For them and for me it was effective. They made allowances when I could not explain myself, or when I could not understand the information they were conveying about their world: After all, they did not expect me to cope with the subtleties and intricacies of their language. The Yanomama, just like ourselves, have their own biases: They believe whites are infantile and thus less intelligent.

## Principal Iticoteri Characters

(EETEE CO TEH REE)

ANGELICA (An geh lee ca)
An old Indian woman at the Catholic mission who sets up the journey to the Iticoteri country

ARASUWE (Arah suh weh)
Milagros's brother-in-law, headman of the Iticoteri

ETEWA (Eh teh wuh)
Arasuwe's son-in-law

HAYAMA (Hah yah muh)
Angelica's oldest living sister, mother-in-law of Arasuwe, grand-mother of Ritimi

HOAXIWE (How bashee weh)
Tutemi's and Etewa's newborn son

IMAWAAMI ()
The legendary woman shapori.

IRAMAMOWE (Eerah mah moh weh)
Arasuwe's brother, a shaman at the Iticoteri settlement

KAMOSIWE (Kah moh see weh)
Angelica's father

MATUWE (Mah tuh weh)
Hayama's youngest son

MILAGROS (Mee la gros)
Angelica's son, a man who belongs to both worlds, the Indian's and the white man's

MOCOTOTERI (Moh coh toh teh ree)
The inhabitants of a nearby shabono

PURIWARIWE (Puh ree wahree weh)
Angelica's brother, an old shaman at the Iticoteri settlement

RITIMI (Ree tee mee)
Arasuwe's daughter, first wife of Etewa

SISIWE (See see weh)
Ritimi's and Etewa's six-year-old son

TEXOMA (Teh shomuh)
Ritimi's and Etewa's four-year-old daughter

TUTEMI (Tuh teh mee)
Etewa's young second wife

XOTOMI (Shoh toh mee)
Arasuwe's daughter, Ritimi's half-sister

XOROWE (Shoh roh weh)
Iramamowe's son

# PART ONE

## Chapter 1

I was half asleep. Yet I could sense people moving around me. As if from a great distance, I heard the soft rustle of bare feet over the packed dirt of the hut; the coughing and clearing of throats, and the faint voices of women. Leisurely I opened my eyes. It was not quite dawn. In the semidarkness I could see Ritimi and Tutemi, their naked bodies bent over the hearths where the embers of the night's fires still glowed. Tobacco leaves, water-filled gourds, quivers with poisoned arrowheads, animal skulls, and bundles of green plantains hung from the palm-frond ceiling, appearing to be suspended in the air below the rising smoke.

Yawning, Tutemi stood up. She stretched, then bent over the hammock to lift Hoaxiwe into her arms. Giggling softly, she nuzzled her face against the baby's stomach. She mumbled something unintelligible as she pushed her nipple into the boy's mouth. Sighing, she eased herself back into her hammock.

Ritimi pulled down some dried tobacco leaves. She soaked them in a calabash bowl filled with water, then took one wet leaf and, before rolling it into a wad, sprinkled it with ashes. Placing the quid between her gum and lower lip, she sucked at it noisily while preparing two more. She gave one to Tutemi, then approached me. I closed my eyes, hoping to give the impression that I was asleep. Squatting at the head of my hammock, Ritimi ran her tobacco-soaked finger, wet with her saliva, between my gum and lower lip, but did not leave a quid in my mouth. Chuckling, she edged toward Etewa, who had been watching from his hammock. She spat her wad into her palm and handed it to him. A soft moan escaped her lips as she placed the third quid in her mouth and lowered herself on top of him.

The fire filled the hut with smoke, gradually warming the chilly damp air. Burning day and night, the hearth fires were the center of each dwelling. The smoke stains they left on the thatch ceiling set one household apart from the next, for there were no dividing walls between the huts. They stood so close together that adjacent roofs overlapped each other, giving the impression of one enormous circular dwelling. There was a large main entrance to the entire compound with a few narrow openings between some huts. Each hut was supported by two long and two shorter poles. The higher side of the hut was open and faced a clearing in the middle of the circular structure, while the lower, exterior side of the hut was closed with a wall of short poles wedged against the roof.

A heavy mist shrouded the surrounding trees. The palm fronds, hanging over the interior edge of the hut, were silhouetted against the grayness of the sky. Etewa's hunting dog lifted it's head from under it's curled-up body, and without quite waking, opened it's mouth in a wide yawn. I closed my eyes, dozing off to the smell of green plantains roasting in the fires. My back was stiff, and my legs ached from having squatted for hours the day before, digging weeds in the nearby gardens.

I opened my eyes abruptly as my hammock was vigorously rocked back and forth, and I gasped as a small knee pressed into my stomach. Instinctively I pulled the hammock's sides over me to protect myself from the cockroaches and spiders that invariably fell from the thick palm-thatched roof whenever the poles holding up the huts were shaken.

Giggling, the children crawled on top and around me. Their brown naked bodies were soft and warm against my skin. As they had done almost every morning since I had first arrived, the children ran their chubby hands over my face, breasts, stomach, and legs, coaxing me to identify each part of my anatomy. I pretended to sleep, snoring loudly. Two little boys snuggled against my sides, and the little girl on top of me pressed her dark head under my chin. They smelled of smoke and dirt.

I had not known a word of their language when I first arrived at their settlement deep in the jungle between Venezuela and Brazil. Yet that had not been an obstacle to the eighty or so people occupying the shabono in accepting me. For the Indians, not to understand their language was tantamount to being aka boreki- dumb. As such, I was fed, loved, and indulged: My mistakes were excused or overlooked as if I were a child. Mostly my blunders were acknowledged by boisterous outbursts of laughter that shook their bodies until they rolled on the ground, tears brimming in their eyes.

The pressure of a tiny hand against my cheek stopped my reveries. Texoma, Ritimi's and Etewa's four-year-old daughter, lying on top of me, opened her eyes and, moving her face closer, began to flutter her stubby eyelashes against mine. "Don't you want to get up?" the little girl asked, running her fingers through my hair. "The plantains are ready."

I had no desire to abandon my warm hammock. "I wonder- how many months have I been here?" I asked.

"Many," three voices answered in unison.

I could not help smiling. Anything beyond three was expressed as many, or more than three. "Yes, many months," I said softly.

"Tutemi's baby was still sleeping inside her belly when you first arrived," Texoma murmured, snuggling against me.

It was not that I had ceased being aware of time, but the days, weeks, and months had lost their precise boundaries. Here only the present mattered. For these people only what happened each day amidst the immense green shadows of the forest counted. Yesterday and tomorrow, they said, were as undetermined as a vague dream; as fragile as a spider's web, which was visible only when a streak of sunlight sears through the leaves.

Measuring time had been my obsession during the first few weeks. I wore my self-winding watch day and night and recorded each sunrise in a diary as if my very existence depended on it. I cannot pinpoint when I realized that a fundamental change had taken place within me. I believe it all started in a small town in eastern Venezuela where I had been doing research on healing practices even before I arrived at the Iticoteri settlement.

After transcribing, translating, and analyzing the numerous tapes and hundreds of pages of notes gathered during months of field work among three curers in the Barlovento area, I had seriously begun doubting the validity and purpose of my research. My endeavor to organize the data into a meaningful theoretical framework proved to be futile, in that the material was ridden with inconsistencies and contradictions.

The emphasis of my work had been directed toward discovering the meaning that curing practices have for the healers and for their patients in the context of their everyday life activities. My concern had been in discerning how social reality, in terms of health and illness, was created out of their interlocked activity. I reasoned that I needed to master the manner in which practitioners regard each other and their knowledge, for only then would I be able to operate in their social setting and within their own system of interpretation. And thus the analysis of my data would come from the system in which I had been operating and would not be superimposed from my own cultural milieu.

While in the field I lived in the home of dona Mercedes, one of the three curers I was working with. Not only did I record, observe, and interview the curers and their numerous patients, but I also participated in the curing sessions, immersing myself totally in the new situation.

Yet I was faced day to day with blatant inconsistencies in their curing practices and their explanations of them. Dona Mercedes laughed at my bewilderment and what she considered my lack of fluidity in accepting changes and innovations.

"Are you sure I said that?" she asked upon listening to one of the tapes I insisted on playing for her.

"It's not me speaking," I said tartly, and began reading from my typed notes, hoping she would become aware of the contradictory information she had given me.

"That sounds wonderful," dona Mercedes said, interrupting my reading. "Is that really me you are talking about? You have converted me into a real genius. Read me your notes on your sessions with Rafael and Serafino."

These were the other two curers I was working with.

I did as she asked, then turned on the tape recorder once more, hoping she would help me with the conflicting information. However, dona Mercedes was not interested at all in what she had said months earlier. To her that was something in the past and thus had no validity. Boldly she gave me to understand that the tape recorder was at fault for having recorded something she had no memory of having said. "If I really said these things, it's your doing. Every time you ask me about curing I start talking without really knowing what I am saying. You always put words into my mouth. If you knew how to cure, you wouldn't bother writing or talking about it. You would just do it."

I was not willing to believe that my work was useless. I went to see the other two curers. To my great chagrin they were not much help either. They acknowledged the inconsistencies and explained them much as dona Mercedes had.

In retrospect my despair over this failure seems comical. In a fit of rage, I dared dona Mercedes to burn my notes. She willingly complied, burning sheet after sheet over the flame of one of the candles illuminating the statue of the Virgin Mary on the altar in her curing room. "I really can't understand why you get so upset about what your machine says and what I say," dona Mercedes observed, lighting another candle on the altar. "What difference does it make about what I do now and what I did a few months ago? All that matters is that the patients get well. Years ago, a psychologist and a sociologist came here and recorded everything I said on a machine like yours. I believe it was a better machine: It was much larger. They were only here for a week. With the information they got, they wrote a book about curing."

"I know the book," I snapped. "I don't think it's an accurate study. It's simplistic, superficial, and lacks a true understanding."

Dona Mercedes peered at me quizzically, her glance half pitying, half deprecatory. In silence I watched the last page turn to ashes. I was not bothered by what she had done; I still had the English translation of the tapes and notes. She got up from her chair and sat next to me on the wooden bench. "Very soon you'll feel that a heavy load has been lifted off your back," she consoled me.

I was compelled to go into a lengthy explanation concerning the importance of studying non-Western healing practices. Dona Mercedes listened attentively, a mocking smile on her face.

"If I were you," she suggested, "I would accept your friend's offer to go hunting up the Orinoco River. It would be a good change for you."

Although I had intended to return to Los Angeles as soon as possible in order to conclude my work, I had seriously considered accepting a friend's invitation for a two-week trip into the jungle. I had no interest in hunting but believed I might have the opportunity of meeting a shaman, or witnessing a curing ceremony, through one of the Indian guides he planned to hire upon arriving at the Catholic mission, which was the last outpost of civilization.

"I think I should do that," I said to dona Mercedes. "Maybe I'll meet a great Indian curer who will tell me things about healing that not even you know."

"I'm sure you'll hear all kinds of interesting things," dona Mercedes laughed. "But don't bother to write them down- you won't do any kind of research."

"Oh, really. And how do you know that?"

"Remember I'm a bruja," she said, patting my cheek. There was an expression of ineffable gentleness in her dark eyes. "And don't worry about your English notes safely tucked away in your desk. By the time you return, you won't have any use for your notes."

## Chapter 2

A week later I was on my way in a small plane to one of the Catholic missions on the upper Orinoco with my friend. There we were to meet the other members of the party, who had set out by boat a few days earlier with the hunting gear and the necessary provisions to last us two weeks in the jungle.

My friend was eager to show me the wonders of the muddy, turbulent Orinoco River. He maneuvered the small aircraft with daring and skill. At one moment we were so close to the water's surface that we scared the alligators sunning themselves on the sandy bank. The next instant we were up in the air, above the seemingly endless, impenetrable forest. No sooner had I relaxed than he would dive once again- so low that we would see the turtles basking on logs at the edge of the river.

I was shaking with dizziness and nausea when we finally landed on the small clearing near the cultivated fields of the mission. We were welcomed by Father Coriolano, the priest in charge of the mission, the rest of our party who had arrived the day before, and a group of Indians who cried excitedly as they scrambled into the small plane.

Father Coriolano led us through the plots of maize, manioc, plantains, and sugar cane. He was a thin man with long arms and short legs. Heavy eyebrows almost hid his deep-set eyes and a mass of unruly beard covered the rest of his face. At odds with his black cassock was his torn straw hat, which he kept pushing back so that the breeze could dry his sweat-covered forehead.

My clothes clung damply to my body as we walked past a makeshift pier of piles driven into the mud at the bank of the river where the boat was tied. We stopped and Father Coriolano began discussing our departure the next day. I was encircled by a group of Indian women who did not say a word, but only smiled shyly at me. Their ill-fitting dresses came up in front and dipped in back, giving the impression that they were all pregnant.

Among them was an old woman so small and wrinkled she reminded me of an ancient child. She did not smile like the others. There was a silent plea in the old woman's eyes as she held her hand out to me. My feelings were strange as I watched her eyes fill with tears: I did not want to see them roll down her clay-colored cheeks. I placed my hand in hers. Smiling contentedly, she led me toward the fruit trees surrounding the long, one-story mission.

In the shade, underneath the wide overhang of the building's asbestos roof, squatted a group of old men holding enameled tin cups in their trembling hands. They were dressed in khaki clothes, their faces partly covered by sweat-stained straw hats. They laughed and talked in high-pitched voices, smacking their lips over their rum-laced coffee. A noisy pair of macaws, their brightly colored wings clipped, perched on one of the men's shoulders.

I could not see the men's features, nor the color of their skin. They seemed to be Speaking in Spanish, yet their words sounded unintelligible to me. "Are those men Indians?" I asked the old woman as she led me into a small room at the back of one of the houses fringing the mission.

The old woman laughed. Her eyes, scarcely visible between the slits of her lids, came to rest on my face. "They are racionales. Those who are not Indians are called racionales," she repeated. "Those old men have been here for too long. They came to look for gold and diamonds."

"Did they find any?"

"Many of them did."

"Why are they still here?"

"They are the ones who cannot return to where they came from," she said, resting her bony hands on my shoulders. I was not surprised by her gesture. There was something cordial and affectionate in her touch. I just thought she was a bit crazy. "They have lost their souls in the forest." The old woman's eyes had grown wide; they were the color of dried tobacco leaves.

Not knowing what to say, I averted my eyes from her penetrating gaze, and looked around the room. The blue-painted walls were faded from the sun and peeling from the dampness. Next to a narrow window stood a crudely constructed wooden bed. It looked like an oversized crib on which mosquito wire had been nailed all around. The more I looked at it, the more it reminded me of a cage that could be entered only by lifting the heavy mosquito-screened top.

"I am Angelica," the old woman said, peering at me. "Is this all you have brought with you?" she asked, removing the orange knapsack from my back.

Speechless and with a look of complete astonishment, I watched her take out my underwear, a pair of jeans, and a long T-shirt. "That's all I need for two weeks," I said, pointing to my camera and the toilet kit at the bottom of the knapsack.

Carefully, she removed the camera and unzipped the plastic toilet kit and promptly emptied it's contents on the floor. It contained a comb, nail clipper, toothpaste and brush, a bottle of shampoo, and a bar of soap. Shaking her head in disbelief, she turned the knapsack inside out.

Absentmindedly, she brushed away the dark hair sticking to her forehead. There was a vague air of dreamy recollection in her eyes as her face wrinkled into a smile. She put everything back into the knapsack and without a word led me back to my friends.

Long after the mission was dark and silent I was still awake, listening to the unfamiliar sounds of the night coming through the opened window. I don't know whether it was because of my fatigue or the relaxed atmosphere at the mission, but before retiring that evening I had decided not to accompany my friends on their hunting expedition. Instead I was going to stay the two weeks in the mission. Happily, no one minded. In fact, everybody seemed relieved. Although they had not voiced it, some of my friends believed that a person who did not know how to use a gun had no business going on a hunt.

Spellbound, I watched the blue transparency of the air dissolve the shadows of the night. A softness spread over the sky, revealing the contours of the branches and leaves waving with the breeze outside my window. The solitary cry of a howler monkey was the last thing I heard before falling into a deep sleep.

"So you are an anthropologist," Father Coriolano said at lunch the next day. "The anthropologists I have met were all loaded with recording and filming equipment, and who knows what other gadgets." He offered me another serving of baked fish and corn on the cob. "Are you interested in the Indians?"

I explained to him what I had been doing in Barlovento, touching upon the difficulties I had encountered with the data. "I would like to see some curing sessions while I'm here."

"I'm afraid you won't see much of that around here,"

Father Coriolano said, picking out crumbs of cassava bread lodged in his beard. "We have a well-equipped dispensary. Indians come from far away to bring their sick. But perhaps I can arrange for you to visit one of the nearby settlements, where you could meet a shaman."

"I would be very grateful if that were possible," I said. "Not that I came to do field work, but it would be interesting to see a shaman."

"You don't look like an anthropologist." Father Coriolano's heavy eyebrows arched and met. "Of course most of the ones I have met were men; but there've been a few women." He scratched his head. "Somehow you don't match my description of a woman anthropologist."

"You can't expect us to all look alike," I said lightly, wondering whom he had met.

"I suppose not," he said sheepishly. "What I mean is that you don't look fully grown. This morning, after your friends left, I was asked by various people why the child was left with me."

His eyes were lively as he joked about how the Indians expected a fully grown white adult to tower over them. "Especially if they are blond and blue eyed," he said. "Those are supposed to be veritable giants."

That night I had the most terrifying nightmare in my mosquito-netted crib. I dreamt that the top had been nailed shut. All my efforts to extricate myself proved futile against the pressure of the lid. Panic overtook me. I screamed and shook the frame until the whole contraption tumbled over. I was still half asleep as I lay on the floor, my head resting against the small bulge of the old woman's hanging breasts. For a moment I could not remember where I was. A childish fear made me press closer to the old Indian, knowing that I was safe.

The old woman rubbed the top of my head and whispered incomprehensible words into my ear until I was fully awake. I felt reassured by her touch and the alien, nasal sound of her voice. I was not able to rationalize this feeling, but there was something that made me cling to her. She led me to her room, back of the kitchen. I lay next to her in a heavy hammock fastened to two poles. Protected by the presence of the strange old woman, I closed my eyes without fear. The faint beat of her heart and the drip of water filtering through an earthen water jar put me to sleep.

"It will be much better if you sleep here," the old woman said the following morning as she hung a cotton hammock next to hers.

From that day on Angelica hardly ever left my side. Most of the time we stayed by the river, talking and bathing by it's bank, where the gray-red sand was the color of ashes mixed with blood. Completely at peace, I would sit for hours watching the Indian women wash their garments, and listen to Angelica's tales of her past. Like clouds wandering about the sky, her words intermingled with the images of women rinsing their clothes in the water and spreading them out on the stones to dry.

Angelica was not a Maquiritare like most of the Indians at the mission. She had been given to a Maquiritare man when she was very young. He had treated her well, she was fond of saying. Quickly she had learned their way of life, which had not been so different from the ways of her own people. She had also been to the city. She never told me which city. Neither did she tell me her Indian name, which according to the customs of her tribe was not to be said aloud.

Whenever she talked about her past, her voice sounded foreign to my ears. It became very nasal and often she would switch from Spanish into her own language, mixing up time and place. Frequently she stopped in the middle of a sentence: Hours later, or even the following day, she would resume the conversation at the exact spot where she had left off, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to converse in that fashion.

"I will take you to my people," Angelica said one afternoon. She looked at me, a flickering smile on her lips. I had the feeling she had been about to say something else, and I wondered if she knew about Father Coriolano's arrangement with Mr. Barth to take me to the nearby Maquiritare settlement.

Mr. Barth was an American miner who had been in the Venezuelan jungle for over twenty years. He lived down-river with an Indian woman, and many an evening he invited himself to the mission for dinner. Although he had no desire to return to the States, he greatly enjoyed hearing about them.

"I will take you to my people," Angelica said again. "It will take many days to get there. Milagros will guide us through the jungle."

"Who is Milagros?"

"He's an Indian like me. He speaks Spanish well." Angelica rubbed her hands with glee. "He was supposed to accompany your friends, but he decided to stay behind. Now I know why."

Angelica spoke with an odd intensity; her eyes sparkled and I had the same feeling I had had when I first arrived, that she was a bit crazy. "He knew all along that I would need him to accompany us," the old woman said. Her lids closed as if she no longer had the strength to lift them. Abruptly, as if fearing to fall asleep, she opened her eyes wide. "It doesn't matter what you say to me now. I know that you will come with me."

That night I lay awake in my hammock. By the sound of Angelica's breathing I knew that she was asleep. I prayed that she would not forget her offer to take me into the jungle. Dona Mercedes's words ran through my head. "By the time you return you won't have any use for your notes." Perhaps I would do some field work among the Indians. The thought amused me. I had not brought a tape recorder; neither did I have paper and pencils- only a small diary and a ball-point pen. I had brought my camera but only three rolls of film.

Restlessly I turned in my hammock. No, I had no intention of going into the jungle with an old woman, whom I believed to be a bit mad, and an Indian whom I had never seen. Yet there was something so tempting about a trip through the jungle. I could easily take some time off. I had no deadlines to meet; there was no one waiting for me. I could leave a letter for my friends explaining my sudden decision. They would not think much of it. The more I thought about it, the more intrigued I became. Father Coriolano, no doubt, would be able to supply me with enough paper and pencils. And yes, perhaps dona Mercedes had been right. I would have no use for my old notes on curing when- and if, the thought intruded ominously- I returned from such a journey.

I got out of my hammock and looked at the frail old woman while she slept. As if she were sensing my presence, her lids fluttered, her lips began to move. "I will not die here but among my own people. My body will be burned and my ashes will remain with them." Her eyes slowly opened; they were dull, befogged by sleep, and they expressed nothing, but I sensed a deep sadness in her voice. I touched her hollowed cheeks. She smiled at me, but her mind was clearly elsewhere.

I awoke with the feeling I was being watched. Angelica told me that she had been waiting for me to wake up. She motioned me to look at a box, the size of a vanity case, made out of tree bark, standing next to her. She opened the tightly fitting lid and with great relish proceeded to show me each item, breaking into loud exclamations of joy and surprise; as if it were the first time she had seen each article. There was a mirror, a comb, a necklace made out of plastic pearls, a few empty Pond's cold cream jars, a lipstick, a pair of rusted scissors, a faded blouse and skirt.

"And what do you think this is?" she asked, holding something behind her back.

I confessed my ignorance and she laughed. "This is my writing book." She opened her notebook, it's pages yellow with age. On each page were rows of crooked letters. "Watch me." Taking out a chewed-up pencil from the box, she began to print her name. "I learned to do this at another mission. A much larger one than this one. It also had a school. That was many years ago, but I haven't forgotten what I learned." Again and again she printed her name on the faded pages. "Do you like it?"

"Very much." I was bewildered by the sight of the old woman squatting on the floor with her body bent forward, her head almost touching the notebook on the ground. Yet she was perfectly balanced as she painstakingly traced the letters of her name.

Suddenly she straightened up, closing her notebook. "I have been to the city," she said, her eyes fixed on a spot beyond the window. "A city full of people that looked all the same. At first I liked it, but I grew tired of it very fast. There was too much for me to watch. And it was so noisy. Not only people talked, but things talked as well." She paused, scowling in a tremendous effort to concentrate, all the lines in her face deepened. Finally she said, "I didn't like the city at all."

I asked her which city she had been to, and at which mission she had learned to write her name. She looked at me as if she had not heard what I asked, then continued with her tale. As she had done before, she began to mix up time and place, relapsing into her own language. At times she laughed, repeating over and over, "I will not go to Father Coriolano's heaven."

"Are you really serious about going to see your people?" I asked. "Don't you think it's dangerous for two women to go into the forest? Do you actually know the way?"

"Of course I know the way," she said, snapping out of her almost trancelike state. "An old woman is always safe."

"I'm not old."

She stroked my hair. "You aren't old, but your hair is the color of palm fibers and your eyes the color of the sky. You'll be safe too."

"I'm sure we'll get lost," I said softly. "You can't even remember how long ago it was you last saw your people. You told me they always move farther into the forest."

"Milagros is going with us," Angelica said convincingly. "He knows the forest well. He knows about all the people living in the jungle." Angelica began putting her belongings into the bark box. "I better find him so we can leave as soon as possible. You'll have to give him something."

"I haven't got anything he'd want," I said. "Maybe I can arrange for my friends to leave the machetes they brought with them at the mission tor Milagros."

"Give him your camera," Angelica suggested. "I know he wants a camera as much as he wants another machete."

"Does he know how to use a camera?"

"I don't know." She giggled, holding her hand over her mouth. "He told me once that he wants to take pictures of the white people who come to the mission to look at the Indians."

I was not keen on parting with my camera. It was a good one and very expensive. I wished I had brought a cheaper one with me. "I'll give him my camera," I said, hoping that once I explained to Milagros how complicated it was to operate, he would prefer a machete.

"The less you have to carry, the better," Angelica said, closing the lid on her box with a bang. "I'm going to give all this to one of the women here. I won't need it anymore. If you go empty-handed, no one will expect a thing from you."

"I'd like to take the hammock you gave me," I said in jest.

"That might be a good idea." Angelica looked at me, nodding her head. "You're a fussy sleeper and probably won't be able to rest in the fiber hammocks my people use." She picked up her box and walked out of the room. "I'll be back when I find Milagros."

As Father Coriolano drank his coffee, he looked at me as though I were a stranger. With great effort he got up, steadying himself against a chair. Seemingly disoriented, he gazed at me without saying a word. It was the silence of an old man. As he ran his stiff, gnarled fingers across his face, I realized for the first time how frail he was.

"You're crazy to go into the jungle with Angelica," he finally said. "She is very old; she won't get very far. Walking through the forest is no excursion."

"Milagros will accompany us."

Father Coriolano turned toward the window, deep in thought. He kept pushing his beard back and forth with his hand. "Milagros refused to go with your friends. I'm sure he will not accompany Angelica into the jungle."

"He will." My certainty was incomprehensible. It was a feeling completely foreign to my everyday reason.

"Although he is a trustworthy man, he is strange," Father Coriolano said thoughtfully. "He has acted as a guide to various expeditions. Yet..." Father Coriolano returned to his chair and, leaning toward me, continued. "You aren't prepared to go into the jungle. You cannot begin to imagine the hardships and dangers entailed in such an adventure. You haven't even got the proper shoes."

"I have been told by various people who have been in the jungle that tennis shoes are the best thing to wear. They dry fast on your feet without getting tight and they don't cause blisters."

Father Coriolano ignored my comment. "Why do you want to go?" he asked in an exasperated tone. "Mr. Barth will take you to meet a Maquiritare shaman: You will get to see a curing ceremony without having to go very far."

"I don't really know why I want to go." I looked at him helplessly. "Maybe I want to see more than a curing ceremony. In fact, I wanted to ask you to let me have some writing paper and pencils."

"What about your friends? What am I supposed to tell them? That you just disappeared with a senile old woman?" he asked as he poured himself another cup of coffee. "I've been here for over thirty years, and never have I heard of such a preposterous plan."

It was past siesta time, yet the mission was still quiet as I stretched in my hammock hanging under the shade of the twisted branches and jagged leaves of two poma-rosa trees. In the distance I saw the tall figure of Mr. Barth approaching the mission clearing. Strange, I thought, for he usually came in the evening. Then I guessed why he was here.

Stopping by the steps leading up to the veranda, close to where I lay, he squatted on the ground, and lit one of the cigarettes my friends had brought him.

Mr. Barth seemed uneasy. He stood up, and walked back and forth as if he were a sentry guarding the building. I was about to call out to him when he began talking to himself, his words pouring out with the smoke. He rubbed the white stubble on his chin, and scraped one boot against the other in an effort to get rid of the mud. Squatting once more, he began to shake his head as if in that way he could rid himself of what was going through his mind.

"You have come to tell me about the diamonds you have found in the Gran Sabana," I said as a way of greeting, hoping to dispel the melancholy expression in his gentle brown eyes.

He drew on the cigarette, and blew the smoke out through his nose in short bursts. After spitting out a few ¦ particles of tobacco that had stuck to the tip of his tongue, he asked, "Why do you want to go with Angelica into the forest?"

"I already told Father Coriolano, I don't really know."

Mr. Barth softly repeated my words, making a question out of them. Lighting another cigarette, he exhaled slowly, gazing at the spiral of tobacco smoke melting into the transparent air. "Let's go for a walk," he suggested.

We strolled along the river's bank where vast, interwoven roots emerged from the earth like sculptures of wood and mud. Quickly the warm, sticky dampness permeated my skin. From under a layer of branches and leaves, Mr. Barth pulled out a canoe, pushed it into the water, then motioned me to climb in. He steered the craft right across the river, making for the shelter of the left-hand bank, which offered some protection from the full strength of the current. With precise, strong movements, he guided the canoe upstream until we reached a narrow tributary. The bamboo thicket yielded to a dark heavy growth, an endless wall of trees standing trunk to trunk at the very edge of the river. Roots and branches overhung the water; vines climbed down the trees, winding themselves around their trunks like snakes crushing them in a tight embrace.

"Oh, there it is," Mr. Barth said, pointing to an opening in that seemingly impenetrable wall.

We pulled the boat across the marshy bank and tied it securely around a tree trunk. The sun hardly penetrated through the dense foliage; the light faded to a tenuous green as I followed Mr. Barth through the thicket. Vines and branches brushed against me like things alive. The heat was not so intense anymore, but the sticky dampness made my clothes cling to me like slime. Soon my face was covered with grimy vegetable dust and spiderwebs that smelled of decay.

"Is this a path?" I asked incredulously, almost stumbling into a greenish puddle of water. It's surface quivered with hundreds of insects that were hardly more than pulsating dots in the turbid liquid. Birds flew away and amidst the greenness I could not discern their color or size but only heard their furious screeches, protesting our intrusion. I understood Mr. Barth was trying to frighten me. The thought that he might be taking me to another Catholic mission also crossed my mind. "Is this a path?" I asked again.

Abruptly Mr. Barth stopped in front of a tree, so tall it's upper branches seemed to reach into the sky. Climbing plants twisted and turned upward around the trunk and branches. "I intended to give you a lecture and scare the devil out of you," Mr. Barth said with a sulky expression. "But whatever I rehearsed to say seems foolish now. Let's rest for a moment and then we'll go back."

Mr. Barth let the boat drift with the current, paddling only whenever we got too close to the bank. "The jungle is a world you cannot possibly imagine," he said. "I can't describe it to you even though I have experienced it so often. It's a personal affair- each person's experience is different and unique."

Instead of returning to the mission, Mr. Barth invited me to his house. It was a large round hut with a conical roof of palm leaves. It was quite dark inside, the only light coming from a small entrance and the rectangular window in the palm-thatched roof, operated by means of a rawhide pulley. Two hammocks hung in the middle of the hut. Baskets filled with books and magazines stood against the whitewashed walls: Above them hung calabashes, ladles, machetes, and a gun.

A naked young woman got up from one of the hammocks. She was tall, with large breasts and broad hips, but her face was that of a child, round and smooth, with slanted dark eyes. Smiling, she reached for her dress, hanging next to a woven fire fan. "Coffee?" she asked in Spanish as she sat on the ground in front of the hearth next to the aluminum pots and pans.

"Do you know Milagros well?" I asked Mr. Barth after he had introduced me to his wife, and we were all seated in the hammocks, the young woman and I sharing one.

"That's hard to say," he said, reaching for his coffee mug on the ground. "He comes and goes: He's like the river. He never stops, never seems to rest. How far Milagros goes, how long he stays anywhere, no one knows. All I've heard is that when he was young he was taken from his people by white men. He is never consistent with his story. At one time he says they were rubber collectors, at another time they were missionaries, the next time he says they were miners, scientists. Regardless of who they were, he traveled with them for many years."

"To which tribe does he belong? Where does he live?"

"He is a Maquiritare," Mr. Barth said. "But no one knows where he lives. Periodically he returns to his people. To which settlement he belongs, I don't know."

"Angelica went to look for him. I wonder if she knows where to find him."

"I'm sure she does," Mr. Barth said. "They are very close. I wonder if they are related." He deposited the mug on the ground, and got up from his hammock, momentarily disappearing in the thick bush outside the hut. Mr. Barth reappeared seconds later with a small metal box. "Open it," he said, handing me the box.

Inside was a brown leather pouch. "Diamonds?" I asked, feeling it's contents.

Smiling, Mr. Barth nodded, then motioned me to sit down beside him on the dirt floor. He took off his shirt, spread it on the ground, then asked me to empty the pouch on the cloth surface. I could barely hide my disappointment. The stones did not sparkle; they rather looked like opaque quartz.

"Are you sure these are diamonds?" I asked.

"Absolutely sure," Mr. Barth said, placing a stone the size of a cherry tomato in my palm. "If it's cut properly, it'll make a most handsome ring."

"Did you find these diamonds here?"

"No," Mr. Barth laughed. "Near the Sierra Parima, years ago." Half closing his eyes, he rocked back and forth. His cheeks were ruddy with little veins, and the stubble on his chin was damp. "A long time ago my only interest in life was to find diamonds in order to return home a wealthy man." Mr. Barth sighed heavily, his gaze lost on some place beyond the hut. "Then one day I realized that my dream to become rich had dried out, so to speak: It no longer obsessed me, and neither did I want to return to the world I had once known. I remained here." Mr. Barth's eyes shone with unshed tears as he gestured to the diamonds. "With them." He blinked repeatedly, then looked at me and smiled. "I like them as I like this land."

I wanted to ask him so many questions, but was afraid to distress him. We remained silent, listening to the steady, deep murmur of the river.

Mr. Barth spoke again. "You know, anthropologists and missionaries have a lot in common. Both are bad for this land. Anthropologists are more hypocritical; they cheat and lie in order to get the information they want. I suppose they believe that in the name of science all is fair. No, no, don't interrupt me," Mr; Barth admonished, shaking his hand in front of my face.

"Anthropologists," he continued in the same harsh tone, "have complained to me about the arrogance of the missionaries, about their high-handedness and paternalistic attitude toward the Indians. And look at them, the most arrogant of them all, prying into other people's lives as if they had every right to do so." Mr. Barth sighed loudly as if exhausted by his outburst.

I decided not to defend anthropologists, for I feared another outburst, so I contented myself with examining the diamond in my hand. "It's very beautiful," I said, handing him the stone.

"Keep it," he said, then picked up the remaining stones. One by one he dropped them into the leather pouch.

"I'm afraid I can't keep such a valuable gift." I began to giggle and added as an excuse, "I never wear jewelry."

"Don't think of it as a valuable gift. Regard it as a talisman. [* talisman- a trinket or piece of jewellery thought to be a protection against evil] Only people in the cities regard it as a jewel," he said casually, closing my fingers over the stone. "It will bring you luck." He got up, brushing the dampness off the seat of his pants with his hands, then stretched in his hammock.

The young woman refilled our mugs. Sipping the heavily sweetened black coffee, we watched the whitewashed walls turn purple with twilight. Shadows had no time to grow, for in an instant it was dark.

I was awakened by Angelica whispering into my ear. "We're going in the morning."

"What?" I jumped out of my hammock fully awake. "I thought it would take you a couple of days to find Milagros. I better get packed."

Angelica laughed. "Packed? You haven't got anything to pack. I gave your extra pair of pants and a top to an Indian boy. You won't need two pairs. You better go back to sleep. It will be a long day tomorrow. Milagros is a fast walker."

"I can't sleep," I said excitedly. "It'll be dawn soon. I'll write a note to my friends. I hope the hammock and the thin blanket will fit in my knapsack. What about food?"

"Father Coriolano put sardines and cassava bread aside for us to pack in the morning. I will carry it in a basket."

"Did you talk to him tonight? What did he say?"

"He said it's in the hands of God."

I was all packed when the chapel bell began to chime. For the first time since I had arrived at the mission, I went to mass. Indians and racionales filled the wooden benches. They laughed and talked as if they were at a social gathering. It took Father Coriolano a long time to silence them before he could say mass.

The woman sitting next to me complained that Father Coriolano always managed to wake her baby with his loud voice. The infant indeed began to cry, but before his first great shriek was heard, the woman uncovered her breast and pressed it against the baby's mouth.

Kneeling down, I raised my eyes to the Virgin above the altar. She wore a blue cloak embroidered in gold. Her face was tilted heavenward, her eyes were blue, her cheeks pale, and her mouth a deep red. In one arm she held the infant Jesus: The other arm was extended, it's hand white and delicate, reaching out to the strange heathens at her feet.

## Chapter 3

Machete in hand, Milagros led the way on the narrow path bordering the river. His muscular back showed through his torn red shirt. The khaki pants, rolled halfway up his calves and fastened above his waist with a cotton string, made him look shorter than his medium height. He walked at a fast pace, supporting his weight on the outer edge of his feet, which were narrow at the heel and spread like an open fan at the toes. His short-trimmed hair and the wide tonsure [* tonsure- the shaved crown of a monk's or priest's head] on the crown of his head reminded me of a monk.

I stopped and turned around before following on the trail leading into the forest. Across the river, almost hidden around a bend, lay the mission. Shrouded in the early morning sunlight, it seemed like something already out of touch. I felt oddly removed, not only from the place and the people I had been with for the past week, but from all familiar things. I sensed some change within me, as if crossing the river marked the end of a phase, a turning point. Something of this must have shown in my face for when I looked to my side and caught Angelica's gaze there was understanding in it.

"Already far away," Milagros said, stopping next to us. Folding his arms across his chest, he let his gaze wander along the river. The morning light dazzling over the water reflected in his face, tinting it with a golden sheen. It was an angular, bony face in which the small nose and full lower lip added an unexpected vulnerability that contrasted sharply with the deep circles and wrinkles around his slanted brown eyes. They were uncannily similar to Angelica's eyes, with that same timeless expression in them.

In absolute silence we walked beneath the towering trees, along trails hidden by massive bushes entangled with vines, branches and leaves, creepers and roots. Spiderwebs clung to my face like an invisible veil. Greenness was all I could see, and dampness all I could smell. We went over and around logs, across streams and swamps shaded by immense bamboo growths.

Sometimes Milagros was in front of me; at other times Angelica was, with her U-shaped basket on her back, held in place by a tumpline of bark that went around her head. The basket was filled with gourds, cassava bread, and cans of sardines.

I had no sense of which direction we were going. I could not see the sun- only it's light, filtering through the dense foliage. Soon my neck was stiff from looking up at the incredible height of the motionless trees. Only the straight palms, undefeated in their vertical thrust toward the light, seemed to sweep the few visible patches of sky with their silver-shaded fronds.

"I've got to rest," I said, sitting down heavily on a fallen tree trunk. By my watch it was already after three in the afternoon. We had walked nonstop for over six hours. "I'm famished."

Handing me a calabash from her basket, Angelica sat next to me. "Fill it," she said, motioning with her chin to the nearby shallow stream.

Squatting in the river, with his legs apart, palms resting on his thighs, Milagros bent forward until his lips touched the water. He drank without getting his nose wet. "Drink," he said, straightening up. He must be nearly fifty, I thought. Yet the unexpected grace of his flowing movements made him seem much younger. He smiled briefly, then waded downstream.

"Watch out or you'll be taking a bath!" Angelica exclaimed, smiling mockingly.

Startled by her voice, I lost my balance and toppled over headfirst into the water; "I'm no good at drinking water the way Milagros does," I said casually, handing her the filled gourd. "I think I'll just stick to the calabash." Sitting next to her, I took off my soaked tennis shoes. "Whoever said that sneakers were the best thing for the jungle never walked for six hours in them." My feet were red and blistered, my ankles scratched and bleeding.

"It's not too bad," Angelica said, examining my feet. She ran her fingers gently over my soles and the blistered toes. "You have pretty good calluses. Why don't you walk barefoot? Wet shoes will only soften your feet more."

I looked at the bottoms of my feet; they were covered by thick calloused skin that I had acquired from practicing karate tor years. "What if I step on a snake?" I asked. "Or on a thorn?" Although I had not yet seen a single reptile, I had watched Milagros and Angelica stop at various times to pull thorns out of their feet.

"One has to be pretty stupid to step on a snake," she said, pushing my feet off her lap.

"Compared to mosquitoes, thorns are not too bad. You are lucky the little devils don't bite you the way they do the racionales." She rubbed my arms and hands as if expecting to find a clue there. "I wonder why?"

Angelica had already marveled at the mission that I slept like the Indians, without mosquito netting. "I've got evil blood," I said, grinning. Seeing her puzzled look, I explained that as a child I had often gone with my father to the jungle to look for orchids. Invariably, he would be stung by mosquitoes, flies, and whatever biting insects were around. Somehow they never bothered me. Once my father had even been bitten by a snake.

"Did he die?" Angelica asked.

"No. It was a most curious incident. The same snake bit me too. I cried out right after my father did. He thought I was making fun of him until I showed him the tiny red spots on my foot. Only it didn't swell and turn purple the way his did. We were driven by friends to the closest town, where my father was given antivenin serum. He was ill for days."

"And you?"

"Nothing happened to me," I said, and told her it was his friends who said half jokingly that I had evil blood. They did not believe, as the doctor did, that the snake had exhausted it's supply of poison on the first bite and whatever it had left had been insufficient to have any effect on me. I told Angelica that on one occasion I was bitten by seven wasps, the ones they call mata caballo- horse killer. The doctor thought I was going to die. I only developed a fever and in a few days I was fine.

I had never seen Angelica so attentive, listening with her head slightly bent as if afraid to miss a single word. "I was also bitten by a snake once," she said. "People believed I was going to die." She was quiet for a moment, deep in thought, then a timid smile creased her face. "Do you think it spent it's poison on someone else first?"

"I'm sure it did," I said, touching her withered hands.

"Maybe I have evil blood too," she said, smiling. She looked so frail and old. For an instant I had the feeling she might disappear amidst the shadows.

"I'm ancient," Angelica said, looking at me as though I had expressed my thoughts out loud. "I should have died a long time ago. I've kept death waiting." She turned to watch a row of ants demolish a bush as they cut away squares of leaves and carried them off in their mouths. "I knew it was you who would take me to my people- I knew it the moment I saw you." There was a long pause. She either did not want to say anything else or was trying to find the appropriate words. She was watching me, a vague smile on her lips. "You also knew it- otherwise you wouldn't be here," she finally said with utter conviction.

I giggled nervously; she always succeeded in making me uneasy with that intense glint in her eyes. "I'm not sure what I'm doing here," I said. "I don't know why I'm going with you."

"You knew you were meant to come here," Angelica insisted.

There was something about Angelica's sureness that made me feel argumentative. It would have been so easy to agree with her, especially since I did not know myself why I was in the jungle on my way to God knows where. "To tell you the truth, I had no intention of going anyplace," I said. "Remember, I didn't even accompany my friends up-river to hunt alligators as I had planned."

"But that's exactly what I'm saying," she assured me as if she were speaking to a stupid child. "You found an excuse to cancel your trip so you could come with me." She laid her bony hands on my head. "Believe me, I didn't have to think much about it. Neither did you. The decision was made the moment I laid eyes on you."

I buried my head in the old woman's lap to hide my laughter. There was no way to argue with her. Besides, she might be right, I thought. I had no explanation myself.

"I waited a long time," Angelica went on. "I had almost forgotten that you were supposed to come to me. But when I saw you I knew that the man had been right. Not that I ever doubted him, but he had told me so long ago that I believed I had missed my chance."

"What man?" I asked, lifting my head from her lap. "Who told you I was coming?"

"I'll tell you another time." Angelica pulled the basket closer and picked out a large piece of cassava bread. "We better eat," she added, and opened a can of sardines.

There was no point in insisting. Once Angelica had decided not to talk, there was no way to make her change her mind. My curiosity unsatisfied, I contented myself in examining the neat row of fat sardines lying in the thick tomato sauce. I had seen that kind in the supermarket in Los Angeles; a friend of mine used to buy them for her cat. I took one out with my finger and spread it on the piece of flat white bread.

"I wonder where Milagros is," I said, biting into the sardine sandwich. It tasted quite good.

Angelica did not answer; neither did she eat. From time to time she sipped water from the gourd. A faint smile lingered at the corners of her mouth and I wondered what it was that the old woman was thinking about that created such a look of longing in her eyes. All of a sudden she stared at me as if awakening from a dream. "Look," she said, nudging my arm.

In front of us stood a man, naked except for the red cotton strands around his upper arms and a string around his waist that circled his foreskin, tying his penis against his abdomen. His whole body was covered with brownish-red designs. In one hand he held a long bow and arrows, in the other a machete.

"Milagros?" I finally managed to mumble, recovering from my initial shock. Still, I barely recognized him. It was not only that he was naked; he seemed taller, more muscular. The red zigzag lines running from his forehead down to his cheeks, across his nose, and around his mouth sharpened the contours of his face, erasing it's vulnerability. There was something else besides the physical change, something I could not pinpoint. It was as though by discarding the clothes of a racional, he had shed some invisible weight.

Milagros began to laugh in a loud, uproarious manner. A laughter that sprang from deep inside him, it shook his whole body. Echoing and booming through the forest, it mingled with the startled cries of a flock of parrots that had taken flight. Squatting before me, he stopped abruptly and said, "You almost didn't recognize me." He thrust his face so close to mine that our noses touched, then asked, "Do you want me to paint your face?"

"Yes," I said, taking the camera from my knapsack. "But can I take a picture of you first?"

"That's my camera," he said emphatically, reaching for it. "I thought you had left it at the mission for me."

"I would like to use it while we're at the Indian settlement." I began demonstrating to him how the camera worked by first putting in a roll of film. He was very attentive to my explanation, nodding his head every time I asked if he understood. I hoped to confuse him by pointing out all the intricacies of the gadget. "Now let me take a picture of you, so you can see how the camera should be held."

"No, no." He was quick to stop me, taking the camera from my hands. Without any difficulty he opened the back cover and lifted out the film, exposing it to the light. "It's mine, you promised. Only I can take pictures with it."

Speechless, I watched him, hang the camera over his chest. It looked so incongruous against his nakedness I was unable to repress my laughter. With exaggerated gestures he began to focus, adjust, and point the camera all around him, talking to imaginary subjects, telling them to smile, to stand closer or to move farther apart. I had the strong urge to pull at the cotton string around his neck that held the arrow-point quiver and the fire drill swinging from his back.

"You won't get any pictures without film," I said, handing him the third and last roll.

"I never said I wanted to take pictures." Gleefully he exposed the film to the light, then very deliberately put the camera in it's leather case. "Indians don't like to be photographed," he said seriously, then turned toward Angelica's basket on the ground and searched through it's contents until he found a small gourd sealed with a piece of animal skin. "This is onoto," he said, showing me a red paste. It was greasy and had a faint aromatic odor I was unable to define. "This is the color of life and joy," he said.

"Where did you leave your clothes?" I asked him as he cut a piece of vine, the length of a pencil, with his teeth. "Do you live nearby?"

Busying himself with chewing one end of the vine until it resembled a makeshift brush, Milagros did not bother to answer. He spat on the onoto, then stirred the red paste with the brush until it was soft. With a precise, even hand he drew wavy lines across my forehead, down my cheeks, chin, and neck, circled my eyes, and decorated my arms with round spots.

"Is there an Indian settlement around here?"

"No."

"Do you live by yourself?"

"Why do you ask so many questions?" The expression of annoyance, heightened by the sharp lines of his painted face, matched the irritated tone of his voice.

I opened my mouth, uttered a sound, then hesitated to say that it was important for me to know about him and Angelica- that the more I knew, the better I would feel. "I was trained to be curious," I said after a while, sensing he would not understand the fleeting anxiety that I tried to alleviate by asking questions. Knowing about them, I thought, would give me some sense of control.

Smiling, totally oblivious to what I had said, Milagros looked at me askance, examined my painted face, then burst into loud guffaws. It was a cheerful, hilarious laugh, like that of a child. "A blond Indian," he said, wiping tears from his eyes.

I laughed with him, all my momentary apprehension dispelled. Stopping abruptly, Milagros leaned toward me, and whispered an incomprehensible word into my ear. "That's your new name," he said seriously, putting his hand over my lips to prevent me from repeating it out loud. Turning toward Angelica, he whispered the name into her ear.

As soon as Milagros had eaten, he motioned us to follow him. Disregarding my blisters I quickly put on my shoes. I could discern nothing but green as we climbed up hills and down plains- an unending green of vines, branches, leaves, and prickly thorns; where all the hours were hours of twilight. I no longer lifted my head to catch glimpses of the sky through patches of leaves but was content to see it's reflection in puddles and streams.

Mr. Barth had been right when he told me that the jungle was a world impossible to imagine. I could not believe it was I walking through this unending greenness on my way to an unknown destination. My mind ran wild with anthropologists' descriptions of fierce and belligerent Indians belonging to unacculturated tribes.

My parents had been acquainted with some German explorers and scientists who had been in the Amazon jungle. As a child I had been bewildered by their tales of head-hunters and cannibals: A all of them told of incidents where they had escaped a sure death by saving the life of a sick Indian, usually a tribal chief or one of his relatives. A German couple and their small daughter, who had returned from a two-year journey through the South American jungle, made the deepest impression on me. I was seven when I saw the cultural artifacts and life-size photographs they had collected during their travels.

Totally captivated by their eight-year-old daughter, I followed her through the palm-decorated room in the foyer of the Sears building in Caracas. I hardly had a chance to look at the assortment of bows and arrows, baskets, quivers, feathers, and masks hanging on the walls as she hurried me into a darkened alcove. Squatting on the floor, she pulled out a red-dyed wooden box from under a pile of palm fronds, and opened it with a key hanging from her neck. "This was given to me by one of my Indian friends," she said, taking out a small wrinkled head. "It's a tsantsa, a shrunken enemy head," she added, caressing the long dark hair as if it were a doll.

I was awed as she told me that she had not been frightened to be in the jungle, and that it had not been at all the way her parents described it. "The Indians weren't horrifying or fierce," she had said very earnestly. Not for an instant did I doubt her words as she looked at me with her large serious eyes. "They were gentle and full of laughter- they were my friends."

I could not remember the girl's name, who having lived through the same events as her parents had not experienced them with the same prejudices and fears. I chuckled to myself, almost falling over a gnarled root covered by slippery moss.

"Are you talking to yourself?" Angelica's voice cut into my reveries. "Or to the spirits of the forest?"

"Are there any?"

"Yes. Spirits dwell in the midst of all this," she said softly, gesturing around her. "In the thick of the creeping lianas, in company with the monkeys, snakes, spiders, and jaguars."

"No rain tonight," Milagros asserted, sniffing the air as we stopped by some boulders bordering a shallow river. It's calm, clear waters were strewn with pink flowers from the trees standing like sentries on the opposite bank. I took off my shoes, letting my sore feet dangle in the soothing coolness, and watched the sky, a golden crimson, turn gradually to orange, to vermilion, and finally into a deep purple. The dampness of the evening filled my nose with the scent of the forest, a smell of earth, of life, of decay.

Before the shadows closed in around us completely, Milagros had made two hammocks from strips of bark, knotted on either end to a suspension rope of vines. I could not disguise my delight when he hung my cotton hammock between the two uncomfortable-looking bark cradles.

Full of anticipation, I followed Milagros's movements as he loosened the quiver and fire drill from his back. My disappointment was immense when, upon removing the piece of monkey fur sealing the quiver, he took out a box of matches and lit the wood Angelica had gathered.

"Cat food," I said peevishly as Milagros handed me an open can of sardines. I had envisioned my first dinner in the jungle consisting of freshly hunted tapir or armadillo meat roasted to perfection over a crackling fire. All the smoldering twigs did was to send a thin line of smoke into the air, it's low flames barely illuminating our surroundings.

The scant light of the fire dramatized Angelica's and Milagros's features, filling hollows with shadows; adding a shine to their temples, above their protruding eyebrows, along their short noses and their high cheekbones. I wondered why the fire made them look so much alike.

"Are you related?" I finally asked, puzzled by the resemblance.

"Yes," Milagros said. "I'm her son."

"Her son!" I repeated in disbelief. I had expected him to be a younger brother or a cousin; he looked as it he was in his fifties. "Then you are only half Maquiritare?"

They both began to giggle, as if enjoying a secret joke. "No, he isn't half Maquiritare," Angelica said in between fits of laughter. "He was born when I was still with my people." She did not say another word, but moved her face close to mine with an expression at once challenging and bemused.

I shifted nervously under her piercing gaze, wondering if my question had offended her. Curiosity must be a learned trait, I decided. I was anxious to know everything about them, yet they never asked me anything about myself. All that seemed to matter to them was that we were together in the forest. At the mission Angelica had shown no interest in my background. Neither was she willing to let me know about hers, except for the few stories regarding her life at the mission.

Our hunger satisfied, we stretched in our hammocks.

Angelica's and mine hung close to the fire. She was soon asleep, her legs tucked under her dress. The air felt chilly and I offered the thin blanket I had brought with me to Milagros, which he gladly accepted.

Glowworms, like dots of fire, lit up the dense darkness. The night pulsated with the cries of crickets and the croaking of frogs. I could not sleep: E-xhaustion and nervousness prevented me from relaxing. I watched the hours move by on my illuminated wristwatch and listened to the sounds in the jungle that I could no longer identify. There were creatures that growled, whistled, creaked, and howled. Shadows slithered beneath my hammock, moving soundlessly as time itself.

In an effort to see through the darkness I sat up, blinking, not sure if I was asleep or awake. Monkeys with phosphorescent eyes darted from behind ferns. Beasts with snarling mouths gaped at me from the branches overhead, and giant spiders crawling on legs as fine as hair spun silver webs over my eyes.

The more I watched, the more frightened I became. A cold sweat trickled from my neck to the base of my spine as I beheld a naked figure with bow drawn, aiming at the black sky. When I clearly heard the hissing sound of the arrow I put my hand over my mouth to stifle a scream.

"Don't be afraid of the night," Milagros said, laying his hand on my face. It was a fleshy, calloused hand; it smelled of earth and roots. He fastened his hammock above mine, so close I could feel the warmth of his body through the strips of bark. Softly he began to talk in his own language, a procession of rhythmical, monotonous words that shut off all the other sounds of the forest. A feeling of peace crept into me, and my eyes began to close.

Milagros's hammock no longer hung above mine when I awoke. The sounds of night, now very faint, still lingered between the misty palms, the bamboo, the nameless vines, and parasitic growths. There was no color in the sky yet- only a vague clarity, forecasting a rainless day.

Crouching over the fire, Angelica stoked and blew on the embers, bringing them to life again. Smiling, she motioned me to join her. "I heard you in my sleep," she said. "Were you afraid?"

"The forest is so different at night," I said, a little embarrassed. "I must have been overly tired."

Nodding her head, she said, "Watch the light- see how it reflects from leaf to leaf until it descends to the ground, to the sleeping shadows. That's the way dawn puts to sleep the spirits of the night." Angelica began to caress the leaves on the ground. "During the day the shadows sleep. At night they dance in the darkness."

I smiled sheepishly, not quite knowing what to say. "Where did Milagros go?" I asked after a while.

Angelica did not answer: She rose, looking around her. "Don't be afraid of the jungle," she said. Lifting her arms above her head, she began to dance with little jerky steps and to chant in a low monotonous tone that abruptly changed to a very high pitch. "Dance with the night shadows and go to sleep lighthearted. If you let the shadows frighten you, they will destroy you." Her voice faded to a murmur. She turned her back to me and slowly walked toward the river.

The water was cold as I squatted naked in the middle of the stream: It's placid pools held the first morning light. I watched Angelica collect wood, placing each branch in the crook of her arm as if she were holding a child. She must be stronger then she looks, I thought, rinsing the shampoo out of my hair. But then she might not be as old as she appeared either. Father Coriolano had told me that by the time an Indian woman is thirty she is often a grandmother. If they reach forty they have attained old age.

I washed the clothes I had worn, impaled them on a stick close to the fire, then put on a long T-shirt that reached almost to my knees. It was much more comfortable than my tight jeans.

"You smell good," Angelica said, running her fingers through my wet hair. "Does it come from the bottle?"

I nodded. "Do you want me to wash your hair?"

She hesitated for a moment, then rapidly took off her dress. She was so wrinkled that not an inch of smooth skin was left on her. She reminded me of one of the frail trees bordering the path, with their thin gray trunks, almost withered, yet supporting branches with green leaves. I had never seen Angelica naked before, for she wore her cotton dress day and night. I was certain then that she was more than forty years old- ancient, in fact, as she had told me.

Sitting in the water, Angelica shrieked and laughed with delight as she splashed around, spreading the suds from her head all over her body. With a broken gourd I rinsed off the soap, and after drying her with the thin blanket, I combed her dark short hair, shaping the bangs at an angle. "Too bad we don't have a mirror," I said. "Do I still have the red paint on?"

"Just a little bit," Angelica said, moving close to the fire. "Milagros will have to paint your face again."

"In a moment we'll be smelling like smoke," I said, turning toward Angelica's bark hammock. Easing myself inside, I wondered how she could have slept there without falling out. It was barely long enough for me and so narrow that I could not turn to the side. Yet, in spite of the itchy bark against my back and head, I found myself dozing off as I watched the old woman break the gathered wood into even-sized twigs.

An odd heaviness kept me between that crack of consciousness that is neither wakefulness nor sleep. I could feel the red of the sun through my closed lids. I was aware of Angelica to my left, mumbling to herself as she fed the fire, and of the forest around me, pulling me deeper and deeper into it's green caverns. I called the old woman's name, but no sound escaped my lips. I called again and again, but only soundless forms glided out of me, rising and falling Tyith the breeze like dead butterflies. The words began to speak without lips, mocking my desire to know, asking a thousand questions. They exploded in my ears, their echoes reverberating around me like a flock of parrots crossing the sky.

I opened my eyes, aware of the smell of singed hair. On a crudely built roasting platform, about a foot above the fire, lay a monkey, complete with tail, hands, and feet. Wistfully, I eyed Angelica's basket, still replete with cans of sardines and cassava bread.

Milagros lay in my hammock asleep, his bow leaning against a tree trunk, his quiver and machete on the ground, within reach.

"Is this all he killed?" I asked Angelica, getting out of the hammock. Hoping it would never be ready, I added, "How long will it take until it's done?"

Angelica looked at me with a rapt smile of unmistakable glee. "A bit longer," she said. "You'll like it better than sardines."

Milagros dismembered the monkey by hand, serving me the choicest part, the head, considered a delicacy. Unable to bring myself to suck out the brain from the cracked skull, I opted for a piece of the well-done thigh. It was stringy and tough and tasted like an old gamy bird, slightly bitter. Finishing the monkey's brain with rather exaggerated relish, Milagros and Angelica proceeded to eat the inner organs, which had been cooking in the embers, each individually wrapped in strong, fan-shaped leaves. They dipped each morsel in the ashes before they put them in their mouths. I did likewise with the pieces of thigh and was surprised to notice the added saltiness of the meat. What we did not finish was wrapped in leaves, tied securely with vines, and placed in Angelica's basket for our next meal.

## Chapter 4

The next four days and nights seemed to melt into each other as we walked, bathed, and slept. They had a dream-like quality, in which oddly shaped trees and vines repeated themselves like images endlessly reflected in invisible mirrors- images that vanished upon emerging into a clearing of the forest or by a river beach where the sun shone fully on us.

By the fifth day my feet were no longer blistered. Milagros had cut up my sneakers, attaching softened pieces of vegetable fiber to the soles. Each morning he tied the makeshift sandals anew, and my feet, as if obeying an impulse of their own, would follow Milagros and the old woman.

We walked always in silence, along trails bordered by leaves and ferns the size of a man. We crawled beneath the underbrush or cut our way through the walls of creepers and branches that left our faces dirty and scratched. There were times when I lost sight of my companions, but easily followed the twigs Milagros was in the habit of breaking as he walked. We crossed rivers and streams spanned by suspension bridges made out of vines fastened to trees on either bank. They were so fragile-looking that each time we crossed one I feared it would not support our weight.

Milagros laughed, assuring me that his people, although weak navigators, knew the art of building bridges.

On some trails we discovered footprints in the mud, which according to Milagros indicated we were in the vicinity of an Indian settlement. We never got close to one for he wanted us to reach our destination without delay. "If I were on my own I would have arrived long ago," Milagros said every time I inquired as to when we would reach Angelica's village. Then, looking at us, he would shake his head, and add in a resigned tone, "Women slow you down."

But Milagros did not mind our relaxed pace. Often he made camp in the early afternoon at some wide river beach where we bathed in the sun-warmed pools, and dried ourselves on enormous smooth rocks jutting out of the water. Drowsily we watched the motionless clouds so slow to change their formations that it would be dusk before they disintegrated into different configurations.

It was during these lazy afternoons that I pondered over my motives in joining this bewildering venture. Was it to fulfill a fantasy of mine? Was I running away from some responsibility I could no longer handle? I even considered the possibility that Angelica might have cast a spell on me.

As the days passed my eyes became accustomed to the ever present greenness. Soon I began to distinguish red and blue macaws, rare toucans with black and yellow beaks. Once I even saw a tapir crashing through the undergrowth in search of water. It ended up as our next meal.

Monkeys with reddish fur followed us from above only to disappear as we continued through stretches of river between cascades, and by quiet channels reflecting the sky. Buried deep in the underbrush, on moss-covered logs, red and yellow mushrooms grew, so delicate that upon my touch they disintegrated as if made of colored dust.

I tried to orient myself by the large rivers we encountered, thinking they would correspond to those I remembered in geography books. But each time I asked for their names, they never coincided with mine, for Milagros only referred to them by their Indian designations.

At night under the light of the faint fire, when a white fog seemed to emanate from the ground and I felt the dampness of the night dew on my face, Milagros would begin talking in his low nasal voice about the myths of his people.

Angelica, with her eyes wide open, as if she were trying to keep awake rather than to pay attention, would sit up straight for about ten minutes before she was fast asleep. Milagros talked long into the night, bringing alive the time when beings who were part spirit, part animal, part human, inhabited the forest- creatures who caused floods and disease, replenished the forest with game and fruits, and taught mankind about hunting and planting.

Milagros's favorite myth was about Iwrame, an alligator, who before becoming an animal of the river walked and talked like a man. Iwrame was the keeper of fire, which he hid in his mouth, refusing to share it with others. The creatures of the forest decided to entertain the alligator with a sumptuous feast, for they knew that only by making Iwrame laugh could they steal the fire. Joke upon joke was told until finally, unable to contain himself any longer, Iwrame burst into laughter. A small bird flew into the opened jaw, snatched the fire, and flew high into a sacred tree.

Without changing the basic structure of the various myths he chose to tell, Milagros modified and embellished them according to his mood. He added details that he had not thought of before, interjecting personal views that seemed to come at the spur of the moment.

"Dream, dream," Milagros said each night upon finishing his tales. "A person who dreams lives long."

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Was it real, was it a dream? Was I awake or asleep when I heard Angelica stirring? She mumbled something unintelligible and sat up. Still befuddled, she pulled away the hair sticking to her face, looked around, then approached my hammock. She gazed at me with a strange intensity: Her eyes were enormous in her thin, wrinkled face.

She opened her mouth: Strange sounds came from her throat and her whole body began to shake. I reached out my hand, but there was nothing- only a vague shadow receding into the bushes. "Old woman, where are you going?" I heard myself ask. There was no reply- only the sound of dripping mist from the leaves. For an instant I saw her once more, the way I had seen her that same afternoon bathing in the river: Then she vanished in the thick night fog.

Without being able to stop her, I saw how she disappeared into an invisible crevice of the earth. No matter how much I searched I could not even find her dress. It's only a dream, I repeated to myself, yet I continued looking for her among the shadows, amidst the leaves shrouded in mist. But there was no vestige [* vestige- an indication that something has been present] of her.

I awoke with a profound anxiety. I noticed the heavy palpitations of my heart. The sun was already high above the treetops. I had never slept so late since starting our journey- not because I had not wanted to, but because Milagros insisted we rise at dawn. Angelica was not there; neither were her hammock or basket. Leaning against a tree trunk were Milagros's bow and arrows. Strange, I thought. He had never left without them before. He must have gone with the old woman to gather the fruits or nuts he discovered yesterday afternoon, I kept repeating to myself, trying to appease my mounting distress.

I walked to the water's edge, not knowing what to do. They had never gone together before, leaving me behind.

A tree, infinitely lonely, stood at the other bank of the river, it's branches bowed over the water, their weight supporting a network o£ creepers on which delicate red flowers bloomed. They clung like trapped butterflies in a gigantic spider's web.

A flock of parrots noisily settled on some vines that appeared to be growing out of the water without any visible support, for I could not distinguish the trees to which they belonged. I began to imitate the parrot's shrieks, but they remained completely unaware of my existence. Only when I walked into the water did they take flight, spanning a green arch across the sky.

I waited until the sun disappeared beyond the trees, and the blood red sky tainted the river with it's fire. Listlessly I walked back to my hammock, poked the fire, and tried to revive the ashes. I became numb with terror as a green snake with amber-colored eyes stared into my face. With it's head poised in midair, it seemed as startled as I. Afraid to breathe, I listened to the rustling of leaves as it slowly disappeared among the gnarled roots.

With absolute certainty I knew that never again would I see Angelica. I did not want to weep, but could not control my tears as I buried my face in the dead leaves on the ground. "Old woman, where have you gone?" I whispered, as I had done in my dream. I called her name across the immense green sea of growth. There was no answer from the ancient trees. Mutely, they witnessed my sorrow.

I barely made out Milagros's figure in the thickening shadows. Rigid, he stood before me, his face and body blackened by ashes. For an instant he held my gaze, then his eyes closed, his legs bent beneath him, and, exhausted, he sank to the earth.

"Did you bury her?" I asked, draping his arm over my shoulders in order to drag him toward my hammock. With great difficulty I lifted him inside- first his torso, then his legs.

He opened his eyes, stretching his hand toward the sky as if the distant clouds were within his reach. "Her soul ascended to heaven, to the house of thunder," he said with great effort. "The fire released her soul from her bones," he added, then fell into a deep sleep.

As I watched over his restless dreams, I saw the shadowy bulk of phantom trees grow before my tired eyes. In the darkness of the night, these chimerical trees seemed more real and taller than the palms. I was no longer sad. Angelica had disappeared in my dream; she was part of the real and the fictitious trees. Forever she would roam among the spirits of vanished animals and mythical beings.

It was almost dawn when Milagros reached for his machete and his bow and arrows lying on the ground. Absentmindedly he hung his quiver on his back and without saying a word he walked into the thicket. I followed, afraid to lose him among the shadows.

In silence we walked for about two hours, then Milagros abruptly stopped by the edge of a cleared area in the forest. "The smoke of the dead is harmful to women and children," he said, pointing to a log pyre. [* pyre- wood heaped for burning a dead body as a funeral rite] It had partly collapsed, and in the midst of the ashes I could see darkened bones.

I sat on the ground and watched Milagros dry over a small fire a log mortar that he had made from a tree trunk. Something between horror and fascination kept my eyes glued on Milagros as he began sifting through the ashes for Angelica's bones. He crushed them with a slender pole until they were reduced to a gray-black powder.

"Through the smoke of the fire, her soul reached the house of thunder," Milagros said. It was already night when he filled our gourds with the powdered bones. He sealed them with a sticky resin.

"If she could only have kept death waiting a little longer," I said wistfully.

"It makes no difference," Milagros said, looking up from the mortar. His face was without expression yet his black eyes were bright with unshed tears. His lower lip trembled, then set in a half smile. "All she wanted was for her life essence to be once again part of her people."

"It's not the same," I said, without really understanding what Milagros was saying.

"Her life essence is in her bones," he said, as if excusing my ignorance. "Her ashes will be among her people in the forest."

"She isn't alive," I insisted. "What good are her ashes when she had wanted to see her people?" An uncontrollable sadness overcame me at the thought that never again would I see the old woman's smile or hear her voice and laughter. "She never got to tell me why she was so certain I would come with her."

Milagros began to cry, and picking up pieces of coal from the pyre, he rubbed them against his tear-stained face. "One of our shamans told Angelica that although she would leave her settlement, she would die among her own people, and her soul would remain a part of her tribe." Milagros looked at me sharply as I was about to interrupt him. "The shaman assured her that a girl with the color of your hair and eyes would make sure that she did."

"But I thought her people had no contact with whites," I said.

Tears still flowed from Milagros's eyes as he explained that there had been a time when his people had lived closer to the big river. "Nowadays there are only some old people left who still remember those days," he said softly. "For a long time we have been moving farther and farther into the forest."

I saw no reason to continue the journey, I thought despondently. What would I do without the old woman among her people. She had been my reason for being here. "What shall I do now? Are you going to take me back to the mission?" I asked, then seeing Milagros's puzzled expression, added, "It's not the same to take her ashes."

"It is the same," he murmured. "For her it was the most important part," he added, tying one of the ash-filled gourds around my waist.

My body stiffened for an instant, then relaxed as I looked into Milagros's eyes. His blackened face was awesome and sad at the same time. He pressed his tear-stained cheeks against mine, then blackened them with coals. Timidly I touched the gourd around my waist: It was light, like the old woman's laughter.

## Chapter 5

For two days, at an ever accelerating pace, we walked up and down hills without rest. Apprehensively, I watched Milagros's silent figure slip in and out of the shadows. The urgency of his movements only intensified my feelings of uncertainty: There were moments when I felt like screaming at him to take me back to the mission.

The afternoon closed over the forest as the clouds turned from white to gray to black. Heavy and oppressive, they hovered over the treetops. A deafening roar of thunder broke the stillness: Water came down in sheets, tearing at branches and leaves with relentless fury.

Motioning me to take cover under the gigantic leaves he had cut, Milagros squatted on the ground. Instead of joining him, I took off my knapsack, untied the gourd filled with Angelica's powdered bones from around my waist, and pulled off my T-shirt. Warm and soothing, the water beat against my aching body. Lathering first my head, then my body with shampoo, I washed away the ashes, the smell of death from my skin. I turned to look at Milagros; his blackened face was drawn with fatigue, his eyes held such sadness that I regretted having cleaned myself in such haste. Nervously I began to wash my T-shirt and without looking at him asked, "Are we almost to the settlement?" I was certain we had walked well over a hundred miles since leaving the mission.

"We will be there tomorrow," Milagros said, unwrapping a small bundle of roasted meat held together with lianas and leaves. A peculiar smile lifted the corners of his mouth, and deepened the wrinkles around his slanted eyes. "That is, if we walk at my pace."

The rain thinned. The clouds dispersed. I breathed deeply, filling my lungs with the clear, fresh air. Drops continued to trickle from the leaves long after the rain abated. As they caught the reflection of the sun they glittered with the dazzling intensity of bits of broken glass.

"I hear someone coming," Milagros whispered. "Stay still."

I heard nothing- not even the call of a bird or the rustling of leaves. I was about to say so when a branch cracked and a naked man appeared on the path in front of us. He was not much taller than myself- perhaps five feet four. I wondered it it was his muscular chest or his nakedness that made him seem so much bigger than me. He carried a long bow and several arrows. His face and body were covered with red serpentine lines that extended all the way down the sides of his legs, ending in dots around his ankles.

A short distance behind him, two naked young women stared at me. A frozen expression of surprise held their dark eyes wide open. Tufts of fibers seemed to grow from their ears. Matchlike sticks stuck out from the corners of their mouths and lower lips. Fastened about their waists, upper arms, wrists, and below their knees were bands of red cotton string. Their dark hair was cut short, and like the man, they had a clean, wide-shaven tonsure on the crown.

No one said a word and out of sheer nervousness I shouted, "Shori noje, shori noje!" Angelica had advised me that if I ever happened to meet Indians in the forest, I should greet them by shouting: Good friend, good friend!

"A ia, aia, shori," the man answered, moving closer. Red feathers adorned his ears: They were sticking out of two pieces of short cane, the size of my little finger, which were inserted through each lobe. He began to speak to Milagros, gesticulating a great deal, motioning with his hand or a nod of his head toward the path leading into the thicket. Repeatedly he raised one of his arms straight above his head, his fingers extended as if reaching for a ray of sunlight.

I beckoned the women to come closer. Giggling, they hid behind bushes. When I saw the bananas in the baskets fastened to their backs I opened my mouth wide and gestured with my hands that I wanted to eat one of them. Cautiously the older of the two women approached, and without looking at me she unfastened her basket, then broke the softest, yellowest banana from the bunch. In one swift motion she removed the slender sticks from around her mouth, sank her teeth in the peel, bit along it, broke it open, then held the naked fruit in front of my face. It had an oddly triangular shape and was certainly the thickest banana I had ever seen.

"Delicious," I said in Spanish, rubbing my stomach. It tasted very much like an ordinary banana but left a heavy coating in my mouth.

She gave me two more. As she was peeling the fourth I tried to make her understand that I could not eat another. Grinning, she dropped the remaining fruit on the ground, then placed her hands on my stomach. They were calloused hands, yet the delicate, slender fingers were gentle as she hesitantly touched my breasts, shoulders, and face, as if she wanted to verify that I was real. She began to talk in a high-pitched nasal tone that reminded me of Angelica's voice. She pulled the elastic on my panties and called her companion to take a look. It was only then that I felt embarrassed: I tried to pull away. Laughing and squealing with delight, they embraced me, stroking the back and front of my body. Then they took my hand and guided it over their own faces and bodies. They were slightly shorter than I, yet they were massive: With their full breasts, protruding stomachs, and wide hips, they seemed to dwarf me.

"They are from the Iticoteri village," Milagros said in Spanish, turning toward me. "Etewa and his two wives, Ritimi and Tutemi, as well as other people from the settlement, have made camp for a few days at an old abandoned garden nearby." He reached for his bow and arrows, which he had left leaning against a tree trunk, and added, "We will travel with them."

Meanwhile the women had discovered my wet T-shirt. Enthralled, they rubbed it against their painted faces and bodies before I had a chance to slip it over my head. Stretched and streaked with red onoto paste, it hung on me like a dirty oversized rice sack.

I put the ash-filled gourd in my knapsack, and as I lifted it on my back the women began to giggle uncontrollably. Etewa came to stand next to me: He stared at me with his brown eyes, then a wide grin lit his face as he ran his fingers through my hair. His finely chiseled nose and the gentle curve of his lips gave his round face an almost girlish appearance.

"I will go with Etewa to track down a tapir he spotted a while ago," Milagros said. "You walk with the women."

For an instant I could only stare at him in disbelief. "But..." I finally managed to utter, not knowing what else to say. I must have looked comical for Milagros began to laugh: His slanted eyes all but disappeared between his forehead and his high cheekbones. He put one hand on my shoulder. He tried to look serious but a flickering smile remained on his lips.

"These are Angelica's and my people," he said, turning toward Etewa and his two wives. "Ritimi is her grand-niece. Angelica never saw her."

I smiled at the two women: They nodded their heads as if they had understood Milagros's words.

Milagros's and Etewa's laughter echoed through the lianas, then died away as they reached the bamboo thicket bordering the path along the river. Ritimi took my hand and led me into the thicket.

I walked between Ritimi and Tutemi. We moved silently in single file toward the abandoned gardens of the Iticoteri. I wondered whether it was because of the heavy load on their backs or whether it gave their feet a better grip on the ground that they walked with their knees and toes pointing inward. Our shadows grew and diminished with the faint rays of sunlight filtering through the treetops. My ankles were weak from exhaustion. I moved clumsily, stumbling over branches and roots. Ritimi put her arm around my waist, but it made walking on the narrow path even more awkward. She pulled the knapsack from my back, and stuffed it in Tutemi's basket.

I was seized by an odd apprehension. I wanted to retrieve my knapsack, pull out the ash-filled gourd, and tie it around my waist. I had the vague notion of having severed some kind of a bond. Had I been asked to put my feelings into words I would not have been able to do so. Yet I sensed that from that moment on some of the magic and enchantment Angelica had transfused into me had vanished.

The sun was already below the horizon of trees as we reached a clearing in the forest. Amidst all the other shades of green I clearly distinguished the lighter, almost translucent green of the plantain fronds. Strung out on the edge of what once must have been a large garden were low triangular-shaped huts arranged in a semicircle with their backs to the forest. The dwellings were open on all sides except for the roofs, which were covered with several layers of broad banana leaves.

As if someone had given a signal, we were instantly surrounded by open-mouthed, wide-eyed women and men. I held on to Ritimi's arm: Her having walked with me through the forest made her different from these gaping figures. Encircling me by the waist, she drew me close to her. The rapid, excited tone of her voice kept the crowd at bay for a moment longer. Suddenly their faces were only inches away from mine. Saliva dribbled down their chins, and their features were disfigured by the tobacco wads stuck between their gums and lower lips. I forgot all about the objectivity with which an anthropologist is to regard another culture. At the moment these Indians were nothing more than a group of ugly, dirty people. I closed my eyes only to open them the next instant as an unsteady bony hand touched my cheeks. It was an old man. Grinning, he began to shout: "Aia, aia, aiiiashori!"

Echoing his shouts, everyone at once tried to embrace me, almost crushing me with joy. They managed to pull my T-shirt over my head. I felt their hands, lips, and tongues on my face and body. They smelled of smoke and earth: Their saliva, which clung to my skin, smelled of rotten tobacco leaves. Appalled, I burst into tears.

With apprehensive expressions on their faces, they pulled away. Although I could not understand their words, their tone clearly revealed their bewilderment.

Later that night I learned from Milagros that Ritimi had explained to the group that she had found me in the forest. At first she had believed I was a spirit, and she had been afraid to come near me. Only after she had seen me devour the bananas was she convinced I was human, for only humans eat that greedily.

Between my hammock and Milagros's burned a fire: Smoking and sputtering, it threw a faint light over the open hut, leaving the trees outside in one solid mass of darkness. It was a reddish light that, combined with the smoke, made my eyes water. People sat around the fire so close to each other their shoulders touched. Their shadowed faces looked all the same to me: The red and black designs on their bodies seemed to have a life of their own as they moved and twisted with each gesture.

Ritimi sat on the ground, her legs fully extended, her left arm resting against my hammock. Her skin was a soft deep yellow in the wavering light: The painted lines on her face ran toward her temples, accentuating her Asiatic features. Clearly I could see the small holes, free of the sticks, at the corners of her mouth, lower lip, and the septum of her wide nostrils. Aware of my stare, she looked at me directly, her round face creasing into a smile. She had square short teeth: They were strong and very white.

I began to doze off to the gentle murmur of their voices, yet slept fitfully, wondering what Milagros was telling them as I kept waking to the sound of laughter.

# PART TWO

## Chapter 6

"When do you think you'll be back?" I asked Milagros six months later, handing him the letter I had written to Father Coriolano at the mission. In it I briefly notified him that I intended to stay for at least two more months with the Iticoteri. I asked him to inform my friends in Caracas; and most important of all, I begged him to send with Milagros as many writing pads and pencils as he could spare. "When will you be back?" I asked again.

"In two weeks or so," Milagros said casually, fitting the letter into his bamboo quiver. He must have detected the anxiousness in my face for he added, "There is no way to tell, but I'll be back."

I watched as he started down the path leading to the river. He adjusted the quiver on his back, then turned to me briefly, his movements momentarily arrested as though there were something he wished to say. Instead he lifted his hand to wave good-bye.

Slowly I headed back to the shabono, passing several men felling trees next to the gardens. Carefully I stepped around the logs cluttered all over the cleared patch, making sure not to cut my feet on the pieces of bark, chips, and slivers of wood buried amidst the dead leaves on the ground.

"He'll be back as soon as the plantains are ripe," Etewa shouted, waving his hand the way Milagros had just done. "He won't miss the feast."

Smiling, I waved back, wanting to ask when the feast would take place. I did not need to: He had already given me the answer: When the plantains were ripe.

The brush and logs that were scattered each night in front of the main entrance of the shabono to keep out intruders had already been moved aside. It was still early, yet the huts facing the round, open clearing were mostly empty. Women and men were working in the nearby gardens, or had gone into the forest to gather wild fruits, honey, and firewood.

Armed with miniature bows and arrows, a group of little boys gathered around me. "See the lizard I killed," Sisiwe said, holding the dead animal by the tail.

"That's all he can do shoot lizards," a boy in the group said mockingly, scratching his ankle with the toes of his other foot. "And most of the time he misses."

"I don't," Sisiwe shouted, his face turning red with rage.

I caressed the stubbles on the crown of his head. In the sunlight his hair was not black but a reddish brown. Searching for the right words from my limited vocabulary, I hoped to assure him that one day he would be the best hunter in the settlement.

Sisiwe, Ritimi's and Etewa's son, was six, or at the most seven, years old for he did not yet wear a pubic waist string. Ritimi, believing that the sooner a boy tied his penis against his abdomen the faster he would grow, had repeatedly forced the child to do so. But Sisiwe had refused, arguing that it hurt. Etewa had not insisted. His son was growing healthy and strong. Soon, the father had argued, Sisiwe would realize that it was improper for a man to be seen without a waist string. Like most children, Sisiwe wore a piece of fragrant root tied around his neck, a charm against disease, and as soon as the designs on his body faded, he was painted anew with onoto.

Smiling, his anger forgotten, Sisiwe held on to my hand, and in one swift motion climbed up on me as if I were a tree. He wrapped his legs around my waist. He swung backward and, stretching his arms toward the sky, shouted, "Look how blue it is- the color of your eyes."

From the middle of the clearing the sky seemed immense. There were no trees, lianas, or leaves to mar it's splendor. The dense vegetation loomed outside the shabono, beyond the palisades [* palisades- fortifications consisting of a strong fence made of stakes driven into the ground] of logs protecting the settlement. The trees appeared to bide their time, as if they knew they were only provisionally held in check.

Tugging at my arm, the children pulled me together with Sisiwe to the ground. At first I had not been able to associate them with any particular parent for they wandered in and out of the huts, eating and sleeping wherever it was convenient. I only knew where the babies belonged, for they were perennially hanging around their mother's bodies. Whether it was day or night, the infants never seemed disturbed, regardless of what activity their mothers were engaged in.

I wondered how I would do without Milagros. Each day he had spent several hours teaching me the language, customs, and beliefs of his people, which I eagerly recorded in my notepads.

Learning who was who among the Iticoteri proved to be most confusing. They never called each other by name, except when someone was to be insulted. Ritimi and Etewa were known as Mother and Father of Sisiwe and Texoma. (It was permissible to use children's names, but as soon as they reached puberty everyone refrained from it.) Matters were further complicated in that males and females from a given lineage called each other brother and sister; males and females from another lineage were referred to as brother-in-law and sister-in-law. A male who married a woman from an eligible lineage called all the women of that lineage wives, but did not have sexual contact with them.

Milagros often pointed out that it was not only I who had to adapt. The Iticoteri were just as baffled by my odd behavior: To them I was neither woman, man, or child, and as such they did not quite know what to think of me or where they could fit me in.

Old Hayama emerged from her hut. In a high-pitched voice she told the children to leave me alone. "Her stomach is still empty," she said. Putting her arm around my waist, she led me to the hearth in her hut.

Making sure not to step on or collide with any of the aluminum and enamel cooking pots (acquired through trade with other settlements), the tortoise shells, gourds, and baskets scattered on the ground, I sat across from Hayama. I extended my legs fully, in the way of the

Iticoteri women, and scratching the head of her pet parrot, I waited for the food.

"Eat," she said, handing me a baked plantain on a broken calabash. Attentively the old woman watched as I chewed with my mouth open, smacking my lips repeatedly. She smiled, content that I was fully appreciating the soft sweet plantain.

Hayama had been introduced to me by Milagros as Angelica's sister. Every time I looked at her I tried to find some resemblance to the frail old woman I had lost in the forest. About five feet four, Hayama was tall for an Iticoteri woman. Not only was she physically different from Angelica, but she did not have her sister's lightness of spirit. There was a harshness to Hayama's voice and manner that often made me feel uncomfortable. And her heavy, drooping eyelids gave her face a peculiarly sinister expression.

"You stay here with me until Milagros returns," the old woman said, serving me another baked plantain.

I stuffed the hot fruit in my mouth so I would not have to answer. Milagros had introduced me to his brother-in-law Arasuwe who was the headman of the Iticoteri, as well as to the other members of the settlement. However, it was Ritimi who, by hanging my hammock in the hut she shared with Etewa and their two children, had made it known that I belonged to her. "The white girl sleeps here," she had said to Milagros, explaining that little Texoma and Sisiwe would have their hammocks hung around Tutemi's hearth in the adjoining hut.

No one had interfered with Ritimi's scheme. Silently, a smile of gentle mockery on his face, Etewa had watched as Ritimi rushed between their hut and Tutemi's, rearranging the hammocks in the customary triangle around the fire. On a small loft built between the back poles supporting the dwelling, she placed my knapsack, amidst bark boxes, an assortment of baskets, an ax, and gourds with onoto, seeds, and roots.

Ritimi's self-assuredness stemmed not only from the fact that she was the headman Arasuwe's oldest daughter- by his first wife, a daughter of old Hayama, now dead- and that she was Etewa's first and favorite wife; but also because Ritimi knew that in spite of her quick temper everyone in the shabono respected and liked her.

"No more," I pleaded with Hayama as she took another plantain from the fire. "My belly is full." Pulling up my T-shirt, I pushed out my stomach so she could see how filled it looked.

"You need to grow fat around your bones," the old woman said, mashing up the banana with her fingers. "Your breasts are as small as a child's." Giggling, she pulled my T-shirt up further.

"No man will ever want you- he'll be afraid to hurt himself on the bones."

Opening my eyes wide in mock horror, I pretended to gobble down the mush. "I'll surely get fat and beautiful eating your food," I said with my mouth full.

Still wet from her river bath, Ritimi came into the hut combing her hair with a densely thistled pod. Sitting next to me, she put her arms around my neck, and planted resounding kisses on my face. I had to restrain myself from laughing. The Iticoteri's kisses tickled me. They kissed differently: Each time they put their mouth against my cheek and neck, they vibrated their lips while sonorously ejecting air.

"You are not moving the white girl's hammock in here," Ritimi said, looking at her grandmother. The certainty of her tone was not matched by the inquiring softness of her dark eyes.

Not wanting to be the cause of an argument, I made it clear that it did not make much difference where my hammock hung. Since there were no walls between the huts, we practically lived together. Hayama's hut stood on Tutemi's left, and on our right was Arasuwe the headman's, which he shared with his oldest wife and three of his smallest children. His other two wives and their respective offspring occupied adjacent huts.

Ritimi fixed her gaze on me, a pleading expression in her eyes. "Milagros asked me to take care of you," she said, running the thistled pod through my hair, softly, so as not to scratch my scalp.

After what seemed an interminable silence, Hayama finally said, "You can leave your hammock where it is, but you will eat here with me."

It was a good arrangement, I thought. Etewa already had four mouths to feed. Hayama, on the other hand, was taken good care of by her youngest son. Judging by the amount of animal skulls and plantains hanging from the thatched palm roof, her son was a good hunter and cultivator. Other than the baked plantains eaten in the morning, there was only one meal, in the late afternoon, when families gathered together to eat. People snacked throughout the day on whatever was available- fruit, nuts, or such delicacies as roasted ants and grubs.

Ritimi also seemed pleased with the eating arrangement. Smiling, she walked over to our hut and pulled down the basket she had given me which was hanging above my hammock, then took out my notepad and pencil. "Now let us work," she said in a commanding tone.

In the days that followed Ritimi taught me about her people as Milagros had done for the past six months. He had set up a few hours each day for what I referred to as formal instruction.

At first I had great difficulty in learning the language. Not only did I find it to be heavily nasal, but it was extremely difficult to understand people when they talked with wads of tobacco in their mouths. I tried to devise some sort of a comparative grammar, but gave it up when I realized that not only did I not have the proper linguistic training, but the more I tried to be rational about learning their language, the less I could speak.

My best teachers were the children. Although they pointed things out to me, and greatly enjoyed giving me words to repeat, they made no conscious effort to explain anything. With them I was able to rattle on, totally uninhibited about making mistakes. After Milagros's departure, there was still much I did not comprehend, yet I was astonished by how well I managed to communicate with others, reading correctly the inflection of their voices, the expression on their faces, and the eloquent movements of their hands and bodies.

During those hours of formal instruction, Ritimi took me to visit the women in the different huts, and I was allowed to ask questions to my heart's content. Baffled by my curiosity, the women talked freely, as if they were playing a game. They patiently explained again and again whatever I did not understand.

I was grateful Milagros had set that precedent. Not only was curiosity regarded as bad manners, but it went against their will to be questioned. Yet Milagros had lavishly indulged me in what he called my eccentric whim, stating that the more I knew about the language and customs of the Iticoteri, the quicker I would feel at home with them.

It soon became apparent that I did not need to ask too many direct questions. Often the most casual remark on my part was reciprocated by a flow of information I would not have dreamed of eliciting.

Each day just before nightfall, aided by Ritimi and Tutemi, I would go over the data gathered during the day, and try to order it under some kind of classificatory scheme such as social structure, cultural values, subsistence techniques, and other universal categories of human social behavior.

However, to my great disappointment, there was one subject Milagros had not touched upon: shamanism. I had observed from my hammock two curing sessions, of which I had written detailed accounts.

"Arasuwe is a great shapori," Milagros had said to me as I watched my first curing ritual.

"Does he invoke the help of the spirits when he chants?" I asked as I watched Milagros's brother-in-law massage, suck, and rub the prostrate body of a child.

Milagros had given me an outraged look. "There are things one doesn't talk about." He had gotten up abruptly, and before walking out of the hut had added, "Don't ask about these things. If you do, you will run into serious trouble."

I had not been surprised by his response, but I had been unprepared for his outright anger. I wondered if his refusal to talk about the subject was because I was a woman, or because shamanism was a taboo topic. I did not dare to find out at the time. Being a woman, white, and alone was precarious enough.

I was aware that in most societies knowledge regarding shamanistic and curing practices are never revealed except to the initiates. During Milagros's absence I did not mention the word shamanism once but spent hours deliberating over what would be the best way to learn about it without arousing any anger and suspicion.

From my notes on the two sessions it became evident that the Iticoteri believed the shapori's body underwent a change when under the influence of the hallucinogenic snuff epena. That is, the shaman acted under the assumption that his human body transformed itself into a supernatural body. Thus he made contact with the spirits in the forest. My obvious approach would be to arrive at an understanding of shamanism via the body- not as an object determined by psychochemical laws, holistic forces in nature, the environment, or the psyche itself; but through an understanding of the body as lived experience, the body as an expressive unity known through performance.

Most studies on shamanism, including mine, have focused on the psychotherapeutic and social aspects of healing. I thought that my approach would not only provide a novel explanation but would furnish me with a way of learning about curing without becoming suspect. Questions concerning the body need not necessarily be associated with shamanism. I had no doubt that little by little I would retrieve the necessary data without the Iticoteri ever being aware of what I was really after.

Any pangs of conscience I felt regarding the dishonesty of my task were quickly stilled by repeating to myself that my work was important for the understanding of non-Western healing practices. The strange, often bizarre customs of shamanism would become understandable in the light of a different interpretational context, thus furthering anthropological knowledge in general.

"You haven't worked for two days," Ritimi<said to me one afternoon. "You haven't asked about last night's songs and dances. Don't you know they are important? If we don't sing and dance the hunters will return without meat for the feast." Scowling, she threw the notepad into my lap. "You haven't even painted in your book."

"I'm resting for a few days," I said, clutching the notepad against my breast as if it were the dearest thing I possessed. I had no intention of letting her know that every precious page was to be filled exclusively with data on shamanism.

Ritimi took my hands in hers, examined them intently, then, assuming a very serious expression, commented, "They look very tired- they need rest."

We burst out laughing. Ritimi had always been baffled that I considered decorating my book to be work. To her work meant digging weeds in the garden, collecting firewood, and repairing the roof of the shabono.

"I liked the dances and songs very much," I said. "I recognized your voice- it was beautiful."

Ritimi beamed at me. "I sing very well." There was a charming candor and assurance in her statement; she was not boasting but only stating a fact. "I'm sure the hunters will return with plenty of game to feed the guests at the feast."

Nodding in agreement, I looked for a twig, then began to sketch a human figure on the soft dirt. "This is the body of a white person," I said as I sketched the main organs and bones. "I wonder how the body of an Iticoteri looks?"

"You must be very tired to ask such a stupid question," Ritimi said, staring at me as if I were dim-witted. She stood up and began to dance, chanting in a loud melodious voice: "This is my head, this is my arm, this is my breast, this is my stomach, this is my..."

In no time at all, attracted by Ritimi's antics, a group of women and men gathered around us. Squealing and laughing, they made obscene remarks about each other's bodies. Some of the adolescent boys were laughing so hard, they rolled on the ground, holding their penises.

"Can anyone draw a body the way I drew mine?" I asked.

Several responded to this challenge. Grabbing a piece of wood, a twig, or a broken bow, they began to draw on the dirt. Their drawings differed markedly from each other's, not only because of the obvious sexual differences, which they made sure to emphasize, but because all the men's bodies were depicted with tiny figures inside the chest.

I could hardly hide my delight. I thought these must be the spirits I had heard Arasuwe summon with his chant before he began the curing session. "What are these?" I asked casually.

"The hekuras of the forest who live in a man's chest," one of the men said.

"Are all men shapori?"

"All men have hekuras in their chests," the man said. "But only a real shapori can make use of them. Only a great shapori can command his hekuras to aid the sick and counteract the spells of enemy shapori." Studying my sketch, he asked, "Why does your picture have hekuras, even in the legs? Women don't have hekuras."

I explained that these were not spirits, but organs and bones, and they promptly added them to their own drawings. Content with what I had learned, I willingly accompanied Ritimi to gather firewood in the forest- the women's most arduous and unwelcome task. They could never get enough wood, for the fires were never allowed to die.

That evening, as she had done every night since I arrived at the settlement, Ritimi examined my feet for thorns and splinters. Satisfied that there were none, she rubbed them clean with her hands.

"I wonder if the bodies of the shapori go through some kind of transformation when they are under the influence of epena," I said. It was important to have it confirmed in their own words since the original premise of my theoretical scheme was that the shaman operated under certain assumptions concerning the body. I needed to know if these assumptions were shared by the group, and if they were of a conscious or unconscious nature.

"Did you see Iramamowe yesterday?" Ritimi asked. "Did you see him walk? His feet didn't touch the ground. He is a powerful shapori. He became the great jaguar."

"He didn't cure anyone," I said glumly. It disappointed me that Arasuwe's brother was considered a great shaman. I had seen him beat his wife on two occasions.

No longer interested in pursuing the conversation, Ritimi turned away from me, and began to get ready for our evening ritual. Lifting the basket that held my belongings from the small loft at the back of the hut, she placed it on the ground. One by one she took out each item and held it above her head, waiting for me to identify it. As soon as I did she repeated the name in Spanish, then in English, starting a nocturnal chorus as the headman's wives, and several other women who each night gathered in our hut, echoed the foreign words.

I relaxed in my hammock as Tutemi's fingers parted my hair searching for imaginary lice: I was certain I did not have any- not yet. Tutemi appeared to be five or six years younger than Ritimi, whom I believed to be twenty. She was taller and heavier, her stomach round with her first pregnancy. She was shy and retiring. Often I had discovered a sad, faraway look in her dark eyes, and at times she talked to herself as if she were thinking aloud.

"Lice! Lice!" Tutemi shouted, interrupting the women's Spanish-English chant.

"Let me see," I said, convinced that she was joking. "Are lice white?" I asked, examining the tiny white bugs on her finger. I had always believed they were dark.

"White girl, white lice," Tutemi said mischievously. With gleeful delight she crunched them one by one between her teeth and swallowed them. "All lice are white."

## Chapter 7

It was the day of the feast. Since noon I had been under the ministrations of Ritimi and Tutemi, who took great trouble to beautify me. With a sharpened piece of bamboo, Tutemi cut my hair in the customary style, and with a knife-sharp grass blade she shaved the crown of my head. The hair on my legs she removed with an abrasive paste made from ashes, vegetable resin, and dirt.

Ritimi painted wavy lines across my face, and intricate geometric patterns over my entire body with a piece of chewed-up twig. My legs, red and swollen from the depilation, were left unpainted. On my looped earrings, which I claimed could not be removed, she tied a pink flower together with tufts of white feathers. Around my upper arms, wrists, and ankles she fastened red cotton strands.

"Oh no. You're not going to do that," I said, jumping out of Ritimi's reach.

"It won't hurt," she assured me, then asked in an exasperated manner, "Do you want to look like an old woman? It won't hurt," Ritimi insisted, coming after me.

"Leave her alone," Etewa said, reaching for a bark box on the loft. He looked at me, then burst into laughter. His big white teeth and his squinting eyes seemed to mock my embarrassment. "She doesn't have much pubic hair."

Gratefully I tied the red cotton belt Ritimi had given me around my hips and laughed with him. Making sure I fastened the wide flat belt in such a manner that the fringed ends covered the offending hair, I said to Ritimi, "Now you can't see a thing."

Ritimi was not impressed, but gave an indifferent shrug, and continued examining her pubis for any hair.

Dark circles and arabesques [* arabesques- ornaments that interlaces simulated foliage in an intricate design] decorated Etewa's brown face and body. Over his waistband he tied a thick round belt made of red cotton yarn: Around his upper arms he fastened narrow bands of monkey fur to which Ritimi attached the black and white feathers Etewa had selected from the bark box.

Dipping her fingers in the sticky resin paste one of Arasuwe's wives had prepared in the morning, Ritimi wiped them over Etewa's hair. Immediately Tutemi took a handful of white down feathers from another box and plastered them on his head until he looked as if he were wearing a white fur cap.

"When will the feast start?" I asked, watching a group of men haul away enormous piles of plantain skins from the already cleaned, weed-free clearing.

"When the plantain soup and all the meat is ready," Etewa said, strutting about, making sure we could see him from every angle. His lips were twisted in a smile, and his humorous eyes still squinted. He looked at me, then removed the wad of tobacco from his mouth. Placing it on a piece of broken calabash on the ground, he spat over his hammock in a sharp, strong arc. With the assurance of someone who feels pleased and delighted with his own looks, he turned toward us once more, then walked out of the hut.

Little Texoma picked up the slimy quid. Stuffing it into her mouth she began to suck on it with the same gratification I would have felt biting into a piece of chocolate. Her small face, disfigured with half of the wad protruding from her mouth, looked grotesque. Grinning, she climbed into my hammock, and promptly fell asleep.

In the next hut I could see the headman Arasuwe lying in his hammock. From there he supervised the cooking of plantains and the roasting of the meat brought by the hunters who had left a few days before. Like workers on an assembly line, several men had in record time disposed of the numerous bundles of plantains. One sank his sharp teeth into the peel, cutting it open: Another pried the hard skin away, then threw the fruit into the bark trough Etewa had built early that morning: A third watched over the three small fires he had lit underneath the trough.

"How come only men are cooking?" I asked Tutemi. I knew women never cooked large game, but I was baffled that none of them had even gotten close to the plantains.

"Women are too careless," Arasuwe answered for Tutemi as he stepped into the hut. His eyes seemed to challenge me to contradict his statement. Smiling, he added, "They get distracted too easily, and let the fire burn through the bark."

Before I had a chance to say anything, he was back in his hammock. "Did he only come in to say that?" I asked.

"No," Ritimi said. "He came to look you over."

I was reluctant to ask if I had passed Arasuwe's inspection lest I remind her of my unplucked pubic hair. "Look," I said, "visitors are arriving."

"That's Puriwariwe, Angelica's oldest brother," Ritimi said, pointing to an old man among the group of men. "He is a feared shapori. He was killed once but didn't die."

"Killed once but didn't die." I repeated this slowly, wondering if I was supposed to take it literally, or if it was a figure of speech.

"Killed in a raid," Etewa said, walking into the hut. "Dead, dead, dead, but didn't die." He spoke distinctly, moving his lips in an exaggerated manner as if he could thus make me understand the true meaning of his words.

"Are there still raids taking place?"

No one answered my question. Etewa reached for a long hollow cane and a small gourd hidden behind one of the rafters, then left us to greet the visitors who stood in the middle of the clearing facing Arasuwe's hut.

More men walked into the compound and I wondered aloud if any women had been invited to the feast.

"They are outside," Ritimi said. "With the rest of the guests, decorating themselves while the men take epena."

The headman Arasuwe, his brother Iramamowe, Etewa, and six other Iticoteri men- all decorated with feathers, fur, and red onoto paste- squatted face to face with the visitors who were already on their haunches. They talked for a while, avoiding one another's eyes.

Arasuwe unfastened the small gourd hanging around his neck, poured some of the brownish-green powder into one end of his hollow cane, then faced Angelica's brother. Placing the end of the cane against the shaman's nose, Arasuwe blew the hallucinogenic powder with great force into one of the old man's nostrils. The shaman did not flinch, groan, or stagger off, as I had seen other men do. But his eyes did become bleary and soon green slime dripped from his nose and mouth, which he flicked away with a twig. Slowly he began to chant. I did not catch his words; they were spoken too softly, and the groans of the others drowned them out.

Glassy-eyed, with mucus and saliva dripping down his chin and chest, Arasuwe jumped into the air. The red macaw feathers hanging from his ears and arms fluttered around him. He jumped repeatedly, touching the ground with a lightness that seemed incredible in someone so stockily built. His face seemed to be carved in stone. Straight bangs hung over a jutting brow. His wide, flaring nose and his snarling mouth reminded me of one of the four guardian kings I had once seen in a temple in Japan.

A few of the men had staggered away from the rest of the group, holding their heads as they vomited. The old man's chant became louder; one by one the men gathered once more around him. Quietly they squatted, their folded arms over their knees, their eyes lost on some invisible spot only they could see, until the shapori finished his song.

Each of the Iticoteri men returned to his hut accompanied by a guest. Arasuwe had invited Puriwariwe. Etewa walked into his hut with one of the young men who had vomited. Without glancing at us, the guest stretched in Etewa's hammock as if it were his own: He did not look older than sixteen.

"Why didn't all the Iticoteri men take epena or decorate themselves?" I whispered to Ritimi, who was busy cleaning and repainting Etewa's face with onoto.

"Tomorrow they will all be decorated. More guests will come in the next few days," she said. "Today is for Angelica's relatives."

"But Milagros isn't here."

"He came this morning."

"This morning!" I repeated in disbelief. The young man lying in Etewa's hammock opened his eyes wide, looked at me, then shut them again. Texoma awoke and began to wail. I tried to calm her by pushing the tobacco quid, which had fallen to the ground, back into her mouth. Refusing it, she began to cry even louder. I handed her to Tutemi, who rocked the child back and forth until she was still.

Why had Milagros not let me know he was back? I wondered, feeling angry and hurt. Tears of self-pity welled up in my eyes.

"Look. He's coming," Tutemi said, pointing toward the shabono's entrance.

Followed by a group of men, women, and children, Milagros walked directly toward Arasuwe's hut. Red and black lines circled his eyes and mouth. Spellbound, I gaped at the black monkey tail wrapped around his head, from which multicolored macaw feathers dangled, matching the ones that hung from his fur armbands. Instead of the festive cotton belt, he wore a bright red loincloth.

An inexplicable uneasiness overtook me as he approached my hammock. I felt my heart pound with fear as I gazed up into his tense, strained face.

"Bring your gourd," he said in Spanish, then turned around, and walked toward the trough filled with plantain soup.

Without paying the slightest attention to me, everyone followed Milagros into the clearing. Speechless, I reached for my basket, set it on the ground before me, and took out all my possessions. At the bottom, wrapped in my knapsack, was the smooth, ochre-colored calabash with Angelica's ashes. I had often wondered what I was supposed to do with it. Ritimi had never touched the knapsack when she went through my belongings.

The gourd felt heavy in my stiff, cold hands. It had been so light when I had carried it tied around my waist in the forest.

"Empty it into the trough," Milagros said. Again he spoke in Spanish.

"It's filled with soup," I said stupidly. I felt my voice quiver, and my hands were so unsteady I thought I would not be able to pull the resin plug from the calabash.

"Empty it," Milagros repeated, tilting my arm gently. I squatted awkwardly, and slowly poured the burnt, finely powdered bones into the soup. I stared hypnotically at the dark heap they formed on the thick yellow surface. The smell made me nauseous. The ashes did not submerge. Milagros poured the contents of his own gourd on top of them. The women began to wail and cry. Was I supposed to join them? I wondered. I felt certain no matter how hard I tried not a single tear would come to my eyes.

Startled by sharp cracking sounds, I straightened up. With the handle of his machete, Milagros had split the two gourds into perfect halves. Next he mixed the powder into the soup, blending it so well that the yellow pap turned into a dirty gray.

I watched him bring the soup-filled gourd to his mouth, then empty it in one long gulp. Wiping his chin with the back of his hand, he filled it once more, and handed the ladle to me.

Horrified, I looked at the faces around me: Intently they watched every movement and gesture I made, with eyes that no longer seemed human. The women had stopped wailing. I could hear the accelerated beats of my heart. Swallowing repeatedly in an effort to overcome the dryness in my mouth, I held out a shaking hand. Then I shut my eyes tightly, and gulped down the heavy liquid. To my surprise the sweet, slightly salty soup glided smoothly down my throat. A faint smile relaxed Milagros's tense face as he took the empty gourd from me. I turned around, and slowly walked away as ripples of nausea tightened my stomach.

High-pitched chatter and squeals of laughter issued from the hut. Sisiwe, surrounded by his friends, sat on the ground, showing them each one of my personal belongings, which I had left scattered around. My nausea dissolved into rage as I saw my notepads smoldering on the hearth.

Startled, the children laughed at me as I burned my fingers trying to retrieve what was left of the pads. Slowly the bemused expressions on their faces changed to amazement when they realized I was crying.

I ran out of the shabono down the path toward the river, clutching the burnt pages to my breast. "I'll ask Milagros to take me back to the mission," I mumbled, wiping the tears from my face. The idea struck me as so absurd that I burst out laughing. How could I face Father

Coriolano with a shaven tonsure.

Squatting at the edge of the water, I stuck my finger in my throat and tried to vomit. It was no use. Exhausted, I lay face up on a flat boulder jutting over the water and examined what was left of my notes. A cool breeze blew my hair. I turned on my stomach. The warmth of the stone filled me with a soft laziness that melted all my anger and weariness away.

I looked for my face in the clear water, but the wind ruffled away all reflection from the surface. The river gave back nothing. Trapped in the dark pools along the bank, the brilliant green of the vegetation was a cloudy mass.

"Let your notes drift with the river," Milagros said, sitting beside me on the rock. His sudden presence did not startle me. I had been expecting him.

With a slight movement of my head I silently assented, and let my hand dangle over the rock. My fingers unclasped. I heard a faint splash as the scorched pad fell into the water. I felt as if a burden had been lifted off my back as I watched my notes drift downriver. "You didn't go to the mission," I said. "Why didn't you tell me you had to bring Angelica's relatives?"

Milagros did not answer but stared out across the river.

"Did you tell the children to burn my notes?" I asked.

He turned his face toward me but remained silent. The contraction of his mouth revealed a vague disillusionment I failed to comprehend. When he spoke at last it was in a soft tone that seemed forced from him against his will. "The Iticoteri as well as other settlements have moved over the years deeper and deeper into the forest, away from the mission and the big rivers where the white man passes by." He turned to look at a lizard crawling uneasily over the stone. For an instant it stared at us with lidless eyes, then slithered off. "Other settlements have chosen to do the opposite," Milagros continued. "They seek the goods the racionales offer. They have failed to understand that only the forest can give them security. Too late, they will discover that to the white man the Indian is no better than a dog."

He knew, he said, having lived all his life between the two worlds, that the Indians did not have a chance in the world of the white man, no matter what a few individuals of either race did or believed to the contrary.

I talked about anthropologists and their work, the importance of recording customs and beliefs, which as he had mentioned on a previous occasion were doomed to be forgotten.

The hint of a mocking smile twisted his lips. "I know about anthropologists; I once worked for one of them as an informant," he said, and began to laugh: It was a high-pitched laughter, but there was no emotion in his face. His eyes were not laughing but shone with animosity.

I was taken aback because his anger seemed directed at me. "You knew I was an anthropologist," I said hesitantly. "You yourself helped me fill part of my notebook with information about the Iticoteri. It was you who took me from hut to hut, who encouraged others to talk to me, to teach me your language and your customs."

Impassively Milagros sat there, his painted face an expressionless mask. I felt like shaking him. It was as if he had not heard my words. Milagros stared at the trees, already black against the fading sky: I looked up into his face. His head was silhouetted against the sky. I saw the flaming macaw feathers and purple manes of monkey fur as if the sky were streaked with them.

Milagros shook his head sadly. "You know you didn't come here to do your work. You could've done that much better at one of the settlements close to the mission." Tears formed at the edge of his eyelids: They clung to his stubby lashes, shining, trembling. "Knowledge of our ways and beliefs was given to you so you would move with the rhythm of our lives; so you would feel secure and protected. It was a gift, not to be used or to be given to others."

I could not shift my gaze away from his bright moist eyes: There was no resentment in them. I saw my face mirrored in his black pupils. Angelica's and Milagros's gift. I finally understood. I had been guided through the forest, not to see their people with the eyes of an anthropologist- sifting, judging, analyzing all I saw and heard- but to see them as Angelica would have seen them, for one last time. She too had known that her time and the time of her people was coming to an end.

I shifted my gaze to the water. I had not felt my watch falling in the river, but there it was lying amidst the pebbles, an unstable vision of tiny illuminated spots coming together and moving apart in the water. One of the metal links on the watchband must have broken, I thought, but made no effort to retrieve the watch, my last link with the world beyond the forest.

Milagros's voice broke into my reveries. "A long time ago at a settlement close to the big river, I worked for an anthropologist. He didn't live with us in the shabono, but built himself a hut outside the log palisade. It had walls and a door that locked from the inside and the outside." Milagros paused for a moment, wiping the tears that had dried around his wrinkled eyes, then asked me, "Do you want to know what I did to him?"

"Yes," I said hesitantly.

"I gave him epena." Milagros paused for a moment, and smiled as if he were enjoying my apprehension. "This anthropologist acted like everyone else who inhaled the sacred powder. He said he had the same visions as the shaman."

"There is nothing strange about that," I said, a little piqued by Milagros's smug tone.

"Yes, there is," he said, and laughed. "Because all I blew up his nostrils were ashes. All ashes do is make your nose bleed."

"Is that what you are going to give me?" I asked, and flushed at the obvious self-pity that permeated my voice.

"I gave you part of Angelica's soul," he said softly, helping me to my feet.

The shabono's boundaries seemed to dissolve against the darkness. I could see well in the faint light. The people gathered around the trough reminded me of forest creatures, their shining eyes smeared with the light from the fires.

I sat next to Hayama, and accepted the piece of meat she offered me. Ritimi rubbed her head against my arm. Little Texoma sat in my lap. I felt content, protected by the familiar odors and sounds. Intently I watched the faces around me, wondering how many of them were related to Angelica. There was not a single face resembling hers. Even Milagros's features, which had once seemed so much like Angelica's, looked different. Perhaps I had already forgotten what she looked like, I thought sadly. Then on a beam of light extending from the fire I saw her smiling face. I shook my head, trying to erase the vision, and found myself staring at the old shaman Puriwariwe, squatting a bit apart from the group.

He was a small, thin, dried-up man with a brownish-yellow skin; the muscles of his arms and legs were already shrunken. But his hair was still dark, curling slightly around his head. He was not adorned: All he wore was a bowstring around his waist. Sparse hairs hung from his chin, and the vestiges of a mustache shadowed the edges of his upper lip. Under heavy wrinkled lids, his eyes were like tiny lights, reflecting the gleam of the fire.

Yawning, he opened a cavernous mouth where yellowed teeth hung like stalagmites. Laughter and conversation ceased as he began to chant in a voice that gave the impression of belonging to another time and place. He possessed two voices: The one coming from his throat was high-pitched and wrathful; and the other, coming from his belly, was deep and soothing.

Long after everyone had retired to their hammocks, and the fires had burned down, Puriwariwe remained crouched in front of a small fire in the middle of the clearing. He sang in a low-keyed voice.

I got up from my hammock, and squatted next to him, trying to bring my buttocks to touch the earth. According to the Iticoteri it was the only way one could squat for hours, and be totally relaxed. Puriwariwe looked at me, acknowledging my gaze, then stared into space as though I had disturbed his train of thought. He did not move and I had the odd sensation he had fallen asleep. Then he shifted his buttocks on the ground without relaxing his legs, and gradually began to chant once more in a voice that was but a faint murmur. I was not able to understand a single word.

It began to rain and I returned to my hammock. The drops pattered softly onto the thatched palm roof, creating a strange, trancelike rhythm. When I looked again toward the center of the clearing, the old man had disappeared; and as dawn lit up the forest, I felt myself slip into a timeless sleep.

## Chapter 8

The red sunset tinted the air with a fiery glow. The sky was aflame for a few minutes before it dissolved rapidly into darkness. It was the third day of the feast. From my hammock, together with Etewa's and Arasuwe's children, I watched the sixty or so men, Iticoteri as well as their guests, who without food or rest had been dancing since noon in the middle of the clearing. To the rhythm of their own shrill shouts, to the clacking of their bows and arrows, they turned one way, then another, stepping backward and forward, a throbbing, never-ending beat of sound and motion, an undulating array of feathers and bodies, a blur of crimson and black designs.

A full moon rose above the treetops, casting a radiant light over the clearing. For a moment there was a lull in the unceasing noise and movement. Then the dancers broke out in savage, strangled cries that filled the air with an ear-piercing sound as they flung aside their bows and arrows.

Running inside the huts, the dancers grabbed burning logs from the hearths, and with a frenzied violence banged them against the poles holding up the shabono. All sorts of crawling insects scurried for safety in the palm-thatch roof before they fell like a cascade to the ground.

Terrified that the huts might come crashing down, or that the flying embers might set the roofs on fire, I ran outside with the children. The earth trembled under the men's stomping feet as they trampled out all the hearths in the huts. Brandishing the lighted logs high above their heads, they ran out into the center of the clearing, and resumed their dance with mounting frenzy. They circled the plaza, their heads wagging back and forth like marionettes whose strings had broken. The soft white feathers in their hair fluttered onto their sweat-glistening shoulders.

The moon moved behind a black cloud: Only the sparks of the fiery logs illuminated the clearing. The men's shrill cries rose to a higher pitch. Wielding their clubs overhead, they invited the women to join in the dance.

Shouting and laughing, the women darted back and forth, expertly dodging the swinging logs. The frenzy of the dancers mounted to a compelling intensity, converging toward a final climax as young girls, holding clusters of yellow palm fruit in their upraised arms, joined the crowd, their bodies swaying with sensual abandon.

I was not sure if it was Ritimi who grabbed my hand and pulled me into the dance, for in the next instant I stood alone among the ecstatic faces whirling around me. Caught between shadows and bodies, I tried to reach old Hayama standing in the safety of a hut, but I did not know in which direction to move. I did not recognize the man who, brandishing a log above his head, pushed me back amidst the dancers.

I cried out. Terror-stricken, I realized it was as if my cries were mute, exhausted in countless echoes reverberating inside me. I felt a sharp pain on the side of my head, right behind my ear, as I fell face down on the ground. I opened my eyes, trying to see through the shadows thickening about me, and wondered if those frenzied feet whirling and leaping in the air realized I had fallen amidst them. Then there was darkness, punctuated by pinpoints of light darting in and out of my head like glowworms in the night.

I was vaguely aware of someone dragging me away from the trampling dancers to a hammock. I forced my eyes open, but the figure hovering above me remained blurred. I felt a pair of gentle, slightly shaky hands touch my face, and the back of my head. For an instant I thought it was Angelica. But upon hearing that unmistakable voice coming from the depths of his stomach, I knew it was the old shaman Puriwariwe, chanting. I tried to focus my eyes, but his face remained distorted, as if I were seeing it through layers of water. I wanted to ask him where he had been, for I had not seen him since the first day of the feast, but the words were nothing but visions in my head.

I don't know whether I had been unconscious or whether I had slept, but when I awoke Puriwariwe was no longer there. Instead I saw Etewa's face bending over mine, so close I could have touched the red circles on his cheeks, between his brows, and at the corners of each eye. I stretched out my arm, but there was no one there. I shut my eyes; the circles danced inside my head like a red veil in a dark void. I shut them tighter until the image broke into a thousand fragments. The fire had been relit: It filled the hut with a cozy warmth that made me feel as if I were wrapped in an opaque cocoon of smoke. Dancing shadows silhouetted against the darkness were reflected on the golden patina of gourds hanging from the rafters.

Laughing happily, old Hayama came into the hut, and sat on the ground beside me. "I thought you would sleep till morning." Raising both hands to my head, her fingers probed until she found the swollen lump behind my ear. "It's big," she said. Her weathered features expressed a distant sorrow: Her eyes held a soft gentle light.

I sat up in the fiber hammock. Only then did I realize I was not in Etewa's hut.

"Iramamowe's," Hayama said before I had a chance to ask where I was. "His hut was the closest for Puriwariwe to bring you in after you were pushed against one of the men's clubs."

The moon had traveled high in the sky. It's pale shimmer spilled into the clearing. The dancing had ceased, yet an inaudible vibration still hung in the air.

Shouting, clacking their bows and arrows, a group of men positioned themselves in a semicircle in front of the hut. Iramamowe and one of the visitors stepped into the center of the gesticulating men. I could not tell which settlement the guest was from: I had been unable to distinguish the various groups who had come and gone since the beginning of the feast.

Iramamowe spread his legs in a firm stance, and raised his left arm over his head, exposing his chest fully. "Ha, ha, ahaha, aita, aita," he shouted, tapping his foot on the ground; a fearless cry that was meant to dare his opponent to strike him.

The young visitor adjusted his distance by measuring his arm length to Iramamowe's body. He took several dry runs, then with his closed fist delivered one powerful blow on the left side of Iramamowe's chest.

My body recoiled in shock. I felt nauseous as though the pain had swept through my own chest. "Why are they fighting?" I asked Hayama.

"They aren't fighting," she said, laughing. "They want to hear how their hekuras, the life essence that dwells inside their chests, resound. They want to hear how the hokums vibrate with each blow."

The crowd cheered enthusiastically. The young visitor stood back, his chest heaving with excitement, and punched Iramamowe once more. Chin arrogantly raised, eyes perfectly steady, body stiff in defiance, Iramamowe acknowledged the cheers of the men. It was only after the third blow that he broke his stance. For an instant his lips parted in an appreciative grin, then set once more in a snarl of indifference and contempt. The persistent tapping of his foot, Hayama assured me, revealed nothing other than annoyance: His adversary had not yet struck him hard enough.

With a morbid, righteous kind of satisfaction I hoped Iramamowe felt the pain of each blow. He deserved it, I thought. Ever since I had seen him strike his wife, I had built up a resentment against him. Yet, as I watched, I could not help but admire the gallant way he stood in the middle of the crowd. There was something childishly defiant in the ramrod straightness of his back, the manner in which his bruised chest was thrust forward. His round, flat face with it's narrow forehead and flared upper lip appeared so vulnerable as he stared at the young man in front of him. I wondered if the slight flicker of his brown eyes betrayed that he was shaken.

With a shattering force the fourth blow landed on Iramamowe's chest. It reverberated like the rocks that tumbled down the river during a storm.

"I believe I heard his hekuras," I said, certain Iramamowe's rib had been broken.

"He's waiteri," the Iticoteri and their guests shouted in unison. With rapt expressions on their faces they bounced up and down on their haunches, clacking their bows and arrows over their heads.

"Yes. He is a brave one," Hayama repeated, her eyes fixed on Iramamowe, who, satisfied that his hekuras had resounded potently, stood erect amidst the cheering men, his bruised chest puffed up with pride.

Silencing the onlookers, the headman Arasuwe stepped toward his brother. "Now you take Iramamowe's blow," he said to the young man who had delivered the four punches.

The visitor positioned himself in the same defiant stance in front of Iramamowe. Blood spilled from the young man's mouth as he collapsed to the ground after receiving Iramamowe's third blow.

Iramamowe jumped in the air, then began to dance around the fallen man. Sweat glistened on his face, on the strained muscles of his neck and shoulders. But his voice sounded clear, vibrant with joy, as he shouted, "Ai ai aiaiaiai, aiai!"

Two of the visiting women carried the injured man into the empty hammock next to where Hayama and I sat. One of them cried: The other bent over the man and began to suck blood and saliva from his mouth until his breath came in slow, measured gasps.

Iramamowe challenged another of the guests to strike him. After receiving the first punch he knelt on the ground, from where he dared his opponent to hit him once more. He spat blood after the next blow. The guest got down on his haunches facing Iramamowe. Wrapping their arms around each other, they embraced.

"You hit well," Iramamowe said, his voice a barely audible whisper. "My hekuras are full of life, potent and happy. Our blood has flown. This is good. Our sons will be strong. Our gardens and the fruits in the forest will ripen to sweetness."

The guest voiced similar thoughts. Vowing eternal friendship, he promised Iramamowe a machete he had acquired from a group of Indians who had settled near the big river.

"I have to watch this one more closely," Hayama said, walking out of the hut. Her youngest son was one of the men who had stepped into the circle for the next round of ritual blows.

I did not want to remain with the injured visitor in Iramamowe's hut. The two women who had brought him in had left to ask the shaman from their own group to prepare some medicine that would ease the pain in the man's chest.

My head began to spin as I stood up. Slowly I walked through the empty huts until I reached Etewa's. I stretched in my cotton hammock. An eerie silence closed in on me as if I were falling into a light faint.

I was awakened by angry shouts. Someone said, "Etewa, you have slept with my woman without my permission." The voice was so close it was as if he had spoken into my ear. Startled, I sat up. A group of men and giggling women had gathered in front of the hut. Etewa, standing perfectly still in the middle of the crowd, his face an unreadable mask, did not deny the charge. Suddenly he shouted, "You and your family have eaten like hungry dogs for the last three days." It was a deplorable accusation; visitors were given whatever they asked; for during a feast the hosts' gardens and hunting territory were at their guests' disposal. To be insulted in such a manner implied that the man had taken advantage of his privileged status. "Ritimi, get me my nabrushi," Etewa shouted, scowling at the angry young man in front of him.

Sobbing, Ritimi ran into the hut, picked up the club, and without looking at her husband handed the four-foot-long stick to him. "I can't watch," she said, throwing herself into my hammock. I put my arms around her, trying to comfort her. Had it not been that she was so distressed I would have laughed. Not in the least concerned with Etewa's infidelity, Ritimi was afraid the night might end with a serious fight. Watching the two angry men shout at each other, and the crowd's excited reaction, I could not help but be alarmed in turn.

"Hit me on the head," the enraged visitor demanded. "Hit me, if you are a man. Let's see if we can laugh together again. Let's see if my anger passes."

"We are both angry," Etewa shouted with insolent vigor, hefting the nabrushi in his hand. "We must appease our wrath." Then, without further ado, he delivered a solid whack on the man's shaven tonsure.

Blood gushed from the wound. Slowly it spread over the man's face until it was covered like some grotesque red mask. His legs shook, almost buckling under him. But he did not fall.

"Hit me and we'll be friends again," Etewa shouted belligerently, silencing the aroused crowd. He leaned on his club, lowered his head, and waited. When the man struck him, Etewa was momentarily dazed; blood flowed down his brow and lashes, forcing him to close his eyes. The explosive yells of the men broke the silence, a chorus of approving shouts demanding they hit each other again.

With a mixture of fascination and disgust I watched the two men facing each other. Their muscles were drawn tightly, the veins in their necks distended, their eyes bright, as if rejuvenated by the raging flow of blood. Their faces, set in contemptuous red masks, betrayed no pain as they stepped around one another like two injured cocks.

With the back of his hand Etewa wiped the blood obstructing his vision, then spat. Lifting his club, he let it fall on his opponent's head, who without uttering a sound collapsed on the ground.

Clicking their tongues, their eyes a bit out of focus, the spectators emitted fearsome cries. I was certain a fight would break out as the whole shabono filled with their earpiercing yells. I held on to Ritimi's arm, and was surprised that her tear-stained face was set in a complacent, almost cheerful expression. She explained that she could tell by the tone of the men's shouts that they were no longer concerned with the initial insults. All they were interested in was to witness the power of each man's hekuras. There were no winners or losers. If a warrior fell, all it meant was that his hekuras were not strong enough at the moment.

One of the onlookers emptied a water-filled calabash on the prostrate guest, pulled his ears, wiped the blood from his face. Then, helping him up, he handed the half-dazed man his club, and urged him to hit Etewa once more on the head. The man had barely enough strength to lift the heavy stick; instead of landing on Etewa's skull, it struck him in the middle of the chest.

Etewa fell to his knees; blood spilled from his mouth, over his lips, chin, and throat, down his chest and thighs, a red trail seeping into the earth. "How well you hit," Etewa said in a strangled voice. "Our blood has flown. We are no longer troubled. We have calmed our wrath."

Ritimi went to Etewa. Sighing loudly, I lay back in my hammock and closed my eyes. I had seen enough blood for the night. I probed the swollen area on my head, wondering if I had a slight concussion.

I almost fell from my hammock as someone held on to the liana rope tying it to one of the poles in the hut. Startled, I looked up into Etewa's bloodied face. Either he did not see me, or was beyond caring where he rested, for he just slumped on top of me. The odor of blood, warm and pungent, mingled with the acrid smell of his skin. Repelled and fascinated, I could not help but stare at the open gash on his skull, still bleeding, and his swollen purple chest.

I was wondering how I could extricate my legs from under his weight when Ritimi stepped into the hut carrying a water-filled gourd, which she heated over the fire.

Expertly she lifted Etewa halfway up, and motioned me to slip behind him in the hammock so that she could prop him against my raised knees. Gently, she washed his face and chest clean.

Etewa was perhaps twenty-five, yet with his hair clinging damply to his forehead, and his lips slightly parted, he looked as helpless as a child in sleep. It occurred to me that he might die of internal injuries.

"He will be well tomorrow," Ritimi said as if she had guessed my thoughts. Softly she began to laugh: Her laughter had a ring of childishly secret delight. "It's good for blood to flow. His hekuras are strong. He is waiteri."

Etewa opened his eyes, pleased to hear Ritimi's praise. He mumbled something unintelligible as he gazed into my face.

"Yes. He is waiteri," I agreed with Ritimi.

Tutemi arrived shortly with a dark hot brew.

"What is that?" I asked.

"Medicine," Tutemi said, smiling. She stuck her finger in the concoction, then put it against my lips. "Puriwariwe made it from roots and magical plants." A gleam of contentment shone in Tutemi's eyes as she forced Etewa to drink the bitter-tasting brew. Blood had flown: She was convinced she would bear a strong, healthy son.

Ritimi examined my legs, which were cut and bruised from being dragged across the clearing by Puriwariwe, and she washed them with the remaining warm water. I lay down in Etewa's uncomfortable fiber hammock.

The moon, circled by a yellow haze, had moved until it was almost over the horizon of trees. A few men were still dancing and singing in the clearing: Then a cloud hid the moon, obscuring everything in sight. Only the sound of voices, no longer shrill but a gentle murmur, told that the men were still there. The moon revealed itself once more, a pale light illuminating the tops of the trees, and the brown-skinned figures materialized against the darkness, shadows of long bodies giving substance to the soft clacking of bows and arrows,

Some of the men sang until a rim of light began to appear over the trees to the east. Dark purple clouds the color of Etewa's bruised chest covered the sky. Dew shone on the leaves, on the fringe of the palm fronds hanging around the huts. The voices began to fade, drifting away on the chilly breeze of dawn.

# PART THREE

## Chapter 9

Planting and sowing was primarily a man's task, yet most women accompanied their husbands, fathers, and brothers whenever they went to work in the gardens in the mornings.

Besides keeping them company, the women helped weed, or took the opportunity to collect firewood if new trees had been felled.

For several weeks I had gone with Etewa, Ritimi, and Tutemi to their plots. The long, arduous hours spent weeding seemed to be wasted, for there never was any improvement to be seen. The sun and rain favored the growth of all species impartially, without recognizing human preferences.

Every household had their own area of land separated by the trunks of felled trees. Etewa's garden was next to Arasuwe's, who cultivated the largest area among the Iticoteri, for it was from the headman's plot that guests were fed at a feast.

At first I had recognized nothing but plantains, several kinds of bananas, and various palm trees scattered throughout the gardens. The palms were also purposely cultivated for their fruit, each tree belonging to the individual who planted it. I had been surprised to discover among the tangle of weeds an assortment of edible roots, such as manioc and sweet potatoes, and a variety of gourd-bearing vines, cotton, tobacco, and magical plants. Also growing in the gardens as well as around the shabono were the pink-flowered and red-podded trees from which the onoto paste was made.

Clusters of the red spiny pods were cut down, shelled, and the bright crimson seeds, together with the pulpy flesh surrounding them, were placed in a large water-filled calabash. As it was stirred and crushed, the onoto was boiled for a whole afternoon. After it had cooled during the night, the semi-solid mass was wrapped in perforated layers of plantain leaves, then tied to one of the rafters in the hut to dry. A few days later the red paste was transferred to small gourds, ready for use.

Ritimi, Tutemi, and Etewa each had their own patches of tobacco and magical plants in Etewa's garden. Like everyone else's tobacco plots, they were fenced off with sticks and sharpened bones to discourage intruders. Tobacco was never taken without permission; quarrels ensued whenever it was. Ritimi had pointed out several of her magical plants to me. Some were used as aphrodisiacs and protective agents: Others were employed for malevolent purposes. Etewa never talked about his magical plants, and Ritimi and Tutemi pretended they did not know anything about them.

Once I watched Etewa dig up a bulbous root. The following day, before leaving to hunt, he rubbed his feet and legs with the mashed-up root. For our evening meal that day we had armadillo meat. "What a powerful plant," I had commented. Puzzled, he had regarded me for a long time, then, grinning, said, "Adoma roots protect one from snake bites."

On another occasion, as I was sitting in the garden with little Sisiwe, listening to his detailed explanation concerning the variety of edible ants, we saw his father dig up another of his roots. Etewa crushed the root, mixed it's sap with onoto, then rubbed the substance over his entire body. "A peccary [* peccary- nocturnal gregarious pig-like wild animals of North America and South America] will cross my father's path," Sisiwe whispered. "I know by the kind of root he used. For every animal there is a magical plant."

"Even for monkeys?" I asked.

"Monkeys are frightened by terrifying yells," Sisiwe said knowingly. "Paralyzed, the monkeys can no longer run away and the men can shoot them."

One morning, almost hidden behind the tangled mass of calabash vines and weeds, I caught sight of Ritimi. I could only see her head rising behind the woody stems, pointed leaves, and clusters of white, bell-shaped flowers of the manioc plants. She seemed to be talking to herself; I could not hear what she was saying, but her lips moved incessantly, as if she were reciting some incantation. I wondered if she was charming her tobacco plants to grow taster or whether she was actually intending to help herself to some from Etewa's patch, which was next to hers.

Surreptitiously, Ritimi edged her way toward the middle of her own tobacco plot. Her air of urgency was unmistakable as she snapped branches and leaves. Looking around, she stuffed them into her basket, then covered them with banana fronds. Smiling, she rose, hesitated for an instant, then walked toward me.

I looked up in feigned surprise as I felt her shadow above me.

Ritimi placed her basket on the ground and sat next to me. I was bursting with curiosity, yet I knew it would be futile to ask what she had been doing.

"Don't touch the bundle in my basket," she said after a moment, unable to suppress her laughter. "I know you were watching me."

I felt myself blushing and smiled. "Did you,snatch some of Etewa's tobacco?"

"No," she said in mock horror. "He knows his leaves so well he would notice if one were missing."

"I thought I saw you in his plot," I said casually.

Lifting the banana fronds from the basket Ritimi said, "I was in my own patch. Look, I took some branches of oko-shiki, a magical plant," she whispered. "I will make a powerful concoction."

"Are you going to cure someone?"

"Cure! Don't you know that only the shapori cures?" Tilting her head slightly to one side, she deliberated before she continued. "I'm going to bewitch that woman who had intercourse with Etewa at the feast," she said, smiling broadly.

"Maybe you should also prepare a potion for Etewa," I said, looking into her face. Her change of expression took me by surprise. Her mouth was set in a straight line; her eyes were narrowly focused on me. "After all, he was as guilty as the woman," I mumbled apologetically, feeling uneasy under her hard scrutiny.

"Didn't you see how shamelessly that woman taunted him?" Ritimi said reproachfully. "Didn't you see how vulgarly all those visiting women behaved?" Ritimi sighed, almost comically, then added with unconcealed disappointment, "Sometimes you are quite stupid."

I didn't know what to say. I was convinced that Etewa was as guilty as the woman. For want of anything better, I smiled. The first time I discovered Etewa in a compromising situation had been quite accidental. As everyone else did, I left the hut at dawn every day to relieve myself. I always strayed a bit farther into the forest, beyond the area set aside for human evacuation. One morning I was startled by a soft moan. Believing it was a wounded animal, I crawled, as quietly as I could, toward the noise. Totally surprised, I could only stare as I saw Etewa on top of Iramamowe's youngest wife. He looked into my face, smiling sheepishly, but did not stop moving on top o£ the woman.

Later that day Etewa offered me some of the honey he had found in the forest. Honey was a rare delicacy and was hardly ever shared with the same willingness as other foods were. In fact, most of the time honey was consumed at the spot where it was found. I thanked Etewa for the treat, assuming I was being bribed.

Sugars were something I constantly craved. I was no longer squeamish about consuming the honey together with wax combs, bees, maggots, pupae, and pollen the way the Iticoteri did. Whenever Etewa brought honey to the settlement, I would sit next to him and stare longingly at the runny paste studded with bees in varying stages of the metamorphic process until he offered me some. It never occured to me that he believed I had finally learned that to eye something one desired, or to ask for it outright, was considered proper behavior. Once, hoping to remind him that I knew of his philandering, I had asked him if he was not afraid to get hit on the head again by some enraged husband.

Etewa had looked at me in absolute astonishment. "It's because you don't know better- otherwise you wouldn't say such things." His tone was distant, the look in his eyes haughty as he turned toward a group of young boys engaged in sharpening pieces of bamboo that were to be used as arrowheads.

There were other occasions, not always accidental, when I encountered Etewa in similar circumstances. It soon became obvious that dawn was not only a time for attending to the baser bodily functions, but provided the safest opportunity for extramarital activity. I became greatly interested in who was cuckolding whom. Cueing themselves the evening before, the involved parties would disappear at dawn in the thicket. A few hours later, very casually, they returned by different routes, often carrying nuts, fruits, honey, sometimes even firewood. Some husbands reacted more violently than others upon finding out about their women's doings- they beat them, as I had seen Iramamowe do. Others, besides beating their wives, demanded a club duel with the male culprit, which sometimes ended in a larger fight that others joined.

Ritimi's words cut into my reveries, "Why are you laughing?"

"Because you are right,"" I said. "Sometimes I'm quite stupid." It suddenly dawned on me that Ritimi knew of Etewa's activities- probably everyone in the shabono was aware of what was going on. No doubt it had been a coincidence when Etewa had offered me the honey that first time. Only I had examined the event with suspicion, believing all the time I was his accomplice.

Ritimi put her arms around my neck and planted smacking kisses on my cheek, assuring me that I was not stupid- only very ignorant. She explained that as long as she knew with whom Etewa was involved she was not greatly concerned about his amorous pursuits. She was by no means pleased by it, but believed she had some kind of control if it was with someone from the shabono. What distressed her was the possibility Etewa might take a third wife from some other settlement.

"How are you going to bewitch that woman?" I asked. "Are you going to make the concoction yourself?"

Standing up, Ritimi smiled with obvious satisfaction. "If I tell you now, the magic won't work." She paused, a quizzical expression in her eyes. "I'll tell you about it when I have bewitched the woman. Maybe someday you too will need to know how to bewitch someone."

"Are you going to kill her?"

"No. I'm not that courageous," she said. "The woman will have pains in her back until she has a miscarriage."

Ritimi slung the basket over her shoulders, then headed toward one of the few trees left standing near her tobacco patch. "Come, I need to rest before bathing in the river."

I stood for a moment to ease my cramped muscles, then followed her. Ritimi sat on the ground, resting her back against the massive tree trunk. It's leaves were like open hands between us and the sun, providing a cool shade. The earth, padded with leaves, was soft. I lay my head on Ritimi's thigh, and watched the sky- so blue, so pale, it seemed transparent. The breeze rustled through the cane brush that grew behind us, gently, as if reluctant to impose itself on the midmorning stillness.

"The bump is gone," Ritimi said, running her fingers through my hair. "And there are no scars left on your legs," she added mockingly.

I agreed drowsily. Ritimi had laughed at my fear of getting sick from what she considered an insignificant injury. Having been pulled to safety by Puriwariwe was insurance enough that I would be well, she had assured me. However, I had been afraid that the cuts on my legs would become infected and I had insisted she wash them with boiled water every day. Old Hayama, as an added precaution, had rubbed the powder of burnt ants' nest on the wounds, claiming that it was a natural disinfectant. I had no ill effects from the stinging powder: The cuts healed quickly.

Through half-closed lids I gazed at the airy spaciousness of the gardens in front of me. Startled by shouts coming from the far end of the gardens, I opened my eyes. Iramamowe seemed to have materialized from beneath the banana fronds on his way toward the sky. Spellbound, I followed his movements as he worked his way up the spiny trunk of a rasha palm. So as not to hurt himself with the thorns, he worked with two pairs of crossed poles tied together, which he placed on the trunk one at a time. Relaxed, one motion leading to the next without a noticeable break, he alternated between standing on a pair of crossed poles and lifting the other set to place it higher on the trunk, until he reached the yellow clusters of rasha, at least sixty feet above the ground. For a moment he disappeared under the palm fronds that made a silvery arc against the sky. Iramamowe cut the drupes, tied the heavy clumps on a long vine, then eased them to the ground. Slowly, he worked his way down, vanishing in the greenness of banana leaves.

"I like the boiled drupes; they taste like ..." I said, then realized I did not know the word for potato. I sat up. With her head to the side, her mouth slightly open, Ritimi was sound asleep. "Let's go bathe," I said, tickling her nose with a grass blade.

Ritimi stared at me; she had the disoriented look of someone just awakened from a dream. Leisurely she rose to her feet, yawning and stretching like a cat. "Yes, let's go," she said, fastening the basket on her back. "The water will wash my dream away."

"Did you have a bad one?"

She looked at me gravely, then brushed the hair off her forehead. "You were alone on a mountain," she said vaguely, as if she were trying to recollect her dream. "You weren't frightened, yet you were crying." Ritimi gazed at me intently, then added, "Then you woke me."

As we turned into the path leading to the river, Etewa came running after us. "Get some pishaansi leaves," he said to Ritimi. He turned to me. "You come with me."

I followed him through the newly cleared area of forest where fresh plantain suckers had already been planted between the rubble of felled trees, the trimmed leaf sheaths exposed above the ground. They were spaced from ten to twelve feet apart, allowing for the future full-grown plants to overlap leaves, but not to shade one another. Only a few days ago, Etewa, Iramamowe, and other close kin of the headman Arasuwe had helped him separate the suckers from the large basal corm of the plantains. On a contraption made with vines and thick leaves, fitted with a tumpline, they transported the heavy suckers to the new site.

"Did you find any honey?" I asked expectantly.

"No honey," Etewa said, "but something just as delicious." He pointed to where Arasuwe and his two oldest sons stood. They were taking turns at kicking an old banana tree. Hundreds of whitish, fat larvae fell out from between the multilayered green trunk.

As soon as Ritimi returned with the pishaansi leaves from the forest, the boys picked up the wriggling worms and put them on the sturdy wide leaves. Arasuwe lit a small fire. One of his sons held an elliptically-shaped piece of wood with his feet firmly planted on the ground while

Arasuwe twirled the drill between his palms with an astounding speed. The ignited wood dust set fire to the termites' nest over which dry twigs and sticks were added.

Ritimi cooked the larvae for only a moment until the pishaansi leaves were black and brittle. Opening one of the bundles, Etewa wet his forefinger with saliva, rolled it in the roasted grub, then offered it to me. "It tastes good," he insisted as I turned my face away. Shrugging, he sucked his own finger clean.

Mumbling between mouthfuls, Ritimi urged me to give them a try. "How can you say you don't like them if you haven't even tasted them?"

With thumb and forefinger I placed one of the grayish, still soft grubs into my mouth. They are no different from escargot, I told myself, or cooked oysters. But when I tried to swallow the grub, it remained stuck to my tongue. I took it out again, waited till I had enough saliva, then swallowed the worm as if it were a pill. "In the morning, all I can eat is plantain," I said as Etewa pushed a bundle in front of me.

"You have worked in the garden," he said. "You have to eat. When there is no meat it is good to eat these." He reminded me that I had liked the ants and centipedes he had offered me on various occasions.

Looking into his expectant face, I could not bring myself to say that I had not liked them one bit, even though the centipedes had tasted like deep-fried vegetable tidbits. Reluctantly I forced myself to swallow a few more of the roasted grubs.

Ritimi and I followed behind the men on our way to the river. Children splashing in the water sang about a fat tapir that had fallen into a deep pool and drowned. Men and women were rubbing themselves with leaves; their bodies glistened in the sun, golden and smooth. Sparkling droplets on the tips of their straight hair reflected the light like diamond beads.

Old Hayama beckoned me to sit next to her on a large boulder at the edge of the water. I believe I had become Ritimi's grandmother's special charge, and she had taken it as a personal challenge to fatten me up. Like the children in the shabono, who were well fed so they would grow healthy and strong, old Hayama made sure I had plenty to snack on at all hours of the day. She indulged my insatiable appetite for sugars. Whenever someone found the sweet, thick, light-colored honey produced by nonstinging bees- the only kind given to the children- old Hayama made sure I was given at least a taste. If honey of the stinging black bees was brought to the shabono, Hayama also secured me some. Only adults partook of this kind, for the Iticoteri believed it caused nausea and even death to children. The Iticoteri were certain no harm would result if I ate both kinds, for they were unable to decide whether I was an adult or a child.

"Eat these," old Hayama said, offering me a few sopaa fruit. Greenish yellow, they were the size of lemons. I cracked them open with a stone (I had already broken a tooth trying to open nuts and fruits as the Iticoteri did) and sucked the sweet white pulp: The small brown seeds I spat out. The sticky juice gummed up my fingers and mouth.

Little Texoma climbed on my back, perching the small capuchin monkey she carried with her day and night on my head. The pet wrapped it's long tail around my neck, so tightly I almost choked. One furry hand held on to my hair while the other swung in front of my face, striving to snatch away my fruit. Afraid to swallow monkey hair and lice, I tried to shake myself free. But Texoma and her pet shrieked with delight, believing I was playing a game. Lowering my feet in the water, I tried to slip my T-shirt over my head. Caught unawares, child and monkey jumped away.

The children pulled me down to the sand, tumbling beside me. Giggling, they began to walk, one by one, on my back, and I gave myself up to the pleasure of their small, cool feet on my aching muscles. In vain I had tried to convince the women to massage my shoulders, neck, and back after I had weeded for hours in the gardens. Whenever I had tried to show them how good it felt, they gave me to understand that although they liked being touched, massaging was something only the shapori did when a person was ill or bewitched. Fortunately they had no objections to letting the children walk on my back. To the Iticoteri it was quite inconceivable that someone could actually derive pleasure from such a barbaric act.

Tutemi sat next to me in the sand and began to unwrap the pishaansi bundle Ritimi had given her. Her pregnant belly and swollen breasts seemed to be held in place by the taut stretched skin. She never complained of aches or nausea; neither did she have any cravings. In fact, there were so many food taboos a pregnant woman had to obey that I often wondered how they bore healthy babies. They were not allowed to eat large game. Their only source of protein were insects, nuts, larvae, fish, and certain kinds of small birds.

"When will you have the baby?" I asked, caressing the side of her stomach.

Knitting her brows in concentration, Tutemi deliberated for a while. "This moon comes and goes; another comes and goes, then one more comes and before it disappears, I will bear a healthy son."

I wondered if she was right. By her calculations that meant in three months. To me she looked as though she were about to give birth any day now.

"There are fish upriver- the kind you like," Tutemi said, smiling at me.

"I will take a quick swim, then I'll go with you to catch them."

"Take me swimming with you," little Texoma pleaded.

"You have to leave your monkey behind," Tutemi said.

Texoma perched the capuchin on Tutemi's head and came running after me. Shrieking with pleasure, she lay on my back in the water, her hands holding on to my shoulders. I stretched my legs and arms slowly and fully with each stroke until we reached a pool at the opposite bank.

"Do you want to dive to the bottom?" I asked her.

"I do, I do," she cried, nuzzling her small wet nose against my cheek. "I'll keep my eyes open, I'll not breathe, I'll hold on tight without choking you."

The water was not very deep. The blurred grayish, vermilion, and white pebbles resting in the amber sand shimmered brightly in spite of the trees shading the pool. I felt Texoma's hands tugging at my neck; quickly I swam to the surface.

"Come out," Tutemi shouted as soon as she saw our heads. "We're waiting for you." She pointed to the women next to her.

"I'll go back to the shabono now," Ritimi said. "If you see Kamosiwe give this to him." She handed me the last of the larvae bundles.

I followed the women and several men on the well-trodden trail. Shortly we encountered Kamosiwe, standing in the middle of the path. Reclining against his bow, he appeared to be fast asleep. I placed the bundle at his feet. The old man opened his one good eye; the bright sun made him squint, grotesquely disfiguring his scarred face. He picked up the larvae: Slowly he began to eat, shifting from one foot to the other.

Following Kamosiwe as we climbed a small hill thick with growth, I marveled at the uncanny agility with which he moved. He never looked where he walked, yet always avoided the roots and thorns on the trail.

Slight, shrunken with age, he was the oldest-looking man I had ever seen. His hair was neither black, gray, or white, but an indistinctly colored woolly mop that apparently had not been combed for years. Yet it was short, as if cut periodically. It probably had stopped growing, I decided, like the stubbles on his chin that were always the same length. The scars on his wrinkled face were caused by a blow from a club that had taken out one of his eyes. When he spoke his voice was but a murmur, the meaning of which I had to guess.

At night he would often stand in the middle of the clearing, speaking for hours on end. Children crouched at his feet, feeding the fire that had been lit for him. His spent voice carried a strength, a tenderness that seemed at odds with his looks. There was always a feeling of urgent necessity in his words, a sense of warning, of enchantment as they scattered into the night. "There are words of knowledge, of tradition, preserved in the memory of this old man," Milagros had explained. It was only after the feast that he mentioned that Kamosiwe was Angelica's father.

"You mean he is your grandfather?" I had asked in disbelief.

Nodding, Milagros had added, "When I was born, Kamosiwe was the headman of the Iticoteri."

Kamosiwe lived by himself in one of the huts close to the entrance of the shabono. He neither hunted nor worked in the gardens any longer; yet he was never without food or firewood. He accompanied the women to the gardens or into the forest when they went to collect nuts, berries, and wood. While the women worked, Kamosiwe stood watch, leaning against his bow, a banana leaf stuck on the tip of his arrow to shade his face from the sun.

Sometimes he waved his hand in the air- perhaps at a bird, perhaps at a cloud, which he believed was the soul of an Iticoteri. Sometimes he laughed to himself. But mostly he stood still, either dreaming or listening to the sound of the wind rustling through the leaves.

Although he had never acknowledged my presence among his people, I often caught his one eye on me. Sometimes I had the distinct feeling he purposely sought my presence, for he always accompanied the group of women I was with. And at dusk, when I would seek the solitude of the river, he would be there, squatting not too far from me.

We stopped at a point where the river widened between the banks. The dark rocks scattered on the yellow sand appeared as if someone had purposely arranged them in a symmetrical order.

The shadowed still water was like a dark mirror reflecting the aerial roots of the giant matapalos. Coming down from a height of ninety feet, they choked and constricted the tree. It was on one of it's branches, as a tiny seed dropped by a bird, that the deadly roots had first germinated. I could not tell what kind of a ' tree it had been- perhaps a ceiba, for the branches bending in tragic grandeur were full of thorns.

Equipped with branches from the arapuri tree growing nearby, some of the women waded into the shallow river. Their piercing, shrill cries shattered the stillness as they beat the water. The frightened fish took refuge under the rotten leaves on the opposite bank, where the other women caught them with their bare hands. Biting off their heads, they flung the still wriggling fish into the flat baskets on the sand.

"Come with me," one of the headman's wives said. Taking me by the hand, she led me further upriver. "Let's try our luck with the men's arrows."

The men and young boys who had accompanied us were circled by a group of shrieking women demanding they lend them their weapons. Fishing was considered a woman's activity: Men only went to laugh and jeer. It was the only time they allowed the women to use their bows and arrows. Some men handed their weapons to the women, then quickly ran to the safety of the bank, afraid of getting hit accidentally. They were delighted that none of them made a kill.

"Try," Arasuwe said, handing me his bow.

I had taken archery lessons at school and felt certain of my skill. However, as soon as I held his bow I knew this was impossible. I could barely draw the bow; my arm shook uncontrollably as I released the short arrow. I tried repeatedly, but not once did I hit a fish.

"What a bold way to shoot," old Kamosiwe said, handing me a smaller bow belonging to one of Iramamowe's sons. The boy did not complain but glowered at me sullenly. At his age no man would willingly hand his weapon to a woman.

"Try again," Kamosiwe urged. His one eye shone with a strange intensity.

Without the slightest hesitation I drew the bow once more, aiming the arrow at the shimmering silvery body that for an instant seemed motionless under the surface. I felt the tension of the drawn bow suddenly relax; the arrow released effortlessly. I distinctly heard the sharp sound of the arrow hitting the water and then saw a trail of blood. Cheering, the women retrieved the arrow-pierced fish. It was no bigger than a medium-sized trout. I returned the weapon to the boy, who stared at me with astonished admiration.

I looked for old Kamosiwe, but he was gone.

"I will make you a small bow," Arasuwe said, "and slender arrows- the kind used for shooting fish."

The men and women had gathered around me. "Did you really shoot the fish?" one of the men asked. "Try it again. I didn't see it."

"She did, she did," Arasuwe's wife assured him, showing him the trophy.

"Ahahahaha," the men exclaimed.

"Where did you learn to shoot with a bow and arrow?" Arasuwe asked.

As best as I could, I attempted to explain what a school was. Watching Arasuwe's puzzled eyes, I wished I had said that my father had taught me. Explaining something that required more than a few sentences at a time could be a frustrating experience, not only for me, but for my listeners as well. It was not always a matter of knowing the right words: Rather the difficulty stemmed from the fact that certain words did not exist in their language. The more I talked, the more troubled Arasuwe's expression became. Frowning with disappointment, he insisted I explain why I knew how to use the bow and arrow. I wished Milagros had not gone to visit another settlement.

"I know of whites who are good marksmen with a gun," Arasuwe said. "But I have never seen a white use the bow and arrow skillfully."

I felt a need to belittle the fact that I had actually hit a fish, alleging that it was sheer luck, which it was. However, Arasuwe kept insisting that I knew how to use the Indians' weapons. Even Kamosiwe had noticed the way I held the bow, he said loudly.

I believe that somehow I got the idea of school across, for they insisted I tell them what else I had been taught. The men laughed outrageously upon hearing that the way I had decorated my notebook was something I had learned at school. "You haven't been taught properly," Arasuwe said with conviction. "Your designs were very poor."

"Do you know how to make machetes?" one of the men asked.

"You need hundreds of people for that," I said. "Machetes are made in a factory." The harder I tried to make them understand, the more tongue-tied I became. "Only men make machetes," I finally said, pleased to have found an explanation that satisfied them.

"What else did you learn?" Arasuwe asked.

I wished I had some gadget with me, such as a tape recorder, a flashlight, or some such thing, to impress them with. Then I remembered the gymnastics I had practiced for several years. "I can jump through the air," I said off-hand. Clearing off a square area of the sandy beach, I placed four of the fish-filled baskets in each of it's corners. "No one can step into this space." Standing in the middle of my arena, I gazed at the curious faces around me. They broke into hilarious guffaws as they watched me do a series of stretch exercises. Although the sand did not have the springiness of a floor exercise mat, I was at least comforted by the thought that I would not hurt myself if I missed my footing. I did a couple of handstands, cartwheels, front and back walkovers, then a forward and backward somersault. I did not land with the grace of an accomplished gymnast, but I was pleased by the admiring faces around me.

"What strange things you were taught," Arasuwe said. "Do it again."

"One can only do it once." I sat on the sand to catch my breath. Even if I had wanted to I could not repeat my performance.

The men and women came closer, their intent eyes fixed on me. "What else can you do?" one of them asked.

For an instant I was at a loss; I thought I had done plenty. After a moment's consideration, I said, "I can sit on my head."

Laughter shook their bodies until tears rolled down their cheeks. "Sit on the head," they repeated, each time bursting into new peals of laughter.

I flattened my forearms on the ground, placed my forehead on my intertwined palms, and slowly lifted my body upward. Sure of my balance, I crossed my upraised legs. The laughter stopped. Arasuwe lay flat on the ground, his face close to mine. He smiled, crinkling the corners of his eyes. "White girl, I don't know what to think of you, but I know if I walk with you through the forest, the monkeys will stop to see you. Enchanted, they will sit still to watch you, and I will shoot them." He touched my face with his large calloused hand. "Sit on your buttocks again. Your face is red, as if it were painted with onoto. I'm afraid your eyes will fall out of your head."

Back in the shabono, Tutemi placed one of the bundles of fish, cooked in pishaansi leaves, in front of me on the ground. Fish was my favorite food. To everyone's surprise, I preferred it to armadillo, peccary, or monkey meat. The pishaansi leaves and the salty solution derived from the ashes of the kurori tree added a spiciness that greatly enhanced it's natural flavor.

"Did your father want you to learn to use the bow and arrow?" Arasuwe asked, squatting next to me. Before I had a chance to answer, he continued, "Had he wanted a boy when you were born?"

"I don't think so. He was very pleased when I was born. He already had two sons."

Arasuwe opened the bundle in front of him. Silently he shifted the fish toward the middle of the leaves, as if he were pondering a mystery for which he had no adequate words. He motioned me to take some of his food. With two fingers and a thumb, I lifted a large portion of fish into my mouth. As was proper, I licked the juice dribbling down my arm and when I ran into a spine I spat it on the ground, without spitting out any of the flaky meat.

"Why did you learn to shoot arrows?" Arasuwe asked in a compelling tone.

Without thinking I answered, "Maybe something in me knew I was to come here someday."

"You should have known that girls don't use the bow and arrow." He smiled at me briefly, then began to eat.

## Chapter 10

The soft patter of rain and the voices of men singing outside the hut woke me from my afternoon nap. Shadows began to lengthen and the wind played with the palm fronds hanging over the roofs. Sounds and presences filled the huts all at once. Fires were stoked. Soon everything smelled of smoke, of dampness, of food and wet dogs. There were men chanting outside, oblivious to the drops pecking at their backs and at their masklike faces. Their eyes, watery from the epena, were fixed on the distant clouds, open wide to the spirits of the forest.

I walked out into the rain to the river. The heavy drops drumming on the ceiba leaves awakened the tiny frogs hiding under the tall grass blades that grew along the bank. I sat down at the edge of the water. Unaware of time passing, I watched the concentric circles of rain spreading over the river, pink flowers drifting by like forsaken dreams of another place. The sky darkened; the outline of the clouds began to blur as they merged into each other. The trees turned into a single mass. Leaves lost their distinctive shapes, becoming indistinguishable from the evening sky.

I heard a whimpering sound behind me; I turned around but saw only the faintest gleam of rain on the leaves. Seized by an inexplicable apprehension, I ascended the trail leading to the shabono. At night I was never sure of anything; the river, the forest were like presences I could only feel but never understand. I slipped on the muddy path, stubbing my toe on a gnarled root.

Once more I heard a soft whimpering sound. It reminded me of the mournful cries of Iramamowe's hunting dog, which he had shot in a fit of rage with a poisoned arrow during a hunt when the animal had barked inopportunely. The injured dog had returned to the settlement and hid outside the wooden palisade, where it had whined for hours until Arasuwe put an end to it's suffering with another arrow.

I called softly. The cries stopped and then I distinctly heard an agonized moan. Maybe it's true that there are forest spirits, I thought, straightening up. The Iticoteri claimed that there were beings who cross a tenuous boundary that separates animal from man. These creatures call the Indians at night, luring them to their deaths. I stifled a cry. It seemed as if a shape loomed from the dark- some concealed figure that moved among the trees only a pace from where I stood. I sat down again in an effort to conceal myself. I heard a faint breathing: It was more like a sighing, accompanied by a rattling, choking sound. Through my head rushed the stories of revenge, of bloody raids the men were so fond of talking about at night. In particular I remembered the story about Angelica's brother, the old shaman Puriwariwe, who supposedly had been killed in a raid, yet had not died.

"He was shot in the stomach, where death hides," Arasuwe had said one evening. "He didn't lie down in his hammock, but remained standing in the middle of the clearing, leaning on his bow and arrow. He swayed but didn't fall.

"The raiders remained rooted on the spot, unable to shoot another arrow as the old man chanted to the spirits.

With the arrow still stuck in the spot where death lies, he disappeared into the forest. He was gone for many days and nights. He lived in the darkness of the forest without food or drink. He chanted to the heknras of animals and trees, creatures that are harmless in the clear light of the day, but in the shadows of the night they cause terror to the one who cannot command them. From his hiding place, the old shapori lured his enemies: He killed them one by one, with magical arrows."

Again I heard the whimpering sound, then a choking noise. I crawled, carefully feeling for thorns in the undergrowth. I gasped in terror as I touched a hand; it's fingers were curled around a broken bow. I did not recognize the sprawled-out body until I touched Kamosiwe's scarred face. "Old man," I called, afraid that he was dead.

He turned on his side, pulled his legs up with the ease of a child that seeks warmth and comfort. He tried to focus with his single, deeply set eye as he looked at me helplessly. It was as though he were returning from a great distance, from another world. Steadying himself against the broken bow, he tried to get on his feet. He clutched my arm, then let out an eerie sound as he sank to the ground. I could not hold him up. I shook him, but he lay still.

I felt for his heartbeat to see if he was dead. Kamosiwe opened his one eye: His gaze seemed to hold a silent plea. The dilated pupil reflected no light: Like a deep, dark tunnel, it seemed to draw the strength out of my body. Afraid I would make a mistake, I talked to him in Spanish, softly, as if he were a child. I hoped he would close that awesome eye and fall asleep.

Lifting him by the armpits, I dragged him toward the shabono. Although he was only skin and bones, his body seemed to weigh a ton. After a few minutes I had to sit and rest, wondering if he was still alive. His lips trembled: He spat out his tobacco quid. The dark saliva dribbled over my leg. His eye filled with tears. I put the wad back into his mouth, but he refused it. I took his hands, rubbed them against my body so as to imbue them with some warmth. He started to say something, but I heard only an unintelligible mutter.

One of the young boys who slept close to the entrance, next to the old man's hut, helped me lift Kamosiwe into his hammock. "Put logs on the fire," I said to one of the gaping boys. "And call Arasuwe, Etewa, or someone who can help the old man."

Kamosiwe opened his mouth to ease his breathing. The wavering light of the small fire accentuated his ghostlike paleness. His face twisted into an odd smile, a grimace that reassured me I had done the right thing.

The hut filled with people. Their eyes shone with tears: Their sorrowful wails spread throughout the shabono.

"Death is not like the darkness of night," Kamosiwe said in a barely audible whisper. His words fell into silence as the people, gathered around his hammock, momentarily stopped their laments.

"Do not leave us alone," the men moaned as they burst into loud weeping. They began to talk about the old man's courage, about the enemies he had killed, about his children, about the days he was headman of the Iticoteri and the prosperity and glory he had brought to the settlement.

"I will not die yet." The old man's words silenced them once again. "Your weeping makes me too sad." He opened his eye and scanned the faces around him. "The hekuras are still in my chest. Chant to them, for they are the ones who keep me alive."

Arasuwe, Iramamowe, and four other men blew epena into each other's nostrils. With blurred eyes they began to sing to the spirits dwelling below and above the earth.

"What ails you?" Arasuwe asked after a while, bending over the old man. His strong hands massaged the weak, withered chest; his lips blew warmth into the immobile form.

"I'm only sad," Kamosiwe whispered. "The hekuras will soon abandon my chest. It's my sadness that makes me weak."

I returned with Ritimi to our hut. "He will not die," she said, wiping the tears from her face. "I don't know why he wants to live so long. He is so old, he is no longer a man."

"What is he?"

"His face," she said, "has become so small, so thin..." Ritimi looked at me as if at a loss for words to express her thoughts. She made a vague gesture with her hand, as if grasping for something she did not know how to voice. Shrugging, she smiled. "The men will chant throughout the night, and the hekuras will keep the old man alive."

A monotonous rain, warm and persistent, mingled with the men's songs. Whenever I sat up in my hammock I could see them across the clearing in Kamosiwe's hut, crouched in front of the fire. They chanted with a compelling force, convinced that their invocations could preserve life, as the rest of the Iticoteri slept.

The voices faded with the rosy melancholy of dawn. I got up and walked across the clearing. The air was chilly, the ground damp from the rain. The fire had died down, yet the hut was warm from the misty smoke. The men huddled together still crouched around Kamosiwe. Their faces were drawn; their eyes were hollowed by deep circles.

I returned to my hammock as Ritimi was getting up to rekindle the fire. "Kamosiwe seems well," I said, lying down to sleep.

As I stood up from behind a bush I saw Arasuwe's youngest wife and her mother slowly pushing their way through the thicket in the direction of the river. Quietly I followed the two women. They had no baskets with them- only a piece of sharpened bamboo. The pregnant woman held her hands to her belly as if supporting it's heavy weight. They stopped under an arapuri tree, where the undergrowth had been cleared and broad platanillo leaves had been scattered on the ground. The pregnant woman knelt on the leaves, pressing her abdomen with both hands. A soft moan escaped her lips, and she gave birth.

I held my hand over my mouth to stifle a giggle. I could not conceive that giving birth could be so effortless, so fast. The two women talked in whispers, but neither one of them looked at, or picked up, the shiny wet infant on the leaves.

With the bamboo knife, the old woman cut the umbilical cord, then looked around until she found a straight branch. I watched her place the stick across the baby's neck, then step with both feet at either end. There was a faint snapping sound. I was not sure if it was the baby's neck or if it was the branch that had cracked.

The afterbirth they wrapped in one bundle of platanillo leaves, the small lifeless body into another. They tied the bundles with vines, and placed them under the tree.

I tried to hide behind the bushes as the women got up to leave, but my legs would not obey me. I felt drained of all emotion, as if the scene in front of me were some bizarre nightmare. The women looked at me. A faint flicker of surprise registered on their faces, but I saw no pain or regret in their eyes.

As soon as they were gone I untied the vines. The lifeless body of a baby girl lay on the leaves as if in sleep. Long black hair, like silk strands, stuck to her slippery head. The lashless lids were swollen, covering the closed eyes. The trickle of blood running from nose and mouth had dried, like some macabre onoto design on the faint purplish skin. I pried open the small fists. I checked the toes to see if they were complete: I found no visible deformity.

The late afternoon had spent itself. The dried leaves made no rustling sound under my bare feet: They were damp with the night. The wind parted the leafy branches of the ceibas. Thousands of eyes seemed to be staring at me; indifferent eyes, veiled in green shadows. I walked down the river, and sat on a fallen log that had not yet died. I touched the clusters of new shoots that desperately wanted to see the light. The cricket's call seemed to mock my tears.

I could smell the smoke from the huts and I resented those fires that burned day and night, swallowing time and events. Black clouds hid the moon, cloaking the river in a veil of mourning. I listened to the animals- those that wake from their day's sleep and roam the forest at night. I was not afraid. A silence, like a soft dust from the stars, fell around me. I wanted to fall asleep, and wake up knowing it had all been a dream.

Through a patch of clear sky I saw a shooting star. I could not help smiling. I had always been fast to make a wish, but I could not think of any.

I felt Ritimi's arm around my neck. Like some forest spirit she had sat down noiselessly beside me. The pale sticks at the corners of her mouth shone in the dark as if they were made of gold. I was grateful she was near me, that she did not say a word.

The wind brushed away the clouds that obscured the moon: It's light covered us in a faint blue. Only then did I notice old Kamosiwe squatting beside the log, his eye fixed on me. He began to talk, slowly, enunciating each word. But I was not listening. Leaning heavily on his bow, he motioned us to follow him to the shabono. He stopped by his hut: Ritimi and I walked on to ours.

"Only a week ago, women and men cried," I said, sitting in my hammock. "They cried believing Kamosiwe was going to die. Today I saw Arasuwe'swife kill her newborn child."

Ritimi handed me some water. "How could the woman feed a new baby at her breast when she has a child that still suckles?" she said briskly. "A child who has lived this long."

Intellectually I grasped Ritimi's words. I was aware that infanticide was a common practice among Amazonian Indians. Children were spaced approximately two to three years apart. The mother lactated during this time, and refrained from bearing another child in order to sustain an ample supply of milk. If a deformed or female child were born during this time, it was killed, so as to give the nursing child a better chance of survival.

Emotionally, however, I was unable to accept it. Ritimi held my face, forcing me to look at her. Her eyes shone, her lips trembled with feeling. "The one who has not yet glimpsed at the sky has to return from where it came." She stretched her arm toward the immense black shadows that began at our feet and ended in the sky. "To the house of thunder."

## Chapter 11

Instead of the women's soft chattering, I was awakened one morning by Iramamowe's shouts announcing that he would prepare curare that day.

I sat up in my hammock. Iramamowe stood in the middle of the clearing. Legs apart, arms folded over his chest, he scrutinized the young men who had gathered around him. At the top of his voice he warned them that if they planned to help him prepare the poison, they were not to sleep with a woman that day. Iramamowe went on ranting as if the men had already misbehaved, reminding them that he would know if they disobeyed him for he would test the poison on a monkey. Should the animal survive he would never again ask the men to assist him. He told them that if they wished to accompany him into the forest to collect the various vines needed to make the mamucori, they had to refrain from eating and drinking until the poison had been smeared on their arrowheads.

Calm returned to the shabono as soon as the men left. Tutemi, after stoking the fires, rolled the tobacco quids for herself, Ritimi, and Etewa, then returned to her hammock. I thought there was time to snatch a bit more sleep before the plantains buried under the embers were done. I turned over in my hammock: The smoke warmed the chilly air. As they did every morning after relieving themselves, little Texoma and Sisiwe, as well as Arasuwe's two youngest children, climbed into my hammock and snuggled up to me.

Ritimi had been oblivious to the morning events. She was still sound asleep on the ground. Sleep did not interfere with Ritimi's vanity. Her head, resting on her arm, was propped in such a manner that it allowed her to wear her full beauty regalia: Slender polished rods were stuck through the septum of her nose and the corners of her mouth. Her exposed cheek revealed two brown lines, a sign recognizable by everyone in the shabono that she was menstruating. For the last two nights Ritimi had not slept in her hammock, had not eaten meat, had not cooked any of the meals, and had not touched Etewa or any of his belongings.

Men feared menstruating women. Ritimi had told me that women were known not to have hekuras in their chest but were linked to the life essence of the otter, the ancestor of the first woman on earth. During their menses, women were thought to be imbued with the supernatural powers of the otter. She did not seem to know what these powers were, but she said that if a man saw an otter in the river he never killed it for fear that a woman in the settlement would die that same instant.

The Iticoteri women had at first been puzzled as to why I had not menstruated since my arrival. My explanation- loss of weight, change of diet, new surroundings- was not thought to be the reason. Instead they believed that as a non-Indian, I was not fully human. I had no link to the life essence of any animal, plant, or spirit.

It was only Ritimi who wanted to believe and prove to the other women that I was human. "You have to tell me immediately when you are roo, as if I were your mother," Ritimi would say to me every time she herself menstruated. "And I will make the proper preparations so you will not be turned into a stone by the tiny creatures that live underground."

Ritimi's insistence was probably another reason my body did not follow it's normal cycles. Since I have a tendency to suffer from claustrophobia, I had periodic attacks of anxiety triggered by the possibility of having to endure the same restrictions that an Iticoteri girl going through her first menses does.

Only a week before, Xotomi, one of the headman's daughters, had emerged from a three-week confinement. Her mother, upon learning that Xotomi had begun her first period, built an enclosure made out of sticks, palm fronds, and vines in a corner of their hut. A narrow space had been left open. It was barely large enough for her mother to slip in and out of twice a day to feed the meager fire inside (which was never allowed to die) and remove the soiled platanillo leaves covering the ground. The men, afraid of dying young or of becoming ill, did not so much as glance toward that area in the hut.

For the first three days of her menstrual period Xotomi was only given water and had to sleep on the ground. Thereafter she was given three small plantains a day and was permitted to rest in the small bark hammock that was hung inside. She was not allowed to speak or weep during her confinement. All I heard from behind the tied palm fronds was the faint sound of Xotomi scratching herself with a stick, for she was not supposed to touch her body.

By the end of the third week, Xotomi's mother dismantled the enclosure, tied the palm leaves into a tight bundle, then asked some of her daughter's playmates to hide them in the forest. Xotomi did not move, as if the palm fronds were still around her. She remained crouched on the ground with downcast eyes. Her slightly hunched shoulders seemed so frail that I was sure if someone grasped them the bones would give way with a hollow crack. More than ever she looked like a frightened child, thin and dirty.

"Keep your eyes on the ground," her mother said, helping the twelve-, perhaps thirteen-year-old girl to her feet. With her arms around her waist, she led Xotomi to the hearth. "Don't rest your eyes on any of the men in the clearing," she admonished the girl, "lest you want their legs to tremble when they have to climb trees."

Water had been heated. Lovingly, Ritimi washed her half-sister from head to foot, then rubbed her body with onoto until it glowed uniformly red. Fresh banana leaves were placed on the fire as Ritimi guided the girl around the hearth. Only after Xotomi's skin smelled of nothing but burnt leaves was she allowed to look at us and speak.

She bit her lower lip as she slowly lifted her head. "Mother, I don't want to move out of my father's hut," she finally said, then burst into tears.

"Ohoo, you silly child," the mother exclaimed, taking Xotomi's face into her hands. Brushing aside the tears, the woman reminded the girl how lucky she was to become the wife of Hayama's youngest son Matuwe, that she was fortunate to be so close to her brothers, who would protect her should he mistreat her. The mother's dark eyes glittered, blurred with tears. "I had reasons to be heavy-hearted when I first came to this shabono. I had left my mother and brothers behind. I had no one to protect me."

Tutemi embraced the young girl. "Look at me. I also came from far away, but now I'm happy. I will soon have a child."

"But I don't want a child," Xotomi sobbed. "I only want to hold my pet monkey."

In a swift impulse I reached for the monkey perched on a cluster of bananas and handed it to Xotomi. The women burst into giggles. "If you treat your husband right, he'll be like your pet monkey," one of them said in between fits of laughter.

"Don't say such things to the girl," old Hayama said reprovingly. Smiling, she faced Xotomi. "My son is a good man," she said soothingly. "You'll have nothing to fear." Hayama went on praising her son, stressing Matuwe's prowess as a hunter and provider.

The day of the wedding Xotomi sobbed quietly. Hayama came to her side. "Don't cry anymore. We will adorn you. You'll be so beautiful today, everyone will gasp in wonder." She took Xotomi's hand, then motioned the women to follow them through a side exit into the forest.

Sitting on a tree stump, Xotomi wiped her tears with the back of her hand. A whimsical smile appeared on her lips as she gazed into old Hayama's face, then she readily submitted to the women's ministrations. Her hair was cut short, her tonsure shaven. Tufts of soft white feathers were pushed through her perforated earlobes: They contrasted sharply with her black hair, adding an ethereal beauty to her thin face. The holes at the corners of her mouth and lower lip were decorated with red macaw feathers. Through the perforated septum in her nose Ritimi inserted an almost white, very slender polished stick.

"How lovely you look," we exclaimed as Xotomi stood in front of us.

"Mother, I'm ready to go," she said solemnly. Her dark slanted eyes shone, her skin looked flushed with the onoto. She smiled briefly, revealing strong, even white teeth, then led the way back to the shabono. Only for an instant- just before entering the clearing- was there a silent plea in her eyes as she turned to look at her mother.

Her head held high, her gaze focused on no one in particular, Xotomi slowly circled the clearing, seemingly unperturbed by the admiring words and glances of the men. She entered her father's hut and sat in front of the trough filled with plantain pap. First she offered some of the soup to Arasuwe, then to her uncles, her brothers, and finally to each man in the shabono. After she had served the women, she walked toward Hayama's hut, sat down in one of the hammocks, and began to eat the game prepared by her husband, to whom she had been promised before she had been born.

Tutemi's words cut into my reveries. "Are you going to eat your plantain here or at Hayama's?"

"I'd better eat there," I said, grinning at Ritimi's grandmother, who was already waiting for me in the hut next to Tutemi's.

Xotomi smiled at me as I came over. She had changed a great deal. It had nothing to do with the weight she had gained back since emerging from her confinement. Rather it was her mature behavior, the way she looked at me, the way she urged me to eat the plantain. I wondered if it was because girls- as opposed to boys, who were able to prolong their childhood into their teens- were encouraged by the time they were six or eight to help their mothers with the domestic chores- gathering wood, weeding in the gardens, taking care of their younger siblings. By the time a boy was considered an adult, a girl of the same age was married and often the mother of a child or two.

After eating, Tutemi, Xotomi, and I worked for several hours in the gardens, then walked into the shabono, refreshed from our bath in the river. A group of men, their faces and bodies painted black, sat together in the clearing. Some were scraping the bark off thick pieces of branches.

"Who are these people?" I asked.

"Don't you recognize them?" Tutemi laughed at me. "It's Iramamowe and the men who went with him yesterday into the forest."

"Why are they painted black?"

"Iramamowe!" Tutemi shouted. "The white girl wants to know- why are your faces all black?" she asked, then ran into her hut.

"It's good you are running," Iramamowe said, standing up. "The baby in your womb might weaken the mamucori by adding water." Frowning, he turned to Xotomi and me; before he had a chance to say anything else, Xotomi pulled me by the hand into Etewa's hut.

In between fits of laughter Xotomi explained that anyone who had been in the water that day was not supposed to come close to the men preparing curare. Water was believed to weaken the poison. "If the mamucori doesn't work right, he will blame you."

"I would have liked to watch them prepare the mamucori," I said disappointedly.

"Who would want to watch anything like that?" Ritimi said, sitting up. "I can tell you what they are going to do." She yawned and stretched, then folded the platanillo leaves she had been sleeping on and covered the ground with fresh ones. "The men are painted black because mamucori is not only useful for hunting but also for making war," Ritimi said, motioning me to sit next to her. She peeled a banana, then with a full mouth explained how the men were boiling the mamucori vine until it turned into a dark liquid. Later the dried ashukamaki vine would be added to thicken the poison. Once the mixture had been boiled down, it would be ready to be brushed on the men's arrowheads.

Resignedly I helped Tutemi prepare the tobacco leaves for drying. Following her precise instructions, I split each leaf along the nervation, pulling upward so they bundled up, then tied them in bunches on the rafters. From where I sat I was unable to see what was going on outside Iramamowe's hut. Children surrounded the working men, hoping to be asked to help. No wonder I had not seen a single child that morning bathing in the river.

"Get some water from the stream," Iramamowe said to little Sisiwe. "But don't get your feet wet. Step on trunks, roots, or stones. If you get wet, I'll have to send someone else."

It was late afternoon when Iramamowe was almost finished mixing and boiling the curare. "Now the mamucori is becoming strong. I can feel my hands going to sleep." In a slow, monotonous voice he began to chant to the spirits of the poison as he stirred the curare.

Around midmorning the following day Iramamowe came running into the shabono. "The mamucori is useless. I shot a monkey but it didn't die. It walked away with the useless arrow stuck in it's leg." Iramamowe ran from hut to hut, insulting the men who had helped him prepare the curare. "Didn't I warn you not to sleep with women. Now the mamucori is worthless. If an enemy should attack us, you won't even be able to defend your women. You think you are brave warriors. But you are as useless as your arrows. You should be carrying baskets instead of weapons."

For a moment I thought Iramamowe was going to cry as he sat on the ground in the middle of the clearing. "I'll make the poison by myself. You are all incompetent," he muttered over and over until his anger was spent, until he was thoroughly exhausted.

A few days later at dawn, shortly before the monkey Iramamowe had shot with his newly poisoned arrow was fully cooked, a stranger walked into the shabono carrying a large bundle. His hair was still wet from a river bath; his face and body were extravagantly painted with onoto. Placing his bundle, as well as his bow and arrows, on the ground, he stood silently in the middle of the clearing for a few minutes before he approached Arasuwe's hut.

"I've come to invite you to my people's feast," the man said in a loud singsong voice. "The headman of the Mocototeri has sent me to tell you that we have many ripe plantains."

Arasuwe, without getting up from his hammock, told the man that he could not attend the feast. "I cannot leave my gardens now. I've planted new banana saplings; they need my care." Arasuwe made a sweeping gesture with his hand. "Look at all the fruit hanging from the rafters; I don't want them to spoil."

The visitor walked over to our hut and addressed Etewa. "Your father-in-law doesn't wish to come. I hope you will be able to visit my people who have sent me to invite you."

Etewa slapped his thighs with pleasure. "Yes. I'll come. I don't mind leaving my plantains behind. I'll give others permission to eat them."

The visitor's dark lively eyes shone with delight as he went from hut to hut inviting the Iticoteri to his settlement. The man was invited to rest in old Kamosiwe's hut. He was offered plantain soup and monkey meat. Later in the evening he untied his bundle in the middle of the clearing. "A hammock," the men who had gathered around him murmured disappointedly. Even though the Iticoteri acknowledged the comfort and warmth of cotton hammocks, only a few women owned one. The men preferred the bark or vine ones, replacing them periodically. The visitor was eager to trade the cotton hammock for poisoned arrowheads and epena powder made from seeds. Talking and exchanging news, some Iticoteri men stayed up all night with the visitor.

Arasuwe was adamant that I should not be part of the group going to the Mocototeri feast. "Milagros has entrusted you to me," the headman reminded me. "How can I protect you if you are at another place?"

"What do I need to be protected for?" I asked. "Are the Mocototeri dangerous people?"

"The Mocototeri are not to be trusted," Arasuwe said after a long silence. "I can feel it in my legs that it is not right for you to go."

"When I first met Angelica she told me that it was not dangerous for a woman to walk through the forest."

Arasuwe did not bother to answer or comment on my statement but looked at me as if I had become invisible. Obviously he considered the matter settled and did not intend to demean himself by any further bantering with an ignorant girl.

"Maybe Milagros will be there," I said.

Arasuwe smiled. "Milagros will not be there. If he were I would have no reason to worry."

"Why are the Mocototeri not to be trusted?" I persisted.

"You ask too many questions," Arasuwe said. "We are not on friendly terms with them," he added grudgingly.

I looked at him in disbelief. "Why then do they invite you to a feast?"

"You are ignorant," Arasuwe said, walking out of the hut.

It was not only I who was disillusioned by Arasuwe's decision. Ritimi was so disappointed she could not show me off to the Mocototeri that she enlisted Etewa and Iramamowe, as well as old Kamosiwe, to help convince her father to let me accompany them. Although old people's advice was valued and respected, it was Iramamowe, known for his bravery, who finally persuaded and assured his brother that no harm would befall me at the Mocototeri settlement.

"You should take the bow and arrows I made for you," Arasuwe said to me later that evening. He began to laugh uproariously. "that would certainly astonish the Mocototeri. It would almost be worth it for me to go and witness their surprise." Seeing that I was checking my arrows, Arasuwe added somberly, "You can not take them. It's not proper for a woman to walk through the forest carrying a man's weapon."

"I will take care of her," Ritimi promised her father. "I'll make sure she never leaves my side-not even when she has to go into the bush."

"I'm sure Milagros would have wanted me to go," I said, hoping to make Arasuwe feel more at ease.

Eyeing me gloomily, he shrugged his shoulders. "I trust you will return safely."

Anticipation and apprehension kept me awake that night. The familiar noises of the collapsing logs in the fire filled me with misgivings. Etewa stirred the embers with a stick before lying down. Through the smoke and mist the distant crowns of trees looked like ghosts. The spaces between the leaves were like hollow eyes accusing me of something I did not understand. I was almost tempted to follow Arasuwe's advice, but the light of day dispelled my apprension.

## Chapter 12

The sun had barely taken the chill off the morning air when we set out with baskets stocked with plantains, calabashes, hammocks, the paraphernalia for decorating ourselves, and the items for trade: thick bundles of undyed cotton yarn, newly fashioned arrowheads, bamboo containers filled with epena and onoto. With their own hammocks slung around their necks, the older children walked close behind their mothers. The men, closing up the rear of each family unit, carried nothing but their bows and arrows.

There were twenty-three of us. For four days we walked silently through the forest at a relaxed pace set by the old people and children. Whenever they became aware of the slightest movement or sound in the thicket, the women stood still, pointing with their chins in the direction of the disturbance. Swiftly the men disappeared in the specified direction. More often than not, they returned with an agouti- a rabbit-like rodent- or a peccary, or a bird, which was cooked as soon as we made camp in the afternoon. The children were forever on the lookout for wild fruit. Their keen eyes would follow the flight of bees until they reached their hives in a hollow tree trunk. While the insects were still in flight, they were able to accurately identify whether they belonged to the stinging or nonstinging variety.

Hayama, Kamosiwe, and several of the old people wrapped strips of the fibrous bast of a tree around their thorax and abdomen. They claimed it restored their energy and made walking easier. I tried it too, but the tightly wrapped bast only gave me a rash.

As we climbed up and down hills, I wondered if it was a different route from the one I had been on with Milagros. There was not a tree, rock, or stretch of river I could recall. Neither did I remember having encountered mosquitoes and other insects hovering above the marshes. Attracted by our sweaty bodies, they buzzed around us with a maddening persistence. I, who had never been bothered by them, could not decide which part of my body to scratch first. My torn T-shirt offered no protection. Even Iramamowe, who initially had been oblivious to their unrelenting bites, occasionally acknowledged the inconvenience by slapping his neck, his arm, or by lifting his leg to scratch his ankle.

Around noon of the fifth day we made camp at the edge of the Mocototeri's gardens. The cleared-out undergrowth made the giant ceibas appear even more monumental than in the forest. Shafts of sunlight filtered through the leaves, illuminating and shadowing the dark ground.

We bathed in the nearby river, where red flowers, suspended from lianas overhanging the water, swayed with sensuous grace to the rhythm of the breeze. Iramamowe and three other young men were the first to don their festive attire and to paint themselves with onoto before heading toward the host's shabono. Iramamowe returned shortly, carrying a basket filled with roasted meat and baked plantains.

"Ohooo, the Mocototeri have so much more," he said, distributing the food among us.

Before the women began to beautify themselves they assisted their men with the pasting of white down on their hair, and tying feathers and monkey fur around their arms and heads. I was given the task of decorating the children's faces and bodies with the prescribed onoto designs.

Our laughter and chatter were interrupted by the shouts of an approaching Mocototeri.

"He looks like a monkey," Ritimi whispered.

I nodded in agreement, barely able to conceal my giggles. The man's short bowed legs and long disproportionate arms seemed even more pronounced as he stood next to Etewa and Iramamowe, who looked imposing with their white down-covered heads, the long multicolored macaw feathers streaming from their armbands, and their bright-red waist belts.

"Our headman wants to start the feast. He wants you to come soon," the Mocototeri said in the same formal high-pitched voice as the man who had come to the shabono to invite us to the feast. "If you take too long to prepare yourselves, there will be no time to talk."

With their heads held high, their chins slightly pushed up, Etewa, Iramamowe, and three young men, also properly painted and decorated, followed the Mocototeri. Although they pretended indifference, the men were aware of the admiring glances of the rest of us as they strutted toward the shabono.

Overcome by last-minute nervousness, the women hurried through the last touches of their toilette, adding a flower or feather here, a dab of onoto there. How they looked was entirely up to the judgment of the others, for there were no mirrors.

Ritimi fastened the waist belt around me, making sure the wide fringe was centered properly. "You're still so thin," she said, touching my breasts, "even though you eat so much. Don't eat today the way you eat at our shabono or the Mocototeri will think we don't give you enough."

I promised to eat very sparingly, then burst into laughter as I remembered that this was the same advice my mother used to give me as a child whenever I was invited to spend the weekend with friends. She too had been embarrassed by my voracious appetite, thinking that people might believe I was not properly fed at home or, worse yet, that they might think I had a tapeworm.

Just before we set out toward the Mocototeri shabono, old Hayama admonished her great-grandchildren, Texoma and Sisiwe, to behave properly. Raising her voice so that the other children who had come with us could also hear her, she stressed how important it was to minimize any chance for the Mocototeri women to criticize them once they had departed. Old Hayama insisted the children try to urinate and defecate for one last time behind the bushes, for once inside the shabono no one would clean up after them or take them outside if they had to go.

Upon reaching the Mocototeri clearing, the men formed a line, holding their weapons vertically to their upraised haughty faces. We stood behind them with the children.

A group of shouting women ran out of the huts as soon as they saw me. I was neither afraid nor repelled as they touched, kissed, and licked my face and body. But Ritimi seemed to have forgotten how the Iticoteri had first greeted me when I arrived at their settlement, for she kept mumbling under her breath that she would have to retrace the onoto designs on my skin.

Holding my arm in a strong grip, one of the Mocototeri women pushed Ritimi aside. "Come with me, white girl," she said.

"No," Ritimi shouted, pulling me closer to her. Her smile did not detract from the sharp angry tone of her voice. "I've brought the white girl for you to look at. No one must take her away from me. We are like each other's shadows. I go where she goes. She goes where I go." Trying to outstare her opponent, Ritimi's eyes held the woman's fixed gaze, daring her to challenge her words.

The woman opened her tobacco-filled mouth in gaping laughter. "If you have brought the white girl to visit, you must let her come into my hut."

Someone from behind the group of women approached us. With arms crossed over his chest, he pushed his hips forward with a little swagger as he came to stand beside me. "I'm the headman of the Mocototeri," he said. As he smiled, his eyes were but two shining slits amidst the red designs of his deeply wrinkled face. "Is the white girl your sister that you protect her so?" he asked Ritimi.

"Yes," she said forcefully. "She is my sister." .

Shaking his head in disbelief, the headman studied me. He seemed totally unimpressed. "I can see that she is white, but she doesn't look like a real white woman," he finally said. "Her feet are bare like ours: She does not wear strange clothes on her body except for this." He pulled at my torn, loose underpants. "Why does she wear this under an Indian waist belt?"

"Pantiis," Ritimi said importantly: She liked the English word better than the Spanish, which she had also learned. "That's what white people call it. She has two more of them. She wears pantiis because she is afraid that spiders at night and centipedes during the day might crawl inside her body."

Nodding as if he understood my fear, the headman touched my short hair, and rubbed his fleshy palm over my shaven tonsure. "It's the color of the young assai palm fronds." He moved his face close to mine until our noses touched. "What strange eyes- they are the color of rain." His scowl disappeared in a smile of delight. "Yes, she must be white; and if you call her sister, then no one will take her away from you," he said to Ritimi.

"How can you call her sister?" the woman who still held my arm asked. There was earnest perplexity written all over her painted face as she gazed at me.

"I call her sister because she is like us," Ritimi said, putting her arm around my waist.

"I want her to come and stay in my hut," the woman said. "I want her to touch my children."

We followed the woman into one of the huts. Bows and arrows were leaning against the sloping roof. Bananas, gourds, and bundles of meat wrapped in leaves were strung from the rafters. Machetes, axes, and an assortment of clubs lay in the corners. The ground was littered with twigs, branches, fruit skins, and shards of earthenware vessels.

Ritimi sat with me in the same cotton hammock. As soon as I had finished the juice made from soaked palm fruit the woman had given me, she placed a small baby in my lap. "Caress him."

Turning and twisting in my arms, the infant almost fell to the ground. And when he stared into my face he began to bawl.

"You better take him," I said, handing the woman the child. "Babies are afraid of me. They first have to get to know me before I can touch them."

"Is that so?" the woman asked, eyeing Ritimi suspiciously as she rocked the baby in her arms.

"Our babies don't scream." Ritimi cast contemptuous glances at the infant. "My own and my father's children even sleep with her in the same hammock."

"I'll call the older children," the woman said, gesturing toward the little girls and boys peeking from behind the bundles of plantains stacked against the sloping roof.

"Don't," I said. I knew that they would be frightened too. "If you force them to come, they too will cry."

"Yes," said one of the women who had followed us into the hut. "The children will sit with the white girl as soon as they see that their mothers are not afraid to touch her palm-fiber hair and pale body."

Several women had gathered around us. Tentatively at first, their hands explored my face, then my neck, arms, breasts, stomach, thighs, knees, calves, toes: There was not a part of me they left unexamined. Whenever they discovered a mosquito bite or a scratch, they spat on it, then rubbed the spot with their thumbs. If the bite was recent, they sucked out the poison.

Although I had become accustomed to Ritimi's, Tutemi's, and the Iticoteri's children's lavish shows of affection, which never lasted more than a moment, I felt uncomfortable under the exploring touch of so many hands on my body. "What are they doing?" I asked, pointing to a group of men squatting outside the hut next to us.

"They are preparing the assai leaves for the dance," said the woman who had placed the baby in my lap. "Do you want to look at that?"

"Yes," I said emphatically, wanting to shift the attention away from myself.

"Does Ritimi have to accompany you everywhere you go?" the woman asked as Ritimi got up from the hammock with me.

"Yes," I said. "Had it not been for her I would not be visiting your shabono. Ritimi has taken care of me since I arrived in the forest."

Ritimi beamed at me. I wished I had expressed words to that effect sooner. Not once during the rest of our stay did any of the Mocototeri women question Ritimi's proprietary manner toward me.

The men outside the hut were separating the still closed, pale yellow leaves of the young assai palm with sharp little sticks. One of the men rose from his squatting position as we approached. Taking the tobacco wad from his mouth, he wiped the dribbling juice from his chin with the back of his hand and held the palm frond over my head. Smiling, he pointed to the fine gold veins in the leaf, barely visible against the light of the setting sun. He touched my hair, replaced the wad in his mouth, and without saying a word, continued separating the leaves.

Fires were lit in the middle of the clearing as soon as it was dark. The Iticoteri men touched off an explosion of wild cheering from their hosts as they lined up, weapons in hand, around the fires. Two at a time, the Iticoteri danced around the clearing, slowing down in front of each hut, so all could admire their attire and their dancing steps.

Etewa and Iramamowe made up the last pair. Shouts reached a higher pitch as they moved in perfectly matched steps. They did not dance around the huts but stayed close to the fires, wheeling and spinning at an ever accelerating speed, their rhythm dictated by the leaping flames. Etewa and Iramamowe stopped abruptly in their tracks, held their bows and arrows vertically next to their faces, then aimed them at the Mocototeri men standing in front of their huts. Laughing uproariously, the two men resumed their dance while the onlookers broke out in exultant, approving shouts.

The Iticoteri men were invited by their hosts to rest in their hammocks. While food was served, a group of Mocototeri burst into the clearing. "Hail, ham, haiiii," they shouted, moving to the clacking of their bows and arrows, to the swishing sound of the fringed, undulating assai palm fronds.

I could hardly make out the dancing figures. At times they seemed fused together, then they leapt apart, fragments of dancing arms, legs, and feet visible from between the swaying palm fronds- black, birdlike silhouettes with giant wings as they moved away from the light of the fires, blazing copper figures, no longer man or bird, as their bodies glistening with sweat glowed in the flames.

"We want to dance with your women," the Mocototeri demanded. When there was no response from the Iticoteri, they jeered. "You are jealous of them. Why don't you let your poor women dance? Don't you remember we let you dance with our women at your feast?"

"Whoever wants to dance with the Mocototeri, may do so," Iramamowe shouted, then admonished the men, "But you will not force any of our women to dance if they don't wish to do so."

"Haii, haiii, haiiii," the men yelled euphorically, welcoming the Iticoteri women as well as their own.

"Don't you want to dance?" I asked Ritimi. "I will go with you."

"No. I don't want to lose you in the crowd," she said. "I don't want anyone to hit you on the head."

"But that was an accident. Besides, the Mocototeri are not dancing with fire logs," I said. "What could they possibly do with palm fronds?"

Ritimi shrugged her shoulders. "My father said the Mocototeri are not to be trusted."

"I thought one only invites one's friends to a feast."

"Enemies too," Ritimi said, giggling. "Feasts are a good time to find out what people are planning to do."

"The Mocototeri are very friendly," I said. "They have fed us very well."

"They feed us well because they don't want anyone to say they are stingy," Ritimi said. "But as my father has told you, you are still ignorant. You obviously don't know what's going on if you think they are friendly." Ritimi patted my head as if I were a child, then continued, "Didn't you notice that our men didn't take epena this afternoon? Haven't you realized how watchful they are?"

I had not noticed, and was tempted to add that I thought the Iticoteri's behavior was not very friendly but remained quiet. After all, as Ritimi had pointed out, I did not understand what was going on. I observed the six Iticoteri men dancing around the fires. They were not moving with their usual abandon and their eyes kept darting back and forth, keenly watching all that went on around them. The rest of the Iticoteri men were not lounging in their host's hammocks but were standing outside the huts.

The dance had lost it's enchantment for me. Shadows and voices took on a different mood. The night now seemed packed with an ominous darkness. I began to eat what had been served to me earlier. "This meat tastes bitter," I said, wondering if it was poisoned.

"It's bitter because of the mamucori," Ritimi said casually. "The spot where the poisoned arrow hit the monkey hasn't been washed properly."

I spat out the meat. Not only was I afraid of being poisoned, but I felt nauseous as I remembered the sight of the monkey boiling in the tall aluminum pot, a layer of fat and monkey hairs floating on the surface.

Ritimi put the piece of meat back on my calabash plate. "Eat it," she urged me. "It's good- even the bitter part. Your body will get used to the poison. Don't you know that fathers always give their sons the part where the arrow hit? If they are shot in a raid by a poisoned arrow they won't die because their bodies will be used to the mamucori."

"I'm afraid that before I get hit by a poisoned arrow, I will die from eating poisoned meat."

"No. One doesn't die from eating mamucori," Ritimi assured me. "It has to go through the skin." She took the already chewed piece from my calabash, bit off a chunk, then pushed the remaining half into my gaping mouth. Smiling mockingly, she exchanged her dish with mine. "I don't want you to choke," she said, eating the rest of the cooked monkey breast with exaggerated gusto. Still chewing, she pointed toward the clearing, and asked if I could see the woman with the round face dancing by the fire.

I nodded, but I did not recognize which one she meant. There were about ten women dancing close to the fire. They all had round faces, dark slanted eyes, voluptuous bodies the color of honey in the light of the flames.

"She is the one who had intercourse with Etewa at our feast," Ritimi said. "I've bewitched her already."

"When did you do that?"

"This afternoon," Ritimi said softly, and began to giggle. "I blew the oko-shiki I had collected from my garden on her hammock," she added with satisfaction.

"What if someone else sits in her hammock?"

"It makes no difference. The magic is only meant to harm her," Ritimi assured me.

I had no chance to find out more about the bewitching for at that moment the dancing ceased and the tired, smiling dancers returned to the various huts to rest and eat.

The women who joined us around the hearth were surprised Ritimi and I had not danced. Dancing was as important as painting the body with onoto- it kept one young and happy.

Shortly the headman stepped into the clearing and announced in a thunderous voice, "I want to hear the Iticoteri women sing. Their voices are pleasing to my ears. I want our women to learn their songs."

Giggling, the women nudged each other. "You go, Ritimi," one of Iramamowe's wives said. "Your voice is beautiful."

That was all the encouragement Ritimi needed. "Let's all go together," she said, standing up.

Silence spread over the shabono as we walked out into the clearing with our arms around each other's waists. Facing the headman's hut, Ritimi began to sing in a clear, melodious voice. The songs were very short: The last two lines were repeated as a chorus by the rest of us. The other women sang too, but it was Ritimi's songs, one in particular, that the Mocototeri headman insisted she repeat until his women had learned it.

*When the wind blows the palm leaves,*
*I listen to their melancholy sound with the silent frogs.*
*High in the sky, the stars are all laughing,*
*But cry tears of sadness as the clouds cover them.*

The headman walked toward us and, addressing me, said, "Now you must sing for us."

"But I don't know any songs," I said, unable to repress my giggles.

"You must know some," the headman insisted. "I've heard stories of how much the whites like to sing. They even have boxes that sing."

In the third grade in Caracas I had been told by the music teacher that besides having a dreadful voice I was also tone deaf. However, Professor Hans, as he expected to be addressed, was not insensitive to my desire to sing. He allowed me to remain in the class provided I stayed in the last row and sang very softly. Professor Hans did not bother much with the required religious and folk songs we were supposed to be learning, but taught us Argentinian tangos from the thirties. I had not forgotten those songs.

Looking at the expectant faces around me, I stepped closer to the fire. I cleared my throat and began to sing, oblivious to the jarring notes escaping my throat. For a moment I felt I was faithfully reproducing the passionate manner in which Professor Hans had sung his tangos. I clutched my hands to my breast, I closed my eyes as if transported with the sadness and tragedy of each line.

My audience was spellbound. The Mocototeri and Iticoteri had come out of their huts to watch my every gesture.

The headman stared at me for a long time, then finally said, "Our women cannot learn to sing in this strange manner."

The men sang next. Each singer stood alone in the middle of the clearing, both hands resting high on his upright bow. Sometimes a friend accompanied the performer: Then the singer rested his arm over his companion's shoulder. One song in particular, sung by a Mocototeri youth, was the favorite of the night.

*When a monkey jumps from tree to tree*
*I shoot it with my arrow.*
*Only green leaves drop down.*
*Swirling around, they gather at my feet.*

The Iticoteri men did not lie down in their hammocks but talked and sang with their hosts throughout the night. I slept with the women and children in the empty huts around the main entrance of the shabono.

In the morning I stuffed myself with the papayas and pineapples one of the Mocototeri girls had brought for me from her father's garden. Ritimi and I had discovered them earlier on our way into the bush. She had advised me not to ask for the fruit- not because it was not proper, but because the fruit was unripe. But I did not mind their sour taste or even the slight stomachache that followed. I had not eaten familiar fruits for months. Bananas and palm fruit were like vegetables to me.

"You had a wretched voice when you sang," a young man said, squatting next to me. "Ohoo, I didn't understand your song, but it sounded hideous."

Speechless, I glared at him. I did not know whether to laugh or insult him in turn.

Putting her arms around my neck, Ritimi burst into laughter. She looked at me askance, then whispered in my ear, "When you sang I thought the monkey meat had given you a bellyache."

Squatting on the same spot in the clearing where they had started out last night, a group of Iticoteri and Mocototeri men were still talking in the formal, ritualized manner proper to the wayamou. Bartering was a slow, involved affair during which equal importance was given to the items for trading and the exchange of information and gossip.

Close to noon, some Mocototeri women began criticizing their husbands for the items they had exchanged, stating that they needed the machetes, aluminum pots, and cotton hammocks themselves. "Poisoned arrowheads," one of the women shouted angrily. "You could make them yourself if you weren't so lazy." Without paying the slightest attention to the women's remarks, the men continued their hagglings.

## Chapter 13

It was past noon when we left the Mocototeri settlement, our baskets filled with the accustomed plantains, palm fruits, and meat given to departing guests.

Shortly before nightfall, three Mocototeri men caught up with us. One of them raised his bow as he spoke. "Our headman wants the white girl to stay with us." He stared at me down the shaft of his drawn arrow.

"Only a coward points his arrow at a woman," Iramamowe said, stepping in front of me. "Why don't you shoot, you useless Mocototeri?"

"We haven't come to fight," the man remarked, returning his bow and arrow to an upright position. "We could have ambushed you some time ago. All we want is to frighten the white girl so she'll come with us."

"She cannot stay with you," Iramamowe said. "Milagros brought her to our shabono. If he had wanted her to stay with you, he would have taken her to your settlement."

"We want her to come with us," the man persisted. "We will bring her back before the rains start."

"If you make me angry, I shall kill you on the spot." Iramamowe pounded his chest. "Remember, you cowardly Mocototeri, that I'm a fierce warrior. The hekuras in my chest are always at my command, even without epena." Iramamowe moved nearer to the three men. "Don't you know that the white girl belongs to the Iticoteri?"

"Why don't you ask her where she wants to stay?" the man said. "She liked our people. Maybe she wants to live with us."

Iramamowe began to laugh- a rumbling laughter that did not reveal whether he was amused or outraged. He stopped abruptly. "The white girl does not like the way the Mocototeri look. She said you all resemble monkeys." Iramamowe turned toward me. There was such a pleading expression in his eyes that it was all I could do not to giggle.

I felt a tinge of remorse as I looked into the bewildered faces of the three Mocototeri. For an instant I felt tempted to deny Iramainowe's words. But I could not ignore his anger, nor had I forgotten Arasuwe's apprehension at my going to the feast. I crossed my arms over my chest, lifted my chin, and without looking at them directly said, "I don't want to go to your settlement. I don't want to eat and sleep with monkeys."

The Iticoteri burst into loud guffaws. The three men turned around abruptly, then disappeared on the path leading into the thicket.

We made camp not too far from the river in a cleared area of the forest, where the remains of temporary shelters still stood. We did not cover them with new leaves, for old Kamosiwe assured us that it would not rain that night.

Iramamowe did not eat, but sat, glum and intense, in front of the fire. There was a tension about him as if he were expecting the three men to reappear at any moment.

"Is there any danger the Mocototeri might come back?" I asked.

Iramamowe was some time before giving me an answer. "They are cowards. They know that my arrows will kill them on the spot." He stared fixedly on the ground: His lips set in a straight line. "I'm considering what would be the best way to return to our shabono."

"We should divide up our party," old Kamosiwe suggested, gazing at me with his one eye. "There is no moon tonight; the Mocototeri will not return. Perhaps tomorrow they will ask again for the white-girl. We can tell them that they frightened her away, that she asked to be taken back to the mission."

"Are you sending her back?" Ritimi's voice hung in the darkness, charged with anxiety.

"No," the old man said cheerfully. The grayish bristles on his chin, his one eye that never missed anything, his slight wrinkled body gave him the appearance of a wicked elf. "Etewa should return to the shabono with Ritimi and the white girl by way of the mountains. It's a longer route but they won't be slowed down by children and old people. They will reach our settlement no later than a day or two after we do. It is a good route, not traveled much." Old Kamosiwe got up and sniffed the air. "It will rain tomorrow. Build a shelter for the night," he said to Etewa, then squatted, a smile on his lips, his one sunken eye staring at me. "Are you afraid to return to the shabono by way of the mountains?"

Smiling, I shook my head. Somehow I could not envision myself to be in real danger.

"Were you afraid when the Mocototeri aimed his arrow at you?" old Kamosiwe asked.

"No. I knew the Iticoteri would protect me." I had to refrain myself from adding that the incident had seemed comical to me rather than dangerous. I did not fully realize at the time that in spite of the obvious bluffing, characteristic of any critical circumstance, the Mocototeri and Iticoteri were perfectly serious in their threats and demands.

Old Kamosiwe was delighted with my reply. I had the feeling his pleasure derived not so much from the fact that I had not been frightened, but rather by my trust in his people. He talked to Etewa long into the night. Ritimi fell asleep holding my hand in hers, a blissful smile on her lips. Watching her dream, I knew why she looked so happy. For a few days she would have Etewa practically to herself.

In the shabono men hardly ever showed any outward affection toward their wives. It was considered a weakness. Only toward the children were the men openly tender and loving; they indulged, kissed, and caressed them lavishly. I had seen Etewa and even the fierce Iramamowe carry the heavy loads of wood for their women only to drop them as soon as they approached the shabono. When there had been no other man near, I had seen Etewa save a special piece of meat or fruit for Ritimi or Tutemi. Protected by the darkness, I had seen him press his ear against Tutemi's womb to listen to the strong kicks of his unborn child. In the presence of others he never mentioned that he was to be a father.

Ritimi and I were awakened by Etewa hours before dawn. Quietly we left the camp, following the sandy bank of the river. Except for our hammocks, a few plantains, and the three pineapples the Mocototeri girl had given me, our baskets were empty. Old Kamosiwe had assured Etewa that he would find plenty of game. There was no moon, yet the water shone black, reflecting the faint glow of the sky. At intervals the sound of a nocturnal bird darted through the stillness, a faint cry heralding the oncoming dawn. One by one, the stars faded: The contours of trees became distinct as the rosy light of dawn descended all the way to the shadows at our feet. I was astonished at the width of the river, and at the silence of it's flowing waters so still they did not seem to move. Three macaws formed a triangle in the sky, painting the stationary clouds with their red, blue, and yellow feathers as the orange glowing sun rose over the treetops.

Etewa opened his mouth in a yawn that seemed to force it's way up from the farthest depths of his lungs. He squinted: The light of the sun was too bright for eyes that had not slept enough.

We unfastened our baskets. Ritimi and I sat on a log from where we watched Etewa draw his bow. Slowly, he raised his arms and arched his back, pointing his arrow high in the air. Motionless, he stood for an interminable time, a stone figure, each taut muscle carefully etched, his gaze attentive to the birds crossing the sky. I did not dare ask why he was waiting so long to let his arrow go.

I did not hear the arrow travel through the air- only a flashing cry that dissoved into a flapping of wings. For an instant the macaw, a mass of feathers held together by the red-tinted arrow, was suspended in the sky before it plunged downward, not too far from where Etewa stood.

Etewa made a fire over which we roasted the plucked bird and some plantains. He ate only a small portion, insisting that we finish the rest so we would have enough strength for the arduous climb over the hills.

We did not miss the sunlight on the river path as we turned into the thicket. The penumbra of vines and trees was soothing to our tired eyes. Decaying leaves looked like patches of flowers against the background of greenness. Etewa cut branches from the dark, wild cocoa trees. "With this wood one makes the best fire drills," he said, stripping the branches of their bark with his sharp knife, which was made from the lower incisor of an agouti. Then he cut the green, yellow, and purple pods individually attached to the stunted cacao trunks by short leafless stems. He split the fruits open and we sucked the sweet gelatinous flesh surrounding the seeds, which we wrapped in leaves. "Cooked," Ritimi explained, "the pohoro seeds are delicious." I wondered if they would taste like chocolate.

"There must be monkeys and weasels nearby," Etewa explained, showing me the discarded, chewed-up fruit skins on the ground. "They like the pohoro fruit as much as we do."

A bit further on Etewa stopped in front of a twisted vine, which he marked with his knife. "Mamucori," he said. "I will return to this spot when I need to make fresh poison."

"Ashnkamaki?" I exclaimed as we stopped beneath a tree, it's trunk encrusted with glossy, waxlike leaves. But it was not the liana used to thicken curare. Etewa pointed out that those leaves were long and jagged. He had stopped because of the various animal bones on the ground.

"Harpy eagle," he said, gesturing to the nest at the top of the tree.

"Don't kill the bird," Ritimi pleaded. "Perhaps it's the spirit of a dead Iticoteri."

Ignoring his wife, Etewa climbed up the tree. Upon reaching the nest he lifted out a shrieking white fluffy chick. We heard the loud cries of it's mother as Etewa threw the chick on the ground. He propped himself against the trunk and a branch, then aimed his arrow at the circling bird.

"I'm glad I shot the bird," Etewa said, motioning us to follow him to the spot where the dead eagle crashed through the trees. "It eats only meat." He turned toward Ritimi, then added softly, "I listened to it's cry before I aimed my arrow- it wasn't the voice of a spirit." He plucked the soft white feathers from the bird's breast, the long gray ones from it's wings, then wrapped them in leaves.

The afternoon heat filtering through the leaves made me so drowsy that all I wanted to do was sleep. Ritimi had dark smudges under her eyes, as if she had dabbed coal on the tender skin. Etewa's pace slackened. Without saying a word, he headed toward the river. We stood motionless in the wide, shallow waters, held in suspension by the heat and the glare. We stared at the reflected clouds and trees, then lay down on a bank of ochre-colored sand in the middle of the river. Blues faded into green and red from the tannin of the submerged roots. Not a leaf stirred, not a cloud moved. Even the dragonflies hovering over the water seemed motionless in their transparent vibrations. Turning on my stomach, I let my hands lie flat on the river's surface as if I could hold the languid harmony reigning between the reflection in the river and the glow in the sky. I slid on my stomach until my lips touched the water, then drank the mirrored clouds.

Two herons that had taken flight at our arrival returned. Poised on their long legs, with necks sunk between their feathers, they watched us through blinking, half-closed lids. I saw silvery bodies jump up in the air, seeking the intoxicating heat shimmering over the water. "Fish," I exclaimed, my lethargy momentarily gone.

Chuckling, Etewa pointed with his arrow to a flock of shrieking parrots crossing the sky. "Birds," he shouted, then reached for the bamboo quiver on his back. He took out an arrowhead, tasted it with the tip of his tongue to see if the poison was still good. Satisfied by it's bitter taste, he fastened the sharp point to one of his arrow shafts. Next he tested his bow by letting go of the string. "It's not well stretched," he said, untying it at one end. He twisted the string several times, then threaded it again. "We will stay here for the night," he said, wading through the water. He climbed up on the opposite bank, disappearing behind the trees.

Ritimi and I remained on the sandy bank. She unwrapped the feathers and spread them on a stone for the sun to kill the lice. Excitedly she pointed to a tree on the bank on which clusters of pale flowers hung like fruit. She cut whole branches, then offered me the flowers to eat.

"They are sweet," she pointed out upon noticing my reluctance to eat them.

Trying to explain that the flowers reminded me of strongly perfumed soap, I fell asleep. I awoke with the sounds of dusk sweeping up the light of the day, the rustling of the breeze cooling the trees, the calls of birds settling for the night.

Etewa had returned with two curassows and a bundle of palm fronds. I helped Ritimi collect firewood along the riverbank. While she plucked the birds, I assisted Etewa with building the shelter.

"Are you sure it's going to rain?" I asked him, looking at the clear, cloudless sky.

"If old Kamosiwe said it's going to rain, then it will," Etewa said. "He can smell rain the way others can smell food."

It was a cozy little hut. The front pole was higher than the two in the back but not high enough for us to stand up. The poles were connected with long sticks, giving the shelter a triangular shape. Both the roof and the back were covered with palm fronds. We covered the ground with platanillo leaves, for the poles were not strong enough to support three hammocks.

Actually, Etewa did not build the shelter so much for Ritimi's and my comfort as for his. If he got wet in the rain, he might cause the child in Tutemi's.womb to be born dead or deformed.

Ritimi cooked the birds, several plantains, and the cacao seeds over the fire Etewa built inside the hut. I mashed one of our pineapples. The mixture of flavors, textures, reminded me of a Thanksgiving dinner.

"It must be like momo nuts," Ritimi said after I had explained about cranberry sauce. "Momo is also red; it needs to be boiled for a long time until it's soft. It also has to soak in water until all the poison is leached out."

"I don't think I'd like momo nuts."

"You will," Ritimi assured me. "See how much you like the pohoro seeds. Momo nuts are even better."

Smiling, I nodded. Although the roasted cacao seeds did not taste like chocolate, they were as delicious as fresh cashews.

Etewa and Ritimi were asleep the moment they lay back on the platanillo leaves. I stretched out next to Ritimi. In her sleep she reached over, hugging me close to her. The warmth of her body filled me with a soothing laziness; her rhythmic breathing lulled me into a pleasant drowsiness. A succession of dreamlike images drifted through my mind, sometimes slow, sometimes fast, as if someone were projecting them in front of me: Mocototeri men brachiating from tree to tree glided past me, their cries indistinguishable from the howler monkeys. Crocodiles with luminous eyes, barely above the surface of the water, blinked sleepily, then suddenly opened their giant jaws ready to swallow me. Anteaters with threadlike viscous tongues blew bubbles in which I saw myself captive together with hundreds of ants.

I was awakened by a sudden gust of wind; it brought with it the smell of rain. I sat up and listened to the heavy drops pattering on the palm fronds. The familiar sounds of crickets and frogs provided a continuous pulsating background hum to the plaintive cries of nocturnal monkeys, the flutelike calls of forest partridges. I was sure I heard steps and then the snapping of twigs.

"There is someone out there," I said, reaching over to Etewa.

He moved to the front pole of the shelter. "It's a jaguar looking for frogs in the marshes." Etewa turned my head slightly to the left. "You can smell him."

I sniffed the air repeatedly. "I can't smell a thing."

"It's the jaguar's breath that smells. It's strong because he eats everything raw." Etewa turned my head once more, this time to the right. "Listen, he is returning to the forest."

I lay down again. Ritimi awoke, rubbed her eyes, and smiled. "I dreamt that I walked up in the mountains and saw the waterfalls."

"We will go that way tomorrow," Etewa said, unfastening the epena pouch from around his neck. He poured some of the powder in his palm, then with one deep breath drew it into his nostrils.

"Are you going to chant to the hekuras now?" I asked.

"I will beg the spirits of the forest to protect us," Etewa said, then began to chant in a low voice. His song, carried on the night breeze, seemed to traverse the darkness. I was certain it reached the spirits dwelling in the four corners of the earth. The fire died down to a red glimmer. I no longer heard Etewa's voice, but his lips were still moving as I fell into a dreamless sleep.

I was awakened shortly by Ritimi's soft moans and touched her shoulder, thinking she was having a nightmare.

"Do you want to try it?" she murmured.

Surprised, I opened my eyes and looked into Etewa's smiling face; he was making love to her. I watched them for a while. The motion of their bodies was so closely adjusted they barely moved.

Etewa, not in the least embarrassed, moved out of Ritimi and knelt in front of me. Lifting my legs, he stretched them slightly. He pressed his cheeks against my calves; his touch was like the playful caress of a child. There was no embrace; there were no words. Yet I was filled with tenderness.

Etewa switched to Ritimi again, resting his head between her shoulder and mine.

"Now we truly are sisters," Ritimi said softly. "On the outside we don't look the same, but our insides are the same now."

I snuggled against her. The river breeze brushing through the shelter was like a caress.

The rosy light of dawn descended gently over the treetops. Ritimi and Etewa headed toward the river. I stepped outside the shelter and breathed in the new day. At dawn the darkness of the forest is no longer black but a bluish green, like an underground cave that is illuminated by a light filtering through some secret crack. A sprinkling of dew, like soft rain, wet my face as I pushed leaves and vines out of my way. Little red spiders with hairy legs hastily respun their silvery webs.

Etewa found a honeycomb inside a hollow trunk. After squeezing the last drop in our mouths, he soaked the comb in a water-filled calabash and later we drank the sweet water.

We climbed overgrown paths bordering small cascades and stretches of river that swept by at dizzying speeds, causing a breeze that blew our hair and swayed the bamboo on the shore.

"This is the scene of my dream," Ritimi said, extending her arms as if to embrace the wide expanse of water hurtling down before us into a deep wide pool.

I edged my way onto the dark basalt rocks protruding around the falls. For a long time I stood beneath it, my hands raised to break the thunderous force of the water descending from heights already warmed by the sun.

"Come out, white girl," Etewa shouted. "The spirits of the rushing water will make you ill."

Later in the afternoon we made camp by a grove of wild banana trees. Amidst them I discovered an avocado tree. It had only one fruit; it was not pear shaped, but round, as big as a cantaloupe, and shone as if it were made out of wax. Etewa lifted me so I could reach the first branch, then slowly I climbed toward the fruit hanging at the tip of the highest limb. My greed to reach the green ball was so great I ignored the brittle branches cracking under my weight. As I pulled the fruit toward me the branch I was standing on gave way.

Etewa laughed till tears rolled down his cheeks. Ritimi, also laughing, scraped the mashed avocado from my stomach and thigh.

"I could have hurt myself," I said, piqued by their indifference and mirth. "Maybe I broke a leg."

"No, you didn't," Etewa assured me. "The ground is soft with dead leaves." He scooped some mashed fruit in his hand and urged me to taste it. "I told you not to stay under the falls," he added seriously. "The spirits of the rushing water made you ignore the danger of dry branches."

By the time Etewa had built the shelter all trace of day had vanished. The forest was clouded in a whitish mist. It did not rain, but the dew on the leaves fell in heavy drops at the slightest touch.

We slept on the platanillo leaves, warmed by each other's bodies and by the low fire that Etewa kept alive throughout the night by periodically pushing the burning logs closer to the flame with his foot.

We left our camp before dawn. Thick mist still shrouded the trees and the cry of frogs reached us as if from a great distance. The higher we climbed, the scantier the vegetation became until at last there was nothing but grasses and rocks.

We reached the top of a plateau eroded by winds and rains, a relic from another age. Below, the forest was still asleep under a blanket of fog. A mysterious, pathless world whose vastness one could never guess from the outside. We sat on the ground and silently waited for the sun to rise.

An overwhelming sense of awe brought me to my feet as the sky in the east glowed red and purple along the horizon. The clouds, obedient to the wind, opened to let the rising disk through. Pink mist rolled over the treetops, touching up shadows with deep blue, spreading green and yellow all over the sky until it changed into a transparent blue.

I turned to look behind me, to the west, where clouds were changing shape, giving way to the expanding light. To the south, the sky was tinted with fiery streaks and luminous clouds piled up, pushed by the wind.

"Over there is our shabono," Etewa said, pointing into the distance. He grasped my arm and turned me around, into a northerly direction. "And over there is the great river, where the white man passes by."

The sun had lifted the blanket of tog. The river shone like a golden snake cutting through the greenness until it lost itself in an immensity of space that seemed to be part of another world.

I wanted to speak, to cry out loud, but I had no words with which to express my emotions. Looking at Ritimi and Etewa, I knew they understood how deeply I felt. I held out my arms as if to embrace this marvelous border of forest and sky. I felt I was at the edge of time and space. I could hear the vibrations of the light, the whispering of trees, the cries of distant birds carried by the wind.

I suddenly knew that it was out of choice and not out of lack of interest that the Iticoteri had never been curious about my past. For them I had no personal history. Only thus could they have accepted me as something other than an oddity. Events and relationships of my past had begun to blur in my memory. It was not that I had forgotten them; I had simply stopped thinking about them, for they had no meaning there in the forest. Like the Iticoteri, I had learned to live in the present. Time was outside of me. It was something to be used only at the moment. Once used, it sank back into itself and became an imperceptible part of my inner being.

"You have been so quiet for so long," Ritimi said, sitting on the ground. Pulling her knees up, she clasped them, then rested her chin on them and gazed at me.

"I've been thinking of how happy I am to be here," I said.

Smiling, Ritimi rocked herself gently to and fro. "One day I will collect wood and you will no longer be at my side. But I will not be sad, because this afternoon, before we reach the shabono, we will paint ourselves with onoto and we will be happy watching a flow of macaws chase the setting sun."

# PART FOUR

## Chapter 14

Women, I had been told, were not to concern themselves with any aspect of the epena ritual. They were not supposed to prepare it, nor were they allowed to take the hallucinogenic snuff. It was not even proper for a woman to touch the cane tube through which the powder was blown, unless a man specifically asked her to fetch it for him.

To my utter astonishment one morning, I saw Ritimi bent over the hearth, attentively studying the dark reddish epena seeds drying over the embers. Without acknowledging my presence, she proceeded to rub the dried seeds between her palms over a large leaf containing a heap of bark ashes. With the same confidence and expertise I had seen in Etewa, she periodically spat on the ashes and seeds as she kneaded them into a pliable uniform mass.

As she transferred the doughy mixture onto a hot earthenware shard, Ritimi looked up at me, her smile clearly revealing how delighted she was by my bafflement. "Ohooo, the epena will be strong," she said, shifting her gaze back to the hallucinogenic dough bursting with loud popping sounds on the piece of terra-cotta. With a smooth stone she ground the fast-drying mass until it all blended into a very fine powder, which included a layer of dust from the earthenware shard.

"I didn't know women knew how to prepare epena," I said.

"Women can do anything," Ritimi said, funneling the brownish powder into a slender bamboo container.

Waiting in vain for her to satisfy my curiosity, I finally asked, "Why are you preparing the snuff?"

"Etewa knows I prepare epena well," she said proudly. "He likes to have some ready whenever he returns from a hunt."

For several days we had eaten nothing but fish. Not being in the mood for hunting, Etewa, together with a group of men, had dammed a small stream, in which they placed crushed, cut-up pieces of ayori-toto vine. The water had turned a whitish color, as if it were milk. All the women had to do was to fill their baskets with the asphyxiated fish that rose to the surface. But the Iticoteri were not too fond of fish and soon the women and children began to complain about the lack of meat. Two days had passed since Etewa and his friends had set out for the forest.

"How do you know Etewa is returning today?" I asked, and before Ritimi answered, hastily added, "I know, you can feel it in your legs."

Smiling, Ritimi picked up the long narrow tube and blew through it repeatedly. "I'm cleaning it," she said with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

"Have you ever taken epena?

Ritimi leaned closer to whisper in my ear, "Yes, but I did not like it. It gave me a headache." She looked around furtively. "Would you like to try some?"

"I don't want a headache."

"Maybe it's different for you, "she said; Standing up, she casually put the bamboo container and the three-foot-long cane into her basket. "Let's go to the river. I want to see if I mixed the epena well."

We walked along the bank, quite a distance from where the Iticoteri usually came to bathe or to draw water. I squatted on the ground in front of Ritimi, who meticulously began introducing a small amount of epena into one end of the cane. Delicately, she flicked the tube with her forefinger, scattering the powder along it's length. I felt drops of sweat running down my sides. The only time I had ever been drugged was when I had had three wisdom teeth removed. At the time I had wondered if it would not have been wiser to bear the pain instead of the gruesome hallucinations the drug had induced in me.

"Lift your head slightly," Ritimi said, holding the slender tube toward me. "See the little rasha nut at the end? Press it against your nostril."

I nodded. I could see that the palm seed had been tightly attached to the end of the cane with resin. I made sure the small hole that had been drilled into the hollowed-out fruit was inside my nose. I ran my hand along the fragile length of the smooth cane. I heard the sharp sound of compressed air shooting through the tube. I let go of it as a piercing pain seared into my brain. "That feels terrible!" I groaned, pounding the top of my head with my palms.

"Now the other one," laughed Ritimi as she placed the cane against my left nostril.

I felt as if I were bleeding, but Ritimi assured me it was only mucus and saliva dribbling uncontrollably from my nose and mouth. I tried to wipe myself clean but was unable to lift my heavy hand.

"Why don't you enjoy it instead of being so fussy about a little slime running into your belly button?" Ritimi said, grinning at my clumsy efforts. "I'll wash you later in the river."

"There is nothing to enjoy," I said, beginning to sweat profusely from every pore. I felt nauseous and there was an odd heaviness in my limbs. I saw points of red and yellow light everywhere. I wondered what Ritimi found so funny. Her laughter reverberated in my ears as if it came from inside my head. "Let me blow some in your nose," I suggested.

"Oh, no. I have to watch over you," she said. "We cannot both end up with a headache."

"This epena has to give more than a headache," I said. "Blow some more into my nose. I want to see a hekura."

"Hekuras don't come to women," Ritimi said between fits of laughter. She placed the cane against my nose. "But perhaps if you chant they'll come to you."

I felt each grain travel up my nasal passage, exploding in the top of my skull. Slowly, a delicious lassitude [* lassitude- a state of comatose; a feeling of lack of interest or energy] spread through my body. I turned my gaze to the river, almost expecting a mythical creature to emerge from it's depths. Ripples of water began to grow into waves splashing back and forth with such force that I scurried backward on my hands and knees. I was certain the water was trying to trap me. Shifting my eyes to Ritimi's face, I was bewildered by her alarmed expression.

"What is it?" I asked. My voice trailed off as I followed the direction of her gaze. Etewa and Iramamowe stood in front of us. With great difficulty I stood up. I touched them to make sure I was not hallucinating.

Unfastening the large bundles slung over their backs, they handed them to the other hunters standing behind on the trail. "Take the meat to the shabono," Iramamowe said hoarsely.

The thought that Etewa and Iramamowe would eat so little of the meat filled me with such sadness I began to cry. A hunter gives away most of the game he kills. He would rather go hungry than risk the chance of being accused of stinginess. "I'll save you my portion," I said to Etewa. "I prefer fish to meat."

"Why are you taking epena? Etewa's voice was stern, but his eyes were sparkling with amusement.

"We had to check if Ritimi mixed the powder properly," I mumbled. "It's not strong enough. Haven't seen a hekura yet."

"It's strong," Etewa retorted. Putting his hands on my shoulders, he made me squat on the ground in front of him. "Epena made from seeds is stronger than the kind made from bark." He filled the cane with the snuff. "Ritimi's breath does not have much strength." A devilish grin creased his face as he placed the tube against my nostril and blew.

I fell backward, cradling my head, which reverberated with Iramamowe's and Etewa's uproarious laughter. Slowly I stood up. My feet felt as though they were not touching the ground.

"Dance, white girl," Iramamowe urged me. "See if you can lure the *hekuras* with your chant."

Mesmerized by his words, I held out my arms and began to dance with small jerky steps, the way I had seen the men dance when in an epena trance.

Through my head ran the melody and words of one of Iramamowe's *hekura* songs.

*After days of calling the hekura of*
*the hummingbird,*
*she finally came to me.*
*Dazzled, I watched her dance.*
*I fainted on the ground,*
*and did not feel as she*
*pierced my throat*

*and tore out my tongue.*
*I did not see how my blood*
*flowed into the river,*
*tinting the water red.*
*She filled the gap with precious feathers.*
*That is why I know the hekura songs.*
*That is why I sing so well.*

Etewa guided me to the edge of the river, then splashed water on my face and chest. "Don't repeat his song," he warned me. "Iramamowe will get angry. He will harm you with his magic plants."

I wanted to do as he told me, yet I was compelled to repeat Iramamowe's *hekura* song.

"Don't repeat his song," Etewa pleaded. "Iramamowe will make you deaf. He will make your eyes bleed." Etewa turned toward Iramamowe. "Do not bewitch the white girl."

"I won't," Iramamowe assured him. "I'm not angry at her. I know she is still ignorant of our ways." Framing my face with his hands, he forced me to look into his eyes. "I can see the hekuras dancing in her pupils."

In the light of the sun Iramamowe's eyes were not dark, but light, the color of honey. "I can also see the hekuras in your eyes," I said to him, studying the yellow specks on his iris. His face radiated a gentleness that I had never seen before. As I tried to tell him that I finally understood why his name was Jaguar's Eye, I collapsed against him. I was vaguely aware of being carried in someone's arms. As soon as I was in my hammock, I fell into a deep sleep from which I did not awaken until the following day.

Arasuwe, Iramamowe, and old Kamosiwe had gathered in Etewa's hut. Anxiously, I looked from one to the other. They were painted with onoto; their perforated earlobes were decorated with short, feather-ornamented pieces of cane. When Ritiroi sat next to me in my hammock, I was certain she had come to protect me from their wrath. Before giving any of the men a chance to speak, I began weaving excuses for having taken epenn. The faster I talked, the safer I felt. A steady flow of words, I thought, was the surest way of dispelling their anger.

Arasuwe finally cut into my incoherent chatter. "You talk too fast. I can't understand what you are saying."

I was disconcerted at the friendliness of his tone. I was certain it was not a result of my talking. I glanced at the others. Except for a vague curiosity, their faces revealed nothing. I leaned against Ritimi and whispered, "If they aren't upset, why are they all in the hut?"

"I don't know," she said softly.

"White girl, have you ever seen a hekura before yesterday?" Arasuwe asked.

"I've never seen a hekura in my life," I rapidly assured him. "Not even yesterday."

"Iramamowe saw hekuras in your eyes," Arasuwe insisted. "He took epena last night. His personal hekura told him she had taught you her song."

"I know Iramamowe's song because I've heard it so often," I almost shouted. "How could his hekura have taught me? Spirits don't come to women."

"You don't look like an Iticoteri woman," old Kamosiwe said, gazing at me as if he were seeing me for the first time. "The hekuras could easily be confused." He wiped the tobacco juice dribbling down the side of his mouth. "There have been times when hekuras have come to women."

"Believe me," I said to Iramamowe, "the reason I know your song is because I've heard you sing it so many times."

"But I sing very softly," Iramamowe argued. "If you really know my song, why don't you sing it now?"

Hoping this would bring the epena incident to an end, I began to hum the melody. To my utter distress, I could not remember the words.

"You see," Iramamowe exclaimed triumphantly. "My hekura taught you my song. That's why I didn't get angry at you yesterday, why I didn't blow into your eyes and ears, why I didn't hit you with a burning log."

"It must be so," I said, forcing a smile. Inwardly I shuddered. Iramamowe was well known for his quick temper, revengeful nature, and cruel punishments.

Old Kamosiwe spat his tobacco wad on the ground, then reached for a banana hanging directly above him. Peeling it, he stuffed the fruit whole in his mouth. "A long time ago there was a woman shapori," he mumbled, still chewing. "Her name was Imaawami. Her skin was as white as yours. She was tall and very strong. When she took epena, she sang to the hekuras. She knew how to massage away pain and how to suck out sickness. There was no one like her to hunt for the lost souls of children, and to counteract the curses of enemy shamans."

"Tell us, white girl," Arasuwe said, "have you known a shapori before you came here? Have you ever been taught by one?"

"I've known shamans," I said. "But they have never taught me anything." In great detail I described the kind of work I had been engaged in prior to my arrival at the mission. I talked about dona Mercedes and how she had permitted me to watch and record the interaction between herself and her patients. "Once dona Mercedes let me take part in a spiritual seance," I said. "She believed that I might be a medium. Curers from various areas had gathered at her house. We all sat in a circle chanting for the spirits to come. We chanted for a very long time."

"Did you take epena?" Iramamowe asked.

"No. We smoked big, fat cigars," I said, and almost giggled at the memory. There had been ten people in dona Mercedes's room. Rigidly we had all sat on stools covered with goat skin. With obsessive concentration we had puffed at our cigars, filling the room with smoke so thick we could hardly see each other. I was too busy getting sick to be transported into a trance. "One of the curers asked me to leave, saying that the spirits would not come as long as I stayed in the room."

"Did the hekuras come after you left?" Iramamowe asked.

"Yes," I said. "Dona Mercedes told me the following day how the spirits entered into the head of each curer."

"Strange," Iramamowe murmured. "But you must have learned many things if you lived at her house."

"I learned her prayers and incantations to the spirits, and also the types of plants and roots she used for her patients," I said. "But I was never taught how to communicate with spirits or how to cure people." I looked at each of the men. Etewa was the only one who smiled. "According to her, the only way to learn about curing was to do it."

"Did you start curing?" old Kamosiwe asked.

"No. Dona Mercedes suggested I should go to the jungle."

The four men looked at one another, then slowly turned to me, and almost in a chorus asked, "Did you come here to learn about shamans."

"No!" I shouted, then in a subdued tone added, "I came to bring Angelica's ashes." Choosing my words very carefully, I explained how it was my profession to study people, including shamans- not because I wanted to become one, but because I was interested in learning about the similarities and differences between various shamanistic traditions.

"Have you been with other shapori besides dona Mercedes?" old Kamosiwe asked.

I told the men about Juan Caridad, an old man I had met years before. I got up and reached for my knapsack, which I kept inside a basket tied to one of the rafters. From the zipped side pocket, which because of the odd lock had escaped the women's curiosity, I pulled out a small leather pouch. I emptied it's contents into Arasuwe's hands. Suspiciously, he gazed at a stone, a pearl, and the uncut diamond I had been given by Mr. Barth.

"This stone," I said, taking it from Arasuwe's hand, "was given to me by Juan Caridad. He made it jump out of the water before my eyes." I caressed the smooth, deep golden-colored stone. It fitted perfectly in my palm. It was oval-shaped, flat on one side, a round bulge on the other.

"Did you stay with him the way you did with dona Mercedes?" Arasuwe asked.

"No. I didn't Stay with him for very long," I said. "I was afraid of him."

"Afraid? I thought you were never afraid," old Kamosiwe exclaimed.

"Juan Caridad was an awesome man," I said. "He made me have strange dreams in which he would always appear. In the mornings he would give me a detailed account of what I had dreamt."

The men nodded knowingly at each other. "What a powerful shapori," Kamosiwe said. "What did he make you dream about?"

I told them that the dream that had frightened me the most had been, up to a point, an exact sequential replica of an event that had taken place when I was five years old. Once, while I was returning from the beach with my family, my father decided, instead of driving directly home, to take a detour through the forest to look for orchids. We stopped by a shallow river. My brothers went with my father into the bush. My mother, afraid of snakes and mosquitoes, remained in the car. My sister dared me to wade with her along the shallow riverbank. She was ten years older than I, tall and thin, with short curly hair so bleached by the sun it appeared white. Her eyes were a deep velvety brown, not blue or green like most blondes'. As she squatted in the middle of the stream, she told me to watch the water between her feet, which to my utter bewilderment turned red with blood. "Are you hurt?" I asked. She did not say a word as she stood up. Smiling, she beckoned me to follow her. I remained in the water, petrified, as I watched her climb up the opposite bank.

In my dream I experienced the same fear, but I told myself that now that I was an adult there was nothing to be afraid of. I was about to follow my sister up the steep bank when I heard Juan Caridad's voice urging me to remain in the water. "She is calling you from the land of the dead," he said. "Don't you remember that she is dead?"

No matter how much I begged him, Juan Caridad absolutely refused to discuss how he succeeded in appearing in my dreams or how he knew that my sister had died in a plane crash. I had never talked to him about my family. He knew nothing about me except that I had come from Los Angeles to learn about curing practices.

Juan Caridad did not get angry when I suggested that he probably was familiar with someone who knew me well. He assured me that no matter what I said or what I accused him of, he would not discuss a subject he had sworn to remain silent about. He also urged me to return home.

"Why did he give you the stone?" old Kamosiwe asked.

"Can you see these dark spots and the transparent veins crisscrossing the surface?" I said, holding the stone close to his one eye. "Juan Caridad told me that they represent the trees and the rivers of the forest. He said the stone revealed that I would spend a long time in the jungle, that I should keep it as a talisman to protect me from harm."

The four men in the hut were silent for a long time. Arasuwe handed me the uncut diamond and the pearl. "Tell us about these."

I talked about the diamond Mr. Earth had given me at the mission.

"And this?" old Kamosiwe asked, picking up the small pearl from my hand. "I've never seen such a round stone."

"I've had it for a long time," I said.

"Longer than the stone Juan Caridad gave you?" Ritimi asked.

"Much longer," I said. "The pearl was also given to me by an old man when I arrived at Margarita Island, where I had gone with some classmates for a holiday. As we disembarked from the boat, an old fisherman came directly toward me. Placing the pearl in my hand, he said, 'It was yours from the day you were born. You lost it, but I found it for you at the bottom of the sea.' "

"What happened then?" Arasuwe asked impatiently.

"Nothing much," I said. "Before I recovered from my surprise, the old man was gone."

Kamosiwe held the pearl in his hand, letting it roll back and forth. It looked strangely beautiful in his dark, calloused palm, as if it belonged there. "I would like you to have it," I said to him.

Smiling, Kamosiwe looked at me. "I like it very much." He held the pearl against the sunlight. "How beautiful it is. There are clouds inside the stone. Did the old man who gave it to you look like me?" he asked as all four men were walking out of the hut.

"He was old like you," I said as he turned toward his hut. But the old man had not heard me. Holding the pearl high above his head, he pranced around the clearing.

* * *

No one said a word about my having taken epena. On some evenings, however, when the men gathered outside their huts to inhale the hallucinogenic powder, some youths would jokingly cry out, "White girl, we want to see you dance. We want to hear you sing Iramamowe's hekura song." But I did not try the powder again.

## Chapter 15

I never found out where Puriwariwe, Angelica's brother, lived. I wondered if someone actually called him when he was needed or if he intuited it. Whether he would stay in the shabono for days or weeks, no one knew. There was something reassuring about his presence, about the way he chanted to the hekuras at night, urging the spirits to protect his people, especially the children, who were the most vulnerable of all, from the spells of an evil shapori.

One morning the old shapori walked directly into Etewa's hut. Sitting in one of the empty hammocks, he demanded I show him the treasures I kept hidden in my knapsack.

I was tempted to retort that I kept nothing hidden, but remained silent as I unfastened my basket from the ratter. I knew he was going to ask me for one of the stones and fervently wished it would not be the one Juan Caridad had given me. Somehow I was certain it was the stone that had brought me to the jungle. I feared that if Puriwariwe were to take it from me, Milagros would arrive and take me back to the mission. Or worse, something dreadful might happen to me. I believed implicitly in the stone's protective powers.

Intently the old man studied both the diamond and the stone. He held the diamond against the light. "I want this one," he said, smiling. "It holds the colors of the sky." Stretching in the hammock, the old man placed the diamond and the other stone on his stomach. "Now, I want you to tell me about the shapori Juan Caridad. I want to hear of all the dreams in which this man appeared."

"I don't know if I can remember them all." Glancing at his thin, wrinkled face and emaciated body, I had the vague feeling I had known him longer than I could remember. There was a familiar, tender response in me as his smiling eyes held my gaze. Lying comfortably in my hammock, I began to speak with an easy fluency. Whenever I did not know the Iticoteri word, I filled in with a Spanish one. Puriwariwe did not seem to mind. I had the impression he was more interested in the sound and rhythm of my words than in their actual meaning.

When I finished with my narration, the old man spat out the wad of tobacco Ritimi had prepared for him prior to leaving for work in the gardens. In a soft voice he spoke of the woman shaman Kamosiwe had already told me about. Not only was Imaawami considered a great shapori, but she was also believed to have been a superb hunter and warrior who had raided enemy settlements together with the men.

"Did she have a gun?" I asked, hoping to learn more about her identity. Since I first heard about her, I had been obsessed with the possibility that she might have been a captive white woman. Maybe as far back as the time when the Spaniards first came looking for El Dorado.

"She used a bow and arrows," the old shaman said. "Her mamucori poison was of the best kind."

No matter how I phrased my question, I was unable to learn whether Imaawami was a real person or a being that belonged to a mythological epoch. All the shapori was willing to say was that Imaawami existed a long time ago. I was certain the old man was not being evasive; it was common for the Iticoteri to be vague about past events.

On some evenings, after the women had cooked the last meal, Puriwariwe would sit by the fire in the middle of the clearing. Both young and old gathered around him. I always looked for a spot close to him, for I did not want to miss a word of what he said. In a low, monotonous, nasal tone, he talked about the origin of man, of fire, of floods, of the moon and the sun. Some of these myths I already knew. Yet each time they were recounted it was as if I were listening to a different story. Each narrator embellished, improved upon it according to his own vision.

"Which one is the real myth of creation?" I asked Puriwariwe one evening after he finished the story of Waipilishoni, a woman shaman who had created blood by mixing onoto and water. She had given life to the woodlike bodies of a brother and sister by making them drink this substance. The evening before the shapori had told us that the first Indian was born out of the leg of a manlike creature.

For an instant Puriwariwe regarded me with a perplexed expression. "They are all real," he finally said. "Don't you know that man was created many times throughout the ages?"

I shook my head in amazement. He touched my face and laughed. "Ohoo, how ignorant you still are. Listen carefully. I will tell you of all the times the world was destroyed by fires and floods."

A few days later, Puriwariwe announced that Xorowe, Iramamowe's oldest son, was to be initiated as a shapori. Xorowe was perhaps seventeen or eighteen years old. He had a slight, agile body and a narrow, delicately featured face in which his deep brown eyes seemed overly large and glowing. Taking only a hammock, he moved into the small hut that had been built for him in the clearing. Since it was believed that hekuras fled from women, no females were allowed near the dwelling- not even Xorowe's mother, grandmother, or his sisters.

A youth who had never been with a woman was chosen to take care of the initiate. It was he who blew epena into Xorowe's nostrils, who saw that the fire was never out, and made sure each day that Xorowe had the proper amount of water and honey, the only food the initiate was allowed. The women always left enough wood outside the shabono, so the boy did not have to search too far. The men were responsible for finding honey. Each day the shapori urged them to go farther into the forest for new sources.

Xorowe spent most of the time inside the hut lying in his hammock. Sometimes he sat on a polished tree trunk Iramamowe had placed outside the dwelling, for he was not supposed to sit on the ground. Within a week, Xorowe's face had darkened from the epena. His once glowing eyes were dull and unfocused. His body, dirty and emaciated, moved with the clumsiness of a drunkard.

Life went on as usual in the shabono, except for the families living closest to Xorowe's hut, who were not allowed to cook meat on their hearths. According to Puriwariwe, hekuras detested the smell of roasting meat, and if they so much as caught a whiff of the offensive odor, they would flee back to the mountains.

Like his apprentice, Puriwariwe took epena day and night. Tirelessly, he chanted for hours, coaxing the spirits into Xorowe's hut, begging the hekuras to cut open the young man's chest. Some evenings Arasuwe, Iramamowe, and others accompanied the old man in his chants.

During the second week, in an uncertain, quivering voice, Xorowe joined in the singing. At first he only sang the hekura songs of the armadillo, tapir, jaguar, and other large animals, which were believed to be masculine spirits. They were the easiest to entice. Next he sang the hekura songs of plants and rocks. And last he sang the songs of the female spirits- the spider, snake, and hummingbird. They were not only the most difficult to lure but, because of their treacherous and jealous nature, were hard to control.

Late one night, when most of the shabono was asleep, I sat outside Etewa's hut, and watched the men chant. Xorowe was so weak one of the men had to hold him up so Puriwariwe could dance around him. "Xorowe, sing louder," the old man urged him. "Sing as loud as the birds, as loud as the jaguars." Puriwariwe danced out of the shabono into the forest. "Xorowe, sing louder," he shouted. "The hekuras dwelling in all the corners of the world need to hear your song."

Three nights later, Xorowe's joyful cries echoed through the shabono: "Father, Father, the hekuras are approaching. I can hear their humming and buzzing. They are dancing toward me. They are opening my chest, my head. They are coming through my fingers and my feet." Xorowe ran out of the hut. Squatting before the old man, he cried, "Father, Father, help me, for they are coming through my eyes and nose."

Puriwariwe helped Xorowe to his feet. They began to dance in the clearing, their thin emaciated shadows spilling across the moonlit ground. Hours later, a despairing scream, the cry of a panic-stricken child, pierced the dawn. "Father, Father, from today on let no woman come near my hut."

"That's what they all say," Ritimi mumbled, getting out of her hammock. She stocked the fire, then buried several plantains under the hot embers. "When Etewa decided to be initiated as a shapori, I had already gone to live with him," she said. "The night he begged Puriwariwe to let no woman near him I went to his hut and drove the hekuras away."

"Why did you do that?"

"Etewa's mother urged me to do it," Ritimi said. "She was afraid he would die. She knew Etewa liked women too much; she knew he would never become a great shapori." Ritimi sat in my hammock. "I will tell you the whole story." She snuggled comfortably against me, then began to speak in a low whisper.

"The night the hekuras entered Etewa's chest, he cried out just as Xorowe did tonight. It is the female hekuras who make such a fuss. They want no woman in the hut. Etewa sobbed bitterly that night, crying out that an evil woman had passed near his hut. I felt quite sad when I heard him say that the hekuras had left him."

"Did Etewa know it was you who had been in his hut?"

"No," Ritimi said. "No one saw me. If Puriwariwe knew, he didn't say. He was aware Etewa would never be a good shapori."

"Why did he get initiated in the first place?"

"There is always the possibility that a man may become a great shapori." Ritimi rested her head against my arm. "That night many men stayed up chanting for the hekuras to return. But the spirits had no desire to come back. They had left not only because Etewa had been soiled by a woman, but because the hekuras were afraid he would never be a good father to them."

"Why does a man get soiled when he goes with a woman?"

"Shapori do," Ritimi said. "I don't know why, because men as well as shapori enjoy it. I believe it's the female hekuras who are jealous and afraid of a man who enjoys women too often." Ritimi went on to explain how a sexually active man had little desire to take epena and chant to the spirits. Male spirits, she explained, were not possessive. They were content if a man took the hallucinogenic snuff before and after a hunt or a raid. "I'd rather have a good hunter and warrior than a good shapori for a husband," she confessed. "Shapori don't like women much."

"What about Iramamowe?" I asked. "He is considered a great shapori, yet he has two wives."

"Ohoo, you are so ignorant. I have to explain everything to you." Ritimi giggled. "Iramamowe does not sleep with his two wives often. His youngest brother, who has no woman of his own, sleeps with one of them." Ritimi looked around to make sure no one was overhearing us. "Have you noticed that Iramamowe often goes into the forest by himself?"

I nodded. "But so do other men."

"And so do women," Ritimi aped me, mispronouncing the words the way I had. I had great difficulty imitating the proper Iticoteri nasal tone, which probably was a result of their usually having tobacco wads in their mouths. "That's not what I mean," she said. "Iramamowe goes into the forest to find what great shapori seek."

"What is that?"

"The strength to travel to the house of thunder. The strength to travel to the sun and come back alive."

"I've seen Iramamowe sleep in the forest with a woman," I confessed.

Ritimi laughed softly. "I will tell you a very important secret," she whispered. "Iramamowe sleeps with a woman the way a shapori does. He takes a woman's energy away, but gives nothing in return."

"Have you slept with him?"

Ritimi nodded. But no matter how much I coaxed and pleaded with her, she would not elaborate any further.

A week later, Xorowe's mother, sisters, aunts, and cousins started to wail in their huts. "Old man," the mother cried, "my son has no more strength. Do you want to kill him of hunger? Do you want to kill him from lack of sleep? It is time you left him alone."

The old shapori paid no attention to their cries. The following evening Iramamowe took epena and danced in front of his son's hut. He alternated between jumping high in the air and crawling on all fours, imitating the fierce growls of a jaguar. He stopped abruptly. With his eyes fixed on some point directly in front of him, he sat on the ground. "Women, women, do not despair," he cried out in a loud, nasal voice. "For a few more days Xorowe has to remain without food. Even though he appears weak, and his movements are clumsy, and he moans in his sleep, he will not die." Standing up, Iramamowe walked toward Puriwariwe and asked him to blow more epena into his head. Then he returned to the same spot where he had been sitting.

"Listen carefully," Ritimi urged me. "Iramamowe is one of the few shapori who has traveled to the sun during his initiation. He has guided others on their first journey. He has two voices. The one you just heard was his own; the other one is that of his personal hekura."

Now Iramamowe's words sprang from deep in his chest; like stones rumbling down a ravine, the words tumbled into the silence of people gathered in their huts. Huddled together in an atmosphere heavy with smoke and anticipation, they seemed to be barely breathing. Their eyes glittered with longing for what the personal hekura of Iramamowe had to say, for what was about to take place in the mysterious world of the initiate.

"My son has traveled into the depths of the earth, and has burned in the hot fires of their silent caves," said Iramamowe's rumbling hekura voice. "Guided by the hekura eyes, he has been led through cobwebs of darkness, across rivers and mountains. They have taught him songs of birds, fishes, snakes, spiders, monkeys, and jaguars.

"Although his eyes and cheeks are sunken, he is strong. Those who have descended into the silent burning caves; those who have traveled beyond the forest mist, will return with their personal hekura in their chest. Those are the ones who will be guided to the sun, to the luminous huts of my brothers and sisters, the hekuras of the sky.

"Women, women, do not cry out his name. Let him go on his journey. Let him depart from his mother and sisters, so he can reach this world of light, which is more exhausting than the world of darkness."

Spellbound, I listened to Iramamowe's voice. No one talked, no one moved, no one looked anywhere but at his figure, sitting rigidly in front of his son's hut. After every pause, his voice rose to a higher pitch of intensity.

"Women, women, do not despair. On his path he will meet those who have withstood the long nights of mist. He will meet those who have not turned back. He will meet those who have not trembled in fear by what they have witnessed during their journey. He will meet those who had their bodies burned and cut up, those who had their bones removed and dried in the sun. He will meet those who did not fall into the clouds on their way to the sun.

"Women, women, do not disturb his balance. My son is about to reach the end of his journey. Do not watch his dark face. Do not look into his hollow eyes that shine with no light, for he is destined to be a solitary man." Iramamowe stood up. Together with Puriwariwe he entered Xorowe's hut, where they spent the rest of the night chanting softly to the hekuras.

A few days later, the youth who had taken care of Xorowe during his long weeks of initiation washed him with warm water and dried him with fragrant leaves. Then he painted his body with a mixture of coals and onoto- wavy lines extending from his forehead down his cheeks and shoulders. The rest of his body was marked with evenly distributed round spots that reached to his ankles.

For a moment Xorowe stood in the middle of the clearing. His eyes shone sadly from their hollow sockets, filled with an immense melancholy, as if he had just realized he was no longer his former human self, but only a shadow. Yet there was an aura of strength about him that had not been there before, as if the conviction of his newfound knowledge and experience were more enduring than the memory of his past. Silently Puriwariwe led him into the forest.

## Chapter 16

"White girl!" Ritimi's six-year-old son shouted, running along the manioc rows. Out of breath, he stopped in front of me, then cried out excitedly, "White girl, your brother..."

"My what?" Dropping my digging stick, I ran toward the shabono. I stopped at the edge of the cleared strip of forest around the wooden palisade circling the shabono. Although it was not considered a garden, gourds, cotton, and an assortment of medicinal plants grew there. According to Etewa, the reason for this cleared strip was that enemies could not possibly trespass silently through this kind of vegetation as they could a forest cover.

No unusual sounds came from the huts. Crossing the clearing toward the group of people squatting outside Arasuwe's hut, I was not surprised to see Milagros.

"Blond Indian," he said in Spanish, motioning me to squat beside him. "You even smell like one."

"I'm glad you are here," I said. "Little Sisiwe said you were my brother."

"I spoke to Father Coriolano at the mission." Milagros pointed to the writing pads, pencils, sardine cans, boxes of crackers, and sweet biscuits the Iticoteri were passing around. "Father Coriolano wants me to take you back to the mission," Milagros said, looking at me thoughtfully.

I could think of nothing to say. Picking up a twig, I drew lines on the dirt. "I can't leave yet."

"I know." Milagros smiled, but there was a trace of sadness about his lips. His voice was quite gentle, ironic. "I told Father Coriolano you were doing much work. I convinced him how important it is for you to finish this remarkable research you are conducting."

I could not repress my giggles. He sounded like a pompous anthropologist. "Did he believe you?"

Milagros pushed the writing pads and pencils toward me. "I assured Father Coriolano that you are well." From a small bundle Milagros pulled out a box containing three bars of Camay soap. "He also gave me these for you."

"What am I to do with them?" I asked, sniffing the scented bars.

"Wash yourself!" Milagros said emphatically, as it he really believed I had forgotten what soap was for.

"Let me smell it," Ritimi said, lifting a bar from the box. She held it against her nose, closed her eyes and took one long breath. "Hum. What are you going to wash with it?"

"My hair!" I exclaimed. It occurred to me that perhaps the soap would kill the lice.

"I'll wash mine too," Ritimi said, rubbing the bar on her head.

"Soap only works with water," I explained. "We have to go to the river."

"To the river!" cried the women who had gathered around the men as they stood up.

Laughing, we ran down the path. Men returning from the gardens just gaped at us, whereas the women accompanying them turned around and ran after us, toward Ritimi, who was holding the precious soap in her upraised hand.

"You have to get your hair wet," I called out from the water. The women remained on the bank, looking doubtfully at me. Grinning, Ritimi handed me the soap. Soon my head was covered with a thick lather. I scrubbed hard, enjoying the dirty suds squishing through my fingers, down my neck, back, and chest. With a halved calabash I rinsed my hair, using the soapy water to wash my body. I began to sing an old Spanish commercial advertising Camay soap- one I used to hear on the radio as a child. "For a heavenly array, there is nothing like jabon Camay."

"Who wants to be next?" I asked, wading toward the bank where the women stood. I felt I was glowing with cleanliness.

Stepping back, the women smiled, but none volunteered. "I will, I will," little Texoma shouted, running into the water.

One by one, the women came closer. Awed, they watched attentively as the suds seemed to grow out of the child's head. I worked up a stiff lather and shaped Texoma's hair until spikes stuck out all around her head. Hesitantly, Ritimi touched her daughter's hair. A timid smile crinkled the corners of her mouth. "Ohoo, what beauty!"

"Keep your eyes closed until I've rinsed out all the soap," I admonished Texoma. "Close them tight. It hurts if the suds run into your eyes."

"For a heavenly array," Texoma cried out as the soapy water ran down her back. "There is nothing like . . ." She looked at me and I filled in the rest. "Sing that song again. I want my hair to turn the color of yours."

"It won't turn my color," I said. "But it will smell good."

"I want to be next!" the women began shouting.

Except for the pregnant ones, who were afraid that the magic soap might harm their unborn children, I washed at least twenty-five heads. However, not wanting to be outdone, the pregnant women decided to wash their hair in the accustomed manner- with leaves and mud from the bottom of the river. To them too I had to sing the silly Camay soap commercial. By the time we were all scrubbed, my voice was hoarse.

The men gathered around Arasuwe's hut were still listening to Milagros's account of his visit to the outside world. They sniffed our hair as we squatted beside them. An old woman crouching next to a youth, pushed his head between her legs. "Sniff this, I washed it with Camay soap."

She began to hum the melody of the commercial.

The men and women burst into guffaws. Still laughing, Etewa shouted, "Grandmother, no one wants your vagina, even if you fill it with honey."

Cackling, the woman made an obscene gesture, then went inside her hut. "Etewa," she shouted from her hammock, "I've seen you lying between the legs of even older hags than myself."

After the laughter subsided, Milagros pointed to the four machetes placed on the ground in front of him. "Your friends left these at the mission before departing for the city," he said. "They are for you to give away."

I looked at him helplessly. "Why so few?"

"Because I couldn't carry more," Milagros said cheerfully. "Don't give them to the women."

"I will give them to the headman," I said, gazing at the expectant faces around me. Grinning, I pushed the four machetes in front of Arasuwe. "My friends sent these for you."

"White girl, you are clever," he said, checking the sharp point of one of the machetes. "This one I will keep for myself. One is for my brother Iramamowe, who has protected you from the Mocototeri. One is for Hayama's son, from whose garden and game you eat the most." Arasuwe looked at Etewa. "One should be for you, but since you were given a machete not too long ago at one of our feasts I will give the machete to your wives, Ritimi and Tutemi. They take care of the white girl as if she were their own sister."

For a moment there was absolute silence; then one of the men stood up and addressed Ritimi. "Give me your machete so I can cut down trees. You don't need to do the work a man does."

"Don't give it to him," Tutemi said. "It's easier to work in the gardens with a machete than with a digging stick."

Ritimi looked at the machete, picked it up, then handed it to the man. "I will give it to you. The worst sin of all is not to give away what others ask of you. I don't want to end up in shopariwabe."

"Where is that?" I whispered to Milagros.

"Shopariwabe is a place like the missionaries' hell."

I opened one of the sardine cans. After popping one of the silvery oily fish into my mouth, I offered the can to Ritimi. "Try one," I coaxed her.

She looked at me uncertainly. Between thumb and forefinger, she daintily lifted a piece of sardine into her mouth. "Ugh, what an ugly taste," she cried, spitting it out.

Milagros took the can from my hand. "Save them. They are for the journey back to the mission."

"But I'm not going back yet," I said. "They will spoil if we save them for long."

"You should return before the rains," Milagros said gravely. "Once they start, it will be impossible to cross rivers or walk through the forest."

I could not help the smug grin. "I have to stay at least until Tutemi's child is born," I said. I was sure the baby would arrive during the rains.

"What shall I tell Father Coriolano?"

"What you told him already," I said mockingly. "That I'm doing remarkable work."

"But he expects you to return before the rains," Milagros said. "It rains for months!"

Smiling, I took one of the boxes of crackers. "We better eat these- they will spoil with the humidity."

"Don't open the other sardine cans," Milagros said in Spanish. "The Iticoteri won't like them. I will eat them myself."

"Aren't you afraid to go to shopariwabe?"

Without answering, Milagros passed the already opened can around. Most of the men only smelled the contents, then handed it to the next person. The ones who were daring enough to taste the sardines, spit them out. The women did not bother either smelling or trying them. Milagros smiled at me when the can was returned to him. "They don't like sardines. I will not go to hell if I eat them all by myself."

The crackers were no success either, except with a few children, who licked off the salt. But the sweet biscuits, even though they tasted rancid, were eaten with smacking sounds of approval.

Ritimi appropriated the writing pads and pencils. She insisted I teach her the same kind of designs with which I had decorated my burned notebook. Dutifully, she practiced writing the Spanish and English words I had taught her. She was not interested in learning how to write, even though she eventually learned to draw all the letters of the alphabet, including a few Chinese ideograms I had once been taught in a calligraphy class. To Ritimi they remained designs that she painted sometimes on her body, preferring the letters S and W.

Milagros stayed for a few weeks at the shabono. He went hunting with the men and helped them in the gardens. Most of the time, however, he spent lounging in his hammock, doing nothing but play with the children. At all hours one could hear their shrieks of delight as Milagros balanced the younger ones high in the air on his upraised feet. In the evenings he entertained us with stories about the nape- the white men he had met through the years; the places he had visited; and the eccentric customs he had observed.

Nape was a term applied to all foreigners- that is, all who were not Yanomama. The Iticoteri made no distinction between nationalities. To them a Venezuelan, Brazilian, Swede, German, or American, regardless of their color, were nape.

Seen through Milagros's eyes, these white men appeared peculiar even to me. It was his sense of humor, his knack for the absurd, and his dramatic rendition that transformed the most mundane, insignificant event into an extraordinary happening. If ever anyone in the audience dared to doubt the veracity of his account, Milagros, in a very dignified manner, would turn to me. "White girl, tell them if I'm lying." No matter how much he had exaggerated, I never contradicted him.

## Chapter 17

Tutemi joined Ritimi and me in the gardens. "I think my time is coming," she said, dropping her wood-filled basket on the ground. "My arms have no strength. My breathing is not deep. I can no longer bend easily."

"Are you in pain?" I asked, seeing Tutemi's face twist into a grimace.

She nodded. "I'm also afraid."

Gently Ritimi probed the girl's stomach, first on the sides, then the front. "The baby is kicking hard. It's time for it to come out." Ritimi turned to me. "Go get old Hayama. Tell her that Tutemi is in pain. She will know what to do."

"Where will you be?"

Ritimi pointed straight ahead. I cut through the forest, jumping over fallen trunks, heedless of thorns, roots, and stones. "Come quickly," I shouted, gasping for air, in front of Hayama's hut. "Tutemi is having her child. She's in pain."

Picking up her bamboo knife, Ritimi's grandmother first went to see an old man living in a hut across the clearing. "I'm sure you heard the white girl," Hayama said. Seeing the old man nod, she added, "If we need you, I will send her to get you."

I walked in front of Hayama, impatiently waiting every fifty paces for her to catch up. Leaning heavily on the piece of broken bow she used as a cane, she seemed to be moving even more slowly then usual. "Is the old man a shapori?" I asked.

"He knows all there is to know about a child that does not want to be born."

"Tutemi has only pains."

"When there is pain," Hayama said deliberately, "it means that the child doesn't want to leave the womb."

"I don't think it means that at all." I was unable to disguise the argumentative tone of my voice. "It's normal for the first child to be difficult," I affirmed, as if I really knew. "White women have pains with almost every child."

"It's not normal," Hayama affirmed. "Maybe white babies don't want to see the world."

Tutemi's moans came muffled through the underbrush. She was crouching on the platanillo leaves Ritimi had spread on the ground. Dark shadows circled her feverish eyes. Minute drops of perspiration shone above her brow and on her upper lip.

"The water has already broken," Ritimi said. "But the baby doesn't want to come."

"Let us go farther into the forest," Tutemi begged. "I don't want anyone at the shabono to hear my screams."

Tenderly, old Hayama pushed the young woman's bangs back from her forehead, and wiped the sweat from her face and neck. "It will be better in a moment," she said soothingly, as if speaking to a child. Each time the contractions came, Hayama pressed hard on Tutemi's stomach. After what I judged to be an interminably long time, Hayama told me to get the old shapori.

He was prepared. He had taken epena, and over the fire a dark concoction was boiling. With a stick he flicked the mucus from his nose, then poured the brew into a gourd.

"What is it made of?"

"Roots and leaves," he said, but did not mention the name of the plant. As soon as we reached the three women, he urged Tutemi to empty the gourd to the last drop. While she drank, he danced around her. In a high nasal voice, he pleaded with the hekura of the white monkey to release the neck of the unborn child.

Slowly, Tutemi's face relaxed, and her eyes lost their frightened expression. "I think the baby will come now," she said, smiling at the old man.

Hayama held her from behind, stretching Tutemi's arms over her head. While I was wondering whether it was the concoction or the shaman's dance that had induced such a state of relaxation, I missed the actual birth. I put my hand over my mouth to stifle a scream as I saw the umbilical cord wrapped around the neck of the purple-skinned boy. Hayama cut the cord, then put a leaf on the navel to absorb the blood. She rubbed her forefinger in the afterbirth, then smeared the finger against the child's lips.

"What is she doing?" I asked Ritimi.

"She is making sure the boy will learn to speak properly."

Before I had a chance to blurt out that the child was dead, the most disconcerting human cry I have ever heard echoed through the forest. Ritimi picked up the screaming infant, and motioned me to follow her to the river. She filled her mouth with water, waited for a moment for it to warm up, then squirted it over the baby. Imitating her, I helped her rinse his little body clean of slime and blood.

"Now he has three mothers," Ritimi said, handing the baby to me. "Whoever washes a newborn baby is responsible for it should something happen to the mother. Tutemi will be happy that you have helped wash her child."

Ritimi filled a large platanillo leaf with mud, while I cradled the boy in uncertain arms. I had never held a newborn baby before. Looking in awe at the purplish wrinkled face, at his tiny fists, which he tried to push into his mouth, I wondered what miracle had made him live.

Hayama wrapped the placenta into a tight bundle of leaves, and placed it under a small elevated windscreen the old man had built under a tall ceiba. It was to be burned in a few weeks. With the mud we covered all traces of blood on the ground to prevent wild animals and dogs from sniffing around.

With the child safely in her arms, Tutemi led the way back to the shabono. Before entering her hut, she placed him on the ground. We who had witnessed the birth had to step three times over the baby, thus marking his acceptance into the settlement.

Etewa did not look up from his hammock: He had been resting there since learning that his youngest wife was in labor. Tutemi entered the hut with their newborn son, and sat by the hearth. After squeezing her nipple, she pushed it inside the baby's mouth. Avidly, the boy began to suck, opening his still unfocused eyes from time to time as if imprinting on his mind this source of food and comfort.

Neither parent ate anything that day. On the second and third day Etewa caught a basketful of small fish which he cooked and fed to Tutemi. Thereafter both of them slowly resumed a normal diet.

The day after giving birth, Tutemi returned to work in the gardens with the newborn baby strapped on her back. Etewa, on the other hand, remained resting in his hammock for a week. Any physical effort on his part was believed to be deleterious to the infant's health.

On the ninth day Milagros was asked to pierce the boy's earlobes with long rasha palm thorns, which were kept in the holes. After cutting the sharp points close to the lobes, Milagros coated each end with resin so the child would not pull the blunted thorns out. On that same day, the infant was also given the name of Hoaxiwe, for it was a white monkey that had wanted to keep the child in the womb. It was only a nickname. By the time the boy started walking, he would be given his real name.

# Chapter 18

It was not quite dawn when Milagros leaned over my hammock. I felt his calloused hand brushing my forehead and cheeks. I could hardly see his features in the darkness. I knew he was leaving. I waited for him to speak, but fell asleep without finding out whether he had actually wanted to say something.

"The rains will come soon," old Kamosiwe announced that evening. "I've seen the size of the young turtles. I've been listening to the croaking of the rain frogs."

Four days later, in the early afternoon, the wind blew with terrifying force through the trees and the shabono. The empty hammocks swung back and forth like boats on a tempestuous sea. The leaves on the ground swirled in spiralling dances that died as suddenly as they had begun.

I stood in the middle of the clearing, watching the gusts of wind coming from every direction. Pieces of bark flattened against my shins. Kicking my legs, I tried to shake the bark off, but it stuck to me as if it had been glued on. Giant black clouds darkened the sky. The steady far-off roar of approaching rain grew louder as it moved across the forest. Thunder rumbled through the clouds, and the flickering of white lightning flashed through the afternoon darkness. The groans of a falling tree, hit by lightning, echoed through the forest with the mournful clamor of other uprooted trees crashing to the ground.

Shrieking, the women and children huddled together behind the plantains stacked against the sloping roof. Seizing a log from the fire, old Hayama rushed into Iramamowe's hut. Desperately, she began to beat one of the poles. "Wake up!" she screamed. "Your father is not here. Wake up! Defend us from the hekuras." Hayama was addressing Iramamowe's personal hekura, for he was out hunting with several other men.

Thunder and lightning receded into the distance as the clouds broke open above us. The rain came in a solid sheet, so dense we could not see across the clearing. Moments later, the sky was clear. I accompanied old Kamosiwe to look at the roaring river. Masses of earth toppled from the banks, gouged out by the raging torrent. Each landslide was followed by the tearing of vines, which snapped with sounds like breaking bowstrings.

A great stillness settled over the forest. Not a bird, insect, or frog could be heard. Suddenly, without any warning, a growl of thunder seemed to come directly out of the sun, cracking over our heads. "But there are no clouds," I shouted, falling on the ground as if struck.

"Don't defy the spirits," Kamosiwe warned me. Cutting two large leaves, he motioned me to take cover. Squatting side by side, we watched the rain cascade down from a clear sky. Gusts of wind shook the forest until the curtain of dark clouds hid the sun once more.

"Storms are caused by the dead whose bones have not been burned; whose ashes have not been eaten," old Kamosiwe said. "It's these unfortunate spirits, longing to be cremated, who heat up the clouds until fires light up the sky."

"Fires that will finally burn them," I completed his sentence.

"Ohoo, you are not so ignorant anymore," Kamosiwe said. "The rains have started. You will be with us for many days- you will learn so much more."

Smiling, I nodded. "Do you think Milagros has reached the mission?"

Kamosiwe looked at me askance, then broke into a hoarse, raspy laughter, the laughter of a very old man, resounding eerily in the noise of the rain. He still had most of his teeth. Strong and yellowish, they stood out from his receding gums like pieces of aged ivory. "Milagros did not go to the mission. He went to see his wife and children."

"At which settlement does Milagros live?"

"In many."

"Does he have a wife and children in all of them?"

"Milagros is a talented man," Kamosiwe said, his one dark eye shining with a devilish glint. "He has a white woman somewhere."

Filled with anticipation, I looked at Kamosiwe. I was finally going to learn something about Milagros. But the old man remained silent. When he put his hand in mine, I knew his mind had wandered elsewhere. Slowly, I massaged his gnarled fingers.

"Old man, are you really Milagros's grandfather?" I asked, hoping to bring him back to the subject of Milagros.

Startled, Kamosiwe looked into my face, his one eye scrutinizing me intently as if he had thought of something. Mumbling, he gave me his other hand to massage.

Absentmindedly, I watched his one eye rolling into his socket as he drowsed. "I wonder how old you really are?"

Kamosiwe's eye came to rest on my face, clouded with memories. "If you lay out the time I've lived, it would reach all the way to the moon," Kamosiwe murmured. "That's how old I am."

We stayed under the leaves, watching the dark clouds disperse across the sky. Mist drifted through the trees, filtering the light to a ghostly gray.

"The rains have started," Kamosiwe repeated softly as we walked back to the shabono. The fires in the huts produced more smoke than heat, but the rainy air created a misty warmth. I stretched in my hammock, and fell asleep to the distant and confused sounds of the storming forest.

The morning was cold and damp. Ritimi, Tutemi, and I stayed in our hammocks the whole day, eating baked plantains, and listening to the rain pound on the palm-hatched roofs.

"I wish Etewa and the others had returned last night from the hunt," Ritimi mumbled from time to time, looking at the sky, which changed only from a faint white to gray.

The hunters returned late in the afternoon of the following day. Iramamowe and Etewa walked directly into old Hayama's hut carrying her youngest son Matuwe in a litter made from bark strips. Matuwe had been injured by a falling branch. Carefully, the two men transferred him to his own hammock. His leg hung limply down and his shinbone threatened to pierce the swollen purple skin.

"It's broken," old Hayama said.

"It's broken," I repeated with the rest of the women in the hut. I had adopted the habit of stating the obvious. It was a way of expressing concern, love, sympathy all at once.

Matuwe gasped in pain as Hayama set the leg straight. Ritimi held his foot outstretched while the old woman made a splint with broken pieces of arrow shafts. Deftly, she arranged them along each side of the leg, inserting cotton fibers in between the skin and cane. Around the splint, extending all the way from the ankle to the middle of his thigh, Hayama bound fresh strips of a thin, resistant bark.

Totemi and Xotomi, the man's young wife, giggled each time Matuwe moaned. They were not amused, but were trying to cheer him up. "Oh, Matuwe, it doesn't hurt," Xotomi tried to convince him. "Remember how glad you were when your head was bleeding after you had been hit with a club at the last feast."

"Stay still," Hayama said to her son. Fastening a liana rope over one of the rafters, she tied one end to his ankle, the other to his thigh. "Now you cannot move your leg," she said, inspecting her work with satisfaction.

About two weeks later, Hayama removed the bark and cane splint. The purple bruised leg had turned green and yellowish but was no longer swollen. She probed around the bone lightly. "It's growing together," she announced, then proceeded to massage the leg with warm water. Every day, for almost a month, she went through the same routine of unfastening the cast, massaging the leg, then tying it back to the rafter.

"The bone is mended," Hayama affirmed one day, breaking the cane splint into small pieces.

"But my leg is not healed!" Matuwe protested in alarm. "I cannot move it properly."

Hayama calmed him, explaining that his knee had become stiff from having had his leg stretched out for so long. "I'll continue massaging your leg until you can walk as you did before."

The rains brought with them a sense of tranquillity, of timelessness, as day and night blurred into each other. No one worked much in the gardens. For endless hours we lay or sat in our hammocks conversing in that odd way people do when it rains, with long pauses and absentminded stares into the distance.

Ritimi tried to make a basket weaver out of me. I started out with what I thought was the easiest kind- the large U-shaped basket used for carrying wood. The women had great fun watching my awkward attempts at trying to master the simple twining technique. I then concentrated my efforts on something I believed to be more manageable- the flat, disklike baskets used for storing fruit or separating the ashes from the bones of the dead. Although I was quite pleased with the finished product, I had to agree with old Hayama that the basket did not look the way it was supposed to.

Grinning at her, I remembered the time a school friend had done her best to teach me how to knit. In the most relaxed manner, while watching TV, talking, or waiting for an appointment, she knitted beautiful sweaters, mittens, and skiing caps. I sat tensely beside her, with tight shoulders, my stiff fingers holding the needles only inches away from my face, cursing every time I dropped a stitch.

I was not ready to give up basketry. One had to try at least three times, I told myself, as I began to make one of the flat fishing baskets.

"Ohoo, white girl." Xotomo giggled uncontrollably. "You didn't twine it tight enough." She put her fingers through the loosely woven vine strips. "The fish will slip through the holes."

Finally I resigned myself to the simple task of splitting the bark and vines needed for weaving into the most perfectly even strands, which were much in demand. Emboldened by my success, I made a hammock. I cut strands about seven feet long, tied the ends firmly together, reinforcing them with intertwined bark rope below the binding. I joined the liana strands loosely with transverse cotton yarn, which I had dyed red with onoto. Ritimi was so enchanted with the hammock, she replaced Etewa's old one with it.

"Etewa, I made a new hammock for you," I said as he came in from working in the gardens.

He looked at me skeptically. "You think it will hold me?"

I clicked my tongue in affirmation, showing him how well I had reinforced the ends.

Hesitantly he sat in the hammock. "It seems strong," he said, stretching fully. I heard the rubbing of the vine rope against the pole, but before I could warn him Etewa and the hammock were on the ground.

Ritimi, Tutemi, Arasuwe, and his wives, watching from the hut next to us, burst into guffaws, immediately attracting a large crowd. Slapping each other on their thighs and shoulders, they doubled up with laughter. Later I asked Ritimi if she had tied the hammock loosely on purpose.

"Naturally," she said, her eyes shining with loving malice. She assured me that Etewa was not in the least upset. "Men enjoy being outwitted by a woman."

Although I had my doubts as to whether Etewa had actually enjoyed the incident, he certainly held no grudge against me. He advertised throughout the shabono how well he was resting in his new hammock. I was besieged with requests. Sometimes I made as many as three hammocks a day. Several men busied themselves supplying me with cotton, which they separated by hand from the seeds. With a whorl stick they spun the fibers into thread, and twisted them into the strong yarn which I loosely wove in between the strands.

With a finished hammock draped over my arm, I entered Iramamowe's hut one afternoon. "Are you going to make arrows?" I asked him. He had climbed up a pole in his hut and was reaching for cane stored under the rafters of the roof.

"Is this hammock for me?" he asked, handing me the cane. He took the hammock, fastened it, then sat astride on it. "It's well made."

"I made it for your eldest wife," I said. "I'll make you one if you teach me how to make arrows."

"It isn't time to make arrows," Iramamowe said. "I was only checking if the cane is still dry." He regarded me mockingly, then burst into laughter. "The white girl wants to make arrows," he shouted at the top of his voice. "I will teach her, and take her hunting with me." Still laughing, he motioned me to sit beside him. He spread the cane on the ground, then sorted the shafts according to size. "The long ones are best for hunting. Short ones are best for fishing and killing the enemy. Only a good marksman will use long ones for whatever he pleases. They are often flawed and their trajectory is imprecise."

Iramamowe selected a short and a long shaft. "In here I will fit the arrowhead," he said, splitting one end of each cane. Firmly he tied them together with cotton thread. He cut a few feathers in half, then attached them to the other end by means of resin and cotton thread. "Some hunters decorate their shafts with their personal designs. I only do so when I go raiding. I like my enemy to know who killed him."

Like most Iticoteri men, Iramamowe was a superb raconteur, animating his stories with precise onomatopoeia, [* onomatopoeia- using words that imitate the sound they denote] dramatic gestures, and pauses. Step by step, he took his listener through the hunt: how he first spotted the animal; how before releasing his arrow he blew on it the powdered roots of one of his magic plants to immobilize his victim, thus making sure his arrow would not fail to hit it's target; and how, once hit, the animal resisted dying.

With his eyes fixed on me, he emptied the contents of his quiver on the ground. In great detail he explained about all the arrowheads he had. "This is one of the palmwood points," he said, handing me a sharp piece of wood. "It's made from splinters. The ringlike grooves cut into the point are smeared with mamucori. They break inside the animal's body. It's the best point for hunting monkeys." He smiled, then added, "And for killing the enemy."

Next he held up a long, wide point, sharpened along it's edges and decorated with meandering lines. "This one is good for hunting jaguars and tapirs."

The excited barking of dogs, mingled with the shouts of people, interrupted Iramamowe's explanation. I followed him as he rushed toward the river. An anteater the size of a small bear had taken refuge from the barking dogs in the water. Etewa and Arasuwe had wounded the animal on the neck, stomach, and back. Raised on it's hind legs, it pawed the air desperately with it's powerful front claws.

"Want to finish it off with my arrow?" Iramamowe asked.

Unable to avert my gaze from the animal's long tongue, I shook my head. I was not sure whether he was serious or joking. The animal's tongue hung out of a narrow muzzle, dripping a sticky liquid in which dead ants swam. Iramamowe's arrow hit the anteater's tiny ear, and instantly the animal collapsed. The men tied ropes around the massive body, then hoisted it up the bank, where Arasuwe quartered the animal so the men could carry the heavy pieces to the shabono.

The men singed off the hair, then placed the various pieces on a wooden platform built over the fire. As soon as Hayama wrapped the innards in pishaansi leaves, she buried them in the embers.

"An anteater," the children cried out. Clapping their hands in delight, they danced around the fire.

"Wait until it's cooked properly," old Hayama warned the children, whenever one poked at the tightly wrapped bundles. "You will get sick if you eat meat that isn't well done. It has to cook until no more juice drips from the leaves."

The liver was done first. Hayama cut me a piece before the children got to it. It was tender, juicy, and unpleasantly sour, as if it had been marinated in rancid lemon juice.

Later Iramamowe brought me a piece of the roasted hind leg. "Why didn't you want to try my arrow?" he asked.

"I might have hit one of the dogs," I said evasively, biting into the tough meat. It too tasted sour. I looked up into Iramamowe's face, and wondered if he had been aware that I did not want to be even vaguely compared to Imaawami, the woman shaman who knew how to call the hekuras and hunted like a man.

On stormy afternoons the men took epena, and chanted to the hekura of the anaconda to twist herself around the trees so as to prevent the wind from breaking their trunks. During one particularly vicious storm, old Kamosiwe rubbed white ashes over his wrinkled body. In a hoarse, raspy voice he called out to the spider, his personal hekura, to spin her protective silvery threads around the plants in the gardens.

Suddenly his voice changed to a higher pitch, as shrill as the piercing shriek of a parakeet. "I was once an old child who climbed to the tallest treetop. I fell, and was transformed into a spider. Why do you disturb my peaceful sleep?"

Reverting again to his old man's voice, Ramosiwe rose from his squatting position. "Spider, I want to blow your sting on those hekuras who break and tear the plants in our gardens." With his epena cane, he blew all around the shabono, aiming the spider sting against the destructive spirits.

The following morning I accompanied Kamosiwe into the gardens. Smiling, he pointed to the small hairy spiders busily reweaving their webs. Minute drops of moisture clung to the tenuous silvery threads. In the sunshine they glistened like jade pearls, reflecting the greenness of leaves.

We walked through the steaming forest toward the river. Squatting next to each other we silently watched the broken lianas, trees, and masses of leaves speeding by in the muddy waters. Back in the shabono, Kamosiwe invited me into his hut to share with him his specialty-roasted ants dipped in honey.

A favorite pastime during these rainy nights was for a woman to ridicule her husband for a wrongdoing through a song. A quarrel ensued whenever the woman hinted that her man was better fit to carry a basket than a bow. These disputes always ended up as public arguments, in which others took an active part by expressing their own opinions. Sometimes hours after the quarrel had ended someone would shout across the clearing with a fresh insight into the particular problem, thus renewing the squabble.

## PART FIVE

## Chapter 19

Whenever the sun pierced through the clouds, I went with the women and men to work in the gardens. The weeds were much easier to pull from the soaked ground, but I had little energy. Like old Kamosiwe, I just stood amidst the high blades of the manioc plants, and soaked up the light and warmth of the sun. Counting the birds, which had not appeared for days, crossing the sky, I wished for the hot rainless days. After so many weeks of rain, I longed for the sun to stay long enough to lift the mist.

One morning I felt so dizzy I could not get out of my hammock. I lowered my head toward my knees, and waited for the spell to pass. I did not have the strength to lift my head and answer Ritimi's anxious words which were lost in the loud persistent noise around me. It must be the river, I thought: It was not too far away.

But then I realized the noise came from another direction. Desperately, as if my life depended on it, I tried to think where the sound actually came from: It came from within me.

For days I heard nothing but drumming in my head. I wanted to open my eyes. I could not. Through my closed lids I saw the stars burn brighter instead of fading in the sky. Panic seized me at the thought that it would be night forever, that I was descending deeper and deeper into a world of shadows and disconnected dreams.

Waving from misty riverbanks, Ritimi, Tutemi, Etewa, Arasuwe, Iramamowe, Hayama, old Kamosiwe drifted by me. Sometimes they jumped from cloud to cloud, sweeping the mist with leafy brooms. Whenever I called them, they melted into the fog. Sometimes I could see the light of the sun, shining red and yellow, between branches and leaves. I forced my eyes to stay open, and realized it had only been the fire dancing on the palm-thatched roof.

"White people need food when they are sick," I distinctly heard Milagros's shouts. I felt his lips on mine as he pushed masticated meat into my mouth.

Another time I recognized the shapori Puriwariwe's voice. "Clothes make people ill." I felt him pull my blanket away. "I need to cool her down. Get me white mud from the river." I felt his hands coil around my body, covering me with mud from the top of my head to the tip of my toes. His lips left a trail of coldness on my skin as he sucked the evil spirits out of me. My hours of wakefulness and sleep were filled with his voice.

Wherever I focused my eyes in the darkness, Puriwariwe's face appeared. I heard the song of his hekura. I felt the sharp hummingbird's beak cut open my chest. The beak turned into light. Not the light of the sun or the light of the moon, but the dazzling radiance of the old shapori's eyes. He urged me to look into his deep pupils. His eyes appeared lidless, extending toward his temples. They were filled with dancing birds.

The eyes of a madman, I thought.

I saw his hekuras suspended in dewdrops, dancing in the shiny eyes of a jaguar, and I drank the watery tears of the epena. A violent tickling in my throat tightened my stomach until I vomited water. It flowed out of the hut, out of the shabono, and down the path to the river, melting with the night of smoke and chanting.

Opening my eyes, I sat up in my hammock. I distinctly saw Puriwariwe running outside the hut. He stretched his arms to the night, his fingers spread wide as if summoning the energy of the stars. Turning around, he looked at me. "You are going to live," he said. "The evil spirits have left your body." Then he disappeared into the shadows of the night.

After weeks of violent storms, the rains abated to an even, almost predictable pattern. Dawns would arrive opaque and misty, but by midmorning white fluffy clouds would drift across the sky. Hours later the clouds would gather above the shabono. They would hang so low that they appeared to be suspended from the trees, ominously darkening the afternoon sky. A heavy downpour would follow, fading to a light drizzle that often continued far into the night.

I did not work much in the gardens during those rainless mornings but usually accompanied the children into the swamps that had formed around the river. There we would catch frogs and pry out crabs from underneath stones.

The children, on all fours, eyes and ears alert to the slightest motion and sound, pounced with uncanny agility. on the unsuspecting frogs. With eyes that looked almost transparent because of the diffused light, the little girls and boys worked with the precision of evil gnomes as they pulled the fiber loops around the frogs' necks until the last croak died down. Smiling, with the candor only children have when unaware of their cruelty, they would cut open the frogs' feet so that all the blood, which was believed to be poisonous, could flow out. After the frogs had been skinned, each child would wrap his catch in pishaansi leaves and cook them over the fire. With manioc gruel, they tasted delicious.

Mostly, I just sat on a rock in the tall bamboo grass and watched rows of shiny black and yellow scarabs climb with careful, almost imperceptible slowness up and down the light green stems. They looked like creatures of another world, protected by their brilliant armor of obsidian and gold. On windless mornings it was so quiet in the bamboo grass that I could hear the beetles sucking sap from the tender shoots.

Early one morning, Arasuwe sat at the head of my hammock. There was a cheerful glow on his face, extending from his high cheekbones to his lower lip, where a wad of tobacco protruded. The concentration of wrinkles around his eyes deepened as he grinned, adding a reassuring warmth to his expression. I fixed my gaze on his thick, ribbed nails as he cupped his brown hand to catch the last drops of honey from a calabash. He extended his hand toward me and I dipped my finger in his palm. "This is the best honey I've had for a long time," I said, licking my finger with relish.

"You can come with me downriver," Arasuwe said. He went on to explain that with two of his wives and his two youngest sons-in-law, one of which was Matuwe, he was going to an abandoned garden where months earlier they had felled several palm trees to harvest the tasty palm hearts. "Do you remember how much you liked the crisp, crunchy shoots?" he asked. "By now the decaying pith in the dead trunks must be filled with fat worms."

As I was pondering on how to express that I would not like the grubs as much as I had enjoyed the palm hearts, Ritimi came to sit beside me. "I will also go to the gardens," she said. "I have to watch over the white girl."

Arasuwe blew his nose, flicking the mucus away with his forefinger, then laughed. "My daughter, we are going by canoe. I thought you didn't like traveling on water."

"It's better than walking through a swampy forest," Ritimi said flippantly.

Ritimi came instead of Arasuwe's youngest wife. For a short distance we walked along the riverbank until we reached an embankment. Hidden underneath the thicket was a long canoe.

"It looks like one of the large troughs you use for making soup," I said, eyeing the bark contraption suspiciously.

Proudly, Arasuwe explained that both were made in exactly the same fashion. The bark of a large tree was loosened in one piece by pounding the trunk with clubs. Then the ends were heated over a fire to make them pliable enough to be folded back and pinched into a flat-nosed basin, and finally the ends were lashed together with vines. A crude framework of sticks Was added to give the boat it's stability.

The men pushed the canoe into the water. Giggling, Arasuwe's second wife, Ritimi, and I climbed inside. Afraid to upset the tublike craft, I did not dare move from my crouching position. Arasuwe maneuvered the canoe with a pole into the middle of the river.

With their backs turned to their mother-in-law, the two young men sat as far away from her as they could. I wondered why Arasuwe had brought them at all. It was considered incestuous for a man to be familiar with his wife's mother, especially if the woman was still sexually active. Men usually avoided their mothers-in-law altogether, to the extent that they did not even look at them. And under no circumstances did they say their names aloud.

The current seized us, carrying us swiftly down the gurgling, muddy river. There were stretches when the waters were calm, reflecting the trees on either side of the bank with exaggerated intensity. Gazing at the mirrored leaves, I had the feeling we were ripping through an intricately laced veil. The forest was silent. From time to time we caught sight of a bird gliding across the sky. Without flapping it's wings, it seemed to be flying asleep. The ride was over all too soon. Arasuwe beached the canoe in the sand amidst black basalt rocks.

"Now we have to walk," he said, looking at the dark forest ascending in front of us.

"What about the canoe?" I asked. "We should turn it upside down so the afternoon rain won't fill it with water."

Arasuwe scratched his head, then burst into laughter. He had mentioned on different occasions that I was far too opinionated- not necessarily because I was a woman, but because I was young. Old people, regardless of sex, were respected and held in esteem. Their advice was sought and followed. It was the young ones who were discouraged from voicing their judgments. "We will not use the boat to get back," Arasuwe said. "It's too hard to pole upriver."

"Who is going to take it back to the shahonof" I could not help asking, afraid we would have to carry it.

"No one," he assured me. "The boat is only good for going downstream." Grinning, Arasuwe turned the canoe upside down. "Maybe someone else will need it to go farther downriver."

It felt good to move my cramped legs. We walked silently through the wet, marshy forest. Matuwe was in front of me. He was thin and long legged. His quiver hung so low on his back that it bumped back and forth on his buttocks. I began to whistle a little tune. Matuwe turned around. His scowling face made me giggle. I had the overwhelming temptation to poke his buttocks with the quiver, but controlled my impulse. "Don't you like your mother-in-law?" I asked, unable to refrain myself from teasing him.

Grinning shyly, Matuwe blushed at my impudence for having spoken Arasuwe's wife's name aloud in front of him. "Don't you know that a man cannot look at, talk to, or be near his mother-in-law?"

His stricken tone made me feel guilty for having teased him. "I didn't know," I lied.

Upon arriving at the site, Ritimi assured me that it was the same abandoned garden she and Tutemi had taken me to after our first encounter in the forest. I did not recognize the place. It was so overgrown with weeds, I had a hard time finding the temporary shelters I knew to stand around the plantain trees.

Slashing the weeds with their machetes, the men looked for the fallen palm tree trunks. After uncovering them, they dug out the decaying pith, then broke it open with their bare hands. Ritimi and Arasuwe's wife shrieked ecstatically as they saw the wriggling grubs, some as big as Ping-Pong balls. Squatting beside the men, they helped bite off each larva's head, pulling it away together with the intestines. The white torsos were collected in pishaansi leaves. Whenever Ritimi damaged a grub, which she did quite often, she ate it raw on the spot, smacking her lips in approval.

Despite their mocking pleas that I help them prepare the grubs, I could not bring myself to touch the squirming blobs, let alone to bite off their heads. Borrowing Matuwe's machete, I cut down banana fronds with which to cover the roofs of the badly weathered shelters.

Arasuwe called me as soon as some of the larvae were roasting on the fire. "Eat it," he urged, pushing one of the bundles in front of me. "You need the fat- you haven't had enough lately. That's why you have diarrhea," he added in a tone that begged no argument.

I grinned sheepishly. With a resoluteness I did not feel, I opened the tightly bound package. The shrunken, whitish grubs were swimming in fat; they smelled like burnt bacon. Watching the others, I first licked the pishaansi leaf, then carefully popped a grub into my mouth. It tasted wonderfully similar to the burned gristly fat around a New York steak.

At dusk, soon after we had settled into one of the repaired huts, Arasuwe announced in a solemn tone that we had to return to the shabono.

"You want to travel at night?" Matuwe asked incredulously. "What about the roots we wanted to dig up in the morning?"

"We cannot stay here," Arasuwe reiterated. "I can feel it in my legs that something is about to happen at the shabono." Closing his eyes, he swung his head to and fro as if the slow, rhythmic movement could provide him with an answer as to what he should do. "We have to reach the shabono by dawn," he said determinedly.

Ritimi distributed among our baskets the nearly forty pounds of grubs the men had recovered from the decaying palm trunks, placing the smallest amount into mine. Arasuwe and his two sons-in-law took the half-burned logs from the fire, then we set out in single file. To keep the makeshift torches glowing, the men blew on them periodically, dispersing a shower of sparks amidst the damp shadows.

At times the almost full moon cut through the leaves, casting an eerie, bluish-green light on the path. The tall tree trunks stood like columns of smoke dissolving in the humid air, as if intent on eluding the embrace of vines and parasitic growths hanging across space. Only the trees' crowns were perfectly outlined against the moving clouds.

Arasuwe stopped often, cocking his ear to the slightest sound, his eyes darting back and forth in the darkness. He breathed deeply, dilating his nostrils, as if he could detect something besides the smell of wetness and decay. When he looked at us women, his eyes appeared anxious. I wondered if the memories of raids, ambushes, and God knows what other dangers rushed through his mind. But I did not dwell for too long on the headman's worried expression. I was too concerned in making sure the exposed roots of the giant ceibas were not bulging anacondas digesting a tapir or a peccary.

Arasuwe waded into a shallow river. He cupped his hand behind his ear as if trying to catch the faintest sound. Ritimi whispered that her father was listening to the echoes of the current, to the murmur of the spirits that knew of the dangers lying ahead. Arasuwe placed his hands on the surface of the water, and for a moment held the reflected image of the moon.

As we walked on, the moon faded into a misty, barely discernible image. I wondered if the lonely clouds traversing the sky were trying to keep abreast of us in their journey toward morning. Little by little, the calls of monkeys and birds faded, the night breeze ceased, and I knew dawn was not far away.

We arrived at the shabono at that time of still indeterminate grayness when it is no longer night and not yet morning. Many of the Iticoteri were still asleep. Those who were up greeted us, surprised to see us back so soon.

Relieved that Arasuwe's fears had been unfounded, I lay down in my hammock.

I was awakened abruptly when Xotomi sat beside me. "Eat this quickly," she urged, handing me a baked plantain. "Yesterday I saw the kind of fish you and I like best." Without waiting to hear whether or not I was too tired to go, she handed me my small bow and short arrows. The thought of eating fish instead of grubs quickly dispelled my fatigue.

"I want to come too," little Sisiwe said, following us. We headed upriver, where the waters formed wide pools. Not a leaf stirred, not a bird or frog could be heard.

Squatting on a rock, we watched the early rays of the sun filter through the mist-enshrouded canopy of leaves. As if strained through a gauzy veil, the faint rays lit the dark waters of the pool.

"I heard something," little Sisiwe whispered, holding on to my arm. "I heard a branch snap."

"I heard it too," Xotomi said softly.

I was sure it was not an animal but the unmistakable sound of a human who steps with caution, then stops at the noise he has made.

"There he is," Sisiwe shouted, pointing across the river. "It's the enemy," he added, then fled toward the shabono.

Grabbing my arm, Xotomi pulled me to the side. I turned around. All I saw were the dewy ferns on the opposite bank. At that same instant Xotomi let out a piercing scream. An arrow had hit her in the leg. I dragged her into the bushes by the side of the path, insisting we crawl farther into the thicket until we were hidden completely.

"We will wait here until the Iticoteri come to rescue us," I said, examining her leg.

Xotomi wiped the tears from her cheeks with the back of her hand. "If it's a raid, the men will stay in the shabono to defend the women and children."

"They will come," I said with a confidence I was far from feeling. "Little Sisiwe went for help."

The barbed point had pierced through her calf. I broke the arrow, pulled the head from the ghastly wound that was bleeding from both sides, then wrapped my torn underpants around her leg. Blood soaked through the thin cotton instantly. Worried that the arrow might have been poisoned, I carefully undid the makeshift bandage and examined the wound once again to see if the flesh around it was getting dark. Iramamowe had explained to me that a wound caused by a poisoned arrow invariably darkened. "I don't think the arrowhead was smeared with mamiicori," I said.

"Yes. I also noticed," she said, smiling faintly. Leaning her head to one side, she motioned me to be still.

"Do you think there is more than one man?" I whispered when I heard the sound of a twig snapping.

Xotomi looked at me, her eyes wide with fear. "There usually are."

"We can't wait here like frogs," I said, taking my bow and arrows. Quietly, I crawled toward the path. "Show your face, you coward, you monkey! You have shot at a woman!" I yelled in a voice that did not sound like my own. For good measure I added the words I knew an Iticoteri warrior would say: "I will kill you on the spot when I see you!"

No farther than twelve feet from where I stood a blackened face peeked from behind the leaves. His hair was wet. I had an irrational desire to laugh. I was sure he had not taken a bath, but had slipped crossing the river, for the water was only waist high.

I pointed my arrow at him. For an instant I was at a loss as to what to say next. "Drop your weapons on the path," I finally shouted. Then for good measure I added, "My arrows are poisoned with the best mamucori the Iticoteri make. Drop your weapons," I repeated. "I'm aiming at your stomach, right where death lies."

Wide-eyed, as if he were apprehending an apparition, the man stepped out on the trail. He was not much taller than I, but was powerfully built. His bow and arrows were clutched tightly in his hands.

"Drop your weapons on the ground," I repeated, stomping my right foot for emphasis.

With careful slowness, the man placed his bow and arrows on the path in front of him.

"Why did you shoot at my friend?" I asked as I saw Xotomi crawling out to the path.

"I did not want to shoot at her," he said, his eyes fixed on the torn, bloodied makeshift bandage wrapped around Xotomi's leg. "I wanted to shoot at you."

"At me!" I felt helpless in my anger. I opened and closed my mouth repeatedly, unable to utter a single word. When I finally regained my speech, I stammered insult upon insult in all the languages I knew, including Iticoteri, which had the most descriptive profanities of all.

Transfixed, the man stood in front of me, seemingly more surprised by my foul language than at the arrow I still held pointed at him. Neither one of us noticed Arasuwe and Etewa approach.

"A Mocototeri coward," Arasuwe said. "I ought to kill you on the spot."

"He wanted to kill me," I said in a cracking voice. I felt all my courage melt away, leaving me shaking. "He shot Xotomi in the leg."

"I didn't want to kill you," the Mocototeri said, eyeing me supplicantly. "I only wanted to hit your leg so as to prevent you from running away." He turned to Arasuwe. "You can be assured of my good intentions; my arrows are not poisoned." He looked at Xotomi. "I hit you accidentally when you dragged the white girl away," he mumbled, as if not fully accepting that he had missed.

"How many more of you are here?" Arasuwe asked, squatting beside his daughter. Not for a moment did he take his eyes from the Mocototeri as he ran his fingers over the wound. "It's not bad," he said, straightening up.

"There are two more." The Mocototeri imitated the call of a bird, and was immediately answered by similar cries. "We wanted to take the white girl with us. Our people want her to stay at our shabono."

"How do you think I could have walked if I was injured?" I asked.

"We would have carried you in a hammock," the man said promptly, smiling at me.

Shortly, two other Mocototeri emerged from the thicket. Grinning, they stared at me, not in the least embarrassed or afraid for having been caught.

"How long have you been here?" Arasuwe asked.

"We have been watching the white girl for several days," one of the men said. "We know she likes to catch frogs with the children." The man smiled broadly as he turned toward me. "There are many frogs around our shabono."

"Why have you waited so long?" Arasuwe asked.

In the frankest manner the man observed that there had always been too many women and children around me. He had hoped to capture me at dawn when I went to relieve myself, for he had heard that I preferred going far into the forest by myself. "But we didn't see her go, not even once."

Grinning, Arasuwe and Etewa looked at me, as if waiting for me to elaborate on the matter. I stared back at them. Since the rains had started, I had noticed a lot more snakes around the usual places set aside for bodily functions, but I was not going to discuss with them where I went instead.

With the same enthusiasm as if he were telling a story, the Mocototeri went on to explain that they had not come to kill any of the Iticoteri, or to abduct any of their women. "All we wanted was to take the white girl with us." The man laughed, then uttered, "Wouldn't it have surprised you and your people if suddenly the white girl had disappeared without leaving a trace?"

Arasuwe conceded that indeed it would have been quite a feat. "But we would have known it was the Mocototeri who had taken her. You were careless enough to leave footprints in the mud. I saw plenty of evidence as I was scouting around the shabono that Mocototeri had been here. Last night I had the certainty something was amiss- that's why I returned so promptly from our trip to the old gardens." Arasuwe paused for a moment, as if giving the three men time for his words to sink in, then declared, "Had you taken the white girl with you, we would have raided your settlement and taken her back, as well as some of your women."

The man who had shot Xotomi in the leg picked up his bow and arrows from the ground. "Today was a good time, I thought. There was only one woman and a child with the white girl." He looked helplessly at me. "But I hit the wrong person. There must be powerful hekuras in your settlement protecting the white girl." He shook his head, as if full of doubt, then fixed his gaze on Arasuwe. "Why does she use a man's weapon? We saw her one morning at the river with the women, shooting fish like a man. We did not know what to think of her. That is why I failed to hit her. I no longer knew what she was."

Arasuwe commanded the three men to walk toward the shabono.

I was overwhelmed with the absurdity of the whole situation. Only the thought that Xotomi had been hurt kept me from laughing, yet a convulsive smile kept rising to my lips. I tried to keep a sober expression but I could feel my mouth twitching. I carried Xotomi piggyback, but she laughed so hard her leg started to bleed again.

"It will be easier if I lean against you," she said. "My leg doesn't hurt too much."

"Are the Mocototeri prisoners?" I asked.

She looked at me uncomprehendingly for an instant, then finally said, "No. Only women are taken captive."

"What will happen to them at the shabonof"

"They will be fed."

"But they are enemies," I said. "They shot you in the leg. They ought to be punished."

Xotomi looked at me, then shook her head as if knowing that it was beyond her to make me understand. She asked me if I would have killed the Mocototeri if he had not dropped his weapons on the ground.

"I would have shot him," I said loud enough for the men to hear. "I would have killed him with my poisoned arrows."

Arasuwe and Etewa glanced back. The stern expression on their faces relaxed into a smile. They knew my arrows were not poisoned. "Yes, she would have shot you," Arasuwe told the Mocototeri. "The white girl is not like our women. Whites kill very fast."

I wondered if I actually would have shot my arrow at the Mocototeri. I certainly would have kicked him in the groin or stomach had he not dropped his bow and arrows. I was aware of the folly of trying to overpower a stronger opponent, but I saw no reason a small person could not startle an unsuspecting assailant with a quick punch or kick. That, I was sure, would have given me enough time to run away. A kick would certainly have shocked the unaware Mocototeri even more than my bow and arrows. That thought gave me much comfort.

Arriving at the shabono, we were met by the Iticoteri men staring at us down the shaft of their drawn arrows. The women and children were hiding inside the huts. Ritimi came running toward me. "I knew you would be fine," she said, helping me carry her half-sister into old Hayama's hut.

Ritimi's grandmother washed Xotorni's leg with warm water, then poured epena powder into the wound. "Don't get out of your hammock," she admonished the girl. "I will get some leaves to wrap around your calf."

Exhausted, I went to rest in my hammock. Hoping to fall asleep, I pulled the sides over me. But I was awakened shortly by Ritimi's laughter. Leaning over me, she covered my face with resounding kisses. "I heard how you scared the Mocototeri."

"Why did only Arasuwe and Etewa come to rescue us?" I asked. "There might have been many Mocototeri men."

"But my father and husband didn't come to rescue you," Ritimi informed me candidly. She made herself comfortable in my hammock, then explained that no one in the shabono had realized I had gone with Xotomi and little Sisiwe to catch fish. It was purely accidental that Arasuwe and Etewa had found Xotomi and myself.

Arasuwe, following his premonitions, had gone to scout the shabono's surroundings upon returning from our night-long trek. Although he suspected that something was amiss, he had not actually known there were Mocototeri outside.

Her father, Ritimi declared, was only performing his headman's duty and checking to see if there was evidence of intruders. It was a task a headman had to perform by himself, for usually no one was willing to accompany him on such a dangerous mission. No one was expected to.

Only lately had I come to realize that although Arasuwe had been introduced to me by Milagros as the headman of the Iticoteri, it was an uncertain title. The powers of a headman were limited. He wore no special insignia to distinguish him from the other men, and all adult males were involved in important decisions. Even if a judgment had been reached, each man was still free to do what he pleased.

Arasuwe's importance stemmed from his kinship following. His brothers, numerous sons, and sons-in-law gave him power and support. As long as his decisions satisfied the people of his shabono, there was little dispute as to his authority.

"How come Etewa was with him?"

"That was totally unforeseen," Ritimi said, laughing. "He was probably returning from a clandestine rendezvous with one of the women of the shabono when he stumbled upon his father-in-law."

"You mean no one would have come to rescue us?" I asked incredulously.

"Once the men know that the enemy is around, they will not purposely go outside. It's too easy to be ambushed."

"But we could have been killed!"

"Women are hardly ever killed," Ritimi stated with utter conviction. "They would have captured you. But our men would have raided the Mocototeri settlement and brought you back," she argued with astounding simplicity, as if it were the most natural course of events.

"But they shot Xotomi's leg." I felt like crying. "They intended to maim me."

"That's only because they didn't know how to capture you," Ritimi said, putting her arms around my neck. "They know how to deal with Indian women. We are easy to abduct. The Mocototeri must have been at their wits' end with you. You should be happy. You are as brave as a warrior. Iramamowe is certain you have special hekuras protecting you, so powerful they even deviated the arrow intended for you into Xotomi's leg."

"What will happen to the Mocototeri?" I asked, looking into Arasuwe's hut. The three men were sitting in hammocks, eating baked plantains as if they were guests. "It is strange how you treat the enemy."

"Strange?" Ritimi looked at me, puzzled. "We treat them right. Didn't they reveal their plan? Arasuwe is glad they didn't succeed." Ritimi mentioned that the three men would probably stay with the Iticoteri for some time- especially if they suspected that there was a good chance their settlement was to be raided by the Iticoteri. The two shabonos had been raiding back and forth for many years- as far back as her grandfather's and great-grandfather's time, and even before.

Ritimi pulled my head toward her and whispered in my ear, "Etewa has been wishing to take revenge on the Mocototeri for a long time."

"Etewa! But he was so happy to go to their feast," I said, bewildered. "I thought he liked them. I know Arasuwe believes they are a treacherous lot- even Iramamowe. But Etewa! I was sure he was delighted to dance and sing at their party."

"I told you once that one doesn't go to a feast only to dance and sing but to find out what other people's plans are," Ritimi whispered. She looked at me anxiously. "Etewa wants his enemy to think that he has no intention of avenging his father."

"Was his father killed by the Mocototeri?"

Ritimi put her hand to my lips. "Let us not talk about it. It's bad luck to mention a person who has been killed in a raid."

"Is there going to be a raid?" I managed to ask before Ritimi pushed a piece of baked plantain in my mouth.

She only smiled at me but did not answer. The thought of a raid made me feel extremely uncomfortable. I had a hard time swallowing the plantain. Somehow I had associated raids with the past. The few times I had asked Milagros about them, he had been vague with his answers. Only now did I wonder if there had been regret in Milagros's voice when he stated that the missionaries had been quite successful in their attempt to put an end to intervillage feuding.

"Is there going to be a raid?" I asked Etewa as he entered the hut.

He looked at me, his face set in a scowl. "That's not a question for a woman to ask."

## Chapter 20

It was dusk when Puriwariwe walked into the shabono. I had not seen him since my illness, since the night he had stood in the middle of the clearing, arms outstretched as if pleading with the darkness.

From Milagros I had learned that for six consecutive days and nights the old shapori had taken epena. The old man had been on the verge of collapsing under the weight of the spirits he had called into his chest. Yet perseveringly he had beseeched the hekuras to cure me from the onslaught of a tropical fever.

Ritimi had also emphasized that it had been a particularly hard struggle to cure me in that the hekuras resent being called in the rainy season. "It was the hekura of the hummingbird that saved you," she had explained. "In spite of it's small size, the hummingbird is a powerful spirit. It's used by an accomplished shapori as a last resort."

I had not been comforted in the least when Ritimi had wrapped her arms around my neck, assuring me that if I had died my soul would not have wandered aimlessly in the forest but would have ascended peacefully to the house of thunder, for my body would have been burned and my pulverized bones would have been eaten by her and her relatives.

I joined Puriwariwe in the clearing. "I'm well now," I said, squatting beside him.

He looked at me with veiled, almost dreamy eyes, then ran his hand over my head. It was a small dark hand that moved rapidly, yet felt heavy and slow. A vague tenderness softened his features, but he did not say a word. I wondered if he knew that I had felt the beak of a hummingbird cutting into my chest during my illness. I had told no one.

A group of men, their faces and bodies painted black, gathered around Puriwariwe. They blew epena into each other's noses, and listened to his chant, pleading with the hekuras to come out of their hiding places in the mountains. The men's black figures were more like shadows, barely illuminated by the fires of the huts. Softly, they repeated the shaman's songs. I felt a chill run up my spine as the quickened pace of their unintelligible words became more menacing and forceful.

Upon returning to the hut I asked Ritimi what the men were celebrating.

"They are sending hekuras to the Mocototeri settlement to kill the enemy."

"Will the enemy really die?"

Drawing up her knees, she looked pensively beyond the palm fringe of the hut into the pitch-dark sky, bereft of moon and stars. "They will die," she said softly.

Convinced there was not going to be a real raid, I dozed off and on in my hammock, listening to the chanting outside. More than hearing the men, I visualized the fragments of sound, endlessly rising and falling, as being carried away by the smoke from the hearths.

Hours later I got up and sat outside the hut. Most of the men had retired to their hammocks.

Only ten remained in the clearing, Etewa among them. With closed eyes, they repeated Puriwariwe's song. His words came to me clearly through the humid air:

*Follow me, follow my vision.*
*Follow me over the treetops.*
*Look at the birds and butterflies; such colors you will never see on the ground.*
*I'm rising into heaven, toward the sun.*

The shapori's song was interrupted abruptly by one of the men. "I've been struck by the sun-my eyes are burning," he shouted as he stood up. He looked helplessly around in the darkness. His legs gave way under him and, he collapsed with a thud on the ground. No one took any notice.

Puriwariwe's voice became more insistent, as if he were trying to raise the men collectively toward his vision. He repeated his song again and again to those still squatting around him. Urging the men not to get sidetracked in the dew of their visions, he warned them of spearlike bamboo leaves and poisonous snakes lurching from behind trees and roots on the path to the sun.

Above all, he urged the men not to pass into human sleep, but to step from the darkness of the night to the white darkness of the sun. He promised them that their bodies would be soaked with the glow of the hekuras, that their eyes would shine with the sun's precious light.

I remained outside the hut until the dawn erased the shadows on the ground. Expecting to find some visible evidence of their journey to the sun, I walked from man to man, peering intently into each face.

Puriwariwe watched me curiously, a mocking grin on his haggard face. "You'll find no outward indication of their flight," he said as if he had read my thoughts. "Their eyes are dull and red from the night's vigil," he added, pointing to the men who were staring indifferently into the distance, totally unconcerned with my presence. "That precious light you expect to see reflected in their pupils, only shines inside them. Only they can see it."

Before I had a chance to ask him about his journey to the sun, he had walked out of the *shabono* into the forest.

In the days that followed, a gloomy oppressive mood enveloped the settlement. At first it was only a vague feeling, but I finally became obsessed with the certainty I was being purposely kept in the dark about some impending event. I became morose, distant, and irritable. I struggled against my sensation of isolation. I tried to hide my ill-focused apprehension, yet I felt as if I were being attacked by unidentifiable forces. Whenever I asked Ritimi or any of the other women if there was some approaching change, they would not even acknowledge my question. Instead they would comment on some silly incident, hoping to make me laugh.

"Are we going to be raided?" I finally asked Arasuwe one day.

He turned his perplexed face toward me as if he were trying to untangle my words.

I felt confused, nervous, and close to tears. I told him that I was not stupid, that I had noticed how the men were constantly on the alert and how the women were afraid to go by themselves into the gardens or to fish in the river. "Why can't someone tell me what is going on?" I yelled.

"There is nothing going on," Arasuwe said calmly. Folding his arms behind his neck, he stretched comfortably in his hammock. He began to talk about something unrelated to my question, chuckling frequently at his own tale.

But I was not to be soothed. I did not laugh with him. I did not even pay attention to his words. He seemed totally bewildered as I stomped back to my hut.

I was miserable for days, feeling alternately resentful and sorry for myself. I did not sleep well. I kept repeating to myself that I, who had so totally embraced this new life, was suddenly treated like a stranger. I felt angry and betrayed.

I could not accept that Arasuwe had not taken me into his confidence. Not even Ritimi had been willing to put me at ease. If only Milagros were here, I wished fervently. Surely he would dispel my anxiety. He would tell me everything.

One night, when I could not quite lose myself in sleep, but hovered in a half-waking state, I was suddenly hit by an insight. It did not come in words, but translated itself as a whole process of thoughts and memories that flashed like pictures before me, and put everything into a proper perspective.

I felt elated. I began to laugh with relief that turned into sheer joy. I could hear my laughter echo through the huts. Sitting up in my hammock, I noticed that most of the Iticoteri were laughing with me.

Arasuwe squatted by my hammock. "Have the spirits of the forest made you mad?" he inquired, holding my head between his hands.

"Quite mad," I said, still laughing. I looked into his eyes; they shone in the darkness. I gazed at Ritimi, Tutemi, and Etewa standing next to Arasuwe, their curious, sleepy faces aglow with laughter. Words blurted out of me in an unending procession, piling onto one another with astonishing velocity. I was speaking in Spanish, not because I wanted to conceal anything, but because my explanation would not have made sense in their language. Arasuwe and the others listened as if they understood, as if they sensed my need to unburden myself of the turmoil within me.

I had realized that I was, after all, an outsider, and my demand to be informed of events not even the Iticoteri talked about among themselves was due to my feelings of self-importance. What had turned me into an intolerable individual was the thought of being left out- excluded from something I believed I had a right to know.

I had not questioned why I believed I had the right to know. It had made me miserable, blinding me to all the joyful moments I had so much cherished before. The gloom and oppressiveness I had felt was not outside, but within me; communicating itself to the shabono and it's people.

I felt Arasuwe's calloused hand on my shaven tonsure. I did not feel ashamed of my feelings, but was glad to realize that it was up to me to restore the sense of magic and wonder at being in a different world.

"Blow epena in my nose," Arasuwe said to Etewa. "I want to make sure the evil spirits stay away from the white girl."

I heard murmuring, a rustling of voices, a soft laughter, then Arasuwe's monotonous chant. I fell into a peaceful sleep, the best I had had for days. Little Texoma, who had not come into my hammock for days, awoke me at dawn. "I heard you laugh last night," she said, snuggling against me. "You had not laughed for so many days, I was afraid you would not laugh ever again."

I gazed into her bright eyes as it I might find in them the answer that would enable me in the future to laugh away all the anxiety and turmoils of my spirit.

An unusual stillness enshrouded the shabono as the shades of night closed in around us. The lulling touch of Tutemi's fingers as she searched my head for lice almost put me to sleep. The women's noisy chatter subsided to whispers as they went about preparing the evening meals and nursing their babies.

As if obeying an unspoken command, the children forsook their vociferous evening games, and gathered in Arasuwe's hut to listen to old Kamosiwe's tales. He seemed to be totally engrossed in his own words, gesturing dramatically with his hands as he talked. Yet his own eye was fixed intently on the long tubes of sweet potatoes sticking out from the embers. I watched in awe as the old man picked the roots out of the fire with his bare hand. Not waiting for the potatoes to cool, he crammed them into his mouth.

From where I sat I could see the waning moon appear over the treetops, obscured by the traveling clouds that shone white against the dark sky. The night stillness was pierced by an eerie sound- something between a scream and a growl. The next instant Etewa, his face and body painted black, materialized out of the shadows. He stood in front of the fires that had been lit in the clearing and clacked his bow and arrows high above his head. I did not see from which hut the others appeared, but eleven more men, their faces and bodies equally blackened, joined Etewa in the clearing.

Arasuwe pushed and pulled each of them until they all stood in a perfectly straight line, then, after positioning the last man in place, he joined them. The headman began to sing in a deep, nasal tone. The others repeated the last line of his song in a chorus. I could distinguish each separate voice in the murmured harmony, though I understood none of the words.

The longer they sang, the angrier the men seemed to become. At the end of each song, they let out the most ferocious screams I had ever heard. Oddly, I had the feeling that the louder they yelled, the more remote was their rage, as if it was no longer part of their black-painted bodies.

Abruptly they became silent. The faint light of the fires accentuated the wrathful expression on their rigid, mask-like faces; and the feverish glow in their eyes. I could not see if Arasuwe gave the command, but in unison they shouted, "How I will enjoy watching my arrow hit the enemy. How I will enjoy seeing his blood splash all over the ground."

Holding their weapons above their heads, the warriors broke the line, and gathered into a tight circle. They began to shout, first softly, then in such piercing voices that I felt a chill run down my spine.

They were silent once more, and Ritimi whispered in my ear that the men were listening to the echo of their screams so they could determine from which direction it came. The echoes, she explained, carried the spirits of the enemy.

Groaning, clacking their weapons, the men began to prance about the clearing. Arasuwe calmed them down. Two more times they gathered into a tight circle and shouted with all their might. Instead of walking into the forest, as I had expected and feared, the men moved toward the huts standing close to the entrance of the shabono. They lay down in the hammocks, and forced themselves to vomit.

"While they chanted, they devoured their enemies," she said. "Now they have to get rid of the rotten flesh."

I sighed with relief, yet I felt oddly disappointed that the raid had been acted out symbolically.

Shortly before dawn, I was awakened by the wailing of women. I rubbed my eyes to make sure I was not dreaming. As if no time had elapsed, the men stood outside in exactly the same straight formation they had assumed earlier in the night. Their cries had lost their fierceness, as if the wails of the women had dampened their wrath. They flung the plantain bundles, which had been stacked at the shabono's entrance, over their shoulders, then marched dramatically down the path leading to the river.

Old Kamosiwe and I followed the men at a distance. I thought it was raining, but it was only dew dripping from leaf to leaf. For a moment the men stood still, their shadows perfectly outlined against the light sand of the riverbank. The half-moon had traveled across the sky, shimmering faintly through the misty air.

As if the sand had sucked in their shadows, the men vanished before my eyes. All I heard was the sound of rustling leaves, of snapping branches receding into the forest. The mist closed in on us like an impenetrable wall, as though nothing had happened, as if all I had seen was only a dream.

Old Kamosiwe, sitting beside me on a rock, touched my arm lightly. "I no longer hear the echoes of their steps," he said, then slowly walked into the water. I followed him. I shivered with coldness. I felt the little fish that hide beneath the submerged roots brush against my legs, but I could not see them in the dark waters.

Old Kamosiwe giggled as I rubbed him dry with leaves. "Look at the sikomasik," he said rapturously, pointing to the white mushrooms growing on a rotten tree trunk.

I picked them up for him, wrapping them in leaves. When roasted over the fire, they were considered a delicacy, particularly by the old people.

Kamosiwe held the end of his broken bow toward me;

I pulled him up the slippery path leading to the shabono. The mist did not rise the whole day, as if the sun were afraid to witness the men's journey through the forest.

## Chapter 21

Little Texoma sat next to me on the log in the bamboo grass. "Aren't you going to catch any frogs?" I asked her.

She looked at me woefully. Her eyes, usually so bright, were dull. Slowly they filled with tears.

"What makes you sad?" I asked, cradling her in my arms. Children were never left to cry for fear that their soul might escape through their mouths. Lifting her on my back, I headed toward the shabono. "You are as heavy as a basket full of ripe plantains," I said in an effort to make her laugh.

But the little girl did not even smile. Her face remained pressed against my neck; her tears rolled unchecked down my breasts. Carefully, I laid her down in her hammock. She clung to me tenaciously, forcing me to lie beside her. Soon she was asleep. It was not a peaceful sleep. From time to time her little body trembled as if she were in the throes of some dreadful nightmare.

With Tutemi's baby strapped to her back, Ritimi entered the hut. She began to cry as she looked at the sleeping child next to me. "I'm sure one of the evil Mocototeri shapori has lured her soul away." Ritimi wept with such heartbreaking sobs, I left Texoma's hammock and sat next to her.

I did not know quite what to say. I was sure Ritimi was not only crying for her little daughter, but also for Etewa, who had been gone with the raiding party for almost a week. Since her husband's departure, she had not been her usual self. She had not worked in the gardens; neither had she accompanied any of the women to gather berries or wood in the forest.

Listless and dejected, she moped around the shabono. Most of the time she lay in her hammock, playing with Tutemi's baby. No matter what I did or said to cheer her up, I was unable to erase the forlorn expression on her face. The rueful little smile with which Ritimi responded to my efforts only made her look all the more despondent.

I put my arms around her neck and planted loud kisses on her cheek, reassuring her all the time that Texoma had nothing but a cold. Ritimi was not to be consoled. Weeping did not bring her any release or tire her out, but only intensified her distress.

"Maybe something has happened to Etewa," Ritimi said. "Maybe a Mocototeri has killed him."

"Nothing has happened to Etewa," I stated. "I can feel it in my legs."

Ritimi smiled slightly, as if doubting my words."But why is my little daughter sick?" she insisted.

"Texoma is sick because she got chilled playing in the swamps with the frogs," I stated matter-of-factly. "Children get sick very fast, and recuperate just as speedily."

"Are you sure that's the way it is?"

"Absolutely sure," I said.

Ritimi looked at me doubtfully, then said, "But none of the other children are sick. I know Texoma has been bewitched."

Not knowing how to answer, I suggested that it would be best to call Ritimi's uncle. Moments later I returned with Iramamowe. During his brother Arasuwe's absence, Iramamowe assumed the duties of a headman. His bravery made him the most qualified man to defend the shabono from potential raiders. His reputation as a shaman insured the settlement of protection against evil hekuras sent by enemy sorcerers.

Iramamowe looked at the child, then asked me to fetch his epena cane and the container with the hallucinogenic powder. He had a young man blow the snuff into his nose, then chanted to the hekuras, pacing up and down in front of the hut. From time to time he jumped high in the air, yelling at the evil spirits- which he believed had lodged in the child's body- to leave Texoma alone.

Gently Iramamowe massaged the child, starting with her head, down her chest, her stomach, all the way to her feet. He flicked his hands repeatedly, shaking off the evil hekuras he had drawn out of Texoma. Several other men took epena and chanted with Iramamowe throughout the night. He alternately massaged and sucked the disease from her little body.

However, the child was not any better the following day. Motionless, she lay in her hammock. Her eyes were red and swollen. She refused all food, including the water and honey I offered her.

Iramamowe diagnosed that her soul had wandered from her body and proceeded to build a platform with poles and lianas in the middle of the clearing. He fastened assai palm leaves in his hair: He drew circles around his eyes and mouth with a mixture of onoto and coals. Prancing around the platform, he imitated the cries of the harpy eagle. With a branch from one of the bushes growing around the shabono he swept the ground thoroughly in an effort to locate the wandering soul of the child.

Unable to find the soul, he gathered several of Texoma's playmates around him. He decorated their hair and faces the same as his, then lifted them onto the platform. "Examine the ground from above," he told the children. "Find your sister's soul."

Imitating the cries of the harpy eagle, the children jumped up and down on the precariously built structure. They swept the air with the branches the women had handed them; but they too were unable to catch the lost soul.

Taking the branch Ritimi gave me, I joined the others in the quest. We swept the paths leading to the river, to the gardens, and to the swamps, where Texoma had been catching frogs. Iramamowe exchanged his branch for mine. "You carried her to the shabono," he said. "Maybe you can find her soul."

Without any thoughts as to the futility of the task, I swept the ground with the same eagerness as the others. "How does one know the soul is nearby?" I asked Iramamowe as we retraced our steps back to the shabono.

"One just knows," he said.

We searched in every hut, sweeping under hammocks, around each hearth, and behind stacks of plantains. We lifted baskets from the ground. We moved bows and arrows leaning against the sloping roof. We scared spiders and scorpions out of their nests in the thatched roof. I gave up the hunt when I saw a snake slithering from behind one of the rafters.

Laughing, old Hayama cut the reptile's head off with one swift blow of Iramamowe's machete. She wrapped the still wriggling, headless snake in pishaansi leaves, then placed it on the fire. Hayama also collected the spiders falling on the ground. These too were wrapped in leaves and roasted. Old people were particularly fond of the soft bellies. The legs Hayama saved, to be ground later. The powder was believed to heal cuts, bites, and scratches.

By dusk little Texoma showed no signs of improvement. Motionless, she lay in her hammock, her eyes staring vacantly at the thatched roof. I was filled with an indescribable sense of helplessness as Iramamowe once again bent over the child to massage and suck out the evil spirits.

"Let me try to cure the child," I said.

Iramamowe smiled almost imperceptibly, focusing his gaze alternately on me and Texoma. "What makes you think you can cure my grand-niece?" he asked with deliberate thoughtfulness. There was no mockery in his tone- only a vague curiosity. "We have not found her soul. A powerful enemy shapori has lured it away. Do you think you can counteract an evil sorcerer's curse?"

"No," I hastily assured him. "Only you can do that."

"What will you do then?" he asked. "You said once that you never cured anyone. What makes you think you can now?"

"I will help Texoma with hot water," I said. "And you will cure her with your chants to the hekuras."

Iramamowe deliberated for a moment: Gradually his thoughtful expression relaxed. He held his hand over his mouth as if he were hiding an urge to giggle. "Did you learn much from the shapori you knew?"

"I remember some of the ways they cured," I answered, but did not mention that the cure I intended for Texoma was my grandmother's way of dealing with a fever that had not broken. "You said you have seen hekuras in my eyes. If you chant to them, maybe they will help me."

An easy smile came and lingered around Iramamowe's lips. He seemed almost convinced by my reasoning. Yet he shook his head as if full of doubt. "Curing is not done this way. How can I ask the hekuras to help you? Will you also want to take epena?"

"I won't need to take the snuff," I assured him, then remarked that if a powerful shapori could command his hekuras to steal the soul of a child, then an accomplished sorcerer like himself could certainly command his spirits, which according to him were already acquainted with me, to come to my aid.

"I will call the hekuras to assist you," Iramamowe declared. "I will take epena for you."

While one of the men blew the hallucinogenic substance into Iramamowe's nostrils, Ritimi, Tutemi, and Arasuwe's wives brought me calabashes filled with hot water that old Hayama had heated in the large aluminum pots. I soaked my cut-up blanket in the hot water and, using the legs of my jeans as gloves, I wrung each thin strip of cloth until not a drop of moisture was to be squeezed out. Carefully, I wrapped them around Texoma's body, then covered her with the heated palm fronds some of the older boys had cut for me.

I could hardly move among the crowd gathered in the hut. Silently they watched my every motion, intent and alert, so as not to miss anything. Iramamowe squatted beside me, chanting tirelessly into the night. As the hours passed, the people retired to their hammocks. I was not put off by their show of disapproval, but kept changing the compresses as soon as they cooled off. Ritimi sat silently in her hammock, her interlaced fingers resting limply on her lap in an attitude of supreme hopelessness. Whenever she glanced at me she broke into tears.

Texoma seemed oblivious to my ministrations. What if she had something other than a cold? I thought. What if she got worse? My assurance faltered. I mumbled a prayer for her with a fervor I had not had since I was a child. Looking up, I noticed Iramamowe gazing at me. He seemed anxious, as if aware of the mixture of feelings- magic, religion, and fear- fighting inside me. Determinedly, he went on chanting.

Old Kamosiwe came and joined us. He squatted close to the hearth. The cold of dawn had not yet crept into the hut, but the mere fact that there was a fire made him huddle over it instinctively. Softly, he began to chant. His murmured song filled me with comfort: It seemed to carry the voices of past generations. The rain prattled on the thatched roof with a determined vigor, then relaxed into a light drizzle that plunged me into a kind of stupor.

It was almost dawn when Texoma began tossing in her hammock. Impatiently she tore at the wet pieces of blanket, at the palm fronds wrapped around her. With eyes opened wide in surprise, she sat up, then smiled at old Kamosiwe, Iramamowe, and myself crouching beside her hammock. "I'm thirsty," she said, then gulped down the water and honey I gave her.

"Will she be well?" Ritimi asked hesitantly.

"Iramamowe lured her soul back," I said. "The hot water has broken her fever. Now she needs to be kept warm and sleep peacefully."

I walked into the clearing, and stretched my cramped legs. Old Kamosiwe, leaning against a pole, looked like a child with his forearms tightly wrapped around his chest to keep warm. Iramamowe stopped beside me on the way to his hut. We did not talk, but I was certain we shared a moment of absolute understanding.

## Chapter 22

At the sound of approaching steps, Tutemi motioned me to lower myself beside the moldy leaves of the squash vines. "It's the raiding party," she whispered. "Women are not supposed to see from which direction the warriors return."

Unable to curb my curiosity, I slowly stood up. There were three women with the men: one of them was pregnant.

"Don't look," Tutemi pleaded, pulling me down. "If you see the path on which the raiders return, the enemy will capture you."

"How beautiful the men look with the bright feathers streaming from their armbands, and the onoto designs on their bodies," I said. "But Etewa is missing! Do you think he has been killed?" I asked in dismay.

Tutemi looked at me, a dazed expression on her face. There was no nervousness in her movements as she separated the large squash leaves to peek at the retreating figures. Her anxious face beamed with a smile as she grabbed my arm. "Look, there is Etewa." She pulled my head close to hers so I could see where she was pointing. "He is unucai."

Trailing a distance behind the others, Etewa walked slowly, with his shoulders hunched forward as if he were burdened by a heavy weight on his back. He was not adorned with feathers or paint. Only short little sticks of arrow cane were stuck through his pierced earlobes and one arrow cane stick was tied to each wrist like a bracelet.

"Is he ill?"

"No! He is unucai," she said admiringly. "He has killed a Mocototeri."

Unable to share Tutemi's excitement, I could only stare at her in dumb incredulity. I felt my eyes fill with tears, and turned my gaze away from her. We waited until Etewa was out of sight, then slowly headed toward the shabono.

Tutemi quickened her pace upon hearing the welcoming shouts from the men and women in the huts. Surrounded by the exultant Iticoteri, the raiders stood proudly in the clearing. Turning away from her husband, Arasuwe's youngest wife approached the three captive women, who had not been included in the jubilant greetings. Silently they stood apart, their apprehensive gazes fixed on the approaching Iticoteri woman.

"Painted with onoto- how disgusting," Arasuwe's wife yelled. "What else can one expect from a Mocototeri woman? Do you think you have been invited to a feast?" Glaring at the three women, she picked up a stick. "I will beat you all. If I had been captured, I would have run away," she shouted.

The three Mocototeri huddled closer to each other.

"At least I would have arrived crying pitifully," Arasuwe's wife hissed, pulling the hair of one of the women.

Arasuwe stepped in between his wife and the Mocototeri. "Leave them alone. They have cried so much they have soaked the path with their tears. We made them stop. We didn't want to listen to their wails." Arasuwe took the stick away from his wife. "We demanded they paint their faces and bodies with onoto. These women will be happy here. They will be treated well!" He turned to the rest of the Iticoteri women who had gathered around his wife. "Give them something to eat. They are hungry like us. We haven't eaten for two days."

Arasuwe's wife was not intimidated. "Were your men killed?" she asked the three women. "Did you burn them? Have you eaten their ashes?" She faced the pregnant woman. "Was your husband also killed? Do you expect an Iticoteri man to become a father to your child?"

Pushing his wife roughly away, Arasuwe announced, "Only one man was killed. He was shot by Etewa's arrow. He was the man who killed Etewa's father the last time the Mocototeri raided us so treacherously." Arasuwe turned to the pregnant woman. There was no sympathy in his eyes or in his voice as he continued, "You were captured by the Mocototeri some time ago. You have no brothers among them who will rescue you. You are now an Iticoteri. Do not cry any longer." Arasuwe went on to explain to the three captives that they would be better off with his people. The Iticoteri, he stressed, had enjoyed meat almost every day as well as plenty of roots and plantains throughout the rainy season. No one had gone hungry.

One of the captives was only a young girl, perhaps ten or eleven years old. "What will happen to her?" I asked Tutemi.

"Like the others, she will be taken as a wife," Tutemi said. "I was probably her age when I was abducted by the Iticoteri." A wistful little smile curved her lips. "I was lucky Ritimi's mother-in-law chose me as a second wife for Etewa. He has never beaten me. Ritimi treats me like a sister. She does not quarrel with me, nor does she make me work too..." Tutemi broke in midsentence as Arasuwe's youngest wife resumed her shouting at the Mocototeri women.

"How disgusting to come all painted. All you need is to stick flowers in your ears and start to dance." She followed the three women into her husband's hut. "Did the men rape you in the forest? Is that why you stayed away so long? You must have enjoyed it." Pushing the pregnant woman, she added, "Did they also sleep with you?"

"Shut up!" Arasuwe yelled, "or I'll beat you till I draw blood." Arasuwe turned to the women who had followed behind. "You should rejoice that your men have returned unharmed. You should be content that Etewa has killed a man, that we have brought three captives. Go to your huts and prepare food for your men."

Grumbling, the women dispersed to their respective hearths.

"Why is only Arasuwe's wife so upset?" I asked Tutemi.

"Don't you know?" she asked, smiling maliciously. "She is afraid he will take one of the women as his fourth wife."

"Why does he want so many?"

"He is powerful," Tutemi stated categorically. "He has many sons-in-law who bring plenty of game and help him work in the gardens. Arasuwe can feed many women."

"Were the captives raped?" I asked.

"One was." Tutemi was momentarily puzzled by my shocked expression, then went on to explain that a captured woman was usually raped by all the men in the raiding party. "It's the custom."

"Did they also rape the young girl?"

"No," Tutemi said casually. "She is not yet a woman. Neither did they rape the pregnant one- they are never touched."

Ritimi had remained in her hammock throughout the whole commotion. She told me she had no reason to get worked up about the Mocototeri women, for she knew Etewa would not take a third wife. I was happy to notice that her sadness and dejection, which had been so much a part of her during the last few days, had vanished.

"Where is Etewa?" I asked. "Is he not coming to the shabono"

Ritimi's eyes appeared almost feverish with excitement as she explained that her husband, since he had killed an enemy, was searching for a tree not too far from the settlement on which he could hang his old hammock and quiver. However, before he could do so, he had to strip the tree's trunk and branches of it's bark.

Ritimi's eyes expressed a deep concern as she faced me. She warned me against gazing at such a tree. She was certain I would not confuse it with the kind that is stripped of it's bark to make troughs and canoes. Those trees, she explained, still looked like trees. Whereas the ones stripped by a man who has killed looked like a ghostly shadow, all white among the greenness around them, with hammock and quiver, bow, and arrows dangling from the peeled branches. Spirits- evil ones in particular- liked hiding in the vicinity of such places. I had to promise Ritimi that if I ever found myself in the neighborhood of such a tree, I would run from the spot as fast as possible.

In a voice so low I thought she was talking to herself, Ritimi confided her fears to me. She hoped Etewa would not collapse under the weight of the man he had killed. The hekuras of a slain man lodge themselves in the killer's chest, where they remain until the dead man's relatives have burned the body and eaten the pulverized bones. The Mocototeri would postpone for as long as possible the burning of the body in the hope that Etewa would die from weakness.

"Will the men talk about the raid?" I asked.

"As soon as they have eaten," Ritimi said.

With his bow and arrows in hand, Etewa walked across the clearing toward the hut where Iramamowe's son had been initiated as a shaman. The men who had been with Etewa on the raid covered the sides of the hut with palm fronds. Only a small entrance was left open at the front. They brought him a water-filled calabash and built a fire inside.

Etewa was to remain in the hut until Puriwariwe would announce that the dead Mocototeri had been burned. Day and night Etewa had to be on the alert in case the dead man's spirit came prowling about the hut in the form of a jaguar. Were Etewa to talk, touch a woman, or eat during those days, he would die.

Old Hayama, accompanied by her daughter-in-law, came into our hut. "I want to find out what's going on at Arasuwe's place," the old woman said, sitting beside me. Xotomi sat on the ground, reclining her head against my legs, dangling from my hammock. A purple scar- a reminder of the arrow wound- marred the smooth line of her calf. That did not worry Xotomi: She was grateful the wound had not become infected.

"Matuwe caught one of the women," Hayama said proudly. "It's a good time for him to get another wife. I'd better select the right one for him. I'm sure he will make a mistake if it's left up to him to make the choice."

"But he has a wife," I stammered, looking at Xotomi.

"Yes," the old woman agreed. "But if he is to have a second wife, this is the best time. Xotomi is young. It will be easy for her to be friends with another woman now. Matuwe should take the youngest of the three captives." Hayama brushed her hand over Xotomi's shaven tonsure. "The girl is younger than you. She will obey you. If you menstruate, she can cook for us. She can help you in the gardens and with the gathering of wood. I'm getting too old to work much."

Xotomi examined the three Mocototeri women in Arasuwe's hut. "If Matuwe is to take another wife, I wish him to take the young girl. I will like her. She can warm his hammock when I'm pregnant."

"Are you?" I asked.

"I'm not certain," she said, smiling smugly.

Hayama had told me some time ago that a pregnant woman usually waited three to four months, sometimes even longer, before telling her husband of her state. The man was a tacit accomplice in this deception, for he also dreaded the restrictive food and behavior taboos.

Whenever a woman suffered a miscarriage or gave birth to a deformed child, she was never at fault. It was the husband who was always blamed. In fact, if a woman repeatedly bore a sickly infant, she was encouraged to conceive by another man. Her own husband, however, had to obey the taboos and raise the baby as his own.

Hayama went over to Arasuwe's hut. "I will take this Mocototeri girl with me. She will make a fine wife for my son," she said, taking the girl by the hand. "She will live with me in my hut."

"I captured a woman," Matuwe said. "I don't want this child. She is too thin. I want a strong woman who will bear healthy sons."

"She will grow strong," Hayama said calmly. "She is still green, but soon she will be ripe. Look at her breasts. They are already large. Besides," she added, "Xotomi will not mind it you take her." Hayama faced the men gathered inside and outside Arasuwe's hut. "No one is to touch her. I will take care of her until she becomes my Son's wife. From today on she is my daughter-in-law."

No objections were raised by the men as Hayama took the girl into our hut. Shyly, the Mocototeri sat on the ground, close to the hearth. "I will not beat you," Xotomi said, taking the girl's hand in hers. "But you must do what I tell you."

Matuwe grinned sheepishly at us across the hut. I wondered if he was proud to have two wives, or actually embarrassed to be forced into taking a child when he had captured a woman.

"What will happen to the other captives?" I asked.

"Arasuwe will take the pregnant one," Hayama declared.

"How do you know?" Without waiting for her answer, I asked about the third one.

"She will be given to someone as a wife after she has been taken by any of the men in the shabono who wish to do so," Hayama said.

"But she has already been raped by the raiders," I said indignantly.

Old Hayama burst into laughter. "But not by the men who didn't participate in the raid." The old woman patted my head. "Don't look so stricken. It is the custom. I was captured once. I was raped by many men. I was lucky and found a chance to escape. No, don't interrupt me, white girl," Hayama said, putting her hand over my mouth. "I didn't run away because I had been raped. I forgot that very fast. I escaped because I had to work too hard and was not given enough food."

As the old woman had predicted, Arasuwe took the pregnant woman for himself.

"You have three wives already," the youngest one shouted, her face contorted in anger. "Why do you want another one?"

Giggling nervously, Arasuwe's two other wives watched from their hammocks as the youngest pushed the pregnant woman on the burning coals of the hearth. Arasuwe jumped out of his hammock, took a burning log from the fire, and handed it to the fallen Mocototeri woman. "Burn my wife's arm," he urged the Mocototeri woman as he held his youngest wife pinned against one of the poles in the hut. Sobbing, the pregnant woman covered her burned shoulder with her hand.

"Burn me!" Arasuwe's wife dared her, twisting away from her husband's grip. "If you do, I will burn you alive- but no one will eat your bones. I shall scatter them in the forest, so we can piss on them..." She stopped, her eyes widened in genuine astonishment as she discovered the extent of the woman's injured shoulder. "You are really burnt! Does it hurt much?"

Looking up, the Mocototeri wiped the tears from her face. "I'm in great pain."

"Oh, you poor woman." Solicitously, Arasuwe's wife helped her to stand up, guiding her over to her own hammock. She took leaves from a calabash and gently placed them on the woman's shoulder. "It will heal very fast. I will make sure of it."

"Don't weep any longer," Arasuwe's oldest wife said, sitting next to the Mocototeri woman. She patted her leg affectionately. "Our husband is a good man. He will treat you well. I will make sure no one in the shabono mistreats you."

"What will happen when the baby is born?" I asked Hayama.

"That's hard to say," the old woman conceded. She remained quiet for a moment as if deep in thought. "She may kill it. Yet it it is a boy Arasuwe might ask his oldest wife to raise him as if it were his own."

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Hours later, Arasuwe began his tale about the events of the raid. He talked in a slow, nasal tone. "We traveled slowly the first day and stopped to rest often. Our backs ached from the heavy loads of plantains. That first night we hardly slept, for we didn't have enough firewood to keep warm. The rain fell with such force the night sky seemed to melt with the darkness around us. The following day we walked somewhat faster, arriving in the vicinity of the Mocototeri settlement. We were still far enough away that the enemy hunters would not discover our presence that night, yet close enough that we didn't dare light a fire in our camp."

I could only see Arasuwe's face in profile. Fascinated, I watched the red and black designs on his cheeks moving animatedly with the rhythm of his speech, as if they had a life of their own. The feathers in his earlobes added a softness to his stern, tired face, a playfulness that belied the horror of his tale.

"For a few days we carefully watched the comings and goings of our enemy. Our aim was to kill a Mocototeri without alarming their shabono of our presence. One morning we saw the man who had killed Etewa's father walk into the thicket after a woman. Etewa shot him in the stomach with one of his poisoned arrows. The man was so dazed he did not even shout. By the time he recovered from his surprise, Etewa had shot a second arrow in his stomach and another in his neck, right behind his ear. He fell on the ground, dead.

"Walking like a stunned man, Etewa headed home, accompanied by my nephew. Meanwhile Matuwe had found the woman hiding in the thicket. He threatened to kill her if she so much as opened her mouth to cough. Matuwe, together with my youngest son-in-law, headed toward our settlement with the reluctant woman. We were all to meet later at a predetermined location.

As the rest of us were deciding whether to split into even smaller groups, we saw a mother with her little son, a pregnant woman, and a young girl, all heading into the forest. We could not resist the temptation. Quietly, we followed them." Leaning back in his hammock, hands locked behind his head, Arasuwe regarded his spellbound audience.

Taking advantage of the headman's pause, one of the men who had been on the raid stood up. Motioning the people to make space for him to move, he opened his narration with exactly the same words Arasuwe used. "We traveled slowly the first day."

But that was all his and the headman's narratives had in common. Gesticulating a great deal, the man mimicked with exaggerated flare the moods and expressions of different members of the raiding party, thus adding a touch of humor and melodrama to Arasuwe's dry, matter-of-fact rendition.

Encouraged by his audience's laughter and cheers, the man told at great length about the two youngest members of the raiding party. They were no older than sixteen or seventeen. Not only had they complained of sore feet, the cold, and their aches and pains, but they had been afraid of prowling jaguars and spirits on the second night when they had all slept without lighting a fire. The man interspersed his account with detailed information on the variety of game and ripening wild fruit- color, size, and shape- he had spotted on the way.

Arasuwe resumed his own report as soon as the man paused. "When the three women and the girl were far enough from the shabono," the headman continued, "we threatened to shoot them if they tried to run away or scream. The small boy managed to sneak into the bushes. We did not pursue him, but retreated as fast as possible, making sure not to leave footprints behind. We were sure that as soon as the Mocototeri discovered the dead man they would follow us.

"Just before dusk, the mother of the boy who had sneaked away cried out in pain. Sitting on the ground, she pressed her foot between her hands. She wept bitterly, complaining that a poisonous snake had bitten her. Her heartbreaking wails saddened us so much we did not even make sure there had been a snake. 'What good has it been,' she sobbed, 'for my little son to run away if he no longer has a mother to take care of him?' Screaming that she could not bear the pain any longer, the woman hobbled into the bushes. It took us a moment to realize we had been tricked. We searched the forest thoroughly, but we couldn't discover in which direction she had fled."

Old Kamosiwe laughed heartily. "It's good that she tricked you. It never pays to abduct a woman who has left behind a small child. They cry until they become ill and, worse: They almost always escape."

The men talked until the rainy dawn enshrouded the shabono. In the middle of the clearing stood the solitary hut where Etewa was enclosed. It was so quiet and apart- so close, yet so far removed from the voices and laughter.

A week later, Puriwariwe visited Etewa. As soon as he had eaten a baked plantain and honey, the old man asked Iramamowe to blow epena into his head. Chanting, Puriwariwe danced around Etewa's hut. "The dead man has not yet been burned," he announced. "His body has been placed in a trough. It is rotting high up in a tree. Do not break your silence yet. The hekuras of the dead man are still in your chest. Prepare your new arrows and bow. Soon the Mocototeri will burn the rotting flesh for the worms are already crawling out of the carcass." The old shapori circled Etewa's hut once more, then danced across the clearing into the forest.

Three days later, Puriwariwe announced that the Mocototeri had burned the dead man. "Take out the sticks from your earlobes, untie the ones from your wrists," he said, helping Etewa stand up. "In a few days take your old bow and arrows to the same peeled tree on which you hung your hammock and quiver."

Puriwariwe led Etewa into the forest. Arasuwe, together with some of the men who had been on the raid, followed behind.

They returned in the late afternoon. Etewa's hair had been cut, his tonsure shaven. His body had been washed and painted afresh with onoto. Cane rods, decorated with red macaw feathers, had been inserted in his earlobes. He also wore the new fur armbands, adorned with feathers, and the thick cotton waist belt Ritimi had made for him. Arasuwe offered Etewa a basket full of tiny fish he had cooked for him in pishaansi leaves.

Three days later, Etewa ventured for the first time by himself into the forest. "I've shot a monkey," he announced hours later, standing in the clearing. As soon as a group of men had gathered around him, he gave them precise information as to where the animal could be found.

To insure the aid and protection of the hekuras during future hunts, Etewa went two more times by himself into the forest. On each occasion he returned without the kill, then informed others where they could locate it. Etewa did not eat of the monkey and the two peccaries he had shot.

One afternoon he returned with a curassow hung from his back. He scalped the bird, saving the strip of skin where the curly black feathers were attached. It would serve as an armband. The wing feathers he saved for feathering his arrows. He cooked the almost two-foot-long bird on a wooden platform he had built over the fire. Tasting to see if the curassow was done thoroughly, he then proceeded to divide it between his children and two wives.

"Is the white girl your child or your wife?" old Hayama shouted from her hut as Etewa handed me a piece of the dark breast meat.

"She is my mother," Etewa said, joining the laughing Iticoteri.

Days later, Arasuwe supervised the cooking of plantain pap. Etewa emptied a small gourd into the soup. Ritimi told me they were the last of the powdered bones of Etewa's father. Tears rolled down the men's and women's cheeks as they swallowed the thick soup. I took the calabash ladle Etewa offered me and cried for his dead father.

As soon as the trough was empty, Arasuwe shouted at the top of his voice, "What a waiter! man we have amongst us. He has killed his enemy. He has carried the dead man's hekuras in his chest without succumbing to hunger or loneliness during his confinment."

Etewa walked around the clearing. "Yes, I am waiteri," he sang. "The hekuras of a dead man can kill the strongest warrior. It is a heavy burden to carry them for so many days. A person can die of sorrow." Etewa began to dance. "I no longer think about the man I killed. I dance with the shadows of the night, not with the shadows of death." The longer he danced, the lighter and faster his steps became, as though through the movements he was finally able to shake off the burden he had borne in his chest.

Many an evening the events of the raid were retold by the men. Even old Kamosiwe had a version. All the stories had in common with the original one was that Etewa had killed a man, that three women had been captured. In time only a vague memory of the actual facts remained, and it became a tale of the distant past like all the other stories the Iticoteri were so fond of telling.

# PART SIX

## Chapter 23

As if only a moment had passed, the memories of the bygone days, weeks, and months drifted through my mind in vivid detail.

The pressure of tiny feet kneading on my stomach woke me from my reveries. Words of protest died on my lips as Tutemi lowered Hoaxiwe on top of me. I cradled the baby in my arms, lest he awaken little Texoma who had fallen asleep in my hammock while waiting for me to get up. I reached for Hoaxiwe's frog skulls threaded on a liana string hanging at the head of my hammock and rattled them in front of him. Gurgling with delight, the baby tried to reach them.

"Are you awake?" Texoma mumbled, touching my cheek lightly. "I thought you were going to sleep the whole day."

"I've been thinking about all I've seen and learned since I first came here," I said, taking her small hand in mine: The narrow palm, the long, delicately shaped fingers were oddly mature for a five-year-old child, and contrasted sharply with her dimpled face. "I didn't realize the sun's already up."

"You didn't even notice my brother and cousins leaving your hammock as soon as the plantains were baked," Texoma said. "Were you thinking very hard?"

"No," I laughed. "It was more like dreaming. It seems as if no time has passed since the day I arrived at the shabono."

"To me it's like a long time," Texoma said seriously, caressing her half-brother's soft hair. "When you first arrived, this tiny baby was still sleeping inside Tutemi's belly. I remember well the day my mothers found you." Giggling, the little girl buried her face in my neck. "I know why you wept that day. You were afraid of my great-uncle Iramamowe- he has an ugly face."

"That day," I whispered conspiringly, "I was afraid of all the Iticoteri." Feeling a warm wetness on my stomach, I held Hoaxiwe away from me. Etewa, sitting astride his hammock, smiled in amusement as he watched the arc of his son's urine spanning over the fire.

"Of all of us?" Texoma asked. "Even of my father and grandfather? Even of my mothers and old Hayama?" Bending over my face, she gazed at me with an expression of incredulity, almost of anguish, as if she were searching for something in my eyes. "Were you also afraid of me?"

"No. I wasn't afraid of you," I assured her, bouncing the laughing Hoaxiwe on my thighs.

"I wasn't afraid of you either." Sighing with relief, Texoma lay back in the hammock. "I didn't hide like most of the children did when you first walked into our hut. We had heard that whites were tall and hairy like monkeys. But you looked so little, I knew you couldn't be a real white."

As soon as her basket was securely fastened to her back, Tutemi lifted her baby from my lap. Expertly she placed him in the wide, softened-bark sling she wore across her chest. "Ready," she said, smiling, then looked questioningly at Etewa and Ritimi.

Grinning, Etewa picked up his machete and his bow and arrows.

"Will you come later?" Ritimi asked me as she adjusted the long, slender rod stuck through the septum of her nose. The corners of her mouth, free of the usual smooth sticks, turned up in a smile, dimpling her cheeks. As if sensing my indecision, Ritimi did not wait for my reply but followed her husband and Tutemi to the gardens.

"Hayama is coming," Tutemi whispered. "She is wondering why you haven't come to eat her baked plantain." The little girl slid from the hammock, and ran toward a group of children playing outside.

Muttering, Hayama walked through Tutemi's hut. Her loose skin hung in long vertical wrinkles down her thighs and belly. Her face was set in a stern mien as she handed me a half-gourd filled with plantain mush. Sighing, she sat in Ritimi's hammock, letting her hand trail along the ground as she rocked herself to and fro, apparently entranced by the rhythmic squeaking of the liana knot against the pole. "It's too bad I've not been able to fatten you up," the old woman said after a long silence.

I assured her that her plantains had worked wonders- that given a bit more time I might even become fat.

"There isn't much time," Hayama said softly. "You are leaving for the mission."

"What?" I cried, struck by the definiteness of her tone. "Who says so?"

"Before he left, Milagros made Arasuwe promise that if we were to move to one of our old gardens deeper in the forest, we were not to take you." The nostalgic, almost dreamy gaze of her eyes softened Hayama's expression as she reminded me of the various families who several weeks before had left for the old gardens. Believing they were to return soon, I had not paid much attention to their departure at the time. Hayama went on to explain that Arasuwe's household, as well as those of his brothers, cousins, sons, and daughters, had not yet followed the others for the simple reason that the headman was waiting to hear from Milagros.

"Is the shabono going to be abandoned?" I asked. "What about the gardens here? They were only recently expanded. What will happen to all the new plantain shoots?" I said excitedly.

"They will grow." Hayama's face crinkled with cheerful amusement. "The old people and many of the children will remain here. We will build temporary shelters close to the plantain patches, for no one likes to live in ancillary shabono. We will take care of the gardens until the others return. By then the bananas and rasha fruit will be ripe and once again it will be time to feast."

"But why are so many Iticoteri leaving?" I asked. "Isn't there enough food here?"

Hayama did not actually say that there was a food shortage, yet she stressed the fact that old gardens, which have not been visited for a long time, become a feeding ground for monkeys, birds, agouti, peccary, and tapir. Men have an easy time hunting and the women still find plenty of roots and fruits in such gardens to last until the game has been exhausted. "Besides," Hayama went on, "a temporary move is always good, especially after a raid. If I weren't too old, I would also go."

"Like a holiday," I said.

"Yes. A holiday!" Hayama laughed, once I explained what was meant by the word. "Oh, how much I'd like to go and sit in the shade, stuffing myself with kafu fruit."

Kafu trees were prized for their bark and bast fibers. The clusters of fruit, each about ten inches long, hang on a common stalk. The gelatinous, fleshy fruit is filled with tiny seeds and tastes like an overripe fresh fig.

"If I can't move with Arasuwe and his family to the old gardens," I said, squatting at the head of Hayama's hammock, "then I will stay here with you. There is no reason for me to return to the mission. We'll await the return of the others together."

Hayama's eyes shone with an unnatural brightness as they rested on my face. In a slow, deliberate tone, she made it clear that, although it was not customary to raid an empty shabono or to kill old people and children, the Mocototeri would undoubtedly make trouble if they were to learn, which the old woman assured me they would, that I had been left behind in an unprotected settlement.

I shuddered, remembering how several weeks before a group of Mocototeri men, armed with clubs, had arrived at the shabono demanding the return of their women. After both groups had shouted threats and insults at each other, Arasuwe told the Mocototeri that he had purposely freed one of the abducted women on his way home. He stressed the fact that not for an instant had he been taken in by the woman's trick of having been bitten by a snake. However, after more bickering on both sides, the headman reluctantly handed over the girl old Hayama had chosen as a second wife for her youngest son. Threatening to retaliate at a later date, the Mocototeri left.

It was Etewa who had explained to me that although the Mocototeri had had no intention of starting a shooting war- they had left their bows and arrows hidden in the forest- the headman had acted wisely in returning the girl so promptly. The Iticoteri were outnumbered, as several men had already left for the abandoned gardens.

"When will Arasuwe join the others in the old gardens?" I asked Hayama.

"Very soon," she said. "Arasuwe has sent several men to find Milagros. Unfortunately, they have been unable to get in touch with him so far."

I smiled to myself. "It seems that regardless of what Arasuwe promised, I'll end up going with Ritimi and Etewa," I said smugly.

"You won't," Hayama assured me, then grinned maliciously. "It's not only from the Mocototeri we have to protect you, but a shapori might abduct you on the way to the gardens, and keep you as his woman in a faraway hut."

"I doubt it," I said, giggling. "You told me once that no man would want me this skinny." I told the old woman about the incident in the mountains with Etewa.

Pressing her folded arms across her hanging bosom, Hayama laughed until tears rolled down her wrinkled cheeks. "Etewa would take any woman that's available," she said. "But he's afraid of you." Hayama leaned over her hammock, then whispered, "A shapori isn't an ordinary man. He wouldn't want you for his pleasure. A shapori needs the femaleness in his body." She lay back in the hammock. "Do you know where that femaleness is?"

"No."

The old woman looked at me as if she thought I was slow-witted. "In the vagina," she finally said, almost choking on her laughter.

"Do you think that Puriwariwe might abduct me?" I asked mockingly. "I'm sure that he's too old to care about women."

Genuine amazement widened her eyes. "Haven't you seen? Hasn't anyone told you that that old shapori is stronger than any man in the shahono?" she asked. "There are nights when that old man goes from hut to hut, sticking his cock inside every woman he can find. And he doesn't get tired. At dawn, when he returns to the forest, he's as ready as ever." Hayama assured me that Puriwariwe could not possibly abduct me, for he no longer needed anything.

She warned me, however, that there were other shamans, less powerful than the old man, who might.

Closing her eyes, she sighed loudly. I thought she had fallen asleep, but, as if sensing my motion to get up, the old woman turned to me abruptly. She placed both her hands on my shoulders, then asked me in a voice that shook with emotion, "Do you know why you like being with us?"

I looked at her uncomprehendingly, and as I opened my mouth to respond Hayama went on to say, "You are happy here because you have no responsibilities. You live like us. You have learned to speak quite well, and know many of our customs. To us you are neither child or adult, man or woman. We make no demands on you. If we did, you would resent it." Hayama's eyes were so dark as they held my gaze, they made me uncomfortable. In her wrinkled face they seemed too large and bright, as if glowing with an inexhaustible inner energy. After a long pause, she added provokingly, "Were you to become a woman shapori, you would be very unhappy."

I felt threatened. Yet, as I stammered inanities to defend myself, I suddenly realized that she was right and I was seized by a desperate desire to laugh.

Gently the old woman pressed her fingers over my lips. "There are powerful shapori living in remote places where the hekuras of animals and plants dwell," Hayama said. "In the dark of night, those men consort with beautiful female spirits."

"I'm glad I'm not a beautiful spirit," I said.

"No. You are not beautiful." Hayama with her cajoling laugh and mocking gaze made it impossible for me to take offense at her uncomplimentary remark. "Yet to many of us you are strange." There was great tenderness in her voice as she tried to make me understand why the Mocototeri wanted to take me to their shabono. Their interest in me was not due to the usual reasons Indians befriend whites- to get machetes, cooking pots, and clothes- but because the Mocototeri believed I had powers. They had heard of how I had cured little Texoma, about the epena incident, and how Iramamowe had seen hekuras reflected in my eyes. They had even seen me use a bow and arrow.

All my endeavors to make the old woman realize that it required no special powers, only common sense, to help a child with a cold were in vain. I argued that even she herself could be considered to have healing powers- she set bones and smeared secret concoctions made from animal parts, roots, and leaves on bites, scratches, and cuts. But my reasonings were futile. To her there was a vast difference between setting a bone, and coaxing the lost soul of a child back into it's body. That, she stressed, only a shapori could do.

"But Iramamowe brought her soul back," I asserted. "I only cured her cold."

"He didn't," Hayama insisted. "He heard you chant."

"That was a prayer," I said feebly, realizing that a prayer was in no way different from Iramamowe's hekura chants.

"I know whites are not like us," Hayama interrupted me, determined to prevent me from arguing further. "I'm talking about something different altogether. Had you been born an Iticoteri, you would still be different from Ritimi, Tutemi, or me." Hayama touched my face, running her long, bony fingers over my forehead and cheeks. "My sister Angelica would never have asked you to accompany her into the forest. Milagros would never have brought you to stay with us if you were like the whites he knows." She regarded me thoughtfully, then, as if struck with an afterthought, added, "I wonder if any other whites would have been as happy as you have been with us."

"I'm sure they would have," I said softly. "There aren't many whites who have a chance to come here."

Hayama shrugged her shoulders. "Do you remember the story about Imawaami, the woman shapori?" she asked.

"That's a myth!" Afraid that the old woman was trying to make some connection between Imawaami and myself, I hastily added, "It's like the story of the bird who stole the first fire from the alligator's mouth."

"Maybe," Hayama said dreamily. "Lately, I have been thinking about the stories my father, grandfather, and even my great-grandfather used to tell about the white men they had seen traveling along the big rivers. There must have been whites journeying through the forest long before my great-grandfather's time. Perhaps Imawaami was one of them." Hayama moved her eager face close to mine, then continued in a whisper. "It must have been a shapori who captured her, believing the white woman was a beautiful spirit. But she was more powerful than the shapori. She stole his hekuras and became a sorceress herself." Hayama looked at me provokingly, as if daring me to contradict her.

I was not surprised by the old woman's reasoning. The Iticoteri were in the habit of bringing their mythology up to date, or of incorporating facts into their myths. "Do Indian women ever become shapori?" I asked.

"Yes," Hayama said promptly. "Female shapori are strange creatures. Like men, they hunt with bow and arrows. They decorate their bodies with the spots and broken circles of a jaguar. They take epena, and lure the hekuras into their chests with their songs. Women shapori have husbands who serve them. But if they have children, they once again become ordinary women."

"Angelica was a shapori, wasn't she?" I was unaware I had thought out loud. The thought came with the certainty of a revelation.

I recalled the time Angelica had awakened me from a nightmare at the mission, the way her incomprehensible song had soothed me. It had not resembled the melodious song of the Iticoteri women but the monotonous chant of the shamans. Like them, Angelica seemed to possess two voices- one that orginated from somewhere deep inside her, the other from her throat.

I remembered the days of walking with Milagros and Angelica through the forest and how Angelica's remarks about the spirits of the forest lurking in the shadows- that I should always dance with them, but never let them become a burden- had enchanted me. I clearly visualized how Angelica had danced that morning- her arms raised above her head, her feet moving with quick jerky steps in the same manner that the Iticoteri men danced when in an epena trance.

Until now I had never thought it in the least odd that Angelica, as opposed to the other Indian women at the mission, had considered it very natural for me to have come to hunt in the jungle.

Hayama's words awoke me from my musings. "Did my sister tell you she was a shapori?" A profound grief filled Hayama's eyes; tears gathered at their corners. The drops never rolled down her cheeks but lost themselves in a network of wrinkles.

"She never told me," I murmured, then lay down in my hammock. With one leg on the ground I pushed myself back and forth, adjusting the rhythm of my hammock to Hayama's so that the vine knots would squeak in unison.

"My sister was a shapori," Hayama said after a long silence. "I don't know what happened to her after she left our shabono. While she was with us, she was a respected shapori, but she lost her powers when she had Milagros." Hayama sat up abruptly. "His father was a white man."

Afraid that my curiosity might escape through my eyes, I closed them. I did not dare breathe, lest the smallest sound put an end to the old woman's reveries. There was no way of learning which country Milagros's father had come from. Regardless of their origins, any non-Indian was considered a nape.

"Milagros's father was a white man," Hayama repeated. "A long time ago, when we lived closer to the big river, a nape came to stay at our settlement. Angelica believed she could get his power. Instead she got pregnant."

"Why didn't she abort?"

A broad grin crossed Hayama's lined face. "Perhaps Angelica was too confident," the old woman murmured. "Maybe she believed she could still be a shdpori after having a child by a white man." Hayama's mouth opened wide with laughter, revealing yellowish teeth. "There is nothing white about Milagros," she said mischievously. "Even though my sister took him away. In spite of all he learned from the white man, Milagros will always be an Iticoteri." Hayama's eyes shone with a strong, unwavering stare, and her face revealed a certain indefinable, pent-up triumph.

The thought that I would soon be returning to the mission filled me with apprehension. On several occasions since my illness I had tried to imagine what it would be like to return to Caracas or to Los Angeles. How would I react to seeing relatives and friends? During those moments, I had known I would never leave of my own accord.

"When will Milagros take me back to the mission?" I asked.

"I don't think Arasuwe will wait for Milagros. The headman can no longer postpone his departure," Hayama said. "Iramamowe will take you back."

"Iramamowe!" I exclaimed in disbelief. "Why not Etewa?"

Patiently, Hayama explained that Iramamowe had been near the mission on several occasions: He knew the way better than any of the Iticoteri. There was also the possibility of Etewa being discovered by Mocototeri hunters, in which case he would be killed and I would be abducted. "Iramamowe, on the other hand," Hayama assured me, "can make himself invisible in the forest."

"But I can't!" I protested.

"You will be guarded by Iramamowe's hekuras," Hayama said with utter conviction. Cumbersomely, the old woman stood up, rested for a moment with her hands on her thighs, then took my arm and slowly walked me over to her own hut. "Iramamowe has protected you before," Hayama reminded me, then eased herself into her hammock.

"Yes," I agreed. "But I can't go to the mission without Milagros. I need sardines and crackers."

"That stuff will only make you sick," she said contemptuously. Hayama assured me that I would not suffer from hunger on the way, for Iramamowe's arrows would hit plenty of game. Besides, she would give me a basketful of plantains.

"I'm too weak to carry such a heavy load," I objected, knowing that Iramamowe would carry nothing besides his bow and arrows.

Hayama regarded me with gentle mockery. She stretched in her hammock, opened her mouth in an interminable yawn, and promptly fell asleep.

I walked into the clearing. A group of children, mostly little girls, were playing with a puppy. Each girl tried to make the animal suck from her flat nipples.

Except for a few old people resting in their hammocks, and several menstruating women crouching near the hearths, most of the huts were deserted. I went from dwelling to dwelling, wondering if they knew I was soon to leave. An old man offered me his tobacco wad. Smiling, I declined. "How can anyone refuse such a treat?" his eyes seemed to say as he reinserted the wad between his lower lip and gum.

Late in the afternoon I walked into Iramamowe's hut. His oldest wife, who had just returned from the river, was hanging two water-filled gourds on the rafters. We had become good friends since the time her son Xorowe had been initiated as a shapori, and we had spent many afternoons talking about him. Occasionally Xorowe returned to the shabono to cure people afflicted with colds, fevers, and diarrhea. He chanted to the hekuras' with the same zeal and strength as the more experienced shamans did. Yet, according to Puriwariwe, it would still be some time before Xorowe could send his own spirits to cause harm among an enemy settlement. Only then would he be accepted as a full-fledged sorcerer.

Iramamowe's wife poured some water into a small calabash, then added some honey. Greedily, I watched the runny paste, studded with bees in the various stages of their metamorphic process. After stirring it thoroughly with her finger she offered me the gourd. Smacking my lips between each sip, I finished the drink, and licked the bottom clean. "What a delight," I exclaimed. "I'm sure it's from the amoshi bees." They were a stingless variety, and greatly prized for their dark aromatic honey.

Smiling in agreement, Iramamowe's wife motioned me to sit beside her in her hammock. She examined my back for flea and mosquito bites. Discovering two recent ones, she sucked out the poison. The light entering the hut grew dimmer. It seemed that such a long time had passed since I had talked with Hayama that morning. Drowsily, I closed my eyes.

I dreamt I was with the children by the river. Thousands of butterflies fluttered out of the trees, swirling through the air like autumn leaves. They alighted on our hair, faces, and bodies, covering us with the tenuous golden light of dusk. Despondently I gazed at their wings, like delicate hands waving farewell. "You cannot be sad," the children were saying. I looked into each face, and kissed the laughter on their lips.

## Chapter 24

Instead of the bamboo knife she always used, Ritimi trimmed my hair with a sharp grass blade. Frowning with concentration, she made sure the hair was cut evenly all around my head.

"Not my tonsure," I said, covering the top of my head with my folded hands. "It hurts."

"Don't be so cowardly," Ritimi laughed. "You don't want to arrive at the mission looking like a barbarian."

I could not make her understand that among whites I would be considered an oddity with a bald spot on the top of my head. Ritimi insisted that it was not merely for aesthetic reasons but practical ones as well that she needed to shave the crown of my head.

"Lice," she pointed out, "like that particular spot best. I'm certain Iramamowe will not delouse you in the evenings."

"Maybe you should shave my hair completely," I suggested. "That's the best way to get rid of them."

Horrified, Ritimi stared at me. "Only the very sick have their heads shaved. You would look ugly."

Nodding in agreement, I submitted to her ministrations. Upon finishing, she rubbed the bald spot with onoto. Then, she very carefully painted my face with the red paste. She drew a wide straight line just below my bangs and wavy ones across my cheeks with dots between each of the lines. "What a shame I did not pierce your nose and the corners of your mouth when you first arrived," she said disappointedly. Removing the polished slender stick from her septum, she held it under my nose. "How beautiful you would have looked," she sighed with comical resignation, and proceeded to paint my back with wide onoto lines rounding toward my buttocks. On the front, starting below my breasts, she drew wavy lines all the way to my thighs. Lastly she encircled my ankles with broad red bands. Looking down my legs, I had the feeling I was wearing socks.

Tutemi tied a newly made cotton belt around my waist, the front fringe resting on my pubis. Pleased at my appearance, she clapped her hands and jumped up and down excitedly. "Oh, the ears!" she cried, motioning Ritimi to hand her the white feather tufts held together on a thin string. Tutemi tied them on my earrings. Around my upper arms and below my knees she fastened red-dyed cotton strands.

Encircling my waist with her arm, Ritimi took me from hut to hut, so I could be admired by the Iticoteri. For one last time I saw myself reflected in the women's shiny eyes; and delighted in the men's mocking smiles. Yawning, old Kamosiwe stretched his skinny arms until they seemed about to be pulled from their sockets. He opened his one eye, studying my face as if he were trying to memorize my features. With slow, deliberate movements, he unfastened the small pouch he wore around his neck, and took out the pearl I had given him. "Whenever I let this stone roll on my palm, I will think of you."

Unwilling to believe that never again would I stand there in the shabono, that never again would I awake to the children's laughter as they climbed into my hammock at dawn, I wept.

There were no good-byes. I simply followed Iramamowe and Etewa into the forest. Ritimi and Tutemi were behind me, as if we were going to collect firewood. Silently we walked along the path the whole day, stopping only momentarily to snack.

The sun was setting behind the horizon of trees when we came to a halt beneath the dark shadows of three giant ceibas. They had grown so close together that they appeared to be one. Ritimi fastened the basket she had been carrying for me on my back. It was packed with plantains, roasted monkey meat, a honey-filled calabash, several empty gourds, my hammock, and my knapsack which contained my jeans and a torn shirt.

"You won't grow sad if you paint your body with onoto each time you bathe in the river," Ritimi said, tying a small gourd around my waist. It had been polished with abrasive leaves. Smooth and white, it hung from my cotton belt like a giant teardrop.

The forest, the three smiling faces, blurred before me. Without another word, Ritimi led the way into the thicket. Only Etewa turned around before melting into the shadows. A grin lit his face as he waved the way he had so often seen Milagros do when he bid me farewell.

I gave free rein to the vast desolation inside me. It did not make me feel any better, but only heightened my despondency. Yet, in spite of my wretchedness, I was strangely aware of the three ceibas in front of me. As if in a dream, I recognized the trees. I had been on this very spot before. Milagros had squatted in front of me. Impassively, he had watched the rain wash my face and body of Angelica's ashes. Today it was Iramamowe squatting on the same spot, gazing at the tears rolling uncontrollably down my cheeks.

"It was here that I first saw Ritimi, Tutemi, and Etewa," I said. Suddenly I realized it had been Ritimi's deliberate choice to accompany me this far. I understood all she had left unsaid, how deeply she felt. She had given me back a basket and a gourd, the two items I was carrying that distant day. Only now the gourd was not filled with ashes, but with onoto, a symbol of life and happiness. A quiet loneliness, humble and accepting, filled my heart. I carefully dried my tears so as not to erase the onoto designs.

"Perhaps one day Ritimi will find you on this spot again," Iramamowe said, his habitually stern face softened by a fleeting smile. "Let's walk a bit farther before we rest for the night." Lifting the heavy bunch of plantains from my basket, he Hung it over his shoulder. He was slightly swaybacked and his belly stuck out.

Iramamowe must have felt the same urge to walk as I did. My feet seemed to move of their own accord, knowing exactly where to step in the darkness. I never lost sight of Iramamowe's arrow quiver, immobilized under the load of plantains. Moving through the darkness, I had the illusion that it was not I but the forest that was leaving.

"We'll sleep here," Iramamowe said, inspecting the weathered lean-to that stood away from the path. He built a small fire inside, then hung his hammock next to mine.

I lay awake watching the stars and the faint moon through the opening of the hut. Mist thickened the darkness until there was no light left. Trees and sky formed one mass through which I imagined bows falling from the clouds like heavy rain; and hekuras rising from invisible crevices in the earth: They danced to the sound of a shaman's song.

The sun was high over the treetops when Iramamowe woke me. After finishing a baked plantain and a piece of monkey meat, I offered him my calabash with honey.

"You'll need it for the days of walking," he said. A friendly glance softened his words of refusal. "We will find more on the way," he promised, reaching for his machete and his bow and arrows.

We walked at a steady pace, much faster than I remember ever having walked in my life. We crossed rivers, we moved up and down hills that bore no familiar landmark. Days spent walking, nights spent sleeping chased each other with predictable swiftness. My thoughts did not reach beyond each day or night. There was nothing between them but a short-lived dawn and dusk during which we ate.

"I know this place!" I exclaimed one afternoon, breaking the long silence. I pointed to the dark rocks jutting from the earth. They formed a perpendicular wall along the river's edge. But the longer I gazed at the river and trees, already purple in the twilight, the less sure I felt I had been there before. I climbed over a tree trunk that extended all the way into the water. The day had been deadly still, but now the leaves began to stir gently, sending forth a fresh whisper along the river. Arching branches and creepers brushed the water's surface, burying themselves in the dark liquid that harbored no fish and discouraged mosquitoes. "Are we close to the mission?" I asked, turning to Iramamowe.

He did not answer. After a moment, as if annoyed by the silence he was unwilling to break, he motioned me to follow.

I felt tired- each step was an effort- yet I could not remember having gone very far that day. I lifted my head as I heard the cry of a bird. A yellow leaf, like a giant butterfly, fluttered from a branch. As if afraid to fall and rot on the ground, the leaf clung to my thigh. Iramamowe held out his hand behind him, gesturing me to remain still. Stealthily he stalked along the riverbank. "We will eat meat tonight," he whispered, then disappeared in the uncertain light, his body but a line against the shimmering river's surface.

Lying down on the dark sand, I watched the sky ablaze for a moment as the earth swallowed the sun. I drank the last of the honey Iramamowe had found that morning, then fell asleep with it's sweetness on my lips. Awakened by the sound of crackling flames, I turned on my stomach. On a small platform built over the fire Iramamowe was roasting an almost two-foot-long agouti.

"It's not good to sleep at night without the protection of a fire," he said, facing me. "The spirits of the forest might bewitch you."

"I am so tired," I yawned, moving closer to the fire. "I could sleep for days."

"It will rain during the night," Iramamowe announced as he planted the three poles that would make our shelter around the roasting meat. I helped him cover the roof and sides with the wild banana fronds he had cut while I slept. He fastened the hammocks close to the fire, so we could push the logs to the flames without having to get up.

The agouti tasted like roast pork, tender and juicy. What we did not finish Iramamowe tied to a stick high above the fire. "We'll eat the rest in the morning." Grinning, as if pleased with himself, he stretched fully in his hammock. "It will give us strength to climb the mountains."

"Mountains?" I asked. "I only went over hills when I came with Angelica and Milagros." I bent over Iramamowe. "The only time I climbed up a mountain was when I returned to the shabono with Ritimi and Etewa from the Mocototeri feast. Those mountains were close to the shabono." I touched his face. "Are you sure you know the way to the mission?"

"What a question to ask," he said, closing his eyes, and crossing his arms over his chest. His bristly eyebrows slanted toward his temples. There were a few hairs at the edge of his upper lip. The skin over his high cheekbones was stretched taut, only a faint trace of the onoto designs still recognizable. As if annoyed by my scrutiny, he opened his eyes: They reflected the light of the fire, but his gaze revealed nothing.

I lay down in my hammock. I ran my fingers along my forehead and cheeks, wondering if the onoto lines and dots had also faded on my face. Tomorrow I'll bathe in the river, I thought. And my uneasiness, which is probably nothing but exhaustion, will vanish as soon as I paint myself anew with onoto. Yet, no matter how I tried to reassure myself, I was unable to still my mounting distrust. My body and mind were tight with a vague premonition I could not put into words. The air became chilly. Leaning over, I pushed one of the logs closer to the flames.

"It will be even colder in the mountains," Iramamowe mumbled. "I will make us a drink from plants that will keep us warm."

Reassured by his words, I began to inhale and exhale with exaggerated depth, deliberately pushing all thoughts away, until I was aware of nothing but the sound of the rain, the smoke-warmed air, the smell of damp earth. And I slept a calm, untroubled sleep that lasted throughout the night.

In the morning we bathed in the river, then painted each other's faces and bodies with onoto. Iramamowe was specific about the designs he desired: A serpentine line across his forehead, extending down to his jaws, then around his mouth; a circle between his brow, at the corners of his eyes, and two on each cheek. On his chest he wanted wavy lines, running all the way to his navel, and on his back the lines had to be straight. A smile of gentle mockery softened his face as he covered me from head to foot with uniform circles.

"What do they mean?" I asked eagerly. Ritimi had never decorated me thus.

"Nothing," he said, laughing. "This way you don't look so skinny."

At first the ascent up the narrow trail was easy. The undergrowth was free of serrated grasses and thorny weeds. A warm mist enshrouded the forest, creating a diaphanous light through which the crowns of the tall palm trees seemed to hang suspended from the sky. The sound of waterfalls echoed eerily through the misty air, and each time I brushed against a branch or leaf tiny drops of moisture clung to me. The afternoon rain, however, turned the path into a muddy menace. I bruised my toes repeatedly on the roots and stones beneath the slippery surface.

We made camp late in the afternoon, halfway up the summit. Exhausted, I sat on the ground and watched Iramamowe pound three strong poles into the earth. I did not have the strength to help him cover the triangular structure with palm fronds and giant leaves.

"Are you coming back this way on your return to the shabonof" I asked, wondering why he was reinforcing the hut so well. It appeared altogether too sturdy for a one-night shelter.

Iramamowe gave me a sidelong glance but did not answer.

"Is there going to be a storm tonight?" I asked in an exasperated tone.

An irrepressible smile played around his lips, and his face looked uncannily childish as he squatted beside me. A mischievous sparkle, as if he were planning some prank, shone in his eyes. "Tonight you will sleep well," he finally said, then proceeded to build a fire inside the cozy hut. He fastened my hammock in the back: His own he hung close to the narrow entrance. "Tonight we will not feel the cold air," he said, looking for the gourd in which were soaking the shredded leaves and pale yellow flowers of a plant he had found the previous day, growing over some rocks in a sunny spot along the river's edge. He unsealed the calabash, added more water, then placed it over the fire. Softly he began to chant, his eyes fixed on the dark simmering liquid.

Trying to figure out the words of his song, I fell asleep. I was awakened shortly by him. "Drink this," he urged, holding the gourd close to my lips. "It has been cooled by the mountain dew."

I took a sip. It tasted like herb tea, bitter but not unpleasantly so. After a few more gulps, I pushed the calabash toward him.

"Drink it all," Iramamowe said coaxingly. "It will keep you warm. You will sleep for days."

"Days?" I emptied the gourd, smiling at his remark as if it were a joke. A faint touch of malice seemed to be lurking somewhere within him. By the time it fully dawned on me that he was not being facetious, a pleasant numbness seeped through my body, melting my anxiety into a comforting heaviness that made my head feel as if it were lead. I was sure it would break off my neck. The image of my head rolling on the ground, a ball with two glass eyes, threw me into spasms of laughter.

Crouching by the fire, Iramamowe watched me with growing curiosity. Slowly, I stood up. I've lost my physicality, I thought. I had no control over my legs as I tried to place one foot in front of the other. Dejected, I slumped on the ground, next to Iramamowe. "Why don't you laugh?" I asked, surprised at my own words. What I really wanted to know was if the sound of drops prattling on the thatched roof was a storm. I wondered if I had actually spoken, for the words kept reverberating in my head like a distant echo. Afraid to miss his answer, I moved closer to him.

Iramamowe's face became taut as the cry of a nocturnal monkey broke the night's stillness. His nostrils flared, his full lips set in a straight line. His eyes, piercing into mine, grew larger, shining with a deep loneliness, a gentleness that contrasted oddly with his severe masklike face.

As if I were animated by a slow-motion mechanism, I crawled to the edge of the hut, each of my movements a gigantic effort. I felt as if all my tendons had been replaced with elastic strings. I relished the sensation of being able to stretch in any direction, into the most absurd postures I could imagine.

From the pouch hanging around his neck, Iramamowe poured epena into his palm. He drew the hallucinogenic powder deep into his nostrils, then began chanting. I felt his song inside me, surrounding me, drawing me toward him. Without any hesitation I drank from the gourd he once again held to my lips. The dark liquid no longer tasted bitter.

My sense of time and distance became distorted. Iramamowe and the fire were so far away, I feared I had lost them across the wide expanse of the hut. Yet the next instant, his eyes were so close to mine I saw myself reflected in their dark pupils. I was crushed by the weight of his body, and my arms folded beneath his chest. He whispered words into my ears that I could not hear. A breeze parted the leaves, revealing the shadowy night, the treetops brushing the stars-countless stars, massed together as if in readiness to fall. I reached out: My hand grasped leaves adorned with diamond drops. For an instant, they clung to my fingers, then disintegrated like dew.

Iramamowe's heavy body held me: His eyes sowed seeds of light inside me: His gentle voice urged me to follow him through dreams of day and night, dreams of rainwater and bitter leaves. There was nothing violent about his body imprisoning mine. Waves of pleasure mingled with visions of mountains and rivers, faraway places where hekuras dwell. I danced with the spirits of animals and trees, gliding with them through mist, through roots and trunks, through branches and leaves. I sang with the voices of birds and spiders, jaguars and snakes. I shared the dreams of all those who feed on epena, on bitter flowers and leaves.

I no longer knew if I was awake or dreaming. At moments I vaguely remembered old Hayama's words about shamans needing the femaleness in their bodies. But those memories were neither clear nor lasting: They remained dim, unexamined premonitions. Iramamowe always knew whenever I was about to fall into real sleep, whenever my tongue was ready to ask, whenever I was about to weep.

"If you can't dream, I'll make you," he said, taking me in his arms, and rubbing away my tears against his cheek. And my desire to refuse the gourd sitting by the fire like a forest spirit vanished. Greedily I drank the dark bearer of visions until once again I was suspended in a timelessness that was neither day or night. I was one with the rhythm of Iramamowe's breath, with the beat of his heart, as I merged with the light and the darkness inside him.

A time came when I felt I was moving through an undergrowth of trees, leaves, and motionless vines. I knew I was not walking; yet I was descending from the cold forest, sunk in mist. My feet were tied and my upside-down head shook as though it were being emptied. Visions flowed from my ears, nostrils, and mouth, leaving a faint line on the steep path. And for one last instant I glimpsed shabonos inhabited by men and women shamans of another time.

When I awoke, Iramamowe was crouched by the fire, his face alight with the flames and a faint streak of moon shining into the hut. I wondered how many days had elapsed since the night he had first offered me the bitter-tasting brew. There was no gourd by the fire. I was certain we were no longer in the mountains. The night was clear. The soft breeze stirring the treetops disentangled my thoughts and I drifted into a dreamless sleep as I listened to the monotonous sound of Iramamowe's *hekura* songs.

The persistent growling of my stomach awoke me. I felt dizzy as I stood on uncertain legs in the empty hut. My body was painted with wavy lines. How strange it had all been, I thought. I felt no regret: I was not filled with hate or repulsion. It was not that I was numbed emotionally. Rather I felt the same indescribable sensation I experienced upon awakening from a dream that I could not quite explain.

Near the fire lay a bundle containing roasted frogs. I sat on the ground and gnawed on the tiny bones until they were clean. Iramamowe's machete reclining against one of the poles reassured me that he was somewhere close by.

Following the sound of the river, I walked through the tangled growth. Startled to see Iramamowe beaching a small canoe only a short distance away, I hid behind some bushes. I recognized the craft as being one made by the Maquiritare Indians. I had seen that kind, made from a hollowed tree trunk, at the mission. The thought that we might be close to one of their settlements, or perhaps even to the mission, made my heart beat faster. Iramamowe gave no indication of having heard or seen me approach. Furtively, I returned to the shelter, wondering how he came into possession of the canoe.

Moments later, with a vine rope and a large bundle slung over his back, Iramamowe walked into the hut. "Fish," he said, dropping the rope and bundle on the ground.

I blushed, and embarrassed at my blushing, laughed.

Unhurriedly, he balanced the wrapped fish between the logs, making sure enough heat but no direct flames reached the platanillo leaves. Totally engrossed in the sound of the simmering fish, he remained squatting by the fire. As soon as all the juices were cooked away, he removed the bundle from the logs with a forked stick and opened it. "It's good," he said, scooping a handful of white, flaky meat into his mouth, then pushed the bundle toward me.

"What happened in the mountains?" I asked,

Startled by my belligerent tone, his mouth gaped open. A piece of unchewed fish fell into the ashes. Automatically, without checking the dirt sticking to it, he put the morsel back into his mouth, then reached for the liana rope on the ground.

An irrational fear seized me. I was convinced that Iramamowe was going to tie me up and carry me farther into the forest. I was no longer aware that only a short while before I had been certain we were near a Maquiritare settlement, or even the mission. All I could think of was old Hayama's story about shamans who kept captive women hidden in faraway places. I was convinced Iramamowe would never take me back to the mission. The thought that had he wanted to keep me hidden in the forest he would not have brought me down from the mountains did not cross my mind at that moment.

I did not trust his smile, nor the gentle glint in his eyes. I picked up the water-filled gourd standing by the fire and offered it to him. Smiling, he dropped the rope. I moved closer as if I intended to bring the calabash to his lips. Instead, I smashed it between his eyes with all my strength. Caught totally unawares, he fell backward, staring at me in dumb incredulity as the blood ran down on both sides of his nose.

Heedless of thorns, roots, and the sharp grass, I sped through the thicket toward the place where I had seen the canoe. But I miscalculated where Iramamowe had anchored it, for when I reached the river there was nothing but stones strewn along the bank: The craft was farther upriver. With a swiftness I hardly believed myself capable of, I leaped from rock to rock. Gasping for breath, I slumped beside the canoe, pushed halfway up the sandy bank. A cry escaped my throat when I saw Iramamowe standing in front of me.

Squatting, he opened his mouth and laughed. His laughter came in bursts, extending from his face to his feet with such force the ground shook beneath me. Tears ran down his cheeks, mingling with the blood from the gash between his brows. "You forgot this," he said, dangling my knapsack in front of me. He opened it, then handed me my jeans and shirt. "Today you will reach the mission."

"Is this the river on which the mission stands?" I asked, staring at his bloodstained face. "I don't recognize this place."

"You have been here with Angelica and Milagros," he assured me. "The rains change the rivers and the forest the way the clouds change the sky."

I pulled up my jeans; loosely they hung from my waist, threatening to slide over my hips. The damp moldy-smelling shirt made me sneeze. I felt awkward and turned uncertain eyes to Iramamowe. "How do I look?"

He walked around me, examining me meticulously from every angle. Then, after a moment's deliberation, he squatted once more and pronounced with a laugh, "You look better painted with onoto."

I squatted beside him. The wind was still: There was no movement on the river. Shadows from the tall trees reached across the water, darkening the sand at our feet. I wanted to apologize for smashing the gourd in his face, and to explain my suspicions. I wanted him to tell me of the days in the mountains, but was reluctant to break the silence.

As if cognizant and amused by my dilemma, Iramamowe lowered his face to his knees and laughed softly, as if sharing his mirth with the drops of blood falling between his wide spread toes. "I wanted to take the hekuras I once saw in your eyes," he murmured. He went on to say that not only he but also Puriwariwe, the old shapori, had seen the hekuras within me. "Every time I lay with you and felt the energy bursting inside you, I hoped to lure the spirits into my chest," Iramamowe said. "But they didn't want to leave you." He turned his eyes to me, intense with protest. "The hekuras would not answer my call; they would not heed my songs. And then I became afraid that you might take the hekuras from my body."

Anger and an indescribable sadness rendered me speechless for a moment. "Did we stay longer than a day and a night in the mountains?" I finally asked, my curiosity getting the better of me.

Iramamowe nodded, but did not say for how long we had remained in the hut. "When I was certain that I could not change your body; when I realized that the hekuras would not leave you, I carried you in a sling to this place."

"Had you changed my body would you have kept me in the forest?"

Iramamowe looked at me sheepishly. A smile of relief parted his lips, yet his eyes were veiled with a vague regret. "You have the soul and shadow of an Iticoteri," he murmured. "You have eaten the ashes of our dead. But your body and head is that of a nape." A silence punctuated his last sentence before he softly added, "There will be nights when the wind will bring your voice mingled with the cries of monkeys and jaguars. And I will see your shadow dancing on the ground, painted by the moonlight. On those nights I will think of you." He stood up and pushed the canoe into the water. "Stay close to the bank- otherwise the current will take you too swiftly," he said, motioning me to climb inside.

"Aren't you coming?" I asked, alarmed.

"It's a good canoe," he said, handing me a small paddle. It had a beautifully shaped handle, a rounded shaft, and the oval blade was shaped like a pointed concave shield. "It will take you safely to the mission."

"Wait!" I cried before he let go of the craft. My hands trembled as I fumbled with the zippered side pocket of my knapsack. I took out the leather pouch, and handed it to him. "Do you remember the stone the shaman Juan Caridad gave me?" I asked. "It's yours now."

Something between shock and surprise seemed to momentarily paralyze his face. Slowly his fingers closed over the pouch, and his features relaxed into a smile. Without a word, he pushed the canoe into the water. Folding his arms across his chest, he watched me drift downriver. I turned my head often, until he was out of sight. There was a moment when I thought I still saw his figure, but it was only the wind playing with the shadows that tricked my eyes.

## Chapter 25

The trees on either side of the banks, the clouds traveling across the sky shadowed the river. Hoping to shorten the time between the world left behind and the one now awaiting me, I paddled as fast as I could. But I soon got tired, and then only used the small paddle to push myself free whenever I got too close to the bank.

At times the river was clear, reflecting the lush greenness with exaggerated intensity. There was something peaceful about the darkness of the forest and the deep silence around me. The trees seemed to be nodding in farewell as they bent slightly with the afternoon breeze; or perhaps they were only lamenting the passing of day, of the sun's last rays fading in the sky. Shortly before twilight deepened, I maneuvered the canoe toward the opposite bank, where I had seen stretches of sand amidst the dark rocks.

As soon as the craft hit the sand, I jumped out and dragged the canoe farther up the bank, close to the forest edge, where drooping vines and branches formed a safe, dark nook. I turned around and gazed at the distant mountains, violet in the dusk, and I wondered if I had been up there for more than a week before Iramamowe carried me to the hut where I had awakened that morning. I climbed to the highest rock and scanned the landscape for the lights of the mission. It had to be farther than Iramamowe estimated, I thought. Only darkness crept from out of the river, crawling up the rocks as the last vestiges of sunlight disappeared from the sky. I was hungry but did not dare explore the sandy river shore for turtle eggs.

I could not decide whether I should place my knapsack under my head as a pillow or wrap it around my cold feet as I lay inside the canoe. Through the tangled mass of branches above me I saw the clear sky, filled with innumerable tiny stars shining like golden specks of dust. As I drifted off to sleep, my feet tucked in my knapsack, I hoped that my feelings, like the light of the stars spanning the sky, would reach those I had loved in the forest.

I awoke shortly. The air was filled with the sounds of crickets and frogs. I sat up, then looked around me as if I could dispel the darkness. Shafts of moonlight spilled through the branches, painting the sand with grotesque shadows that seemed to come alive with the rustling of wind. Even with my eyes closed, I was painfully conscious of the shadows brushing against the canoe. And each time a cricket interrupted it's continuous chirping I opened my eyes, waiting for the sound to resume. Dawn finally silenced the cries, murmurs, and whistling of the forest. The mist-coated leaves looked as if they had been sprinkled with fine silver dust.

The sun rose over the treetops, tinting the clouds orange, purple, and pink. I bathed, washed my clothes with the fine river sand, spread them over the canoe to dry, then painted myself with onoto.

I was glad I had not arrived at the mission the day before, as I had first hoped, but that I still had time to watch the clouds change the sky. To the east, heavy clouds gathered, darkening the horizon. Lightning flashed in the distance, thunder followed after long intervals, and white lines of rain moved across the sky toward the north, keeping ahead of me. I wondered if alligators were basking in the sun amid the driftwood scattered on the bank. I had not floated downriver for long before the waters widened. The current became so strong I had a hard time keeping from swirling around in the shallow waters along the bank beset with rocks.

For an instant I thought I was hallucinating when I saw on the opposite bank a long dugout slowly pushing it's way upriver. I stood up, frantically waving my shirt in the air, then cried with sheer happiness as the dugout crossed the wide expanse of water and headed toward me. With calculated precision, the almost thirty-foot-long canoe beached just a few paces away.

Smiling, twelve people climbed out of the canoe- four women, four men, and four children. They looked odd in their Western clothes and the purple designs on their faces. Their hair was cut like mine, but the crown of their head was not shaved.

"Maquiritare?" I asked.

Nodding, the women bit their lips as if trying to contain their giggles. Their chins quivered until they burst into uncontrollable laughter that was echoed by the men. Hastily, I put on my jeans and shirt. The oldest woman came closer. She was short and sturdy, her sleeveless dress revealing round fat arms and long breasts, which hung to her waist. "You are the one who went into the forest with the old Iticoteri woman," she said, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to have found me paddling down-river in a dugout made by her people. "We know about you from the father at the mission." After formally shaking my hand, the old woman introduced me to her husband, their three daughters, their respective husbands and children.

"We left early this morning," the old woman's husband said. "We have been visiting relatives who live nearby."

"She has become a real savage," the youngest of the three daughters cried, pointing to my cut feet with such an expression of outrage that it was all I could do not to giggle. She searched my canoe and shook the empty knapsack. "She has no shoes," she said in disbelief. "She is a real savage!"

I looked at her bare feet.

"Our shoes are in the canoe," she affirmed, and proceeded to bring an assortment of footwear from the boat. "See? We all have shoes."

"Do you have any food with you?" I asked.

"We do," the old woman assured me, then asked her daughter to put the shoes back into the canoe, and bring one of the bark boxes.

The box was lined with platanillo leaves and filled with cassava bread. I huddled over the food, almost hugging it as I dunked piece after piece into a water-filled calabash before popping it into my mouth. "My stomach is full and happy," I said after I had eaten halfway down the box.

The Maquiritare regretted that they had no meat but only sugarcane with them. The old man cut a foot-long piece, peeled the bamboolike bark with his machete, then handed it to me. "It will give you strength," he said.

I chewed and sucked on the pale hard fibers until they were dry and tasteless. The Maquiritare had heard about Milagros. One of the sons-in-law knew him personally, but none of them knew where Milagros was.

"We will take you to the mission," the old man said.

I made a feeble attempt to convince him that it was not necessary for him to retrace his steps, but my words lacked conviction. Eagerly I boarded the craft, sitting between the women and children. To take advantage of the full speed of the current, the men steered the canoe right into the middle of the river. They paddled without saying a word to each other, yet each man was so attuned to the others' rhythm that they were able to anticipate each other's precise needs in advance. I remembered Milagros had once mentioned to me that the Maquiritare were not only the greatest boat builders of the Orinoco area, but also the best navigators.

Exhaustion pressed heavily on my eyes. The rhythmic splashing of the paddles made me so drowsy, my head kept lolling forward and sideways. The bygone days and nights drifted through my mind like fragmented dreams of another time. It seemed all so vague, so far away, as if it had all been an illusion.

It was noon when I was awakened by Father Coriolano, who had come into the room to bring me a mug filled with coffee. "Eighteen hours of sleep is a good start," he said. His smile held the same reassuring warmth with which he had greeted me the day before as I stepped out of the Maquiritare's boat.

My eyes were still heavy with sleep as I sat on the canvas cot. My back was stiff from resting in a flat position. Slowly, I sipped the hot black brew, so strong, and thickened with sugar it made me nauseous.

"I also have chocolate," Father Coriolano said.

I straightened the calico shift I had been given to sleep in, and followed him into the kitchen. With the flair of a chef preparing a fancy meal, he stirred two tablespoons of dried milk powder, four of Nestle's chocolate powder, four of sugar, and a few grains of salt into a pot of water boiling on a kerosene stove.

He drank my unfinished coffee while I spooned the delicious-tasting chocolate. "I can radio your friends in Caracas to pick you up with their plane anytime you want."

"Oh, not yet," I said faintly.

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The days passed slowly. In the mornings I wandered around the gardens along the riverbank and at noon I sat under the large mango tree that bore no fruit outside the chapel. Father

Coriolano did not ask me what my plans were, or how long I intended to stay at the mission. He seemed to have accepted my presence as something inevitable.

In the evenings I spent hours talking to Father Coriolano and to Mr. Barth, who often came to visit. We chatted about the crops, the school, the dispensary- always impersonal subjects. I was grateful that neither of them asked me where I had been for over a year, what I had done, or what I had seen. I would not have been able to answer- not because I wanted to be secretive, but because there was nothing to say. If we exhausted our conversation, Mr. Barth would read us articles from newspapers and magazines, some over twenty years old. Regardless of whether we were listening or not, he rattled on as he pleased, now and then interrupting himself to roar with laughter.

In spite of their humor and affable nature, there were evenings when shadows of loneliness crossed their faces as we sat in silence listening to the rain pattering on the corrugated roof; or to the solitary cry of a howler monkey settling for the night. It was then that I wondered if they too had learned the secrets of the forest: secrets of misty caves; of the sound of sap running through branches and trunks; of spiders spinning their silvery webs. At those times I wondered if that was what Father Coriolano had tried to warn me about when he had talked of the dangers of the forest. And I wondered if it was this that kept them from returning to the world they had left behind.

At night, enclosed in the four walls of my room, I felt a vast emptiness. I missed the closeness of the huts, the smell of people and smoke. Carried by the sound of the river flowing outside my window, I dreamt I was with the Iticoteri. I heard Ritimi's laughter, I saw the children's smiling faces, and there was always Iramamowe, squatting outside his hut calling to the hekuras that had eluded him.

Walking along the river's edge one afternoon, I was overcome by an uncontrollable sadness. The noise of the river was loud, drowning out the voices of the people chatting nearby. It had rained at noon and the sun peeked through the clouds without properly shining. Aimlessly I walked up and down the sandy beach. Then in the distance I saw the lonely figure of a man approaching. Dressed in khaki pants and a red checkered shirt, he looked indistinguishable from any of the Westernized Indians around the mission. Yet there was something familiar about the man's swaggering gait.

"Milagros!" I cried, then waited until he stood before me. His face looked unfamiliar under the torn straw hat through which his hair stuck out like blackened palm fibers. "I'm so glad you came."

Smiling, he motioned me to squat beside him. He brushed his hand over the top of my head. "Your hair has grown," he said. "I knew you would not leave until you saw me."

"I'm going back to Los Angeles," I said. There had been so many things I wanted to ask him, but now that he was beside me, I no longer saw the need to have anything explained. We watched the twilight spread over the river and the forest. The darkness filled with the sounds of frogs and crickets. A full moon ascended the sky. It grew smaller as it climbed and covered the river with silver ripples. "Like a dream," I murmured.

"A dream," Milagros repeated. "A dream you will always dream. A dream of walking, of laughter, of sadness." There was a long pause before he continued. "Even though your body has lost our smell, a part of you will always keep a bit of our world," he said, gesturing toward the distance. "You will never be free."

"I didn't even thank them," I said. "There is no thank you in your language."

"Neither is there good-bye," he added.

Something cold, like a drop of rain or dew, touched my forehead. When I turned to face him, Milagros was no longer by my side. From across the river, out of the distant darkness, the wind carried the Iticoteri's laughter. "Good-bye is said with the eyes." The voice rustled through the ancient trees, then vanished, like the silvery ripples on the water.

END

## Glossary

ASHUKAMAKI (Ah shuh kah mah kee)
A vine used to thicken the curare poison.

AYORI-TOTO (Ah yo ree toh toh)
A vine used to poison fish.

EPENA (Eh peh nah)
A hallucinatory snuff derived from either the bark of theepena tree or the seeds of the hisioma tree. Both substances are prepared and taken in the same fashion.

HEKURAS (Heh kuh rahs)
Tiny humanoid spirits that dwell in rocks and mountains. Shamans contact the hekuras by taking the hallucinatory snuff epena. Through chants the shamans lure the hekuras into their chests. Successful shamans can control these spirits at will.

MAMUCORI (Mah muh ko ree)
A thick vine used to make the curare poison.

MOMO (Moh moh)
A nutlike edible seed.

NABRUSHI (Nah bru shee)
A six-foot-long club used for fighting.

NAPE (Nah peh)
A foreigner. Anyone who is not an Indian, regardless of color, race, or nationality.

OKO-SHIKI (Oh koh shee kee)
Magical plants used for malevolent purposes.

ONOTO (Oh no toh)
A red vegetable dye derived from the crushed, boiled seeds of the Bixa orellana. The dye is used for decorating the face and body as well as baskets, arrowheads, and ornaments.

PISHAANSI (Pee sha han see)
A large leaf used for wrapping meat, for cooking, or as a receptacle.

PLATANILLO (Plah tah neeyo)
A large, broad, sturdy leaf used for wrapping and as ground cover.

POHORO (Ph oh roh)

Wild cacao.

RASHA (Rah sha)
The cultivated spiny-trunked peach palm. Highly valued for it's fruit, which it produces for fifty years and longer. After the plantain, it is probably the most important plant in the gardens. These palms are owned individually by whoever planted them.

SHABONO (Sha boh noh)
A permanent Yanomama settlement consisting of a circle of huts around an open clearing.

SHAPORI (Sha poh ree)
A shaman, witch doctor, sorcerer.

SIKOMASIK (See kouw mah seek)
A whitish edible mushroom that grows on decaying tree trunks.

UNUCAI (Uh nuh kah ee)
A man who has killed an enemy.

WAITERI (Wah ee teh ree)
A brave, courageous warrior.

WAYAMOU (Wah yah mow)
The formal, ritualized ceremonial language used by the men when bartering.

### The End - Shabono - © 1982 by Florinda Donner ###

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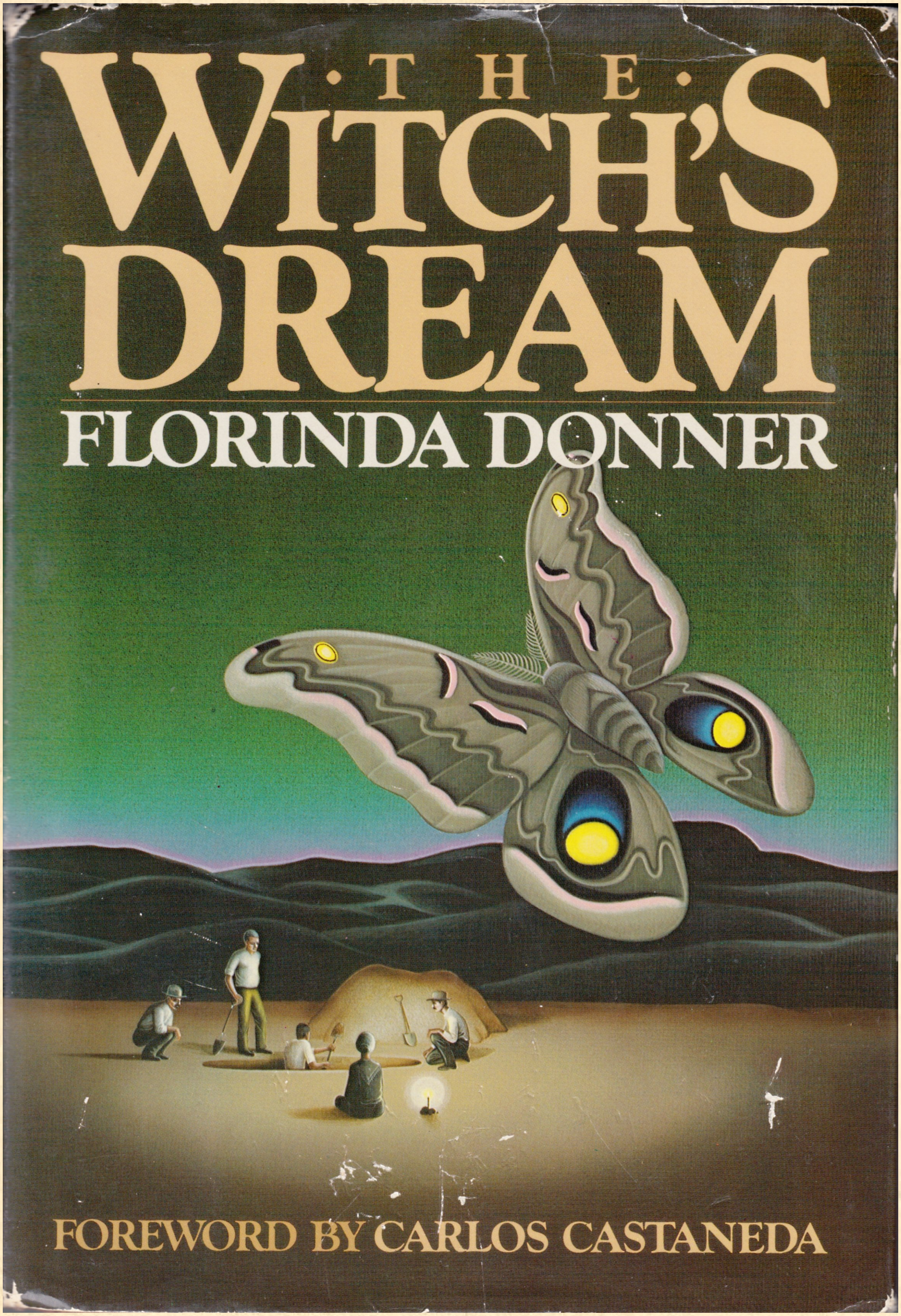
## 16 - THE WITCH'S DREAM: A HEALER'S WAY OF KNOWLEDGE

© 1985 - Florinda Donner-Grau. Donner-Grau's experiences with doña Mercedes, an aged healer in a remote Venezuelan town known for it's spiritualists, sorcerers, and mediums.


THE WITCH'S DREAM
FLORINDA DONNER
FOREWORD BY CARLOS CASTANEDA

# Book 16 – THE WITCH'S DREAM

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TO ALL THOSE
WHOM I CANNOT
MENTION BY NAME

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## Foreward

The work of Florinda Donner has a most special significance for me. It is, in fact, in agreement with my own work, and at the same time it deviates from it. Florinda Donner is my co-worker. We are both involved in the same pursuit; both of us belong to the world of don Juan Matus. The difference stems from her being female. In don Juan's world, males and females go in the same direction, on the same warrior's path, but on opposite sides of the road. Therefore, the views of the same phenomena obtained from those two positions have to be different in detail but not in flavor.

This proximity to Florinda Donner under any other circumstance would unavoidably engender a sense of loyalty rather than one of ruthless examination. But under the premises of the warrior's path, which we both follow, loyalty is expressed only in terms of demanding the best of ourselves. That best, for us, entails total examination of whatever we do.

Following don Juan's teachings, I have applied the warrior's premise of ruthless examination to Florinda Donner's work. I find that for me there are three different levels, three distinct spheres, of appreciation in it.

The first is the rich detail of her descriptions and narrative. To me, that detail is ethnography. The minutiae of daily life, which is commonplace in the cultural setting of the characters she describes, is something thoroughly unknown to many of us readers.

The second has to do with art. I would dare say that an ethnographer should also be a writer. In order to place us vicariously in the ethnographic horizon he or she describes, an ethnographer would have to be more than a social scientist: An ethnographer would have to be an artist.

The third is the honesty, simplicity, and directness of the work. It is here, without doubt, where I am most exigent. Florinda Donner and I have been molded by the same forces; therefore, her work must conform to a general pattern of striving for excellence. Don Juan has taught us that our work has to be a complete reflection of our lives.

I can't help having a warrior's sense of admiration and respect for Florinda Donner, who in solitude and against terrifying odds has maintained her equanimity, has remained faithful to the warrior's path, and has followed don Juan's teachings to the letter.

— CARLOS CASTANEDA

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## Author's Note

The state of Miranda, in northeastern Venezuela, was populated by Carib and Ciparicoto Indians during prehispanic times. During colonial times, two other racial and cultural groups became prominent there: the Spanish colonizers; and the African slaves that the Spaniards brought to work their plantations and mines.

The descendants of those Indians, Spaniards, and Africans make up the mixed population that presently inhabits the small hamlets, villages, and towns scattered over the inland and coastal areas.

Some of the towns in the state of Miranda are famous for their healers; many of whom are also spiritualists, mediums, and sorcerers.

In the midseventies, I made a trip to Miranda. Being at that time an anthropology student interested in healing practices, I worked with a woman healer. To honor her request for anonymity, I have given her the name Mercedes Peralta, and I have called her town Curmina.

As faithfully and accurately as I could, and with the healer's permission, I recorded in a field diary everything about my relation with her, from the moment I came to her house. I also recorded separately what some of her patients told me about themselves.

The present work consists of portions of my field diary, and the stories of those patients who
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were selected by Mercedes Peralta herself.

The parts taken from my field diary are written in the first person. I have, however, rendered the patient's stories into the third person. This is the only liberty I have taken with the material, other than changing the names and the personal data of the characters of the stories.

# PART ONE

## Chapter 1

It began for me with a transcendental event; an event that shaped the course of my life. I met a nagual. He was an Indian from northern Mexico.

The dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy defines nagual as the Spanish adaptation of a word that means sorcerer or wizard in the Nahuatl language of southern Mexico.

Traditional stories of naguals - men of ancient times who possessed extraordinary powers and performed acts that defied the imagination - do exist in modern Mexico.

But in an urban or even rural setting today, actual naguals are purely legendary. They seem to live only in folktales, through hearsay, or in the world of fantasy.

The nagual I met, however, was real. There was nothing illusory about him. When I asked him out of well-meant curiosity what made him a nagual, he presented a seemingly simple, and yet utterly complex idea as an explanation for what he did and what he was. He told me that nagualism begins with two certainties: the certainty that human beings are extraordinary beings living in an extraordinary world; and the certainty that neither men nor the world should ever be taken for granted under any circumstances.

From those sweet, simple premises, he said, grows a simple conclusion: Nagualism is at once taking off one mask and wearing another. Naguals take off the mask that makes us see ourselves and the world we live in as ordinary, lusterless, predictable, and repetitious; and put on the second mask, the one that helps us see ourselves - and our surroundings - for what we really are; breathtaking events that bloom into transitory existence once, and are never to be repeated again.

After meeting that unforgettable nagual, I had a moment's hesitation due solely to the fear I felt on examining such an imposing paradigm. I wanted to run away from that nagual and his quest, but I could not do it. Some time later, I took a drastic step and joined him and his party.

But this is not a story about that nagual, although his ideas and his influence bear heavily in everything I do. It is not my task to write about him or even to name him. There are others in his group who do that.

When I joined him, he took me to Mexico to meet a strange, striking woman - without telling me that she was perhaps the most knowledgeable and influential woman of his group. Her name was Florinda Matus. In spite of her worn, drab clothes, she had the innate elegance of most tall, thin women. Her pale complexioned face, gaunt and severe, was crowned by braided white hair and highlighted by large, luminous eyes. Her husky voice and her joyful, youthful laughter eased my irrational fear of her.

The nagual left me in her charge. The first thing I asked Florinda was whether she was a nagual herself. Smiling rather enigmatically, she further refined the definition of the word. She said, "To be a sorcerer or a wizard or a witch doesn't mean to be a nagual. But any of them can be one if he or she is responsible for and leads a group of men and women involved in a specific quest of knowledge."

When I asked her what that quest was, she responded that for those men and women it was to find the second mask; the one that helps us see ourselves and the world for what we really are - breathtaking events.

But this is not the story of Florinda either, despite the fact that she is the woman who guides me in every act I perform. This is, rather, the story of one of the many things she made me do.

"For women the quest of knowledge is indeed a very curious affair," Florinda told me once. "We have to go through strange maneuvers."

"Why is that so, Florinda?"

"Because women really don't care."

"I care."

"You say you care. You really don't."

"I'm here with you. Doesn't that speak for my caring?"

"No. What happened is that you like the nagual. His personality overwhelms you. I am the same myself. I was overwhelmed by the preceding nagual; the most irresistible sorcerer there was."

"I admit you are right but only partially. I do care about the nagual's quest."

"I don't doubt it. But that's not enough. Women need some specific maneuvers, in order to get at the core of themselves."

"What maneuvers? What core of ourselves are you talking about, Florinda?"

"If there is something inside us that we don't know about - such as hidden resources, unsuspected guts and cunning, or nobility of the spirit in the face of sorrow and pain - it will come out if we are confronted by the unknown while we are alone; without friends, without familiar boundaries, without support.

"If nothing comes out of us under those circumstances, it's because we have nothing.

"And before you say you really care for the nagual's quest, you must first find out for yourself whether there is something inside you. I demand that you do that."

"I don't think I am any good at being tested, Florinda."

"My question is: Can you live without knowing whether or not you have something hidden inside you?"

"But what if I am one of those who have nothing?"

"If that's the case, then I will have to ask you my second question: Can you go on being in the world you have chosen if you have nothing inside you?"

"Why, of course I can continue to be here. I've already joined you."

"No. You only think you have chosen my world. To choose the nagual's world is not just a matter of saying you have. You must prove it."

"How do you think I should go about doing that?"

"I'll give you a suggestion. You don't have to follow it, but if you do, you should go alone to the place where you were born. Nothing could be easier than that. Go there and take your chances, whatever they may be."

"But your suggestion is impractical. I don't have good feelings about that place. I didn't leave in good standing."

"So much the better: The odds will be stacked against you. That's why I picked your country. Women don't like to be bothered too much: If they have to bother with things, they go to pieces. Prove to me that you are not that way."

"What would you suggest I do in that place?"

"Be yourself. Do your work. You said that you want to be an anthropologist. Be one. What could be simpler?"

## Chapter 2

Years later, following Florinda's suggestions, I finally went to Venezuela, the country of my birth. On the surface, I went to gather anthropological data on healing practices. Actually, I was there to carry out, under Florinda's guidance, the maneuvers necessary to discover whether I possessed hidden resources, without which I could not remain in the nagual's world.

The agreement that my journey must be a solitary one was nearly drawn out of me by force. With strong words and decisive gestures, Florinda served notice that under no circumstances should I seek counsel from anyone around me during the trip. Knowing that I was in college, she strongly advised me not to use the trappings of academic life while in the field. I should not ask for a grant, have academic supervisors, or even ask my family and friends for help. I should let circumstances dictate the path to follow; once I had taken it, I must plunge into it with the fierceness of women on the warrior's path.

I arranged to go to Venezuela on an informal visit. I would see my relatives, I thought, and gather information on any possibility for a future study in cultural anthropology. Florinda praised me for my speed and thoroughness. I thought she was humoring me. There was nothing to praise me for. I mentioned to her that what worried me was her lack of instructions. Again and again I asked her for more details about my role in Venezuela. As the date of my departure approached, I became increasingly anxious about the outcome of it all. I insisted, in no uncertain terms, that I needed more specific instructions.

Florinda and I were sitting in wicker chairs, comfortably padded by soft cushions, under the shade of one of the many fruit trees growing in her huge court patio. In her long unbleached muslin dress, her wide-brimmed hat, fanning herself with a lace fan, Florinda looked like someone from another time.

"Forget about specific information," she said impatiently. "It won't do you any good."

"It certainly will do me a lot of good," I insisted. "I really don't understand why you're doing this to me, Florinda."

"Blame it on the fact that I am in the nagual's world; on the fact that I am a woman and that I belong to a different mood."

"Mood? What do you mean by a different mood?"

She gazed at me with remote, disinterested eyes. "I wish you could hear yourself talking. What mood?" she mocked me. Her face expressed tolerant contempt. "I don't go for seemingly orderly arrangements of thought and deed. For me, order is different from arranging things neatly. I don't give a damn about stupidity and I have no patience. That's the mood."

"That sounds dreadful, Florinda. I was led to believe that in the nagual's world, people are above pettiness and don't behave impatiently."

"Being in the nagual's world has nothing to do with my impatience," she said, making a humorous, hopeless gesture. "You see, I'm impeccably impatient."

"I really would like to know what it means to be impeccably impatient."

"It means that I am, for instance, perfectly conscious that you are boring me now with your stupid insistence on having detailed instructions. My impatience tells me that I should stop you. But it is my impeccability that will make you shut up at once.

"All this boils down to the following: If you persist in asking for details guided only by your bad habit of having everything spelled out, in spite of my telling you to stop, I'll hit you. But I'll never be angry at you, or hold it against you."

In spite of her serious tone I had to laugh. "Would you really hit me, Florinda? Well, hit me if you have to," I added, seeing her determined face. "But I've got to know what I am going to do in Venezuela. I'm going crazy with worry."

"All right! If you insist on knowing the details I consider important, I'll tell you. I hope you understand we're separated by an abyss, and this abyss can't be bridged by talk. Males can build bridges with their words: Women can't. You're imitating males now. Women have to make the bridge with their acts. We give birth, you know. We make people. I want you to go away so that in aloneness you'll find out what your strengths or weaknesses are."

"I understand what you say, Florinda, but consider my position."

Florinda relented, dismissing the retort that arose to her lips.

"All right, all right," she said wearily, motioning me to move my chair next to hers. "I'm going to give you the details I consider important for your trip. Fortunately for you, they are not the detailed instructions you are after. What you want is for me to tell you exactly what to do in a future situation, and when to do it. That's something quite stupid to ask. How can I give you instructions about something that doesn't yet exist? I'll give you, instead, instructions on how to arrange your thoughts, feelings, and reactions. With that in hand, you'll take care of any eventuality that might arise."

"Are you really serious, Florinda?" I asked in disbelief.

"I'm deadly serious," she assured me. Leaning forward in her chair, she went on speaking with a half smile about to break into a laugh. "The first detailed item to consider is taking stock of yourself. You see, in the nagual's world, we must be responsible for our actions."

She reminded me that I knew the warrior's path. In the time I had been with her, she said, I had received extensive training in the laborious practical philosophy of the nagual's world. Therefore, any detailed instructions she might give me now would have to be, actually, a detailed reminder of the warrior's path.

"In the warrior's path, women don't feel important," she went on, in the tone of someone reciting from memory, "because importance waters down fierceness. In the warrior's path women are fierce. They remain fiercely impassive under any conditions. They don't demand anything, yet they are willing to give anything of themselves. They fiercely seek a signal from the spirit of things in the form of a kind word, an appropriate gesture; and when they get it, they express their thanks by redoubling their fierceness. In the warrior's path, women don't judge. They fiercely reduce themselves to nothing in order to listen, to watch; so that they can conquer and be humbled by their conquest; or be defeated and be enhanced by their defeat. In the warrior's path, women don't surrender. They may be defeated a thousand times, but they never surrender. And above all, in the warrior's path, women are free."

Unable to interrupt her, I had kept gazing at Florinda, fascinated though not quite grasping what she was saying. I felt acute despair when she stopped as though she had nothing more to tell me. Without quite wanting to, I began crying uncontrollably. I knew that what she had just told me could not help me to resolve my problems.

She let me cry for a long time and then she laughed. "You really are weeping!" she said in disbelief.

"You are the most heartless, unfeeling person I've ever met," I said between sobs. "You're ready to send me God knows where, and you don't even tell me what I should do."

"But I just did," she said still laughing.

"What you just said has no value in a real-life situation," I retorted angrily. "You sounded like a dictator spouting slogans."

Florinda regarded me cheerfully. "You'll be surprised how much use you can get out of those stupid slogans," she said. "But now, let us come to an understanding. I'm not sending you any place. You're a woman in the warrior's path, you're free to do what you wish, you know that. You haven't yet grasped what the nagual's world is all about. I'm not your teacher; I'm not your mentor; I'm not responsible for you. No one but yourself is. The hardest thing to grasp about the nagual's world is that it offers total freedom. But freedom is not free. I took you under my wing because you have a natural ability to see things as they are; to remove yourself from a situation and see the wonder of it all. That's a gift: You were born like that. It takes years for average persons in the nagual's world to remove themselves from their involvement with themselves and be capable of seeing the wonder of it all."

Regardless of her praise, I was nearly beyond myself with anxiety. She finally calmed me down by promising that just before my plane left she would give me the specific detailed information I wanted.

I waited in the departure lobby of the airline, but Florinda didn't show up at all.

Despondent and filled with self-pity, I gave free rein to my despair and disappointment. With no concern for the curious glances around me, I sat down and wept. I felt lonelier than I had ever felt before. All I could think of was that no one had come to see me off: No one had come to help me with my suitcase. I was used to having relatives and friends see me off.

Florinda had warned me that anyone who chose the nagual's world had to be prepared for fierce aloneness. She had made it clear that to her, aloneness did not mean loneliness but a physical state of solitude.

## Chapter 3

Never had I realized how sheltered my life had been. In a hotel room in Caracas, alone and without any idea of what to do next, I came to experience first hand the solitariness Florinda had talked about.

My parents were not in Venezuela at the time, and I was unable to contact my brothers by telephone. All I felt like doing was sitting on the hotel bed and watching TV. I didn't want to touch my suitcase. I even thought of taking the plane back to Los Angeles.

Only after tremendous effort did I begin to unpack. Neatly tucked inside a pair of folded slacks I found a piece of paper with Florinda's handwriting. I read it avidly.

*Don't worry about details. Details tend to adjust themselves to serve the circumstances if one has conviction. Your plans should be as follows. Pick anything and call that the beginning. Then go and face the beginning. Once you are face to face with the beginning, let it take you wherever it may. I trust that your convictions won't let you pick a capricious beginning. Be realistic and frugal, so as to select wisely. Do it now!!*

*P.S. Anything would do for a start.*

Possessed by Florinda's decisiveness, I picked up the phone, and dialed the number of an old friend of mine: I was not sure she would still be in Caracas.

The polite lady who answered the phone gave me other possible numbers to call because my friend was no longer at that address. I called all of them, for I could no longer stop. The beginning was taking hold of me. Finally I located a married couple I knew from childhood; my parents' friends. They wanted to see me immediately, but they were going to a wedding in an hour, so they insisted on taking me along. They assured me it was all right.

At the wedding I met an ex-Jesuit priest, who was an amateur anthropologist. We talked for hours on end. I told him of my interest in anthropological studies. As if he had been waiting for me to say a magical word, he began to expound on the controversial value of folk healers, and the social role they play in their societies.

I had not mentioned healers or healing in general as a possible topic for my study, although it was foremost in my mind.

Instead of feeling happy that he seemed to be addressing himself to my inner thoughts, I was filled with an apprehension that verged on fear. When he told me that I should not go to the town of Sortes, even though it was purported to be the center of spiritualism in western Venezuela, I felt genuinely annoyed with him. He seemed to be anticipating me at every turn. It was precisely to that small town that I had planned to go if nothing else happened.

I was just about to excuse myself and leave the party, when he said in quite a loud tone that I should seriously consider going to the town of Curmina, in northern Venezuela, where I could have phenomenal success because the town was a new, true center of spiritualism and healing.

"I don't know how I know it, but I know you're dying to be with the witches of Curmina," he said in a dry, matter-of-fact tone.

He took a piece of paper, and drew a map of the region. He gave me exact distances in kilometers from Caracas to the various points in the area where he said spiritualists, sorcerers, witches, and healers lived. He placed special emphasis on one name: Mercedes Peralta. He underlined it and, totally unaware of it, first encircled it, then drew a heavy square around it and boxed it in.

"She's a spiritualist, a witch, and a healer," he said smiling at me. "Be sure you go and see her, will you?"

I knew what he was talking about. Under Florinda's guidance, I had met and worked with spiritualists, sorcerers, witches, and healers in northern Mexico and among the Latino population of southern California. From the very beginning Florinda classified them.

Spiritualists are practitioners who entreat the spirits of saints or devils to intercede for them, with a higher order, on behalf of their patients. Their function is to get in touch with spirits and interpret their advice. The advice is obtained in meetings during which spirits are called. Sorcerers and witches are practitioners who affect their patients directly. Through their knowledge of occult arts, they bring unknown and unpredictable elements to bear on the two kinds of people who come to see them: patients in search of help; and clients in search of their witchcraft services. Healers are practitioners who strive exclusively to restore health and well-being.

Florinda made sure she added to her classification the possible combinations of all three. In a joking way, but in all seriousness, she claimed that in matters of restoring health, I was predisposed to believe that non-Western healing practices were more holistic than Western medicine. She made it clear that I was wrong. Healing, Florinda said, depended on the practitioner and not on a body of knowledge. Florinda maintained that there was no such thing as non-Western healing practices. Healing, unlike medicine, was not a formalized discipline. She used to tease that in my own way, I was as prejudiced as those who believe that if a patient is cured by means of medicinal plants, massages, or incantations, either the disease was psychosomatic or the cure was the result of a lucky accident that the practitioner did not understand.

Florinda was convinced that a person who successfully restored health, whether a doctor or a folk healer, was someone who could alter the body's fundamental feelings about itself and the body's link with the world - that is, someone who offered the body, as well as the mind, new possibilities so that the habitual mold to which body and mind had learned to conform could be systematically broken down. Other dimensions of awareness would then become accessible, and the commonsense expectations of disease and health could become transformed as new bodily meanings became crystalized.

Florinda had laughed when I expressed genuine surprise upon hearing such thoughts which were revolutionary to me at the time. She told me that everything she said stemmed from the knowledge she shared with her companions in the nagual's world.

Having followed the instructions in Florinda's note, I let the situation guide me: I let it develop with minimal interference on my part. I felt I had to go to Curmina, and look up the woman that the ex-Jesuit priest had talked about.

When I first arrived at Mercedes Peralta's house, I did not have to wait long in the shadowy corridor before a voice called me from behind the curtain directly in front of me that served as a door. I climbed the two steps leading to a large, dimly lit room that smelled of cigar smoke and ammonia. Several candles, burning on a massive altar that stood against the far wall, illuminated the figurines and pictures of saints arranged around the blue-robed Virgin of Coromoto. It was a finely carved statue with red smiling lips, rouged cheeks, and eyes that seemed to fix me with a benign, forgiving gaze.

I stepped closer. In the corner, almost hidden between the altar and a high rectangular table, sat Mercedes Peralta. She appeared to be asleep, with her head resting against the back of her chair; her eyes closed. She looked extremely old. I had never seen such a face. Even in it's restful immobility, it revealed a frightening strength. The glow of the candles, rather than softening her sharply chiseled features, only accentuated the determination etched in the network of wrinkles.

Slowly, she opened her eyes. They were large and almond shaped. The whites of her eyes were slightly discolored. At first her eyes were almost blank, but then they became alive and stared at me with the unnerving directness of a child. Seconds passed and gradually under her unwavering gaze, which was neither friendly nor unfriendly, I began to feel uncomfortable.

"Good afternoon, dona Mercedes," I greeted her before I started to lose all my courage and run out of the house. "My name is Florinda Donner, and I am going to be very direct so as not to waste your valuable time."

She blinked repeatedly, adjusting her eyes to look at me.

"I've come to Venezuela to study healing methods," I went on, gaining confidence. "I study at a university in the United States, but I truly would like to be a healer. I can pay you if you take me as your student. But even if you don't take me as your student, I can pay you for any information you would give me."

The old woman did not say a word. She motioned me to sit down on a stool, then rose and gazed at a metal instrument on the table. There was a comical expression on her face as she turned to look at me.

"What is that apparatus?" I asked daringly.

"It's a nautical compass," she said casually. "It tells me all kinds of things."

She picked it up and placed it on the topmost shelf of a glass cabinet that stood against the opposite wall.

Apparently struck by a funny thought, she began to laugh. "I'm going to make something clear to you right now," she said. "Yes, I'll give you all kinds of information about healing, not because you ask me, but because you're lucky: I already know that for sure. What I don't know is if you're strong as well."

The old woman was silent, then she spoke again in a forced whisper without looking at me; her attention on something inside the glass cabinet.

"Luck and strength are all that count in everything," she said. "I knew the night I saw you by the plaza that you are lucky, and that you were looking for me."

"I don't understand what you're talking about," I said.

Mercedes Peralta turned to face me, then laughed in such a discordant manner that I felt certain she was mad. She opened her mouth so wide I could see the few molars she still had left. She stopped abruptly, sat on her chair, and insisted that she had seen me exactly two weeks ago late at night in the plaza. She had been with a friend, she explained, who was driving her home from a seance that had taken place in one of the coastal towns.

Although her friend had been baffled to see me alone so late at night, she herself had not been in the least surprised. "You reminded me instantly of someone I once knew," she said. "It was past midnight. You smiled at me."

I did not remember seeing her, or being alone in the plaza at that hour. But it could have been that she had seen me the night I had arrived from Caracas. After waiting in vain for the week-long rain to stop, I had finally risked the drive from Caracas to Curmina.

I knew full well that there would be landslides: It turned out that instead of the usual two hours, the drive took me four. By the time I had arrived, the whole town was asleep, and I had trouble finding the hostel near the plaza, which had also been recommended to me by the former priest.

Mystified by her insistence that she knew I was coming to see her, I told her about him and what he had said to me at the wedding in Caracas.

"He was quite insistent that I look you up," I said. "He mentioned that your ancestors were sorcerers and healers - famous during colonial times, and that they were persecuted by the Holy Inquisition."

A flicker of surprise widened her eyes slightly. "Did you know that in those days accused witches were sent to Cartagena in Colombia to be tried?" she asked and immediately went on to say, "Venezuela wasn't important enough to have an Inquisitorial tribunal."

She paused and, looking straight into my eyes, asked, "Where had you originally planned to study healing methods?"

"In the state of Yaracuy," I said vaguely.

"Sortes?" she inquired. "Maria Lionza?"

I nodded. Sortes is the town where the cult of Maria Lionza is centered. Maria Lionza is said to have been born of an Indian princess and a Spanish conquistador, and she is purported to have had supernatural powers. Today, she is revered by thousands in Venezuela as a saintly miraculous woman.

"But I took the ex-priest's advice and came to Curmina instead," I said. "I've already talked with two women healers. Both agreed that you're the most knowledgeable; the only one who could explain healing matters to me."

I talked about the methods I wanted to follow, making it all up on the spur of the moment: direct observation, and participation in some of the healing sessions while tape recording them - and, most important of all, systematic interviewing of the patients I observed.

The old woman nodded, giggling from time to time. To my great surprise, she was totally amenable to my proposed methods. She proudly informed me that years ago she had been interviewed by a psychologist from a university in Caracas, who had stayed for a week right there in her house.

"To make it easier for you," she suggested, "you can come and live with us. We have plenty of rooms in the house."

I accepted her invitation, but told her that I had planned to stay for at least six months in the area. She seemed unperturbed. As far as she was concerned, I could stay for years.

"I'm glad you're here, Musiúa," she added softly.

I smiled. Although born and raised in Venezuela, I have been called a Musiúa (moo-see-yua) all my life. It is usually a derogatory term, but depending on the tone in which it is said, it can be turned into a rather affectionate expression referring to anyone who is blond and blue-eyed.

## Chapter 4

Startled by the faint rustle of a skirt swishing past me, I opened my eyes, and gazed at the candle burning on the altar in the semidarkness of the room. The flame flickered and sent up a single black thread of smoke. On the wall appeared a woman's shadow with a stick in it's hand. The shadow seemed to impale the heads of the men and women who, with closed eyes, were sitting beside me on old wooden chairs arranged in a circle. I could barely stifle a nervous giggle upon realizing that it was Mercedes Peralta, placing big, hand-rolled cigars in everyone's mouth. She took the candle from the altar, and lit each cigar with it. Then she returned to her chair in the middle of the circle. In a deep monotonous voice she began to chant an unintelligible, repetitious incantation.

Suppressing a fit of coughing, I tried to synchronize my smoking with the rapid puffing of the people around me. Through teary eyes I watched their solemn, masklike faces becoming momentarily animated with every puff until they seemed to dissolve in the thickening smoke. Like a disembodied object, Mercedes Peralta's hand materialized out of that vaporous haze. Snapping her fingers, she repeatedly traced the air with the imaginary lines connecting the four cardinal points.

Imitating the others, I began to sway my head to and fro, to the rhythmic sound of her snapping fingers, and her low-voiced incantations. Ignoring my growing nausea, I forced myself to keep my eyes open so as not to miss a single detail of what was occurring around me. This was the first time I had been allowed to attend a meeting of spiritualists. Dona Mercedes was going to serve as the medium and contact the spirits.

Dona Mercedes' own definition of spiritualists, witches, and healers was the same as Florinda's; with the exception that she recognized another independent class: Mediums. Dona Mercedes defined mediums as the interpreting intermediaries who serve as conduits for the spirits to express themselves. She understood that mediums were so independent that they did not have to belong to any of the three other categories. And they could also be all four categories in one.

"There is a disturbing force in the room." A man's voice interrupted dona Mercedes' incantations.

Smoldering cigars perforated the smoky darkness like accusing eyes as the rest of the group mumbled their agreement.

"I'll see to it," dona Mercedes said, rising from her chair.

She went from person to person, pausing for an instant behind each one.

I yelled out in pain as I felt something sharp piercing my shoulder.

"Come with me," she whispered into my ear. "You aren't in a trance."

Afraid I would resist, she took me firmly by the arm, and led me to the red curtain that served as a door.

"But you yourself asked me to come," I insisted before I was pushed out of the room. "I won't bother anyone if I sit quietly in a corner."

"You'll bother the spirits," she murmured, and noiselessly drew the curtain shut.

I walked to the kitchen at the back of the house, where I usually worked at night transcribing tapes, and organizing my gradually growing field notes.

Swarms of insects clustered around the single bulb dangling from the kitchen ceiling. It's weak light illuminated the wooden table standing in the middle of the room, but left the room's corners in shadows; where the flea-ridden, mangy dogs slept.

One side of the rectangular kitchen was open to the yard. Against the other three soot-blackened walls stood a raised adobe cooking pit, a kerosene stove, and a round metal tub filled with water.

I walked into the moonlit yard.

The cement slab where dona Mercedes' companion Candelaria spread out well-soaped clothes to whiten in the sun each day shone like a silvery puddle of water. The wash hanging on the lines looked like white stains against the darkness of the stucco wall encircling the yard.

Outlined by the moon, fruit trees, medicinal plants, and vegetable patches formed a uniform dark mass humming with insects and the strident call of crickets.

I returned to the kitchen, and checked the pot simmering on the stove. No matter what time of day or night, there was always something to eat. Usually it was a hearty soup made of meat, chicken, or fish, depending on what was available, and an assortment of vegetables and roots.

I searched for a soup plate among the dishes piled on the wide adobe shelves built into the wall. There were dozens of unmatched china, metal, and plastic plates.

I served myself a large bowl of chicken soup, but before sitting down, I remembered to scoop out some water from the nearby tub and replenish the pot on the stove. It had not taken me long to familiarize myself with the habits of that eccentric household.

I started to write down what had transpired in the meeting. Trying to recollect every detail of an event or every word of a conversation was always the best exercise to fight off the sense of loneliness that invariably came upon me.

The cold nose of a dog rubbed against my leg. I searched for leftover pieces of bread, fed them to the dog, and then returned to my notes.

I worked until I felt sleepy and my eyes burned, strained by the weak light. I collected my tape recorder and papers, then headed toward my room, situated at the other end of the house. I paused for an instant in the inside patio. It was patched with moonlight. A faint breeze stirred the leaves of the gnarled grape vine; it's jagged shadows painted lacy patterns on the brick courtyard.

I felt her presence before actually seeing the woman: She was squatting on the ground, almost hidden by the large terra-cotta pots scattered throughout the patio. A wooly mop of hair crowned her head like a white halo, but her dark face remained indistinct, blending in with the shadows around her.

I had never seen her in the house before. I recovered from my initial fright by reasoning that she must be one of dona Mercedes' friends, or perhaps one of her patients, or even one of Candelaria's relatives, who was waiting for her to come out of the seance.

"Pardon me," I said. "I'm new here. I work with dona Mercedes."

The woman nodded as I spoke. She gave me the impression she knew what I was talking about; but she did not break her silence. Possessed by an inexplicable uneasiness, I tried not to succumb to hysterical fright. I kept repeating to myself that I had no reason to panic because an old woman was squatting in the patio.

"Were you at the seance?" I asked in an uncertain voice.

The woman shook her head affirmatively.

"I was there, too," I said, "but dona Mercedes kicked me out."

I felt relieved all of a sudden and wanted to make fun of the situation.

"Are you afraid of me?" the old woman asked abruptly. Her voice had a cutting, raspy, yet youthful sound.

I laughed. I was about to say no with a flippant air, when something held me back. I heard myself saying that I was terrified of her.

"Come with me," the woman ordered me matter-of-factly.

Again my first reaction was to follow her boldly; but instead, I heard myself saying something I had not intended. "I have to finish my work. If you care to talk to me, you can do it here and now."

"I command you to come!" the woman's voice boomed.

All the energy of my body seemed to drain out of me at once. Yet, I stated, "Why don't you command yourself to stay."

I could not believe I had said that. I was ready to apologize, when a strange reserve of energy flowed into my body, and made me feel almost under control.

"Have it your way," the woman said, and stood up from her squatting position. Her height was inconceivable. She grew and grew until her knees were at my eye level.

At that point I felt my energy leaving me and I let out a series of wild, piercing screams.

Dona Mercedes' companion Candelaria came rushing to my side. She covered the distance between the room where the meeting of spiritualists was taking place and the patio before I had time to gasp for air, and scream once more.

"Everything is all right now," she repeated in a soothing voice that seemed to come from far away.

Gently, she rubbed my neck and back, but I could not stop from shaking. And then without wanting to, I began to cry.

"I shouldn't have left you by yourself," she said apologetically. "But who would've thought a Musiúa would see her?"

Before any of the other participants in the meeting came out to see what was going on, Candelaria took me to the kitchen. She helped me into a chair and gave me a glass of rum.

I drank it and told her what had happened in the patio. The instant I had finished both the rum and my account, I felt drowsy, distracted, but far from drunk.

"Leave us alone, Candelaria," dona Mercedes said, stepping into my room. Not only did Candelaria put me to bed, she also placed a cot alongside so that she would be there when I awoke.

After a long silence, dona Mercedes began, "I don't know how to say this, but you're a medium. I knew this all along." Her feverish eyes seemed to be suspended in a crystalline substance as she studied my face intently. "The only reason they did let you sit in the seance was because you're lucky. Mediums are lucky."

In spite of my apprehension I had to laugh.

"Don't laugh about this," she admonished. "It's serious. In the patio you called a spirit all by yourself, and the most important spirit of them all came to you; the spirit of one of my ancestors. She doesn't come often, but when she does, it's for important reasons."

"Was she a ghost?" I asked stupidly.

"Of course she was a ghost," she said firmly. "We understand things the way we've been taught. There are no deviations from that. Our beliefs are that you saw a most frightening spirit; and that a live medium can communicate with the spirit of a dead medium."

"Why would that spirit come to me?" I asked.

"I don't know. She came to me once to warn me," she replied, "but I didn't follow her advice."

Dona Mercedes' eyes became gentle, and her voice grew softer as she added, "The first thing I told you when you arrived was that you're lucky. I was lucky, too, until someone broke my luck. You remind me of that person. He was as blond as you are. His name was Federico and he also had luck, but he had no strength whatsoever. The spirit told me to leave him alone. I didn't, and I am still paying for it."

At a loss as to how to take the sudden turn of events, or the sadness that had come upon her, I placed my hand over hers.

"He had no strength whatsoever," she repeated. "The spirit knew it."

Although Mercedes Peralta was always willing to discuss anything pertaining to her practices, she had quite emphatically discouraged my curiosity regarding her past. Once, and I don't know whether I caught her unaware or whether it was a deliberate move on her part, she revealed that she had suffered a great loss many years ago.

Before I had a chance to decide whether she was actually encouraging me to ask personal questions, she lifted my hand to her face, and held it against her cheek. "Feel these scars," she whispered.

"What happened to you?" I asked, running my fingers over the rough scar tissue on her cheeks and neck.

Until I touched them, the scars had been indistinguishable from the wrinkles. Her dark skin felt so brittle I was afraid it would disintegrate in my hand. A mysterious vibration emanated from her entire body. I could not shift my gaze from her eyes.

"We won't talk about what you saw in the patio," she said emphatically. "Things like that pertain only to the world of mediums, and you should never discuss that world with anyone. I would certainly advise you not to be afraid of that spirit, but do not beckon her foolishly."

She helped me get out of my bed, and led me outside to the same spot in the patio where I had seen the woman. As I stood there inspecting the darkness around us, I realized that I had no idea whether I had slept a few hours or an entire night and day.

Dona Mercedes seemed to be aware of my confusion. "It's four in the morning," she said. "You've slept almost five hours."

She crouched where the woman had been. I squatted beside her between the shrubs of jasmine hanging down from wooden lattices; like perfumed curtains.

"It never occurred to me that you didn't know how to smoke," she said, and laughed her dry raspy laughter.

She reached inside her skirt pocket, pulled out a cigar, and lit it.

"At a meeting of spiritualists, we smoke hand-rolled cigars. Spiritualists know that the smell of tobacco pleases the spirits."

After a short pause, she put the lit cigar in my mouth. "Try to smoke," she ordered.

I drew on it, inhaling deeply. The heavy smoke made me cough.

"Don't inhale," she said impatiently. "Let me show you how."

She reached for the cigar, and puffed at it repeatedly, breathing in and out in short even spurts.

"You don't want the smoke to go to your lungs, but to your head," she explained. "That's the way a medium calls the spirits. From now on, you're going to call the spirits from this spot. And don't talk about it until you can conduct a spiritualist's meeting all by yourself."

"But I don't want to call the spirits," I laughingly protested. "All I want is to sit in one of the meetings and watch."

She regarded me with a threatening determination. "You are a medium, and no medium goes to a meeting to watch."

"What is the reason for a meeting?" I asked, changing the subject.

"To ask questions of the spirits," she promptly responded. "Some spirits give great advice. Others are malevolent."

She chuckled with a touch of malice. "Which spirit shows up depends on the medium's state of being."

"Are mediums, then, at the mercy of the spirits?" I asked.

She was silent for a long time, looking at me without betraying any feelings in her face.

Then in a defiant tone she said, "They are not if they are strong."

She continued staring at me fiercely, then she closed her eyes. When she opened them again, they were devoid of all expression.

"Help me to my room," she murmured.

Holding on to my head, she straightened up. Her hand slid down my shoulder, then to my arm, the stiff fingers curling around my wrist like carbonized roots.

Silently, we shuffled down the dark corridor where wooden benches and chairs covered with goat hide stood rigidly against the wall. She stepped inside her bedroom. Before closing the door she reminded me again that mediums do not talk about their world.

"I knew the instant I saw you in the plaza that you were a medium, and that you would be coming to see me," she affirmed. A smile, the meaning of which I did not understand, crossed her face. "You have come to bring me something from my past."

"What?"

"I don't quite know myself. Memories, perhaps," she said vaguely. "Or perhaps you are bringing my old luck back."

She brushed my cheek with the back of her hand, and softly closed the door.

## Chapter 5

Lulled by the soft breeze and the laughter of children playing in the street, I dozed all afternoon in the hammock that hung between two soursop trees in the yard. I was even oblivious to the scent of powder detergent mingled with the pungent odor of creosol with which Candelaria washed the floors twice each day; regardless of whether they were dirty.

I waited until it was nearly six o'clock. Then, as Mercedes Peralta had requested, I went and knocked on her bedroom door. There was no answer. Quietly, I stepped inside. Usually at that time, she was through with the people who came to her to be treated for one malady or another. She never saw more than two a day. On her bad days, which were quite frequent, she saw no one. On those occasions, I took her for rides in my jeep and for long walks in the surrounding hills.

"Is that you, Musiúa?" dona Mercedes asked, stretching in her low-hanging hammock, fastened to metal rings built into the wall.

I greeted her and sat on the double bed by the window. She never slept in it. She maintained that from a bed, regardless of it's size, one could have a fatal fall. Waiting for her to get up, I looked around the oddly furnished room that never failed to enchant me. Things had been arranged there with a look of purposeful incongruity. The two night tables at the head and foot of the bed, cluttered with candles and figurines of saints, served as altars. A low wooden wardrobe painted blue and pink blocked the door that opened to the street. I wondered what was inside, for dona Mercedes' clothes - she never wore anything but black - hung everywhere, from hooks on the walls and behind the door, at the head and foot of the iron bedstead, and even from the ropes holding the hammock. A crystal chandelier, which did not work, dangled precariously from the cane ceiling. It was gray with dust, and spiders had spun their webs around it's prisms. An almanac, the kind one tears a page from each day, hung behind the door.

Combing her fingers through her white mop of hair, Mercedes Peralta heaved a deep sigh, then swung her legs out of the hammock and hunted about with her feet for her cloth sandals. She sat still for a moment, then moved to the high narrow window facing the street and opened it's wooden panels. She blinked repeatedly until her eyes adjusted to the late-afternoon light beaming into the room. Intently, she gazed at the sky, as if she were expecting some message from the sunset.

"Are we going for a walk?" I asked.

Slowly, she turned around. "A walk?" she repeated, arching her brows in surprise. "How can we go for a walk when I have a person waiting for me."

I opened my mouth ready to inform her there was no one outside, but the mocking expression in her tired eyes compelled me to silence. She took my hand, and we walked out of her room.

With his chin buried in his chest, a frail-looking old man dozed on the wooden bench outside the room where Mercedes Peralta treated people who came for help.

Sensing our presence, he straightened up. "I don't feel too well," he said in a toneless voice, reaching for his straw hat and the walking stick lying beside him.

"Octavio Cantu," Mercedes Peralta said, addressing herself to me, but shaking his hand.

She led him up the two steps into the room. I followed close behind. He turned around with an inquiring expression in his eyes as he gazed at me.

"She's been helping me," she said. "But if you don't want her with us, she'll go outside."

He stood there for a moment nervously shifting his feet.

His mouth twisted into a lopsided smile. "If she has been helping you," he murmured with a touch of helplessness, "I suppose it's all right."

With a swift movement of her head, Mercedes Peralta motioned me to my stool by the altar, then helped the old man into the chair directly in front of the high rectangular table. She seated herself to his right, facing him.

"Where could it be?" she mumbled repeatedly, searching among the assortment of jars, candles and cigars, dried roots, and scraps of material scattered on the table.

She sighed with relief upon finding her nautical compass, which she placed in front of Octavio Cantu. Attentively, she studied the round-shaped metal box.

"Look at this!" she cried out, beckoning me to move closer.

It was the same compass I had seen her examine so intently the first day I walked into that room. The needle, barely visible through the opaque, badly scratched glass, moved vigorously to and fro, as if animated by some invisible force emanating from Octavio Cantu.

Mercedes Peralta used the compass as a diagnostic device only if she believed the person to be suffering from a spiritual ailment rather than a natural disease. So far, I had been unable to determine what criteria she used to differentiate between the two kinds of maladies. For her, a spiritual ailment could manifest itself in the form of a bout of bad luck as well as a common cold, which, depending on the circumstances, might also be diagnosed as a natural ailment.

Expecting to find some mechanical contraption that activated the needle, I examined the compass at every opportunity. Since there was none, I accepted her explanation as a bona-fide truth: Whenever a person is centered, that is, when body, spirit, and soul are in harmony, the needle does not move at all. To prove her point, she placed the compass in front of herself, Candelaria, and me. To my great astonishment, the needle moved only when the compass was in front of me.

Octavio Cantu craned his neck to peer at the instrument. "Am I sick?" he asked softly, gazing up at dona Mercedes.

"It's your spirit," she murmured. "Your spirit is in great turmoil."

She returned the compass to the glass cabinet, then positioned herself behind the old man and rested both hands on his head. She remained that way for a long time; then with quick, sure movements, she ran her fingers down his shoulders and arms. Swiftly, she stepped in front of him, her hands brushing lightly down his chest, his legs, all the way to his feet. Reciting a prayer that was part church litany, part incantation - she maintained that every good healer knew that Catholicism and spiritualism complemented each other - she alternately massaged his back and chest for nearly a half hour.

To give momentary relief to her tired hands, she periodically shook them vigorously behind her back. She called it casting off the accumulation of negative energy.

To mark the end of the first part of her treatment, she stamped her right foot three times on the ground. Octavio Cantu shuddered uncontrollably. She held his head from behind, pressing her palms to his temples until he began to draw slow, difficult breaths. Mumbling a prayer, she moved to the altar, lit a candle and then a hand-rolled cigar, which she began to smoke with even, rapid puffs.

"I should be used to it by now," the old man said, breaking the smoky silence.

Startled by his voice, she began to cough until tears rolled down her cheeks. I wondered whether she had accidentally inhaled the smoke.

Octavio Cantu, oblivious to her coughing, continued to talk. "I've told you many, many times that whether I'm sober or drunk, I only dream one dream. I'm standing in my shack. It's empty. I feel the wind and see shadows moving everywhere. But there are no more dogs to bark at the emptiness and at the shadows. I awake with a terrible pressure: It feels like someone were sitting on my chest; and as I open my eyes, I see the yellow pupils of a dog. They open wider and wider, until they swallow me..." His voice trailed off.

Gasping for breath, he looked around the room. He no longer seemed to know where he was.

Mercedes Peralta dropped the cigar stub on the floor. Grabbing his chair from behind, she swiftly turned him around, so that he was now facing the altar. With slow, mesmerizing movements, she massaged him around his eyes.

I must have dozed off, for I found myself alone in the room. I quickly looked around. The candle on the altar was almost burned down. Right above me in the corner close to the ceiling sat a moth the size of a small bird. It had enormous black circles on it's wings; they stared at me like curious eyes.

A sudden rustle made me turn around. Mercedes Peralta was sitting in her chair by the altar. I muffled a scream. I could have sworn she had not been there a moment before.

"I didn't know you were there," I said. "Look at that big moth above my head." I searched for the insect, but it was gone.

There was something about the way she looked at me that made me shudder. "I got too tired and fell asleep," I explained. "I didn't even find out what was wrong with Octavio Cantu."

"He comes to see me from time to time," she said. "He needs me as a spiritualist and a healer. I lighten the burden that weighs on his soul." She turned to the altar, and lit three candles. In the flickering light her eyes were the color of the moth's wings. "You'd better go to sleep," she suggested. "Remember, we're going to go for a walk at dawn."

## Chapter 6

Certain that I had overslept again, I dressed quickly and headed down the dark corridor. Mindful of the creaking hinges, I carefully opened the door to Mercedes Peralta's room and tiptoed toward the hammock.

"Are you awake?" I whispered, pushing aside the gauzy material of the mosquito netting. "Do you still want to go for a walk?"

Her eyes opened instantly, but she was not really awake yet. She continued to stare quietly ahead.

"I do," she finally said hoarsely, brushing the netting aside completely. She cleared her throat, spat in the bucket on the floor, and then moved over a little to make room for me in the hammock.

"I'm glad you remembered our walk," she mumbled as she crossed herself.

Closing her eyes, she folded her hands and prayed to the Virgin and to a number of saints in heaven. She thanked them individually for their guidance in helping her with the people she treated and then asked for their forgiveness.

"Why their forgiveness?" I inquired as soon as she finished her long prayer.

"Look at the lines on my palms," she said, placing her upturned hands in my lap.

With my index finger I traced the clearly delineated V and M lines that seemed to have been branded; the V on her left palm, and the M on her right.

"V stands for vida, life. M stands for muerte, death," she explained, enunciating the words with deliberate precision. "I was born with the power to heal and harm."

She lifted her hands from my lap, and brushed the air as though she intended to erase the words she had spoken. She stared around the room, then deliberately maneuvered her thin, fleshless legs out of the hammock and slipped into a pair of cutout shoes through which her toes protruded. Her eyes twinkled with amusement as she straightened the black blouse and skirt, which she had slept in.

Holding on to my arm, she led me outside. "Let me show you something before we go for our walk," she said, heading toward the working room.

She turned directly to the massive altar, which was made entirely out of melted wax. It had been started with a single candle, she said, by her great-great-grandmother, who had also been a healer.

Lovingly, she ran her hand over the glossy, almost transparent surface.

"Search for the black wax amid the multi-colored streaks," she urged me. "That's the evidence that witches light a black candle when they use their power to harm."

Countless strands of black wax ran into the colored bands.

"The ones closer to the top are mine," she said. Her eyes shone with an odd fierceness as she added, "A true healer is also a witch."

A glimmer of a smile lingered on her lips for a moment; then she went on to say that not only was she well known throughout the area, but that people came for her treatments from as far as Caracas, Maracaibo, Merida, and Cumana. People knew about her abroad as well: Trinidad, Cuba, Colombia, Brazil, and Haiti. There were pictures somewhere in the house attesting that among those persons had been ministers of state, ambassadors, and even a bishop.

She regarded me enigmatically, then shrugged her shoulders.

"My luck and my strength were peerless at one time," she said. "I ran out of both, and now I can only heal."

Her grin widened, and her eyes took on a teasing gleam. "And how is your work progressing?" she asked with the innocent curiosity of a child.

Before I had a chance to take in the sudden change of topic, she added, "Regardless of how many healers and patients you interview, you will never learn that way. A real healer must be first a medium and a spiritualist, and then a witch."

A dazzling smile lit up her face. "Don't be too upset when one of these days I burn your writing pads," she said casually. "You're wasting your time with all that nonsense."

I became utterly alarmed. I did not take kindly to the prospect of seeing my work go up in flames.

"Do you know what's of real interest?" she asked, and then answered her own question. "The issues that go beyond the superficial aspects of healing. Things that can't be explained, but may be experienced. There have been plenty of people who have studied healers. They believe that by watching and asking questions they may understand what mediums, witches, and healers do. Since there is no point in arguing with them, it's a lot easier to leave them alone to do whatever they want. It cannot be the same in your case," she went on. "I cannot let you go to waste. So, instead of acting like you are studying healers, you're going to practice calling the spirit of my ancestor every night in the patio of this house. You can't take notes on that because the spirits count time in a different way. You'll see. To deal with the spirits is like entering inside the earth."

The memory of the woman I had seen in that patio perturbed me terribly. I wanted to abandon right then all my quest and forget Florinda's plans and run away.

Suddenly dona Mercedes laughed, a clear burst that dispelled my fears. "Musiúa, you should see your face," she said. "You're about to faint. Among other things, you're a coward." Despite her wry mocking tone, there was sympathy and affection in her smile. "I shouldn't push you. So I'm going to give you something you'll like - something that has more value than your study plans; A glimpse into the life of some personages of my choice. I will make them weave tales for you. Tales about fate. Tales about luck. Tales about love." She brought her face close to mine and in a soft whisper added, "Tales about strength and tales about weakness. That will be my gift to you to keep you appeased." She took my arm and led me outside. "Let's go for our walk."

Our steps rang lonely through the silent street bordered by high concrete sidewalks. In a faint murmur, obviously wary of waking the people sleeping inside the houses we passed, Mercedes Peralta remarked that during her days as a young healer, her house - the biggest one on the street - had stood isolated at what was then considered the outskirts of town. "But now," she said - the sweeping gesture of her arm encompassing everything around us - "it seems I live in the center of town."

We turned onto the main street, and walked all the way to the plaza where we rested on a bench facing the statue of Bolivar on a horse. The town hall stood at one side of the plaza, the church with it's bell tower at the other. Many of the original buildings had been pulled down and replaced by boxlike structures. Yet, the old houses that still stood, with their wrought-iron grills, their red-tile roofs gray with age, and their wide eaves that permitted the rain water to splash clear of the brightly painted walls, gave the center of town it's distinct colonial atmosphere.

"This town has not been the same since the day the clock in the tower of the city hall was fixed," she mused.

She explained that a long time ago, as if resenting the advent of progress, the clock had stopped at twelve o'clock.

The local pharmacist had seen to it that it was fixed, and immediately afterward, as though conjured up by an act of magic, lampposts were put on the streets, and sprinklers were installed in the plaza so that the grass would stay green all year-round. And before anyone knew what was happening, industrial centers mushroomed everywhere.

She paused for an instant to catch her breath, then pointed to the shack-covered hills surrounding the city. "And so did the squatters' shanty towns," she added.

She rose and we walked to the end of the main street to where the hills began.

Huts made of corrugated metal sheets, crates, and cardboard hung precariously on the steep slopes. The owners of the shacks close to the city streets had boldly tapped electricity from the lampposts. The insulated wires were crudely camouflaged with colored ribbons.

We turned onto a side street, then into an alley, and finally we followed a narrow path winding up the only hill that had not yet been claimed by squatters. The air, still damp from the night dew, smelled of wild rosemary. We climbed almost to the top of the hill, where a solitary saman tree grew. We sat down on the damp ground carpeted with tiny yellow daisies.

"Can you hear the sea?" Mercedes Peralta asked.

The faint breeze, rustling through the tree's intricately woven crown, scattered a shower of powdery golden blossoms. They alighted on her hair and shoulders like butterflies. Her face was suffused with an immeasurable calm. Her mouth opened slightly, revealing her few teeth, yellow with tobacco and age.

"Can you hear the sea?" she repeated, turning her dreamy, slightly misted eyes toward me.

I told her that the sea was too far away beyond the mountains.

"I know that the sea is far away," she said softly. "But at this early hour, when the town still sleeps, I always hear the sound of the waves carried by the wind."

Closing her eyes, she leaned against the tree trunk, as if to sleep.

The morning stillness was shattered by the sound of a truck winding it's way through a narrow street below. I wondered whether it was the Portuguese baker delivering his freshly baked rolls, or the police picking up last night's drunks.

"See who it is," she urged me.

I walked a few steps down the path, and watched an old man get out from a green truck parked at the bottom of the hill. His coat hung loosely on his stooped shoulders, and a straw hat covered his head. Aware of being watched, he looked up, and waved his walking stick by way of greeting. I waved in return.

"It's the old man you treated last night," I told her.

"How fortunate!" she murmured. "Call him. Tell him to come up here. Tell him I want to see him. My gift to you begins now."

I walked down to where his truck was parked and asked the old man to walk back up the hill with me. He followed me without a word.

"No dogs today," he said to Mercedes Peralta by way of greeting, and sat beside her.

"Let me tell you a secret, Musiúa," she said, beckoning me to sit across from her. "I am a medium, a witch, and a healer. Of the three, I like the second because witches have a particular way of understanding the mysteries of fate. Why is it that some people get rich, successful, and happy, while others find only hardship and pain? Whatever decides those things is not what you call fate: It's something more mysterious than that. And only witches know about it."

Her features strained for an instant with an expression I could not fathom as she turned to Octavio Cantu.

"Some people say that we're born with our fate. Others claim that we make our fate with our actions. Witches say that it's neither and that something else catches us like the dog catcher catches a dog. The secret is to be there if we want to be caught, or not to be there if we don't want to be caught."

Her glance strayed to the eastern sky, where the sun was rising over the distant mountains. After a few moments she faced the old man once more. Her eyes seemed to have absorbed the sun's radiance, for they shone as if smeared with fire.

"Octavio Cantu is coming to the house for his seasonal treatments," she said. "Perhaps little by little he'll weave a tale for you. A tale about how chance joins lives together and how that something that only witches know about fastens them into one bundle."

Octavio Cantu nodded his head in agreement. A tentative smile parted his lips. The scant beard on his chin was as white as the hair sticking out from under his straw hat.

Octavio Cantu came to dona Mercedes' house eight times. Apparently she had been treating him periodically since he was a young man.

Besides being old and run down, he was an alcoholic. Dona Mercedes emphasized, however, that all his maladies were of the spirit. He needed incantations, not medicines.

At first, he hardly talked to me, but then he began to open up, feeling more confident perhaps. We spent long hours talking about his life. At the beginning of each of our sessions, he invariably seemed to succumb to despair, loneliness, suspicion. He demanded to know why I was interested in his life. But he always checked himself and regained his aplomb, and for the rest of the session - whether an hour or an entire afternoon - he would talk about himself as if he were some other person.

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Octavio pushed the flat piece of cardboard aside, and edged in through the small doorlike opening of the shack. There was no light inside, and the pungent smoke of the dwindling fire in the stone hearth made his eyes tear. He shut them tight and groped his way in the darkness. He tripped over some tins and banged his shin on a wooden crate.

"Damn stinking place," he swore under his breath.

He sat for a moment on the packed dirt floor, and rubbed his leg. In the farthest corner of the wretched shack, he saw the old man asleep on a discarded, worn-out backseat of a car. Slowly, avoiding the crates, ropes, rags, and boxes scattered on the ground, he walked bent over to where the old man was lying.

Octavio lit a match. In the dim light the sleeping man looked dead. The rising and falling of his chest was so slight he hardly seemed to breathe. High cheekbones protruded from his black, emaciated face. His torn, dirty khaki pants were rolled up his calves. His long-sleeved khaki shirt was buttoned tightly around his wrinkled neck.

"Victor Julio!" Octavio shouted, shaking him vigorously. "Wake up, old man!"

Victor Julio's trembling, wrinkled eyelids opened for a moment. Only the discolored white of his eyes showed before he shut them again.

"Wake up!" Octavio cried out with exasperation. He reached for the narrow-brimmed straw hat on the ground, and pushed it down hard on the old man's unkempt white hair.

"Who the hell are you?" Victor Julio grumbled. "What do you want?"

"I'm Octavio Cantu. I've been appointed by the mayor as your helper," he explained with an air of importance.

"Helper?" Unsteadily the old man sat up. "I need no helper."

He slipped into his worn-out laceless shoes and staggered around the dark room until he found the gasoline lantern. He lit it. He rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and, blinking repeatedly, regarded the young man carefully.

Octavio Cantu was of medium height, with strong muscles, visible through his unbuttoned, faded blue jacket. His pants, which seemed too large for him, bagged over his new shiny boots. Victor Julio chuckled, wondering if Octavio Cantu had stolen them.

"So you're the new man," he said in a rasping voice, trying to determine the color of Octavio's eyes, shaded by a red baseball cap. They were shifty eyes, the color of moist earth.

Victor Julio decided there was something decidedly suspicious about the young man. "I've never seen you around here," he said. "Where do you come from?"

"Paraguana," Octavio answered curtly. "I've been here for a while. I've seen you several times at the plaza."

"Paraguana," the old man repeated dreamily. "I've seen the sand dunes of Paraguana."

He shook his head and in a harsh voice demanded, "What are you doing in this godforsaken place? Don't you know that there is no future in this town? Haven't you noticed that the young people have migrated to the cities?"

"It's all going to change," Octavio declared, eager to steer the conversation away from himself. "This town is going to grow. Foreigners are buying up the cacao groves and the sugarcane fields. They are going to build factories. People are going to flock to this town. People are going to get rich."

Victor Julio doubled up with mocking laughter. "Factories aren't for those like us. If you stick around long enough, you'll end up like me."

He put his hand on Octavio's arm. "I know why you're so far away from Paraguana. You're running away from something, aren't you?" he asked, staring hard into the young man's restless eyes.

"What if I am?" Octavio shifted uncomfortably.

Octavio realized that he didn't have to tell him anything. No one knew about him in this town.

Yet, something in the old man's eyes unnerved him. "I had some trouble back home," he muttered evasively.

Victor Julio shuffled over toward the opening of the shack, reached for his burlap sack hanging on a rusty nail, and took out a bottle of cheap rum. His hands, crisscrossed by protruding veins, shook uncontrollably as he unscrewed the lid of the bottle. He gulped repeatedly, heedless of the amber liquid trailing down his scraggly beard.

"There is a lot of work to be done," Octavio said. "We better get going."

"I was young like you when I was appointed by another mayor as a helper to an old man," Victor Julio reminisced. I too was strong and eager to work. And look at me now. The rum doesn't even burn my throat any longer."

Squatting on the ground, Victor Julio searched for his walking stick. "This cane belonged to the old man. He gave it to me before he died."

He held up the dark, highly polished stick to Octavio. "It's made of hardwood from the Amazon jungle. It will never break."

Octavio glanced briefly at the cane, and then asked impatiently, "Is the stuff we need here? Or do we still have to get it?"

The old man grinned. "The meat has been soaking since yesterday. It should be ready by now. It's outside behind the shack in a steel drum."

"Are you going to show me how to fix the meat?" Octavio asked.

Victor Julio laughed. All his front teeth were missing. The remaining yellow molars looked like two pillars in his cavernous mouth.

"There is really nothing to show," he said in between giggles. "I just go to the pharmacist every time I want to prepare the meat. He's the one who mixes the beef tenderizer. Actually," he explained, "it's more like a marinade." His mouth spread into a wide grin. I always get the meat from the slaughterhouse, compliments of the mayor."

He took another gulp from the bottle. "Rum helps me to prepare myself." He rubbed his chin dry. "The dogs are going to catch up with me one of these days," he mumbled under his breath and handed the half-empty bottle to Octavio. "You better have some too."

"No thanks," Octavio refused politely. "I can't drink on an empty stomach."

Victor Julio opened his mouth ready to say something. Instead, he picked up his walking stick and his burlap sack, and motioned Octavio to follow him outside. Absorbed, Victor Julio stood for a moment and watched the sky. It was neither dark nor light but that strange oppressive gray that comes before dawn. In the distance he heard the barking of a dog.

"There's the meat," he said, pointing with his chin to the steel drum standing on a tree stump. He handed Octavio a bundle of ropes. "It'll be easier to carry the drum if you tie it on your back."

Expertly, Octavio looped the ropes around the steel drum, lifted it on his back, then crossed the ropes over his chest, and tied them securely below his navel. "Is this all we need?" he asked, avoiding the old man's gaze.

"I've some extra rope and a can of kerosene in my sack," Victor Julio explained and took another gulp of rum. Absentmindedly, he stuffed the bottle in his pocket.

In single file they followed the dry gully that cut across the cane break. All was silent except for the fading buzz of the crickets and the gentle breeze rustling through the bladelike leaves of the cane. Victor Julio had trouble breathing. His chest hurt. He felt so tired he wanted to lie down on the hard ground. He turned often to gaze at his shack in the distance. A foreboding feeling crossed his mind. The end was near. He had known for a long time that he was too old and feeble to do all the work he was supposed to do. It would be only a matter of time before they got a new man.

"Victor Julio, come on," Octavio called impatiently. "It's getting late."

The town was still asleep.

Only a few old women on their way to church were about. With their heads covered by dark veils, they hurried past the two men without returning their greetings. On the narrow concrete sidewalks, seeking the protection of the silent houses, scrawny, sickly looking dogs lay curled up in front of closed doors.

At Victor Julio's command, Octavio lowered the steel drum on the ground, and opened the tight lid. Using the long wooden pliers he had retrieved from his burlap sack, the old man picked chunks of meat from the drum. And as he and Octavio slowly made their way through town, he fed every stray dog they came across. Hungrily, wagging their tails, the animals devoured the fatal meal.

"The dogs will feed on you in hell," a fat woman shouted before disappearing through the large wooden door of the old colonial church at the other side of the plaza.

"No rabies this year," Victor Julio shouted back, wiping his nose on the sleeve of his shirt. "I think we got them all well fed for the hereafter."

"I counted seventeen," Octavio complained, stretching his sore back. "That's a lot of dead dogs to pull."

"The biggest one we won't have to carry," Victor Julio said, a sinister smile twisting his face. "There is one dog that won't die in the street."

"What do you mean?" Octavio asked, turning his red baseball cap around on his head, a puzzled look on his face.

Victor Julio's eyes narrowed, his pupils sparkled with an evil glint. His thin old body shivered with anticipation.

"I'm all keyed up. Now, I'm going to kill the Lebanese storekeeper's black German shepherd."

"You can't do that," Octavio protested. "It's not a stray dog. It's not sick. It's well fed. The mayor said only stray sickly dogs."

Victor Julio swore loudly, then looked at his helper with a wicked expression. He was certain that this was the last time he would have access to the poison. If not Octavio, then someone else would be in charge of disposing of the dogs at the end of the next dry season. He could understand why the young man didn't want to cause any trouble in town, but that was not any of his concern. He had wanted to kill the Lebanese's dog ever since it had bitten him. This was his last chance.

"That dog is trained to attack," Victor Julio said. "Every time it gets loose it bites someone. It bit me some months ago."

He pulled up his pant leg. "Look at the scar!" he muttered angrily, rubbing the purple, knotty spot on his calf. "The Lebanese didn't even bother to take me to a doctor. For all I knew that dog could have had rabies."

"But it didn't and you can't kill it," Octavio insisted. "The dog isn't in the street. It's got an owner." He looked imploringly at the old man. "You're only asking for trouble."

"Who cares," Victor Julio snapped belligerently. "I hate that animal and I won't have another chance to kill it."

Victor Julio flung his burlap sack over his shoulder. "Come on, let's go."

Unwillingly, Octavio followed the old man through a narrow side street toward the outskirts of town. They stopped in front of a large, green stucco house.

"The dog must be in the back," Victor Julio said. "Let's have a look." They walked along the brick wall encircling the backyard. There was no sign of the dog.

"We better leave," Octavio whispered. "I'm sure the dog sleeps inside the house."

"It'll come out," Victor Julio said, trailing his walking stick along the wall.

Loud barking splintered the morning stillness. Excitedly, the old man jumped up and down on his frail legs, brandishing his walking stick in the air above his head. "Give me the rest of the meat!" he demanded.

Octavio unfastened the ropes from his chest, and reluctantly lowered the steel drum to the ground. The old man picked out the last pieces of meat with the wooden pliers, and flung them over the wall.

"Just listen to that beast gulping down that poisoned meat," Victor Julio said gleefully. "That vicious brute is as hungry as the rest of them."

"Let's get out of here fast," Octavio hissed, lifting the steel drum on his back.

"There's no hurry." Victor Julio laughed. A sensation of elation invaded his body as he looked for something on which to stand.

"Let's go," Octavio insisted. "We're going to get caught."

"We won't," Victor Julio assured him calmly, climbing on the shaky wooden crate he had propped against the wall.

He stood on his toes and looked at the raging dog. Barking furiously, the animal spat foam and blood in an effort to wrench loose whatever had stuck in it's throat. It's legs grew rigid. It toppled over. Powerful spasms wheeled it's body around.

Victor Julio shivered. "It's even hard to die," he murmured, stepping down from the crate.

He didn't feel any satisfaction in having killed the Lebanese's German shepherd. In all the years of poisoning dogs, he had always avoided seeing them die. He had never enjoyed killing the town's stray mongrels, but it was the only job that had been available to him.

A vague fear filled Victor Julio's heart. He looked down the empty road. He curled his left thumb backward and placed the walking stick between it and his wrist. Holding his arm outstretched, he started to move the stick back and forth so rapidly the cane seemed to be suspended in midair.

"What kind of trick is that?" Octavio asked, watching him enthralled.

"It's no trick. It's an art. This is what I do best," Victor Julio explained sadly. "In the mornings and afternoons I entertain the small children in the plaza with my dancing stick. Some of the children are friendly to me."

He handed the cane to Octavio. "Try it. See if you can do it."

Victor Julio laughed at Octavio's clumsy attempt to hold the stick properly.

"It takes years of practice," the old man said. "You've got to develop your thumb in order to stretch it backward until it touches the wrist. And you have got to move your arm much faster so the stick won't have time to fall on the ground."

Octavio handed him back the cane. "We better get those dogs!" he exclaimed, surprised by the suddenness of the morning glow and the flame-colored blotches appearing on the eastern sky.

"Victor Julio, wait for me," a child called after them.

Barefoot, her black tangled hair tied on top of her head, a six-year-old girl caught up with the two men.

"Look what my aunt brought me to play with," she said, holding up a German shepherd puppy for the old man to see. "I named her Butterfly. She looks like one, doesn't she?"

Victor Julio sat on the curb. The little girl sat next to him and placed the cute, chubby puppy on his lap. Distractedly, he ran his fingers along the black and pale yellow fur.

"Show Butterfly how you make your walking stick dance," the child pleaded.

Victor Julio put the dog on the ground, and retrieved the bottle of rum from his pocket. Without drawing a breath, he emptied it's contents, then dropped the bottle into his burlap sack. There was a desolate expression in his eyes as he gazed into the child's smiling face. Soon she would grow up, he thought. She would no longer sit with him under the trees in the plaza and help him fill the trash cans with leaves, and believe they would turn to gold during the night. He wondered if she, too, would shout at him, taunt him, like most of the older children did. He closed his eyes tightly.

"Let's see if the stick feels like dancing," he mumbled. Rubbing his creaking knees, he got up.

Mesmerized, both Octavio and the child watched the stick. It seemed to be dancing by itself, animated not only by the swift graceful movement of Victor Julio's arms but also by the rhythmic tapping of his foot and his hoarse, yet melodious, voice, as he sang a nursery rhyme. Octavio put the drum down, and sat on it to admire the old man's skill.

Victor Julio stopped his song in mid-sentence. His stick fell on the ground. With a look of surprise and horror, he saw the puppy lapping up the juice of the poisoned meat, trickling from the drum.

The girl picked up the cane, caressed the finely carved head, and handed it to Victor Julio. "I've never seen you drop it," she remarked concerned. "Did the stick get tired?"

Victor Julio placed his trembling hand on her head, pulling her ponytail gently. "I'm going to take Butterfly for a walk," he said. "Go back to bed before your mother finds you out here. I'll see you later at the plaza. We'll pick leaves together."

He lifted the chubby puppy in his arms, and motioned Octavio to follow him up the street.

The stray dogs were no longer curled up in front of closed doors, but lay rigid with their legs extended, scattered around the dusty streets, their glassy eyes staring blankly into space. One by one, Octavio tied them with the ropes Victor Julio had brought in his burlap sack.

Butterfly, her whole body shaking convulsively, sent a stream of blood down the old man's pants. He shook his head with despair. "What am I going to tell the kid?" he mumbled, fastening the poisoned puppy with the others.

They made two trips, and dragged the dead dogs to the outskirts of town, past the Lebanese's house, past the empty fields, down into a dried-up ravine. Victor Julio covered them with a layer of dry branches, then doused the heap with the can of kerosene he had brought with him and set them afire. The dogs burned slowly, filling the air with the smell of scorched flesh and fur.

Panting, their throats raw with smoke and dust, the two men climbed out of the ravine. They didn't walk far before they collapsed under the shade of a blooming red acacia tree.

Victor Julio stretched out on the hard ground still cool from the night. His hands trembled as he held the walking stick securely over his stomach. He closed his eyes, and tried to still his breathing, hoping it would dispel the pain constricting his chest. He wished he could sleep, lose himself in dreams.

"I've got to get going," Octavio said after a short while. "I've got some other jobs to do."

"Stay with me," the old man begged. "I have to tell the kid about her dog."

He sat up and gazed imploringly at Octavio. "You can help me. Children so soon become afraid of me. She's one of the few who is friendly."

The wretched emptiness in Victor Julio's voice frightened Octavio. He leaned against the tree trunk and closed his eyes. He couldn't bear to see the fear and the loss reflected in the old man's face.

"Come with me to the plaza. Let everyone know you're the new man," Victor Julio pleaded.

"I won't stay in this town," Octavio said gruffly. "I don't like this business of killing dogs."

"It's not a matter of liking or disliking it," Victor Julio remarked. "It's a matter of fate."

Victor Julio smiled wistfully and let his gaze wander in the town's direction. "Who knows, you might have to stay here forever," he mumbled, closing his eyes again.

The silence was broken by the sound of angry voices. Down the road came a group of boys led by the oldest son of the Lebanese. They stopped a few paces away from the two men.

"You killed my dog," the Lebanese boy hissed, then spat on the ground inches away from Victor Julio's feet.

Propping himself on his cane, the old man rose. "What makes you think it was me?" he asked, trying to gain time.

Victor Julio's hands shook uncontrollably as he searched for the bottle of rum in his sack. He stared at the empty bottle uncomprehendingly. He didn't remember having drunk the last drop.

"You killed the dog," the boys repeated in a chant. "You killed the dog." Cursing and jabbing him, they tried to grab his stick and his burlap sack.

Victor Julio backed away. Brandishing his cane, he swung it blindly at the jeering boys. "Leave me alone!" he screamed through trembling lips.

Momentarily startled by his rage, the boys stood still. Suddenly, as if they had only just noticed that Victor Julio was not alone, they turned to Octavio.

"And who are you?" one of the boys yelled, looking from one man to the other, perhaps measuring the consequences of having to deal with both. "Are you with the old man? Are you his helper?"

Octavio didn't answer but swung the rope over his head, lashing it out in front of him like a whip. Laughing and screaming, the boys dodged the well-aimed snaps. But when several of them were stung by the rope, not only on their calves and thighs but also on their shoulders and arms, they backed away. They ran after Victor Julio, who, in the meantime, had fled toward the ravine, where the dogs were still burning.

Victor Julio turned his head. Terror dilated his pupils as he saw the boys approaching so close behind him. They no longer seemed human: They reminded him of a pack of barking dogs. He tried to run faster, but the searing pain in his chest slowed him down.

The boys picked up pebbles and threw them at him, just teasing him. But when the Lebanese boy reached for a good-sized stone, the rest of the boys, eager to outdo each other, selected even larger rocks.

One of them hit Victor Julio on the head. He staggered. His vision blurred. The ground under his feet gave way, and he tumbled down the precipice. The wind carried the old man's cry out of the ravine.

Panting, their faces streaked with dust and sweat, the boys stood looking at each other. Then, as though someone had given a signal, they scurried in all directions.

Octavio ran down the steep slope, and knelt by Victor Julio's inert body. He shook him vigorously. The old man opened his eyes. His breath came in spurts. His voice was only a faint muffled sound.

"I knew that the end was near, but I thought it was only the end of my job. It never occurred to me it was going to be this way."

His pupils flickered with an oddly bright gleam as he stared into his helper's eyes. Slowly, the light went out.

Octavio shook him frantically. "Jesus! He's dead!" he muttered, then made the sign of the cross.

He raised his sweaty face toward the sky. A pale moon was clearly visible despite the blinding brightness of the sun. He wanted to pray but could not think of a single prayer. Only images came to his mind: a legion of dogs chasing the old man over the fields.

Octavio felt his hands grow cold and his body begin to tremble. He could run away again to another town, he thought. But then they might suspect him of having killed Victor Julio. He had better stay for a while, he decided, until things cleared up.

For a long time Octavio just kept staring at the dead man. Then, on an impulse, he picked up Victor Julio's cane lying nearby. He caressed it and rubbed the finely carved head against his left cheek. He felt that it had always belonged to him. He wondered if he would ever be able to make the stick dance.

## Chapter 7

Octavio Cantu had had his last treatment of the season. He put on his hat and rose from the chair. I noticed how the years had caved in his chest, and wasted the muscles of his arms. His faded coat and pants were several sizes too big. Bulging sharply on the right-side pocket was a large bottle of rum.

"It always happens when she finishes my treatments, I put her to sleep," he whispered to me, fixing his sunken and discolored eyes on Mercedes Peralta. "I've talked to you too much today. Anyway, I can't figure out why you're interested in me."

A wide smile creased his face as he held his walking stick between his thumb and wrist. He moved his arm back and forth so skillfully the cane appeared to be suspended in midair. Without saying another word he walked out of the room.

"Dona Mercedes," I called softly, turning to her. "Are you awake?"

Mercedes Peralta nodded. "I'm awake. I'm always awake even when I'm asleep," she said softly. "That's the way I try to stay a jump ahead of myself."

I told her that since I had begun talking to Octavio Cantu I had been plagued by deep, nagging questions. Could Octavio Cantu have avoided stepping into Victor Julio's shoes? And why did he repeat Victor Julio's life so completely?

"Those are unanswerable questions," dona Mercedes replied. "But let's go to the kitchen and ask Candelaria. She's got more sense than the two of us together. I'm too old to have sense, and you're too educated."

With a beaming smile on her face, she took my arm and we walked to the kitchen.

Candelaria, engrossed in scrubbing the copper-plated bottoms of her precious stainless-steel pots and pans, did not hear or see us approach. She let out a piercing, startled scream when dona Mercedes nudged her arm.

Candelaria was tall, with sloping shoulders and wide hips. I couldn't tell her age. She looked as much thirty as she looked fifty. Her brown face was covered with tiny freckles, so evenly spaced they seemed to have been painted on. She dyed her dark curly hair a carrot red and wore dresses made from bold-colored printed cottons.

"Well? What are you doing in my kitchen?" she asked with feigned annoyance.

"The Musiúa is obsessed with Octavio Cantu," dona Mercedes explained.

"My God!" Candelaria exclaimed. Her face expressed genuine shock as she looked up at me. "Why him?" she asked.

Baffled by her accusing tone, I voiced the questions I had just asked dona Mercedes.

Candelaria began to laugh. "For a minute I was worried," she said to dona Mercedes. "musiús are weird. I remember that musiú from Finland who used to drink a glass of urine after his dinner to keep his weight down. And the woman who came all the way from Norway to fish in the Caribbean sea. To my knowledge, she never caught anything. But she had the boat owners fighting among themselves to take her out to sea."

Laughing uproariously, the two women sat down.

Candelaria went on, saying, "One never knows what goes on in the minds of musiús." They are capable of anything."

She laughed in spurts, each louder than the preceding one. Then she went back to scrubbing her pots.

"It looks like Candelaria thinks very little of your questions," dona Mercedes said. "I personally think that Octavio Cantu couldn't avoid stepping into Victor Julio's shoes. He had very little strength: That's why he was caught by that mysterious something I talked to you about; that something more mysterious than fate. Witches call it a witch's shadow."

"Octavio Cantu was very young and strong," Candelaria said all of a sudden, "but he sat too long under Victor Julio's shadow."

"What is she talking about?" I asked dona Mercedes.

"When people are fading away, especially at the moment they die, they create with that mysterious something a link with other persons, a sort of continuity," dona Mercedes explained. "That's why children turn out just like their parents. Or those who take care of old people follow into the steps of their wards."

Candelaria spoke again. "Octavio Cantu sat too long in Victor Julio's shadow. And the shadow sapped him. Victor Julio was weak, but upon dying the way he did, his shadow became very strong."

"Would you call the shadow the soul?" I asked Candelaria.

"No, the shadow is something all human beings have, something stronger than their soul," she replied seemingly annoyed.

"There you are, Musiúa," dona Mercedes said. "Octavio Cantu sat too long on a link - a point where fate links lives together. He didn't have the strength to walk away from it. And, like Candelaria says, Victor Julio's shadow sapped him. Because all of us have a shadow, a strong or a weak one, we can give that shadow to someone we love, to someone we hate, or to someone who is simply available. If we don't give it to anyone, it floats around for a while after we die before it vanishes away."

I must have stared at her uncomprehendingly. She laughed and said, "I've told you that I like witches. I like the way they explain events, even though it's hard to understand them. Octavio needs me to ease his burden. I do that through my incantations. He feels that unless I intervene he will repeat Victor Julio's life detail by detail."

"It's advisable," Candelaria blurted out, "not to sit too long under anybody's shadow unless you want to follow in his or her footsteps."

# PART TWO

## Chapter 8

I was anticipating the loud sounds that usually reverberated through the house every Thursday morning as Candelaria rearranged the heavy furniture in the living room. Wondering whether I had actually slept through the commotion, I walked down the silent corridor to the living room.

Shafts of sunlight filtered through the cracks in the wooden panels that covered the two windows facing the street. The dining table with it's six chairs, the dark sofa, the stuffed armchairs, the glass coffee table, and the framed prints of pastoral landscapes and bullfighting scenes on the walls were exactly as Candelaria had arranged them the previous Thursday.

I walked out into the yard, where I found Candelaria, half-hidden behind a hibiscus bush. Her frizzy, red-dyed hair had been brushed out of her face and was held in place by bejeweled combs. Twinkling gold loops dangled from her earlobes. Her lips and nails were a glossy red and matched the colors of her brightly printed cotton dress. Her large eyes under lids that never opened all the way betrayed a dreaminess that was at odds with her sharp angular features and her crisp, almost brusque manner.

"What made you get up so early, Musiúa?" Candelaria asked. Rising, she tidied her wide skirt and the low-cut bodice of her dress that revealed a generous amount of her ample bosom.

"I didn't hear you move the furniture this morning," I said. "Are you going out?"

Without answering she hurried into the kitchen, her loose sandals slapping on her heels as she ran. "I'm behind with everything today," she declared, stopping momentarily to get her foot back into the sandal that had slipped off.

"I'm sure you'll catch up," I said. "I'll help you." I lit the wood in the cooking pit, and set the table with the mismatched pieces of china.

"It's just seven-thirty," I remarked. "You're only half an hour late."

As opposed to dona Mercedes, who was totally indifferent to schedules, Candelaria divided her day into precisely timed tasks. Although no one ever sat down for a meal at the same time, Candelaria fixed breakfast at exactly seven. By eight o'clock she was mopping the floors and dusting the furniture. She was tall enough that she had to stretch only her arms to reach the spider webs in the corners and the dust on the lintels. And by eleven o'clock the daily pot of soup was simmering on the stove.

As soon as that was accomplished, she tended to her flowers. Watering can in hand, she first walked up and down the patio, then the yard, sprinkling her plants with loving care. At two o'clock sharp she did the laundry, even if she only had one towel to wash. After the ironing was done, she read illustrated romances. In the evenings, she cut out magazine pictures and pasted them in photo albums.

"Elio's godfather was here last night," she whispered. "Dona Mercedes and I talked with him till dawn."

She reached for the mortared corn cooked the evening before, and began to knead the white dough for the comcakes we ate for breakfast.

"He must be over eighty years old. And he still hasn't gotten over Elio's death. Lucas Nunez blames himself for the boy's death."

"Who is Elio?" I asked.

"Dona Mercedes' son," Candelaria murmured, shaping the dough into round patties. "He was only eighteen when he died tragically. It was a long time ago."

She brushed a strand of hair behind her ear, then added, "You'd better not mention to her that I told you she had a son."

She placed the corncakes on the grill spanning the cooking pit, then faced me, a devilish grin on her lips. "You don't believe me, do you?" she asked, but stopped me from responding by holding up one hand.

"I have to concentrate now on the coffee. You know how fussy dona Mercedes gets if it isn't strong or sweet enough."

I regarded Candelaria suspiciously. She was in the habit of telling me the most outlandish stories about the healer, such as the time when dona Mercedes was apprehended by a group of Nazis during the Second World War and held captive in a submarine.

"She's a liar," dona Mercedes had once confided. "And even if she's telling the truth she exaggerates it so much that it might as well be a lie."

Candelaria, thoroughly unconcerned about my suspicions, wiped her face on the apron she had tied around her neck, then with a swift, abrupt movement, she turned around and hurried out of the kitchen.

"Watch over the corncakes," she cried out from the corridor. "I'm behind with everything today."

Around midday, Mercedes Peralta finally woke up after sleeping through Candelaria's Thursday commotion, which was noisier than usual because of the hurry. Undecidedly, dona Mercedes stood at the door of her room, squinting her eyes to adjust to the brightness. She rested against the door frame for a moment before venturing out into the corridor.

I rushed to her side, and taking her arm, I led her to the kitchen. Her eyes were red. She had a frown and a sad look around her mouth. I wondered if she, too, had spent the night awake. There was always the possibility that Candelaria had indeed been telling the truth.

Seemingly preoccupied, she studied the plateful of corncakes, but instead of taking one, she broke off two bananas from the bunch hanging on one of the rafters. She peeled them, cut them into slivers, then daintily ate the bananas, one sliver at a time.

"Candelaria wants you to meet her parents," she said, delicately wiping the corners of her mouth. "They live in the hills, close to the dam."

Before I had a chance to say that I would be delighted, Candelaria came sauntering into the kitchen. "You'll love my mother," she affirmed. "She's small and skinny like you, and she also eats the whole day long."

I voiced the idea that, somehow, I had never thought of Candelaria as having a mother. With a rapt smile the two women listened attentively as I tried to make them understand what I meant by that. I assured them that categorizing certain people as the motherless type had nothing to do with age or looks but with some elusive, remote quality that I couldn't quite explain. What seemed to delight Mercedes Peralta the most about my elucidation was that it failed to make any sense. She sipped her coffee pensively, then looked at me askance.

"Do you think I had a mother myself?" she asked. She closed her eyes, and puckering up her mouth, she moved her lips as if she were sucking from a breast. "Or do you believe I was hatched from an egg?"

She glanced up at Candelaria and in a serious tone pronounced, "The Musiúa is quite right. What she wants to say is that witches have very little attachment to parents or children. Yet, they love them with all their might but only when they are facing them, never when they turn their backs."

I wondered if Candelaria was afraid I would mention Elio, for she stepped behind dona Mercedes, gesticulating wildly for me to remain silent. Dona Mercedes seemed to be determined to read our thoughts: She first looked at me, then at Candelaria, with fixed unblinking eyes.

Sighing, Dona Mercedes wrapped her hands around her mug and sipped the rest of her coffee. "Elio was only a few days old when his mother, my sister, died," she said, looking at me. "He was my delight. I loved him as though he were my own child."

She smiled faintly, and after a short pause, she continued talking about Elio. She said that no one would have called him handsome. He had a wide sensuous mouth, a flat nose with sprawling nostrils, and wild kinky hair. But what made Elio irresistible to young and old alike were his big, black, and lustrous eyes, which shone with happiness and sheer well-being.

At great length dona Mercedes talked about Elio's eccentricities. Although he was to become a healer like herself, he rarely spent any time thinking about healing. He was too busy falling in and out of love. During the day, he chatted the hours away with the young women and girls who came to see her. In the evenings, guitar in hand, he went to serenade his conquests. He hardly ever returned before dawn except when he was unsuccessful in his amatory ventures. Then, he was back early and entertained her with his witty, but never vulgar, renditions of his failures and successes.

With morbid curiosity I awaited for her to talk about his tragic death. I felt disappointed when she glanced up at Candelaria. "Go and get me my jacket," she murmured. "It gets windy in those hills where your parents live."

She rose and, leaning against my arm, shuffled out into the yard.

"Today, Candelaria will surprise you," she confided. "There are all kinds of delightful quirks about her. If you were to know only half of them, you would probably faint with shock."

Dona Mercedes chuckled softly like a child trying hard not to give away a secret.

## Chapter 9

Laughter, excited voices, and the blaring sound of jukebox music spilled from the small restaurants and bars that lined the street leading out of Curmina. Beyond the gas station, before the street joined the road, large trees on either side interlinked their branches to form arches, creating a dream-like stillness.

On the road we passed solitary shacks made out of cane plastered over with mud. They all had a narrow doorway, a few windows, and a thatched roof. Some of the huts were whitewashed, others just mud colored. Flowers, mostly geraniums growing in discarded cooking pots and tin cans, hung from deep eaves. Majestic trees aglow with golden and blood-red blossoms shaded meticulously swept yards, where women were doing their wash in plastic tubs, or were spreading clothes to dry on bushes. Some greeted us with a slow smile; others with a nearly imperceptible nod of their heads. Twice we stopped at a roadside stall where children sold fruit and vegetables picked from their gardens.

Candelaria, sitting in the backseat of my jeep, gave me directions. We passed a cluster of huts in the outskirts of a small town, and within moments a blanket of fog enveloped us; a fog so thick I could barely see beyond the hood of the jeep.

"Oh Lord Jesus Christ," Candelaria began to pray. "Come down and help us get through this devilish fog. Please, Holy Mary, Mother of God, come here to protect us. Blessed Saint Anthony, Merciful Saint Theresa, Divine Holy Ghost, gather around to help us."

"You'd better stop it, Candelaria," dona Mercedes cut in. "What if the saints are indeed listening to you and answer your prayers? How are we going to get them all into the car?"

Candelaria laughed, then burst into song. Over and over she repeated the first few lines of an aria from an Italian opera.

"Do you like it?" she asked me, catching my glance in the rearview mirror. "My father taught it to me. My father is Italian. He likes opera and taught me arias by Verdi, Puccini, and others."

I glanced at dona Mercedes for confirmation, but she had fallen asleep.

"It's true," Candelaria insisted, then proceeded to sing a few lines from arias of different operas.

"Do you know them, too?" she asked after I had correctly guessed the opera to which some of them belonged. "Is your father Italian, too?"

"No." I laughed. "He's German. I don't really know much about operas," I confessed. "The only thing he taught me about music was that Beethoven was nearly a demigod. Every Sunday, for as long as I lived at home, my father played all of Beethoven's symphonies."

The fog lifted as abruptly as it had descended about us, unveiling chain after chain of bluish mountains. They seemed to extend forever across an emptiness of air and light. Following Candelaria's directions, I turned into a narrow dirt lane angling sharply from the road: It was barely wide enough for the jeep.

"Here it is," she cried out excitedly, pointing at the two-story house at the end of the lane. The whitewashed walls were yellow with age, and the once red tiles were gray and mossy.

I parked, and we got out of the jeep.

An old man clad in a frayed T-shirt was leaning out of an upstairs window. He waved at us and then disappeared, his loud excited voice ringing through the silence of the house. "Roraima! The witches are here!"

Just as we reached the front door, a small, wrinkled woman stepped out to greet us. Smiling, she embraced Candelaria, then dona Mercedes.

"This is my mother," Candelaria proudly said. "Her name is Roraima."

After a slight hesitation, Roraima also embraced me. She was barely five feet and very lean. She wore a long black dress. She had thick black hair and the bright eyes of a bird. Her motions, too, were birdlike, dainty and quick as she ushered us inside the dark vestibule where a small light burned under a picture of Saint Joseph. Beaming with contentment, she told us to follow her along the wide L-shaped gallery bordering the inside patio where a lemon and guava tree shaded the open living-dining room and the spacious kitchen.

Mercedes Peralta whispered something in Roraima's ear, and then continued down the corridor that led to the back of the house. For a moment I stood undecided, then followed

Candelaria and her mother up the stone stairs to the second floor, past a row of bedrooms; all of which opened onto the wide balcony running the length of the patio.

"How many children do you have?" I asked as we passed the fifth door.

"I have only Candelaria." The leathery wrinkles in Roraima's face deepened as she smiled. "But the grandchildren from Caracas come to spend their holidays here."

Aghast, I turned to Candelaria and stared into her dark, guarded eyes in which a glimmer of amusement was just discernible.

"I didn't know you had any children," I said, wondering if this was the surprise dona Mercedes had hinted at that morning. Somehow it was a letdown.

"How can I have any children?" Candelaria retorted indignantly. "I'm a maiden!"

I burst into laughter. Her statement not only implied that she was unmarried but that she was also a virgin. The haughty expression on her face left no doubt that she was very proud of the fact.

Candelaria leaned over the railing, then she turned and looked up. "I've never told you that I have a brother. Actually he's only a half brother. He's much older than I. He was born in Italy. Like my father, he came to Venezuela to make his fortune. He has a construction company. He's rich now."

Roraima nodded her head emphatically. "Her half brother has eight children. They love to spend the summers here with us," she added.

In a sudden change of mood, Candelaria laughed and embraced her mother. "Imagine!" she exclaimed. "The Musiúa can't conceive that I have a mother." With an impish smile she added, "And what's even worse - she doesn't believe that I have an Italian father!"

At that very instant, one of the bedroom doors opened, and the old man I had seen at the window stepped out onto the balcony. He was stocky with sharp angular features that strongly resembled Candelaria's. He had dressed in a hurry. His shirt was buttoned up askew, the leather belt holding up his pants had not been fitted into the loops around the waist, and his shoe laces were untied. He embraced Candelaria.

"Guido Miconi," he introduced himself to me, then apologized for not welcoming us at the door. "As a child, Candelaria was as pretty as Roraima," he said, holding his daughter in a warm embrace. "Only when she grew up did she start to resemble me."

Clearly sharing a private joke, all three burst into laughter. Roraima, giving a satisfied nod, regarded her husband and her daughter with unabashed admiration. She took my arm and led me downstairs. "Let's join dona Mercedes," she suggested.

The yard, bordered by a stake fence, was enormous. At the farthest end stood an open hut with a thatched roof. Sitting in a hammock fastened to the crossbeam of the hut was Mercedes Peralta. She was sampling Roraima's homemade cheese. She congratulated Roraima on her success.

Guido Miconi stood irresolute in front of dona Mercedes: He seemed unsure whether to shake her hand or to put his arm around her. She smiled at him and he embraced her.

We all sat around the hammock, except for Roraima who sat in it beside Mercedes Peralta. Roraima asked her questions about me, which dona Mercedes promptly answered as if I were not there.

For a while I listened to their conversation, but soon the heat, the stillness of the air, and Guido Miconi's and the women's low voices interspersed now and then by faint giggles made me so drowsy I stretched out on the ground. I must have dozed off, for dona Mercedes had a hard time making me understand that I was to check with Candelaria about lunch. I had not heard Candelaria and her father leave.

I went inside the house. A deep soothing voice murmuring an incantation came from one of the bedrooms. Afraid that Candelaria was entertaining her father with one of my tapes of a healing session, I rushed upstairs. On a previous occasion she had played a tape and promptly erased it by pushing the wrong button.

I stopped short at the half-opened door. Speechless, I watched Candelaria massage her father's back and shoulders while she softly mumbled an incantation. There was something about her stance - the concentrated, yet fluid beauty of her moving hands - that reminded me of Mercedes Peralta. I realized then that Candelaria was also a healer.

As soon as she finished massaging her father, she turned to face me; a glimmer of amusement in her eyes. "Did dona Mercedes ever tell you about me?" Her voice had a curious softness that I had never heard before. "She says that I was born a witch."

There were so many questions running through my mind, I was at a loss where to begin. Candelaria, aware of my bewilderment, shrugged her shoulders in a sort of helpless gesture.

"Let's fix lunch," Guido Miconi offered, heading for the stairs.

Candelaria and I followed behind him. Suddenly, he turned around and faced me.

"Mercedes Peralta is right," he said, then bent his head and stared fixedly at the lacy shadows of the guava tree on the brick patio.

For a long time he just stood there shaking his head now and then, unsure what to say or do next. He looked up, smiled faintly, and then began to walk about the patio, his hands lightly touching flowers and leaves, his shiny eyes seeming not quite to take me in when they focused on me.

"It's a strange story," he said to me in an excited voice that made his Italian accent more pronounced. "Candelaria says that dona Mercedes wants me to tell it to you. You know that you're welcome here. I hope you come often, so we can talk."

I was at a loss. I looked at Candelaria, hoping for some kind of explanation.

"I think I know what dona Mercedes wants to do with you," Candelaria said.

Taking my arm, she led me to the kitchen. "She likes you a lot, but she can't give you her shadow because she's got only one and she's giving it to me."

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"I'm a witch," she replied, "and I'm following in dona Mercedes' footsteps? Only by following in the spiritual footsteps of a healer can you be a healer yourself. That's what's called a junction, a link. Dona Mercedes has already told you that witches call it a shadow. Shadows are true for everything," she continued, "and there is only one heir to anyone who has real knowledge. Victor Julio had real knowledge about killing dogs and made an unwitting link for Octavio Cantu. I've said to you that Octavio sat too long in Victor Julio's shadow and that dona Mercedes is giving me her shadow. By letting certain people tell you their stories, she is trying to put you, for an instant, under the shadow of all those people so that you'll feel how the wheel of chance turns, and how a witch helps that wheel move."

Unsuccessfully, I tried to tell her that her statements were throwing me into deeper confusion.

She stared at me with bright, trusting eyes.

"When a witch intervenes, we say it's the witch's shadow that turns the wheel of chance." she said thoughtfully; Then after pausing for a moment, she added, "My father's story would fit, but I shouldn't be present when he tells his story to you. I inhibit him. I always have."

She looked back at her father and laughed. Her laughter was like a crystalline explosion: It reverberated through the whole house.

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Sleepless, Guido Miconi tossed in the bed, and wondered if the night, made longer by Roraima's peaceful sleep, would ever end. An anxious expression crossed his face as he gazed at her naked body, dark against the white sheet, and at her face, hidden behind a tangled mass of black hair. Gently, he pushed the hair aside. She smiled. Her eyes opened slightly, shiny between the thick, stubby lashes, but she did not wake up.

Taking care not to disturb her, Guido Miconi rose and looked out the window. It was almost dawn. In a nearby yard a dog began to bark at a singing drunkard staggering down the street. The man's steps and song died away in the distance. The dog went back to sleep.

Guido Miconi turned away from the window and squatted to reach under the bed for the small suitcase he kept hidden there. With the key he wore on a chain around his neck, along with the medal of the Virgin, he opened the lock and fumbled for the wide leather pouch tucked in between his folded clothes. An odd feeling, almost a premonition, made him hesitate for a moment. He did not tie the pouch around his waist. He reached inside, retrieved a heavy gold bracelet, placed it on the pillow beside Roraima, and put the pouch back into the suitcase.

He shut his eyes tightly. His mind went back to the day he immigrated to Venezuela - twenty years ago - tempted by the opportunities for work and the good pay. He had been only twenty-six years old. Certain that his wife and their two children would soon join him, he had remained in Caracas for the first few years. To save money, he had lived in cheap rooming houses conveniently close to the construction sites where he was working. Each month he sent part of his savings home.

After several years, he finally realized that his wife did not want to join him. He moved out of Caracas and accepted work in the interior. Letters from home reached him only sporadically, and then they stopped altogether. He no longer sent money. Instead, as so many of his co-workers did, he began to invest his salary in jewels. He was going to return to Italy a rich man.

"A rich man," Guido Miconi murmured, securing the suitcase with a leather strap. He wondered why the words no longer evoked the familiar excitement.

He glanced at Roraima on the bed. He was already missing her. His mind went back almost a decade to that day he first saw Roraima in the courtyard of his cheap rooming house, where he was heating his spaghetti on a Primus cooker. She was hollow-eyed and wore a dress that was too large for her thin, slight frame: He thought her to be one of the children in the neighborhood who were always making fun of the foreigners, in particular, the Italian construction workers.

But Roraima had not come to mock the Italians. She had been hired to work at the boarding house. And at night for a few coins, she shared the men's beds. To the annoyance of his co-workers, she attached herself to Guido so devotedly that she refused to sleep with anyone else, no matter how much money they offered. One day, however, she disappeared. No one knew where she had come from: No one knew where she had gone.

Five years later he saw her again. For some inexplicable whim, instead of driving out with the crew to the barracks next to the site where a factory and a pharmaceutical laboratory were being built, he took a bus all the way into town. There, sitting in the bus depot, as if waiting for him, was Roraima.

Before he had quite recovered from his surprise, she called to a little girl playing nearby.

"This is Candelaria," she pronounced, grinning up at him disarmingly. "She's four years old and she's your daughter."

There was something so irrepressibly childish in her voice, in her expression, he couldn't help but laugh. As frail and slight as he remembered her, Roraima looked like the sister rather than the mother of the child standing beside her.

Candelaria looked at him in silence. The veiled expression of her dark eyes made him think of someone very old. She was tall for her age. Her face was serious as only a child's could be. She shifted her gaze to the children she had been playing with. When she looked up at him again there was an impish gleam in her eyes. "Let's go home," she said, taking his hand and pulling him forward.

Unable to resist the firm pressure of her tiny palm, he went with her down the main street to the outskirts of town. They stopped in front of a small house fenced in by a row of corn stalks waving in the breeze. The cement blocks were unplastered, and the corrugated zinc sheets of the roof were held in place with large stones.

"Candelaria finally brought you here," Roraima stated, reaching for the small suitcase in his hand. "And to think that I almost stopped believing that she was born a witch."

Roraima invited him inside to a small hall that opened into a wide room, empty except for three chairs arranged against the wall. One step down was a bedroom partitioned off by a curtain. On one side beneath a window stood a double bed on which Roraima dropped his suitcase. On the other side hung a hammock in which the child went to lie down.

He followed Roraima along a short corridor into the kitchen and sat down at the wooden table in the middle of the room.

Guido Miconi took Roraima's hands in his and, as though clarifying matters to a child, he told her that what had brought him to town wasn't Candelaria but the dam that was going to be built in the hills.

"No, that's only on the surface. You came because Candelaria brought you here," Roraima stammered. "Now you'll stay here with us. Won't you?"

Seeing that he remained silent, she added, "Candelaria was born a witch."

With an encompassing wave of her hand, Roraima took in the room, the house, the yard. "All this belongs to her. Her godmother is a famous healer and gave her all this." Her voice dropped, and she muttered the words, "But that's not what she wanted. She wanted you."

"Me!" he repeated, shaking his head sad and baffled. He had never lied to Roraima about his family in Italy. "I'm sure her godmother is a good healer. But being born a witch! That's pure nonsense. You know that one day I will return to the family that I left behind."

A strange disturbing smile flittered across Roraima's face as she reached for the pitcher and for the turned-down glass on the table.

She filled it, then held the glass out to him and added, "Miconi, this tamarind water has been bewitched by your daughter Candelaria. If you drink it, you'll stay with us forever."

For a second he hesitated, then burst into laughter. "Witchcraft is nothing but superstition."

He emptied his glass in one long gulp. "That was the best refreshment I have ever had," he remarked, holding out the glass for more.

His daughter's faint coughing broke into his reveries. He tiptoed to the other side of the partitioned-off room and anxiously bent over Candelaria sleeping in a hammock that hung from two rings cemented into the wall. A sad smile parted his lips as he peered into her little face, in which so often he had tried to discover a likeness to himself. He saw none. But oddly enough, there were times the girl made him think of his grandfather. It was not so much a resemblance but rather a mood, a certain gesture made by the child, which never failed to startle him. She also had that same easy way with animals that the old man had had. She healed every donkey, cow, goat, dog, and cat in the neighborhood. She actually coaxed birds and butterflies to perch on her outstretched arms. His grandfather had had that same gift: A saint, people had called him in the small town in Calabria.

Whether or not there was anything saintly about Candelaria, he was no longer sure.

One afternoon he had found the child lying on her stomach in the yard, her chin resting on her folded arms, talking to a sickly looking cat curled up a few inches in front of her. The feline seemed to be answering her, not with meowing sounds, but with short grunts that resembled an old man's laughter.

The instant they felt his presence, both Candelaria and the cat leapt up in the air, as if some invisible thread had pulled them. They landed right in front of him, a spooky smile on their faces. He had stood bewildered, as for a fleeting instant, their features appeared to be superimposed on each other's: He had been unable to decide whose face belonged to whom. Ever since that day he had kept wondering about what Roraima always said, that Candelaria was not a saint but a witch.

Softly, so as not to wake her, Guido Miconi caressed the child's cheek, and then tiptoed to the small vestibule lit dimly by the dying light of an oil lamp. He reached for his jacket, hat, and shoes laid out the evening before and finished dressing. He held the lamp up to the mirror and studied his image. At forty-six, his gaunt, weatherworn face was still filled with that indestructible energy that had carried him through years of hard work. His hair, although gray streaked, was still thick; and his light brown eyes shone brightly beneath his bushy brows.

Cautiously, without stepping on the dog whining and twitching it's legs in sleep, he let himself out the door. He leaned against the wall and waited until his eyes adjusted to the shadows. Sighing, he watched the early workers heading toward work like phantoms in the emptiness of the predawn darkness.

Instead of going to the southern end of town where a truck waited to take the laborers to the construction site of the dam in the hills, Miconi headed toward the plaza where the bus for Caracas was parked. The faint light inside the bus blurred the shapes of the few passengers dozing in their seats. He moved to the very back. As he lifted his suitcase to the rack above him, he saw a shadow through the grimy window of the bus. Black and immense, the shadow stood out against the white wall of the church. He didn't know what made him think of a witch; and although he wasn't religious, he quietly began to pray. The shadow dissolved into a faint cloud of smoke.

The dimming of the lights in the plaza must have played a trick on his eyes, he thought, and chuckled. Roraima and Candelaria would have explained it differently. They would have said that he had seen one of those nocturnal entities that wander about at night; beings that never leave any trace, but use mysterious signals to announce their presence and disappearance.

The ticket collector's voice cut into his musings. Miconi paid his fare, asked about the best way to go to the port of La Guaira, and then closed his eyes.

Rattling and swaying, the bus crossed the valley, then slowly ascended the dusty winding road. Miconi sat up and looked back for one last time. The retreating rooftops, and the white church with it's bell tower kept swimming through his tear-filled eyes. How he loved the sound of those bells. Now he would never hear them again.

It had been a month since Guido Miconi left Roraima and Candelaria. After resting for a moment under the elusive shade of the blooming almond trees in the plaza, he resumed his walk up the steep, narrow street that ended in a flight of crooked steps carved into the hill. He climbed halfway up, then turned to gaze at the port below him: La Guaira, a city crowded in between the mountains and the sea, with it's pink, blue, and buff-colored houses, it's twin church towers, and it's old customhouse overlooking the harbor like some ancient fort.

His daily excursions to the secluded spot had become a necessity. It was the only place where he felt safe and at peace. Sometimes he had spent hours up there watching the large ships dropping anchor. He had tried to guess by their flags or the color of their smokestacks to which country they belonged.

His weekly visits to the shipping offices in town had been as essential to his well-being as gazing at the ships. He was still undecided whether he should return to Italy directly or by way of New York. Or, as Mr. Hylkema at the shipping office had suggested, perhaps he should see something of the world first by boarding one of those German freighters that sailed to Rio, Buenos Aires, across to Africa, and then into the Mediterranean sea. But regardless of how enticing the possibilities, Guido Miconi had been unable to bring himself to book his passage back to Italy. He couldn't understand why; and yet, in the depths of him he knew.

Guido Miconi climbed to the top of the steps and turned into a narrow twisting path that led to a clump of palm trees. He sat on the ground, his back against a trunk, and fanned himself with his hat. The stillness was absolute. The palm fronds hung motionless. Even the birds seemed to be floating effortlessly, like falling leaves pinned to the cloudless sky.

He heard a faint laughter echoing in the silence. Startled, he looked around. The tinkling sound reminded him of his daughter's laughter. And suddenly, her face materialized before his eyes; a fleeting image, unsubstantial, floating in some tenuous light; so pale, it seemed her face was surrounded by a halo.

With quick abrupt movements, as though he were trying to erase the vision, Guido Miconi fanned himself with his hat.

Perhaps it was true that Candelaria was born a witch, he mused. Could the child indeed be the cause for his indecision to leave? he asked himself. Was she the reason for his inability to bring to mind the faces of his wife and children in Italy; regardless of how hard he tried?

Guido Miconi rose and scanned the horizon. For an instant he thought he was dreaming as he saw a large ship emerge like some mirage through the shimmering heat. The vessel came closer, angling toward the harbor.

In spite of the distance, he clearly recognized it's green, white, and red smokestack. "An Italian ship!" he exclaimed, throwing his hat up in the air. He was certain that he had finally broken the spell of Venezuela; and of Roraima and Candelaria - superstitious creatures who read omens in the flight of birds, the movements of shadows, the direction of the wind. He laughed happily. This ship approaching the harbor, like some miracle, was his liberation.

In his excitement he stumbled several times as he hurried down the crooked steps. He ran past the old colonial houses. He had no time to stop and listen to the sound of water splashing in the fountains, and the songs of caged birds spilling out of open windows and doors. He was going to the shipping offices: He was going to book his passage home this very day.

A child's voice calling his full name brought Guido Miconi up short. Overcome by a sudden dizziness he closed his eyes and leaned against a wall. Someone gripped his arm. He opened his eyes, but all he saw were black spots whirling in front of him. Again he heard a child's voice call his name.

Slowly, his dizziness subsided. With his eyes still unfocused he glanced into the worried face of Mr. Hylkema, the Dutchman at the shipping office.

"I don't know how I got here, but I want to speak with you," Guido Miconi stammered. "From the hill I've just seen an Italian ship approach the harbor. I want to book my passage home this very instant."

Mr. Hylkema shook his head in disbelief. "Are you sure you want to go?" he asked.

"I want to book my passage home," Miconi insisted childishly. "Right now!"

Upon catching Mr. Hylkema's eyes on him eloquent with meaning, Guido Miconi added, "I have finally broken the spell!"

"Of course you have." Mr. Hylkema patted him reassuringly on the shoulder, and then steered him toward the cashier's counter.

Looking up, Guido Miconi watched the tall, gaunt Dutchman move behind the counter. As usual, Mr. Hylkema was dressed in a white linen suit and black cloth sandals. A fringe of gray hair growing on one side of his head had been carefully combed and distributed over his naked skull. His face had been aged by the relentless tropical sun and, no doubt, by rum.

Mr. Hylkema brought out a heavy ledger and placed it noisily on the counter. He pulled up a chair, sat down, and began to write.

"There are some of us who are meant to stay here," Mr. Hylkema said, then lifted his pen and pointed to Miconi. "And you, my friend, are never going to return to Italy."

Guido Miconi, not quite knowing what to make of his words, bit his lip.

Mr. Hylkema burst into a loud, toneless laughter, which sprang from the depths of his belly, and moved up with a rumbling painful sound. But when he spoke again, Mr. Hylkema's voice had a curious softness. "I was just joking. I'll take you to the ship myself."

Mr. Hylkema went with him to his hotel, and helped him gather his belongings. After making sure he had a cabin all to himself, as he had requested and paid for, the Dutchman left him with the ship's purser.

Still dazed, Guido Miconi glanced around, wondering why there was no one on the deck of the Italian ship anchored at pier. He reached for a chair beside a table on the deck, straddled it, and rested his forehead against the wooden back. He wasn't insane. He was in the Italian ship, he repeated to himself, hoping to dispel the realization that there was no one around. As soon as he had rested a moment, he thought, he would walk down to another deck, and confirm for himself that the crew and the rest of the passengers were somewhere in the ship. The thought restored his confidence.

Guido Miconi rose from his chair, and leaning over the railing looked down at the pier. He saw Mr. Hylkema waving; looking up at him.

"Miconi!" the Dutchman shouted. "The ship is pulling anchor. Are you sure you want to go?"

Guido Miconi felt a cold sweat. An immeasurable fear took possession of him. He longed for his peaceful life, for Roraima and Candelaria; his family.

"I don't want to go," he shouted back.

"You have no time to get your luggage. The gangplank has been lifted. You must jump now. You'll land in the water. If you don't jump now, you'll never make it!"

Guido Miconi vacillated for an instant. In his suitcase were the jewels he had hoarded over the years, working with almost inhuman strength. Was all that going to be lost? He decided he still had enough strength to start all over again and jumped over the railing.

Everything blurred. He braced himself for the impact with the water. He was not worried: He was a good swimmer. But the impact never came. He heard Mr. Hylkema's voice saying loudly, "I think this man has fainted. The bus cannot leave until we take him out. Someone get his suitcase."

Guido Miconi opened his eyes. He saw a black shadow against the white wall of the church. He didn't know what made him think of a witch. He felt that he was being lifted and carried away. And then he had a devastating realization.

"I've never left. I've never left. It's been a dream," Guido Miconi kept repeating. He thought of his jewels in his suitcase. He was sure that whoever grabbed his suitcase would steal it, but the jewels no longer mattered to him, he had already lost them in the ship.

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## Chapter 10

Mercedes Peralta accompanied me on my last visit to Guido Miconi's house. When we were about to return to town at the end of the day, Roraima took me by the hand, and led me through a patch of canebrake up a narrow trail to a small clearing enclosed by yucca plants whose flowers, straight and white, made me think of rows of candles on an altar.

"Do you like it?" Roraima asked, pointing to a seed bed roofed with a framework of thin, dry branches that were held at the corners by slender, forked poles.

"It looks like a doll's vegetable patch!" I exclaimed, examining the ground covered with feathery carrot shoots, tiny heart-shaped lettuce leaves, and curly, lacy parsley sprigs.

Beaming with delight, Roraima walked up and down the neatly ploughed rows in the adjacent field. Pieces of dry leaves and bits of twigs clung to her long skirt. Each time she pointed out the spot where she would plant a lettuce, a radish, a cauliflower, she turned toward me, her mouth arched in a faint, ethereal smile, her sharp eyes glinting between lids half-closed against the already low afternoon sun.

"I know that whatever I have is due to a witch's intervention," she suddenly exclaimed. "The only good point that I have is that I know that."

Before I had a chance to take in what she had said, she approached me with her arms wide open in an expansive gesture of affection.

"I hope you don't forget us," she said and led me to my jeep. Mercedes Peralta, seated in the front seat, her head reclining on the backrest, was sound asleep.

Leaning out from one of the upstairs windows was Guido Miconi, waving farewell in a gesture that was more a beckoning than a good-bye.

Shortly before we reached Curmina, Mercedes Peralta stirred. She yawned loudly, then absentmindedly looked out the window.

"Do you know what really happened to Guido Miconi?" she asked.

"No," I said. "All I know is that both Miconi and Roraima call it a witch's intervention."

Dona Mercedes giggled. "It certainly was a witch's intervention," she said. "Candelaria already told you that when witches intervene it's said that they do it with their shadows. Candelaria made a link, a junction for her father: She made him live a dream. Since she is a witch, she moved the wheel of chance. Victor Julio also made a link, and he also moved the wheel of chance, but since Victor Julio wasn't a witch, the dream of Octavio Cantu - although it is both as real and unreal as Miconi's dream - is longer and more painful."

"How did Candelaria intervene?"

"Certain children," dona Mercedes explained, "have the strength to wish something with great passion for a long period of time."

She settled back in her seat and closed her eyes. "Candelaria was such a child. She was born that way. She wished her father to stay, and she wished it without a single doubt. That dedication, that determination, is what witches call a witch's shadow. It was that shadow that wouldn't let Miconi go."

We drove the rest of the way in silence. I wanted to digest her words. Before we went into her house, I asked her one final question.

"How did Miconi have such a detailed dream?"

"Miconi never wanted to leave, not really," dona Mercedes replied. "So that offered an opening to Candelaria's unwavering wish. The details of the dream itself, well, that part had nothing to do with the witch's intervention: That was Miconi's imagination."

# PART THREE

## Chapter 11

I sat up as something brushed my cheek. Slowly, I raised my eyes toward the ceiling, searching for a gigantic moth. Ever since I had seen that bird-sized moth in the healing room, I had been obsessed with it. Nightly, the moth appeared in my dreams transforming itself into Mercedes Peralta. When I told her that I somehow believed my dream, she laughed it off as a figment of my imagination.

I settled back onto my lumpy pillow. As I was drifting back into sleep, I heard the unmistakable shuffle of Mercedes Peralta passing my door. I got up, put on my clothes, and tiptoed down the dark corridor. A soft laughter came from her working room. The amber glow of candlelight seeped through the opening of the carelessly drawn curtain. Overcome by curiosity I looked inside. Sitting at the table were Mercedes Peralta and a man, his face shaded by a hat.

"Won't you join us?" dona Mercedes called. "I was just telling our friend here that it wouldn't be long before you came looking for me."

"Leon Chirino!" I exclaimed as he turned toward me and pushed up the brim of his hat by way of greeting.

During my unsuccessful seance participation he had been introduced to me as the man in charge of organizing the spiritual meetings. He was in his seventies, perhaps even in his eighties, yet his dark face had few wrinkles. He had big black eyes and sparkling white teeth, which ought to have been yellow from smoking cigars. There were white Stubbles on his chin, yet his white, short-cropped hair was immaculately combed. His dark suit, wrinkled and baggy, looked as if he had slept in it.

"He's been working like a madman," dona Mercedes said as if reading my thoughts.

Although I had not been invited again to a seance, Mercedes Peralta had encouraged me to visit Leon Chirino at least once a week. Sometimes she accompanied me; sometimes I went alone. He was a carpenter by profession, yet his knowledge about the various shamanistic traditions practiced in Venezuela was astounding. He was interested in my research and spent hours going over my notes, tracing sorcerers' procedures to their Indian and African roots. He knew about all the Venezuelan spiritualists, witches, and healers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He spoke of them with such unaffected familiarity that he gave me the impression he had known them personally.

Mercedes Peralta's voice intruded on my reveries. "Would you like to come with us to fulfill a promise?" she asked me.

Disconcerted by her question, I gazed from one to the other. Their faces revealed nothing.

"We'll be leaving right away," she said to me. "We have a long night and a long day ahead of us." She rose and took my arm. "I've got to prepare you for the trip."

It took her no time to get me ready. She hid my hair under a tight, knitted sailor's cap and darkened my face with a black vegetable paste. And she made me swear that I would not speak to anyone or ask questions.

Ignoring my suggestion that we take my jeep, Mercedes Peralta scrambled into the backseat of Leon Chirino's old Mercury. With it's crumpled fenders and battered chassis, the car looked as if it had been salvaged from a junk yard.

Before I had a chance to ask about our destination, she ordered me to hold and take good care of her basket, which was filled to capacity with medicinal plants, candles, and cigars. Sighing loudly, she made the sign of the cross and promptly fell asleep.

I did not dare disturb Leon Chirino with conversation: He seemed to need all his concentration to keep his car rolling. The dim headlights barely illuminated the area right in front of us. Bent slightly forward, he tensely gripped the wheel, as if he could thus help the car over the dark hills. When it balked on the steep upgrades, he spoke softly to it, urging it forward. Downhill, he let the car go, taking the curves in almost complete darkness, and at such a reckless speed, I feared for our lives. Dust billowed through the glassless windows and through the gaps in the cardboard that concealed the rusted holes in the floor.

Smiling triumphantly, he finally brought the car to an abrupt halt. He turned off the headlights. Dona Mercedes stirred in the backseat.

"We've arrived," Leon Chirino said softly.

Quietly, we got out of the car. It was a dark, cloudy night. Not a star shone in the sky. Whatever was out there stretched in front of us like a black void. I staggered clumsily after dona Mercedes, who seemed to have no problem seeing in the darkness.

Leon Chirino took me by the arm and guided me. I heard muffled laughter all around me. There seemed to be other people, but I couldn't see any of them.

Finally, someone lit a kerosene lantern. In the faint, wavering light I was able to make out the silhouette of four men and dona Mercedes crouching in a circle. Leon Chirino took me a few feet away from the group. I felt totally incapacitated. He helped me to sit down and then propped me against something that looked like a rock protruding from the ground. He handed me the lantern and instructed me to hold on to it and shine it on whatever I was told to. Then he gave me two canteens: The largest one was filled with water, the smaller one with rum. I was supposed to hand them to the men whenever they asked for them.

Silently and quite effortlessly, two men began to dig the loose dirt with long shovels. They deposited the dirt in a neat pile next to the hole. At least a half hour elapsed before they stopped and asked for the canteen with rum. While they drank and rested, Leon Chirino and another man began to dig.

Taking turns, the men worked, drank either rum or water, and rested. Within an hour they had dug a hole deep enough for a man to disappear in it.

The instant one of the men hit something hard with his shovel they stopped working. Leon Chirino asked me to shine the light inside the hole but not to look at it.

"This is it," said one of the men. "Now we can all dig around it." He and his partner joined the others in the hole.

I was dying with curiosity but did not dare break my promise. I wished I could at least talk to dona Mercedes, sitting not too far from me. Immobile, she seemed to be in a deep trance.

The men worked feverishly in the hole. At least half an hour elapsed before I heard Leon Chirino's voice telling dona Mercedes that they were ready to open it.

"Musiúa, light a cigar from my basket and hand it to me," she ordered. "And also bring me my basket."

I lit a cigar, and as I rose to bring it to her, Leon Chirino whispered from the bottom of the hole. "Crouch, Musiúa! Crouch."

I stooped and handed dona Mercedes the cigar and the basket.

"Don't look into the hole for anything in the world!" she whispered in my ear.

I moved back to where I had been sitting; fighting the nearly invincible desire to shine the lantern into the hole. I knew with absolute certainty that they were digging out a trunk filled with gold coins. I could hear the dull sound of the shovels hitting what seemed to be a large and heavy object.

Fascinated, I watched dona Mercedes retrieve a black candle and a jar with black powder from her basket. She lit the black candle, propped it on the ground next to the hole, and then ordered me to turn off the lantern.

The black candle gave out an eerie light. Dona Mercedes sat on her calves next to the candle.

Obeying some unvoiced command, the men stuck their heads out of the hole one by one right in front of her. Each time a head appeared, she poured some of the black powder into her cupped hands and then rubbed each head as if it were a ball. As soon as she was done with the heads, she smeared the black powder on the men's hands.

My curiosity reached it's peak when I heard the cracking sound of a lid being opened.

"We've got it," Leon Chirino said, popping his head out of the hole.

Dona Mercedes handed him the jar with the black powder, another one filled with a white powder, and then she blew out the black candle. Once again we were engulfed by total darkness. The groaning and heaving sounds of the men rising from the hole only accentuated the unnatural silence. I huddled against dona Mercedes, but she pushed me away.

"It's done," Leon Chirino whispered in a strained voice.

Dona Mercedes relit the black candle. I could barely make out the shapes of the three men carrying a large bundle. They deposited it behind the mound of dirt. I was watching them so intently that I almost fell forward into the pit when I heard dona Mercedes' voice telling Leon Chirino, who was still inside the hole, to fasten the nails quickly and climb out.

Leon Chirino emerged right away, and dona Mercedes massaged his hands and face, while the other three men picked up their shovels and filled the hole.

As soon as they were done, dona Mercedes placed the lit candle in the center of the filled-up hole. Leon Chirino threw the last shovel of dirt over it and put out the flame.

Someone relit the kerosene lamp, and immediately the men went to work: They arranged the ground so perfectly that no one could have guessed that a hole had been dug. I watched them for a while, but I lost interest, all my curiosity was focused on the now visible bundle wrapped in a tarpaulin.

"No one will ever know," one of the men said and chuckled softly. "Now, let's get out of here. It'll be daylight soon."

We all walked over to the bundle. I led the way with the light. In my eagerness to find out what it was, I tripped over it. The tarpaulin slid a bit, revealing a woman's foot clad in a black shoe. Unable to restrain myself, I pulled the tarpaulin and shone the light on the exposed bundle. It was the corpse of a woman. My fright and revulsion were so intense I did not even scream - as I wanted and meant to. All I could manage was a faint croak, and then everything went black.

I came to, lying on dona Mercedes' lap in the backseat of Leon Chirino's car. Pressed firmly against my nose was a handkerchief soaked with a mixture of ammonia and rose water. It was dona Mercedes' favorite remedy. She used to call it a spiritual injection.

"I always knew you were a coward," she commented and began to massage my temples.

Leon Chirino turned around. "You're very daring, Musiúa," he said. "But you still don't have the strength to back it up. You will though. Some day, you will."

I was not in the mood for comments. My fright had been too great for comfort. I accused them of malice for not warning me about their doings. Dona Mercedes said that everything they did was premeditated and that part of that premeditation was my total ignorance. It gave them a sort of protection against the desecration of a tomb. The flaw was my greedy interest to find out what was under the tarpaulin.

"I told you that we were going to fulfill a promise," dona Mercedes said to me. "We have done the first part. We have unearthed a corpse, now we have to bury it again." She closed her eyes and fell asleep.

I scrambled into the front seat. Humming softly, Leon Chirino turned the car onto a dirt road that led to the coast.

It was already morning when we reached an abandoned coconut grove.

Cued perhaps by the smell of the sea breeze, Mercedes Peralta awoke. She yawned loudly, then sat up. Leaning out the window, she seemed to breathe in the sound of the distant waves.

"This is a good place to park," Leon Chirino stated, stopping at the foot of the straightest and tallest palm tree I had ever seen. It's heavy silvery fronds appeared to be sweeping the clouds from the sky.

"Lorenzo Paz's house isn't far from here," Leon Chirino went on, helping dona Mercedes out of the car. "The walk will do us good." Smiling, he handed me her basket to carry.

We turned away from the sea and set out along a well-trodden path that cut across a thick grove of tall bamboo bordering a stream. It was cool and dark inside the grove, and the air had taken on the green transparency of leaves. Leon Chirino walked way ahead of us, his straw hat down over his ears, so that the wind would not carry it away.

We caught up with him by a short narrow bridge. Leaning over the rustic balustrade made out of freshly cut poles, we rested for a moment and gazed at a group of women washing their clothes, pounding them on flat river stones. A shirt slipped out of someone's hands, and a young girl jumped into the water to catch it. Her thin dress swelled out like a balloon, then molded itself to her breasts, stomach, and the gentle curve of her hips.

The straight dirt road on the other side of the bridge led to a small village, which we did not approach. Instead, we turned onto a side road along a neglected maize field. Hardened corn husks hung forlornly on withered stalks: They rustled like crumpled newspapers in the faint breeze. We came to a small house: It's walls had been recently painted, and the tile roof had been partially redone. Banana trees, their fronds almost transparent in the sunlight, stood on either side of the front door like so many guards.

The door was ajar. Without knocking or calling out, we walked straight in. A group of men squatting on the brick floor with their backs against the wall lifted their rum-filled glasses in greeting, then continued their conversation in low, unhurried voices. Dust bars of sunlight beamed in through a narrow window, adding to the stale heat and intensifying the pungent odor of kerosene and creosol. In the far corner, propped on two crates, stood an open coffin.

One of the men rose and, holding my elbow gently, led me to the coffin. The man was slight but strongly built. His white hair and wrinkled face indicated age, yet there was something youthful about the graceful slant of his cheek-bones and the mischievous expression in his tawny brown eyes.

"Have a look at her," he whispered, bending toward the dead woman lying in the rough, unpainted coffin. "See how beautiful she still is."

I stifled a scream. It was the same woman we had unearthed last night. I moved closer and examined her carefully. Despite the gray-greenish tint to her skin that not even the heavy makeup could disguise, there was something alive about her. She seemed to be smiling at her own death. On her finely chiseled nose rested a pair of wire-rimmed, glassless spectacles. Her garish, red-painted lips were slightly parted, revealing her strong white teeth. A red robe trimmed with white had been wrapped around her long body. To her left lay a staff, to her right, a red-and-black wooden devil's mask fitted with two menacing, twisted ram's horns.

"She was very beautiful and very, very dear to me," the man said, straightening a fold in the robe.

"It's incredible how beautiful she still is," I agreed with him. Afraid he might stop talking, I held back my questions.

As he continued fussing with the woman's red robe, he gave me a detailed report on how he and his friends had unearthed her from her grave in the cemetery near Curmina and brought her to his house.

Suddenly, he looked up, and realizing that I was a stranger, he examined me with unrestrained curiosity.

"Oh, dear me! What kind of a host am I?" he exclaimed. "Here I'm talking and talking, when I haven't offered you anything to drink or to eat."

He took my hand in his. "I'm Lorenzo Paz," he introduced himself.

Before I had a chance to say that I could not possibly swallow a thing, he ushered me through a narrow doorway that led to the kitchen. Mercedes Peralta, standing by a kerosene stove that was perched on top of a waist-high stone hearth, was stirring a concoction made from the medicinal plants she had brought with her.

"You'd better bury her soon, Lorenzo," dona Mercedes said. "It's far too hot to keep her above ground any longer."

"She'll be fine," the man assured her. "I'm certain her husband paid for the best embalmment job available in Curmina.

"And to be on the safe side, I sprinkled the coffin with quicklime and wrapped strips of cloth soaked in kerosene and creosol around her body." He looked at the healer beseechingly. "I've got to be sure her spirit has followed us here."

Nodding, dona Mercedes continued stirring her concoction.

Lorenzo Paz half filled two enamel mugs with rum. He handed one to me, the other to dona Mercedes. "We'll bury her as soon as it cools down," he promised and then went back to the other room.

"Who was the dead woman we unearthed last night?" I asked dona Mercedes and then sat down on a bundle of dried palm fronds stacked against the wall.

"For someone who spends most of her time studying people, you're not very observant," she remarked, laughing softly. "I pointed her out to you some time ago. She was the pharmacist's wife."

"The Swedish woman?" I asked aghast. "But why...?" The rest of my words were drowned out by the roaring laughter of the men in the other room.

"I think they've just found out you were the one holding the light last night," dona Mercedes said and went into the other room to laugh with the men.

Unaccustomed to drinking liquor, I fell into a drowsy state not far from actual sleep. The men's voices, their laughter, and moments later, the rhythmic pounding of a hammer reached me as if they were coming from far away.

## Chapter 12

Late in the afternoon after the men had left for the cemetery with the coffin, dona Mercedes and I went to the village.

"I wonder where all the people are?" I asked. Except for a young girl standing in a doorway with a naked baby astride her hip and a few dogs lying in the shade of the houses, the place was deserted.

"At the cemetery," dona Mercedes said, leading me toward the church across the plaza. "It's the day of the dead. People are weeding the graves of their deceased relatives and saying prayers for them."

It was cool and shadowy inside the church. The last threads of sunlight spilling through the tinted-glass windows in the nave illuminated the statues of saints in the niches along the walls. A life-size crucifix, with it's ripped, twisted flesh and it's drooping, bleeding head in vivid color, dominated the altar. To the right of the crucifix stood the statue of the blissful-faced Virgin of Coromoto draped in a blue, star-embroidered, velvet cape. To the left was the cross-eyed figurine of Saint John, with his narrow-brimmed hat at a rakish angle and a red flannel cape, torn and dusty, flung casually over his shoulders.

Dona Mercedes blew out the flame of seven candles that were burning on the altar, put them in her basket, and lit seven new ones. She closed her eyes and, folding her hands, recited a long prayer.

The sun was only a glimmer behind the hills when we walked out of the church. The crimson and orange clouds trailing across the sky toward the sea gilded the late afternoon in a golden twilight. By the time we arrived at the cemetery it was dark. The entire village seemed to have come out to commune with their dead. Men and women praying in soft voices were crouched beside graves ringed with lit candles.

We walked along the low wall encircling the cemetery to a secluded spot where Lorenzo Paz and his friends were resting. They had already lowered the coffin into the ground and covered it with dirt. Their faces, sculpted into abstract masks by the surrounding candlelight, could have been the ghostly forms of the dead beneath us. As soon as they spotted Mercedes Peralta, they began to pound the makeshift cross firmly into the ground at the head of the grave. Then, the men disappeared, swiftly and soundlessly, as if they had been swallowed up by the darkness.

"Now we have to lure Birgit Briceno's spirit here," dona Mercedes said, retrieving the seven candles she had taken from the church's altar and the same number of cigars from her basket.

She stuck the candles in the soft ground on top of the grave. As soon as she had them all lit, she put a cigar in her mouth.

"Watch carefully," she mumbled, handing me the rest of the cigars. "The instant I finish smoking this one, you must have the next cigar ready for me, already lit."

Taking deep drags she blew the smoke into the four cardinal directions. She huddled over the grave, and smoking uninterruptedly, she recited an incantation in a low raspy voice. The tobacco smoke no longer seemed to come out of her mouth but directly from the ground. Like a fine mist, it grew around us, enveloping us like a cloud. Fascinated, I just sat there, handing her cigar after cigar, listening to her melodious, but incomprehensible, chanting.

I edged closer to her as she began to move her left arm over the grave. I thought she was shaking a rattle, but I could see nothing in her hand. I could only hear the clattering sound of seeds or, perhaps, small pebbles moving rapidly in her hand. Tiny sparks, like fireflies, escaped from in between her closed fingers. She began to whistle a strange tune that soon became indistinguishable from the rattling noise.

Out of the cloud of smoke emerged a tall bearded figure wearing a long robe and a Phrygian cap.

I held my hand over my mouth to muffle my giggles. I believed that either I was still under the influence of the rum I had had earlier or the pallbearers were playing some kind of trick, all part of the day's festivities for the dead. Totally absorbed, I watched the figure move out of the circle of smoke toward the wall surrounding the cemetery. The vision lingered there, a wistful smile on it's face. I heard soft laughter, so quiet, so unearthly, it might have been part of Mercedes Peralta's chanting. Her voice became louder. The sound seemed to come from the four corners of the grave, each side repeating the words like an echo. The smoke dispersed: It rose toward the palm trees and vanished into the night. For a long time, dona Mercedes remained huddled over the grave, mumbling softly, her face barely visible in the light of the burned-down candles.

She turned toward me, the trace of a smile on her lips. "I lured Birgit Briceno's spirit here but not to her grave," she said. Holding onto my arm, she stood up.

I wanted to ask her about the strange vision, but something in the empty expression of her eyes compelled me to silence.

Lorenzo Paz, leaning against an enormous boulder, was waiting for us outside the cemetery. Without saying a word he rose and followed us down the narrow path leading to the beach. A half-moon shone brightly on the bleached-out driftwood scattered about the wide stretch of sand.

Dona Mercedes ordered me to wait by an uprooted tree trunk. She and Lorenzo Paz walked down to the shoreline. He took off his clothes, then waded into the water and vanished amid the rolling phosphorescent whitecaps edged in silver shadows. He was gone for quite some time until a wave, shimmering with moonlight, washed him up on the beach. Mercedes Peralta retrieved a jar from her basket and poured it's contents over his prostrated form in the sand. Kneeling beside him, she rested her hands on his head and murmured an incantation. Gently, she massaged him, her fingers barely touching his body, until a faint halo appeared around him. Swiftly, she rolled him from side to side, her hand describing oddly circular movements in the air, as if she were gathering shadows and wrapping them around him.

Moments later she came up to where I was sitting. "Birgit Briceno's spirit was clinging to him like a second skin," she said, sitting beside me on the tree trunk.

Shortly, Lorenzo Paz, fully dressed, walked toward us. Dona Mercedes, with a movement of her chin, motioned him to sit in front of her on the sand. Pursing her lips, she made loud smacking noises, and her rapid, drawn-in breaths became muffled growls in her throat as she recited a long prayer.

"It will be a long time before Birgit Briceno's ghost will forget," she said. "Dying continues long after the body is in the ground. The dead lose their memories ever so slowly."

She turned toward me and ordered me to sit in the sand beside Lorenzo Paz. His clothes smelled of candle smoke and rose water.

"Lorenzo," dona Mercedes addressed him, "I'd like you to tell the Musiúa the story of how you bewitched Birgit Briceno."

He regarded her with a puzzled air, then turned around and faced the sea: His head slightly cocked, he seemed to be listening to a secret message from the waves.

"Why would she like to hear nonsensical stories about old people?" he asked her without looking at me. "The Musiúa has her own stories. I'm sure of that."

"Let's say that I ask you to tell her," dona Mercedes said. "She's examining the many ways through which the wheel of chance can be made to turn by human means. In your case, an object turned the wheel for you, Lorenzo."

"The wheel of chance!" he said, a wistful tone in his voice. "I remember it all as if it happened only yesterday." Seemingly bemused, he prodded a pebble with the tip of his shoe and stretched out flat on the sand.

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From his rocking chair behind the counter of the dim, smoke-filled bar, Lorenzo watched the group of men leaning over the billiard table in the corner. He shifted his gaze to the old mantel clock on the shelf, marking the time under a glass bell. It was almost dawn. He was about to rise and remind the men of the late hours, when he heard the unmistakable sound of Petra's shuffling feet from back of the house. Promptly, he sat down again. A wicked grin spread slowly over his face. He would let his aunt deal with the men. No one in town escaped her admonitions: They listened to her words regardless of how vile and outrageous they were.

"Those damn clinking billiard balls won't let a soul sleep," she complained in a croaky voice as she stepped into the room. "Don't you have wives waiting for you? Don't you have work to go to in the morning, like any good Christian?"

She gave the men no time to recover from their surprise but continued in the same indignant manner. "I know what's the matter with you. You're already regretting that you brought those pagan Christmas trees into your homes and that you permitted your children to act in a Christmas play."

She crossed herself and faced one of the men. "You are the mayor," she said. "How can you allow such things! Have you all turned Protestant?"

"God forbid, Petra," the mayor said, making the sign of the cross. "Don't make a mountain out of a molehill. What's the harm in a tree and a play? The children like it."

Grumbling something unintelligible, she turned to go, then stopped short.

"Shame on don Serapio! He's more foreign than a true foreigner. And shame on that real foreign wife of his. Thanks to them most children in town will not get their presents from the Three Wise Men on the sixth of January, as every good Christian should."

She reached for a pack of cigarettes on the counter. "Now they will get them on Christmas day," she went on, "from some fellow called Santaclos. It's a disgrace!"

Leaning against the door, she stared at the mayor menacingly, oblivious that the ever present cigarette in her mouth had fallen onto the floor. She reached for the half-empty bottle of rum next to the billiard table and left the room muttering to herself.

Lorenzo, grinning behind the counter, clearly remembered the day when a truck loaded with singularly fragrant trees arrived in town. Don Serapio, the pharmacist, had called them Christmas trees. He had ordered them from Caracas, together with the appropriate decorations and records of European Christmas songs. Not to be outdone by each other, don Serapio's friends quickly followed his example and paid a great deal of money for the brittle trees so that they could be prominently displayed in their living rooms.

To the great chagrin of the older relatives living in those homes, the trees were placed next to, and in some instances even in place of, the traditional nativity scenes. With their windows wide open, so every passerby could see in and hear such unknown tunes as "Silent Night" and "Tannenbaum," the women decorated the scraggly branches with glass balls, garlands, gold and silver tinsel, and cotton snow.

The rattling of the beaded curtain shattered Lorenzo's reveries. He waved to the men as they left the bar, then put the bottles back on the shelves. His glance was caught by a mask crammed behind the cheap religious statuary of virgins, saints, and mute-suffering Christs. The figurines had been given to him over the years by his poorer customers to pay for their drinks. He pulled out the mask. It was a devil's mask with huge ram horns. A man from Caracas had left it behind. He, too, had been unable to pay for the glasses of rum he had consumed.

Upon hearing Petra clanking her pots and pans in the kitchen, he put the mask back on the shelf. Instead of locking up the bar, he took his rocking chair outside on the sidewalk. The wide branches of the ancient samans on the plaza stood outlined against the pale dawn sky.

Leisurely, he rocked himself back and forth. Through half-closed lids he watched the old men who never slept beyond dawn. They sat in front of their doors, talking, recollecting every minute detail of their bygone days in ever increasing vividness.

A melody floated through the stillness. Across the street, Birgit Briceno, the pharmacist's wife, was looking out from her window directly at Lorenzo, her face resting on her folded arms. Her radio was on. He wondered if she had also not slept or if she had simply risen early. Her face was a perfect oval. And the corners of her small, sensual, beautiful mouth were set in a gesture of defiance and boldness. Her yellow hair was braided around her head, and her cold blue eyes seemed to sparkle as she smiled at him.

He nodded at her in silent greeting. He was always dumbstruck in her presence, for she had been for him, since the day he first saw her, the picture of beauty.

She's the reason I've reached the age of forty and never married, he mused. To him, all women were desirable and irresistible, but Birgit Briceno was more than irresistible, she was indeed unattainable.

"Why don't you come and watch the Christmas play tonight, Lorenzo? Tonight is Christmas Eve," Birgit Briceno shouted from across the street.

The old men, dozing in front of their doors, suddenly perked up and turned their heads toward the bar owner. Grinning expectantly, they waited for his answer.

So far, Lorenzo had consistently declined don Serapio's invitations. He couldn't abide the pharmacist's air of self-importance, nor his insistence in trying to convince every friend and acquaintance that he was the most influential man in town, and that it fell upon him to give an example of what civilized living was all about. However, regardless of how insufferable he found the man, Lorenzo couldn't resist his wife's summons. In a loud voice, he promised Birgit Briceno that he would come that evening. He then took his rocking chair inside and went to sleep in his hammock at the back of the house, pleased and full of confidence in himself.

Dressed in a white linen suit, Lorenzo walked around his bedroom, testing his new patent leather shoes. It was a large room crowded with heavy ornate mahogany pieces that had once stood in the parlor, which his father had converted into a bar years ago. Lorenzo sat on the bed, took off his shoes and socks, and put on his cloth sandals.

"I'm glad you aren't that vain," Petra commented, shuffling into the room. "There's nothing worse than having uncomfortable feet. It makes a person downright insecure."

Her little dark eyes shone with approval as she examined his suit. "You'll never entice Birgit Briceno by ordinary means, though," she pronounced, catching his glance in the mirror. "That foreigner will respond only to witchcraft."

"Really?" Lorenzo mumbled, shrugging his shoulders with studied indifference.

"Isn't that the reason you went to see a witch? To get a love potion for that Musiúa?" she challenged him, crossing her spindly arms across her flat chest. Realizing that he wasn't about to answer, she added, "Well then, why don't you follow the witch's advice?"

Lorenzo laughed and regarded his aunt thoughtfully. She had an uncanny way of knowing what was on his mind, and her assessments were always accurate.

Petra had moved into the house upon his father's death. He had been ten years old then. Not only had she taken care of him all these years, but she had also managed the bar until he had been capable of doing so himself.

"Birgit Briceno will respond only to witchcraft," Petra repeated obstinately.

Lorenzo examined himself in the mirror. He was too short and stocky to look dignified. His cheekbones were too pronounced, his mouth too thin, his nose too short to be handsome. Yet, he loved women unabashedly, and he knew that women loved men who loved them that way. But to have Birgit Briceno, he would need more than that. And he wanted her more than anything in the world. He had never doubted the power of witchcraft. The witch's recommendation on how to seduce the foreign woman, however, was far too outlandish.

"Love potions are for people who don't have the strength to go directly to the spirit of things," she had said to him. "Anything can grant you your wish, your most earnest wish, if you're strong enough to wish your wish directly into the spirit of a thing. You have a devil's mask; ask the mask to seduce Birgit Briceno."

He decided it was all too vague. He was too practical: He relied only on something that was concrete.

"You know what?" he said, facing his aunt. "Birgit Briceno herself has invited me to her house."

"She probably invited half the town," Petra replied cynically. "And the uninvited half will be there, too."

She rose and, before shuffling back to her room, added, "I didn't say you couldn't get Birgit Briceno. But mark my words. It won't be through ordinary means."

He had discarded the witch's advice because he did not want merely to seduce the Swedish woman: He wanted her to love him, even if only for an instant. In his moments of euphoria he thought he would not be satisfied with less than one hour.

The front door and the windows of the Bricenos' house were wide open. The tall fir tree in the living room, lit by a myriad of colorful lights, could be seen in all it's splendor from the plaza.

Lorenzo walked inside the house. The place looked like a train station. Rows of chairs faced a raised platform that had been set up in the patio. The stuffed leather armchairs, couch, and Moroccan stools from the living room had been moved out into the gallery next to the willow furniture. Boys and girls dashed about barefoot, their mothers in tow, trying to put last minute touches on their costumes.

"Lorenzo!" don Serapio called out the instant he caught sight of him from the wide open living room. Although he was tall and thin, don Serapio had quite a paunch, and whenever he stood, his legs were slightly spread.

Don Serapio adjusted his thick horn-rimmed glasses and patted Lorenzo cordially on the shoulder. "We're about to serve coffee," he said, steering him toward his guests, the elite of the town.

Among them were the doctor, the mayor, the barber, the school principal, and the priest. They all had the same expression on their faces: utter perplexity at seeing Lorenzo in don Serapio's house. The pharmacist seemed genuinely pleased to have the elusive bar owner among his guests.

Lorenzo greeted everyone, then edged his way to the door, and almost collided with Birgit Briceno as she stepped into the room.

"Well!" she exclaimed, her smile taking them all in. "We have the children ready to start the play. But first, come and join your wives for cookies and coffee." Taking her husband's arm she led the way to the dining room.

Lorenzo could not take his eyes off her. She was tall and strongly built, yet he thought there was something vulnerable, almost frail about her long neck and her delicate hands and feet.

As though aware of his scrutiny, she looked at him. She hesitated for a moment, then poured coffee into two minute, gold-rimmed cups and brought them over to where he stood. "There is also rum," she said, wistfully eyeing the bottle at the far end of the table, "to which only the men help themselves."

"I'll take care of that, right away," Lorenzo said, finishing his coffee in one gulp. He reached for the bottle, filled his cup with the rum, then casually exchanged her empty cup with his.

Grinning, she reached for a cookie, nibbled at it, and sipped her rum daintily. "There are always surprises in store for me," she said, her eyes suddenly sparkling, her cheeks flushed.

Lorenzo was oblivious to everything except her. He had not realized that don Serapio was talking until she made a subtle gesture of annoyance. "I'd better get back to the children," she said.

In a slow pedantic voice, the pharmacist was denouncing the Venezuelan tradition of Christmas revelers, who each night played their drums and sang improvised Christmas carols. Not only was it annoying, he stressed, to hear the incessant beating of drums, but it was downright disgusting to see young men reeling through the streets from all the rum they had been given as a reward for their songs.

An expression of pure mischief spread slowly over Lorenzo's face as he recalled his last visit to the witch. "I don't believe what you're telling me," he had said, "because I don't know who could grant me such a monumental wish."

"Trust me," she had replied. "There is no way to know who grants these wishes. But they do happen. And when you least expect it."

She had insisted that he already possessed the item that would cast a spell on Birgit Briceno: a devil's mask. "All I can add is that you must wear the mask in triumph, and it will grant you your wish."

The witch had told him that it was vital for him to choose his time well, for the mask's magic would work only once. Certain that more than a coincidence was involved in his spotting the mask that morning, Lorenzo walked casually out into the yard. He made sure no one saw him, then dashed into a side street and slipped into his house through the back door.

He tiptoed to the bar, lit a candle, and reached for the mask on the shelf. Hesitantly, he ran his fingers over it's red-and-black-painted surface. The carver had put something diabolical into his creation, Lorenzo thought. He had the odd feeling that the eye slits, half-hidden behind bushy brows made from sisal fibers, were accusing him for his neglect; and the mouth, with the long fangs of some wild animal at each corner, grinned fiendishly, daring him to dance with the mask on. He held it over his face. His eyes, nose, and mouth fitted so well into the mask, he almost believed it had been made for him. Only his cheekbones rubbed slightly against the smooth wood inside. He tied the rawhide straps behind his head and covered them with the long sisal fibers, dyed purple, green, and black, hanging down the back.

Lorenzo did not hear Petra shuffling into the room. Startled, he leapt into the air when she spoke.

"You'll have to change your clothes," she declared and handed him a pair of pants and a patched shirt. "Take off your sandals, the devil goes barefoot."

She looked around, afraid someone might overhear, then added, "Remember, the devil commands without uttering a word."

Quietly, the same way he had come in, Lorenzo slipped out the back door. He deliberated for an instant, wondering which way to turn when he heard a group of revelers playing their drums down the street. Protected by the shadows, Lorenzo kept close to the walls as he approached them.

"The devil!" one of them shouted upon seeing Lorenzo, then excitedly ran up and down the street, announcing that the devil had come to town.

Four young men detached themselves from the group and surrounded the devil, their hands moving loosely and gracefully as they began to beat on their drums. One of them sang an impromptu verse, proclaiming that they were at the devil's command for the night. Lorenzo felt a shiver run up his spine. It filled him with a restlessness he could not control. Slowly, he lifted his muscular arms, and his feet moved, on their own accord, to the rhythm of the drums.

Windows and doors opened as they cavorted through the streets toward the plaza, followed by an ever increasing crowd. As if the devil had requested it, the lights in the plaza and in the surrounding houses went out for three or four seconds. The music stopped. Momentarily paralyzed, the crowd watched the devil go into the Bricenos' house. Lorenzo leapt upon the platform in the patio just as rockets, lit by someone outside, shot up in the air. Red, blue, green, and white lights exploded against the sky, then fell dizzily to earth, a shower of faint golden sparks. Spellbound, the guests stood transfixed, their eyes on the devil and the drummers that had followed close behind him. As if hearing some silent music, Lorenzo danced in the middle of a circle of quiet drummers, his body slightly stooped over, his red-and-black mask gleaming, his horns menacingly pointing to heaven. Then all at once like thunder came the sound of the drums, turning the prolonged silence into a rumble that extended to every corner of the house.

The devil, seeing Birgit Briceno leaning against the dining-room door, jumped down from the platform, grabbed the bottle of rum on the table, and handed it to her. Laughing, she took the bottle, then proudly tossed her head back and drank. Confident of his power, the devil danced around her, moving with consummate grace, his back stiff, only a suggestion of movement in his hips. With hands outstretched, her face rapt, Birgit Briceno responded to the drums as if in a trance. Don Serapio, his face contorted behind the thick, horn-rimmed glasses, sat huddled in the depths of an armchair that suddenly looked too wide for him. The guests, mingling with the crowd that had come in from the plaza, began to dance. Slowly, their hips swayed modestly, their movements deliberately restrained.

Lorenzo, surrounded by an ever increasing number of dancing women, who all wanted to hold him, to touch him, to reassure themselves that he was made of flesh and blood, lost sight of Birgit Briceno. He broke free from the women's eager hands and hid behind a door. Making sure he had not been followed, Lorenzo dashed to the back of the house, peeking into every room he passed.

The sound of joyful laughter brought him to an abrupt halt. Leaning against the arch that separated the laundry area from the backyard stood a tall, corpulent figure clad in black boots, a long red robe trimmed with white, and a red Phrygian cap fastened on top of a curly wig.

Lorenzo moved closer to the oddly attired person. "Birgit Briceno," he mumbled under his breath, gazing up into her clear, bold eyes framed by wire-rimmed spectacles that had no glass in them.

"Santaclos!" she corrected, a wide grin parting her lips, hidden by a shaggy beard and mustache.

She reached for a burlap sack on the ground stuffed with packages and a staff leaning against the wall.

"I was going to wait until tomorrow and surprise the children who took part in the Christmas play with gifts," she explained, "but I can't pass up this opportunity."

Her smile took on a sly, conspiratorial edge. "You are with me, aren't you?" she asked, and her eyes shone with a wicked gleam as she bent down to look into the slits of his mask.

Lorenzo bowed to her, then reached for the burlap sack, flung it over his shoulder, and motioned her to follow him. He led her out to the backyard onto a side street toward the plaza, where a few old people, several women, and their small children had gathered to watch the party at the Bricenos' house from across the street.

"There goes the devil!" a little girl shrieked. Calling to the other children to follow her, she ran toward the middle of the plaza. They stopped abruptly. Silently, the children stood in front of the two figures, their eyes wide with fear and curiosity.

"That's the devil," the little girl said, pointing to Lorenzo. "And who are you?" she demanded of the tall figure. "Why are you dressed like that?"

"I'm Santaclos and I bring presents," Birgit Briceno said, pulling out a package from her burlap sack. Smiling, she handed it to the child.

"Do you have presents for us, too?" the other children asked, dancing around them.

Laughing, Birgit Briceno placed the packages into their eager little hands. A bewildered little girl held a box tightly against her chest and shouted excitedly, "Santaclos and the devil are going to dance together!"

The children's delighted shrieks attracted a crowd in a matter of moments. Some musicians among them began to play their instruments and beat their drums.

"Let's dance away from your house," Lorenzo whispered into Birgit Briceno's ear. "And when we get to a side street, we'll slip away."

Lorenzo looped a bandanna around her waist and held the ends firmly. Their bodies twisted and trembled in a fiery, rhythmical embrace. Afraid to loose his grip on the ends of his bandanna, he ignored the other women's explicit invitations to dance with them.

In the eyes of everyone, he was engrossed in his dancing, but the moment he heard another group of musicians coming down the street, he grabbed the startled Birgit Briceno by the hand and pulled her through the multitude. Before anyone realized what had happened, the devil and Santaclos had vanished.

They ran until they were out of breath. And when they heard the crowd laughing and thumping just around the corner, Lorenzo lifted Birgit Briceno in his arms and walked through the front door into the home of one of his friends and customers. Lorenzo saw him in the living room amid a small group of people. It did not occur to Lorenzo that he might be intruding upon a family reunion. All he could think of was that he had to convince his friend to lend him his car.

"What a night," Birgit Briceno sighed, a beaming smile parting her lips. "That crowd almost got us." Pulling off the wig, beard, and mustache, she threw them out the window.

She unfastened the cushions from under her robe and flung them on the backseat. "Where are we going?" she asked, searching the darkness outside.

Lorenzo chuckled behind his mask and continued driving toward the small house he owned near the sea. Giggling, she relaxed in her seat. "I smell the sea breeze," she murmured shortly, breathing in deeply.

"I was born in a Swedish fishing village," she said. "The people I come from have always been buried at sea or by the sea, and the only regret I have in life is that I won't. Serapio already owns a plot in the cemetery in town."

Puzzled by her odd concern, he stopped the car.

"Can the devil's mask grant me my wish to be buried by the sea?" she asked with such a serious, determined expression on her face that he could only nod in agreement.

"A promise like that is sacred," she said. The look in her eyes made it clear that for her their understanding was total.

She leaned back in her seat. She was still, yet a strange, almost mischievous smile played around her mouth. "And I, on my part, promise to love the bearer of the wish-granting mask all this night," she whispered.

He would have settled for an instant of love. Next to an instant, a night was an eternity.

## Chapter 13

For days on end, I had pondered the meaning of the stories I had heard. I thought I understood what was meant by a link, or a witch's shadow, or the wheel of chance; but, I still wanted dona Mercedes or Candelaria to clarify things. I had accepted from the beginning that I was not there to interpret what I was experiencing in terms of my academic training, however, I could not help seeing things in terms of what I had learned in the nagual's world.

Florinda would have explained it all in terms of intent: a universal, abstract force responsible for molding everything in the world we live in. Being an abstract force, it's molding power is ordinarily outside the reach of man, yet under special circumstances it allows itself to be manipulated. And that is what gives us the false impression that people or things grant us wishes.

Compared to Florinda - and I could not avoid making the comparison - dona Mercedes and Candelaria were more simple pragmatists. They did not have an overall encompassing understanding of their actions. They understood whatever they did, as mediums, witches, and healers, in terms of separate, concrete events loosely connected with one another.

For instance, dona Mercedes was giving me concrete examples of ways of manipulating something nameless. The act of manipulating it, she called a witch's shadow. The result of that manipulation she called a link, a continuity, a turn of the wheel of chance.

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"It was certainly the mask that granted Lorenzo's wish," dona Mercedes said with absolute conviction. "I've known other, very similar instances of things granting wishes."

"But tell me, dona Mercedes, which is the important factor, the thing itself or the person who has the wish?"

"The thing itself," she replied. "If Lorenzo hadn't had that mask, he could've spent his life panting over Birgit Briceno; and that would've been all his wish amounted to. A witch would say that the mask, not Lorenzo, made the link."

"Would you still call it a witch's shadow, even if there was no witch involved?"

"A witch's shadow is only a name. All of us have a bit of a witch in us. Lorenzo is definitely not a spiritualist or a healer, yet he has a certain power to bewitch. Not enough, though, to make a link, to move the wheel of chance; but with the aid of the mask, it was a different story."

# PART FOUR

## Chapter 14

A faint noise startled me. I tried to move, but my left arm, flung behind my head, was stiff from lack of circulation. I had fallen asleep in Mercedes Peralta's room after becoming thoroughly exhausted from taking an inventory of her dried medicinal plants.

I turned my head upon hearing a voice call my name. "Dona Mercedes?" I whispered. Except for the sound of the knots of the healer's hammock, squeaking as they rubbed over the metal rings, there was no answer. I tiptoed over to the corner. No one was in the hammock. Yet, I had the distinct feeling that she had just been in the room and that somehow her presence still lingered about.

In the grips of inexplicable anxiety, I opened the door, then ran down the dark silent corridor. I crossed the patio to the kitchen and out into the yard. There in the hammock that hung between two soursop trees lay dona Mercedes enveloped in tobacco smoke, like a shadow. Slowly, her face emerged from the smoky dimness. It was more like an image in a dream. Her eyes glittered with a peculiar hollow depth.

"I was just thinking about you," she said. "About what you're doing here." She pulled up her legs to get out of the hammock.

I told her that I had fallen asleep in her room, and had been frightened by the sound of her empty hammock.

She listened in silence, a worried expression on her face. "Musiúa," she said sternly, "how many times have I told you never to fall asleep in the room of a witch? We're very vulnerable while asleep."

Unexpectedly, she giggled and covered her mouth, as though she had said too much. She signaled me to come closer and to sit on the ground near the edge of her hammock. She began to massage my head. Her fingers traveled with an undulating movement down to my face. A soothing numbness spread across my features. My skin, muscles, and bones seemed to dissolve under her deft fingers. Totally relaxed and at peace, I fell into a drowsiness that was not quite sleep. I was half-conscious of her gentle touch, as she continued to massage me. Finally, I lay faceup on the nearby cement slab.

Silently, dona Mercedes stood over me. "Watch, Musiúa," she suddenly cried out, looking up at the full moon racing through the clouds. Hiding, rising, emerging, the moon seemed to tear the clouds in it's rush. "Watch," she cried out again, throwing a clump of gold medals fastened to a long gold chain into the air high over her head. "When you see the chain again, you'll have to return to Caracas."

For an instant the dark clump seemed to be suspended against the full moon emerging from behind a cloud. I did not see it fall. I was too preoccupied wondering what had prompted her to mention that I had to go back to Caracas. I asked her about it: She remarked that it was foolish of me to assume I was going to stay in Curmina forever.

## Chapter 15

The persistent sharp call of a cicada on the branch above my head was more like a vibration punctuating the stillness of the hot and humid night. I turned on my stomach on the mat in the patio and waited for the woman who had been appearing to me at the same spot every night.

Dona Mercedes, dozing in a nearby hammock, had decided to keep me company that night, breaking with her presence the singularity of those appearances. She had established from the beginning that as long as no one else was with me or watched me, my contacts with the spirit would remain superpersonal events. If, however, someone else was present, the entire matter would become public property, so to speak.

I had acquired by then a certain expertise in smoking cigars. At first, I had expressed to dona Mercedes my concern about the irritating effect of the heat on the delicate tissue inside the mouth. She had laughed my fear away, assuring me that the smoke of ritual cigars was actually cool and soothing. After practicing for a short while, I had to agree with her: The smoke was indeed cool: The tobacco seemed mentholated.

Dona Mercedes' decision to accompany me that night was triggered by Candelaria's doubts that I was strong enough to hold a full seance by myself. To them, a full seance meant that at one point the medium has absolutely relinquished all voluntary control of her person and the spirit can express itself through the medium's body.

Earlier that day, dona Mercedes had explained to me that my presence in her house was no longer tenable: Not because she or Candelaria were in any way at odds with me or cross with me, but because she had nothing of value to give me. She assured me that both Candelaria and herself felt nothing but the deepest affection for me. Had she liked me less, she would have been satisfied with letting me watch her treat the sick and pretend that I was her helper. It was her affection for me that forced her to be truthful. What I needed was a link, and she had none for me. She could only make one for Candelaria. However, since the spirit had chosen me to be an intermediary or, perhaps, even a true medium, she had to honor that choice. So far, she had helped me do so by indirectly helping me make nightly contacts with the apparition.

"The fact that the spirit of my ancestor has chosen you," she had said, "makes you, Candelaria, and me sort of relatives."

Candelaria had told me then that she had had contact with the same spirit since childhood. But, following a medium's tradition of total secrecy, she could not possibly elaborate on that.

Dona Mercedes stirred in her hammock and crossed her arms behind her head. "Musiúa, you better squat and start smoking," she said in a soft, relaxed tone.

I lit a cigar, puffing at it in short even spurts and murmured the incantation she had taught me. The smoke and the sound were definitely the agents that brought the apparition every time. I heard a soft rustle. Dona Mercedes also heard it, for she turned at the same instant I did. A few feet away, squatting between Candelaria's giant terracotta flower pots, was the woman.

Dona Mercedes crouched beside me and took the cigar from my mouth. She puffed at it, mumbling an incantation; a different one from mine. I felt a tremor in my body; an invisible hand gripped me by the throat. I heard myself making whizzing, gurgling noises. To my amazement, they sounded like words said by someone else with my own vocal cords. I knew instantly - although I did not understand them - that they were words of yet another incantation. The apparition hovered over my head, and then it disappeared.

Next, I found myself with dona Mercedes and Candelaria inside the house. I was soaked in perspiration and felt physically exhausted. And so were the two women. However, my exhaustion was not a debilitating one. I felt extraordinarily light and exhilarated.

"How did I get here?" I asked.

Candelaria consulted dona Mercedes with a questioning look and then said, "You had a full seance."

"This changes everything," dona Mercedes said in a faint voice. "The spirit of my ancestor has made a link for you. So, you must stay here until the spirit lets you go."

"But why did the spirit choose me?" I asked. "I'm a foreigner."

"There are no foreigners for the spirits," Candelaria answered. "The spirits only search for mediums."

## Chapter 16

Mercedes Peralta sat hunched over the altar, mumbling an incantation.

Faint with hunger and fatigue, I kept glancing at my watch. It was nearly six o'clock in the evening. I fervently wished that the large woman sitting by the table would be dona Mercedes' last patient for the day.

There had been no explanation for her seeing more than two sick persons a day, but for the last four Saturdays dona Mercedes had seen as many as twelve in one day.

They were mostly women from the nearby hamlets who took advantage of their weekly trip to the market and stopped by to see the healer. There were always those who sought help for such specific ailments as headaches, colds, and female disorders. The great majority, however, came to be relieved of their emotional problems. Unrequited love, marital difficulties, strife with in-laws, growing children, and problems at work and in the community were the most frequently discussed topics. Graying hair, loss of hair, the appearance of wrinkles, and bouts of bad luck were among the more frivolous complaints. Dona Mercedes treated each person, whatever his or her problem, with the same genuine interest and efficiency.

She would first diagnose the ailment with the aid of her nautical compass or by interpreting the pattern of the cigar's ashes on the plate. If the person's imbalance was caused by psychological turmoil - she called it spiritual - she would recite a prayer-incantation and give a massage. If the person was suffering from a physical ailment, she would prescribe medicinal plants and a follow-up.

Her artful use of language and her great sensitivity to each person's minute change in mood prompted the most reluctant man or woman to open up and talk candidly about his or her intimate concerns.

Mercedes Peralta's voice startled me. "You really messed up this time," she addressed the large woman sitting in front of the table.

Dona Peralta shood her head in disbelief, and once again examined the cigar's ashes, which she had collected on a metal plate on the altar.

"You're a fool," she declared, holding the plate under the woman's face, expecting the woman to recognize in the soft, gray-greenish powder the nature of her ailment. "You really are in trouble this time."

Rushing with apprehension, the woman looked from side to side, as if she were trying to find a way to escape. She puckered up her lips like a child.

Dona Mercedes rose, moved to where I sat on a stool in my usual corner, and in a formal tone pronounced, "I would like you to write down the treatment my client is to follow."

As usual, I listed first the prescribed herbs, flower essences, and dietary restrictions. Then, I wrote out a detailed account of when and under what circumstances the patient was to take the herbal infusion and the purifying baths. With dona Mercedes' permission, I never failed to make a carbon copy for myself. And finally at her urging, I read out loud several times what I had written. I was certain that it was not only to reassure dona Mercedes herself that I had listed everything correctly but mainly to benefit the patient in case she was illiterate.

With the instructions clutched in her hand, the woman rose and faced the altar. She put some bills under the statue of the Virgin, then solemnly promised that she would follow dona Mercedes' instructions.

Dona Mercedes stepped over to the altar, lit a candle, and kneeled to pray to the saints that her judgments would be correct.

I mentioned that I knew doctors who prayed a great deal.

"What good doctors and healers have in common is abiding respect for their patients," she declared. "They trust the great force that is out there to guide them. They can summon that power through prayer, meditation, incantations, tobacco smoke, medicines, and equipment."

She reached for the carbon copies of all the instructions I had written out that day, then counted the pages. "Did I really see that many persons today?" she asked, seemingly uninterested in hearing my answer. A faint smile parted her lips as she closed her eyes and leaned back in her uncomfortable-looking chair. "Go and bring me all your notebooks on all my clients but not the ones on the persons who are telling you their stories. I want to see how many people I've treated since you got here." She got up and walked with me to the door. "Bring everything to the patio. I want Candelaria to help me," she added.

It took me almost an hour to gather all my materials. With the exception of my diary, I carried everything to the patio, where dona Mercedes and Candelaria were already waiting for me.

"Is that it?" dona Mercedes asked, eyeing the bundles of paper I had placed on the ground right in front of her.

She did not wait for my answer but ordered Candelaria to stack the papers and index cards by the steel drum at the far end of the patio. As soon as she had done so, Candelaria came to sit beside me on the mat. We both faced dona Mercedes, who was once again lying in her hammock.

"I've already told you that you are here under the auspices of the spirit of my ancestor," dona Mercedes said to me. "Since last night you are a medium chosen by that spirit. And mediums don't keep papers about healing. The very idea is hideous."

She rose from her hammock and walked to where my bundles of notes were. Only then did it dawn on me what she intended to do. She broke the string bindings with a knife and dropped handfuls of paper into the steel drum. Mesmerized, I watched the smoke rise from the drum. I had not noticed before that there was a fire inside it.

Eager to save some of my work, I jumped up. Candelaria's words stopped me from running to the drum.

"If you do that, you must leave right away." She smiled and patted the mat beside her.

In that instant I understood everything. There was nothing I could have done.

## Chapter 17

After an entire day's work, dona Mercedes fell soundly asleep in her chair.

I watched her for a while, wishing I could relax that easily, then I quietly put back the various bottles, jars, and boxes in the glass cabinet. As I tiptoed past her on my way out, she suddenly opened her eyes. She turned her head slowly and listened, her nostrils flaring as she sniffed the air.

"I almost forgot," she said. "Bring him in, right away."

"There isn't anybody," I replied with absolute certainty.

She raised her hands in a helpless gesture. "Just do what I tell you," she said softly.

Certain that she was going to be wrong this time, I stepped outside. It was nearly dark. No one was there. With a triumphant smile on my face I was about to walk back into the room when I heard a faint cough. As if he had been conjured up by dona Mercedes' assertion, a neatly dressed man emerged from the shadows in the corridor. His legs were disproportionately long. His shoulders, in contrast, seemed small and looked frail under his dark coat. He vacillated for an instant, then lifted a cluster of green coconuts in a slight salute. In his other hand, he held a custom-made machete.

"Is Mercedes Peralta in?" he asked in a deep, raspy voice, interspersed by a harsh cough.

"She's waiting for you," I said, holding the curtain aside for him.

He had short, stiff, curly hair, and the space between his brows was creased in a deep frown. His dark, angular face exuded an unyielding hardness, matched by the fierce, relentless expression in his eyes. Only at the corners of his well-shaped mouth lingered a certain softness.

He stood irresolute for a moment, then a faint smile spread slowly over his face as he approached dona Mercedes. He dropped the coconuts on the ground, and adjusting his pants at the knees, squatted by her chair. He selected the biggest coconut on the cluster, and with three expert cuts of his short machete, removed the top.

"They are just the way you like them," he said. "Still soft and very sweet."

Dona Mercedes brought the fruit to her lips, and in between her noisy slurps, remarked how good the milk was. "Give me some of the inside," she demanded, handing the fruit back to him.

With one sure blow, he halved the coconut and then loosened the soft, gelatinous pulp with the tip of his machete.

"Prepare the other half for the Musiúa," dona Mercedes said.

He stared at me long and hard, then without a word he scraped the remaining half of the coconut with the same meticulous care and handed it to me. I thanked him.

"And what brings you here today?" dona Mercedes asked, breaking the awkward silence. "Do you need my help?"

"Yes," he said, pulling a cigarette case from his pocket. He lit a cigarette with a lighter. After taking one long drag, he returned the case to his pocket. "The spirit is all right," he said. "It's this damned cough that's getting worse. It doesn't let me sleep. I also have this headache. It doesn't let me work."

She invited him to sit down, not opposite her where her patients usually sat, but on the chair by the altar. She lit three candles in front of the Virgin, then casually inquired about the coconut plantation he owned somewhere along the coast.

He turned around slowly and gazed into her eyes. She coaxed him with a movement of her head. "This Musiúa helps me with my patients," she said to him. "You can talk as if she weren't present."

His eyes caught mine for a moment. "My name is Benito Santos," he said and swiftly looked back at dona Mercedes. "Does she have a name?"

"She says her name is Florinda," dona Mercedes answered before I had time to say anything. "But I call her Musiúa."

She watched him intently, then positioned herself behind him. With slow easy movements, she rubbed an unguent on his chest and shoulders for nearly a half hour.

"Benito Santos," she said, turning toward me, "is a powerful man. He comes to see me from time to time; always for a headache or a cold or a cough. I cure him in five sessions. I use a specially made unguent and an eloquent prayer offered to the spirit of the sea."

She continued massaging him for a long time. "Is the headache gone?" she asked, resting her hands on Benito Santos' shoulders.

He did not seem to have heard her question. He stared with unseeing eyes at the flickering candles. He began to talk about the sea and how ominous it was at dawn when the sun rises from the dim lusterless water. In a monotonous, almost trancelike murmur, he spoke about his daily noon excursions into the sea. He had never learned to swim, only to float.

"Pelicans circle around me," he said. "Sometimes they fly very low and look directly into my eyes. I'm certain they want to know if my strength is waning."

With his head bowed, he remained silent for a long time, then his voice faded to an even lower, hard-to-understand murmur. "At dusk, when the sun is behind the far away hills and the light no longer touches the water, I hear the voice of the sea. It tells me that someday it will die, but while it lives, it is relentless. I know then that I love the sea."

Mercedes Peralta pressed her palms over his temples, her fingers spanning his head.

"Benito Santos," she said, "is a man who has overcome guilt. He's old and he's tired. But even now he is relentless like the sea."

Benito Santos came to see dona Mercedes for five consecutive days. After finishing each of his daily treatments, she always asked him to tell me his story. He never answered her and totally ignored me.

Finally, at the end of his last appointment, he abruptly turned and faced me. "Is that your jeep out there in the street?" he asked. Without giving me time to answer, he added, "Drive me back to the coconut plantation, please."

We drove in silence. Just prior to reaching the coast, I assured him that he did not have to honor dona Mercedes' request.

He shook his head emphatically. "Whatever she asks is sacred to me," he said dryly. "I just don't know what to say or how to say it."

I paid countless visits to Benito Santos under the pretext of getting coconuts for dona Mercedes. We talked a great deal. But he never warmed up to me. He always stared at me defiantly until I turned my eyes away. He made it perfectly clear that he was talking to me only because Mercedes Peralta had requested it. He certainly was, as she had described him, hard and relentless.

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Clutching his machete firmly in his hand, Benito Santos stood motionless in the hot noon sun. It scorched his back, stiff from cutting cane for a week. He pushed back the brim of his hat to cool his forehead. His eyes followed the group of weary men walking across the empty, harvested sugarcane fields on their way into town.

For the last day and night everyone had worked without rest. Like him, the men would have no jobs to go to on Monday. It had been the last sugarcane crop before the tractors were to flatten and parcel off the land. The owner of those fields had held out the longest. But finally, like all the other planters in the area, he had been forced to sell his property to a land-developing company in Caracas. The valley was to be converted into an industrial center. Germans and Americans were going to build pharmaceutical laboratories. Italians were not only going to construct a shoe factory, but bring their own workers from Italy as well.

"Damn foreigners," Benito Santos swore, spitting on the ground. He didn't know how to read or write, and he had no skills. He was a sugarcane cropper. All he knew was how to wield a machete. Dragging the long blade on the ground, he approached the hacienda's courtyard, then turned to the small bungalow, where the foreman had his office. A group of men, some standing, some squatting under the shade of the building's wide overlapping roof, eyed him suspiciously as he stepped into the office.

"What do you want?" the short, potbellied foreman sitting behind a gray metal desk asked. "You got paid, didn't you?" he added impatiently, wiping the sweat off his neck with a neatly folded white handkerchief.

Benito Santos nodded. He was a taciturn man, almost gruff. It was hard for him to speak, to ask a favor.

"I heard that the sugarcane has been transported to a mill in the next town," he stammered, his eyes fixed on the foreman's massive neck bulging over the collar of his starched shirt. "I've been around mills before. I'm wondering if you could hire me to work there."

Leaning back in his chair, the foreman regarded Benito Santos through drooping lids. "You live around here, don't you? How would you be getting to the next town? It's more than fifteen miles from here."

"By bus," Benito Santos mumbled, looking furtively into the man's eyes.

"Bus!" The foreman laughed scornfully, stroking his thin, neatly trimmed mustache. "You know well that the bus only leaves when it's full. You'd never get there before noon."

"I'll make it," Benito Santos said desperately. "If you give me the job, I'll make it somehow.

Please."

"Listen," the foreman snapped. "I hired anyone capable of cutting down sugarcane regardless of age or experience because we had a deadline to meet. It was made perfectly clear to every man hired that this was a six-day job.

"At the mill we already have more people than we need." The foreman began to shuffle through the papers on his desk. "Don't waste any more of my time. I'm a busy man."

Benito Santos stepped into the courtyard, making sure not to trample on the tufts of grass growing between the stones. The mill, at the far end of the yard, already looked abandoned even though it had been in use only a few days ago. He knew he would never see it's like in the valley again.

The loud honking of a truck jolted him. Quickly, he stepped aside, lifting his hand for a ride into town. He was enveloped in a cloud of dust.

"You got to walk, Benito Santos," someone shouted from the moving vehicle.

Long after the dust had settled he could still hear the shouts and laughter of the workers on the truck. His fingers curled tightly around the handle of his machete. Slowly, they relaxed again. He pulled his hat well over his forehead to shade his eyes from the bright sun glazing the blue of the sky.

Benito Santos didn't follow the main road into town but cut across the empty fields until he reached a narrow trail. It led toward the southern end of town, where the Saturday open-air market was situated. He walked slower than usual, aware of the hole in one of his shoes and the flapping sole of the other, which stirred the dust on the ground before him. From time to time, he rested under the dark cool shade of the mango trees growing on either side of the path: Dispiritedly, he watched the fleeting green outline of lizards darting in and out of the bushes.

It was way past noon when he reached the market. The place was still bustling with people. Vendors, their voices already hoarse, advertised their merchandise with the same enthusiasm they had displayed earlier that morning. And the customers, mostly women, haggled shamelessly over the prices. Benito Santos walked past the Portuguese farmers' stands, where the now limp vegetables lay in disarray; past the meat and dry-fish stalls, where flies swarmed around and mangy dogs waited with endless patience for a piece of meat to fall on the ground. He grinned at the hired children who were standing behind the fresh-fruit stalls, packing rotten fruit in paper bags instead of letting the customers choose from the merchandise on display.

He fingered the money in his pocket: six days' wages. He deliberated whether he should buy food for his wife, Altagracia, and their small son now or later.

"Later," he said out loud. There was always the chance that he would get a better deal if he haggled with the merchants just before they were ready to pack up.

"Get your food while you have the money, Benito Santos," an old woman who knew him well shouted. "The beans and the rice won't get any cheaper."

"Only women wait for the afternoon bargains," a merchant taunted him, making obscene gestures with a plantain.

Benito Santos stared at the grinning faces of the Lebanese peddlers, standing behind their gaudy stalls, advertising cheap dresses, costume jewelry, and perfumes. Rage made the veins in his temples swell and stiffened the muscles on his neck. The humiliating incident in the foreman's office was vivid in his mind. The scornful laughter of the workers on the truck still rang in his ears. The machete was as light as a knife in his hand. With tremendous effort he turned around and walked away. A cold sweat bathed his body. His mouth was dry. He felt a tingling in his stomach that was not hunger. He would have his rum now, he decided. He couldn't wait until he got home. He needed the rum to dispel his anger, to dispel his gloom, his despondency.

Purposefully, he headed toward the main entrance of the market, where trucks and packtrains of donkeys waited to be reloaded with the produce that wasn't sold. He crossed the street, then stepped inside the small dark store at the corner and bought three pint bottles of the cheapest rum. He sat down under the shade of a tree, facing the trucks and the donkeys. He didn't want to miss the moment the merchants began to pack up. Sighing contentedly, he leaned against the tree trunk. He took off his hat and wiped the sweat and the dust from his haggard face with his sleeve. Carefully, he opened one of the bottles and downed the first pint in one long gulp. Gradually, the rum dulled the tension in his stomach; it eased the pain in his stiff back and sore legs. He smiled. A vague feeling of well-being drifted through his head. Yes, he mused, it was better to sit there, enjoying his rum, than to go home and listen to Altagracia's incessant nagging. He was slow to anger, but today he had had as much as he could take.

Through drooping lids, Benito Santos watched the people gathered in a circle near the market's entrance. It was the same crowd that came every Saturday afternoon from the nearby hamlets to bet on the cockfights. Drowsily, he let his gaze wander to the two men squatting beneath a tree directly across from him. He wasn't much interested in cockfights, yet his attention was caught by the two roosters the men held in their hands. They bounced them up and down to strengthen their legs. With an oddly gentle gesture, the men ruffled the birds' feathers and then shoved them against each other to rouse their spirits.

"That's a fine-looking bird," Benito Santos said to the man holding the dark rooster with the golden-tipped feathers.

"He certainly is," the man agreed readily. "He'll be in the last fight this afternoon. The best birds are saved for the last fight," the man added proudly, brushing the rooster's feathers. "You ought to bet on him. He'll be the winner today."

"You're sure?" Benito Santos asked casually, taking out another bottle of rum from his paper bag.

He took a long gulp, then meandered through the crowd of excited men squatting around a sand pit. They made room without looking at him, their eyes fixed on the center of the arena where two birds were locked in deadly combat.

"Your bets! Gentlemen, your bets!" a man shouted, his voice silencing the noisy crowd for a moment. "Your bets for the last fight! For the real fight!"

Eagerly the men exchanged their dirty bills for the colored markers indicating the amount of their bets.

"Are you sure your rooster is going to win today?" Benito Santos asked the owner of the bird with the golden-tipped feathers.

"He sure is!" the man exclaimed, planting rapturous kisses on the bird's scarred crest.

"Afraid to bet, Benito Santos?" asked one of the workers who had been cutting cane with him during the week. "You'd better buy some food for your old woman if you don't want trouble tonight," he added mockingly.

Benito Santos chose a marker and without hesitation bet the rest of his wages on the cock with the golden-tipped feathers. He was certain he would double his money. He would be able to buy not only rice and beans but meat and more rum. There might even be enough money to buy his son his first pair of shoes.

Benito Santos, as excited as the rest of the spectators, shouted his approval as the owners raised their birds high over their heads. They sucked the sharp, deadly spurs on the roosters' legs as evidence that there was no poison on them. The men mumbled sweet nothings to their birds, and then, at the command of the referee, they placed them in the center of the sand pit.

The combatants viewed each other angrily but refused to fight. The crowd shouted, and a wicker cage was lowered over the roosters. Excitedly the men goaded the birds to attack. The roosters trembled with rage, and their plumage spread out beneath their shaved, bloodshot necks. The cage was lifted. The cocks jumped at each other, skillfully avoiding pecks and blows of wings. But soon they were engaged in a deadly wing-beating, head-thrusting, leg-kicking explosion of fury. The white cock's feathers were red with blood, either from it's own wounds or from the deep gash on it's opponent's neck.

Silently, Benito Santos prayed for the bird he had bet on to win. At a signal from the referee, the open-beaked, hard-breathing roosters were lifted from the pit. With mounting anxiety Benito Santos watched the owner of the golden-feathered bird blow on it's wounds. Soothingly, he talked to the rooster, caressing and fussing over it.

At the referee's command, the birds were once again placed in the center of the circle. The white-feathered bird instantly took a well-aimed jump and sunk it's spurs into it's opponent's neck. It's triumphant crow shattered the silence of the audience as the golden-tipped rooster toppled over dead.

Benito Santos smiled bitterly, then laughed behind a grimace that struggled to hold back his tears. "At least I've got my rum," he mumbled, then gulped down the rest of his second bottle.

With trembling fingers he wiped his chin dry. He walked away from the crowd, heading toward the hills: the empty cane fields stretching endlessly before him shimmered in the bright afternoon sunlight. The yellow dust of the road raised by his shoes settled like fine, golden powder on his arms and hands.

Slowly, he went up a steep hill. Wherever there was a tree, he crossed the road and rested in it's shade. He opened his last bottle of rum and took one long gulp. He didn't want to see his wife. He couldn't bear to look into her accusing eyes.

He scanned the hills around him and let his gaze rest on the green slopes on the other side of the road where a high ranking general in the government had his farm. Benito Santos took another swallow. The rum filled him with a vague hope. Perhaps they might give him a job at the general's place. He could cut the green, irrigated alfalfa grown specifically for the horses. Hell! He had a skill! He thought. He was a sugarcane cropper. Cutting cane or alfalfa was all the same. He might even be able to ask for an advance. Not much. Just enough to buy some rice and beans.

He almost ran down the hill, then up the newly paved road leading to the general's farm. He was so excited by the possibility of getting a job that he didn't even see the two soldiers by the wide open gate.

"Where do you think you're going?" one of them stopped him, pointing his rifle to a sign on the road. "Can't you read? No trespassing beyond this point. This is a private road."

Benito Santos was so winded his throat hurt with each breath. He looked from one soldier to the other, then addressed the second soldier, who was leaning against a large boulder next to the sign. He looked older and friendlier. "I'm in desperate need of a job," he murmured.

Silently, the soldier shook his head; his eyes fixed on Benito Santos' stiff black hair sticking through his torn straw hat. Benito Santos' worn, rolled-up khaki pants and shirt clung damply to his tall, gaunt frame.

"There are no jobs in this place," he said in a sympathetic tone. "There isn't anyone around here to hire you, anyway."

"There must be someone there with the horses," Benito Santos insisted. "Maybe I could help. Just for a couple of hours every day."

The guards looked at each other, then shrugged and grinned mischievously. "Ask for the German in charge of the horses," the younger-looking man said. "He might help you."

For a moment Benito Santos wondered what the soldiers could be laughing about. But he felt too grateful to let it worry him. Afraid they might change their minds and call him back, he hurried along the straight paved road cut into the hill.

He stopped short in front of the general's house. Undecided, he stood looking at the two-story building. It was all white with a long balcony supported by massive columns. Instead of calling out, he tiptoed toward one of the downstairs windows. It was open, and the air gently fluttered the gauzy curtain. He wanted to have a quick look and see what it was like inside. He had heard that the luxurious furnishings had been brought over from Europe.

"What are you doing here?" a loud, heavily accented voice asked from behind him.

Startled, Benito Santos almost dropped his bottle of rum as he turned around. Wide-eyed, he regarded a wiry, middle-aged man with blond, closely cropped hair. He must be the German the soldiers had told him to see, he thought, looking into the man's restless eyes. They were the color of the sky and shone hard under fiercely jutting brows.

"Do you have a job for me?" Benito Santos asked. "Any kind of job."

The man moved closer to Benito Santos and stared at him menacingly. "How dare you come here, you drunkard?" he spat out, his voice cold with contempt. "Get out of here before I set the dogs on you."

Benito Santos' gaze became unsteady, his eyelids twitched. He felt like a beggar. He hated to ask for a favor. He had always worked the best he could. His tongue felt heavy.

"Just for a couple of hours." He held out his hand so the man could see the cracks and calluses. "I'm a hard worker. I'm a cane cutter. I could cut some grass for the horses."

"Get out!" the German yelled. "You're drunk."

Benito Santos walked slowly, dragging the tip of his machete on the ground. The road before him seemed longer than ever, as though it stretched itself deliberately to delay his arrival home. He wished he had someone to talk to. The monotonous drone of the insects made him feel even more desolate. He crossed the dry gully to his shack. He remained outside for a moment, deeply breathing in the late-afternoon air, letting the gentle breeze cool his flushed face. He had to stoop to enter his shack. It had no windows, only an opening in the front and one in the back, which he closed at night with a piece of cardboard propped up with a stick.

The heat was stifling inside. The sound of the hammock's ropes rubbing against the wood and Altagracia's uneven breathing irritated him. He knew she was seething with wrath. He turned to look at his son sleeping on the ground. He wore a discolored rag, which barely covered his small chest. He couldn't remember whether the boy was two or three years old.

Altagracia rose from her hammock, her eyes fixed on the bag in his hand. She planted herself in front of him and demanded in a harsh, shrill voice, "Where is the food, Benito?"

"The market was already packed up by the time I got there," Benito Santos mumbled, moving over to the cot in one corner of the shack, the paper bag held tightly in his hand. "I'm sure there are still some beans and rice left here."

"There is nothing here as you well know," Altagracia said, trying to grab the paper bag. "You sure had time to get drunk."

Her face with it's yellowish, sagging skin was flushed. Her sunken, usually lifeless eyes shone with anger and despair. He clearly felt the accelerated pounding of his heart. He didn't have to give her an explanation. He didn't owe anyone an explanation.

"Shut up, woman," he yelled.

He lifted the bottle and drank the rest of the rum without drawing a breath.

"I worked the whole night cutting cane. I'm tired." He threw the empty bottle through the opening of the shack. "I want some peace and quiet now. I want no woman shouting at me. Take the boy and get the hell out of here."

Altagracia grabbed Benito Santos by the arm before he had a chance to lower himself on the cot.

"Give me the money; I'll buy the food myself. The boy needs to eat."

She ripped open his pocket. "No money?" she repeated, in a daze, looking uncomprehendingly at him.

"Didn't you get paid today? You couldn't have spent six days' wages on rum." Shouting obscenities, she pulled his hair and pounded her clenched fists against his aching back and chest.

He felt drunk, not with rum, but with rage and hopelessness. He saw the gleam of fear in her eyes as he raised his machete. Her scream filled the air, then there was silence. He looked at her still form on the ground, at her tangled mass of hair soaked in blood.

He felt something tugging at his pants. His small son held onto his leg with such strength he was certain the child would never let him free. Possessed by an irrational fear, Benito Santos tried to shake him loose, but the boy would not let go. The boy's eyes were those of his mother; dark and deep, filled with that same accusing light. Benito Santos' temples began to throb under the boy's unblinking stare. With blind fury, he raised the machete once more.

Never in his life had he felt such an agonizing desolation. Never before had he been so clear-headed either. For a moment it was as if he had had another life, a more meaningful life - a life with a greater purpose - and was now looking into the nightmare that his existence had become. Then, more aware than he had ever been, he soaked some rags in the nearly empty can of kerosene and set his shack on fire.

He ran as far as he could and then stopped. Motionless, he stood gazing at the empty fields at the foot of the hills, at the faraway mountains in the distance. In the morning those mountains were the color of hope. Beyond them was the sea. He had never seen the sea. He had only heard that it was immense.

Benito Santos waited until the mountains, the hills, and the trees were no more than shadows; shadows like the memories of his childhood.

He felt he was again walking with his mother through the narrow streets of his village amid the crowd of the faithful behind some procession at nightfall with candles winking through the darkness.

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen." His voice drifted away with the wind and the thousands of small sounds shrouding the hills.

He shivered with fear, and took off again in a wild run. He ran until he could no longer breathe. He felt himself sinking into the soft ground. The earth was swallowing him: It was soothing him with blackness; and Benito Santos knew that this was the last day of his useless life. He had at last died.

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He opened his eyes, seemingly to the sound of a woman's wailing, but it was the night breeze, rustling through the leaves around him. How he had wished to remain forever in darkness; but he knew that nothing would ever be that easy for him. He rose, picked up his machete, and headed toward the road that led to the mountains. A clear light came down from the sky. It spread around him: It even gave him a shadow. The clear light made the air thinner, easier to breathe.

He had no place to go. Nothing to look forward to. He felt no profound emotion. There was only a vague sensation, a vague hope that he might get to see the sea.

* * *

## Chapter 18

"It's time for you to go," Candelaria said. "You shouldn't be working on Sundays." She pulled the plug of my tape recorder.

At that very instant, dona Mercedes stepped into the kitchen. She frowned, noticing that I was still in my robe. "Why aren't you ready?" she asked me.

"I know why," Candelaria said. Her voice held a curious softness, and a glimmer of amusement shone in her eyes. "She doesn't want to collect Benito Santos' coconuts. She's afraid of him."

Before I had a chance to deny her accusation, she was gone from the room.

"Is that true, Musiúa?" dona Mercedes asked, pouring herself a cup of coffee. "I haven't noticed that you held any ill-feelings toward him."

I assured her that I did not. However, I couldn't help feeling that what Benito Santos had done to his wife and his child was abominable.

"His story has nothing to do with morality or justice," she interrupted me. "It's the story of a violent, desperate man.

I protested because I deeply resented that he had looked after only himself. I talked almost hysterically about the despair and the hopelessness of women and children.

"Stop it, Musiúa." With her finger she poked me on my chest next to my collarbone. It felt as if she were pushing me with an iron tip. "Don't give in to your false sense of order. Don't be a Musiúa that comes from a foreign country to find flaws: That kind of person would feel offended by Benito Santos and miss what I am trying to show you. I want to place you under the shadow of the people I've selected to tell you their stories. The story of Benito Santos' last day of his useless life sums up all his existence. I asked him to tell it to you with all the details he could remember; and I have also sent you to see for yourself his coconut grove by the sea so you would verify that the wheel of chance did turn."

It was hard for me to explain my feelings to dona Mercedes without moralizing. I did not want to, but I could not help myself. She gave me an all-knowing smile.

"The value of his story," she said all of a sudden, "is that without any preparation, he made a link himself: He made the wheel of chance move. Witches say that sometimes one single act makes that link."

Dona Mercedes pushed herself up from the chair she had been sitting on, and holding firmly to my arm walked me out of the kitchen toward her room.

At her door, she stopped and looked at me. "Benito Santos killed his wife and child. That act moved the wheel of chance; but what made him end up where he is now - by the sea - was his desire to see the sea. As he must have told you, it was a vague desire, yet it was the only thing he had after committing an act of such violence and finality. So, the desire took hold of him and drove him. That is why he has to remain faithful to that desire that saved him. He has to love the sea. He comes to me so that I can help him maintain his unwavering course. It can be done, you know. We can make our own link with one single act. It doesn't have to be as violent and desperate as Benito Santos' act, but it has to be as final. If that act is followed by a desire of tremendous strength, sometimes, like Benito Santos, we can be placed outside of morality."

# PART FIVE

## Chapter 19

It was late in the afternoon when dona Mercedes and I left the house and walked up the street to Leon Chirino's house. Leisurely, we went past the old colonial houses near the plaza and peeked inside the open windows. The rooms were dark, yet we could make out the shadows of old women counting rosary beads as they said their silent afternoon prayers.

We rested on a bench in the plaza, surrounded by old men sitting on crude wooden chairs propped against tree trunks. We waited with them for the sun to disappear behind the hills, and for the evening breeze to cool the air.

Leon Chirino lived on the other side of town at the foot of a shack-covered hill. His house, made of unplastered cement blocks, had an extensive yard and was encircled by a high wall. The small wooden gate in the wall was unlocked, as was the front door. Without bothering to knock or to call out we went through a large living room and headed straight for the back patio, which had been converted into a workshop. Under the bright glare of a single bulb, Leon Chirino was sanding a piece of wood. He spread his hands in a gesture of invitation and pleasure, and invited us to sit on the bench across from his working table.

"I guess it's time to get ready," he said, brushing the sawdust off his kinky white hair, and the wood shavings from his clothes.

Expectantly, I looked at dona Mercedes, but she merely nodded. A secret light shone in her eyes as she turned to Leon Chirino. Without a word she rose and shuffled down the corridor bordering the patio toward the back of the house.

I was about to follow, when Leon Chirino stopped me short. "You'd better come with me," he said, switching off the light.

He spat through his teeth, accurately aiming at one of the dried-up flower pots in the corner.

"Where is dona Mercedes going?" I asked.

He shrugged impatiently, and guided me in the opposite direction to a narrow alcove that separated the living room from the kitchen. Against one wall of the small enclosure stood an earthenware water filter; against the other, a refrigerator.

"Would you like one of these?" He held up a bottle of Pepsi he had removed from the icebox. Not waiting for my reply, he opened the bottle and casually added, "Dona Mercedes is making sure there are enough cigars."

"Is there going to be a seance?" I asked, taking the bottle from his hand.

Leon Chirino turned on the light in the living room, then moved to the high window facing the street. He reached for a wooden panel, and before placing it in the window sill, he looked back over his shoulder; his eyes shining, one hand stroking his chin. His smile, slightly crooked, was devilish.

"There certainly is going to be one," he said.

Sipping the Pepsi, I went to sit on the couch by the window. The lack of furniture made the room appear larger than it actually was. Other than the couch, there was only a tall cabinet crammed with books, snapshots, bottles, jars, cups, and glasses; and several wooden chairs lined up against the walls.

Mumbling something unintelligible, Leon Chirino turned off the light, then lit the candles that stood on the carved ledges beneath the various pictures of saints, Indian chieftains, and black slave leaders adorning the ochre-painted walls.

"I want you to sit here," he ordered, placing two chairs in the middle of the room.

"On which one?"

"Whichever you prefer."

Grinning broadly, he unfastened my wristwatch, put it in his pocket, then went to the cabinet and took out a small jar. The jar was half-filled with mercury: In his dark hands it looked like the giant pupil of a live monster.

"I understand that you're a full-fledged medium," he said, placing the jar in my lap. "The mercury will keep the spirit from gravitating toward you. We don't want the spirit near you. It's too dangerous for you."

He winked and hung a silver chain necklace with a medal of the Virgin around my neck. "This medal is guaranteed to be a protection," he assured me.

Closing his eyes, he joined his hands in prayer. As soon as he had finished, he warned me that there was no way of knowing whose spirit would visit us during the seance.

"Don't let go of the jar and don't remove the necklace," he admonished, pulling up the rest of the chairs to form a circle in the middle of the room.

He blew out all the candles except the one burning beneath the picture of El Negro Miguel - a famous slave leader who had headed the first slave uprising in Venezuela. Then he said another short prayer, and silently left the room.

The candle had almost burned down when he returned. Urging me to keep my eyes fixed on the jar in my lap, he sat beside me. Overcome by curiosity, I looked up several times when I heard people come into the room, and sit on the chairs. In the uncertain light I failed to recognize a single face.

Mercedes Peralta was the last one to come in. She removed the candle from the ledge and distributed the hand-rolled cigars.

"Don't talk to anyone before or after the seance," she whispered in my ear as she held the flickering flame to my cigar. "No one else besides Leon Chirino knows you are a medium. Mediums are vulnerable."

She sat down opposite me. I closed my eyes, and puffed skillfully as I had done countless times in dona Mercedes' patio. I became so engrossed in that act that I lost track of time.

A soft moan arose from the smoky darkness. I opened my eyes and saw a woman materialize in the middle of the circle of chairs, a hazy figure. Slowly, a reddish light spread all over her until she seemed to be aglow. The manner in which she carried herself, the way she was dressed - black skirt and blouse - the familiar way she tilted her head to one side, made me think it was Mercedes Peralta. However, the longer I observed her, the less sure I was.

Wondering whether I was going through one of the inexplicable visions I had had in the patio, I clutched the mercury jar in my hands and rose from my chair. I stood transfixed as the woman became transparent. I found nothing frightening about her transparency: I simply accepted that it was possible to see through her.

Without any warning the woman collapsed in a dark heap on the ground: The light inside her seemed to have been turned off. I was totally reassured that she was not an apparition when she took out a handkerchief, and blew her nose.

Exhausted, I sank into my chair. Leon Chirino, sitting on my left, nudged me with his elbow, gesturing me to keep my attention on the center of the room. There, inside the circle of chairs where the transparent woman had been, stood an old, foreign-looking woman. She stared at me, her blue eyes wide open, frightened, bewildered. Her head jerked back, then forward, and before I could make any sense of the vision, it faded - not suddenly; but slowly, it floated about. It was so quiet in the room that for an instant I thought everyone had gone.

On the sly, I glanced around me. All I saw was the glow of cigars. They couldn't possibly be smoking the same cigars dona Mercedes had distributed, I thought: I had finished mine a long time ago. As I leaned forward to attract Leon Chirino's attention, someone placed a hand on my shoulder.

"Dona Mercedes!" I exclaimed, recognizing her touch.

With my head bent I waited for her to say something. When she didn't, I looked up, but she was not there. I was alone in the room: Everyone else had left. Frightened, I stood up, and ran toward the door, only to be stopped by Leon Chirino.

"Frida Herzog's spirit roams around here," he said. "She died on the steps of this hill."

He moved toward the window and opened the wooden panels. Like a ghostly apparition the smoke swirled out of the room, dissolving into the night air. Leon Chirino faced me and once again repeated that Frida Herzog had died on the steps of that hill. He walked around the room carefully inspecting the shadowy corners, perhaps to make sure that no one was there.

"Was Frida Herzog the old woman I saw?" I asked, "Did you see her, too?"

He nodded, then mumbled once again that her spirit was still roaming around. He brushed his forehead repeatedly, as if he were trying to rid himself of a thought or, perhaps, the image of the frightened old woman. The stillness in the room became unsettling.

"I'd better catch up with dona Mercedes," I said softly and opened the door.

"Wait!" Leon Chirino stepped forward and grabbed my arm.

He lifted the silver necklace over my head and took the jar containing the mercury from my hand.

"During a seance, chronological time is suspended," he murmured in a slow, tired voice. "Spiritual time is a time of equilibrium that is neither reality nor a dream. Yet, it is a time that exists in space."

He emphasized that I had been plummeted into an event that had happened a long time ago.

"The past has no time sequence," he continued. "Today can be joined up with yesterday; with events of many years ago."

He fastened my watch around my wrist, and said, "The best thing is not to talk about these matters. What happens is vague and elusive, and not meant to be put into words."

Anxious to catch up with dona Mercedes, I agreed with him halfheartedly. Leon Chirino, however, determined to keep me in his house, repeated again and again that Frida Herzog had died on the hills right behind his house.

"I saw dona Mercedes turn transparent," I interrupted him. "Did you see that, too?"

He stared at me, as though he had not expected me to ask about her, but the next moment he was laughing.

"She wanted to dazzle you," he said brimming with pride. "She's a perfect medium."

Half-smiling, he closed his tired eyes. He seemed to be savoring some treasured vision. Then gently he pushed me outside, and without a sound, closed the door behind me.

For a moment I stood bewildered outside Leon Chirino's door. I knew I had lost track of time during the seance, but somehow I couldn't believe that the whole night had gone by, and that I had failed to hear the rain: Yet, it was dawn and there were puddles on the sidewalk.

A parrot screeched somewhere in the distance. I looked up. Across the street, standing like a shadow by the eucalyptus tree that marked the cement steps leading up the shack-covered hill, was Mercedes Peralta. I ran toward her. Anticipating my questions, she touched my lips with her finger, then bent low and picked up a small, freshly broken branch lying on the ground. It was still wet with the night's rain. She shook it: The scent of eucalyptus, imprisoned in hundreds of drops, showered on my head.

"We better get going," she said, but instead of heading home, she led me up the hill.

The air smelled of mildewed cardboard. There was no one around. The shacks appeared to be abandoned. Halfway up, we turned onto one of the paths that spread like branches from the wide steps; and stopped in front of a yellow-painted house roofed with sheets of corrugated tin.

The unlocked front door opened directly into what seemed to be a bedroom. A narrow, neatly made-up bed stood in the middle of the room. Hairy ferns growing in animal-shaped flower pots rested on stools. Bamboo cages with canaries in them hung from the ceiling. Pants, jackets, and crisply ironed shirts dangled from wrought-iron hooks fastened on the yellow walls. A man emerged from behind a brightly patterned curtain that I first mistook for a wall decoration.

"Efrain Sandoval!" I exclaimed, wondering what the man from whose store I purchased my notepads and pencils was doing in that place.

I was well acquainted with him and his German-born wife, who by speech and manner was more Venezuelan than a born native. Together with their two daughters they lived near the plaza above the stationery-radio-TV shop he owned. He was in his forties, but his slight build and his delicately featured face made him look much younger. His slanted dark eyes fringed by long, curly lashes shone brightly. He appeared to be amused by some secret thought. As always, he was immaculately dressed; but that morning, his whole being reeked of cigar smoke.

"Were you at the seance?" I asked him in an involuntary tone of incredulity.

Gesturing me to be quiet, he invited us to sit on the bed.

"I'll be right back," he promised, vanishing behind the curtain.

Shortly, he reappeared, carrying a bamboo tray heavy with food, plates, and cutlery. He cleared off one of the stools and placed the tray on it; and with the flamboyant movements of a maitre d', he served us black beans, rice, fried plantains, spicy shredded meat, and coffee. In nervous anticipation I looked from one to the other, expecting a discussion of the spiritualists' meeting.

"The Musiúa is about to burst with curiosity," dona Mercedes announced, a devilish glint in her eyes. "She wants to know why you live up here, when you have such a nice home above your store in town. I would like you to tell her why."

"You would?" Efrain Sandoval asked indifferently as he ate the last of the beans on his plate.

He chewed slowly, stalling for time. He rose, walked over to the window, and opened it. For a second or two he gazed at the pale dawn sky then turned and stared at me.

"I guess you must have a good reason for wanting to know about me?" he added in a questioning tone.

"She does," dona Mercedes answered. "So don't be put off when she comes to your store to pester you for your story."

Efrain Sandoval smiled sheepishly, tilted his stool, and leaned against the wall. He let his gaze wander about the room: There was a remote expression in his eyes: He seemed no longer aware of our presence.

"But what's the point of telling her?" he finally asked without looking at dona Mercedes. "It's not an earth-shaking story. It's rather banal."

"That's the very point of it," she said. "The Musiúa has heard all kinds of stories by now. Yours is of particular interest because you never did anything to make it happen. You were just there, placed by a higher order."

"I still don't see how the story of Frida Herzog is going to help the Musiúa," Efrain Sandoval insisted.

"Let her worry about that," Mercedes Peralta said dryly.

She rose from the bed and motioned me to do likewise. Efrain Sandoval looked as though he was going to argue the point.

Instead he nodded. "As you already know, I have a large house in town," he said, turning toward me.

He opened his arms wide. "Yet, I also live here where I can feel the presence of Frida Herzog, who unwittingly gave me everything I have."

He moved toward the window, but before closing it he glanced uncertainly at dona Mercedes, and asked, "Are you going to give me a cleansing today?"

"Of course." She laughed. "Don't mind the Musiúa. She has seen me doing this before."

Efrain Sandoval seemed to vacillate for a moment, then, apparently afraid that there might not be enough time, he promptly took off his coat and lay face up on the bed. Mercedes Peralta retrieved a small bottle, a white handkerchief, two candles, and two cigars from her dress pocket. Meticulously, she lined them up on the floor at the foot of the bed. She lit one of the candles, then a cigar, and inhaled deeply. Wrapped in smoke, the murmured words of her incantation tumbled out of her mouth with each exhalation. A wicked smile flittered across her face as she reached for the white handkerchief and the little bottle, half-filled with a mixture of perfumed water and ammonia. She poured a generous amount on the handkerchief, and folded it into a perfect square.

"Breathe!" she commanded, and in one swift, well-aimed motion she held the handkerchief under Efrain Sandoval's nose.

Mumbling incoherently, he twisted and turned in an effort to sit up. Tears rolled down his cheeks, and his moving lips tried in vain to form a plea. Dona Mercedes held him in place quite effortlessly by simply increasing the pressure of her hand over his nose. Soon, he gave up struggling. He crossed his arms over his chest and lay still, utterly exhausted.

Dona Mercedes lit a second cigar. Mumbling a soft prayer, she asked the spirit of Hans Herzog to protect Efrain Sandoval. The last few puffs of smoke she blew into her cupped hands, and then ran her fingers over his face, his folded arms, and all the way down his legs. Startled upon hearing a strange sound, I looked around me. The room was filled with smoke, and out of that haze a form appeared, no more than a shadow or a billow of smoke that seemed to be hovering beside the bed.

Efrain Sandoval's deep sleep, punctuated by loud snoring, broke the spell. Mercedes Peralta rose, put all her paraphernalia, including the cigar stubs, into her pocket, then turned to the window and opened it. Pointing her chin to the door, she motioned me to follow.

"Will he be all right?" I asked once we were outside: I had never attended such a short session.

"He'll be fine for another year," she assured me. "Every year, Efrain Sandoval attends a spiritualists' meeting to renew himself."

She made a wide sweeping gesture with her arms. "Frida Herzog's spirit roams around here, Efrain believes it has brought him luck, and that's why he has chosen to keep this shack while his family lives in town. It isn't true, but his belief doesn't harm anyone. In fact, it brings him relief."

"But who is Frida Herzog?" I asked. "And who is Hans Herzog? You definitely asked his spirit to protect Efrain."

Dona Mercedes put her hand over my lips. "Musiúa, have patience," she said, bemused. "Efrain will tell you in time. All I can say is that the one who moved the wheel of chance for Efrain wasn't Frida Herzog. She had no reason to. It was actually a ghost who did it. The ghost of Hans Herzog."

Dona Mercedes leaned heavily against me as we walked down the hill. "I can hardly wait to get into my hammock," she mumbled. "I'm dead tired."

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Afraid that someone might tamper with or perhaps even steal his moped, Efrain pulled it up onto the sidewalk and into the hallway of the new two-story building owned by his employer, Frida Herzog. The Finnish woman and her children who lived in the bottom apartment watched him resentfully. They considered the hallway their front porch. He shrugged his shoulders apologetically, and climbed the stairs to Frida Herzog's apartment.

He had worked for the Herzogs since he was an adolescent: It was Hans Herzog who had bought him the moped. The years he worked for him had flown by so fast, Efrain had not even felt them. He had liked his job as an all-around helper and delivery boy in Hans Herzog's poultry business, but what he had enjoyed the most was his employer's gentility and his grand sense of humor. Efrain never had the feeling that he was working, but rather that he went to the office every day to get a lesson in the art of good living. Over the years he had become more like an adopted son or a disciple of Hans Herzog than an employee.

"I thank you, Efrain," he used to tell him, "a man of my nature needs, at a certain age, an unbiased audience; a captive ear."

Hans Herzog had immigrated from Germany before the war, not to make a fortune, but in search of fulfillment. He married late in life because he considered marriage and parenthood a moral necessity: He called them the controlled strains of paradise. When Hans Herzog had a stroke, it was Efrain who tended him day and night. Hans Herzog could not speak anymore, but he communicated with Efrain just the same through the intensity of his eyes. In his last moments, he made a frantic effort to say something to Efrain; he failed. So he shrugged his shoulders and laughed. And died.

Now, Efrain worked for the man's widow, but not in the same capacity, and certainly not with the same pleasure. She had sold the poultry business: It reminded her of her husband, she said; but she kept Efrain as an employee because he was the only one who knew how to drive the moped.

Noticing that the door to Frida Herzog's apartment was ajar, he pushed it open without knocking and stepped into the tiny hall that led to the living room.

The room, cluttered with beige upholstered furniture, was divided from the dining area by a grand piano. Glassed-in bookcases stood on either side of an enormous fireplace, which Frida Herzog lit once a year on Christmas Eve. Efrain moved back a few steps so he could see himself completely in the gilded mirror hanging above the mantel piece. He was in his midtwenties, yet his small wiry frame and his boyish, somehow immature, beardless face, made him look sixteen. With painstaking absorption he combed his curly hair, and adjusted his tie and the cologne-scented handkerchief in his breast pocket. Being poor was no reason to look untidy, he thought, and he glanced over his shoulder to make sure the back of his coat was smooth and unwrinkled. Whistling, he crossed the room and stepped out onto the wide balcony.

Potted rubber trees, orchids, ceiling-high ferns, and bird cages partially hid Frida Herzog. Stout and solidly built, she sat at her desk, a white wrought-iron table with a heavy, opaque glass top.

"I've been waiting for you since nine o'clock," she said by way of greeting.

The angry expression in her blue eyes was magnified by the thick, horn-rimmed glasses posted menacingly on her prominent nose.

"What peace! What coolness one breathes in this veritable heaven!" Efrain exclaimed in a tone of exaltation.

He knew that flattering Frida Herzog about her jungle always put her in a good mood. "Even at noon your canaries sing like angels."

Imitating the call of the birds, he took off his coat and hung it carefully over the back of a chair.

"Never mind the birds," she said crossly, motioning him to sit across from her. "I pay you a salary, and I expect you to be here on time."

"I was held up by prospective clients," he said importantly.

She regarded him doubtfully, dabbing at the tiny drops of perspiration on her upper lip and forehead with a delicately embroidered handkerchief. "Did you take any orders?"

She gave him no opportunity to answer, but pushed several of the slender white boxes on the table toward him. "Check these," she grumbled.

Undaunted by her bad mood, he cheerfully informed her that the orders were as good as written up and signed. Then, almost reverently, he opened the white boxes before him and gazed in awe at the bulky, silver-plated ballpoint pens lying luxuriously in the dark blue velvet-lined cases. He uncapped one pen, unscrewed it's top, and carefully inspected a small rectangular piece of metal and rubber resting on a minute ink pad. It was a seal. To lift it out, he pressed the hollow end of the pen's cap on the perfectly fitting mount projecting from the metal plate. He stamped the box, screwed the seal back, and capped the pen. He did the same with the other pens: He made sure this way that the customers' names and addresses were spelled correctly.

"How many times do I have to tell you that I want no fingerprints on the pens?" Frida Herzog snapped, grabbing the pen from his hands. She polished it with her handkerchief and slipped it back inside the box. "Now wrap them!"

He gave her a hostile glance, and did as she ordered.

"Do you also want me to glue the address labels on them?" he asked as soon as he finished wrapping the last one.

"Yes. Do that." She handed him six neatly typed labels from a small, metal filing box. "Make sure to apply the glue evenly."

"What?" Efrain retorted irritably: He had not understood a word she said. Her accent, barely noticeable under ordinary circumstances, flared up whenever she was angry or afraid, making it difficult to understand what she was saying.

Frida Herzog spoke slowly, enunciating each word carefully as she repeated, "Apply the glue evenly all the way to the corners of the labels."

She looked at him sternly and added, "I want the labels to stay glued."

"If looks could kill, I would be dead," he mumbled, bringing both hands to his head in a mock gesture of agony.

Then he smiled at her entrancingly as he cursed her under his breath.

"What did you say?" Frida Herzog asked, her accent so thick that the words came out slurred.

"I said that it won't take me any time at all to do what you want."

He loosened his blue-striped tie and the collar of his stiffly starched shirt, then reached for the gourd-shaped glue container on the table and squeezed a small amount of glue on each label.

Meticulously, he spread it evenly with the rubber-tipped nozzle all the way to the corners and then pasted the labels to the small, perfectly wrapped, marked boxes containing the ballpoint pens.

"That's nicely done, Efrain." A hint of approval momentarily played upon Frida Herzog's plump, rosy face.

She never got over being surprised at the neat way he adhered the labels exactly in the middle of the boxes. She couldn't have done it better herself.

Encouraged by her compliment, he decided to ask about the pen she had promised him. Although he had already given up hope of ever receiving one from her, he nevertheless reminded her at every opportunity. Each time she had a different excuse for not honoring her promise.

"When are you going to give me a pen?" he repeated, his voice high and urgent.

Frida Herzog stared at him in silence, then shifted forward in her chair and planted her elbows firmly on the table.

"Haven't I told you before of the difficulties I have had in convincing the manufacturer of the pens to give me the dealership for this area? Don't you realize that to be my age," she never said how old she was, "and to be a woman is a great handicap?"

She paused for a moment, then with a touch of pride in her tone, added, "Just because I am doing so well selling pens doesn't mean I'm in a position to give them away."

"One pen won't break you," Efrain insisted.

"Your pen! Your pen! Is that all you ever think of?" Indignation made her voice quiver.

She thrust her face forward, only inches away from his. Her eyes didn't even blink as they held his fixed. Mesmerized, he just kept staring at her blue eyes in which a glimmer of madness was just discernible.

Perhaps sensing she had gone too far, she shifted her gaze away. Slowly, her expression softened. In a coaxing tone she went on to say that she was certain that together they could sell thousands of pens. They would sell them not only in town and in the surrounding hamlets but all over the country.

"Be patient, Efrain," she entreated, leaning even closer toward him. "When business expands, we'll both get rich!"

She slumped back in her chair, and ran her hand affectionately over the small, gray filing box.

"But all I want is a pen, you crazy old idiot," Efrain mumbled despairingly.

Frida Herzog didn't hear him: Dreamily, she gazed at her bird cages, a sad, faraway look in her eyes.

"I work very hard," Efrain said in a loud clear voice. "Not only have I been delivering pens for you, but I've gotten nearly all your customers myself."

He ignored her attempt to interrupt him. "And you won't even give me a pen."

"I'm not saying that you haven't done well," she said peevishly. "All I'm trying to do is make you understand that at the beginning of any business venture, sacrifices have to be made."

She paced about the balcony, her voice rising sharply as she continued. "Very soon I'll not only give you a pen and a commission, but make you a partner."

She came to stand in front of him. "I'm a businesswoman. I can envision these pens in every household all over the country. Efrain, we'll sell a pen to every literate person in this country."

She moved away from him, and leaned over the railing. "Just look at those hills!" she cried out. "Look at those shacks!"

With a sweep of her arm that made the wide sleeves of her housecoat flutter, she took in the whole panorama before her.

A radiant smile parted her lips as she turned to face him. "Just think of all those shacks in the hills. What opportunities! We'll sell pens to the illiterates as well. Instead of having to make an X every time they need to sign a document, they can instead stamp their name on any paper that needs their signature."

She clapped her hands in childish delight, then sat beside him and reached into her pocket.

"This," she declared holding up her own gold-plated pen, "is the ideal answer for everyone's problem!"

Gingerly, she unscrewed the pen, hooked the tiny seal onto the cap's hollow end, and stamped the back of each of the boxes on the table. Proudly, she read her name and address printed in minute, purple letters.

"There are hundreds of people living in those shacks. I just know they'll all want one of these pens." She touched his arm. "Efrain, as of today I'll pay you a commission on every pen you sell in those hills."

"They can't afford one," he reminded her sarcastically.

"I'll do something I've never done before," she declared bombastically. "I'll let them have the pens on credit."

With a sweeping motion, she distractedly scooped the small pen boxes - including her gold pen - into Efrain's worn leather satchel. "You'd better go now."

A look of sheer incredulity spread across his face. He looked up at her, wondering if she had noticed her mistake, then he nonchalantly reached for his satchel. "I'll see you tomorrow," he said.

"You only have six pens to deliver this afternoon," she reminded him. "I'll be expecting you back by five o'clock. These pens have already been paid for. You won't have to wait around for the money."

"It's the middle of the day," Efrain protested. "You can't expect me to go in this heat. Besides, I've got to eat first. I also need money to cover my traveling expenses."

Noticing her blank expression, he clarified, "I need to get gas for the moped."

She handed him some small change. "Don't forget to ask for a receipt," she said, glaring at him over her glasses.

He shrugged with displeasure. "Stingy idiot. This won't even fill the tank," he said and hissed under his breath.

"What did you call me?" Frida Herzog snapped.

He bit back the insult that rose to his lips. "This isn't enough to fill the gas tank," he said, slipping the coins in his pocket.

He took out his comb and, ignoring her disapproving expression, ran it through his unruly black hair.

"Four of the deliveries are within walking distance," she admonished. "There is no need to run the moped around town. I've walked those distances myself and even farther. If I can do it at my age, I would certainly expect a young man like you could do it."

Whistling softly, he adjusted his tie and put on his coat. With a casual wave of his hand he turned and walked out into the living room. A loud sigh escaped his lips. His eyes widened, expressing both surprise and admiration. Sitting in one of the bulky armchairs, her bare legs hanging over the armrest, was Antonia, Frida Herzog's only daughter. She didn't cover her legs, but looked at him with tender concern - the way women look at babies - and then she smiled provocatively.

She was a small, pretty woman in her midtwenties; but her worn-out, haggard expression and the air of despair about her made her look much older. She was gone most of the time. Much to her mother's embarrassment, Antonia took off with men every chance she got, only returning periodically to visit. No wonder the old woman was in such a foul mood, Efrain thought. He felt a surge of passion for Antonia and wished he could stay and talk to her; but knowing that Frida Herzog could hear them from the balcony, he merely puckered his lips and blew Antonia a soundless kiss before he walked out the front door.

Frida Herzog stood motionless by the balcony railing. She blinked repeatedly: The burning sun and the vibrant air made her eyes tear. Heat waves billowed in the nearby foothills, transforming the multicolored shacks into a hazy flickering collage. Not too long ago those hills had been green. Almost overnight, squatters had transformed them into shanty towns. Like mushrooms after a heavy rain, the shacks had just popped up one morning, and no one had dared to pull them down.

Her glance strayed to Efrain's noisy moped sputtering along in the street below. She hoped that he would first call on the two secretaries at the pharmaceutical laboratory who had been so enthusiastic about the pens. Frida Herzog was certain that once the two girls showed off their dazzling new pens to their co-workers, orders would be coming in promptly.

Chuckling to herself, she turned and gazed across the balcony into the living room where her daughter sat. Frida Herzog heaved a deep sigh, and disappointedly shook her head from side to side. There was no way to make Antonia understand that she didn't want bare legs on the beige, raw silk-covered armchairs. She had had such high hopes for her beautiful daughter. Antonia could have married any number of rich men. It was beyond Frida Herzog's comprehension why the girl had married a penniless, unambitious salesman, who one day just walked out on her. Frida Herzog couldn't remember whether it had been during lunch or dinner when he got up from the table and never returned.

With an air of resignation, Frida Herzog stepped into the living room, forcing her lips into a pleasant smile.

"Really! Efrain is getting more impudent every day," she said, sitting in the armchair opposite Antonia. "I'm afraid that if I give him a pen, he'll quit work. That's all he's interested in."

"You know what he's like," Antonia said. She didn't look up but continued to buffer her long, well-cared-for nails. "So, all Efrain wants is a pen. What's wrong with that?"

"He should buy one!" Frida Herzog snapped spitefully.

"Really, Mother," Antonia chided. "Those silly trinkets are way too expensive. Obviously, he can't afford one."

"Don't make me laugh," Frida Herzog snorted. "I pay him well. If he wouldn't waste his money on clothes, he could..."

Antonia's words stopped her in midsentence. "Those pens are only a fad," she stated, "and Efrain knows it, too. In a few months, or perhaps only weeks, people will no longer want them."

Frida Herzog straightened in her chair as if her spine had been pulled up. Her face was red with anger. "Don't you dare tell me that," she yelled. "This pen will go on forever!"

"Calm down. Mother. You can't believe that," Antonia said in a conciliatory tone. "Why do you think you're selling pens in this godforsaken place? Don't you realize it's because no one in Caracas wants them any longer?"

"That's not true," Frida Herzog shouted. "Some day I'll have the dealership for the entire region, maybe even for the whole country. If I were the manufacturer of the pens, I would be trying to expand internationally. That's what I would do. Create an empire."

Antonia laughed, then turned toward the mirror above the mantel piece. Streaks of premature gray laced her dark blond hair. There were wrinkles on either side of her mouth. Her large blue eyes would have been beautiful had it not been for their hard, embittered expression. Not age, but exhaustion and despair were beginning to rob her face and body of it's youth.

"Efrain has skills you haven't yet discovered," Antonia said. "No one can equal him in finding ways to make money. But to think you can get rich on pens! That's a joke. Why can't you simply use him in what he's best at?"

A contemptuous grin spread over Frida Herzog's face. "Use him at what he's best at! You think that I don't know what you have been up to in the last few months. I might be a little deaf, but I'm not stupid."

Seeing Antonia was about to rise, she hastily added, "You never had any class: Making out with Efrain! You should be ashamed of yourself. He's a mulatto, or whatever! He's colored."

Her anger spent, Frida Herzog leaned back in her armchair and closed her eyes. She wished she could retract her words, yet when she spoke again, her voice was still querulous. "Isn't there anything you want out of life?"

"I want to marry Efrain," Antonia said softly.

"Over my dead body!" Frida Herzog yelled. "I'll disinherit you. I'll throw you out of this house."

She gasped for air. "Let me tell you, I'm going to take his moped away and fire him."

But Antonia no longer heard her. She had left the living room, slamming the door behind her. For a few seconds Frida Herzog gazed at that door through which her daughter had disappeared, expecting her to return at any moment. Her eyes felt heavy with tears that would not fall. Silently, she headed toward her bedroom down the hall.

She sat in front of the kidney-shaped dressing table. With trembling fingers, she took off her glasses and examined herself in the mirror. She ought to get a new permanent, she thought, combing her fingers through her wispy gray hair. Her eyes, encircled by dark shadows, were sunken. Her skin, once as smooth and white as fine porcelain, had aged inexorably, eroded by the relentless tropical sun.

Tears flooded her eyes. "Oh God," she said softly. "Don't let me get ill and die in this foreign place."

She heard soft steps outside; no doubt Antonia had been listening by the door. She was too tired to worry about it. She lay on the bed and dozed in a half-pleasant sleep, lulled by the gentle sound of a Mozart sonata. The thought that Antonia was actually playing the grand piano filled her with intense joy. The girl had always played so well.

It was almost four when Frida Herzog awoke. As usual after a nap, she felt refreshed and in good spirits. She decided to wear the polka-dot silk dress and the matching shoes Antonia had given her for Christmas.

The sun, already halfway down the sky, filled the living room with shadows. She looked out across the balcony at the brightly colored shacks on the distant hills. They appeared to be so much closer in the afternoon light. She went to the kitchen and prepared her afternoon tray: coffee, sugar, cream, and a plateful of poppy-seed pastries.

"Antonia," she called affectionately, as she sat down in one of the armchairs.

She listened for the familiar clicking of heels on the hard tile floor before pouring the coffee. She called again, but there was no answer. She must have gone out, Frida Herzog decided, unfolding a white linen napkin on her lap.

It was close to five when she checked the time on her gold wristwatch. Efrain should be back any minute now, she thought. Perhaps he had been telling the truth and had indeed found her a new client. Although she never voiced it, she had long ago recognized that despite his lack of ambition, he was good at dealing with people. Too bad she would have to let him go. She would have a hard time finding a replacement for him, but she couldn't possibly consent to having him around when she knew Antonia's plans for him. The thought that her daughter might have wanted only to upset her crossed her mind. She couldn't really believe that Antonia would marry that boy.

By six o'clock Frida Herzog was so restless that she called the two secretaries at the laboratory and the owner of the clothing store near the plaza. The pens had not been delivered. Dumbstruck, she stared at the telephone, then stepped out on the balcony, and with nervous hands, she turned over every item on her desk.

"He took my pen!" she shrieked.

She headed for the front door and hurried down the stairs out into the street. She neither saw the startled faces of the neighbors gossiping on the sidewalk nor heard their greetings as she dashed around the corner. Only upon reaching the foot of the hill did she stop to rest. Wishing she had put on more comfortable shoes instead of high heels, she slowly climbed the wide dirt path leading to the shacks.

She had never been to Efrain's house, but she knew more or less where it was. She had heard about the dangers of those shanty towns where no stranger dared to go. Even the police were reluctant to pursue criminals that chose to hide in those hills. She was not afraid. Who would want to harm an old woman? She felt quite reassured upon noticing that not all the dwellings were shacks. Some were made of cement blocks, and a few were even two stories high.

She paused frequently to catch her breath, to quiet her rapidly pounding heart. People stared at her curiously. Barefoot, half-naked children stopped their games and giggled as she walked by.

Just before reaching the top of the hill, she turned around and gazed at the town below. A gentle breeze cooled her flushed face. Bathed in the mellow, diffused glow of the twilight, still vibrant with the afternoon heat, the town had never looked more beautiful. Overcome by an odd, undefinable premonition of doom, her eyes searched for the silhouette of her building.

A girl's friendly voice dispelled her feelings.

"Do you need any help?" she asked, regarding her curiously. "Are you lost?"

"I'm looking for Efrain Sandoval's house," Frida Herzog responded. So absorbed had she been in locating her building, she hadn't noticed that it was almost night. "Can you tell me where Efrain lives?"

She repeated her question several times, while the girl kept staring at her, a blank expression on her face. It was obvious that she had not understood a word she was saying.

"You have gone too far," an old man squatting nearby informed her politely. He was barely outlined by the faint light escaping from the unevenly hammered boards of a shack. "Go down a bit and turn left onto the walkway. It's the yellow house. You can't miss it. It looks like a canary."

There was a worried look in his eyes as he watched her unsteady steps down the hill. "You'd better go home though," he called after her. "There are a lot of drunks around at this time, and they get into fights."

But Frida Herzog didn't hear his warning words: They were drowned by the angry shouts of men and the sound of hurried, thudding steps. Before she had a chance to turn and see what was happening, she felt a sharp blow. The ground seemed to move underneath her, and she crashed through a makeshift railing put up to mark, rather than safeguard, a vertical drop. For an instant, she saw in horror how the rock-covered ground below advanced to meet her. There were voices, some loud, some soft, and then there was only silence and darkness.

Efrain awoke with a start: He had had an uncanny dream. As he had done so many times before in his sleep, he had again talked with Hans Herzog. His friend was urging him to take matters in his own hands and marry Antonia. Together they should take a tour around the world. Efrain had laughed. He told his friend that he would rather hear one of his stories about those foreign places. Hans Herzog had refused, saying that it was time for Efrain to see those places himself. Although Efrain was accustomed to the vividness of his dreams of Hans Herzog, this particular one had been so suggestive: It had left a lingering sense of reality which Efrain could not dispel. To this day he had doggedly refused to admit that his friend and employer was dead. After all, he saw him and talked to him every night in his dreams.

Efrain lit the kerosene lamp on the table by his bed and opened the bottle of beer he had put on a stool. He poured it into a tall glass and blew the foam from the rim before taking a long gulp. He didn't mind that the beer was warm.

"To taking matters in my own hands!" he toasted, removing the gold-plated pen from his satchel. Chuckling contentedly, he unscrewed the seal, hooked it onto the cap's hollow end, and stamped his arm repeatedly.

A week ago he had decided to take matters in his own hands and arranged with an engraver at a jewelry store to make him an exact replica of the seal but with his name on it. Efrain had no doubt that luck had intervened in his favor. How else could he explain this startling coincidence: The day he was to pick up the stamp bearing his name and address, Frida Herzog, by mistake, had put her own gold-plated pen in his satchel along with the six he was to deliver.

He poured the rest of the beer in his glass and sipped contentedly. Perhaps some unconscious part of Frida Herzog had wanted him to have the pen. He liked to believe that.

An insistent knocking on his door intruded on his thoughts.

"Efrain!" someone called, the voice urgent. "An old foreign lady who was looking for you has been knocked down by a drunk."

"Frida Herzog!" Grabbing the satchel from the table he rushed outside toward the crowd gathered at the bottom of the hill.

"It can't be," he repeated, pushing the people aside.

She was sprawled on the ground. He kneeled down by her. The dim light of a kerosene lamp cast a yellowish gleam on her face. He tried to say something, but not a word passed his lips. All he could do was stare into her pale blue eyes. Without her glasses, which lay smashed beside her, her eyes looked wide, watchful, almost childlike. The suggestion of a frown hovered around her lips, slightly parted to reveal her white teeth. He felt that there was something she wanted to say.

"I've got the pens," he said reassuringly, taking the six boxes from the satchel. He held them close to her face. "I couldn't deliver them today," he lied, "because I got involved with filling out some order forms for you. We have four new clients."

Her frown deepened. Her lips moved, mumbling something about his being fired from the job and about Antonia. Her eyes grew wider, her pupils dilated, and then life ran out.

"I work for her," Efrain said to no one in particular. "Life is so strange. Only this morning she gave me this most beautiful pen," he explained, removing the gold-plated pen from his pocket.

With precise, careful movements he hooked the seal to the pen's cap and pressed it against his forearm.

He read his name and address in a loud clear voice, "Efrain Sandoval. The Canary Shack. Curmina; and I can arrange for any of you to buy one of these precious pens on credit."

## Chapter 20

It was Sunday morning, and I was sitting with dona Mercedes in the plaza, waiting for Candelaria to come out of church. Only an hour earlier, I had had my last meeting with Efrain Sandoval.

On a nearby bench was a well-dressed, dignified old man, reading out loud from a Caracas newspaper. He read in a grave voice, absorbed in what seemed important to him: He never noticed the smiles of the people around him. Across the street, a disheveled old man came out of a bar that was already open. He put on his hat, and clutching a bottle in a plastic sack tightly under his arm, he walked down the street, coughing and wheezing.

With an inexplicable feeling of sadness I glanced at dona Mercedes. She was wearing sunglasses, and I couldn't see the expression in her eyes as she looked straight ahead of her. She folded her arms across her chest and hugged herself as if touched by a sudden cold wind. She listened attentively as I tried to tell her how I had understood so far all the stories I had heard.

"You are showing me the different ways to manipulate that force that Florinda calls intent" I said.

"To make it move is not the same as to manipulate it," she corrected me, still hugging herself. "And I'm trying much more than that. As I said, I'm putting you temporarily under the shadow of those people so that you can feel the wheel of chance moving. Without that feeling, everything you're doing will be empty. You must follow the ups and downs of the person who is telling you his tale: For an instant you must be under his shadow."

"How about Efrain Sandoval? He certainly had nothing to do with what happened to him. Why should I be placed under his shadow?" I asked.

"Because the wheel moved for him. He didn't move it himself, yet it's his life that changed. I wanted you to feel that change, to feel that movement of the wheel. As I've already mentioned to you, a ghost, the spirit of Hans Herzog, moved it for him. Just as Victor Julio, at the moment of dying, moved the wheel of chance and ruined the life of Octavio Cantu, Hans Herzog moved that wheel after he was dead and enriched the life of Efrain Sandoval."

Dona Mercedes took off her glasses and looked straight into my face.

She opened her mouth to add something, but instead she smiled and rose from the bench. "Mass will be over any moment now," she said. "Let's wait for Candelaria at the church door."

# PART SIX

## Chapter 21

"Musiúa, are you there?" Mercedes Peralta whispered, opening the door to my room noiselessly.

Outlined by the weak beam of my reading light, she was the picture of a witch with her long black dress and her wide-brimmed felt hat that hid half of her face.

"Don't turn on the light," she said as I reached for the switch. "I can't bear the brightness of a bulb."

She sat on my bed. Her brow was set tightly in concentration as she smoothed out the wrinkles in my blanket. She looked up and fixed her unblinking eyes on my face. Self-consciously I ran my fingers over my cheeks and chin, wondering whether there was something wrong.

Giggling, she turned toward the night table and began neatly stacking my small, thin notepads.

"I must go to Chuao right now," she finally said, her voice low and grave.

"Chuao?" I repeated. "At this hour?"

Seeing her emphatic nod, I added, "We'll get stuck in the mud if it rains."

Chuao was a village near the coast, at least an hour's drive from Curmina.

"It will rain," she casually admitted. "But with your jeep we won't get stuck."

She sat hunched over the night table, biting her lower lip, deliberating whether to say more.

"I have to be there tonight by midnight," she murmured in a tone that betrayed urgency rather than desire. "I have to get some plants that will be available only tonight."

"It's past eleven," I pointed out, checking the illuminated dial of my wristwatch. "We'll never make it by midnight."

Grinning, dona Mercedes reached for my jeans and shirt hanging at the front of the iron bedstead. "We'll make your watch stop counting the hours."

A faint smile lit up her face; her eyes, trusting and expectant, held mine. "You'll take me, won't you?"

Heavy raindrops drummed on the jeep the moment we left town. Within seconds the rain came in a solid sheet, dense and dark. I slowed down, unable to see, irritated by the squeaking of the wipers clearing an arc of glass that was instantly blurred again. The trees fringing the road waved indistinctly beside and above us, giving the impression that we were driving through a tunnel. Only the intermittent solitary bark of a dog indicated that we had passed another shack.

The rainstorm ended with the same abruptness with which it had begun, yet the sky remained overcast. The clouds hung oppressively low. I kept my eyes glued to the windshield, intent on avoiding the frogs, which, momentarily blinded by the headlights, jumped across the road.

All at once, as if they had been erased from the sky, the clouds vanished the moment we turned onto the road that led to the coast. The moon shone brightly upon a flat landscape where an occasional tree swayed gently in the breeze, it's leaves shining silvery in the unreal light.

I stopped in the middle of a crossroad and got out of the jeep. The air, warm and humid, smelled of the mountains and the sea.

"What made you stop here, Musiúa?" Mercedes Peralta asked, her voice full of bewilderment as she got out and stood beside me.

"I'm a witch," I explained, looking into her eyes.

I knew that if I'd told her that I just wanted to stretch my legs, she wouldn't believe me.

"I was born in a place like this," I went on, "somewhere between the mountains and the sea."

Mercedes Peralta frowned at me, then a humorous, delighted twinkle shone in her eyes. Giggling uncontrollably, she sat on the wet ground and pulled me down with her. "Perhaps you weren't born like a normal human being; maybe a curiosa lost you on her way across the sky," she said.

"What is a curiosa?" I asked.

She regarded me cheerfully and explained that curiosas were witches who were no longer concerned with the obvious aspects of sorcery: symbolic paraphernalia, rituals, and incantations.

"Curiosas," she whispered, "are beings preoccupied with things of the eternal. They are like spiders, spinning fine, invisible threads between the known and the unknown."

She took off her hat, then lay on her back, flat on the ground, with her head precisely in the middle of the crossroad, pointing north.

"Lie down, Musiúa," she urged me, stretching her arms toward the east and the west. "Make sure the top of your head touches mine and that your arms and legs are in the same position as mine."

It was comfortable lying head to head on the crossroad. Although separated by our hair, I had the feeling our scalps were fused together. I turned my head sideways and to my great amusement noticed how much longer her arms were than mine. Seemingly aware of my discovery, dona Mercedes moved her arms closer to mine.

"If someone sees us, they'll think we're crazy," I said.

"Perhaps," she conceded. "However, if it's people who usually walk by this crossroad at this time of the night, they will run away in fright, thinking they have seen two curiosas ready for flight."

We were silent for a moment, but before I asked her about the curiosas' flight, she spoke again.

"The reason I was so interested to know why you stopped at the crossroad," she said, "was that there are people who swear they have seen a curiosa lying naked on this very spot. They say that she had wings growing out of her back and that they saw her body become translucent white as she took off into the sky."

"I saw your body turn transparent at the seance for Efrain Sandoval," I said.

"Of course you did," she retorted with an amused casualness. "I did that just for you because I know that you'll never be a healer. You're a medium and, perhaps, even a witch but not a healer. I should know it, I'm a witch myself."

"What makes one a witch?" I asked in between fits of giggles. I did not want to take her seriously.

"Witches are creatures not only capable of moving the wheel of chance," she replied, "but also capable of making their own link. What would you say if at this moment we took off flying, joined at our heads?"

For a second or two, I had the most terrifying apprehension. Then, a feeling of utter indifference invaded me.

"Repeat any of the incantations the spirit of my ancestor taught you," she commanded. "I'll say it with you."

Our voices merged into a single harmonious sound, filling the space around us, enveloping us into a giant cocoon. The words rose into a deep continuous line, carrying us up and up. I saw the clouds advancing at me. We began to turn like a wheel until everything was black.

Someone was shaking me vigorously. I woke up with an unexpected jolt. I was sitting behind the steering wheel of my jeep. And I was driving! I had no recollection of walking back to the car.

"Don't fall asleep," dona Mercedes said. "We'll crash and die like two fools."

I stepped on the brakes and turned off the ignition. The thought that I had been driving asleep made me tremble with fear.

"Where are we going?" I asked. My voice sounded an octave lower.

She smiled and made a gesture of exasperation, raising her eyebrows.

"You get tired too easily, Musiúa," she said. "You're too little. But, I think that's your best feature. If you were bigger, you would be unbearable."

I insisted on knowing our destination: I meant it in terms of physical locale, so that I could drive with a sense of direction.

"We are going to meet Leon Chirino and another friend," she informed me. "Let's go. I'll give you directions as you drive."

I started the jeep and drove in silence. I was still drowsy.

"Is Leon Chirino a medium and a healer?" I asked shortly.

She laughed softly but did not answer.

After a long moment she asked, "What makes you think that?"

"There's something quite inexplicable about him," I said. "He reminds me of you."

"Does he now?" she asked mockingly: Then in a sudden serious tone she admitted that Leon Chirino was a medium and a clairvoyant.

Lost in thought, I did not hear her directions and was jolted when she yelled. "You passed it! You've got to back up now," she admonished, pointing to a tall bucare tree.

"Pull up there!" She smiled, then added, "We have to walk from here on."

The tree marked the entrance to a narrow path. The ground was covered with small flowers. I knew them to be red, but they appeared black in the moonlight. Bucares hardly ever grow by themselves: Usually, they are found in groves, shading coffee and cacao trees.

Following a narrow, overgrown trail bordered by other bucare trees, we headed toward a cluster of hills looming darkly before us. There were no other sounds than Mercedes Peralta's uneven breathing and the crackling of twigs being crushed under our feet. The path ended in front of a low house bordered by a wide clearing of hard-packed earth. It's mud walls, plastered over a cane frame, were badly weathered. The roof was partially covered with zinc sheets and dried palm fronds. Deep eaves extended to make a wide porch. The front had no windows, only a narrow door through which a faint light escaped.

Dona Mercedes pushed the door open. Flickering candles cast more shadows than light in a sparsely furnished room. Leon Chirino, sitting on a straight-backed chair, stared at us with an expression of surprise and delight. Haltingly, he stood up, embraced the healer warmly, and guided her to the chair he had just vacated.

He greeted me and jokingly shook my hand. "Let me introduce you to one of the greatest healers around," he said. "Second only to dona Mercedes herself."

But before he could continue, someone cried out, "I'm Agustin."

Only then did I notice the low-hanging hammock in the corner. A small man lay in it. His body was half-twisted, one foot touching the ground, so that he could rock the hammock back and forth. He didn't seem particularly young, nor was he old. He was perhaps in his thirties, yet his hollowed cheeks and sharp bones made him look like a starved child. The most remarkable thing about him was his eyes. They were light blue, and in his black face they shone with a dazzling intensity.

Awkwardly, I stood in the middle of the room. There was something eerie about the uncertain light of the candles playing with our shadows on the walls, gauzy with cobwebs. The Spartan furniture - a table, three chairs, two stools, and a cot, all meticulously arranged against the wall - imparted an unlived-in atmosphere to the room.

"Do you live here?" I asked Agustin.

"No. I don't," he said, approaching me. "This is my summer palace." Pleased with his joke, he threw his head back and laughed.

Embarrassed, I moved toward the nearest stool and screamed as something sharp scratched my ankle. A hideous, dirty-looking cat stared up at me.

"There is no need to yell the place down," Agustin said and gathered the scrawny feline in his arms.

It began to purr the instant he rubbed it's head. "She likes you. Do you want to touch her?"

I shook my head emphatically. It wasn't so much the fleas and the mangy bare spots scattered over it's yellowish fur that I minded, but it's piercing yellow-green slitted eyes that never left my face.

"We better go if we want to get the plants in time," Leon Chirino said, helping dona Mercedes to her feet.

He unhooked the oil lamp hanging from a nail behind the door, lit it, and then signaled us to follow him.

A low-arched doorway covered by a plastic curtain led into a back room that served as a kitchen and storage area. One side of the room opened to a large plot filled with short, stubby trees and tall shrubs. In the faint light of the lantern, it looked like an abandoned fruit orchard. We squeezed through a gap in the seemingly impenetrable wall of bushes and found ourselves in a desolate landscape. The hillside, with it's recently burned underbrush and charred stumps, looked frighteningly grotesque in the moonlight.

Without a sound, Leon Chirino and Agustin vanished.

"Where did they go?" I whispered to dona Mercedes.

"They went ahead," she said vaguely, pointing into the darkness.

Shadows, animated by the oil lamp she carried, zigzagged beside and ahead of us on the narrow path leading into the thicket. I saw a light in the distance, gleaming through the bushes. Like a glowworm, it appeared and disappeared in quick succession. As we came closer to it, I felt sure I could hear a monotonous chant mingling with the distinct sound of buzzing insects and of leaves stirring in the breeze.

Mercedes Peralta turned off the oil lamp. But before the last glimmer died out, I saw her billowing skirt settle near a crumbling low wall, about twelve feet from where I stood. A glowing cigar illuminated her features. A diaphanous, shimmering radiance escaped through the top of her head. I called out her name, but there was no answer. Fascinated, I watched a misty cloud of cigar smoke hover directly above me in a circle. It didn't disperse the way smoke would, but stayed fixed in midair for a long moment. Something brushed my cheek. Automatically, I brought my hand to my face and then in utter astonishment gazed at my fingertips; they were phosphorescent. Frightened, I ran toward the low wall where I had seen dona Mercedes sit down. I had barely moved a few steps, when I was intercepted by Leon Chirino and Agustin.

"Where are you going, Musiúa?" Leon Chirino asked mockingly.

"I have to help dona Mercedes collect her plants."

My response seemed to amuse them. They chuckled. Leon Chirino patted me on the head, and Agustin daringly grabbed my thumb and squeezed it as if it were a rubber pump.

"We have to wait here patiently," Agustin said. "I've just pumped patience inside you through your thumb."

"She brought me here to help her," I insisted.

"Sure," he said reassuringly. "You have to help her but not with her plants."

Taking my arm, he guided me toward a fallen tree trunk. "Let's wait for dona Mercedes here."

Leaves hung from Mercedes Peralta's forehead, silvery green and shining. Quietly, she fastened the oil lamp on a branch, then squatted on the ground and proceeded to sort the plants she had collected into separate piles. Verbena roots were prescribed for menstrual pains. Valerian roots soaked in rum were an ideal remedy for nervousness, irritability, anxiety, and nightmares. Torco roots, soaked in rum, cured anemia and yellow fever. Guaritoto roots, basically a male remedy, were prescribed for bladder difficulties. Rosemary and rue were used mainly as disinfectants. Malva leaves were applied on skin rashes, and Artemisia boiled in sugarcane juice eased menstrual pains, killed parasites, and reduced fevers. Zabila cured asthma.

"But you grow all these plants in your yard," I said puzzled. "Why did you come here to collect them?"

Agustin grinned gleefully. "Let me tell you something, Musiúa," he whispered, bringing his head close to mine. "These plants have grown out of corpses."

He made a sweeping gesture with his hand. "We are in the middle of a cemetery."

Alarmed, I looked around. There were neither tombstones nor mounds to indicate that we were in a graveyard, but I hadn't seen any tombstones in the other cemetery either.

"Our ancestors are buried here," Agustin said and crossed himself. "On nights like this, when a full moon alters the distance of graves and paints white shadows at the foot of trees, one can hear a pitiful moaning and the rattling of chains. Men carrying their cutoff heads wander about. They are the ghosts of slaves who, after having dug a deep hole to bury their masters' treasures, were decapitated and interred with the gold. But there is no need to be frightened," Agustin hastened to add. "All they want is a bit of rum. If you give them some, they will tell you where the treasures are buried. There are also ghosts of friars who died blaspheming and now want to confess their sins, but there is no one to hear them. And there are the ghosts of pirates who came all the way to Chuao in search of the Spaniards' gold."

He chuckled, then added in a confidential tone, "There are also the lonely ghosts, who whistle at passersby. These are the simplest of them all. They don't ask for much. All these lonely ghosts want is for someone to say an Our Father for them."

Mercedes Peralta, a root poised in one hand, slowly lifted her head. Her dark eyes held mine in their gaze. "Agustin has an inexhaustible supply of stories," she said. "Each tale he garnishes to the limit."

Agustin rose. The way he stretched his body and limbs gave the impression that he was boneless. He plopped down in front of dona Mercedes and buried his head in her lap.

"We better get going," she said, stroking his head tenderly. "I'm sending the Musiúa to your place in a few days."

"But I treat only children," Agustin stammered, looking up at me with a sad, apologetic face.

"She doesn't need a healing." Dona Mercedes laughed. "All she wants is to watch you and to hear your stories."

## Chapter 22

I sat up with a jolt: Something had plopped down on my bed by my feet with a forceful thump. The dog sleeping nearby raised it's head, pricked it's ears, but hearing nothing other than my mumbled imprecations, put it's muzzle back on it's forepaws. For a moment, I was totally disoriented as to where I was, but when I heard dona Mercedes' soft, yet persistent murmur, I realized I was in the house of Leon Chirino's brother, in a small town an hour's drive from Curmina. I was on the cot they had set up for me in the kitchen. I had driven Leon Chirino and dona Mercedes there in the middle of the night, for they had to conduct a private seance for his brother.

Closing my eyes, I settled back on the lumpy pillow and abandoned myself to the comforting sound of the healer's voice. I felt the sound wrap itself around me. I was definitely falling asleep when another thumping noise woke me up again. The musty blanket I was covered with was all bunched up around my neck. I half rose to straighten it out and screamed upon seeing Agustin's cat perched on my knee.

"Why do you always shriek when you see my pet?" His voice coming from the darkness was full of gentle mockery. Agustin, sitting cross-legged at the foot of my cot, reached for his cat.

"I've come to protect you from the dog," he explained, his dazzling blue eyes fixed on my face. "Dogs don't really sleep at night. If you open your eyes in the darkness you can see how a dog watches you all night long. That's why they are called watchdogs." He laughed at his own joke.

I opened my mouth to speak to him, but no sound crossed my lips. I reached out, but Agustin and the cat wavered indistinctly before my eyes until they finally faded away. Perhaps they are all outside, I thought, and stepped into the yard, still shrouded by the shadows of dawn. There was no one about. I looked at my wristwatch. Only two hours had passed since dona Mercedes, Leon Chirino, and I had arrived. Realizing that I had had far too little sleep, I went back to my cot, pulled the blanket over my head, and dozed off.

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I awoke to the sound of voices and music and the scent of coffee. Leon Chirino, bent over the kerosene stove, was listening to the radio as he strained freshly made coffee through a flannel sieve.

"Did you have a good sleep?" he asked, motioning me to sit down by him.

I joined him at a big, square table covered with brand-new oilcloth. He half filled two cups with coffee and added to each a generous amount of cane liquor.

"For strength," he said, pushing the steaming porcelain cup toward me.

Afraid to get drunk, I took a few hesitant sips. The cup had golden edges and painted roses on it's surface.

He replenished his own cup with more coffee and cane liquor.

"Dona Mercedes says that you're clairvoyant," I said. "Can you tell me what fate has in store for me?" I hoped that my abrupt question would elicit a candid response.

"My dear," he said in that charming forbearance older people show when addressing someone much younger. "I'm an old friend of dona Mercedes. I live with her ghosts and her memories. I share her solitude." He spat through his teeth, then taking two cigarettes from the pack on the table, he put one behind each ear.

"You'd better go and see Agustin," he advised. "He starts early. Let me show you the way into town."

"You really haven't answered my question," I said undaunted by his eagerness to get me out of the house.

A sardonic, bemused expression appeared on his face. "I can't tell you what's in store for you," he affirmed.

"Clairvoyants have glimpses of things they don't understand and then make up the rest."

He took my arm and practically pulled me outside. "Let me show you the way to Agustin's house," he repeated.

He pointed to a trail winding down the hill. "If you follow this path, you'll reach town. Anyone there will tell you where Agustin lives."

"What about dona Mercedes?" I asked.

"We'll come and get you in the evening," he replied, then bent toward me and in a conspiratorial whisper he added, "Dona Mercedes and I will be busy the whole day with my brother's business."

The twittering of bluebirds in the trees and the fragrance of the ripe mangoes, shimmering amid the dark foliage like clumps of gold, filled the air. A well-trodden path winding down the slope ran into a wide dirt-packed street and branched off again into the hills at the other end of the hot, sunlit town. Women sweeping the cement sidewalks in front of their brightly painted houses paused for an instant to return my greeting as I walked by.

"Can you tell me where the healer Agustin lives?" I asked one of the women.

"I sure can," she replied, resting her chin on her hands cupped over the end of the broom handle. In a loud voice - no doubt for the benefit of her curious neighbors - she directed me to the green stucco house at the very end of the street. "It's the one with the big antenna on the roof. You can't miss it."

She lowered her voice to a murmur and in a confidential tone assured me that Agustin could cure anything from insomnia to snakebites. Even cancer and leprosy were not too much for him. His young patients always got well.

I knocked repeatedly on Agustin's front door, but there was no answer.

"Just walk right in," a young girl shouted, leaning out a window across the street. "Agustin can't hear you. He's way in the back."

Following her advice, I stepped through the front door that opened into the inside patio. I peeked into each of the three rooms I passed, which also opened onto the patio. Except for a hammock in each of them, the first two rooms were empty. The third one was the living room. Calendars and magazine pictures decorated the walls. A row of straight-backed chairs and a plastic-covered couch faced an enormous television set. Farther back was the kitchen. Beyond the kitchen through an alcove was yet another room. I saw Agustin there, seated at a large table.

As I approached, he rose smiling and stood scratching his head, his other hand thrust deep into the pocket of his worn khaki pants. His white shirt had patches, and the cutoff sleeves were frayed at the unhemmed cuffs.

"This is my working room!" he exclaimed proudly, extending his arm about in a circle. "I've got everything in here. And I'm about to open. My patients come through the side door. That door brings both of us luck."

The room, well lit and ventilated by two windows facing the hills, smelled of disinfectant. There were rows of unvarnished, unpainted shelves on all the walls. On the shelves, neatly arranged and all properly labeled, stood various-sized flasks, bottles, jars, and boxes filled with dried roots, bark, leaves, and flowers. These items were not only identified by their common names but also by their scientific Latin nomenclature. The table was hand carved and faced the open windows. Bottles, bowls, pestles, books, and two scales were lined up on the highly polished surface. A cot and the three-foot-tall crucifix hanging in a corner with it's votive candle burning on a triangular ledge beneath it indeed confirmed that I had stepped into the working room of a healer, not an old-fashioned apothecary.

Without much ado, Agustin brought in another chair from the kitchen and invited me to observe him at work. He opened the lucky side door he had pointed out earlier. There were three women and four children in the adjacent room.

The hours passed swiftly. He treated each patient by first examining a jar filled with the child's urine that had been brought in by the mother. Prompted by each woman's account of her child's symptoms, Agustin proceeded to "read the waters." The odor, the color, and the kind of microbes, or filaments, as he preferred to call them and which he claimed to see with the naked eye, were all carefully considered before he arrived at a diagnosis.

Fevers, colds, indigestion, parasites, asthma, rashes, allergies, anemia, and even measles and smallpox were among the most prevalent illnesses Agustin claimed to recognize after a thorough "reading of the waters."

In respectful silence, each woman waited for Agustin to invoke the help of Christ before he prescribed the appropriate medication. He mixed his own herbal concoctions. Being familiar with, and a believer in, modern pharmacopoeia, Agustin was inclined to supplement his own remedies with milk of magnesia, antibiotics, aspirins, and vitamins, which he had repacked and rebottled in his own containers. Like Mercedes Peralta, he charged no set fee but left it to the judgment of his clients: That is, they paid whatever they could afford.

Our late lunch of chicken and pork empanadas, brought to us by a woman in the neighborhood, came to an abrupt end when a man carrying a small boy walked into the kitchen. The child, perhaps six or seven years old, had cut the calf of his leg while playing in the field with his father's machete. In his calm, sure manner, Agustin carried the child to the cot in his working room and undid the makeshift, blood-soaked bandage. First he bathed the deep gash with rosemary water, and then with peroxide.

It was hard to tell whether the child was being hypnotized by Agustin's soothing touch, as he massaged the anxious little face, or by his soft voice, as he recited an incantation, but in a matter of moments, the boy was asleep. And then Agustin began the most important part of his treatment. To stop the bleeding, he applied to the wound a poultice of leaves that had been soaked in clear, sugarcane liquor. Then he prepared a paste that, he claimed, would heal the wound in less than ten days and leave no scar. Invoking the guidance of Christ, Agustin sprinkled a few drops of a milky substance on an abalone shell. With slow, rhythmic motions he began to grind the shell with a broad wooden pestle. A half hour elapsed before he had little less than a half teaspoon of a greenish, musky-smelling substance. He examined the cut once more, pressed the wound closed with his fingers, and carefully spread the paste over the gash. Mumbling a prayer, he expertly bandaged the leg with strips of white cloth. A satisfied smile lit his face as he handed the sleeping boy into the father's arms and told him to bring him every other day to change the dressing.

Late in the afternoon, certain that there would be no more patients that day, Agustin gave me a tour of his yard. His medicinal plants grew in neat rows and square patches, arranged as carefully as the jars and bottles were on the table and shelves in his working room. At the far end of the yard, leaning against a tool shed, stood an old kerosene refrigerator.

"Don't open it!" Agustin cried out, holding my arm in a firm grip.

"How could I?" I protested. "It's padlocked. What secrets do you keep in there?"

"My witchcraft," he whispered. "You do know that I practice witchcraft, don't you?"

His tone was mocking, but his face was somber when he added, "I'm a specialist in healing children and bewitching adults."

"Do you really practice witchcraft?" I asked incredulously.

"Don't be obtuse, Musiúa," Agustin chided.

He paused for a moment, then in an emphatic tone, added, "Dona Mercedes must have told you that the other side of healing is bewitching. They go together because one is useless without the other. I heal children. I bewitch adults," he repeated, knocking on the top of the refrigerator. "I'm very good at both. Dona Mercedes says that one day I will bewitch the same ones I healed when they were children." He smiled at my startled face. "I don't think I will. But only time will tell."

Taking advantage of his expansive mood, I finally told him what had been on my mind the whole day. That I had seen and talked to him when I was in a dreamlike state.

Agustin listened attentively, but his gaze betrayed nothing.

"I can't quite define what it was," I said, "but it wasn't a dream!" Exasperated by his unwillingness to comment or to explain, I urged him to say something.

"I like you so much that I wanted to know if you're really a medium," he said, smiling. "Now I know you are."

"I think you're humoring me," I said, even more exasperated.

Agustin's eyebrows raised in arcs of astonishment. "It must be horrible to have big feet."

"Big feet?" I stammered uncomprehendingly, looking down at my sandals. "My feet are in perfect proportion to my size."

"They should be smaller," Agustin insisted, putting his fingers to his lips as though to suppress a smile. "Your feet are too large. That's why you live in perpetual reality. That's why you want everything explained." There was mockery in his voice, mixed with a tinge of compassion that did nothing to reassure me.

"Witchcraft follows rules that cannot be empirically demonstrated or repeated, unlike other laws of nature. Witchcraft is precisely the act of persuading reason to rise above itself or, if you wish, to move below itself." He chuckled and gave me a push.

I stumbled over my feet, and he quickly grabbed my arm to keep me from falling.

"Do you see now that your feet are too big?" Agustin asked and then laughed.

I wondered if he was trying to hypnotize me, for he gazed at me without blinking. I was held captive by his eyes. Like two drops of water, they seemed to spread wider and wider, blurring everything around me. All I was aware of was his voice.

"A sorcerer chooses to be different from what he was raised to be," he continued. "He has to understand that witchcraft is a lifelong task. A sorcerer, through witchcraft, weaves patterns like webs; patterns that transmit invoked powers to some superior mystery. Human actions have an endless, spreading network of results; he accepts and reinterprets these results in a magical way."

He brought his face even closer to mine and lowered his voice to a soft whisper. "A sorcerer's hold on reality is absolute. His grip is so powerful, he can bend reality every which way in the service of his art. But he never forgets what reality is or was."

Without another word he turned and walked toward the living room. Swiftly, I followed after him. He plopped down on the sofa and crossed his legs the way I had seen him do on my cot.

Smiling up at me, he patted the place beside him. "Let's have some real witchcraft," he said, switching on the remote control of the enormous TV set.

There was no time to ask any more questions. In the next instant, we were surrounded by a group of giggling children from the neighborhood.

"Each evening they come here to watch TV with me for an hour or so," Agustin explained. "Later on, you and I will have time to talk."

After that initial meeting, I became Agustin's unbiased admirer. Attracted not only by his healing skills but by his haunting personality, I practically moved into one of the empty rooms of his house. He wove countless stories for me, including the one Mercedes Peralta wanted me to hear.

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Startled by a faint moan, Agustin opened his eyes. In a shaft of light, a spider suspended on invisible thread dropped from the crumbling cane ceiling all the way to the ground where Agustin lay curled up like a cat. He reached toward the spider, crushed it between his fingers, and ate it. Sighing, he drew his knees even closer to his chest as he felt the cold of dawn seep through the cracks of the weather-beaten mud walls.

Agustin couldn't remember whether days or weeks had passed since his mother brought him to this dilapidated, abandoned hut, where bats hung from the ceiling like unlit bulbs and cockroaches swarmed around in daylight and in darkness. All he knew was that he had been hungry ever since; that the slugs, spiders, and grasshoppers he caught never stilled the gnawing pain in his swollen belly.

Agustin heard the faint moan again. It came from the shadowy corner at the far end of the room. He saw an apparition of his mother sitting on the mattress, her mouth slightly open as she rubbed her naked belly. She was riding the mattress as though she were on a donkey, her naked shadow moving up and down on the soot-stained wall.

Only a few hours before, he had seen his mother struggling with a man. He had seen her thin legs, like black snakes, wrapped tightly around the man's torso, squeezing the breath out of him. And when he heard his mother's piercing scream, followed by a silence that had lasted for the rest of the night, he knew that the man had won the struggle. He had killed her.

Agustin's tired eyes closed with pleasure at the thought that he was now an orphan. He was safe. They would take him at the mission.

Half-conscious of his mother's ghostly sighs, giggles, and whispers whirling about the room, he dozed off again. A loud groan shattered the morning stillness. Agustin opened his eyes and pressed his fist against his lips to stifle a scream as he saw the same man from the night before sit up on the mattress. Agustin didn't know the man, yet he was sure he was from Ipairi. Agustin vaguely remembered seeing him talking to his mother in the plaza. Had the women from the small hamlet in the hills sent the man to take Agustin back? To perhaps kill him? It couldn't be. He must be having a vivid horrible dream.

The man cleared his throat and spat on the ground. His voice filled the room. "I'll take you away today. But I can't take the boy. Why didn't you leave him with the Protestants? You know that they have a place for children: Even if they won't take him, they'll feed him."

When Agustin heard his mother's harsh reply he knew that he was wide awake: He knew that she was not a ghost.

"The Protestants won't take any children unless they are orphaned," his mother said. "There was nothing else I could do but bring the boy to this abandoned shack. I'm waiting for him to die."

"I know of a woman who'll take him," the man said. "She'll know what to do with him. She's a witch."

"It's too late now," his mother said. "I wish I had given Agustin to a witch when he was born. Ever since he was a baby, a witch in Ipairi wanted him. She used to feed him strange potions and hang amulets around his wrists and neck, allegedly to guard him from calamities and disease. I know she cast a spell on the boy. That witch is responsible for all my misfortune."

His mother was silent for a moment; then in a strangled whisper, as though she were under attack by an unseen enemy, she added, "I'm terrified of witches. If I went to one now, she'd know that I haven't been feeding the boy. She'd kill me."

Tears rolled down Agustin's cheeks as he remembered the days in Ipairi when his mother used to cradle him in her arms. She would smother him with kisses and tell him that his eyes were like pieces of the sky. But when the women in the neighboring shacks forbade their children to play with him, his mother became a different person. She no longer touched or kissed him. Finally, she ceased speaking to him altogether.

One afternoon, a woman carrying a dead child in her arms burst into their shack. "Blue eyes in a black face," she screamed at Agustin's mother, "that's the work of the devil. That's the devil himself. He killed my baby with the evil eye. If you don't get rid of that boy, I will."

That same night, his mother fled with him to the hills. Agustin was certain that it was that woman who had cast a spell on his mother so she would hate him.

The man's loud voice cut into Agustin's reveries.

"You don't have to take him to the witch yourself. I can leave word with her to pick the kid up tonight. We'll be gone by then. I'll take you far away from here, where no witch will ever find you," the man promised.

His mother remained silent for a long time; then she flung her head back and laughed hysterically. She rose from the mattress and wrapped the dirty blanket tightly around her body. Stepping around the broken table and the few crates scattered about, she made her way across the room.

"Look at him," she hissed, jerking her chin toward the comer where Agustin lay curled up, pretending to be asleep. "He's only six years old, yet he looks like an evil old man. His hair has fallen out. His body is covered with scabs. His stomach is swollen with parasites. Yet, he survives. He has no clothes. He sleeps without a blanket. Yet, he doesn't even catch cold."

She turned toward the man on the mattress. "Can't you see that he is indeed the devil? The devil will find me wherever I go."

His mother's eyes shone feverishly bright under her disheveled hair. "The thought of having suckled the devil at my own breast fills me with fear and revulsion."

She reached up to a niche in the wall where she had hidden the corncakes the man had brought her last night. She gave one to the man, and nibbling on the other one, she lowered herself beside him on the mattress.

In a monotonous, trancelike tone she recounted that Agustin was a changeling.

"One of the nurses at the hospital changed my own baby for the devil," she continued, her tone suddenly vehement. Everyone knew that I was going to have a girl. My pregnant belly was broad instead of pointed. My hair began to fall out. Blotches and blemishes appeared on my skin. My legs swelled. Those are the symptoms of carrying a girl. At first, even though I knew he was a changeling, I couldn't help but love him. He was so beautiful and so clever. He never cried. He spoke before he walked, and he sang like an angel. I refused to believe any of the women in Ipairi who accused Agustin of having the evil eye. Even after my stillborn pregnancy I didn't pay any attention to the neighbors' insinuations. I just thought they were ignorant, and worst of all, envious of the boy's beautiful eyes. After all, who ever heard of a child having the evil eye?"

She scraped out the white, soft center of the corncake and flung the dry crust across the room. "But when my man died in an accident at the mill, I had to agree with the women." She covered her face with her hands, and quietly added, "Agustin has never been ill in his life. I should have left him to his fate in Ipairi. Then his death would not be on my conscience."

"Let me get word to the woman I've been telling you about," the man said, his voice soft, yet persuasive. "I know she'll take him."

At great length he explained about his job at the pharmaceutical laboratory. He worked in the storeroom and was on very good terms with his boss. He foresaw no difficulties in convincing the man of his need for an advance.

"With the money, the two of us can go to Caracas," he said. He rose and dressed. "Wait for me at the laboratory. I'll be out by five. I'll have everything arranged by then."

Agustin reached for the dry crust on the ground. On unsteady legs, he walked toward the narrow, back doorway, which no longer had a door, and stepped out into what had once been a yard. He headed toward his favorite place, the gnarled, no-longer-blooming acacia tree overhanging the ravine. He sat on the ground, his legs extended in front of him, his naked back resting against a portion of the crumbling low wall that had once encircled the grounds.

The scrawny, sickly looking cat that had followed him all the way from Ipairi rubbed it's coarse fur against his thigh. Agustin gave it a small piece of the crust, then pushed the cat away toward the lizards scuttling in and out of the crevices in the mud wall. He would not part with another crumb. He was never capable of satisfying his own relentless hunger; a hunger that filled his days and nights with dreams of food. With a sigh on his lips he dozed off.

Startled by a gust of wind, he woke up. Dead leaves swirled in a circle around him. The leaves rose high up in the air and then descended in brown rustling whirlpools into the ravine. He could hear the murmuring stream below. When it rained the shallow water grew into a seething river, sweeping along trees and dead animals from the hamlets in the mountains. Agustin turned his head slightly and gazed at the silent hills around him. Thin columns of smoke drifted up into the sky, melting with the moving clouds. Could the Protestant mission be that close? He asked himself. Or perhaps the smoke was from the house of the woman who wasn't afraid to take him. He rested his cheek on his small bony hand. Flies buzzed around his open mouth. He pressed his parched lips together, spread his legs, and urinated. He was hungry. He could feel the pain inside him as he again fell asleep.

The sun was high when Agustin awoke. The cat was nearby, devouring a large lizard. He crawled toward the feline. It snarled viciously, holding the half-eaten reptile tightly under it's paw. Agustin kicked the cat in the stomach, then reached for the slippery entrails and swallowed them. He looked up and found his mother watching him from the doorway.

"Holy Virgin!" she exclaimed. "He isn't human." She crossed herself. "It won't be long before he poisons himself."

Again she made the sign of the cross and, folding her hands in prayer, murmured, "Holy Father. Get him out of my way. Make him die a natural death, so I won't have him on my conscience."

She went inside, lifted the mattress, and pulled out her only dress. She caressed it and lovingly pressed the wrinkled dress against her body, then shook it repeatedly and laid it out on the mattress with great care.

Curiously, Agustin watched her light a fire in the cooking pit. Humming a little tune, she retrieved the coffee and the pieces of sugar loaf she kept in a crate nailed high up on the wall. Agustin wanted a piece of that sugar. He tried to stand up, but overcome by nausea he crouched with his elbows against the ground and vomited unchewed pieces of lizard. Salty tears dribbled down his sunken cheeks. He gagged repeatedly, foam and bile spurting from his trembling lips. He wiped his mouth and chin on his shoulders. With a painful moan he tried to straighten up but slumped forward on the ground. The sound of the murmuring ravine engulfed him like a soft veil. When the smell of coffee filtered through his nostrils and he heard his mother say that she had made him sweet coffee, he knew that he was dreaming. His dry lips grimaced. He wanted to smile when he heard her laugh; that high, abrupt, happy laughter he used to know so well. He wondered if she would put on her red dress and meet the man at the pharmaceutical laboratory.

Agustin opened his eyes. On the ground next to him stood a small tin filled with coffee. Afraid the vision would vanish, he reached out and lifted the can to his mouth. Indifferent to the burning pain on his lips and tongue, he sipped the strong, very sweet brew. It cleared his head and stopped his nausea. Dreamily, Agustin gazed at the slanted rain lines in the distance. Within moments dark clouds, edged with gold, floated across the sky. The clouds stained the hills with purple shadows and turned the sky a smoky black. A cold wind, followed by a deafening roar, rose from the bottom of the ravine. The rainwater from the distant hills gushed down the deep gorge with outrageous force. Within moments large heavy drops burst from the sky.

Agustin rose, tilted his face skyward, and, with arms outstretched, welcomed the soothing coolness that washed him clean. Driven by an inexplicable impulse, he went into the house and picked up the dress on the mattress. Clutching it with trembling hands, he hurried outside to the very edge of the ravine and threw the garment into the wind. It flew like a kite, landing on a leafless branch of the old acacia tree overhanging the steep slope.

"You devil! You monster!" his mother screamed, rushing toward him, her hair tumbling wildly about her face, her arms extended. As if transfixed by the sound of the roaring water, she just stood there between the boy and the fluttering dress, her eyes filled with hatred, unable to say a word. Then, holding on to weeds and exposed roots, she carefully eased herself toward the overhanging branch of the acacia tree.

Agustin watched her from behind the gnarled trunk with fascinated interest. Her feet moved with unerring agility on the steep slippery ground. She will get the dress by any means, he thought. He felt anger and fear. She was only a few inches away from it. She stretched her arm as far as she could. She touched the dress with the tip of her fingers and then lost her footing and tumbled over the brink. Her horror-stricken scream mingled with the sound of the roaring water was carried away by the wind.

Agustin moved closer to the edge. His eyes shone with a hollow depth as he saw his mother's body spin helplessly in the thick brown water on it's journey to the sea. The storm died away. The rain ceased. The wind dropped: All but the turbulent water in the ravine regained it's habitual murmuring calm.

Agustin walked into the house, lay down on the mattress, and covered himself with the thin, dirty blanket. He felt the coarse, wet fur of the cat seeking the warmth of his body. He pulled the blanket over his eyes and fell into a deep dreamless sleep.

It was night when he awoke. Through the open doorway he could see the moon entangled in the barren branches of the acacia tree. "We'll go now," he murmured, stroking the cat.

He felt strong. It would be easy to walk across the hills, he decided. With each other as companions, he had the vague certainty that he and the cat would find the Protestant mission or the house of the woman who was not afraid to take him.

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## Chapter 23

Mercedes Peralta came rushing into my room, sat on my bed, and shifted about until she was comfortably settled.

"Unpack your gear," she said. "You can't go to see Agustin anymore. He's left for his yearly trip to remote areas in the country."

She spoke with such certainty that I had the feeling she had just finished talking to him over the telephone; but I knew there wasn't one in the neighborhood. Candelaria came at that moment into the room holding a tray with my favorite dessert: guava jelly and a few slices of white cheese.

"I know it's not the same as sitting spiritually with Agustin in front of a TV set," she remarked, "but I'm all you have for the moment."

She placed the tray on the night table and sat down on the bed opposite from dona Mercedes. Dona Mercedes laughed and urged me to eat my treat. She said that Agustin was known in distant, godforsaken towns and visited them yearly. At great length she talked about his gift for healing children.

"When will he be back?" I asked. The thought that I might not see him again filled me with indescribable sadness.

"There's no way to know," dona Mercedes said. "Six months, perhaps even longer. He does this because he feels he has a great debt to pay."

"Whom does he owe?"

She looked at Candelaria, then both of them looked at me as though I ought to have known.

"Witches understand debts of this kind in a most peculiar manner," dona Mercedes finally said. "Healers pray to the saints, and to the Virgin, and to our Lord Jesus Christ. Witches pray to power: They entice it with their incantations."

She rose from the bed and paced about the room. Softly, as though she were talking to herself, she continued to say that although Agustin prayed to the saints, he owed something to a higher order; an order that was not human. Dona Mercedes was silent for a few moments, looking at me but allowing no expression to be read on her face.

"Agustin has known about that higher order all his life, even as a child," she continued. "Did he ever tell you that the same man who was going to take his mother away found Agustin on a pitch-black night, in the rain, already half-dead, and brought him to me?"

Dona Mercedes did not wait for my response but quickly added, "To be in harmony with that higher order has always been the secret of Agustin's success. He does it through his healing and bewitching."

Again she paused for a moment, looking up at the ceiling. "That higher order made Agustin and Candelaria a gift," she continued, lowering her gaze toward me. "It helped them from the moment they were born. Candelaria pays part of her debt by being my servant. She is the best servant there is."

Dona Mercedes moved toward the door, and before stepping outside, she turned to face Candelaria and me, a dazzling smile on her face. "I think that in some measure you, too, owe a great deal to that higher order," she said. "So try by all means to pay back the debt you have."

Not a word was said for a long time. The two women looked at me with a sense of expectancy. It occurred to me that they were waiting for me to make the obvious connection - obvious to them: Just as Candelaria was a born witch, Agustin was a born sorcerer.

Dona Mercedes and Candelaria listened to me with beaming smiles.

"Agustin is capable of making his own links," dona Mercedes explained. "He has a direct connection to that higher order which is the wheel of chance itself; and the witch's shadow as well, or whatever it is that makes that wheel move."

# PART SEVEN

## Chapter 24

Sharing the faint light of the bulb above us, Candelaria and I sat across from each other at the kitchen table. She was studying the glossy pictures in the magazine I had bought for her; I was transcribing my tapes.

"Did you hear a knock at the front door?" I asked, pulling the earphone from my ear.

Totally oblivious to my words, she pointed to the picture of a blond model. "I can't decide which girl I like better," she mused. "If I cut out this one, I'll lose the one on the other side of the page, the brunette walking down the street with a tiger on a leash."

"I would save the one with the tiger," I suggested. "There will be more blond models in the magazine." I touched her arm. "Listen, someone's at the door."

It took Candelaria a moment to draw herself away from the magazine and another moment to realize that indeed there was someone knocking.

"Who could it possibly be at this late hour?" she mumbled indifferently, as she shifted her attention back to the glossy pages.

"Perhaps it's a patient." I glanced at my watch. It was almost midnight.

"Oh no, my dear," Candelaria said calmly and looked up. "No one ever comes at this hour. People know that dona Mercedes doesn't treat anyone this late unless it's an emergency."

Before I had a chance to say that it probably was an emergency there was another, this time more insistent, knock.

I hurried to the front of the house. For a moment I hesitated outside the healing room, deliberating whether I should let Mercedes Peralta know that there was someone at the door. For three days Mercedes Peralta had been in that room. Day and night she had lit candles on the altar, smoked cigar after cigar, and, with a rapturous expression on her face, had recited unintelligible incantations until the walls vibrated with the sound. Mercedes Peralta had never answered any of my questions, yet, she seemed to welcome my interruptions when I brought her food or insisted she rest for a few hours.

Another knock sent me hurrying to the front door, which Candelaria always bolted as soon as it got dark; an unnecessary precaution, for anyone wanting to come inside could have done so through the open kitchen.

"Who is it?" I asked before unlatching the iron bolt.

"Gente de paz, peaceful folk," a man's voice answered.

Amazed to hear someone with a faint foreign accent reply in the archaic convention dating from the days of the Spanish Conquest, I automatically responded in the required manner, "Hail the Virgin Mary," and opened the door.

The tall, white-haired man leaning against the wall regarded me with such a baffled expression on his face, I burst into laughter.

"Is this Mercedes Peralta's house?" he asked in a halting voice.

I nodded, studying his face. It was not so much that it was wrinkled but rather eroded, ravaged as though by grief or pain. His watery blue eyes were sunken in wide circles of age and weariness.

"Is Mercedes Peralta in?" he asked, looking past me into the dimly lit hallway.

"She is," I replied. "But she doesn't see people this late."

"I've been walking around town for hours, pondering whether I should come," he said. "I need to see her. I'm an old friend or an old enemy."

Shaken by the anguish and despair in the man's voice, I invited him inside.

"She's in her working room," I said. "I'd better let her know that you've come to see her." I stepped ahead of him and smiled encouragingly. "What is your name?"

"Don't announce me," the man begged, gripping my arm. "Let me go in by myself. I know the way."

Stiffly, he limped across the patio and down the corridor. He paused for a second in front of dona Mercedes' room, then climbed the two steps leading inside. I followed close behind him ready to take the blame should Mercedes Peralta be annoyed by the intrusion. For an instant, I thought she had already gone to bed: But as soon as my eyes became accustomed to the shadowy darkness, I saw her sitting in her high-backed chair at the far end of the room, barely outlined by the faint light of a single candle burning on the altar.

"Federico Mueller!" she gasped, staring at him in total panic.

She seemed not to trust her vision and repeatedly rubbed her eyes with her hands. "How can it be? All these years I thought you were dead."

Awkwardly, he went down on his knees, buried his face in the healer's lap, and cried with the abandonment of a despairing child. "Help me, help me," he repeated in between sobs.

Hastily, I moved toward the entrance, only to halt abruptly when I heard Federico Mueller fall on the floor with a dull thump. I wanted to summon Candelaria, but dona Mercedes stopped me.

"How extraordinary!" she exclaimed in a trembling tone. "Everything is fitting into place like a magical jigsaw puzzle. This is the person you remind me of. You brought him back to me."

I wanted to tell her that I saw no similarity between the old man and myself, but she sent me to her bedroom to fetch her basket with medicinal plants. When I returned, Federico Mueller was still lying curled up on the floor. Dona Mercedes was trying to revive him.

"Get Candelaria," she said. "I can't handle Federico Mueller by myself."

Candelaria had heard the commotion and was already standing by the entrance. She walked in. There was an expression of disbelief, of sheer horror in Candelaria's eyes.

"He's come back," she murmured, approaching Federico Mueller.

Candelaria crossed herself, then turned to dona Mercedes and asked, "What do you want me to do?"

"His soul is detaching itself from his body," she answered. "I'm too weak to try to push it back."

Candelaria sat on her haunches and swiftly moved Federico Mueller's inert body to a sitting position. She gave him a sort of bear hug from behind. The bones of his back cracked as if they were breaking into a hundred pieces.

Candelaria propped him in a sitting position against the wall. "He's very ill," she said to me. "I think he's come back here to die." She left the room crossing herself.

Federico Mueller opened his eyes. He took in everything in one glance, then he looked at me as if he were silently begging me to leave him alone with dona Mercedes.

"Musiúa," she said in a weak voice as I was walking out of the room, "since you have brought him back to my life, you ought to stay."

I sat down awkwardly on my stool. He began to talk to no one in particular. He rambled on incoherently for hours. Mercedes Peralta listened attentively: Whatever he was saying seemed to make all the sense in the world to her.

A long silence ensued after Federico Mueller stopped talking. Slowly, dona Mercedes rose and lit a candle in front of the statue of the Virgin. Poised before the altar, she looked like an ancient wood statue, her face an expressionless mask. Only her eyes seemed alive as they filled with tears. She lit a cigar and drew each breath deep inside her, as if she were feeding a force within her chest. The flame grew brighter as the candle shrank. It cast an eerie light on her features as she turned to face Federico Mueller. Mumbling a soft incantation, she massaged first his head and then his shoulders.

"You can do anything you want with me," he said, pressing both her palms against his temples.

"Go into the living room," dona Mercedes said, her voice a shaky whisper. "I'll be along shortly with a valerian potion. It will put you to sleep." Smiling, she patted his hair into place.

Hesitantly, he limped across the patio and down the corridor. The sound of his steps echoed faintly through the house. Mercedes Peralta turned once again to the altar but could not reach it. She was beginning to fall, when I jumped up and caught her. Feeling the uncontrollable tremor of her body, I realized how immense had been her stress and her poise. She had comforted Federico Mueller for hours. I had seen only his turmoil: She had revealed nothing about her own.

"Musiúa, tell Candelaria to get ready," dona Mercedes said, stepping into the kitchen where I was writing. "You're taking us in your jeep."

Certain that she was already asleep, I went immediately to look for Candelaria in her room. She was not there. The door of her wardrobe stood wide open, exposing the bevel-edged mirror on it's door and all her clothes. They were arranged not only by color but also by the length of the hems. Her narrow bed - a frame of laths, and a horsehair mattress - stood between two bookcases filled with romance novels and photo albums containing cutout magazine pictures. Everything was in immaculate order, nothing was rumpled.

"I'm ready," Candelaria said behind me.

Startled, I turned around. "Dona Mercedes wants you to..." She did not let me finish, but propelled me toward my room down the corridor.

"I've taken care of everything," she assured me. "Hurry up and change. We don't have much time."

On my way out I peeked into the living room. Federico Mueller was sleeping peacefully on the couch. Dona Mercedes and Candelaria were already waiting for me in my jeep. There was no moon or a single star in the sky, yet it was a lovely night; soft and black with a cool wind blowing from the hills.

Following Candelaria's directions, I drove the two women to the homes of the people who regularly attended the spiritualists' meeting. As was customary, I waited outside. Except for Leon Chirino, I had never met any of them, yet I knew where each one of them lived. I wondered if the two women were setting a date for a seance, for they did not stay long at any of the houses.

"And now to Leon Chirino's house," Candelaria said, helping dona Mercedes settle in the backseat.

Candelaria seemed angry. Nonstop she rambled on about Federico Mueller. Although I was bursting with curiosity, I could not pay attention to her seemingly incoherent statements. I was too preoccupied watching the distraught look on dona Mercedes' face in the rearview mirror. She opened her mouth several times to speak, but instead she shook her head and looked out the window, seeking aid and comfort from the night. Leon Chirino took a long time coming to the door. He must have been sound asleep and unable to hear Candelaria's impatient, loud banging. He opened the door with his arms crossed, protecting his chest from the cold, humid breeze spreading the dawn across the hills. There was a look of foreboding in his eyes.

"Federico Mueller is at my house," dona Mercedes said before he had time to even greet her.

Leon Chirino did not say a word. Yet, it was evident that he had been thrown into a state of profound agitation, of great indecision. His lips trembled, and his eyes alternately shone with rage or filled with tears under his white, bushy brows.

He motioned us to follow him to the kitchen. He made sure dona Mercedes was comfortably settled in a hammock hanging near the stove, then he made a fresh pot of coffee, while we sat in complete silence. As soon as he had served Candelaria and me a cup, he helped dona Mercedes into a sitting position, and standing behind her proceeded to massage the back of her head. He moved down to her neck, then to her shoulders and arms, all the way to her feet. The sound of his melodious incantation floated over the room, clear like the dawn, peaceful and infinitely lonely.

"Only you know what to do," Leon Chirino said to her, helping her up. "Do you want me to come with you?"

Nodding, she embraced him and thanked him for lending her his strength. A mysterious smile curved her lips as she turned to the table, and leisurely sipped her cup of coffee.

"Now we have to see my compadre," she said, taking my arm. "Please take us to El Mocha's house."

"Lucas Nunez?" I asked, looking from one to the other.

All three nodded, but no one said a word. I had remembered Candelaria's comment about the godfather of dona Mercedes' adopted son Elio: Candelaria had told me that Lucas Nunez blamed himself for Elio's death.

The sun had already risen above the mountains when we reached the small town along the coast where Lucas Nunez lived. The place was hot and salty from the sea and musky with flowering mimosa trees. The town's main street lined with brightly painted colonial houses, a small church, and a plaza ended at the edge of a coconut plantation. Beyond was the sea. It could not be seen, but the wind carried the sound of waves breaking on the shore.

Lucas Nunez's house stood on one of the town's side streets, which were not really streets but wide paths covered with stones. Dona Mercedes rapped lightly on the door and, without waiting for an answer, pushed it open and stepped inside a dark, damp room. Still blinded by the brightness outside, I could at first barely make out the silhouette of a man reading at a wooden table in a small back patio. He gazed at us with such a desolate expression on his face I wanted to flee. Haltingly, he stood up and silently embraced dona Mercedes, Leon Chirino, and Candelaria. The man was tall and bony. His white hair was cropped so close to his head that the darkness of his scalp shone through.

I felt a strange anguish upon noticing his hands and realized why he was nicknamed El Mocho, the maimed one. The first joint of each finger was missing.

"Federico Mueller is at my house," dona Mercedes said softly. "The Musiúa here brought him to my door."

Slowly, Lucas Nunez turned toward me. There was something so intense about the man's narrow face, about his shiny eyes, that I shrank back.

"Is she related to him?" he asked in a harsh voice, no longer seeming to see me.

"The Musiúa has never seen Federico Mueller in her life," dona Mercedes remarked. "But she brought him to my door."

Lucas Nunez leaned against the wall. "If he is in your house, then I will kill him," he declared in a strangled whisper.

Dona Mercedes and Leon Chirino each took him by an arm and led him into one of the rooms.

"Who is this Federico Mueller?" I asked Candelaria. "What did he do?"

"But, Musiúa," she said impatiently. "I've been telling you during the whole trip about the horrible things Federico Mueller did."

She looked at me baffled, shaking her head in disbelief. Despite my insistence that she repeat them, she would not say another word about Federico Mueller.

Instead of going to rest in her hammock upon returning to her house, Mercedes Peralta asked Candelaria and me to join her in her working room. Mercedes Peralta lit seven candles on the altar, and reaching behind the folds of the Virgin's blue mantle, pulled out a revolver. Horrified and fascinated, I watched her caress the gun. She smiled at me, and pressed the revolver into my hands.

"It's unloaded," she said. "I unloaded it the day you arrived. I knew then that I wasn't going to need it, but I didn't know that you were going to bring him back to me."

She went over to her chair and, heaving a deep sigh, sat down. "I've had that gun for almost thirty years," she went on. "I was going to kill Federico Mueller with it."

"And you should do it now!" Candelaria hissed through clenched teeth.

"I know what I'm going to do," dona Mercedes went on, ignoring the interruption. "I'm going to take care of Federico Mueller for as long as he lives."

"Dear God!" Candelaria exclaimed. "Have you lost your mind?"

A childlike look of innocent hope, a wave of affection, shone in dona Mercedes' eyes as she regarded us intently. She held up her hand, pleading us to silence.

"You brought Federico Mueller to my door," she said to me. "And now I know that there is nothing to forgive. Nothing to understand; and he came back to make me realize just that. This is why I'll never mention what he did. He was dead, but he's not now."

## Chapter 25

There were several empty rooms in the house, but Federico Mueller chose to sleep in the narrow alcove back of the kitchen. It was just large enough for a cot and a night table. Quite vehemently, he declined my offer to drive him to Caracas and get his belongings. He said that nothing of what he had there would be of any value to him now; yet, he was grateful, when at dona Mercedes' prompting, I bought him several shirts and a pair of khaki pants, and toiletries.

And thus, Federico Mueller became part of the household. Dona Mercedes pampered him. She indulged him. Every morning and again every afternoon she treated him in her working room; and each night she made him drink a valerian potion laced with rum. Federico Mueller never left the house. He spent all his time either in a hammock in the yard, or talking to dona Mercedes. Candelaria ignored his existence: He did likewise; not only with her, but also with me.

One day, however, Federico Mueller began to speak to me in German, haltingly at first: It cost him a tremendous effort to form the words. But soon he gained a total command of the language, and never again did he speak a word of Spanish with me. That changed him radically. It was as though his problems, whatever they may have been, were encased in the sound of Spanish words.

Candelaria was, at first, mildly curious about the foreign language. She began asking Federico Mueller questions, and ended up succumbing to his innate charm. He taught her German nursery rhymes, which Candelaria sang the whole day long with faultless pronunciation. And he repeated to me again and again in a perfectly coherent way what he had said to dona Mercedes the night he arrived.

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As happened every night, Federico Mueller woke up screaming. He sat up in bed, his back pushed against the headboard in an effort to escape that one particular face: It always came so close to him he could see the cruel mocking glint in the man's eyes and his gold-rimmed teeth as he laughed in great guffaws. Beyond him were all the other faces of the people who always populated his nightmares: faces distorted by pain and fear. They always screamed in agony, begged for mercy. All of them except her. She never screamed. She never broke her stare. It was a look he could not bear.

Moaning, Federico Mueller pressed his fists against his eyes, as if with that gesture he could keep his past at bay. For thirty years he had been tormented by those nightmares, and by the memories and visions that would follow in a wave of dreadful lucidity.

Exhausted, he slid back under the covers. Something palpable, yet unseen, lingered in the room. It prevented him from falling asleep. He pushed the blanket aside, and reluctant to turn on the light, limped across to the window, and pulled back the curtain. Spellbound, he gazed at the white mist of dawn filtering into the room. He strained his eyes wide open to reassure himself that he was not dreaming. As it had so often happened, she materialized out of that formless haze, and sat by his working table amid the stuffed birds that stared at him impassively from their dead, empty glass eyes. Carefully, he approached the figure. Swiftly she vanished, like a shadow that leaves no trace. The bells of the nearby church and the hurried steps of old women on their way to early mass echoed through the silent streets. The familiar sounds reassured him that today was going to be like any other day. He washed and shaved, then prepared his morning coffee and ate standing at the stove. Feeling decidedly better, he settled down to work on his birds. A vague restlessness, some undefined dread, prevented him from finishing his work on the owl he had promised a client for that afternoon.

He put on his good suit, and went outside for a walk. The city still had an air of restful clarity at that early hour. Slowly, he limped down the narrow street. The section of Caracas where he lived had been bypassed by the frenzy of modernization that had swept through the rest of the city. Except for a casual greeting, he never stopped to talk to anyone. Yet, he felt oddly protected by these old streets with their one-story colonial houses alive with the laughter of children, and the voices of women gossiping in front of their doors.

At first, people had talked a great deal about him, but he never gave in to the need to explain his presence. He was aware that because of his aloofness, his neighbors speculated and were suspicious of him. Over the years, as was to be expected, people's interest in him finally waned. Nowadays, they merely thought of him as an eccentric old man who stuffed birds for a living, and wanted to be left alone.

Federico Mueller caught a glimpse of himself in a mirror outside a shop. As always when he saw his reflection, he couldn't help but be startled to discover that he looked so much older than his years could possibly warrant. Not a vestige remained of the tall, handsome man with blond curls and a deep tan. Although he had been only thirty when he first came to live in this section of Caracas, he already looked the way he did now at sixty: old before his time, with a useless leg, white hair, deeply etched wrinkles, and a death-like pallor that wouldn't disappear regardless of how long he stayed outdoors.

Shaking his head, he resumed his walk toward the plaza and rested on a bench. A few old men were already about, sitting with their hands between their knees, each one lost in his own memories. He found something oddly disturbing in their unshared solitude. He rose and walked on, limping through block after block of crowded streets.

The sun was hot. The contours of buildings had lost their early-morning preciseness, and the noise in the streets intensified the dizzying shimmer of the haze hanging over the city. And again, as he had done so many times before, he found himself standing in front of the same bus depot. His eyes caught a dark face in the crowd.

"Mercedes," he whispered, knowing that it couldn't possibly be her.

He wondered if the woman had heard him, for suddenly she looked into his eyes. It was a rapid, yet deliberate glance that filled him with apprehension and hope. Then the woman vanished in the crowd.

"Have you seen a dark, tall woman pass by?" he asked one of the hawkers roaming around the bus depot, his tray of candies and cigarettes strapped in front of him.

"I've seen hundreds of women," the man said, making a wide circle with his hand. "There are lots of women around here." He grabbed Federico Mueller's arm and turned him slightly to the left. "See those buses over there? They are filled with women. Old ones, dark ones, tall ones. Anyway you like them. They are all going to the coastal towns." Laughing, the man continued weaving in and out of the waiting buses, advertising his wares.

Possessed by an irrational certainty that he would find that face, Federico Mueller got on a bus and walked down the aisle gazing intently at each passenger. They stared back at him in silence. For an instant, he thought that all the faces resembled hers. He had to rest for a moment, he thought, and sat on one of the empty seats at the back of the bus.

A faint, faraway voice demanding his ticket roused him from his slumber. The words vibrated in his head. A drowsiness pressed heavily on his brow, and he had difficulty opening his eyes. He gazed out the window. The city was far behind.

Puzzled and embarrassed, he looked up at the ticket collector. "I didn't intend to go anyplace," Federico Mueller stammered apologetically. "I only came looking for someone."

He paused for a moment, then mumbled to himself. "Someone I hoped and dreaded to find on this bus."

"That happens," the man remarked sympathetically. "Since you have to pay the full fare, you might as well take advantage of the ride, and go all the way to Curmina."

The man smiled and patted Federico Mueller on the shoulder. "There you can get a bus that will take you back to the capital."

Federico Mueller handed him some money. "When does the bus come back to Caracas?" he asked.

"Around midnight," the man said vaguely. "Or whenever there are enough people to make the trip worthwhile." The man gave him back his change, then continued down the aisle, and collected the rest of the tickets from the passengers.

It was fate that I had to catch this bus without having planned to do so, Federico Mueller thought. A half smile flittered across his face. His worn eyelids closed with a feeling of hope, quiet and deep. Fate was finally forcing him to surrender to his past. An unknown peacefulness filled him as he recalled that past.

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It all began at a party in Caracas, where he was approached by a high-ranking general in the government, who asked him point-blank to join the secret police. Believing him to be drunk, Federico did not take the man's words seriously. It came as a surprise when a few days later an army officer knocked on his door.

"I'm Captain Sergio Medina," he introduced himself.

There had been nothing sinister about the short, powerfully built man with the copperish skin and the gold-rimmed teeth that flashed in a strong open smile. Convincingly, he talked about the excitement involved in the job they had in mind for him, the good pay, the fast promotions. Flattered and intrigued, Federico accompanied Medina to the general's house.

Patting him affectionately on his back, like an old friend, the general took him to his study. "This job will earn you the respect and gratitude of this country," the general said. "A country that, after all, is your own and yet isn't. This will be your chance to truly become one of us."

Nodding, Federico could not help but agree with the general. He had been sixteen years old when his parents had immigrated to Venezuela. Under the auspices of a government program, they had settled in the interior to farm the vast acreages of land allotted to them, which they had hoped to own one day. After an accident that killed both of his parents, Federico, not in the least interested in farming, apprenticed himself to a German zoologist, an expert in taxidermy who taught him all he knew.

"I can't think how I could be of use to you," Federico said to the general. "All I know is how to trap and stuff birds."

The general laughed uproariously. "My dear Federico," he emphasized, "your experience as a taxidermist is the ideal cover for the job we have in mind for you."

The general smiled confidentially, and leaning closer added, "We have accurate reports of a subversive group operating in the Curmina area. We want you to find out about them."

He laughed again, gleefully, like a child. "So far, we have been unsuccessful with the men we have sent into the area. But you, my friend, a musiú trapping birds, will not arouse any suspicion."

Federico was never given the opportunity to refuse the job. Within days, a brand-new jeep equipped with the latest instruments and chemicals of a quality he had never been able to afford were put at his disposal.

Federico was always careful when in the hills. One morning, however, upon seeing a rare toucan in one of his traps, he leapt out of his hammock without first putting on his boots. He felt a sting between his toes. He swore, and thought he had stepped on a thorn. But when a sharp pain radiated from the small punctures- where two little drops of blood had formed- and quickly spread through his whole foot, and up his leg, he knew he had been bitten by a snake: A snake he had neither seen nor heard.

He rushed to his jeep parked nearby and rummaged through his gear until he found his first-aid kit. He tied a handkerchief halfway up the calf of his leg, then expertly cut across the two punctures and bled the wound. But too much poison had already gone into the bloodstream. Flashing pains shot all the way to his buttocks, and his foot swelled to twice it's size. He would never make it to Caracas, he thought, easing himself behind the steering wheel. He would have to take his chances in the nearest town.

The nurse at the dispensary near the plaza calmly informed him that they were out of antivenin serum.

"What am I supposed to do? Die?" Federico shouted, his face contorted with anger and pain.

"I hope not," the nurse remarked calmly. "I'm sure you've already discarded the chances of reaching Caracas in time."

She studied him, carefully considering her next words. "I know of a healer here. She has the best contras, the secret potions to counteract a snake's poison."

The nurse smiled apologetically. "That's why we hardly ever stock up on serum. Most victims prefer to go to her."

She examined the swollen foot once more. "I don't know what kind of snake bit you, but it looks bad to me. Your only chance is the healer. You'd better take it."

Federico had never been to a witch doctor in his life, but at that moment he was willing to try anything. He didn't want to die. He was beyond caring who helped him.

The nurse, assisted by two customers from the bar across the street, carried Federico to the witch doctor's house in the outskirts of town. He was put on a cot in a smoke-filled room that smelled of ammonia. At the rasping sound of a match, Federico opened his eyes. Through the haze of smoke, he saw a tall woman lighting a candle on an altar. In the flickering light her face was like a mask, very still with high-molded bones over which her tautly stretched skin, dark and smooth, shone like polished wood. Her eyes, hooded by heavy lids, revealed absolutely nothing as they looked into his.

"A macagua bite for sure," she diagnosed, shifting her gaze to his foot. "That snake gave you all she had. You were lucky the nurse brought you here. There is no serum for this kind of poison."

She pulled up a chair beside him, then examined his foot with great attention, her long fingers soft and gentle as she probed the skin around the wound.

"You don't have to worry," she stated with absolute conviction. "You're young. You'll survive the poison and my treatment."

Turning toward the table behind her, she reached for two large decanters filled with a syruplike greenish brown liquid in which roots, leaves, and snake entrails floated around. From one jar, she poured a certain amount in a metal plate: From the other one, she half filled a small tin mug. She lit a cigar. Inhaling deeply, she closed her eyes and swayed her head. Abruptly, she bent over his foot and blew what seemed to be the accumulated smoke of the entire cigar into the cut he had made with his knife. She sucked the blood, then quickly spit it out and rinsed her mouth with a clear, strong-smelling liquid. Seven times she repeated this procedure.

Thoroughly exhausted, she rested her head against the back of her chair. A few moments later she began to mumble an incantation. She unbuttoned his shirt, and with her middle finger which she had dipped into the cigar's ashes, she drew a straight line from the base of his throat down to his genitals. With remarkable ease, she turned him around, pulled off his shirt, and painted a similar line down his back.

"I've halved you now," she informed him. "The poison can't go over to the other side." She then retraced the back and front lines with a dab of fresh ashes.

In spite of his pain, Federico laughed. "I'm sure the poison spread all over my body a long time ago," he said

She held his face between her hands, forcing him to look into her eyes. "musiú, if you don't trust me, you'll die," she warned him, then proceeded to wash his foot with the liquid she had poured into the metal plate.

That done, she reached for the tin mug. "Drink it all," she commanded, holding it to his lips. "If you throw up, you're done for."

Uncontrollable waves of nausea threatened to bring the foul-tasting potion up.

"Force yourself to keep it down," she urged him, placing a small rectangular pillow filled with dried maize kernels under his neck.

She watched him attentively as she soaked a handkerchief in a mixture of rose water and ammonia.

"Now breathe!" she ordered, holding the handkerchief over his nose. "Breathe slowly and deeply."

For a moment he struggled under the suffocating pressure of her hand, then gradually relaxed as she began to massage his face.

"Don't get close to pregnant women. They'll neutralize the effect of the contra," she admonished.

He looked at her uncomprehendingly, then mumbled that he did not know any pregnant women. Seemingly satisfied with his statements, Mercedes Peralta turned to the altar, lined up seven candles around the statue of Saint John, and lit them. Silently, she gazed at the flickering flames, then with a sudden jerk, she threw back her head and recited an oddly dissonant litany. The words turned into a cry, which rose and fell with the regularity of her breathing. It was an inhuman-sounding lament that caused the walls to vibrate and the candle flames to waver. The sound filled the room, the house, and went far beyond, as if it were meant to reach some distant force.

Federico was vaguely aware of being moved into another room. The days and nights blurred into each other as he lay half-conscious on the cot, hounded by fevers and chills. Whenever he opened his eyes, he saw the healer's face in the darkness, the red stones in her earrings shining like an extra pair of eyes. In a soft melodious voice, she sent the shadows, the terrible phantoms of his fever, scurrying to their corners. Or, as if she were part of his hallucinations, she identified those unknown forces and commanded him to wrestle with them. Afterward, she bathed his sweat-covered body and massaged him until his skin was cool again. There were times when Federico felt someone else's presence in the room. Different hands, larger and stronger, yet as gentle as the healer's, cradled his head while she urged him in a harsh tone to drink the foul-tasting potions she held to his lips.

The morning she brought him his first meal of rice and vegetables, a young man holding a guitar followed her into the room.

"I'm Elio," he introduced himself. Then strumming his guitar, he began to sing a funny little ditty that related the events of Federico's bout with the poison. Elio also told him that the day the nurse at the dispensary brought him to his mother's house, he set out for the hills, and with his machete, slayed the macagua that had bitten him. Had the snake survived, the potions and incantations would have been useless.

One morning, upon noticing that the purple swollen flesh had returned to normal, Federico reached for his laundered clothes hanging over the bedstead. Eager to test his strength, he walked out into the yard, where he found the healer bent over a tub rilled with rosemary water. Silently, he watched her dip her hands into the purple liquid.

Smiling, she looked up at him. "It keeps my hair from turning white," she explained, combing her fingers repeatedly through her curls.

Bewildered by the surge of desire welling up inside him, he moved closer. He longed to kiss the drops of rosemary water trickling down her face, her neck, into the bodice of her dress. He didn't care that she might be old enough to be his mother. To him she was ageless and mysteriously seductive.

"You saved my life," he murmured, touching her face. His fingers lingered on her cheeks, her full lips, her warm smooth neck. "You must have added a love potion to that foul-tasting brew you forced me to drink every day."

She looked straight into his eyes but did not answer. Afraid she had taken offense, he mumbled an apology. She shook her head, her raspy laughter starting low in her throat. He had never heard such a sound. She laughed with her whole soul, as if nothing else in the world mattered.

"You can stay here until you're stronger," she said, tousling his blond curls. In her veiled eyes, there was a hint of mockery but also of passion.

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Months passed swiftly. The healer accepted him as her lover. Yet, she would never let him stay a full night in her room.

"Just a little longer," he pleaded each time, caressing the silken texture of her skin, fervently wishing that for once she would give in to his demand. But she always pushed him out into the darkness, and laughing, would close the door behind him.

"Perhaps if we stay lovers for three years," she used to tell him every time.

The rainy season had almost come to an end before Federico resumed his trips into the hills. Elio accompanied him, at first to protect him, but soon he too was caught up with trapping and stuffing birds. Never before had Federico taken someone with him. Despite the ten-year age difference, they became the best of friends. Federico was surprised at how readily Elio endured the long hours of silence as they waited for a bird to fall into a trap; and how much he enjoyed their leisurely walks along the cool, hazy summits, where one was easily overtaken by fog and wind. Federico was often tempted to tell Elio about Captain Medina, but somehow he never dared to break that intimate, fragile stillness. Federico felt a vague guilt about the easy days in the hills and the secret nights with the healer. Not only had he convinced Elio and the healer, but he himself had begun to believe that Captain Medina was merely the middleman from Caracas who sold his stuffed birds to schools, museums, and curio shops.

"You've got to do better than catch those damn birds," Captain Medina said to him one afternoon as they were having a beer at a local bar. "Mingle more with the healer's patients. Through gossip, one learns the most astounding things. At any rate, you must finish your brilliant maneuver."

Federico had been surprised and, in turn, upset when Captain Medina had congratulated him on his clever scheme: The captain actually believed that Federico had let the snake bite him on purpose.

"It's the intellectuals," Federico said, "the educated people, who plan and plot against a dictatorship. Not poor farmers and fishermen. They are too busy making a living to notice what kind of government they have."

"musiú, you aren't paid to give me your opinions," Medina cut him short. "Just do what you're supposed to do."

Medina turned the empty beer glass in his hands, then looked up at Federico and added in a whisper, "Not too long ago the leader of a small, but fanatic, revolutionary group escaped from jail. We have reason to believe that he's hiding in the area."

Laughing, Medina placed his right hand on the table. "He left in jail the first joint of each of his fingers. For that, he's now called *El Mocho*."

The rain had kept on falling since early afternoon: The sound of the defective gutter by his window prevented Federico from falling asleep. He went out into the corridor and was about to light a cigarette when he heard a soft murmur coming from the healer's working room. He knew it was not the healer. That morning he had driven her to a neighboring town where she was to attend a seance. Federico tiptoed down the corridor. Among the different voices, he distinctly recognized Elio's excited voice. At first, he could not make much sense of their conversation, but when the words 'dynamite', 'the proposed dam in the hills', and 'the dictator's unofficial visit to it' crop up several times, he realized with disturbing clarity that he had unwittingly stumbled on a plot to assassinate the head of the military government. Federico leaned against the wall, his heart beating violently, then he resolutely walked up the two steps into the dark room.

"Elio! Is that you?" Federico said. "I heard voices and got worried."

There were several men in the room: They recoiled instantly into the shadows. Elio was not in the least perturbed. He took Federico by the arm and introduced him to the man sitting on the chair by the altar.

"Godfather, this is the musiú I've been telling you about," he said. "He's a friend of the family. He's to be trusted."

Slowly, the man rose. There was something saintly about his bony face, with the wide cheekbones standing out sharply under his dark skin and eyes that shone with a chilling fierceness. "A pleasure to meet you," he said. "I'm Lucas Nunez."

For a moment Federico stared at the proffered hand, then shook it. The first joint of each finger was missing.

"I feel that you can be trusted," he said to Federico. "Elio says that you may be willing to help us."

Nodding, Federico closed his eyes, afraid his voice and gaze would betray his turmoil. Lucas Nunez introduced him to the group of men. One by one they shook his hand, then sat back on the floor, forming a half-circle. The faint flicker of the candles on the altar barely outlined their faces. Federico listened attentively to Lucas Nunez's precise, calm arguments as he discussed the past and present political situation in Venezuela.

"And how can I help you?" Federico asked him at the end of his explanation.

Lucas Nunez's eyes revealed a sad, reflective mood: His face clouded over, struck with unwelcome memories.

But then, he smiled and said, "If the others agree, you could drive some explosives into the hills for us."

They all agreed instantly. Federico sensed that they had accepted him so fully and so quickly because they knew he was Mercedes Peralta's lover.

It was after midnight when their conversation ceased, bit by bit, like the flapping wings of an injured bird. The men looked pale, haggard. Federico felt a chill as they embraced him. Without a sound, they left the room and disappeared into the darkness of the hall.

He was stunned by the devilish irony of his situation. Lucas Nunez's last words rang in his ears. "You're the perfect man for the job. No one will suspect a musiú trapping birds in the hills."

Federico pulled the jeep over to a small clearing beside the road. A light drizzle swathed the hills as with gauze, and the half-moon filtering through the misty clouds gave a spectral radiance to the landscape.

Silently, he and Elio unloaded the well-padded box packed tightly with dynamite sticks.

"I'll carry the stuff down to the shack," Elio said, smiling reassuringly. "Don't look so worried, Federico. They'll have the bridge mined by dawn."

Federico watched him descend the steep overgrown trail into the shadows below. Often he had come with him to this spot, looking for wild pomarrosas, a peculiarly fragrant fruit that smells like rose petals. It was the healer's favorite fruit. Federico sat on a fallen tree trunk and buried his face in his hands. Except for the vague guilt he had felt, at times, for accepting the generous pay- which far exceeded the worth of even the rarest of birds he had delivered to Medina - he had dismissed all thought regarding the implications of what he was doing. Until now, it had all seemed to him like a make-believe adventure in a movie or in some exotic novel. It had nothing to do with having to betray people he knew and loved; people who trusted him. He wished Elio would hurry: Federico had seen Medina's jeep parked in a secluded place on the outskirts of town, secretly following him. Federico had told Medina everything, and now it was too late to regret it.

He leapt to his feet as a dazzling flash of lightning illuminated the sky. Thunder broke in a deafening roar, echoing in the depths of the ravine. Rain came in a solid sheet, so dense it blurred everything around him.

"What a fool I am!" he cried out loud, running down the steep trail. With absolute certainty, Federico knew that Medina had no intention of honoring his promise to spare the healer and her son, that he had only given it as a means to get Federico to divulge everything he knew.

"Elio!!" Federico screamed, but his shout was drowned by the resounding volley of a machine gun and the startled cries of hundreds of birds rising up into the dark sky.

In the few minutes that it took him to reach the shack, his mind raced through a nightmare. With devastating clarity he saw how his life, in one instant, had taken a fatal turn. Almost mechanically, he went through the motions of sobbing over Elio's lifeless, torn body. He neither heard nor saw Medina and the two soldiers entering the shack.

Medina was shouting at one of his men, but his voice was only a distant murmur. "You goddamn fool! I told you not to shoot! You could have had us all blown to pieces with that dynamite."

"I heard someone running in the dark," the soldier defended himself. "It could have been an ambush. I don't trust this musiú!"

Medina turned away from the man and pointed his flashlight into Federico's face. "You're dumber than I thought," he spit. "What did you think this was going to be? Make believe?" He ordered the soldiers to take the box with the explosives up the ravine.

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Federico brought the jeep to such a violent halt in front of the healer's house that he pitched forward, hitting his head on the windshield.

For a moment he sat dazed looking uncomprehendingly at the closed door; at the closed shutters.

No light shone through the cracks of the wooden panels, yet the blaring sound of a radio playing a popular tune could be heard for miles.

Federico went around to the yard, where he saw the army jeep parked on the side street. "Medina!" he screamed, running across the patio through the kitchen to the healer's working room.

Defeated, utterly worn-out, he fell to the ground, not far from where the healer lay moaning in the corner by the altar.

"She doesn't know anything," Federico shouted. "She's not involved in this."

Medina threw his head back and laughed uproariously: His gold-rimmed teeth caught the light of the candles burning on the altar. "To be a double-crossing spy, you have to be infinitely more clever than I," he said. "I have practice. Being cunning and suspicious is my livelihood."

He kicked Federico in the groin. "If you wanted to warn her, you should have come here first and not wasted time crying over the boy you killed."

The two soldiers grabbed the healer by the arms, forcing her to stand up. Her half-closed eyes were bruised and swollen. Her lips and nose were bleeding. Shaking herself loose, she glanced around the room until her eyes found Federico.

"Where is Elio?" she asked.

"Tell her, Federico." Medina laughed, his eyes shining with malice. "Tell her how you killed him."

Like an enraged animal unleashing it's last strength, she pushed Medina against the altar, then turned to one of the soldiers and reached for his gun. The soldier fired a shot. The healer stood still, her hands pressed on her chest, trying to stop the blood from seeping through the bodice of her dress. "I curse you to the end of your days, Federico."

Her voice dropped: The words were unclear. She seemed to be reciting an almost inaudible incantation. Softly, like a rag doll, she collapsed on the ground.

With a last surge of lucidity, Federico made a final decision: in death, he would join the people he had betrayed. His thoughts ran ahead of him. He would atone by killing the men responsible for everything: himself, and his accomplice - Medina.

Federico unsheathed his hunting knife and plunged it into Medina's heart. He expected to be killed instantly, but one of the soldiers only shot him in the leg. Hand-cuffed, blindfolded, and gagged, Federico was carried outside into a car. He wondered if it was already daylight, for he heard the mocking babble of a flock of parrots crossing the sky. He was certain they had arrived in Caracas when the car stopped hours later. He was put into a cell. He confessed to anything his torturers hinted at: Everything, he said, was immaterial to him. His life had already ended.

Federico had no idea how long he remained in jail. Unlike the other prisoners, he did not count the weeks, months, and years. All the days were the same to him. One day he was set free. It was a morning of great agitation. People were screaming, crying, and laughing in the streets. The dictatorship had come to an end. Federico moved to an old section of the city and he began to stuff birds again. He no longer went into the hills to trap them, however.

## Chapter 26

"Human nature is most strange," dona Mercedes said. "I knew that you were going to do something for me. I knew it from the first moment I laid eyes on you. And yet, when you did what you were here to do, I couldn't believe my eyes. You have actually moved the wheel of chance for me. I can say that you enticed Federico Mueller to return to the realm of the living. You brought him back to me by the force of your witch's shadow."

My retort was cut off before I had time to open my mouth. "During all these months you've been at my house," she said, "you have been under my shadow, in a minimal way, of course; yet the usual would've been for me to make a link for you, and not the other way around."

I wanted to clarify matters. I insisted that I had not done anything. But she would not hear of it. For the sake of understanding, I proposed a line of thought: She had made the link herself with her conviction that I was the one who would bring her something.

"No," she said, puckering her face. "Your reasoning is wrong. It makes me very sad that you seek explanations that only impoverish us."

She rose and embraced me. "I feel sorry for you," she whispered in my ear.

Suddenly, she laughed, a joyful sound that dispelled her sadness. "There is no way to explain how you've done this," she said. "I'm not talking about human arrangements or about the shadowy nature of witchcraft, but about something as elusive as timelessness itself."

She almost stammered, searching for words. "All I know and feel is that you made a link for me. How extraordinary! I was trying to show you how witches move the wheel of chance, and then you moved it for me yourself."

"I told you I can't take credit for that," I insisted and meant it. Her fervor embarrassed me.

"Don't be so thick, Musiúa," she retorted in an annoyed tone that reminded me of Agustin. "Something is helping you to create a transition for me. You can say, and be thoroughly accurate in saying it, that you have used your witch's shadow without even knowing it."

# PART EIGHT

## Chapter 27

The rainy season was almost over, yet it still rained every afternoon; a torrential downpour accompanied by thunder and lightning. Usually, I spent these rainy afternoons with dona Mercedes in her room, where she lay in her hammock, either bemused with or indifferent to my presence. If I asked her a question, she would answer me: If I said nothing, she would remain silent.

"No patient ever comes after the rain," I said, watching the downpour from her bedroom window.

The storm was soon over, and it left the street flooded. Three buzzards landed on a nearby roof. With wings outstretched they leapt about, then lined up at the very ridge and faced the sun bursting through the clouds. Half-naked children came out of their houses. They booed the buzzards away, then chased one another across the muddy puddles.

"No one ever comes after the rain," I repeated and turned to dona Mercedes, who was sitting silently in her hammock, one leg crossed over the other, staring at her cutoff shoe.

"I think I'll go and visit Leon Chirino," I said and got up from my chair.

"I wouldn't do that," she mumbled, her gaze still on her toes.

She looked up. There was a heavy brooding look in her eyes. She hesitated, frowning and biting her lips, as if she wanted to say something else. Instead, she rose and, taking my arm, led me to her working room.

Once inside, she moved with great speed, her skirt swishing noisily as she went from one corner to another, looking over and over again in the same places, turning everything upside down on the table, on the altar, and inside the glass cabinet. "I can't find it," she finally said.

"What did you lose?" I asked. "Perhaps I know where it is."

She opened her mouth to speak, but instead she turned to the altar. She lit a candle, then a cigar, which she puffed on nonstop until it was just a stub, her eyes fixed on the ashes falling on the metal plate in front of her. She turned abruptly, stared at me still standing by the table, and went down on her haunches. She crawled underneath the table and, reaching behind the bottles, dragged out a long gold chain on which a clump of medals was attached.

I began, "What are you..."

I stopped in midsentence as I remembered the night she threw the chain high up in the sky. 'When you see the medals again, you'll return to Caracas,' she had said. I never found out if some kind of trick had been involved or if I had merely been too tired to witness their fall. I had totally forgotten about the medals, for I had not seen them since.

Mercedes Peralta was grinning as she stood up. She hung the medals around my neck and said, "Feel how heavy they are. Pure gold!"

"They really are heavy!" I exclaimed, bouncing the clump in my hand.

Smooth and shiny, the medals had a luxuriant orange tinge to them, characteristic of Venezuelan gold. They ranged in size from a dime to a silver dollar. Not all of them were religious medals. Some bore the likeness of Indian chieftains from the time of the Spanish Conquest.

"What are they for?" - I asked.

"To diagnose," dona Mercedes said. "To heal. They're good for anything I choose to do with them."

Sighing loudly, she sat on her chair by the table. With the chain still around my neck, I stood in front of her. I wanted to ask her where I should put the medals, but a feeling of utter desolation rendered me speechless. As I gazed into her eyes, I saw boundless melancholy and longing reflected in them.

"You're an experienced medium now," she murmured. "But your time here has ended."

She had tried for a week to help me summon the spirit of her ancestor: It seemed that my incantations had no more power. We had failed to lure the spirit as I alone had done every night for months. Dona Mercedes laughed a little tinkling laughter that sounded oddly ominous.

"The spirit is telling us that it's time for you to move on. You have fulfilled what you came to do. You came to move the wheel of chance for me. I moved it for you the night I saw you at the plaza from Leon Chirino's car. It was at that precise instant that I wished you to come here. Had I not done so, you would never have found me regardless of who sent you to my door. You see, I, too, used my witch's shadow to make a link for you."

She gathered the boxes, candles, jars, and scraps of material from the table, piled them in her arms, then carefully eased herself out of her chair. "Help me," she said, pointing with her chin to the glass cabinet.

After placing each item neatly on the shelves, I turned to the altar and lined up the knocked-over saints.

"A part of me will always be with you," dona Mercedes said softly. "Wherever you go, whatever you do, my invisible spirit will always be there. Fate has woven it's invisible threads and tied us together."

The thought that she was saying good-bye brought tears to my eyes. It struck me like a revelation that I had taken her for granted, loved her carelessly and easily the way one loves the old. I had no time to express my feelings, for at that moment an old woman burst into the room.

"Dona Mercedes!" she cried out, clutching her folded hands against her shriveled bosom. "You have to help Clara. She's had one of her attacks, and there is no way I can bring her here. She's just lying on her bed as if she were dead."

The woman spoke rapidly out of the side of her mouth, her voice rising sharply as she moved toward the healer.

"I don't know what to do. There is no use calling the doctor, for I know that she's having one of her attacks."

She paused and crossed herself, and as she looked about the room, she discovered me. "I didn't realize you were with a patient," she mumbled contritely.

Offering the woman a chair, dona Mercedes put her at ease. "Don't worry, Emilia. The Musiúa is no patient. She's my helper," she explained. Then she sent me to fetch her basket from the kitchen.

As I stepped outside I heard dona Mercedes ask Emilia if the aunts had been to visit Clara. I took my time closing the curtain behind me so that I could hear the woman's answer.

"They finally left this morning," she said. "They have been here for almost a week. They want to move back here. Luisito came, too. As usual he was anxious to take Clara back with him to Caracas."

Although I had no way of assessing what the information meant to dona Mercedes, I knew that she deemed it necessary to include the house in her treatment, for she sent Emilia to the drugstore to purchase a bottle of lluvia de oro, golden rain; a bottle of lluvia de plata, silver rain; and a bottle of la mono poderosa, the powerful hand. These flower extracts, mixed with water, are used to wash the bewitched as well as their houses. It is a task the bewitched themselves have to perform.

The valley and the gentle slopes south of town - where sugarcane fields used to be - had been claimed by industrial centers and unattractive rows of boxlike houses. Amid them, like some relic of the past, stood what remained of the hacienda El Rincón: a large pink house and an orchard.

For a long time dona Mercedes and I stood gazing at the house, the peeling paint, the closed doors, and shutters. Not a sound came from inside. Not a leaf stirred in the trees.

We walked through the front gate. The traffic noise from the wide streets around us was muted by the crumbling high wall enclosing the property and by the tall casuarina trees, which also shut out the direct sun.

"Do you think Emilia has returned?" I whispered, intimidated by that eerie silence; by the afternoon shadows falling across the wide walkway.

Without answering, dona Mercedes pushed open the front door. A gust of wind redolent of decay scattered dead leaves at our feet. We walked along the wide corridor bordering the inside patio full of shade and humidity. Water trickled from a flat dish held perfectly balanced on the raised hands of a chubby angel. We turned a corner and continued along another corridor past endless rooms. Half-opened doors allowed glimpses of unmatching odds and ends of furniture thrown together in the most haphazard fashion. I could see sheets draped over couches and armchairs, rolled-up carpets, and statues. Beveled mirrors, portraits, and paintings were propped against the walls, as if waiting to be rehung. Dona Mercedes, not in the least perturbed by the chaotic atmosphere of the house, only shrugged her shoulders when I commented on it.

With the confidence of someone familiar with her surroundings, she stepped into a large, dimly lit bedroom. At the very center stood a wide mahogany bed draped with mosquito nets as delicate as mist. Dark, heavy curtains covered the windows, and a black cloth was flung over the mirror on the dresser. The smell of burning tallow, incense, and holy water made me think of a church. Books lay everywhere, piled carelessly on the floor, on the bed, on the two armchairs, on the night table, on the dresser, and even on an upside-down chamber pot.

Mercedes Peralta turned on the lamp by the night table. "Clara," she called softly, pushing the netting aside.

Expecting to see a child, I stood gaping at a young woman, perhaps in her late twenties, propped against the raised headboard with her limbs all awry like a rag doll that had been carelessly tossed on the bed. A red Chinese silk robe embroidered with dragons barely covered her voluptuous figure. In spite of her disheveled appearance, she was stunningly beautiful, with high slanted cheekbones, a sensual full mouth, and dark skin burnished to a fine gloss.

"Negrita, Clarita," dona Mercedes called, shaking her gently by the shoulder.

The young woman opened her eyes with a start - like someone awakening from a nightmare - then shrank back, her pupils enormously dilated. Tears flowed down her cheeks, but no expression crossed her face.

Pushing the books onto the floor, dona Mercedes placed her basket at the foot of the bed, retrieved a handkerchief, sprinkled it with perfumed water and ammonia, her favorite remedy, and held it under the woman's nose. The spiritual injection, as dona Mercedes called it, did not seem to affect the young woman, for she only stirred slightly.

"Why can't I die in peace?" she asked, her voice querulous with fatigue.

"Don't talk nonsense, Clara," dona Mercedes said, rummaging through her basket. "When a person is ready to die, I'll gladly help them prepare for their eternal sleep. There are sicknesses that bring a body's death, but your time to die hasn't come yet."

As soon as dona Mercedes had found what she was after, she rose and motioned me to come closer.

"Stay with her. I'll be back shortly," she whispered in my ear.

Uneasily, I watched her leave the room, then shifted my attention to the bed, and caught sight of the deathlike stillness in the woman's face. She did not even appear to be breathing, but she seemed aware of my intense scrutiny: her lids slowly opened, flickering lazily, hurt by the dim light. She reached for the brush on the night table. "Would you braid my hair for me?" she asked.

Smiling, I nodded and took the brush. "One or two braids?" I asked, running the brush through her long curly hair; over and over to get out the tangles.

Like dona Mercedes' and Candelaria's, her hair smelled of rosemary.

"How about one nice thick braid?" I asked.

Clara did not answer. With a fixed, but absent, gaze she stared at the farthest wall in the room, where oval-framed photographs hung surrounded by palm fronds braided in the form of a cross.

With her face contorted by pain she turned toward me. Her limbs began to shake violently. Her face darkened as she gasped for air and tried to push herself up the headboard.

I ran to the door, but afraid to leave her all by herself, I did not dare go out of the room. Repeatedly, I called for dona Mercedes: There was no answer. Certain that some fresh air would do Clara good, I stepped over to the window and pulled open the curtain. A faint glimmer of daylight still lingered outside. It made the leaves of the fruit trees vibrate with color and chased the shadows out of the room. But the warm breeze drifting through the window made Clara only worse. Her body shook convulsively: Heaving and gasping, she collapsed on the bed.

Afraid that she might be suffering from an epileptic seizure and might bite off her tongue, I tried to get the hairbrush between her chattering teeth. That filled her with terror. Her eyes dilated further. Her fingernails turned purple, and her wildly racing heartbeat throbbed in the swelling veins of her neck.

At a total loss as to what to do, I clutched the gold medals, which were still around my neck, and swung them back and forth in front of her eyes. I was not guided by any definite thought or idea; it was a purely automatic response.

"Negrita, Clarita," I murmured the way I had heard dona Mercedes call her earlier.

With a feeble effort, Clara tried to lift her hand. I lowered the chain within her reach. Moaning softly, she clasped the medals and held them against her breasts. She seemed to be drawing strength from some magic force, for the swollen veins in her neck receded. Her breathing became easier. Her pupils went back to normal, and I noticed that her eyes were not dark but a light brown, like amber. A faint smile formed on her lips, which stuck dryly to her teeth. Closing her eyes, she let go of the medals and slipped sideways on the bed.

Dona Mercedes walked in so swiftly that she seemed to materialize at the foot of the bed, as if conjured up by the shadows invading the room. In her hands, she held a large aluminum mug filled with a strong-smelling potion. Tightly clasped under her arm was a pile of newspapers. Pressing her lips firmly together, she gestured me to remain silent, then placed the mug on the night table, and the newspapers on the floor. She picked up the gold chain from the bed and, smiling, hung the medals around her neck. Mumbling a prayer, she lit a candle and again rummaged through her basket until she found a tiny black clump of dough wrapped in leaves. She rolled the dough between her palms into a ball and dropped it into the mug. It dissolved instantly with a fizzling sound.

She stirred the potion with her finger, and after tasting it brought the mug to Clara's lips. "Drink it all," she ordered.

Dona Mercedes watched silently, with an oddly detached expression on her face, as Clara gulp the liquid down.

An almost imperceptible smile appeared on Clara's face. It quickly turned into a harsh laughter, and ended in a terrified chatter, of which I did not catch a single word. Moments later, she lay flat on the bed, whispering broken excuses and asking forgiveness. Totally unperturbed by her outburst, dona Mercedes bent over Clara and massaged around her eyes; her fingers describing identical circles. She moved to her temples, then with downward strokes, massaged the rest of her face, as if she were pulling off a mask. Expertly, she rolled Clara toward the edge of the bed. Then, making sure Clara's head was hanging directly over the newspapers on the floor, she pressed hard on Clara's back until she vomited.

Nodding with approval, dona Mercedes examined the dark clump on the floor, wrapped it in the papers, and tied the bundle with a string.

"Now we'll have to bury this mess outside," she said, and in one swift motion she lifted Clara off the bed.

Gently, she wiped her face clean and tightened the belt on her robe.

"Musiúa," dona Mercedes called, turning toward me, "hold Clara's other arm."

With the young woman in between us, we slowly shuffled down the corridor out into the yard and down the wide cement steps that led to the terraced slope where fruit trees grew. There dona Mercedes buried the bundle in a deep hole she made me dig. Clara sat on the stone steps and watched us indifferently.

For six consecutive days Clara fasted. Every afternoon at precisely six o'clock, I drove dona Mercedes to El Rincón. She treated Clara in exactly the same manner. Each session ended under a fruit tree, where the newspaper bundle, smaller each day, was buried.

On the sixth and last day, hard as she tried, Clara did not vomit. Nevertheless, dona Mercedes made her bury the empty, bundled-up paper.

"Will she be all right now?" I asked on the way home. "Are the sessions over?"

"Not quite, to both questions," she said. "Starting tomorrow, you're going to see Clara every day by yourself as part of her treatment."

She patted my arm affectionately. "Get her to talk to you. It'll do her a lot of good. And," she added as an afterthought, "it'll do you a lot of good too."

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Clothes and shoebox in hand, Clara hurried down the corridor into the bathroom. She dropped everything on the floor, then took off her nightgown and admired herself in the mirrored walls. She moved closer to see if her budding breasts had grown a bit more overnight. A satisfied smile spread over her face as she bent her head and counted her few pubic hairs. Humming a little tune, she turned on the hot and cold water faucets in the enormous shell-shaped bathtub, then went over to the dressing table and carefully examined the various bottles arranged on the marble top. Unable to decide which of the bath gels or salts to use, she poured a small amount of each into the water.

For a moment she stood staring at the foaming bubbles. How different it had been in Piritu. Water had to be drawn from the river or from the newly installed municipal faucet by the road and had to be carried up the hill in tin cans. Only a year had passed since her arrival at El Rincón, yet it seemed she had been living in this large old house forever. She had made no conscious effort to forget her life in Piritu. Her memories, however, had begun to fade like visions in a dream. All that remained was her grandmother's face, with the sound of her rocking chair creaking on the dirt-packed floor on that last day in the shack.

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"You're almost grown up, Negra," her grandmother had said, her face looking older, more tired than it ever had before.

The child knew at that instant that the only person she had in the world was going to die.

"That's what old age does," her grandmother had said, aware of the child's realization. "When a body is ready to die, there is nothing one can do but lie down and close one's eyes. I've already traded my rocking chair for a coffin, and this shack for a Christian burial."

"But grandmother..."

"Hush, child," the old woman stopped her in mid-sentence.

She pulled out a handkerchief from her skirt pocket, untied the knot in one corner, and counted the few coins she kept there for an emergency. "It's enough to get you to El Rincón."

She ran her fingers over the child's face, then braided her long curly hair.

"No one knows who your father is, but your mother, my daughter, is don Luis's illegitimate child. She left for Caracas right after you were born. She went to seek her fortune; but fortune doesn't need to be sought... quote."

Her voice trailed off: She had lost her train of thought.

After a long silence she added, "I'm sure don Luis will recognize you as his granddaughter. He's the owner of El Rincón. He's old and lonely."

She took the child's hands in hers, pressed them against her wrinkled cheeks, and kissed the leaf-shaped mole in her right palm. "Show this to him."

The candle burning before the figure of a black Christ blurred before the child's eyes. She let her gaze wander to the cot in the corner, to the basket stuffed with starched, unironed clothing, to the wheelbarrow leaning against the wall in which she pushed her grandmother around. For one last time her eyes rested on the old woman: Settled back in her rocking chair, she stared with empty eyes into the distance, her face already shrunken with death.

It was dusk when the bus driver let her off right in front of the recessed arched doorway built into the wall surrounding El Rincón. She walked up the terraced hillside, where fruit trees grew all evenly spaced from one another. Halfway up she stopped short and remained utterly still, her whole being taken over by the sight of a small tree covered with white blossoms.

"That's an apple tree," a voice said; and then inquired, "And who are you? Where have you come from?"

For an instant, she believed it was the tree that had spoken, then she became aware of an old man standing beside her.

"I fell out of the apple tree," she said, holding out her hand in greeting.

Surprised by her formal gesture, he stared at her hand. Instead of shaking it, he just held it in his, her palm turned up.

"Strange," he murmured, his thumb moving over the leaf-shaped mole.

"Who are you?" he asked again.

"I think I'm your granddaughter," she said hopefully: She had taken an instant liking to him.

He was frail-looking, with silver-white hair that contrasted sharply with his tanned face. From his nose to the corners of his mouth ran two deep lines. She wondered if they had been drawn by worry and hard work, or by smiling a lot.

"Who sent you here?" the old man asked, his thumb still rubbing over the leaf-shaped mole.

"My grandmother, Eliza Gomez, of Piritu. She used to work here. She died yesterday morning."

"And what's your name?" he asked, studying her upturned face with the wide, amber-colored eyes, the fine nose, the full mouth, and the determined angle of her chin.

"They call me La Negra...," she faltered under his intense scrutiny.

"La Negra Clara," he said. "That was my grandmother's name. She was as dark as you."

To make light of his words, he led her around the apple tree.

"It was the size of a parsley sprig when I brought it back with me from a trip to Europe. People laughed at me, saying that the tree would never grow in the tropics. It's old now. It hasn't grown very tall, nor has it ever borne any fruit. But once in a while it dresses itself all in white."

Wistfully, he looked at the delicate blossoms: Then his glance came to rest on the child's eager face, and he said, "It's just as well that you fell out of the apple tree. This way I'll never take such a gift for granted."

Emilia's voice roused Clara from her reveries. "Negraaaaa," she called, sticking her head through the door. "Hurry up, child. I heard the car down the road."

Hastily, Clara stepped out of the tub, dried herself, and still half-wet, slipped into her favorite dress. It was yellow with embroidered daisies around the collar, the sleeves, and the waistband. Looking at herself in the mirror, she giggled. The dress made her look even darker, but she liked it. She had no doubt that her cousin Luisito would like it, too. He was to spend the whole summer at El Rincón. She had never met him: Last summer his parents had taken him to Europe.

Upon hearing the sound of an engine, Clara rushed along the corridor to the living room just in time to see from the open window a shiny black limousine pull up the driveway. Amazed, she watched the uniformed chauffeur and a corpulent woman dressed in a white smock alight from the car. Somber faced, they unloaded an endless number of suitcases, boxes, baskets, and bird cages. Silently, they carried everything inside, disdaining Emilia's help when she ran out to give them a hand. Before they were quite done, a loud, uninterrupted honking echoed down the road. Within moments a second car, just as large, black, and shiny as the first one, pulled up.

A short fat man, dressed in a beige guayabera, a Panama hat, and dark pants stuffed into boots that creaked with newness, moved out from behind the steering wheel. Clara knew it was Raul; a very important man in the government and her grandfather's son-in-law.

"Don Luis!" Raul shouted. "I've brought your daughters; the Three Graces!"

He bowed low, almost sweeping the ground with his hat, then opened the back door of the limousine and held out his hand to help three women out of the car: the twins, Maria del Rosario and Maria del Carmen; and the youngest sister, Maria Magdalena, Raul's wife.

"Luisito," Raul called, opening the car's front door. "Let me help you with those..."

Clara, not waiting to hear the rest of his words, rushed outside. "Luisito! I've been looking forward..." She came to a dead halt.

Bewildered, Clara stared at the little boy holding on to a pair of crutches. "I didn't know you had an accident."

Glowering, Luisito looked into her dark face. "I didn't have an accident," he said matter-of-factly.

For being so slight and frail, he had a booming voice. "I had poliomyelitis," he explained, and noticing her uncomprehending expression, he added, "I'm a cripple."

"A cripple?" she repeated with a quizzical, yet calm, acceptance. "No one told me."

His little white hands and dark curls framing his pale, delicately featured face made her think of something unworldly. He reminded her of the blossoms on the apple tree. She knew him to be thirteen, a year older than she, but to look at him one would think he was seven or eight. His lips turned up at the corners, twitching, as if he had guessed her thoughts, and was suppressing his laughter.

"Oh, Luisito." She sighed with relief and bent to kiss his cheek. "You look like an angel."

"Who is she?" one of the twins asked, turning to Emilia. "Did you find someone to help you in the kitchen? Is she a relative of yours?"

"I'm Clara!" the child retorted, planting herself between the housekeeper and the aunt. "La Negra Clara, your niece!"

"My what?" the woman shrieked, grabbing Clara by the arm and shaking her.

"Negrita, Clarita," the boy cried excitedly. With the aid of only one crutch he limped toward her.

"Didn't you hear, Aunt Maria del Rosario? She's my cousin!" Taking Clara's hand, he pulled her away from his startled parents and his aunts. "Let's see what's keeping Grandfather."

Before Clara could explain that Grandfather was in town, Luisito had turned to the wide gravel path that led to the orchard behind the house. He maneuvered his crutches so swiftly and skillfully, he made her think of a monkey rather than a cripple.

"Luisito!" Maria del Rosario called after him. "You have to rest after the long, tiring drive. It's too hot to be outdoors."

"Leave him alone," Raul said, ushering the three women inside. "The fresh air will do him good."

"Where is Grandfather?" Luisito asked, easing himself to the ground under the shade of the mango tree growing by the wall.

"In town," Clara said, sitting beside him. She was glad she had not accompanied her grandfather on his rounds as usual.

She liked going with him to the barber shop, to the pharmacy where he bought the latest medicines which he never took, and to the bar where he had a glass of brandy and played a game of dominoes. But today, she wouldn't have missed Luisito's arrival for anything in the world.

"Let's surprise Grandfather. He didn't expect you until late in the afternoon," Clara suggested. "Let's go into town without telling anybody."

"I can't walk that far." Luisito lowered his head and slowly pushed his crutches away.

Clara sucked in her lower lip. "We'll make it," she declared with fierce determination. "I'll push you in the wheelbarrow. I'm good at that."

She held her hand over his lips to stop him from interrupting her. "All you have to do is slide into the wheelbarrow and sit."

She pointed to the narrow arched doorway in the wall. "I'll meet you there."

She gave him no time to voice any objections but rose and ran to the tool shed halfway down the slope.

"You see how easy it was." Clara laughed and helped him into the wheelbarrow. "No one will know where we are."

She placed the crutches on his lap, then pushed him along the wide, newly paved road, past factories, and still, empty stretches of land. Sighing heavily, she brought the wheelbarrow to an abrupt halt. The heat made the landscape waver in the distance. The shimmering light hurt her eyes. Her grandmother, although tiny and skinny, had certainly weighed more than Luisito, she thought, yet Clara didn't recall having had such a hard time pushing her about as she did now with her cousin.

"It'll take forever to get into town on this road," she declared, wiping the dust and perspiration off her face with the back of her hand. "Hold on tight, Luisito!" she cried out, steering the wheelbarrow down an empty field, green with weeds from the recent rains.

"You're a genius," the boy said laughing. "This is better than anything! You make me feel very happy; and happiness is what makes people healthy. I know it because I'm a cripple."

Excitedly, he pointed one of his crutches skyward. "Look, Clara. Look at those vultures above us. They are so powerful, so free."

He grabbed her arm. "Look at them! Look at their open black wings, how their legs stretch out beneath their tails. Look at their fierce beaks dripping blood. I'll bet you they're happy, too."

"The slaughterhouse is nearby," Clara explained.

"Push me to that pack of vultures on the ground," he begged, pointing to a place where the birds had settled like black shadows at the other side of the slaughterhouse.

"Faster, Clara!" he yelled. "Faster!"

The vultures hopped aside, then lifted lazily into the air and flew low in ever tightening circles before descending again a bit farther away. Watching his flushed face, his eyes shiny with excitement, Clara knew that she was making him happy. For a moment, her attention strayed from the uneven terrain, and she failed to maneuver the wheelbarrow around a large stone. Luisito fell forward amid a clump of tall grass. He lay so still he looked dead.

"Luisito," Clara called anxiously, kneeling beside him. He didn't respond.

Carefully, she turned him around. Blood trickled from a cut on his forehead, and the weeds had scratched his cheeks. His lids fluttered open. His eyes, round and puzzled, looked up into hers.

"You're wounded," she said. Taking his hand, she pressed it against his forehead, then showed him his bloodstained fingers.

He looked so happy, so pleased with himself that she laughed.

"Let's see if you're injured anyplace else," she said. "What about your leg?"

He sat up, then lifted his pant leg and said, "The braces are fine. If the braces ever get twisted, my father knows how to adjust them."

"But what about your leg?" she insisted. "Is it all right?"

Luisito shook his head sadly. "It will never be all right," he declared and swiftly pushed down his pants.

He explained to her what poliomyelitis was. "I've been to many doctors," he continued. "Father has taken me to the United States and to Europe, but I will always be a cripple."

He shouted the word so many times he became exhausted by his effort, and broke into a fit of coughing.

He looked at her sheepishly. "I'll go with you anywhere you want me to," he said, pressing his head against her shoulder. "Clara, are you really my cousin?"

"Do you think I'm too dark to be your cousin?" she retorted.

"No," he replied thoughtfully. "You're too nice to be my cousin. You're the only one who doesn't make fun of me or look at me with pity and disdain."

He pulled out a white handkerchief from his pocket, folded it into a triangle, then rolled it and fastened it around his forehead.

This will be the best summer I've ever had," he said happily. "Come on, cousin, let's find Grandfather."

Before opening the dining room door, Clara brushed a few loose strands of hair behind her ears: Since the aunts' arrival from Caracas, her grandfather and she no longer had breakfast in the kitchen. Maria del Rosario sat at the far end of the table, arranging flowers in a vase, tweaking them here and there with impatient gestures. Maria del Carmen, with her head buried in her missal, sat silently beside her sister. Luisito's parents, who had only stayed for a few days at El Rincón, had left for Europe.

"Good morning," Clara mumbled, taking her seat at the long mahogany table next to Luisito.

Don Luis looked up from his plate, and winked at her impishly. He was trying to provoke the twins; he went on dunking his roll in his coffee, slurping noisily: They never ate before going to mass. From over the rim of her hot-chocolate cup, Clara stole a glance at the disapproving faces of the twins. They no longer bore any resemblance to the oil paintings of the young beautiful girls hanging in the living room. With their sallow complexions, their sunken cheeks, and their dark hair pulled back in a small bun, they reminded her of the embittered nuns that taught catechism at school.

Of the two, Maria del Rosario was the most difficult. Clara felt anxious and uneasy in her presence. Maria del Rosario had the nervous eyes of a person who does not sleep; eyes of impatience and alarm; eyes that were always watching and judging. She was only agreeable when she had her own way.

One hardly noticed Maria del Carmen, on the other hand. Her heavy-lidded eyes seemed to be weighed down by some ancestral tiredness. She walked with noiseless steps and spoke in a voice so soft it seemed as though she was only moving her lips.

Maria del Rosario's sharp voice intruded on Clara's musings.

"Won't you convince Luisito that you two should go with us to mass this Sunday, Clara?" she addressed the child as if speaking to her was against her better judgment.

"No. She won't," Luisito answered for her. "We'll go in the evening, with Emilia."

Clara stuffed a fritter into her mouth to hide her smile. She knew Maria del Rosario would not insist. She hated scenes on Sunday, and there was no one like Luisito to get his way. Aside from his grandfather, Luisito never heeded anyone's advice. He used and abused the terror he inspired by his rages whenever his aunts tried to oppose his wishes; rages expressed in such frantic banging of his crutches against any object in front of him, obscene gestures, and foul language that it put the women on the verge of fainting.

"Clara, finish your breakfast," Maria del Rosario ordered. "The maid wants to clear everything away before we leave. She, too, wants to go to church."

Clara gulped down the rest of her hot chocolate and handed the cup to the tall, grave-looking woman the twins had brought with them from Caracas. She was from the Canary Islands and had taken over the running of the house. Emilia was not in the least upset, for all she had to do now was to prepare don Luis' food. He absolutely refused to eat the vegetarian dishes the aunts were so partial to.

"Not even dogs would eat this food," he would say each time they all sat down for a meal.

Clara wasn't particularly fond of vegetarian dishes either, but she thought it the height of elegance when Maria del Rosario had the chauffeur drive her each morning to the fields of the Portuguese farmers, so that she could pick the vegetables for that day's meal, and pay twice as much as Emilia would at the open market on Saturdays.

The instant Clara heard the light tap of Luisito's crutches coming down the corridor, she climbed out the window and ran halfway down the terraced slope to the mango tree growing by the wall. Unconcerned about her yellow dress getting dirty, she stretched full length on the ground, and kicked off her shoes. Unable to find a comfortable position she turned this way and that. She felt her blood hammering in her temples, in her breasts, in her thighs. It filled her with a strange desire she didn't understand. She sat up abruptly upon hearing Luisito approach.

"Why didn't you answer?" he asked, easing himself down beside her. He placed the crutches within reach and added, "They have all gone to mass, including Grandfather."

Smiling, she searched his face with tender admiration. He had a dreamy, soft-edged look, sweet, yet daring.

She wanted to tell him so many things, but she could not express any of them. "Kiss me the way they do in the movies," she demanded.

"Yes," he whispered, and that one word answered all her turmoil, that strange desire she didn't understand. "Oh, Negrito," he mumbled, burying his face in her neck. She smelled of the earth and the sun.

Her lips moved, but there was no sound. Wide-eyed, she watched him open his pants. She couldn't shift her gaze away. His face shone down on her with glowing animation: His eyes seemed to melt between his long lashes. Carefully, so his steel braces would not hurt her, he eased himself on top of her.

"We'll stay together forever," Luisito said. "I've convinced my parents that I'll be happier at El Rincón. They are going to send a tutor out here."

Clara closed her eyes. In the last three months her love for Luisito had taken on monumental proportions. Daily they lay together in the shade of the mango tree.

"Yes," she whispered. "We'll stay together forever." She wrapped her arms around him.

She didn't know what she heard first: Luisito's muffled sigh or Maria del Rosario's horrified scream.

The aunt shrieked. She moved closer and, lowering her voice, said, "Luisito, you are a disgrace to the family. What you have done is unspeakable."

Her hard, implacable eyes never wavered for an instant from the red and white blossoms hanging over the wall.

"And as for you, Clara," she went on, "your behavior comes as no surprise. No doubt you'll end up in the gutter, where you belong."

She hurried up the steps. At the top, she halted. "We'll be returning to Caracas this very day, Luis. And don't pull any of your tantrums. It won't work this time. No obscene gesture, no foul language, could be worse than what you have done."

Luisito began to cry. Clara took his pale face in her hands and wiped the tears from his lashes with her fingers. "We'll love each other forever. We'll always be together," she said, and then she let him go.

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Clara watched the evening shadows darken everything around her. Through a veil of tears she gazed up at the tree above her. The leaves, outlined against the starlit sky, took on unexpected forms, shapes she did not quite recognize. A swift breeze erased the patterns. All that remained was the sound of the wind; a desolate cry, bringing an end to the summer.

"Clara!" her grandfather called.

Torn between remorse and anxiety, she didn't answer. The light shimmering among the fruit trees didn't waver. The certainty that her grandfather would wait for her, even if it took her the whole night to answer, filled her with gratitude.

Slowly, she rose and brushed the leaves and the dampness from her dress. "Grandfather," she called softly, climbing the steps toward the light, and the love and understanding that awaited her.

"Let's look at the apple tree," don Luis said. "Perhaps it'll bloom again next summer."

## Chapter 28

Two weeks later, on a Sunday afternoon, dona Mercedes announced that she had to go to El Rincón.

"Has Clara taken ill again?" I asked, alarmed.

"No," dona Mercedes said, rising from the hammock in her bedroom. "I want to make sure she follows my instructions: She's a willful patient."

Dona Mercedes rested her hands on my shoulders. "Today, you and I will help Clara. Together we'll move the wheel of chance for her."

She turned to the blue and pink painted wardrobe that blocked the door facing the street, and fumbled with the key.

Before unlocking it, she looked back at me and said, "Gather all your clothes and put them in your jeep. Seeing that you're packed, Clara will think you are leaving for Caracas. She may decide to take advantage of the ride. In the depths of her, she knows that she will be well only if she leaves El Rincón."

I was really surprised at the scarcity of my belongings. I had brought much more, but then I remembered that I had given away most of what I had to some of Agustin's young patients.

"Clara's story is a sort of bonus to you," dona Mercedes said as she helped me put my bag in the jeep. "At least I didn't expect it. It came out of nowhere, but it's very appropriate. I encouraged you to talk to Clara and to spend time with her. Under her shadow, I'm sure you have felt the turns of the wheel of chance in her life. She's another person with a natural gift; a natural control over the witch's shadow."

Definitely, Clara was a very strong person. I felt that her emotional conflicts made her rather somber: She seemed, at least to me, always preoccupied; reflecting on something unsaid.

Dona Mercedes agreed with my assessment of Clara, and added that Clara needed our combined help.

"Let me put it this way," she said. "Clara is so strong that she has now engaged your witch's shadow and mine to move the wheel of chance for her."

"What is the meaning of that, dona Mercedes?"

"It means that you and I are going to help her leave, not so much because we're good Samaritans, but because she is forcing us to do it."

There was a strong compulsion in me to disagree with her or, rather, to set the record straight.

"Nobody is forcing me to do anything," I said.

Dona Mercedes peered at me quizzically, her glance half-pitying, half-mocking: Then she lifted my bag, and gently placed it on the back seat.

"You mean to say you wouldn't move a finger to help her?" she asked in a whisper.

"No. I didn't say that. I merely said that Clara is not forcing me at all. I'd gladly do it all by myself without her asking me."

"Ah, there is the link. Clara forces us without saying a word.

"Neither you nor I could remain impassive. In one way or another, we have been under her shadow too long."

Through the rearview mirror I could still see Candelaria, a hazy lonely figure waving farewell. She had fastened a yellow, blue, and red plastic pinwheel to the jeep's antenna. It whirled noisily in the wind.

"Do you think Candelaria wanted to come with us to Caracas?" I asked dona Mercedes.

"No," she mumbled: Dona Mercedes had already settled in her seat to doze. "Candelaria hates Caracas. She always gets a headache the moment she reaches the outskirts of the capital."

As soon as I brought the jeep to a full stop in front of El Rincón, dona Mercedes, not waiting for me to help her out, alighted from the car, and dashed into the house. Swiftly, I caught up with her, and followed her toward the swishing sound of a broom. It was Clara cleaning the patio. She looked up. She smiled but did not speak to us. She seemed to be sweeping the silence and the shadows, for there wasn't a single leaf on the ground. Dona Mercedes lit two candles on the stone ledge circling the fountain. She closed her eyes and waited for Clara to finish.

"I did all you told me to do," Clara said, sitting between the two lit candles.

Dona Mercedes did not look at her but began to sniff the air, trying to identify some elusive scent.

"Listen carefully, Clara," she said shortly. "The only thing that will keep you well is to leave this house."

"Why should I leave it?" Clara asked, alarmed. "Grandfather left it to me. He wanted me to stay here."

"He wanted you to have the house," dona Mercedes corrected her. "He did not want you to stay here. Don't you remember he said that to you before he died?"

Seemingly indifferent to Clara's mounting agitation, dona Mercedes lit a cigar. She smoked with slow, even puffs and began to massage Clara's head and shoulders. She blew the smoke around her, as if she were outlining her form against the air.

"This house is inhabited by ghosts and memories that don't belong to you, Clara," she went on. "You were only a guest in this house. You ruled this place from the moment you arrived because you had luck and strength. These two forces were disguised in you as affection and a great ease with people. But there's no one here anymore. It's time to leave. Only ghosts remain here: Ghosts and shadows that don't belong to you."

"But what can I do?" Clara asked tearfully.

"Go to Caracas!" dona Mercedes exclaimed. "Go and live with Luisito!"

"Really, dona Mercedes!" Clara retorted indignantly. "How can you suggest such a thing. It's downright indecent."

Dona Mercedes replied, "You sound like your aunts." and she regarded Clara cheerfully; then flung her head back and laughed. "Don't be an ass, Clara. What's indecent is to pretend to be prudish. Have you forgotten what you and Luisito have been doing since you were twelve years old?"

Clara remained silent, seemingly lost in thought. "I can't be rushed into a decision." She smiled, tracing the cement cracks on the ground with her toes. "I can't just leave all this."

"You can if you have guts," dona Mercedes said. "The Musiúa here is also leaving today. We will take you to Luisito."

"And what about Emilia?" Clara asked.

Dona Mercedes replied, "Emilia will be happy with your aunts.

"Your aunts have been wanting to come back to El Rincón for a long time. This place holds all their memories; all their feelings. Here, the three women can set back the clock to an ideal time that never was. The shadows of the past will dim the present, and erase their frustrations."

Dona Mercedes was silent for an instant, then she took Clara's hands in hers, perhaps to communicate the urgency of her words. "Put on your yellow dress. Yellow suits you. It'll give you strength. Change quickly. You need nothing else. When you came to El Rincón you had only one dress; you should leave the same way."

Seeing Clara's hesitation, Dona Mercedes pressed her point. "This is your last chance, girl. I've already told the Musiúa that the only way for you to keep well is to love Luisito with abandon and completeness, as you did when you were a child."

Clara's large eyes, bright with tears, closed in a hurt blink. "But I love him," she murmured. "You know that I have never loved anyone but him."

Dona Mercedes regarded her thoughtfully. "True," she admitted and, turning toward me, added, "She had dozens of rich suitors. She still does, and she still gets a malicious pleasure disappointing them. She's escaped from more sure engagements than I care to remember."

Clara's laughter rang out loud. She put her arm around dona Mercedes' shoulders and brushed her lips across her cheek.

"You always exaggerate everything," she said, her tone betraying how delighted she was. "But in spite of all my admirers, I never loved anyone but Luisito."

Dona Mercedes took her arm and guided her toward her room. "You have to love Luisito in the world the way you love him within the crumbling walls of El Rincón."

She pushed Clara inside, and said, "Go on and put on your yellow dress. We'll be waiting for you in the jeep."

Clara's description of Luisito had not prepared me for the astonishingly handsome man who greeted us at his apartment door in Caracas. I knew that he was in his late twenties, but he looked like a teenager with black curly hair, green-yellow eyes, and smooth white skin. When he smiled, his cheeks dimpled. In spite of his pronounced limp, there was nothing awkward about his movements. His engaging personality and his self-sufficient manner did not allow for pity.

Luisito was not in the least surprised to see us; and when he served us a sumptuous meal, I knew that dona Mercedes had arranged things beforehand. We stayed until late: It was an unforgettable night. I had never seen dona Mercedes in such an expansive mood. Her flawless mimicry of the people we all knew in Curmina, her knack for recalling the most absurd situations, her talent for dramatizing them, and her shameless exaggerations turned her anecdotes into memorable tales.

It was shortly before midnight when, declining Luisito's invitation to stay for the night, Mercedes Peralta rose and embraced both Clara and Luisito at the same time. Then, with her arms wide open, she approached me with an exuberant gesture of affection.

"Don't embrace me like that. You're not saying good-bye to me, too. I'm going back with you." I laughed and returned her embrace.

I reached for the ignition. Wrapped around my keys was a chain. With trembling fingers I untangled it. It was a long gold chain with a huge medal hanging from it.

"You better wear it," dona Mercedes said, looking at me. "It's Saint Christopher, the remarkable patron saint of travelers."

A sigh of contentment escaped her lips as she settled back in her seat. "You'll be well protected. After all, you're a traveler who has stopped only for a moment."

Instead of heading for Curmina, dona Mercedes directed me along specific streets; clear across town. I had the feeling we had been driving in circles, when she finally made me stop in front of an old, green colonial house.

"Who lives here?" I asked.

"My ancestors lived here," she replied. "It's their house. And I am just a leaf of an enormous tree."

She looked at me so intently she seemed to be imprinting my face in the depths of her eyes. Leaning closer, she whispered in my ear. "A witch has to have luck and strength to move the wheel of chance.

"Strength can be groomed, but luck cannot be beckoned: It cannot be enticed. Luck, independent of witchcraft or human arrangements, makes it's own choice."

She ran her fingers through my hair and over my face, feeling rather than seeing me, then added, "That's why witches are so attracted to it."

I was filled with an odd premonition. I looked at her questioningly, but she reached for her basket and pulled out a reddish brown leaf shaped like a butterfly.

"Look at it carefully," she said, handing me the leaf. "The spirits of my ancestors told me to always carry a dry leaf. I am this leaf, and I want you to throw it through that window."

She pointed to the house in front of us. "As you throw it, recite an incantation. I want to know how powerful your incantations are."

Willing to humor her, I examined the leaf from every angle, turning it over and over. I surveyed it's surface and searched it's depths.

"It's beautiful," I said.

"Throw it through the window," she repeated.

I climbed up the wrought-iron grill, pushed the heavy curtain aside, and threw the leaf inside as an incantation flowed out of me. Instead of falling to the ground, the leaf fluttered upward toward the corner by the ceiling like a moth. Alarmed, I jumped down.

Mercedes Peralta was no longer in the jeep. Certain that she had gone into the house, I knocked softly on the door.

It was open. "Dona Mercedes," I whispered and stepped inside.

The house, built around a patio and shadowy corridors, was like a silent dark cloister. Long rain gutters dropped from the dark roof, and metal rings dangled from the ancient protruding eaves. I walked to the center of the patio, toward a weeping willow shrouded in mist. Like phantom beads, the tiny silvery dew-drops on it's leaves slid soundlessly into the fountain beneath. A gust of air shook the willow tree, scattering fresh dry leaves all around me. Gripped by an irrational fear, I ran out into the street.

I sat in my jeep determined to wait for Mercedes Peralta. I reached under my seat for a box of tissue paper and felt my camera and tape recorder. Puzzled, I turned around: I had no recollection of packing anything but my clothes. To my utter astonishment, I discovered a box on the backseat. It contained my tapes and my diaries. Stuck to the box was an unsigned note. I recognized Candelaria's bold handwriting.

It read, "A witch's farewell is like dust from the road; it sinks in as one tries to slough it off."

## Epilogue

I returned to Los Angeles, and then I went to Mexico to face Florinda.

Upon hearing a detailed summary of my experiences, she found it quite extraordinary and inexplicable that my life in dona Mercedes' world began with her own handwritten note, hidden among my clothes, and ended with Candelaria's, hidden among my tapes.

Although Florinda made fun of what she called my compulsive thoroughness, she urged me to see if I could use my numerous tapes to write my dissertation.

Working with the material, I became aware that in spite of the fact that I had had no theoretical plan to organize my objectives, the events in dona Mercedes' house seemed prearranged to introduce me to spiritualists, witches, healers; and the people they deal with; and what they do in the context of their daily activities. Having followed dona Mercedes' activities in healing, and having learned to use her own system of interpretation, I sincerely believed that I had mastered, at least intellectually, the way healers see themselves, each other, and their knowledge. I was certain that my experience and the notes I had collected would suffice to write a dissertation.

However, after transcribing, translating, and analyzing my tapes and notes, I began to doubt my intellectual mastery of healing. My attempt to organize the data to fit a meaningful framework proved to be futile: My notes were ridden with inconsistencies and contradictions, and my knowledge of healing could not fill in the gaps.

Florinda then made a cynical suggestion: Either alter the data to fit my theories, or forget about the dissertation altogether. I forgot about the dissertation. Florinda has always urged that I look beneath the surface of things. In the case of my experience with dona Mercedes, she suggested that I look deeper than the possible academic value. She thought my academic bias blinded me to more important aspects. I read and reread the stories dona Mercedes had selected for me and finally understood what Florinda wanted. I realized that if I removed the academic emphasis from my own work, I would be left with a document about human values - human values definitely foreign to us, yet perfectly understandable, if we momentarily placed ourselves outside our usual frame of reference.

With those stories, dona Mercedes proposed to show me that witches, or even ordinary people, are capable of using extraordinary forces that exist in the universe to alter the course of events, or the course of their lives, or the lives of other people. The course of events, she called 'the wheel of chance,' and the process of affecting it, she called 'the witch's shadow.' She claimed that we can alter anything without directly intruding upon the process; and sometimes without even knowing that we are doing so.

For Westerners, this is an unthinkable proposition. If we find ourselves affecting the course of events without directly intruding upon them, we think of coincidence as the only serious explanation; for we believe that direct intervention is the only way of altering anything. For example, men of history affected events with complex social decisions. Or in a more reduced scope, people directly intervene through their actions in the lives of others. In contrast, the stories selected by dona Mercedes make us aware of something that we are not familiar with. The stories point to the incomprehensible possibility that without direct mediating, we can be more influential than we think in shaping the course of events.

On the whole, Florinda was satisfied with the results of my journey to Venezuela. She said that she had wanted me to get firsthand knowledge of my hidden resources. Her idea was that I had to function effectively in an environment unknown to me, and that I had to learn to adapt quickly to situations outside the boundaries of what I know, accept, and can predict. Florinda maintained that nothing could be more appropriate for bringing out those hidden resources than a confrontation with the social unknown.

My life in dona Mercedes' house, and my interaction with her patients and friends was that social unknown. I admitted to Florinda that her admonitions about the woman-warrior philosophy - which were quite incomprehensible to me at the time - actually became the basis for all my acts while I stayed with dona Mercedes.

"There are many ways of behaving when one is in a normal setting," Florinda commented, "but when one is alone, in danger, or in darkness, there is only one way: the warrior's way."

Florinda said that I had discovered the value of the warrior's way and the meaning of all it's premises. Under the impact of an unfamiliar life situation, I had found out:

…that not surrendering means freedom;

…that not feeling self-important breeds an indomitable fierceness;

…and that vanquishing moral judgments brings an all-soothing humbleness that is not servitude.

### The End - The Witch's Dream: A Healer's Way of Knowledge - © 1985 by Florinda Donner-Grau ###

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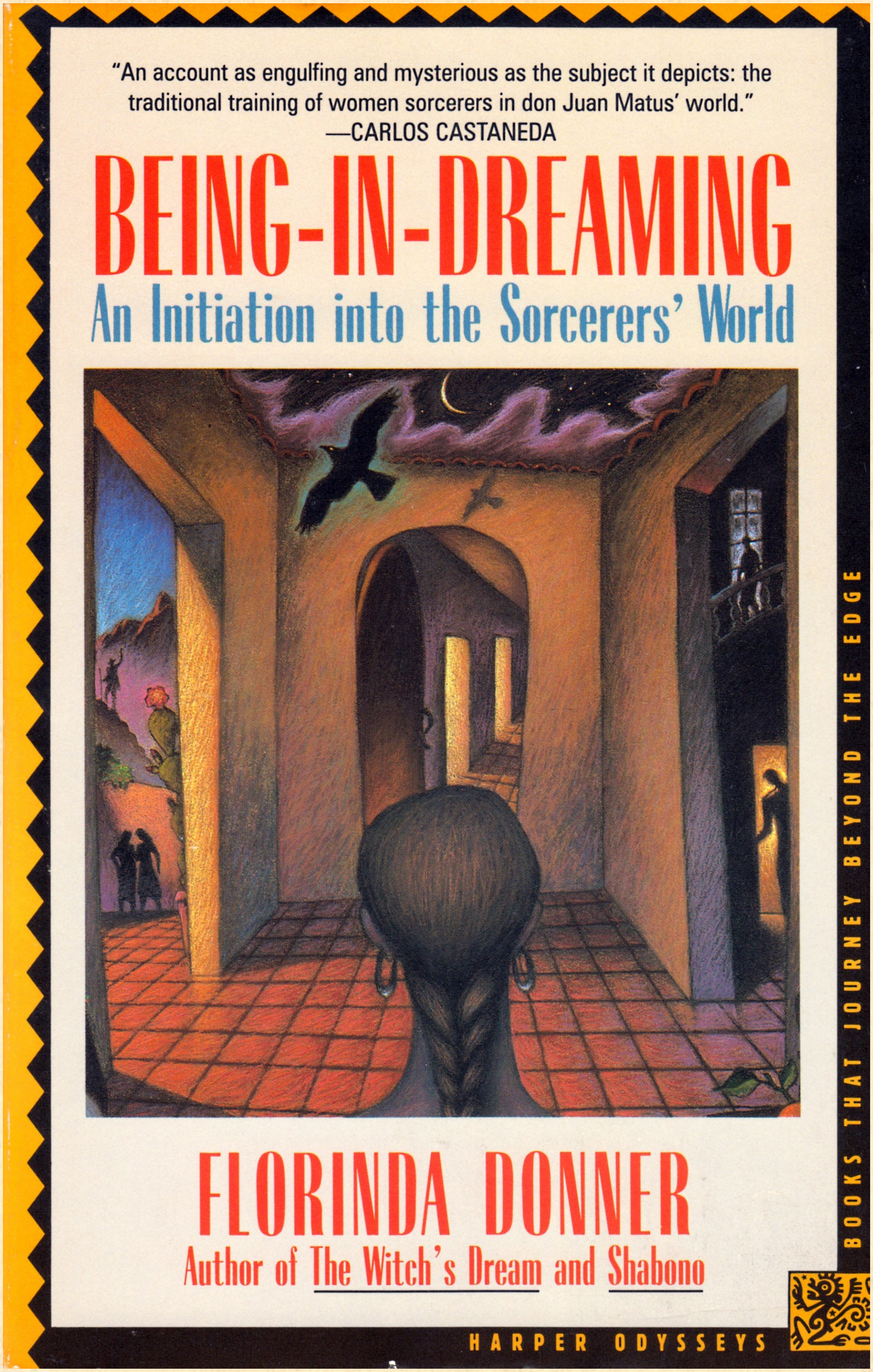
## 17 - BEING-IN-DREAMING: AN INITIATION INTO THE SORCERERS' WORLD

©1991 - Florinda Donner.  Covering some of the training Florinda received from don Juan's group of sorcerer's starting in July 1970.



"An account as engulfing and mysterious as the subject it depicts: the traditional training of women sorcerers in don Juan Matus' world."
—CARLOS CASTANEDA
BEING-IN-DREAMING
An Initiation into the Sorcerers' World
FLORINDA DONNER
Author of The Witch's Dream and Shabono
BOOKS THAT JOURNEY BEYOND THE EDGE
HARPER ODYSSEYS

# Book 17 - BEING-IN-DREAMING

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*For all those who dream sorcerers' dreams.*
*And for the few who dreamt them with me.*

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## Ser en el Ensueno (Be in the Dream) - Carlos Castaneda's preface to the Spanish edition of Being-In-Dreaming, *not included in the English Language Edition*

Florinda Donner is a disciple of don Juan Matus, a master sorcerer from the state of Sonora, Mexico, and for over twenty years, a companion of mine in that apprenticeship. Because of her natural talents, don Juan and two of his fellow sorceresses, Florinda Grau and Zuleica Abelar, gave Florinda Donner very special instruction and care. Between the three of them they trained her as a "dreamer" and led her to develop her *dreaming attention* to an extraordinary degree of control.

According to the teachings of Don Juan Matus, the sorcerers of ancient Mexico practiced two arts: the *art of stalking* and the *art of dreaming*. To practice one or the other art was decreed by the innate attitude of each practitioner of sorcery. Dreamers were those who possessed the ability to fix what sorcerers call *dreaming attention,* a special aspect of consciousness, on the elements of normal dreams. They called *stalkers* those who possessed an innate aptitude known as the *stalker's attention*, another special state of consciousness, which allows one to find the key elements of any situation in the everyday world and fix that attention on them, in order to alter them or to help them stay on course.

Through his teachings, Don Juan Matus always made it very clear that the ideas of the sorcerers of old are still valid today and that modern sorcerers still fall into these two traditional camps. Therefore, his effort as a teacher was to instill in his disciples the ideas and practices of the sorcerers of old through rigorous training and iron discipline.

The idea of the sorcerers is that by getting the *dreaming attention* fixed on the elements of normal dreams, these dreams are immediately transformed into *dreaming*. For them, *dreaming* is a unique state of consciousness; something like an open floodgate to other worlds that are real but alien to the rational mind of modern man.

The first time don Juan spoke to me about the *art of dreaming*, I asked him:

— Do you mean to say, don Juan, that a sorcerer takes his *dreams* as if they were reality?

“A sorcerer does not take anything as if it were something else," he answered. Dreams are dreams. Dreams are not something that can be taken as reality: *dreams* are a separate reality.”

— What's that all about? Explain it to me.

“You have to understand that a sorcerer is not an idiot or mentally deranged. A sorcerer has neither the time nor the disposition to deceive himself, or to deceive anyone, let alone to move falsely. What he would lose by doing so is too great. He would lose his *power*, which takes a lifetime to perfect. A sorcerer is not going to waste something worth more than his life by taking one thing for another. *Dreams* are real to a sorcerer because he can deliberately actualize them; he can choose from a variety of possibilities those that are most likely to get him where he needs to go.”

— Do you mean then that *dreams* are as real as what we are doing now?

“If you prefer comparisons, I will tell you that *Dreams* are perhaps more real. In them one has power to change the nature of things or to change the course of events. But all that is not what is important.”

— What is important then, Don Juan?

“The game of perception. To *dream* or to *stalk* means to widen the field of what can be perceived to a point inconceivable to the mind.”

In the sorcerer's view, all of us in general possess natural gifts as *dreamers* or *stalkers,* and many of us find it very easy to gain control of the attention of *dreaming* or the attention of *stalking*, and we do it so skillfully and naturally that most of the time we don't even realize we have done it. An example of this is the story of the training of Florinda Donner, who has needed whole years of grueling work, not to gain control of her dreaming attention, but to clarify her achievements as a *dreamer* and integrate them into the linear thinking of our civilization.

Florinda Donner was once asked why she wrote this book, and she replied that it was essential for her to recount her experiences in the process of confronting and developing *dreaming attention* in order to tempt, intrigue or incite, at least intellectually, those who would be interested in taking seriously the affirmations of Don Juan Matus about the limitless possibilities of perception.

Don Juan believed that in the whole world there does not exist, nor perhaps has there ever existed, any other system, except that of the sorcerers of ancient Mexico, that gives perception it's deserved pragmatic value.

CARLOS CASTANEDA

Translated with www.DeepL.com /Translator (free version)

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## Author's Note

My first contact with the sorcerers' world was not something I planned or sought out: It was rather a fortuitous event. I met a group of people in northern Mexico, in July of 1970, and they turned out to be the strict followers of a sorcerers' tradition belonging to the Indians of pre-Columbian Mexico.

That first meeting had a long-range, overpowering effect on me. It introduced me to another world that coexists with ours. I have spent twenty years of my life committed to that world. This is the account of how my involvement began, and how it was spurred and directed by the sorcerers who were responsible for my being there.

The most prominent of them was a woman named Florinda Matus. She was my mentor and guide. She was also the one who gave me her name, Florinda, as a gift of love and power.

To call them sorcerers is not my choice. Brujo or bruja, which mean sorcerer or witch, are the Spanish terms they themselves use to denote a male or a female practitioner. I have always resented the negative connotation of those words, but the sorcerers themselves put me at ease, once and for all by explaining that what is meant by sorcery is something quite abstract; the ability, which some people develop, to expand the limits of normal perception. The abstract
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quality of sorcery voids automatically, then, any positive or negative connotation of terms used to describe it's practitioners.

Expanding the limits of normal perception is a concept that stems from the sorcerers' belief that our choices in life are limited, due to the fact that they are defined by the social order. Sorcerers believe that the social order sets up our lists of options, but we do the rest: By accepting only these choices, we set a limit to our nearly limitless possibilities.

This limitation, they say, fortunately applies only to our social side and not to the other side of us; a practically inaccessible side, which is not in the realm of ordinary awareness. Their main endeavor, therefore, is to uncover that side. They do this by breaking the frail, yet resilient, shield of human assumptions about what we are and what we are capable of being.

Sorcerers acknowledge that in our world of daily affairs there are people who probe into the unknown in pursuit of alternative views of reality. The sorcerers contend that the ideal consequences of such probings should be the capacity to draw from our findings the necessary energy to change, and to detach ourselves from our definition of reality. But the sorcerers argue that unfortunately such probings are essentially mental endeavors: New thoughts and new ideas hardly ever change us.

One of the things I learned in the sorcerers' world was that without retreating from the world, and without injuring themselves in the process, sorcerers do accomplish the magnificent task of breaking the agreement that has defined reality.

## Chapter 1

On an impulse after attending the baptism of a friend's child in the city of Nogales, Arizona, I decided to cross the border into Mexico. As I was leaving my friend's house, one of her guests, a woman named Delia Flores, asked me for a ride to Hermosillo.

She was a dark-complexioned woman, perhaps in her mid-forties, of medium height and stout build. She was powerfully big, with straight black hair arranged into a thick braid. Her dark, shiny eyes highlighted a shrewd, yet slightly girlish, round face.

Certain that she was a Mexican born in Arizona, I asked her if she needed a tourist card to enter Mexico.

"Why should I need a tourist card to enter my own country?" she retorted, widening her eyes with exaggerated surprise.

"Your mannerism and speech inflection made me think you were from Arizona," I said.

"My parents were Indians from Oaxaca," she explained, "but I am a ladina."

"What's a ladina?"

"Ladinos are sharp Indians who grow up in the city," she elucidated. There was an odd excitement in her voice.

I was at a loss to understand as she added, "They take up the ways of the white man, and they are so good at it that they can fake their way into anything."

"That's nothing to be proud of," I said judgingly. "It's certainly not too complimentary to you, Mrs. Flores."

The contrite expression on her face gave way to a wide grin:

"Perhaps not to a real Indian or to a real white man," she said cheekily, "but I am perfectly satisfied with it myself."

She leaned toward me, and added, "Do call me Delia. I've the feeling we're going to be great friends."

Not knowing what to say, I concentrated on the road. We drove in silence to the check point. The guard asked for my tourist card, but didn't ask for Delia's. He didn't seem to notice her - no words or glances were exchanged between them. When I tried to talk to Delia, she forcefully stopped me with an imperious movement of her hand. Then the guard looked at me questioningly. Since I didn't say anything, he shrugged his shoulders and waved me on.

"How come the guard didn't ask for your papers?" I asked when we were some distance away.

"Oh, he knows me," she lied, and knowing that I knew she was lying, she burst into a shameless laughter.

"I think I frightened him, and he didn't dare to talk to me," she lied again. And again she laughed.

I decided to change the subject, if only to save her from escalating her lies. I began to talk about topics of current interest in the news; but mostly we drove in silence. It was not an uncomfortable or strained silence. It was like the desert around us; wide and stark, and oddly reassuring.

"Where shall I drop you?" I asked as we drove into Hermosillo.

"Downtown," she said. "I always stay in the same hotel when I'm in the city. I know the owners well, and I'm sure I can arrange for you to get the same rate I get."

I gratefully accepted her offer.

The hotel was old and run down. The room I was given opened to a dusty courtyard. A double, four-poster bed and a massive, old-fashioned dresser shrunk the room to claustrophobic dimensions. A small bathroom had been added, but a chamber pot was still under the bed: It matched the porcelain washing set on the dresser.

The first night was awful. I slept fitfully, and in my dreams I was conscious of whispers and shadows moving across the walls. Shapes of things, and monstrous animals rose from behind the furniture. People materialized from the corners; pale, ghostlike.

The next day I drove around the city and it's surroundings; and that night, although I was exhausted, I stayed awake. When I finally fell asleep into a hideous nightmare, I saw a dark, amoeba - shaped creature stalking me at the foot of the bed. Iridescent tentacles hung from it's cavernous crevices. As the creature leaned over me, it breathed, making short, raspy sounds that died out into a wheeze.

My screams were smothered by it's iridescent ropes tightening around my neck. Then all went black as the creature - which somehow I knew to be female - crushed me by lying on top of me.

That timeless moment between sleep and wakefulness was finally broken by the insistent banging on my door, and the concerned voices of the hotel guests out in the hall. I turned on the light, and mumbled some apologies and explanations through the door.

With the nightmare still sticking to my skin like sweat, I went into the bathroom. I stifled a scream as I looked into the mirror: The red lines across my throat and the evenly spaced red dots running down my chest looked like an unfinished tattoo. Frantically, I packed my bags. It was three o'clock in the morning when I walked out into the deserted lobby to pay my bill.

"Where are you going at this hour?" Delia Flores asked, emerging from the door behind the desk: "I heard about your nightmare. You had the whole hotel worried."

I was so glad to see her I put my arms around her, and began to sob.

"There, there," she murmured soothingly, stroking my hair: "If you want to, you can come and sleep in my room. I'll watch over you."

"Nothing in this world will make me stay in this hotel," I said. "I'm returning to Los Angeles this very instant."

"Do you often have nightmares?" she casually asked, leading me toward the creaky old couch in the corner.

"Off and on," I said. "I've suffered from nightmares all my life. I've gotten sort of used to them. But tonight it was different: It was the most real, the worst nightmare I've ever had."

She gave me an appraising, long look and then slowly dragging her words said, "Would you like to get rid of your nightmares?" As she spoke, she gave a half glance over her shoulder toward the door, as if afraid that someone might be listening there. "I know someone who could truly help you."

"I would like that very much," I whispered, untying the scarf around my neck to show her the red marks. I told her the explicit details of my nightmare.

I asked, "Have you ever seen anything like this?"

"Looks pretty serious," she pronounced, carefully examining the lines across my throat. "You really shouldn't leave before seeing the healer I have in mind. She lives about a hundred miles south of here; about a two-hour ride."

The possibility of seeing a healer was most welcome to me: I had been exposed to them since birth in Venezuela. Whenever I was sick, my parents called a doctor, and as soon as he left, our Venezuelan housekeeper would bundle me up and take me to a healer. As I grew older and no longer wanted to be treated by a witchdoctor - none of my friends were - she convinced me that it couldn't possibly do any harm to be twice protected. The habit was so ingrained in me that, when I moved to Los Angeles, I made sure to see a doctor as well as a healer whenever I was ill.

"Do you think she will see me today?" I asked. Seeing her uncomprehending expression, I reminded her that it was already Sunday.

"She'll see you any day," Delia assured me. "Why don't you just wait for me here, and I'll take you to her. It won't take me but a minute to get my belongings together."

"Why would you go out of your way to help me?" I asked, suddenly disconcerted by her offer. "After all, I'm a perfect stranger to you."

"Precisely!" she exclaimed, rising from the couch. She gazed down at me indulgently, as though she could sense the nagging doubts rising within me.

"What better reason could there be?" she asked rhetorically. "To help a perfect stranger is an act of folly or one of great control. Mine is one of great control."

At a loss for words, all I could do was to stare into her eyes, which seemed to accept the world with wonder and curiosity. There was something strangely reassuring about her. It was not only that I trusted her, but I felt as if I had known her all my life: I sensed a link between us; a closeness.

And yet, as I watched her disappear behind the door to get her belongings, I considered grabbing my bags and bolting for the car. I didn't want to end up in a predicament by being daring as I had so many times before. But some inexplicable curiosity held me back despite the familiar nagging feeling of alarm.

I had waited for nearly twenty minutes when a woman, wearing a red pantsuit and platform shoes, stepped out of the door behind the clerk's desk. She paused underneath the light. With a studied gesture, she threw her head back so that the curls of her blond wig shimmered in the light.

"You didn't recognize me, did you?" she laughed gleefully.

"It's really you, Delia," I exclaimed, staring at her, open-mouthed.

"What do you think?" Still cackling, she stepped out with me onto the sidewalk toward my car parked in front of the hotel.

She flung her basket and duffel bag in the back seat of my small convertible, then sat beside me.

Delia said, "The healer I'm taking you to see says that only the young and the very old can afford to look outrageous."

Before I had a chance to remind her that she was neither, she confided that she was much older than she appeared to be.

Her face was radiant as she turned toward me and exclaimed, "I wear this outfit because I like to dazzle my friends!"

Whether she meant me or the healer, she didn't say: I certainly was dazzled. It wasn't only her clothes that were different: Her whole demeanor had changed. There wasn't a trace of the aloof, circumspect woman who had traveled with me from Nogales to Hermosillo.

"This will be a most enchanting trip," she pronounced, "especially if we put the top down."

Her voice was happy and dreamy. "I adore traveling at night with the top down."

I readily obliged her. It was almost four o'clock in the morning by the time we left Hermosillo behind. The sky, soft and black and speckled with stars, seemed higher than any other sky I had ever seen. I drove fast, yet it seemed we were not moving. The gnarled silhouettes of cactus and mesquite trees appeared and disappeared endlessly under the headlights: They seemed to be all the same shape; all the same size.

"I packed us some sweet rolls and a full thermos of champurrado," Delia said, reaching for her basket in the back seat. "It'll be morning before we get to the healer's house."

She poured me half a cup of the thick hot chocolate made with cornmeal, and fed me, bite by bite, a sort of Danish roll.

"We're driving through a magical land," she said as she sipped the delicious chocolate. "A magical land populated by warring people."

"What warring people are they?" I asked, trying not to sound patronizing.

"The Yaqui people of Sonora," she said and kept quiet, perhaps measuring my reaction.

"I admire the Yaqui Indians because they have been in constant war," she continued: "The

Spaniards first; and then the Mexicans - as recently as 1934 - have felt the savagery, cunning, and relentlessness of the Yaqui warriors."

"I don't admire war or warlike people," I said. Then, by way of apologizing for my belligerent tone, I explained that I came from a German family that had been torn apart by the war.

"Your case is different," she maintained. "You don't have the ideals of freedom."

"Wait a minute!" I protested. "It is precisely because I espouse the ideals of freedom that I find war so abhorrent."

"We are talking about two different kinds of war," she insisted.

"War is war," I interjected.

"Your kind of war," she went on, ignoring my interruption, "is between two brothers who are both rulers and are fighting for supremacy."

She leaned toward me, and in an urgent whisper added, "The kind of war I'm talking about is between a slave and the master who thinks that he owns people. Do you see the difference?"

"No. I don't," I insisted stubbornly, and repeated that war is war no matter what the reason.

"I can't agree with you," she said, and sighing loudly leaned back in her seat: "Perhaps the reason for our philosophical disagreement," she continued, "is that we come from different social realities."

Astonished by her choice of words, I automatically slowed the car. I didn't mean to be rude, but to hear her spout academic concepts was so incongruous and unexpected that I couldn't help but laugh.

Delia didn't take offense: She watched me, smiling, thoroughly pleased with herself, and said, "When you get to know my point of view, you may change your mind."

She said this so seriously and yet so kindly that I felt ashamed of myself for laughing at her.

"You may even apologize for laughing at me," she added as if she had read my thoughts.

"I do apologize, Delia," I said and truly meant it. "I'm terribly sorry for my rudeness. I was so surprised by your statements that I didn't know what to do."

I glanced at her briefly, and added contritely, "So I laughed."

"I don't mean social apologies for your conduct," she said, shaking her head in disappointment. "I mean apologies for not understanding the plight of man."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said uneasily. I could feel her eyes boring through me.

"As a woman, you should understand that plight very well," she said. "You have been a slave all your life."

"What are you talking about, Delia?" I asked, irritated by her impertinence. Then I immediately calmed down, certain that the poor Indian had no doubt an insufferable, overwhelming husband. "Believe me, Delia, I'm quite free. I do as I please."

"You might do as you please, but you're not free," she persisted: "You are a woman, and that automatically means that you're at the mercy of men."

"I'm not at the mercy of anybody!" I yelled. I couldn't tell whether it was my assertion or my tone of voice that made Delia burst into loud guffaws. She laughed at me as hard as I had laughed at her before.

"You seem to be enjoying your revenge," I said, peeved. "It's your turn to laugh now, isn't it?"

Suddenly serious, she said, "It's not the same at all. You laughed at me because you felt superior. A slave that talks like a master always delights the master for a moment."

I tried to interrupt her and tell her that it hadn't even crossed my mind to think of her as a slave, or of me as a master, but she ignored my efforts. In the same solemn tone she said that the reason she had laughed at me was because I had been rendered stupid and blind to my own womanhood.

"What's with you, Delia?" I asked, puzzled. "You're deliberately insulting me."

"Certainly," she readily agreed and giggled, completely indifferent to my rising anger. She slapped my knee with a resounding whack.

"What concerns me," she went on, "is that you don't even know that by the mere fact that you're a woman you're a slave."

Mustering up all the patience I was capable of, I told Delia that she was wrong: "No one is a slave nowadays."

"Women are slaves," Delia insisted. "Men enslave women. Men befog women. Men's desire to brand women as their property befogs us," she declared: That fog hangs around our necks like a yoke."

My blank look made her smile. She lay back on the seat, clasping her hands on her chest.

"Sex befogs women," she added softly, yet emphatically: "Women are so throughly befogged that they can't consider the possibility that their low status in life is the direct end result of what is done to them sexually."

"That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard," I pronounced.

Then, rather ponderously, I went into a long diatribe about the social, economic, and political reasons for women's low status. At great length I talked about the changes that have taken place in the last decades; how women have been quite successful in their fight against male supremacy. Peeved by her mocking expression, I couldn't refrain from remarking that she was no doubt prejudiced by her own experiences; by her own perspective in time.

Delia's whole body shook with suppressed mirth. She made an effort to contain herself and said, "Nothing has really changed. Women are slaves. We've been reared to be slaves. The slaves who are educated are now busy addressing the social and political abuses committed against women. None of the slaves, though, can focus on the root of their slavery - the sexual act - unless it involves rape or is related to some other form of physical abuse."

A little smile parted her lips as she said that religious men, philosophers, and men of science have for centuries maintained, and of course still do, that men and women must follow a biological, God-given imperative having to do directly with their sexual reproductive capabilities.

"We have been conditioned to believe that sex is good for us," she stressed: "This inherent belief and acceptance has incapacitated us to ask the right question."

"And what question is that?" I asked, trying hard not to laugh at her utterly erroneous convictions.

Delia didn't seem to have heard me: She was silent for so long I thought she had dozed off.

I was startled when she said, "The question that no one dares ask is, what does it do to us women to get laid?"

"Really, Delia," I chided in mock consternation.

"Women's befogging is so total, we will focus on every other issue of our inferiority except the one that is the cause of it all," she maintained.

"But, Delia, we can't do without sex," I laughed. "What would happen to the human race if we don't..."

She checked my question and my laughter with an imperative gesture of her hand.

"Nowadays, women like yourself, in their zeal for equality, imitate men," she said: "Women imitate men to such an absurd degree that the sex they are interested in has nothing to do with reproduction. They equate freedom with sex, without ever considering what sex does to their physical and emotional well-being. We have been so thoroughly indoctrinated, we firmly believe that sex is good for us."

She nudged me with her elbow, and then, as if she were reciting a chant, she added in a sing-song tone, "Sex is good for us. It's pleasurable. It's necessary. It alleviates depression, repression, and frustration. It cures headaches, low and high blood pressure. It makes pimples disappear. It makes your tits and ass grow. It regulates your menstrual cycle. In short, it's fantastic! It's good for women. Everyone says so. Everyone recommends it."

She paused for an instant, and then pronounced with dramatic finality, "A fuck a day keeps the doctor away."

I found her statements terribly funny, but then I sobered abruptly as I remembered how my family and friends, including our family doctor, had suggested - not so crudely to be sure - sex as a cure for all the adolescent ailments I had had growing up in a strictly repressive environment. The doctor had said that once I was married, I would have regular menstrual cycles. I would gain weight. I would sleep better. I would be sweet tempered.

"I don't see anything wrong with wanting sex and love," I said defensively: "Whatever I've experienced of it, I have liked very much. And no one befogs me. I'm free! I choose whom I want and when I want it."

There was a spark of glee in Delia's dark eyes when she said, "Choosing your partner does in no way alter the fact that you're being fucked."

Then with a smile, as if to mitigate the harshness of her tone, she added, "To equate freedom with sex is the ultimate irony: Men's befogging is so complete, so total, it has zapped us of the needed energy and imagination to focus on the real cause of our enslavement."

She stressed, "To want a man sexually or to fall in love with one romantically are the only two choices given to the slaves. And all the things we have been told about these two choices are nothing but excuses that pull us into complicity and ignorance."

I was indignant with her. I couldn't help but think that she was some kind of repressed, man - hating shrew.

"Why do you dislike men so much, Delia?" I asked in my most cynical tone.

"I don't dislike them," she assured me: "What I passionately object to is our reluctance to examine how thoroughly indoctrinated we are. The pressure put upon us is so fierce and self - righteous that we have become willing accomplices. Whoever dares to differ is dismissed and mocked as a man - hater or as a freak."

Blushing, I glanced at her surreptitiously. I decided that she could talk so disparagingly about sex and love because she was, after all, old: Physical desires were all behind her.

Chuckling softly, Delia put her hands behind her head:

"My physical desires are not behind me because I'm old," she confided, "but because I've been given a chance to use my energy and imagination to become something different than the slave I was raised to be."

I felt thoroughly insulted rather than surprised that she had read my thoughts. I began to defend myself, but my words only triggered more laughter. As soon as she stopped, she turned toward me. Her face was as stern and serious as that of a teacher about to scold a pupil.

"If you are not a slave, how come they reared you to be a Hansfrau?" she asked. "And how come all you think about is to heiraten, and about your future Herr Gemahl who will Dich mitnehmen?"

I laughed so hard at her use of German I had to stop the car lest we have an accident. More interested in finding out where she had learned German so well, I forgot to defend myself from her unflattering remarks that all I wanted in life was to find a husband who would whisk me away. Regardless of how hard I pleaded, however, she disdainfully ignored my interest in her German.

"You and I will have plenty of time to talk about my German later," she assured me. She regarded me mockingly and added, "Or about your being a slave."

Before I had a chance to retort, she suggested that we talk about something impersonal.

"Like what?" I asked, starting the car again. Adjusting the seat in an almost reclining position, Delia closed her eyes.

"Let me tell you something about the four most famous leaders of the Yaquis," she said softly: "I'm interested in leaders; in their successes or their failures."

Before I had a chance to grumble that I really wasn't that interested in war stories, Delia said that Calixto Muni was the first Yaqui leader who had attracted her attention. She wasn't a gifted storyteller: Her account was straightforward, almost academic, yet I was hanging on her every word.

Calixto Muni had been an Indian who had sailed for years under the pirates' flag in the Caribbean. On his return to his native Sonora, he led a military uprising against the Spaniards in the 1730s. Betrayed, he was captured and executed by the Spaniards.

Then Delia gave me a long and sophisticated elucidation of how during the 1820s, after the Mexican independence was achieved and the Mexican government attempted to parcel out the Yaqui lands, a resistance movement turned into a widespread uprising. It was Juan Bandera, she said, who, guided by the spirit itself, organized military units among the Yaquis. Often armed only with bows and arrows, Bandera's warriors fought the Mexican troops for nearly ten years. In 1832, Juan Bandera was defeated and executed.

Delia said that the next leader of renown was Jose Maria Leyva, better known as Cajeme - the one who doesn't drink. He was a Yaqui from Hermosillo. He was educated, and had acquired vast military skills fighting in the Mexican army. Thanks to those skills, he unified all the Yaqui towns. From his first uprising in the 1870s, Cajeme kept his army in an active state of revolt.

He was defeated by the Mexican army in 1887 in Buatachive; a fortified mountain stronghold. Although Cajeme managed to escape and hide in Guaymas, he was eventually betrayed and executed. The last of the great Yaqui heroes was Juan Maldonado, also known as Tetabiaterolling stone. He reorganized the remnants of the Yaqui forces in the Bacatete Mountains from which he waged ferocious and desperate guerrilla warfare against Mexican troops for more than ten years.

"By the turn of the century," Delia wrapped up her stories, "the dictator Porfirio Diaz had inaugurated a campaign of Yaqui extermination. Indians were shot down as they worked in the fields. Thousands were rounded up and shipped to Yucatan to work in the henequen plantations, and to Oaxaca to work in the sugar cane fields."

I was impressed by her knowledge, but I still couldn't figure out why she had told me all this.

I said admiringly, "You sound like a scholar; a historian in the Yaqui way of life. Who are you really?"

For an instant she seemed to be taken aback by my question, which was purely rhetorical, then she quickly recovered and said, "I've told you who I am. I just happen to know a great deal about the Yaquis. I live around them, you know."

She was silent for a moment, then nodded as if she had reached some conclusion and added, "The reason I've told you about the Yaqui leaders is because it is up to us women to know the strength and the weakness of the leader."

"Why?" I asked, puzzled. "Who cares about leaders? They are all nincompoops as far as I'm concerned."

Delia scratched her head under the wig, then sneezed repeatedly and said with a hesitant smile, "Unfortunately, women must rally around men, lest women want to lead themselves."

"Whom are they going to lead?" I asked sarcastically.

She looked at me, astonished, then rubbed her upper arm; the gesture, like her face, girlish.

"It's quite difficult to explain," she murmured. A peculiar softness had entered her voice; part tenderness, part indecision, part lack of interest: "I'd better not. I might lose you completely. All I can say, for the time being, is that I'm neither a scholar nor a historian. I'm a storyteller, and I haven't told you the most important part of my tale yet."

"And what might that be?" I asked, intrigued by her desire to change the subject.

"All I've given you so far is factual information," she said. "What I haven't mentioned is the world of magic from which those Yaqui leaders operated. To them, the actions of wind and shadows, and of animals and plants were as important as the doings of men. That's the part that interests me the most."

"The actions of wind and shadows, and of animals and plants?" I repeated mockingly.

Unperturbed by my tone, Delia nodded. She pushed herself up in the seat, pulled off the blond curly wig and let the wind blow through her straight black hair.

"Those are the Bacatete Mountains," she said, pointing to the mountains to the left of us, barely outlined against the semidarkness of the dawn sky.

"Is that where we are going?" I asked.

"Not this time," she said, sliding down into her seat again.

A cryptic smile played around her lips as she half turned toward me.

"Perhaps one day you'll have a chance to visit those mountains," she mused, closing her eyes. "The Bacatetes are inhabited by creatures of another world; of another time."

"Creatures of another world, of another time?" I echoed her in mock seriousness. "Who or what are they?"

"Creatures," she said vaguely. "Creatures that don't belong to our time, to our world."

"Now, now, Delia. Are you trying to scare me?" I couldn't help laughing as I turned to glance at her.

Even in the dark, her face shone. She looked extraordinarily young, the skin molded without wrinkles over curving cheeks, chin, and nose.

"No. I'm not trying to scare you," she said matter-of-factly, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. "I'm simply telling you what is common knowledge around here."

"Interesting. And what kind of creatures are they?" I inquired, biting my lip to suppress my giggles. "And have you seen them?"

"Of course I've seen them," she said indulgently. "I wouldn't be talking about them if I hadn't."

She smiled sweetly, without a trace of resentment. "They are beings that populated the earth at another time and now have retreated to isolated spots."

At first I couldn't help laughing out loud at her gullibility. And then, seeing how serious and how convinced she was that these creatures indeed existed, I decided that rather than make fun of her I should accept her credulousness. [*credulousness - tendency to believe too readily and therefore to be easily deceived] After all, she was taking me to a healer, and I didn't want to antagonize her with my rational probes.

"Are those creatures the ghosts of the Yaqui warriors who lost their lives in battle?" I asked.

She shook her head negatively, then, as if afraid someone might overhear, she leaned closer and whispered in my ear, "It's a well - known fact that those mountains are inhabited by enchanted creatures: birds that speak, bushes that sing, stones that dance. Creatures that can take any form at will."

She sat back and regarded me expectantly. "The Yaquis call these beings surem. They believe that the surem are ancient Yaquis who refused to be baptized by the first Jesuits who came to Christianize the Indians."

She patted my arm affectionately. "Watch out. They say that the surem like blond women."

She cackled with delight. "Maybe that's what your nightmare was all about. A surem trying to steal you."

"You don't really believe what you're saying, do you?" I asked derisively, unable to keep my annoyance in check.

"No. I've just made up that the surem like blonds," she said soothingly. "They don't like blonds at all."

Although I didn't turn to glance at her, I could feel her smile and the humorous twinkle in her eyes. It irked me to no end. I thought her to be either very candid, very coy, or, even worse, very mad.

"You don't believe that creatures from another world really exist, do you?" I snapped ill-humoredly. Then, afraid I had offended her, I glanced at her with a word of half-anxious apology ready. But before I could say anything, she answered in the same loud, ill-tempered tone of voice I had used.

"Of course I believe they exist. Why shouldn't they exist?"

"They just don't!" I snapped sharply and authoritatively, then quickly apologized.

I told her about my pragmatic upbringing and how my father had guided me to realize that the monsters in my dreams, and the playmates I had as a child - invisible to everyone, but me, of course - were nothing but the product of an overactive imagination.

"From an early age I was reared to be objective and to qualify everything," I stressed. "In my world, there are only facts."

"That's the problem with people," Delia remarked. "They are so reasonable that just hearing about it lowers my vitality."

"In my world," I continued, ignoring her comment, "there are no facts anywhere about creatures from another world, but only speculations and wishful thinking, and," I emphasized, "fantasies of disturbed minds."

"You can't be that dense!" she cried out delightedly in between fits of laughter, as if my explanation had surpassed all her expectations.

"Can it be proven that those creatures exist?" I challenged.

"What would the proof consist of?" she inquired with an air of obvious false diffidence.
[*diffidence - lack of self-confidence]

"If someone else can see them, that would be a proof," I said.

"You mean that if, for instance, you can see them, that'll be proof of their existence?" she inquired, bringing her head close to mine.

"We can certainly begin there."

Sighing, Delia leaned her head against the backrest of her seat and closed her eyes. She was silent for such a long time I was certain she had fallen asleep, and I was thus startled when she sat up abruptly and urged me to pull over to the side of the road. She had to relieve herself, she said.

To take advantage of our stop, I, too, went into the bushes.

As I was about to pull up my jeans, I heard a loud male voice say, "How delicious!" and sigh just behind me. With my jeans still unzipped I dashed to where Delia was.

"We'd better get out of here fast!" I cried out. "There is a man hiding in the bushes."

"Nonsense," she brushed my words aside. "The only thing behind the bushes is a donkey."

"Donkeys don't sigh like lecherous men," I pointed out, then I repeated what I had heard the man say.

Delia collapsed into helpless laughter, then seeing how distressed I was, she held up her hand in a conciliatory gesture. "Did you actually see the man?"

"I didn't have to," I retorted. "It was enough to hear him."

She lingered for a moment longer, then headed toward the car. Right before we climbed up the embankment to the road, she stopped abruptly and, turning toward me, whispered, "Something quite mysterious has happened. I must make you aware of it."

She led me by the hand back to the spot where I had squatted, and right there, behind the bushes, I saw a donkey.

"It wasn't there before," I insisted.

Delia regarded me with apparent pleasure, then shrugged her shoulders and turned to the animal.

"Little donkey," she cooed in a baby voice, "did you look at her butt?"

She's a ventriloquist, I thought: She's going to make the beast talk. However, all the donkey did was to bray loudly and repeatedly.

"Let's get out of here," I pleaded, tugging at her sleeve. "It must have been the owner who's lurking in the bushes."

"But this little darling has no owner," she cooed in that same silly baby voice, and scratched the animal's soft, long ears.

"It certainly has an owner," I snapped. "Can't you see how well fed and groomed it is?"

In a voice that was getting hoarse with nervousness and impatience, I stressed again how dangerous it was for two women to be out alone on a deserted road in Sonora.

Delia regarded me silently, seemingly preoccupied. Then she nodded as if in agreement and motioned me to follow her. The donkey walked close behind me, nudging my buttocks repeatedly with it's muzzle. Mumbling an imprecation, I turned around, but the donkey was gone.

"Delia!" I cried out in sudden fright. "What happened to the donkey?"

Startled by my cry, a flock of birds rose in raucous flight. The birds circled around us, then flew east toward that fragile crack in the sky that marked the end of the night and the start of the day.

"Where is the donkey?" I asked again in a barely audible whisper.

"Right here in front of you," she said softly, pointing to a gnarled, leafless tree.

"I can't see it."

"You need glasses."

"There is nothing wrong with my eyes," I said tartly. "I can even see the lovely flowers on the tree."

Astonished at the beauty of the glowing, snow - white morning glory - shaped blossoms, I moved closer. "What kind of a tree is it?"

"Palo Santo."

For one bewildering second I thought that the donkey, which was emerging from behind the satiny, silver-gray trunk, had spoken. I turned to look at Delia.

"Palo Santo!" she laughed.

Then the thought crossed my mind that Delia was playing a joke on me. The donkey probably belonged to the healer, who, no doubt, lived nearby.

"What's so funny?" Delia asked, catching the all - knowing smirk on my face.

"I've got a most horrible cramp," I lied.

Holding my hands against my stomach I squatted, and said, "Please wait for me in the car."

The instant she turned to go, I took off my scarf and tied it around the donkey's neck. I enjoyed anticipating Delia's surprise upon discovering, once we were at the healer's place, that I had known about her joke all along. However, any hope of seeing the donkey or my scarf again were soon dashed. It took us almost two more hours to reach the healer's house.

## Chapter 2

It was around eight o'clock in the morning when we arrived at the healer's house in the outskirts of Ciudad Obregon. It was a massive old house with whitewashed walls and a tile roof, gray with age. It had wrought - iron windows and an arched doorway.

The heavy door to the street was wide open. With the confidence of someone familiar with her surroundings, Delia Flores led me across the dark hall, down a long corridor, toward the back, to a sparsely furnished room with a narrow bed, a table, and several chairs. What was most unusual about the room was that it had a door in each of the four walls: They were all closed.

"Wait here," Delia ordered me, and pointing with her chin toward the bed she said, "Take a little nap while I get the healer. It might take me some time," she added, closing the door behind her.

I waited for her footsteps to fade down the corridor before I inspected the most unlikely healing room I had ever seen. The whitewashed walls were bare. The light brown tiles of the floor shone like a mirror. There was no altar, no images or figurines of saints, the Virgin, or Jesus, which I had always assumed were customary in healing rooms. I poked my head through all four doors. Two opened into dark corridors. The other two led to a yard enclosed by a high fence.

As I was tiptoeing down a dark corridor, toward another room, I heard a low, menacing snarl behind me. Slowly, I turned around. Barely two feet away there stood an enormous, ferocious - looking black dog. It didn't attack me but stood it's ground growling, showing it's fangs. Without directly meeting the animal's eyes, yet not letting it out of my sight, I walked backward to the healing room.

The dog followed me all the way to the door. I closed the door softly, right on the beast's nose, and leaned against the wall until my heartbeat was back to normal. Then I lay down on the bed, and after a few moments - without the slightest intention of doing so - I fell into a deep sleep.

I was roused by a soft touch on my shoulder. I opened my eyes and looked up into an old woman's wrinkled pink face.

"You're dreaming," she said. "And I'm part of your dream."

Automatically, I nodded in agreement. However, I wasn't convinced that I was dreaming. The woman was extraordinarily small. She wasn't a midget or a dwarf: Rather, she was the size of a child, with skinny arms and narrow, fragile - looking shoulders.

"Are you the healer?" I asked.

"I'm Esperanza," she said. "I'm the one who brings dreams."

Her voice was smooth and unusually low. It had a curious, exotic quality, as though Spanish - which she spoke fluently - was a language to which the muscles of her upper lip were not accustomed. Gradually, the sound of her voice rose until it became a disembodied force filling the room. The sound made me think of running water in the depths of a cave.

"She's not a woman," I mumbled to myself. "She's the sound of darkness."

"I'll remove the cause of your nightmares now," she said, fixing me with an imperious gaze as her fingers closed lightly around my neck: "I'll get them out, one by one," she promised.

Her hands moved across my chest like a soft wave. She smiled triumphantly, then motioned me to examine her opened palms. "See? They came out so easily."

She was gazing at me with an expression of such accomplishment and wonder, I couldn't bring myself to tell her that I didn't see anything in her hands.

Certain that the healing session was over, I thanked her and sat up. She shook her head in a gesture of reproach and gently pushed me back on the bed.

"You're asleep," she reminded me. "I'm the one who brings dreams, remember?"

I would have loved to insist that I was wide awake, but all I managed to do was to grin foolishly as sleep pulled me into a comforting slumber.

Laughter and whispers crowded around me like shadows. I fought to wake myself. It took a great effort to open my eyes and sit up, and look at the people gathered around the table. The peculiar dimness in the room made it difficult to see them clearly. Delia was among them. I was about to call out her name when an insistent scratching sound behind me made me turn around.

A man, precariously squatting on a high stool, was noisily shelling peanuts. At first sight he seemed to be a young man, but somehow I knew him to be old. He was slight of body, with a smooth, beardless face. His smile was a mixture of cunning and innocence.

"Want some?" he asked.

Before I could so much as nod, my mouth dropped open. All I could do was stare at him as he shifted his weight to one hand and effortlessly lifted his small, wiry body into a handstand. From that position he threw a peanut at me, and it went straight into my gaping mouth.

I choked on it. A sharp tap between my shoulder blades immediately restored my breathing. Grateful, I turned, wondering who among the people, who were all standing by me now, had reacted so swiftly.

"I'm Mariano Aureliano," said the man who had tapped my back.

He shook my hand. His gentle tone and the charming formality of his gesture mitigated the fierce expression in his eyes and the severity of his aquiline features: The upward slant of his dark brows made him look like a bird of prey. His white hair and his weathered, copperish face bespoke age, but his muscular body exuded the vitality of youth.

There were six women in the group, including Delia. All of them shook my hand in that same eloquent formality. They didn't tell me their names: They simply said that they were glad to meet me. Physically, they didn't resemble each other, and yet there was a striking alikeness about them; a contradictory blend of youth and age, a blend of strength and delicacy that was most baffling to me, accustomed as I was to the roughness and directness of my male - oriented, patriarchal, German family.

Just as with Mariano Aureliano and the acrobat on the stool, I could not tell the women's ages. They could have been as much in their forties as in their sixties.

I experienced a fleeting anxiety as the women kept staring at me. I had the distinct impression they could see inside me and were reflecting on what they saw. The amused, contemplative smiles on their faces did little to reassure me. Anxious to break that disturbing silence in any way I could, I turned away from them and faced the man on the stool. I asked him if he was an acrobat.

"I'm Mr. Flores," he said. He did a back flip from the stool and landed in a cross-legged position on the floor. "I'm not an acrobat," he pronounced. "I'm a wizard."

There was a smile of unmistakable glee on his face as he reached into his pocket and pulled out my silk scarf; the one I had tied around the donkey's neck.

"I know who you are. You're her husband!" I exclaimed, pointing an accusing finger at Delia. "You two sure played a clever trick on me."

Mr. Flores didn't say a word. He simply gazed at me in polite silence. "I'm nobody's husband," he finally pronounced, then cartwheeled out of the room through one of the doors that led to the yard.

On an impulse, I jumped off the bed and went after him. Blinded momentarily by the brightness outside, I stood for a few seconds dazed by the glare, then crossed the yard and ran down the side of a dirt road into a recently ploughed field partitioned off by tall eucalyptus trees. It was hot. The sun bore down like flames. The furrows shimmered in the heat like effervescent giant snakes.

"Mr. Flores," I called out. There was no answer. Certain that he was hiding behind one of the trees, I crossed the field in a run.

"Watch those bare feet!" warned a voice coming from above me.

Startled, I looked up, straight into Mr. Flores' upside - down face. He was hanging from a branch, dangling from his legs.

"It's dangerous and utterly foolish to run about without shoes," he admonished sternly, swinging back and forth like a trapeze artist: "This place is infested with rattlesnakes. You'd better join me up here. It's safe and cool."

Knowing that the branches were far too high to reach, I nonetheless held up my arms with childish trust. Before I realized what he intended to do, Mr. Flores had grabbed my wrists and whisked me up into the tree with no more effort than if I had been a rag doll. Dazzled, I sat beside him staring at the rustling leaves: They glimmered in the sunlight like slivers of gold.

"Do you hear what the wind is telling you?" Mr. Flores asked after a long silence. He moved his head this way and that so I could fully appreciate the astounding manner in which he wiggled his ears.

"Zamurito!" I exclaimed in a whisper as memories flooded my mind. 'Zamurito', little buzzard, was the nickname of a childhood friend from Venezuela. Mr. Flores had the same delicate, birdlike features, jet-black hair, and mustard-colored eyes. And most astounding, he, like Zamurito, could wiggle his ears one at a time or both together.

I told Mr. Flores about my friend, whom I had known since kindergarten. In the second grade, we had shared a desk. During the long midday recess, instead of eating our lunch at the school grounds, we used to sneak outside and climb to the top of a nearby hill to eat in the shade of what we believed was the largest mango tree in the world. It's lowest branches touched the ground: It's highest swept the clouds. In the fruit season, we used to gorge ourselves on mangoes.

The hilltop was our favorite place until the day we found the body of the school janitor hanging from a high branch. We didn't dare to move or to cry: Neither of us wanted to lose face in front of the other. We didn't climb up the branches that day but tried to eat our lunch on the ground, practically under the dead man, wondering which of us would break down first. It was I who did.

Zamurito had asked me in a whisper, "Have you ever thought of dying?"

I had looked up at the hanged man. At that same instant the wind had rustled through the branches with an unfamiliar insistence. In the rustle I had distinctly heard the dead man whispering to me that death was soothing. It was so uncanny that I got up and ran away screaming, indifferent to what Zamurito might have thought of me.

"The wind made those branches and leaves speak to you," Mr. Flores said as I finished my story.

His voice was soft and low. His golden eyes shone with a feverish light as he went on to explain that at the moment of his death, in one instantaneous flash, the old janitor's memories, feelings, and emotions were released and absorbed by the mango tree.

"The wind made those branches and leaves speak to you," Mr. Flores repeated. "For the wind is yours by right."

Dreamily, he glanced through the leaves, his eyes searching beyond the field stretching away in the sun.

"Being a woman enables you to command the wind," he went on. "Women don't know it, but they can have a dialogue with the wind any time."

I shook my head uncomprehendingly. "I really don't know what you're talking about," I said, my tone betraying my mounting unease: "This is like a dream. If it wouldn't be that it goes on and on, I'd swear it was one of my nightmares."

His prolonged silence annoyed me. I could feel my face flush with irritation. What am I doing here, sitting in a tree with a crazy old man? I pondered. And at the same time I was apprehensive that I may have offended him. I opted for apologizing for my bluntness.

"I realize that my words don't make much sense to you," he admitted. "That's because there is too much crust on you. It prevents you from hearing what the wind has to say."

"Too much crust?" I asked, puzzled and suspicious. "Do you mean that I'm dirty?"

"That, too," he said, and made me blush. He smiled and repeated that I was enveloped by too thick a crust and that this crust couldn't be washed away with soap and water, regardless of how many baths I took.

"You are filled with judgments," he explained. "They prevent you from understanding what I'm telling you and that the wind is yours to command."

He regarded me with narrowed, critical eyes.

"Well?" he demanded impatiently. Before I knew what was happening he had taken hold of my hands and in one swift, fluid motion had swung me around and gently dropped me to the ground. I thought I saw his arms and legs stretch like rubber bands. It was a fleeting image, which I immediately explained to myself as a perceptual distortion caused by the heat. I didn't dwell upon it, for at that precise moment I was distracted by the sight of Delia Flores and her friends spreading a large canvas cloth under the next tree.

"When did you get here?" I asked Delia, baffled that I had failed to see or hear the group approach.

"We are going to have a picnic in your honor," she said.

"Because you joined us today," one of the women added.

"How did I join you?" I asked, ill at ease.

I had failed to see who had spoken. I gazed from one to the other, expecting one of them to explain the statement.

Indifferent to my growing unease, the women busied themselves with the canvas cloth, making sure it was spread out smoothly. The longer I watched them, the more concerned I became. It was all so strange to me. I could easily explain why I had accepted Delia's invitation to see a healer, but I couldn't understand at all my subsequent actions. It was as if someone else had taken over my rational faculties and was making me stay there and react and say things I didn't mean to. And now they were going to have a celebration in my honor. It was disconcerting to say the least. No matter how hard I thought about it, I couldn't figure out what I was doing there.

"I certainly haven't merited any of this," I mumbled, my Germanic upbringing getting the better of me. "People don't just do things for others for the hell of it."

Only upon hearing Mariano Aureliano's exuberant laughter did I realize that all of them were staring at me.

"There's no reason to ponder so heavily what's happening to you today," he said, tapping me softly on the shoulder. "We're having a picnic because we like to do things on the spur of the moment. And since you have been healed by Esperanza today, my friends here like to say the picnic is in your honor."

He spoke casually, almost indifferently, as if he were talking of some trifling matter. But his eyes said something else: They were hard and serious as though it were vital I listen to him carefully.

"It's a joy for my friends to say that the picnic is in your honor," he continued. "Accept it, just as they say it, in simplicity and without premeditation."

His eyes became soft as he gazed at the women, then he turned to me and added, "The picnic is not in your honor at all, I assure you. And yet," he mused, "it is in your honor. It's a contradiction that will take you quite some time to understand."

"I didn't ask anyone to do anything for me," I said sullenly. I had become inordinately ponderous, the way I always have been when threatened:

"Delia brought me here, and I am thankful." I felt then compelled to add, "And I would like to pay for any services rendered to me."

I was certain I had offended them, and I knew that any minute now I would be asked to leave. Other than hurting my ego, it wouldn't have bothered me much. I was frightened, and I had had enough of them.

To my surprise and annoyance, they didn't take me seriously. They laughed at me, and the angrier I became, the greater their mirth. Their shiny, laughing eyes were fixed on me, as if I were an unknown organism.

Wrath made me forget my fear. I lashed out at them, accusing them of taking me for a fool. I charged that Delia and her husband - I didn't know why I insisted on pairing them together - had played a disgusting joke on me.

"You brought me here," I said, turning to Delia, "so you and your friends can use me as your clown."

The more I ranted, the more they laughed. I was about to weep with self-pity, anger, and frustration when Mariano Aureliano came to stand beside me. He began to talk to me as if I were a child. I wanted to tell him that I could take care of myself, that I didn't need his sympathy, and that I was going home, when something in his tone and in his eyes appeased me so thoroughly that I was certain he had hypnotized me. And yet, I knew he hadn't.

What was so unknown and disturbing to me was the suddenness and completeness of my change. What would have ordinarily taken days had happened in an instant: All my life I had indulged in brooding over every indignity or affront - real or imagined - I had suffered. With systematic thoroughness, I would mull them over until every detail was explained to my satisfaction.

As I looked at Mariano Aureliano, I felt like laughing at my earlier outburst. I could hardly remember what it was that had infuriated me to the point of tears.

Delia pulled me by the arm and asked me to help the other women unpack the china plates, crystal goblets, and ornate silverware from the various baskets they had brought. The women didn't talk to me or to each other. Only little sighs of pleasure escaped their lips as Mariano Aureliano opened the serving dishes: There were tamales, enchiladas, a hot chili stew, and hand-made tortillas - not flour tortillas as was customary in northern Mexico and which I didn't much care for, but corn tortillas.

Delia handed me a plate with a little bit of everything on it.

I ate so greedily I was finished before anyone else. "This is the most delicious food I've ever tasted," I gushed, hoping for seconds.

No one offered them. To hide my disappointment, I commented on the beauty of the antique lace trim around the canvas cloth we were sitting on.

"I did that," the woman sitting on Mariano Aureliano's left said.

She was old-looking, with disheveled gray hair that hid her face. In spite of the heat, she wore a long skirt, a blouse, and a sweater.

"It's authentic Belgian lace," she explained to me in a gentle, dreamy voice. Her long slender hands, glinting with exquisite jeweled rings, lingered lovingly on the broad trim. In great detail, she told me about her handiwork, showing me the kinds of stitches and threads she had used to sew on the trim. Occasionally, I caught a fleeting glimpse of her face through all that mass of hair, but I couldn't tell what she looked like.

"It's authentic Belgian lace," she repeated. "It's part of my trousseau."

She picked up a crystal goblet, took a sip of water and added, "These, too, are part of my trousseau: They're Baccarat."

I didn't doubt that they were. The lovely plates - each one was different - were of the finest porcelain. I was wondering whether a discreet peek under mine would pass unnoticed, when the woman sitting to Mariano Aureliano's right encouraged me to do so:

"Don't be shy. Take a look," she urged me. "You're among friends."

Grinning, she lifted her own plate. "Limoges," she pronounced, then lifted mine briefly and noted that it was a Rosenthal.

The woman had childlike, delicate features. She was small, with round, thickly lashed black eyes. Her hair was black, except for the crown of her head, which had turned white, and was combed back into a tight little chignon. There was a force, an edge to her that was quite chilling as she besieged me with direct, personal questions.

I didn't mind her inquisitor's tone. I was accustomed to being bombarded with questions by my father and brothers when I went on a date or embarked on any kind of activity on my own. I had resented it, but it was the normal interaction at home: Thus, I never learned how to converse. Conversation for me was parrying verbal attacks, and defending myself at any cost.

I was surprised when this woman's coercive interrogation didn't immediately make me feel like defending myself.

"Are you married?" the woman asked.

"No," I said softly but firmly, wishing that she would change the subject.

"Do you have a man?" she insisted.

"No. I don't," I retorted, beginning to feel the stirring of my old defensive self.

"Is there a type of man you're partial to?" she went on. "Are there any personality traits you prefer in a man?"

For an instant I wondered whether she was making fun of me, but she seemed to be genuinely interested, as did her companions. Their curious, anticipating faces put me at ease. Forgetting my belligerent nature and that these women might be old enough to be my grandmothers, I spoke to them as if they were friends my age and we were discussing men.

"He has to be tall and handsome," I began. "He has to have a sense of humor. He has to be sensitive without being wishy-washy. He has to be intelligent without being an intellectual."

I lowered my voice and in a confidential tone added, "My father used to say that intellectual men are weak to the core, and traitors - all of them. I think I agree with my father."

"That's all you want in a man?" the woman inquired.

"No," I hastened to say. "Above all, the man of my dreams has to be athletic."

"Like your father," one of the women interjected.

"Naturally," I said defensively. "My father was a great athlete; a fabulous skier and swimmer."

"Do you get along with him?" she asked.

"Marvelously," I enthused. "I adore him. Just the thought of him brings tears to my eyes."

"Why aren't you with him?"

"I'm too much like him," I explained. "There is something in me that I can't quite understand or control that pulls me away."

"What about your mother?"

"My mother." I sighed and paused for a moment to find the best words to describe her: "She's very strong. She's the sober part in me. The part that is silent and doesn't need reinforcement."

"Are you very close to your parents?"

"In spirit, I am," I said softly. "In practice, I am a loner. I don't have many attachments."

Then, as if something inside me was pushing to come out, I revealed a personality flaw that not even in my most introspective moments would I have admitted to myself:

"I use people rather than nourish or cherish them," I said; then immediately made amends saying, "But I'm quite capable of feeling affection."

I gazed from one to the other with a mixture of relief and disappointment: None of them seemed to attach any importance to my confession. The women went on to ask if I would describe myself as a courageous being or as a coward.

"I'm a confirmed coward," I stated. "But unfortunately my cowardice never stops me."

"Stops you from what?" the woman who had been questioning me inquired. Her black eyes were serious, and the wide span of her brows, like a line drawn with a piece of charcoal, was concentrated in a frown.

"From doing dangerous things," I said. Pleased to notice that they seemed to be hanging on my every word, I explained that another one of my serious flaws was my great facility to get into trouble.

"What trouble have you gotten into that you can tell us about?" she asked. Her face, which had been grave all this time, broke into a brilliant, almost malicious smile.

"How about the trouble I'm in now?" I said half in jest, yet fearing that they might take my comment the wrong way. To my surprise and relief they all laughed and yelled the way rural people are wont to do when something strikes them as daring or funny.

"How did you end up in the United States?" the woman asked when they had all calmed down.

I shrugged, not really knowing what to say. "I wanted to go to school," I finally mumbled. "I was in England first, but I didn't do much except have a good time. I really don't know what I want to study. I think I'm in search of something, although I don't know exactly what."

"That brings us back to my first question," the woman said. Her thin, pert face and her dark eyes were animated and peering like an animal's. "Are you in search of a man?"

"I suppose I am," I admitted, then added impatiently, "What woman isn't? And why do you ask me so insistently about it? Do you have someone in mind? Is this some kind of a test?"

"We do have someone in mind," Delia Flores interjected. "But he's not a man." She and the others laughed and shrieked with such abandon I could not help but giggle, too.

"This is definitely a test," the inquisitive woman assured me as soon as everyone was quiet.

She was silent for a moment, her eyes watchful and considering. "From what you told me, I can conclude that you are thoroughly middle class," she went on. She flung her arms wide in a gesture of forced acceptance. "But then, what else can a German woman, born in the New World, be?"

She saw the anger in my face and, with a barely suppressed grin on her lips, added, "Middle-class people have middle-class dreams."

Seeing that I was about to explode, Mariano Aureliano explained that she was asking all these questions because they were simply curious about me. Only seldom did they have visitors and hardly ever any young ones.

"That doesn't mean that I have to be insulted," I complained.

As though I hadn't said anything, Mariano Aureliano continued to make excuses for the women. His gentle tone and his reassuring pat on my back melted my anger, just as it had before. His smile was so touchingly angelic I didn't for a moment doubt his sincerity when be began to flatter me: He said that I was one of the most extraordinary, one of the most remarkable persons they had ever met. I was so moved that I encouraged him to ask anything he wanted to know about me.

"Do you feel important?" he inquired.

I nodded. "All of us are very important to ourselves," I stated. "Yes, I think I am important, not in a general sense, but specifically, just to myself."

At great length I talked about a positive self-image, self-worth, and how vital it was to reinforce our importance in order to be psychically healthy individuals.

"And what do you think about women?" he asked. "Do you think they are more or less important than men?"

"It's quite obvious that men are more important," I said. "Women don't have a choice. They have to be less important in order for family life to roll on smooth wheels, so to speak."

"But is it right?" Mariano Aureliano insisted.

"Well, of course, it's right," I declared. "Men are inherently superior. That's why they run the world. I've been brought up by an authoritarian father, who, although he raised me as freely as my brothers, nevertheless let me know that certain things are not so important for a woman. That's why I don't know what I'm doing in school or what I want in life." I looked at Mariano Aureliano, then in a helpless, defeated tone added, "I suppose I'm looking for a man who is as sure of himself as my father."

"She's a simpleton!" one of the women interjected.

"No, no, she isn't," Mariano Aureliano assured everyone. "She's just confused, and as opinionated as her father."

"Her German father," Mr. Flores corrected him emphatically, stressing the word German: He had descended from the tree like a leaf, softly and without a sound. He served himself an immoderate amount of food.

"How right you are," Mariano Aureliano agreed and grinned. "Being as opinionated as her German father, she's simply repeating what she has heard all her life."

My anger, which rose and fell like some mysterious fever, was not only due to what they were saying about me, but also because they were talking about me as if I were not present.

"She's unredeemable," another woman said.

"She's fine for the purpose at hand," Mariano Aureliano defended me with conviction.

Mr. Flores backed Mariano Aureliano. And the only woman who had not spoken so far said in a deep, husky voice that she agreed with the men; that I was fine for the purposes at hand.

She was tall and slender. Her pale-complexioned face, gaunt and severe, was crowned by braided white hair and highlighted by large, luminous eyes. In spite of her worn, drab clothes, there was something innately elegant about her.

"What are you all doing to me?" I shouted, unable to contain myself any longer. "Don't you realize how horrible it is for me to hear you talk about me as if I were not here?"

Mariano Aureliano fixed his fierce eyes on me. "You are not here," he said in a tone that was devoid of all feeling. "At least not yet. And most important, you don't count. Not now or ever."

I almost fainted with wrath. No one had ever spoken to me so harshly and with such indifference to my feelings. "I puke and piss and shit on all of you, goddamned, cocksucking farts!" I yelled.

"My God! A German hick!" Mariano Aureliano exclaimed, and they all laughed.

I was about to jump up and stomp away when Mariano Aureliano tapped me repeatedly on my back.

"There, there," he murmured as if burping a baby.

And as before, instead of resenting being treated like a child, my anger vanished. I felt light and happy. Shaking my head uncomprehendingly, I looked at them and giggled. "I learned to speak Spanish," I said, "in the streets of Caracas with the riffraff. I can cuss horribly."

"Didn't you just love the sweet tamales?" Delia asked, closing her eyes in delicate appreciation. Her question seemed to be a password: The interrogation ended.

"Of course she did!" Mr. Flores responded for me. "She only wishes she had been served more. She has an insatiable appetite."

He came to sit beside me. "Mariano Aureliano outdid himself and cooked a delight."

"You mean he cooked the food?" I asked in disbelief. "He has all these women, and he cooks?"

Mortified by how my words might be interpreted, I hastened to apologize. I explained that it surprised me to no end that a Mexican male would cook at home when there were women. Their laughter made me realize that I hadn't meant to say that either.

"Especially if the women are his women. Isn't that what you meant?" Mr. Flores asked, his words interspersed by everybody's laughter.

"You're quite right," he continued. "They are Mariano's women: Or to be more precise, Mariano belongs to them."

He slapped his knee gleefully, then turned to the tallest of the women - the one who had only spoken once - and said, "Why don't you tell her about us."

"Obviously, Mr. Aureliano doesn't have that many wives," I began, still mortified by my gaffe.

"Why not?" the woman retorted, and everyone laughed again. It was a joyful, youthful laughter, yet it didn't put me at ease.

"All of us here are bound together by our struggle, by our deep affection for one another, and by the realization that without one another nothing is possible," she said.

"You aren't part of a religious group, are you?" I asked in a voice that betrayed my growing apprehension. "You don't belong to some kind of a commune, do you?"

"We belong to power," the woman replied. "My companions and I are the inheritors of an ancient tradition. We are part of a myth."

I didn't understand what she was saying. I glanced uneasily at the others: Their eyes were fixed on me. They were watching me with a mixture of expectation and amusement.

I shifted my attention back to the tall woman. She, too, was observing me with that same bemused expression. Her eyes were so shiny they sparkled. She leaned over her crystal goblet and daintily sipped her water.

"We are essentially dreamers," she explained softly. "We are all dreaming now, and, by the fact that you were brought to us, you are also dreaming with us."

She said this so smoothly that I really didn't realize what she had said.

"You mean I am sleeping and having a dream with you?" I asked in mock incredulity. I bit my lip to suppress the laughter bubbling up within me.

"That's not exactly what you're doing, but it's close enough," she admitted.

Unperturbed by my nervous giggles, she went on to explain that what was happening to me was more like an extraordinary dream where all of them were helping me by dreaming my dream.

"But that's idio...," I started to say, but she silenced me with a wave of her hand.

"We are all dreaming the same dream," she assured me.

She seemed to be transported by a joy I was at a loss to understand.

"What about the delicious food I just ate?" I asked, looking for the chili sauce that had dribbled on my blouse.

I showed her the spots. "That can't be a dream. I ate that food!" I insisted in a loud, agitated tone. "I did! I ate it myself."

She regarded me with a cool composure, as though she had been expecting just such an outburst. She asked equably, "But what about Mr. Flores lifting you up to the top of the eucalyptus tree?"

I was on the verge of telling her that he hadn't lifted me to the top of the tree but only to a branch when she whispered, "Have you thought about that?"

"No. I haven't," I said snappishly.

"Of course, you haven't," she agreed, nodding her head knowingly as if she were aware that I had that instant remembered that even the lowest branch of any of the trees around us was impossible to reach from the ground. She said then that the reason I hadn't thought about it was because in dreams we are not rational. "In dreams we can only act," she stressed.

"Wait a minute," I interrupted her. "I may be a little dizzy, I admit. After all, you and your friends are the strangest people I have ever met. But I am as awake as I can be." Seeing that she was laughing at me, I yelled, "This is not a dream!"

With an imperceptible nod of her head she motioned to Mr. Flores, who in one swift movement reached for my hand and propelled himself, with me in tow, to a branch of the nearest eucalyptus tree. We sat there for an instant, and before I could say anything, he pulled me back to the ground, to the same spot where we had been sitting.

"Do you see what I mean?" the tall woman asked.

"No, I don't," I screamed, knowing that I had had a hallucination. My fear turned to rage, and I let out a stream of the foulest imprecations. My rage spent, I was engulfed by a wave of self-pity, and I began to weep. "What have you people done to me?" I asked in between sobs. "Have you put something in the food? In the water?"

"We have done nothing of the sort," the tall woman said kindly. You don't need anything..."

I could barely hear her. My tears were like some dark, gauzy veil: They blurred her face and also her words.

"Hold on," I heard her say, although I could no longer see her or her companions. "Hold on, don't wake up yet."

There was something so compelling about her tone, I knew that my very life depended on seeing her again. With some unknown and totally unexpected force, I broke through the veil of my tears.

I heard a soft clapping sound, and then I saw them. They were smiling, and their eyes shone so intensely their pupils seemed to be lit by some inner fire. I apologized first to the women and then to the two men for my silly outburst; but they wouldn't hear of it. They said that I had performed exceptionally well.

"We are the living parts of a myth," Mariano Aureliano said. He puckered his lips, and blew into the air. "I will blow you to the person who now holds the myth in his hands. He will help you clarify all this."

"And who might he be?" I asked flippantly.

I was going to ask whether he would be as opinionated as my father, but I was distracted by Mariano Aureliano. He was still blowing into the air. His white hair stood on end: His cheeks were red and distended.

As if in answer to his effort, a soft breeze began to rustle through the eucalyptus trees. He nodded, apparently aware of my unspoken thought and confusion. Gently, he turned me until I faced the Bacatete Mountains.

The breeze turned into a wind; a wind so harsh and cold it hurt to breathe. With a seemingly boneless, uncoiling movement, the tall woman rose, grabbed my hand, and pulled me with her across the ploughed furrows. We came to a sudden halt in the middle of the field. I could have sworn that with her outstretched arms she was luring the spiral of dust and dead leaves spinning in the distance.

"In dreams, everything is possible," she whispered.

Laughing, I opened my arms to beckon the wind. Dust and leaves danced around us with such force that everything blurred before my eyes. The tall woman was suddenly far away. Her body seemed to be dissolving in a reddish light until it completely vanished from my field of vision.

And then blackness filled my head.

## Chapter 3

It was impossible for me to determine, at that time, whether the picnic had been a dream or had actually taken place. I was incapable of remembering, in a sequential order, all the events I had participated in from the moment I fell asleep on the bed in the healing room. My next clear recollection was that I found myself talking with Delia at the table, in that same room.

Familiar with such lapses of memory, which used to occur in my childhood, I didn't at first make much of this discrepancy. As a child, eager to play, I would often get out of my bed half asleep and sneak out of my house through the window grill. Many times, I did indeed wake up in the plaza, playing with other children who weren't put to bed as early as I was.

There was no doubt in my mind that the picnic had been real, although I couldn't immediately place it in a time sequence. I tried to think, to reconstruct the events, but it frightened me to bring forth the idea of my childhood memory lapses. Somehow, I was reluctant to ask Delia about her friends, and she didn't volunteer any information either. However, I did ask about the healing session, which I knew had been a dream.

"I had such an elaborate dream about a healer," I began cautiously. "Not only did she tell me her name, but she also assured me that she had made all my nightmares vanish."

"It wasn't a dream," Delia stated, her tone clearly revealing her displeasure. She stared at me with an intensity that made me want to fidget, to move away. "The healer did tell you her name," she went on. "And she certainly did cure you from your sleep maladies."

"But it was a dream," I insisted. "In my dream, the healer was the size of a child. She couldn't have been real."

Delia reached for the glass of water on the table, but she didn't drink. She turned it around, on and on, without spilling a drop.

Then she looked at me with glittering eyes. "The healer gave you the impression of being little, that's all," she said, nodding to herself, as though the words had just occurred to her, and she had found them satisfactory. She sipped her water with slow, slurping noises, and her eyes grew soft and reflective. "She had to be little in order to cure you."

"She had to be little? You mean I only saw her as being little?"

Delia nodded repeatedly then, leaning toward me, whispered, "You see, you were dreaming. Yet it wasn't a dream. The healer really came to you and cured you, but you were not in the place in which you are now."

"Come on, Delia," I objected. "What are you talking about? I know it was a dream. I am always totally aware that I am dreaming, even though the dreams are completely real to me. That's my malady, remember?"

"Maybe now that she has cured you, it's no longer your malady but your talent," Delia proposed, smiling. "But going back to your question, the healer had to be small, like a child, because you were quite young when your nightmares first began."

Her statement was so outlandish, I couldn't even laugh. "And now I am cured?" I asked facetiously.

"You are," she assured me. "In dreaming, cures are accomplished with great ease, almost effortlessly. What's difficult is to make people dream."

"Difficult?" I asked, my voice harsher than I had intended. "Everybody has dreams. We all have to sleep, don't we?"

Delia rolled her eyes derisively to the ceiling then gazed at me and said, "Those are not the dreams I am talking about. Those are ordinary dreams. Dreaming has purpose: Ordinary dreams don't have any."

"They certainly do!" I emphatically disagreed with her, then went into a lengthy diatribe about the psychological importance of dreams. I cited works on psychology, philosophy, and art.

Delia wasn't in the least impressed with my knowledge. She agreed with me that ordinary dreams must indeed help maintain the mental health of individuals, but insisted that she wasn't concerned with that.

"Dreaming has a purpose: Ordinary dreams don't," she reiterated.

"What purpose, Delia?" I said condescendingly.

She turned her head sideways, as if she wanted to hide her face from me. An instant later she looked back at me. Something cold and detached showed itself in her eyes, and the change of expression was altogether so ruthless that I was frightened.

"Dreaming always has a practical purpose," she declared. "It serves the dreamer in simple or intricate ways. It has served you to get rid of your sleeping maladies. It served the witches at the picnic to know your essence. It served me to screen myself out of the awareness of the immigration guard patrol asking to see your tourist card."

"I'm trying to understand what you are saying, Delia," I mumbled. Then I asked forcefully, "Do you mean that you people can hypnotize others against their wills?"

"Call it that if you wish," she said.

On her face was a look of calm indifference that bore little sympathy. "What you can't see yet is that you, yourself, can enter quite effortlessly into what you would call a hypnotic state. We call it dreaming; a dream that's not a dream; a dream where we can do nearly anything our hearts desire."

Delia almost made sense to me, but I had no words with which to express my thoughts, my feelings. I stared at her, baffled. Suddenly, I remembered an event from my adolescence. When I was finally allowed driving lessons in my father's jeep, I surprised my family by showing them that I already knew how to shift: I had been doing it for years in my dreams. With an assurance that was even baffling to me, on my first venture I took the jeep on the old road from Caracas to La Guayra, the port by the sea. I deliberated whether I should tell Delia about this episode, but instead asked her about the healer's size.

"She is not a tall woman, but neither is she as small as you saw her. In her healing dream, she projected her smallness for your benefit, and in doing so, she was small. That's the nature of magic. You have to be what you want to give the impression of."

"Is she a magician?" I asked expectantly.

The thought that they all worked in a circus; that they were part of some magic show had passed my mind at various times. It would explain so many things about them, I believed.

"No. She's not a magician," Delia said. "She's a sorceress."

Delia gazed at me so scornfully I was ashamed of my question. "Magicians are in a show," she explained, gazing at me pointedly: "Sorcerers are in the world without being part of the world."

She was silent for a long time, then a sigh escaped her lips. "Would you like to see Esperanza now?" she asked.

"Yes," I said eagerly. "I would like that very much."

The possibility that the healer had been real and not a dream made my head spin. I didn't quite believe Delia, and yet I wanted to believe her in the worst way. My thoughts ran wild. Suddenly I realized that I hadn't mentioned to Delia that the healer of my dream had told me her name was Esperanza.

I was so absorbed in my thoughts I failed to notice that Delia as speaking.

"I'm sorry, what did you say?"

"The only way you can make sense of all this is to call back dreaming," she maintained.

Laughing softly, she waved her hand as she were signaling someone to come.

Her words were of no importance to me. I was already pondering another train of thought. Esperanza was real, and I was certain she was going to clarify everything for me. Besides, she had not been the picnic: She had not treated me as abominably as all the other women had. I harbored the vague hope that Esperanza had liked me, and this thought somehow restored my confidence.

To disguise my feelings from Delia, I told her that I was anxious to see the healer. "I would like to thank her, and of course, pay her for all she did for me."

"It's already paid," Delia stated. The mocking glint in her eyes early revealed that she was privy to my thoughts.

"What do you mean it's already paid?" I asked in an involuntarily high-pitched voice. "Who paid for it?"

"It's hard to explain," Delia began with a distant kindness that put me momentarily at ease: "It all began at your friend's party in Nogales. I noticed you instantly."

"You did?" I asked expectantly, eager to hear some compliment on my tasteful and carefully chosen wardrobe.

There was an uncomfortable silence. I couldn't see Delia's eyes, veiled under her half-closed lids. There was something quiet yet oddly disturbing about her voice as she said that what she had noticed about me was that every time I had to talk to my friend's grandmother, I seemed to be absentminded as if I were asleep.

"Absentminded is putting it mildly," I said. "You have no idea what I went through; what I had to do to convince that old lady that I wasn't the devil incarnate."

Delia seemed not to have heard me. "I knew in a flash that you had great facility to dream," she went on: "So I followed you around through the house and saw you in action. You were not fully aware of what you were doing or saying. And yet you were doing fine; talking and laughing, and lying your head off to be liked."

"Are you calling me a liar?" I asked in jest but betraying my hurt.

I felt an impulse to get angry. I stared at the pitcher of water on the table until the threatening feeling had passed.

"I wouldn't dare call you a liar," Delia pronounced rather pompously. "I'd call you a dreamer."

There was a heavy solemnity in her voice, but her eyes sparkled with mirth, with genial malice, as she said, "The sorcerers who reared me told me that it doesn't matter what one may say as long as one has the power to say it."

Her voice conveyed such enthusiasm and approval, that I was sure someone was behind one of the doors listening to us.

"And the way to get that power," she said, "is from dreaming. You don't know this because you do it naturally, but when you are in a pinch, your mind goes instantly into dreaming."

In order to change the subject, I asked, "Were you reared by sorcerers, Delia?"

"Of course I was," she declared, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"Were your parents sorcerers?"

"Oh, no," she said and chuckled: "The sorcerers found me one day and reared me from then on."

"How old were you? Were you a child?"

Delia laughed, as if with my question I had reached the height of humor.

"No, I wasn't a child," she said. "I was perhaps your age when they found me, and began to rear me."

"What do you mean they began to rear you?"

Delia gazed at me but without focusing her eyes on me. For a moment I thought she hadn't heard me or, if she had, she wasn't going to answer me. I repeated my question.

She shrugged and smiled. "They reared me as one rears a child," she finally said. "It doesn't matter how old you are: In their world, you are a child."

Suddenly afraid we might be overheard, I glanced over my shoulder, and whispered, "Who are these sorcerers, Delia?"

"That's a very tough question," she mused. "At the moment, I can't even begin to answer it. All I can tell you about them is that they are the ones who said to me that one should never lie to be believed."

"Why should one lie then?" I asked.

"For the sheer pleasure of it," Delia promptly retorted.

She then rose from the chair, and walked toward the door that led to the yard. Before stepping outside, she turned and with a grin on her face asked, "Do you know the saying, 'If you are not lying to be believed, you can say anything you want, regardless of what anybody thinks of you.'"

"I've never heard such a saying."

I suspected she had made it up: It had her stamp.

"Besides, I don't understand what you're trying to say," I added primly.

"I'm sure you do," she said, looking sidelong at me through the strands of her black hair. Gesturing with her chin, she motioned me to follow her. "Let's go and see Esperanza now."

I jumped up and dashed after her, only to come to an abrupt halt by the door. Momentarily blinded by the brightness outside, I stood there, wondering what had happened. It seemed that no time had elapsed since I had run after Mr. Flores across the field. The sun, as it had been then, was still at the zenith.

I caught a glimpse of Delia's red skirt as she turned a corner. I rushed after her across a stone archway that led to a most enchanting patio.

At first I saw nothing; so strong was the contrast between the dazzling sunlight and the intense shadows of the patio. Breathlessly, I simply stood there, perfectly still, inhaling the humid air: It was fragrant with the scent of orange blossoms, honeysuckle, and sweet peas. Climbing up strings that seemed to be suspended from the sky, the sweet peas hung like a brightly colored tapestry amidst the foliage of trees, shrubs, and ferns.

The healer I had seen before in my dream was sitting on a rocking chair in the middle of the patio. She was much older than Delia and the women at the picnic; though how I knew this, I couldn't say. She was rocking to and fro with an air of dreamy abandon. I felt an anguishing pain that gripped my whole being, for I had the irrational certainty that her rocking movement was taking her farther and farther away from me. A wave of agony, an indescribable loneliness engulfed me as I kept staring at her. I wanted to cross the patio and hold her, but something about the patio's dark tiles, laid out in a most intricate pattern, held my feet in place.

"Esperanza," I finally managed to whisper in a voice so feeble it was barely audible even to myself.

She opened her eyes and smiled quite without surprise; as if she had been expecting me. She rose and walked toward me. She was not the size of a child, but about my height; five feet and two inches. She was thin and fragile-looking, yet exuded a vitality that made me feel puny and shrunken.

"How happy I am to see you again." Her voice sounded sincere. She motioned me to grab one of the rush chairs and sit beside her.

As I looked about me, I discovered the other women, including Delia. They were sitting on rush chairs, half hidden by shrubs and trees: They, too, were watching me curiously. Some of them smiled, while the others kept on eating tamales from the plates on their laps.

In the shady, green light of the patio - in spite of the mundane task of eating - the women appeared insubstantial; imaginary. Each one of them was unnaturally vivid without being distinct. They seemed to have absorbed the patio's greenish light, which had settled all around us like a transparent fog. The fleeting but awesome idea that I was in a house populated by ghosts crossed my mind.

"Would you like to eat something?" Esperanza asked me. "Delia has made the most delicious food you can imagine."

"No, thank you," I murmured in a voice that didn't sound like my own. Seeing her questioning expression, I added feebly, "I'm not hungry."

I was so nervous and agitated that even if I had been starving I wouldn't have been able to swallow a bite.

Esperanza must have sensed my fear. She leaned toward me and patted my arm reassuringly. "What is it that you want to know?"

"I thought I had seen you in a dream," I blurted out, then, noticing the laughter in her eyes, added, "Am I dreaming now?"

"You are, but you are not asleep," she replied, enunciating her words slowly and precisely.

"How can I be dreaming and not be asleep?"

"Some women can do that with great ease," she maintained. "They can be dreaming and not be asleep. You are one of those women. Others have to work a lifetime to accomplish that."

I sensed a tinge of admiration in her voice, yet I wasn't in the least flattered. On the contrary: I was more worried than ever. "But how is it possible to dream without sleeping?" I insisted.

"If I explain to you how it is possible, you won't understand it," she pronounced. "Take my word for this: It's much better to postpone the explanations for the time being."

Again she patted my arm and a gentle smile lit up her face. "For the moment it's enough for you to know that, for you, I am the one who brings dreams."

I didn't think it was enough, but I didn't dare to tell her so. Instead, I asked her, "Was I awake when you cured me of my nightmares? And was I dreaming when I sat outside in the field with Delia and all the others?"

Esperanza regarded me for a long moment then nodded sagely, as if she had decided to reveal some monumental truth. "You're too dumb to see the mystery of what we do."

She said this so matter-of-factly; so nonjudgmentally that it didn't occur to me to take offense, or to attempt any kind of rebuttal.

"But you could make me see it, couldn't you?" I pleaded eagerly.

The other women giggled: It wasn't a mocking sound but a murmuring that echoed all around me like a muffled chorus. The sound didn't seem to come from the women but from the shadows of the patio. Rather than a giggle, it was a whisper; a delicate warning that not only made me lose my thrust, but erased my troubling doubts; my desire to know. And then I knew, without a shadow of doubt, that I had been awake and dreaming both times. It was a knowledge that I couldn't explain, however. It was something beyond words.

Yet, after a few moments, I felt compelled to dissect my realization, to put it all into some kind of logical framework.

Esperanza regarded me with apparent pleasure.

Then she said, "I'm going to explain to you who we are and what we do."

She prefaced her elucidation with an admonition: She warned me that whatever she had to tell me wasn't easy to believe. Therefore, I had to suspend judgment and hear her out without interruptions; without questions:

"Can you do that?"

"Naturally," I shot back.

She was silent for a moment, her eyes appraising me thoughtfully. She must have sensed my uncertainty and the question that was about to burst from my lips.

"It isn't that I don't want to answer your questions," she maintained. "It's rather that at this time it will be impossible for you to understand the answers."

I nodded, not in agreement, but afraid that if so much as a peep came out of me she would stop talking altogether.

In a voice that was but a soft murmur, she told me something that was both incredible and fascinating. She said that she was the spiritual descendant of sorcerers who lived in the valley of Oaxaca millennia before the Spanish conquest.

Esperanza was silent for a long time. Her eyes, fixed on the bright, multicolored, sweet peas, seemed to reach nostalgically into the past.

Esperanza continued, "As it is for me, the part of those sorcerers' activities pertinent to you is called dreaming. Those sorcerers were men and women who possessed extraordinary dreaming powers, and performed acts that defied the imagination."

Hugging my knees, I listened to her. Esperanza was a brilliant raconteuse and a most gifted mimic: Her face changed with each turn of her explanation. It was at times the face of a young woman, at other times an old woman's; or it was the face of a man, or that of an innocent and impish child.

She said that millennia ago, men and women were the possessors of a knowledge that allowed them to slip in and out of our normal world. And thus they divided their lives into two areas: the day and the night. During the day they conducted their activities like everyone else: They engaged in normal, expected, everyday behavior. During the night, however, they became dreamers. They systematically dreamed dreams that broke the boundaries of what we consider to be reality.

Again she paused, as though giving me time to let her words sink in.

"Using the darkness as a cloak," she went on, "they accomplished an inconceivable thing: They were able to dream while they were awake."

Anticipating the question I was about to voice, Esperanza explained that to be dreaming while they were awake meant that they could immerse themselves in a dream that gave them the energy necessary to perform feats that stagger the mind while they were perfectly conscious and awake.

Because of the aggressive mode of interaction at home, I never developed the ability to listen for very long. If I couldn't meddle with direct, belligerent questions, any verbal exchange, no matter how interesting, was meaningless to me. Now, unable to argue, I became restless. I was dying to interrupt Esperanza. I had questions, but to get answers; to have things explained to me was not the thrust of my urge to interrupt. What I wanted to do was to give in to my compulsion to have a shouting match with her in order to feel normal again.

As if privy to my turmoil, Esperanza stared at me for an instant and then signaled me to speak. Or I thought she had given me such a command. I opened my mouth to say - as usual - anything that came to my mind even if it wasn't related to the subject. But I couldn't say a word. I struggled to speak and made gargling sounds to the delight of the women in the background.

Esperanza resumed talking, as if she hadn't noticed my futile efforts. It surprised me to no end that she had my undivided attention. She said that the origins of the sorcerers' knowledge could be understood only in terms of a legend: A superior being commiserating with the terrible plight of man - to be driven as an animal by food and reproduction - gave man the power to dream and taught him how to use his dreams.

"Legends, of course, tell the truth in a concealed fashion," she elucidated: "The legends' success in concealing the truth rests on man's conviction that they are simply stories. Legends of men changing into birds or angels are accounts of a concealed truth, which appears to be the fantasizing, or simply the delusions of primitive or deranged minds. So it's been the task of sorcerers for thousands of years to make new legends, and to discover the concealed truth of old ones. This is where dreamers come into the picture. Women are best at dreaming. They have the facility to abandon themselves; the facility to let go. The woman who taught me to dream could maintain two hundred dreams."

Esperanza regarded me intently as if she were appraising my reaction which was complete stupefaction for I had no idea what she meant. She explained that to maintain a dream meant that one could dream something specific about oneself and could enter into that dream at will. Her teacher, she said, could enter at will into two hundred specific dreams about herself.

"Women are peerless dreamers," Esperanza assured me: "Women are extremely practical. In order to sustain a dream, one must be practical, because the dream must pertain to practical aspects of oneself. My teacher's favorite dream was to dream of herself as a hawk. Another was to dream of herself as an owl. So depending on the time of the day, she could dream about being either one, and since she was dreaming while she was awake, she was really and absolutely a hawk or an owl."

There was such sincerity and conviction in her tone and in her eyes, I was entirely under her spell. Not for a moment did I doubt her. Nothing she could have said would have seemed outlandish to me at that moment.

She further explained that in order to accomplish a dream of that nature, women need to have an iron discipline.

She leaned toward me and in a confidential whisper, as though she didn't want the others to overhear her, said, "By iron discipline I don't mean any kind of strenuous routine, but rather that women have to break the routine of what is expected of them. And they have to do it in their youth," she stressed, "And most important, with their strength intact. Often, when women are old enough to be done with the business of being women, they decide it's time to concern themselves with nonworldly or other - worldly thoughts and activities. Little do they know or want to believe that hardly ever do such women succeed." She gently slapped my stomach, as if she were playing on a drum. "The secret of a woman's strength is her womb."

Esperanza nodded emphatically, as if she had actually heard the silly question that popped into my mind: "Her womb?"

"Women," she continued, "must begin by burning their matrix. They cannot be the fertile ground that has to be seeded by men following the command of God himself."

Still watching me closely, she smiled and asked, "Are you religious by any chance?"

I shook my head. I couldn't speak. My throat was so constricted I could scarcely breathe. I was dumbstruck with fear and amazement, not so much by what she was saying, but by her change: If asked, I wouldn't have been able to tell when she changed, but all of a sudden her face was young and radiant: Inner life seemed to have been fired up in her.

"That's good!" Esperanza exclaimed. "This way you don't have to struggle against beliefs," she pointed out. "They are very hard to overcome. I was reared a devout Catholic. I nearly died when I had to examine my attitude toward religion." She sighed.

Her voice, turning wistful, became soft as she added, "But that was nothing compared to the battle I had to wage before I became a bona fide dreamer."

I waited expectantly, hardly breathing, while a quite pleasurable sensation spread like a mild electrical current through my entire body. I anticipated a tale of a gruesome battle between herself and terrifying creatures. I could barely disguise my disappointment when she revealed that she had to battle herself.

"In order to be a dreamer, I had to vanquish the self," Esperanza explained. "Nothing, but nothing, is as hard as that. We women are the most wretched prisoners of the self. The self is our cage. Our cage is made out of commands and expectations poured on us from the moment we are born. You know how it is. If the first born child is a boy, there is a celebration. If it's a girl, there is a shrug of the shoulders and the statement, 'It's all right. I still will love her and do anything for her.'"

Out of respect for the old woman, I didn't laugh out loud. Never in my life had I heard statements of that sort. I considered myself an independent woman, but obviously, in light of what Esperanza was saying, I was no better off than any other woman. And contrary to the manner in which I would have normally reacted to such an idea, I agreed with her. I had always been made aware that the precondition of my being a woman was to be dependent. I was taught that a woman was indeed fortunate if she could be desirable so men would do things for her. I was told that it was demeaning to my womanhood to endeavor to do anything myself if that thing could be given to me. It was drilled into me that a woman's place is in the home with her husband and her children.

"Like you, I was reared by an authoritarian yet lenient father," Esperanza went on: "I thought, like yourself, that I was free. For me to understand the sorcerers' way - that freedom didn't mean to be myself - nearly killed me. To be myself was to assert my womanhood. And to do that took all my time, effort, and energy. The sorcerers, on the contrary, understand freedom as the capacity to do the impossible, the unexpected-to dream a dream that has no basis, no reality in everyday life."

Her voice again became but a whisper as she added, "The knowledge of sorcerers is what is exciting and new. Imagination is what a woman needs to change the self and become a dreamer."

Esperanza said that if she had not succeeded in vanquishing the self, she would have only led a woman's normal life; the life her parents had designed for her; a life of defeat and humiliation; a life devoid of all mystery; a life that had been programmed by custom and tradition.

Esperanza pinched my arm. I cried put in pain.

"You'd better pay attention," she reprimanded me.

"I am," I mumbled defensively, rubbing my arm: I had been certain that no one would notice my waning interest.

"You won't be tricked or enticed into the sorcerer's world," she warned me. "You have to choose, knowing what awaits you."

The fluctuations of my mood were astonishing to me because they were quite irrational. I should have been afraid. Yet I was calm, as if my being there were the most natural thing in the world.

"The secret of a woman's strength is her womb," Esperanza said and slapped my stomach once more.

She said that women dream with their wombs, or rather, from their wombs. The fact that they have wombs makes them perfect dreamers.

Before I had even finished the thought 'why is the womb so important?' Esperanza answered me.

"The womb is the center of our creative energy," she explained, "to the point that, if there would be no more males in the world, women could continue to reproduce. And the world would then be populated by the female of the human species only."

She added that women reproducing unilaterally could only reproduce clones of themselves.

I was genuinely surprised at this specific piece of knowledge. I couldn't help interrupting Esperanza to tell her that I had read about parthenogenetic and asexual reproduction in a biology class.

She shrugged her shoulders and went on with her explanation. "Women, having then the ability and the organs for reproducing life, have also the ability to produce dreams with those same organs," she said.

Seeing the doubt in my eyes, she warned me, "Don't trouble yourself wondering how it is done. The explanation is very simple, and because it's simple, it's the most difficult thing to understand. I still have trouble myself. So in a true woman's fashion, I act: I dream and leave the explanations to men."

Esperanza claimed that originally the sorcerers she had told me about used to pass their knowledge on to their biological descendants or to people of their private choice, but the results had been catastrophic. Instead of enhancing this knowledge, these new sorcerers, who had been selected by arbitrary favoritism, confabulated to enhance themselves. They were finally destroyed, and their destruction nearly obliterated their knowledge. The few sorcerers who were left then decided that their knowledge should never again be passed on to their descendants or to people of their choice but to those selected by an impersonal power, which they called the spirit.

"And now, all this brings us to you," Esperanza pronounced. "The sorcerers of ancient times decided that only the ones who were pinpointed would qualify. You were pointed out to us. And here you are! You are a natural dreamer. It's up to the forces that rule us where you go from here. It's not up to you. Nor to us, of course. You can only acquiesce or refuse."

From the urgency in her voice, and the compelling light in her eyes, it was obvious that she had given this explanation in complete seriousness. It was this earnestness that stopped me from laughing out loud. Also, I was too exhausted.

The mental concentration I had needed to follow her was too intense. I wanted to sleep. She insisted I stretch my legs, lie down, and relax. I did it so thoroughly that I dozed off.

When I opened my eyes, I had no idea how long I had slept. I sought the reassuring presence of Esperanza or the other women. There was no one with me on the patio. But I didn't feel alone: Somehow their presence lingered amidst the green all around me, and I felt protected. A breeze rustled the leaves. I felt it on my eyelids, warm and soft. It blew around me, then passed over me the same way it was passing over the desert, quickly and soundlessly.

With my gaze fixed on the tiles, I walked around the patio trying to figure out it's intricate design. To my delight, the lines led me from one rush chair to the other. I tried to recall who had sat in which chair, but hard as I tried, I couldn't remember.

I was distracted by a delicious scent of food, spiced with onions and garlic. Guided by that smell, I found my way to the kitchen, a large rectangular room. It was as deserted as the patio. And the bright tile designs adorning the walls reminded me of the patterns in the patio. I didn't pursue the similarities, for I had discovered the food left on the sturdy wooden table standing in the middle of the room. Assuming that it was for me, I sat down and ate it all. It was the same spicy stew I had eaten at the picnic: Warmed over, it was even tastier.

As I gathered the dishes to take them to the sink, I discovered a note and a drawn map under my place mat. It was from Delia. She suggested I return to Los Angeles by way of Tucson, where she would meet me at a certain coffee shop specified on the map. Only there, she wrote, would she tell me more about herself and her friends

# Chapter 4

Eager to hear what Delia had to tell me about her friends, I went to Tucson on my way to Los Angeles. In Tucson I arrived at the coffee shop in the late afternoon. An old man directed me to an empty space in the parking lot. Only when he opened my door did I realize who it was.

"Mariano Aureliano!" I exclaimed. "What a surprise. I'm so glad to see you. What are you doing here?"

"I was waiting for you," he said. "So my friend and I saved this space for you."

I caught a glimpse of a burly Indian driving an old red pickup truck: He had pulled out of the parking space as I drove into the lot.

"I'm afraid Delia couldn't make it," Mariano Aureliano said apologetically. "She had to leave for Oaxaca unexpectedly."

He smiled broadly and added, "I'm here on her behalf. I hope I fit the bill."

"You've no idea how delighted I am to see you," I said truthfully.

I was convinced that he, better than Delia, would help me make sense of all that had happened to me during the past few days.

"Esperanza explained to me that I was in some sort of a trance when I met all of you," I added.

"Did she say that?" he asked almost absentmindedly.

His voice, his attitude, and his whole demeanor was so different from what I remembered, that I kept staring at him hoping to discover what had changed. His fiercely chiseled face had lost all it's fierceness. I was busy with my own turmoil, however, and didn't give his change any more thought.

"Esperanza left me alone in the house," I went on: "She and all the women went away without even saying good-bye to me. But I wasn't disturbed," I hastened to point out: "Although I'm usually very put out when people are not courteous."

"Oh really!" he exclaimed, as if I had said something extremely meaningful.

Afraid that he might take offense at what I was saying about his companions, I immediately started to explain that I hadn't really meant to say that Esperanza and the others had been unfriendly. "Quite the contrary, they were most gracious and kind," I assured him.

I was about to reveal what Esperanza had told me, but his steady gaze stopped me. It wasn't an angry stare or a threatening one: It was a piercing look that cut through all my defenses. I had the certainty he was seeing right into the mess that my mind was.

I glanced away to hide my nervousness then told him in a light, almost joking tone that it hadn't really mattered to me that I had been left alone in the house. "I was intrigued that I knew every corner of that place," I confided, then paused for a moment, wondering what impact my words were having on him.

But he kept staring at me.

"I went to the bathroom, and I realized that I had been in that bathroom before," I continued: "There were no mirrors in it. I remembered that detail before I actually entered the room. Then I remembered that there were no mirrors in the whole house. So I went through every room, and sure enough, I couldn't find any."

Noticing that I was still getting no reaction from him, I went on to say that I had realized while listening to the radio on my way to Tucson that it was one day later than I expected.

"I must have slept a whole day," I finished in a strained tone.

"You didn't quite sleep a whole day," Mariano Aureliano pointed out indifferently: "You walked through the house and talked to us a great deal before falling asleep like a log."

I started laughing. My laughter was very near to hysteria, but he didn't seem to notice this. He laughed too, and I relaxed.

"I don't sleep like a log, ever," I felt compelled to explain. "I'm an extremely light sleeper."

He was silent, and when he finally spoke his voice was serious; demanding:

"Don't you remember being curious about how the women dressed and did their hair without glancing into mirrors?"

I could think of no reply, and he went on to say, "Don't you remember how odd you found it that there were no pictures on the walls, and that there was no - I have no recollection of having talked to anyone," I cut him off in midsentence. Then I glanced at him guardedly, thinking that perhaps, just in order to mystify me, he was saying I had interacted with everybody in that house, when in reality nothing of that sort had happened.

"Having no recollection of it doesn't mean it didn't take place," he said curtly.

My stomach fluttered involuntarily: It wasn't his tone of voice I took exception to, but rather the fact that he had answered my unspoken thoughts.

Certain that if I kept on talking something would dispel my mounting apprehension, I went into a long and muddled recitation of how I felt. I recounted what had happened. There were gaps in the order of events as I tried to reconstruct all that had taken place between the healing session and my drive to Tucson during which I knew that I had lost a whole day.

"You people are doing something to me; something strange and threatening," I finished, feeling momentarily righteous.

"Now you're being silly," Mariano Aureliano pronounced and he smiled for the first time: "If something is strange and threatening, it is only because you're new at it. You're a tough woman. It'll make sense to you sooner or later."

I was annoyed at the sound of his word 'woman'. I would have preferred if he had said girl: Accustomed as I was to being asked for my papers to prove that I was over sixteen, I suddenly felt old.

"Youth must be only in the eyes of the beholder," he said as if he were again reading my thoughts: "Whoever looks at you must see your youth, your vigor; but for you to feel you're a kid is wrong. You must be innocent without being immature."

For some inexplicable reason, his words were more than I could bear. I wanted to weep; not out of hurt, but out of despondency.

At a loss for what to do, I suggested we have something to eat. "I'm famished," I said, trying to sound cheerful.

"No, you're not," he said with authority. "You're just trying to change the subject."

Startled by his tone and his words, I looked at him, appalled. My surprise swiftly turned to anger. Not only was I hungry, but I was also exhausted and stiff from the long drive. I wanted to yell and vent on him all my wrath and frustration, but his eyes didn't let me move. There was something reptilian about those unblinking, burning eyes: for a moment I thought he might swallow me up, as a snake swallows a mesmerized, defenseless bird.

The mixture of fear and anger escalated to such heights I felt blood rushing to my face. And I knew by the slight curious lift of his brows that my face had turned purple. Since very early childhood, I had indulged in horrid attacks of temper. Other than trying to soothe me, no one had ever stopped me from indulging in these attacks, and I had indulged in them until I had refined them into king-sized temper tantrums. These tantrums were never caused by being denied what I wanted to have or wanted to do but by indignities - real or imagined - inflicted on my person.

Somehow the circumstances of that moment, however, made me feel ashamed of my habit. I made a conscious effort to control myself, which nearly consumed all my strength, but I calmed down.

"You were a whole day with us, a day which you can't remember now," Mariano Aureliano proceeded, seemingly unconcerned by my fluctuating mood. "During that time, you were very communicative and responsive; a thing which was extremely rewarding to us. When you are dreaming, you are a much better being, more appealing, more resourceful. You allowed us to know you in great depth."

His words threw me into a turmoil. Growing up asserting myself the way I did, I had become quite adept at detecting meaning hidden behind words. 'To know me in great depth' bothered me to no end, especially 'great depth.' It could only mean one thing, I thought, and immediately discarded it as being preposterous.

I became so absorbed in my own calculations that I no longer paid any attention to what he was saying. He kept on explaining about the day I had lost, but I only caught bits and pieces. I must have been staring at him blankly, for all of a sudden he stopped talking.

"You're not listening," he reprimanded me sternly.

"What did you do to me when I was in a trance?" I shot back at him. More than a question, it was an accusation.

I was startled by my own words, for it was not a thought-out statement: The words had simply escaped me of their own accord. Mariano Aureliano was even more surprised. He almost choked on the burst of laughter that followed his wide-eyed expression of shock.

"We don't go around taking advantage of little girls," he assured me. Not only did he sound sincere, but he seemed to be offended by my accusation: "Esperanza told you who we are. We are very serious people," he stressed, then in a mocking tone added, "And we mean business."

"What kind of business?" I demanded belligerently. "Esperanza didn't tell me what you want from me."

"She certainly did," he retorted with such assurance I wondered for an instant if he hadn't been concealed, listening to our conversation in the patio. I wouldn't have put it past him.

"Esperanza told you that you have been pointed out to us," he went on. "And now we are as driven by that as you are driven by fear."

"I'm not driven by anything or anybody," I shouted, quite forgetting that he hadn't told me what is was they wanted from me.

Without being in the least affected by my anger, he said that Esperanza had made it very clear to me that they were committed to rear me from now on.

"Rear me!" I yelled. "You're crazy. I've had all the rearing I need!"

Ignoring my outburst, he went on to explain that their commitment was total; and whether or not I understood this was of no importance to them.

I stared at him, unable to hide my dread. Never before had I heard someone express himself with such compelling indifference and such concern at the same time. In an effort to conceal my alarm, I tried to imbue my voice with a spunkiness I was far from feeling when I asked, "What do you imply when you say you are going to rear me?"

"Just what you hear," he answered. "We're committed to guide you."

"But why?" I asked, frightened and curious at the same time. "Can't you see that I don't need any guidance, that I don't want any..."

My words were drowned by Mariano Aureliano's joyful laughter. "You certainly need guidance.

Esperanza already showed you how meaningless your life is."

Anticipating my next question, he motioned me to be silent. "As to why you and not someone else, she explained to you that we let the spirit tell us who we should guide. The spirit showed us that you were the one."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Aureliano," I protested. "I really don't want to be rude or ungrateful, but you must understand that I'm not seeking help. I don't want anybody to guide me, even though I probably need guidance. The mere thought is abhorrent to me. Do you see what I mean? Do I make myself clear?"

"You do, and I do see what you mean," he echoed, moving back a step away from my pointed finger. "But precisely because you don't need anything, you are a most adequate candidate."

"Candidate?" I yelled, fed up with his insistence.

I looked around me, wondering if I had been overheard by the people going in and out of the coffee shop.

"What is this?" I went on yelling. "You and your companions are all a bunch of nuts. You leave me alone, you hear? I don't need you or anyone."

To my surprise and morbid delight, Mariano Aureliano finally lost his temper and began to berate me like my father and brothers used to. In a tightly controlled voice that never rose to be heard beyond us, he insulted me. He called me stupid and spoiled. And then, as if insulting me had given him impetus, he said something unforgivable. He shouted that the only asset I ever had was to be born blond and blue-eyed in a land where blond hair and blue eyes were coveted and revered.

"You never had to struggle for anything," he asserted. "The colonial mentality of the cholos of your country made them regard you as if you really deserved special treatment. Privilege based merely on having blond hair and blue eyes is the dumbest privilege there is."

I was livid. I've never been one to take insults sitting down. My years of training at shouting matches at home and the extraordinarily descriptive vulgarities I learned - and never forgot - in the streets of Caracas in my childhood paid off that afternoon. I said things to Mariano Aureliano that embarrass me to this day.

I was so worked up I didn't notice that the burly Indian who was driving the pickup truck had joined us. I only realized he was there when I heard his loud laughter. He and Mariano Aureliano were practically on the ground, clasping their stomachs, shrieking with delight.

"What's so funny?" I yelled, turning to the burly Indian. I insulted him, too.

"What a foul-mouthed woman," he said in perfect English. "If I were your daddy I would wash your mouth with soap."

"Who asked you to butt in, you fat turd?" In blind fury, I kicked him in the shinbone.

He yelled out in pain, and cursed me.

I was about to reach for his arm, and bite him when Mariano Aureliano grabbed me from behind and tossed me in the air.

Time stopped. My descent was so slow, so imperceptible, it seemed to me that I was suspended in the air forever. I didn't land on the ground with my bones broken, as I expected, but in the arms of the burly Indian. He didn't even stagger but held me as if I weighed no more than a pillow, a ninety-five pound pillow. Catching the wicked glint in his eyes, I was certain he was going to toss me again. He must have sensed my fear, for he smiled and gently put me down.

My wrath and strength spent, I leaned against my car and sobbed.

Mariano Aureliano put his arm around me and stroked my hair and shoulders, the way my father used to do when I was a child. In a soothing murmur, he assured me that he wasn't in the least upset at the barbarities I had yelled at him.

Guilt and self-pity only made me weep harder.

He shook his head in a sign of resignation, although his eyes shone with mirth. Then in an obvious effort to make me laugh, too, he confessed that he still couldn't believe I would know, let alone use, such foul language. "Well, I suppose language is there to be used," he mused, "and foul language should be used when the circumstances are called for."

I wasn't amused. And once the attack of self-pity had passed, I began, in my usual fashion, to mull over his assertion that all I had going for me was blond hair and blue eyes.

I must have cued Mariano Aureliano about my feelings, for he assured me that he had said that only to upset me and that there wasn't a shred of truth in it. I knew he was lying. For an instant

I felt doubly insulted, and then I was appalled to realize that my defenses were shattered. I agreed with him. He had been right on target about everything he had said. With a single stroke, he had unmasked me; cut through my shield, so to speak. No one, not even my worst enemy, could have hit me with such an accurately devastating blow. And yet, whatever I might have thought about Mariano Aureliano, I knew he wasn't my enemy.

I felt quite dizzy with my realization. It was as if an unseen force were crushing something within me; the idea of myself. Something that had given me strength was now depleting me.

Mariano Aureliano took me by the arm, and walked me toward the coffee shop. "Let's sign a truce," he said jovially. "I need you to do me a favor."

"You need only to ask," I responded, trying to match his tone.

"Before you got here, I went into this coffee shop to have a sandwich, and they practically refused to serve me. When I complained, the cook threw me out." Mariano Aureliano looked at me dejectedly and added, "That happens when one is an Indian."

"Report that cook to the manager," I cried out in righteous indignation; my own turmoil totally and most mysteriously forgotten.

"That wouldn't help me in the least," Mariano Aureliano confided.

The only way I could help him, he assured me, was to go into the coffee shop by myself, sit at the counter, order an elaborate meal, and drop a dead fly in my food.

"And blame the cook," I finished for him. The whole scheme sounded so preposterous it made me laugh. But when I caught sight of his genuine expectation, I promised to do what he asked of me.

"Wait here," Mariano Aureliano said, then together with the burly Indian - who had yet to be introduced to me - headed toward the old red pickup truck parked in the street. They returned within moments.

"By the way," Mariano Aureliano said, "this man here is John. He's a Yuma Indian from Arizona."

I wanted to ask him if he also was a sorcerer, but Mariano Aureliano beat me to the punch. "He is the youngest member of our group," he confided.

Giggling nervously, I extended my hand and said, "I'm glad to meet you."

"Likewise," John responded in a deep, resonant voice, and clasped my hand warmly in his. "I hope you and I never come to blows again," he grinned.

Although he wasn't very tall, he exuded the vitality and strength of a giant. Even his big, white teeth seemed indestructible.

In a joking manner, John felt my biceps. "I'd bet you can knock a fellow out cold with one punch," he said.

Before I had a chance to apologize to him for my kicks and insults, Mariano Aureliano pressed a small box into my hand.

"The fly," he whispered. "John here suggests that you wear this," he added, retrieving a black, curly wig from a bag. "Don't worry, it's brand new," he assured me as he pulled the wig over my head.

Then, holding me at arm's length, he regarded me critically. "Not bad," he mused, making sure my long, blond braid was tucked in properly. "I don't want anyone to recognize you."

"There's no need to disguise myself," I asserted. "Take my word for it, I don't know anyone in Tucson."

I turned the side mirror of my car and looked at myself. "I can't go in looking like this," I protested. "I look like a poodle."

Mariano Aureliano gazed at me with an exasperating air of amusement as he arranged some stray curls. "Now, don't you forget that you have to sit at the counter and yell bloody murder when you discover the fly in your food."

"Why?"

He regarded me as if I were dim-witted. "You have to attract attention and humiliate the cook," he pointed out.

The coffee shop was packed with the early dinner crowd. However, it wasn't long before I was seated at the counter and was waited on by a harassed-looking but friendly old waitress.

Half-hidden behind the order rack was the cook. Like his two helpers, he appeared to be Mexican or Mexican-American. He went about his job so cheerfully I was quite certain he was harmless; incapable of malice. But when I thought of the old Indian waiting for me in the parking lot, I felt no guilt whatsoever as I emptied the little matchbox - with such stealth and speed not even the men on either side of me noticed it - over the perfectly cooked hamburger steak I had ordered.

My shriek of revulsion was genuine upon seeing a large, dead cockroach on my food.

"What is it, dear?" the waitress asked concernedly.

"How does the cook expect me to eat this?" I complained.

I didn't have to pretend anger. I was indignant; not at the cook but at Mariano Aureliano. "How can he do this to me?" I asked in a loud voice.

"It's all some dreadful accident," the waitress explained to the two curious and concerned customers on either side of me. She showed the plate to the cook.

"Fascinating!" the cook said, his voice loud and clear.

Rubbing his chin thoughtfully, he studied the food. He wasn't in the least upset. I had the vague suspicion he was laughing at me. "This cockroach must have either fallen from the ceiling," he deliberated, gazing at my head in fascinated interest, "or perhaps from her wig."

Before I could retort indignantly and put the cook in his place, he offered me anything that was on the menu. "It'll be on the house," he promised.

I asked for a steak and a baked potato, which was almost immediately brought to me. As I was pouring some salad dressing over my lettuce, which I always ate last, I discovered a good-sized spider crawling from under a lettuce leaf. I was so taken aback by this obvious evocation I couldn't even shriek. I looked up. Waving from behind the order rack was the cook, a dazzling smile on his face.

Mariano Aureliano was waiting for me impatiently. "What happened?" he asked.

"You and your disgusting cockroach!" I spat out, then added resentfully, "Nothing happened. The cook didn't get upset. He enjoyed himself immensely, at my cost, of course. The only one who got upset was me."

At his urging, I gave Mariano Aureliano a detailed account of what took place. The more I talked, the more pleased he was. Disconcerted by his reaction, I glowered at him. "What's so funny?" I demanded.

He tried to keep a serious face, but his lips twitched. His soft chuckle exploded into a loud, delighted laughter. "You can't take yourself so seriously," he chided. "You're an excellent dreamer, but you're certainly no actress."

"I'm not acting now. And I certainly wasn't acting in there," I said defensively in a high, shrill voice.

"I meant that I was counting on your ability to be convincing," he said. "You had to make the cook believe something that wasn't true. I really thought you could."

"How dare you criticize me!" I shouted. "I made a fool of myself on your behalf, and all you can say is that I don't know how to act!"

I pulled off the wig and threw it at him. "I'm sure I've got lice now."

Ignoring my outburst, Mariano Aureliano went on to say that Florinda had already told him that I was incapable of pretending.

"We had to know it for sure, in order to put you in your proper slot," he added equably. "Sorcerers are either dreamers or stalkers. Some are both."

"What are you talking about? What's this nonsense of dreamers and stalkers?"

"Dreamers deal with dreams," he explained softly. "They get their power; their wisdom from dreams. Stalkers on the other hand deal with people; with the everyday world. They get their wisdom; their power from interacting with their fellow men."

"You obviously don't know me at all," I said derisively. "I interact very well with people."

"No, you don't," he contradicted me. "You yourself said that you don't know how to converse. You're a good liar, but you lie only to get what you want. Your lies are too specific, too personal. And do you know why?"

He paused for a moment, as if to give me time to respond. But before I could even think of what to say he added, "Because for you, things are either black or white with no shades of color in between. And I don't mean it in terms of morality, but in terms of convenience. Your convenience, that is. A true authoritarian."

Mariano Aureliano and John exchanged glances, then both squared their shoulders, clicked their heels and did something unforgivable to me. They raised their arms in a fascist salute and said, "Mein Fuehrer!"

The more they laughed, the greater was my rage. I felt my blood ringing in my ears, rushing to my face. And this time, I did nothing to calm myself. I kicked my car and banged my arms against the roof.

The two men, instead of trying to soothe me - as my parents or my friends definitely would have done - stood there and laughed as I were providing them with the funniest spectacle possible.

Their indifference, their complete lack of concern for me was so shocking that my wrath slowed down of it's own accord. Never had I been so completely disregarded. I was lost. I realized then that I had no more maneuvers left. I had never known until that day that if the witnesses to my tantrums didn't show any concern, I didn't know what to do next.

"I think she's confused now," Mariano Aureliano said to John. "She doesn't know what to do."

He put his arm around the burly-indian's shoulders and added softly, yet still loud enough for me to ear, "Now she is going to cry, and when she does, she's going to cry her head off until we console her. Nothing is as tiresome as a spoiled cunt."

That did it for me. Like an injured bull, I lowered my head and charged Mariano Aureliano.

He was so startled by my vicious, sudden attack, he almost lost his balance: It gave me enough time to sink my teeth in the fleshy part of his stomach. He let out a yell, a mixture of pain and laughter.

John grabbed me by the waist and pulled me away. I didn't let go of my bite until my partial bridge came off. I had knocked two of my upper front teeth out when I was thirteen in a fight between the Venezuelan and the German students at the German high school in Caracas.

Both men howled with laughter. John bent over the trunk of my Volkswagen, holding his stomach and banging my car. "She's got a hole in her teeth, like a football player," he cried out in between shrieks.

My embarrassment was beyond words. I was so vexed that my knees gave in on me and I slid to the paved ground, like a rag doll, and actually passed out.

When I came to my senses, I was sitting inside the pickup truck. Mariano Aureliano was pressing my back. Smiling, he stroked my head repeatedly and then embraced me.

I was surprised by my absence of emotion: I was neither embarrassed nor annoyed. I was relaxed; at ease. It was a tranquility; a serenity I had never known before. For the first time in my life, I realized that I had never been at peace with myself or with others.

"We like you immensely," Mariano Aureliano said. "But you have to cure yourself of your temper tantrums. If you don't, they will kill you. This time it was my fault. I must apologize to you. I did deliberately provoke you."

I was too calm to say anything. I got out of the truck to stretch my arms and legs. I had painful cramps in my calves.

After a few moments of silence, I apologized to the two men. I told them that my temper had gotten worse since I had started drinking colas compulsively.

"Stop drinking them," Mariano Aureliano suggested.

Then he completely changed the subject and went on talking as if nothing had happened. He said that he was extremely pleased that I had joined them.

"You are?" I asked uncomprehendingly. "Did I join you?"

"You did!" he emphasized. "One day it will all make sense to you."

He pointed to a flock of crows cawing above us. "The crows are a good omen. See how marvelous they look. They are like a painting in the sky. To see them now is a promise that we will see each other again."

I gazed at the birds until they flew out of sight. When I turned to look at Mariano Aureliano, he was no longer there. The pickup truck had rolled away without a sound.

## Chapter 5

Disregarding the scratchy bushes, I dashed after the dog, who was scurrying through the sagebrush with reckless speed. I soon lost sight of it's golden fur shimmering amidst the fragrant wild shrubs and followed the sound of it's barks, growing fainter and fainter in the distance.

Uneasily, I glanced at the thick fog advancing on me. It closed in around the spot where I stood and within moments there was no sight of the sky. The late afternoon sun, like a subdued ball of fire, was scarcely discernible. And the magnificent view of the Santa Monica Bay, now more imagined than seen from the Santa Susana Mountains, had disappeared with incredible speed.

I wasn't worried about the dog getting lost. I, however, had no idea where to find the secluded spot my friends had chosen for our picnic. Or where the hiking path was that I had taken to chase after the dog.

I took a few hesitant steps in the same general direction the dog had followed, when something made me stop. Emerging from above, through some crack in the fog, I saw a tiny point of light descending toward me. Another one followed, then another, like little flames tied to a string. The lights trembled and vibrated in the air, then just before they reached me, they vanished, as though the fog around me had swallowed them up.

Since they had disappeared only a few feet in front of me, I moved on, closer to the spot, eager to examine that extraordinary sight. As I peered intently into the fog, I saw dark, human shapes glide through the air, two or three feet off the ground, moving as though they were tiptoeing on clouds. One after the other, the human shapes squatted, forming a circle. I took a few more vacillating steps, then stopped as the fog thickened and absorbed them.

I remained still, not knowing what to do. I felt a most unusual fright. Not the fright I am familiar with, but one in my body, in my belly; the kind of fright animals must have. I don't know how long I stood there. When the fog cleared enough for me to see, I saw to my left, about fifty feet away, two men sitting cross-legged on the ground. They were whispering to each other, and the sound of their voices seemed to be all around me, captured in small patches of fog that were like tufts of cotton. I didn't understand what they were saying, but I felt reassured as I caught a word here and there: They were speaking in Spanish.

"I'm lost!" I shouted in Spanish.

Both men slowly turned around, hesitant, disbelieving, as though they were seeing an apparition. I spun around, wondering if there was someone behind me that was causing their dramatic reaction; but there was no one.

Grinning, one of the men rose, stretched his limbs until his joints cracked, then covered the distance between us in quick strides. He was young, short, and powerfully built, with massive shoulders and a big head. His dark eyes radiated amusement and curiosity.

I told him that I had been hiking with friends and had gotten lost chasing after their dog. "I've no idea how to get back to them," I finished.

"You can't go any further this way," the man warned me. "We are standing on a cliff."

He took me confidently by the arm and led me to the very edge of the precipice, no more than ten feet away from where I had been standing.

"This friend of mine," he said, pointing to the other man, who had remained seated, staring at me, "had just finished telling me that there is an ancient Indian burial ground down below when you showed up and nearly scared us to death."

He studied my face, my long blond braid, and asked, "Are you Swedish?"

Still bewildered by what the young man had said about the burial ground, I stared into the fog. Under normal circumstances, as a student of anthropology, I would have been thrilled to find out about an ancient Indian burial ground. At the moment, however, I couldn't care less if there was indeed one in that foggy emptiness below me. All I could think of was that if I hadn't been distracted by those lights I might have ended up buried myself.

"Are you Swedish?" the young man asked again.

"I am," I lied and immediately regretted it. I couldn't think of any way to correct it, though, without losing face.

"You speak Spanish perfectly," the man commented. "Swedish people have a marvelous ear for languages."

Although I felt terribly guilty, I couldn't help adding that more than a gift, it was a necessity for Scandinavians to learn various languages if they wanted to communicate with the rest of the world.

"Besides," I confessed, "I grew up in South America."

For some strange reason this piece of information seemed to baffle the young man. He shook his head, as if in disbelief, and then remained silent for a long while, deep in thought. Then, as if he had arrived at some kind of a decision, he took me briskly by the hand, and guided me to where the other man was sitting.

I had no intention of socializing: I wanted to get back to my friends as soon as possible, but the young man made me feel so at ease that instead of asking them to lead me back to the hiking path, I gave them a detailed account of the lights and human shapes I had just seen.

"How strange that the spirit would spare her," the seated man muttered as if to himself, his dark brows drawn together in a frown. But obviously he was talking to his companion, who mumbled something in return that I didn't catch. They exchanged conspiratorial glances, intensifying my feelings of unease.

"I beg your pardon?" I said, turning to the man who was sitting. I didn't get what you were saying."

He stared at me aggressively and morosely.

"You were warned of the danger," he stated in a voice that was deep and resonant. "The emissaries of death came to your help."

"The who?" I felt compelled to ask, even though I had understood him perfectly well. I examined him closely. For an instant, I had the certainty I knew him, but as I kept staring at him, I realized I had never seen him before. Yet I couldn't completely discard the feeling of knowing him. He was not as young as the other man, but he wasn't old either. He was definitely an Indian. His skin was dark brown. His hair was blue-black, straight and thick as a brush. But it wasn't only his outward appearance that was almost familiar to me: He was morose, as only I could be morose.

Seemingly uncomfortable under my scrutiny, he rose abruptly. "I'll take you to your friends," he mumbled: "Follow me, and don't you dare fall down. You'll fall on top of me and kill us both," he added in a gruff tone.

Before I had the opportunity to say that I wasn't a clumsy oaf, he led the way down a very steep side of a mountain in the opposite direction of the cliff.

"Do you know where you are going?" I shouted after him, my voice sharp with nervousness.

I couldn't orient myself - not that I am normally good at it - but I had not been aware of climbing up a hill as I chased the dog.

The man turned around. An amused little grin quickly lit his face, though his eyes did not smile. He looked at me with a black, stony look. "I'm going to take you to your friends," was all he said.

I didn't like him, yet I believed him. He wasn't too tall - about five feet ten - and he was small boned, yet his body projected the massiveness and compactness of a stocky person. He moved in the fog with extraordinary confidence, stepping with ease and grace down what I thought was a vertical drop.

The younger man climbed down behind me, helping me every time I got stuck. He had the solicitous manner of an old-fashioned gentleman. His hands were strong and beautiful, and incredibly soft to the touch. His strength was tremendous. He easily lifted me up and over his head several times; perhaps not an extraordinary feat considering my puny weight, but quite impressive taking into account that he was standing on shale ledges, and was no more than two or three inches taller than I.

"You have to thank the emissaries of death," the man who had led the way insisted as soon as we had reached level ground.

"I do?" I asked mockingly.

The thought of saying thank you to the 'emissaries of death' seemed ridiculous to me.

"Do I have to get down on my knees?" I asked in between a fit of giggles.

The man didn't think I was being funny. He rested his hands on his hips and looked me full in the eye, his narrow, gaunt face unsmiling. There was something menacing about his stance; about his slanted dark eyes under the bristly eyebrows running together over the bridge of his chiseled nose. Abruptly, he turned his back to me, and moved away to sit on a nearby rock.

"We can't leave this spot until you thank the emissaries of death," he pronounced.

Suddenly, the realization that I was alone in a godforsaken place hit me. I was fogged in with two strange men; one of them perhaps dangerous. I knew he wouldn't budge from the spot until I fulfilled his ludicrous request. To my amazement, instead of feeling frightened, I felt like laughing.

The all-knowing smile on the younger man's face clearly revealed that he knew how I felt, and he was quite delighted by it.

"You don't have to go as far as kneeling," he told me, and then, no longer able to hold back his mirth, he began to laugh.

It was a bright, raspy sound; it rolled like pebbles all around me. His teeth were snow-white and perfectly even, like a child's. His face had a look at once mischievous and gentle.

"It's enough to say thank you," he prompted me. "Say it. What do you have to lose?"

"I feel stupid," I confided, deliberately trying to win him over. "I won't do it."

"Why?" he asked in a nonjudgmental tone. "It'll only take a second, and," he stressed, smiling, "it won't hurt a bit."

In spite of myself, I had to giggle.

"I'm sorry, but I can't do it," I repeated: "I'm like that. The moment someone insists that I do something I don't want to do, I get all tense and angry."

Eyes on the ground, his chin resting on his knuckles, the young man nodded his head thoughtfully.

After a long pause he said, "It's a fact that something prevented you from getting hurt, perhaps even killed. Something inexplicable."

I agreed with him. I even admitted that it was all very baffling to me. I tried to make a point about phenomena happening coincidentally at the right time; in the right place.

"That's all very appropriate," he said. Then he grinned and daringly nudged me on the chin. "But it doesn't explain your particular case," he said: "You have been the recipient of a gift. Call the giver coincidence, circumstances, chain of events, or whatever: The fact remains that you were spared pain; injury."

"Perhaps you're right," I conceded. "I should be more grateful."

"Not more grateful. More pliable, more fluid," he said and laughed.

Seeing that I was getting angry, he opened his arms wide as if to encompass the sagebrush around us.

"My friend believes that what you saw has to do with the Indian burial ground, which happens to be right here."

"I don't see a burial ground," I said defensively.

"It's hard to recognize it," he explained, squinting at me as if he had trouble with his eyes. "And it isn't the fog that prevents one from seeing it. Even on a sunny day, one sees nothing but a patch of sagebrush."

He went down on his knees and, grinning, looked up at me. "However, for the knowing eye, it's an unusually shaped patch of sagebrush." He lay flat on the ground, on his stomach, his head tilted to the left, and motioned me to do the same.

"This is the only way to see it clearly," he explained as I lay down beside him on the ground. "I wouldn't have known this but for my friend here who knows all kinds of interesting and exciting things."

At first I saw nothing, then one by one I discovered the rocks in the thick underbrush. Dark and shiny, as though they had been washed by the mist, they sat hunched in a circle, more like creatures than stones.

I stifled a scream as I realized that the circle of rocks was exactly like the circle of human figures I had seen earlier in the fog.

"Now I am truly frightened," I mumbled, shifting uncomfortably. "I told you that I saw human figures sitting in a circle."

I looked at him to see if his face betrayed any disapproval or mockery before I added, "It's too preposterous, but I could almost swear those rocks were the people I saw."

"I know," he whispered, so softly I had to move closer to him.

"It's all very mysterious," he went on: "My friend, who you must have noticed is an Indian, says that certain Indian burial grounds such as this one have a row or a circle of boulders. The boulders are the emissaries of death."

He looked at me closely, and then as if he wanted to make sure he had my full attention, he confided, "They are the emissaries, mind you, and not the representation of the emissaries."

I kept staring at the man, not only because I didn't know what to make of his statements, but because his face kept changing as he talked and smiled. It wasn't that his features changed, but his face was at moments that of a six-year-old child, a seventeen-year-old boy, and that of an old man, too.

"These are strange beliefs," he continued, seemingly oblivious to my scrutiny: "I didn't put too much stock in them until the moment you came out of the blue, as my friend was telling me about the emissaries of death, and then you told us that you had just seen them. If I were given to distrust," he went on, his tone suddenly menacing, "I would believe that you and he are in cahoots."

"I don't know him!" I defended myself, indignant at the mere suggestion, then whispered softly, so only he could hear, "To be quite frank, your friend gives me the creeps."

"If I were given to distrust," the young man repeated, ignoring my interruption, "I would believe that you two are actually trying to scare me. But I'm not distrustful. So the only thing I can do is suspend judgment and wonder about you."

"Well, don't wonder about me," I said irritably. "And I don't now what the hell you're talking about anyway."

I glared at him angrily. I had no sympathy for his dilemma. He too was giving me the creeps.

"He's talking about thanking the emissaries of death," the older man said. He had walked to where I was lying and was peering down at me in a most peculiar manner.

Eager to get away from that place and those two crazy people, I stood up and shouted my thanks. My voice echoed, as if the under-brush had turned into rocks. I listened until the sound died away. Then, as if possessed, and quite against my better judgment, I cried out my thanks again and again.

"I'm sure the emissaries are more than satisfied," the younger man said, nudging my calf. Laughing, he rolled on his back.

There was a wonderful strength in his eyes, in the delighted power of his laugh. I didn't doubt for an instant, despite the levity, that indeed I had thanked the emissaries of death. And most oddly, I felt myself protected by them.

"Who are you two?" I directed my question at the younger man.

In one agile, smooth motion he sprang to his feet. "I'm Jose Luis Cortez; my friends call me Joe," he said, holding out his hand to clasp mine. "And this here is my friend Gumersindo Evans-Pritchard."

Afraid I would laugh out loud at the name, I bit my lip and bent to scratch an imaginary bite on my knee. "A flea, I think," I said, gazing from one man to the other. Both stared back at me, defying me to make fun of the name. There was such a serious expression on their faces that my laughter vanished.

Gumersindo Evans-Pritchard reached for my hand-hanging limply at my side - and shook it vigorously. "I'm delighted to make your acquaintance," he said in perfect English with an upper - class British accent. "For a moment I thought you were one of those stuck-up cunts."

Simultaneously, my eyes widened and my mouth opened. Although something in me registered that his words were meant as a compliment rather than an insult, my shock was nevertheless so intense that I just stood there as if paralyzed. I wasn't prudish - under the proper circumstances I could outswear anyone - but to me there was something so appallingly offensive about the sound of the word cunt, it rendered me speechless.

Joe came to my rescue. He apologized for his friend, explaining that Gumersindo was an extreme social iconoclast. Before I had a chance to say that Gumersindo had definitely shattered my sense of propriety, Joe added that Gumersindo's compulsion to be an iconoclast had to do with the fact that his last name was Evans-Pritchard.

"It shouldn't surprise anyone," Joe noted. "His father is an Englishman who abandoned his mother, an Indian woman from Jalisco, before Gumersindo was born."

"Evans-Pritchard?" I repeated guardedly, then turned to Gumersindo and asked him if it was all right for Joe to reveal to a stranger his family's skeletons in the closet.

"There aren't skeletons in the closet," Joe answered for his friend. "And do you know why?"

He fixed me with his shiny, dark eyes that were neither brown nor black but the color of ripe cherries.

Helplessly, I shook my head to say no, my attention held by his compelling gaze. His one eye seemed to be laughing at me: The other one was dead serious, ominous and menacing.

"Because what you call skeletons in the closet are Gumersindo's source of strength," Joe went on. "Do you know that his father is now a famous English anthropologist? Gumersindo hates his guts."

Gumersindo nodded his head almost imperceptibly, as if he were proud of his hatred.

I could hardly believe my good fortune. They were referring to none other than E. E. Evans-Pritchard, one of the most important social anthropologists of the twentieth century. And it was precisely during this term at UCLA that I was researching a paper on the history of social anthropology and the most eminent proponents in the field.

What a scoop! I had to restrain myself from shouting out loud and jumping up and down with excitement. To be able to come with some awful secret like that. A great anthropologist seducing and abandoning an Indian woman. I was not in the least concerned that Evans-Pritchard hadn't done any fieldwork in Mexico - he was mainly known for his research in Africa - for I was certain I would discover that during one of his visits to the United States he had gone into Mexico. I had the very proof standing before me.

Smiling sweetly, I gazed at Gumersindo and made the silent promise that, of course, I wouldn't reveal anything without his permission. Well, perhaps I would just say something to one of my professors, I thought. After all, one didn't come across this kind of information every day.

My mind was spinning with possibilities. Perhaps a small lecture with only a few selected students at the home of one of my professors. In my mind, I had already selected the professor. I didn't particularly like him, but I appreciated the rather childish manner in which he tried to impress his students. Periodically, we met at his home. Every time I had been there, I had discovered on his desk a note, left there as if by mistake, written to him by a famous anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss.

"You didn't tell us your name," Joe said politely, gently pulling me by my sleeve.

"Carmen Gebauer," I said without hesitation, giving the name of one of my childhood friends. To ease my discomfort and guilt at having lied again with such facility, I asked Joe if he was from Argentina. Seeing his puzzled frown, I hastened to add that his inflection was definitely Argentinian. "Even though you don't look like an Argentinian," I noted.

"I'm Mexican," he said. "And judging by your accent, you grew up either in Cuba or in Venezuela."

I didn't want to continue on that line of conversation and swiftly changed the subject. "Do you know how to get back to the hiking path?" I asked, suddenly concerned that my friends might be worried by now.

"No, I don't," Joe confessed with childish candor. "But Gumersindo Evans-Pritchard does."

Gumersindo led the way across the chaparral, up a narrow trail on the other side of the mountain. It wasn't long before we heard my friends' voices and the barking of their dog.

I felt intense relief, and at the same time I was disappointed and puzzled that neither man tried to find out how to get in touch with me.

"I'm sure we'll meet again," Joe said perfunctorily by way of farewell.

Gumersindo Evans-Pritchard surprised me by gallantly kissing my hand. He did this so naturally and gracefully that it didn't occur to me to laugh at him.

"It's in his genes," Joe explained. "Even though he's only half English, his refinement is beyond reproach. He's totally gallant!"

Without another word or backward glance, both of them disappeared in the mist. I doubted very much that I would ever see them again. Overcome with guilt for having lied about my name, I was on the verge of running after them when my friends' dog almost knocked me to the ground as it jumped on me and tried to lick my face.

## Chapter 6

Dumbfounded, I stared at the guest speaker. In his three-piece suit, short, curly hair, and clean-shaven face, Joe Cortez looked like someone from another time amidst the long-haired, bearded and beaded, casually dressed students in one of the large lecture auditoriums at the University of California in Los Angeles.

Hastily, I slipped into the empty seat in the back row of the packed auditorium, a seat saved for me by the same friend I had gone hiking with in the Santa Susana Mountains.

"Who is he?" I asked her.

Shaking her head in disbelief, she regarded me impatiently, then scribbled Carlos Castaneda on a piece of paper.

"Who in the dickens is Carlos Castaneda?" I asked and giggled involuntarily.

"I gave you his book," she hissed, then added that he was a well-known anthropologist who had done extensive fieldwork in Mexico.

I was about to confide to my friend that the guest speaker was the same man I had met in the mountains the day I had gotten lost. However, for some very good reason, I didn't say anything. That man was responsible for almost destroying our friendship, which I treasured immensely. My friend had been adamant in her opinion that the story about Evans-Pritchard's son was hogwash. I had insisted that the two men had nothing to gain by telling me a tall tale. I just knew that they had candidly spoken the truth. My friend, mad at me for believing them, had called me a gullible fool.

Since neither of us had been willing to yield, our argument had become quite heated. Her husband, hoping to bring us out of our frenzy, had suggested that perhaps I had been told the truth. Irked by his lack of solidarity with her, my friend had yelled at him to shut up.

We had driven home in a morose state, our friendship strained. It took a couple of weeks to wash away the bad feeling. In the meantime, I had tried my information on Evans-Pritchard's son on several people more versed in anthropological matters and in anthropologists than I or my friend. Needless to say, I was made to feel like an idiot. Out of stubbornness, I held on to my blind belief that I alone knew the truth. I had been reared to be practical; if one lies, it has to be to gain something that can't be gained otherwise. And I was at a loss to figure out what those men could have had to gain.

I paid little attention to Carlos Castaneda's lecture. I was too absorbed with wondering about his reason for lying to me about his name. Given as I was to deducing other people's motives from a simple statement or an observation, I had a field day trying to search for a clue to his.

But then I remembered that I, too, had given him a false name. And I couldn't determine why I had done so.

After long mental deliberation, I decided that I had lied because automatically I hadn't trusted him. He was too self-confident, too cocky to inspire my trust. My mother had reared me to distrust Latin men, especially if they were not somewhat subservient. She used to say that Latin machos were like bantam cocks, interested only in fighting, eating, and having sex, in that order. And I suppose I had believed her without even thinking about it.

I finally looked at Carlos Castaneda. I couldn't make heads or tails of what he was talking about. But I became fascinated by his movements. He seemed to speak with his whole body, and his words, rather than emerging from his mouth, seemed to flow from his hands, which he moved with the gracefulness and agility of a magician.

Boldly, I walked up to him after the lecture. He was surrounded by students. He was so solicitous and engaging with the women that I automatically despised him.

"You've lied to me about your name, Joe Cortez," I said in Spanish, pointing an accusing finger at him.

Holding his hand over his stomach, as if he had received a blow, he gazed at me with that same hesitant, disbelieving expression he had had when he first saw me in the mountains.

"It is also a lie that your friend Gumersindo is the son of Evans-Pritchard," I added before he recovered from his surprise at seeing me. "Isn't it?"

He made a pleading gesture for me not to say any more. He didn't seem to be in the least embarrassed. There was such plain and simple wonder in his eyes that my righteous wrath was stopped short. Gently, he held me by the wrist, as if afraid I would leave.

After he finished talking with the students, he silently led me to a secluded bench, shaded by a gigantic pine tree, in the north campus.

"All this is so strange that I am truthfully speechless," he said in English as we sat down.

He gazed at me as if he still couldn't believe I was sitting beside him.

"I never thought I would find you again," he mused: "After we left, my friend - his name, by the way is Nestor - and I discussed you at great length. We concluded that you were a semiapparition."

He abruptly changed to Spanish and said that they even went back to the place where they had left me in the hope of finding me.

"Why did you want to find me?" I asked in English; confident that he would respond in English that he went there because he liked me.

In Spanish, there is no way to say that one just likes someone else. The response has to be more florid and at the same time more precise. In Spanish, one can either happen to evoke a good feeling - me caes bien - or arouse total passion - me gustos.

My candid question plunged him into a long silence. He seemed to be fighting whether he ought to speak or not. At last, he said that finding me in the fog that afternoon had caused him a profound upheaval. His face was enraptured as he revealed all this, and his voice betrayed the deepest awe as he added that finding me in the lecture room had been nearly the end of him.

"Why?" I asked, my vanity pricked.

I instantly regretted it because I was convinced he was going to tell me he was head over heels in love with me, and that would have been too disturbing. I wouldn't have known how to respond.

"It's a very long story," he said, still in a pensive mood. He puckered his lips, as if he were talking to himself, rehearsing what he was going to say next.

I knew the signs of a man who is preparing to make his pitch. "I haven't read your work," I said in order to head him off in a different direction. "What is it about?"

"I've written a couple of books about sorcery," he replied.

"What kind of sorcery? Voodoo, spiritualism, or what?"

"Do you know anything about sorcery?" he asked with a note expectation in his voice.

"Of course I do. I grew up with it. I've spent a great deal of time in the coastal region of Venezuela: It's an area that is famous for it's sorcerers. Most summers of my childhood were spent with a family of witches."

"Witches?"

"Yes," I said, pleased with his reaction. "I had a nanny who is a witch. She was a black woman from Puerto Cabello. She took care of me until I was an adolescent. Both my parents worked, and when I was a child, they were quite happy to leave me in her care. She could handle me much better than either of my parents. She would let me do as I pleased. My parents, of course, let her take me everywhere. During the school holidays she would take me with her to visit her family. It was not her biological family but her witch family. Although I wasn't allowed to participate in any of their rituals and trance sessions, I did manage to see a great deal."

He regarded me curiously, as if he didn't believe me.

Then he asked with a bemused smile, "What made her a witch?"

"All sorts of things. She killed chickens and offered them to the Gods in exchange for favors. She and her fellow witches - men and women - would dance until they would go into a trance. She recited secret incantations that had the power to heal her friends and injure her enemies. Her specialty was love potions. She prepared them with medicinal plants and all sorts of bodily refuse, such as menstrual blood, nail clippings, and hair, preferably pubic hair. She made amulets for good luck in gambling or in matters of love."

"And your parents allowed all this?" he asked in disbelief.

"At home, no one knew about it, except myself and my nanny's clients, of course," I explained. "She made house calls, as any doctor would. All she ever did at home was to burn candles behind the toilet bowl whenever I had nightmares. Since it seemed to help me and there was no danger of anything catching fire amidst the tiles, my mother openly allowed her to do this."

He suddenly stood up and began to laugh.

"What's so funny?" I asked, wondering whether he thought I had made it all up. "It's the truth, I assure you."

"You assert something to yourself, and as far as you are concerned, once you make the assertion it turns into the truth," he said with a serious face.

"But I told you the truth," I insisted, certain that he was referring to my nanny.

"I can see through people," he said calmly. "For instance, I see you're convinced that I am going to make a pass at you. You've convinced yourself about it and now it is the truth. That's what I am talking about."

I tried to say something, but indignation took my breath away. I would have liked to run away. But that would have been too humiliating. He frowned slightly, and I had the unpleasant impression that he knew what I was feeling. My face got red. I trembled with suppressed anger. Nonetheless, within moments I felt extraordinarily calm. It wasn't due to any conscious effort on my part; yet I had the distinct sensation that something in me had shifted. I had the vague recollection that I had gone through a similar experience before, but my memory faded away as fast as it came.

"What are you doing to me?" I muttered.

"I just happen to see through people," he said in a contrite tone. "Not all the time and certainly not with everybody, but only with the people I am intimately associated with. I don't know why I can see through you."

His sincerity was apparent. He seemed much more baffled than I was. He sat down again and moved closer to me on the bench. We remained in total silence for a while. It was a most pleasant experience to be able to drop all effort at making conversation and not feel that I was being stupid. I looked up at the sky. It was cloudless and transparent like blue glass. A soft breeze blew through the pine branches, and the needles fell on us like a gentle rain. Then the breeze turned into a wind, and the dry, yellow, fallen leaves of the nearby sycamore blew toward us. They swirled around us with a soft, rhythmic sound. In one abrupt swoop, the wind carried the leaves high up into the air.

"That was a fine display of the spirit," he murmured. "And it was for you; the wind, the leaves spinning in the air in front of us. The sorcerer I work with would say that that was an omen. Something pointed you out to me, at the precise moment I was thinking that I'd better leave. I cannot leave now."

Thinking only about his last statement, I felt inexplicably happy. It wasn't a triumphant happiness, the kind of glee one feels when getting one's way. It was rather a feeling of profound well-being that didn't last long. My ponderous self took over suddenly and demanded that I be rid of those thoughts and feelings. I had no business being there. I had cut a class, missed lunch with my real friends, missed my daily laps at the pool in the women's gym.

"Perhaps it'll be better if I leave," I said. I intended it as a statement of relief, but when I said it, it sounded as if I were feeling sorry for myself - which somehow I was.

But instead of leaving, I asked him, as casually as I could, whether he had always been able to see through people.

"No, not always." His kind tone clearly betrayed that he was conscious of my inner turmoil. "The old sorcerer I work with has recently taught me how."

"Do you think that he could teach me, too?"

"Yes, I think he would." He seemed amazed at his own statement. "If he feels about you the way I do, he'll certainly try to."

"Did you know about sorcery before?" I asked timidly, slowly coming out of my agitation.

"In Latin America everybody thinks that they know, and I believed I did. In that sense, you remind me of myself. Like you, I was convinced that I knew what sorcery was. But then, when I really encountered it, it wasn't like I thought it was."

"How was it?"

"Simple. So simple that it's scary," he confided: "We think that sorcery is scary because of it's malignancy. The sorcery I encountered is not malignant at all, and because of that, it's the scariest thing there is."

I interrupted him and commented that he must be referring to white as opposed to black sorcery.

"Don't talk nonsense, damn it!" he impatiently snapped at me.

The shock of hearing him speak to me in that manner was so great that I gasped for breath. I was instantly thrown back into turmoil. He turned his face to avoid my gaze. He had dared to yell at me. I became so angry I thought I was going to have a fit. My ears were buzzing. I saw dark spots in front of my eyes. I would have hit him, if he hadn't jumped out of my reach so swiftly.

"You're very undisciplined," he said and sat down again. "And quite violent. Your nanny must have indulged your every whim and treated you as if you were made of precious glass."

Seeing my scowling frown, he went on to say that he hadn't really yelled at me out of impatience or anger. "It doesn't matter to me personally whether you listen or not," he explained. "But it matters to someone else on whose behalf I shouted at you. Someone who is watching us."

I was perplexed at first, then uneasy. I looked all around me, wondering whether his sorcerer teacher might be watching us.

He ignored me and went on to say, "My father never mentioned to me that we have a constant witness. And he never mentioned it because he didn't know it. Just like you, yourself, don't know it."

"What kind of nonsense are you talking about?" My raspy, angry voice reflected my feelings at the moment. He had yelled at me, he had insulted me. I resented that he was talking his head off as if nothing had happened. If he believed that I was going to overlook his actions, he was in for a surprise. "You won't get away with it," I thought, smiling at him maliciously. "Not with me, buddy."

"I'm talking about a force, an entity, a presence which is neither a force nor an entity nor a presence," he explained with an angelic smile. He seemed totally oblivious to my belligerent mood. "Sounds like gibberish, but it isn't. I am referring to something that only sorcerers know about. They call it the spirit. Our personal watcher, our perennial witness."

I don't know exactly how or what precise word triggered it, but suddenly he had my full attention. He went on talking about this force, which he said wasn't God or anything to do with religion or morality, but an impersonal force, a power that was there for us to use if we only learned to reduce ourselves to nothing. He even held my hand, and I didn't mind it. In fact, I liked the feel of his strong, soft touch. I became morbidly fascinated with the strange power he had over me. I was aghast that I longed to sit with him on that bench indefinitely with my hand in his.

He went on talking. And I went on listening to every word he said. But at the same time I perversely wondered when he was going to grab my leg, for I knew that he wasn't going to have enough with my hand, and I couldn't do anything to stop him. Or was it that I didn't want to do anything to stop him?

He explained that he had been as careless and undisciplined as one could be, but that he never knew the difference because he was imprisoned by the mood of the time.

"What's the mood of the time?" I asked in a rough, unfriendly voice, lest he think I was enjoying being with him.

"Sorcerers call it the modality of the time," he said. "In our day, it's the concern of the middle class. I am a middle-class man, just like you're a middle-class woman..."

"Classifications of that nature don't hold any validity," I interrupted him rudely, yanking my hand out of his. "They are simply generalizations."

I scowled at him suspiciously. There was something startlingly familiar about his words, but I couldn't think where I had heard them before or what significance I was attaching to them. Yet I was sure those words had a very vital significance for me if I could only recall what I already knew about them.

"Don't give me this social scientist gaff," he said jovially. "I'm as aware of it as you are."

Giving in to a wave of total frustration, I took his hand and bit it.

"I'm truly sorry about that," I instantly mumbled, before he recovered from his surprise. "I don't know why I did it. I haven't bitten anyone since I was a child."

I sidled to the far edge of the bench, in readiness for his retaliation. It didn't come.

"You're absolutely primitive" was all he said, rubbing his hand in a dazed sort of way.

I let out a deep sigh of relief. His power over me was shattered. And I remembered that I had an old score to settle with him.

He had turned me into the laughingstock of my anthropology student friends. "Let's go back to our original problem," I said, trying to arouse my anger. "Why did you tell me all that nonsense about Evans-Pritchard's son? You must have realized that I was going to make a fool of myself."

I watched him carefully, certain that confronting him like this after the bite would finally break his self-control or at least rattle him. I expected him to yell, to lose his confidence and impudence. But he remained unperturbed. He took a deep breath and adopted a serious expression.

"I know that it looks like a simple case of people telling tall tales for their amusement," he began in a light, casual tone. "But it's more complex than that."

He chuckled softly, then reminded me that he hadn't known at that time that I was a student of anthropology and that I would make a fool of myself.

He paused for a moment, as if searching for the proper words, then he shrugged helplessly and added, "I really can't explain to you now why I introduced my friend to you as Evans-Pritchard's son, unless I tell you much more about myself and my aims; and that's not practical."

"Why not?"

"Because the more you know about me, the more entangled you'll become." He regarded me thoughtfully, and I could see in his eyes that he was sincere. "And I don't mean a mental entanglement. I mean you'll become personally entangled with me."

This was such a blatant display of gall that I regained all my confidence.

I fell back on my well-tried sarcastic laughter and said in a cutting tone, "You are perfectly disgusting. I know your kind. You are the typical example of the conceited Latin macho I have battled with all my life."

Seeing the expression of surprise on his face, I pressed on in my most haughty tone, "How dare you to think that I'll be entangled with you?"

He didn't become red in the face as I expected. He slapped his knee and laughed uproariously, as if that was the funniest thing he had ever heard. And to my utter dismay, he began to tickle me in the ribs as if I were a child.

Afraid to laugh - I was ticklish - I screeched with indignation. "How dare you to touch me!" I stood up to leave. I was shaking. And then I shocked myself even further by sitting down again.

Seeing that he was about to tickle me again, I curled my hands into fists and held them before me. "I'll smash your nose if you touch me again," I warned him.

Thoroughly unconcerned by my threat, he reclined his head against the back of the bench and closed his eyes.

He laughed gaily, a deep chortling laugh that made him shiver all over. "You're a typical German girl who grew up surrounded by brown people," he said, turning sideways toward me.

"How do you know I am German? I never told you that," I said in a faltering voice I intended to be softly menacing.

"I knew that you were German when I first met you," he said. "You confirmed it the moment you lied that you were Swedish. Only Germans born in the New World after the Second World War lie like that. That is, of course, if they live in the United States."

Although I wasn't going to admit this to him, he was right. I often felt people's hostility as soon as they learned that my parents were Germans; in their eyes it automatically made us Nazis. It didn't make any difference when I told them that my parents were idealists. Of course, I had to admit to myself that, like good Germans, they believed that their kind were inherently better; but basically they were gentle souls who had been apolitical all lives.

"All I did was to agree with you," I pointed out acidly. "You saw blond hair, blue eyes, high cheekbones, and all you could think of was a Swede. You are not very imaginative, are you?"

I pushed my advantage. "You had no business lying yourself, unless you're a fucking liar by nature," I went on, my voice rising against my will. Tapping his chest with my index finger I added derisively, "Joe Cortez, eh?"

Is your name really Cristina Gebauer?" he shot back, imitating my odious, loud voice.

"Carmen Gebauer!" I shouted, offended that he hadn't remembered the name correctly. Then, suddenly ashamed of my outburst, I went into a chaotic defense of myself. After a few moments, realizing that I didn't know what I was saying, I abruptly stopped and confessed that I was indeed German, and that Carmen Gebauer was the name of a childhood friend.

"I like that," he said softly, a barely suppressed grin on his lips. Whether he was referring to my lying or to my confession I couldn't tell.

His eyes were brimming with kindness and with amusement. In a tender, wistful voice he proceeded to tell me the story of his childhood girlfriend, Fabiola Kunze.

Confused by his reaction, I turned away and gazed at the nearby sycamore and the pine trees beyond. Then, eager to hide my interest in his story, I began to play with my fingernails: I pushed back the cuticles and peeled off the nail polish, methodically and thoughtfully.

The story of Fabiola Kunze resembled my own life so closely that after a few moments I forgot all about my pretense at indifference and listened to him attentively. I suspected that he was fabricating the story, and yet I had to give him credit for coming up with details that only a daughter of a German family in the New World would know.

Fabiola allegedly was mortally afraid of dark Latin boys, but she was equally afraid of the Germans. The Latins scared her because of their irresponsibility; the Germans, because they were so predictable.

I had to restrain myself from laughing out loud when he described scenes of Fabiola's home on a Sunday afternoon when two dozen Germans would sit around a beautifully set table - with the best china, silver, and crystal - and she would have to listen to two dozen monologues that passed for conversation.

As he went on giving specific details of those Sunday afternoons, I began to feel more and more uncomfortable: there was Fabiola's father prohibiting political debates in his house but compulsively aiming at starting one, seeking devious ways to tell dirty jokes about Catholic priests. Or her mother's mortal dread: her fine china was in the hands of these clumsy oafs.

His words were cues to which I unconsciously responded. I began to see scenes of my Sunday afternoons like pictures flashed on the wall for my observation.

I was a veritable bundle of nerves. I wanted to stomp and carry on as only I knew how. I wanted to hate this man, but I couldn't. I wanted vindication, apologies, but I couldn't get any from him. I wanted to dominate him. I wanted him to fall in love with me so I could reject him.

Ashamed of my immature feelings, I made a great effort to pull myself together. Pretending to be bored, I leaned toward him and asked, "Why did you lie about your name?"

"I didn't lie," he pronounced. "That's my name. I have several names. Sorcerers have different names for different occasions."

"How convenient!" I exclaimed sarcastically.

"Very convenient," he echoed and gave a slight wink, which infuriated me beyond measure.

And then he did something completely outlandish and unexpected. He put his arms around me. There was no sexual overtone in his embrace. It was the spontaneous, sweet, and simple gesture of a child who wants to comfort a friend. His touch soothed me instantly and so completely that I began to sob uncontrollably.

"I'm such a shit," I confessed. "I want to beat you, and look at me. I am in your arms." I was about to add that I was enjoying it when a surge of energy rushed through me.

As if I had awakened from a dream, I pushed him away. "Let go of me," I hissed and stomped away.

I heard him choking with laughter. I wasn't in the least concerned about his chuckles: my outburst had dissipated instantly. I stood rooted to the spot, trembling all over, unable to walk away. And then, as if I had a giant rubber band attached to me, I returned to the bench.

"Don't feel bad," he said kindly.

He seemed to know exactly what it was that was pulling me back to the bench. He patted my back as one does a baby's after a meal.

"It isn't what you or I do," he continued. "It's something outside the two of us which is acting upon us. It's been acting upon me for a long time. Now I am accustomed to it. But I can't understand why it acts upon you. Don't ask me what it is," he said, anticipating my question. "I can't yet explain it to you."

I wasn't going to ask him anything anyway: My mind had stopped functioning. I felt exactly as if I were asleep, dreaming that I was talking.

Moments later, my numbness passed. I felt more animated yet not quite like my usual self. "What's happening to me?" I asked.

"You are being focused and pushed by something that doesn't come from you," he said. "Something is pushing you, using me as a tool. Something is superimposing another criterion on your middle-class convictions."

"Don't start on that middle-class idiocy," I said feebly. It was more like I was pleading with him.

I smiled helplessly, thinking that I had lost my usual gall.

"These, by the way, are not my own opinions or ideas," he said: "I'm like you, strictly a product of middle-class ideology. Imagine my horror when I came face to face with a different and more prevailing ideology. It ripped me apart."

"What ideology is that?" I asked meekly, my voice so low it as barely audible.

"A man brought that ideology to me," he explained. "Or rather, the spirit spoke and acted on me through him. That man is a sorcerer. I've written about him. His name is Juan Matus. He's the one ho made me face my middle-class mentality. Juan Matus once asked me a grand question: 'What do you think university is?' I, of course, answered him like a social scientist: 'A center of higher learning.' He corrected me and declared that a university should be called a 'Middle-Class Institute' because it is the institution we attend to further perfect our middle-class values. We attend the institute to become professionists, he said. The ideology of our social class tells us that we must prepare ourselves for occupying managerial positions. Juan Matus said that men go to the middle-class institute to become engineers, lawyers, doctors, etc., and women go there to get a suitable husband, provider, and father of their children. Suitable is naturally defined by middle-class values."

I wanted to contradict him. I wanted to shout at him that I knew people who weren't necessarily interested in a career or looking for a spouse; that I knew people who were interested in ideas, in learning for it's own sake. But I didn't know such people. I felt a terrible pressure in my chest and had an attack of dry coughing. It wasn't the cough or the physical discomfort that made me wriggle in my seat and prevented me from arguing with him. It was the certainty that he was speaking about me: I was going to a university precisely to find a suitable man.

Again I stood up, ready to leave: I had even extended my hand to shake his in farewell when I felt a powerful tug on my back. It was so strong I had to sit down, lest I fall. I knew he hadn't touched me: I had been looking at him all the time.

Thoughts of people I didn't quite remember; of dreams I hadn't quite forgotten came crowding into my mind forming an intricate pattern from which I couldn't extricate myself. Unknown faces, half-heard sentences, dark images of places, and blurred images of people threw me momentarily into some kind of limbo. I was close to remembering something about all this kaleidoscope of visualizations and sounds; but the knowledge flittered away, and a feeling of calm and ease overtook me; a tranquility so deep that it screened out all my desire to assert myself.

I stretched my legs in front of me as if I didn't have a care in the world - and at the moment I didn't - and began to talk. I couldn't remember ever talking about myself so frankly before, and I couldn't fathom why I was suddenly so unguarded with him. I told him about Venezuela, my parents, my childhood, my restlessness, my meaningless life. I told him of things I wouldn't even admit to myself.

"I've been studying anthropology since last year. And I really don't know why," I said. I was beginning to feel slightly uncomfortable by my own revelations. I shifted restlessly on the bench, but I couldn't stop myself from adding, "Two subjects that interest me more are Spanish and German literature. To be in the anthropology department defies all I know about myself."

"That detail intrigues me to no end," he said. "I can't get into it now, but it seems as if had been placed here for you to find me, or vice versa."

"What does all this mean?" I asked, then blushed, realizing that I was interpreting and centering everything on my womanhood.

He seemed to be thoroughly aware of my state of mind.

He reached for my hand and pressed it against his heart. "Me gustas, nibelunga," he exclaimed dramatically, and for good measure he translated the words into English, "I'm passionately attracted to you, Nibelung."

He looked at me with the eyes of a Latin lover and then burst into raucous laughter.

"You're convinced I have to say this to you sooner or later, so it might as well be now."

Instead of getting angry at being teased, I laughed: His humor gave me great pleasure. The only Nibelungen I knew were from my father's German mythology books. Siegfried and the Nibelungen. As far as I could remember, they were underground, magical, dwarfish beings.

"Are you calling me a dwarf?" I asked in jest.

"God forbid!" he protested. "I'm calling you a German mythical being."

Shortly afterwards, as if it were the only thing we could have done, we drove to the Santa Susana Mountains, to the place we had met. Neither of us said a single word as we sat on the cliff overlooking the Indian burial ground. Moved by a pure impulse of companionship, we sat there in silence, oblivious to the afternoon turning into night.

## Chapter 7

Joe Cortez parked his van at the bottom of a hill. He came around to open my door and with a gallant flair helped me alight from the car. I felt relieved that we had finally stopped, although I couldn't imagine why: We were in the middle of nowhere. We had been driving since early morning. The day's heat, the flat desert, the merciless sun, and the dust of the road were but a vague memory as I breathed in the cold, heavy night air.

Agitated by the wind, the air swirled about us like something palpable, something alive. There was no moon. And the stars, incredible in number and brilliance, only seemed to intensify our isolation. Under that uneasy splendor, the hills and the desert stretched all around us, nearly invisible, full of shadows and murmuring sounds. I tried to orient myself by looking at the sky, but I didn't know how to identify the constellations.

"We're facing east," Joe Cortez whispered, as if I had spoken out loud; then patiently he tried to teach me the major constellations in the summer sky. I could only remember the star Vega, because the name reminded me of a seventeenth-century Spanish writer, Lope de Vega.

While we sat in silence on the top of his van looking at the sky, my mind wandered through the events of our journey.

Less than twenty-four hours ago, while we were eating in a Japanese restaurant in downtown Los Angeles, he had asked me, out of the blue, if I would accompany him to Sonora for a few days.

"I would love to go," I said impulsively. "The school term is over. I'm free. When do you plan to leave?"

"Tonight!" he said. "In fact, right after we finish our meal."

I laughed, certain that his invitation had been a joke. "I can't leave on such short notice," I pointed out. "What about tomorrow?"

"Tonight," he insisted softly, then held out his hand to clasp mine in a formal handshake.

Only when I saw the delight and mischief in his eyes did I realize that he wasn't saying good-bye but sealing an agreement.

"When decisions are made, they have to be acted upon immediately," he pronounced, leaving the words hanging in midair in front of me. Both of us stared at them as though we could indeed see their size and shape.

I nodded, hardly aware of having made the decision. The chance had been there, outside of me, ready, inevitable. I didn't have to do anything to bring it about.

Suddenly, with shattering vividness, I remembered my other trip to Sonora a year before. My body stiffened with fear and shock as images - disconnected in their sequence - stirred deep within me. The events of that odd trip had faded from my conscious mind so totally and absolutely that, only until a moment before, it was as if they had never taken place. But now the events were as clear in my mind as they were the day they happened.

Shivering not with cold but with an undefinable dread, I turned to face Joe Cortez; ready to tell him about that trip. He was staring at me with an odd intensity: His eyes were like tunnels, deep and dark: They absorbed my dismay. But they also made the images of that trip recede. Once the images had lost their impulse, all that was left in my mind was a trite, empty thought. I believed at that instant, in my usual assertive manner, that I couldn't tell anything to Joe Cortez, because a true adventure always dictates it's own course and the most memorable, exciting events in my life had always been those whose course I had not interfered with.

"What do you want me to call you? Joe Cortez or Carlos Castaneda?" I asked with nauseating feminine joviality.

His copper-colored face crinkled up in a smile. "I'm your childhood companion. Give me a name. I call you nibelunga."

I couldn't come up with a suitable name. I asked him, "Is there any order to your names?"

"Well," he mused, "Joe Cortez is a cook, a gardener, a handy-man; a solicitous and thoughtful man. Carlos Castaneda is a man from the academic world, but I don't think you have met him yet."

He looked at me fixedly and smiled: There was something childlike and intensely trusting about that smile.

I decided to call him Joe Cortez.

We spent the night - in separate rooms - in a motel in Yuma, Arizona. After leaving Los Angeles, all through the long drive I had worried myself sick about the sleeping arrangements. I had at moments feared he would pounce on me before we got to the motel. After all, he was a strong young man, too self-confident and aggressive. I wouldn't have been so worried if he had been American or European. But because he was Latin, I simply knew what his assumptions were. Accepting his invitation to spend a few days with him meant that I was willing to share his bed.

His thoughtfulness and considerate behavior toward me throughout the long drive was a detail that fit perfectly with what I thought and expected of him: He was preparing the ground.

It was late when we got to the motel. He went to the manager's office to see about our rooms. I stayed in the car, imagining scenario upon lurid scenario.

I had been so absorbed with my fantasies, I failed to notice his return from the office. Hearing him dangle a set of keys before me, I jumped in my seat and dropped the brown paper sack I had been holding, unconsciously clutched against my breast. It contained all my toiletries, which we had bought on the way.

"I got you a room at the back of the motel," he said. "It's away from the highway."

He pointed to the door a few steps away from us and added, "I'll sleep in this one, close to the street. I'm used to sleeping through any kind of noise." He chuckled to himself. "These were the only two rooms they had left."

Disappointed, I took the key from his hand. All my scenarios fell apart. I wasn't going to have the opportunity to refuse him. Not that I really wanted to do so. Yet my very soul clamored for a victory, no matter how small.

"I don't see why we have to rent two rooms," I said with studied casualness.

My hand was shaking as I retrieved the toiletries on the floor and stuffed them into the paper sack. What I had said next sounded incredible to me, yet I couldn't stop myself. "The traffic won't let you rest, and you need your sleep as much as I do."

I didn't for a moment believe that anyone could sleep through the noise coming from the highway.

Without looking at him, I got out of the car, and then I heard myself propose, "We could sleep in the same room - in two beds, that is."

I stood there for a moment, numbed and appalled. Never before had I done such a thing, nor had I had such a schizoid reaction. I was saying things that I didn't mean. Or did I mean them but didn't know what I felt?

His mirth put an end to my confusion. He laughed so hard people turned on the light in one of the rooms and yelled at us to shut up.

"Stay in the same room and have you take advantage of me in the middle of the night," he said in between waves of hilarity. "Right after my shower. No way!"

I blushed so intensely my ears were burning. I wanted to die of shame. This was not one of my scenarios.

I went back inside the car and slammed the door. "Take me to the Greyhound bus," I hissed at him with suppressed wrath. "Why in the hell did I come with you? I should have my head examined!"

Still laughing, he opened the door and gently pulled me out. "Let's sleep not only in the same room but in the same bed."

He looked at me sheepishly. "Please, let me make love to you!" he pleaded as if he really meant it.

Aghast, I tore myself loose from his hold and yelled, "Not in your fucking life!"

"There," he said. "This is such a fierce refusal that I dare not insist."

He reached for my hand and kissed it. "You have refused me and put me in my place. No more problems. You're vindicated."

I turned away from him, ready to weep. My chagrin was not due to his unwillingness to spend the night with me - had he expected to do so, I truly wouldn't have known what to do - but to the fact that he knew me even better than I knew myself. I had refused to give credence to what I thought was his way of flattering himself. He was able to see through me. Suddenly, it frightened me.

He moved closer and hugged me. It was a sweet, simple embrace. As had happened before, my turmoil vanished completely, as though it had never existed. I hugged him back and said yet the most incredible thing, "This is the most exciting adventure of my life."

I immediately wanted to retract my statement. The words that had escaped were not mine. I didn't even know what I meant. This was not the most exciting adventure of my life. I had taken many exciting trips. I had been around the world.

My irritation reached it's peak when he kissed me goodnight, swiftly and softly, as one kisses a child, and I liked it against my will. I had no will. He pushed me down the corridor toward my room.

Cursing myself, I sat down on my bed and wept in frustration, in anger and self-pity. Since as far back in life as I could remember, I had always had my way. I was accustomed to it. To be confused and not know what I wanted was a brand - new sensation for me and a most unwelcome one.

I slept restlessly with my clothes on until he banged on the door, early in the morning, to wake me up.

We drove all day, meandering along out-of-the-way roads. As he had told me, Joe Cortez was indeed a solicitous man. Throughout the long drive, he was the kindest, the most considerate and entertaining companion one could wish for. He pampered me with food and songs and stories. He had an astonishingly deep yet clear baritone voice. And he knew all my favorite songs. Corny love songs from every South American country, all their national anthems, old ballads, and even nursery rhymes.

His stories made me laugh until my abdominal muscles hurt. As a storyteller, he kept me enraptured with every turn of his tale. He seemed to be a born mimic. His uncanny imitation of every conceivable South American accent - including the distinctive Portuguese of Brazil - was more than mimicry, it was magic.

"We'd better climb down from the car's roof." Joe Cortez's voice broke into my reveries. "It gets cold at night in the desert."

"It's a tough environment," I said, wishing we would get back into the van and drive off.

Ill at ease, I watched him retrieve some bags from the car. He had bought all kinds of presents for the people we were going to visit.

"Why did you park here in the middle of nowhere?"

"You ask the dumbest questions, nibelunga," he replied. "I parked here because it is here where our car journey ends."

"Have we arrived at our mysterious destination that you can't talk about?" I asked in a sarcastic tone.

The only thing that had marred the enchanting drive had been his refusal to tell me where exactly we were going.

In a matter of milliseconds, I became so angry with him that I was ready to punch him in the nose. The thought that my sudden irritability was simply the result of a long, exhausting day, brought me a needed sense of relief.

"I'm getting nasty now, but I don't mean to," I said in a jovial tone that sounded phony even to me.

My voice was so strained it revealed just how much it cost me to hold back my temper. It worried me that I could get mad at him so easily and so quickly.

"You really don't know how to converse," he said with a big smile. "You only know how to coerce."

"Oh! I see, Joe Cortez has left. Are you going to start insulting me again, Carlos Castaneda?"

He chortled gaily at my remark, which by then wasn't meant to be funny. "This place is not in the middle of nowhere," he said. The city of Arizpe is nearby."

"And the U.S. border is to the north," I recited. "And Chihuahua to the east. And Los Angeles is somewhere northwest of here."

He shook his head disparagingly and took the lead. Silently, we walked through the chaparral, which I could feel more than see, along a winding narrow trail. The path grew wider as we approached a vast clearing fenced in by short mesquite trees. The silhouettes of two houses could be discerned in the darkness. The bigger of the two had lights inside. The small dark house stood some distance away.

We walked up to the large house. Pale moths fluttered in the light slanting through the windowpanes.

"I have to warn you that the people you're going to meet are a bit strange," he said in a whisper. "Don't say anything. Let me do the talking."

"I always say whatever I please," I asserted. "And I don't like to be told how to behave. I'm not a child. Besides, my social manners are impeccable. I can assure you that I won't embarrass you."

"Get off your high horse, goddamn it!" he hissed in a tightly controlled voice.

"Don't treat me like I am your wife, Carlos Castaneda," I yelled at the top of my voice, pronouncing his last name the way I felt it ought to be pronounced: with a tilde on then, which I knew he much disliked.

But he didn't get angry: It made him laugh as he so often did when I expected him to explode with wrath. He never does, I thought, and sighed despondently. He had the most extraordinary equanimity. Nothing ever seemed to ruffle him or cause him to lose his temper. Even when he shouted, it somehow always sounded phony.

Just as he was about to knock, the door opened. A thin man formed a black shadow in the rectangle of light. With an impatient gesture of his arm, he bade us in. We entered a plant-filled vestibule. Swiftly, as though afraid to show his face, the man moved ahead of us and, without a word of greeting, opened an inner door with rattly glass panes.

We followed him along a dark corridor and across an inside patio, where a young man sitting on a rush chair was playing a guitar and singing in a soft, grief-stricken voice. He paused the instant he noticed us. He didn't return my greeting and resumed his playing as we turned a corner and went down another equally dark corridor.

"Why is everyone so impolite?" I whispered into Joe Cortez's ear. "Are you sure this is the right house?"

He chuckled softly. "I've told you, they are eccentric," he murmured.

"Are you sure you know these people?" I insisted.

"What kind of a question is that?" he snapped in a quiet yet menacing tone. "Of course I know them."

We had reached a lighted doorway. His pupils gleamed. "Are we going to stay here overnight?" I asked uneasily.

"I've no idea," he whispered in my ear and then kissed my cheek. "And please, don't ask any more questions. I'm trying my best to accomplish a nearly impossible maneuver."

"What maneuver is that?" I whispered back. A sudden realization made me feel anxious and uncomfortable but also excited. The word maneuver had been the clue.

Seemingly aware of my innermost feelings, he shifted the bags he was carrying into one arm and gently took my hand and kissed it - his touch sent pleasurable shivers throughout my body - and led me across the threshold. We entered a large, dimly lit, sparsely furnished living room. It was not what I expected a provincial Mexican living room to look like. The walls and the low ceiling were immaculately white: There wasn't a picture or a wall decoration to mar that whiteness.

Against the wall opposite the door stood a large couch. On it sat three elderly, elegantly dressed women. I couldn't quite see their faces, but in the dim light they looked peculiarly alike - without actually resembling one another - and vaguely familiar. I was so baffled by this I barely noticed the two people sitting on the spacious armchairs nearby.

In my eagerness to reach the three women, I took an involuntary giant leap. I had failed to notice that the room had a split-level brick floor. As I steadied myself, I noticed the beautiful oriental rug and the woman sitting in one of the armchairs.

"Delia Flores!" I exclaimed. "My God! I can't believe this!"

I touched her, for I needed to make sure she was not a figment of my imagination.

"What is going on?" I asked instead of greeting her. At that same instant I realized that the women on the couch were the same women I had met the previous year at the healer's house.

I stood gaping, frozen, my mind dazed with shock. A quick, faint smile twitched the corners of their mouths as they turned toward the white - haired old man sitting in the other armchair.

"Mariano Aureliano." My voice was but a soft, shaky whisper. All the energy was gone from me. I turned to face Joe Cortez and in that same feeble voice accused him of tricking me. I wanted to scream at him, insult him, do him bodily harm, but I had no strength left in me, not even to lift my arm. I barely realized that, like me, he stood rooted to the floor, his face ashen with shock and bewilderment.

Mariano Aureliano rose from his chair and moved toward me, arms extended to embrace me. "How happy I am to see you again."

His voice was soft and his eyes shone brightly with excitement and joy. He lifted me off the ground in a bear's hug. My body was limp. I had no strength - or desire - to reciprocate his warm embrace. I could not say a word. He put me down, and went over to greet Joe Cortez with that same effusive warmth.

Delia Flores and her friends came over to where I stood. One by one they embraced me and whispered something in my ear. I felt comforted by their affectionate touches and by their soft voices, but I didn't understand a thing they said. My mind wasn't there with me. I could feel and hear but I couldn't make sense of what I felt and heard.

Mariano Aureliano gazed at me and said in a clear voice that pierced the fog of my mind, "You haven't been tricked. I told you from the beginning that I would blow you to him."

"So you're..." I shook my head, unable to finish my sentence as it finally dawned on me that Mariano Aureliano was the man Joe Cortez had told me so much about: Juan Matus, the sorcerer who had changed the course of his life.

I opened my mouth to say something but shut it again. I had the sensation of being cut loose from my own body. My mind couldn't accommodate any further astonishment; and then I saw Mr. Flores emerge from the shadows. Upon realizing that he was the man who had let us in, I simply passed out.

When I regained consciousness, I was lying on the couch. I felt extraordinarily well rested and free of anxiety. Wondering how long I had been out, I sat up and lifted my arm to look at my wristwatch.

"You have been out for exactly two minutes and twenty seconds," Mr. Flores announced, studying his watchless wrist.

He was sitting on a leather ottoman near the couch. In a sitting position he appeared much taller than he did standing up, for his legs were short and his torso long.

"How terribly dramatic to swoon away," he said, coming to sit beside me on the couch: "I'm truly sorry we have frightened you."

His yellow-amber eyes, shiny with laughter, belied the genuinely concerned tone of his voice. "And I do apologize for not greeting you at the door."

His face reflected a bemusement bordering on fascination as he pulled my braid. "With your hair hidden under the hat and with that heavy leather jacket I thought you were a boy."

I stood up and had to hold on to the couch. I was still a bit dizzy. Uncertainly, I looked around me. The women were no longer in the room, and neither was Joe Cortez. Mariano Aureliano was sitting in one of the armchairs, staring fixedly ahead of him. Perhaps he was asleep with his eyes open.

"When I first saw the two of you holding hands," Mr. Flores went on, "I was afraid that Charlie Spider had turned queer."

He said the whole sentence in English. He pronounced his words beautifully and precisely and with genuine relish.

"Charlie Spider?" I laughed at the name and at his formal English pronunciation. "Who is he?"

"Don't you know?" he asked, his eyes wide with genuine puzzlement.

"No, I don't. Should I know?"

He scratched his head, perplexed by my denial, then asked, "With whom have you been holding hands?"

"Carlos held my hand as we stepped into this room."

"There you are," Mr. Flores said, gazing at me with rapt approval, as if I had resolved a particularly difficult riddle. Then seeing my still-mystified expression he added, "Carlos Castaneda is not only Joe Cortez, but he's also Charlie Spider."

"Charlie Spider," I mumbled softly. "That's a very catchy name."

Of all the three names, it was the one I liked best, no doubt because I was exceedingly fond of spiders. They didn't frighten me in the least, not even big, tropical spiders. The corners of my apartment were always spotted with spider webs. Whenever I cleaned, I could not bring myself to destroy those gauzy webs.

"Why does he call himself Charlie Spider?" I asked curiously.

"Different names for different situations." Mr. Flores recited the answer as if it were a slogan. "The one who should explain all this to you is Mariano Aureliano."

"Is Mr. Aureliano's name also Juan Matus?"

Mr. Flores nodded emphatically. "It most certainly is," he said, with a broad, gleeful smile. "He also has different names for different situations."

"How about yourself, Mr. Flores? Do you also have different names?"

"Flores is my only name. Genaro Flores." His tone was flirtatious. He leaned toward me and in an insinuating whisper proposed, "You can call me Genarito."

I shook my head involuntarily. There was something about him that scared me more than Mariano Aureliano did. On a rational level, I couldn't decide what it was that made me feel this way. Outwardly, Mr. Flores seemed much more approachable than the other man. He was childlike, playful, and easygoing. And yet, I didn't feel at ease with him.

"The reason I only have one name," Mr. Flores broke into my reveries, "is that I am not a nagual."

"And what is a nagual?"

"Ah, that's a terribly difficult thing to explain." He smiled disarmingly. "Only Mariano Aureliano or Isidoro Baltazar can explain that."

"Who is Isidoro Baltazar?"

"Isidoro Baltazar is the new nagual."

"Don't tell me any more, please," I said fretfully. Holding my hand to my forehead I sat down again on the couch. "You're confusing me, Mr. Flores, and I'm still kind of weak."

I looked at him pleadingly and asked, "Where is Carlos?"

"Charlie Spider is spinning some spiderish dream." Mr. Flores said the whole sentence in his extravagantly pronounced English then chuckled contentedly as though he were savoring a particularly clever joke. He glanced gleefully at Mariano Aureliano - still staring fixedly at the wall - then back at me and back at his friend. He must have sensed my growing apprehension, for he shrugged helplessly, held up his hands in a resigned gesture, and said, "Carlos, also known as Isidoro Baltazar, went to visit..."

"He left?" My shriek made Mariano Aureliano turn to look at me. I was more distraught at being left alone with the two old men than I was about learning that Carlos Castaneda was known by yet another name, and that he was the new nagual, whatever that meant.

Mariano Aureliano rose from his chair, bowed deeply, and, holding out his hand to help me up, said, "What could possibly be more delightful and rewarding for two old men than to guard you until you awoke from your dreams?"

His engaging smile and his old-fashioned courtesy were irresistible.

I relaxed instantly. "I can't think of anything more delightful," I cheerfully agreed and let him lead me to a brightly lit dining room across the corridor, to an oval-shaped mahogany table at the far end of the room. Gallantly, he held out a chair for me, waited until I was comfortably seated, then said that it was not too late for supper and that he would go himself to the kitchen and bring me something delicious to eat. My offer to help him was graciously rejected.

Mr. Flores, instead of walking to the table, cartwheeled across the room, calculating the distance with such precision he landed a few inches away from the table. Grinning, he sat beside me. His face showed no trace of exertion: He wasn't even out of breath.

"In spite of your denial that you aren't an acrobat, I believe that you and your friends are part of some magic show," I said.

Mr. Flores sprang from his chair, his face crinkling with mischief. "You're absolutely right. We are part of some magic show!" he exclaimed, reaching for one of the two earthenware jugs standing on the long sideboard. He poured me a cup of hot chocolate. "I make a meal of it by eating a piece of cheese with it." He cut me a slice of Manchego cheese.

Together they were superb.

I wanted seconds, but he didn't offer me any. I thought that a cup - and it had only been half full - was not enough. I had always been partial to chocolate and could eat inordinate amounts of it without ill effects. I was certain that if I concentrated on my desire to have more of it, he would be obliged to pour me another cup without my having to ask. I was able to do this as a child when I wanted something badly enough.

Greedily, I watched him remove two extra cups and two saucers from the tall china closet. I noticed that between the crystal, the china, and the silverware on the shelves stood an odd assortment of prehispanic clay figurines and plastic prehistoric monsters.

"This is the witches' house," Mr. Flores said in a conspiratorial tone, as if to explain the incongruity of the decor in the china closet.

"Mariano Aureliano's wives?" I asked daringly.

He didn't answer but gestured for me to turn around. Mariano Aureliano was standing right behind me.

"The same ones," Mariano Aureliano said cheerfully, placing a porcelain tureen on the table. "The same witches who made this delicious oxtail soup."

With a silver ladle he served me a plateful and urged me to add to it a wedge of lime and a slice of avocado.

I did so, then devoured it all in a few gulps. I ate several platefuls, until I felt physically satisfied, almost stuffed. We sat around the table for a long time. The oxail soup had the most soothing effect on me. I was at ease. Something that was usually very nasty in me had been turned off. My whole being, body and spirit, was thankful that I didn't have to use up energy to defend myself.

Nodding his head, as though silently confirming each of my thoughts, Mariano Aureliano watched me with keen, amused eyes.

I was about to address him as Juan Matus, when he anticipated my intent and said, "I'm Juan Matus for Isidoro Baltazar. For you, I am the nagual Mariano Aureliano."

Smiling, he leaned closer and whispered in a confidential tone, "The man who drove you here is the new nagual, the nagual Isidoro Baltazar. That's the name you should use when you talk to him or about him. You're not quite asleep but not quite awake either," Mariano Aureliano went on explaining, "so you'll be able to understand and remember everything we say to you."

Seeing that I was about to interrupt him, he added sternly, "And tonight, you're not going to ask stupid questions."

It wasn't so much his tone, but a force, an edge to him that was chilling. It paralyzed my tongue; my head, however, of it's own accord, made a nodding gesture of affirmation.

"You have to test her," Mr. Flores reminded his friend.

A definite wicked gleam appeared in Mr. Flores' eyes as he added, "Or better yet, let me test her myself."

Mariano Aureliano paused, a long, deliberate moment charged with ominous possibilities, and regarded me critically, as if my features would give him a clue to some important secret.

Mesmerized by his keen, piercing eyes, I didn't so much as blink.

He nodded thoughtfully, and Mr. Flores asked me in a deep, grave tone, "Are you in love with Isidoro Baltazar?"

And I'll be damned if I didn't say yes in a mechanical, unanimated voice.

Mr. Flores moved closer, until our heads almost touched, and in a whisper that shook with suppressed laughter asked, "Are you really madly, madly in love with him?"

I said yes again, and both men burst into loud, elated guffaws. The sound of their laughter, bouncing around the room like ping-pong balls, finally broke my trance-like state. I hooked onto the sound and pulled myself out of the spell.

"What in the name of hell is this," I shouted at the top of my voice.

Startled, both men jumped out of their chairs. They looked at me, then at each other, and burst out laughing again with ecstatic abandon. The more eloquent my insults, the greater their mirth. There was something so infectious about their laughter, I couldn't help but giggle, too.

As soon as we had all calmed down, Mariano Aureliano and Mr. Flores bombarded me with questions. They were particularly interested in how and when I first met Isidoro Baltazar. Every absurd little detail overjoyed them. By the time I had gone over the events for the fourth and fifth time, I had either improved and enlarged my story with each telling, or I had remembered details I wouldn't have dreamed I could remember.

"Isidoro Baltazar saw through you and through the whole thing," Mariano Aureliano judged when I finally finished with my various accounts. "But he doesn't see well enough yet. He couldn't even conceive that I had sent you to him."

He regarded me wickedly and corrected himself. "It wasn't really I who sent you to him. It was the spirit. The spirit chose me to do it's bidding, though, and I blew you to him when you were most powerful, in the midst of your dreaming-awake."

He spoke lightly, almost listlessly: Only his eyes conveyed the urgency of his knowledge. "Perhaps your dreaming-awake power was the reason Isidoro Baltazar didn't realize who you were, even though he was seeing; even though the spirit let him know the very first time he set eyes on you. A display of lights in the fog is the ultimate giveaway. How stupid of Isidoro Baltazar not to see the obvious."

He chuckled softly, and I nodded in agreement, without knowing what I was agreeing to.

"That'll show you that to be a sorcerer is no big deal," he continued. "Isidoro Baltazar is a sorcerer. To be a man of knowledge is something else. For that, sorcerers have to wait sometimes a lifetime."

"What's the difference?" I asked.

"A man of knowledge is a leader," he explained, his voice low, subtly mysterious: "Sorcerers need leaders to lead us into and through the unknown. A leader is revealed through his actions. Leaders have no price tag on their heads, meaning that there is no way to buy them or bribe them or cajole them or mystify them."

He settled more comfortably in his chair and went on to say that all the people in his group had made it a point to study leaders throughout the ages in order to see if any of them fulfilled the requirements.

"Have you found any?"

"Some," he admitted. "Those we have found could have been naguals."

He pressed his finger against my lips and added, "Naguals are, then, natural leaders; men of tremendous energy who become sorcerers by adding one more track to their repertoire: the unknown. If those sorcerers succeed in becoming men of knowledge, then there is practically no limit to what they can do."

"Can women..." He didn't let me finish.

"Women, as you will learn someday, can do infinitely more complex things than that," he affirmed.

"Did Isidoro Baltazar remind you of someone you met before?" Mr. Flores interrupted.

"Well," I began expansively, "I felt thoroughly at ease with him. I felt as if I had known him all my life. He reminded me of someone perhaps in my childhood; a forgotten childhood friend perhaps."

"So you really don't remember meeting him before?" Mr. Flores interjected.

"You mean at Esperanza's house?" I asked, wondering whether I had seen him at the healer's place and didn't recall it.

He shook his head disappointedly. Then, apparently no longer interested in my response, he went on to ask if I had seen someone waving at us on our way to the house.

"No," I said. "I didn't seen anyone waving at us."

"Think hard," he insisted.

I told the two men that after Yuma, instead of going east to Nogales on Highway 8-the most logical route - Isidoro Baltazar headed south into Mexico, then east through "El Gran Desierto," then north again into the United States through Sonoyta, to Ajo, Arizona, and back into Mexico to Caborca, where we had a most delicious lunch of beef tongue in a green chili sauce.

"After getting into the car with a full stomach, I hardly paid any attention to the road," I admitted. "I know we passed through Santa Ana, and then we headed north again to Cananea, and then south again. A veritable mess, if you ask me."

"Can't you remember seeing anyone on the road?" Mr. Flores insisted. "Anyone waving at you?"

I shut my eyes tightly in an effort to visualize anyone waving at us, but my memory of the trip was one of stories and songs and of physical exhaustion. And then as I was about to open my eyes, the image of a man flashed before me. I told them that I vaguely recalled there had been a young man in the outskirts of one of those towns who I thought was trying to catch a ride.

"He might have waved at us," I said. "But I'm not sure."

Both men chuckled like children trying hard not to give away a secret.

"Isidoro Baltazar wasn't too sure of finding us," Mariano Aureliano remarked gleefully. "That's why he followed this outlandish route. He followed the sorcerers' path; the coyote trail."

"Why wouldn't he be sure of finding you?" I interrupted.

"He didn't know whether he would find us until he saw the young man waving at him," Mariano Aureliano explained. "That young man is a sentry from the other world. His waving was a sign it was all right to continue. Isidoro Baltazar should have known then who you really were, but he is very much like you; extremely cautious: And when he's not cautious, he's extremely reckless."

He paused for a moment to let the words sink in then added meaningfully, "Moving between those two points is the surest way to miss the boat. Cautiousness blinds as surely as recklessness."

"I can't understand the logic of all this," I murmured wearily.

Mariano Aureliano elucidated, "Whenever Isidoro Baltazar brings a guest, he has to heed the sentry's signal before he can continue on his journey."

"Once he brought a girl he was in love with." Mr. Flores chuckled, closing his eyes as if transported by his own memory of the girl: "A tall, dark-haired girl. Strong girl. Big feet. Nice face. He drove all over Baja California, and the sentry never let him through."

"Do you mean he brings his girlfriends?" I asked with morbid curiosity. "How many has he brought?"

"Quite a few," Mr. Flores said candidly: "He did that, of course, entirely on his own. Your case is different," he pointed out. You're not his girlfriend: You were just coming back. Isidoro Baltazar nearly croaked when he found out he was so stupid to miss all the indications of the spirit. He was merely your chauffeur. We were waiting for you."

"What would have happened if the sentry hadn't been there?"

"What always occurs when Isidoro Baltazar comes accompanied," Mariano Aureliano replied: "He wouldn't have found us, because it's not up to him to choose whom to bring into the sorcerers' world."

His voice was enticingly soft as he added, "Only those the spirit has pointed out may knock on our door, after they have been ushered into it by one of us."

I was about to interrupt, then remembering his admonition that I wasn't to ask stupid questions, I quickly pressed my hand against my mouth.

Grinning appreciatively, Mariano Aureliano went on to say that in my case Delia had brought me into their world. "She's one of the two columns, so to speak, that make the door of our door. The other one is Clara. You'll meet her soon."

There was genuine admiration in his eyes and in his voice as he went on to say, "Delia crossed the border just to bring you home. The border is an actual fact, but sorcerers use it symbolically. You were on the other side and had to be brought here, to this side. Over on the other side is the daily world, here on this side is the world of sorcerers. Delia ushered you in smoothly; a real professional job. It was in impeccable maneuver that you will appreciate more and more as time passes."

Mariano Aureliano half-rose from his chair and reached for the porcelain compote on the sideboard. He placed it in front of me. "Help yourself. They're delicious."

Enraptured, I gazed at the pulpy dry apricots on the hand-painted dish then tried one. They were more than wonderful. I put three in my mouth.

Mr. Flores winked at me. "Go ahead," he urged me. "Put all of them in your mouth before we take the plate away."

I blushed and tried to apologize with a mouth full of apricots.

"Don't apologize!" Mariano Aureliano exclaimed. "Be yourself, but be yourself in control. If you want to finish the apricots, then finish them, and that should be all there is to it. What you should never do is finish them, and then feel sorry you did."

"Well, I'll finish them," I said. And that made them laugh.

"Do you know that you met Isidoro Baltazar last year?" Mr. Flores said.

He was balancing so precariously on his tilted chair, I feared he would fall backwards and crash into the china closet. A wicked glint of delight dawned in Mr. Flores' eyes as he began to hum a well-known ranchera song. Instead of the words that went with it, he made up a little ditty that told the story of Isidoro Baltazar, a famous cook in Tucson: A cook who never lost his cool, not even when he was accused of putting dead cockroaches in the food.

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "The cook! The cook in the coffee shop was Isidoro Baltazar! But that can't be true," I mumbled. "I don't think he would..." I stopped myself in midsentence.

I kept staring at Mariano Aureliano, hoping to discover something in his face, in that aquiline nose, in those piercing eyes. I shook involuntarily, as if I were suddenly chilled. There was something savage in his cold eyes.

"Yes?" he prompted me. "You don't think he would...?" he urged me with a movement of his head to finish my sentence.

I was going to say, inanely, that I didn't think Isidoro Baltazar could lie to me so despicably. I couldn't quite bring myself to say it, though.

Mariano Aureliano's eyes became even harder, but I was too upset; too sorry for myself to feel frightened.

"So, I was tricked after all," I finally blurted out, glowering at him. "Isidoro Baltazar knew all along who I was. It's all a game."

"It's all a game," Mariano Aureliano readily agreed. "A marvelous game, though. The only game worth playing."

He paused as if to give me time to complain some more. But before I had a chance to do so, he reminded me of the wig he had pulled over my hair.

"If you didn't recognize Isidoro Baltazar - who wasn't disguised - what makes you think that he recognized you in your poodle outfit?"

Mariano Aureliano kept watching me. His eyes had lost their hardness: Now they were sad, weary.

"You weren't tricked. You weren't even enticed. Not that I wouldn't do so if I deemed it necessary," he noted in a light, soft tone: "I told you what was what from the beginning. You have witnessed stupendous events; still you haven't noticed them. As most people do, you associate sorcery with bizarre behavior, rituals, drugs, incantations."

He leaned closer and lowered his voice to a mere whisper, then added that true sorcery was a most subtle and exquisite manipulation of perception.

"True sorcery," Mr. Flores interjected, "does not allow for human interference."

"But Mr. Aureliano claims that he blew me to Isidoro Baltazar," I pointed out with immature impertinence. "Isn't that interfering?"

"I'm a nagual," Mariano Aureliano said simply. "I'm the nagual Mariano Aureliano, and the fact that I am the nagual enables me to manipulate perception."

I had paid close attention to his words, but I didn't have the vaguest idea what he meant by manipulating perception. Out of sheer nervousness, I reached for the last dry apricot on the plate.

"You're going to get sick," Mr. Flores said. "You're so tiny, and you're such a super pain in the... eye."

Mariano Aureliano came to stand behind me, then pressed my back in such a way it made me cough up the last apricot I had had in my mouth.

## Chapter 8

At this point, the sequence of events, as I remember it, becomes blurry. I don't know what happened next. Perhaps I fell asleep and wasn't aware of it, or perhaps the pressure Mariano Aureliano exerted on my back was so great that I passed out.

When I came to my senses again, I was lying on a mat on the floor. I opened my eyes and instantly became conscious of the intense brightness around me. There seemed to be sunlight in the room. I blinked repeatedly, wondering whether there was something wrong with my eyes. I couldn't focus them.

"Mr. Aureliano," I called out. "There seems to be something wrong with my eyes."

I tried to sit up but couldn't.

It wasn't Mr. Aureliano or Mr. Flores who was standing by my side: A woman was there. She was leaning over me blotting out the brightness, so to speak. Her black hair hung loosely down her sides and shoulders: She had a round face and an imposing bust. Again I tried to sit up. She didn't touch me, yet I knew that somehow she was holding me down.

"Don't call him Mr. Aureliano," she said. "Or Mariano either. That's very disrespectful of you: Call him nagual, and when you talk about him, call him the nagual Mariano Aureliano. He likes his full name." Her voice was melodious. I liked her.

I felt feisty. I wanted to ask her why all the nonsense about being disrespectful. I had heard Delia and all the other women call him the most ridiculous pet names and fuss over him as if he were their favorite doll. He certainly had enjoyed every minute of it. But I couldn't remember when and where I had witnessed that.

"Do you understand?" the woman asked.

I wanted to say yes, but I didn't have a voice. I tried, to no avail, to open my mouth and say something. When she insisted on knowing if I had understood, all I could do was nod.

She offered me her hand to help me up. Before she touched me I was up, as if my desire to rise had superseded the actual contact with her hand and had pulled me into a sitting position before she did.

Astonished by this occurrence, I wanted to ask her about it, but I could barely keep myself upright. And as for talking, words simply refused to come out of my mouth.

She stroked my hair repeatedly. Obviously, she was thoroughly aware of my plight. She smiled kindly and said, "You're dreaming."

I didn't hear her say that, but I knew that her words had moved directly from her mind into mine. She nodded and told me that, indeed, I could hear her thoughts and that she could hear mine. She assured me that she was like a figment of my imagination, yet she could act with me or upon me.

"Pay attention!" she commanded me. "I'm not moving my lips, and yet I am talking to you. Do the same."

Her mouth didn't move at all. Wondering whether I could feel a movement in her lips when she silently enunciated her words, I wanted to press my fingers against her mouth. She was actually very good-looking but menacing. She reached for my hand and pressed it against her smiling lips. I didn't feel a thing.

"How can I talk without my lips?" I thought.

"You have a hole between your legs," she said directly into my mind. "Focus your attention on it. The pussy talks."

That remark hit a funny chord in me. I laughed so hard I lost my breath and blacked out again.

The woman shook me awake. I was still on the same mat on the floor, but I was propped up with a thick cushion behind my back. I blinked and shuddered, then drew a long breath and looked at her: She was sitting on the floor beside me.

"I'm not given to fainting," I said and surprised myself by being able to utter the words. The sound of my own voice was so reassuring that I laughed out loud and repeated the same sentence several times.

"I know, I know," she appeased me. "Don't worry, you're not quite awake anyway. I am Clara. We have already met at Esperanza's."

I should have protested or asked her what she meant. Instead, without doubting for an instant, I accepted that I was still asleep and that we had met at Esperanza's.

Memories, foggy thoughts, visions of people, of places, began to emerge slowly. A clear thought popped into my mind: I had dreamt once that I met her. It was a dream. Thus, I never had thought about it in terms of real events. The moment I hooked onto that realization, I remembered Clara.

"Of course, we've met," I said triumphantly. "But we met in a dream, so you are not real. I must be dreaming now, therefore I can remember you."

I sighed, content that it could all be explained so easily, and relaxed against the thick pillow. Another clear memory of a dream popped into my mind. I couldn't recall exactly when I had dreamt this dream, but I remembered it as clearly as if the event had actually taken place: In it, Delia had introduced me to Clara. Delia had described Clara as the most gregarious of the women dreamers. "She actually has friends who adore her," Delia had confided in me.

The Clara of that dream was quite tall, strong, and rotund. She had observed me insistently as one observes a member of an unknown species, with careful eyes and nervous smiles. And yet, in spite of her demanding scrutiny, I had liked her immensely. Her eyes were speculating and smiling and green. What I remembered best about her intense watchfulness was that she had looked at me with the unblinking stare of a cat.

"I know this is just a dream, Clara," I repeated, as if I needed to reassure myself.

"No. This is not just a dream, it's a special dream," Clara contradicted me forcefully: "You're wrong to entertain such thoughts. Thoughts have power: Be watchful of them."

"You're not real, Clara," I insisted, in a strained, high-pitched voice. "You're a dream. That's why I can't remember you when I am awake."

My stubborn persistence made Clara chuckle. "You have never tried to remember me," she finally explained. "There was no point in it, no reason for it. We women are excruciatingly practical. Our great flaw or our great asset."

I was about to ask her what the practical aspect of remembering her now was, when she anticipated my question.

"Since I am in front of you, you need to remember me. And you do." She bent lower and, fixing me with her catlike stare, added, "And you won't forget me anymore. The sorcerers who reared me told me that women need two of anything in order to solidify it. Two sights of something, two readings, two frights, etc. You and I have now met twice. Now I am solid and real."

To prove how real she was, she pushed up the sleeves of her blouse and flexed her biceps. "Touch them," she urged me.

Giggling, I did. She indeed had hard, powerfully defined muscles. They felt as real as anything. She also made me touch the muscles of her thigh and calf.

"If this is a special dream," I said cautiously, "what do I do in this dream?"

"Anything your heart desires," she said. "You're doing fine so far. I cannot guide you, though, for I am not your dreaming teacher. I am simply a fat witch who actually takes care of the other witches. It was my partner, Delia, who delivered you into the sorcerers' world, just like a midwife. But she was not the one who first found you. Florinda did."

"Who is Florinda?" I giggled uncontrollably. "And when did she find me?"

"Florinda is another witch," Clara said matter-of-factly, then began to giggle too. "You met her. She's the one who took you into her dream in Esperanza's house. Do you remember the picnic?"

"Ah," I sighed appreciatively. "You mean the tall woman with the husky voice?" A radiance filled me. I had always admired tall women.

"The tall woman with the husky voice," Clara confirmed: "She found you a couple of years ago at a party you attended with your boyfriend; a plush dinner in Houston, Texas, at the house of an oilman."

"What would a witch be doing at a party in an oilman's house?" I asked.

Then the full impact of her claim hit me. I was dumbstruck. Although I didn't remember seeing Florinda, I certainly did recall the party. I had gone with a friend who flew in his private jet from Los Angeles just to attend that party and flew back the next day. I was his translator. There had been several Mexican businessmen at that party who didn't speak English.

"Jesus!" I exclaimed under my breath. "What a weird turn of events!"

In great detail I described the party to Clara. It was the first time I had been to Texas. Like some star-struck movie fan, I ogled the men, not because they were handsome but because they looked so outlandish to me in their Stetson hats, pastel-colored suits, and cowboy boots. The oilman had hired entertainers. They had staged a variety show, worthy of Las Vegas, in a nightclub grotto built especially for the occasion. It throbbed with loud music and strobe lights. And the food had been superb.

"But why would Florinda attend such a party?" I asked.

"The world of sorcerers is the strangest thing there is," Clara said by way of an answer.

She jumped up, like an acrobat, from a sitting position to a standing one, without using her arms. She paced about the room, back and forth in front of my mat. She looked formidable in her full, dark skirt, her cowboy denim jacket - colorfully embroidered in the back - and her sturdy cowboy boots. An Australian hat, pulled low over her brow as if to protect her from the noonday sun, added the last touch to her eccentric, outlandish appearance.

"How do you like my outfit?" she asked, pausing in front of me. Her face was radiant.

"It's great," I gushed. She certainly had the flair, the confidence to carry off any kind of outfit. "It's really cool."

She kneeled beside me on the mat and in a confidential whisper said, "Delia is green with envy. We are always in competition to see who comes up with the nuttiest getup. It has to be crazy without being stupid."

She was silent for a moment, and her eyes watched me, considering. "You're welcome to compete," she offered. "Do you want to join us in our game?"

I nodded emphatically, and she spelled out the rules for me.

"Originality, practicality, low price, and no self-importance," she rattled off. Then she rose again and twirled a few more times around the room. Laughing, she collapsed beside me and said, "Florinda thinks I should encourage you to participate. She says that in that party, she found out that you had a touch for thoroughly practical outfits."

She could barely finish the sentence: She was overcome by a great burst of giggles.

"Did Florinda talk to me there?" I asked and gazed at her slyly, wondering whether she would tell me what I had omitted from my account; information that I wasn't going to volunteer.

Clara shook her head then gave me a distracted smile, meant to deflect further questions about the party.

"How did Delia happen to be at the baptism in Nogales, Arizona?" I asked, shifting the conversation to the events of the other party.

"Florinda sent her there," Clara admitted, tucking all her loose hair into her Australian hat. "She crashed the party by telling everyone that she had come with you."

"Wait a minute!" I interrupted her. "This is no dream. What are you trying to do to me?"

"I'm trying to instruct you," Clara insisted, without altering her air of indifference. Her tone was even, almost casual. She didn't seem to be interested in the effect her words were having on me. Yet she watched me carefully as she added, "This is a dream, and we are certainly talking in your dream, because I am also dreaming your dream."

That her outlandish statements were enough to appease me was proof that I was dreaming. My mind became calm, sleepy, and capable of accepting the situation.

I heard myself speak, a voice detached from my volition. "There is no way Florinda could have known about my driving to Nogales," I said. "My girlfriend's invitation was accepted on the spur of the moment."

"I knew that this would be incomprehensible to you," Clara sighed.

Then, looking into my eyes and weighing her words carefully, she declared, "Florinda is your mother more than any mother you ever had."

I found her statement preposterous, but I couldn't say a word.

"Florinda feels you," Clara continued. She had a devilish glint in her eyes as she added, "There is a homing device she uses. She knows wherever you are."

"What homing device?" I asked, my mind suddenly completely in control. The thought that someone might know at all times what I was up to filled me with dread.

"Her feelings for you are a homing device," Clara said with beautiful simplicity and in a tone so soft and harmonious that it made my apprehension vanish.

"What feelings for me, Clara?"

"Who knows, child?" she said wistfully. She drew her legs up, wrapped her arms around them, and rested her chin on her knees. "I've never had a daughter like this."

My mood changed abruptly from amusement back to apprehension. In the rational, thought-out manner that was my style, I began to worry about the subtle implications of Clara's statement. And it was precisely my rational deliberations that again turned on my doubts. This couldn't possibly be a dream. I was awake: My concentration was too keen for me to be otherwise.

Sliding down the cushion propped against my back, I half closed my eyes. I kept watching Clara through my lashes, wondering whether she would slowly fade away as people and scenes fade away in dreams. She didn't. I felt momentarily reassured that I was awake and so was Clara.

"No, we're not awake," she contradicted me, again intruding into my thoughts.

"I can speak," I said by way of validating my state of total consciousness.

"Big deal!" she cackled. "Now I am going to do something that will wake you up, so that you can continue the conversation while you are really awake." She enunciated the last word with great care, drawing it out in an exaggerated fashion.

"Wait. Wait, Clara," I pleaded. "Give me time to adjust to all his." I preferred my uncertainty to what she might do to me.

Impervious to my pleading, Clara rose and reached for the pitcher of water standing on a low table nearby. Still giggling, she hovered over me, holding the pitcher over my head. I tried to roll to the side, but I was not able to do so. My body wouldn't obey me; it seemed to be glued to the mat. Before she actually poured the water over me, I felt a cold, soft sprinkle on my face. The coldness rather than the wetness produced a most peculiar sensation. It first blurred Clara's face looming over me the way ripples distort the surface of water. Then the coldness centered itself on my stomach and pulled me inward, like a sleeve that's pulled inside out. My last thought was that I was going to drown in a pitcher of water. Bubbles upon bubbles of darkness spun me around until everything went black.

When I came to myself again, I was no longer lying on the mat on the floor but on the couch in the living room. Two women were standing at the foot of the couch, staring at me with wide, curious eyes. Florinda, the tall, white-haired woman with the husky voice, was sitting beside me, humming an old lullaby - or so it seemed to me - and caressing my hair, my face, my arms, with great tenderness.

Her touch and the sound of her voice held me down. I just lay there, my unblinking eyes fixed on hers, certain I was having one of my vivid dreams, which always began as dreams and ended up as nightmares. Florinda was speaking to me. She was telling me to look into her eyes.

Her words moved soundlessly, like the wings of butterflies. But whatever I saw in her eyes filled me with a familiar feeling - the irrational, abject terror I experienced in my nightmares. I jumped up and bolted straight for the door. It was the automatic, animal's reaction I had always had in a nightmare.

"Don't be frightened, my darling," the tall woman said, coming after me. "Relax. We are all here to help you. There is no need to be so upset. You'll hurt your little body by subjecting it to unnecessary fright."

I had stopped by the door, not because she had persuaded me to stay but because I couldn't open the damn thing. Frantically, I pulled and pushed the door. It didn't budge. The tall woman was just behind me. My trembling increased. I shook so hard that my body ached, and my heart beat so loudly and erratically I knew it would burst through my chest.

"Nagual!" the tall woman called out, turning her head over her shoulder. "You'd better do something. She's going to die of fright."

I didn't see to whom she was talking, but in my wild search for an escape, I saw a second door at the other end of the room. I was certain I had enough energy left in me to make a dash for it, but my legs gave in on me. As if life had already abandoned my body, I sank to the floor. My last breath escaped from me. The woman's long arms swooped down on me like a great eagle's wings. She held me, put her mouth to mine, and breathed air into me.

Slowly, my body relaxed: My heartbeat returned to normal. I was filled with a strange peace that quickly turned into a wild excitement. It wasn't fear that filled me with wildness but her breath. It was hot: It scorched my throat, my lungs, my stomach, my groin; moving all the way to my hands and my feet. In a flash, I knew that the woman was exactly like me only taller, as tall as I would have liked to be. I felt such love for her that I did something outlandish: I kissed her passionately.

I felt her lips widen into a smile. Then she threw her head back and laughed. "This little rat kissed me," she said, turning to the others.

"I'm dreaming!" I exclaimed, and they all laughed with childlike abandon.

At first I couldn't help but laugh, too. Within moments, however, I was my usual self-embarrassed after one of my impulsive acts and angry at having been caught.

The tall woman embraced me. "I'm Florinda," she said, and she lifted me up and cradled me in her arms as if I were a baby: "You and I are the same," she went on. "You're as petite as I would have liked to be. It's a great disadvantage to be tall. No one can ever cradle you. I'm five ten."

"I'm five two," I confessed, and we both laughed because we understood each other to perfection. I was short on the second inch but always rounded it up. I was certain Florinda was closer to five eleven but rounded it down to ten. I kissed her cheeks and her eyes. I loved her with a love that was incomprehensible to me: It was a feeling untainted by doubt or dread or expectation: It was the love one feels in dreams.

Seemingly in complete agreement with me, Florinda chuckled softly. The elusive light in her eyes, the ghostly whiteness of her hair, was like some forgotten memory. I felt as if I had known her from the day I was born. It occurred to me that children who liked their mothers must be lost children. Filial love coupled with admiration for the mother's physical being must result in a sense of total love, like the love I felt for this tall, mysterious woman.

She put me down. "This is Carmela," she said, turning me toward a beautiful, dark-eyed, dark-haired woman. Her features delicate, and her skin was flawless: She had the smooth, creamy pallor of someone who stays much indoors.

"I only take moon baths," she whispered in my ear as she embraced me. "You ought to do the same. You're too fair to be out in the sun: You're ruining your skin."

It was her voice, more than anything else, that I recognized. She was the same woman who had asked me all those direct, personal questions at the picnic. I remembered her in a sitting position: she had seemed small and frail. To my surprise, she was three or four inches taller than I. Her powerful, muscular body made me feel insignificant in comparison.

With her arm draped around my shoulder, Florinda guided me toward the second woman who had been standing beside the couch when I awoke. She was muscular and tall but not as tall as Florinda. She wasn't conventionally beautiful - her features were too strong for that - yet there was something striking, thoroughly attractive about her, including the faint shadow of fine hair on her upper lip, which she obviously didn't bother to wax or bleach. I sensed a tremendous force in her, an agitation that was completely under control yet still there.

"This is Zoila," Florinda said to me.

Zoila made no motion to either shake my hand or to embrace me. Carmela laughed and spoke for Zoila: "I'm very happy to see you again."

Zoila's mouth curved in the loveliest of smiles, showing white, large, even teeth. As her long, slender hand, glinting with jeweled rings, brushed my cheek, I realized she was the one whose face had been hidden under a mass of scraggly hair. She was the one who had sewn the Belgian lace around the canvas cloth we had sat on during the picnic.

The three women surrounded me and made me sit on the couch.

"The first time we met you, you were dreaming," Florinda said. "So we really didn't have time to interact. This time, however, you're awake, so tell us about yourself."

I was about to interrupt her and say that this was a dream and that during the picnic, whether asleep or awake, I had told them everything worth knowing about myself.

"No, no. You're wrong," Florinda said, as if I had spoken my thoughts out loud. "You're completely awake now. And what we want to know is what you've done since our last meeting. Tell us specifically about Isidoro Baltazar."

"You mean this is not a dream?" I asked timidly.

"No. This is not a dream," she assured me. "You were dreaming a few minutes ago, but this is different."

"I don't see the difference."

"That's because you're a good dreamer," she explained. "Your nightmares are real: You said that yourself."

My whole body tensed up; and then, as though it knew that it couldn't withstand another attack of fright, it gave up. My body abandoned itself to the moment. I repeated to them what I had already told and retold Mariano Aureliano and Mr. Flores earlier. This time, however, I remembered details I had altogether overlooked before such as the two sides of Isidoro Baltazar's face; the two simultaneous moods he showed that were plainly revealed in his eyes. The left one was sinister, menacing: The right one was friendly, open.

"He's a dangerous man," I maintained, carried away by my observations. "He has a peculiar power to move events in whatever direction he pleases, while he remains outside, watching you squirm."

The women were enthralled by what I was saying. Florinda signaled me to continue.

"What makes people so vulnerable to his charm is that he is a generous man," I went on. "And generosity is perhaps the only virtue that none of us can resist, because we are dispossessed, [*dispossessed-physically or spiritually homeless or deprived of security] regardless of our background."

Realizing what I had said, I stopped abruptly and gazed at them, aghast.

"I don't know what has come upon me," I muttered in an attempt to apologize. "I truly don't know why I said that when I haven't thought about Isidoro Baltazar in those terms myself. It's not me talking. I'm not even capable of making those kinds of judgments."

Florinda said, "Never mind, child, where you get these thoughts. Obviously you're plugging into the source itself. Everybody does that - plugs into the source itself - but it takes a sorcerer to be aware of it."

I didn't understand what she was trying to tell me. I restated that I had no intention of shooting off my big mouth.

Florinda giggled and regarded me for a few moments thoughtfully. "Act as if you were in a dream. Be daring and don't apologize," she said.

I felt stupid, incapable of analyzing what I felt. Florinda nodded, as if in agreement, then turned to her companions and said, "Tell her about us."

Carmela cleared her throat and without looking at me said, "The three of us and Delia make a unit. We deal with the daily world."

I hung on her every word, but I didn't understand her at all.

"We're the unit of sorceresses who deal with people," Carmela clarified: "There is another unit of four women who don't deal with people at all."

She took my hand in hers and examined my palm - as if she were to read my fortune - then closed it gently into a fist and added, "You're just like us in general. That is, you can deal with people. And you're like Florinda in particular."

Again she paused, and with a dreamy look on her face she repeated what Clara had already told me.

"It was Florinda who found you," she said. "Therefore, while you remain in the world of sorcerers, you belong to her. She'll guide you and look after you."

Her tone carried such a great certainty that it threw me into genuine worry.

"I don't belong to anyone," I said. "And I don't need anyone to look after me." My voice was strained, unnatural, uncertain.

Silently, the women watched me, bemused smiles on their faces.

"Do you think I need guidance?" I asked defiantly, gazing from one to the other.

Their eyes were half closed, their lips parted in those same contemplative smiles. The imperceptible nods of their chins clearly indicated that they were waiting for me to finish what I had to say.

"I think I do very well in life on my own," I finished lamely.

"Do you remember what you did at the party where I found you?" Florinda asked me.

As I stared at her in amazement, Carmela whispered in my ear, "Don't worry, you can always find a way to explain anything."

Florinda waved a finger at me, not in the slightest disturbed. Panic crept over me at the thought that they might know that I had walked naked in that party in front of dozens of people.

Until that moment, I had been, if not proud of my outlandish behavior, at least acceptant of it. To my way of thinking, what I did at that party was a manifestation of my spontaneous personality. First, I had taken a long horseback ride with the host, in my evening gown without a saddle, to show him - after he dared me and bet I couldn't do it - that I was as good on horseback as any cowboy. I had an uncle in Venezuela who had a stud farm, and I had been on a horse since I was a toddler. Upon winning the bet, dizzy from the exertion and alcohol, I took a plunge in his giant pool - in the nude.

"I was there by the pool when you went in naked," Florinda said, obviously privy to my recollection. "You brushed me with your naked buttocks. You shocked everyone, including me.

I liked your daringing. Above all, I liked that you walked naked all the way from the other side of the pool just to brush against me. I took that as an indication that the spirit was pointing you out to me."

"It can't be true," I mumbled. "If you had been at that party, I would have remembered you. You're too tall and striking-looking to be overlooked."

It wasn't meant as a compliment: I wanted to convince myself that I was being tricked, manipulated.

"I liked the fact that you were killing yourself just to show off," Florinda went on: "You were a clown, eager to draw attention to yourself at any cost, especially when you jumped on a table and danced for a moment, shaking your buttocks shamelessly, while the host yelled his head off."

Instead of embarrassing me, her remarks filled me with an incredible sense of ease and delight. I felt liberated. The secret was out, the secret I had never dared to admit, that I was a show-off who would do anything to get attention. A new mood overtook me, definitely more humble, less defensive. I feared, however, that such a mood wouldn't last. I knew that any insights and realizations I had arrived at in dreams had never survived. But perhaps Florinda was right and this was no dream, and my new frame of mind would endure.

Seemingly cognizant of my thoughts, the three women nodded emphatically. Instead of feeling encouraged by their agreement, it only revived my uncertainties. As I had feared, my insightful mood was short-lived. Within moments I was burning with doubts; and I wanted a respite.

"Where is Delia?" I asked.

"She's in Oaxaca," Florinda said, then added pointedly, "She was here just to greet you."

I had thought that if I changed the subject, I would get a respite and have a chance to recuperate my strength. Now I was facing something I had no resources to deal with. I couldn't accuse Florinda outright - as I would normally have done with anybody - of telling lies in order to manipulate me. I couldn't tell her that I suspected they had made me groggy and had taken me from room to room while I was unconscious.

"What you say is really preposterous, Florinda," I chided. "I can't believe that you expect me to take you seriously."

Chewing the inside of my lip, I stared at her long and hard. "I know that Delia is hiding in one of the rooms."

Florinda's eyes seemed to tell me she understood my quandary.

"You have no other option except to take me seriously," she said. Though her tone was mild, it was final.

I turned to the other two women, hoping for some kind of an answer, anything that would ease my growing apprehension.

"If someone else guides you, it's actually very easy to dream," Carmela confided: "The only drawback is that that someone else has to be a nagual."

"I've been hearing all along about a nagual," I said. "What is a nagual?"

"A nagual is a sorcerer of great power who can lead other sorcerers through and out of the darkness," Carmela explained: "But the nagual himself told you all that a while ago. Don't you remember?"

Florinda interceded as my body contorted in an effort to remember. "Events we live in everyday life are easy to recall. We have plenty of practice in doing that. But events lived in dreams are another story. We have to struggle very hard to bring them back, simply because the body stores them in different places. With women who don't have your somnambulist brain," she pointed out, "dreaming instructions begin by making them draw a map of their bodies - a painstaking job that reveals where the visions of dreams are stored in their bodies."

"How do you draw this map, Florinda?" I asked, genuinely intrigued.

"By systematically tapping every inch of your body," she said: "But I can't tell you more. I'm your mother, not your dreaming teacher. Now, she recommends a small wooden mallet for the actual tapping. And she also recommends to tap only the legs and hips. Very rarely, the body stores those memories in the chest or belly. What's stored in the chest, back, and belly are the memories of everyday life. But that's another matter. All that concerns you now is that remembering dreams has to do with physical pressure on the specific spot where that vision is stored. For instance, if you push your vagina by putting pressure on your clitoris, you'll remember what Mariano Aureliano told you," she finished with a kind of simple cheerfulness.

I stared at her aghast, then burst into nervous, fitful giggles. I wasn't going to push anything.

Florinda laughed, too, gleefully, seemingly enjoying my embarrassment. "If you won't do it," she threatened, "then I will simply have Carmela do it for you."

I turned to Carmela. With a half smile about to break into a laugh, she assured me that indeed she would push my vagina for me.

"There is no need to!" I cried out in dismay. "I remember everything!"

And indeed I did. And not only what Mariano Aureliano had said but also other events.

"Is Mr. Aureliano..."

"Clara told you to call him the nagual Mariano Aureliano," Carmela cut me off in midsentence.

"Dreams are doors into the unknown," Florinda said, stroking my head: "Naguals lead by means of dreams. And the act of dreaming with purpose is the art of sorcerers. The nagual Mariano Aureliano has helped you to get into dreams that all of us dreamed."

I blinked repeatedly. I shook my head, then fell back against the cushions of the couch, shocked by the absurdity of all I was remembering.

I remembered that I had dreamed of them a year ago in Sonora, a dream that had lasted, I thought, forever. In that dream, I met Clara, Nelida, and Hermelinda; the other team, the dreamers. They told me that the leader of that team was Zuleica but that I couldn't dream of her yet.

As the memory of that dream became clear in my mind, it also became clear that among those women no one was more, and no one was less than the other. That one woman in each group was the leader was in no way a matter of power, of prestige, or of accomplishment; but simply a matter of efficiency. I didn't know why, but I was convinced that all that mattered to them was the deep affection they had for each other.

In that dream everyone had said to me that Zuleica was my dreaming teacher. That was all I could remember. Just as Clara had told me, I needed to see them or dream of them one more time in order to solidify my knowledge of them. As it was, they were but disembodied memories.

I vaguely heard Florinda say that after a few more tries I would fare much better in shifting from my memory of dreams, to the dream I was dreaming, and then to the normal state of awakeness.

I heard Florinda giggle, but I was no longer in the room. I was outside, walking across the chaparral. I walked slowly along an invisible path, a little uneasy, for there was no light, no moon, no stars in the sky.

Pulled by some invisible force, I stepped into a large room. It was dark inside except for the lines of light crisscrossing from wall to wall over the faces of the people sitting in two circles - an inner and an outer circle. The light got bright and then became dim, as if someone in the circle were playing with the electric switch, turning it on and off.

I recognized Mariano Aureliano and Isidoro Baltazar sitting, back to back, in the middle of the inner circle. It wasn't so much that I recognized their faces but rather their energy. It wasn't that their energy was brighter than or different from anyone else's. There was simply more of it. It was massive. It was one splendid, great lump of inexhaustible brilliance.

The room shone white. There was a vividness to things, a hardness to every edge and corner. There was such a clarity in that room that everything stood out separately, by itself, especially those lines of light that were tied to the people sitting in the circle - or that emanated from them. The people were all connected by lines of light, and they looked as if they were the suspension points of a giant spider web. They all communicated wordlessly, through the light. I was pulled to that silent, electric tension until I, too, was a point in that web of luminosity.

I was stretched out on the couch; my head resting in Florinda's lap. "What's going to happen?" I asked, looking up at her.

She didn't answer; neither did Carmela or Zoila, who were sitting by her with their eyes closed. I repeated my question several times, but all I heard was the gentle breathing of the three women. I was certain they were asleep, yet I felt their quiet, keen eyes on me. The darkness and the silence moved about the house like something alive, bringing with them an icy wind and the scent of the desert.

## Chapter 9

Shivering with cold, I wrapped the blanket tightly around me and sat up. I was in a strange bed, in a strange room furnished only with the bed and a night table, yet everything around me exuded familiarity. However, I couldn't decide why it was all so well known to me. Perhaps I am still asleep, I thought. How do I know this isn't a dream? I sank back into my pillows. I lay there with my arms behind my head and let the bizarre events I had witnessed and lived - half dream, half memory - run through my mind.

It had all begun, of course, the year before, when I drove with Delia Flores to the healer's house. Delia had claimed that the picnic I had had with everyone there had been a dream. I had laughed at her, and discarded her statements as preposterous.

She had been right, though. I knew now that the picnic had been a dream. Not my dream, but a dream dreamt by others and to which I had been invited; I was a participating guest. My mistake all along had been to try doggedly to deny it; to discard it as a fake without knowing what I meant by fake. All I succeeded in doing was to block that event from my mind so completely that I was never aware of it.

What I needed to do was to accept that we have a track for dreams; a groove where only dreams run. Had I set up myself to remember the dream I had had in Sonora, as nothing else but a dream, I would have succeeded in retaining the wonder of what had occurred while the dream was being dreamt.

The more I speculated about it, and about all the things that were happening to me now, the greater my discomfort. But what surprised me the most was that I wasn't really scared of all these people who, although supportive, were a scary bunch by any count. And it suddenly dawned on me that the reason why I wasn't scared was that I knew them very well. The proof to me was that they themselves had voiced the strange yet comforting feeling I had had: that I was coming home.

I discarded all these thoughts as soon as I had formulated them, and honestly wondered whether perhaps I was mentally unbalanced and they had found a way to focus on it and thus enhance it. In a serious, systematic fashion I reviewed the history of my family in an effort to recall everything I might have heard about mental illness.

There was a story of a maternal great-uncle who, Bible in hand, would preach at street corners. Then both my great-grandfather and my grandfather, at the onset of the First and the Second World Wars, respectively, committed suicide upon realizing that everything was lost to them. One of my grandmothers blew her brains out when she realized that she had lost her beauty and sex appeal.

I liked to believe that I had inherited my feeling of detachment from being the true granddaughter of all those nuts. I had always believed that this feeling of detachment gave me my daring.

Those morbid thoughts caused me such anxiety that I jumped out of bed. With nervous, jerky movements I pulled my body out of the blanket. To my utter bafflement I found myself bundled in a heavy flannel nightshirt. I had on thick, knee-length wool socks, mittens, and a cardigan sweater.

"I must be ill," I mumbled to myself in dismay. "Why else would I be cold with all these clothes on?" Normally, I slept in the nude, regardless of the climate.

Only then did I notice the sunlight in the room: It came through the thick, semi-opaque window. I was certain that the light shining in my eyes had awakened me. And I really needed to find the bathroom. Worried that the house didn't have inside plumbing, I stepped toward the sliding door at the other end of the room, which was open, and sure enough, it was a water closet with a lidded chamber pot in it.

"Damn it! I can't go to the bathroom in a water closet!" I yelled.

The door opened and Florinda walked in. "It's all right," she said, embracing me. "There's an outhouse. The water closet is a relic from the past."

"How fortunate it's already morning," I laughed. "No one will ever know that I'm too fainthearted to go to the outhouse in the dark."

Florinda gave me a strange look, then turned her gaze away, and at last said in a whisper, "What makes you think it's morning?"

"The sun woke me up a little while ago," I said, moving toward the window. Uncomprehendingly, I stared at the darkness outside.

Florinda's face brightened. She seemed to control herself, but then her shoulders shook with laughter as she pointed to the light bulb in the lamp standing behind the bed. I had mistaken the bright bulb for the sunlight.

"What makes you so sure you're awake?" she asked.

I turned to look at her and said, "My unbearable urge to go to the bathroom."

She took me by the arm and said, "Let me take you to the outhouse before you disgrace yourself."

"I'm not going anywhere until you tell me whether I'm awake or dreaming," I yelled.

"What a temper!" Florinda exclaimed, lowering her head until her forehead touched mine.

Her eyes were wide. "You're dreaming-awake," she added, enunciating each word carefully.

In spite of my growing apprehension, I began to laugh. The sound of my laughter, which reverberated around the room like a distant echo, dispelled my anxiety. At that moment I was no longer concerned about whether I was awake or dreaming. All my attention was focused on reaching the toilet.

"Where is the outhouse?" I growled.

"You know where it is," Florinda said, folding her arms over her chest. "And you'll never reach it in time, unless you will yourself be there. But don't bring the outhouse to your bed. That's called lazy dreaming; the surest way to soil your bed. Go to the outhouse yourself in a flick of an eyelid."

To my utter horror, I couldn't reach the door when I tried to. My feet lacked the confidence to walk. Slowly and uncertainly, as if they were unable to decide which way to go, they moved, one foot ahead of the other. Resisting to accept that my feet were no longer under my command, I tried to speed up my movements by lifting, with my hands, one foot after the other.

Florinda didn't seem to care what was happening to me. Tears of frustration and self-pity welled up in my eyes as I stood rooted to the spot. My lips shaped the word help, but no sound came out of my mouth.

"What's the matter?" she asked as she took hold of one of my arms and gently pulled me down to the floor.

She removed my heavy woollen socks and examined my feet: She now seemed genuinely concerned. I wanted to explain that my inability to move was due to my being emotionally exhausted. But hard as I tried, I couldn't formulate my thoughts into words. As I struggled to utter a sound, I noticed that something was wrong with my vision: My eyes were no longer able to focus. Florinda's face remained blurry and fuzzy no matter how hard I squeezed my eyes; regardless of how close I moved my face to hers.

"I know what's the matter with you," Florinda whispered in my ear. "You have to go to the outhouse. Do it! Will yourself there!"

I nodded emphatically. I knew that I was indeed dreaming-awake, or rather, that I was living in another reality that didn't yet fully belong to me, but to which I had access through these people. Then I felt inexplicably at ease; and suddenly I was in the outhouse, not in a dreamed outhouse but in a real one.

It took me a long time to test my surroundings, to make sure this was the real thing. It was.

Then I was back in the room, but I didn't know how. Florinda said something flattering about my dreaming capacity. I paid little attention to her remarks, for I was distracted by the pile of blankets against the wall. I hadn't noticed them upon awakening, yet I was certain I had seen them before.

My feeling of ease vanished quickly as I tried to recall where I had seen those blankets. My anguish grew. I didn't know any longer whether I was still in the same house I had arrived at earlier in the evening with Isidoro Baltazar or whether I was someplace else.

"Whose room is this?" I asked. "And who bundled me up with all these clothes?"

It terrified me to hear my own voice.

Florinda stroked my hair and in a kind, soft voice said that for the time being this was my room; and that she had bundled me up so I wouldn't get cold. She explained that the desert is deceiving; especially at night.

She regarded me with an enigmatic expression, as though she were hinting at something else. It disturbed me because her words gave me no clues about what she might be referring to. My thoughts reeled aimlessly. The key word, I decided, was desert. I hadn't known the witches' place was in the desert: We had arrived at it in such a roundabout way, I had failed to ascertain where exactly the house was located.

"Whose house is this, Florinda?" I asked.

She seemed to be wrestling with some deep problem, her expression changing from thoughtful to worried several times. "You're home," she finally said, her voice deep with emotion. Before I could remind her that she hadn't answered my question, she gestured for me to be silent and pointed a finger at the door.

Something whispered in the darkness outside. It could have been the wind and the leaves, but I knew it was neither. It was a soothing, familiar sound: It brought back to me the memory of the picnic. In particular, it brought back Mariano Aureliano's words: "I will blow you, as I blew the others, to the one person who now holds the myth in his hands."

The words rang in my ears: I turned to look, wondering if Mariano Aureliano had perhaps come into the room and was repeating them out loud this very instant.

Florinda nodded. She had read my mind. And her eyes, fixed on mine, were forcing me to acknowledge my understanding of his claim. At the picnic I hadn't given much thought to his statement. It had simply been too preposterous. Now I was so curious to find out who "the others" really were that I couldn't afford to let the topic of the conversation slip by.

"Isidoro Baltazar talked about some people who work with him," I began cautiously: "He said that they had been entrusted to him and that it was his sacred duty to help them. Are they the ones who... blew to him?" I asked hesitantly.

Florinda nodded her head affirmatively, a faint smile curling her lips as if she found my reluctance to mention the word blew amusing. "Those are the ones the old nagual blew to the new nagual: They are women, and they are like you."

"Like me?" I asked uncertainly.

I wished I hadn't been so absorbed with my own puzzling changes of moods and feelings toward Isidoro Baltazar during the trip, and had paid closer attention to all he had revealed about his world.

"In what way are those women like me?" I asked and then added, "Do you know them?"

"I've seen them," she said noncommittally.

"How many women have been blown to Isidoro Baltazar?" I asked with ill-concealed displeasure; yet the mere thought of them was both exciting and alarming.

Florinda was positively gleeful at my reaction. "A few. And they don't resemble you physically, yet they are like you. What I mean is that they resemble one another the way my fellow sorceresses and I resemble one another," Florinda explained: "Weren't you, yourself, surprised at how much alike we looked when you first met us?"

Acknowledging my nod, she went on to say that what made her and her cohorts so alike - in spite of the obvious physical differences - was their unbiased commitment to the sorcerers' world.

"We are drawn together by an affection that is as yet incomprehensible to you," she said.

"I bet it is," I stated as cynically as I could. Then my curiosity and excitement about the women who had been blown to Isidoro Baltazar got the better of me. "When will I meet them?"

"When you find them," Florinda said. Her voice, though low, had an extraordinary force that all but silenced me for a moment.

"How can I find them if I don't know them? It's impossible."

"Not for a witch," she remarked casually: "As I already said, you don't resemble them physically, but the glow inside you is as bright as the glow inside them. You will recognize them by that glow."

Her eyes were fixed on me intently, as if she could indeed see the glow inside me. Her face was grave and her voice unusually low as she said, "It's the glow of sorcerers."

I wanted to make some impudent remark, but something in her manner alarmed me.

"Can I see that glow?" I asked.

"We need the nagual for that," Florinda said and pointed to the nagual Mariano Aureliano, who was standing in the shadowy corner of the room. I hadn't noticed him at all, but I didn't find his sudden appearance in any way alarming.

Florinda told him what I wanted.

He motioned me to follow him to the middle of the room. "I'll show you that glow," he said then squatted and, holding up both hands, gestured for me to get on his back.

I asked, "We are going for a piggyback ride?" I made no effort to conceal my disappointment. "Aren't you going to show me the glow of sorcerers?"

Although I clearly remembered his words that true sorcery was not bizarre behavior, rituals, drugs, or incantations, I nevertheless expected a show; some demonstration of his power, such as mixing spells and simples over the fire.

Ignoring my disillusionment, Mariano Aureliano urged me to put my arms around his neck, lightly so as not to choke him.

"Don't you think I am a little too old to be carried around?" I cautioned him.

Mariano Aureliano's laughter gurgled up inside him, exploding with outrageous delight. In one swift motion he sprang to his feet. Tucking his arms behind my knees, he shifted me into a comfortable position and stepped out into the hall, but my head didn't hit the door frame.

He walked so fast and effortlessly I had the distinct sensation of floating down the long dark corridor. Curious, I glanced all around me. However, we moved too fast to catch any but brief glimpses of the house. A soft yet persistent scent permeated everything: a fragrance of orange blossoms and the freshness of cold air.

Outside, the yard was blurred by mist. All I was able to see was a uniform mass of dark silhouettes. Swirls of fog transformed every space, revealing and then blotting out strange shapes of trees and stones. We were not at the witches' house. I was sure of that.

I heard nothing except a rhythmical breathing. I couldn't tell if it was the nagual Mariano Aureliano's breathing or my own. The sound spread all over the yard. It made the leaves tremble, as if a wind were rustling through the branches. The trembling seeped into my body with every breath I took. It made me so dizzy I wrapped my arms tightly around his shoulders lest I lose consciousness. Before I had a chance to tell him what I was experiencing, the fog closed in around me, and I felt myself dissolve into nothingness.

"Rest your chin on the top of my head." The nagual Mariano Aureliano's voice came as if from a great distance.

The words jolted me, for I had quite forgotten that I was riding on his back.

"Whatever you do, don't let go of me," he added with great urgency as he pushed me up on his back so my head was above his.

"What could possibly happen if I let go?" I asked in a tone that betrayed my growing apprehension. "I would just fall onto the ground, wouldn't I?" My voice had gotten terribly screechy.

Mariano Aureliano laughed softly but didn't answer. Leisurely, he walked up and down the extensive yard with light, soft steps, almost in a kind of dance. And then, for an instant, I had the distinct impression that we rose in the air: We became weightless. I felt that we actually traveled through the darkness for a fleeting moment, then I felt the solid ground through Mariano Aureliano's body. Whether the fog had lifted or whether we were in a different yard, I couldn't determine, but something had changed. Perhaps it was only the air: It was heavier, harder to breathe.

There was no moon, and the stars were faint, yet the sky shone as if it were lit from some faraway spot. Slowly, as if someone were outlining them in the air, the contours of trees became clear.

About five feet away, in front of a particularly tall and bushy zapote tree, Mariano Aureliano came to an abrupt halt. At the foot of that tree stood a group of people, perhaps twelve or fourteen. The long leaves, weighed down by the mist, shadowed their faces. A strange green light emanating from the tree made each person unnaturally vivid.

Their eyes, their noses, their lips, all of their features gleamed in that green light, yet I could make out nothing of their faces. I didn't recognize any of them. I couldn't even determine whether they were males or females; they were simply people.

"What are they doing?" I whispered into Mariano Aureliano's ear. "Who are they?"

"Keep your chin on the top of my head," he hissed.

I pressed my chin firmly against his head, fearing that if I pushed too hard my whole face would sink into his skull.

Hoping to recognize someone by his or her voice, I said good evening to them.

Fleeting smiles parted their lips. Instead of returning my greeting, they averted their faces. An odd sound came from amidst them; a sound that energized them, for they, too, like the tree, began to glow. Not a green light, but a golden brilliance that coalesced and shimmered until they all fused into one big golden ball that just hovered there under the tree.

Then the golden ball dissolved into patches of luminosity. Like giant glowworms they appeared and disappeared among the trees, sowing light and shadow in their passing.

"Remember that glow," Mariano Aureliano murmured. His voice echoed in my head. "It's the glow... of the surem."

A sudden gust of wind scattered his words. The wind was alive; it glowed against the darkness of the sky. It blew with great violence, with a strange ripping sound. Then the wind turned against me; I was certain it meant to annihilate me. I cried out in pain as a particulariy icy gust seared my lungs. A coldness spread through my body until I felt myself grow stiff.

Whether it was Mariano Aureliano who had spoken or the wind self, I couldn't tell. The wind roared in my ears, blotting out everything around me. Then it was inside my lungs. It wriggled like a living thing, eager to devour every cell in my body. I could feel myself collapse, and I knew I was going to die. But the roaring stopped. The silence was so sudden I heard it. I laughed out loud, thankful that I was still alive.

## Chapter 10

The bed was big and comfortably soft. A golden radiance filled the room. Hoping to prolong this moment of well-being a bit longer, I closed my eyes and buried myself in sleepy bliss amidst fragrant linen sheets and subtly scented lavender pillow cases.

I could feel every muscle and every bone in my body tense as I remembered the night's events; disconnected fragments of some god-awful dream. There was no continuity, no linear sequence to all I had experienced during those interminable hours. I had awoken twice during the night, in different beds, in different rooms, even in a different house.

As if they had a life of their own, these disconnected images piled up and expanded, all at once, into a labyrinth that somehow I was able to comprehend all at once. That is, I perceived every event simultaneously. The sensation of those images growing out of my skull into an enormous, fanciful headdress was so real I jumped out of bed and dashed across the room to the steel and glass dresser. The three-paneled mirror was covered with rice paper. I tried to peel off a corner, but the paper clung to the glass like a skin.

The sight of the silver-backed hairbrush with it's matching comb, the bottles of perfume, and the jars of cosmetics on the dresser had a soothing effect on me: I, too, would have arranged the bottles and jars by size, in a row, like tools. Somehow I knew that I was in Florinda's room, in the witches' house. This knowledge restored my sense of equilibrium.

Florinda's room was enormous. The bed and the dresser were the only pieces of furniture in it. They stood in opposite corners, away from the walls and at an angle, leaving a triangular space behind them. I pondered the arrangement of the bed and the dresser for quite some time but couldn't figure out whether it followed some kind of esoteric pattern, the significance of which eluded me, or whether it was merely the result of Florinda's aesthetic whim.

Curious as to where the three doors in the room led, I tried them all. The first one was locked from the outside. The second one opened to a small, rectangular - shaped walled - in patio. Puzzled, I stared at the sky, until it finally dawned on me that it was not morning, as I had assumed upon awakening, but late afternoon. I wasn't disturbed that I had slept the whole day. On the contrary, I was elated. Convinced that I am an insomniac, I am always overjoyed by my oversleeping spells.

The third door opened into the corridor. Anxious to find Isidoro Baltazar, I made my way to the living room. It was empty. There was something forbidding about the neat and straight manner in which the furniture was arranged. Nothing revealed that anyone had sat on the couch and the armchairs the night before. Even the cushions stood stiffly, as if at attention.

The dining room across the corridor looked equally forsaken, equally austere. Not a chair was out of place. Not a crumb; not a stain in the polished surface of the mahogany table; nothing betrayed that I had sat there last night with the nagual Mariano Aureliano and Mr. Flores, and eaten dinner. In the kitchen, separated from the dining room by an arched vestibule and a narrow hall, I found a jug, half filled with champurrado, and a covered plate with some sweet tamales. I was too hungry to bother with heating them. I poured myself a mugful of the thick chocolate and ate the three corn cakes directly from their corn - husk wrappings. Stuffed with pieces of pineapple, raisins, and slivered almonds, they were delicious.

It was inconceivable to me that I had been left alone in the house, yet I couldn't ignore the stillness around me. It wasn't the comforting peace one is conscious of when people are purposely being quiet, but rather it was the overwhelming soundlessness of a deserted place. The possibility that, indeed, I had been abandoned there made me choke on a piece of tamale.

On my way back to Florinda's room, I paused in front of every door I passed.

"Anybody home?" I called out as I knocked repeatedly. There was no answer.

I was about to step outside when I distinctly heard someone ask, "Who is calling?"

The voice was deep and raspy, but I couldn't tell whether it was a man or a woman who had spoken. I couldn't determine from which direction, let alone from which room, the voice had come.

I retraced my steps and called out again at the top of my voice whether anybody was home. Upon reaching the far end of the corridor, I hesitated for a moment in front of a closed door. I turned the doorknob, then quietly opened it a crack and sidled in.

With my eyes tightly shut, I reclined against the wall and waited for my heartbeat to normalize. Suppose someone caught me in here, I thought guiltily, but my curiosity outweighed any sense of wrong-doing as I breathed in the air of mystery, of enchantment, that permeated the room.

The heavy, dark curtains were drawn, and the only light came from a tall reading lamp. It's huge shade, fringed with tassels, cast a circle of yellow light on the chaise lounge by the window. At the very center of the room stood a four-poster bed: Canopied and curtained, it dominated the space as if it were a throne. The bronze and wood-carved oriental figurines, ensconced on the four round tables in each corner, appeared to stand guard over the room like some celestial deities.

Books, papers, and magazines were piled on the drop-front French desk and on the chest of drawers. There was no mirror on the kidney-shaped dresser, and instead of a comb and brush, or bottles of perfume and cosmetics, a set of fragile-looking demitasses [*demitasse - small coffee cup; for serving black coffee] stood on the glass-topped surface. Strands of pearls, gold chains, rings, and brooches spilled from the delicate gold-rimmed cups like some abandoned treasure. I recognized two of the rings: I had seen them on Zoila's hand.

The inspection of the bed I reserved for last. Almost reverentially, as if indeed it were a throne, I pulled back the curtain and gasped with delight. The brightly colored pillows on the silky green spread made me think of wild flowers in a meadow.

And yet an involuntary shiver shook my body as I stood in the middle of the room. I couldn't help but feel that the warmth, the mystery, and the enchantment this room exuded were but an illusion.

The sensation of having stepped into some kind of a mirage was even more pronounced in the third room. It, too, seemed warm and friendly at first. The very air was tender and loving. Echoes of laugher seemed to bounce off the walls. However, this atmosphere of warmth was only a tenuous, fleeting impression, like the fading sunlight streaking through the glassless, gauze-curtained windows.

As in the other room, the bed dominated the space. It too was canopied and decorated with brightly colored pillows that had been tossed about with absentminded abandon.

Against one wall stood a sewing machine. It was an old one; a hand-painted treadle machine. Next to it was a tall bookcase. Instead of books, the shelves were stacked with bolts of the finest cottons, silks, and wool gabardine cloth, all neatly arranged by color and fabric.

Six different colored wigs, all stretched over staked gourds, were displayed on a low table under the window. Among them was the blond one I had seen Delia Flores wear, and the dark, curly one Mariano Aureliano had pulled over my head outside the coffee shop in Tucson.

The fourth room was a bit further down from the others and across the hall. The last afternoon sun rays, filtering through a latticed wall, lay on the floor like a carpet of light and shadows, a wavering square of rectangular patterns. Compared to the other two rooms, it gave the impression of being empty.

The few pieces of furniture were so artfully placed it made the space seem larger than it actually was. Low bookshelves with glass doors lined the walls. At the far end, in an alcove, stood a narrow bed. The white-and-gray-checkered blanket hung low, and matched the shadows on the floor. The dainty rosewood secretaire with it's delicate chair of ebonized rosewood with ormolu didn't detract from the overall sense of starkness of the room but rather enhanced it. I knew that it was Carmela's room.

I would have liked to check the titles of the books behind the glass panels, but my anxiety was too great. As if someone were chasing me, I dashed out into the corridor and down to the inside patio. I sat on one of the rush chairs. I was trembling and perspiring, yet my hands were icy cold. It wasn't guilt that had me shaking - I wouldn't have minded getting caught snooping around - but the alien, otherworldly quality these beautifully furnished rooms exuded. The stillness that clung about the walls was an unnatural stillness. It had nothing to do with the absence of it's inhabitants, but with the absence of feelings and emotions that usually permeate lived-in spaces.

Every time someone had referred to the women as sorceresses and witches, I had inwardly laughed. They neither acted nor looked as I had expected witches to look and act - flamboyantly dramatic and sinister. But now I knew for certain that they were indeed different from other human beings. It frightened me that they were different in ways I couldn't understand; in ways I couldn't even conceive.

A soft, rasping sound put an end to my disturbing thoughts. Following the distinctly eerie noise, I tiptoed down the corridor, away from the bedrooms, toward the other end of the house. The rasping sound came from a room at the back of the kitchen. I crept up softly, only to have the sound die down the instant I pressed my ear against the door. It resumed as soon as I moved away. Puzzled, I once more pressed my ear to the door, and the rasping sound promptly ceased. I moved back and forth several times, and, as if the rasping sound were dependent on my doings, it either started or stopped.

Determined to find out who was hiding-or worse, who was purposely trying to frighten me - I reached for the doorknob. Unable to open the door, I fumbled for several minutes before I realized that it was locked and that the key had been left in the lock.

That someone dangerous might have been confined in that room, for a very good reason, only came to me once I was inside. An oppressive semidarkness clung about the heavy drawn curtains, like something alive that was luring the shadows of the entire house to this enormous room. The light grew dimmer. The shadows thickened around what appeared to be discarded pieces of furniture and peculiar-looking small and enormous figures made out of wood and metal.

The same rasping sound that had drawn me to this room broke the silence. Like felines, the shadows prowled about the room as if searching for prey. In frozen horror, I watched the curtain. It pulsated and breathed like a monster of my nightmares.

All of a sudden, the sound and the movement ceased. The motionless silence was even more frightening. I turned to leave, and the pulsating, rasping sound began again. Resolutely, I crossed the room and pulled back the curtain. I laughed out loud upon discovering the broken glass pane in the French door. The wind had been alternately sucking and blowing the curtain through the jagged gap.

The fading afternoon light streaming through the half-opened curtain rearranged the shadows in the room and revealed an oval-shaped mirror on the wall, half hidden by one of the odd-looking metal figures. I squeezed myself between the sculpture and the wall and gazed rapturously into the old Venetian glass. It was blurry and misty with age, and it distorted my image so grotesquely that I ran out of the room.

I went outside the house, through the back door. The wide clearing behind the house was deserted. The sky was still bright, but the tall fruit trees circling the grounds had already turned the color of twilight. A flock of crows passed overhead. Their black flapping wings extinguished the brightness in the sky, and night swiftly descended into the yard.

With a feeling of utter dejection and despair, I sat on the ground and wept. The harder I cried, the more pleasure I felt from lamenting at the top of my voice.

The sound of a rake jolted me out of my self-pity. I looked up and saw a slight person raking leaves toward a small fire in the back of the clearing.

"Esperanza!" I cried out, rushing toward her, only to stop abruptly upon realizing that it wasn't her but a man.

"I'm sorry," I mumbled apologetically. "I mistook you for someone else."

I held out my hand and introduced myself. I tried not to stare at him, but I couldn't help it: I wasn't quite sure that he wasn't Esperanza disguised as a man.

He put his hand in mine, pressing it softly, and said, "I'm the caretaker." He didn't tell me his name.

His hand felt as brittle as a bird's wing in mine. He was a thin, ancient-looking man. His face was birdlike, too, aquiline and keen-eyed. His white hair was tufted and feathery. It wasn't only his slight frame and birdlike appearance that reminded me of Esperanza, but also the wrinkled, expressionless face and the eyes, shiny and limpid as those of a child, and the teeth, small and square and very white.

"Do you know where Florinda is?" I asked. He shook his head and I added, "Do you know where any of the others are?"

He was silent for a long moment, and then as though I hadn't asked him anything, he repeated that he was the caretaker. "I take care of everything."

"You do?" I asked, eyeing him suspiciously. He was so frail and puny-looking he didn't seem capable of taking care of anything, including himself.

"I take care of everything," he repeated, smiling sweetly as if thus he could erase my doubts. He was about to say something else, but instead he chewed his lower lip thoughtfully for a moment, then turned around, and went on raking the leaves into a little pile with neat, deft, quick movements.

"Where is everyone?" I asked.

Resting his chin on his hand, cupped over the end of the rake handle, he glanced at me absently. Then grinning inanely, he looked all around him, as though at any moment someone might materialize from behind one of the fruit trees.

Sighing loudly and impatiently, I turned to leave.

"The old nagual took Isidoro Baltazar to the mountains."

He didn't look at me: His eyes were focused somewhere in the distance. "They'll be back in a couple of days."

"Days!" I screeched indignantly. "Are you sure you heard them correctly?"

Dismayed that my worst fear had come true, I could only mumble, "How could he have left me here all by myself?"

"They left last night," the old man said, pulling back a leaf that the wind had blown away from the pile in front of him.

"That's impossible," I contradicted him forcefully. "We only got here last night. Late last night," I stressed.

Indifferent to my assertively rude tone and to my presence, the old man set fire to the little pile of leaves in front of him.

"Didn't Isidoro Baltazar leave a message for me?" I asked, squatting beside him. "Didn't he leave me a note or something?"

I felt an impulse to shout, but for some reason I didn't dare. Some mystifying aspect of the old man's appearance disconcerted me. The thought that he was Esperanza in disguise still nagged me.

"Did Esperanza go with them to the mountains?" I asked.

My voice trembled because suddenly I was seized by a desperate desire to laugh. Short of pulling down his pants and showing me his genitals, there was nothing he could do to convince me that he was indeed a man.

"Esperanza is in the house," he murmured, his attention fixed on the little pile of burning leaves. "She's in the house with the others."

"Don't be ridiculous: She's not in the house," I contradicted him rudely. "No one is in the house. I've been searching for them the whole afternoon. I checked every room."

"She's in the little house," the old man repeated obstinately, watching me as intently as he had watched the burning leaves. The glint of mischief in his eyes made me want to kick him.

"What little..." My voice faded as I remembered the other house, the one I had seen upon our arrival. It actually caused me an intense physical pain to think of that place.

"You could have told me right away that Esperanza is in the little house," I said peevishly.

Surreptitiously, I glanced all around me, but I couldn't see the place. The tall trees and the wall beyond hid it from view.

"I'm going to see if Esperanza is indeed there as you claim," I said, rising.

The old man rose, too, and turning toward the nearest tree, he reached for an oil lamp and a burlap sack hanging from a low branch. "I'm afraid I can't let you go there by yourself," he said.

"I don't see why not," I countered, piqued. "Perhaps you're not aware of it, but I'm Florinda's guest. I was taken to the little house last night." I paused for a moment, then added for good measure, "I was there for sure."

He listened carefully, but his face looked doubtful.

"It's tricky to get there," he warned me at last. "I have to prepare the path for you. I have to..."

He seemed to catch himself in the middle of a thought he didn't want to express. He shrugged, then repeated that he had to prepare the path for me.

"What's there to prepare?" I asked irritably. "Do you have to cut through the chaparral with a machete?"

"I'm the caretaker. I prepare the path," he repeated obstinately and sat on the ground to light the oil lamp. For an instant it guttered in the air, then burned strongly. His features appeared almost fleshless, unwrinkled, as if the light had smoothed away the mark of time. "As soon as I'm done with burning these leaves, I'll take you there myself."

"I'll help you," I offered. Clearly, the man was senile and needed to be humored. I followed him around the clearing and helped him gather the leaves into little piles, which he promptly burned. As soon as the ashes had cooled, he swept them into the burlap sack. The sack was lined with plastic. It was this particular detail - the plastic lining - that brought back a half-forgotten childhood memory.

As we swept the heaps of ashes into the sack, I told him that as a small child living in a village near Caracas, I was often awakened by the sound of a rake. I used to sneak out of bed and, cat-footed, creep down the corridor, past my parents' and brothers' rooms into the parlor, which faced the plaza. Heedful of the creaking hinges, I used to open the wooden panels covering the windows and squeeze through the wrought iron bars. The old man in charge of keeping the plaza clean was always there to greet me with a toothless smile, and together we used to rake into little piles the leaves that had fallen during the night - any other kind of refuse was put into trash cans. We burned these piles, and as soon as the ashes had cooled, we swept them into a silk-lined burlap sack. He claimed that the water fairies, dwelling in a sacred stream in the nearby mountains, turned the ashes into gold dust.

"Do you also know of fairies who change ashes into gold dust?" I asked, seeing how delighted the caretaker was with my story.

He didn't answer but giggled with such pleasure and abandon I couldn't help but laugh, too. Before I knew it, we had reached the last little pile of ashes next to a recessed, arched doorway built into the wall. The narrow wooden gate stood wide open.

Across the chaparral was the other house almost hidden in shadows. No light shone through the windows, and it appeared to be shifting away from me. Wondering whether the house was but a figment of my imagination; a place remembered in a dream, I blinked repeatedly and rubbed my eyes. Something was wrong, I decided, as I recalled walking up to the witches' house the night before with Isidoro Baltazar. The smaller house had stood to the right of the larger one. How then, I asked myself, could I now see the place from the witches' backyard? In an effort to orient myself, I moved this way and that, but I couldn't get my bearings. I bumped into the old man, who was squatting before the pile of ashes, and fell over him.

With astounding agility he rose and helped me up. "You're full of ashes," he said, wiping my face with the folded cuff of his khaki shirt.

"There it is!" I cried out. Sharply focused, silhouetted against the sky, the elusive house appeared to be only a few steps away: "There it is," I repeated, jumping up and down as if by doing so I could hold the house in place; detain it in time. "That's the true house of the witches," I added, standing still in front of the old man so he could proceed with wiping the ashes off my face. "The big house is but a front."

"The house of the witches," the old man said slowly, savoring his words. Then he cackled, seemingly amused. He swept the last of the ashes into his burlap sack, then motioned me to follow him through the gate.

Two orange trees grew on the other side of the gate, away from the wall. A cool breeze rustled through the blooming branches, but the flowers didn't stir. They didn't fall to the ground. Against the dark foliage, the blossoms looked carved, as though they had been made of milky quartz. Like sentinels, the two trees stood guard over the narrow path. The path was white and very straight, like a line that had been drawn on the landscape with a ruler.

The old man handed me the oil lamp, then scooped out a handful of ashes from his burlap sack and poured them from one hand to the other - as though he were weighing them - before he sprinkled them onto the ground.

"Don't ask any questions and do as I say," he said, his voice no longer hoarse: It had an airy quality: It sounded energetic and convincing.

He bent slightly, and walking backwards, he let the rest of the ashes trickle directly from his burlap sack onto the narrow trail.

"Keep your feet on the line of ashes," he admonished. "If you don't, you'll never reach the house."

I coughed to hide my nervous laughter. Holding out my arms, I balanced on the narrow line of ashes as if it were a tightrope. Each time we stopped for the old man to catch his breath, I turned to look at the house we had just left. It seemed to be receding into the distance; and the one in front of us didn't seem to get any closer. I tried to convince myself that it was merely an optical illusion, yet I had the vague certainty that I would never make it on my own to either house.

As if sensing my discomfort, the old man patted my arm reassuringly. "That's why I'm preparing the path." He looked into his burlap sack and added, "It won't be long now before we'll get there. Just remember to keep your feet on the line of ashes. If you do, you'll be able to move back and forth safely, anytime."

My mind told me that the man was a lunatic. My body, however, knew that I was lost without him and his ashes. I was so absorbed in keeping my feet on the faint line, it took me by surprise when we finally stood in front of the door.

The old man took the oil lamp from my hand, cleared his throat, then rapped lightly on the carved panel with his knuckles. He didn't wait for an answer but pushed the door open and went inside.

"Don't go so fast!" I cried out, afraid to be left behind. I followed him into a narrow vestibule. He left the oil lamp on a low table. Then without a word or a backward glance, he opened a door at the far end and disappeared into the darkness.

Guided by some vague memory, I stepped into the dimly lit room and went directly to the mat on the floor. There was no doubt in my mind now that I had been there the night before, that I had slept on that very mat. What I wasn't so sure of was how I got to that room in the first place. That Mariano Aureliano had carried me on his on his back across the chaparral was vivid in my mind. I also was certain that I had woken up in that room - before being carried over by the old nagual - with Clara sitting beside me on the mat.

Confident that within moments all would be explained to me, I sat on the mat. The light in the oil lamp flickered and then went out. I sensed, rather than saw, things and people moving around me. I heard a murmur of voices, intangible sounds coming from every corner. Out of all these noises, I recognized a familiar rustling of skirts and a soft giggle.

"Esperanza?" I whispered, "God! I am so glad to see you!" Although it was her I expected to see, I was nevertheless stunned when she sat beside me on the mat. Timidly, I touched her arm.

"It's me," she assured me.

Only after hearing her voice was I convinced that it was indeed Esperanza and not the caretaker who had exchanged his khaki pants and shirt for the rustling petticoats and the white dress. And once I felt the soothing touch of her hand on my face, all thoughts the caretaker vanished.

"How did I get here?" I asked.

"The caretaker brought you here," she laughed. "Don't you remember?"

She turned toward the low table and relit the oil lamp.

"I'm talking about last night," I clarified. "I know I was here. I woke up on this mat. Clara was here with me. And then Florinda was here, and the other women..."

My voice trailed off as I remembered that I had awoken afterward in the living room of the other house and then again on a bed. I shook my head, as if I could thus bring some order to my memories. Forlornly, I gazed at Esperanza, hoping she would fill in the gaps. I told her of the difficulties I was having remembering the night's events in sequential order.

"You shouldn't have any problems," she said. "Get in the track of dreams: You're dreaming-awake now."

"You mean that I am asleep now, this very instant?" I asked mockingly. I leaned toward her and asked, "Are you asleep, too?"

"We are not asleep," she repeated, enunciating her words carefully. "You and I are dreaming-awake."

She held up her hands in a helpless gesture. "I told you what to do last year. Remember?"

A rescuing thought suddenly occurred to me, as if someone had just whispered it in my ear: 'When in doubt, one must separate the two tracks; the track for ordinary affairs and the track for dreams since each has a different state of awareness.' I felt elated, for I knew that the first track one should test is the track of dreams. If the situation at hand doesn't fit that track, then one is not dreaming.

My elation quickly vanished when I tried to test the track for dreams. I had no inkling of how to go about it or of what the track for dreams was, for that matter; and worse, I couldn't remember who had told me about it.

"I did," Esperanza said just behind me: "You have moved a great deal in the realm of dreams. You nearly remembered what I told you last year, the day after the picnic. I said to you then that, when in doubt about whether you are in a dream or whether you are awake, you should test the track where dreams run on - meaning the awareness we have in dreams - by feeling the thing you are in contact with. If you are dreaming, your feeling comes back to you as an echo. If it doesn't come back, then you are not dreaming."

Smiling, she pinched my thigh and said, "Try it on this mat you're lying on. Feel it with your buttocks. If the feeling returns, then you're dreaming."

There was no feeling returning to my numbed buttocks. In fact, I was so numb that I didn't feel the mat. It seemed to me I was lying on the rough tiles of the floor.

I had a strong urge to point out to her that it should be the opposite - if the feeling returns, then one is awake - but I controlled myself in time. I knew without any doubt that what she meant by 'the feeling returning to us' had nothing to do with our known, agreed-upon knowledge of what feeling is. The distinction between being awake and dreaming-awake still eluded me, yet I was certain that it's meaning had nothing to do with our ordinary way of understanding awareness.

I said, "I know that I am dreaming-awake, and that's that."

I sensed that I was near a new, deeper level of understanding, and yet I could not quite grasp it.

I asked, "What I would like to know is, when did I fall asleep?"

"I've already told you, you're not asleep. You are dreaming-awake."

I began to laugh involuntarily, in a quiet, utterly nervous manner. She didn't seem to notice or to care.

"When did the transition occur?" I asked.

"When the caretaker was making you cross the chaparral and you had to concentrate on keeping your feet on the ashes."

"He must have hypnotized me!" I exclaimed, in a not altogether pleasant voice. I began to talk incoherently, entangling myself in words without quite succeeding in making sense, until finally I was weeping and denouncing them all.

Esperanza watched me silently, her eyebrows lifted, her eyes wide open with surprise.

I was immediately ashamed of my outburst; but at the same time I was glad I had spoken because a momentary relief, the kind that comes after a confrontation, washed over me.

"Your confusion," she continued, "originates with your facility to move from one state of awareness into the other with great ease. If you had struggled, like everybody else does to attain smooth transitions, then you would know that dreaming-awake is not just hypnosis."

She paused for an instant, then finished softly, "Dreaming-awake is the most sophisticated state humans can attain."

She stared off into the room as if a clearer explanation might suddenly be brought to her by someone hiding in the shadows. Then she turned to me and asked, "Did you eat your little food?"

Her change of subject took me by surprise, and I began to stammer. Once I recovered, I told her that I had indeed eaten the sweet tamales. "I was so hungry, I didn't bother to heat them up. They were delicious."

Idly playing with her shawl, Esperanza asked me to give her an account of what I had done since I awoke in Florinda's room.

As if I had been given a truth-telling potion, I blurted out more than I intended to reveal, but Esperanza didn't seem to mind my snooping around the women's rooms. She wasn't impressed with my knowing to whom each room belonged.

What interested her to no end, however, was my encounter with the caretaker. With a smile of unmistakable glee on her face, she listened as I told my tale of confusing the man with her. When I mentioned that at one point I considered asking him to pull down his pants so I could check his genitals, she doubled up on the mat, shrieking with laughter.

She leaned against me and whispered suggestively in my ear, "I'll put you at ease."

There was a wicked gleam in her eyes as she added, "I'll show you mine."

"There is no need to, Esperanza," I tried to ward her off. "I don't doubt that you are a woman."

"One can never be too sure what one is," she casually dismissed my words. Oblivious to my embarrassment - caused not so much by her imminent nudity but by the thought that I had to look at her old, wrinkled body - she lay down on the mat and with great finesse slowly lifted her skirts.

My curiosity won out over my embarrassment. I stared at her, open-mouthed. She had no panties on. She had no pubic hair. Her body was incredibly young, the flesh strong and firm, the muscles delicately delineated. She was all one color; an even, copperish pink. There were no stretch marks on her skin, no ruptured veins. Nothing marred the smoothness of her stomach and legs.

I reached out to touch her, as if needing to reassure myself that her silky, smooth-looking skin was real, and she opened the lips of her vagina with her fingers. I averted my face, not so much from embarrassment as from my conflicting emotions. Nudity, whether male or female, wasn't the issue. I had grown up quite freely at home. No one was particularly careful to avoid being seen naked. And while in school in England, I had been invited one summer to spend a couple of weeks in Sweden at a friend's house by the sea. The whole family belonged to a nudist colony, and they all worshiped the sun with every bit of their naked skin.

Seeing Esperanza naked before me was different. I was aroused in a most peculiar manner. I had never really focused on a woman's sexual organs. Of course, I had examined myself thoroughly in the mirror, and from every possible angle. I had also seen pornographic movies, which I had not only disliked, but had found offensive as well. Seeing Esperanza so intimately was a shattering experience, for I had always taken my sexual responses for granted. I had thought that as a woman I could only get aroused with a male. My overwhelming desire to jump on top of her took me completely by surprise and was counterbalanced by the fact that I didn't have a penis.

When Esperanza suddenly rose from the mat and took off her blouse I gasped out loud, then stared at the floor until the feverish, tingling sensation in my face and neck subsided.

"Look at me!" Esperanza demanded impatiently.

Her eyes were bright. Her cheeks were flushed. She was completely naked. Her body was slight, yet bigger and stronger looking than when dressed. Her breasts were full and pointed.

"Touch them!" she commanded in a soft, alluring tone.

Her words echoed around the room like a disembodied sound, a mesmerizing rhythm that swelled into a throb in the air, a pulse of sound felt rather than heard, which little by little tightened and quickened until it beat fast and hard, like the rhythm of my own heart.

Then all I heard and felt was Esperanza's laughter.

"Is the caretaker hiding in here, by any chance?" I asked when I could talk. I was suddenly suspicious and guilty about my daring.

"I hope not!" she cried out with such an air of dismay that it made me laugh.

"Where is he?" I asked.

Her eyes opened wide, then she grinned as though she were going to laugh. But she wiped the mirth from her face, and in a serious tone said that the caretaker was somewhere on the grounds, and that he took care of both houses but he didn't go around spying on anybody.

"Is he really the caretaker?" I asked, trying to sound skeptical. "I don't want to malign him, but he really doesn't look capable of taking care of anything."

Esperanza giggled then said that his frailness was deceptive. "He is very capable," she assured me: "You have to be careful with him. He likes young girls, especially blond ones."

She leaned closer and, as if afraid we might be overheard, whispered in my ear, "Did he make a pass at you?"

"Heavens no!" I defended him. "He was exquisitely polite and helpful. It's just that..." My voice trailed off into a whisper, and my attention began to wander in an odd sort of way to the furniture in the room, which I couldn't see because the low-burning oil lamp cast more shadows than light on my surroundings.

When I finally managed to focus my attention back on her, I was no longer concerned with the caretaker. All I could think of, with a persistence I couldn't shake off, was why Isidoro Baltazar had left for the mountains without letting me know, without leaving me a note.

"Why would he leave me like that?" I asked, turning to Esperanza. "He must have told someone when he'll return."

Seeing her all-knowing smirk, I added belligerently, "I'm sure you know what's going on."

"I don't," she insisted, quite incapable of understanding my plight. "I don't concern myself with such things. And neither should you. Isidoro Baltazar is gone, and that's that. He'll be back in a couple of days, in a couple of weeks. Who knows? It all depends on what happens in the mountains."

"It all depends?" I shrieked.

I found her lack of sympathy and understanding abominable. "What about me?" I demanded. "I can't stay here for weeks."

"Why not?" Esperanza inquired innocently.

I regarded her as if she were demented, then blurted out that I had nothing to wear, that there was nothing for me to do here. My list of complaints was endless: They came pouring out until I was exhausted.

"I simply have to go home; be in my normal milieu," I finished. I felt the inevitable tears, and did my best to suppress them.

"Normal?" Esperanza repeated the word slowly, as though she were tasting it. "You can leave any time you wish. No one is holding you back. It can easily be arranged to get you to the border where you can catch a Greyhound bus bound for Los Angeles."

I nodded, not trusting myself to speak. I didn't want that either. I didn't know what I wanted, but the thought of leaving was unbearable. I somehow knew that if I left I would never find these people again, not even Isidoro Baltazar in Los Angeles. I began to weep uncontrollably. I wouldn't have been able to put it into words, but the bleakness of a life, of a future without them, was unbearable to me.

I didn't notice Esperanza leaving the room, and I didn't notice her coming back. I wouldn't have noticed anything if it wasn't for the delicious aroma of hot chocolate wafting under my nose.

"You'll feel better after eating," she assured me, placing a tray in my lap. Smiling slowly and affectionately, she sat beside me and confided that there is nothing like chocolate to take away one's sadness.

I couldn't agree with her more. I took a few hesitant sips and ate several of the buttered, rolled tortillas. I told her that although I didn't really know her or any of her friends, I couldn't conceive of not ever seeing them again. I confessed that I felt a freedom and an ease with her and her group that I had never encountered anywhere else before. It was a strange feeling, I explained, part physical, part psychological, and wholly defiant of analysis. I could describe it only as a sense of well-being or a certainty that I had finally found a place where I belonged.

Esperanza knew exactly what it was I was trying to express. She said that having been part of the sorcerers' world even for a short time was addictive. It wasn't the amount of time, she stressed, but the intensity of the encounters that mattered. "And your encounters have been very intense," she said.

"They have?" I asked.

Esperanza lifted her eyebrows with sincere surprise, then rubbed her chin in an exaggerated attitude, as though she were deliberating on a problem that had no solution. After a long silence, she finally pronounced, "You will walk lighter after you fully realize that there is no going back to your old life."

Her voice, though low, had an extraordinary force. Her eyes held mine for a moment, and I knew that instant what her words meant.

"Nothing will ever be the same for me again," I said softly.

Esperanza nodded. "You'll return to the world, but not to your world or to your old life," she said, rising from the mat with the abrupt majesty small people command.

She rushed toward the door, only to come to a sudden halt. "It's wildly exciting to do something without knowing why we are doing it," she said, turning to look at me: "And it's even more exciting to set out to do something without knowing what the end result will be."

I couldn't disagree with her more, and declared, "I need to know what I'm doing. I need to know what I'm getting into."

She sighed and held up her hands in comical deprecation.

"Freedom is terribly frightening," she spoke harshly; and before I had a chance to respond, she added gently, "Freedom requires spontaneous acts. You have no idea what it is to abandon yourself spontaneously..."

"Everything I do is spontaneous," I interjected. "Why do you think I am here? Do you think I deliberated much whether I should come or not?"

She returned to the mat and stood looking down at me for a long moment before she said, "Of course you didn't deliberate about it. But your acts of spontaneity are due to a lack of thought rather than to an act of abandon."

She stomped her foot to prevent me from interring her again. "A real spontaneous act is an act in which you abandon yourself completely, but only after profound deliberation," she went on; "An act where all the pros and cons have been taken into consideration and duly discarded. You expect nothing, and you regret nothing. With acts of that nature, sorcerers beckon freedom."

"I'm not a sorcerer," I mumbled under my breath, pulling at the hem of her dress to prevent her from leaving, but she made it clear that she had no interest in continuing our conversation.

I followed her outside, across the clearing, to the path that led to the other house.

As the caretaker had done earlier, she too urged me to keep feet on the line of ashes.

"If you don't," she admonished, "you'll fall into the abyss."

"Abyss?" I repeated uncertainly, glancing all around me at the mass of dark chaparral extending on either side of us.

A light breeze sprung up. Voices and whispers rose from a dark mass of shadows. Instinctively, I held on to Esperanza's skirt.

"Can you hear them?" she asked, turning to face me.

"Who am I supposed to hear?" I murmured hoarsely.

Esperanza moved closer, then, as if afraid we might be overheard, she whispered in my ear, "Surems of another time. They use the wind to wander across the desert, forever awake."

"You mean ghosts?"

"There are no ghosts," she said with finality, and started walking again.

I made sure that my feet stayed on the line of ashes, and I didn't let go of her skirt until she came to an abrupt halt in the middle of the patio of the big house. For an instant she hesitated, as though she couldn't decide to which part of the house she ought to take me. Then she went up and down the various corridors and turned corners until finally we stepped into an immense room that had escaped my earlier exploration of the house. The walls were lined to the ceiling with books. At one end of the room stood a sturdy, long, wooden table. At the other end hung a white, flouncy, hand-woven hammock.

"What a magnificent room!" I exclaimed. "Whose is it?"

"Yours," Esperanza offered graciously. She went to the wooden chest standing by the door and opened it. "The nights are cold," she warned, handing me three thick woolen blankets.

"You mean I can sleep in here?" I asked excitedly.

My whole body shivered with pleasure as I matted the hammock with the blankets and lowered myself into it. As a child, I had often slept in one. Sighing with contentment, I rocked myself back and forth, then pulled in my legs and stretched out luxuriously. "Knowing how to sleep in a hammock is like knowing how to ride a bicycle: One never forgets how," I said to her.

But there was no one to hear me. She had left without my noticing it.

## Chapter 11

I turned off the light and lay very still in my hammock, lulled by the noises of the house, strange creaking sounds and the trickling of water from an earthenware filter standing outside my door.

Abruptly, I sat up as the unmistakable sound of footsteps echoed along the corridor. "Who could it be at this hour?" I thought. I tiptoed across the room and pressed my ear against the door. The footsteps were heavy. My heart beat fast and loud as the steps came closer. They stopped in front of my door. The knock was urgent, and although I was expecting it, it nonetheless startled me. I jumped back, knocking over a chair.

"Did you have a nightmare?" Florinda asked, stepping into the room. She left the door half open, and the light from the corridor shone inside.

"I thought you would be happy to hear the sound of my steps," she said mockingly, smiling at me. "I didn't want to sneak up on you."

She straightened up the chair, and draped a pair of khaki pants and a shirt over the backrest.

"Compliments of the caretaker. He says you can keep them."

"Keep them?" I repeated, eyeing the garments suspiciously. They looked clean and ironed. "What's wrong with my jeans?"

"You'll be more comfortable in these pants during the long drive to Los Angeles," Florinda said.

"But I don't want to leave!" I cried out in alarm. "I'm staying here until Isidoro Baltazar returns."

Florinda laughed, then seeing that I was about to weep, she said, "Isidoro Baltazar is back, but you're welcome to stay longer if you wish."

"Oh, no, I don't," I blurted out.

The anxiety I had felt for the past two days was all but forgotten. So were all the questions I had wanted to ask Florinda. All I could think of was that Isidoro Baltazar was back. "Can I see him now?" I asked.

"I'm afraid you can't." Florinda stopped me from leaving the room.

For a moment her statement didn't register. I stared at her uncomprehendingly, and she repeated that it wasn't possible to see the new nagual tonight.

"Why not?" I asked, bewildered. "I'm sure he would want to see me."

"I'm sure he would," she readily agreed. "But he is sound asleep, and you can't wake him up." It was such a fierce refusal that all I could do was stare at her, speechless.

Florinda looked at the floor for a long time, then gazed up at me. Her expression was sad. For an instant I believed she would relent and take me to see Isidoro Baltazar. Instead, she repeated with sharp finality, "I'm afraid you can't see him tonight." Hastily, as if afraid she might still change her mind, she embraced and kissed me, and then left the room. She switched off the light outside, then turned from the shadows of the corridor to look at me and said, "Go to sleep now."

Tossing and turning, I lay awake for hours. Close to dawn I finally got up and put on the clothes Florinda had brought me. They fit me well, except for the pants, which I had to cinch in at the waist with a piece of string - I had no belt with me.

Shoes in hand, I stole down the corridor past the caretaker's room to the back entrance. Mindful of the creaking hinges, I opened the door carefully and only a crack. It was still dark outside, yet a soft, radiant blue was spreading across the eastern sky. I ran to the arched doorway built into the wall, stopping momentarily by the two trees outside it that guarded the path. The air was heavy with the fragrance of orange blossoms. Whatever lingering doubts I might have had about crossing the chaparral were dispelled as I discovered that fresh ashes had been strewn on the ground. Without another thought I dashed to the other house.

The door was ajar, but I didn't go in right away. I crouched beneath the window and waited for some kind of a sound. I didn't have to wait long before I heard a loud snoring. I listened for a while and went inside. Guided by that distinct snoring sound, I went directly to the room at the back of the house. In the darkness I could hardly make out the sleeping form on the straw mat, yet I had no doubt that it was Isidoro Baltazar. Fearing that he might be startled if I were to wake him too suddenly, I returned to the front room and sat on the couch. I was so excited I could not sit still. I was beside myself with joy thinking that any moment now he would wake up. Twice I tiptoed back into the room and looked at him. He had turned in his sleep and was no longer snoring.

I half roused to murmur, "I'm waiting for Isidoro Baltazar to wake up," but I knew I had made no sound. I made a conscious effort to sit up. I swayed dizzily before I could focus my eyes on the man standing beside me. It was Mariano Aureliano.

"Is Isidoro Baltazar still asleep?" I asked him.

The old nagual gazed at me for a long time. Wondering whether I was dreaming, I boldly reached for his hand, only to drop it abruptly. It burnt as if it were on fire.

He raised his brows, seemingly surprised by my actions.

"You won't be able to see Isidoro Baltazar until the morning," he spoke slowly, as if it cost him a great effort to enunciate the words.

Before I had a chance to say that it was almost morning; that I would wait for Isidoro Baltazar on the couch, I felt Mariano Aureliano's burning hand on my back, pushing me across the threshold.

"Go back to your hammock."

There was a sudden rush of wind. I turned around to protest, but Mariano Aureliano was no longer there. The wind reverberated in my head like a deep gong. The sound grew softer and softer until it was but a bare vibration. I opened my mouth to prolong the last faint echoes.

It was midmorning when I awoke in my hammock, wearing the clothes Florinda had brought me. Automatically, almost without thought, I went outside and across the clearing to the little house. The door was locked. I knocked repeatedly and I called out, but there was no answer. I tried to force the windows open but they too were locked. I was so shaken I was on the verge of tears. I ran down the hill to the small clearing beside the road, the only spot where a car could be parked. Isidoro Baltazar's van was not there. I walked along the dirt road for quite some time, looking for fresh tire tracks. There were none.

More confused than ever, I returned to the house. Knowing that it would be useless to look for the women in their rooms, I stood in the middle of the inside patio and yelled for Florinda at the top of my voice. There was no sound, except for the echo of my own voice settling around me.

No matter how many times I reviewed what Florinda had said, I couldn't come up with a satisfying explanation. The only thing I could be sure of was that Florinda had come to my room in the middle of the night to bring me the clothes I was wearing. Her visit and her statement that Isidoro Baltazar was back must have triggered a vivid dream in me.

To stop myself from speculating why I was alone in the house - not even the caretaker seemed to be about - I began to mop the floors. Cleaning always had a soothing effect on me. I was done with all the rooms including the kitchen when I heard the distinct sound of a Volkswagen engine. I ran down the hill and flung myself at Isidoro Baltazar even before he got out of the van, almost jerking him to the ground.

"I still can't get over it," he laughed, putting his arms around me in a tight embrace. "You were the one the nagual told me so much about. Do you know that I nearly passed out when they greeted you?"

He didn't wait for my comment but hugged me again, and laughing, lifted me off the ground.

Then, as if some restraint had broken free within him, he began to talk nonstop. He said that he had known about me for a year. The nagual had told him that he was entrusting a weird girl to him. The nagual had described that girl metaphorically as 'twelve o'clock in the morning of a clear day which is neither windy nor calm, neither cold nor hot, but alternates between all those, driving one nuts.'

Isidoro Baltazar confessed that being the pompous ass that he was, he knew instantaneously that the nagual was referring to his girlfriend.

"Who is your girlfriend?" I cut him short.

He made a sharp movement with his hand, positively displeased by my words.

"This is not a story of facts," he snapped. "This is a story of ideas; so you would see how idiotic I am."

His annoyance quickly gave way to a brilliant smile. "I actually believed I could find out for myself who that girl was." He paused for an instant, then added softly, "I've even involved a married woman with children in my search."

He heaved a deep sigh then grinned and said, "The moral of my story is that in the sorcerers' world one has to cancel out the ego or it is curtains for us; for in that world, there is no way for average persons like ourselves to predict anything."

Then, seeing that I was weeping, he held me off at arm's length and gazed at me anxiously. "What is the matter, nibelunga?"

"Nothing really," I laughed in between my sobs, drying my tears. "I don't have an abstract mentality that can worry about the world of abstract stories," I added cynically.

In as hard a tone as I could muster, I added, "I worry about the here and now. You've got no idea what I've been through in this house."

"Of course, I have a very good idea," he retorted with deliberate harshness. "I've been at it for years."

He regarded me with an inquisitor's eye and asked, "What I want to know is, why didn't you tell me you had been with them already?"

"I was about to, but I didn't feel it was important," I mumbled in confusion.

Then my voice acquired a firm and steady ring as words poured involuntarily out of me. "It turns out that meeting them was the only important thing I have ever done."

To hide my surprise, I immediately began to complain that I had been left in the house all by myself.

"I didn't have a chance to let you know that I was off to the mountains with the nagual," he whispered with a sudden irrepressible smile.

"I forgot all about that," I assured him. "I'm talking about today. This morning when I awoke, I expected you to be here. I was certain you had spent the night in the little house, sleeping on a straw mat. When I couldn't find you, I panicked."

Seeing his puzzled face, I told him of Florinda's midnight visit, of my subsequent dream, and of finding myself alone in the house upon awakening this morning. I sounded incoherent. My thoughts and words were all mixed up. However, I couldn't stop talking.

"There are so many things I cannot accept," I said, finally putting an end to my diatribe. "Yet I cannot refute them either."

Isidoro Baltazar didn't say a word. He kept staring at me as if expecting me to continue, his eyebrows raised in an inquiring, mocking arch. His face was thin and drawn and the color of smoke. His skin exuded a strange coolness and a faint scent of earth, as if he had spent his days underground in a cave.

All thought of my turmoil vanished as I gazed into his ominous left eye, with it's terrible, merciless gaze. At that moment it no longer mattered what was the authentic truth and what was the illusion - the dream within a dream. I laughed out loud, feeling as light as the wind. I could feel an unbearable weight being lifted off my shoulders as I kept staring into his wizard's eye. I recognized it. Florinda, Mariano Aureliano, Esperanza, and the caretaker all had such an eye. Preordained for all time to be without feeling; without emotion, that eye mirrors emptiness. Then, as if it had revealed enough, an inside lid — as in a lizard's eye — shut over the left pupil.

Before I had a chance to comment on his wizard's eye, Isidoro Baltazar closed both eyes for an instant. When he opened them again they were exactly alike, dark and shiny with laughter, the wizard's eye but an illusion. He put one arm around my shoulders and walked with me up the hill.

"Get your things," he said just before reaching the house. "I'll wait for you in the car."

I thought it odd that he wouldn't come in with me, but at the time I didn't think of asking him why. Only as I was gathering my few belongings did it occur to me that perhaps he was afraid of the women. That possibility then made me laugh out loud; for I suddenly knew with a certainty that astonished me that the only thing Baltazar was not afraid of was women.

I was still laughing when I reached the van at the bottom of the hill. I opened my mouth to explain to Isidoro Baltazar the cause of my mirth, when a strange, fierce emotion flooded me; a stab so strong I couldn't speak. What I felt wasn't sexual passion. Neither was it platonic affection. It wasn't the feeling I felt for my parents or brothers or friends. I simply loved Isidoro Baltazar with a love that was untainted by any expectation, doubts, or dread.

As if I had spoken out loud, Isidoro Baltazar embraced me so fiercely I could hardly breathe.

We drove off very slowly. I craned my neck out the window, hoping to catch a glimpse of the caretaker amidst the fruit trees.

"It feels odd to leave like this," I mused, slumping back in my seat. "In a way Florinda said goodbye to me last night. But I wish I could have thanked Esperanza and the caretaker."

The dirt road wound around the hill, and as we reached a sharp bend, the back of the little house came into view. Isidoro Baltazar stopped the car and turned off the engine. He pointed to the frail old man sitting on a crate in front of the house. I wanted to get out of the car and run up the hill, but he held me back.

"Just wave at him," he whispered.

The caretaker rose from the crate. The wind made his loose jacket and pants flap against his limbs, as if they were wings. He laughed out loud, then bent backwards, and seemingly with the wind's momentum did a double back flip. For a moment he appeared to be suspended high in the air. He never landed on the ground but vanished, as if the wind had sucked him away.

"Where did he go?" I whispered in awe.

"To the other side," Isidoro Baltazar giggled with childlike delight. "That was his way of saying good-bye to you."

He set the car in motion again. As if he were baiting me, he glanced at me mockingly from time to time. "What is it that's troubling you, nibelunga?" he finally asked.

"You know who he is, don't you?" I said accusingly. "He isn't the caretaker, is he?"

Isidoro Baltazar frowned slightly, then after a long silence he reminded me that, for me, the nagual Juan Matus was Mariano Aureliano.

He assured me that there must be a good reason that I knew him under that name. "I'm sure there is an equally sound justification for the old man not to reveal his name to you."

I argued that, since I knew who Mariano Aureliano was, I didn't see the purpose of the old man's pretension.

"And," I stressed smugly, "I do know who the caretaker is."

I glanced sideways to see Isidoro Baltazar's reaction. His face revealed nothing.

"Like all the people in the sorcerers' world, the caretaker is a sorcerer," he said. "But you don't know who he is."

He turned to me briefly, then fixed his attention again on the road. "After all these years, I don't know who any of them really is, including the nagual Juan Matus. As long as I am with him, I think I know who he is. The moment his back is turned, however, I am at a loss."

Almost dreamily, Isidoro Baltazar went on to say that in the world of everyday life, our subjective states are shared by all our fellow men. For this reason, we know at all times what our fellow men would do under given circumstances.

"You're wrong, you're deadly wrong," I shouted. "Not to know what our fellow men would do under given circumstances is what's exciting about life. That's one of the few exciting things left. Don't tell me you want to do away with it."

"We don't know what our fellow men would exactly do," he explained patiently, "but we could write down a list of possibilities which would hold true; a very long list, I grant you, yet a finite list. In order to write down this list, we don't have to ask our fellow men for their preferences. All we have to do is place ourselves in their position and write down the possibilities pertinent to us. They'll be true to everybody, because we share them. Our subjective states are shared by all of us."

He said that our subjective knowledge of the world is known to us as common sense. It might be slightly different from group to group, from culture to culture, yet in spite of all these differences, common sense is sufficiently homogeneous to warrant the statement that the everyday world is an intersubjective world.

"With sorcerers, however, the common sense we are accustomed to is no longer in operation," he stressed. "They have another kind of common sense, because they have other kinds of subjective states."

"You mean that they are like beings from another planet?" I asked.

Isidoro Baltazar laughed. "Yes. They are like beings from another planet."

"Is that why they are so secretive?"

"I don't think secretive is the right term," he remarked thoughtfully: "They deal differently with the everyday world. Their behavior appears secretive to us because we don't share the same meaning. And since we don't have any standards to measure what is common sense to them, we opt for believing that their behavior is secretive."

"They do whatever we do: they sleep, they cook their meals, they read," I interjected. "Yet I could never catch them in the act. Believe me, they are secretive."

Smiling, he shook his head. "You saw what they wished you to see," he insisted. "And yet they weren't hiding anything from you. You couldn't see. That's all."

I was about to contradict him, but I didn't want him to dislike me. It wasn't so much that he was right, for I didn't really understand what he was talking about; rather, I felt that all my snooping around had not given me a clue as to who these people were or what they did. Sighing, I closed my eyes and leaned my head against the backrest.

As we drove, I told him again of my dream; how real it was to have seen him asleep, snoring on the straw mat. I told him of my conversation with Mariano Aureliano; the heat on his hand. The more I spoke, the more I was convinced that it hadn't been a dream at all. I drove myself into such a state of agitation I ended up weeping.

"I don't know what they did to me," I said. "I'm not quite sure whether I'm awake or dreaming even now. Florinda kept telling me that I was dreaming-awake."

Isidoro Baltazar nodded, then said softly, "The nagual Juan Matus refers to it as heightened awareness."

"Heightened awareness," I repeated.

The words rolled easily off my tongue even though they sounded exactly the opposite of dreaming-awake. I vaguely remembered hearing them before. Either Florinda or Esperanza had used the term, but I couldn't recall in what connection. The words were on the verge of suggesting some meaning, albeit vague, but my brain was already too dulled by my unsuccessful attempts to recount my daily activities at the witches' house.

Regardless of how hard I tried, there were certain episodes I could not recall. I fumbled for words that somehow paled and died away in front on my very eyes, like a vision half seen and half remembered. It wasn't that I had forgotten anything, but rather, images came to me fragmented, like pieces in a puzzle that didn't quite fit. This forgetfulness was a physical sensation, as if a fog had settled over certain parts of my brain.

"So dreaming-awake and heightened awareness are the same?" More than a question, it was a statement whose meaning escaped me.

I shifted in my seat and, pulling my legs under me, sat facing Isidoro Baltazar. The sun outlined his profile. The black curly hair falling over his high forehead, the sculpted cheekbones, the strong nose and chin, and finely chiseled lips gave him a Roman appearance.

"I must be still in heightened awareness," I said, "I never noticed you before."

The car swayed on the road as he threw his head back and laughed. "You are definitely dreaming-awake," he stated, slapping his thigh. "Don't you remember that I'm short, brown, and homely looking?"

I giggled. Not because I agreed with his description but because it was the only thing I remembered him saying in the lecture he gave the day I formally met him. My merriment was quickly replaced by an odd anxiety. It seemed that months had passed, instead of only two days, since we came to the house of the witches.

"Time passes differently in the sorcerers' world," Isidoro Baltazar said as if I had spoken out loud. "And one experiences it differently."

He went on to say that one of the most difficult aspects of his apprenticeship was to deal with sequences of events in terms of time. Often they were all mixed up in his mind; confused images that sank deeper whenever he tried to focus on them.

"Only now, with the nagual's help, do I remember aspects and events of his teachings that took place years ago," he said.

"How does he help you?" I asked. "Does he hypnotize you?"

"He makes me shift levels of awareness," he said. "And when he does, it is not only that I remember past events, but I relive them."

"How does he do that?" I insisted. "I mean, make you shift."

"Until recently I believed that it was accomplished by a sharp pat on my back, between the shoulder blades," he said: "But now I'm quite certain that his mere presence makes me shift levels of awareness."

"Then he does hypnotize you," I insisted.

He shook his head and said, "Sorcerers are experts at shifting levels of awareness. Some are so adept they can shift the level of awareness of others."

I nodded. Already I had numerous questions, but he gestured for patience.

"Sorcerers," he went on, "make one see that the whole nature of reality is different from what we believe it to be; that is, from what we have been taught it to be. Intellectually, we are willing to tease ourselves with the idea that culture predetermines: who we are, how we behave, what we are willing to know, or what we are able to feel. But we are not willing to embody this idea; to accept it as a concrete, practical proposition. And the reason for that is that we are not willing to accept that culture also predetermines what we are able to perceive. Sorcery makes us aware of different realities; different possibilities, not only about the world but also about ourselves, to the extent that we no longer are able to believe in even the most solid assumptions about ourselves and our surroundings."

I was surprised that I could absorb his words so easily, when I didn't really understand them.

"A sorcerer is not only aware of different realities," he went on, "but he uses that knowledge in practicalities. Sorcerers know - not only intellectually but also practically - that reality, or the world as we know it, consists only of an agreement extracted out of every one of us. That agreement could be made to collapse, since it's only a social phenomenon. And when it collapses, the whole world collapses with it."

Seeing that I couldn't follow his argument, he tried to present it from another angle. He said that the social world defines perception to us in proportion to it's usefulness in guiding us through the complexity of experience in everyday life. The social world sets limits to what we perceive; sets limits to what we are capable of perceiving.

"To a sorcerer, perception can go beyond these agreed-upon parameters," he stressed. "These parameters are constructed and buttressed by words, by language, by thoughts. That is, by agreement."

"And sorcerers don't agree?" I asked tentatively, in an effort to understand his premise.

"They do agree," he said, beaming at me, "but their agreement is different. Sorcerers break the normal agreement, not only intellectually but also physically or practically or whatever one wants to call it. Sorcerers collapse the parameters of socially determined perception; and to understand what sorcerers mean by that, one has to become a practitioner. That is, one has to be committed. One has to lend the mind as well as the body. It has to be a conscious, fearless surrender."

"The body?" I asked suspiciously, immediately wondering what kind of ritual might be involved. "What do they want with my body?"

"Nothing, nibelunga," he laughed.

Then, in a serious yet kind tone, he added that neither my body nor my mind was yet in any condition to follow the arduous path of the sorcerer. Seeing that I was about to protest, he quickly allowed that there was nothing wrong with either my mind or my body.

"Wait a minute now!" I interjected forcefully.

Isidoro Baltazar ignored my interruption and went on to say that the world of sorcerers is a sophisticated world; that it wasn't enough to understand it's principles intuitively. One also needed to assimilate them intellectually.

"Contrary to what people believe," he explained, "sorcerers are not practitioners of obscure esoteric rituals, but stand ahead of our times. And the mode of our time is reason. We are reasonable men as a whole. Sorcerers, however, are men of reason, which is a different matter altogether. Sorcerers have a romance with ideas. They have cultivated reason to it's limits, for they believe that only by fully understanding the intellect can they embody the principles of sorcery without losing sight of their own sobriety and integrity. This is where sorcerers differ drastically from us. We have very little sobriety and even less integrity."

He glanced at me briefly and smiled. I had the unpleasant impression that he knew exactly what I was thinking, or rather, that I couldn't think at all. I had understood his words, but their meaning had eluded me. I didn't know what to say. I didn't even know what to ask. For the first time in my life, I felt utterly stupid. It didn't make me feel inadequate, though, for I realized that he was right. My interest in intellectual matters had always been shallow and superficial. To have a romance with ideas was a totally alien concept to me.

We were at the U.S. border in Arizona in a few hours, yet the drive was unwarrantedly exhausting. I wanted to talk, but I didn't know what to say, or rather, I couldn't find the words to express myself. I felt somehow intimidated by all that had happened. It was a new feeling for me.

Sensing my uncertainty and discomfort, Isidoro Baltazar began to talk. In a candid manner, he admitted to being baffled by the sorcerers' world even to this day; even after so many years of studying and interacting with them.

"And when I say studying, I really mean studying." He laughed and slapped his thigh to emphasize his statement. "Only this morning I was clobbered by the sorcerers' world in ways impossible to describe."

He spoke in a tone that was half assertion, half complaint, yet there was such a delighted power in his voice; some wonderful inner strength in him, that I felt uplifted. He gave me the impression that he could do anything, endure anything, and allow nothing to matter. I sensed a will in him; an ability to overcome all obstacles.

"Imagine, I really thought I was gone with the nagual for only two days." Laughing, he turned to me and shook me with his free hand.

I had been so absorbed by the sound, the vitality of his voice, that I failed to understand what he was talking about. I asked him to repeat what he had said. He did, and I still missed what he meant.

"I don't get what's exciting you so much," I finally said, suddenly irritated by my inability to grasp what he was trying to tell me. "You were gone for two days. What of it?"

"What?" His loud exclamation made me jump in my seat, and banged my head on the roof of the van.

He peered straight into my eyes but didn't say a word. I knew he was not accusing me of anything, yet I felt that he was making fun of my moroseness, my changing moods, or my lack of attention. He parked the car on the side of the road, turned off the engine, then shifted in his seat to face me.

"And now I want you to tell me all you've experienced." There was a nervous excitement in his voice, a restlessness, a vitality. He assured me that the sequential order of events didn't mean a thing.

His compelling, engaging smile was so reassuring, I told him at it length all I remembered. He listened attentively, chuckling from time to time, urging me with a movement of his chin every time I faltered.

"So, all this has happened to you in..." He paused, gazing at me with shining eyes, then casually added, "two days?"

"Yes," I said firmly.

He crossed his arms over his chest in an expansive gesture.

"Well, I have news for you," he said. The merry look in his eyes belied the seriousness of his tone, the set expression of his straight lips. "I've been gone for twelve days. But I thought it was only two. "I thought you were going to appreciate the irony of it because you had kept a better count of time. You didn't, though. You're just like me. We've lost ten days."

"Ten days," I mumbled, bewildered, then turned to look out the window.

I didn't say a word for the rest of the trip. It wasn't that I didn't believe him. It wasn't that I didn't want to talk. There was nothing for me to say, even after I bought the L.A. Times in the first newsstand that carried it and corroborated that, indeed, I had lost ten days. But were they really lost? I asked myself that question, yet I didn't wish a reply.

## Chapter 12

Isidoro Baltazar's office-studio consisted of one rectangular room overlooking a parking lot, a small kitchen, and a pink-tiled bathroom. He took me there the night we returned from Sonora. Too exhausted to notice anything, I followed him up the two flights of stairs, along a darkly carpeted corridor to apartment number 8. The instant my head hit the pillow, I was asleep and dreamt that we were still on the road. We had driven nonstop all the way from Sonora, alternating with each other at the wheel and pausing only to eat or fill up the gas tank.

The apartment was sparsely furnished. Beside the twin bed, he had a long, masonite folding picnic table that served as his desk, a folding chair, and two metal filing cabinets in which he kept his field notes. Several suits and half a dozen shirts hung in the two big closets in the hall. The rest of the space was taken up by books. They were stacked up in piles. There were no bookcases. The books appeared to have never been touched, let alone read. The cupboards in the kitchen were also crammed with books, except for one shelf, which had been set aside for a plate, a mug, a knife, a fork, and a spoon. On the gas stove stood a kettle and a saucepan.

Within three weeks I found myself a new apartment, about a mile down the street from the UCLA campus, right around the corner from his office-studio. Yet I continued to spend most of my time at his place. He had set up a second twin bed for me, a card table, and a folding chair - identical to his - at the other end of the room.

In the six months that followed, Sonora became a mythological place for me. Having no longer any desire to block away my experiences, I juxtaposed the memories of the two times I had been there. But hard as I tried, I couldn't remember a thing about the eleven days I had lost: one during the first trip, ten during the second.

Isidoro Baltazar plainly refused even to mention the idea of having lost those days. At times, I was in total agreement with him: The absurdity of considering those days lost simply because I couldn't remember them became so plain to me that I was filled with gratitude toward him for attaching no importance to the matter. It was clear that he was protecting me. At other times, however, for no reason at all, I nursed a deep resentment. It was his duty to help me, to clarify the mystery for me, I repeated to myself, until I was convinced he was purposely hiding things from me.

"You'll drive yourself nuts if you keep harping on it," he finally said one day. "And all your turmoil will be for nothing, because it will resolve nothing." He hesitated for a moment, as if reluctant to voice what he was about to say next, then shrugged and added in a challenging tone, "Why don't you use the same energy in a more practical manner, like lining up and examining your bad habits."

Instead of admitting to such a notion, I immediately counter-attacked with the other complaint that had been brewing inside me. I still hadn't met the other young women who had been entrusted to him by the old nagual.

He had told me so much about them that I felt I already knew them. Whenever I had asked him about them, he had answered my questions at great length. He spoke rapturously about them. With profound and obviously sincere admiration, he had said that an outsider would describe them as attractive, intelligent, accomplished - they all possessed advanced university degrees - self-assured, and fiercely independent. To him, however, they were much more than that: They were magical beings who shared his destiny. They were linked to him by ties of affection and commitment that had nothing to do with the social order. They shared in common their search for freedom.

Once, I even gave him an ultimatum. "You've got to take me to them, or else."

Isidoro Baltazar laughed gaily, a deep, chuckling laugh. "All I can tell you is that nothing is as you imagine," he said. "And there is no way to tell when you will finally meet them. You'll just have to wait."

"I've waited long enough!" I shouted. Seeing no reaction on his face, I added derisively, "You're deluding yourself if you believe that I will find a bunch of women in Los Angeles. I don't even know where to start looking."

"You'll find them the way you found me," he stated, "the way you found Mariano Aureliano."

I regarded him suspiciously. I couldn't help but suspect that there was a sort of secret malice about him. "I wasn't looking for you," I pointed out peevishly. "Nor was I looking for Mariano Aureliano. Believe me, meeting you and him was purely accidental."

"There are no accidental meetings in the sorcerers' world," he noted casually. I was on the verge of telling him that I didn't need this kind of advice when he added in a serious voice, "You'll meet them when the time is right. You don't have to go looking for them."

Facing the wall, I counted to ten, then turned toward him smiling and said sweetly, "The problem with you is that you're a typical Latin. Tomorrow is always good enough for you. You've no concept of getting things done." I raised my voice to prevent him from interrupting me. "My insistence on meeting your friends is to speed things up."

"To speed things up?" he repeated uncomprehendingly. "What's there to speed up?"

"You have been telling me almost daily that there is so little left," I reminded him. "You, yourself, are always talking about how important it is for me to meet them, and yet you act as if you had an eternity before you."

"I tell you this constantly because I want you to hurry and clean your inner being, not because I want meaningless acts done as fast as you can," he said impatiently. "It isn't up to me to introduce them to you. If it were up to me, I wouldn't be sitting here listening to your inanities." He closed his eyes and sighed exaggeratedly in mock resignation. He smiled, then mumbled softly, "You're too dumb to see what's happening."

"Nothing is happening," I retorted, stung by his insult. "I'm not as stupid as you think. I've noticed this air of ambivalence about your reactions toward me. Sometimes I have the distinct impression that you don't know what to do with me."

"I know exactly what to do," he contradicted me.

"Then why do you always appear undecided when I propose something?" The words had escaped me as if of their own accord.

Isidoro Baltazar looked sharply at me. For a moment I expected that he would attack me with those quick, harsh words he could use, demolish me with some sharp criticism. But his voice was surprisingly gentle when he said that I was quite right in my assessment.

"I always wait till events make a choice for me," he affirmed. "And then I move with speed and vigor. I will leave you behind if you don't watch out."

"I'm already far behind," I said in a self-pitying tone. "Since you won't help me find these women, I'm doomed to remain behind."

"But this is not the real pressing problem," he said. "You haven't yet made your decision, that's the trouble." He lifted his brows expectantly, as if waiting for my impending outburst.

"I don't know what you mean. What is it I have to decide?"

"You haven't decided to join the sorcerers' world. You're standing at the threshold, looking in, waiting to see what's going to happen. You're waiting for something practical that will make it worth your while."

Words of protest rose in my throat. But before I could give vent to my profound indignation, he said that I had the mistaken idea that moving into a new apartment and leaving my old life-style behind was a change.

"What is it then?" I asked sarcastically.

"You haven't left anything behind, except your belongings," he said, ignoring my tone. "For some people that is a gigantic step. For you, though, it's nothing. You don't care about possessions."

"No, I don't," I agreed, then insisted that regardless of what he believed, I had made my decision to join the sorcerers' world a long time ago. "Why do you think I'm sitting here if I haven't joined yet?"

"You have certainly joined it in body," he stated, "but not in spirit. Now you are waiting for some kind of map, some comforting blueprint before you make your final decision. Meanwhile, you'll go on humoring them. The main problem with you is that you want to be convinced that the sorcerers' world has something to offer."

"Doesn't it?" I blurted out.

Isidoro Baltazar turned to me, his face crinkling with delight. "Yes, it has something very special to offer. It's called freedom. However, there's no guarantee that you'll succeed in attaining it; that any of us, for that matter, will succeed."

I nodded thoughtfully, then asked him what I had to do to convince him that I had indeed joined the sorcerers' world.

"You don't have to convince me. You have to convince the spirit. You have to close the door behind you."

"What door?"

"The one you still keep open. The door that will permit you to escape if things are not to your liking or don't fit your expectations."

"Are you saying that I will leave?"

He regarded me with an enigmatic expression, then shrugged his shoulders and in a voice that was but a mere murmur said, "That's between you and the spirit."

"But if you yourself believe that..."

"I don't believe anything," he cut me short. "You came into this world the way everybody else did. It was none of anybody's doing. And it will be none of anybody's doing if you or anyone else decides to leave."

I gazed at him in confusion. "But surely you'll try to convince... if I..." I stammered.

He shook his head before I finished speaking. "I will not convince you or anyone else. There will be no power in your decision if you need to be propped up every time you falter or doubt."

"But who will help me?" I asked, stricken.

"I will. I'm your servant." He smiled, not cynically but shyly and sweetly. "But I serve the spirit first. A warrior is not a slave but a servant of the spirit. Slaves have no choice; servants do. Warriors' choice is to serve impeccably. My help is exempt from calculation," he continued. "I cannot invest in you, and neither, of course, can you invest in me or in the sorcerers' world. This is the basic premise of that world: Nothing is done in it that might be construed as useful; only strategic acts are permitted. This is what the nagual Juan Matus taught me and the way I live: A sorcerer practices what he or she preaches. And yet nothing is done for practical reasons. When you get to understand and practice this, you will have closed the door behind you."

A long, breathless silence settled between us. I changed positions on the bed where I was sitting. Thoughts swarmed into my head. Perhaps none of the sorcerers would believe me, but I had certainly changed, a change that had been almost imperceptible at first. I noticed it because it had to do with the most difficult thing some of us women can encounter: jealousy and the need to know.

My fits of jealously were a pretense, not necessarily a conscious one, but nevertheless there was something of a posturing about them. Something in me demanded that I be jealous of all the other women in Isidoro Baltazar's life. But then something in me was keenly aware that the new nagual's life wasn't the life of an ordinary man, not even one who might have many wives. Our relation, if it could be called that, did not fit into any kind of habitual, known mold, no matter how I tried to make it fit into that mold. In order for jealousy and possessiveness to have a grasp, it needs a mirror; not only one's own, but one's partner's as well. And Isidoro Baltazar no longer mirrored the drives, needs, feelings, and emotions of a man.

My need to know about Isidoro Baltazar's life was an overpowering need: It simply consumed me that he never allowed me a real entry into his private world. And yet I did nothing about it. It would have been quite simple to follow him or to snoop through his papers and find out once and for all who he really was, I often reminded myself. But I couldn't do it. Something in me knew that I could not proceed with him as I normally would have done. What stopped me, more than any sense of propriety, was the trust he had bestowed on me. He had given me complete access to his belongings, and that made him, not only in practice but even in my thoughts, inviolable.

I laughed out loud. I did understand what a warrior's strategic act was. Isidoro Baltazar was wrong. He was taking my lifelong habit of moodiness and Germanic finickiness as lack of commitment. It didn't matter. I knew that I had at least begun to understand and practice the warrior's strategy, at least when he was present - not necessarily present in the studio but present in Los Angeles. In his absence, however, I often began to falter, and when I did, I usually went to sleep in his studio.

One night, as I was inserting my key in the lock, I felt an arm reach out and pull me in.

I screamed in terror. "What... what...," I stammered as the hand that was holding my arm let go of me.

Trying to regain my balance, I leaned against the wall. My heart thumped wildly.

"Florinda!" I stared at her, bewildered. She had on a long robe, gathered at the waist. Her hair hung loose down the sides and back. I wondered whether she was real or merely a shadowy apparition, rimmed by the faint light behind her shoulders. I moved toward her and surreptitiously touched her sleeve.

"Is that you, Florinda? Or am I dreaming?"

"It's the real thing, dear. The real me."

"How did you get here? Are you all by yourself?" I was well aware of the futility of asking her that.

"Had I known that you would come, I would have started earlier with my cleaning," I said, trying to smile. My lips stuck to my teeth. "I love to clean Isidoro Baltazar's studio at night. I always clean at night."

Instead of making any remark, Florinda turned sideways, so the light hit her face. A wicked smile of delight dawned in her eyes. "I told you never to follow any one of us or come uninvited. You're lucky," she said. "You're lucky it wasn't someone else who pulled you in here tonight."

"Who else could have pulled me in?" I asked with a bravado I was far from feeling.

Florinda gazed at me for a moment longer, then turned around and said over her shoulder, "Someone who wouldn't have cared if you had died of fright."

She moved her head slightly, so her profile was outlined by the faint light. She laughed softly, and, waving her hand in the air as if to brush away the words, she traveled the length of the room to the small kitchen. She seemed not to walk but to glide in a sort of undeliberate dance. It made her long white hair, hanging unbraided down her back, shimmer like a silvery curtain in the uncertain light.

Trying to imitate her graceful walk, I followed behind her. "I do have a key, you know," I said. "I've been coming here every day, at any hour, since we returned from Sonora. In fact, I practically live here."

"Didn't Isidoro Baltazar tell you not to come here while he's in Mexico?" Florinda's tone was even, almost casual. She was not accusing me, yet I felt she was.

"He might have mentioned something," I remarked with studied indifference. Seeing that she frowned, I felt compelled to defend myself. I told her that I was often there by myself and that I didn't think it would make any difference whether Isidoro Baltazar was five miles or five hundred miles away. Emboldened by her repeated nods, I confided that besides doing my schoolwork there, I spent hours rearranging the books in the closets. I had been restacking them by author and subject matter. "Some of the books are so new the pages are still uncut," I explained. "I've been separating them. In fact, that's what I came here to do tonight."

"At three in the morning?" she exclaimed.

Blushing, I nodded. "There are plenty of pages still to cut. It takes forever in that one has to be very careful not to damage the pages. It's soothing work, though. It helps me sleep."

"Extraordinary," Florinda said softly.

Encouraged by her obvious approval, I went on talking. "I'm sure you can understand what being here does to me," I said. "In this apartment, I feel detached from my old life, from everything and everyone but Isidoro Baltazar and his magical world. The very air fills me with a sense of utter remoteness."

I sighed, long and loudly. "Here I never feel alone, even though most of the time I'm here by myself. Something about the atmosphere of this apartment reminds me of the witches' house. That same coldness and lack of feeling, which at first I had found so disturbing, permeates the walls. And it's precisely this lack of warmth, this remoteness, that I seek day and night. I find it oddly reassuring. It gives me strength."

"Incredible," Florinda whispered as if in disbelief and took the kettle to the sink.

She said something, which I didn't hear above the splash of water, then put the water-filled kettle on the stove.

"I'm so happy that you feel so at home here," she said, sighing dramatically. "The security you must feel in such a little nest, knowing you have a companion." She added in a most facetious tone that I should do everything I could to make Isidoro Baltazar happy and that included sexual practices, which she described with horrendous directness.

Stupefied to hear such things, I stared at her open-mouthed. With the assuredness and efficiency of someone familiar with the peculiar setup of the kitchen, she produced the two mugs, my special teapot, and the bag of chocolate chip cookies I kept hidden in the cupboards behind the thick German and French Cassels' dictionaries.

Smiling, Florinda turned to me and asked abruptly, "Whom did you expect to find here tonight?"

"Not you!" I blurted out, realizing too late that my answer had given me away. I went into a lengthy and elaborate elucidation of why I believed I might find there, if not all of them, then at least one of the other young women.

"They will cross your path when the time is right," Florinda said. "It isn't up to you to force an encounter with them."

Before I knew what I was saying, I found myself blaming her, as well as Mariano Aureliano and Isidoro Baltazar, for my sneakiness. I told her that it was impractical - not to mention impossible - for them to expect me to wait until some unknown women crossed my path and to believe that I would actually recognize them by something so inconceivable as their inner glow. As usual, the more I complained, the better I felt.

Florinda ignored me. "One, two spoonfuls, and one for the pot," she chanted in an exaggerated British accent as she measured out the tea. Then in a most casual manner she remarked that the only capricious and impractical thing was for me to think of and treat Isidoro Baltazar as a man.

"I don't know what you mean," I said defensively.

She gazed at me intently until I blushed. "You know exactly what I mean," she stated, then poured the tea into the mugs.

With a quick gesture of her chin she indicated which of the two I should take. With the bag of cookies in her hand she sat on Isidoro Baltazar's bed, the one nearest to the kitchen. Slowly, she sipped her tea. I sat beside her and did the same.

"You haven't changed at all," she said all of a sudden.

"That's pretty much what Isidoro Baltazar said to me some days ago," I retorted. "I know, however, that I've changed a great deal."

I told her that my world had been turned upside down since my return from Sonora. At great length I explained about finding a new apartment, about moving and leaving everything I owned behind. She did not so much as nod but sat there silent and stiff like a stone.

"Actually, I can't take much credit for disrupting routines or becoming inaccessible," I conceded, laughing nervously and faltering on through her silence: "Anyone in close contact with Isidoro Baltazar will forget that there are boundaries between night and day, between weekdays and holidays."

I glanced at her sideways, pleased with my words. "Time just flows by and gives way to some..." but I couldn't finish the sentence: I had been hit by a strange thought. Nobody, in my memory, had ever told me about disrupting routines or becoming inaccessible. I regarded Florinda intently, then my glance wavered involuntarily. Was it her doing? I asked myself. Where did I get these ideas? And what was even more baffling, I knew exactly what these ideas meant.

"This should be a warning that something is just about to pop out of you," Florinda said, as if she had followed my train of thoughts. She went on to say that whatever I had done so far in dreams hadn't imbued my waking hours with the necessary hardness, the necessary self-discipline needed to fare in the sorcerers' world.

"I've never done anything like this in my life," I said. "Give me a break. I am new at it."

"Of course," she readily agreed.

She reclined her head against the pillows and closed her eyes. She was silent for so long I thought she had fallen asleep, and thus I was startled when she said, "A real change is not a change of mood or attitude or outlook. A real change involves a total transformation of the self."

Seeing that I was about to interrupt her, she pressed her finders against my lips and added, "The kind of change I'm talking about cannot be accomplished in three months or in a year or in ten. It will take a lifetime."

She said that it was extraordinarily difficult to become something different than what one was raised to be.

"The world of sorcerers is a dream; a myth: yet it is as real as the everyday world," Florinda proceeded: "In order to perceive and to function in the sorcerers' world, we have to take off the everyday mask that has been strapped to our faces since the day we were born and put on the second mask; the mask that enables us to see ourselves and our surroundings for what they really are: breathtaking events that bloom into transitory existence once, and are never to be repeated again. You'll have to make that mask yourself." She settled more comfortably on the bed and, cupping her hands around the mug, which I had refilled, took noisy little sips.

"How do I make this mask?" I asked.

"By dreaming your other self," she murmured: "Certainly not by just having a new address, new clothes, new books."

She glanced at me sideways and grinned mockingly. "And certainly not by believing you have a new man."

Before I could deny her brutal accusation, she said that outwardly I was a fluid person, capable of moving at great speed. But inside I was rigid and stiff. As Isidoro Baltazar had remarked already, she, too, maintained that it was fallacious for me to believe that moving into a new apartment and compulsively giving away all I possessed was a change.

I bowed my head, accepting her criticism. I had always had an urge to get rid of things. And as she had pointed out, it was basically a compulsion. To my parents' chagrin, I had periodically disposed of my clothes and toys since early childhood. My joy at seeing my room and closets neatly arranged and nearly empty surpassed the joy of having things.

Sometimes my compulsion was so overpowering that I thinned out my parents' and brothers' closets as well. Hardly ever were these items missed, for I always made sure to get rid of clothes I hadn't seen anyone wear for a while. Quite a few times, nevertheless, the whole household would explode in sudden and total confusion as my father went from room to room, opening wardrobes and yelling, searching for a specific shirt or a pair of pants.

Florinda laughed, then got to her feet and moved to the window overlooking the alley. She stared at the black-out curtain as though she could see through it. Glancing backward over her shoulder, she said that for a woman it is a great deal easier than for a man to break ties with family and past.

"Women," she maintained, "are not accountable. This lack of accountability gives women a great deal of fluidity. Unfortunately, women rarely, if ever, make use of this advantage."

She moved about the room, her hand trailing over the large metal filing cabinet and over the folding card table.

"The hardest thing to grasp about the sorcerers' world is that it offers total freedom." She turned to face me and added softly, "But freedom is not free."

"What does freedom cost?"

She said, "Freedom will cost you the mask you have on; the mask that feels so comfortable and is so hard to shed off; not because it fits so well, but because you have been wearing it for so long."

She stopped pacing about the room and came to stand in front of the card table.

"Do you know what freedom is?" she asked rhetorically. "Freedom is the total absence of concern about yourself," she said, sitting beside me on the bed. "And the best way to quit being concerned with yourself is to be concerned about others."

"I am," I assured her. "I constantly think of Isidoro Baltazar and his women."

"I'm sure you do," Florinda readily agreed.

She shook her head and yawned. "It's time for you to begin to shape your new mask; the mask that cannot have anyone's imprint but your own. It has to be carved in solitude. Otherwise it won't fit properly. Otherwise there will always be times when the mask will feel too tight, too loose, too hot, too cold ..." Her voice trailed off as she went on enumerating the most outlandish discomforts.

A long silence ensued, and then in that same sleepy voice she said, "To choose the sorcerers' world is not just a matter of saying you have. You have to act in that world. In your case, you have to dream. Have you dreamt-awake since your return?"

In a thoroughly morose mood, I admitted that I hadn't.

"Then you haven't made your decision yet," she observed severely. "You are not carving your new mask. You are not dreaming your other self. Sorcerers are bound to their world solely through their impeccability."

A definite gleam appeared in her eyes as she added, "Sorcerers have no interest to convert anyone to their views. There are no gurus or wise men among sorcerers, only naguals. They are the leaders, not because they know more or because they are in any way better sorcerers, but simply because they have more energy. I'm not necessarily referring to physical strength," she qualified, "but to a certain configuration of their being that permits them to help anyone break the parameters of perception."

"If sorcerers are not interested in converting anyone to their views, why then is Isidoro Baltazar the old nagual's apprentice?" I interrupted her.

"Isidoro Baltazar appeared in the sorcerers' world the same way you did," she said. "Whatever it was that brought him could not be ignored by Mariano Aureliano. It was his duty to teach Isidoro Baltazar all he knew about the sorcerers' world."

She explained that no one had been looking for Isidoro Baltazar or for me. Whatever had brought us into their world had nothing to do with anyone's doing or volition.

"There is nothing any one of us would do to keep you against your will in this magical world," she said, smiling: "And yet we would do any imaginable or unimaginable thing to help you stay in it."

Florinda turned sideways as if she wanted to hide her face from me. An instant later she looked back over her shoulder. Something cold and detached showed in her eyes, and the change of expression was altogether so remarkable that I was frightened. Instinctively, I moved away from her.

"The only thing I cannot and will not do, and neither will Isidoro Baltazar, for that matter, is to help you be your old ugly, greedy, indulgent self. That would be a travesty."

As if to soften the insult, she put her arm around my shoulders and hugged me.

"I'll tell you what you need," she whispered; but then was silent for so long I thought she had forgotten what she was going to say. "You need a good night's sleep," she finally murmured.

"I'm not in the least tired," I retorted.

My response was automatic, and I realized that most of my responses were contradictions of what was being said. For me, it was a matter of principle to be right.

Florinda laughed softly, then embraced me again. "Don't be so Germanic," she murmured. "And don't expect everything to be spelled out clearly and precisely to you."

She added that nothing in the sorcerers' world was clear and precise: Instead, things unfolded slowly and vaguely.

"Isidoro Baltazar will help you," she assured me. "However, do remember that he won't help you in the way you expect to be helped."

"What do you mean?" I asked, disentangling myself from her arms so I could look at her.

"He will not tell you what you want to hear. He will not tell you how to behave, for, as you already know, there are neither rules nor regulations in the sorcerers' world."

She giggled gleefully, seemingly enjoying my growing frustration.

"Always remember, there are only improvisations," she added, then, yawning widely, she stretched out fully on the bed and reached for one of the neatly folded blankets stacked on the floor. Before she covered herself, she rose up on her elbow and looked at me closely. There was something hypnotic about her sleepy voice as she told me that I should always bear in mind that I traveled on the same warrior's path as Isidoro Baltazar.

She closed her eyes, and in a voice that was almost too faint to be heard said, "Never lose sight of him. His actions will guide you in so artful a manner that you won't even notice it. He's an impeccable and peerless warrior."

I urgently shook her arm. I was afraid she would fall asleep before she finished talking.

Without opening her eyes, Florinda said, "If you watch him carefully, you'll see that Isidoro Baltazar doesn't seek love or approval. You'll see that he remains impassive under any conditions. He doesn't demand anything, yet he is willing to give anything of himself. He avidly seeks a signal from the spirit in the form of a kind word; an appropriate gesture... and when he gets it, he expresses his thanks by redoubling his efforts. Isidoro Baltazar doesn't judge. He fiercely reduces himself to nothing in order to listen, to watch, so that he can conquer and be humbled by his conquest; or be defeated and enhanced by his defeat. If you watch carefully, you'll see that Isidoro Baltazar doesn't surrender. He may be vanquished, but he'll never surrender. And above all, Isidoro Baltazar is free."

I was dying to interrupt her, to cry out that she had already told me all that, but before I could ask her anything else, Florinda was sound asleep.

Afraid I might miss her in the morning if I returned to my apartment, I sat down on the other bed. Strange thoughts rushed into my awareness. I relaxed. I let myself go completely as I realized that they were disconnected from the rest of my normal thoughts. I saw them like beams of light, flashes of intuition.

Following one of those flashes of intuition, I decided to feel with my seat the bed I was sitting on. And to my dumbfounded surprise, my buttocks felt as if they had sunk into the bed itself. For an instant, I was the bed, and the bed was reaching out to touch my buttocks. I relished this sensation for quite some time. I knew then that I was dreaming, and I understood with complete clarity that I had just felt what Esperanza had described as 'my feeling being thrown back at me.' And then my whole being melted, or better yet, it exploded.

I wanted to laugh out loud for the sheer joy of it, but I didn't want to wake Florinda. I had remembered it all! Now I had no difficulty whatsoever in recalling what I had done in the witches' house in those ten lost days. I had dreamt! Under Esperanza's watchful eye, I had dreamt on and on of waking up in the witches' house or in Esperanza's place or sometimes in other places I couldn't quite see at the moment.

Clara had insisted that before any particular thing I saw in dreams could be fixed permanently in my memory, I needed to see it twice. I had seen all the women more than twice: They were permanently etched in my memory. As I sat there on the bed watching Florinda sleep, I remembered the other women of the sorcerers' party with whom I had interacted in a dreamlike state during those forgotten days. I saw them clearly, as if they had conjured themselves up before me; or rather, as if I had been transported, bodily, back to those events.

The most striking to me was Nelida, who looked so much like Florinda that at first I believed she was her twin. Not only was she is tall and thin as Florinda, but she had the same color eyes, hair, ind complexion: Even their expressions were the same. Temperamentally, they were alike, too, except that Nelida came across as more subdued, less forceful. She seemed to lack Florinda's wisdom and energetic force. And yet there was a patient, silent strength to Nelida that was very reassuring.

Hermelinda could have easily passed as Carmela's younger sister. Her thin, five-foot two-inch body was delicately rounded and so were her exquisite manners. She appeared to be less self-assured than Carmela. She was soft-spoken and moved in quick jerks that somehow meshed into gracefulness. Her companions told me that her shyness and quietness brought out the best in others and that she could not handle a group or even two people at the same time.

Clara and Delia made a stupendous team of pranksters. They weren't really as big as they first appeared. It was their robustness, their vigor and energy, that made one think they were large, indestructible women. And they did play the most delightful competitive games. They paraded their outlandishly eccentric outfits at he slightest opportunity. Both played the guitar very well and had beautiful voices to match: They sang, one trying to outdo the other, not only in Spanish, but in English, German, French, and Italian as well. Their repertoire included ballads, folk songs, every conceivable popular song including the latest pop songs. I only had to hum or recite the first line of a song and either Clara or Delia would immediately finish the whole song for me. And then they had their poem writing contests, writing verse to the occasion.

They had written poems to me and slipped them under my door, unsigned. I had to guess who had written the poem. Each claimed that if I truly loved her, as she loved me, I would intuitively know the author.

What made their competitiveness delightfully appealing was the fact that there was no edge to it. It was meant to entertain, not to put each other down. Needless to say, Clara and Delia had as much fun as their audience.

If they took a liking to someone, as they seemed to have done with me, there was no limit to their affection and loyalty. Both of them defended me with an astonishing perseverance, even when I was in the wrong. In their eyes, I was perfect and could do no wrong. From them I learned that it was a dual responsibility to uphold that trust. It wasn't that I was afraid of disappointing them and tried to live up to their expectations, but rather, it was the most natural thing for me to believe that I was perfect and to behave with them in an impeccable manner.

The strangest among all the women sorcerers was my dreaming teacher, Zuleica, who never taught me anything. She didn't even speak to me or perhaps hadn't noticed that I existed.

Zuleica was, just like Florinda, very beautiful; perhaps not as striking, but beautiful in a more ethereal way. She was petite: Her dark eyes with the winged eyebrows and the small, perfect nose and mouth were framed by wavy dark hair that was turning gray. It accentuated her aura of other-worldliness.

Hers was not an average beauty, but a sublime one, tempered by her relentless self-control. She was keenly aware of the comic element of being beautiful and appealing in the eyes of others. She had learned to recognize it and used it as if it were a prize she had won. She was, therefore, totally indifferent to anything or anyone.

Zuleica had learned to be a ventriloquist and had turned it into a superior art. According to her, words voiced by moving the lips become more confusing than they really are.

I was delighted by Zuleica's habit of talking, as a ventriloquist, to walls, tables, china, or any other object in front of her, and so I kept on following her around whenever she made an appearance. She walked through the house without seeming to touch the ground, without seeming to stir the air. When I asked the other sorcerers whether this was an illusion, they explained that Zuleica abhorred leaving footprints.

After I had met and interacted with all the women, they explained to me the difference between the dreamers and the stalkers. They called it the two planets. Florinda, Carmela, Zoila, and Delia were stalkers: forceful beings with a great deal of physical energy; go-getters; inexhaustible workers; specialists on that extravagant state of awareness they called dreaming-awake.

The other planet - the dreamers - was composed of the other four women: Zuleica, Nelida, Hermelinda, and Clara. They had a more ethereal quality. It was not that they were less forceful or less energetic: It was rather that their energy was simply less apparent. They projected a sense of other-worldliness even when engaged in the most mundane activities. They were the specialists on another peculiar state of awareness they called 'dreaming in worlds other than this world.' I was told that this was the most complex state of awareness women could reach.

When the dreamers and the stalkers worked together, the stalkers were like a protective, hard, outer layer that hid a deep core. The dreamers were that deep core: They were like a soft matrix that cushioned the hard, outer layer.

During those days in the witches' house, I was taken care of as if I were their most precious concern: They cossetted and fussed over me as if I were a baby. They cooked me my favorite foods. They made me the most elegant and well-fitting clothes I had ever had. They showered me with presents, outright silly things and valuable jewels, which they put away, waiting for the day I would wake up, they said.

There were two more women in the sorcerers' world. They were both stalkers: two fat girls, Martha and Teresa. Both were lovely to look at and had glorious appetites to match. Not that they fooled anyone, but they kept a cache of cookies, chocolates, and assorted candies hidden in a secret compartment in the pantry. To my great delight, they made me privy from the very beginning to their secret cache and encouraged me to dip freely into it, which, of course, I did.

Martha was the older of the two. She was in her mid-twenties, an exotic blend of German and Indian blood. Her color, if not altogether white, was pale. Her luxurious black hair was soft and wavy and framed a high-cheeked, broad face. Her slanted eyes were a brilliant green-blue, and her ears were small and delicate, like a cat's, soft and almost rosily transparent.

Martha was given to long, sorrowful sighs - Germanic, she claimed - and to moody silences, a heritage of her Indian soul. She had recently begun to take lessons on the violin, which she would practice at any hour of the day. Instead of anyone criticizing her or getting angry, they unanimously agreed that Martha had a great ear for music.

Teresa was barely five feet tall, but her bulk made her seem much taller. Rather than looking Mexican, she looked like an Indian from India. Her flawless skin was a rich, creamy light brown. Her almond-shaped eyes, liquid and dark, were framed by long, curly lashes, so heavy they kept her lids low, giving her a dreamy, far-away expression. Her gentleness and sweet disposition made one want to protect her.

Teresa was artistic, too. She painted watercolors late in the afternoon. With her easel before her, her brushes and tray with paint and water at the ready, she would sit for hours in the yard, waiting for the light and shadows to be just right. Then, with Zen-like control and fluidity, she would dash across the page with her paint-dipped brushes.

The bulk of my hidden memories had surfaced. I was exhausted. The rhythm of Florinda's faint snoring rising and falling across the room like a distant echo was mesmerizing.

When I opened my eyes, the first thing I did was to call out her name. She didn't answer. The bed was empty. The yellow sheet, tucked tightly under the mattress, showed no evidence that anyone had sat, let alone slept, there. The two pillows were back to their usual position - plopped against the wall - and the blanket she had used was stacked with the others on the floor.

Eagerly, I searched the apartment for a clue, some indication that she had indeed been there. I found nothing, not even a long gray hair in the bathroom.

## Chapter 13

Whenever I was fully awake, I didn't quite remember about those lost days, except that I knew, with absolute certainty, that they were not lost. Something had happened to me during that time; something with an inward meaning that escaped me. I didn't make a conscious effort to recapture all those vague memories. I simply knew they were there half-hidden like people one knows slightly but whose names one can't exactly recall.

I have never been a good sleeper, but from that night on - since Florinda's appearance at Isidoro Baltazar's studio - I went to sleep at all hours just to dream. I simply passed out every time I lay down, and slept for inordinately long stretches of time. I even put on weight, which unfortunately didn't go to the right places. Yet I never dreamt with the sorcerers.

One afternoon I awoke abruptly to a loud clatter. Isidoro Baltazar had dropped the kettle in the sink. My head hurt, my eyes were blurred. I had the immediate memory of a terrible dream that just as quickly escaped recall. I was sweating heavily.

"It's all your fault," I yelled at him. "If you would only help me, I wouldn't be sleeping my life away." I wanted to rant, to give in to my frustration and impatience. But it suddenly flashed through my mind that I couldn't do that because I could no longer enjoy my complaining as I used to.

His face was radiant with pleasure, as though I had spoken my thoughts out loud. He grabbed his chair, sat astride it, and said, "You know that I cannot help you. Women have a different dreaming avenue. I can't even conceive what women do to dream."

"You ought to know, with so many women in your world," I retorted churlishly.

He laughed: Nothing seemed to alter his good spirits.

"I can't even begin to conceive what women do to dream," he went on: "Males have to struggle incessantly to arrange their attention in dreams: Women don't struggle, but they do have to acquire inner discipline."

His smile was brilliant as he added, "There is one thing that might help you. Don't approach dreaming in your usual compulsive manner. Let it come to you."

I opened and closed my mouth, then quickly my astonishment turned to rage. My former insight forgotten, I put on my shoes and stomped out in a huff, making sure to bang the door behind me. His laughter followed me all the way to my car in the parking lot below.

Dejected, feeling utterly unloved, alone, and above all, sorry for myself, I drove to the beach. It was deserted. It was raining at the beach. There was no wind, and the rain fell very gently, very straight. There was something peaceful about the hushed sound of the lapping waves and the rain hitting the water. I took off my shoes, tucked up my pants, and walked until I was washed clean of my indulgent moods.

I knew that I was rid of them because I heard from the whispering, lapping waves Florinda's words, "It's a solitary fight."

I wasn't threatened: I simply accepted that I was indeed alone; and it was this acquiescence that brought me the conviction of what I had to do. And since I am not one to wait, I acted immediately.

After leaving a note under Isidoro Baltazar's door - I didn't want him to talk me out of it - I set out for the witches' house. I drove all night, all the way to Tucson. I checked in at a motel, slept most of the day, then late in the afternoon set out again, taking the same route Isidoro Baltazar had followed on our return trip.

My sense of direction is poor, yet that route is imprinted deep within me. With a baffling assurance, I knew exactly what roads to take; where to turn. I reached the witches' house in no time at all. I didn't bother to check my watch, for I didn't want to lose the feeling that no time had elapsed between the time I got into my car in Tucson and my arrival at the witches' house.

That there was no one at the house didn't bother me in the least. I was aware that no direct, formal invitation had been extended to me; but I remembered clearly that Nelida had told me, as she hid in a drawer a small basket with the gifts they had all given me, that I should come back any time I wished.

Nelida's words rang in my ears: "Day or night, this basket will pull you safely in."

With an assurance that ordinarily only comes from practice, I went directly to the room Esperanza had given me. The white, flouncy hammock was ready, as if waiting for me. A vague uneasiness finally took hold of me, but I wasn't nearly as scared as I should have been. Not quite relaxed, I lowered myself in the hammock, one leg outside to rock myself back and forth.

"To hell with my fears," I cried out and pulled my leg in and stretched out luxuriously like a cat until all my joints cracked.

"Oh, you've made it back safely," a voice said to me from the corridor.

I didn't see her and I didn't necessarily recognize her voice, yet I knew it was Nelida. I waited expectantly for her to come in, but she didn't.

"Your food is in the kitchen," I heard her say. Her steps moved away from my door, down the corridor. I jumped up and dashed after her. "Wait, wait, Nelida!" I shouted. There was no one in the hall or in the rooms I passed on my way to the kitchen. There was no one in the whole house, for that matter. Yet, I was sure they were there. I heard their voices, their laughter, the clatter of dishes, of pots and pans.

I spent the next few days in a perpetual state of anticipation, waiting for something significant to occur. I couldn't imagine what was supposed to happen, but I knew that it had to be connected with the women.

For some unfathomable reason, the women didn't want to be seen. Their astoundingly furtive behavior kept me in the corridors it all hours, prowling noiselessly, like a shadow. Regardless of the ingeniously sneaky schemes I devised to surprise the women, I never caught so much as a glimpse of them. They glided in and out of their rooms, in and out of the house, as if in between worlds, leaving in their wake the sound of their voices and laughter.

Sometimes I wondered whether the women were indeed there; whether the sounds of footsteps, of murmurs and giggles, were but figments of my imagination. Whenever I was about to believe it was my imagination, I would hear one of them tinkering on the patio. Then, seized by renewed fervor, expectation, and excitement, I would run to the back of the house, only to discover that once again I had been outwitted. At those times I was convinced that the women, being real witches, had some kind of a bat - like internal echo location system that alerted them to my sounds.

My disappointment at not being able to catch them in front of the stove always vanished at the sight of the exotic little meals they left behind for me. The deliciousness of the dishes amply compensated for the meagerness of the portions. With great gusto I ate their wonderful food. Yet I was still hungry.

One day just before twilight, I heard a man's voice softly calling my name from the back of the house. I jumped out of my hammock and ran down the corridor. I was so glad to see the caretaker, I nearly jumped on him like a dog does. Unable to contain my joy, I kissed him on the cheeks.

"Watch out, nibelunga." He said this in the same voice and manner of Isidoro Baltazar. I sprang back, my eyes wide with surprise. He winked at me and added, "Don't get carried away, because the next thing you know, you'll be taking advantage of me."

For an instant I didn't know what to make of his words. But then he laughed, and patted my back reassuringly. I completely relaxed.

"It's good to see you," he said softly.

"It's wonderful to see you!" I giggled self-consciously, then asked him where everybody else was.

"Oh, they are around," he said vaguely. "At the moment they are mysteriously inaccessible, but ever present." Seeing my disappointment he added, "Have patience."

"I know they are around," I murmured. "They leave food for me." I glanced over my shoulder to ham it up and confided, "But I'm still hungry. The portions are too little."

According to the caretaker, this was the natural condition of power food: One could never get enough of it. He said that he cooked his own food - rice and beans with either chunks of pork, beef, or chicken - and ate only once a day but never at the same hour.

He took me then to his quarters. He lived in the large, cluttered room behind the kitchen, amidst the odd wood and iron sculptures, where the air, thick with the scents of jasmine and eucalyptus, hung heavy and motionless around the drawn curtains. He slept on a cot, which he kept folded in the armoire when it was not in use, and ate his meal at a small chippendale table with spindly legs.

He confided that he, like the mysterious women, disliked routines. Day or night, morning or afternoon, was all the same to him. He swept the patios and raked the leaves outside the clearing whenever he felt like doing so. Whether there were blossoms or leaves on the ground was immaterial.

In the days that followed, I had a hellish time trying to adjust to this seemingly unstructured way of life. Out of compulsion, rather than out of any desire to be useful, I helped the caretaker with his chores. Also, I invariably accepted his invitations to share his meals. His food was as delicious as his company.

Convinced that he was more than the caretaker, I did my best to get him off-guard with my devious questions; a useless technique, for I never got any satisfactory answers.

"Where do you come from?" I bluntly asked him one day while we were eating.

He looked up from his plate, and as if he had been expecting an outright interrogation, he dutifully pointed to the mountains toward the east, framed by the open window like a painting.

"The Bacatete Mountains?" My voice betrayed my disbelief. "But you're not an Indian," I mumbled disconcertedly. "The way I see it, only the nagual Mariano Aureliano, Delia Flores, and Genaro Flores are Indians."

Emboldened by the surprised, expectant look on his face, I added that, in my opinion, Esperanza transcended racial categories. I leaned across the table and in a secretive tone confided to him what I had already told Florinda. "Esperanza wasn't born like a human being. She was established by an act of witchcraft. She is the very devil."

Leaning back in his chair, the caretaker shrieked with joy. "And what do you have to say about Florinda? Did you know she's French? Or rather, her parents were French. They were from the families that came to Mexico with Maximilian and Carlota."

"She's very beautiful," I murmured, trying to remember when, exactly, in the eighteen hundreds the Austrian prince was sent by Napoleon to Mexico.

"You haven't seen her when she's all dolled up," the caretaker gushed. "She's something else. Age means nothing to her."

"Carmela told me that I am like Florinda," I said in a fit of vanity and wishful thinking.

Propelled by the laughter bubbling up inside him, the caretaker sprang up from his chair. "That'll be the day." He said the words with no particular feeling, as though he didn't care in the least how they would be received.

Irritated by his remark; his lack of feeling, I glared at him with ill-concealed animosity. Then, eager to change the subject, I asked him about the nagual Mariano Aureliano. "Where exactly does he come from?"

"Who knows where naguals come from?" he muttered, moving toward the window.

For a long while he gazed at the distant mountains, then he turned toward me once again and said, "Some people say that naguals come from hell itself. I believe it. Some people say that naguals are not even human." Again he paused, and I wondered if the long silence was to be repeated.

As if sensing my impatience, he came to sit beside me and added, "If you ask me, I'd say that naguals are superhuman. That's the reason they know everything about human nature. You can't lie to a nagual. They see through you. They see through anything. They even see through space to other worlds in this world, and to other worlds out of this world."

I moved uneasily in my chair, wishing he would stop talking. I regretted engaging him in this conversation. There was no doubt in my mind that the man was insane.

"No, I'm not insane," he assured me, and I let out a loud shriek. "I'm saying things that you've never heard before, that's all."

Feeling oddly on the defensive, I blinked repeatedly. But my uneasiness gave me a surge of courage, and I asked him point blank, "Why are they hiding from me?"

"It's obvious," he shot back, then seeing that it wasn't at all obvious to me, he added, "You should know it. You and your kind are the crew, not me. I'm not one of them. I'm merely the caretaker. I oil the machine."

"You're getting me more confused than I was," I muttered, irritated. Then a momentary flash of insight hit me. "Who are the crew you are referring to?"

"All the women you met the last time you were here. The dreamers and the stalkers. They told me that the stalkers are your kind, and you are one of them."

He poured himself a glass of water and went with it to the window. He took a few sips then informed me that the nagual Mariano Aureliano had tried out my stalking abilities in Tucson, Arizona, when he sent me into the coffee shop to put a cockroach in my food. The caretaker turned his back to the window, looked straight into my face, and added, "You failed."

"I don't want to hear about that nonsense," I cut him short. I had no desire to hear the rest of the story.

His face crinkled with mischief. "But then, after your failure, you exonerated yourself by kicking and yelling at the nagual Mariano Aureliano without shame or regard. Stalkers," he stressed, "are people who have a knack for dealing with people."

I opened my mouth to say that I didn't understand a word he was saying, but quickly shut it again.

"What has been baffling," he went on, "is that you are a great dreamer. If it wouldn't be for that, you'd be like Florinda - less the height and the looks, of course."

Smiling venomously, I cursed the old creep silently.

"Do you remember how many women were there at the picnic?" he asked all of a sudden.

I closed my eyes to better visualize the picnic. I clearly saw six women sitting on the canvas cloth, spread out under the eucalyptus trees. Esperanza wasn't there, but Carmela, Zoila, Delia, and Florinda were.

"Who were the other two?" I asked, more mystified than ever.

"Ah," he murmured appreciatively, a brilliant smile creasing his face. "Those two were dreamers from another world. You saw them clearly, but then they disappeared, and your mind didn't acknowledge their vanishing because it was simply too outlandish."

I nodded absentmindedly, unable to conceive that I had actually seen only four women, when I knew that there had been six.

The thought must have seeped through to him, for he said that it was only natural to have focused on the four. "The other two are your source of energy. They are incorporeal and not from this world."

Lost and bewildered, all I could do was stare at him: I had no more questions to ask.

"Since you are not in the planet of the dreamers," he clarified, "your dreams are nightmares, and your transitions between dreams and reality are very unstable and dangerous to you and to the other dreamers. So Florinda has taken it upon herself to buffer and protect you."

I rose with such impetus my chair turned over. "I don't want to know anything else!" I cried out. Just in time, I stopped myself from blurting out that I was better off not knowing about their mad ways and rationales.

The caretaker took me by the hand and walked with me outside, across the clearing, across the chaparral to the back of the small house.

"I need you to help me with the generator," he said. "It needs fixing."

I laughed out loud and told him that I didn't know anything about generators. Only when he opened the trap door of a concrete encasement did I realize that the electric current for the lights in the house was generated there. I had completely taken for granted that the electrical lights and appliances of rural Mexico were like those I was familiar with.

From that day on, I tried not to ask him too many questions. I felt that I was not prepared for his answers. Our meetings acquired the nature of a ritual in which I did my best to match the old man's exquisite usage of the Spanish language. I spent hours pouring over the various dictionaries in my room, searching for new and often archaic words with which to impress him.

One afternoon, as I was waiting for the caretaker to bring in the food - it was the first time since I discovered his room that I was alone in it - I remembered the old, strange mirror. I carefully examined it's spotty, misty surface.

"You'll get trapped in the mirror if you look at yourself too much," a voice behind me said.

Expecting to see the caretaker, I turned around, but there was no one in the room. In my eagerness to reach the door, I almost knocked over the wood and iron sculpture behind me. Automatically, I reached out to steady it, but before I so much as touched it, the figure seemed to spin away from me in an odd circular motion, then came to it's original position with an astonishingly human sigh.

"What's the matter?" the caretaker asked, stepping into the room. He placed a large tray on the rickety table and, looking up into my ashen face, asked once more what was wrong with me.

"Sometimes, I've the feeling that these monstrosities are alive, watching me," I said, gesturing with my chin toward the nearby sculpture. Noticing his grave, unsmiling face, I hastened to reassure him that I didn't mean monstrous in terms of ugliness but rather in terms of being big. I took several deep, shuddering breaths and repeated that his sculptures gave me the impression of being alive.

Glancing furtively around himself and lowering his voice to a barely audible whisper, he said, "They are alive."

I felt so uncomfortable that I began to babble about the afternoon I first discovered his room; how I had been lured to it by an eerie-sounding murmur that turned out to be the wind pushing the curtain through a broken window.

"Yet at the time I believed it to be a monster," I confided, giggling nervously. "An alien presence feeding on the twilight shadows."

Chewing his lower lip, the caretaker regarded me with keen eyes. Then his gaze drifted unfocused around the room. "We better sit down to eat," he finally said. "We don't want to let our food get cold."

He held out the chair for me, and as soon as I was comfortably seated, he added in a vibrant tone, "You're quite right to call them presences, for they are not sculptures. They are inventions."

He confided in a conspiratorial tone, "They were conceived from patterns glimpsed at in another world, by a great nagual."

"By Mariano Aureliano?" I asked.

He shook his head and said, "By a much older nagual, named Elias."

"Why are these inventions in your room?" I asked. "Did this great nagual make them for you?"

"No," he said. "I only take care of them."

Rising, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a neatly folded white handkerchief and proceeded to dust the nearby invention with it.

"Since I'm the caretaker, it falls upon me to take care of them. One day, with the help of all these sorcerers you've already met, I will deliver these inventions where they belong."

"And where is that?"

"Infinity, the cosmos, the vacuum."

"How do you propose to take them there?"

"Through the same power that got them here in the first place: the power of dreaming-awake."

"If you dream like these sorcerers dream," I began cautiously, trying hard to conceal the triumph in my voice, "then you must also be a sorcerer yourself."

"I am, but I am not like them."

His candid admission confused me. "What's the difference?"

"Ah!" he exclaimed knowingly. "All the difference in the world. But I can't explain it now. If I do, you'd get even more morose and angry. Someday, though, you'll know all about it by yourself, without anyone having to tell you."

I could feel the wheels churning in my head as I desperately tried to come up with something else to say; another question to ask.

"Can you tell me how the nagual Elias came to have the inventions?"

"He saw them in his dreaming and captured them," the caretaker confided. "Some of them are copies, done by him, of inventions he couldn't cart away. Others are the real thing; inventions transported by that great nagual all the way to here."

I didn't believe a word he said, yet I couldn't help but add, "Why did the nagual Elias bring them?"

"Because the inventions themselves asked him to."

"Why did they?"

The caretaker dismissed my probings with a wave of his hand and urged me to eat my food. His unwillingness to satisfy my curiosity only piqued my interest. I couldn't imagine why he didn't want to talk about the contraptions when he was so good at evasive answers: He could have told me anything.

The instant we finished our meal, he asked me to retrieve his cot from the armoire. Knowing his preference, I unfolded it for him in front of the curtained French door. Sighing contentedly, he lay down, resting his head on the rectangular little pillow that was attached to one end of the cot. It was filled with dried beans and maize kernels. According to him, the pillow ensured sweet dreams.

"I'm ready for my nap now," he said, loosening the belt on his pants. It was his polite way of dismissing me.

Peeved by his refusal to talk about the inventions, I piled our plates on the tray and stormed out of the room. His snores followed me all the way to the kitchen.

That night I awoke to the strumming of a guitar. Automatically, I reached for the flashlight I kept beside my low-hanging hammock and checked my watch. It was a bit past midnight. I wrapped my blanket tightly around me and tiptoed out into the corridor that led to the inside patio.

On the patio, sitting on a rush chair, was a man playing a guitar. I couldn't see his face, but I knew it was the same man Isidoro Baltazar and I had seen and heard the first time I was there.

As he had done then, the man stopped playing the moment he saw me. He got up from his chair and went inside the house.

As soon as I was back in my room, his plucking resumed. I was about to doze off when I heard him sing in a clear, strong voice. He sang to the wind, beckoning it to come from across miles of silence and emptiness.

As if responding to his haunting invocation, the wind gathered force. It whistled through the chaparral. It tore the withered leaves from the trees and swept them into rustling heaps against the walls of the house.

On an impulse, I opened the door to the patio. The wind filled the room with an unspeakable sadness, not the sadness of tears but the melancholic solitariness of the desert, of dust and ancient shadows. The wind circled around the room like smoke. I inhaled it with every breath. It sat heavy in my lungs, yet the deeper I breathed, the lighter I felt.

I went outside and, squeezing between the tall bushes, made my way to the back of the house. The white-washed walls caught the moonlight and reflected it brightly onto the windswept ground of the wide clearing. Afraid I might be seen, I darted from fruit tree to fruit tree, hiding in the dark shadows cast by the moonlight until I reached the two blooming orange trees outside the wall guarding the path to the little house.

The wind brought the sound of giggles and dim murmurings from across the chaparral. Daringly, I dashed along the path, only to lose my nerve once I reached the front door of the small, dark house. Quivering with excitement, I inched my way to an open window. I recognized Delia's and Florinda's voices, but the window was too high for me to see what the women were doing.

I listened, expecting to hear something profound; to be transported by some mind - shattering revelation that would help me resolve what I had come there for - my inability to dream. But I only heard gossip. I became so engrossed in their malicious insinuations that I laughed out loud several times, forgetting that I was eavesdropping.

At first I thought they were gossiping about outsiders, but then I realized they were talking about the women dreamers, and their most insidious remarks were directed against Nelida.

They said that she had so far been unable, after so many years, to break away from the grip of the world. Not only was she vain - they claimed she spent all day in front of the mirror - but she was lusty as well. She did everything in her power to be a sexually desirable woman in order to entice the nagual Mariano Aureliano. Someone pointed out, cattily, that, after all, she was the only one who could accommodate his enormous, intoxicating organ.

Then they talked about Clara. They called her a pompous elephant who believed that it was her duty to bestow blessings on everyone. The recipient of her attention was, at the moment, the nagual Isidoro Baltazar, and the treat was her naked body. He wasn't to have it, only to see it. Once in the morning and again once at night she would regale him with the sight of her nakedness. She was convinced that by doing this, she would ensure the young nagual's sexual prowess.

The third woman they talked about was Zuleica. They said that she had delusions of being a saint and the Virgin Mary. Her so-called spirituality was nothing but craziness. Periodically she would lose her marbles; and whenever she had one of her fits of insanity, she would clean the house from top to bottom, even the rocks in the patio or around the grounds.

Then there was Hermelinda. She was described as being very sober, very proper, the paragon of middle-class values. As Nelida, she was incapable, after so many years, of stopping herself from seeking to be the perfect woman, the perfect homemaker. Although she couldn't cook or sew or embroider or play the piano to entertain her guests, Hermelinda wanted to be known, they said in between fits of giggles, as the paragon of good femininity, just as Nelida wanted to be known as the paragon of naughty femininity.

If the two of them would only combine their talents, one voice remarked, then they would have the perfect woman to please the master; perfect in the kitchen and in the living room, wearing an apron or an evening dress, and perfect in bed with her legs up whenever the master wanted it.

When they grew silent, I ran back to the house, to my room and into my hammock, but hard as I tried, I could no longer go back to sleep. I felt that some kind of a protective bubble had burst around me, obliterating my sense of delight; of enchantment at being at the witches' house. All I could think of was that, by my own doings this time, I was stuck there in Sonora with a bunch of crazy old women who did nothing else but gossip when I could have been in Los Angeles having fun.

I had come looking for advice. Instead, I was ignored; reduced to the company of a senile old man who I believed to be a woman. By the time I sat down to eat with the caretaker in the morning, I had driven myself into such a state of righteous indignation that I couldn't swallow a bite.

"What's the matter?" the old man asked, gazing at me intently. Normally, he avoided direct eye contact. "Aren't you hungry?"

I glared back at him. Giving up any attempt at self-control, I unburdened all my pent-up anger and frustration.

As I went on complaining, I had a flash of sobriety: I told myself that I shouldn't blame the old man, that I should be grateful, for he had shown me nothing but kindness. But it was too late to stop myself. My petty grievances had acquired a life of their own. My voice became shriller still as I magnified and deformed the events of the past few days. With malicious satisfaction, I told him that I had eavesdropped on the women.

"They don't want to help me in the least," I asserted with resonant authority. "All they do is gossip. They said horrible things about the women dreamers."

"What did you hear them say?"

With great relish I told him everything. I surprised myself with my extraordinary power to recollect every detail of the women's wicked remarks.

"Obviously, they were talking about you," he declared the moment I finished my account. "In a symbolic fashion, of course." He waited for the words to sink in, and before I could protest, he asked innocently, "Aren't you quite a bit like all this?"

"Like hell I am!" I exploded. "And don't give me any psychological shit. I won't take this kind of crap; not even from an educated man, much the less from you, you fucking peon."

The caretaker's eyes opened wide in bewilderment and his frail shoulders sagged. I felt no sympathy for him, only pity for myself. I had wasted my time telling him what I had heard.

I was about to say what a mistake it had been for me to make that long, arduous journey and all for nothing, when the caretaker looked at me with such contempt that I felt ashamed of my outburst.

"If you hold your temper, you'll understand that nothing these sorcerers do is just to entertain themselves, or to impress someone; or to give way to their compulsiveness," he said with great equanimity. "Everything they do or say has a reason - a purpose."

He stared at me with an intensity that made me want to move away, but I couldn't. "Don't go around thinking that you're here on a vacation," he stressed. "For the sorcerers you've fallen prey to, there are no holidays."

"What are you trying to tell me?" I demanded angrily. "Don't beat around the bush, just say it."

"How can anyone be more clear?" His voice was deceptively mellow and loaded with more meaning than I could fathom. "The witches already told you last night what you are. They used the four women of the dreamers' planet as a false front to describe to you, the eavesdropper, what you really are: a slut, with delusions of grandeur."

So great was my shock, I was momentarily stunned. Then anger, hot as lava, shot through my whole body.

"You miserable, insignificant piece of shit," I yelled and kicked him in the groin. Before my kick had landed I already had a flash image of the little old bastard on the ground, wriggling with pain, except that my kick never landed anywhere but in the air. With the speed of a prize fighter he had jumped out of the way.

He smiled with his mouth, but his eyes were flat and cold as he watched me puffing and groaning. "You are playing on the nagual Isidoro Baltazar all those tricks the witches talked about. You were trained for it. Think about it. Don't just get angry."

I opened my mouth to say something, but no sound emerged. It wasn't so much his words that had left me speechless as his devastatingly indifferent, icy tone. I would have preferred he had yelled at me, for then I would have known how to react: I would have yelled louder.

There was no point in fighting him. He wasn't right, I assured myself. He was simply a senile man with a bitter tongue. No, I wasn't going to get mad at him, but I wasn't going to take him seriously either.

"I hope you're not going to weep," he warned me before I recovered from my shock.

Despite my determination not to get mad at the senile bastard, my face grew red with anger. "Of course, I'm not," I snapped.

Before I tried another kick, I yelled at him that since he was only a chicken-shit servant he deserved to be beaten for his impertinence, but the hard, relentless expression in his eyes made me lose my momentum.

Without the faintest change in his courteous yet inexpressive tone, somehow he managed to convince me that I should apologize to him.

"I'm sorry," I finally said, and truly meant it. "My bad temper and bad manners always get the best of me."

"I know it: They all warned me about you," he said seriously, then added, smiling, "Eat your food."

I was ill at ease all through the meal. Chewing slowly, I watched him surreptitiously. Although he didn't make the slightest effort to be friendly, I knew that he wasn't angry with me. I tried to comfort myself with that thought, but I didn't find it very comforting. I sensed that his lack of concern wasn't deliberate or studied. He wasn't punishing me. Nothing of what I had said or done would have had any effect on him.

I swallowed the last bite and said the first thing that entered into my head with an assurance that astonished me, "You're not the caretaker."

He looked at me and asked, "And who do you think I am?" His face relaxed into an amused grin.

His smile made me lose all caution. A tremendous recklessness came over me. I blurted out - and naturally as an insult - that he was a woman, that he was Esperanza.

Relieved that I had finally gotten it off my chest, I sighed loudly and added, "That's why you're the only one who has a mirror: You need to look convincing as either a man or a woman."

"The Sonoran air must have affected you," he mused. "It's a known fact that the thin desert air affects people in the most peculiar manner."

He reached for my wrist and held it in a tight grip as he added, "Or it is perhaps your nature to be mean and onerous and blurt out with an air of absolute authority anything that enters your head?"

Chuckling, the caretaker leaned closer toward me, and suggested that I take a nap with him. "It'll do us a lot of good. We're both onerous," he said.

"So that's it!" I exclaimed, uncertain whether I should take offense or laugh at his suggestion. "You want me to sleep with you, eh?" I added that Esperanza had already warned me about him.

"Why do you object to taking a nap with me if you believe me to be Esperanza?" he asked, rubbing the nape of my neck. His hand was warm and soothing.

"I don't object," I defended myself feebly. "I simply hate naps. I never take a nap. I was told that even as a baby I hated naps."

I spoke rapidly and nervously, tripping over my words, repeating myself. I wanted to get up and leave, but the slight pressure of his hand on my neck kept me pinned down to the chair.

"I know that you're Esperanza," I insisted rashly. "I recognize her touch: It has the same soothing effect as yours."

I could feel my head sway, and my eyes closed against my will.

"So it has," he agreed gently. "It'll do you good to lie down, even if only for a moment."

Taking my silence for acquiescence, he went to the armoire and pulled out his cot and two blankets. He gave me one.

It was a time of endless surprises for me. Without knowing why, I lay down without protest. Through half-closed lids, I watched him stretch until all his joints cracked. He shook off his boots, unfastened his belt, then lowered himself on the cot next to me. Under the cover of his thin cotton blanket, he wiggled out of his pants, casually dropping them on the floor, next to his boots. He lifted his blanket and showed himself to me. Blushing, I stared at him with wild curiosity and wonder. His naked body, like Esperanza's, was the antithesis of what I had taken it to be. His body was supple, hairless, and smooth. He was thin as a reed and yet muscular. And he was definitely a male and young!

I didn't even pause to think, but holding my breath, I gingerly lifted my blanket. The sound of a woman's faint giggle made me close my eyes and pretend I was asleep. But knowing that she wasn't going to come into the room, I relaxed. Putting my arms behind my head I became absorbed in an uncanny sense that the caretaker and the faint giggles coming from the corridor had restored a balance; had renewed the magic bubble all around me. What exactly I meant by this, I didn't know, except that the more my body relaxed, the closer I was getting to an answer.

## Chapter 14

After my return from the witches' house I never needed any more coaxing or encouragement. The women sorcerers had succeeded in giving me a strange coherence; a sort of emotional stability I never had before. It wasn't that I was suddenly a changed person, but rather there was a clear purpose to my existence. My fate was delineated for me. I had to struggle to free my energy. And that was that. Simplicity itself.

But I didn't remember, clearly or even vaguely, all that had transpired in the three months I spent at their house. The task of remembering it took me years; a task into which I plunged with all my might and determination.

The nagual Isidoro Baltazar, nevertheless, warned me about the fallaciousness of clear-cut goals and emotionally charged realizations. He said that they were worthless because the real arena of a sorcerer is the day-to-day life and in this arena superficial rationales do not withstand pressure.

The women sorcerers had said more or less the same but in a more harmonious way. They explained that since women are used to being manipulated, they agreed easily. But a woman's agreements are simply empty adaptations to pressure. But if it is possible to convince that women of the need to change her ways, then half the battle is won. Even if they don't intellectually agree, their emotional realization is infinitely more durable than that of men.

I had the two opinions to weigh. I thought that both were right. From time to time, all my sorcery rationales crumbled under the pressures of the everyday world, but my original commitment to the sorcerers' world was never in need of revision.

Little by little I began to acquire enough energy to dream. This meant that I finally understood what the women had told me: Isidoro Baltazar was the new nagual; and he was no longer a man. This realization also gave me enough energy to return periodically to the witches' house.

That place, known as the witches' house, belonged to all the sorcerers of the nagual Mariano Aureliano's group. A big and massive house from the outside, it was indistinguishable from other houses in the area; hardly noticeable in spite of the exuberantly blooming bougainvillea hanging over the wall that encircled the grounds. What made people pass the house without noticing it, the sorcerers said, was the tenuous fog that covered it, thin as a veil, visible to the eye, but unnoticeable to the mind.

Once inside the house, however, one was acutely and inescapably aware of having stepped into another world. The three patios, shaded by fruit trees, gave a dreamlike light to the dark corridors and the many rooms that opened on these corridors. What was most arresting about the house were the brick and tile floors which were laid out in the most intricate designs.

The witches' house was not a warm place, yet it was friendly. It was not a home by any stretch of the imagination, for there was something crushing about it's impersonality; it's relentless austerity. It was the place where the old nagual Mariano Aureliano and his sorcerers conceived their dreams and realized their purpose. Since the concern of those sorcerers had nothing to do with the daily world, their house reflected their otherworldly preoccupations: Their house was the true gauge of their individuality; not as persons, but as sorcerers.

At the witches' house, I interacted with all the sorcerers of the nagual Mariano Aureliano's party. They didn't teach me sorcery or even dreaming. According to them, there was nothing to teach. They said that my task was to remember everything that had transpired between all of them and me during those initial times that we were together. In particular, I was to remember everything that Zuleica and Florinda did or said to me - but Zuleica had never talked to me.

Whenever I tried to ask any of them for help, they outright refused to have anything to do with me. They all argued that, without the necessary energy on my part, all they would do would be to repeat themselves; and that they didn't have time for that.

At first, I found their refusal ungenerous and unfair. After a while, however, I gave up every attempt to probe them, and I simply enjoyed their presence and their company. I realized that they were, of course, totally right in refusing to play our favorite intellectual game; that of pretending to be interested by asking so - called soul - searching questions which usually have no meaning to us whatsoever. And the reason they have no meaning to us is that we don't have the energy to do anything about the answer we might hear, except to agree or disagree with it.

Via our daily interaction, however, I realized scores of things about their world. The women dreamers and stalkers embodied two modes of behavior among women, as different as they could be.

Initially, I wondered whether the group that was described to me as the dreamers - Nelida, Hermelinda, and Clara - were the actual stalkers. For as far as I could ascertain, my interaction with them was on a strictly everyday, worldly level. Only later did I fully realize that their mere presence elicited-without even any hint of it - a new modality of behavior on my part. That is, I felt no need to reassert myself with them. There were no doubts, there were no questions on my part whenever I was with them. They had the singular ability to make me see - without ever having to state it verbally - the absurdity of my existence. And yet I felt no need to defend myself.

Perhaps it was this lack of forcefulness, of directness, that made me acquiesce, accept them without any resistance. It wasn't long before I realized that the women dreamers, by interacting with me on a worldly level, were giving me the necessary model to rechannel my energies. They wanted me to change the manner in which I focused on mundane matters such as cooking, cleaning, laundering, staying in school, or earning a living. These were to be done, they told me, under different auspices: They were not to be mundane chores but artful endeavors; one as important as the other.

Above all, it was their interaction with each other and with the women stalkers that made me aware of how special they were. In their humanness; their ordinariness, they were devoid of ordinary human failings. Their total awareness coexisted easily with their individual characteristics; be it short temperedness, moodiness, rude forcefulness, madness, or cloying sweetness.

In the presence and company of any of those sorceresses, I experienced the most peculiar feeling that I was on a perpetual holiday. But that was but a mirage. They were on a perpetual warpath, and the enemy was the idea of the self.

At the witches' house, I also met Vicente and Silvio Manuel, the other two sorcerers in the nagual Mariano Aureliano's group.

Vicente was obviously of Spanish descent. I learned that his parents had come from Catalonia. He was a lean, aristocratic-looking man with deceptively frail-looking hands and feet. He shuffled around in slippers and preferred pajama tops, which hung open over his khaki pants, to shires. His cheeks were rosy, but otherwise he was pale. His beautifully cared for goatee added a touch of distinction to his otherwise absentminded demeanor.

Not only did he look like a scholar, but he was one. The books in the room I slept in were his; or rather, it was he who collected them, who read them, who cared for them. What made his erudition [*erudition - profound scholarly knowledge] so appealing - there was nothing he didn't know about - was that he conducted himself as though he was always the learner. I felt sure that this could seldom be the case, for it was obvious that he knew more than the others. It was his generous spirit that made him give his knowledge away with a magnificent naturalness and without ever shaming anyone for knowing less.

Then there was Silvio Manuel. He was of medium height, corpulent, beardless, and brown skinned. A mysterious, sinister-looking Indian, he was the perfect image of what I expected an evil-looking brujo to look like. His apparent moodiness frightened me, and his sparse answers revealed what I believed to be a violent nature.

Only upon knowing him did I realize how much he enjoyed cultivating this image. He was the most open, and for me, delightful, of all the sorcerers. Secrets and gossip were his passion. Whether they were truths or falsehoods didn't matter to him. It was his recounting of them that was priceless to me, and to everyone else, for that matter. He also had an inexhaustible supply of jokes, most of them downright dirty. He was the only one who enjoyed watching TV and thus was always up to date on world news. He would report it to the others with gross exaggerations, salting it with a great deal of malice.

Silvio Manuel was a magnificent dancer. His expertise in the various indigenous, sacred dances was legendary. He moved with rapturous abandon and would often ask me to dance with him. Whether it was a Venezuelan joropo, a cumbia, a samba, a tango, the twist, rock and roll, or a cheek-to-cheek bolero, he knew them all.

I also interacted with John, the Indian I had been introduced to by the nagual Mariano Aureliano in Tucson, Arizona. His round, easygoing, jovial appearance was but a facade. He was the most unapproachable of all the sorcerers. He drove around in his pickup truck on errands for everyone else. He also fixed whatever needed to be mended in and around the house.

If I didn't bother him with questions or comments and kept silent, he would take me with him on his errands and show me how things were fixed. From him I learned how to change washers and adjust a leaking faucet or toilet tank; how to fix an iron, a light switch; how to change the oil and spark plugs in my car. Under his guidance, the proper use of a hammer, a screwdriver, a saw, and an electric drill became quite natural to me.

The only thing none of them did for me was answer my questions and probes about their world. Whenever I tried to engage them, they referred me to the nagual Isidoro Baltazar. Their standard rebuff was to say, "He's the new nagual. It's his duty to deal with you. We are merely your aunties and uncles."

At the beginning, the nagual Isidoro Baltazar was more than a mystery to me. Where he actually lived was not clear to me. Oblivious to schedules and routines, he appeared at and disappeared from the studio at all hours. Day and night were all the same to him. He slept when he was tired - hardly ever - and ate when he was hungry - almost always. Between his frantic comings and goings, he worked with a concentration that was astounding. His capacity to stretch or compress time was incomprehensible to me. I was certain that I spent hours, even entire days, with him, when in reality it could have been only moments, snatched here and there either during the day or the night from something else he did - whatever it might have been.

I had always considered myself an energetic person. However, I could not keep up with him. He was always in motion - or so it appeared; agile and active; ever ready to undertake some project. His vigor was simply incredible.

It was much later that I fully understood that the source of Isidoro Baltazar's boundless energy was his lack of concern with himself. It was his unwavering support; his imperceptible yet masterful machinations that helped me stay on the right track. There was a lightheartedness in him, a pure delight in his subtle yet forceful influence, that made me change without my noticing that I was being led along a new path; a path on which I no longer had to play games or needed to pretend or use my womanly wiles to get my way.

What made his guidance so tremendously compelling was that he had no ulterior motive. He wasn't in the least possessive, and his guidance wasn't adulterated with promises or sentimentality.

He didn't push me in any particular direction. That is, he didn't advise me on what courses I should take or what books I should read. That was left entirely up to me.

There was only one condition he insisted upon: I was to work on no particular goal other than the edifying and pleasurable process of thinking. A startling proposition! I had never considered thinking in those terms or in any others. Although I didn't dislike going to school, I had certainly never thought of schoolwork as particularly pleasurable. It was simply something I had to do, usually in a hurry and with the least possible effort.

I couldn't help but agree with what Florinda and her cohorts had so bluntly pointed out to me the first time I met them: I went to school not to pursue knowledge but to have a good time. That I had good grades was more a matter of luck and loquaciousness than studiousness. I had a fairly good memory, I knew how to talk, and I knew how to convince others.

Once I got past my initial embarrassment over having to admit and to accept the fact that my intellectual pretensions were a sham and that I didn't know how to think except in the most shallow manner, I felt relieved. I was ready to put myself under the sorcerers' tutelage, and to follow Isidoro Baltazar's study plan. To my great disappointment, he didn't have one. All he did was insist that I stop studying and reading outdoors. He believed that the thinking process was a private, almost secret rite and could not possibly occur outdoors in public view. He compared the process of thinking with leavened dough. It can only rise inside a room.

"The best way to understand anything, of course, is in bed," he said to me once. He stretched out on his bed, propped his head against several pillows, and crossed the right leg over the left, resting the ankle on the raised knee of the left leg.

I didn't think much of this absurd reading position, yet I practiced it whenever I was by myself. With a book propped on my chest, I would fall into the most profound sleep. Keenly sensitive to my insomniac tendencies, I was more pleased with sleep than with knowledge.

Sometimes, however, just prior to that moment of losing consciousness, I would feel as if hands were coiling around my head, pressing ever so lightly against my temples. My eyes would automatically scan the open page before I was even conscious of it and lift entire paragraphs off the paper. The words would dance before my eyes until clusters of meaning exploded in my brain like revelations.

Eager to uncover this new possibility opening up before me, I pushed on, as if driven by some relentless taskmaster. There were times, however, when this cultivation of reason and method exhausted me, physically as well as mentally. At those times, I asked Isidoro Baltazar about intuitive knowledge; about that sudden flash of insight, of understanding, that sorcerers are supposed to cultivate above all else.

He always said to me at those times that to know something only intuitively is meaningless. Flashes of insight need to be translated into some coherent thought, otherwise they are purposeless. He compared flashes of insight to sightings of inexplicable phenomena. Both wane as swiftly as they come. If they are not constantly reinforced, doubt and forgetfulness will ensue, for the mind has been conditioned to be practical and accept only that which is verifiable and quantifiable.

He explained that sorcerers are men of knowledge rather than men of reason. As such, they are a step ahead of Western intellectual men who assume that reality - which is often equated with truth - is knowable through reason. A sorcerer claims that all that is knowable through reason is our thought processes; but that it is only by understanding our total being, at it's most sophisticated and intricate level, that can we eventually erase the boundaries with which reason defines reality.

Isidoro Baltazar explained to me that sorcerers cultivate the totality of their being. That is, sorcerers don't necessarily make a distinction between our rational and our intuitive sides. They use both to reach the realm of awareness they call silent knowledge, which lies beyond language, beyond thought.

Again and again, Isidoro Baltazar stressed that for one to silence one's rational side one first has to understand his or her thought process at it's most sophisticated and intricate level. He believed that philosophy, beginning with classical Greek thought, provided the best way of illuminating this thought process. He never tired of repeating that, whether we are scholars or laymen, we are nonetheless members and inheritors of our Western intellectual tradition. And that means that regardless of our level of education and sophistication, we are captives of that intellectual tradition and the way it interprets what reality is.

Only superficially, Isidoro Baltazar claimed, are we willing to accept that what we call reality is a culturally determined construct. And what we need is to accept at the deepest level possible that culture is the product of a long, cooperative, highly selective, highly developed, and last but not least, highly coercive process that culminates in an agreement that shields us from other possibilities.

Sorcerers actively strive to unmask the fact that reality is dictated and upheld by our reason; that ideas and thoughts stemming from reason become regimes of knowledge that ordain how we see and act in the world; and that incredible pressure is put on all of us to make certain ideologies acceptable to ourselves.

He stressed that sorcerers are interested in perceiving the world in ways outside of what is culturally determined. What is culturally determined is that our personal experiences, plus a shared social agreement on what our senses are capable of perceiving, dictate what we perceive. Anything out of this sensorially agreed - upon perceptual realm is automatically encapsulated and disregarded by the rational mind. In this manner, the frail blanket of human assumptions is never damaged. Sorcerers teach that perception takes place in a place outside the sensorial realm. Sorcerers know that something more vast exists than what we have agreed our senses can perceive. Perception takes place at a point outside the body, outside the senses, they say. But it isn't enough for one merely to believe this premise: It is not simply a matter of reading or hearing about it from someone else. In order for one to embody it, one has to experience it.

Isidoro Baltazar said that sorcerers continually and actively strive to break that frail blanket of human assumptions. However, sorcerers don't plunge into the darkness blindly. They are prepared. They know that whenever they leap into the unknown, they need to have a well-developed rational side. Only then will they be able to explain and make sense of whatever they might bring forth from their journeys into the unknown.

He added that I wasn't to understand sorcery through reading the works of philosophers. Rather, I was to see that both philosophy and sorcery are highly sophisticated forms of abstract knowledge. Both for sorcerer and philosopher, the truth of our Being-in-the-world does not remain unthought. A sorcerer, however, goes a step further. He acts upon his findings which are already by definition outside our culturally accepted possibilities.

Isidoro Baltazar believed that philosophers are intellectual sorcerers. However, their probings and their pursuits always remain mental endeavors. Philosophers cannot act upon the world they understand and explain so well except in the culturally agreed-upon manner. Philosophers add to an already existing body of knowledge. They interpret and reinterpret existing philosophical texts. New thoughts and ideas resulting from this intense studying don't change them, except perhaps in a psychological sense. They might become kinder, more understanding people - or, perhaps, the opposite. However, nothing of what philosophers do philosophically will change their sensorial perception of the world, for they work from within the social order. Philosophers uphold the social order even if intellectually they don't agree with it. Philosophers are sorcerers manque. [*manque - unfulfilled or frustrated in realizing an ambition]

Sorcerers also build upon an existing body of knowledge. However, they don't build upon this knowledge by accepting what has already been established and proven by other sorcerers. Sorcerers have to prove to themselves anew that that which already stands as accepted does indeed exist, does indeed yield to perceiving. To accomplish this monumental task, sorcerers need an extraordinary amount of energy which they obtain by detaching themselves from the social order without retreating from the world. Sorcerers break the agreement that has defined reality, without breaking up in the process themselves.

## Chapter 15

Uncertainty took hold of me shortly after we crossed the border into Mexico at Mexicali. My justification for going to Mexico with Isidoro Baltazar, which had seemed so brilliant to me before, now seemed only a shady excuse for forcing him to take me along. I doubted now that I would be able to read sociological theory at the witches' house as I said I would. I knew that I would do there exactly what I did on all previous occasions: sleep a great deal, dream weird dreams, and try desperately to figure out what the people in the sorcerers' world wanted me to do.

"Any regrets?" Isidoro Baltazar's voice made me jump. He was looking at me sideways and had probably been watching me for a while.

"Of course not," I hastened to assure him, wondering whether he was referring to my general feeling or to my quietness.

I stammered some inanities about the heat, then turned to look out the window. I didn't speak anymore, mainly because I was scared and morose. I could feel anxiety crawling on my skin like a swarm of ants.

Isidoro Baltazar, on the other hand, warmed up to his ebullient best. He was elated. He sang and told me inane jokes. He recited poetry in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Even tidbits of spicy gossip about people we both knew at UCLA failed to dispel my gloom. That I wasn't a responsive audience didn't mean a thing to him. Even my yelling at him to leave me alone didn't dampen his high spirits.

"If people were watching us, they would believe that we've been married for years," he commented in between fits of laughter.

If sorcerers were watching us, I thought dejectedly, they would know that something is wrong. They would know that Isidoro Baltazar and I are not equals. I am factual and final about my actions and decisions. For him actions and decisions are fluid, whatever their outcome, and their finality is measured in that he assumes full responsibility for them, regardless of how trivial or how significant they are.

We drove, straight south. We didn't meander, as we usually did in order to get to the witches' house. When we left Guaymas - never before had we been that far south on our way to the witches' house - I asked him, "Where are you taking me?"

He casually responded, "We are taking the long way. Don't worry."

That was the same answer he gave me when I asked again, during our dinner in Navojoa.

We left Navojoa behind and drove south, heading toward Mazatlan. I was beside myself with worry. Around midnight, Isidoro Baltazar veered off the main highway and turned into a narrow dirt road. The van swayed and rattled as he drove over potholes and stones. Behind us the main highway was visible only for an instant in the scant flicker of the taillights, then it disappeared altogether, swallowed by the bushes that fringed the road. After an excruciatingly long ride, we came to an abrupt halt, and he switched off the headlights.

"Where are we?" I asked, looking all around me.

For a moment I saw nothing. Then, as my eyes got accustomed to the darkness, I saw tiny white specks not too far ahead of us. Tiny stars that appeared to have fallen from the sky. The exuberant fragrance of the jasmine bushes climbing up the roof and tumbling down over the ramada had been so entirely blocked out of my mind that, when I suddenly recognized it, I felt as though I had inhaled that perfumed air before only in a dream. I began to giggle. It all gave me an almost childlike sense of wonder and delight. We were at Esperanza's house.

"It was here I first came with Delia Flores," I mumbled to myself. Then in one instant I was nearly choking with anxiety, and reached for Isidoro Baltazar's hand and asked, "But how can this be possible?"

"What?" he asked in a bewildered tone. He was agitated and ruffled. His hand which usually was always warm was icy cold.

"This house was in the outskirts of Ciudad Obregon, more than a hundred miles north," I yelled. "I drove here myself. And I never left the paved road."

I looked all around me in the darkness, and I recalled that I had also driven from that house to Tucson, and I had never been in or near Navojoa in my life.

Isidoro Baltazar was silent for a few minutes. He seemed preoccupied; searching in his mind for an answer. I knew there was none that would have pleased me. Shrugging, he turned to face me. There was a force, an edge to him - much like there was to the nagual Mariano Aureliano - as he said that to him there was no doubt that I had been dreaming-awake when, together with Delia, I left Hermosillo for the healer's house. "I suggest that you let it go at that," he admonished: "I know from personal experience how the mind can go in circles trying to arrange the unarrangeable."

I was about to protest when he cut me off, and pointed to the light moving toward us. He smiled in anticipation, as though he knew exactly to whom that enormous, swaying shadow on the ground belonged.

"It's the caretaker," I murmured in astonishment, as he came to stand in front of us. Impulsively, I put my arms around his neck and kissed him on both cheeks. "I never expected to see you here," I muttered.

He smiled sheepishly but didn't talk to me. He embraced Isidoro Baltazar, patting him repeatedly on the back the way Latin men are wont to do when greeting each other, then mumbled something to him. Hard as I tried to listen, I couldn't understand a single word. The caretaker led us to the house.

There was something forbidding about the massive front door. It was closed. So were the barred windows. No light, no sound escaped the thick walls. We circled the house to the backyard enclosed by a high fence; to the door that led directly to a square room.

I felt reassured upon recognizing the four doors. It was the same room I had been taken to by Delia Flores. It was as sparsely furnished as I remembered it: a narrow bed, a table, and several chairs.

The caretaker placed the oil lamp on the table and then urged me to sit down. Turning to Isidoro Baltazar, he draped an arm around his shoulders and walked with him out into the dark corridor. The suddenness of their departure left me stunned. Before I fully recovered from my surprise and my indecision as to whether I should follow them, the caretaker reappeared. He handed me a blanket, a pillow, a flashlight, and a chamber pot.

"I would rather use the outhouse," I said primly.

The caretaker shrugged his shoulders, then pushed the chamber pot under the bed.

"Just in case you have to go in the middle of the night." His eyes glinted with emphatic glee as he told me that Esperanza kept a big, black watchdog outside. "He doesn't take kindly to strangers wandering across the yard at night."

As if on cue, I heard a loud barking.

"I'm not a stranger," I said casually, trying to ignore the ominous note in the beast's barking. "I've been here before. I know the dog."

The caretaker lifted his brows in surprise, then asked, "Does the dog know you?"

I glared at him. He sighed, and reaching for the oil lamp on the table, he turned toward the door.

"Don't take away the light," I said, stepping quickly in front of him to block his way.

I tried to smile, but my lips stuck to my teeth.

"Where is everybody?" I finally managed to ask. "Where are Esperanza and Florinda?"

"At the moment, I'm the only person who's here," he said.

"Where is Isidoro Baltazar?" I asked, panic-stricken. "He promised to take me to the witches' house. I've to work on my paper."

My thoughts; my words were all jumbled and confused as I talked about my reasons for accompanying Isidoro Baltazar to Mexico. I was close to tears as I told the caretaker how important it was for me to finish my work.

He patted my back most reassuringly and made soothing noises, as if he were talking to a child.

"Isidoro Baltazar is asleep. You know how he is. The instant his head hits the pillow, he's gone out of the world." He smiled faintly and added, "I'll leave my door open in case you need me. Just call me if you have a nightmare or something, and I'll come right away."

Before I had a chance to tell him that I hadn't had one since the last time I was in Sonora, the caretaker disappeared down the dark corridor.

The oil lamp on the table began to sputter, and moments later it went out. It was pitch dark. I lay down fully clothed and closed my eyes. All was silent except for a soft, raspy breathing coming from far away. Conscious of that breathing sound and the hardness and narrowness of my bed, I soon gave up the effort to sleep.

Flashlight in hand, I crept down the corridor on noiseless feet, hoping to find Isidoro Baltazar or the caretaker. Softly, I rapped on door after door. No one answered. No sound came from any of the rooms. An odd, almost oppressive silence had settled over the house. Even the rustlings and chirpings outside had ceased. As I suspected, I had been left alone in the house.

Rather than worry about it, I decided to look into the rooms. They were bedrooms; eight of them of the same size and disposition; rather small, perfectly square, and furnished only with a bed and a night table. The walls and the two windows in all of them were painted white, and the tile floors were of an intricate design. I opened the sliding doors of the closets by gently pushing their bottom left corners with my foot. I knew, without knowing how I knew, that a tap or gentle kick on that spot released a mechanism that opened the doors.

I moved the folded blankets stacked up on the floor in one of the closets and got to a small secret door. I released the concealed dead bolt, disguised as a wall light socket. Since I was beyond being surprised, I accepted my knowledge of the trap doors; a knowledge that was, of course, inadmissible to my conscious mind.

I opened the small, secret door, crawled through the tiny opening, and found myself in the closet of the next room. With no great astonishment - since I already knew it - I discovered that by squatting through these secret openings I could go from one to another of the seven rooms.

I swore under my breath as my flashlight went out. Hoping to revive the batteries, I took them out and screwed them back in again. It was no use: They were dead. The darkness was so intense in these rooms that I couldn't see my own hands. Afraid of hitting myself against a door or a wall, I slowly felt my way into the corridor.

The effort was so great that I was gasping and shaking as I pulled myself upright and leaned against the wall. I stood in the corridor for a long time, wondering in which direction to go to find my own room.

From the distance came fragments of voices. I couldn't tell whether the sound came from inside the house or from the outside. I followed the sound. It led me to the patio. I vividly recalled that green, almost tropical patio past the stone archway, with it's ferns and thick foliage, it's fragrance of orange blossoms, and honeysuckle vines.

I hadn't taken but a few steps when I saw the enormous silhouette of a dog shadowed against the wall. The beast growled. It's blazing eyes sent a chill running up my spine.

Instead of giving in to my fear, or perhaps because of it, I felt the strangest thing happen. It was as if I had always been folded like a Japanese fan or like a folded cutout figurine. Suddenly, I unfolded. The physical sensation was almost painful.

The dog watched me, confused. It began to whine like a puppy. It flapped it's ears and coiled on the ground. I stood there glued to the spot. I wasn't afraid: I simply couldn't move. Then, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, I folded back, turned around, and left. This time I had no trouble finding my room.

I awoke with a headache and that illusion of not having slept at all, which, as an insomniac, I knew so well. The muscles of my body were disconnected. I groaned out loud as I heard a door open and light fell over my face. Feebly, I tried to turn on my other side without falling off the narrow bed.

"Good morning!" Esperanza exclaimed, stepping into the room in a sweep of skirts and petticoats. "Actually, good afternoon," she corrected herself, pointing at the sun through the open door. There as a wonderful gaiety in her, a delightful power in her voice when she told me that it was she who had thought of retrieving my books and papers from the van before Isidoro Baltazar left with the old nagual.

Abruptly, I sat up. I was fully awake.

"Why didn't the nagual Mariano Aureliano come to say hello to me? Why didn't Isidoro Baltazar tell me he was leaving?" I blurted out. I mentioned to her that now I would never be able to finish my paper and enter graduate school.

Esperanza regarded me with a curious expression, and said that if writing my paper was such a mercenary act I would never be able to bring it through.

Before I had a chance to tell her that personally I didn't care if never entered graduate school, she added, "You don't do your paper to get into graduate school. You do it because you love doing it; because there's nothing else at the moment you would rather do."

"There is plenty I would rather do."

"Like what?" she challenged me.

I thought for a moment but couldn't come up with anything specific. I had to admit, if only to myself, that I had never enjoyed working on a paper as much as I did on this one. For once, I had started with the reading and research at the beginning of the term instead of waiting, as I usually did, until a few days before the paper was due. It was the knowledge that it was my ticket into graduate school that had spoiled my enjoyment.

Esperanza, as if again privy to my thoughts, said that I should forget about graduate school and only think of writing a good paper.

"Once you're part of the sorcerers' world and begin to grasp the nature of dreams, you are on your way to understanding what sorcery is all about; and that understanding frees you."

I looked at her, puzzled. I couldn't figure out what she was trying to tell me.

"It frees you from wanting anything." Esperanza enunciated the sentence very carefully, as if I were deaf.

She regarded me thoughtfully then added, "Greed is your middle name, and yet you don't need or want anything..."

Her voice trailed off as she began to arrange my books, papers, and stacks of index cards on the table. Her face was radiant as she turned to look at me.

In her hands, she held several pencils. "I sharpened them for you with a razor blade," she said. "I'll sharpen them for you whenever they get dull."

She placed the pencils beside my legal-sized writing pad and then flung her arms wide, as if to encompass the whole room. "This is a wonderful place for you to work. No one will bother you here."

"I'm sure of that," I said. Seeing that she was about to leave, I asked her where Isidoro Baltazar had slept last night.

"On his straw mat. Where else?" Giggling softly, she gathered up her skirts and petticoats and stepped out into the yard. I watched her until she disappeared behind the stone arch. My eyes hurt, dazzled from staring into the light.

Moments later, there was a loud knock on one of the doors that opened into the corridor.

"Are you decent?" the caretaker asked, pushing the door open before I had a chance to say that I was. "Nourishment for your brain," he said, placing a bamboo tray on the table.

He poured me a bowl of clear broth, then urged me to eat the machaca Sonorense. "I made it myself," he informed me.

The mixture of scrambled eggs, shredded meat, onions, and hot chilies was delicious.

"When you finish, I'll take you to the movies," he said.

"When I finish eating?" I asked excitedly, stuffing a whole tortilla in my mouth.

"When you finish with your paper," he clarified.

As soon as I was done with the meal, he said that I had to get acquainted with the dog.

"Otherwise, you won't be able to go outside. Not even to the outhouse."

I was about to tell him that I had actually met the dog and had gone to the outhouse last night, when with a swift gesture of his chin he motioned me to follow him into the yard. The big black dog lay curled up in the shade of the high fence of plaited cane. The caretaker squatted beside the animal and scratched it behind the ears. Bending even lower, he whispered something in the animal's ear.

Abruptly, the caretaker rose: Startled, I stepped backward, falling on my seat. The dog whined, and the caretaker, with one incredible leap, cleared the high fence. I scrambled to my feet and was about to run out of there fast when the dog stretched it's forepaws and placed them on my feet. I could feel the pressure of the paws through my shoes. The dog looked up at me and opened it's muzzle in a wide, drawn-out yawn. It's tongue and gums were blue-black.

"That's a sign of the finest pedigree."

I was so startled to hear the caretaker behind me that I wheeled around. I lost my balance again and fell over the dog. I didn't dare move at first, then slowly I eased my head to the side. The dog's amber-colored eyes were fixed on me. The dog bared it's teeth, not in a growl but in a most friendly, doggish smile.

"Now you're friends," the caretaker pronounced, helping me up. "And it's time for you to start on your paper."

The next three days were dominated entirely by my desire to finish my task. I worked for long stretches but somehow didn't feel the passing of time. It wasn't that I was so engrossed in my work that I lost track of the hours. Rather, time seemed to have transformed itself into a matter of space. That is, I began to count time as interludes; interludes between my sightings of Esperanza.

Every day around midmorning, when I was eating my breakfast - whatever she had left for me in the kitchen - she would suddenly appear. Soundlessly, she seemed to materialize out of the perpetual bluish smoke that hung about the kitchen like a cloud. Invariably, she combed my hair with a coarse wooden comb but never said a word. Neither did I.

I would see her again in the afternoons. As soundlessly as she appeared in the kitchen, she would abruptly materialize in the yard, and sit in her custom-made rocking chair under the stone archway. For hours, she would stare into space, as if she could see beyond the limits of human vision. Other than a brief nod or a quick smile, there was no interaction between us at that hour, yet I knew that I was protected in her silence.

The dog, as if it had been directed by the caretaker, never left my side. It followed me around day and night, even to the outhouse. I particularly looked forward to our late afternoon outings, when the dog and I would race across the fields toward the row of trees that divided the plots of land. There we would sit in the shade, staring into space like Esperanza. It sometimes seemed to me that I could reach out and touch the distant mountains. I would listen to the breeze rustling through the branches and wait until the yellow light of the setting sun turned the leaves into golden chimes. I waited until the leaves turned blue and finally black. Then the dog and I would race back to the house, to escape the faint voice of the wind telling about the loneliness of that arid land.

On the fourth day I awoke, startled. From beyond the door that opened to the yard, a voice called out, "Time to get up, lazy bones." The caretaker's voice was drowsily indifferent.

"Why don't you come in?" I asked. "Where were you all these days?" There was no answer. I sat wrapped in my blanket, waiting for him to appear, too tense and sleepy to go out and see for myself why he was hiding. After a while I roused myself and went outside. The yard was deserted. In an effort to chase my sleepiness away, I drew bucket after bucket of cold water over my head.

My breakfast was different that morning: Esperanza didn't show up. It was only after I settled down to work that I realized that the dog had also vanished. Listlessly, I thumbed through my books. I had very little energy and even less desire to work. I just sat at my table for hours, gazing at the distant mountains through my opened door.

The transparent silence of the afternoon was broken now and then by the faint clucking of hens scratching the ground for seeds and by the penetrating cry of the cicadas vibrating in the blue, cloudless light as if it were still noon.

I was about to doze off when I heard some noise in the yard. I looked up quickly. The caretaker and the dog lay side by side on a straw mat in the shade of the fence. There was something odd about the way they lay, sprawled out on the straw mat. They were so still, they appeared dead.

With a mixture of concern and curiosity, I tiptoed toward them. The caretaker noticed my presence before the dog did. He opened his eyes wide in an exaggerated fashion, then in one swift motion sat up cross-legged and asked, "Did you miss me?"

"I did!" I exclaimed, then laughed nervously.

It seemed an odd question for him to ask. "Why didn't you come into my room this morning?" Seeing his blank expression I added, "Where have you been for the past three days?"

Instead of answering, he asked in a harsh tone, "How is your work coming along?"

I was so taken aback by his brusqueness, I didn't know what to say. I didn't know whether I should tell him that my paper was none of his business or whether I should confess that I was stuck.

"Don't upset yourself trying to think up an explanation," he said. "Just tell me the truth. Tell me that you need my expert opinion on your term paper."

Afraid I would burst out laughing, I squatted beside the dog and scratched it's head.

"Well?" the caretaker demanded. "Can't you admit that without me you're lost?"

Uncertain about the state of his mind, I decided it was better to humor him than to contradict him. I said that, indeed, I hadn't written a single line the whole day; and that I had been waiting for him; knowing that only he could rescue me. I assured him that it wasn't really up to my professors at school but up to him to decide my fate as a graduate student.

The caretaker beamed at me, then asked that I bring him my paper. He wanted to have a look at it.

"It's in English," I said pointedly. "You won't be able to read it."

My impulse, to add that even if it were in Spanish he wouldn't be able to understand it, was checked by the certainty that I wasn't that ill mannered after all.

He insisted I bring him the paper. I did. He spread out the pages all around him, some on the mat, others on the dusty ground, then retrieved from his shirt pocket a pair of metal-rimmed glasses and put them on.

"It's important to look like an educated man," he whispered, leaning toward the dog. The animal pricked up one ear, then made a soft growling sound, as if to agree with him. The dog shifted positions, and the caretaker motioned me to sit between him and the animal.

He looked like an owl; erudite and austere as he pored over the loose sheets on the ground. He made disapproving, clucking sounds with his tongue. He scratched his head. He shuffled and reshuffled the sheets, as if trying to find some order that eluded him.

The muscles in my neck and shoulders ached from sitting in that position. Sighing with impatience, I reclined against the fence and closed my eyes. In spite of my growing irritation, I must have dozed off, for I was suddenly startled by a faint yet insistent buzz. I opened my eyes. Sitting nearby, facing me, sat a gorgeously dressed, beautiful-looking woman. She said something to me, but I couldn't hear what it was. The buzzing in my ears rose.

The woman leaned forward, toward me, and in a loud, clear voice asked, "Aren't you going to say hello to me?"

"Nelida! When did you get here? I was trying to shake off the buzzing in my ears," I explained.

She nodded, then drew up her long, shapely legs under the skirt she was wearing and wrapped her arms around them.

"It's good to see you," she said dreamily.

With frowning brows, the caretaker mumbled to himself as he studied the pages before him.

"Your scribbles are not only hard to read," he pronounced after a while, "but they don't make much sense.

Nelida stared at me with narrow, critical eyes, as if daring me to contradict him.

I fidgeted, eager to get away, to escape the scrutiny of her unnerving gaze. She leaned forward and grabbed my arm in a firm grip.

The caretaker began to read from the pages with an exasperating slowness. What he read sounded familiar, but whether he actually followed the text I couldn't tell because I couldn't concentrate. I was too irritated by the capricious manner in which he cut the sentences, the phrases, and sometimes even the words.

"All in all," he stated upon finishing with the last page, "it's a badly written paper."

He stacked the loose sheets in a pile, then leaned against the fence. Very deliberately he bent his knees up in the same position Isidoro Baltazar had taught me - the right leg crossed over with the ankle resting on the left thigh - and closed his eyes. He was silent for so long I thought he had fallen asleep and was thus startled when in a slow, measured voice he began to talk about anthropology, history, and philosophy. His thoughts seemed to come into being while he was talking, and words flowed out of him clearly and precisely, with a simplicity that was easy to follow, easy to understand.

I listened to him attentively. Yet at the same time I couldn't help thinking, "How could he possibly know so much about Western intellectual trends? How educated was he? Who was he really?"

"Could you repeat everything again?" I asked the instant he finished speaking. "I'd like to take notes."

"Whatever I said is all in your paper," the caretaker assured me. "It is buried under too many footnotes, quotes, and undeveloped ideas."

He leaned closer until his head almost touched mine.

"It's not enough to cite works in an effort to supply your paper with the veracity it lacks."

Dumbfounded, I could only stare at him.

"Will you help me write my paper?" I asked.

"No, I can't do that," he said with a grave look in his eyes. "That's something you must do on your own."

"But I can't," I protested. "You just pointed out how badly written my paper is. Believe me, that's my best shot."

"It's not!" He contradicted me forcefully, then gazed at me with an air of astonishment that was mingled with a friendly warmth: "I'm sure your professors will accept the paper once it's neatly typed. But I wouldn't. There is nothing original about it."

I was too stunned to be upset.

"You're only paraphrasing what you have read," the caretaker continued. "I demand that you rely more on your own opinions, even if they contradict what is expected of you."

"It's only a term paper," I said defensively. "I know it needs more work, but I also need to please my professors. Whether I agree with the expressed views is beside the point. I need to get accepted into graduate school, and that entails, in part, pleasing my professors."

"If you want to draw strength from the sorcerers' world," he said, "you can no longer work under such premises. Ulterior motives are not acceptable in this magical world of ours. If you want be a graduate student, then you have to behave like a warrior, not like a woman who has been trained to please. You know, even when you are bestially nasty, you strive to please. But from now, whenever you write, since you were not trained to do writing, you can certainly adopt a new mood: the warriors' mood."

"What do you mean by the warriors' mood?" I asked. "Do I have to fight my professors?"

"Not your professors," he said. "You have to fight yourself; every inch of the way. And you have to do it so artfully and so cleverly that no one will notice your struggle."

I wasn't quite sure what he meant, and I didn't want to know, either. Before he could say anything else, I asked him how he knew so much about anthropology, history, and philosophy.

Smiling, he shook his head. "Didn't you notice how I did it?" he asked, then proceeded to answer his own question. "I picked the thoughts out of thin air. I simply stretched my energy fibers and hooked those thoughts, as one hooks fish with a fishing line, from the immeasurable ocean of thoughts and ideas that is out there."

He made a wide gesture with his arms, as though to encompass the very air around him.

I argued, "To pick up thoughts, Isidoro Baltazar told me, one must know which are the ones that might be useful. So you must have studied history, philosophy, and anthropology."

"Perhaps I did at one time," he said undecidedly, scratching his head in perplexity. "I must have."

"You had to!" I stated sententiously, as if I had made a great discovery.

Sighing loudly, he leaned against the fence and closed his eyes.

Nelida asked, "Why do you insist on always being right?"

Startled to hear her speak, I stared at her open-mouthed. The corners of her lips curled up into a mischievous, secret smile. Then she motioned me to close my mouth. I had been so engrossed in listening to what the caretaker had to say about my paper I had forgotten all about her even though she had been sitting right in front of me. Or had she? The thought that she might have gone and returned without me noticing it filled me with anxiety.

"Don't let that bother you," Nelida said softly, as if I had voiced my fears out loud. "We are in the habit of coming and going without anyone ever noticing us."

Her tone canceled the chilling effect of her statement. Gazing from one to the other, I wondered whether they would actually vanish, unperceived, before my very eyes. I tried to make sure they wouldn't. Stretching like a cat, I lay flat on the straw mat and inched my foot toward the hem of Nelida's dress, which trailed on the ground; my hand went to the caretaker's jacket. He must have noticed the tug on his sleeve, for he sat up abruptly and stared at me. I closed my eyes but kept watching them through my lashes. They didn't move. Their straight postures betrayed no trace of fatigue, whereas I had to fight to keep my eyes open.

A cool breeze, fragrant with the scent of eucalyptus, sprang up. Streaks of colored clouds trailed across the sky, and the deep, transparent blue grew slowly more diffused. It melted away so languidly, it was impossible to distinguish what was cloud and what was sky, what was day and what was night.

With my foot on the hem of Nelida's dress and clutching onto the caretaker's jacket as if my life depended on it, I fell asleep. It seemed that only moments had passed when I was awakened by a hand touching my face.

"Florinda?" I whispered, knowing instinctively that the woman sitting beside me was someone else. She was murmuring something. I had the feeling she had been murmuring for a long time and I had just awakened to hear what she was saying.

I wanted to sit up, but the woman prevented me from doing so with a gentle but firm touch on my shoulder. A small flame flickered somewhere unsteadily in the darkness. It shed a gentle, wavering pallor upon her face. It made her look ghostlike. She seemed to grow as she moved closer. Her eyes, too, grew larger as they stared down into mine. The arch of her brows, like a curve drawn with a black marker, was concentrated in a frown.

"Nelida!" I sighed with relief.

Smiling faintly, she nodded. I wanted to ask her about the caretaker and about my term paper, but she pressed her fingers against my lips and continued with her murmurings. The sound grew fainter and fainter. It seemed to come from a great distance, and then it finally faded away all together.

Nelida rose and motioned me to do the same. I did so and noticed that we were not outside in the yard but in one of the empty bedrooms along the corridor.

"Where is my term paper?" I asked, alarmed at the possibility that the wind might have scattered the pages. The idea that I might have to begin my work from scratch made me feverish.

Nelida made an imperious gesture with her chin, motioning me to follow her. She was much taller than I, and looked exactly like Florinda. Had it not been that she was so delicate, I wouldn't have been able to tell them apart. At that moment, she appeared as an infinished version of Florinda - as Florinda must have been when she was younger. There was something so ethereal about Nelida, so frail, and yet so appealing. I used to joke with Isidoro Baltazar that if I were a man I would go for her. He had retorted - I had hoped in jest - that that was perhaps the reason why Nelida hardly ever talked to me.

We headed toward my room. I heard steps all around me. It couldn't be Nelida, I decided, for she walked so quietly she seemed not to touch the ground. The absurd notion that I was hearing my own steps made me tiptoe as silently as a cat, yet I still kept hearing the steps. Someone's feet moved like mine did; the same rhythm echoing slightly on the tile floor. I glanced backward several times, but there was, of course, no one behind me. Hoping to dispel my fear, I giggled out loud.

Nelida turned around abruptly. I thought she was going to reprimand me, but she, too, began to laugh. She put her arm around my shoulders. Her touch wasn't particularly warm or tender. I didn't care. I liked her, and her touch was very reassuring to me. Still giggling, and with the sound of footsteps all around us, we entered my room.

A strange brilliance hung about the walls, as if a fog had seeped through the four doors in the room, which at that moment I could not see. The fog had changed the shape of the room, giving it strange contours, almost making it round. Regardless of how much I blinked and squinted, all I could see was the table I had been working on for the past three days. I stepped closer. To my relief, I saw my paper arranged in a neat pile. Next to it were all my pencils: They had been sharpened.

"Nelida!" I cried out excitedly, wheeling around. I could no longer see her. The fog was denser now. It closed around me with every breath I drew. It seeped inside me, filling me with a deep, excited feeling of lightness and lucidity. Guided by some invisible source, I sat at the table and spread out the pages all around me. Right under my watchful eyes the entire structure of my paper emerged, superimposing itself on my original draft like a double exposure on a frame of film.

I lost myself in admiration of the skilled development of the themes. As if they were being maneuvered by some invisible hand that thought and wrote, the paragraphs rearranged themselves, imposinging a new order. It was all so gorgeously clear and simple that I laughed out of joy.

"Write it down."

The words echoed softly in the room. Curious, I glanced all und me, but I saw no one. Knowing that whatever I was experiencing was definitely more than a dream, I reached for my notepad and a pencil, and began to write with a furious speed. Ideas came to me with an incredible clarity and ease. They pulsated in my head and in my body like sound waves. I simultaneously heard and saw the words. Yet it wasn't my eyes or my ears that perceived what was there before me. Rather, it was some filaments within me that were ching out and, like some noiseless vacuum cleaner, sucking up the words shining before me like dust particles.

After a while, the order superimposed on my paper began to blur. One by one the lines faded away. Desperately, I tried to hold on to this splendid structure, knowing that it would all vanish without a trace. Only the memory of my awareness of that magnificent lucidity remained. And then that, too, was extinguished, as if a candle had been blown out. A curl of fog, as fine as a thread, lingered in the room. Then it withdrew in little ripples, and an oppressive darkness closed in around me. I was so drained, I knew I was going to faint.

"Lie down!"

I didn't even bother to look up, knowing that I wouldn't be able to see anyone. With great effort, I rose from my chair and staggered to my bed.

## Chapter 16

For a moment, I just lay on my bed, vaguely aware of my amazing, astonishing dream, so unlike any other dream. For the first time ever I was conscious of all I had done.

"Nelida?" I whispered as a soft, raspy, murmuring, coming from the other end of the room, intruded on my reveries. I sat up only to lie back quickly as the room began to spin around me.

I waited for a few moments, then tried again. I stood and took a few hesitant steps. I collapsed on the floor and hit my head against the wall.

"Shit!" I cried out when the room kept spinning around me. I'm fainting."

"Don't be so dramatic," Florinda said, then giggled as she saw my bewildered face. She touched first my forehead, then my neck, as if she were afraid I might be running a fever. "You aren't fainting," she pronounced. "You need to replenish your energy."

"Where is Nelida?"

"Aren't you happy to see me?" She took my arm and helped me back to the bed. "You're faint with hunger."

"I'm not." I contradicted her, more out of habit than conviction. Although I didn't feel hungry, I was certain my dizziness was caused by a lack of food. Except for breakfast, I hadn't eaten at all during the day.

"We wondered why you didn't," Florinda said, responding to my thoughts. "We prepared such a delicious stew for you."

"When did you get here?" I asked. "I have been silently calling you for days."

Closing her eyes, Florinda made a humming sound, as if the noise would help her remember. "We have been here for several days, I think," she finally said.

"You think!" I was completely taken aback, my temper getting the better of me. I quickly recovered. "Why didn't you let me know that you were here?"

More than hurt, I was puzzled that I had failed to notice their presence. "How could I have been so unaware?" I mumbled, more to myself than to her.

Florinda regarded me with a curious expression in her eyes. She seemed surprised by my bafflement.

"If we had let you know that we were here, you wouldn't have been able to concentrate on your work," she remarked sagaciously. "As you well know, instead of writing your paper, you would have been pending on our comings and goings. All your energy would have been spent in trying to find out what we do, wouldn't it?"

Her voice was low and raspy, and a strange, excited light made her eyes even more shiny than usual. "It was a deliberate act on our part that you should work without distractions," she assured me.

Then she went on to explain that the caretaker had helped me with my paper only after he was satisfied with what I had done so far. She claimed that in dreaming he found the inherent order of my notes.

"I, too, saw the inherent order of my notes," I said smugly. "I, too, saw it in a dream."

"Of course you did," Florinda readily agreed. "We pulled you into dreaming so you could work on your paper."

"You pulled me into dreaming?" I repeated.

There was something startlingly normal about her statement. Yet at the same time it made me feel apprehensive. I had an uncanny sense that I was finally close to understanding what dreaming-awake was, but somehow I couldn't quite grasp it. In an effort to make sense, I told Florinda all that had happened from the moment I saw the caretaker and the dog in the yard.

It was difficult to make it sound coherent, for I couldn't decide myself when I had been awake and when I had been dreaming. To my utter bewilderment, I could recall the exact outline of my paper as I had seen it superimposed on my original draft. "My concentration was far too keen for me to have been dreaming," I pointed out.

"That's precisely what dreaming-awake is," Florinda interrupted me. "That's why you remember it so well."

Her tone was that of an impatient teacher explaining a simple but fundamental point to a backward child. "I've already told you that dreaming-awake has nothing to do with falling asleep and having a dream."

"I took notes," I said, as if that would invalidate her statement. Seeing her nod, I asked her if I would find whatever I saw in dreaming-awake jotted down in my own handwriting on my pad.

"You will," she assured me. "But before you do, you'll have to eat first."

She rose and, holding out her hand, helped me to my feet. To put a semblance of order to my appearance, she tucked my shirt into my jeans and brushed off the pieces of straw sticking to my sweater. She held me at arm's length and regarded me critically. Not satisfied with the results, she began to fuss with my hair, tweaking the unruly strands this way and that.

"You look quite frightful with your hair sticking out all over the place," she pronounced.

"I'm used to taking a hot shower upon awakening," I said, and followed her out into the corridor.

Seeing that she was heading toward the kitchen, I told her that I had to go to the outhouse first.

"I'll walk with you." Noticing my displeased face, she added that she only wanted to make sure I didn't get dizzy and fall into the shit hole.

Actually, I was glad to hold on to her arm as we made our way to the yard. I almost fell as we stepped outside, not so much from weakness as from the shock of seeing how late in the day it was.

"What's the matter?" Florinda asked. "Do you feel faint?"

I pointed up at the sky. A faint gleam was all that remained of the sun's light. "I can't possibly have lost a day," I said. My voice had all but vanished even before I finished speaking.

I struggled to assimilate the idea that indeed a whole night and the whole day had passed, but my mind would not accept it. Not being able to account for time, measured in the usual manner, unhinged me.

"Sorcerers break time's flux," Florinda answered my thoughts. "Time, in the fashion we measure it, doesn't exist when one dreams the way sorcerers dream. Sorcerers stretch or compress time at will. For sorcerers, time is not a matter of minutes or hours or days but an altogether different matter. When dreaming-awake, our perceptual faculties are heightened," she proceeded in a patient, measured tone: "However, when it comes to perceiving time, something altogether different happens. The perception of time does not become heightened but is canceled out completely."

She added that time is always a factor of consciousness; that is, to be aware of time is a psychological state that we automatically transform into physical measurements. It is so ingrained in us that we can hear, even when we are not consciously aware of it, a clock ticking inside us, subliminally keeping track of time.

"In dreaming-awake, that capacity is absent," she emphasized. "A thoroughly new, unfamiliar structure, which somehow is not to be understood or interpreted as we normally do with time, takes over."

"Then all I will ever consciously know about dreaming-awake is that time has either been stretched or compressed," I said, trying to come to grips with her elucidation.

"You will understand a great deal more than that," she assured me emphatically: "Once you become adept at entering heightened awareness, as Mariano Aureliano calls it, you'll be aware then of whatever you wish because sorcerers are not involved in measuring time. They are involved in using it; in stretching or compressing it at will."

"You mentioned earlier that you all helped me into dreaming," I said. "Then some of you must know how long that state lasted."

Florinda said that she and her companions were perennially in a state of dreaming-awake, that it was precisely their joint effort that pulled me into dreaming-awake, but that they never kept track of it.

"Are you implying that I might be dreaming-awake now?" I asked, knowing the answer before she responded. "If I am, what did I do to reach this state? What steps did I take?"

"The simplest step imaginable," Florinda said. "You didn't let yourself be your usual self. That is the key that opens doors. We have told you many times and in many ways that sorcery is not at all what you think it is. To say that to stop yourself from being your usual self is sorcery's most complex secret sounds like idiocy, but it is't. It is the key to power, therefore the most difficult thing a sorcerer does. And yet, it isn't something complex or impossible to understand. It doesn't boggle the mind, and for that reason no one can even suspect it's importance or take it seriously.

Judging by the result of your latest dreaming-awake, I can say that you have accumulated enough energy, through preventing yourself from being your usual self."

She patted my shoulder and turned away. "I'll see you in the kitchen," she whispered.

The kitchen door was ajar but no sound came from the inside.

"Florinda?" I whispered.

A soft laughter answered my call, but I couldn't see anyone. As soon as my eyes became accustomed to the penumbra, I saw Florinda and Nelida sitting around the table. Their faces were unnaturally vivid in that tenuous light. Their same hair, their same eyes, their same noses and mouths, gleamed as if lit by an inner light. It was the most eerie thing to see two beings so totally alike.

"You two are so beautiful that you're scary," I said and stepped closer. The two women gazed at each other, as if to validate my statement, then burst into a most disturbing laughter. I felt a curious prickle running down my spine. Before I had a chance to comment on their odd sounding laughter, they stopped. Nelida beckoned me to sit on the empty chair beside her.

I took a deep breath. I had to stay calm, I told myself as I sat down. There was a tenseness and a crispness about Nelida that unnerved me. She served me a plateful of a thick soup from the tureen standing in the middle of the table.

"I want you to eat everything," she said, pushing the butter and a basket with warm tortillas toward me.

I was famished. I attacked my food as if I had not eaten for days. It tasted wonderful. I ate all there was in the tureen and washed down the buttered tortillas with three mugfuls of hot chocolate.

Satiated, I slumped back in my chair. The door to the yard was wide open and a cool breeze rearranged the shadows in room. Twilight seemed to be lasting forever. The sky was still streaked with heavy layers of color: vermilion, deep blue, violet, and gold. The air had that transparent quality that brought close the distant hills. As if propelled by some inner force, the night seemed to shoot out of the ground. The shadowed movements of the fruit trees in the wind, rhythmic and graceful, swept the darkness up into the sky.

Esperanza burst then into the room and placed a lit oil lamp on the table. She regarded me with unblinking eyes, as if she had difficulty in focusing. She gave the impression that she was still concerned with some otherworldly mystery, that she wasn't yet quite there. Then slowly her eyes thawed, and she smiled as if she knew now that she had returned from a great distance.

"My paper!" I cried out upon discovering the loose sheets and my notepad under her arm.

Grinning broadly, Esperanza handed me my notes. Eagerly, I examined the sheets and laughed out loud upon seeing the pages on the pad filled with precise and detailed instructions - written half in Spanish, half in English - on how to proceed with my term paper. The handwriting was unmistakably mine.

"It's all there," I said excitedly. "That's how I saw it in my dream."

The thought that I might be able to zoom through graduate without having to work so hard made me forget all my for anxiety.

"There are no shortcuts to writing good term papers," Esperanza said. "Not even with the aid of sorcery. You should know that without the preliminary reading, the note taking, and the writing and rewriting, you would never have been able to recognize the structure and order of your term paper in dreaming."

I nodded wordlessly. She had spoken with such an incontestable authority that I didn't know what to say.

"What about the caretaker?" I finally managed to ask. "Was he a professor in his youth?"

Nelida and Florinda turned to Esperanza, as if it were up to her to answer.

"I wouldn't know that," Esperanza said evasively. "Didn't he tell you that he's a sorcerer in love with ideas?"

She was silent for a moment, then added softly, "When he is not taking care of our world, as befits a caretaker, he reads."

"Besides reading books," Nelida elucidated, "he reads a most extraordinary number of scholarly journals. He speaks several languages, so he's quite up to date with the latest of everything. Delia and Clara are his assistants. He taught them to speak English and German."

"Is the library in your house his?" I asked.

"It belongs to all of us," Nelida said. "However, I'm sure he's the only one, beside Vicente, who has read every book on the shelves."

Noticing my incredulous expression, she advised me that I shouldn't be fooled by appearances regarding the people in the sorcerers' world.

"To reach a degree of knowledge, sorcerers work twice as hard as normal people," she assured me. "Sorcerers have to make sense of the everyday world as well as the magical world. To accomplish that, they have to be highly skilled and sophisticated, mentally as well as physically."

She regarded me with narrowed, critical eyes then chuckled softly.

"For three days, you worked on your paper," she explained. "You worked very hard, didn't you?" She waited for my assent then added that, while dreaming-awake, I worked on my term paper even harder than I did while awake.

"Not at all," I hastened to contradict her. "It was all quite and effortless." I explained that all I did was see a new version of my paper superimposed on my old draft, and then I copied what I saw.

"To do that took all the strength you had," Nelida maintained. "While dreaming-awake, you channeled all your energy into a single purpose. All your concern and effort went into finishing your paper. Nothing else mattered to you at the moment. You had no other thoughts to interfere with your endeavor."

"Was the caretaker dreaming-awake when he looked at my paper?" I asked. "Did I see what he saw?"

Nelida rose and walked slowly to the door. For a long moment she peered out into the darkness then returned to the table. She whispered something to Esperanza, which I didn't hear, and then sat down again.

Esperanza chuckled softly then said that what the caretaker saw in my paper was different from what I saw and wrote down. "Quite naturally so, for his knowledge is by far more vast than yours."

Esperanza stared at me with her quick, dark eyes that somehow made the rest of her face seem lifeless. "Guided by his suggestions, and according to your own capabilities, you saw what your paper ought to read like. That's what you wrote down."

"While dreaming-awake, we have access to hidden resources, which we never use ordinarily," Nelida said, going on to explain that, the instant I saw my paper, I remembered the clues the caretaker had given me.

Noticing my incredulous expression, she reminded me what the caretaker had said about my paper: "Too many footnotes, too many notes and sloppily developed ideas."

Her eyes radiated sympathy and amusement as she went on to say that since I was dreaming and I am not as stupid as I pretended to be, I immediately saw all kinds of links and connections that I hadn't noticed before within my material.

Nelida leaned toward me, a half-smile playing over her lips as she waited for my reaction.

"It's time you know what made you see a better version of your original paper." Esperanza sat up straight and gave me a wink as if to emphasize that she was about to reveal a major secret. "When dreaming-awake, we have access to direct knowledge."

I could see the disappointment in her eyes as she regarded me for a long moment.

"Don't be so dense!" Nelida snapped impatiently: "Dreaming-awake should have made you realize that you have, as all women do, a unique capacity to receive knowledge directly."

Esperanza made a silencing gesture with her hand and said, "Did you know that one of the basic differences between males and females is how they approach knowledge?"

I had no idea what she meant. Slowly and deliberately, she tore off a clean sheet from my notepad and drew two human figures. One head she crowned with a cone and said that it was a man. On the other head, she drew the same cone, but upside down, and said that it was a woman.

"Men build knowledge step by step," she explained, her pencil poised on the figure crowned with a cone: "Men reach up. They climb toward knowledge. Sorcerers say that men cone toward the spirit. They cone up toward knowledge. This coning process limits men on how far they can reach."

She retraced the cone on the first figure. "As you can see, men can only reach a certain height. Their path toward knowledge ends up in a narrow point: the tip of the cone."

She looked at me sharply. "Pay attention," she warned me and pointed her pencil to the second figure, the one with the inverted cone on it's head. "As you can see, the cone is upside down, open like a funnel. Women are able to open themselves directly to the source, or rather, the source reaches them directly, in the broad base of the cone. Sorcerers say that women's connection to knowledge is expansive. On the other hand, men's connection is quite restricted. Men are close to the concrete," she proceeded, "and aim at the abstract. Women are close to the abstract, and yet try to indulge themselves with the concrete."

"Why are women, being so open to knowledge or the abstract, considered inferior?" I interrupted her.

Esperanza gazed at me with rapt fascination. She rose swiftly, stretched like a cat until all her joints cracked, then sat down again.

"That women are considered inferior, or, at the very best, that female traits are equated as complementary to the male's, has to do with the manner in which males and females approach knowledge," she explained: "Generally speaking, women are more interested in power over themselves than over others. Power over others is clearly what males want."

"Even among sorcerers," Nelida interjected, and the women all laughed.

Esperanza went on to say that she believed that originally women saw no need to exploit their facility to link themselves broadly and directly to the spirit. She said women saw no necessity to talk about or to intellectualize this natural capacity of theirs because it was enough for them to put their natural capacity in action, and to know that they had it.

"Men's incapacity to link themselves directly to the spirit was what drove them to talk about the process of reaching knowledge," she stressed. "They haven't stopped talking about it. And it is precisely this insistence on knowing how they strive toward the spirit; this insistence on analyzing the process that gave them the certainty that being rational is a typically male skill."

Esperanza explained that the conceptualization of reason has been done exclusively by men, and that this has allowed men to belittle women's gifts and accomplishments. And even worse, it has allowed men to exclude feminine traits from the formulation of the ideals of reason.

"By now, of course, women believe what has been defined for them," she emphasized: "Women have been reared to believe that only men can be rational and coherent. Now men carry with them a load of unearned assets that makes them automatically superior regardless of their preparation or capacity."

"How did women lose their direct link to knowledge?" I asked.

"Women haven't lost their connection," Esperanza corrected me. "Women still have a direct link with the spirit. They have only forgotten how to use it; or rather, they have copied men's condition of not having it at all. For thousands of years, men have struggled to make sure that women forget it. Take the Holy Inquisition, for example. That was a systematic purge to eradicate the belief that women have a direct link to the spirit. All organized religion is nothing but a very successful maneuver to put women in a lower place. Religions invoke a divine law that says that women are inferior."

I stared at her in amazement, wondering to myself how she could possibly be so erudite.
[*erudite - having or showing profound knowledge]

"Men's need to dominate others and women's lack of interest in expressing or formulating what they know and how they know it has been a most nefarious alliance," Esperanza went on: "It has made it possible for women to be coerced from the moment they're born into accepting that fulfillment lies in homemaking, in love, in marriage, in having children, and in self-denial. Women have been excluded from the dominant forms of abstract thought and educated into dependence. Women have been so thoroughly trained in the belief that men must think for them that women have finally given up thinking."

"Women are quite capable of thinking." I interrupted her.

"Women are capable of formulating what they have learned," Esperanza corrected me, "but what they have learned has been defined by men. Men define the very nature of knowledge, and from that knowledge they have excluded that which pertains to the feminine. Or if the feminine is included, it is always in a negative light. And women have accepted this."

"You are years behind the times," I interjected. "Nowadays women can do anything they set their hearts to do. They pretty much have access to all the centers of learning, and to almost anything men can do."

"But this is meaningless as long as women don't have a support system; a support base," Esperanza argued: "What good is it that women have access to what men have when women are still considered inferior beings who have to adopt male attitudes and behaviors in order to succeed? The truly successful women are the perfect converts: They too look down on women. According to men, the womb limits women both mentally and physically. This is the reason why women, although they have access to knowledge, have not been allowed to help determine what this knowledge is. Take for instance, philosophers," Esperanza proposed. "The pure thinkers. Some of them are viciously against women. Others are more subtle in that they are willing to admit that women might be as capable as men were it not for the fact that women are not interested in rational pursuits. And if women are interested in rational pursuits they shouldn't be because it is more becoming for a woman to be true to her nature: a nurturing, dependent companion of the male."

Esperanza expressed all this with unquestionable authority.

Within moments, however, I was assailed by doubts. "If knowledge is but a male construct, then why your insistence that I go to school," I asked.

"Because you are a witch, and as such you need to know what impinges on you and how it impinges on you," she replied: "Before you refuse something, you must understand why you refuse it. You see, the problem is that knowledge, in our day, is derived purely from reasoning things out. But women have a different track, never, ever taken into consideration. That track can contribute to knowledge, but it would have to be a contribution that has nothing to do with reasoning things out."

"What would it deal with, then?" I asked.

"That's for you to decide after you master the tools of reasoning and understanding."

I was very confused.

"What sorcerers propose," she explained, "is that men can't have the exclusive right to reason. Men seem to have it now simply because the ground where men apply reason is a ground where maleness prevails. Let us, then, apply reason to a ground where femaleness prevails; and that ground is, naturally, the inverted cone I described to you; women's connection with the spirit itself."

She tilted her head slightly to one side, considering what to say.

"That connection has to be faced with a different aspect of reasoning. An aspect never, ever used before: the feminine side of reasoning," she said.

"What is the feminine side of reason, Esperanza?"

"Many things. One of them is definitely dreaming." She regarded me questioningly, but I had nothing to say.

Her deep chuckle caught me by surprise. "I know what you expect from sorcerers. You want rituals, incantations. Odd, mysterious cults. You want to sing. You want to be one with nature. You want to commune with water spirits. You want paganism. Some romantic view of what sorcerers do. Very Germanic. To jump into the unknown," she went on, "you need guts and mind. Only with them will you be able to explain to yourself and to others the treasures you might find."

She leaned toward me, eager, it seemed, to confide something.

She scratched her head and sneezed repeatedly, five times as the caretaker had. "You need to act on your magical side," she said.

"And what is that?"

"The womb." She said this so distantly and calmly, as if she were not interested in my reaction, that I almost missed hearing it. Then suddenly, realizing the absurdity of her remark, I straightened up and looked at the others.

"The womb!" Esperanza repeated. "The womb is the ultimate feminine organ. It is the womb that gives women that extra edge; that extra force to channel their energy."

She explained that men, in their quest for supremacy, have succeeded in reducing woman's mysterious power, her womb, to a strictly biological organ, whose only function is to reproduce; to carry man's seed.

As if obeying a cue, Nelida rose, walked around the table, and came to stand behind me. "Do you know the story of the Annunciation?" she whispered in my ear.

Giggling, I turned to face her. "I don't."

In that same confidential whisper, she proceeded to tell me that in the Judeo-Christian tradition, men are the only ones who hear the voice of God. Women have been excluded from that privilege, with the exception of the Virgin Mary.

Nelida said that an angel whispering to Mary was, of course, natural. What wasn't natural was the fact that all the angel had to say to Mary was that she would bear the son of God. The womb did not receive knowledge but rather the promise of God's seed. A male god, who engendered another male god in turn.

I wanted to think, to reflect on all that I had heard, but my mind was in a confused whirl.

"What about male sorcerers?" I asked. "They don't have a womb, yet they are clearly connected to the spirit."

Esperanza regarded me with undisguised pleasure, then looked over her shoulder, as though she were afraid to be overheard, and whispered, "Sorcerers are able to align themselves to intent, to the spirit, because they have given up what specifically defines their masculinity, and they are no longer males."

## Chapter 17

The manner in which Isidoro Baltazar was pacing about the room was different from the way he usually covered the length of his rectangular studio. Before, I had always been soothed by his pacing. This time, however, his steps rang with a disturbing, oddly menacing sound. The image of a tiger prowling in the bushes - not ready to pounce on a victim but sensing that something was not quite right - came to mind.

I turned away from my paper and was about to ask him what was the matter, when he said, "We are going to Mexico!"

The way he said it made me laugh. The gruffness and seriousness of his voice warranted my joking question, "Are you going to marry me there?"

Glaring at me, he came to an abrupt halt. "This is no joke," he snapped angrily. "This is the real thing."

No sooner had he spoken than he smiled and shook his head. "What am I doing?" he said, making a humorous, helpless gesture. "I am getting angry at you, as if I had time for that. What a shame! The nagual Juan Matus warned me that we are crap to the very end."

He hugged me fiercely, as if I had been gone for a long time and had just returned.

"I don't think it's such a good idea for me to go to Mexico," I said.

"Cancel anything pending. There is no more time." He sounded like a military man giving orders.

Since I was in a festive mood, I couldn't help retorting, "Jawohl, mein Gruppenfuehrer!"

He lost his tightness and laughed.

As we drove through Arizona, a most peculiar feeling suddenly flooded me. It was a bodily sensation something like a chill that extended from my womb to my entire body and brought goose bumps all over my skin; the knowledge that something was wrong. There was in that feeling a new element I had not encountered before; absolute certainty, without a tinge of being right or wrong.

"I just had an intuition. Something is wrong!" I said, my voice rising against my will.

Isidoro Baltazar nodded, then said in a matter-of-fact tone, "The sorcerers are leaving."

"When?" My cry was quite involuntary.

"Maybe tomorrow or the next day," he replied. "Or perhaps a month from now, but their departure is imminent." [*imminent - close in time; about to occur]

Sighing in relief, I slumped on my seat and consciously relaxed.

"They have been saying that they're leaving since the day I met them more than three years ago," I murmured, but I didn't really feel right about saying it.

Isidoro Baltazar turned to glance at me, his face a mask of sheer contempt. I could see the effort he was making to erase his dissatisfaction.

He smiled, then patted my knee and said softly, "In the sorcerers' world, we can't be that factual. If sorcerers repeat something to you until you're cynically bored with it, it is because they want to prepare you for it." He fixed me momentarily with his hard, unsmiling eyes and added, "Don't confuse their magical ways with your dumbo ways."

I nodded wordlessly. His statement didn't anger me: I was too scared for that. I kept quiet.

The journey didn't take any time at all, or so it seemed to me. We took turns sleeping and driving, and by noon of the following day we were at the witches' house. The instant the car's engine had been shut off, we both jumped out of the car, slammed the doors shut, and ran up to the witches' house.

"What's the idea?" the caretaker said.

He was standing by the front door, seemingly bewildered by our abrupt and loud arrival. "Are you two fighting or chasing each other?"

He looked at Isidoro Baltazar and then at me. "Gee! Running like this."

"When are you leaving? When are you leaving?" I repeated mechanically, unable to contain my growing anxiety and fear any longer.

Laughing, the caretaker patted my back reassuringly and said, "I'm not going anyplace. You're not going to get rid of me that easily."

His words sounded genuine enough, but they didn't relieve my anxiety.

I searched his face, his eyes, to see if I could detect a lie. All I saw was kindness and sincerity. Upon realizing that Isidoro Baltazar was no longer standing beside me, I tensed up again. He had vanished, as noiselessly and swiftly as a shadow.

Sensing my agitation, the caretaker pointed with his chin to the house. I heard Isidoro Baltazar's voice, rising as if he were protesting, and then I heard his laughter.

"Is everybody here?" I asked, trying to move past the caretaker.

"They are inside," he said, blocking my way with his outstretched arms. "They can't see you at the moment."

Seeing that I was about to protest, he added, "They were not expecting you. They want me to talk to you before they do."

He took my hand and led me away from the door. "Let's go to the back and pick up some leaves," he proposed. "We'll burn them and leave the ashes for the water fairies. Perhaps they'll turn them into gold."

We didn't talk at all as we gathered pile after pile of leaves, but the physical activity and the sound of the rake scratching the ground soothed me.

It seemed we had been gathering and burning leaves for hours when suddenly I knew that there was someone else in the yard. I turned my head quickly and saw Florinda. Dressed in white pants and jacket, sitting on the bench under the zapote tree, she was like an apparition. Her face was shaded by a wide-brimmed straw hat, and in her hand she held a lace fan. She seemed not quite human and so remote that I just stood motionless, absolutely amazed. Wondering whether she was going to acknowledge me, I took a few hesitant steps toward her. Upon noticing that she didn't in any way register my presence, I waited, undecided. It wasn't that I was trying to protect myself against being refused or being slighted by her, but rather, some undetermined yet unconsciously understood rule kept me from demanding that she pay attention to me.

However, when the caretaker joined Florinda on the bench, I reached for the rake propped against a tree and inched my way toward them. Grinning absentmindedly, the caretaker looked up at me, but his attention was on what Florinda was saying. They spoke in a language I didn't understand, yet I listened to them, entranced. Whether it was the language or her affection for the old man, I didn't know; but her raspy voice was unusually soft and strange, and hauntingly tender.

Abruptly, she rose from the bench. As if she were propelled by some hidden spring, she zigzagged across the clearing like a hummingbird; pausing for an instant beside each tree; touching a leaf here and a blossom there.

I raised my hand to call her attention, but I was distracted by a bright blue butterfly weaving blue shadows in the air. It flew toward me and alighted on my hand. The wide, quivering wings fanned out and their shadow fell darkly over my fingers. It rubbed it's head with it's legs, and after opening and closing it's wings several times, it took off again, leaving on my middle finger a ring in the shape of a triangular butterfly.

Certain that it was but an optical illusion, I shook my hand repeatedly. "It's a trick, isn't it?" I asked the caretaker in a shaky voice. "It's an optical illusion?"

The caretaker shook his head, and his face crinkled into a most radiant smile. "It's a lovely ring," he said, holding my hand in his. "It's a magnificent gift."

"A gift," I repeated. I had the briefest flash of insight, but it disappeared, leaving me lost and bewildered.

"Who put the ring on my finger?" I asked, staring at the jewel. The antennae and the thin, elongated body dividing the triangle were fashioned in white gold filigree and were studded with tiny diamonds.

"Didn't you notice the ring before?" the caretaker asked.

"Before?" I repeated, baffled. "Before what?"

"You've been wearing that ring since Florinda gave it to you," he replied.

"But when?" I asked, then held my hand over my mouth to stifle my shock. "I can't remember Florinda giving me the ring," I said more to myself than to him. "And why haven't I noticed the ring before?"

The caretaker shrugged, at a loss to explain my oversight, then suggested that perhaps I hadn't noticed the ring because it fit so perfectly on my finger. He seemed about to say something else but stopped himself, and instead suggested that we pick up some more leaves.

"I can't," I said. "I have to talk to Florinda."

"You do?" he mused, in the manner of one hearing a ridiculous and probably unsound idea. But he didn't persuade me to the contrary, and said, "She's gone for her walk," pointing with his chin toward the path that led to the hills.

"I'll catch up with her," I stated. I could see her white-clad figure weaving in and out of the high chaparral in the distance.

"She goes far," the caretaker warned me.

"That's no problem," I assured him.

I ran after Florinda, then slowed down before I caught up with her. She had the most beautiful walk: She moved with a vigorous, athletic motion, effortlessly, her back erect.

Sensing my presence, she came to an abrupt halt, then turned and held out her hands in a gesture of greeting. "How are you, darling?" she said, gazing at me. Her raspy voice was light and clear, and very soft.

In my eagerness to learn about the ring, I didn't even greet her properly. Stumbling over my words, I asked her if she had put the ring on my finger. "Is it mine now?" I said.

"Yes," she said. "It's yours by right." There was something in her tone; a sense of certainty that both thrilled and terrified me. Yet it didn't even occur to me to refuse the no doubt expensive gift.

"Does the ring have magical powers?" I asked, holding up my hand against the light so that each stone sparkled with a dazzling radiance.

"No," she laughed. "It doesn't have powers of any sort. It is a special ring, though. Not because of it's value or because it belonged to me, but because the person who made this ring was an extraordinary nagual."

"Was he a jeweler?" I inquired. "Was he the same person who built the odd-looking figures in the caretaker's room?"

"The same one," she replied. "He wasn't a jeweler, though. He wasn't a sculptor either. The mere thought that he might be considered an artist made him laugh. Yet anyone who saw his work couldn't help but see that only an artist could have executed the extraordinary things he did."

Florinda moved a few steps away from me and let her eyes roam across the hills, as if she were searching for memories in the distance.

Then she turned once more toward me and in a barely audible whisper said that whatever this nagual made, whether it was a ring, a brick wall, tiles for the floor, the mysterious inventions, or simply a cardboard box, it invariably turned out to be an exquisite piece; not only in terms of it's superb craftsmanship, but because it was imbued with something ineffable. [*ineffable - defying expression or description]

"If such an extraordinary individual made this ring, then it has to have some kind of power," I insisted.

"The ring in itself has no power, regardless of who made it," Florinda assured me: "The power was in the making. The nagual who made this ring was aligned so thoroughly with what sorcerers call intent that he was able to produce this lovely jewel without him being a jeweler. The ring was an act of pure intent."

Reluctant to sound stupid, I didn't dare admit that I had no inkling what she meant by intent. So I asked her what had prompted her to make me such a marvelous gift. "I don't think I deserve it," I added.

"You will use the ring to align yourself with intent," she said. A wicked grin spread across her face as she added, "But, of course, you already know about aligning yourself with intent."

"I know nothing of the sort," I mumbled defensively, then confessed I didn't really know what intent was.

"You might not know what the word means," she said off-handedly, "but something in you intuits how to tap that force."

She brought her head close to mine and whispered that I had always used intent to move from dream to reality or to bring my dream - whatever it might have been - to reality. She glanced at me expecting no doubt for me to draw the obvious conclusions.

Seeing my uncomprehending expression, she added, "Both the inventions in the caretaker's room and the ring were made in dreams."

"I still don't get it," I complained.

"The inventions frighten you," she said equably. "And the ring delights you. Since both are dreams, it can easily be the reverse..."

"You frighten me, Florinda. What do you mean?"

"This, dear, is a world of dreams. We are teaching you how to bring them about all by yourself." Her dark, shiny eyes held mine for a moment, and then she added, "At the moment, all the sorcerers of the nagual Mariano Aureliano's party help you enter into this world and are helping you to stay in it now."

"Is it a different world? Or is it that I am different myself?"

"You are the same but in a different world." She was silent for a moment then conceded that I had more energy than before. "Energy that comes from your savings and from the loan all of us made you."

Her banking metaphor was very clear to me. What I still didn't grasp was what she meant by a different world.

"Look around you!" she exclaimed, holding her arms out wide. "This is not the world of everyday life."

She was silent for a long time, then in a voice that was but a low, gentle murmur, added, "Can butterflies turn into rings in the world of daily affairs; in a world that has been safely and rigorously structured by the roles assigned to all of us?"

I had no answer. I looked around me; at the trees, at the bushes, at the distant mountains. Whatever she meant by a different world still eluded me. The difference had to be a purely subjective one, was the thought that finally occurred to me.

"It isn't!" Florinda insisted, reading my thoughts. "This is a sorcerer's dream. You got into it because you have the energy."

She regarded me quite hopelessly, and said, "There is really no way to teach dreaming to women. All that can be done is to prop them up, so as to make them realize the enormous potential they carry in their organic disposition. Since dreaming for a woman is a matter of having energy at her disposal, the important thing is to convince her of the need to modify her deep socialization in order to acquire that energy. The act of making use of this energy is automatic; women dream sorcerers' dreams the instant they have the energy."

She confided that a serious consideration about sorcerers' dreams, stemming from her own shortcomings, was the difficulty of imbuing women with the courage to break new ground. Most women - and she said she was one of them - prefer their safe shackles to the terror of the new.

"Dreaming is only for courageous women," she whispered in my ear. Then she burst into loud laughter and added, "Or for those women who have no other choice because their circumstances are unbearable - a category to which most women belong, without even knowing it."

The sound of her raspy laughter had an odd effect on me. I felt as if I had suddenly awakened from a deep sleep and remembered something quite forgotten while I had slept: "Isidoro Baltazar told me about your imminent departure. When are you leaving?"

"I'm not going anywhere yet." Her voice was firm, but it rang with a devastating sadness: "Your dreaming teacher and I are staying behind. The rest are leaving."

I didn't quite understand what she meant, and to hide my confusion I made a joking comment.

"My dreaming teacher, Zuleica, hasn't said a single word to me in three years. In fact, she has never even talked to me. You and Esperanza are the only ones who have really guided me and taught me."

Florinda's gales of laughter reverberated around us, a joyous sound that brought me intense relief, and yet I felt puzzled.

"Explain something to me, Florinda," I began. "When did you give me this ring? How come I went from picking leaves with the caretaker to having this ring?"

Florinda's face was full of enjoyment as she explained that it could easily be said that picking leaves is one of the doors into a sorcerers' dream provided one has enough energy to cross that threshold.

She took my hand in hers and added, "I gave you the ring while you were crossing; therefore, your mind didn't record the act. Suddenly, when you were already in the dream, you discovered the ring on your finger."

I looked at her curiously. There was something in her elucidation I couldn't grasp; something so vague, so indistinct.

"Let's return to the house," she suggested, "and recross that threshold. Perhaps you'll be aware of it this time."

Leisurely, we retraced our steps, approaching the house from the back. I walked a few steps ahead of Florinda so I could be perfectly aware of everything. I peered at the trees, the tiles, the walls; eager to detect the change or anything that might give me a clue to the transition.

I didn't notice anything, except that the caretaker was no longer there. I turned around to tell

Florinda that I most definitely had missed the transition, but she was not behind me. She was nowhere in sight. She was gone and had left me all alone there.

I walked into the house. It was, as had happened to me before, deserted. This feeling of aloneness no longer frightened me; no longer gave me the sensation I had been abandoned. Automatically, I went to the kitchen and ate the chicken tamales that had been left in a basket. Then I went to my hammock and tried to put my thoughts in order.

I woke up and found myself lying on a cot, in a small, dark room. I looked desperately about me, searching for some inkling of what was going on. I sat bolt upright as I saw big, moving shadows lurking by the door. Eager to find out whether the door was open and the shadows were inside, I reached under the cot for the chamber pot - which somehow I knew to be there - and threw it at the shadows. The pot landed outside with an excessively loud clatter.

The shadows vanished. Wondering whether I had simply imagined them, I went outside. Undecided, I stared at the tall mesquite fence encircling the clearing, and then I knew in a flash where I was: I was standing in back of the small house. All this went through my mind as I searched for the chamber pot, which had rolled all the way to the fence. As I bent to pick it up, I saw a coyote squeeze through the mesquite fence. Automatically, I threw the pot at the animal, but the pot hit a rock instead. Indifferent to the loud bang and to my presence, the coyote crossed the clearing. It turned it's head audaciously several times to look at me. It's fur shimmered like silver. It's bushy tail swept over the various rocks like a magic wand. Each rock it touched came to life. The rocks hopped about with shiny eyes and moved their lips, asking peculiar questions in voices too faint to be heard.

I screamed; the rocks moved appallingly fast toward me.

I immediately knew that I was dreaming.

"This is one of my usual nightmares," I mumbled to myself. "With monsters and fear and everything else."

Convinced that once I had recognized and voiced the problem, I had neutralized it's effects on me, I was about to give in and settle down to live a nightmare terror when I heard a voice say, "Test the track of dreams."

I wheeled around. Esperanza was standing under the ramada tending to a fire on a raised platform made of cane heavily coated with mud. She looked strange and remote in the gleaming, moving light of the fire, as if she were separated from me by a distance that had nothing to do with space.

"Don't be frightened," she ordered. Then she lowered her voice to a murmur and said, "We all share one another's dreams, but now you are not dreaming."

Doubt must have been written all over my face. "Believe me, you are not dreaming," she assured me.

I stepped a bit closer. Not only did her voice sound unfamiliar, but she herself was different. From where I was standing she was Esperanza; nonetheless, she looked like Zuleica. I moved very close to her. She was Zuleica! Young and strong and very beautiful. She couldn't have been more than forty years old. Her oval face was framed by curly, black hair that was turning gray. Hers was a smooth, pale face, highlighted by liquid, dark eyes set wide apart. Her gaze was indrawn, enigmatic, and very pure. Her short, thin upper lip hinted at severeness, while the full, almost voluptuous lower lip gave an indication of gentleness and also passion.

Fascinated by the change in her, I simply stared at her, enthralled. I definitely must be dreaming, I thought.

Her clear laughter made me realize that she had read my thoughts.

She took my hand in hers and said softly, "You're not dreaming, my dear. This is the real me. I am your dreaming teacher. I am Zuleica. Esperanza is my other self. Sorcerers call it the dreaming body."

My heart thumped so violently it made my chest ache. I almost choked with anxiety and excitement. I tried to pull my hand away, but she was holding me with a firm grip that I couldn't break. I pressed my eyes tightly shut. More than anything I wanted her to be gone when I opened them again. She was there, of course, her lips parted in a radiant smile. I closed my eyes again, then jumped up and down and stomped on the ground as if I had gone berserk. With my free hand, I slapped my face repeatedly, until it burned with pain. All to no avail: I couldn't wake up. Every time I opened my eyes, she was there.

"I think you've got enough," she laughed, and I commanded her to hit me.

She readily obliged, striking two sharp blows on my upper arms with a long, hard walking stick.

"It's no use, dear." She spoke slowly, as if she were very tired. She took a deep breath and let go of my hand. Then she spoke again. "You're not dreaming. And I am Zuleica. But when I dream, I am Esperanza; and something else, too, but I am not going to go into that now."

I wanted to say something, anything, but I couldn't speak. My tongue was paralyzed and all I managed to produce was a whimpering, doglike sound. I tried to relax with breathing I had learned in a yoga class.

She chuckled, seemingly taken with my antics: It was a reassuring sound that had a soothing effect on me: It radiated so much warmth, such deep confidence, that my body relaxed instantaneously.

"You're a stalker," she proceeded. "And you belong, by all rights, to Florinda. Her tone brooked (*brook-put up with something or somebody unpleasant) no argument, no contradiction. "You're also a somnambulist and a great natural dreamer, and by virtue of your ability, you also belong to me."

One side of me wanted to laugh out loud and tell her that she was raving mad. But another side of me was in complete agreement with her claim.

I asked hesitantly, "By which name do you want me to call you?"

"By which name?" she repeated, gazing at me as if it should have been self-evident. "I'm Zuleica. What do you think this is? A game? We don't play games here."

Taken aback by her vehemence, I could only mumble, "No, I don't think this is a game."

"When I dream, I am Esperanza," she continued, her voice sharp with intensity.

Her face was stern but radiant and open without pity all at the same time.

"When I don't dream, I am Zuleica. But whether I am Zuleica or Esperanza or anything else, it shouldn't matter to you. I am still your dreaming teacher."

All I could do was nod idiotically. Even if I had had something to say, I wouldn't have been able to do so. A cold, clammy sweat of fear ran down my sides. My bowels were loose and my bladder about to burst. I wanted to go to the bathroom and relieve myself and puke.

I finally couldn't hold it any longer. It was a matter of disgracing myself right there or running to the outhouse. I had enough energy to opt for the latter.

Zuleica's laughter was the laughter of a young girl: It followed me all the way to the outhouse.

When I returned to the clearing, she urged me to sit beside her on the nearby bench. I automatically obeyed her and sat down heavily on the edge; nervously putting my hands over my closed knees.

There was an undeniable gleam of hardness but also of kindness in her eyes. It came to me in a flash, as if I had known it before, that her ruthlessness was, more than anything else, an inner discipline. Her relentless self-control had stamped her whole being with a most appealing elusiveness and secretiveness; not the secretiveness of overt and furtive behavior, but the secretiveness of the mysterious; the unknown. That was the reason I followed her around, whenever I saw her, like a puppy dog.

"You've had two transitions today," Zuleica explained. "One from being normally awake to dreaming-awake and the other from dreaming-awake to being normally awake. The first was smooth and unnoticeable: The second was nightmarish. That's the normal state of affairs. All of us experience those transitions just like that."

I forced a smile. "But I still don't know what I did," I said. "I am not aware of any steps. Things just happen to me, and I find myself in a dream, without knowing how I got there."

There was a glint in her eyes.

"What is ordinarily done," she said, "is to start dreaming by sleeping in a hammock or in some kind of a strapping contraption hanging from a roof beam or a tree. Suspended in that fashion, we don't have any contact with the ground. The ground grounds us: Remember that. In that suspended position, a beginning dreamer can learn how energy shifts from being awake to dreaming and from dreaming a dream to dreaming-awake. All this, as Florinda already told you, is a matter of energy. The moment you have it, off you go. Your problem now is going to be whether you'll be able to save enough energy yourself since the sorcerers won't be able to lend it to you anymore."

Zuleica raised her brows in an exaggerated manner and added, "We'll see. I'll try to remind you, the next time we share one another's dreams."

Seeing the dismay on my face, she laughed with childlike abandon.

"How do we share one another's dreams?" I asked, gazing into her astonishing eyes: They were dark and shiny with beams of light radiating from the pupils.

Instead of answering, Zuleica dropped a few more sticks into the fire. Embers burst and spilled, and the light grew brighter. For an instant she stood still, her eyes fixed on the flames as if she were gathering in the light. She turned sharply and glanced briefly at me, then squatted and wrapped her strong, muscular arms around her shins. Looking into the darkness, listening to the crackling fire, she rocked from side to side.

"How do we share one another's dreams?" I asked again.

Zuleica stopped rocking. She shook her head, then looked up, startled, as if suddenly awakened.

"That's something impossible for me to explain now," she stated. "Dreaming is incomprehensible. One has to feel it, not discuss it. As in the everyday world, before one explains something and analyzes it, one has to experience it."

She spoke slowly and deliberately. She admitted that it was important to explain as one went along. "Yet, explanations sometimes are premature. This is one of those times. One day it will all make sense to you," Zuleica promised, seeing the disappointment in my face.

With a quick, light motion, she rose to her feet and went to stare at the flames, as if her eyes needed to feed on the light. Her shadow, thrown by the fire, grew enormous against the wall and the ceiling of the ramada. Without so much as a nod, she turned with a sweep of her long skirt and disappeared inside the house.

Unable to move, I stood rooted to the spot. I could barely breathe as the clatter of her sandals grew fainter and fainter.

"Don't leave me here!" I yelled in a panic-stricken voice. "There are things I need to know."

Zuleica materialized by the door instantly. "What do you need to know?" she asked in a detached, almost distracted tone.

"I'm sorry," I gabbled, glancing into her shiny eyes. I examined her, almost hypnotized. "I didn't mean to shout," I added apologetically. "I thought you had gone into one of the rooms."

I looked at her beseechingly, hoping she would explain something to me.

She didn't. All she did was ask me again what it was I wanted to know.

"Would you talk to me when I see you again?" I blurted out the first thing that came into my head; afraid she would leave if I didn't keep on talking.

"When I see you again, we won't be in the same world as before," she said. "Who knows what we'll do there?"

"But a while ago," I insisted, "you yourself told me you are my dreaming teacher. Don't leave me in darkness. Explain things to me. The torment I experience is more than I can bear. I am split."

"You are," she admitted casually. "You certainly are split."

She looked at me, her eyes brimming with kindness. "But that's only because you don't let go of your old ways. You're a good dreamer. Somnambulist brains have formidable potential. That is... if you would cultivate your character."

I hardly heard what she said. I tried to put my thoughts in order, but I couldn't. A succession of images of events I didn't quite remember went through my mind with incredible speed. My will exercised no control upon their order or their nature. Those images were transformed into sensations that, however precise, refused to be defined; refused to be formulated into words, or even into thoughts.

Obviously aware of my incapacity, Zuleica's face lit up in an expansive grin.

"We have all helped the nagual Mariano Aureliano to push you into the second attention all along," she said slowly and softly: In there, we find fluency and continuity as we do in the world of everyday life. In both states, the practical is dominant. We act efficiently in both states. What we can't do in the second attention, however, is to break what we experience into pieces so we can handle it, so we can feel secure, so we can understand it."

While she talked, I was thinking to myself, 'She's wasting her time telling me all this. Doesn't she know that I am too stupid to understand her explanations?'

But she continued to speak, smiling broadly, obviously knowing that for me to admit that I was not too bright meant that I had changed somehow: Otherwise, I would never admit such a notion, even to myself.

"In the second attention," she continued, "or as I prefer to call it, when dreaming-awake, one has to believe that the dream is as real as the everyday world. In other words, one has to acquiesce. For sorcerers, all worldly or otherworldly pursuits are ruled by irreproachable acts, and in back of all irreproachable acts lies acquiescence. And acquiescence is not acceptance. Acquiescence involves a dynamic element: It involves action."

Her voice was very soft, and there was a feverish gleam in her eyes as she finished.

"The moment one begins dreaming-awake, a world of enticing, unexplored possibilities opens up; a world where the ultimate audacity becomes a reality; where the unexpected is expected. That's the time when man's definitive adventure begins. The world becomes limitless with possibilities and wonder."

Zuleica was silent for a long time: She seemed to be debating what else to say.

"With the help of the nagual Mariano Aureliano, you once even saw the glow of the surem," she began, and her soft voice, turning wistful, became softer still: "The surem are magical creatures that exist only in Indian legends; beings that sorcerers can see only while dreaming-awake at the deepest level. The surem are beings from another world: They glow like phosphorescent human beings."

She wished me good night, turned, and disappeared inside the house. For a second I stood numbed, then I dashed after her. Before I reached the threshold I heard Florinda behind me say, "Don't follow her!"

Florinda's presence was so unexpected that I had to lean against the wall, and wait for my heartbeat to return to normal.

"Come and keep me company," Florinda said. She was sitting on the bench, feeding the fire. The elusive light in her eyes, and the ghostly whiteness of her hair was more like a memory than a vision. I stretched out on the bench beside her, and, as if it were the most natural thing to do, I placed my head in her lap.

"Never follow Zuleica, or any one of us for that matter, unless you're asked to do so," Florinda said, combing her fingers through my hair: "As you know now, Zuleica isn't what she appears to be. She's always more, much more than that. Never try to figure her out, because when you think you have covered all the possibilities, she'll flatten you out by being more than you can imagine in your wildest fantasies."

"I know," I sighed contentedly.

I could feel the tension draining from my face. I could feel it leaving my body.

"Zuleica is a surem from the Bacatete Mountains," I said with absolute conviction. "I've known about these creatures all along."

Seeing the astonishment in Florinda's face, I went on daringly, "Zuleica wasn't born like an ordinary human being. She was established. She's sorcery itself."

"No," Florinda contradicted me emphatically. "Zuleica was born. Esperanza wasn't."

She smiled down into my face and added, "This should be a worthy riddle for you."

"I think I understand," I murmured, "but I am too insensitive and can't formulate what I understand."

"You're doing fine," she chuckled softly. "Being as insensitive as you normally are, you must wait until you are really, really awake, 100 percent in order to understand. Now you are only 50 percent awake. The trick is to remain in heightened awareness. In heightened awareness, nothing is impossible to comprehend for us."

Feeling that I was about to interrupt her, she covered my lips with her hand and added, "Don't think about it now. Always remember that you're compulsive, even in heightened awareness, and your thinking is not thorough."

I heard someone moving in the shadows behind the bushes. "Who is there?" I asked, sitting up.

I looked all around me but couldn't see anyone. Women's laughter echoed across the yard.

"You can't see them," Florinda said sleepily.

"And why are they hiding from me?" I asked.

Florinda smiled. "They are not hiding from you," she explained. "It's just that you can't see them without the nagual Mariano Aureliano's help."

I didn't know what to say to that. On one level, it made perfect sense, yet I found myself shaking my head. "Can you help me see them?"

Florinda nodded. "But your eyes are tired: They are tired from seeing too much. You need to sleep."

Purposefully I kept my eyes wide open; afraid to miss whoever was going to come out of the bushes the moment my attention slackened. I stared at the leaves and the shadows, no longer knowing which was which, until I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

## Chapter 18

The caretaker was dozing on his favorite bench in the shade of the zapote tree. That's all he had been doing for the past two days. He no longer swept the patios or raked the leaves outside but instead sat for hours on that bench, dozing or staring into the distance, as if he had a secret understanding with something that only he could see.

Everything had changed in the house. 'Did I do wrong to come to see them?' I asked myself incessantly. I felt, as usual, guilty and defensive. All I did was to sleep uninterrupted for hours on end. When awake, however, I was disturbingly aware that nothing was the same. Aimlessly, I wandered about the house, but it was to no avail. Something seemed to have fled from the house.

The caretaker's long and loud sigh intruded on my thoughts. Unable to contain my anxiety any longer, I pushed my book aside, rose to my feet, and covered the short distance between us.

"Won't you rake and burn some leaves today?" I asked.

He looked up, startled, but did not answer. He was wearing sunglasses. I couldn't see the expression in his eyes through the dark lenses. I didn't know whether to stay or to leave or to wait for his reply. Afraid he might doze off again, I asked in a loud, impatient tone, "Is there a reason why you aren't raking and burning leaves any longer?"

He parried my question with one of his own, "Have you seen or heard a leaf fall for the past two days?"

His eyes seemed to drill through me as he lifted his glasses.

It was the seriousness of his tone and demeanor rather than his statement which I found ridiculous; that compelled me to answer. "No," I said.

He beckoned to me to sit beside him on the bench. Leaning close to me, he whispered in my ear, "These trees know exactly when to let go of their leaves."

He glanced all around him, as if he were afraid we might be overheard, then added in that same confidential whisper, "And now the trees know that there's no need for their leaves to fall."

"Leaves wilt and fall, regardless of anything," I pronounced pompously. "It's a law of nature."

"These trees are utterly capricious," he maintained stubbornly. "They have a mind of their own. They don't follow the laws of nature."

"What has prompted the trees not to drop any leaves?" I asked, trying to keep an earnest expression.

"That's a good question," he mused, rubbing his chin thoughtfully: "I'm afraid I don't know the answer yet. The trees haven't told me."

He smiled at me inanely and added, "I've already told you, these trees are temperamental."

Before I had a chance to retort, he asked, out of the blue, "Did you make yourself your lunch?"

His abrupt change of subject took me by surprise.

"I did," I admitted, then hesitated for a moment. An almost defiant mood took hold of me. "I don't care all that much about food. I'm quite used to eating the same food day in and day out. If it weren't for the fact that I get pimples, I would live on chocolates and nuts."

Throwing all caution to the winds, I began to complain. I told the caretaker that I wished the women would talk to me. "I would appreciate if they'd let me know what is going on. Anxiety is taking it's toll on me."

After I had said all I wanted to say, I felt much better; much relieved.

"Is it true that they are leaving forever?" I asked.

"They have already left forever," the caretaker said. Seeing my noncomprehending expression, he added, "But you knew that, didn't you? You're just making conversation with me, aren't you?"

Before I had a chance to recover from my shock, he asked me in a genuinely puzzled tone, "Why should this be shocking to you?"

He paused for a moment, as if to give me time to think, then answered the question himself. "Ah, I've got it! You are furious because they took Isidoro Baltazar with them." He patted me repeatedly on my back, as though to emphasize each word. His gaze told me that he didn't care if I gave in to either anger or tears. To know that I had no audience gave me an instantaneous sense of equanimity.

"I didn't know that," I murmured. "I swear, I didn't know it."

I stared at him in mute despair. I felt all the blood drain from my face. My knees ached. My chest was so tight I couldn't breathe. Knowing that I was about to faint, I held on to the bench with both hands.

I heard the caretaker's voice like a distant sound. "No one knows if he'll ever be back. Not even I know that." Leaning toward me, he added, "My personal opinion is that he has gone with them temporarily, but he'll come back; if not right away, some day. That's my opinion."

I searched his eyes, wondering whether he was mocking me. His cheerful face radiated sheer goodwill and honesty, and his eyes were as guileless as a child's.

"However, when he returns, he won't be Isidoro Baltazar anymore," the caretaker warned me. "The Isidoro Baltazar you knew, think is already gone. And do you know what's the saddest part?" He paused, then answered his own question. "You took him so for granted that you didn't even thank him for all his care; his help, his affection for you. Our great tragedy is to be buffoons, oblivious to anything else, except our buffoonery."

I was too devastated to say a word.

Abruptly, the caretaker rose to his feet. Without another word, as if he were too embarrassed to stay with me, he walked toward the path that led to the other house.

"You can't just leave me here by myself," I shouted after him.

He turned, waved at me, and then began to laugh. It was a loud, joyful sound that raised echoes across the chaparral. He waved once again, then vanished, as if the bushes had swallowed him.

Incapable of following him, I waited for him to return or to appear suddenly in front of me and scare me half to death. I was almost bracing myself for a fright I intuited in my body more than I anticipated in my mind.

As it had happened before, I didn't see or hear Esperanza approach, but I sensed her presence. I turned around and there she was, sitting on the bench under the zapote tree. I became elated just watching her.

"I thought I was never going to see you again," I sighed. "I had nearly resigned myself to it. I thought you were gone."

"Goodness gracious!" she chided me in mock consternation.

"Are you really Zuleica?" I blurted out.

"Not a chance," she retorted. "I am Esperanza. What are you doing? Driving yourself nuts with questions no one can answer?"

Never in my life have I been so close to a total breakdown as at that moment. I felt that my mind was not going to take in all that pressure. I was going to be ripped apart by my anguish and turmoil.

"Brace yourself, girl," Esperanza said harshly. "The worst is yet to come. But we can't spare you. To stop the pressure now, because you're about to go bonkers, is unthinkable to sorcerers. It's your challenge to be tested today. You either live or you die; and I don't mean this metaphorically."

"I'll never see Isidoro Baltazar?" I asked, hardly able to speak through my tears.

"I can't lie to you to spare your feelings. No, he'll never be back. Isidoro Baltazar was only a moment of sorcery. A dream that passed after being dreamed. Isidoro Baltazar, as the dream, is gone already."

A small, almost wistful smile curved her lips. "What I don't know yet," she continued, "is if the man, the new nagual, is gone forever as well. You understand, of course, that even if he returns, he won't be Isidoro Baltazar. He'll be someone else you have to meet all over again."

"Would he be unknown to me?" I asked, not quite sure whether I wanted to know.

"I don't know, my child," she said with the weariness of uncertainty. "I simply don't know. I am a dream myself; and so is the new nagual. Dreams like us are impermanent, for it is our impermanence that allows us to exist. Nothing holds us, except the dream."

Blinded by my tears, I could barely see her.

"To ease your pain, sink deeper into yourself," she said softly: "Sit up with your knees raised and grab your ankles with crossed arms, right ankle with the left hand. Put your head on your knees and let the sadness go. Let the earth soothe your pain. Let the earth's healing force come to you."

I sat on the ground in exactly the manner she prescribed. Within moments my sadness vanished. A deep bodily sensation of well-being replaced my anguish. I lost sight of myself, in any context except the context of the moment at hand. Without my subjective memory I had no pain.

Esperanza patted the place beside her on the bench. As soon as I was seated, she took my hand in hers and rubbed it for an instant as if she were massaging it, then said that it was quite a fleshy hand for being so bony. She turned the palm up and studied it intently. She didn't say a word, but gently curled my hand into a fist.

We sat in silence for a long time. It was late afternoon. Nothing could be heard but the rhythmic sound of leaves moved by the breeze.

As I stared at her, a most uncanny certainty possessed me: I knew that Esperanza and I had already talked at length about my coming to the witches' house and the sorcerers' departure.

"What is it with me, Esperanza?" I asked. "Am I dreaming?"

"Well," she began slowly. There was a gleam in her eyes as she proposed I test the dream. "Sit on the ground and test it."

I did. All I felt was the coldness of the rock I had sat on. No feeling was sent back to me.

"I'm not dreaming," I asserted. "Then why do I feel that we've already talked?"

I searched her face to see if I could find a clue to my dilemma stamped on her features.

"This is the first time I've seen you since my arrival, but I feel we've been together every day," I mumbled, more to myself than to be heard. "It's been seven days now."

"It's been much longer. But you must resolve this puzzle yourself, with minimal help," Esperanza said.

I nodded in agreement. There was so much I wanted to ask, but I knew and accepted that it would be useless to talk. I knew without knowing how I knew it that we had already covered all my questions. I was saturated with answers.

Esperanza regarded me thoughtfully, as if she doubted my realization. Then, very slowly, enunciating her words carefully, she said, "I want you to know that the awareness you have gotten here, no matter how deep and permanent it may seem to you, is only temporary. You'll get back to your nonsense soon enough. That's our women's fate; to be especially difficult."

"I think you are wrong," I protested. "You don't know me at all."

"It's precisely because I know you that I'm saying this." She paused for a moment, and when she spoke again her voice was harsh and serious. "Women are very cagey. Remember, being reared to be a servant makes you extremely shifty and clever."

Her explosive, resonant laughter erased any desire I might have had to protest.

"The best thing you can do is not to say anything," she declared.

Taking my hand, she pulled me up and suggested that we go to the small house for a long, much-needed talk.

We didn't go inside the house but sat down on a bench by the front door. Silently, we just sat there for nearly an hour. Then Esperanza turned toward me: She didn't seem to see me. In fact, I wondered if she had forgotten that I had come with her and was sitting beside her. Without acknowledging my presence, she stood up and moved a few steps away from me and gazed at the other house, nestled among a clump of trees. It was quite a while before she said, "I'm going far."

I couldn't tell whether it was hope, excitement, or apprehension that gave me a strangely sickening sensation in the pit of my stomach. I knew that she wasn't referring to distance in terms of miles but in terms of other worlds.

"I don't care how far we're going," I said with a bravado I was far from feeling. I desperately wished to know, but didn't dare ask, what would be at the end of our journey.

Esperanza smiled and opened her arms wide as if to embrace the setting sun. The sky in the west was a fiery red; the distant mountains, a shadowy purple. A light breeze swept through the trees: The leaves shimmered and rustled.

A silent hour went by, and then all was still. The spell of twilight immobilized everything around us. Every sound and movement ceased: The contours of bushes, trees, and hills were so precisely defined, they appeared to have been etched against the sky.

I moved closer to Esperanza as the shadows crawled up on us and blackened the sky. The sight of the other silent house, with it's lights twinkling like glowworms in the dark, aroused some deeply buried emotion within me. The emotion wasn't connected to any particular feeling of the moment, but to a vaguely sad, nostalgic memory buried in childhood.

I must have been totally engrossed in my reveries: Suddenly I found, myself walking alongside Esperanza. My tiredness, my former anxiety, had all vanished. Filled with an overwhelming sense of vigor, I walked in a kind of ecstasy, a silent happiness, my feet drawn forward but not by my volition alone.

The path we were walking on ended abruptly. The ground rose and trees stretched high above us. Huge boulders were scattered here and there. From somewhere in the distance came the sound of running water, like a soft, comforting chant. Sighing with sudden fatigue, I leaned against one of the boulders and wished that this was the end of our journey.

"We haven't reached our destination yet!" Esperanza shouted. She was already halfway up some rocks and she moved with the agility of a goat. She didn't wait for me. She didn't even look back to see if I was following her. My short rest had robbed me of my last strength. Gasping for breath, I slipped repeatedly on the stones as I scrambled after her.

Halfway up, the trail continued around a huge boulder. The dry and brittle vegetation gave way to luscious growth, dark in the early evening light. The air, too, was no longer the same: It was humid and, for me, easier to breathe. Esperanza moved unerringly along a narrow path: It was full of shadows, full of silences and rustlings. She knew each of the night's mysterious sounds. She identified each of it's pulsating croaks, cries, calls, and hisses.

The path came to an end in front of some steps cut into the rock. The steps led to a concealed mound of stones.

"Pick one," she ordered, "and put it in your pocket."

Worn as smooth as pebbles in a brook, the stones all looked the same at first. Upon closer examination, however, I discovered that they were all different. Some were so smooth and shiny they appeared to have been polished in a tumbler.

It took me quite some time until I found one I liked. It was heavy, yet it fit easily in my palm. It's light brown, bulky mass was wedge-shaped and crisscrossed by almost translucent milky veins.

Startled by a noise, I almost dropped the stone. "Someone is following us," I whispered.

"Nobody is following us!" Esperanza exclaimed, with a look halfway between amusement and incredulity. Seeing me draw back behind a tree, she giggled softly and said that it was probably a toad jumping through the underbrush.

I wanted to tell her that toads don't jump in the darkness, but I wasn't sure it was true. It surprised me that I hadn't just said it with the most absolute certainty; as was my habit.

"Something is wrong with me, Esperanza," I said in an alarmed tone of voice. "I'm not myself."

"There is nothing wrong with you, dear," she assured me absentmindedly. "In fact, you are more yourself than ever."

"I feel strange..." My voice trailed off. I had begun to see a pattern in what had been happening to me since the first time I arrived at the witches' house.

"It's very hard to teach something so unsubstantial as dreaming," Esperanza said. "Especially to women. We women are extremely coy and clever: After all, we've been slaves all our lives. We women know how to precisely manipulate things when we don't want anything to upset what we have worked so hard to obtain: our status quo."

"Do you mean that men don't?"

"They certainly do, but they are more overt. Women fight underhandedly. Their preferred fighting technique is the slave's maneuver: to turn the mind off. They hear without paying attention. They look without seeing."

She added that to instruct women was an accomplishment worthy of praise.

"We like the openness of your fighting," she went on. "There is high hope for you. What we fear the most is the agreeable woman who doesn't mind the new, and does everything you ask her to do; then turns around and denounces you as soon as she gets tired or bored with the newness."

"I think I am beginning to understand," I mused uncertainly.

"Of course you have begun to understand!" Her assertion was so comically triumphant, I had to laugh: "You have even begun to understand what intent is."

"You mean I am beginning to be a sorceress?" I asked. My whole body shook as I tried to suppress a fit of giggles.

"Since you arrived here, you've been dreaming-awake on and off," Esperanza stated. "That's why you fall asleep so much."

There was no mockery; not even a trace of condescension in her smiling face.

We walked in silence for a while, and then she said that the difference between a sorcerer and an ordinary person was that the sorcerer could enter into a state of dreaming-awake at will. She tapped my arm repeatedly, as if to emphasize her point, and in a confidential tone added, "And you are dreaming-awake because, in order to help you hone your energy, we have created a bubble around you since the first night you arrived."

Esperanza went on to say that from the moment they first met me, they had nicknamed me Fosforito, little match. "You burn too fast and uselessly."

She gestured for me to remain quiet and added that I didn't know how to focus my energy.

"Your energy is deployed to protect and uphold the idea of yourself."

Again she motioned me to be silent, said that what we think is our personal self is, in actuality, only an idea: She claimed that the bulk of our energy is consumed in defending that idea.

Esperanza's eyebrows lifted a little, an elated grin spreading across her face.

Esperanza explained, "To reach a point of detachment, where the self is just an idea that can be changed at will, is a true act of sorcery; and the most difficult of all. When the idea of the self retreats, sorcerers have the energy to align themselves with intent and be more than what we believe is normal. Women, because they have a womb, can focus their attention with great facility on something outside their dreams while dreaming," she explained: "That's precisely what you have been doing all along, unbeknownst to yourself. That object becomes a bridge that connects you to intent."

"And what object do I use?"

There was a flicker of impatience in her eyes. Then she said that it was usually a window or a light or even the bed.

"You're so good at it that it is second nature with you," she assured me: "That's why you have nightmares. I told you all this when you were in a deep state of dreaming-awake, and you understood: As long as you refuse to focus your attention on any object prior to sleeping, you don't have bad dreams."

"You are cured, aren't you?" she asked.

My initial reaction, of course, was to contradict her. However, upon a moment's thought, I could only agree with her: After my meeting with them in Sonora, I had been fairly free from nightmares.

"You'll never be really free from them as long as you persist in being yourself," she pronounced: "What you should do, of course, is to exploit your dreaming talents deliberately and intelligently. That's why you're here. And the first lesson is that a woman must, through her womb, focus her attention on an object. Not an object from the dream itself, but an independent one, one from the world prior to the dream. Yet, it isn't the object that matters," she hastened to point out: "What's important is the deliberate act of focusing on it, at will, prior to the dream and while continuing the dream."

She warned me that although it sounded simple enough, it was a formidable task that might take me years to accomplish.

"What normally happens is that one awakens the instant one focuses one's attention on the outside object," she said.

"What does it mean to use the womb?" I interjected. "And how is it done?"

"You are a woman," Esperanza said softly. "You know how to feel with your womb."

I wanted to contradict her, to explain that I didn't know anything. Before I could do so, however, she went on to explain that in a woman, feelings originate in the womb.

"In men," she claimed, "feelings originate in the brain."

Esperanza poked me in the stomach and added, "Think about it. A woman is heartless except with her brood because her feelings are coming from her womb. In order to focus your attention with your womb, get an object and put it on your belly or rub it on your genitalia."

Esperanza laughed uproariously at my look of dismay, then, in between fits of laughter, chided me:

"I wasn't that bad. I could have said that you need to smear the object with your juices, but I didn't. Her tone serious again, she continued, "Once you establish a deep familiarity with the object it will always be there to serve you as a bridge."

We walked in silence for a stretch, and Esperanza was seemingly deep in thought. I was itching to say something, yet knew that I didn't have anything to say. When Esperanza finally spoke, her voice was stern, demanding.

"There is no more time for you to waste," she said: "It's very natural that in our stupidity we screw things up. Sorcerers know this better than anyone else. But sorcerers also know that there are no second chances. You must learn control and discipline because you have no more leeway for mistakes. You screwed up, you know. You didn't even know that Isidoro Baltazar had left."

My ethereal dike that was holding the avalanche of feelings broke down. My memory was restored and sadness overtook me. My sadness became so intense that I didn't even notice I had sat and was sinking into the ground as if it were made out of sponge. Finally, the ground swallowed me. It was not a suffocating, claustrophobic experience because the sensation of sitting on the surface coexisted simultaneously with the awareness of being swallowed by the earth; a dual sensation that made me yell, "I'm dreaming now!"

That loudly spoken announcement triggered something within me: A new landslide of different memories flooded in on top of me. I knew what was wrong with me: I had screwed up and had no energy to dream. Every night since my arrival, I had dreamt the same dream, which I had forgotten about until that very moment. I dreamt that all the women sorcerers came to my room and drilled me in the sorcerers' rationales. They told me, on and on, that dreaming is the secondary function of the womb - the primary being reproduction and whatever is related to it. They told me that dreaming is a natural function in women; a pure corollary of energy. And given enough energy, the body of a woman by itself will awake the womb's secondary functions; and the woman will dream inconceivable dreams.

The dreaming energy needed, however, is like aid to an underdeveloped country: It never arrives. Something in the overall order of our social structures prevents that energy from being free so women can dream.

Were that energy free, the women sorcerers told me, it would simply overthrow the 'civilized' order of things. But women's great tragedy is that their social conscience completely dominates their individual conscience. Women fear being different and don't want to stray too far from the comforts of the known. The social pressures put upon them not to deviate are simply too overpowering. And rather than change, women acquiesce to what has been ordained: 'Women exist to be at the service of man.' Thus, women can never dream sorcery dreams although they have the organic disposition for it.

Womanhood has destroyed women's chances: Whether it be tinted with a religious or a scientific slant, it still brands women with the same seal: Women's main function is to reproduce, and whether they have achieved a degree of political, social, or economic equality is ultimately immaterial.

The women sorcerers told me all this every night. The more I remembered and understood their words, the greater was my sorrow. My grief was no longer for me alone, but for all of us; a race of schizoid beings trapped in a social order that has shackled us to our own incapacities. If we ever break free, it is only momentarily; a short-lived clarity before we plunge willingly or forced back into the darkness.

"Stop this sentimental garbage," I heard a man's voice say. I looked up and saw the caretaker bending over; peering at me.

"How did you get here?" I asked. I was perplexed and a little flustered: "You've been following us?" More than a question, it was accusation.

"Yes, I've been following you in particular," he leered at me.

I searched his face. I didn't believe him. I knew he was poking at me, yet I was neither annoyed nor frightened by the intense glint in his eyes.

"Where is Esperanza?" I asked. She was nowhere in sight. "Where did she...?"

I stammered nervously, unable to get the words out.

"She's around," he said, smiling: "Don't worry. I'm also your teacher. You are in good hands."

Hesitantly, I put my hand in his. Effortlessly, he pulled me up to a flat boulder overlooking a large, oval-shaped pool of water. The pool was fed by a murmuring stream trickling from somewhere in the darkness.

"And now, take off your clothes," he said. "It's time for your cosmic bath!"

"My what?" Certain that he was joking, I began to laugh. But he was serious. He tapped me repeatedly on the arm, just like Esperanza did, and urged me to take off my clothes. Before I knew what he was doing, he had already untied the laces on my sneakers.

"We don't have all that much time," he admonished, then pressed me to get on with it.

The look he gave me was cold, clinical, impersonal: I might have been the toad Esperanza had claimed was jumping around.

The sheer idea of getting into that dark, cold water, infested, no doubt, with all sorts of slimy creatures, was appalling to me. Eager to put an end to that preposterous situation, I sidled down the boulder and stuck my toes into the water.

"I don't feel a thing!" I cried out, shrinking back in horror. "What's going on? This is not water!"

"Don't be childish," the caretaker scolded me. "Of course it's water. You just don't feel it, that's all."

I opened my mouth to let out an imprecation but controlled myself in time. My horror had vanished.

"Why don't I feel the water?" I asked, trying hard to gain time.

I knew that stalling for time was a useless affair because I had no doubt that I was going to end up in the water whether I felt the water or not. However, I had no intention of giving in gracefully.

"Is this waterless water some kind of a purification liquid?" I asked.

After a long silence, charged with menacing possibilities, he said that I might call it a purification liquid.

He emphasized, "However, I should warn you that there isn't a ritual capable of purifying anyone. Purification has to come from within. It's a private and lonely struggle."

"Then why do you want me to get into this water, which is slimy even if I don't feel it?" I said with all the force I could invoke.

His lips twitched as if he were about to laugh, but seemingly reluctant to give in, his face grew grave again, and he said, "I'm going to dive into that pool with you."

And without any further hesitation he completely undressed.

He stood in front of me, barely five feet away, stark naked. In that strange light that was neither day nor night, I could see with utter clarity every inch of his body. He didn't make bashful attempts to cover his nakedness. Quite the opposite; he seemed to be more than proud of his maleness and paraded it in front of me with defiant insolence.

"Hurry up and take off your clothes," he urged me. "We don't have much time."

"I'm not going to do that. It's insane!" I protested.

"You are going to do that. It's a decision you'll make all by yourself." He spoke without vehemence, without anger, yet with quiet determination. "Tonight, in this strange world, you will know that there is only one way to behave: the sorcerers' way."

He stared at me with a curious mixture of compassion and amusement.

With a grin that was meant to reassure me but didn't, the caretaker said that jumping into the pool would jolt me.

It would shift something within me. "This shift will serve you, at a later time, to understand what we are and what we do."

A fleeting smile lit up his face as he hastened to point out that jumping into the water would not give me the energy to dream-awake on my own. He warned me that it would certainly take a long time to save and hone my energy, and that I might never succeed.

"There are no guarantees in the sorcerers' world," he said. Then he conceded that jumping into the pool might shift my attention away from my everyday concerns: the concerns expected of a woman of my age; of my time.

"Is this a sacred pool?" I asked.

His brows shot up in obvious surprise. "It's a sorcerers' pool," he explained, gazing at me steadily.

He must have seen that my decision had been made, for he unfastened the watch around my wrist.

"The pool is neither holy nor evil."

He shrugged his thin shoulders and fastened my watch around his own wrist.

"Now look at your watch," he ordered me. "It's been yours for many years. Feel it on my wrist."

He chuckled as he started to say something and decided against it. "Well, go on, take off your clothes."

"I think I'll just wade in with my clothes on," I mumbled. Although I wasn't prudish, I somehow resisted the idea of standing naked in front of him.

He pointed out that I would need dry clothes when I got out of the water. "I don't want you to catch pneumonia."

A wicked smile dawned in his eyes. "This is real water even though you don't feel it," he said.

Reluctantly, I took off my jeans and shirt.

"Your panties too," he said.

I walked around the grassy edge of the pool, wondering whether I should just dive in and get it over with or whether I should get wet little by little, cupping water in my hands, letting it trickle down my legs, my arms, my stomach, and, last, over my heart, as I remembered old women doing in Venezuela before wading into the sea.

"Here I go!" I cried out, but instead of jumping in I turned to look at the caretaker.

His immobility frightened me. He seemed to have turned into stone, so still and erect did he sit on the boulder. Only his eyes seemed to have life: They shone in a curiously compelling way, without any source of light to account for it. It astounded more than saddened me to see tears trickling down his cheeks. Without knowing why, I, too, began to weep, silently. His tears made their way down, I thought, into my watch on his wrist. I felt the eerie weight if his conviction, and suddenly my fear and my indecision were gone, and I dove into the pool.

The water was not slimy but transparent like silk; and green. I wasn't cold. As the caretaker had claimed, I didn't feel the water. In fact, I didn't feel anything: It was as if I were a disembodied awareness swimming in the center of a pool of water that did feel liquid but not wet. I noticed that light emanated from the depths of the water. I jumped up like a fish to gather impetus, then dove in search if the light.

I came up for air. "How deep is this pool?"

"As deep as the center of the earth." Esperanza's voice was clear and loud; it carried such certainty that, just to be myself, I wanted to contradict her. But there was something uneasy in the air that stopped me; some unnatural stillness, some tension that was suddenly broken by a crisp, rustling sound all around us; a sort of warning whisper; a rushing, ominous warning that something was odd.

Standing on the exact same spot where the caretaker had stood was Esperanza. She was stark naked.

"Where is the caretaker?" I shouted in a panic-stricken voice.

"I am the caretaker," she said.

Convinced that those two were playing some horrendous trick on me, I propelled myself, with one great sidestroke, toward the overhanging boulder Esperanza was standing on.

"What's going on?" I demanded to know in a voice that was but a whisper, for I could hardly breathe.

Gesturing for me to remain still, she moved toward me with that boneless, uncoiling movement so characteristic of her. She craned her neck to look at me, then stepped closer and showed me my watch strapped around her wrist.

"I am the caretaker," she repeated.

I nodded automatically. But then, right there in front of me, instead of Esperanza, was the caretaker, naked as he had been before, pointing at my watch on his wrist. I didn't look at the watch: All my attention was focused on his sexual organs.

I reached out to touch him, to see if perhaps he was a hermaphrodite. He wasn't. With my hand still probing, I felt, more than saw, his body fold into itself, and I was touching a woman's vagina. I parted the lips to make sure the penis was not hidden somewhere in there.

"Esperanza..." My voice faded as something clamped around my neck. I was conscious of the water parting as something pulled me into the depths of the pool. I felt cold. It wasn't a physical coldness but rather the awareness of the absence of warmth, of light, of sound; the absence of any human feeling in that world where that pool existed.

I awoke to the faint sound of snoring: Zuleica was sleeping beside me on a straw mat laid on the ground. She looked as beautiful as ever, young and strong, yet vulnerable—unlike the other women sorcerers—in spite of the harmony and power she exuded.

I watched her for a moment then sat up as all the events of the night came flooding into my mind. I wanted to shake her awake and demand that she tell me what had happened, when I noticed that we were not by the pool up in the hills but in the exact same spot where we had been sitting earlier, by the front door of the real witches' house.

Wondering whether it had all been a dream, I gently shook her by the shoulder.

"Ah, you finally woke up," she murmured sleepily.

"What happened?" I asked. "You have to tell me everything."

"Everything?" she repeated, yawning noisily.

"Everything that happened at the pool," I snapped impatiently.

Again she yawned, and then she giggled. Studying my watch, which was on her wrist, she said that something in me had shifted more than she had anticipated. "The sorcerers' world has a natural barrier that dissuades timid souls," she explained. "Sorcerers need tremendous strength to handle it. You see, it's populated by monsters, flying dragons, and demonic beings, which, of course, are nothing but impersonal energy. We, driven by our fears, make that impersonal energy into hellish creatures."

"But what about Esperanza and the caretaker?" I interrupted her. "I dreamt that both were really you."

"They are," she said, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. "I've just told you. You shifted deeper than I anticipated and entered into what dreamers call dreaming in worlds other than this world. You and I were dreaming in a different world. That's why you didn't feel the water. That's the world where the nagual Elias found all his inventions. In that world, I can be either a man or a woman. And just like the nagual Elias brought his inventions to this world, I bring either Esperanza or the caretaker. Or rather, my impersonal energy does that."

I couldn't put my thoughts or feelings into words. An incredible urge to run away screaming took hold of me, but I couldn't put it into action. My motor control was no longer a volitional matter with me. Trying to rise and scream, I collapsed on the ground.

Zuleica wasn't in the least concerned or moved by my condition. She went on talking as if she hadn't seen my knees give, as if I weren't lying sprawled on the ground like a rag doll. "You're a good dreamer. After all, you've been dreaming with monsters all your life. Now it's time you acquired the energy to dream like sorcerers do, to dream about impersonal energy."

I wanted to interrupt her, to tell her that there was nothing impersonal about my dream of Esperanza and the caretaker; that, in fact, it was worse than the monsters of my nightmares, but I couldn't speak.

"Tonight, your watch brought you back from the deepest dream you have ever had," Zuleica continued, indifferent to the weird sounds emerging from my throat. "And you even have a rock to prove it."

She came to where I lay openmouthed, staring at her. She felt in my pocket. She was right. There it was; the rock I had picked from the pile of stones.

## Chapter 19

A loud, shattering noise woke me. I sat up in my hammock, peering into the darkness, and saw that the wooden panels covering the windows were down. A cold, sucking wind swirled up around me. Leaves rustled across the patio outside my room. The rustling grew, then abruptly faded to a gentle swishing sound. A dim brightness seeped into the room. Like mist, it clung to the bare walls. For a moment, as if I were conjuring him up, Isidoro Baltazar stood at the foot of my hammock.

"Nagual!" I cried out.

He looked real, yet there was something undefined about him like an image seen in water. I cleared my throat to speak, but only a faint croak escaped my lips as the image dissolved in the mist. Then the mist moved, restless and abrupt like the wind outside.

Too tense to sleep, I sat wrapped in my blanket, pondering whether I had done the right thing to come to the witches' house looking for the nagual Isidoro Baltazar: I had not known anywhere else to go. I had patiently waited for three months, then my anxiety had become so acute that it finally prompted me to act. One morning - seven days ago - I had driven nonstop to the witches' house. And there had been no question in my mind then about whether I had proceeded correctly - not even after I had to climb over the wall at the back of the house and let myself in through an unlocked window. However, after seven days of waiting, my certainty had begun to falter.

I jumped out of my hammock onto the tiled floor, landing hard on the heels of my bare feet. Shaking myself that way had always helped me dispel my uncertainties. It didn't work this time, and I lay down again in my hammock.

If there is one thing I should have learned in the three years I had spent in the sorcerers' world, it is that sorcerers' decisions are final; and my decision had been to live and die in the sorcerers' world. Now it was time for me to prove it.

An unearthly sounding laughter startled me out of my reveries. Eerily it reverberated throughout the house, then all was silent again. I waited tensely, but there was no other sound except that of dry leaves being pushed by the wind on the patio. The leaves sounded like a faint, raspy whisper.

Listening to that sound not only lulled me to sleep but pulled me into the same dream I had been dreaming for the past seven nights.

*I am standing in the Sonoran desert. It is noon. The sun, a silvery disk so brilliant as to be almost invisible, has come to a halt in the middle of the sky. There is not a single sound, not a movement around. The tall saguaros, with their prickly arms reaching toward that immobile sun, stand like sentries guarding the silence and the stillness.*

*The wind, as if it has followed me through the dream, begins to blow with tremendous force. It whistles between the branches of the mesquite trees and shakes them with systematic fury. Red dust devils well up in powdery swirls all around me. A flock of crows scatter like dots through the air then fall to the ground a bit farther away, softly, like bits of black veil.*

*As abruptly as it has begun, the wind dies down. I head toward the hills in the distance. It seems I walk for hours before I see a huge, dark shadow on the ground. I look up. A gigantic bird hangs in the air with outstretched wings, motionless, as though it were nailed to the sky. It is only when I gaze again at it's dark shadow on the ground that I know that the bird is moving. Slowly, imperceptibly, it's shadow glides ahead of me.*

*Driven by some inexplicable urge, I try to catch up with the shadow; but regardless of how fast I run, the shadow moves farther and farther away from me. Dizzy with exhaustion, I stumble over my own feet and fall flat on the ground.*

*As I rise to dust off my clothes, I discover the bird perched on a nearby boulder. It's head is slightly turned toward me, as though beckoning me. Cautiously, I approach it. It is enormous and tawny, with feathers that glisten like burnished copper. It's amber-colored eyes are hard and implacable and as final as death itself.*

*I step back as the bird opens it's wide wings and takes off. It flies high up until it is only a dot in the sky. Yet it's shadow on the ground is a straight dark line that stretches into infinity and holds together the desert and the sky.*

*Confident that if I summon the wind I will catch up with the bird, I invoke an incantation. But there is no force; no power in my chant. My voice breaks into a thousand whispers that are quickly absorbed by the silence. The desert regains it's eerie calm. It begins to crumble at* *the edges, then slowly fades all around me...*

Gradually I became conscious of my body lying in the hammock. I discerned, through a shifting haze, the book-lined walls of the room. Then I was fully awake as the realization hit me, as it had hit me every time during the past week, that this had not been an ordinary dream; and that I knew what it meant.

The nagual Mariano Aureliano had once told me that sorcerers, when they talk among themselves, speak of sorcery as a bird: They call it the bird of freedom. They say that the bird of freedom only flies in a straight line and never comes around twice. They also say that it is the nagual who lures the bird of freedom. It is he who entices the bird to shed it's shadow on the warrior's path. Without that shadow, there is no direction.

The meaning of my dream was that I had lost the bird of freedom. I had lost the nagual and, without him, all hope and purpose. What weighed the most on my heart was that the bird of free-flew away so fast it didn't give me time to thank them properly, didn't give me time to express my endless admiration.

I had assured the sorcerers all along that I never took their world or their persons for granted, but I did; in particular Isidoro Baltazar's. He surely was going to be with me forever, I thought. Suddenly, they were gone, all of them, like puffs of air, like shooting stars; and they took Isidoro Baltazar with them.

I had sat for weeks on end in my room, asking myself the same question: How can it be possible that they vanished like that? A meaningless, superfluous question, considering what I had experienced and witnessed in their world. All it revealed was my true nature: meek and doubting. For the sorcerers had told me for years that their ultimate purpose was to burn; to disappear, swallowed by the force of awareness. The old nagual and his party of sorcerers were ready, but I didn't know it. They had been preparing themselves nearly all their lives for the ultimate audacity: to dream-awake that they sneak past death - as we ordinarily know death to be - and cross over into the unknown; enhancing and without breaking the unity of their total energy.

My regret was most intense upon recalling how my usual doubting self would emerge when I least expected it. It was not that I didn't believe their stupendous, otherworldly, yet so practical aim and purpose. Rather, I would explain them away; integrate them; make them fit into the everyday world of common sense - not quite, perhaps, but certainly coexisting with what was normal and familiar to me.

The sorcerers certainly tried to prepare me to witness their definitive journey; that they would one day vanish was something I was almost aware of. But nothing could have prepared me for the anguish and despair that followed. I sank into a well of sadness from which I knew I would never come out. That part was for me alone to deal with.

Afraid I would only give in to more despair if I stayed a moment longer in my hammock, I got up and made breakfast. Or rather, I warmed up last night's leftovers: tortillas, rice, and beans - my standard meal of the last seven days, except that for lunch I would add a can of Norwegian sardines. I had found the sardines at a grocery store in the nearest town. I had bought all the cans they had. The beans were also canned.

I washed the dishes and mopped the floor. Then, with broom in hand, I went from room to room looking for some new dirt, a spider web in some forgotten corner. From the day I had arrived, I had done nothing else but scrub floors, wash windows and walls, sweep patios and corridors. Cleaning tasks had always distracted me from my problems; had always given me solace. Not this time. Regardless of how eagerly I went about my chores, I couldn't still the anguish; the aching void within me.

A quick rustling of leaves interrupted my cleaning chores. I went outside to look. There was a strong wind blowing through the trees. It's force startled me. I was ready to close the windows when the wind abruptly died out. A profound melancholy settled over the yard, over the bushes and trees, over the flower and vegetable patches. Even the bright purple bougainvillea hanging over the wall added to the sadness.

I walked over to the Spanish colonial-motif fountain, built in the middle of the yard, and knelt on the wide stone ledge. Absent-mindedly, I picked out the leaves and the blossoms that had fallen in the water. Then, bending over, I searched for my image on the smooth surface. Next to my face appeared the very beautiful, stark, and angular face of Florinda.

Dumbfounded, I watched her reflection, mesmerized by her large, dark, luminous eyes, which contrasted dazzlingly with her braided white hair. Slowly, she smiled. I smiled back.

"I didn't hear you come," I whispered, afraid that her image might vanish; afraid that she might be only a dream.

She let her hand rest on my shoulder, then sat beside me on the stone ledge.

"I'm going to be with you only for a moment," she said. "I'll come back later, though."

I turned around and poured out all the anguish and despair that had accumulated in me.

Florinda stared at me. Her face reflected an immeasurable sadness. There were sudden tears in her eyes; tears that were gone as fast as they had come.

"Where is Isidoro Baltazar?" I asked her.

I averted my face and gave free rein to my pent-up tears. It wasn't self-pity or even sorrow that made me weep, but a deep sense of failure; of guilt and loss. It was drowning me. Florinda had certainly warned me in the past about such feelings.

"Tears are meaningless for sorcerers," she said in her deep, husky voice: "When you joined the sorcerers' world you were made to understand that the designs of fate, no matter what they are, are merely challenges that a sorcerer must face without resentment or self-pity."

She paused for a moment, then in her familiar, relentless manner she repeated what she had said to me on previous occasions.

"Isidoro Baltazar is no longer a man but a nagual. He may have accompanied the old nagual; in which case he'll never return. But then, he may not have."

"But why did he..." My voice died away before I had asked the question.

"I really don't know at this time," Florinda said, raising her hand to forestall my protest: "It is your challenge to rise above this; and as you know, challenges are not discussed or resented. Challenges are actively met. Sorcerers either succeed in meeting their challenges, or they fail at it. And it doesn't really matter which, as long as they are in command."

Irked by the prosaicness of her feelings and attitudes, I said resentfully, "How do you expect me to be in command when the sadness is killing me? Isidoro Baltazar is gone forever."

She retorted sternly, "Why don't you heed my suggestion; and behave impeccably regardless of your feelings," Her temper was as quick as her brilliant smile.

"How can I possibly do that? I know that if the nagual is gone the game is over."

"You don't need the nagual to be an impeccable sorceress," she remarked: "Your impeccability should lead you to him even if he's no longer in the world. To live impeccably within your circumstances is your challenge. Whether you see Isidoro Baltazar tomorrow, in a year, or at the end of your life should make no difference to you."

Florinda turned her back to me. She was silent for a long time. When she faced me again, her face was calm and oddly bland, like a mask, as though she were making a great effort to control her emotions. There was something so sad about her eyes it made me forget my own anguish.

"Let me tell you a story, young woman," she said in an unusually harsh voice, as if her tone was meant to cancel the pain in her eyes: "I didn't go with the nagual Mariano Aureliano and his party; and neither did Zuleica. Do you know why?"

Numb with anticipation and fear, I stared at her, openmouthed. "No, Florinda. I don't," I finally managed to say.

Her voice now low and soft, she said, "We are here because we don't belong to that party of sorcerers. We do, but then we don't really. Our feelings are with another nagual, the nagual Julian, our teacher. The nagual Mariano Aureliano is our cohort, and the nagual Isidoro Baltazar, our pupil. Like yourself, we've been left behind. You, because you were not ready to go with them. We, because we need more energy to take a greater jump; and join perhaps another band of warriors; a much older band. The nagual Julian's."

I could feel Florinda's aloneness and solitude like a fine mist settling all around me. I barely dared to breathe lest she stop talking.

At great length she told me about her teacher, the nagual Julian; famous by all accounts. Her descriptions of him were compressed, yet so evocative I could see him before my very eyes: the most dashing being that ever lived. Funny, sharp-witted, and fast-thinking; an incorrigible prankster. A storyteller. A magician who handled perception as a master baker handles dough, kneading it into any shape or form without ever losing sight of it. To be with the nagual Julian, Florinda assured me, was something unforgettable. She confessed that she loved him beyond words, beyond feelings. And so did Zuleica.

Florinda was silent for a long time, her gaze fixed on the distant mountains, as if drawing strength from those sharp-edged peaks.

When she spoke again her voice was a barely audible whisper. "The world of sorcerers is a world of solitariness, yet in it, love is forever. Like my love for the nagual Julian. We move in the world of sorcerers all by ourselves, accounting only for our acts, our feelings, and our impeccability." She nodded, as if to underline her words: "I've no longer any feelings.

Whatever I had went away with the nagual Julian. All I have left is my sense of will, of duty, and of purpose. Perhaps you and I are in the same boat." She said this so smoothly that it passed before I realized what she had said.

I stared at her, and as always, I was dazzled by her splendid beauty and youthfulness which the years had left bewitchingly intact.

"Not me, Florinda," I finally said: "You had the nagual Isidoro Baltazar and me and all the other disciples I've heard about. I have nothing. I don't even have my old world."

There was no self-pity in me, only a devastating knowledge that my life, as I had known it until now, had ended.

I said, "The nagual Isidoro Baltazar is mine, by right of my power. I'll wait, dutifully, a bit longer, but if he's not here in this world anymore, neither am I. I know what to do!"

My voice trailed off as I realized that Florinda was no longer listening to me. She was absorbed in watching a small crow making it's way toward us along the fountain ledge.

"That's Dionysus," I said, reaching into my pocket for his pieces of tortilla. I had none with me. I looked up at the marvelously clear sky. I had been so engrossed in my sadness, I hadn't noticed that it was already past noon, the time this little crow usually came for it's food.

Florinda said, "That fellow is quite upset." She laughed at the bird's outraged caws, then looked me in the eye and said, "You and the crow are quite alike. You get easily upset; and you're both quite loud about it."

I could barely contain myself from blurting out that the same could be said about her. Florinda chuckled, as though she knew the effort I was making not to weep.

The crow had perched on my empty hand and stared at me sidelong with it's shiny, pebblelike eyes. The bird opened it's wings but didn't fly away. It's black feathers sparkled blue in the sun.

I calmly told Florinda that the pressures of the sorcerers' world were unbearable.

"Nonsense!" she chided, as if she were talking to a spoiled child: "Look, we scared Dionysus away." Enraptured, Florinda watched the crow circle over our heads; then she fixed her attention back on me.

I averted my face. I didn't know why, for there was nothing unkind in the gaze of those shiny, dark eyes. Florinda's eyes were calm and utterly indifferent as she said, "If you can't catch up with Isidoro Baltazar, then I and the rest of the sorcerers who taught you would have failed to impress you. We would have failed to challenge you. It's not a final loss for us, but it certainly will be a final loss for you."

Seeing that I was about to weep again, she challenged me, "Where is your impeccable purpose? What happened to all the things you've learned with us?"

"What if I never catch up with Isidoro Baltazar?" I asked tearfully.

"Can you go on living in the sorcerers' world if you don't make an effort to find out?" she asked sharply.

"This is a time when I need kindness," I mumbled, closing my eyes to prevent my tears from spilling. "I need my mother. If I could only go to her."

I was surprised at my own words, yet I really meant them. Unable to hold back my tears any longer I began to weep.

Florinda laughed: She wasn't mocking me. There was a note of kindness, of sympathy in her laughter.

"You're so far away from your mother," she said softly, with a pensive, distant look in her eyes, "that you'll never find her again."

Her voice was but a soft whisper as she went on to say that the sorcerers' life builds impassable barriers around us. Sorcerers, she reminded me, don't find solace in the sympathy of others or in self-pity.

"You think that all my torment is caused by self-pity, don't you, Florinda?"

"No. Not just self-pity but morbidity, too."

She put her arms around my shoulders and hugged me as if I were a small child.

"Most women are damn morbid, you know," she murmured. "You and I are among them."

I didn't agree with her, yet I had no desire to contradict her. I was far too happy with her arms around me. In spite of my somber mood, I had to smile. Florinda, like all the other women in the sorcerers' world, lacked the facility to express maternal feelings. And although I liked to kiss and hug the people I loved, I couldn't bear to be in someone's arms for more than an instant. Florinda's embrace was not as warm and soothing as my mother's, but it was all I could hope to get.

Then she went into the house.

I came suddenly awake. For a moment I simply lay there—on the ground at the foot of the fountain—trying to remember something Florinda had said before I fell asleep in the leaf-spotted sunlight. I had obviously slept for hours. Although the sky was still bright, the evening shadows had already stolen into the yard.

I was about to look for Florinda in the house when an unearthly sounding laughter echoed across the yard: It was the same laughter I had heard during the night.

I waited and listened. The silence around me was unsettling. Nothing chirped; nothing hummed; nothing moved. Yet, still as it was, I could sense noiseless footsteps, silent as shadows, behind me.

I wheeled around. At the far edge of the yard, almost concealed by the blooming bougainvillea, I saw somebody sitting on a wooden bench. Her back was turned to me, but I immediately recognized her.

"Zuleica?" I whispered uncertainly, afraid that the sound of my voice might scare her away.

"How happy I am to see you again," she said, beckoning me to sit beside her.

Her deep, clear voice, vibrant with the briskness of the desert air, didn't seem to come from her body but from far away. I wanted to embrace her, but I knew better. Zuleica never liked to be touched, so I just sat beside her and told her that I, too, was happy to see her again. To my utter surprise, she clasped my hand in hers; a small, delicate hand. Her pale, copperish-pink, beautiful face was oddly blank. All the life was concentrated in her incredible eyes: neither black nor brown but strangely in between; and oddly clear. She fixed her eyes on me in a prolonged stare.

"When did you get here?" I asked.

"Just this moment," Zuleica replied, her lips curling into an angelic smile.

"How did you get here? Did Florinda come with you?"

"Oh, you know," Zuleica said vaguely, "women sorcerers come and go unnoticed: Nobody pays attention to a woman, especially if she's old. Now, a beautiful young woman, on the other hand, attracts everybody's attention. That's why women sorcerers should always be disguised if they are handsome. If they are averagely homely, they have nothing to worry about."

Zuleica's sudden light tap on my shoulder jolted me. She clasped my hand again, as though to dispel my doubts, then gazed at me calmly and keenly and said, "To be in the sorcerers' world one has to dream superbly."

She looked away. An almost full moon hung over the distant mountains.

"Most people don't have the wits nor the size of spirit to dream. They cannot help but see the world as ordinary and repetitious; and do you know why?" she asked, fixing me with her keen gaze: "Because if you don't fight to avoid it, the world is indeed ordinary and repetitious. Most people are so involved with themselves that they have become idiotic. Idiots have no desire to fight to avoid ordinariness and repetitiousness."

Zuleica rose from the bench and put on her sandals. She tied her shawl around her waist so her long skirt wouldn't drag, and walked to the middle of the patio. I knew what she was going to do before she even started. She was going to spin. She was going to perform a dance in order to gather cosmic energy. Women sorcerers believe that by moving their bodies they can get the strength necessary to dream.

With a barely perceptible gesture of her chin, she motioned me to follow her and imitate her movements. She glided on the dark brown Mexican tiles and brown bricks that had been laid out in an ancient Toltec pattern by Isidoro Baltazar; a sorceric design binding generations of sorcerers and dreamers throughout the ages in webs of secrets and feats of power - a design into which he had put himself, around and inside it, with all his strength, all his intent, willing myth and dream into reality.

Zuleica moved with the certainty and agility of a young dancer. Her movements were simple, yet they required so much speed, balance, and concentration that they left me exhausted. With uncanny agility and swiftness, she spun around, away from me. For an instant she vacillated amidst the shadows of the trees, as though to make sure I was following her. Then she headed toward the recessed, arched doorway built into the wall encircling the grounds behind the house. She paused momentarily by the two citrus trees growing outside the walls; the ones that stood like two sentries on either side of the path leading to the small house across the chaparral.

Afraid of losing sight of her, I dashed along the narrow, dark trail. Then, curious and eager, I followed her inside the house, all the way to the back room. Instead of turning on the light, she reached for an oil lamp hanging from one of the rafters. She lit it. The lamp cast a flickering glow all around us but left the corners of the room in shadows. Kneeling in front of the only piece of furniture in the room; a wooden chest sitting under the window, she pulled out a mat and a blanket.

"Lie down, on your stomach," she said softly, spreading the mat on the tiled floor.

I heaved a deep sigh and gave in to a pleasant sense of helplessness as I lay, face down, on the mat. A feeling of peace and well-being spread through my body. I felt her hands on my back: She wasn't massaging me but tapping my back lightly.

Although I had often been in the small house, I still didn't know how many rooms it had or how it was furnished. Florinda had once told me that that house was the center of their adventure. It was there, she said, where the old nagual and his sorcerers wove their magic web. Like a spider's web, invisible and resilient, it held them when they plunged into the unknown, into the darkness and the light, as sorcerers do routinely.

She had also said that the house was a symbol. The sorcerers of her group didn't have to be in the house or even in it's vicinity when they plunged into the unknown through dreaming. Everywhere they went, they carried the feeling; the mood of the house in their hearts. And that feeling and mood, whatever they were for each of them, gave them the strength to face the everyday world with wonder and delight.

Zuleica's sharp tap on my shoulder startled me. "Turn on your back," she commanded.

I did so.

Her face, as she bent down, was radiant with energy and purpose.

"Myths are dreams of extraordinary dreamers," she said: "You need a great deal of courage and concentration in order to maintain them. And above all, you need a great deal of imagination. You are living a myth, a myth that has been handed down to you for safekeeping."

She spoke in a tone that was almost reverent. "You cannot be the recipient of this myth unless you are irreproachable. If you are not, the myth will simply move away from you."

I opened my mouth to speak, to say that I understood all that, but I saw the hardness in her eyes. She was not there to have a dialogue with me.

The repetitive sound of branches brushing against the wall outside died out and turned into a throb in the air; a pulsating sound that I felt rather than heard. I was on the verge of falling asleep when Zuleica said that I should follow the commands of the repetitive dream I had had.

"How did you know I've been having that dream?" I asked, alarmed, trying to sit up.

"Don't you remember that we share one another's dreams?" she whispered, pushing me back onto the mat: "I'm the one who brings you dreams."

"It was just a dream, Zuleica." My voice trembled because I was seized by a desperate desire to weep. I knew it wasn't just a dream, but I wanted her to lie to me.

Shaking her head, she looked at me. "No. It wasn't just a dream," she said quietly. "It was a sorcerers' dream, a vision."

"What should I do?"

"Didn't the dream tell you what to do?" she asked in a challenging tone. "Didn't Florinda?"

She watched me with an inscrutable expression on her face. Then she smiled, a shy, childlike smile.

"You have to understand that you cannot run after Isidoro Baltazar. He's no longer in the world. There is nothing you can give him or do for him anymore. You cannot be attached to the nagual as a person, but only as a mythical being."

Her voice was soft yet commanding as she repeated that I was living a myth.

"The sorcerers' world is a mythical world separated from the everyday one by a mysterious barrier made out of dreams and commitments. Only if the nagual is supported and upheld by his fellow dreamers can he lead them into other viable worlds from which he can entice the bird of freedom."

Her words faded in the shadows of the room as she added that the support Isidoro Baltazar needed was dreaming energy, not worldly feelings and actions.

After a long silence, she spoke again.

"You have witnessed how the old nagual, as well as Isidoro Baltazar, by their mere presence, affect whoever is around them; be it their fellow sorcerers or just bystanders; making them aware that the world is a mystery where nothing can be taken for granted under any circumstances."

I nodded in agreement.

For a long time I had been at a loss to understand how naguals could, by their mere presence, make such a difference. After careful observation, comparing opinions with others, and endless introspection, I concluded that their influence stemmed from their renunciation of worldly concerns. In our daily world, we also have examples of men and women who have left worldly concerns behind. We call them mystics, saints, religious people. But naguals are neither mystics nor saints and are certainly not religious men. Naguals are worldly men without a shred of worldly concerns.

At a subliminal level, this contradiction has the most tremendous effect on whoever is around them. The minds of those who are around a nagual can't grasp what is affecting them, yet they feel the impact in their bodies as a strange anxiety, an urge to break loose, or as a sense of inadequacy, as if something transcendental is taking place somewhere else, and they can't get to it.

But the naguals' built-in capacity to affect others doesn't only depend on their lack of worldly concerns or on the force of their personalities; but rather on the force of their unreproachful behavior. Naguals are unreproachful [*unreproachful - not criticizing] in their actions and feelings; regardless of the ambushes-worldly or otherworldly-placed on their interminable path. It isn't that naguals follow a prescribed pattern of rules and regulations in order to have unreproachful behavior, for there are no rules and regulations. Rather, they use their imaginations for adopting or adapting to whatever it takes to make their actions fluid.

For their deeds, naguals, unlike average men, don't seek approval, respect, praise, or any kind of acknowledgment from anyone, including their fellow sorcerers. All they seek is their own sense of flawlessness; of innocence, of integrity.

It is this that makes a nagual's company addictive. Others becomes dependent on his freedom as one would to a drug. To a nagual, the world is always brand new. In his company, one begins to look at the world as if it had never happened before.

"That's because naguals have broken the mirror of self-reflection," Zuleica said, as if she had followed my train of thoughts. "Naguals are able to see themselves in the mirror of fog which reflects only the unknown. It is a mirror that no longer reflects our normal humanity expressed in repetition; but reveals the face of infinity. Sorcerers believe that when the face of self-reflection and the face of infinity merge, a nagual is totally ready to break the boundaries of reality and disappear as though he wasn't made of solid matter. Isidoro Baltazar had been ready for a long time."

"He can't leave me behind!" I cried out. "That would be too unfair."

"It's downright foolish to think in terms of fairness and unfairness," Zuleica said: "In the sorcerers' world, there is only power. Didn't every one of us teach you that?"

"There are many things I learned," I conceded gloomily. After a few moments, I mumbled under my breath, "But they are not worth anything at the moment."

"They are worth the most now," she contradicted me: "If you have learned one thing, it's that at the bleakest moments warriors rally their power to carry on. A warrior doesn't succumb to despair."

"Nothing of what I've learned and experienced can alleviate my sadness and despair," I said softly: "I've even tried the spiritual chants I learned from my nanny, and Florinda laughed at me. She thinks am an idiot."

"Florinda is right," Zuleica pronounced: "Our magical world has nothing to do with chants and incantations; with rituals and bizarre behavior. Our magical world, which is a dream, is willed into being by the concentrated desire of those who participate in it. It is held intact at every moment by the sorcerers' tenacious wills; the same way the everyday world is held together by everybody's tenacious will."

She stopped abruptly. She seemed to have caught herself in the middle of a thought that she didn't wish to express. Then she smiled. Making a humorous, helpless gesture, she added, "To dream our dream, you have to be dead."

"Does that mean I have to drop dead right here and now?" I asked in a voice that was getting hoarse. "You know that I am ready for that, at a drop of a hat."

Zuleica's face lit up, and she laughed as though I had told the best of jokes. Seeing that I was as serious as I could be, she hastened to clarify, "No, no. To die means to cancel all your holdings; to drop everything you have, everything you are."

"That's nothing new," I said. "I did that the moment I joined your world."

"Obviously you didn't. Otherwise you wouldn't be in such a mess. If you had died the way sorcery demands, you would feel no anguish now."

"What would I feel, then?"

"Duty! Purpose!"

"My anguish has nothing to do with my sense of purpose," I shouted. "It's apart, independent. I am alive and feel sadness and love. How can I avoid that?"

Zuleica clarified, "You're not supposed to avoid it, but to overcome it. If warriors have nothing, they feel nothing."

"What kind of an empty world is that?" I asked defiantly.

"Empty is the world of indulging, because indulging cuts off everything else except indulging." She gazed at me eagerly, as if expecting me to agree with her statement. "So it's a lopsided world; boring, repetitious. For sorcerers, the antidote of indulging is dying. And they don't just think about it, they do it."

A cold shiver went up my back. I swallowed and remained silent, looking at the splendid sight of the moon shining through the window.

"I really don't understand what you're saying, Zuleica."

"You understand me perfectly well," she maintained. "Your dream began when you met me. Now it's time for another dream. But this time, dream dead. Your error was to dream alive."

"What does that mean?" I asked restlessly: "Don't torment me with riddles. You, yourself, told me that only male sorcerers drive themselves nuts with riddles. You're doing the same to me now."

Zuleica's laughter echoed from wall to wall. It rustled like dry leaves pushed by the wind.

"To dream alive means to have hope. It means that you hold on to your dream for dear life. To dream dead means that you dream without hope. You dream without holding on to your dream."

Not trusting myself to speak, all I could do was to nod.

Florinda had told me that freedom is a total absence of concern about oneself; a lack of concern achieved when the imprisoned bulk of energy within ourselves is untied. She had said that this energy is released only when we can arrest the exalted conception we have of ourselves; of our importance; an importance we feel must not be violated or mocked.

Zuleica's voice was clear but seemed to come from a great distance as she added, "The price of freedom is very high. Freedom can only be attained by dreaming without hope; by being willing to lose all, even the dream. For some of us, to dream without hope; to struggle with no goal in mind, is the only way to keep up with the bird of freedom."

### The End - Being in Dreaming: An Initiation into the Sorcerers' World - ©1991 by Florinda Donner ###

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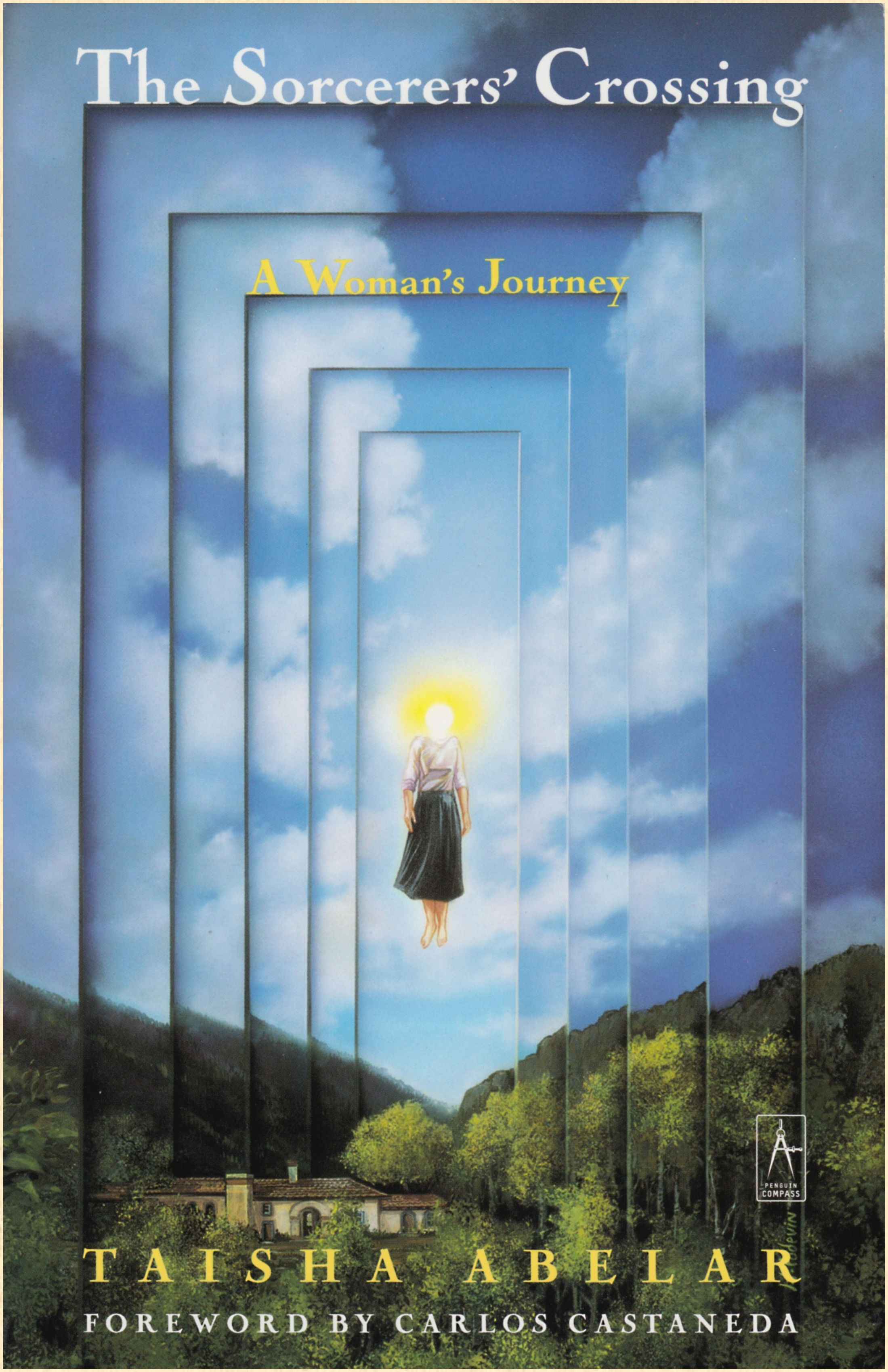
## 18 - THE SORCERERS' CROSSING: A WOMAN'S JOURNEY

©1992 -Taisha Abelar. Covering her apprenticeship, including physical training, with a sorceress of don Juan's group between 1969?-1970?


The Sorcerers' Crossing
A Woman's Journey
PENGUIN COMPASS
TAISHA ABELAR
FOREWORD BY CARLOS CASTANEDA

# Book 18 – THE SORCERERS' CROSSING

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(*clickable/tappable*)

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With affection for all
who journey into the unknown

## Foreword by Carlos Castaneda

Taisha Abelar is one of a group of three women that were deliberately trained by some sorcerers from Mexico; under the guidance of Don Juan Matus.

I have written at length about my own training under him, but I have never written anything about this specific group, of which Taisha Abelar is a member. It was a tacit agreement among all of those who were under don Juan's tutelage that nothing should be said about them.

For over twenty years we have upheld this agreement. Even though we have worked and lived in close proximity, never have we talked with one another about our personal experiences. In fact, never had there been an opportunity even to exchange our views about what specifically don Juan or the sorcerers of his group did to each one of us.

Such a condition was not contingent upon don Juan's presence. After he and his group left the world, we continued to adhere to it, simply because we had no desire to use our energy to review any previous agreements. All our available time and energy was employed in validating for ourselves what don Juan had so painstakingly taught us.

Don Juan had taught us sorcery as a pragmatic endeavor by means of which any of us can directly perceive energy. He had maintained that in order to perceive energy in such a fashion, we need freedom from our normal capacity to perceive. To free ourselves and directly perceive energy was a task that took all we had.

It is a sorcerer's idea that the parameters of our normal perception have been imposed upon us as part of our socialization, not quite arbitrarily, but laid down mandatorily nonetheless. One aspect of these obligatory parameters is an interpretation system which processes sensory data into meaningful units; and renders the social order as a structure of interpretation.

Our normal functioning within the social order requires a blind and faithful adherence to all it's precepts; none of which call for the possibility of directly perceiving energy. For example, don Juan maintained that it is possible to perceive human beings as fields of energy; like huge, oblong, whitish luminous eggs.

In order to accomplish the feat of heightening our perception, we need internal energy. Thus, the problem of making internal energy available to fulfill such a task becomes the key issue for students of sorcery.

Circumstances proper to our time and place have made it possible now for Taisha Abelar to write about her training, which was the same as mine, and yet thoroughly different. The writing took her a long time, because, first, she had to avail herself of the sorcery means to write. Don Juan Matus himself gave me the task of writing about his sorcery knowledge; and he himself set the mood of this by saying, "Don't write like a writer, but like a sorcerer." He meant that I had to do it in a state of enhanced awareness which sorcerers call 'dreaming.' It took Taisha Abelar many years to perfect her dreaming to the point of making it the sorcery means to write.

In don Juan's world, sorcerers, depending on their basic temperaments, were divided into two complementary factions: 'dreamers' and 'stalkers'. Dreamers are those sorcerers who have the inherent facility to enter into states of heightened awareness by controlling their dreams. This facility is developed through training into an art: the art of dreaming. Stalkers, on the other hand, are those sorcerers who have the innate facility to deal with facts and are capable of entering states of heightened awareness by manipulating and controlling their own behavior. Through sorcery training, this natural capability is turned into the art of stalking.

Although everybody in don Juan's party of sorcerers had a complete knowledge of both arts, they were arranged in one faction or the other. Taisha Abelar was grouped with the stalkers and trained by them. Her book bears the mark of her stupendous training as a stalker.

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## Preface

I have devoted my life to the practice of a rigorous discipline which for lack of a more suitable name we have called sorcery. I am also an anthropologist, having received my Ph.D. in that field of study. I mention my two areas of expertise in this particular order because my involvement with sorcery came first. Usually, one becomes an anthropologist and then one does fieldwork on an aspect of culture- for example, the study of sorcery practices. With me, it happened the other way around: as a student of sorcery I went to study anthropology.

In the late sixties, while I was living in Tucson, Arizona, I met a Mexican woman by the name of Clara Grau, who invited me to stay in her house in the state of Sonora, Mexico. There, she did her utmost to usher me into her world. Clara Grau was a sorceress; part of a cohesive group of sixteen sorcerers. Some of them were Yaqui Indians; others were Mexicans of various
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origins and backgrounds, ages and sexes. Most were women. All of them pursued, single-heartedly, the same goal: breaking the perceptual dispositions and biases that imprison us within the boundaries of the normal everyday world and prevent us from entering other perceivable worlds.

For sorcerers, to break such perceptual dispositions enables one to cross a barrier and leap into the unimaginable. They call such a leap "the sorcerers' crossing." Sometimes they refer to it as 'the abstract flight,' because it entails soaring from the side of the concrete; the physical, to the side of expanded perception and impersonal abstract forms.

These sorcerers were interested in helping me accomplish this abstract flight so that I could join them in their basic endeavors.

For me, academic training became an integral part of my preparation for the sorcerers' crossing. The leader, or 'nagual' as he is called, of the sorcerers' group with whom I am associated, is a person with a keen interest in formal academic erudition. Hence, all those under his care were encouraged to develop their capacity for the abstract, clear thinking that he acquired in a modern university.

As a woman, I had an even greater obligation to fulfill this requirement. Women in general are conditioned from early childhood to depend on the male members of our society to conceptualize and initiate changes. The sorcerers that trained me had very strong opinions in this regard. They felt that it is indispensable that women develop their intellects and enhance their capacity for analysis and abstraction in order to have a better grasp of the world around them.

Also, training the intellect is a bona-fide sorcerers' subterfuge. By deliberately keeping the mind occupied in analysis and reasoning, sorcerers are free to explore, unimpeded, other areas of perception. In other words, while the rational side is busy with the formality of academic pursuits, the energetic or nonrational side, which sorcerers call 'the double', is occupied with the fulfillment of sorcery tasks. In this way, the suspicious and analytic mind is less likely to interfere or even notice what is going on at a nonrational level.

The counterpart of my academic development was the enhancement of my capacity for awareness and perception: together the two develop our total being. Working together as a unit, they took me away from the taken-for-granted life that I had been born into and socialized for as a woman; to a new area of greater perceptual possibilities than what the normal world had in store for me.

That is not to say that solely my commitment to the world of sorcery was enough to assure my success. The pull of the daily world is so strong and sustained that in spite of their most assiduous training, all practitioners find themselves again and again in the midst of the most abject terror, stupidity and indulging, as if they had learned nothing. My teachers warned me that I was no exception, and that only a minute to minute relentless struggle can balance one's natural but stupefying insistence to remain unchanged.

After a careful examination of my final aims, I, in conjunction with my cohorts, arrived at the conclusion that I have to describe my training in order to emphasize to seekers of the unknown the importance of developing the ability to perceive more than we do with normal perception. Such enhanced perception has to be a sober, pragmatic, new way of perceiving. It cannot be, under any condition, merely the continuation of perceiving the world of everyday life.

The events I narrate here depict the initial stages of sorcery training for a stalker. This phase involves the cleansing of one's habitual ways of thinking, behaving and feeling by means of a traditional sorcery undertaking, one which all neophytes need to perform, called 'the recapitulation'. To complement the recapitulation, I was taught a series of practices called 'sorcery passes', involving movement and breathing. To give these practices an adequate coherence, I was instructed with the accompanying philosophical rationales and explanations.

The goal of everything I was taught was the redistribution of my normal energy, and the enhancement of it, so that it could be used for the out-of-the-ordinary feats of perception demanded by sorcery training. The idea behind the training is that as soon as the compulsive pattern of old habits, thoughts, expectations and feelings is broken by means of the recapitulation, one is indisputably in the position to accumulate enough energy to live by the new rationales provided by the sorcery tradition- and to substantiate those rationales by directly perceiving a different reality.

## Chapter 1

I had walked to an isolated spot away from the highway and people in order to sketch the early morning shadows on the unique lava mountains that fringe the Gran Desierto, in southern Arizona. The dark brown jagged rocks sparkled as bursts of sunlight illuminated their peaks. Strewn on the ground around me were huge chunks of porous rocks, remnants of the lava flow from a gigantic volcanic eruption. Making myself comfortable on a large clump of rock and oblivious to anything else, I had sunk into my work, as I often did in that rugged, beautiful place. I had finished outlining the promontories and depressions of the distant mountains when I noticed a woman watching me. It annoyed me no end that someone would disturb my solitude. I tried my utmost to ignore her, but when she moved nearer to look at my work, I turned around in anger to face her.

Her high cheekbones and shoulder-length black hair made her look Eurasian. She had a smooth, creamy complexion, so it was difficult to judge her age; she could have been anywhere between thirty and fifty. She was perhaps two inches taller than I, which would have made her five nine, but with her powerful frame, she looked twice my size. Yet, in her black silk pants and Oriental jacket, she seemed extremely fit.

I noticed her eyes. They were green and sparkling. It was that friendly gleam that made my anger vanish, and I heard myself asking the woman an inane question, "Do you live around here?"

"No," she said, taking a few steps toward me. "I'm on my way to the U.S. border checkpoint at Sonoyta. I stopped to stretch my legs and ended up in this isolated spot. I was so surprised to see someone out here, so far away from everything, that I couldn't help intruding the way I have. Let me introduce myself. My name is Clara Grau."

She extended her hand and I shook it, and without the slightest hesitation I told her that I was given the name Taisha when I was born, but later, my parents didn't think the name was American enough and began calling me Martha, after my mother. I detested that name and decided on Mary instead.

"How interesting!" she mused. "You have three names that are so different. I'll call you Taisha, since it's your birth name."

I was glad she had selected that name. It was the one I had chosen myself. Although at first I had agreed with my parents about the name being too foreign, I had disliked the name Martha so much that I ended up making Taisha my secret name.

In a harsh tone that she immediately concealed behind a benign smile, she bombarded me with a series of statements in the guise of questions. "You're not from Arizona," she began.

I responded to her truthfully, an unusual thing for me to do, accustomed as I was to being cautious with people, especially strangers. "I came to Arizona a year ago to work."

"You couldn't be more than twenty."

"I'll be twenty-one in a couple of months."

"You have a slight accent. You don't seem to be an American, but I can't pinpoint your exact nationality."

"I am an American, but as a child I lived in Germany," I said. "My father is American and my mother, Hungarian. I left home when I went to college and never went back, because I didn't want to have anything more to do with my family."

"I take it you didn't get along with them?"

"No. I was miserable. I couldn't wait to leave home."

She smiled and nodded as if she was familiar with the feeling of wanting to escape.

"Are you married?" the, woman asked.

"No. I don't have anyone in the world." I said that with the touch of self-pity I had always had whenever I talked about myself.

She didn't make any comment, but spoke calmly and precisely as if she wanted to put me at ease and at the same time convey as much information about herself as she could with each of her sentences.

As she talked, I put my drawing pencils in my case but without taking my eyes away from her. I didn't want to give her the impression I wasn't listening.

"I was an only child and both my parents are dead now," she said. "My father's family are Mexican from Oaxaca. But my mother's family are Americans of German descent. They are from back east, but now live in Phoenix. I just returned from the wedding of one of my cousins."

"Do you also live in Phoenix?" I asked.

"I've lived half my life in Arizona and the other half in Mexico," she replied. "But for the past years, my home has been in the state of Sonora, Mexico."

I began to zip up my portfolio. Meeting and talking to this woman had so unsettled me that I knew I wouldn't be able to do any more work that day.

"I've also traveled to the Orient," she said, regaining my attention. "There, I learned acupuncture and the martial and healing arts. I've even lived for a number of years in a Buddhist temple."

"Really?" I glanced at her eyes. They had the look of a person who meditated a great deal. They were fiery, and yet tranquil.

"I'm very interested in the Orient," I said, "especially in Japan. I also have studied

Buddhism and the martial arts."

"Really?" she said, echoing me. "I wish I could tell you my Buddhist name, but secret names shouldn't be revealed except under the proper circumstances."

"I told you my secret name," I said, tightening the straps of my portfolio.

"Yes, Taisha, you did, and that's very significant to me," she replied with undue seriousness. "But still, right now it's time only for introductions."

"Did you drive here?" I asked, scanning the area for her car.

"I was just going to ask you the same question," she said.

"I left my car about a quarter of a mile back, on a dirt road south of here. Where is yours?"

"Is your car a white Chevrolet?" she asked cheerfully.

"Yes."

"Well, mine is parked next to it." She giggled as if she had said something funny. I was surprised to find her laughter so irritating.

"I've got to go now," I said. "It's been very pleasant meeting you. Good-bye!"

I started to walk to my car, thinking that the woman would remain behind admiring the scenery.

"Let's not say good-bye yet," she protested. "I'm coming with you."

We walked together. Next to my one hundred and ten pounds, the woman was like a huge boulder. Her midsection was round and powerful. She projected the feeling that she could easily have been obese, but she wasn't.

"May I ask you a personal question, Mrs. Grau?" I said, just to break the awkward silence.

She stopped walking and faced me.

"I'm not anybody's Mrs.," she snapped. "I am Clara Grau.

"You can call me Clara, and, yes, go right ahead and ask me anything you wish."

"I take it you're not partial to love and marriage," I commented, reacting to her tone.

For a second, she gave me a fearsome look, but she softened it instantly, and said, "I'm definitely not partial to slavery, but not only for women.

"Now, what was it that you were going to ask me?"

Her reaction was so unexpected that I lost track of what I was going to ask and embarrassed myself by staring at her.

"What made you walk all the way to this place in particular?" I asked hurriedly.

"I came here because this is a place of energy." She pointed at the lava formations in the distance. "Those mountains were once spewed forth from the heart of the earth, like blood.

"Whenever I'm in Arizona, I always make a detour to come here. This place oozes a peculiar earthly energy.

"Now let me ask you the same question, what made you pick this spot?"

"I often come here. It's my favorite place to sketch." I didn't mean it as a joke, but she burst out laughing.

"This detail settles it!" she exclaimed, then continued in a quieter tone.

"I'm going to ask you to do something you may consider outlandish or even foolish, but hear me out.

"I'd like you to come to my house and spend a few days as my guest."

I raised my hand to thank her and say no, but she urged me to reconsider. She assured me that our common interest in the Orient and the martial arts warranted a serious exchange of ideas.

"Where exactly do you live?" I asked.

"Near the city of Navojoa."

"But that's more than four hundred miles from here."

"Yes, it's quite a distance. But it's so beautiful and peaceful there that I'm certain you would like it."

She kept silent for a moment as if waiting for my reply, then continued, "Besides, I have the feeling that there is nothing definite you're involved in at the moment, and you've been at a loss to find something to do. Well, this could be just the thing you've been waiting for."

She was right about my being completely at a loss as to what to do with my life. I had just taken some time off from a secretarial job in order to catch up with my artwork, but I certainly didn't have the slightest desire to be anyone's house guest.

I looked around, searching the terrain for something that would give me an inkling of what to do next. I had never been able to explain where I had gotten the idea that one could get help or clues from the surroundings, but I usually did get help that way. I had a technique, which seemed to have come to me out of nowhere, by means of which I often found options previously unknown to me. I usually let my thoughts wander away as I fixed my eyes on the southern horizon, although I had no idea why I always picked the south. After a few minutes of silence, insights usually came to me to help me decide what to do or how to proceed in a particular situation.

I fixed my gaze on the southern horizon while we walked, and suddenly I saw the mood of my life stretched out before me like the barren desert. I can truthfully say that although I knew that the whole area of southern Arizona, a bit of California, and half of the state of Sonora, Mexico, is the Sonoran Desert, I had never before noticed how lonely and desolate this wasteland was.

It took a moment for the impact of my realization that my life was as empty and barren as that desert to register. I had broken off with my family, and I had no family of my own. I didn't even have any prospects for the future. I had no job. I had lived off a small inheritance left to me by the aunt I was named after, but this income had run out. I was utterly alone in the world. The vastness that stretched all around, harsh and indifferent, summoned up in me an overwhelming sense of self-pity. I felt in need of a friend, someone to break the solitude of my life.

I knew it would be foolish to accept Clara's invitation and jump into an unknown situation over which I had no control, but there was something about the directness of her manner and about her physical vitality that aroused in me both curiosity and a feeling of respect. I found myself admiring and even envying her beauty and strength. I thought that she was a most striking and powerful woman, independent, self-reliant, indifferent, yet not hard or humorless. She possessed the exact qualities I had always wanted for myself. But above all, her presence seemed to dispel my barrenness. She made the space around her energetic, vibrant, full of endless possibilities.

Yet still, it was my unbending policy never to accept invitations to people's houses, and certainly not from someone whom I had just met in the wilderness. I had a small apartment in Tucson and to accept invitations meant to me that I had to reciprocate; a thing that I wasn't prepared to do. For a moment, I stood there motionless, not knowing which way to turn.

"Please say that you'll come," Clara urged. "It would mean a great deal to me."

"All right, I suppose I could visit with you," I said lamely, wanting to say the exact opposite.

She looked at me elated and I immediately disguised my panic with a conviviality I was far from feeling. "It'll be good for me to change scenery," I said. "It'll be an adventure!"

She nodded approvingly. "You won't regret it," she said with an air of confidence that helped to dispel my doubts. "We can practice martial arts together."

She delivered a few brisk movements with her hand that were at once graceful and powerful. It seemed incongruous to me that this robust woman could be so agile.

Noticing that she easily adopted the stance of a long-pole fighter, I asked, "What specific style of martial arts did you study in the Orient?"

"In the Orient, I studied all the styles, and yet none of them in particular," she replied, with just a hint of a smile. "When we are at my house, I'll be happy to demonstrate them."

We walked the rest of the way in silence. When we reached the place where the cars were parked, I locked my gear in the trunk and waited for Clara to say something.

"Well, let's get started," she said. "I'll lead the way. Do you drive fast or slow, Taisha?"

"At a crawl."

"Me too. Living in China cured me from hurrying."

"May I ask you a question about China, Clara?"

"Of course. I've already said that you may ask anything you want without asking permission first."

"You must have been in China before the Second World War. Isn't that so?"

"Oh, yes. I was there a lifetime ago. I gather that you've never been to mainland China, yourself."

"No. I've only been to Taiwan and Japan."

"Of course things were different before the war," Clara mused. "The line to the past was still intact then. Now everything is severed."

I didn't know why I was afraid to ask her what she meant by her remark, so I asked instead how long would the drive to her house be. Clara was disturbingly vague: She only warned me to be prepared for an arduous trip. She softened her tone and added that she found my courage extremely rewarding.

"To go so nonchalantly with a stranger," she said, "is either utterly foolish or tremendously daring."

"Usually I'm very cautious," I explained, "but this time I'm not myself at all."

This was the truth, and the more I thought about my inexplicable behavior, the greater became my discomfort.

"Please tell me a little more about yourself," she asked pleasantly. As if to put me at ease, she came and stood by the door of my car.

Again I found myself conveying true information about myself. "My mother is Hungarian but from an old Austrian family," I said.

"She met my father in England during the Second World War, when the two of them worked in a field hospital. After the war, they moved to the United States and then they went to South Africa."

"Why did they go to South Africa?"

"My mother wanted to be with her relatives that lived there."

"Do you have any brothers or sisters?"

"I have two brothers, a year apart in age. The oldest is twenty-six now."

Her eyes were focused on me. With an unprecedented ease, I unburdened painful feelings I had kept bottled up all my life. I told her that I grew up lonely. My brothers never paid attention to me because I was a girl. When I was little, they used to tie a rope around me and hook me to a post like a dog while they ran around the yard and played soccer. All I could do was tug at my rope and watch them having a good time. Later, when I was older, I'd run after them. But by that time they both had bicycles and I could never keep up with them. When I used to complain to my mother, her usual reply was that boys will be boys, and that I should play with dolls and help around the house.

"Your mother raised you in the traditional European way," she said.

"I know it. But that's no consolation."

Once I had started, it seemed that there was no way for me to stop telling this woman more about my life. I said that whereas my brothers went on trips and, later, away to school, I had to stay at home. I wanted to have adventures like the boys, but according to my mother, girls had to learn to make beds and to iron clothes. "It's adventure enough to take care of a family," my mother used to say. "Women are born to obey." I was on the verge of tears when I told Clara that I had three male masters to serve as far back as I could remember: my father and my two brothers.

"That sounds like an armful," Clara remarked.

"It was terrible. I left home to get as far away from them as I could," I said. "And to have adventures too. But so far, I haven't had all that much fun and excitement. I suppose I just wasn't brought up to be happy and light-hearted."

Describing my life to a total stranger made me extremely anxious. I stopped talking and looked at Clara, waiting for a reaction that would either alleviate my anxiety or would increase it to the point of making me change my mind and not go with her after all.

"Well, it seems that there's only one thing you know how to do well, so you may as well make the most of it," she said.

I thought she was going to say I could draw or paint, but to my utter chagrin, she added, "All you know how to do is to feel sorry for yourself."

I tightened my fingers on the handle of the car door. "That's not true," I protested. "Who are you to say that?"

She burst out laughing and shook her head. "You and I are very alike," she said: "We've been taught to be passive, subservient and to adapt to situations; but inside we're seething. We're like a volcano ready to erupt; and what makes us even more frustrated is that we have no dreams or expectations except the one of someday finding the right man who will take us out of our misery."

She left me speechless.

"Well? Am I right? Am I right?" she kept asking. "Be honest, am I right?"

I clenched my hands, getting ready to tell her off. Clara smiled warmly, exuding vigor and a sense of well-being that made me feel that I didn't need to lie or hide my feelings from her.

"Yes, you have me pegged," I agreed.

I had to admit that the only thing that gave meaning to my dreary existence, besides my artwork, was the vague hope that someday I would meet a man who would understand me and appreciate me for the special person I was.

"Maybe your life will change for the better," she said in a promissory tone.

She got into her car and signaled me with her hand to follow her. I became aware then that she had never asked me if I had my passport or enough clothes or money or had other obligations. That didn't frighten or discourage me. I didn't know why, but as I released the handbrake and began moving, I was certain I had made the right decision. Perhaps my life was going to change after, all.

## Chapter 2

After more than three hours of continuous driving, we stopped for lunch in the city of Guaymas. As I waited for our food to arrive, I glanced out the window at the narrow street flanking the bay. A group of shirtless boys were kicking a ball; elsewhere, workers were laying bricks at a construction site; others were taking their noon break, leaning against piles of unopened sacks of cement, sipping sodas from bottles. I couldn't help but think that in Mexico everything seemed extra loud and dusty.

"In this restaurant, they serve the most delicious turtle soup," Clara said, regaining my attention.

Just then a smiling waitress with a silver front tooth placed two bowls of soup on the table. Clara politely exchanged a few words with her in Spanish before the waitress hurried off to serve other customers.

"I've never had turtle soup before," I said, picking up a spoon and examining it to see if it was clean.

"You're in for a real treat," Clara said, watching me wipe my spoon with a paper napkin.

Reluctantly, I tasted a spoonful. The bits of white meat floating in a creamy tomato base were indeed delicious.

I took several more spoonfuls of soup, then asked, "Where do they get the turtles?"

Clara pointed out the window. "Right from the bay."

A handsome, middle-aged man sitting at the table next to ours turned to me and winked. His gesture, I thought, was more an attempt at being humorous than a sexual innuendo. He leaned toward me as if we had been addressing him. "The turtle you're eating now was a big one," he said in accented English. Clara looked at me and raised an eyebrow as if she couldn't believe the audacity of the stranger.

"This turtle was big enough to feed a dozen hungry people," the man went on. "They catch the turtles in the sea. It takes several men to haul one in."

"I suppose they harpoon them like whales," I remarked.

The man deftly moved his chair to our table. "No, I believe they use large nets," he said. "Then they club them to render them unconscious before slitting open their bellies. That way, the meat doesn't get too tough."

My appetite flew out the window. The last thing I wanted was for an insensitive assertive stranger to join us at our table, yet I didn't know how to handle the situation.

"Since we're on the subject of food, Guaymas is famous for it's jumbo shrimp," the man continued with a disarming smile. "Let me order some for the two of you."

"I've already done that," Clara said cuttingly.

Just then our waitress returned bringing a plate of the largest shrimp I had ever seen. It was enough for a banquet, certainly much more than Clara and I could possibly eat, no matter how hungry we were.

Our unwanted companion looked at me waiting to be invited to join our meal. If I had been alone, he would have succeeded in attaching himself to me against my will. But Clara had other plans and reacted in a decisive manner. She jumped up with feline agility, loomed over the man and looked straight down into his eyes.

"Buzz off, you creep!!" she yelled in Spanish. "How dare you sit at our table. My niece is no frigging whore!"

Her stance was so powerful and her tone of voice so shocking that everything in the room came to a halt. All eyes were focused on our table. The man cowered so pitifully that I felt sorry for him. He just slid out of the chair and half crawled out of the restaurant.

"I know that you're trained to let men get the best of you, just because they're men," Clara said to me after she had sat down again: "You've always been nice to men, and they've milked you for everything you had. Don't you know that men feed off women's energy!"

I was too embarrassed to argue with her. I felt every eye in the room was on me.

"You let them push you around because you feel sorry for them," Clara continued: "In your heart of hearts you're desperate to take care of a man, any man. If that idiot had been a woman, you yourself would never have let her sit down at our table."

My appetite was spoiled beyond repair. I became moody, pensive.

"I see I've hit a sore spot," Clara said with a smirk.

"You made a scene; you were rude," I said reproachfully.

"Definitely," she replied, laughing. "But I also scared him half to death."

Her face was so open and she seemed to be so happy that I finally had to laugh, remembering how shocked the man had been.

"I'm just like my mother," I grumbled. "She succeeded in making me a mouse when it comes to men."

The moment I voiced that thought, my depression vanished and I felt hungry again. I polished off almost the whole plate of shrimp.

"There's no feeling comparable to starting a new turn with a full stomach," Clara declared.

A pang of fear made the shrimp sit heavy in my stomach. Because of all the excitement, it hadn't occurred to me to ask Clara about her house. Maybe it was a shack, like the ones I had seen earlier while driving through the Mexican towns. What kind of food would I be eating? Perhaps this was going to be my last good meal. Would I be able to drink the water? I envisioned myself coming down with acute intestinal problems. I didn't know how to ask Clara about my accommodations without sounding insulting or ungrateful. Clara looked at me critically. She seemed to sense my turmoil.

"Mexico is a harsh place," she said. "You can't let your guard down for an instant. But you'll get used to it. The northern part of the country is even more rugged than the rest. People flock to the north in search of work or as a stopping place before crossing the U.S. border. They come by trainloads. Some stay, others travel inland in boxcars to work in the huge agricultural enterprises owned by private corporations. But there just isn't enough food or work for everyone, so the majority go as braceros to the United States."

I finished every drop of the soup, feeling guilty about leaving anything behind.

"Tell me more about this area, Clara."

"All the Indians here are Yaquis who were relocated in Sonora by the Mexican government."

"Do you mean they have not always been here?"

"This is their ancestral homeland," Clara said, "but in the twenties and thirties, they were uprooted and sent by the tens of thousands to central Mexico. Then in the late forties, they were brought back to the Sonoran Desert."

Clara poured some mineral water into her glass and then filled mine.

"It's hard to live in the Sonoran Desert," she said. "As you saw while driving, the land here is rugged and inhospitable. Yet the Indians had no choice but to settle around the shambles of what was once the Yaqui River. There, in ancient times, the original Yaquis built their sacred towns and lived in them for hundreds of years until the Spaniards came."

"Will we drive by those towns?" I asked.

"No. We don't have time. I want to get to Navojoa before dark. Maybe someday we can take a trip to visit these sacred towns."

"Why are those towns sacred?"

"Because for the Indians the location of each town along the river symbolically corresponds to a spot in their mythical world. These sites, like the lava mountains in Arizona, are places of power. The Indians have a very rich mythology. They believe they can step in and out of a dream world at a moment's notice. You see, their concept of reality is not like ours. According to the Yaqui myths, those towns also exist in the other world," Clara went on, "and it is from that ethereal realm that they receive their power. They call themselves the people without reason, to differentiate themselves from us, the people with reason."

"What sort of power do they get?" I asked.

"Their magic, their sorcery, their knowledge: All of that comes down to them directly from the dream world. That world is described in their legends and stories. The Yaqui Indians have a rich, extensive oral history."

I looked around the crowded restaurant. I wondered which of the people sitting at the tables, if any, were Indians, and which were Mexican. Some of the men were tall and wiry, while others were short and stocky. All the people looked foreign to me, and I felt secretly superior and distinctly out of place.

Clara finished the shrimp along with the beans and rice. I felt bloated myself, but in spite of my protests, she insisted on ordering caramel custard for dessert.

"You'd better fill up," she said with a wink. "You never know when you'll have your next meal or what it will consist of. Here in Mexico we always eat the kill of the day."

I knew she was teasing me, and yet I sensed truth in her words. Earlier I had seen a dead donkey hit by a car on the highway. I knew that the rural areas lack refrigeration and therefore people eat whatever meat is available. I couldn't help wondering what my next meal would be. Silently, I decided to limit my stay with Clara to only a couple of days.

In a more serious tone, Clara continued her discussion. "Things went from bad to worse for the Indians here," she said. "When the government built a dam as part of a hydroelectric project, it changed the course of the Yaqui River so drastically that the people had to pack up and settle elsewhere."

The harshness of this kind of life clashed with my own upbringing where there was always enough food and comfort. I wondered if coming to Mexico wasn't the expression of a deep desire, on my part, for a complete change. All my life I had been searching for adventure, yet now that I was in it's clutches, a dread of the unknown filled me.

I took a bite of the caramel custard and put out of my mind that dread which had sprouted since meeting Clara in the Arizona desert. I was glad to be in her company. At the moment, I was well-fed on jumbo shrimp and turtle soup, and even though, as Clara herself had intimated, this might be my last good meal, I decided I would have to trust her and allow the adventure to unfold.

Clara insisted on paying the bill. We filled up the cars with gasoline and were on the road again. After driving for several more hours, we arrived at Navojoa. We didn't stop but went through it, leaving the Pan American Highway to turn onto a gravel road heading east. It was midafternoon. I wasn't tired at all: In fact, I had enjoyed the remainder of the trip. The further south we drove, the more a sense of happiness and well-being replaced my habitual neurotic and depressed state.

After more than one hour of a bumpy ride, Clara veered off the road and signaled for me to follow. We coasted on hard ground along a high wall topped by a flowering bougainvillaea. We parked in a clearing of well-packed earth at the end of the wall.

"This is where I live," she called to me as she eased herself out of the driver's seat.

I walked to her car. She looked tired and seemed to have grown bigger. "You look as fresh as when we started," she commented. "Ah, the marvels of youth!"

On the other side of the wall, completely hidden by trees and dense shrubs, loomed a huge house with a tile roof, barred windows and several balconies. In a daze, I followed Clara through a wrought-iron gate, past a brick patio and through a heavy wooden door into the back of the house. The terra-cotta tile floor of the cool, empty hall enhanced the starkness of the whitewashed walls and the dark natural wood beams of the ceiling. We walked through it into a spacious living room.

The white walls were bordered with exquisitely painted tiles. Two immaculate beige couches and four armchairs were arranged in a cluster around a heavy wooden coffee table. On top of the table were some open magazines in English and Spanish. I had the impression that someone had just been reading them, sitting in one of the armchairs, but had left in a hurry when we entered through the back door.

"What do you think of my house?" Clara asked, beaming proudly.

"It's fantastic," I said. "Who would have thought there'd be such a house way out here in the wilderness?"

Then my envious self reared it's head and I became utterly ill at ease. The house was the kind of house I had always dreamed of owning, yet knew I would never be able to afford.

Clara said, "You can't imagine how accurate you are in describing this place as fantastic. All I can tell you about the house is that, like those lava mountains we saw this morning, it is imbued with power. A silent exquisite power runs through the house like an electric current runs through wires."

Upon hearing this, an inexplicable thing happened: My envy disappeared. It vanished totally with the last word she said.

"Now I'll show you to your bedroom," she announced. "And I'll also set up some ground rules you must observe while you're here as my guest. Any part of the house which is to the right and to the back of this living room is yours to use and explore, and that includes the grounds. But you must not enter any of the bedrooms, except of course, yours. There you can use anything you want. You can even break things in fits of anger or love them in outbursts of affection. The left side of the house, however, is not accessible to you at any time, in any way, shape or form. So stay out of it."

I was shocked by her bizarre request yet I assured her that I understood perfectly, and I would acquiesce to her wishes. My real feelings were that her request was rude and arbitrary. In fact, the more she warned me to stay away from certain parts of the house, the more curious I became to see them.

Clara seemed to have thought of something else and added, "Of course, you can use the living room: You can even sleep here on the sofa if you're too tired or lazy to go to your bedroom. "Another part you can't use, however, is the grounds in front of the house and also the main door. It's locked for the time being, so always enter the house through the back door."

Clara didn't give me time to respond. She ushered me down a long corridor past several closed doors, which she said were bedrooms and therefore forbidden to me, to a large bedroom. The first thing I noticed upon entering was the ornate wooden double bed. It was covered with a beautiful crocheted off-white bedspread. Next to a window on the wall facing the back of the house stood a hand-carved, mahogany etagere filled to capacity with antique objects, porcelain vases and figurines, cloisonne boxes and tiny bowls. On the other wall was a matching armoire, which Clara opened. Hanging inside were women's vintage dresses, coats, hats, shoes, parasols, canes; all of them seemed to be exquisite hand-picked items.

Before I could ask Clara where she had gotten those beautiful things, she closed the doors.

"Feel free to use anything you wish," she said. "These are your clothes, and this is your room for as long as you stay in this house."

She then glanced over her shoulder as if someone else were in the room and added,

"And who can tell how long that will be!"

It appeared that she was talking about an extended visit. I felt my palms sweat as I awkwardly told her that I could, at best, stay for only a few days. Clara assured me that I would be perfectly safe with her there; much safer, in fact, than anywhere else. She added that it would be foolish for me to pass up this opportunity to broaden my knowledge.

"But I've got to look for a job," I said by way of an excuse. "I don't have any money."

"Don't worry about money," she said. "I'll lend you whatever you need or give it to you. It's no problem."

I thanked her for her offer, but informed her that I had been brought up to believe that to accept money from a stranger was highly improper no matter how well-meaning the offer was.

She rebuffed me, saying, "I think what's the matter with you, Taisha, is that you got angry when I requested that you don't use the left side of the house or the main door. "I know that you felt I was being arbitrary and excessively secretive. Now you don't want to stay more than a polite day or two. Maybe you even think I'm an eccentric old woman with a few bats in the belfry?"

"No, no, Clara, it's not that. I've got to pay my rent. If I don't find a job soon I won't have any money, and to accept money from anyone is out of the question for me." '

"Do you mean that you didn't get offended by my request to avoid certain parts of the house?"

"Of course not."

"Didn't you get curious to know why I made the request?"

"Yes, I was curious."

"Well, the reason is that other people live on that side of the house."

"Your relatives, Clara?"

"Yes. We are a large family. There are, in fact, two families living here."

"Are they both large families?"

"They are. Each has eight members, making sixteen people all together."

"And they all live on the left side of the house, Clara?" In all my life I had never heard of such an odd arrangement.

"No. Only eight live there. The other eight are my immediate family and they live with me on the right side of the house.

"You are my guest, so you must stay on the right side. It's very important that you understand this. It may be unusual, but it's not incomprehensible."

I marveled at her power over me. Her words put my emotions at ease, but they didn't calm my mind. I understood then that in order to react intelligently in any situation, I needed a conjunction of both an alarmed mind and unsettled emotions. Otherwise, I remained passive, waiting for the next external impulse to sway me. Being with Clara had made me understand that in spite of my protest to the contrary; in spite of my struggle to be different; independent, I was incapable of thinking clearly or of making my own decisions.

Clara gave me a most peculiar look, as if she were following my unvoiced thoughts. I tried to mask my confusion by hurriedly saying, "Your house is beautiful, Clara. Is it very old?"

"Of course," she said, but didn't explain whether she meant that it was a beautiful house or that it was very old.

With a smile she added, "Now that you've seen the house - that is, half of it - we have a little business to take care of."

She removed a flashlight from one of the cabinets, and from the armoire she took out a padded Chinese jacket and a pair of hiking boots. She told me that I had to put them on after we had a snack, because we were going for a walk.

"But we just got here," I protested. "Won't it be dark soon?"

"Yes. But I want to take you to a look-out point in the hills from where you can see the entire house and grounds. It's best to first see the house at this time of the day. We all had our first glimpse of it in the twilight."

"Who do you mean when you say 'we'?" I asked.

"The sixteen people that live here, naturally, All of us do exactly the same things."

"All of you have the same professions?" I asked, unable to hide my surprise.

"Good gracious, no," she said, bringing her hand to her face as she laughed:

"I mean that whatever any one of us has to obligatorily do, the rest of us have to do too. Each one of us had to first see the house and grounds in the twilight, so that is the time you must view it, too."

"Why are you including me in this, Clara?"

"Let's just say for now it's because you are my guest."

"Am I going to meet your relatives later on?"

"You'll get to know all of them, "she assured me. "At the moment, there is no one in the house except the two of us, and a guard dog."

"Are they away on a trip?"

"Exactly, all of them have left for an extended journey and here I am guarding the house with the dog."

"When are you expecting them back?"

"It'll be a matter of weeks yet, maybe even months."

"Where did they go?"

"We are always on the move. Sometimes I leave for months at a time, and someone else stays behind to look after the property."

I was about to ask again where they went, but she answered my question. "They all went to India," she said.

"All fifteen of them?" I asked incredulously.

"Isn't that remarkable? It'll cost a fortune!" She said that in a tone of voice that was such a caricature of me and my inner feelings of envy that I had to laugh in spite of myself.

Then the thought struck me that it wouldn't be safe to be alone in such a remote, empty house with only Clara for company.

"We are alone but there's nothing to fear in this house," she said with a curious finality. Except maybe the dog. When we return from our walk, I'll introduce you to him. You've got to be very calm to meet him. He'll see right through you, and attack if he senses any hostility, or that you're afraid."

"But I am afraid," I blurted out. I was already starting to shake.

I hated dogs ever since I was a child, when one of my father's Doberman pinschers jumped on me and pushed me to the ground. The dog didn't actually bite me, she just growled and showed me her pointed teeth. I screamed for help, for I was too terrified to move. I was so frightened I wet my pants. I still remember how my brothers made fun of me when they saw me, calling me a baby that should be wearing diapers.

"I don't like dogs one bit, myself," Clara said, "but the dog we have is not really a dog. He is something else."

She had sparked my interest, but that didn't dispel my sense of foreboding.

"If you want to freshen up first, I'll accompany you to the outhouse just in case the dog is prowling around," she said.

I nodded. I was tired and irritable. The impact of the long drive had finally caught up with me. I wanted to wash the dust of the road from my face and comb the tangles out of my stringy hair.

Clara led me through a different corridor, then out to the back. There were two small buildings some distance from the main house.

"That's my gymnasium," she said, pointing at one of them. "It is off limits to you, too, unless I care to invite you in someday."

"Is that where you practice martial arts?"

"It is," Clara said dryly. "The other building is the outhouse. I'll wait for you in the living room, where we can have some sandwiches. But don't bother about fixing your hair," she said, as if noticing my preoccupation, there are no mirrors here. Mirrors are like clocks. They record the passage of time. And what's important is to reverse it."

I wanted to ask her what she meant by reversing time, but she prodded me toward the outhouse. Inside, I found several doors. Since Clara hadn't made any stipulations about the left and right sides of this building, and since I didn't know where the toilet was, I explored all of it. On one side of the central hall, there were six small water closets, each with a low wooden toilet the height for squatting. What made them unusual was that I didn't notice the distinct odor of a septic tank, nor the overpowering stench of lime-filled dirt holes. I could hear water running underneath the wooden toilets, but I couldn't tell how or from where it was led in.

On the other side of the hall, there were three identical beautifully tiled rooms. Each contained a free-standing antique tub and a long chest on top of which sat a pitcher filled with water and a matching porcelain basin. There were no mirrors in those rooms, or any stainless-steel fixtures on which I could have caught my reflection. In fact, there was no plumbing at all.

I poured water into a basin, splashed my face with it, then ran my wet fingers through my tangled hair. Instead of using one of the soft white Turkish towels for fear I would dirty it, I wiped my hands with some tissues that were in a box on the chest. I took several deep breaths and rubbed my tense neck before going out to face Clara again.

I found her in the living room arranging flowers in a blue and white Chinese vase. The magazines that had been open earlier were neatly stacked and next to them was a plate of food.

Clara smiled when she saw me. "You look as fresh as a daisy," she said. "Have a sandwich. Soon it will be twilight. We have no time to lose."

## Chapter 3

After I had gobbled down half of a ham sandwich, I hurriedly put on the jacket and boots Clara had given me. We left the house; each carrying a heavy-duty flashlight. The boots were too tight and the left one rubbed against my heel. I was certain I was going to get a blister. But I was glad I had the jacket because the evening was cold. I pulled up the collar and fastened the toggle at the neck.

"We are going to walk around the grounds," Clara said. "I want you to see this house from a distance and in the twilight. I'll be pointing out things for you to remember, so pay close attention."

We followed a narrow trail. In the distance, I could see the dark, jagged silhouette of the eastern mountains against the purple sky. When I commented on how sinister they looked, Clara replied that the reason those mountains seemed so ominous was because their ethereal essence was ancient. She told me that everything in the realms of the visible and invisible has an ethereal essence; and that one must be receptive to it in order to know how to proceed.

What she said reminded me of my tactic of looking at the southern horizon to gain insights and direction. Before I could ask her about it, she continued talking about the mountains and trees and the ethereal essence of rocks. It seemed to me that Clara had internalized Chinese culture to the point that she spoke in riddles the way enlightened men were depicted in Oriental literature. I became aware, then, that at an underlying level I had been humoring her all day. This was an odd feeling, for Clara was the last person I would want to treat in a condescending manner. I was used to humoring weak or overbearing people at my job or in school, but Clara was neither weak nor overbearing.

"That is the place," Clara said, pointing to a level clearing on higher ground. "You'll be able to see the house from there."

We left the trail and walked to the flat area she had pointed out. From there we had a breathtaking view of the valley below. I could see a large clump of tall green trees surrounded by darker brown areas, but not the house itself, for it was completely camouflaged by the trees and shrubs.

"The house is perfectly oriented according to the four directions," Clara said, pointing to a mass of greenery: "Your bedroom is on the north side; and the forbidden part of the house is on the south side. The main entrance is to the east. The back door and the patio area are to the west."

Clara pointed with her hand where all those sections were, but for the life of me, I couldn't see them. All I was able to make out was the dark green patch.

"You'd need X-ray vision to see the house," I grumbled. "It's totally hidden by trees." Ignoring my disagreeable mood, Clara said amiably, "And very important trees, too. Every one of those trees is an individual being with a definite purpose in life."

"Doesn't it go without saying that every living being on this earth has a definite purpose?" I said, peeved. Something in the enthusiastic way that Clara was showing off her property annoyed me. The fact that I couldn't see what she was pointing at made me even more irritable. A strong gust of wind made my jacket balloon at my waist, and then the thought occurred to me that my irritation might be born out of sheer envy.

"I didn't mean it to sound trivial," Clara apologized: "What I wanted to say was that everything and everyone in my house is there for a specific reason; and that includes the trees, myself, and of course also you."

I wanted to change the subject, so for lack of anything better to say, I asked, "Did you buy this house, Clara?"

"No. We inherited it. It has been in the family for generations, although given the turmoils Mexico has been through, the house has been destroyed and rebuilt many times."

I realized that I felt most at ease when I asked simple, direct questions, and Clara gave me direct answers. Her discussion about ethereal essences had been so abstract that I needed the respite of talking about something mundane, but to my chagrin Clara cut our commonplace exchange short, and lapsed into her mysterious insinuations again.

"That house is the blueprint of all the actions of the people who live there," she said almost reverently: "It's best feature is that it's concealed. It is there for anyone to see, but no one sees it. Keep that in mind. It's very important!"

How could I not remember it, I thought: For the past twenty minutes I had been straining my eyes in the semidarkness trying to see the house. I wished I had a pair of binoculars so that I could have satisfied my curiosity. Before I could comment, Clara began walking down the hill. I would have liked to stay there a while longer by myself, to breathe in the fresh night air; but I was afraid I would not be able to find my way back in the dark. I made a mental note to return to that spot during the day, and determine for myself whether it was really possible to see the house the way Clara had said.

On our return trek, we were at the back entrance of her property in no time at all. It was pitch black. I could see only the small area illuminated by our flashlights. She beamed hers onto a wooden bench, and told me sit and take off my boots and jacket, then hang them on the rack next to the door.

I was famished. Never in my life could I remember being so hungry; yet I thought it would be rude to ask Clara outright whether or not we were going to eat dinner. Perhaps she expected that the sumptuous meal we had in Guaymas would last us for the day. Yet judging from Clara's size, she was not one that would skimp on food.

She volunteered, "Let's go to the kitchen and see what we can find to eat. But first, I'm going to show you where the dynamo is kept and how to turn it on."

She guided me with her flashlight along a path leading around a wall to a brick shed, roofed with corrugated steel. The shed housed a small diesel generator. I knew how to turn it on because I had lived in a house in the country that had a similar generator in case of electrical failure. When I pulled the lever, I noticed from the shed window that only one side of the main house and part of the hall seemed to be wired for electric lights: There lights were lit, while everything else remained in darkness.

"Why didn't you wire the whole house?" I asked Clara. "It doesn't make sense to leave most of the house dark."

On an impulse, I added, "If you like, I can wire it for you."

She looked at me, surprised, "Is that right? Are you sure you wouldn't burn the place down?"

"Positive. They used to tell me at home that I'm a wizard with wires. I worked as an electrician's apprentice for a while, until the electrician started getting fresh with me."

"Then what did you do?" Clara asked.

"I told him where he could shove his wires, and quit."

Clara let out a guttural laugh. I didn't know what she found humorous; that I worked as an electrician or that one had made passes at me.

"Thanks for the offer," Clara said after regaining her voice. "But the house is wired exactly the way we want it. We use electricity only where it's needed."

I surmised that it was needed mostly in the kitchen and that this must be the part of the house that had light. Automatically I started toward the area that was lit. Clara tugged at my sleeve to stop me.

"Where are you going?" she asked,

"To the kitchen."

"You're heading the wrong way," she said. "This is rural Mexico. Neither the kitchen nor the bathroom is inside the main house. What do you think we have? Electric refrigerators and gas stoves?"

She led me along the side of the house past her gymnasium to another small building I hadn't seen before. It was almost totally hidden by pungent flowering trees. The kitchen was actually one enormous room, with a terra-cotta tile floor, freshly whitewashed walls and a bright row of track lights overhead. Someone had gone to a great deal of trouble installing modern fixtures. But the appliances were old - in fact, they looked like antiques. On one side of the room stood a gigantic iron wood-burning stove that, surprisingly, seemed to be lit. It had a foot bellow and an exhaust pipe that vented through a hole in the ceiling. On the other side of the room, there were two long picnic-style tables with benches placed on either side. Next to them was a work table with a three-inch-thick butcher-block top. The surface of the wood looked used, as if it had seen a lot of chopping.

Hanging from strategically placed hooks along the walls were baskets, iron pots and pans and a variety of cooking utensils. The whole place had the look of a rustic but comfortable well-stocked kitchen that one sees featured in certain magazines.

On the stove were three earthen pots with lids. Clara told me to sit down at one of the tables. She went to the stove, and with her back toward me busied herself; stirring and ladling. In a few minutes, she had placed a meal of meat stew, rice and beans in front of me.

"When did you prepare all this food?" I asked, genuinely curious, for she had had no time in which to do it.

"I just whipped all this up, and put it on the stove before we left," she said lightly.

'How gullible does she think I am?' I thought. 'This food must have taken hours to prepare.' She laughed self-consciously at my stare of disbelief.

"You're right," she said as if she wanted to give up the pretense. "There's a caretaker that prepares food for us sometimes."

"Is the caretaker here now?"

"No, no. The caretaker must have been here in the morning, but is gone now. Eat your food and don't worry about such unimportant details as where it came from."

'Clara and her house are full of surprises,' was the thought that crossed my mind, but I was too tired and hungry to ask any more questions, or to ponder about anything that wasn't immediate. I ate voraciously: The jumbo shrimp I had stuffed myself with at lunch was totally gone and forgotten. For someone who was a finicky eater, I was wolfing down my food. As a child, I had always been too nervous to relax and enjoy our meals. I was always anticipating all the dishes I would have to wash afterward. Every time one of my brothers used an extra plate or a needless spoon, I'd cringe. I was certain that they deliberately used as many dishes as they could just so I would have more to wash up. On top of that, at every meal, my father would take the opportunity to argue with my mother. He knew her manners prevented her from leaving the table until everyone had finished eating; so he poured out to her all his complaints and grievances.

Clara said that it wouldn't be necessary for me to wash dishes, although I offered my help. We went to the living room, one of the rooms she apparently felt needed no electricity, for it was pitch black. Clara lit a gasoline lantern. I had never in my life seen the light of such a lamp. It was bright and eerie, yet at the same time soft and mellow. Shimmering shadows were everywhere. I felt I was in a dream world, far from the reality lit up by electric lights. Clara, the house, and the room all seemed to belong to another time; to a different world.

"I promised you that I would introduce you to our dog," Clara began; sitting down on the couch: "The dog is an authentic member of the household. You must be very careful with what you feel or say around him."

I sat down next to her. "Is it a sensitive, neurotic dog?" I asked, dreading the encounter.

"Sensitive, yes. Neurotic, no. I seriously think this dog is a highly evolved creature; but being a dog makes it difficult, if not impossible, for that poor soul to transcend the idea of the self."

I laughed out loud at the preposterous notion of a dog having an idea of itself. I confronted Clara with the absurdity of her statement.

"You're right," she conceded. "I shouldn't use the word 'self.' I should rather say, he is lost in feeling important."

I knew that she was poking fun at me. My laughter became more guarded.

"You may laugh, but I'm actually quite serious," Clara said in a low tone: "I'll let you be the judge." She leaned closer, and lowered her voice to a whisper. "Behind his back, we call him sapo, which means 'toad' in Spanish; because he looks like a huge toad. But don't you dare call him that to his face. He'll attack you and rip you to shreds. Now, if you don't believe me, or if you're daring or stupid enough to try it and the dog gets mad, there's only one thing you can do."

"What's that?" I asked, humoring her again, although this time with a genuine touch of fear.

"You say very quickly that 'I' am the one who looks like a white toad. He loves to hear that."

I wasn't about to fall for her tricks. I thought I was too sophisticated to believe such nonsense.

"You've probably trained your dog to react negatively to the word sapo," I argued: "I've had experience with dog training. I'm certain dogs aren't intelligent enough to know what people are saying about them let alone get offended by it."

"Then let's do the following," Clara proposed. "Let me introduce you to him. Then we'll look in a zoology book for pictures of toads and comment on them. Then at one point you say to me, very quietly, 'He certainly looks like a toad,' and we'll see what happens."

Before I could accept or reject her proposition, Clara went out through a side door and left me alone. I assured myself that I had the situation well under control and that I wouldn't let this woman talk me into believing absurdities such as dogs in possession of a highly evolved consciousness.

I was giving myself a mental pep talk to be more assertive, when Clara came back with the hugest dog I had ever seen. It was a male dog, massive, with fat paws the size of coffee saucers. His hair was lustrous, black. He had yellow eyes with the look of someone bored to death with life. His ears were rounded and his face bulged and wrinkled on the sides. Clara was right: He had a definite resemblance to a giant toad. The dog came right up to me and stopped, then looked at Clara as if waiting for her to say something.

"Taisha, may I introduce you to my friend Manfred. Manfred, this is Taisha."

I felt like extending my hand and shaking it's paw, but Clara gave me a don't-do-it signal with a movement of her head.

"Very pleased to meet you, Manfred," I said trying not to laugh or sound afraid.

The dog moved closer and began to sniff my crotch. Disgusted, I jumped back; but at that instant, he turned around and hit me with his hindquarters directly behind my knee joint so that I lost my balance. The next thing I knew, I was on my knees; then on all fours on the floor, and the beast was licking the side of my face. Then before I could get up or even roll over, the dog farted right in my nose.

I jumped up screaming. Clara was laughing so hard she couldn't talk. I could have sworn that Manfred was laughing too. He was so elated that he had propped himself behind Clara, and was looking at me askance, scratching the floor with his huge front paws.

I was so outraged that I yelled, "Damn you, stinking toad-dog!"

In one instant, the dog jumped and rammed me with his head. I fell backward onto the floor with the dog on top of me. His jaw was only inches from my face: I saw a look of fury in his yellow eyes. The smell of his foul breath was enough to make anyone vomit, and I was definitely close to it. The louder I screamed for Clara to get that damn dog off me, the more ferocious became his snarls.

I was about to faint from fright, when I heard Clara yell above the dog's growls and my screams, "Tell him what I told you, tell him quickly."

I was too terrified to speak. Exasperated, Clara tried to move the dog off me by pulling him by his ears, but this only enraged the beast more.

"Tell him! Tell him what I said!" Clara yelled.

In my terror, I couldn't remember what I was supposed to say. Then as I was about to pass out, I heard my voice screeching, "I'm sorry. Clara is the one who looks like a toad."

Instantly the dog stopped his snarling and moved off my chest. Clara helped me up and guided me to the couch. The dog followed beside us as if he were giving her a hand. Clara had me drink some warm water, which made me even more nauseous. I barely reached the outhouse before I became violently ill.

Later, when I was resting in the living room, Clara suggested that we look at the book about toads with Manfred to give me a chance to reiterate that it was Clara who looked like a white toad. She said that I had to erase any confusion from Manfred's mind.

"Being a dog makes him very petty," she explained. "Poor soul. He doesn't want to be that way, he just can't help it. He flares up whenever he feels someone is making fun of him."

I told her that in my state, I was a poor subject for further experiments in dog psychology. But Clara insisted that I play it out to the end. As soon as she opened the book, Manfred came over to look at the pictures. Clara teased and joked about how strange toads looked, that some of them were even downright ugly. I held up my end and played along. I said the word 'toad,' and the Spanish word 'sapo,' as often and as loudly as I could in the context of our absurd conversation. But there was no reaction from Manfred. He seemed as bored as he was the first time I laid eyes on him.

When, as we had agreed upon, in a loud voice I said that Clara certainly looked like a white toad, Manfred immediately began wagging his tail and showed signs of true animation. I repeated the key phrase several times, and the more I repeated it, the more excited the dog became. I had then a flash of insight, and said that I was a skinny toad working her way to being just like Clara. At that, the dog jumped up as if prodded by an electric shock.

Then when Clara said, "You're carrying this a bit too far, Taisha," I truly thought Manfred was so elated that he couldn't take it any longer. He ran out of the room. I leaned back against the couch dazed. Down in the depth of me, and in spite of all the circumstantial evidence supporting it, I still couldn't believe that a dog could react to a derogatory nickname the way Manfred had.

"Tell me, Clara," I said, "what is the trick? How did you train your dog to react that way?"

"What you saw is not a trick," she replied: "Manfred is mysterious; an unknown being. There is only one man in the world who can call him sapo or sapito, little toad, to his face without inciting his wrath. You'll meet that man one of these days. He's the one who's responsible for Manfred's mystery, so he's the only person who can explain it to you."

Clara stood up abruptly. "You've had a long day," she said, handing me the gasoline lantern. "I think it's time for you to go to bed."

She took me to the room she had assigned to me. "You'll find everything you need inside," she said: "The chamber pot is under the bed, in case you are afraid to go to the outhouse. I hope you'll be comfortable."

With a pat on my arm, she disappeared down the dark corridor. I had no idea where her bedroom was. I wondered if it could perhaps be in the wing of the house I was not allowed to set foot in. She had said good night in such a strange fashion that for a moment I just stood there holding on to the doorknob, inferring all sorts of things.

I entered my room. The gasoline lantern splashed shadows everywhere. On the floor was a pattern of swirls cast from the vase of flowers that had been in the living room, which Clara must have brought in and set on the table. The carved wood chest was a mass of shimmering grays. The posts of the bed were lines that curved up the wall like snakes. Instantly I grasped the reason for the presence of the mahogany etagere filled with figurines and cloisonne objects. The light of the lantern had completely transformed them creating a fantasy world. Cloisonne and porcelain are not suited for electric lights, was the thought that came to mind.

I wanted to explore the room, but I was bone tired. I set the lantern on a small table next to the bed and undressed. Laid over the back of a chair was a white muslin nightgown which I put on. It seemed to fit; at least it didn't drag on the floor.

I climbed into the soft bed and lay with my back propped against the pillows. I didn't douse the lantern immediately: I became intrigued watching the surreal shadows. I remembered that as a child I used to play a game at bedtime: I would count how many shadow objects I could recognize on the walls of my room.

The breeze from the half-open window made the shadows on the walls flutter. In my exhausted state, I imagined I could see shapes of animals, trees and flying birds. Then in a mass of gray light I saw the faint outline of a dog's face. It had rounded ears and a flat, wrinkled snout. It seemed to be winking at me. I knew it was Manfred.

Strange feelings and questions began to flood my mind. How could I ever arrange the events of the day? I couldn't explain any of them to my satisfaction. The one thing that was most remarkable was that I knew for certain that my last remark - that I was a skinny toad on my way to being like Clara - had established a bond of empathy between Manfred and myself. I also knew for certain that I couldn't think of him as an ordinary dog, and that I was no longer afraid of him. In spite of my disbelief, he seemed to possess a special intelligence that made him aware of what Clara and I were saying.

The wind suddenly made the curtains open; dissolving the shadows in an array of shimmering fluff. The dog's face began to merge with the other markings on the wall that I fancied to be charms that would give me the power to meet the night. How remarkable, I thought, that the mind can project it's experiences onto a blank wall, as if it were a camera that had stored endless footage of film.

The shadows flickered as I lowered the wick of the lantern and the last bit of light faded from the room leaving me in pitch blackness. I wasn't afraid of the darkness. The fact that I was in a strange bed; in a strange house didn't distress me. Earlier, Clara had said this was my room, and after being in it for only a short while, I felt completely at home. I had a strong feeling that I was protected.

As I stared at the blackness in front of me, I noticed the air in the room become effervescent. I remembered what Clara had said about the house being charged with an imperceptible energy, like an electric current flowing through wires. I hadn't been aware of it earlier because of all the activity, but now in absolute silence, I distinctly heard a mild humming sound. Then I saw the minutest bubbles jumping all around the room at a tremendous speed. They were frantically bumping into one another giving off a buzzing sound like the drone of thousands of bees. The room; the entire house seemed to be charged with a subtle electric current that filled my very being.

## Chapter 4

"Did you sleep well?" Clara asked me as I entered the kitchen.

She was about to sit down at the table to eat. I noticed there was a place set for me, although she hadn't told me the night before at what time breakfast would be.

"I slept like a bear," I said truthfully.

She asked me to join her and dished some spicy shredded meat onto my plate. I told her that waking up in an unknown bed had always been a difficult moment for me. My father had changed jobs often and the family had to move to wherever there was a position available. I dreaded the morning jolt of awakening disoriented in a new house, but that dread hadn't materialized this time. The feeling I had upon awakening was that the room and the bed had always been mine.

Clara listened intently and nodded. "That's because you are in harmony with the person to whom the room belongs," she said.

"Whose room is it?" I asked, curious.

"You'll find out some day," she said, placing a hefty portion of rice next to the meat on my plate. She handed me a fork. "Eat up. You'll need all your strength today."

She didn't let me talk until I had finished everything on my plate.

"What are we going to do?" I asked as she put the dishes away.

"Not we," she corrected me. "You will be going to a cave to begin your recapitulation."

"My what, Clara?"

"I told you last night that everything and everyone in this house has a reason for being here, including you."

"Why am I here, Clara?"

"Your reason for being here has to be explained to you in stages," she said: "On the simplest level, you're here because you like it here regardless of what you may think. A second, and more complex, reason is that you're here to learn and practice a fascinating exercise called the recapitulation."

"What is this exercise? What does it consist of?"

"I'm going to tell you about it when we get to the cave."

"Why can't you tell me now?"

"Bear with me, Taisha. I can't answer all your questions at this point, because you don't have enough energy yet to handle the answers. Later on, you yourself will realize why it's so difficult to explain certain things. Put on your hiking boots, and let's go now."

We left the house and climbed the low hills toward the east, following the same trail we had taken the previous night. After a short hike, I spotted the flat clearing on high ground that I had intended to revisit. Without waiting for Clara to take the initiative, I headed toward it because I was eager to find out if I could see the house during the daytime.

I peered down into a bowl-like depression squeezed between hills and covered with green foliage, but although it was clear and sunny, I couldn't see any signs of the buildings. One thing was evident; there were more huge trees than I remembered seeing at night.

"Surely you can recognize the outhouse," Clara said. "It's that reddish spot by that clump of mesquite trees."

I jumped inadvertently because I had been so absorbed gazing into the valley that I hadn't heard Clara come up behind me.

To help direct my attention, she pointed to a particular section of the greenness below. I thought of telling her out of politeness that I was seeing it; the way I always agreed with people, but I didn't want to start my day by humoring her. I kept silent. Besides, there was something so exquisite in that hidden valley that it took my breath away. I stared at it so totally absorbed that I became drowsy: Leaning against a boulder, I let whatever was in the valley carry me away. And it did transport me. I felt that I was at a picnic ground where a party was going full force. I heard the laughter of people...

My reverie ended when Clara lifted me to my feet by my armpits.

"My goodness, Taisha!" she exclaimed. "You're stranger than I thought. For a moment there, I thought I'd lost you."

I wanted to tell her what I dreamt because I was certain that I had dozed off for an instant. But she didn't seem interested and started walking away.

Clara had a firm and purposeful stride, as if she knew exactly where she was going. I, on the other hand, walked aimlessly behind her trying to keep up without stumbling. We walked in total silence. After a good half hour, we were by a particular formation of rocks I was certain we had passed earlier.

"Weren't we here before?" I asked, breaking the silence.

She nodded. "We're going in circles," she admitted. "Something is stalking you and if we don't lose it, it will follow us to the cave."

I turned around to see if someone was behind us. I could distinguish only the shrubs and the twisted branches of trees. I hurried to catch up with Clara and tripped over a stump. Startled, I shrieked as I fell forward. With incredible speed, Clara caught me by the arm and broke my fall by placing her leg in front of me.

"You're not very good at walking, are you," she commented.

I told her I had never been a good outdoor person; that I grew up believing hiking and camping were for country folks; unsophisticated backwoods people, but not for educated urbanites. Walking in the foothills of the mountains was not an experience I found enjoyable. And except for the view of her property, scenery that others would find breathtaking left me indifferent.

"Just as well," Clara said. "You're not here to look at the scenery. You have to keep your mind on the trail. And watch out for snakes."

Whether there were snakes in the area or not, her admonition certainly kept my attention on the ground. As we continued walking, I became increasingly out of breath. The boots Clara had equipped me with were like lead weights on my feet. I had a hard time lifting my thighs to put one foot in front of the other.

"Is this nature walk really necessary?" I finally asked.

Clara stopped in her tracks and faced me. "Before we can talk about anything meaningful, you'll have to be at least aware of your elaborate entourage," she said. "I'm doing my best to help you do just that."

"What are you talking about?" I demanded. "What entourage?" My habitual moodiness had gotten hold of me again.

"I'm referring to your barrage of habitual feelings and thoughts; your personal history," Clara explained: "Everything that makes you into what you think you are; a unique and special person."

"What's wrong with my habitual feelings and thoughts?" I asked. Her incomprehensible assertions were definitely annoying me.

"Those habitual feelings and thoughts are the source of all our troubles," she declared.

The more she spoke in riddles, the greater became my frustration. At that moment, I could have kicked myself for succumbing to this woman's invitation to spend some time with her. It was a delayed reaction. Fears that had been kindling inside me now flared up full force. I imagined that she might be a psychopath who at any moment might pull out a knife and kill me. On second thought, having been trained in martial arts as she obviously had been, she wouldn't need a knife. One kick from her muscular leg could have been the end of me. I was no match for her. She was older than I, but infinitely more powerful. I saw myself ending up as just another statistic; a missing person never heard from again. I deliberately slowed down my pace to increase the distance between us.

"Don't get into such a morbid frame of mind," Clara said, definitely intruding into my thoughts: "By bringing you here, all I wanted to do was to help prepare you to face life with a little more grace. But it seems that all I succeeded in doing is to start a landslide of ugly suspicions and fears."

I felt genuinely embarrassed for having had such morbid thoughts. It was bewildering how she had been so absolutely right about my suspicions and fears, and how she had with one stroke soothed my internal turmoil.

I wished it would have been possible for me to apologize and reveal to her what was going through my mind, but I wasn't prepared to do that: It would have put me at even more of a disadvantage.

"You have a strange power to soothe the mind, Clara," I said instead. "Did you learn to do this in the Orient?"

"It's no great feat," she admitted, "not because your mind is easy to soothe, but because all of us are alike. To know you in detail, all I have to do is to know myself. And this, I promise you, I do. Now, let's keep on walking. I want to reach the cave before you collapse completely."

"Tell me again, Clara, what are we going to do in that cave?" I asked, unwilling to start walking again.

"I'm going to teach you unimaginable things."

"What unimaginable things?"

"You'll know soon," she said, looking at me with wide eyes.

I craved more information, but before I could engage her in conversation, she was already halfway up the next slope. I dragged my feet and followed her for another quarter of a mile or so until we finally sat down by a stream. There, the foliage of the trees' was so dense I could no longer see the sky. I took off the boots. I had a blister on my heel.

Clara picked up a hard-pointed stick and poked my feet in between the big and the second toe. Something like a mild current of electricity shot up my calves and ran along my inner thighs. Then she made me kneel on all fours and, taking each foot at a time, turned my soles up and poked me at the point just below the protuberance of my big toe. I yelled with pain.

"That wasn't so bad," she said in the tone of someone accustomed to treating sick people: "Classical Chinese doctors used to apply that technique to jolt and revive the weak, or to create a state of unique attention. But today such classical knowledge is dying out."

"Why is that, Clara?"

"Because the emphasis on materialism has led man to move away from esoteric pursuits."

"Is that what you meant when you told me in the desert that the line to the past was severed?"

"Yes. A great upheaval always brings about deep changes in the energy formation of things; changes that are not always for the better."

She ordered me to place my feet into the stream and feel the smooth rocks along the bottom. The water was ice cold and made me shiver involuntarily.

"Move your feet at the ankles in a clockwise circle," she suggested. "Let the running water draw away your fatigue."

After a few minutes of circling my ankles, I felt refreshed but my feet were nearly frozen.

"Now try to feel all your tension flow down to your feet, then throw it out with a sideward snap of your ankles," Clara said. "This way you'll also get rid of the coldness."

I continued flicking the water with my feet until they were numb. "I don't think this is working, Clara," I said, pulling my feet out.

"That's because you're not directing the tension away from you," she said, "Flowing water takes away tiredness, coldness, illness and every other unwanted thing. But in order for this to happen, you must intend it, otherwise, you can flick your feet until the stream runs dry with no results."

She added that if one did the exercise in bed, one would have to use the imagination to visualize a running stream.

"What exactly do you mean by 'intend it'?" I asked, drying my feet with the sleeves of the jacket. After a vigorous rubbing, they finally warmed up.

"Intent is the power that upholds the universe," she said. "It is the force that gives focus to everything. It makes the world happen."

I couldn't believe that I was listening to her every word. Some major change had definitely taken place, transforming my habitual bored indifference into a most unusual alertness. It wasn't that I understood what Clara was saying, because I didn't. What struck me was the fact that I could listen to her without fretting or becoming distracted.

"Can you describe this force more clearly?" I asked.

"There's really no way to talk about it, except metaphorically," she said. She brushed the ground with the sole of her shoe, sweeping dry leaves aside. "Underneath the dry leaves is the ground; the enormous earth. Intent is the principle underneath everything."

Clara put her cupped hands in the water, and splashed her face. I again marveled that her skin had no wrinkles. This time I commented on her youthful appearance.

"The way I look is a matter of keeping my inner being in balance with the surroundings," she said, shaking the water off her hands. "Everything we do hinges on that balance. We can be young and vibrant like this stream, or old and ominous like the lava mountains in Arizona. It's up to us."

I surprised myself by asking her, as if I believed what she was saying, if there was a way I could gain that balance.

She nodded. "You most certainly can," she said. "And you will, by practicing the unique exercise I'm going to teach you: the recapitulation."

"I can't wait to practice it," I said excitedly, putting on my boots.

Then for no explicable reason, I became so agitated that I jumped up and said,

"Shouldn't we be on our way again?"

"We've already arrived," Clara announced, and pointed to a small cave on the side of a hill. As I gazed at it, my excitement drained out of me. There was something ominous and foreboding about the gaping hole; but inviting, too. I had a definite urge to explore it, yet at the same time I was afraid of what I might find inside.

I suspected we were somewhere in the proximity of her house; a thought I found comforting. Clara informed me that this was a place of power, a spot the ancient geomancers from China, the practitioners of feng-shui, would have undoubtedly picked as a temple site.

"Here, the elements of water, wood and air are in perfect harmony," she said. "Here, energy circulates in abundance. You'll see what I mean when you get inside the cave. You must use the energy of this unique spot to purify yourself."

"Are you saying that I have to stay here?"

"Didn't you know that in the ancient Orient, monks and scholars used to retreat to caves?" she asked. "Being surrounded by the earth helped them to meditate."

She urged me to crawl inside the cave. Daringly, I eased myself in, putting all thoughts of bats and spiders out of my mind. It was dark and cool, and there was room for only one person. Clara told me to sit cross-legged, leaning my back against the wall. I hesitated, not wanting to dirty my jacket, but once I leaned back, I was relieved to be able to rest. Even though the ceiling was close to my head and the ground pressed hard against my tailbone, it wasn't claustrophobic. A mild, almost imperceptible current of air circulated in the cave. I felt invigorated, just as Clara had said I would. I was about to take off my jacket and sit on it when Clara, squatting at the mouth of the cave, spoke.

"The apex of the special art I want to teach you," she began, "is called the abstract flight, and the means to achieve it we call the recapitulation."

She reached inside the cave and touched the left and right sides of my forehead.

"Awareness must shift from here to here," she said: "As children, we can easily do this, but once the seal of the body has been broken through wasteful excesses, only a special manipulation of awareness, right living, and celibacy can restore the energy that has drained out; energy needed to make the shift."

I definitely understood everything she said. I even felt that awareness was like a current of energy that could go from one side of the forehead to the other, and I visualized the gap in between the two points as a vast space; a void that impedes the crossing.

I listened intently as she continued talking. "The body must be tremendously strong," she said, "so that awareness can be keen and fluid in order to jump from one side of the abyss to the other in the blink of an eye."

As she voiced her statements, something extraordinary happened. I became absolutely certain that I would be staying with Clara in Mexico. What I wanted to feel was that I would be returning to Arizona in a few days; but what I actually felt was that I would not be going back. I also knew that my realization was not merely the acceptance of what Clara had had in mind from the start; but that I was powerless to resist her intentions because the force that was maneuvering me was not hers alone.

"From now on, you have to lead a life in which awareness has top priority," she said, as if she knew I had made the tacit commitment of remaining with her: "You must avoid anything that is weakening and harmful to your body or your mind. Also, it is essential, for the time being, to break all physical and emotional ties with the world."

"Why is that so important?"

"Because before anything else, you must acquire unity."

Clara explained that we are convinced that a dualism exists in us; that the mind is the insubstantial part of ourselves, and the body is the concrete part. This division keeps our energy in a state of chaotic separation, and prevents it from coalescing.

"Being divided is our human condition," she admitted. "But our division is not between the mind and the body, but between the body, which houses the mind or the self, and the double, which is the receptacle of our basic energy."

She said that before birth, man's imposed duality doesn't exist, but that from birth on, the two parts are separated by the pull of mankind's intent. One part turns outward and becomes the physical body; the other, inward and becomes the double. At death the heavier part, the body, returns to the earth to be absorbed by it, and the light part, the double, becomes free. But unfortunately, since the double was never perfected, it experiences freedom for only an instant, before it is scattered into the universe.

"If we die without erasing our false dualism of body and mind, we die an ordinary death," she said.

"How else can we die?"

Clara peered at me with one eyebrow raised. Rather than answer my question, she revealed in a confiding tone that we die because the possibility that we could be transformed hasn't entered our conception. She stressed that this transformation must be accomplished during our lifetime, and that to succeed in this task is the only true purpose a human being can have. All other attainments are transient since death dissolves them into nothingness.

"What does this transformation entail?" I asked.

"It entails a total change," she said. "And that is accomplished by the recapitulation: the cornerstone of the art of freedom. The art I am going to teach you is called the art of freedom; an art infinitely difficult to practice, but even more difficult to explain."

Clara said that every procedure she was going to teach me, or every task she might ask me to perform, no matter how ordinary it might seem to me, was a step toward fulfilling the ultimate goal of the art of freedom: the abstract flight.

"What I'm going to show you first are simple movements that you must do daily," she continued. "Regard them always as an indispensable part of your life. First, I'll show you a breath that has been a secret for generations. This breath mirrors the dual forces of creation and destruction, of light and darkness, of being and notbeing."

She told me to move outside of the cave, then directed me, by gentle manipulation, to sit with my spine curved forward and to bring my knees to my chest as high as I could. While keeping my feet on the ground, I was to wrap my arms around my calves and firmly clasp my hands in front of my knees, or if I wished I could clasp each elbow. She gently eased my head down until my chin touched my chest.

I had to strain the muscles of my arms to keep my knees from pushing out sideways. My chest was constricted and so was my abdomen. My neck made a cracking sound as I tucked my chin in.

"This is a powerful breath," she said. "It may knock you out or put you to sleep. If it does, return to the house when you wake up. By the way, this cave is just behind the house. Follow the path and you'll be there in two minutes."

Clara instructed me to take short, shallow breaths. I told her that her request was redundant since that was the only way I could breathe in that position. She said that even if I only partially released the arm pressure I was creating with my hands, my breath would return to normal. But this wasn't what she was after. She wanted me to continue the shallow breaths for at least ten minutes.

I stayed in that position for perhaps half an hour, all the while taking shallow breaths as she had instructed. After the initial cramping in my stomach and legs subsided, the breaths seemed to soften my insides and dissolve them. Then after an excruciatingly long time, Clara gave me a push that made me roll backward so I was lying on the ground, but she didn't permit me to release the pressure of my arms. I felt a moment of relief when my back touched the ground, but it was only when she instructed me to unclasp my hands and stretch out my legs that I felt complete release in my abdomen and chest. The only way of describing what I felt is to say that something inside me had been unlocked by that breath and had been dissolved or released. As Clara had predicted, I became so drowsy that I crawled back inside the cave and fell asleep.

I must have slept for at least a couple of hours in the cave. And judging from the position I was lying in when I woke up, I hadn't moved a muscle. I believed that that was probably because there wasn't any room in the cave for me to toss and turn in my sleep, but it could also have been because I was so totally relaxed, I didn't need to move.

I walked back to the house, following Clara's directions. She was on the patio, sitting in a rattan armchair. I had the impression that another woman had been sitting there with her, and when she heard me coming, she had quickly gotten up and left.

"Ah, you look much more relaxed now," Clara said. "That breath and posture does wonders for us."

Clara said that if this breath is performed regularly, with calmness and deliberation, it gradually balances our internal energy.

Before I could tell her how invigorated I felt, she asked me to sit down because she wanted to show me one other body maneuver crucial for erasing out false dualism. She asked me to sit with my back straight and my eyes slightly lowered so that I would be gazing at the tip of my nose.

"This breath should be done without the constraints of clothing," she began. "But rather than having you strip naked in the patio in broad daylight, we'll make an exception. First, you inhale deeply, bringing in the air as if you were breathing through your vagina. Pull in your stomach and draw the air up along your spine, past the kidneys, to a point between the shoulder blades. Hold the air there for a moment, then raise it even further up to the back of the head, then over the top of your head to the point between your eyebrows."

She said that after holding it there for a moment, I was to exhale through the nose as I mentally guided the air down the front of my body, first to the point just below the navel, and then to my vagina, where the cycle had begun.

I began to practice the breathing exercise.

Clara brought her hand to the base of my spine, then traced a line up my back, over my head, and gently pressed the spot between my eyebrows.

"Try to bring the breath here," she said. "The reason you keep your eyes halfway open is so that you can concentrate on the bridge of your nose as you circulate the air up your back and over your head to this point; and also so you can use your gaze to guide the air down the front of your body, returning it to your sexual organs."

Clara said that circulating the breath in such a fashion creates an impenetrable shield that prevents outside disruptive influences from piercing the body's field of energy: It also keeps vital inner energy from dispersing outwardly. She stressed that the inhalation and exhalation should be inaudible, and that the breathing exercise could be done while one is standing, sitting or lying down; although in the beginning it is easier to do it while sitting on a cushion or on a chair.

"Now," she said, pulling her chair closer to mine, "let's talk about what we began discussing this morning: the recapitulation."

A shiver went through me. I told her that although I had no conception of what she was talking about, I knew it was going to be something monumental and I wasn't sure I was prepared to hear it. She insisted that I was nervous because some part of me sensed that she was about to disclose perhaps the most important technique of self-renewal. Patiently she explained that the recapitulation is the act of calling back the energy we have already spent in past actions. To recapitulate entails recalling all the people we have met, all the places we have seen, and all the feelings we have had in our entire lives; starting from the present and going back to the earliest memories; then sweeping them clean, one by one, with the sweeping breath.

I listened, intrigued, although I couldn't help feeling that what she said was more than nonsensical to me. Before I could make any comments at all, she firmly took my chin in her hands and instructed me to inhale through the nose as she turned my head to the left, and then exhale as she turned it to the right. Next, I was to turn my head to the left and right in a single movement without breathing. She said that this is a mysterious way of breathing and the key to the recapitulation, because inhaling allows us to pull back energy that we lost; while exhaling permits us to expel foreign, undesirable energy that has accumulated in us through interacting with our fellow men.

"In order to live and interact, we need energy," Clara went on. "Normally, the energy spent in living is gone forever from us. Were it not for the recapitulation, we would never have the chance to renew ourselves. Recapitulating our lives and sweeping our past with the sweeping breath work as a unit."

Recalling everyone I had ever known and everything I had ever felt in my life seemed to me an absurd and impossible task. "That can take forever," I said, hoping that a practical remark might block Clara's unreasonable line of thought.

"It certainly can," she agreed. "But I assure you, Taisha, you have everything to gain by doing it, and nothing to lose."

I took a few deep breaths, moving my head from left to right imitating the way she had shown me to breathe in order to placate her, and let her know I had been paying attention.

With a wry smile, she warned me that recapitulating is not an arbitrary or capricious exercise.

"When you recapitulate, try to feel some long stretchy fibers that extend out from your midsection," she explained: "Then align the turning motion of your head with the movement of these elusive fibers. They are the conduits that will bring back the energy that you've left behind. In order to recuperate our strength and unity, we have to release our energy trapped in the world and pull it back to us."

She assured me that while recapitulating, we extend those stretchy fibers of energy across space and time to the persons, places and events we are examining. The result is that we can return to every moment of our lives and act as if we were actually there.

This possibility sent shivers through me. Although intellectually I was intrigued by what Clara was saying, I had no intention of returning to my disagreeable past, even if it was only in my mind. If nothing else, I took pride in having escaped an unbearable life situation. I was not about to go back and mentally relive all the moments I had tried so hard to forget. Yet Clara seemed to be so utterly serious and sincere in explaining the recapitulation technique to me, that for a moment, I put my objections aside, and concentrated on what she was saying.

I asked her if the order in which one recollects the past matters. She said that the important point is to re-experience the events and feelings in as much detail as possible, and to touch them with the sweeping breath, thereby releasing one's trapped energy.

"Is this exercise part of the Buddhist tradition?" I asked.

"No, it isn't," she replied solemnly. "This is part of another tradition. Someday, soon, you'll find out what that tradition is."

## Chapter 5

In the middle of our conversation on the patio, Clara suddenly had a vacant, far-away look as if she had caught sight of something or someone at the side of the house. She hurriedly got up and excused herself, leaving me to ponder the importance of all the things she had said.

I didn't see Clara again until the following morning at breakfast. As we sat to eat our morning meal of shredded meat and rice, I told Clara that on my return trip from the cave yesterday, I had confirmed her statement that it was only a short distance from the house.

"Why did we really meander so much to get there, Clara?" I asked.

Clara burst out laughing. "I was trying to get you to take off your boots, so we passed by the stream," she replied.

"Why did I have to take off my boots? Was it because of my blister?"

"It wasn't your blister," Clara said emphatically. "I needed to poke very crucial points on the soles of your feet to awaken you from your lifelong lethargy. Otherwise, you would have never listened to me."

"Aren't you exaggerating, Clara? I would have listened to you even if you didn't poke my feet." She shook her head and gave me a knowing smile. "All of us were brought up to live in a sort of limbo where nothing counts except petty, immediate gratifications," she said. "And women are the masters of that state. "Not until we recapitulate can we overcome our upbringing. And talking about recapitulating ..." Clara noticed my pained expression and laughed.

"Do I have to go back to the cave, Clara?" I interrupted, anticipating what I thought she was going to tell me. "I'd much rather stay here with you. If you pose for me, I can make a few sketches of you, and then paint your portrait."

"No, thank you," she said, uninterested. "What I am going to do is give you some preliminary instructions on how to proceed with the recapitulation."

When we had finished eating, Clara handed me a writing pad and pencil. I thought she had changed her mind about my sketching her portrait. But as she pushed the writing materials toward me, she said that I should begin making a list of all the people I had met, starting from the present and going back to my earliest memories.

"That's impossible!" I gasped. "How on earth am I going to remember everyone I've ever come into contact with from day one?"

Clara moved the plates aside to give me room to write.

"Difficult, true, but not impossible," she said. "It's a necessary part of the recapitulation. The list forms a matrix for the mind to hook on to."

She said that the initial stage of the recapitulation consists of two things. The first is the list, the second is setting up the scene, and setting up the scene consists of visualizing all the details pertinent to the events that one is going to recall.

"Once you have all the elements in place, use the sweeping breath. The movement of your head is like a fan that stirs everything in that scene," she said: "If you're remembering a room, for example, breathe in the walls, the ceiling, the furniture, the people you see. And don't stop until you have absorbed every last bit of energy you left behind."

"How will I know when I've done that?" I asked. "Your body will tell you when you've had enough," she assured me:

"Remember, intend to inhale the energy that you left in the scene you're recapitulating, and intend to exhale the extraneous energy thrust into you by others."

Overwhelmed by the task of making the list and beginning to recapitulate, I couldn't think at all. A perverse and involuntary reaction of my mind was to go absolutely blank. Then a deluge of thoughts flooded in, making it impossible for me to know where to start. Clara explained that we must start the recapitulation by first focusing our attention on our past sexual activity.

"Why do you have to begin there?" I asked suspiciously.

"That's where the bulk of our energy is caught," Clara explained. "That's why we must free those memories first!"

"I don't think my sexual encounters were all that important."

"It doesn't matter. You could have been staring up at the ceiling bored to death, or seeing shooting stars or fireworks - someone still left his energy inside you and walked off with a ton of yours."

I was totally put off by her statement. To go back to my sexual experiences now seemed repugnant.

"It's bad enough," I said, "to relive my childhood memories, but I won't hash up what happened with men."

Clara looked at me with a raised eyebrow.

"Besides," I argued, "you'll probably expect me to confide in you. But really, Clara, I don't think what I did with men is anyone's business."

I thought I had made my point.

Clara resolutely shook her head and said, "Do you want those men you had to continue feeding from your energy? Do you want those men to get stronger as you get stronger? Do you want to be their source of energy for the rest of your life? No. I don't think you understand the importance of the sexual act or the scope of the recapitulation."

"You're right, Clara. I don't understand the reason for your bizarre request. And what's this business of men getting stronger because I'm their source of energy? I'm nobody's source or provider. I promise you that."

She smiled and said that she had made a mistake in forcing a confrontation of ideologies at this time. "Bear with me," she begged: "This is a belief I have chosen to uphold. As you progress with your recapitulation, I will tell you about the origin of this belief. Suffice it to say that it is a critical part of the art I'm teaching you."

"If it's as important as you claim, Clara, perhaps you'd better tell me about it now," I said. "Before we go any further with the recapitulation, I'd like to know what I'm getting into."

"All right, if you insist," she said, nodding.

She poured some camomile tea into our mugs and added a spoonful of honey to hers.

In the authoritative voice of a teacher enlightening a neophyte, she explained that women, more so than men, are the true supporters of the social order, and that to fulfill this role, they have been reared uniformly the world over to be at the service of men.

"It makes no difference whether women are bought right off the slave block, or they are courted and loved," she stressed. "Their fundamental purpose and fate is still the same: to nourish, shelter and serve men."

Clara looked at me, I believed, to assess if I was following her argument. I thought I was, but my gut reaction was that her entire premise seemed wrong.

"That may be true in some cases," I said, "but I don't think you can make such sweeping generalizations to include all women."

Clara disagreed vehemently. "The diabolical part of women's servile position is that it doesn't appear to be merely a social prescription," she said, "but a fundamental biological imperative."

"Wait a minute, Clara," I protested. "How did you arrive at that?"

She explained that every species has a biological imperative to perpetuate itself, and that nature has provided tools in order to ensure that the merging of female and male energies takes place in the most efficient way. She said that in the human realm, although the primary function of sexual intercourse is procreation, it also has a secondary and covert function, which is to ensure a continual flow of energy from women to men.

Clara put such a stress on the word 'men' that I had to ask, "Why do you say it as if it were a one-way street? Isn't the sexual act an even exchange of energy between male and female?"

"No," she said emphatically. "Men leave specific energy lines inside the body of women. They are like luminous tapeworms that move inside the womb, sipping up energy."

"That sounds positively sinister," I said, humoring her.

She continued her exposition in utter seriousness. "The energy lines are put there for an even more sinister reason," she said, ignoring my nervous laughter, "which is to ensure that a steady supply of energy reaches the man who deposited them. "Those lines of energy, established through sexual intercourse, collect and steal energy from the female body to benefit the male who left them there."

Clara was so adamant in what she was saying that I couldn't joke about it but had to take her seriously. As I listened, I felt my nervous smile turn into a snarl.

"Not that I accept for a minute what you're saying, Clara," I said, "but just out of curiosity, how in the world did you arrive at such a preposterous notion? Did someone tell you about this?"

"Yes, my teacher told me about it. "At first, I didn't believe him either," she admitted, "but he also taught me the art of freedom, and that means that I learned to see the flow of energy. Now I know he was accurate in his assessments, because I can see the worm-like filaments in women's bodies for myself. You, for example, have a number of them, all of them still active."

"Let's say that's true, Clara," I said uneasily. "Just for the sake of argument, let me ask you why should this be possible? Isn't this one-way energy flow unfair to women?"

"The whole world is unfair to women!" she exclaimed. "But that's not the point."

"What is the point, Clara? I know I'm missing it."

"Nature's imperative is to perpetuate our species," she explained. "In order to ensure that this continues to take place, women have to carry an excessive burden at their basic energy level, and that means a flow of energy that taxes women."

"But you still haven't explained why this should be so," I said, already becoming swayed by the force of her convictions.

"Women are the foundation for perpetuating the human species," Clara replied. "The bulk of the energy comes from them, not only to gestate, give birth and nourish their offspring, but also for ensuring that the male plays his part in this whole process."

Clara explained that ideally this process ensures that a woman feeds her man energetically through the filaments he left inside her body, so that the man becomes mysteriously dependent on her at an ethereal level. This is expressed in the overt behavior of the man returning to the same woman again and again to maintain his source of sustenance. That way, Clara said, nature ensures that men, in addition to their immediate drive for sexual gratification, set up more permanent bonds with women.

"These energy fibers left in women's wombs also become merged with the energy makeup of the offspring, should conception take place," Clara elaborated: "It may be the rudiments of family ties, for the energy from the father merges with that of the fetus, and enables the man to sense that the child is his own. These are some of the facts of life a girl's mother never tells her. Women are reared to be easily seduced by men, without the slightest idea of the consequences of sexual intercourse in terms of the energy drainage it produces in them. This is my point and this is what is not fair."

As I listened to Clara talk, I had to agree that some of what she said made sense to me at a deep bodily level. She urged me not just to agree or disagree with her, but to think this through and evaluate what she had said in a courageous, unprejudiced and intelligent manner.

"It's bad enough that one man leaves energy lines inside a woman's body," Clara went on, "although that is necessary for having offspring and ensuring their survival. But to have the energy lines of ten or twenty men inside her feeding off her luminosity is more than anyone can bear. No wonder women can never lift up their heads."

"Can a woman get rid of those lines?" I asked, more and more convinced that there was some truth to what Clara was saying.

"A woman carries those luminous worms for seven years," Clara said, "after which time they disappear or fade out. But the wretched part is that when the seven years are about to be up, the whole army of worms, from the very first man a woman had to the very last one, all become agitated at once so that the woman is driven to have sexual intercourse again. Then all the worms spring to life stronger than ever to feed off the woman's luminous energy for another seven years. It really is a never-ending cycle."

"What if the woman is celibate?" I asked. "Do the worms just die out?"

"Yes, if she can resist having sex for seven years.

"But it's nearly impossible for a woman to remain celibate like that in our day and age, unless she becomes a nun, or has money to support herself. And even then she still would need a totally different rationale."

"Why is that, Clara?"

"Because not only is it a biological imperative that women have sexual intercourse, but it is also a social mandate."

Clara gave me then a most confusing and distressing example. She said that since we are unable to see the flow of energy, we may be needlessly perpetuating patterns of behavior or emotional interpretations associated with this unseen flow of energy. For instance, for society to demand that women marry or at least offer themselves to men is wrong, as it is wrong for women to feel unfulfilled unless they have a man's semen inside them. It is true that a man's energy lines give women purpose; make them fulfill their biological destinies of feeding men and their offspring. But human beings are intelligent enough to demand of themselves more than merely the fulfillment of the reproduction imperative. She said that, for example, to evolve is an equal if not a greater imperative than to reproduce; and that, in this case, evolving entails the awakening of women to their true role in the energetic scheme of reproduction.

She then turned her argument to the personal level and said that I had been reared, like every other woman, by a mother who regarded as her primary function raising me to find a suitable husband so I would not have the stigma of being a spinster. I was really bred, like an animal, to have sex, no matter what my mother chose to call it.

"You, like every other woman, have been tricked and forced into submission," Clara said. "And the sad part is that you're trapped in this pattern, even if you don't intend to procreate."

Her statements were so distressing that I laughed out of sheer nervousness.

Clara wasn't fazed at all.

"Perhaps all this is true, Clara," I said, trying not to sound condescending. "But in my case, how can remembering the past change anything? Isn't it all water under the bridge?"

"I can only tell you that to wake up, you must break a vicious circle," she countered, her green eyes assessing me curiously.

I reiterated that I didn't believe in her theories about diabolic biological imperatives or vampirelike males leeching off women's energy, and argued that just sitting in a cave remembering isn't going to change anything.

"There are certain things I just don't want to think about ever again," I snapped and banged my fist on the kitchen table. I stood up ready to leave and told her that I didn't want to hear any more about the recapitulation, the list of names, or any biological imperatives.

"Let's make a deal," Clara said, with the air of a merchant getting ready to cheat a customer. "You're a fair person; you like to be honorable. So I'll propose that we reach an agreement."

"What kind of an agreement?" I asked with mounting anxiety.

She tore off a sheet from the writing pad and handed it to me. "I want you to write and sign a promissory voucher stating that you're going to try the recapitulation exercise for one month only. If, after a month, you don't notice any increase in energy, or any improvement in how you feel toward yourself or toward life in general, you will be free to go back home, wherever home is. If this turns out to be the case, you can simply write off the entire experience as the bizarre request of an eccentric woman."

I sat down again to calm myself. As I took a few sips of tea, the thought struck me that it was the least I could do after all the trouble Clara had gone to for me. Besides, it was apparent that she wasn't going to let me off the hook that easily. I could always go through the motions of recapitulating my memories: After all, who is to know if, in the cave, I did the visualization and breathing, or if I just daydreamed or took a nap?

"It's only one month," she said sincerely. "You won't be signing your life away. Believe me, I'm really trying to help you."

"I know that," I said. "But why would you bother doing all this for me? Why me, Clara?"

"There is a reason," she replied, "but it's so farfetched that I can't spring it on you now. The only thing I can tell you is that by helping you, I'm fulfilling a worthy purpose; paying off a debt. Would you accept my repaying a debt as a reason?"

Clara looked at me so hopefully that I picked up the pencil and wrote the voucher, deliberately fussing over the wording so that there would be no confusion about the one-month time frame. She bargained with me for not including in that month the time it took me to draw up the list of names. I agreed and made an addendum to that effect. Then, in spite of my better judgement, I signed it.

## Chapter 6

It took weeks of brain-racking work to compile the list. I hated myself for having let Clara talk me into not including that time in the voucher. During those long days, I worked in absolute solitude and silence. I only saw Clara at breakfast and at dinner, which we ate in the kitchen; but we hardly spoke. She would rebuff all my attempts at cordial conversation, saying that we would talk again when I had finished my list. When I had completed it, she put down her sewing and immediately accompanied me to the cave. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and according to Clara, early morning and late afternoon were the most propitious times to begin such a vast undertaking.

At the entrance of the cave, she gave me some instructions.

"Take the first person on your list", Clara said, "and work your memory to recall everything you experienced with that person from the moment you two met to the last time you interacted. Or, if you prefer, you can work backward, from the last time you had dealings with that person to your first encounter."

Armed with the list, I went to the cave every day. At first, recapitulating was painstaking work. I couldn't concentrate because I dreaded dredging up the past. My mind would wander from what I considered to be one traumatic event to the next, or I would simply rest or daydream. But after a while, I became intrigued with the clarity and detail that my recollections were acquiring. I even began to be more objective about experiences I had always considered to be taboo.

Surprisingly, I also felt stronger and more optimistic. Sometimes, as I breathed, it was as if energy were oozing back into my body, causing my muscles to become warm and to bulge. I became so involved in my recapitulation task that I didn't need a whole month to prove it's worth. Two weeks after the starting time stipulated in the voucher, while we were eating dinner, I asked Clara to find someone to move me out of my apartment and to put my things in storage. Clara had suggested this option to me several times before, but each time I had refused her offer because I was not ready to make the commitment. Clara was delighted with my request.

"I'll have one of my cousins do it," she volunteered. "She'll take care of everything. I don't want any worries to keep you from concentrating."

"Now that you mention it, Clara," I said, "there is one other thing that's been bothering me."

Clara waited for me to speak. I told her that I found it very odd that our meals were always ready, although I had never seen her cooking or preparing food.

"That's because you're never in the house during the day," Clara said matter-of-factly. And at night, you retire early."

It was true that I spent most of my time in the cave. When I did go back to the house, it was to have a meal in the kitchen. Afterward, I stayed in my room because the size of the house intimidated me. It was enormous. It didn't look abandoned, for it was filled to capacity with furniture, books and various decorative objects made of ceramic, silver or cloisonne. Every room was clean and dust free, as if a maid came regularly to tidy up. Yet the house seemed empty because there were no people in it. Twice Clara had disappeared on mysterious errands that she refused to discuss; during those times, the only other living being in the house beside myself was Manfred. Those were also the times when Manfred and I hiked into the hills overlooking the house. I had mapped the house and it's grounds from an observation point I thought I had found myself. I didn't want to admit at that time that Manfred had guided me to it.

From my private promontory, I spent hours trying to figure out the orientation of the house. Clara had indicated that it followed the cardinal points, but when I checked it with a compass, the house seemed to be on a slightly different alignment. The grounds around the house were most disturbing because they defied any accurate mapping I tried to devise. I could see from my observation post that the grounds seemed much more extensive than when measured from the house itself. Clara had forbidden me to set foot in the front part of the house - the east - as well as the south side. But I had calculated, by walking around the periphery of the house, that the two areas were identical to the west and north sides to which I had access. However, when seen from a distance, they weren't identical at all; and I was at a loss to explain the discrepancy.

I gave up trying to pin down the layout of the house and grounds, and began placing my attention on another mysterious problem: Clara's relatives. Although she constantly referred to them in an oblique manner, I had not yet seen hide nor hair of them.

"When are your relatives coming back from India?" I asked Clara point-blank.

"Soon," she replied.

She picked up her rice bowl with one hand and held it the way the Chinese do. I had never seen her use chop-sticks before and marveled at the incredible precision with which she manipulated them.

"Why are you so concerned with my relatives?" she asked.

"To tell you the truth, Clara, I don't know why, but I'm very curious about them," I said. "I've been having unsetting feelings and thoughts in this huge house."

"Do you mean that you don't like the house?"

"On the contrary, I love it. It's just so big and haunting."

"What kind of thoughts and feelings unsettle you?" she asked, putting down her bowl.

"Sometimes I think I see people in the hallway, or I hear voices. And I'm always under the impression that someone is watching me, but when I look around there isn't anyone there."

"There's more to this house than meets the eye," Clara admitted, "but that shouldn't engender fear or worry. There is magic in this house, in the land, and in the mountains around this entire area. That's the reason we chose to live here. In fact, that's also the reason you decided to live here yourself, even though you don't have the slightest inkling of that being the reason for your choice. But this is the way it should be. You bring your innocence to this house and the house with all the intent it stores turns it into wisdom."

"It all sounds very beautiful, Clara, but what exactly does it mean?"

"I always talk to you with the hope that you will understand me," Clara said with a note of disappointment: "Every one of my relatives, who, I assure you, will come into contact with you sooner or later, will speak to you in the same way. So don't think that we're talking nonsense just because you don't understand us."

"Believe me, Clara, I don't think that at all, and I am grateful that you are trying to help me."

"It's the recapitulation that's helping you, not me," Clara corrected me:

"Have you noticed any strange things about the house, other than what you have already told me?"

I told her about the disparity between my visual assessments of the house from the observation post and from the grounds. She laughed until she was coughing.

"I have to adjust my behavior to this new development," Clara said when she could talk again.

"Can you explain to me why the grounds seem to be lopsided, and why I get such different compass readings when I'm down here than when I'm up on the hill?" I asked.

"I certainly can; but it won't make any sense to you. What's more, you may even get frightened."

"Does it have to do with the compass, Clara? Or is it me? Am I crazy or what?"

"It has to do with you, of course: You're the one making those measurements; but it's not that you're crazy. It's something else."

"What is it, Clara? Tell me. This whole thing is giving me the creeps. It's as if I were in a science fiction movie where nothing is real and anything can happen. I hate that genre!"

Clara didn't seem willing to divulge anything more. Instead she asked, "Don't you like the unexpected?"

I told her that having male siblings had been so devastating for me; that I became jaded, and as a matter of principle, I hated everything they liked. They watched Twilight Zone on television, and raved about it. To me, it was a most manipulative and contrived show.

"Let's see how I can put this," Clara conceded: "First of all, this is definitely not a science fiction house. It's rather a house of extraordinary intent. The reason why I can't explain it's discrepancies is because I can't explain to you yet what intent is."

"Please don't talk in riddles, Clara," I begged. "It's not only frightening, but plainly infuriating."

"In order for you to understand this delicate matter, I have to talk in a roundabout way," Clara said: "So let me first tell you about the man who was directly responsible for my being here in this house, and indirectly responsible for my relation with you. His name was Julian and he was the most exquisite being you could ever encounter. He found me one day when I had lost my way in those mountains in Arizona and he brought me here to this house."

"Wait a minute, Clara, I thought you said that this house has been in your family for generations," I reminded her.

"Five generations, to be exact," she replied.

"How can you make two contradictory statements with such nonchalance?"

"I'm not contradicting myself. It's you who are interpreting things without a proper foundation. The truth is that this house has been in my family for generations; but my family is an abstract family. It's a family in the same manner this house is a 'house,' and Manfred is a 'dog.' But you already know that Manfred isn't a real dog; nor is this house real like any other house. Do you' see what I mean?"

I wasn't in the mood for Clara's riddles. For a while, I sat quietly, hoping that she would change the subject.

Then I felt guilty for brooding and being short-tempered. "No, I don't see what you mean, I finally said.

"In order for you to understand all this, you have to change," Clara said patiently: "But then, that's precisely why you are here: to change. And to change means that you will be able to succeed in making the abstract flight, at which time everything will be clear to you."

At my desperate urging, she explained that this unimaginable flight was symbolized by moving from the right side of the forehead to the left, but what it really meant was bringing the ethereal part of us, the double, into our daily awareness.

"As I've already explained to you," she went on, "the body-mind dualism is a false dichotomy. The real division is between the physical body, which houses the mind, and the ethereal body or the double, which houses our energy. The abstract flight takes place when we bring our double to bear on our daily lives. In other words, the moment our physical body becomes totally conscious of it's energetic ethereal counterpart, we have crossed over into the abstract; a completely different realm of awareness."

"If it means I'll have to change first, I seriously doubt I'll ever be able to make that crossing," I said. "Everything seems so deeply ingrained in me that I feel I'm set for life."

Clara poured some water into my cup. She put down the ceramic pitcher and looked at me squarely.

"There is a way to change," she said, "and by now you are up to your ears in it. It's called the recapitulation."

She assured me that a deep and complete recapitulation enables us to be aware of what we want to change by allowing us to see our lives without delusion. It gives us a moment's pause in which we can choose to accept our usual behavior, or to change it by intending it away before it fully entraps us.

"And how do you intend something away?" I asked. "Do you just say, 'Begone, Satan!'?"

Clara laughed and took a sip of water. "To change, we need to meet three conditions," she said: "First, we must announce out loud our decision to change so that intent will hear us. Second, we must engage our awareness over a period of time: We can't just start something and give it up as soon as we become discouraged. Third, we have to view the outcome of our actions with a sense of complete detachment. This means we can't get involved with the idea of succeeding or failing. Follow these three steps and you can change any unwanted feelings and desires in you," Clara assured me.

"I don't know, Clara," I said skeptically. "It sounds so simple the way you put it."

It wasn't that I didn't want to believe her: It was just that I had always been practical; and from a practical point of view, the task of changing my behavior was staggering in spite of her three-fold program.

We finished our meal in complete silence. The only sound in the kitchen was the constant dripping of water as it passed through a limestone filter. That gave me a concrete image of the gradual cleansing process of recapitulating. Suddenly, I had a surge of optimism. Perhaps it was possible to change oneself; to become purified drop by drop, thought by thought, just like the water passing through the filter.

Above us, the bright track lights cast eerie shadows on the white tablecloth. Clara put down her chopsticks and began curling her fingers as if she were making shadow pictures on the tablecloth. At any moment I expected her to do a rabbit or a turtle.

"What are you doing?" I asked, breaking the silence.

"This is a form of communication," she explained, "not with people though, but with that force we call intent."

She extended her little and index fingers, then made a circle by touching her thumb to the tips of the two remaining fingers. She told me that this was a signal to trap the attention of that force and to allow it to enter the body through the energy lines that end or originate in the fingertips.

"Energy comes through the index and little finger if they are extended like antennae," she explained, showing me the gesture again. "Then the energy is trapped and held in the circle made by the other three fingers."

She said that with this specific hand position we can draw sufficient energy into the body to heal or strengthen it, or to change our moods and habits.

"Let's go to the living room, where we can be more comfortable," Clara said. "I don't know about you, but this bench is beginning to hurt my bottom."

Clara stood up and we walked across the dark patio, through the back door and hall of the main house into the living room. To my surprise, the gasoline lamp had already been lit and Manfred was asleep curled up next to an armchair. Clara made herself comfortable in that chair, which I had always taken to be her favorite. She picked up a piece of embroidery that she had been working on and carefully added a few more stitches by passing the needle through the cloth and pulling it out with a graceful sweeping motion of her hand. Her eyes were steadfast; intent on her work.

To me it was so unusual to see this strong woman doing needle work that I glanced over curiously to see if I could catch a glimpse of her handicraft. Clara noticed my interest and held up the cloth for me to see. It was a pillowcase with embroidered butterflies perched on colorful flowers. It was too gaudy for my taste.

Clara smiled as if she sensed my critical opinion of her work.

"You might tell me that my work is sheer beauty or that I'm wasting my time," she said, taking another stitch, "but that wouldn't affect my inner serenity. This attitude is called 'knowing your worth.'" She asked a rhetorical question that she answered herself: "And what do you think my worth is? Absolutely zero."

I told her that in my opinion she was magnificent, truly a most inspiring person. How could she say that she had no worth?

"It's all very simple," Clara explained. "As long as the positive and negative forces are in balance, they cancel each other out and that means that my worth is zero. It also means that I cannot possibly be upset when someone criticizes me, nor can I be pleased when someone praises me."

Clara held up a needle and, in spite of the dim light, she quickly threaded it.

"Chinese sages of ancient times used to say that in order to know your worth, you have to slip through the eye of the dragon," she said, pulling the two ends of the thread together.

She said that those sages were convinced that the boundless unknown is guarded by an enormous dragon whose scales shine with a dazzling light. They believed that the courageous seekers who dare to approach the dragon are awed by it's blinding glare, by the power of it's tail that with the minutest flicker crushes anything in it's way, and by it's burning breath that turns to ashes everything within it's reach. But they also believed that there is a way to slip by that unapproachable dragon. Clara said that they were confident that by merging with the dragon's intent, one can become invisible and go through the dragon's eye.

"What does that mean, Clara?" I asked.

"It means that through the recapitulation we can become empty of thought and desire, which for those ancient seers meant to become one with the dragon's intent, therefore invisible."

I picked up an embroidered cushion, another sample of Clara's work, and tucked it behind my back. I took several deep breaths to clear my mind. I wanted to understand what she was saying, but her insistence in using Chinese metaphors made it all the more confusing to me. Yet there was such an urgency in everything she said, that I felt it would be my loss if I didn't at least try to understand her.

Watching Clara embroidering, I was suddenly reminded of my mother. Perhaps it was that memory that induced in me a monumental sadness; a longing that had no name. Or perhaps it was listening to what Clara had said; or just being in her empty, hauntingly beautiful house, under that eerie light of the gasoline lamp. Tears flooded my eyes and I began to weep.

Clara jumped up from her chair and stood beside me. She whispered in my ear so loudly that it sounded like a shout, "Don't you dare to give in to self-pity in this house. "If you do, this house will reject you. It will spit you out, just like you spit out an olive pit."

Her admonition had the proper effect on me. My sadness instantly vanished. I dried my eyes and Clara continued talking as if nothing had happened.

"The art of emptiness was the technique practiced by Chinese men of wisdom who wanted to go through the dragon's eye," she said, taking her seat again: "Today, we call it the art of freedom. We feel it's a better term because that art really leads to an abstract realm where humanness doesn't count."

"Do you mean, Clara, that it is an inhuman realm?"

Clara put her embroidery down in her lap and looked at me. "What I mean is that almost everything we have heard about this realm, from sages and seers who sought it, smacks of human concerns. But we, the ones who practice the art of freedom, have found out from firsthand experience that this is an inaccurate portrayal. In our experience, whatever is human in that realm is so unimportant that it is lost in the vastness."

"Wait a minute, Clara. What about that group of legendary personages called the Chinese immortals? Didn't they achieve freedom in the way you mean it?" .

"Not in the way we mean it," Clara said. "Freedom to us is being free from humanness. The Chinese immortals were caught in their myths of immortality; of being wise, of having liberated themselves, of coming back to earth to guide others along the way. They were scholars, musicians; possessors of supernatural powers. They were righteous and whimsical very much like the classical Greek gods. Even nirvana is a human state, in which bliss is being free from the flesh."

Clara had succeeded in making me feel completely forlorn. I told her that all my life I had been accused of lacking human warmth and understanding. In fact, I had been told that I was the coldest creature anyone could ever come across. Now Clara was saying that freedom was being free from human compassion, and I had always felt I was missing something crucial by not possessing it.

I was on the verge of tears of self-pity again, but Clara came again to my rescue.

"Being free from humanness doesn't mean such an idiotic thing as not possessing warmth or compassion," she said.

"Even so, freedom the way you describe it is inconceivable to me, Clara," I insisted. "I'm not sure I would want any part of it."

"And I'm sure I want every part of it," she retorted: "Although my mind cannot conceive it either, believe me, it does exist! And believe me, too, that someday you'll be saying to someone else whatever I am saying to you now about it. Perhaps you'll even be using the same words."

She winked at me as if she knew for certain that this was going to happen.

"As you continue to recapitulate, the entrance of the realm where humanness doesn't count will appear to you," Clara went on: "That will be the invitation for you to go through the dragon's eye. This is what we call the abstract flight. It actually entails crossing a vast chasm into a realm that cannot be described because man isn't the measure of it."

I became numb with dread. I didn't dare take Clara lightly, for she always meant what she said. The thought of losing my humanness, such as it was, and jumping into a chasm was more than frightening. I was about to ask her if she knew when that entrance was going to appear to me, but she continued her explanation.

"The truth of the matter is that the entrance is in front of us all the time," Clara said, "but only those whose minds are still and whose hearts are at ease can see or feel it's presence."

She explained that to call it an entrance was not metaphorical because it actually appears sometimes as a plain door, a black cavern, a dazzling light or anything conceivable; even a dragon's eye. She said that, in this respect, the metaphors of China's early sages were not farfetched at all.

"Another thing the ancient Chinese seekers believed was that invisibility is the corollary of having attained a calm indifference," she said.

"What is a calm indifference, Clara?"

Instead of answering me directly, she asked if I had ever seen the eyes of fighting cocks.

"I've never seen a fighting cock in my life," I told her.

Clara explained that the look in the eyes of a fighting cock is not the look found in the eyes of ordinary people or animals because those eyes mirror warmth, compassion, rage, fear.

"The eyes of a fighting cock are filled with none of these," Clara informed me: "Instead, they reflect an indescribable indifference, something also found in the eyes of beings who have made the great crossing. Instead of looking outwardly at the world, they have turned inwardly to gaze at that which is not yet present.

"The eye that gazes inwardly is immovable," Clara went on. "It reflects not human concerns or fears, but the vastness. Seers who have gazed at the boundless have attested that the boundless stares back with a cold, unyielding indifference."

## Chapter 7

One afternoon just before dark, Clara and I were taking the long scenic route to the house from the cave when she suggested that we sit and rest in the shade of some trees. We were watching the shadows that the trees cast on the ground, when suddenly a gust of wind made the leaves quiver. The leaves began to shimmer in a flurry of light and dark, causing ripples in the patterns on the ground. When the wind passed, the leaves once again became still and so did the shadows.

"The mind is like these shadows," Clara said softly. "When our breathing is even, our minds are still. If our breathing is erratic, the mind quivers like stirred leaves."

I tried to notice if my breathing was even or disturbed, but I honestly couldn't tell.

"If your breath is agitated, your mind becomes restless," Clara continued: "To quiet the mind, it's best to begin by quieting your breathing."

She told me to keep my back erect and to concentrate on my breathing until it was soft and rhythmic, like that of an infant.

I pointed out that if a person is physically active as we had just been, hiking over hills, one's breathing couldn't possibly be as soft as an infant's who just lies around and does nothing.

"Besides," I said, "I don't know how infants breathe. I haven't been around many of them, and when I was, I didn't pay attention to their breathing."

Clara moved closer and put one hand on my back and the other on my chest. To my dismay, she pressed until I was so constricted that I felt I was going to suffocate. I tried to move away but she held me down with an iron grip. To compensate, my stomach began moving in and out rhythmically as air again entered my body.

"This is how infants breathe," she said. "Remember the sensation of your stomach popping out so you can reproduce it regardless of whether you are walking, exercising or lying around doing nothing. You probably won't believe this, but we are so civilized that we have to relearn how to breathe properly."

She removed her hands from my chest and back. "Now let the breath rise to fill your chest cavity," she instructed. "But don't let it flood your head."

"There is no way for the air to get into my head," I laughed.

"Don't take me so literally," she scolded. "When I say air, I'm really talking about energy derived from the breath, which enters the abdomen, the chest and then the head."

I had to laugh at her seriousness. I braced myself for another barrage of Chinese metaphors.

She smiled and winked. "My seriousness is a corollary of my size," she said with a chuckle. "We big people are always more serious than petite jovial ones. Isn't that right, Taisha?"

I didn't know why she was including me when she talked of big people. I was at least two inches shorter than her and a good thirty-five pounds lighter. I thoroughly resented being called big, and even more so her intimation that I was overly serious, but I didn't voice this because I knew she would make an issue out of it, and tell me to do a deep recapitulation on the subject of my size.

Clara looked at me as if to gauge my reaction to her statement. I smiled and pretended it hadn't fazed me in the least. Upon seeing my attentiveness, she became serious again and continued to explain that our emotional well-being is directly linked to the rhythmic flow of our breathing.

"The breathing of a person who is upset," she said, leaning closer, "is rapid and shallow and is localized in the chest or head. The breathing of a relaxed person sinks to the abdomen."

I tried to lower my breathing to my stomach so that Clara wouldn't suspect that I had been upset.

She smiled knowingly and added, "It's harder for big people to breath from the abdomen because their center of gravity is just a bit higher. It's therefore even more important that we remain calm and unperturbed."

She went on to explain that the body is divided into three main chambers of energy: the abdomen, chest and head. She touched my stomach just below my navel, then my solar plexus and then the center of my forehead. She explained that these three points are the key centers of the three chambers. The more relaxed the mind and body are, the more air a person can take into each of the three body divisions.

"Infants take in a vast amount of air for their size," Clara said. "However, as we grow older we become constricted, especially around the lungs, and we take in less air."

Clara took a deep breath before continuing. "Since emotions are directly linked to the breath," she said, "a good way to calm ourselves is by regulating our breathing. "For example, we can train ourselves to absorb more energy by deliberately elongating each breath we take."

She stood up and asked me to observe her shadow carefully. I noticed that it was perfectly still. Then she told me to stand and look at my own shadow. I couldn't help detecting a slight quiver, like the shadow of the trees when the leaves were touched by a breeze.

"Why is my shadow shaking?" I asked. "I thought I was standing perfectly still."

"Your shadow quivers because the winds of emotion are blowing through you," Clara replied. "You're more quiet than when you first began to recapitulate, but. there is still a great deal of agitation left inside you."

She told me to stand on my left leg with my right leg raised and bent at the knee. I wobbled as I tried to keep my balance. I marveled that she stood on one leg as easily as she had stood on two, and her shadow was absolutely motionless.

"You seem to have a hard time keeping your balance," Clara noted, setting down her leg and raising the other one: "That means that your thoughts and feelings are not at ease, and neither is your breathing."

I raised my other leg to try the exercise again. This time my balance was better, but when I saw how still Clara's shadow was, I experienced a sudden pang of envy and I had to lower my leg to keep from falling.

"Whenever we have a thought," Clara explained, setting down her leg again, "our energy moves in the direction of that thought. Thoughts are like scouts; they cause the body to move along a certain path. Now, look at my shadow again," she ordered. "But try not to regard it as merely my shadow. Try to see into the essence of Clara as shown in her shadow-picture."

Immediately I tensed. I was on trial and my performance was going to be evaluated. My childhood competitive feelings of having to outdo my brothers surfaced.

"Don't tense up," Clara said sternly. "This is not a contest. This is merely a delight. Do you understand? A delight!"

I had been thoroughly conditioned to react to words. The word 'delight' threw me into total confusion, and finally into panic. She's not using the word correctly, was all I could think. She must mean something else. But Clara repeated the word over and over, as if she wanted it to sink in.

I kept my eyes on her shadow. I had the impression that it was beautiful, serene, full of power. It wasn't merely a dark area, it seemed to have depth, intelligence and vitality. Then suddenly I thought I saw Clara's shadow move independent of any movement of Clara's body. The movement was so incredibly fast that it almost went unnoticed. I waited, holding my breath, peering at it, pouring on it all my attention. Then it happened again, and this time I was certainly prepared for it. It quivered and then stretched, as if it's shoulders and chest had suddenly been inflated. The shadow seemed to have come alive.

I let out a shriek and jumped up. I shouted to Clara that her shadow was alive. I was ready to run away, terrified that the shadow would run after me, but Clara restrained me by holding my shoulder.

When I had calmed down enough to talk again, I told her what I had seen, all the while keeping my eyes averted from the ground for fear of catching another glimpse of Clara's sinister shadow.

"To see the movement of shadows means that you have obviously freed a huge portion of energy with your recapitulation," Clara remarked.

"Are you sure I didn't just imagine this, Clara?" I said, hoping she would say I had.

"It was your intent that made it move," she said authoritatively.

"But don't you think that recapitulating also disturbs the mind?" I asked. "I must be very disturbed in order to see shadows moving by themselves."

"No. The purpose of the recapitulation is to break basic assumptions we have accepted throughout our lives," Clara explained patiently: "Unless they are broken, we can't prevent the power of remembering from clouding our awareness."

"What exactly do you mean by the power of remembering, Clara?"

"The world is a huge screen of memories. If certain assumptions are broken," she said, "the power of remembering is not only held in check, but even canceled out."

I didn't understand what she was saying and I resented her being so obscure.

"It probably was the wind that stirred the dirt on which your shadow was projected," I said, offering a reasonable explanation.

Clara shook her head. "Try looking at it again and find out for sure," she suggested.

I felt goose bumps on my arms. Nothing was going to make me stare at her shadow again.

"You insist that shadows of people don't move by themselves," Clara said, "because that's what your ability to remember tells you. Do you remember ever seeing them move?"

I replied, "No. I certainly do not."

"There you are. What happened to you just now is that your normal ability to remember was held in check for an instant and you saw my shadow move."

Clara shook a finger at me and chuckled. "And it wasn't the wind stirring the dirt, either," she said.

Then she hid her head with her arm, as if she were a timid child. It struck me as odd that even though she was a grown woman, she never looked ridiculous performing childish gestures.

"I have news for you," Clara continued. "You've seen shadows move before as a child, but then you were not yet rational so it was all right to see them move. As you grew up, your energy was harnessed by social constraints, and so you forgot you had seen them moving, and only remember what you think is permissible to remember."

I was trying to appreciate the scope of what Clara was saying when I suddenly remembered that as a child I used to see shadows wiggle and twist on the sidewalks; especially on hot, clear days. I always thought they were trying to pull themselves free from people they belonged to. It terrified me to see the shadows curl sideways to peek behind them. It always seemed odd that adults would be so totally oblivious of their shadows' antics. I mentioned this to her.

Clara concluded that my being terrified was a product of the conflict between what I really saw, and what I had already been told was possible and permissible to see.

"I don't think I follow you, Clara," I said.

"Try to imagine yourself as a giant memory warehouse," she suggested: "In that warehouse, someone other than yourself has stored feelings, ideas, mental dialogues and behavior patterns. Since it is your warehouse, you can go in there and rummage around any time you want and use whatever you find there. The problem is that you have absolutely no say over the inventory, for it was already established before you came into possession of the warehouse. Thus you are drastically limited in your selection of items."

She added that our lives seem to be an uninterrupted time line because in our warehouses the inventory never changes. She stressed that unless this storehouse is cleared out, there is no way for us to be what we really are.

Overwhelmed by my memories and by what Clara was explaining, I sat down on a large rock. From the corner of my eye, I saw my shadow and experienced a jolt of panic as I asked myself, What if my shadow wouldn't quite sit the way I do?

"I can't take this, Clara," I said, jumping up. "Let's go back to the house."

Clara ordered me to stay put. "Calm the mind," she said, staring at me, "and the body too will become tranquil; otherwise you're going to burst."

Clara held her left hand in front of her body with the wrist resting just above her navel and her palm faced sideways. The fingers were pressed together, pointed downward to the ground. She told me to adopt this hand position and gaze at the tip of my middle finger. I looked over the bridge of my nose, which forced me to look downward while slightly crossing my eyes. She explained that to gaze fixedly in that manner places our awareness outside of us onto the ground, thus diminishing our inner agitation.

Then she said I was to inhale deeply while pointing at the ground; intending to get from it a sparkle of energy, like a drop of glue, on my middle finger. Next, I was to rotate my hand up at the wrist until the base of my thumb touched my breastbone. I was to gaze at the tip of my middle finger for a count of seven and then shift my awareness immediately to my forehead, to a spot in between the eyes and just above the bridge of the nose.

"This shift," she said, "must be accompanied by the intent of transferring the sparkle of energy from the middle finger to that spot between the eyes. If the transfer is accomplished, a light appears on the dark screen behind the closed eyes".

She said that we can send this luminous spot of energy to any part of our body to counteract pain, disease, apprehension or fear.

She then moved her hand and gently pressed my solar plexus. "If you need a quick surge of energy, as you do now, do the power breath I am about to show you and I guarantee that you will feel recharged."

I watched Clara do a series of short inhalations and exhalations through her nose in rapid succession, vibrating her diaphragm. I imitated her and after twenty or so breaths, contracting and relaxing my diaphragm, I felt warmth spreading throughout my midsection.

"We're going to sit here doing the power breath and gazing at the light behind the eyes," she said, "until you're no longer frightened."

"I wasn't really that scared," I lied.

"You didn't see yourself," Clara retorted. "From where I'm sitting, I saw someone who was just about to faint."

She was absolutely right. Never had I experienced such total fright as when I saw Clara's shadow stretching itself out. Lost memories had surfaced from such forgotten depths that, for a second or two, I had felt I was actually a child again.

I held my palm sideways and gazed at my fingertip the way Clara had recommended. I kept my eyes fixed, and then shifted my attention to the center of my forehead. I didn't see any light, but I gradually became calm.

It was almost dark. I could see Clara's silhouette outlined beside me.

Clara's voice was soothing as she said, "Let's remain here for a while longer to allow that sparkle of energy to settle in your body."

"Did you learn this technique in China, Clara?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I told you that I had a teacher here in Mexico," she said.

Clara then added reverently, "My teacher was an extraordinary man who dedicated his life to learning, and then to teaching us the art of freedom."

"But isn't this method of breathing Oriental in origin?"

She seemed to deliberate before answering me. I thought her hesitation was due to her desire to remain secretive, so I probed, "Where did your teacher learn it? Was he also in China?"

"He learned everything he knew from his teacher," Clara said evasively.

When I asked her to tell me more about her teacher and what he had taught her, Clara apologized for not being at liberty to discuss the subject further at this time.

"In order to understand it," she explained, "you need to acquire a special kind of energy, which at the moment you don't have."

She patted my hand. "Don't rush things," she said sympathetically: "We intend to teach you all we know, so why the hurry?"

"I'm always so intrigued when you say 'we,' Clara, because I get the impression that there are other people in the house, and I begin to see and hear things that my reason tells me can't possibly be true."

Clara laughed until I thought she was going to fall off the boulder on which she sat. Her sudden and exaggerated outburst annoyed me even more than her refusal to tell me about her teacher.

"You don't know how funny your dilemma is to me," she said by way of an explanation: "It proves to me, just like when you saw the shadows moving, that you're freeing your energy. You are beginning to empty your warehouse. The more items of your inventory you discard, the more you make room for other things."

"Like what?" I said, still annoyed. "Seeing shadows move and hearing voices?"

"Perhaps," she said vaguely. "Or you might even see the people the shadows and voices belong to."

I wanted to know what people she was referring to, but she refused to say any more about it. Abruptly she stood up and announced that she wanted to get back to the house to turn on the generator before it got too dark.

## Chapter 8

I hadn't seen Clara for three days. Some mysterious errand was keeping her away. It was her habit now, without a word of warning, to leave me alone in the house for days at a time with only Manfred for company. Although I had the whole house to myself, I never dared to venture beyond the living room, my bedroom, Clara's gymnasium, the kitchen and of course the outhouse. There was something about Clara's house and grounds, especially when Clara was away, that filled me with an irrational fear. The result was that when I was alone, I kept a strict routine, which I found comforting.

I used to wake up around nine, make my breakfast in the kitchen on a hot plate because I still didn't know how to light the wood-burning stove, pack a light lunch, then go to the cave to recapitulate, or take a long hike with Manfred. I would return in the late afternoon to practice kung fu forms in Clara's martial arts gymnasium. The gym was a big hall with a vaulted ceiling, a varnished wooden floor and a standing black-lacquer rack on which a variety of martial arts weapons were displayed. Along the wall opposite the door was a raised platform covered with straw mats. I had once asked Clara what the platform was for. She had said it was where she did her meditation.

I had never seen Clara meditate because whenever she went into the building by herself, she always locked the door. Every time I had asked her what kind of meditation she practiced, she had refused to elaborate on it. The only thing I ever found but was that she called it 'dreaming.'

Clara had allowed me free access to her gymnasium whenever she wasn't using it herself. When I was alone in the house, I gravitated to that room, finding there emotional solace for it was imbued with Clara's presence and power. It was there that she taught me a most intriguing style of kung fu. I had never been interested in Chinese martial arts because my Japanese karate teachers had always insisted that it's movements were too elaborate and cumbersome to be of any practical value. Systematically they ran down the Chinese styles and elevated their own, saying that although karate had it's roots in the Chinese styles, it's forms and applications were thoroughly altered and perfected in Japan. Ignorant of martial arts, I believed my teachers and totally discounted all other styles. Consequently, I didn't know what to make of Clara's kung fu style. In spite of my ignorance, one thing was obvious: She was an indisputable master of it.

After working out for an hour or so in Clara's gymnasium, I would change clothes and go to the kitchen to eat. Invariably, my food would be there, set on the table, but I was always so famished after exercising that I just wolfed down whatever had been prepared without speculating how it got there.

Clara had told me, when I questioned her about it, that when she was gone the caretaker came to the house to cook my meals. He must have also done the laundry because I would find my clothes neatly folded in a pile at the door of my bedroom: All I had to do was iron them.

One evening after a heavy workout which Manfred looked on growling critically from time to time; I had such a surplus of energy that I decided to break my routine and return to the cave in the darkness to continue recapitulating. I was in such a hurry to get there that I forgot to bring my flashlight. It was a cloudy night. Yet despite the total darkness, I didn't stumble on anything along the path. I got to the cave and recapitulated; visualizing and breathing in memories of all my karate instructors and every demonstration and tournament I had participated in. It took me most of the night, but when I had finished I felt thoroughly cleansed of the prejudices that I had inherited from my teachers as part of my training.

The following day Clara still hadn't returned, so I went to the cave a bit later than usual. As I walked home in daylight, I tried a deliberate exercise. I walked on the same path I had walked every day, only this time I kept my eyes shut to simulate darkness. Because it had only occurred to me later that it had been very unusual to have walked all the way to the cave the night before without tripping, I wanted to see if I could walk without stumbling. But with my eyes shut, I fell several times over stumps and rocks, and badly bruised my shin.

I was on the living room floor putting bandages on my abrasions when Clara unexpectedly walked in the door. "What happened to you?" she asked with a look of surprise. "Were you and the dog fighting?"

At that very instant, Manfred ambled into the room. He barked gruffly, as if offended. I was convinced that he had understood what Clara had said. Clara stood in front of him, bowed slightly from the waist, the way an Oriental student bows to his master, and voiced a most convoluted bilingual apology.

She said, "I am extremely sorry, my dear señor, for having spoken so lightly about your irreproachable behavior and your exquisite manners; and above all, your superior consideration that makes you un señor entre señores, el mãs ilustre entre todos ellos - a lord among lords, the most illustrious of them all."

I was absolutely bewildered. I thought Clara had lost her mind during her three days' absence. I had never heard her speaking like this before. I wanted to laugh, but her serious expression made my laugh stick in my throat.

She was about to begin another barrage of apologies when Manfred yawned, looked at her bored, turned around, and left the room.

Clara sat down on the couch, her body shaking with muffled laughter. "When he's offended, the only way to get rid of him is to bore him to death with apologies," she confided.

I hoped that Clara would tell me where she had been for the past three days. I waited for a moment in case she would bring up the subject of her absence, but she didn't. I told her that while she was gone, Manfred had come every day to visit me at the recapitulation cave; and that it was as if he went there from time to time to check if I was all right.

Again I wanted Clara to say something about the nature of her trip, but instead she said without surprise, "Yes, he's very solicitous, and extremely considerate of others. Therefore he expects the same treatment from them; and if he even suspects that he's not getting it, he becomes rabid. When he's in that mood, he's deadly dangerous. Remember that night he nearly snapped your head off when you called him a toaddog?"

I wanted to change the subject. I didn't like to think of Manfred as a mad dog. Over the past months, he had become more a friend than a beast. He was such a friend that the unsettling certainty he was the only one who truly understood me had taken possession of me.

"You haven't said what happened to your legs," Clara reminded me.

I told her about my failed attempt at walking with my eyes shut. I explained that I had had no difficulty walking in the dark the night before.

She looked at the scratches and welts on my legs and patted my head as if I were Manfred.

"Last night, you weren't making a project out of walking," she said: "You were determined to get to the cave, so your feet automatically took you there. This afternoon, you were consciously trying to replicate last night's walking, but you failed miserably because your mind got in the way."

She thought for a moment then added, "Or perhaps you weren't listening to the voice of the spirit that could have guided you safely."

She puckered up her lips in a childish gesture of impatience as I told her that I hadn't been aware of any voices; but that sometimes in the house, I thought I heard strange whisperings;

although I was convinced that that was only the wind blowing through the empty hallway.

"We've agreed that you weren't going to take anything I say literally, unless I tell you beforehand to do so," Clara reminded me sternly: "By emptying your warehouse, you are changing your inventory. Now there is room for something new, such as walking in darkness; so I thought that perhaps there might also be room for the voice of the spirit."

I was trying so hard to figure out what Clara was saying, that my forehead must have been furrowed. Clara sat down In her favorite chair and patiently began to explain what she meant.,

"Before you came to this house, your inventory had nothing on dogs being more than dogs. But then you met Manfred and meeting him forced you to modify that part of your inventory." She shook her hand like an Italian and said, "Capisce?"

"You mean Manfred is the voice of the spirit?" I asked, dumbfounded.

Clara laughed so hard that she could barely speak. "No, it's not quite what I mean. It's something more abstract," she mumbled.

She suggested I take out my mat from the closet. "Let's go to the patio and sit under the zapote tree," she said as she was getting some salve from a cabinet: "The twilight is the best time to listen for the voice of the spirit."

I unrolled my mat under the huge tree covered with peachlike green fruits. Clara massaged some salve into my bruised skin. It hurt fearsomely, but I tried not to wince. When she had finished, I noticed that the biggest welt had almost disappeared. She leaned back and propped her back against the thick tree trunk.

"Everything has a form," she began, "but besides the outer shape, there is an inner awareness that rules things. This silent awareness is the spirit. It is an all-encompassing force that manifests itself differently in different things. This energy communicates with us."

She told me to relax and to take deep breaths because she was going to show me how to exercise my inner hearing, "For it is with the inner ear," she said, "that one is able to discern the spirit's biddings. When you breathe, allow the energy to flow out of your ears," she continued.

"How do I do that?" I asked.

"When you exhale, fix your attention on the openings of your ears and use your intent and your concentration to direct the flow."

She monitored my attempts for a while, correcting me as I went along.

"Exhale through your nose with your mouth closed and the tip of your tongue touching your palate," she said. "Exhale noiselessly."

After a few attempts, I could feel my ears pop and my sinuses clear. Then she instructed me to rub the palms of my hands together until they were hot and to place them over my ears with my fingertips almost touching, at the back of my head.

I did as she instructed. Clara suggested I massage my ears using a gentle circular pressure. Then, with my ears still covered and my index fingers crossed over the middle fingers, I was to repeatedly tap behind each ear by snapping my index fingers in unison. As I flicked my fingers, I heard a sound like a muffled bell reverberating inside my head. I repeated the tapping eighteen times as she had instructed. When I removed my hands I noticed I could distinctly hear the faintest sounds in the surrounding vegetation, while before, everything had been undifferentiated and muffled.

"Now, with your ears clear, perhaps you'll be able to hear the voice of the spirit," Clara said: "But don't expect a shout from the treetops. What we call the voice of the spirit is more of a feeling; or it can be an idea that suddenly pops into your head. Sometimes it can be like a longing to go somewhere vaguely familiar, or a longing to do something also vaguely familiar."

Perhaps it was the power of her suggestion that made me hear a soft murmur around me. As I began paying closer attention to it, the murmur turned into human voices speaking in the distance. I could distinguish women's crystalline laughter, and a man's voice, a rich baritone, singing. I heard the sounds as if the wind was carrying them to me in spurts. I strained to make out what the voices were saying, and the more I listened to the wind, the more elated I became. Some ebullient energy inside me made me jump up. I was so happy that I wanted to play, to dance, and to run around like a child. And without realizing what I was doing, I began to sing and leap and twirl around the patio like a ballerina until I had completely exhausted myself.

When I finally came to sit down next to Clara, I was perspiring, but it was not a healthy physical sweat. It was more like the cold sweat of exhaustion. Clara too was out of breath, from laughing at my antics. I had succeeded in making an utter fool of myself, jumping and cavorting around the patio.

"I don't know what came over me," I said at a loss for an explanation.

"Describe what happened," Clara said in a serious tone.

When I refused out of embarrassment, she added, "Otherwise, I'll be forced to view you as being a bit... well, batty in the belfry, if you know what I mean."

I told her that I had heard the most haunting laughter and singing, and that it actually drove me to dance around.

"Do you think I'm going crazy?" I asked, concerned.

"If I were you, I wouldn't worry about it," she said. "Your cavorting was a natural reaction to hearing the voice of the spirit."

"It was not a voice; it was lots of voices," I corrected her.

"There you go again, the literal-minded Miss Perfect," she scoffed.

She explained that literal-mindedness is a major item of our inventory, and that we have to be aware of it to bypass it. The voice of the spirit is an abstraction that has nothing to do with voices, and yet we may at times hear voices.

She said that in my case, since I was raised a devout Catholic, my own way of readapting my inventory would be to turn the spirit into a sort of guardian angel; a kind, protective male that watches over me.

"But the spirit is not anybody's guardian," she went on: "It is an abstract force, neither good nor evil; A force that has no interest whatsoever in us, but that nevertheless responds to our power. Not to our prayers, mind you, but to our power. Remember that the next time you feel like praying for forgiveness!"

I asked, alarmed, "But isn't the spirit kind and forgiving?"

Clara said that sooner or later I was going to discard all my preconceptions about good and evil; God and religion, and think only in terms of a completely new inventory.

"Do you mean good and evil don't exist?" I asked, armed with the ready-made barrage of logical arguments about free will and the existence of evil I had learned throughout my years of Catholic schooling.

Before I could even begin to present my case, Clara said, "This is where my companions and I differ from the established order. I've told you that for us freedom is to be free from humanness. That includes God, good and evil, the saints, the Virgin and the Holy Ghost. We believe that a nonhuman inventory is the only possible freedom for human beings. If our warehouses are going to remain filled to capacity with the desires, feelings, ideas and objects of our human inventory, where is our freedom then? Do you see what I mean?"

I understood her, but not as clearly as I would have liked to; partly because I was still resisting the idea of relinquishing my humanness; and also because I hadn't yet recapitulated all the religious preconceptions handed down to me by the Catholic school system. I was also accustomed to never thinking of anything that didn't pertain to me directly.

As I tried to find flaws with her reasoning, Clara jolted me out of my mental speculations with a tap on my ribs. She said that she was going to show me another exercise for stopping thoughts and for feeling energy lines, otherwise I would be doing what I had always done: be enthralled with the idea of myself.

Clara told me to sit in a cross-legged position and lean sideways as I inhaled, first to the right, then to the left, and to feel how I was being pulled by a horizontal line extending out of the opening of my ears. She said that, surprisingly, the line didn't sway with the motion of one's body but remained perfectly horizontal, and that this was one of the mysteries she and her cohorts had uncovered.

"Leaning in this manner," she explained, "moves our awareness - which normally is always directed to the front - to the side."

She ordered me to loosen my jaw muscles by chewing and swallowing saliva three times.

"What does this do?" I asked, swallowing with a gulp.

"The chewing and swallowing brings some of the energy lodged in the head down to the stomach, lessening the load on the brain," she said with a chuckle. "In your case, you should do this maneuver often."

I wanted to get up and walk around because my legs were falling asleep, but Clara demanded that I remain seated for a while longer and practice this exercise.

I leaned to both sides, trying as hard as I could to feel that elusive horizontal line, but I couldn't feel it. I did manage, however, to stop my thoughts from their usual avalanche. Perhaps an hour passed with me sitting in total silence without any thoughts at all. Around us, I could hear crickets chirping and leaves rustling, but no more voices were brought by the wind. For a while I listened to Manfred's barking coming from his room at the side of the house. Then, as if moved by an unvoiced command, thoughts rushed in my mind again. I became aware of what had been their complete absence; and how peaceful total silence had been. My restless body movements must have cued Clara, for she began to speak again.

"The voice of the spirit comes from nowhere," she continued: "It comes from the depth of silence; from the realm of not-being. That voice can only be heard when we are absolutely quiet and balanced."

She explained that the two opposing forces that move us, male and female, positive and negative, light and dark, have to be kept in balance so that an opening is created in the energy that surrounds us; an opening through which our awareness can slip. It is through this opening in the energy encompassing us that the spirit manifests itself.

"Balance is what we are after," she went on. "But balance doesn't only mean an equal portion of each force. It also means that as the portions are made equal, the new, balanced combination gains momentum and begins to move by itself."

Clara searched my face in the darkness, I felt, for signs of comprehension.

Finding none, she said almost cuttingly, "We are not that intelligent, are we?"

I felt my whole body tense at her remark. I told her that in all my life nobody had ever accused me of not being intelligent. My parents, my teachers had always praised me for being one of the brightest students in the class. When it came to report cards, I nearly made myself ill by studying to make sure I had better grades than my brothers.

Clara sighed and listened patiently to my lengthy reaffirmation of my intelligence. Before I had exhausted my arguments to convince her that she was wrong, she conceded, "Yes, you are intelligent, but everything you've said refers only to the world of everyday life. More than intelligent, you are studious, industrious and cunning. Wouldn't you agree?"

I had to agree with her in spite of myself, because my own reason told me that if I had truly been as intelligent as I claimed, I wouldn't have had to nearly kill myself studying.

"In order to be intelligent in my world," Clara explained, "you must be able to concentrate; to fix your attention on any concrete thing as well as on any abstract manifestation."

"What kind of abstract manifestations are you talking about, Clara?" I asked.

"An opening in the energy field around us is an abstract manifestation," she said: "But don't expect to feel it or see it in the same manner you feel and see the concrete world. Something else takes place."

Clara stressed that for us to fix our attention on any abstract manifestation, we have to merge the known with the unknown in a spontaneous amalgamation. In this way, we can engage our reason, yet at the same time be indifferent to it.

Clara told me then to stand up and walk around. "Now that it's dark, try walking without looking at the ground," she said. "Not as a conscious exercise, but as a sorcery not-doing."

I wanted to ask her to explain what she meant by a sorcery not-doing, but I knew that if she did, I would be consciously thinking about her explanation and gauging my performance against this new concept, even if I wasn't sure what it meant. I did recall, however, that she had used the term "not-doing" before; and in spite of my reluctance to ask questions, I still tried to remember what she had told me about it. For me, knowledge, even if it was minimal and faulty, was better than none for it gave me a sense of control; whereas no knowledge left me feeling completely vulnerable.

"Not-doing is a term that comes to us from our own sorcery tradition," Clara went on, obviously aware of my need for explanations: "It refers to everything that is not included in the inventory that was forced upon us. When we engage any item of our forced inventory, we are doing. Anything we do that is not part of that inventory is not-doing."

Any degree of relaxation I had achieved was abruptly disrupted by the statement she had just made.

"What did you mean, Clara, when you referred to your tradition as sorcery?" I demanded.

"You catch every detail when you want to, Taisha.

"No wonder your ears are So big," she said laughing; and didn't answer me right away.

I stared at her, waiting for her reply.

Finally she said, "I wasn't going to tell you about this yet, but since it slipped out, let me just say that the art of freedom is a product of sorcerers' intent."

"What sorcerers are you talking about?"

"There have been people here in Mexico, and there still are, who are concerned with final questions. My magical family and I call them sorcerers. From them we have inherited all the ideas I am acquainting you with. You already know about the recapitulation. Not-doing is another of those ideas."

"But who are these people, Clara?"

"You'll know all there is to know about them soon," she assured me. "For now, let's just practice one of their not-doings."

She said that not-doing at this particular moment would be, for example, to force myself to trust the spirit implicitly by letting go of my calculating mind.

"Don't just pretend to trust while secretly harboring doubts," Clara warned me: "Only when your positive and negative forces are in perfect accord will you be capable of either feeling or seeing the opening in the energy around you; or walking with your eyes closed, and be assured of success."

I took a few deep breaths and began walking, not looking at the ground but with my hands outstretched in front of me in case I bumped into things. For a while I kept stumbling, and on one occasion I tripped over a potted plant and would have fallen had Clara not grabbed my arm. Gradually I began to stumble less and less, until I had no trouble walking smoothly. It was as if my feet could see clearly everything on the patio and knew exactly where to step and where not to step.

## Chapter 9

One afternoon while recapitulating in the cave, I fell asleep. Upon awakening, I found a pair of beautifully polished crystals lying on the ground next to me. For a while I deliberated whether or not to touch them because they looked quite ominous. They were about five inches long and perfectly translucent. Their tips had been fashioned into a sharp point, and they seemed to shine with a light of their own.

When I saw Clara walking toward the cave, I carefully slid the crystals onto my palm and crawled out the cave to show them to her. "Yes, they are exquisite." She nodded as if she recognized them.

"Where did they come from?" I asked.

"They were left here for you by someone who's watching you very closely," she said, putting down a bundle she was carrying.

"I didn't see anyone leave them."

"That person came while you were dozing off.

"I warned you not to fall asleep during your recapitulation."

"Who came while I was dozing? One of your relatives?" I asked excitedly. I laid the fragile crystals down on a pile of leaves and put on my shoes: Clara had advised me never to wear shoes while recapitulating because, by constricting the feet, they impede the circulation of energy.

"If I told you who left the crystals, it wouldn't make any sense to you or it might even frighten you," she said.

"Try me. After seeing your shadow move, I don't think anything can frighten me."

"All right, if you insist," she said, untying her bundle. "The person who's watching you is a master sorcerer, with very few equals on this earth."

"You mean a real sorcerer? One who does evil things?"

"I mean a real sorcerer, but not one who does evil things. He is a being who shapes and molds perception the way you might paint a picture with your brushes. But that doesn't mean that he is arbitrary. When he manipulates perception with his intent, his behavior is impeccable."

Clara compared him to the Chinese master painters who were said to have painted dragons so lifelike that when they put in the pupils as the finishing touch, the dragons flew right off the wall or the screen on which they had been painted. In the low tone of a meaningful disclosure, Clara said that when a consummate sorcerer is ready to leave the world, all he has to do is manipulate perception, intend a door, step through it and disappear.

The deep passion, expressed in her voice, made me uneasy. I sat down on a large flat rock, and holding the crystals, I tried to fathom who the master sorcerer might be. Since the day I arrived, I hadn't talked to anyone but Clara and Manfred, simply because there was no one else around. There wasn't any sign of the caretaker Clara had mentioned, either. I was about to remind her that she and Manfred were the only beings I had seen since my arrival, when I recalled that there had been one other person I had seen; a man who seemed to have appeared out of nowhere one morning when I was sketching some trees near the cave. He was squatting in a clearing about a hundred feet from where I was. The cold was making me shiver and also made me focus my attention on his green windbreaker. He had on beige trousers and the typical wide-brimmed straw hat of northern Mexico. I couldn't see his features because he wore his hat tilted over his face, but he seemed muscular and limber.

He was facing sideways. I could see him fold his arms across his chest. Then he turned his back to me and, to my utter amazement, brought his hands all the way around his back where he touched his fingertips. Then he stood up and walked away, disappearing into the bushes.

I quickly sketched his squatting posture, then put down my drawing pad and tried to imitate what he had done; but no matter how I stretched my arms and contorted my shoulders, I couldn't touch my fingers behind my back. I continued squatting with my arms wrapped around me. In a moment, I had stopped shivering and felt warm and comfortable in spite of the cold.

When I told Clara about the man, she remarked, "So you've already seen him."

"Is he the master sorcerer?"

Clara nodded, and reached into her bundle to hand me a tamale she had brought for my meal.

"He's very limber," she said. "It's nothing for him to dislodge his shoulder joints then ease them into place again. If you continue your recapitulation and store enough energy, he may teach you his art. The time you saw him, he just showed you how to fight the cold with a specific posture: squatting with the arms wrapped around the chest."

"Is that some form of yoga?"

Clara shrugged. "Perhaps your paths will cross again and he'll answer that question himself. In the meantime, I'm sure these crystals will help you to clarify things inside you."

"What exactly do you mean by that. Clara?"

Ignoring my question, she asked, "What aspect of your life were you recapitulating before you fell asleep?"

I told Clara that I had been remembering how I hated to do chores at home. It seemed to take me forever to wash the dishes. What made it worse was that all the while I could see my brothers playing ball outside the kitchen window. I envied them for not having to do housework and loathed my mother for making me do It. I felt like smashing all her precious plates, but of course I couldn't.

"How do you feel now, recapitulating all this?"

"I feel like smacking all of them, my mother included. I can't bring myself to forgive her."

"Perhaps the crystals will help you rechannel your intent and your trapped energy," Clara said softly.

Driven by a strange urge, I slid the crystals between my index and middle fingers. The crystals fit comfortably, as if they were attached to my hands.

"I see you already know how to hold them," she remarked. "The master sorcerer instructed me that if I saw that you could hold them correctly by yourself, I was to show you one indispensable movement that you can do with these crystals."

"What kind of movement, Clara?"

"A movement of power," she said. "I'll explain more about it's origin and purpose later.

"For now, let me just show you how it's done."

She told me to firmly press the crystals between my index and middle fingers. Helping me from behind, she gently made me extend my arms in front of me at the height of my shoulders, and rotated them in a counterclockwise direction. She had me begin making large circles that became increasingly smaller until the movement stopped and the crystals became two dots pointed into the distance; their extended imaginary lines converged at a spot on the horizon.

"When you make the circles, be sure to keep your palms facing each other," she corrected me, "and always begin by making large, smooth circles. "This way you gather energy that you can then focus onto whatever you want to affect regardless of whether it is an object, a thought or a feeling.

"How will pointing the crystals affect them?" I asked.

"To move the crystals and point them the way I showed you takes the energy out of things," she explained. "The effect is like defusing a bomb. This is exactly what you want to do at this stage of your training, so never under any circumstance rotate your arms in a clockwise direction while holding the crystals.

I asked, "What would happen if I rotated them in that direction?"

"You would not only make a bomb, but you would light the fuse and cause a gigantic explosion. A clockwise movement is for charging things, for gathering energy for any enterprise. We'll save that movement for a later occasion; when you are stronger."

"But isn't that what I need now, Clara? To gather energy? I feel so depleted."

"Of course you need to gather energy," she agreed, "but right now you must do it by demolishing your indulgence in absurdities. There is plenty of energy you can harness simply by not doing the things you are accustomed to, like complaining, or feeling sorry for yourself, or worrying about things that can't be changed. Defusing these concerns will give you a positive, nurturing energy that will help to balance and heal you. On the other hand, the energy you would gather by moving the crystals in a clockwise direction is a virulent kind of energy, a devastating blast that you won't be able to withstand at the moment. So promise me that you will not under any circumstances attempt to do it."

"I promise, Clara. But it sounds rather tempting."

"The master sorcerer that gave you these crystals is watching your progress," she warned, "so you must not misuse them."

There was a tinge of morbid curiosity in my question as I asked, "Why is this master sorcerer interested in watching me?"

I was uneasy, yet I felt flattered that a man would go to the trouble of observing me, even if it was from a distance.

"He has designs on you," Clara replied casually.

My alarm was instantaneous. I clenched my hand into a fist and jumped up indignantly.

Clara said, annoyed, "Don't be so stupid and leap to the wrong conclusion. I assure you, nobody is trying to get in your pants. You really do need to recapitulate your sexual encounters in depth, Taisha, so you can get rid of your absurd suspicions."

Her tone, devoid of all feeling, and her vulgar choice of words were somehow sobering. I sat down again and mumbled an apology.

She put a finger to her lips. "We are not involved in ordinary pursuits," she assured me. "The sooner you get that straight, the better. When I speak of designs, I mean sublime designs; maneuvers for a daring spirit. In spite of what you think, you are very daring. Look at where you are now. Every day you sit for hours alone in a cave recapitulating your life away. That takes courage."

I confessed that whenever I thought how I had followed her and was now living in her house as if it were the most natural thing in the world, I became totally alarmed.

"It has always baffled me," she said, "yet I've never asked you outright what made you accompany me so willingly? I would not have done it myself."

"My parents and brothers always told me that I'm crazy," I admitted. "I suppose that must be the reason. Some strange emotion is bottled up inside me, and because of it, I always end up doing weird things."

"Such as what, for instance?" Her sparkling eyes urged me to confide in her.

I hesitated. There were dozens of things I could think of, each a traumatic event that stood out as a milestone to mark a moment when my life turned - always for the worse. I never talked about these catastrophes, although I was painfully aware of them; and during the past months of intensive recapitulating, many of them had become even more poignant and vivid.

Not wanting to go into detail, I said, "Sometimes I do silly things."

"What do you mean by silly things?" Clara asked.

After further prompting on her part, I gave her an example. I told her about an experience I had had not too long before, in Japan, where I had gone to participate in an international karate tournament. There, in Tokyo's Budokan, I had disgraced myself in front of tens of thousands of people.

"Tens of thousands of people?" she echoed me. "Aren't you exaggerating a bit?"

"Definitely not!" I said. "The Budokan is the largest auditorium in the city and it was packed!"

Recalling the incident, I felt my hands clenching and my neck tensing. I didn't want to continue. "Isn't it better just to let sleeping dogs lie?" I asked. "Besides, I've already recapitulated my karate experiences."

"It's important that you talk about your experience," Clara insisted: "Perhaps you didn't visualize it clearly enough or breath it in thoroughly. It still seems to have a hold over you. Just look at you, you're breaking out in a nervous sweat."

To appease her, I described how my karate teacher had once let it slip that he thought women were lower than dogs. To him, women had no place in the world of karate and especially not in tournaments. That time, in the Budokan, he wanted only his male students to go on stage to perform. I told him that I hadn't come all the way to Japan just to sit on the sidelines and watch the all male team competing. He warned me to be more respectful, but instead I became so angry that I did something disastrous.

"What exactly did you do?" Clara inquired.

I told her that I became so enraged, I climbed onto the central platform, grabbed the gong from the master of ceremonies, struck it myself and formally announced my name and the name of the karate routine I was going to demonstrate.

"And did they give you a grand applause?" Clara asked, grinning.

"I flubbed it," I said, near tears: "In the middle of the long sequence of movements, my mind went blank. I forgot what came next. All I saw was a sea of faces staring at me in disapproval. Somehow, I managed to get through the rest of the form and left the stage in a state of shock. To take matters into my own hands, and to disrupt the program the way I did was bad enough; but to forget my form in front of thousands of spectators was the ultimate insult to the Karate Federation. I brought shame to myself, my teachers and I suppose to women in general."

"What happened afterward?" Clara asked, trying to suppress a chuckle.

"I was expelled from the school, there was talk of revoking my black belt, and I never practiced karate again."

Clara burst out laughing. I, on the other hand, was so moved by my shameful experience that I began to weep; and on top of that, I was doubly embarrassed for having revealed it to Clara.

Clara shook my shoulders to jolt me. "Do the sweeping breath," she said. "Breathe in now."

I moved my head from right to left, breathing in the energy that was still hopelessly caught in the exhibition hall. As I brought my head back to the right again, I exhaled all the embarrassment and self-pity that had enveloped me. I moved my head repeatedly, doing one sweeping breath after the other until all my emotional turmoil was released. Then I moved my head from right to left and back again without breathing, thereby severing all ties with that particular moment of my past. When I had finished, Clara scanned my body then nodded.

"You are vulnerable because you feel important," she declared, handing me an embroidered handkerchief to blow my nose: "All that shame was caused by your misguided sense of personal worth. Then by bungling your performance, as you were bound to do, you added more insult to your already injured pride."

Clara was silent for a moment; giving me time to collect myself.

She finally asked, "Why did you quit practicing karate?"

"I just got tired of it and all the hypocrisy," I snapped.

She shook her head and said, "No.

"You quit because no one paid any attention to you after your misadventure; and you didn't get the recognition you thought you deserved."

In all honesty, I had to admit Clara was right. I had believed I deserved recognition. Every time I committed one of my wild, impulsive acts, it had been to boost my self-image or to compete with someone in order to prove that I was better. A sense of sadness and dejection enveloped me. I knew that in spite of all my breathing and recapitulating, there was no hope for me.

"Your inventory is changing very naturally and harmoniously," Clara said, tapping my head lightly. "Don't worry so much. Just concentrate on recapitulating, and everything else will take care of itself."

"Perhaps I need to see a therapist," I said. "Although, isn't recapitulating a kind of psychotherapy?"

"Not at all," Clara disagreed. "The people who first devised the recapitulation lived hundreds, if not thousands, of years ago; so you certainly shouldn't think of this ancient renewing process in terms of modern psychoanalysis."

"Why not?" I said. "You have to admit that going back to your childhood memories and the emphasis on the sexual act sounds like what psychoanalysis are interested in, especially the ones with a Freudian twist."

Clara was adamant. She stressed that the recapitulation is a magical act in which intent and the breath play indispensable roles.

"Breathing gathers energy and makes it circulate," she explained. "It is then guided by the preestablished intent of the recapitulation, which is to free ourselves from our biological and social ties. The intent of the recapitulation is a gift bestowed on us by those ancient seers who devised this method and passed it on to their descendants," Clara continued: "Each person performing it has to add his or her own intent to it; but their intent is merely the desire or need to do the recapitulation. The intent of the recapitulation's end result, which is total freedom, was established by those seers of ancient times. Because it was set up independently of us, it is an invaluable gift."

Clara explained that the recapitulation reveals to us a crucial facet of our being: The fact that for an instant, just before we plunge into any act, we are capable of accurately assessing it's outcome, our chances, and our motives and expectations. Since this knowledge is never to our convenience or satisfaction, we immediately suppress it.

"What do you mean by that, Clara?"

"I mean that you, for example, knew for a split second that it would be a deadly mistake to jump onto the stage of the auditorium and disrupt the performance. But, you immediately suppressed that certainty for various reasons. You also knew, for a moment, that you had stopped practicing karate because you felt offended at not being praised or given recognition. But, you instantly covered up that knowledge with another, more self-enhancing explanation;

that of being fed up with the hypocrisy of others."

Clara said that this moment of direct knowing was called 'the seer' by the people who first formulated the recapitulation, because it allows us to directly see into things with unclouded eyes. Yet in spite of the clarity and accuracy of the seer's assessments, we never pay attention to it, or give the seer a chance to make itself heard. Through a continual suppression, we stifle it's growth and prevent it from developing it's full potential.

"In the end, the seer inside us is filled with bitterness and hatred," Clara went on: "The ancient men of wisdom who invented the recapitulation believed that since we never stop subduing the seer, it finally destroys us. But they also assured us that by means of the recapitulation we can allow the seer to grow and unfold as it was meant to do."

"I never realized what the recapitulation was really about," I said.

"The purpose of the recapitulation is to grant the seer the freedom to see," Clara reminded me: "By giving the seer range, we can deliberately turn the seer into a force that is both mysterious and effective; a force that will eventually guide us to freedom instead of killing us. This is the reason why I always insist that you tell me what you find out through your recapitulation," Clara said: "You must bring the seer to the surface, and give it the chance to speak and tell what it sees."

I had no problem understanding or agreeing with her. I knew perfectly well that there is something inside me that always knows what's what. I also knew that I suppress it's capacity to advise because what it tells me is usually contrary to what I expect or want to hear.

A momentary insight I had to share with Clara was that the only time I ever invoked the seer's guidance was when I looked at the southern horizon, and deliberately sought it's help; and I had never been able to explain why I did that.

"Someday all that will be explained to you," she promised, but from the way she was grinning, I deduced that she didn't want to say any more about it.

Clara suggested I return to the cave for a few more hours, then come to the house and take a nap before dinner.

"I'll send Manfred to fetch you," she offered.

I declined. I couldn't have possibly gone back into the cave that day. I was too exhausted.

Revealing to Clara my embarrassing moments, and having to fend off her personal attacks, had left me emotionally drained. For an instant, my attention was caught by light being reflected on one of the crystals. Focusing my attention on the crystals calmed me. I asked Clara if she knew the reason why the master sorcerer had given me the crystals. She replied that he hadn't actually given them to me, but that he had, rather, recovered them on my behalf.

"He found them in a cave in the mountains. Someone must have left them there ages ago," she said gruffly.

Her impatient tone made me think that she didn't want to talk about the master sorcerer either, so I asked her instead, "What else do you know about these crystals?"

I held one up to the sunlight to see it's translucence.

"The use of crystals was the domain of sorcerers of ancient Mexico," Clara explained: "They are weapons, used to destroy an enemy."

Hearing that gave me such a jolt I nearly dropped one of the crystals. I tried to give them to Clara to hold, wanting nothing more to do with them, but Clara refused to take them.

"Once you hold crystals like these in your hands, you can't pass them on," she reprimanded me: "It's not right: In fact, it's dangerous. These crystals must be treated with infinite care. They are a gift of power."

"I'm sorry," I said, "I didn't mean any disrespect, I just became frightened when you said they were used as weapons."

"Formerly, they were, but not today," she clarified. "We've lost the knowledge of how to turn them into weapons."

"Was there such a knowledge in ancient Mexico?"

"There certainly was! It's part of our tradition," she declared: "Just as in China where there were ancient beliefs so farfetched that they have turned into legends, here in Mexico we also have our share of beliefs and legends."

"But how is it that nobody knows very much about what went on in ancient Mexico, while everybody is aware of the beliefs and practices of ancient China?"

"Here in Mexico, there were two cultures that collided head on: the Spaniards and the Indians," Clara explained: "We know everything about ancient Spain, but not ancient Mexico simply because the Spaniards were the victors and tried to obliterate Indian traditions. But in spite of their systematic and relentless efforts, they didn't succeed completely."

"What were the practices associated with the crystals?" I asked.

"It is believed that sorcerers of ancient times used to hold the mental image of their enemy while in a state of intense and pinpointed concentration; a unique state that is nearly impossible to attain and certainly impossible to describe. In such condition of mental and physical awareness, they would manipulate that image until they found it's center of energy."

"What did those sorcerers do with their enemy's image?" I asked, driven by morbid curiosity.

"They used to look for an opening usually localized in the area of the heart; like a tiny vortex around which energy circulates. As soon as they found it, they would point at it with their dartlike crystals."

At the mention of pointing with the crystals at the image of an enemy, I began to shiver. In spite of my discomfort, I felt compelled to ask Clara what happened to the person whose image was being manipulated by the sorcerers.

"Perhaps his body withered," she offered. "Or maybe the person met with an accident. It is believed that those sorcerers themselves never knew exactly what would happen. However, if their intent and power were strong enough, they would be assured of success in destroying their enemy."

More than ever I wanted to put the crystals down, but in the light of what Clara had said, I didn't dare profane them. I wondered why on earth anyone would want to give them to me.

"Magical weapons were terribly important at one time," Clara continued: "Weapons such as crystals became an extension of the sorcerer's own body. The crystals were filled with energy that could be channeled and projected outward across time and space."

Clara said that the ultimate weapon, however, is not a crystal dart, a sword or even a gun. It is the human body. The human body can be turned into an instrument capable of gathering, storing and directing energy.

"We can regard the body either as a biological organism or as a source of power," Clara explained: "It all depends on the state of the inventory in our warehouse. The body can be hard and rigid, or soft and pliant. If our warehouse is empty, the body itself is empty, and energy from infinity can flow through it."

Clara reiterated that in order to empty ourselves, we have to sink into a state of profound recapitulation and let energy flow through us unimpeded. Only in quiescence, [* quiescence - a state of quiet (but possibly temporary) inaction] she stressed, can we give the seer in us full reign; or can the impersonal energy of the universe turn into the very personal force of intent.

"When we have emptied ourselves sufficiently of our obsolete and encumbering inventory," she went on, "energy comes to us and gathers itself naturally. When enough of it coalesces, it turns into power. Anything can announce intent's presence: a loud noise, a soft voice, a thought that isn't yours, an unexpected surge of vigor or well-being."

Clara emphasized that in the final analysis, it made no difference whether power descends on us in a state of wakefulness or in dreams. It is equally valid in both cases; dreaming being, however, more elusive and potent.

"What we experience in wakefulness in terms of power should be put into practice in dreams," she continued. "And whatever power we experience in dreams should be used while we are awake. What really counts is being aware regardless of whether we are awake or asleep."

She peered at me and repeated, "What counts is being aware."

Clara was silent for a moment. Then she told me something I considered to be completely irrational. She said, "Being aware of time, for example, can make a man's life span several hundred years."

"That's absurd," I said. "How can a man live that long?"

"Being aware of time is a special state of awareness that prevents us from aging quickly and dying in a few decades," Clara explained: "There is a belief handed down from the ancient sorcerers, that if we would be able to use our bodies as weapons - or, put in modern terms, if we would empty our warehouses - we would be able to slip out of the world to roam elsewhere."

"Where would we go?" I asked.

Clara looked at me in surprise, as if I ought to know the answer. "To the realm of notbeing; to the shadows' world," she replied: "It is believed that once our warehouse is empty, we would become so light that we could soar through the void and nothing would hinder our flight. Then we could return to this world youthful and renewed."

I shifted on the uncomfortable rock numbing my tailbone. "But this is just a belief, isn't it, Clara?" I asked. "A legend handed down from ancient time."

"At this moment, it is just a belief," she acknowledged: "But moments, like all things, are known to change. Nowadays, more than ever, man needs to renew himself and experience emptiness and freedom."

For a moment I wondered what it would be like to be as vaporous as a cloud and float up into the air, with nothing to bar my coming and going.

Then I mentally returned to earth again and felt obliged to say, "All this talk about being aware of time, and passing into the shadows' world, Clara, is impossible for me to accept or to understand. It isn't part of my tradition, or, as you put it, it isn't part of the inventory in my warehouse."

"No, it isn't," Clara agreed. "This is sorcery!"

"Do you mean to say that sorcery still exists and is practiced today?" I asked.

Clara suddenly got up and grabbed her bundle.

"Don't ask me any more about it," she said flatly: "Later on, you'll find out whatever you want to know, but from someone who is more capable of explaining these things than I."

## Chapter 10

Clara sat on the rattan armchair at the edge of the patio, brushing her shiny black hair. Then she arranged it with her fingers until everything was in place. When she had finished grooming herself, she brought her left palm to her forehead and stroked it in a circular fashion. Then she moved her hand over the top of her head and down the back of her neck, after which she flicked her wrists and fingers in the air. She repeated this stroking and flicking sequence several more times.

I was fascinated watching her movements. There was nothing careless or haphazard about them. She performed them with intense concentration, as if she were engaged in a most important task.

"What are you doing?" I asked, breaking the silence. "Are you giving yourself some sort of a facial massage?"

Clara glanced over at me, sitting on the matching armchair, imitating her movements.

She said, "This circular stroking prevents wrinkles from forming on the forehead. "It may appear like a facial massage to you, but it isn't. These are sorcery passes; movements of the hand that are designed to gather energy for a specific purpose."

"What specific purpose is that?" I asked, flicking my wrists the way she had done.

"The purpose of these sorcery passes is to keep one looking youthful by preventing wrinkles from forming," she said: "The purpose has been decided beforehand, not by me or by you, but by power itself."

I had to admit that whatever Clara was doing certainly worked. She had lovely skin that set off her green eyes and dark hair. I had always believed that her youthful appearance was the consequence of her Indian genes. I never suspected that she deliberately cultivated it by means of specific movements.

"Whenever energy gathers, as in the case of these sorcery passes, we call it power," Clara continued: "Remember this, Taisha, power is when energy gathers, either by itself or under someone's command. You're going to hear much more about power, not just from me but from the others, too. They're expected back any time now."

Although Clara constantly referred to her relatives, I had by now given up all hope of ever meeting them. Her reference to power was an additional matter. I had never understood what she meant by power.

"I'm going to show you some sorcery passes that you must perform every day of your life from now on," she announced.

I let out a sigh of complaint. There were so many things that she told me to do every day of my life: the breathing, the recapitulation, the kung fu exercises, the long walks. If I lined up back to back everything she told me to do, there wouldn't be enough hours in the day for even half of them.

"For heaven's sake, don't take me so literally," Clara said, seeing my pained expression: "I'm cramming all I can into your peewee brain because I want you to know about all these things. Knowledge assists in gathering energy; therefore knowledge is power. To make sorcery work, we must know what we're doing when we intend the result not the purpose, mind you, but the result of the sorcery act. If we intended the purpose of our sorcery actions, we would be creating sorcery; and you and I don't have that much power."

"I don't think I'm following you, Clara," I said, moving my chair closer. "For what don't we have enough power?"

"I mean that even between the two of us, we can't gather the overwhelming energy it would take to create a new purpose. But, individually we can certainly gather enough energy to intend the result of these sorcery passes: no wrinkles for us. This is all we can do since the passes' purpose- to keep us young and youthful looking- is already set."

"Is it like the recapitulation whose end result had been intended beforehand by the ancient sorcerers?" I asked.

"Exactly," Clara said. "The intent of all sorcery acts has already been set. All we have to do is hook our awareness to it."

She moved her chair across from me so that our knees were barely touching. Then she vigorously rubbed each thumb on the palm of the opposite hand and placed them on the bridge of her nose. She moved them outward with light, even strokes over her eyebrows to the temples.

"This pass will keep furrows from developing between your eyebrows," she explained.

After quickly rubbing together her index fingers, like two sticks starting a fire, she brought them vertically to each side of her nose and gently moved them sideways over her cheeks several times.

"That's to clear the sinus cavities," she said, deliberately constricting her nasal passages. "Instead of picking your nose, do this movement."

I didn't appreciate her reference to my picking my nose, but I tried the movement, and it did clear my sinuses as she had said.

"The next pass is to keep the cheeks from sagging," she said.

She briskly rubbed her palms together, and with long, firm strokes, she slid them up each cheek to her temples. She repeated this movement six or seven times, always using slow, even, upward strokes.

I noticed her face was flushed, but she didn't stop yet. She placed the inner edge of her hand with her thumb folded over her palm above her upper lip, and rubbed back and forth with a vigorous sawlike motion.

She explained that the spot where the nose and upper lip join, when briskly rubbed, stimulates energy to flow in mild, even bursts. But if greater bursts of energy were needed, they could be obtained by pricking the point at the center of the upper gum underneath the upper lip and below the nose septum.

"If you get drowsy in the cave while recapitulating, rub this point briskly, and it will temporarily revive you," she said.

I rubbed my upper lip and felt my nose and ears clear. I also experienced a slight numbing sensation on the roof of my palate. It lasted for a few seconds but took my breath away. It left me with the sensation that I was just about to uncover something that was veiled.

Next, Clara moved her index fingers sideways under her chin, again using a quick back-and-forth sawlike motion. She explained that stimulating the point under the chin produces a calm alertness. She added that we can also activate this point by resting the chin on a low table while sitting on the floor.

Following her suggestion, I moved my cushion to the floor and sat on it, and rested my chin on a wooden crate that was just level with my face. By leaning forward, I put a slight pressure on that chin point Clara had indicated. After a few moments, I felt my body settle down: A prickling sensation rose up my back, entered my head, and my breathing became deeper and more rhythmic.

"Another way to awake the center under the chin," Clara continued, "is by lying on the stomach with the hands in fists, one on top of the other, under the chin."

She recommended that when doing the exercise with the fists, we should tense them to create pressure under the chin and then relax them to release the pressure. Tensing and relaxing the fists, she said, produces a pulsating movement that sends small bursts of energy to a vital center directly connected with the base of the tongue. She stressed that this exercise should be done cautiously, otherwise one might develop a sore throat.

I went to sit in the rattan chair again.

"This group of sorcery passes I've shown you," Clara continued, "must be practiced daily until they cease to be massage-like movements and become what they really are: sorcery passes."

"Watch me!" she ordered.

I saw her repeat the movements she had shown me, except that this time she was making her fingers and hands dance. Her hands seemed at times to penetrate deeply into the skin of her face. At other times, her hands passed over it lightly; as if gliding on the skin's surface; and moving so rapidly that they seemed to disappear. Watching her exquisite movements kept me mesmerized.

"This way of stroking was never in your inventory," she laughed when she had finished: "This is sorcery. It requires an intent different from the intent of the daily world. With all the tension that rises to the face, we certainly need a different intent if we are going to relax the muscles and tone the centers located there."

Clara said that all our emotions leave traces on our face more than on any other part of our body. Therefore we have to release accumulated stress using the sorcery passes and their accompanying intent.

She stared at me for a moment and remarked, "I see from the tension in your face that you've been pondering over your recapitulation. Be sure to do your passes before going to bed tonight to remove those creases in your forehead."

I admitted that I had been worrying about my recapitulation.

"The problem is that you are spending too much time in the cave," Clara said with a wink. "I don't want you turning into a bat-girl. By now I think you've gathered enough energy to start learning other things."

She jumped out of the chair as if released by a spring. It was so incongruous to see such a powerful woman jumping up so agilely that I had to laugh. I myself got up more slowly, as if I were twice her size.

She looked at me and shook her head. "You're too stiff," she noted. "You need to do some special physical exercise to open your vital centers."

We went to the rack where the coats and boots were kept outside the back door of the house. She handed me a wide-rimmed straw hat and led me to a clearing a short distance from the kitchen annex.

The sun shone brightly and it was an unusually warm day. Clara told me to put on the hat. She pointed to an area surrounded by a wire fence where the ground had been dug in furrows and lined with small plants in neat parallel rows.

"Who cleared the ground and put in all the plants?" I asked, surprised because I hadn't noticed Clara working there. "It looks like a huge project. Did you do it yourself?"

"No. Someone else came and did it for me."

"But when? I've been here every day and didn't see anyone."

"That's no mystery," Clara said. "The person who worked on this vegetable garden came when you were at the cave."

Her explanation didn't satisfy me. The garden was so well organized that it looked like it had taken more than one person to lay it out.

Before I could probe her further, Clara announced, "From now on you'll take care of this garden. Consider it your new task."

I tried not to show my disappointment at being given yet another task that required daily attention. I had thought that by physical exercise Clara had meant that we were going to practice a new martial art form; preferably one using a classical Chinese weapon like the broadsword or long pole. Seeing my downcast look, Clara assured me that cultivating a garden would be good for me. It would give me the physical activity and exposure to the sun that I needed for health and well-being. She also pointed out that for more than six months I had been doing nothing but focusing on incidents of my life. Caring for something outside of myself would prevent me from becoming more self-centered. It shocked me to realize that half a year had passed. To me, it seemed like only yesterday that I had come to Clara's house and my life had changed so drastically that nothing remained the same.

"Most people only know how to care for themselves," Clara said, jolting me out of my train of thought. "Although not very well at that. Because of this overwhelming emphasis, the self becomes distorted; full of outrageous demands."

We walked to a wooden gate; the entrance to the garden.

"Working in this garden will give you a special kind of energy that you can't get from recapitulating or breathing or practicing kung fu," Clara said.

"What kind of energy is that?"

"The energy of the earth," she replied.

Her eyes were as green as the new plants.

She added, "The energy of the earth complements the energy of the sun. Perhaps you'll feel it entering through your hands as you work the soil. Or it may start to flow into your legs as you squat on the ground."

I had never worked in a garden before and wasn't sure what to do. I asked her to outline my duties. She peered at me for a moment as if wondering if she had picked the right person for the task.

"The ground is still moist from yesterday's rain," she said, stooping down to touch the soil. "But when it's dry, you'll have to carry buckets of water from the stream; or if you're very clever, you can devise an irrigation system."

"I might just do that," I said confidently. "I'll construct an electric water pump like one I saw in a house in the country; and connect it to the dynamo. Then I wouldn't have to lug the buckets of water up the hill."

"It doesn't matter how you do it as long as the plants get watered. Also, you'll have to feed the plants every two weeks from that pile of compost at the end of the garden. And make sure that all the weeds are pulled. Around here they spread like wildfire. And keep the gate closed so no rabbits can get in."

"No problem," I assured her half-heartedly.

"Good. You can begin now."

She pointed to a bucket and told me to fill it with compost and mix it into the soil around each plant. When I returned with the bucket full of what I hoped wasn't night soil, (* night soil-human excreta used as fertilizer) she gave me a digging tool with which to loosen the earth. For a while she watched as I worked, cautioning me not to dig too closely to the tender plants.

As I concentrated on the task, I felt a sense of well-being, and a strange peace surround me. The dirt was cool and soft in my fingers. For the first time since I had been in Clara's house, I felt truly at ease, safe and protected.

"The energy of the earth is nurturing," she remarked, as if noticing my change of mood: "You're empty enough from your recapitulation that some of it is already creeping into your body. You feel at ease because you know that the earth is the mother of all things."

She swept her hands over the rows of plants. "Everything comes from the earth. "The earth sustains and nourishes us; and when we die, our bodies return to it."

She paused for a moment then added, "Unless of course, we succeed in the great crossing."

"You mean there's a chance that we won't die?" I asked. "Really, Clara, aren't you exaggerating?"

"We all have a chance for freedom," she said softly, "but it's up to each one of us to seize it and turn it into an actuality."

She explained that by storing energy, we can dissolve our preconceptions about the world and the body; thus making room in our warehouse for other possibilities. A chance not to die was one of these possibilities. She said that the best explanation of this extravagant alternative was offered by the sages of ancient China. They claimed that it is feasible for one's personal awareness, or te, to link up knowingly with the all-encompassing awareness or Tao. Then when death comes, one's individual awareness is not dispersed as in ordinary dying, but expands and unites with the greater whole.

She added that the recapitulation in the setting of a cocoon-like cave had enabled me to gather and store energy. Now I needed to use that energy to strengthen my bond with the abstract force called the spirit.

"That's why you have to cultivate the garden and absorb it's energy, and also the energy of the sun," she said: "The sun bestows it's energy on the earth and causes things to grow. If you allow the sun's light to enter your body, your energy, too, will flourish."

Clara told me to wash my hands in a bucket of water, and to sit on a log by a clearing outside the fenced garden because she was going to show me how to begin to direct my attention to the sun. She said that I should always wear a wide-rimmed hat in order to shield my head and face. She also warned me never to do any of the breathing passes she was about to show me for more than a few minutes at a time.

"Why are they called breathing passes?" I asked.

"Because the preset intent of these passes is to pass energy from the breath to the area where we place our attention. It could be an organ in our body or an energy channel; or even a thought, or a memory as in the case of the recapitulation. What is important is that energy is transmitted, thus fulfilling the intent established beforehand. The result is sheer magic because it appears as if it had sprung out of nowhere. That's why we call these movements and breaths sorcery passes."

Clara instructed me to face the sun with my eyes closed, and then take a deep breath through my mouth, and pull the sun's warmth and light into my stomach. I was to hold it there for as long as I could, then swallow, and finally, exhale any air that was left.

"Pretend you're a sunflower," she teased. "Always keep your face toward the sun when you breathe. The light of the sun charges the breath with power, so be sure to take big gulps of air, and completely fill your lungs. Do this three times."

She explained that in this exercise, the energy of the sun automatically spreads throughout the entire body. Yet, we could deliberately send the sun's healing rays to any area by touching the spot where we want the energy to go; or by simply using the mind to direct energy to it.

"Actually, when you have practiced this breath long enough, you don't need to use your hands anymore," she went on. "You can just visualize the sun's rays oozing directly into a specific part of your body."

She suggested that I do the same three breaths, but this time breathing through my nose and visualizing the light flowing down into my back; thus energizing the channels along my spine. That way, the sun's rays would flood my entire body.

"If you want to bypass breathing through the nose or mouth altogether," Clara said, "you can breathe directly with your stomach or your chest or your back. You can even bring the energy up the body through the soles of your feet."

She told me to concentrate on my lower abdomen on the spot just below my navel, and breathe in a relaxed fashion until I could feel a bond forming between my body and the sun.

As I inhaled under her guidance, I could feel the inside of my stomach becoming warmer and filled with light. After a while, Clara told me to practice breathing with other areas. She touched the spot on my forehead between my eyes. When I concentrated my attention there, my head became flushed with a yellow glow. Clara recommended that I absorb as much of the sun's vitality as I could by holding my breath; then rolling my eyes in a clockwise direction before exhaling. I did as she instructed and the yellow glow intensified.

"Now stand up and try breathing with your back," she said, and helped me to take off my jacket.

I turned my back to the sun and tried to place my attention on the various centers she pointed out with a touch. One was between my shoulder blades, another was at the nape of my neck. As I breathed, visualizing the sun on my back, I felt a warmth move up and down my spine, then rush to my head. I became so dizzy that I nearly lost my balance.

"That's enough for today," Clara said, handing me my jacket.

I sat down feeling giddy, as if I were happily drunk.

Clara said, "The light of the sun is pure power. After all, it's the most intensely gathered energy there is."

She said that an invisible line of energy flows out directly from the top of the head, upward to the realm of not-being; or it can flow from the realm of not-being down into us via an opening at the very center of the top of the head.

"If you like, you can call it the life line that links us to a greater awareness," she said. "The sun, if used properly, charges this line and causes it to spring into action. That's why the crown of the head must always be protected."

Clara said that before we returned to the house, she was going to show me another powerful sorcery pass; one involving a series of body movements. She said that it had to be executed in one single motion, with strength, precision and grace; but without straining.

"I can't urge you enough to practice all the passes I've shown you," she said. "They are the indispensable companions of the recapitulation. This one did wonders for me. Watch me closely. See if you can see my double."

"Your what?" I said, panicking.

I was afraid I would miss something crucial, or not know what to make of it even if I saw it.

"Watch my double," she repeated, enunciating the words carefully. "It's like a double exposure. You have enough energy to intend with me the result of this sorcery pass."

"But tell me again, Clara, what is the result?"

"The double: The ethereal body: The counterpart of the physical body, which by now you must know, or at least suspect, is not merely a projection of the mind."

She moved to an area of level ground, and stood with her feet together and her arms at her sides.

"Clara, wait. I'm sure I don't have enough energy to see what you're referring to, because I can't even understand it conceptually."

"It doesn't matter if you understand it conceptually. Just watch closely. Maybe I have enough power for both of us to intend my double."

In the most agile movement I had yet seen her perform, she brought her arms over her head, with her palms touching in a gesture of prayer. Then she arched backward, forming an elegant bow with her arms stretched out behind her, almost to the ground. She flipped her body laterally to the left so that instantly she ended up bending forward almost touching the ground; and before I could even open my mouth in surprise, she had flipped back and her body was gracefully arched backward.

She flipped back and forth two more times, as if to give me a chance to see her inconceivably fast and graceful movements; or perhaps a chance to see her double. At one point in her movement, I saw her as a hazy shape, just as if she were a life-size photograph that had been double exposed. For a fraction of an instant, there were two Claras moving, one a millisecond behind the other.

I was completely perplexed by what I saw, which when I thought about it, I could explain as being an optical illusion created by her speed. But at a bodily level, I knew that my eyes had seen something inconceivable. I had had enough energy to suspend my common sense expectations, and allow another possibility to enter in.

Clara stopped her exquisite acrobatics and came and stood beside me, not even out of breath. She explained that this sorcery pass enables the body to unite with it's double in the realm of not-being; a realm whose entrance hovers above the head and slightly behind it.

"By bending backward with the arms outstretched, we create a bridge," Clara said. "And since the body and the double are like two ends of a rainbow, we can intend them to join."

"Is there any specific time when I should practice this pass?" I asked.

"This is a sorcery pass of the twilight," she said. "But you have to have lots of energy, and be extremely calm in order to do it. The twilight helps you to become calm and gives you an added boost of energy. That's why the end of the day is the best time to practice it."

"Should I try it now?" I asked.

When she looked at me doubtfully, I assured her that I had studied gymnastics as a child and was eager to try it.

"The question is not whether, you have studied gymnastics as a child, but how calm you are now," Clara replied.

I said that I was as calm as I could be. Clara laughed in disbelief, but told me to go ahead and try it. She said she would watch over me to make sure I didn't break anything by twisting too forcefully.

I planted my feet on the ground, bent my knees and began slowly executing my best backbend. But, when I got past a certain point, gravity took over and I fell clumsily to the ground.

"You're the farthest thing from being calm," Clara concluded amiably as she helped me up. "What's bothering you, Taisha?"

Rather than revealing to Clara what was on my mind, I asked if I could try the movement again. But, the second time I had more trouble than before. I was sure my mental and emotional concerns had made me lose my balance. I knew that the demands of the self, as Clara had said, were really outrageous. They took all my attention. I saw no solution except to confess to Clara what was on my mind. I told her what bothered me the most was that I seemed to have reached a standstill in my recapitulation.

"What is causing it?" Clara asked.

I admitted that it had to do with my family. "I know now without a doubt that they dislike me," I said sadly: "Not that I didn't suspect it all along, because I did; and I used to get into rages about it. But, now that I have reviewed my past, I can't get angry the way I used to, so, I don't know what to do."

Clara eyed me critically, moving her head backward to size me up.

"What is there to do?" she asked. "You've done the work and found out that they disliked you. That's good! I don't see the problem."

Her cavalier tone annoyed me. I expected if not sympathy, at least understanding and an intelligent comment.

"The problem," I said emphatically, on the verge of tears, "is that I'm stuck. I know that I need to go deeper than I have, but I can't. All I can think is that they disliked me, whereas I loved them."

"Walt, wait. Didn't you tell me that you hated them? I distinctly remember..."

"Yes, I did say that, but at the time I said it I didn't know what I was saying. I really loved them; my brothers too. Later I learned to despise them, but that was much later. Not as a child. As a child I wanted them to pay attention to me and play with me."

"I think I see what you mean," Clara said, nodding. "Let's sit down and discuss this."

We sat down again on the log.

"As I see it, your problem stems from a promise you made as a child. You did make a promise as a child, didn't you, Taisha?" she asked, looking at me squarely in the eye.

"I don't recall making any promises," I said sincerely.

In a friendly tone, Clara suggested that perhaps I didn't recall because I had been very young when I made it, or because it was more of a feeling than a promise actually stated in so many words. Clara explained that as children, we often make vows and then become bound by those vows even though we can no longer remember making them.

"Such impulsive pledges can cost us our freedom," Clara said: "Sometimes we are bound by preposterous childish devotion, or pledges of undying, eternal love."

She said that there are moments in everyone's life, especially in early childhood, when we have wanted something so badly that we automatically fixed our total intent on it, which, once fixed, remains in place until we fulfill our desire. She elaborated by saying that vows, oaths and promises bind our intent; so that from then on, our actions, feelings and thoughts are consistently directed toward fulfilling or maintaining those commitments regardless of whether or not we remember having made them.

She advised me to review, during the recapitulation, all the promises I had ever made in my lifetime, especially the ones made in haste or ignorance or faulty judgement. Unless I deliberately retrieved my intent from those promises, she advised, intent would never rise freely to be expressed in the present.

I tried to think about what she was saying, but my mind was a mass of confusion. Suddenly I remembered a scene from my very early childhood. I must have been six. I wanted to be cuddled by my mother but she pushed me away, saying that I was too old for cuddling, and told me to go clean up my room. Yet the youngest of my brothers, who was four years older than I and was my mother's favorite, was always cuddled by her. I swore then that I would never love or get close to any of them ever again. From that day on, I seemed to have kept my promise by always remaining estranged from them.

"If it's true that they didn't love you," Clara said, "it was your fate not to be loved by your family. Accept it! Besides, what possible difference could it make now whether they loved you or not?"

It still made a difference, but I didn't tell Clara that.

Clara went on, "I too had a problem very much like yours. I had always been aware of being a friendless, fat, miserable girl. But through recapitulating I found out that my mother had deliberately fattened me up since the day I was born. She reasoned that a fat, homely girl would never leave home; and she wanted me there as her servant for life."

I was horrified. This was the first time Clara had revealed anything about her past to me.

"I went to my teacher, who was definitely the greatest teacher one can ever have, for advice about this problem," she went on: "He said to me, 'Clara, I feel for you, but you are wasting your time because then was then: now is now. Now there is only time for freedom. You see, I sincerely felt that my mother had ruined me for life: I was fat and couldn't stop eating. It took me a long time to get the meaning of 'Then was then: now is now.' And now there is only time for freedom."

Clara was silent for a moment as if to let the impact of her words settle on me.

"You have only time to fight for freedom, Taisha," she said, giving me a nudge. "Now is now."

## Chapter 11

It was growing dark and I was becoming more and more apprehensive about finishing my task. Clara had asked me to rake the leaves in the clearing behind the house; and also to carry some rocks from the stream and make a border on each side of the path leading from the vegetable garden to the back of the patio. I had raked the leaves, and was hurriedly lining up the river rocks along the path when Clara came out of the house to check on my progress.

"You're setting the rocks any which way," she said glancing at the path. "And you haven't raked up the leaves yet. What have you been doing all afternoon, daydreaming again?"

To my dismay, an untimely gust of wind had scattered the neat piles I had made before I had had a chance to put the leaves in a basket.

"The path looks pretty good to me," I said, on the defensive: "As for the leaves, well, can I help it if the wind made a mess of them?"

"When aiming for the perfect form, 'pretty good' isn't good enough," Clara interrupted: "You ought to know by now that the outward form of anything we do is really an expression of our inner state."

I told her that I didn't see how arranging heavy rocks could be anything but hard work.

"That's because you do everything just to get by," she retorted.

She walked over to the row of rocks I had lined up and shook her head. "These rocks look as if you've dropped them without considering their proper placement."

"It's getting dark and I was running out of time," I explained.

I was in no mood for a lengthy discussion on aesthetics or composition. Besides, I felt I already knew more than Clara about the subject of composition from my art classes.

Clara said, "Placing rocks is just like practicing kung fu. It's how we do things that matters, not how fast or how much we get done."

I shook my wrists to relax my cramped fingers. "Do you mean that carrying rocks is a part of martial arts training?" I asked, surprised.

"What do you think kung fu is?" she countered.

I suspected she was asking me a trick question, so I deliberated for a moment to find the right answer.

I said confidently, "It's a set of martial arts fighting techniques."

Clara shook her head. "Leave it to Taisha to come up with a pragmatic reply," she said with a laugh.

She sat down on one of the wicker chairs at the edge of the patio from where we had a good view of the path. I slumped into the chair next to her. I settled comfortably, propping my feet on the rim of a huge ceramic pot. Clara then began to explain that the term "kung fu" is derived from the juxtaposition of two Chinese characters; one meaning 'work done over a period of time,' and the other word signifying 'man.' When these two characters are combined, the term refers to man's endeavor to perfect himself through constant effort. She contended that whether we practice formal exercises, or arrange rocks, or rake leaves we always express our inner state through our actions.

"Therefore, to perfect our acts is to perfect ourselves," Clara said. "This is the true meaning of kung fu."

"But still, I don't see the connection between garden work and practicing kung fu," I said.

"Then let me spell it out for you," Clara replied with a tone of exaggerated patience: "I asked you to carry the rocks from the stream so that walking up the hilly trail with the added weight would develop your internal strength. We are not just interested in building muscles, but rather in cultivating internal energy. Also, all the breathing passes I have taught you thus far, and that you should be practicing daily, are designed to increase your internal strength."

I felt guilty: From the way she had looked at me when she said I should be practicing the breathing exercises daily, I knew that she was aware I wasn't doing them religiously.

"What you have been learning here with me might be referred to in China as internal kung fu, or nei kung," Clara continued: "Internal kung fu uses controlled breathing and the circulation of energy to strengthen the body and augment one's health. External martial arts, like the karate forms you learned from your Japanese teachers and some of the forms I showed you, focus on building muscles and quick body responses in which energy is released and is directed away from us."

Clara said that internal kung fu was practiced by monks in China long before they developed the external or hard styles of fighting that are popularly known as kung fu today.

"But understand this," Clara continued. "Regardless of whether you are learning martial arts or the discipline I have been teaching you, the goal of your training is to perfect your inner being so that it can transcend it's outer form in order to accomplish the abstract flight."

A feeling of dejection swept over me like a somber cloud. I felt my old mood of failure taking hold of me. Even if I did do the breathing passes as Clara recommended, I felt I would never be able to succeed in whatever it was that she wanted. I didn't even know what the great crossing meant, let alone conceive of it as a pragmatic possibility.

"You've been very patient all these months," Clara said, patting me on the back as if sensing my need for encouragement: "You've never really pressed me about my constant insinuations that I am teaching you sorcery as a formal discipline."

I saw the perfect opportunity to ask something that had been on my mind from the first time she used the word.

"Why do you call this formal discipline sorcery?" I asked.

Clara peered at me. The expression on her face was seriousness itself.

"It's hard to say," she replied. " My reluctance to discuss it is because I don't want to misname it and scare you away. I think now is the time to talk about it, though. But first let me tell you something more about the people of ancient Mexico."

Clara leaned toward me and in a low voice said that the people of pre-Hispanic Mexico were very similar in many respects to the ancient Chinese. Perhaps because they both may have had the same origins, they shared a similar world view. The ancient Indians of Mexico, however, had a slight advantage, she said, because the world in which they lived was in transition. This made them extremely eclectic and curious about every facet of existence. They wanted to understand the universe, life, death and the range of human possibilities in terms of awareness and perception. Their great drive to know led them to develop practices that enabled them to arrive at unimaginable levels of awareness. They made detailed descriptions of their practices and mapped the realms that those practices unveiled. This tradition they handed down from generation to generation, always shrouding it in secrecy.

Nearly out of breath with excitement or perhaps wonderment, Clara ended her discussion of those ancient Indians by saying that they were indeed sorcerers. She stared at me wide-eyed. In the twilight, her pupils were enormous. She confided that her foremost teacher, a Mexican Indian, possessed a complete knowledge of those ancient practices, and he had taught them to her.

"Are you teaching me those practices, Clara?" I asked, matching her excitement. "You said the crystals were used as weapons by the ancient sorcerers, and the sorcery passes were empowered with their intent, and the recapitulation also was devised in ancient times. Does that mean that I am learning sorcery?"

"That is partially true," Clara said. "But for the time being, it's better not to focus on the fact that these practices are sorcery."

"Why not?"

"Because we are interested in something beyond the aberrant, esoteric rituals and incantations of those sorcerers of ancient times. You see, we believe that their bizarre practices and obsessive search for power resulted only in a greater enhancement of the self. This is a dead-end road because it never leads to total freedom, and total freedom is what we ourselves are after. The danger is that one can easily become swayed by the mood of those sorcerers."

"I wouldn't become swayed," I assured her.

"I really can't tell you any more at the moment," she said, exasperated, "but you'll find out more as you go along."

I felt betrayed and protested vehemently. I accused her of deliberately toying with my mind and feelings by keeping me dangling with bits of information that piqued my curiosity; and with promises that all was going to be clarified at some unspecified future date.

Clara completely ignored my protests. It was as if I hadn't said a word. She stood up, walked over to the pile of rocks and picked one up as if it were made of Styrofoam. After deliberating for a moment as to which side to turn up, she set the rock down on the edge of the path. She then arranged two more rocks the size of footballs on either side of it. When she was satisfied with their placement, she stepped back to study the effect. I had to admit that the garden path, the smooth gray rocks she had set, and the jagged green leaves of the plants made a most harmonious composition.

"It is the grace with which you manipulate things that matters," Clara reminded me as she picked up another rock: "Your inner state is reflected in the way you move, talk, eat or place rocks. It doesn't matter what you do, as long as you gather energy with your actions and transform it into power."

For a while, Clara gazed at the path as if considering where to place the next rock she held in her hands. When she found a suitable spot, she gently set it down and gave it an affectionate pat.

"As an artist you should know that the rocks have to be put where they are in balance," she said, "not where it is the easiest for you to drop them. Of course, if you were imbued with power, you could drop them any which way and the result would be beauty itself. To understand this is the real purpose of the exercise of placing rocks." From the tone of her voice, and the ugly, erratic arrangement of my rocks, I realized I had failed again at my task.

I felt acutely dejected.

"Clara, I'm not an artist," I confessed. "I'm merely a student. In fact, I'm an ex-student. I dropped out of art school a year ago. I like to make believe that I'm an artist, but that's about all. I'm really nothing."

"We are all nothing," Clara reminded me.

"I know, but you are a mysterious, powerful nothing, while I'm a meager, stupid, petty nothing. I can't even set down a bunch of dumb rocks. There's no..."

Clara clamped her hand over my mouth. "Don't say another word," she warned. "I'm telling you again. Be careful of what you say out loud in this house, especially in the twilight!"

It was almost dark then and everything was absolutely still to the point of being eerie. The birds were silent. Everything had quieted down. Even the wind, which had been so annoying earlier while I was trying to rake the leaves, had settled.

"It's the time of no shadows," Clara whispered. "Let's sit under this tree in the dark and find out if you can summon the shadows' world."

"Wait a moment, Clara," I said in a loud whisper that bordered on a screech. "What are you going to do to me?"

Waves of nervousness were cramping my stomach, and in spite of the cold, my forehead was perspiring.

Clara asked me then outright if I had been practicing the breaths and the sorcery passes she had taught me. I wanted more than anything to tell her that I had, yet that would have been a lie. In truth, I had practiced them minimally, just so I wouldn't forget them; because recapitulating took all of my available energy and left me no time for anything else. At night I was too tired to do anything, so I just went to bed.

"You haven't been doing them regularly or you wouldn't be in this sorry state now," Clara said, leaning closer. "You're trembling like a leaf. There's one secret to the breathing and the passes I've taught you that makes them invaluable."

"What is that?" I stammered.

Clara tapped me on the head. "They have to be practiced every day or else they're worthless. You wouldn't think of going without eating or drinking water, would you? The exercises I've taught you are even more important than food and water."

She had made her point. I silently vowed that every night before going to bed I would do them, and again upon awakening in the morning before going to the cave.

"The human body has an extra energy system that comes into play when we are under stress," Clara explained. "And stress happens any time we do anything to excess; like being overly concerned with yourself and your performance, as you are now. That's why one of the fundamental precepts of the art of freedom is to avoid excesses."

She said that the movements she was teaching me, whether she called them breaths or sorcery passes, were important because they operate directly on the reserve system; and that the reason they can be called indispensable passes is because they allow added energy to pass into and through our reserve pathways. Then when we are summoned to action, instead of becoming depleted from stress, we become stronger, and have surplus energy for extraordinary tasks.

"Now, before we summon the shadows' world, I'll show you two more indispensable sorcery passes which combine breathing and movements," she went on: "Do them every day and you not only won't get tired or sick, but you'll have plenty of surplus energy for your intending."

"For my what?"

"Your intending," Clara repeated. "For intending the result of anything you do. Remember?"

She held my shoulders and twisted me around so that I was facing north.

"This movement is particularly important for you, Taisha, because your lungs are weakened from excessive weeping," she said: "A lifetime of feeling sorry for yourself certainly has taken it's toll on your lungs."

Her statement jolted me to attention. I watched her bend her knees and ankles and assume a martial art posture called the 'straight horse,' because it simulates the sitting position of a rider mounted on a horse, with his legs a shoulders' width apart and slightly bowed. The index finger of her left hand was pointed down, while her other fingers were curled at the second joint. As she began to inhale, she gently but forcefully turned her head to the right as far as she could, and rotated her left arm at the shoulder joint over her head in a full circle all the way to the back, ending up with the heel of her left palm resting on her tailbone. Simultaneously she brought her right arm around her waist to her back and placed her right fist over the back of her left hand, wedging it against her bent left wrist.

Using her right fist, she pushed up her left arm along her spinal column, her left elbow bent akimbo, and finished her inhalation. She held her breath for a count of seven, then released the tension on her left arm, lowered it to her tailbone again and rotated it at the shoulder joint straight overhead to the front, ending up with the heel of her left palm resting on her pubis. Simultaneously she brought her right arm around her waist to the front and placed that fist on the back of her left hand, and pushed the left arm up her abdomen as she finished exhaling.

"Do this movement once with your left arm, and again with your right one," she said. "That way you will balance your two sides."

To demonstrate, she repeated the same movements, alternating arms, and this time turning her head to the left.

"Now you try it, Taisha," she said, stepping aside to give me room to circle my arm backward.

I replicated her movements. As I swung my left arm back, I felt a painful tension along the underside of my extended arm, running all the way from my finger to my armpit.

"Relax and let the breath's energy flow through your arm and out of the tip of your index finger," she said. "Keep it extended and the other fingers curved. That way you'll release any blockage of energy along the pathways in your arm."

The pain grew even more acute as I pushed my bent arm upward along my back.

Clara noticed my pinched expression. "Don't push too hard," she warned, "or you'll strain your tendons. And round your shoulders a bit more as you push."

After performing the movement with my right arm, I felt a burning in my thigh muscles from standing with my knees and ankles bent. Even though I stood in the same position every day while practicing kung fu, my legs seemed to vibrate as if an electric current were running through them. Clara suggested I stand up and shake my legs a few times to release the tension.

Clara emphasized that in this sorcery pass, rotating and pushing the arms up in conjunction with breathing moves energy to the organs in the chest and vitalizes them. It massages deep, underlying centers that rarely are activated. Turning the head massages the glands in the neck and also opens energy passageways to the back of the head. She explained that if awakened and nourished by the energy from breathing, these centers could unravel mysteries beyond anything we can imagine.

"For the next sorcery pass," Clara said, "stand with your feet together and look straight ahead as if you were facing a door that you are going to open."

Clara told me to raise my hands to eye level and to curl my fingers as if I were placing them inside the recessed handles of sliding doors that open in the middle.

"What you are going to open is a crack in the energy lines of the world," she explained:

"Imagine those lines as rigid vertical cords that make a screen in front of you. Now grab a bunch of the fibers and pull them apart with all your might. Pull them apart until the opening is big enough for you to step through."

She told me that once I had made that hole, I should step forward with my left leg and then quickly, using my left foot as a pivot, rotate one hundred and eighty degrees counterclockwise to face the direction from which I had come. By my turning in this manner, the energy lines I had pushed apart would wrap around me.

To return, she said, I had to open the lines again by pulling them apart the same way I had done before, then step out with the right foot and quickly turn one hundred and eighty degrees clockwise as soon as I had taken the step. In this fashion, I would have unwrapped myself and would again be facing the direction in which I had begun the sorcery pass.

"This is one of the most powerful and mysterious of all the sorcery passes," Clara cautioned. "With it we can open doors to different worlds, provided of course that we have stored a surplus of internal energy and are able to realize the intent of the pass."

Her serious tone and expression made me ill at ease. I didn't know what to expect if I succeeded in opening that invisible door. In a brusque tone, she then gave me some final instructions.

"When you step in," she said, "your body has to feel rooted, heavy, full of tension. But once you are inside and have turned around, you should feel light and airy, as if you were floating upward. Exhale sharply as you first lunge forward through the opening, then inhale slowly and deeply, filling your lungs completely with the energy from behind that screen."

I practiced the pass several times as Clara looked on, but it was as if I were only going through the outward motions. I couldn't feel the energy fibers forming the screen that Clara was talking about.

"You're not pulling the door open hard enough," Clara corrected me. "Use your internal energy, not just your arm muscles. Expel the stale air and pull in your stomach as you lunge forward. Once inside, breathe as many times as you can, but be on the alert. Don't stay longer than you need to."

I mustered up all my strength and grabbed the air. Clara stood behind me, held my forearms and gave them a tremendous pull sideways. Instantly I felt as if some sliding doors had opened. Exhaling sharply, I lunged through it, or rather Clara had given me a shove from behind, pushing me forward. I remembered to turn around and breathe deeply, but for a moment I worried that I wouldn't know when to come out. Clara sensed this and told me when to stop breathing and when to step out.

"As you practice this sorcery pass by yourself," Clara said, "you'll learn to do it perfectly, but be careful. All sorts of things can happen once you go through that opening. Remember, you have to be cautious and at the same time bold."

"How will I know which is which?" I asked.

Clara shrugged. "For a while, you won't. Unfortunately, prudence comes to us only after we've gotten blasted."

She added that cautiousness without cowardice is hinged on our ability to control our internal energy; and to divert it into the reserve channels so that it is available to us when we need it for extraordinary actions.

"With enough internal energy, anything can be accomplished," Clara said, "but we need to store and refine it. So let's both practice some of the sorcery passes you've learned and see if you can be cautious without being cowardly and summon up the shadows' world."

I experienced a surge of energy that began as small circles in my stomach. At first I thought it was fear, but my body didn't feel frightened. It was as if an impersonal force, void of desires or sentiment, was stirring inside me; moving from the inside out. As it ascended, my upper back jerked involuntarily.

Clara moved to the center of the patio, and I followed her. She began doing some of the sorcery passes, slowing herself down to allow me to follow her.

"Close your eyes," she whispered. "When your eyes are closed, it's easier to use energy lines that are already there to keep your balance."

I shut my eyes and started to move in unison with Clara. I had no trouble following her cues for changing positions, yet I had difficulty in keeping my balance. I knew it was because I was trying too hard to do the movements correctly. It was like the time I had tried walking with my eyes shut, and kept stumbling because I desperately wanted to succeed. But gradually my desire to excel diminished and my body became more limber and subtle. As we kept on moving, I became so relaxed that I felt I had no bones or joints. If I raised my arms overhead, it seemed I could stretch them all the way to the tops of the trees. If I bent my knees and lowered my weight, a surge of energy rushed downward through my feet. I felt I had grown roots. Lines were extending from the soles of my feet deep into the earth, giving me an unprecedented stability. Gradually the boundary between my body and it's surroundings dissolved. With every pass I did, my body seemed to melt and merge with the darkness until it began to move and breathe all by itself.

I could hear Clara breathing beside me, performing the same passes. With my eyes closed, I sensed her shape and postures. At one point, the strangest thing yet happened. I felt a light turning on inside my forehead. But as I looked up, I became aware that the light wasn't really inside me at all. It came from the top of the trees, as if a huge panel of electric lights had been turned on at night, illuminating an outdoor stadium. I had no trouble seeing Clara and everything on the patio, and what was around it.

The light had the strangest hue, and I couldn't decide if it was rose-tinted, pinkish or peach, or like pale terra-cotta. In places, it seemed to change it's glare depending on where I looked.

Clara, peering at me curiously, said, "Don't move your head, and continue keeping your eyes closed. Just concentrate on your breathing."

I didn't know why she had said to continue keeping my eyes closed since she saw that my eyes were wide open: I was trying to determine the coloration of the light, for it seemed to change with every movement of my head, and it's intensity fluctuated depending on how hard I stared at it. I became so involved with the glow around me that I lost the rhythm of the breaths. Then as suddenly as the light had turned on, it switched off again and I was left in total darkness.

"Let's go into the kitchen and heat up some stew," Clara said, nudging me.

I hesitated. I felt disoriented; out of place. My body was so heavy I thought I must be sitting down.

"You can open your eyes now," Clara said.

I never remembered having had such a difficult time opening my eyes as I did at that moment. It seemed to take me forever to do it, for just as I got them open, they would droop shut again. This opening and closing seemed to go on for a long time, until I felt Clara shaking my shoulders.

"Taisha, open your eyes!" she commanded. "Don't you dare pass out on me. Do you hear?"

I shook my head to clear it and my eyes popped open. They had been closed all the time. It was pitch black, but there was enough moonlight coming through the foliage to see Clara's silhouette. We were sitting under the tree on the two rattan armchairs in the patio.

"How did I get here?" I asked dazed.

"You walked over here and sat down," Clara said matter-of-factly.

"But what happened? A moment ago it was light. I could see everything clearly."

"What happened is that you entered into the shadows' world," Clara said with a congratulatory tone: "I could tell by the rhythm of your breathing that you had gone there, but I didn't want to frighten you then by asking you to look at your shadow. If you had looked, you would have known that..."

I instantly understood what Clara was intimating.

I gasped, "There were no shadows. There was light but nothing had a shadow."

Clara nodded. "Tonight you've found out something of real value, Taisha. In the worlds outside this one, there are no shadows!"

## Chapter 12

After more than eight months of faithfully practicing the recapitulation, I was able to do it all day long without fretting or becoming distracted. One day, while I was visualizing the buildings where I attended the last year of high school, the classrooms, and the teachers I had, I became so involved in going down the aisles and seeing where my classmates sat, that I ended up talking to myself.

"If you talk to yourself, you can't breathe correctly," I heard a man's voice say.

I was so startled that I bumped my head against the cave wall. I opened my eyes, and the image of the classroom faded as I turned to look at the cave's entrance. Outlined against the opening, I saw a man squatting. I immediately knew that he was the master sorcerer; the man I had once seen in the hills. He wore the same green windbreaker and trousers, but this time I could see his profile. He had a prominent nose and a mildly sloping forehead.

"Don't stare," I heard the master sorcerer say. His voice was low, and rumbled like a stream over gravel: "If you want to learn more about breathing, remain very quiet and regain your equilibrium."

I continued taking deep breaths until his presence no longer frightened me, and I became, instead, relieved that I was finally making his acquaintance. He sat down cross-legged at the cave entrance, and leaned in the way Clara always did.

"Your movements are too jerky," he said in a low murmur. "Breathe like this."

He inhaled deeply as he gently turned his head to the left. Then he exhaled thoroughly as he smoothly turned his head to the right. Finally, he moved his head from his right shoulder to the left and back to the right again without breathing, and then back to the center. I copied his movements inhaling and exhaling as completely as I could.

"That's more like it," he said. "When exhaling, throw out all the thoughts and feelings you are reviewing. Don't just turn your head with your neck muscles. Guide it with the invisible energy lines from your midsection. Enticing those lines to come out is one of the accomplishments of the recapitulation."

He explained that just below the navel was a key center of power, and that all body movements, including one's breathing, had to engage this point of energy. He suggested I synchronize the rhythm of my breathing with the turning of my head, so that together they would entice the invisible energy lines from my abdomen to extend outward into infinity.

"Are those lines a part of my body or am I to imagine them?" I asked.

He shifted his position on the ground before answering.

He said, "Those invisible lines are a part of your soft body; your double. "The more energy you entice out by manipulating those lines, the stronger your double will become."

"What I wanted to know was, are they real or just imaginary?"

"When perception expands, nothing is real and nothing is imaginary," he said. "There is only perception. Close your eyes and find out for yourself."

I didn't want to shut my eyes. I wanted to see what he was doing in case he made any sudden moves. But, my body grew limp and heavy, and my eyes began to droop shut in spite of my efforts to keep them open.

"What is the double?" I managed to ask before I drifted off into a drowsy stupor.

"That's a good question," he said: "It means that a part of you is still alert and listening."

I sensed him take a deep breath and inflate his chest.

After slowly exhaling, he said, "The physical body is a covering; a container, if you will. By concentrating on your breathing, you can make the solid body dissolve so that only the soft, ethereal part is left."

He corrected himself, saying that it is not that the physical body dissolves, but that by changing the fixation of our awareness we begin to realize that it was never solid in the first place. This realization, he said, is the exact reversal of what took place as we matured. As infants, we were totally aware of our double. As we grew up, we learned to put increasingly more emphasis on the physical side and less on our ethereal being. As adults we are completely unaware that our soft side exists.

He explained, "The soft body is a mass of energy. Usually we are aware only of it's hard, outer casing. We become aware of our ethereal side by allowing our intent to shift back to it."

He stressed that our physical body is inseparably linked with it's ethereal counterpart, but that link has been clouded over by our thoughts and feelings which are focused exclusively on our physical body. In order to shift our awareness from our hard appearance to it's fluid counterpart, we must first dissolve the barrier that separates the two aspects of our being.

I wanted to ask him how that could be done, but I found it impossible to voice my thoughts.

"The recapitulation helps to dissolve our preconceptions," he said, answering me, "but it takes skill and concentration to reach the double. Right now you are using your ethereal part to some extent. You are half asleep, but some part of you is awake and alert. It can hear me and sense my presence."

He warned me that there is considerable danger involved in releasing the energy that is locked within us, because the double is vulnerable and can easily become injured in the process of shifting our awareness to it.

He cautioned me, "You can inadvertently create an opening in the ethereal net and lose vast amounts of energy; precious energy that is necessary to maintain a certain level of clarity and control in your life."

"What is that ethereal net?" I mumbled, as if talking in my sleep.

"The ethereal net is the luminosity that surrounds the physical body," he explained: "This web of energy gets torn to shreds during daily living. Huge portions of it become lost or entwined in other people's bands of energy. If a person loses too much vital force, he becomes ill or dies."

His voice had lulled me so thoroughly that I was breathing from my stomach as if in a deep sleep. I had slumped against the side of the cave, but I didn't feel it's hard walls.

"Breathing works on both the physical and ethereal levels," he explained, "it repairs any damage in the ethereal net and keeps it strong and pliant."

I wanted to ask something about my recapitulation, but I couldn't formulate the words; they seemed so far away. Without my asking, he again supplied the answer.

"This is what you've been doing for the past months with your recapitulation. You are retrieving filaments of your energy from your ethereal net that have become lost or entangled as a result of your daily living. By focusing on that interaction, you are pulling back all that you dispersed over twenty years and in thousands of places."

I wanted to ask him whether the double had a specific shape or, color. I was thinking of auras. He didn't reply. After a long silence, I forced my eyes open and saw that I was alone in the cave. I strained to peer through the dark to the light at the opening where I had first seen him outlined against the entrance. I suspected that he had slipped away and was waiting nearby for me to crawl out. As I looked, a bright patch of light appeared, hovering about two feet from me. The illusion startled me, yet at the same time it enthralled me so that I couldn't turn my eyes away. I had the irrational certainty that the light was alive, conscious and aware that my attention was focused on it. Suddenly the glowing sphere expanded to twice it's size and became encircled by an intense purple ring.

Frightened, I squeezed my eyes shut, hoping that the light would disappear so I could leave the cave without passing through it. My heart pounded loudly in my chest and I was perspiring. My throat was dry and constricted. With great effort, I slowed down my breathing. When I opened my eyes, the light had vanished. I was tempted to explain away the entire event as a dream, for I often dozed off during my recapitulation, but the memory of the master sorcerer and what he had said was so vivid that I was almost certain it all had been real.

Cautiously I crawled out of the cave, put on my shoes and took the shortcut to the house. Clara was standing by the living room door as if she were expecting me. Panting, I blurted out that I had either just spoken with the master sorcerer or I had had a most vivid dream about him. She smiled and pointed with a subtle movement of her chin to the armchair. My mouth fell open: There he was; the same man who had been with me in the cave only minutes before, except that he was wearing different clothes. Now he had on a gray cardigan sweater, a sports shirt and tailored trousers.

He was much older than I thought, but also much more vital.

It was impossible for me to tell his age; he may have been forty or seventy. He appeared to be extremely strong, and neither lean nor corpulent. He was dark, and looked Indian. He had a prominent nose, a strong mouth, a square chin and sparkling black eyes, which had the same intense look I had seen in the cave. All of these features were accentuated by a thick, lustrous crop of white hair. The remarkable effect of his hair was that it didn't turn him into an old man, as white hair ordinarily does. I remembered how old my father looked when his hair turned silver and how he covered it with dyes and hats; all to no avail because old age was in his face, in his hands, in his whole body.

"Taisha, let me introduce you. This is Mr. John Michael Abelar," Clara said to me.

The man politely stood up and extended his hand. "Very glad to meet you, Taisha," he said in perfect English as he gave my hand a strong shake.

I wanted to ask him what he was doing here, and how he had changed his clothes so fast; and whether or not he had really been in the cave. A dozen other questions ran through my mind, but I was too shocked and intimidated to ask any of them. I pretended to be calm and not nearly as unsettled as I was. I commented on how well he spoke English, and how clearly he had expressed himself when he talked to me in the cave.

"It's nice of you to say so," he said, with a disarming smile. "But I ought to speak English well. I'm a Yaqui Indian. I was born in Arizona."

"Do you live in Mexico, Mr. Abelar?" I asked awkwardly.

"Yes. I live in this house," he replied. "I live here with Clara."

He looked at her in a way I could only describe as sheer affection. I didn't know what to say. I felt self-conscious, embarrassed for some unknown reason.

"We are not man and wife," Clara said, as if to put me at ease, and at that both of them broke out laughing.

Rather than lightening things up, their laughter made me feel even more selfconscious. Then to my dismay, I recognized the emotion I was feeling: It was pure jealousy. In an inexplicable possessive impulse, I felt that he belonged to me. I tried to conceal my embarrassment by quickly asking some trivial questions. "Have you lived in Mexico for a long time?"

"Yes, I have," he said.

"Are you planning to return to the United States?"

He fixed me with his fierce eyes, then smiled and said in a charming way, "Those details are unimportant, Taisha. Why don't you ask me about the topic we discussed in the cave? Was anything unclear?"

At Clara's suggestion, we sat down; Clara and I on the sofa, and Mr. Abelar on the winged chair. I asked him if he would tell me more about the double. The concept interested me enormously.

"Some persons are masters of the double," he began. "They can not only focus their awareness on it but also spur it into action. The majority of us, however, are scarcely aware that our ethereal side exists."

"What does the double do?" I asked.

"Anything we want it to do. It can jump over trees, or fly through the air, or become large or small, or take the shape of an animal; or it can become aware of people's thoughts, or become a thought and hurl itself in an instant over vast distances."

"It can even act like the self," Clara interjected, looking straight at me: "If you know how to use it, you can appear in front of someone and talk to him as if you were really there."

Mr. Abelar nodded. "In the cave, you were able to perceive my presence with your double. It was only when your reason woke up that you doubted that your experience had been real."

"I'm still doubting," I said. "Were you really there?"

"Of course," he replied with a wink, "as much as I'm really here."

For a moment I wondered if I was dreaming now, but my reason assured me I couldn't possibly be. Just to make certain, I touched the table. It felt solid.

"How did you do it?" I asked, leaning back on the sofa.

Mr. Abelar was silent for a moment as if choosing his words. "I let go of my physical body and allowed my double to take over," he said: "If our awareness is tied to the double, we are not affected by the laws of the physical world; rather, we are governed by ethereal forces. But as long as awareness is tied to the physical body, our movements are limited by gravity and other constraints."

I still didn't understand if that meant that he could be in two places at once. He seemed to sense my confusion.

"Clara tells me you are interested in martial arts," Mr. Abelar said. "The difference between the average person and an expert in kung fu is that the latter has learned to control his soft body."

"My karate teachers used to tell me the same," I said. "They insisted that martial arts trained the soft side of the body, but I could never understand what they meant."

"What they probably meant was that when an expert practitioner attacks, he strikes the vulnerable points of his enemy's soft body," he said: "It's not the power of the physical body that is destructive, but the opening he makes in his enemy's ethereal body. He can hurl into that opening a force that rips through the ethereal net to cause major damage. A person may receive what seems at the time only a gentle hit, but hours or perhaps days later, the person may die from that blow."

"That's right," Clara agreed. "Don't be fooled by the outward movements or by what you see. It's what you don't see that counts."

From my karate teachers, I had often heard similar tales. When I had asked them how those feats were performed, they couldn't give me a coherent' explanation. I had thought at the time that it was because my teachers were Japanese and couldn't express such intricacies of thought in English. Now Mr. Abelar was explaining something similar, and although his command of

English was perfect, I still couldn't understand what he meant by the soft body or the double, and how to tap it's mysterious powers.

I wondered if Mr. Abelar was a martial artist, but before I could ask him, he continued.

"True martial artists, as Clara has described them to me from her training in China, are interested in mastering the control of their soft body," he said: "The double is controlled not by our intellect but by our intent. There is no way to think about it or to understand it rationally. It has to be felt, for it is linked to some luminous lines of energy crisscrossing the universe."

He touched his head and pointed upward. "For instance, a line of energy that extends up from the top of the head gives the double it's purpose and direction. That line suspends and pulls the double whichever way it wants to go. If it wants to go up, all it has to do is to intend up. If it wants to sink into the ground, it just intends down. It's that simple."

At that point Clara asked me whether I remembered what she had told me in the garden the day we were doing the sun breathing exercises: how the crown of the head always needed to be protected. I told her I remembered very clearly - ever since then, I was afraid to leave the house without a hat. She then asked me if I was able to follow what Mr. Abelar was saying. I assured her that I was having no trouble understanding him even though I didn't comprehend the concepts; and paradoxically, I found what he was saying incomprehensible, yet also familiar and believable. Clara nodded and said that was so because he was directly addressing a part of me that was not quite rational and had the ability to grasp things directly, especially if a sorcerer spoke to it directly.

What Clara said was true. There was something about Mr. Abelar that put me even more at ease than Clara did. It wasn't his polite and soft-spoken manner, but something in the intensity of his eyes that forced me to listen and follow his explanations, despite the fact that rationally they seemed nonsensical. I heard myself asking questions as if I knew what I was talking about.

"Would I be able to reach my soft body some day?" I asked Mr. Abelar.

"The question is, Taisha, do you want to reach it?"

For a moment I hesitated. From my recapitulation, I had found out that I'm complacent and cowardly, and that my first reaction is to avoid anything that is too troublesome or frightening. But I also had an intense curiosity to experience things out of the ordinary, and as Clara had once told me, I possessed a certain reckless daring.

"I'm very curious about the double," I said, "so I definitely do want to get to it."

"At any price?"

"Anything short of selling my body," I said lamely.

At that they both burst out laughing so hard I thought they were going to convulse right there on the floor. I hadn't meant to be facetious either, for in truth, I wasn't certain what secret plans they had for me. As if sensing my train of thought, Mr. Abelar said that it was time to acquaint me with certain premises of their world. He straightened up and assumed a serious demeanor.

"The involvements of men and women are no longer our concern," he said. "That means we are not interested in man's morality, immorality or even amorality. All our energy is poured into exploring new paths."

"Can you give me an example of a new path, Mr. Abelar?" I asked.

"Certainly. How about the task you are engaged in; the recapitulation? The reason I'm talking to you now is because by means of the recapitulation you have stored enough energy to break certain physical boundaries. You have perceived, if only for an instant, inconceivable things that are not part of your normal inventory, to use Clara's terminology."

I warned him, "My normal inventory is pretty weird. I'm beginning to see from recapitulating the past that I was crazy. In fact, I still am crazy. The proof of it is that I'm here and I can't tell if I'm awake or dreaming."

At that they both burst out laughing again as if they were watching a comedy program and the comedian had just dropped his punchline.

"I know very well how crazy you are," Mr. Abelar said with a note of finality, "but not because you're here with us. More than crazy, you're indulgent. Nevertheless, since the day you came here, contrary to what you might think, you haven't indulged as much as you had in the past. So in all fairness, I'd say that some of the things Clara tells me you did, like entering what we call the shadows' world wasn't indulging or being crazy. It was a new path; something unnamed and unimaginable from the point of view of the normal world."

A long silence followed that made me fidget uneasily. I wanted to say something to break the spell, but I couldn't think of anything. What made it worse was that Mr. Abelar kept giving me sideward glances. Then he whispered something to Clara and they both laughed softly; irritating me no end because there was no doubt in my mind they were laughing at me.

"Maybe I'd better go to my room," I said, getting up.

"Sit down, we're not through yet," Clara said.

"You have no idea how much we appreciate your being here with us," Mr. Abelar said all of a sudden. "We find you humorous because you are so eccentric. Soon you will meet another member of our party; someone who is as eccentric as you are, but much older. Seeing you reminds us of her when she was young; that's why we laugh. Please forgive us."

I hated being laughed at, but his apology was so genuine that I accepted it. Mr. Abelar resumed talking about the double as if nothing else had been said.

"As we let go of our ideas of the physical body, little by little or all at once," he said, "awareness begins to shift to our soft side. In order to facilitate this shift, our physical side must remain absolutely still, suspended as if it were in deep sleep. The difficulty lies in convincing our physical body to cooperate, for it rarely wants to give up it's control."

"How do I let go of my physical body, then?" I asked.

"You fool it," he said. "You let your body feel as if it were sound asleep. You deliberately quiet it by removing your awareness from it. When your body and mind are at rest, your double wakes up and takes over."

"I don't think I follow you," I said.

Clara snapped, "Don't play the devil's advocate with us, Taisha. "You must have done this in the cave. In order for you to have perceived the nagual, you must have used your double. You were asleep and yet aware at the same time."

What caught my attention in Clara's statement was the way she had spoken of Mr. Abelar: She had called him 'the nagual.' I asked her what that word meant.

"John Michael Abelar is the nagual," she said proudly. "He is my guide; the source of my life and well-being. He is not my man by any stretch of the imagination and yet he is the love of my life. When he is all that for you, he'll then be the nagual for you also. In the meantime, he's Mr.

Abelar, or even John Michael."

Mr. Abelar laughed, as if Clara had said those things only in jest, but Clara held my gaze long enough to let me know that she had meant every word of it.

The silence that followed was finally broken by Mr. Abelar.

"In order to activate the soft body, you have to first open certain body centers that function like gates," he continued: "When all the gates are open, your double can emerge from it's protective covering. Otherwise, it will forever remain encased within it's outer shell."

He asked Clara to get a mat out of the closet. He spread it on the floor and told me to lie face up with my arms at my sides.

"What are you going to do to me?" I asked suspiciously.

"Not what you think," he snapped.

Clara giggled. "Taisha is really wary of men," she explained to Mr. Abelar.

"It hasn't done her any good," he replied, making me feel utterly self-conscious.

Then, facing me, he explained he was going to show me a simple method for shifting awareness from my physical body to the ethereal net that surrounds it.

"Lie down and close your eyes, but don't fall asleep," he ordered.

Embarrassed, I did as he asked, feeling strangely vulnerable lying down in front of them.

He knelt down beside me and spoke in a soft voice. "Imagine lines extending out from the sides of your body, beginning at your feet," he said.

"What if I can't imagine them?"

"If you want to, you certainly can," he said. "Use all your strength to intend the lines into existence."

He elaborated that it was not really imagining those lines that was involved, but rather a mysterious act of pulling them out from the side of the body, beginning at the toes and continuing all the way up to the top of the head. He said that I should also feel lines emanating from the soles of my feet going downward and wrapping around the length of my body to the back of my head; and also other lines that radiated from my forehead upward and downward, along the front of my body to my feet, thus forming a net or a cocoon of luminous energy.

"Practice this until you can let go of your physical body and can place your attention at will on your luminous net," he said. "Eventually, you'll be able to cast and sustain that net with a single thought."

I tried to relax. I found his voice soothing. It had a mesmerizing quality. At times it seemed to come from very close, and at other times from far away. He cautioned me that if there was a place in my body where the net felt tight or where it was difficult to stretch the lines out or where the lines recoiled, that was the place where my body was weak or injured.

"You can heal those parts by allowing the double to spread out the ethereal net," he said.

"How do I do that?"

He replied, "By intending it, but not with your thoughts. Intend it with your intent, which is the layer beneath your thoughts. Listen carefully: Look for it beneath the thoughts; away from them. Intent is so far away from thoughts that we can't talk about it: We can't even feel it, but we can certainly use it."

I couldn't even conceive how to intend with my intent. Mr. Abelar said that I shouldn't have too much difficulty casting my net because for the past few months, unknowingly, I had been projecting just such ethereal lines during my recapitulation. He suggested that I begin by concentrating on my breathing. After what seemed to be hours, during which time I must have dozed off once or twice, I could eventually feel an intense tingling heat in my feet and head. The heat expanded to form a ring encircling my body lengthwise.

In a soft voice, Mr. Abelar reminded me that I should focus my attention on the heat outside my body and try to stretch it out, pushing it out from within and allowing it to expand.

I focused on my breathing until all the tension in me vanished. As I relaxed even more, I let the tingling heat find it's own course. It didn't move outward or expand; it contracted instead, until I felt I was lying on a gigantic balloon, floating in space. I experienced a moment of panic. My breathing stopped and for an instant I was suffocating. Then something outside of myself took over and began to breathe for me. Waves of lulling energy surrounded me, expanding and contracting until everything went black and I could no longer focus my awareness on anything.

## Chapter 13

I awoke hearing Clara tell me to sit up. It took me a long time to respond; first, because I was totally disoriented; and second, because my legs were numb. Seeing my difficulty, Clara held me under the arms and pulled me forward, then propped some pillows behind my back so I could sit without her help. I was in my bed and I had my nightgown on. From the light, I could tell it was late afternoon.

"What happened?" I muttered. "Did I sleep all night?"

"You did," Clara replied. "I was concerned about you. You went off the deep end into a perceptual limbo. No one could get through to you. So we decided to let you sleep it off."

I leaned over and rubbed my legs until the prickling sensation stopped. I still felt groggy and strangely enervated. (*enervated - lacking strength or vigor)

"You've got to talk to me until you're yourself again," Clara said in her most authoritative tone. "This is one of those occasions when talking is good for you."

"I don't feel like talking," I said, plopping back onto the pillows. I had broken out in a cold sweat and my limbs felt limp and rubbery. "Did Mr. Abelar do something to me?"

"Not while I was looking," Clara replied, and laughed jovially at her own joke.

She took my hands in hers and rubbed the backs of them, attempting to revive me.

I wasn't in the mood for levity. "What really happened, Clara?" I demanded. "I don't remember a thing."

She made herself comfortable on the edge of the bed.

"Your first encounter with the nagual was too much for you," Clara said. "You're too weak: That's what happened. But I don't want you to focus on that because you become discouraged so easily. Also, I don't want you to read between the lines, as you're apt to do, and come up with the wrong conclusions."

"Since I don't know what's going on, how I am going to read between the lines?" I said, my teeth chattering.

"I'm sure you'd find a way," Clara sighed. "You're exceptionally adept at jumping to conclusions; unfortunately, the wrong ones. And it doesn't matter that you don't know what's going on. You always assume that you do."

I had to admit I hated ambiguous situations, because they always put me at a disadvantage. I wanted to know what was going on so I could deal with the contingencies.

"Your mother taught you to be a perfect woman," Clara said. "By observing the surroundings, perfect women infer everything they need to know, especially when a male is involved. They can anticipate their man's subtlest wishes. Perfect women are always aware of changes in his moods because they believe that these changes are caused by something they themselves said or did. Consequently, they feel it's up to them to appease their man."

Having seen myself, by means of my recapitulation, acting in such a fashion again and again, I had to admit, to my chagrin, that Clara was correct. I was well trained. I only needed a look or a sigh or tone of voice from my father and I would know exactly what he was thinking or feeling. The same was true of my brothers. They had me jumping at the most subtle cues. What's worse, I only had to imagine that a man didn't like me and I would bend over backward to please him.

Clara nudged my side gently as if to get my attention. "If you and I had been alone last night, you wouldn't have passed out so dramatically," she said, with a most annoying smile.

I replied, "What are you insinuating, Clara? That I find Mr. Abelar appealing?"

"Precisely. When a man is around, you undergo an instant transformation. You become the woman that will do anything for a man's attention, including passing out."

"I beg to differ with you," I said. "I really wasn't trying to play up to Mr. Abelar."

"Think about it! Don't just defend yourself," Clara said: "I'm not attacking you. I'm merely pointing out to you what I used to feel and do myself."

Deep down I knew what Clara was talking about. Mr. Abelar had such a charismatic charm that, in spite of his age, I found him utterly attractive. Yet I chose not to acknowledge this, either to myself or to Clara. To my relief, Clara didn't pursue the subject of my feelings for Mr.

Abelar.

She continued, "I understand you perfectly because I too had my John Michael Abelar.

"He was the nagual Julian Grau, the most handsome and debonair being that ever lived. He was charming, impish and funny. He was truly unforgettable. Everyone adored him, including John Michael and the rest of my family. We all kissed the ground he walked on."

It occurred to me, listening to Clara rave about her teacher, that she had spent too much time in the Orient. I had always been disturbed by the obscene adoration that students in the karate world felt for their teacher, or sensei. They too literally kissed the ground their teacher walked on, bringing their heads to the floor in obeisance whenever the master entered the room. I didn't say this to Clara, but I felt that she was lowering herself by revering her teacher so much.

"The nagual Julian taught us everything we know," she went on, oblivious to my judgements. "He dedicated his life to leading us to freedom. He gave special instruction to the nagual John Michael Abelar; instruction that made him qualified to become the new nagual."

"Do you mean, Clara, that naguals are like kings?" I asked, wanting her to see the danger and fallacy of too much veneration.

"No. Not at all. Naguals have no self-importance whatsoever," she said. "And it is precisely for this reason that we can adore them."

"What I meant, Clara, was, do they inherit their post?" I corrected myself quickly.

"Oh, yes! They certainly inherit their post, but not like kings. Kings are sons of kings. A nagual, on the other hand, has to be singled out by the spirit because unless the spirit chooses him, he cannot set himself up as a leader. A nagual to begin with is a person with extraordinary energy, but it is not until he is taught the rule of the naguals that he actually becomes a nagual himself."

I followed Clara's explanation, but I felt inexplicably ill at ease with it. Upon deliberation, I realized that the part that bothered me was that the spirit has to make the selection.

"How does the spirit decide whom to pick?" I asked.

Clara shook her head. "That, my dear Taisha, is a mystery beyond mysteries," she said softly.

"All a nagual can do is fulfill the spirit's biddings, or fail miserably."

I thought of Mr. Abelar and wondered what bidding the spirit had in mind for him. I remembered also that Clara had said that he might one day be a nagual to me.

"By the way, where is Mr. Abelar?" I asked trying to sound casual.

"He left last night when he realized that you were out for the count."

"Will he be back?"

"Certainly. He lives here."

"Where, Clara? In the left side of the house?"

"Yes. At the moment, he is there. Not at this precise moment," she corrected herself, "but nowadays. At other times, he lives with me on the right side of the house. I take care of him."

I felt a pang of jealousy so potent that it charged me with a surge of energy. "You said he wasn't your husband, didn't you, Clara?" I asked, with a most disturbing twitch in the side of my mouth.

Clara laughed so hard that she rolled backward onto the bed out of breath.

"The nagual John Michael Abelar has transcended all aspects of being a male," she assured me, sitting up again.

"What do you mean, Clara?"

"I mean, he's not a human being any longer, but I can't explain all this to you because I lack the finesse and you lack the facility to understand me. The way I see it, my inability to explain things to you is the reason why the nagual gave you those crystals."

"What inability, Clara? You speak perfectly well."

"Then it's you who doesn't understand perfectly well."

"That's idiotic, Clara."

"Then how come I can't convey to you what we are and what we have in mind for you?"

I took several deep breaths to settle my nervous stomach.

"What do you have in mind for me, Clara?" I asked, falling prey once more to panic.

"It's very hard for me to explain," she began: "You and I definitely belong to the same tradition. You are an integral part of what we are. Therefore, we are compelled to teach you."

"Whom do you mean when you say 'we'? Do you mean you and Mr. Abelar?"

Clara took a moment as if giving herself time to answer correctly.

"As I've told you already, we are more than two," she said. "In fact, I'm not really your teacher, and neither is the nagual John Michael. Someone else is."

"Wait, wait, Clara. You're confusing me again. Who is this other person you're referring to?"

"Another woman like yourself, but older and infinitely more powerful. I'm merely your usher. I'm in charge of preparing you; of getting you to store enough energy through your recapitulation so you can meet this other person. And believe me, her presence is much more devastating than the nagual's."

"I don't understand what you're trying to say, Clara. Do you mean she's dangerous and will harm me?"

"That's the problem when I try to answer your questions," Clara said. "You get confused because you and I have only a superficial connection. "You ask me a question, expecting a clear-cut answer that would satisfy you, and I give you an answer that satisfies me and throws you into confusion. I recommend that you either don't ask questions or take my answers without getting into a dither." (*dither- an excited state of agitation)

I wanted to know more about Mr. Abelar and this other woman's plans for me; so with the hope of getting Clara to tell all, I promised that from then on, I would weigh all her answers with due consideration, but with no panic or agitation on my part.

"All right. Let's see how you take this," Clara said tentatively: "I'm going to tell you what the nagual told you last night before you passed out on him. But, since I'm not a male, you no doubt are going to react differently to me than you did when the nagual talked to you. You might even listen to me."

"But I don't remember him telling me anything after I fell asleep on the mat," I protested.

She paused and searched my face, I suppose for some spark of recognition. She shook her head to denote she found none, although I was trying to appear as calm and attentive as possible, and even smiled to reassure her.

"He told you about all the beings that live in this house," Clara began. "He told you that they are all sorcerers, including Manfred."

At the mention of Manfred's name, something inside me clicked.

"I knew it," I blurted out without thinking.

I found the idea that Manfred was a sorcerer perfectly believable, yet I hadn't the vaguest notion of why it should be so. I told Clara that at one point I must have already entertained that thought, although I still didn't know exactly what a sorcerer is.

"Of course you do," Clara assured me with a broad smile.

"But I tell you, I don't."

Clara looked at me bewildered. "You're sure you don't remember the nagual explaining this to you?"

"No. I really don't."

"A sorcerer, to us, is someone who, through discipline and perseverance, can break the limits of natural perception," Clara said with an air of formality.

"Well, that doesn't make things any clearer," I said. "How can Manfred do all that?"

She seemed to appreciate my confusion.

"I think we're having a misunderstanding again, Taisha. I'm not just talking about Manfred. It hasn't sunk in yet that all of us in this house are sorcerers; not just the nagual, Manfred and myself, but the fourteen others you haven't yet met. We are all sorcerers; all abstract beings. If you want to think of sorcery as something concrete involving rituals and magic potions, all I can tell you is that there are sorcerers who are as concrete as that, but you won't find them in this house."

Obviously we were on different trains of thought. I was talking about Manfred and she was talking about people I hadn't even laid eyes on. It was only then, after she had told me so directly, that it finally struck me that Clara, Mr. Abelar and the elusive others to whom they kept alluding were all sorcerers. Rather than ask any more questions, I remembered her advice and thought it best to remain silent.

She went on to elaborate that abstract sorcerers seek freedom through enhancing their capacity to perceive; while concrete sorcerers, like the traditional ones who lived in ancient Mexico, seek personal power and gratification through increasing their self-importance.

"What's wrong with seeking personal gratification?" I asked, taking a sip of water from a glass on the bedside table.

"Leave it to Taisha to side up with the concrete sorcerers," she said with a look of concern. "No wonder the nagual gave you those crystal darts."

In spite of my promise to stay calm, at the mention of the crystals, waves of nervousness ran through me. My stomach began to cramp with such intensity that I was certain I was coming down with an intestinal flu.

"It's nearly impossible for me to explain to you what we do, and even harder to convey why we do it," Clara said. "You must ask those questions of your teacher."

"My teacher?"

"You're not listening to me, Taisha. I've already told you that you have a teacher. You haven't met her yet because you don't have the necessary energy. Meeting her requires ten times more energy than meeting the nagual, and you still haven't recovered from that encounter. You look green and pasty."

"I think I have a case of the flu," I said, feeling dizzy again. Clara shook her head:

"You have a bad case of indulging," she interjected before continuing. "The nagual can also explain anything you ask him. The only problem is that you think he's a male, and if he talks to you for more than a few minutes, rest assured, you're going to fall into your female mold. That's why your teacher has to be a woman."

"Aren't you making too much of this male-female thing?" I said, trying to get out of bed.

I felt weak and my legs were trembling. The room began to spin and I nearly fainted. Clara caught me by the arm in the nick of time.

She said, "We'll soon find out if I'm making too much of it", she said. "Let's go outside and sit in the shade of a tree. Maybe the fresh air will help revive you."

She helped me put on a long jacket and some pants, and led me like an invalid out of the room to the back patio.

We sat on some straw mats under the enormous zapote tree that shaded nearly the entire patio. Once before, I had asked Clara if I could eat the fruit.

She had hushed me and said, "Just eat, but don't talk about it."

I did what she told me, but I felt guilty ever since; as if I had insulted the tree.

We sat in silence listening to the wind rustling the leaves. It was cool and peaceful there and I felt relaxed and at ease again. After a while, Manfred sauntered over from around the side of the house where he had a room with a large swinging panel cut into the door so he could come and go as he pleased. He came up to me and began licking my hand. I looked into his soulful eyes and I knew we were the best of friends. As if by an unstated invitation, he eased himself across my lap, making himself comfortable. I stroked his soft silky coat and felt the most profound affection for him. Gripped by an inexplicable compassion, I leaned forward and embraced him. The next thing I knew I was weeping, for I felt so sorry for him.

"Where are your crystals?" Clara demanded. Her harsh tone brought me back to reality.

"In my room," I said, letting go of Manfred to wipe my eyes on the sleeve of my jacket.

He took one look at Clara's disapproving stare, jumped off my lap, and moved across the walk to sit under a nearby tree.

"You should have them with you at all times," she snapped: "As you already know, weapons like those crystals have nothing to do with war or peace. You can be as peace-loving as you wish and yet still need weapons. In fact, you need them at this moment to fight your enemies."

"I don't have any enemies, Clara," I sniffled. "No one even knows I'm alive."

Clara leaned toward me. "The nagual gave you those crystals to help you to destroy your enemies," she said softly: "If you had them with you at this moment, you could make your sorcery passes with them and that would help dissipate your nagging self-pity."

"I wasn't feeling sorry for myself, Clara," I said, on the defensive. "I was feeling sorry for poor Manfred."

Clara laughed and shook her head. "There's no way to feel sorry for poor Manfred. No matter what form he is in, he's a warrior. Self-pity, on the other hand, is inside you, and expresses itself in different ways. Right now you're calling it 'feeling sorry for Manfred.'"

My eyes began to tear once more because, together with my insecurity, I did have a bottomless pool of pity, centered totally on myself. I had done enough recapitulating to realize that I had learned this reaction from my mother, who felt sorry for herself every day of her life, or at least every day of my life with her. Since I never knew any other personal expression in her, that was what I had learned to feel myself.

"You should hold the crystal weapons in your fingers and make your sorcery passes at the heart of your elusive enemies, such as self-importance, that come to you disguised as self-pity, moral indignation or righteous sadness," Clara went on.

I could only stare at her in dismay. She went on to accuse me of being weak; of falling apart the moment a little pressure is put on me. But what hurt me the most was when she told me that my months of recapitulating were meaningless: They were nothing but shallow reveries, for all I had done was to reminisce nostalgically about my marvelous self or wallow in pity remembering my not-so-marvelous moments.

I couldn't understand why she was attacking me so viciously. My ears were buzzing as I experienced a surge of fury. I began to weep uncontrollably, hating myself for having allowed Clara the opportunity to devastate me emotionally. I heard her words as if they were coming from far away.

She was saying, "...self-importance, lack of purpose, unchecked ambition, unexamined sensuality, cowardice: The list of enemies that try to stop your flight to freedom is endless, and you must be relentless in your fight against them."

She told me to calm down. She said she had just been trying to illustrate to me that our attitudes and feelings were our real enemies and that they were just as damaging and dangerous as any bandit armed to the teeth that we might encounter on the road.

"The nagual gave you those crystals to round up your energy," she said: "The crystals are extraordinary for gathering our attention and fixing it. That is a quality of quartz crystals in general, and the specific intent of these crystals in particular. To accomplish this, all you have to do is perform your sorcery passes with them."

I wished I had the crystals with me then. Instead I looked at Manfred's sympathetic, shiny eyes. The thought occurred to me that they were reflecting light just as the quartz crystals had done. For a moment, his eyes held my gaze; and as I stared at them an irrational certainty popped into my mind. I knew Manfred was a sorcerer of the ancient tradition, a sorcerer's spirit that had somehow gotten trapped in a dog's body. The moment I thought that, Manfred let out a sharp yelp as if in affirmation.

I wondered, too, if it wasn't Manfred who had found the crystals for me in a cave, or rather had led the nagual to them, the same way he had led me to my favorite lookout point in the hills overlooking the house and grounds.

"You asked me once how it was possible that I knew so much about crystals," Clara said, interrupting my speculations: "I couldn't tell you then because you hadn't yet met the nagual. But now that you've been introduced to him, I can tell you that..." She took a deep breath and leaned toward me, "We are sorcerers from the same tradition as those of ancient times. We have inherited all their esoteric rituals and incantations, but although we know how to use them, we aren't interested in making them work."

"Manfred is an ancient sorcerer!" I exclaimed in sincere amazement, but forgetting that I hadn't mentioned to her my mental speculations.

Clara looked at me as if questioning my sanity and then laughed so hard that conversation stopped. I heard Manfred barking as if he too were laughing, and the eerie part was that I could have sworn that either Clara's laughter had an echo or that someone hiding behind the comer of the house was also laughing. I felt like a complete imbecile. Clara didn't want to hear the details about light being reflected in Manfred's eyes.

"I've told you that you are slow and not that intelligent, but you didn't believe me," she chided. "But don't worry, none of us is that intelligent either. We are all arrogant, dumb, thick-headed apes."

She gave me a rap on my head to bring the point home. I didn't like being called a thick-headed ape, but I was still so excited about my discovery that I let the remark pass.

"The nagual has many other reasons for giving you those crystals," Clara continued, "but he will have to explain them to you himself. The one thing I know for certain is that you will have to make a pouch for them."

"What kind of pouch?"

"A sheath made with whatever material you feel is right. You can use suede, felt or quilt, or even wood if that is what you want to use."

"What kind of pouch did you make for yours, Clara?"

"I didn't get any crystals myself," she said, "but I handled them at one time in my youth."

"You speak of yourself as if you were old. The more I see you, the younger you look."

"That's because I do plenty of sorcery passes to create that illusion," she replied, laughing with childlike abandon. "Sorcerers create illusions. Just look at Manfred."

At the mention of his name, Manfred stuck his head out from behind the tree and stared at us. I had the uncanny sensation that he knew we were talking about him and he didn't want to miss a single word.

"What about Manfred?" I asked, automatically lowering my voice.

"One would swear that he's a dog," Clara said in a whisper. "But that's his power to create an illusion." She nudged me and gave me a conspiratorial wink. "You see, you are absolutely right, Taisha. Manfred is not a dog at all."

I couldn't tell whether she was coaxing me to agree with her for Manfred's sake because now he was sitting up and definitely listening to every word we were saying; or whether she really meant what she said; that Manfred was not a dog. Before I could find out which, a shrill noise from inside the house made both Clara and Manfred jump up and rush in that direction.

I began to follow, but Clara turned to me and said gruffly, "You stay where you are. I'll be back in a moment."

She ran into the house with Manfred close on her heels.

## Chapter 14

Weeks went by, then months. I didn't really pay attention to dates and time. Clara, Manfred and I lived in perfect harmony. Clara had ceased to insult me, or perhaps it was that I had ceased to feel insulted. I spent all my time recapitulating and practicing kung fu with Clara and with Manfred, who, at one hundred pounds of bone and muscle, was a mighty dangerous opponent. I was certain that to be rammed with his head was equivalent to being punched by a prize fighter.

The one thing that worried me was a contradiction I found difficult to resolve. While Clara maintained that my energy was unmistakably on the rise because I could now have conversations with Manfred, I believed the opposite was true; that I was slowly going over the deep end.

Whenever Manfred and I were alone, a bond of indescribable affection would possess me. I actually adored him, and it was this blind feeling of love that created a bridge between us so he could, at times, transmit his thoughts and moods to me. I knew Manfred's feelings were simple and direct like a child's. He experienced happiness, discomfort, pride in any accomplishment, and fear of everything; which was instantly turned to wrath. But the traits that I found most admirable in him were his courage and his capacity for compassion. I sensed that he actually felt sorry for Clara for looking like a toad. With respect to courage, Manfred was unique. His was the courage of an evolved consciousness aware of his imprisonment. To me, Manfred was alone beyond comprehension, and no one can face that imposed solitude the way he did without possessing peerless courage.

One afternoon, upon returning from the cave, I sat down to rest under the shade of the zapote tree. Manfred came to me and lay across my legs and fell instantly asleep. Listening to his snoring and feeling his warm weight in my lap made me drowsy. I must have fallen asleep, because I suddenly woke up from a dream in which I was arguing with my mother over the advantages of not putting the silverware away after washing them. Mr. Abelar was staring at me with fierce, cold eyes. His gaze, the posture of his body, his extremely defined features, and his concentration gave me the total impression that he was an eagle. He imbued me with awe and fear. The temperature and the light had changed. It was almost dark: Twilight shadows had fallen over the patio.

"What happened?" I asked.

"What happened is that Manfred's got hold of you and is using your energy like a fiend," he said with a broad smile. "He did the same with me. There seems to be a genuine rapport between you two. Try calling him sapito and let's see if he gets angry."

"No. I can't do that," I said, running my fingers on Manfred's head. "He's beautiful and solitary and in no way does he resemble a t-o-a-d."

I found it absurd that I had actually spelled the word, but something in me didn't want to risk offending Manfred.

"Toads are also beautiful and solitary," Mr. Abelar said with a glint.

Spurred by a sudden curiosity, I leaned over to Manfred and whispered in his ear, "Sapito," having only the best of feelings. Manfred yawned, as if bored with my empathy.

Mr. Abelar laughed. "Let's go into the house," he said, "before Manfred saps all your energy. Besides, it's warmer there."

I pushed Manfred off my lap and followed Mr. Abelar inside the house. I sat down very formally in the living room, acutely self-conscious at being alone with a man in a dark, empty house.

Mr. Abelar lit the gasoline lantern, then sat on the sofa a respectable distance away and said, "I understand you wanted to ask me some questions. Now is a good time, so go ahead and ask them."

For an instant my mind went blank. Being confronted so directly with his intense stare made me lose my composure.

Finally, I asked, "What happened to me the night I met you, Mr. Abelar? Clara felt she couldn't explain it to me adequately, and I don't remember much about it."

"Your double took over," he said matter-of-factly, "and you lost control of your everyday self."

"What do you mean, I lost control?" I asked, worried. "Did I do anything I shouldn't have?"

"Nothing that you couldn't tell your mother about," he chuckled. His eyes sparkled, full of mischief. "Seriously, Taisha, all you did was to cast your luminous net as far as you were able to. You learned how to rest on that invisible hammock that is actually a part of you. Someday, as you become more adept, you may begin to use it's lines to move and alter things."

"Is the double inside or outside the physical body?" I asked. "That night, it seemed to me that, for a moment, something clearly outside of myself had taken over."

"It's both," Mr. Abelar said. "It is inside and outside the physical body at the same time. How can I put it? In order to command it, the part of it that is outside floating freely has to be linked to the energy that is housed inside the physical body. The external force is beckoned and held by an unwavering concentration, while the internal energy is released by opening some mysterious gates in and around the body. When the two sides merge, the force that is produced allows one to perform inconceivable feats."

"Where are those mysterious gates you're talking about?" I asked, incapable of meeting his gaze directly.

"Some are close to the skin, others are deep inside the body," Mr. Abelar replied. "There are seven main gates. When they are closed, our inner energy remains locked within the physical body. The presence of the double inside us is so subtle that we can go through our entire lives without ever knowing that it is there. However, if one is going to release it, the gates must be opened and this is done through the recapitulation and the breathing exercises Clara showed you."

Mr. Abelar promised that he himself would guide me to deliberately open the first gate after I had successfully accomplished the abstract flight. He emphasized that in order to open the gates, a complete change of attitude is necessary because our preconceived notion that we are solid is what keeps the double imprisoned rather than any physical structure of the body itself.

"Couldn't you describe to me where the gates are so I can open them myself?"

He looked at me and shook his head. "To tamper haphazardly with the power behind the gates is foolish and dangerous," he warned: "The double must be released gradually; harmoniously. A prerequisite, however, is that one remains celibate."

"Why is celibacy important?" I asked.

"Didn't Clara tell you about the luminous worms a man leaves inside a woman's body?"

"Yes," I said, ill at ease and embarrassed. "But I must confess I didn't really believe her."

"That was a mistake," he said, annoyed. "For without a thorough recapitulation first, you would literally be opening a can of worms. And to have sex would only be adding more fuel to the fire."

He laughed heartily making me feel ridiculous.

"Seriously, though, storing sexual energy is the first step in the journey toward the ethereal body; the journey into awareness and total freedom."

Just then, Clara entered the living room wearing a white flowing kaftan that made her look like a huge toad. I began to snicker for thinking such a disrespectful thought, and immediately glanced over at Mr. Abelar, who I could have sworn was thinking the same thing. Clara sat down on the armchair and smiled at both of us sitting awkwardly on the couch.

"Have you gotten to the subject of the gates yet?" she asked Mr. Abelar curiously. "Is that why Taisha is pressing her legs together so tightly?"

Mr. Abelar nodded in utter seriousness. "I was just about to tell her that an enormous gate is in the sexual organs. But I don't think she will understand what I'm talking about. She still has quite a few misconceptions in that department."

Simultaneously, they both broke out in such peals of laughter that I felt utterly disconnected. I resented being laughed at and talked about as if I weren't in the room. I was about to tell them that they didn't understand me at all, when Clara spoke again, this time addressing me.

"Do you understand why we are recommending that you remain celibate?" she asked.

"To journey to freedom," I said, repeating Mr. Abelar.

I boldly asked Clara if she and Mr. Abelar were celibate, or if they were just recommending behavior they were not prepared to practice themselves.

"I told you we are not man and wife," Clara replied, not the least bit perturbed. "We are sorcerers interested in power; in gathering energy, not losing it."

I turned to Mr. Abelar and asked him if he really was a sorcerer and what that entailed. He didn't answer me, but looked at Clara as if he were asking her permission to divulge something. Clara nodded her almost imperceptible assent.

"I don't feel at ease with the word 'sorcerer,'" Mr. Abelar said, "because it connotes beliefs and actions that are not part of what we do."

"What exactly do you do?", I asked. "Clara said only you could tell me."

Mr. Abelar straightened his back and gave me a frightening look that jolted me to attention.

He began formally, "We are a group consisting of sixteen people, myself included, and one being: Manfred. Ten of the people are women. All of us do the same thing: We have dedicated our lives to developing our double. We use our ethereal bodies and defy many of the natural laws of the physical world. Now, if that's being a sorcerer, then all of us are sorcerers. If not, then we're not. Does that make things any clearer?"

"Since you are teaching me about the double, am I going to be a sorceress too?" I asked.

"I don't know," he replied, scanning me curiously: "It'll all depend on you. It is always up to us individually to fulfill or to nub our fate."

"But Clara said everyone in this house has a purpose for being here. Why was I selected?" I asked. "Why me in particular?"

"That's a very difficult question to answer," Mr. Abelar said, smiling. "Let's say that we are compelled to include you. Do you remember that night, about five years ago, when you were caught in a compromising situation with a young man?"

I immediately began to sneeze, my usual reaction when I felt threatened. During my recapitulating I had remembered time and again being in compromising situations. Since I was fourteen, I had been obsessed with boys and had aggressively run after them, as I had run after my brothers as a child. I wanted desperately to be loved by anyone because I knew my family didn't like me. But I always ended up scaring off my would-be suitors before they could get too close. My aggressiveness made everyone think I was a loose woman; capable of anything. Consequently, I had the worst reputation imaginable in spite of the fact that I hadn't done even half of the things my friends and family attributed to me.

"You were caught on the food counter where you worked in the concession stand of a drive-in theater in California. Remember?" I heard Mr. Abelar say.

How could I possibly not remember? That was by far one of the worst experiences of my life. And because it was so sensitive, I had put off recapitulating it deeply; always skirting it's fringes. I had at that time a high school summer job selling hot dogs and soft drinks in a drive-in theater. Near the end of the summer, Kenny, the young man who managed the concession stand, told me that he loved me. Up to that moment, I had been indifferent to him because I had my eye on the boss, who was handsome and rich. Unfortunately, the boss was interested in Rita, my red-headed nemesis, who was nineteen and gorgeous. Every night soon after the movie began, she would slip into the boss's office and lock the door. When she emerged just before intermission, her pink and white checkered uniform was wrinkled and her hair was limp and tangled. I acutely envied Rita for all the attention she was getting. What made it even worse was her promotion to running the cash register, while I had to continue passing out popcorn and serving soft drinks at the counter.

When Kenny told me that I was beautiful and desirable, I began to think of him in a different light. I overlooked the fact that he had severe acne, drank beer by the gallon, listened to country music, wore boots, and spoke with a heavy Texan drawl. All of a sudden I found him manly and affectionate, and all I cared to know about him was that his parents were Catholic and didn't know that he smoked marijuana. I was beginning to fall in love with him, and didn't want personal details to stand in the way.

Kenny became incensed when I told him that I had to quit working at the end of the week because my family was leaving for a holiday in Germany, and I had to go with them. He said my parents were deliberately trying to separate us. He took my hand and swore that he couldn't live without me. He proposed marriage; but I was not quite sixteen so I told him that we would have to wait. He embraced me passionately and said that the least we could do was to have sex. I didn't know if he meant sometime before I left for Germany or right then; but I thoroughly agreed with him, and I opted for right then. We had about twenty minutes until the show broke, so I moved the rest of the buns from the worktable and began taking off my clothes.

He was frightened. He shook like a little boy, although he was twenty-two. We hugged and kissed, but before anything else could happen, we were interrupted by an old man who burst into the room. Upon seeing us in such a compromising situation, he grabbed a broom, hit me on the back with the straw side. The old man chased me half-naked into the foyer; in full view of the people who had lined up at the snack shop. They laughed and jeered at me. The worst part was that I recognized two of my teachers from school. They were as shocked to see me as I was to see them. One of my teachers reported the incident to the principal, who in turn informed my parents. By the time everyone finished gossiping, I was the laughingstock of the school. For years afterward, I hated that horrid old man who took it upon himself to be my moral judge. I thought he had actually ruined my life, for I was never allowed to see Kenny again.

"I was that man," Mr. Abelar said, as if he had been following my thoughts.

At that moment, the full impact of remembering my public humiliation struck me. To have the person responsible for it in front of me was more than I could bear. I began to weep out of sheer frustration. The worst part was, that Mr. Abelar didn't seem at all sorry for what he had done.

"I've been looking for you ever since that night," Mr. Abelar said, grinning slyly.

I read all kinds of kinky sexual nuances into his look and words. My heart was about to explode out of wrath and fear. I knew then that Clara had brought me to Mexico for sinister reasons, centering on some secret scheme the two of them had been hatching from the start that included plenty of aberrant sex. I didn't believe their claim of celibacy, not for an instant.

"What do you intend to do to me?" I asked, my voice cracking with fear.

Clara looked at me puzzled then began to laugh as if she had understood all that had been going through my mind.

Mr. Abelar imitated my cracked voice as he asked Clara the same question, "What do you intend to do to me?"

Then his booming laughter joined Clara's to reverberate throughout the house. I heard Manfred's howls from his room: It sounded like he too was laughing. I was more than miserable. I was devastated. I got up to leave, but Mr. Abelar pushed me back onto the couch.

"Shame and self-importance make terrible companions," he said seriously: "You haven't recapitulated that incident or you wouldn't be in such a state now."

Then softening his fierce stare to an almost kind look.

He added, "There's nothing Clara and I want to do to you. You've done more than enough yourself. That night, I was looking for the rest room and opened a door for employees only. Since a nagual never makes such a careless mistake because he is always aware of what he does, I had to assume that I was fated to find you, and that you had a special significance for me. Seeing you there half naked, about to give yourself to a weak man who might have destroyed your life, I acted in a very specific manner and hit you with the broom."

"What you did was to make me the laughingstock of my family and friends," I yelled.

"Perhaps. But, I also grabbed your ethereal body and tied an energy line around it," he said: "From that day on, I've always known where you were. Yet it has taken me five years to get you in a position where you would listen to what I have to say,"

For the first time, what he was saying registered. I stared at him incredulously.

"You mean you've known where I was all the time?" I asked.

"I've been tracking your every move," he said definitely.

"You mean you've been spying on me." The implications of what he was saying were slowly rising to the surface.

"Yes, in a manner of speaking," he admitted.

"Did Clara also know I lived in Arizona?"

"Naturally. We all knew where you were."

"Then, it was not by accident that Clara found me in the desert that day," I gasped.

I turned to Clara, furious. "You knew I would be there, didn't you?"

Clara nodded. "I admit it. You went there so regularly it wasn't hard to follow you."

"But you told me that you just happened to be there," I shouted. "You lied to me; you tricked me into coming to Mexico with you. And you've been lying to me ever since; laughing behind my back for God only knows what reason."

All my doubts and suspicions that had not had expression for months finally surfaced and exploded.

"This has been nothing but a joke to you," I yelled, "to see how stupid and gullible I am."

Mr. Abelar gave me a ferocious look, but that didn't stop me from staring right back at him. He tapped me on the top of my head to quiet me.

"You're deadly wrong, young lady," he said sternly. "All this has not been a joke to us. "It's true we laugh a great deal at your idiocies, but none of our actions are lies or tricks. They are utterly serious: In fact, they are a matter of life or death to us."

He was so earnest and looked so commanding that the bulk of my anger dissipated, leaving in it's place a hopeless bewilderment.

"What did Clara want with me?" I asked, looking at Mr. Abelar.

"I entrusted Clara with a most delicate mission; that of bringing you home," he explained. "And she succeeded. You followed her, obeying your own inner drive. It was extremely difficult to get you to accept an invitation from anyone; but from a total stranger, it's nearly impossible. But she did it. Hers was a masterful stroke! I have only praise and admiration for a job well done."

Clara jumped up to her feet and took a graceful bow.

Assuming a solemn expression as she sat down again, she said, "Leaving all joking aside, the nagual is right. It was the most difficult thing I've ever done in my life. For a while there, I thought you were going to let your suspicious nature get the better of you and tell me to get lost. I even had to lie and tell you that I have a secret Buddhist name."

"You don't have one?"

"No, I don't. My desire for freedom has burned every secret in me."

"But I'm still not clear as to how Clara knew where to find me," I said, looking at Mr, Abelar. "How did she know I was in Arizona at that particular time?"

"By means of your double," Mr. Abelar replied, as if it were the most obvious thing.

The instant he said that, my mind cleared and I understood exactly what he meant. In fact, I knew it was the only possible way they could have kept track of me.

"I tied an energy line to your ethereal body the night I burst in on you," he explained: "Since the double is composed of pure energy, it isn't that difficult to mark it. I had felt that, given the circumstances of our meeting, it was the least I could do for you as a form of protection."

Mr. Abelar looked at me, waiting for me to ask a question. But my mind was too busy trying to remember more details of what had happened that night when he had run into the room.

"Aren't you going to ask me how I marked you?" he said, gazing at me intently.

My ears popped. The room became energized and everything fell into place. I didn't have to ask Mr. Abelar how he had done it, I already knew it.

I exclaimed, "You marked me when you hit me with the broom!"

It was perfectly clear, but when I thought about it, it made no sense whatsoever, for it didn't explain anything.

Mr. Abelar nodded, pleased that I had arrived at that realization myself.

"That's right. I marked you when I struck your upper back with the broom as I chased you out the door. I left a particular energy inside you. And this energy has been lodged in you ever since that night."

Clara came over and scrutinized me. "Haven't you noticed, Taisha, that your left shoulder is higher than the right?"

I had been aware that one of my shoulder blades protruded more than the other, causing my neck and shoulders to be tense.

"I thought I was born that way," I said.

"Nobody is born with the nagual's mark," Clara laughed. "The nagual's energy is lodged behind your left shoulder blade. Think about it. Your shoulders got out of alignment after the nagual struck you with the broom."

I had to admit that it had been around the time I had had my summer job in the drive-in theater that my mother first noticed that there was something wrong with my upper back. She was fitting a sundress she was sewing for me and saw that it didn't fit properly. She was shocked to find that the flaw was not in the dress but in my shoulder blades: One was definitely higher than the other. The next day she had the family doctor examine my back. He concluded that my spine was slightly curved to one side. He diagnosed my condition as congenital scoliosis, but assured my mother that the curvature was so slight that we shouldn't concern ourselves with it.

"It's a good thing the nagual didn't leave too much energy in you," Clara teased, "otherwise you'd be a hunchback."

I turned to face Mr. Abelar. I felt the muscles in my back tense, the way they usually did when I was nervous.

"Now that you have me reeled in, what are your intentions?" I asked.

Mr. Abelar took a step closer. He fixed me with his cold stare.

"All I've wanted, since the day I found you, was to do the same thing I did for you that night," he replied solemnly, "to open the door and chase you out. This time, I want to open the door of the daily world and chase you out to freedom."

His words and mood unleashed a wealth of feelings. For as long as I can remember, I had been always searching; looking out of windows and peering down streets as if something or someone was around the comer waiting for me. I've always had premonitions; dreams of escaping, although I didn't know from what. It was this feeling that had compelled me to follow Clara to an unknown destination. And this feeling was also what prevented me from leaving in spite of the impossibility of my tasks. As I held Mr. Abelar's gaze, an indescribable wave of well-being enveloped me. I knew that I had at last found what I had been looking for. Following an impulse of the purest affection, I leaned over and kissed his hand. Out of the unsuspected depth of me, I muttered something that had no rational but only an emotional significance.

"You are the nagual to me, too," I said.

His eyes were shining; happy we had finally come to an understanding. He ruffled my hair in an affectionate way, and all my pent-up fears and frustrations exploded in a deluge of anguished tears.

Clara got up and handed me a handkerchief.

She said, "The way to get you out of this sad mood is to make you angry or to make you think. I'm going to do both by telling you this. Not only did I know where to find you in the desert, but do you remember that hot, stuffy little apartment you asked me to move your things out of? Well, the building is owned by my cousin."

I looked at Clara shocked, unable to utter a single word, Clara's and Mr. Abelar's laughter was like a giant explosion reverberating inside my head. I couldn't have been more surprised at anything they might have said or sprung on me. As my initial numbness subsided, instead of becoming angry for being manipulated, I was filled with awe at the incredible precision of their maneuvering and at the immensity of their control which, I finally realized, was not control over me but over themselves.

## Chapter 15

One day several months after I had met Mr. Abelar, Clara, instead of sending me to the cave to recapitulate, asked me to keep her company while she worked in the yard. Near the vegetable garden beyond the back patio of her house, I watched Clara meticulously rake leaves into a pile. On top of the heap, she carefully arranged some crisp brown leaves into an elliptical pattern.

"What are you doing?" I asked, moving closer to take a better look.

I was feeling tense and somber for I had spent the entire morning in the cave recapitulating memories of my father. I had always thought he was a bombastic and arrogant ogre. To realize he was actually a sad, defeated man broken by the war and his thwarted ambitions left me emotionally drained.

"I'm making a nest for you to sit on," Clara replied. "You are to brood like a hen hatching eggs. I want you to be rested because we may have a visitor this afternoon."

"And who might that be?" I asked casually.

For months Clara had promised to introduce me to the other members of the nagual's group- her mysterious relatives that had finally returned from India- but she never had. Every time I had expressed my desire to meet them, she always said I needed to cleanse myself first with a more thorough recapitulation because in my present state I wasn't fit to meet anyone. I believed her. The more I examined memories of my past, the more I felt in need of cleansing.

"You haven't answered my question, Clara," I said testily. "Who's coming?"

"Never mind who," she said, handing me a bunch of dry, copper-colored leaves: "Put these over your navel and tie them with your recapitulation sash."

"I left my sash in the cave," I said.

"I hope you're using it properly," she commented. "The sash supports us while we recapitulate. You're to wrap your stomach with it and tie one end of it to the stake I planted in the ground inside the cave. That way, you won't fall over and bang your head if you doze off or in case your double decides to wake up."

"Should I go and get it?"

She clicked her tongue, exasperated. "No, we don't have time. Our visitor might be here any minute and I want you to be relaxed and at your best. You can use my sash."

Clara hurried inside the house and momentarily returned with a strip of saffron cloth. It was truly beautiful. It had an almost imperceptible pattern woven in it. In the sunlight the strip of silk shimmered, changing it's hue from a dark gold to a mellow amber.

"If any part of your body is injured or in pain, wrap this sash around it," Clara explained. "It will help you recover. It has a bit of power, for I've done years of recapitulating wearing it. Someday you'll be able to say the same about your sash."

"Why can't you tell me who's coming to visit?" I pressed. "You know I hate surprises. Is it the nagual?"

"No, it's someone else," she said, "but equally powerful, if not more so. When you meet her, you have to be quiet and empty of thoughts, or you won't benefit from her presence."

With exaggerated solemnity, Clara said that today, as a matter of principle, I had to use all the sorcery passes she had taught me, not because anyone was going to test me to make sure I knew them, but because I had come to a crossroad and I had to begin moving in a new direction.

"Wait, Clara, don't frighten me with talk of changing," I pleaded. "I'm terrified of new directions."

"To frighten you is the farthest thing from my mind," she assured me. "It's just that I'm a bit worried myself. Do you have your crystals with you?"

I unbuttoned my vest and showed her the leather double-shoulder holster I had fashioned, with her help, to hold the two quartz crystals. The crystals were secured, one under each arm, like two knives in their own sheathes; complete with an overlapping flap, and fastened with a snap.

She said, "Take them out and have them ready; and use them to rally your energy. Don't Wait for her to tell you to do so. Do it at your own discretion whenever you feel you need an extra boost of energy."

From Clara's statements, it was easy to deduce two things: that this was going to be a serious encounter, and that our mystery guest would be a woman.

"Is she one of your relatives?" I asked.

"Yes, she is," Clara replied with a cold smile:

"This person is my relative; a member of our party. Now relax and don't ask any more questions."

I wanted to know where her relatives were staying. It was impossible that they were staying in the house because I would have run across them or at least seen signs of their presence. The fact that I hadn't seen anybody had turned my curiosity into an obsession. I imagined that Clara's relatives were deliberately hiding from me and even spying on me. This made me angry and at the same time even more determined to catch a glimpse of them. The origin of my turmoil was the unmistakable feeling that I was constantly being watched.

I deliberately tried to entrap whoever it was by leaving one of my drawing pencils lying around to see if anyone picked it up, or by placing a magazine open at a certain page and checking it later to see if that page had been changed. In the kitchen, I carefully examined the dishes for signs of use. I even went as far as smoothing out the packed dirt on the path by the back door, then coming back later and searching the ground for footprints or unfamiliar tracks. In spite of all my efforts at sleuthing, the only prints I ever saw were those of Clara, Manfred and myself. If a person was hiding from me, I was convinced I would have noticed it, but as it was, there seemed to be no one else in the house in spite of my being certain that other people were present.

"Forgive me, Clara, but I have to ask you," I finally blurted out, "because it's driving me nuts. Where are your relatives staying?"

Clara looked at me surprised. "This is their house. They are staying here, of course."

"But where exactly?" I demanded. I was on the verge of confessing how I had laid traps to no avail, but decided against it.

"Oh! I see what you mean," she said. "You haven't found any signs of them in spite of your efforts at playing detective; but that's no mystery. You never see them because they're staying in the left side of the house."

"Don't they ever come out?"

"They do, but they avoid the right side because you're staying here and they don't want to disturb you. They know how much you value your privacy."

"But not to show themselves ever? Isn't that carrying the idea of privacy a bit too far?"

"Not at all," Clara said. "You need absolute solitude to concentrate on your recapitulation. When I said that you're going to have a visitor today, I meant that one of my relatives is going to come from the left side of the house to where we are and meet you. She's been looking forward to talking to you, but had to wait until you had cleansed yourself minimally. I told you that to meet her is even more taxing than to meet the nagual. You need to have stored enough power or else you'll go off the deep end as you did with him."

Clara helped me put the leaves on my stomach, and tie them with the cloth.

"These leaves and this sash will buffer you from the woman's onslaughts," Clara said, then looking at me added softly, "and from other blows too. So whatever you do, don't take it off."

"What's going to happen to me?" I asked, nervously packing in more leaves.

Clara shrugged. "That'll depend on your power," she said and gave the knot in the cloth a firm tug. "But, from the looks of you, God only knows."

With trembling fingers I rebuttoned my shirt and tucked it into my baggy pants. I looked bloated with the wide saffron band around my middle. The leaves were like a brittle, scratchy pillow covering my abdomen. But gradually my jittery stomach stopped shivering and became warm, and my entire body felt relaxed.

I must have given her a surprised look because she asked me, "What do you think hens do when they brood?"

"I really couldn't say, Clara."

"A hen remains still and listens to her eggs underneath her, directing all her attention to them. A hen listens and never lets her concentration waver. In this unbending manner she intends the chicks to hatch. It's a quiet listening that animals do naturally; but which human beings have forgotten, and therefore must cultivate."

Clara sat down on a large, pale gray rock and faced me. The rock had a natural depression in it and looked like an armchair.

"Now, doze like a hen does and listen with your inner ear while I talk. Concentrate on the warmth in your womb and don't let your attention wander. Be aware of the sounds around you, but don't allow your mind to follow them."

"Do I really have to sit here like this, Clara? I mean, wouldn't it be better if I just took a refreshing nap?"

"I'm afraid not. As I've said, our visitor's presence is terribly taxing. If you fail to gather energy, you'll sink pitifully. Believe me, she's not soft like me. She's more like the nagual, pitiless and hard."

"Why is she so taxing?"

"She can't help it. She's so far removed from human beings and their concerns that her energy might completely disrupt you. By now, there's no difference between her physical body and her ethereal double. What I mean to say is that she is a master sorceress."

Clara gave me a searching look and commented on the dark circles under my eyes.

"You've been reading at night by the light of the lantern, haven't you?" she scolded. "Why do you think we don't have electricity in the bedrooms?"

I told her I hadn't read a single page since the day I arrived at her house because the recapitulation and all the other things she had asked me to do gave me no time for anything else.

I admitted, "I'm not particularly fond of reading though, but I do browse from time to time through your bookshelves in the halls."

I didn't tell her that what I really meant to say was that I went there snooping to see if any of the books had been removed by her relatives.

She laughed and said, "Some of the members of my family are avid readers. I'm not one of them."

"But don't you read for pleasure, Clara?"

"Not me. I read for information. But some of the others do read for pleasure."

"So how come I never see any of the books missing?" I asked, trying to sound casual.

Clara giggled. "They have their own library on the left side of the house," she said.

Then she asked me, "You don't read for pleasure, Taisha?"

"Unfortunately, I also only read for information," I said.

I told Clara that for me the joy of reading was nipped in the bud when I was in grade School. One of my father's friends, who owned a book distribution firm, had the habit of giving him boxes of books that were out of print. My father used to screen them and give me the literary books, which he said I had to read in addition to my regular homework. I always took it for granted that he meant I had to read every word. What's more, I thought I had to finish one book before beginning the next one. It came as a complete surprise to me when I found out later that some people start several books simultaneously and switch back and forth, reading according to their mood.

Clara looked at me and shook her head as if I were a lost cause. "Children do strange things under pressure," she said. "Now I know why you've turned out to be so compulsive. I bet if you try to remember those stories now, you'll be shocked at what you find. As children, we can never question what's presented to us, just as you didn't question that you had to read a book from cover to cover. All the members of my family have serious contentions about what's done to children."

"I've become obsessed with meeting your family, Clara."

"That's only natural. I've talked about them so often."

"It's not just that, Clara," I said. "It's more of a physical sensation.

"I don't know why, but I can't stop thinking about them. I even dream about them."

The minute I voiced that, something arranged itself in my mind, and I bluntly confronted Clara with a query. Since she knew who I was, and her cousin being my landlord knew me, it suddenly occurred to me to ask whether I knew her other relatives too.

"Naturally all of them know you," Clara said, as if it were the most obvious thing; but she didn't answer my question.

I couldn't possibly imagine who they might be. I insisted, "Now let me bluntly ask you this, Clara. Do I know them?"

"These are all impossible questions, Taisha. I think it's best that you don't ask them."

I became sulky. I got up from my seat of leaves but Clara gently pushed me down again.

"All right, all right. Little Miss Snoop," she said. "If it will make you stay put, I'll tell you. You know them all, but you certainly don't remember having met them. Even if any one of my relatives were standing right in front of you, my guess is that you still wouldn't have even the slightest twitch of recognition. But, at the same time, something in you will get extremely agitated. Now are you satisfied?"

Her reply didn't satisfy me in the least. In fact, it convinced me that she was deliberately mystifying me, leading me on, playing with words.

"You must enjoy tormenting me, Clara," I said, disgusted.

Clara laughed out loud. "I'm not playing with you," she assured me: "To explain what we are and what we do is the most trying thing in the world. I wish I could make it clearer, but I can't. So it's pointless to keep on insisting on explanations when there are none."

I shifted uncomfortably on the ground: My legs had fallen asleep. Clara suggested that I lie on my stomach and rest my head on my right arm, bending it at the elbow. I did that and found the position comfortable. The ground and the leaves seemed to keep me rooted while my mind was still but alert. Clara leaned over and caressed my head affectionately. Then she fixed me with her gaze in such an odd way that I grabbed her hand for a moment and held it.

Clara, loosening my grip, said softly, "I've got to go now, Taisha, but rest assured I'll see you again."

Her green eyes had specks of light amber in them, and their glow was the last thing I saw.

I woke up when someone was poking my back with a stick. A strange woman was standing over me. She was tall, slender and incredibly striking. Her features were exquisitely chiseled; small mouth, even teeth, perfectly defined nose; oval face; delicate, almost transparent white Nordic complexion; lustrous, curly gray hair. When she smiled, I thought she was an adolescent girl, full of daring and sensuality. When she looked serene, she seemed to be a continental European woman, fashionable and mature. There was elegance in her stylish dress, especially in her sensible shoes, something I had never seen in the United States, where well-dressed women wearing comfortable shoes always appeared matronly.

The woman was at once older and younger than Clara. The woman was definitely older in age, but years younger in appearance, and she possessed something I could only call inner vitality. By contrast, Clara seemed to be still in a formative stage, while this being was the finished product. I knew that someone incredibly different, perhaps as different as a member of another species, was examining me with genuine curiosity.

I sat up and quickly introduced myself. She reciprocated warmly.

"I am Nelida Abelar," she said in English. "I live here with the rest of my companions. "You already know two of them, Clara and the nagual, John Michael. You will meet the rest of us soon."

She spoke with a slight inflection. Her voice was appealing and so utterly familiar that I couldn't help staring at her. She laughed, I think at the fact that due to my surprise, my face muscles were locked in a frozen smile. The sound of her raspy laughter was also remotely familiar: I had the sensation that I had heard that laughter before. The thought crossed my mind that I had seen this woman on another occasion, although I could not fathom where. The more I stared at her, the more convinced I became that I knew her at one time but had forgotten when.

"What's the matter, dear?" she asked in a solicitous tone. "Do you have the feeling we've met before?"

"Yes, yes," I said excitedly, for I felt that I was about to remember where I had seen her.

"You'll remember sooner or later," she said in a soothing tone that led me to understand that there was no hurry: "The cleansing breath you do while recapitulating will eventually allow you to remember everything you have ever done, including your dreams. Then you'll know where and when we've met."

I felt embarrassed for staring at her and for being caught so completely off guard. I stood up and faced her, not challengingly, but with awe.

"Who are you?" I asked, in a daze.

"I already told you who I am," she said, smiling. "Now, if you want to know if I am a sort of personage, you'll be disappointed. I'm not anyone important. I'm only one of a group of people who seek freedom. Since you've met the nagual, the next step for you was to meet me. That is because I am responsible for you."

Upon hearing that she was responsible for me, I experienced a pang of fear. All my life I had fought to gain my independence, and I had struggled for it as fiercely as I was capable of.

"I don't want anyone to be responsible for me," I said. "I've fought too hard to be independent to fall under anyone's thumb now."

I thought she would take offense, but she laughed and patted me on the shoulder.

"I never meant it like that," she said. "No one wants to keep you down. The nagual has an explanation about your unruly personality. He really believes that you have a fighting spirit. In fact, he thinks you're undeniably crazy, but in a positive sense."

She said that the nagual's explanation of my craziness was that I was conceived under unusual and desperate conditions. Nelida then related to me facts about my parents' history that no one except my parents knew. She disclosed that before I was conceived, while my parents lived and worked in South Africa, my father was incarcerated for reasons he never revealed. I had always fantasized that he was not really in a prison but in a political detention camp. Nelida said that my father saved a guard's life, and later that guard helped my father to escape by turning his back at a crucial moment.

"With his pursuers on his trail," Nelida continued, "he went to see his wife; to be with her for the last time on earth. He was certain he would be caught and killed. During that passionate life-death embrace, your mother became pregnant with you. The intense fear and passion for life that your father was feeling then was transmitted to you. Consequently, you were born restless and unruly and with a passion for freedom."

I could barely hear her words. I was so stunned by what she was revealing to me that my ears were buzzing and my knees went weak. I had to lean against a tree trunk to keep from falling down. Before I could speak, she continued.

"The reason your mother was so unhappy and secretly despised your father was because he used up all of her family inheritance to pay for his mistakes, whatever they might have been. The money ran out and they had to leave South Africa before you were born."

"How can you know things about my parents that not even I am clear about?" I asked.

Nelida smiled. "I know those things because I am responsible for you," she replied.

Again I felt a jolt of fear run through me, making me shiver: I was afraid that if she knew my parents' secrets, she must also know things about me. I had always felt safe, hidden in my impregnable subjective fortress. I was lulled into a false security; certain that what I felt and thought and did didn't matter as long as I kept it hidden; as long as no one else knew about it. But now it was obvious that this woman had access to my inner self. I desperately needed to reaffirm my position.

I said defiantly, "If I'm anything, I'm my own person. No one is responsible for me, and no one is going to dominate me."

Nelida laughed at my outburst. She tousled my hair the way the nagual had done; a gesture both soothing and utterly familiar.

"Nobody is trying to dominate you, Taishika," she said in a friendly tone. Her gentleness served to dissipate my anger. Nelida continued, "I've said all those things to you because I need to prepare you for a very specific maneuver."

I listened to her intently because I sensed from her tone that she was about to reveal something awesome to me.

"Clara has brought you to your present level in a most artistic and effective way. You will forever be indebted to her. Now that she's finished her task, she has gone, and the sad part is that you didn't even thank her for her care and her kindness."

Some horrible, unnamed feeling loomed over me. "Wait a minute," I muttered. "Did Clara leave?"

"Yes, she did."

"But she'll be coming back, won't she?" I asked.

Nelida shook her head. "No. As I told you, her job is done."

At that moment, I had the only true feeling I had ever had in my entire life. Compared to that feeling, nothing of what I had felt before was real; not my anger, not my fits of rage, not my outbursts of affection, not even my self-pity was true when compared with the searing pain I felt at that moment. The feeling was so intense, it numbed me. I wanted to weep, but I couldn't. I knew then that real pain brings no tears.

"And Manfred? Is he gone too?" I asked.

"Yes. His job of guarding you is finished too."

"And what about the nagual? Will I see him again?"

"In the sorcerers' world anything is possible," Nelida said, touching my hand: "But one thing is for certain: It is not a world to be taken for granted. In it, we must voice our thanks now, because there is no tomorrow."

I stared at her blankly, totally stunned.

She gazed back at me and whispered, "The future doesn't exist. It's time you realized this. When you have finished recapitulating and have completely erased the past, all that will be left is the present. And then you will know that the present is but an instant, nothing more."

Nelida gently rubbed my back, and told me to breathe. I was so grief-stricken that my breathing had stopped.

I asked pleadingly, "Will I ever be different? Is there a chance for me?"

Without answering, Nelida turned around and walked toward the house. When she reached the back door, she signaled me with a beckoning crook of the index finger to follow her inside.

I wanted to run after her, but I couldn't move. I began to whimper, then the oddest whine came out of me; a sound that was not quite human. I knew then why Clara had tied her protective sash around my stomach: It was to shield me from this blow. I lay face down on the pile of leaves and released into them the animal cry that was choking me. It didn't relieve my anguish. I took out my crystals, placed them in my fingers and turned my arms in counterclockwise circles that became smaller and smaller. I pointed the crystals at my indolence, at my cowardice, and at my useless self-pity.

## Chapter 16

Nelida was patiently waiting for me at the back door. It had taken me hours to calm down. It was late afternoon. I followed her inside the house. In the hall just outside the living room, she stopped so abruptly that I nearly collided with her.

Nelida turned to face me, and said, "As Clara told you, I live in the left side of the house. I'm going to take you there, but first let's go in the living room, and sit down for a while so you can catch your breath."

I was panting and my heart was beating disturbingly fast.

"I'm in good physical condition," I assured her. "I practiced kung fu with Clara every day. But right now I'm not feeling very well."

"Don't worry about being out of breath," Nelida said reassuringly: "The energy of my body is pressing on you. That extra pressure is what's making your heart beat faster. When you get used to my energy, it will no longer bother you."

She took my hand, and guided me to sit on a cushion on the floor with my back propped against the front of the sofa.

"When you are agitated as you are now, prop your lower back against a piece of furniture. Or, bend your arms backward; pressing your hands against the top of your kidneys."

To sit on the floor with my back propped in that fashion had a definite relaxing effect on me. In a few moments I was breathing normally and my stomach was no longer tied in knots.

I watched Nelida pace back and forth in front of me.

"Now, let's understand something once and for all," she said as she continued her relaxed, easy stride: "When I say that I'm responsible for you, I mean that I am in charge of your ultimate freedom. So don't give me any more nonsense about your struggle for independence. I'm not interested in your capricious fight against your family. Even though you've been at odds with them all your life, your fight has had no purpose or direction. It's time to give your natural strength and compulsive drive a worthy cause."

Her pacing, I noticed, was not nervous at all. It seemed to be, rather, a way of trapping my attention, for it had put me completely at ease yet kept me attentive.

I asked her once more if I would ever see Clara and Manfred. Nelida looked at me with a pitiless gaze that sent chills through me.

"No, you won't see them," she said. "At least not in this world. Both of them have done their impeccable best to prepare you for the great flight. Only if you are successful in awakening the double and crossing over into the abstract will you meet again. If not, they will become memories that you will talk about with others for a while, or keep to yourself, then gradually forget."

I swore to her that I would never forget Clara or Manfred; that they would be a part of me always, even if I never saw them again. And although something in me knew that that would be so, I couldn't bear such a final separation. I wanted to weep as I had done so easily all my life. But, somehow my sorcery pass with the crystals had worked: Weeping had fallen off me. Now when I really needed to cry, I couldn't. I was hollow inside. I was what I've always been: cold. Except that now I had no more pretenses. I remember what Clara had told me; that coldness is not cruelty or heartlessness, but an unbending detachment. At last I knew what it meant to be without pity.

"Don't focus on your loss," Nelida said, sensing my mood. "At least not for the time being. Let's deal, rather, with helpful ways to gather energy to attempt the inevitable: the abstract flight. You know now that you belong to us; to me in particular. You must try today to come to my side of the house."

Nelida took off her shoes, and sat down in an armchair across from me. In one graceful movement, she raised her knees to her chest and planted her feet on the seat. Her full skirt was pulled over her calves so that only her ankles and feet showed.

"Now, try not to be bashful, judgy or kinky," she said.

Then before I could respond, she lifted her skirt and spread her legs apart.

"Look at my vagina," she ordered: "The hole between the legs of a woman is the energetic opening of the womb; an organ that is at the same time powerful and resourceful."

To my horror, Nelida had no underwear on. I could see right into her crotch. I wanted to look away but I was mesmerized. I could only stare with my mouth half open. She was hairless, and her abdomen and legs were hard and smooth with absolutely no wrinkles or fat.

"Since I'm not in the world as a female, my womb has acquired a different mood than the mood of an average, undisciplined woman," Nelida said, without a hint of embarrassment. "So you simply shouldn't see me in a derogatory light."

She was indeed beautiful and I felt a jolt of sheer envy. I was at least one third her age and I couldn't possibly have looked that good in a similar position. In fact, I wouldn't dream of letting anyone see me naked. I always wore long bathrobes, as if I had something to hide. Remembering my own shyness, I politely looked away, but not before I got an eyeful of what I can only call sheer energy- the area around her vagina seemed to radiate a force that if I stared at it made me dizzy.

I shut my eyes and didn't care what she thought of me. Nelida's laughter was like an endless cascade of water, soft and bubbly.

"You are perfectly relaxed now," she said: "Look at me again, and take a few deep breaths to charge yourself."

"Wait just a moment, Nelida," I said, struck by sudden fear; not fear of looking at her vagina, but of what I had just realized.

Showing me her nakedness had done something inconceivable to me: It had soothed my anguish, and made me abandon all my prudishness. In one instant, I had become extraordinarily familiar with Nelida. Stammering pitifully, I told her what I had just realized.

"That's exactly what the energy from the womb is supposed to do," Nelida said cheerfully: "Now really, you must look at me and breathe deeply. After that, you can analyze things to your heart's content."

I did as she said, and felt no shyness at all. Breathing in her energy made me feel strangely invigorated as if a bond had formed between us that needed no words.

"You can accomplish wonders by controlling and circulating the energy from the womb," Nelida said, pulling her skirt over her calves again.

Nelida explained that the womb's primary function is reproduction in order to perpetuate our species. But, she said, unbeknownst to women, the womb also has subtle and sophisticated secondary functions; and it was these that she and I were interested in developing.

I was so pleased when Nelida had included me in her statement that I actually experienced a tickling sensation inside my stomach. I listened attentively as she explained that the most important secondary function of the womb is to serve as a guiding unit for the double. Whereas males have to rely on a mixture of reason and intent to guide their doubles, females have at their disposal their womb; a powerful source of energy with an abundance of mysterious attributes and functions all designed to protect and nurture the double.

"All this is possible, of course, if you have rid yourself of all the encumbering energy men have left inside you," she said: "A thorough recapitulation of all your sexual activity will take care of that."

She emphasized that using the womb is an extremely powerful and direct method of reaching the double. She reminded me of the sorcery pass I had learned in which one breathes directly with the opening of the vagina.

"The womb is the way female animals sense things and regulate their bodies," she said: "Through the womb, women can generate and store power in their doubles to build or destroy; or to become one with everything around them."

Again I felt a tingle in my abdomen; a mild vibration that spread this time to my genitals and inner thighs.

"Another way of reaching the double, also called the other, besides using the energy of the womb, is through movement," Nelida continued: "This is the reason why Clara taught you the sorcery passes. There are two passes that you must use today to prepare yourself adequately for what is to come."

She walked to the closet, pulled out a straw mat, unrolled it on the floor and told me to lie on it. When I was flat on my back, she asked me to bend my knees a bit, fold my arms across my chest, and roll once to my right side and then once to my left. She made me repeat this movement seven times. As I rolled, I was to slowly curl my spine at the shoulders.

She told me then to sit cross-legged once more on the floor leaning my back against the couch, while she took her seat on the armchair. Slowly and softly, she inhaled through her nose. Then she gracefully wiggled her left arm and hand out and upward as if she were boring a hole in the air with her hand. Then she reached in, grasped something and pulled her arm back, giving me the total impression of a long rope being retrieved from a hole in the air. She then did the same movements with her right arm and hand.

As she performed her sorcery pass, I recognized it to be a movement of the same nature as the ones Clara had shown me, but it was different too; lighter, smoother, more energetically charged. Clara's sorcery passes were like martial art movements: They were graceful and filled with internal strength. Nelida's passes were ominous, threatening, and yet, at the same time a pleasure to watch: They radiated a nervous energy but they were not agitated.

While she executed her pass, Nelida's face was like a beautiful mask. Her features were symmetrical, perfect. Watching her exquisite movements done with utter aloofness and detachment, I remembered what Clara had said about Nelida having no pity.

"This pass is for gathering energy from the vastness that lies just behind all that we see," she said: "Try making a hole. Reach behind the facade of visible forms, and grasp the energy that sustains us. Do it now."

I tried to replicate her swift, graceful movements, but felt stiff and clumsy in comparison. I couldn't feel I was reaching through a hole and grasping energy, not by any stretch of the imagination. Nevertheless, after I had finished the pass, I felt strong and bursting with energy.

"It doesn't really take much to communicate or reach the ethereal body," Nelida went on: "Sound is a powerful way of attracting the etheral body's attention in addition to using the womb and movement."

She explained that by systematically directing words to our source of awareness - the double - one can receive a manifestation of that source.

"Provided, of course, that we have enough energy," she added: "If we do, it may take only a few selected words or a sustained sound to open something unthinkable in front of us."

"How exactly can we direct those words to the double?" I asked.

Nelida extended her arms in a sweeping gesture.

"The double is nearly infinite," she said: "For just as the physical body is in communication with other physical bodies, the double is in communication with the universal life force."

Abruptly Nelida stood up. "We've done our sorcery passes and also plenty of talking," she said. "Now let's see if we can act. I want you to stand in front of the door leading to the left side of the house. I want you to remain very quiet, but acutely aware of everything around you."

I followed her down the hall to the door that had always been closed. Clara had explained to me that it was kept closed even when all of the family members were present in the house. Since Clara had made me promise that I would never under any circumstances try to open it, no matter how curious I became, I never paid much attention to the door.

As I looked at it now, I could see nothing unusual: It was just a common wooden door much like all the others in the house. Nelida carefully opened it. There was a hallway, just like the right-side hallway that led to the other side of the house.

"I want you to repeat one word," Nelida said, standing close behind me: "The word is 'intent.' I want you to say 'intent' three or four times or even more, but bring it out from the depths of you."

"From the depths of me?"

"Allow the word to burst out from your midsection loud and clear. In fact, you should shout the word 'intent' with all your strength."

I hesitated. I hated to shout and I disliked it when people raised their voices at me. As a child, I learned it was impolite to shout and I dreaded to hear my parents arguing in loud voices.

"Don't be bashful," Nelida said. "Shout as loud and as many times as it's needed."

"How will I know when to stop?"

"You stop when something happens, or when I tell you to stop because nothing has happened. Do it! Now!"

I said the word 'intent'. My voice sounded hesitant, feeble, unsure. Even to my ear, it lacked conviction. But, I kept on repeating it; each time with more vigor. My voice became not deep but shrill and loud, until I shocked myself into a near faint with a hair-raising scream that wasn't my own; and yet I had heard it before. It was the same shrill noise I had heard the day Clara and Manfred had dashed into the house; leaving me under the tree. I began to shiver, and became so dizzy that I slumped down on the spot and leaned against the door frame.

"Don't move!" Nelida ordered; but it was too late: I was already limp on the floor.

"Too bad you moved when you should have stayed put," Nelida said sternly, but added a smile when she saw I was about to pass out. She squatted next to me, and rubbed my hands and neck to revive me.

"What did you make me shout for?" I muttered, straightening up against the wall.

"We were trying to catch the attention of your double," Nelida said: "Seemingly, there are two levels to the universal awareness: the level of the visible, of order, and of everything that can be thought or named; and the unmanifested level of energy that creates and sustains all things. Because we rely on language and reason," Nelida continued, "it is the level of the visible that we regard as reality. It appears to have an order, and is stable and predictable. Yet in actuality, it is elusive, temporary and ever changing. What we judge as permanent reality is only the surface appearance of an unfathomable force."

I felt so drowsy, I could barely follow her words. I yawned several times to take in more air. Nelida laughed when I opened my eyes wide in an exaggerated manner to give her the impression I was paying full attention.

"What you and I want to do with all this shouting," she went on, "is to catch the attention, not of the visible reality, but rather the attention of the unseen; the force that is the source of your existence; a force that we hope will carry you across the chasm."

I wanted to listen to what she was saying, but a strange thought kept distracting me. Just before I had slumped to the floor, I had caught a glimpse of a rare sight. I had noticed that the air in the hall behind that door was bubbling, just like it had in the darkness of my room the first night I had slept in the house.

As Nelida continued speaking, I turned to look into the hallway again, but she moved in front of me and blocked my view. She bent over and picked up a leaf that, while I was shouting, must have fallen out of the protective bundle Clara had tied around my midsection.

"Perhaps this leaf will help clarify things," she said, holding it up for me to see. She talked fast, as if she knew my attention was waning and she wanted to get as much in as she could before my mind wandered off again.

"It's texture is dry and brittle: It's shape is flat and round: It's color is brown with a touch of crimson. We can recognize it as a leaf because of our senses; our instruments of perception, and our thought that gives things names. Without them, the leaf is abstract, pure, undifferentiated energy. The same unreal, ethereal energy that flows through this leaf flows through and sustains everything. We, like everything else, are real on the one hand, and only appearances on the other."

She carefully put the leaf back on the floor as if it were so fragile that it would shatter at the slightest touch.

Nelida paused for a moment as if to wait for my mind to assimilate what she had said, but my attention was again drawn through the open door to the hallway where I saw filaments of light streaming through a large window at the end of the hall. I caught a fleeting glimpse of men and women; that is, three or four people for an instant had stuck their heads out of doors opening onto the hallway. They all seemed to have been awakened at once by my shouts, and had poked their heads out of their bedrooms to see what all the commotion was about.

"You're certainly undisciplined," Nelida barked at me. "Your attention span is much too short."

I tried to tell Nelida what I had seen, but she subdued me with one look. I felt a chill going up my spine into my neck and I ended up shivering involuntarily. It was then, as I sat there confused and defenseless, that the strangest thought thus far occurred to me: Nelida seemed familiar to me because I had seen her in a dream. In fact, I had seen her not in one dream, but in a series of recurring dreams, and the people in the hall...

"Don't let your mind go beyond this point!" Nelida shouted at me: "Don't you dare: Do you hear me? Don't you dare to wander away! I want your undivided attention here with me."

She pulled me to my feet and told me to gather my wits. I did my best to gather them because I was definitely intimidated by her. I had always taken pride in believing that no one could dominate me, yet one look from this woman could stop my thoughts and fill me with awe and dread at the same time.

Nelida gave me a firm knock on the top of my head with a knuckle. It sobered me up as easily as her shouts had unsettled me.

"I've been talking my head off because Clara assured me that talking is the best way to relax you and pique your interest," she said. "I want you ready to go through this door at any cost."

I told her that I had the certainty that I had seen her in my dreams. And, that was not all: I had the feeling that the people that had poked their heads into the hall were also known to me.

When I mentioned the people, Nelida stepped back and scrutinized me as if looking for markings on my body. She was silent for a moment; perhaps considering whether or not to divulge something.

"We are a group of sorcerers, as the nagual and Clara have already told you. We are a lineage, but not a family lineage. In this house there are two branches of that lineage. Each has eight members. The members of Clara's branch are the Graus, and the members of my branch are the Abelars. Our origin is lost in time. We count ourselves by generations. I am a member of the generation in power, and that means I can teach what my group knows to someone who is like me; in this case, you. You are an Abelar."

She stood behind me and turned me in the direction of the hallway.

"Now, no more talking. Face the hallway and shout again the word 'intent.' I think you are ready to meet all of us in person."

I shouted "intent" three times. This time my voice didn't screech, but resonated loudly beyond the walls of the house. On the third shout, the air in the hall began to fizzle. Billions of tiny bubbles sparkled and glowed as if they had all lit up at the same instant. I heard a soft hum that reminded me of the sound of a muffled generator. It's mesmeric purr drew me inside past the threshold where Nelida and I had been standing. My ears were plugged and I had to swallow repeatedly to unplug them. Then the humming stopped and I found myself in the middle of a hallway that was the exact mirror image of the hallway in the right side of the house where my room was. Only this hallway was full of people. They all had come out of their rooms, and were staring at me as if I had dropped in from another planet; materializing right in front of their very eyes.

Among them, at the far end of the hallway, I saw Clara. She had a beaming smile and opened her arms inviting me to come and embrace her. Then I saw Manfred, pawing the floor. He was as happy to see me as Clara was. I ran toward them, but instead of feeling my steps on the wooden floor, I felt that I had been catapulted in the air. To my agony, I flew past Clara and Manfred and all the other people in the hallway. I had no control over my movements. All I could do was shout Clara's and Manfred's names in anguish as I flew past them beyond the hall, beyond the house, beyond the trees and the hills into a blinding glare, and finally into an absolutely black stillness.

## Chapter 17

I was dreaming that I was digging the ground in the garden when a sharp pain in my neck awoke me. Without opening my eyes, I groped for the pillows in order to ease my neck into their soft comfortable folds. But my hands searched in vain. I couldn't find the pillows: I couldn't even feel the mattress. I began swaying as if I had eaten or drunk too much the night before, and was feeling the unsettling effects of indigestion. Gradually I opened my eyes. Instead of seeing the ceiling or walls, I saw branches and green leaves. When I tried to rise up, everything around me began moving. I realized that I was not in my bed. I was suspended in midair in some sort of leather harness and it was I who was swaying, not the world around me. I knew beyond a doubt that this was not a dream. As my senses tried to make order out of chaos, I saw that I was hoisted with pulleys into the highest branch of a tree.

The sensation of unexpectedly waking up restrained, coupled with the realization that there was nothing beneath me, created in one instant a physical terror of heights. I had never been up in a tree in my life. I began to scream for help. No one came to my rescue so I continued screaming until I lost my voice. Exhausted, I hung there like a limp carcass. Being physically terrified had made me lose control of my excretory functions. I was a mess. But screaming had drained me of my fears. I looked around and slowly began to assess my situation.

I noticed that my arms and hands were free, and when I turned my head downward, I saw what was suspending me. Thick brown leather belts were buckled around my waist, chest and legs. Around the trunk of the tree was another belt, which I could reach if I stretched my arms. That belt had the end of a rope and a pulley attached to it. I saw then that all I bad to do to free myself was to release the rope and let myself down. It took an excruciating effort to reach the rope and then lower myself because my arms and hands were trembling. But once I was lying on the ground, I was able to painstakingly unbuckle the straps from around my body and slip out of the harness.

I ran into the house calling for Clara. I had a vague recollection that I wouldn't be able to find her, but it was more of a feeling than a conscious certainty. Automatically, I began searching for her but Clara was nowhere to be found and neither was Manfred. I became aware then that somehow everything had changed, but I didn't know what or when or even why things were different from the way they used to be. All I knew was that something had been irreparably broken.

I lapsed into a long inner monologue. I said to myself how I wished that Clara hadn't gone off on one of her mysterious trips precisely when I needed her most. Then I reasoned that there might be other explanations for her absence. She might be deliberately avoiding me or visiting with her relatives in the left side of the house. Then I remembered meeting Nelida and I rushed to the door of the left side hallway and tried to open it, ignoring Clara's warning never to tamper with that door. I found it was locked. I called out to her through the door a few times, then kicked it in anger and went to my bedroom. To my dismay, that door was locked too. Frantically I tried opening the doors to the other bedrooms in the hallway. All of them were locked except one which was a sort of storage room or den. I had never entered it: I had obeyed Clara's specific instructions to keep out of it. But that door had always remained ajar, and every time I had passed by, I had peeked inside.

This time I went in, calling out for Clara and Nelida to show themselves. The room was dark but filled to capacity with the most bizarre collection of objects I had ever seen. In fact, it was so crammed with grotesque sculptures, boxes and trunks that there was hardly any room to move around.

Some light came in from a beautiful stained-glass bay window along the back wall. It was a mellow glow that cast eerie shadows on all the objects in the room. It made me think that this was the way storage rooms of elegant but no longer inservice ocean liners that have cruised the world over must look like. The floor underneath me suddenly began to sway and creak and the objects around me also seemed to shift. I let out an involuntary shriek and rushed out of the room. My heart was pounding so fast and loud that it took several minutes and quite a few deep breaths to quiet it.

In the hallway, I noticed that the large walk-in closet opposite to that storage room was open and all my clothes were there, neatly placed on hangers or folded on shelves. Pinned to the sleeve of the jacket that Clara had given me the first day I came to the house was a note addressed to me. It read, 'Taisha, the fact that you are reading this note tells me that you have let yourself down from the tree. Please follow my instructions to the letter. Do not go back to your old room, for it is locked. From now on, you will sleep in your harness, or in the tree house. We have all gone on an extended trip. The whole house is in your care. Do your best!' It was signed 'Nelida.'

Stunned, I stared at the note for a long time, reading it again and again. What did Nelida mean that the house was in my care? What was I supposed to do there all alone? The thought of sleeping in that horrible harness, hung like a side of beef, gave me the eeriest feeling of all.

I wanted tears to flood my eyes. I wanted to feel sorry for myself because they had left me alone and angry with them for leaving without warning me first, but I couldn't do any of these. I stomped around trying to work up momentum for a tantrum. Again, I failed miserably. It was as if something inside me had been turned off making me indifferent and incapable of expressing my familiar emotions. But I did feel abandoned. My body began to shiver as it always had just before I burst out weeping. However, what gushed out next was not a deluge of tears, but a stream of memories and dreamlike visions.

I was hanging in that harness, looking down. Below, people were standing at the foot of the tree laughing and clapping. They were shouting up at me trying to get my attention. Then all of them made a sound in unison like a lion's roar, and left. I knew that had been a dream. But, I knew meeting Nelida had definitely not been a dream. I had her note in my hand to prove it. What I wasn't certain of was why and how long I had been hanging from the tree. Judging from the state of my clothes and how famished I was, I might have been there for days. But how did I get up there?

I grabbed some of my clothes from the closet and went to the outhouse to wash and change. When I was clean again, it dawned on me that I hadn't looked in the kitchen. I had a persistent hope that maybe Clara was there eating and hadn't heard me calling. I pushed the door open, but the kitchen was deserted. I poked around for food. I found a pot of my favorite stew on the stove and wanted desperately to believe that Clara had left it for me. I tasted it and gasped with a tearless sob. The vegetables were finely sliced, not diced, and there was hardly any meat. I knew that Clara hadn't made it and that she was gone. At first I didn't want to eat the stew, but I was terribly hungry. I took my bowl from the shelf, and filled it to the brim.

It was only after I had eaten and was assessing my present situation that it occurred to me there was one other place I had forgotten to look. I hurried to the cave with the vague hope of finding Clara or the nagual there. But I found no one; not even Manfred. The solitude of the cave and the hills gave me such a feeling of sadness that I would have given anything in the world to be able to weep. I crawled inside the cave feeling the despair of a mute that only yesterday knew how to talk. I wanted to die there on the spot, but instead I fell asleep.

When I woke up, I returned to the house. Now that everyone was gone, I thought, I may as well leave too. I walked to the place where my car was parked. Clara had driven it constantly and serviced it in a garage in the city. I started it to charge the battery, and to my relief, it worked perfectly. After stuffing some of my things into an overnight bag, I got as far as the back door when a strong pang of guilt stopped me. I reread Nelida's note. In it she had asked me to take care of the house. I couldn't just abandon it. She had said to do my best. I felt that they had entrusted me with a particular task, and that I had to stay even if it was only to find out what that task was. I put my things back in the closet, and lay down on the couch to take stock of myself.

All the screaming I had done had definitely irritated my vocal cords. My throat was terribly sore; but other than that, I seemed to be in good physical condition. Shock, fear and self-pity had passed; and all that was left was the certainty that something monumental had happened to me in that left hallway. But try as I could, I couldn't remember what happened after I had stepped over the threshold.

Aside from these fundamental concerns, I also had one serious immediate problem: I wasn't certain how to start the wood-burning stove. Clara had demonstrated over and over how to do it, but I just couldn't get the knack of it; perhaps because I never expected that I would have to start it myself. One solution that occurred to me was to keep the fire burning by feeding it all night. I rushed to the kitchen to place more wood on the fire before it went out.

I also boiled more water and washed my bowl with some of it. The rest of the water I poured into the limestone filter, which looked like a thick, inverted cone. The huge receptacle sat on a sturdy wrought-iron stand and, drop by drop, filtered the boiled water. From the receptacle where the water collected under the filter, I poured a couple of ladles into my mug. I drank my fill of the cool, delicious water, then decided to go back to the house. Perhaps Clara or Nelida had left me other notes telling me more specifically what I had to do.

I looked for keys to the bedroom doors. In a hall cabinet, I found a set that were marked with different names. I picked one out that had Nelida's name on it. I was surprised to find that that key fit my bedroom. Then I picked out Clara's key, and tried it in different doors until I found the lock that it fit. I turned the key and the door opened, but when it came to going inside her room and snooping around, I couldn't do it. I felt that even if she was gone, she was still entitled to her privacy.

I closed the door again, locked it and put the keys back where I had found them. I returned to the living room and sat on the floor, leaning my back against the sofa the way Nelida had suggested I do when I was tense. It definitely helped to calm my nerves. I thought of getting in my car again and leaving. But I really had no desire to leave. I decided to accept the challenge and house-sit for as long as they were gone; even if it was forever.

Since I had nothing else in particular to do, it occurred to me that I could try reading. I had recapitulated my early negative experiences with books, and I thought I would test myself to see if my attitude toward them had changed. I went to browse through the bookshelves. I found that most of the books were in German, some were in English and a few were in Spanish. I made a quick survey and saw that the majority of the German books were on botany; there were also some on zoology, geology, geography and oceanography. On a different shelf, hidden from view, was a collection of astronomy books in English. The Spanish books, on a separate bookshelf, were literature, novels and poetry.

I decided that I would first read the books on astronomy, since the subject had always fascinated me. I picked out a thin book with plenty of pictures and began to leaf through it, but soon it put me to sleep.

When I woke up, it was pitch black in the house and I had to grope my way in total darkness to the back door. On my way to the shed where the generator was housed, I noticed light coming from the kitchen. I realized that someone must have already turned the generator on. Elated that perhaps Clara had come back, I rushed toward the kitchen. As I approached, I heard soft singing in Spanish. It wasn't Clara. It was a male voice, but not the nagual's. I continued with great trepidation. Before I reached the door, a man poked his head out and, upon seeing me, let out a loud scream. I screamed at the same time. Apparently I had frightened him as much as he had scared me. He came out the door, and for a moment, we just stood there staring at each other.

He was slim but not skinny; wiry yet muscular. He was my height or perhaps an inch taller than I, about five eight. He was wearing blue mechanic's coveralls, like those worn by gas station attendants. He had a light pinkish complexion. His hair was gray. He had a pointed nose and chin, prominent cheek bones and a small mouth. His eyes were like those of a bird, dark and round yet shining and animated. I could hardly see the whites of his eyes. As I stared at him, I had the impression that I wasn't looking at an old man, but at a boy that had wrinkled due to an exotic disease. There was something about him that was at once old and young; winning yet unsettling. I managed to ask him in my best high school Spanish to please tell me who he was and to explain his presence in this house.

He stared at me curiously. "I speak English," he said, with hardly an accent, "I've lived for years in Arizona with Clara's relatives. My name is Emilito. I'm the caretaker. And you must be the tree dweller."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You are Taisha, aren't you?" he said, taking a few steps toward me. He moved with ease and agility.

"Yes, I am. But what was that you said about me being a tree dweller?"

"Nelida told me that you live in the big tree by the front door of the main house. Is that true?"

I nodded automatically, and it was only then that I became aware of something so obvious that only a thick-headed ape could have missed. The tree was on the forbidden front part of the house, the east; the part of the grounds that I could only see from my observation post in the hills. That revelation sent a surge of excitement through me because I realized, too, that I was now free to explore terrain that had always been denied me.

My delight was cut short when Emilito shook his head as if he felt sorry for me. "What did you do, you poor girl?" he asked, patting my shoulder gently.

"I didn't do anything," I said, taking a step back.

The clear implication was that I had done something wrong for which I had been strung up in the tree as a form of punishment.

"Now, now, I didn't mean to pry," he said, smiling: "You don't have to fight with me. I'm nobody important. I'm merely the caretaker; a hired hand. I'm not one of them."

"I don't care who you are," I snapped. "I'm telling you, I didn't do anything."

"Well, if you don't want to talk about it, it's all right with me," he said, turning his back to reenter the kitchen.

"There's nothing to talk about," I yelled, wanting to get, in the last word.

I had no problem in yelling at him, a thing I wouldn't have dared to do if he had been young and handsome.

I surprised myself again by shouting, "Don't give me a hard time. I'm the boss. Nelida asked me to take care of this house. She said so in her note."

He jumped as if struck by lightning. "You are a weird one," he muttered.

Then he cleared his throat and shouted at me, "Don't you dare to come any closer. I might be old, but I'm plenty tough. To work here doesn't include risking my neck or being insulted by idiots. I'll quit."

I didn't know what had come over me.

"Wait a minute," I said apologetically. "I didn't mean to raise my voice, but I'm extremely nervous. Clara and Nelida left me here without any warning or explanation."

"Well, I didn't mean to shout either," he said, in the same apologetic tone I had used. "I was only trying to figure why they strung you up before they left. That's the reason I asked if you had done something wrong. I didn't mean to pry."

"But I assure you, sir, I didn't do anything, believe me."

"Why are you a tree dweller, then? These people are very serious. They wouldn't do this to you just for the hell of it. Besides, it's obvious that you are one of them. If Nelida leaves you notes saying to take care of the house, you have to be buddy-buddy with her. She doesn't give the time of the day to anyone."

"The truth is," I said, "that I don't know why they left me in the tree. I was with Nelida in the left side of the house, and then the next thing I knew, I woke up with my neck bent all out of shape and hanging from that tree. I was terrified."

Remembering my anguish upon finding myself alone, with everyone gone, I couldn't help becoming agitated again. I began to shake and sweat right in front of this strange man.

"You were in the left side of the house?" His eyes widened, and the surprise on his face seemed genuine.

"For an instant I was there, but then everything went black," I said.

"And what did you see?"

"I saw people in the hallway. Lots of them."

"How many, would you say?"

"The hallway was full of people. Maybe twenty or thirty."

"That many, huh? How strange!"

"Why is that strange, sir?"

"Because there weren't that many people in the whole house. There were only ten people here at that time. I know, because I'm the caretaker."

"What does this all mean?"

"I'll be damned if I know! But to me, it seems that there is something very wrong with you."

My stomach knotted as a familiar cloud of doom settled over me. It was the exact sensation I had had as a child in the doctor's office when they found out I had mononucleosis. I had no idea what that was, but I knew I was done for; and from the grim looks on everyone's face, they seemed to know it too. When they were going to give me a shot of penicillin, I screamed so hard that I fainted.

"Now, now," the caretaker said gently. "There's no use in being so upset. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Let me tell you what I know about that harness. Maybe it will make things clear for you. They use it when the person they are treating is... well... a bit off his or her rocker; if you know what I mean."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Call me Emilito," he said, smiling. "But, please, don't call me 'sir.' Or you can refer to me as the caretaker, just as everyone refers to John Michael Abelar as the nagual. Now, let's go into the kitchen, and sit at the table where we can talk more comfortably."

I followed him into the kitchen and sat down. He poured warm water he had heated on the stove into my mug and brought it to me.

"Now, about the harness," he began, sitting down on the bench opposite me: "It's supposed to cure mental maladies, and they usually put people in it after they've gone off the deep end."

"But I'm not crazy," I protested. "If you or anyone else is going to insinuate that I am,

I'm leaving."

"But you must be crazy," he reasoned.

"That does it. I'm going back to the house." I stood up to leave.

The caretaker stopped me. "Wait, Taisha. I didn't mean to say that you're crazy. There may be another explanation," he said, in a conciliatory tone. "These people mean very well. They probably thought that you should reinforce your mental power while they are away, not cure you from a mental disease. That's why they put you in the harness. It's my fault for jumping to the wrong conclusion. Please accept my apologies."

I was more than willing to let bygones be bygones, and sat down at the table again. Besides, I needed to be on good terms with the caretaker because he obviously knew how to light the stove. Also, I didn't have the energy to continue feeling offended. Besides, at this point, I felt he was right. I was crazy. I just didn't want the caretaker to know it.

"Do you live nearby, Emilito?" I asked, trying to sound at ease.

"No. I live here in the house. My room is across the hall from your closet."

"You mean you live in that storage room full of sculptures and things?" I gasped. "And how do you know where my closet is?"

"Clara told me," he replied with a grin.

"But if you live here, how come I've never seen you around?"

"Ah, that's because you and I obviously keep different hours. To tell you the truth, I've never seen you either."

"How is that possible, Emilito? I've been here for over a year."

"And I've been here for forty years, on and off."

We both laughed out loud at the absurdity of what we were saying. What I found unsettling was that at a very deep level I knew that it was this person's presence I had so often sensed in the house.

"I know, Emilito, that you have been watching me," I said bluntly: "Don't deny it, and don't ask me how I know it. What's more, I also know that you knew who I was when you saw me outside the kitchen door. Isn't that so?"

Emilito sighed and nodded. "You're right, Taisha. I did recognize you. But you still gave me a genuine fright."

"But how did you recognize me?"

"I've been watching you from my room. But don't get angry. I never thought that you would feel me watching you. My humble apologies if I made you feel uncomfortable."

I wanted to ask him why he had been watching me, I hoped that he would say that he found me beautiful or at least interesting, but he cut our conversation short and said that since it was dark, he felt obliged to help me hoist myself up into the tree.

"Let me make a suggestion," he said. "Sleep in the tree house instead of the harness. It's a thrilling experience. I, too, once was an occupant of that tree house for an extended stay, although it was quite a long time ago."

Before we left, Emilito served me a bowl of delicious soup and a stack of flour tortillas. We ate in complete silence. I had tried to talk to him, but he said that conversing while eating was bad for the digestion. I told him that Clara and I always chatted endlessly during our meals.

"Her body and mine aren't even remotely alike," he muttered. "She's made of iron, so she can do anything she wants to her body. I, on the other hand, can't take any chances with my puny little body. And neither can you."

I liked him for including me among the little bodies, although I had hoped what he meant was that I was frail rather than puny.

After dinner, he walked me very solicitously through the main house to the front door. I had never been in that section of the house, and I deliberately slowed my pace, trying to take in as much of it as I could. I saw an enormous dining room with a long banquet table and a china cabinet full of crystal goblets, champagne glasses and dishes. Next to the dining room was a study. As I passed, I got a glimpse of a massive mahogany desk and bookcases filled with books lining one wall. Another room had electric lights on but I couldn't see inside because it's door was only slightly ajar. I heard muffled voices coming from inside.

"Who's in there, Emilito?" I asked excitedly.

"Nobody," he said. "That whispering you heard is the wind. It plays strange tricks on the ears as it blows through the shutters."

I gave him a who-are-you-kidding stare, and he gallantly opened the door for me to look inside. He was right: The room was empty. It was just another living room, similar to the one on the right side of the house. However, when I looked closer I noticed something odd in the shadows cast on the floor. A shudder went through me, for I knew the shadows were wrong. I could have sworn that they were agitated, shimmering, dancing, but there was no wind or movement in the room.

In a whisper, I told Emilito what I noticed.

He laughed and patted me on the back. "You sound exactly like Clara," he said. "But that's good. I'd be worried if you sounded like Nelida. Do you know that she has power in her pussy?"

The way he said that, his tone of voice and the curious birdlike wonder in his eyes struck me as so funny that I began to laugh, nearly to the point of tears. My laughter vanished as suddenly as it had begun, as if a switch inside me had been turned off. That Worried me; and it worried Emilito too, for he looked at me warily as if questioning my mental stability.

He unlatched the main door and led me out front where the tree was. He helped me put on the harness and showed me how to use the pulleys to hoist myself up in a sitting position. He gave me a small flashlight and I pulled myself up. From the top branches, I could vaguely see a wooden tree house. It was close to the place where I had first awakened in the harness, but I hadn't seen it then because of my extreme fright, and because of all the foliage that surrounded it.

From the ground, the caretaker beamed his flashlight directly onto the structure and yelled up after me, "There's a maritime flashlight inside, Taisha, but don't use it too long. And in the morning, before you come down, be sure to disconnect it's batteries."

He held his flashlight in place until I crawled onto a small landing in front of the tree house and finished unhooking the harness.

"Good night. I'm leaving now," he called up. "Pleasant dreams."

I thought I heard him chuckling as he moved his beam of light away and headed for the main house. I entered the tree house using my own weak flashlight and I searched for what he called the maritime flashlight. It was a huge light that was fixed to a shelf; on the floor there was a large square battery in a casing nailed to the boards. I connected it to the light and turned it on.

The tree house was one tiny room with a small raised platform that served as both a bed and a low table. It had a sleeping bag rolled up on top of it. The structure had windows all around, with hinged shutters that could be propped open by thick sticks that lay on the floor. In the corner of the room was a chamber pot that fit inside a basket that had a lid attached to one side. After this cursory examination of the room, I disconnected the big flashlight and crawled into the sleeping bag.

It was absolutely dark. I could hear the crickets and the hum of the stream in the distance. Nearby, the wind rustled the leaves and gently rocked the whole house. As I listened to the sounds, unknown fears began to enter my awareness and I fell prey to physical sensations I had never felt before. Total darkness distorted and masked the sounds and movements so thoroughly that I felt them as if they were coming from inside my body. Every time the house shook, the soles of my feet tingled. Whenever the house creaked, the inner part of my knees twitched. The back of my neck popped whenever a branch snapped.

Then fear entered my body as a tremor in my toes. The vibration rose to my feet and then to my legs, until my entire lower body shook out of control. I became drowsy and disoriented. I didn't know where the door or the flashlight were. I began to feel the house tilting. It was barely perceptible at first, but it became more noticeable until it seemed that the floor was inclined at a forty-five degree angle. I let out a scream as I felt the platform tilt even more. The thought of having to hoist myself down petrified me. I was certain I would die by falling from the tree. On the other hand, the sensation of being tilted was so dramatic that I was sure I would slide off the platform and out the door. At one point the incline was so acute that I felt as if I were actually standing up instead of lying down.

I screamed at every sudden movement, holding on to one of the beams on the side to keep from sliding. The whole tree house seemed to be coming apart. I became nauseous from the motion. The swaying and creaking grew so intense that I knew this would be my last night on earth. Just when I had completely given up all hope of pulling through, something inconceivable came to my rescue. A light spilled out from within me. It poured out through all the openings of my body. The light was a heavy luminous fluid that fixed me to the platform by covering me like a shiny armor. It constricted my larynx and subdued my screams, but it also opened my chest area so I could breathe easier. It soothed my nervous stomach and stopped the shaking of my legs. The light illuminated the entire room so I could see the door a few feet in front of me. As I basked in it's glow, I grew calm. All my fears and concerns vanished so that nothing mattered anymore. I lay perfectly still and tranquil until the dawn broke. Totally refreshed, I hoisted myself down and went to the kitchen to make breakfast.

## Chapter 18

I found a plate of tamales on the kitchen table. I knew that Emilito had prepared them, but he wasn't anywhere in sight. I poured some water into my mug and ate all the tamales, hoping that the caretaker had already had his breakfast.

After I washed the plate, I went to work in the vegetable garden, but I tired easily. I made myself a nest of leaves under a tree, the way Clara had showed me, and sat on it to rest. For a while, I watched the swaying branches of the tree across from me, and the motion of those branches brought me back to my childhood. I must have been four or five years old; I was grabbing onto a handful of willow branches. It wasn't that I was remembering it: I was actually there. My feet were dangling beneath me, barely touching the ground. I was swinging. I screamed with delight as my brothers took turns pushing me. Then they jumped up to grab higher branches; bringing their knees up, they swung back and forth, putting their feet down only to push off the ground to gain momentum for another ride.

As soon as it ended, I breathed in everything I was reliving; the joy, the laughter, the sounds, the feelings I had for my brothers. I swept the past away with a turning motion of my head. Gradually, my eyelids grew heavy. I slumped down on my nest of leaves, and fell into a sound sleep.

I was awakened by a sharp poke in my ribs. The caretaker was nudging me with a walking stick.

"Wake up, it's already afternoon," he said. "Didn't you sleep well last night in the tree house?"

As I opened my eyes, a beam of light kindled the treetop with orange hues. The caretaker's face, too, was lit up by an eerie glow that made him look ominous. He had on the same blue coveralls he had worn the day before, and tied to his belt were three gourds. I sat up and watched as he carefully removed the stopper of the largest gourd, lifted it to his mouth, and took a gulp. Then he smacked his lips with satisfaction.

"Didn't you sleep well last night?" he asked again, peering at me curiously.

"Are you kidding?" I moaned. "I can truthfully say it was one of the worst nights of my life."

A torrent of whining complaints began pouring out of me. I stopped, horrified, when I realized that I sounded just like my mother. Whenever I would ask her how she had slept, she would give me a similar discourse of discontent. I had hated her for that, and to think I was doing the same thing!

"Please, Emilito, forgive me for my petty outburst," I said. "It's true that I didn't sleep a wink, but I'm fine."

"I heard you screaming like a banshee," he ventured. "I thought you were either having nightmares or falling out of the tree."

"I thought I was falling out of the tree," I said, wanting sympathy. "I nearly died of fright. But then a strange thing happened and I got through the night."

"What strange thing happened?" he asked, curious, sitting down on the ground a safe distance from me.

I saw no reason not to tell him, so I described in as much detail as I could the events of the night, culminating with the light that came to save me. Emilito listened with genuine interest, nodding at the appropriate times as if he understood the feelings I was describing.

"I'm very glad to hear that you are so resourceful," he said. "I really didn't expect you to make it through the night. I thought you would faint. What this all boils down to is that you're not as bad off as they said you were."

"Who said I was bad off?"

"Nelida and the nagual. They left me specific instructions not to interfere with your healing. That's why I didn't come to help you last night, even though I was greatly tempted - if for no other reason than to get some peace and quiet."

He took another gulp from his gourd. "Do you want to take a swig?" he offered, holding it out for me to take.

"What's in the gourd?" I asked, wondering if it was liquor; in which case, I wouldn't have minded having a sip.

He hesitated for a moment, then he turned the gourd upside down and gave it a few strong shakes.

"It's empty," I scoffed. "You were trying to trick me."

He shook his head. "It only seems empty," he retorted: "It's filled to the brim with the strangest drink of all. Now, do you or don't you want to drink from it?"

"I don't know," I said.

For an instant, I wondered if he was toying with me. Seeing him in his neatly ironed blue coveralls with gourds tied to his belt, I had the impression that he was an escapee from a mental institution.

He shrugged and stared at me; wide-eyed.

I watched as he recorked the gourd, and securely tied it to his belt with a thin leather thong.

"All right, let me have a sip," I said, driven by curiosity, and a sudden urge to find out what his game was.

He uncorked the gourd again, and handed it to me. I shook it and peered inside. It was indeed empty. But, when I put it to my lips, I had a most unfamiliar oral sensation. Whatever flowed into my mouth was somehow liquid, but it wasn't anything like water. It was more like a dry, almost bitter pressure that suffocated me for an instant, and then filled my throat and my entire body with a cool warmth.

It occurred to me that the gourd had a fine powder that had gotten into my mouth. To find out if that was true, I shook it onto the palm of my hand, but nothing came out.

The caretaker said, noting my surprise, "There is nothing in the gourd that the eyes can see."

I took another imaginary sip, and was jolted nearly out of my shoes. Something electric flowed through me and made my toes tingle. The tingling went up my legs to my spine like a lightning bolt, and when it entered my head I nearly passed out.

I saw the caretaker jumping up and down laughing like a prankster. I grabbed onto the ground to steady myself with my hands.

When I had somewhat regained my equilibrium, I confronted him angrily. "What the hell is in this gourd?" I demanded.

In a serious tone, he said, "What's in it is called 'intent. Clara told you a little about it. It's now up to me to tell you a bit more."

"What do you mean that it's now up to you, Emilito?"

"I mean that I'm your new usher. Clara did part of that work and I must do the rest."

My first reaction was simply not to believe him. He himself had said that he was merely a hired hand and not part of the group. It was obvious that this was a prank, and I wasn't going to fall for any more of his tricks.

"You're just pulling my leg, Emilito," I said, forcing a laugh.

"I am now," he said, and leaped over and actually gave my leg a yank.

Before I could get up, he celebrated his own joke by tugging my leg again. He was so animated that he hopped around in a squatting position like a rabbit; laughing playfully.

"You don't like your teacher to pull your leg?" he giggled.

I didn't like him to touch me, period, and definitely not my leg. But I didn't like Clara to touch me either. I began to toy with the idea of why I didn't like to be touched. Despite my having recapitulated all my encounters with people, my feeling regarding physical contact was as strong as ever. I filed this problem away for future examination because the caretaker had settled down, and was beginning to explain something that needed all my attention.

"I'm your teacher," I heard him say. "Besides Clara, Nelida and the nagual, you have me to guide you."

"You're a mass of misinformation, that's what you are," I snapped. "You yourself told me that you're merely a hired caretaker. So what's this business that you're my teacher?"

"It's true. I really am your other teacher," he said seriously.

"What could you possibly have to teach me?" I shouted, disliking the prospect immensely.

"What I have to teach you is called 'stalking with the double,'" he said, blinking like a bird.

"Where are Clara and Nelida?" I demanded.

"They are gone. Nelida said that in her note, didn't she?"

"I know they are gone, but where exactly did they go?"

"Oh, they went to India," he said with a grin that looked like an uncomfortable desire to burst out laughing.

"Then they won't be back for months," I said, feeling vicious.

"Right. You and I are alone. Not even the dog is here. You have, therefore, two options open to you. You can either pack your junk and leave, or you can remain here with me and settle down to work. I don't advise you to do the former, because you don't have any place to go."

"I don't have any intention of leaving," I informed him. "Nelida left me in charge to take care of the house and that's what I'm going to do."

"Good, I'm glad you've decided to follow the sorcerers' intent," he said.

Since it must have been obvious to him that I hadn't understood, he explained that the intent of sorcerers differs from that of average people in that sorcerers have learned to focus their attention with infinitely more force and precision.

"If you are my teacher, can you give me a concrete example to illustrate what you mean?" I asked, staring at him.

He thought for a moment as he looked around.

His face lit up and he pointed at the house. "This house is a good example," he said: "It is the result of the intent of countless sorcerers who amassed energy and pooled it over many generations. By now, this house is no longer just a physical structure, but a fantastic field of energy. The house itself could be destroyed ten times over, which it has been, but the essence of the sorcerers' intent is still intact because it is indestructible."

"What happens when the sorcerers want to leave?" I asked. "Is their power trapped here forever?"

"If the spirit tells them to leave," Emilito said, "they are capable of lifting off the intent from the present spot where the house stands and placing it somewhere else."

"I have to agree that the house is really spooky," I said and told him how it had resisted my detailed measurements and calculations.

"What makes this house spooky is not the disposition of the rooms or walls or patios," the caretaker remarked, "but the intent that generations of sorcerers poured into it. In other words, the mystery of this house is the history of the countless sorcerers whose intent went into building it. You see, they not only intended it, but constructed it themselves, brick by brick, stone by stone. Even you have already contributed your intent and your work to it."

"What could my contribution be?" I asked, sincerely taken aback by Emilito's statement. "You can't possibly mean that crooked garden path I laid."

He said, laughing, "No one in his right mind could call that a contribution. No. You've made a few others."

He remarked that on the mundane level of bricks and structures, he considered my contribution to be the careful electric wiring, the pipe fitting, and the cement casing for the water pump I had installed to pump water from the stream up the hill to the vegetable garden.

"On the more ethereal level of energy flow," he went on, "I can tell you in all sincerity that one of your contributions is that never before have we witnessed in this house anyone merging her intent with Manfred."

At that moment something popped into my mind. "Are you the one who can call him 'toad' to his face?" I asked. "Clara once told me that someone could do it."

The caretaker's face beamed as he nodded. "Yes, I'm the one. I found Manfred when he was a puppy. He had been either abandoned or he had run away; perhaps from a motor home in the area. When I found him he was almost dead."

"Where did you find him?" I asked.

"On Highway 8, about sixty miles from Gila Bend, Arizona. I had stopped on the side of the road to go to the bushes and I actually pissed on him. He was lying there almost dead from dehydration. What impressed me the most was that he had not run onto the highway as he could have done so easily. And, of course, that he was lying right where I went to piss."

"Then what happened?" I asked.

I was so overtaken with sympathy for poor Manfred's plight that I forgot all my anger at the caretaker.

"I took Manfred home and put him in water, but didn't let him drink," the caretaker said: "And then I offered him to the sorcerers' intent."

Emilito said that it was up to the sorcerers' intent to decide not only whether Manfred lived or died, but whether Manfred would be a dog or something else. He lived and became something more than a dog.

"The same thing happened to you," he continued. "Maybe that's why the two of you got along so well. The nagual found you spiritually dehydrated, ready to make a shambles of your life. Since he was in the drive-in movie with Nelida, it was up to them to offer you to the sorcerers' intent, which they did."

"How did they offer me to the sorcerers' intent?" I asked.

"Didn't they already tell you?" he asked, surprised.

I considered for a moment before replying, "I don't think so."

"The nagual and Nelida called intent out loud, no doubt right there by the concession stand, and announced that they were putting their lives on the line for you without hesitation or regrets; without holding anything back. And both of them knew at once that they couldn't take you with them at that time, but would have to follow you around wherever you went. So you can say now that the sorcerers' intent took you in. The nagual's and Nelida's invocation worked. Look where you are! Talking to yours truly."

He looked at me to see if I was following his argument. I stared back with a silent plea for a more precise elucidation of the sorcerers' intent. He shifted to a more personal level and said that if he would take all the things I had said to Clara about myself as an example of intending, he would conclude that my intent is one of total defeat. He said that I had, in a sustained fashion, always intended to be a crazy, desperate loser.

"Clara told me everything you told her about yourself," he said, clicking his tongue: "For instance, I would say that you jumped into that arena in Japan not to demonstrate your martial arts skills, but to prove to the world that your intent is to lose."

He pounced on me, saying that everything I did was tainted by defeat. Therefore the most important thing I had to do now was to set up a new intent. He explained that this new intent was called sorcerers' intent because it isn't just the intent of doing something new, but the intent of joining something already established: an intent that reaches out to us through thousands of years of human toil.

He said that in that sorcerers' intent there wasn't room for defeat, for sorcerers have only one path open to them: to succeed in whatever they do. But in order to have such a powerful and clear view, sorcerers have to reset their total being, and that takes both understanding and power. Understanding comes from recapitulating their lives, and power gathers from their impeccable acts.

Emilito looked at me and tapped his gourd. He explained that in his gourd he had stored his impeccable feelings, and that he had given me that sorcerers' intent to drink in order to counteract my defeatist attitude and prepare me for his instruction. He said something else, but I couldn't pay attention to him; his voice began to make me feel drowsy. My body got heavy all of a sudden. As I focused on his face, I saw only a whitish haze, like fog in the twilight. I heard him tell me to lie down and cast out my ethereal net by gradually relaxing my muscles.

I knew what he wanted me to do and automatically followed his instructions. I lay down and began moving my awareness from my feet upward to my ankles, calves, knees, thighs, abdomen and back. Then I relaxed my arms, shoulders, neck and head. As I moved my awareness to the various parts of my body, I felt myself become more and more drowsy and heavy.

Then the caretaker ordered me to make small counterclockwise circles with my eyes allowing them to roll back and up into my head. I continued relaxing until my breathing became slow and rhythmic, expanding and contracting by itself. I was concentrating on the lulling waves of my breathing, when he whispered that I should move my awareness out of my forehead to a place as far above me as I could, and there make a small opening.

"What kind of opening?" I muttered.

"Just an opening. A hole."

"A hole into what?"

"A hole into the nothingness your net is suspended on," he replied. "If you can move your awareness outside your body, you'll realize that there is blackness all around you. Try to pierce that blackness; make a hole in it."

"I don't think I can," I said, tensing up.

"Of course you can," he assured me. "Remember, sorcerers are never defeated, they can only succeed."

He leaned toward me and in a whisper said that after I had made the opening, I should roll my body up like a scroll and allow myself to be catapulted along a line extending from the crown of my head into the blackness.

"But I'm lying down," I protested feebly. "The crown of my head is nearly against the ground. Shouldn't I be standing up?"

"The blackness is all around us," he said. "Even if we are standing on our heads, it is still there."

He changed his tone to a hard command and ordered me to place my concentration on the hole I had just made and to let my thoughts and feelings flow through that opening. Again my muscles tightened because I hadn't made any hole. The caretaker urged me to relax; to let go and act and feel as if I had made that hole.

"Throw out everything that's inside you," he said. "Allow your thoughts, feelings and memories to flow out."

As I relaxed and released the tension from my body, I felt a surge of energy push through me. I was being turned inside out: Everything was being pulled out from the top of my head; rushing along a line like an inverted cascading waterfall. At the end of that line, I sensed an opening.

"Let yourself go even deeper," he whispered in my ear. "Offer your whole being to nothingness."

I did my best to follow his suggestions. Whatever thoughts arose in my mind instantly joined the cascade at the top of my head. I vaguely heard the caretaker say that if I wanted to move, I only needed to give myself the directive and the line would pull me wherever I wanted to go. Before I could give myself the command, I felt a gentle but persistent tugging on my left side. I relaxed and allowed this sensation to continue. At first, only my head seemed to be pulled to the left, then the rest of my body slowly rolled to the left. I felt as if I were falling sideways, yet

I sensed that my body had not moved at all. I heard a dull sound behind my neck, and saw the opening grow larger. I wanted to crawl inside, to squeeze through it and disappear. I experienced a deep stirring inside me. My awareness began moving along the line at the crown of my head and slipped through the opening.

I felt as if I were inside a gigantic cavern. It's velvety walls enveloped me. It was dark, but my attention was caught by a luminescent dot. It flickered on and off like a beacon, appearing and disappearing whenever I focused on it. The area in front of me became illuminated by an intense light, then gradually everything became dark again. My breathing seemed to cease altogether and no thoughts or images disturbed the blackness. I no longer felt my body. My last thought was that I had dissolved.

I felt a hollow popping sound. My thoughts returned to me all at once, tumbling down on me like a mountain of debris, and with them came the awareness of the hardness of the ground, the stiffness of my body, and some insect biting my ankle. I opened my eyes and looked around: The caretaker had taken my shoes and socks off, and was poking the soles of my feet with a stick to revive me. I wanted to tell him what had happened, but he shook his head.

"Don't talk or move until you're solid again," he warned.

He told me to close my eyes and breathe with my abdomen.

I lay on the ground until I felt I had regained my strength, then I sat up and leaned my back against a tree trunk.

"You opened a crack in the blackness and your double slid to the left and then went through it," the caretaker said before I had asked him anything.

I admitted, "I definitely felt a force pulling me, and I saw an intense light."

"That force was your double coming out," he said, as if he knew exactly what I was referring to. "And the light was the eye of the double. Since you've been recapitulating for over a year, you've also been, at the same time, casting your energy lines; and now they're beginning to move by themselves. But because you're still involved in talking and thinking, those energy lines don't move as easily and completely as they are going to someday."

I had no idea what he meant when he said that I had been casting my energy lines as I recapitulated. I asked him to explain.

"What's there to explain?" he said. "It's a matter of energy. "The more energy you call back through recapitulating, the easier it is for that recovered energy to nourish your double. Sending energy to the double is what we call casting your energy lines. Someone who sees energy will see it as lines coming out of the physical body."

I asked, "But what does that mean to someone like me who doesn't see?"

"The greater your energy," he explained, "the greater your capacity to perceive extraordinary things."

"I think what has happened to me is that the greater my energy becomes, the crazier I get," I said without trying to be facetious.

"Don't run yourself down in such a casual manner," he remarked: "Perception is the ultimate mystery because it's totally unexplainable. Sorcerers as human beings are perceiving creatures, but what they perceive is neither good nor evil. Everything is just perception. If human beings, through discipline, can perceive more than is normally permitted, more power to them. Do you see what I mean?"

He refused to say one more word about it. Instead, he took me through the house then out the front door to my tree. He pointed to the top branches and said that because this particular tree had living quarters in it, it was equipped with a lightning rod.

"In this area, lightning is sudden and dangerous," he said. "There are lightning storms even without a drop of rain. So when it does rain, or when there are too many cumulonimbus clouds in the sky, go to the tree house."

"When there are too many what in the sky?" I asked.

Emilito laughed and gently patted me on the back.

He said, "When the nagual Julian put me in a tree house, he told me the same thing; but at that time I didn't dare to ask him what he meant, and he didn't tell me either. I found out much later that he meant thunderclouds."

He laughed at my look of dismay. "Is there any danger of lightning striking the tree?" I asked.

"Well, there is, but your tree is safe," he replied. "Now get up there while it's still light."

Before I hoisted myself up, he gave me a sack of walnuts that were cracked, but not shelled.

He said that if I had to be a tree dweller, I had to eat like a squirrel; little bits at a time and nothing at night.

That was fine with me, I told him, because I never really liked to eat anyway.

"Do you like to shit?" he asked, chuckling: "I hope not, because the worst part about living in a tree house is when you have to evacuate your bowels. Human excrement is difficult to deal with. My philosophy is that the less you have of it, the better off you are."

He found his statements so utterly funny that he doubled over laughing. Still chuckling, he turned around and left me to ponder over his philosophy.

## Chapter 19

That night it rained, and there was thunder and lightning. But there is no way on earth for me to explain what it was like to be in a tree house while bolt after bolt of lightning ripped through the sky and fell on the trees around me. My fear was indescribable. I screamed even harder than I had the first night when I felt my platform bed tilting. It was an animal fright, and it paralyzed me. The only thought that occurred to me was that I am a natural coward, and when tension is too great I always pass out.

I didn't regain consciousness until around noon the next day. When I let myself down, I found Emilito waiting for me; sitting on a low branch with his feet nearly touching the ground.

"You look like a bat from hell," he commented. "What happened to you last night?"

"I nearly died of fright," I said.

I wasn't going to pretend toughness or play at being in control. I felt like I must have looked; like a living rag.

I said to him that for the first time in my life, I had commiserated with soldiers in battle: I had felt the same fear they must experience when bombs explode all around them.

"I disagree," he said. "Your fear last night was even more intense. Whatever was shooting at you wasn't human. So at the level of the double, it was a gigantic fear."

"Please, Emilito, explain to me what you mean by that."

"Your double is about to become aware; so under conditions of stress, like last night, it becomes partially aware, but also totally frightened. It's not used to perceiving the world. Your body and your mind are accustomed to it, but your double isn't."

I was certain that if I had been prepared for the storm, I would have relaxed. If my fear and my thoughts about the storm hadn't interfered, some force inside me would have come completely out of my body, and perhaps might have even stood up, moved around, or come down from the tree. What frightened me most was the sensation of being cooped up; trapped inside my body.

"When we enter into absolute darkness where there are no distractions," the caretaker said, "the double takes over. It stretches it's ethereal limbs, opens it's luminous eye, and looks around. Sometimes experiencing it can be even more frightening than what you felt last night."

"The double won't be that frightening," I assured him. "I'm ready for it."

"You aren't ready for anything yet," he retorted. "I'm sure your screams last night could have been heard all the way to Tucson."

His comment annoyed me. There was something about him I didn't like, but I couldn't pinpoint what it was. Perhaps it was because he looked so odd. He wasn't manly. He seemed to be the mere shadow of a man, and yet he was deceptively strong. But what really bothered me was that he didn't let me push him around, and that irritated my competitive side no end.

In a surge of anger I asked him belligerently, "How dare you run me down every time I say something you don't like!"

The moment I said that I regretted it, and apologized profusely for my aggressiveness.

"I don't know why I get so irritated with you," I ended up confessing.

"Don't feel bad," he said. "It's because you sense something about me that you can't explain. As you yourself put it, I'm not manly."

"I didn't say that," I protested.

From his look, he obviously didn't believe me. "Of course you did," he insisted. "You said it to my double just a moment ago. My double never ever makes mistakes or misinterprets things."

My nervousness and embarrassment reached their peak. I didn't know what to say. My face was red and my body trembled. I couldn't understand what had caused my exaggerated reaction. The caretaker's voice broke into my thoughts.

"You are reacting like that because your double is perceiving my double," he said: "Your physical body is frightened because it's gates are opening, and new perceptions are flowing in. If you think you feel bad now, imagine how much worse it'll be when all your gates are open."

He spoke so convincingly that I wondered if he was right.

"Animals and infants," he continued, "have no problem perceiving the double, and they are often disturbed by it."

I mentioned that animals didn't particularly like me and that, except for Manfred, the feeling was mutual.

"Animals don't like you," he clarified, "because some of your body gates have never been completely closed and your double is struggling to come out. Be prepared. For now that you're deliberately intending it, they're going to fling open. One of these days your double is going to awake all at once, and you might find yourself across the patio without having walked over."

I had to laugh, mostly out of nervousness and at the absurdity of what he was suggesting.

"And what about children, especially infants?" he asked. "Don't they holler when you pick them up?"

They usually did, but I didn't tell the caretaker.

"Babies like me," I lied, knowing too well that the few times I had been around infants, they had begun to cry as soon as I came near them. I had always told myself that it was because I lacked a maternal instinct.

The caretaker shook his head in disbelief. I challenged him to explain how animals and infants could sense the double when I didn't know it existed myself. In fact, until Clara and the nagual told me about it, I had never heard of such a thing. Nor had I ever met anyone who knew about it. He rebuffed me, saying that what animals and infants sense has nothing to do with knowing, but with the fact that they have the equipment to sense it: their open gates.

He added that those gates are permanently receptive in animals, but that human beings close theirs as soon as they begin to talk and think and their rational side takes over.

Thus far, I had given the caretaker my full attention because Clara had told me that no matter who might be talking to me and no matter what he might be saying, the exercise is to listen. But the more I listened to Emilito, the more annoyed I became, until I found myself in the throes of a bona-fide rage.

"I don't believe any of this," I said. "Why do you say that you're my teacher, anyway? You still haven't made that clear."

The caretaker laughed. "I certainly didn't volunteer for the post," he said.

"Then who appointed you?"

After a thoughtful pause, he said, "It's a long chain of circumstances. The first link of this chain was set when the nagual found you naked with your legs up in the air." He burst out laughing, with a shrill birdlike sound.

I resented immensely his insulting sense of humor. "Get to the point, Emilito, and tell me what's going on," I yelled.

"I'm sorry, I thought you'd enjoy an account of your doings, but I see I was wrong. We, on the other hand, have enjoyed ourselves immensely with your antics. For years we have laughed at the tribulations and hardships John Michael Abelar inherited because he walked into the wrong room and found a naked girl, when all he wanted to do was to piss." He doubled up laughing.

I didn't see the humor of it. My fury was so gigantic that I wanted to lash out at him with a few punches and well-placed kicks. He looked at me and moved back, undoubtedly sensing I was about to explode.

"Don't you find it hilarious that John Michael had to go through hell with the problem he inherited, just because he wanted to piss? The nagual and I have that in common: Whereas I only found a half-dead puppy, he found a completely crazed girl; and we both are responsible for them for the rest of our lives. Seeing what happened to us, the members of our party got so scared that they vowed never to take another leak again before they checked and rechecked the place."

He burst out laughing so hard he had to pace back and forth to keep from choking.

Seeing that I wasn't even smiling, he quieted down.

"Well... let's continue then," he said, composing himself. "Once the first link was cast; when he found you with your legs up, it was the nagual's duty to mark you, which he promptly did. Then he had to keep track of you. He used Clara and Nelida to help him. The first time he and Nelida came to visit you was the summer you had graduated from high school, and worked as a camp counselor in a mountain resort."

"Is it true that he found me through an energy channel?" I asked, trying not to sound patronizing.

"Absolutely. He had marked your double with some of his energy so he could follow your movements," he said.

"I don't remember ever seeing them," I said.

"That's because you always believed you were having recurring dreams. But the two of them actually came to see you in the flesh. They continued to visit you many times over the years, especially Nelida. Then, when you came to live in Arizona following Nelida's suggestions, all of us had a chance to visit you."

"Wait a minute. This is getting too bizarre. How could I follow her suggestion when I don't even remember meeting her?"

"Believe me, she kept telling you to live in Arizona, and you did; but of course you thought you were deciding it yourself."

As the caretaker talked, my mind flashed back to that period of my life. I remembered thinking that Arizona was the place where I should be. I did the southern horizon gazing technique to decide where to get a job, and I received the strongest feeling that I should head for Tucson. I even had a dream in which someone was telling me I should work in a bookstore. I wasn't fond of books and it was odd that I should be working with them, but when I got to Tucson I went directly to a bookstore with a 'Help Wanted' sign. I took the job typing up order forms, working the cash register, and shelving books.

"Whoever came to see you," Emilito went on, "always pulled your double, so you have only a vague dreamlike memory of us with the exception of Nelida. You know her as you know the back of your hand."

So many people came into that bookstore, but I vaguely remembered an elegantly dressed, beautiful woman who came in once and talked to me in a friendly way. It was so unusual because no one else paid any attention to me. She might very well have been Nelida.

At a deep level everything Emilito had said made sense, but to my rational mind it seemed so far-fetched that I would have to be crazy to believe him.

"What you're saying is pure horse manure," I said, more defensively than I had intended.

My harsh reaction didn't perturb him in the least.

He stretched his arms above his head and rotated them in circles. "If what I said is really just a pile of manure, I dare you to explain what's happening to you," he challenged with a grin: "And don't try to be a little girl with me and get all weepy and flustered."

I heard my cracking voice yell, "You're full of shit, you God damn..." but my burning fury ended right then.

I couldn't believe I was shouting profanities. Immediately I began to apologize, saying that I was not accustomed to shouting or using foul language. I assured him that I had been reared in a most civil way, by a well-mannered mother who wouldn't dream of raising her voice.

The caretaker laughed and lifted a hand to stop me. "Enough apologizing," he said: "It's your double that's talking. It's always direct and to the point, and since you have never allowed it expression, it is full of hatred and bitterness."

He explained that at that moment my double was extremely unstable due to being bombarded by thunder and lightning, but especially due to the events of five days ago when Nelida pushed me into the left hallway so I could begin the sorcerers' crossing.

"Five days ago!" I gasped. "You mean I was hanging in the tree for two days and two nights?"

"You were there exactly two days and three nights," he said with a malevolent smirk. "We took turns hoisting ourselves up there to see if you were all right. You were out but doing fine, so we left you alone."

"But why was I strapped that way?"

"You failed miserably trying to accomplish a maneuver we call the abstract flight or the sorcerers' crossing," he said. "The attempt depleted your energy reserves."

He clarified that it wasn't actually a failure on my part, but rather a premature attempt that had ended in complete disaster.

"What would have happened if I had succeeded?" I asked.

He assured me that success would not have put me in a more advantageous position but that it would have served as a point of departure; a sort of lure, or a beacon that would have accurately marked the way for a future time when I would have to make the final flight all by myself.

"You are now using the energy of all of us," he went on. "We are all compelled to help you. In fact, you're using the energy of all the sorcerers that have preceded us and once lived in this house. You're living off their magic. It is exactly as if you were lying on a magic carpet that takes you to incredible places; places that exist only in the magical carpet's path."

"But I still don't understand why I am here," I said. "Is it just because the nagual John Michael Abelar made a mistake and found me?"

"No, it's not quite that simple," he said, looking at me squarely: "In fact, John Michael isn't really your nagual. There is a new nagual and a new era. You are a member of the new nagual's party."

"What are you saying, Emilito? What new party? Who decides that?"

"Power. The spirit. That boundless force out there decides all that. For us, the proof that you belong to the new era is your total similarity with Nelida. She was in her youth just like you are now; to the point that she, too, used up all her reserve energy when she first attempted the abstract flight. And just like you, she nearly died."

"You mean I could have actually died attempting it, Emilito?"

"Certainly. Not because the sorcerers' flight is so dangerous, but because you are so unstable.

Someone else doing the same thing would have merely gotten a bellyache, but not you. You, like Nelida, have to exaggerate everything, so you nearly died. After that, the only way to restore you was by leaving you up in the tree off the ground for whatever time it took for you to come to your senses. There was nothing else we could have done."

Incredible as it sounded, who had happened gradually began making sense to me. Something had gone dreadfully wrong during my encounter with Nelida. Something in me had been out of control.

"I let you drink from my intent gourd yesterday to find out if your double is still unstable," Emilito explained: "It is! The only way to buttress your double is with activity, and like it or not, I'm the only one who can guide your double in this activity. This is the reason I'm your teacher; or rather, I am the teacher of your double."

"What do you think happened to me with Nelida?" I asked, still uncertain as to what exactly went wrong.

"You mean what didn't happen," he corrected me. "You were supposed to cross the chasm gently and harmoniously and wake up your double to full awareness in the left hallway."

He went into a convoluted explanation of what they had hoped would happen.

Under Nelida's direction I was supposed to shift my awareness back and forth between my body and my double. This shifting was to have erased all the natural barriers developed through life; barriers that separate the physical body from the double. The sorcerers' plan, he said, was to allow me to get acquainted with all of them in person since my double already knew them. But because of my craziness, I didn't cross gently and harmoniously. In other words, the awareness my double acquired had nothing to do with the daily awareness of my body. This resulted in a sensation that I was flying and couldn't stop. All my reserve energy drained out of me without any restraint and my double went berserk.

"I regret to tell you this, Emilito, but I don't understand what you're talking about," I said.

"The sorcerers' crossing consists of shifting the awareness of daily life, which the physical body possesses, to the double," he replied: "Listen carefully. The awareness of daily life is what we want to shift from the body to the double. The awareness of daily life!"

"But what does that mean, Emilito?"

"It means that we are after sobriety, measure, control. We are not interested in craziness and helter-skelter results."

"But what does it mean in my case?" I insisted.

"You indulged in your excesses and didn't shift your awareness of daily life to your double."

"What did I do?"

"You imbued your double with an unknown, uncontrollable awareness."

"Regardless of what you say, Emilito, it's impossible for me to believe all this," I said. "In fact, it's really inconceivable."

"Naturally, it's inconceivable," he agreed. "But, if you're after something conceivable, you don't have to sit here holding on to your doubts shouting at me. Something conceivable for you is to be naked and with your legs up."

He flashed a lecherous smile that gave me the chills. But before I could defend myself, he changed his expression to one of utter seriousness.

He said softly, "To draw out the double gently and harmoniously, and shift to it our awareness of daily life is something without parallel. To do that is something inconceivable. Now let's do something thoroughly conceivable. Let's go and eat breakfast."

## Chapter 20

My third night in the tree house was like camping out. I simply slipped into the sleeping bag, fell into a sound sleep and woke up at dawn. Lowering myself down was easier too. I had gotten the knack of moving the ropes and pulleys without straining my back and shoulders.

"This is the last day of your transition phase," Emilito announced after we had eaten breakfast. "You have much work to do. But you're fairly industrious, so it won't be too difficult."

"What do you mean by a transition phase?"

"Yours is a six-day transition from the last time you talked to Clara till now. Don't forget, you have spent six nights in the tree; three during which you were unconscious; the other three nights you were aware. Sorcerers always count events in sets of threes."

"Do I also have to do things in sets of threes?" I asked.

"Certainly," he said, "You're Nelida's heir, aren't you? You're the continuation of her line."

He gave me a sly grin and added. "But for now you have to do whatever I do. Remember, for however long it takes, I'm your guide."

Hearing Emilito say that made me swallow hard. Whereas I had felt a twitch of pride whenever Nelida included me with her in any of her statements, I didn't like it one bit when the caretaker joined me with him.

Noticing my discomfort, he assured me that forces beyond anyone's control had placed us together to fulfill a specific task. Therefore, we had to abide by the rule because that was the way things were done in his sorcery tradition.

"Clara prepared your physical side by teaching you to recapitulate, and by loosening your gates with the sorcery passes," he explained: "My job is to help solidify your double, and then teach it 'stalking.'"

He assured me that no one else could teach me how to stalk with the double except himself.

"Can you explain what stalking with the double is?" I asked.

"Of course I can, but it would not be wise to talk about it because stalking means doing, not talking about doing. Besides, you already know what it means since you have done it."

"Where and when have I done it?"

"The first night you slept in the tree house," Emilito said, "when you were about to die of fright. On that occasion your reason was at a loss as to how to handle the situation, so circumstances forced you to depend on your double. It was your double that came to your rescue. It flowed out of the gates that your fear had thrown wide open. I call that stalking with the double. The nagual and Nelida are the masters of the double and they'll give you the finishing touches," he went on, "provided I do the rough work. So it's up to me to get you ready for them, just like it was up to Clara to get you ready for me. And unless I get you ready, they won't be able to do anything at all with you."

"Why couldn't Clara continue being my teacher?" I asked, taking a sip of water.

He peered at me, then he blinked like a bird. "It's the rule to have two ushers," Emilito said. "Every one of us had two ushers, including myself. But, my final teacher was a nagual. That is also the rule."

Emilito explained that the nagual Julian Grau was not only his teacher, but the teacher of each of the sixteen members of the household. The nagual Julian, together with his own teacher - another nagual by the name of Elias Abelar - had found each of the members one by one; and helped them on their way to freedom.

"Why is it that the names Grau and Abelar keep on recurring?"

"Those are power names," Emilio explained: "Every generation of sorcerers uses them, with each nagual's name following an alternate-generation rule. That means that John Michael Abelar inherited the name from Elias Abelar; but the new nagual, the one that will come after John Michael Abelar, will inherit the name Grau from Julian Grau. That's the rule for the naguals."

"Why did Nelida say that I am an Abelar?"

"Because you are just like her, and the rule says that you will inherit her last name or her first name; or, if you wish, you can inherit both names. She herself inherited both names from her predecessor."

"Who decided on that rule and why have it in the first place?" I asked. "The rule is a code by which sorcerers live to keep from becoming arbitrary or whimsical. They have to adhere to the precepts set up for them because the precepts were made by the spirit itself. This is what I was told and I have no reason to doubt it."

Emilito said that his other teacher was a woman named Talia. He described her as the most exquisite woman anyone could ever imagine existing on this earth.

"I think Nelida is the most exquisite being," I blurted out, but stopped myself from saying more: Otherwise I would have sounded just like Emilito; totally overcome with absolute devotion.

Emilito leaned across the kitchen table and with the air of a conspirator about to reveal a secret said, "I agree with you. "But wait until Nelida really gets hold of you: Then you'll love her as if there's no tomorrow."

His words didn't surprise me for he had correctly assessed something I already felt: I loved Nelida as if I had known her forever; as if she were the mother I never really had. I told him that she was to me the kindest, most beautiful and impeccable being I had ever encountered; this in spite of the fact that until a few days ago I didn't even know she existed.

"But of course you knew her," Emilito protested. "Every one of us came to see you, and Nelida saw you more often than anyone. When you came here with Clara, Nelida had taught you endless things already."

I asked uneasily, "What do you think she's taught me?"

He scratched the top of his head for a moment, then said, "She taught you, for example, to call your double for advice."

"You say that I did that during my first night in the tree house, but I don't know what I did."

"Of course you do. You have always done it. What about your technique of relaxing and looking at the southern horizon to ask for advice?"

The moment he said this, something cleared in my mind. I had completely forgotten about some dreams I had had over the years in which a beautiful, mysterious lady used to talk to me and leave gifts for me on my bedside table. Once I dreamt that she left an opal ring and another time a gold bracelet with a tiny heart charm. Sometimes she would sit on the edge of my bed and tell me things that upon awakening I would begin to do like gazing at the southern horizon; or wearing certain colors; or even styling my hair a certain way that was more becoming. When I felt sad or alone, she would soothe and comfort me and whisper sweet nothings in my ear.

The thing I remember most vividly was that she told me that she loved me for what I was. She used those exact words, "I love you for what you are." Then she would rub my back where I was tense or stroke my head and tousle my hair. I realized that it was because of her that I didn't want my mother to touch me. I didn't want anyone to touch me except that lady. When I woke up after any of these dreams, my feeling was that nothing in the world mattered as long as that lady held me in her heart.

I always thought that those were my fantasy dreams. Having gone to Catholic schools, I even thought perhaps she was the Blessed Virgin or one of the saints that kept on appearing to me. I had been taught that all good things come from them. At one time, I even thought she was my fairy godmother, but never in my wildest imagination did I think that such a being really existed.

"That was not the Virgin or a saint, you idiot," Emilito laughed. "That was our Nelida. And she really did give you those jewels. You'll find them in the box under the platform in the tree house. They were given to her by her predecessor. Now she passes them on to you."

"You mean that opal ring really exists?" I gasped.

Emilito nodded. "Go see for yourself. Nelida told me to tell you..."

Before he could finish his statement, I ran out of the kitchen to the front of the house. With record speed, I hoisted myself up to the tree house. There, in a silk box hidden under the platform, were exquisite jewels. I recognized the opal ring that had red fire in it and the gold charm bracelet; and there were other rings, a gold watch, and a diamond necklace. I took out the gold bracelet with the heart and put it on, and for the first time since Clara left, I found my eyes filled with tears. They were not tears of self-pity or sadness, but of sheer joy and elation because now I knew beyond a doubt that the beautiful lady had not been merely a dream.

I called out Nelida's name and thanked her at the top of my voice for all her favors. I promised to change, to be different and do whatever Emilito told me, anything, as long as I could see and talk to her again.

When I let myself down I found Emilito standing by the door in the kitchen. I showed him the bracelet and rings and asked him how it was possible for me to have seen the same jewels years ago in my dreams.

"Sorcerers are extremely mysterious beings," Emilito said, "because most of the time they act from the energy of their double. Nelida is a great stalker. She stalks in dreams. Her power is so unique that she can not only transport herself, but bring things with her. That's how she could visit you, and that's why her name is Abelar. Abelar to us means stalker, and Grau means dreamer. All the sorcerers in this house are either dreamers or stalkers."

"What's the difference, Emilito?"

"Stalkers plan and act out their plans. They connive and invent, and change things whether they are awake or in dreams. Dreamers move onward without any plan or thought. They jump into the reality of the world or into the reality of dreams."

"All this is incomprehensible to me, Emilito," I said, examining the opal ring in the light.

"I'm guiding you so it will become comprehensible," Emilito replied. "And to help me guide you, you must do what I tell you. Everything I will say, do, or recommend that you do is either the exact replica of what my two teachers told me or it is something patterned on what they said."

He leaned closer to me. "You may not believe this," he whispered, "but you and I are basically alike."

"In what way, Emilito?"

"We are both a bit insane," he said with a most serious face. "Pay close attention and remember this. In order for you and me to be sane, we have to work like demons at balancing, not the body or the mind, but the double."

I saw no point in arguing or agreeing with him, but as I sat down at the kitchen table again, I asked him, "How can we be sure that we're balancing the double?"

"By opening our gates," he replied. "The first gate is in the sole of the foot, at the base of the big toe."

He reached under the table and grabbed my left foot and in one incredibly swift maneuver, he removed my shoe and sock. Then using his index finger and thumb as a vise, he pressed the round protuberance of my big toe at the sole of my foot and the toe joint at the top of my foot. The sharp pain and the surprise made me scream. I yanked my foot away so forcefully that I bumped my knee on the underside of the table.

I stood up and yelled, "What the hell do you think you're doing!"

He ignored my angry outburst and said, "I'm pointing out the gates to you according to the rule, so pay close attention."

He stood up and moved around to my side.

"The second gate is the area that includes the calves and the inner part of the knee," he said bending over and stroking my legs. The third is at the sexual organs and tailbone." Before I could move away, he slid his warm hands into my crotch and lifted me up a bit as he gave me a firm squeeze.

I fought him off but he grabbed my lower back.

"The fourth and the most important is in the area of the kidneys," he said.

Unconcerned with my vexation, he pushed me down on the bench again. He moved his hands up my back. I cringed, but for Nelida's sake I let him.

"The fifth point is in between the shoulder blades," he said. "The sixth is at the base of the skull, and the seventh is at the crown of the head."

To isolate the last point, his knuckles descended hard on the very top of my head.

He moved back to his side of the table and sat down. "If our first or second centers are open, we transmit a certain kind of force that people may find intolerable," he went on: "On the other hand, if the third and fourth gates are not as closed as they are supposed to be, we transmit a certain force that people will find most appealing."

I knew for a fact that the caretaker's lower centers were wide open because I found him as obnoxious and intolerable as anyone could be. Half jokingly and partly out of guilt for feeling the way I did toward him, I admitted that people didn't take to me easily. I had always thought it was a lack of social grace for which I felt I had to compensate by being extra accommodating.

"It's only natural," he said, agreeing. "You have had the gates in your feet and calves partially open all your life. Another consequence of those lower centers being open is that you have trouble walking."

"Wait just a moment," I said, "there's nothing wrong with the way I walk. I practice martial arts. Clara told me that I move smoothly and gracefully."

At that he burst out laughing. "You can practice whatever you please," he retorted, "you still drag your feet when you walk. You have an old man's shuffle."

Emilito was worse than Clara. At least she had the grace to laugh with me, not at me. He had absolutely no sympathy for my feelings. He picked on me the way older children pick on younger, weaker ones who have no defenses.

"You're not offended, are you?" he asked, peering at me.

"Me, offended? Of course not." I was seething.

"Good. Clara assured me that you have rid yourself of most of your self-pity and self-importance through your recapitulation. Recapitulating your life, especially your sex life, has loosened some of your gates even more. The cracking sound you hear at the back of your neck is the moment when your right and left sides have separated. This leaves a gap directly in the middle of your body where the energy rises to the neck; the place where the sound is heard. Hearing that pop means that your double is about to become aware."

"What should I do when I hear it?"

"To know what to do isn't that important because there's very little we can do," he said. "We can either remain seated with our eyes shut, or we can get up and move about. The important point is to know that we are limited because our physical body controls our awareness. But if we can turn it around so that our double controls our awareness, we can do practically anything we can imagine."

He stood up and came toward me. "Now, you are not going to trick me into talking about things the way you did Clara and Nelida," he said: "You can only learn about the double by doing. I'm talking to you only because your transition phase hasn't ended yet."

He took me by the arm and without another word, he practically dragged me to the back of the house. There he positioned me under a tree, with the top of my head a few inches below a low, thick branch. He said that he was going to see if I could project out my double again, this time in full awareness, with the help of the tree.

I seriously doubted I would be able to project out anything, and I told him so. He insisted that if I intended it, my double would push out from inside me and expand beyond the boundaries of my physical body.

"What am I supposed to do, exactly?" I asked, hoping he would show me a procedure that was part of the sorcerers' rule.

He told me to close my eyes and concentrate on my breathing. As I relaxed, I was to intend a force to flow upward until I could touch the top branches with a feeling that came out of the gate in the crown of my head. He said that this was going to be fairly easy for me because I was going to use my friend the tree for support. The tree's energy, he explained, would form a matrix for my awareness to expand.

After a time of concentrating on my breath, I felt a vibrating energy rising up my back, trying to push out of the top of my head. Then something opened inside me. Every time I inhaled, a line elongated to the top of the tree. When I exhaled, the line was pulled down into my body again. The feeling of reaching the top of the tree became stronger with my every breath until I truly believed that my body expanded, becoming as tall and voluminous as the tree.

At one point, a profound affection and empathy for the tree enveloped me. It was at that same moment that something surged up my back and out my head, and I found myself viewing the world from the top branches. This sensation lasted only an instant, for it was disrupted by the caretaker's voice commanding me to come down and flow inside my body again. I felt something like a waterfall; an effervescence flowing downward entering the top of my head and filling my body with a familiar warmth.

"You don't want to stay mixed with the tree too long," he told me when I opened my eyes.

I had an overwhelming desire to embrace the tree, but the caretaker pulled me by the arm to a large boulder some distance away, where we sat down. He pointed out that aided by an outside force, in this case uniting my awareness with the tree, one can easily make the double expand. However, because it's easy, we run the risk of staying merged with the tree too long in which case we might sap the tree of the vital energy it needs to maintain itself in a strong and healthy state; or we might leave some of our own energy behind by becoming emotionally attached to the tree.

"One can merge with anything," he explained: "If whatever or whomever you merge with is strong, your energy will be enhanced as it was whenever you merged with the magician, Manfred. But if it is sick or weak, stay away. In any case, you must do the exercise sparingly because like everything else, it is a double-edged sword. Outside energy is always different from our own, often antagonistic to it."

I listened attentively to what the caretaker said.

One thing stood out from everything else, and I asked, "Tell me, Emilito, why did you call Manfred a magician?"

"That's our way of acknowledging his uniqueness. Manfred to us can not be anything else but a magician. He's more than a sorcerer. He would be a sorcerer if he had lived among his kind. He lives among human beings; and human sorcerers at that. And he is par with them. Only a consummate magician could accomplish that feat."

I asked him if I would ever see Manfred again. The caretaker crossed his index finger over his lips in such an exaggerated fashion that I kept quiet and didn't press him for an answer.

He picked up a twig and drew an oval shape on the soft ground. Then he added a horizontal line that transected it midway. Pointing to the two partitions he explained that the double is divided into a lower and an upper section which correspond roughly in the physical body to the abdomen and chest cavities. Two different currents of energy circulate in these two sections. In the lower one circulates the original energy we had while still in the womb. In the upper section circulates the thought energy which enters the body at birth with the first breath. He said that thought energy is enhanced by experience and rises upward into the head. The original energy sinks down into the genital area. Usually in life these two energies become separated in the double, causing weaknesses and unbalance in the physical body.

He drew another line, this time down the center of the elliptical shape, dividing it lengthwise into two, which, he stated, corresponds to the right and left sides of the body. These two sides also have two specific patterns of energy circulation. In the right side, energy circulates up on the frontal part of the double, and down on the back of it. On the left side, energy circulates down on the frontal part of the double, and up on the back.

He explained that the error many people make when trying to seek the double is to apply to it the rules of the physical body; seeking to train it, for example, as if it were made of muscle and bone. He assured me that there is no way to condition the double through physical exercises.

"The easiest way to resolve this problem is to separate the two," the caretaker explained: "Only when they are undeniably separate can awareness flow from one to the other. That is what sorcerers do so that they can dispense with the nonsense of rituals, incantations and elaborate breathing techniques that are supposed to unify them."

"But what about the breaths and sorcery passes that Clara taught me? Are they nonsense too?"

"No. She taught you only things that would help you separate your body and your double. Therefore, the breaths and sorcery passes are all useful for our purpose."

He said that perhaps our greatest human fallacy is to believe that our health and wellbeing is in the realm of the body when, in essence, the control of our lives is in the realm of the double. This fallacy stems from the fact that the body controls our awareness. He added that ordinarily our awareness is placed on the energy that circulates in the right side of the double, which results in our ability to think and reason and be effective in dealing with ideas and people. Sometimes accidentally, but more often due to training, awareness can shift to the energy that circulates in the left side of the double which results in behavior not so conducive to intellectual pursuits or dealing with people.

"When awareness is turned steadily to the left side of the double, the double is fleshed out and emerges. Then we are capable of performing inconceivable feats. This shouldn't be surprising because the double is our energy source. The physical body is merely the receptacle where that energy has been placed."

I asked him if there are some people who can focus their awareness on either side of the double at will.

He nodded. "Sorcerers can do that," he replied: "The day you can do that, you'll be a sorceress yourself."

He said that some people can shift their awareness to the right or the left side of the double after they have successfully completed the abstract flight simply by manipulating the flow of their breath. Such people can practice sorcery or martial arts as readily as they can manipulate intricate academic constructs. He emphasized, however, that because of the mystery and power inherent on the left; our urge to turn awareness steadily to the left it is a trap infinitely more deadly than the attractions of the world of everyday life.

"The real hope for us lies in the center," he said, touching my forehead and the center of my chest, "because in the wall that divides the two sides of the double is a hidden door that opens into a third, thin, secret compartment. Only when this door opens can one experience true freedom."

He grabbed my arm and pulled me off the rock. "Your transition time is nearly up," he said, hurrying me back into the house. "No more time for explanations. We'll leave the transition phase behind us with one hell of a bang. Come, let's go to my room."

I stopped dead in my tracks. I was no longer merely ill at ease, I felt threatened. No matter how eccentric Emilito might be; and no matter how much he talked about the ethereal double, he was still a male, and the memory of his hand grasping my private parts in the kitchen was much too vivid. I knew that it hadn't been an impersonal touch merely for the purpose of demonstration, either: I had clearly sensed his lust when he touched me.

The caretaker peered at me with cold eyes. "What the hell do you mean that you sensed my lust when I touched you?"

I could only stare back at him with my mouth gaping. He had voiced my thought verbatim. A surge of shame went through me, accompanied by a cold shiver that spread over my entire body. I blurted out some lame apologies. I told him that I used to fantasize that I was so beautiful that all men found me irresistible.

"To recapitulate means to burn all that," he said. "You haven't done a thorough job. This, no doubt, is the reason you cracked while attempting the sorcerers' crossing."

He turned around and walked away from the house.

He said, "It's not time yet to show you what I had in mind. No. You need to do much more work to clean up your act. Much more. And from now on, you'll have to be twice as careful, too; you will have to run twice as hard because you can not afford any more slip-ups."

## Chapter 21

Emilito ended my transition period right then; attacking me for having misread his thoughts. From then on he dropped his whimsical air of a prankster and became a most demanding taskmaster. There were no more lengthy explanations of the double or other aspects of sorcery, hence no more solace stemming from intellectual understanding. There was only work; pragmatic and demanding. Every day for months from morning until night, I would be steeped in activity until, exhausted, I went to sleep in the tree house.

Besides continuing to practice kung fu and working in the garden, I was put in charge of cooking lunch and dinner. Emilito showed me how to light the stove; and how to prepare some simple dishes - a thing that my mother had tried to do but had failed completely. Because I had other duties, I would usually put all the ingredients into one pot on the stove to cook, then come back later when it was time to eat. After several weeks of making the same stew, I got a perfect blend of flavors. Emilito said that I turned out to be, if not a fairly good cook, at least one whose food is edible. I took this as a compliment, because nothing I had made in my entire life, from poundcake to meatloaf, had been edible.

We ate our meals in total silence; a silence that he would break if he wanted to tell me something. But, if I wanted to converse, he would tap his stomach to remind me of his delicate digestion.

Most of my time was still devoted to recapitulating. Emilito had instructed me to go over the same events and people I had recapitulated before, except that this time I was to do it in the tree house. Hoisting myself up to the tree house every day made me lose my initial fear of heights. I relished being outdoors, especially in the late afternoons; the time I set aside for this particular task. Under Clara's supervision, I had recapitulated in a dark cave. The mood of that recapitulation was heavy, earthy, somber and often terrifying. My recapitulation under Emilito's guidance in the tree house was dominated by a new mood. It was light, airy, transparent. I remembered things with an unprecedented clarity. With my added energy, or the influence of being off the ground, I was able to remember infinitely more detail. Everything was more vivid and pronounced, and less charged with the self-pity, moroseness, fear or regret that had characterized my previous recapitulation.

Clara had asked me to write on the ground the names of each person I had encountered in my life, then erase it with my hand after I had breathed in the memories associated with that person. Emilito, on the other hand, had me write the names of people on dry leaves and then light a match to them after I had finished breathing in everything I had recollected about them. He had given me a special device to incinerate the leaves. It was a twelve-inch metal cube with neatly perforated, round, small holes on all sides. Half of one side of the box was fitted with a glass, like a tiny window. There was a sharp pin in the center of the underside of the lid. On the side with the window, there was a lever that slid in and out where one could fasten a match and strike it from the outside against a rough surface inside the box after the lid was closed.

"In order to avoid starting a blaze," Emilito explained, "you have to pierce the dry leaf with the pin on the lid so when you close the lid, it will be suspended in the middle of the box. Then look inside the box through it's little glass window and, using the handle, strike your match and place it under the leaf and watch it burn to cinders."

As I gazed at the flames consuming each leaf, I was to draw in the energy of the fire with my eyes; always being careful not to inhale the smoke. He instructed me to put the ashes from the leaves into a metal urn and the used matches into a paper sack. Each of the matchsticks represented the husk of the person whose name had been written on the dry leaf that had been disintegrated by that particular match. When the urn was full, I was to empty it from the top of the tree, letting the wind scatter the ashes in all directions. I was instructed to lower the burnt matchsticks in a paper bag on a separate rope; and Emilito, handling the bag with a pair of tongs, would put it in a special basket he always used for that purpose. He was careful never to touch the matches or the bag. My best guess was that he buried them somewhere in the hills, or perhaps tossed them in the stream to let the water disintegrate them. Disposing of the matches, he had assured me, was the final act in the process of breaking the ties with the world.

After about three months of recapitulating in the afternoons, Emilito abruptly changed my work schedule.

"I'm tired of eating your boring stew," he said one morning as he hoisted up some food he had prepared for me.

I was overjoyed, not only because I might have extra time to spend in the tree house, but because I genuinely liked eating food cooked by someone else.

The first time I tasted his cooking, I had the total certainty that Clara had never cooked the food she had served me. The real cook had always been Emilito. He made things with a special zest that always made whatever he cooked a delight to eat.

Every morning around seven, Emilito would be standing at the foot of the tree ready to hoist up some food he had packed in a basket. After eating breakfast in the tree house, I usually went back to my recapitulation, which, once I had been freed from the dread of uncovering something unpleasant, was now more than ever like an exciting adventure of examination and insight. The more of my past I breathed in, the lighter and freer I felt.

As I broke off old, past links, I began forming new ones. In this instance, my new links were with the unique being that was guiding me. Emilito, although stern and determined to make sure that I kept my nose to the grindstone, was in essence as light as a feather. At first, I was surprised that both he and Clara had claimed that I was like them. But upon a deeper examination, I had to agree that I was as ponderous as Clara and as flighty, if not as insane, as Emilito.

Once I became accustomed to his oddity, I found no difference between Emilito and Clara, or the nagual, or even Manfred. My feelings for them overlapped so that I began to feel affection for Emilito and very naturally one day I began to rejoice in calling him Emilito. The first time we met, Emilito had said to me that his name was Emilito - the Spanish diminutive for Emilio. It had seemed ridiculous to me to call a mature man 'little Emilio,' so I did it reluctantly. But as I got to know him better, I couldn't conceive of addressing him in any other way.

Whenever I thought about the four of them, they merged in my mind. But, I could never merge them with Nelida. She was special to me and I held her forever apart and above everyone else even though I had seen her only once in the real world. I felt that the day I had focused my eyes on her, the bond that already existed between us became formalized. That single encounter in the daily world awareness, no matter how fleeting, had been enough to make that bond indestructible and everlasting.

One day after we had our lunch in the kitchen, Emilito handed me a package. As I held it against me, I knew it was from Nelida. I tried to find a return address on it but there was none. Attached to the package was a cartoon drawing of a woman puckering up her lips to kiss. Inside, written in Nelida's handwriting, were these words. 'Kiss the tree.' I ripped open the package and found a pair of soft leather ankle-high shoes that laced up the front. The soles were fitted with rubber cleats.

I held them up for Emilito to see. I couldn't conceive what they were used for.

"Those are your tree-climbing shoes," Emilito said, nodding in recognition: "Nelida knew you have an affinity for trees in spite of your fear of falling. The cleats are made of rubber so you won't damage the tree bark."

The arrival of the package seemed to be the signal for Emilito to give me detailed instructions on tree climbing. So far, I had only used the harness to hoist myself up to the tree house; although sometimes I dozed off or slept in the harness as if I were lying strapped in a hammock. I had never actually climbed the tree except for one very low branch from which I had hung while propping my feet on another branch.

"Now is the time to find out what you're made of," he said in a no-nonsense tone. "Your new task won't be difficult, but if you don't give it your total concentration, it could prove to be fatal. You need to apply all your newly stored energy to learn what I have to show you."

He told me to wait for him by the grove of tall trees in front of the house. Moments later, Emilito met me, carrying a long flat box. He opened it and took out several safety belts and lengths of soft rock-climbing rope. He strapped a belt to my waist and affixed another, longer belt to it by means of safety hooks used in mountaineering. Putting a similar belt around himself, he showed me how to climb a tree by hooking the longer belt around the tree trunk and using it as a support to move up along the trunk. He climbed with swift and precise movements. Along the way, he looped ropes on the branches to secure his position. The end result was a web of ropes that allowed him to move safely around the tree from one side to the other.

He came down as agilely as he had climbed up.

"Be sure all the ropes and knots are secure," he said. "You can't have any major mistakes here. Little mistakes are correctable: Big ones are fatal."

"My goodness, am I supposed to do what you just did?" I asked, really astonished.

It wasn't that I was any longer afraid of heights. I simply didn't feel I had the patience to tie all the hooks and ropes in place. It had taken me quite a while just to get used to going up and down the tree in the harness.

Emilito nodded and laughed cheerfully.

"This is a real challenge," he admitted, "but once you get the hang of it, I'm sure you will agree it's worth it. You'll see what I mean."

He handed me a length of rope and he patiently showed me how to tie and untie knots. He showed me how to use pieces of rubber hose with my climbing rope pulled through them in order not to bruise the tree bark when I looped a rope around a branch to set up a new rope line to climb. He showed me how to maneuver my feet to maintain my balance; and how to avoid disturbing birds' nests in the process of climbing.

For the following three months I worked under his constant supervision, confining myself to the lower branches. I achieved a respectable control of the equipment; enough calluses on my hands so that I no longer needed to wear gloves; and enough maneuverability and balance in my movements so that Emilito let me venture into the higher branches. I meticulously practiced on them the same maneuvers I had learned on the lower branches; and one day without even trying for it, I reached the top of the tree I was climbing. Later that day, Emilito presented me with what he told me was his most meaningful gift to me. It was a set of three green jungle camouflage overalls and matching caps, obviously bought in an army surplus store in the States.

Dressed in jungle fatigues, I lived in the grove of tall trees clustered by the front of the house. I came down only to go to the bathroom and, occasionally, to have a meal with Emilito. I climbed any tree I wanted, provided it was high enough. There were only a few trees I would not climb; the ones that were very old and would find my presence an intrusion, or the really young ones that weren't strong enough to tolerate my ropes and movement.

I preferred youthful, vigorous trees, for they made me happy and optimistic. Yet, some of the older ones were desirable too, for they had so much more to tell. The only tree that Emilito allowed me to sleep in overnight was the one with the tree house in it because it was fitted with a lightning rod. I slept on my platform bed, or secured in the leather harness. Or, at times I slept strapped in a simple way on a branch of my choosing.

Some of my favorite branches were thick and free from protuberances. I would lie on one face down. Resting my head on a small pillow I always brought up with me, I embraced the branch with arms and legs; maintaining a precarious but exhilarating balance. Of course I always made certain that a rope was tied to my waist and secured to a higher branch, just in case I lost my balance while asleep.

The feeling I had developed for the trees was beyond words. I had the certainty that I was able to absorb their moods, know their age, their insights and what they sensed. I could communicate with a tree directly through a sensation that came out from the inside of my body. Often, communication began with a spilling forth of pure affection almost as intense as what I felt for Manfred; an affection that came out of me always unexpectedly and unsolicited. Then I could feel the tree's roots descending into the earth. I knew whether they needed water and which roots were extending toward the underground water source. I could tell what it felt like to live seeking light, anticipating it, intending it; and what it felt like to feel heat, cold or be ravaged by lightning and storms. I learned what it was like never to be able to move off one's destined spot; to be silent; to sense through the bark, and the roots; and to intake light through the leaves. I knew beyond the shadow of doubt that trees feel pain. And I also knew that once communication is engaged, trees pour themselves out in affection.

As I was seated on a sturdy limb with my back resting on the tree trunk, my recapitulation took on an altogether different mood. I could remember the minutest details of my life experiences without fear of any coarse emotional involvement. I would laugh my head off at things that at one time had been deep traumas for me. I found my obsessions no longer capable of evoking self-pity. I saw everything from a different perspective; not as the urbanite I had always been, but as the carefree and abandoned tree dweller that I had become.

One night, while we were still eating a rabbit stew I had made, Emilito surprised me by talking to me animatedly. He asked me to remain seated after dinner because he had something to tell me. This was so out of the ordinary that I grew excited with anticipation. The only beings I had talked to for months had been the trees and the birds. I prepared myself for something monumental.

"You've been a tree dweller for over six months now," he began. "It's time to find out what you've done up there. Let's go into the house. I have something to show you."

"What do you have to show me, Emilito?" I asked, remembering the time he had wanted to show me something in his room and I had refused to follow him.

The name Emilito suited him to perfection. He had become a most cherished being to me, just like Manfred. One of the lofty insights I had received while perched in the high branches of a tree was that Emilito was not human at all. Whether he had once been a human being and the recapitulation had wiped all that away, I could only speculate. His nonhumanness was a barrier that impeded anyone from crossing over to him for a subjective exchange. No average person could ever enter into what Emilito thought, felt or witnessed. But if Emilito so desired, he could cross over to any of us and share with us our subjective states. His nonhumanness was something I had sensed from the first time I encountered him at the kitchen door. Now I was able to be at ease with him; and although I was still separated by that barrier, I could marvel at his achievement.

I asked Emilito again, since he hadn't answered me, what he was going to show me.

"What I have to show is of ultimate importance," he said: "But how you will see it will depend on you. It will depend on whether you have acquired the silence and balance of the trees."

We hurriedly walked across the dark patio to the house. I followed him through the hallway to the door of his room. It made me doubly nervous to see him stand there for a long moment and take deep breaths as if to compose himself for what was to come.

"All right, let's go in," he said, gently tugging the sleeve of my shirt: "A word of caution. Don't stare at anything in the room. Look at whatever you want, but scan the things lightly, using only quick glances."

He opened the door and we entered his extravagant room. Living in the trees had made me completely forget the first time I had walked into that room the day Clara and Nelida had left. Now I was again startled by the bizarre objects that filled it. The first things I saw were four floor lamps; one at the center of each wall. I couldn't even begin to conceive what kind of lamps they were. The room and everything in it was illuminated by an eerie, mellow amber light. I was familiar enough with electrical equipment to know that no standard light bulb, even if it were seen through a lampshade made of the most unusual tissue, could ever give off that kind of light.

I felt Emilito take my arm to help me step over a foot-high fence that parceled a small square area in the southwest corner of the room.

"Welcome to my cave," he said with a grin as we stepped into the partitioned area.

In that square there was a long table half hidden by a black curtain, and a row of four most unusual looking chairs. Each chair had a high solid oval back that curved around the body; and instead of legs had a seemingly solid round base. All four chairs were facing the wall.

"Don't stare," Emilito reminded me as he helped me to sit down on one of the chairs.

I noticed that they were made of some sort of plastic material. The round seat was cushioned, although I couldn't tell how. It was hard as wood, but it had a springiness that gave way when I moved up and down on the seat. The chair also swiveled as I moved sideways. The oval back, which seemed to wrap itself around my back, was also cushioned but equally hard. All the chairs were painted with a vivid cerulean blue.

Emilito sat in the chair next to me. He swiveled his chair around to face the center of the room, and in an unusually strained voice, he told me to swivel around also. When I did, I let out a gutteral gasp. The room I had crossed a moment ago had disappeared. Instead, I was staring at a vast flat space, illuminated by a peach-colored glow. The room now extended out into seemingly infinite space right before my very eyes. The horizon in my view was jet black. I gasped again for I had a hollow feeling in the pit of my stomach. I felt the floor was moving out from under my feet and I was being pulled into that space. I no longer felt the swivel chair underneath me, although I was still sitting on it.

I heard Emilito say, "Let's swivel back again."

However, I had no strength to make the chair turn. He must have done it for me, for I suddenly found myself looking at the corner of the room again.

"Incredible, wouldn't you say?" Emilito asked, smiling.

I was incapable of uttering a single word or asking questions I knew had no answers. After a minute or two, Emilito made my chair swivel around once more, to give me another eyeful of infinity. I found the immensity of that space so terrifying that I closed my eyes. I felt him turning the chair around again.

"Now get off the chair," he said.

Automatically I obeyed him and stood there shaking involuntarily, trying to get my voice back. He bodily turned me around to make me face the room.

Gripped with fear, I stubbornly or wisely refused to open my eyes. Emilito gave me a sound rap on the top of my head with his knuckle which made my eyes pop open. To my relief, the room was not black endless space, but the way it had been when I walked in. Discarding his admonitions to only look in glances, I stared at every one of those unidentifiable objects.

"Please, Emilito, tell me, what is all this?" I asked.

"I am merely the caretaker," Emilio said. "All this is under my care." He swept his hand over the room: "But I'll be damned if I know what it is. In fact, none of us knows what this is. We inherited it with the house from my teacher, the nagual Julian, and he inherited it from his teacher, the nagual Elias, who had also inherited it."

"This looks like some sort of backstage prop room," I said, "but this is an illusion, isn't it, Emilito?"

"This is sorcery! You can perceive it now, because you've freed enough energy to expand your perception. Anyone can perceive it provided they have stored enough energy. The tragedy is that most of our energy is trapped in nonsensical concerns. The recapitulation is the key. It releases that trapped energy and voilà. You see infinity right in front of your eyes."

I laughed when Emilito said 'voilà' because it was so incongruous and unexpected. Laughing alleviated some of my tension.

All I couldsay was, "But is all this real, Emilito, or am I dreaming?"

"You are dreaming, but all this is real. It is so real that it can kill us by disintegrating us."

I couldn't rationally account for what I was seeing, thus there was no way I could either believe or doubt my perception. My dilemma was insurmountable and so was my panic. Emilito moved closer to me.

He whispered, "Sorcery is more than black cats and naked people dancing in a graveyard at midnight; putting hexes on other people."

"Sorcery is: cold, abstract, impersonal. That's why we call the act of perceiving it 'the sorcerers' crossing,' or 'the flight to the abstract.' To withstand it's awesome pull we have to be strong and determined. It is not for the timid or weak-hearted: This is what the nagual Julian used to say."

My interest was so intense that it forced me to listen with unequalled concentration to every word Emilito was saying. All the while, my eyes were riveted to those objects in the room. My conclusion was that none of them was real. Yet, since I was obviously perceiving them, it made me wonder if I too wasn't real; or if I was concocting them. It was not that they were indescribable, they were simply unrecognizable to my mind.

"Now prepare yourself for the sorcerers' flight," Emilito said: "Hold on to me for dear life. Grab my belt if you have to or climb on my back piggyback fashion, but whatever you do, do not let go."

Before I could even ask him what he intended next, he maneuvered my walking around the chair, and made me sit down facing the wall. Then he swiveled the chair ninety degrees so that I was once again looking at the center of the room; at that terrifying infinite space. He helped me stand up by holding my waist, and he made me take a few steps into infinity.

I found it almost impossible to walk. My legs seemed to weigh a ton. I felt Emilito pushing and lifting me up. Suddenly an immense force sucked me in and I was no longer walking but gliding in space. Emilito was gliding alongside me. I remembered his warning and I grabbed onto his belt; in the nick of time too, because just then another surge of energy made me accelerate at top speed. I yelled at him to stop me. Quickly he eased me onto his back and I held on for dear life. I squeezed my eyes shut, but that made no difference. I saw the same vastness before me whether my eyes were open or closed. We were soaring in something that wasn't air. It was not over the earth, either. My greatest fear was that a monumental burst of energy was going to make me lose my hold on Emilito's back. I fought with all my might to hang on, and maintain my grip and my concentration.

It all ended as abruptly as it had begun. I was jolted by another blast of energy, and I found myself drenched in perspiration standing by the blue chair. My body trembled uncontrollably. I was panting and gasping for air. My hair was over my face, damp and tangled.

Emilito pushed me onto the seat and swiveled me around to face the wall.

"Don't you dare to piss in your pants while sitting on this chair," he warned harshly.

I was beyond bodily functions. I was empty of everything including fear. It all had drained out of me while soaring in that infinite space.

Nodding, Emilito said, "You are able to perceive as I do, but you don't have any control yet in the new world you are perceiving. That control comes with a lifetime of discipline and storing power."

"I'll never be able to explain this to myself," I said, and swiveled on my own to face the center of the room; to take another peek at that pinkish infinity. Now the objects I saw in the room were tiny, like chess pieces on a chess board. I had to deliberately seek them out to notice them. On the other hand, the coldness and awesomeness of that space filled my soul with unmitigated terror. I remembered what Clara had said about the seers that had sought infinity; how they had stared at that immensity, and how it had stared back at them with a cold and unyielding indifference. Clara never told me that she herself had stared at it, which now I knew she had. So, what would have been the point of her telling me then? I would only have laughed or found her fanciful. Now it was my turn to stare at infinity with no hope of comprehending what I was looking at. Emilito was right: It would take me a lifetime of discipline and of storing power to understand that I'm gazing at the boundless.

"Now let's look at the other side of infinity," Emilito said, and gently made my chair swivel to face the wall. He ceremoniously lifted the black curtain while I stared vacantly, trying to control my chattering teeth.

Behind the curtain there was a long narrow blue table. It had no legs, and seemed to be attached to the wall although I could not see any hinges or braces holding it up.

He ordered me, "Prop your forearms on the table, and rest your head on your fists by placing them under your chin the way Clara showed you. Put pressure under your chin. Hold your head gently and don't become tense. Gentleness is what we need now."

I did as he instructed. Instantly a small window opened on the black wall, about six inches away from my nose. Emilito was sitting to my right apparently also looking through another small window.

"Look inside," he said. "What do you see?"

I was looking at the house. I saw the front door and the dining room on the left side of the house. I had glanced into dining room briefly as I had passed it with Emilio the first time I used the main entrance. The room was well lit and filled with people. They were laughing and conversing in Spanish. Some of them were helping themselves to food from a sideboard set with an assortment of tempting dishes, beautifully laid out on silver platters. I saw the nagual. Then I saw Clara. She was radiant and happy. Clara was playing the guitar and singing a duet with another woman who could easily have been her sister. The other woman was as large as Clara, but dark complected. The other woman did not have Clara's fiery green eyes: The other woman's eyes were fiery, but were dark and sinister. Then I saw Nelida dancing by herself to the hauntingly beautiful tune. She was somehow different from the way I remembered her, although I couldn't pinpoint what the difference was.

For a while I watched them, enchanted as if I had died and gone to heaven. The scene was: so ethereal, so joyous, so untouched by daily concerns. But, I was suddenly jolted out of my enjoyment when I saw a second Nelida entering the dining room from a side door. I couldn't believe my eyes, but there were two of them. I turned to Emilito and confronted him with a silent question.

He said, "The one that is dancing is Florinda. She and Nelida are exactly alike, except that Nelida is a bit softer looking," he peered at me and winked, "but far more ruthless."

I counted the people in the room. Besides the nagual, there were fourteen people; nine women and five men. There were the two Nelidas; Clara and her dark sister; and five other women who were unknown to me. Three were definitely old, but like Clara, Nelida, the nagual and Emilito, they were of an indeterminate age. The other two women were only a few years older than I, perhaps in their midtwenties.

Four of the five men were older, and looked as fierce as the nagual. But one of the men was young. He had a dark complexion. He was short and seemed very strong. His hair was black, curly. He gesticulated in an animated way as he talked, and his face was energetic, full of expression. There was something about him that made him stand out from all the rest. My heart leaped, and I was instantly drawn to him.

"That one is the new nagual," Emilito said.

As we looked into the room, he explained that every nagual imbues his sorcery with his particular temperament and experience. The nagual John Michael Abelar, being a Yaqui Indian, had brought to his group the pathos of the Yaquis as a characterizing mark of all their actions. Their sorcery, he said, was soaked in the somber mood of those Indians. And all of the sorcerers, myself included, were bound by the rule to familiarize ourselves with the Yaquis; to follow their ups and downs.

"This perspective will prevail for you until the new nagual takes over," he said in my ear: "Then you will have to soak yourself in his temperament and experience. That is the rule. You will have to go to college. He's lost in academic pursuits."

"When will this take place?" I whispered.

He replied softly, "Whenever all the members of my group together face that infinity in the room behind us, and we allow it to dissolve us."

A cloud of fatigue and desperation was beginning to envelop me. The strain of trying to understand the inconceivable was too great.

"This room, of which I am the caretaker, is the accumulated intent and range of temperament of all the naguals that preceded John Michael Abelar," he said in my ear: "There is no way on earth I can explain what this room is. To me, just as it is to you. it's incomprehensible."

I moved my eyes away from the dining room with all it's ebullient people and looked at Emilito. I finally understood that Emilito was as solitary as Manfred; a being capable of inconceivable awareness, yet burdened by the solitude that that awareness brings. I wanted to weep, but my desire to weep was momentary because I realized that sadness is such a base emotion when in it's place I could feel awe.

"The new nagual will take care of you," Emilito said, pulling my attention back into the dining room: "He is your final teacher; the one who will take you to freedom. He has many names; one for each of the different facets of sorcery he is involved with. For the sorcery of infinity, his name is Dilas Grau. Someday you will meet him and the others. You couldn't do it the day you were with Nelida in the left hallway, nor can you do it now here with me. But, you will cross over soon. They are waiting for you."

A nameless longing took hold of me. I wanted to slip through that viewing hole into the room to be with them. There was warmth and affection there. They were waiting for me.

### The End - The Sorcerers' Crossing: A Woman's Journey - © 1992 by Taisha Abelar ###

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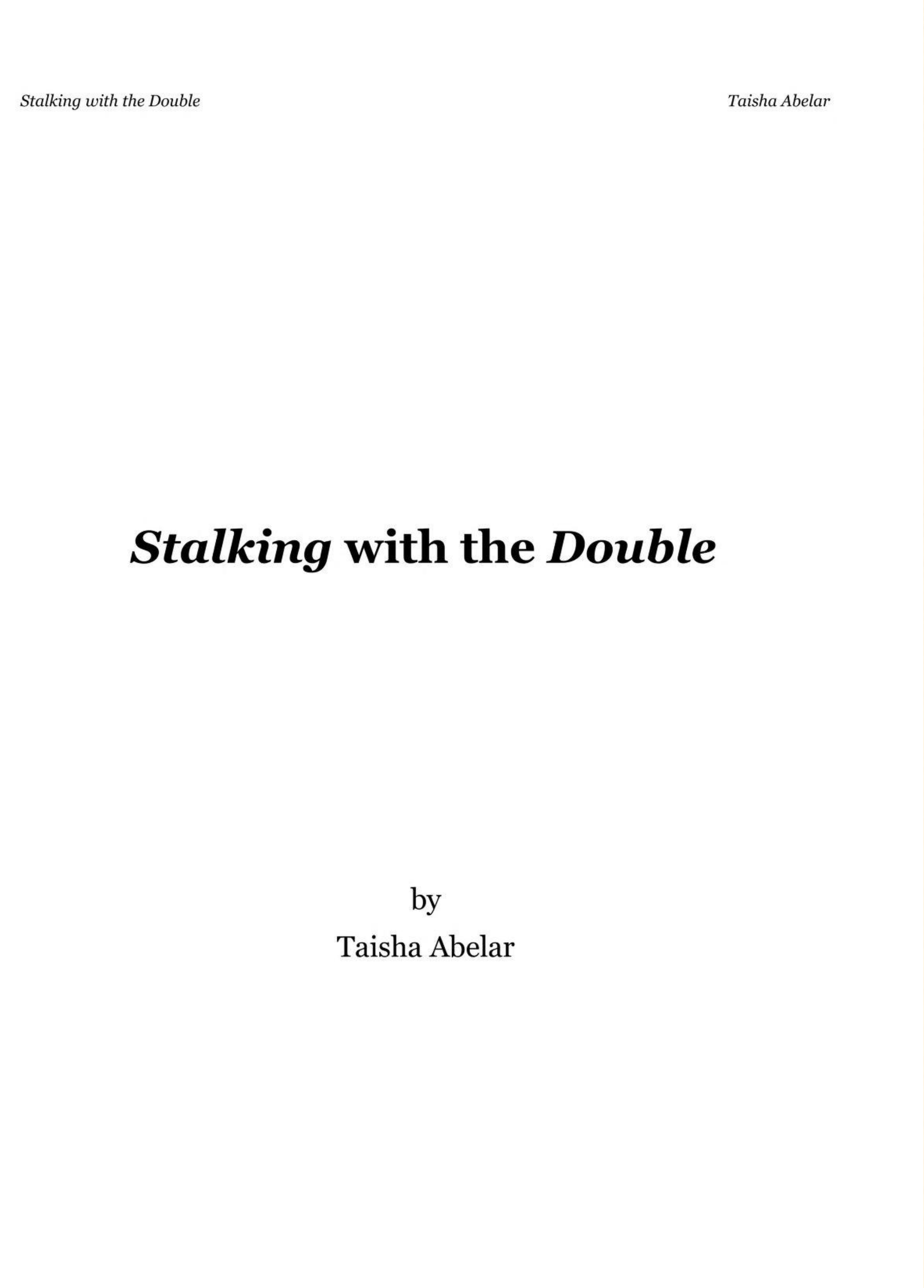
# 19 - STALKING WITH THE DOUBLE

(Unpublished Manuscript)

1996 - Taisha Abelar. Picks up a year after the events of 1968-1969, which were covered in The Sorcerer's Crossing - © 1992.



*Stalking with the Double* Taisha Abelar

***Stalking* with the *Double***

by
Taisha Abelar

# Book 19 – STALKING WITH THE DOUBLE

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(*clickable/tappable*)

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# Author's Note

In my previous work, The Sorcerers' Crossing, I describe being ushered into the sorcerers' tradition by a woman named Clara Mendez. She belonged to a group of sorcerers led by don Juan Matus. My training under their auspices consisted of two parts: first, I had to perform a thorough recapitulation of my life, using a specific breathing method to recover trapped energy from the past, and second, I was taught a series of sorcery passes; movements and postures designed to reinforce the *energy body* or the *double*.

After a failed attempt to meet the other members of don Juan's party by means of a deliberate manipulation of perception, referred to as the *sorcerers' crossing*, I was given further instruction in order to stabilize my *energy body*. To this effect, I spent many months in a tree house in a grove of trees located somewhere to the front of Clara's house. This phase of my training was guided by the caretaker, Emilito. He started me on another *recapitulation*, and had me perform certain *gazing* techniques, as well as perfect my tree climbing skills, and certain *dreaming* and *stalking* maneuvers too complex for me to fully comprehend at that time.

When my *energy body* had familiarized itself with a new perceptual configuration, a new "being-in-the-world", Emilito suggested that I return to Los Angeles to continue my academic training. He assured me that this was necessary in order to balance the right and left sides of my being, and to hone the control required to continue on the sorcerer's path.

## Chapter 1: The Meaning of Life

The lecture on anthropological research methods had left many questions unanswered for me. After the lecture, later that afternoon, I paid the teaching assistant a visit in order to clarify some points raised by the professor. When I entered the office, I found the teaching assistant at his desk eating pistachio nuts. He was deliberately aiming the shells out the window at unsuspecting students on the lawn below. I had once been sitting on the building's steps, under that very window, when something had landed on the top of my head. I thought that pigeons were roosting in the rooftop crannies, but I discovered, upon closer inspection, that what had hit me was not pigeon droppings, but pistachio nut shells. Now I understood where those shells were coming from.

“This one is a real ‘poor baby,’” I thought, watching Rex Jones turn red at being caught at his tricks. He had a sheepish grin and a boyish demeanor and the overall sense which Clara Mendez referred to as the “poor baby syndrome”. She pointed out that all of us were operating under the social and psychological command that we had to regard ourselves and present ourselves at all times, if possible, in the light of “poor baby, me.” At the time she told me this, I resented it immensely and argued the point, but after a soulful examination, I had to admit that I myself loved to be regarded as a poor baby. Not only this, but I had not come across anyone who did not fall into that category.

“I hope I’m not disturbing you,” I said to Rex Jones, “but today’s lecture brought up some points I would like to discuss with you. That is, if you’re not too busy.”

With a thrust of his leg, Rex Jones pushed his swivel chair away from the window.

“How can I help you?” he said pointing to a chair. I noticed he took in an eyeful of the rising hemline of my skirt as I sat down.

“I don’t understand how anthropologists can know what is going on in a foreign culture when they don’t even speak the language?” I said pulling my skirt down over my knees.

Rex Jones smiled nervously, but the nervous twitch of his pale cheek betrayed impatience. “Anthropologists practice a method called, ‘participant observation,’” he said, hammering on his words. He glanced at his watch to gauge how much time he had before his office hour was over. “The anthropologist fieldworker participates in the activities of the society he's studying; he takes copious notes; he tape records and photographs everything pertinent, which, upon returning from the field, he analyzes within the framework of his theory. In other words, he uses his data to prove the hypothesis he has set out to test.”

“Are you saying that the anthropologist already knows what kind of data he wants to isolate before he goes to the field?” I asked. “Isn't that being biased?”

Rex Jones gave his chair a little swivel toward the desk and put on his wire rimmed glasses, carefully adjusting them over each ear.

“That isn't bias; it's his modus operandi. If Anthropology is to be a science,” he continued, leaning towards me, “it must follow the scientific method, which is hypothesis testing. His findings must be open to verification.”

“Meaning what?” I asked.

“Meaning that another fieldworker collecting the same data under similar circumstances would obtain the same results.”

“But what about Lewis and Redfield in Tepotzlan?” I asked.

I was referring to the classic case in which two fieldworkers doing research in the same rural community in Mexico had obtained dramatically different results, thereby showing that replication, although theoretically advisable, might not be feasible in actual practice.

“That was a special case,” Rex Jones conceded. “It only proves that the researchers weren't looking at the same things, or documenting their work carefully enough, and that’s precisely my point: Social Science entails careful documentation.”

I reminded him how difficult it was for two people in our own culture to agree about a given issue, even though the issue was familiar to both of them; a condition which made agreement about issues of a foreign culture nearly miraculous.

“Anthropologists are people before they are scientists?” I pointed out. “So, while they are participating and observing, wouldn’t they also be emotionally involved in a life where everything is strange? Wouldn’t they have feelings, opinions, and interpret events according to their past experiences?”

Images of the cave in Northern Mexico, where I had spent many months reliving my own past experiences in a process called the “*recapitulation*”, came to mind. I remembered how difficult it had been for Clara Mendez, my teacher, and I to reach an agreement about anything, including what she had meant by the “poor baby” syndrome. She was departing from the inconceivable viewpoint of what she referred to as the sorcery tradition, and I saw everything from the predictable vantage point of my middle-class upbringing. We had heated arguments in her kitchen; disagreements in which we were talking at cross purposes, not seeing the world in the same terms at all.

Rex Jones chuckled condescendingly at my moment of introspection, which he seemed to interpret as confusion. “You’re missing the point,” he said shaking his head. “That’s precisely why anthropologists need to follow a strict methodology decided upon beforehand. Fieldworkers must refrain from making subjective interpretations and stick to recording objective facts. Look at the sociologists downstairs.”

He was referring to the department of demographers who had their offices on the second floor. At one point in the history of the university, Anthropology had been a part of the Sociology department, but now they prided themselves in being independent, but not too independent, it seemed, when it came to methodology. It was partially the fear of becoming a hardened actuary, that had made me select Anthropology as a major. It still had an air of romanticism to it, a certain sense of adventure surviving from the nineteenth century travelers' accounts in which modern-day Anthropology has it's roots. Despite the field workers' efforts to categorize everything via the scientific method, Anthropology still had the potential for exploring the unknown, of crossing conceptual boundaries.

“What about the sociologists?” I asked clicking my pen to the open position in case I had to take notes.

“Sociology, as we know, depends on how reliable it's data collection techniques are and on the ability to verify it's findings. That's why they use statistical analysis, surveys, in-depth interviews, to ensure replication. Anthropology must copy their methodology because verification is even more important in our discipline, where, as you yourself have pointed out, everything is strange.”

I noticed Rex's roving eye dart at my legs again. I gave him a fierce look that Clara Mendez, the champion of women, would have been proud of. I had always assumed the vulnerable state of women was a natural condition resulting from our biological makeup, but Clara had set the record straight from the outset.

“Biology my foot,” she had said. “Licking men's balls and being their servants is the not the result of any biology, but of the mesmeric commands of our male-dominated culture.”

I was shocked to hear her say that at the time, and it was only after months of listening to Clara's sermons about the plight of women, and immersing myself in the practice called the *recapitulation*, that I began to see more clearly the pitiful position society has allocated for the female species. It was obvious that we women had to fight twice as hard as men to succeed in anything we did. Once in our own right, and once again to overcome the powerful predispositions thrust upon us by our male culture. One of the reasons for attending the university and cultivating the intellect, I was told, was to be able to grasp and evaluate for myself the taken-for-granted views of the role of women, and in so doing, free myself from their mesmeric grip.

“A stranger coming to ‘study’ culture, which is an abstraction,” I said picking up the thread of our argument, “could work in the field for years without ever realizing that he is misunderstanding what he sees or what the people are doing. It has happened to countless researchers and to Peace Corps workers."

"The Anthropologists and Peace Corps workers I know are pretty astute," Rex said. "They know when someone is bullshitting them."

"What if the anthropologist wants to help the people he is living with?" I proposed. "What if he or she gets so involved in the culture, that it is impossible for him or her to remain objective?"

I was thinking of events that had happened under the tutelage of Clara and her colleagues, and of how I would never be able to explain their worldview adequately using the theories of anthropology or the scientific method.

"Then he or she is no longer an anthropologist," said Rex raising a bushy eyebrow. "He or she is simply a social worker or a do-gooder, or worse yet, has gone native."

To bring his point home, he cited several cases in which the anthropologist had "gone native." The first incident involved a researcher working among the Navajo Indians, While studying the Peyote Cult, using the method of participant observation, he ingested far too many peyote buttons to remain objective. He had visions of the Great Spirit, received countless messages, and when he came out of his hallucinogenic state, he started his own religion.

"And don't forget the case of Beth Wassermann, a field worker in Samoa," Rex reminded me reaching for his pipe.

"Was she one of Boas's students, like Margaret Mead?"

He shook his head, I had the distinct feeling that he was pulling my leg.

"What about Beth Wassermann?" I ventured.

"She went to Samoa to collect data for her doctoral dissertation on sexual customs and marriage rites. She put aside her objectivity and 'participated' far too much more than was necessary, if you catch my drift."

Rex made a lewd gesture that left no doubt as to the nature of Ruth Wassermann's participation among the Samoans.

"What happened to her?" I asked, certain that the story would not end well.

“She fell in love with a Polynesian prince,” Rex said shaking the stem of his pipe at me as if he were scolding a child. “She broke the taboos and the witch doctor put a curse on her. She nearly died in childbirth, if the minister hadn't intervened with his white magic. Beth left the islands in disgrace and never finished her research.”

Silence fell upon the room. Rex looked at me to assess my reaction.

“I'm still not convinced,” I said doggedly. “It seems to me that the whole approach to anthropology is wrong. You have to do more than merely observe to understand anything. You have to become involved.”

Rex took his pipe out of his mouth, turned it over and tapped it on the edge of an ashtray. Nothing fell out. I realized he was using the pipe as a placebo to help him stop smoking or perhaps to make him appear more distinguished.

“You don’t have to taste an apple to know that it's red,” he reminded me.

“But how do you know what an apple tastes like unless you bite into it?” I countered. “If you go to the field already burdened with a bag of hypotheses, you’re not really being open to the experiences, which is the whole point of anthropology: the study of man, what he believes in, how he feels, how he thinks, how he relates to the universe.

Rex smacked his lips and stuck the pipe back into his mouth. He seemed to have come to the end of his patience.

“You’re asking questions that belong to the domain of philosophy. If you want to know about the meaning of life, you’re in the wrong department. Although my friend Carlos might be able to answer some of your questions. He’s an apprentice to a Mexican shaman.”

Upon hearing his name, the teaching assistant sitting at an adjacent desk put down the book he was reading and turned to face Rex.

“She wants to know about the meaning of life,” Rex said. “I’ll be damned if I can answer her questions, so I'll leave her in your hands.”

He glanced at his watch again. “Besides, I’m late. I have to drive all the way to Gardenia.”

Rex stuffed some examination papers into his briefcase and hurriedly left the room.

“What’s so pressing in Gardenia?” I asked, turning my chair to face Carlos.

“Rex likes to gamble,” Carlos said in a hushed tone. “And Gardenia is the only place near here where it’s legal. Mark my words, one of these days he'll gamble away his research grant to Nepal.”

Carlos had black curly hair, a smiling friendly face, and a mischievous sparkle in his dark shiny eyes. I had the unsettling feeling that I had seen him before; not just in the Anthropology department, but somewhere else and that we were united by an invisible bond, but try as I might, I could not remember where or when we had met.

Carlos leaned forward and looked at me intently as if he, too, had experienced a kind of deja vu. “Haven’t we met before?” he said obviously aware of the cliche.

Even though he had taken the words right out of my mouth, it sounded so much like the classic line that I became defensive.

“You’ve probably seen me around the halls,” I said trying to sound casual. “Or in Hitchcock’s class.”

“Hmm. Perhaps,” he said giving me a pensive look.

His gaze actually held me the way hypnotists might grasp a patient.

“You’re much too young and pretty to worry about the meaning of life,” he said in a friendly tone. “You can’t be more than nineteen or twenty. Why not leave the weighty questions to the wizened philosophers?”

“I’m twenty two and I’m very much interested in the meaning of life,” I snapped, annoyed by what seemed to me a chauvinistic statement. “What’s the point to all this? There must be something more that makes life worth living than the bullshit we’ve gotten every day of our lives.”

As I spoke I gesticulated with my hands, knocking over a dish of paper clips on his desk. They scattered over his papers, but Carlos pretended not to notice.

“I respect your concerns,” he said leaning toward me. “It’s just that most people really aren’t interested in the meaning of anything except, perhaps, of love.”

“I disagree,” I said. “What about the seekers and meditators?  They’re always searching for answers to life’s fundamental questions.”

“True, but in my opinion, the so called ‘gurus’ are not so much engaged in a bona fide philosophical inquiry, but in an attempt to intensify their experiences. They are looking for the meaning of life precisely because they are bored with life. If they would live life with gusto, they would not be so concerned with searching for it's meaning.”

I had a feeling he was including me in the category of those who lacked gusto in their lives.

“Come back in twenty years after you’ve lived and then we can talk about the meaning of life,” he said with a wink.

“In twenty years the entire world might be blown to bits!” I snapped. “Is that the intensity of experience you’re talking about?”

I realized from his pained expression that I was shouting. I don’t know why I had gotten so riled up. A cool gust of wind came in from the open window and ruffled the examination papers on Carlos’s desk. I took a deep breath to calm myself.

“If you really want to know about the meaning of life,” Carlos said, “you should meet this Yaqui Indian I’m working with. He knows a great deal about life and it's meaning. In fact he is one of the wisest people I’ve ever met. Perhaps we can go to Mexico some time and I’ll introduce you to him.”

Upon hearing this, I experienced an intense apprehension. I began to perspire. All my senses were on red alert. Perhaps Carlos was just making polite conversation, or maybe he was trying to proposition me with some sort of a trip. At any rate, I felt a deep uneasiness. Going to Mexico with Clara Mendez was one thing, but to go with a strange man was another. The worst part was that something inside me wanted to return to Mexico in the worst way.

I looked at Carlos, trying to discern his meaning, when for an instant, I thought he had shrunk and moved backwards in space. It was as if I were seeing him from the end of a long tunnel. I continued staring dumbfounded, and suddenly I recalled where I had seen him before. Once I had had a vision of a gathering of sorcerers in Mexico. One of them was a young latin man with dark curly hair that looked very much like the person talking to me now.

The more I looked at Carlos the more this secret suspicion grew inside me. With no rational foundation, I became convinced that Carlos was the young man of my vision, the new *nagual*. I remembered being told that when power put us in contact, he would bring me to Mexico where I would meet the other members of the present *nagual's* party that were waiting for me. I tried recalling who these other members were, but I was certain that except for Clara, Nelida and a strange bird-like creature named Emilito, I had never met them. I was shocked to realize that my time in Los Angeles had almost obliterated their memory. My overwhelming concern with daily activities and my studies at the University, had created a wall of forgetfulness. The dull oblivion that surrounded me was so dense that the time I had spent in Mexico became vague and dreamlike, as if it had never happen.

Yet, of one thing, I was certain, I had been expressly commanded not to return to Mexico or search for anyone until power again opened the way, and when that moment came, I had to seize the quarter centimeter of chance power offered, or the door would close, perhaps never to open again. As a wave of memory swept over me, I felt my ears buzzing and experienced a profound dizziness. I wanted to run away, yet I heard myself saying, “I’d like to go to Mexico," in a voice that could hardly be my own, for it came from the distant end of that long tunnel.

I looked up and realized that Carlos was also confused. It was obvious from his expression, that he had not expected me to take his invitation seriously, let alone give him a definitive answer.

“Are you alright?” Carlos asked with genuine concern.

“I’m perfectly fine,” I said shaking my head to clear it, “It’s just so warm in here.”

As I regained my senses I told myself that I had gotten only a glimpse of a face, and that the vision of the *nagual's* party had been so fleeting I could have easily been mistaken about this young man. Most likely he wasn't the same person at all. Yet in spite of my rational doubts, I was driven by an unknown force. I had the certainty that if Carlos was the man in my vision, I could only find that out in Mexico; and if I didn’t act now, I would never get another chance.

“I do want to go to Mexico,” I repeated.

“Well, that would be great,” Carlos said uneasily, gathering up the paper clips I had spilled, "We’ll do that sometime.”

“I really want to go. When would be a good time?”

“I go to Sonora every other weekend," Carlos said hesitantly.

“All right. How about next weekend. I’ll be through with my exams by then.”

“Wooow, not so fast,” Carlos said trying to back off. “Don’t you think we should go to a movie or have dinner or something first, instead of rushing off to Mexico? After all we hardly know each other."

“Movies bore me, and I never eat in restaurants,” I said. “Besides, I’d like to meet this sorcerer informant, that you are working with. I promise I wouldn’t be in the way.”

I could tell Carlos was peeved by my insistence, but that his curiosity was also peaked. He seemed to be considering the possibilities, but then had a sudden change of heart.

“Really, I don’t think I could just spring someone on the old man,” he said. “Especially a young woman. Do you speak Spanish?”

"Yes, I do,” I lied without flinching.

He looked surprised. “It still isn’t a good idea. I don’t know why I brought it up in the first place. Let’s forget the whole thing.”

“It is a good idea!” I said enthusiastically. “Think of it as an appointment with destiny.”

Again Carlos hesitated.

“How about asking your informant if it’s all right to bring a friend from the University,” I suggested. “A fellow anthropology student. What harm is there in that. If he says, no, we’ll forget about it. It can’t hurt to ask. What do you have to lose?”

Carlos sighed with relief, as if he had found a way out. He was certain that his Yaqui Indian informant would not wish to meet a young woman from the United States.

“Alright, I’ll ask if I can bring someone,” he conceded. “If he agrees. I’ll call you and you can join me in Nogales.”

I wrote my phone number on a scrap of paper and handed it to him, I watched him slip it into his shirt pocket. As I left the room, I was certain he would never mention me to his Indian informant, let alone use the phone number. The following week, late at night, I received an unexpected phone call.

## Chapter 2: Nogales

I looked at my watch; it was 5:53 A.M. I had driven straight from Los Angeles to Nogales, stopping only twice to refuel and to grab a bite to eat. Carlos had asked me to meet him at nine o'clock in front of the Greyhound bus depot, but I had given myself plenty of leeway in case the traffic was heavy or I had car trouble.

As I parked the car in an all-night parking lot near the bus depot, I wondered if I had made the right decision in coming. Carlos had sounded strange during the brief telephone conversation. It was as if he couldn't talk or was reluctant to do so. I could have easily misunderstood the time and place of our meeting. There had been a great deal of static on the line, with a Spanish speaking female voice interrupting. I had assumed it was the operator, but now I wasn't certain.

Despite the feeling of having met him before, I didn't really know Carlos and I wasn't familiar with Mexico, for I had never ventured beyond the vicinity of Clara's house. Rural Mexico was, to me, a hostile and rugged country where anything could happen to the unsuspecting traveler. Also, I had been exaggerating when I told Carlos that I spoke Spanish. The few classes I had taken at the University hadn't given me a command of the language. Once again, it seemed, I had jumped into a situation I was completely ill-equipped to handle.

The long drive had left me exhausted. I set the alarm of my wristwatch for eight thirty, then stretched out along the back seat to relax. With my eyes closed, I practiced some *recapitulating* breathing, a practice I had neglected to keep up. I wondered if by returning to Mexico, I would be able to better understand some of the inconceivable events that had taken place under the guidance of Clara and her group of sorcerers.

Those events now seemed so distant that trying to recall them filled me with a deep melancholy. My constant concern with myself and my daily activities had clouded my vision, and in spite of the months of *recapitulating* and the countless promises I had made to change, old ways and feelings had slowly crept back like crab grass, whose growth had been trimmed, but whose roots remained stubbornly intact.

Then sun beat down on my head when I awoke from a sound sleep. I had been *dreaming* I was gazing at leaves of the grove of trees in front of Clara's house. I experienced instant panic: it was nine thirty! The alarm had failed to go off, or if it did, I had not heard it! I feared I would miss my appointment with destiny, and the long drive would have been for nothing. As usual, I had been careless, when I should have remained alert. On top of everything, the sun, shining through the car window, had given me a king-sized headache.

In my hasty departure, I neglected to bring a hat.

I locked the car door and headed for the bus depot where I joined the crowd of people milling about in a great hurry. Everyone was either going towards the border or had just crossed over and was rushing away from it. I nearly collided with a hunchbacked woman. When I heard crying, I realized that the woman wasn't hunchbacked at all; she was carrying a baby wrapped in a roboso tied to her back and shoulders. Not even the baby's head was visible, and I wondered how it could breathe.

I felt so sorry for the woman, that I gave her a ten dollar bill. She took it and smiled gratefully, flashing a silver front tooth. At the sight of money, I was instantly surrounded by a group of boys selling lottery tickets. They all insisted that I buy one or at least let them carry my bag. I bought a box of Chiclets from a girl in pigtails and hurried passed stands selling belts, ponchos and pottery figurines.

I wanted to buy some bananas, for the last meal I had eaten was a meatloaf sandwich at Gila Bend, but I didn't dare take the time. I needed to get to the Greyhound bus depot in a hurry. Cars were parked or stopped in every available space and everyone seemed to be honking at the same time. I stood on the street corner waiting for an opening to cross, when I saw Carlos in the distance, waving his hand. I couldn't tell if he was telling me to stay put or to meet him. I was so relieved to see him that I hurried across the street, stopping a few cars in the process.

At close range, Carlos looked different. His clothes smelled of mesquite wood smoke. At the University he wore tailored slacks and sports coats. Now he had on Levis, a long sleeved khaki shirt and hiking boots. He had a kind of energy and agility that made him stand out from the crowd. Something in the way he balanced his weight on the balls of his feet, gave the impression of an athlete with superb control over his movement.

“I suppose you thought I wasn't going to show up,” I said to break the awkwardness.

“You're right. I was beginning to wonder if you were coming. How was the drive?”

“I was in a daze through most of it. Luckily there wasn't much traffic. I would have been on time, but I fell asleep.”

“My god. Did you have an accident?”

“No, I woke up in the nick of time, but that’s the reason I’m late.”

He gave me a confused look. I realized that he had thought I had fallen asleep at the wheel while driving rather than in the back seat.

“To be perfectly frank,” I said quickly, “I didn’t expect to hear from you.”

“Me too,” Carlos said, taking my bag. “I was surprised when I was told to call you.”

“Who told you to call me?”

“The Yaqui Indian I am working with.”

Carlos explained that true to his promise he had mentioned to his informant, that he had met a student at the University and that he had invited her to come to Mexico.

“My informant wanted me to tell him in detail the circumstances of our meeting,” Carlos continued.

“What did you tell him?”

“I described to him how Rex Jones got fed up with your questioning and handed you over to me. Apparently that was an omen.”

“What do you mean by an omen?”

“Don Juan said that things never come to us directly; that there always has to be an usher who opens the door, and that if we didn’t jump at that precise instant, the door would close and we would never know what might have been.”

Carlos looked at me seriously.

“You mean Rex Jones is some sort of an usher?” I asked, confused.

He nodded. “According to don Juan, mysterious forces were at work. Something in me had voiced an invitation to bring you to Mexico, and something in you jumped to accept it. That could only mean one thing.”

“What was that?” I wondered if it wasn’t the one thing that is on every man’s mind where an over night trip with a woman is concerned.

Carlos took my arm to help me around an open manhole in the sidewalk.

“It means,” he explained, “that at one level, we were both aware of the importance of the moment. It also means that power had opened the way, and that we have to be impeccable in order to travel under it's auspices. In other words, we are in the hands of power moving through an open door.”

A cold shiver ran up my back. I was afraid I was not prepared for such a journey.

“From now on, neither you nor I are in charge of what will happen,” Carlos continued. “Whatever may happen after we cross the border, falls within the designs of power. In other words, something besides your or I will be calling the shots.” He gave me a penetrating look. “Are you up to it?”

Before I could reply, we found ourselves at the border checkpoint. Carlos told me that he had left his car on the other side, and that he would cross over and wait for me in Mexico. He showed me which form I needed to fill out and which door I would be passing through to enter Mexico. He handed me my bag then left through that same doorway and disappeared around the corner of the building.

I didn’t like being left alone. I envisioned it as a test to see if I could make it across on my own. Or perhaps, Carlos thought I spoke enough Spanish that I didn't need him to translate. While I waited in line, I began assessing my situation, I was about to embark on a journey with someone I had seen in a vision; on a quest for power in a manner that could only be called, “following the designs of the spirit.” Carlos had made it clear from the outset that we would not be on a vacation, but under the auspices of power. I didn't know what “power” meant, but I knew that it was too abstract a concept for precise definitions. On such a journey, all one could do was to acquiesce, and follow it's illusive course.

As I mulled things over, I had the distinct feeling I was being watched. Perhaps Nelida or Mr. Abelar were among the Mexicans that had lined up to cross the border. It had been many months since I had seen them, but I was certain I would recognize them, especially Emilito, who often visited me in dreams. He had big owl-like eyes, that blinked as he stared vacantly. I would wake up in the middle of the night and find him standing by my bedside. Then he would vanish before I could talk to him.

I heard raspy coughing behind me. I turned around, just in time to see an old man drop a huge glob of saliva onto the floor. I cringed, nauseated. I would have moved away but in front of me was a woman holding an infant whose runny nose was making tracks on his face. He was trying to grab my hair with his sticky fists. I recognized the tattered magenta raboso; it was the same woman I had bumped into as I had hurried to the Greyhound bus depot. She smiled at me in recognition and said something in rapid Spanish which I didn't understand. I smiled back dumbly nodding.

It was hot and stuffy and I felt dizzy, but I didn't dare to go to the door for fear of losing my place in line. I reached inside my purse for a scented handkerchief and waved it in front of my face with a devil may care attitude. Rather than leaving me room, the man behind me crowded forward as the line progressed. I felt another wave of nausea flood me and became totally judgmental.

I rationalized my feelings of superiority as an attempt to balance my physical distress. I realized that these were dangerous feelings to have. During the long hours of recounting my life, I had discovered that I had been surrounded by people who felt intrinsically superior to everyone else. Their superiority was based on nothing but false reasoning, just as was mine, I had simply copied their feelings to perfection. I kept telling myself that I was not a part of the scene, but was a student of anthropology, a person of cultured European ancestry, who was there to do research, not be touched by the poverty and filth that pervaded the place.

In the midst of my emotional buttressing, I experienced a profound feeling of dejection as I realized that months of *recapitulating* meant nothing when confronted with discomfort and a lack of control wherein my idea of the myself was threatened. What was worse, I saw now, was that the power to imbue the self with worth comes from an unshakable core that we all have: the feeling, or rather the certainty, that we are special and above reproach.

I moved forward to put distance between myself and the old man behind me, of whom I kept catching glimpses from the corner of my eye. He seemed to be inwardly laughing at my discomfort, and that made me even more annoyed. For distraction, I opened my purse and took out the gold pen Clara had loaned me to make my *recapitulation* list; a list of names of all the people I had ever encountered during my lifetime. It had been a long list and I had come to consider the pen as my own possession. Clara had said it had belonged to one of the members of the *nagual's* party, although she had never said who that person was. When I returned to Los Angeles, I took the pen with me and used it to take my examinations at the University. If I did not have my "power" pen with me, I always felt I did poorer on the exams.

I filled out the tourist card but before I could return the pen to my purse, the old man behind me butted up against me and asked, “may I borrow your pen?”

Startled, to hear English spoken, I turned around to face him. He was old, but not decrepit; of medium height, with a wide flat nose, and oriental looking eyes. He had an air of familiarity about him as he smiled in a friendly manner.

I looked at his hands; they were dirty. I did not want to lend my power pen to a stranger who might contaminate it with weird energy, or worse yet, pocket it while I wasn’t looking. I wanted to say I didn’t have a pen but he had obviously seen me using it. Besides, outright lying was something I had trouble doing. The *recapitulation* had helped me realize that my reluctance to lie stemmed from several painful childhood incidents.

On one occasion, my mother had accused me of tracking mud onto her newly polished linoleum floor. I had had no trouble lying then, and I had accused my younger brother of dirtying up the floor, but when my mother found my muddy shoes under my bed, she made me apologize to my brother and to beg his forgiveness. I also had to go to bed without supper. Later, as I recapitulated this event, I realized that it had not been so much the dirty kitchen floor that had infuriated my mother, but the act of lying which was something well brought up girls simply ought not do.

I looked at the old man. As if sensing my preoccupation, he wiped his hands on the front of his shirt to clean them.

“It’s a beautiful pen,” he whispered leaning closer. “I will guard it carefully. Too many thieves around.”

I couldn’t tell if he was being facetious, but as if in a daze, I slowly handed him the pen. From the corner of my eye, I kept a close watch to make sure he didn’t pocket it. I sneaked a few sideways glances at his face too. It was quite striking, now that I got a better look. He had high cheekbones, strong Indian features, and eyes that burned with a fierce bird-of-prey intensity that reminded me of Emilito’s; it gave the man an awesome, yet strangely appealing quality.

Watching his face made me dizzy. I heard a loud buzzing in my ear and felt a pressure at my solar plexus. The room began to sway and I felt as if I was about to keel over.

“Lean on me,” the man said as he pressed my back to steady me.

“When is the baby due?” the woman in front of me asked, turning around.

“What are you talking about?” I stammered.

I realized, then, that they must have thought I was pregnant and that was why I was feeling faint.

“I know how you must feel, dear,” said the woman giving me a sympathetic pat. She looked like Clara, only shorter, stockier, and darker complected. “When I was carrying Heime,” she continued, “I used to feel faint all the time.”

“I’m fine,” I said. “I just haven't eaten.”

“I saw you in the street with that young man,” she continued as if she hadn’t heard me. “Is he your husband, or did you cross the border to get married?”

“I did not come to Mexico to get married,” I yelled, “and I'm not pregnant!”

Everyone in the room turned to look at who was shouting, A young man leaning against the wall smiled and shook his head as if he knew better.

“Perhaps you came for an abortion,” the old man said with a snicker. “Shame on you.” He grinned making his eyes look wild.

I was so embarrassed that I had a hard time taking in enough air. I stared at the old man's face. His eyes were shining as if illuminated by two tiny flames. They were black, glossy, like an animal’s except for two tiny dots of amber light that kept getting larger and larger. Yet try as I might, I could not turn my head away. I became mesmerized by his eyes. The room became a white haze except for the man’s face, which had a golden ring around it. Then his face started to expand until his features disappeared altogether. All that was left was a ball of light. I was no longer in the room, but seemed to be moving at infinite speed through a long black tunnel.

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“Make room!” I heard someone call. “Give the gringa some air!”

I opened my eyes to see muddy shoes and khaki trousers. I was gazing up at a handful of strangers who were looking down at me. I realized then, I was lying on the floor of the border checkpoint. The thought of being on that dirty floor full of spit and filth, made me immediately raise up. Someone helped me to stand by pulling my arms. Another person handed me water in a paper cup. Gratefully, I drank it not thinking whether it was drinkable or not.

I remembered my pen. I looked for the old man with the burning eyes, but to my dismay, he was nowhere in sight.

A younger man solicitously handed me half of a cheese sandwich wrapped in cellophane, I took it numbly. All I wanted was to get out of that room into the fresh air. When the official stamped my form, I hurried out the side door stepping into air, light and mariachi music coming from a nearby restaurant.

Across the street I saw Carlos talking to some men sitting on large cement sacks that had been stacked up against the side of a building. When I approached he did not introduce me, but hurriedly broke off the conversation.

“No problems crossing?” he asked.

“It was so stuffy in that room that I keeled over and hit the floor,” I said dryly. “Then someone swiped my gold pen, and everyone accused me of being pregnant, but other than that, it all went fine.”

“Are you serious?” he asked.

“Do I look like I’m joking?”

He looked at me concerned. I imagined my pallor was as gray as the powdered cement scattered overground.

“When was the last time you’ve eaten?”

I had a fleeting image of Clara's well lit kitchen and the wonderful meals we would have there prepared by the elusive caretaker, Emilito.

“A lifetime ago,” I said, knowing that I was indulging in melancholy and self pity. I allowed the waves of dejection to pass until I felt at ease again.

Carlos said something in Spanish to the people he had been talking to and they all looked at me and shook their heads pathetically.

“Carlitos certainly has his hands full,” one of them said in heavily accented English, and everyone giggled and nodded in agreement, Then I saw a man walk past us at a brisk pace. He seemed to be in a great hurry but he paused and turned for an instant as if he wanted me to see his face.

“That’s him,” I said grabbing Carlos’s sleeve. “He’s the one who took my pen.”

“Who?”

Before I could point the man out, he disappeared in the crowd of Mexicans gathered in the street.

## Chapter 3: Santa Ana

It was hot in the Sonoran Desert; over 100 degrees in the shade. In a car without air conditioning, it was like being in an oven turned on low. I had learned to make beef jerky that way, leaving the thin strips of meat on an oven rack to dehydrate over night. The windows of the Chevrolet were rolled down and the hot air fanned my face. I felt like a piece of beef jerky, dry and lifeless.

“Can you be more specific as to what we are going to do on this journey to power?” I asked Carlos pulling down the visor to shield my eyes from the glare of the road.

Carlos glanced at me in spurts as he drove. “It’s difficult to explain,” he said slowing down for a curve. “We’re just going proceed without any specific plan and allow the spirit to guide us. That’s what I do whenever I come to Mexico to see don Juan. I abandon myself to the circumstances as they present themselves.”

“That sounds fine to me, but are we just going to drive aimlessly or are we heading somewhere in particular?”

“We are going to the Yaqui towns of Vicara and Potam with the hope of finding ceremonial masks for the Ethnographic museum. That will be our overt maneuver; but essentially we are searching for power.”

“How will we know when we find it?” I asked wiping the sweat off my forehead with a paper towel.

Carlos laughed at my pained expression. “We will know because something in us will change, or our perception of the world will change. Either way, our journey begins there, in the Yaqui towns.”

“Why there?”

“Because that’s where don Juan and his associates gather to renew themselves. That is where the sorcerers of his group come to restore their power.”

The terrain from Nogales to Hermosillo was desolate; for miles there was nothing to see except giant saguaro cacti and long spiny ocotillo interspersed with toyon trees and small shrubs. Now and then we passed a dense cluster of prickly pear with small birds pecking at it's red fruit. For distraction, I tried to identify as many different types of flora as I could. If I did not recognize a plant, I asked Carlos it's name. He seemed very knowledgeable regarding the vegetation of the area.

“At one time I wanted to study the medicinal properties of plants,” he said, “and don Juan often took me hiking in the desert.”

“Is it possible to survive in the desert?” I asked.

“The Indians use the barrel cactus as a source of water and of course the fruit of the tuna is edible,” he replied, “as well as many of the other shrubs and roots, but you have to know about plants.”

The Pan American highway cut the flat terrain like a black ribbon. I watched the white line stretching ahead of us until it disappeared near the horizon in a shimmering mirage of vaporous water. To ease my distress, I fanned myself with a cologne scented handkerchief. Carlos glanced at the white cloth waving like a flag of truce, and wrinkled his nose.

“It smells like a rose garden,” he said half smiling, but when he sneezed, I could tell the perfume bothered him.

I put the handkerchief back in my purse and popped a Chiclet into my mouth. For distraction, I tested myself on how many variety of flora I could actually identify without his help, I could pick out

the bisnaga, the tuna, the maguey, which is used to make tequilia, the tall yucca that blooms only once every ten years, and, of course, the manzanilla and toyon trees loaded with scrumptious but inedible red berries.

Around noon we came to a stretch of highway that was being repaired. We slowed down to a crawl and I watched the shirtless road workers manually filling in potholes. A worker with a red kerchief around his head, was shoveling tar from a bucket, the other wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat, was rolling the tar out with an implement that looked like an enormous iron. Further down the road, another worker was brushing water on the freshly tarred area, sweeping it with a wet broom, causing steam to form as the water evaporated in the heat.

The fresh asphalt looked like a thick strip of melted licorice, good enough to eat. I realized then that I was famished. Except for the soda I had in Nogales, some fruit we had bought at a roadside stand, and some crackers I had found in a bag in the back seat, I had not eaten since Gila Bend.

In Nogales, Carlos had offered to feed me, but my fainting spell had left me too upset to eat. It would be three hours before we reached Hermosillo, where Carlos said he knew of an excellent restaurant. Resigned, I searched through my purse for some more chewing gum to moisten my throat.

The overripe mangoes were fermenting in the plastic sack in the back seat. A pungent order drifted forward and invaded my nostrils. The smell was familiar, yet not offensive. I closed my eyes and let the scent of mangoes envelop me.

As my sinuses cleared, I saw a purple light in the area around my forehead. The space opened up into a scene in front of my eyes. I got a glimpse of Emilito making his special brew of mango liqueur. He was wearing a chef's hat and had on an apron over his neatly pressed blue overalls. He was in the kitchen of Clara's house, standing in front of the enormous wood burning stove.

"Because you are a tree dweller," he said, "you are entitled to sample this excellent liqueur I've brewed."

I stared at him dumbfounded.

"I didn't know you drank liquor, Emilito, let alone brewed it yourself. Isn't it bad for your health?"

"It is," he admitted with a devil-may-care gleam in his eye, "but this is a special occasion, so we will try some, you and I."

I began to feel that familiar panic whenever Emilito broke one of his stringent rules. I had never seen Emilito this relaxed before. He was always so careful about what he ate or drank because of his delicate constitution. A dozen questions and as many fears flooded me.

“What is the special occasion?” I asked.

“It’s my birthday,” he said with a childlike squeal.

“But I thought one didn’t celebrate birthdays in the sorcerers’ world. What about the *recapitulation*, what about erasing your personal history, what about facing oncoming time?”

“What about them?” he asked, blinking like a bird.

He took out of the cupboard two exquisite etched liquor glasses. I had never seen them there before, in spite of the keen eye I kept on the placement of objects in and about the house. Nothing had escaped my scrutiny for I had been obsessed with determining who lived in the house and what they were up to.

“I though that losing one’s personal history meant that one didn’t focus on the day one was born, let alone celebrate it,” I said, admiring the glasses. They were crystal with a delicate stem and the faintest geometric pattern etched in the rim.

He carefully set the glasses down on the table. “Where did you ever get that idea?” he asked. “The day you were born is most important.”

“It’s a day I want to forget,” I said.

He smacked his lips. “Well, if it isn’t important to you, then it is to me.”

“I don’t understand.”

“It’s important because that was the day I began repaying my debt,” he explained.

“I still don’t get it. Can you tell me what you mean?”

“The day you woke up in the harness and lowered yourself down from the tree, and the first moment you laid eyes on me at this very kitchen door, that was the day I began repaying my debt. As far as I’m concerned, that was your birthday and, in a way, mine too, and in case you didn’t know it, which you don’t because you have a sluggish, lazy mind, that day was exactly one year ago from today. So, Taisha let’s drink up and celebrate our freedom.”

He handed me the sherry glass filled with a yellow orange thick liquid he had poured out of a clear distillery flask, the kind with the bulbous bottom one sees in a chemists laboratory. He held up his glass and waited for me to do the same.

I had the foresight to know that as soon as our glasses touched something monumental would happen. I hesitated. I didn’t want to toast, and yet I was compelled to follow Emilito's gesture. Reluctantly, I held up my glass and said “prost” the way Emilito had, and even tried to smile a bit. Then he insisted we clink glasses.

He sipped his liquor delicately, savoring every bit. I cautiously took a sip of mine. I nearly choked. It tasted like sweet turpentine. Thick, and sticky and warm. Emilito, happy that I was drinking

his concoction, looked at me with such hopeful anticipation that I took another sip.

“Isn’t this really something?” he said, waiting for my reply.

“Yes, it is,” I said, trying not to grimace.

That was all I could say; the liqueur had burned my throat and I wondered it I would ever talk again. He made me drink every drop and then I passed out.

I remembered having the most vivid dream. There was Clara and Manfred and gorgeous Nelida. I thought we were at a picnic grounds, until I realized it was the back of someone’s house. There was an open fire in an oil drum filled with mesquite wood and a grid on top. I smelled pork roasting over mesquite wood. There was a large gathering; among them, a few were young but others were older, and one young man in particular was staring at me. They all seemed so happy and bubbling with enthusiasm and carefree delight, that I forgot my anxiety and was happy too.

I focused my gaze on the young man. He seemed to be the center of the group of people who were listening to him talk. I wanted to go over there, but Nelida stopped me. She placed her hand on my shoulder and said, “stay here, it’s not time yet. You’ll meet the new *nagual* soon, on the other side. Then your task will be to merge the two sides. Only the profoundest affection will allow you to do that.”

I woke up. Something was poking my ribs. I realized it was the car door handle. We must have gone around a sharp curve because I was slumped against the door.

"Damn dogs," Carlos said. "They're always crossing the street when a car's coming."

"Did we hit it?" I asked concerned.

Carlos reached out an arm to help me straighten up. "No," he said returning his hand to the steering wheel. "I think we were in luck."

I looked up just in time to see a mangy dog slithering off the side of the road into a gully.

"Are there people living around here?" I asked surprised to see a domesticated animal. Except for the construction crew, whom I assumed were there just to repair the road, some crows and a field mouse darting across the road, I hadn't seen a single sign of life for miles.

"Naturally there are people living here," Carlos replied. "Near the hills there are many rancherias. You can't see them from the highway, but they're there. It's dangerous to wander about here at night. People around here shoot first and ask questions later."

"Who would want to live out here in the middle of the Sonoran Desert?" I said, hoping the temperamental Chevrolet wouldn't choose this spot to break down.

"It's not a question of wanting," Carlos corrected me. "This entire area was at one time settled by the Yaqui Indians before they were relocated to Central Mexico. Later, they were brought back by the carloads to work in the mines. We are nearing a town called Santa Ana named after the famous general who fought at the Alamo and who later became President of Mexico. There's even a song about the town."

"I've never heard of it… the song I mean. I've heard of the general. Wasn't he president of Mexico three times?"

"He got his leg shot off and they had a hero's burial for it," Carlos said. "And when he fell out of grace they dug up the leg and threw it in the river."

I took a map of Mexico out of the glove compartment and carefully unfolding it then refolding it to show only the area that concerned us. I wanted to see just how far we were from Hermosillo and that excellent restaurant that Carlos had said was there.

As we turned a curve, a Pemex station and a cluster of buildings came into view. The houses were white with doors painted a brilliant turquoise, the widespread color of the area. Most of the houses in Sonora had their doors painted turquoise or blue. I had always thought it was to represent the blue cloak of the Virgin of Guadalupe, but Carlos said it was because it was an easy color for divers to see, so they wouldn't run into the houses coming around the curves of the narrow streets.

It made sense. By the looks of the dirt alleyways and no sidewalks, it would be easy for a truck or car to swerve around a bend too fast and ram a house.

“This is Santa Ana,” Carlos said slowing down. “If you’re hungry we can stop and get something to eat here.”

I began to salivate with anticipation, but when I saw a dead dog on the roadside, recently hit by a car, my stomach again became queasy. Carlos pulled into the gas station and told me to wait for him in the building next door which was a restaurant while he filled the car with petrol.

When I entered, I found the large airy room was deserted. It had a black and white linoleum floor, metal tables with green speckled Formica tops, framed pictures of the Swiss Alps on the whitewashed walls, and faded ruffled curtains on the casement windows, whose sashes were painted the traditional blue. There was even a broken down jukebox in the corner. The place looked like something out of a fifties movie. Any minute I expected a motorcycle gang to ride through the door, and revving their motors, ride circles around the tables.

I sat down at one of the tables under a ceiling fan that had one of it's armatures missing. A lean middle aged woman and a girl of about ten came out from behind a blue curtain that led to another room. The woman seemed groggy from the heat, or perhaps they had been taking a siesta in the next room and were awakened when I entered. I smiled at the woman, and winked at the girl, who immediately ran and hid behind the curtain.

Confidently, I ordered two Pienafiel mineral waters, “sin gas” in Spanish. The woman smiled and nodded and momentarily returned with one bottle of mineral water with bubbles and a glass of ice, which she set on the table with a bang, I decided it was safer to drink, directly from the bottle and bypass the glass and the ice. I was trying to decipher the hand written menu, when Carlos came in and sat down across from me.

“Forget what’s on the menu,” he said taking it out of my hand. “In rural Mexico, it’s best to order the plate of the day.”

“And what might that be?” I asked, handing him a napkin I pried out of the stainless steel napkin holder.

“I’ll find out.” He beckoned for the woman to come over.

A friendly exchange followed. Carlos attempted to include me in the conversation, but the flow was too fast, so I just nodded dumbly whenever I thought it was appropriate. Then Carlos turned to me and said in English, “she says the stew is fresh. The meat was just killed today.”

“What kind of meat are we talking about?” I asked, remembering the dead dog on the highway.

“It’s hard to say,” he replied with a shrug. “Let’s find out, shall we? I’ll order two specialties of the house.”

Since I had agreed we were on a trip of power and that I would offer as little resistance as possible, I accepted his recommendations with a nod.

“Stew will be fine,” I said, cleaning my spoon with a napkin.

Carlos ordered for me, and the woman, in a faded blue skirt and white blouse, gave me an angry look, apparently offended that I had cleaned the silverware.

Right away the woman returned with two bowls on a tray along with a stack of steaming tortillas and a bowl of green chili peppers. She set them on the table and I was so famished that before she even took the tortillas off the tray, I was already dipped into the stew. I nearly choked. It was the hottest stew I had ever tasted. I literally had to douse the fire in my mouth with mineral water.

The waitress chuckled and pretended not to notice my discomfort, but I suspected that she was getting back at me for insinuating that her silverware wasn’t clean and had spiked my portion of stew with extra chili powder.

“I can’t tell what kind of meat this is,” I said after downing plenty of water. “The chili powder is too overpowering.”

The stew, including the meat, looked uniformly brownish red, although I thought I detected a few beans or perhaps they were bones; I wasn’t sure.

“Do you suppose it’s dog meat?” I asked peering at the stew.

Carlos took a bite. “No, most likely it’s beef,” he said and confidently took another bite. “Hmm. On second thought, perhaps it’s donkey meat.”

Regardless of what it was, he made short shrift of his stew. Apparently he was no stranger to chili peppers either, for he ate a couple of the green ones right from the bowl. I, on the other hand, only picked at my food and stuffed myself with tortillas.

“I sure hope I’m not eating someone’s pet,” I said by way of commentary.

“Dogs aren’t pets around here,” Carlos informed me. “There isn’t enough food to feed people let alone dogs. A dog’s life in Sonora is truly worth nothing. They have to scrounge all day for food where there isn’t any.”

A fly landed on the tortillas and I quickly shooed it away with a flick of my hand.

“How come Mexico is so poor?” I asked tearing off a bit of the tortilla and leaving the part where the fly had landed. “It seems to me that with all the aid from the United States government, they could grow enough food to feed their population.”

Carlos shook his head. “There’s too much graft and corruption in the higher places,” he said. “Very little of the money ever trickles down to where it’s really needed.”

“Graft and corruption,” I said. “Two of the meanest words in the English language.”

I looked at Carlos, his sparking eyes had taken on a somber air, revealing a more serious side of his nature.

“The Revolution didn’t free the Mexican people,” he continued. “It only enslaved them more. Now everything is in the hands of the government or the big agricultural conglomerates, and the people are still going hungry. What kind, of revolution is that, when ninety percent of the land is still in the hands of a meager ten percent?”

Just then the little girl turned on the jukebox, and the room was tilled with lively music. It was a “ranchera”, the typical music of Sonora. The instruments included the small accordion, a harmonica and some sort of percussion sound all blended together in a lively beat that reminded me of a German polka. I wondered what the words were and asked Carlos to translate.

“I thought you said you spoke Spanish,” Carlos remarked.

“I do, in an elementary sort of way.”

“How elementary do you mean?”

I realized it would be impossible to keep up a pretense. In a country where only Spanish was spoken, one’s deficiencies would undoubtedly become clear. It was better that I made a clean breast of things.

“First year college level,” I admitted. “I won’t expect you to translate everything. Besides, I understand a great deal.”

Carlos nodded. Apparently he didn't believe my boasting.

The song ended as abruptly as it had begun. The woman came over and stood by the table and chatted with Carlos in a flirtatious manner. I looked on, trying to follow the gist of their conversation. I could tell that she was definitely attracted by Carlos and that at one point she was saying terrible things about her drunken husband, but when I was unable follow their banter of jokes and laughter, I gave up listening and began assessing the woman’s appearance.

I was surprised to see that the woman wasn’t as old as she had first seemed. In fact, under her untidy appearance, she was beautiful; with large almond eyes, high cheekbones and perfectly flawless bronze skin. Her elaborate pendant earrings and long, jet black hair, that was done in a single braid, gave her an exotic look. Incongruously, she wore a large amethyst ring on the index finger of her right hand. There was something about her that looked familiar, yet I couldn’t pinpoint what it was. I wondered who she was, and what caused her to spend her life working in a desert town in Sonora.

I realized I was beginning to feel superior again. The woman’s entire life had been decided for her. She had no alternative but to follow the designs of her fate. Then I began to pity her for being stuck in a small town, having to wait on customers at all hours, and to take care of a husband who drinks excessively, and an obviously undernourished, sickly daughter. The only excitement in her dreary life would be going to mass on Sunday and gossiping with her neighbors about the latest birth or wedding, I thanked my stars that I wasn’t in her shoes.

My thoughts were interrupted when the woman suddenly turned to me and gave me a fierce stare as if she caught the drift of my feelings. A strange uneasiness came upon me as I remembered a previous time I visited Mexico. I was with Clara, also sitting in a restaurant, only it had been full of customers. I recalled how an intrusive stranger sat down at our table uninvited and how Clara dispatched him with a similar intensity that allowed him no alternative but to leave not only our table but the restaurant itself. Now, I felt like doing the same thing, for that woman's stare had cut right through me. On top of that, she had pointed her amethyst clad finger at me and instantly I got a headache.

The woman gave Carlos a smile and me another contemptuous look and left our table, leaving no doubt in my mind that I had completely misjudged her strength.

"That woman is a famous curer," Carlos said in a whisper. "She has patients that come to her from all over Sonora."

"What? You mean she doesn't live here in the back room?" I said stunned. "What is she doing waiting on tables? I thought this was her place."

"Ermilina is filling in for her sister who is visiting relatives in Hermosillo," Carlos explained.

I felt lower than a snake in the sand for getting caught in petty judgment.

"And that girl? I suppose she isn't her daughter."

"No. That's her sister's child, Carmelita. She looks just like her, doesn't she?"

I nodded. "I would have sworn she was her daughter. I suppose she doesn't have a drunken husband either?"

"No. What makes you say that? She isn't married."

I shrugged. "Well, anyone can make a mistake," I said to myself. I wanted to leave before the woman came back. I did not want to face her again. I would hate to be her enemy for I knew enough to tell that that woman had power. If she was a curer she could also cast spells, and I knew about the fear people had of the "evil eye," or "mal ojo," of witches.

I glanced at the door.

"Are you expecting someone?" Carlos asked.

"Who would I be expecting?” I said. At the same time, I realized that I felt a strange excitement at once again being in what I always regarded as “sorcery country,” as though I expected Clara to walk in, sit down at our table and begin chatting in her easy way, just as if nothing happened in the many months that elapsed.

From the moment I met Carlos at the University, I wanted to tell him about Clara and Emilito and the sorcerers’ house near Navojoa, but a deep barrier always prevented me from talking about them. At one point on our drive, I wanted to tell him of the dream I had with Emilito, but I always felt that telling someone one’s dreams invites analysis or comment on one’s innermost being so, again, I remained silent.

“Do you think don Juan will be at his house when we get there?” I asked.

I began to vigorously shake my head from side to side to clear it. It was a habit I had picked up from the time I stayed with Clara. Whenever I became mentally bogged down, or emotionally upset, I allowed myself a moment of relaxation by shaking my head. That movement cause an electric current or a quiver of energy to rush up my spine into the back of my head, causing an involuntary shiver, which helped to throw off any tension.

“Perhaps,” Carlos said observing me curiously, “but as I’ve said, sometimes he’s difficult to track down.”

“Does he hide from you?”

“Not exactly, he just isn’t in his house, and no one knows where he’s gone or when he will return.”

“That can make doing field research difficult,” I said taking a bite of one of the chili peppers. “What if he’s not there now? Then we came all this way for nothing.”

It was fiercely hot but I pretended the pepper didn’t bother me. There was something very impressive, I thought, about eating chili peppers straight from the bowl. I remember my brothers eating chilies from a jar, without flinching, in a kind of childhood test of bravery. Since I had copied everything they did, I also followed them in that endeavor. I got blisters in my mouth from the burns to prove I was just as macho as they were. I realized that the *recapitulation* hadn’t cured me of my deep rooted competitiveness, for I was doing the same thing now, and I was no longer a child.

“What do you mean coming for nothing?” Carlos said raising an eyebrow at my grimace. “What about delighting in each other's company?”

That sounded so much like something Clara might have said that I had to laugh.

“The trip won't be for nothing,” Carlos assured me. “Remember our plan to collect masks for the Ethnological museum?”

“What kind of masks are you looking for?” I asked.

“Pascola masks. Masks carved for the dances that the Yaqui Indians perform during their celebrations. They represent animals or spirits. The Yaqui Indians believe that by wearing the masks while they dance, they can enter into the spirit world.”

“Do you believe that is possible?” I asked.

Carlos took a sip of mineral water, “Of course, don’t you?” he asked turning the question around.

I wanted to say, “I certainly do,” but a familiar inner warning bell sounded. Now was not the time or place to talk about my own experiences.

“In a way,” I said casually. “They say sorcerers do it all the time, although I don’t really know what sorcery is. Perhaps you can tell me.”

“Sorcery is the ability to perceive more than our society and our personal milieu permits us to perceive,” he said. “Sorcerers say that there is more to all this than meets the eye, but to actually perceive other levels of reality, such as the spirit world, one has to store personal power.”

He became serious and said that to investigate the practices of sorcery and it's ramifications was the reason he had been coming to Mexico on a regular basis.

“If there is something to it, I’m going to find out,” he said with a smile.

The fly was circling the table again. I shooed it away.

“What about Zen Buddhism?” I asked.

He looked at me surprised. “What about it?”

“Did you know that in the old days in China, when Buddhists monks wanted to build a road, they had to pick out all the worms from the dirt and move them to safety before they could proceed with their construction work?”

“And I thought roadwork was slow here in Mexico,” Carlos said with a laugh. “That sounds absolutely tedious. Why would they do that?”

“The Buddhists believe that to kill even the most insignificant life form is wrong. Take this fly for instance. A Zen Buddhist sitting here would not swat it.”

Carlos gave me a curious look as if the heat of the chilis had gotten the better of me. I told him that once my karate teacher, while lecturing to his students about the importance of zen in martial arts, proceeded to squash all the flies that had landed on his desk.

“And with a rolled up martial arts magazine to boot,” I said. “My teacher didn’t see the irony of it all, but to me it was a major revelation. After that, I could no longer respect him.”

“You lost respect for your teacher because he killed a fly?” Carlos asked, “What does killing flies have to do with respect?”

“Don’t you get it? Not because he killed a fly, but because of what the fly represented. It was obvious that my teacher was trying to make us students believe he was a Zen master, but the flies were a dead giveaway.”

Carlos looked at me as it I were a fly, and he wanted to swat me.

“Don’t you see?” I lamented. “Don’t you get it?”

“I sympathize with you,” he said at last. “I too lost respect for my teacher, don Juan. He kept calling me a stupid imbecile and since I knew I wasn’t one, I couldn’t respect him any longer. I thought he was deliberately insulting me and that it was he who was stupid for not appreciating my worth. Luckily, I didn’t stop seeing him, and now I respect him even more because I know he was right. I am an imbecile and so are you.”

I didn’t like it all when he included me in his realization. We weren’t yet on such familiar terms that he could insult me with impunity. In fact, when I thought about it, I realized that it was important to me that Carlos respect me. I was deliberately trying to make a good impression on him, to the point of eating green chili peppers. To my dismay, the basic premises that governed my behavior had not changed in spite of the *recapitulation*.

Clara had warned me that it was not enough to merely recapitulate one's life; one must also act upon the understanding that a thorough examination of one's life brings. It's not the case that one is suddenly different, but that by being aware of one's habits, one has a moment's pause to act differently if one so chooses. What the *recapitulation* does is that, by bringing awareness to the foreground, it gives one a chance to be different. Whether or not one takes that choice, depends on one's energy at that particular moment. More often than not, I saw that in spite of my understanding of my own behavioral dynamics, my initial reaction was still the same as always.

To impress my companion, I said, "do you know a song called, 'Ich Liebe Caborca?'"

Without waiting for his reply, I began to sing a few bars of a song Clara had taught me about a town in the Gran Desierto settled by Germans. Carlos was not impressed. In fact, my singing seemed to embarrass him more than my trying to speak Spanish. He told me to pipe down. Instead of complying, I obstinately began to sing louder. I didn't know what had gotten into me, for I never sang in front of anyone. Carlos' presence seemed to be doing strange things to me.

When I had finished the whole song, I began to laugh nervously. I knew the heat of the chili peppers had begun to singe my brain, for when I turned my head, I thought I saw Emilito's bird-like face peek out from behind the blue curtain that led to the other room. For a moment he shook his finger at me, warning me not to indulge. It happened so fast that I knew it was an illusion, a product of wishful thinking, like the mirage of water on a desert road. My rational mind explained it away saying that it must have been that woman curer or the little girl that had poked her head out from behind the curtain.

Nevertheless, I took Emilito's phantom warning to heart. I used all my effort to gain control over myself.

"What are you looking at?" Carlos asked.

"I just thought I saw someone."

"But there's no one in the room," he said, concerned.

"I mean someone I knew in the past."

I looked straight at him. A bubble burst and I knew without a doubt that Carlos was the person Emilito had said the *spirit* would put me in contact with. Only, there was no way I could tell him that without him thinking I was crazy, and that was the last thing I wanted anyone to think about me, especially Carlos, He seemed too sober, and I felt that only a stable, reasonable person would pass his scrutiny.

“Do you know many people in Mexico?” I asked trying to sound casual.

He mentioned the names of several people, but Clara and Emilito were not among them.

The woman came back and Carlos gave her some bills to pay for the meal. They chatted while I watched the flies fighting over the crumbs on the table. Then the woman’s eyes held mine for a moment, and in that instant I knew we had met before. She was one of the women in the vision I had in Emilito’s house, I stared at her terrified, but she did not smile to put me at ease as I would have liked. Rather, to my utter dismay, she regarded me with complete contempt.

As we got up to leave, she followed us and whispered harshly in my ear. “Stop indulging, young lady,” she said in English, “or you’ll be in deep trouble.”

I reacted with anger and didn’t want to believe her, but some part of me knew she was right.

## Chapter 4: Hermosillo

It was late afternoon by the time we arrived in Hermosillo. We stopped at the main intersection to allow a group of school children wearing blue blazers and knee pants to cross the street. They were accompanied by patrolmen carrying a yellow and white stop sign held up high. When the elderly man lowered the sign, the cars resumed their erratic movement, honking as they made their way through the intersection. With the windows rolled down, I could hear the bells of bicycles, car engines, and barking dogs.

We passed houses with potted geranium plants decorating their tile steps, and ornate wrought iron fences and gates protecting the entrances. Carpets of burgundy bougainvillea covered parts of the tile rooftops, wrapping themselves around chimney stacks, or hanging in thick clusters from trellises or balcony railings.

Carlos parked the car near the plaza made of a circular park with benches an a gazebo in the center.

“Let’s stretch our legs for a moment,” he said. “I want to stop at a bakery I know and buy some bread and also some fruit before heading on to Guaymas.”

I was relieved to be able to get out of the car and walk before continuing our journey. The chili peppers I had eaten in Santa Ana had upset my stomach and I needed to go to the restroom badly.

“Now don’t go following me in with your notebook,” I said seriously.

Carlos laughed. “It was my friend, Larry, who did the study; I only assisted him on a few occasions.”

Along our drive, Carlos had entertained me with a story of how a friend of his at the University was interested in studying toilet behavior, cross culturally. To this effect, Larry kept a notebook on people’s activities in restrooms. He had accurate records on who went into the public facilities; how long they spent at the urinals or in the cubicles; whether they wrote graffiti on the walls; how much toilet paper was consumed during each occurrence; whether they flushed, and if so how many times; and when possible, information on whether they wiped themselves from the front to the back, or the back to front, and so on.

His friend had complied quite a bit of data, complete with drawings, on the subject of restroom activity, and had submitted his proposal to the National Institute for Mental Health for a research grant. Unfortunately, the cross cultural study on toilet behavior was not approved due to cutbacks in government funding.

“I wouldn’t mind living in this town,” I said to Carlos after I came out of the restroom and we were walking toward a small park. “Everything is so lush and clean.”

“Back there in Santa Ana, I got the impression that you didn’t like Mexico,” Carlos said while stopping to tie his shoe.

“That’s because I thought I was eating dog meat. This is a beautiful place. Where do the people work?”

“In the fields, or in the mines in the hills, or in construction,” Carlos said.

While driving into town, I had seen plenty of evidence of construction work. Everywhere people were building or refurbishing buildings. It was obvious that there was no shortage of masons, carpenters and plasterers here. Near the park, workers were digging a huge pit perhaps to lay new pipes or to repair an old sewage system.

“I used to work in construction,” I said with a touch of pride.

Carlos looked at me in surprise.

“You don't seem like the redneck type!” he said laughing.

“I worked for one, though, as an apprentice, although I knew a lot more about carpentry than he apparently did. Lemont was working on a remodeling project and hired me to be his assistant, provided that I didn’t complain about his radio that he kept on full blast on the country music station, and his foul language, a habit he had picked up in Vietnam.”

“What type of things did you build?”

“Our first project was a redwood deck, using no nails whatsoever, only nuts and bolts. Quite a challenge. You see, he was a Buddhist from a commune in Oregon and he was convinced that to use nails would desecrate the wood. I really needed the money, so I tolerated his eccentricities, the loud radio, his beer guzzling, his profanity, and his body odor. Whenever I wanted to quit, he kept telling me that I was working with a master carpenter who had no peers in the construction world, and that I should be paying him for his guidance.”

“Sounds like quite a character,” Carlos said.

“He was. After weeks he still didn’t trust me to use his power tools which he dusted and oiled every night. I realized it was a situation of observing, hauling lumber, and sweeping up sawdust.”

“That doesn’t sound too exciting.”

“It wasn’t. Lemont had promised me hands-on experience but the only actual hands-on experience I ever received throughout the entire project were his prods and pinches to various parts of my anatomy. I was so desperate, I developed a severe allergy to sawdust and began having fits of sneezing. I was going to hang in there for the rest of the summer, but the situation went from bad to worse.”

“What happened?” Carlos asked, concerned.

“He kept insisting I come to his house to see the new kitchen cabinets he had installed, and share a joint of marijuana while listening to some Willie Nelson tapes. Well, I knew what that meant and realized the situation had become hopeless. I quit and with the money I had saved, I entered the University, where things weren’t all that much better where men were concerned, if you know what I mean.”

Carlos didn’t reply one way or the other.

“Lets look into some of the shops," Carlos suggested stepping aside to avoid a hole in the ground. “Do you need to buy any gifts for friends or relatives?”

“I don’t have any.”

“Friends or relatives?” Carlos inquired.

"Neither.”

He looked at me and shook his head. He sang the line of a Mexican song. “No tengo ni madre ni padre, ni un perro que ladre. I have no mother or father, not even a dog that barks.”

“That about sums up my situation,” I said.

“I don’t have any parents either,” Carlos said. “And I’ve learned that to have friends is too restricting. You always end up trying to please them or to fulfill their expectations. They pin you down.

You’re lucky to be an orphan.”

I wasn’t an orphan, but I did not bother to correct Carlos’ false impression. I realized that I wanted him to think I had no one in the world. It made me appear independent and mysterious. Besides, I had never felt I was a part of my family anyway. As a child I had always imagined that I was a changeling, A nurse must have gotten me mixed up in the hospital with the hundreds of other babies of the post war baby boom. At least, that was what I used to tell myself.

We entered one of the shops that lined the arcade around the plaza. It had the typical ceramic and leather goods you would find in any shop in Mexico, but in one corner, half hidden by a postcard rack, I found a thick wool poncho with braided fringe. I wanted to buy it but Carlos insisted on paying for it himself. He said that it was a good idea to get it because even though the days were hot, the nights in Sonora were cool.

After some casual browsing, we headed for the bakery that Carlos affirmed was the best in Sonora.

“You mean you’ve sampled bread from all of them?” I teased.

“Practically,” he said, but from his lean, muscular physique, it was hard to believe that he had over-indulged in baked goods.

On our way to the bakery, we had to detour around another deep pit in road that sprang in front of us so suddenly that I nearly fell in and would have had Carlos not grabbed me by the arm and pulled me aside.

“We almost lost you, there,” he laughed. “This isn’t Los Angeles where there are sidewalks and where the cars will stop for dazed pedestrians. Around here you have to watch were you’re going.”

I flushed with embarrassment as I realized that with my martial arts and sorcery training, I was still a walking zombie. I seemed to operate on the assumption that whoever I was with knew where they were going, and therefore I didn't have to pay attention. It was also true while driving. I trusted my companions implicitly and never knew how I got wherever I ended up. This was particularity true when that companion was male. Unwittingly, it was a subtle way of relinquishing control to the opposite sex. I knew it was a dangerous way of proceeding. I remembered Clara’s warning that in the sorcerers world, everything was important and that I always had to be attentive to details and assume responsibility for my actions.

I kept my eyes downcast and avoided the pits and ruts in the road. I noticed that Carlos was exceedingly fleet-footed. His exquisite natural balance and prowess gave him an easy stride. For a while, I tried to imitate his style of walking. Whereas I moved from the hips with little flexibility in my knees and ankles, Carlos flexed his knees and ankles and rolled off the balls of his feet achieving a smooth feline sprint. Copying his stride, I deliberately flexed my knees and shifted my weight more toward the front of my feet, rather than landing heavy on my heels the way I normally walked. After a while, my calves began to ache. I felt I was using them for the first time in months.

The last time I pushed them to the limit was when I was walking with Clara in the hills near her house. I could never keep up with her pace, but walking with her had rid me, at least temporarily, of the “doctor’s shuffle” as Clara had called my way of walking. Doctors, she had insisted, had a distinctive shuffle, moving from the hips, as they sauntered from their consultation rooms to the examination room, or down the corridors of hospitals, which Clara claimed was the most they ever walk in their lives.

“They all have bad knees,” she said expounding on her generalization. It was not something I was prepared to dispute, for I had to agree that the few doctors I had come into contact with, including my own family physician, fell into her category of shuffling as they walked.

I was aware that having been away from Clara’s influence, I had again lapsed into my old habits, including my lazy hip walking pattern, shuffling along as if my listless legs resented the burden of having to carry my body to a place neither they nor I wanted to go.

“What’s the matter with your walk?” Carlos asked, concerned. “Did you injure your ankle back there on the road?”

I realized trying to imitate his sprint made my stride appear awkward and uneven. One of my legs was actually dragging behind the other in an attempt to keep up with my head and shoulders.

“Sit here while I go get the bread,” he said, pointing at an iron bench across from the gazebo.

“I’ll go with you,” I offered.

“No,” he said firmly. I had the distinct feeling he didn’t want to be seen in my company.

Obediently, I sat on the bench and watched him enter the store marked, “panaderia” across the street. Through the glass window, I could see him talking to a beautiful woman perhaps in her late twenties whom I assumed was a customer. She was elegantly dressed, in a fashionable lime green blouse and beige skirt, not a white uniform one would expect a bakery attendant to be wearing. I could see her attire, because I moved closer to the door and actually peeked through the window.

Then I saw Carlos hugging her in a most affectionate manner as she gave him the bag of bread he came for. Then she turned, looked at me and before I could hide, she winked at me as if she knew me. I rushed back to the bench in the nick of time, and pretended to be tying my shoelaces, but as I peeked up I could see the woman had accompanied him to the door and was waving goodbye to Carlos and then to me across the road.

A strange anger possessed me. I was fuming. What was going on? How is it that people seem to know me when I don't remember them? It couldn't just be coincidence, that witch-women in the restaurant and now this beauty in the bakery. I felt there was a conspiracy going on and I was somehow at the center of it.

I remembered how Clara and Mr. Abelar tricked me in the past. They followed my movements from way back, and when I thought I met them for the first time, they already knew me intimately. The same thing was happening now, and it all began in the Anthropology department when I suspected that I met Carlos before. I must have met him before because otherwise why would I be having a fit of jealousy now, as if he belonged to me from olden times?

I tried telling myself that the woman was no doubt only a casual acquaintance of his and hugged him only because people south of the border are more demonstrative than in the United States. Yet I couldn't help thinking that the woman wasn't Mexican at all, only very deeply tanned. I wondered who that gorgeous woman was and why Carlos didn't want me to go with him into the bakery, and why she waved at me.

“Let's move to another bench,” Carlos said. “It's shadier over there by those trees.” But I knew the real reason for moving was that he was hiding something. I was distraught to realize Carlos was a man with many secrets. Not that I didn't have secrets myself, which I wouldn't dream of revealing. Yet I had the unreasonable expectation that others had to be completely candid with me.

We walked to the other side of the plaza and sat down on an identical white wrought iron bench, only this one faced the opposite direction of the bakery which was completely hidden by the foliage of trees.

“Why is that your favorite bakery?” I asked trying to sound casual.

Carlos grinned mischievously, “because they make such delicious bread,” he said handing me a round flat loaf sprinkled with pink sugar. “It must be the water or the flour they use. Try it and tell me if it isn't so.”

I attacked the bread with a ferocity that surprised me, but I had to admit, it was delicious. The rolls were a world apart from the bread in the United States. The sugar coating sweetened my disposition and I decided not to ask about the bakery or the lovely woman I wasn't supposed to have seen. She was one of those secrets, I hoped would be revealed in time.

Carlos took out a bottle of mineral water from the sack and from his pocket, a Swiss Army knife which had a bottle opener attached to it along with six or seven other sharp implements. He pried off the cap and handed it to me. I finished the bread, then looked inside the bag to find four more small round loaves, each with a different color sugar coating. I picked out a green one. It tasted like the pink one; the coloring was not a different flavoring but merely food color.

“Why did you decide to become an Anthropologist?” I asked taking a sip of mineral water.

“Because the study of man is one of the most important endeavors one can engage in. Especially studying man’s belief systems, his cognitive structures, his culture as he lives it. I’m particularly interested in a phenomenological approach to the study of man.”

“What do you mean by a phenomenological approach?”

“A phenomenological approach to anthropology or sociology would be to take a person and leave them here in Hermosillo to see how they went about interpreting a foreign culture.”

“Are you planning on leaving me here?” I asked in a moment of panic. “To see how I fare?”

Carlos laughed. “No. I was referring to an experiment I had cooked up with a professor in the sociology department. Not speaking the language or being familiar with the customs, he was going to live here in Hermosillo for a while, and I would be the observer and guardian to make certain that no real harm came to him. The premise was that as he went through his daily tasks of trying to arrange the world in recognizable terms, the taken-for-granted aspects of the world would, by their disruption, reveal themselves. They would make themselves available for investigation.”

“I don’t get it,” I said taking another bite of bread.

“In every simple act he would have to find the natural order of phenomenon that for him, because he lacked membership, would be chaotic. In other words, he would have to create order in his day-to-day existence. This process of creating order, would be the subject matter for our investigation. Since the professor’s interest was the study of norms and how they are constituted in our daily lives, I thought it was a terrific plan, right up his alley.”

“Did you do it?”

"No. We were all set to leave for Mexico, when he backed out at the last minute."

"Why was that?"

"He kept thinking of all the contingencies. He was afraid of contracting some horrendous disease, or of being shot or robbed. All sorts of prejudices and personal considerations came into the picture and so he never left Los Angeles where he felt he was on familiar, and therefore safe, ground."

"It would have been a great study," I said, then I had a frightening thought. "Are you sure I'm not the guinea pig this time?"

Carlos leaned over. "We're all guinea pigs in the hands of power," he whispered.

Just then a crow perched on top of the gazebo and started cawing. Carlos gestured to it with a nod. "A reaffirmation," he said.

"I still don't see how that ties in with phenomenology?" I said, getting back to the discussion at hand.

"Phenomenology takes the tacit faith we have in the reality of our everyday world and makes this the principle subject for investigation," Carlos explained.

"Exactly what tacit faith are you referring to?" I asked.

Carlos thought for a moment as if to find the right words.

"For example, our assumption that the world is shared, that it is the same world for all normal individuals. Also, that there is a temporal and spacial continuity to things."

"Isn't that true?"

"Not necessarily. Sorcerers like don Juan don't see the world the same way you or I do. Their training and membership in the sorcerer's tradition enables them to see the world in entirely different terms. Phenomenology questions the assumption that the world is inter-subjectively shared by members. Or rather makes that sharing the subject matter of it's investigation. It also questions the *a priori* that what we call reality has a natural history, a causal basis which allows us to reasonably expect the world to continue in the future in much the same way it has in the past."

"Are you saying the world won't continue in the future as it has in the past?"

"We don't know, but the fact that we assume that it does is prime matter for phenomenological investigation. These are presuppositions that cannot be accepted outright, but need to be the focus of investigation."

Carlos talked about his interest in Husserl and Heidegger and the French phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponti.

I told him about a sociology class I had taken taught by a professor in the Sociology department, who had devised a method for studying social interaction using a phenomenological approach. He called his deviant approach to study social interaction, "ethnomethodology."

"That was the professor I was going to take to Mexico," Carlos said. "He taught a course called 'The Study of Deviant Behavior.'"

"That's the one," I agreed. "Small world. I was going to be his disciple. He had a flock of students pending on his every word much as a Zen master has students begging him to enlighten them."

"Did you become enlightened with his method?" Carlos asked, teasing.

I shook my head and took another bread from the bag. "For a while I was really impressed with what he had to say," I admitted. "I even became his research assistant without pay just so I could study his methods. I went to his office on Saturdays to assist him on a project. He was studying the natural flow of conversation and had a theory that the squeaks of guinea pigs were not random but a part of a complex system of coded communication. He had reels of tape recordings of guinea pig squeaks that he wanted me to decode and analyze according to his theoretical system."

"What happened?" he asked. "Did you discover a consistent pattern?"

"I never stuck around long enough to find out," I said. "One Saturday the professor came into the office where I was transcribing a tape of squeaks, and stood behind me for a while, making me believe he wanted to read over my shoulder, to see it a pattern was emerging. Then I felt him lean closer and start to blow in my hair. When I moved, he sat down next to me and put a long arm around my shoulder, pulled me to him and tried to kiss me. The old geezer had the gall to say he was certain I was interested in having an affair with him because I had come on Saturday to work when no one in their right mind works on Saturdays, but what cinched it for him was that I had told him I didn't expect to be paid for my work. Well, I only came because I genuinely thought he needed help and because I thought I could learn something from his methods. You see, I was having a romance with knowledge, but it was completely misinterpreted."

"What happened?" Carlos asked expectantly.

"I shoved the heavy tape recording equipment off the table right into his lap, I was sure I crushed his guinea pig. You should have heard the squeals!"

Carlos looked at me curiously as if he didn't know what to think.

"I ran out of the office and that was my last encounter with the professor of deviant behavior and with his deviant methods of sociology."

"Well, there is a lot to be said for the phenomenological method," Carlos continued, "all deviant professors aside."

As he talked, I nervously munched on bread trying not to drop too many crumbs on the ground. For whenever crumbs fell, a host of greedy little black birds with yellow eyes and long tail feathers rushed to gobble them up. Carlos's elucidation seemed to have an immediate truth to it. As far as I could tell, experiencing things directly, without the intervention of idealizations, was what Clara and Mr. Abelar had meant when they said that the *energetic body* or *double* could experience realities directly which our reason could never comprehend.

"Take continuity of perception, for example," Carlos continued. "According to phenomenologists, there is a continuity to perception, but it isn't a given. Perception itself is related only to the present. but this present is always seen in terms of having a past behind it and an open ended future before it."

"I think I need a concrete example here," I said trying to follow his explanation.

Carlos pointed to the flowering Jacaranda tree across the walkway near the gazebo.

"Take that tree over there," he said. "You see that tree only here and now, but in seeing it, you are already presupposing that it was there yesterday in the same spot, and what's more, that it will continue to be there tomorrow even when we are no longer sitting on this bench observing it."

I had to agree. That tree looked like it had been there quite a while. In fact, the blossoms on the ground, proved it was there before we had sat down on the bench.

"The flowers on the ground," Carlos said noticing my glance, "attest to the fact that they were shed prior to us sitting down here on the bench since we didn't see any of them fall. Your mind tells you that that tree has a history, even though you and I haven't been here long enough to perceive it directly."

"I know that tree has a history," I agreed. "It didn't just materialize in front of our eyes this instant."

"Exactly, but how do you know that? How can you be so certain? That is the prime material for phenomenological investigation. What's more, I know that you know that I am perceiving the same tree you are and that we are having an intersubjective agreement as to what constitutes reality, but can we really be certain that we are seeing the same things? A phenomenological approach would question that intersubjective agreement too, or at least, take such an *a priori* assumption into consideration in any discussion."

My mind was reeling trying to imagine what the phenomenologists were up to. To me they were a kind of urban sorcerers, white magicians playing with mind and perception, much as the Clara and her group of sorcerers in Mexico had done while I was living among them. Only, to the phenomenologists, it seemed more of an intellectual game. They lacked the actual energetic force to make the Jacaranda tree disappear in front of one's eyes upon realizing that it's presence is mere interpretation.

Nelida, Emilito and Mr. Abelar, on the other hand, had the energy to make strange inexplicable things happen by manipulating perception. While I was living in Clara's house, things kept disappearing and then I would find them weeks later in the same places I must have looked a hundred times. What's more, features of her house would shift depending on my vantage point. I could never explain these occurrences and Clara had told me not to even try.

It seemed very existential sitting on a park bench in a Mexican town, discussing the philosophy of Husserl, eating delicious bread, but somehow my mind kept flashing back to different questions. Not philosophical ones of whether or not the tree in the park exists in it's own right or because we are perceiving it via a power called intentionality. Such talk seemed to me filled with overtones of Thomas Aquinas trying to figure out how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. I had had enough of that kind of talk from the Jesuit priests at the schools I had attended.

I wanted to know more about don Juan, Carlos's informant. Since he was also a sorcerer, perhaps he knew John Michael Abelar or of him. Then the thought struck me that perhaps he was Mr. Abelar; that he and don Juan might be the same person. I wouldn't put anything past the sorcerers. I knew they existed on a different perceptual plane, one I was barred from by my lack of energy and understanding. Perhaps, they were all there in the park with us and I was incapable of seeing them because I did not have the means for interpreting their perceptual reality. Perhaps the sorcerers, unlike the tree in the park, had no taken-for-granted history or future. Perhaps they lacked the temporality and spaciality of things, so, therefore, they didn't exist for us the way "things" in the world existed.

"Only an intentional analysis of the present, of perception in and of itself as making something present," Carlos continued, "will give us an inkling of how we construct the world around us. Husserl called that 'living space,' the 'life world', meaning life as it is lived in the present."

"I think I follow you," I said tentatively wiping the crumbs off my fingers. "But I need another example."

"Take that other tree," Carlos said, this time pointing to a beautiful magnolia dotted with white flowers. "The tree gives itself to us as there, as fully present. Although I only see it from the front, I know that it has a back and sides even though I don't see them. So besides knowing that it has been there yesterday, as well as that it will be there tomorrow, I also know that it has sides and a back and an inside and long roots under the ground even thought I don't immediately see them. That's what Husserl means by 'spaciality' being built into perception. We assume the tree is there in all it's fullness."

"True," I agreed, "It's not just a flat facade. I see a complete tree."

"But that very completeness is an accomplishment, an activity, rather than a given," Carlos explained. "In the tree's presence, in the very fact that we see it as a tree here and now, lies a continuity of what we are still conscious of, what had flowed away and what is no longer intuited at all. The tree has a continuity of past and future, resulting from the memory of the tree we saw yesterday, and the expectations we have that it will be there tomorrow. The tree's continuity is put there via our capacity for intentionality. We know it will be the same tree tomorrow as it is today, and it has spaciality, which allows us to see a front and a back and intuit it's fullness."

I took a sip of mineral water. Talking about phenomenology, made me question perception. I had the certainty that if I *gazed* at that tree long enough, and if only I had enough sorcerer's energy, I could make it disappear, since it really didn't have a past or future, back or bottom other than the one incorporated in our interpretation of it. The tree wasn't there the way I saw it at all. Perception linked with mind, or what Brentano called, intentionality, was playing a gigantic trick on the perceiver.

I felt I wanted to get to the bottom of this charade once and for all. I was tired of being fooled by one particular mode of perceiving that had been forced upon me by virtue of the fact that I had been born into a particular "life world" or "being-in-the-world", as Husserl called it. I wanted more than anything to see the trees the way I had seen them under the guidance of Emilito, when I had climbed them, felt their roots, gazed at their leaves, talked to them, loved them, understood them, but now all that was gone as it the giant eye of that reality had closed and sealed that world from view, leaving me stranded on the wrong side of the door. If only Carlos could help me cross over to the other side!

"To understand sorcery, is to expand one's capacity of perception," Mr. Abelar had once told me. "Sorcerers, through the *recapitulation* and other practices, store enough energy to break the reflexivity of space and time. Their practices are deliberately geared towards disrupting the world as we live it."

Now Carlos was saying the same thing, and I knew there must be an inherent truth to it. "A sorcerer would look at that tree and not consider it's 'thereness' as a given," Carlos continued. "Sorcerers, according to don Juan, try to break the mold of perception into which we were born."

"Do you think it's really possible to do that?" I asked, "I mean break out of the mold of perceiving the world as we know it."

"Of course. According to Husserl, all perceptual acts point toward or intend, some object," Carlos explained. "In other words, all seeing is seeing something, all thinking is thinking something. All perception is perception of something, and perception projects itself toward it's intended object which is not a thing, or a given, but an act of creation, and as an act of creation, it can be recreated, or altered to fit a different mold."

"I get it. You're saying that as long as we see perception as a given, we are stuck, forever imprisoned, but if we realize that it is only phenomenon to be investigated, then different ways, or alternatives to perception open up."

“That’s right,” Carlos said. “And who knows what lies in the realm of possibilities available to man as a sentient being?”

“The sorcerers’ path is to break the boundaries of social perception,” Carlos said. “And I say social perception not human perception, because a sorcerer is able to perceive worlds not open to us as socialized beings, but which are, nevertheless, open as possibilities to sentient beings who have given up their social interpretations of the world as they live it.”

“How did you get interested in studying perception?” I asked Carlos.

He was silent for a moment. It was a silence steeped in thought rather than one born out of having run out of things to say.

After a while he said, “It was my good fortune to meet a man who, in my mind, is the most precise and remarkable person I’ve ever know. He has taken me as his apprentice and is teaching me to break the boundaries of perception. You see, you were right when you said in the office of the Anthropology department, that all this that is before us, could not possibly be all there is to the world.”

He swept his hands in a graceful movement in front of us to include the trees, the cars, the boy on his bicycle and the people strolling around the plaza. “There is a way to break through the barriers set up by language and thought, and perceive phenomena directly. That is what phenomenologists talk about; and that is what sorcerers actually do.”

I looked at Carlos. I knew why Emilito had insisted I attend the university. Not only so our paths would cross, but also so that I would have the capacity to conceptualize and share the new *nagual*’s predilection for the abstract.

Carlos turned to look at me and our eyes fixed for an indescribable instant in which my entire future was summed up and my past rushed to meet the present. I couldn’t put it into words, but in that moment, no one else in the world existed, and just as people had their own shared agreements, we held a moment of agreement, too, a silent intersubjectivity, to which no one else was privy. I let out a sigh of relief that seemed to have been trapped inside me for eons, for I knew beyond a doubt that this was the new *nagual*. Fate had joined our paths, and forevermore we would journey together.

“If you’re game,” Carlos said breaking the silence. “We can blast through the world of perception. Let’s find out if there is anything beyond this that we have always taken for granted.”

He laughed for a moment to break the seriousness, but I knew he meant what he said, and somewhere in the depth of silence I agreed. On that park bench I silently agreed to do whatever it took to accompany him to the ends of the earth and beyond. I leaned my head against his as if to merge forces. He reached up and tousled my hair the way Nelida had, and I knew our fates were sealed forever.

We got up without any spoken words or promises, for none had to be made. We both knew at the deepest level that something had changed in the most subtle way. We were not the same as when we had sat down on the bench. We were joined by an *intent* that did not stem from the social order. It existed prior to our encounter in the office of the Anthropology department, and prior yet, to the vision of another reality. Something else had set up our appointment on this park bench, and made possible this journey of power, but what that force was, we could not fathom. For it originated within and emerged from the inconceivable depths of silence. Yet that same force would catapult us to freedom.

## Chapter 5: The Road to Guaymas

We drove in silence. I searched my mind for something to say, but small talk had never been my strong point. Each topic that arose as a possibility for discussion, I immediately discarded as either too trivial or too technical for casual conversation. The stringent gatekeeper, lodged somewhere in the back of my mind, kept censoring every topic before I could bring it up.

“Who was that beautiful woman in the bakery?” I asked out of the blue.

“What woman?” he replied keeping his eyes on the road, “I don’t recall anyone in particular.”

I didn’t know how to broach the subject without sounding jealous and possessive so I let it drop. Yet, I couldn’t get that person out of my mind, I was sure she was not Mexican, for although her skin was dark, it was more a tan than a natural pigment, I had not been close enough to see her eyes, but if I had, I know they would have been blue. From her dress, I had the certainty that she was from the United States, and from her manner, I suspected that she and Carlos were more than casual acquaintances.

I laughed at myself as I realized that I was already in competition with a woman I had not even met. In spite of the *recapitulation* I had done under Clara’s and Emilito’s guidance, I was still reacting like a woman rather than in the disciplined and detached manner of a sorcerer, Clara had warned me that my behavior with respect to men would a be most difficult pattern to break. For certain attitudes and expectations were inculcated in girls at an early age in order to fulfill their social and biological imperatives.

“Femaleness,” Clara had warned me soon after I had begun my *recapitulation*, “includes being jealous, possessive, and treating one’s man as it he were a helpless dependent child. It involves the mandate that if he strays or digresses, he will have to be forgiven, for that is the lot a woman is expected to bear: she must stand by her man under all conditions.”

“I would never put up with such behavior,” I said adamantly.

“You’ll be horrified at what you uncover upon examining your life,” she said laughing. “You’ll put up with whatever your mother put up with, and you yourself told me that she had to put up with a great deal.”

Remembering Clara's words, made me realize that in spite of my professed change, I was still looking into a mirror in which my idea of how a woman ought to behave governed my feelings and actions.

“How much further to Guaymas?” I asked emerging from my self-reflection.

“About an hour,” Carlos said.

He, too, had been lost in thought, although I was certain it was not about himself; and having answered my question he returned to that inner silence from which I had aroused him. I resented his mental retreat, yet I had no qualms in doing the same thing myself. I realized there existed a lack of fairness in my treatment of others. I expected others to carry the burden of the interaction, to entertain or instruct me, while I remained the passive recipient. It was a mode of behavior I had learned as a child from my mother. She had ingrained in me that a girl should speak only when spoken to, meaning that in polite company, I had to sit quietly and not make myself a nuisance by asking silly questions. I had always wondered why that rule didn’t apply to my brothers, who instead of sitting quietly, were rowdy and climbed over the furniture of the friends we were visiting, as if they had the run of the house. On top of that, everyone had found them to be lively and rambunctious boys.

Once learned, I had kept the rule of quiet passivity, not bothering to revise it as an adult. In recompense, I always kept up a lively inner dialogue, to the point of laughing or snickering at my own silent jokes. During my stay with Clara, she had immediately put a stop to this autocentric behavior. I received a sound rap on the head from her whenever she saw my lips moving, or detected even so much as a smile on my face that wasn't warranted by external events, but having been away from the sorcerers' influence for many months, the habit of talking to myself had returned.

"Why is it so difficult to change?" I had once asked Clara after a day of *recapitulating* in the cave near her house.

We sat down in the kitchen where she handed me a plate of stew. As we ate, she explained that the power to change depended on ones energy. She then put forth the sorcery thesis that the sexual excitation of one's parents at the moment of conception determined the energetic configuration of the infant.

"What exactly does that mean, Clara?" I asked.

"If there was little or no excitation during the sex act, the child born out of that union will be as dull as a plug nickel," she explained. "On the other hand if both parents were excited, then the child will have the energy and optimism to meet life head on and delight in whatever comes his way."

"What happens if only one of the parents was excited?" I asked.

"You tell me," she replied peering at me. "You ought to know from personal experience."

"The person gets enthusiastic for a while and then she peters out," I admitted. "One is imbalanced and unstable."

Clara nodded. "They know that ultimately they don't have the energy to go through with whatever they start. So they give up half way. They never bring anything to fruition; they are defeated before they even begin."

"What can one do about it?" I asked.

"They can tighten their belts and intend themselves different," she said.

"How do they intend themselves different?"

"A person with little energy has to project herself out of herself. She has to link up with a different dream. She has to dream herself anew."

“To dream oneself anew sounds like a metaphor,” I said sighing. “Is it really possible to change?”

“It certainly is,” Clara said. “But first you have to recapitulate your undisciplined life and puke it out. Then you begin *dreaming* a new being, one with vigor and lots of energy to spare. Little by little, you wake up the *energy body* until your acts and feelings match your new being. Every strong and precise act will reinforce the *dreaming body*, and your dream-being, will give power to your daily acts. In this way, you hoist yourself out of your self on the wings of *intent*.”

Remembering Clara’s words filled me with courage and optimism. I pressed a place along my left side just above the spleen, a point Clara had said was useful for becoming alert and for getting a bit of added energy whenever one felt despondent, listless or drowsy.

I glanced at Carlos. “What is the population of Guaymas?” I asked, again attempting conversation. “I passed through there several years ago. I suppose it’s really grown.”

Carlos gave me a curious look as if he wasn’t sure I was really interested in talking about the population of Guaymas.

“It has grown in the past few years, but I don't know what the population is.”

If it hadn't been getting dark, he might have noticed my lips moving as I began to repeat some power words to myself. As it was, my dismal mood was lost in the descending twilight. The darkness was settling like a gray filter covering the eyes. To the west, the sky became a deep purple with red streaks where the sun had already set. The low hills in the distance were black cutouts pasted against the gray-black sky. From time to time, we passed a few Saguaro cactus, silhouetted against the low hills. Their thick arms were turned upward, outstretched to the black heavens as if they had been frozen in a posture of supplication.

All the saguaro were the same; some were taller than others, some had stubbier armatures, but they were all hoping for the same thing: grace to drop from heaven, in the form of gentle rain, droplets of mist to quench their eternal thirst.

I had forgotten how noisy the night in the city was compared to the utter stillness of the desert. I rested my head against the seat’s headrest and listened to the thumping of the car tires passing over the rough road. From the sounds, I could detect that the left rear tire was low, for the wheels were not evenly balanced and an extra thump arose from that direction. It caught my attention and the rhythmic thud lulled me into a half sleep.

I smiled at the thought that if Carlos had wanted to hold a conversation now, I wouldn’t be able to come up with a coherent comment. For a hypnotic spell had taken hold of me, and I was feeling heavy, drowsy, so that I could barely keep my eyes open.

The road ahead was straight, illuminated by the bright car headlights. It formed a long, gray tunnel, that pulled my gaze into it, guided by the white center dividing line that peaked in the distance. It took too much effort to pull my eyes away from the road, so I just kept staring at the white line sucking me into a long, deep tunnel, making me drowsier and drowsier. With great effort I shifted my eyes to the side of the road. To my amazement, the landscape had changed. The desert was gone! Gone were the Saguaro cacti, the dusty shrubs, and the occasional tumbleweed that I had seen rolling along the roadside.

Instead, we were driving through a forest and I was seeing giant pine trees on either side of the road. The trees were as tall as the sky, which had disappeared in a mass of dark, piney branches.

Since I wasn’t asleep, I knew it was a mirage, but not one that was frightening; it rather was astounding. I let my senses explore the trees which were becoming more and more delineated as we moved through them. Some of the trees were giant redwood with furry bark, long straight trunks and bushy tops. They were so close together that there was no way to see beyond them, to see what was holding them up. Mirage or not, in the darkness, they seemed to be as real as the grove of trees I had seen while driving in Northern California.

All of a sudden the road was curving as if we were in the mountains. Not being familiar with the landscape around Guaymas, I thought perhaps we were climbing into hilly terrain. I allowed myself to go with the scenery and didn't bother to evaluate it with my rational knowledge of the Sonoran Desert and of redwood forests. Watching the trees pass, became for me, a form of entertainment; I found myself looking out for bear, or hoping to spot a deer, but I didn’t.

I was so intrigued with the vision, that I could not tell how much time had passed. Carlos was driving slower than usual, as if he too were afraid a deer might dart across the road. I made no mention of the forest of trees that surrounded us, for I was certain Carlos would think me crazy, and the scenery would disappear. Besides, I no longer had the ability to speak. I could barely think let alone voice my thoughts. Then I stopped thinking altogether and sunk into a heavy silence, watching the trees, waiting for a phantom animal to move among them, and finally, just watching.

John Michael Abelar had once told me that men were not the only creatures who could attain a state of heightened awareness.

“Dogs, deer, crows, any animal can have a direct line to intent,” he had said. “We call them magical creatures. Sorcerers seek them and use them as aids or helpers.”

I must have fallen asleep because at one point I was no longer sitting in the front seat of Carlos’s car, but on some sort of hard wooden bench. My head was tilted back resting on a thick post, and instead of looking up at the inside of the car, I was looking up at some giant trees in front of Clara’s house. I was practicing a *gazing* exercise that Emilito had taught me, and I was sitting on that special bench he had constructed according to ancient sorcerers' specifications.

This particular *gazing* bench was designed specifically for *gazing* at trees. The three posts that supported the back of the bench were about six inches square and six inches taller than the top horizontal plank that served as the back of the bench. The tops of the posts were cut at a slant so that when sitting on the bench, one could lean the head back against one of the three thick protruding vertical posts. They were cut at a perfect angle so that when the head was tilted back, it allowed one to *gaze* upward without having to strain the neck or hold up the head. One could then be totally relaxed during the *gazing* practice, whether one was *gazing* at trees, at clouds, or at the moon or stars at night.

This particular bench was set in front of a grove of trees, three of which stood out from the rest. The bench allowed three persons to *gaze* simultaneously, and, if they wished, go into states of *dreaming* together, Emilito was sitting beside me on the bench with his head resting on the post at the other end. He was also *gazing* upward at one of the three trees that were on a slight hill some distance away. Emilito was *gazing* at the left one, the one that corresponded to his position on the bench, while I was *gazing* at the one on the right, directly in line with my point of vision.

The trees were outlined against the purple-blue sky. I was totally relaxed looking at the tree in front of me. It was voluminous, green with swirls of lighter green foliage that seemed to be alive and moved even when there was no wind. In between the thick swirling foliage, there were dark empty spaces where I could see the articulation of the branches.

“Look carefully at every feature of your tree,” Emilito said softly. “Without moving your head off the *gazing* post, listen to my instructions, then do what I say.”

I relaxed and waited for his whispered directives. He told me to begin at the trunk of the tree and sweep my eyes upward, first incorporating the lower branches, and then moving upward by sweeping the tufts of leaves with my gaze.

I did as he said, relaxing completely, letting the energy from my eyes sweep the tree trunk and gradually ascend.

“Leave your head where it is, just move your *gaze* in the direction of the tree’s growth,” he said. “If your *gaze* gets lost, stuck or distracted, begin again at the bottom.”

I repeated the sweeping procedure perhaps twenty times, always beginning at the bottom, then sweeping my eyes upward along every part of the tree; it's trunk, the side where the tree met the sky, moving toward the thick bushy parts in the center, and gently along the visible brown branches and out to the foliage again. I continued this movement until I had covered the entire surface of the tree, then I began again.

After giving me my initial instructions, Emilito was silent and I sensed he was *gazing* at the tree on the far left that corresponded with his position on the bench. I was curious about the other trees so I turned my head slightly shifting my *gaze*. Instantly, I felt a poke in my left side. He had poked me with a stick that was lying on the bench between us, that I hadn't noticed it before.

“Stay in your own tree,” Emilito snapped. “Curiosity killed the squirrel.”

I wanted to tell him it was the cat, but I didn’t dare correct him.

“These trees are not the same,” Emilito explained. “Each one must be *gazed* at from it's proper place on the bench.”

“How are they different?” I asked not daring to move my eyes off the tree in front of me.

“They are different in the same way people are different,” he replied. “They have their own mood and temperament, their own energy. You know enough about trees from climbing and living in them to realize they are not the same.”

That was true. Trees were as different in temperament as people. Each tree I climbed was a unique being with a history often longer than the lifespan of man. From climbing them, I had learned to sense the tree’s subtle moods, their changes, their needs and even their outpouring of affection. Trees were solitary beings, yet underneath the ground horrendous things were taking place. The roots were intertwined in a mass of growth competing for every inch of space and moisture. I learned that human beings were nothing in their aggressiveness and competitiveness when compared to trees. Their roots twisted and pushed and strangled each other in an endeavor to survive, going through the most intricate contortions to stake their claim to life.

From above the ground, trees seemed more stable. I realized that it was precisely because trees were so aware and stable that a great part of my sorcerer's training had taken place strapped in a harness, suspended from a tree or while living in a tree house.

“That’s right, Taisha,” Emilito said picking up my thoughts. “That’s why you became a tree dweller. The instability of your *double* demanded it. You were learning how to *stalk* with the *double*. You had to stay in the trees until your *assemblage point* stabilized in it's new position.”

I remembered I was not allowed to come down from the trees except to go to the bathroom. The rest of the time I stayed up there *recapitulating* or climbing from branch to branch with my tree climbing gear. Whenever I wanted something to eat I would have to shout for Emilito to bring me my food. At first, I was reluctant to shout, for I had been taught that ladies never raised their voices, but I knew from past experience that, shouting was the only way Emilito would respond. I would squat and let out a shriek so loud that all the birds around me would fly off in fright, but gradually, the birds got used to my shouting and would just peer at me with one black eye as if I were a strange bird making even stranger noises. Then Emilito would appear at the foot of the tree with a basket of food that he would hoist up to the platform where I was sitting.

“I too was once a tree dweller,” Emilito said again reading my thoughts. “We were both a bit batty, touched in the head.”

Just to prove his point, he gave me another unexpected poke in the ribs.

“And this little branch,” he added giggling, “is to make sure inexperienced *gazers* don’t fly off into the tree or fall asleep on the bench. If I sense you flying or falling asleep, I’ll poke you like this.”

He chuckled and gave me another poke.

“I’m not falling asleep,” I said annoyed. Although, at one point in my *gazing,* I had the feeling I had been sucked into the tree as if I were sitting on one of it's branches.

Emilito let out a howl. “Are you sure you’re not asleep?” he said. “Maybe you already tell asleep while I wasn’t watching.”

“I did not,” I said and to prove it I pinched myself on the spot below the left floating rib, the place where he had been poking me. Then I brought my eyes back to the tree corresponding to my end of the bench and repeated the *gazing* sweeping motion in a most detailed and deliberate manner. I repeated it again and again, feeling with my eyes, as Emilito had recommended, the patches, the differences in shading and texture, and the openings where the branches poked through.

“Now, move your *gaze* around the periphery of the tree where it meets the sky,” Emilito instructed. “Follow the outline of tree and sky with your *gaze* as if you were painting the tree with a long handled brush.”

I did what he suggested and all of a sudden the color of the tree changed from a dark green to a bright chartreuse as it a gigantic spot light had been turned on. The sky, instead of being a purple black, turned into a bright blue green. It happened so suddenly that I closed my eyes and pressed backwards against the bench. Luckily, the sturdy head post kept me from falling to the ground. When I opened my eyes again, the change of color was still in effect.

“Let the energy from the tree flood your eyes,” Emilito said. “Merge with the tree the way I showed you.”

When I did, the tree changed colors again. Now the sky was a bright gold, and the tree became a mass of dazzling peach colored light. Each leaf was a bit of light superimposed on a simmering limb, forming a matrix of light. Layers and layers of light burst forth from the tree until I was looking at a pulsating shimmering spread of energy that merged with the energy of the golden sky around it.

It was a sight to behold. I realized then why different parts of the tree were different colors; they had different intensities of energy emanating from them. These patches corresponded with moods or feelings that the tree gave off, and there were dark spots, too. Places from which no light emanated. I knew that these were the shadow entities that inhabited a realm very close to our own, and sometimes crossed over. I was surprised to see some of these shadow beings climbing the tree branches the way I used to climb them.

The light of the tree shimmered and moved as if wet, like raindrops illuminated by a car headlight. Nothing about the tree was static; it was absolutely fluid, impermanent. In one moment, my taken-for-granted impression of trees, that they were stable, sedentary and permanently rooted was blasted away. Upon seeing the shimmering pulsating mass of yellow and white surrounded by the palest pink: halo, I knew trees were in constant flux.

“Are you *seeing* it?” Emilito asked.

“Yes, yes,” I gasped. “Whoa! I had no idea trees looked like that.”

“Don’t get too excited or you'll shift your *gaze* back to normal vision,” he warned. “Stay relaxed and calm. Don’t wake up.”

“There you go again, Emilito. Forget your prodding stick. I'm really not asleep, but it certainly seems as it I were dreaming. Am I dreaming, Emilito?” I asked not daring to move my eyes away.

“Yes and no,” he said. “*Gaze* now; ask questions later.”

I remained still and silent for I did not want the scene to dissipate. I feasted my eyes on the light for as long as I could. Then as suddenly as it had appeared, the light vanished and I was again *gazing* at the enormous tree in front of me. It was as if a radiant apparition had vanished leaving behind only it's familiar outward form and the memory of something stupendous now gone. It was a shimmering ghost fading away, and the tree that had been so magnificent at the outset of my *gazing*, was now a disappointment compared to *seeing* it's true essence.

“You can open your eyes now,” Emilito said poking me in the ribs with his stick. “The show’s over,”

“What a show!” I said. “I had no idea...”

Emilito raised a hand to silence me.

“Of course you had an idea,” he said. “We all know how to *see* the essence of things. We did it as infants; and you did some *gazing* while living in the trees. Have you forgotten how to shift your eyes and project your feeling? Are you looking and feeling only yourself and ignoring everything else?”

“Stop, Emilito. Stop,” I said remorseful for all the time I had wasted looking at myself, when I could have been *seeing* trees and other things.

“Shallow is form, look behind,” Emilito said feigning an oriental accent.

I had to laugh. I wondered where he had learned that Buddhist adage. He must have gotten it from Clara who always had been spouting oriental aphorisms.

“You sound like a Buddhist monk,” I said. “Don’t tell me you were in China, too, along with Clara?”

Emilito smiled and nodded, “I'm the caretaker of this house,” he said. “But I do get around. Someday I’ll tell you my story. Or, better yet, allow you to *see* for yourself.”

Emilito looked at me as if he had a stupendous secret to reveal. It gave me the shivers. He told me to examine the bench to see how it was put together so I could construct one myself in case I ever needed to. It was fastened with pegs pushed through drilled holes. I was impressed by it's sturdy yet elegant construction.

“This bench is a real help for *gazing*,” I said. “A great design too.”

“Made by yours truly,” he said with a bow.

“Did you learn this in China?” I asked.

“No. The idea was handed down to the *nagual's* lineage from the ancient sorcerers. The sorcerers of our line have all sorts of devices and gadgets to aid them in their *dreaming* and *seeing* and *stalking*. The leather harness in which you were suspend is one such aid, this *gazing* bench is another. Of course, they are only devices that make *seeing* and *dreaming* easier, but *seeing* and *dreaming* and *stalking* can be done without depending on any device. All one needs is an impeccable spirit, and of course, energy stored through the *recapitulation*, refraining from indulging, and inner silence, so that the *energetic body* or *double* can awake. Then one can *stalk* with it and do all kinds of things.”

“What do you mean by *stalking* with the *double*?” I asked.

“What a silly question,” he said blinking at me. “That's what you were doing all those months in the trees. You were solidifying your *energy body* and *stalking* the trees and yourself with it, as well as the companions that lived up there with you.”

“What do you mean companions?” I inquired. “Other than the squirrels and birds, I was up there by myself, and you know it.”

Emilito smacked his lips. “Like hell you were. What about your shadow companions?”

I remembered seeing the shadow beings in the trees as I was gazing at the tree and did recall seeing plenty of shadows while I was living in the tree house. In fact, many of the smaller ones I had thought were birds hopping among the branches turned out to be small fluttering shadows. I told Emilito this fact.

“As your *energy body* becomes clearer, you’ll remember your friends more clearly. Now we are using the *double* to gaze at trees. You could even move from this bench into the trees themselves,” Emilito continued. “You remember doing the tree merging while standing under a tree. Someday when you have stored enough energy, you can try *gazing* from this bench again and we’ll see if you can be catapulted into the tree. Maybe even some of the shadow beings will help you.”

“I’d rather just climb the tree with my tree climbing gear,” I said. Somehow the idea of being sucked up into the tree tops, or anywhere else for that matter, by a shadowy confederate, was too unsettling. The memory of crossing the threshold into the left side of the hall of Clara's house where the other members of the *nagual's* party had been waiting, was still too vivid. Some force had catapulted me with such a devastating push, that I flew right out of the house and beyond the recognizable world itself. Then I woke up hanging from a tree, with no recollection of what had happened, how I had gotten there, or how long I had been suspended.

“Well, then, if you’re scared of jumping into the treetops with your *double*, or of letting the shadow beings give you a push, how about making the trees move away from their spot?”

“What are you saying, Emilito? That trees can move from their spot?”

“That’s right. Trees aren’t what they seem at all. You *saw* that yourself. Once we *see* them as masses of light, we realize that they can merge with other *energetic beings*, just as we can move and merge with trees.”

“Are you saying that trees can actually change their position?”

“Some trees can, but not all,” Emilito clarified. “Just as some people or animals can get to their *double*, but not everyone has the energy to become aware of their other side and begin to *stalk* with it.

“You mean a tree can pop up somewhere else? That’s hard to believe, Emilito, mighty hard.”

"Not when you *see* trees as energy that's constantly changing," he insisted. "Energy never stays the same. It moves depending on it's surroundings." His eyes became fierce as a bird of prey. "And," he

added, "depending on who's commanding it."

I had to waver in my certainty. The memory of *seeing* that tree glowing with a flowing light, had given me the impression that it was in a state of flux. Perhaps, Emilito was right after all; trees could move away from their spot.

"The ancient sorcerers, using their powers of *seeing*, would make an all out search for such trees, which they called 'power trees,'" Emilito explained. "They would form intense bonds with them. The tree then would become the sorcerer's ally and even transport them to different places. The sorcerers would aid the tree with their energy, and the tree would help the sorcerer in a symbiotic relationship. Sometimes a sorcerer would even merge with a tree permanently in order to temporarily prolong his own life."

"It sounds downright gruesome," I said. "Like some sort of magic carpet sorcerers could sit on to travel."

"They didn't travel with them, they just moved with them. There is a difference," Emilito clarified. "If they wanted to travel, they would change into a bird or a swift footed animal such as the mountain lion, which are much more adept at traveling than are trees."

"What would they do with trees then?"

"They would hide in them, and move the trees to confuse whoever was pursuing them. In ancient times, sorcerers had fierce enemies who hounded them relentlessly. Sorcerers would hide or merge with the trees so that their enemy would become confused. Or they could cause an entire grove of trees to move together. Imagine seeing an army of trees advancing on you. Their enemies would die of sheer fright."

"Or trees can exchange positions to see what it's like to be on another spot." Emilito continued, "but that takes tons of energy, even for a tree, and even if that happened, a person would not notice the switch unless he was a sorcerer."

When Emilito said that trees could exchange places, I remembered an incident that happened in Clara's house. To the rear of the patio were several fruit trees including a large zapote and a loquot. At one time, I had thought the loquot tree was on the right side of the patio, and the zapote on the left, but one day, after I had been staying with Clara for several months, I could have sworn that the trees had changed places. I discovered that it was the zapote tree that was on the right side of the patio shading the bench Clara and I often sat on. When I mentioned this to Clara, she immediately hushed me up and told me not to speak of the zapote ever again. That wasn't difficult to do because I discarded my speculation as an absurd impossibility.

Now, in the light of what Emilito was saying about trees, I wasn't so certain anymore. Perhaps, those trees had exchanged positions.

I asked Emilito about this. He said that the trees in the *nagual's* house were very special; they had *power* and, therefore, they could do whatever they liked. They could bloom out of season, bear fruit all year around, or exchange places if they wished.

"That's hard to believe," I said. "And yet..."

"Enough talk. You've used up your *dreaming* attention. It's time to wake up. Rest your head against the *gazing* bench."

"What do you mean it's time to wake up. I'm already awake."

"You asked me before whether you were awake or *dreaming*. Now I can tell you that you are awake and asleep at the same time. You are awake in your *double*, but asleep in your physical body."

He leaned toward me and gently pushed my head backwards against the bench post. I felt a prickling pressure on my forehead and then at the back of my neck and head. I saw Emilito's face so close yet so clearly that I began to suspect that he was right, I was dreaming. The thought of having to leave and go back to the every day world created in me such a sadness that I tears came to my eyes. I didn't want to leave Emilito and the grove of trees. I resisted waking up. I wanted to ask him more about the Loquat and the Zapote, and about gazing, and about how trees are able to move from their spots, and most of all, about his own secret story that he promised to reveal to me.

"Emilito," I called as if I were up in the treehouse waiting for my meal. "Emilito." But the scene in front of me had already shifted and I was no longer outside Clara's house sitting on the gazing bench. Emilito's energy had added stability to the *dreaming* reality, but now that he was gone, I was unable to control the scene. I could no longer see him, yet an intense longing stayed with me. Then I again felt the pressure on the back of my neck as if Emilito's hand was pushing me against the post, and my head was bursting with a prickly energy that forced my eyes to slowly open.

I first saw the car ceiling, then the dashboard. Then Carlos sitting behind the driver's wheel. The headrest pushing against my neck had made it numb; the prickly sensation traveled down my shoulders and into my back, arms and hands. I was awake but I couldn't move. I felt like my head was made of electrified Styrofoam, light and sizzling at the same time. I remained silent with my eyes open for a while longer, not moving.

"How long have I been sleeping?" I asked trying to straighten up.

"About an hour," Carlos replied.

"How much further to Guaymas?" I asked, then laughed because it was exactly the same question I had asked just before I had fallen asleep. Yet it seemed ages ago.

"It's just round the bend," Carlos said, as a huge hill came into view. "We'll get something to eat, and spend the night there. Tomorrow we'll head east to the Yaqui towns and see what our power brings us."

I could detect the faint glow of the city in the distance. A shiver went through me as a dark shadow fluttered by the car for a moment obscuring it's headlights.

## Chapter 6: Guaymas at Night

Carlos parked the car near the wharf so we could look out onto the choppy sea. Eerie dry docks and warehouses, illuminated with white lights were silhouetted against the twilight sky. From somewhere on the ocean, came the deep moans of a tog horn. The sounds drifted back to shore carrying a somber mood. The only sound more lonely than a fog horn was the moaning of air brakes in the night as trucks come to a gradual halt. That sound always conjured up in me the image of vast flatland and a solitary driver without shelter or home.

The air was cool. I wrapped the poncho around me to hold in the warmth. I remembered a crocheted afghan I had as a child, which had disappeared along with my other keepsakes, when Clara's cousin had put the things from my apartment into storage. Whoever had sorted through my things had done a thorough job of wiping out the identity of the person to whom they belonged. They had deliberately discarded the items that had a personal significance, such as my photo album, the stuffed tiger from childhood, also my favorite suede jacket, and the karate uniform and black belt, which I had always worn for practice. What was packed in the storage boxes, were items such as dishes, pots and pans, towels and clothes I had hardly worn. They could have belonged to anyone, with no sense of personal history, or individuality.

I was in the midst of nostalgically morning my loss, when I saw a white envelope taped to one of the box tops. Inside, was a note from Nelida; it said: “Don't morn your mementos; then is then; now is now.” Clipped to the card were seven crisp one hundred dollar bills. The implication being that I should buy whatever I needed.

For a while, I just stood there with the note and bills in my hand. Then, as I began to clam down and assess the situation, I realized Nelida's masterful *stalker’s* maneuver. She knew that I would have trouble parting with my mementos, so, in one stroke, she had done it for me. The thought that I would never see her again, made all my anger vanish and my attachment to things seem insignificant. Then and there, I promised to do whatever it took to break the hold that possessions had over me. I vowed with all my heart to fight coveting, greed, and self-pity, but as the days grew into months, my resolve weakened, for I was constantly bombarded by memories of the past, and present influences that pulled me towards acquisition and attachment. It seemed I was waging a battle impossible to win.

We drove past the dark wharves that cast massive black shadows on the pavement. I was thinking of Nelida’s superb sense of detachment, when I saw the flashing sign of a Ramada Inn. Carlos veered into it's well lit parking lot.

“We’ll stay here for the night, if that’s all right with you,” he announced. “We’ll continue on to the Yaqui towns in the morning.”

I waited in the car while he registered us. Then we drove around one of the wings of the main two story building, and parked again. The adjacent rooms were on the ground floor and opened onto a long covered corridor that lead to a fenced off swimming pool area.

“Let’s grab a bite to eat,” he suggested. “I know of a good restaurant near the center of town which is only a few blocks from here. We can walk if you like.”

“I’m not at all tired,” I said and meant it.

I set my bag on the bed and looked in the bathroom mirror. I wanted to wash my hair but Carlos had said to meet him in fifteen minutes and I didn’t want to keep him waiting. Besides I didn't want him to think I was one of these women who took hours priming in front of a mirror. Clara had cured me of that.

Since there were no mirrors in her house, I got used to performing my daily hygiene with maximum efficiency. Clara also weaned me from wearing make up, which she said blocked the natural flow of energy around the face. The day after I arrived at her house, she handed me a box of tissues and told me in no uncertain terms to wipe off my lipstick. I was embarrassed and infuriated for it recalled a scene that had happened before in junior high school when Sister Beatrice came up to me in the hall, handed me a tissue and made me wipe off the lipstick I had dabbed on. Now Clara was having me do the same thing and I felt ridiculous.

"I'm free, white and twenty one," I told her, "And I'm definitely old enough to wear lipstick."

"It has nothing to do with age," Clara said adamantly. "If you want to be a clown and paint your face, be my guest, but for storing energy, the skin, especially around the mouth, eyes, and forehead has to be kept tree from noxious substances. Even face lotion has to be used sparingly."

She went into a lengthy digression of how chemicals, even in the so called organic make-up were absorbed by the skin and ingested, as in the case of lipstick, through contact with the tongue.

"What about mascara?" I said annoyed, "Do you want me to look, like a rabbit with pink eyes?"

Clara threw up her hands in exasperation. "better to resemble a rabbit than a bat from hell!" she said. "That black stuff runs all around the rims of your eyes because you're constantly rubbing them. Why not leave your face natural? There are no men around here for you to attract."

"If I don't put on some rouge, I'll look like death warmed over," I insisted.

"You look like death warmed over if you do put on rouge," Clara said as she slid my makeup kit off the counter into the trash bin. "Stop using these, and the natural glow of your skin will shine through and your color will return. Just think of how much time you'll save not having to worry about how you look. Besides, as I've said, you're not here to bag a man. Which is what putting on make up is all about. Am I right?"

She had a point. The fashion magazines and advertisements lead one to believe that a woman was not fully dressed unless she had make up on. I decided to follow her suggestions, and after only two weeks, according to Clara, the pallor of my skin, that had been systematically dulled, had regained it's natural sheen.

I turned off the water faucet and put on some natural bee's wax lip gloss, which being colorless and odorless did not, according to my scheme, fall into the category of makeup. Then, wrapped in my poncho, I waited for Carlos outside my door with a few minutes to spare.

We walked to a plaza surrounded by an arcade of shops. The restaurant was on the ground floor of an old hotel. There were outdoor tables along the arcade, but most of people were sitting inside because of the brisk night air, A tall waiter dressed entirely in black except for a white towel around his waist, seated us near a column that held up a mezzanine where musicians were playing a lively tune. I scrutinized the menu, but couldn't decide what to order. When the waiter returned, Carlos ordered fried steak and rice and plenty of tortillas for both of us.

“Don't eat the tomatoes,” he warned, when the waiter brought a small tomatoes and onion salad that apparently came with the meal.

“If I eat the tomatoes will I die?” I asked concerned.

I told him about what happened to an anthropology professor I once had. While trekking to the village where he was to conduct his fieldwork in New Guinea, he picked a ripe tomato fresh off the vine and ate it. An hour later his whole body was covered with lumps and he tell into a coma. Four sure-footed Gururumba natives had to carry him down the mountainside in a make shift stretcher, where he was rushed to the local hospital. It turned out that the anthropologist was allergic to the toxins in that particular variety of tomato and he nearly died.

“Nothing as dramatic as that,” Carlos replied. “But you'll no doubt get Montezuma's revenge.”

“I've heard that can be pretty dramatic in itself,” I said moving the salad off to the side.

We finished the steaks. It was delicious meat marinated in a hot sauce with fried onions.

“Aren't you going to eat your rice?” Carlos asked pointing at the untouched pile on may plate.

“I never eat rice.”

“Is it against your religion?” he teased.

“No, I just never eat it. Even as a child, my mother, knowing that I wouldn’t eat rice, always made me mashed potatoes instead, I don’t know why I didn’t eat rice, I just didn’t.”

“Perhaps, it was because you were a princess.”

I resented the insinuation of having been spoiled, which to me was the furthest thing from the truth. “She just made me potatoes because she knew I wouldn’t eat the rice. If you really want to know, rice reminded me of a pile of intestinal worms that, when I looked down, seemed to come alive in my plate. I just couldn’t swallow them.”

Carlos peered at me and shook his head. “An interesting case for Dr. Katz,” he said gravely.

“Who’s Dr. Katz?”

“He’s a psychiatrist I once worked for at the Neuropsychiatric Institute, at U.C.L.A. He used to interview patients and I would classify the recorded sessions in terms of a rigorous content analysis.”

“You were at the N.P.I.?” I said surprised. “So was I. Small world.”

“What were you in for?” he asked concerned.

It struck me that he thought I had been at the Neuropsychiatric Institute as an inmate. I felt insulted for his lack, of confidence in my sanity.

“I wasn’t a patient,” I said quickly to set the record straight. “I was there to do research, just like yourself. Only I worked on a project involving autistic children.”

“That sounds interesting,” he said helping himself to some of my rice.

“Actually, it was one of the most boring projects I’ve ever worked on.” I moved my plate over to him so the grains wouldn’t scatter all over the table. “The object of the research was to get the child to talk, or rather to make phonemes. I had to sit in front of the child, who was in a small isolation booth with a window cut into it, so he wouldn’t become distracted. I would hold his face and say, ‘Look at me, look at me. Say mmm. mmmm. mmmm.’ The child would squirm and look away and try to get off his stool, anything but make the sound, mmm. If by chance he did make the sound, mmm, or something remotely similar, the procedure dictated that I pop an M & M candy into his mouth. Then I moved on to another phoneme, repeating the words, ‘Look at me. Look at me. Say ahh. ahh. ahh.’ and so on for about an hour until I was reduced to a babbling idiot."

"Did you have much success with that approach?" Carlos asked.

"Are you kidding. It was hopeless. I doubt any of the children ever learned to talk, although I didn't stay with the project long enough to find out. I became so frustrated trying to get the child's attention and making ail those weird sounds, that I ended up eating most of the M & M candy myself. I suppose I was rewarding myself for the trouble I had getting the child to sit still. I have to admit that I put on quite a few extra pounds that summer. To me those children were un-trainable."

"I disagree," Carlos said. "I had an autistic girl in my care and after only several weeks, I actually got her to talk. I took her to the circus and the zoo. We had the best time. She talked, but only to me."

"I thought you did content analysis on tape interviews at the N.P.I.," I said.

"I did that after I got fired working with autistic children," Carlos explained. "The head of the project was furious because I treated the girl like a human being. I really liked her; to me, she was a fine human being, not just a subject in a case study."

"He probably envied your success," I said. "I know how it is among researchers. Everyone wants to claim credit for any breakthrough."

Carlos shrugged. "He gave me a job in which I didn't interact with people directly. He had me listen to tapes of psychiatric sessions. I listened to hours and hours of people's complaints about every conceivable subject. Some of the problems were genuine, but most of the time people just wanted attention."

"That's probably true, I said soaking up the gravy with a bit of tortilla. "Who doesn't want attention or affection?"

Carlos peered at me again. "The real question is," he said, "who is willing to give it? I have a friend, who every morning opens his bedroom window and yells, 'Does anyone out there love me?' at the top of his lungs. Of course, he hates his wife and everyone around him, but he wants unconditional love himself."

"You probably think, that I never eat rice because I want attention or perhaps love," I mumbled self consciously.

“I wouldn’t know,” he said. “You tell me.”

He looked at me in such a way I had to avert my eyes. Love, to me, was a delicate subject I didn't care to discuss.

“By the way, do you eat corn?” Carlos asked.

The way he said it make be think he was trying to assess my psychological profile by means of food products.

“I have nothing against corn. In fact, it’s my favorite vegetable," I said exaggerating my fervor.

“Then let’s have some pie made out of sweetened corn.”

When it arrived I took a bite. Although I had never eaten corn as a dessert, I had to admit, the pie was delicious.

After Carlos paid the waiter, he suggested we take in a movie. I was too excited to sleep, so I agreed, even though I assumed the film would be in Spanish, thereby, difficult for me to understand.

Several blocks from the restaurant was the theater, although it did not look like the movie theaters I was accustomed to seeing in the United States that had a marquis of flashing neon lights. It was an ordinary Spanish style building, with several posters on the front of it and a small window for a box office. I could tell from the posters that the coming attractions included a film with Charles Bronsen and another with Cantinflas.

“You’re in for a real treat,” Carlos said. “They’re showing a kung fu movie. You told me you had studied martial arts.”

I was relieved for in martial art movies one didn’t have to understand the language. The action spoke for itself.

It was dark, when we entered the theater, from the buzz of the people, I sensed the room was packed. When our eyes had become accustomed to the dark, Carlos led us to a back row where we found two empty seats. I was acutely aware of the smells around me. Someone behind me was coughing heavily. He must have been drinking too, for I sensed the distinct odor of alcohol coming from that direction. Worse yet, there was the smell of stale urine emanating from the back row.

The feature had just begun. It was a Bruce Lee film dubbed in Spanish. His dubbed voice didn't sound at all like Bruce Lee's own voice, which was a bit screechy, especially, when he went into his vocal gyrations during his fighting routines. The dubbed voice was a deep baritone, very gruff, fitting the Mexican image of a kung-fu fighter, but I soon grew accustomed to the voice and the odors, and was captivated by the action.

Bruce Lee was going through his elaborate nunchaku routine. The audience yelled, cheered, jeered and whistled unabashedly as he whipped the nunchaku under his arm with impressive speed. I could tell that the majority of the audience was male, but there were a few women in the group, because their heads were leaning against their companion's shoulder. I surmised they were young couples out on dates.

Weapons were something my purist Japanese instructors would teach only to male students. When I had asked my karate teacher, why I couldn't study weapons just like his male students, he took my into his private office and carefully explained to me the true meaning of karate. The character "Kara," means "empty" he said, whereas "te" means fist or hand. Thus, the essence of karate is empty hand fighting with no weapons. He made it clear that I should dedicate myself to learning the essence of Karate and not worry about learning weapons, which weren't that useful in a woman's hands in the first place.

"The body is a weapon," he had said. "It is a weapon of the highest order. Perfect it and you will be in control of any situation."

"What if I'm walking down a dark alley and I'm attacked by a bunch of thugs?" I asked. "Will I be able to defend myself then?"

"Why would you even think of walking down a dark alley?" he said. "The first rule of a martial artist is to avoid trouble before it begins." He never told me how that was done because I'm sure he didn't know, but when I had asked Mr. Abelar, "How do you avoid trouble before it begins?" he had replied, "your energetic body will tell you where there is trouble. It's possible to *see* with your energetic body what goes on around you. *Recapitulate*, and let the *seer* within your emerge and come to your rescue." He added that sorcerers who train the *energetic body* or *double*, are able to go through walls or fly through the air and do all sorts of things the physical body couldn't do.

Bruce Lee let out one of his stylized yelps as he incapacitated a pack of thugs with a series of perfectly placed flying kicks. I promised myself, that upon returning to Los Angeles, I would begin a regime of daily martial art practice, and I would resume *recapitulating* and I wasn't going to slough off on the *sorcery passes* Clara had taught me either. I would make time to do them. I wanted more than anything for the *seer* in me to awaken.

I felt a draft on my neck. I thought they must have turned on the air conditioning full blast, although I didn't hear any motors running. I glanced up to see it any fans were going, but all I saw was a uniformly black ceiling painted with white streaks and some air conditioning ducts. Someone really messed up the ceiling with spray paint was my thought. I returned my attention to the movie, but the draft didn't stop.

Finally I leaned over to Carlos. "I don't suppose we could change seats," I whispered. "The air conditioner is blowing right on my neck."

"Guaymas gets pretty windy at night," he said not taking his eyes off the move.

"Windy? What wind?"

I looked up again and experienced a moment of total perceptual dissonance. I suddenly saw we were sitting out in the open and what I had thought was a perfectly smooth surface with specks of paint, was the sky; the paint were clumps of clouds, and the air ducts were shadows of trees. It was as it some force had come and lifted off the roof while I was watching the movie. I felt my stomach sink as when riding a fast moving elevator; simultaneously the top of my head expand upward, in an acute physical distortion. I grabbed onto Carlos' arm for support, for I felt some part of me was shooting straight up and I was ascending out of the theater into the air.

"There's no roof," I whispered. "We're out in the open!"

Carlos turned to me and said, "I thought you knew that when we came in."

"How was I supposed to know that. It was dark when we came in."

I felt disgusted with myself at being caught unawares after I had agreed to be more attentive, and ridiculous for not having noticed such an obvious fact as a missing ceiling. I knew in spite of my *recapitulation*, I still took everything for granted. Unless something actually hit me on the head, I didn't notice it. I blamed my total stupor on my lazy middle class upbringing. Having gone to Catholic schools, I was trained to obey authority without question. My entire life had been based on accepting dogma, on having faith in the world around me without ever thinking, exploring or questioning my surroundings.

Clara had warned me of this condition shortly after she had put me to recapitulate. She had said I had a sluggish energetic body, in fact, one that was totally asleep.

“Your values were handed to you by your parents, the schools you went to, the culture in which you live, and by the force of reason itself, which makes you powerless to move away from the expected,” she had said. “Unless you recapitulate your life, you will live and die the way your parents did. You don't have to look any further than your family to know what is waiting for you.”

Her words had given me a tremendous jolt because to repeat my parents lives was the last thing I wanted to do. Yet in spite of the *recapitulation*, a mysterious force was still making me perceiving in terms of my given mold. All theaters according to my past experience had had roofs on them, so the present one could be no exception. I didn’t know what had made me suddenly realize that my assumption was faulty. Perhaps, the same force that had made me put a roof over my head, now, allowed me to see that there was no roof there. That was the mysterious force of *intent* that phenomenologists analyze and which sorcerers try to alter and disrupt through their practices.

According to the phenomenologists, I fleshed out perception, and gave it a spacial and temporal congruence. Perception came ready made. All one had to do was to learn certain categories as a child and the world was there in front of one’s eyes consistent and complete and unchangeable. It is up to the sorcerers to show us that that certainty is not all that there is to the world. That it is possible to alter perception, to break out of it's bounds and to create a different, yet still consistent, reality.

I once asked Clara why the layout of her house didn’t seem stable, but shifted depending on from where one observed it.

“It’s the sorcerer’s *intent* that has constructed the house and has imbued it with power. It is permitted with a special kind of energy capable of transforming it from an ordinary house into a place of power. Perhaps, one day, you will construct your own house and place in it that special inconceivable sorcerers’ intent.”

“I wouldn’t know how to do that, Clara,” I said. “I don’t have any power.”

She laughed and said everyone has the power to stop their stupidity and indulgence, but that some people are too lazy or afraid to use it. Once one moves away from the self by practicing the *recapitulation* and the *sorcery passes* and quieting the internal dialogue, one can intrinsically become something else. Just as the sorcerers' house became something else under the powerful and impeccable *intent* of those beings that lived in it.

It was clear from her words that for sorcerers, perception held a different kind of intentionality; that different premises were used from the ones governing our every day life. In a sorcerer's house, a wall could disappear, or perhaps a roof could fly off, or a door that wasn't there before could suddenly open. It would all be congruent with the sorcerer's way of perceiving, with his energetic configuration, which was lightness and fluidity itself. The barriers of perception were not rigid.

I returned my attention to the film. My body was adjusting to the new parameters of my environment. Rather than feeling cooped up in a stuffy theater with the air conditioning blasting, I felt that the expanse above me was endless. The air was fresh and the odors that had been so stifling before, had completely vanished. Perception was indeed a limitless, mysterious affair. For out of the billions of possibilities that exist in the universe, man isolates only a few. It is his ability to select and isolate that gives him a sense of security, reduces dissonance, and enables him to live in what he believes is a relatively sate environment where death has no immediate place. Yet to move away from the known, one must, as the phenomenologists do, question ones basic taken for granted ways of perceiving. But to question the certainty of one's own reality, one needs a minimal chance to perceive it differently. Only then might one learn something that one didn't already know; or see something one hadn't already seen.

I realized then, that what Clara and Emilito had tried to teach me, was a new way of perceiving with the body; a way in which the personal or psychological self did not take precedence. Countless times, they had tried to make me cognizant that there are other possibilities of perception open to us, possibilities not included in our normal every day understanding of the world. They had insisted that by means of a thorough *recapitulation* of one's life, one could empty the warehouse of one's familiar items, and venture into uncharted terrain. Letting go of the known and habitual was the key, they had said. Storing energy to move, was the means.

"Of what do I let go?" I kept insisting.

"Of your expectations, of what others expect of you, in short, of everything you are, was or hope to be," Clara had replied. "Let go and allow the energy to work directly on your senses, without interpreting and thinking with your puny mind. If you have to interpret, then use the sorcerers' way, which is to make your categories, then throw them away."

"Tell me Clara, what exactly is a sorcerer?" I had asked.

“A sorcerer is someone who through discipline and conserving energy is able to perceive more than the everyday world,” she replied.

Gradually, it became clear to me that sorcerers had their own way of perceiving and interpreting. The *intent* set up by a long line of sorcerers, each adding to it his own power, his own understanding, his own personal explanations, led to an alternate reality, just as real and predictable as the one into which we were born. One had to use sorcery to understand perception, then apply it's techniques to break the barriers that keep us imprisoned.

“But are we forever condemned to explain and interpret the world?” I asked.

Clara shook her head. “No. Finally one arrives at the point where no explanation is needed or could ever be given. There, one stops thinking and silently immerses oneself in the mystery that surrounds us.”

## Chapter 7: Vicam Station

I had not slept well. The dreams I had were so vivid that they could have actually happened, I woke up feeling exhausted for I had been walking over hilly terrain all night. Over breakfast, I asked Carlos to tell me where we were going and what I was to expect upon getting there.

“All I can say is that I’m going to take you to meet some people,” he said matter-of-factly. “And there is no way of knowing what to expect when we get to the party because power is unpredictable.”

“The party? What kind of party?”

“A gathering, a fiesta,” Carlos said as he signaled the waitress for the check.

“In that case I’d better change into something more suitable,” I told him.

While Carlos paid the check, I hurried back to my room to change. The only dressy clothes in my travel bag were a beige linen skirt and a sleeveless silk blouse, I had purchased with the money Nelida had left me. I had put the garments in the bag at the last moment with no thought of ever wearing them. Now I put them on quickly and hurried out the door. Carlos was standing by the car checking the coolant under the hood.

“Where exactly is this party?” I asked trying to keep a lid on my excitement.

“In the Yaqui town of Bacum,” he said closing the hood with a bang. “As I told you, I want you to meet some people I’ve been associated with. They are having a small gathering in your honor.”

“My honor? But I’ve never met them, have I?”

“No, you haven’t, but they are anxious to meet you.”

“Why? Did you tell them about me? When did you see them?”

We had not left each other’s company since we had crossed the border. Unless Carlos had slipped out of his room during the night, there was no way he could have met anyone. Perhaps someone had telephoned or sent him a message. A strange agitation possessed me. The only people I knew in Mexico were Clara, Nelida and Mr. Abelar, and of course Emilito, who I was certain was not one to attend social gatherings.

“I can’t wait to meet them,” I said excitedly. “Do I look alright?”

Carlos scanned me from head to toe. “Don’t you have some proper walking shoes?”

“I can’t wear hiking boots with this outfit,” I said. “It would ruin the look.”

I realized that I was going to great lengths to impress the people I was going to meet, to the extent of wearing uncomfortable dress sandals, but I wanted to look elegant, not as though I had been trekking in the desert with one outfit to my name. Besides, Carlos had stipulated that the party was in someone’s house and that we were going to drive there. I didn’t see too much walking on the agenda.

“Alright then, let’s go,” Carlos said. I got in the car, trying hard not to wrinkle my skirt.

We drove out of Guaymas then headed southeast towards the Yaqui towns. It was obvious that Carlos had driven on Mexican roads many times, for the car hugged the road as he negotiated the curves in an expert manner. Nevertheless, every time the road disappeared around a bend, I held my breath hoping that we would not be surprised by an oncoming truck or bus passing in our lane. Placed along the roadside, as a constant reminder of a tragic mishap, were wooden crosses or shrines with wilted flowers marking the spot where a car had gone off the road, or there had been a collision, or a person had accidentally been run down. To my distress, these morbid memorials were disturbingly numerous.

We came to a small town made up of a cluster of adobe houses with doors opening into dark rooms that looked like caves. In an open courtyard delineated with cane fences, I spotted a fat white chicken being taunted by two smaller reddish hens. Next to a house was a rust covered car with no wheels, the remnants of an accident, and having been abandoned there, never moved again.

“Is this one of the Yaqui town?” I asked.

“No, this is Empalme. The Yaqui towns are further ahead. Bacum, where we are headed, is one of the Eight Pueblos regarded by the Yaqui as being located on sacred ground. The Rahum chronicles lists them as having been established before the coming of the Spaniards.”

“What is the Rahum chronicles?”

“It is a list of Memorable Dates in Yaqui history. According to the chronical, there were four great men who called the people together and led them around the boundaries of Yaqui country. They went to Cabora on the Cocoraqui arroyo, from there to Takalaim, the peak just north of Guaymas. As they went along the boundary they preached and sang with the people, thus, establishing the boundary line of Yaqui Territory. After that, they founded the Eight Pueblos. Singing of the Boundary and establishing the towns sometime in the remote past is the solemn belief about the origin of their tribal territory.”

“What are the other seven towns?” I asked.

“Cocorit, Vicam, Torim, Potam, Rahum, Huirivis, and Belem,” Carlos said. “They were situated along the lower sixty miles of the Yaqui River, but during the late nineteenth century, the main channel of the Yaqui River below Potam shifted sharply and Belem was left completely without water, and the water supply to Huirivis and Rahum was severely curtailed.”

“What happened to the people in these places?”

“They had to relocate elsewhere. Many were given land by the people of Potam, others moved to Empalme or started new settlements, but with the steady encroachment of Mexicans into their lands, most of the Yaquis have left the original sites, such as Bacum, and have set up new villages elsewhere, often with the same name. The same thing happened in Vicam. A new village center, called Vicam Station was established on the railroad in Vicam territory.

However, the majority of the people now living there are Mexicans.”

We passed another settlement, more clusters of low, flat roofed adobe houses surrounded by cane fences held in place with crooked posts. A fat women with a shawl over her head, stood in a doorway, watching the cars passing on the highway. Next to the house were a pair of dusty gray donkeys tethered in a small corral with a sloping ramada. An old man, who could barely make it up the hill, was pushing a four-wheeled cart full of manure. Elsewhere, a group of men were standing near the roadside as if waiting for a bus or truck to come along and pick them up and take them to Guaymas. They waved at us as we passed. A mangy dog barked and ran after the car as we slowed down for a curve, then we sped up and left the dog biting a cloud of dust.

Around noon, Carlos turned off the main highway onto a well packed dirt road. We drove through the heat and dust to a small cluster of adobe houses placed in a haphazard fashion with no regular block or street plan. Some of the houses had corrugated tin roofs with adobe walls. They were lined up one against the other in a group of four or five room additions that would allow an extended family to live together. Sometimes a cane fence shut them off completely from their neighbors.

“Is this where the Yaqui Indians live?” I asked rolling up my window so the dust wouldn’t get in the car.

Carlos pointed in the opposite direction. “No. The Yaqui Indians live on the other side of the highway behind those cane fences we saw earlier as we drove up. The Mexicans, or yorims as the Yaqui call them, live in these houses.”

Carlos said that Mexican houses in Vicam Station were better built than those on the other side of the main highway. These had cement floors, some electricity, and families owned television sets, radios, bicycles and sometimes even a car or truck.

“What about the Yaqui Indians? How do they live?” I asked.

“Their houses have dirt floors, no electricity and they have to bring in water from the wells or irrigation ditches in five gallon gasoline cans,” Carlos replied.

“Even here it seems that it’s important to be born on the right side of the highway,” I said. “The entire world is divided into the ‘have’s’ and the ‘have-not’s’.”

Carlos said that demarcations and comparisons were universal; that there were always people who had and those that didn't, no matter how poor they were.

"Dichotomies are a part of the human condition," he explained. "They are built into language, which is based on contrast and opposition. Like day and night, male and female."

"Hotdogs and hamburgers," I added.

He gave me a quizzical look. I told Carlos that as children on hot summer days, my brothers and I used to run through the sprinklers naked. They would tease me saying that I didn't have a hot dog appendage the way they had. They said mine looked like a hamburger. When I insisted that hamburgers were better than hot dogs, they immediately demonstrated the contrary by peeing in perfect arcs. When I tried futility to do the same, they laughed because I could only tinkle straight down.

"They had convinced me that I was born without something essential," I told Carlos, "that I was deficient, and that feeling dogged me for the rest of my life. I felt cheated for not having been born a male."

Carlos said "Hot dogs aren't any better than hamburgers!" laughing. "You have been fooled by the authority and certainty that males have as children that they are superior by virtue of the fact that they are desired by their parents whereas females usually are not. Males depart from a more privileged position, but we are not intrinsically superior."

I remembered Clara assuring me of the same fact. "The womb is the giver of life," she had said. "It can create, be a source of strength, move things and make things happen. You're a fool to blindly accept a position of inferiority without question. Why not accept a position of strength and confidence instead. The womb can give you all that and more. It is the organ of life itself."

A group of children ran after the car playfully hurling small rocks at it. Carlos parked in front of a house with a blue curtain covering the entrance. Instantly, young boys crowded around the car stroking it and kicking the tires. Others kept their distance and watched wide eyed as we stepped out of the car.

"Is this where the party is?" I asked avoiding the eyes of the children.

Carlos shook his head. "No, but I have to pay my respects to some friends, first. They've always been very kind to me."

A woman wearing a white embroidered blouse and a long faded blue skirt and maroon apron came out to greet us. Her skin was brown and smooth, and her eyes were shiny, black, and friendly. Carlos introduced her as doña Mercedes, who smiled warmly as she grasped my hand in a firm handshake. She pulled the curtain aside and invited us inside her home. The room was semi-dark, the walls were of stucco and the cement floor had been recently swept with water. I was surprised how cool it was. A reddish curtain, tacked to the window, gave the room a mellow glow. The curtain fluttered in the breeze and let light through as it billowed away from the window.

Through an open doorway, I could see an iron cot, like the ones lined up in army barracks. A chest-of-drawers with an alter on top stood next to the bed. I saw a crucifix draped with a rosary and a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Leaning against it was a photograph of a young man. The shrine was flanked with flowers and two lighted white votive candles. All I could think was that somebody had recently died. For it looked like a shrine to the memory of a departed family member.

We sat down on a maroon sofa that had lost most of it's stuffing, I kept sinking in deeper until I hit a hard board. The springs were poking my bottom uncomfortably but I thought it would be impolite to stand up and sit elsewhere. Two girls around eight and ten, from time to time poked their heads into the room from behind the blue curtain, and let out exuberant giggles. Carlos stopped his conversation with doña Mercedes long enough to play peek-a-boo with the girls. Then the hostess said something to Carlos in rapid Spanish I could not follow.

“Doña Mercedes says Benny should be back any moment,” Carlos said. “He just went to the store to buy sodas.”

“Did he know we were coming?” I asked.

“Someone had seen the car on the road,” he replied, “so he knew we would be stopping by his house the way I always do.”

I was eager to meet Benny, doña Mercedes’ youngest son. Carlos had said he was in his mid-twenties and that sometimes when he did fieldwork in Vicam, he stayed in the back room which Benny occupied when he was not away constructing irrigation ditches for the huge cooperative farms owned by the Mexican government. His older brother, Raul, had recently died in a landslide while dynamiting to build a tunnel through a hill.

“Is this the Benny who wants the shower?” I whispered to Carlos.

Carlos nodded. On our drive from Guaymas, he had told me a story about a friend of his whose dream was to live in the United States. He said that every time he visited his house, Benny begged Carlos to hide him in the trunk of his car and smuggle him across the border, Carlos had always refused, but this did nothing to impede their friendship.

Benny had felt fate had dealt him a harsh blow for allowing him to be born on the wrong side of the Rio Bravo. Especially when his mother, who while pregnant with him, had been visiting relatives in Tucson, could have had her child there, thereby making him a citizen of the United States. He was constantly talking about going north, boasting that he had made it to Arizona twice, but had been caught and deported. Benny knew what kind of cars Americans drove; the large houses they lived in, and he had even been in the well-stocked department stores in Phoenix.

One day, coming home from working in the fields, Benny was washing up in the back of his house over a water trough. He again asked Carlos to hide him in the trunk of his car when he left for the United States the flowing day.

“I’d give and arm and a leg to have a decent shower,” Benny had told him.

Carlos assured his friend that although he couldn’t take him to the United States, his second dream would be fulfilled: he would have the shower of his dreams.

Benny looked surprised. “That’s impossible,” he said.

“No, really,” Carlos had insisted. “When I was a boy, I helped my grandfather build a shower on his farm. I’ll build one just like it for you.”

Carlos had described how he could connect a pipe to the water storage tank in the back of the house. With a series of pulleys and with the help of gravity, the water would run into a smaller tank outside the cooking area. A chain hooked up to a plug, when released, would allow the water to rush through a shower head with enough pressure to douse whoever stood underneath. He would even build a cane barrier for privacy and allow the water to be collected in a trough below for recycling.

“You’re crazy,” Benny said after listening to Carlos’ plans. “What kind of shower is that? I may as well bathe in the irrigation ditch.”

Carlos admitted that he was stunned.

“I want a real shower with tile walls, a glass door with swans engraved on it like I saw in the

‘Home and Garden’ magazine; and real plumbing with hot and cold water all year around.”

Carlos confessed that it had not occurred to him that that was what his friend had in mind. He had to admit that Benny was right; such a shower was impossible to construct where he lived.

“Were you still friends after that?” I had asked.

“Yes, but the gifts I always brought with me, the clothes for his two sisters, the radios, the portable T.V., aways seemed inadequate.”

Doña Mercedes’ curtain opened and a tall slim young man with a winning smile entered, wearing American Levi’s, a black leather jacket and a baseball cap. He embraced Carlos by repeatedly slapping both palms on his back. He glanced at me sitting on the sofa then smiled shyly as we were introduced. After exchanging a few English phrases, he seemed to have exhausted his repertoire and the conversation reverted back to Spanish.

Through an opening in the curtain, I watched the girls playing outside. At one point doña Mercedes took me to the back porch area covered by a ramada. It was also the kitchen area where food was cooking in huge aluminum pots over a pit lined with stones. To the side, I could see a water holding tank. I scrutinized the area with my contractor's eye, wondering if it would be possible to construct a shower. There was adequate space, but, of course, no plumbing.

I thought of the beautiful bathroom in Clara's house, with water mysteriously running under the floor. The water had been piped in from a natural underground spring, but there was no running water around Benny’s house, except the water from the well, whose use was restricted and had to be brought to the house in a bucket. I realized that to build a shower in Benny’s house was an impossible undertaking, the entire community would have to be renovated.

After a polite interval, we got up and said goodbye. Benny came with us to accompany us part of the way. He said we needed him to give us directions, for the roads were not marked and we could easily get lost if we left the highway. Besides, he too, wanted to visit Bacum where his favorite uncle lived.

As we drove, Carlos talked with Benny in the front seat. I could tell Carlos was getting nervous. His hands gripped the steering wheel tightly as it he were clenching his fists. At first I thought it was because Benny had hitched a ride, but then I concluded it was our destination that made him nervous.

I, too, was ill at ease. After a thorough *recapitulation*, I came to the conclusion that I was never fond of social gatherings because I was too stiff, too afraid of making a fool of myself. Later, I had a bona fide reason for not to get entangled with people and their enterprises. Both Clara and Emilito had warned me not to fall prey to the mesmeric commands governing social interaction.

“The only thing a man is after,” Clara had said with her customary frankness, “is to maneuver a woman into a position where he can leave his luminous worms inside her body.”

“What are you talking about?” I demanded.

Clara explained that during the sex act, a man leaves his energy inside a woman’s body. These luminous worms, as she had called them, by feeding off the energy of the woman, force her to support her man energetically against her will or her knowledge. Sorcerers don’t waste their sexual energy, but store it to be used for *dreaming* or *stalking*.

“Both of these activities take enormous amounts of energy,” Clara said. “Our basic energy is our sexual energy. So we must not dissipate it in a momentary exchange with someone we don’t give a hoot about.”

She said that women are mesmerized by men on an energetic level. Only by *recapitulating* her life, can a woman free herself from the burden of having to continually place her energy at the disposal of men.

The car suddenly swerved onto a dirt road, and nearly collided with a giant saguaro cactus that had fallen onto it's side. From then on the ride was bumpy. I rolled up the window so the dust wouldn’t get into the car and scanned the terrain through the insect spotted glass. I expected to see a colonial mansion like Clara’s, hidden among the dense shrubs and mesquite groves, but all I saw was a cluster of houses made of sun dried mud brick, held together with packed straw, the typical construction of the area.

Carlos parked the car on a gravel shoulder.

“Are we here?” I asked lamely. “I don’t see any place big enough for a party.”

“We have to let Benny off here,” he said, “This is where his uncle lives.”

We said good bye and promised to meet again the next day to look for Pascola masks Carlos wanted to donate to the University's Ethnographic Museum. Then Benny gave the car’s fender a firm pat, as if to send it on it's way, and we continued on the road for a few more miles. In front of a wall of dense shrubbery, we stopped again.

“We have to walk a bit,” Carlos said getting out of the car.

My heart sank at the thought of walking through the underbrush in my dress sandals, but walk we did. Or rather, Carlos walked. I hobbled behind him like a lame mule. My linen skirt was covered with dust, and my bare arms scratched from the underbrush.

“I have to take off my nylons,” I said, after about twenty minutes of trekking. “They have too many runs in them. I can’t show up with polka-dot legs.”

Carlos agreed. I stepped behind a tolan tree and discretely removed my panty-hose and took the opportunity to urinate out of sheer nervousness. I stuffed the nylons into my shoulder bag and caught up with Carlos who was looking at a small cactus down the path.

I had no idea where we were going. All I could do was to follow Carlos, cool and comfortable in his long sleeved shirt and Levi’s. I envied the agility with which he walked over the uneven terrain in his hiking boots. From time to time, he held aside a tree branch or a thorny shrub as we passed.

“Can’t we go back to the car to change my shoes?” I asked knowing we couldn’t. I really wanted to go further than that. I wanted to drive to a motel, check in and sit under the shade of an umbrella by the pool, sipping a cool soda.

“No. We can’t go back,” he said decisively. “They’re expecting us and we’re late as it is.”

I began to pout.

“We’re almost there,” he said reassuringly.

The smell of smoke made me pick up my pace for I knew we were nearing habitation. My stomach was growling; I had worked up a ferocious appetite. I was wondering if I would be able to eat the food or if I would have to settle for politely nibbling, when I heard Carlos say, “I see they’ve already started the festivities. Hurry, they’re expecting us.”

We crossed a wooden bridge over a gully; there was water under it in the arroyo. The broken planks creaked as we passed. I paused to looked down. The water was muddy and slow moving. It looked like a stream of running milk chocolate. It must have come down from the area of the Obregon Dam where there was a reddish clay deposit. The river of chocolate I dubbed it, for it looked like thick cocoa.

Then I saw the house nested among a clump of manzanilla trees. It was not a beautiful estate, like Clara's, but a group of humble adobe huts. Children and chickens ran in the courtyard. A mangy dog was scrounging for scraps. Around the side of the house, a donkey was tied to a stake in the ground, being able to graze only as far as the rope around his neck would allow him.

I felt a moment of sheer terror. I was no different from that donkey with a noose around it's neck that didn't allow it to move beyond the limits of it's known world. Yet, we are all like that. If we pulled on the rope too hard, we would strangle ourselves. We have means at our disposal to cut our ties, yet fear prevents us from ever trying, and even as we cut one rope, another rope becomes visible, in a gigantic knot tied with an infinite number of ropes, all serving the same purpose: to hold us fixed and not allow us to stray from the life into which we were born.

As I crossed the creaky bridge on shaky steps, I knew Clara and Nelida would not be among the invited guests: I would not meet them here today.

## Chapter 8: The Fiesta

The houses were marked by a path of round river rocks. A cooking fire was burning nearby; I could smell the familiar scent of mesquite wood smoke, common to that area. We followed the narrow lane to the back of a house which had a single window with no glass or screen. A ramada covered an open kitchen where cooking implements and baskets hung from nails pounded into the two outside posts. Corn tied in bundles laid on top of the awning to dry in the sun.

Underneath the ramada, two women were preparing food over an open grill. One was seated on a plank bench in front of a matate. She was flattening tortillas in her palms then placing them in the skillet to cook over the fire. The other woman took charge of turning them over and removing them when they were done. Relatives or guests sat on orange crates turned on their sides, or they stood in small groups drinking sodas. Chickens and a couple of mean looking dogs had the run of the compound. A girl, six or seven, dressed in Levi's overalls and a dirty t-shirt, was eating corn on the cob near the threshold.

I stood there, surrounded by strange sights and sounds and a hoard of smiling people. All I could think of was that my feet hurt, for a tiny pebble had wedged itself between the straps of my sandals. I regretted that I had not put on proper walking shoes. I had wanted to look stylish but everything seemed to have conspired against me. My hair had come undone, my skirt was wrinkled, my blouse was torn and I was perspiring profusely.

Everyone embraced Carlos as if he were an old friend. As I was introduced to them, they looked me over and politely shook my hand. They seemed happy to meet me. They complemented my clothes and examined the color and texture of my hair as if I were a monkey in a zoo. One woman looked concerned at the scratches on my arms. The little girl was shy and avoided me altogether. A dog came and urinated at my feet, and one of the ladies had to apologetically shoo it away.

A petite woman with a long black braid down her back and pointed white teeth asked me to sit down on an orange crate and hospitably handed me a soda. I thanked her and after surreptitiously wiping off the top of the open bottle, I took a sip. The conversation began and I looked on as everyone spoke in rapid Spanish. Whenever anyone addressed me directly, I smiled and shrugged, incapable of using the phrases I had learned in my conversation classes. I realized that those classes, had not prepared me for real social interaction where everyone talked at once in an animated way.

I passed the time watching a group of recently hatched chicks pecking the dirt floor. It was strange to see chickens and dogs running around what must have been the family's living quarters. I wondered if I had the constitution or stamina to live under such conditions for an extended period of time.

Carlos laughed and was totally at ease and engaging as he told stories. From time to time, he nodded at me, indicating that I was the topic of conversation. Everyone looked at me and smiled, and I smiled back, nodding, wondering what they were saying. A young man asked him a question; the laughter stopped and everyone’s gaze fell on me. I felt as if they were waiting for me to say something but I hadn’t the foggiest idea what that might be, so I just nodded and everyone laughed louder.

“They’re wondering how we met,” Carlos explained. “I told them that you are a student of Anthropology and that I am your professor.”

The people smiled and giggled.

“Has he taught you what he knows how to do best?” whispered a woman behind me.

I was shocked to hear English spoken, and I turned around. It was the woman from the restaurant in Santa Ana. The lady who had been filling in for her sister. I hadn't recognized her before; for now her hair was braided and she was wearing a white embroidered dress. I stared at her dumbfounded trying to figure out the meaning of her question and what she was doing at the party. I had assumed, incorrectly, that no one at the gathering spoke English. As I stared at her, I realized that her sparkling eyes were amber, not black, and that she had olive skin and that she was really very beautiful. For the first time I saw her as a person, not just as a generic Mexican or an Indian.

Her mean stare made me realize that I never looked at people directly, but only at their outlines, their general shapes, and that I only gave the impression that I was looking at them. It wasn't that I couldn't see well or needed glasses. On the contrary, I prided myself on my 20-20 vision. It was more a case of being afraid or too self absorbed to look at anyone in the eye, for I didn't want anyone to look at me. I realized that in spite of my belief that I wanted to be noticed, I also wished very much to remain hidden.

I wanted to ask the woman what she meant by her comment, but she had already moved away. I returned my attention to the main group. The conversation seemed endless; the wooden crate beneath me was numbing my tailbone. After a while I was no longer paying attention, nor bothering to pretend that I was listening. I felt like an outsider, as if I had been thrown into a raging river in which it was pointless to try to swim. No more fake smiles and nervous chuckling, pretending I was having a good time. I felt I was pouting, and on the verge of getting up and going for a walk, even though I knew it would have been rude to do so. What's worse, self-pity and discontent were creating in an internal dialogue that was anything but friendly.

I was annoyed with Carlos for bringing me to a place where no one paid any attention to me. Carlos had intimated that I would be the guest of honor but after the initial curiosity wore off, I was all but ignored. Besides, I had expected a lively party in a house with plenty of music and good things to eat. Soft sofas, maybe even a hired Mariachi group playing old Mexican favorites with perhaps a tango thrown in for a continental flair, and deep down, I had expected to see Clara, and Nelida and Mr. Abelar. As I began to focus on my profound disappointment, I became increasingly morose.

After a while, I noticed some black spots flying in the air around me. At first, I thought the heat and my fatigue had caused my eyes to play tricks on me, but looking closer, I saw that the spots seemed to be jumping up from the ground about three feet into the air. Lulled into a stupor by the foreign sounds, I occupied myself following the movements of the black specks. They seemed to be everywhere shooting off at random. As soon as one landed, another one bounced up. It was odd that no one else in the room took notice of them.

I was relieved when a robust Indian woman in a blue dress, who seemed to be the hostess, stood up and suggested we all move to a table under some trees where “carnitas” and beans were being served. The lady piled some roast pork on a plate along with a ladle of beans and rice and handed it to me with a bent fork. As I was eating, I felt that my legs were beginning to itch. I thought there must be mosquitoes flying around under the table so I tried to brush them away with a hand.

One of the women noticed my movements and made some comment, about keeping one’s hands above the table in polite circles. Everyone laughed except me. I didn’t dare examine my legs in front of everyone, but when I casually put a hand to my calf, I felt that my legs were full of bumps. I began to scratch, until the hostess noticed me and looked at my legs. I saw then that they were completely covered with bites. It dawned on me that the jumping black specks that entertained me earlier during the conversation were giant fleas, feasting on my bare legs. Never before had I seen fleas so big and so numerous and so viscous.

A striking woman with jet black hair pulled back into a bun, got up, grabbed my hand and led me inside an adjacent house. Carlos followed and assured me not to worry because if I was going to get bitten by anything, I was in the right place. The woman whose house I was in was a powerful sorceress. She gave my hand a squeeze as if to reaffirm what Carlos had said. She had high cheekbones, a strong wide mouth, and smooth, coffee colored skin drawn tightly over her face, giving her an eerie mask-like appearance. She looked a bit groggy too, as if she had just awaken from a long sleep.

“Her name is Zuleica,” Carlos said.

With an imperceptible movement of her chin, doña Zuleica signaled for Carlos to sit on a bench near the door as it to stand guard, and led me to sit on a chair and prop my legs on a stool. She examined my legs and shook her head and clicked her tongue as if she didn’t like what she saw. Then she said something to Carlos in rapid Spanish.

“Zuleica says the flea bites are a bad omen,” Carlos said.

“What do you mean a bad omen?” I asked.

“It means your life will be difficult, filled with many obstacles along the way,” Carlos said.

“Unless you stop your overwhelming concern with the self, troubles will feast on you the way the fleas

have attacked your legs.”

I cringed. It was just what I needed: more obstacles. As if there weren’t enough hurdles to overcome. Doña Zuleica looked at me sympathetically and said something about staying with her so she could heal me.

“She wants me to tell you that there is a way to avoid trouble,” Carlos continued. “But for that you will have to change. She says you will have to be reborn.”

I did not understand in what way I could change. I had done a thorough *recapitulation* of my life, beginning from the present and moving backwards to my very first memories. Then I had done another one, moving forward from my very first memories to the present, and what was so bad with the way I was living anyway, I wondered. I was going to school, grooming a romance with knowledge the way Emilito had recommended. I felt I was doing everything I needed to be, and yet Zuleica’s grim prognosis frightened me.

Doña Zuleica looked directly into my eyes and said something more. I turned to Carlos bewildered.

“She wants to help you,” he said. “She says that unless you stop pampering yourself, the bit of power that you have stored will turn against you and you will be worse off than before.”

“What can I do?” I asked. “Tell me the steps so I can follow them.”

“She says there are no steps,” Carlos said. “There is only an overall feeling that comes when one has decided wholeheartedly to follow the path of knowledge impeccably. Zuleica says that you still lack that feeling.”

I let out a sigh of sheer defeat. I didn’t even have the energy to argue.

“She could help you get stronger, but you would have to stay with her,” Carlos said. “Personally,” he added, “I would advise against that.”

“Why shouldn’t I?” I asked, and just to be contrary added, “It sounds like a good idea.”

I had no intention of staying in a flea ridden place with a woman who looked like she was either groggy or drunk. On top of that, from the way she peered at me, I could tell there was a streak of madness in her that she could not disguise. I had seen that look before, in Emilito, and at times, in myself.

"Zuleica is a master *dreamer*," he said. "You're not used to her touch. It might do you more harm than good."

I had no idea what he was talking about so I remained silent.

I scanned the room. A mattress was on the floor covered with burlap bags. Baskets of dried herbs and roots were piled in a corner. Jars with powders of different colors set were on a table. The place had a chaotic sense about it, the smell of fear. I would probably get eaten alive by fleas, or rats or bitten by bugs and snakes. At the very least I would be totally out of my element, and inconvenienced to the maximum.

I shook my head. "I have to go back to Los Angeles, to go to the University," I said to Zuleica.

Doña Zuleica smiled in a most eerie fashion that made the hair on my arms stand on end. She patted my hand, her face full of disdain. Then she rubbed my swollen legs with a foul smelling lotion which temporarily afforded some relief from the itching. She turned her back for a moment and took from a shelf a jar of light brown powder that looked like ground chocolate. She sprinkled some into a tin cup and added bottled water to it. She gave the mixture a stir, then handed it to me to drink.

I looked at Carlos for a sign as to whether or not to drink it. He in turn glanced at doña Zuleica for a cue. Her nearly imperceptible nod caused him to say, "It's alright to drink. Doña Zuleica says it will relieve the itching."

I took the cup from Zuleica's outstretched hands, braced myself for something bitter, and took a few sips. Surprisingly it didn't taste foul as one might have expected. I was certain there was cocoa powder in that jar. As I gulped the rest of the drink down, I gagged a bit, for the pork had been very salty and had given me a great thirst. Doña Zuleica stroked my back, then took the cup, surprised that I had drunk it's contents so fast. I realized then that she had expected me to sip it slowly, and before I could ask what was in it, the impact of her brew hit me full force.

I nearly fell off the chair. The next thing I knew I was slumped against the mattress on the floor. My body was numb; I couldn't move. I sensed something licking my face. It was a huge dog. I tried to push it away in disgust, but my limbs were rubbery. Then the black dog moved away and I looked into his yellow eyes. Instantly I recognized him; it was Manfred, the being Emilito found as a puppy and had raised in Clara's house. My heart leapt with joy. Then liquid love flowed between our eyes and I reached out to embrace him. That surge of pure affection gave me the power to sit up. I put my arms around Manfred's neck, but my arms went right through him. Manfred had no substance, and for that matter, neither had I. We sort of blended together in one exuberant ball of bliss.

I was so happy to see him, that we rolled on the floor making one furry bundle, and I no longer cared if there were fleas on the floor or if Manfred or I were covered with them. I heard childish squealing, and I didn't think it was coming from Manfred, so it must have been I who was making those sounds. Then someone came and abruptly pulled us apart. I looked up and saw John Michael Abelar standing there. His face was all aglow and rounder and fuller than I remembered, but it was unmistakably he, and he had a very stern expression.

"Don't waste your energy cavorting," he said in a gruff tone. "Zuleica didn't give you a love potion."

"What did she give me?" I wanted to ask, but I couldn't voice the words.

Then I realized I didn't have to talk in the normal way; I could just think my question. I heard a female voice very near me; it was Nelida, and she could understand what I was thinking.

"Zuleica did something to boost your energy into the second attention," Nelida explained. "But as usual, it pushed you to the brink and beyond."

"But how did Manfred get here and Mr. Abelar and you?"

Mr. Abelar's face softened as he said "we came to meet you in the presence of the young *nagual*, Carlos, but since you were still lost in concerns with yourself, we couldn't meet you in your ordinary state. You wouldn't have given the members of my party the time of the day."

"And I, being responsible for you, couldn't allow that," Nelida added. "I know you are capable of a more exquisite maneuver, Taisha."

"Oh, but I would have been honored to meet them all," I protested. "I've waited so long for this encounter."

"Then why were you rude and bored to death, when you were introduced to some of the members of our party?" Nelida asked.

“When was this? I never met anyone.”

“Of course you did,” Nelida said.

“Where? When?” I tried to organize my thoughts but there was no linear structure on which to hang them.

“In the house where the fleas bit you,” Nelida replied. “You were bored stiff and couldn’t wait to get out of there. You didn’t even have the courtesy to give them your attention.”

“But those were just ordinary people, weren’t they? I didn’t know that they were part of the *nagual*’s sorcery group.”

“Of course you knew, but being such a superior woman, you didn’t have the *power* to see that let alone act on it,” Nelida said. “Whenever anyone wanted to approach, you turned your back and snubbed them.”

“But I don’t speak Spanish very well,” I protested.

“It’s not your lack of Spanish, but your self-importance that hinders you,” Nelida insisted. “You regarded everyone as poor Indians who weren’t fit to wipe your feet.”

I wanted to protest but something in me knew she was right.

“The young *nagual* had to apologize to everyone in your behalf,” Nelida continued, “otherwise they would have thrown you out on your ear. You're lucky you got away with only a few flea bites. The fleas were relentless with you and that was the omen. You have to be treated ruthlessly. If Zuleica hadn’t helped you with her *energy*, you and I wouldn’t be talking now. You would have been booted across that bridge in front of the house, and you would have never returned. Zuleica even asked you to stay with her to teach you how to *stalk* with the *double*, which you refused for petty reasons.”

I looked around. In the corner stood a tall lady, with her hair in a bun. It was Zuleica, she smiled and nodded with brilliant eyes, as if agreeing with all that Nelida had said.

I knew that I had flubbed my chance. My sense of self-importance was still overpowering. If left up to my own devices, I always fell back into the pit of superiority and self-obsession I was accustomed to inhabiting.

“Couldn’t I meet everyone now?” I asked hopefully.

“No, they've already left,” Nelida said.

“Have they given up on me?”

“Practically. Yet, you will meet them one by one, depending on your power,” Nelida replied. “The young *nagual*, who is your guide will take you to meet them. The only one who stuck around was

Manfred; apparently it doesn’t matter to him that you are an imbecile, his affection for you is peerless.”

I heard a sharp bark as if in affirmation, and a feeling of love weld up inside me. “Likewise,” I said and was about to burst out weeping. In fact, tears had already begun to fall. I moved my arm to wipe them, when I felt a warm body next to me tugging at my arm. I turned my head to see a young pretty girl, about my age, winking at me. She had short dark brown, curly hair, delicate features, brown eyes, and an eerie smile like Zuleica's.

“I stuck around too because I’m crazy, just like you,” she said and giggled.

Instantly her eyes became wild, glowing like a doll that had suddenly come to life. I thought that she would devour me with her tiny piranha-like teeth. I wanted to move away, but she held me down with superhuman strength. As she began to climb on top of me, I screamed for Nelida to get her off me.

“I thought you came to Mexico to find love,” she said in a throaty voice. “Well, I’m your man.” She gyrated her hips in a lewd motion then kissed me on the mouth.

As I struggled to free myself, I heard a chorus of laughter in the background.

“You two behave yourselves,” Nelida said and pulled the girl off me. “That’s Josefina. Don’t mind her. She’s always direct and to the point.”

“I didn’t mean to frighten you,” the young girl said in Spanish. She touched my hair affectionately. She was the picture of sweetness and decorum again, “but you were such a shit-ass with everyone, I thought you needed a good fuck.”

My mouth fell open. Such crude language didn't jive with her delicate appearance. She smiled and nodded as if I had better believe her.

"Josefina always speaks the truth," Nelida said, "or she doesn't speak at all. Isn't that right, Josefina?"

The girl nodded mutely. It was then I realized that I had no trouble understanding Spanish. In fact, I had the certainty that I had learned the language somewhere before. Although where, I didn't know.

Nelida came to my rescue. "One can easily understand a different language in the second attention," she said. "Once you bypass the rational mind, you have no difficulty with languages. You used to speak German and Hungarian, and some Spanish, remember?"

That was true. I used to know those languages as a child, but I had forgotten them out of lack of use.

"One never forgets," Nelida said. "The assemblage point simply moves to a different position where that language is no longer in the foreground, but you can always move back. Now you'd better sleep. You've used up just about all the *dreaming energy* Zuleica gave you."

I wanted to ask her how Zuleica gave me *dreaming energy* but then I remembered that there was something missing. It was as if I had misplaced something that had been with me, but I didn't know what it was. Then I heard a voice and the missing piece fell into place, I saw Carlos sitting down next to me and I knew we had know each other for a long, long time. In fact, we had spent a lifetime together. How could I have forgotten the feeling I had for him? I touched his hand and lay down on my left side. Then our hands melted together and I could no longer sustain his image. My eyelids were so heavy that they closed in spite of my effort to keep them open.

"Will I see you again?" I managed to ask Nelida.

Nelida tousled my hair they way she always did. "That depends entirely upon you, on how impeccable you are with yourself and others, but it is the new *nagual's* duty to bring you to freedom. You have been entrusted into each other's care by the spirit itself. Trust him and support him, because his path and yours are forever entwined."

I made her a solemn promise. Then she said something else, maybe even many other things, but I could not remember any of them, because I fell asleep to Nelida's soft commands that sounded like a lullaby. I dreamed I was suspended from a harness attached to a tree branch. Someone was pushing me as if I were on a swing. I looked down, I saw Carlos reaching up to catch my ankles to give me a push. He was laughing with abandon. Next to him, Emilito was jumping up and down like a big child wanting to play too.

I awoke from a deep sleep. The darkness in the room was intense. It was pitch black; there was no light anywhere. As my eyes became accustomed to the shapes and shadows in the room, I could tell I was laying on the hard mattress. Someone had thrown a blanket over me and the heat of it made the bites on my legs itch terribly. It was all I could do to keep from scratching them. The rough blanket around my face was suffocating me. I smelled it's staleness; it made me sneeze.

Carlos was lying near me. From the sound of his rhythmic breathing, I could tell he was asleep. I was glad that my stifled sneeze had not awaken him. I lay there for a long time, afraid to move or get up. I needed to go to the bushes to relieve myself, but fear of encountering a snake or one of the dogs, kept me from venturing into the darkness. To pass the time, I tried to remember what had happened the previous afternoon.

We had come to a fiesta; I had been introduced to a group of people, then Zuleica had given me a potion to drink; it had knocked me out. What followed was too vague to put into thoughts. I remembered seeing Nelida and Mr. Abelar and a young pretty girl I hadn’t met before, and Manfred was there too, barking in the background. I remembered seeing the new *nagual*, and Nelida rubbing my head and telling me things, but then in a flash they were gone and I fell asleep to dream haunting dreams.

Carlos turned onto his side. I tried to fall asleep again but I couldn’t. Some part of me was wide awake, fully alert, ready to fight danger, A dog was barking incessantly in the distance. Then, I must have fallen asleep, for the next thing I knew Carlos was shaking me saying it was time to go. He wanted to return to Vicam Station to meet Benny to look for Pascola masks to donate to the ethnological museum.

I put on the long-sleeved shirt and cotton drawstring pants someone left by my shoulder bag, and gratefully slipped into a pair of guaraches. As we crossed the wooden bridge on our way back to where we had parked the car, I turned and glanced at the house one last time. In the distance I saw Zuleica waving at me, smiling as if we shared a secret. I waved back and as our eyes met, I had the certainty that I would meet her again. I would accept her invitation to stay with her, and Emilito would be there too, and my life would change.

## Chapter 9: Pascola Masks

My legs were red and swollen. The lotion Zuleica had given me for the flea bites had not helped one bit. On the contrary, something in it seemed to make the bites even more virulent. It reminded me of the time I had had chicken-pox as a child, only now, I was far more uncomfortable.

“What did Zuleica give me that knocked me out?” I asked Carlos as we were driving to Vicam Station.

“Cocoa.”

“You mean there was only cocoa powder in that drink? I don’t believe it.”

Carlos nodded. “She thought you liked hot chocolate. That it would take your mind off the bites.”

“I do like it, but it never affected me like that before.”

“What affected you was Zuleica’s art of mesmerism,” he explained. “She can move a person’s center of awareness with her dream body. All she has to do is to look you in the eyes, or touch your forehead, or the back of your neck or shoulder blade and you’ll go out like a light.”

“Are you sure there was nothing in the drink?” I insisted.

“Absolutely. She doesn’t need to resort to using drugs or potions. Zuleica is a sorceress of the highest caliber. The *nagual* Julian taught her himself. She has an affinity for you because you are like her, quite a bit crazy. Someday, she’ll show you her art.”

“What might that be?” I asked, “Knocking people out with a pat on the back?”

Carlos pulled down the visor of the car to shield himself from the sun’s glare. “Zuleica is a consummate *dreamer*. She *stalks* with her *dream body*. When you meet her again, she’ll teach you how to *stalk* with the *double*.”

“What is *stalking* with the *double*?” I asked.

“You’ll have to wait until Zuleica shows you,” Carlos said. “She’s the master of it. As I’ve said, she learned from the *nagual* Julian, and from someone else in our linage."

"Who was this other person?"

"A sorcerer of unending accomplishments. All I can tell you is that don Juan's lineage is indebted to this person, just as he is indebted to our lineage."

I wanted to ask more about this mysterious personage and about Zuleica's art, but we had already arrived at Vicam Station. Benny was waiting in front of his house. When he saw our car, he hopped in and said he knew of several people who may have masks for sale. He offered to accompanying us so that we would not get lost. At first, I thought he was just being polite or wanted the company of his friend, but when I saw that an ordinary rock was a sign post, or a cactus indicated a turn onto a road, it was evident that we needed the guidance of someone who knew the terrain to perfection.

It would be impossible to find anyone's house or store unless one had been there before, sometimes, even then. For, even with Benny in the car, we had to backtrack on several occasions to catch a missed turn onto a road that was barely visible.

We drove across the highway and veered off onto a road that, according to Benny, would take us to Potam, where don Felipe, a mask carver, lived. It was a feat just to find a particular house, for they all looked alike. The typical house had plaited cane walls, sometimes coated heavily with mud, and a roof composed of layers of cane resting on a few mesquite rafters with earth piled on top of the cane. Construction materials included adobe brick, cane with mesquite support posts and rafters. Sometimes, I could see mats of split cane serving as part of the roof. All the houses had two or three rooms and had a ramada which consisted of a roof supported on crooked mesquite posts. Besides offering protection from the sun, the ramada served as a storage area for herbs and corn that were placed on top of it to dry.

The houses were surrounded by fences, five or six feet high, made of plaited cane, which sometimes afforded people complete privacy. I saw corrals with an occasional goat, pig or donkey, and, of course, chickens and the scrawniest dogs south of the border. Everywhere I could smell burning mesquite wood from kitchen fires. What struck me was that, except for the occasional barking of a dog or the cawing of a crow, everything was quiet. I couldn't help notice the sharp contrast from the noisy Mexican community of Vicam where Benny lived and the Yaqui settlements.

“Shall I turn right?” Carlos asked as we drove through the underbrush.

“Eees, turn here,” Benny said pointing out the window.

“Is that the Mesquite tree were I go left?”

“Eees, go left,” Benny replied.

“Do you think the mask maker will be at home?” I asked.

“Eees, he’s always in,” said Benny. “If not we’ll go to the store.”

I tried to figure out why Benny was prefacing all his replies with “eees”. I thought it might be some sort of Spanish expletive used in that part of Sonora, or perhaps, a Yaqui word. As we were waiting for Benny to return from a quick trip to the bushes, I asked Carlos what ‘eees’ meant.

“Benny uses it every time he says something,” I said.

Carlos laughed. “He’s saying ‘yes’ in English. Benny is trying to learn English. Converse with him a little. Don’t be shy.”

When Benny came back, I asked him what the Yaquis sold in their stores.

“Saddles and canned goods,” he said, “Coffee and sugar and Coca-Cola.”

Wherever there was a store, Benny said he knew of it and he intended to take us to all of them.

“Where are all the women?” I asked having passed only men on the road.

“Inside their houses,” Benny replied. “They don’t come out unless they have a reason, like getting water from the well, or wood for the fires or to get supplies from the store.”

“I can’t believe there is a store around here," I said. I could see nothing but low roofed adobes and desert vegetation.

“Eees, we go there now to look for masks,” Benny explained.

We followed a dirt road that was rutted from the rains, until we came to a mud house, like all the other structures of the area, only perhaps a bit longer. Sacks of grain were piled against one wall. It had no windows, only a door painted turquoise. Several tall Yaqui Indians were standing near the entrance; others were sitting on a plank bench drinking orange and lime sodas. All had on sombreros to shade themselves from the noonday sun. Some men had mustaches and were older, others were young boys in their teens, and, as usual, there were no women.

Carlos parked the car and I followed him and Benny into the store. I was surprised to see a variety of merchandise. There was a long counter, and on the walls were shelves stocked with canned goods as well as sacks of flour, sugar and coffee. One section of the store was devoted to tools and light farm equipment, such as ropes, spades, tools and other implements.

Benny talked to the proprietor with whom he seemed to be on friendly terms. After a while, the man left through a curtained door leading into a back room.

“He has a few masks in the back,” Carlos said to me. “He’s going to bring them out for us to look at.”

Benny opened the cooler and pulled out several sodas which we sipped, while we waited for the man to return. When I looked up, I noticed a girl behind the counter staring at me. She must have come out from the back room because she had not been in the store when we entered, and I was certain she hadn't come through the front door. She had short curly dark hair and beautiful delicate features. She couldn’t have been more than seventeen. Her skin was smooth and brown and she had the biggest black eyes I had ever seen.

Carlos started to talk to her. They spoke in such hushed voice that I could barely hear them, but I could tell from their serious expressions that the two were discussing something important. The girl seemed on the verge of tears. Carlos was trying to console her. He put an arm around her and patted her head. Finally, the girl turned to me and gave me a look of hatred that could make the blood of a lizard curdle, then she slipped thorough the curtain into the back room.

Before I could ask Carlos who the girl was, the owner of the store came back holding three carved wooden masks and laid them on the counter. They were masks used by the dancers during the Pascola celebrations. They were painted black with red markings around the eyes and across the cheeks. Bleached horsehair formed a fringe of bangs over the forehead, and served as eyebrows, while longer strands of horse hair hung down the front of the mask like a goatee or beard. Around the rims were carved triangles and circles. Two had a cross on the forehead, the third mask had a lizard pained on each cheek.

Carlos bargained about the price, for the man did not seem to want to part with all three masks. When Benny started to leave, dragging us with him to show that we were not interested, the man agreed to sell and I saw money changing hands.

On the way out we passed some hats hanging on a rack. Carlos tried a few on until he found one that fit him, which he left on his head. Benny took his worn hat off and put on a new one.

“Pick one out,” Carios said to me. “No one in Sonora goes without a hat.”

The first one I put on seemed to fit, but there was no mirror in the store to see how it looked. I caught my reflection on the side of a stainless steel thermos on the counter. I liked it. I looked less of a foreigner with a sombrero on.

Carlos paid for the hats and sodas. The owner walked out with us and when I looked back, I saw the girl standing in the doorway watching us. For a moment I felt sorry for her. Her options seemed dismally limited. She could marry one of the young men who was standing outside the store admiring her, and then spend her life looking after him and their children. Most likely she would never go more than ten miles out of the area. Perhaps she would visit a relative in one of the neighboring towns for a wedding or a birthday, and there exchange gossip about the latest birth or mourn over someone who had recently died. Or, if she were lucky, she might get a job as a maid in one of the motels in Ciudad Obregon, or Guaymas. In short, the girl’s future was sealed in the grimmest way.

A crow’s loud cawing from a nearby cottonwood tree caught me by surprise. I remember another time when I was having a similar mental dialogue concerning a woman who had served us in the restaurant in Santa Ana, but who had turned out to be a curer. I had been wrong then; and from the way the girl had glared at me, I felt I was wrong again.

I watched the girl through the side mirror as Carlos and Benny talked to the owner and some of the young men standing by the door. One of them seemed to be giving Carlos directions, for he was pointing off into the distance to the east. I sensed that the girl was looking at Carlos with what I could only call admiration or fondness. It struck me then that the girl was in love with him. I felt a pang of jealousy which I immediately tried to hide by smiling at Carlos as he got in the car. As we drove off, leaving Benny to talk with some friends he had run across, I watched the girl watching us until we disappeared behind the dust and shrubs.

“Who is that girl?” I asked as we continued down the dirt road.

Dust was getting in my eyes and made me sneeze.

For a moment Carlos was silent. “That’s Josefina,” he finally said. “Don’t you remember?”

The name was so familiar. Suddenly, my ears popped and I remembered where I had seen her. She was the girl that had accosted me in Zuleica’s house.

“She’s a sorceress!” I gasped. “What’s she doing here? And don’t tell me she’s helping out the owner of the store, like that woman in the restaurant in Santa Ana.”

“No, she just came for some supplies.”

“You mean she lives around here?”

Again a long silence.

“She seems to like you a lot,” I said, “Have you known her long? What were you two whispering about in there?”

Carlos shrugged. “She wants me to take her to the United States,” he said. “I’m teaching her English.”

For an instant I lapsed into a familiar moroseness. I was certain Carlos was teaching her English so he could bring her to the United States.

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… the “self”. These feelings of love and hate, jealously, or envy did not simply go away by changing one’s venue. They were deeply rooted, buried in every cell of our being. To rid ourselves of these feelings, we would have to do more than to recapitulate our lives; we would, in Zuleica’s words, have to become transformed.

The car reached the highway with a thud. I was relieved to see Carlos smiling. Perhaps, he wasn’t attached to the girl in the store after ail, I breathed easier and lost myself watching the shadows and colors the sun cast on the desert landscape as we drove to don Felipe’s, the mask maker’s house.

His house had a wooden cross in the courtyard and was situated on the edge of a cultivated field. It was more spacious than the other houses I had seen, and it was built of good adobe bricks and the dirt around it was clean and well packed.

Carlos asked me to wait in the car while he talked with don Felipe, but I insisted on going inside. Don Felipe introduced us to his wife, who immediately left the room, as if she were too shy to speak to strangers. Don Felipe was elderly, tall, and had a sense of quietude about him. His eyes were not bright and burning, but rather distant, as if looking off somewhere into another world. I suspected he read Spanish, for he had several books on a shelf. In his conversational manner he projected a simplicity and intelligence. He seemed knowledgeable on many subjects.

At one point, I sensed the discussion centered on the Rahum Chronicle and some of the legendary heroes of Yaqui history, for I heard the names of Calixto Muni, Cajeme, Tetabiate and Juan Bandera repeatedly mentioned. Carlos had told me earlier that Calixto Muni was an 18th century Yaqui leader who had organized the Yaquis into a military unit to fight the Mexicans, Juan Bandera, who claimed to have had a vision of the Virgin of Guadalupe, also organized military units of Yaquis under a flag of the virgin. Tetabiate, after Cajeme's defeat, reorganized the remnants of the Yaqui forces in the mountains north of the Yaqui river, and waged guerrilla warfare against Mexicans for many years.

I sensed don Felipe didn't want to sell Carlos any masks, but when Carlos said that he was working with don Juan, whom don Felipe seemed to know, he got up and went into the back room and brought out a masks wrapped in a red cloth. He carefully unfolded the cloth to reveal a mask unlike the ones that we had found in the store. This mask was really spooky. It was unpainted and had no horsehair trim. The facial features were distorted as if in a snarl. The mouth was open, the eyes were slightly slanted, one higher than the other. The wood was white with layers of natural swirls in it's grain. It was beautiful, yet at the same time, awesome.

Carlos thanked don Felipe and we left.

"Why is that mask so different?" I asked, walking to the car.

"That's a mask of an *ally*," Carlos said. "The other masks are for the Pascola dancers."

Carlos carefully put the mask in the trunk after wrapping it in a towel for protection.

"What's an *ally*?" I asked, trying to think if Clara or John Michael Abelar had ever discussed that topic.

“An *ally* is a force that exists outside the world of ordinary perception,” Carlos said. “That force can take any shape when in service of the sorcerer.”

“You mean anything can be an *ally*?” I asked.

“No, they are specific entities that are formless, but they can take the shape of anything they wish to emulate, depending on the energy that they harness from the human world.”

“Have you ever seen one?” I asked.

“Don Juan showed me his *ally* on several occasions and nearly frightened me to death. Once I had to wrestle with it and thought I was done for.”

“Is it like a ball of energy? Sizzling and kind of bluish?”

“It could be a man, a gigantic black door, a ferocious animal, anything, but, yes, it's full of sizzling energy.”

I told Carlos about a series of recurring dreams I had had, of at least I thought they were dreams. I was staying in Clara’s house in the beautiful room she had assigned to me. I would just be drifting off to sleep, when I heard noises outside my door in the hallway. At first, I thought it was footsteps, someone big walking down the corridor. Terrified, I put my head under the covers and hoped the noises would go away.

But they didn’t. Sometimes there was some scratching at the door, as if a huge animal was prowling outside trying to get in. In my semi-sleep state, I would get up and push a heavy dresser in front of the door so that nothing could get in, but to no avail. The force, or whatever was behind the door, would be so fearsome strong, that the dresser would move aside, pushed by a sizzling energy, I’d just stand there petrified watching the antique dresser moving away from the door, and seeing the door itself bulging inward toward me with a tremendous force, about to bust off his hinges.

I would either run back to my bed and hide, preferably under it, or I would stand there so petrified that I was unable to move. I remembered trying to scream, but nothing came out of my mouth. Sometimes I would wake up panting, soaked in perspiration, or, I would wake up on the floor in front of the door, partly covered by the dresser. My heart would be pounding so strongly, that it would take hours to quiet down.

These encounters became so recurring that I told Clara about them.

“That force is nothing to sneeze at,” she said seriously. “You say the door is about to burst off it's hinges. Watch out! Whatever is prowling out there is about to come in.”

“What will happen if it does?” I asked. “Will I die?”

“Who can tell?” she said. “That force is determined to get you.”

“Why is it after me?” I asked. “What did I do wrong?”

In my mind, I ran the gamut of all the sins of commission and omission, and there were plenty of them.

“It’s not what you didn’t do,” she said shaking her head pathetically. “It’s what you did do. You’ve been doing your *sorcery passes*, especially, the one where you grab the imaginary sliding door and pull it open. That’s the one that started this whole thing, and that’s the one that may save you in a pinch.”

“What kind of pinch are you talking about, Clara. Will the force really come after me?”

“You bet your boots. I’d say it’s about to burst through the door any moment now, and when it does, you’re going to have to put up a fight.”

I felt my stomach sink right there. “I’d rather flee than fight,” I said. “I’m a coward. I only pretend to be tough, and sometimes I don’t even pretend well.”

Clara looked me up and down groggily and shook her head. “You only say you’re a coward, out of habit,” she remarked. “You’re tougher than you let on.”

“Let me be the judge of that, Clara," I insisted. “And I say when it comes to nightmarish forces, I’m a coward.”

She laughed and sighed resigned. “Have it your way, Taisha, it really doesn’t matter what you are. The thing that counts is what you do when the force comes through that door.”

“What should I do?” I asked.

“You grab it like this, and shake it like a huge Turkish towel.”

She demonstrated by holding up her two fists as if she were grabbing something in mid-air and began flinging her arms up and down wildly, thrashing about as if she were holding something invisible that was unstoppable in it's fury.

“Keep hold of it,” she warned. “Don’t you dare let go, no matter how hard it thrashes you about.”

Right there I knew I was lost, but my rational mind needed to know the very worst that could happen, so I asked, “What will happen if I let go?”

She stopped her bizarre gyrations and looked me in the eye. Her expression was cold and ominous. “The *ally* will gobble you up,” she said. “It likes tender little cowards,” and then she made the most ominous biting noises with her teeth, as she said, “Yum, Yum, yummy, yumm, yum,” over and over.

As Clara went on with her yummy, yum, yums she rubbed her stomach and patted her head at the same time in opposite circles. Then I knew that one of us had lost their mind, and I wondered if it wasn’t me.

I had decided then and there to disregard her advice as bordering on the absurd, and, to my relief, I didn’t have the encounter again the rest of that week, but the following week, right before my menstrual period, I felt the force again. This time, it was prowling outside my door with an increased ferocity. As I stood in front of the door, I could tell it meant business by the fierce white light that was bursting under the door and through the cracks on the sides, cracks that were getting larger as the sturdy door was being pushed away from it's hinges.

I didn’t even have time to run to my bed. The door burst aside, or rather was snapped off, and flung to the side, and I was face to face with a most blinding white light that was the size of the door frame. I was petrified, frozen to the core. I couldn’t scream or breathe. As it began advancing toward me, I was about to faint. Then, I realized that this sizzling glob of light was absolutely conscious and aware. Before I passed out, I heard in my ear Clara's voice saying yummy yum yum, over and over.

I had a moment of decision, of either getting rolled over by the boulder of light, or of grabbing it and shaking it like Clara had shown me. Some force inside me rallied, and in spite of myself, I instinctively lurched forward, diving into the ball of light head on like one would dive into a huge wave in the sea. I knew I would be electrocuted, fried to a crisp as when throwing a hairdryer into the bath tub; but to my amazement, the electricity was not hot at all. The sizzling was cool, yet tremendously forceful.

I grabbed onto it, and hung on with all my might as it thrashed me about, first from side to side as it tried to shake me off, then in circles, as we roiled on the floor. I felt as if I were tumbled by a wave on the ocean bottom. It's force was so strong, that I lost consciousness, but something in me kept on grabbing.

Then, gradually, the force seemed to diminish. It became stiffer, rigid, then, more flaccid, having lost much of it's sizzling quality. It became flat and spongy, then, almost vaporous, until it evaporated altogether and I was left on the floor holding onto nothing.

I took a deep breath and perspiring, walked to my bed. All I could think of was, “what the hell was that?” When I woke up the next morning, I told Clara what had happened. She no longer seemed interested.

“Now, they won’t bother you again,” was all she said. “You’d be surprised how word gets around on the energetic plane. Forces know that they have another thing coming if they mess with Taisha.”

“What forces are those?” I asked Clara.

She said it was just a force that permeated the universe, bundles of energy, aware and predatory, like everything else in existence.

Remembering the encounter gave me the shivers. I moved closer to Carlos in the front seat, so my arm touched his. We drove back to Vicam Station in complete silence.

## Chapter 10: Pascola Dances

We met Benny in the store at Vicam station where we were buying bread and fruit for our lunch. He said that if we hurried we could get to Potam in time to see the Pascola dances that were apart of the celebrations honoring the Holy Trinity, the patron of the church. On the way I asked Benny to tell me about the festivities. He explained that they included dancing, singing, playing musical instruments, colorful processions, and a fireworks display after dark.

“And of course plenty of food and drinking,” he added with a grin.

Under Benny's expert guidance, we made it to Potam in record time. The streets were so crowded, that we had a hard time maneuvering the car through the throngs of spectators. Yaquis and Mexicans from all over Sonora had gathered for the celebrations that were taking place in the plaza in front of the church. Two ramadas had been set up, on the east and west sides of the plaza, manned by two groups of four festival managers, or fiesteros.

"The four wearing red headdresses, carrying the red flags manage the western ramada," Benny said. "The ones on the eastern ramada have on blue headdresses and carry blue flags."

I craned my neck to see the different managers milling about the ramadas.

"Why do they have on different colored costumes?" I asked.

"The 'blues' are the Christians," Benny explained. "The red ones are the Moors."

"I didn't know there were Moors in Sonora," I said surprised.

Carlos gave me a nudge, "They are not really Moors," he said impatiently. "They are only playing the part of the Moors. You see, the fiesta is a dramatization of the fifteenth century conflict between the Christians and the Moors in Spain."

How that European struggle had woven itself into the ceremonies of a small Yaqui village was beyond my knowledge of history. I noticed that the red fiesteros or moros were wearing a small cone shaped hat made of wood about four inches high. On top of it was inserted a metal crescent from which hung a red cloth that covered their heads and most of the moro's face.

"We have to keep our eyes on the blue ones," Carlos said, pointing in the opposite direction. "The Christians are at the East side."

"Why do we have to watch the Christians?" I asked, intrigued by what the Moors were doing.

"Because it is at the eastern ramada where the Pascola and deer dances will take place," he explained.

I stood on my toes to see the men dressed in blue head gear. I noticed that they were wearing blue ribbons tied around their heads; the cloth completely covering their hair and the upper portion of their shoulders. They, too, were carrying wooden sticks, but instead of a crescent, they had a metal cross on the tip.

I couldn’t see well, so we moved through an opening in the crowd to a place near the church steps. From there we had a bird’s eye view of the east or Christian end of the plaza where the dancing would take place. The musicians had already begun to warm up their violins, harps, reed whistles and drums. Then the dancers came out, dressed in apron-like loin cloths, fringed vests, leggings and masks.

“What is the meaning of the Pascola dances and of the masks?” I asked standing on a low wall to get a better view. “Is there a religious significance to the dances?”

“There is,” Carlos said, “The Yaquis believe that baptism already existed before the coming of the Spaniards. Those who did not wish to be baptized became enchanted. They had the power to transcend death, and existed on an invisible plane superimposed on the Yaqui tribal territory. The Yaqui believe that there is another world which is always there, just as this world surrounds us.”

“Are the invisible people ghosts or phantoms?”

“They are not dead,” Carlos explained, “The Yaquis called them the people of the Monte. They believe that the unbaptized ones or invisible ones are the source of the dances and music played for the pascola.”

“There are stories of caves in the hills where men have encountered the invisible people and have learned to play the music for the pascola dances directly from them,” Benny interjected.

“What about the dances themselves?” I asked. “Who taught them the movements?”

“The people of the Monte,” said Benny. “They, too, are learned with the help of the invisible people. Sometimes one can hear pascola music in the bush where there are no people, and the Yaqui know that it is the people of the Monte playing. Personally, I think it’s the wind, but then, I’m not a Yaqui.”

I watched the east end where the dancing had begun. The dancers were making the most bizarre movements, as if they had no control over the musculature of their arms and legs, and the sounds that came out of their mouths were animalistic growls and shrieks unlike any human sounds I had ever heard.

“They look weird,” I whispered to Carlos. “And they sound even weirder.”

“That’s because they are giving the deliberate impression that they are coming from the spirit world. The reason they wear masks and make those unintelligible sounds, is because they haven't yet learned to speak the language of men, or move their arms and legs as is proper to human beings. The dancers must be introduced gradually into the world of men."

As we moved closer to the eastern ramada, Benny explained and Carlos translated other aspects of Yaqui tradition. I learned that the dancers are believed to have a direct connection with the animals of the Monte, whom they regard as their guardians and teachers. The entire dance is a dramatization of the passage from one world, the invisible realm of timeless existence, into the world of temporal and spacial limits inhabited by man, and then they moved back into the timeless with the help of the animals that the masks represented.

As I watched the dancers in their costumes, I notice that on their calves and ankles they wore bands onto which were sewn hundreds of cocoons that rattled whenever they took a step. They danced in a circle, moving their arms and legs rhythmically to the musicians' tunes. After a while they seemed to lose their strangeness and moved smoothly in synchronization with the music. Then they advanced to the center of the square, then turned separating to face the four directions, all the while thumping their feet so that the cocoon rattles made dry rasping sounds. They mingled with the music of the violins, drums and flutes, so that together they produced a hypnotic mixture of mesmeric reverberation.

After a while, another dancer came out to joint the group of pascola dancers. Benny said he was the deer dancer, which was denoted by the fact that he was wearing a deer's head as part of his costume. He symbolized the magical deer that inhabited the Monte, the realm that existed before time began. Accompanying the deer dancer, was a group of singers, singing special songs.

"Eees. The deer songs are very poetic," Benny said.

"What are they about?" I asked.

"They are songs of things that happened long ago, but it is not necessary to believe that they really happened, or that they are true, to appreciate their beauty. The Yaqui take pride in the telling of these stories."

I watched as the deer dancer moved his taut body. He seemed to have great endurance. His head was bowed as if in a trance, induced by the rhythmic shakes of the giant gourd rattles he held in each hand. He no longer seemed aware of the world around him, as if his own repetitive movements had carried him into another realm.

I noticed that the monotonous sounds were also having a deleterious affect on me. I seemed to have entered a mild stupor brought on by the repetitive sound of the instruments and by the rhythmic thumping of the dancer's feet that made the cluster of cocoons on his ankles rattle. At one point, it seemed as if I were viewing the dancer's world superimposed on the reality that was in front of me.

The more I focused my attention on the dancer wearing the deer mask, the more my own head began to sway. I heard a voice inside me telling me to keep my eyes on the dancer. His movements seemed particularly smooth as if he were propelled by an outside force; as if his body was no longer made of flesh and bone. He was fluid, empty, merging with the world of the invisible people and the spirit animals. Perhaps, what the Yaqui believed was true; and that dancing and wearing masks allows one to transcend one's humanness, slip outside the grip of time, and momentarily perceive from a different perspective.

Like the sorcerers who had trained me, a consummate dancer can grasp knowledge and *see* things beyond the limitations of his human form. Perhaps, for a moment, through the union with the dance and the sound of the reed whistle, drums, and rattling of a thousand dry cocoons, he is able to become what he was before the analytic mind began to dominate man. It is a way of regaining his heritage and once again, becoming one with the invisible people of the timeless plane.

As I watched the dancers thumping the ground with their legs, and moving in a semi circle, I realized how incomprehensible the world of the Yaqui Indian was to an outsider. Unless a person became a Pascola dancer, steeped in Yaqui ways, one could not really appreciate the events that were taking place, and to be a dancer one had to be a member of the Yaqui culture, and even then, it would take years of training with a master teacher, to perfect the art. Unless, one learned directly from one of the invisible people or animals of the Monte.

It was clear to me that an external description, such as those presented by anthropologists, would not adequately depict what went on inside the Yaqui deer dancer's head. An anthropologist, as an observer, could only describe what he saw from his external vantage point; for example, the costumes, the dances steps, or the stories that were told by the singers about Yaqui history. The anthropologist would analyze the Yaqui myths, record their music and eventually file them away in the ethnomusicological archives as part of a dying tradition.

Or he might examined the Yaqui social structure to see how people were organized in terms of the status and roles or their kinship relationships. Or he might dwell on the prescribed or proscribed behaviors that the members need to fulfill. He could discuss the tasks each person had to accomplish in order for the festivities to run smoothly. For example, what were the duties of the blue and red fiesteros. Or he might examine the function the festivities and dances had in serving the community or their importance in strengthening social solidarity.

It was obvious that the celebrations gave the people a strong sense of communal cohesion. Hundreds had gathered with their families and relatives from neighboring towns to watch the dances, and to wait tor food to be served and the drinking to begin. An anthropologist would undoubtedly report that the festivities offer it's participants and spectators a chance to escape the mundane drudgery of everyday life. Through ritual expression, it takes the collective mind out of the realm of the profane and elevates it to the level of the sacred, reviving the ever-present myths of the past. As the dancers tell stories with their masks and movements, people could relive the events of Yaqui history, thereby, giving flesh and substance to happenings that may or may not have occurred in actual time.

As the gamut of anthropological explanations of the festivities ran through my mind, it was evident that in order to understand something, it was not enough to see things from an objective viewpoint, describing things in order that other researchers could replicate what one heard and saw. In order to understand the phenomenon one needed to become a member of that society or group. What was it like, I wondered, to be behind the mask of the dancer, to create the festival, not as an outsider, but as a member of the group, and see the world as the deer dancer himself saw it. In other words, one had to bite into an apple to taste or experience it's essence, not merely describe it's properties from the outside.

Yet the reverse was also true. A Yaqui Indian, without having attended a university, would find it impossible to understand the concepts and theories of the discipline of Anthropology. For a person who could not read or write, the rules of academic life would be incomprehensible. The masked dancer could never become a professor of anthropology, unless he went through the ranks and worked his way up the scholastic ladder. For that, he would have to begin at an early age to learn the ramifications of academic life. It would take years of specialized training, just as it would to become a pascola dancer.

When the dances were over, the dancers mingled with the crowds, to entertain the children as was part of their duties. Parents had hoisted their children onto their shoulders, so they could see the clowning and cavorting that was taking place. I noticed the child in front of me, riding on his father's back. For an instant, I had the certainty that I, too, had ridden on someone's back, and not as a child. Yet for the life of me I could not remember when it had been.

Then, as I watched the child, looking over his father's shoulder, a total recollection struck me, as if blown on the nagging breeze that kept ruffling the back of my neck, I saw myself hanging from the harness in the giant tree in front of Clara's house. Someone was standing at the foot of the tree, grabbing my legs and swinging me back and forth. I didn't get nauseous or dizzy. On the contrary, I was yelling gleefully, to be pushed again, for the sensation of swinging was sheer delight to me.

I looked down and saw Carlos pushing me. He asked if I wanted to ride on his shoulders. I said I was too heavy, but he said the harness would support most of my weight. I lowered myself down onto his shoulders and held onto his head. He hooked his arms around my legs and off we went in small circles. We were laughing so hard that I didn't even notice that the harness had gotten tangled. When he let go, I was spinning like a top that had been wound up.

I shook my head to dispel the memory. It couldn't have happened, I thought; it was something I was just imagining. Yet the vision and feeling of having known Carlos before was so strong and delineated that I had trouble dispelling it. I took hold of his arm, so as not to get separated as we moved through the crowd on our way back to the car.

Benny had wanted to stay for the dancing and fireworks, but Carlos said he needed to make another stop to collect some masks and perhaps a set of cocoon rattles for the museum. We left Benny in the company of some of his friends, and drove back to Vicam Station, but before reaching the town, Carlos suddenly veered off the main highway onto an obscure road as if he knew exactly where he was going.

After several miles of a bumpy ride, he parked the car on a well packed area of ground near an adobe house almost completely hidden by shrubs. As we got out, he said casually, that we were not there to look at masks, but that it was don Juan's house and he had wanted to see if he was home. Carlos called out announcing our presence, but no one came to the door. I waited in the car while Carlos walked down the road to see if he could catch don Juan returning from the store. Carlos said he had a strong feeling that he would encounter him on the road the way he had done on the previous occasions he had come to visit him.

For a while I waited in the car, then I grew restless and decided to sit on a bench that was near the house. I wanted to sketch the fences and the Sonoran house construction, to complement the sketches I had made earlier of the desert chaparral. I brought a bottle of mineral water with me from the car and made myself comfortable on the roughly hewn bench.

After a few minutes, a wiry man in his early fifties came out of the house and stretched as if he had been asleep. I greeted him and tried to explain in Spanish, who I was and why I was sitting under his ramada.

"I already know who you are," he said in English.

He had on a sombrero and as he introduced himself as Juan Matus, he removed it from his head and made a slight bow in the manner of a gentleman. When he raised up again, I could see his face. I felt my stomach sink and my mouth fall open as I registered a moment of sheer confusion. It was John Michael Abelar. I could barely recognize him, but it was unmistakably he. He had that same strength and vibrancy, and the same shiny eyes that could change in an instant from calmness to ferocity.

“Mr. Abelar! What are you doing dressed up as a Yaqui Indian? I almost didn’t recognize you.”

“When in Rome, do as the Romans do,” he said with a laugh. “In these parts I’m known as Juan Matus, but you can call me what ever you wish.”

After the initial shock of seeing him had subsided, I was surprised at how easy it was to be in his company. The energy he imparted to the encounter made my inherent stiffness vanish. I knew I ought to have been terrified of him, but somehow I wasn’t. He exuded a sense of reasonableness and fairness that gave the impression that in all his dealings, he was impeccable. In fact, I was so at ease with him that I wanted to regard him as a familiar relative.

“Just don’t call me grandpa,” he teased, reading my thoughts.

“I’ll call you don Juan, like Carlos does,” I said. “As you said, when in Rome, do as the Romans do.”

He nodded. I noticed that on his porch were a set of cocoon rattles like the ones the Pascola dancers had used, and also, several masks similar to the ones Carlos had bought at the neighboring stores.

“Seeing those cocoon rattles, I thought that a pascola dancer lived here,” I said. “Do you go around masquerading as one?”

Don Juan laughed. “I learned a few of the Yaqui dance steps in my youth,” he admitted. “I lived many years in Pascua, a Yaqui town in Arizona.”

“What kind of dances did you do?” I asked him.

“The deer dance was my specialty,” he said walking over to where I was sitting. He glanced at my notebook in which I had already begun sketching part of the ramada and some of the masks.

“Can you tell me about the deer dance?” I asked covering my drawings with my forearm. I didn’t tell him about the dances I had just seen in Potam.

“Do you want a demonstration?” he offered.

For a moment I hesitated wondering if I shouldn’t wait for Carlos to return.

“Carlos won’t be back for quite a while,” don Juan informed me. “Right now he’s on his way to Ciudad Obregon on some business.”

“What kind of business?” I asked, alarmed. “Besides his car is here, how is he going to get there?”

“Someone is driving him in her car,” he said with an emphasis on the “her.” He peered at me as if to assess my reaction.

I registered a moment of uneasiness. “You mean he’s looking for more masks? And what about me? What am I supposed to do, wait in the car until he comes back?”

“You’re not the only business he has, young lady,” don Juan said sternly. “Right now he’s occupied elsewhere. He left you here in my care.”

“But when is he coining back?”

“Not tonight,” he said tersely. He gave me a look that left no room for any more questions or commentary.

“You’ve always been interested in movements and in martial arts,” he reminded me. “Yaqui dances are quite different from Oriental movements.”

Don Juan stooped over and began to put on the cocoon rattles that he had removed from a peg. Up close, I could see they were made from hundreds of dried moth larvae sewn onto a wide leather strap which he tied around his calves. Then he reached for a mask of a deer’s head, like the one the deer dancer in Potam had worn. Part of it was made out of a real deer’s head with ears and a pointed snout and antlers.

Don Juan was ready to demonstrate the deer dance. Eagerly, I picked up my pad and pencil to jot down notes. Benny had explained that the masked dancers communicated with the realm of the invisible ones through their movements, but I still did not know how it was done or what the dance steps signified.

Don Juan began smoothly sliding his sandalled feet over the dirt floor under the ramada, seemingly brushing the ground with deer hoofs. His back was slightly arched and his head was looking down. With ankles and knees bent, his movements took on a sleek, graceful appearance as if he were identifying with the animal the mask represented. His body became more limber, his movements light yet forceful. He twisted his waist and torso back and forth, swaying his arms rhythmically behind him to the dry rattling sound of the cocoons. Then a series of raspy yet muffled shakes followed as he repeatedly thumped down on the ground, alternating his feet.

He began to chant in a monotonous tone in a language I could not understand. The thumping and rattling continued until my eyelids grew heavy. I thought it must be the heat or all the excitement of the day that was making me tired and I tried hard to keep my eyes open, but soon my head began bobbing up and down just like don Juan’s, until I could no longer stay awake. The last thing I remember was my note pad slipping out of my lap onto the ground, but I did not have the volition to pick it up.

I was watching a purple circle of light in front of my eyes opening until I no longer saw a man masquerading as a deer, gyrating to the sound of chanting and cocoon rattles. I was seeing a forest, and standing in front of me gazing back through the opening of the purple eye, was a magnificent deer. The hollow rattling faded into the distance and mingled with the wind rustling the branches of the pines, the leaves on the ground, and with the rushing of a nearby stream.

Mesmerized, I watched the deer gazing back at me. I knew what it was thinking. It’s words, for this dream deer cold talk, came to me on the rustling sounds of the ground leaves. More wordless sounds spilled out of it's mouth like a fountain of bubbles that floated toward me. Instantly, I and the deer became friends, for it too, could comprehend my thoughts.

“Don’t be surprised that you can understand me,” said the deer without moving it's mouth. Although he spoke without words, that was the meaning his eyes were expressing. “If you let go of your limiting ideas of what is real and unreal, all sorts of things can happen. Deer can talk too, and have feelings.”

I thought, “am I dreaming? What happened to the desert? How did I come to this forgotten forest?” No sooner had I thought these things, when the deer told me that the forest exists in another realm, the realm of myth, and one enters that realm by letting go of the world in which one lives.

“But how did this happen?”I wondered. “Did I just fall asleep?”

“The shaman’s rattles helped transport you,” explained the deer, it’s liquid eyes shimmering in the mellow afternoon light. “His rhythmic sounds put you to sleep and made you wake in this enchanted realm. I am your friend, your guardian animal. If you have any questions about things just find me and I will tell you the answers. Now is there anything in particular you would like to know?”

Instinctively I looked for my notepad. I wanted to write everything down the deer said, so that when I awoke, I would have proof that I had really been where I seemed I was. I wanted to ask the deer all sorts of questions, details about the forest and the nature of the world I was in, but the more I tried to think, the less I could formulate my thoughts.

“What is the meaning of life?” I blurted out.

The deer looked at me for an instant and then began to laugh, and as he laughed a million bubbles came out of it's mouth until a golden fog rose up around me, completely opaquing the forest and the deer itself. All I heard was the rushing stream and it was that sound that brought me back to the desert hut, and to the masked deer dancer who was standing over my slumped body staring at me. Slowly, I remembered who and where I was and marveled at the sorcery by which don Juan had transported me into the dream realm. I wanted to ask if he had also seen the deer, or if he had actually become the deer himself, but it took too much effort to speak.

Don Juan took off his mask and scrutinized, me from head to foot. He knew that I had seen a vision. I wanted to ask him how it was done, how the purple eye had opened right in front of me, but he motioned for me to remain silent. He gave his cocoon rattles a few more shakes as he stepped away from me, then he stooped over and untied the rattles from his ankles.

“The cocoons are made of dried moth larvae,” he explained, holding them up for me to see. “When so many are gathered together, they have the power to break barriers and to transport. The mask of the deer calls the guardian spirit to come to the window of this world. Then it’s easy to slip though. You had a short journey, but now you know it can be done, and you can go into the world of *dreaming* again whenever you want.”

I stared at don Juan, only half believing him. The thought occurred to me that he had put some powdered herbs into the water I had been drinking when he stooped over to look at my drawing, and that that was what had affected me. I glanced at the bottle on the mud brick ledge.

“It was the deer mask and the cocoon rattles,” he assured me. “Nothing in your drink. If the dance and dancer have power, together they can transport one to the other side.”

Don Juan hung the rattles on a nail on the ramada post. He carefully wrapped the deer mask in a piece of cloth then excused himself and went inside the house to put it away.

The twilight spilled over the ground casting liquid shadows everywhere. For a long time I sat staring at the notebook on the ground, waiting for don Juan to come back so I could ask him more questions, but when he didn’t come out, I finally got up enough energy to go inside the house to look for him, but don Juan wasn’t there. He seemed to have vanished, perhaps though that illusive crack into the world of *dreaming*.

## Chapter 11: Cleansing Angelica

It was too windy to sit under the ramada in the dusk, and too spooky to wait inside don Juan’s house, so I decided to sit in the car until Carlos or don Juan returned. I was absorbed in writing up my notes when I heard a knocking on the windshield. I nearly jumped through the car roof. Don Juan was staring through the glass motioning me to roll down the window.

“Let’s go for a walk,” he said when I got out of the car. He was carrying a bundle tied to his back like a knapsack.

“But won’t it be dark soon?” I said.

“So much the better,” he replied.

Obediently, I put on my poncho and sombrero and followed him into the chaparral. According to my compass, which I always carried with me, we were heading in a westerly direction. As I trudged behind him, I noticed his hands. The tips of his middle and ring fingers were curled and pressed against the palms, while the thumbs, index, and pinky fingers were extended in a natural position.

“Keep your fingers like this and you won’t tire yourself,” he said holding up his hand for me to see, “and positioning your gaze just above the horizon helps to quiet your thoughts. If you succeed, you will have more energy while walking."

"Where are we going?" I asked trying to copy his hand position.

"To a place of power," he said picking up his pace.

Even though I kept my gaze just above the horizon as don Juan had recommended, I could not quiet my thoughts. I was lining up in my mind all the questions I had been unable to ask him earlier. Now they were bursting to get out.

"Was it really the power of the mask and dance movements that cause me to have that vision of the deer?" I blurted out.

"The rattling of the cocoons was the line that took you into the dream world and the link that brought you back," don Juan said. "But the dancer himself can move someone with his intent."

"What do you mean by intent?" I asked.

"I mean that the energy coming out of the dancer can impinge on the energy of the observer, and can change the world around him. You, being liquid, were easily moved."

"But is there really another world one can enter? Do you believe the Yaqui myth of the realm of the Monte populated by invisible people? And what about the spirit animals, do they exist?"

He stopped to peer at me for an instant. "After what you've seen, how can you ask those questions?"

"I just want your opinion," I said defensively.

"The Yaqui Indians call it the realm of the Monte, but I call it the *world of dreaming*," he said. "Women are better at slipping into this realm than men because they are less rigid in their expectations and beliefs. Now, no more questions. Let's walk in silence."

The distant hills were already bathed in shades of dark purple, and the sky was what my art teachers had always called a perfect watercolor sky; with billowing clouds in different shades of gray, red, and pink. We came towards a clump of green shrubbery and a long row of cottonwood trees. When we were closer, I could see that the upper branches of the trees had been cut off, as if they had been harvested or someone had done a poor job of pruning. Still, it was one of the few areas in the terrain where there was lush vegetation.

"That's the Yaqui river," don Juan said, pointing to the clump of trees. "It cuts across the territory, bringing the only source of water to the land. That's why places along it are *power spots*. Plants and animals flock to them, as well as spirits that seek moisture."

We crossed over a low plank bridge, that seemed about to fall apart under our feet.

"It's not very big," I remarked, looking down. "And it's practically dry. Somehow I expected a real river full of water."

"After the rains, it fills up," he assured me. "But it is never very wide."

We climbed down the barranca to a creek on the other side; it was one of the areas where the earth was moist. Don Juan told me to be careful because the rocks were slippery. After walking down the creek for a stretch, we sat on a rock. Don Juan took off his knapsack, reached in and handed me a round Mexican bread and an orange, and some thin strips of dried meat. I was famished for I hadn't eaten since lunch. We missed the food at the Holy Trinity festival, because as visitors, it would not be safe for us to eat from the street vendors.

I began to peel the orange and wiped my fingers on some dry leaves. From where we sat I could hear the trucks rumbling by on the highway stirring up clouds of dust and exhaust.

"Trucks in Mexico have names given to them by their owners which they paint above the bumper," don Juan explained. "The one that just passed was called 'Wounded Heart.'"

I wondered how he knew that, for there was no way he could have seen the truck from where we were sitting.

"I *see*," he said casually.

"What does it mean to '*see*', don Juan?"

"It means different things to different people. Sometimes, it's having the certainty that a thing is so. Other times it's a voice that tells you something specific, or it can be a visual sensation of *seeing energy fibers* or colors moving around a person, plant, animal or object. It can even be a longing that grips you, and doesn't let you go."

"I have a longing that doesn't let me go," I said. "But I don't know what it is. I can never voice it. It comes from so far away."

Don Juan looked at me for a moment then shook his head. “That’s not *seeing*, that’s called indulging.”

He let out a spurt of genuine laughter. I wanted to argue with him but he shook his head.

“I bet it has something to do with finding love,” he said giving me a nudge.

“I suppose you’re right,” I conceded, “but don’t sorcerers love or want to be loved?”

“They do, but not in the way ordinary people fall in and out of love. A sorcerer’s affection is peerless. He has no vested interest or personal attachment to his feeling. It is given without any strings attached, and once given, it is never ever retracted.”

The finality of his statements gave me a chill. It made any notion of love that I had ever come across seem paltry, inferior and soaked in emotional indulging.

“I don’t know if I could commit myself in such a final, absolute way,” I said, offering him half of the bread.

Don Juan laughed and said that it had nothing to do with personal choice or commitment. It was rather a question of fate, to which one either acquiesced and acted impeccably or resisted to one’s dying breath.

“The flow of fate bringing people together is rare and mysterious,” he said softly. “Only a blind fool or knowledge criminal would not acquiesce to such a gift.”

“What is a knowledge criminal?”

His eyes were glossy as if remembering something that happened long ago. “Someone who knows better but obstinately refuses to act upon his knowledge.” Then he laughed and said teasingly, “don’t worry, this is not a proposition from an old man.”

I laughed too but a bit more nervously than I had intended. Don Juan was far from being an old man.

Another truck drove by. I wondered where it was going. Perhaps to Mazatlan, or Guadalajara, or even as far south as Mexico City. I commented to don Juan that I had never been to any of these places.

“You’ll go there soon,” he said with such certainty that I was forced to ask: “how do you know? Are you *seeing* again?”

“Carlos will take you there,” he said. “Zuleica is in Guadalajara waiting for you. She has something to teach you.”

“Can’t I stay here with you?” I asked, feeling at ease in his company and afraid to death of what Zuleica had to teach me.

“No, your path is different. We are all bound to help you, but you are not like us. You have to return to Los Angeles. You have other things to do.”

“What will I have to do?” I asked alarmed.

“That is for the *spirit* to decide. It will tell you and your power will dictate what you are capable of.” He nudged me and said softly. “You are capable of more than you realize.”

Just then a gust of wind rustled the leaves of the cottonwood trees. I felt a chill that entered my very bones. The consequence of not being up to the *spirit’s* challenge was too divesting to formulate, so even thought I didn’t know what that challenge might be, I decided to seize it.

“Tell me more about the deer dancer, don Juan. Exactly how does the dancer enter into another realm?”

Don Juan took off his hat and wiped his forehead with a kerchief he had in his shirt pocket. “At first, entering the dream world may be a frightening experience; or it may only seem like a dream from which one doesn’t wake up, but for a sorcerer, that dream is real and if you go into that world often enough, it will become real for you too.”

“How can a sorcerers or Yaqui say the dream world is real?” I asked. “Can’t they tell the difference between the waking state and dreams?”

“For sorcerers it’s real because they can act in the dream state with certainty and control. They *stalk* their dreams; they can learn things, find things, understand things that are not clear in the everyday world.”

“What kind of things?”

“Things about the future, or what someone is doing miles away. It’s a way of seeing beyond what is in front of you.”

“Are you talking about divination, don Juan?”

The Anthropological literature was full of references of how, in “primitive” cultures, the shaman enters a trance to see what the future holds, to diagnose illness, or to seek out the proper treatment. African witch-doctors were particularity fond of using smoke and charred bones or the liver of chickens to make forecasts. Magic, sorcery, divination, witchcraft, all these areas were a part of the Anthropological tradition; yet they always had seemed so far removed from our actual day to day activities, our personal lives. To the Yaqui, such activities did not seem strange at all. Don Juan, himself, had used his dancing to open the door to the world of the spirits, to a different reality. A world that was for a sorcerer as real and predictable as the everyday world was for us.

“The magical realm of the Yaqui isn’t extraordinary at all,” don Juan said. “It’s not a part of the supernatural or an aspect of the sacred and profane dichotomy anthropologists so readily set up.”

“How do you know about what anthropologists do?” I asked.

“Arizona is full of anthropologists,” he laughed. “Especially the tribal areas around Tucson. Someone is always trying to get a poor sucker to answer a questionnaire for a few dollars. They go around making categorization schemes without ever knowing what they are talking about.”

“My sentiments exactly,” I said. “But I tried telling that to one of my professors once and he accused me of not being professional material, and proceeded to kick me out of his office.”

“You have to learn to *stalk* your professors,” don Juan recommended, “Or they’ll gobble you up for breakfast. Those professors feast on young co-eds.”

“How do I *stalk* them?” I asked.

“Treat the University as a hunting ground. If you go there to be discovered, or to be liked, or to make a statement, you’ll fall flat on your face. If they sense you are challenging them, the *petty tyrants* will put up a fight and they almost always win.”

“How can I overcome them?” I asked. “They are men, they are petty, and they hold the power.”

“You walk around them on cat feet, and never let them know your opinions or what you are thinking. A consummate *stalker* has no opinions. He or she adapts to any circumstance, swiftly and smoothly like wind. If they think they have you cornered, you are already somewhere else. Be elusive and beyond containment, but devastatingly powerful.”

“That sounds like a contradiction to me,” I said.

Just then another gust of wind ruffled the ground leaves. It blew a bunch right into my lap. Don Juan laughed and said I was going to make a superb *stalker*, provided that I treated everything as *controlled folly*, and make myself zero so no one would be able to grab hold of me.

“Besides, only someone who is as light as the wind can pass through the cracks between the worlds,” don Juan continued.

“What do you mean by the cracks between the worlds?” I asked.

“The sorcerers *see* that the world of the spirits exists and that there are entities other than human beings and animals that roam the earth,” don Juan said, “but they exist behind a wall that is full of cracks, so to speak. A sorcerer takes that knowledge for granted just as westerners take for granted the belief in God, heaven, the scientific method, or the Pope’s infallibility, or walking on the moon, or anything else that affects their everyday lives.”

“Are you saying that Neil Armstrong never walked on the moon? Or that he passed through some sort of cosmic crack to get there?”

“Not at all. Only that it takes a tremendous effort for man to bring into his awareness the end result that of a man walking in outer space. Or that a man in Rome is the direct representative of God on earth, or that a Virgin conceived a son. In the light of these feats of *intending*, the knowledge that other entities coexist with man on earth does not take such a great leap of faith.”

I looked around. I had never regarded spirits as part of my daily world, but as a child I did see shadows coming alive, and had at times, felt the presence of a guardian angle. I had also assumed saints, fairies, elves and leprechauns existed, even though I had never seen one. So it was not so difficult to accept that the Yaqui Indians, too, had spirit entities, like the spirit deer I had encountered, who protect and advise them as do our supernatural helpers.

“If the Yaqui say there is a spirit world and that they learn in dreams, a person would have to experience this kind of learning to know what they are talking about," I told don Juan. "If the Yaqui address themselves to a mythological realm and treat it as reality, in order to understand it, the anthropologist must do the same. He must make their myths his reality,"

I told don Juan that it is the Anthropologist's task to describe, to the best of his ability, what goes on in another culture, in another reality, the way members of that culture see and live it. Therefore, he has to be as open and accessible to phenomena that he encounters, no matter how strange they might be; no matter how different from his own expectations or experiences. In short, the field worker must suspend judgment while he is doing research. Only in this way might he go beyond his limited way of thinking, his ethnocentrism; and his perceptual bias. Furthermore, by seeing another reality, one's own taken-for-granted reality would lose it's ultimate importance.

"Women make the best sorcerers," don Juan said after listening to my discourse, "and no doubt the best anthropologists too."

"Why is that?"

"Because they are much more sensitive than men. They can experience and accept things beyond their range more readily without the insistence on reasserting themselves the way men do. On the other hand, women are much more vulnerable and must be cushioned from the shock of encountering other realities. They tend to indulge and lose their underpinnings at the drop of a hat."

I laughed because for a moment I thought he had said women lose their "underpants" at a drop of a hat.

"That too," don Juan said laughing, "but unfortunately there is never a shortage of men to support them in that department!"

In a more serious note he added that if a woman was sober, courageous, and adventuresome, and didn't lose her underpants, she could uncover mysteries beyond her wildest expectations.

"But doesn't she have to have spirit helpers?" I asked.

"It's true, some spirits are helpers," don Juan continued. "Every person, upon birth, receives a totem animal that protects and advises him throughout his lifetime. Perhaps, yours is the deer."

I liked deer. I was born in an area full of forests, and plenty of deer. I enjoyed being in the forest, being still, remaining hidden. I had to agree, I had something in common with deer by way of temperament.

“What is your totem animal?” I asked.

“The crow. I have always had an affinity with them, every since my teacher showed me how to become one.”

“I like birds too,” I said. “I often dream I’m flying.”

“Crows are excellent *stalkers*,” don Juan added, “and some of the Pascola masks depict them.”

I finished the orange and the rest of the dried meat.

“The dancer, if he has *power*, can actually can turn into the animal he portrays,” don Juan continued. “I’ve talked to and observed quite a number of Pascola dancers. For some, the dance is merely a means to show off, but for others the dance is a vehicle; the mask, the music and the mesmeric movement of the cocoon rattles usher the dancer into the spirit realm. There he can learn about the mysteries of the universe, and even find answers to life’s fundamental questions.”

Don Juan gave me a nudge and I knew he was referring to what I had asked the spirit deer. Or perhaps Carlos had told him about our meeting in the Anthropology department when I had asked him the same question.

“If you meet the deer in your dreams,” he advised me, “ask him about the meaning of life. He will tell you what you want to know.”

“Is that what you do, don Juan? Learn in your dreams?”

Don Juan nodded. “And through *seeing*. Right now I *see* that there is a patch of angelica growing over there. Exactly the plant we came all this way to find.”

We got up and walked toward the bend in the creek where don Juan had said the plants were growing.

“What are the plants for?” I asked.

"They are invaluable for female sorcerers," he said. "It gives them sobriety, purpose and cushions them from the erratic perceptual changes that they are prone to, especially during their menstrual periods."

Earlier as we walked he had stopped from time to time to allow me to examine certain plants at close range. He had cautioned me not to pick any of them but only to remember what they looked like, in case I ever needed to find them. There was Manzanilla, sage, and a small plant with blue flowers. He had said that we were not there to gather herbs, but to learn how to store *power*. He assured me that if I ever needed to heal myself, it would be though manipulating *energy* directly, not by ingesting any plant. There was one exception to this rule, and that was the angelica plant.

We walked up to some large yellow-green plants that looked like tall overgrown celery. They had shot up about a yard and at the tips were tufts of dried stalks with tiny brown seeds.

"This is Angelica," he said taking off a bit of the leaf and rubbing it between his fingers.

"It smells like celery," I said taking a sniff. "What does it taste like?"

"Find out for yourself," he said and gave me a bit of the seeds to chew. They tasted like bitter celery.

"Do I make an infusion out of the leaves or seeds?" I asked.

"You can, or you chew on the seeds directly, but in your case it's better to smoke it."

"How do I smoke it?"

"You first dry the stalks and then crush a bit and put it in a pipe and lite a match to it."

"I've never smoked anything in my life," I said.

"Not even marijuana?" he teased.

"A friend of mine gave me a joint once to try, but I didn't like it. The smoke really hurt my lungs and made me sneeze. You see, I'm allergic to smoke."

"This is not marijuana," he said seriously. "Besides, you probably inhaled too much smoke into your lungs when you should have allowed the smoke to envelope you."

“What does angelica smoke do?” I asked.

“It cleans the energy fibers of the body.”

He stepped back and gave me a groggy look, running his eyes up and down from head to toe. “There’s a great deal of debris clinging to your fibers in spite of your *recapitulation*,” he said. “So in stubborn cases like yourself, one has to use smoke to cleanse the *double*. You don’t have to inhale it. Just allow the smoke to caress you. It knows what to do. It will clean you without you having to direct it.”

Don Juan gathered some of the dry stalks and put them inside his knapsack. He said he would give them to me later. If I ran out, I would have to find the next batch myself.

“What if I can’t come back here?” I said.

“Angelica grows everywhere,” he replied, “You can find it in abundance in the canyons around Los Angeles. Then you have to let the stalks dry and find a pipe in your *dreaming* and put some crushed leaves inside. Or you can light the tip of the stalk directly.”

We sat down on a log and he asked me for a match. I pulled out a match book from my pocket, for along with the compass, I always carry a book of matches in my pockets so that I could gaze at it's flame whenever I needed to. I wondered how don Juan knew I had matches with me. He lit a dry stalk about three inches long by holding a match to it's tip. Then he moved the stalk back and forth in front of my nose and allowed the smoke to enveloped me. The smoke made me cough and my eyes burn and I didn’t like the sensation at all, but when the smoke cleared, I experienced a calmness and  clarity that was unprecedented.

At first I couldn’t pin point exactly what the difference was, then I realized that my calmness resulted from the fact that my internal dialogue had completely stopped. I had no more thoughts, I was content to perceive directly, without filtering everything through words and thoughts. I felt that the ‘I’ that was always in command had vanished. Somehow the smoke had made things absolutely still so that there was no separation between the analytical “I” and the things it thought about.

Subtle as it was, it seemed like the difference between night and day. During the day everything is agitated, the streets are full of traffic and noise, the energy of people, and the tension and hurry of life, fills one’s being. At night, things quiet down. No one is going anywhere. The birds, too, have settled in their nests and all is at rest. That was the way I felt after I had inhaled only a few puffs of smoke; completely at rest, with no hurry, no worries, everything had returned to it's natural place. The world was the way it should be, without the constant interference of thoughts and expectations.

It was an exquisite feeling of serenity that the smoke brought. It was like burning incense in a church. I began to breath deeply from my abdomen and relished the tranquility and ease of having nothing to say, nothing to do, and no place to go, except to be where I was at that precise moment in time. It was as if my being had blended with eternity extending in front of my eyes.

“The angelic smoke is like that,” don Juan said sensing my mood. “It expects nothing from you. It humbly does it's job of cleansing away the debris of the past. If you are emotionally upset or agitated, surround yourself with angelica smoke. No need to inhale it, and only use it when you feel agitated and need to calm yourself. Never abuse it. Together with the *recapitulation*, it will served as a means to cleanse and soothe the erratic bent of your nature.”

Don Juan reiterated that I didn’t need to use a pipe or to really inhale at all. I could just light a bit of the stalk, and let the smoke rise while holding the piece of angelica root in my left hand. The effect would be the same. The smell of the smoke, around me would be enough to clear my head and cause my internal dialogue to cease.

He made a small fire out of wood, then placed some branches of angelica that he had collected from the ground, on top of the tire. We sat in front of it for a while and from time to time he used his jacket to fan the smoke in my direction. When the fire had extinguished itself, he took a stick and pointed to the charged remains.

“Earlier you wanted to know about *seeing*,” he said. “The ancient sorcerers of our lineage, used many different methods to understand the state of things. They used corn kernels, the patterns in the clouds, the formation of leaves in the trees and on the ground, or after a fire had gone out, the placement of the charred wood.”

*(add section from chapter on fire and divination) – From the Original scan*

## Chapter 12: Crow’s Dream

It was past midnight by the time we return to don Juan’s house. Carlos’s car was still parked where he had left it, so I knew he had not returned. I wanted to sleep in the car with the windows rolled up and the doors locked, but don Juan would not hear of it.

“My house is at your disposal,” he said with an air of gallantry. “Please, make your self at home.”

He assured me that I would be perfectly safe, and he personally guaranteed that his house had no fleas because he kept no animals. He lit a kerosene lantern and set it on the table that was next to a cot. He handed me a folded wool blanket and said he needed to go to Torim to see some people. He stressed that he would not be back until the following day.

“What if someone comes snooping around here?” I said, ill at ease.

“No one will disturb you,” he assured me.

“How can you be so certain?”

”This house is well protected.”

“By what? An invisible alarm system?” I said with a laugh.

“You could call it that. I have a guardian that frightens off any unwanted visitors.”

At first I thought he was referring a guard dog, but before I could ask him who this guardian was, he said. “Shall I show it to you?”

“No, no, no. I’ll take your word for it,” I said, suddenly afraid. If I was to sleep there, I didn’t want any frightening details to play on my imagination.

“If you do see or hear something unusual, it’s best just to ignore it,” he said.

I nodded and took the blanket. When he left the room, I lay down on the cot that had a lumpy horsehair mattress. I tried to fall asleep, but sleep would not come. A part of me was wide awake, on the alert; the other part was desperately trying to fall asleep. Instead of feeling the hardness of the mattress beneath me, I felt as if I were suspended in a soft cotton batting that was warm and numbing. I attributed this odd sensation to the strange vibrations in the room that made all hardness dissolve. It was a liquid room, moving, changing shapes in the darkness. Or, perhaps, it was my blood or adrenaline surging through my body, or being in the *nagual’s* lair, but the buzzing became louder until my body seemed to disappear and all that was left of me was a dull, overall tingling.

The feeling was reminiscent of the first night I had spent in Clara's tree house. On that occasion, being off the ground had made my body expand, balloon outward, and I had been enveloped with the same sensation of floating with no self reference in terms of my physical size or shape. Emilito had later explained this sensation as my *double* coming out and taking over, because being in the tree house had inhibited the pull of gravity on my physical body.

I was remembering Emilito and the mysterious tree house, when I heard a snapping that sounded like a twig breaking, coming from a pile of baskets in the corner of the room. All my senses were on alert. The front of my body seemed totally open as if there were a huge gaping hole where my stomach and chest should have been. I strained to see in the darkness, but could see only the outlines of the paraphernalia in the room; a few gourds hanging from ropes, two Yaqui masks, one of a deer, another of a crow hooked to the post; the silhouette the kerosene lantern on the table.

I heard the noise again. The snapping might have been a giant cricket, except that the sound was too clipped, too brittle. It was more like the click of a metal dime-store toy in the shape of a frog or a mouse that snaps when the metal lever is depressed and released. Now the click was on the other side of the room; it seemed to have moved closer to the cot. I raised up a bit, leaning against the folded burlap bag that served as a pillow. I jumped when I heard the sound next to my head.

The click came again, this time by the door. It made the area in my midsection leap whenever it snapped. Whatever the sound was, it was definitely hopping about the room, as if trying to attract my attention. As I lay wide awake trying to anticipate from where the next click would be coming, I realized that the sorcerers' world was full of the unexpected. I decided to follow don Juan's advice and ignore what ever it was in the room. I must have fallen asleep, for I drifted into a dream that seemed totally real.

I was taking the crows mask off the wall and put in on my head. Don Juan was going to show me some movements. First he demonstrated how I should position my feet. Bending my knees, I had to raise up on the balls of my feet then thump down onto the heels repeatedly. I copied his action, raising my heels off the ground then sharply placing them down again. After a while, it became a single smooth performance involving my ankle and knee joints. I felt my legs become rubbery, viscous; my hands were hanging loosely at my sides. I imagined myself a wine maker trampling on a vat of grapes with my bare feet.

Then, following don Juan's lead, I arched the upper portion of my back as if I were lifted by some exterior force, and bringing my arms out to the sides of my body, I opened them up like the wings of an enormous bird. My head was inclined forward and I was looking down, while raising my arms up and down in conjunction with my breathing. I flapped my arms again and again in a repetitive action.

After what seemed an eternity, the ground in front of me opened and I was no longer dreaming; I was standing waving my arms in simulated flight. I was actually in the air, soaring over a breathtaking view of the desert! I could see vegetation, irrigation ditches, roads, and the pitaya fences around the flat roofed adobe houses. As I soared in the air, I moved my arms so vigorously that I was growing tired. I heard don Juan say that I did not have to flap so hard; but that I could, if I wished, simply glide.

At his suggestion, I let go and experienced the most exquisite sensation of gliding through the air. I could feel the wind ruffle my sleek black feathers, and in the distance I could see the most beautiful snow capped mountains. I suspected they were the sacred mountains of the mythical Yaqui world, but they were as real as any formation in the waking world. They were breathtaking in their splendor; more beautiful than any landscape I had ever seen on this earth. I flew over the valley, soaring, then flapping my wings, only to glide again. Then I heard music drifting toward me from the distance. As the music filled my very being, I experienced a state of exquisite happiness. I heard don Juan say that I could land if I was tired. I looked down and saw a grove of tall trees and headed for the top branches.

“You can stop moving your arms now,” don Juan said. “The crow has safely landed.”

I perched on the branch and rested. I could feel my crow’s body, my beak and head, and my feathery wings. I was preening myself the way birds do, happy to be in the tree with the breeze rustling the leaves. When I had rested, I swooped down to a field, and began hopping on the ground. After a while, another crow, came and hopped alongside me. Then the strangest thing happened. The crow mounted me and we mated the way crows do. Not that I had the faintest notion of how crows mated. Yet I was certain I was experiencing the act the way crows did it. In fact, the other crow, in no time at all, had me in the position he wanted, and a pleasurable interchange followed. The realization that the other crow was don Juan made it all the more exhilarating.

In that dream, I saw and felt things that for the rational mind are incomprehensible, and although my rational mind was circumvented, my senses were keen and I experienced an outpouring of the most profound affection. It was that surge of emotion that created such a stirring in the depth of me that I would always remember the feeling of my crow’s body and what it is like to soar through the air lighter than wind.

After a while the field vanished and I found myself again standing in don Juan's house, flapping my arms in the stylized crow's flight. I felt something rough brushing my face, and I heard breathing that wasn't my own. I realized then that the blanket was rubbing my cheek and that it was I who was breathing heavily in my sleep. As the moment of dual awareness merged, I awoke and found myself lying on the cot. I remembered every detail of the dream, and I closed my eyes to recapture the feeling of the wind rushing against me and to bring back the glorious mountain range surrounding that rapturous valley.

For a long time, I lay awake in the darkness, half listening for the clicking sounds to come again, but they had stopped. So had the loud buzzing that had permeated the room. Light was shining through the widow as dawn was breaking. I leaned over for my notepad and pen and wrote down everything I could remember about the crow's dream. The image of the terrain was crystal clear, and I could still hear the music of the mountains and feel it's melodic stains softly vibrate inside my body. When I had finished writing down my recollections, I put my notebook aside and dozed off again. I awoke several hours later with the sun shining in my eyes. I could tell by the light, it was going to be an extremely hot day. I sat up when I heard don Juan coming in the door.

"How were your accommodations?" he asked, opening a sack of groceries he had placed on the table. "Not too uncomfortable, I trust?"

"I had the most vivid dream of flying over the desert," I said.

He asked me to describe the dream in detail, which I did, for it was still fresh in my mind. He looked at me and smiled as if he knew I had deliberately left out the part about the two crows cavorting in the field.

"To turn into a crow in your dreams is not so far-fetched," he said. "To do it while you are awake is another matter."

"How can you turn into a crow while you are awake?"

"With unbending intent, the body will follow where the mind leads," he assured me.

I asked him to explain what he meant by that.

"You do it all the time," he said. "For example, when you activate a memory called unhappiness, your whole being immerses itself in that feeling and you become unhappy. That is why indulging in anything is not recommended. The mind is not separate from the body, although we prefer to think that it is."

I opened a bottle of mineral water and took a sip.

"Every time we look in a mirror," don Juan said, "or see our reflection in a pool of water, we think we see the same person we saw the last time we looked. We may see a few changes such as wrinkles or a longer beard or a different expression, but we know these differences are superficial. They don't make us someone else. We have learned to recognize ourselves as beings that change, yet to our inner eye, we are nevertheless the same."

He leaned toward me and brought his face uncomfortably close to mine. "But it's only a mirage," he whispered. "That's why you should never look too closely in a mirror; you'll fix yourself permanently as something you don't want to be."

I suspected that Clara had told him of my repeated request to have mirrors installed in her bath house. I had a difficult time adjusting to not seeing my reflection, and kept trying to catch glimpses of myself on any shiny, reflective surface.

He reiterated that we are constantly changing and are never the same from moment to moment. Every new thought, action, or experience makes us different. It is only the memory of ourselves that assures us that we are continuous, stable and familiar.

"If we are always changing," I said, "how can we recognize ourselves?"

He said that there is no way of ever recognizing ourselves, because we are a mystery; totally unknown to ourselves and to others.

"That is one of the precepts of *stalking*," he stressed. "I learned it from my benefactor, the *nagual* Julian, and I am passing it on to you. We are an indescribable mystery."

"But I know who I am," I insisted.

"That's because you're a fool," don Juan said chuckling. "It's idiotic to believe that just because you have a name, an address, a job, or go to school, that you are known to yourself or to others. These attributes are not your true self; they are only ways of describing who you are, so that you can talk about yourself as a social person."

"Are you saying that I don't exist?"

“You do exist, but not in the way you think,” he said.

Don Juan stressed that the idea that the body is a constant continuous entity, is one of the most difficult assumptions to break.

“Why is that?” I asked taking a bite of the bread that he brought.

“Because people identify themselves with their bodies, which they view in the manner that is accepted by the world around them.”

I argued that the physical body is real and not just an appearance, but he insisted that to hold this position stemmed from limited perception and faulty reasoning.

“Your body is an idea, an abstraction,” he reiterated. “How you regard it depends on your culture and the modality of the time in which you live. For example, people of the past did not have the same view of the body as we do today, and Western man does not have the same view of it as does a sorcerer.”

“Don’t we all have basically the same physical structure?” I asked. “Two arms and legs and a torso?”

“If we all had the same physical make up, we would all be able to do the same things,” he replied. “But most people can’t fly through the air, or step through walls, or extend their *luminous fibers* to journey over vast distances. Or disappear right in front of your eyes.”

I must have given him a quizzical look, for he added, “some people can’t perceive their ethereal or *energetic body* that would allow them to perform these extraordinary feats. Therefore, unlike the sorcerer who daily tunes and invigorates his *energetic body*, his *double*, the average person does nothing to enhance it, but does everything to enhance his self-importance, his social person.”

“What do you mean by self-importance?” I asked.

Don Juan thought for a moment as if to chose his words. “It is placing undue emphasis on the idea a person has of himself. In order for that idea to become real, it must be given constant energy. One must always cater to it, sustain it, reinforce it, pamper it in order to keep it alive.”

When I asked him why that was so, don Juan replied that people have lost touch with their mysterious origins that render them unknown, and were left only with a paltry imitation, a phantom idea that they regard as real.

“If people realized that they were unknown to themselves and to others, they would not regard themselves as important or prop themselves up with feeling special. They would know that they already are special, but having lost sight of their real mystery, they try to make themselves mysterious, and try to act important, but that is a deadly mistake.

“Why is that a mistake?”

“Because we should never try to be anything,” he replied. “Our mysterious nature already makes us everything we could possibly be.”

Don Juan said he wanted to go for another walk and told me to finish eating so I could accompany him.

“What about Carlos?” I asked “Shouldn’t I wait here for him? Isn’t he coming back today?”

Don Juan handed me a strip of beef jerky and told me to chew it slowly. “I have a feeling that Carlos will be occupied for most of the day,” he said.

I was dying to know what exactly Carlos would be occupied with. No doubt it was that pretty girl I had seen the other day in the store. I imagined the would spend the day teaching her English, or who knows what else. Noticing my preoccupation, don Juan gave me a firm rap on the top of the head with his knuckles.

“I know what you are thinking: ‘why would a man want another woman when he can have you?’ Your petty possessiveness is useless around here,” he said gruffly. “You have an idea of yourself that you are jealous and possessive. The sooner you get rid of that idea, the better off you’ll be.”

“That’s the way most women feel,” I said.

“Then that’s precisely what you will have to guard against,” he said sternly. “Remember, self importance kills. Don’t waste your limited energy upholding stands that are untenable. Hold firm to your underpinnings.”

He laughed at his play on words. Then he continued with earthy directness. “The minute a man pays any attention to a woman, she drops her ‘underpinnings.’”

“That’s simply not true,” I argued. “A women can love a man purely, without any physical involvement.”

“But can she love him if he loves other women, and not be ruffled by it?” he challenged.

I thought for a moment. He had a point. From my own experience, and from the people I had known, a selfless love like that would really not be feasible in our culture.

I shrugged. “If you’re talking about polygamy,” I said. “I don’t think we women should put up with that.”

I was so against men playing around that, for me, nothing short of total fidelity would do. I remembered how miserable my mother’s life had been because of my father’s indiscretions. From her, I had learned the attitude that men were heartless masters that would stop at nothing in using a woman then casting her aside without so much as a backward glance.

“I am not talking about polygamy,” don Juan said. "I am talking about freedom from self-importance. No one is unique or privileged by any stretch of the imagination.”

“But if we don’t see ourselves as unique or special, how can we distinguish ourselves from other people and things?” I asked.

“Why do you want to distinguish yourself from people or things?” he retorted. “Individuality is needed to interact in the world of people, but you already know how to do that. What I’m suggesting is an alternative mode of being in which your *energetic body* interacts with the *spirit*.”

“And what is the *spirit*?” I asked.

Don Juan looked at me steadily for a moment; his cold eyes became fierce like an eagle’s. His stare forced me to look away. He chuckled, lifted one of the gourds he had tied to his belt, opened the stopper and took a sip. I felt obliged to repeat my question.

“I really don’t know,” he said. “We can return to our origin, even act from it, but we can never know or say what it is.”

“Then what good is it, if we can't talk about it?” I protested in a tone that bordered on whining.

Don Juan grabbed my shoulders and shook them as if I were a rag doll. “Stop indulging in self pity and act like a warrior."

He stomped his foot on the ground repeatedly like a bull ready to charge, giving me a ferocious look that made his nostrils flare. His pantomime was so lifelike that I had to step aside, afraid he would ram me, but instead of charging, he suddenly twirled lightly on his heels and walked out the door. He motioned for him to follow him. We walked down the dirt road for a while, then quite unexpectedly, he veered off into the chaparral. It was all I could do to keep up with him. After an exhausting trek, during which time I employed *not-doing* techniques, such as keeping my gaze above the horizon, and my hands in the proper position, and maintained a prolonged silence, I was still breathing heavily by the time we reached a formidable rock formation.

Don Juan told me to sit on a large bolder and to slow down my breathing. He said that in the tradition of sorcery there were hundreds if not thousands of *not-doing* techniques, each designed to produce a specific effect that had been intended by sorcerers of his lineage. The hand position was one of them, just as was gazing at a point above the horizon while walking. He reiterated that he personally thought that *not-doing* was one of the best ways a *stalker* has of disrupting routine or habitual reactions of one's day to day life.

"Do the match technique," he suggested, "to quiet down."

"Now?"

He nodded and poured a few drops of water from his gourd into a depression in the rock. I pulled out my book of matches, and holding one between my thumb and index finger, I struck it and brought the flame seven or eight inches in front of my eyes. As I gazed at it, I inhaled the flame into the area between the eyes, until the flame had almost burned down. Then, without extinguishing the flame, I dipped the tip of the match in the water to cool the end, and transferred it to the thumb and index fingers of my left hand. I held the match upside down, so that the flame was now burning upward a few inches from my eyes.

"Draw the blue flame into your eyes," don Juan said. "Use *intent* to pull it inside you."

I did a series of nine matches, burning one end, then turning it upside down as I transferred it to my left hand and gazed as the flame burned at the other end. After nine matches, he told me to stop. He instructed me to breath deeply from the abdomen and then begin to practice another *not-doing* technique which involved expanding my awareness behind me, above me, and into the distance all around me.

"What should I try to look for or feel?" I asked.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "Perhaps, a tree to the back, or a bird in the branch above you, or a cloud in the sky overhead. The purpose of this *not-doing* technique is to stretch oneself out as if one were casting a giant net."

He explained that deliberately elongating one's awareness, which is usually directed forward, has the effect of waking up the *energetic body* or *double*, by breaking through the confining boundaries one had learned to regard as one's physical body.

"When your mind and breath are able to reach beyond the recognized limits of the physical body," don Juan explained, "then you'll know that things are vacuous, and physical and mental continuity is only an expression of the mind or social self."

He assured me that our perception of the world is fundamentally tied to how we sense our bodies, and how elastic our breathing is. To change our perception of the world, we must begin by changing our awareness of our body. We must know that our bodies are in constant flux; yet, in order not to lose control during our ethereal wanderings, our awareness has to be firmly fixed.

"To what is our awareness fixed?" I asked.

"Not to the self or the objects of the world," he assured me. "For these will keep you imprisoned. Rather, it is anchored to one's breathing. The breath is the line that can pull you outside of your boundaries, and make your physical body appear and disappear."

He told me to close my eyes, and try to anchor my awareness to my breathing.

I became apprehensive. Sometimes, when I practiced some of the *sorcery passes* Clara had taught me, I felt my body melt away, but I never ventured too far on that track for fear of losing myself or becoming totally unknown to myself. Even when I had dreamed I was a crow, I was still aware of being myself, *dreaming* I was a crow.

So I began cautiously. According to don Juan's instructions, I was to allow my awareness to flow outward in all directions, as I elongated my breathing. Then I was to link the stretching of my mind to the rhythmic flow of the breath. Finally, I had to merge my breathing, which was limited, to the limitless breathing of the earth and the sky. He told me to breathe far behind me, high above me and out to either side, until the vast desert around me moved rhythmically to the expansion and contraction of the breath.

After a time of total concentration, I had the sensation of moving like an enormous bellows; my entire panorama was pulsating to the same rhythm. At one point, I was so far away, that I could barely hear don Juan's voice urging me to open my eyes and describe to him what I had experience.

"I was no longer aware of my body," I said. "It became so enormous that I seemed to completely vanish."

"Your body can't vanish," he said, "for the simple reason that it was never there in the first place."

I rubbed my calves to bring blood back into them.

"It is the way you place your attention that makes you think you have a physical body," don Juan said. "Place your attention differently, and you will have a different body. Perhaps that of a horse or a cow or a falcon."

I told him I didn't want the body of a horse or a cow, but I wouldn't mind being a falcon, temporarily.

"You don't need to worry about changing your shape permanently," he assured me. "Fate has given you the form of a human being, and no matter where you are, that memory will always pull you back to that particular configuration, at least for the time being,"

He suggested that since I dreamed I was a crow flying over landscapes, I could try, if I had enough energy, to sustain that configuration for a short while using the breathing and my attention to bring about the change.

"*Stalking* with the *double* is what enables you to keep the assemblage point fixed in the new dream position," he said. "It means fleshing out all the ramifications of being a crow. What it means to fly, how crows feel and move, what it means to interact with other birds, and even to mate as a bird. You did that in your dream earlier. Let's see if you can move your assemblage point to that position now, starting from your waking state."

He swept clean an area of ground and spread out my poncho. Then he told me to lie on my stomach and repeat the breathing I had just done. Again I was to place all my awareness outside of myself, then use my mind to imagine I had formed wings, and my breathing to create the sensation of flying. After a period of intense concentration and controlled breathing, I felt a heaviness on either side of me. It was as if I had gigantic wings, moving in a rhythmic fashion to the pattern of my breath. The area around my face had grown long and pointed, while my legs and arms had become numb and heavy, until they disappeared completely. I was looking down, the earth had grown transparent and I could see fields below me; all the while, the rhythmic expansion of my breath kept the giant wings in motion.

At one point, I heard don Juan whisper that I should slow down my breathing and try to soar for a while. At that suggestion, my breath came slower. I could feel the wind as scenes below me shifted and tree tops, scores of shrubs, and distant hills came into view. Then I took another breath and I was soaring again.

After a while don Juan told me to stop. He said I should open my eyes and concentrate on remembering my physical body again. As I did, I noticed that the area that was my chin was completely numb; it had been pressed against the hard ground. My arms and legs also were asleep, and it was some time before I could move them. Don Juan briskly rubbed my calves and arms until I felt an acute painful tingling sensation. When that sensation subsided, I felt solid again.

“Was I dreaming?” I asked after I had described to don Juan my experience.

“You were not asleep," don Juan assured me. “You used your *intent* and concentrated on your breath to change your shape. Whenever the breath gives life to an idea, that new configuration becomes real.”

He said the key to any transformation or sorcery shape-changing was combining the breath with an idea to give it life.

“Most of the time, a person has an idea without the power of the breath to actualize it," he said. “Or he may have the proper breath energy, without the *intent* to give it form and direction, but when breath and *intent* become united as movement and direction, energy and form, then a new reality is created and sustained for as long as the two are joined. That is what sorcerers call *stalking* with the *double*. It means to use the *energy body* to perceive a reality with form and substance and *energetic* validity.”

“It certainly felt as if I had had wings and were flying, and I don’t recall falling asleep,” I said. “It had been just as real as the world in front of me now.”

“Of course, you couldn’t sustain that *intent* for very long,” don Juan continued, “because to concentrate the breath and flesh out an idea, takes an extraordinary energy. I loaned you some of mine so you had no problem in concentrating your breath and giving life to a different reality. A reality you had found on your own earlier while doing *dreaming*. Now you reactivated that same perceptual place. So you now have another position to go to, that's just as real as that of being a human being."

He reiterated that by combining *intent* and breath, one can for a time change one's perception of reality and will oneself to move beyond the confining limits of one's own bodily configuration.

"This is what sorcerers call *stalking* with the *double*," he repeated. "And this is what sorcerers do: they expand the possibilities of perceiving beyond the limit that is permitted to us as social person. In other words, this maximizes their experience as sentient beings."

Don Juan went on to say that to change into a bird or an animal, was one of the power positions handed down by the ancient sorcerers of his lineage. It is one of the *not-doing* techniques that is still in use today.

"To be a human being involves more than just being born, living then dying," he said. "It means to expand one's potential by going beyond known boundaries of one's existence and leaping into the unknown. For to have a body is not to merely be so much flesh and bone that has to be fed and kept alive at any cost."

"To be alive," he stressed, "is to be aware, to be a point of view that never knows it's own limits. Nevertheless, one must try to comprehend one's nature, to intuit from a finite perspective, one's infinite possibilities."

Don Juan said that another precept of the *stalker* was never to know what he was, but to always act as if he did know. "To flesh out reality and then discard it."

"That's what it means to be alive," he said. "To intuitively grasp the wonder of the world, and to boldly leap into the infinite in spite of our rational limitations. To link our breath with anything we can imagine, until we become so fluid and unknown to ourselves, that we become the unimaginable. To *stalk* with the *double* is to attempt to touch the bottomless springs of our mysterious origins."

Don Juan suggested that I sit quietly for a moment and contemplate what he had said, for changing shapes in the tradition of the sorcerers was a deliberate act of *not-doing* of the body, a complex maneuver of *stalking*.

"Only by departing from inner silence can one reach the deep level of awareness that will allow us to grasp and move intuitively," he said. "Only by rest and renunciation can one circumvent the relentless control of reason."

He uncorked his gourd and gave me a drink. Right away I felt better and noticed that the nervous tremor that had taken hold of my midsection had all but disappeared.

"It is not our body that makes us the same day after day," he disclosed after a long silence. "One's body is constantly changing, degenerating, and soon it will die. Regard your body as yourself, and you too will degenerate and die."

"What, then, should I regard as myself?" I asked.

Don Juan smiled. His eyes became two slits as he peered at me.

"See yourself as a spirit that roams the realm of the unchanging," he replied. "Consider yourself one with the mysterious darkness that is never increased or diminished. Regard yourself as these, and your potential will be limitless."

Don Juan explained that whereas our bodies and our actions are in constant flux, only the realm of the dark mysterious remains constant because nothing can be added to it or taken from it. Therefore, in order to have genuine continuity, which is in essence no continuity at all, we must link ourselves to the strata beyond the world of appearance. Our bodies must become so abstract, that we become aware of *not-being*.

"We are what we are not," Don Juan said cryptically. "And whatever we think we are, is temporary, illusory and only the smallest fragment of our true nature."

"Then, if we can never know ourselves," I said, "it seemed to me too lonely, too solitary a path to be beneficial."

I had always thought that even if people were indifferent to one another, they were still there to fall back on. To be without a self would be to be without others, and that seemed to me the coldest most desolate mode of existence.

"There is no way you can ever be with yourself or others," don Juan reiterated. "Except as *controlled folly*. We are the empty manifestations of an unknowable force sorcerers call the Eagle."

He said the light that reaches our eyes are the Eagle's emanations. He stressed that it is a mistake for us to regard our acts as our own, or to think of ourselves in charge or in command. For to do so only perpetuates the false dichotomy of a self that is the motivating force of an action, and another self that is the doer or executor behind that action. It is that mind-body misconception that is at the root of our confusion. It leads to a false view of the world.

"Give your breath and *energy* to perpetuate the social person, and your real nature remains forever obscured," don Juan warned. "For the self, or the social, cultural image that one enhances with one's life force, is a mistake. It is only a way of thinking and talking, and not what we are at all."

He admitted that our true nature is one with the underlying force that sorcerers call the Eagle. *Seers* can *see* it's *energy* flowing through us and making up our very being; and we must humbly acknowledge that life force, or we remain blind to everything around us. I wanted don Juan to tell me more about this mysterious power that acts through us. He shrugged and replied that there was nothing more to say about it; that we simply were different aspects of the Eagle's emanations, just as was everything else in existence.

I pressed him to elaborate on it's attributes.

"Sorcerers have been unable to unravel it's mystery even though, throughout antiquity, *seers* have put all their efforts into attempting to understanding it, and because of this inability they called it the Great Unfathomable. The old sorcerers called it the Eagle because it stands with it's beak open ready to devour awareness at the moment of death. It's emanations are commands because we must follow them, just as planets must follow their orbits in the sky. Those who humbly acquiesce to the Eagle's commands, remain healthy and strong; those who fight against them, wear themselves out and find an early death."

He stressed that only by acquiescing to the force that moves us can we find well-being and purpose; happiness; fighting against it brings disease and unhappiness.

"In order to create anything," he explained, "we must draw from the emanations of the Eagle, from it's dark side and bring it into being, that is, into the field of awareness of man. This is how sorcerers make things happen; this is the true essence of magic. Since everything has a dark side and a light side, the dual elements of movement and rest, of activity and inaction, things can be flipped around, and that is how sorcerers cross the boundaries of the visible world into the realm of the invisible."

"Are you talking about the mythical realm of the Yaqui Indians?" I asked.

“I’m not just talking about the realm of the Yaqui Indians,” he stressed. “I am talking about all existence. If your awareness is linked to the origin of all things, you can accomplish seemingly impossible feats.”

“How does one do that?”

“Follow the natural rhythm of things, and moving with the energy around you,” he said. “If you want to act, you must be tranquil. By the same token, if you want to rest, you must fill yourself with activity.”

He said that when both elements, being and *not-being* are in balance, so that inside we are unchanging and imperturbable, but outside we are fluid and changeable, then we reflect the power behind all things. He added that in order to reflect the realm of the unchanging, we have to suspend our everyday view of the world. He stressed that suspending our human judgments is the first step into the realm of the unknowable, and for this to take place, quieting the internal dialogue is a fundamental prerequisite.

“Therefore, it is of utmost importance to achieve *inner silence* through the practice of the *recapitulation*, the *sorcery passes*, and all the sorcery *not-doing* techniques you have been taught,” he said. “Only in this way can you lose yourself and be one with the vastness.”

## Chapter 13: Places of Power

The afternoon brought cool relief. Don Juan and I had hiked to a place where volcanic eruptions had taken place millions of years ago. The area was strewn with huge chunks of lava and pieces of shiny obsidian that spread out on the desert like a lumpy gray carpet.

“The Yaqui Indians regard this as a place of power,” don Juan remarked. “They say that there is energy trapped in all this lava rock.”

“What kind of energy?” I asked catching my breath.

“The kind of energy that can make one discover things of the past. All one has to do is pick up a rock, be silent, and listen to it's message.”

“Do you really believe rocks can talk?” I asked. “Isn’t that a bit far-fetched?”

“Don’t take my word for it,” don Juan replied. “Find out for yourself whether or not it’s true.”

He pointed to a hill not far from where we were. “Let’s hike to the top of that mound. That’s the best spot to listen to rocks.”

We walked over the uneven terrain. Even though I had on a pair of thick crepe soled shoes, the rocks and obsidian glass were sharp and the loose stones made walking difficult. I was careful to avoid the patches of tuna cactus with thorny spines that jutted out between the clumps of rock. I had once been told that cactus spines were extremely dangerous, for they could lodge themselves in the body, and travel to the heart or even to the brain, causing sudden death. I didn’t know whether or not that was true, but I wasn’t about to put the theory to a test.

When we reached the top of the promontory, I was winded. I sat down to rest, taking in the magnificent view. I could see the entire desert valley with it's winding highway weaving in a southeasterly direction. The purple hills in the distance lay like a jagged cutout against the sky. Seemingly from nowhere a solitary crow flew toward us cawing as it passed overhead, Don Juan looked up to note it's direction of flight. It was flying into the afternoon sun.

“Does the flight of crows mean anything in particular?” I asked.

“You bet it does,” he replied dusting off his hat. “Especially if one has an affinity with them. Crows can be bearers of messages, but it’s easy to misinterpret the omens.”

“What happens if you get the message wrong?” I asked.

“All sorts of unfortunate things,” he said solemnly. “You could wind up going full speed ahead, when you should be biding your time. Or you could miss an appropriate turn in the road, because you hesitate to act.”

“You mean a crow could save your life?” I said.

“It could,” don Juan agreed. “Crows and other entities serve as guides. They tell a sorcerer what to do and when to do it. In the warrior’s world, timing is crucial. If you miss your chance, it may never come again.”

The finality of his words gave me a chill. I knew what he meant. There was a condition of being out of synchronization with life. It was a feeling of inner imbalance; of never catching the crest of the wave and riding with it, but always having it break on top of you. Therefore, instead of a breathtaking ride, one feels tumbled, overwhelmed, as if something had crashed upon one full force when one wasn't ready or when one least expected it.

"That's what I mean by timing," don Juan agreed when I described to him this state.

"What causes this condition of being out of step?" I asked.

"Having lost our connection with our *double*," he said.

"I don't understand. Can you explain what you mean?"

"I mean that when we are born we are intrinsically connected to our other side. The lines of communication with the broader picture, so to speak, are open, but as we grow, we gradually cut off that connection and we live with only half our being. Therefore, we are always unbalanced and have the feeling we are missing something."

Don Juan paused for a moment as if wondering whether or not to continue. "There is something else," he said. "It has to do with the way a person is conceived."

"If you are going to tell me about the theory of the bored conception, I already heard that from Clara."

"Well, hear it again from me, because it obviously hasn't sunk in. The offspring of any love making will be full of energy and will have the power to live in the moment only if both parents were sexually excited. If only one parent had an outburst of excitation, the child's energetic nature will be imbalanced and a part of him will always lag behind. If neither of the parents felt very excited, which is usually the case after many years of living with someone, the child will be what we call a bored conception, and he will not be capable of energetically grasping life's flow."

"That's a dismal scenario," I said. "Isn't there anything one can do about it? After all we aren't responsible for what happened during the moment of our conception."

"Of course there are other factors besides the initial energetic thrust, and that's the challenge of reestablishing the link with the *double*. Anyone can do that, no matter how lethargically one was conceived."

"How can one reestablish a link with the *double*?" I asked.

“By curtailing *self-importance*. By not being concerned with the concreteness of things. By becoming abstract in one’s thinking and behavior. By treating everything as manifestations of energy, and not as objective reality. Focusing on the self takes the energy that one needs to act efficiently. For example, to regret past actions or to be too involved or concerned with the outcome of anything, weighs a person down so that he cannot act efficiently, spontaneously, and with the proper timing,”

“What if you just don’t know what to do or when to do it?” I said in a complaining tone.

“You must stop and wait, until you catch the motion of things,” don Juan replied. “And listen for the omens; watch the indications emitted from the world around you. They act directly on your *energetic body*. Of course, for that, you have to be absolutely fluid and have to reduce your desires to nothing. You must feel no hurry and have no need to control or manipulate things. Then you can listen to the world’s whispers. Sometimes omens tell you how to do something. Such as, for example, which plant to pick for a particular ailment. Or they predict the outcome of a course of action. Naturally, other forces can tell you these things too.”

“What other forces are those?”

“The voice of *seeing*, for example. That comes directly from your *energetic body*. Or it may come from another entity that advises you. At any rate, it advises you from a place not accessible to your everyday physical body, and you have to open a channel to that place.”

Don Juan was unusually serious, he kept glancing at the hillside as if waiting for someone or for something to happen. On an impulse, he raised his arms above his head and stretched. I imitated his movements that could be likened to a monkey bracketing on invisible tree branches. I couldn’t help noticing that the sky was a cerulean blue, not gray and hazy as in Los Angeles where sometimes you can’t see the high rises a few blocks away. The sky was a clear, impenetrable canopy, pure and crystalline. I imagined I could hear sounds from miles away, for there was nothing in the air to impede the waves coming toward us.

“Sit here for a while, quiet your thoughts and listen to the lava rocks,” don Juan said. “I’ll go to the other side of the hill so I won’t disturb your concentration.”

“You won’t disturb my concentration,” I said, but he was already walking around a bend. I was about to follow him when it occurred to me that he might have gone to relieve himself behind a boulder, I decided to stay put and try listening to the rocks as he had suggested, although I hadn’t the vaguest notion of what he meant by listening to the rocks, or what I was supposed to hear if it did listen to them.

It took me a long time to quiet my thoughts, I was angry with my mother for not having been sexually excited when she made me. Although Nelida had told me from her *seeing* that my father had been besides himself with passion, my mother had not liked him and had barely felt a thing. I blamed her for my deficiencies, for being dependent on others for my well-being, which I was well aware was a disastrous situation. As I was mulling this over in my mind, my eye was caught by a shiny object about twenty feet in font of me. The sun was reflected on a piece of glass, or perhaps it was obsidian, or even a piece of metal. As I gazed at it, my internal dialogue gradually ceased.

In the desert where everything is barren, the mind seems to flatten out as if to mirror the terrain. The jagged internal peaks of worry and discontent dissolve so that inside and out there are no barriers, no expectations, no preconceptions to interfere with the natural flow of energy. As I continued my gazing practice, I experienced a moment of welcomed release, as if concerns that had been weighing me down had suddenly been lifted from me. Until that moment, I had not realized the horrendous burden concerns about the self placed upon one. It seemed much easier to simply let go, rather than to carry them around like so much useless baggage.

I scanned the ground until I found what I was looking for. A rock that was near the shiny object, seemed to beckon me. I picked up the rock and looked at it. It was an ordinary piece of lava, light and porous, but somehow, I developed a rapport with it. It may sound strange to form a sympathetic bond with an inanimate object, but that rock had movement inside it. I gazed at it; it was smooth and round and had yellow specks shooting off it's black surface. I followed the lines with my eyes. Then I saw the glow around it, a bright buff color that seemed friendly and yet awesome at the same time in it's agelessness.

Following an inner directive, I held the rock to my abdomen. I didn't expect to hear anything, for I was not listened with my ears, and don Juan hadn't specified what I had to do, but surprisingly, the amorphous chunk of lava began to tell me things. I assured myself that I was merely imagining it, but it didn't matter; I listened anyway. It was a kind of game I was playing to humor don Juan so I would have something to report to him later. Mentally, I asked the rock from where it came from, and I immediately received a strong tingling sensation in my womb, and I instantly knew things about the rock that, to the rational mind, would have been absurd.

For example, the rock told me about the depth of the earth from where it had come, saying it was like a womb. It was born, or rather, spewed up by a tremendous force eons ago. It told me how it reckoned time in terms of eons rather than years the way we did, and, seen within the limited temporal range we call history, our lives are insignificant with respect to eons gone by. It told me about our blindness, that grave misconception that we operate under, that we think we manipulate nature and control it, ourselves and others. When actually this is only a mirage, a quality of self-reflection and most of all a scarcity of time.

As I held the rock, I had a peculiar sense of seeing the broader picture, in which I was being controlled, driven by relentless forces to an inevitable destruction.

I felt this in my midsection as a series of soft ripples. It was a muffled movement coming from within the rock's core as I held it to my abdomen. I was absorbing the rock's essence until my entire body felt as if it were covered in layers of subtle vibration. Then a profound melancholy grasped me, as one existential question after another arose. Why am I alive? Who am I? What is the point of all this?

For a while I sat on the hilltop in the middle of nowhere, contemplating the futility of life, when a tremor when through me like the roll of thunder, that shook me to the core. I felt a release of feelings that I could not name or isolate. I remembered Clara's words; that there is no end to the wellsprings of man's indulgence. Instead of fighting or containing it, I let the shiver pass until all was still again.

I felt exhausted, as if a volcano had erupted spilling forth mountains of clinging and concern. Experiences that I had not thoroughly *recapitulation* gushed forth so suddenly that I could not stop to examine them; I didn't even have time to do the sweeping breath to breathe those feelings away. I understood how the baggage of memory and experience made me heavy, ponderous, encrusted with concerns about what I thought, felt, wanted to be, or didn't want to be. These mental fabrications served only weigh me down so that I was forever out of synchronization with time and life.

I wanted to let go of everything inside me, leave it all behind, start with nothing, so I could be free, but something in me did not want to let go. It clung to life and feared oblivion. Yet, the message of the lava rock: was to leave things as they are; not to worry about trivialities, not to strive or interfere. Things will take care of themselves. Live for today, for the weight of all our yesterdays will drag us down, and thoughts of tomorrow will distract us from our present purpose. The rock told me there is a way of perceiving without possessing, and that was by simply allowing life to unfold, to be what it is, outside yet inextricable merged with the self at any particular moment.

I looked at the rock and thanked it for it's messages. I was about to put it in my pocket to take it with me as a reminder of how important it is to let go when, I felt a tap on my right shoulder.

“Haven’t you learned anything from your gushing realizations?” I heard a voice say.

Instantly I dropped the rock and looked up petrified, panting instead of breathing. There in front of me was Nelida. I received such a jolt to my midsection that I feared I had to go to the bathroom on the spot. Nelida told me to immediately assume a half sitting, half kneeling posture that sorcerers use in moments of great upheaval. She helped me tuck my right leg under my crotch with my right foot pressing the perineum; my left knee was bent and my thigh and calf were pressed to my body.

“Use this posture of protection whenever you received a fright or jolt,” she advised.

I sat there for a few moments to compose myself. I had the certainty that Nelida had manifested herself out of nowhere on the hillside like the apparition of the Virgin. Then I realized the absurdity of this and told myself that probably Nelida had been waiting on the other side of the hill and don Juan had told her where to find me.

“I like the explanation of the Virgin appearing out of nowhere better!” Nelida said with a laugh. “I could be the Virgin of the Lava. Let’s build a grotto here on this spot. People would come from all over to venerate. As the saying goes, ‘Where there is veneration, even rocks emit light!’”

I laughed at her lighthearted humor and began to feel more at ease. Nelida sat down on a nearby boulder, I couldn’t help noticing how stylishly she was dressed. She had on khaki culottes and a matching jacket and high black boots that were made of soft Napa leather. She looked as if she was an advertisement for a travel magazine.

“Do you envy my outfit?” she asked noticing my furtive glances.

I felt myself flush. The last thing I wanted to do was to envy Nelida’s clothes, but something in me couldn’t help it. I was so disheveled, so rumpled that I felt like a sod of earth next to her cool, fresh appearance. How could anyone look so spiffy in the desert? It would never occur to me to dress up to go romping through the boulders and cactus.

“I wish I didn’t envy all the time,” I whined. “But I can’t help it. Every time I see someone with something expensive or good looking, I want it too.”

She laughed and reminded me that I had just spent an hour purging myself of desires and attachments.

“What happened to ail your cathartic realizations, little miss, Me-Too?” she said smiling. “Well, at least your glances don’t include men’s crotches.”

“I beg your pardon? Why would I look at men’s crotches?”

Nelida smiled. “You’d be surprised at how many woman are fixated on men’s rear ends. Whenever some women pass a man in the street, their eyes automatically wander down in that direction.”

“Well, to me men’s crotches are the least interesting part of their anatomy,” I said peeved.

“Perhaps,” she said with a sparkle, “but my point is that our eyes are trained to seek out things. For some of us it’s a good looking face or derriere, for others it’s articles of clothing. We were all trained like monkeys to grasp and covet things.”

“I suppose you’re right,” I said. “But I can’t help wanting the exciting things others have.”

“Don’t you know that to have possessions is unimportant?” she said. “There is no need to strive or struggle. Everything takes care of itself.”

I told her how my mother had spent her entire life struggling to acquire things: china, furniture, knickknacks for the house, and if she didn’t have the money to buy certain items, which was usually the case, she would feel deprived and unhappy. There was always that look of disappointment and envy in her eyes whenever we went to visit friends and she saw something for their house like a matching set of cookware, or matching luggage, or when one of her friends showed up with a new dress or coat.

“I refused to take anything that she had saved for me, when I left,” I said defiantly.

“You may not have taken her embroidered table cloths that she was saving for you in her hope chest,” Nelida said, “but you certainly took her envy. You would have been better off taking the napkins and silverware and leaving the coveting behind. That sense of coveting, was the legacy that she handed down to you.”

“It’s easy to leave something concrete like napkins,” I said. “Those are real, but envy isn’t real. How can I let go of something that isn’t real?”

“You begin by *recapitulating*,” Nelida said.

“I already *recapitulated* that and it didn’t work.”

“It works, but you keep going back to things that you should have let go of long ago.”

“I hadn’t even been aware that it was still part of my baggage,” I said.

“Well now you are aware of it,” she said, “Energy leaves from the eyes and also enters through them. So control your glances. It’s extremely important to train one’s eyes.”

“How can one train one’s eyes?”

“By placing all your *intent* in forging your *energy body* and never deviate from that purpose,” Nelida said. “*Recapitulating* is only the beginning. It loosens your affiliation with every day life and diminishes the force with which objects impinge on the *energy* from your eyes. Now use that added *energy* not to reinforce your envy, but to forge your *energy body*, your *double*. Instead of reflecting envy, use your eyes to energize the *double*. Only with your *energy body* will you be able to make the *abstract flight*.”

“Why do you call it the *abstract flight*?” I asked.

“Sorcerers believe that there are other universes besides the one into which you we born,” she replied, “but only someone who has stored enough energy is able to cross over and move through different intersections.”

“How are the other universes different?” I asked.

“The world we are born into is concrete and is determined by organic matter governed by physical laws,” she said. “It is linearly organized in terms of time time and factually organized in terms of space, but with enough energy we are able to cross over the boundaries that separate worlds upon worlds. Worlds in which energy is inorganic, not linear but circular, ever present and timeless. Those worlds are not made up of matter, but of energy and awareness, and one can only enter into the other realms by becoming formless and virtually abstract. In essence, one becomes the dream body and this crossing over is the *abstract flight*. So don’t waste your energy on envying concrete objects you can never take with you, but which only burden you down and will make you stay put. Use your energy to forge your *energy body* so you can make the *abstract flight*.”

“How do I forge my *energy body*?” I asked.

Nelida did not answer but beckoned me with a crook of her index finger to follow her. We left the hilltop and stopped at a clearing where she told me to light a fire. When we gathered enough wood, I lit a fire with my matches. Only then did Nelida make herself comfortable on a large rock and begin talking to me again.

“One *sorcery pass* in particular has the *intent* to forge the *energy body*,” she said. “And someday someone will show it to you. Now we must use the flame to change the direction of your eyes so that they will no longer reflect human concerns but the *dreaming body*, the eyes of the *double*.”

She told me to look at the flame through half closed lids, then turn my head to the left and visualize the fire coming from that direction. I then had to move my head to the center again and looked at the real flame again, and turn my head to the left again and visualize the flame. After repeating this action she said my eyes were fixed away from the direction of everyday life so that the things of the world would no longer have such a strong pull on me.

## Chapter 14: Guests of Life

Nelida stood up and with a few sweeps of her foot, put out the fire.

“Shouldn’t we wait here for don Juan?” I said.

She let out an exuberant laugh. “He’ll know where to find us if he wants.”

We hiked up a step canyon. I was exhausted and gulping in enormous gulps of air.

“I don’t think I can make it to the top without a rest,” I said.

“Don’t be such a wimp. Aren’t you curious to find out where I am taking you?”

“I need a rest,” I insisted.

“What you need is to remember you are a guest of the earth,” Nelida said as she sat down on a rock. “We can rest on rocks, leaning against trees, or simply by pressing our fingers against the center of the palm, but we don’t realize we can get energy from little things, because we think we are here as conquerors of the earth.”

I sat on a rock. Immediately, I sensed some of the energy of the boulder entering my spine through the pressure exerted on my tailbone.

Nelida continued, “when we feel that we own people and things, we are wasteful and arrogant. We are coercive and make maltreatment our style of being.”

To my surprise, the rock was comfortable and I wanted to ask Nelida questions so I could prolong this moment of rest.

“I don’t think we can extend the notion of ownership to include people,” I said. “This isn’t the middle ages where a feudal lord owns his land and his subjects.”

“Don’t fool yourself, Taisha. A mother rules her children; husbands still own their wives; a priest dominates his congregation, and the media mesmerizes the masses. The world abounds with tyrants, masters and slaves.”

Nelida said it was better to abandon such arrogant or submissive behavior and adopt the role of a humble guest.

“Why a guest?” I asked shifting on the sofa-rock.

“A guest is free,” Nelida said. “Not much is expected of him and the place he is visiting and the people there are not under his thumb. He expects nothing, yet is given everything. Sorcerers say this makes for a joyous journey.”

I was silent, trying to apply Nelida’s counsel to my own state of being. I had always thought it was a mark of character to be acquisitive, competitive, and whenever possible in control of people.

“Why not simply accept that we own and control nothing?” Nelida inquired. “We have to use things to help us on our journey, true, but nothing is ours to keep or control.”

“How can you say that?” I said, feeling threatened. I had grown up with the sense of never having had enough of material things or of being in control of my life. Now this sorceress was saying that it was deleterious to have material attachments.

As if sensing my revulsion, Nelida informed me that contrary to how it appeared, sorcerers did not covet possessions or try to dominate people.

“In fact, sorcerers maintain that not even the clothes on our backs are ours,” she said with a glint. “How can anything belong to us when we don’t have the power to hold it?”

“The shoes I’m wearing belong to me; I bought them myself,” I said playing the devil’s advocate.

“And I suppose you’ll keep them for the rest of your life, long after they have served their purpose,” Nelida scoffed with a derisive laugh.

She had me pegged. It was impossible for me to discard anything, even though it no longer functioned or I no longer had any use for it.

“It’s pointless to cling,” Nelida said in a softer tone. “How can your clothes belong to you when not even the body wearing them is yours?”

I thought she was carrying the idea of not owning anything to the extreme. I began to defend my point as if my life depended on it, but she merely laughed at me.

“You’re better off abandoning, right from the start, the idea of having or owning things,” she advised, “and adopt a new mode of regarding yourself and others in which nothing is ours, not even ourselves. This way you cut through the sham of having things and the resulting burden of having to guard your possessions. *Stalkers* are fluid and frugal. They are free from encumbrances.”

I didn’t like what she was saying. I had visions of having to dispose of my things in a giant garage sale. The frugality of the sorcerer’s world was repugnant to me. I was raised with the idea of someday having a house, furniture, a car and beautiful, stylish clothes. As an adolescent I would look at fashion magazines, and imagine that one day I would be able to afford the clothes featured in them, and I had to admit that the dream of owning my own home was always just over the horizon.

“Let’s continue walking while we talk,” Nelida said and stood up.

She petted the rock she had been sitting on as if it were a puppy, then sniffed out a few times.

“The adjustment that sorcerers have to make,” she said as she walked, “is that they cease to regard their body as their own. Then there is nothing they can lose, not even life itself.”

Nelida explained that one of the fundamental aims of *stalking* is to care for the body, not as an object or possession, but as a temporary guest. “By treating it impeccably,” she said, “we turn it into a most efficient vehicle for our journey.”

“This means you don’t indulge in food or drink, or anything that makes you tired, ill-at-ease, or sick, and you are never needy or wanting because there is nothing that you are lacking.”

I argued that what a person felt was a result of their circumstances. Some people, I informed her, are born into unfortunate circumstances, like poverty, and have to struggle to rise above it.

“That may be true,” she admitted, “but once a person *recapitulates* their life, poverty can no longer touch them.”

“I don’t see how that can be true,” I said.

“Simply because they are no longer there to be touched,” she said.

“How can a person live like that?” I argued. “I was thirteen years old before I had a new dress, and I wasn’t happy.”

Nelida laughed at my self-pitying tone. “You mean you wore the same old dress for thirteen years? That’s incredible.”

“No, of course not,” I said annoyed. “I mean everything I had worn up to that time were hand me-downs from my cousins. The new dress was a present for my thirteenth birthday. I still remember how my mother took me to a dress shop to pick out any dress I wanted. I nearly fainted from the tension of having to chose the perfect dress that I thought would have to last me for the rest of my life. I knew I would never get another one. It took me hours of trying things on, and agonizing decision-making for it had to be the perfect dress. On top of everything, I feared that at any moment, my mother would lose her patience and go home without buying me anything.”

“When I finally selected a flouncy maroon and navy blue sundress, my mother looked at me pathetically and said, ‘don’t tell me you’re going to choose that one?’ and I knew I had made the wrong choice, but I stubbornly insisted that I wanted that dress and no other. When I got home I wept, because, in it, I looked like a pillow sham.”

Nelida laughed even harder and urged me to stop feeling sorry for myself. She said I had been fortunate for I could have made that dress, even if it looked like a bedspread, into a power object.

“Or you could have ripped it to shreds and thrown it in the trash,” she said.

I was shocked to hear her say that.

“I could never have done that,” I said. “It was the only new thing I owned. Besides, I had to wear it to my birthday party.”

“Look at it this way,” she said. “When you want nothing, that is the only time you can really be free to enjoy life. You never know what’s going to happen next, but since you are no longer attached to anything, it doesn’t matter; you simply enjoy the ride. That’s the sorcerer’s way,”

To me, it seemed impossible to arrive at a state of such complete detachment, and I admired Nelida immensely for having accomplished it.

“How can one become so detached?” I asked. “Isn’t it only natural to want to have things?”

Nelida shook her head. “Sorcerers say that our attachments and desires are mesmeric commands and so they can be broken by being aware of them and using other new mesmeric commands. Take your eyes, for example.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Your eyes. Are you aware that you constantly rub them?”

I told her that my eyes itched and that I was probably allergic to some of the flora in the vicinity, but I was not aware that I was rubbing them all the time.

“Your eyes itch because you irritate them by rubbing them. Why not simply leave them alone?”

I argued that if one’s eyes itched, it was an automatic reaction to rub them. Nelida shook her head; her eyes glistened in the sunlight.

“I suppose you consider having sensitive eyes an asset,” she remarked. “but I assure you it’s not. If you stop being concerned with them, the itching will go away.”

“How can I do that?”

"By being conscious of your hand and giving yourself the command not to rub them," she said. "In this way, you will have a moment's pause to alter the habit. It might take weeks or months of deliberate effort, but sooner or later the mesmeric command will be broken and you won't be able to reach for your eyes without being aware of it."

I couldn't see why she was making such a mountain out of a molehill and was about to reach for my eyes but caught myself. Nelida said that most things we did were habits we no longer were aware of, so they controlled us.

"Being jealous, envious, reacting a certain way: all engage an awareness that you have made real and thus they rule your being," she said.

"But you are talking about feelings," I said. "How can you help what you feel?"

"You can change a feeling the same way you can stop excessive eating or drinking or smoking or anything else you want to change."

Nelida explained that the secret to success lay in being aware of the behavior we want to change and then to deliberately altering it's flow by an act of *not-doing*. When we disrupt the natural flow of a feeling or action, we are practicing what sorcerers call, *not-doing*. "Sorcerers practice *not-doing* in order to change," she said.

"But first you must be aware of the pattern, and for that you need a deep, thorough *recapitulation*. If, as in your case, you have learned to react by feeling sorry for yourself or envying others, then every time that feeling comes to you, be aware of it. *Stalk* yourself; map out your weaknesses. Then you have a choice to continue or to change. Finally, you can *intend* anything away before it entraps you."

"It sounds easy, but is it really possible to change a lifelong habit?"

"You bet it is," Nelida said. "But it takes a great deal of energy. *Recapitulating* helps you acquire the added energy needed for extraordinary feats such as breaking people's mesmeric commands."

I remembered Clara saying the same thing.

"The difficulty arises when we become obsessive and we turn everything into another doing," Nelida said. "You must regard *not-doing* as a game. Perform it often enough and you will see that feelings and desires are only places where we have accumulated energy. Remove this energy and you remove the desire itself."

Nelida stood up and stretched. At least I thought that was what she was doing.

"One other thing," she said, "*not-doing* will not work without the sorcerer's cloak of confidence."

Try as I might, I couldn't remember anyone talking about the cloak of confidence.

"The *sorcery pass* I just showed you allows your *energy body* to wrap itself in that cloak," Nelida said.

She stretched her arms out to each side and took a deep breath. Then she raised her arms to her shoulder level and bent her elbows, keeping the palms of her hands facing down. She squeezed her shoulder blades together while her arms barely moved at all. Then exhaling slowly and evenly, she brought her arms around to the front and placed her palms together with her finger tips pointing upward.

"Why do sorcerers call this movement, 'the cloak of confidence'?" I asked.

"This movement tightens the bands of energy across the chest. By pushing the chest outward, and the shoulder blades backwards, the energy lines that are sagging become taunt again. That bar across the chest of the *energy body* serves as a shield. Things bounce off it, and that gives one a sense of confidence when facing the world of doing,"

I repeated this motion several times until I felt comfortable with it. With a surge of energy, I made it to the top of the ridge, stumbling over loose rocks as I scrambled up the trail. When I got to the top, I let out an involuntary gasp. Hidden in the tall bushy trees was a high gray wall that had partially crumbled away, and a shattered archway leading into a hacienda gone to ruin. I could see broken statues and columns on the ground. Steps covered with weeds led to a flat area that once had been a magnificent courtyard. There was even a church that was part of the compound and many secondary outbuildings that clustered within the walls. I felt my heart leap with excitement.

"What on earth is such a huge hacienda doing out here?" I gasped.

"It was built hundreds of years ago and was moved to this spot by the ancient sorcerers," Nelida replied. "Your awe comes from the energy that the sorcerers left in that place."

“Wait a minute, Nelida. Did you say the sorcerers moved it to this place? How was that possible? It would have taken a work crew of thousands of people to dismantle the original buildings and move them stone by stone over this rugged terrain.”

Nelida shook her head, “They didn’t dismantle and rebuild it,” she said. “The ancient sorcerers *intended* it. They could cause entire cities to move simply by using their *intent*. A single hacienda was no great feat for them.”

Nelida suggested we walk around the outer grounds to make our presence known, for the place oozed sorcerers’ *intent* and we had to announce ourselves first, before bursting in on it. As we walked she stressed that the buildings had been deliberately set on an energetic fissure in the earth, and so it exuded power. It was this power that gave my body an added boost, whereas before it was dormant.

“When energy is circulated, fatigue leaves the body,” she said, as we came to the walls that had long ago crumbled away.

Suddenly, Nelida let out a shriek that set the hairs on my arms standing at attention.

“Do I have to yell too?” I asked with a shiver.

“Of course. You have to let *intent* know you are here. Otherwise it may spit you out. Then you wouldn’t be able to escape fast enough, should the power of the old sorcerers turns against you.”

I took a deep breath, faced the entrance and yelled, “*intent*”, three times, as loud as I could. An echo, as if the ancient sorcerers were yelling back, made it even more eerie. When I had finished yelling, Nelida peered into my eyes and asked me how I felt. I told her that I was frightened out of my pants, but in spite of that, I felt totally refreshed.

“Good,” she said. “That means that the ancient sorcerers’ energy has a beneficial effect on you and we can proceed.”

“What if I felt tired instead?” I asked.

“We would have to turn back the way we came and you would miss the lessons in store for you here. Now, sit and let silence envelop you, so we can proceed through the portals.”

I had heard Nelida say this before, many times, but I still didn't know what "letting silence envelop me" meant on a practical level. I asked her to be more specific. She replied that I had just done it, to some extend, with the help of the sorcerer's cry. She elaborated that in order to be silent, one had to let go of the self, and for that, one needed to grab onto something else, for example, the sun's light, or the breath, or to *intent* itself via the power cry. In this way energy is release and power can be harnessed. Nelida explained that unveiling and accumulating power was the ancient sorcerers primary aim.

"And how does one unveil power?" I asked.

Nelida sat down on a nearby step. She assumed the right calf in front of the chest position with her hands wrapped around her calf, while sitting on her bent left leg. She told me to assume the same ancient sorcerers *not-doing* posture.

"There are many ways to entice power," she began, "but they all come down to one thing, and that is to perform every action with awareness. Whether you sit, walk or eat or practice the *sorcery passes*, every breath you take must be a breath for power. Then, gradually, the spirit begins to disclose itself and your *energy body* wakes up. The yell enables you to clear a path to *intent* as well as gives your *energy body* a jolt."

I jumped up saying I was ready to explore the ruins and to examine some of the figurines I had seen in the courtyard. Perhaps they were pre-Columbian artifacts I could take back to the archaeological museum at the university, but Nelida was adamant.

"Sit down. We are not here on a treasure hunt or to do research for a term paper."

She assured me that such explorations would be meaningless, for they would not help me in my tasks to unveil and harness power. The only things that would be of any value to our present purpose, were silence and detachment.

"Don't get on your high horse and turn this into another doing," she warned. "Let power act through you. Then everything will fall into place naturally."

I told her that her recommendation was much too vague to be of any practical value. She leaned closer and whispered that she would reveal the only thing that was of any practical value, for it was the key to freedom.

"The ancient sorcerers were very practical people," she said. "So practical, in fact, that they lost themselves in procedures. Modern sorcerers saw that the road of the ancients lead to ruin. So they isolated impeccability as their only guide, and why is impeccability the key to freedom?”

Nelida did not wait for me to offer a reply.

“Impeccability is the other side of the spirit. Like two sides of a coin or two sides of a hill,”

I wanted to ask her what she meant by impeccability but she stopped me with a wave of her hand. Smoothly she changed her position to bring her left knee to her chest and sat on her right bent leg. I copied her. She turned to gaze at the top of the hill we had just climbed down.

“The ancient sorcerers could go right though that hillside and land on the top, or on the other side,” Nelida said. “They didn’t need to climb to the top first the way we did. They needed only awareness and *intent* to control the direction of their flight, but some of us have less energy, so that all our actions have to be geared toward being impeccable. Only in this way, can we store enough power to let go of the personal self and land on the other side of the mountain.”

Nelida picked up a stick and drew a curve on the ground that resembled the slope of a mountainside.

“On this side there is impeccability,” she said pointing with her stick. “Our bodies and our actions and all the things we see and feel must be tuned with awareness and control. On the other side is pure understanding that makes us abandon ourselves. In the middle is a barrier made up of concern that veils everything. It is the fog that must be purified in order to see the other side clearly.”

Nelida pointed to the middle line of her drawing—the heavy part that formed the mountainside. She said that in our mesmeric state, we only see the personal self and direct everything towards it’s enhancement. Since it is the self that governs our actions, they are superficial, shoddy and full of self. We believe the self is immortal, consequently we are indolent as if we had all the time in the world at our disposal, but once we realize there is something beyond the self, something veiled and mysterious, we begin to turn our attention and efforts towards unveiling it and exploring it's mystery.

“The less one emphasizes the self, the higher the spirit will soar,” Nelida said. “On the other hand, the more self-important we are, the more we cling to emotions, judgments and ideas. Remove the emphasis on the self and the spirit will soar.”

“Is there a special chant or breath one can do to get rid of the self once and for all?” I asked.

“What a question! Have you forgotten about the *recapitulation*? Have you lost sight of the *sorcery passes*?”

“No, I only meant that was there a shorter, quicker way. *Recapitulation* takes so long.”

“There are no shortcuts to power,” Nelida said, “Yet anything is helpful when done with the proper attitude.”

“What would the proper attitude be?”

“When one is sincere and truthful to one’s purpose; when one does not act for personal gain; when one is abandoned and doesn’t care a hoot about what happens to herself, then the mountain of self-reflection becomes so transparent that the spirit can be seen,”

Nelida stressed that to liberate the *energy body*, and to tap the spirit was the goal of modern sorcerers.

“Why is that their goal?”

“Because only freedom can bring joy and ease into our lives,” she said, “Only pure, humble acts can attract power that is needed to cut through the apes’ judgments and doings.”

Nelida added that just as people don’t know how to live without the self, the ancient sorcerers didn’t know how to live without power. “Modern sorcerers have a different orientation,” she said.

“How are they bound?”

“They are not interested in controlling people; modern sorcerers are bound to the spirit.”

For a while we were immersed in total silence, I let the place fill me with it's vibrant charge. Then I became aware of the sound of birds. Perhaps they had been there all along only I hadn’t noticed them before.

“It is difficult to let go,” Nelida continued, “because we fear we will have nothing to fall back on, but that’s only because we haven’t yet realized that the personal self is illusory.”

“How does one finally let go then?” I asked.

"Letting go is a matter of abandon. When one does it, it is all at once. For some, it may take years of deliberation; for others, it only takes a sudden realization, but when one finally abandons oneself to power, it brings with it a fluidity that makes the actions of the self seem dull and cumbersome in comparison."

Nelida stressed that letting go of the self was a *stalker's* art. One had no qualms in dropping one's person, for one finds it a burden too heavy to carry.

"Why is the self a burden?" I asked. "Doesn't it help us in our life?"

"It ought to, but in most cases it is a source of fear and discontentment. If you really listen to your internal monologue, you realize that it is nothing but a long list of complaints or self assertion. A *stalker* takes an inventory of his internal talk, examines it and then discards it, I recommend you do the same. For the internal monologue links you to the feelings that belong to your parents and to their parents for generations back, and unless you divest yourself of them, they will extend themselves into the future ensnaring you for the rest of your life."

The sound of birds stopped. Even the wind had stopped blowing, somewhere in the distance I heard a rustling in the underbrush; perhaps a rabbit or lizard scurrying away. Then I heard the sounds of crickets and realized that they too were under the spell of a mesmeric command.

"Sorcerers, in order to be free, break away from the human heritage or what we call the human condition," Nelida continued. "Through discipline, they remove themselves from the chain of apelike existence, with no future or past to bind them. Buddhist call this, 'liberating oneself from the wheel of life.' Sorcerers call it 'puking out one's ape-like existence.'"

A feeling of misery swept over me. I knew I was lost. The process of *recapitulating* was never ending. Everything I did or felt or hoped for was fuel for the *recapitulation*. Unless I stopped acting altogether, I was creating more entanglements. Theoretically I could appreciate the need for '*not doing*', but in actual practice, I still wanted to be in control, to be liked and respected by others, to be in charge of my life. The thought of not getting these things, filled me with frustration.

"Whether we agree with the sorcery teachings or not," Nelida continued sensing my mood, "self reflection must be stopped or else we will spend our entire existence trying to fulfill the expectations of our parents and peers. What's worse, we become the petty tyrants we struggle to overthrow. Only by leaving home, family, past and future can we truly be free."

I asked Nelida what she meant by leaving home. I had left home, yet I wasn't free.

“That’s because you still carry your parents’ feelings with you,” she said. “You are ambitious like your father, you are looking for love like your mother; you want instant success with no effort. You are in deadly competition with your bothers and that puts you at odds with everything and everyone around you. Therefore, human concerns are as near to you as they can be.”

“Leaving home is not merely saying goodbye to family and friends or putting distance between you. It involves relinquishing your place in the emotional food chain: that line that is made up of ancestors and decedents. You must give up your human heritage and it's rewards and security, and take yourself out of the quagmire of human affairs. Only when you are so detached that you are no longer bound by a personal self, can you truthfully say that you are no longer your parent’s child.”

“As long as one is hooked to the self, one is hooked to others,” she stressed. “Only when one has nothing, expects nothing and needs nothing, is one truly without a self.”

“But I did the *recapitulation* and I’m still hooked to others,” I said whining.

Nelida stood up and gave me a surprised look, as if she doubted what I was saying.

“You are hooked to the sorcerer’s *intent*. All you need to do is to acquiesce to it. You have evolved, through accumulating power, into something else, and that is why we are here on this place of the ancient sorcerers: to prove to your reason that you are no longer your parent’s child.”

“How will we do that?”

“By examining the background as well as the foreground.”

I gave Nelida a blank stare. Without another word, she got up and asked me to follow her inside the courtyard. We passed a series of tiny rooms, with doors no more than four feet in height.

“The ancient sorcerers must have been midgets,” I mumbled.

“*Recapitulation* chambers,” Nelida said. “But we are not here to *recapitulate* but to practice *gazing* and through *gazing* move our *assemblage point* to the place of the ancient sorcerers.”

She told me to sit, and make myself comfortable by leaning against a wall. In front of me were a series of pillars, seven to be exact, arranged in a cluster. They seemed to have been, at one time, the supports of a low roof or very high altar. I gazed at them for a long time looking not with my eyes, but with a feeling that emanated from my womb the way Emilito had taught me. At one point, I succeed in pushing the pillars away from me using my gaze. Then, suddenly, it was not the pillars that were being pushed away but I was being hurled up and backwards a great distance.

I found myself on top of a hill looking down at the pillars. They were at the end of a long tunnel, tiny and in sharp focus as if I were looking through the wrong end of binoculars. Then each of the pillars grew taller, as high as the sky. It was as if a giant grid with cracks in it had formed in front of my eyes. The world, as it normally is perceived, had split into segments with each segment separated by a black column. I was looking at the sky and at the same time behind the sky into infinity. Then the pillars shrunk until I was again looking at them head on. Nelida nudged my side. I realized I had fallen over and had perhaps passed out.

“What happened!?” I exclaimed, sitting up. “I had a complete distortion of perception. Those pillars were enormous and I was looking at them from the top of a hill.”

“That was not a perceptual distortion,” Nelida clarified when I told her what I saw. “Since you entered the sorcerer’s world, your acts are performed in a different context, only your reason refuses to accept this. If you only see what your reason tells you, your acts tend to be shallow, haphazard. In order to see the deep context, you have to remove yourself from your immediate surroundings and that is exactly what you did.”

“Tell me again what I did.”

“You expanded your vision. The sorcerer’s place of power allowed you to do this. Otherwise, you would never know what you are and where you are at any given moment. Not to see where you come from is disastrous.”

I asked her to explain more in detail what happened so I could better understand what she was driving at.

“You were on the cliff looking down on the ruins and suddenly you found yourself sitting on this rock looking at the pillars. You might think that you only dreamed that you were sitting on the hilltop and that the pillars were your dream. That is because you regarded the ruins you saw earlier from the ground as real.”

“On the other hand, you might remember having hiked down the mountainside, but if you don’t recall sitting down on this rock you might think you are dreaming this now. The view from the hilltop and the ruins you see now belonged to two different peals of reality.

“The way the ruins appear, their very existence, depended on the position of your assemblage point. Today you succeeded in moving it slightly, so you saw from two different perspectives.”

What Nelida was saying was that what we perceive hinges on our capacity and intensity for awareness. As our assemblage point shifts, so does our perception of the world around us, Nelida went on to say that it was because we can hold our assemblage point steady that we can agree and talk about the things we see.

“But the world is not just what we can agree upon,” she stressed. “Sorcerers say there are many levels of reality and waking up our *energy body* allows us to perceive with a keener awareness so that nothing is the same. You experienced this for yourself.”

Nelida had often told me that the world is alive and in constant flux, but I always seemed to lapse into my habitual view of it. She said this was because patterns become fixed and stored in a vast storehouse of memory to be called upon again and again. This results in the sensation that the world we perceive is concrete and predictable.

“We human beings are extremely limited in our repertoire of feelings and actions. You should know this from the *recapitulation*. We are like drunkards that head straight for the bottle without ever questioning why we drink or even the desirability of drinking.”

She stated that a set of patterns is presented to us from infancy and reinforced by mesmeric commands that make us repeat them over and over.

“We become limited because we no longer look at the larger picture. We simply allow our bodies to follows the lines of least resistance, and that is, whatever is familiar and know to us. To be aware would mean to allow our *energy body* to act for us regardless of what we may have learned to consider as easy or reasonable. To allow awareness to guide us, would be comparable to the alcoholic refusing the bottle even though his whole being has learned to crave liquor.”

“Will his craving ever stop?”

“Yes, by emptying our storehouse through the *recapitulation*, we break the hold that concreteness has on us,” she said. “There is a quicker path. The *energy body* can wake up suddenly and see that the self is not important. A person who liberates himself from the confines of self reflection will perceive in totally different way."

I had to agree. By waking up my *energy body*, my entire perspective had been altered. Yet the prospect of permanent change seemed staggering, but ultimately worthwhile. To clear my head I gazed at the rocks.

"Do I really have to leave the familiar world behind and enter some strange reality?" I asked at last.

"You only need to relinquish your idea of the world. But that is everything! For it is our ideas that fix us and make us concrete. And why, you might ask, do we have to forsake our ideas to be free?Because ideas are limiting whereas energy is limitless. In order to be one with sheer energy, we must first remove the obstacle of the self, for it is the fog that covers the real and immediate with the false and interpreted."

I began to squeeze my shoulder blades together to acquire confidence. As I scanned the pillars, I experienced another perceptual distortion: they appeared to be swaying in the wind. When I remarked on it, Nelida said that there were always distortions. Life was energy moving unfettered, yet we imprison and contain it by eliminating possibilities that do not fit our reasonable expectations.

"One who sees that reality is simply a point of view, acts for no reason and expects no rewards," Nelida said.

"Wouldn't such a person be terribly lonely?" I asked.

"Such a person isn't lonely because he or she has aligned himself with that force that moves us and makes us complete."

"How will I know if I'm acting from the spirit or for myself?" I asked, giving my shoulder blades a sharp squeeze.

Nelida gave me a dispassionate look. "As you continue to act impeccably, you accumulate personal power so that ultimately the spirit and your being become one. Then all your acts are the reflection of the spirit's *intent*."

## Chapter 15: La Catalina

We walked towards a cluster of adobe houses, Carlos had parked the car about a quarter of a mile up the road so that it would not be seen from the houses.

“I’ll show you where to wait but I don’t want to go inside or to cross the curer’s path,” he said with a furtive glance.

“Why don’t you want the curer to see you?” I asked suspiciously.

“Because that curer is a witch. I’ve had some run-ins with her in the past. So it’s best that she does not associate you with me or with don Juan.”

I was growing more and more apprehensive. “What should I tell her if she asks me why I am here?”

“Just say that you’re a student of anthropology and that she came highly recommended by some people in Vicam Station, and you’re here because you want her to look at the flea bites on your legs.”

By the looks of the place, whoever lived there, seemed to be highly successful. The house was larger than the other Yaqui houses in the area, and the grounds around it looked clean and well kept. There were even a few ornamental potted plants by the door adding a decorative touch. An elderly couple were seated on a bench under the ramada. Two portly Mexican ladies were standing in the courtyard, waiting for their turn to see the curer. Seated on another bench was a woman with a child, and next to her sat a woman nursing an infant completely covered by a shawl. Towards the side of the house was a small corral where a donkey was kept. As I turned, I caught a glimpse of a man disappearing behind the corral as if he did not want to be seen.

“Doña Catalina is the best curer in Sonora,” Carlos said as we sat down on a vacant bench some distance from the house. “Mexicans as well as Indians come to see her. Don Juan says that she has more power than all the curers in this area put together.”

I noticed a touch of pride and also fear in his voice as he said this.

“Do you know her well?” I asked.

“Not at all. I met her once at a gathering of some of don Juan’s colleagues. Although, on several occasions, I have actually seen her work. She can remove a patient’s organ, douse it in alcohol, and put it back into his body without making an incision or drawing blood.”

“Come now,” I said incredulously. “That’s impossible. She must be using some sort of trickery.”

I had heard of the “psychic surgery” used by some practitioners. It’s purpose is similar to western surgery, except that no blood is drawn and the patient is conscious during the procedure, but, unlike western surgery, immediately afterwards the patient is able to get up and leave the premises with no scar or ill effects.

“I bet it's a question of faith healing, where the patient is highly suggestible,” I offered.

The anthropological literature is abound with studies of faith healers who, through the laying on of hands, cause the patient to experience a catharsis of sorts, during which time the healing takes place. I had seen a demonstration of such healing on television. People just dropped their crutches and began to walk again, or, miraculously, they could hear or see. I had never given much credence to this sort of curing and had always considered it to fall into the category of what anthropologists called “healing by hysterical conversion.” The effects in such cases were usually temporary and treated the symptoms rather than the illness itself, which often returned when the person came to his senses and the force of public support was removed.

“She’s not a faith healer,” Carlos said decisively.

“Then how does doña Catalina practice her art? Does she use sleight of hand?”

According to anthropological accounts, the only way such a surgery could possibly be produced, since it defies reason and the laws of science, is through the use of some sort of chicanery. The usual explanation offered is that the onlookers are put into a hypnotic trance through the use of repetitive sounds, such as chanting or drumming. Then the curer goes to work producing spectacular effects, much as a magician performs tricks that amaze an audience who only see what the magician allows them to see.

“No. She doesn’t use sleight of hand,” Carlos said. “Some charlatans probably do rely on tricks such as having a spare organ up their sleeve, but Catalina does something else, much more spectacular.”

“What is that?” I asked laughing at the image of someone having a dripping goat’s heart or liver hidden under their poncho and producing it at just the right moment to amaze the onlookers.

“Catalina cures by changing the reality around her, and anyone who is witnessing the operation, including the patient himself, participates in this altered reality.”

“I don’t understand,” I said, moving away from a coughing patient who had come to stand by the bench where we were sitting.

“If we depart from the premise, as the sorcerers do, that the real world is also a dream world and that it can be perceptually altered if one has enough power, then the curer, who is also a sorceress, can change the reality immersing them by altering the consensus of the people involved. Then all those who are present actually witness a world with new perceptual parameters; they are forced to acknowledge what they see with a new intersubjective agreement to replace the old one.”

“Isn’t this a form of mass hypnosis?” I queried.

“Not really,” Carlos replied, “Unless you call being alive or what we are experiencing now a form of hypnosis. What Catalina does is to alter the awareness of her patients and the awareness of whoever is witnessing her curing, and of course her own awareness, which is subject to the *dreaming* and *stalking* abilities of sorcerers. Then whatever happens for them is as real as the world we are experiencing now sitting here on this bench.”

“You mean she uses her dream body during her curing sessions?" I asked.

“That is what happens. She has learned to utilize parts of her *dreaming* reality and is able to project it onto people’s everyday reality so powerfully and completely that profound disruptions take place. Then she uses her *stalking* techniques to fill in the breaks and makes life recognizable to the onlookers, although it's features are markedly different from the everyday reality, but just as real.”“How is it different from everyday reality?”

“Well, she can remove an organ without drawing blood. Within our consensual reality that is impossible to do.”

“I see what you mean,” I said with a shudder.

I wondered how healers like Catalina acquired such extraordinary powers to be able to change the world around them and cause everyone within their field of energy to experience the inconceivable. Waiting for my turn, I grew more uneasy, wondering what she would do to me once I got into her field of energy, Carlos had assured me that her powers were genuine and that no trickery was involved and her fame attested to her skills as a curer.

We had to wait for over two hours until all the people before us had been seen. In all that time I had gotten one glimpse of the curer, although the man lurking behind the corral came out and stood there for a while watching us from a distance. When it was our turn, Carlos told me to go in and that he would wait for me in the car. He reminded me not to mention that I was associated with don Juan or himself, but to be attentive and see if I could detect anything strange about the curer. He emphasized that I should be silent and aware so I could catch as much as I could of doña Catalina's *stalking* techniques.

I entered the house with trepidation. A young Yaqui girl greeted me with a stern look. She seemed very capable and was even dressed as a nurse in a neat white uniform with white sandals. She asked me what my problem was. I immediately showed her the bites on my legs which fortunately were still red and virulent. She nodded and took a white index card from a metal file box and wrote down my name along with the date and the reason I was there.

When the curer was ready to see me, her young assistant led me into the inner room behind a dark wooden door. The girl handed her my card and quietly left the room. Immediately I sensed I was in the presence of a most remarkable woman. Doña Catalina was tall, perhaps in her mid forties, and had on an open white smock over a blouse and a straight skirt. Her jet black hair was pulled back by a headband and was held in place in a high bun. She had no wrinkles and had a beautifully sculptured face, but what were most striking were her eyes; they seemed to burn with an energy coming from every inch of her vibrant body. I had not seen eyes like that except on don Juan and his associates. This woman was handsome and had a mysterious inner power, I detected a confidence and a commanding manner that at the same time put me at ease, yet placed me somewhat at her mercy.

I thought that the first prerequisite of a successful healing situation, that of faith in the curer's ability, was easily met in this case. What's more, doña Catalina seemed to have a kindness and concern that immediately put me at ease despite the fact that she was a total stranger. I tried to talk to her in Spanish as best I could. She smiled at my efforts and said in fairly good English, "I want you to lie down on the bed with your head up."

I lay down on a narrow cot draped with a clean white sheet and a small pillow. Following her instructions, I kept my head up, off the pillow, which is what I thought she had said. It was an awkward position and I couldn't understand why I couldn't put my head down, but she had specifically said to lie with my "head up", so I strained my neck to keep my head off the cot.

Perhaps it was part of the curing procedure.

Doña Catalina gently pulled up my pant-legs and examined the bites on my legs. They were not as red or swollen as before, but they still itched and were virulent. A few scabs had already formed where I had been unable to restrain myself from scratching. I craned my neck to see what doña Catalina was doing; she was wiping my legs with some pungent liquid.

By now my neck was getting tired and I could hardly keep it off the pillow. Doña Catalina gently opened the front closure of my Levi’s and eased up my shirt to expose my stomach. Then she put some lotion on her hands and began massaging my abdomen in a circular fashion, first in a clockwise direction, then in a counterclockwise direction. As she moved her hands, I felt her fingers doing strange things: it felt like tiny rodents feet moving all over my abdomen causing an itching sensation, as if her she were searching for something through her sense of touch.

At a given moment, I realized that what doña Catalina had meant was for me to lie on the cot “face up” and she had not meant for me to keep my head up at all. I relaxed my neck muscles and laughed to myself as my head gratefully hit the pillow. I had been literal-minded again, as usual, like the time in an ice skating class when the instructor had told everyone to skate to the music and I headed right toward the sound speakers.

I could hardly keep from giggling to myself. It must have been strange for doña Catalina to see a gringa not wanting to let her head touch the pillow. I knew she must have thought I was afraid of catching lice or that her pillow wasn’t clean enough, I had an uncontrollable urge to giggle at my own stupidity and tried my best to suppress my mirth as doña Catalina kept exploring my stomach.

“Am I tickling you?” she asked noticing my suppressed smiles.

“No, I'm fine,” I said, trying to control my giddiness.

I watched doña Catalina's expression as she worked. It was calm and serious. She was totally engrossed, searching with her fingers for clues of what was happening under the skin. When she was finished with the examination of my midsection, she gestured that I could adjust my clothing again.

“You have worms,” she concluded, “I’m going to give you some medicine. Other than that you’re perfectly healthy,” I was shocked to hear that I had intestinal worms. I mentally ran though a list of things I had eaten since coming to Mexico. I concluded that the cause was probably the donkey meat I had eaten in Santa Ana.

“How do I get rid of them?” I asked tucking in my blouse.

“Stay away from men,” she said matter-of-factly.

“I beg your pardon?” I couldn’t see what men had to do with intestinal parasites.

“You still have many worms inside you,” she repeated.

Then I remembered what Clara had said about energetic worms. She had told me that during the sex act, men leave energetic filaments inside a woman's body which to a *seer* look like thousands of luminous worms. They remain inside the body of a woman for seven years, feeding off her energy and making her grow weaker as the recipient males grow stronger. Each renewed contact between a man and a woman, strengthens the ties, and makes the energetic worms even more active. Perhaps the itching I had felt in my abdomen were the worms being pushed around by doña Catalina's probing fingers.

“What can I do to get rid of them?” I asked alarmed. “Besides staying away from men?”

For years I had been leading a celibate life, so as not to renew the connection or vigor of any “worms” contracted through past encounters.

“Stay away from men,” she repeated. “Then in time, the worms will die out by themselves.”

I nodded. I wondered how she know about the luminous worms? Whether it was common knowledge among sorcerers. Or perhaps, it was a subtle trap so that I would reveal my connection with Clara or don Juan. I decided to play the devil’s advocate.

“How can you be sure I even have worms?” I asked.

“I felt them with my hands,” she replied. “There are more on your left side than on your right. These will be harder to get rid of. You are still attached to them and call them your own.”

I couldn’t think why that would be so. I had done a thorough *recapitulation* of all sexual encounters and felt very detached from them. I watched doña Catalina fill a small plastic bottle with some pink liquid that looked like pepto bismol. She tightly sealed the cap and placed the bottle on the table.

“You are to take a teaspoonful three times a day,” she instructed. “Wash down there with water boiled with rosemary, eat more and worry less.”

“What makes you say I worry?” I asked sheepishly.

She looked me straight in the eyes.

“I can tell from the condition of your spleen,” she replied. “I wasn’t just massaging your stomach, I was examining each of your internal organs; your liver, spleen and kidneys. I can tell what you are feeling in them. If they are happy or sad, calm or agitated.”

“You mean to say that internal organs have emotions?” I asked.

She gave me the eeriest smile, and nodded. “If you don’t treat them well, they won’t give you a moment’s peace,” she said and handed me the pink medicine.

I asked her how much her fee was. She shrugged and said that the plastic bottle and medicine cost twenty pesos but that I could pay whatever I wanted to her assistant on my way out. I thanked her and was about to leave when she stopped me.

“You know Juan Matus, don’t you?” she said with a certainty that left no room for doubt. “Did he send you here?”

Remembering Carlos’s command not to mention that I was associated with them, I didn’t know what to say, so I just stared at her dumbly.

“Did he bring you?” she demanded again with an icy stare.

I was totally on the defensive. “No, he didn’t,” I said.

She looked at me surprised, as if she didn’t believe me.

“Really, I didn’t come with anyone by that name,” I insisted.

She lost her pleasant manner.

“I came with a friend. He’s waiting for me in the car.”

She gave me a penetrating glare that would freeze a lizard, then looked me up and down. “You’re not like the rest,” she said. “You certainly didn’t come here to be cured. You have ulterior motives. Did you come here to spy on me or to steal my power?”

“Of course not,” I said shocked. “I assure you, I had the best intentions.”

“I don’t believe you. You came to steal my curing secrets didn’t you?”

All of a sudden I became terrified. I broke out in a cold sweat. I wanted to leave but she jumped in front of the door blocking the exit. I couldn’t understand what had gotten into doña Catalina. A moment ago she was a ministering angel. Her gentleness and confidence, I knew now, were *stalkers* techniques designed to put me off guard. Now it was an instant reversal; she was an enemy, a dangerous adversary, a black sorceress of the most malignant kind.

“I don’t know what you mean,” I said. “I have to leave now. Please step aside.” And to match her confidence, I added, although not quite as energetically as I would have liked, “I’m warning you, I know martial arts.”

At that she looked at me and laughed. I took a few backward steps to place more distance between us. I did know martial arts but what good would that do in the face of this formidable opponent who was not only bigger than I was but much more powerful. Every inch of Catalina was bursting with an aggressive yet focused energy. While, I, on the other hand, was cowering until I hit the cot and could move back no further.

Catalina just laughed at me flashing her strong white teeth. Her laughter seem to be a challenge, an animal grin of aggression, about which there was nothing friendly or humorous.

“If you don’t move away from that door. I’ll yell for help,” I warned. “My friend is by the car. He’ll come running.”

Actually, that was only partially true. What I had neglected to add was that Carlos had parked the car a quarter of a mile away, and we had walked to her house. If he was by the car, he wouldn’t have heard me even if I had yelled at the top of my lungs.

“And my friend is waiting by the corral across the courtyard,” she said with a smirk. “He’ll come running even if I don’t yell. If you don’t believe me, just look out the window.”

I looked out the window and saw the same man who had been lurking by the corral, standing in the courtyard. At this distance I could tell there was something familiar about him. Then I remembered where I had seen him. It was while crossing the border at Nogales. It was the Indian who had caused me to faint and had taken that opportunity to pocket my gold pen. I felt fear grip my core as he gave me a most imperceptible nod of recognition, as if he, too, remembered the incident, I knew there was no escaping from this duo of sorcerers.

“Who is that man?” I demanded to know.

“He’s my protector,” Catalina said with a smile, “so don’t try any funny business.”

With a single movement of her hand she pulled at her headband, and her hair came tumbling down around her shoulder. She was absolutely wild, her eyes burning with fury. I was so frightened that my knees were shaking and I nearly sat down on the cot. On an impulse I decided to escape through the window. I jumped onto the cot and pushed the casement window open, but I had only gotten my head and torso out when I felt something like hot iron shackles clamp down on my ankles. I screamed and saw the witch tugging at my feet. I kicked so hard that she had to let go and jump backwards, but she had me in a disadvantageous position. I was panting, with cold fury. If only I had my crystals so I could point them at her, was the thought that came to mind, but they were in a drawer in my desk: in Los Angeles. A lot of good they did me there, when I really felt I needed to use them here.

No matter. I reached into my pocket and pretended to pull something out. I held my hands in the proper position for crystal dart throwing, with my arms extended and my index fingers pointing straight out at her.

“Watch out, I have crystals!” I yelled.

As I fixed her with my gaze, an unknown surge of strength filled me. No longer were my knees wobbling, they became strong, and my legs felt longer and longer, as if charged with an energy rising from the earth. My back cracked and straightened out, as energy shot up from the ground through my neck and out the top of my head. I seemed to be very tall, my head was practically touching the ceiling, and I was looking down at her, still pointing my fingers, with the imaginary crystal in my hands.

Somehow that did the trick. Catalina stepped out of the range of my aim and gave me a frightened look. The next moment she was her confident self again, but I was raving mad.

“Juan did send you didn’t he?” she said. “You’re his ally.”

“You’re crazy,” I said lowering my hands. “Allies aren’t human.”

I tried to control my breathing and as I did I shrunk in size until I was no longer stretched out. I moved to the door on rubbery legs, just as it opened and Carlos stepped in. I felt so relieved that I hadn’t time to consider what had happened. This feeling of being stretched out, was familiar. I had felt it before although I didn’t know where or when.

“That witch wouldn’t let me leave,” I mumbled to Carlos. “So I nearly zapped her with my crystals.”

I didn’t know what I was saying. My hands were like ice. My teeth were chattering; I was freezing cold.

Carlos took one look at Catalina, grabbed me by the arm and pulled me out of the house. I could hear the woman’s eerie laughter following us all the way to the car.

“That woman is insane,” I gasped. “She wouldn’t let me leave. She kept on insisting that don Juan sent me to steal her power. I don’t know what come over me. I think I hallucinated out of sheer anger or fright. I was so angry I nearly went through the roof, and I don’t mean that figuratively.”

“Catalina is the north wind,” Carlos said. “And very dangerous.”

“Then why did you bring me to her?” I demanded. “She seemed so friendly and competent at first.”

“Because she has power,” he replied, “I thought you might see how a real *stalker* operates. You saw her in action.”

“I certainly did, but wasn’t that dangerous?” I asked. “She knew I didn’t come there just for my flea bitten legs. Although she did give me some lotion which I left in the house.”

“As long as she didn’t suspect you were with me, I thought you would be safe, but I see I was wrong. She saw through you right way.”

“Not right away,” I corrected him. “Only later, as I was about to leave.”

When we got in the car, Carlos asked me to recount everything that happened from the moment I entered the house, which I did to the best of my recollection.

"It all started out so amicably, I had to keep from laughing because I thought she had wanted me to keep my head up throughout the session for some mysterious reason. So I held this awkward position for as long as my neck could stand it. Then when I realized my error, I couldn't help giggling."

"That must have been what threw her off the track," Carlos said. "You laughing, and keeping your stomach tense. She couldn't really *see* inside you until you relaxed your body. Then she could *see* you weren't the same as everyone else."

"What do you mean?"

"Catalina, being a *seer,* could *see* that your energy doesn't flow the same way as her other patients."

"What do you mean it doesn't flow the same way? How is it different?"

"It isn't quite the human pattern of energetic movement," Carlos said. "That's what gave her the idea that you were don Juan's *ally*."

"She certainly did get suspicious. She kept asking me if don Juan had sent me, and I kept insisting that he didn't. Then she really got angry and accused me of coming to steal her power, which certainly wasn't the case."

Carlos listened to the rest of my account in silence, especially when I told him about the strange man in the back of her house. My teeth were still chattering; just the thought of that woman and her protector made me shiver. North wind or not, she certainly could make someone freeze to the core. Carlos said I shouldn't talk about her anymore, because the more - we talked about her, the easier it was for her to track us through our thoughts.

"You mean she's going to follow us?"

"She's a powerful witch. She can follow us to the ends of the earth if she has the mind to, but I think she just wants us out of this area. We'd better just get our things and leave."

"You mean she's running us out of town? What would happen if we didn't go?"

"She could make life very uncomfortable for us, especially at night. I wouldn't want to incur her wrath more than we already have."

“But I didn’t mean any harm,” I said. “I didn’t even know what I was supposed to look for.”

“Her *stalking* techniques,” Carlos reminded me.

“Like what?”

“Didn’t you notice her appearance? Was she old or young? Confident or at ease?”

“She was very beautiful and confident and at ease. I liked her. I don’t know why she reacted as she did. Are you sure we shouldn’t go back and talk to her? Straighten things out?”

“Believe me, it’s better not to antagonize her further. There’s no end to her power. You saw how young she made herself look.”

“What do you mean, ‘made herself look?’ How old is she?”

“She’s the *nagual* Julian’s cohort. That makes her very, very old.”

“That would make her over a hundred,” I gasped. “But she didn’t look a day over forty!”

“Exactly. We’ll leave here right away.”

“Do you think she’ll let us go?”

“Your display of the *double* caught her off guard. I saw the tail end of it. You must have put the fear of the devil in her.”

"What display? All I wanted to do was to get out of there.”

“Something came to your rescue, and it wasn’t me.”

“Where will we go?” I asked.

“We have two choices,” Carlos said. “We can either go north to Los Angeles, or we can go south to Guadalajara.”

Just then a crow alighted from a tree branch and flew toward the hills in the distance. I opened my compass and checked the direction; it was flying due south.

“My feeling is we still have unfinished business in Mexico,” Carlos said as the car picked up speed.

## Chapter 16: The Marketplace

We drove long into the night without stopping. I was afraid to close my eyes even for an instant for fear of seeing the face of the witch, Catalina. Even with my eyes open, I could not get her visage out of my mind. She had worked herself into my thoughts and had gotten a foothold there, as if she had left her energy inside me, or had removed something of mine that was vital for my well being. I was certain she was doing witchcraft on the level of the invisible, and all my efforts went to fighting an exhausting battle of the will. Carlos was right, she was pursuing us, and I had a gnawing anxiety that if I fell asleep, something terrible would happen.

For an instant my eyes drooped and in my drowsy state, the smudges of dirt and light reflected on the windshield became the awesome face of Catalina with large teeth and glowing eyes. The trees outside were her black hair flowing like a banshee. I shook my head to dispel her image, yet I couldn’t help being obsessed with what had happened.

Now her face was burned into my memory forever, like a flame after staring at it too long. I felt like a moth flying erratically around a light bulb; unable to break the fixation I had with that woman and her power. Also, I couldn’t help worrying about the luminous worms that she had said were draining my energy. I thought I had gotten rid of all of them during the *recapitulation* I had done under Clara’s guidance, but seven years had not elapsed, and according to the sorcerers, that was the duration for luminous worms existing inside a woman’s womb.

All I could think of was that Catalina had “awakened” the luminous worms in my stomach by massaging it. I thought of the girl in the store who wanted to go the United States with Carlos. I felt a pang of jealousy and hated myself for feeling that way. The witch, Catalina had me pegged. In spite of my denying it, I was still attached to men, and being loved and accepted was prominent, despite anything I said or did to the contrary.

I tried to think of other things, but the darkness around us was too engulfing. It seemed to be darker than a normal night. That worried me. I glanced over at Carlos but he was as worried and preoccupied as I was. For distraction, I asked him to describe the kinship system of the Yaqui Indians, and whether they had the mother-in-law “joking relationship” pattern, predominant in so many other cultures.

“Is there mother-in-law avoidance among the Yaqui?” I asked.

Carlos looked at me as if I were a cockroach.

“I mean according to Malinowsky, based on his work in the Trobriand Islands, there is usually an avoidance structure set up between the husband and the wife’s mother. Or is between the mother’s brother and the sister’s daughter? That would be an incest taboo since it would make him her uncle.”

“It’s better just to keep quiet, rather than to talk nonsense,” Carlos said turning his eyes back to the road.

I felt a jolt. I knew he was angry with me because of the luminous worm. I felt like a traitor, guilty of still being energetically attached to men that, by now, I didn’t give a fig about. I had one foot in the world of sorcery, the other gangrenous one, was immersed in the world of human affairs. Upon more soul searching, I realized I was still concerned with finding love, thinking of who will take care of me in times of need, and what will happen to me if I didn’t succeed in the sorcerer’s world. I was investing, expecting rewards for my efforts, and when no rewards were forthcoming, I tended to give up and revert back to my familiar pattern of behavior.

As we drove in the dark, memories came back to haunt me. I couldn’t believe they still had such a powerful emotional valence. I was certain Catalina had stirred up a can of worms during her treatment, and because of it, I could remember every detail of things that had taken place years ago.

I was fourteen, banging on the church doors at two o’clock in the morning wanting desperately to have a priest hear my confession. I couldn’t take it any longer. I was afraid I would die in the night and be condemned to eternal hell for doing the things the tragic couple in Father O’Brien's Sunday sermon had done. That Sunday at mass he had told us what had happened to two teenagers in his previous parish who had gone on a drive up the mountains to do ‘shameful’ things. While they were engrossed in petting and kissing, and other things which he left deliberately vague, the hand-break had worked itself loose and the car rolled down the mountain side, killing the young people instantly. When their bodies were found, to the shock of their parents, they were in various states of undress. Father O’Brien had said that their death had come so suddenly that they didn’t even have time to make an act of contrition, and now their souls are in perpetual agony.

The doors of the church had been locked and no one came to hear my confession. I got tired of pounding and became so enraged that I swore that I would never expect anything from the church again. God had closed his heart to me in my hour of need and I would do the same to him forever. I gave the thick wooden door a sound kick, spat on the ground, and because I was so agitated and needed to relieve myself, I squatted down and urinated right there on the church steps. I never went to confession again, and to my mother's profound distress, I decided to sleep late every Sunday and skip mass altogether.

When I recounted this event to Clara, she said that I was lucky that no priest had been there to open the church door. For, to confess and throw oneself on the mercy of a priest or God, himself, in a moment of weakness was the worst thing anyone could do. She said that contrary to what I might have thought at the time, power had not deserted me after all, because by urinating on the church steps I broke my ties with the church forever. She had assured me that urinating is one of the best ways sorcerers have of severing their connections with things.

"I too had an awful time disassociating myself from the Church," she had revealed. "I used to look forward to Sunday mass so I could meet with friends. Then I would go to their houses and eat and gossip all afternoon. That was the only enjoyment I had in my life, so I clung to it like there's no tomorrow."

"How did you break that habit?" I asked.

"My teacher, the *nagual* Julian, had me collect all my piss in jars for days. Then, late one night, I had to go to the church of my home town and when no one was around I had to till all the holy water basins with urine and also the baptismal fount. Then I had to go up to the altar and fill the chalices and add some piss to the incense dispenser. Imagine the next morning, for he had me go on a Saturday, the surprise of the priest and parishioners when they blessed themselves with my piss. I didn't see the humor of it at the time, because I was frightened to death and felt guilty for years afterward over committing holy sacrilege, but the *nagual* Julian, said that that is exactly what we do, we try to bless ourselves and become holy using someone else's piss as if it were sacred. Years later I saw the irony of it and the touch of genius in the *nagual*'s *stalker's* plan. You, on the other hand, had followed no plan; you simply went there to relieve yourself and the spirit took care of the rest, without you even knowing it."

As we drove in an uneasy silence, I breathed in the memories and softly exhaled them. Several hours later we arrived at the city of Los Moches. We stopped at a modern all-night diner to eat. I was ravenous. My legs were itching terribly out of guilt, tension and lack of sleep. I almost wished I had not left Catalina's potion in her house. Yet I had been told never to accept food or drink from anyone, and certainly not medicine. Who could say what that lotion contained or might have done to me after la Catalina's wrathful outburst.

We ordered bacon and eggs in the well-lit coffee shop. Carlos seemed tired, but I was relieved to see that he too was ravenous. Somehow, we still had our appetites, so things could not have been totally out of control, During the meal I kept reaching down to scratch my legs because my Levi's rubbed against the bites, making them itch all the more.

"I know a pharmacy in this town," Carlos said, noticing my discomfort. "When they open in the morning, we'll go there. There is also a curer who works in the herb market..."

I couldn't believe my ears. "Not another curer," I said adamantly. "I simply refuse to go."

"No, this is different," Carlos assured me. "He's an herbalist. He has studied pharmacology and medicinal plants. He's very knowledgeable. Besides, it's a good idea to cancel out the powerful effect Catalina had on you."

This was the first time since leaving Sonora that Carlos had mention the sorceress's name. I thought that perhaps we had put enough distance between us to neutralize the pull of her power.

"Alright, if you think it's a good idea," I said, rubbing my calf against the table leg. "How did la Catalina get to be so powerful?" I asked.

"Every morning before dawn she walks five miles to a hilltop and stands there naked to absorb the energy of the earth and wind," he replied.

"How do you know that?" I asked. "Have you seen her naked?"

Carlos laughed uneasily. "No. Don Juan told me. She is like a cousin to his line. Although, as I said, she really belongs with the *nagual* Julian's party."

"Why didn't she go with them when they left the world?"

"She wasn't ready. She still wanted to do things in the world, I suppose."

We checked into a motel and I spent the rest of the night in a fitful sleep. I felt that there was a hoard of people in the room. If I opened my eyes quickly, I could see some of them standing next to my bed, for they couldn't vanish fast enough, and I could certainly hear them whispering. Don Juan was there, and two other men; all three of them were wearing suits. I sensed their presence and their bulk but I could not make out their faces, although I thought one of them was the man Catalina had called her “protector.”

At one point in my sleep, I was curled up on my left side, shivering like a dog from the cold. One of the men was poking me with a walking stick to see if I would awake. I felt and could see and hear what they were doing, but I could not move. I decided to feign sleep so I could eavesdrop on what they were saying, for I knew they were whispering about me.

“She’s still stuck on what happened in high school,” don Juan said, annoyed.

“She can’t stop indulging,” another one said.

“Idiot,” the man that was poking me said. “That’s what a Catholic upbringing will do. There is no end to her self-pity. It wasn’t as though she gave herself to Father O’Brien.”

“In her mind she did,” someone said in a pathetic tone that made everyone laugh.

I must have made some sort of movement, because someone asked, “do you suppose she can hear us?”

“I wouldn’t put it past Taisha,” don Juan replied. “She’s pretty sneaky. Let’s talk to her; maybe we can pour some sense into her.”

Then they started talking to me and telling me things; what to do to straighten out my life; how important it was to let go of the past and not cling to memories; and things about the *recapitulation*, which they said was a never-ending process, I sensed their strength and fairness and I felt safe in their presence, Don Juan was so indifferent and non-judgmental that I was relieved. I knew that if someone so noble didn’t give a hoot about what I was or did, that it couldn’t be that bad. They must be right, I was only indulging.

They told me many things, about myself and about Carlos and of things to come, but I knew I would not be able to remember even a fraction of what they had said, and then someone did something that I would remember always. He began to sing a song. It was a song about saying goodbye and leaving memories behind, even the happy ones that made our hearts laugh. The song was so strange, because it recounted specific moments I had lived. It was as if that song was tailor made for my life and the words described what I was feeling in the deepest part of me.

Of course, I began to cry, not because it was a sad song, but because it was about me. It was a song of making peace with one's heart and with lost youth. It was a song of liberation, beautiful and strong for it captured the essence of the moment. It summed up the temporariness of life. Listening to it, I felt purged and a deep sense of gratitude and love welled up for those who were helping me for no reason at ail. That simple tune had reached places no words could have touched.

The next morning I remembered what had happened in the room the night before, I wanted to write down everything so that I could later make sense out of it, and follow the advice they had given me, but all I could recapture was the essence of some of the things they told me, and, of course, the song which was still in my mind weaving it's melodic spell.

After breakfast, we drove to the center of town, parked the car near the plaza and walked to the marketplace.

“This person has a stall in the market where he sells medicinal herbs,” Carlos said. “I think it's in this aisle if I'm not mistaken,”

We walked passed the rows of fruit vendors and a stand that sold poultry. Chickens were hanging upside down with their heads chopped off and blood was dripping into a pan below. I became queasy. It was not a pleasant sight to see so soon after breakfast.

Carlos make some inquiries as to whether the man we were looking for was there that day. A stocky woman with a red ribbon braided into her two long plaits, pointed to a stand at the end of the row. It was more than a stand; it was almost a small consultation room, portioned off by plywood and curtains. There was a sign on the curtain, saying “the doctor is out.”

“The curer will be back shortly,” said a thin gaunt youth who was the curer's assistant.

He led us behind the curtain and asked me to sit down on a crate. A hot breeze came thorough the opening of the fabric making the windowless quarters even stuffier. The cement floor was swept clean and there was an altar with wilted flowers and a statue of the virgin and some drooping candles. A trunk was the only bulky piece in the area, other than the crates and a chair. On it the curer had laid out his paraphernalia. Stacked against one wall were dried herbs tied together with pieces of red yarn. I didn't recognize any of the herbs, except for the angelica which I had gone to find in a stream bed with don Juan. Next to the dried herbs was a granite mortar and pestle for grinding medicines to a powder. A row of neatly labeled jars with different powdered herbs, others in roots form, and still others in leaves, lined the wall.

I shifted my position on the Pepsi Cola crate, or rather leaned over to watch the flickering flame of the candles that the assistant had lit on the shrine. My legs itched madly and it was all I could do to keep from scratching them. Carlos had bought me a pair of white cotton mittens to wear so that if I did scratch, I would not draw blood and scar my legs. I took the mittens from my pocket and put them on just in case I had a fit of itching I could not control. I looked like I had white cat's paws.

"I'll go see if I can find the curer," Carlos said.

I insisted that he stay with me and not wander off like he did at doña Catalina's house. As we discussed this, the curtain opened and a stooped woman supporting herself on a crooked cane stepped into the inner room. It was all she could do to walk. The assistant greeted her warmly and helped her to the sole chair that Carlos had vacated.

"Is she the curer?" I asked Carlos in dismay.

Carlos shook his head. "I don't think so. She must be one of his patients."

But the assistant introduced her to us as the curer's wife. She kept raving about her husband's powers, saying that he had cured her son's shoulder which he had dislocated while digging an irrigation ditch.

"Why doesn't he cure her?" I whispered to Carlos? "She seems to be on her last leg."

The old woman smacked her lips and looked me up and down in disapproval. I sensed she distinctly disliked Americans with their soft, cushioned ways. I wasn't about to antagonize anyone after the experience with doña Catalina, so I said "buenos dias," and smiled as graciously as I could.

She nodded and said "buenos dias," but did not smile.

The curer must be ancient if that is his wife, I thought. Just then, a sprite man, perhaps in his late forties, entered through the curtain. He was tall for a Mexican, lean, and he exuded a sort of wiry vitality. He had a pointed well trimmed beard giving me the impression of a Spanish gentleman on leave from his hacienda, and like the Spaniards, his skin was light. His eyes were friendly and he had well marked laugh lines around his eyes and mouth giving him a mischievous appearance. He was dressed in charcoal trousers and a white tunic-like shirt with embroidery down the front that, with a little imagination, could pass for a doctor's smock.

Carlos, the curer, don Vicente, and his assistant chatted amicably in Spanish for a while as his wife, who looked more like his mother or even his grandmother, looked on in silence. Then the curer ceremoniously bowed and formally asked us permission to begin practicing his healing art. He was such a gentleman that I instinctively trusted him. His assistant had told us earlier, while his wife was informing us of his prowess, that he could diagnose illness by evaluating the color and shape of a person's energy that surrounds his body.

The curer started by staring at me as if assessing the state of my energy. I was worried about what he might see, especially after the clash with la Catalina. I would have hidden all the bad things if I could, including the foreign luminous worms, but how could one hide what was already invisible? The curer became foggy eyed and a bit groggy and he seemed to be looking right through me so there was no place to hide. I didn't like the way he was shaking his head in dismay. After an uneasy interval, he opened his eyes wider and with a frown whispered something to Carlos in Spanish.

"He believes it is a case of bewitchment," said Carlos.

"Witchcraft! I knew it. But he hasn't even looked at the flea bites yet." I began to roll up my pant legs.

The curer glanced at the red swollen bites and nodded as he repeated what he had said before, "Embrujamiento."

"Now he's certain it's witchcraft," Carlos said.

The old woman in the corner nodded in agreement.

"But doesn't witchcraft have to be done by an enemy?" I asked. "I don't have any enemies in Mexico, except maybe for Catalina, but I had the bites before I had the run in with her. So I know she didn't cause them."

"He thinks a jealous woman put the hex on you," said Carlos.

"I don't know any jealous women," I said, except for myself, I couldn't help thinking.

Don Vicente examined the bites carefully then took two white candles and ran them sideways up and down along my calves. He periodically shook the candles in the air as if to cast off the poison that the candles had attracted to them. Then he got a flask of yellowish liquid from the shrine, which he said was holy water, and sprinkled it on my legs. I cringed as if I were Satan himself, for I remembered Clara's story about urinating in the holy water founts in the church. I was certain that the liquid was the curer's own urine.

Then the assistant took from the top of the chest a rattle with a long handle and gave it to the curer who shook it vigorously all around my body. With eyes closed, don Vicente hummed a monotonous chant as he kept shaking the rattle as if to ward off evil spirits. The sound of the rattle made me remember the girl whom I had seen in the Yaqui store, the day we had bought our hats and the Pascola masks. I saw again the look of contempt the girl had given me while I was sitting in the front seat of the car, but I had already gotten bit, how could she have caused it? I was thinking of the possibilities of illnesses caused by the evil eye, when don Vicente interrupted my thoughts.

"Someone wants you to be as miserable as can be," he said. "They may not have caused the bites, but they are certainly keeping them from healing."

I wondered if Don Vicente's sinister diagnosis was correct. I had heard witchcraft discussed in my anthropology courses, but I had always thought that curses and the evil eye were concepts primitive people used to explain the world of cause and effect because they were somehow lacking in rationality or logical thought. Could someone's ill feelings really affect another person physically? After meeting la Catalina, I was certain of it.

I caught myself. It was all too easy to blame others for one's own carelessness or ill fortune. Was my discomfort really something a jealous woman had wished upon me or was it something I had brought upon myself. To see cause and effect on a supernatural plane, which could not be refuted, seemed to me an easy way to explain anything. I decided that the fleas had bitten me simply because my legs were there and uncovered. Yet the more I thought of the other people sitting in the same room, some wearing skirts with their legs also uncovered, I realized none of them had gotten bit. They were exposed to the same dirt floor, the same fleas; and it was true, the fleas had descend on me with a particular vengeance.

"What can I do about it?" I asked concerned, I hoped I would not have to kill a chicken or drink the blood of a goat or something of that nature.

Don Vicente put down the rattle and searched through his trunk. He brought out an amulet, on a string, made of a small seed that looked strangely like. an eye. He said I needed to wear it around my neck for nine days, then the swelling and itching would be gone. The amulet called "eye of the deer" would counteract the force of the venom sent by the evil wisher, whom he said I had had contact with. The curer also gave me a holy card of Saint George, slaying a dragon which I was to place under my pillow while I slept.

I put the holy card in my pocket and rolled down my pant legs. I decided to follow don Vicente's instructions to the letter, even though I knew that the dragon slayer had not been a real saint at all, because according to the Catholic Church, Saint George had never officially existed and neither had dragons. I realized that what was superstition in one culture was reality in another. Besides, what did I know about the supernatural world and it's ramifications? I was trapped in ordinary life thinking of myself, with no hope of escaping, unless something drastic happened.

We stepped out of the curtained off area which had been a sanctuary apart from the world, and entered the hustle and bustle of the market place. Don Vicente addressed Carlos in private in friendly tones. From time to time he glanced at me and chuckled. I wondered if he was telling him more about the evil eye and what to do to counteract it.

His wife had followed us through the curtain and was slowly walking away, stopping to browse at several of the stalls. I noticed then something strange. She was no longer stooped over, and she had lost her limp and had abandoned her cane. From where I stood she seemed like a young woman with an exquisitely straight back. I wanted to follow her around the market place to see what she was up to and how she had accomplished her remarkable metamorphosis, but Carlos came up to me and said it was time to go. I thanked don Vicente and we left.

"What did the curer say to you?" I asked as we stopped to buy some short stubby bananas at a stall outside the main market.

Carlos hesitated for a moment then said, "Don Vicente thinks you're a bit crazy and that's why you're so susceptible to witchcraft."

"What makes him think that?" I asked.

"He could tell from his *seeing* that your energy field is erratic. Something in you was hopping all over the place."

"How could he tell?"

"He could *see* it in your eyes."

Carlos peered at my eyes as if to see if what don Vicente had said was true. "He also said that if you don't do something about your indulging soon, your heath will be impaired. Then it will be difficult to cure you.”

“Well, if it’s a question of internal balance,” I said. “I’m a hopeless case. I just saw his wife walk away without a trace of a limp; and her back was completely straight. She wasn’t even using her cane.”

“What?”

“I said, his wife, when she walked down the isle wasn’t limping. And she wasn't stooped at all.”

“I think you’re beginning to see things,” Carlos said with a nervous laugh. “Either that, or don Vicente is right. Someone has bewitched you.”

## Chapter 17: Saying Goodbye

We continued hiking on trail that wound mostly downhill. The loose gravely rock made walking difficult and I had to be extremely careful not to slide. More than once I lost my footing on shale that turned into a small landslide, and I landed on my rear end. Instead of helping me up, Nelida scolded me for being clumsy. We came to a hut hidden in the underbrush. I expressed bewilderment that anyone would live in the desert so far from the nearest town.

“By now you ought to know that sorcerers’ houses are found where one least expected them,” she said.

“You mean sorcerers live here?” I said stopping in my tracks.

“They do. We’ll spend the night here and hike back early the next morning. Tomorrow our three day interlude will be over.”

I began rubbing my eyes and I told her that I cherished my time with her and did not want it to come to an end.

“Don’t indulge in sentimentality. You know that it’s in the nature of things to come to an end. Fortunately we already said goodbye.”

I assured her that I never said any such thing.

“To cling is indulging,” she said firmly and walked to the door of the hut. “You’re riding on the sorcerer’s power now, but when you return to Los Angeles, you’ll have to rely on your own power. Therefore, you must behave impeccably or else the bird of freedom will fly away and you will be left feeling sorry for yourself under the tree.”

Nelida's words gave me a sobering jolt. The thought that the spirit would fly away and I would never see her again was more frightening than anything I could imagine.

We entered the adobe hut; it was cool inside. The single room was sparsely furnished. Only a mattress with a folded blanket and a carved wooden trunk lined the walls. A table and two orange crates set on their sides were in the center of the room. Nelida sat on the mattress and brought her knees to her chest and folded her arms around them, a position she had taught me to assume whenever I wanted to relax. The bent legs covered the energy centers along the front of the body and prevented energy from dissipating through agitation.

“We are in the hands of power and we must humbly accept what it offers us,” she continued in a gentler tone. “We control nothing and must not cling, for in the circular course of things, the end is always one with the beginning.”

“But how do we know when the end will come, or if there will be another beginning?” I asked.

Nelida straightened her long legs and looked at me squarely.

“You prepare for the end by always saying goodbye at the beginning. You do this naturally, with as much flair and affection as if you were say hello.”

Something was forming in my thoughts. I saw what was coming, yet there was no power on earth to avert it. If I kept talking perhaps there was something I could hold on to after she was gone, if only her words. I told her that I didn’t understand how one could always be saying goodbye, when one didn’t know when one was leaving.

“But don’t you see, Taisha? You are leaving all the time. Every moment you are leaving one thing to embrace something else. The very act of going to something new means that you are saying farewell to that which you have left behind. If you never say your peace and voice you’re thanks, if you continually cling to what has passed, how can you ever have the energy to accept the marvelous present?”

“What exactly do you mean by clinging?” I asked doggedly, following her to the table.

Nelida explained that clinging was both a mental attitude and a physical sensation. Mentally, one is drawn back, again and again to something that is no longer in one's immediate surroundings. Physically, one becomes constricted, as one holds onto ideas or memories that are illusory. Both mental and physical constrictions reinforce each other, so that one is unable to open willingly and accept fully the new challenges that continually present themselves.

"If you cling, you are plagued with a sense of loss and longing," Nelida remarked sitting down on one of the orange crates. "So you always feel unfulfilled. It would be much wiser not to cling, but to simply let go. Then you won't feel that you have lost anything, for you have already made full use of whatever it was that left. My advice is to never hold on to anything beyond it's time or your time."

Nelida explained that saying goodbye at the same time as saying hello, is the *stalker's* art of recognizing and accepting life's impermanence.

"Nothing ever remains the same, but constant change should not effect a seasoned *stalker*, for when change comes he or she is ready."

"How can we be ready for change when we don't know what will happen next or where it will happen?"

Nelida grabbed my hand that was rubbing my eyes. Slapping it as one would slap a child, she said I must not rub in my agitation but allow the energy in my eyes to flow out freely.

"As *stalkers*, we are ready for change," Nelida continued in an even tone, "because we accept our fate, which is to evolve. We are able to shift our awareness easily and smoothly to match the events that are shifting around us. By being one with the moment, a *stalker* does not notice the change, and never feels a loss. Thus, our lives are always full and yet remain forever an open-ended question mark."

"I would feel more secure if our lives were contained in closed brackets," I mumbled.

"That is because you have grown accustomed to your prison bars. But when your life is a constant question mark, there is no telling what you are capable of doing. Perhaps, even escaping the ultimate exclamation point: our death!"

"What if you love someone or want something you can't have?" I argued. "Then you are bound to feel disappointed or cheated."

Nelida shook her head.

“You never want anything you can’t have,” she replied. “Just as you never want anything you can have. By *recapitulting* your life and practicing *not-doing*, you change your attitude, and by that I mean, your mind becomes fluid so you cling to nothing. Then whatever comes your way is more than enough. Nor do you expect anything to last. Then, whatever withdraws from you, has stayed longer than it's time, but your intrinsic energy never stays or leaves.”

“But you said we will have to leave tomorrow,” I protested. “I might never see you again.”

Nelida stood up and paused at the small window cut into the adobe. “Perhaps you will be gone but I will never have to leave this desert.”

“How can that be?”

“Simply because I was never here.”

I shivered. Nelida said this with such certainty that even if I wanted to doubt her, I couldn’t. Impulsively I embraced her. She was solid and yet indescribably empty to the touch. When I closed my eyes, I could no longer feel her. I realized then, that her presence in the room depended on visual and auditory clues that were, to a large extend, based on my memory of her, rather than on her actual existence. That thought gave me a jolt of genuine fright. Instinctively, I moved backwards a few steps.

“To be here and not here at the same time is what sorcerers mean by *stalking* with the *double*,” Nelida said. “It means that being is no more real than *not-being*.”

“There you go again, talking in riddles again,” I said, afraid she would vanish at any moment.

She looked at me as if impatient with my inability to understand.

“It means,” she continued when she saw in my face genuine confusion, “that not being here is as real as being here. The fact that this desert or this hut is something that surrounds me, something that I love profoundly, cannot be denied, but if another scene surrounds me, I will love it as deeply, for the feeling of affection is inside me, and only in the scene for as long as I choose to place it here.”

She looked at me solemnly. “It’s true, I take my *awareness* and *energy* with me wherever I go," she said. "I leave nothing behind. You, on the other hand, leave everything behind like a comet. Anyone can follow your trail. I call that lousy *stalking*."

"How can you not be and yet still feel affection?" I asked.

"That is the riddle of the heart that takes *stalkers* a lifetime to unravel," she said. "Someday you will understand it."

She took two china cups from a shelf and set them on the table along with a teapot. I was surprised to see that they were made of exquisitely fine porcelain, so out of place in an adobe shack. Their unexpected presence gave me a true jolt and I imagined for a moment that Nelida had plucked them out of the air, for I had not noticed them on the shelf, upon entering the room.

On a portable kerosene stove she set water to boil. As she prepared tea, I lifted up one of the cups to examine it. The blue and while porcelain was delicately shaped with a willow pattern design. I wondered if the tea set was an antique from the Ming Dynasty, in which case, it was priceless. "So much for sorcerers not being interested in personal possessions," I thought. Nelida answered my unvoiced question, saying she had acquired the tea set during her travels in the Orient. She added that it really didn't matter how valuable it was or how old it was because for her it was always here and always now.

Nelida filled my cup with tea with aromatic blossoms in it.

"This cup that was empty moments before, is now filled with tea," she said as she put down the pot, "or you can fill it with whatever substance you chose, but the cup is the same no matter what it contains, don't you agree?"

I nodded and waited for her to clarify her point.

Nelida explained that once a person has *recapitulated* and has acquired detachment, their *energy body* no longer shivers every time the world moves around them. Because they are empty and allow *intent* to move them, they have a center that is constant and seemingly does not move at all.

"Didn't anyone teach you about maintaining the center?" she asked, surprised.

I told her that Clara and Emilito had taught me many things including how to maintain one's equilibrium while climbing trees in order not to get dizzy or nauseous when hanging upside down. By focusing the gaze on a specific point, it appears as if the world is moving while the body remains stationary.

Nelida nodded when I had finished describing to her some of Emilito’s tree climbing precepts. She picked up her cup and took a sip. “Because the cup has no cracks, it can hold anything at all. You can empty it, or fill it and it is still the same cup. But if it had a crack in it, then you would noticed the tea dripping out little by little until it was gone. Then, the cup, if it could feel, would sense that it had lost something.”

I agreed that if it were in the nature of a cup to feel, that because of the crack and the tea tricking out, the cup would experience a sense of loss and might even feel unhappy, unfulfilled or nostalgic about the past.

“That is because the cup is cracked,” she said, peering at me, “but if you seal the crack, then when the cup is filled and emptied, it would not sense a loss because it is the nature of a cup to be empty or full. While it is not in the nature of a functional cup to be cracked or broken. A cup that has a hole or no bottom can no longer function for what it was intended, that is, to be a container.”

“I still don’t understand what that has to do with anything?”

Nelida explained that if the *energy body* has holes in it or is injured, the person feels the drainage of the life force and tries to hold back the inevitable loss by hoarding and clinging. What a person doesn’t realize is that it is not the fear of losing that makes him cling but the weakness of his energetic being that is the cause of his turmoil.

Nelida explained that all of us were like cups, some with cracks others with no bottoms, while still others were strong and intact.

“The strong ones never cling or feel a loss when things leave them,” Nelida said, “because regardless of whether they are empty or full their essential nature remains intact. Such people can come and go without the burdensome attitudes of the weak, who cling to every crumb that comes their way, always fearing that someone might take it away. They are like beggars who scramble for crumbs because they feel they will never eat again.”

“What can you do if you are a cup with a crack?” I asked. “Is there any hope for needy beggars?”

“Recapitulate! Do the *sorcery passes*. Empty and restore your energy. Forget about the tea and the water, the fruit juice that you can't hold. Don't try to become filled again and again; it will only seep out and exacerbate your sense of loss. Dedicate all your energy to revitalization, Then, when you are strong again, it won't matter whether you are holding grapefruit juice or water. You can be empty or full, but you are never possessive about anything or afraid to let go."

"Why are you no longer possessive?" I asked feeling intoxicated from the aromatic tea.

"Because you know that it is not what fills you that is important, but your link with *intent*. Practice *not-doing*, empty your cup to seal it. Once it is energetically sealed, then you'll know nothing is lacking."

Nelida explained that to be needy or greedy really means that one is energetically dependent on others for sustenance. Therefore, one is always at the mercy of someone else or begging for energetic handouts.

"But if you dip your cup into the vastness, then nothing can disturb or disappoint you. For then you are soaked in the source of all things. Then a person is never afraid of saying goodbye for he or she knows that ultimately there is nothing to leave and no place to go.""What about the saucers?" I asked.

Nelida laughed heartily as if I had said something hilariously funny.

"Toss them out!" she smiled. "We have no use for saucers. It is better to rest upon the vastness itself."

Nelida set her cup on the table and explained that to rest on the vastness, means to forget oneself so completely that there is no difference between oneself and one surroundings. Then the world conforms to our *intent*. When we take no notice of ourselves, then our timing is perfect; then we no longer know whether we are moving or being moved. Then the unfathomable guides and guards our being.

"But first we must rely on our *impeccability*," Nelida said. "Empty your cup though the *recapitulation* so you won't have the sensation of draining and losing. Then while you are empty you repair the damages to your *energy body* through the sorcery passes, finally, after you are energetically sound, and you are clear and at ease with yourself and others, then you can begin to spread that ease and clarity to all your enterprises and encounters. No matter what arises, a *stalker* will be able to handle it with the ease and delight that springs from the depth of *not-being*."

“What if the people I’m with are nervous and unhappy?” I asked, carefully setting my cup down on the table, Nelida filled it with more of the delicious tea. “Wouldn’t I be contaminated by their negative moods?” I was thinking of an incident that happened not long ago in the anthropology department.

I was riding up the elevator when Tim Howard, a graduate student corralled me and in an aggressive manner asked: “how come you’re always smiling? Did you discover the source of happiness?”

I became flustered. Immediately I began explaining that I didn’t realize I was always smiling, and demanded to know how feeling happy could be offensive, but by the time we got to the third floor, I was thoroughly depressed and depleted of energy.

“If you exude ease and delight from the depth of your being, you will contaminate others,” Nelida assured me.

“What if they are so strong that they sway me?” I insisted.

“There is no way anyone can affect a *stalker* because his warrior’s purpose cannot be swayed. Now, if you are cracked, or are on the look out to be liked or are investing and expecting payoffs, then everything seeps out or in and can affect you. As in the elevator, all your energy moves to the place of the damage to repair it but to no avail, for you cannot hold or change anything; nor can you seal anything when your are so full of yourself, but a complete nature holds itself within itself. It needs nothing added to it, nor can anything be taken away from it. Not even the feelings of acquiring or losing.”

Nelida reached across the table to affectionately pat my hand. She assured me that after *recapitulating* my *energy body* was fairly strong and that was why she could talk to me. It was wrong for me to persist in feeling weak merely out of habit.

“A person who is united with *intent* itself, enjoys the company of others but never clings or is needy, simply because her emptiness and fullness prevents her from knowing need or tenacity.”

Nelida explained that to fortify one’s *energy body* entails changing one’s behavior, and giving up the feelings of desperation that serve no purpose.

“Where does one begin?” I asked feeling overwhelmed.

Nelida smiled and said that the best way to consolidate one's *energy body* was through the *recapitulation*, resulting in a cleansing of the turmoil associated with daily existence.

"It is the dissolution of conflict and inner turmoil that puts the personal self to rest," Nelida said. "It results in merging of one's inner and outer worlds, so that what one thinks and does and says are the same as what happens."

It was getting dark. Nelida got up and pointed to the bed. "Have a good rest. I am going for a short walk. Adios."

"You mean 'hasta luego,' don't you?" I said.

Nelida stood for a moment and smiled. Then stepped out and closed the door behind her.

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When I awoke the next morning, Don Juan was standing in doorway peering at me. He said to get up for it was time to leave. We climbed down the canyon by a different trail and hiked back to his house. As we walked I was filled with a vibrant energy. I felt open, porous, and light.

I wanted to ask him where Nelida had gone and to tell him all the things she had said and what had happened at the ruins, when he stopped me with a flick of his hand. Suddenly, I couldn't put my recollections into words. I knew some things could never be forced into words and had to remain at the level of *silent knowledge*.

Carlos was waiting when we arrived at don Juan's house. My heart leapt with relief at seeing him again. It had only been three days, but it seemed to have been forever. He did not ask where I had been. It was the riddle of the heart that Nelida had said I would take a lifetime to unravel. Looking into the new *nagual*'s bright shiny eyes, I knew then it had to do with letting go of the self, and of accepting the gifts the *spirit* offered without question, without interfering.

## Chapter 18: Guadalajara

Carlos drove south on the Pan-American highway; he kept his eyes on the road and did not relax his concentration at all during the long hours of driving. I offered to relieve him at the wheel, but he refused, saying that it was dangerous for the inexperienced driver to negotiate the curves on Mexican roads, and we needed to get to a large city as fast as safety would allow.

As we drove, I had the feeling someone or something was following us, hovering outside on the passenger side. That feeling had made me so anxious that I had to struggle to keep my eyes open. I kept drifting off into a light sleep and found myself back in the Sonoran Desert floating over the chaparral. I could see rows of enormous agave cactus and clusters of tall saguaro, and the long brown lines of irrigation ditches. I knew something was wrong; I felt vaporous, as if I had no substance, or that the bulk of me was somewhere else.

When I was awake, I was disoriented; I couldn't think and could hardly formulate a coherent answer to Carlos's questions. He was asking me about my studies, what courses I planned to take in the fall. That world was so distant that I couldn't remember the course titles, the professor's names, or people I had had contact with at the University. I was tripping over my words as if I were drunk or had a speech impediment.

"You sound like my Turkish grandmother," Carlos said. "She would always mix up her p's and b's and twist words around. I used to be ashamed of her because I thought she had a heavy accent, but later I realized that she had aphasia."

"Well, I don't have aphasia," I said annoyed. "I just can't seem to focus my thoughts."

Carlos turned off onto a shoulder of the road, stopped the car and examined my pupils. He concluded that La Catalina had gotten a strong hold over me and that she wasn't about to let go.

"What does she want with us?" I asked, my teeth chattering from an inner chill.

"Your sudden visit and suspicious behavior was interpreted as an attempt to snatch her power," Carlos said. "She acted in the only way she knew how to defend herself from an inexplicable force."

Carlos reiterated that we had to put even greater distance between us, and quickly too, for we had offended La Catalina by not making it plain who we were and why we had come to see her.

"Why would she want to hurt us if she is part of don Juan's group of sorcerers?" I asked.

"It's not a question of what la Catalina wants," Carlos explained, "but once certain forces are set into motion, there is nothing she can do to retract them. It is like the *recapitulation*. Once your *intent* and breath are sent out, whoever happens to be in it's path is done for."

“Do you think she might retaliate against her will?”

Carlos started the car again. “There’s no way of know what she might do,” he said. “Therefore we must continue our journey and rally our power.”

When I asked Carlos how far south we were fleeing, he said we would keep driving until we ran out of power, or until something told us to stop. I had the gnawing suspicion that I had already run out of power. From the time of the gathering in the house in Sonora where the fleas had attacked me, to the encounter with la Catalina, things had not turned out well, I rationalized these ill fated outcomes, as a result of not having been adequately prepared as to who these people were, or what I was to expect. Had I been better informed, I would have handled the encounters with more finesse. Yet at the same time, I knew that in the sorcerer’s world the test of a warrior’s metal always came disguised, to see if one could act impeccably without warning or preparation, but simply from an inner conviction.

It was late afternoon by the time we reached Guadalajara. Carlos parked the car near the Hotel de Mendoza, near the long park-like plaza Tapatia. We got out and walked to an area where there was a gazebo set on a raised platform with steps leading up to it that served as a stage. An orchestra had assembled; the musicians seemed to be preparing to play, for they were warming up their violins and trumpets. A good sized crowd had gathered to hear the concert and to stroll along the walkways of the park.

Massive Colonial style buildings surrounded the park. To the west was the Degollado Theater, the home of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Jalisco. Further on we could see parts of the government palace. Streets veered off in various directions from the central plaza. To my left was an enormous building with carved wooden doors opening to a series of steps. It seemed to be a government building of some kind with a statue of a man riding a horse in front of a fountain. Carlos wanted to head for the statue.

“Can we stay to listen to the concert?” I asked.

Carlos nodded. We looked for a bench where we could sit and listen to the music, but they were all occupied by families and young couples. I realized we were not in the best spot to listen to the orchestra. The place was packed with old men with walking sticks, grandmothers looking after boisterous children, and young women who were parading before the appreciative stares of young men.

The paths were crowded too with vendors selling balloons, artificial flowers, and pinwheels.

Other stands and carts were selling cotton candy, fruit, ice cream, and all kinds of wares, including canaries in small cages. We stood for a while waiting for the orchestra to begin. In the distance I could see the twin towers of the cathedral. It was a striking mixture of Byzantine, Gothic and Arabic styles. Carlos said that the 200 foot towers were erected in l848, after an earthquake had destroyed the original structures. The towers were beautifully decorated with yellow and blue tiles that glistened in the afternoon sun.

In the opposite direction, across the park, east according to my compass, there were three story houses with bars covering the windows. Flowering geranium pots and other plants graced the second story balconies accessed by beautiful french doors opening out to them. One house in particular caught my attention. It's shutters were freshly painted blue. It seemed to exude vitality from every stone. Compared to it, the other houses seemed drab and old.

“The orchestra is about to start playing,” Carlos said taking my arm. “Shall we walk around the plaza to find a better spot?”

We began to stroll, but I grew more and more uneasy, I had the unsettling sensation that I was being followed or that someone I couldn’t see was watching me. I grew self conscious, irritable, for I knew whoever it was was scrutinizing me at a deep level. I had all but forgotten la Catalina in the excitement of the park, but this was something else having nothing to do with la Catalina’s reprisals.

I looked at the people seated or the ones standing on the benches so they could see the musicians, but I didn’t recognize anyone. I saw children with their mothers, teenagers out on dates, an elderly woman and a gentleman. Then there was a strong and attractive middle aged woman, carrying a mesh shopping bag full of parcels, I saw nothing out of the ordinary.

The band had begun playing. They sounded our of tune. They were playing the Vienna Waltz by Strauss, which had been one of my mother’s favorite piece. She had played it over and over on the piano so that it had become ingrained in my memory. I was mulling over as to how it ought to be played when a man approached Carlos and began talking to him. At first I didn’t pay any attention, for I was engrossed in finding fault with the musicians. but when I turned and saw the familiar face almost completely hidden by a sombrero, my mouth fell open.

“Emilito!” I cried. “What are you doing here? Is it really you?”

We stood there for a moment staring at each other. Tears came to my eyes for I had thought I would never see him again.

“Indulging as usual,” he said and winked devilishly. “Have you been practicing what I taught you?”

“I haven’t been,” I confessed, “but I am going to the university as you recommended.”

Emilito nodded. He whispered something to Carlos who suddenly excused himself, saying he had an errand to run, but that he would join up with us later. I was so happy to see Emilito that I barely heard what Carlos was saying. I started to follow him as he left, but Emilito grabbed my arm to stop me.

“Let him go, dear. Don’t you like my company?” He sounded actually peeved like a child who was about to be abandoned.

He prodded me in the opposite direction toward another bench, some distance away from the orchestra. I turned to see if I could catch sight of Carlos to ask him not to leave me alone in an unknown city, but he had already disappeared in the crowd.

“You’ll see him later,” Emilito assured me. “Now what about your practice of *stalking* with the *double*?”

“What do you mean?”

“*Stalking* with the *double*,” he repeated with an exasperated click of his tongue. “Have you been practicing it?”

I was at a loss as to what to say. I tried to remember what he had taught me with respect to that subject, but my mind was a mass of confusion. I looked at his wide lemur-like eyes and noted the disappointment in, them. I wanted to say that I understood what he meant and that I was practicing diligently every day, but that would have been dishonest, so I said,”I don’t honestly know if I’ve been *stalking* with the *double*.”

He recommended that I lean back, on the bench, close my eyes and try to remember what he had taught me on that subject.

“Remember how to find things, how to get things done, how to move things with a force stemming from inner silence and beyond?” he suggested.

I closed my eyes and tried to settle my erratic breathing. Then as I drifted off into a restful state, I remembered something that Emilito had said a long ago while I was living in the trees under his care. I had complained that since I could not leave the tree-house, which had been our agreement, I was unable to practice the martial art forms Clara had taught me. For that I needed plenty of space and preferably a hard wood floor.

“Practice martial arts with your *double*,” Emilito had recommended. “That’s the best sort of practice anyway.”

“How do I practice martial arts with my *double* when I can’t even leave the tree house?” I ashed.

Emilito had laughed and to my amazement had executed a series of the most graceful and impossible bodily movements I had ever seen. Right there beneath the tree-house, Emilito had flipped backwards and then laterally in circles, rotating his body in a horizontal plane like a Frisbee, and I knew he wasn’t using pulleys or ropes, or extra fast film to speed up his movements as they did in martial art movies to give the impression of actors defying gravity. Watching Emilito’s superb movements from the treehouse, was sheer delight. “Why hadn’t he taught me before?” I lamented. Now that I couldn’t leave the trees, it was too late to learn how to spin in the air.

“Practice these movements with your *double*,” he had repeated and again showed me the lateral spinning motion.

“But how do I practice that without falling out of the tree?” I had asked.

“Use your imagination and intend it,” he said. “Intent! Intent! Intent!” he called out in a shrill bird like squawk as he walked toward the house.

That night and all the subsequent nights for several weeks, before falling asleep, I visualized the movements Emilito had demonstrated. I saw myself doing them over and over until I found myself doing them in my dreams. With some practice, my dream body could move any way I willed it to. I found I could do the most elaborate flips and back bends, I could leap from the ground to the tree house and back down again in a single bound, using not pulleys and ropes but the energy from my midsection, and I could do a thing I had always wanted to do, but could never accomplish with my waking body, no matter how hard I stretched, and that was touching my chin to my toes. After that, Emilito would show me movements on a regular basis, which I would then practice first by visualizing them, and then by repeating them over and over until I could do them in my *dreaming*.

I opened my eyes and told Emilito what I had remembered; that while I was in the treehouse, I practicing long sequences of movements, putting the gravity defying techniques that he had shown me, together in new patterns, so that every night I would dream of doing combinations of movement.

“That’s *stalking* with the *double*,” Emilito said, pleased. “That’s sending out the *double* as a scout to put things in order. Then when you do it, it’s a cinch because the energy has already been deployed to produce a certain effect. The rest follows by itself.”

I realized that in spite of my reason, that was the way I did practically everything, from practicing martial arts movements, to writing a term paper, or giving a report in a class, or designing a dress, or composing a poem or cooking a stew. Following the pattern I had learned under Emilito’s tutelage, I always set up the form at night, in a quiet restful state. I laid the foundation and imagined myself going through the motions of doing that particular thing.

For example, if I were going to make a dress, I would go through all the steps in the exact order I needed to do them. I would see myself selecting the proper material, folding it, cutting it, taking the pieces in their proper order and sewing them together. I would see which way would be better and make changes if I needed to, repeating the sequence in a different order. A voice would tell me if there was a better way of doing it, and when I had it completed, in the most economical and efficient way, whenever I felt it was the proper time, I would allow the activity to unfold to it's completion. It was as if the thing were already done and I was only the agent, silently going through the motions of it's execution.

The same thing would happen if I had to give a report in one of my classes. I would visualize myself writing the paper while in a light sleep. Or rather, I would blank my mind and something would isolate a topic and tell me how to organize it in the most precise and understandable manner. When it was arranged, I would put it down on paper exactly as I had written it with my dream body. I realized that the years of *recapitulation* had enabled me to visualize in detail entire scenes and long sequences with no difficulty at all. Something would tell me what to say or do and I would see and hear myself saying and doing it. Then when it came time to give the report, or do the activity, I proceeded as if it were already completed.

“*Stalking* with the *double* comes in handy when you’re gong to school,” Emilito said after I had explained to him how I proceeded. “It bypasses thought and goes directly to the source of energy that enables us to act most efficiently.”

“I guess I do use *intent*,” I said. “If I need to find something, like a specific blouse to match a skirt, say out loud ‘I need a blouse,’ or ‘find me the perfect blouse,’ and the force out there puts it in front of me by making me encounter it sometime during the course of events. I don’t have to do anything. It brings it to me.”

Emilito said that was the art of *stalking*: to reach the point when one does nothing, but allows the power of *intent* to alter reality so subtly that the intended items appear as elements in one’s daily life. It is a harmonious process of changing perception via the force of *intent*, something so mysterious and subtle that it seems as if it comes out of nowhere, Emilito stressed that that force only responds if one is impeccable in one’s daily life, and if one has no attachment to things. Feelings of desperation, or clinging or greed or need will thwart the free flowing energy required for *intent* to respond to one’s silent bidding.

“You must not be that un-impeccable,” Emilito said, “if you can *stalk* with the *double* using the power of *intent*. Or perhaps you are the apple of someone's eye and someone is lending you their power.”

“What do you mean?” I asked. “Who would be lending me their power? Nelida?”

“I’m not talking about Neilda,” Emilito said. “She watches over you, to see that you don’t stray from the path. This sounds like something different.”

He sniffed the air a couple of times as if trying to determine something. In fact, he sniffed in all directions as if he were smelling something intangible.

“What are you doing, Emilito?” I asked. “Did I forget to put on deodorant this morning?”

“I wouldn’t know about that,” he said. “I’m interested in determining who is lending you their power.”

“Perhaps it’s Mr. Abelar, the *nagual* Juan Matus or the new *nagual*, Carlos.”

“Juan Matus is your teacher, true,” Emilito said. “But he is pretty miserly with his power. He wouldn’t lend it for the hell of it, and Carlos is in charge of leading you to freedom, but this smells like something else. Like someone has made you a gift, and you don’t even know it.”

All of a sudden I was afraid, sensing something that was beyond words. It was so dark, that it came from the darkness itself.

“Someone has been teaching you things at night,” Emilito announced like an oracle. “And I know who it must be.”

"Who, Emilito? Tell me."

"It's not up to me to spill the beans," he said, "If your true benefactor wants to reveal himself, then so be it. If not, let it remain a secret."

At the mere mention of the word "secret" I registered a chill. My whole body shivered from the marrow of my bones outward. I experienced what don Juan had called the "warrior's shiver." He said it happened when a force moves the ethereal body directly and so powerfully that it is then registered by the physical body.

"Can't you tell me, who you are referring to, Emilito? Now I'm scared to even go to sleep at night."

"And you should be," he said seriously. "Someone has been showing you how to manipulate *intent*, but not merely from the treetops, but from the deepest levels of the beyond."

"So how come I don't remember or even know what you're talking about?" I asked, "and how come I'm still such a shitbird?"

"Because that someone is teaching your *double* directly. Very sneaky. He must come while you're in a profound sleep. That's why you don't remember, and that's why you can afford to be so indulging. If you had a bit more energy you would be aware and you would know who I'm talking about, because you *double* already knows him intimately."

"Him? Is it a he?"

I had still thought it might be Nelida, but whenever she comes in my dreams, I am usually aware of her presence. There is nothing secretive about her. On the contrary, she is open and lighthearted, almost to the point of being nurturing in an indifferent sort of way. This other force sounded all too sinister. I didn't relish the idea that someone or something was manipulating my energy in my sleep, and especially not a male figure.

"Sinister is right!" Emilito said with such an exaggerated warrior's shiver that his body vibrated from head to toe. It was so comical that, I laughed out of sheer nervousness. "The real mystery is why would he be all that interested in the likes of you?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," I said. "Nobody is interested in me. That's just the trouble. I'm really an inconsequential piece of shit overlooked by everyone."

I said that with all the self-pity I could muster, for I felt I had been abandoned by Emilito, Nelida, Clara and don Juan.

“Now, now, tree dweller, let’s have none of that self pity crap,” Emilito said with a nudge that almost pushed me off the bench. “No one abandoned you. You have your own path, and it’s not here with us. Whatever we teach you has to be to your dream body or *double*, and you don’t have to be in Mexico for that.”

“Why not?”

“A stupid question,” Emilito said, “because as you know very well, the dream body is not bound by space and time. We can meet anywhere and any time, even the city of the angels.”

The way he said that, had made Los Angeles sound utterly enchanting.

“I know that, Emilito. What I meant was why do you have to teach the *double*? Why can’t you just teach my physical body directly, the way you used to. Why can’t I stay here in Guadalajara with you?”

Emilito gave me mock look of horror. “What do you have in mind?” he said moving to his side of the bench, “and what makes you think I ever taught your physical body? Do you know something that I don’t?”

“No, I don’t mean it like that. I know you’re beyond all that male-female crap, and so am I. I just don’t like being in Los Angeles by myself so far from all of you.”

“You are not by yourself, now that you have met Carlos, the young *nagual*,” Emilito said. “He will look out for you, and the rest of us are always aware of your presence.”

“You mean you *see* me?”

“Of course, we *see* your *energy body*, and we know your inner most thoughts.”

He raised an eyebrow and shook his head, “So you’d better continue *recapitulating*. The stronger your *intent* gets the purer you have to be.”

I told Emilito about something that had been troubling me. I had a part time job in a typing pool while going to school, and every time I parked my car to go to work, a young man, slightly retarded and perhaps homeless would be waiting on the corner asking if he could clean my windshields for some money. For a while I simply let him clean them and gave him a few dollars in return, but since I drove there four or five times a week, I didn't need my windshield cleaned each time, so I would say, "no thank you." Sometimes, I felt sorry for him and gave him some money anyway. Especially after he had told me he had to be careful about what he ate because he suffered from stomach ulcers.

The thought that he had bleeding ulcers, the way my older brother had as a teenager, made the situation all the more poignant. I wanted to give him all the money I had, yet at the same time I was on a tight student's budget and had to watch what I spent, and I didn't want my windows cleaned so I was at a loss as to what to do. It got to the point that I dreaded driving up to the parking lot of my work, for I did not want to see this person.

To avoid encountering him, I went so far as to park down the street, but he would find me anyway on my way home. He would say, "there's my lady-friend," in such a pleasant tone that made me feel like a rat if I didn't give him any money, and angry if I did. I became so guilty and annoyed with this routine that one day I stopped in my tracks when I was out of sight, and said in a loud voice, "Enough is enough, I don't ever want to see that person again."The next day I was relieved to see that the young man wasn't on the street corner, but I didn't think anything of it expecting to see him there the next day, but I didn't. I though he was on vacation, although where or how I couldn't fathom. After a week of not seeing him, I was afraid he might be ill and felt doubly guilty. As time went on the young man didn't return. In fact, I never saw him again.

When I finished my account, Emilito shook his head. "Now I'm certain that someone has been teaching you to *stalk* with the *double*. Those things don't just happen just like that."

"What do you think happened to that man, Emilito?" I asked feeling alarmed. "Why didn't he ever come back?"

"It makes no difference what happened to him," Emilito said. "He may have gone on vacation the way you would have liked to believe; or he maybe he was hit by a car while washing a windshield; or perhaps he move to a street corner where business was better. Or maybe he died of his ulcers or of malnutrition. Whatever happened to him is not the issue here."

"What are you saying?" I asked. "What is the issue?"

"The fact that you never laid eyes on him again, means that you were capable of altering the flow of *intent*. By voicing your desire, you moved something. Your *intent* moved that young man away from that street corner. How or to what it was moved, makes no difference."

"I didn't want him to come to any harm," I protested. "I just didn't want him to keep bothering me. You yourself said that a *stalker* should never be subject to routines, and giving him money every time I saw him, was a routine."

"That's precisely what I'm saying. You were able to disrupt a routine by altering the flow of intent. That is *stalking* with the *double*, and someone has been teaching you how to do that."

"I still don't think it had anything to do with me," I said. "It could have been coincidence. He probably had somewhere else to go."

"Call it coincidence, witchcraft, sorcery or whatever you like," Emilito said. "The point is that you never saw the young man again. Who gives a fig what the reason is or what explanation you want to use? Your uneasiness is an indication that you had something to do with it whether you are aware of it or not."

"Who do you think is teaching me this?" I asked still not convinced.

"I already told you it's not for me to say," he replied. "But there is another secret that I can reveal to you, if you follow me."

"I'd rather wait for Carlos to come back, it it's all the same to you," I said, afraid of what Emilito might reveal to me.

The orchestra had stopped playing long ago. Emilito popped up from the bench and said we could not wait for Carlos to return. It was getting dark and he wanted to take me to meet his friend who lived in a house nearby. He pointed to the west and said that if we craned our necks, we could see the house from where we were standing. I could see the corner of a wooden balcony, it was only a bit of railing that showed, and the rest was covered by the adjacent buildings. To my surprise he was pointing to the house behind the one on the corner; the house that had the balcony with flowers, the one I had liked so much upon arriving at the plaza.

"Who lives there?" I asked, "and are you sure Carlos will be there waiting for us?"

"A beautiful lady," Emilito said, "and I'm absolutely certain Carlos will be there, but will he be waiting for us? I very much doubt it. He's probably enjoying himself too much."

He said that with a wolf-like wink that implied all sorts of devilish things. I experienced a wave of jealousy that was too obvious to hide. Emilito shook his head for he knew he had hit a sore spot. From his chuckle, I could tell he had been deliberately putting my claim to being detached as a woman to the test; I failed miserably.

We walked to the house in silence. He had such a spritely, sure gait that I had to make an effort to keep up with him so I would not get lost in the crowd and end up in an unknown place. Along the way he said that he had something that he wanted to show me, something only for the eyes of the *double* or dream body and that we had to hurry for twilight was the best time to witness such sights.

## Chapter 19: The *Energy Body*

Nelida led me to the top of the bluff from where I had seen the ruins. She said it was a place the ancient sorcerers called a twin power spot.

“Why do they call it a power spot?” I asked, stopping to catch my breath. I looked back across the valley. I could see the trail winding along the red rimmed canyon. I was surprised at how much distance we had covered in a short time.

“The ancient sorcerers have imbued the rocks and earth with their intent,” Nelida said. “The columns and the point on the bluff from where you saw the ruins, form an energetic arch that allowed your *energy body* to be pulled away from it's moorings. Returning to that place, will seal your *energy body* and fill it with vitality. However, I wouldn’t recommend spending the night there.”

“Why is that?”

“Because the somber mood of the ancient sorcerers would derail you from your purpose,” Nelida said. “You are somber enough as it is. You don’t need to be pushed over the brink.”

I laughed nervously. I was standing dangerously close to the edge where one false step lead to a sharp drop of hundreds of feet. I saw ominous boulders that seemed to have been lodged below by a torrential flood. Now a stream meandered in an uneven course. It was hard to believe that a river had cut so deeply into the mountainside. Now the stream appeared to be trapped down there with no hope of escape.

Nelida pointed to a flat mesa across the ravine and said, “That is the place over there.”

“It frightens me to go back there,” I told Nelida, moving away from the edge. “Somehow, that place didn’t seem friendly to me.”

Nelida gave me a sideways glance.

“What makes you think that places of power have to be friendly, especially the twin power spots of the ancient sorcerers? All that is needed for a place to be useful is that there is a particular *intent* flowing from the earth.”

We continued to make our way to the area from where I had seen the ruins. My thighs were burning. I had to stop every fifteen steps or so for the climb was decidedly uphill. Nelida had given me a bottle of Pienafiel water which she told me to sip slowly, I had gotten to the last drop and was about to toss the bottle away when she stopped me with a strong grasp on my arm.

“You must act impeccably,” she said. “That means leaving nothing behind.”

I tied the empty bottle to a belt loop of my jeans and we continued walking. When we got to the flat area, Nelida took a series of deep breaths and asked me if I noticed anything particular about the place. I inhaled a few times then told her that the air seemed to be thinner, clearer and more transparent; I was no longer tired.

“You are right,” Nelida said. “The air here is light, not heavy like the air you are accustomed to breathing. This air has been purified through the sorcerers’ *intent* so that only the essence of vitality remains.”

I wasn't prepared to go as far as attributing my renewed well-being to the essence of vitality, but breathing the air did seem to energize me. Nelida urged me to fill my lungs with the life-giving charge. As I breathed, she disclosed that the ancient sorcerers used to practice their *dreaming* here and that they dwelt in the caves that dotted the mountainside.

“Why did they pick this place in particular as their power spot?” I asked.

We sat down on a flat rock that had a slight depression in it, as if the rock had been carved out for sitting. Although, I couldn’t help noticing that whoever had sat there before had larger buttocks.

“There are certain natural cracks in the crust of the earth through which one can slip,” Nelida said. “The ancient *seers* were experts at finding these cracks and at stepping through them. They handed down this knowledge from generation to generation. We are sitting on one such crack now.”

I jumped up. Nelida laughed and said it was not a geological crack or fault line, but an opening in the earth’s energy crust.

“Were the sorcerers that lived here hermits?” I asked, sitting down again.

“Many of them were,” she admitted. “Just as are many of the modern sorcerers that use these caves today, but because they are recluses not because they live alone or are holy men, but because they have, succeeded in detaching themselves from human concerns.”

“Why is that? Are sorcerers misanthropic?”

Nelida shook her head, brought her knees to her chest and wrapped her arms around her calves, I copied her posture. Immediately, I felt a warm buzzing sensation in my chest and abdomen, which heated me up in spite of the wind that blew around us.

“Sorcerers are not misanthropic,” she said with a glint. “We enjoy ourselves immensely in the company of others. Our teacher, the *nagual* Julian, often entertained his guests with elaborate tableaus and hilarious theatrical presentations. Yet in the midst of this revelry, he managed to remain detached from people. Sorcerers, even though they may appear to be ordinary men and women, are not like other people at all,”

“What makes them different?”

“Living on their place of power, learning from the earth, and *seeing* energy directly makes them regard everything as fluid and temporary. Through the *recapitulation*, a sorcerer breaks his ties with the world and with the self. As he strategically cuts himself off from extraneous disturbances, he simplifies his life and his desires. He seals himself off from human concerns, and very deliberately casts and secures a mysterious line.”

“Is it an energy line?” I asked.

“Yes, but not to the earth or to people. It is a line linking him directing to intent. When his change is complete, he can return to the world of people and yet remain apart from them. No matter where he is, alone or in the company of others, his only bond is to intent, and only the spirit can lay claim on him.”

I felt a sudden shiver at the finality and the loneliness such a bond entailed.

“Let’s build a fire,” Nelida suggested as if sensing my mood.

I helped her gather dry wood and arrange it in a pile. She asked me for some matches and struck one to a branch. The fire made a crackling sound that sent sparks flying upward. Soon a warm glow filled the clearing, I told her that don Juan had said that the ancient sorcerers knew how to foretell the future from the distribution of embers as the fire had burned out.

“The old sorcerers knew a great deal about a great many things,” Nelida said as she tossed another branch onto the flames. “They could examine the remains of the burnt branches and foretell the future.”

“How could anyone tell the future from bits of charred wood?” I wanted to know.

Nelida said that the sorcerers who knew the technique could not only predict events to come, but could examine the current state of affairs in order to avoid calamities or unwanted occurrences.

“A person with the facility, looks at the arrangement of the dying embers and branches, and the powers of fire and wood tell him what he wants to know.”

“Do you know how to do this?”

Nelida nodded. “It has to do with how the branches lie after the fire has gone out and the pattern the dying sparks make that gives the clue. For example, if the fire goes out suddenly and five branches remain glowing, then something sudden or on a grandiose scale will occur.”

“How do you know that?” I asked staring at the fire.

“Because all of the five directions are lit up at once,” she replied. “If, on the other hand, the fire burns down slowly, and there are many branches still left kindled, making a circular patter, then the turn of events will be gradual and for the better.”

Nelida added that the direction the charred branches are pointing is also an indication. A large branch pointing north, signifies great upheaval or activity; the east is the direction of dawn and wisdom, the south of warmth and nurturing, and the west of introspection and mystery.

"Now, if a branch is pointing straight up, or if a gust of wind suddenly blows the fire out, you're in deep trouble."

"Why is that?"

"*Intent* is indicating the direction of the zenith, and that always means giant movement."

"I still don't see what a fire has to do with events that affect human beings?"

"Our bodies, the elements, the energy of fire, the four compass points all merge into one," Nelida explained. "That is how we can examine the arrangement of the charred wood and see how it relates to our lives."

She said it was a mistake to regard ourselves as separate from the elements, for the same forces that move the fire, rule our energy bodies.

"The reason we think ourselves as separate from everything else," Nelida explained, "is precisely because we are thinking. It is thought that separates us from the totality and makes us forget our common origin."

She drew closer to the fire and told me to extend my hands near the flames.

"You can pull the energy of the fire into your body through your palms," she suggested. "Allow the heat to merge with your body to warm you."

I held out my palms, and felt the warmth of the fire flow into my hands, until I was so hot I began to perspire. I no longer needed my poncho and took it off.

"We are all made up of light," Nelida continued. "Light activates our *energy body* and even though we have a human form, to a sorcerer who sees, we are essentially filaments of light."

Nelida called our human side our ape's heritage, adding that our animal heritage makes us act in an unruly fashion.

"We have another side that is totally hidden."

"How do you know this other side exists if it's completely hidden?" I wanted to know.

"Sorcerers *see* it, and we all know it is there," she assured me. "But near as it is, for it is our very selves, it always remains out of reach. As long as we cling to our ape form, we can never tap that other part, the part that sorcerers call the *energy body* or *double*."

I sighed and looked at the glowing embers.

"We all long for something just out of reach," Nelida said sensing my mood. "We see possibilities in our dreams; we wish to be more energetic, but we always try to find fulfillment in the things of the world. Hence, we are doomed to fail."

"Why is that?"

"Because the part that we are looking for to make us complete is not in the world," she said. "That part is the *energy body*. It belongs to the realm of pure energy. To tap it, we must turn our eyes elsewhere."

Nelida said that only the *recapitulation* enables us to see that the physical and intellectual holdings that we have so assiduously amassed are a mirage in front of the eyes. Yet we cling to them as if our very survival depended on it, even though it is only an illusory agreement based on our sharing of a common perceptual framework.

"Why is the *recapitulation* so important?" I asked.

"The *recapitulation* allows you to build an energy platform from which you can asses the concerns and experiences that you call your life. In other words, the *recapitulation* allows you the opportunity to come into contact with the other,"

"What is the other like?"

Nelida looked at me thought the glow of the dying embers.

"It is the light that moves us before it has been molded by interpretations. There is nothing worse than for our energy to be limited by the circumstances of our life. From infancy, we become shaped and contorted by labels, until we think our personal self is all there is, and we completely lose sight of our energy being or *double*."

"Can you give me a concrete example?" I asked stretching my legs that were beginning to cramp from sitting on hard granite.

"For example, take not having possessions," she said.

“Aren’t things important?” I asked. “You see so much poverty in the world. Who can blame people for wanting a better way of life?”

“Many of the sorcerers in our lineage experienced poverty, yet they themselves were not destitute.”

I argued that a child who knows only poverty has no defenses. It's entire world becomes meager and poor. Nelida nodded.

“Worse yet, her spirit becomes petty, greedy and twisted,” she said looking straight at me. “Material blight brought on by life’s circumstances is nothing compared to poorness of the spirit. Whereas the poor or hungry body can be healed with proper nourishment, there is no cure for a meager spirit. It has only misery and a lack of fulfillment awaiting it.”

I wanted to know if it was possible to avoid poorness of the spirit if one was born into a situation of material blight.

“If you have enough energy, you can’t be touched by anything,” Nelida assured me, “even if you are surrounded by poor and petty people.”

Nelida said that to a sorcerer who *sees*, all things are equal because they are energy. Therefore, a sorcerer living in a shack considers himself wealthy while an ordinary person living in the city may regard himself poor even though he has a house full of furniture and a closet full of clothes.

“Who do you think is poorer?” Nelida asked, “the sorcerer in the mountains or the person in the city?”

I told her that even though he has more, the person in the city was poorer, thinking that that was what she wanted to hear.

Nelida shook her head. “As long as a person has not detached his *energy body* from the idea of poverty or riches; as long as he has not recapitulated his life, he is poor of spirit,” she said.

Something she said about being detached from riches, called forth a childhood incident. Sometimes, for no apparent reason, my father would bring home a box of french pastries. My brothers and I would stand around the table and argue over who would get which piece, for there was only one per person, I wanted to eat all of them or at least more than one but I had to wait until it was my turn to chose, for, invariably, age took precedent. I would be last and all the good creamy pastries had already been selected by my brothers, father and mother. I would be left with the fruit tart, or an egg custard when I would kill for the cream puff or chocolate eclair my brothers were eating.

“Why did you fret so?” Nelida asked when I told her the story. “Didn’t you know that pastries are all the same. It didn’t matter which one you picked or what was left in the box.”

I argued that they were not all the same at all. Some had chocolate icing, others had vanilla cream, and the napoleon that my father always chose, had a flaky crust, but Nelida insisted that I was being arbitrary in saying that one was intrinsically more desirable than the other.

“They are all made with flour, sugar, eggs and milk,” she said. “Only their appearance varies. Why wring your insides for a slight variation in outer appearance?”

I had never thought of it that way. Looked at from a detached perspective, they all had been pretty much the same. What made one or another better, was my brothers insisting that their pastry was better than mine. To covet one and turn my nose up on another was being arbitrary and petty.

“You should have let your brothers rave all they wanted, and still enjoy the one you had,” she said. “You could have practiced being indifferent to their mesmeric commands.”

“All I knew was I hated them for taking the best pieces,” I said, “but now I see that you are right; flour, milk and sugar are the same no matter what shape you put them in,”

“Only when a person has found that common ground in which all things are equal, is he truly free,” Nelida said. “For then he has liberated himself from the circumstances of life that place limits on his possibilities.”

Nelida stood up and walked to the edge of the clearing. She looked down at the bottom of the ravine. I had the sense that the stream was imprisoned by the massive canyon walls.

“Our *energy body* is like that stream,” she said pointing down. “The sides of the canyon are the circumstances of our lives that imprison us. Even when we look up, all we see are our prison walls. Our only hope for freedom is to flow steadily onward with an *unbending intent*.

“We have to have courage and optimism, especially when we begin *recapitulating* our lives,” Nelida continued. “We must know that the walls around us are illusory; they cannot mold us forever; they cannot detain us on our journey. Like the stream, our energy must flow onward and not avoid any nook or cranny, but not linger either lest we never reach our final destination."

"What is that?" I asked.

"The sea," Nelida said. "The vast eternal sea."

Nelida left me alone on the hilltop to regroup my energy. She had said she was going to do some sorcery *not-doing*s in one of the nearby caves. I wanted desperately to go with her but she insisted I sit quietly and let the power of the place energize me. To while away the time, I gazed at a stagnant pool, left over from a recent rain. In it I could see reflected the nearby boulders and a scraggly toyan tree. For a while, I watched the rocks shimmering in the green-black liquid. A blade of sunlight piercing the branches made the water ripple. I gazed at the pool for a long time; the movement in it seemed to be mesmerizing me and bearing a silent message.

I looked up at the trees and rocks from where the sun was shining. They were the same trees and rocks I had seen reflected in the pool of water, and yet they were not. There was another world, and the reflections of things was it's entrance. What we call the real world was made up of substances, things like trees and rocks and water that we could name, yet they were as Illusory as the images in the pool of water.

I stood up and began to practice some sorcery passes, I made vertical figure eights in the air with my palm. I extended my arms and squeezed my shoulder blades to strengthen my cloak of confidence. I picked up the energy spark from the earth with my fingertips and brought them to my forehead. When I had finished moving, I began to search the underbrush for a plant Nelida had asked me to gather. When I had a bundle full I found Nelida sitting on a rock as if she had waiting for me to pass that way.

"Did you find the herb I asked you to look for?" she asked.

I told her I had some in my knapsack. It was extremely foul smelling and would no doubt stink up the bag for weeks to come.

"What are you going to do with the plants?" I asked.

"I'm going to make a paste to rub on the infected bites on your legs," She said. "An added advantage is that it will keep the body hair from growing back, so you wont have to shave your legs.”

I wonder how she knew I had scabs and cuts from continually shaving them with dull razor blades I was too lazy or cheap to replace.

As Nelida took the herbs, I told her about the realization I had had with the sun’s reflections in the puddle of water. She shrugged, unimpressed.

“When the mind and body are at ease, a tiny crack is created and an insight can slip through,” she said. “That’s why I keep urging you to be silent and let the voice of the spirit tell you what’s what. Otherwise you will never grasp anything.”

She handed me a strip of dried meat, similar to the meat that don Juan had given me. I wondered if it came from the same batch of power meat. I ate with gusto. Walking had made me hungry. Nelida leaned back against a tree trunk and said she wanted to tell me more about the voice of *seeing* which was another way of talking about the voice of the *spirit*. She agreed that the insight I had had at the pool of water was a start but there was much more to it.

“What do you think causes someone lift her head and look at the sun?” Nelida asked gazing at me intently. “When all her life she only looked at her reflection in a stagnant pool of water? What makes a person suddenly turn in the direction of the other?”

I ventured a guess. “Perhaps, the person got bored looking at his own reflection,” I said, using the masculine gender to counter her use of the feminine.

“But the person doesn’t know that what she sees are only reflections?” Nelida argued. “She thinks that this is all there is to the world.”

“Might he have turned his eyes by chance or by luck?” I asked.

“Could be,” she agreed. “But there is yet another possibility.”

She waited for me to make another suggestion.

“Maybe, the sun was so bright, it pulled the person’s eyes toward it?” I offered.

Nelida nodded; her eyes began to sparkled. “You’re right,” she said. “The sun pulled her eyes with it's brilliance.”

Nelida explained that the sun, in this case, was what sorcerers call *intent*. When one has polished one's link to *intent*, the power of *intent* is strong enough to pull one's eyes away from self reflection. Before this can occur, the body and mind must be purified through the *recapitulation* and the sorcery passes.

"By practicing the sorcery passes and by cleaning the lines of the past using the sweeping breath, by becoming one with your activities, whether it is studying, sewing, drawing, or anything else you might do, you transform yourself. Provided, of course, that you do these things with the sorcerers' purpose."

"What is the sorcerer's purpose?"

"To evolve," Nelida said. "To wake up *intent* so that one can see the world through lucid eyes. The eyes of the ordinary person are clouded with thoughts; his feelings are twisted with concerns. You must first clear a path to *intent*, before it can begin to pull you. Then you can gradually tap the *energy body*, and when it is as bright as the sun, you let go of the self and allow *intent* to move you."

"How does it move you?" I asked.

"With energy, my dear. With energy. Once you abandon the reasoning mind that makes everything factual, *intent* pulls you to the side of sheer energy."

Nelida said that it takes a great deal of *recapitulating* to let go of one's judgments, opinions, and our incessant need for control, but once one makes the crossing, it is as if one had always understood, only before, one hadn't the power to see that nothing ever existed in any other way.

"Concentrate on *intending* a bridge to the *energy body*," Nelida advised. "Do the sorcery passes, then use their energy and *intent* to cross over to the other side in full awareness. Only then can you escape the fate that awaits you as a human being."

"What fate awaits me?" I asked with a shiver. I feared that she had seen something in the charred embers of the fire and knew something I didn't.

"The fate of your parents, naturally."

I thought about my parents. My mother had died of cancer after a long bout of illness. My father died of cirrhosis of the liver alter months of excruciating pain. I froze at the thought of what fate had in store for me, if I failed to make the crossing.

“Prolonged illness and death are all you have to look forward to,” Nelida said reading my thoughts. “And it doesn’t matter if one dies rich or poor, young or old, peacefully or slowly from some hideous disease. What matters is that people die unawares, consequently they all go to the same place.”

I asked Nelida if there was some sort of Hades where everyone who was not aware went when they died. Nelida laughed and said that unless we merge with our energy bodies, the hell is right here on this earth.

“But don’t you need a teacher to help you to change and get to your *energy body*?” I asked. “I know when I go back to Los Angeles, you won’t be there, and I’ll be at a loss as to what to do.”

“We don’t need teachers,” Nelida assured me. “Anyone can make the crossing. All we have to do is to let go of our holdings. Intend it; fulfill the sorcerers’ bidding, but who wants to recapitulate their lives and let go of herself?”

Nelida was talking about me again. I wanted to defend myself and argue that I had recapitulated my tail off, but I knew it would be pointless. There were enormous reservoirs left that I hadn’t even touched.

“There is really not much more to say on the subject,” Nelida said. “In fact, I am talking to you only to convince your reason that it's empty assertions and clinging will not lead to freedom. To hold onto the self is a waste of energy. You are better off using this energy to forge the *double* so that *intent* can, pull it to freedom.”

Nelida reiterated, that all one needs to do is to acquiesce and to abandon the willful need to control that characterizes our daily life.

“Whenever you practice the sorcery passes focus on the abdomen and let the energy flow unimpeded. Also never feel important or that you have accomplished something.”

“Why is that?” I asked.

“Only when one is *not-doing* and *not-being*, can *intent* take hold,” Nelida said.

“How can one do something and not do it at the same time? That has always been difficult for me to grasp.”

“You let go and allow the energy to act through you, regardless of what you do. Sink down and become quiet. Consider this as your new sorcery task: to become quiet and deep,”

Nelida took a thermos from a knapsack and poured a cup of water for me to drink. Deftly she screwed the top back and returned the thermos to her bag.

“Developing the *energy body* is another sorcery task that you must fulfill,” she said taking a sip of water. “Some people are more adept at this than others, but everyone begins at the same place; with a strong attachment to the self.”

“How does one break this attachment?”

“One simply decides one has had enough of indulging and pampering the child in us, and one starts to live a disciplined life. Everything we have shown you are means to make it easier for you to give up your obsessive self concern.”

I nodded. Something in me was agreeing with what Nelida was saying but some other part of me still didn’t want to let go of being in control. The thought that some outside force would rule me was antithetical to my idea of independence. I felt that unless I asserted myself, I would always be the last one to choose the pastry and would have to take what was left.

“Don’t be afraid to exert yourself. Freedom must be earned,” Nelida said. “Seize your quarter centimeter of chance and give it your best effort, but not to enhance your ego.”

Sensing my reluctance to change, Nelida continued. “A part of you wants to give up, while the other part clings. Consequently there is conflict, but once the decision is made, there is no more struggle, only purpose, delight and acquiescing.”

Nelida stood up, saying she wanted to practice some sorcery passes to help unify the body and mind and release the energy that was trapped in various body centers. She said that through our habit of holding everything in, energy stagnates. A sorcerer lets go of everything and does not carry anything inside him that would block the flow of energy.

“The first area that needs to be released is the sexual center,” Nelida said.

“Why, because it is the lowest?”

“No, because of the emphasis placed upon it by our puritanical culture,” she corrected me.

“This rigidity expresses itself in emotional needs for love and our excessive attention placed on courtship and mating. Courtship and mating are so dominant that they leaves no energy for anything else. Releasing and purifying the energy trapped in the sexual centers vitalizes the entire body including the centers located outside the luminous cocoon itself.”

When I asked her what she was talking about, she repeated that the sorcery passes increase one’s energy, or can be done as a means of invoking *intent*. They were doors to *not-being*, as well as a means of disrupting the habits the body has built up through a lifetime of doing.

“Sorcery passes wake up the *energy body*,” Nelida said. “They are designed to release trapped energy, but they must never be thought of as mere exercises, or even as martial arts, yoga or tai chi.”

“Why is that?”

“Their *intent* is different. It was set by sorcerers of ancient times.”

“Did they make them up?”

“No, they were not simply not made up. These passes come down in our linage through *dreaming* or from the spirit itself. When you have enough energy you too may be able to pull sorcery passes directly from the spirit. The voice of the *seeing* will tell you all you need to know about sorcery passes,”

Nelida clarified that whatever came to the sorcerers at any moment was designed for a given purpose.

“Sorcerers, especially *stalkers*, are extremely flexible. They follow the design of the spirit. All we do is empty ourselves and allow *intent* to move us. That is why no two sorcery passes are alike. And one never knows which pass one should do until the moment of doing it. This is the sense in which we practice them today. We do them to lead us to awareness and freedom. Used properly, their *intent* may help one escape in a flurry of light.”

## Chapter 20: *Not-Being*

On the way back to don Juan’s house, we took a different trail. It was steep and rutted from the rain and flash floods had eroded the clay earth. After an hour of hiking, Nelida tapped my head with a flick of her finger.

“You are talking to yourself again,” she said in a warning tone.

It was true. I was inwardly complaining to myself that my muscles ached and how I wished I had more physical prowess to keep up with someone twice my age. I laughed out of sheer nervousness.

“It’s not muscles you need for walking,” Nelida corrected me. “It’s internal strength. Walking with internal strength takes very little exertion. In fact, none at all.”

She stopped walking and ran her hand up my spine informing me that two currents flowed along both sides of the backbone.

“When I took you on this walk, it was to store your energy and balance your positive and negative forces, not to exhaust them,” she said. “These channels are interconnected with others, linking the internal organs with the muscles, tendons and skin

She explained that when sorcerers *see* the *energy body*, they *see* that it is made up of a subtle force that flows thorough bilateral and symmetrical channels, joining the front and back of the body to form a continuous circuit. To a *seer* it looks like a luminous egg or cocoon that surrounds the physical body. In between the shoulder blades, an arm’s length away is a point of intense luminosity which she called the place of awareness, or assemblage point.

She stressed that the energy passages have to be kept open in order for the subtle force to circulate freely. Whenever a person overexerts oneself physically, mentally, or emotionally, one creates a blockage, in which fibers of light become knotted. The energy is constricted in one area, thereby, producing an excess in another, like damning up a stream. This produces an energy imbalance causing illness in the body.

Nelida found a flat area and told me to clear it of rocks and debris.

“Lie down on your back and merge with the earth by tensing and relaxing all your muscles,” she said.

I did as she directed, spreading out my poncho as a blanket.

She asked me specifically to note the difference in feeling between tightening and relaxing various muscle groups.

“Tightening and relaxing involve two opposite energies,” she explained, as she placed my knapsack under my head for a pillow. “If a person is too relaxed or weak, he needs to tighten; if he is too tense or agitated, he needs to relax. When the forces of tension and relaxation are in balance, the person experiences health and well-being.”

Nelida elaborated saying that the body naturally regulates itself and finds it's optimal state of balance which is not only important for maintaining one’s health, but also for becoming aware of the universal forces that surround us.

When I again felt rested and my breathing was back to normal, she told me to sit up. Again she traced a line up my spine to the crown of the head, pausing to point out various centers with a soft pressure of her fingers.

“The first gate is at the tailbone; the second is between the kidneys; the third is higher, opposite the solar plexus; another is between the shoulder blades; another is at the nape of the neck, and there is the one here, at the top of the skull.”

She gently pressed the last place with her thumb placing her fingers like open fans on the back of the head.

“These areas are storage centers for energy,” she explained, lightly touching the six areas again so I could note them. “They also refine the energy as it flows up the back.”

As she pressed, I sensed a mild current or vibration. After a while, I felt my breath slow down and become even. My ribcage, that had been tight from walking, now expanded and contracted with ease, allowing me to intake more air. As she massaged my lower back near the kidneys, I experienced a sharp pain. She said that massaging the body releases excess energy that tends to accumulate in the muscles, especially around the joints. One way to massage was with the palms or the fingers, moving them along the pathways that encircled the body. Sorcerers could also point with the index finger to open up any energy blockage.

Nelida stressed that in the sorcerers’ world extreme behavior had to be avoided because if one went to far in one direction, one taxed the complementary forces that are needed to balance oneself. She added that a person should strive for ease and balance in order to achieve the optimal level of efficiency in any task.

“The center of life and wellbeing is in the *energy body*,” she said, again running a finger up my spine. “Between the two channels on either side of the backbone, is a third passageway.

When the point of awareness passes down the back and enters the womb, one becomes calm and centered. The *energy body* is so subtle that one hardly notices the assemblage point stirring. Yet when it moves away from it's moorings, the place behind the shoulder blades, it is as if we enter a different world. All human struggle seems insignificant."

For a while we sat in silence. Then she pointed to my boots and remarked that there is nothing worse than wearing shoes that don't fit well.

"Only when your energy and your activities are in perfect concordance, do you neither notice yourself nor what you do," she said.

I asked her to explained her statement.

"Because people want to be noticed," she began, "they continually call attention to themselves and to their acts. To concentrate on doing something while being indifferent to the outcome, means giving your full attention to the task. The most effective state, for a *stalker*," Nelida continued, "is to be completely absorbed in the moment, so one does not waste energy thinking about the past or future."

I asked her if it wasn't unreasonable to worry about whether or not one was overdoing anything. Nelida replied that one should never worry about anything, because to worry means that one is already imbalanced.

"Put another way," she offered, "if you are thinking while acting, it will be those thoughts, not the action, that will stay in your memory. On the other hand, if you are silent while acting, when you try to recall the actions, there will be little to remember. That is why sorcerers say that the self is an idea. When you understand this and stop your running internal monologue, another awareness will rise to the foreground."

As I thought on what Nelida had said, it seemed to coincide with what I had felt while performing the *recapitulation*. I had experienced a kind of withdrawal, a separation from myself and the world as I knew it. One part of me, which consisted of all that I recalled having experienced in the world, seemed to have become detached and was floating unencumbered. Behind this lay a substrata of awareness that was silent, vast and empty. It served as the background to support activities, but because all my attention had always been focused on my thinking self, that silent infrastructure had gone unnoticed. With the *recapitulation*, the distinction was clear; there existed a separation between myself as a conglomeration of ideas, feelings, activities, and this other indefinable, silent awareness.

"While *recapitulating*," I told Nelida, "it seemed that awareness was no longer attached to my familiar self. It seemed to be hovering outside, observing the responses that I had habitually regarded as my familiar self. While the personal self is full of struggle, tension and stress from living; the other awareness is detached and indifferent, a dark silence, perfectly contained, without thought or desire."

"What you are describing is the relationship between awareness of the personal self and awareness of the *energy body*," Nelida clarified. "The *recapitulation* breath and the sorcery passes allowed you to activate the *energy body*. From that perspective you can see that the everyday self is only an appearance sustained by the power of speech and thought."

Nelida patiently explained that after a person has swept his personal past clean with the breath, the self that is remembered, is no longer capable of affecting the present.

"Does a person still use the self to interact?" I asked.

"One does, but at the same time one knows better than to believe that what he sees is all there is to the world," Nelida replied.

"I don't understand," I said. "Could you be more specific?"

"A person uses the self and the physical body in everyday situations, but he knows it is a facade, only for show," Nelida explained. "Like a facade, it has an elaborate front, with nothing behind. One no longer believes the self is important or all there is to being. One sees everything as *controlled folly* floating in a sea of mystery."

Nelida stressed that detachment happens naturally once awareness is no longer identified with the personal self.

"When the thinking self remains at the service of pure awareness, one becomes increasingly quiet. Yet one's actions are easy and efficient. This is because the energy that was once reserved for enhancing the personal self, is directly employed for creativity, health and well-being."

Nelida reiterated that to confuse pure awareness of the *energy body* with the personal, thinking self, is deadly.

"Not only does it force the *energy body* to follow the actions of an undisciplined master, or an unruly child, but it also tricks the person into believing that what one sees is all there is to existence. The personal self is linked to the senses and seeks immediate gratification in things that are finite. The *energy body* must never be linked to the senses or be confused with anything. Only then can it retain it's rightful place as conduit of the life force."

"Why is that?"

"Because when awareness becomes identified with the things it is aware of, including the self or the mind, it becomes clouded by the interpretations of daily life. You must allow the *seer* in you to guide you," she stressed, "and not let the personal self pull awareness up and down like a yo-yo in an attempt to satisfy it's every whim."

I had to agree that it is hellish to be constantly at the mercy of one's feelings and those of others, but I knew that when it came to actual practice, it was a different matter.

"What is involved is a turning of the tables," Nelida continued, "and that can only be done by returning one's attention to the silence that is beyond speech and thought."

"What exactly is pure awareness?" I asked.

"The awareness of *not-being*," she said. "It is a direct link to a force sorcerers call *intent*: a force that is not the self, yet one that gives rise to all things, including the self. When you understand this contradiction, you will see that there is nothing to defend and nothing to reflect upon, not even the self."

After a long silence Nelida went on to say that the mind experiences perfect harmony when the right and left channels in the body merge and one's awareness crosses over to the *energy body*. This state is reflected by a specific movement in the assemblage point.

"When one is centered, it's easy to see *energy* directly," Nelida explained, "because the physical body no longer makes itself felt. If you try to remember how your body feels when it is in a state of heightened awareness, or when you experience the lines of the universe, I guarantee you will have difficulty recalling these sensations."

I had to agree. Whatever feelings I experienced during the *recapitulation* in the cave or in the trees were so different from the feelings I was accustomed to having, that later I could not recall them.

"That's because in the trees, you were operating directly from your *energy body*, just as you are doing now while you are with me. In the trees your *energy body* woke up. To suspend someone from the trees, is a sorcery maneuver to break the pull gravity has on the physical body and consolidate the *energy body*."

Nelida explained that all experiences leave a trace in the body. To stand erect, for example, involves a certain distribution of pressure and weight on the legs and also a tensing and relaxing of certain muscles groups. Sitting involves a different pattern of bodily awareness, depending on how gravity exerts it's pull on the physical body.

"Being suspended from the trees or climbing them, breaks the pull of gravity and allows the *energy body* to take over," she said. "In addition, the fact that there were no far off horizons allowed you to concentrate on the immediacy of the moment, and since you have no history of feelings for acting in the moment without reflection, you became silent for you had no words to describe what you were doing. That's why it is so difficult for you to remember what happened after you woke up in the trees."

"What exactly did happen?"

"You were training your *energy body* to *stalk*," Nelida said. "The novel sensations and responses not formerly encountered in your storehouse of experience, allowed you to forge your *energy body*. You have already experience casting your luminous net and entering the black cavern above you head. These, too, are instances of *stalking* with your *energy body*."

Nelida leaned back against a rock, stretched her legs and told me to sit silently while she refreshed my memory about *not-doing*.

"*Not-doing* is to act without acting; it is to have no words or labels to describe your actions."

"How can one act without knowing what one is doing?" I asked.

"By acting from deep silence, without becoming involved with your actions," she replied. "For when you are not tied to expectations or to the outcome of your actions, you will not notice your actions. Like shoes that fit just right."

Nelida added that when one is empty and silent inside, yet full of vigor and activity, one is acting without acting. On the other hand, if we are filled with concern and worry and expectations, and have little energy directed toward our task, we are acting and in a very inefficient manner. We must dissolve the person in us, so that we can be free from being and doing. When one has no desires or ambitions, yet one is vitally engaged in the action at hand, one knows unerringly when to continue and when to stop.

“There is a door to *not-being*,” Nelida said. “It opens so one can slip inside. Once inside, power renews and revitalizes the *energy body*, or it can destroy us. It is that indifferent, but to find the opening one has to be selfless, and to go through it with awareness, one has to rid oneself of attachments to our familiar world.”

“What does one do inside the door?”

“You allow the fire from within to dissolve you and you experience *not-being*.”

“Is that what happens when people die?”

For a moment she was silent. “Everything originates from there and returns to it,” Nelida said. “Some call it the womb or creator of the universe. Others call it the destroyer of the universe. For that is what happens. The world as we know it comes to an end.”

Nelida explained that in order to prolong one's life for more than the usual span of sixty or seventy years, one has to dissolve one’s physical body again and again without losing one’s awareness. A person can let go little by little through the *recapitulation*, or at death a person is forced to relinquish everything all at once. I was curious to know more about the mysterious crack she was alluding to.

“For sorcerers it is the realm beyond death,” Nelida said. “It is familiar to us and to you because, although you are not consciously aware of it, you have been there many times before.”

I nervously played with my Kleenex, only to realize I had shredded it to bits. I put the pieces in my pocket not to leave traces of litter on the ground.

“You can look at it this way,” Nelida continued. “The body you have now is asleep. It hasn’t yet learned the intricacies of *stalking* with the *double* and of *not-doing* and *not-being*, but your awareness is old and we have taken you beyond the barrier of the self many times. That is why sensations there are not unknown to you.”

I asked her why she said that my awareness is old. She explained that some people have an awareness that extends back into the realm of *not-being*.

“How far back?” I wanted to know.

“Only you can answer that question,” Nelida replied. “Or rather, only your awareness that is old can say how far into *not-being* it has journeyed."

"Is it like reincarnation?" I asked.

"There is no reincarnation," she replied. "There is no past or future either. Awareness is just awareness. There are infinite lines criss-crossing the universe. Bach one of them is a conglomeration of awareness. All I am saying is that your awareness has traveled on other lines, besides the one that amalgamates this world."

Suddenly, I felt apprehensive. I experienced a moment of confusion, in which part of me knew something, yet couldn't say what it was.

"Practice dissolving your physical body," Nelida recommended. "Only then will you be able to answer your questions. Going beyond your individual self, puts you directly in touch with the ancient awareness. You already know from your *recapitulation* that the self is only a cover; a shield that we use in the world. To *stalk* with the *energy body*, you have to experience *not-being* many times and accumulate awareness in order to make it recognizable."

"How can I *stalk* with the *energy body* without the *nagual* or you or Emilito to guide me?"

"I already told you that the best way to *not-be*, is to stop talking to yourself. That you can do all by yourself. I also told you that we make the world with our words and thoughts, which together with actions and feelings constitutes our being. *Not-being* is not to have thoughts, either about ourselves or about the world."

"How can one not have thoughts?"

"Not to think is not the same as being imbecilic," Nelidia said. "Rather, it leads one to pure awareness and to silence which are the prerequisites of *not-being*.

"To be inwardly silent," Nelida continued, "is to make no judgments or distinctions between good and evil, myself and others, then and now, and more importantly, it means not having concepts of any kind. Try feeling and acting with your *energy body*, then you can avoid the pitfalls of always thinking about things,"

"Is it wrong to think about things?"

"No, it's not wrong, but it's distracting to always talk to yourself. Doing this and that will never lead you to the *energy body*. Reasoning only produces limited knowledge and shoddy awareness. There is a much more inclusive way to understand, and that is to intuit directly without the intervention of thought."

I felt forlorn, dejected. I knew when I returned to Los Angeles and to the University, thinking and reasoning would be all that awaited me.

"We have talked of this before," Nelida reminded me. "It comes down to this, regard the self as unimportant; so unimportant, in fact, that you forget about it altogether. Then, *per force*, you will begin to forge your *energy body*."

"What about when I am in school and have to study for an examination. How can I use my *energy body*, then? And what about when I am talking to professors and fellow students?"

She tapped the top of my head and said that if one is selfless, gradually, the boundaries between the perceiver and the object that is being perceived disappear. She described selflessness not as a moral condition, but as an impersonal state in which one no longer regards the self as a separate entity; a state in which there is no concept of the perceiving self, nor of the thing perceived.

"What does this state feel like to the person?"

Nelida thought for a moment then replied. "It is as if one has misplaced something, or has lost sight of it and can't remember what it is, but because it is not important, one is no longer interested in finding it."

Nelida made clear that the reason the self is usually regarded so highly is because we use it as our single and constant reference point with respect to the world. It is the center from which we think, feel, and shape our existence, and we have been forging it since we were infants.

"Abandon the self, and you do away with the fluctuations of thought," she continued. "By the same token, still your thoughts, and the self is erased. Then you can *stalk* with the *double*, then you see your professors and your fellow students as *controlled folly*. Then everything is equal and you can grasp any concept directly with your *energy body*. Then you are truly capable of having a romance with knowledge. Without the intervention of thought and the self, you will be operating from the point of *not-being* where the personal self is no longer your primary point of view. Then the *seer* in you will tell you what is what."

"Why is *not-being* so important?"

"Thinking makes you ask stupid questions," she said. "Marvels issue forth from the realms of *not-being*; health, clear vision, direct understanding, mysterious powers, but a person needs total concentration and a willingness to abandon the personal self in order to open the door and slip through in full awareness."

Nelida scrutinized me in the amber light.

"Are you willing to let go of your wonderful self?" she asked point blank.

For a moment I hesitated, thinking she meant that I was really wonderful. Then I nodded even though I knew she meant the opposite.

"I certainly hope so," she said. "For your resolve will be tested sooner than you think."

## Chapter 21: Stalking With The Double

Emilito took me to the most beautiful Spanish colonial house I had ever seen other than Clara's. Outside, it had a plain facade with bars on the windows and several second story balconies overlooking the streets below. The balcony I had admired from the plaza was laden with potted geraniums and thick green ferns. Whoever lives here loves plants, was the feeling that came to me as we entered through the massive twelve-paneled door.

Inside, the courtyard was cool and dark. It reminded me of a cloister from another era. Columns and arches lined stone walkaways. Raised beds framed a small orchard with fruit trees. Portions of the high walls were covered with honeysuckle and hanging wisteria growing up trellises. Cool stone benches were flanked with flowers growing in ceramic pots with a marbleized bluish-green glaze, and out of a stone planter grew a huge agave cactus.

To one side was a dark hallway which lead to a small garden patio. A high-backed carved wooden bench was set against the wall, and a beautiful jacaranda tree shaded the rectangular enclosure. To the side was a stone grotto, with a slender waterfall flowing into a tiny pool. The house and grounds seemed to me the most peaceful place on the earth. From time to time I could hear the flurry of birds, but even they were hushed and subdued as if out of respect for the sanctity of the house. To think that this oasis of tranquility existed in the heart of a busy cosmopolitan city seemed in itself an act of power.

"Sit on this bench and wait for the lady of the house to show herself," Emilito suggested. "Now that I've delivered you, I'll be on my way."

"Wait, wait, Emilito. I don't know the lady of the house. Won't you stay and introduce me to her?"

"Of course you know her," Emilito said, surprised. "You met her in Sonora. Her name is Zuleica."

At the mention of her name, I remembered the lady at the fiesta who had given me the cocoa to drink for the flea bites. She had wanted me to stay with her but I had declined. I had no idea she lived in such beautiful surroundings.

"But what should I do when I meet her?" I asked.

Emilito gave me a stern look. "When you meet her, be impeccable," he advised. "That's all anyone can do."

Before I could ask him what would impeccability mean in this situation, he left through a side door leading off the corridor. I sat on the bench, feeling forlorn, watching the fish playing in the pond. The harmony of that house and the ripples in the water soon made me feel drowsy, but in a pleasant way. I exhaled a few times, and with my breath all my concerns seemed to flow out until there was nothing left but a profound sense of wellbeing. I closed my eyes and listened to the water running over the small rocks, and imagined seeing the tiny goldfish that by now had hid under some water plants.

"If only this waiting dream would last forever," I heard a woman's voice say.

I turned and looked into the dark corridor but saw no one. but those words summed up in me the moment, for that is exactly how I felt.

"That's right, dear, rest, and let the sound of the water take you where it will."

The voice came from my left, very near. Startled, I opened my eyes to see a tall lady wearing a black flowing caftan with an Indian motif around a stand up collar. Her auburn hair was piled high in a pleasing although somewhat old-fashioned hair do. The skin of her face was taut and her eyebrows arched expressively with the aid of eyebrow pencil. Her mouth was thin and delicate and her eyes were fixed on me in such a piercing manner that I knew it was Zuleica.

She could hypnotize me with her gaze if she wanted too, I thought, but somehow I didn't mind.

I trusted her; for at a deep level we were alike. Then the realization surfaced as to how we were alike and that made me uneasy. We were both quite a bit crazy and had to use all our energy to make a coherent presentation of ourselves in the face of utter chaos.

“You’re not afraid of me are you?” Zuleica asked solicitously. “Because I assure you, I’m here to help you.”

“I’m not afraid,” I said and meant it. Zuleica was so far beyond the pettiness of the world that she exuded strength and vitality in her voice and movements. Except for her burning eyes, she was the picture of calmness and serenity.

“You’re going to stay with me for a while, and I’m going to teach you how to *stalk*, with your *dream body*,” she said.

“But I still haven’t finished *recapitulating*,” I said. “Shouldn’t I continue with that?”“*Recapitulating* is important, but so is *dreaming*. I have to set you up in the proper manner now because there is so little time. Then you can practice on your own. While you are here, however, you have to follow my instructions. Agreed?”

I had no choice but to nod my head in agreement for she was nodding hers.

“*Dreaming* and *gazing* go hand in hand,” Zuleica began. “You already caught on to that when you *gazed* at the ripples in the pond. Now let the sound of the water take you. That’s how you start. You find something in the world that shimmers or has a glow to it and you *gaze* at it. Then you find a sound, like rain, water from a stream, even the noise of the city will do, and you follow the sounds. Then you transfer it into your dreams by *gazing* in your dreams or hearing that sound in your sleep.”

I knew what she meant, for once I had a rock tumbler that made a terrible rattling noise. Since I had to keep it on 24 hours a day for the stones to be polished as they collided against each other in the tumbler, I could hear that noise in my sleep. I remember that noise would take me places I didn’t want to go. So I finally had to turn off the machine at night.

“There are exercises you can do you to move your awareness to the other side,” Zuleica said.

“The other side?”

“To your *dreaming body*.”

She spoke in such a soft melodic voice that it calmed me just to listen to her.

“When you sleep, you must allow your *dream body* to become aware, conscious oi itself. You do this first by looking at your hands, and then by getting up out of your bed to move around. Or you can find anything else you wish, such as the item you gaze at during the day. Or something in particular you wish to find. In other words, your *dream body* must respond to your commands. To *stalk* with the *double* is to control your movements in a specific endeavor and not expend all your energy in one crazy outburst.”

“How does one expend one’s energy?” I asked.

“Gradually, harmoniously. Try to prolong your *dreaming* endeavor as long as possible but always reserve energy so you can wake up and you don’t get lost in places you won’t be able to come back from.

“Now, I will show you a few specific exercises you can practice.”

She placed a cushion on the floor in front of a low. wrought iron table and told me to sit comfortably, crossing my legs if I wished. In the center of the table she placed a short blue candle and lit it. After flickering for a while, the yellow flame formed a perfect unwavering oval. Zuleica gently blew on the flame causing it to leap sideways for an instant. When the current of air had passed, the flame straightened out and became calm again. I watched Zuleica intently for I knew there was a lesson in what she was doing.

“There are two sides to everything,” she said sitting down in a high-backed cane chair, “and that includes the mind. On the one hand, it can think, reason, and reflect upon itself in order to create and draw conclusions. The other quality of the mind is to be silent, inactive and without thought. We all know how to reason and reflect upon ourselves, but to achieve silence is more difficult.”

Without getting up, she blew on the flame again. I was surprised to see that the flame leaped as it had done before.

“The mind is like this flame. It flares up at the slightest disturbance and flutters the moment a breeze touches it,” she said. “Thoughts and desires are like gusts of air; they activate the mind and make it flutter.”

In a clear tone she explained that there are two approaches to achieving mental rest. She stood and placed her hand around the flame to form a partial shield, then blew at it again. This time, the flame, being protected by her hand, did not flicker.

“One approach to silence and rest is to shield the mind from outside disturbances that can unsettle it. You do this by removing yourself from the disruptive or injurious forces that threaten your wellbeing. In other words, you withdraw and hide yourself in your depths.”

The second method, Zuleica said was more difficult to accomplish for it involved a delicate maneuver of shielding the mind, not from outside influences, but from it's own influence. In this case, since the disturbing stimuli come from within, there is no way to run or retreat into the self, for the mind itself is agitated and running. Therefore, one has to stop one’s agitation by fixing the mind to some point such as an image, idea, or sound, and in this way render it immobile.

“Quietude is the product of discipline and training,” Zuleica said. “It involves stopping the internal dialogue by focusing on a single point, or by expanding awareness to merge with the great silence that exists beyond the limits of thought.”

As I listened to her talk, I felt a quietness settle about me as if it came not from her words but from her very being.

“To be unperturbed means that nothing can pull your attention away from it's center,” she said sensing my mood. “One of the best methods to achieve this is by gazing at a light or luminous object.”

She asked me if I had understood the two approaches for resting the mind, which she said were really methods of *gazing*. When I hesitated, she repeated them. In the first instance, the body and mind are removed from the disturbing stimuli, by retreating or moving away from it. This can be accomplished because the disruptive forces come from the outside. In the second instance, the body and mind are set firm, because the disturbances arise from within one’s own being.

“It’s best to use a combination of both methods; retreat and fixation,” she said, “That is why you are here in this quiet house where no one bothers you. While you are learning these *gazing* techniques you must retreat from the outside world, but you must also retreat from the world you carry inside you by fixing your mind though *gazing* practices.”

“What does fixing the mind actually do?” I asked.

“Only a fixed or centered mind allows you the freedom to come and go as you please.”

I told her I didn’t understand how a fixed mind could allow one to move about. It seemed to be a contradiction. Zuleica carefully picked up the candle and slowly moved it from side to side so that the flame did not waver but different areas of the table were illuminated.

“Notice that the flame does not flicker and yet it moves about. A fixed and steady awareness allows you to see into anything, to move in any direction without becoming agitated by what you see or do. Therefore, you are able to come and go anywhere and still be in control.”

Zuleica set the candle on the table so that the flame was just at the level of my eyes.

“If you’re mind is not fixed, and your thoughts jump around, whatever you see will pull you and affect your awareness. Then you will have to struggle to extricate yourself before you are free to move on to something else, and in no time at all you will have so many ties that you won’t be able to move at all.”

“What will happen then?”

“You will have to *recapitulate* your acts to free your energy,” she said. “That’s why we recommend that one always *recapitulates* the events of the day so that one is freed of their influence, and one does not build up energetic bonds.”

Zuleica stressed that recalling the events of my life combined with the sweeping breath I had learned, could clean not only past ties, but also maintain awareness in a fluid condition every moment of the day. Once freed, the awareness can be focused and used at the service of *intent*, or the spirit that rules us and gives us life.

“We must use our awareness to liberate awareness,” she said. “Just as we use a needle to take out a splinter in a finger. Now, enough explanation. Let’s get down to practice.”

Zuleica instructed me to *gaze* at the candle for a moment then to place the palms of my hands over my eyes, and visualize the flame. For a while I looked at the flame then closed my eyes and covered them with my palms. I could see a chartreuse circle, then a golden flame appeared which turned into a bright red-orange glow. Soon the flame was replaced by a small black opening that formed in front of my eyes.

Zuleica told me to repeat the exercise of *gazing* at the flame, then covering my eyes with my palms. This time, the reddish light seemed to be moving to my right, and it was difficult to keep it centered in my inner field of vision. She said I should try to move the image of the flame closer and further away from me, while keeping my eyes covered with my palms. After a while I was able to hold the image of the flame and move it further away or bring it closer to me using the force of my mind.

“This *gazing* practice will help you to develop your focusing ability,” Zuleica said when I opened my eyes again. “Just as the *sorcery passes* strengthen your *energetic body*, your mental control can be sharpened through *gazing* techniques.”

She added that visualizing a light, not only quiets the thoughts, but it also activates a fundamental *energy center* in the back of the head, invigorating the entire body. She remarked that with continued practice, I would no longer need to *gaze* at a candle, but would be able to see the flame simply by closing my eyes. The light, once fixed, would help me to concentrate on a single point, to the exclusion of all other influences.

“This is one way of resting the mind,” Zuleica said. “Even though you are actively concentrating, your mind is at rest because it is not dispersed in a thousand directions.”

The most invigorating form of rest, she explained, is not passive sleep in which a person is at the mercy of disturbing dreams, but a controlled, active concentration, in which one is attending only the invigorating light in front of the eyes.

She recommended that I stand up and walk around for a while to loosen my limbs before going on to the second *gazing* exercise. When I had again sat down on the cushion, I saw that Zuleica had placed a large black crow’s feather on top of the table.

“Now, I’ll show you another way of resting the mind,” she said. “Sit quietly, breathe naturally and without any thoughts, *gaze* at the feather.”

She said that I was to focus my attention on the feather until it and I merged. She said it was possible to merge with any object one was *gazing* at so that it was no longer a separate entity, but something alive and a part of one’s own *energetic being*.

“How is that possible?” I asked. “Everyone knows the world is made up of separate objects.”

Zuleica arched an eyebrow. “Is it really?” she asked. “Objects are only separate when we think about them. When we *gaze* at them, they merge in a single field of energy which also includes our *energetic bodies*.”

She looked at me to see if I comprehended what she said. I must have given her a dumb look for she added, “I have just revealed a sorcery secret and you insist on taking it as an ordinary statement. Think about it what I said.”

I was silent for a moment. “It still looks like an ordinary leather to me,” I said stubbornly.

Zuleica shook her head, “The here and there are one. The there and here are one. Nothing is separate from anything.”

As I *gazed* at the feather, I noticed that my breathing became slower, more rhythmical. It had lowered down into my abdomen. My thoughts faded and I was immersed in a profound silence. It seemed that Zuleica was right. At one point the feather was aware and observing me; it radiated energy at me as if it were conscious of my watching it. I had the distinct certainty that if intended it I could make the feather lift off the table and float in the air, for we were energetically linked.

After a while, Zuleica told me to move my head in small circles to rest my eyes; they had begun to tear from the strain of staring at the feather. She explained that the point of the *gazing* was not to stare fixedly at an object, but to let the eyes gently caress the object, so that, responding to one’s feeling, it opens up and emanates it's own feeling and knowledge.

“It is a merging of both feelings, from the *gazer* and the object, that results in a common blending of awareness and a sense of mutual trust and affection,” Zuleica said.

She further elaborated that this feeling of openness and empathy is the result of stopping one’s internal dialogue and of allow one’s inner sensibility to spill forth and merge with whatever one is *gazing* at.

“Pick any object that is pleasing to you,” Zuleica said. “Never *gaze* at anything that is unpleasant or frightening.”

“Why is that?”

“Because through steadfast *gazing* you open centers in your *energetic body* and the energy of the object will enter inside you. By the same token, if you are not in an agreeable mood, you should not inflict your negative feelings on the objects around you by concentrating on them, regardless of whether they are rocks, feathers or people.”

I rested my eyes by making circles with my nose, first in a clockwise, then in a counterclockwise direction. When I was relaxed again, Zuleica gave me a third exercise for fixing the mind, one which involved visualizing a shape or form.

“What kind of a form should I visualize?” I asked.

“Any pleasing shape will do,” she replied. She picked up my drawing pad and inscribed a circle. In it's center, she drew a smaller circle and shaded it black. She said that a circle was always pleasing to visualize because it represented the completeness of the universe from which nothing could be added or taken away. To visualize a circle, she said filled one with a sense of fullness and wellbeing that was needed for a joyous journey.

Zuleica told me to close my eyes, and moving in a clockwise direction, slowly and smoothly draw a circle with my mind. Then my inner feeling was to leap into the center of the circle and momentarily rest there. Then I was to fix my attention at the top and begin inscribing the circle again and repeat the procedure of pushing through the center of it. Zuleica explained that the circular motion of the eyes as well as mentally leaping into the circle’s center, should be repeated until I could do it with great concentration.

I found this exercise more difficult to do than the last one. It made me drowsy. I began to yawn and fidget.

“When gazing at an inner or outer shape, one must not become agitated or let one’s thoughts roam,” Zuleica warned. “If they do, immediately bring your attention back to your task.”

She explained that leaping into the circle’s center had a very powerful effect on the energy points located behind the eyes. Pushing into the center of the circle, helped to open the passageway or door to the other world.

“What’s on the other side?” I wanted to know.

Zuleica hesitated. “Perhaps everything, perhaps nothing. Soon you will see for yourself.”

She suggested I continued inscribing circles in order to still and strengthen the mind. She assured me that by gently yet firmly pushing to the center, I would develop a steadfastness and imperturbability that were indispensable for journeying with the *energy body*.

After I practiced the technique several more times, Zuleica stood up and told me to select one of the three techniques she had shown me, and practice it while she attended to some affairs. I decided to gaze at the lighted candle; somehow I found the smooth yellow flame appealing. When I closed my eyes, I could still see the flame and practiced moving it back and forth and to the side. It seemed that only moments had passed, when Zuleica returned and told me to blow out the candle.

“'Whenever the mind is agitated or unsettled, be sure to do one of these exercises,” she advised, “The golden flame, once fixed in your mind will shine through the fog like a beacon from the other side. Once fixed, even if your eyes are closed, it will be there in front of you to calm your heart.”

We sat in almost total darkness for the sun had already set, and she had not yet lit the outdoor lanterns.

“Why is it important to quiet the mind?” I asked.

“If you link your actions to the level of profound silence,” Zuleica said, “you will have accomplished a delicate feat; that of action thorough inaction or *not-doing*. Once one learns to harness the energy of *not-doing*, one can become truly powerful.”

She further explained that in order to accomplish anything, we needed an *unbending intent* that gives one’s acts direction and purpose, as well as a refined and subtle awareness that give one’s acts power. She stressed that only a refined and subtle awareness will allow us to reach beyond the world of form and enter the energy layers of the other realms.

She leaned closer on her chair and said in a low tone, “now I will reveal the second of the sorcerer’s secrets. When you practice *gazing* you are really practicing *dreaming* while you are awake,”

Again she looked at me to see if I understood her meaning.

“You are focusing the energy of *intent*, which is abstraction itself, and are moving away from the physical level into the realm of pure energy.

She explained that *intent* is the force that holds things together, gives them order and power. *Gazing* awakens the underlying awareness sorcerers call *intent*, that force that enables us to perceive, and links our body directly to it. It is also this firm and unbending force called *intent*, that distinguishes acts of power from the shallow, arbitrary acts of everyday life.

“Through *gazing*, your physical body is gradually transformed so that it matches your mental vitality. Finally, the body becomes so light that it's is rendered into sheer energy. When this happens, one is *dreaming* with the totality of oneself. All one has to do is to *intend* something and the body will perceive it. This happens because one has linked oneself to *intent* and is *dreaming* oneself using the power of creation itself. *Gazing* techniques were designed by sorcerers of antiquity to arrive at this subtle manipulation of perception."

Zuleica picked up the feather and let it fall gently onto the table.

"Practice *gazing* and you will eventually purify your body so that it will become as light as this feather," she said. "When your body becomes transformed into pure energy like your mind, there will be no difference between what you think and what you are. The here and there of space and time will merge into a single awareness of now, and your mind and body will no longer be separate, but a single energetic unit of being here.

As she talked, I sensed someone else watching us from the darkness of the corridor. At first I only caught a glimpse of a shape; then I saw him standing there, as if eavesdropping on our conversation or observing my practice. I had noticed him earlier and had kept turning my head to see if the man was still there. I assumed it was someone living in that house, for the house was large with many rooms.

Zuleica smiled, "It's not time to meet him yet, but you will soon when you are more invisible. For now, concentrate on your practices."

"Who is that man?" I asked alarmed.

"The one who makes the darkness respond," she said.

"Respond to what?"

"To his bidding, to his *intent*. He is the Master of Intent. When you learn to *stalk* with the *double*, he will come and show you his art."

"Can't I meet him now?" I asked.

She laughed and said I was in no condition to meet anyone in my present energetic state, and it would take a great deal of energy to interact with the Master of Intent.

"In the darkness you sense him. He will speak to your *double* directly. When you reach the point of *silent knowledge*, he will guide you, and you will know."

"What will I know?"

“I can’t tell you that. You will simply know directly, and if anyone asks you, you yourself will not be able to say what it is that you know. It will be too deep, too vast for words. You will try to remember, but you won’t be able to think of it, because what you know is so far removed from thought that words will fail you.”

“Then what good is it?” I asked, “if I won’t remember what he teaches me, or if I won’t be able to say what it is, what’s the point of knowing anything?”

“You will make things happen,” she said. “You will cause the darkness to move and manifest itself in light.”

For a while, I tried to figure out what she meant, and then suddenly I knew. For as Emilito had warned me, someone had already been showing me how to *stalk* with the *double*. I didn’t know what Zuleica meant, but I knew that I already knew. The certainty came to me that the Master of Intent had been teaching me all along. The closest way I could explain it was that he had been setting up something in an area that was beyond my waking attention, beyond even my dreams. It was a place where no dreams existed and yet energy flowed unimpeded by thoughts or wishes or even images arising in sleep.

With that realization, the man stepped out of the shadows. I was not surprised to see that it was the same man I had encountered at the border crossing in Nogales; the one who had made me faint by pushing my upper back, and the one I had seen again in Catalina’s house, when she had pointed out the window to her protector.

He seemed to know me also, and yet I had laid eyes on him only twice as far as I could recollect. He nodded perfunctorily from a distance. I avoided his gaze for I remembered what happened the last time I looked into his eyes. He said nothing, and I knew there was nothing to be said, but the pressure of his presence made my thoughts stop and the muscles of my arms and legs swell as a current of energy passed through me. I could hear the air around me buzzing; I breathed heavily, taking in gobs of air though my mouth. Then I felt the back of my neck pop as he came, or rather, drifted closer.

I saw his mouth move; he was saying something, but I couldn’t hear him. It was a silent sound and I was being pushed away by that voiceless whisper. I fell backwards onto the bench, and had to hold on tor dear life so I wouldn’t pass out. Then I felt the top of my head open and something shoot out so violently that I ended up in San Francisco.

I knew it was San Francisco because I could see the Golden Gate bridge. I was soaring over the choppy gray waters and could see where the rust colored paint was peeling off the massive iron girdles held up by cables. Then I was flying around skyscrapers, large office buildings with dark glass windows. I flew very hard so I wouldn't get trapped between the buildings, which had strong air currents circling around them. I could hear the deafening roar the air conditioning units on the top of the buildings. I did not like that area one bit. It was so menacing that I became frightened. The shadows of the tall building on the streets below made the scene dark and ominous.

I could hear a horrible sound, I looked and knew it was a helicopter, and I was being sucked into the propeller blade, for the wind was horrendously strong and I could not fight against it. I made a supreme effort to pull away using every bit of my energy in my womb. Then I felt myself sucked into a long tunnel by a cord that was attached to my body somewhere at the other end. I was pulled south, through different terrain zooming below me at a fantastic speed. I saw or rather sensed the scenery changing from cities, to desert, to cities and lakes as I covered thousands of geographical miles in mere seconds. When the rushing stopped, I found myself back in Guadalajara, in the patio, slumped on the bench of Zuleica's house.

I opened my eyes and found Zuleica staring at me. I told her where I had been. She was not pleased to hear of my travels.

"You expend all you energy in one uncontrolled outburst. You traveled a great distance for nothing, and to what avail?"

"I don't know what happened," I said.

"The master of darkness loaned you some of his energy and you wasted it in a cross-country joy ride, that's what happened. I hope you at least enjoyed the sights."

I shook my head. "It all zoomed by too fast, like a movie played at an ultra fast speed, I just got glimpses of water and desert and buildings, and many cities below."

"Glimpses. Glimpses. What good are glimpses?" Zuleica said. "We are after control. You have a great deal of work ahead of you before you can use your *stalking* techniques to control your flying or whatever you chose to do with your *dreaming* energy. So practice, practice."

She left me alone in the darkness so I could continue practicing the *gazing* exercises.

## Chapter 22: The Other Side

After several weeks of practicing the *gazing* and *dreaming* techniques Zuleica had taught me, I felt a strange silence settle over me. I was no longer in a hurry; I had no appointments to keep; nowhere to go and no one to talk to. I seldom saw Carlos or don Juan, and when our paths did cross, they usually avoided me. I could move freely on the ground floor of Zuleica's house and in the patios and garden, but I was not allowed upstairs or outside the compound. My food was brought to me by a servant, and I slept in a high platform for which I needed a stepladder to climb into.

During the day, I worked on some sketches. Drawing, I realized, was really another form of *gazing*; it allowed me to spend hours in total silence without getting bored. At night, I practiced finding my hands in my dreams; moving about without shifting the scene; locating certain object Zuleica had specified beforehand, and giving myself commands in my dreams, that I would carry out with as much detail as possible.

One evening, I was *gazing* at the ripples in the pond. It was twilight and the small patio was a mass of dense shadows. Everything was so still that I thought I could hear whispering on the other side of the house. I again sensed a person lurking in the darkness, but this time, the man abruptly came out of the shadows and stood before me. I recognized him as the Master of Intent, but before I could say anything he vanished in a flurry of ripples that began with his feet and undulated upward to encompass the top of his head. To my astonishment, he had actually vibrated himself into non-existence right before my eyes. He melted into the darkness as mysteriously as he had appeared.

Before I could become too frightened, Zuleica came and sat beside me on the bench.

"The Master of Intent, just showed you how to merge with the darkness," she said. "Don't be afraid of it. Embrace it. Be one with the night. Become invisible as he is."

I felt something inside me struggle, resist. I did not want to be invisible. I wanted to be recognized and noticed. I was tired of being overlooked. I wished other people would help me get rid of my moroseness and quandaries, not ignore me even more. The memory of my grammar school classmates teasing me, and my teachers criticizing me because I did not speak English, unsettled me. My class mates would say: "What's the matter, a cat got your tongue?" and take turns pulling my pigtail. Then they left me to brood on a bench while they ran off to play jump rope or kickball. I vowed then that I would get the attention I felt I deserved and no longer would be a frightened nobody. My whole life's endeavor was a struggle to fulfill that ambition. Now Zuleica was telling me to become invisible and be a silent, unseen nobody again,

“A *stalker’s* training is in the art of being invisible,” Zuleica whispered as if following the drift of my thoughts, “A *stalker* makes herself unobtrusive in all situations, and never calls attention to herself,”

“Never?” I said, remembering the fortune cookie I once had that said: “There is only one thing worse that being talked about, and that’s not being talked about.”

It was true. It was easier to be criticized or insulted than to be ignored, overlooked. I did not want to not exist. Some part of me fought desperately to survive; it I was a lesser part that settled for criticism rather than oblivion. I would have liked for Carlos and don Juan to have taken time to evaluate my progress or even lack of progress, but they always passed me in the corridors without saying a word.

“Let go,” Zuleica said. “Let go of everything. Just let go.”

“Why must I?” I said stubbornly.

“So that the energy waves from eternity can tumble you into other realms. They can’t reach you if you shield yourself with yourself. Only if you are invisible can the waves affect your *energy body* directly.”

Something in me still fought the idea of being invisible.

“Let go of your crappy self,” Zuleica snapped.

I heard her say that over and over and as she kept saying it something in me began to give up. I started letting go, although of what I didn’t know, but I kept letting go more and more until I became fluffy, like a giant pillow, and when that pillow dissolved, I became a tiny dot lost somewhere in the black vastness, and then I lost awareness of being a dot, and I was nothing.

“Cross over,” a voice said. “Let the energy waves of the universe push you over to the other side, to the world where we are.”

I followed the voice and heard it talk of a parallel universe almost identical to ours that existed behind a barrier. That barrier was made up of our concerns, our ideas of reality, our energetic affiliation to everyday life, and, fundamentally, to ourselves. Then I heard the voice of Nelida repeating what she had told me seemingly long ago, how not even the body is ours to keep;

that the essence of life is borrowed, not ours to cling to. The essence of life is fluid and our awareness must be also fluid to move with it, or it is forever scattered in the fragmentation of the world into which we were born, but that there is a way out, and that is to let go and be nothing.

I opened my eyes, and saw that I was still sitting on the bench by the pond, but instead of Zuleica, Emilito was there staring at me. So was Carlos and don Juan, Nelida and other people milling about the patio. Food had been set out on a sideboard. I was in the midst of a party going full force. People were having a lively discussion. They were comparing descriptions of their travels, of the things they had seen in the twin universe, as they called it.

“There is a Pope but he isn’t celibate,” Carlos said. “He has a fat and loudmouthed wife.”

“Ah, but does he live in Rome?” don Juan asked cryptically. He seemed to be more relaxed than usual; almost jovial.

Carlos thought for a moment as if it were a trick question.

“I have seen the most exquisite grove of trees,” Emilito interrupted. “They are dark green and enormous. Excellent for tree climbing.”

“I have talked to many people, they are healthy and vital, but totally closed-minded,” don Juan added. “They are unable to imagine or speculate. All their behavior is ritualistic, compulsive and governed by rules.”

“Their language is fascinating,” Carlos continued. “The fundamental unit is not the phoneme based on sound, but a syntactical structural element. Their brains directly impinge on one another in the form of an agreed upon structural framework governed by rules of syntax.”

“I have seen a typewriter that writes with syllables, prefixes and suffices instead of letters. Each key is practically a word in itself,” don Juan said. “That’s something for Taisha to explore.”

I became very exited upon hearing about such a machine. I wanted to know more about it, but other people contributed their descriptions of discoveries they had made about that world. I learned that the people there had a periodic table of chemical elements, but instead of having the usual 52 elements; their world had 76 elements, and some of them were not the same as the ones in our world.

“There are some animals that are very strange,” don Vicente said, “and very unusual plants I had never encountered before. Much of the knowledge for curing comes from this world.”

I had a moment of sudden inspiration. “You’re talking about the realm of the invisible people of the Monte,” I said. “You mean the Yaqui Indians are right? There really is such a world parallel to our own, and magical plants and animals really do exist?”

Don Juan nodded. “The sad part is, however, that for the Yaqui Indians the realm of the invisible is now only a myth. They can catch glimpses of it, but they cannot enter it with the totality of themselves. So for them it must remain only a part of their mythology.”

“Why is that?” I asked.

“Their everyday world has become too real and all-encompassing for them,” don Juan explained. “The door has been sealed shut by a barrier of human concern that they cannot penetrate. However, it was not always like this; but now the western world has impinged on the Yaqui so powerfully that, for them, that door remains forever sealed. All they can do is to relate stories of that world and tell tales of magic and wonder from a bygone time.”

I looked around for Zuleica but she was nowhere in sight. Then I noticed that my surroundings looked somehow different. Although we were in the same house, it was not the same. It looked more like the patio and house did after a long session of gazing at the stones and walls. I couldn’t put my finger on it, but I realized the tiles were not exactly square; they were rhomboid, and there was an ever so slight tilt to the floor and walls. If I had my leveler and plumb line with me, I could have determined their distance from true for certain. As it was, they seemed to be shifting as they did after my sessions of *gazing*.

The tiles were shiny and vibrated causing their shapes to alter every so slightly. The roof beams of the corridor were not parallel as they should have been, and then I noticed that the trees were different too. Larger, fuller, their foliage more dense, and, while I was at it, I noticed the people in the patio. They looked pristine, pure, empty as if they had form but no substance.

Emilito stared at me the way Zuleica had done whenever I was totally preoccupied with something in order to gain my attention. Then I saw him wink at me and nod his head. Suddenly I knew what his secret was, the mysteries he had wanted to reveal to me when I had enough energy to comprehend it. Now I grasped it without him having to tell me. He was Zuleica’s *dreaming body*. That was the reason why Zuleica wasn’t there in the room.

Emilito nodded silently waiting for me to finish with my bubbling realizations. I knew also that if that was so, then I, too, was in my *dreaming body* and so was everyone in the room and that was why they seemed so sparkling. What's more, the house, the bench, the tables, the food that had been set out in the patio, all were part of another world. I had crossed over into the twin world without even realizing it, and that meant that the discoveries that everyone had been sharing, were not about some inaccessible distant dream world, but about the very reality which we were now inhabiting.

The minute I realized this, Emilito said, “that’s right, Taisha. I am the other side of Zuleica, and you are your dream body, the other side of yourself. You have used the energetic wave from the universe to cross over to the parallel world, the one that exists next to our own.”

I pinched myself to see if I was real, and seemed to be as solid as could be, given my state of excitation and ebullience upon realizing where I was.

“We are in another braid of the universe,” Emilito explained. “The one overlapping with the world of every day life; made up of the same energy only slightly different. Now you know what it means to become invisible, and what it is like to be *stalking* with the *double, a*nd why we always stress sobriety and control. Without control awareness is dispersed. You can do without the self of everyday life, but you can’t do without sobriety and clarity. Awareness must remain intact, no matter where you find yourself so that you can continue to perceive.”

I embraced Emilito and thanked him for all his help. To my surprise, he seemed to be solid, and yet he wasn't, for we encompassed volumes of space, like two gigantic pillows embracing, but the reason I could grasp him, was because I, too, was billowy and without substance.

“But how is it possible that you are a man when Zuleica is a woman?” I asked. “My dream body is not that of a man.” I touched myself quickly to see if what I was saying was true.

“The *nagual* Julian taught us how to move our assemblage points to the position of a man,” Emilito explained. “It was an extraordinary challenge to be male and I took it. It’s so tiresome to have a hole between your legs,” he added with an exaggerated sigh. “It leads to all sorts of outlandish behavior.”

Everyone laughed in agreement, especially the female members of the group. Then I saw Carlos signaling me to come over to him. I realized I had known him forever and now I knew where it was that we had met. It was not in the anthropology department of the university, as I had first thought, but it was here in the twin world which I had visited often. We had done many things on this side, things that were inconceivable from the point of view of the everyday world.

Then I saw a young woman about my age. She was blond, had blue eyes and was petite and very pretty. Her name was Florinda, and she was the ward of the older woman, with the same name, who was Nelida's counterpart.

"You and I are sisters," I said embracing her affectionately, for I recognized her from other encounters, although I could not remember them in detail.

"Remember each other well," don Juan said, "because you'll meet again in the world of everyday life and will have forgotten that you knew each other. You will have to reconstruct this feeling of unbiased affection from scratch."

The *nagual* woman, Carol, whom I remembered seeing before, was there too. She was the young woman who had given Carlos the bread in the bakery in Hermosillo, but I already knew her. She had helped hoist me up into the tree house and had looked after me while I was unconscious for three days and two nights.

"And we also will meet again on the other side," she said, lisping a bit on the word "side." "But we won't forget. We'll always remember that we loved each other," and she embraced me with such genuine affection that an overwhelming emotion enveloped me and I knew we were tied to each other forever across universes.

Don Juan stood the three of us around Carlos and moved our heads together so that they touched. He told us that his task was to make certain through all our training that our assemblage points would be in the same position, and even though our assemblage points would be constantly displaced throughout our training, they would move at the same rate and in the same direction, so that the four of us would function as a single unit and be able to amalgamate a consistent reality that we shared.

"For some time Carol will have to stay on this side with us," he went on. "But you will not really be separated; the bond of energy set up in this world will hold across the boundaries between the twin universes.. You only have to be silent and abandon yourself to know where each of the other is."

I knew what he meant, but I also became frightened. From experience it was evident that the universe was vast and one could easily get lost. I also was aware of my tendency to indulge in self-obsessions and in struggles for independence which could only set up barriers and block the energy holding us together. The most dangerous part was that we would meet again in the world of human affairs, where our power would be minimal, diminished by the concerns of daily life and the absence of don Juan and the energy of his sorcerer group. We would be operating on a low level awareness, colored by the massive interference of the bulk of humanity with their own obsessions and concerns.

“Florinda will be your companion and act as your counter balance,” don Juan said. “She’ll see to it that you don’t indulge too much. If you do, she will be at your throat like a ferocious jaguar.”

Florinda let out a growl and clicked her teeth together repeatedly in a biting motion. Everyone laughed.

“Better watch out, or she’ll be at your throat,” don Juan warned.

“And I will never be at your throat,” Carol said soothingly.

“Listen to Florinda; she is more sober than you. The two of you will flank the new nagual, and journey with him, perfecting yourselves until Carol Tiggs returns.”

“When will she come back?” I asked.

"Only power can decide that,” don Juan replied, “and your impeccability.” He paused for a moment. “If you want to see your loved one again. Be impeccable. Do your *recapitulation* and don’t think about yourselves.”

Carol gave us a wistful smile urging us on.

“I’m counting on you, Taisha,” she whispered so no one could hear. “You will pull me and I will pull you. Agreed?”

I nodded but wordlessly asked, how? She showed me her left hand. She was wearing a gold and diamond ring that looked like a tiny monstrance. She told me to gaze at it for a moment and to remember it always, because one day, she would give it to me as a sign that we had been together before.

“In the world of everyday life, it is so easy to forget,” she said. “Tokens of proof are always welcome.”

“I’ll never forget,” I swore, embracing her. “I’ll pull you with my affection.”

“This afternoon you have enough energy to grasp the truth of the twin universe as a bona fide realm of existence,” don Juan said, “but it’s not that easy to cross over with your body. You can catch glimpses of it in dreams, but to come here with the totality of yourself takes years of training and storing energy, and even then, there are countless obstacles and no guarantees.”

“Then I won’t go back,” I said. “I’ll stay here with all of you.”

“That’s not possible,” he said sternly, “You have to perfect yourself in the world of human beings. You have to begin from that point and journey here.”

“Why?”

“Because that is were the bulk of your energy is rooted, besides there is no advantage of being on this side, A *stalker* must be fluid so that you can move anywhere. You must be at ease and impeccable no matter where you are; in this world, or in the one in which you live, or in any other place in the infinite band of possibilities that makes us sentient beings.”

“Leave the self behind, and you can go anywhere,” Carol said. “Your task is to dissolve everything that makes a human being grounded in the world of human beings.”

“Then, I’ll leave everything here,” I said.

Don Juan smiled. He advised me that while we were in the everyday world, all the energy gleaned from *recapitulating* and impeccable actions would be able to cross over to be stored here with them. Carol would remain to act as a beacon and to help consolidate our *double*. The more impeccable we were and the less emphasis we placed on our personal selves, the more we would strengthen our other side, or *energy body*.

“You will be like squirrels gathering nuts for the winter,” Carol said. “Your energetic selves will get stronger and more concise, until one day you will be able to tip the scales and find the entirety of your being on this side with nothing left for the world of the human apes.”

That day, she said, we would become invisible to the human eye and we would consolidate the totality of ourselves on the other side.

It was all crystal clear. I knew now the importance of the sorcerers’ training; the *recapitulation* was to rid oneself of one’s remembered past and to release one’s trapped energy; losing self-importance prevented one from placing undue energy on the fabricated social self, thereby making it into a permanent feature. The sorcery passes enable one to dissolve the solidity of one's body and purify it energetically. Losing personal history frees one from the compulsion of relating oneself to a single mode of being, and prevents us from being pinned down by others with their thoughts and expectations.

To test one's progress and transformation, sorcerers use petty tyrants they find in their daily world. In this way, they make certain that change isn't merely an ideal but an actual bodily metamorphoses on a fundamental *energetic level*. By regarding the world as *controlled folly*, a *stalker* is assured of not becoming entangled with human concerns. Only in this way can one liberate enough energy and become fluid to move with one's body into the twin world.

Quieting the internal dialogue through the *gazing* techniques has a triple purpose. First, it blocks the reinforcement and affirmations we constantly give ourselves that the world is such and such. Second, it enables us to store the energy needed to make the crossing. Third and finally, it creates an opening in our *energetic bodies* so that the waves from the universe can tumble us over to the other side.

I thought of what Zuleica had said about letting go and becoming invisible. Now I knew why everything that is human had to be abandoned. Sorcerers utilize the same methods as do the phenomenoiogists, such as suspending judgment, questioning the taken for granted aspects of space and time, but sorcerers do not merely describe phenomena but are able to actually transcend reality. Reality is constituted by the existence and condition of our sense apparatus that enable us to perceive the world. Sorcerers, by deliberately and consistently enhancing that capacity for perception through storing energy, liberate themselves from the imprisonment of a single mode of being. Sorcery is really the capacity to perceive more than the average person.

"Taisha is philosophizing even in the twin world," Emilito said out loud.

"Let her conceptualize and speculate all she wants," don Juan said. "Someday she will be able to live her realizations. Besides, it means she and Carlos will get along famously. We all know how he is given to analysis and conceptual interpretations."

"Like the nagual Elias before us," Emilito said.

Don Juan nodded.

"Well, then let Taisha speculate on this," Emilito said. "The here and there of the tree house."

I turrned to face him. His eyes were glowing with the excitement of a revelation. With a nodding of his head he coaxed me to think about it. I was at a loss as to what he was referring to.

“Living in the tree house, gave you a different perspective on here and there,” he said.

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“There was no horizon in your world,” he said bringing his face so close to mine that his features became blurred.

It dawned on me then that half of Clara’s house, the grounds at the front part of her place, including the giant trees and the tree house, had all existed in the twin world. I had already spend many months of my training on this side. No wonder Emilito had insisted that I recapitulate again, saying I had to do it several times for there were many layers of existence to break through. I had to do it once with my everyday body and again with the *double*.

What’s more, Emilito was right; my extended stay in the treehouse and the trees, had altered the relationship between my body and the ground. My *assemblage point*, or center for organizing perception, had been displaced to another point on my *energetic body*, thereby enabling me to experience different special and temporal relationships.

Now that I focused my attention on it, I remembered that the foliage of many of the trees was so thick: that the sky as well as the horizon were completely obscured. Perception of the world in the trees was not laid out in terms of distant and close space. Rather everything was immediate, intimately related to my body. It was a superb training to expand the limits of my awareness of space. The more I climbed the trees, the more fluid my assemblage point became, until I could swing from branch to branch feeling no separation between myself, and my surroundings.

It gave me a new perspective on the world, totally different from the one I had while I was on the ground. In order to climb the trees, I had to match my physicality with that of the branches and leaves. My entire existence was determined by the here and now. For any distraction could have caused a lost of balance and a fall to my death. At any given moment, all of me was focused on a specific concern; that of maneuvering through the branches. Past, future, and the far away had all merged into a single point: the immediate now, which was governed by my particular task at hand.

I had dissolved my old mode of being in the world through my first *recapitulation* in the cave, and I had incorporated a new one, that of a tree dweller, by never leaving the trees. I experienced a new bodily solidity that at times would express itself in an intense feeling of claustrophobia. I could dispel this by either merging with the trees energetically, or by creating a new experience of space or time, in which case my body had to dissolve the branches around me and move beyond them. I did this through a second *recapitulation*, which expanded my temporal horizon; and through practicing the bodily movements Emilito would periodically show me from the ground, which expanded my spacial horizon.

“You recapitulated in the trees, practiced *dreaming* and *intending* in the trees and even were able to do movements outside the trees leaping with your *energetic body* into a different realm,” Emilito reminded me. “All this is *stalking* with the *double*. It was made possible by abandoning the memory of the limits of the physical self.”

“You moved from the trees to another reality,” don Juan said. “A realm which is inaccessible from the world of everyday life. You used *intending* to catapult you from one braid of the universe to another. Now you know what we mean when we say that *intending* is the wings that carry a sorcerer across the span of eternity. Soon my party will be leaving on those wings, but we will meet again, somewhere in the folds of *dreaming* and from there catapult ourselves to freedom.”

I wanted to ask him when and where they would be going and more specifically how we would catapult ourselves to freedom, but my *dreaming* energy was waning. I knew I would be waking up soon in the world of every day life, and there, I would forget most of what had transpired here. It would be like a vivid dream, fragmented for a short while, then it would fade and merge with the dense fog that separated the twin universes.

“I have to go now,” I said. “I don’t suppose you could keep me here with you?”

“No.” don Juan said firmly. “If you come it will have to be on the wings of *intent* blown by your own fluidity.”

I thought of Nelida’s advice of always saying goodbye to each moment because it would never again return. She caught the drift of my thoughts.

“Impeccability is saying hello, thank you and goodbye all in one moment through your superb actions,” she said as she embraced me. “That way you will always be at ease, with no regrets, and with nothing pending.”

I nodded. It summed up everything I felt in a nutshell so that nothing more needed to be said. I looked at everyone, trying to incorporate them in my gazing memory before they faded into the fog.

I woke up, gradually becoming solid again. I was laying in my bed in Zuleica's house, numb and disoriented, and then I remembered bits and pieces of a giant mosaic. I knew that another world existed, a world that was as real as the one I had learned to call my own. I knew that I was nothing. That whatever I thought I was, is a fabrication, a temporary consolidation of components held together by a force for some effect, but it could never be taken for real. There was another reality, parallel to our own, and it too wasn't real. The position of our assemblage points was everything. It amalgamated worlds upon worlds and enabled us to experience them as our world, as the world.

The world of everyday life was only one perceptual possibility out of an infinite number of possibilities that make up existence. The *stalkers* training is to be fluid, invisible without attachment to self and things, so that one could shift back and forth at ease without losing energy or getting lost.

Living in the world of everyday life was like being a student in a class. I had to give a good presentation, I had to appear that I knew what I was talking about, that I meant what I said. I needed to strive for order and coherence, but when the class was over, whatever was said meant nothing, it was only an orderly structure created for that moment and not meant to ever be taken seriously as something real or believable. It was an exercise which had tb be discarded when the need was over so that one could move on in a never ending journey.

So it was with the twin reality. It was made up of people and animals and vegetation just like our world, only different. The grove of trees in Clara's house, the tree house, Emilito and myself all had been part of the twin world. I realized I had spent entire stretches of time there without even knowing it. I had been able to enter it under the power of don Juan and his group of sorcerers who trained me.

He and his group of sorcerers, through a lifetime of training, stored enough energy to cross back and forth without losing their awareness, their control and sobriety. With training I, too, would be able to make the great crossing and have enough energy not only to perceive the twin world but to hold that position of the assemblage point long enough to remember it in detail, and with added energy to be able to describe the place and the path so that the listener on this side would be able to comprehend them and perhaps even to make that journey himself.

Carlos came into the room where I had awoken. He examined my eyes to see if I was myself again and nodded satisfied. He told me to go get my things together, for we were returning to Los Angeles. A new academic year would be starting soon, and it would not be auspicious to miss the first day of classes.

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Editor's Note

This text is a best effort to produce a "finished" version of Taisha Abelar's unpublished manuscript, that can currently be found at https://archive.org/details/taisha-book. Any and all changes made, were intended to further enhance the manuscript and, as such, changes from the original scan have been minimized and focused on giving this book the same professional demeanor of the published works of Carlos Castaneda, Taisha Abelar, and Florinda Donner-Grau.

The apocryphal history of this work, which has been highly anticipated by Castaneda and Abelar fans and followers for decades now, is almost entirely outside of the scope of this commentary. However, apparently the unpublished manuscript was disseminated to women trainees in workshops and private classes in 1996.  Years later, a typewritten copy made it's way under a scanner, and thus we have a scanned ".PDF" file!

To untrained eyes, the original manuscript appears to have been a work in progress at the time when work on this manuscript stopped. In the original scan, a page is missing, which, unfortunately, we will just have to live with. The page would have been numbered 150 in the original manuscript. In addition, the original scan has two chapter 15's, 16's, and 17's, that are roughly all of the same length. However, they all have unique content and were retained, kept in the order presented, and renumbered sequentially.

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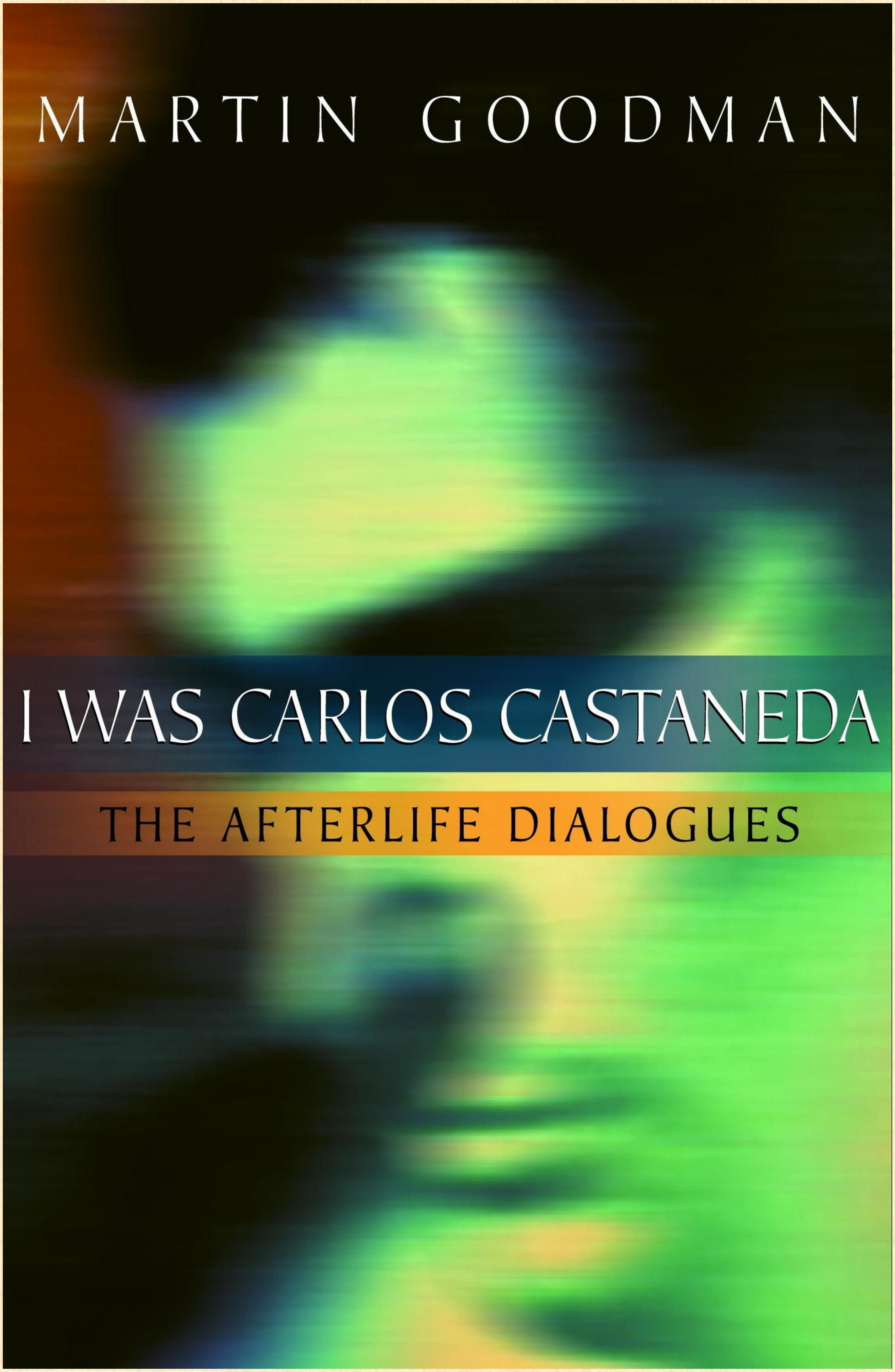
## 20 - I WAS CARLOS CASTANEDA: THE AFTERLIFE DIALOGUES

© 2001 - Martin Goodman. Multi-day conversations with the post-mortem embodiment of Carlos Castaneda in the French Pyrenees.


MARTIN GOODMAN
I WAS CARLOS CASTANEDA
THE AFTERLIFE DIALOGUES

# Book 20 – I Was Carlos Castaneda: The Afterlife Dialogues

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At the close of a ceremony sometime after the events described in this book, the participants held a thanksgiving. Thanks were given to friends, and also to those who had made lives hell for a while. They were all part of the history that had brought us to the present moment, and that moment was absolutely fine. Worth all the thanks we could ever give.

So the distinction between friends and enemies was dropped, and everybody was thanked by name. When we ran out of names we moved on to species, so even mosquitoes and malarial parasites got a mention.

Many people are part of the fabric of this book in some way. They have my thanks, even though they are not necessarily named here. Names are withheld to honor their privacy most of all. For the same reason, I have disguised, renamed, omitted, and merged characters in the narrative. People are free to declare their own interests and involvement in the story told here. I intend that they also be free to keep their anonymity.

This book could not have happened without my earlier practice in breaking bounds. My years in Scotland introduced me to an alternative and vigorous take on culture, and I thank the Scottish Arts Council for their generous funding for my writing career.

In teaching terms, my weekly tutorials with Professor Peter Geach engaged me with a master of Socratic dialogue. Professor Geoffrey Hill brazenly confounded lecture halls filled with students who wanted their literature simplified or explained in psychological terms, and showed the way to wonder. I appreciated this renowned poet's advice that my own writing must first be grounded in the study of those who have gone before me. It's hard to break the bounds without recognizing them.

James Broughton's first gift to me was a copy of his Androgyne Journal, a manual for transcending all known categories of wonder. He led life on his own terms, and those terms were dictated by love. Even in illness his encouragement for my writing was constant, and I have enjoyed trying to implement some of the lessons he gave. He now blesses heaven as well as Earth.

Jeanette Watson gave inspirational and truly generous support at a crisis point in my career, an act that helped make this book possible.

My thanks to Christobel Haward, whose readiness to gift her little house in the French

Pyrenees ultimately saw me in place for the events in this book. My thanks to Pam Clark and Mel Clark, and Madame Rosa Capela, for their care for me and my home in the village. It is a magical land.

As is my home in mountains near Santa Fe, New Mexico, where I am writing now. The land here has nurtured this book.

On the morning I was to begin writing, a coyote stepped out of the surrounding woodland and paced around the yard. I have glimpsed coyotes' bodies gliding between the trees, and I wake regularly to the primeval chorus of their celebration howls as they gather in the night outside our house, but this is the only such daytime sighting in my years here. I took the appearance as a special blessing on the nature of this book, and so I thank the coyote.

When I walked from the house to begin that day's writing, I came up to the "bothy." This is a sublime and beautiful writing studio gifted to the land by Emma Thompson and designed by Greg Wise—the architectural work itself an astonishing gift. Greg speaks of the design as a "fallen tepee," for the structure is angled for it's roof to rest on a lattice of massive and graceful hand-hewn beams as it shoots high to embrace the view of mountains. The building redefines Santa Fe style in a most appropriate way, for it embodies the union of sky and Earth that is so strong a feature of the high-altitude life here. It is a blessing to have worked here.

My thanks to Lynette Herring, Dr. Romig, and the staff of St. Vincent's Hospital here in Santa Fe. Without their urgent care and expertise I would not have lived to finish this tale.

Not all stories are meant to be told. After writing the first episodes, I set this book aside. It seemed enough to have survived the personal experience, and there was still a lot to learn from the lessons I had received. I doubted my strength to bring this particular book into being and thus engage with the energy of the world. So I thank my mother, Kay O'Neill, for reading that early portion and urging me to continue. You might notice from the nature of this book what an unusual mother I have. She was my first lesson in breaking bounds.

Toinette Lippe recognized the merit in that early portion, and worked selflessly and resourcefully with my agent Lorraine Kisly to bring it to it's publishing home. My editor Patricia Gift moved swiftly to create that publishing home at Three Rivers Press. They are my blithe spirits. I couldn't have written this book without their encouragement and support, so I thank them very much.

My thanks to Ralph Metzner and Dr. Charles Grob, who gave early and expert help in putting my experiences of ayahuasca into perspective. Also to Colleen Kelly, Robert Ott, George Greer,

and Requa Tolbert for their inspired listening and pleasing counsel, and Mac Hawley for his reminiscences of Castaneda that should have prepared me better for my meeting.

My partner James Thornton has led me to break more bounds than I knew existed. He encouraged me on the bold early steps of this journey, accompanied me, protected me, and nursed me. Over our shared daily ritual of pots of tea he brought his intellectual brilliance, his mystical experience, his keen intuition and infinite love and care to many conversations. Sharing life with him, it isn't possible to remain in the miasma of unresolved conflicts. For me, he is the reason that a phoenix can rise from the ashes.

My thanks and respect to Carlos Castaneda. When it comes to breaking bounds, he leads the field. I appreciate the techniques and truths about writing and life he has shown me.

The most a book can wish for is to keep the reader reading, and to be wrapped in that person's life with the breath of the closing sentence. For the power of reading as an alchemical act I thank you the reader.

## FOREWORD

### Life Before Death – A Brief Introduction to Carlos Castaneda

In February 1998 I received a curious and completely unexpected invitation– would I like to interview Carlos Castaneda? To the uninitiated, the invitation will mean nothing. But those who came of age in the Sixties counterculture will recognize that it was like being invited to peruse the Cretan Minotaur.

Carlos Castaneda stands alongside Timothy Leary as one of the great avatars—and one of the great enigmas—of the psychedelic age. In 1968 Castaneda published The Teachings of Don Juan, describing his apprenticeship in the deserts of Mexico to an Indian shaman, and his induction through mind-altering substances into "the Yaqui way of knowledge."

Like Herman Hesse's Steppenwolf and Aldous Huxley's The Doors of Perception, The Teachings of Don Juan and it's sequels became essential reading for a legion of seekers after truth- guidebooks into a fantastic and exotic world beyond the dull grind of materialism. And long after the first generation of fans had moved on to more pragmatic concerns– mortgages, families, tax returns – the books continued to sell. Since 1968, the works of Carlos Castaneda have sold more than eight million copies in seventeen different languages, totally unhindered by the fierce debate about whether Don Juan really existed or was simply a figure of Castaneda's imagination. No less a mystery was Castaneda himself. "The art of the hunter," Don Juan had taught, "is to become inaccessible," and it was a maxim that Castaneda had observed with an almost religious dedication for thirty years, forsaking public appearances, refusing almost all interviews, leading the life of a recluse.

But now, I was told, there had been a mysterious and dramatic change of heart. After years of inaccessibility, Castaneda had emerged into the public eye, bringing with him for the first time what he claimed was the most important facet of Don Juan's teachings—a system of physical movements known as “magical passes." He was prepared to lift the shroud of secrecy and talk to the world.

A date was provisionally set for me to meet him in Los Angeles. I was told that he would countenance no photographs, no tape-recording equipment. I would be allowed only to take notes, as he had taken notes during his years of tutelage at the feet of Don Juan. "A recording," Castaneda had told the Los Angeles Times in 1995 in a rare conversation, "is a way of fixing you in time. The only thing a sorcerer will not do is be stagnant. The stagnant world, the stagnant picture, those are the antitheses of the sorcerer."

Then the date was changed. And changed again. Castaneda, I was told, was "on retreat" in the Mexican desert. When—if—he returned, I would be notified. In late March, I left for California on other business. But the call never came. There was a simple reason. At the time that I was sitting in a hotel room in Los Angeles, Castaneda was not in Mexico at all. He was three miles away from me in his Westwood home, dying of liver cancer.

Carlos Castaneda died, at the age of seventy-two, on April 27. But, peculiarly, it was to be another two months before the news of his death became public.

There was no announcement, no press report, no funeral or service of any kind. According to the Culver City mortuary that handled his remains, his body was cremated at once, his ashes spirited away to the Mexican desert.

In death, as in life, Castaneda remained inscrutable. When, eventually, the news of his death leaked out to the press, two British newspapers ran obituaries, alongside photographs of a man who was not Carlos Castaneda. His friends drew a veil of silence over the death, refusing to comment. In a statement to the press, his agents, Toltec Artists, would say only that "In the tradition of the shamans of his lineage, Carlos Castaneda left this world in full awareness."

A key aspect of the teachings of Don Juan, as recounted by Carlos Castaneda, was the necessity of the "self" to die. "It is imperative to leave aside what [Don Juan] called 'personal history," Castaneda told the Chilean magazine Uno Mismo in 1997. "To get away from 'me' is something extremely annoying and difficult. What the shamans like Don Juan seek is a state of fluidity where the personal 'me' does not count." For Castaneda, "the personal me" was a subject of constant fluctuation and revision. By his own account, Castaneda was born on December 25, 1935, in São Paulo, Brazil. His mother died when he was seven and he was raised by his father, a professor of literature whom Castaneda supposedly regarded with a mixture of fondness and contempt– a shadow of the man he would subsequently meet in Don Juan. “I am my father," Castaneda told Time magazine in his first—and last–major interview in 1973. "Before I met Don Juan, I would spend years sharpening my pencils and then getting a headache every time I sat down to write. Don Juan taught me that's stupid. If you want to do something, do it impeccably, and that's all that matters." He claimed to have been educated in Buenos Aires and sent to America in 1951. He traveled to Milan, where he studied sculpture, before returning to America and enrolling at UCLA to study anthropology.

In fact, American immigration records indicate that Castaneda was born not in 1935, but in 1925—not in Brazil, but in Cajamarca, Peru. His father was not a university professor, but a goldsmith. His mother died when he was twenty-four. And while it was true that he had studied painting and sculpture, this was not in Milan, but at the National Fine Art School in Peru. Arriving in America in 1951, he studied creative writing at Los Angeles City College before enrolling in an anthropology course at UCLA in 1959.

The following year, he traveled to the Mexico-Arizona desert, intending to study the medicinal use of certain plants among local Indians. At a bus station in the town of Nogales in Arizona, he would later write, he met the man he called Don Juan. For the psychedelic generation, it was the equivalent of Stanley stumbling into a jungle clearing and discovering Livingstone, the young John Lennon bumping into Paul McCartney at a church fete in Woolton.

According to Castaneda, Don Juan Matus was a Yaqui Indian nagual, or leader of a party of sorcerers–the last in a line stretching back to the time of the Toltecs, the pre-Hispanic Indians who inhabited the central and northern regions of Mexico a thousand years ago. Under the guidance of the Yaqui sage, Castaneda was introduced to the psychotropic substances of peyote, jimsonweed, and "the little smoke," a preparation made from Psilocybe mushrooms that had been dried and aged for a year. Under the influence of these drugs, the bemused anthropologist underwent a series of bizarre encounters, with columns of singing light, a bilingual coyote, and a 100-foot-tall gnat —“the guardian of the other world”—manifestations of the "powers," or impersonal forces, that a man of knowledge must learn to use.

The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge was first published in 1968 as an anthropological thesis by the University of California Press. A year later–repackaged in a psychedelic dust jacket—it was published by a mainstream company. It became an immediate counterculture hit, prompting an exodus of would-be apprentice sorcerers to the deserts of Mexico in search of Don Juan—or at least good drugs.

A Separate Reality, published in 1971, was more of the same—a giant gnat circles around Castaneda, and he sees Don Juan's face transformed into a ball of glowing light –as the old Indian inducted Castaneda into the so-called second cycle of apprenticeship. These experiences were not just psychedelic, magical mystery tours. The use of drugs, Castaneda explained, was Don Juan's way of leading his pupil to "see" the world outside the cultural and linguistic constraints of Western rationalism, unencumbered by conditioned preconceptions or the taint of personal history.

Drugs were not in themselves the destination, he explained in Journey to Ixtlan, which was published in 1973; they were merely one route to the destination, to be discarded once this fundamental shift in perception had been achieved. Journey to Ixtlan won Castaneda his Ph.D. from UCLA. It also made him a millionaire.

By now, doubts about the authenticity of Castaneda's accounts had begun to multiply. It was one thing for him to refuse to divulge the identity and whereabouts of the Yaqui sage (Don Juan, he always made clear, was a pseudonym that he used to protect his teacher's privacy), but quite another for him to refuse to let his field notes be examined by other anthropologists. But whatever the doubts about the book's provenance, even the most skeptical critics agreed that they were powerful parables about the search for personal enlightenment, "remarkable works of art," as the author Joyce Carol Oates described them.

Shortly before Castaneda's death, his agent delivered to his publisher the manuscript of his last book, The Active Side of Infinity. Read in the light of his death, the book has a distinctly valedictory air. Reappraising his encounters with Don Juan, Castaneda reiterates that "the total goal" of shamanic knowledge is preparation for facing the "definitive journey–the journey that every human being has to take at the end of his life" to the region that shamans called "the active side of infinity." And, then, the journey back to life again?

Soon after Castaneda's death was announced, the Internet was buzzing with accounts from people whom he had supposedly visited in their dreams. Now, Martin Goodman brings us the resurrected Castaneda. Having reconstituted his body in the mountains, Castaneda steps down from the heights of the French Pyrenees. He has issues of his past life to resolve, while evoking powers of sorcery and storytelling to alert Goodman to the magical art of living. The Castaneda of these "Afterlife Dialogues," fresh with lessons and perspectives from his passage beyond death, conjures leaps of credibility reminiscent of one of the most persistent characters of twentieth-century literature... the Don Juan of Castaneda's own books.

With Castaneda assuming the role of Don Juan, Goodman is left in the young Castaneda's highly polished shoes. Publication of this book leaves him open to praise, to thanks, and to criticism. He might find guidance in Castaneda's response to his critics.

That response was always the same. Castaneda was writing about states of mind and perception outside the normal conventions of academia, so the normal terms of reference did not apply. Sorcerers, he said, have only one point of reference: "infinity."

He would continue repeating the same mantra to the very end.

"I invented nothing."

- MICK BROWN

Crazy old men are essential to society.

Otherwise young men have no suitable models.

-JAMES BROUGHTON

## THE MEETING

Lightning jags above the Pyrenean mountains, thunder roars, and death takes on new meaning. It is appropriate that the first time I see the man he stands at the foot of the full-size crucifix that borders the road just outside the village. But then everything he does is appropriate.

Do I recognize him, this man who fought shy of cameras all his life? Of course not. His book jackets carry no image of him. I found his first book so disturbing I never read another. Millions bought his every book, but not me.

Then he died. On April 27, 1998. It was some two months before the death was reported, and about two months after then that we meet.

August 21, to be precise.

I'm jumping ahead of myself, but then I'm excited. It's not that he came back from the dead. That's wild enough, but he'll explain it. It's that he chose to come back to me. The first drops of rain fall. They bounce off his head, and give an extra sheen to the silver hair with it's curls drawn back across his scalp. I stop on my walk—not because he looks at me, because he doesn't. He has never seen me before, yet he yells my name out loud against the thunderclaps as he looks up at the naked body of the crucified Christ.

"Martin!"

It's a cry for help. I do nothing but remain where I am as the rain falls. "Come here and look at this!"

I step up to his side, and we both raise our heads toward the face of Jesus.

"Tell me what's wrong about this, and what's right."

"Is this a riddle?" I ask.

"The only riddle is why I am asking you, and not telling you."

"It's wrong that Jesus was killed?" I suggest.

"You have a simple mind. Maybe that's a virtue in you. Can you absorb all that I am going to tell you? We'll see. First I will tell you what is wrong about this statue. It is pathetic that this crucifix is here. People paid good money to have this piece of wood carved, painted, and erected. What purpose does it serve? Every time they come and go along this road, they are faced with death. Christ is not about dying. He is about eternal life. Not death, but resurrection. If people want a symbol by the side of the road, then let them build an empty tomb. At least such a structure could shelter passersby from the rain. Come on, Martin. We will go to your home and get dry."

He shakes his head to sling water from his hair into my face, then starts off down the road into the village. I am impressed by his language. His voice is gentle, with a slight trace of an accent to give it distinction; I presume the accent comes from nearby Spain, and the flow of his words is beautiful. There is no pause, but softness of delivery gives polish to every word. His skin is tanned in depth, it has the color and texture of a local's, but his whole air of being is cosmopolitan.

"How do you know my name?"

"Is that what is important? How somebody knows your name? I use your name because I am talking to you. It is important that you listen to what I have to say rather than waste time wondering why I say it. We are speaking of Christ. There is time to consider you later. You now know what is bad about hanging this dead body beside the road for all to see. This morbid fascination with death kills the spirit. But tell me, what is good about it?"

"The craftsmanship?"

"Nonsense. You go past this statue on your walk every day. Do you ever stop and stare at it as I was doing?" "Sometimes. Not for so long."

"That's fine, as it happens. There is not so much to see. I am a sculptor myself, trained in Italy, so you can take my word for the quality of the piece. But you can never know this much for yourself, not about sculpture or anything, any work of man or nature, unless you spend time staring into it. Tune yourself to where you're looking, Martin. Open wide and see if there is a message for you there. If there is, you will know it from your eyes. They will vibrate. You will take in the energy of it's creator. If you stare at a tree or a flower, you take in the energy of the universe. Stare at a statue, and you take in the energy of the sculptor. The devotion in that sculptor was slight. There is little that is universal there. But there was some care as he formed this image of the male human body. The male nude. You can see he ran his hands over the wooden skin. What value there is in this sculpture is in the surface alone. The statue has painted flesh but no heart, no guts. Still it's a body, nonetheless. That's our goodness, Martin."

"The body is our goodness?"

"Perfect. You're learning. My time may not be wasted. Yes, the joy of being human is living in a body. It's fine to have a body as an emblem of religion, even if it is a dead one. Do you eat meat, Martin?”

"Sometimes."

"Dead meat?"

"Of course."

"You're wrong. Meat isn't dead. You'd run a mile if offered dead meat on a plate. It would stink to high heaven. No, the meat you eat has the life of the animal still inside it. That's why it gives life to you. You think Christ rose from the dead? You're a simpleton. Christ dies and the light goes out of the universe, the big bang gets sucked back in a big whimper. Christ never died. He picked up his body and took it for a stroll. The Romans had one agenda, and he had his own. He had work still to do. There's some work you can't do outside of a body. If people could just get a hint of that, they'd thrill to being alive."

We reach the steps that lead up to my house and he trots up them, as though leading me to his own home. The door is unlocked. He kicks off his shoes in the entryway and steps inside.

"Welcome," he says, and spreads his arms wide to hug me as I step inside to join him. The hug squeezes my arms to my sides and leaves me breathless. He holds me longer than is right. It feels like he is taking an impression of my body into the flesh of his own.

"You know me?"

I shake my head.

"But you do. You know me as well as I know you. I come like this, like this storm in your life, but it is necessary. I blow in, I make things fresh and clear for you, then I blow out again. Things can grow after a storm like the one I bring. You need new growth, yes, Martin?"

I'm too numb to nod my head, so I just stare at him.

"It is so. You were dead, and now you are alive. You have many years ahead of you. Me, I have this short reprieve. Just a brief while longer to jump around in my own body. I share what I can with you before I go. And now I give you what makes my body still work as it does. I give you my name."

He holds out his hand. I take it in mine and we shake.

"Carlos," he says. "Carlos Castaneda."

There was a power in the handshake, like a whiteout that left my mind blank. I don't know how it worked. I can only say I felt more drained than charged as a result. "The Carlos Castaneda?" I ask at last.

He grins, lifts his hands in the air, and spins around on his right foot before clicking his heels at a standstill again to present himself.

"But you can't be."

"Why not? I'm a writer. You're a writer. We both find ourselves in this ancient French village. It's natural that we should meet." "But you're dead."

The smile goes from his face and he flashes into anger. "Who told you so?"

“It was reported. I read your obituary. Your body was burned and the ashes spread over the Arizona desert." "Details," he says. "Mere details." He steps further into the room and slumps into one of the armchairs.

"They kept your death secret for a time."

"Why a time? Why not forever?"

"Your son—"

"I have no son."

"Stepson then. Your wife's son. He got an attorney's letter and released the news."

He says nothing. Simply leans back his head, opens his mouth, and lets out a long sound. It's a moan first of all, then the vocal cords stop vibrating and the sound is different. It's a death rattle. I step closer to examine him. Saliva drools from a corner of his mouth and his pupils have rolled back behind his eyelids to leave only the whites of the eyes and the veins.

There is silence, then his tongue sticks out, pink rather than gray, and remarkably juicy. It starts at the corner of his mouth and licks all the way round his lips. As I watch the tongue I feel myself watched in return. The right eyeball has swiveled back into place. One eye fixed on me, the other still white, it's like a hideous wink. Then both eyes shut tight, stay closed awhile, and snap open. He stares up at me, opens wide his mouth, and laughs. It's a honking laugh, which seems to stem from spasms in his chest, and I feel the gusts of stale breath against my face.

I sit on the sofa to face him, with the window behind me, and wait for an explanation.

"So, dear boy." As he speaks he shifts his body to sit upright. "You think that death is the end?"
"No."

"Of course not. But look at you. See how much work you still have to do. It seems even my death freaks you out. Makes you too stupid to speak. How are you going to cope with your own death when it comes?"

"Did you really die?"

"That's good. It's good you can ask the question. It means you can accept the possibility that I'll say yes. Well, poor Martin, that is my answer. Yes. Yes, Carlos Castaneda did die."

"So you're not him?"

"If I'm not, then who am I?"

"You tell me.”

"OK. Let's stop playing games. You're locked inside a temporal frame, closed into your own worldview, so I will answer in your own language. I'll use a tense you can understand. I was Carlos Castaneda."

"And now?"

“A good question. Thank you for asking. As we speak I see how helpful speaking is. I've been roaming these mountains, frankly astonished to still be alive. Christ walked on water, but it seems much more miraculous for me to be walking on earth. I was sick. Sick for a long while. Cancer is interesting, experiencing your own body's decomposition while still fully conscious, but it tires you out. By the time death comes it's a relief to let go. I wasn't finished though, Martin. The Romans kept to their time schedule when they crucified Christ. He went along with it, but still had his own agenda to complete. He came back, picked up his body, and carried on. As with the Romans for him, so with cancer for me. I let it have it's say. Now I'm back. It's a delight to be free of it."

"How did you manage it?” This is the magic of logic. Even when something is palpably insane, like conversing with a dead writer who's strolled into your home, logic has a structure that can keep a conversation going. "Christ's body was smothered in oils, wrapped in cloth, and laid in a tomb. You were cremated. There was nothing left but dust."

"You are asking me to justify my existence?"

"Tell me how a man can compose himself out of dust."

"You know this already. You know how a human body is formed from the matter of combusted stars."

"That's physics. We're talking metaphysics."

"I'll tell you why I'm back. The cause before the effect. Does that make sense?"

"And then you'll tell me the effect? You'll tell me how you did it?"

"If you can't work it out for yourself."

"OK," I agree.

"You have any drink in this house?"

"Wine. Beer. Whiskey."

"Whisk!" The thought cheers him. "Straight up. No ice. As it comes."

I pour one for him, then one for myself—which I water down. He holds the tumbler near his nose, sniffs, and smiles. The vaporous smell of it seems enough for now. He doesn't drink.

"So," he says. "My story. Because it bores me, because it is everything I wish to escape, I will be brief. Pay attention. This bears no repetition."

## CASTANEDA'S TALE

"I was born long ago, and given the name Carlos. A fine name, and I was a fine boy, but born too close to the jungle. Most boys of an adventuring kind get to imagine a jungle. It's a place of power and myth. I got to live in one. No great inventions will ever come out of the jungle, no masterpieces of world art. A jungle is both a terrifying and an exhilarating place to grow up, for however vivid a person's mind, nature will always outstrip his imagination. A jungle forms it's own sky from a canopy of leaves, gathers it's own rain, teems with outlandish forms of life, sings and chants and sprouts through the day and the night. It's like living in a constant wet dream, pulsating, sticky, hot, moist, and frantic with images.

"I leave the jungle, head for Europe, later claim a home in the desert lands of the American Southwest, and I never see the boy Carlos again. What is born in the jungle can never leave. I took the shell of my adult body out to meet the best of Western civilization, but the shell was empty. I stood before the dry achievements of the world's greatest artists and architects, I read the fruits of centuries of writers and thinkers, and I was dazed. I cannot miss the boy Carlos, for even the part of me that is capable of missing him was left behind in the jungle. I was a desiccated man left to stuff his hollow body with a desiccated culture.

"People asked if my teacher Don Juan really existed. Of course he did. How could I have woken up without him? A sprinkling of datura, a dash of peyote, a swill of water, and traces of the jungle were back in my system. The sap rose within me once again.

"Others say my books are filled with invention. The dunderheads. They are blind to their own civilization and they dare to question mine? I move my life to their arid deserts so that my (vision) has space to work, to recapture the essence of a truer life in words that entertain them, then they dare to use imagination as a dirty word? I spit on them. What are all the books filled with that they revere so much? Imagination. The people they vaunt as geniuses clawed through the dust of words to come up with something they think is profound. A something, now mark you this, they have maybe glimpsed yet never known as the fabric of their own lives. What I give people is not invention. It's the very essence, the energy of the boy Carlos's life.

"I do my best to stay invisible. Why do I do this? I told the world it was for fear of their capturing my spirit, binding me tight in a present moment that is soon discarded as the past. That, my man, was a lie. To get this world to understand you have to speak to it in lies. The verbal lie spared people the far greater lie of my existence. How can I go in front of people as a writer, a personality, a personage, when I know that this body they want to pay homage to is just an empty shell?

"I have ten books out in the world. They appear in many languages, in many millions of copies. Do you imagine it needs ten books to say all I have to say? Do you think it cannot all be said in this conversation between ourselves? Of course it can. Each book repeats itself, and then each book repeats the other. People thrive on repetition. They are so swamped with meaningless drivel that books are like amusement parks. There's nothing to take in but they come along for the ride. I figure if I keep writing they'll take the ride for longer. Who knows, if I keep their attention for long enough they might catch sight of the reality behind all those words.

"What is that reality? I call it a Separate Reality, but that of course is another of my lies. Reality is reality, and it's our book-reading society that is separate from it. "Then I am dying, and I realize I am a fool. I have kept myself out of the public eye, but I forgot about the public imagination. Millions on millions of people know my name, and they each have an impression of me. For some I am like a god, for others a charlatan, it makes no difference. There is this gargantuan figure out there, a being called Carlos Castaneda, who is far from imaginary. He finds his source in my life and work, and is fed by the energy of hordes.

"My life was passing and I screamed and cursed. People said it was the pain of cancer, but they are fools. I saw the terror of my life force being tethered forever to this puffed-up, pain-filled ghost. I die, but the distorted Castaneda of people's imaginations will live on and drag me with it. To live in the public imagination, Martin, believe me that is damnation. It is fire and brimstone. Of course I screamed and cursed.

"And so I have come back. How I did so, as agreed, we leave till later. Why is very simple. I have two tasks. One, to reclaim the boy Carlos as part of myself and so be free to leave this world behind. The other, to somehow deflate the public image of me and replace it with something I can bring myself to live with. Or die with."

He chuckles, sniffs the whiskey one more time, then downs it in one gulp. His eyes shine as he holds the glass out for more.

I take his glass, carry it down the room to the kitchen area, and notice a churning hollowness inside myself. I wonder at this effect his story has had on my system. Then I realize that meeting him has skipped me past my regular dinner hour, and the feeling is simply one of hunger.

"Would you like to eat with me?" I ask.

"What are you having?"

"Trout. I bought two in town today."

"Very good." He slaps his hands against his thighs and beams at me. "Thank you."

I prepare the trout, set the heads and tails aside for the neighborhood cat when she comes on her nightly visit, and set the fish frying with some butter and garlic and a scattering of mushrooms. I slice two potatoes thin so they will boil fast. Carlos comes and stands beside me, looking out of the kitchen window.

"Look!" he says. He sounds astonished, then breaks into laughter. From the kitchen window you can look straight down at the bend in the river some thirty feet below. This is what has amused him.

"Six," he calls out, though I am standing beside him and there is no need for such volume. "No, seven. Eight. Let me tell you, there are ten of them down there. Ten big, fat trout. You can see them from your kitchen, yet you trudge into town and pay good money for those two scrawny little things at the market."

"I was going to eat them both," I say in my own defense. "I wasn't expecting to share.”

"Oh, that's fine. Don't worry about me. I haven't eaten for weeks in fact. Whatever little you can spare will amuse my stomach enough. I just wonder why you make life so difficult for yourself instead of taking what nature offers you."

"I don't know how to fish. Besides, I don't have a license."

"Is it the angler who needs the license, or the fishing tackle? Tonight we will enjoy the fruits of your voyage into town. It will be fine. And tomorrow, I shall cook for you."

He pours himself a fresh whisk and takes it back to his armchair. I concentrate on the fish, turning it over, reflecting on this new information that Carlos Castaneda seems to have come to stay. At least for one more day.

It is good to eat at last, to satisfy my stomach even while the rest of me subsides into confusion.

Carlos dabs his lips with a napkin.

"My first meal since coming alive again,” he announces, looking down at his clean plate with some pride. Even the bones are chewed and swallowed. "What have you been eating, then?"

"The sun. Like the plants, I've been feeding off the sun."

"That's why you were so hungry."

"Not at all. You are why I am so hungry. On the mountain it was enough to be part of nature, drinking occasionally from a spring. Coming down to talk with you, it brings me back to earth.

Till now I have borrowed some of your energy. Thank you for it. I'll return it before I go. Now your meal has given me some energy of my own. We can both relax a little. We will get through."

"Get through what?"

"Our stories."

"I have no stories."

"A writer with no stories? You're kidding me. I know you. You have stories to tell that you don't even understand yourself yet. That's why I am here." "To help me understand my own stories?"

"To release your stories so that we can both understand them. Your stories, I hope, hold the key that will unlock the door to my boy Carlos. My listening, I trust, will clear a path in your life in return."

"You're going to listen to my stories?"

He laughs. "You forget, dear friend, that listening is exactly what I do. My books are composed of stories I listened to. My skill is in making those stories make sense. Sense, at least, to me. So tell me, Martin. Recount your adventures in Peru."

"How do you know I was there?"

"As I was dying I returned to the country of my birth.”

"Brazil?"

"That is one fact on record about my birth. A life has many births. For now, when I speak about the country of my birth, I mean Peru. I returned in energy to the country of my birth as I lay dying in Los Angeles. There I hear my name called. It is part of a conversation. And who is taking part in this conversation? Yourself. Remember it." I hear a command, not a question. As I concentrate, the conversation slips back into my mind.

"In Cuzco?" I ask him.

He nods.

"But that was nothing. A passing reference."

"What you call a passing reference was a slander that breathed foulness on my life, but no matter. I was simply intrigued. You spoke my name, I took my chance. My name breathed out of your body, and with your next breath you took my essence in. I reached you in the highlands of Peru. You took me into the Amazonian jungle. That is my secret. That is why I have come. We will take that journey together. But first, please set the scene. Recall that conversation to get us started."

"It wasn't a conversation. At least not about you. More like an anecdote with your name slipped in. It really was nothing."

"You are forgetting two things. One is that I am asking you to tell me what I already know. That's OK. You'll learn to accept that in time. The second thing you are forgetting is less forgivable."

He closes his mouth, clamping hold of the silence.

"What's that?" I'm eventually forced to ask. "What's the second thing?"

"You dare to ask me that, when I know words are wasted on you?"

"How do you mean, words are wasted on me?"

"Martin!" He snaps my name out, calling me to attention. "What's one of the first things you learned in the ceremony last September?"

"How do you know about the ceremony? Nobody knows about that."

"How? Another question? Why bother with your questions, when you refuse to learn what you've already been shown? Last September, what did you learn about words? Tell me."

His attitude throws me. I'm so stunned by what he apparently knows about me that I forget what I know about myself and have no answer for him at first. He sits with his arms locked in position against his knees, his body motionless, and stares at me. I close my eyes to escape from him for a moment. It gives me a chance to collect myself, to step back into that room in New Mexico of almost a year before and bring it back into my mind.

## THE FIRST AYAHUASCA JOURNEY

The room was a large one in an old adobe compound, cleared of furniture so all the participants had space to lie on the wooden floor. The Peruvian shaman called the circle's attention to the ritual that would begin our second ceremony. My life was about to change.

Maybe not as much as it's changing now though, with Carlos in the room. I let my narration dwindle into silence. Well, not silence, but the series of highly vocal yawns Carlos is emitting.

"Don't mind me," he assures me. "I'm simply yawning to keep myself alive."

"Alive?"

"You bet. You know what I gave my life to? The power of myth. I am one of the greatest storytellers this century has known. Yet as I sit here listening to you drone on, I come to see a fatal flaw in all I ever wrote. It was fine at the time, but it's old-fashioned now. Have you ever done any guided meditations?" "A few."

"And how did they start? You were sitting by a pool in a forest. You heard a sound...?" "Something like that."

"Nothing like that. You ARE sitting by a pool... You HEAR a sound. Present tense, not past. Everything is now. As you tell your story, don't confine it to the past. Don't kill it off. Take me there so I'm living it with you. I'm alive now because I'm living life with you. Don't kill me off with your choice of tense. That's too funny a way for a writer to expire."

I carry on, and try to make the shift he's looking for.

Attending the ceremony is a breakthrough in itself. Having enjoyed transformative visionary experiences without taking any form of psychedelic medicine, I am unsure of surrendering myself to their powers. One name has attracted me, however. Ayahuasca. I heard the name, and it resounded in me like a call. When I was a young boy the jungles of the Amazon were my dream destination. Now ayahuasca comes out of the Amazon as an emissary. First the name, and then the plant medicine itself.

I like the term “plant medicine” instead of “drug." I am intrigued to hear of the "teachings" ayahuasca has to offer. Pleased too that it comes out of an ancient native tradition, and that a shaman steeped in the ways of the jungle is bringing the medicine to us. I kneel in front of him, take the tiny vessel in my hands, and tip the bitter liquid down my throat.

Carlos interrupts me.

"Goodbye," he says, stands up, and walks to the door.

"What's wrong?"

He steps outside. I go out to find him standing by the wall, looking down the valley.

"You're bored with your own story. If that's your mood, I'm wasting my time. You'll never write the book I need you to write."

"I'm not bored. I'm just getting started."

"Tiny!" Spittle flies from his mouth as he utters the word. "A tiny cup. A bitter liquid. A Peruvian shaman. Throw in an adjective and be done with it. You're like the rest of them. Stuck on being a famous living writer, and you haven't even started living."

"It's you that died."

"I lived first. You know how I lived? I gave my attention to everything around me. You know what paying attention does? It makes you God! It's the power of creation, the power to give life. Fail to notice something, and it's no longer there. It fades from existence. Be a man. Find the quality in what surrounds you. Then you'll see how reciprocal life is. Then you'll no longer be half-dead, for the qualities in you will come to life. Be that kind of man, then be a writer."

He goes quiet.

“Life is in the details," he adds.

The silence hangs a while longer.

"The

cup o is made of clay," I try. "Light to the touch. And warm somehow. Like cupping a bird in your hands. Slighter than you could believe, seeming vulnerable, yet with a life inside that beats in a way I don't know how. This cup is brown, but with an intricate design in white around it's topmost half that's like a maze. Just holding this cup is like going on a journey."

Carlos looks at me.

"Maybe," he says. "You think you can keep it up?"

"I'll try."

"Storytellers have the power of life and death. You'd better try hard."

He turns from me, walks back into the house, and sits back down in the armchair. I follow. I close my eyes to picture the space first, check around the New Mexican room for all the details, see what interests me as I revisit that time, then resume the story.

Ayahuasca comes from the stem of a vine, thicker than a man's wrist and brown and gnarled as a tree trunk. Hammered into pulp, mixed with chicruna leaves to render it's powers active, it is brewed into a brown potion that is quaintly called tea.

I take little notice of the shaman while we are all choosing our spot to lie on the floor, assembling our little range of possessions: our mat, our pillow, our blankets, our water, our bowl should we need to be sick. A slight man, his nose beaked, graying hair that skirts his shoulders, floral shirt, drawstring trousers, skin tanned and leathered beyond his middle age, the shaman is a fairly typical Santa Fe type. At first I presume he is one of the evening's participants. Then a robe dropped over his head transforms him. It is a pale robe, reaching to his knees, it's design in simple brown ink an expanse of the mazelike pattern drawn around the ceremonial cup. My eyes seek to travel different routes through the maze. It makes me dizzy, so I let my eyesight blur.

A wind blows. I hear it, a thin and rhythmical wind, then realize it is a near-whistle of a chant being blown across the top of the liquid. The shaman is singing his power into the medicine. A light flares in the darkening room, the tobacco glows in the bowl of his pipe, he blows smoke across the surface of the liquid, and the ayahuasca is wakened to it's powers.

I swallow my dose at sunset, but the room has already drawn itself back into shadows as clouds swarm through the sky. Rains thrash the windows behind the shaman's back, a lightning flash and a roar of thunder energize the room. The medicine is bitter. I lie down to wait for it to take effect.

"Words...,

He nods.

," I say to Carlos. I'm nervous about losing his attention again. "I know you asked me about words, but can I speak about sound first?"

The medicine is a psychedelic, so I expect visions, but it is my hearing that hallucinates first. It opens, it broadens, until I am no longer listening from inside the limits of my body. The scope of my listening changes. I hear the soft breathing of a person at the far end of the room, but the breathing seems so close to my ear it is as loud as a wind. Another person moves a limb, and the crack of that person's bones sounds in my own joints. On a bare wooden floor, in a house set in the desert, I hear rustlings in the undergrowth. Without looking, with my eyes closed in the gathering darkness, I recognize a mouse that is nuzzling through leaves near my head. It is the same mouse

I killed in a trap that afternoon, thinking my trailer home was too small for both the creature and myself. As I hear it pattering across the floor, the tiny sounds thud into my flesh.

This is the way a jungle floor hears things. I have become the ears of the jungle.

My body stretches. Rolling from my mat to the hardness of the floor, my body luxuriates in pushing out it's limbs. There are no aches, there is no tension. "Sounds as good as death," Carlos comments.

"Do you ache now?"

"Everything is relative." He adjusts his body in the armchair. “Death was good though."

This time with ayahuasca is good too. Every position my body discovers finds it nestling in comfort. I begin to see the magic in this first lesson from ayahuasca. The bounds of my self-perception alter. From being tethered to a human body, my experience expands to take me back to the source of the medicine. I become a jungle vine. "Show me!" Carlos sits forward in his chair to watch.

"Show you what?"

"I want to observe you as a jungle vine."

"It's a story. In the past. I was on a drug high. I can't just do it."

"Of course you can. Ayahuasca showed you the way. You can go back anytime. You should know that, but of course you don't. We'll come back to it later. Do you remember earlier times when you morphed into something else?"

I think awhile, but come up with nothing.

"No memories of swings? Kicking out and sailing high, your little body at one with the swing and the motion and the surging to new heights? Funny, I was sure I recalled something like that in your past. Never mind. Your story's not bad. I'm staying alive for it. Go on."

One member of the group keeps taking a drink of water. I hear it pour down his throat and trickle through his body. It seems an exaggerated thirst until I recognize a truth that surprises me. This man is not drinking for himself. Someone else in the room is thirsty. His drinking quenches that other person's thirst.

While this is happening a monologue chatters on inside my head. I praise myself for all that is happening to me. As ayahuasca pushes me on into new realms of experience I pity those still stuck in my old view of life. I compare myself to my friends, to my partner, and find countless points of niggling grievance in our relationships. And as this inner monologue mutters on, the teachings of ayahuasca keep interrupting me. It has no wisdom that it can offer me on my own, for if it does so that wisdom will become poisonous. I am so stuck on the need to think myself special, so fixed on the notion that my life is defined in competition with others, that I have to get rid of this fatal flaw in my nature before any progress can be made. I have to get rid of the idea that I am separate and acknowledge that I am a part of all things. Ayahuasca does not want to warp me any further by inflating my ego. It needs me to see that there is no benefit for anybody that is not also a universal benefit.

As my center of hearing expands through the acreage of jungle floor, as I recognize that one person can quench another person's thirst in the way that you water roots to give strength to leaves, my limited concepts of myself loosen. I had heard the spiritual truth that "we are one another," without learning how to live the fact. Now the fact becomes part of my living experience. It becomes undeniable.

"Ha!"

The noise from Carlos startles me. He relaxes his posture and slumps back in his chair as though someone has punched him in the solar plexus.

"What's up?"

"Undeniable, you say?"

Carlos sticks his fingers down his throat and pretends to vomit. I watch him gagging, expect to see his trout come swimming up to splash on the stone floor. Then he stops and looks at me.

"I'm waiting for you to come up with the truth about words, and you spew up stuff like that. Should I simply despair of you? The lesson you've learned is undeniable, is it? One gulp of a magic potion, the first hour of the first psychedelic trip of your life, and you've already vanquished the ego?

"I tell you this, though I don't know why I bother because you listen to nothing. But I tell you this one truth in any case. Nothing in a man's life is undeniable. We have endless, boundless, limitless capacities to fool ourselves. Look at Peter, the first saint and model among men, forewarned by Jesus Christ himself, yet when the cock crows three times he sees that man's capacity to deny anything has blossomed in himself. And do you know what? I bet even Peter didn't learn his lesson. Fall once, and you have it in you to fall again.”

"That was his lesson?"

"That's your lesson. Peter's was of a different order. I don't know if he learned it or not. I came back to life before the two of us could discuss the matter. When the rooster crowed thrice, when Peter denied Christ, do you think it mattered to Jesus? Of course it didn't. Jesus was busy with his own troubles. In denying he knew Jesus, Peter was denying the Christ in himself. He identified with his body and denied his soul. What was his lesson? To wake up to himself whenever he hears a rooster crow. Nature's more reliable than our minds. It keeps in constant harmony with creation. I like to use birdsong that way. Hear a bird sing, and I pause to recollect who I am. "But what do you want with Peter's lesson? You don't remember your own. That's why I had to put on this old body to be here with you now. Otherwise we'd be having this exchange on some other level, and I'd be free. Instead of that, I'm here to interrupt you. 'We are one another,' you say. Go on."

"Am I wrong in thinking that?"

"Think what you like, it doesn't bother me. I just question the degree to which you learned it."

His voice is calm now, his body relaxed.

"Besides, I was bored. You were getting lost in the story. Entranced by the flow of your own words. I stopped you before you zoomed on past the point we're looking for. Words are escape valves. Passions, pressures, boredom, madness, shame, they all take flight that way. Words mesmerize us like lullabies and goad us like war chants. They guide us through the dull mechanics of life. Yet there is still a truth in words. You saw it when you let go of your sense of self and recognized a group as a whole composed of elements such as yourself. At this point in your story, if not in your life, you see this. So carry on. Tell me the truth of words."

And I remember.

"Words came back to me," I say. "Snatches of conversation. Pieces of good advice. I didn't pay much attention to them at the time. Now I saw the mistake in that." "What sort of advice?"

I look for an example, and smile at the first that comes into my head.

"It sounds silly now."

"Try me."

"It was a sentence spoken by a lifeguard I met on the beach at Carpinteria, about ninety miles north of LA."

"I know the place well."

"She wasn't a friend or anything. I only met her that once, a quick interview for a Baywatch-flavored magazine piece I was writing. The sentence was her advice for any youngster starting out on a life-guarding career. 'Always use the best sunscreen,' she said. 'Never go the cheap route.'"

"And that advice seems silly to you?"

"Not silly. Just not very consequential.”

"Go back. Close your eyes as you did before. Review the setting. Tell me what was happening when you heard this sentence again."

I do as he asks. Go back in my imagination to the room and the ceremony. Recall the sensation of surrendering control of my body. This is nothing to do with torpor or inertness. Nothing to do with trembling or fits. It is simply and wondrously accepting that a will beyond my own has control of my movements. It needs no decision of mine for me to move or be still. My body recognizes when an action suits it, and responds accordingly.

My body sits up and I watch two participants, a man and a woman, stand and move around the room. They stoop a little as they move, their outlines smudged and gray in the darkness. The sight washes me clean of millennia of conditioning. My view of myself as a human being is stripped away as an ancestral memory takes it's place. The man and woman appear as figures from the Stone Age, cave dwellers after dusk at a time before our myths have been reduced into words.

My body rises, not of my volition but stirred by some other prompting, and goes to join them.

They prepare a second dose of ayahuasca for themselves. My hands reach out to the man, an apprentice to the shaman, and receive a fresh bowl of the medicine. It is weightless and floats toward my face. Before bringing it to my lips, I look into it. The tiny vessel disappears from sight and the tea takes on the appearance of a knot in a dark piece of wood, a spiraled whorl cupped in my hand. Looking into this whorl is a journey in itself, for the whorl stretches out in the form of a long tunnel. It is a journey into the essence of the ayahuasca. I fall in love with it's look and it's color.

Then my head rises, and the bowl touches my lower lip. I smell it as it rests there, and wait for the medicine to give itself to me. The bowl waits for it's moment, then tips it's contents into my mouth.

Ayahuasca feeds itself to me. I know it is this way, rather than anything so simple as my taking a drink. Ayahuasca is inside me, it has already taken over my limbs as though they are outreaches of a vine, and then sent my body out to receive this extra potion. Now is a moment of initiation. My mouth holds the liquid for a while, moving it round to flow against every atom of my palate, and then one swallow and the medicine pours down inside me.

Back on my mat, I sit while my right hand reaches up. It's fingers stroke my cheek, feeling the dryness of the skin. I feel sad that I am taking such little care of this body that is in my charge. It is being ravaged by my summer treks in deserts and mountains, by living at the high New Mexican altitude. It is then that the sentence comes to me, the advice on sunscreen from a lifeguard met once on a Californian beach.

"Now it's August," Carlos observes. "I met you when you were coming back from a walk in these French mountains. The thunderstorm broke what has been a very hot time. Tell me, are you wearing sunscreen, quality or otherwise?"

"I've got some with me."

He laughs. "Touch the skin on your face."

"It's dry," I admit after doing so. "Flaky."

"What a figure you are. What an example of denial. You're given a lesson from an expert on skin care, it's repeated as part of a sacred rite, a reminder stares you in the face whenever you look in a mirror, you accept the need to apply the lesson in your life, yet still you deny it. You think your body's inconsequential? Then you deserve to go through the mill of retrieving it from the dust of death.

"You're a human being who doesn't value his body. A writer who doesn't value words. You're a sorry case, Martin."

"I do value words."

"You value their sound, their form, their texture, their flow. You're into the aesthetic of words. But you're the same as everyone else in these benighted times. In olden days, in what we so pitifully term the Dark Ages, sorcerers could reckon with the power of words. They were mighty things. Now they are simply pearls before swine. "And here too am I, beyond the silence of the grave, talking too much."

He stops speaking. I feel the silence grow too heavy.

"I did learn a lesson," I say. "I just forget to apply it."

"Ha!"

"At night, before sleeping, I rerun all the conversations of the day. At least I mean to. And not just conversations, chance remarks overheard in passing too. I look for any resonance. Anything that seems to carry some special meaning."

"And then?"

"I fall asleep."

He chuckles. I smile back.

"You exasperate me," he says. "But I'm glad I've come. There's a lot you have to be shown. You've found the resonance. The vibration. That's good. Isolate that quality and you have a chance of sifting the words of truth from the garbage.

"Words are energy, Martin. You will never know how much this universe calls for us to act in harmony with it, how it yearns for us to remove the blinkers of separation. Like a gulf stream squeezed inside the oceans, it is an energy that calls us to our senses. It runs a message through the drivel of our lives. It pours itself through people's heads, in one ear and out the other, and finds voice now and again in the tenor of their words. Make our restless selves still for a while, tune ourselves to that energy, and more of such words will spill from our mouths.

"Loudspeakers don't show musical mastery in transmitting the works of Bach. We don't show wisdom in speaking inspired words. Pay attention to our own speech, however, and we develop our powers of listening.

"It's only in listening that truth can be heard. In listening to our own words or the words of others, stay alert for the resonance. Even clichés take fire when we truly hear them for the first time. Tell me, Martin, do you think that animals lie, any more than flowers or trees or rivers lie?"

I give it some thought. "I suppose not."

"You're right. Lying is a quality unique to humans. There are no lies outside of the human condition, as there is no truth. There is harmony but there is no truth. Nobody ever speaks the truth, for as words are spoken they are still unheard. Truth is born in the act of deep listening, not of speaking, when words find resonance in a person's being. What do you think happens to that truth?"

I'm barely following the sense of this. "I don't know," I admit.

"It nearly always expires. It shimmers and fades through lack of attention, and suddenly it's gone. Truth when heard doesn't enter the fabric of our world until someone bothers to apply it. People must give awareness to what they hear and then act on it.

"Think, tonight, if what I say is true. From the look on your face, I can tell that no truth has registered yet. See if the echo of my words has a resonance. Then, application or denial, the choice is yours."

He looks above my head, out at the darkening sky.

"Would you like to go outside for a while?" I ask. "I normally like to sit out there at dusk."

"You've not recalled your use of my name in Peru yet."

"No," I admit, but I stand up to lead the way outdoors in any case. Sometimes two writers can be too much of a load for one room. I need to get some air.

## THE KINGDOM OF THE INCAS

I call the cat Maxine, as though she's my pet. In fact it's me that belongs to her. I moved into her territory and she trained me to deliver scraps of food. Other house-holders in her territory offer her the same service.

The ring of porcelain against stone, as the plate of fish trimmings hits the ledge, is her call. She scampers down the steps and leaps up to the wall to bite at her dinner. Splotched in patches of black, brown, and white, this mottled cat has torn ears and scars around her brow. Her belly is heavy with one of her semiannual broods. Twice a year she disappears to some hole in the hillside, to drop and possibly eat her litter, then reappears on the rounds of her territory.

I tell Carlos nothing of this. We simply watch her eat, clean her paws, and pace away. Maxine is her own world of mystery. We have ours.

We sit on chairs and face the hillsides. Bats explode from the buildings behind us to flutter mere inches from our faces. They then stream down to catch insects above the river some way below. Sitting side by side we let the daylight fade. The first stars appear before I break the silence.

"Peru was my first time in the southern hemisphere," I tell him. "I was excited about seeing a totally different nighttime sky. Eager to see the Southern Cross. Then there it was, a constellation as simple and unspectacular as a kite, pinned against a largely empty sky. I saw how silly I was, to want to see the southern skies when the starscape above my own country is so dense and rich I can never hope to fathom it."

"People say 'live in the moment,'" Carlos responds. "They think it's truth but it's only hindsight. If it were the truth they wouldn't need to state it, they'd be living it. Knowing what we've got before it's gone, that's the secret of life. You're lucky. You had a chance to miss your northern skies while you were still able to come back and appreciate them. I'm lucky too. I missed being in a body, and here I am."

"You talk about truth not existing till it's heard," I recollect. This is a new idea, so I pause to think it through. It's good that we're both looking out in the same direction, so I don't have to face him as I carry on. "So it's not true that you've come back from the dead. There's only me to hear it, and I don't believe it. So if that's not true, what's the point in us talking? Whatever we say will be based on a lie."

"You're not the only one here." He stays quiet while I wonder what he means. "I'm here."

I look aside at him. He sits very trimly on the wooden seat, smiling, his back straight, his face angled toward the sky.

"My own words resonate in me," he continues. "It's quite thrilling."

"You don't care that I don't believe you?"

"But you do. You're merely in denial. The way you denied me in Peru even before we'd met."

So I recall and recount the story he wants to hear. It seems so insignificant, so paltry a thing, yet it is obviously going to keep coming up in our conversation till I have got it out of the way.

"It was just a dinner-table conversation."

"Pathetic."

I look across as Carlos turns his chair around to face me.

"You're a professional storyteller, yet you start off a tale with two of the biggest mistakes in the book. That word 'just,' apologizing before you start out, as though your story isn't worth listening to. Any story's worth listening to if you make it worth the telling. And what about setting the scene? Who's there? Where's this dinner table? A second failing in only one sentence, a story without context. I want the sights, the smells, the sounds. I'm hungry for this scene. So give it me." "Give me time."

"No. My attention's wandering. You've got to grab it. You can even charge your silences with meaning if you make the storytelling effort. So try."

I take a deep breath as he rattles his chair around to face the stars once again. I'm tempted to say forget it, this is my house and I'm going to bed. Please go so I can lock the door behind you and sleep safely. But of course I don't, for although this is my house it isn't my story anymore. Carlos is reeling it out of me. So while he's sitting there, playing the line as the river runs below him, angling for a bigger and better story, I find I have to carry on.

The time is dusk, darkness swooping down above the main square of Cuzco. It is an ancient city built by the Incas to be their stronghold, the place where their kings and sorcerer-priests maintained the esoteric knowledge on which their empire was built. The plan of the city takes the form of the fabled jaguar. Following the folds of green hills in this high Andean valley, the head of this jaguar is in the great stone compound of Sacsayhuaman some way above us. Here in this ancient square of Cuzco, we are somewhere near the heart.

(I admit to hamming up the story, childishly goaded by Carlos's criticism. However he doesn't rise to the bait. Instead he looks rapt. I continue in the same mode, setting aside my regular literary taste, until I find I am actually enjoying myself.)

Our party is housed in a building that fronts the square. The building takes paying guests, and though this makes it a hotel such status is only a concession to modern times. Tourists arrive in little buses, throng the alleys and streets, little knowing that they are in fact the ghosts and that the spirits and figures of earlier times still teem and swirl around them. Cuzco was built to survive earthquakes, to endure through millennia, not for the sake of tourists or the small concerns of modern-day merchants. It is the heart of the Incan empire, and the heart is still beating. Someday, when Earth can bear the sight of such magnificence as the Incas now hide from our view, the glories of that empire may be revealed again. And the hotel where we are staying will drop all pretenses and once again exude the power of it's days as a temple building, the palatial home of the virgins of the Sun God. Maidens selected and cherished for their beauty led brief and pampered lives here, before their purity was offered up in sacrifice to the heavens.

The walls of my room are composed of gray polygonal stones, cut to sit snug against each other without the ephemeral smearing of mortar. Trapezoidal niches sit high in the walls, waiting for incense and idols to be returned to them. The toilet that is set in front of the sealed doorway will be smashed as figures resume their bodily substance and demand right of passage through the bathroom.

Stirred by hunger, two of us step out and dart between the shadows of peddlers still hawking wares in the square as daylight fades. We head past the Spanish cathedral on our right-hand side and aim for lights in the nearest café, set inside the galleried walkway that fronts most of these buildings. A waiter shows us to a table near the window, with no cloth covering, so that the dark varnished oak of it's surface reflects the café's strips of naked neon lights.

Music soothes us, comfortingly familiar, the clear single notes of a piano stilling the air and summoning the orchestra for the slow movement of Beethoven's third piano concerto. Behind the sound, more subtle but thrilling too, is the sizzle of onions in a pan. Their smell mingles with the aroma of newly baked bread. The waiter takes our order for cheese omelettes and we relax into the sense of having discovered our Peruvian home-away-from-home.

It is then that the tiny figure of don Pedro steps in through the door. His beaked nose seems to have drawn him in, on the trail of an evening snack. He looks our way, catches my eye, and I nod and gesture toward the spare seat at our table. We're pleased to see him. This is the shaman accompanying our party, and no one yet seems to have spent private time with him. Or at least if they did they aren't telling, as we might tell no one about this meeting of ours.

"The doors of the cathedral were open next door," he announces once he has settled down and ordered the same meal as we. "A mass was about to begin. I could see the candles glowing. It was decision time. Food for the soul, or food for the body. So I veered left, and here I am."

"Do shamans go to church?" I ask.

"I have known several shamans who became Christian." He nibbles at a slice of bread. Though he seems to be eating hungrily, half the feeble slice will still be left at the end of his meal. "They last for two, three, maybe five years. Then they have to give it up and become shamans again. Christianity is all about love. They cannot abide so much love."

"What's shamanism about then, if it's not about love?"

He simply looks at me and raises one eyebrow.

I've asked the question. Now it's for me to find my own answer. It will be one of the fiercest challenges of the coming months.

We have finished our omelettes, dabbed the juice of soft-cooked eggs from our mouths, and spoken about our itinerary while based in Cuzco, when don Pedro suddenly returns the conversation to shamanism. Now that his hunger is satisfied he is more free for matters of the soul.

"Sex," he announces. "We shamans have a high sense of our own calling, but seven times out of ten that's what shamanism is about. Few people care for the distinctions. Shaman, curandero, sorcerer, they have no interest in the terms. When people come to me for help only one thing is on their minds. Sex. They want more virility; they want someone's heart; they want to free themselves of one person so as to go with another. The shaman cannot say what shamanism is about. He serves the desires of others."

He stops speaking and stares across the table, sensing a challenge.

"I don't believe that."

The challenge comes from Keith, my companion at our table. He is a litigation lawyer, and I shall come to value his clear-sightedness on this trip. Though he's a native New Yorker, his Irish ancestry seems the strongest element in him—his blue eyes, pale complexion, curls of dark hair, and high-arched dancer's feet that always seem to have skipped around you so that his comments keep coming from an angle different than you expect. He speaks softly, blinks slowly, but never misses a beat. "I wouldn't be here, don Pedro, if I didn't respect your intelligence. You can't have chosen to be a slave to the desires of others. There has to be more to your choice of profession than that."

Don Pedro smiles, recognizing our conversation has become a debate, and responds. "I'm no slave. No one receives the services of a shaman without payment of some kind. In my travels I meet very poor people who need help. 'Why don't you go to your shaman?' I ask them, and they tell me it is because they have nothing to give in exchange. If they have nothing to give, then he will take what they do not want to give him. He will take their souls. There are always forces clustered around a shaman, glad to lend him their services for the payment of a soul."

Keith is not satisfied. "You have a grander philosophy than that, don Pedro. I know you have. There's some ambition that keeps you going."

Don Pedro sucks the last of his soda up through a straw before continuing. He uses the pause to take the argument back into history.

"When the Spanish first came to the jungle they found no churches and no idols, so they said there was no religion. They found no trading posts, so they said there was no civilization. Jungles are dark and the Spaniards were blinded by the light of their own expectations, so they could not see the riches that were there. "Hopefully it will be different for you the invisible that is there will be made apparent. Maybe for now you are a little like those Spaniards. You think there is commerce, there is religion, there are these neat little pockets that life slips into. I tell you a shaman satisfies desires at a price and you want something more. You want a grand philosophy. In the jungle religion and commerce are all one thing. The shaman is a banker. He administers the natural powers. He goes to the guardian spirits of the animals, the rivers, the plants, the birds, the trees, and he finds out what they can spare. He pays his dues in ritual, then tells his people what is coming to them, the hunters what will be their catch and the gatherers what to gather. The shaman is the intermediary between man and the environment. When the bank is empty, when the natural resources are too depleted, no more loans can be made. He learns of this from the nature guardians, passes on the message, and his people move to a different region.

"You ask if I have an ambition. If I do, it is that. I want people to reawaken to the shaman's role of administering the forces of nature. I want to gather a group of people and an area of land and put these old shamanic ways of managing the land into practice.

"But it is a distant ambition. Here we are, away from the jungle, and remnants of a great civilization are all around us. Could the Spaniards see that when they came here? Of course not. All they saw was the gold and the religious trappings. The real power of the area was invisible. I have a friend, a humble and so a great man. For years he lived in these mountains and took down dictation of a great work, learning from plants in the way you are learning. This book is a great spiritual history of the region. Some may call it fantasy, deny that you can take dictation from vegetable matter, but for me his book is more true than any history book from any university press. My friend was trained by a great master here in Peru. He and two colleagues were the master's apprentices. One of these you probably know. He is big in the West. Wrote books about a teacher called Don Juan."

"Carlos Castaneda," I say.

"My friend's book is only in Spanish, one limited edition. Castaneda's sell in many copies and many languages everywhere in your Western world. Each civilization gets the books it deserves."

"So Castaneda studied here in Peru?" I ask. He does not answer or nod his head, but simply watches as I carry on. "You're saying your friend wrote spiritual truth and Castaneda's books are a sham? They give the West what it is looking for, not what it needs?"

Keith has danced around the conversation to add a point of his own. "The shaman caters to people's desires."

Don Pedro smiles and stands up. "These are your words, not mine. Enough talking, I think. We've an early start tomorrow. It's time for sleep. Thank you for my dinner." He leaves me with the check, and I'm happy to pay it. There's a chance this shaman has done me some service during our conversation. I don't want to be in his debt. "Good," Carlos declares, and slaps his knees. "You know the part I like best? When don Pedro forces you to say my name. Ha! The man is on my side! Now you have spoken at last. The story is out. But you missed an important detail."

"What was that?"

Above the sound of the river and the croaking frogs I hear him exhale, then suck the air in again.

"You speak my name"—he breathes out again—"and with your next breath you take me in. We two are one. This is it, Martin. This is where our story begins." He stands. "We've an early start tomorrow. Time for my sleep."

Without my invitation he reenters my house and lays himself down on the sofa. Smaller than I imagined him, five feet six or so, he fits on it without the need to curl up. I follow him indoors and am about to ask him to leave when he interrupts me. His voice is gruff. I don't understand, but before I can query his comment he repeats it. The man is on his back, his lips vibrating, and the sound I am hearing is a snore.

## THE POWER OF MOUNTAINS

Carlos doesn't shake me. His hand simply grips my shoulder.

I seize hold of it, push and twist, but he's firmly planted and doesn't move.

"I startled you," he says. "Were you dreaming?"

I was, but being wakened scared all the dreams from me.

"What time is it?"

The bell in the church tower clangs out the first of six beats as my answer. After some debate the clock was set to match the sleeping pattern of the village mayor, staying silent after his ten o'clock bedtime and becoming active again to raise him at six. It is still pitch-black outside and far too early for me.

I turn over and go back to sleep.

"Get up, Martin!" Carlos calls before going back downstairs. "Hurry. Get your clothes on. The start of a new day is much too exciting to sleep through."

I get up. He waits for me outside, my backpack already on his back. The air outdoors is fresh but surprisingly chilly. Venus still shines like a bright pin in the black sky over to the southwest.

Carlos says nothing but walks away.

"That's my backpack," I tell him.

"Don't worry. It's not heavy. We'll take turns."

And for some reason, maybe his momentum, maybe my docility, I find myself walking with him.

We go around the side of the house and up steps through alleyways lit a soft yellow by lanterns. This first passageway is the Rue des Moines, the street of the monks. Centuries ago they headed out from their monastery further south toward Spain, and walked up through the mountains till they reached this particular bend in the river and sensed they were home. My own home was once a goat-house belonging to this community of monks. Houses cluster round the hillside, their stone walls curving round to fill the available slots.

Our route leads us around the church, gargoyles peering out from it's tower. The dial on the clock is brightly lit, the time just past six o'clock. As we step around the church walls to start on the track up the mountain, the bells strike again. There is no chance of missing the passage of time in this ancient village. The clock strikes each hour twice so workers on the terraces of distant hillsides can grow still and count the chimes the second time around.

Nothing stirs around the tombs of the graveyard down to our right. It's too early for the pack of hunting dogs penned to our left as well, who normally love to bark and howl at anything that passes. Too early for anything but sleep, in my humble opinion of the moment. I struggle to keep up with Carlos as he gathers speed, not running or seeming to race at all but still ascending the asphalt track at a pace that leaves me breathless.

The path winds until the terraces of old vineyards are left behind, and carries on between plantings of scrub oak. The air is scented by wild bushes of rosemary and thyme and clusters of lavender, and across to the east the sky is tinted with the first orange streak of sunrise.

"Here!" Carlos declares, and we leave the track to walk through the soft dry grass of a meadow, the silhouettes of poplars becoming clear against the lightening sky. After some twenty yards the meadow vanishes over the edge of the hill, but a cluster of weathered rocks borders the drop. Carlos climbs up, and gestures for me to come and sit beside him. The rocks are rounded and matted with lichen. It is easy to become comfortable, though not as comfortable as in my own bed.

We sit in silence for a while, Carlos looking straight ahead while I look around. The only drama seems to be that the stars are fading, and I fail to find the charm of the moment.

Carlos takes off the backpack and reaches his hand into it, looking at me to draw my attention. He's like some kiddies' magician with his hand in a top hat. I don't care if he brings out a rabbit or even a camel. I don't want to be impressed.

"Do I know you, or do I know you?" he asks. And pulls out the thermos flask from my kitchen. Like real magic he unscrews the top and pours me a mugful of hot, strong tea. With milk, without sugar. The way I like it. At last I manage to shed a smile on the day. He watches me drink.

"So now, young Martin, are miracles possible?"

"Anything's possible after my morning tea." I smile again. "Thanks."

He doesn't drink himself, but reaches into the pack to pull out something else. I recognize the black leather tubular casing of my monocular. I bought it in Berlin shortly after the Wall came down, from a market stall set up under the Brandenburg Gate. Part of old Soviet army supplies. I tried it out for the first time on the statue on top of the Gate's high archway. It was one of the visual shocks of my life. Expecting sculpture, I was looking instead down the flared nostrils of a horse that was charging toward me. I dropped the monocular for the naked-eye view, pale and distant horses pulling a chariot, then dared to look through my monocular again. The city surroundings were charged with stunning detail as I moved the lens around. I bought the monocular and carried it to France.

Carlos brings the instrument to his eye. His mouth opens, and a soft gasp follows. I look in the direction he is aiming, but notice nothing. The sky is empty of the eagles and lammergeyers I sometimes see spreading their wings up there. There is nothing but the gradual unfolding of hills and mountains toward the more distant view. "Now put down your tea and enter the day," Carlos commands, and passes the monocular to me.

I scan the landscape, still blind to what I am seeing.

"Mont Canigou," he pronounces, and the syllables of the name seem to bring it to life. The first daylight is touching the high flanks now, the coating of their scrub and trees like green fur. And then the mountain ridge, arching from the left to dip into a deep ridge and join the rounded half-dome of the mountain's peak. This is the sacred mountain of the Pyrenees. Whether coated in snow, clear and bare like today, or shimmering in haze that makes the whole mountain some ethereal wash against the sky, Canigou is the spot on Earth that holds all the aspirations of the local Catalan people.

Magnified many times so that it's details pounce against my right eye, Canigou suddenly seems as close as a companion. The rocks where Carlos and I are sitting have become broad enough to hold us all, two men and a sacred mountain. That is the sense the sight of Canigou achieves, light filtering in above the Mediterranean to turn the whole of the eastern Pyrenees into one vast yet intimate space that holds us at it's center.

"You know something about sacred mountains," Carlos remarks.

I wish sometimes he would pose comments on my life as questions rather than statements. It's satisfying to have nuggets of your own life you can present from time to time as a surprise to those who think they know you. Carlos appears to draw his knowledge of me not from research, but rather from access into the center of my life. "It seems unfair that I should know so much about your life." So now Carlos is even speaking from knowledge of my current thoughts. He's reading my mind. "But nothing is unfair. Everything comes down to exchange in the end. This is not about some mind-reading skill I've developed. I live your life as though it's my own. I have access to any moment in your history. Perhaps I live your life more consciously than you do, but that's just a qualitative difference. And where I have access to the inner workings of your life, you of course have access to mine. In time you may experience this. For now sharing your life is enough. And your experience of mountains such as these." I once wrote a book about my travels to sacred mountains of the world. Cherry blossoms forming a pink and delicate dawn out of which Mount Fuji rises. The chills of Kilimanjaro reaching through two sleeping bags, waking me to study it's beauty through my clouds of breath. The rapture of light burnishing Ayers Rock. Snow and ice

wiping me clean on my pilgrimage to Kailas, my first sight of it's peak being like a reinvention of my soul. For all I have studied mountains, they remain an impenetrable mystery to me.

"Mountains fascinate you," Carlos informs me. “Maybe if I tell you my understanding of them, it will help unlock the mystery of me. You already know everything I know, but until you understand that fact I'll have to reveal it to you. That's why we've come to this spot, on the dawn of this new day. We'll share what we know of mountains while we sit in front of this mighty one. It'll remind us that our words are more important than we recognize.

"You will begin. Tell me about Machu Picchu."

"I've nothing to say. I've only been there twice. No more than a week in all."

"Stop it! No more apologizing. You're a storyteller. Start with the setting."

Somehow it's harder to set a mountain than a conversation. Geographical statistics don't do it and a physical description barely comes close. We see mountains as rock, as vast and solid statements on the landscape, but when we do that we miss the story. Mountains are heaved up from the core of the earth, they are shaped by sun and wind and water. Rivers curl round their bases, streams spring from their sides, air licks and buffets them, and what we see is never solid but in a permanent state of flux. It is a living sculpture, being remodeled every moment by the forces of nature.

Carlos understands this. He allows me time to sit in silence before I begin.

There are two ways to approach Machu Picchu: from above and from below.

The first comes after days of trekking. The Inca Trail rises to the Sun Gate, where sentries were once stationed to turn back those not permitted to set eye on the wonders laid out below. For me there are no sentries. Instead as I reach the Sun Gate for the first time a morpho butterfly, the size of a dinner plate and lit an electric lapis lazuli, the color of the sky condensed, flits up the path toward me and passes through the white stone pillars of the ruined archway. From here the path is all downhill, tired feet pattering down the paved pathway between banks of orchids that flourish as large as bushes and trees. Stepping down through such fragrance and color, I see that the ruined site still far below has grass that shines a bright light green, like the soft lawn of a garden. Surrounded by jagged Andean peaks, Machu Picchu resembles a place where mountains are tamed.

On my second visit to Machu Picchu, approached from below along a road that winds back and forth upon itself to gather height, our group arrives at dawn. We stand on a parapet and the tableau of land on which Machu Picchu is built seems like a yacht bobbing in a raging ocean. Clouds pour down from the highest peaks but they also stream up from the heights below. The mountains are darkness and the clouds are bright, as though ferrying daylight into the valley. Rimmed and packed with silver and white, they swirl and dance, rip to ribbons and re-form, drape the mountains and reveal them again—an astounding drama of immense scale. Our eyes shine and water as we stand and stare out, watching our planet breathe.

Don Pedro gathers us on a smooth rock carved into a landscape of it's own, and we speak of the apus, the spirits of the mountains, for the first time. I wonder where apus stand in a cosmological hierarchy. Are they like angels, subservient to God?

I hear of Inti, the all-powerful god of the sun. I hear of Pachamama, a goddess we might view as Mother Earth. And I hear how apus feel no more regard for them than an industrialist might feel for an aristocrat. It takes a rare person, a sorcerer of exceptional training, to communicate with apus, because these mountain spirits have no interest at all in the ways of human beings. Some say that when the Incas abandoned the plateau of Machu Picchu this is the way they fled, their spirits leaping to join the apus on the highest peaks that even now are obscured by cloud. In fleeing, they took their secrets with them.

I wander the site, seeing what clues they left behind. A mountaintop is no place for humans to aspire to grandeur. The stonework of the buildings is impressive, the scale of the enterprise as it spreads over acres is daunting, but it is the intimacy of little details that strikes me. In the quarry are rocks that were being prepared for building even as the Incas left, cracks chiseled into great stones and filled with water to freeze in the night, ice expanding to split huge boulders into manageable blocks, water working stone. Climbing the trail a further fifteen hundred feet above the ruins, up to the summit of a peak also known as Machu Picchu, I notice that the ground is paved all the way and carved stone steps still give sure footing. This leaves me with tender thoughts of the human effort involved in hauling each one of the stones into place. And at the top, eleven thousand feet above the level of the seas, I see the summit has been worked into terraced gardens, where occasional flowers still grow.

A low hill rises from the site itself, an altar laid out on top, and from the surrounding walls juts a natural tip of rock. Looking from the contours of it's pale stone to the contours of mountains that face it, you see that the one aspect mirrors the other.

Guidebooks proclaim how little is known about Machu Picchu, educated guesswork nibbling at the mystery and still coming away amazed, so I set my guidebook aside and see what the site can show me about itself. I ask that I be taken to what I should see. The process is simple, trusting my body to the same guiding force that led it during my time with ayahuasca some months before. Without the medicine my body is much heavier than then, I'm conscious of all the work involved in shifting my limbs, but in deciding to follow my feet my mind has no more decisions to take and so is free to trust and rest awhile.

My feet lead me down the slope from the altar, turn me to my right so that I leave the track and am walking over grass and then clambering up a waist-high step in the land, turn me round, and set me down. I look around and my mind kicks in again, making judgments.

"You're still as silly as they come," it says. "Look at you, plonked down in the middle of an undistinguished patch of grass. You ask to be led to something, and this is what it amounts to. When will you learn that abandoning control like that will lead you nowhere?"

With nothing more to say about a ridiculous situation, my mind turns silent and I sit on.

Simply sitting on the grass is pleasant enough. I look up at the blue of the sky, bring my gaze down to take in the mountains, down further still to take in the twin rocks that bulge from the grass in front of me. And then I understand. I am sitting in the very position from which it is possible to appreciate the wonder that these twin rocks hold. Looking from them to the twin peaks that rise behind them, I see that once again the rocks mirror the mountains exactly. They are angled the same way, their relative heights match the perspective from which I am viewing them, and even the deep fissure that marks the high peak to my right is marked in the same way on the right-hand stone.

I wonder if chance might have put them there. It seems unlikely, two such perfect stones in such perfect positions, the surrounding ground raised to be a viewing platform of the perfect height, but then Machu Picchu is a place for miraculous happenings. I turn around and look across to the hill that holds the altar on it's top. At it's ridge is the small run of stone in which I first noticed the reflection of the surrounding mountains. Now I am able to see it from the side, and recognize that the miniature mountain range jutting through the wall of the hilltop is simply the top few inches of a rock almost thirty feet deep and twenty feet wide. Made of a lighter stone, this giant rock has been set at an angle in the hillside, held in place simply so the patterns of one edge can protrude from the hilltop at the angle they do.

These reflections of the surrounding mountains are evidently neither accidental nor manufactured. It would be simple to carve a likeness of mountains from stone, and much simpler too to have broken off the corner of the mighty stone than to have raised and slotted the whole segment into the hillside. It seems clear that having recognized the forms of mountains within rocks, the ancient builders understood that those rocks were too sacred to break. The whole rock, whatever it's size, needs to be set in place, and just as we see only the parts of a mountain that rise into the air so these rock replicas can be rooted far deeper in the earth than we would ever imagine.

"I like the perception," Carlos comments from his perch on the rock beside me. “I didn't see these reflective qualities in Machu Picchu especially, but then I find them everywhere. There are many mirrors in nature. But think of the effort, hauling vast rocks into place to mirror the surrounding mountains. Why do you think they bothered?"

"To show their admiration?"

"Always a good motive. But not enough in itself. You don't yet understand the nature of exchange. These Incan priests knew better. They wouldn't show their admiration without something in return.”

"Isn't admiration already their part in the exchange? Their gift for what they admire?"

"True. But the cycle of exchange is endless. Reflect something, and you absorb it's powers. That's why people sit in front of gurus. In reflecting the mountains, Machu Picchu is absorbing their energy into the earth. But tell me more. I'm revisiting the site as you speak. Enjoying your guided tour."

I stand up from the grass and tour the whole site, my eyes now trained to look for mountain forms in rocks, and again and again I find them. Looking from these rocks, I admire the exactness with which they reflect the contours and surface of the opposing mountain landscape.

At the center of this site, behind my back from where I was first led to sit, the ground drops to a lower level. There are no ruins on display here, though the hill with the altar complex stands to one side and the other is terraced and lined with a run of stone buildings. The ground below seems suited to an arena, spectators ranged on either side. A shallow pit rests in the middle of this area, but for me a greater clue to what might have happened here is the swath of grass of a different order from the grass elsewhere. I have noticed the same difference in old graveyards; thicker, paler grass growing where the minerals of decomposing human bodies alter the quality of the soil. It seems to me that the show witnessed by the spectators was a ritual of human sacrifice, human blood spilling it's minerals into the surrounding ground.

Gathered alongside any human audience to watch this spectacle were the mountains. In recognizing that rocks were set to reflect the mountain landscape, I also see clearly that this site is now little more than a relic. No mystery remains to be discovered on Machu Picchu for the mystery has vanished. No coach-loads of tourists or archaeologists can reclaim it. The people who set the rocks dedicated their lives to the service and appreciation of mountains. The current of their lives is what flowed between these symbolic rocks and the distant peaks. Some lives were sacrificed to the knife, but all lives were sacrificed to the mountains, for there is nothing else to live for at such height. The rituals that enlivened Machu Picchu have been forgotten, but rituals are simply patterns learned from the daily commitment and focus of a person's life. It is the focus and appreciation of mankind that has gone, perhaps gone to play with the apus on the cloud-soaked summits.

Machu Picchu is a memorial to a time when we once held mountains in high regard. As a reward for that regard, the Incan civilization spanned this portion of the globe. Maybe the civilizations we have now are a reward for our disregard.

As the day closed, I joined the other travelers and we went back down the mountain.

Carlos unscrews the lid of the flask and pours me another cup of tea.

"So you think we've forgotten the mountains," he observes while I drink. "You think they've let us go."

The sun has risen during my story, and it strikes color from the summit of Canigou.

"I think so," I admit.

"So the Incas knew the secret of worshipping mountains, and now it's lost?"

"Maybe."

He passes me the monocular. I lift it to my eye, and Canigou leaps back into sharp detail.

"Awesome?" he asks.

I lower the monocular and nod.

"Excuse a dead man's wisdom, Martin, and let me tell you this. When something has roused you to awe, when it has felt the touch of your worship, it will never let you go. It's the case with mountains. It's the case with life."

We both stare out at the Pyrenean mountains in silence.

"So we're all right, then," I say. "The mountains are still looking after us."

"Far from it. They don't let go, but we can still fight to be free. Fight with our intelligence. See through the patterns that hold us. You know your Old Testament?" "Only as stories. I've never studied it much. It doesn't appeal, to be honest. It's too full of war and vengeance, one tribe of Israel battling against another." "So you understand? You see the pattern?"

I turn from the mountains to look at him, understanding nothing.

"Where do our myths start, Martin? The Garden of Eden, a place where four mighty rivers find their source, therefore obviously located up a mountain? Or after the Flood, where Noah leads man and beast down the slopes of Ararat? Does Judaism hail from the moment Moses receives the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai? Or maybe it's when Abraham is spared the slaughter of his son Isaac on the summit of Mount Moriah, when the Lord of that mountain promises to secure the future of Judaism through Abraham's descendants.

"When the new Messiah arrives, of course he must make his appearance on Mount Zion and honor the prophecies that herald him. Jesus is born on the heights of Bethlehem. The devil leads him to a mountaintop for the last of his trials in the desert, and on such home ground Jesus has the power to resist. His disciples learn his worth after climbing with him to witness his transfiguration on the summit of Mount Tabor, his face flushed with light as Moses appears to him there and God speaks out of the clouds. He is crucified on a hilltop, on Calvary, and after his resurrection appears to his disciples on a mountainside in Galilee.

"Centuries pass and the Archangel Gabriel appears to a man sitting in a cave in the side of Mount Hira. The man is Muhammad, and it is in this mountainside that he first hears the words of the Koran. From the summit of Mount Moriah, where Abraham was pledged to obedience, Muhammad is later whisked on his night journey to the heavens. Jews, Christians, Muslims, they struggle through the centuries, slay each other in thousands, for the right to lay claim to the heights of Jerusalem. In the name of God, Jews and Arabs, Christians and Moslems, Catholics and Protestants, regularly slaughter one another. Our planet stinks of religious massacres. Have you ever thought why?"

"It has to do with mountains?" I ask.

"One thing to know, before you give your heart to mountains. They are powerfully jealous of each other. Pledge loyalty to one and it expects you to be faithful. Followers of religions believe they are following the one God. They are wrong. History tells them they are wrong, the Bible tells them they are wrong, but they are slaves to their partial understanding and believe what they want to believe."

He raises his head toward Canigou, lifts his arms in salutation, and intones from the Bible in a clear-pitched voice.

"I will lift up mine eyes to the mountain. From whence shall my help come? My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth.'" He lets the words resound awhile, then turns to me to continue his lesson.

"Devotees of religions worship the Lord of a mountain. They are the mountain's cohorts, and will battle the world to proclaim his dominion over the earth. Call it Islam, Judaism, Christianity, any faction, even the Mormons of America with their own message brought down from their own mountain, they are all mountain religions. Don't think mountains have let people go. Never think that. They have roused us with their prophets, stirred us with their myths, hidden themselves in our religions the way they hide themselves in cloud. They divide the peoples of the world among themselves, and set them at each other's throats."

I stay quiet for a while.

"Buddhism," I suggest after some thought. "That doesn't fit your theory."

"The one religion without a God. You're right. And where did it start? On a mountain? Uniquely, no, it didn't. The Buddha found his enlightenment under a tree. That doesn't mean mountains haven't done their best to take Buddhism over. Mountains of the Far East are clustered with Buddhist shrines. The slopes and peaks of Tibet are stacked with ridiculous Buddhist mythology. No matter what sect, choose your flavor of Buddhism, study real hard, and then see which jealous mountain god you've attached yourself to.

"But remember this feeling about Buddhism. Remember how it started under a tree when you move your story down from the Andes to the Amazon. Until the new American churches based around ayahuasca, no religion ever came out of the jungle. You can't separate the jungle religions from their trees, you see. And that's enough of my talking. Here endeth my sermon on the mount. Come, Martin."

He stands and leads the way back down the path. I look east as we descend, away from the mountains, toward the strip of blue that is the Mediterranean Sea, and try and let it's color wash me clean of so many alien thoughts.

## THE BREAKFAST MAGICIAN

At home in my kitchen he pulls the sleeves of his jacket back across the cuffs of his shirt, holds up his hands, and purses his fingers. He's making an exhibition of himself.

I watch, because in a house as tiny as mine any exhibition is hard to ignore.

His shirt is mustard yellow, made of thick brushed cotton and buttoned up to the collar. His jacket has the brown color of peat and something of the same texture. With a flourish he dips his hands into the two jacket pockets and plucks an egg out of each. These he places in a bowl on the sideboard. His hands dip into the pockets again, then again, till six large brown-shelled eggs are collected in the bowl. Then he reaches into his breast pocket and picks out a sprig of fresh parsley.

*"Voilà!" he says. "Le petit déjeuner."*

"Where did you get them?" I ask as he assembles the chopping board and knife and cracks the first of the eggs into a second bowl, whisking it as it falls.

"You have no ears?" He cracks all the eggs, deftly using just one hand while whisking with the other. "Didn't you hear the cockerel?"

"You took eggs from there? From the neighbor's hen-house? But that's stealing."

"The hens didn't complain. Why do you? Sit yourself down and finish your story while I cook."

"What story?"

"Machu Picchu. The story of coming down the mountain."

"I took the bus."

"And...?"

The bus takes a road that zigs and zags down the mountain, working a gradual descent that drops twenty-five meters for every two hundred before turning a sharp corner back on itself to continue it's descent.

A group of children gather at the first bend, shouting and waving at us. At the edge of the group stands a boy, a dark-skinned local of about fourteen dressed in a simple green tunic, a red headband round his shock of dark hair and a red belt round his waist, leather sandals on bare feet. He spreads his arms and leans to one side, like a bird banking in flight.

"Goodbye," he calls, his voice clear and the syllables long.

We smile and settle back in our seats as the bus continues, losing height, turning the first sharp bend.

"Goodbye."

Our boy is there again, poised in his stance of banked flight, emitting his long call, waiting for us to pass him on the road.

"Goodbye," again and again, a miraculous apparition every time our bus runs along a fresh straight. We rise from our seats to find him, wonder at how his trick is done, delight in the achievement. A race is on. Once we think we've beaten him, that our driver's raced the engine too fast and we'll be gone before he arrives, then he leaps through the undergrowth and lands on the road.

"Goodbye."

We passengers cheer. This is one race we don't want to win.

The bus turns a final bend, reaches the level of the river, and our descent is made. The boy jumps down to the road ahead of us and trots our way. The bus stops, the door opens, and the boy climbs in. Soaked in sweat, breathless, he holds on to the seats as he walks down the aisle, accepting money to fill a green bag tied to the belt around his waist.

"You paid him?" Carlos asks.

"More than I could afford."

"Nonsense. You paid for the two of us. That was a lovely story. It makes me happy."

He smiles as he continues his breakfast preparation. His obvious good mood is at odds with my bad one.

"Why did we have to speak of the mountains?" I ask. "Why so soon? Why before breakfast? And why frighten me with your version of religions? I don't need knowledge like that."

"What's better, a hen or a human?"

"That's a silly question."

"Then you'll give me a silly answer. Which of the two has a greater moral dimension?"

"Put that way it's easy. A human, of course. There's no morality in a hen."

"Wrong. Hens lay eggs. They do it whether I'm there to take them or not. They don't serve me. They serve their own nature. People have bigger brains than hens. Their scope is almost limitless. And what do they do with these great brains of theirs? They have ideas. And what's their next step? They serve those ideas. Hens conceive of no God, and slaughter nobody in God's name.

"Why do we two speak of mountains? We speak of mountains so we can learn from hens. We can follow their example, trust our own nature and be mindful of what it is that we serve.

"Your Peruvian boy of the mountains? He serves speed, youth, drama, surprise. This is vital, to serve the best of ourselves at any moment. In California your boy would be on the beach. There in the Andes he surfs the mountain. I like this boy. He brings to mind the young Carlos. It's time, I think, to reclaim that young Carlos. Time for tales of the jungle."

He puts a match to the gas ring on the stove. There is a whoosh as the blue flame sucks up the air and leaps four feet high.

"This is an old stove," Carlos observes.

"It's never done that before."

"Ha!" The flame has subsided to normal, but he waves his hands at it like a conjurer nevertheless. "There's life in the old dog yet, as they say."

He puts my old cast-iron pan on the heat and whisks the stream of beaten eggs as it flows into the pan. The eggs rise, he folds them, waits till the skin is mottled a light brown, slices the omelette in half, and presents it on two plates.

My first forkful stays solid as I lift it, then bursts in my mouth. The warmth, the taste, the juiciness are luscious.

"Magic," I say.

He smiles and cuts off a dainty mouthful for himself. We eat in silence as the sun wheels round to cast it's light through the four-foot depth of the stone window casings and onto our table.

Carlos smacks his lips as the last morsel slides down his throat. "Impeccable, though I say so myself. Did you eat such delicacies in the jungle?"

"The food wasn't the highlight."

"You'll tell me. It will help us build a fresh appetite as we walk."

"I'll make up a picnic."

"How very European of you. We're going into the jungle. The jungle will feed us. We will take nothing but ourselves."

He stands, slides his chair under the table, and steps from the room. I hear him whistle a tune as he waits for me outside. His whistling is like a low wind, a seven-beat musical line that keeps repeating itself with variations. I clear the plates from the table and stack them in the sink, till the tune permeates me and I suddenly know where it comes from. It is the tune whistled by don Pedro, a tune of his own devising, sacred to the heart of the jungle ceremonies.

The light outside the front door is much brighter than any that filters through the jungle canopy. The air is much less humid. The summer has been dry, the river is narrow, the scrub and trees and bushes on the hills are turning brown, but as Carlos opens the gate and leads the way there is a very real sense of following him in through the first forest wall of the Amazon.

## FOLLOW THE LEADER

The gate was erected by the village commune, to stop small children from continuing on the path out of the village and tumbling to their deaths. Beyond it, and just outside my kitchen window, is a grating. The thin stream of an irrigation canal flows through it, traveling underneath the village to emerge again after a hundred yards, providing water for gardens and farming plots till it drops to rejoin the river.

When the grating clogs with leaves and twigs, the channel rises and tips over the wall as a waterfall. The course of the river runs some thirty feet below, beyond the rocks that form it's banks. My job in the village when I am here is to keep this grating clean. I churn at it with a stick to stir the mat of leaves over the wall. Before I do, I feel through the water. Often I find a frog spread-eagled against the bars, the stream too fast to swim against, the drop over the wall too perilous to be an option of choice. I place the creature in a bucket and carry it down to where the river runs through bulrushes under the bridge. The frog keeps to the bucket's shelter as the river waters stream around it, till I pull the bucket away and it kicks it's legs to move above the pebbles.

Carlos spins around on the narrow walkway beside the channel and dives toward my feet. With my back against the wall of the house, feeling the warmth already absorbed by it's stone, I watch him scoop his hand through the water.

The creature on the palm of his hand is not a frog. It's a similar size, but far more curious. Four webbed feet, a stubby tail, skin a glossy black, but with flashes of vivid yellow zagged down it's sides.

"What is it?" I ask.

A stupid part of me wonders if it's some creature he always carries with him, hidden up his sleeve, produced like this for moments of amazement. It isn't a creature that seems native to France, though I keep being surprised at the stark wildness of the Pyrenees.

Carlos lifts the creature to his ear. It waggles it's feet in the air, then grows still as it's head burrows into Carlos's earlobe.

"A fire salamander, it tells me." Carlos nestles the creature in his left hand and cups his right over the top. "Far from fiery now though. Chilled close to death by the water. It will accompany us a little way. Come on, Martin. This bodes well. There's adventure ahead of us."

I'm still wary of the narrowness of the path, and the sheer fall to the left of it. I worry at edging past the banks of wild fennel that grow in a wild garden to my right. Carlos steps out with a nimbleness I glance up to admire before looking back down at my feet. He waits for me beneath the shade of an ancient cherry tree, whose trunk is rooted ten feet below so that it's branches drape a low canopy over the path.

He takes a deep breath as I catch up with him, then lets it out. It is a sigh of contentment.

"A perfect day in a perfect world," he says.

I let out a sigh too, but of a different kind. I don't notice I've done so till he turns to me with a question.

"Sorry for yourself or for the world?"

"Neither. Just unsettled." "By me?"

"I suppose so. I was happy till you came. This village generally makes me happy. I felt out of balance till I got back here. A few walks in the hills set me to rights again. Now that balance is gone. Even this walkway seems narrow and dangerous. What have you done, Carlos? I walk this way every day. Now I feel that if I take one more step I will fall."

He stares at me a moment. I worry about what he is preparing to say, but his lips barely move when he speaks and his voice is soft. "Sit down."

Steps lead down around the cherry tree to a garden plot below. I tread down the first one and sit down beside the channeled stream. "Your heart is beating fast?" Carlos asks.

"Knocking. Really hard. It feels just this side of a heart attack."

"It's exhilaration."

"It's fear."

"Same thing."

"Not in my world, Carlos. Not in my world."

"Then leave your world. You have to. You know this. You have to step through your fear."

"Fear can be good. It stops you jumping in front of a train. Stops you walking off a cliff."

"This little walkway is the path that you tread every day, you tell me. Is it a rational fear that sees you terrified of this path?"

It's obviously not rational. Fear doesn't have to be rational to be real, I am about to reply. Instead I sit and think a while longer, till I come up with a rational response. "I'm scared of following you."

"Ha!"

Carlos manages to sit himself down on the narrow strip of cement beside the channeled water. He uncovers the salamander and settles it on the palm of his right hand, his middle finger crooked as a support for the reptile's chin. His left hand he places against my chest.

"Your heart's beating fast enough for two." He takes his hand away. "That's what hearts do at the point of entering a new relationship. It happened to me on meeting my teacher."

"Is it happening now?"

"I feel the pressure on your heart as my own. Otherwise not. You should have felt my heart that day in Cuzco though, when you spoke my name and then breathed me in. I certainly did. Boom. Boom. I thought I would die. For a moment I did."

"You died?"

"Just for a moment."

"Is this something you've been doing all your life? Dying and resurrecting yourself?"

"You're being flippant, Martin." He lets the silence carry a gentle rebuke for a while, before continuing. "But yes. We die many times in one lifetime. People are stuck on death as something final, whereas it's just a transition. Our lives are put on hold many times. Our spirit pops out to check the terrain and often discovers radical new departures. Our bodies are heavy and our habits are strong, so of course we normally ignore such chances to change and carry on in our old ways. But those little deaths keep on coming, till the big one arrives that can't be ignored. I say that, though of course people do ignore it as long as they can. So many people I've met out there do not realize they have died."

"You say things like that and expect me to follow you? It's like taking a hike with death."

"We all take hikes with death. It makes our lives exquisite. But you are afraid, so here is what we shall do. We shall sit and stare at the path ahead. When it looks ready for us, we shall stand up and walk. I tell you now, the path will be ready for me and I shall walk along it. If it looks ready for you, you walk along it too. If it doesn't, turn around and go back home. You will never see me again. If we both walk the path, whoever goes first, the other must not go in the spirit of following. No one is a follower, no one a leader. We are simply both alive."

I look at him to see if he is going to say more, but he simply stares at the path. The salamander on his hand shares the same focus.

I look ahead and stare too.

I don't know how many minutes elapse before the first effect kicks in. Maybe fifteen. Then there is no sense of time. No sense of Carlos or the salamander either. Simply a view of the changing path.

I suspect what I see is dazzles of light, bounced as reflections from the flowing stream. They are bright shimmers, glints that stretch out through the air and then fade. I know heat haze, when the view above the ground wobbles out of shape. This change in the air has no such loss of definition, no waves of shapelessness. It is more as if the air were defining itself as crystal.

The glints spread wider, building on themselves like the structure of cells. I look to the thin channel of water running as the center of the path to pass by my side, understanding now that the light is no reflection, and I see that the quality of the stream has changed. The sound of it's running is clear to me, in fact it is amplified to the volume of a torrent as I listen, but for a while the water looks quite still. Then I notice movement begin, and it is a dual movement. The stream has twin currents. One is the usual flow, the surface heavings and churnings of the water coming toward me. The other is a pointillist version of the same water, like a vision of it's atomic structure, and this is flowing too, only it flows upstream.

And as a stream can flow against itself, so the cement pathway on either side of the channel is on the move too. Solid turns to liquid, and the atomic structure flows up against it's own gradient.

I look up from the path to the crystallized air, and find it has taken the form of solid light. It arches above and around the path, like a tunnel in that it stretches into the distance, but unlike a tunnel in that it gives no sense of boundaries. There is no light at the end of this tunnel, for the tunnel is light.

I stand, step forward, and place a foot on either side of the water. The path is solid, the movement still flowing but forming no conveyor belt. The path has direction but movement along it has to be my own.

I see Carlos is right. Fear can be exhilaration.

Step by step, I walk the path and journey into the light.

I sense Carlos sitting down beside me.

"You put something into those eggs?" I ask. Opening my eyes, I turn to him and smile.

He smiles back. I lean forward to look beyond him, along the short section of path we have both walked. The ancient vine terraces, earth piled high behind walls of rounded stone, rise to the left. To the right are the wild pomegranate and fig trees. The channel carries water in between them. The cement to either side of the channel is solid, weathered, static. The view has assumed it's old, accustomed form.

Below our feet a mountain stream tumbles down to the river. We are sitting on a bridge, a basic one built of flagstones that carries the path and channel over the dip in the land. We are in the shade of a younger cherry tree that grows on the level above us. I swing my legs, look down into the dark green shadows of the foliage, and can find nothing to say.

"Let me tell you a story," Carlos says, and sets the docile salamander down on his trouser leg so that his hands are free to draw illustrations in the air. "It's an ayahuasca story. It asks to be told now."

"I am sitting, like this, but on a rock beside a river. Think of it as this river below us, only twice as wide and faster flowing. Maybe I've been sitting for an hour. Maybe for a lifetime."

"Is this in France? Here in the Pyrenees?"

He pauses at my interruption, and stares into my face as though willing me to apologize.

"No. Peru. If you have any more interruptions in you, use them now."

"Is this story a dream, or something real?"

"Your question saddens me. I will repeat it to you at the end of my tale. Hopefully you will have found your own answer. Till then, though I may speak, I shall not speak to you. I shall address my tale to the fire salamander. She is already rapt and most receptive. Eavesdrop if you wish."

Carlos turns his attention from me, and tells the rest of his tale in words that sail out over the salamander's head.

"I am on a rock. It was hot to sit on, but now the heat has passed into me and there is comfort so long as I keep still."

His head erect, his eyelids closed, he journeys into the memory. I hear a noise, a slow and grinding roar, and look around. The noise continues, and I trace it to his throat. As I do so, his eyes snap open and he stares directly ahead.

"The noise is unlike any I have ever known. Only the vision before me explains it. A rock stands at the edge of the river, water streaming around it. As I watch a small bump on the top of the rock it swells, it grows, and I see that the sound I am hearing is the sound of growing stone.

"The bulge rises to take the shape of a helmet, the sort of smooth leather helmet worn by early aviators. This helmet is molded to the skin of the creature that appears beneath it. As the head is lifted higher on top of shoulders and a torso, I watch the creature's eyes. They are the large round eyes of an owl, but set in the eye sockets of a man's face. I say a man, but he is more like the original of garden gnomes, his flesh and clothing all an unpainted gray stone.

"I expected him to keep on rising, but his legs when they appear swell out of the sides of the rock. He is straddling it, the river water mounting round his feet. "My rock is on higher ground, so he has to look up at me. His eyes engage mine. The pupils are gray but flecked with black, and as I look at these black specks they shift and take wing into a flight of crows. The crows in flight are my whole field of view for a moment. When the view clears the creature has his back to me, and somehow the land between us has risen so that our two rocks are joined into one vessel. He kicks with his feet and our ship of rock starts to move.

"I grip at stone with my hands, shift my legs to cling to the sides, and instinctively kick out with my feet to help propel us forward. Our vessel enters the river and races on top of it's flow."

Carlos's body judders with the impact of his tale. His presence as a narrator is too distracting for me. I cannot watch him while picturing the images of his story for myself. I close my eyes as he continues:

*Life's a strain sometimes. Then it all turns around. The best you can do is hold on for the thrill of the ride.*

*I'm holding now. Speed is a blur of white and blue and green around me, and a rush of cool wind against my face. The force of the wind increases to buffet my whole body as the creature in front of me melts. Inch by inch he retreats back into the stone. I draw my feet out of the water to rest them where his body has disappeared, lean back on my hands, and look ahead.*

*The way ahead is a wave of white water spurting over our bow. The vessel gathers speed, we are on a steeper incline, and for a moment of panic I see that the fate of the creature is to be my own fate. The way ahead is now nothing but stone, a mountain of granite wider than the horizon and reaching up to mask the sky.*

*My hands slip. Flat on my back, I wait for the moment of impact.*

*It comes, but without pain. It is an enveloping darkness.*

*I think to rise, to explore this sudden afterlife. In front of me is nothing but blackness. I look behind, and sight returns. The river rushes my way, dipping through the narrow opening of a cave to turn subterranean. I watch the water flow till it reaches my vessel, and see that my rock is now a ledge and the water rushes beneath me. There is no chance of stepping in and wading back to the light. The power of the water is much too full. I turn again to the way ahead, and the darkness has lifted. Or rather, as in the cinema, an image has projected itself upon it.*

*My rock merges with the land as a beginning of an illumined path.*

*Gloom hangs to my left, but as I walk it configures itself as shadows, and these shadows group together into the trunks and branches of a forest. A song winds it's way through the trees, it's clear notes formed from a woman's voice to keep pace with my progress. I catch sight of her white robe, the flowing tresses of her hair that blend the reds, the blues, the orange hues of a fire's flames, and though I cannot see the details of her face her grace compels me to love her.*

*I love her for her height too. As I look up to the stars, look up to the mountains, I like to look* *up to my women. A woman more than six feet tall is liable to excite me. This apparition seems to vary in height, but is eight feet at her shortest. She is my type of woman.*

*Her unattainability makes her still more so. Her identity is clear to me. Clear in the way a baby knows it's mother at it's first glance out into the world. She is the lord and mistress of the forest, the mother of ayahuasca, and her song unwinds like the supplest of vines.*

*A song and a vision such as this should enchant me, but I am wary of enchantment. I turn my head to the right of the path, and peer out into the dusk. At first there is nothing but grayness to see. Then I peer down, and find that the land lies an unscalable distance below me.*

*It is a barren stretch, with little vegetation and many rocks. From my elevation I see nothing to wonder at, but below me there are groups of people engrossed in their lives. With arms looped around each other and their bodies stooped to bring their heads close, they seem to be keeping a secret, and they turn now and again to check on other groups. All around the barren land such clusters stoop and peer about.*

*The people are draped in clothes of drabness, a camouflage against the terrain. There is nothing to appeal in what I see but for the configurations of a game. Yet their excitement in the game, though restrained, is very clear. It is the excitement to be found when greed anticipates fulfillment, a static excitement that almost chokes upon itself. The path descends and I descend with it, approaching for a closer look.*

*They see me now, and their game comes to a halt. Faces turn my way, and arms are drawn back. They prepare to throw me something. I prepare to catch it. As I do so a song from the forest draws my attention.*

*I turn back to the other side of my path.*

*The mother of ayahuasca is close now. Her face is simply a green wash of forest colors but her robe is brilliant in it's whiteness and her flaming hair is vivid. It's tips are licks of blue and the air around her is white with heat. I hear the tune of her song, then find it has unraveled to leave words I can understand.*

*"Where...," she sings,*

*"are... "you...?"*

*The players below me shout for my attention. They use a name that they seem to think is mine. The name is their gift to me, and their hands hold out other offerings. The gifts are sticks, a rarity in their rocky land where wood does not appear to grow..*

*"Who are these people?" I ask the forest lady. My words come from me in song, and conjure a song in return.*

*"People like you*

*Who took the path.*

*Reached where they are*

*But no further.*

*They followed desires*

*But not their feet.*

*Look*

*where you are going."*

*Though my voice now sings, it doesn't have the meter of verse. "How did they get down from the path?" I ask.*

*"They play a game*

*That's less than life.*

*They play a game.*

*They play a game."*

*A stick lands at my feet, and stirs up dust like tinsel spray. I bend toward it.*

*A line of song arrests my motion, and I pause to wait for the sense of it's message.*

*Shamans in a shadow land*

*See them cock their heads,*

*Ears attuned to silent whistles*

*From their magic darts.*

*Look. You have one at your feet.*

*An invitation to the game.*

*Pick it up*

*To enjoy*

*Eternities of playing.*

*"Is it fun?" I ask. "Is it fun to play their game?"*

*This dusk you see*

*Masks nothing.*

*What you see is what there is*

*In all it's radiance.*

*"And this stick?" I ask. "What should I do with it?"*

*Pick it up*

*And they succeed.*

*Before you engage*

*Consider.*

*Do you choose to play this game*

*Or do they choose you?*

*I consider the stick. It doesn't seem threatening. A stick might well be useful along a forest path. "If I walk past this stick, and do not pick it up," I ask her, "how far along the path might I go?"*

*Her song, wordless now, streams off into the depths of her forest. I look down at the players of the game. They are animated now. Their faces break into silent laughter, they jump in the air and twirl around, making their game attractive. The air seems to shift and spin around them, like a torrent of tiny insects.*

*A boulder is lodged on the forest side of my path. I sit on it for reflection.*

*As my decision forms itself, I feel the warmth of the sun against my face and the heat of stone beside my legs. I open my eyes. My view is of the river from where I sit on the rock. The sunlight is gentle as it dips below the landscape, placing colors on the river as the water rushes by.*

Carlos slides a finger down the fire salamander's spine.

"So there's my story," he tells her. "Do you think our friend was listening too?"

He turns to me. His eyes are moist with unshed tears.

"So, Martin, dream or reality?"

"That was no dream." I get used to the view across the river, the play of sunlight across the field of low vines, the children's playground with it's bright yellow slide in front of the modern village hall. It feels right to anchor myself in a view of a world I am used to before continuing. "It was a story without an end, though. Did you pick up the stick?"

"It's important to hear the question. Not my answer. You have to make the choice for yourself."

"But did you?"

"You have too much sense of Carlos Castaneda, for all that you have not read my books. Too many expectations. Please let them go. I am beyond that now. But I'll answer you. No, I did not pick up the stick."

"But you entered the game?"

"Ha!" He wipes his eyes with the back of his hands, and is grinning when he turns to me. "See! Already you know my actions as well as your own! Yes, you're right. I am a proud rather than a stupid man. I thought I could have the best of both worlds. I did not stoop and pick it up, but still I joined the game. The mother of ayahuasca was

right. That game-world was a hard place to leave. I tell you this, Martin. Shamanism is not a spectator sport. Come, let's continue our walk. I'm all talked out. Our legs need to get some more conversation pumping."

"Along the path?"

"Why not? I'm free of distractions. Let's see how far we can go."

He cups the salamander in his hands, and steps out.

## THE HARMONY OF BRAINS

The path skirts a hillside, wheeling round to the left. It's curve follows even as it exaggerates the bend in the river. The rivulet carried wide to ferry water to the village still runs beside our feet. To our left is the rough lawn surrounding the first of two mill houses. Until recently two dogs, one with the looks and injured ferocity of a jackal, would bark and snarl greetings at this juncture of the walk while the washing of a single woman's vast brood, the eldest a soldier back from the Balkans and the youngest tiny golden-tressed twins, spanned the garden on a long clothesline. Now the dogs, the colors of the wash, the blond mother resplendent in her one-piece scarlet swim-suit, are gone. The family was evicted for nonpayment of rent, and the house is emptied, ready for sale.

I tell Carlos this as we walk. Then I speak of the latest developments in the boundary dispute between the village and the second mill house that we pass. The English owners, friends of mine, are sitting in the shade of an apple tree in their garden and fail to see me when I wave.

About thirty people weather each winter in the village. I used to think of them as hardy old souls, too impoverished to afford retreats in the gentler climate of the Mediterranean coast, battening their ancient doors and stoking the fires in their kitchen-cum-front-rooms, holding out for the spring. On closer acquaintance I learned of the domestic and sexual intrigues that render even these old and sequestered mountain lives both warm and spiced. And in the summer the population swells to more than two hundred; shutters slam open and breezes breathe through the houses as families return from the far removes of Parisian lives to make a holiday playground of their ancestral village.

This day in August is at the height of the holiday period. One spring I was excited by the village dogs' quest for bitches in heat. I watched their comings and goings along the dusty lanes, sad there was no one to share my dog gossip with, then recognized how pinched my world had become. Now, for this brief period, the matrix of passions and intertwined desires that gives energy to city life is transplanted to our village. The whole valley is in heat, and we watch each other with excitement. Carlos breaks the flow of my village gossip by stepping from the pathway and down a wooded slope. I follow, holding on to the trunks of slender trees for balance, and stop beside Carlos. He is looking through the trees at the people gathered below. Sand has been trucked up into the mountains, then tipped and raked to form a beach.

Thirty feet wide and twenty feet deep, the beach is already fairly covered with families and beach towels. Bodies ranging from white through pink to bronze sit and lie in the blaze of the sun. An overspill of people is in the water.

If they all looked up they would see us. They don't.

"They're playing games,” I remark to Carlos, reminded of his story. "They've fallen off the path.”

"You're an idiot," he informs me. "That story I told our salamander here is a vision of the shamanic path. It is quite specific. I don't deal in metaphors."

The outdoor rock pool, almost circular and a quarter of an acre in size, is a natural delight of the village. The river tumbles in from the southwest. Boulders coated mineral white give the look of a sizable waterfall even when the river is low. The pool is deep enough in parts to accept high dives. A small ledge forms a diving platform in the rock face to one side, and steps are hammered up the side of a tree that leans out above the water from the side where we stand.

Two adults, a male and a female, slice a crawl back and forth across the widest section of the pool. Two women lounge in the shadows. And three children are stationed around the rocks.

"Do you know the triune brain theory?" Carlos asks.

"You tell me I'm an idiot. How could I know such a thing?"

He ignores my sulks and shifts straight into his explanation.

"Man has three brains. The most ancient and smallest, lodged in the bump you feel at the top of your spine, has been with us since our reptilian existence. It's our lizard brain. The second, domesticated and obedient, that coats the first like short-cut pastry, is our dog brain. The third, some say the highest but also the youngest and largest and most tender of all, is the thick mass that we know as gray matter. Dogs have the lizard brain as part of their makeup as well, but of all the mammals this gray matter is unique to us. That's why it's called the human brain. And below us are three children to illustrate the theory. Do you see that girl?"

She is maybe fourteen. Of the three children, she is doing the least to attract attention to herself. Yet her tactics as an attention-grabber are superb.

She is lying on the flattened top of a rock about seven feet above the pool, her arms at her sides, her legs straight out. Before lying down she must have arched her back and reached her hands around her long black hair to lift it high, for it is set around her head as it would float were she on her back in the water.

Thin cotton straps hold triangular black cups that pouch her breasts, which have the fresh plumpness of something still growing. A patch of black material forms her briefs, tied against the flesh of her sides with bows. The costume is as close to nudity as she dares. The sun ripens her as she lies quite still, absorbing the heat to her core. "She's illustrating the lizard brain," Carlos says.

"You think that's what she's doing?" I ask. "Are you fully returned from the dead?"

A pulse goes through the girl. Her head lifts up, her left foot slides along the rock to raise her inner thigh into view, and she lowers the sunglasses from her eyes to stare over them.

She is looking at a newcomer, who stands in the shade of the trees beyond the beach. And he looks back. Aged sixteen, trainers on bare feet, baggy shorts hanging down to his kneecaps, a lilac muscle shirt loose around his body, his hair the brown fuzz of his summer cut, the youth returns her look.

"The lizard brain, home to the basic instincts," Carlos opines. "Lust, hunger, fear, aggression. The flash points in our behavior, those times when we snap and lose our control, they all surge out of the lizard brain. It strips us of pretensions and leaves us bare-bones naked. Now, you see that boy?"

He could easily be the brother of the girl on the rock, judging by her total disregard for him. Her younger brother, about twelve years old. Where she is stillness, he is movement. His body, a glossy bronze but for the electric blue of his swimming trunks, spread-eagles against the rock face as he finds the hand and footholds to haul himself up from the water to the diving ledge. Once there, he turns his head. On the beach his mother, sitting upright in her one-piece swimsuit of fluorescent pink, gives him her full attention.

The boy reaches back his arms. His posture promises a beautiful swallow dive. As his knees flex he looks across to his mother. Makes sure she is watching. The promise of flight becomes a loss of balance. His legs pedal through the air and his body smacks against the water.

His mother looks shocked by the splash, then reverts to a smile when her son's head appears. He finds his bearings by seeking her out again.

"The dog brain's active in that one," Carlos continues. "Trust, loyalty, obedience, friendship, play. Even much of what we know as love. Now observe this girl beneath the trees."

She sits on a rock in the shade below us. Thirteen most likely, her blond hair tucked behind her ears. Though she is in the shade, she still wears loose drawstring pants down to her ankles and a full-sleeved cotton blouse as protection against the sun. Her legs are crossed, and cradled in her lap is a book. Comfortable in the landscape, she is somewhere far away in spirit. Carlos picks up a short stick and lobs it into the water in front of her, as though it were falling naturally from the tree. It's splash makes her jump. She traces the disturbance to the stick, watches the rings from the splash eddy toward her on the shore, then returns to her book and it's far-away setting. "This girl is steered by the human brain. The stirring of art, of music, of science, of philosophy, the capacity for a moral viewpoint, the perspective of setting oneself apart, all stem from this gray matter. You're with me so far?"

"Is this a metaphor, or are there actually three brains?"

"As I said, I don't deal in metaphors. For want of a better word, this is science. Paleocortex, mesocortex, and neocortex. A big trouble with people, maybe the basic one, is that we are run from one brain at a time rather than all three in harmony. Promptings from the lizard brain result in our rashest actions, not a damn given for the consequences. That's our kill-or-be-killed, devil-take-the-hindmost mode. The dog brain sees us mawkish and flabby-minded, eager to go with the herd. And the human brain on it's own is doomed to self-reflection. 'How does this experience reflect on me?' is it's constant reaction. Life from the outside in rather than the inside out. Come now, Martin. You're in storytelling mode. Tell me a story of someone acting one brain at a time."

There's power in a request for a story. You're no longer rattling anecdotes into a vacuum. Your story is invited to engage with someone's life. It will mix with the listener's experience, and the chemistry of that mixture can have the power to heal. It's important to pause, let go of expectations, and see what story might emerge. My head clears itself at Carlos's request, and only one story comes to mind. I wait, so much wanting an alternative story to reveal itself, but nothing comes. It is this story or nothing. And as I tell the story, I recognize that I am also it's listener.

"This story belongs to Glasgow in the week of the first air strikes in the Gulf War. It happened on a day when all the world was turned upside down. A day when hell smothered the life of my friend.

"He was an artist who worked as my illustrator. I knew him as bright, sensitive, caring, a good husband to his young wife and good father to his baby daughter. The other love in his life was a 1973 Porsche Targa. It was red, so he called it Scarlet, and spoke lovingly of the car's feminine curves.

"He nursed it from a wreck back to pristine condition. Weekdays it stayed under a tarpaulin on the street outside his house. Saturdays he could always find an extra hour or two to care for it. The engine gleamed as bright as the body. On Sunday mornings the wraps came off again and he drove his family off to visit with either his parents or his in-laws.

"That day they were nearly there, just turning into the main street that leads to his parents' house, and a battered Ford shot out in front of them. Two thirteen-year-old joyriders were in the front seats. They were using the white center markings like a track. There was no room for my friend to stay on course. He swerved onto the sidewalk, tried to straighten but couldn't, and the Porsche scraped it's side along a wall.

"That should have been it. Some shock for the family, a reparable car. But that's not how it was. When his wife talks now, she talks only of this. How the man she had lived with and loved became someone she had never seen. His face contorted, yelling curses, slamming his foot down on the pedal and bombing his Scarlet to top speed. His wife screamed, his baby cried, and he just kept shouting as the engine mounted into it's air-cooled roar and they drew close to the tail of the road-hogging Ford. "It lasted minutes—maybe two, maybe three. Maybe the kids didn't know their road signs, maybe they panicked, but they veered up a road and my friend followed. It was the exit ramp to the highway. Both cars flew at top speed into the lanes of oncoming traffic.

"The stainless steel roll bar on the car saved the wife's life, but her story becomes a blank at this point. All she knows is that she woke up in a hospital as a childless widow. The teenage joyriders died too, as did one other driver caught in the pileup."

"Will that do?" I ask Carlos.

He simply returns my look.

"The dog brain for the love of his wife, his daughter, maybe even his car? The lizard brain for the curses, the madness, the life-busting surge of road rage? The human for his artistic side, his pride in that perfect, damnable Porsche? I still can't connect that driving demon to the careful friend I'd known. Perhaps there wasn't one person. Perhaps there were three, governed by three brains as you say, and I simply never met them all. What happens in death, Carlos? Do all these fractured parts come together?" "Please finish your story."

So I go quiet for a while, discovering what is left to tell.

"It's not just that we act from only one brain at a time," I realize. "We can take in only one aspect at a time as well."

For I remember and recount how others dealt with the death.

They buried the baby, and after an autopsy they buried my friend. His wife stayed away. There were maybe fifteen of us gathered in the plain funeral parlor of the Scottish crematorium. The coffin was shrouded in a purple velvet cloth. After an address was given and prayers spoken, machines cranked and the coffin was lowered, the cloth falling flat as the bulge of the coffin sank from sight. And with the dropping of the coffin and the body into the furnace below I sensed a rushing upwards, a huge release as the soul of my friend flew from the scene.

Outside, I joined the line of people waiting to pay their respects to my friend's parents. The man and woman, my friend's features shared between them, were not old themselves. They stood in black outfits, smiled their thanks for our coming, and shook our hands. In childhood their son had suffered from a heart complaint. Maybe this was linked to the road rage. I don't know. As he roamed the Scottish hills they feared he might never return. But surgery and medical care saw him through to a sweet life. And now this.

"How can they survive?" I asked the minister.

"They absorb what they can, and leave the rest," he reassured me, recalling all the other people he had counseled through grief. "This is nothing they can comprehend, so they don't even try. We'll never know how they can survive, but believe me, they will."

To try and reach my own understanding, I visited the city library and ordered all the newspapers of the previous week. The story was a second-lead to the Gulf War stories but was easy to find. As I read all the versions in the press there was not a scrap of my friend to be seen in all the reportage. Simply a story of a road-rage maniac locked on revenge who brought death to several families on a Sunday morning. One more pulse of horror in a city accustomed to violence.

"Thank you," Carlos says. "I don't know what to do with your story. Can we just walk on a little way, and see what comes to me? It's time to release this little creature in any case."

The salamander seems settled for now on the open palm of Carlos's right hand. He carries her back to the cement pathway and follows it to it's end. This is where the stream of water is diverted from the river, angled to run along the irrigation channel. There is nowhere else for us to walk, but at shoulder height is a ledge broad and long enough to be a path for our reptile. Carlos sets her down and she immediately scuttles along and out of sight.

"Au revoir," he says.

He leans back against the side of the hill, and looks up through overhanging branches toward the blue of the sky.

"You ask me if all the parts of ourselves come together in death. We will find that out in time. Crucial for now is that you pull together the fractured parts of yourself before we carry on.

"We're about to walk into history. You'll find yourself intact when we get there, but it's better if you can take with you a little extra prescience to illuminate the figure you were then, otherwise the venture will be a waste of time. We'll not change history. Simply take a little more consciousness to it, knowing where it's heading. "The trick of bringing the three brains into harmony is to open up to infinity. Invite down a force that sees you acting according to it's designs. It's the equivalent of opening up to our potential on this earth. That's what our free will amounts to: opening ourselves fully to the plan that's laid out for us. You know some of this, so I won't belabor it.

"What pleases me most about the story of your friend, and it does please me even as it tires me out, is your reaction to the newspaper stories. You saw the depth behind the sensationalism. You learned that there is infinitely more to a story than it's details, even though sensational details are all that most readers want. Those newspapers offered facts but couldn't get near the truth.

"I pulled this story from you, in place of the trite stuff you were feeding me, because I knew you needed to hear it. Admit it, you'd forgotten about your friend." He lowers his head to look at me, and I nod.

"It threw me for a while," he continued. "I knew the story, as I know everything in your life, but I also knew you had forgotten it. Then I remembered your naiveté. You've never learned the essence of a storytelling life. Shall I tell you it?"

I nod again.

"Collect and recount the stories that shaped you. Until you do, you'll never be properly shaped. Life is a storytelling art form. Censorship is evil but editing's divine. There are not so many episodes that define a life. If you fail to recollect them, let alone learn from them, your life will never be defined. This story of your Glaswegian friend is a fundamental one for you. You thought his life blessed, and discovered it cursed. It showed you there was no model for your life but your own. And left to your own devices, with nothing to model yourself on that you could trust, you were completely at a loss. You sold your apartment and belongings and set off on the search, the quest, that has led you to this moment. Led you to talking to me by this riverside here and now. Am I right in this, or am I fantasizing?"

"You're right."

He lets out a deep sigh.

"Forgive me," he explains. "I hate preaching. But time is limited and there's only so much narrative I can push myself through. Now remember as we step into history that your life has no models. There is nothing to trust. On your own, life can be spurred by only one brain at a time. To have the three brains run in harmony you have to give up control. Know that, and in history we'll see where you failed."

"We're looking for my failures?"

"Don't worry. Failure's a byproduct of success, and who really cares about either? We're looking for something much more juicy. Come with me."

Carlos takes off his shoes, ties the laces together and hangs a shoe either side of his shoulder, and steps his stockinged feet into the river. "What are you doing?" I ask.

"There's no going back on this route. Ever onward, Martin. Ever onward. I shall stand here till you join me, or till I get swept away. The choice is yours."

The river is some twenty-five feet wide at this point, and just a few feet from where Carlos is standing it drops into a weir. I have sometimes come and sat mesmerized by the smooth curve of water as the river eases over it's fall. I've never thought to use this as a crossing place though.

I tie my trainers and hang them over my shoulder to copy Carlos, and step into the water. The force of the current snatches at my ankles. I make my way, stone by stone, to stand at his far side. I'm heading for the far bank and haven't thought to stop, but he yells in my ear.

"Turn and face upstream!"

As he yells he takes hold of my shoulder and spins me round. His shout starts a roar in my ear, the sound of the river falling over the weir but amplified to a level of pain. His hand supports my back as I lose my balance. I seem to be falling even as the view in front of me stays in place. I see the waters of the river, and the high reach of trees to it's sides.

Then the roar subsides to little more than a babble, and the cold flow around my ankles grows warm. I notice high mud banks to either side, and see how the riverbed of stones has disappeared beneath the brown stream of the water. The river, a warm river, is churning mud into it's course.

And then the pieces slot together. I am losing my mind even as the scene in front of me begins to make sense. I stepped into a river in the French Pyrenees, but I am standing in a river in the Amazon.

The pressure of Carlos's hand on my back increases, and I let myself fall against it.

## UPRIVER

A rock brings me back. In my hand it is a lightweight shell twice the size of my fist, curved like my fist too and with a pinkness to match the flesh of my palm. It is clearly the shell of a snail, though the Amazonian creature that once lived here redefines the species with it's size. It would be a feast in itself for any Frenchman. I press my hand hard around it, hard enough to crush it to splinters. Instead of breaking, the shell presses into my flesh. It is solid, and the warmth leaks from it until it is cold and has transmitted that cold to my entire body.

My eyes open against a blue sky. The pain in my hand makes me release my grip on what is no longer a shell but a rock. Water surges broad and strong around me, tugging and pulling at my body, twisting it round. My head is the only anchor, the only thing keeping me in place. I jerk it forward, turn from my back to reach for the ground with my hands and knees, find my face is submerged and water is filling my nostrils.

"Up!"

The shout gives me a clue how to orientate myself. Carlos's hands provide another. They were holding my head, but now they grab me under the armpits and haul me from the river. My feet drag against the stones till he has dropped me on the riverbank.

The riverbank in the French Pyrenees.

I blink and rub the water from my eyes and look out across the weir, to the path we had followed on the other side.

"Come on," Carlos says. He is wet too, his trousers soaked though his top half is relatively dry. "Come up and rest till your senses come back."

I haul myself out of the water and sit down next to him. Neither of us speaks for some time.

"Sorry," he finally says. "I'm so fixed on knowing every aspect of your life I lose sight of the fact that you and I are not the same person. There is so much your body does not know yet. Simple things. Such as balance."

"I can balance," I say. "It's not my forte, I admit. I used to fall over and walk into things a lot, but I'm much better than I was. I watch where I'm going, try not to walk backwards, that sort of thing. I can regress when I'm tired, become flat-out Mr. Magoo then, but I'm nowhere near as clumsy as I was. Put me in any real-life situation and I can cope. Flash me bodily to another continent while I'm standing in the middle of a European river and then maybe things do fall apart. What's your game, Carlos? How do you do that?"

"Do what? Tell me what happened."

"You know what happened. You tempted me into this river, then pulled some trick that flashed me back six months so that I thought I was standing in an Amazonian stream. How did you do that?"

"Recall your own actions before you go questioning me. You think that was a flashback to a different time?"

"I was walking upriver to the jungle clearing. It shocked me at first, then I remembered it clearly."

"Were you on your own or with others?"

"On my own."

"And that's what you did six months ago? Went walking in the river on your own?"

I was never on my own in that stretch of river, but always in a party of others. I see the nature of the question, see that he needs me to think rather than reply. "So that wasn't a memory?" I eventually ask.

"Real time, Martin. The Peruvian Amazon in the here and now. And much as you've sworn in recent weeks that you'll never go back, I worried for a while that I'd never be able to drag you out of there. Whatever you did in the jungle, Martin, it grabbed hold of you. It's part of you now."

"Did you see it? Did you see what I was seeing?"

"For a while. I walked with you for a while. I was part of your enchantment as you looked up toward the jungle canopy, rubbed the moisture from leaves against your cheeks, squeezed the mud between your toes. Then you entered the waterfall, the thin stream that showered down from rocks to your left, cool water cascading across the top of your scalp. That should have roused you, but no. The jungle was simply licking you, licking the minerals from your sweat.

"The final chapter, Martin. You nearly wrote the final chapter, of a story no one would ever read. You nearly had me stuck with you. I want it. I want that taste of the jungle so much. I was touching it through you. It was touching me back. Then I pulled away. Just in time. I want to reclaim myself from the jungle, not have it reclaim me. "I withdrew from you, came back to this river and lowered you into the current. The wet and the cold should have snapped you right back. You're stubborn, Martin. You held on in there. The balance I'm talking about isn't a matter of staying on your feet. You were doing well enough with that. It's a balance between two worlds. Keeping one foot in each, feeling the full weight of your body in every tread."

"Two worlds?" I wonder what they are. "The Amazon and the Pyrenees? Then and now? Life and the afterlife?"

"You're advancing. At least you don't offer dreams and reality as a choice anymore. Simply put, one world is time. It's a chronological world. The only logic most lives run by is chronologic. It has the ultimate truth at the heart of it: 'First we're born and then we die.' The rest of chronologic is a dreary passage from minute to minute.

“The other world is outside of time. A timeless world. Few people choose to live in this world because most don't realize they can. They catch sight of it though. For them it is composed of moments of wonder. Or moments of fear. Occasions when they can look back and say, 'My heart stood still.' Such snatches of life beyond the norm are viewed like glimpses from a speeding train. There seems no chance of taking them as your own, they just fly by like instant memories. Do you remember though how sometimes at stations, when two trains are stopped beside each other, passengers from one look out at the passengers in the other, then suddenly their train is moving. At least it seems to be for there is movement past their window and the other passengers are left behind. Then the last carriage is gone and the station reappears. It was the other train that moved and not their own.

"That's an illustration of how life lets us step from speeding trains. Step from time into the timeless, and the train of your life will still be there whenever you return. It's going nowhere without you."

"It felt so real though." The twin impressions are still there in my hand. "I was holding on to a shell, then found I was actually holding on to a rock, but they both felt like themselves. What's the physical link between these two worlds?"

"One is just as physical as the other. The vibrational nature is different, but that's just like tuning to the same radio station in different parts of the globe. You simply have to change your own frequency. The physical is a mode of perception. It is better to think in terms of energy, and that is universal whatever form it takes." "Can you experience the two simultaneously?”

“Time and timeless at the same time, you mean?” Carlos asks. “Ha!”

"So that's a stupid question?"

"Not stupid. Simply funny. It takes time to come up with the right questions. That's what much of life's about, so don't worry. The answer? The truth about time is that it doesn't march on. It's always prepared to wait for you. And can you be in more than one timeless place at once? Why bother? There are no pressures of time. Better to give your full awareness to wherever you choose to be. Shifting awareness from one place to another is like living in a disco's strobe lighting. Fun for a while, then you get to see that much of the dance is composed of what you're missing."

"But you said I was getting stuck. That the Amazon had hold of me and wouldn't let go. You had to pull me back. So it seems that my life in time, my chronological life, was about to go on without me."

"It wouldn't have gone on." He turns his head to face me. "It would have waited forever."

"Time stands still?"

"That's the divine order of things. It's the essence of what we call God. It's the span of all the energy that we call human life. This eternal wait for full appreciation." "Appreciation?"

"You remember the truth of the chronological world?"

"'First we're born and then we die.' "

"That's it. It doesn't matter whether we live for a day or a hundred and twenty years. In eternity, length doesn't matter. We are all immortal. What is unique is the opportunity to watch ourselves blaze and die. Do you think God is dead? Never. He's incapable of it. Appreciation of death is special to human life. There's no need to pay attention in eternity. What goes around comes around, miss it once and the opportunity will come around again. Such is limbo, such is hell. In life, no moment repeats itself. Understand that, and you see the moment's value. Life is finite, so each moment has infinity wrapped inside it. Seeing that is enlightenment. Bringing awareness to the passage of life, that is enlightenment. Seeing the end within the beginning of everything, caring for that fragility of the life we all share, this is the way to eternal life. An eternal life that isn't a hell of repetition, but a life filled with awareness and appreciation."

"I was appreciating the Amazon."

"Nonsense. You succumbed to it. It was ravishing you. You were lost in the timeless before you had a sense of what time was about. You were in a loop, boy. The eternal loop of pleasured oblivion."

The tone of his voice as much as his words unnerves me. Some violent shiver passes up from the base of my spine to fly out through the crown of my head, and my whole body is left shaking.

"Come," Carlos says, and offers his hand to help me get to my feet. "Let's get into the sun and make you warm.”

I take his hand, steady myself on my feet for a moment, then follow him along the thin line of path that stretches along this side of the river.

## POOLSIDE REFLECTIONS

Carlos's socks leave damp prints on the rocks, and I place the prints of my own bare feet on top of them. He stops at a point where a series of huge white boulders squeezes the river into a narrow force, then releases it into a broad expanse that is a pool with the relative stillness of a lake.

He bends to take off his wet socks, then unbuckles his trousers.

"Strip!" he orders. "Lay your clothes out on these rocks. They'll soon be dry."

I look up to check that we are hidden from the road that runs through the valley. We seem well sheltered. When I turn back to Carlos he is draping his trousers over hot stone. He turns back and laughs when he sees the expression on my face.

"My joke!" he says. "And worth it just to see you now. Is that amazement, envy, or wonder?"

"Did you steal it from a horse?"

He looks down to admire himself. I note there is no underwear among the clothes on the rocks, so he must tuck his penis down a trouser leg.

"No, it's all mine." He lifts it up to admire it, then lets it flop back down. "I can do nothing with it, of course. It's length can serve no one. But when I got the chance to reconstitute myself anew, I granted myself this endowment. What man of imagination wouldn't?"

He takes off his jacket, his waistcoat, his shirt, lays them all flat against rocks, then turns back to me.

"I'm in good shape, no?"

For someone his age, it's true. There's little flab, and a barrel chest that he takes a deep breath to expand as I study him.

"Fine," I say. "But why not come back in a twenty-year-old body, if you had the choice?"

"I brought back the body that had fallen apart. I'm simply me without the sickness. There was too much sexual energy for my present purposes, so I tacked it onto the length of my dick. Ha!" He lifts wide his arms and looks up toward the sun. "Go on, God. Do me justice. Render me stone to be a statue to myself."

He holds the pose so long and so still I begin to fear that the wish is working. Then he lowers his arms, rubs his hands together, and looks at me.

"Come, Martin. Don't be shy. Get naked and sit by me."

I can't say I'm comfortable, but I obey. Leaving my clothes and trainers spread out on rocks to dry, I go and sit beside him. He has settled in a place where the branches of an oak reach out to give us shade.

"And now, our story begins," he tells me. "You were in the Amazon just now. Take me there in story. Tell me of your arrival in the clearing. Make the telling as immediate as when you were in that river just now. Drench me with it."

And I try to do so.

But first I get stuck.

"There's a story in my head. A children's story. Somehow I can't think of anything else. I've got to start there."

"What story?"

"Jack and the Beanstalk."

"Ha!" Carlos slaps his hands against his naked thighs, a sound as loud as his funny half laugh. "Good. Go on. Tell me."

"You know the story. I don't want to tell it all. Just recall some of the main details, I suppose. Jack takes the family cow off to market. It's the only valuable possession they have, and he is persuaded to trade it for a handful of beans."

"His mother's warned him against doing anything so stupid," Carlos joins in.

"And now she despairs. Her son's an utter fool in her eyes. He could have had gold but he chose the beans. She throws them away and one of them sprouts. The stem thickens to the strength of a tree trunk and the green shoot soars up, up, up till it pierces the clouds. There's little for Jack to do but climb it.

"Up there the place is rarefied, but it's no more heaven than Buckingham Palace or the White House is paradise on Earth. It's a piece of immaculate real estate, with a castle that's home to a fearsome giant. To the giant, Jack is a morsel of food. To Jack, the giant is the owner of a goose that lays golden eggs. With the goose tucked under his arm he flees. The giant roars and sets off in pursuit. Jack leaps to the beanstalk and climbs back down, and before the giant can follow and bring slaughter to the earth, Jack grabs an ax and chops the beanstalk down."

I stop speaking. Then I realize it's for me to carry on. "That's all there is to say of the story."

"I remember extra details."

"Me too. Somehow they don't seem important just now."

"Then find the importance in the story as you've told it," Carlos advises.

I consider it for a while.

"We're all Jack," I suddenly realize. "Every one of our party that is sitting in a longboat, heading down the Ucayali River with the Amazon jungle ahead and all around us. Jack near the beginning of his story."

"So what's already happened? Where are you all in terms of this fairy tale?"

"We've gone against the normal advice of the world. All of us are struggling financially. We've taken what we had, and instead of investing it in gold we've paid good money for this journey to Peru. We chew coca leaves in the Andes and prepare to drink plant extracts in a jungle clearing. We've spurned the mineral world to invest in the vegetable. And ayahuasca, the mashed pulp of a jungle vine, is our beanstalk. It's going to lead us out of our world and up above the clouds."

"OK, Jack. You're heading up your ayahuasca beanstalk. What's going to come?"

I think it through. It takes a while to simplify the wild drama of my own story into a fairy tale.

"I'll find somewhere magnificent but dangerous, somewhere I feel very small. Tucked in a corner of a dark place I'll discover a real treasure. My job is to grab it to my chest and bring it home. It won't be easy. All the forces up there will try to stop me. The only thing to do is run and run, never stop and never look back, come back down to Earth and chop that old vine down as quick as I can so disasters can't follow me. I'll never be able to go up that vine again, but then I won't need to. Though it nearly killed me I've brought back what I wanted. My home is perfect now."

"There you go," Carlos says. "Your nutshell. Do you think you can fit your story into it?"

"It fits," I say. And I'm almost crying as I sit there naked on a rock, in an oak tree's shade. The wonder and beauty of the fit astonishes me. "I've never seen fairy tales in this way before. It seems like a map that explains my life."

"Nobody likes to be told how to live. The adventure of life is in all the not-knowing, all the mistakes made for ourselves. So the lives of those who have gone before us are left as stories. They explain what's happened, not what's going to happen. Fairy tales are for children, but told by adults. They are old seeds planted in young lives. Do you know the storyteller's definition of innocence?"

I shake my head.

"Innocence is a story waiting to be understood. And now, Martin, it is time to hear yours."

Even now, as I write, I see how Carlos keeps setting me up for my story. Yet I'm reluctant to begin. There is so much more contentment in simply sitting and listening to the river as it passes by.

"You make me nervous," I confess.

"Is it me, or the story you have to tell?"

"You've been so critical of me. No matter how I start I expect you'll find fault."

"You started long ago, Martin. We're both locked in this story now. We have to stay till the end. Don't worry about me. I won't say a word. Tell the story to yourself. I'll just sit here, mind my own business, watch my clothes steam, and eavesdrop."

I do, in fact, know how to tell a story. Excuse me if instead I tell it as I told it then. Despite Carlos's pretense at only eavesdropping, his very presence shaped my tale. Incidents that seemed trivial were illuminated in my memory. I kept my eyes closed through much of the account, but when I opened them it was still the Amazon that I saw. I am even-tempered, but you'd have had no sense of that if you'd seen me. I imagine I trembled and shook like someone in the throes of a breakdown, my voice bursting with anger one moment then quivering in a whisper the next.

To tell a story of a journey is to relive it afresh. English explorers kept a stiff upper lip for sane reasons. In hostile territory a show of extreme emotion simply marks you out as prey. I had bottled my emotions in order to survive. Now Carlos was the genie who uncorked my bottle.

What follows is an impassioned account. I could have tamed it, but sometimes taming is akin to lying.

I have to be responsible. Don't expect picturesque travel writing designed to entice you to visit the place for yourself. I used to write like that for newspapers. No more. Apocalypse Now wasn't made as an ad for the Vietnamese Tourist Board.

And this is no ad for the Amazon.

*Forget ecotourism. Just forget it. It's clear as our little party steps from the longboat and sinks in mud that we're entering a war zone. Don Pedro climbs the bank and hands our passports over a wooden parapet to two soldiers with automatic rifles. They look from the passport photos to us—it's something to do—then wave us on with their rifle butts. Choose damnation if we want. We mean nothing to them.*

*Keith's prepared for the worst. He wears a battered felt hat and holds a mud-brown* *umbrella above his head as a parasol. The sun beats down on the river as he sits in the shade and smiles, tilting the parasol to enjoy such sights as toucans flashing colors and screeching and laughing as they dart between the highest branches of trees on the riverbank.*

*The rest of us burn in the sun. What doesn't hit us directly bounces off the river surface and tries to get us from a different angle.*

*We'll get no better view of the jungle till we come out the other side of the ordeal. On the banks of the river the vegetable world of the Amazon grows and bends and winds to weave a blockage of the sky. Like the way a fetus gets to see humanity from inside the womb— that's the kind of view the jungle gives of itself when you're inside it.*

*But we're on the river, so we get to see the jungle in some perspective. We've already driven mud roads for hours in cars, and sped full-throttle downriver for hours more. Now we climb from the longboat and slide through more mud to two hollowed-out logs. Their outboard motors extend from long metal limbs so they can be raised above the rocks and vegetable debris in the shallower waters of a tributary. Don Pedro rides the foremost prow, calling directions to the stern as we steer the navigable route.*

*And then the boats can go no further.*

*Here's where you get some social commentary. The truth is, I'm delivering a privileged whine. I'm all fortitude at the time, flush with exploratory zeal, the reality of the situation yet to dawn. But in fact all I have to do is step from the boat into the muddy waters of this tributary and wade my way upstream. I wear a small backpack, but the larger cases and full provisions are loaded onto the backs of locals who stepped on board our craft from thatched villages along the way. We term these men hunters, their modest heights doubled by the size of our loads, and these are the jungle familiars. They surge ahead of us and out of sight.*

*I carry a staff, a smooth limb of wood about six feet high. It renders me magnificent in my own eyes. I bear it the way I imagine Moses bore his in parting the Red Sea. It gives me balance and majesty. I'm forging up the river like a man in a myth.*

*Don Pedro is more sprightly. His route through the waters seems a way of walking upon them, so often does he find a strip so shallow his ankles are barely covered. But there are times the waters reach to our chests. Among us is the wife of the foremost hunter; she has come with her two daughters. One daughter's head peers above the water as her feet tread the riverbed. The other is tiny and is dragged along in the flow as she holds on to her mother's skirt, kicking with her legs. The mother's hands are filled with provisions.*

*I sweep the girl into my arm and hoist her high, she in one hand and the staff for balance in the other.*

*Which reminds me of a joke.*

*What do you call a young maiden on the back of a court jester?*

*Virgin on the ridiculous.*

*But I'm doing my best and feeling proud. We near the site of our camp and the bank is suddenly strewn with rocks and pebbles. I set the girl down and she hurries away, searching the ground near her feet. She bends and picks something up, which she carries to me as a gift.*

*I hold out my hand and a tiny stone, with rounded edges and shining a bright coral pink, drops from her fingers into my palm.*

*She is four years old and already teaching me the supreme lesson of the jungle. Nothing is given, no debt can be owed, for the code of the jungle is exchange. A lift through the waters for the little girl, a stone for me. The past is canceled and life goes on.*

*And before we climb the bank to our clearing, let me describe another wonder.*

*I read before coming that the villages of the Amazonian jungle were the world's foremost malarial zones. No problem, reassured don Pedro. His clearing by a waterfall has no record of mosquitoes. It is a miraculously mosquito-free zone. Any that might turn up will be free of the malarial parasite, because there are no infected villagers in flying range for them to pick up the disease from. Take antimalarial precautions if we wish, but the medication will work against the effects of the ayahuasca. And besides, why bring medicine into the jungle, which with all it's natural remedies is the largest pharmacy on Earth?*

*And so it is with some dismay that we find the promised order of events inverted as each person steps from the boat. For around the head of everyone, permanent companions for our river walk, is a swirling black halo. Dark and doom-filled clouds of insects.*

*Through all the jungle swelter, mosquitoes have detected and swarmed to the warmth of our blood.*

A real-time buzz passes my ear. Mosquitoes in this part of France have some sense of insect etiquette. They don't bite in sunlit hours but wait to swarm at dusk. This is some rogue female, out to disturb the order of things.

I stop my tale, hold my breath, and wait. The creature lands on my right thigh. I wait for her to pincer in and attach herself to my skin, then strike. The blow is sharp and hard. I take my hand away and see the tiny corpse splattered against my flesh, then look across at Carlos.

He is staring across the river to the far bank. The break in my story, the slap of my hand against my thigh—none of it appears to affect him.

The appearance of a mosquito in France at this moment of my story set in Peru is no coincidence. I know that much. And I know that Carlos is causal to the creature's appearance in some way.

Maybe this is a kindness, keeping me in two worlds when I might otherwise be lost.

Maybe not.

I've never thought the matter of trust through, but now I reach a decision that needs no thinking.

I don't trust Carlos.

And suddenly the killing of the mosquito is like the slaughter of an army. I take a deep breath and feel the strength of a conqueror. The decision not to trust Carlos is a breakthrough.

Such a breakthrough that I find I am waiting for him to acknowledge it. He's adept at reading my mind, and this moment is worthy of comment. He doesn't want my trust, nor my distrust either. I know that much.

"Trust yourself."

He doesn't say as much, but somehow I hear those words in my head.

I'm no longer telling my story for him, hoping for the favor of his interest. I'm simply telling it.

I close my eyes and continue. I'm back on the riverbank in the Amazon, but tired of the old perspective. I'm moving faster, close to the ground. There's an eagerness to take in every detail. It's like I'm scampering with the senses of a jungle rat.

There's no story now. Rats don't tell stories. Just the drama of observations.

*Up the path channeled in the mud bank, surefooted now and not slithering, for there's no time to lose, I pass through the outer ring of trees to enter the clearing.*

*I've slushed through peat bogs in Ireland and come across stone circles and the fallen stones of beehive houses. Driven across the sands of Saudi Arabia to where withered palms surround adobe houses crumbling back to desert. Felt the bite of the winds of the Gobi Desert blasting the air where palace walls once stood. Looked at the sky through a broken dome on a hillside near Mount Ararat where a sultan kept his harem, the black tar of bat droppings now caking curved walls.*

*My travels have shown me the ruins of the world, but nothing as sad as this.*

*Some trees lie where they fell. Most were dragged clear, but others were used to make the buildings. There are no walls to the encampment, but there is a range of thatched roofs mounted on pillars. I know the history. The rectangular roof to the right formed the first and only building for the first groups that came. Then other roofs were woven from leaves and raised above the ground.*

*Tambos, small square roofs mounted over sleeping platforms, circle the clearing. This is the accommodation. I scurry through the vegetation that's already cloaking the clearing a thick green, stems bending around me as I run, down a mud path through a forest of ferns, and there is the shack of the squat shithouse with slugs a luminous green and white on it's walls. Back now and up to a higher level and the tambos of the hunters. Down once again but pause for the view of the ceremonial house. Twenty feet in circumference, the roof is mounted on spans of trees, ribbed like the web of a vast Amazonian spider. And beyond it I see the party rise into the clearing for the first time.*

*The sky is black but without thunder, and the monsoon rains are like a storm at sea, for the world is composed of water. Rain forests have little to do with the earth, for the soil and nutrients wash away and the land is like a liquid. Trees grow close to support each other, vines grapple trunks to hold them in place and reach for the heavens themselves, and in the clearing I see that our party is lost. There is nothing to support them, nothing to hold them up. Rain pours down them like an outer skin that is melting into mud. They have hopes, but the hopes belong to dreams. They have praise for all the human endeavor that thought it could build a village in the jungle, but witness the puniness of what remains. Paddle a dugout* *canoe against the current and you work hard just to stay still. Rest for a moment and you're swept away. Jungle builders need the same perseverance. It needs commitment every waking moment and no holidays near the city. This camp has had no visit for six months. The party arrives in a new home as it's being consumed by the vegetable world.*

*And among the party I spy myself, wading to the meager shelter of the second tambo. Keith heads for the same resting place, each tambo home to two people. He's drenched despite his parasol.*

*It's too late. For all my ratlike speed at viewing the camp, I can't reverse history. My assessment shows how wise it is to flee, but the chance has gone. The boats that brought us have chugged away, and can't be brought back till the appointed time some two weeks hence. My story is locked in the pattern of fate that will bring it to it's conclusion. Still low to the ground I surrender my legs and sweep like water through the camp. I halt by the riverside, and time compacts for the rains to cease and water to steam from the land. The sun casts it's light on an expanse of beauty, a waterfall some twenty-five feet high and eighty feet across.*

*"I once saw a man take stance in the center of the fall," don Pedro will tell us. “A god of the waterfall who stretches protection toward us all. And the deep pool before him has the energy of a goddess. It is there for bathing but never for play. It is not for water sports and splashing. Treat the pool with reverence and it will restore you, lend you the energy you need."*

The waterfall roars, and as I speak with eyes closed it reaches out to break a wave against me.

I rub the water from my eyes and open them. Carlos is staring at me. Knees tucked close against his chest most likely, for such is the tidal splash he caused. He has bombed into the river pool.

"Ha!" he shouts. "Too much respect can kill a man. Come into the river and play."

He turns his body, wheeling an arm through the top of the water, and gathers a wave that he sweeps from the river to break against my chest and face. I don't think but jump in, aiming to land by his head and tug him underwater. The jump is fueled by anger. I want to grab his silver hair and drag him down, make him gasp and choke. But as I reach out there is nothing to grab. I turn and he is behind me, and splashes me again.

"Come, Martin," he calls. "Admit it. What was the best part of your stay?"

"That waterfall," I answer. "The waterfall and the pool. Playing in the pool."

"Ha!" Carlos says, and leaps from the water as though gulping at the laugh and swallowing it down. He smiles as if happy.

"Good. You're learning your lesson."

"What lesson?"

"The pool did restore you. It freed you into the spirit of play. The lesson? You ignored the advice of the self-styled expert and trusted yourself to nature instead. The joy you felt was respect enough. Now you can give thanks."

"How?"

"You're in a river pool. Stand still and feel it wrap around you. It carries flotsam much bigger than you, so feel it's strength yet remember it's care. Know how well you are being treated. Appreciate and give thanks."

I bend my knees to lower my shoulders beneath the surface, stretch wide my arms, tilt back my head for my eyelids to filter the colors of sun and sky, and giving thanks is immediate and easy. Appreciation washes through me like a river, and leaks from my eyes as tears.

I have practiced anger, pain, hurt, and acceptance from my time in the Amazon. I have never practiced thankfulness.

And as I do, I sense my story is about to take on new colors.

## WHERE THE BEE SUCKS

"Please," Carlos says once we are both dressed, "Take me somewhere that is special to you."

An image of such a place comes to my mind at the instant of his request, even down to the detail of yellow lichen on it's stonework.

"I know of a place. But there are others that are nearer."

"You think I am old and tired?" Carlos strides ahead, leaping over rocks to find a path that leads up to the road. He talks as he goes, loud enough for me to hear as I trail behind him. "Remember the boy who flew down Machu Picchu? That is the sort of vigor I have. It's you who will work up a sweat. Come on. We'll take the asphalt way. Pump up some speed. And if you don't mind we'll walk in silence. You are in mid-story. This walk need be no interruption."

As I hurry in his wake I recognize that he has chosen the route even though I am the one who is supposed to know the destination. I decide to say nothing until he leads us astray, when I will make a great point of calling him back and setting him on the right path.

The road is just wide enough for two cars, though few have need to come this way. The rocks to our left are often sheer, rising into hills. Wild thyme and rosemary grow in the fissures to scent the air we walk through. To our right is a drop to the river and the valley floor. I am still getting used to this view, for it changed the previous winter, fierce rain-storms charging the river so that it cut a fresh course through acres of previously undivided meadow.

The slight gradient sees us heading uphill. To reach Mont Canigou from my village you must first climb high. Then the road plummets toward the broad river valley that takes in the town of Prades, the home of Pablo Casals and birthplace of Thomas Merton, before the land heaves into high mountains.

The road winds to keep itself tucked against the hillside, and spans narrow gullies with bridges to keep to a level. Carlos's speed is that of a professional road-walker. His arms should be held like chicken wings at his sides, thrashing at the air as his buttocks swing. In fact he has the demeanor of someone strolling; one hand holds the wrist of the other behind his back, and he turns his head to look about him as he goes. But for the rapid flash of his shoes darting along the road there is no way to see where his speed is coming from. I do indeed break into a sweat, and have to run for short spurts to keep up.

I overtake him once as we cross a bridge, so as to divert him up a grassy road into the hills. Thirty yards in I stoop to focus his attention on a flower growing by the roadside.

Honoring the challenge of maintaining silence I don't speak, and the flower looks so like it's name there is no real need to introduce it. Eighteen inches high, the dark and light petals of it's flowers lift and droop to form the replica of a bee, many such replicas all clustered around the stem. One of the delights in these mountains in summer is discovering orchids, several with flowers patterned on other images from nature. This is the bee orchid.

Carlos stops and smiles appreciatively, but he's not to be fooled. I showed him the orchid for it's rareness and beauty, but also for the chance to pause and rest. Accepting that the grassy road was merely a diversion, he turns back to the asphalt and races on.

As the road turns and begins a much steeper ascent his pace slows. I'm so hoping for some sign of collapse in him that I don't realize his slowing is on my behalf. I expect him to sit on the bench that is set in the shade of ash trees, and I show off by not even looking aside at him as I march past.

That nimble yet casual trot of his brings him to my side in an instant. Taking my arm he coaxes me from the road and down a short earth path with grasses lush and waist-high along it's sides.

He has found a spring. He cups his hands beneath the flow of water from the hillside, and they are soon full. He mimes for me to open my mouth, then pours the water down my throat. I gasp at it, not realizing how dry I have become. He laughs, a breathy laugh with no vocal sound, then reaches more water for me. I study his face before opening my mouth for it. Sweat is streaming down my forehead to make my eyes sting, but the skin of his face is dry. He fetches more water up to my mouth, his fingernails resting on my lower lip as he pours, till he sees that I am full. Then he is on his way again, and I am once more struggling up the road in pursuit.

There is not far to go now. I let myself slow down a little, so that he will be a good way in front of me at the point where we are to take a track down into the valley on our left. I look forward to calling him back.

He doesn't look back to check with me. The turning comes and he takes it, heading straight down the track. By the time I am on the track too and able to look down at where he is going, I see him disappear left along a narrow path through a patch of woodland.

He is precisely on course for my secret destination. I have looked forward to the drama of introducing it to him. Now that drama is gone. Saving a secret for Carlos is like introducing your own body to a surgeon, who already knows it better than you ever will simply from scanning an X ray.

I find Carlos inside the ruin. Though it carries the name of Saint Felicity and dates back to the tenth century, this chapel has more of an eighteenth or nineteenth-century resonance for me, the feeling of an era smug with it's own achievements so that romance could be found in the crumbled walls of earlier civilizations. Blocks of dark stone, their edges weathered by centuries and softened by lichen, stand solid though the timber roof of this ruin is long gone. The walls squeeze in and the earthen floor rises for the place where the altar once stood. Carlos is seated on a loosened stone in the main body of the chapel. An arched window in the apse points up toward the sky. "A sacred space with walls and no ceiling," Carlos observes. "Please, sit here and take me to a sacred space with a ceiling and no walls. Take me to the ceremonial hut in your jungle. Speak to me of a ceremony."

I sit where he pats the earth. In front of me is a square of cut stone, presumably fallen from the jagged space where walls once met the roof. It is colored in yellow lichen. I am tired and a little bewildered, but as I gaze up the dark stone walls and meet the blue of the sky above, a memory of a ceremony is triggered and I have no strength to hold it back.

"I have an intention going into the ceremony," I remember.

"A grand one?"

"In it's way. I ask for ayahuasca to show me it's majesty, show how we fit into the scheme of things, and how we can best promote the richness of life on Earth." "It gave you these teachings?"

"I'll tell the story. We'll see."

*It's possible for me to take ayahuasca and feel no effect. Fear of the process can put up internal blocks that even major hallucinogens find it hard to break through. This time I am certain at once that the medicine has engaged. A technique I sometimes practice of focusing on the center of my forehead, summoning any sense of fragmentation in myself to cohere around that point, calls the medicine into consciousness. This is a soft manner of focusing, related to stories of the opening of the third eye, and is really a broadening of vision that sees through forms to the energy that lies behind them.*

*The soft focus is on the ayahuasca, and through it to a broad and illuminated realm of experience. The first vision behind my closed eyes is of a structure formed of thin interlocking blue bars, enmeshing with others and expanding and swirling, like an animated viewing of my own DNA, the matrix of my being.*

*The sequence subdues into one of a single stalk colored yellow and black, reaching from where I lie far into the heavens. And the evening's paisley swirl of psychedelic patterns is composed of peacock eyes. When don Pedro squats beside me the peacock pattern glows bright on his white-clad rump.*

*And it is such open-eyed visions that form the main wonder of the evening. I am directed by the medicine to look to my left and watch for what will appear. Keith is lying there, and as I watch him I take the opportunity of sending love his way. As I do so a shape forms above him. One cell, composed of light as much as anything, the color of clear plastic, drifts into space, then others flood in to honeycomb against it. Soon the cells are cells no more but compose a whole being.*

*I counsel this being in directed thought that Keith merits it's care and affection. It turns it's head at my intrusion—a calm and slow maneuver—and studies me. It's eyes are rounded cones that have no single point of focus; they are more a composition of energy cells, each of which is a lens. It turns it's attention back to the figure below it.*

*The creature is clearly a bee, but more like the eternal spirit of bee some seven feet in length. Keith struggles a little beneath it, and the bee waits for the moment when the man relaxes, then it lowers it's legs to hold him still. I watch pulses of light drop from the creature to enter the head and body of Keith. The operation successful, it swings it's head toward me and comes my way.*

*An effect I notice under ayahuasca is the power of yawns. Special effects in movies show the heads of young men bursting their bonds to transform into the heads of werewolves. These ayahuasca yawns possess some such transfiguring quality. They mount on top of each other, wrench the jaw impossibly wide, and the sense is of a new being breaking out of my skin.*

*I lose sight of the bee as it hovers above me, but offer it a series of these mighty yawns and the sharp taste of nectar drops onto my tongue. I swallow it down with my saliva. The bee appears to take a full impression of my body as it feeds me; then it moves on.*

*I rest awhile, then am prompted to rise and turn to look outside. The ground just outside the ceremonial hut is busy with tiny beings that are strokes of white light about half an inch tall. They swarm in a pattern of labor, streaming in and out of the hut as though carrying materials, and indeed a structure appears around the prone figure of Keith. It is like a mosquito net, formed into a square tent as rigidly as if it were held up by poles. As I watch this tent of light another being enters, it's body again a foot longer than Keith's, again with the power to lower it's legs and hold the man still as it injects material into him. This creature is not a bee but is encased in the armor of a shell—a seven-foot-long beetle. Again this creature comes to me and the taste of nectar returns to my mouth. This is an evening of receiving nourishment, but the matrix that I took to be my DNA is also linked with visions of energy lines stretched across my whole field of vision. Largely green, they are a usual visionary experience of ayahuasca for me, something like following the tracery of veins* *inside some cosmic leaf. Some call this the web of life, and as I lie still it is clear to me that if this is a web I am simply one of it's strands. Nourishment comes through the web to feed me, while in exchange some other force is siphoned out from me to supply the rest of the web.*

"Thank you," Carlos says. His words tell me my tale is finished. Till then I have been sitting with my eyes closed, as though still lying in the aftermath of the experience. "That will do for now."

“That's all there is,” I reply, resentful at such a dismissive reception of my tale.

"It's fine. What you say is beautiful and clearly true. I was hoping for something more though.”

"A seven-foot bee isn't good enough? You want a swarm of fifty-foot dragonflies? You want me to invent?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. I didn't know you were doing your best. Let me applaud." He claps his hands a few times, then stands up. The irony is not lost on me. "Can we leave now?"

"Go home, you mean?"

"No. Just out of this ruin. I wanted to bring you to your special place. I thought it would help contain you, like a pool with pearls to dive for. You could take a deep breath and dive deep for the pearls from your stories, feeling safe here. This chapel is no use at all though. I want you safe and it makes you scared. Scared to profane it. "You think Saint Felicity worried about being holy? Not on your life. You don't choose a life out here unless you're consumed by passion. Confront the passionate woman in Felicity and you'd be running home to mother.

"I'd say forget it, but you can't. A chapel's a chapel to you. It leaves you fractured. You divide yourself into good and bad, and you try and show just the good part here. Good and bad are like left and right, interchangeable according to perspective, equal parts of an indivisible whole. You want the world to be beautiful. You learned in the Amazon that beauty can be savage and wild. These walls won't let you release that fact. We must leave them behind."

I join him outside.

"I liked the silent walk," I tell him. "It's hot. I'm tired. I'm not really in a storytelling mood."

"Do you think your mood is of significance?"

It obviously isn't. Not wishing to admit that, I say nothing.

"Moods foster lies. A story worth telling tells itself. If you were truly tired you'd put up less resistance. Let's sit by the river."

In fact, if I have any special place at all at this point it is by the river. I had never taken time to sit in the chapel before. Now that I have, I understand why my memory first turned there. Carlos may have found his initiation into the mysteries of life in the jungles of his childhood. My own childhood found mysteries in lush woodland. The stories of my native mythology all took me into the heart of the woods—fairy tales in which young men tied food in bundles on the end of sticks and ventured into the forest. The witch who lives in her gingerbread house in a forest clearing never frightened me as if she were an evil character. She magnetized me. She was someone I wanted to meet, even if our meeting entailed her destruction.

The early saints of England all lived in places such as this one of Saint Felicity. They set their lives against wilderness. In time barons would own the land and dispense livings and parishes to priests, but this institution that became the Church of England was not my real heritage. The barons and squires built palatial estates for themselves, and tucked into woodland in their grounds would be curious buildings known as follies. The follies were often given over to the use of resident hermits. These men and sometimes women who reflected the wildness of Christ in their lives, who found deeper communion with the woods than with human society, they are the spiritual ancestors of my imagination.

The passion of Saint Felicity doesn't scare me. I find it hard to trust a dispassionate saint. Carlos and I have walked down the path, marked by stones, that leads to the river, grass of a shadow-soaked green all around it, and we stand beneath a tree to look out over the water. I am thinking of Saint Felicity.

"Have you ever seen her?" he asks.

"No, but I do feel her presence."

"Only in the ceremonies, or at other times?"

"Here. Only here." Then I first suspect we are talking at cross-purposes. "Do you mean Saint Felicity?"

"Who knows? Perhaps they are one and the same. I'm asking about the lady of ayahuasca. You asked to be shown the majesty of ayahuasca. For an Englishman, majesty must mean a queen. I thought you wished to meet the reigning queen of the jungle."

"I'd already met her. That came before the jungle."

Trained in his curious art of storytelling, I pause and close my eyes to recall the encounter.

"This is in New Mexico. My first true encounter with ayahuasca, when I listen with the ears of a jungle floor and my body stretches like a vine. At first I am directed to look high into one corner of the room. I see twin and tiny lights there, and from these lights white forms begin to drape themselves down till they reach the floor. The drapes fall as though from two shoulders and merge into the body of a great being. Then before the head appears to identify itself I receive another prompting. The same command that saw me look up for the being's appearance now requires me to bend my head. It is no idle command, for it comes with an explanation. If I set eyes on the majesty of this being, I will become transfixed by her image. Such a visual experience requires my submission, and this is not the use she has for me. Save myself the sight and I spare myself the blandness of worshipping her, which I could otherwise not resist. Bowing my head and not looking up is all she asks of me for now.

"I do so, and sense her come across to be with me. This is enough, that I recognize and understand the embrace of her protection. She supports me, but lays no claims on me."

"I'm told ayahuasca is a jealous mistress," Carlos comments.

"Really? Is that so? It's what don Pedro told me. Once you are on the path of ayahuasca, no other path is tolerated. Try and leave it and you will fade to nothing, probably painfully so."

"Then you are lucky. You were not claimed."

"Blessed," I suddenly realize, then tune to the direction of Carlos's gaze. He is looking at the edge of the river.

Broad flat stones run from the land some way into the water, their tops dry and white launchpads for a squadron of damselflies. For many thousands of years these insects, fairly few in number, have found no need to evolve. Their bodies are tubes of iridescent blue that they lift and turn to shine in sunlit air, gossamer wings turning to target them at tiny insects that waft with the river's breeze. Meal accomplished, they land again and wait for the next prey.

But the stones also eddy the river into swirls of varying currents, and it is one such miniature whirlpool that holds Carlos's attention. A damselfly is caught there, spinning around.

I lean down and scoop her clear with my cupped hands, letting the water stream out through my fingers so her feet have purchase on my palm. She straightens herself, shakes her wings, and takes off.

"You have a story for me," Carlos prompts me. "It is not a direct memory, which is why I remind you. But it completes your encounter with the bee and the beetle, I think."

It's true. I recall for him a story told by Keith. It concerns the day before the ceremony. Keith told it to me in response to my account of seeing the giant insects hovering over his body. He did not see them at the time, but felt some strong presence. He appreciated the lessons it brought of the reciprocity in nature.

*Down by the river, Keith, who carries skills from his profession's minute scrutiny of legal documents into his observations of the natural world, stoops by a small puddle of water. The edges of the water are clustered with bees, an inch and a half in length, merging the bright stripes of their bodies in shifting patterns as they pile above and around one another for the chance to suck at rare mineral deposits, a white crust left by the water's evaporation.*

*As Keith admires this play of nature, a hand reaches in and picks a bee from the crowd. The hunter's son Diego is showing off. Knowing the bee does not sting, presuming Keith does not know this, the boy makes a show of bravery. His daring act accomplished, he flicks the bee into the river's edge. Caught by the water, the insect flutters it's wings but cannot get free.*

*Keith turns a verbal attack on the boy first of all. Till now the man has been silent, so a sudden flow of Spanish takes the lad by surprise. Only mosquitoes can be killed, Keith tells him. All other insect life is sacred.*

*He turns back to the river, steps in to rescue the bee, but as he does so observes a miracle of flight, the bee shifting such a surge of speed into it's wings that they beat to lift it out of the river and into the air.*

*Back at the camp Keith is writing in his journal when some movement on the ground beside the tambo attracts his attention. Rains are pouring, a drop hitting the edge of a beetle with such force and weight that the insect topples. It has fallen off a crest of mud and is on it's back, kicking it's legs, it's head submerged in water.*

*Keith reaches down and sets the creature to rights. Back on it's legs, it ambles off.*

*And so, it seems, the visits of the giant spirit bee and beetle were not random acts of nature. They were returns of attention, the jungle's and nature's rule of exchange. What we give, so shall we receive.*

I have an aptitude for fun and play, but I can be earnest and pompous too. Pleased with what I have articulated, I feel my perceptions deserve a period of silence at the very least.

Somehow Carlos keeps turning all my expectations on their heads.

"Ha!" he explodes.

Damselflies zip from the stones as Carlos skips across them to stand with the river coursing around him. Hands by his sides he faces the flow of water, then the hands slowly float up till his arms are horizontal, not held there but resting on energy. For maybe five minutes he stays there, then flaps the arms and shakes his body before coming back to join me on the riverbank.

"It's no good," he confesses. "What you say disturbs me and I can't let it go. I didn't expect such a thing. Didn't expect to be emotional."

He sits down. The natural care and precision of his movements is gone. Half of him sits on a stone, the other half on grass, the imbalance of his body a measure of what seems to be going on inside. He looks at the river as he speaks, and while tears don't mark his face I see his eyes are moist. His voice is lower and his speech a little more gradual to filter his emotion.

"I want to tell you not to be so fucking insensitive." He glances up at me, registers my shock, flashes a quick grin that passes as soon as it shows itself, then looks back at the river. “That's how angry I feel. You go crowing about being plugged into the web of life. You parade your revelations about nature's give-and-take. You're still wet behind the ears. Still primed with vitality. Just you wait. Ultimately, dear boy, when push comes to shove there's no give anymore. It's take take take till you're used up and dry. Till you're dust blowing over the Arizona desert.

"I envy you. I've pitied you before, but now I envy you. Make the most of it. By the time I'm gone, which is not long now, there will be not a shred of pity or envy. I must burn them off. Cremate them in this sun before the sun goes down. For now, while I feel these emotions, let me indulge them.

"Do you know my last connection to the web of life? Plugged into plastic tubes and machinery. IV drips, catheters, morphine injections, oxygen tanks—that's how we hold on till the end. It's pathetic. Undignified. You don't know how angry that makes a man.

"This give-and-take is on a scale way beyond your ability to conceive it. And why shouldn't it be? Your body's fairly young. It's bound to be the center of your universe. Take from one body, feed to another, it's all the same to nature. That's a truer reality. While you're juicy and productive you're kept going, at the expense of so much else. Then the juice turns sour and you're expendable.

"Your lesson from the ceremony is fine. I'm not criticizing it. Everything is exchange. We two, we're exchanging. You'll appreciate that later. But there's a lesson beyond that you're missing. Do good and you'll be done good by—do you really believe that?"

His tone doesn't need me to answer. This is my time for listening.

"It's sentimental bullshit. Stuff like that sees Christians come apart in jungles. Light attracts dark, like candles attract moths. Children walking suburban streets, proud of their new sneakers, shining with health and goodness, are snatched into cars by perverts. That's a return for goodness. Good doesn't only attract good, Martin. Evil craves a bite of it. You're a saint? You're martyred. You're Christ? You're crucified. The little community you care for is so outnumbered you're labeled an ethnic minority? You're all massacred.

"You're right. Do good, and there are forces of goodness to take care of you. I wouldn't be here now if there weren't some goodness in you. Nor would I be here if you weren't so damned ignorant and confused.

"That's your lesson. Shake off your ignorance. The visions you see on ayahuasca? That's life. Available to you always. Your friend Keith was alert to the needs of life around him. He received some reward. You were alert to his experience, you sent love and counseled affection, you received your reward. The lesson is alertness. It's the need to take action as a consequence of full consciousness. Keith's first act when the boy discards the bee? He attacks. What does he attack? The ignorance in the boy that lets him do evil.

"Do good. That's great. But don't do good and expect thanks. Where you find harm, expect a cause. Sure, assist the victim of a street attack, but don't get mugged yourself. Look after what's in front of you, but look out for what's behind you as well. Spirit bee waits till Keith relaxes to give him due care and attention. That's another lesson. Stop struggling, grow calm, and tune in to your intuitions. Take their direction. When they steer you out of harm's way, don't be blind to the favor. Look back and find the source of the harm. Study and learn so you can act in the future."

He's reached the end of a sentence, but he lapses into silence so suddenly it's as though he's interrupted himself.

"Carlos!" he cries, and slaps the flat of his hand against his forehead.

He shifts his seat to the stone so that he is neatly balanced again and looks at me with his explanation.

"You realize what I'm doing? I'm teaching again. Back to my old habits. You were once a teacher?"

I nod.

"Then you know how hard it is. You find an emotion and make it a passion. Use it to enflame others. In the position of one who knows, you don't let yourself know nothing. Your emotion holds a lesson just for you, if you go quiet and pay it attention. Instead you preach it as a lesson for everyone. It's why evangelists preach hatred and prejudice. Evangelists. I despise them. And that is not my emotion speaking, it's my studied opinion. They claim to channel the word of God. A filthy, disgusting, dangerous, and puerile claim. God is silent care and attention, not putrid defamations of humanity. Fools cloak themselves in the garb of gods and strut as petty dictators. Too grand and proud to believe they have feelings, they read flushes of embarrassment as divine inspiration. Voices of terror and not of love, they preach their fears instead of face them. Stir people to hate what they already fear and you're empowered with many followers. Spokespeople for God make me sick."

True to his word, and with surprising elegance, he turns his head to the side and a stream of vomit flows from his mouth to the ground. It is colored the yellow of the morning eggs.

"That's better," he says, and pulls a mustard-yellow handkerchief from his pocket to dab at his mouth. “I feel purged. Do you practice vomiting? As soon as you feel yourself filled with bile, let it go. It's a good practice.

"Now if you don't mind I could do with some help. Find me a pebble, will you? Smooth and flat."

I search through the stones gathered along the river's edge, find one, and bring it back. He takes it, thanks me, and stands. Twisting his body, then freezing it in the posture of a Greek discus thrower, he spins around to send the stone skimming along the river. I watch and count as it skips over the surface.

"Wonderful," he announces, and grins. "I've never done so well. Even as a boy. Now help me again, Martin. You do the talking so I don't get to teach. I was feeling emotions now and didn't face them. Whatever disturbed me is still there. Part of what I've lost. Please go ordinary for a while. Tell me of everyday life in the jungle. How you lived. What you ate. Speak of that boy Diego."

I look for a stone for myself and send it skimming. It manages three hops. Carlos's hopped seven times before skipping a little mud bluff and going out of sight. "In the beginning is the rain," I say, and wait to see what follows.

## THE GATHERING SWARM

In the beginning is the rain, and in the rains mosquitoes throng. Sun comes out to steam the land, and in the steam mosquitoes throng. In the dusk mosquitoes throng. In the night, in the day, in the sun, in the shade, in the camp, in the jungle, in the hills, on the river, mosquitoes throng.

The beginning and the end of this story is rain, and it's punctuation is the hum and bite of mosquitoes.

We have tents made of gauze for protection from insects. Mosquitoes coat the exterior, reaching through with their proboscises. Lean close enough and they have you, sucking your blood into their bellies. Our all-natural organic insect repellent they treat like a salad course.

Equivalent to the presence of mosquitoes is the absence of don Pedro. His tambo is set apart from the hunters' and our own, and he keeps to the shade of that or the shadows of the jungle. His appearance, like a cat's, is mainly for food.

Essential to the success of the ayahuasca ceremonies is the diet. At it's purest this would consist of hearts of palm and water. The Amazonian version we enjoy consists of a white river fish, grilled without adornment, with a side dish of grilled plantain. The fish, boqui chicos, is chosen on account of it's selective diet, which consists of fruit that falls from trees into the river. The creature is therefore fruit made flesh, and the flesh is riddled with bones.

Once his fish is picked clean, don Pedro carries it's skeleton to the river. No one can help him, for if an enemy gets hold of the bones from his plate the shaman's life is in danger. The danger is extreme when the shaman is on a special diet. Curses might be planted on the bones, and the bones buried.

To illustrate the fact, don Pedro tells a dinnertime story.

"I was visiting a village on the edge of the jungle. Not unlike the Shipibo village we visited together, communal houses of thatched roofs raised high above platforms. Sitting in such a house it is possible to reflect on advanced civilization and see how little our technology gives us. Here, though there is every evidence of extreme poverty, sustenance comes from the living earth and the air is made cool as it breezes through the shade.

"But on a sleeping mat in the house lies an eighteen-year-old girl, her long black hair soaked in her sweat, her mouth open and rigid as cries of pain pass up from her stomach.

"Seldom have I arrived in a place at a more dramatic moment, for as the sick girl cries another hollers, shouting to be released from the grip of the sick girl's father. This struggling girl is nine years old. The man beats her, using his forearm as a club, as women stand around and scream at the girl. 'Where are the bones?' they shout at her. 'Where have you buried the bones?'

"Few girls are born to resist such attack. When the man releases her she runs to the edge of the platform and drops to the ground, then crawls beneath the boards of the house's platform. The adults climb down and bend to watch her. Little by little the young girl's fingers scrabble away a square of dirt. One by one she picks out the bones, then crawls out to lay them at the father's feet.

"He stares without picking them up. The women reach arms under the platform, pointing toward a square adjacent to the one the girl has cleared.

"It seems the girl has done all she can. This other square of dirt is not her responsibility but the province of 'the other one.' The women know at once who this other one is. She is an older woman, a witch, to whom the girl is apprenticed. The child received her call in a dream, following the sound of her name till it led her deep into a forest. The sound mingled with a smell of meat, and that smell led her to the open fire in which the meat was sizzling. Her hunger strong, the child took the meat from the witch and chewed it and swallowed it down. It was delicious.

"The meat was human flesh. On eating it the child was transformed. An innocent no more, she had become a witch."

We ask if the story has a happy ending.

"The body of the eighteen-year-old shuddered and died. As a shaman I was welcomed by the mothers of all the daughters, to cure these children of possible witchhood. I worked hard, did probable good, and prospered somewhat. Life is a war with a series of battles. I see no happy ending."

At the close of the meal we carry our separate tin plates down to the river, and each stands some distance from the other as we wash them clean. Fish dart to gulp at the scraps. Monsoon rain sweeps down to give the plates a final rinse.

I tip back my head. Slap a mosquito on my cheek. Open my mouth and taste the rain. It is a treat to drink water that is not filtered or boiled, for raindrops touch my tongue with sweetness. Otherwise the diet includes nothing sweet and nothing touched by salt. The ayahuasca brew is foul and bitter. Such variations in taste are almost welcome.

A calamity hits the austere purity of our intentions, whereby the combination of diet and fasting was to sustain us throughout the two weeks of our stay. A woman in our party, her body chemistry awry, starts a period she isn't expecting. Menstruation has a shamanic force of it's own that no sorcery of don Pedro can keep at bay. He sees it's energy swirl around the camp. For a while it seems the ceremonies must cease, but then only the woman is excluded.

Wiser than many, before coming to Peru she hung an Indian shawl over a clothesline at home. Bright red with patterning of yellow and orange, it is large enough to wrap a corpse. She sprayed it once with the most poisonous insect repellent available, let it dry, then sprayed it again. This she has brought with her to drape around herself, chain-smoking hand-rolled cigarettes to keep mosquitoes from the unprotected portions of her face. She looks like a woman in purdah, and now she is such a woman. Cross-legged on the platform in her tambo, holes burned in the gauze netting of her tent by her cigarettes, she sits bundled while smoke puffs and billows from her mouth.

Her menstruation, for some reason, has broken the diet of us all. Don Pedro leads the lamentation while jungle guinea pig roasts.

"One day's true diet is like ten years of spiritual practice," he explains. "Once I embarked on an eight-day diet in preparation for taking a new plant medicine. Just a little way into the diet I received a vision of a fleet of large, rich ships on a wide river. The captain appeared, walked up to me, and handed me his business card. 'All this will be yours,' he assured me, 'if you diet for eight years.'

"I can't,'" I moaned.

"'Why not?' the captain asked. 'It's not so much to ask.'

"Then I realized that by eight years he meant eight days.

"Hunters in these jungles also diet. The diet is a cleansing and preparation to receive the wisdom of a plant medicine, and the diet is also the taking of the plant itself. When I speak of diet, I speak of all this. And for hunters, the diet is also their work. Honor this diet, and the prey is attracted to them while they track it down. The prey is attracted, the prey is tracked, the resolution is a meeting. Like the destiny of lovers.

"On one diet, the first two animals that come the hunters' way draw the fire of no shot or arrow. They must disappear in the way that they came, for these creatures are only phantasms. The third animal they see is ripe for the kill, for this creature is real."

The guinea pig oozes fat onto our plates. It comes with rice that is duly salted, and plantains that are sweet.

The way out of the diet is marked by a ceremony. Sitting on a stool in the ceremonial hut, don Pedro sings his enchantments and takes sips of Agua Florida, or "flavored water," which smells like cheap cologne. We each have our own bottle, individually empowered by the breath, songs, tobacco smoke, and sound of our names that a shaman passes into the liquid. This Agua Florida spurts as spray from the shaman's mouth to cleanse parts of the body; we take sips ourselves to spray over our chests, take a cigarette to puff smoke over our arms and legs and torso. With luck, with blessing, the smoke and the liquid dislodge the mosquito from her purchase on our skin. This ceremony is too profound for us to be swatting all the time.

The ceremony is completed with taking a spoonful of salt. The salt is fuel for tears of relief as we receive a meal worth enjoying. Then the diet resumes as we begin to purify ourselves once again, in preparation for the next ceremony.

Boqui chicos are almost as boring to catch as they are to eat. Gunshots ring out as hunters grasp the opportunity to track animals instead of fish. I am standing by the pool, setting my attempts at reflective stillness against the waterfall's roar, when a sound as loud as a gunshot breaks against a flat rock to my right. This is the sound made by a wet carcass of a deer falling twenty-five feet over a waterfall. A hunter hurries down a path to the side of the river and hauls the dead beast back into the water's flow, the easiest way of transporting it. Blood curls from it's body to dilute in the river as the deer half bumps and half floats onto the rock that will be it's final butchering site. Some of the animal will reach our tin plates. Most will travel on in boats to feed the hunters' families.

A small wooden boat is tethered to the bank just above the waterfall. I push off and sit in the bottom, dip the paddles in the water and set out to row as elegantly and effectively as I can. I forget that my rowing practice was not on a tributary of the Amazon but on small lakes in English parks, where it's required that you row round and round. I head upriver, but the bow of my boat veers toward the opposite bank and goes on veering. After some strenuous rowing the boat bumps into the bank just a few feet from my starting place.

I hear laughter. At first it is chuckles, then sidesplitting roll-on-the-floor hilarity. Diego the hunter's son is giving his hiding place away. Tracking members of our party is a favorite game of his. Best of all is tracking the women. They are much older than his mother, but they are forming the visions and fantasies of his dreams. Very best of all are those times in the morning and evening, when they wander down to the river to wash and he admires the white fullness of their breasts with their coating of soap. He loves each of the women in turn, and brings me reports of his passions.

Sometimes the women stay in the shelter of their tambos. At these times he tracks me. The youngest member of our party, I am the closest to being his playmate. As he peers out from the camouflage of the jungle, he cannot bear to stay hidden for long. I hear my name called, in a piping voice as soft as birdsong, and look to find his eager brown face smiling out from the leaves.

He picks himself up from his laughter and jumps into the boat, taking the paddles from my hands. Expertly he powers us up the river, and we duck the overhanging branches as we go. With the waterfall's roar left behind, this is my time for silent communion with the jungle.

It is Diego's time to sing. He sings of the Amazon. He sings of his love for Peru. He sings a song learned in school that contains the names of every South American country. And as he sings and smiles and paddles he teaches me the refrain, laughs at my memory and Spanish pronunciation, urges me to sing more loudly, and demands that I teach him a song of my own in return.

I sing him a song from a musical I have written. He is puzzled; the smile slips from his face. Then he sings his own Spanish song again, has me join in, and laughs with happiness.

Sometimes the boy turns into a man. He effects the transition by wiping all happiness from his features, for his impression of adults is of earnestness. Then, following his hunter father, he pads barefoot up the forest trails. A machete in hand, he helps clear the jungle trails. Visitors to the clearing are so few that soon after they are gone the jungle closes around the trails. Don Pedro's hope is for a steady stream of pilgrims on the ayahuasca trail. They will follow maintained paths to resting places in the hills of the jungle, and their money will help support a local economy in which hunters will once again learn to take a shaman's direction in managing resources.

It's a project doomed to failure on the acres of this reserve, for the shaman has lost the fundamental control over his tribe: his ability to command them to move on. An area can support people for only so long. Sustainability requires that they be semi-nomadic, but the jungle is now owned and there is nowhere to move to. Back from clearing the trails, Diego is a thirteen-year-old boy again. He stands and lets the waterfall bounce off his head. Leaps into the pool with a child's delight and scream. Challenges me to race after race.

I explain that this pool is sacred, that it is not for racing or splashing but for reverence. Then I explain the fact again. After that, we race.

Keith has developed a technique for killing mosquitoes. It is his own version of hunting, using himself as bait.

"Let them dig in,” he explains. And it is digging as much as puncturing. The creatures insert a sharp tube into the flesh, but the tube comes in two sections. First the bottom half pushes forward, then the top, shoveling ever deeper. The purpose of this tube is to inject saliva, which prevents the blood of it's food from congealing on it's passage into the creature's stomach. This is the way malarial parasites are injected into fresh organisms too. And it is this saliva that causes the irritation, swelling, and itching that accompany the bites.

Keith is being a true jungle hunter. He is attracting the prey as well as tracking it. And as is the case with any hunter in the jungle, he is also the prey himself.

His technique is precise: the timing is delicate. He aims to catch the mosquitoes while they are hooked into his skin, as they face a delay before they can extract themselves and dart away. But he intends also to catch them before they inject saliva into his system.

This hunting game is dicing with death. Both the insects' and his own. It's a version of Russian roulette. None of the mosquitoes might be loaded with the deadly malarial parasite. Or one of them might. The game is being played all over his exposed skin.

Maybe this is how tabla players in India establish their techniques. Swatting rhythms across their naked flesh, lightning speed to catch mosquitoes at dusk, learning how to strike their drums with the resonance of life and death.

"Got it!"

Keith slaps again, another tiny corpse splattered against his skin.

"And you, you bastard."

I look away from him, across the camp toward the cooking hut. This is a ceremonial day, so the aromas are not too enchanting. More boqui chicos and rubbery plantains to chew through. But the smell of the fire is always comforting, as is the glow of it's embers and the lick of it's flames around the water pot.

The fire is tended by Maria. She gathers the wood for it's fuel too, and carries the water in pails from the river. She guts the fish and prepares the plantains. At breakfast, lunch, and dinnertime she is tirelessly at work to provide for us all.

In moments to herself she squats outside her tambo, spreads pieces of cloth over the surface of a sawn trunk, and uses a stick to mark in a design in mahogany dye. The mazelike pattern is learned and absorbed from her native Shipibo culture. The art is representational, a rendering of patterns observed in visions of ayahuasca. Women are traditionally kept from the plant medicine and the ceremonies, and this leaves them free to observe the practice on their own. These tender and expansive paintings are a feminine view, drawn from the source of the web of life.

Maria's husband was a famous ayahuasca shaman. They worked as a team, her role as a medicine woman being to prepare and help purge celebrants at the ceremony. Her study is the plants of the region, their roots and stems and leaves. She learned from apprenticeship, and lessons came from her own use of ayahuasca. She no longer imbibes this plant, for the rate of exchange is very high. It can take a high price for the lessons it gives. It took the life of her husband, for it is typical of shamans that while they are empowered to heal others they cannot heal themselves. And she knows that her own health might not survive one more encounter with the plant.

Bare-legged and barefoot, dressed in her wraparound black skirt bright with Shipibo design and her blouse of brightest green, her black hair tied to hang down her back, she treads the jungle paths to collect medicinal leaves. These are divided among plastic buckets and soaked in water, a daily gift for each of us in our party. Sun pushes into the mixture to heat and arouse it, blending the scents and juices from the leaves. And at a time of our choosing, generally just before sunset, we each step down and take a bucket for our ritual cleansing.

Facing the east first of all, the direction from where the sun gifts itself each day, we pour the first splashes of this plant bath over our heads. Then we face each of the other directions in turn, returning to the east in conclusion. The whole of our body is washed and scented. Scraps of green cling to our skin and our hair as we let ourselves dry in the air, sheltering in our tambos if the rain is falling, the juice of the plants feeding through our pores.

The night, closing in with a near-total blackness, witnesses sound replacing vision. Against the backdrop of a waterfall's roar, crickets call, monkeys shriek, and frogs croak and gurgle their liquid notes like the pulse of the jungle, like a marimba band. Piercing the night with a pencil torch you can find the frogs. Tiny as fingernails, sitting on leaves as broad as fields, puffing up their chests of glossy green, purple, or white, and singing.

"I'm growing mellow," I admit to don Pedro when we find we are near each other, both drying from our plant baths. "When I got here I was raging with anger. Angry with you, with the jungle, with the mosquitoes, with the rain. Now I find that is passing. I hate the mosquitoes still, but some calm is setting in."

"It's good," he says. "Good you are calm. But anger is good too. It's appropriate. The jungle is a place of great harmony. It is also a place where everything preys on something else. We prey and are preyed upon. Acceptance and alertness, calm and anger, that's a kind of harmony to see you through."

## THE CARLOS CONCERTO

You may have missed Carlos in the last chapter. Consider yourself lucky. The sequence and flow of my jungle reminiscences were pretty much as I have transcribed them here. That fact is one of the greater accomplishments of my speaking career.

"Go on," Carlos says, puzzled at my sudden silence.

"Do you want me to?"

"I asked you, didn't I?"

"But you're not listening. You keep running away while I'm speaking."

"You're still with me. So close you have no need to shout. So how is it that I am running away? I walk and listen, you walk and talk, we are still together. Go on."

So I do carry on with my tales and descriptions, but it's like walking a dog off the leash. A dog who trots across a room to the murmur of it's name, but enjoys the sound rather than the content of heart-to-heart conversations. Though I am still in the broad consciousness of the creature, so that it turns it's head occasionally to check out my whereabouts, I am quite subsidiary to it's sense of freedom.

Carlos takes his direction from the river, but if he is now a dog he is no golden retriever. He doesn't enter the river for the fun of it, but only when it provides the simplest route. When rocks rise to cliffs on either side he takes off his shoes and socks, rolls up his trousers, and hurries through the water. Otherwise he keeps the river to his right-hand side and walks on the land.

Sometimes I think he is turning to me, about to comment on what I've said, but it's actually more like some profound nervous tic. His head snaps sideways to line up with his shoulder; then just as quickly he snaps it back to face forward again. He curls his fingers a little inward like an ape's, and stoops slightly as though his momentum is coming from the weight of his head.

I do my best to stay with him. His trousers give his legs protection while my legs are bare in shorts and are soon striped with the scratches of thorns, but though he once does look at my legs and their lines of blood it is with passing interest. The only concern he shows is when I stop speaking. It takes him a few moments to register my silence, then he turns to me and spins a circle in the air with his hand. It is my continuity signal. I am to carry on.

There's no relation I can spot between what I am saying and what Carlos is doing. Perhaps he is undoing the previous enchantment, where I stepped from the bank of a French river and into the Amazon. Now I speak of the Amazon, while his attention is focused on the French landscape around him. It's as though I'm narrating the sound track to the wrong movie.

I try to justify Carlos's behavior. I recall how wrong it feels to step from a cinema matinee and find the world outside still bright with sunlight. I remember that Carlos is a master storyteller, and that stories belong to the darkness of night, conjured by the flames from a bonfire. I think how people dim the lights of an auditorium and make the surroundings sterile. Certainly I've never spoken to an audience that has been consumed with interest in the fabric of their seats, crawled down the aisles to investigate one another's footwear, fingered the bared weave in frayed carpeting, rubbed wet fingers around the brass plaques of seat numbers.

Such is my audience now. Carlos's body is a bag of sensations. He quivers with touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste. He pauses to stroke some grasses, nibbles a leaf from a branch and rolls it in the saliva of his mouth before swallowing it down, spins a pirouette to track the beating wings of a bird in flight, bulges eyes before the radiant turquoise of a scarab beetle clinging to the green of a stalk, and as we skirt a meadow he drops to his hands and knees and crawls fast with his nose to the ground.

I finish speaking as his body hangs poised above the ground, his nostrils snuffling up the spores from mulch beneath a beech tree. He makes no comment on the silence. I have no more to say in any case. I just sit in attendance while he scrabbles at the earth with his fingers, digging his way down.

He holds still, like an animal that freezes it's prey before pouncing. Then digs in his right hand.

"Voilà!" he shouts.

He has pulled out a small black root, and holds it up in the nest of his fingers like a prize. Shuffling forward on his knees, he presents it to me. "A man of my word," he announces. "I said I would find you food."

I study the root, sniff it, and sneeze. It's like the smell of being buried alive.

"What is it?"

"A truffle."

"What do I do with it?"

"You live in France and ask me what to do with a truffle? What's wrong with you? Filled with dreams and stories, have you no sense of where you are? Come with me." He jumps to his feet. His nimbleness and enthusiasm are those of a man returned to his youth. I follow him, but when he stops it takes a while for me to reach his side. It's hot and I'm suddenly weary. I can't keep to the pace of this burst of living.

"Lie down," Carlos says, as though stepping back into empathy from his period of madness.

It's an easy command to follow, especially since he shows the way and lies down first.

"Close your eyes."

Tight as I close them, the sun still burns through my eyelids. My vision is a yellow dazzle.

"Hold your arm over your eyes."

That's better.

"Listen."

I wait for him to tell me something, but he says nothing.

He must be listening too.

I concentrate, tuning in for the hum of distant conversation, the crack of a twig as someone approaches us along a path.

Still I hear nothing. Just the sound of the river. The constant rush of river water.

Water spilling over separate stones. A babble of sounds that stream into and around each other. The river runs, the strikes and beats of it's music sustained in permanent echoes, sound mounting on sound to reach high and spread till it floods and washes the whole landscape.

Now I listen.

The valley is a canvas of sounds. The river is the undercoat and the final gloss. Other strokes sound between them till the canvas is filled.

The wings of a wood pigeon crack into flight. The rustle of leaves and creaking branch that it leaves. The tremble of birdsong across a hillside. The wind pouring sound through the echoes of river. The whisper of breeze from a mayfly's wings. The surging airward and snapping mouth of a trout. The swallowed silence of the mayfly. The thumping undercurrent of my heartbeat.

And the wind of a tune blown through Carlos's lips.

It is the seven-beat pulse song from the shaman in Peru. I hear it finding levels in the canvas of sound, laying measures on the landscape.

Carlos repeats the tune, then goes quiet for a while. I am so habituated to the human voice that I take his quietness to be silence. He sings his tune in a different register and key each time. This is no arbitrary arrangement, but it takes a while before I see it.

A frog croaks.

There is a pause of several beats, then Carlos opens his throat. It is the frog who is conducting this section of song. It's croak sets the tone and the timing of Carlos's song. Then I hear that there is no silence, simply a continuation of song. Carlos's voice is one instrument, perhaps an oboe, in an entire orchestra of sound. The frog is not ignored, but neither is it the sole conductor. It is one among a host of players whose notes add direction, harmonics, and rhythm.

Within this orchestra there is even a frog section. I focus on the frogs for a while, creatures lined along the river-source of sound. Their croaks syncopate around one another, pulsating notes of their scale, a dizzying excitement of noise that reaches a crescendo, sustains it, then suddenly stops. There is no diminuendo, no steady withdrawal of frogs from the chorus, simply one moment when they are all in full voice, the next when they have fallen silent.

Their silence is a sound, and they listen to it.

The notes played by boulders in the river, the percussion of crickets, the hum of insects drifting in and out of the foreground, the rustle of leaves, the high staccato of a red squirrel's cry—each joins the existing song and eases it toward a variation.

The song of Carlos picks from among this soundscape while my attention is elsewhere. Still keeping to a seven-beat principle, he extends his range to reach between a high falsetto and a cavernous rumble. Runs of notes quaver between the beats, music for a light-footed but energetic dance.

The song itself is a dance. I feel the tread of it's notes across my body. They form a wave of delicate touch, like the trilling of a harpist's fingers, and I realize my body is being played.

Carlos's song is stroking a song out of me. I don't feel tense, for the song of the landscape has subdued me, but I note a stiffness inside me.

I am holding my voice the way you hold a kite. To catch a wind you need to throw it high, but the kite stays rigid in your hand as you wait for the moment. Then up it goes. The string grows taut, the kite flies high, it is played by the wind but also by you. You keep a hold, keep control, while the kite expresses freedom.

My voice is now played like a kite. I let it go, but Carlos has control. It comes softly at first as I gauge it's power. I sense the purpose of my singing, see that it brings the tread of Carlos's song from the surface of my body deep into it's interior. My song is not an echo of Carlos's. It is more immediate. It is that song's reflection. When Carlos sings high, I sing high. When low, I sing low. For each of the dance steps in between my voice keeps pace, and our song is twinned. I am astonished at this ability to anticipate and chime with every instant variation; then astonishment moves to acceptance as my voice branches into variations of it's own. They take the lead from Carlos, are tempered to match his song's flight, but from fueling his notes with my own sound they wheel away at times to add contrapuntal harmony.

I have ingested Carlos's song. I know the song is born from ayahuasca, for it takes the path of ayahuasca through my body. It explores, touches, and awakens every node. I feel a variation reach through my legs, traverse my feet, pump through each of my toes. I feel it surge in my chest, flow through my organs, shimmer along my arms. It touches my left cheek to leave it so clean I feel nothing but a hollow there, then moves around to wash my face away. Notes are sharp in the crown of my head, while a minor key stirs at my heart. My voice takes the song and adds vibrations, and my body vibrates as it hears it's own song.

The song shifts. Carlos drops to a note so low I can't follow, a note that carries the color of blackness, a sustained resonance that shapes the image of a cave in my mind. The note is a resolution. I let the cave contain me, relax into silence, and lie still.

"Keep your eyes closed."

Carlos has rolled toward me to speak soft and direct in my ear.

"Let me guide you. Just a little way."

He takes my arm and helps me rise to my feet. We walk across the meadow grass. The sun's brightness dims. He turns me round and sits me down, then holds on to my shoulder and urges me back. I am resting against a tree.

"No hurry," he says. "Whenever you're ready you can open your eyes. You're in shade now. It won't hurt.”

I keep my eyes closed and listen. The individual sounds, the river and winds, crickets and frogs, birdsong and stirring leaves, are still there. I no longer hear from inside them though.

"You feel tired. But it's not so."

This is a new game of Carlos's. Intuiting my emotions, then denying them.

"You think you have sung yourself dry. Again, it is not so. Your singing has recharged you."

I open my eyes. I have to do so before I can speak. With eyes closed my words would resonate inside me. I want a break from the intensity of that.

"It was beautiful," I admit.

Out in the meadow I can see the indentation left in the grass by my body.

"It continues," Carlos assures me. "Water evaporates, but it does not disappear. It simply takes another form. It is the same with your song. It still resounds. You can gather it in and resume it whenever you choose."

"Can I?" It seems doubtful to me. "When I first heard a shaman sing, I thought it was the voice of God. Or perhaps not the voice, but the direction. When don Pedro told me that twenty percent of the teachings of ayahuasca are true, the rest lies, it confirmed my experience. Teachings from ayahuasca come at me in five layers. Each layer seems true, but put them together and they are contradictory. It's like life in this media age. All truths are true, but some truths are truer than others.

"That's what the shaman's song shows me. When confused I listen, and one of the five truths resonates with the song. This is the truth to hold on to. Anchored to this truth I can go back and analyze the deception in the other four layers.

"Thanks for out there just now. You showed me the true nature of the shaman's song."

"You're paying me a compliment?"

"I'm thanking you."

"Well, don't. It's lazy."

"It's polite."

"Ha!" His snort of a laugh is dismissive. "I forget that you're English.”

"You know where I grew up? The exact place?"

He goes silent and reflects.

"A little. It's coming. I'm getting a picture now that you ask me. Till now though it's hardly been current in your psyche. You've shut it off." "What's the picture?"

"A tower. A redbrick tower with a parapet and a roof that's ocean green. Set in a parkland of English trees."

"That's the carillon. In Queen's Park in Loughborough. That's my hometown, in the heart of England. It's funny that's the image that comes to you. I never think of it at all. Now you mention it, I want to cry."

I hold back the tears, but explore the emotion.

"It must be a sacred space for me, the feeling is so strong. There are two duck ponds there. One has an island complete with a doll's house and is thick with trees and shrubs, where the ducks can roost in safety from foxes at night. The other tucks itself under a miniature bridge you can cross. There are twin aviaries with exotic birds, the screeches of peacocks on the lawns, flower beds rich with color. The town library is set alongside, and you can bring books out to the shade of trees and travel through their worlds. The carillon is a war memorial. The names of the dead are marked on plaques around it's sides. It's a contrast to war, a peaceful place, a polite place. What's wrong with being polite?"

"Very clever. You have your own home in this media age. You build tracks with words. They lead away from things you're too uncomfortable to face. In my life, I was a gentleman. Now I have no interest in politeness. Politeness is not the subject.

"You thanked me for showing you the true nature of song. Am I to glow in your praise? Is your praise worth a fig? What is the true nature of song? You don't say. Is it an empty phrase? Some secret we share that can't be voiced?

"You are a writer, Martin. You have to work harder. If you've got the secret of the shaman's song, then deliver it."

"I was trying to!" I snap back, and catch the hint of a sob in my voice. I collect myself so I can sound more rational when I continue. "That's why I was bringing up Loughborough. You were on the mark when you saw the carillon. Walk up through it's roof to it's viewing platform and you pass through strutwork of heavy oak beams. From these beams hang a series of bells. The bells are made in Loughborough. There's a famous bell foundry there, Taylors. It even made the bells that hang in St. Paul's Cathedral.

"The carillon is different. The player strikes levers with his fists, and the bells ring out tunes. There are recitals in summer. But bells from Taylors also hang in the towers of churches throughout the county. Sometimes four, sometimes six, but best of all when there are eight bells. In the rest of Europe the bellringers ring out tunes, or simply toll the one bell. In Britain the peal from our church bells is unique. It's chain ringing, a folk art, bells wheeling through three hundred and sixty degrees. No tune, but a pattern of chimes, a gathering round in which each bell finds it's slot with a mathematical precision.

"One of the most comforting mysteries of my childhood was the sound of these bells. I would lie in bed and listen to their patterns. The sound spread like a beam of light from a lighthouse, a similar rhythmical pattern combined with a sweep that brought it loud sometimes and faint at others.

"When I grew strong enough to hold the rope and not be hoisted to the rafters, I stood among the bellringers. The physical power I felt through the rope was immense. There was a thrill of power in myself too, that I could grip the rope and sustain the bell then release it in it's swing once again, the clapper striking the metal and the tower resounding.

"But the magic was not in the individual bells. It was in their fusion. Whatever the round, whatever the pattern of strikes, the separate notes gathered inside the tower. The bells beat out a pulse but there was only one note, only one sound, the church tower filled with the single fused sound of all bells ringing. Separate bells ring out across the countryside, calling people to the church, and inside the church is held evidence of universal truth. For all the separate notes we strike, there is only one sound.

For all our separate goals and ideals, there is only one truth. For all our idolatries out in the world, for every divine aspect and manifestation, there is only one God. Is that the nature of song?"

Carlos looks at me. "You say so much and still end with a question."

"OK. A statement. That is the nature of song. That is why the shaman's song showed me the direction of God. It was a song fueled by the spirit of a plant, a song in harmony with nature. I took it as an individual voice, but it was tuning itself to something greater. You sang with the frogs and the river, the birds and the trees and the wind, then I sang with you. We beat out our individual notes, but there was one sound. Find direction by that sound and we're steering by a universal truth." "You think you've heard that sound?"

"Just now. You showed it me."

"The song of a valley? That's just one note. I'm talking about the sound."

I stare at him.

"You look so stupid, Martin. Happily you've done the homework. You've led a rich life. It's just that you're so dumb to it. It's time to walk you back through your own experience. Come with me. I have something to show you."

He steps out into the sunlight and meadow, and pauses by a flower. It's long stem of light green arcs toward it's head of purest, brightest blue. "It's very beautiful," I say. "This is what you have to show me?"

"This columbine? If only things were that simple. They could be. The columbine can teach you everything you need to know. But you're too locked in stories for that to work. Walk with me a little way further. We'll find what you need."

In the distance the river is spanned by the arches of a Roman bridge. Carlos sets his sights on it, and heads off.

## THE SMELL OF LOVE

Carlos walks in his nonchalant pose, hands clasped lightly behind his back, head turning to observe details of the countryside. At the same time he appears to be speeding, walking too fast away from me. My own movements are heavy, weighted with slow motion.

I want to shout at him to slow down, but I don't trust myself to come out with words. Whatever it is inside of me doesn't need a vocabulary to express itself.

It just wants to cry.

"See," Carlos says.

He has stopped short of the bridge and waited for me. He points to the ground.

It's a flower. Another orchid, it's blooms the color of vanilla. They are not in the shape of bees, but are just as clearly distinguishable. Suspended from the stem of the orchid are figures of tiny men, with a head, arms, body, and legs composed of petals.

"It's grotesque," I say. My voice is an emotional growl.

"It's a flower."

"It sucks." I want to rip it out of the ground and smash it to pieces against a rock.

"Why don't you?"

"Are you reading my mind again?" I turn my anger on Carlos. "What is it with you? You lay me down to wash me in a world of beautiful sound. Then you force-march me through the sun to look at this filthy little thing."

"Why do you say it's filthy?"

"What are you now? My psychotherapist? Well, fuck off. I don't need one. Do you know what profession don Pedro had printed on his business card? Psychotherapist. Psychotherapy's not a profession. It's an obsession. Leave my psyche alone."

"This man-orchid makes you think of don Pedro?"

"It's a people-stick. I could see a jester running around with one of these and giggling. Jiggling these little people about in some crazy dance. Were they the English shamans? Our court jesters?"

"You think so?"

"I think so. That's what we do in England. Take what's dangerous and laugh at it."

"Shamans are dangerous?"

"When you go through life, good-humored and easy-going, ready to see the funny side, you don't recognize danger till it's too late."

"So where do you see the danger?"

"The danger's in a sound. The sound of someone having the last laugh. Not a ho-ho-ho kind of laugh. Some bitter, sardonic, triumphant snarl."

"Shamans have the last laugh?"

"It's the only laugh they allow themselves. Their only true laugh. Few get to hear it. They're usually done for by then."

I grasp the orchid with my fist. Earth scatters as I wrench it out of the ground. The petal figures of men go flying as I beat the flower against a stone. The stem and leaves are softened into pulp. I fling them away and rub my hands against a patch of grass, cleaning them of the green juice.

"Better now?" Carlos asks.

"You can't fool me. That was no innocent plant. It was poisonous. You poisoned it."

"I did?"

"I've never trusted you. And I was right."

He doesn't respond. As I wait I find my anger ebbing. I don't want it to go. I call it back.

"You're just like the others. Seduce me with something beautiful. That beautiful dream of sound back there was an illusion, I suppose? Then when you've got me all soft and opened up, you attack. That plant. You showed me it because you knew it was a symbol. It wasn't a flower anymore. You poisoned it with your intent. You wanted it to take me back to the jungle, to stir me up again. You and your fucking jungle. Well, it worked. Little people on a jiggle-stick, that's ayahuasca for you. We sip the brew of the vine and we're tacked on. You know what drinking ayahuasca's like? It's like plugging the umbilical cord back into your belly. You're back in that blissful mother stream, awake to the wonders and harmonies of nature. You're engaged once more in the flow of creation. The shaman plugs you in. Then he unplugs you." "Sounds good to me."

"Do you want a suggestion for the world's most useless manual? 'How to startle a baby.' It's so easy. Shout at it. Frown at it. But there is a best of all. Rip it from it's mother's breast while it's suckling. Go into the jungle, drink the shaman's brew, and you become a baby. A fetus. And the shaman is the midwife. Midwives, they're good things, right? But careless ones, selfish ones, they're abortionists too.

"That lady of ayahuasca? She's powerful, blissful, and real. But she has lousy attendants. I don't trust my God to the politicians of the Vatican. And I don't trust sacred plants to shamans.

"Let me tell you about me and my shaman. We're on a lake, our little boat accompanied by the leaps of freshwater dolphins. This is before the jungle. Don Pedro gives me a warning I fail to hear. Along the shore he has pointed out sites of his own early experiences with ayahuasca. Some of those shamans are working still, but he declares that he will not work with them again. There is not a single shaman that he would trust himself to, for they all have some agenda of their own. They all have some trick they wish to play with our consciousness, even if they believe it to be for our own good."

"They're all psychotherapists," Carlos says.

"Ha!" I respond, and am chilled by how like Carlos I sound. "I thought don Pedro was excluding himself. That he was the only shaman to trust. I was naive.

"He told us stories of attacks. How a shaman sets loose a dart that must be seen and diverted. It can be returned to the source, or sent to ricochet on it's way, but once a dart is set loose it must find a target. In a similar way if a shaman sucks such poison from a victim, he must find a fresh victim to pass it on to. It is part of the jungle's code of exchange. To consent to leave one body, the poison must first be provided with another. There is no universal goodness in shamanism. Goodness for some is paid for by others. The sole concern of the shaman is what's good for him and his cohorts.”

"And sometimes those he loves," Carlos suggests.

"I can't believe in a shaman's love."

"Then let me tell you a story. Once upon a time—”

"This is a fairy tale?"

"That's how I'm going to tell it.”

*Once upon a time in the land of Peru a man stepped out of the jungle. At his side but just two steps behind came his wife.*

*She was a child of the jungle. Her lineage on her mother's side stretched back to a woman we know as Eve, but the story passed down from mother to mother was different from the one that's in our books. In this mother's story Eve ate the fruit that we know as the apple, and thereby gained great knowledge. This knowledge came with a blessing and a curse. The blessing? That the woman knew her birthright. The juice of the fruit passed down her throat and though it bore the taste of semen it had nothing to do with man. It was the surge of saplings out of raw earth, the bursting of blossom and swelling of fruit, the rotting of carcass and hum of a fly, the organics of death and perpetual birth. She knew herself to be seed and fruit, the place where death and birth both meet. Stroking her body she felt in touch with the presence of heaven on Earth.*

*The curse? That this knowledge could never be shared. It passed by right from woman to woman, but it's light was too blind for man to behold.*

*The man we know as Adam clothed the body of his wife and dragged her from her realm. He could not rule in a fecund world. His paradise had to be sterile.*

*Our own story is contemporary. The man who comes out of the jungle with his wife two steps behind is a shaman. He wants to master a knowledge of his own. His wife is an intimate of the powers of life. He will choose to master death.*

*Incan lords never conquered the jungle. Their dominion was in the mountains. And it is to these mountains that the shaman now leads his wife. There is knowledge there that he needs to acquire. Knowledge of competition and death.*

*At night, in a chamber behind a locked door, he undresses his wife and lies with her. Her body is sleek, the sinews strong in the flesh of her limbs, and he lays his cheek on the sweat on her breasts. He smells the simmering milk of life, the steam that glues a jungle floor to it's canopy of trees, passes his nose on down her body to sniff the spores that dance in jungle air, the scent of fish that tangle in jungle pools, and wets her body with his tears and the saliva* *from his mouth. This aroma of skin, her flavor on his tongue, is as close as he can come. Her smell is his strongest hint of her essence.*

*She has a primal beauty.*

*Born of the jungle, she has followed him to rock. There is no purchase for her here.*

*"She is weak and I am strong," the shaman feels, as disease clogs her heart. He tends her in the hospital ward of a high and dusty city, his nostrils filling with the desiccation of death. He holds and caresses, washes and dresses the body of his wife as she slides away to the region of her ancestors.*

*"Oh yes!" she cries, in a passion she once expressed for him. Her eyes are open, but she is seeing beyond this world. Her ancestors are preparing a fiesta to welcome her. They open wide their arms, ready to take her in dance, and prepare themselves to sing the song that is the happiness of her life.*

*She dies.*

*Two days pass. The shaman misses the wild taste from her skin, the vital juice of her energy in his life. He holds a cup to his lips, and tips ayahuasca down his throat.*

*It is as though the ayahuasca carries eyes through which he can see. Down the throat, down the tunnel, he journeys into darkness. Deep within himself, deep within the crust of the earth, it is the same thing. There are creatures here, beasts the color of membrane that move with the flip and blur of anxious flappings, eager to greet him and grasp him and make him stay.*

*These are not the ancestors of his wife. He knows that much. He seeks better company.*

*He hurries on, through tunnels and doors, a sequence of empty chambers. He knows he is in the hallways of death, but there is no wife to greet him. "Too soon," he thinks. "I am here too soon, before she has had the chance to reach here herself." The emptiness is desolate.*

*Then a tunnel ends in shadow, and he traces the edges of darkness to reveal the shape of a man. Twice his height and twice his breadth, swathed in a cloak that hoods it's head. A draped arm stretches to the right. It is an invitation and a direction. The figure floats with the momentum of the arm, and the shaman follows behind. The path is uphill, through a sequence of tunnels.*

*"Go," the figure says, and the voice is shaped from a stale gust of breath. "I can go no further. This is not your time and place. Go, and do not look back."*

*The tunnels branch through many doors, but through one door passes a scent the shaman remembers. It is the breeze, the steam, the memory of his wife. He opens that door and daylight touches the darkness of the passage. He follows the scent again. The door opens to a rose-colored pink, the hint of a distant dawn. Again, and there is a wash of light blue, the salted smell of ocean. Again, and there is a herald of spring as a breeze carries the fresh breath of grass. Again, and there is the moisture of cloud clinging to his body. It wraps him in a silver light and bears him back to life.*

*The journey ends. He has visited death and returned to the land of the living.*

*The lesson is clear. He entered the vision a widower, and returned a true shaman. He can now trade in his expertise, and deal in the realm of the dead.*

*Sometimes still he turns his head, catching the aroma of his wife. At others he hears it whistle as it blows past. It carries a secret just beyond his reach. The woman's secret of life. "I'll find it out," he yells to her, though only he is listening. "I'll live till I've found your secret of life."*

*And that, as I understand it, is the story of one shaman's love.*

"Is that your story?" I ask.

"I'm no shaman. It is the story of a man I care for."

I look at the flowers of the man-orchid that lie around me. With my finger I prop one up onto it's feet. Then I take my finger away. "Not much good, is it?" I say.

I try again. The figure falls again. I laugh, and stand up.

"The last laugh," Carlos observes.

I glare at him.

"You don't trust me. You don't trust don Pedro. There's no one to trust but yourself."

"That's right," I declare.

"Don Pedro, your friend, became your enemy."

"He nearly killed me."

"So you become your enemy."

I raise an eyebrow in query.

"It's a simple rule. I engaged with you. I became you. Engage with your friend, you become your friend. Engage with your enemy, you become your enemy. You're Martin, the shaman who survived."

"I'm no shaman."

"Ha!"

"No one died for my benefit."

"You suffered. You learned. Now you know better. Next time you can make someone suffer in your place." He looks at me and laughs. Not a last laugh. It's more of a blast from the belly, a ho-ho-ho. "Puzzled and angry and so very fierce. You're a picture, Martin. And what I say is true. You saw death and came back to life. It makes you a shaman. A creature of the jungle. You value life as you never have before. You'd sooner kill than be killed."

"Who wouldn't?"

"Ah-ha!" He licks a finger and holds it up in the air, as though testing the wind. "A good question."

He points the moist finger to beyond the bridge.

"Let's go down to the river and find the answer."

"The answer's down there?"

"Of course," he says, and laughs again as he starts to walk away. "The answer's always somewhere else."

## A FISH ON DRY GROUND

"Do you remember your question?" Carlos asks.

We have passed the bridge and kept some feet back from the water. The hillsides are coated with scrub and brush, but trees of real substance line the river. It is under such trees that he asked me to stop and lie down.

"Who wouldn't rather kill than be killed?"

"Good. Now we shall wait for the answer. Keep your eyes open till you feel called to close them. Broaden your focus. See to the sides while you're looking straight up. And please speak. Remember, we are looking for a memory. We are looking for an answer. What do you see?"

"Sky."

"Just sky?"

"Trees."

"Whole trees?"

"Branches. Branches of trees."

"Are they still or are they moving?"

"Not still."

Leaves turn to catch light and shimmer against the sky. Whole boughs sway. It's a delicate motion, for the air in the valley is moving as a breeze rather than wind, but I watch the movement as a bough leans inward a little, then lifts away. Then I see that all the branches are moving in this way. It is soothing to watch them, like the calm I can absorb from watching waves ripple up a shore.

"Their limbs are moving," I say, and am surprised at a quiver of panic in my voice.

"Moving away, or moving in?"

"In. They're coming in. They're bending over me. Drawing closer."

The swaying of the branches is not violent, but dramatic. They sweep in, leaves swooping from distant specks to almost brush my eyelids.

"It's beginning, Martin." Carlos lays a hand over my eyes. I would expect a callused hand but the skin is smooth and cool. "Keep your eyes closed."

I hadn't realized I'd closed them. The sight of the branches has stayed constant. I open my eyes and look out onto the darkness of Carlos's palm. Close them again and there the trees are, the tips of their branches brushing my skin.

"Remember where you are."

I'm in France. Beside a river. I'm in the Amazon too. The trees above me are a flashback. I recall the scene, trees of a jungle reaching out in silhouette against the night. These though are French trees, bright with daylight, preparing themselves for their operation.

"Let them be," Carlos advises. "They're looking for your answer. It's inside you. You know what's happening?"

"My vision. We're replaying my first ayahuasca journey of the jungle. I lay on the floor of the ceremonial hut and it was like I was on an operating table. Trees were the surgeons, bending in like this, reaching down limbs to probe and examine me."

"Let it come, Martin. Allow the journey to return, and tell it as it happens."

"Can you see it too?"

"I see it. But I need to hear it. I need to feel the journey's vibrations in your voice. Go on, Martin. Go on."

Carlos kneels by my side, one hand still against my eyes, the other laid against my stomach.

"Here comes death," I say.

"Don't analyze. Just describe."

"Here comes death," I repeat, for it's the only term that fits. The vibration in my voice sets my body shivering. This is no mere replay of a scene I've viewed before. Then I was naive. Now the scenes are colored with the shadow of what is to come.

Death takes the shape of a cross, and though it comes with no perspective I know from it’s composition that it is life-size. Human skulls, face-out with their empty grins, form the breadth of the main pillar. Skulls mounted on skulls rise high, more skulls forming the crossbeam.

The tone of this ayahuasca journey is set.

My ears wake up.

From a distance, beyond the ceremonial hut, out across the clearing, I hear the buzz of a single mosquito. It is as loud as if already in my ear. I follow the weaving direction of her flight, hear her lock onto the wave of my body heat, listen as she propels herself in a direct course toward me.

My hand is ready. The insect comes within reach. My hand reaches up, and my fingers pluck her from the air. They squeeze the life from her. They flick her away. My ears pick out the traces of more flights, more insects. My senses are a radar scanning the attack. The image of skulls set the alert. This is more than the usual, drab blood-quest of the insects. I need no experience of demons to recognize them. These insects are guided by a mind that is not their own. They carry weapons of destruction that serve them no purpose. They are creatures of demonic intent. Targeted at me.

My right hand is agile. It catches and flicks clear each assault as it comes in. Catch. Flick. Catch. Flick. Catch. Flick.

The wave of insects is gone. My hand moves on. It grabs hold of my left shoulder.

There is no clear sense of why I have to do this. Just the absolute knowledge that it has to be done. It is no casual clasping. I grip tight, my fingers reaching through the flesh for bone.

Keith breaks from his own trance, escapes from his own ayahuasca journey, to sit beside me. He is aware that something is happening, something beyond regular human powers of control.

"I must hold on," I tell him.

My task is so simple, and so hard. There is no rationale to what I am doing, only pain in my hand, pain in my shoulder. Common sense insists I let go.

Common sense did not bring me into the jungle. It is too late to pay it any regard now.

I hold on, and my grip becomes a battle. Forces set themselves against me. They are forces of pain, of emotion, of sight and of sound.

"This is stupid," comes some internal prompting. "You are hurting yourself. Let go. Let go."

My hold relaxes, then my grip tightens again.

"No need to tighten," comes further advice. "You have done as much as a man can do. You have held on long enough. Let go. Let go." The muscles in my hand slacken, then grow rigid again.

“Look!" A voice alerts me to the ayahuasca matrix of color and green light as it stretches across the entire span of the hut. “At last. Your goal. What better destination can there be? You have arrived now. You need hold on no more. Let go. Let go."

And temptation is here. Beauty is here. Maybe I can let go after all. "Shall I hold on?" I ask.

Others lie around the perimeter of the hut, enclosed in their own journeys, but something from among them finds the voice to answer. It comes as a rush of collective breath, a strong but voiceless affirmation.

I hold on.

Voices are constant, a barrage of sound. Some plead, some remonstrate, some come with the air of friendly advice, some with rebuke. Some shout in triumph. "You've done it! You've done it! Well done, Martin! Now let go!"

Lights flash. Sounds swell. Voices merge into one shout, the shout swells into a roar, full-throttle thunder that echoes and multiplies inside the chamber of the hut. I look for the sound of the shaman's song to find the direction of God.

There is no song. There is no shaman.

I don't know that I can do what is to be done. I am puny against this surrounding force. All I can do is carry on. If I win, I win. If I fail, I fail. But I will fail with my hand still clutching my shoulder.

The world is simply volume, simply sound. In the beginning was a word like this, some self-sustaining crash of destruction and creation, a roar that is wrapped around every shriek and whisper that might ever be uttered and that gathers it home.

Then it subdues to the sound of volcanoes bursting out of earthquaked ground.

To the peace beneath the crest of a tidal wave.

To the rage of a waterfall. To the marimba band of tree frogs. To the breath of Keith beside me.

"Is it over?" I ask. "Yes."

"Is it over?" I ask again.

The breath of the group rushes around the hut's perimeter and delivers me an affirmative. I need assurance beside my own, but I need my own knowledge too. I am

aware of the group experience. There are things others know that I do not. And things I have just encountered they cannot be aware of.

I stand, eyes closed. Keith stands too, and takes hold of my right elbow to guide me. I walk from the hut to the clearing beyond.

"Can I let go?"

"Sure," Keith says.

"Really?" "Really."

I release my hold on my shoulder. My body bends. My mouth opens. Vomit shoots from me. It feels as clean as a liquid breath.

I open my eyes.

No eyes have ever opened onto greater beauty. I gaze beyond the clearing to the trees. Branches intertwine to fold the jungle between themselves. Ferns arch their lacy silhouettes. It is a vision of Eden. A sampling of life on Earth before the taint of man.

Keith leads me back to my mat on the earthen floor. I smile and sit with open eyes, but the work of my hands is not done. There are stings lodged within me. My fingers pinch hold of my flesh, grab and wriggle till each sting is pulled free, and flung away. There are no forces against me now. This is a simple matter of clearing. Pinch. Pull. Fling. Pinch. Pull. Fling.

A lady of white, her face a blank of whiteness, her robe and hair white too, appears and stands to my left. To my right the green matrix of life extends itself, and from the center of this luminous web a lady of green appears. She too stands at a distance, observing, too wary of the contamination within me to come too close. Pinch. Pull. Fling. Pinch. Pull. Fling. I cast the stings out of the circle.

I now have a sense of what I am doing. It goes beyond sense, but then everything is far beyond sense. My body is the earth. In vomiting it clean, in pulling out stings, I am clearing it of pollution. I am healing the globe of environmental degradation.

Maria approaches, embers glowing in her long-stemmed pipe, and blows smoke over my hands. She holds my bottle of Agua Florida to my lips. I take a sip and spray it across my legs, my arms, my chest. I swallow a little down, and take a gulp of water too. The water is a wash of such sweetness. It is a taste from a spring in paradise, a taste of a world untarnished by man.

I lie back, content and ignorant. The lady of white, the lady of green observe from a distance.

I think I am cleansed. They know better. Shamanic darts must find a victim. I cannot simply flick my stings away.

"Well done, Martin," I tell myself.

And as I rest, the poison burrows inside me.

"Nice story," Carlos says. "Have you told it many times?"

My eyes are open, Carlos's hands removed. The branches above me are a summer display of leaf, pleasing patterns against the blue of the sky. I sit up. "Just a few. Not like that though. I was seeing the visions again. Hearing the roar."

"You were reviewing the memory. That's very different. Sifting through the material. Looking for your answer. Do you have it?"

Who wouldn't rather kill than be killed...?

"No," I admit.

"The whole cosmos roars for you with every sound ever to be uttered, and you can't even tease out an answer?"

"That's not what it was about."

"Of course it's not. It's about your drama."

"It's about not giving in," I respond. "That's what I get from it. It's a lesson in non-attachment. A subtle lesson. I was attached to gripping my shoulder. It was a stupid thing, but that was OK. We all have our goals, the things we have to do. What we can't be attached to is our sense of reason that can argue us out of what is right. We can't be attached to the opinion of others. They say what we do is bad, they say what we do is great, it's immaterial. We do what we do as well as we can, that's all there is to it. You're a writer, Carlos. You've been praised to the skies and attacked as the devil. It's immaterial. You wrote what you had to write. That's how it is. That's what I learned.” "But you couldn't answer your question."

"The answer wasn't there."

"Think about it." Carlos stands up. "Call me when you're ready.”

"Do you know the answer? Can't you help me?"

He walks away.

"Jesus," I venture. "He didn't attack the guards who came to arrest him. He let himself be crucified. He's someone who wouldn't rather kill than be killed." Carlos keeps on walking.

"Martyrs. I tried to live as a Baha'i once. What really got to me though was their take on humility. It went too far. Their ultimate goal seemed to be to follow their leader, Baha'ullah, to martyrdom. I couldn't see life was about that."

He reaches the river and sits down, but doesn't look back.

"The Jains. They wear masks so as not to breathe in any insects. Sweep the ground before their feet to clear ants out of their path. They respect life. They wouldn't kill.” Carlos takes off his shoes and socks.

"Suicides," I try. "They kill themselves. Maybe they'd choose to be killed if they could.”

"Enough, Martin!" He does not shout, but his tone is cutting. He stands in his bare feet, and turns to face me. "Who needs these thoughts? In the time I have left, do you think I care to debate philosophy? Your answer lies in your experience. Find it there."

"I left out a big part. I never told you why the shaman wasn't there when I needed him.”

"Forget it. I've heard enough. I'm not interested in other people. Stop. Think. Tell me your answer, or don't speak to me again."

He steps from the bank and into the water, holding steady while it courses round his ankles, then treads deeper.

I stand and walk away. Carlos's shift into attack mode has left me too turbulent to sit still. I want solidity beneath my feet. Not grass, not meadow, not dry earth. Something you can stamp on and not leave a trace.

There are two choices. I can scramble up the bank to the asphalt road, but that seems too final. Once on that I'll simply march away.

The other choice is the bridge over the river.

This looks more slender than when it was built, around seventeen hundred years ago. The Romans would have laid deeper levels of paving to carry troops and horses across, walls would have guarded the bridge's flanks. Once more bulky than now, the bridge has shed it's trappings. Four arches link to span the river, stones layered between them to skim the slimmest crossing from one bank to the other. This essence of the bridge is where it's strength lies.

I march across it, not quite stamping my feet but wanting to. I feel more petulant than angry. Carlos's demand seems unreasonable: He's posed a question as a riddle, and I've never been any good at riddles. My attempts at a serious answer were brushed aside. If he doesn't want me to talk again, then I won't. But I'm damned if I'll simply walk away.

A mood comes over me sometimes that I never had a hold on till one day driving across the Saudi Arabian desert toward Medina. I watched four twists of sand, miniature whirlwinds each no wider than tiptoes at the base and, at the top of a funnel, some twenty feet higher, the width of a man with outstretched arms. Not moving fast, for in the desert there's nowhere to rush to, they were just a density of spinning with wavering tops. The sight of them was the image of certain moments in my life, when some internal storm flails with a fury I can barely contain. There's little I can do when such moods are on me but wait till the whirlwind exhausts itself and tumbles as dust.

There's such a whirlwind now. It's driving fuel is petulance.

I turn on the bridge and glare down at Carlos. There's power in such looks of mine. They can make nice people stutter and back away. They need to be looking at me for it to work though, their eyes soft and engaged with mine. Carlos has his back bent and is paying me no regard at all. His hands, fingers spread, are poised above the water and his focus is set just between them.

A purple heron, largely white for all it's name, sometimes patrols this section of river. Carlos's stance, his patience, his utter stillness, his attention remind me of that bird. The frown is smoothed from my face as I stand and watch.

The waters are so clear I can see the drama unfolding. Watch a clutch of five rainbow trout push out from inside the shadow of the bridge to nudge their snouts round sunlit pebbles. They are moving with the direction of the river, tangles of weed streaming alongside, controlling the water with their fins to move steadily.

Three of the fish are youngsters. Two are adults, one of these truly handsome in size. A young fish passes beneath Carlos's hands, nibbling around the man's feet, moving on. Carlos remains intensely still. Then the adult, the long one, the fat one, follows in the youngster's wake.

I don't see the movement. There's no splash, just the thrashing of water around the trout's tail. It's body is secure within Carlos's hands.

No one can catch and hold a trout, not with bare hands, yet this is what Carlos has done. He raises his head. He has been aware of me all along. His gaze locks into mine and he holds it there, the fish secure in his hands. Then his shoulders jerk. The hands and fish stream out of the water. He lets go and the fish keeps on coming, silver drops streaking from it's speckled skin, it's mouth agape, flying full speed toward my face.

There's no time to think. Just react. I slap the fish as hard as I can. It's flesh is firm against my hand, waterdrops spittle my face, the fish skids against the dust of the bridge and lies flapping.

I turn back to Carlos, seeing what else he might throw my way.

He is watching me still. His hands in the river are closed around a trout. I get ready for the next assault, the new fish thrown my way, but Carlos simply stays still. I look at the fish in his hands. A long and fat fish. I look aside to the dust of the bridge.

The dust is dry. There is no fish there.

I know my experience. Carlos threw me a fish that I batted aside. But I know my current experience too. Carlos is holding the exact same fish in the river.

He turns his head away and finds a boulder rising out of the shallows. Still stooped he edges toward it, retaining his hold on the trout, and sits down.

A shiver collects near the space of my spine and shakes itself loose. My body shakes. I know the cause. It's revulsion.

I remember the face of the fish just before I struck it, recall the glaze of it's eye, then shudder again. Watch in my memory as the creature bends and flexes against the ground and skids on to lie thrashing and gasping at the air.

I know what I did. I left it there and stood waiting to beat away the next one.

I retrace my steps across the bridge and walk down to the riverbank. Carlos looks up at me.

"Who wouldn't rather kill than be killed?"

I have my answer at last. It has come from my experience.

"Not me," I say.

He smiles.

"I have your dinner here," he says. "It's not for me. I shall not eat again. But you. There can be no finer dinner for you. Come here. Take it. Bash it's brains out on this rock." I shake my head.

"You mean you want me to let it go?"

I nod.

He opens his hands. The trout drifts forward in the current for a moment, then recognizes it's freedom and spurts off.

Carlos stands and shuffles off to a tree that has fallen into the river, the torn clump of it's roots lodged on the bank, and hoists himself up to perch on the trunk. "Come," he says, and pats the space beside him. "Tell me about life while my feet dry."

"I love life," I tell him, and suddenly my body shakes with such a spasm I have to hold on to the tree so as not to fall off.

"You're shaking for joy?"

"Revulsion," I admit. "I'm sorry. I'd like to explain, but it's all a bit confusing."

"Let's do what you want to do then. Let's look at others. You looked for don Pedro's song in the ceremony but it wasn't there. Don Pedro had fled the hut. He had recently entrusted himself to work with another curandero, but things went wrong. Don Pedro's powers were drained from him, he found his colleague in sorcery was truly his rival, forces of destruction were worming between his internal organs, and now when he is on ayahuasca and at his most vulnerable a shamanic dart comes flying his way. He is alert enough to divert it, but knows that shamanic darts must lodge in a victim or they are still a threat to him. It's nothing personal. He wishes no one harm,

but since someone must be injured it might as well be you. You're vulnerable, which is tempting in itself, you serve him no particular purpose, you're too naive to defend yourself, and you might just be strong enough to survive the attack. It's best for him to get out of harm's way though, just in case. If there's one shamanic dart, there might well be another. He can't go inflicting injury on everyone in his care."

"How do you know all this?"

"A friend of yours quizzed don Pedro in the wake of your illness. Don Pedro confessed the facts and your friend passed the news on to you."

"That's how I come to know it. But you..." I pause and reflect for a moment. "It's true, isn't it? You're plugged right into my memory bank. You know my experience as if it's your own."

"Yes that's true. Your recent experience especially. I've never hidden the fact."

"So why do you make me relive it all? Why do you have me tell all these stories?"

"Come now, Martin. Think of any conversation. Few people listen. They're just waiting for the chance to speak themselves. Conversation is much more about the need to speak than to listen."

"Maybe. But you've not gone to all this trouble just so I can parrot on."

"I want something from you. I want you to do something for me." "What?"

"I'll tell you when you're ready."

"I'm ready now."

"You're getting there. I'll tell you soon. As part of our true conversation. I'm like everyone else. I'm waiting for my turn to speak. But first I'm giving everything I have to listening to you. That way you get to listen to yourself. When you've finished listening to yourself, you'll be ready."

"That fish...," I say, changing tack rather than direction. "I saw it come flying at my face. I felt the weight of it's body as I slapped it aside. But it never left the river. How did you do that?"

"What's a dream, Martin? Something thrown at you, or something you project yourself? You hate riddles. So here's one. What can you send that arrives without leaving you?"

"That fish?"

“A fax. But that fish is a good answer too. Who cares? It's only a riddle. Don't worry about what I do or don't do. Don't worry about anyone else. Look to yourself. Come on. You're getting there."

"I'm not. I'm lost."

"You say you love life."

"Yes. That's new. I used to go to bed at night and count the day another one ticked off. Life was OK but death was going to be sweeter. That changed. It changed when I saw such beauty in the jungle. That beauty was so physical, so voluptuous, it brought life so close. Breathe in and it's all inside me. Breathe out and I spill myself all over it. As close as that. I had a good aesthetic sense before that. I knew what I liked and why I liked it. This is different. It isn't appreciation at a distance. It's sensuous." "The knowledge of Eve."

"You think? Maybe. It's not the knowledge of my mind, I know that much. It's the knowledge of my body. Carnal knowledge. A carnal love of the natural world. It's great, Carlos. It's new to me. I forget it much of the time, but when I remember to practice, it's such a thrill. It's my new religion."

"Not one you'd want to die for though."

"How could I? If my body dies my senses are gone. Then it's all over."

"Dying is sensual too."

"You enjoyed it?"

"Loathed it. It's sensual overkill. But sensual just the same."

"I went there, Carlos. Not all the way like you, but close enough. You know the details?"

"You want to trade hospital stories now?"

"No. Just tell you mine, I suppose. A plane brought me from the steam of the Amazon to New Mexico. It was like delivery from life in a lung. At home in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains near Santa Fe, way up at seven thousand five hundred feet, the air was dry and crystal clear. Nine weeks went by and I thought I was safe. Then an ache started in my shoulder. Hours later malarial parasites stormed out of their incubation in my liver and took over my bloodstream. They gobbled up red cells and sent my body into it's first spell of tremors.

"This was the deadly form of malaria. In the West we have pills that bring a cure. Pills we don't allow into the areas of disease so the parasites can't build up a resistance. Where the malaria is endemic thousands die. In the West we get to live. I take my pills, feel the malaria ebb, while the pain in my shoulder increases.

"To lift my head, to raise a finger, is agony. For weeks the pain is misdiagnosed. I crawl to the doctor on the way to the airport, looking for pain relief so I can return to England and free medical care. He tells me I won't survive the trip. I am ferried straight to hospital.

"There are X rays, there are CAT scans, there are MRI scans, I'm hooked to an IV drip, but as long as I'm still it doesn't matter what department they trolley me to. Completely motionless I'm fairly free of pain. With my eyes open I recognize the simplicity of death. It is simply one breath away. The choice is mine. Stop breathing, and it's all over.

"They analyze my illness. It is streptococcus, a bacterial infection of my blood. It started in my collarbone and spread down my left arm to my fingers, shifted down my chest to cluster round my heart. The location of the disease is what threw them off the scent. The combined experience of many doctors has never known the infection to take root around a collarbone. With the diagnosis in place they set to work. The attendant nurses take on the form of an ayahuasca vision, beings of light working to repair the damage of the jungle operations.

"Close my eyes instead of open them, take a breath instead of choosing to stop breathing, and I am taken out of my body. This is it, Carlos. I'm doing what you said. Listening to myself talk. I've felt no particular buzz till now, but this is something. This is what I've been leading up to.

"A skateboard is coming down a hill, three bowling balls taking a ride on it, the balls complete with the feathered headdresses and faces of comic-book Indians. Then they stop, and the balls become fissured rocks on the ground. In the melted features of one of them I recognize the nostrils of an Indian and travel inside it.

"I am in a tunnel now, composed of clouds shooting by in a blue sky, then beyond the clouds the tunnel continues through a long run of darkness.

"The destination is a place of equal darkness, but instead of the bounds of a tunnel there is a black plain I am standing on. A figure materializes in front of me. Composed of fibers of golden light, it is an old woman, bent toward me with her head hung low for her long hair to form a curtain between us. She moves her head and the hair, more fibers of light, begins to swing. I understand that this is my opportunity to make one wish.

"I can wish for the good of others. I can wish for peace. I can wish for health. Even for a place in heaven. The moment for the wish is there. It is the wish of an instant, with no room for moral contemplation.

"I state my wish.

"Very much money,' I declare.

"The wish is gathered into the woman's hair and she flings her head to one side. The wish goes flying, caught by a naked golden youth of incredible beauty, and as he makes the catch this angel is transformed into a ball of light that soars toward the heavens.

"There you have it, Carlos. I go on a spiritual quest, am offered one wish from the gods, and I wish for money."

"Does it shame you?"

"I feel it should. But no. My life is fine. It lacks only money."

"You'd do good with it?"

"I think so. But who knows? The record of people using money well is not good. We'll see."

"You're sure the money will come?"

"Very much money. I'm certain. The wish was given to be granted." I turn to Carlos, and am smiling. “I'm not ashamed of my wish at all. I'm pleased at my presence of mind."

"Ha!" Carlos slaps his hands against his thighs. "This is better. The more unlikable you are, the more I like you. Goodman. That's your name. Is it right? Are you a good man?"

"I think so, yes."

"Ha ha ha ha ha!"

It's the fullest laughter I have ever known from him. He grabs hold of me to stop himself from slipping off the tree while his body rocks. His hands grip round my left shoulder.

I flinch.

His laughter stops.

"It still hurts?"

I'm in too much pain to speak, so simply nod.

"This is where the infection was?"

I nod again.

"And this is where you clutched yourself throughout that ceremony?"

I take deep breaths to steady myself and ease the pain before I speak. "Exactly there."

"You should be dead," Carlos notes. "Something's looking after you. That's good or it's bad, who knows? The way of exchange is at work. You've been spared in order to do something."

"Aren't we all?"

"Ha!" The snort returns him to good humor. "Good point. People wonder where I learned so much. They search in esoteric places, rooting Indians and Mayans out of the hills. Do you know where I really learned so much? From the street kids of Rio and São Paolo. The most useless thing you can do in those streets is preach humility. Those kids survive where others would die. At least the survivors do. They're proud. They know they're as good as anyone. And they know the world treats them like shit. Humility's not where they're at. They've got to fight for their pride. Fight for each other. Fight fight fight.

"You say we're all spared in order to do something? Too right. So forget being grateful. Forget being humble. Life treats you like shit. It'll keep you in the gutter as long as it can. You've got to fight to get through it. Fight to do what you've got to do. Gripping your shoulder like you did? It's like a rat baring fangs at a coyote. On the face of it there's not a chance in hell. But if you're going to go out, go out fighting.

"Your question was fine. 'Who wouldn't rather kill than be killed?' you asked. 'Not me!' you answered. It's good. Why is it good?"

I can't think.

"I like you. I'll tell you. It's the only answer you could give. How can you answer for anyone else? You can, but you'd be fatuous. The best thing we can do to ourselves, the first thing we must do, is ask tough questions and face up to tough answers. What's your job in this world? Find your answer. Would you kill to stay alive? Find your answer. What would you fight for? These are the questions. Street questions. Give me more."

"How much shit am I prepared to take?"

"Not bad. And the answer?"

"No more."

"Give me another."

"What am I worth?"

"And the answer."

"More than anyone will give me till I screw them to the floor."

"This feel good?"

"Yes."

"So tell me about the revulsion."

I think of the fish, it's face flying so close it seemed as big as mine.

"It wasn't the look of the fish," I say, and think on.

I remember the force with which I smashed it to one side.

"I didn't care about killing it. That feels bad, but it's not that."

I think on a little more.

"It's you." A shiver passes through my spine with the realization. "I was coming to trust you. Just a bit. Then you seemed to launch an attack. That made me sick. It revolted me. It shook me to my senses. I struck out. That's what it was."

"Kill or be killed. It's a rule of the jungle, a rule of life. I told you the story of the ayahuasca road. The shamans with their darts playing games on the side. Now take the story as your own. How does it play?"

"I went to Peru. Trekked into the Amazon. Joined the game without knowing the rules."

"Ignorant of the rules. The moves. The game plan. The players. Ignorant of the whole damned thing. You went in there primed with a New Age philosophy. You know what that philosophy is?"

I shake my head.

"Ignorance is bliss."

I have to laugh. "It's true," I concede. “I'd read about shamanic darts and all that, but I didn't believe in them. I thought they were part of superstition. Give the power of belief to superstitions and they exist. Otherwise they don't. It was a stupid thought, but it gave me comfort. The shamanic Amazon was don Pedro's world. I put myself in his care. I thought he would protect me from all I didn't understand."

"Were you ever a Boy Scout?"

"Yes."

"You were a lousy one. They've got a great motto. 'Be prepared.' You went to the jungle. You nearly died. Who takes the blame?" "Don Pedro."

"You really think that?"

"Why not? He put himself forward as someone who could take care of me. He didn't. He nearly killed me. He'll kill others."

"Most likely. And you? Will you put yourself in his care again?"

"No way."

"Why not?"

"I've learned better."

"So you're no longer ignorant."

"I'm learning."

"You're growing up. Painfully, woefully slowly. Are you in my care now? Or are you wary?"

"Wary."

"Great. That's the way it should be. Come on. Let's continue our walk."

He nudges me to shift along the tree so he can climb down.

"So you're saying my ignorance is to blame?" I ask him.

"Ignorance brings lessons, not blame. Forget blame." He slips his feet into his socks and dons his shoes. "Where are we going?" I ask, for it's clear I'm not leading the way

anymore.

He walks up to the bridge.

"You're wary," he announces with a grin. "But not wary enough. We're going to disturb you some more!"

## THE SONG OF YOUTH

"How do you tell when you're on the right path?" Carlos asks. "Things go smoothly?"

"I said the right path, not a bland path. You know you're on the right path when things get interesting. But why am I running ahead? This is your adopted country. You lead."

The path bends to the right after crossing the river, before arcing left to go uphill. I pass Carlos and walk backwards for a moment, facing him as I introduce the way ahead.

"It's a Roman road. From around the third century." I've not taken the track very far before, but my years as a teacher leave me bluffing expertise at times. "We think of Roman roads as being straight, but not here. You'll see how the Pyrenees make everyone adapt. The road twists and turns."

I turn my attention back to the track. Turn and twist, leap and shout, stumble as I land and scamper up the track a few feet before facing Carlos again.

A snake lies between us. It's body, some five feet long and three inches wide, spans the path.

My foot was about to step on it. I managed to hop and land beyond it, but my balance was gone.

"Cool," Carlos says.

It's not just hip appreciation. He's being descriptive in some way. Though it's baking in the sun the snake looks like it's fresh from the water. There is a sheen to it's skin that shines the blend of turquoise and green of a Caribbean shore.

Two more things surprise me. The snake doesn't move and Carlos doesn't laugh at my clumsiness.

It seems my clumsiness is an irrelevance to Carlos, and that he isn't surprised at all. As I chatted to him about the Roman road he stepped more gently. I was going backwards at my regular pace and leaving him behind. The snake was hidden around a bend but he was already mindful of stepping into it's presence.

"Stay where you are, Martin," he advises. "Don't move."

So far as I know such snakes aren't dangerous. At least not to me. Fishes and frogs should be wary. From my kitchen I sometimes see a curious wake cutting across the river, a snake's head breaking the surface as it's body undulates to propel it. I feel awe rather than fear. But with the advice from Carlos, I freeze.

"Relax," he says. "The creature's safe. Just close your eyes and stay still."

I do as he says. I'm in sun, so rather than darkness there is the amber of sunlight through my eyelids. Then my body sheds some tension. It is as if some energy buzzing around my surface goes liquid and drops inside. The amber coloring before my eyes is still there, some external coating like the heat against my skin, but I sense another shade that is somehow tucked inside all of that. It feels like a cave, or perhaps the interior of a balloon, for it seems to expand as I rest in it. It's color is turquoise green. "It's cool, yes?"

Carlos's voice is close. He has passed the snake to come up beside me.

And though I am standing in a blaze of sun I see the truth in what he is saying. The space I sense myself to be inside is cool.

"Welcome to the consciousness of our snake. Now please bid it goodbye and we shall move on."

"How do I do that?" And the other question I don't voice is, why do I do that? for this space seems most inviting.

"You are in the consciousness of the snake. It tolerates you but does not need you. Thank it for showing you a place of calm, and move on."

"Do I speak out loud?"

"The snake has felt your consciousness. I doubt it needs your language as well. But do what you will."

I thank the creature silently. It feels like a prayer. The sun startles me when I open my eyes.

"Take your time," Carlos says. "And might I suggest you now face the way you're going?"

"That was a beautiful experience."

I'm setting a fast pace up the track, which vegetation has narrowed to a slither of path that in places is obscured completely. The snake showed me a place of calm, but it has also excited me. I pant as I talk, Carlos tripping easily up the path behind me.

"There's a woman of ninety-four in the neighboring village. She wraps a red scarf around her head, knots it under her chin, and heads out to work in her fields each day. She's got a son, aged seventy-six, three times her size, with broad shoulders and a strong back. I hear him, on his own, laugh and joke. By her side he pinches his shoulders inwards and looks down at the ground. I saw the two of them in their field once. He was bending down to admire the beauty of a grass snake. She ran up behind him and brought down the side of her spade to chop the snake's head off, then smashed the spade down again to batter it's writhing body. She has several of her own teeth still, and she hissed a laugh through them. That's typical of these mountain villagers. There's no such thing as an innocent snake in their eyes. Every snake has to be killed. Many villagers have more venom than a viper.

"Does everything have consciousness like that snake? That's what you were doing when you were running like a dog back there, wasn't it? Tuning in to the consciousness of everything around you. Does this truffle you gave me have a consciousness? Is that how you found it?"

I'm chattering so much I don't realize Carlos has stopped. I carry on.

"That snake obviously sets up home wherever it is. My home is what I own, I suppose, the place I put my things. There's comfort inside it's walls. Does the limit of human consciousness of habitat come down to a sense of ownership? There must be loads of other beings who treat our homes as their own. The grass on our lawns. The dust mites. Do dust mites have consciousness, Carlos?"

The response sounds like it could be his, some weird and resounding grunt, but it comes from ahead on the path. Branches of a shrub to my left crack and break, the bank of vegetation shakes, and a black figure snorts and heaves herself out onto the path, her front legs digging into the dirt and kicking up dust as she swings the bulk of her body round to face me.

She is eight feet further up the path. I stare into the nostrils of her pointed snout. They vibrate and spray snot to the sides. The nostrils stare at me while the creature's eyes hold me in black disregard.

She tenses and I expect her charge. A noise to her rear distracts her. I see nothing at first, then up the incline of the path scuttling young streak into view, squeals blown from their brown-striped watermelons of bodies, their trotters tearing at the ground.

The mother shifts her head to one side. I hear Carlos on the path behind me. The sow considers him, choosing whether to charge or disdain us, then hurls herself to the side. It's the first step in a maneuver that turns her round, exposes her flank, then launches her up the path in pursuit of her brood. The hoarse wailing of her grunts sees me stand still even when she is out of sight.

"Do dust mites have consciousness?" Carlos repeats for me. “Maybe as much as you, Martin. Maybe as much as you.”

"Did you know she was there?"

"Breathe in."

I open my mouth and take a deep breath.

"No. Through your nose."

I do so.

"Again. And again."

"It's rich," I admit.

There's a scent of rosemary in the air from a bush to the side the wild boar has all but destroyed in the heat of her escape, but the smell of the boar herself is far stronger. "You indulge your powers, Martin. Powers like talking and tearing through the undergrowth. Yet you ignore the power of your senses."

"Are wild boars dangerous?"

"She's a mother. You cornered her with her babies. What's more dangerous than such a mother?"

"I used to argue there were still bears in these mountains.

In cherry season I'd find these lumps of scat that were really clusters of cherry stones. They were in inaccessible places, on high terraces and along that narrow irrigation channel near my house, and I reckoned only bears could be so fruit-loving, big, and nimble. But the locals assure me the scat is of wild boars, who adore cherries. I've never seen one before, only heard them. It's funny they can be so fierce and threatening as that, yet have such delicate passions and skills."

"You should watch a jaguar kill someday. They can show the delicacy of a surgeon.”

"Do you mind taking over the lead?" I ask.

Carlos smiles as he steps around me.

I was excited by the snake. I'm still more excited after the encounter with the wild boar. With Carlos up at the front it feels safe to keep on talking.

"This Roman road reminds me of a film I once made. It was about a Roman road even more buried than this one. There's a medieval house in the center of York, right next to the minster. Called the Treasurer's House, a beautiful place of oak beams and antiques. What interested me was it's cellar. York's the most haunted city in Europe, and this is the site of the most spectacular visitation.

"A plumber was working down there one day. In his off-duty hours he was a special constable, so his tale was to be believed. Working on some old piping, he suddenly heard the long blast of a horn, so loud and so close he dropped his tools and backed against the cellar wall. He stood quiet and stared as a Roman soldier appeared, complete in military tunic, shuffling steps of a tired march. Other soldiers followed, and horses with wounded soldiers draped across their backs. As he watched a whole brigade of Roman foot soldiers and cavalry march through the cellar, the plumber took in the details. Strangest of all was the fact that he never saw feet, not the feet of the soldiers or of the horses. These ghosts seemed to be walking on the stumps of legs, cut off below their knees.

"He said nothing at the time, fearing madness. Later, when a girl reported a similar visionary experience, he broke his silence to confirm the details of her report with his own. She too had heard the blast of a horn, and seen a footless troop march past.

"The matter was investigated. Historians searched through records, archaeologists dug through the flooring, and it was found that a Roman road had indeed passed through the site of the cellar. Only that road was a foot or more lower than the current level of the cellar floor. The Roman ghosts were marching along the road they once knew, their feet walking on the buried level of their memory."

"How did you film these ghosts?" Carlos asks.

"Mostly with sound effects and my own spoken narrative."

"So your film about Roman ghosts consists of you talking. Why am I not surprised?"

We have reached level ground so that our climb is over. Carlos steps from the path and sits down, patting the ground at his side. I sit down. Around us is a scattering of sun-bleached shells, the size of children's fingernails, the snails that once lived in them long gone. He picks up a few and drops them one at a time into my hand. He then picks up a stone, smooth and round and mottled pink, and adds it to the collection, before curling my fingers round into a loosely held fist.

"Please close your eyes again," he says.

When I've done so, he places his fingertips against my fist.

"What am I doing?" he asks.

"I don't know. I presume you're sending me into some kind of visionary state. I don't know how you do it though."

"Stay simple. What am I doing?"

"Touching my hand."

"How do you know that? Your eyes are closed."

"I can feel it."

"In your hand or in your brain?"

"Both, I suppose."

"And nerves buzz the message right through your system. You use your voice to pass the message on to me. My fingers brush against your hand, but in a very real way I'm touching your whole body. I can't touch your hand and not your body. Do you understand that?"

I nod my head.

"I'm being simple here. I want you to understand what is about to happen. This place you're sitting in the French Pyrenees. You feel it under your backside?" The dry earth is covered with small stones that are digging into me. I wriggle a little.

"You feel it, and it feels you. And what is it, this spot in France? It's part of the whole Earth, just as your hand is a part of your body. Tell me, what's this?"

He touches my arm just above my wrist. I open my eyes to take a look. He's fingering a scar.

"I was taking the lid off a tin of paint in art class in school. Using a screwdriver. It slipped and gouged me just there."

"So it's a wound from a long time ago. But you can remember it and express it. I'm just skimming the surface of your capacity here. Compared to your body, any computer hard drive is like crude carving on stone. Every sound you've ever heard, every image you've ever seen, every sensation you've ever felt, every emotion that's ever swept through you, every thrill and every dullness, every delight and every pain, it's all stored somewhere in your body. You're a writer, you should know this. Everything is real. With so much to reassemble there's no need to invent. You just have to wake to the wonder and potential of experience. The moment of your conception is stored in you. It could take a lifetime just to express the fullness of that.

"Now imagine the earth. Four billion years of history if you can conceive of such nonsense of time. It's seen you rise out of it and it'll see you crumble back. It's felt it's mountains rise and fall. Species evolved, then waned to extinction. Let's not even begin to think of the earth as part of something greater. Just reflect on this experience of billions of years. All that we can guess at, the infinite range of births and deaths and the dramas in between, the entire unknown history of life on Earth, is nothing more than the comings and goings of the pustules on skin. The greatest wars of our civilization? They rate with the eruption of an adolescent zit. We can walk, sail, ride and fly around the surface of the earth, mine it for gold and uncover uranium, but we never get close to penetrating it's depths.

"That's a hint of the earth. We think of wisdom coming from experience. Imagine that kind of experience. Who needs access to more wisdom than that? I know you, Martin. You reach out for God and all the time he's under your butt. What is God? God is something bigger than you. You can look out into the cosmos but believe me the earth is big enough for one lifetime. It's wisdom is enough to direct you to wherever you need to go next. Are you ready to tune in to it?" "The earth?"

"And all it's experience. Are you daunted?"

"A little."

"Do you know what they say about a jungle-load of monkeys given enough time and encouragement among a forest of keyboards? They'll tap and tap till they've tapped out every word of Shakespeare. You know the funniest thing about that story? The achievement is more than Shakespeare could ever manage. He had a quill... and imagine that, imagine the primacy of writing with a sharpened feather... but not even a dream of a typewriter. Our technological era is so self-serving it sees even it's trivia, it's concept of a million manic typing monkeys, as the stuff of myth. Whoever Shakespeare was and that might be a later conversation between us he was surely a man who bridged city and country, who measured power play in the scope of seasons. He sensed the wisdom of the earth. And he was a writer.

"Do you know the difference between Shakespeare and a monkey? A writer and a scribbler?"

"Shakespeare was a genius."

"And the quality of genius? The ability to filter. The wisdom of the earth is a constant deluge. A genius lets through one piece at a time, and discovers it's beauty. Then one more piece, and begins to build a pattern. Genius is the art of appreciating and reassembling the piecemeal beauty of the wisdom of the earth. That's a mouthful, but it sums it up.

"Now I have my request of you. You're a writer. A novelist. You know the immensity of tiny human details. You know a little, a microbial amount, about shamanism. You know a shaman cannot heal himself, only others. I ask you to heal me. I ask you to restore my boy Carlos."

His voice has been soft and measured. Now it bursts in volume, barely containing it's passion. It feels like an accusation of theft.

"I can't just give him back. I've never seen your boy Carlos. I've not got him."

"You can find him. Bring him to me.”

"Are we talking inner child here?"

"Cut the crap. We're talking youth, hope, vitality. We're talking jungle green, not desert dry. We're talking something you're able to do and are going to do. We're talking your life worth living."

"Are you threatening me?"

"You? You're nothing. You've got a future. Something you can be. You're threatening yourself if you don't follow me now. You tell me tired stories of exhausted Roman soldiers."

"It's a true story, so far as I know. A ghost story."

"And what am I? The air is stacked with memories. Hit replay and an image winds it's way through. You step from time into the timeless and there's the same old loop playing itself out. You have me here and find interest in such stale reviewings? Ha!

"There are ghosts. There are ghouls. There are hallucinations. There are visions. It's the same in life as in the afterlife, if you'd only care to think about it. You learn the difference by sucking these encounters in. Feel emptied, sullied, disturbed, possessed, you haven't encountered a vision. Feel richer, broader, deeper, clearer, the vision and you are married. Now, marry me to the boy Carlos!"

"How?"

He grabs hold of my head and pulls it to him, pressing it side-on to his chest. "Listen!"

I hear a rumble in his gut. Then the thump of his heartbeat.

He takes hold of my unclenched hand and places it flat against my own chest.

The resounding rhythm of his heart finds it's echo inside me. My own heart was racing, but as I listen I feel it's pace slow till it beats alongside the heart in Carlos's chest. "There's your beat," he says. "Keep to it. Sit up."

He keeps my hand pressed over my chest as he raises me up.

"Your heart is under one hand. In the other, you are holding shells and a stone. Clutch them tight and they'll bring you back here, to whatever is now. Hold them loose, and they're the comfort of a soft baby's rattle. Please close your eyes. And open your mouth wide. Wider. Wider."

My face stretches into a chasm of a yawn.

"Your mouth and throat are filters. Your song is a siren call. Take the beat from your heart. Don't worry about words. Shape the sounds as they come. Take your time. We're going timeless. No need to hurry. When you find your song lie back. It will keep on singing. You need only listen. Just listen. Sing, Martin. Sing."

I hear him settle on the ground to my side. Hear the breath inside my throat. Allow the first note, a staccato hum, to emerge. Range the same staccato hum up and down the octaves, scoping the possible limits of song so it will know where to sing for itself. Then start to listen as the song takes shape.

I expect the shape to be similar to the soundscape of earlier, when the whole valley became a composition in song. This song has a different intention. I hear nothing outside my head at first, the notes squeezed high to squeak around my cranium. Then less pressured, they explore the inside of my head. Notes become longer, my mouth opening and closing to round them, and lower as they gulp down my throat and reach around my heart. The song now swoops around my body, notes plunging ever deeper. The song claims my waist, moves down my legs, reaches my feet, and tucks around my toes. This weight of song collected in my body now leaves the body's confines for the first time. The notes go slightly lower, reaching below me into the earth. The song settles into the lowest note my voice can achieve, an open-throated bass growl that vibrates and builds and sinks still lower.

My song is now a single note, singing itself. I lay my back flat on the ground, stretch out my legs, and voice a final breath of the note as the song passes through me down into the ground.

I keep my hand against my heart and bring my other arm up to protect my eyes from sunlight. Following the song into the earth I expect darkness but already am catching glimpses of light. With my eyes shielded the journey gathers speed.

The light is green. Dark green, a merging of leaves, ferns, palm fronds, and shadows. There are times it rushes by as the green of the Amazon, times it takes on more light to be the green of Charnwood Forest from my childhood in England, jungle and woodland intermingling to form the walls, floor, and canopy around my propulsion. Then the rocketing speed slows and I am still. From the tunnel I have entered an expanse.

There is movement but no exertion. These new surroundings float toward and around me as I float within them. To my left I look up the long trunk of a palm tree whose fronds reach into a jungle canopy, while the light green leaves of a woodland oak brush my right cheek. The trees give way to stand behind me as I look down at my feet and see grass, look out and see an expanse of water.

The water is slate gray but shaded with the reflected hues of sky and cloud. It edges around a miniature island of tall grass and saplings. I know the setting. It is close to the English home of my youth. Across rolling fields, through gaps in hedges, across a high brick wall, through a stretch of overgrown woodland, this used to be a favorite destination. Beyond this lake rises a high hill, and on top of the hill is the redbrick expanse of an eighteenth-century mansion. I was trespassing yet also felt this land was private to me. I would take off my clothes, step through the mulch, and swim. It was a time of breaking bounds, so somehow also a time of freedom.

As I study the water I see it shiver. There is a ripple in reverse, waves sucked back into the center, and as the ripple disappears into stillness the surface of the lake is broken. Silver light shimmers as a head emerges and flings water from it's hair.

It is a boy.

He catches sight of me and smiles. I smile back as he swims a breaststroke toward the shore, the strokes bringing his shoulders up above the water. Then he stands, the water level dropping to close around his thighs, and steps up toward me.

He's smaller than me. Slimmer than me. As he climbs from the lake I see he moves with a vigor and grace that I lack. I guess he is about fourteen. The lake has washed his self-consciousness away. His naked skin glistens in the air.

I think he is smiling at me, but yet again he seems not to see me. As he comes close his steps don't shorten, his speed doesn't slacken. It seems confrontational but his face is so open, so happy, I don't move.

I feel the coolness of his skin when it has yet to touch me. Gaze back into the deep brown of his eyes. In the pupils of his eyes I catch my own reflection, and it is too late for surprise. I see my reflection, I see the boy, and I recognize that we are the same being. He opens his mouth as I open mine, there is a cry that passes between us, a mixture of sorrow and laughter that encompasses our name, and as he steps still closer and I feel his body merge into my own I see his face again.

And this time it is not my own young face. It has a similar tan of summer, a brown skin, but the hair is curled, the head is squarer, and the cry of his name is different. It's a fusion of sounds, one name layered on the other. I hear Martin. I hear Carlos. I catch reflections of my fourteen-year-old face as an alien boy steps inside me, feel joy as I and my fourteen-year-old self look out over our familiar lake, then look to one side at an unfamiliar expanse of jungle trailing roots and drooping branches into a river's edge.

"Cross your arms," I hear to my right. It is almost the voice of Carlos, the sonorous just-broken voice of an adolescent Carlos. "Hold yourself in."

I cross my arms across my chest and hold them there, sunlight now obliterating the jungle view as I sense a breeze against my face. The song of my journey continues. I hear it's low sustained note, hear it throbbing higher, and sense it making it's return journey: from me into the earth, and now from the earth up through the body of Carlos. It moves up through his chest as he sings, pipes through his throat, then mewls around his skull before fading into silence.

I turn my head to the side and open my eyes. Carlos is sitting with his back erect, his arms hugged tight around his chest. I sit up too, loosen my hold on the shells and stone, and shake them in my fist. They rattle quietly against each other.

Carlos turns his head to mine and opens his eyes. They are wet with tears.

"We thank you."

He shuffles around to face me, then unclasps his hug of himself, spreading his arms wide. The movement releases a force that folds around me. "My boy Carlos and I thank you."

I let go of my handful of shells and stone and fling my own arms wide. Carlos reels back a little, enveloped by the energy my gesture releases. His response of open-hearted laughter triggers my own.

"Stand up."

I get to my feet. "Walk about."

The scattered snail shells splinter beneath the soles of my shoes. The baked ground feels like a professional racetrack, adding some spring in it's surface to my step. "Now you know what it's like to walk on the moon."

I take a few more steps, then laugh. I understand what Carlos means. I watched the first moon walk on black-and-white TV. All that science and technology so that man could learn to walk again, relayed with the amateurishness of a home movie. At the time I wondered what all the fuss was about, but now the image comes back with great tenderness. Those inflated space suits bouncing around, adult males sealed inside them, is a sublime comedy that I am also playing out. Some gravity is lifted as I walk, but my body feels as inert and bulging as those space suits. The new life that has slipped inside that body is taking it for a walk, and having fun with the experience. Carlos jumps to his feet. It's a real accomplishment. I've known people to do it from a chair, a stool, a wall, but he springs upright from his seated posture on the ground and moves straight into the rhythm of a brisk walk.

"Time to go home," he announces, and heads across the high, burnt plain toward the scrub at it's far edge.

"What's happening?" I call out as I follow.

"You feel good, no? Filled with energy?"

"Too good. Where's it come from?"

"You know who is talking? The old Martin. He's tired. Give him a rest. You've recaptured your youth. Enjoy it."

"Is it my youth, or yours? We seemed to get mixed up back there. I met the young version of me. But I met with you too, didn't I? I merged with the young Carlos." "Youth is youth. The young are picky. They find one another attractive or unattractive. Grow old and the distinctions blur. All youth is attractive whatever form it takes."

He breaks from his route and trots off to the right. He pauses in the shade of a fig tree and reaches up. A fig lets go of the tree at the touch of his hand. By the time I reach him he has pulled back it's skin. He presses the purple bud of fruit into my mouth. As I swallow he plucks three more figs from the tree and hands them to me.

"I never believed in the apple," he tells me. "Painters fix a fig leaf over the genitals of Adam and Eve. It's the sexiest leaf going. The curves of a body, the thickness of flesh, fibers you can stroke. What can be said for an apple leaf? Knowing that, compare the fruits. The fig is the real fruit of paradise. The fruit of temptation. Feed yourself as you walk. Keep yourself quiet."

"But—"

"But I want SILENCE!" He splays his hands wide and freezes his face in a grin, cocking his head as though listening to his shout disappear.

"There," he continues. "Silence. My wants come true. That's fine for me. What about you, Martin? Can you live with what you want?"

I know what I want. I want answers. I mean to get them. Whether I can live with them or not.

In the meantime I live with the silence as we walk.

## CAVE DWELLING

Carlos turns around. One moment he is leading the way in front of me, the next he is aiming directly at me. It is as though I'm not there.

He doesn't falter. I jump to the side the moment before we collide. He walks on, retracing our steps. Back across the plain. Switching down the Roman track to descend the hillside. Pacing over the bridge. Climbing up to the asphalt road and assuming a speed that makes me jog to catch up.

Heading back toward the village, he suddenly leaves the road and rips through undergrowth as he scrambles down the bank. I'd say he was running away from me, but he never looks back. A fleeing man keeps an eye on his pursuer. For Carlos I'm no longer there.

It's not just me who has slipped from his awareness. Even in his wildest moments, when the sensual stream of nature made him seem mad but never dizzy, he didn't stumble. Now I watch his arms flail, catching at balance as he trips on a rock. He sets foot in the river with the confidence of a man who walks on water, yet falls forward as a pebble turns beneath his foot. His body is fully submerged for a moment, then his arms wheel round like championship strokes of a butterfly swimmer and he surges up and forward with no loss in momentum.

I follow, but I don't even try to keep up.

Carlos is an old man, one who has befriended me, who is now clearly deranged and in need of help. Once out of the wood he tears through chest-high undergrowth, reaches out his left hand to curl around the trunk of a tree, veers forward and right to swing round the next, and disappears from sight but not from sound as he crashes onward.

I don't call out to him. I don't risk my own footing in pursuit. I check the river for a shallower crossing downstream, bother to take off my trainers so as to wade carefully across, listen for Carlos's progress as I put them on again and tie the laces, then don't even hurry as I make my way through the brief strip of woodland.

By the time I enter the meadow Carlos has already hurried across it and reached the red dirt of the hillside that sweeps up a curve into an almost vertical rise. He reaches for hand and toeholds and hauls himself up to twice his own height before disappearing across the lower rim of a small, round cave.

I pull myself up to look inside the cave. Carlos is sitting against the wall, bent forward slightly as the cave curves toward it's ceiling. His legs stick straight out in front of him, his arms are wide to his sides with their palms flat against the rock. All is dark at first, then I adjust to the interior space and a rosy light picks out the features. It shows me Carlos's eyes. The eyelids are open but the pupils have rolled inside the head somewhere. It is the whites of his eyes that stare back at me.

There's room inside for me to climb up and join him. Just about.

Instead I drop down to the grass that runs up to the sharp edge of the hill and sit there. I give my thoughts time to settle, and they refuse. They have their own white-eyed focus, careering everywhere and finding no moment of sense. Maybe some physical movement will help coordinate me. I stand up and start to move away. "Boy!"

The shout comes from the cave. With more strength of my own I would ignore it and keep on walking. I go back.

Careful maneuvering inside the cave lets me slot into the available space. Carlos and I are at a slight angle to each other. It is as easy to look out over the landscape we have just walked as to look at each other. I study the view for a while before turning to face Carlos. His posture has not changed. As I re-accustom myself to the light of the cave I note that his eyes still glare white. Then the eyelids close, screw tight a moment, and snap open. He is staring at me.

His tone makes his first words an accusation. "What are you doing here?"

"You called me."

"Nonsense." He turns his head to face the view, then turns back to me again. "How did I call you?"

"Boy. You shouted Boy."

"Ha!" This is one of those snorts with no laughter in it. “You know why I ran just now? I was running away from you. Why should I call you? Is your name Boy? Do you see yourself as a boy and not a man?"

I say nothing.

"I'm more than you can handle. On my own, dry as dust, it was OK. With my boy Carlos in me it was different. I was an energy field that could burn you up. I ran away for your own good. Before you were cinders."

"You got your boy back and didn't need me anymore. That's the truth of it."

"You speak of truth? Show it to me. Go on. Point it out so I can take a look at it. Don't speak of truth again till you can do that much."

"You're the master of truth, I suppose. You can pull truth out of a pocket or from up your sleeve..." My words dry up. It feels good to be bickering with Carlos on equal terms. Then I notice I haven't risen to his level at all. Carlos has simply dropped to mine. A tear brims from his left eye and runs down his cheek. “You're crying." "Stop interpreting. You see a tear. It doesn't mean I'm crying."

"What are you doing, then?"

"Are you mad? I'm dead. How can I be doing anything?"

"So what's the tear?"

"Moisture escaping dust. A trickling of sap. The last of my boy Carlos." His hands are still pressed against the walls. He brings his right one to his face and wipes the tear away. "There. I'm back to my dry old self."

"Maybe you want to be on your own?"

"You've got questions. You want answers. We might as well play this game to it's conclusion."

"Is there a conclusion?"

"Everyone has a book in them. Almost none of them are writers, but that's not the point. It helps to think of life as a book with a great ending. When all seems mad, when there's no point carrying on, depression's weighty and suicide's the best way out, you have to trust in the greatness of your own book and hang in there. Tragedies

do somersaults, crazy subplots stream together, redundant characters take curtain calls, loose ends get tied like satin bows, and all you can do if the pain's not too much is laugh at so much perfection."

"You're not laughing now."

"You're interpreting again. You hear no laughter and presume I'm not laughing. You're wrong. This is the most hilarious moment of my whole resurrection."

I wait for more, but it doesn't come.

"Sorry," I say. "I don't get the joke."

"That makes me feel better. I see a joke that you can't see. It's proof of my own existence."

"What's the joke?"

"Is this your first question? I've decided to allow you ten, starting now."

"Ten questions? Is a joke worth a question?"

"That's a question. A wasted one. My answer is yes. The nature of this joke is surely worth a question. You've got nine questions left." "That's not fair."

"It's absolutely fair. But it would cost you a question to find out why. Speak carefully.”

"OK. You say the joke's worth a question. So what is it that you find so hilarious?"

"You step on a plane in Albuquerque. Hours later you stumble through your door in the Pyrenees. You think you've traveled. In reality all that time you merely sat still while modes of transport ferried you about."

"That's what you find so funny?"

"I'll forgive you that question. In return, spare me further interruptions. I use you in a plane as an analogy. If that's too personal for comfort think of a pawn instead. This least significant member of a chess set has the potential to make it right across the board and become a queen. If it does so, should it be proud?" "I suppose so."

"Ha! Some might say a little wooden chess piece has no consciousness, yet you're prepared to think one proud. This gets more hilarious by the moment. Tell me, why did I come here and meet you?"

"You said something about retrieving the young version of yourself. The boy Carlos. And something else about changing people's image of you."

"Ha ha ha. Perfect perfect perfect. You give pride to a chess piece and intentions to me."

"It's what you told me."

"Old habits die hard. All my life I freed my (vision) to tell people what it would most excite them to hear."

"Do you mean you told lies?"

"I take that as a question. You have seven left. My answer is no. Lies are used to sustain fears. I have no fears. I told people stories to confirm their hopes of a more vibrant world. That vibrant world is real. My stories were the trains and planes to ferry them there. Now back to your original question. What is hilarious? This fact. That for a while, despite myself, I was convinced of the separate nature of my own existence."

"How ?"

He pushes his left hand toward me, palm out, urging me to stop.

"You throw me more questions when I am still answering? Please Martin, be patient. Do you want a fact to chew on? Here's one. We have dark and light, positive and negative, sweet and sour, none of which have meaning without the existence of their opposites. In the same way sorcerers always have doubles. In my life I would hear reports of what my double was up to. This duplicate of me took my name, took my appearance, even had hold of my memories. Try as they might, sorcerers never know what their doubles are up to. Stories filter back and we have to deal with the complications, but the double has always moved on. You spoke about fairness. Now is that fair, that our doubles have our memories and we don't have theirs?"

He looks at me, and grins.

"You have a question. It's written all over your face. Come on, out with it."

"Are you the double?"

"You ask me if I am my own double? The question is so funny I shan't count it."

"But you died. Why shouldn't your double carry on without you?"

"Take away light and there is no such concept as darkness. A sorcerer and his double are linked. Without one there is no other."

"Formlessness is no concept without form," I retaliate. I was tutored in abstruse philosophy and sometimes it shows. "Existence doesn't exist without nonexistence. A forgery cannot exist without an original, but when the original is destroyed the forgery can remain. You can have no double if you never existed, but when you died there's no reason your double couldn't carry on."

"So you win. I'm my own double. The point is not worth arguing. It makes no difference.”

"It changes everything."

"How? You've shown no interest in me. Fake or original, I am what I am. You'll never know me. All our time together you've been interested in one thing: how I reflect on your experience."

"I can't get to know you. I can't even keep up with you. You keep changing all the time."

"I shimmer." He wags his head from side to side and holds something invisible between his hands which he moves like a wave from his head to his groin. "Your reflection is fractured. It's up to you to pull it together."

"What about you then? We went looking for your boy Carlos. What have you been pulling together?"

"You are using up a question to inquire about me?"

"Yes."

"I'm touched. I'd shed a tear if there were any left. But that tear you saw was my last. My boy Carlos has gone. You heard me calling him back. He rushed from me like a wind and there's no returning. What have I been pulling together? A dream of a new life. I borrowed some energy from you and felt it as my own. The thrill of nature raced through me on our valley walk. The return of my young Carlos almost burst me, it was so rich. It pumped me full of youth. Do you know what youth is?" I shake my head.

"Youth is hope. Hope lives for a brighter future. Filled with my youth I longed for tomorrow. I readied myself for growth and change. The horror of it dawned on me as we were walking. Do you know the most terrifying aspect of being human?"

I don't bother to think, but simply shake my head again. “Self-interest. And as I walked, brimming with youth, I felt self-interest rise in me. I had hopes. Better days were coming. It was worth saving myself to be a part of it. So I fled. Ran to this cave while I still knew the remedy. Made full body contact and poured my bubbling energy back into the earth."

"Are growth and change bad? Shouldn't we hope? Can't things get better?"

"Is that three questions?"

"Please answer it as one."

"I gave up hope long ago. I replaced it with thanksgiving. I appreciated everything as it is. I gave gratitude for still hanging around in my body. Everything is about relationship. In human terms we flourish when we are appreciated. It's the same with every aspect of life on Earth. Appreciation helps it flourish.

"I would sometimes drive up to Malibu and watch surfers crest the waves, hot young things feeling on top of the world. That image is my symbol for living in the moment. History is impossibly long. Take it back just to the creation of our universe, watch stars combust and dust congeal, see bacteria swirl and intermingle, mountains erupt from Earth's core and water coat it's surface, through millions of years till oceans form and humans evolve and mothers give birth to children, till one child is born to swim into the Pacific and meet the breaking point of a particular wave. Imagine everything that has conspired to form that moment. An inexpressible tide of creation and destruction, change and growth. Can't you feel the wonder, that creation has been sustained so long that it has brought us to this point? A young man riding a wave. "Another image. A woman sits in a laundromat, watching Oprah on TV while her family's clothes churn around in a machine. You've been there. You've seen it. Did you see the miracle it was? That the cosmos and beyond has conspired through all eternity to conjure up that moment? There is no greater miracle than that. And it happens everywhere, at all times.

"Take a worst-case scenario. Rain forests go the way of the dinosaurs, the human species follows. Imagine a moment beyond this disaster. Look at the landscape, look at the sky. Admire how much there is to be seen. Humanity came into being and passed out again to fertilize this moment. Think of the richness and wonder of that." "Will it come to that?"

"Humans are sophisticated beings. It has become possible to imagine our own extinction. I can say this much. We have the power to save our species right now, but never in the future."

"That's a riddle, not an answer."

"Everything you'll ever hear is a riddle. It means nothing till you've worked it out in your own life. But I'll give you more. I'll tell you the most dynamic weapon in the whole human arsenal. It has the power of making anything you want come true. Are you ready for it?"

I nod my head.

"Are you sure? It's a big secret wrapped up in one word."

"I'm ready. Give me the word."

"Focus!"

It seems more of a damp squib than a bombshell. I look at him for further revelation. As he looks back I see movement in his eyes. First his right pupil wanders to the right. Then his left pupil floats to the left. As a technique it should be simple. It's simply the opposite of going cross-eyed. I've never seen the eyes cast wide in this way though. The effect is unnerving. I presume he's seeing double. For me the effect is different. As I look into his face I feel divided, as though two of me are seeing, one looking into each wayward eye.

His pupils wander back to the center, first the right and then the left. It's a relief. I smile to be released from his optical trick. I expect him to laugh, but he does nothing to either excuse or explain his actions. He simply speaks as though there has been no interruption.

"Whatever we focus on, that's what we get."

"So if we focus on the future, on a healthy planet, that's what we'll get?"

"Let's see, shall we?"

He shuffles forward till his legs are outside the cave and hanging down, and pats the ground to his right for me to join him. "Look out there," he says when I am settled beside him.

I look across the meadow to the trees, to the movement of water in the river, to the surrounding mountains and the sky. "Can you see it?" he asks.

"See what?"

"The future."

I stare some more.

"So where is it?" he persists.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Does the future happen here, or somewhere else?"

"Everywhere."

"Then it's here. Show it to me."

I look around the landscape but don't know what to do.

"Forget it, Martin. Forget the future. Believe in nothing you can't see."

"There are signs. Global warming. Corporate culture. Gaping holes in the ozone layer."

"You can see these things?"

"I see their effects. It's clear that if these trends continue our environment will be destroyed. Soon the trends will be irreversible." "Do you lose sleep over this?"

"No. But I should."

"So you worry about not worrying enough?"

"When I think about it."

"Let me give you some perspective. Would you set an infant loose in a playground with a primed and loaded machine gun?" "Of course not."

"Why? Because it knows how to use one?"

"No. Because it doesn't."

"Right. Yet we're all infants armed and set loose in the playground, turning our focus wherever we choose. Here's a scenario. You're strolling along a railroad and an express train is hurtling toward you. Do you focus on the train?"

"It sharpens my focus. I jump off the tracks."

"Good. Danger makes you focus, but you don't focus on the danger. You look at the ground beneath your feet. You move on. The train rushes by and there's no danger to it. Now I like rabbits more than squirrels. Squirrels are rodents. Rabbits are very like us. I'm speaking genetically, but it's clearest in the way rabbits face up to cars at night. They're great little runners, but they don't run. They are mesmerized by the headlights. Stand still and wait to be squashed. Their focus on the car wipes them out. Focus on the oncoming train and you're flattened. Focus on the destruction of the earth and you're history. Stop that, Martin!"

The sudden shout startles me. I'm doing nothing. Just sitting still.

"Stop what?"

"Fool. You've wasted a question. Stop waiting to have your say. Stop wanting to argue before you've even listened. If you must argue, keep waiting. Wait till I'm gone and go argue with the moon. There's no point to be won here. No point to be reached. It's all here. All now.

"You're a writer. Sit down to write a whole book in one go and you'd be paralyzed. That's not how it works. You focus on the next line, the next word. Are these your words? Think of the cosmos that created itself, created language, created you. Your choice of a word has been a long time coming. Maybe creation will sustain itself. Moment by moment, word by word, a book might appear. You say a pawn can be proud of becoming a queen? Then you can be proud of your book if you like. Or you can keep on living. Keep on paying attention to the work of each moment. If that work accumulates into something, so be it. It has it's own existence. You're already in the next moment. You've moved on.

"Take a look through the opening. Who do you see out there?"

We had both shuffled back during the conversation, tucking ourselves inside the cave. I now look outside as directed and am dazzled by the light for a moment. Then the landscape becomes clear.

"Nobody."

"Par for the course. People don't care about Nature. Nature won't care about them.”

"People are beginning to care."

"Impossible. You can't begin to care. If you truly care for one moment, you'll care the next. The power of wonder will have seized you. Focus on the future, even a do-gooding future, and you've missed it. The moment's gone by. You never noticed it. You're in a vacuum. Nature abhors a vacuum. It will wipe you out." "So there's no hope."

"Never. There can be no hope. Hope is in the future. It never happens. But there is always a chance. While there's a person still living, there's a chance. Focus on the moment and it notices, it responds. The future will always take care of itself. Hang in there, appreciate it moment by moment, and it will include you."

I don't know how many moments we sit through, but it seems quite a while.

"Well?" Carlos asks. "What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Nothing comes to mind."

"Then this interview is over."

"But I've got more questions to ask."

"Not now. Please leave me for now. I prefer to be quiet."

"Will I see you again?"

"That's your ninth question—by a generous reckoning. I granted you ten. So long as you still have a question for me, you'll see me again." "When—?"

"Don't be stupid." He puts his hand on my shoulder and pushes, urging me out of the cave. "Be quiet."

I climb down and walk across the meadow. The heat is fierce. The grass to my left and right is still, yet I feel a wind against my neck. I turn to look back at the cave, gaping in the hillside like an open mouth. This narrow wind is coming from that direction. I smile into it, and open my mouth to let it fill me.

People say winds die. I don't believe that happens. This wind stops and I stand and sweat. As I move again, walking back in the direction of my village and home, I find it waiting to glance it's touch against my cheek.

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# Glossary

(linear Roster below)

# Roster

### *In order of appearance:*

**Juan Matus:** A Yaqui indian. Castaneda's prime benefactor; always referred to as Don Juan by Carlos.

**la Catalina:** sorceress, from either don Juan's generation or the generation preceding his.

**Vicente Medrano**: The "scholarly" member of don Juan's group of sorcerers. First appeared in *A Separate Reality*.

**Silvio Manuel**: The "man behind the scenes," aka The Master of Intent. First appeared in *A Separate Reality*.

**Benigno:** one of Carlos's fellow apprentices to don Juan and his group. First appeared in *A Separate Reality*.

**Eligio:** one of Carlos's fellow apprentices to don Juan and his group. First appeared in *A Separate Reality*.

**Genaro Flores:** A Mazetec indian. Fellow sorcerer and friend of Juan Matus. First appeared in *A Separate Reality*.

**Pablito:** one of Carlos's fellow apprentices to don Juan and his group. First appeared in *A Separate Reality*; always referred to as Don Genaro by Carlos.

**Nestor:** one of Carlos's fellow apprentices to don Juan and his group. First appeared in *A Separate Reality*.

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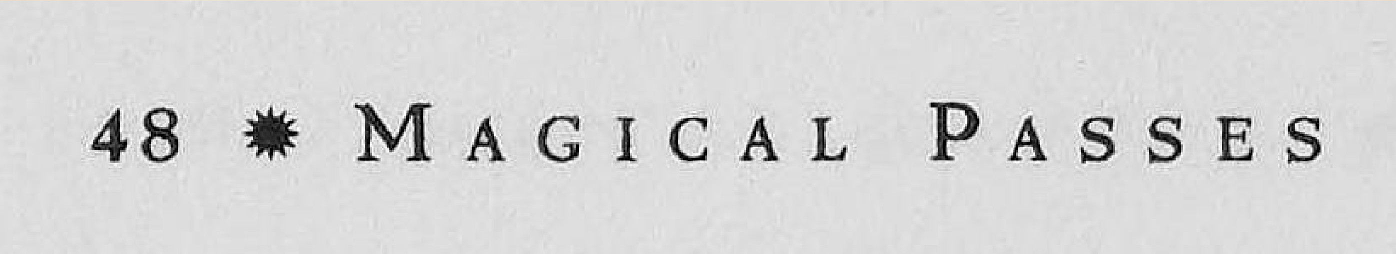

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